

The Donner Summit

Heritloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society and the most historically significant square mile in California.

December, 2022 issue #172

Donner Summit Subway/Underpass

Typically it's easy to get from one side of the railroad tracks to the other. One simply uses the ubiquitous railroad crossings. That was not true on Donner Summit. Forty miles of snowsheds sat on the tracks, built to preserve train travel despite the average thirty-four feet of snow that falls each winter along with the attendant occasional avalanche.

On Donner Summit the railroad crossing was a bit more complicated than just crossing the tracks, that is, until 1914.

It is said that accidents happened, although those stories may be urban myth since there are no reports of accidents during track crossings in the Truckee Republican. The story, "Stuck on the Tracks" on page six is as close as our research department could get. Whether the accidents were true or not, the State decided to build an underpass allowing highway traffic to go under the railroad in 1913.

Imagine you are the "autoist" attempting to cross the summit on the Dutch Flat Rd. (The Lincoln Highway will come along in a few years in 1913).

If you're on the south side, the other side of the snowsheds in the picture to the right, you can just work your way over the rocks to the snowshed. If you're on the north side you have to get up some speed to get up the incline to the snowshed. The picture here is of an automobile emerging from the north side of the snowsheds at the east entrance to Tunnel 6. Stop. Turn off your motor so you can hear. Open the sliding barn door on the side of the snowshed. Listen for any approaching trains. Keep in mind that east bound trains make little noise as they gain speed coasting downhill. If none are coming, walk about fifty yards inside the shed, cross the tracks, and open the sliding barn door on the



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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.

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*historical society humor

Find us on 

other side. If there is no train coming, retrace your steps. Crank the motor on your car to get it started. Run around to the driver's seat and hop in. Drive into the snowshed, along the tracks, then across, and finally, out the barn door on the other side.

The instructions above are for travelers who crossed after snow melt. Crossing before snow melt was even more difficult although there were no trains to contend with. Instead there was snow to contend with which sent adventurous drivers attempting to drive over the top of the snowsheds. They say the "good old days" but that may be a misnomer.

The solution was the building of what may have been the first overpass for a train. With the completion of the subway/overpass in the summer of 1914 automobiles went a little further on the Lincoln Highway and crossed under the tracks, instead of over, safely. The subway was widened the next year because in its original form some people had to remove their running boards to get through. Of course if snow blocked the underpass and the driver was still energetic and adventurous, there was still driving over the snowsheds (see page 4).



There Were Dumb People in the Old Days Too.

F.J. MAUPIN AND R.L. DOUGLAS ARE HIT BY A FREIGHT TRAIN LAST SUNDAY NIGHT AS THEY WERE ATTEMPTING TO GO THROUGH THE SNOW SHEDS IN A NEW 1914 STUTZ AUTOMOBILE.

Mr. Maupin was a mechanical and electrical engineer in Fallon. Mr. Douglas was a "capitalist, politician, banker and rancher" from Churchill Co. Nevada. Together they were hit head on by a freight train on Donner Summit. The car was demolished. Douglas escaped without a scratch and Maupin had only a dislocated collar bone and sprained ankle and wrist. Both were in "severe shock."

They entered the snow sheds intending to follow the tracks to "get over the hill." The snow was two feet deep making it impossible to follow the County road. They'd gone only a hundred yards when they heard the train coming. Douglas jumped out and pressed himself against the snowshed timbers. Maupin was driving the just purchased automobile. He jumped behind the car and was dragged thirty feet or so.

Some car parts were sent to San Francisco where Douglas hoped at least the engine could be used in another machine, Douglas was going to keep what was left of the steering wheel as a memento. Some pieces of the locomotive were torn away along with fifty feet of snowsheds. Here we learn that "Trains travel silently after leaving the Summit going west" since they coast going downhill.

November 20, 1913
Truckee Republican

Another Way Over the Tracks

From an Heirloom article in June, 1915.

This article points out another way that crossing the railroad tracks on Donner Summit could be difficult.

This is how the winners of the 1914 Tahoe Tavern trophy crossed the tracks.

First the contestants ran into a rainstorm on the summit.

The rain had softened the snow so "progress was almost an impossibility." They went a mile and a half by noon that day and were worn out by the "hardest kind of work." No sooner had they set up camp than it began to hail.

