

The Donner Summit

Heirloom

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

August, 2021 issue #156



Why Does it Take so Long for Some Stories to Get into The Heirloom?

Here we are with the DSHS being thirteen years old and we've published 156 issues of the Heirloom. We're just now coming to one of the major historical features of Donner Summit though, the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Road. The route over the summit and down to Donner Lake follows approximately the generally accepted route of the first wagon trains from 1844 to 1846 (in 1846 the emigrants discovered Roller Pass a mile or so south and everyone went there), the Donner party rescuers and those rescued from Donner Lake. The railroad followed closely as did later, the Lincoln Highway. Even Old Highway 40 was built nearby. Thousands of people traveled the Dutch Flat Rd. route on stages, by wagon, by horseback or even by foot. Many tons of equipment were shipped along the road, first for the railroad, then for Truckee, Virginia City, and points east. Sheep and cattle were herded along it. The first automobiles to cross the summit traveled on its remnants. The first motorized crossing of the United States used the Dutch Flat Rd. as did the first bicyclist to ride across the Sierra, then across the country and finally, around the world.

The Dutch Flat Rd. was an important route and the Heirloom has covered all of the stories in the paragraph above but we've never actually covered the road. Maybe it just shows how much history there is on Donner Summit and how much competition there is for Heirloom "real estate."

Maybe it's also because the story is not very compelling. There's not much to it and so we have gathered a collection of materials, an historical potpourri, to coin a no doubt soon to be ubiquitous historical term among professional historians. This month we have the general story and some illustrations. Next month will be a kind of scrapbook of Dutch Flat Donner lake Wagon Rd. photographs.

Reader Advice Solicited

The first issue of the Heirloom "hit the stands" with the September, 2008 issue. Our initial Heirlooms were 10-15 pages long and over the now 156 issues, have grown to twenty pages or so. Each has been full of Donner Summit history and we've covered about every possible story. There are a few left.

Margie Powell was the spark behind the DSHS. She got it started telling Norm Saylor, our president, it would be the perfect repository for his incomparable collection of historic photographs and historical ephemera. She did the required State and Federal paperwork, got things organized, and was the energy behind the DSHS until she passed a couple of years later. As things were getting started and the first Heirlooms rolled off the presses, she cautioned against the Heirlooms being too long. She was afraid we'd run out of history. Of course, she was right in the abstract. As historically significant as Donner Summit is, the history is not unlimited. The problem with her advice was that there is so much history and to tell the stories properly space in the form of more pages was needed. We also wanted to have a mix in each issue so that there would be something for everyone.

Now here we are in 2021, 156 issues and a couple of thousand pages later. Margie's caution is coming true.

cont'd to page 3

Story Locations in this Issue

The Dutch Flat Wagon Rd. parallels a lot of Donner Pass Rd.

Walk the Dutch Flat Route pg 8

pictures Summit Valley pg 9

picture pg 17

DONNER SUMMIT



Finding Your Way Through Donner Summit History

We've now passed 150 issues of the Heirloom: thousands of pages, thousands of pictures, and hundreds of subjects. You've probably begun to realize that you cannot keep all the history in your head. Even if you remember it all, retrieval is difficult.

Fortunately John Albert Index invented the index* and one of the choices we made back at the birth of the DSHS was to index all our Heirloom articles and pictures. We've diligently kept up the indices so that they are many pages long, full of alphabetized titles and subjects. Go to our website and to any of the Heirloom pages (one for each year) and you'll find links to the Heirloom indices.

One of the strengths of the DSHS is the incomparable historical photograph collection of Norm Saylor, our president. The collection is thousands of pictures and again the sheer number makes finding anything in particular, difficult. Avoid the long URL by going to our website and clicking on the "photographs" link and then to the "historic photo collection link." A third link, to the Flickr URL will take you to those thousands of searchable historical photographs of Donner Summit. Have fun.

*historical society humor

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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

Reader Advice from page 1

What do we do when there are no more big stories like this month's Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd.?

In newspaper circles the most important column goes on the right side of the front page. That's where this request is situated on page 1. We hope to get some good suggestions from our almost 1000 subscribers and others who get the Heirloom from the FaceBook link or the website but don't subscribe: info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

The Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Road Pt I

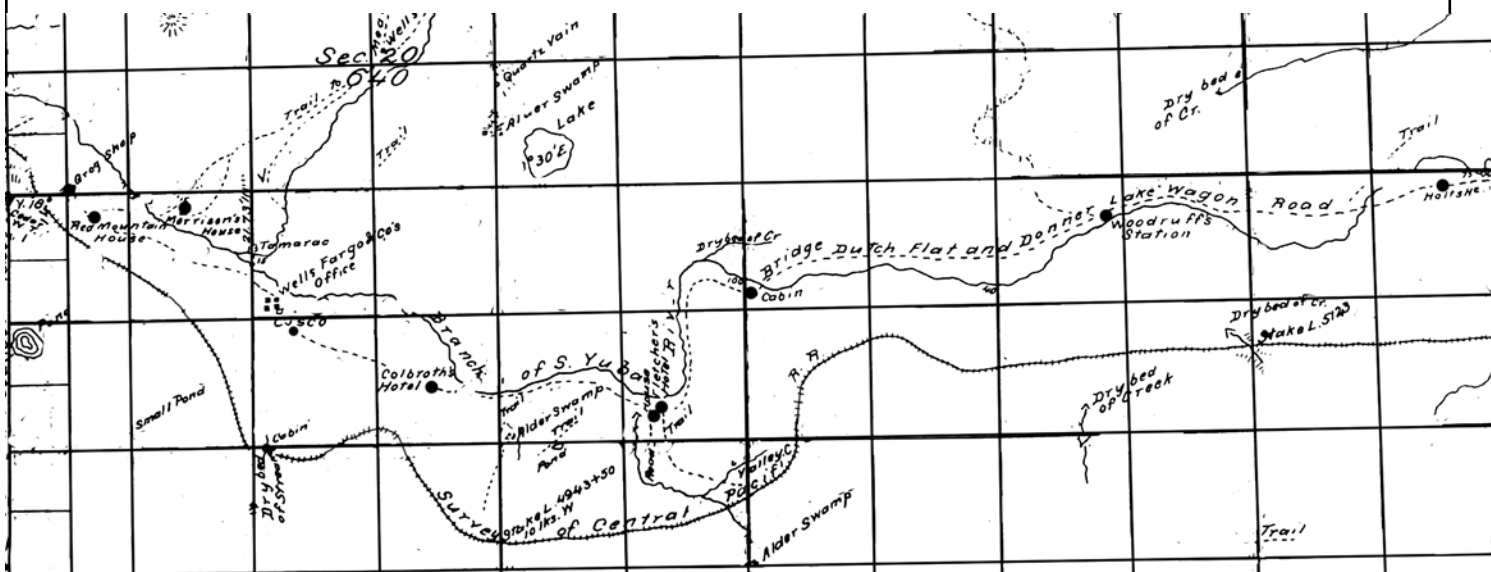
"MESSR. EDITORS: This is one of the most important enterprises ever commenced in this State. The road commences at Dutch Flat, in Placer County, and terminates on the Truckee river [sic], and there connects with other roads to all parts of the Washoe and Humboldt counties. The work commenced last Fall, and was prosecuted as diligently as practicable until the workmen were driven out by the snow... When completed it will be the finest wagon road in the State, with a grade not exceeding ten inches to the rod [$16 \frac{2}{3}$ feet], and with a width sufficient, on the whole line, to enable loaded teams to pass each other without difficulty... this wagon road... will be the shortest, speediest, cheapest and best route. The company will keep the tolls at such rates that it will be far the cheapest route over the mountains.

