

The Donner Summit

Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

May 2021 issue #153

It's Good to Have Friends

It's good to have friends. Jeannine Karnofsky was cleaning out the attic of an old house in Truckee when she came across an album of old photographs. She passed the album on to the Truckee Donner Historical Society because that's a natural destination for local historic items. Local historians at the TDHS had no idea who made the album nor who the people in the pictures are. The date of the album seems to be about 1910 judging from the clothing styles.

The TDHS, noting that many of the old photographs are of Donner Summit and environs, although there are pictures of Truckee, Sacramento and other places, passed the album on to their friends at the Donner Summit Historical Society in 2018. We accepted with alacrity and some of the pictures have found their way into Heirlooms. That left most of the rest of the pictures saved but not enjoyed and so in this issue of the Heirloom we bring some to light.

Here we have about sixty-three pictures, many of Donner Summit scenery, some with people. Clearly the people and the photographer had good taste to spend so much time on the summit memorializing its wonders. We'll probably never know who the people were, what their hopes and dreams and lives were. Who are their descendants? What fun did they have on Donner Summit?

One lesson here is to add captions to the pictures you will be leaving behind.



Above, the notch in the rocks on Donner Peak providing a stunning view down one thousand feet.



Left, the view east from Donner Pass with the railroad snowsheds along the flank of Donner Pk.

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DONNER SUMMIT



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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.

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*historical society humor

Find us on 

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



Snowshed re-construction just east of Donner Summit. Fires were the nemesis of the wooden showsheds and could take out hundreds or even thousands of feet at a time. Until the concrete sheds replaced the wooden ones there was a constant need for rebuilding.

Who are the two young women reading in the forest and what are they reading?



This view of Donner Lake continues to be the subject of photographs today. Look closely and you can see the telephone poles from the first transcontinental telephone line. That may mean this collection dates from 1915 or later. Some of those poles are still there.



Who are the young women in the forest? Those look like amazingly uncomfortable hammocks. Note their hats resting on the front hammock.

Right, a young woman posing with Lake Angela in the background. Note the boat in the lake.



A group posing on a local mountain peak, celebrating the summit?

Another group outdoors

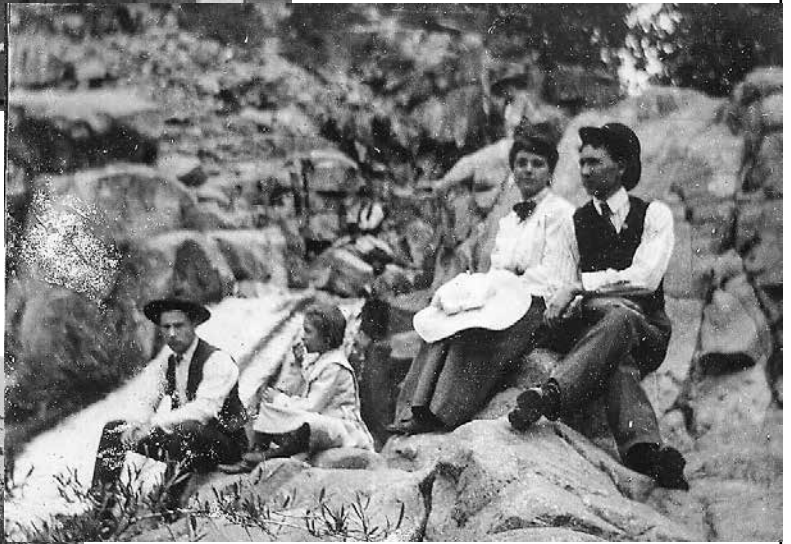




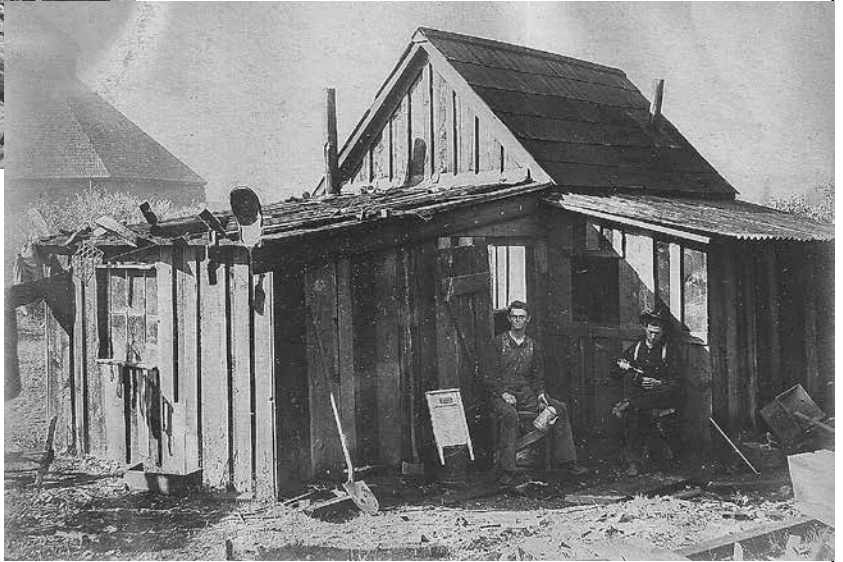
We don't know the train station but it is a really clear picture.

People in the past were just like us. Here is a couple on a Sunday outing with a younger sister and father there to chaperone. You just can't trust guys. Did they marry? Did they have children? Are the descendants around?

A group at Cascade



Railroad workers' house (note the round house in the left background). There's a wash board leaning against the wall.



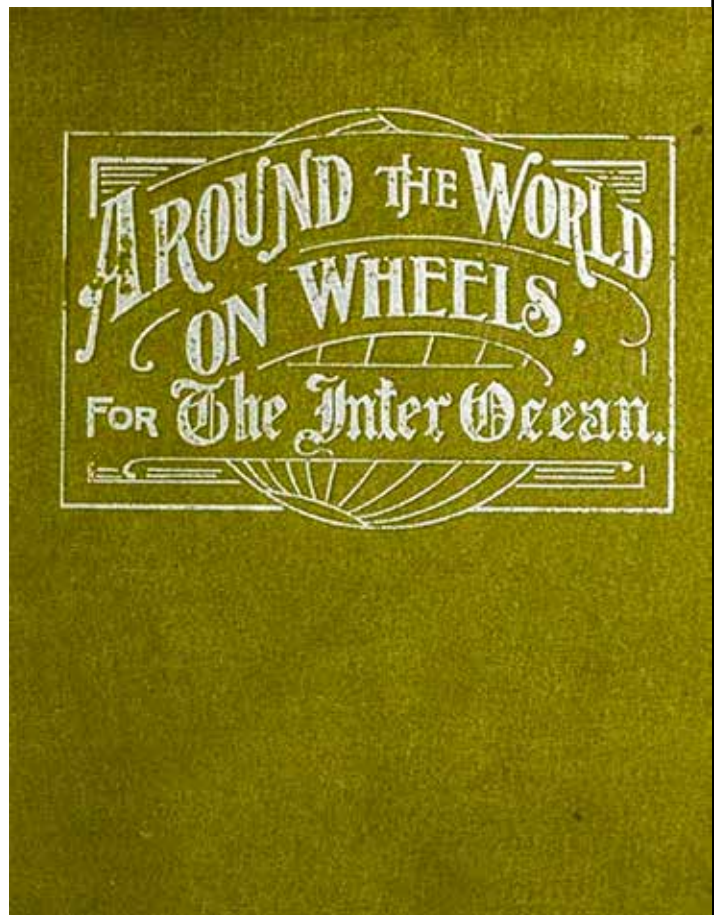
Bicycling Over Donner Summit and Around the World and another Donner Summit First