To get through the snow to the summit, "Sometimes we would back up and take a run at a drift and maybe make six inches headway. Other times, in making a run at a bad place, the front wheels would drop out of sight in a hole undermined by water. It was then a case of throw the car in reverse and pull the front end out of the hole, but the worst of all was when the back wheels would drop into one of these water holes.

"The car would settle down to the running boards, and the only thing to do was to shovel out the snow until the back wheels could get traction on the ground. This usually meant that the car was sitting on an angle of from 30 to 45 degrees- when it was ready to pull itself out of the hole."

Then they ran into a snowstorm

The first sight to meet our eyes in the morning when we crawled out of our sleeping bags was six inches of fresh snow, and more falling all the time.

"That evening it was clear, and Mr. Growling, manager of the Summit Hotel assured us that we would have cold weather the next morning [meaning the car would not sink into the snow]. We went to sleep with the thought that at last our luck and the weather had changed, and sure enough it had. The morning was clear and cold with a light crust on the snow. This gave the chains something to grip, and the Buick climbed the big drifts between the hotel and the Summit without difficulty.

"The crossing through the snowsheds at the summit was blocked with 20 feet of snow, and in order to get onto the road on the north side of the sheds it was necessary to cross directly over the top of them. At this place the snowsheds join a round granite knob. By driving the car up a steep, narrow ledge it is possible to get within 12 feet of the top of the wooden shed, but this last 12 feet is the hard part.

Descent Is Perpendicular.

"The descent from the top of the shed to the road a quarter of a mile below was almost perpendicular, but by exercising a due amount of precaution it was negotiated without trouble.

"It will never again be necessary to cross the top of the sheds, as the Southern Pacific Company and the State Engineer are now building a crossing under the railroad tracks. This crossing is located in such a position that it will be free from snow long before the summit is open."

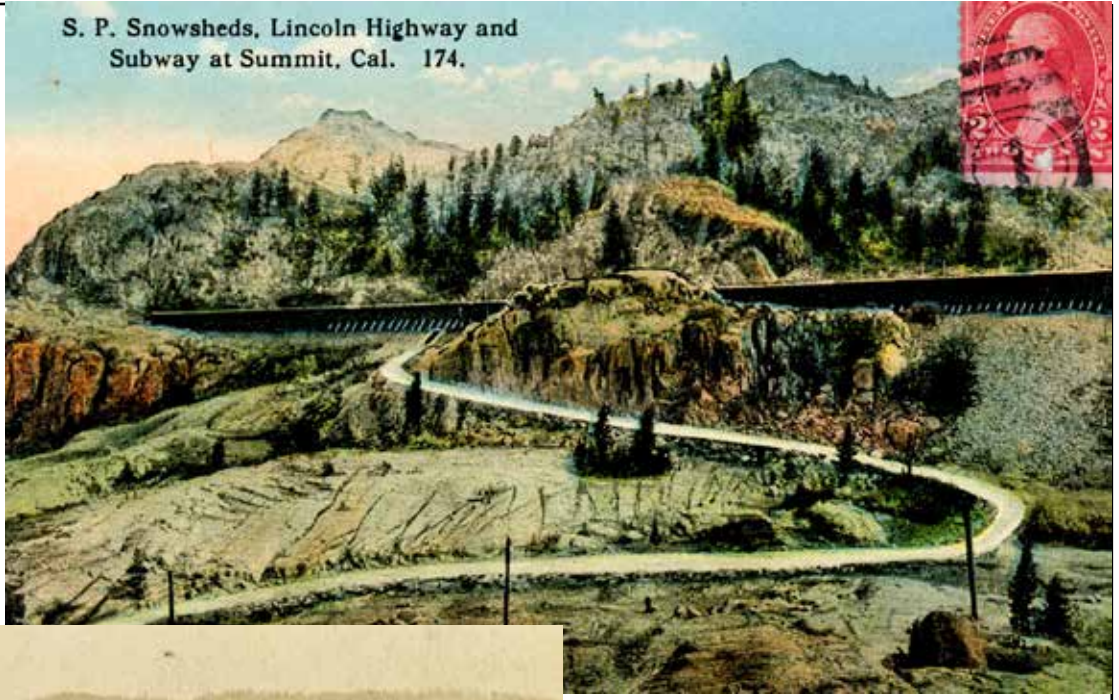
"When we finally got back on the [road] we thought our troubles were over, but one more disappointment was in [store] for us. This last trial, was in the shape of a snowdrift about 100 feet long. When we arrived at the lower end of it the Buick faced an almost sheer drop of 25 feet.

