

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

August, 2017 issue #108 -that's 9 years of Heirlooms

## Petroglyphs, Arborglyphs, Sheep, & the Martis - all in one article & a happy birthday

Here is an example of the difficulties of working for the DSHS. This article was written following explorations in 2015 but it's been languishing in the computer for two years desperately wanting to be highlighted in the Heirloom. The problem is we have a very strict editorial committee at the DSHS, the Donner Summit Editorial Committee (DSEC). The DSEC sets the standards for the Heirloom, keeping its issues, among other things, from being "issues of length" a technical term for issues of too many pages. That leaves many, so far, untold stories. That also gives you, the reader (of which there are almost 800 subscribers not counting those who access via FaceBook or directly from the web) the expectation that there are still many stories out there uncovered of Donner Summit history. So as we go into our tenth year (this month is the DSHS's ninth birthday - happy birthday DSHS), you can rest assured there is still more to come such as piracy on Donner Summit, or going under Donner Summit from Lake Tahoe. If only the issues were longer.

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Now the story:

### **Petroglyphs Below Long Lake**

The Mobile Historical Research Team (MHRT) arm of the DSHS takes its mandate seriously to do on site exploration of Donner Summit history and then pass the research on. In this case the MHRT thought it high time to head out to Long Lake and examine the petroglyphs left by the Native Americans and then the arborglyphs on the aspen trees left by tourists and Basque shepherders in past decades.

Previously we've written about Native American petroglyphs on Donner Summit in our June and August (including an 1873 article from Overland Monthly), 2015 Heirlooms. The petroglyphs on Donner Summit are up to four thousand years old. None were made after about 500 A.D. Donner Summit petroglyphs, made by the Martis Culture, are all rectilinear abstracts. There are no depictions of humans (except in one spot on the river near the Eagle Lakes exit from I-80) or animals except ubiquitous bear paws.

Petroglyph grouping below Long Lake.  
Photo is enhanced for visibility.



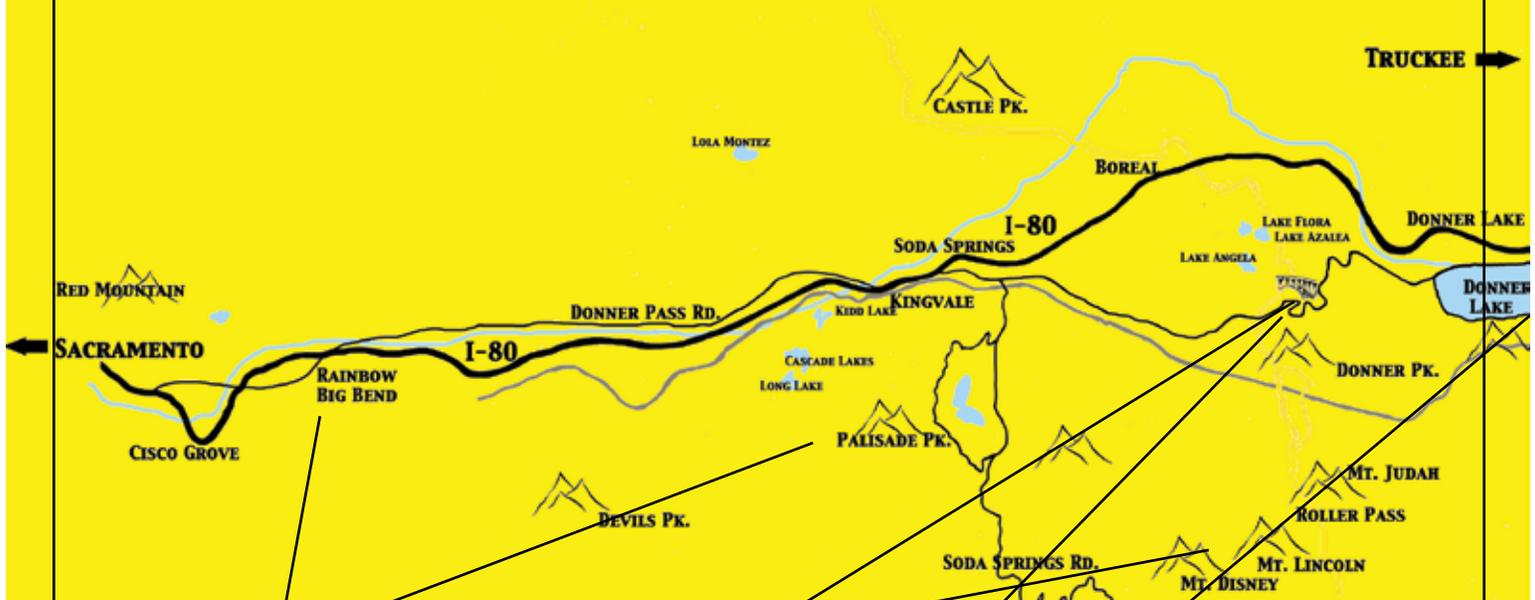
# Story Locations in this Issue

## New and improved map of Donner Summit.

This map takes in a little more area and has a little more detail than the last map.

## In This Issue

# DONNER SUMMIT



Petroglyphs/Arboglyphs/ Long Lake pg 1   Sugar Bowl pg 9   Weather Station pg 11   Camp of Death pg 12  
Pioneer Grave/Big Bend pg 17   Donner Summit Bridge plaque pg 17

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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

They are all on flat, not vertical, granite slabs and all have spectacular views of nearby peaks. The petroglyphs below Long Lake are a good example of a spectacular view sitting under Devil's Pk. The mountain must have had great significance for the Martis because they could have placed the petroglyphs just a little way away looking into the Royal Gorge, the deep canyon of the No. Fork of the American River. That's thousands of feet deep. The Native Americans were looking up though, at the peak and then maybe to the sky and the sun, moon, and stars. Devil's Pk. had a special significance for the Native Americans beyond what other peaks might have represented because it was a good source of basalt which the Martis knapped, or shaped, into projectile points.



Another grouping below Long Lake. Photo is enhanced for visibility.

The meaning or meanings of the petroglyphs are unknown. They may be totemic (family – such as the bear clan represented by the bear paws), magical, historical (reporting past events), wishful or hopefully predictive, or shamanistic (religious or used by tribal shaman). Whatever they were they were probably not doodles. Granite is one of the hardest rocks on the planet and the incising of petroglyphs would have been a labor not indulged in lightly. The petroglyphs were also not done generally where there was camping (such as Summit Valley where there is a plethora of Native American mortars – see the Feb. '13 [Heirloom](#)) or living in summers. They were done in special and sometimes remote spots.

The petroglyphs below Long Lake are very hard to see. A little splash of water on them enhances visibility as does a change in the sun's angle as is the case elsewhere but the MHRT was out on a hot day with a walk of some miles to do still and did not want to use water for aesthetic or investigative purposes. Granite develops a patina on the surface as it's exposed to the elements. The incising of petroglyphs carves through the patina leaving the petroglyphs lighter than surrounding rock. That makes them less difficult to see. The Long Lake petroglyphs have developed patina in the grooves making them exceedingly hard to see. That means the Long Lake petroglyphs must be very old, perhaps older than other summit petroglyphs which are more visible or less invisible because they have not developed as much patina. The petroglyphs at the Long Lake site also look older than other summit petroglyphs. They are more abstract with less discernable designs. That's for petroglyphologists (a term we've proudly inaugurated) to make determinations about, not the MHRT. The Long Lake petroglyphs are so hard to see that in the DSHS photo lab afterwards, some photographs looked like they were just of granite slabs. The barely visible designs seen in the field seemed to have disappeared.

GPS coordinates of the petroglyphs below Long Lake: N 39° 16.832' W 120° 25.847'. They are very faint. Please don't walk on them or touch them.

### Arborglyphs in the American River Canyon

Down the trail is another set of "glyphs." Arborglyphs are carvings into trees. In the Donner Summit area there is only one site of arborglyphs whereas there are dozens of petroglyph sites and many arborglyphs elsewhere. The arborglyphs below Long Lake were done by tourists and earlier, by Basque sheepherders.

The arborglyphs are off the Palisade Creek Trail that leads from Long Lake to the American River. They cover the area of about an acre and are spread all over. Look for the larger or fallen aspen since the "glyphs" were done decades ago. Some are simple initials. Others are more extensive, some wrapping around trees. Some have dates and some are artwork. There is one on the next page which shows successive visits since the "scribe" was considerate by dating his visits. One can imagine that the forested area now was open meadow sprinkled with aspen. Then you can imagine the sheep arriving for summer grazing on the way to Soda Springs. While you have the sheep in





The arborglyph to the left is part of one that wraps completely around the tree.

your mind you can see the Basque sheepherders, with time on their hands, decorating the trees to let us know they were there and to make their campsites more homey.

For the arborglyphs the approximate GPS coordinates are N 39° 15.782' W 120° 25.683'.

