

# The Heirloom starts on the next page, but first...

## Walking Through Donner Summit History

Donner Summit is the most important historical square mile in California and maybe the entire Western United States. Native Americans crossed for thousands of years. The first emigrants to arrive in California with wagons came over Donner Summit. The first transcontinental railroad, the first transcontinental highway, the first transcontinental air route, and the first transcontinental telephone line all crossed Donner Summit. The first person to bicycle around the world went over Donner Summit, as did the first person to make a motorized crossing of the U.S. and the first people to attempt to cross the country in an automobile. That's just a bit of the richness that is Donner Summit history.

Then there are the fun small stories: frozen turkeys roosting in the trees, the two-story out house at the Summit Hotel, blindfolded mules, and the Spider Dance.

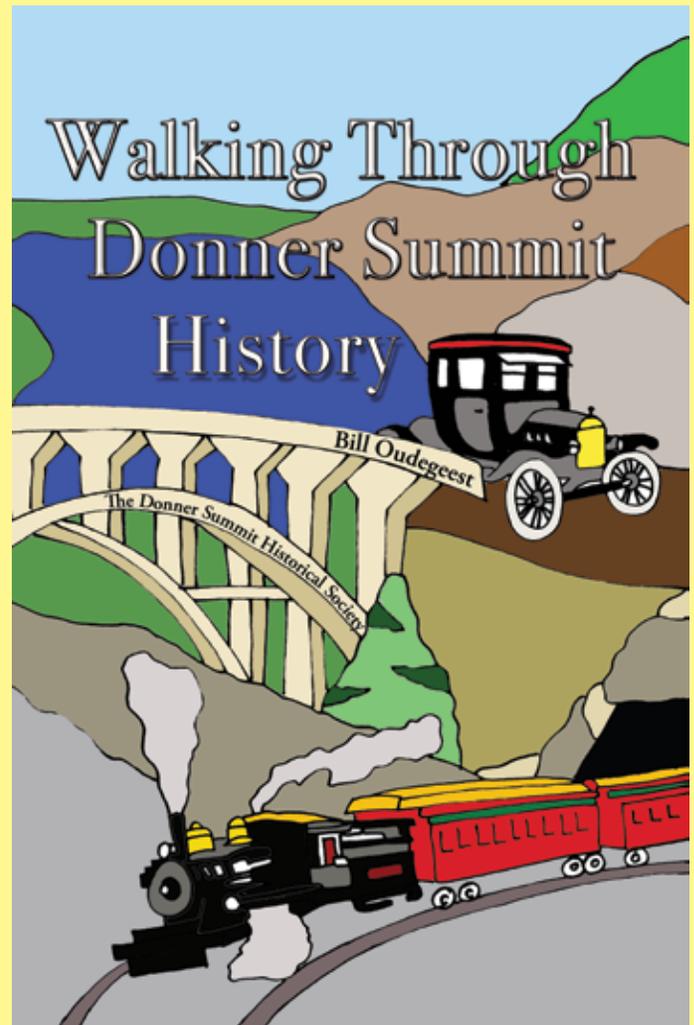
You can walk through Donner Summit history, where it all took place. In the walks described here you will read the stories, "hear" history through people's words, and see the historical photographs that bring the history to life.

218 pages ©2015

\$25 includes tax/shipping via USPO and handling

### To purchase **Walking Through Donner Summit History**,

1. go to our website's store page [www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/store.html](http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/store.html) or just click the link on our front page.
2. send a check for \$25 (includes shipping/handling) to DSHS P.O. 1 Norden, CA 95724
3. Go to the Soda Springs General Store
4. Go to the Donner Summit Historical Society at the blinking light in Soda Springs.
5. Go to the Donner Memorial State Park's Visitors' Center.



# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

May, 2015 issue #81



## Snow is Not a Problem on Donner Summit The Snowsheds of Donner Summit - Pt IV

“The average passenger journeying over the Sierras usually utters a deep sigh of relief -when his train emerges from the snowsheds.”

*San Francisco Call* October 15, 1905

Snowsheds on Donner Summit solved one problem but led to others. “... Economically, the sheds are a great success. Esthetically [sic] they are a great nuisance. Again and again, as one is enjoying the grandest scenery upon the continent, the train plunges into a long, dark chamber, and the view is broken.”

Through to the Pacific Letters, to the NY Tribune, 1869

A 19th Century traveler by train over Donner Summit finally had the opportunity to go West and explore what she'd heard so much about. The train made travel possible. Picture books and guidebooks had helped people travel vicariously through the West. There were also exhibitions of Western painters. It all looked magnificent. A train traveler could finally get to see it in person.

Some of the most spectacular scenery on the planet is just outside the train window as one traveled up to Donner Summit. Unfortunately it was also just beyond two inch thick planks that make up the sides of the snowsheds. The summer sun had shrunken the boards so that strips of light came in and tourists could get an idea of the scenery they were missing as small snippets flickered by like an old time movie or pictures seen in a zoetrope.

The snowsheds were dark and gloomy and the smoke from the locomotive was just as trapped as the passengers, filling the sheds and the passenger compartments. What could have been one of the best train trips in the world was very unpleasant. Passengers could, no doubt, hardly wait to get away from Donner Summit.

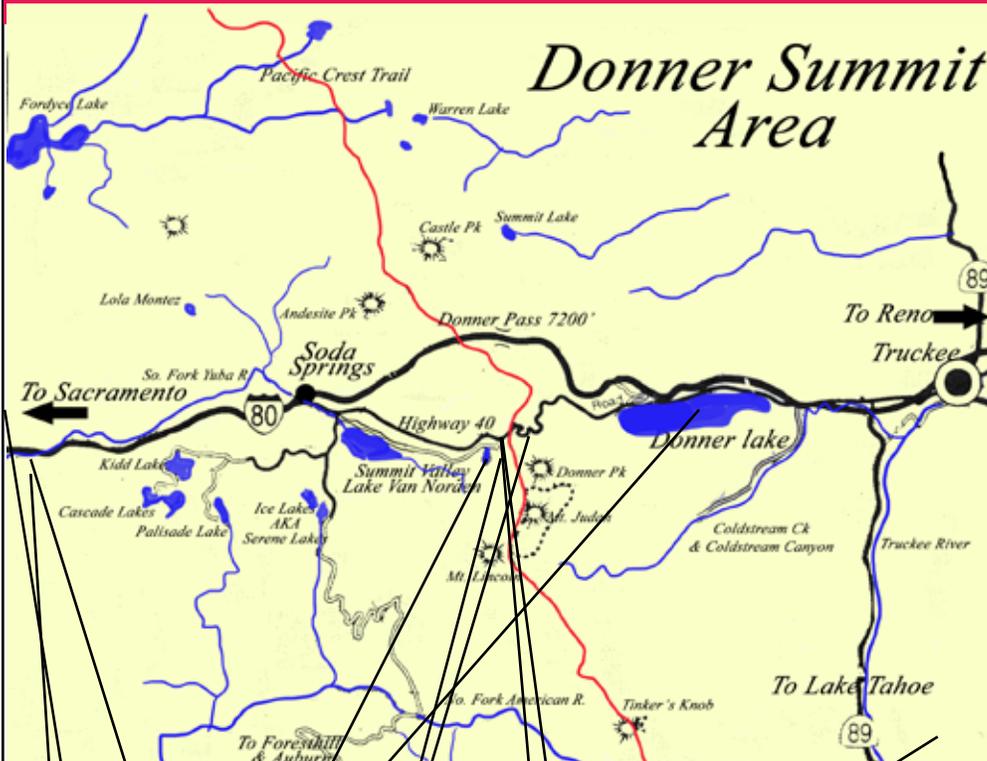
The railroad company eventually removed alternate planks from snowshed sides in summer and after snow had melted, or let flaps down to improve viewing and ventilation.

