



# The Donner Summit Heirloom

## Another First for Donner Summit Wayfinding Signs for Travelers\*

Donner Pass has always been a communications pathway. Animal trails gave way to Native American trails. Those gave way to emigrant trails, a dirt road, the transcontinental railroad, the transcontinental highway, the transcontinental air route, a fiber optic cable, a petroleum pipeline, and finally, I-80.

There are a lot of firsts in that list but those familiar with Donner Summit are familiar with the firsts, and so do not want valuable Heirloom space to be spent on what's already familiar.

We thought we'd covered everything in the communications pathway category until Bob Williams of Lake Mary (on Donner Summit) suggested some attention needed to be paid to the edifices you see here.

The first emigrants coming to California were tired. They were running out of food. They were desperate, given that winter was almost upon them, to avoid the fate of the 1846 Donner Party. They were in a rush to get to California, safety, new lives, and gold.

They had guide books but those had been prepared sometimes years before. That was one need. Another was the merchants in California, hungry for the business of the new emigrants. There was pressure to get emigrants to use particular passes for example (fortunately a lot chose Donner Pass). There was pressure on the State to build roads to benefit certain lobbyists. There was a years long effort to get the railroad to go over the Placerville route instead of Donner Pass. Fortunately good taste prevailed.

With the need of emigrants and business people obvious, the signs here were installed on Donner Summit right next to Coldstream



Original wayfinding signs on Donner Summit above Coldstream Pass with their ads circa 1862

\*later to be called billboards.

# Story Locations in this Issue

## DONNER SUMMIT



Donner Summit signs (billboards) pg. 1, 18

Summit Soda Springs pg 4

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**A note to our loyal readers.** Imagine how happy, ecstatic even, you'd be if you found, in cleaning grandma's attic, a 1918 Inverted Jenny postage stamp worth about one million dollars. You'd be really happy grandma never cleaned the attic and liked to mail letters. There are not a lot of the Jenny's around but the DSHS is giving you, free of charge, this month only, the Inverted Heirloom. Then, for some randomly selected people, some Heirlooms are coming with other inversions.

Why you would want to sell such a collector's item we certainly don't know but if you do, remember the DSHS. You don't have to wait for our annual pledge break.



Find us on 

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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

Pass (the pass that settled into major use because Donner Pass required taking wagons apart and Roller Pass was too steep). As the emigrants worked their ways across the pass they could get important information about what awaited them in California: where to replenish supplies, where to buy mining equipment, where the most beautiful women were. Remember, that until the 20th Century the population was overwhelmingly male and parity between the sexes was not reached until the 20th Century (Gary Noy [Hellacious California...](#) which is reviewed on our website and will hit the June, '21 [Heirloom](#).)

The large signs proved a hit and spawned a whole new advertising craze, billboards on every road. Another Donner Summit first.

Our signs, on Donner Summit, changed over time but when I-80 came through the Donner Pass signs went the way of the little communities all along Old 40, disappearing into the memories of travelers past. We were lucky to find these pictures in Norm's incomparable collection of Donner Summit history photographs. Most pictures show the signs blank, presumably for maintenance, but Norm has so many pictures, that a little searching turned up advertisements for liquor, Tinker's Station hotel a few miles west, and the Summit Ice Co. (see last month's Ice Lakes history stories and later on in this issue.)

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## This Month

Last month's exciting issue of the [Heirloom](#) broke the story of the ice industry on Donner Summit, the first settler at Ice Lakes, Ice Lakes, and how to make ice, among a few other things. This month we continue the ice story with a lot of stories and snippets of history. Some readers might be worried that because this is the April 1<sup>st</sup> issue, there might be "history" that is not history. We at the [Heirloom](#) have an impeccable reputation to maintain and would never dream of leading our readers astray. This is real history, easily verifiable with the most cursory of searches.



## What Dreams He Must Have Had!

**I**n 1866 Fitz William Redding Jr., age 20, became the first permanent settler in Ice Lakes, today's Serene Lakes.

What an adventure living in such an exciting time, the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It must have seemed like the entire world was changing so rapidly and that all things were possible. People could communicate with such speed! You could send a letter all the way from Saint Jo to Sacramento in 12 days by Pony Express and the soon to be completed telegraph line would speed messages unbelievably faster. Already local telegraph lines let people send messages and get instant replies. The Transcontinental railroad was being built and soon you would be able to average twenty-two miles an hour cutting the months long cross-country journey to days. People could even fly using balloons as they had demonstrated in the recent war. Clipper ships had made miraculously fast trans-oceanic runs. Steamboats showed that wind wasn't even needed as they plied the rivers and oceans and ships were being made of iron. Factories were being built everywhere changing how people earned their livings. A whole host of inventions was making life and work easier. Farm equipment made growing crops easier with less labor. Health and sanitation had improved saving lives. The wilderness was being vanquished. Waves of settlers were conquering the continent and new wonders were being discovered. Cities were springing up. Social connections were changing. There were new theories of economics and sociology. The United States was growing unstoppably it seemed in big chunks; having doubled in size and doubled again. There was so much in this rich land just for the taking. What an exciting time! (See the "Age of Wonder" in the June, '16 [Heirloom](#).)

