

The Donner Summit

Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

August, 2020 issue #144

1st Transcontinental Bike Race - 1896

"The Greatest Event Ever"

"Through Miles of Night-gloomed Snowsheds and Down Dizzy Heights."

S.F. Examiner August 27, 1896

The Great Transcontinental Bicycle Relay was a publicity stunt devised by Wm. Randolph Hearst to increase circulation for his two sponsoring newspapers, the San Francisco Chronicle and the New York Journal.

Both papers published a series of articles, most front page, during the thirteen-day cross-country relay. Breathless and sometimes hyperbolic prose described every event bringing readers back day after day to see what would happen next to the "wheelmen." It was, the Examiner said, "The Greatest Event in the History of Bicycling" and since bicycling had taken the country by storm in the late 19th Century, that was quite a claim. There was plenty happening too – riders almost crushed by a train, riders lost in the desert, or a rider running the last few miles of a relay with a broken "wheel" (bicycle) in hand. The object was to carry, by bicycle courier, a packet from the Presidio in San Francisco to New York. The race was publicity for Hearst but also a test of the new technology, bicycles. The Post Office supported the event to see whether bicycles could be part of their mail delivery arsenal and the Army supported the event to determine whether bicycles could be used for carrying messages in place of the horse.

On the very first day the first two riders were a nine year-old brother and his ten year-old sister who took the War Department packet to the wharf in San Francisco on their tandem. Each was quoted at the top of page one. That cute story surely engaged the public so people would buy newspapers to read the stories to come. To further engage readers there were lots of illustrations. Some of those drawings used modern psychology. For example one caption said 8,000 people gathered at Examiner offices for updates (see page 3). One can imagine some people, seeing that thousands wanted immediate updates, wanted to participate themselves as well. There were also lots of drop quotes to grab readers' attention and so draw them into



San Francisco Examiner August 27, 1896

Story Locations in this Issue

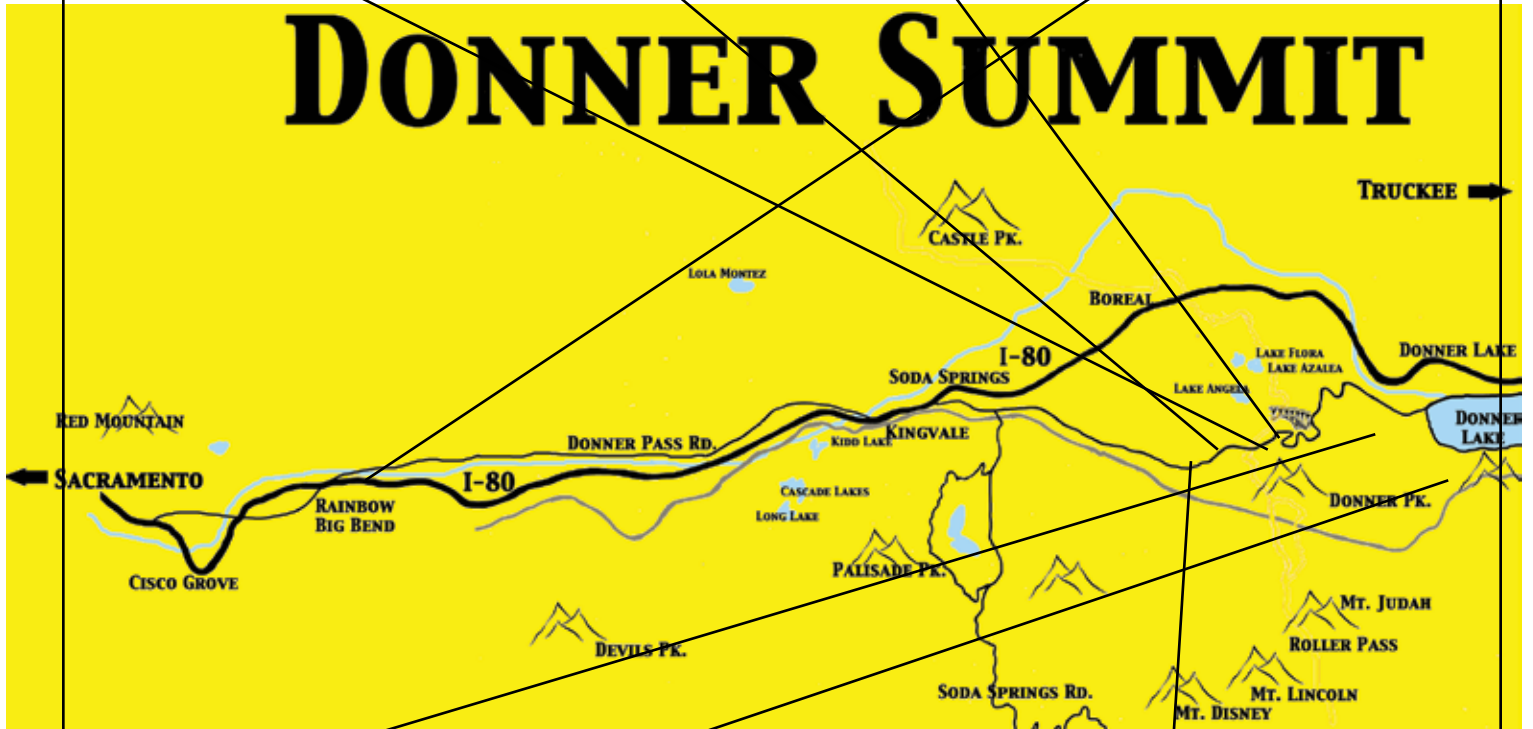
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DONNER SUMMIT



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Souvenir button of the great relay. The "Yellow Fellow" was a bicycle brand. The company had donated all the bicycles used by the couriers.



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Unless otherwise noted, the photographs and other historical ephemera in The Heirloom's pages come from the Norm Saylor collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society

the text such as, “As we were bumping across a lofty trestle a special [a train] came tearing down upon us.” Finally, there was a contest for the person who could most closely guess the completion time (see page 5).

Even though the relay portion over Donner Summit was at night, there was as much reporting as if it had been daylight.

In San Francisco there was a “dense throng of watchers,” horns, whistles and cheers as the two children, Clotilde and George Devany, mounted on their “pretty toy tandem” painted to rival “in hue the gold poppies of the California hills.” A cavalcade of mounted police officers cleared the crowds ahead of the riders. A volley of cheers erupted from another “tremendous crowd” at the ferry landing. Cannons fired a salute in honor of the occasion as the tug left the dock.

