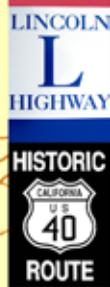


# The Donner Summit *Heirloom*

*History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society*



January, 2016 issue #89

## Snowsheds Pt VI - apparently we weren't done

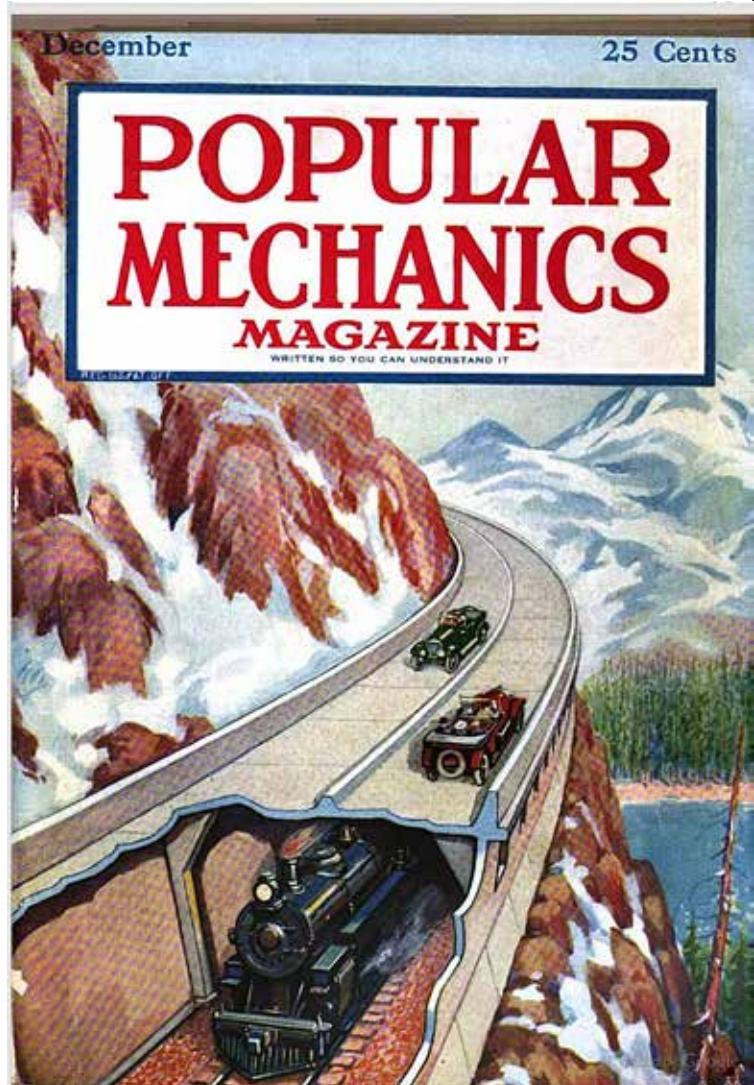
The Heirloom for last February through May had stories with just about all the things anyone would ever want to know about the icon of Donner Summit, the railroad snowsheds. Last month the Heirloom had a story about other uses of the snowsheds besides protecting the train tracks and transcontinental train traffic from snow. We said that was the end, but we did have one more thing.

The Heirloom staff takes its responsibility of delivering Donner Summit history very seriously and leaves no historic stone unturned, to coin a history phrase. We'd come across a Popular Mechanics magazine from December, 1920 which talked about the future of snowsheds.

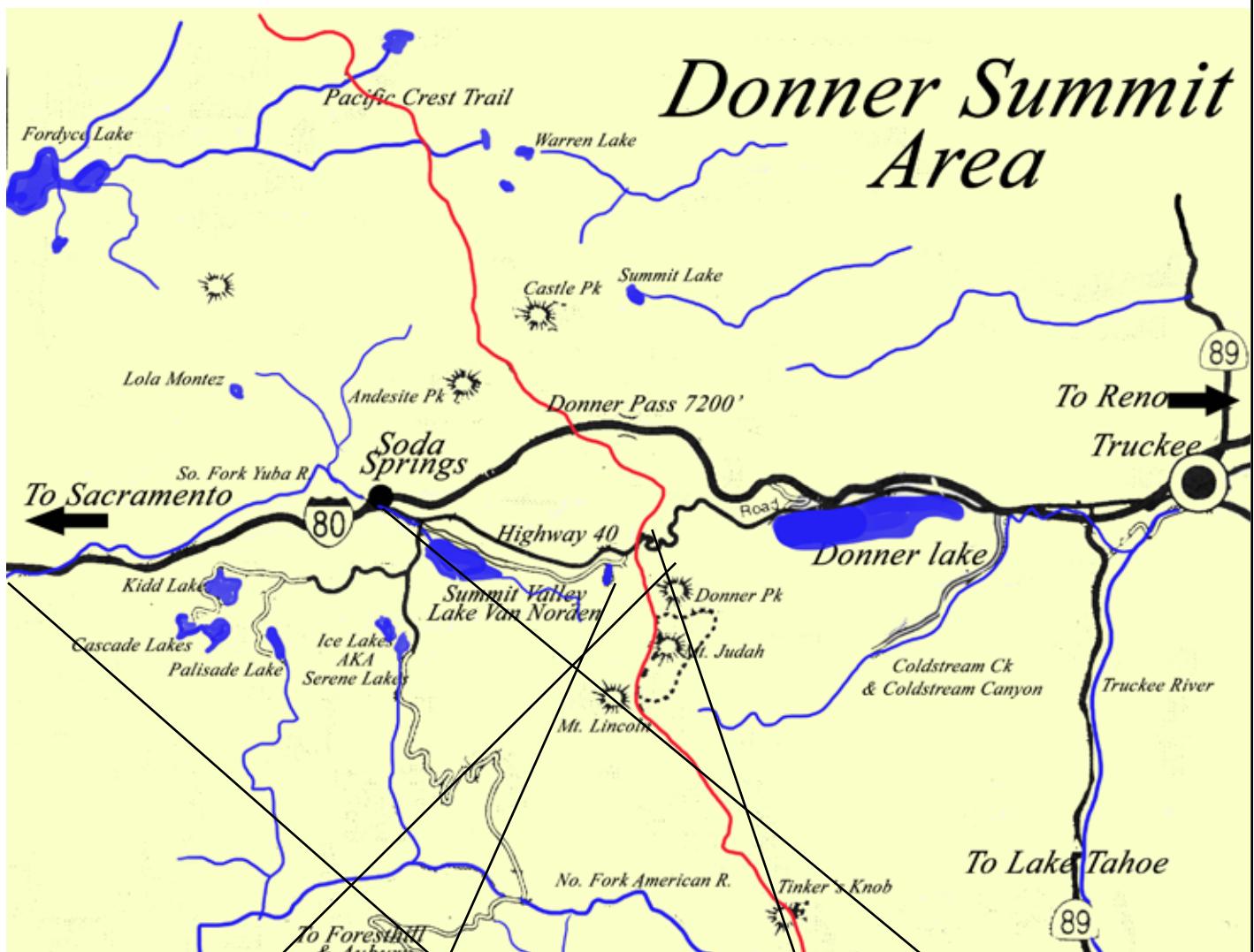
The article said there were "ingenious plans whereby a smooth concrete auto road may be run for 33 miles through a difficult pass of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and a great transcontinental railroad may acquire, at the same time, a system of permanent concrete snowsheds...." "Autos would run with assurance that they would encounter no heavy grades or dangerous curves.