May 4, 1863

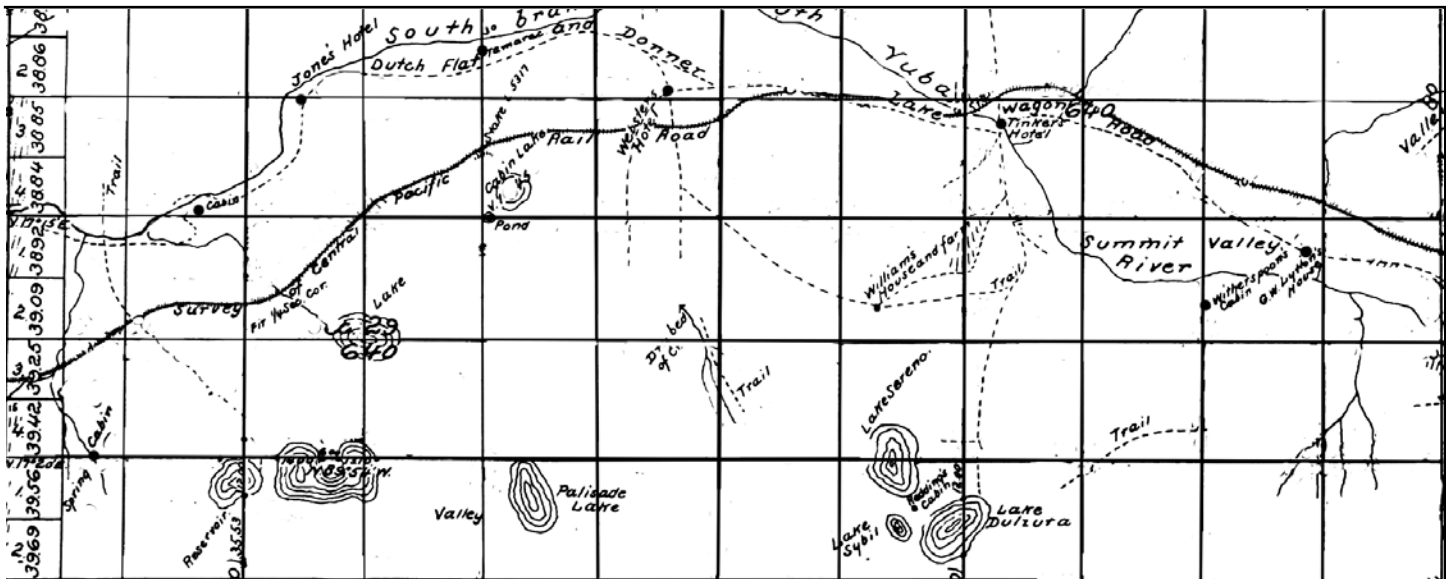
Sacramento Daily Union

The letter to the editor above was signed by "common sense" and the whole article was aimed at convincing Placer Co. to contribute to the road because of the tremendous amount of traffic (the road "will be lined with stages and teams"). The letter added the road would require "hotels innumerable" to accommodate the traffic and so help the local economy. It was also public relations for the new road, a year before completion, to contrast it with its nearest competitor, the Placerville Route (and here, because we are fans of the Donner Route, there'd be the boo's in the audience at the mention of the Placerville Route.)

The Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. began life as The Lake Pass Turnpike Co. and was the result of pressure that had been building for a new road to compete with the Placerville Route after silver was discovered in Virginia City. There was money to be



Here and on the next two pages are parts of the first U.S. Gov't survey of Donner Summit, done in 1866 in preparation for selling U.S. Government land. A little right of center, above, you can see the Dutch Flat Rd. label. On the western side note "Cisco" and the Wells Fargo office and other buildings along the road. The maps have been extensively cleaned of extraneous detail by our graphics department.



This map shows Donner Summit just east of the page three map. Towards the top you can see the Dutch Flat Rd. title. Note Tinker's Hotel directly above.

made in the transportation of goods. The road was built by the Big Four of the Central Pacific Railroad, and a couple of others, who were quickly shut out of the venture, to accommodate teams carrying freight "to and doing business in the State of Nevada" (testimony in front of the Pacific Railway Commission, 1887). Although the road was built by the Big Four its construction was not part of the railroad; it was a separate investment or "property". Leland Stanford, California senator, California governor, Stanford University founder, and one of the Big 4, was a witness before the Pacific Railway Commission in 1887 and he said,

"[W]e thought that it would be a good property, and at that time it was a necessity to the Central Pacific, because as the road went up the mountain there was no wagon road from the railroad to Virginia City to take freight from the end of the railroad. Without the wagon road the railroad could not have done its Nevada business, which at that time was very important, but practically there was not much more than two seasons of wagoning on that road, because the railroad was constructed so rapidly over the mountain." (Pg 2927)

Then he had more to say. "It was built by us as individuals. We never got back the money that it cost to built it, and when we got through with the construction of the railroad we gave the wagon road to the counties in which it was built." (Pg 2928) "The Central Pacific, however, got the benefit of the road, and the entire cost of it ought to have been charged to the Central Pacific." "The wagon road business was a losing one. The [rail]road was a good one. The stage horses used to take the grade on one end of it and trot all the way over the mountains." "The wagon road made a profit, because it had the road [CPRR] to carry stuff from the end of the railroad over the mountains." "But for the speedy construction of the railroad the wagon road would have been a fine property; but, as it was, it was in use but so short a time that we did not get our money back out of it."

The State of California gave the Dutch Flat company a franchise for ten years, 1861 to 1871, to collect tolls (see page 8).

TINKER'S STATION,
DONNER LAKE ROAD,
TINKER & FENTON, Proprietors.

Nearest point for the Celebrated Soda Springs.

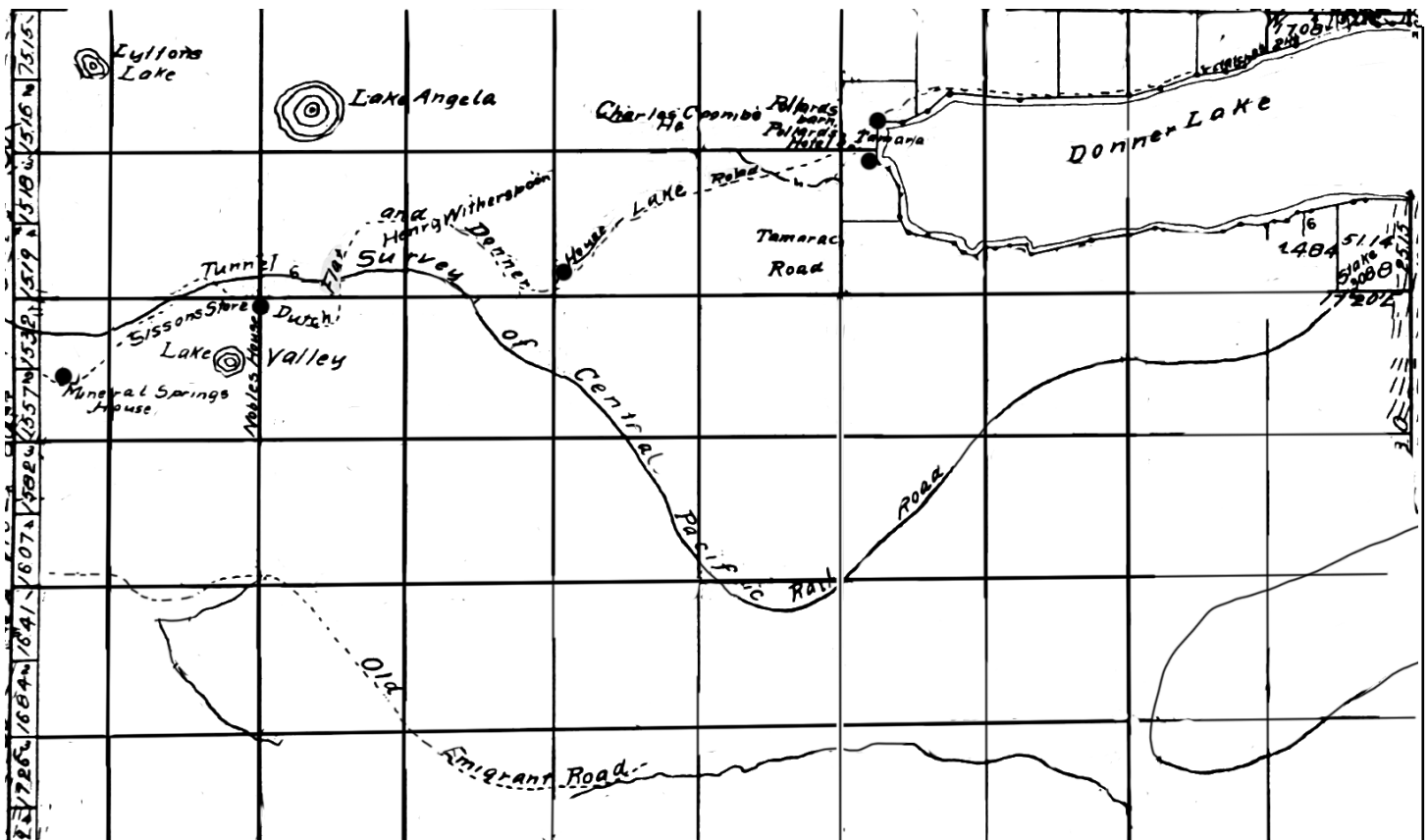
A Bar, with the best of Liquors, connected with the House.