From Oakland the packet went in relays to Hayward, Livermore, Mountain House, Banta, Stockton, Sacramento, Arcade, Newcastle, Auburn, Colfax and Dutch Flat, into the Sierra. The arrival times at each relay change were noted in the newspaper. Articles noted the crowds that were present to see the changes as relay riders passed on and postmasters stamped the packet headed for New York. At Auburn it was noted that “The bicyclists will take the railroad track two miles out of here and among the uncertainties will be a ride through a half-mile tunnel.”

It was night as the couriers crossed the Sierra, “Over the High Sierra, Thrilling Night Rides of Intrepid Mountain Couriers”



San Francisco Examiner August 30, 1896
Thousands listen to the latest news

was the headline with the sub-head saying, “Through Inky Snowsheds and Across Wild Torrents with the Gold Tablet of the ‘Examiner-Journal’ Relay.”

At Dutch Flat (left) no one had ever seen “anything quite so stirring

as the speeding a golden tablet from sea to sea...” as the “monumental relay” came to town. Everything that could

be used as a light was “pressed into service as an illuminating agent” for the celebration of the couriers’ arrival from Colfax. The “restless throng” cast “expectant” glances down the road looking for the rider, but the rider was late. It was hours after midnight when a freight train pulled into the station. An old Indian who had been leaning against a corner of the station house, standing a bit apart from the crowd and sometimes looking with awe at the bicycles, went up to the train’s engineer. He turned back to the crowd, “his black eyes sparkling with excitement. ‘Wheel broke!’ he exclaimed. ‘Man run way down track many miles!’” Just as disappointment took hold

of the crowd there was a wild shout and “a second later a panting dirt-begrimed wheelman dashed swiftly into our little circle, swinging a leathern case in his hand.” T. R. Lilly seized the “precious packet” and sprang to his mount instantly “whirling swiftly out into the gloom.” Here the story over the Sierra was told by Robert Edgren (who also supplied the illustrations) and acted as “trailer” to “Courier Lilly” along with Lilly’s younger brother. The three cycled up the Sierra, over Donner Summit, and down to Truckee.

“That was 3:17 o’clock. And ‘dig in’ we did. Bump, bump, bump, slide, bang, crash over [railroad] ties and over sand, over cinders and over ruts we went, our hearts thumping and our teeth clinched, while every bone was racked with the strain. Sometimes riding and sometimes walking or running swiftly with wheel a-shoulder, but oh, on, on, steadily up the grade toward the summit. Nine miles of as rough riding as every mortal man undertook...” They went into the first



“In many respects this is the greatest feat that has ever been accomplished by that mechanical marvel of the day, the bicycle.”

Scientific American September 19, 1896



San Francisco Examiner
August 27, 1896

yawning tunnel and emerged thankfully saying that they had not met any “of the trains that often come noiselessly down the grade.” They went through “snowsheds long and snowsheds short” and made their way to Emigrant Gap where they passed the train that had left Dutch Flat an hour and a half before them.

On a downhill stretch the train overtook them and forced them to abandon the track to their “rivals.” They pulled themselves with their wheels

against the “heavily timbered sides of the snowshed and crouched as far away from the rumbling wheels as we could in midnight darkness, while you know that a mighty crushing freight is rolling on its juggernaut wheels a few feet from your face – an experience I have little desire to repeat. The roar deafens you, chaos reigns, and cars seem to be running off the track or swaying over to crush you in the darkness, and, worst of all, you feel an almost unconquerable impulse to doubt yourself...”



San Francisco Examiner
August 27, 1896

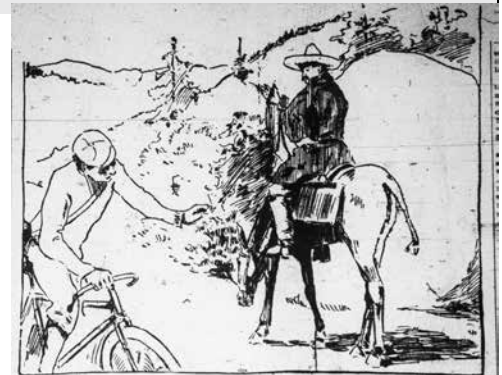
At Cisco there were twenty-five miles of snowsheds and two long trestles, “spanning mountain streams that rush and roar hundreds of feet below.” Just

as daylight was coming the couriers emerged from the snowsheds and Courier Lilly jumped off his bike and dropped to a narrow shelf on the trestle about half way across. Just at that moment there was the rumble of a train. “A moment

later a special came tearing down the grade, ... it seemed like an apparition rather than a substantial railway train.” After the close call the riders “mounted [their] wheels” and “rode swiftly out over that long narrow span of steel and wood that lay stretched there between heaven and earth.”

At the next trestle the couriers rode a narrow plank between the rails “and looked far down at the dashing, plunging mass of foam that broke over the rocks below.”

At the Summit they left the up grade and “commenced to descend.” They reached an opening in the sheds and joined the road to Donner Lake and Truckee. The road took “a sudden plunge of a thousand feet down the mountain side to Donner lake [sic]. The whole roadbed [was] rock. On the left huge cliffs rise up in great terraces; on the right they fall away toward the valley below. Winding here and there, wherever it can find space, lies the road.” Apparently what would become the route of the Lincoln Highway in less than twenty years and was the route of the



MORNING GREETING IN THE SIERRA.
Courier Lilly of the “Banner-Journal” (left) greets the driver of the day at the place where the Donner party perished in the early days. The entire picture of the group of five, representing an expedition of Lilly and his train to a train far up among the mountains. A freight train came thundering down upon them in the darkness of the night.

San Francisco Examiner
August 29, 1896



LEAVING LAST SNOWSHED.

San Francisco Examiner
August 29, 1896

earlier Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. (1864) was no road in 1896 at all. Edgren said that it was a “frightful three miles of scattered bowlders [sic]” but Lilly said, “I can ride anything that stands on edge. I’m going to ride down from the summit if I live.” Down the riders went “with a rush, back pedaling with all our strength.... It was no boy’s play, that as any man can testify who has seen the road. To my mind nothing short of life or death could justify that mad ride from the summit. Twenty times we had to throw ourselves from the runaway wheels to prevent being dashed to death on the bowlders [sic] below. Twenty times did we shoulder bicycles to climb over masses of rocks that made mounted progress impossible, and a thousand times did we congratulate ourselves, I am sure, when the bottom was reached in safety.”

Shortly after their descent they were met by a contingent of “wheelmen” from Truckee. Amid a volley of cheers from “the gentle citizens of Truckee” the packet was handed off to the next courier bound for Reno.