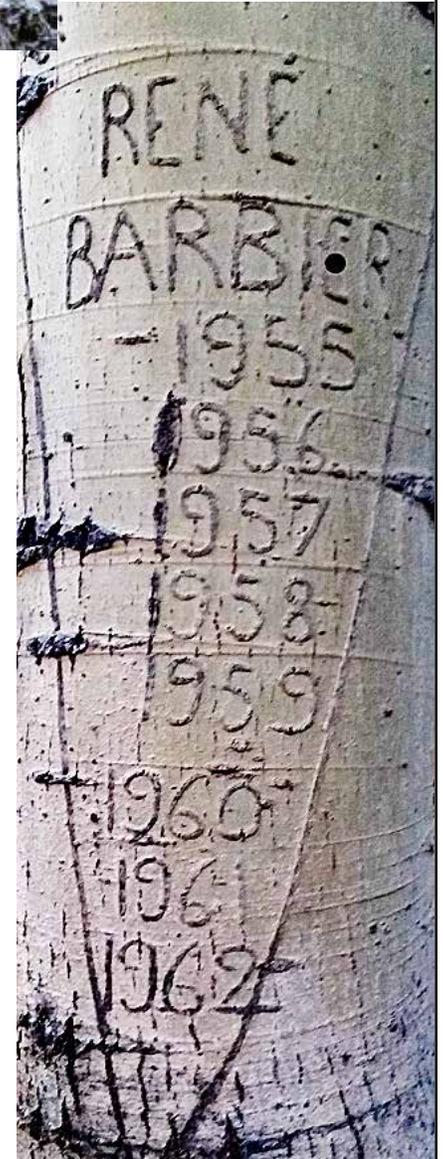
### Sheep on Donner Summit

Most of the various industries in Summit Valley disappeared with time: stagecoach stops, rooming houses, ice making, dairies, and lumber mills. Eventually even the dam stopped impounding water. One industry from the early days though, kept going even into the 1970's.

The high Sierra valleys were attractive to sheep herders. There were more live births, more multiple births, sheep remained healthier, and the wool remained cleaner. Each spring mostly Basque sheepherders would begin the long annual journey to the Sierra Crest where the sheep would fatten up at summer's end before going off on their final journeys via the railroad and later via trucks.

The sheep industry took advantage of the annual processes at the dam in Summit Valley. Each winter and spring the lake would fill up with snowmelt. As summer progressed the waters of lakes lower in elevation in the canal and reservoir system were drawn out for irrigation and electrical generation (see April, May, June, 2013 [Heirlooms](#)). As the lower lakes' water levels dropped the water behind Van Norden dam was let out. As Lake Van Norden's water level dropped the upper meadow area was exposed and grasses began to grow. By summer's end most of the meadow was exposed and grasses had grown tall. When the sheep arrived, they arrived to a luxuriant meadow full of forage. They must have been ecstatic as they crested the ridge to the south but that's speculation for another [Heirloom](#).

Basque sheepherders camped in Summit Valley and watched their flocks. The tinkling of bells on lead sheep was a common sound according to old timers like our chief proofreader, Pat Malberg. The valley was so attractive to sheepherders that in the





1940's one family, the Blackfords, shipped 100,000 sheep annually from Soda Springs. The Blackfords were just one family of many. Eventually sheep husbandry changed and there was more private property with restricted access. By 1977 the Blackfords were shipping only 2,500 sheep per year from Summit Valley.

A measure of how important sheep were is that there is an underpass under I-80 enabling sheep to get to Castle Valley below Castle Pk. without having to dodge traffic. The underpass was built when I-80 was being constructed and is still there if you know where to look.

In places where the Basque camped on their way to the summit meadows and where there were aspen, they carved arborglyphs. Later tourists encountering the carved aspen on Forest Service trails added their own. In this case the arborglyphs are just off the Palisade Creek Trail going to the north fork of the American River.

For more about this area, see Jimmy White's article, "Lost Horse in the Royal Gorge" in the April, '11 Heirloom. It includes a good map.

# The Martis

If you want to learn more about the Martis, the Native Americans who occupied the summit in summers for thousands of years, you can read the books by Willis Gortner (see page 7) or for more abbreviated information, go to the exhibits pages on the DSHS website, <http://www.donnertsummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/exhibits.html>. You will find several dozen exhibits including three having to do with the Martis ("Petroglyphs", "Native Americans," and "Bedrock Mortars...").

## The Martis Culture Native Americans

The first known residents of Summit Valley were a group of Native Americans called the Martis Culture. They were only semi-permanent, occupying Summit Valley in summers and retreating to the foothills on both sides of the Central Sierra in the winters. The Martis have left evidence of their presence in many areas of the Summit in the form of petroglyphs, mortars and metates (grinding stones), and flakes left over from knapping projectile points. The Martis lived in the area from about 2,000 B.C. to 500 A.D. Although archeologists can make hypotheses, no one knows for sure from whom the Martis were descended, who their descendants are, or where they went. The Martis Culture arose when the climate of Western Nevada changed, becoming cooler and wetter. Lake Tahoe filled and overflowed down the Truckee River. Game increased and the Sierra became more hospitable.

The Martis occupied Summit Valley until about 500 A.D. when the climate became drier. Maybe more importantly, simultaneously, the bow and arrow was developed by the area's Native Americans. The new weapon had more power, greater accuracy, and greater range. It must have changed hunting methods and the kinds of food that could be acquired. It may have changed culture. Maybe new prayers were needed. New skills were needed. Maybe values changed. For example, the Martis had worked almost exclusively with basalt to craft tools and projectile points. Basalt cannot be crafted into the finer and lighter points needed on arrows so with the change to bows and arrows, chert and obsidian were valued. Those are not available on the Sierra Crest though.

**DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
**Summit Valley**  
**THE MARTIS CULTURE**  
**THE NATIVE AMERICANS**

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**THE MARTIS CULTURE WAS DISTINCTIVE**

- They were only semi-permanent.
- Lived here primarily in the summer months and retreated to the foothills in the winter.
- Mortars and metates were used for grinding grain.
- Hunting and trapping were important.
- They used a variety of tools.
- They used a variety of projectile points.
- They used a variety of arrowheads.
- They used a variety of spearheads.
- They used a variety of knives.
- They used a variety of scrapers.
- They used a variety of flint.
- They used a variety of chert.
- They used a variety of obsidian.
- They used a variety of basalt.
- They used a variety of quartzite.
- They used a variety of granite.
- They used a variety of gneiss.
- They used a variety of schist.
- They used a variety of mica schist.
- They used a variety of amphibolite.
- They used a variety of quartzite.
- They used a variety of granite.
- They used a variety of gneiss.
- They used a variety of schist.
- They used a variety of mica schist.
- They used a variety of amphibolite.

The culture was only discovered relatively recently by H. J. Decker and A. R. Brown and California geologist William H. Storer in 1906.

The Martis used petroglyphs to mark their territory and to record their activities.

**DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
**Summit Valley**  
**NATIVE AMERICAN**  
**BEDROCK MORTARS, METATES, ETC.**

The Martis and the Knap Rock Culture occupied Summit Valley during summer and fall but left evidence of their presence in many places. The most visible evidence of their presence is in the form of mortars and metates. These are used for grinding grain. The Martis used a variety of tools. They used a variety of projectile points. They used a variety of arrowheads. They used a variety of spearheads. They used a variety of knives. They used a variety of scrapers. They used a variety of flint. They used a variety of chert. They used a variety of obsidian. They used a variety of basalt. They used a variety of quartzite. They used a variety of granite. They used a variety of gneiss. They used a variety of schist. They used a variety of mica schist. They used a variety of amphibolite.

The Martis used petroglyphs to mark their territory and to record their activities.

**WHAT WAS ON THE MENU?**

For the Martis, and the Knap Rock Culture, the diet was a mix of plant and animal products. They used a variety of tools. They used a variety of projectile points. They used a variety of arrowheads. They used a variety of spearheads. They used a variety of knives. They used a variety of scrapers. They used a variety of flint. They used a variety of chert. They used a variety of obsidian. They used a variety of basalt. They used a variety of quartzite. They used a variety of granite. They used a variety of gneiss. They used a variety of schist. They used a variety of mica schist. They used a variety of amphibolite.