It was into this time that Fitz William Redding Jr. was born. He came from adventurous stock his ancestors having left England for New England and generations later, for Canada. His father was a merchant ship owner risking his wealth on the oceans. His much older brother by a different mother, B.B. Redding, had left home at 16 to make his own way in life later leaving his new wife and infant son so he could head for the gold fields of California.

The stories Fitz William must have heard growing up about BB's (we can be familiar here) trip around the Horn to California and about the experiences in the gold fields in the exciting new land and new state, must have made him impatient for his own adventures. When the rest of the family came to California, Fitz William must have traveled the Sierra with his brother as his brother went about his business as land agent of the CPRR and serious fly fisherman.

On some of those trips to Donner Summit to view the new rail route or to see land Mark Hopkins was interested in for a summer home (at Summit Soda Springs, eight miles south from Soda Springs Station, today's Soda Springs), he came across three little lakes just over the ridge and west of the summit. What a spot. How did he convince his father he should be able to patent (buy) the land, that he should be able to settle on it and complete the paperwork once he turned the required age of 21? Did he keep asking over and over (teenagers then couldn't have been too much different from today's and parents likewise)?

Fitz William must have had a lot of drive and enthusiasm to want to settle in the wilderness alone, to be the first permanent settler in Ice Lakes. Being born into an age of wondrous and rapid change, what plans he must have had for his 160 acres. Add the optimism of youth and everything must have seemed possible.

He probably just wore his parents down. Besides his brother had left home at 16 to begin his own life so dad had already been through it once. In September of 1866 Fitz William Jr. built a small 12 X 12 plank cabin and cleared an acre or so of land where the two largest lakes came together. It was a good spot: lakefront, southern exposure, no neighbors, and close to the soon to arrive railroad. There were no roads in the area yet so there were few people to bother him. He could have visited the various summit saloons, hotels, and railroad construction workers' encampments when he wanted companionship, but returning to Serene Lakes, he'd have been absolutely alone except for the occasional hunter.

There was a lot of work for him as he conquered his part of the wilderness: hauling planks from summit sawmills and

building his house, clearing an acre (visualize a football field) of trees. Maybe the trees went to the sawmills and came back as boards. There might have been some furniture to make. Certainly there was the daily search for food.

Then - imagine this - he decided he needed fish in the lakes. He hauled back "three or four hundred trout" to be stocked in Ice Lakes - his lakes. No doubt the idea came from his brother who was really interested in fish, became a fisheries commissioner in California and wrote about fish culture (including how fish farming could refute the Malthusian theory that said increasing population would soon have people starving), having studied the idea back east. Just how did Fitz William haul all those fish up and over the miles from either Donner Lake (where the first Sierra fish farms had just been built) or Summit Soda Springs down on the North Fork of the American River? Since his brother later pulled one hundred fish out of the American in one day and it was only six miles away, it's a safe bet that's where they came from.

Besides farming fish Fitz William was also going to graze animals on the land (Soda Springs Station and Summit Valley later became the second largest sheep shipping station in California), do some dairying (there were a number of dairies on the summit) and maybe harvest ice which looked like it could be a real money maker. What could be a better place?

Fitz William settled in for the winter of 1866-67 but must have been surprised by the snow. Who isn't? By early November he'd gone to live with his parents in Sacramento. The horses couldn't graze and even in November Serene Lakes snow collects in greater amounts than Nova Scotia snow does. Was there also a

girl waiting? That would make a good story.

Fitz William returned in the spring and we can only wonder what he thought when he saw the snow depths as he climbed in altitude. Did he have to leave his horse behind and then hike over the snow to Ice Lakes? How hard was it finding his cabin? Did he spend days looking for it and then digging down to it? Was he sleeping on the snow getting cold and wet? Whatever the case, he soon became sick and returned to Sacramento. He died in June, 1867 just as the railroad was getting to Cisco Grove.

Imagine the dreams he must have had!