It had taken six hours for the three couriers to go from Dutch Flat to Truckee. Just like for the emigrants and building the railroad the Sierra was the most challenging part of the transcontinental trip. Although the rest of the story is not as exciting, it was exciting enough. We’ll leave its telling to others though.

The transfer at Truckee was made “after the most exciting relay yet covered, and probably the most daring of the transcontinental journey. Machovich is one of the most remarkable riders of the mountain districts of America, and has won fame in the West by his plucky night ride amidst besetting perils. He knows every trail and fastness of the Sierra and is as nearly devoid of fear as a man can be.”

San Francisco Examiner August 27, 1896



“There were places on the road to Truckee where we had to pick up our wheels and jump and run over the bowlders [sic] that lay strewn in the way.”

Robert Edgren

San Francisco Examiner August 29, 1896

PRIZE BICYCLE GUESSING COUPON.
 “Examiner”-“Journal” Yellow Fellow Transcontinental Relay.

I predict that the Relay will arrive at the “New-York Journal” office..... days.....
 hours..... minutes..... seconds
 after the start from “The Examiner” office.

Name.....
 Address.....

San Francisco Examiner
 August 27, 1896,
 the hand off in Truckee.

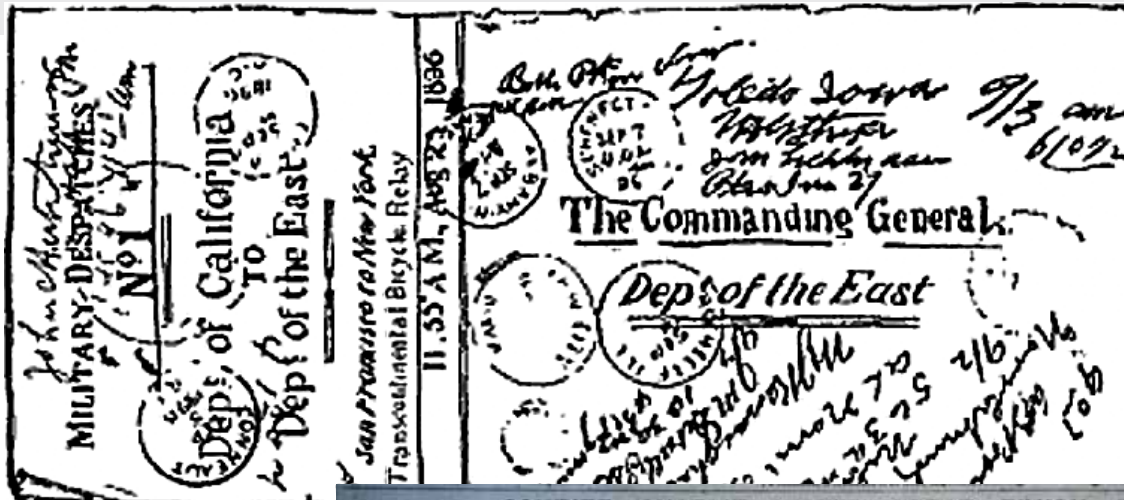
NIGHT-GLOOMED SNOWSHEDS AND A

J. D. Machovich, taking the precious packet from Courier Lilly at Truckee, after the most exciting relay yet covered, and probably the most daring of the transcontinental journey. Machovich is one of the most remarkable riders of the mountain districts of America, and has won fame in the West by his plucky night ride amidst besetting perils. He knows every trail and fastness of the Sierra, and is as utterly devoid of fear as a man can be.

In case you want to enter, the coupon to enter the contest to choose the correct ending time/day. It was in the Examiner on multiple days.

“At noon on the twenty-fifth of August, a war message and post office dispatch were intrusted [sic] by the government authorities to a bicycle relay for transmission across the great American continent. Thirteen days later the last of the 220 couriers reached New York, the eastern terminus of the trip and unslung the scarred and weather beaten wallet from his shoulders, the distance of 3,400 miles having been covered at the average speed of 11 miles an hour.”

Scientific American September 19, 1896



picture of the packet, stamped by post masters all across the country, from Scientific American, September 19, 1896

The arrival in Reno, August 29, 1896 San Francisco Examiner



August 27, 1896 San Francisco Examiner



A more complete and permanent telling of this story can be found in Extraordinary Crossings, available on the DSHS website.



THE DONNER LAKE DISTRICT



Donner Summit - Magnificent

We all know that Donner Summit is magnificent and that people have been celebrating that ever since people arrived. The Native Americans for example, incised granite slabs with petroglyphs in dozens of places on Donner Summit. Their significance and meaning have been lost to history, but that's another story (you can explore the Native Americans and Donner Summit along with their petroglyphs in our "Native Americans..." brochure on our website or at the DSHS – see page 9 for the front panel). We can infer that the Native Americans found Donner Summit magnificent just as we do. The only sites they chose for petroglyphs were under the great peaks where there are great views. There are petroglyphs for example, under the shadow of Castle Pk. with a view south across Castle Valley to Tinker's Knob in the distance and under Devil's Pk. with a view back at Devil's Pk and then south to the Royal Gorge (4,000 feet down). The most easily accessible petroglyphs are those below the Donner Summit Bridge with a view to Donner Lake and the peaks surrounding Donner Pass. You can see that view on the next page.

...a region fit for the residence of the Gods”
(speaking about Donner Summit)

Wm. Minturn in *Travels West*, 1877,
describing Donner Summit

We also include here two sidebars evoking Donner Summit magnificence from the 19th Century. Feel free to come up

with your own appreciations.

When automobiles were new, and extending for some decades after, many newspapers ran columns devoted to their use and enjoyment. At the beginning the columns were cheerleaders for automobiles touting the speed and reliability, reporting on endurance runs, races, and achievements (like the annual attempts to be the first auto over Donner Summit – check out our [Heirloom](#) article indices for stories). Here at the top of the page we have a representative headline for a regular column in the [Modesto News-Herald](#) dated August 1, 1931, touting places to visit in your automobile. The author knew what he/she was talking about.

“Being one of the most scenic and historically significant areas in California, the Donner Lake district... is worthy of attention of every motoring and outing enthusiast.” (sic) The splendid Victory Highway (commemorating WWI) runs from Sacramento

to Auburn and Donner Lake. There travelers have reached “this jewel in the mountains” and have gone 170 miles



One of the magnificent views on Donner Summit. The Native Americans only placed petroglyphs in places with magnificent views. The petroglyphs here are just uphill from Donner Pass Rd., the road in the foreground.

in five hours. The road is so “fine” that you can travel in high gear the whole way, which was apparently great praise. There is beauty the whole way “with the views at the Donner summit climaxing a marvelous trip.” “Lake Van Norden, Donner Peak, the aviation weather bureau house atop a rock 7310 feet high [see the next page], Donner summit bridge [only five years old at this point], Donner Lake and the scenes surrounding the Donner party tragedy combine to provide history, scenery and recreation.” The view of Donner Lake from Donner Summit “is one of the rarest sights in the country” (above).