**SIEIRA CONSERVATION**

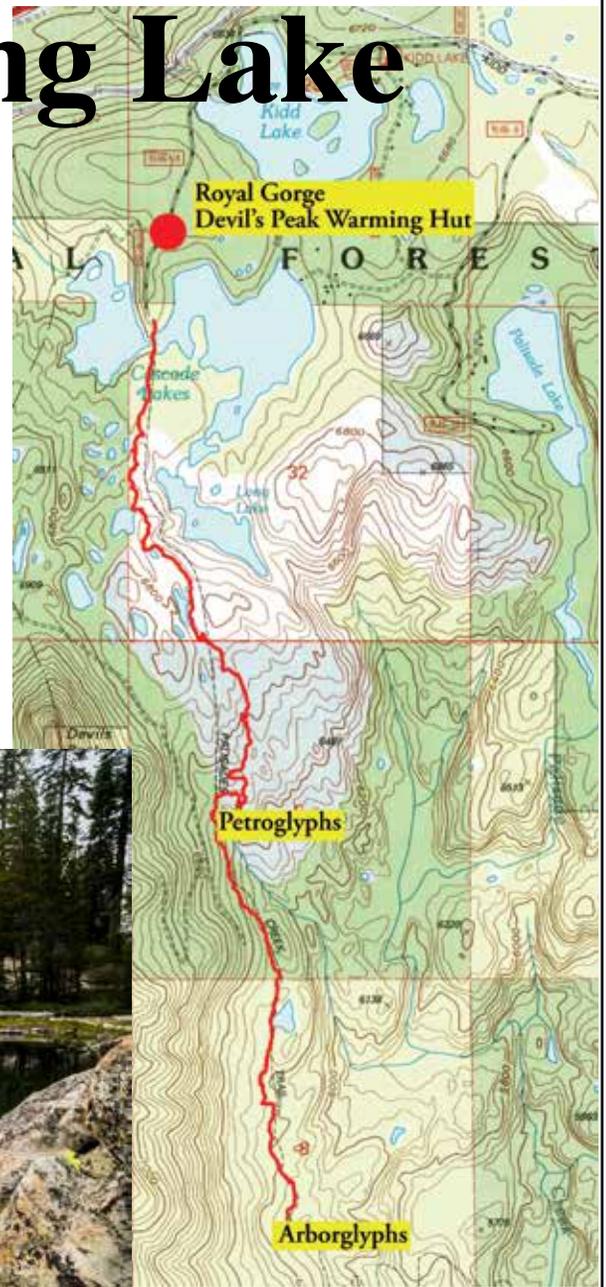
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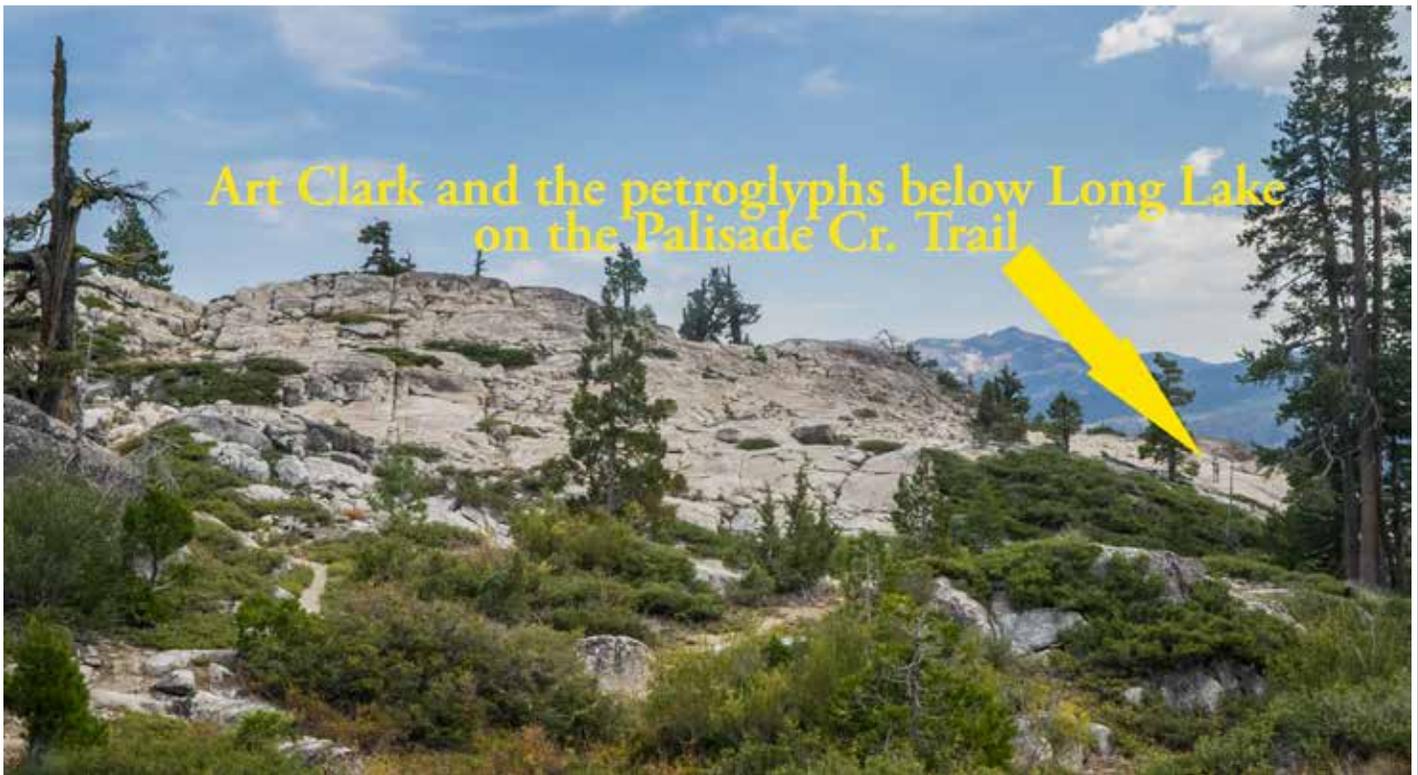


# Getting to Long Lake

To get to Long Lake, turn south on Soda Springs Rd. at the blinking light in "downtown" Soda Springs. Almost to the top of the hill, after you pass Soda Springs Ski Area, is Pahatsi Rd. which is the second right. Turn right onto Pahatsi and stay on it even after it becomes dirt. Keep going a few miles. You will pass the PGE campground at Kidd Lake on the left and then go around Kidd Lake and over the dam. Go up the hill after leaving Kidd Lake and you'll come to a Royal Gorge warming hut named, "Devil's Outlook Warming Hut." That is an intersection. After passing the warming hut on your right, the road heads west and then splits. The steep left will take you to the parking area for the Palisade Creek Trail. The right split descends to the Lower Cascade Lake Dam where the memorial (or grave marker if he's there) to the Donner Party's Charles Stanton is.

When you come to the end of the road, park. Take the trail downhill to Cascade Lakes and keep going. You'll get to Long Lake and you'll be on the Palisade Creek Trail.





Art Clark and the petroglyphs below Long Lake on the Palisade Cr. Trail

## One Intriguing Petroglyph Idea

We don't know what the petroglyphs mean. We can only know that they must have been very important to the Martis culture because they were hard to craft and were incised only in special places - with great views of nearby peaks. In the case of the Long Lake petroglyphs they are in the shadow of Devil's Pk. which is a remarkable geological feature.

Not knowing their meaning(s) has not prevented people from making guesses. One intriguing idea comes from Willis Gortner who wrote [The Martis Indians Ancient Tribe of the Sierra Nevada](#) and [Ancient Rock Carvings of the Central Sierra](#). Both are out of print but both are in the Truckee library (and reviewed on our book reviews web page). Gortner had a house at the Cedars around which there are many petroglyph sites and he studied them extensively. He too could only posit possible



meanings but he did make a remarkable discovery.



Looking at petroglyphs like the one above below Long Lake, one just scratches one's head. Why go to so much trouble to incise those in granite? Looking at petroglyphs like that and others that looked like branches, he thought they looked like maps. So he copied the petroglyphs and then drew current maps on acetate. When he overlaid the copied drawings onto the acetate, they matched in some cases. Maybe some of the petroglyphs are maps.

Others are more clear. The one on the left is a bear paw and those are almost ubiquitous among the various sites. Were those records of successful hunts or prayers for successful hunts? Were they family totems, the Bear clan was here or stakes this place, or were they prayers for bear strength? We don't know and there are no Martis to ask.

# 1867 Continued

Last month our lead article was entitled, "1867" describing Donner Summit 150 years ago. There was more to 1867 and there is still more (see next month). Here is a description of Albert Richardson's trip to Donner Summit in 1867 during the building of the railroad. This first appeared in his book, [Beyond the Mississippi](#)

At Gold Run a six-horse coach awaited us. Our day's ride was up a graded winding road, commanding an endless sweep of dense forest and grand mountain, among graceful tamaracks, gigantic pines and pyramidal firs.

Immense barns beside the mountain houses attest the length and severity of the winters. At many points we found the surveyors awaiting our coach to receive their letters and newspapers. The American pioneer can dispense with his dinner, but not with his mental tabulum.

We reached the summit two hours after dark, when its wild, gloomy grandeur is far more impressive than by day. It is boundless mountain piled on mountain—unbroken granite, bare, verdureless, cold and gray.