In addition the Lincoln Highway ran next to the railroad and it was blocked by snow for five months of the year. Just a little clearing on snowshed roofs would solve that problem. Despite the "large depreciation and fire loss on the present wooden structures" concrete sheds had not yet been installed. This idea would provide the impetus. "With Federal and state aid on the highway part of the project, the burden" on the railroad would be greatly reduced. There would be a large saving in maintenance as well.

This was a rather ingenious solution to some problems. The Forest Service built the Donner Summit Bridge in



# Story Locations in this Issue



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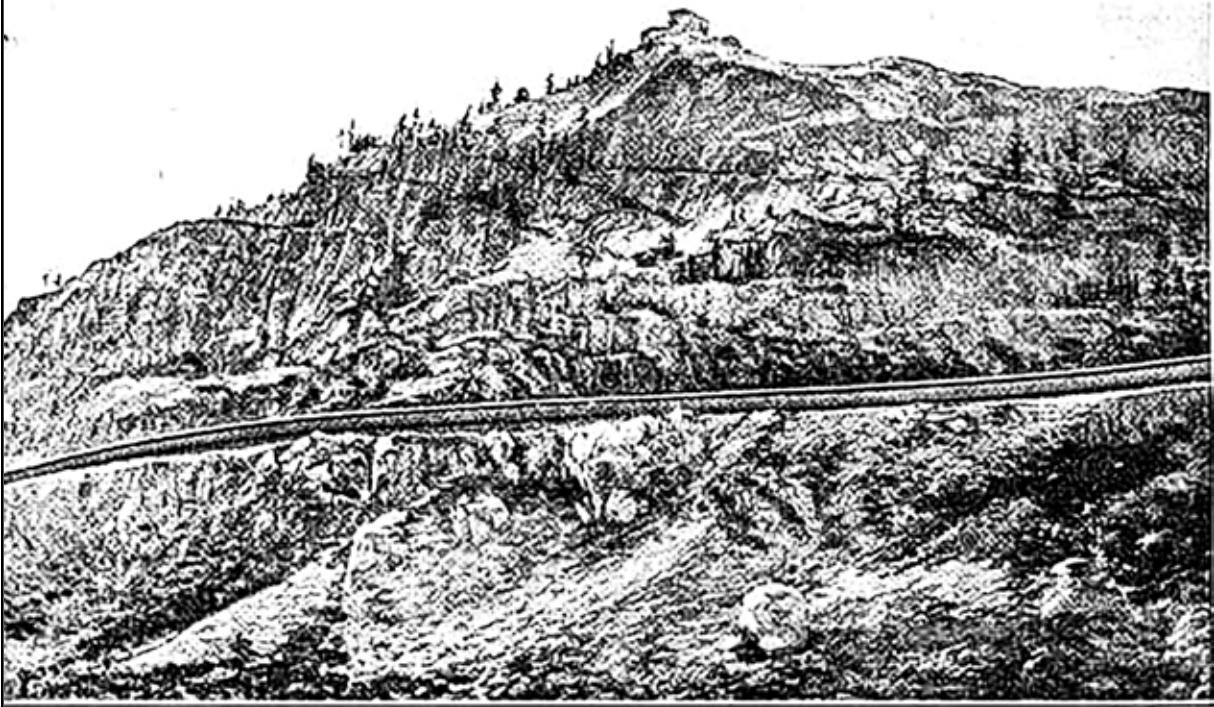
Halfway House page 12

Stewart Pk. page 13 Tinker's Station page 14

editor:  
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Proofread by Pat Malberg, Lake Mary, Donner  
Summit

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



**View, from the Lincoln Highway, of the Present Line of Snowsheds on a Transcontinental Railroad through the Sierra Nevada Mountains: Concrete Construction would Enable Autos to Run on the Roof**

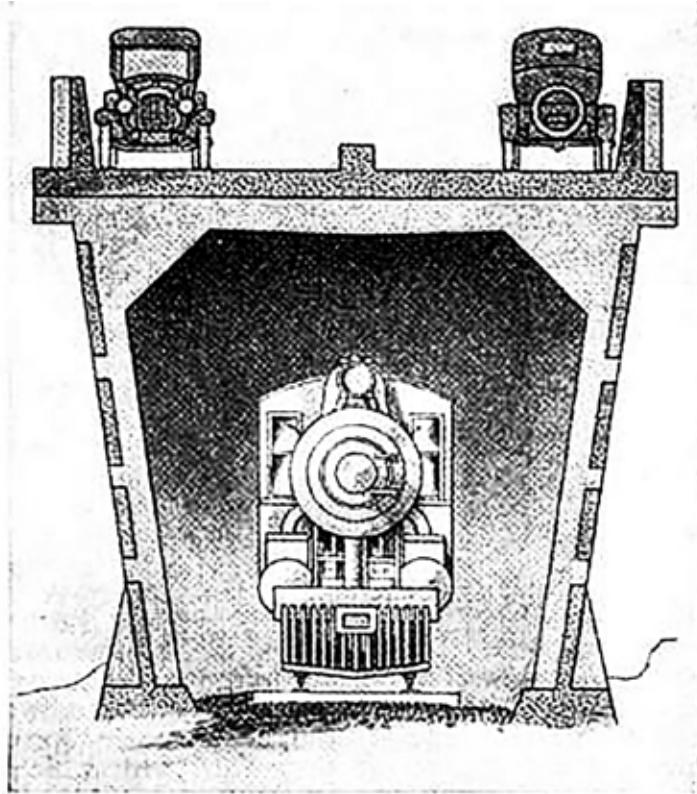
order to facilitate the lumber trucks leaving the Tahoe area. Before the bridge, the maximum grades were 18% and too steep for many laden trucks. The magazine's solution came six years before the bridge arrived and even with the Donner Summit Bridge the maximum grades were 7%.

Railroads have constant even gentle grades of 3-4% maximum. What the engineer who came up with the idea of putting the highway on the snowsheds did not know, was that although there were 30 or 40 miles of snowsheds, they were not continuous. They were broken up by the tops of the 15 Sierra tunnels the railroad went through. Some major excavation would be required.

No one apparently took the notion seriously however as the construction of I-80 shows.

Here is a drawing of Donner Pk., with the proposed concrete snowsheds .

This view is above what is now Old Highway 40 just about where our 20 Mile Museum sign for the snowsheds sits.



**Cross-Sectional View of the Proposed Concrete Snowshed, with an Auto Highway, Protected by Walls, Running on the Roof as a Part of the Lincoln Highway**

# What's in Your Closet?

We've done this topic in a number of Heirlooms, most recently in November of last year. Future generations will be very appreciative of what we've saved about life in the old days. It's a responsibility we're taking seriously.

Giving that some thought we've opened a whole new department at the DSHS. Most readers of this heirloom quality Heirloom remember Richard Boone's television show, "Have Gun Will Travel." People wired Paladin (using a telegraph which is an old communication device) for help. In our case we will not be "Have Gun Will Travel" but rather "Have Historical Stuff Will Travel." If you have historical stuff, particularly photographs we'll come to you.