The whole trip is a study in contrasts from farms, dairies and orchards, until you begin to climb. “Tipping your motor’s nose a bit higher, then the pines and peaks and streaks of perennial snow.” [no it’s not a sentence but it’s the original – literary license - and of course in extolling the virtues of Donner Summit one must be allowed "license."]

The author was apparently taken with the weather station building that sat above Old Highway 40 (Victory Highway, today’s Donner Pass Rd. on page 9). He says there is a “high cottage, “perched several hundred feet above the highway on a solid granite rise. The boys aloft in the cockpit of the mail planes know the meaning of each signal or radio wave from this aviation weather bureau.” (Check out our [Heirloom](#) indices for stories and pictures of the weather station for the transcontinental air route.) The author notes that the emigrant wagons and oxen had no beacons to guide them “and some

“The air has a fresh crispness about it that gives a new life to the visitor whether he has come from the fertile plains or the foggy city. And no wonder... there are seven thousand feet between you and sea level. Seven thousand feet nearer heaven and so much nearer purity. It is a relief to... look up to the stars, nowhere brighter than here, with only the dark pines closing in the distance... The air redolent with the perfume of fresh grass and wild flowers; and aromatic with pine needles. It is a physical pleasure to breathe, a ‘delight to exist’... It is small wonder that a millionaire [Mark Hopkins]... should confess to be happier and healthier here than in the handsomest house on California Street. Nob Hill, to the sierras indeed.” [sic]

California Spirit of the Times magazine
June 13, 1885

(Mark Hopkins, one of the transcontinental railroad's "Big Four," had an estate on Donner Summit.)

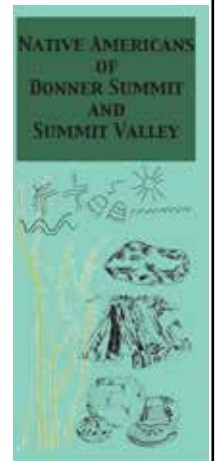


never reached the goal.” (check out [Heirloom](#) indices for emigrant stories and quotes about traveling over Donner Summit.)

Once you reach the top of the pass, “a scene of grandeur meets the eye. It takes one’s breath.” You are overlooking Donner Lake and Truckee. Here we can quote another traveler who came over the pass fourteen years before, “I don’t believe I have adequate words to describe the real beauty of Donner Pass. As we stood looking down I had a floating sensation... I lost all fear as I looked at one of the most beautiful blue lakes [Donner Lake] I had ever seen. Everything below us seemed suspended in shimmering light.” Thornton Round was fourteen years old when he crossed the continent with his family and got to Donner Summit. He had good taste too.

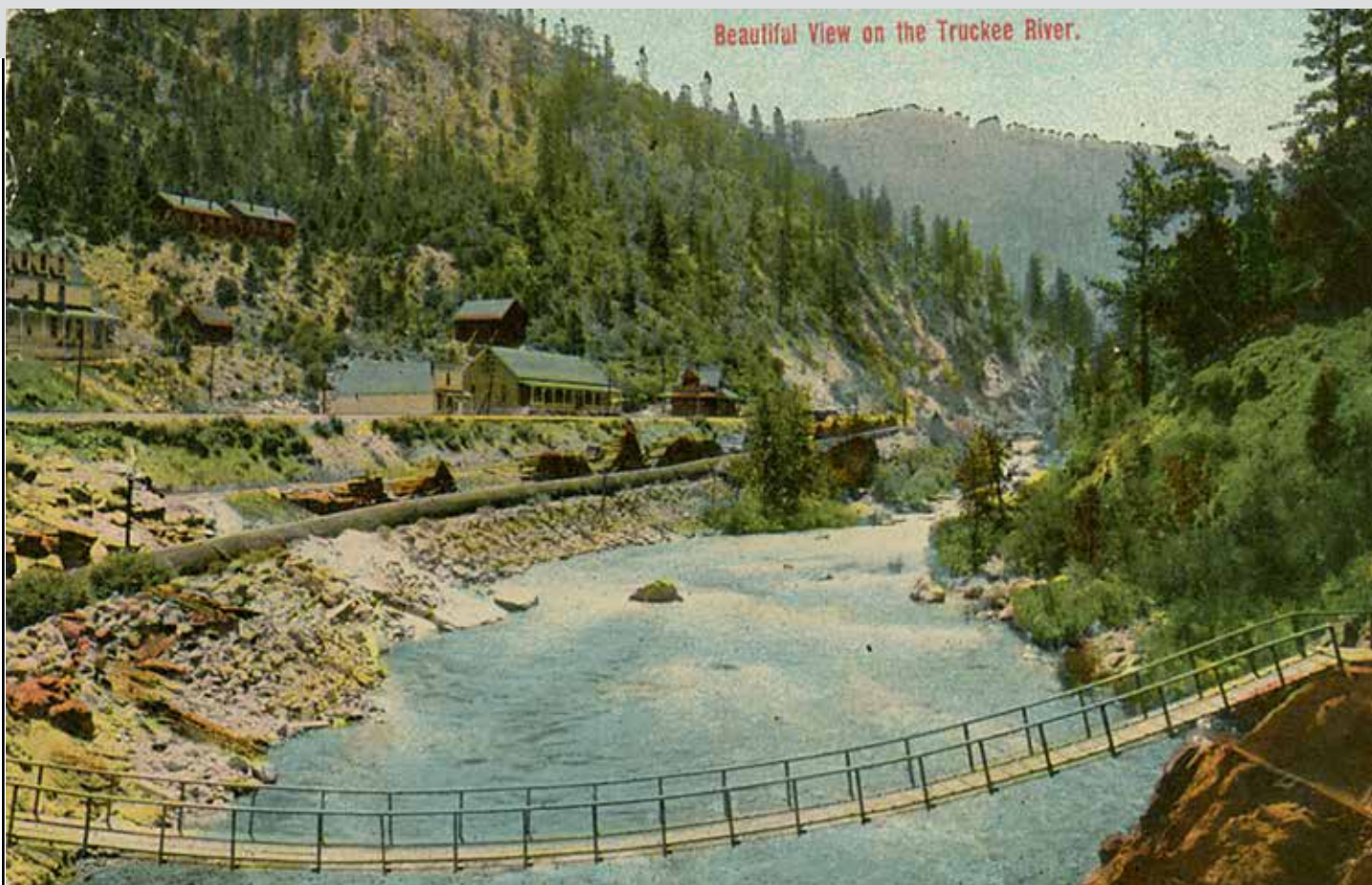
“The Donner bridge [below], just above the lake, spans a chasm of great depth. It is one of the most wonderful and beautiful highway bridges ever designed. With a vast arch it was built on a curve on up grade and tilted for speed by outside [sic] elevation.” “A view from its lookout balcony eastward toward Donner

Lake is a sight never to be forgotten.” Then the author moved on to Donner Lake and the Donner Monument, “in memory of this valiant group of early pioneers... An early Winter, deep snows exacted the inexorable toll.” “One feels that the ground is hallowed by the dead and rededicated by those who pressed on to wind a new empire and paradise.”