The end of the 19th Century saw bicycling become a new national pastime. Everyone was crazy for “wheels” as the new machines were called. They were freedom and speed. They were independence. They were fun. Races and endurance feats were popular. It was into that atmosphere that The Chicago Inter-Ocean newspaper sent Mr. H. Darwin McIlrath on a trip around the world by bicycle with his wife (see our Heirloom articles for the first transcontinental bike race in the August, '20 Heirloom, Thomas Stevens in the March, '15 Heirloom, Annie Londonderry in the March, '18 Heirloom, and Professor Wilson and family in the September, '17 Heirloom). People wanted to bicycle and they wanted to read about bicycling.

In search of more information about an auto accident on the road down from Donner Summit in a Dragon (see our March, '21 Heirloom) our crack research team came across the first attempted crossing of the Sierra on chainless “wheels” (bicycles) by three fellows in 1895. That didn't work out because the guys apparently chickened out after letting a newspaper know about their attempt, but it was while looking for them (because another Donner Summit first is always good to put into our historical quiver) we stumbled across H. Darwin McIlrath and his wife who rode around the world from 1895 to 1898 on a reporting venture for the Chicago Inter-Ocean newspaper. Of course, they went over Donner Summit and Mrs. H. Darwin McIlrath was another first for Donner Summit – the first woman to bicycle around the world and that's enough to get them into the Heirloom. Their book barely mentions the Sierra but there was an article in the Sacramento Record Union that gave a few details about riding from Cisco to Sacramento in one day. There were possibilities for the Heirloom in that – maybe – with more research. So this article is more than a book review; it's another good story about a Sierra crossing.

Prior to the McIlraths departure from Chicago they were so popular and engendered so much public attention that the newspaper had to set aside space to deal with the “letters... [that came in to the newspaper] so thick and fast...” The crowds were so great in front of the building that “special policemen were detailed to keep the throng moving and traffic open.” (Around the World on Wheels). When the McIlraths left Chicago a great cheer went up from the thousands of spectators. The couple mounted their bicycles but could only proceed a few yards “so congested was the street.” They had to lead their wheels a few blocks until the crowds thinned out. That shows how bicycle crazy America had become, just prior to the automobile.

The Leoti Standard (Leoti Kansas 4/10 1895) said thousands cheered the McIlraths on as they left Chicago. They got to Denver on May 8 and Provo on June 13. Sacramento was July 25. Newspaper stories followed them on their way.



Since we focus on Donner Summit and our readers have little patience for less endowed parts of the country we'll only quickly mention a little of what the McIlraths experienced from Chicago to Reno. They met Chinese railroad workers who smoked opium, met Italian railroad workers who were very hospitable, fought the desert, repaired flat tires, endured lack of water, and went from railroad section house to railroad section house and depot to depot. They met a cowboy who'd never seen a bicycle.

In "A Fair Globe Girdler" in the York Gazette (Pennsylvania) (May 4, 1895) there is a description of the McIlraths to personalize the story. The article starts with a little character. A fellow named Frank Lenz had been murdered by "savage Kurds in Armenia" apparently fairly recently (to 1895). Despite that the McIlraths were going to girdle the globe. Clearly they were brave. The trip was also something that had never been done before and here the newspaper mentioned our friend Thomas Stevens (March, '15 Heirloom). The article said "Plucky" riders could peddle around the earth. That feat had been done before. In 1895, though, women were not in that "plucky" globe girdling group -yet. 25,000 miles is a long way. At the same time a woman was attempting the feat, Annie Londonderry (March, '18 Heirloom) but the newspaper said Annie's was an "alleged" attempt. She might have used more steamers and railroads than was proper. Maybe there were rules for globe girdling by bicycle in those days.

Mrs. H. Darwin McIlrath (that's how they kept referring to her) felt sure she could pedal the whole way. Mrs. McIlrath was a brunette, 5'2" weighing only 106 lbs. (San Francisco Call 7/30/95) and the McIlraths had only been married two years. Mrs. H. Darwin had been a housewife during those years.



THE TRAVELS AND ADVENTURES IN FOREIGN LANDS

—OF—

MR. AND MRS. H. DARWIN MCILRATH.

Compiled from Letters Written by Mr. McIlrath and Published in
THE SUNDAY AND WEEKLY INTER OCEAN,
from April, 1895, to November, 1898.

Husband on His World's Bicycle Tour.
Unabashed by the tragic fate of Frank Lenz, who was undoubtedly murdered by the savage Kurds in Armenia, Mr. and Mrs. H. Darwin McIlrath of Chicago have started to girdle the globe on their bicycles. Men globe girdlers are by no means a novelty,




H. D. M'ILRATH.
for Thomas Stevens, Thomas G. Allen and William J. Sachtleben have demonstrated that a plucky rider may pedal a bicycle entirely around the earth.

MRS. M'ILRATH.

In preparation for the trip Mr. and Mrs. had been peddling thirty to sixty miles a day in "all kind of weather and over all grades of road." The San Francisco Call, (7/26/95), noting the arrival of the couple in Sacramento, described Mrs. H. Darwin as "by no means one of the strong-minded masculine type of femininity one would naturally expect capable of mustering up sufficient courage to brave the dangers and hardship to be encountered in a trip of this kind. On the contrary, she is petite, refined, beautiful, possessing the characteristics that blend to form the ideal, without one trace of the new woman." "New women" were clearly to be disdained. On her bicycle she wore a sweater, cap, and bloomers, "perfect costume for the silent steed," she said.