"A consultation was held and Schmidt decided that he could drive down the face of the drift. This he did without accident, but it is safe to say that an automobile was never intentionally driven down a steeper place. This was our last experience with the snow.



The picture here is of Arthur Foote during his crossing of the summit to win the Tahoe Tavern trophy in 1911. It gives you the idea of what it was like going over the snow to get down from the summit.

S. P. Snowsheds, Lincoln Highway and
Subway at Summit, Cal. 174.



Colorized postcard of
the Lincoln Highway
leading from the Donner
Summit subway/over-
pass. Note the snow-
sheds atop the tracks.



Above: closeup of picture to the left show-
ing there was graffiti in the old days too.

"The scenery is most
impressive at every
turn of the road."

Another view of the
Lincoln Highway
coming from the sub-
way. Donner Lake is
in the background.



ROAD NEWS TOLD FOR AUTO OWNER

Subway Road Under Snowshed in Tahoe Regions Open for Autos.

The important part of the article we found in the [Oakland Tribune](#) while preparing our Underpass article is the sub headline above.

"For the benefit of local motorists the Automobile Department of THE TRIBUNE herewith publishes the latest road bulletins received by the California State Automobile Association."

[Here we skip all the irrelevant routes reported in the article and go straight to]

"Lake Tahoe routes: Via Pacific high to Sacramento, thence via Lincoln (Walmond resort on state highway, just ten miles north of Auburn, where first class accommodations may be had); thence to Colfax, Dutch Flat; thence to Truckee, Tahoe; thence via McKinney's around Emerald Bay to Tallac (**new sub way on road just east of Summit, near Truckee, open since August 1**) [emphasis added]; return via Lincoln and state highways to Placerville), thence to Sacramento.

Then the article goes on to more irrelevant routes.

August 23, 1914 [Oakland Tribune](#)

Stuck on the Tracks

"We came to Donner Pass without further mishap. I don't believe I have adequate words to describe the real beauty of Donner pass. It gives one the same sensation as would be felt by going over it in a plane. As we stood looking down I had a floating sensation... As we stood at Donner Pass and gazed below, I lost all fear as I looked at one of the most beautiful blue lakes I have every seen. Everything below us seemed suspended in shimmering sunlight."

The family reached Truckee and then Lake Tahoe, "one of the playgrounds of California today." They decided to head off to Reno. Here Thornton Round's memory got the best of him 42 years after the event. He says they went into the snowsheds. Knowing what we know though, the snowshed crossing had to be on the way to Truckee:

"...we met our next challenge in the form of a snow shed through which we had to pass. I stopped the Ford, got out, and walked ahead to do a bit of reconnoitering. By now the Winton had pulled up to the rear. We turned off both motors so that we might have absolute silence. I put my pencil on the railroad track and listened for vibration which would indicate an approaching train. There was none so I figured it would be safe to proceed. I motioned to Ray to go ahead with the Winton. Ray guided the front wheels of the car over the tracks but that was as far as he got. There was a steep downgrade that dropped off directly opposite the railroad tracks. The Winton was too long to make the dip it would have to in order to nose over the track and start downward. The big car was hung in mid air on the edge of the snow tunnel.

Needless to say, a railroad track is no place to tarry, and we were scared stiff. "

Eventually after removing Mrs. Round and the baby from the car they were able to bounce the car free and then over the tracks. The Ford made it easily.

from [The Good of It All](#) book review of Thornton Round and his family's cross country trip in 1914 before the subway was in operation. See the January, '18 [Heirloom](#). Thornton was fourteen that year that he drove one of the family cars across the country.



This is an interesting picture that has to do with the subway (left side of the picture above the snowbank). Look at how badly people wanted to transit the summit. They couldn't wait for snow melt or maybe couldn't afford to put their cars on trains. Someone has dug a channel in the snow to the subway. Presumably early in the day traffic went one way and later in the day the other way. Imagine getting stuck. George Lamson found this photo and added it to the DSHS photo database.