“It is no exaggeration to say that the scenery... is one continuous glorious masterpiece of painting.”

Sacramento Daily Union  
April 22, 1867

The quote about Donner Summit is true, but unfortunately railroad travelers could not appreciate it in the early days.

# Story Locations in this Issue



## Heirloom Improvements

Discerning readers have no doubt noticed an improvement in Heirloom quality over the last few months.

It turns out the current editor cannot see all the mistakes and typos he's made. The numbers are too overwhelming.

Into the breach stepped Pat Malberg, Lake Mary resident on Donner Summit. She has been proofing the last few issues delivering a needed service and relief to the readers.

Pat has also contributed to the Heirloom in other ways too: insight about the Transcontinental Air Route weather station and her visits there as a girl, an article about Emil Papplou (7/12), and an article about Sugar Bowl Reminiscences (2/14). She will be providing even more in the future, she promises.

## In This Issue

Red Mountain pg 5  
Picture pg 3 Telescoping Snowshed pg 4  
Cisco Grove pg 6 Snowsheds Summit pg 7 and Summit Hotel entrance  
Donner Lake pg 10 Tahoe Tavern pg 11  
Lake Mary pg 13 Shaft House pg 14 and 17 Quarry pag 15

## Announcements:

The new museum at the Donner State Park will open June 6.  
The Donner Party Hikes will be October 3 & 4.  
Heritage Trail and the Margie Powell Illustrated History Hikes will be August 15, 16

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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



"After getting clear of the almost interminable snowsheds, the grand scenery around us was greatly enjoyed." page 49  
A Souvenir of the transcontinental excursion of railroad agents, 1870,

That was not the only or biggest problem with snowsheds. The quotes just make good hooks for the unexpected problem. The big problem was fire. A second one was collapse.

## Fire

"...a more convenient arrangement for a long bonfire I never saw."  
Hawke's Bay Herald January 28, 1870

Missed scenery and a smokey trip over Donner Summit were just inconveniences. Fire was the biggest threat. The sheds were built of lumber which sat in the summer sun drying to kindling perfection. Locomotives sent sparks and cinders out with the smoke and sometimes, oftentimes, they settled on the wood. The timbers caught fire and the lengthy tunnels acted as chimneys. Perusing old newspapers we can see that conflagrations were frequent. The summer edition of the National Fire Protection Quarterly for 1916 said that the railroad lost an average 1770 feet of snowsheds, a third of a mile, annually to fire during the first 31 years of the railroad. When the railroad began using oil instead of coal or wood, the annual loss of snowsheds dropped to less than a third of that.

Fire was such a problem that it engendered a whole new industry on the Summit dedicated to fire suppression. Trackwalkers walked the tracks looking for fire. Finding fire, they would telegraph for the fire train. There were three fire trains always kept with their steam up and ready to go. The trains would race to the fires to put them out before too much damage was done. Even so, there were large fires. One, in 1889, took out 8,000 feet of snowsheds, leaving the railroad vulnerable to the heavier than normal blizzards of 1890.

The railroad also built a lookout on Red Mountain, to which you can still hike (see the Heirloom for July, '10). The men there could see miles of snowsheds. When they saw smoke they telephoned Cisco Grove, with one of the first telephones in California, which then telegraphed the fire train.

To prevent fires from spreading, spaces were needed in the long line of snowsheds and so telescoping sheds were built. In summer one section of shed was rolled into another, leaving a firebreak. The telescoping sheds consisted of fifty foot long sections sitting on wheels that ran on track 16'8" wide. They were placed 2,000 feet to a half mile apart and according to the American Geographical Society Bulletin in 1905, "so far they have proved successful in stopping the progress of large fires." See the picture on the next page.

## IN DANGER BY FOREST FIRES

### Much Damage Done and Several Towns Are Threatened With Destruction

San Francisco, Cal. September 10.  
Fire in the snowsheds of the Central Pacific Railroad has destroyed 2,500 feet of snow-sheds and track in Blue Canyon. The area burned exceeds four miles. The loss is estimated at \$25,000.

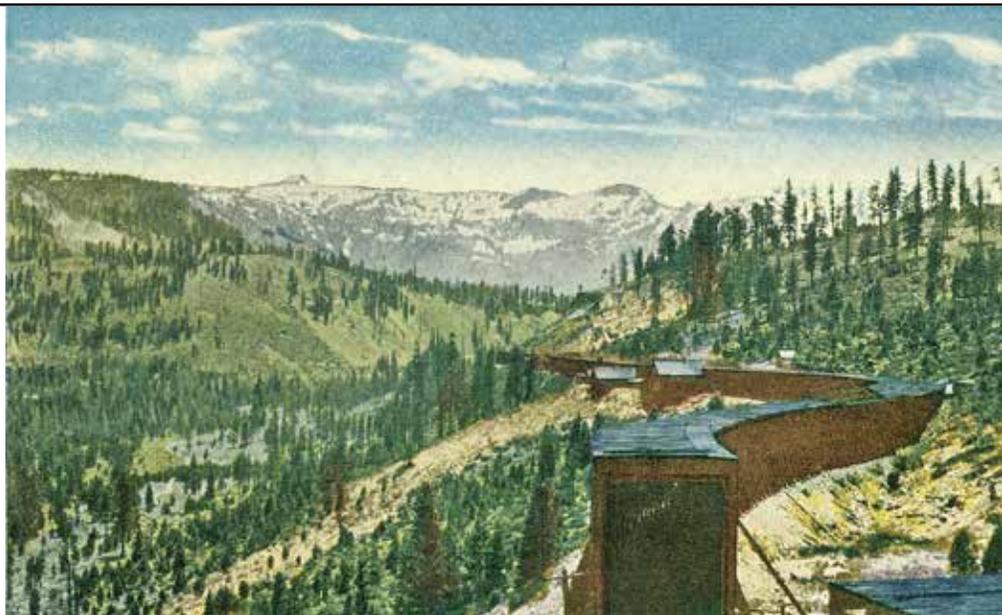
The situation is serious, for almost the entire country along the track in the neighborhood of the sheds is ablaze. Forest fires threaten to sweep down the remaining sheds.