Mr. H. Darwin had an "athletic physique." He was six feet in height, weighed about 160 lbs. and was 31 years old. He was good at sports, as was his wife. His background was interesting. He had a grandfather with seven six-foot sons. The grandfather was a giant who could lift 1,000 lbs. and could vault over a horse. H. Darwin trained to be a doctor for three years but then moved to journalism. As a cyclist and journalist he and his wife were going to "girdle" the globe for his newspaper.

In Chapter I of Around the World On Wheels (a compendium of the weekly letters H. Darwin sent back to Inter-Ocean) he complimented his wife as being a "brave little girl" a "great help... on our memora-

ble voyage, an "expert wheelwoman," and "unerring shot." "Nerves she possesses in abundance."

Their total outfits weighed 50 pounds each. Their bicycles weighed 26 and 27 lbs. Mrs. McIlrath "wore the 'rational' costume so often derided by dress reformers..." They only carried spare underwear thinking they'd rely on local stores when new clothes were needed. Their luggage consisted of camera, photographic film, medicines, repair tools, two .38 pistols and one .44. The three "cannons" were as necessary as repair kits. They also carried letters and credentials to help with local authorities and which saved them from arrest and fines.

The McIlraths crossed the continent from Chicago and then the Sierra. Like Thomas Stevens, eleven years before, they crossed the Sierra over Donner Pass. Unlike Mr. Stevens (see our March, '15 [Heirloom](#)) who wrote vividly about his adventures there (e.g. pressing against tunnel walls to avoid "smoke emitting monsters"), the McIlraths ignored the whole trip up to the pass, the tunnels and the scenery. This shows a great lack of character despite that which was described above.

When riding her attire consists of a sweater, cap and bloomers, which she declares to be the perfect costume for the silent steed.

San Francisco Call July 26, 1895

There was a near drowning crossing Utah, lizards, a rattlesnake dispatched by a .44, the keys to the city at Provo, bicycle repairs, repair to dilapidated toilet,

escorts by local wheelmen, temporary paralysis of hands and arms, a hot springs visit, collision with cows, freezing cold, lack of food, stolen chickens, heavy sands, head-winds, among other things but that's not about Donner Summit and so can be ignored.

Then near Elko they were stopped by a band of horsemen looking for someone which required an inspection of Mr. H. Darwin's mouth (you have to read the story). H. Darwin was not the right person. There was a set of broken handlebars and flat tires. Then, just before Reno, they were met by Professor Wilson and his wife on a tandem bicycle (see our September, '17 [Heirloom](#)). The Wilsons were leading a welcoming party. The whole group rode down the main street of Reno to the Riverside Hotel. Dinner "fit for a king and sufficient for a regiment" was ready. The McIlraths got entertainment in the city, a bike ride around town, and a discussion about gold or free silver (an important political issue of the day - remember Wm. Jennings Bryan's "Cross of Gold speech?"). They visited Virginia City.

Now compare all that detail with the most important part of the trip, crossing the Sierra at Donner Summit as described in their book, [Around the World on Wheels](#).

They were escorted by Professor Wilson to the California border. They left Truckee on the 23rd, "Making the 160 miles to Sacramento shortly after dusk." That's it. There were four sightseeing days in Sacramento and then off to San Francisco for overhauling wheels and shopping by Mrs. H. Darwin. Space in the letter back to his news-

GOLDEN RULE BAZAAR

THAT TRUSS-FRAME MEANS



THE "FOWLER!"

'96 MODELS

NOW IN.

DON'T FAIL TO SEE THEM
AT ONCE.

Its features are one and one-eighth inch tubing, five-inch tread, finest adjustable hand-bar, tapered nickel-plated reinforcements on outside front fork, new seat post bracket, improved truss crown, detachable front and rear sprockets, adjustments of bearings all made with the fingers, a finer finish than ever—altogether it is without a peer.

SPECIAL SALE DAYS.

NOTE— On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of each week we offer Special Bargains, and not infrequently sell many of our best lines at Half Price. See our Window Display on

SPECIAL SALE DAYS.

*Davis
Brothers*
718 MARKET ST

paper was also too limited to talk much about San Francisco beyond “the pleasure in store for a wheelman in the metropolis of the Pacific Coast.” So Donner Summit shouldn’t feel too badly.

By the time they’d reached San Francisco on July 30, they were tanned and dusty. They’d gone 2955 miles and been riding for 58 days. Their Fowler “wheels” (see the ad here in case you’re in the market) had single tube tires and they’d had not more than a dozen punctures. Mr. H. Darwin lost about ten pounds during the cross-country trip and Mrs. H. Darwin had gained a little weight, the details of which were not reported in deference to Mrs. H. Darwin’s sensibilities. They mentioned to the newspaper that one of the interesting things about California was they’d been “snowballing” in the Sierra in the morning (they’d overnighted in Cisco) and eating fruit in 100 degrees in the afternoon.

We don’t need to rely solely on Inter-Ocean reports. The Sacramento Record Union (October 11, 1895) printed an article (headline formatted as it was - see the next column),

ROUND THE WORLD.

**Dr McIlrath and Wife in
New York Today.**

**They Started From Chicago on Their
Bicycles April 10, 1895.**

**Rode 26,200 Miles and Went 6000
More on Foot.**

NEW YORK, Oct 27—After having covered 26,200 miles on bicycles, Dr and Mrs H. Darwin McIlrath arrived here today on the steamship Pennland from Southampton. On finishing the ride to Chicago they will have circled the globe on wheels. On their journey 6000 miles

The Boston Globe October 27, 1898

Down the Sierra on Bicycles The Ride of Mr. and Mrs. McIlrath Last July Interesting Description of their last Day’s Run Into the Capit- Tol City.

Why it took from July to October to get the article in the newspaper is not mentioned. Maybe it’s like the Heirloom, there’s just too much history vying for space. The article gives more detail.

“Early in the morning, July 24th, we were up and away (from Cisco), through the snowsheds again, the path delightfully smooth and the air cool and sweet.” Outside the sheds “the snow lay in great heaps.” Trains passed by going each way but the couple had become accustomed to the “thunder of the pounding pistons, the roar of the forced draught, and the hissing steam, and no longer dreaded their approach.” They emerged from the sheds at Emigrant Gap and stopped at the hotel. It was 5 AM and too early for breakfast there. On they went, twenty miles downhill without an effort. Instead using brakes they put one foot on the front tire to slow their bicycles. Apparently that wasn’t a great idea and H. Darwin McIlrath allowed that if they were to do the trip down the Sierra again, they would use brakes of the “strongest make.”

Soon they were “tearing along... like paper torpedoes.” The speed increased and became too great so H. Darwin tried to back pedal. The strap of his knickerbockers broke, flapped around and got caught in the chain sprocket. He was able to stop, somehow. He ended up with hands feeling as if they “were filled with burning coals.” The detail about how that happened is not included in the story. The important part was that the right leg of his knickerbockers was ripped off as neatly as if a surgeon’s knife had done it. H. Darwin was mad but his wife just laughed.