Through the biting night air we were whirled down the eastern slope for three miles to Donner lake, blue, shining, and sprinkled with stars, while from the wooded hill beyond glared an Indian fire like a great fiendish eyeball. The lake is an exquisite body of water, though less impressive than Tahoe; and the reflections of snowy peak, pine forest, clear sky, and minute twig and leaf in its depths, seem almost miraculous. The illustration [right] as faithful to nature as artist and engraver can make it, is far less vivid than the original photograph. In that, concealing the boat, figures and trees in the foreground water, it is almost impossible to decide which side up the picture should be—which are the real hills, snow and forest, and which the reflection.

Donner lake is named from the Donner party of sixty [sic] Illinois emigrants, en route for Oregon [sic], snowed in here in 1846. Knowing nothing of the climate, they attempted to cross too late, and were imprisoned by inexorable winter. The logs of one of their cabins; and stumps, twelve feet high, of trees which they cut off at the snow-surface, are still seen. Many ate human flesh; and about forty perished from starvation. Several yet live to tell their horrible story.



We slept at the Lake House[hotel at Donner Lake]; and spent the next day with the surveyors among the precipitous granite ledges, and visiting Lake Angela, a lovely little mountain gem. It was like picnicking at the North Pole; for snow lined the higher ravines and icicles hung from the water-tanks on the stage-road [Dutch Flat Rd later to become the Lincoln Highway]. Here during the previous winter they [Chinese railroad workers] were engulfed by a snow-slide. Seeing it approach they stepped behind a tall rock; but it carried them fifty feet deep. In spring their bodies were found standing upright, with shovels in their hands. For several miles the track must be roofed to slide off the snow. There will be less than a mile of tunneling, all near the crest. The cost of the most expensive mile of road is estimated at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. From the summit the line descends to the desert by the valley of the Truckee; and is easy of construction to Salt Lake City. Thus far the work is admirably done, comparing favorably with our best eastern railways.

On the second evening in our tavern parlor, there was a long earnest conference, to determine upon the route near the summit. The candles lighted up a curious picture. The carpet was covered with maps, profiles and diagrams are held down at the edges by candle-sticks to keep them from rolling up. On their knees were president, directors and surveyors creeping from one map to another earnestly discussing plans of their magnificent enterprise. The ladies of our excursion were grouped around them, silent and intent, assuming liveliest interest in the dry details about tunnels, grades, excavations, 'making height' and 'getting down.' Outside the night-wind moaned and shrieked, as if the Mountain Spirit resented this invasion of his ancient domain.

# Pacific Railroad Unopen

Robert Harris wrote a story for Overland Monthly called, "Pacific Railroad Unopen" in 1869 which was partly about a walk he took on Donner Summit in 1867, 150 years ago.

“ Ah! no one will be impressed by the sublimity of this scenery, when whirled through it at twenty miles per hour – a wall of rock on one side, and empty space on the other. What! We are nearing the summit, and there you shall see mountains of granite, sheer and clear, and shall ride along the verge of precipices, where a tossed stone will bound and bound again until it strikes one thousand feet beneath.... Look far beneath you at those puny pine-trees. They are six feet in diameter and one hundred and fifty feet high! Then, look up, far up, a thousand feet or more, at Lincoln Peak, whose granite breasts has faced storms which have crushed and rended these forests. On this crest of Lincoln Peak, the chief Engineer of the road, Mr. S. S. Montague, as if prophetic, raised a white flag on the very day of Lee’s surrender. Surely, this railroad will be a bond of peace and unity.”

“The wagon-road below is lined with slowly moving teams, the drivers cracking their whips, and smacking their lips at the prospect of supper. The loud, sharp reports of blasts as of large rifled guns seem to crack the very mountains.

....

“as I wended my way down this mighty cleft path, with crags ranging 1,500 to 2,000 feet above me on either side, their crests and slopes covered with timber. ...this was the last of the timber;” what will the future train traveler think “on this natural grandeur so beautifully fringed and trimmed with evergreen... No! Ere the iron rails connect with those pushing from the East, the whole regions will be denuded of timber. These monarchs of the forest will lie low; and, buried in the desert sands, will give in their short decay more practical benefit than in their lengthy lives... Those immense piles of wood which the indefatigable choppers are piling up--- where will they travel? What Indians and game will they frighten, as they feed the rushing, fiery demons?”

## Actress Janet Leigh Discovered at Sugar Bowl

Founded in the late 1930s, Sugar Bowl featured the first chair lift in California and only the second chairlift in the United States, Sun Valley having built the first one a year earlier. Due to Walt Disney being one of its early investors, Sugar Bowl hosted a number of movie stars, one of whom discovered Janet Leigh, who was a daughter of employees working there.

Janet Leigh, later married to Tony Curtis, was best known as the murder victim in the shower in Alfred Hitchcock’s “Psycho” though she also starred in many Hollywood films of the time. Born Jeanette Morrison to parents Fred and Helen Morrison, in 1946 her parents took jobs at Sugar Bowl Lodge. Fred worked as a receptionist and Helen as a waitress in the dining room. Norma Shearer, then a leading actress, was a guest at the Lodge, when she noticed a photograph of the Morrison's beautiful young daughter, Jeanette. She asked for a copy to show friends, and though then retired, was a large shareholder in MGM, and convinced the studio to hire her.

Young Jeanette changed her name to Janet Leigh, and the rest is history! Other famous Hollywood stars who were early guests at Sugar Bowl included: Claudette Colbert, Charlie Chaplin, Errol Flynn, and Greta Garbo.

Nick Chickering

Nick Chickering and his family own the old Hopkins Estate which is down the Soda Springs Rd. from the summit. The estate is where the original Summit Soda Springs Hotel was and the actual soda springs is. A future Heirloom will cover that. Nick's parents were one of the four original founding families of Sugar Bowl (see the Heirlooms in October-December, 2009 which include an interview with Nick's mother, Jean Chickering.

# From the DSHS Archives

Norm Sayler, president of the DSHS, loves to explore on EBay for Donner Summit historical photographs. A few months ago he came across this album. Who made it we don't know but the pictures are of Soda Springs and the back of the old hotel. Norm thinks the photos date from the Early 40's and are not after WWII because after WWII so many people wore WWII parkas and no one has one here.

In the pictures at the top of the two guys, Bob Schreiber of Alpineer Ski Club is on the left.

The sign behind the two women and the single woman says "Soda Springs Ski Hut Everything for the Skier Sales and Rental." The building is the Soda Springs Hotel.



# From the DSHS Archives



Here is another of Norm's EBay finds, the weather station that used to sit on Donner Summit. Foundation remains are still there. For more information about the station see the July, '11 [Heirloom](#) and/or our 20 Mile Museum sign for the weather station (along Old 40 at the summit, north side, or on our website).

On the back of the 1933 photograph:  
WATCH YOUR CREDIT

INTERNATIONAL NEWS PHOTOS – SAN FRANCISCO BUREAU  
SLUG (AIRWAY STATION)

HIGHEST AIRWAY STATION

SUMMITT [sic], CALIFORNIA... AT AN ALTITUDE OF 7200 FEET AT SUMMITT HERE THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY CROSSES THE SIERRA NEVADA MOUNTAINS IS THE HIGHEST MAN OPERATED AIR RADIO STATION IN THE WEST. HERE SIX MEN ARE ON TWENTY-FOUR HOUR DUTY SENDING OUT SIGNALS AND WEATHER REPORTS TO THE TRANS-CONTINENTAL AIR LINERS ON WHAT IS ONE OF THE MOST TREACHEROUS STRETCHES OF THE AIRWAY SYSTEM. ON ACCOUNT OF HEAVY WINDS THE BUILDING IS HELD DOWN WITH STEEL CABLES. ALL SUPPLIES MUST BE SNOW-SHOED IN DURING THE WINTER. MATERIAL FOR THE HOUSE HAD TO BE CARRIED IN ON MEN'S BACKS DURING THE BUILDING OF THIS, CONSIDERED ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT LIGHTHOUSES OF THE MAIL SERVICE.

PHOTO SHOWS AIRWAY STATION AT SUMMITT, CALIFORNIA

Santa Ana Register August 10, 1931

## AVIATORS RECOVER FOLLOWING CRASH

AUBURN, Calif. Aug. 20 – UP

Two aviators were recovering here today from injuries received late yesterday when their plane crashed into the Donner summit at the 7000-foot level.

Michael E. Lackey, Penryn, second lieutenant in the air corps reserve, until recently stationed at Crissey field, San Francisco, pilot of the plane, received a crushed leg and broken arm.

Fred A. Rupley, Auburn automobile dealer, escaped with minor cuts and bruises. He was owner of the plane, which was completely wrecked when it crashed into the huge granite boulders within a short distance of the state highway and in view of a score of motorists.