What occasioned this was Len and Ditty Smith of Lake Mary who called asking for a visit to their 1937 cabin. It sits in a beautiful spot on Lake Mary's shoreline. Originally it was 700 square feet but the Smiths enlarged it to accommodate a growing brood of grandchildren. The original part still is the core of the house with its built-in berths making the space as efficient as that of a sailing ship.

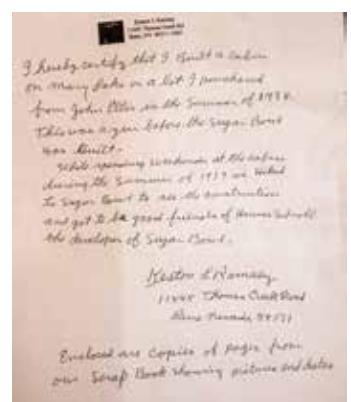
The picture to the right shows the house when it was built and below right shows the original hearth and paneling.

This then brings up the little development on Lake Mary made up of some nice old cabins with real character. Some were even constructed from old snowshod timbers.

Johnny Ellis subdivided the Lake Mary property and put in three rope tows, one at Lake Mary and two at what would become Donner Ski Ranch. You can read about Mr. Ellis, what he did, and the plans he had for the future of Donner Summit in our April and July '09 Heirlooms.



Above, the current Smith cabin with modern siding. Below, the letter providing proof to Placer County showing the house had been built before 1940 and so "grandfathering" in some design deficiencies in the original structure.





The above painting hangs in the Smith home and was painted by Ditty Smith. It portrays the engine house of the Johnny Ellis Lake Mary rope tow. Pieces of the tow still exist in the trees, see below right. Take the PCT and as you finish the initial switchbacks and come out on a straight away above Lake Mary, look in the trees to the left. There is also a large "bull wheel" from the tow at the Boreal Western Ski Sport Museum at Boreal Ski Area.

The Smiths have the most unique house purchase story. In 1970 the previous owner, Olé Larsen, wanted to sell. He wanted the house to go to the right kind of person and he selected Len Smith who'd come to the summit visiting the Dartmouth Outing Club Sierra cabin (also at Lake Mary). Neighbors let Len know that he'd been selected to buy the cabin, even though Len did not know he was in the market. Soon a deal was struck and the Smiths purchased the beautifully situated lakefront cabin for \$14,000.

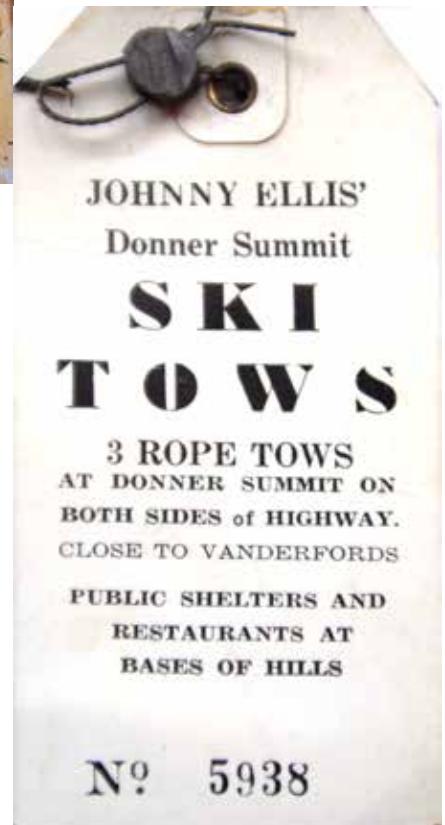
In the decades since it's become a family retreat. When family growth necessitated a size increase the Smiths had to do some historical research to prove the original cabin had been built before 1940 so they would not be held responsible for code changes in the older part. They tracked down the builder, Keston Ramsey,

who supplied a letter that the County accepted.

Mr. Ramsey came up to Lake Mary when the house was finished, pictured to the right in the picture at left at age 97.



It's winter now, so we've thoughtfully included a ski ticket - just in case you need one.



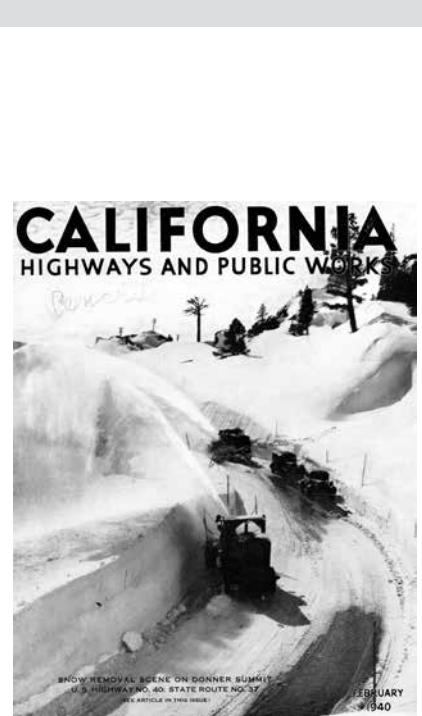
# From the DSHS Archives

One of the joys of Norm Sayler's incomparable collection of Donner Summit history is sitting down with something and perusing. Norm has a lot of old magazines and they can provide hours of fun. One day Norm was doing some perusing and came across the [California Highways and Public Works](#) magazines. In the February, 1940 issue was "Costs of Snow Removal in Relation to Traffic." The title is not inspiring and neither is the article but it does yield some old photographs of Donner Summit which follow here.

Some generalities from the article are still no doubt relevant today. Donner Summit gets a lot of snow and is the most expensive road way to clear. The gas tax does not cover the cost of clearing but there are other benefits to factor in: tourism, economic activity, etc.

Look at what traffic and parking was like before the freeway and all the cars left.

If you want to read the whole thing Norm can pull it out of its drawer.



Left: parking along Old 40 to enjoy the snow.

below: at the Norden Store, parking along Old 40.



# From the DSHS Archives



Top left: Old Highway 40 outside of Soda Springs.

Top right: "slicing down the snow banks" on Old 40

Below right: traffic jam on Old 40.

Below left: dramatic night view of snowblowing on Old 40.



# Winter Fun Donner Summit

You may be looking for a place to spend some quality winter time. A really good spot to have some winter fun is Donner Summit. Just look at the previous two pages to see how popular the place can be. What follows came from a brochure (cover is on the next page) in the DSHS archives. Since there was no date, the editorial staff used our local expert, Norm Sayler, to date the document. His opinion: 1951-52. Here we have some selected local ski areas and places to stay.

## Ski areas

All along U.S. 40 are found a wide variety of skiing facilities ranging from short rope tows on "bunny" slopes for beginners to elaborate installations for the experts. Skiing instructions are available at some centers also.

Donner Ski Ranch 1000' rope tow, 2000' Constat T-Bar, Ski school, 5 instructors, ski shop.

### Cisco

Sitzski of Cisco – 2 rope tows, 700' and 800' Operates 9 AM to 4 PM, \$1.50 per day.  
Instructions, \$2.50 for 2 hours in group. Ski shop and rentals

**Auburn Ski Club** 1000' rope tow Operates 10 AM to 4:30 PM, \$1.50 per day  
A, B, and C ski jumping hills, Instructors available.