Board per Week.....\$10. | Single Meals.....75 cents.

Horses and Carriages furnished to Pleasure Parties.

Twelve miles from Crystal Lake, ten miles from Cisco, and six miles from Pollard's Station.

Tinker's Station was a railroad and stage stop at Soda Springs Station (today's Soda Springs). There was a hotel, bar, livery, and other buildings. See the map above.



This piece of the survey is just east of the section on the previous page and takes you to Donner Lake. Note the railroad route, there were no rails yet on the summit, and the "Emigrant Road." Note too the various buildings along the Dutch Flat Rd. The title starts two sections (squares) below Lake Angela.

Construction had started by 1863 but there was a problem getting labor despite paying \$40 per month. The Dutch Flat Enquirer thought that should be enough pay and said, "fair wages, wholesome board and good treatment" would be offered to workers. "Loungers now have no excuse for indulging in lazy habits. Go to work and earn an honest living, pay your bills and prepare yourselves to look honest men in the face." (July 30, 1863). According to the Sacramento Daily Union (1/2/64) three hundred and fifty workers (or 200 or 300-500 if you read other newspapers) worked for ten months to build the road for \$200,000. That was more than had been spent on any road in the state up to that time, the newspaper said. When finished the road was about ninety miles long from Dutch Flat to Truckee. At Truckee the road connected to other roads already in existence. The road was completed in 1864 but stopped toll collecting in 1868 or so, after traffic had moved to the railroad.

As the railroad building progressed across the Sierra, "end of track" moved uphill. Wherever end of track was a town would grow up and there would be stage and freight service for the rest of the trip over the Sierra. Small hotels were built all along the route, including a couple on Donner Summit.

On June 25, 1864, the month the road was finished, an issue of the Placer Herald reported, "A number of light teams have come westward over Donner Lake road and loaded teams have commenced return trips by the same route. Teamsters expressed themselves highly pleased with the light grades and good width of the road as enabling them to draw heavier loads and to pass abreast at almost any point." In the first year 8,250 wagons, 169 buggies and one horse vehicles, 1276 horsemen and 8,590 head of loose stock used the road. When the road was opened the California Stage Co. began running from Clipper Gap to Virginia City in 16 hrs. Today I suppose that would take just a couple of hours. Maybe a better way to put the heavy use the road experienced is to say that in 1867 fifty-eight train car loads of freight a day were unloaded at Cisco (end of track) onto freight wagons to travel over the Summit on the Dutch Flat Rd. That was a lot of weight and today you trace the route of the road through Summit Valley easily because the compacted earth still cannot grow anything. See page nine.

The Central Pacific extolled their new road via letters placed in the newspapers. On August 26, 1864 the Sacramento Daily Union touted the superiority of the Donner route (as opposed to the Placerville route), "Notwithstanding the Dutch Flat and Donner Lake wagon road is a new and comparatively untraveled road, confessedly unfinished, and not having attained that

solidity that a long traveled, constantly repaired and well-sprinkled road is sure to attain, it has fully demonstrated that its geographical location and its gentle grades ... fully establish the claim of its proprietors that it is the best and easiest road over the Sierras...[sic]"

Those attributes were all great but there was more, "The mountain and lake scenery on the route is unsurpassed for magnificence and beauty," ([Sacramento Daily Union](#) January 2, 1865) another plus for the road.

Not everyone was pleased with the new road though.

Competition

It wasn't always as friendly in the Sierra as it is now. There was a time, surprising now, when there was competition between Donner Summit and the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. route over the Sierra and the Placerville route. We take it for granted today, based on incontrovertible evidence, that the Donner Summit route, today's I-80, is superior. After all, look where they put the railroad, the first transcontinental highway, the Interstate, the first transcontinental telephone line, and the first transcontinental air route and its weather stations and emergency landing strips. The 19th Century was not so enlightened and that can seem shocking to us.

In 1864 The Dutch Flat Rd. had just been finished and was clear competition for the Placerville route and the competition played out in the newspapers. The people on the Placerville route claimed theirs was the better route because it was shorter and there was less snow. The Central Pacific touted its advantages too. The Donner Route was a marvel, "Safety and comfort can't be beat." "By far the best road constructed across the mountains." "Half the maximum grade" of other roads. "Constructed in the best possible manner." "wide enough for teams to pass each other without difficulty." "Commodious hotels have been erected along the route." It only took 17 hours from Sacramento to Virginia City on the Dutch Flat Road.

The proof of the Dutch Flat route's superiority would follow at the end of the summer, 1864

An example of Placerville propaganda was an article in the [Placerville Mountain Democrat](#) on June 18, 1864. "Quickest Trip from Washoe to Sacramento.— Under this heading Stanford, Crocker & Co., with inexcusable extravagance and mendacity, are blowing about a recent trip made on the Dutch Flat route, and are endeavoring to deceive the people into the belief that it is the best time ever made. Unfortunately for them disinterested parties prove that better time has been made on the Placerville route, ... Stanford & Co., with supreme contempt for truth or probability..." The article went on to say that "In spite of their boasting" better time has been made on the Placerville route. "On the 18th of

last March the Pioneer Stage Company made the trip from Virginia City to Folsom in 13 hours and 53 minutes." That was especially good because the time included stoppages and because the road "is constantly filled with teams, which frequently delay the stages and interfere with fast traveling." The Dutch Flat route, "is not traveled by teams." Careful readers might say that would seem to undercut their argument for travel speed.

The article concluded, "The traveling public know that we have the best route, the finest coaches, the fastest teams and the safest drivers; and they look upon the blowing of Stanford, Crocker & Co. as superbly ridiculous."

The two sides continued sniping at each other throwing out accusations of bribery, mendacity, humbug, lying, gross misrepresentation, newspapers were refusing to print news of fast trips that didn't coincide with their favorite "pet and puffed" route, and that certain interests were trying to delay the railroad to protect their local interests.

We'll end this with just one more example. The [Placerville Mountain Democrat](#) (8/27/64) said, "The [Sacramento Union](#) is in a pet ; what's more, it manifests its bewitching rage in a ludicrous manner. It is howling with despair and bleating for sympathy. It is not only angry but frenzied; worse still, it is innocently making itself the laughing-stock of the State; worst of all, it is powerless to help itself. We deeply sympathize with the garrulous and peevish and feeble old lady. She has lost her sweet temper and whines piteously for sympathy."

At the end of the summer the "proof was in the pudding" so to speak.

The Sacramento Valley Railroad (SVRR that went from Sacramento to near Folsom) and the Pioneer State Co. openly boasted that they intended to cover the distance from San Francisco to Virginia City in less than 24 hours. When the Central Pacific Railroad (CPRR) heard about the idea, it jumped in to make it a contest. It would be great publicity which would increase business and traffic. (for the complete story see our August, '19 [Heirloom](#)).

A steamer would carry representatives of both companies along with the current day's edition of a San Francisco paper. That would prevent cheating.

For the CPRR the first leg was from Freeport to Sacramento by horse. That was a good choice because at least one newspaper reported that the steamer, instead of going at its usual 17 mph, instead took 1 ½ hours to go the twelve or fourteen miles. Then it was from Sacramento to Newcastle by train – 42 minutes for the 31 miles. At the end of track in Newcastle the CPRR used an ordinary stage and the usual horses to travel to Virginia City.

SVRR used the train from Freeport to Folsom (Latrobe) and then transferred to the Pioneer Stage for the trip to Virginia City. This train trip was 37 miles and took 1 1/2 hours.

The Sacramento Daily Union (8-26-64) reported the results. From Sacramento the CPRR people took 13 hours 1 minute to get to Virginia City. The whole trip from San Francisco took 21 hours and 1 minute via the Dutch Flat Rd. (DFDLWR). Imagine sitting in a stagecoach for 13 hours.