# Book Review

## Camp of Death

The Donner Party Mountain Camp 1846-47  
J. Quinn Thornton

96 pages 1848

This book is an artifact. It is a primary source and the first reporting, besides newspaper accounts, of the Donner Party tragedy. J. Quinn Thornton interviewed some of the survivors so he had first hand accounts of the winter at Donner Lake. That also was problematical because some of the interviewees were self-interested. Thornton also clearly used some of what had been written in the newspapers at the time and those were very sensational and not factual. The world would have to wait for Charles F. McGlashan's History of the Donner Party, some decades later, for a more balanced view. Nevertheless, if you've read any Donner Party histories you will recognize Quinn's descriptions of episodes. Later writers must have used his book as starting points.

Thornton, who would later become Oregon's first "supreme judge," traveled west in 1846 and until the Donner Party took the Hastings Cut-off, traveled sometimes near them as part of larger groups of wagons.

The short volume covers the tribulations of the Donner Party after they took the Hastings Cut-off. Quinn interviewed Wm. Eddy and so focused on his travails (see picture below). One ox died. The next day, cattle under guard, were stolen when the guards left off guarding to have lunch. Eddy had no more oxen. He cached his goods and then he and his family had to walk, he carrying one child and some sugar, and his wife

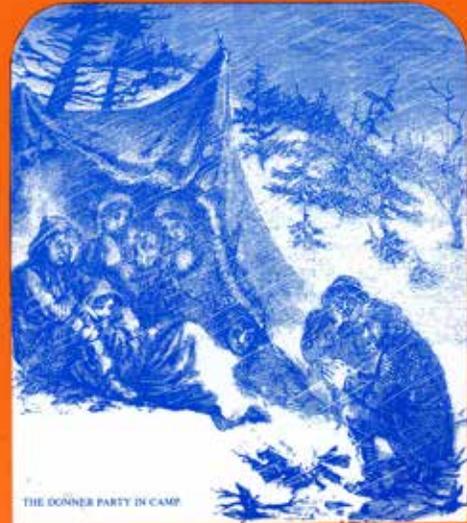


MR. EDDY AND FAMILY SETTING OUT.

## Camp of Death:

*The Donner Party Mountain Camp  
1846-47*

*by J. Quinn Thornton*



the other child. That's not really covered in other treatments and with that focus one gets closer to the tragedy. Imagine being in the position of one of the Eddys walking through the desert to California with virtually nothing. No one would help them carry anything or even give them help. The Donner Party was really a party of separate parties. The descriptions of the Eddys are more evocative than in other portrayals and so makes the story more human.

The book continues, really, as a diary of events day by day. There was an escape attempt from Donner Lake on November 12. It was unsuccessful. There was another on the 22nd. Here the folly of some of the participants is exposed. They got to the top of the pass with a couple of John Sutter's mules. They could go no further with the mules. Charles Stanton, who'd promised to bring the mules back, refused to go on without the mules. They went back to the lake. Presumably they could have made it to Sacramento, gotten help, and returned. Stanton died later.

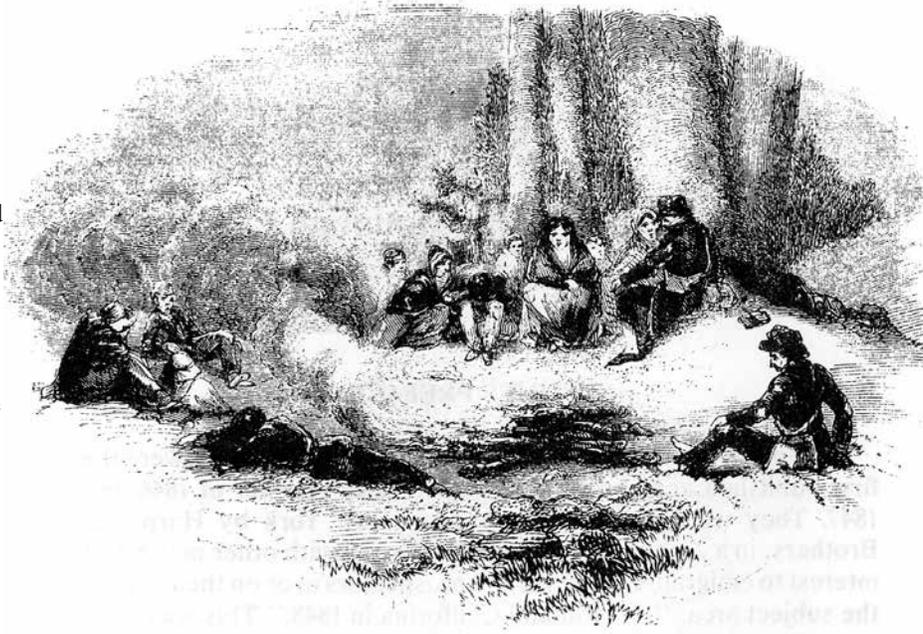
Then there's bad judgment. Wm. Eddy wanted

to kill the mules for food but others refused, afraid they'd have to pay Sutter for the mules. The mules were covered by snow and lost.

Here is one weakness. Quinn clearly interviewed Wm. Eddy and some of the story is told through his eyes. One can sympathize with him, losing his cattle, having to cache his goods, and having to carry his children. One can cheer when he kills some ducks and then

a grizzly. We can see how the party acted too. Mr. Eddy had no gun and so had to borrow one to hunt. He had to give half of what he shot to the gun's owner. Eddy had nothing, arriving at Donner Lake with only his wife, two children, and a little sugar. He never mentions getting food from anyone else and had to give up half of what he hunted. But Mr. Eddy is perhaps not the best source because, according to Quinn's account, Eddy was the hero of each event and had the best advice. He was the one who saved the Forlorn Hope by covering everyone with blankets during the three-day storm. He was the one person who would not eat human flesh. He is the one who kept Wm. Foster from killing anyone else for food.

The 19th Century prose is evocative too. "The wind blew in fearful and terrific blasts from the east. The cold was intense: the wretched sojourners were nearly naked, and almost without food: the snow had now become so deep as to make it increasingly difficult to get wood for fuel. They were completely housed up, and were cut off from all the world, and sympathies of life. The few cattle that had lived up to this time, and the horses, and Capt. Sutter's mules, were all supposed to be lost in the snow, and none now cherished the least hope of ever finding them... They found it very difficult to obtain enough wood to cook their now nearly putrid beef,



THE CAMP OF DEATH.

or even to keep them warm..." pg 23 That was December first.

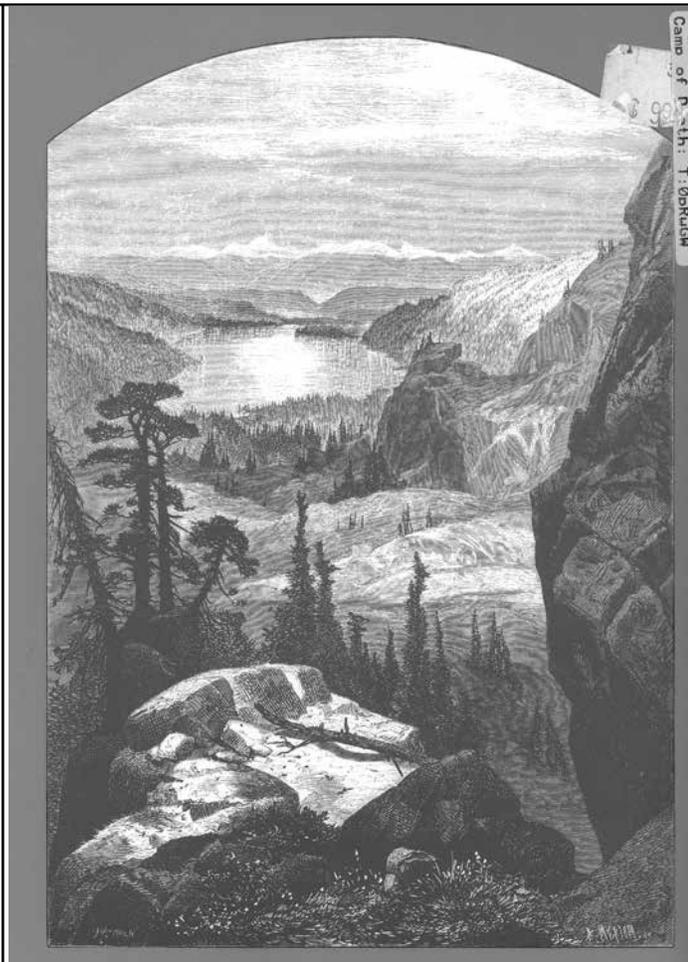
"On the morning of December 30th they resumed their journey, their feet being so swollen that they had burst open, and, although they were wrapped in rags and pieces of blankets, yet it was with great pain and difficulty that they made any progress..." December 31st "... Every foot of that day's struggle was marked with the blood from their feet." Pg 30

Description of the first rescuers' arrival at Donner Lake are vivid, "... the sufferers were seen coming up out of the snow-holes, from the cabins, which were completely covered, ... They tottered toward their deliverers, ... some wept... some laughed... Many of them had a peculiarly wild expression of the eye; all looked haggard, ghastly, and horrible. The flesh was wasted from their bodies, and the skin seemed to have dried upon their bones. Their voices were weak and sepulchral;... Fourteen... had already died from starvation, and many more were so reduced, that it was almost certain they would never rise from the miserable beds upon which they had lain down... The annals of human suffering nowhere present a more appalling spectacle than that which blasted the eyes and sickened the hearts of those brave men [the rescuers]..." The prose is wonderful and you have to read it for yourself. Pg 49



MRS. BRINN IN TRIBULATION.