**"In Sacramento June 22nd Fitz William Jr. son of F.W. and Mary A. Redding, a native of Nova Scotia, aged 21 yrs + 6 mths."**

**Sacramento Union 6/24/1867**

# Consternation

**I**magine the family's consternation after Fitz William died - beyond losing a son. What would happen to the land? F.W. Jr. had gone to a lot of work and maybe it was the only legacy for grieving parents to hold on to.

Dad was in Marysville within the week to file for the land in the name of his son attesting that he'd been 21 when he settled the land and that he was a native born American. Perceptive readers will have noted that Fitz William wasn't 21 when he settled on the land nor was he a natural-born citizen - both requirements to be eligible for buying land from the government.

Then of course the parents inherited.

When Fitz William Redding took over the patent from his son in 1867, which was the 160 acres that is most of the east side of Serene Lakes, he didn't pay anything. In 1869, he finished the government paper work and paid \$400.00 or \$2.50 an acre for the land. Three years later, he prevailed on the Summit Ice Co. to buy the land for \$800.00 which they did, even though by then the company was constructing ice harvesting facilities down by Prosser and didn't need Serene Lakes. That Fitz William was a major stockholder and officer, and that his son was a director, probably didn't have a lot to do with the company purchasing dad's land at 100% profit.

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## Benjamin Bernard Redding -

*"... a man of great energy and decision of character."*

8/22/1882 Sacramento Union

**B**.B. Redding, founder of The Summit Ice Company in Ice Lakes on what was his brother's land, was an interesting person and would deserve to be written about even if he had no connection with Donner Summit. Once California became a state, he became the first state printer. Later he was a member of the Assembly from Yuba (which in those days included Placer) and Sierra counties, was elected mayor of Sacramento in 1856, was elected Secretary of State in 1863, and became land agent for the Central Pacific Railroad and then for the U.S. government. Along the way he was fisheries commissioner, prison commissioner, a Regent of the University of California, president of the Academy of Sciences, and a newspaper publisher. He also set up the Summit Ice Co. at what is now Serene Lakes and helped run the company for the three years it harvested ice at Serene Lakes from 1869 - 1872. He remained a part of the company after its move to Prosser Creek outside of Truckee.

The first Reddings arrived in America in 1630, coming from England, and settling in Massachusetts. In 1760 the governor of Nova Scotia offered land grants to settlers and Benjamin Redding took him up on it. His son, Herbert moved to Gloucester where he became a ship captain and commanded

a ship out of Salem. He died of yellow fever in 1799 in Jamaica leaving his wife and four kids, one of whom was Fitz William Redding. The family moved back to Nova Scotia. All of Fitz' brothers and sisters died without children, one being killed at sea during the war of 1812. Fitz William became a merchant and ship owner and had four kids, one of whom was our Bernard B. Redding, another of whom was Fitz William Redding, Jr. who settled at Ice Lakes on Donner Summit.

B. B. Redding was born in 1824 and apparently his father was pretty demanding which made living with him hard. Relations between the two got more and more strained and finally at age 16, B.B. left home and headed for Massachusetts. There he went to work as a druggist's clerk and then for a grocer for \$4 a week. Learning the trade, and reconciling with his father, he decided, at age 19, to open his own store with a partner. They failed because, B.B. said, he wouldn't sell alcohol - and alcohol was considered a necessity by many in Massachusetts. As president of the local temperance society, he really couldn't sell alcohol of course. B.B. did get something out of the deal, though; he married his partner's sister.



B.B. wasn't done with business though. He found a couple of partners and they opened a chandlery and grocery. The chandlery business was probably a bit tame so when he was only 24 and a letter came to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia telling the news of the gold discovery in California, he was ready to go off to California. Almost immediately B.B.'s father and another man formed a joint stock company to buy a ship, fill it with cargo and send it to California. B.B. was to be super-cargo to take responsibility for the cargo, leaving his wife with their young son in Nova Scotia.

Once the cargo was disposed of, B.B. went to the gold fields and after much searching, he'd earned the munificent sum of \$3.75. Gold digging being a bust, B.B. went to work at hard labor, moving rocks at Pittsburg Bar for \$10 a day. Living there, he became known for his steady, responsible, character. He wouldn't drink, carouse or take part in any other miner games. This was so at odds with miner life that a friend put a sign, "Saint's Rest", on B.B.'s tent. B.B. left it there.

A turn in his life came when a miner from Australia was accused of putting a pick through another man's head. B.B. defended him in a miner's court and got him off. As B.B. gained respect, miners began to use B.B. to draw up papers, represent them, and arbitrate disputes. He was elected to the county convention and from there went to the state convention.

