What's in Your Closet?

The Crampton Family Scrapbook

The Story of the Crampton album

Norm loves those days, days when visitors come to the DSHS at the blinking light in downtown Soda Springs. He loves to talk local history. Norm is happiest when the visitors have some connection to Donner Summit and loves it even more when they have something to contribute.

One day two ladies, Sue Ward and Gayle Pyle, came in with their husbands and two friends. They had a connection to Donner Summit and they had something to contribute. Their grandfather had been C.B. “Bert” Crampton who had owned Crampton’s Lodge on Old Highway 40 decades before. Bert had kept up a photo album (left) and the two women were willing to share. Although we’d be happy to do it, they scanned every page of the album and sent a thumb drive full of old Donner Summit pictures to the DSHS. Here we share with you some of that album. Next month we’ll include some general Donner Summit pictures from the album. In November we’ll include pictures from the flooding of 1950 and in December, some of the Christmas cards from 1950. We plan ahead at the DSHS.

Crampton’s Lodge

In the old days, before the I-80 Interstate, there were little settlements all along Old Highway 40. There were stores, lodges, restaurants, gas stations, cabins, and small single rope tow ski areas, all catering to the tourist trade. You can see how vibrant the Donner Summit economic community along Old 40 was on the tourist map on page three. It also notes the Crampton Lodge location.
In This Issue

Crampton's Lodge
Central Sierra Snowlab
Uhlen Valley before the freeway
From the Archives of the DSHS - first autos over the Summit
Donner Pass and Those Who Crossed It - George R. Stewart
Walking Through Donner Summit History
Then and Now

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.
Businesses along Highway 40 in 1949 serving travelers. Each building with a number on it is a business. Crampton's is circled and is number 25. With the coming of the freeway in the 1960's, businesses on Old 40 disappeared. To see the names of all the businesses go to our website and the January, '15 Heirloom, page 9

Crampton’s Lodge, located almost exactly where the Rainbow exit on I-80 is today, was one of those lodges along Old 40. There were a lot of things at the lodge for tourists: rooms without baths, cabins, campground, sleeping bag dorm, ski rentals, parking, gas station, and grocery store. You could call by asking the operator for “Crampton’s Station.”

Carmy Bert Crampton was born on October 13, 1886 in a one room cabin in Minnesota. He attended formal school through fifth grade. He said he “hungered for knowledge, but I did not intend to get it inside the four walls of a schoolhouse!” He loved to read and his favorite subject was famous men.

At age fourteen he left a dollar a day job in a shingle mill for an office job in a newspaper office. In 1906 he finished his apprenticeship and became a printer. He married his wife, Ethel, in 1908 and they had two children, Jack and June. Later he homesteaded in Montana (1900), gave up on that, and ended up in Sacramento in 1922. During the depression he moved to Stockton where he worked nights as a printer and days as a wrecker in the Union Auto Wreckers wrecking yard (on Cherokee Ln. just past Sam’s Auto Camp he noted) he and his son had purchased.

Bert Crampton worked as a printer and produced fillers (jingles, smiles, anecdotes, and poems) for various newspapers including the Sacramento Bee and the Stockton Record. Thinking he might be “retired” due to age, he went into the automobile business selling cars, parts, and accessories. His health began to fail and he spent several months at the Union Printers Home in Colorado Springs. His health returned and he took his doctor’s advice to live at higher altitudes. He next spent some time around Donner Summit and Lake Tahoe on “the Donner Trail” (Old Highway 40). His health was good and the area attractive, so on August 8, 1937, “Eventually my son and I bought a not-too-prosperous resort in that locality and proceeded to improve it and develop it into a paying business.”

They built several cabins, a gas station, and grocery store stocked where “the needs of most vacationer could be supplied.” Business worked out and frozen foods and fresh meats were added to the grocery list and a dining room and overnight lodging were added to the resort. “Vacationers flocked into the area all summer and ski crowds kept us going in winter. As our facilities increased, so did our business. And so did our headaches!”

In his reminiscences Bert recalled the winter of 1951-52 when the City of San Francisco train was stuck in the snow near Yuba Gap. Old 40 was closed for 28 days straight from the summit to Donner Lake and no one could move past his lodge for days. One day a neighbor brought a dog sled with a doctor for the stalled train.