Overland trains both ways are delayed. Many Knights Templar are on stalled east-bound trains. Wires are down in the burned district.

Pittsburg Press September 10, 1904

That was for prevention. Once fires got started the Railroad had a quick response. Once an alarm was rung fire trains, always waiting with ready crews and full heads of steam, raced to the fires.

To notify the fire trains there were track walkers who kept an eye on the sheds and could ring the alarm when a fire was spotted. Then up on Red Mountain or Signal Hill, the Southern Pacific constructed a lookout. The lookout had a view that could take in almost all of the snowshed route. Once a fire was spotted the lookout men telephoned Cisco which telegraphed the fire trains.



### **Snowshed Collapse**

Snowshed collapse was also a problem given the high snowfalls on Donner Summit. Track walkers walked the track checking snowshed conditions and hundreds of snow shovelers were employed to keep the weight off the snowshed roofs.

Today the railroad, and residents, have better snow machines, the railroad has concrete snowsheds, there are no fire trains, track walkers, and just a few workers take the place of the thousand or more workers of decades ago.



## **TRANSCONTINENTAL TRAINS SUSPENDED**

### **Sheds Collapse and Traffic Is Halted— Service Expected to Be Renewed Today**

SACRAMENTO, Jan. 18.—Transcontinental train service was suspended during the day on both the Southern Pacific and the Western Pacific railroads because of snowslides and landslides in the Sierra Nevada mountains. ... After succeeding in clearing this following a night of persistent struggling against the elements, the Southern Pacific was suddenly plunged into new difficulties at 2:30 this afternoon, when 230 feet of snow sheds at the head of Donner lake, three miles east of the summit, caved in, blocking traffic. ... Additional machinery and extra crews of men were rushed to the scene. Late reports from the summit were to the effect that the road would be opened by tomorrow.

Not for years, declare railroad officials, have they experienced such severe weather conditions in the high mountains. Snow to the depth of 7 1/2 feet was encountered in Blue Canyon and that increased to a depth of 12 feet on the summit.

Trains Blocked in Sierras (Special Dispatch to The Call) RENO, Jan. 18.—With 200 feet of snowsheds down and slides covering the Southern Pacific tracks in the Sierras, traffic over the mountains is in a chaotic condition...

San Francisco Call January 18, 1913

## GREAT FIRE IN THE SNOW SHEDS. The Cisco Railroad Hotel Burnt Down.

**Special to the Alta** The following dispatch was received this morning:

**Cisco, June 29th.** — The Railroad Hotel, together with a quarter of a mile of the snow sheds, was destroyed by fire to-day. The up-train was detained eight hours in consequence, but will reach Ogden in time to connect with the regular Eastern bound train. The fire was caused by a spark from a passing locomotive. A man named Patrick Dormer, in attempting to save some property in the hotel, was caught by the flames and burned to death.

**Further Particulars** The following additional particulars were received by our regular dispatches. It will be observed that the damage done is stated as greater than in our first dispatch:

**Truckee, June 8th** About 11 a. m. to-day a fire broke out in the snow sheds, completely destroying the Cisco Hotel, Western Union Telegraph Office and a number of other buildings, together with about three-quarters of a mile of snow sheds, reaching from tunnel No. 3 to a point a short distance west of the hotel. The telegraph wires of both companies were completely destroyed. The Western Union Company succeeded in getting theirs working at three P. M. The fire spread so rapidly that there was very little property saved, the operators not having time to save the telegraph instruments. The track is badly damaged the whole distance. Superintendents Corning and Bowen are on the ground with a large force of men and expect to get trains through by two o'clock a. m.

Daily Alta California June 30, 1871



Fire Lookout on Red Mountain. This was the first fire lookout in the United States, according to the Forest Service. It was manned 24 hours a day by railroad personnel keeping an eye on the 40 miles of wooden snowsheds.

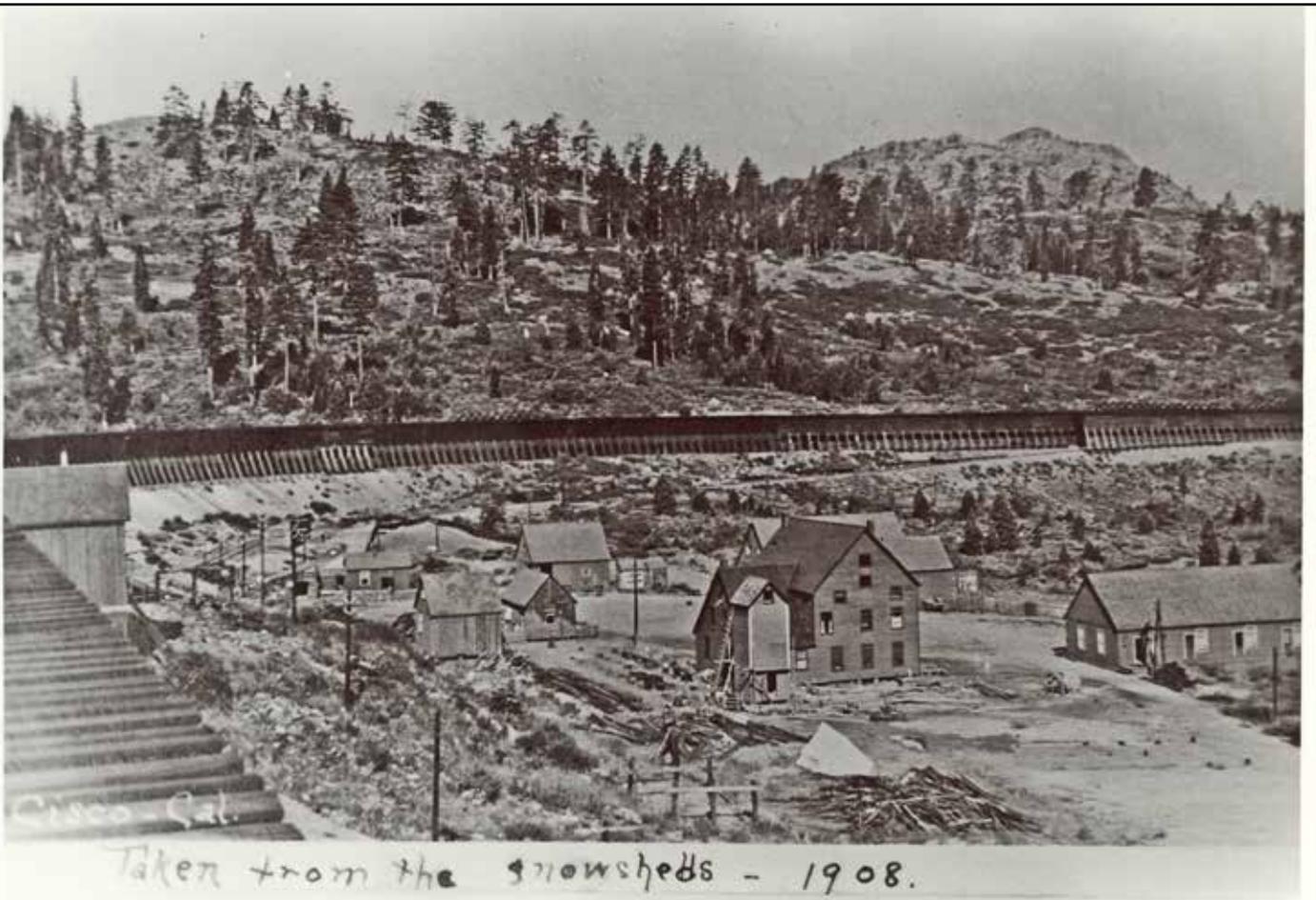
See our July '10 [Heirloom](#) to read all about it.