### Soda Springs

Ski tows on Beacon Hill. Rope tows, double chair lift with intermediate ramp for beginners. \$3 daily, 50¢ ride.  
J-Bar, \$2.50 daily. Snack bar. Public address system.  
Night skiing. Zorich ski shop east of hotel. Sales, service, rental, Private lessons by appointment.

### Norden

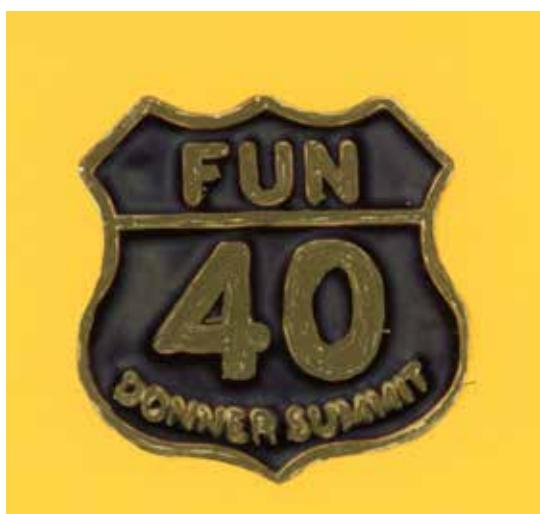
Sugar Bowl – Magic Carpet transportation from Highway 40 near Kiski, \$1 round trip. 2 rope tows. Double chair lift to top of Mt. Disney. Ski shop. Ski School.

## Accommodations

### Cisco Elevation 5940'

**Cisco Grove Lodge** \$5 double. Steam heated cabins. Restaurant and bar.

**Cisco Grove Resort**, 12 miles west of Donner Summit. \$2.50 per person, minimum Minimum rates: \$10 two cabins; \$12 one cabin. 3 housekeeping cabins available. Store and ski supplies.



### Sitzski of Cisco

Dormitory accommodations, \$1 per night, bring sleeping bag.  
Restaurant, coffee shop, store, service station.

### Soda Springs

Trailsyde Lodge at Big Bend  
Private rooms without bath, \$5 double  
Restaurant for breakfast, short orders, and skiers suppers.

### Rainbow Tavern

2 miles east of Cisco.  
\$75.00 single or double with bath.  
Second floor rooms with showers, \$ [sic] and \$6  
Ski hut with dormitory space for large ski parties.  
Dining Room.

**Donner Summit Lodge**,  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile west of Soda Springs  
American plan (breakfast and dinner) dormitory accommodation, \$8.50  
Hotel rooms, bath or shower, Special rates Sunday to Thursday, \$9. Per room. Weekend and holiday rates, \$12 per room.  
Deposit required. Cancellations must have two weeks' notice for refund.  
Cocktail Lounge and dining room.

**Seco Crest Lodge**  
American plan rates (2 meals served family style)  
Dormitory accommodations \$7  
Private rooms single \$8.75; double weekends \$17.50  
Midweek \$16.50  
Cocktail lounge, heated garage.

**Marie and Jack's Ski Hive**,  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile east of Soda Springs.  
Dormitory, \$6 including breakfast and dinner.

**Beacon Hill Lodge** – American plan only.  
Dormitory \$6.50; double, connecting bath \$8.50 per person; Double, private bath \$9.50 per person;  
Triple, connecting bath, \$8 per person.  
Weekly rates for six days only.  
Dormitory \$33; room, connecting bath, \$43; double, private bath \$51  
Ski shop, Cocktail Lounge, dining room, coffee shop.  
Heated swimming pool.

**Soda Springs Hotel**  
Dormitory including bedding, \$2.50  
\$4 single, \$6.50 double without bath;  
\$5 single, \$7.50 double with bath.  
Coffee shop, dining room, cocktail lounge, dancing

**Norden Elevation 7142'**  
**Sugar Bowl Lodge**,  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles south Highway 40  
Magic Carpet transportation from highway near Kiski,  
Dormitory \$3' single \$9 to \$10; double \$12 to \$14;  
Triple \$15 to \$17  
Minimum stay of two nights on weekends.  
Special Monday through Thursday \$23 to \$66  
Special Ski Week, Sunday through Friday \$78  
Dining room, bar, cafeteria

**Ski In Lodge**,  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile east of Norden  
American Plan. \$7.50 double; \$6.75 ea. In triple;  
\$5.50 to \$6.25 in dorms.  
Sunday through Thursday night, breakfast and dinner,  
rooms \$33.75 each; dorm rooms \$30 each; dorms \$27.50 each.  
Deposit required. Heated garage nearby.  
Fountain, ski shop, evening entertainment.

**Donner Summit. Elevation 7135'**  
**Donner Ski Ranch**.  
Dormitory, \$3 per day.  
Cafeteria, dining room, bar, fireside.



### **Winter Driving Advice**

Cooperate and you will find it as easy to drive in the snow as it is in summer. Put on your chains when advised... keep in line and avoid snarling traffic. Either use a good anti-freeze or drain your radiator at night.

#### **Chains Sales and Service**

It is recommended that motorists rent their chains only from reputable rental stations. There have been complaints in the past the motorists have not been able to locate the turn-in stations so that they could return the chains and get a refund on their deposit.

#### **Baxter**

No rentals, but do have an economy chain which sells for \$7.95 and fits all 600X16 or 670X15 tires. These chains are good for a few trips over the mountains, Installation \$1.00, removal 50¢

#### **Emigrant Gap – Nyack Lodge**

No rental but has chains of all sizes at regular retail price.  
Installation \$1.00 removal 50¢

#### **Donner Lake Richard's Garage**

Deposit about \$8. Rental fee \$3.50 for a period of 3 to 5 days.  
No return station. Chains wil have to be taken back or sent via parcel post or Greyhound.  
Installation \$1.00 New chains, \$9.75 and up.

# Book Review Moses Schallenberger at Truckey's [sic] Lake, 1844-45

We reviewed the Opening of the California Trail by George R. Stewart in the December, '15 Heirloom. Here we have kind of a companion piece. It is Moses Schallenberger's reminiscences of his stay at Donner Lake as a 17 year old boy.

To set the stage, The Stephens, Murphy, Townsend Party was the first wagon train to reach California with wagons. They arrived at the Sierra in the fall of 1844. They knew they were in a little trouble. Winter was coming. The party had already split with six people, including Moses Schallenberger's sister heading up the Truckee River canyon to Lake Tahoe where they crossed the Sierra on the west side. The rest of the party realized they could not get over Donner Pass with all their wagons so they left half behind guarded by Moses and two other men. The rest of the party headed up over Donner Pass and got as far as Big Bend where they split again. The men went to California and Sutter's Fort. The women and children remained at Big Bend. A good summary of the Stephens

"I did not suppose that the snow would at any time be more than two feet deep, nor that it would be on the ground continually."

## Moses Schallenberger at Donner Lake

Party is in Truckee's Trail, a fictionalized account, reviewed on our website. You can also go to last month's Heirloom (or on the website) for the review of The Opening of the California Trail which is about the Stephens Party.

Moses and two friends remained at what is now called Donner Lake, "I had no fears of starvation" "Game seemed abundant" said Moses. He had "no anxiety" about Indians either. They were left with two cows, "so worn out and poor that they could go no further."