The Solution to the Crossing Problem

A road crossing at the East end of Tunnel 6, near Summit, will in the near future be a thing of the past. A subway is under construction at a point one hundred feet East of Tunnel 7 and the road will be graded up to it so that automobiles and all conveyances can pass under the track, thus doing away with the attendant dangers of grade crossings. The S. P. Co. has a gang there now doing the work under Foreman C. Northey.

October 16, 1913
Truckee Republican

Summit Brief

Work has been started at the Summitt [sic] subway last Monday and the rocks taken out will be used to fill up the road.

The cattle corals [sic] at Soda Springs are nearly completed, the coral is equipped with all the modern improvements, this

improvement means a good deal to cattle shippers in this district.

June 4, 1914
Truckee Republican

The subway is nearing completion, the concrete sidewalls are nearly done and approaches the nearing of a finished appearance.

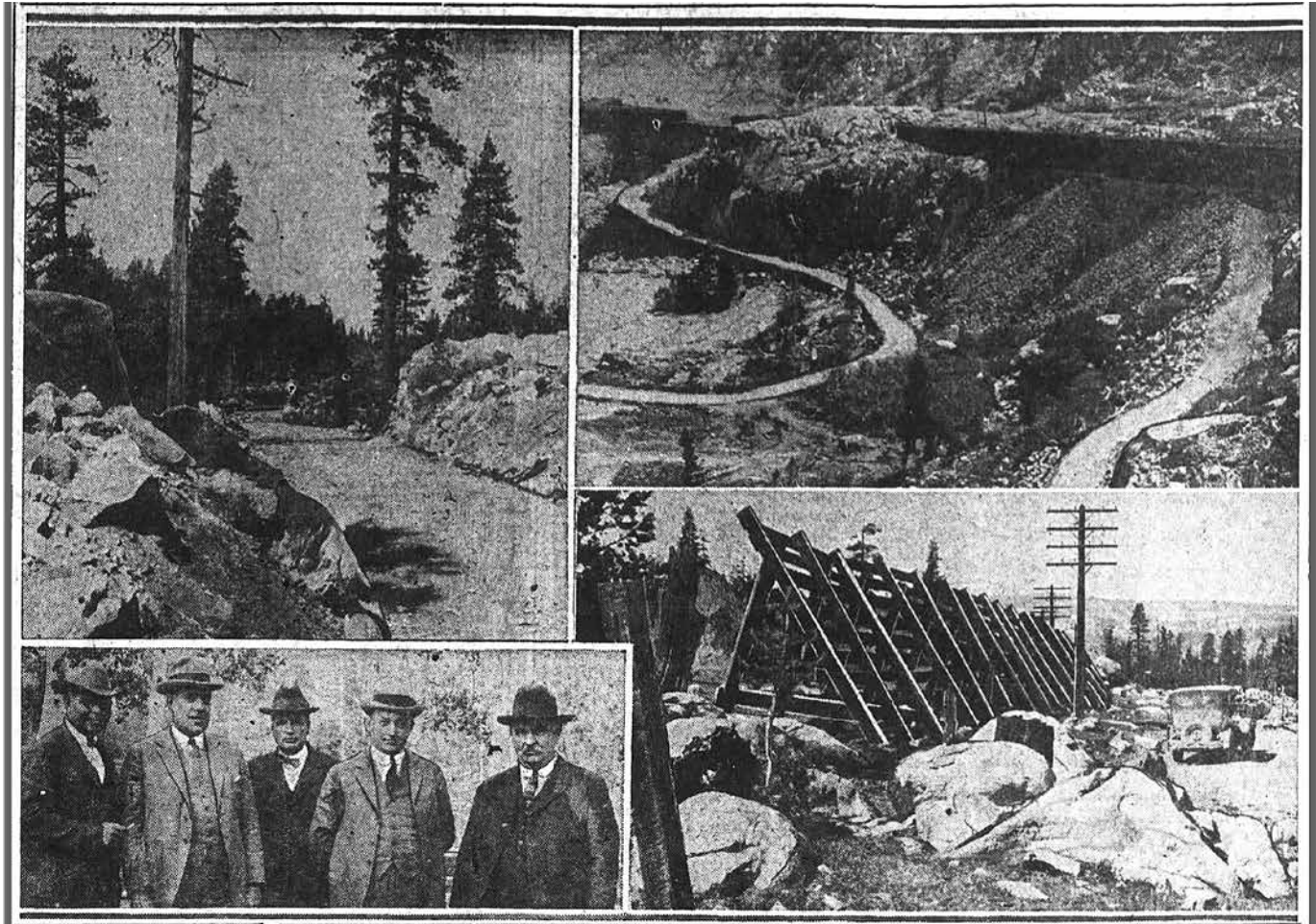
....