For the SVRR from Freeport to Virginia City it took 22 hours and 39 minutes and from San Francisco to Virginia City it took 29 hours 15 minutes. The SVRR people said they'd run into a "trial of speed" due to rain and it would have been cruel to subject the stock and passengers to an "unwarrantable rate of speed" just to win. They telegraphed, "Heavy rains—heavy roads— heavy loads." They also whined that the CPRR had cheated by not taking the slow steamboat to Sacramento. The Daily Alta California also said the contest was unfair because the CPRR train to Newcastle only carried five passengers instead of an ordinary load. From Newcastle they had used a "buggy express" instead of an ordinary stage. Because they'd worn out their stock with the unwarranted speed the stages the next day were all late. Finally, the Sacramento Union said that the California Stage Co., forsaking comfort for speed, thoroughly wore out their superintendent, Charles Crocker, one of the Big Four. He was "unfit for duty" following the race. The Union also pointed out that the "obese superintendent" was of some "three hundred pounds avoirdupoise [sic]."

In response, the Daily Alta said dishonest people always accuse others of dishonesty. The California Stage Co. also said it was sorry to hear "that a brief rain produces such an effect on the Placerville road, causing a trial of speed." They also noted, "The Donner Lake road is new, and comparatively soft, one would suppose ; but it seems to stand fast travel like a well-kept racing track." On that road "heavy rains" did not lead to "heavy roads." It's geographic location was superior, it was kept in good repair and well-sprinkled (for dust), and it's grade was very gentle.

That wasn't the total extent of proof of the superiority of the Dutch Flat route. Four months after the race two newly elected Nevada senators had to get from Carson City to Washington D.C. Governor Nye traveled by Pioneer Stage on the Placerville Route. Wm. Stewart took the California Stage Co. and the Dutch Flat Route. They arrived at San Francisco at the same time. Nye had left twenty four hours ahead of Stewart though, and he'd broken a wrist when a coach overturned.

That would leave the case closed regarding superiority of the Dutch Flat route.

Stories

There were some interesting sights on the Dutch Flat Road

beyond the scenery and whatever ordinary freight hauling and stage travel adventures there were. For example, the locomotive Sacramento was hauled on wagons from Gold Run to the Summit to work as donkey engine over the central shaft of the summit Tunnel #6 in 1867.

Missouri Bill hitched 10 yoke of oxen (20 oxen) to his logging wagon which had two foot wide wheels so it would not sink into the mud. The huge wagon load was such a scary sight to oncoming traffic that it caused a one stampede and "raised hell on the trail." "There was trouble every day" and "stage horses would balk at the sight of her." Eventually oncoming teamsters blindfolded their mules so they would not run off when they saw the engine coming. It took six weeks for the locomotive to come from Sacramento to Donner Summit.

Later in 1867, during summer, two locomotives, forty miles of track and railroad car parts were hauled over the road to Truckee so the railroad could begin building out into Nevada where it was nice and flat and they could build quickly. Once the summit tunnels were finished the track into Nevada would be connected to the summit track which would reap a lot of Government cash (in the form of bonds). That was all for practice. A few months later, in February, 1868, in the middle of winter, another whole locomotive, another forty miles of track, and more parts for railroad cars were taken over the Summit on the road. Oxen wore "shoes" so they would not sink too far into the snow.

You had to be tough to live in those days. The idea was so memorable that the scene became part of a 1925 John Ford movie, "The Iron Horse" (see the December, '19 Heirloom to read about the book that came after the movie. See the January, '18 Heirloom to read about the movie, and the April, '20 Heirloom for a follow-up.

The DFDLWR also played a part in the Dutch Flat swindle when the Big Four were accused of not building a transcontinental railroad but only a railroad to Dutch Flat to connect with their toll road. The accusation was that they were taking investors' money under false pretenses. You can see the railroad and realize there's always been fake news or "alternative facts."

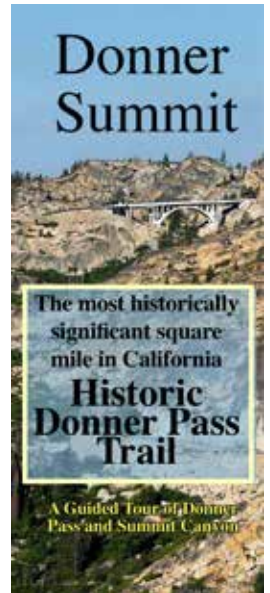
Ending

Alonzo Delano, pen name "Old Block," was a famous writer and humorist who arrived in California (see articles in the July, '20 Heirloom). He eventually ended up in Grass Valley where he was the Wells Fargo agent and County treasurer. In 1874, just five years after the completion of the transcontinental railroad, he took a camping trip from Grass Valley up to Donner Summit along the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd. He said that

"along the route were the remains of many buildings which had been erected years ago, before the railroad was completed, but disused as soon

as travel was transferred to the great passage-way. Large barns and hotels still stood as wrecks, their roofs crushed by the weight of snow, and in some cases only the blackened remains of large hotels were left that had been consumed by fire, the work of accident or design. Now and then a herder had crept in with his cattle from the lower valley, where they could get the grass which is green all Summer long along the streams at this altitude, while it was parched and dried up in the foothills. As we went on, sometimes over roads so rough that we were forced to walk, the snow sheds over our heads seemed to lessen in distance, for our ascent was continuous, till they seemed to leave the hill-side and stretch away beyond the hills into vacancy. We were nearing Summit Valley, an altitude of over 7,000 feet.”

Sacramento Daily Union November 1, 1873
Camping in the Sierras, A Watering-Place in California
Old Block.



The "best route" was not even a route anymore and early automobilists and years later bicyclists would decry its condition.

Walk the Dutch Flat Route

An interesting walk or walks on Donner Summit is along the remnants of the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. You are really walking along the remnants of a successor, the Lincoln Highway. The best portion is from the top of Donner Pass and down to the Truckee Donner Land Trust (TDLT) kiosks on Old Highway 40 a half mile up or so from Donner Lake. It's all downhill. First, pick up our newest brochure, "Donner Summit" (see the front panel at the right). It touts Donner Summit as the most historically significant square mile in California, has a map of the route, and QR codes that will take your smart phone to good stories on your way down to Donner Lake. Then start at the Pacific Crest Trail-head. Instead of going uphill at the sign, take the left side. As you walk down you'll see great views, cross the old railroad route, see snow tunnels, China Wall, petroglyphs thousands of years old, lots of granite, more great views, rock climbers, ads painted on the rocks more than a hundred years ago, etc. Leave a car at the TDLT trailhead so you don't have to walk back uphill. Take a lunch for the great picnic spot (see the map in the brochure).

On the matter of the rates Of toll on the Dutch Flat and Donner Lake Wagon Road

Ordered that the Dutch Flat and Donner Lake Wagon Road Co and it hereby is authorized to charge and collect upon its Wagon Road from Alta in Placer Co. to Ingram's Station in Nevada Co, the rates of toll heretofore established.

Rates of Toll

For a vehicle and one animal	5.00
For a vehicle and two animals	9.00
For a vehicle and four animals	11.00
For a vehicle and six animals	13.00
For a vehicle and eight animals	15.00
For a vehicle and ten animals	17.00
For each additional animal in team	1.00
For a man and horse	1.50
For a pack animal	.75
For loose stock horses, mules, or cattle each	.50
For Hogs and Sheep each	.25

State of California
Nevada County Board of Supervisors August 21, 1865

The board of Supervisors' resolution also allowed the construction of toll gates at Polley's Station [Crystal Lake] and Donner Lake.

Evidence of the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Road Today



Left is Alfred A. Hart photograph #191 "Route in Summit Valley" taken from the flank of Mt. Judah looking west. The far mountain is Red Mountain and the nearer one on the left is what is today Soda Springs ski hill. The valley is Summit Valley. Look to the right and you see a light line which enhances the detail of the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. The road received huge amounts of traffic in just a couple of years until it fell out of use in favor of the railroad. There was so much traffic that even today the road can be seen (below) and that's after it was covered for more than a hundred years by a lake.

Above is a stereo view of the picture above left. Below is a stereo view taken a few years ago by Art Clark so you have a Then & Now view. Note no railroad above, but there is one today.



The picture to the left shows how compressed the soil is where the wagon wheels traveled the Dutch Flat Rd. in Summit Valley. The view looks west. Soda Springs ski hill is the hill in the background.