The three made a cabin after the rest left for California. 12' X 14' with a chimney. There was no chinking or daubing between the logs and no windows. The logs were so well notched they almost touched. A hole was cut for a doorway that was never closed because there was no door.

On the evening of the day the house was finished it began to

snow. It snowed three feet. The three thought the snow would melt but instead it snowed more.

There was no more hunting. The game had left.

The cows were killed.

"It kept snowing continually." The cabin was almost covered with snow and the occupants could do nothing except gather firewood.

"We now began to feel very blue, for there seemed no possible hope for us." The snow was "getting deeper and deeper."

"Death, the fearful, agonizing death of starvation, literally stared us in the face."

They decided to leave.

Each step was an ordeal on the homemade snowshoes. Each step lifted 10 lbs of snow that had caved in on top of the shoe with each step downward.

After more than 15 miles Schallenberger said, [according to the editor, George R. Stewart, about six miles in reality] "I was scarcely able to drag one foot after the other." Walking in snowshoes was "the hardest kind of work."

Then Moses was seized by cramps. He could not walk more than fifty yards without rest.

Their camp that night was a fire and pine boughs to sleep on. In the morning a circle 15 feet in diameter had melted 15 feet down so they could not get to the fire. They had nothing to cook anyway.

Moses realized he could not continue and would have to go back down to the lake - alone.

"We did not say much at parting. Our hearts were too full for that. There was simply a warm clasp of the hand accompanied by the familiar word, "good-by" which we all felt might be the last words we should ever speak to each other. The feeling of loneliness that came over me as the



two men turned away I cannot express, though it will never be forgotten, while the ‘good-by Mose, so sadly and reluctantly spoken, rings in my ears. Today.”

“Mose” felt, “something might turn up” as he returned to the cabin by the lake.

“I was never so tired in my life as when...I came in sight of the cabin. The door sill was only nine inches high, but I could not step over it without taking my hands to raise my leg.”

Food was a necessity and hunting had not panned out once the snow fell but Moses remembered there were some traps in the wagons that had been left behind and he set to work to use them. Using some of the beef he baited the traps and caught a coyote.

It was horrible. So he tried other methods of cooking: a Dutch oven, boiling, every possible manner but “could not get him into a condition where he could be eaten without revolting my stomach.”

For three days he only had coyote to eat.

Then he trapped two foxes. Roasted fox was delicious.

He also tried stewed crow but it was “difficult for me to decide which I like best, crow or coyote.”

He continued to trap catching foxes and coyotes but he never ate another coyote and when he left there were 11 coyotes hanging at the rear of the cabin.

During his stay at Donner Lake he had no desire for anything but meat and had no desire for salt. He had enough coffee for one cup and that he saved for Christmas.

To keep himself occupied, besides trapping and keeping the fire going, there were lots of books. Even so, after a few months at the lake, it seemed like he'd been there for years.

At the end of February “I thought I could distinguish the form of a man moving towards me.” It was Dennis Martin upon whom Moses' sister had prevailed to keep going from Big Bend to the lake to get her brother.

Dictated at the age of 59

#### Moses Schallenberger at Truckey's Lake, 1844-

45

23 pages

From 19th Century Publications  
Rte. 1 Box 9 Chilcoot Ca 96105

## BY STATE TELEGRAPH

### The Weather on the Mountains-A Snow Slide and its Effects

Colfax, January 21st – On Thursday evening January 18th, a snow slide occurred near the summit, destroying a house occupied by two employees of the railroad. J.P. Belknap, who was sleeping on a table, was instantly killed; the other man escaped serious injury, how, it is impossible to tell. The house was rent asunder and covered ten feet deep with snow. Several hours elapsed before Belknap's body was recovered.....It has rained hard and incessantly here for forty-eight hours, with a prospect of continuing. It is the heaviest storm we have had since the winter of 1861-62....

Daily Alta California January 22, 1866



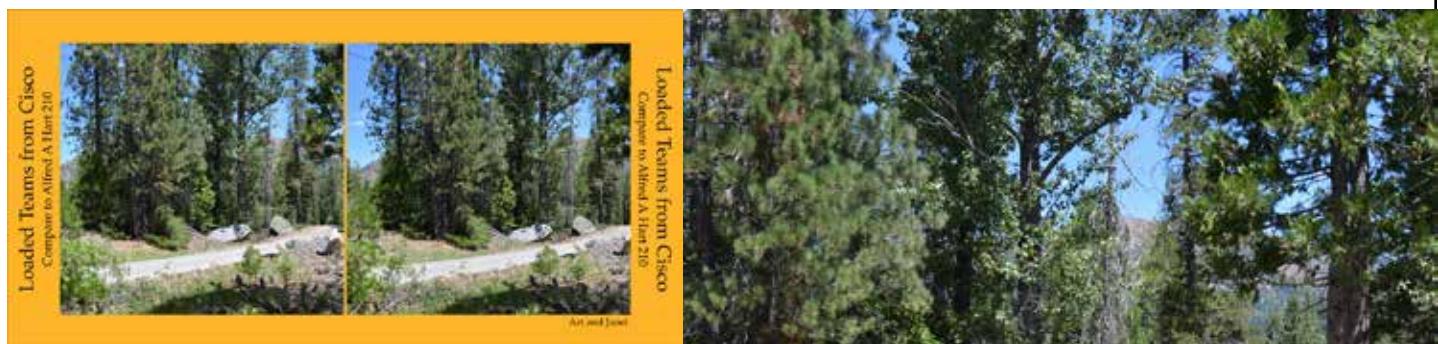
**N EXCURSION TRAIN WILL**  
Leave SACRAMENTO on  
**Sunday, September 19, 1875,**  
FOR THE SUMMIT OF THE  
**SIERRA NEVADA MOUNTAINS!**

topping at all principal stations. This is a rare opportunity, and one never before offered visitors to State Fair to see the fine scenery on the Central Pacific. The arrangements are complete, and the cost within reach of all, being less than one-third of the regular fare. DINNER will be served at the Summit Hotel for all excursionists at 50 cents each, the facilities are sufficient to accommodate all. Train leaves C. P. R. R. Depot, foot of J street, at 10 A. M., arriving at Summit at 12 M. Returning, via Summit at 4:30 P. M., arriving at Sacramento at 9 P. M.