They had to go on so H. Darwin resolved to hide in the bushes if they met anyone or cover his limbs with his coat until they passed.

They continued downhill past old miner’s cabins whose only value was picturesque beauty. The country was “luxuriantly wild” and for miles they rolled through “sylvan beauty.” Eventually they came to a ranch where repairs could be made to the knickerbockers. Next it was on to “Towles” where “crowds of curious people surrounded our machines...” People did not believe the couple had already come the 25 miles from Cisco and were aiming for Sacramento that evening. Then it was on to Alta and then Dutch Flat and the other little towns. The McIlraths just waved their hats and did not stop. The railroad telegraphers tapped out the couple’s progress to the world and the “cynics in Towles”, “The Inter-

Ocean wheels had passed.” Why was there no detail about Truckee and climbing to Donner Summit and down to Cisco?

Dinner was at the Freeman Hotel in Auburn. There “fashionably dressed ladies in light lawns and ducks lounged in the shade, languidly accepting the earnest attentions of a dozen young men, perfect symphonies in blue serge, white flannels and suede shoes.” The McIlraths dismounted “dusty, dirty and grimy.” “...with allopathic doses of hot water and soap, applied externally, we were soon able to enjoy a sumptuous dinner.” After eating they took again to the railroad tracks to Sacramento where a crowd, including reporters, waited. They got further away from Donner Summit and so we leave them to their travels.

Mr. and Mrs. H. Darwin McIlrath returned to the U.S. in October, 1898. They’d ridden 26,200 miles and walked another 6,000 miles. That didn’t include boat travel. Mrs. H. Darwin gained 15 lbs. even though she’d lost two toes when they’d lost their way in the snow.

There was still a thousand miles to go and they arrived in Chicago on December 8, 1898

If you are interested in the “wheels” the McIlraths used the model is “The Fowler” and is available in 1895 at Davis Brothers, 718 Market St. San Francisco ([San Francisco Call](#) July 30, 1895) for about \$120 according to the [Los Angeles Herald](#) (October 20, 1895)

[San Francisco Call](#) September 1, 1895



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IT'S SO WITH THE
"FOWLER" -AND- "BEN-HUR" BICYCLES

SEE THE NEW
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PRICE LIST:

Fowler ROADSTER.....	22 lbs.....	\$105 00
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Fowler LADIES' Special.....	21 lbs.....	105 00
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COMPLETE LINE OF BICYCLE SUNDRIES!
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TRENTON CYCLOMETERS \$1.65.
PACIFIC COAST AGENTS.

Davis Brothers
 718 MARKET ST.

More About Ice on Donner Summit

In our last couple of issues of the Heirloom you learned about ice harvesting methods and ice harvesting in Serene Lakes by the Summit Ice Co. That wasn't the only ice harvesting done on the summit though. Summit Valley Ice Co. also produced ice for a few years in what is now Soda Springs where Castle Creek crosses under the railroad tracks before entering Summit Valley/Van Norden Meadow. The following description comes from the August 26, 1872 Truckee Republican newspaper.

"I visited the ice house of McCauley, who is independent of the snow, and gets along without the labor of cutting the ice and raising it to his warehouse. He runs a little stream of clear water into the upper story of the ice house, and it trickles through small holes into a room below, which has open windows to let in the freezing air, and from each an enormous icicle hangs to the floor and increases in the thickness until they touch each other and when the work is done, and the windows are closed. McCauley has a patent for the idea and I think it could be introduced with great profit in any city north of St Louis, and nothing is wanted but a few nights with the thermometer below freezing and a stream of clear water."

Right is an ad for Mr. McCauley's Summit Valley Ice (as opposed to last issue's Summit Ice Co.) At the top of the next page is a drawing from Mr. McCauley's patent application. You'll note the little address tag in the upper right. Spelled differently, that's McCauley's grandson Tom Macaulay, known as the "Iceman" because of his encyclopedic knowledge of ice in the Truckee area. He passed in 2020.

There were other ice companies on Donner Summit too at Lake Angela and Kidd and Cascade Lakes but not much is known about them since they lasted only a short time. They went bust or followed Summit Ice's decision to move to the Truckee basin where the Truckee Republican said it was a "paradise for icemen" because the weather was colder, the water pure, and the snow less.

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BOSTON FURNITURE CO.
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WAGES IS ALL WE
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ortment of good Furniture and
Bedding of our own make, war-
ranted to suit.
HENRY LUCHSINGER, Manager.
Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum,
No. 649 MARKET STREET**

ja9-2p

**ICE! ICE!
At Lower Prices than Ever Before Sold.
SUMMIT VALLEY ICE COMPANY,
261 First Street, near Folsom,
Office at the Miners' Foundry.
J. L. MOULTHROP, AGENT.
Office open at all hours of the day. mh25-1m2p**

**NEATS FOOT OIL.
THE UNDERSIGNED ARE NOW PREPARED TO SUPPLY NEATS FOOT OIL, direct from Factory. Orders through P. O. Box 1730, or at the Factory, will receive prompt attention.
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Corner Gough and Lombard streets.
Highest price paid for Glue stock. mh5-1m2p**

**METROPOLITAN SALT DEPOT.
P. ZUPO & CO., WHOLESALE AND
Retail Dealers in all kinds of SALT, for
Corned Beef, Pickles, Fisheries, Hides, Soap, etc.
This is the best and cheapest Salt in this Market.**

Daily Alta California March 31, 1870

Clear ice, twenty-one inches thick, is cut in Summit Valley Lake.

Daily Alta California February 5, 1872

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

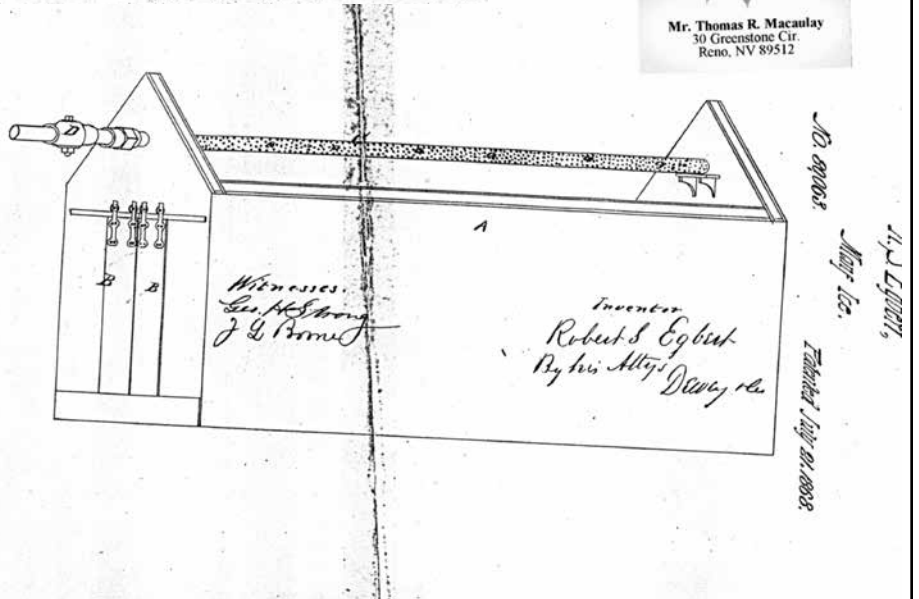
ROBERT S. EGBERT, OF COLFAX, CALIFORNIA.