Another Little Note

We've been collecting Dutch Flat materials for some years and some of it has appeared in this Heirloom issue. There's more to come though. We didn't want this issue to be too long and we thought that giving you some anticipation of what's coming next month might enliven things. Next month: a lot of pictures.

DUTCH FLAT WAGON ROAD.

This new route over the Mountains, by way of Dutch Flat and Donner Lake, can now be traveled by Teams without load, and will be open for loaded Teams

JUNE 15th, 1864.

IT IS

**The Shortest, Best and
Cheapest Route to Wash-
oe, Humboldt and Reese
River.**

Its grade going East at no place exceeds ten inches to the rod, and it is wide enough for Two Teams to pass without difficulty. All teams coming West, without load, can travel the New Road FREE OF TOLL until further notice. All those taking loads at Newcastle, the terminus of the Central Pacific Railroad, three miles from Auburn, can travel the New Road going East, Free of Toll, up to July 1, 1864.

**Teams starting from Virginia City will
take the Henness Pass Road to Ingram's,
at Sardine Valley, where the New Road
turns off to the left.**

CHARLES CROCKER

Sacramento, June 6, 1864

Pres't of the Co.

From the DSHS Archives

Contemporary Views of the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd.

Sacramento Union 10/4/64

A traveler notes the state of the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd. in 1864, just at its completion

The Donner Lake Route.— A correspondent of the San Francisco Bulletin, writing from Gold Hill (H. T.), September 27th, says:

This time I tried the Donner Lake or Dutch Flat route, and was delighted with the trip. As this is just opened, I will give your readers some particulars of the line.

You leave Sacramento at 6 1/2 a. m. for Newcastle, at which place you arrive at 8 o'clock; you there take the stage for Virginia; passing through Auburn and some smaller places you arrive at Dutch Fiat — which is quite a mining town— about 1 p. m. ; here you dine as quickly as you can and off you go ; you now strike the Dutch Fiat road, and a finer road never was made in any mountainous country.

We went dashing along at a rate which you may imagine when I tell you we made 130 miles in 17 hours, or about 17 miles per hour, including all stoppages for changes and meals. There is no part of the road that you cannot trot a buggy right along. The only grade of any moment is in going down to Donner Lake from the summit and this is by no means so heavy as Bush street in your city. The scenery at the summit is magnificent. Bold, craggy granite peaks shoot up on each side as you drive through what we will call the "Silver Gate," on a fine solid level granite road.

On one of these high peaks floated an American flag. This I named Grant Mountain [today's Mt. Stephens]. On the left is another peak with its granite breast bared to the storm of time and strife ; and this is Mount Lincoln. With Lincoln and Grant on either side you can see safety ahead, as before your eyes is the beautiful and placid waters of Donner Lake. Here too is a haven of peace, in the shape of as fine a stopping-place, so far as good meals go, as can be desired.

Donner Lake is not so large but is equally beautiful with Lake Tahoe, while it affords more enjoyment to those fond of aquatic sports, being free from the heavy winds

of Tahoe. Leaving the summit, the view of this lake and the mountain ranges beyond is truly beautiful, one can[not] travel this route and not be pleased. I have crossed the mountains many times, and by every route, and to this I accord the "first premium."

The road I understand, cost \$200,000. On the whole route every few miles fine two-story public houses are being built, and in twelve months time, in respect to public accommodation, this route will excel all others. For a great part of the way you drive along at the rate of nine or ten miles an hour. The road is wide enough for two teams to go along, side by side, nearly all the way, is as smooth as can be desired, all the larger stones being raked off. This road runs very close to the Pacific Railroad survey so those curious to know whether a railway can cross the mountains can easily satisfy themselves on the subject [note that the railroad has not gotten to the summit yet — that's still a couple of years away]. Within sight of the road is the old camp of the "Donner party" who met such a horrible fate in 1847 [sic]. You can see the stumps of the trees standing ten, twenty and twenty-five feet high, cut off by them at the edge of the snow.

The drivers on this route are a smart, good-natured, accommodating set of fellows very cautious and temperate.

SACRAMENTO TO VIRGINIA CITY, NEVADA (via Dutch Flat and Donner Lake) Distance 156 miles. Departures at 6 1/2 A.M. by Pacific Railroad as far as Newcastle Gap, thence by stages to Summit Pass and Virginia. Time to Virginia City in Winter, 32 hours ; in Summer about 18 hours.

Sacramento Union January 2, 1865

Small Note: The articles on these two pages are formatted as they were in the Sacramento Union on their publication dates except that paragraphs were added for readability.

From the DSHS Archives

DUTCH FLAT AND DONNER LAKE WAGON ROAD.

This road is about sixty miles in length, and is constructed from a point on the ridge near Dutch Flat, in Placer county, over the mountains, through the Donner Pass and by Donner Lake to the Henness Pass road, near Crystal Peak and the Truckee — about thirty miles from Virginia City. The road bed is twenty feet wide, and the grade going east in no place exceeds ten inches to the rod [16 2/3 feet]. Stages and light vehicles easily make from seven to nine miles an hour over it, the track being remarkably firm and smooth.

The company that built it commenced the work in the Summer of 1863, diligently prosecuting it until driven off by the Winter snows, resuming it early in the following Spring, finally completing and opening it for travel June 15, 1864. The average number of laborers employed was about three hundred and fifty, for a period of ten months ; and the aggregate cost was about \$200,000, a larger sum than has been expended upon any other one wagon road in the State.

On July 15, 1864, the California Stage Company put on a daily line of six-horse coaches from Virginia City to Newcastle, there connecting with the Pacific Railroad to Sacramento, which has been maintained from that time to the present, being well patronized by the traveling public, and making the best time over this road of any in the State.

For the six months ending January 1, 1865, there have passed over this road : Wagons, drawn by two to twelve animals 3,250

Buggies and one-horse vehicles 169

Horsemen 1,278

Head of loose stock 8,590

All the tolls received by the company since the road was opened have been expended in improving it, and there is now about forty miles, of well-graveled and macadamized road, securing a hard, firm bed in the dry and rainy seasons.

This is the most direct route from Sacramento over the mountains to Virginia City; and passing as it does along and near the line of the Pacific Railroad, it affords to the traveler an interesting view of the progress of that great national work, and full proof of the feasibility of the route for a railroad. The road is unquestionably superior to any other mountain road of equal length in the State. It

has proved to be as superior for a Winter road as for Summer travel, there being less fall of snow and less liability to land slides, which have proved so dangerous on other roads. It is also free from all dangerous precipices. The mountain and lake scenery on the route is unsurpassed for magnificence and beauty. Donner lake is one of the most healthful and invigorating Summer resorts in the Sierra Nevada mountains ; the scenery around it is on the grandest scale.

The stages on this route made the trip to Sacramento regularly in the Summer in four to six hours less time than by any other road, and in the Winter they have generally made it in about twenty-four hours less time. The established Summer time over this route was eighteen hours, and Winter time thirty hours, from Virginia City to Sacramento. Notwithstanding the great severity of the Winter storms of November and December, in the mountains, the travel has been but seldom interrupted or the stages delayed.

On the 22d of August last the great race, of railroads and six-horse coaches, came off over this and the Placerville routes, between the California and the Pioneer stage companies. Notwithstanding "heavy rains, heavy roads and heavy loads," the California Stage Company landed their passengers from Sacramento in Virginia City in thirteen hours — the quickest time ever made — beating their opponents nine hours [sic]. It conclusively proved the superiority of this road for fast travel, and its superiority for heavy loaded teams is illustrated by the fact that Reed & Ash hauled with an eight-mule team, from Newcastle to Virginia City, 19,400 pounds, which is the heaviest load ever taken over the mountains by eight mules.

Sacramento Union January 2, 1865

NEW WAGON ROAD. C. Crocker, President of the Dutch Flat and Donner Lake Wagon Road Company, advertises for sealed proposal for the construction of two section of the road. This company is composed chiefly of Sacramento and Dutch Flat capitalists. The road will cross the Sierras running east from Dutch Flat. Proposals will be received by Huntington & Hopkins until the 12th instant. The work must be completed by the 1st of July, 1863

Sacramento Daily Union August 6, 1862

Book Review

CPRR

The Central Pacific Railroad

Charles Nordhoff, 1882 48 pages

In December, '20 [The Heirloom](#) reviewed a 19th Century reprint by Vista Books (Vistabooks.com, Silverton Colorado), the [Patrick Breen Diary](#). We'd had the Breen diary sitting around for awhile. Since that was an interesting version of the Donner Party we thought we'd look at the rest of Vista Books' library. It's a nice list but not much on Donner Summit. One Donner Summit reprint, though, is [CPRR The Central Pacific Railroad Story of Building the Rails Across the Sierra Nevada of California...](#), reprinted from 1882 and gives us a perspective of the Transcontinental Railroad while under construction and then in use over Donner Summit. One of the strengths of the reprint are the many prints made from old photographs at the time, some of which you see on the next pages.