### BURIED IN A SNOW-SHED

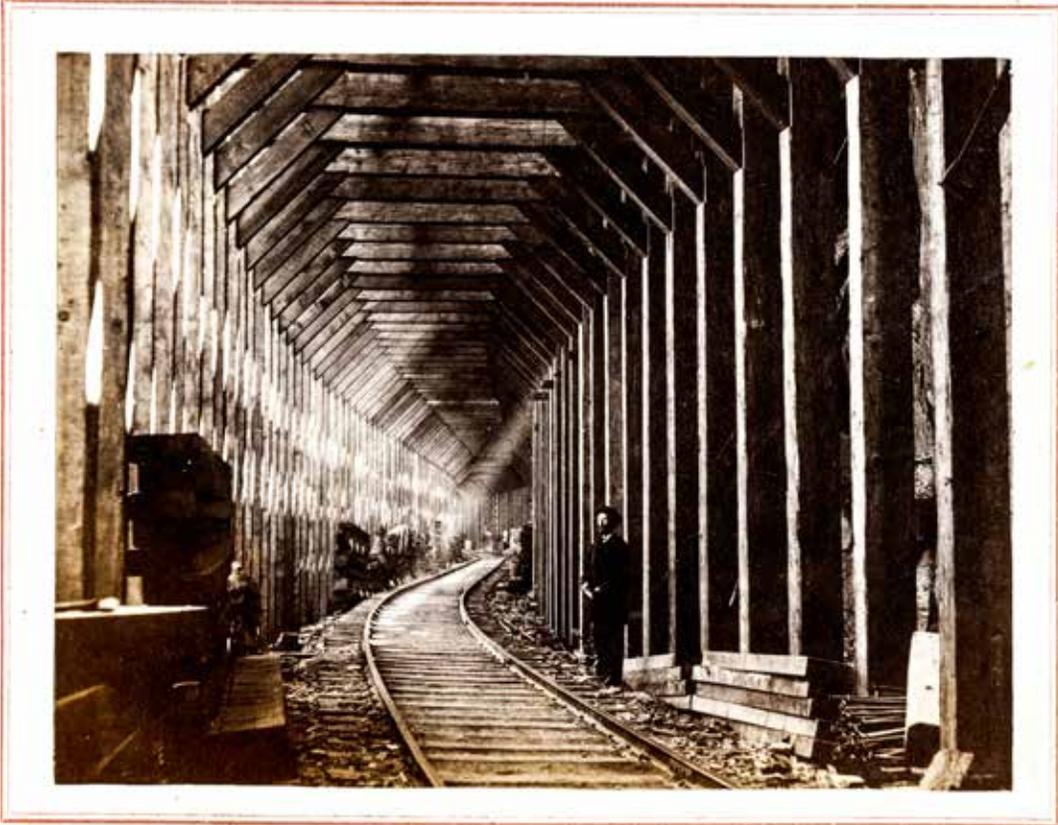
San Francisco, April 20 - A dispatch from Truckee, Cal., on the Central Pacific Railroad, says that 300 feet of snow-shed fell yesterday half a mile west of the Summit, covering a working train and a number of Chinese laborers. Six Chinamen have been taken out dead and five others seriously wounded. A wrecking train and medical aid have been sent to the scene of the disaster.

The New York Times April 21, 1884



Above, snowsheds at Cisco Grove.

Left, snowsheds below Donner Pk., Crested Pk. in the old days.



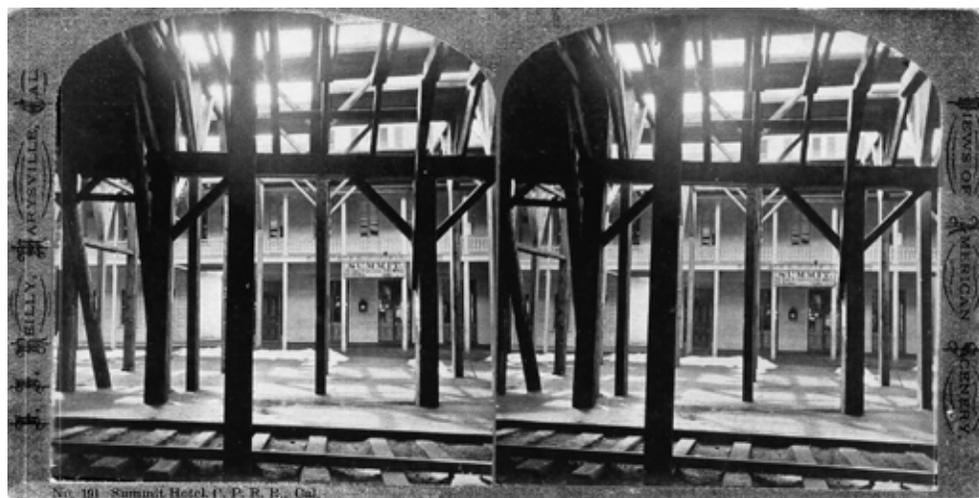
252. Snow Gallery around Crested Peak.  
Timbers 12x14 in., 20 in. apart

# From the DSHS Archives



Right, snowsheds, 1869 just below Donner Pass. Note the chimneys. For this view, Donner Pk. is on the right. Go up to the trail behind the Sugar Bowl Academy at the top of the pass and walk 150 yards to granite knoll.

Below, Snowsheds connected almost all the buildings on the summit. Here the front door of the Summit Hotel (first version) can be seen through the snowsheds at Summit Station.



# Book Review

## Looking for a Summer Destination... in 1915?

### Lake of the Sky

George Wharton James 1915 394 pages

This book is available for free on the Internet, in libraries, or for purchase as a reprint or a used book, also on the Internet. If you purchase a reprint be sure it is an edition with pictures.

At first look an old guidebook to Lake Tahoe does not have much relevance either for Donner Summit history or for today. We kept running into this book, though, in our search for Donner Summit history. So that occasioned a look at this almost 400 page book.

It's really interesting, or a lot of it is, to read about Lake Tahoe and the wider area, including Donner Summit, just after the turn of the last century.

It's not strictly about Lake Tahoe. There are lots of pictures of the old days.