Donner Summit Bridge, 1933. Note the continuous striping. Dashed striping started with WWII to conserve materials.

From the DSHS Archives



Above, front of the 1915 postcard of Floriston on the Truckee River (half way between Truckee and Reno). Left is the back, talking about "oranges in the trees and farmers are planting..." One hopes "Miss Hank" in Cleveland Ohio will know that's for somewhere else in California?

Here's more information from Chaun Owens Mortier and Heidi Sproat of the Truckee Donner Historical Society after a little professional historical consultation (PHC for us historians): "This is definitely Floriston and the hotel on the left (the 2.5 Story white building) was built in 1906 and burnt in 1916. There was a fire in 1899 that destroyed the Original Hotel and the Railroad Buildings. All were rebuilt."

Editor's Note: Why, despite strict rules concerning Heirloom content requiring that content be Donner Summit did a Floriston post card find its way into the Heirloom? I have no idea but there it was in the "August '20" folder and what's in the folder cannot be ignored. It's a nice picture though and it's fun to read the messages people sent in "analog" days.

From the DSHS Archives



Van's Bar with snowsheds behind and Mt. Lincoln behind it all in the 1930's. Van's sat next to Vanderfords' Lodge which sat right where the road to Sugar Bowl leaves Donner Pass Rd. across from Donner Ski Ranch today.

Van's Bar summer of '42



Yuba River flooding in 1963 just above Rainbow. Highway 40, Donner Pass Rd. would be to the right.

Book Review

Carleton Watkins Making the West American

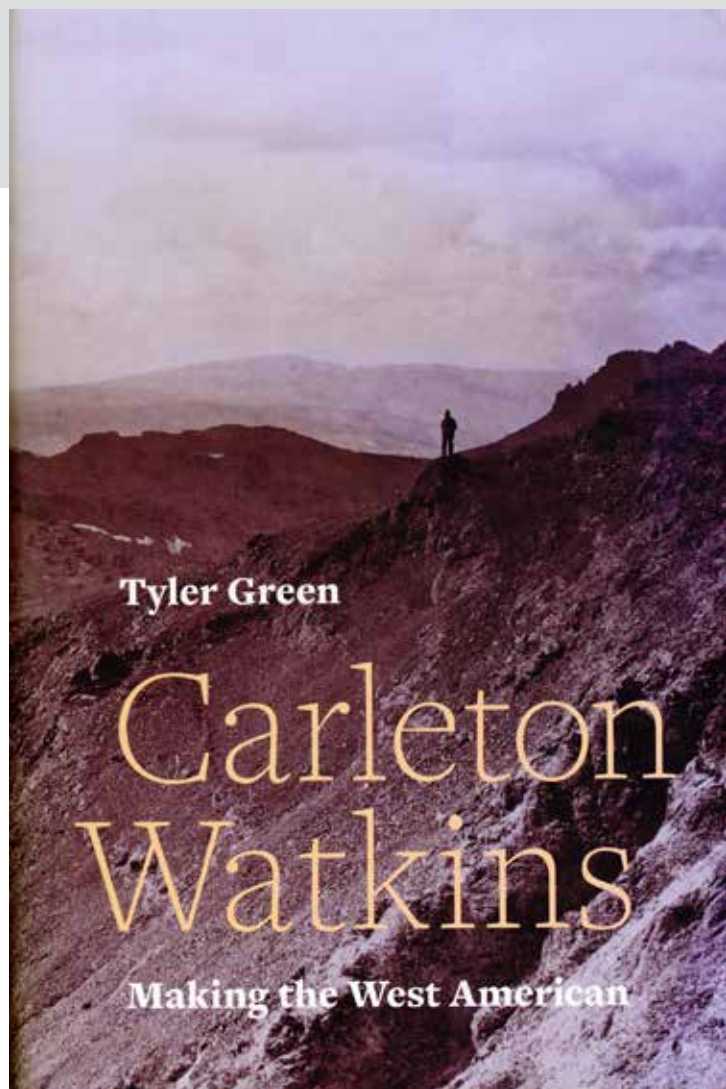
Tyler Green

2018 574 pages

Carleton Watkins was one of the official photographers of the Central Pacific railroad and so took a number of pictures on Donner Summit. In our December, '16 [Heirloom](#) we reviewed [Carleton Watkins the Complete Mammoth Photographs](#). It included photographs of Donner Summit but it was all about the mammoth photographs Watkins took and was not a biography. So you can imagine our excitement when [Carleton Watkins Making the West American](#) was published. Here we'd have the life of one of the many artists who visited Donner Summit and left a mark in the art he did.

There are two problems here. One is that there is virtually nothing in the book about Donner Summit, the first transcontinental railroad, or the pictures Watkins took on Donner Summit and nearby (or parenthetically, his reprinting Alfred A. Hart photos of the railroad and Donner Summit with "Watkins" affixed). The second problem is that there is little about Watkins' life. That second is not Mr. Green's fault. The 1906 earthquake destroyed Watkins records and negatives among other things. We have no entry into the person who was Carleton Watkins beyond a kind of technical entry which is provided by his photographs and what various public records, like newspapers, say. We don't know what he thought of the issues of the day, for example about California and the Union; how he met those who would influence or enable his work; whom he actually knew well; what the loss of his gallery and twenty years of work in 1875 meant and how he recovered; his marriage and children; the destruction of his gallery and work in the San Francisco earthquake; etc. It's a huge hole in what should be a good, or anyway more complete, story especially given the contributions Watkins made. So what's left for a biography if there is nothing about the person?