Nordhoff said that Americans had too much to do to boast about the American "daring piece of engineering," the Central Pacific Railroad that took passengers "speedily and luxuriously" across the Sierra Nevada. The amazing feat takes one to seven thousand feet in elevation where snow lies 60' deep in winter "around cliffs, along the edge of precipices, through miles of snow-sheds, through tunnels and deep rock cuts, across chasms where you shudder as you look down into the rushing torrent below..." It was one of the most remarkable examples of the dauntless spirit of American enterprise." But then Nordhoff said, "...we Americans have too much to do to spend our time boasting."

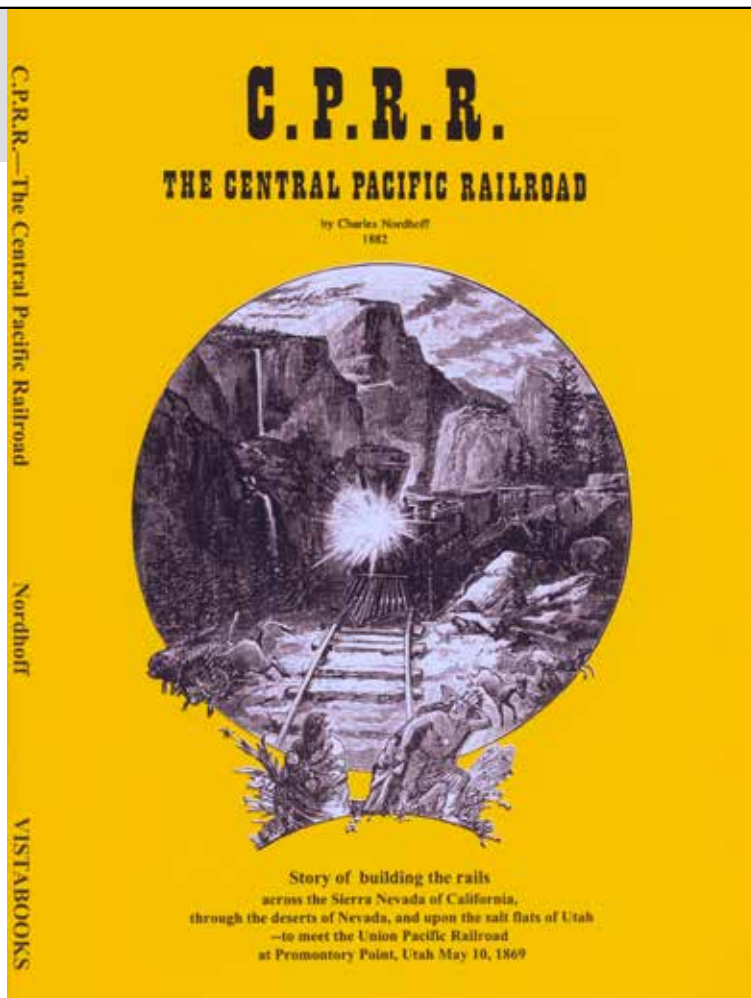
The booklet quickly covers the history of the railroad and its building and financing of the railroad and then a description of the Big 4's principles, industriousness, foresight, etc. I suppose that kept Mr. Nordhoff in free train tickets.

Included are two separate 19th Century articles. One is an anonymous editorial from [Hutching's California Magazine](#) in 1859. That's ten years before the completion of the railroad and three years before building started. The author says people want to see this "'iron horse' snorting and puffing through one or more of the many passes of the Sierra Nevada mountains... give us a railroad... It is the RAILROAD that we want; Give us the Railroad... give it to us at once... We want the Railroad... THE PEOPLE want it, and must have it... we want it without delay!..." You get the idea. After the exhortations to politicians to provide the railroad the author goes on to explain why.

"Commerce waits for it – Peace or War demands it." People in California want to go visiting "the old folks at home." Then there are those east of the Rockies who want to come to California to visit. They could drop in for breakfast, do a little gold panning and then home by way of Salt Lake City where they could see the "Saints" and find out, most importantly, "if the saints of masculine gender are simply men, or giants, that can manage more than one wife." Californians could also send their friends "a basket or two of our ripe luscious peaches" and other fruits.

Finally there was one item that needed to be imported in quantity and the railroad could do that. That product was muslin. But the muslin had to be of a special kind, "with a pretty, good-tempered, loving kind-hearted, intellectual, and contended lady-love, within it..."

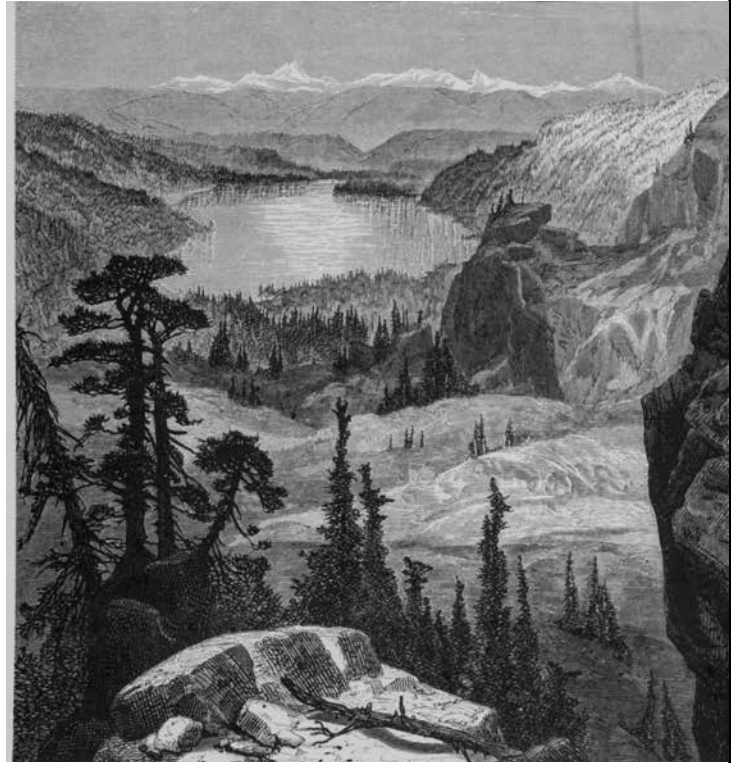
The Iron Horse gentleman, the IRON HORSE, THE IRON HORSE --- larger--- give it to us at once, and our consequent pros-



perity shall tell you how much we appreciate the gift.”

At the end of the booklet the second added story is a description of riding the train across the country in 1872.

“You write very comfortably at a table in a little room, called a drawing-room, entirely closed off, if you wish it, from the remainder of the car, which rooms contains two large and comfortable arm-chairs and a sofa....” Broad clean plate glass windows show off the scenery and are doubled in winter. Your wife sits at the window sewing and looking out. Children play on the floor or look out the windows at the comical prairie dogs. You sit and converse. The heating and ventilation are perfect. The most important part of the travel day is meals and porter calls you to them. Meanwhile your beds are made up. Water and fresh towels are abundant. There is ice and an “attentive servant.” For sleeping two easy chairs become a double berth. The sofa is likewise transformed. The table disappears. Two shelves are let down to become more berths. “The freshest and whitest of linen and brightly colored blankets complete the outfit.” And so you ride along at 22 mph or so. It sounds interesting for a day or two.



Print from the painting, "Donner Lake" by Thomas Moran from Picturesque America, 1874 reviewed in our 4/17 [Heirloom](#)



DOWN THE SIERRA NEVADAS, IN 1865, BEFORE THE C.P.R.R.

CHOICE FROM 12,000,000 ACRES!

OF NEARLY EVERY VARIETY OF

FARMING, FRUIT, GRAZING AND TIMBER LANDS.

THE CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD CO.

now offer, in sections, adjacent to their Railroad lines in California, Nevada and Utah, about twelve million acres of Lands, most of which are well adapted to cultivation, and offer unequalled advantages for settlement or investment.