The 19th Century prose is fun to read. The first pages are descriptions of Lake Tahoe, "Is it necessary to present further claims for Lake Tahoe? Every new hour finds a new charm, every new day calls for louder praise, every added visit only fastens the chains of allurements deeper." Pg 7

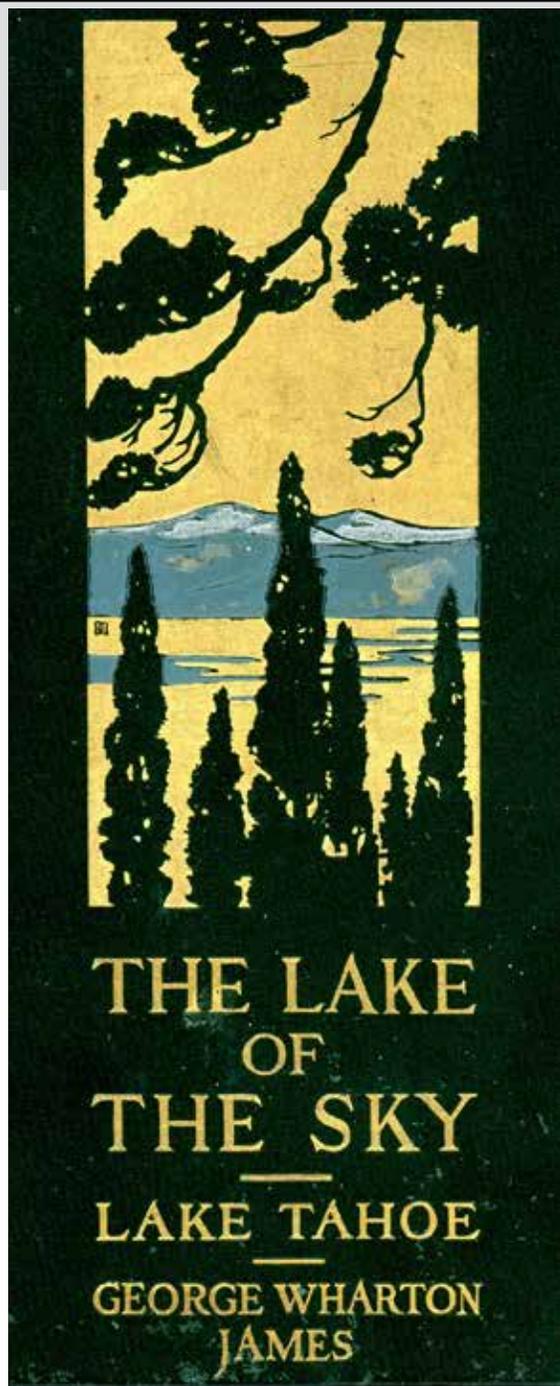
By 1915 Lake Tahoe had become an increasingly popular "Mecca" for hunters, sportsmen, fishermen and the "Natural haunt of the thoughtful and studious lover of God's great and varied out-of-doors."

For over thirty years Mr. James, the author, had been collecting materials about the Lake. It was a "treasure of literature," scientific and descriptive of Lake Tahoe. The book gathers together "the little known jewels." That's what separates this book from guidebooks in general as it addresses almost every topic imaginable. There are forty chapters each dedicated to a different topic: in general, the discovery by Fremont (and the story of his howitzer), the Indians and their legends, geology, other lakes, the Donner Party, taking the train to Tahoe City, automobile tour, various places in the neighborhood, Squaw Valley and the mining there, descriptions of hikes, Washoe customs and their basketry, etc.

It's really interesting, or a lot of it is, to read about Lake Tahoe and the wider area, including Donner Summit just after the turn of the last century.

He mentions the wonders of fishing in the stocked lakes; how the mountain lover will love the peaks, the author climbed 20 peaks all 9,000 feet or higher in elevation; the variety of trees, rare and new species; the geology, "glacial cirques," "stupendous precipices," "gouged, smoothed, planed, and grooved" terrain; the uplift, subsidence and "volcanic outpourings," taking the train, touring by auto, Native American stories, etc.

There are also the author's little stories. Thirty years before writing the book, he'd come to the Lake and heard with various rationales that it was impossible to swim in the Lake without drowning. He could not believe it but was not sure. So he went out in a boat, tied a clothesline to himself and the boat's seat and went for a swim.



"I did not sink...I was never more stimulated to swim in my life. My ten or fifteen foot dive took me into colder water than I had ever experienced before and I felt as if suddenly, and at one fell swoop, I were flayed alive..." He learned one should test the water's temperature before diving in.

He was amazed by the clarity of the lake water (see the sidebar here about the lake water) and decided to test it by dropping a white disk into the lake, just as clarity is tested today. He found that he could see the disk down to 108 feet. Today the USGS puts clarity, using white disks, at 70 feet.

There is an appendix with material from Mark Twain, Thomas Starr King (famous preacher who possibly saved California for the Union; the peak at Donner Ski Ranch used to be called Mt. King; and Lake Angela is named for his sister), Joseph Le Conte (U.C. professor of geology), and a list of the Lake Tahoe resorts (in case you want to visit).

As one reads about the various subjects, there are all kinds of interesting facts that come up. The first name of the Lake Tahoe was not Tahoe or Bigler, but Bonpland and it

was named by John C. Fremont on his second expedition to California in 1842. The name didn't stick obviously. If you are ever on a quiz show and you use Bonpland, remember the DSHS with your winnings. James also mentions Alexi Von Schmidt, whose story has been sitting in our DSHS computers for many years just waiting to come out so we won't mention him here. There were small gold towns near what is now the entrance to Squaw Valley called Knoxville and Claraville. James talks about exploring their ruins and mining remains in 1915.

Throughout the book there is a lot of background so the reader learns the derivation of local names such as Marlette, McKinney, and Maggie's Peaks.

The book serves as a 1915 hiking guide but local hikers from today could use it too. If you are familiar with local hikes, you will readily recognize and enjoy his descriptions. He lists the lakes, streams, springs, and peaks he passes. At vista points he lists the names of peaks to be seen.

1915 Map of Donner Summit and NW Lake Tahoe from Lake of the Sky.



## Mark Twain quote in Lake of the Sky

The air up there in the clouds is very pure and fine, bracing and delicious. And why shouldn't it be? – It is the same the angels breathe.

Also interesting is the resort life he describes. There were many resorts opening around the lake and he describes them, their activities, and flavor. For example "Tahoe Tavern, despite being luxurious is not pretentious. You don't have to 'dress' for dinner." The Tavern offered a wide variety of

activities: casino, music, dancing, rowing, hiking/walking, horseback riding, fishing, amateur theatricals, informal glee clubs, blowing, boating, lectures, concerts, visits to a nearby Indian encampment, lounging, and loafing. It's not Donner Summit so we'll move on.