IMPROVEMENT IN THE MANUFACTURE OF ICE.

Specification forming part of Letters Patent No. 80,063, dated July 21, 1868.

Mr. Thomas R. Macaulay
30 Greenstone Cir.
Reno, NV 89512

A NOVEL ENTERPRISE.- A company has been formed at Tinker's Station in Nevada county [sic], for the purpose of supplying San Francisco with ice. They have constructed an ice house capable of holding 800 or 900 tons of ice, near the railroad track, between Tinker's Station and the Summit. From a stream on the hillside above, a flume has been run to the top of the ice house, where the water is allowed to fall in small jets or spray into the building below. In this manner they expect to gradually form a mass of solid ice which will fill the entire building.



Daily Alta California December 28, 1868



Courtesy of Tom Macaulay, artist's rendition of the Summit Valley Ice Company's production from the Sacramento Bee July 16, 1954

The First Dam in Summit Valley

We don't know why the first dam was built in Summit Valley. According to this article there was one there in 1874 but it was already out of use. Perhaps Mr. Avery, the author below, was correct and there was ice harvesting in the valley proper in addition at surrounding lakes.

"Arrived at the summit of the Sierra Nevada on the line of the railroad, there are many delightful pedestrian and horseback excursions to be made in various directions, and the finest points are fortunately the least hackneyed. At Summit Valley (which is associated with the relief of the tragically fated Donner emigrants, and is only three miles from Donner pass) there is an odious saw-mill, which has thinned out the forests; an ugly group of whitewashed houses; a ruined creek, whose water are like a tan-vat; a big sandy dam across the valley, reared in a vain attempt to make an ice-pond; a multitude of dead, blanched trees, a great, staring, repellent blank. And yet this valley is not unlovely. It's upper end, still a green meadow leads to the base of peaks 10,000 or 12,000 feet high, whose light-gray summits of granite, or volcanic breccia, weather into castellated forms, rise in sharp contrast to the green woods margining the level meadow. A little apart from the noisy station, the woods are beautiful, as we have described them, and the boulder-strewn [sic] earth reminds one of the pasture dotted with sheep."

"Summering in the Sierra" pg 175
Benjamin Avery of Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine February, 1874



To Consumers of ICE of California.

THE NEVADA AND MOUNTAIN LAKES ICE COMPANY.—Established in Nevada County, 1852; Incorporated, January, 1870. Capital Stock, \$100,000; 1,000 Shares.—This Company has a superior quality of Ice, and will continue to sell at reasonable rates, having facilities for procuring it in quantities sufficient to supply the State. Some of the Company's lakes are located on the summit of the Sierras, within a few rods of the C. P. R. R., and others at Nevada City.

The Company offers to consumers the privilege of subscribing for Four Hundred Shares of unassessable stock now remaining unsold. Fifty per cent. will be called in; the balance to be cancelled by dividends.

BEAN & BLACK, No. 410 Montgomery street, San Francisco, are authorized to receive subscriptions for stock.

Directors:

Hon. Wm. Watt,
C. W. Smith,
J. Loyd,
D. Bently,

T. E. Mills,
Horace Hale,
J. S. Thompson,
J. H. Thompson.

CHAS. MARSH, President.

E. W. BIGELOW, Secretary.

San Francisco Office, No. 114 Washington Street.
ie29-1m-4p

Daily Alta California July 16, 1870

From the DSHS Archives

The Fun They Had

They clearly had a lot of fun in the old days. There were horses to ride, guns to shoot, old time costumes to wear. There was lots of old-fashioned stuff to play with. With a good imagination there was lots to do. For example lumber and water were both transported in flumes to great advantage. So it was thought that cakes of ice could similarly travel. An 1873 experiment was tried sending a cake of 11" thick ice down a 3 mile flume. It was only 3" thick at the end so the idea was abandoned.

That historical "tidbit" comes from Joseph Graham, assistant engineer for Union Pacific from [A High Road to Promontory](#)

Then there were ice contests. In May of 1870 a Mr. Mayoux, agent of the Summit Valley Ice Company (see page 11) and Jacob Tomb, an agent of the Little Grass Valley Ice Company made a bet about which company's ice was the slowest to melt. They appointed a judge and each found a suitable block of ice from their companies' inventories. Each weighed 131 pounds and both were placed on an awning where the sun could shine on them all day. The temperature outside was about 90° in the shade. It was a great day for this kind of test.

"About noon and from that time until dark there was great excitement among the friends of the respective chunks, and bets ranging from \$2.50 up to \$100 were freely made..." Summit Valley ice pulled ahead in the contest melting evenly "in the happiest manner imaginable." Imagine the play by play. More money was bet on how much time Summit Valley's ice would outlast Little Grass Valley's ice. Other bets were made on transparency and clearness. Night came and lanterns were brought out and watchmen selected "to keep vigil during the night, and see that neither chunk was disturbed."