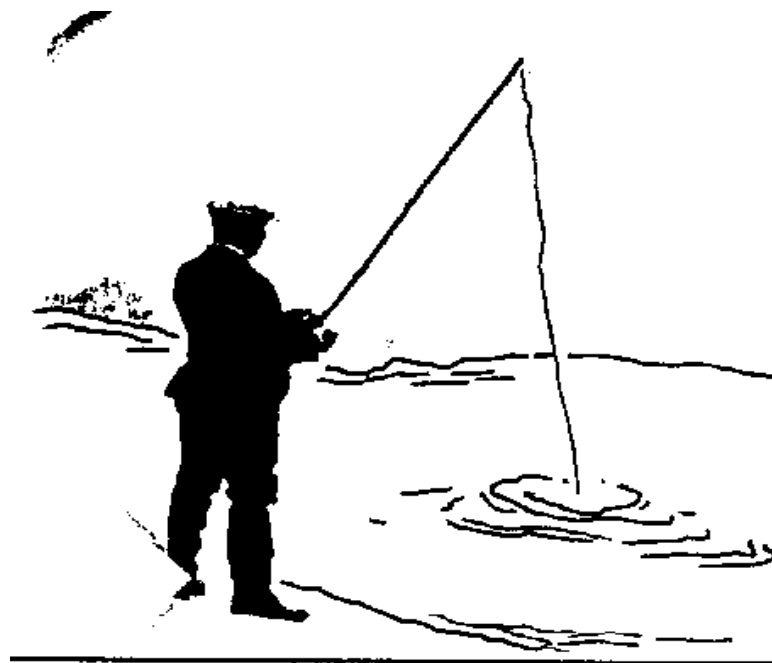
In addition to his various duties, his active mind led him to investigate all kinds of things. He wrote articles and gave presentations on the "Sanitary Influence of Trees", arrowheads, sawdust, ice, artesian water, fossils, pre-historic man, history, weather, nitre, and immigration. One of his major interests was fish. He was an avid fly fisher (supposedly catching about a hundred fish in one 1872 afternoon down at the Summit Soda Springs, the original Soda Springs) and one of his many articles on fish refuted the Malthusian theory arguing that fish culture was increasing the food supply rather than increasing population outstripping it.

Because of his many contributions to California as an early pioneer of the State, the city of Redding was named for him.

As a land agent of the Central Pacific Railroad, we can imagine B.B. traveling the Sierra lands owned by the railroad. By 1866 his brother had built a cabin at Ice Lakes. In 1868, B.B. the entrepreneur, thought those ice lakes would make a good place for ice harvesting so B.B., his father and some friends started the Summit Ice Company building a couple of ice

houses on the lakeshore. Ice Lakes was not a conducive place for ice production so the company moved to Prosser Creek in 1872.

B.B. arrived in California with virtually no money and earned very little in the first few years. By 1860 (census records are an amazing thing) his estate was worth \$6,000 and his family included three boys. By 1870 his estate was worth \$19,000 and he had four boys. A small stroke in 1869 curtailed his activities and sent him on a year long trip of Europe. He continued his many activities afterwards and one morning in August of 1882, he felt a little nauseous after breakfast, so he took his newspaper and went downstairs to lie down and read in the study. There, only 58, he passed away of "apoplexy". His will left half his property to his kids, half to his wife and \$500 a year to his father. By 1882 he'd accumulated a lot of real estate, property, bonds and \$5000 in gold coins. His death was noted in all the major northern California newspapers and one of his pall bearers was the governor of California.



The Summit Ice Company made their first shipment of ice from near Donner Lake on Wednesday. It consisted of two carloads, and was sent to Sacramento. The company has several thousand tons on hand for summer shipment.

Daily National Gazette,  
Nevada City, April 9, 1870:

**CHOICE FROM 12,000,000 ACRES!**

OF NEARLY EVERY VARIETY OF

**FARMING, FRUIT, GRAZING AND TIMBER LANDS.**

## **THE CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD CO.**

now offer, in sections, adjacent to their Railroad lines in California, Nevada and Utah, about twelve million acres of Lands, most of which are well adapted to cultivation, and offer unequalled advantages for settlement or investment.

### **IN CALIFORNIA**

The lands lying on each side of the main line of the Central Pacific Railroad extend from the navigable waters of the Sacramento, above the Bay of San Francisco, across the broadest and most populous portion of the Sacramento Valley and both slopes of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. They are diversified in soil, climate and conditions—embracing the semi-tropical productions of the lower valleys—corresponding with those of Spain, Italy, and the shores of the Mediterranean—the vine, orchard and grain lands of the foot hills—corresponding with those of France, Germany and Austria—and the timber lands of the mountain slopes—corresponding to those of Maine, Sweden, Norway, &c. This central portion of California is already noted for the excellence of its wheat, grapes, pears, cherries, strawberries, small fruits, and garden vegetables generally, and for the ease with which they can be grown to dimensions and perfection unattainable elsewhere. The lands in this belt, purchased of the Company, have resulted in gratifying success to the settlers. Wheat can safely lay in the field till threshed and shipped, and the fruit trees are not troubled by insects or blight.