Green decided the way around the problem was "to learn about the world he [Watkins] inhabited and impacted and to place him and his work in it." That he does. About Watkins' life there are a lot of suppositions phrased as "would have," "probably," "maybe," or "it is possible." Since we can't focus on Watkins' life we focus on what Green filled this large book with: digressions about the world Watkins inhabited and impacted. Some of those subjects are Emerson and the transcendentalists; Thomas Starr King, the man who saved California for the Union; Jesse Benton Fremont (the wife of John Fremont); the birth of the national park idea



and preserving Yosemite along with the wider social and political currents of the time, and how Gettysburg was a model; various historical figures and personalities; farming in Kern County; exploration of the west; science; the politics of the time; the development of the theory that glaciers carved Yosemite and other parts of the Sierra; Wm. Ralston (The man who built San Francisco); and saving California for the Union. So the reader gets a wider view than just a biography of one artist. It's a big slice of the 19th Century.

This book is about Carleton Watkins, a famous 19th Century photographer. He was known nationwide and in Europe. Many 19th Century celebrities collected his work. His pictures hung in the Capitol building and the White House in Washington D.C. One former president might even have stolen Watkins pictures from the White House. He won national and international awards. He helped set Yosemite aside for preservation. He made contributions to science, industry, architecture, and farming. He brought the scenery of California to the nation. Then he died penniless and forgotten in the State Hospital for the insane in Napa. Today,

“...no single American did more to make the West as part of the United States, to join the remote new lands to the East, than Carleton Watkins... Watkins' story is the story of the West's maturation.”

Tyler Green

few have heard of him despite his contributions to California about which the author says, “...no single American did more to make the West as part of the United States, to join the remote new lands to the East, than Carleton Watkins... Watkins' story is the story of the West's maturation.”

The first part of the book traces what little is known about Watkins from his birth in New York in 1829 to his moving to California in 1849. Watkins knew Collis Huntington, one of the Big Four of the Transcontinental Railroad, and came to California with him by ship. Huntington clearly was a major figure in the transformation of California. Green says Watkins was on the same level, playing a starring role in the “rise of the American West and in the transformation of the nation from an agrarian coastal state to a continent – filling industrial power.” That's high praise here and book then proves the point.

It is not known what Watkins did on arrival in California. In 1853 he was a stationery store clerk in San Francisco. Where, how and why he learned photography we also don't know but he perhaps read about it in the magazines he sold in the store. In 1856 he went to work for a short time with a photographer in San Jose. Photographers in those days did their work mostly indoors but with that background Watkins went on to work outdoors doing landscape photography and that is where he would become famous and accomplished “creat[ing] a series of photographs that changed American art and impacted the nation's history.”

What really started Watkins on his own was a contract with John C. Fremont (explorer, first Republican presidential candidate – 1856, and one of the first two California senators) to photograph Fremont's estate in Mariposa. Fremont needed investors to fully develop the gold mining already being done on his property and the Watkins photographs helped sell the investments. It was at Jesse Fremont's (John C.'s wife and the daughter of another U.S. senator) salons at the Mariposa estate that Watkins met many famous Americans including Thomas Starr King. King “did the most to share Watkins' work with the east.” King was a transcendentalist who loved the land so there was a natural connection between the two over California and Western landscapes. To begin with, Watkins' photographs of Yosemite made him famous. For that he'd designed a camera to make “mammoth” photographs, 18” x 22”, something no one was doing and something that made the job much more difficult. In those days the glass negatives were the actual size of the later print which was made via contact printing (laying the glass negative on photographic

paper and then introducing light).

Here we should say Watkins had ambitions to do more than other photographers: going outdoors which few others were doing, designing his own camera, and dealing with more complicated or difficult logistics. Each custom glass plate weighed 4lbs. His processes required triple the amount of chemicals of other photographers with their more modest photographs. His development equipment had to be larger and heavier too. All that he hauled all over California. That sometimes meant hauling the camera, glass plates, and chemicals to prepare the negatives to sometimes almost inaccessible picture locations. For his 1861 trip to Yosemite he hauled in 2,000 lbs. of equipment. All that meant extra assistants. It was also a great risk because it was all expensive. He had to be confident he could recoup his costs with the sales of the resulting photographs.

Unlike other photographers whose pictures were turned

By 1870, Watkins “was already the artist who had contributed the most to American scientists' understanding of the West. He was probably also the artist who had contributed the most to American science, period.”

Tyler Green

into engravings for publication, Watkins “mammoth” photographs were framed to be put on walls. He saw his creations as art work, as did his many famous and well-off customers. Here is the maturation of the photographic art.

Watkins first pictures of Yosemite created a sensation and they went east to show Americans what the landscape in California looked like, as well as to prove the existence of redwoods.

Green says that Watkins' work even has ramifications for today. His alliances with scientists, artists, and transcendentalists over the natural landscape “set an important precedent that continues to have an impact on the environmental movement to this day... and ... led directly to the emergence of the American conservation movement.” Green also makes an interesting point that at the same time

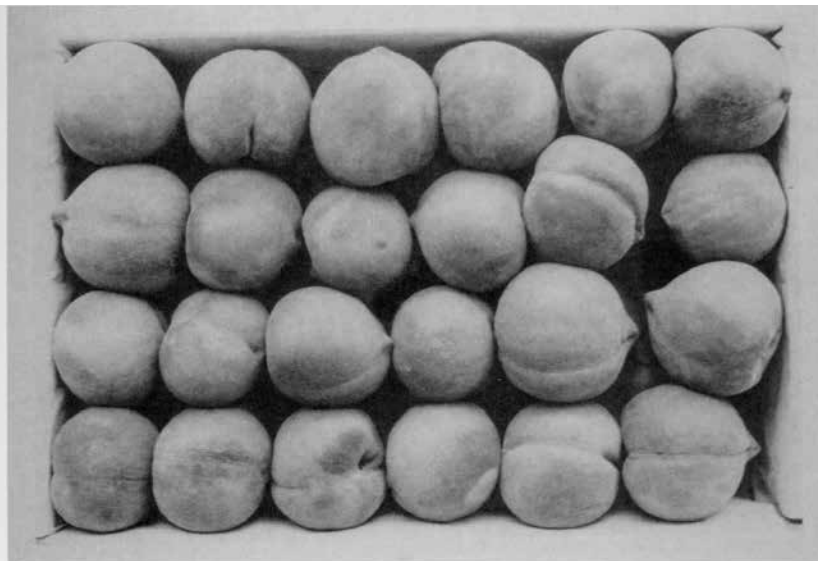
Watkins photographs of Yosemite were being exhibited back east, people were also seeing, in juxtaposition, the exhibits of the horror of the Civil War raging at the time. That gave people positive feelings about the west and gave them a sense of hope.

Watkins pioneered the exposure of California's diverse landscape to the rest of the world photographing Yosemite, the Sierra foothills, Mendocino, missions, architecture, Shasta, and the Sierra. He also photographed the Columbia River area, Montana, and Nevada. His photographs played a part in getting Yosemite preserved.