Some idea of the depth of the snow on the road can be had when it was necessary to pipe a heavy stream of water and use the force of the flow to sluice away the last fourteen feet. This work was finished this week.

July 9, 1914
Truckee Republican

From the DSHS Archives

In looking for material on our underpass article this month we ran across the article and pictures below and on page 10. It talks about fixing the Lincoln Highway route up Donner Pass so it would not be so steep in spots. The Forest Service was a big proponent so logging trucks could get out of the Tahoe Basin and over Donner Pass. In a few years the Donner Summit Bridge would be complete making the route even more conducive to trucking.



New Grade Makes Access to Sierra Summit Easier Than Ever

"These views show the new grade on the road between Donner Lake and Summit, which is being built on easy grades by the Highway Commission. Solid mountains of granite are being blasted out to make the road. At the upper left, the new grade is shown, and at the right the view from the new grades, showing the present road that is used and the steep road that was formerly used, for all travel. At the lower right is another view of the new grade, showing snow fence construction. Below are prominent state officials who attended the Good Roads meeting at Donner Lake last week. They are (left to right), PRESTON PETERSON of the Utah Highway Commission; H. M. TOY of the California Highway Commission; COMMISSIONER LEONARD of the Nevada Highway Commission GOVERNOR SCHRUGHUM of Nevada and GOVERNOR RICHARDSON of California." [upper case letters were apparently in vogue in 1923.]

Oakland Tribune September 23, 1923

Here we should comment from the comfort of 2022. The upper right picture is incorrectly labeled maybe by someone making a quick visit for a picture. By 1923 the road to the right has been abandoned for nine years with the coming of the underpass from which the road on the left comes. The problematical grade was further downhill and would be completely corrected with the building of the Donner Summit, Rainbow, Bridge, completed in 1926. (Check out our [Heirloom](#) indices for articles about the building of the bridge.)



The Subway Today



Top: the view out of the subway north.

Above: the subway today



Left below: the subway with Mt. Stephens in the background.

Left: the subway as a tourist attraction on Donner Summit and canvas for graffiti-ists



From the DSHS Archives

STATE BLASTS A HIGHWAY THROUGH SIERRA GRANITES

Road With Easy Grade From Summit To Donner, Ready In 1924

"Poor condition of the roads through the Sierra has long caused motorists to hesitate in making the long journey from this city [Oakland] to Nevada points and to enjoy the wonders of the east side of the famous range that makes fertile foothills and valleys on this side and sage covered deserts on the east side.

"Before the touring season of 1924 there will be A wonderful road through the Sierra from Colfax to Truckee, with easy grades carved from the living granite, which is the backbone of the Sierra, from one end to the other. Men, machinery and dynamite are now at work moving the mountains to make roads. Work has progressed to a great extent on the road from Summit to Donner Lake, on the east slope of the Sierra.

"From the new grade the two old roads can be seen. Immediately below the new grade is the steep road that was used for many years and then below that is the road that is used now, and will be used until the present highway is completed.

"At a meeting of good roads boosters at Donner Lake Camp last week, Harvey M. Toy, chairman of the California Highway Commission, told the assembled good roads boosters that the Truckee river [sic] connecting road into Nevada would be built and that California would do the best possible to get roads built connecting it to the east.

"The work is progressing rapidly along this new road from the summit. Hundreds of men are drilling deep holes every hour, filling them with dynamite and shooting the side of the hills to pieces."

Oakland Tribune September 23, 1923

Here we have an article about who was maybe the first traveler to use the subway and the adjustments made to the auto to use the subway.