### **Along the CALIFORNIA & OREGON Branch,**

in the renowned Valley of the Sacramento, extending from the centre to the northern boundary of the State, the Company also offer about 4,000,000 acres, with the same general characteristics. This valley is at present the seat of the most successful culture of small grains (wheat, barley, oats, &c.) in the country, and also offers unrivalled facilities for extensive and profitable sheep and stock grazing. The whole comprises a body of over  
**5,000,000 acres of the BEST LAND IN CALIFORNIA.**

### **IN NEVADA**

the main line of the Central Pacific Railroad occupies the Truckee and Humboldt Valleys, the largest and best settled in the State, at a short distance from numerous and important mining regions, whose yield of the precious metals is estimated at from fifteen to twenty million dollars annually. The lands of the Company—about 3,000,000 acres—are so situated as to command these markets for their produce. Wherever the proper cultivation has been applied these lands have yielded good crops of cereals and esculents.

### **IN UTAH,**

in the Great Salt Lake and contiguous valleys, where the Mormons have so successfully demonstrated the fertility of the soil and the healthfulness of the climate, the Company have about 1,500,000 acres—equal in all respects to the lands which command high prices at the southern portion of the valley. Title patent direct from the U. S. Government. These lands will be sold in quantities and on terms to suit. Immigrants, colonists and capitalists, who desire to acquire indestructible real property, certain to advance in value, will be benefited by an examination. Pamphlets, maps, &c., will be furnished by application to

**B. B. REDDING,**

Land Commissioner Central Pacific R. R. Co.,

*Sacramento, Cal*

### **Along the Route of the SOUTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD.**

The undersigned has also been authorized by the Southern Pacific Railroad Company of California to offer, in conjunction with the above, about 3,000,000 acres, situated on both sides of the line of their road, now building, extending from the Bay of San Francisco, at San Jose, southwardly, to the Colorado River (700 miles). This grant covers some of the best lands in the coast and valley counties of the southern half of California, including the far-famed wheat lands of the Contra Costa, San Joaquin, Tulare, Kern River and other valleys. Sheep and cattle husbandry are extensively and successfully carried on there.

Parties desiring information relative to large tracts can apply at the office of the Central Pacific Railroad Company, *54 William Street, New York.*

**C. P. HUNTINGTON, Vice-Prest.**

Ad for the sale of railroad land obtained from the Federal Government as part of the legislation for the transcontinental railroad. Note B.B. Redding's name.

# The Journey of the Mary Jane

The idea was to do some mining of the miners. The limited stock company started by Ebenezer Haley and Fitz William Redding bought a fast ship, the Mary Jane, and filled it with cargo to sell in California. It was a close call though, getting to California and except for the good fortune of picking up a Massachusetts Indian in the Galapagos, there might have been no B.B. Redding in California, no city named Redding, no ice harvested on Ice Lakes, and this Heirloom would be fairly empty.

The organization of the ship's company was unusual since "All the officers, from captain to cook, and all the sailors were owners, and had an equal voice and vote..." (Sacramento Union 11/20/1878). "We were the most democratic-republican company that ever went in search of the Golden Fleece." Even though "the cook being an equal owner with the Captain, and the fore-castle having the power to out-vote the captain, discipline was observed."

Down to the equator the company had a normal voyage and must have been a really fun group since they held daily gatherings to sing temperance (anti-alcohol) songs. They hit Cape Horn after 75 days at sea and got through after only a little trouble. At the Galapagos, the passengers took on water and beef and then hunted down a deck load of 50 immense turtles.

Trouble began when they were becalmed for 26 days west of Mexico. Food and water began to run short and were rationed, with water rationed to one pint per person per day. By April 9<sup>th</sup> the last of the water had been rationed out. There was no more. If some solution wasn't found, the ship's company would die of thirst. While at the Galapagos Islands, though, they'd picked up an Indian from Massachusetts who had been left there by a whaling ship when he'd become sick. He "had begged imploringly to be taken to California..." and the company was lucky they took him because as a boy he'd worked in a distillery. Using his knowledge, some of the crew was able to fashion a distiller. Using the cook's largest kettle and a gun barrel which passed through a keg filled with cold seawater, they distilled sea water into five gallons of drinking water a day. The problem wasn't completely solved and during the ordeal some interesting facets of human behavior became obvious giving B.B. the opportunity to write about some fascinating insights. Some people were generous, some hoarded, some spent their water trading for alcohol and tobacco, some wasted it, and some pooled their rations. Some of the crew demanded that the hoarders share their water since why should they have what they'd saved all to themselves? Before things came to a head though, the winds picked up. Then their chief worry was not human nature, but "that all the gold would be exhausted from the mines before we reached them."