**FARE FOR ROUND TRIP.....\$5 00.**

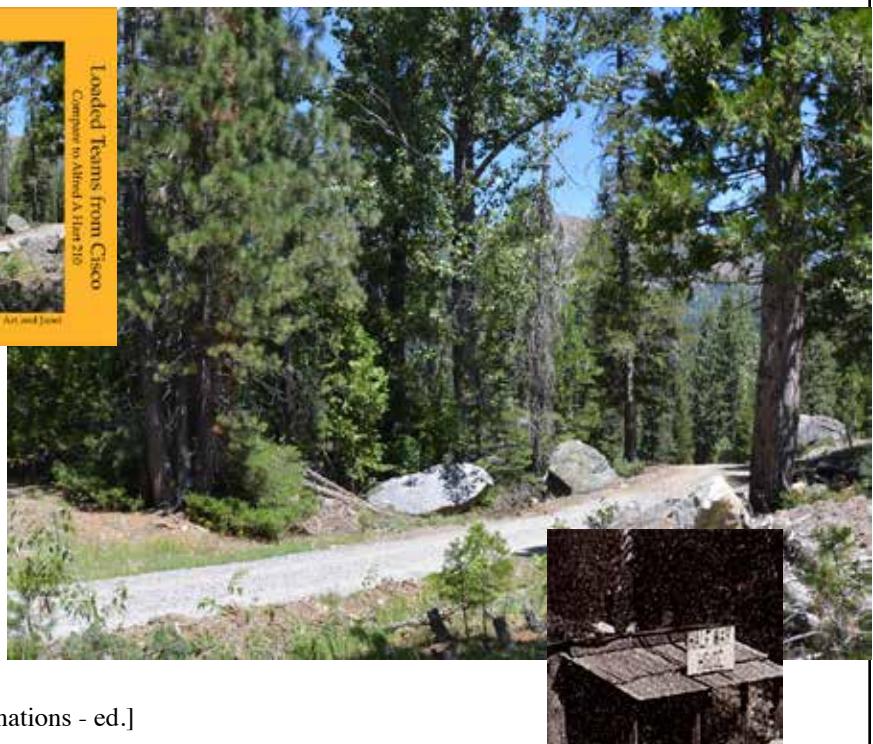
Buy your tickets before getting on train. Tickets sale at A. S. HOPKINS' whole ale and retail News

# Then & Now with Art Clark



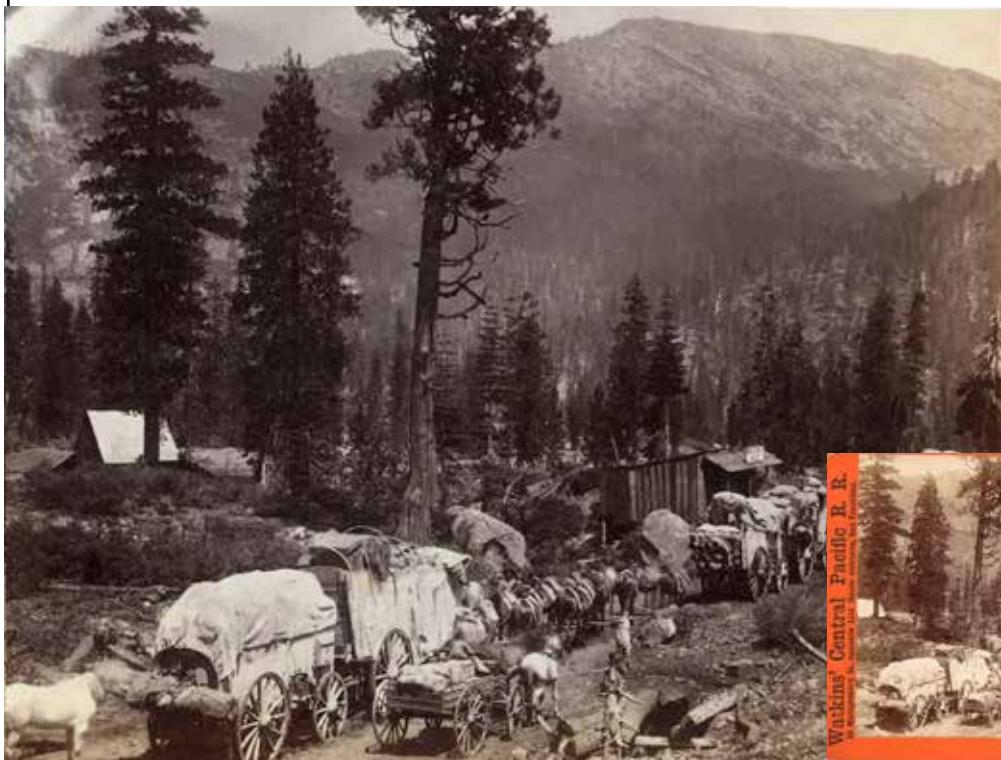
## Half Way House - Alfred A Hart 210

This little building was on the road connecting Upper Cisco with the Dutch Flat-Donner Lake Wagon Road. After reaching the end of the railroad at Cisco, goods were loaded on wagons for the trip over the Summit. [at the height of traffic, 87 train car loads were unloaded per day with the contents put on wagons to travel the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. to their destinations - ed.]



There is a sign on the porch roof of the building next to the wagons (above small inset). It is a mystery. It says, "Half Way House." Half way to where? It is about halfway between the railroad and the South Yuba River, and it is roughly halfway between Dutch Flat and Donner Lake, but who knows? It is pretty small, so it could have been just a bar.

The location for this photograph had eluded me, so I enlisted the aid of Bill Oudegeest, who just walked up, pulled back the brush from the front of the prominent rock, and said "Here it is!" Thanks, Bill!



The old Juniper on the left side is still there, and doesn't look a lot different than it did in the 1860's.

Photo location 39° 18.316'N 120° 32.821'W



# Then & Now with Art Clark

## O'Sullivan 53 - Stewart Peak from Tunnel 6

Timothy H. O'Sullivan was a photographer for the Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel, the first governmental survey of the American West. It was also called the King Survey, for Clarence King, U. S. geologist.

This view is shot from just above the Eastern end of Tunnel 6.

Photo location N39°  
18.954' W120° 19.425'



DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
[www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)

Membership

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

New Membership

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

NAME(S) \_\_\_\_\_

Renewing Membership

MAILING ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

Individual Membership - \$30

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

(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.

## TINKERS STATION

DONNER LAKE ROAD:

## TINKER & FENTON, ---- PROPRIETORS.

Nearest point for the Celebrated Soda Springs.  
A Bar, with the best of Liquors, connected with the House

Board per Week.....\$10. Single Meal.....75 cents

Horses and Carriages furnished to Pleasure Parties

Tweleve miles from Crystal Lake, ten miles from Cisco, and six miles from Pollards Station

In case you are looking for a place to stay and eat on Donner Summit - with apologies to Maria at the Summit Restaurant. This ad, above, is from 1880. You can see the prices are quite reasonable.

Right, one of the cards from one of our "illustrated" hikes of Soda Springs Station a few years before the above ad. This way you'll recognize the place when you go by. They weren't so much for addresses in those days.

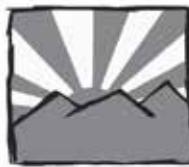


Carleton Watkins  
Summit Valley Station  
about 1870



[www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)

# New History Menu at the Summit Restaurant



## SUMMIT RESTAURANT AND BAR

Phone: 530-426-3904

<http://summitrestaurantandbar.com>

email: maria\_at\_the\_summit@yahoo.com

Established - 2001

Soda Springs, CA

Volume I Issue 6

2015

### Donner Summit Lodge Open Every Day

Hours: Sat/Sun 8 A.M. - 8:30 P.M. MThF Noon-8:30 P.M. Tues. 4-8:30 P.M. The bar is open until the crowd is gone.



#### Donner Summit Lodge, A Short History

Ever since the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd. was built in the early 1860's to service the building of the Transcontinental Railroad, there have been hosteries along the route over Donner Pass.

The first auto to cross Donner Pass crossed in 1901. The first successfully motorized "transcontinentalist" crossed the country using Donner Pass in 1903 on a motor bicycle. With the arrival of the automobile, lodges began to spring up to service automobiles and provide relief for the "autoists".