Sheds to Be Improved

"The first auto to cross the snow capped peaks of the Sierras reached Truckee at 9.45 o'clock Monday morning after one of the hardest trips taken by automobilists, when Howard Davis agent for the Metz car in Auburn and Doctor J. G. Mackay in a 22 and a half horse-power Metz reached this place on their way to Tahoe Tavern, stopping here about fifteen minutes and they arrived at the tavern at 11 o'clock thereby winning the Tahoe Tavern cup

"Gross and McGee the two parties who have won the cup for the past two years, were only five hours behind Davis and Mackay in their Buick, but were unable to make the crossing. Between one and five feet of snow was encountered for six miles on the west side of the Summitt [sic] from Tamarack to Soda Springs.

"Mackay and Davis left Auburn at 9.30 Friday morning, taking over three days to make the trip. Snow and rain continuously beat in their faces. Gross and McGee have been on the way over a week. The running board of the machine had to be cut off on both sides of the machine to allow it to go through the subway under the snowsheds at the summitt. The automobiliists state that it will be two weeks before the road will be passable."

**CLEARANCE
SALE**

OAKLAND "6"

CLOSED CARS

(Fisher Bodies)

Sedans \$1275

Coupes \$1180

2-Pass. Coupes. \$945

(Freight and tax extra)

We need more room for
our new model 6-54—
the balance of the 6-44
models must go!

*All these cars are
guaranteed.*

*We can take a limited number
of trades and arrange terms.*

**Purser-Oakland
Motor Co.**

2400 Broadway

Phone Lakeside 89

Here also is an automobile
ad that was wrapped by the
text of the article.

May 28, 1914

Truckee Republican

Here we have a collection of things found by Heidi Sproat of the Truckee Donner Historical Society. She's been going through old issues of the Truckee Republican. As she has come across Donner Summit items she's sent them along to us. Here you get to enjoy some of her work.



For the Best In Recreation
Come to the High Sierra
 and for the Best on the Sierra Come To

Beacon Hill Lodge
 Elmo Moriano, Manager SODA SPRINGS, Calif.

Truckee Republican March 7, 1946

House Of Vanderford
 On the Old Emigrant Trail . . . Atop Donner Summit

Gene and Lois Woods Ernie and Margot Nordstrom

SKI-HI
 LIVELY MUSIC REAL WESTERN HOSPITALITY

Summit Sport Shop
 WINTER SPORTS EQUIPMENT SALES, REPAIRS, RENTALS

Summit Garage
 SERVICE, PARTS, REPAIR TOWING SERVICE

Summit Photo Shop
 PHOTOGRAPHIC SUPPLIES

Home of San Francisco's VIKING SKI CLUB

Truckee Republican Septembere 19, 1946

Heidi also copied some "Summit Scene" columns by Frances Couillard. They are fairly long so we'll abbreviate here so you can get a taste. What follows comes from the August 8, 1946 Truckee Republican. Note the references to the war that had ended the year before.

"We have cleaned our glasses and peeping in keyholes again. Soda leven. The soda in Soda Springs has started to "work." The "mountain" bread pan of yeast germs, From Herstle Jones' rock palace at Emigrant Gap to Herstle Jones' Donner Ski Ranch at the Summit, the district has become chain on which many pearls are being threaded. And by way of a bit of news, the H. Joneses have a new born on August first."

Then Ms Couillard wrote about the "pearls."

The gift shop (stone buildings) at Cisco was back in operation "after the shortage of gift materials during the war days."

The Big Bend Inn was being improved. Rainbow was under new management and "a place to park can hardly be found." Crampton's had been remodeled. The public camp grounds across the street were "running at full capacity." Today that's Hampshire Rocks. The swimming pool at Kingvale was open. The lunch room there was packed. Eddiie Aro, a ski instructor, had just been married. The Donner Summit lodge was getting an addition which would have a Hammond organ. 70 people had attended a BBQ out back by the river. The Soda Springs post office had gone "third class," whatever that meant, and was in the grocery store which was a sorely needed new Summit addition. Elmo Moriano, owner of Beacon Hill Lodge (upper left on this page) had gotten married. Muriel Jones had had a grand birthday party at the Soda Springs Hotel. Ice Lakes had "poured themselves a foundatoin for a huge hotel. It is fun to hide away in the cocktail lounge at Ice Lakes" and listen to a couple of the regulars make wisecracks. Sugar Bowl was "open for the summer for the first time since the war, are serving grand meals and is open to the public." The Cedars was open again after having been "closed for the past hectic years." The Norden Store was being remodeled. Bud Walton was piling dirt up as construction was taking place at Donner Ski Ranch. "Ski enthusiasts take a look at the beautiful sites for the ski tows on the ranch and can hardly wait for the first snow falls." Work was being done acrosss the street at Ski Hi as well.