On December 16 the Forlorn Hope left for California. Some days later the description is vivid, "About 11 o'clock that memorable night, the storm increased to a perfect tornado, and in an instant blew away every spark of fire. Antoine perished a little before this from fatigue, frost, and hunger. The company, except Mr. Eddy and one or two others, were now engaged in alternately imploring God for mercy and relief. That night's bitter cries, anguish, and despair, never can be forgotten." Pg 27



Donner Lake

Quinn embellishes adding his descriptive prose to the interviews and reading he did. This leads sometimes to clear errors. For example, he says the Forlorn Hope was without shoes but then they “crisped” up their shoes in the fire before eating them.

Quinn also clearly uses the sensational newspaper accounts of the time in his reporting. For example, as rescuers arrived at the actual Donner Camp at Alder Creek, they saw a boy carrying the leg and thigh of Jacob Donner. He’d been sent to get it by George Donner. The Donners had consumed four bodies, “and the children were sitting upon a log, with their faces stained with blood, devouring the half-roasted liver and heart of the father... Around the fire were hair, bones, skulls, and the fragments of half-consumed limbs...” The description goes on but in deference to our readers’ gentility, we’ll forgo including more here.

Then there is the description of Starved Camp on Donner Summit which is, of course, what readers here would be looking for. “During the night a most terrible snow-storm came down upon them... The storm continued, without the slightest intermission,

for two days and three nights... the air became... more intensely cold...” the driving snow “fell so thick as to make it impossible to see beyond a few feet. The cold was so intense as to make it impracticable to chop more than a few minutes without returning to the fire to warm. The party had all lain down and were seeking to shelter themselves beneath their blankets. The driving snow soon covered them up... The men, women, and children, were all so cold as to be in great danger of freezing. ...The children were all crying. One of the women was weeping- another praying.. A portion of Mr. Reeds’ men were also praying.” Two men were “alternately struggling to save expiring coals, and swearing at the others, urging them to leave off praying and go to work for the purpose of saving the fire... Morning came at length, and the storm passed away. The whole party had been two days without any sort of food.” Pg 77

Thornton saved his greatest exaggerations for Kiesburg, the last man rescued, accusing him of “devouring a child before morning” rather than eat beef. Then he devoured another child before noon the next day. Quinn says Keisburg said, A man is a fool who prefers poor California beef to human flesh.” There is lots more.

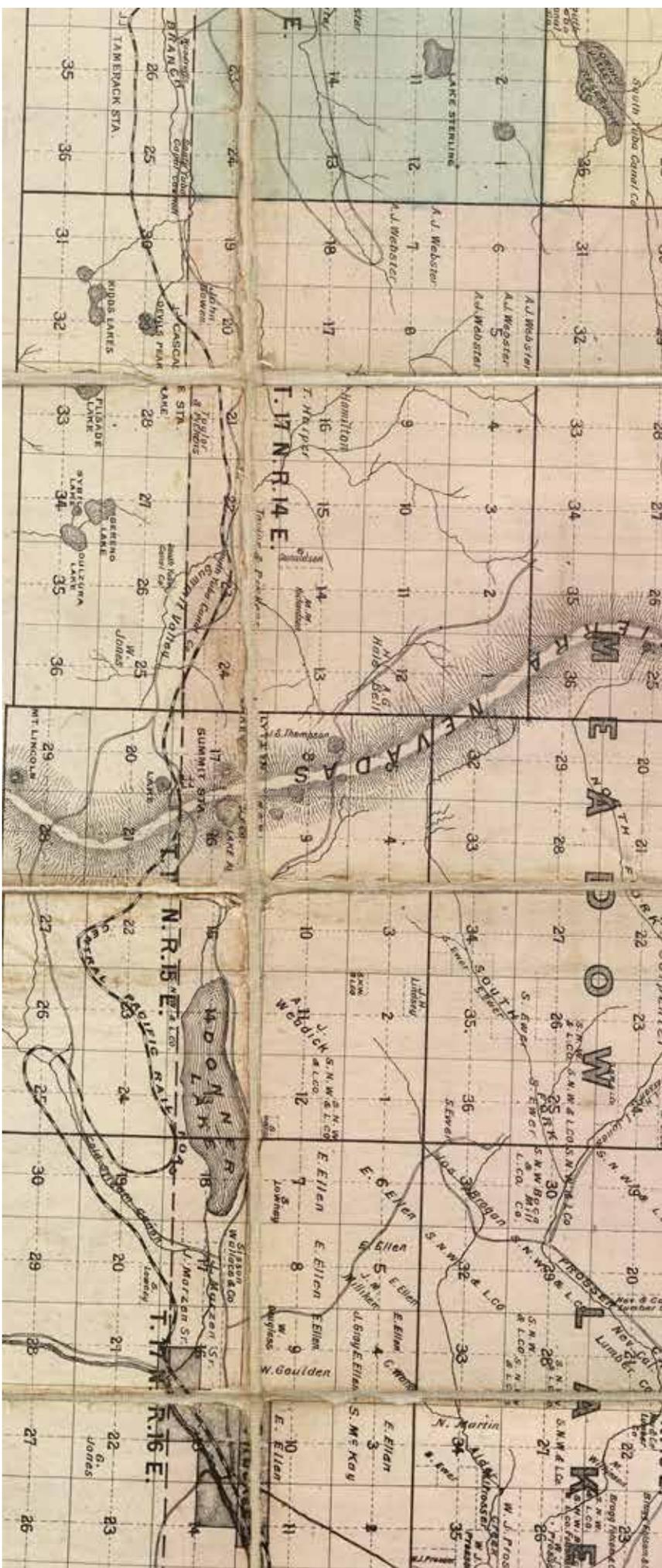
Camp of Death is an interesting and short read but should not substitute for a more balanced and complete telling of the Donner Party tragedy.

## Note:

You have noticed our monthly book reviews. You might want to do some reading of your own.

Stop in at the DSHS. Norm Saylor has a large collection of books for perusing, buying, or checking out.

You might even want to do a review for us.

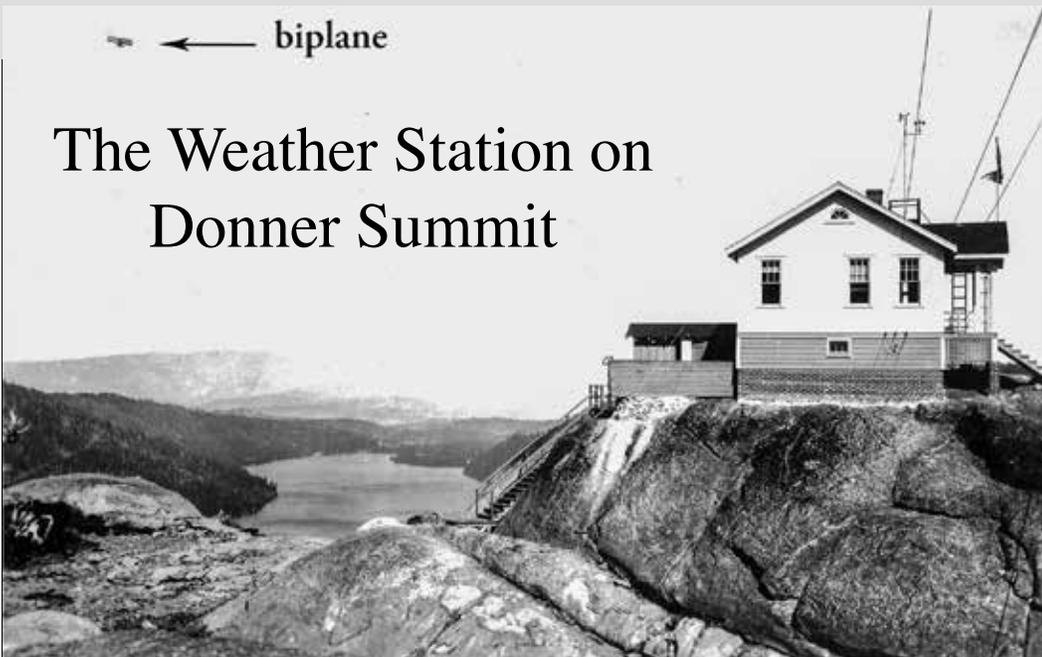


Just for fun an 1880 map of Donner Summit, part of a map of Nevada County.

# Then & Now with Art Clark

← biplane

## The Weather Station on Donner Summit



Read about the Donner Summit weather station in the July '11 [Heirloom](#) or see the 20 Mile Museum sign.