Life can be hard in the mountains and there were various trials and so Bert decided in 1952 after fifteen years, he had to move
his “aging body” to Reno where he went into “semi-retirement,” did some writing and a lot of traveling. Once he moved to Fallon “he began writing in earnest” and published one book, Stuff and Things, at age 95. C.B. died in 1984, age 98.

Crampton Lodge ended with the coming of that section of the freeway in 1959. The land was taken by the State under eminent domain and then the State held an auction for the furnishings and equipment. Four lanes of I-80 cross on top of where Crampton’s once stood.

The album didn’t contain a good overall picture of the Lodge so we had to resort to Norm’s incomparable collection for the one above.

Right, Crampton’s Lodge, 1949 w/dog

Jack Crampton with deer, opening day, 1947

Ad from Crampton’s Lodge News, 1947, a publication for visitors.
Above left: Crampton's upper floor, February, 1948

Left: Crampton's Lodge, 1950

Below: "A pack train in our mountains," 1947

Lower Left: "Store entrance" and "Emergency First Aid", 1950
We sell Fresh Meats, Fresh Milk, Ham, Bacon, Cold Meats, Lunch Goods, Butter, Eggs, Cheese, Ice Cream, Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, Bakery Goods, Etc. at Town Prices.

_Crampton's Lodge News_, Summer, 1947

**Free Mail Service**

If you wish to have your mail come in care of Crampton's Lodge, Soda Springs, Calif., advise your friends and relatives. We'll mail your letter for you, too - and sell you as many postage stamps as you want. Any little thing we can to to help make your vacation more enjoyable is a pleasure to the Crampton family.

_Crampton Lodge News_, 1947
Bert’s Writing Examples

Some of CB’s writing from *Nut Salad Bompa & Me* by Gayle Moxley Pyle, CB’s grand daughter, published 1993 115 pages

“Smiles.”
I guess the Lord meant folks to see
A sunrise now and then.
But I’d see it rise more often
If it came up about 10.

Said a fool to friend, in a fit of rage,
(His chances of happiness dimming): ‘I
could drown my woe in a minute or so ---
But I can’t get my wife to go swimming.

You can almost work yourself to death
I found out to my sorrow ---
Work is the greatest thing there is,
So save some for tomorrow!

Chuckles
My vagabond uncle, Crepe Tatters, while plodding down the road in the outskirts of Rifle, Colorado, reports stumbling onto a big sign in front of a clothes cleaning establishment:
“Let us be your PRESS AGENT!”

CB’s Stuff
Can You Do It?
A comforting thought about aging,
I find, When from tension I’m seeking relief—
I can do what none of my kids can do,
I can whistle while brushing my teeth!
Central Sierra Snow Lab

By the time you are reading this one of the two new 20 Mile Museums signs for 2016 will have been placed in its receptacle. Installation will have occurred if the snow had melted enough. The sign is for the Central Sierra Snowlab (pictured right and also in our November, '15 Heirloom and on its own web page on our website). The sign sits just off Old 40 at the turn off to the Snowlab just a bit east of Soda Springs.

The history portion of the sign is printed in the next column so that's not what this story is about.

Our 20 Mile Museum Committee takes the history on each sign very seriously. The design of the signs does not allow for much text and people don't like to read much text anyway. Our authors work hard to get the necessary history into the fewest words and keep the design of all the signs the same. In order to put this sign together we had general knowledge but for best results we contacted Randall Osterhuber who is the director of the Snowlab.

It was during the back and forth with Randall as he approved the text that he mentioned the Snowlab also has many old photographs and he was willing to temporarily part with them so they could be scanned. Here's another version of "What's in Your Closet" (see page 1 and various Heirlooms for other examples). We'll happily copy materials you are willing to share and we'll probably do an Heirloom story or two as the Crampton Album will become.

In this case the album contained mostly 1961 photographs of Uhlen Valley, the area between Castle Pk. and Boreal, taken before the freeway. Some of those were turned into Then & Now's by Art Clark (see pages 15 and 16). Some of the rest ended up here.

One important job the Snowlab undertakes is to compile summit precipitation figures. The current historical compilation is a fairly new page on our website, donnersummithistoricalsociety.org, and appeared in the February, '16 Heirloom (page 19).