"With all this there are those of us who sit around and bite our nail awaiting the time when the material shortage can be overcome to the extent that we can build on the various lots, selection and rock piles that we have accumulated."

"So the leven is working and watch Soda Springs rise!"

"

Next Time Take the Stagecoach Over Donner Summit

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 Flat — 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 Flat 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. 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.

October 4, 1864
Sacramento Union

Editor's note: Travel on the Dutch Flat Rd. seems wonderful but once the railroad was finished in 1869 travel on the road declined as everyone took the train and the "fine two-story public houses" that were being built in 1864 quickly fell to ruin.

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.**

CHARLES CROCKER

Sacramento, June 6, 1864

Prest of the Co.

Book Review

Voices from the Railroad Stories by Descendants of Chinese Railroad Workers

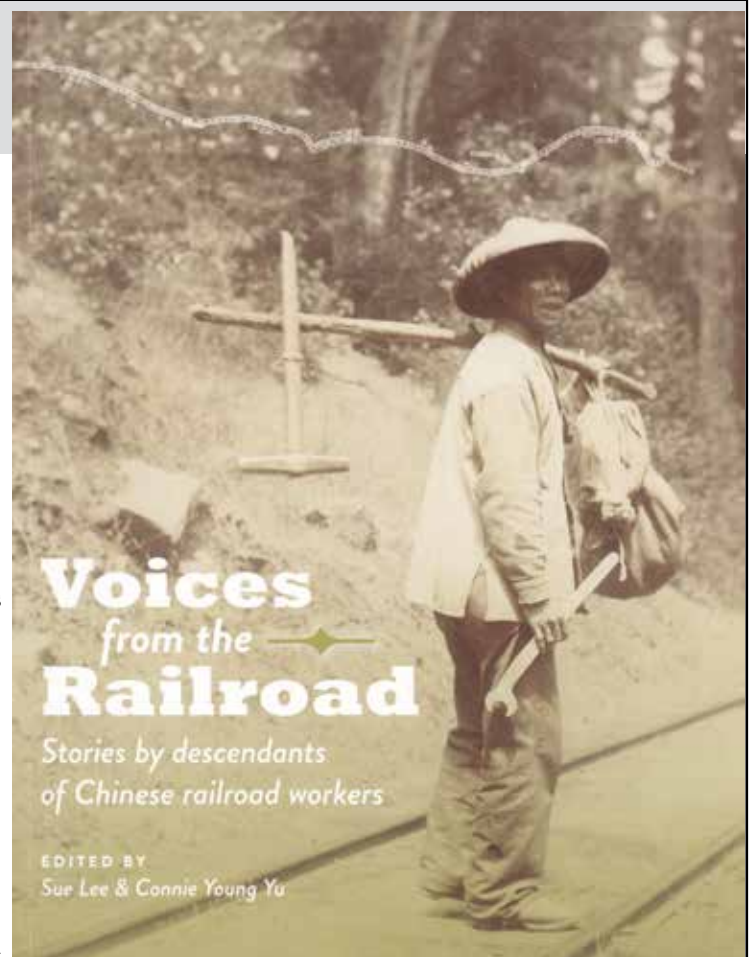
Edited by Sue Lee and Connie Young Yu
2019 95 pages large format

When the Heirloom first approached the subject of the Chinese railroad workers (see Chinese RR Workers parts I-IV in the June-September '16 Heirlooms as well as in other articles listed in our article index) one of our researchers' sources was Stanford University's Chinese Railroad Workers project (<http://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/wordpress/>). From them we learned, as we noted in our 2016 series (Part IV, pg 5 September, '16), that researching Chinese railroad workers is hard due to a dearth of information. Workers were mostly illiterate. Even those who wrote letters home were sending letters home to an area in revolution which probably destroyed much. Racism played a role too. Why memorialize these foreigners? The railroad didn't even know the names of many of its many Chinese workers most having been signed on in groups with only their leaders' names appearing on payroll lists. It seemed that, according to the editors, "Chinese workers weren't worthy of having their names remembered and indeed were not even considered as individuals by the railroad. More likely they were hired in groups with their names lost to history."