We published this "find" which we received from the Truckee Donner Historical Society, in the June, '17 [Heirloom](#). Then we tasked Art Clark with the job of getting a "now," preferably with an airplane.

It took multiple visits to get the angle right. A ladder was needed for the kind of accuracy Mr. Clark demands from his work and which [Heirloom](#) readers expect. The photo below, of Art on the ladder reprising the old photo, was taken by Art's grandson, Clayton Gallagher age 7 using a Vtech Kidzoom ActionCam, a prospective member of the DSHS MHRT.

No airplane was possible without PhotoShop and since the DSHS values honesty, no attempts were made.

There are still foundation remnants to explore.



If you want to access the site park along the road at the top of Old 40, near the gray building. Take the Pacific Crest Trail north for just a bit and then head to the small peak. You will find steel posts that used to guide people to the station and drill holes in the granite for posts that are long gone. When you get to the pinnacle look for foundation remains and the holes in granite that anchored steel cables the prevented the station from flying away in storms.

For more clues about exactly getting to the site consult the 20 Mile Museum sign nearby on the north side of Old 40.



# Odds & Ends on Donner Summit

This is part of a series of miscellaneous history, “Odds & Ends” of Donner Summit. There are a lot of big stories on Donner Summit making it the most important historical square mile in California. All of those episodes\* left behind obvious traces. As one explores Donner Summit, though, one comes across a lot of other things related to the rich history. All of those things have stories too and we’ve been collecting them. Now they’re making appearances in the [Heirloom](#). Last month we covered the stone houses at Cisco on Old Highway 40. This month, it’s a grave.

Go to Big Bend and take the Lincoln Highway (dirt road) turn off, just west of the garage that is opposite the fire station. Follow the old highway around past old houses and take the fork to the left at the Forest Service sign. A half mile up on the left is the grave of the “unknown pioneer.”

There is no official record of the grave or its occupant. There is a question about whether it is truly an “unknown pioneer” there who may have been an emigrant. The emigrant trail did not take that route generally. Maybe it’s another kind of unknown pioneer, someone who moved in later? Maybe it’s the grave of a railroad worker? We do know the Forest Service made the memorial but they also have no record. Why is the grave all alone so far from anything?



\*Native Americans; first wagon trains to California; the first transcontinental railroad, highway, air route, and telephone line, etc.

## @ the Museum

Visitors to the DSHS see a remarkable sculpture on the inside front door. To some it may even remind them of something they’ve seen before.

Visit the Donner Summit or Rainbow Bridge, which is just below the pass on Old Highway 40 on the east side, and you’ll see a handsome commemorative plaque on the pedestrian walkway (near our 20 Mile Museum sign). The original heavy bronze plaque was installed on the bridge in 1925 to commemorate the completion of the bridge (see the December, ’08 [Heirloom](#)). The plaque depicts wagon trains, gold miners, Donner Lake, and other scenes from summit history.

The plaque was stolen from the bridge and was later “discovered” but by then a duplicate had been made to protect the original and that duplicate was installed on the bridge. The Truckee Donner Historical Society ended up with the original and generously loaned it to the DSHS for display. There it is on our inside front door. Come by and touch history.



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

Membership

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

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_ New Membership MAILING ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Renewing Membership CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

(Please mail this card with your check payable to DSHS to Donner Summit Historical Society, P.O. Box 1, Norden, CA 95724)

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual Membership - \$30

\_\_\_\_\_ Family Membership - \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ Friend Membership - \$100 \_\_\_\_\_ Sponsor - \$250

\_\_\_\_\_ Patron - \$500 \_\_\_\_\_ Benefactor - \$1000 \_\_\_\_\_ Business - \$250 \_\_\_\_\_ Business Sponsor - \$1000

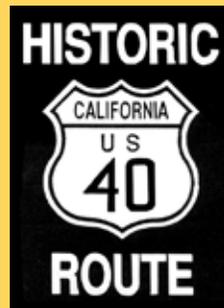
Donner Summit Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

If you would like monthly newsletter announcements, please write your email address below VERY neatly.

\_\_\_\_\_



## Take the Scenic Route: Donner Summit's Old Highway 40



Pick up or download the brochure

**46 interpretive signs along Old 40**  
<http://www.donnersummithistricalsociety.org/pages/20MileMuseum.html>



For information:  
<http://theheritagetrail.blogspot.com>

### Margie Powell Hike:

August 12 & 13

Meet at the Sugar Bowl Academy\* at the top of Old 40 at 9:30 A.M. Download the brochure with the map to the right. It's on our brochure page at the DSHS website, called "Summit Canyon."

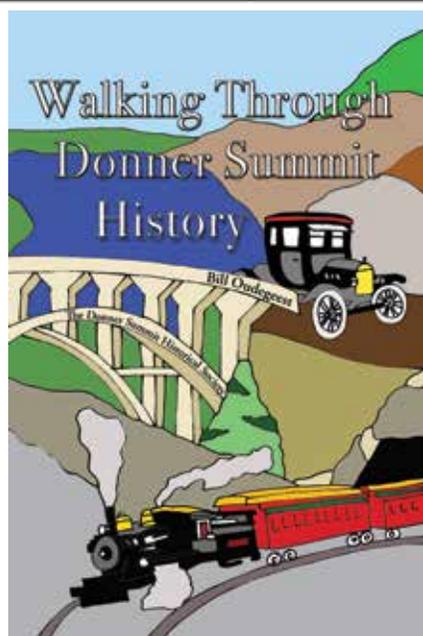
#### Bring:

- comfortable shoes - no flip flops
- water
- sunscreen
- insect repellent
- camera
- hat

#### Lunch

For more details see last month's [Heirloom](#) of the events page on our website.

<b>June 17</b>	<i>Auburn</i>	Bernhard Museum Gold Rush Museum Benton-Welty School Rm	10-4 10-4 10-4
<b>June 24</b>	<i>Lincoln</i>	Lincoln Area Archives Museum Fruitvale School	10-4 10-3
<b>July 1</b>	<i>Tahoe City</i>	Gatekeepers Museum Watson Cabin	10-5 10-5
<b>July 8</b>	<i>Auburn</i>	Placer County Museum Auburn Chinese Joss House Gold Country Medical History Museum	10-4 10-4 10-4
<b>July 15</b>	<i>Penryn/Rocklin</i>	Griffith Quarry Museum Rocklin History Museum	8-12 10-4
<b>August 5</b>	<i>Roseville</i>	Roseville Historical Society Carnegie Museum Roseville Fire Museum Roseville Telephone Museum Maidu Museum and Historic Site	10-4 10-4 10-4 10-4
<b>August 12</b>	<i>Colfax/Dutch Flat/Norden</i>	Colfax Area Heritage Museum Golden Drift Museum Donner Summit Historical Society Museum	10-4 10-4 10-4
<b>August 26</b>	<i>Rocklin</i>	Sierra College Natural History Museum	8-12
<b>Sept. 1</b>	<i>North Auburn</i>	DeWitt History Museum	4-7
<b>Sept. 2 &amp; 3</b>	<i>Foresthill</i>	Forest Hill Divide Museum	10-4



It's summer and you may want to do some history walking.

Walking Through Donner Summit History is still available at the little store in Soda Springs, at the actual DSHS, on our website (<http://www.donnertsummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/store.html>), at the visitors' center at Donner Lake and at the California Welcome Center in Auburn.

You can see the contents at the web page above.

# New 20 Mile Museum Sign - #47



## Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass Donner Lake West End ●

### History

The Donner Lake area is not only an exciting place to live and adventure, but also has lots of interesting history. The story of the Donner Party crossing over this amazing and majestic mountain range (1847) has spread through the area. The Donner Lake area, however, started out as a railroad stop, not a place to live. During the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad (1869), the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. followed the approximate route of the emigrant wagons and was used to transport materials for the building of the railroad and as a toll road. Later, this trail became the Lincoln Highway (1913) and then Highway 40 and was used for tourists crossing over the Sierra Nevada Mountains to get to Donner Lake and Truckee, not just for transporting materials or goods. Eventually, this little railroad stop became more and more populated and with more people visiting and staying, it came to be a bigger town. As the town grew, and more people started to visit, the Donner area became a town that is now known as Truckee, California.



### A Good Story

During her rescue from Donner Lake, Mrs. Graves, a member of the Donner Party, couldn't carry her family's money anymore. She was just too tired. She buried her money near this spot and three days later she died on Donner Summit at what became named "Starved Camp."

In 1891 the money was found by a prospector. There were 116 silver coins worth between \$300.00 to \$500.00. There are conflicting stories about what happened to the money.