IN CALIFORNIA

The lands lying on each side of the main line of the Central Pacific Railroad extend from the navigable waters of the Sacramento, above the Bay of San Francisco, across the broadest and most populous portion of the Sacramento Valley and both slopes of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. They are diversified in soil, climate and conditions—embracing the semi-tropical productions of the lower valleys—corresponding with those of Spain, Italy, and the shores of the Mediterranean—the vine, orchard and grain lands of the foot hills—corresponding with those of France, Germany and Austria—and the timber lands of the mountain slopes—corresponding to those of Maine, Sweden, Norway, &c. This central portion of California is already noted for the excellence of its wheat, grapes, pears, cherries, strawberries, small fruits, and garden vegetables generally, and for the ease with which they can be grown to dimensions and perfection unattainable elsewhere. The lands in this belt, purchased of the Company, have resulted in gratifying success to the settlers. Wheat can safely lay in the field till threshed and shipped, and the fruit trees are not troubled by insects or blight.

Along the CALIFORNIA & OREGON Branch,

in the renowned Valley of the Sacramento, extending from the centre to the northern boundary of the State, the Company also offer about 4,000,000 acres, with the same general characteristics. This valley is at present the seat of the most successful culture of small grains (wheat, barley, oats, &c.) in the country, and also offers unrivalled facilities for extensive and profitable sheep and stock grazing. The whole comprises a body of over

5,000,000 acres of the BEST LAND IN CALIFORNIA.

IN NEVADA

the main line of the Central Pacific Railroad occupies the Truckee and Humboldt Valleys, the largest and best settled in the State, at a short distance from numerous and important mining regions, whose yield of the precious metals is estimated at from fifteen to twenty million dollars annually. The lands of the Company—about 5,000,000 acres—are so situated as to command these markets for their produce. Wherever the proper cultivation has been applied these lands have yielded good crops of cereals and esculents.

IN UTAH,

in the Great Salt Lake and contiguous valleys, where the Mormons have so successfully demonstrated the fertility of the soil and the healthfulness of the climate, the Company have about 1,500,000 acres—equal in all respects to the lands which command high prices at the southern portion of the valley. Title patent direct from the U. S. Government. These lands will be sold in quantities and on terms to suit. Immigrants, colonists and capitalists, who desire to acquire indestructible real property, certain to advance in value, will be benefited by an examination. Pamphlets, maps, &c., will be furnished by application to

B. B. REDDING,

Land Commissioner Central Pacific R. R. Co.,
Sacramento, Cal

Along the Route of the SOUTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD.

The undersigned has also been authorized by the Southern Pacific Railroad Company of California to offer, in conjunction with the above, about 5,000,000 acres, situated on both sides of the line of their road, now building, extending from the Bay of San Francisco, at San Jose, southwardly, to the Colorado River (700 miles). This grant covers some of the best lands in the coast and valley counties of the southern half of California, including the far-famed wheat lands of the Contra Costa, San Joaquin, Tulare, Kern River and other valleys. Sheep and cattle husbandry are extensively and successfully carried on there.

Parties desiring information relative to large tracts can apply at the office of the Central Pacific Railroad Company, 54 William Street, New York.

C. P. HUNTINGTON, Vice-Prest.

BROILED.			
Porter-house Steak	75	Spring Chicken	1 00
Do., with Mushrooms	1 00	Do., half.	75
Mutton-Chops, plain	50	Breakfast Bacon	40
Do., with Tomato		Broiled Ham	40
Sauce	75	Lamb Chops, plain	50
Veal Cutlets, breaded	50		

COLD DISHES.			
Sliced Boiled Tongue	40	Sardines	40
Do., Ham	40	Pickled Lobster	40
Pressed Corned Beef	50	Spiced Oysters	40

OYSTERS.			
Raw	50	Stew	50
Fancy Roast	75	Fried	60

EGGS.			
Boiled Eggs	25	Shirred Eggs	30
Fried Eggs	25	Omelet, plain	30
Poached Eggs	25	Do., with Rum	40
Scrambled Eggs	30	Do., and Ham	40

VEGETABLES.			
Green Corn	10	New Boiled Potatoes	10
New Green Pease	10	Fried Potatoes	10
Stewed New Potatoes	10		

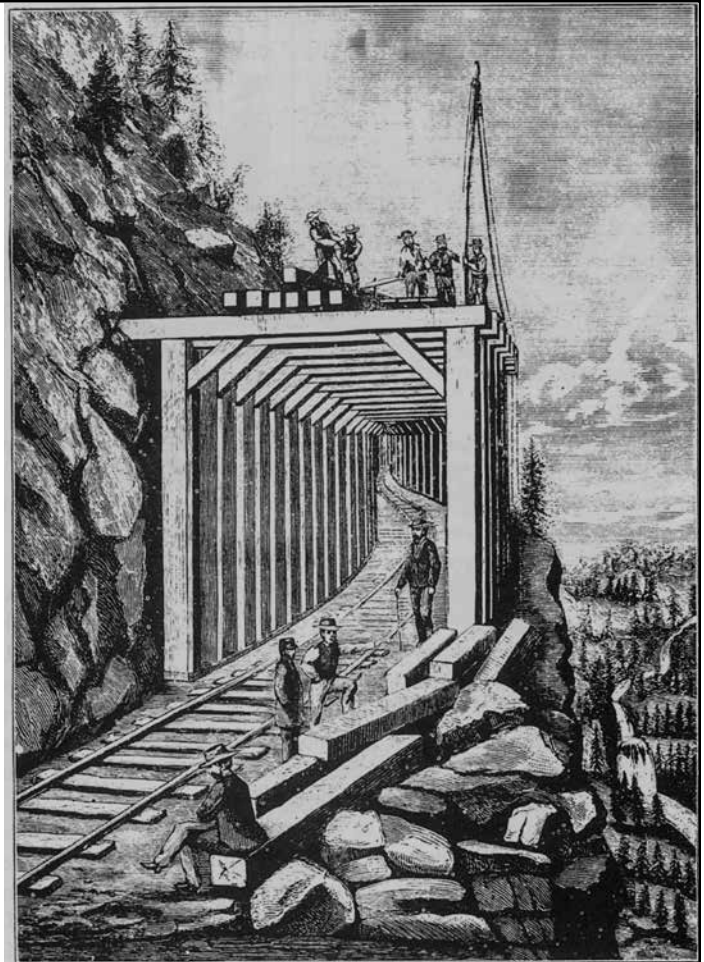
RELISHES.			
Chowchow	10	Worcestersh'e Sauce	
Mixed Pickles	10	Walnut Catsup	
Queen's Olives	15	Tomato Catsup	
Horse-Radish		French Mustard	

PRESERVED FRUITS.			
Peaches	25	Apricots	25
Prunes	25	Damsons	25
Blackberries	25	Cherries	25
Pine-Apples	25		

BREAD.			
Dry Toast	10	Hot Biscuit	10
Milk Toast	25	Corn Bread	
Buttered Toast	15	French Loaf	
Albert Biscuit	10	Boston Brown Bread	
Dipped Toast	15		

BREAKFAST WINES.—Claret and Sauterne.
 CHAMPAGNE WINES.—Heidsick and Krug.

French Coffee, English Breakfast Tea, and Chocolate	15
French Coffee, Tea, Chocolate, without an order.	25



INTERIOR OF SNOW-SHEDS.

"Constructing Snowsheds" from *Croftt's Transcontinental Railroad Guide*, 1872 reviewed in the September, '20 *Heirloom*

menu on the transcontinental railroad

Note:

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

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

You might even want to do a review for us.



SUMMIT SIERRA NEVADAS, DONNER LAKE, SNOW SHEDS AND TUNNELS.

Engraving made from Timothy O'Sullivan photograph, "View from Donner Summit," 1867

Apropos of this issue's main story on page 1, note the Dutch Flat Rd. on the left. Note too all the buildings that used to sit outside the east entrance of Tunnel 6. That's the Dutch Flat Rd. there too going through the snowsheds a short distance in front of the cabins. Note the chimneys on the snowsheds.