The ship finally pulled into San Francisco on May 2<sup>5</sup><sup>th</sup>, 1850 after six months at sea. Twenty five other ships were in port with like cargoes so the Mary Jane's cargo was not a success except for the hardware, wagons, and turtles. The turtles "sold like hot-cakes." The Mary Jane herself sold for \$1300 and went off to the South Seas, unlike many other ships that were sunk, became stationary stores or even foundations for buildings in San Francisco.

## Cloudy Title

You can imagine just a little consternation at a Summit Ice Co. meeting in Sacramento during the summer of 1869. The buildings had just been built, ice would begin to be harvested when winter came and they were looking forward with anticipation. Money was to be made. Maybe someone idly wondered about the status of the land. Probably there was a pregnant pause - a detail overlooked. Well the darn kid died on us. We filed an initial claim. Initial? It hasn't been finalized? We haven't paid for it? We haven't done the paperwork? Anyone can claim our ice houses? Well... We've got \$50,000 dollars invested up there! So they trooped off to the land office to fix things up, sign papers, pay, and make attestations, "so help me God."

Suppose the original patenting of Serene Lakes wasn't done exactly "according to Hoyle." Would current ownership of its various parts be called into question? Would all of the owners of Serene Lakes lots and houses have cloudy title?



In order to patent (purchase) land from the federal government, you could not already have purchased 320 acres of land from the government or owned other land in the territory in which you wanted to patent land; you had to be at least 21 years of age and white; you had to settle on the land for a year (before making payment), make improvements and use it for your own use only; and you had to be a native-born American (which of course left the Native Americans out? - but I digress - besides they weren't white), and you had to use the land for agriculture and not trade.

Along came a settler, Fitz William Redding Jr., to Ice Lakes in 1866 where he built a cabin and cleared land, intending to settle. Unfortunately, he was only 20 years old and was not a native-born American. He lived in Ice Lakes for about two months before being driven out by the snow and went to live with his family in Sacramento. He returned in the spring and was almost immediately taken ill and went back to Sacramento where he died. Dad rushed to Marysville within the week to begin the patenting process. The patenting process was not complete though, and in order for his father to claim the patent, some proof that the requirements had been met was required.

In 1869 F.W.'s brother, B.B., and Jacob Hoehn attested to Fitz William's having settled the land, saying that he'd been 21 years old when he had settled in Serene Lakes, he'd been native born, improved the land, and there were no minerals or mines on the land.

In order to make a claim, the land first had to be surveyed. F.W. Jr.'s father dated the claim on Ice Lakes as of Sept. 17, 1866 which was when Junior had built the cabin. The land wasn't surveyed until a month later. That's just a small discrepancy though.

F.W. Jr. wasn't 21 when he settled the land. He didn't turn 21 until some months later and by then he'd gone back to Sacramento to live. He did return in the spring, but just for a short time until he got sick.

Dad also had to swear that F.W. Jr. was settling it for himself, would not "sell the same on speculation," would "appropriate to his own exclusive use or benefit," would not use it for trade, and had not made any agreements with anyone else that would result in the transfer of title. This is all debatable of course. This was 1869, the ice company, which could be seen as engaged in trade, had been incorporated the year before and buildings had just been built. F.W. Jr. had died three years before. There was something more going on here than just one person's "exclusive use and benefit" or just the "purposes of...agriculture [and not trade]." His brother had attested, "so help me God" that the boy was going to harvest ice on the lakes, "that he might use the lakes in obtaining ice therefrom...."

Fitz William Redding's death notice says, "native of Nova Scotia" which hardly makes him native-born although he was probably white. He could have gotten around that by becoming a naturalized citizen or swearing that he wanted to become one, but since he was dead he couldn't swear. Certainly his brother ran away from Nova Scotia at the age of 16 in 1840 and it was a letter that arrived there that set in motion the joint stock company to buy the Mary Jane and fill her with cargo. For those of you who dislike conspiracies and see glasses as half full, perhaps I can ease your minds on this small aspect. It's possible that dad was a citizen and so his son would have been one automatically.

Young F.W. did erect a residence and improve the land, but he had not settled on it for the requisite one year before offering payment. Payment was offered three years later though.