In describing some of the areas around Lake Tahoe James summarizes what happened to the Donner Party and he provides a pretty dispassionate description following C.F. McGlashan's research (see the heirloom for April '15) and mentions that one interesting trip to take while visiting Lake Tahoe is to Donner Lake and up to the Summit where one can see cut trees of the "Starved Camp." See page 13

The book is long enough that you can skip the chapters you are not particularly interested in and still have lots to read.

Left, the automobile road along Donner Lake, 1915. Donner Pk. is in the distance.

## Hiking hints, 1915 Lake of the Sky

This was first in our June '14 Heirloom but since there's a review of the source book here and summer is coming, a reprise seemed in order.

What to Take Hiking and Riding in 1915 Today many history aficionados enjoy re-enacting historical events. There are Civil War re-enactors, Wild West re-enactors, and WWII re-enactors, for example. There is also the Steam Punk culture which focuses on the Victorian Era.

Some readers of this august publication may want to experience local historical verisimilitude by re-enacting old ways of life on Donner Summit. You might like to pilot an old car along old stretches of the Lincoln Highway, try to incise petroglyphs on local granite, take a wagon up Roller Pass.

For those just starting out in the re-enactment game, consider this simple exercise. The 1915 book, Lake of the Sky, which is about the Lake Tahoe area and which we'll review at some point, includes some snippets of advice. Here is what to take hiking and riding in 1915.

My friends often ask me what food and drink I take along on such hiking or riding trips. Generally the hotel provides a luncheon, but personally, I prefer a few Grant's crackers (a thick, hard cracker full of sweet nutriment, made at Berkeley, Calif.) a handful of shelled nuts – walnuts, pecans, or almonds, a small bottle of Horlick's Malted Milk tablets, a few slabs of Ghirardelli milk chocolate, and an apple or an orange. On this food I can ride or walk days at a time, without anything else. Grant's crackers, Horlick's Malted Milk tablets, and Ghirardelli's chocolate are the best of their kind, and all are nutritious to the full, as well as delicious to the taste. For drink I find Horlick's Malted Milk the most comforting and invigorating, and it has none of the after "letting down" effects that accompany coffee drinking.

## Visit to Grecian Bay, 1915

"There is one especially color-blessed spot. it is in Grecian Bay, between Rubicon Point and Emerald Bay. Here the shore formation is wild and irregular, with deep holes, majestic, grand and rugged rocks and some trees and shrubbery.

"Near the center of this is a deep hole, into which one of the mountain streams runs over a light-colored sandy bottom where the water is quite shallow. Around are varicolored trees and shrubs, and these objects and conditions all combine to produce a mystic revelation of color gradations and harmonies, from emerald green and jade to the deepest amethystine or ultra-marine. When the wind slightly stirs the surface and these dancing ripples catch the sunbeams, one by one, in changeful and irregular measure, the eyes are dazzled with iridescences and living color-changes covering hundreds of acres, thousands of them, as exquisite, glorious and dazzling as revealed in the most perfect peacock's tail-feathers, or humming-bird's throat. Over such spots one sits in his boat spell-bound, color-entranced, and the ears of his soul listen to color music as thrilling, as enchanting as melodies by Foster and Balfe, minuets by Mozart and Haydn, arias by Handel, nocturnes and serenades by Chopin and Schumann, overtures by Rossini, massive choruses and chorals [sic] by Handel, Haydn and Mendelssohn, fugues by Bach, and concertos by Beethoven."

## Tahoe Tavern, 1915

Tahoe Tavern was a famous resort on the shore of Lake Tahoe. It's been replaced by condominiums across from the road into Granlibakken just down 89 from Tahoe City.

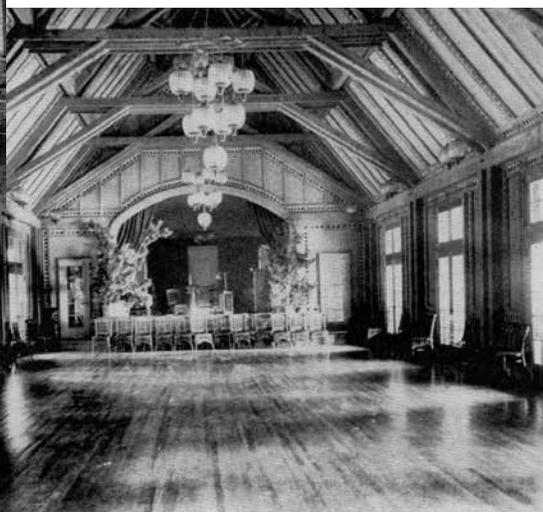
Mr. James referred to it in Lake of the Sky as, "preeminently the chief resort for those who demand luxurious comfort in all its varied manifestations."



Left, front of the Tahoe Tavern, 1915. Below, the rear of the casino on the lakevshore.



Below that, the ladies' lounging room.



Bottom, the ballroom.

# *Intriguing*

In 1915, or today, if one wanted or wants a scenic drive from Lake Tahoe to Donner Summit, one travels 89 to Truckee, turns left and heads up Donner Pass Rd., old Highway 40. One travels generally the route of the wagons trains, the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd., and the Lincoln Highway. One passes petroglyphs, rock climbers, Donner Summit Bridge (1926), passes under the transcontinental air route weather station location and next to the Transcontinental Railroad.

It was with some surprise to read Mr. Wharton James' version of the same trip to Donner Summit in Lake of the Sky. It also went a long way to validating a theory we're working on at the DSHS and which will be followed up upon soon with more sources and on-site exploration by the Mobile Historical Research Team. Stay tuned. Meanwhile, the surprising route:

"An unusual trip that can be taken from Tahoe Tavern is down to the foot of Donner Lake and then, turning to the left, follow the old emigrant and stage-road [into Coldstream Canyon]. It has not been used for fifty years, but it is full of interest. There are many objects that remain to tell of its fascinating history. Over it came many who afterwards became pioneers in hewing out this new land from the raw material of which lasting commonwealths are made. Turning south to Cold Stream, it passes by Summit Valley [apparently taking the very old road over Coldstream Pass and down into Summit Valley] on to Starved Camp [which was the camping spot of one of the groups of the Donner Party to escape Donner Lake - see the May, '14 issue of the Heirloom]. The stumps of the trees cut down by the unfortunate pioneers are still standing [see the picture below by Alfred A. Hart of "Stumps of Trees Cut Down by the Donner Party in Summit Valley].

"It was always a difficult road to negotiate, the divide between Mt. Lincoln and Anderson Peak being over 7500 feet high [he got the names of the mountains mixed up since no road ever went over between Lincoln and Anderson]. But those heroes of 1848-49 made it, triumphing over every barrier and winning for themselves what Joaquin Miller so poetically has accorded them, where he declares that 'the snow-clad Sierras are their everlasting monuments.'