Historical Text in the Snowlab Sign

California has some of the most productive farmland in the world and a population of 38 million people. California alone is one of the biggest economies in the world. Water is critical to that economy and Sierran snows are critical to that water supply. The snows serve as a frozen reservoir slowly releasing water in the spring to streams and rivers downstream. It is vital to know how much snow is in the Sierra, and what the water content of the snow is. How much water will come from the melting snow? Reservoir managers and farmers can then plan. The Central Sierra Snow Lab was established in 1946 to gather accurate information and do snow research. The Snow Lab was built by the U.S. Weather Bureau and the Army Corps of Engineers. The U.S. Forest Service took over in 1952 and the University of California at Berkeley assumed responsibility in 1995.

Donner Summit is a perfect spot for a snow research station. Long term records of snowfall, gathered first by the railroad, go back to 1881. The maritime influence of the Pacific Ocean on Donner Summit results in an average of 34 feet of snowfall each winter - the highest snowfall of any residential area in the continental U.S. The snowpack typically lasts seven months and is deep, ranging from six to sixteen feet. The Lab is located in a large watershed that drains the terrain north of Boreal and west of Castle Peak, making it an ideal location to study runoff and stream flow. With the snow/rain line moving higher each year Donner Summit is an excellent place to gauge the effects.
According to the back of this 1961 picture this is "looking along the freeway right of way". The road here is the "old' access to the lower meadow" in Uhlen Valley.

The flume diverted the Yuba River behind the Donner Summit Lodge for the building of the freeway.

Bucolic Uhlen Valley before the freeway.

East side of the west-bound lanes. The three towers of dirt in the upper center show the original ground level.

Snowcat at the Snowlab - undated
Above: this 1950 picture is of the "Geiger Mueller" counter and part of an experimental battery of precipitation gauges at one of the snowlab stations. The Geiger Mueller was suspended and counted radiation emanating from a source in the ground. The amount of water in the snow would affect readings giving operators a measurement.

Below: original Snowlab behind the Soda Springs Hotel. undated.

Above: The snowlab in 1941

Uhlen Valley from Andesite Ridge, 1961 during freeway construction
From the DSHS Archives

Flanders Men Build Roads of Canvas and Boughs Over Snow
San Francisco Call 5-15-10

This is not about Donner Summit but it could be. Cars in the old days went everywhere as they do today. The adventurers pushed themselves and their vehicles to set records and accomplish feats.

The Sierra merchants were always in a rush to get the roads cleared to Tahoe so tourist season could begin. The first car over the summit each spring was celebrated. It provided publicity telling others that the way was now or soon would be open. For some years the Tahoe Tavern, in Tahoe City, held a contest awarding a silver cup to the first auto over.

This article falls in that category. Although it happened on the Placerville route we can assume like techniques were used on the Donner Summit route so that intrepid travelers could get over the Sierra early in the season. This also shows how well off we are in our high speed vehicles enjoying climate control and beautiful sounds while traveling over wide freeways.

This trip to Tahoe, reported in the San Francisco Call in May, 1910 was supposed to show, “without a doubt the power, endurance and capabilities of the little Flanders ‘Twenty.’…” Upon getting close to the summit of the Lake Tahoe Rd. the drivers found they had to abandon their efforts because the snow was too perilous. To get as far as they did “it was necessary for the occupants of the little car to place pine branches over the snow in the road to give traction to the wheels, and keep the car from sinking into the two feet of snow and slush under it. Sections of canvas were covered over the branches. The method of road building was slow, but brought victory [the Flanders beat two other automobiles]. More than four hours were consumed in traveling a distance of one-a-half miles."

When the canvas got wet the pine boughs had to be placed on top as well as underneath.

The travelers also, parenthetically, got some great views of Halley’s Comet. That was also the year Mark Twain died.

---

Miscellaneous Interesting Fact

The 754th Division of the Military Police took over the Soda Springs Hotel to guard the Southern Pacific Railroad, “life-line” of the west, during World War II.
From the DSHS Archives

First Autos of the Season, 1914

This article goes along with an Heirloom front page article in our June, '15 issue, “Auto Fights Snow and Wins Trophy” but it was found after publication. It’s appropriate for this month’s Heirloom because May was sometimes the first time that an auto could get over the Sierra each year. That, of course, pleased merchants and business owners as well as tourists.