The two attestors also said they had absolutely no interest in the land which would of course lend veracity to their statements. The fact that B.B. Redding and Jacob Hoehn were at that moment engaged in running the ice company on that land and had invested \$50,000 dollars in it was perhaps not enough interest to mention?

# Patenting Government Land

When America was new it was of course undeveloped and a major push by the government was not saving land but developing and populating it. So the government offered incentives to people to move west and settle.

Just in case you find yourself back in time with a few dollars in your pocket and some nice land in view, here's how to purchase public land from the U.S. Government.

- Patenting land means to buy it from the government.
- You'll have to wait for the official governmental survey.  
You can't buy before that.
- You may patent up to 160 acres.
- You must actually settle on the land.
- You may pay for the land and take title only after residing on it for a year.
- You must erect a residence and make improvements.
- You will be required to pay \$1.25 or \$2.50 per acre.
- Indians can't have any claim on the land.
- You must use the land for agriculture and not for trade.
- You must not own other land in the territory nor more than 320 acres elsewhere in the U.S.
- The land can have no valuable minerals or salt, nor can it be in a town or within a mile of a military fort.

All the money collected by the federal government was apportioned to the states by population.

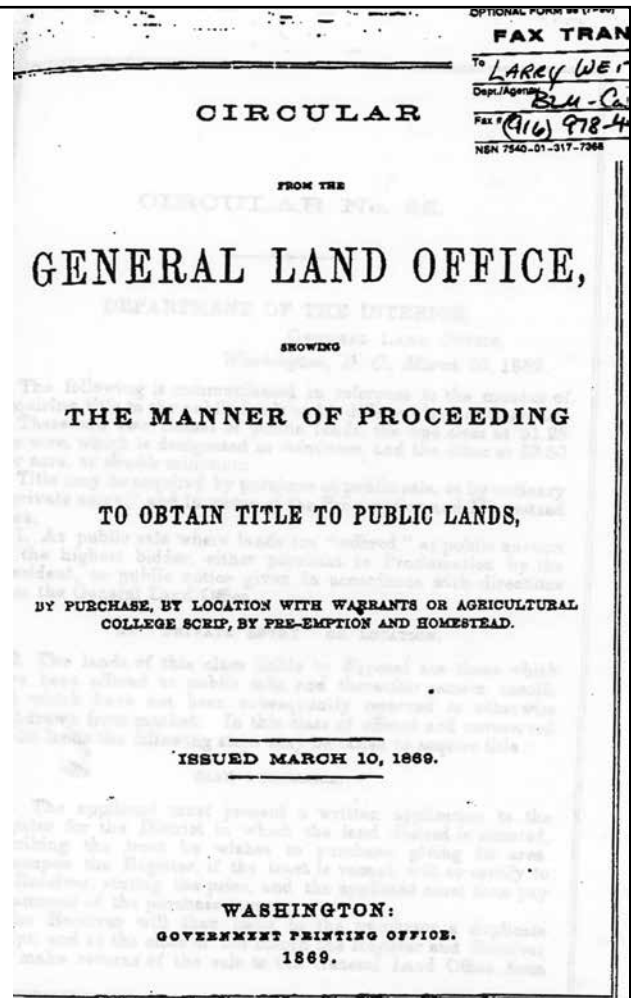
## How people first got land on Donner Summit

Originally, not counting Native Americans, all the land belonged to the Federal Government.

Various acts of Congress enacted methods for the public to get a hold of public lands. These acts encouraged settlement and development of course, but also served to reward people for services rendered. There are examples of all of those ways of transfer on Donner Summit.

Finally, a third method of getting Government land is evident on the summit. Part of what is now Van Norden meadow was issued to Adam Morgenroth as a military patent sometime before 1875 for his services in the military. Veterans could purchase land only if they had been honorably discharged, had been privates or non-commissioned officers, and if they had served a year or more. The idea was to encourage enlistment as well as settle the west.


A man named Elisha Wood bought Soda Springs ski hill in 1871 and George Sheriff bought 160 acres that looks like it might include the Soda Springs hotel land in 1876. We can make some guesses about what they were doing with their land without looking at the census data. Soda Springs and the summit was a going community in the 1870's. Lumber and sheep were



shipped in abundance and a nascent tourist industry was building. It was the age when Mr. Tinker whipped his horses down Baker Ranch Rd. to the hotel at Summit Soda Springs (one day to be featured in the [Heirloom](#)). The state of California also bought land on the summit from the U.S. government for \$1.25 per acre.

Land not patented remained in the public domain and became today's National Forest lands.