Researching the Chinese workers is hard but there's been a small opening with the arrival of Voices from the Railroad. The book is divided into nine parts, each about one Chinese railroad worker, each written by a family member. Rather than continuing in complete anonymity these nine, as the back cover says are, "no longer nameless, faceless workers lost to history." We now have a window we didn't have before into those "Heroes of the Transcontinental Railroad." (see the "Brochure" page on our website for that brochure).

The book is supposed to be about the now identified builders of the transcontinental railroad heretofore shrouded in anonymity so that readers start with high expectations to learn about these nine representatives of the ten thousand or so of their countrymen.

Because the nine stories are written by family members who are not professional writers the writing is a bit uneven. For example, the first story, about Moy Jin Mun, does not tell us much about the title character but rather focuses on the great grandson who lived in San Francisco, spoke Cantonese,



had boxes of artifacts, liked World War II history, and ate Chinese food. That's nice, but what was in the boxes besides the pictures of four shown artifacts? What did his great grandfather do? What are the details? If they don't exist that should be noted.

Other articles include more about railroad worker ancestors. We can imagine the excitement when grandchildren come across ancestors' names in Central Pacific payroll lists. There is a tangible connection to the past. For the reader who is an aficionado of Donner Summit it's interesting to see payroll lists for Summit Camp.

The nine main stories also tell little stories and provide details, for example, discrimination even into the modern era and the Chinese Exclusionary Act for a look at historic discrimination. The King family, minus the patriarch, could all go back to visit China to visit relatives and be assured of re-entering the U.S. Because Jim King's papers said "laborer" he would have been prevented from re-entering the United States. Chinese could not buy property or attend public schools. In the modern era it was difficult for Chinese to get work, "We can't hire you when we have white boys who are out of work." Then there was the Secretary of Labor speaking at the hundredth anniversary of the Golden Spike and

could not bring himself to recognize the Chinese contribution. A Chinese speaker was also removed from the speaking list so that John Wayne could have some speaking time.

There are details about how railroad workers were organized and how they came. “The immigrants came to California by paying their own way or borrowed the necessary funding under the credit ticket system, which covered the cost of transportation and then paid off the loan, plus interest, out of their earning.”

Why the Chinese came to America is important, “This was during a time when many young men were desperate to leave southern China, with civil war raging and the constant threat

of famine. There was no way for a young man to make a living. Going to America meant a chance of survival, not only of himself but for his relatives in China to whom he would send part of his wages.”

Another of the nine stories explains, “They were young and strong, lured by the promise of ‘good wages in Gum San,’ daily meals and enough money to send home. The future looked bleak in the village for the youthful men, and by leaving, it meant hope for the whole clan.”

The book is available from the Chinese Historical Society of America 965 Clay St. San Francisco CHSA.org 415-391-1188

Making History Colorful



Today, due to advances in computer graphics technology, there may be a solution to the color limitations of our historical black & white images. Computers are remarkably adept at manipulating photographic images. Algorithms developed for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning have been adapted to image technology to give almost magical results such as the colorization of black & white images. Algorithms are “trained” by looking at millions of color and black & white versions of photos to “learn” how to add back colors to a black & white image. The algorithms learn how to find a sky and make it blue, find a face and make it flesh colored, find a tree and make the leaves green. They develop highly sophisticated models that can do amazing transformations. Amazingly this technology is now available on desktop computers.



George Lamson

Odds & Ends on Donner Summit



The subway/underpass today. From the PCT trailhead on Donner Summit take the left hand trail about a quarter mile. The trail will go right through the underpass.

Left: Mt. Stephens in the background. Below one of many versions of graffiti. New "artists" come along and cover over the old "art."



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.

Donner Summit Historical Society

www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

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

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