This article was published in a number of newspapers and the route for the 1914 silver cup was over Donner Summit. It is not clear why it was titled as it was.

Sheds to Be Improved

“The first auto to cross the snow capped peaks of the Sierras [sic] reach Truckee at 9.45 [sic] 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 [sic] at 11 o’clock thereby winning the Tahoe Tavern cup.

“….Between one and five feet of snow was encountered for six miles on the west side of the Summit from Tamarack to Soda Springs.

“Mackay and Davis left Auburn at 9.30 [sic] on Friday morning, taking over three days to make the trip. Snow and rain continuously beat in their races. Gross and McGee [other competitors] have been on the way over a week. The running board of the machine had to be cut off on both sides of the machines to allow it go to go through the subway under the snowsheds at the summit. The automobilists state that it will be two weeks before the road will be passable.”

Check out our Heirloom index for other articles about the Tahoe Tavern race. One day we’ll do a comprehensive article on the first autos of the season.

ROAD TO SUMMIT WILL SOON BE OPENED FOR AUTOMOBILES

State has a Large Crew Of Men at Work Clearing the Snow From Road at Tunnel

The road leading to Lake Tahoe through Emigrant Gap will be open for automobiles and other vehicles in about ten days, according to Engineer Edward Goodwin of the state engineering department, who has just made a trip in that section.

Goodwin says that the road between Donner lake and the summit is in excellent condition, except that there is a bank of about ten feet of snow just below the snowsheds.

The state will have this removed in about a week. At two other places there are small snowbanks, but they will be melted away or moved inside of the time stated.

Last year it was necessary to move a bank of snow of twenty-five feet near the entrance to the snowsheds.

Joe Gowling of the Summit, who was in town this past week made the statement that the state had a crew of men at work on the road over the Summit at the present time and that it should be open in about ten days. Wagons can make the trip at the present time however and automobiles can get over with some little difficulty. The snow will have all been removed in the next ten days, however.

Truckee Republican May 22, 1913
San Francisco Examiner
Book Review

Donner Pass and Those Who Crossed it
George R. Stewart  1960  96 pages

George R. Stewart* was a famous author of many books, a number of which had to do with Donner Summit. This one has to do with Donner Summit and is maybe his shortest. If you want a good brief introduction to the history of the summit and don’t know a lot about the topic then you will like this book. If, however, you know a lot about the summit, then this book will be too basic. That said, Stewart includes pages and pages of old photographs which may be of interest. The book is available in libraries and on the internet.

Stewart starts his introduction by saying that you can see Donner Pass but the book is going to give you what you can’t see – the history – “the men, women, and children of the Stevens [sic] Party, who first struggled through, of those of the Donner Party who starved and died by the lake, of the Forty-niners who came for gold, of hard-driving Charlie Crocker and his swarming Chinese who built the railroad, and of some things that have happened in the more recent years.” Stewart meets his goal.

There is the story of the Stephens Party: the background, Chief Truckee, the split with six going to Lake Tahoe and then over the Sierra, the ten foot rock to get over and taking apart the wagons, three members staying at Donner Lake, Elizabeth Yuba Murphy, the women and kids at Big Bend while the men went off to California, and Moses Schallenberger’s story.

Then Stewart goes on to the other emigrants, Coldstream, the Donner Party of 1846 and the Forlorn Hope.

With the coming of the 49’ers the Placerville route took precedence and there is a digression to the foothills, Gold Rush towns, and hydraulic mining.

Then it’s back to Donner Pass. Various promoters wanted different routes over the Sierra to benefit their towns. For example, there was the Placer Co. Emigrant Rd. that was to go over Squaw Valley, making use of a route in existence. Donner Pass later became the preferred route, though, because of the railroad. It was a direct route with a constant grade as the road followed the ridge tops. Stewart talks a bit about Theodore Judah, railroad construction, the Chinese, and Charlie Crocker (one of the Big Four). With the railroad came development and the railroad held “undisputed sway” for travel for fifty years. Then came the highways.