By 1913 the first transcontinental highway, the Lincoln Highway, was in operation and auto traffic increased considerably. In 1913 there were 150 "transcontinentalists" and by 1923 the number had increased to 25,000. Small lodges and service stations were built along the route and early automobiles would have gone right past what is now Donner Summit Lodge. Once the highway was open in winter the lodges offered accommodations for snow sport enthusiasts.

Donner Summit Lodge was built in 1938 to take advantage of the growth of traffic over the, by then, year-round Highway 40. The lodge was expanded twice from the picture above, first just after World War II and then in the 1970's. Additions were made to both ends of the original lodge. The sign on the lodge above says, "Donner Summit Lodge Fine Food Ski Dormitories Cabins."

The picture above is from the Norm Saylor Collection

#### Donner Summit Is Magnificent

People have been saying that for a long time. The Native Americans apparently appreciated the beauty. They kept coming back to summer year after year, decade after decade, century after century for thousands of years. More convincing though is that all the petroglyph sites have wonderful views of nearby peaks. There is not one site, of dozens, that does not have a spectacular view.

The first diarists with the wagon trains began the tradition of remarking on the beauty. Some visitors were almost rhapsodic in their praise.

In 1846 Edwin Bryant said, "The Alps, so celebrated in history, and by all travelers and admirers of mountain landscape, cannot, I am satisfied, present scenery more wild, more rugged more grand, more romantic, and more enchantingly picturesque and beautiful, than that which surround this lake [Donner Lake].... The view is at the top is)...inexpressibly comprehensive, grand, and picturesque. After congratulating ourselves upon the safe achievement of our morningfeat, and breathing our mules a few minutes, we proceeded on our journey."

John Steel, in 1850, said, "A short distance north of the pass I climbed the dizzy heights of a granite peak. The view was magnificent."

In June 13, 1885 the *California Spirit of the Times* magazine said, "The air has a fresh crispness about it that gives a new life to the visitor whether he has come from the fertile plains or the foggy city. And no wonder...there are seven thousand feet between you and sea level. Seven thousand feet nearer heaven and so much nearer purity. It is a relief to.... look up to the stars, nowhere brighter than here, with only the dark pines closing in the distance.... The air redolent with the perfume of fresh grass and wild flowers; and aromatic with pine needles. It is a physical pleasure to breathe, a delight to exist.... It is small wonder that a millionaire [Mark Hopkins]... should confess to be happier and healthier here than in the handsomest house on California Street, Nob Hill, to the sierras indeed."

Mary Ann Graves was a member of the Donner Party and one of the "Forlorn Hope" which escaped Donner Lake. They slogged through the snow and climbed to the toe of Donner Pass. They were starving and exhausted but the view overcame the exhaustion. She said, "The scenery was too grand for me to pass without notice." She remembered another member of the group saying, "We were as near to heaven as we could get."

Thornton Round was 14 in 1914 when his father took him and the rest of the family across the country by automobile. "I don't believe I have adequate words to describe the real beauty of Donner Pass. As we stood looking down I had a floating sensation... I lost all fear as I looked at one of the most beautiful blue lakes [Donner Lake] I had ever seen. Everything below us seemed suspended in shimmering light."

Artists, photographers, print makers, and even advertisers also noted the beauty in their works as you'll see on the next pages.

Summit Restaurant does catering too.

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For some years the DSHS has been providing historically-themed menus for the Summit Restaurant in Soda Springs, just at the freeway exit. We've covered all kinds of topics. In this issue the lead article is about how visitors have been remarking on Donner Summit's magnificence in prose, painting, photography and commercial ads. Then there is an article on the first women to go over Donner Summit in automobiles and motorcycles. One ran over a fellow's foot in San Francisco and that apparently led to marriage. You'll have to stop by for a meal and a "read."

# Dead of Winter

## The Donner Party - a video review

Dead of Winter – The Donner Party  
The Weather Channel  
2 Hours, with commercials

As the video opens the Forlorn Hope is slogging through miles of snow in an attempt to escape the Donner Party encampment at Donner Lake and reach Sutter's Fort. Here in the first scenes those familiar with the story have their suspicions raised. The Forlorn Hope did leave Donner and some did make it to California. They crossed Donner Pass and the high Sierra snows on snowshoes. That was difficult enough for starving exhausted emigrants. When they got out of the snow they ate the rawhide laces and bindings. "Dead of Winter" shows the Forlorn Hope floundering through the snow with no snowshoes. That would have made the actual trip not just harder but excruciatingly difficult. It's hard enough to navigate new fallen snow, as the Forlorn Hope did, on snowshoes. It's almost impossible without.

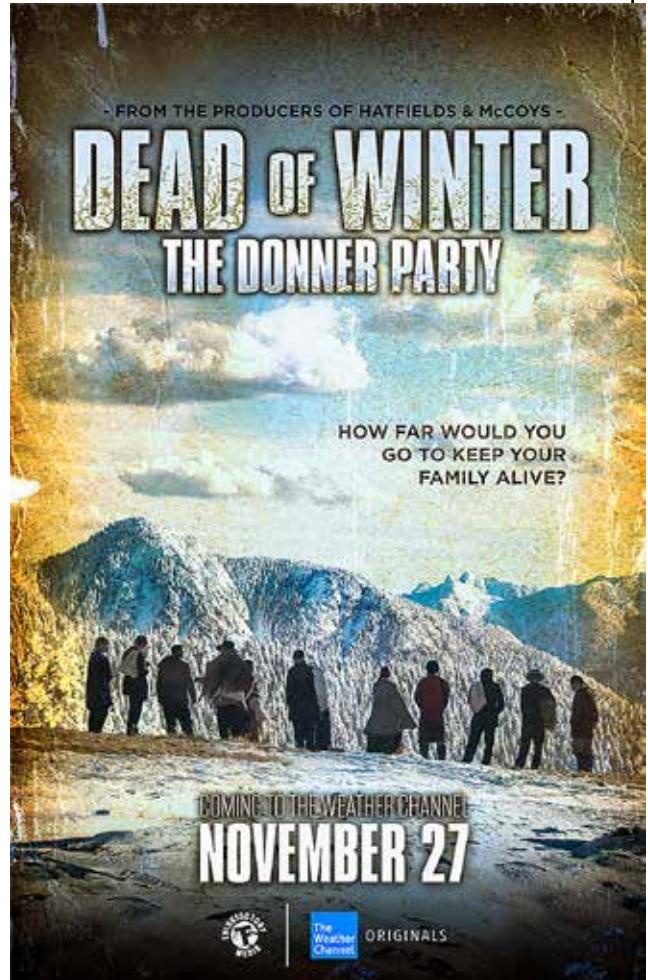
That may seem like a small point but for a knowledgeable viewer it causes suspicion about whatever facts are propounded next. How good was the research?

Fortunately the story is basically accurate and is well done. The story of the Donner Party is told through narrative and interviews illustrated with Donner Party members' quotes (the desert had no plants, no shade, mirages and, according to James Reed, was a "desolate dreary place as if death has reached out and laid his hand upon the earth") and re-enactments of what must have been important scenes. The wonderful scenery is not of Donner Pass and maybe not even of the Sierra but it tells the story.