This is a biography and history book and so there are a lot of facts and analysis. Green injects humor every once in a while to show he's not just an academic. For example, talking about President Johnson at his swearing in, Green says Johnson "gave an acceptance speech that Johnson probably should have given alone..." because he was drunk. About John Muir, "Perhaps one reason Muir felt at home in Yosemite was because the landscape was named after his friends" (by Muir). In talking about the controversy about whether glaciers carved Sierra topography, Green reprises the argument with Josiah Whitney (Mt. Whitney) being dismissive of the new theory and saying it was absurd and based on ignorance. Green has one comment on Whitney's depicting the theory as stupid, "Meow."

Watkins pictures were not just for display and enjoyment. Many of his pictures were the result of contracts to provide evidence in lawsuits, information for prospective investors, or to provide examples for scientific study such as trees, topography, or volcanoes. He photographed to provide records, for example of mining activity and property boundaries. His photographs of Yosemite were used by opposing scientists either to support evidence of glacial action, the now accepted theory, or of cataclysmic geologic events, the now discredited theory.

Green is an art historian and spends a lot of time, sometimes tediously, analyzing photographs, recounting visits, describing pictures, and examining detail. For example, Watkins did a lot of photographing in Kern County getting materials for a client to woo buyers of farmland. Green notes that but also goes into the artistry of the photographs putting them in the context of other artists (painters and photographers), what he needed to show and then how he did it. One example is a simple photograph of a box of peaches (above), "Late George Cling Peaches" which Green says was Watkins' last great photograph. On one level this is a box of peaches showing the bounty of Kern County and how easy it would be for prospective buyers to make money but "so much about Late



Carleton Watkins, *Late George Cling Peaches*, 1888-89. Collection of the Huntington Library, Art Collections and Gardens, San Marino, CA.

George Cling Peaches is unprecedented," says Green in his analysis. Watkins could have done any number of things to show the bounty. He could have taken a picture of a lot of boxes, of trees full of fruit, etc. Instead he chose a straight on shot of the box, presenting the peaches in a grid, "a metaphor for western modernity." This may have been the earliest grid in art and which became a ubiquitous form in art of the 20th Century. The picture also summarized modernity in the way that farm lands are delineated by grids which was how the railroads got the land from the Federal Government, how the land was sold, etc. Orchards were planted in grids and irrigation was done in grids. The grids were made possible by a new science, geodetic mapping to which Watkins had contributed with supporting photographs.

The box of peaches showed another bit of modernity. In 1889 the idea of shipping fruit was new. Previously it had not been possible and fruit was fermented or dried. The coming of railroads meant fruit could be shipped in boxes that protected the fruit and which could be stacked "...his box of peaches w[as] both reality and a metaphor for the newest, latest West." "The picture is a thorough representation of a modern system, a new system of development, land ownership, irrigation, and transportation networks, of a new America made possible by the new West. The last great picture Watkins made [peaches] was of the West that his work had done much to realize.

Green says Wm. Ralston was the man most responsible for initially building San Francisco into a "global urban center", who made the gold mines into financial instruments, who bankrolled many industries, began the pivot from mining to agriculture in California, and "the man who had almost

certainly been the primary enabler of California's greatest artist," Carleton Watkins. (See the sidebar below with a description of a banquet given by Wm. Ralson) Ralston died by suicide in 1875 and Watkins got caught in the aftermath when his loans from Ralston were called in by their purchaser. Watkins lost his gallery in San Francisco, all of his equipment and his entire collection of photographic negatives. Since we have none of Watkins' records or thoughts, we have no idea what the details were, how Watkins reacted initially, what he felt or what effects the tragedy had on him. At age 46 two decades of work were gone and now someone else could sell his "Watkins" photographs. Watkins would end up essentially competing with himself. A lesser man would have been crushed.

Watkins started over making use of his many contacts and former clients. He went back to his previous photo shooting locations and redid his work. It must have been difficult on many levels but Green analyzes the results and says Watkins came back with even better photographs. He also added locations: Lake Tahoe and Virginia City and here he made a trip to the Sierra to photograph the Central Pacific Railroad. That's about all the mention we get of that, partly because details of Watkins' life are missing. A big question, though, is that as he became the photographer of the Central Pacific in place of Alfred A. Hart, how did Watkins feel about "inheriting" Hart's photographs, which belonged to the CPRR, and putting his name on them? He must have been really aggravated to see his pre-1875 photographs sold without any recompense to himself. Here he did something of the same with Hart's work. Green doesn't address that at all.

Watkins married late to an employee of his gallery in San Francisco who was more than twenty years younger. Two children resulted. Here we get one small bit of personal history. Green says that Watkins daughter gave a date for Watkins' marriage that was incorrect. Apparently the parents hid their daughter's illegitimacy from her.

Towards the end of the 19th Century Watkins' sight began to go. We don't know how he dealt with that. Another tragedy hit Watkins on April 18, 1906 when the San Francisco earthquake destroyed his studio and work, ironically just the day before his photographic plates, records, and a mysterious trunk full of historical items were to go to Stanford University. Watkins fell into poverty, became blind, apparently developed dementia, and was committed to Napa State Hospital for the insane. He died in 1916.

A Gilded Age Banquet in San Francisco How the 19th Century 1% enjoyed themselves

brandy, sherry, "grand salmon stuffed with brook trout and baked in rose leaves [and] baked macaroni each stock of which had been stuffed with anchovies and Madagascar peas." The main course featured "a humming-bird filled with baked almonds, surrounded by Spring linner, which, in turn was enveloped by an English snipe. These the carcass of a stuffed goose surrounded, covering which were two canvas-back ducks raised in celery garden, the whole paced within the bosom of a Chicago goose. Soaked in raisin wine for six days, then larded, and smoked three weeks over burning sandalwood, it was at last placed o the spit and roasted with pic-pork drippings."

[The man who built California](#) 332-3
[Maine Journal](#) 4-30-74 also
[Indianapolis Evening News](#) 4-21-74

Description of a "Gilded Age" banquet given by Wm. Ralson

Note:

You have noticed our monthly book reviews. You might want to do some reading of your own.

Stop in at the DSHS. Norm Sayler has a large collection of books for perusing, buying, or checking out.

You might even want to do a review for us.