#### DONNER TREASURE

Claim Made That the Money Has Been Found

A MINER ACCIDENTALLY DISCOVERS THE HIDING PLACE

The Spot in Plain Sight of the Wagon Road Close to Margin of Donner Lake- The Coins Found are of Date Prior to 1845, and comprise the Marking of America, France, Spain, Bolivia and the Argentine Republic-Truckee Excited Over the Discovery

Sacramento Union  
May 16, 1891

### Things to do right here

**A Long Time Ago:**  
Donner Lake has long been a tourist destination and once there were many resorts along the lake like the Donner Camp, above, which was right at the west end of the lake. There was fine trout fishing in the river and in the lake. In fact, at the New Whitney Hotel's pond in Truckee, they had 10,000 trout ready for fly fishing! Resorts had log cabins, boat rentals, dances, carriage rides, buffets, and lots of activities so that people would have great stays. For a while there was even a steamer on Donner Lake.

**Today:**  
Please keep in mind to respect the beautiful land surrounding the Donner Lake.

Swimming in the emerald green waters of the Donner Lake is always refreshing. Kayaking, boating and jet skiing through glassy blue waters and paddle boarding under the full moon are the best. Walking to Rainbow Bridge or hiking to the train tunnels and seeing the beautiful scenic overlook is incredible; the sights will amaze you. Putting one foot in front of the other while exploring the forests of Donner Lake, biking on the rock mountains above Donner Lake, and catching big fish are always a blast. Fourth of July fireworks are a treat, seeing the beautiful colors explode over Donner Lake. Smelling the scent of sizzling hamburgers in the breeze is nice when you're on the beach, and camping in the warm summer weather is a blast. Playing on the beach is always enjoyable and feeling hot sand in your toes is pleasant. Playing with your family and friends is fun every time. All of these adventures await you; you should definitely visit again.

Sign sponsored by the Allen family  
in memory of Oliver Allen  
and the Truckee Rotary



Sign designed and written  
by the Brisbin and Akers Crew  
4th and 5th Grade  
Sierra Expeditionary Learning School





Picture above courtesy the Norm Saylor Collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society  
©2017 Donner Summit Historical Society www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

The DSHS has 46 20 Mile Museum signs mostly along Old Highway 40 from Auburn to Truckee. Here we have sign #47 researched by the 4th and 5th graders at Sierra Expeditionary Academy in Truckee along with their teachers, Ms Brisbin and Ms Akers. The students looked at old pictures and explored old newspaper articles in order to get the "history" and "good story" sections and then brainstormed what to put in the "things to do..." section. They spoke at a Rotary meeting to get some sponsorship. Most of the sponsorship of the sign comes from the Allen family in memory of their father, Oliver Allen. The family owns the land where the sign will be placed. It will be installed when school starts again at the intersection of South Shore and Donner Pass Rd. at the west end of Donner Lake. Truckee students of Ms Brisbin also designed in previous years, the 20 Mile signs for the McIver Dairy in Truckee and the petroglyph sign one turn below Rainbow Bridge on Old 40.



# DONNER PARTY HIKE

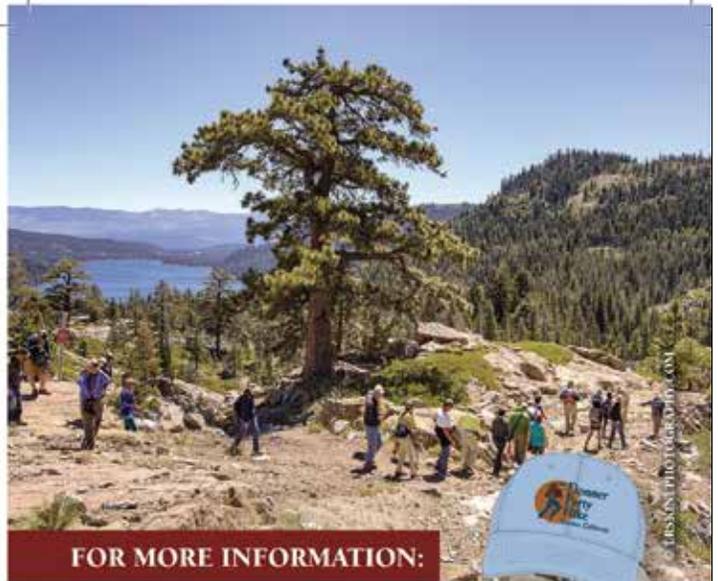
OCTOBER 14 & 15, 2017



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*Learn secrets of the Sierra as you hike with local historians.*

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*Register early and get your commemorative baseball cap!*

**E**xplore scenic Donner Summit with local historians on interpretive walks and hikes. As you trace the steps of the emigrants, imagine the clip-clop of oxen and the rumble of wagons of the countless pioneers who scaled the mighty Sierra Nevada in search of a better life.

**SATURDAY HIKES**—Choose from one of six hikes ranging from 3.5 to 6 miles with varying degree of difficulty. Explore the trails, see petroglyphs or the China Wall. Stroll through meadows or discover hidden Sierra lakes. Price includes guided hike, commemorative hat, hamburger lunch and afternoon presentation. **SATURDAY HIKE:** \$75 per hiker (\$85 after October 3rd)

**SUNDAY WALKING TOUR**—Learn about the grueling mishaps of the Donner Party and the archaeological finds that remain. Then, it's on to all new Donner Memorial State Park to view the Murphy Cabin Site and Pioneer Monument. Price includes guided hike, commemorative hat, hamburger lunch and afternoon presentation plus the Sunday interpretive walks. **SATURDAY/SUNDAY TWO DAY PACKAGE:** \$100 per hiker (\$110 after October 3rd)

**LODGING PACKAGES**—Area lodging packages are available for participants.

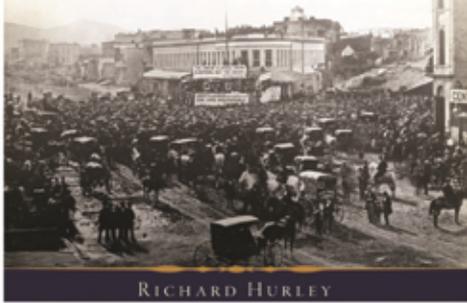
**REGISTER TO SECURE YOUR SPOT IN TIME**—Tour size is limited. Reserve your spot on the trail by October 3rd for early savings.



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# CALIFORNIA AND THE CIVIL WAR



RICHARD HURLEY

## California and the Civil War by Richard Hurley

ISBN: 978-1-6258-5824-5  
\$21.99 | 176 pp. | paperback

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Californians assume that the Civil War happened back East and had little impact on the Golden State. In reality, California experienced Southern partisan activity and even the attempted launch of a privateer on the San Francisco Bay. California volunteers took over the role of the entire pre-war regular army throughout the West.
- The Union's most eloquent spokesman on the Pacific Coast was a Unitarian minister named Starr King, who stood 5 ft 2 in and weighed 120 pounds. Abraham Lincoln called Starr King "the man who saved California for the Union."

### MEDIA CONTACT

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jtyler@arcadiapublishing.com

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AND  
The History Press

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Valor and Sacrifice

In the long and bitter prelude to war, southern transplants dominated California government, keeping the state aligned with Dixie. However, a murderous duel in 1859 killed "Free Soil" U.S. Senator David C. Broderick, and public opinion began to change. As war broke out back east, a golden-tongued preacher named Reverend Thomas Starr King crisscrossed the state endeavoring to save the Golden State for the Union. Seventeen thousand California volunteers thwarted secessionist schemes and waged brutal campaigns against native tribesmen resisting white encroachment as far away as Idaho and New Mexico. And a determined battalion of California cavalry journeyed to Virginia's Shenandoah Valley to battle John Singleton Mosby, the South's deadliest partisan ranger. Author Richard Hurley delves into homefront activities during the nation's bloodiest war and chronicles the adventures of the brave men who fought far from home.

Pub Date 7.24.17

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**RICHARD HURLEY** was born in Upstate New York and lived there until he was nine. His family moved to Europe, where he attended Italian schools and a British school in Switzerland. After high school in California, he went to Harvard, where he pursued medieval European history and visual studies. He was elected to the literary board of the Harvard Lampoon. He worked for three years on the design staff of the Oakland Museum of California, restoring artifacts and preparing exhibits on California history. He returned to school for a Master's degree in Architecture from UC Berkeley, then left the Bay Area for the Sierra Foothills and a career in CAD and computer-based multimedia.

Richard has been an avid history buff since the age of ten, when he visited a recently opened Etruscan tomb. He is also interested in languages and is probably the only writer to recite "Cædmon's Hymn," the oldest surviving poem in English (or Early West Saxon, actually), during an NPR radio interview. Richard is coauthor (along with T.J. Meekins) of the historical fiction *Queen of the Northern Mines*, finalist for the 2012 Independent Book Publishers Association Ben Franklin Prize for historical fiction. Richard and T.J. also guest-curated an exhibit entitled "California and the Civil War" for the Folsom History Museum and have presented multimedia shows on historical topics at museums, libraries, and historical societies across Northern California.

**For an online look at some of the stories covered in *California and the Civil War*, visit California Educational Multimedia's [history page](#).**

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