[Sacramento Daily Union](#) May 7, 1870

[Marysville Daily Appeal](#) May 5 and 6, 1870

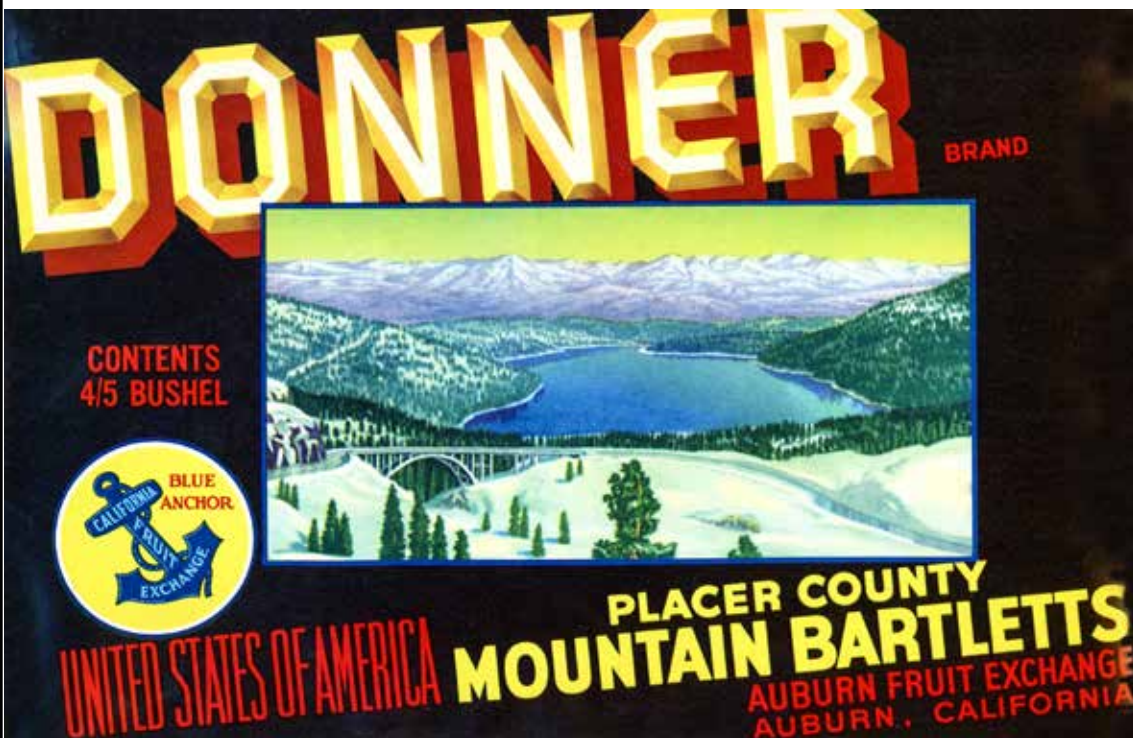
It turns out that the event was more serious than it appears on the surface. Clearly the report above has the Summit Ice coming out the winner in the contest with very clear evidence in the favor of that result. [The Grass Valley Morning Union](#), however, on May 8 described a clearly different and inferior result. It said "Little Grass Valley... won the day, as anything named Grass Valley, always will." According to the [Morning Union](#) the Grass Valley ice lasted four hours and fifty-two minutes longer than the Summit ice. [The Marysville Daily Appeal](#) printed a retraction on May 7 saying they'd been given "false information" about the winner of the contest. Clearly more information is needed.

Parenthetically you can see the fun the [Heirloom](#) staff has ferreting out these gems of important history.

From the DSHS Archives



Traffic was increasing on Highway 40 and in the early fifties a campaign started to make the highway four lanes instead of two. It took until the 1960's for the Interstate to be built as part of President Eisenhower's interstate highway network to improve transportation for defense purposes. Eisenhower had had a miserable trip across the country in 1919 as part of the Army convoy and that experience stuck in his mind. Unfortunately the convoy showed poor tasting choosing the Placerville route to cross the Sierra and so is not suitable for an [Heirloom](#) article (but it is a good story). This picture comes from a Division of Highways article on the blockade of Sierra routes during the winter of 1951-52 which was also when the City of San Francisco Streamliner was stuck at Emigrant Gap for a few days. It was one of a number of billboard-sized entreaties to build a better road.



Some firms in the past have shown exceptionally good taste by adding Donner Summit to their brands. Pears were never grown on Donner Summit but the bridge, lake, and mountains would clearly point to the the quality of these pears. This graphic, that would have been placed on a box of pears, was found under the guest house at my son's property in Napa, CA.

Book Review

The Alta California Pacific Coast and Trans-continental Rail-Road Guide, 1871

418 pages

J.C. Fergusson

Almost as soon as the transcontinental railroad was completed there were guides to enable people to use it. Some were published by the railroads but others were done by unaffiliated authors. The *Alta California Pacific Coast...* the author says, is only the third "Guide-Book" and makes up for the deficiencies of the other two. Those deficiencies include starting the transcontinental trip in New York and not paying enough attention to California. This one starts in California, "the place of greatest interest on the whole journey." Parenthetically, that puts Donner Summit close to the beginning. The publisher's preface says that they have "given information on every subject likely to interest" anyone. Indeed, paging through the book, which is available in PDF form on the internet, is full of an amazing amount of information about every aspect of 1871 California and a lot of aspects of elsewhere. The author further brags on the title page that the book,

"Contains more information about the States and Territories of the Pacific Coast, and those traversed by the Great Trans-Continental Railroad, than any other Book extant." It gives a minutely detailed account of everything on the route across the country and here there is a long list including "Hunting and Fishing Ground..." There is also an account of California's "INDUSTRIES, LAND, CLIMATE, AND HOW NEWCOMERS CAN OBTAIN PUBLIC LAND." The author also brags that the book is "Profusely Illustrated" and where to go "TO HUNT THE BUFFALO, THE ANTELOPE, AND THE ELK." (as well as enjoy upper case letters.)

The guide book does start with California telling the reader to not be content "till you have seen it, for California is a land of wonders." "California is different... She has astonished the world..." but if we try to capture the author's florid prose this will be the longest review in history. So we'll cut that short. Then comes the basics, how to get to California, statistics, and general descriptions of the main geological features and climates including "Donner Lake... remarkably beautiful" which has good hotels. In 1871 there were about 650,000 people in California (today there are almost forty million).

The text is not just the author's. He includes many writings of his contemporaries and they too, are interesting descriptions in a style we don't see now. One author, describing California, says "Our State is the Italy of the New World, possessing a dower of beauty..." The descendants of those who over-ran Europe "will come not to contend with us in arms, but to compete with us in arts. We shall gain victories and celebrate triumphs more numerous and more glorious than those of Republicans and Imperial Rome..." and the triumphs will be in all fields: architecture, engineering, inventing, road building, farming, mining, science, literature, etc. It will all be celebrated in intellectual gatherings, art exhibitions, and industrial fairs. The coast valleys, which have the best climate will be the "favorite place of residence for many thousands from abroad. They will fill the land with wealth, luxury, and art." There's some prescience there.