"This road is now, in places, almost obliterated. One section for three miles is grown up. Trees and chaparral cover it and hide it from the face of any but the most studiously observant. When the road that takes to the north of Donner Lake was built in 1861-62 [Dutch Flat Wagon Rd.] and goes directly and on an easier grade by Emigrant Gap to Dutch Flat, this road by Cold Stream was totally abandoned. For years the county road officials have ignored its existence, and now it is as if it never had been, save for its memories and the fragments of wagons, broken and abandoned in the fierce conflict with stern Nature, and suggesting the heart-break and struggle the effort to reach California caused in those early days.



Automobiles in front of the Tahoe Tavern, part of the Atlantic to the Pacific Automobile Party Premier Tour, 1911. It was a group of rich "transcontinentalists" in caravan stopping at the Tahoe Tavern



# Then & Now with Art Clark

## Turret Mountain (Mount Lincoln)

This view, published by Lawrence and Houseworth, was taken from along the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Road around 1870.

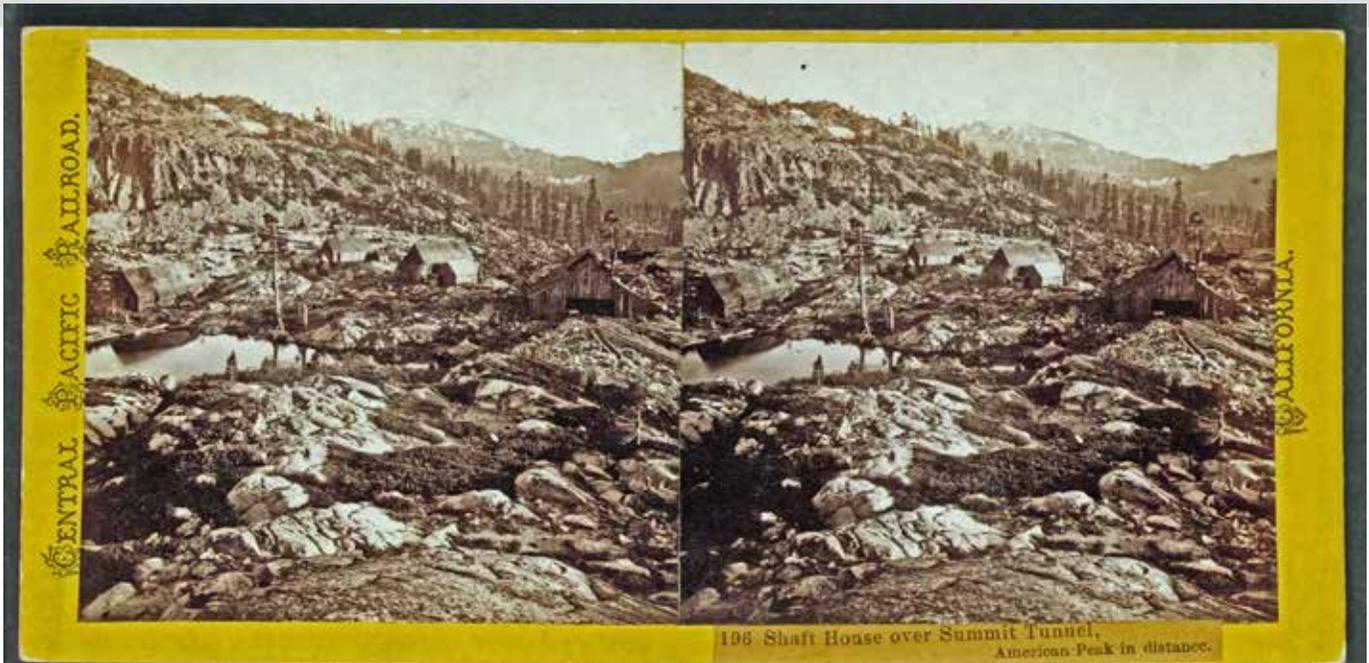
Lake Mary was one of two lakes, Lakes Mary and John at the foot of Donner Peak. Once the dam was built, it became one. Who John and Mary were has been lost to history.

Why was it called Turret Mountain? Who knows?

Photo location: 39°  
18.706'N 120° 19.890'W



# Then & Now with Art Clark



## Alfred A Hart 196 - Shaft House over Summit Tunnel

Tunnel 6 is the longest of the Sierra transcontinental railroad tunnels. It took two years to build. The railroad was so impatient to get on with building beyond the tunnel they dug from two ends at once. That was still not fast enough so they sank a shaft down the middle and dug from the inside out. A donkey engine was placed at the top in a shaft house to hoist out rock and let down workers and supplies.

The rocks where Hart stood to take his photo were quarried for the construction of Hwy 40. The pond was filled in and is now a parking lot.

Photo location 39° 19.032'N 120° 19.576'W



# The Story of a Then & Now

The problem is Art Clark. He does the Then & Now's in the [Heirloom](#). Since so much has happened historically on Donner Summit (the most important historical square mile in California and maybe the entire Western United States) there is a huge number of historical photographs as subjects for his Then & Now's. It gives him a lot to do.

Art came across the Alfred A. Hart #196 photograph title "Shaft House over Summit Tunnel" (ca. 1869). The shaft drops to the center of Tunnel 6 (check our [Heirloom](#) indices for the many articles and references to Tunnel 6) and enabled the CPRR in 1867-68 to not only tunnel in from the east and west ends but from the inside out. Today the top is just a steel covered square hole. In 1867-68 it was a hive of activity. A donkey engine (the stripped down locomotive Sacramento which was the first locomotive in California) hauled workers and supplies up and down and rocks up the shaft. The Sacramento, renamed the Blue Goose, sat in the barn in the photograph (see the next page for a larger view). Other nearby buildings hosted supplies and a blacksmith to repair tools and sharpen the drill bits. Workers went up and down the shaft in eight-hour shifts six days a week. That went on for two years.

The photograph is great. It's good history and so it's a good Then & Now subject. In order to set up his Then & Now's Art is meticulous and professional. An amateur Then & Nowist would accept some discrepancy between then and now because "then" was a long time ago. Art won't accept anything less than perfection because he says the subscribers are counting on him for historical precision. When he went to set up for the "Now" to match the "Then" he discovered he could not get the perfect perspective. Someone had taken away the hill where Alfred A. Hart must have stood. It probably went to Highway 40 construction. There had been a quarry at Alfred A. Hart's photo spot, below. Art could just not get high enough close enough to the shaft. He needed a method to get up into the air. He mentioned a cherry picker but the DSHS motor pool does not have equipment like that. Art was getting quite agitated about not being able to complete the assignment. That's professionalism for you.

The solution came as a part of a deal. Art also holds the key to locating the exact locations of the buildings in Soda Springs in the 19th Century. There is a 1915 survey done along the road which marks the landmarks including buildings. The buildings are gone of course but one should be able to use the other landmarks to locate that which is gone. Unfortunately some of the permanent landmarks are gone or have been moved, in particular a bridge on the Lincoln Highway that went over Castle Creek. Art would not complete the work because he could not be accurate. If Art had a particularly fancy surveying gizmo that could do GPS though, he might be able to find the buildings' locations. He does not have the gizmo however.