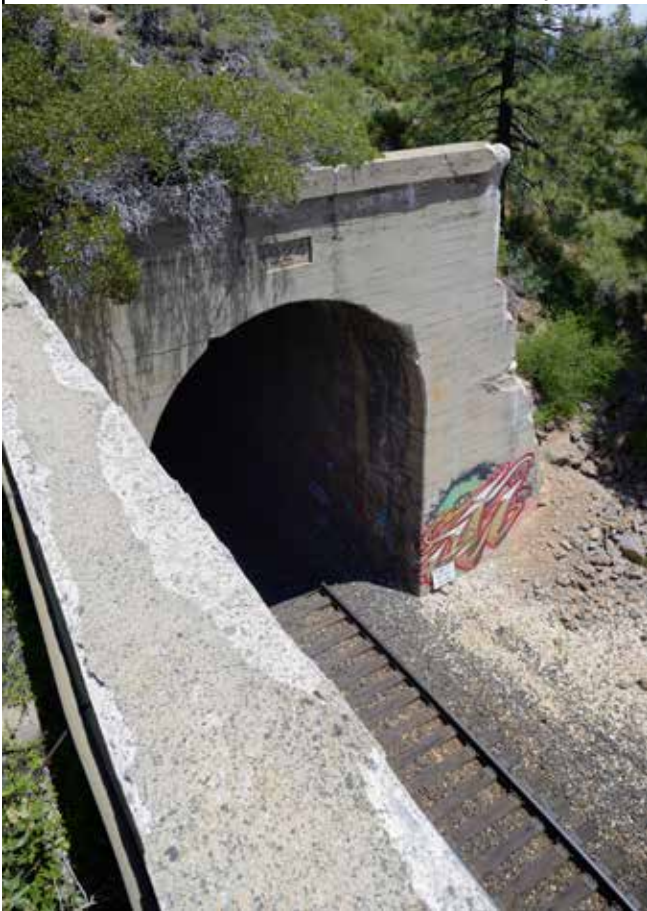
Odds & Ends on Donner Summit Tunnels 13 & 42

It took 15 tunnels for the transcontinental railroad to get over the Sierra in 1868. In 1924 a second track was added requiring more tunnels. The picture on the right shows Tunnel 13 (1868) on the left, and Tunnel 42 (1924) on the right. There used to be a turntable in the foreground where helper engines could turn around and the little railroad stop, Andover, was nearby.

Today, despite the remoteness, the tunnels serve as graffiti canvases.



Today you can walk or bike from Tunnel 6 through tunnels and snowsheds all the way around to Coldstream Canyon where the current transcontinental railroad route comes out of Tunnel 41. Then, if you have energy keep going to where the railroad stop Eder was and head up to the top of Schallenburger Ridge.



Pictures on this page by George Lamson. Pictured, left is Art Clark and at the right side of Tunnel 13 is Bill Oudegeest. All three are members of the DSHS Mobile Historical Research team.





Supposing you did take the walk through the snowsheds and tunnels all the way to Coldstream Valley and the eastern exit of Tunnel 41, the currently used railroad tunnel, and then continued around and up Schallenburg Ridge (there are a number of trails and old roads), and then you did turn around and face west, above is what you would see (minus the labeling). Castle Pk. is on the right and Mt. Lincoln on the left. Mt. Judah is in the center. It's August. Why not try it?



The tunnels are nicely labeled so one doesn't get confused.



Map showing Tunnels 13 & 42.

Map by George Lamson

This is part of a series of miscellaneous history, "Odds & Ends" of Donner Summit. There are a lot of big stories on Donner Summit making it the most important historical square mile in California. All of those episodes* left behind obvious traces. As one explores Donner Summit, though, one comes across a lot of other things related to the rich history. All of those things have stories too and we've been collecting them. Now they're making appearances in the [Heirloom](#).

If you find any "Odds & Ends" you'd like to share pass them on to the editor - see page 2

*Native Americans; first wagon trains to California; the first transcontinental railroad, highway, air route, and telephone line, etc.

What's in Your Closet?

It's always nice to meet fans of the [Heirloom](#), particularly when they come bearing gifts.

Chuck and Kathy Cole have long had a condominium at Tahoe Donner and have been collecting local historical memorabilia and books for even longer. Now that Chuck has retired from the lobbying business the couple thought about giving up the expense of the condominium. That meant the books and memorabilia would be without a home. Fortunately Chuck has been reading the [Heirloom](#) for years and thought the DSHS might be a good home. So, in late July they arrived with a car load of boxes which you can see here and that got Norm excited. There are some good books here that you'll read about in some future [Heirlooms](#).

Meanwhile, what's in your closet that we can preserve for the future?



DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Donner Summit Historical Society.org

I/we would like to join The Donner Summit Historical Society and share in the Summit's rich history.

DATE _____

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_____ Individual Membership - \$30

(Please mail this card with your check payable to DSHS to Donner Summit Historical Society, P.O. Box 1, Norden, CA 95724)

_____ Family Membership - \$50

_____ Friend Membership - \$100

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Donner Summit Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

If you would like monthly newsletter announcements, please write your email address below VERY neatly.



Take the Scenic Route: Donner Summit's Old Highway 40



Pick up the brochure at the DSHS or download it at:
<http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/brochures.html>

50 interpretive signs along Old 40
<http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/20MileMuseum.html>

DSHS Picture Project

The DSHS has Norm Saylor's incomparable collection of historical photographs and ephemera. Ever since the start of the DSHS they've existed only in binders and drawers at the DSHS. Nothing was easily accessible, and more importantly, were vulnerable to mishap.

For some years we been working on digitizing things and then developing an ACDSsee data base to accept the materials. To save volunteer time and effort we limited the exercise to Donner Summit materials and no duplicates. So far about 2800 pictures have been scanned with descriptions. That still left another 900+ that have no descriptions.

Here you see Judy Lieb and Ron Grove sitting with Norm as they "page through" the pictures needing annotation/description. Norm tells the story, names the people, looks for details we non-professionals don't readily see, and gives the dates. The information goes on a form, one per picture, which goes to George Lamson. George then updates the master file and uploads the now annotated pictures to Flickr.

With thousands of pictures now on Flickr, and all searchable, the public has a resources of Donner Summit photographic history. Larger items are in the process of being scanned now and will add ephemera to the collection (newspaper articles, brochures, maps, etc.). The collection is now easily accessible by the public and preserved for future generations.

We have a computer in the DSHS for public access too, but it's being set up just now. Stay tuned. Eventually we'll get a second computer.



This is quite an achievement by the volunteers. If you'd like to help, contact the editor on page 2 or send a check to help with equipment purchasing (see the form on the next page).

Here's the Flickr link:
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/188645737@N03/albums/72157714653193812>

Top: Norm Saylor, Starr Walton, Ron Grove. Bottom: Judy Lieb, Norm Saylor