Odds & Ends on Donner Summit

As you're out enjoying Donner Summit, keep an eye out for markers in the trees and elsewhere. Here's a collection of markers for the Emigrant Trail. There are modern ones like the one to the right which is at the PCT trailhead. Bottom right is a Peter Wedell marker from the 1920's on Mt. Judah. Bottom left is a Boy Scout marker at Roller Pass. The small green one in a tree just below is in Summit Canyon at a spot that might be Moses Schallenger's rock where he described hauling wagons up a ten foot cliff. The one in the middle is another Boy Scout marker that sits on a tree at Summit Valley's west end below the power lines.



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.

Visit the Hub

There is an addition to the list of local museums,* the Lamson Cashion Donner Summit Hub, partially picture here, right. It is almost complete.**

The Hub fills a hole for visitors and residents touting the wonders of Donner Summit including its rich history telling people the stories of Donner Summit and telling people how to get where they might like to go for Donner Summit adventures.. Twelve four foot square exhibits tell twelve different stories. Displays on the front of the shed (right) tell more history and a map orients visitors. A large brochure rack carries most of the Donner Summit Historical Society's brochures (so far this summer thousands have been taken from the rack). There are a couple of 20 Mile Museum interpretive signs on site or nearby including one for the most inspirational square yard in the most historically significant square mile.

The design of the site, done by JK Architects, is unique and imaginative. It's railroad theme echoes Tunnel 6 which is 88 feet below. The top of Tunnel 6's central shaft is a part of The Hub.

The project is also unique because of the hundreds of hours of volunteer labor that went into the project, the partnership between the Donner Summit Association (logo on the shed above) and the Donner Summit Historical Society. The project was built with two Placer County grants but the project is in Nevada County. Finally, many individuals contributed money for



long term maintenance by adopting various components of The Hub like the benches, boulders, bike repair station, etc.

To visit the The Hub, come up Donner Pass Rd. to the top of the pass on Old Highway 40. You'll see the shed, above, which was the gas station for the Division of Highways dating to the 1930's when Highway 40 was first cleared in winter for travel.

*The old jail in Truckee
The Truckee Donner RR Society's little caboose at the train depot
The Museum of Truckee History at the train depot (see the May, '21 [Heirloom](#))
The visitors' Center at the State Park
Our 20 Mile Museum

**Still to go: a shade structure and porta poties, the second of which will mitigate a big problem on Donner Summit for visitors.





DONNER PARTY HIKE

September 18 & 19, 2021

Learn secrets
of the Sierra
as you hike with
local historians.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
info@donnerpartyhike.com
donnerpartyhike.com

Explore scenic Donner Summit with local historians on interpretive walks and hikes. As you trace the steps of the emigrants, imagine the clip-clop of oxen and the rumble of wagons as countless pioneers scaled the mighty Sierra Nevada in search of a better life.

SATURDAY HIKES—Choose from one of seven hikes ranging from 3.5 to 6 miles with varying degree of difficulty. Explore the trails, see petroglyphs or the China Wall. Stroll through meadows or discover hidden Sierra lakes. Following the hikes, enjoy lunch at Donner Ski Ranch along with music and afternoon speakers*.


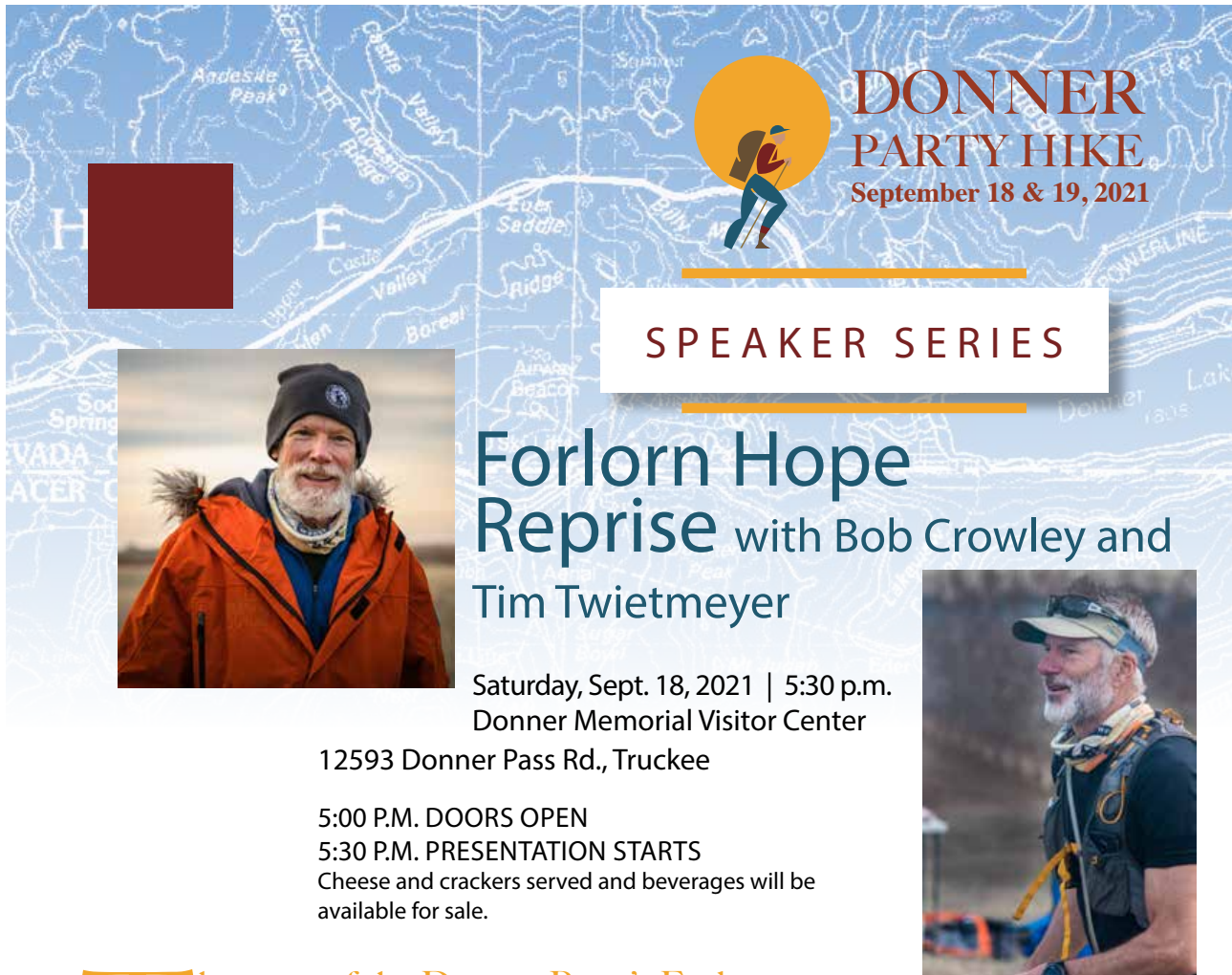
SUNDAY WALKING TOUR—Learn about the grueling mishaps of the Donner Party and the archaeological finds that remain. Then, it's on to Donner Memorial State Park to view the Murphy Cabin Site and Pioneer Monument.

REGISTER TO SECURE YOUR SPOT IN TIME—Tour size is limited. Reserve your spot on the trail by August 31 for early savings.

To sign up go to donnerpartyhike.com. You can read the details there.


*Our 2021 speakers will be Tim Twietmeyer and Bob Crowley, two of the extreme athletes who redid the Donner Party's Forlorn Hope trek last December. They'll talk about the Forlorn Hope and their reprise.

And then, that evening:



DONNER PARTY HIKE
September 18 & 19, 2021


SPEAKER SERIES



Forlorn Hope Reprise with Bob Crowley and Tim Twietmeyer

Saturday, Sept. 18, 2021 | 5:30 p.m.
Donner Memorial Visitor Center
12593 Donner Pass Rd., Truckee

5:00 P.M. DOORS OPEN
5:30 P.M. PRESENTATION STARTS
Cheese and crackers served and beverages will be available for sale.



The story of the Donner Party's Forlorn Hope is a story heroism in the face of extreme hardship and in the face of horrible choices. In 2020 four extreme athletes, captivated by the original journey in 1846, repeated the winter trek. They will talk about the original journey and their reprise with pictures.



For more information: info@donnerpartyhike.com | donnerpartyhike.com

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 _____

NAME(S) _____

_____ New Membership

MAILING ADDRESS _____

_____ Renewing Membership

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

_____ 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

_____ Sponsor - \$250

_____ Patron - \$500

_____ Benefactor - \$1000

_____ Business - \$250

_____ Business Sponsor - \$1000

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>