As it happened, while commiserating with Art over the Shaft House problem, another member of the Mobile Historical Research Team mentioned the Soda Springs buildings and Art mentioned the need for the gizmo. That member happens to have a son



Small quarry on Donner Summit used for the construction of Highway 40.

In the picture on the lower left on the next page, Art and George are standing in the same quarry. They are under the high part to the right.

with such a gizmo which is used in the son's architectural surveying business. If a method could be gotten to get Art into the right place for the Shaft House picture, would Art then do the Soda Springs buildings' locations? It was suspenseful waiting as Art considered. Art didn't like leaving the Shaft House less than perfectly done, so he agreed.

The solution appeared in the form of George Lamson, a sometimes member of the Mobile Historical Research Team. He is an experienced drone pilot with, at this point, 4 hours of piloting experience. His drone could get into the right spot where the hill used to be and take some pictures. Art would have his accuracy. We'd have a new Then & Now.

It took a number of drone flights until Art was satisfied with the perspective and the final Then & Now was ready for publication - see page 15

That part is done. Now the MHRT has to schedule the surveying gizmo and Art will locate the Soda Springs buildings (this memorializes the deal Art made and gives the reader something to anticipate).

As you can see DSHS historical research is not straight forward.

Check out the Then & Now animations on the DSHS website.

See art in person in the [Heirloom](#) for August '13



Art Clark, left; George Lamson, right at "command central for the drone. Below, the drone in flight, George and Art piloting.



George, right; Art left with the drone in flight. Right, George checking all systems.





Shaft House on page 14, but larger for better perusal.

**DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
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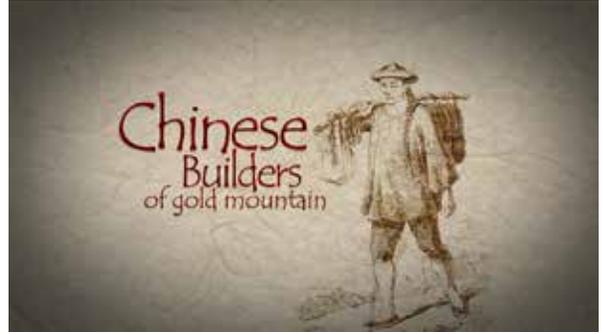
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# Chinese Builders of Gold Mtn.

A Video now available from Nimbus Films

**Chinese Builders of Gold Mountain** is a documentary film that chronicles the contributions of Chinese Immigrants in California in the mid 1800s,

The television version runs 26-minutes. A longer, 45-minute version of the film is available on DVD. The longer version maybe ordered from the film producer's website at [www.transcoshow.com](http://www.transcoshow.com).



Gold Mountain is the name the Chinese gave California during the Gold Rush days.

The film traces the path of Chinese immigrants who came to California in the 1850s. The documentary was filmed in Sacramento, Auburn, Marysville, Locke, Fiddletown, Oroville, St. Helena, Monterey and Donner Summit.

It takes viewers to places where the Chinese lived and worked. In the Sierra Nevada, viewers will see the tunnels the Chinese blasted through solid granite to help build the transcontinental railroad through the mountains. The documentary shows how Chinese built the levees in the San Francisco Bay Delta that reclaimed thousands of acres for agriculture. Chinese were also involved in the creation of California's wine industry, and the film takes viewers inside the wine caves built at Schramsberg Vineyards in Calistoga.

"Through hard work, determination and knowledge, the Chinese made an incredible and lasting mark on California. Chinese Builders of Gold Mountain takes viewers to the places where the Chinese built levees, temples, stores and homes," said film producer Bill George.

The Chinese came to California to find gold. The film explores Fiddletown in Amador County to visit the largest collection of Gold Rush-era Chinese buildings.

Marysville and Oroville were two of the most important towns for Chinese in the 1850s and 1860s. Today, the Bok Kai Temple in Marysville is still operated by the local community, and gives rare insight into the lives of the Chinese who lived and worshipped during the height of the Gold Rush. Also in Marysville is the Chinese American Museum of Northern California, run by Brian Tom. The museum is full of artifacts from the Chinese, and Mr. Tom explains how his grandfather came to Marysville in 1851, mined gold for several years, struck it rich and opened a store which stands to this day. Mr. Tom explains how the Chinese were able to work cooperatively to create wealth in America.

In Oroville, the documentary visits the Chinese Temple and Museum Complex, and interviews Thill Chan Wilcox. Her family has been involved with the complex since the 1850s. Visitors today will find fascinating vestiges of Chinese life, including a replica of a store run by Chinese merchants. The museum contains huge, floor-to-ceiling tapestries, and every corner is full of rare artifacts from California and China, some left by Chinese travelling troupes that entertained Chinese and American audiences.

"The Oroville and Marysville temples are incredible places to visit," film producer George said. "My hope is that after people see the film they will head to these towns and see the wondrous works of Chinese art and culture. These sacred spots need to be supported and appreciated."

The film also explores cultural, legal and political issues, as well as tensions between the Chinese and Anglo communities. Historical perspective and commentary are provided by Brian Tom and Dr. Elizabeth Sinn of Hong Kong University. Dr. Sinn's book, *Pacific Crossing*, detailed the rise of trade between Hong Kong and California spurred by the Gold Rush.

The film was produced by Nimbus Films of Granite Bay, California. The film was written and produced by Bill George. Principal photography was from Brendan Compton of BA Productions in Auburn, California. The film is sponsored by ACC Community services.

### About Nimbus Films

Nimbus Films produces, distributes and markets historical documentary films, focusing on California historical topics. Previous films include "The Hidden Wonder of the World, the Transcontinental Railroad from Sacramento to Donner Summit," which visited the remaining tunnels and construction sites of the original railroad built across the Sierra Nevada. That film won an Award of Excellence from the Sacramento County Historical Society, and an award from the American Society of Civil Engineers for documentary filmmaking.

The company's films are designed to bring history to life by visiting historic sites and showing viewers where history happened.

# Tales from the Menu

A few years ago Maria Montano, the owner of the Summit Restaurant on Donner Summit decided to change the format of her menus and highlight the rich history of Donner Summit. As it happened, there was an historical society on the Summit as well, that could provide some stories patrons could enjoy. The Donner Summit Historical Society opened up an entire new department devoted to Summit Restaurant menus. To read these stories go to the DSHS web pages, [www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org). Pull down the "History" link from the menu at the top of each page and then click on, "Tales from the Menu."

Because there is some room here at the end we've filled a little space with two pictures of the Donner Summit Lodge, in which the Summit Restaurant sits. Of course the current lodge does not look like what's here. These pictures show the current center section. The rooms, now on the right, were added not long WWII and the restaurant, which now sits on the left, was added in 1977.

Stories now in "Tales from the Menu":

Summit Valley - Sierra Jewel

It Was Not Always Easy Getting Over Donner Summit

The Lincoln Highway

Snow Is Not a Problem on Donner Summit