The interviews are done in small parts to illustrate events. There is a meteorologist, a survival expert, and four knowledgeable Donner Party book authors: local Mark McLaughlin, Weathering the Storm (see our coming April, '16 Heirloom for a review); Frank Mullen, The Donner Party Chronicles; Ethan Rarick, Desperate Passage (see our May, '14 Heirloom); and Gabrielle Burton (The Search for Tamsen Donner).

Following the opening scenes of the Forlorn Hope the story returns to the beginning: the backgrounds of some of the party, leaving Independence, Missouri, the journey across the continent, the infamous wrong turn, the 40 Mile Desert that was 80 miles long, the knifing of a member and banishment of James Reed, the leaving of Mr. Hardcoop to die on the trail, dissension, the heroism of Charles Stanton, arriving in the Sierra, setting up camp, misery, rescue, and death. The story is well told and the re-enactments like hacking their way through the Wasatch Mountains or walking beside, and not riding in the wagons, help in the telling showing what life was like. Because it's the Weather Channel the temperature and rainfall are also given and that helps illustrate the story. It was probably 75° when they left Independence and so it was comfortable. Then it was maybe 100° in the desert and averaged 45° at Donner Lake. That puts things in perspective. Imagine living in the very basic cabins, or the tents the actual Donner had at Alder Creek, with the constant cold.

The narrative does not take the easy way out of blaming Lansford Hastings for the problems. It is noted that Hastings did warn about the Sierra and the constant winter. A lot of the blame in this telling falls on James Reed. It was he who convinced the party



to turn left and take Hastings' route. Most of the other issues contributing to the tragedy were not addressed but the video is only two hours (with commercials).

So the basics of the story are true and well-told. There is the issue of the Forlorn Hope at the beginning which leads one to pay attention closely to see if there is anything else amiss. There is. The monument at the State Park in Truckee is the "Emigrant Monument" not the Donner Party Monument. Keseburg was not found at the camp with a pot of boiling body parts. He wasn't even in the camp when the fourth rescue party arrived. He also did not go overtly mad proclaiming his love for human flesh over the cattle carcasses that were being ignored nearby. He also probably did not eat Tamsen Donner as is suggested in the video. This is all gratuitously thrown in at the end and seems to be inserted to sate the discerning public's desire for sensationalism. The Weather Channel should have at least noted that Keseberg vociferously denied the charges above and others. Along that line, one of the video's experts, Ethan Rarick, says in his book that the charges against Keseberg are at least questionable. To end the video with that unanswered and questionable sensationalism is irresponsible.

The video can be found for free online at the Weather Channel and even YouTube.

# Chinese Builders of Gold Mountain - a video review

Chinese Builders of Gold Mountain – Nimbus Films, 2015, 44 minutes

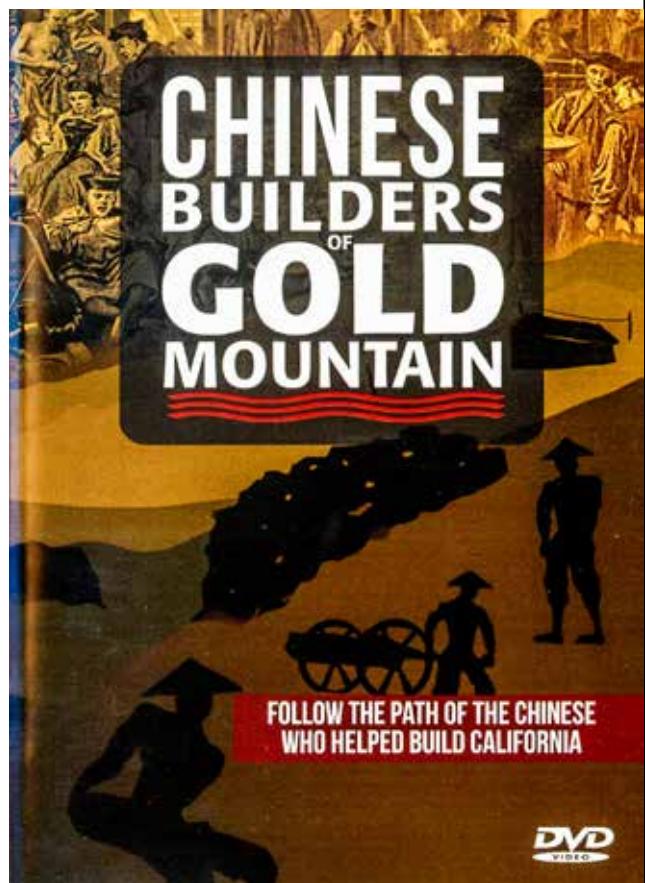
Narrated by Bill George

We've reviewed Bill George's work before. He wrote *Rails, Tales, and Trails* which was reviewed in our April, '14 Heirloom and we had a summary of his video, *Hidden Wonder of the World* (the transcontinental railroad over the Sierra) in our June, '12 Heirloom.

"Chinese Builders of Gold Mountain" (California) follows in the quality of "Hidden Wonder..." and "Rails, Tales...." It's good. "Chinese Builders of Gold Mountain" is not specific to Donner Summit but it's a good historical introduction and given that our Heirloom will, in a few months, carry articles about Summit Camp (the railroad work camp occupied for years by the Chinese on Donner Summit) and the Chinese railroad workers, this is a good fit.

Most Chinese came to California, excited like the rest of the world, for better lives and/or gold. The Chinese did not just help themselves but they helped China and Asia through trans-Pacific trade, California through what they built, and the rest of the United States by opening California to the world (through the transcontinental railroad), and all of that the video explores along with the basic history. For example, Chinese came mostly from Guandong Province and from there to Hong Kong, San Francisco, Sacramento and Marysville (one of the largest cities in California with 10,000 people) and from there to lots of little towns all over the West.

The video is narrated by Bill George and through interviews with experts, old photographs, old documents, historical quotes, and visits to Marysville, Oroville, Locke, the Sierra Summit, Calistoga, two Chinese temples, the State Railroad Museum, and



a Chinese museum in Marysville, the story of Chinese contributions to California is explored along with the tribulations and prejudice Chinese faced.

There are some interesting thoughts in the video beyond the basic history. For example, Westerners were and are individualists but the Chinese had a different outlook on life, the community. They worked in organized groups and for group benefit not just individual benefit. The Chinese did not just work the gold fields (or tailings left by whites) and the railroad. They had other contributions. The video says the Chinese had the most advanced agriculture in the world and they used that technology in California, reclaiming the delta for example. They also had the most advanced fishing techniques, which they applied to the fisheries off the California coast. Their preservation technology enabled them to send fish back to Asia and so, they mined the fisheries just as they mined for gold and helped build trans-Pacific trade. Of course, once the Chinese became successful, whites took over.

There are interesting facts too. For example, in some years, the tax on Chinese gold miners made up 10% of the State budget's income. California gold rebuilt many villages in China and California Chinese supported many people in China.

At the end there is a slide show of old photographs which is interesting too.

The video is 14.99 and available from Bill George at 4520- Shari Wy. In Granite Bay (95746) You can contact Mr. George at [w\\_george@msn.com](mailto:w_george@msn.com) or via the website at, <http://www.transcoshow.com>