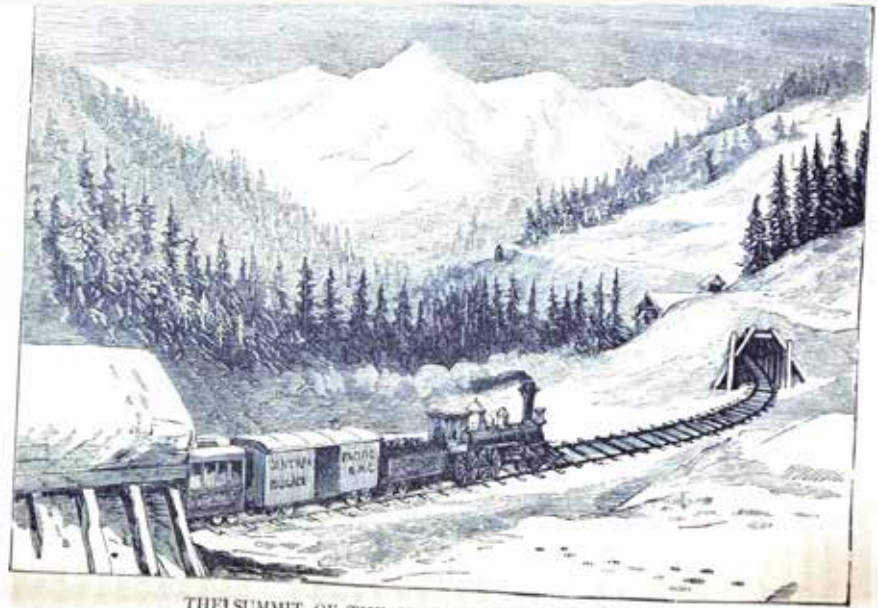
After reading page after page of facts about the industry and agriculture of California along with a long list of statistics (for example California produced 100 billiard tables and 150 pianos annually in 1869), it is amazing to realize that 1871 was just 23



years since the Gold Rush and the population explosion. Californians had built amazingly quickly.

There follows descriptions of towns and cities, starting with a description of San Francisco in 1871 (60 churches, major buildings, streets. Squares, markets, societies, hotels, etc., giving an interesting description of another time.

Once a variety of locations have been described along the coast the book takes off on the transcontinental railroad and here there is a lot of advice for the traveler wanting to take an 1871 trip across the country on the new railroad. There are excellent hotels along the way serving meals for .75 in coin or 1.00 in currency. There is advice for what to bring, how to get tickets, how to check baggage, choosing the south side of the car when going east, sleeping car berths (always choose the lower berth), etc. Once you've "complied with the foregoing simple rules, you may divest your mind of all anxiety... fully prepared to enjoy your trip." So we go along for the ride.



Drawn by NATH. BROS., San Francisco.

Engraved by G. W. SHERMAN.

As the train moves into the Sierra we approach Donner Summit. Cisco has about 200 inhabitants, which is substantially reduced from when it was the end of track during tunnel construction and there were thousands of residents. Leaving Cisco we travel through "grand alpine scenery." Unfortunately "little of its grandeur or beauty can be seen, as the tunnels and snow-sheds are so long and so close together, that we can only catch occasional glimpses." Snow can reach depths of 20 feet "and upwards." Without the "very ingeniously constructed snow-sheds, the railroad would be blocked" by snow each winter. That would be a "calamity." Mail would stop and freight would have to travel around the Horn. The stops approaching Donner Summit are listed along with tunnel lengths: Tamarack, Cascade, and finally, Summit Valley, which according to the text is the picture here. It

would be good if the artist had actually visited the valley. It is a "beautiful little valley... famous for its beauty, and noted for the hospitality of its settlers." The residents are engaged in dairy-farming and stock-raising. They are "eminently successful" at curing pork and ham. The Summit is 7,017 feet in elevation. Here is Summit House, a hotel kept by Mr. Cardwell who is a careful and painstaking host. If you decide to stay for awhile you will be "amply rewarded." In the vicinity "is some of the grandest scenery to be seen in the Sierras." Tall peaks rise into the "pure blue sky, and invite the traveler to ascend them and gaze from their summits upon the magnificent landscape spread out beneath his feet. Here lovely little lakelets surrounded by Pine trees, and sparkling like gems of purest ray, encased in emerald setting, reflect

the snow-clad mountain peaks, and glisten in the sunshine." "Oh! If the human heart can rise from Nature up to Nature's God, surely these mountain peaks are points of inspiration."

Summit Tunnel is next, 1659' feet long cut through solid rock. You need the "aid of a lantern" to inspect it. After "emanating" from the east end "the scene which burst upon our view was almost overpowering. Standing out on the mountain tops, and looking down, there was Donner Lake spread out before us. We were for a moment, lost in silent admiration of the charming landscape reposing in serene beauty beneath. But, however awe-inspiring the scene, and sublime the spectacle of so large a number of persons thus quietly doing homage to the great Creator, it could not long continue. Our pent up feeling must have vent, and so with one accord we sang 'Praise God to Whom All Blessings Flow,' The chests of strong-voiced men heaved with enthusiasm, the faces of the ladies glowed with ardor, and the mountains reverberated with the noble chorus till all felt it was good to be there."

Then it's on to Donner Lake, "a joy forever" and a rendition of the Donner Party. Until C.F. McGlashan's book The History of

Advice for 19th Century train travel

Always take a lower berth on the transcontinental railroad

1. Easier to get into
2. Air is purer and less heated
3. You will be able to see out the window

the Donner Party there were a lot of sensational versions. In this version, the Donner Party had encountered little snow as they approached the Sierra but their “faithful guide,” Truckee, told them to gather their animals and collect wood. They didn’t and a heavy storm ensued. The cattle wandered. The group built some cabins and the snow kept coming, eventually reaching twenty feet in depth. They tried to cross the mountains and then tried to retrace their steps back east. They failed. Wholesome food was consumed as were the dogs and then the hides of the cattle. People started to think about killing some members of the party but they were spared that choice with the first deaths. Some preferred starvation to “feeding on the flesh of their companions.” Others “readily overcame their natural repugnance to this



THE SNOW SHEDS ON THE C. P. R. R., SIERRA NEVADA MOUNTAINS, CAL.
 FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY SAVAGE & OTTINGER, Salt Lake City. Engraved by G. W. SHOURDS.



A VALLEY IN THE SIERRA NEVADA.
 Engraved by G. W. SHOURDS.

species of food, some partaking of it from the first with an avidity amounting to an apparent relish.” When rescuers arrived “No language can adequately describe the spectacle that presented itself” “On every side the scene was heart-sickening and woful [sic] to the extreme... Ghastly skeletons, stripped of flesh, and bodies half devoured, lay strewn around the dismal cabins, from which issues a stifling fetor.” Even though the rescuers had brought food the natural tastes of people at the camp “pushed aside the flour and bacon... choosing rather to partake of the horrid feast to which they had so long been accustomed. Parents were seen feeding on the remains of their children, and children on those of their parents.” The description goes on making our supermarket tabloids seem tame by comparison, but what a treat as one travels across the country by transcontinental railroad accompanied by a guide book with such good research. There were no “in-flight” videos in those days.