“Donner Summit has its beauty of high crags and gleaming granite; the view eastward across the lake [Donner Lake] is justly famous” and the beauty should be preserved from billboards and other things but it does not rival Yosemite. What makes Donner Summit special is that “It has kept a rendezvous with history, and its interest to the person who passes here should be historical as much as scenic. At the summit, for instance, one can enjoy the beauty of the view, but can also see the remains of two primitive roads in addition to the present highway, can look across at the railroad, and can also know that the emigrant wagons were dragged up somewhere to reach the same gap.” (Here you might like to look at the Donner Summit tour in our April, ’16 Heirloom which experiences exactly what Stewart describes).

At page 62 the text breaks off in favor of 26 pages of old pictures which are in addition to the many old pictures that
accompany the text. Then there are some miscellaneous topics: Place Names, Shaping of the Landscape, and Animals and Plants.

*For more on George R. Stewart, see “Author of Many Genres” in the March, ’11 Heirloom and “Creating Something Where Nothing Was” and “Life & Times of George R. Stewart” in the October, ’15 Heirloom. See also our 20 Mile Museum sign (to be installed after snow melt, spring, ’16) for Stewart Pk on our website, http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/PDFs/20milemuseumsigns/StewartPk.pdf

Book Review

By George Lamson

Summer is Coming - Are You Ready?

BOOK REVIEW: Walking Through Donner Summit History by Bill Oudegeest

As our newest local author, Bill Oudegeest is fond of saying, “Donner Summit is the most historic square mile in California”. Well, Bill has made exploring that square mile possible for all of us in his new book “Walking Through Donner Summit History”. Bill’s philosophy on history is that it is something to be experienced personally and not for the dusty museum shelves. This is the philosophy that gave birth to the Donner Summit Historical Society’s 20 Mile Museum driving tour. Now Bill provides us with a walking guide to the Summit area that brings the history to life. There are 9 walks and 1 longer hike that take you to every part of the Summit. Not only does it take you there, but the wonderful vintage photos show you what it was like when history was being made. The human experience is there too in the local stories, newspaper clippings and personal quotes that are included throughout the book.

This book is for everyone that enjoys the Summit area and has a natural curiosity for those that came before us. It gives you the opportunity to not only get out and enjoy the beautiful Summit area as it is today, but understand how it came to be this way. The book is available through a number of venues. The easiest way to get the book is online at the Donner Summit Historical Society webpage at http://donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/index.html

You can also stop by the Historical Society museum at the corner of Donner Pass and Soda Springs Rd. If you are visiting the Donner State Park visitor center, it is also available and it will soon be on the shelves at the bookstore in Truckee. You can’t beat the price of $25 considering the hours of adventure it provides.
Then & Now with Art Clark

Uhlen Valley

In 1948, Boreal Ski Area didn’t exist. Neither did Interstate 80. Upper Castle Creek flowed down Uhlen Valley, as it was called then, and meandered through a quiet meadow on its way to Lake Van Norden. An old road went along the meadow, went past an old cabin, and then split toward Castle Valley.

The coming of the Interstate brought major changes. The creek had to be re-routed, land was leveled, and trees removed.

This view is from Boreal Ridge. Across the freeway are the Andesite Buttes and Peak. Castle Peak is just out of sight on the right.

Photo location
N39° 19.948’
W120° 20.709’
Then & Now with Art Clark

Boreal From Andesite

The original Auburn Ski Club was formed in 1928. Early operations were near Baxter, but poor snow conditions there prompted a move to Cisco. Many competitions were held at that location, until the coming of Interstate 80. Their land was needed for construction of the freeway. In 1964 they moved up to their present location on Boreal Ridge.

This view is from the northern Andesite Butte. Out of sight to the left is Donner Pass and the Rest area. To the right is Soda Springs.

Photo Location:
N39° 20.541'
W120° 21.111'
Boreal Ridge is at lower center and Castle Pk. is at top center. Using the legend below you can see the number monitoring stations the Snowlab had in 1952.
One More Snow-Motor (AKA Snow Devil) picture.

In our February, '16 Heirloom we ran a story about the Armstead Snow-Motor which was a conversion kit for tractors to they could travel across the snow. Of course as soon as the article was out Norm found a new picture in the album Milli Martin contributed containing pictures of her uncle and aunt, Herb and Lena Frederick who owned the Norden Store (see our October and November, '10 Heirlooms). See also our 20 Mile Museum sign for McIver Dairy on our website or in Truckee. That's probably James McIver in front of the machine in front of the snowsheds on Donner Summit.