Then it’s on to Truckee, completely dependent on the lumber industry. From there stages go different directions. Donner Lake is nearby with two hotels as is Lake Tahoe, but Lake Tahoe needs no publicity from us.

The guidebook continues across the country stopping in New York but this part of the trip also needs no publicity from us.

Statistics example pg 45

“According to the United States Census Report of 1869, California had, in that year, 3,505, manufacturing establishments, with a capital of \$23,682,593, employing 24,266 persons, consuming raw material worth \$16,558,636, and producing manufactured articles worth \$59,500,000.”

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.

Odds & Ends on Donner Summit

It's May and hiking opportunities will present themselves as the snow melts. Keep your eyes out for old signs on trees.



In the forest at the west end of Van Norden Meadow showing the route of the emigrants.



Bullet riddled old sign that used to mark the stock trail over Donner Summit



Emigrant Trail markers in Cold-stream Pass, picture by George Lamson

Southern Pacific property marker on Palisade Pk. The railroad got alternate sections of land as an inducement to build the transcontinental railroad



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.



MoTH Opening in Truckee

When the Chamber of Commerce vacated the east end of the Truckee train station, the City could have simply rented it out to a commercial concern and made money. In a forward-looking action, looking back on Truckee's most differentiating asset*, the Truckee City Council decided to allow the Truckee Donner Historical Society (TDHS) and the Truckee Donner Railroad Society to occupy the newly available space with the new Museum of Truckee History. The two societies just had to promise to keep the space open for visitors and pay for electricity and heat. The idea had come from Bill McGlashan, a local luminary, who challenged the Truckee Donner Historical Society to take on the project to tell Truckee's story. The TDHS quickly got the Truckee Donner Railroad Society interested and the project became a whole community efforts with do-


nations "coming out of the woodwork," says MoTH's Greg Zirbel.

What a bargain the town got in the deal.


Truckee's new MoTH is a step back in time to what has made Truckee today and an introduction to one of Truckee's most compelling assets. Enter through the station master's office furnished with original items from the Historical Society and the old train depot, and then go on to historical displays of major stories in Truckee history: The Chinese, the railroad, logging, Native Americans, the ice industry, the Town of Truckee, and the coming of winter sports and the Olympics. There are also displays of Charles McGlashan and the Boca Brewery and Truckee's future. Displays are made up of interpretive material, interactive computer displays, primary and secondary sources, and artifacts. The information and the artifacts come from the Truckee Donner Historical Society, which also runs the town jail museum, and the Truckee Donner Railroad Society, which has its own little museum in the caboose at the other end of the train station. Their volunteers have put in hours to spread the story of the rich

LOGGING INDUSTRY


In our early years, the Wood Industry which includes both Logging and Lumber, was a steady employer for many single and married men. There were women who were well educated on the ways of logging as well.




1890s, Schaffer-Barton Collection (1898)
Visits Play Barton Bates with Ulysses Simpson, Grant Bates And Aunt Lou Barton



The Barton (Hobart Mills) and Schaffer (Truckee/Morris Valley) families were well-known in the logging industry; as was Joseph Gray, E.J. Brickell, George Kruger, Richardson Brothers, Elie Eilen, George Geisendorfer and others. Just in the time frame of 1864-1869, there were at least 13 operating Mills in the Truckee area and at least 3 more in Sardinia Valley.



1870s Barton Family Camp



The number of men in a crew would vary with the size of the operation. It was hard and dirty and dangerous work but a sought-after employment. The first mill in Truckee was built by Joseph Gray and George Schaffer and was located to the south side of the river near town. What was to become the biggest enterprise in Truckee was started in 1867 when E.J. Brickell came to Truckee and bought a partnership with George Geisendorfer and the Truckee Lumber Company was created.


MUSEUM OF TRUCKEE HISTORY Work Crew - California Saw Company

THE TRUCKEE REPUBLICAN

VOL. 36 TRUCKEE, NEVADA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 21, 1907. NO. 5


THE SWITZERLAND OF AMERICA

Picturesque Truckee, Leading Business Firms, Composed of Enterprising and Public-Spirited Men -- Beautiful Lake Tahoe, The Greatest Summer Outing Places in California



RESORTS ON LAKE TAHOE, THE BEAUTIFUL

The great state of California is an empire in itself. It is equal in size to the six New England states and New York and Ohio added. It is approximately 778 miles long by 260 miles wide. It stretches within its borders every variety of climate. From the snow-capped peaks of the Sierras to the hot, sun-baked plains of the Sacramento valley, the diversity of California is a source of pride and interest to all. The state's climate, its geographical position, and its wealth of resources are a magnet for tourists and an inducement to business.



LAKE TAHOE, ELEVATION OVER 9,000 FEET ABOVE SEA LEVEL.

California's greatest natural beauty is Lake Tahoe. It is probably the most elegant lake in California. The history and magnificence of this lake would open the eyes of the most fastidious European, and he would be glad to find the shores of Lake Tahoe as the heart of the Sierra Nevada mountains. California, such a well-wooded, as yet unexplored country.

*Truckee is famous for world-class recreation in summer and winter, a biologically diverse and rich environment, and extraordinary scenery. What differentiates the area from other places blessed with recreational opportunities, biological diversity, and scenery, is the history. This was the gateway to California for many and the route to share the riches of California with the country and the world. It is an historically rich area.

history of the area. Those volunteers have done quite a job. The exhibits tell a myriad of stories and with the interactive computer displays visitors can go past the surface into the details.

Because there have been dozens of donations of historical artifacts to the MoTh, as well as the TDHS's collections, there will be rotating displays which will make repeat visits a must.

Before the space became the new MoTh the exhibit space needed rehabilitation and TDHS's Greg Zirbel filled the bill painting, installing baseboards and flooring, moving furniture in from the jail, and installing display components. With the museum rooms done Greg turned his attention to the history working with Chaun Mortier and Judy and Dave DePuy on the exhibits, labeling, signage, and a million details. Greg Zirbel is a well-known character. He is the builder at Neat Tweets which makes Historical Landmark Replica Birdhouses in Truckee (home studio is open by appointment only). He also dresses as an old miner for our local 3rd graders, to guide visitors at the Old Jail Museum and to add a little character to Truckee Thursdays and at other special local events.

When you stop by for your dose of local history, leave a donation in the box by the exit door. Your contribution will go to maintenance. Note too that the MoTh is soliciting volunteer docents (info@truckeehistory.org). You'll get to become intimate with Truckee history and meet interesting people while you help the community.

Once you're done with the history in the MoTh, you'll be ready to go out and see history in person. It's everywhere.



MoTh committee / board:

Jerry Blackwill, Chaun Mortier, Carl Pape, Bob Bell, Jim Hood, Barbara Czerwinski, Ed Larson, Greg Zirbel

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>