**United States of America,**



**Marysville Land District, State of California.**

**To All to Whom these Presents shall Come, Greeting:**


KNOW YE, That *the Heirs of Fitz William Redding Jr deceased*  
*by Fitz William Redding Jr father of dec<sup>d</sup> of Placer* — County, a  
*who was a Native Born*  
citizen of the United States, a *un* married man, and *over*  
the age of twenty-one years, *has on this 29<sup>th</sup>* day of *June*  
in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-*seven* filed with  
the Register of the Marysville Land District, of the State of California, at the Land Office in Marysville, his DECLARATORY STATEMENT, wherein *he* claims to have SETTLED and IMPROVED, on the  
*17<sup>th</sup>* day of *September* — A. D. 1866 the following  
described Government Lands, to wit:

*North East*

---

Quarter of Section..... *34*  
Township No..... *17N*  
Range No..... *14E*  
Mount Diablo Base and Meridian,  
containing *160* acres,  
which Land has *Not* been offered at Public Sale.

**In Testimony Whereof, I** *L.P. Ayer*  
have hereunto set my hand and seal at the U. S. Land Office, in the  
City of Marysville, on this *29<sup>th</sup>* day of *June* — A. D. 186*7*

*L.P. Ayer*   
Register.

No. *3945*  
T. *17N* R. *14E*  
Base and Meridian of Mount Diablo,  
containing *160* acres.

Proof and payment must be made before *Public Land Sale* but not before *30 Sept 1867*.

Fitz William Redding's initial filing to obtain his son's land.

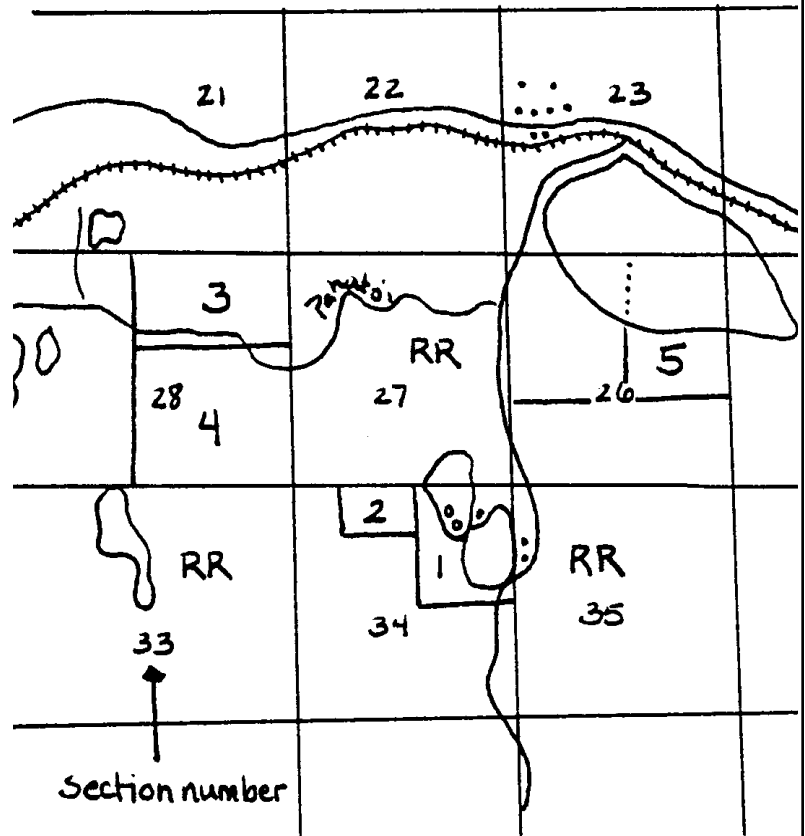
# A Lot of Miscellany for your Enjoyment

The ice harvesters were full of themselves in 1869 on Ice Lakes. The ice houses had been built, the transcontinental railroad had just been completed and couple of hundred or so people were traveling over the Sierra by railroad daily. Imagine them thinking, what else can we do besides ice?

An interesting idea in the October 19, 1869 Alta California (S.F.) newspaper said, "The Summit Ice Company in preparing for the winter's business has constructed a substantial shed 450 feet long by 80 feet in width over the surface of a small lake near Truckee Station, at the Summit, which is proposed to be used for a skating rink. By the use of a floodgate connecting the upper lake, new ice can be formed whenever desired. The place can be reached within one day's travel from San Francisco, and excursion rates will doubtless induce persons fond of skating to frequently visit the location during the winter season."

It's an interesting idea and shows entrepreneurial spirit. Perhaps if the snowfall hadn't been so great there would have been hotels around the lakes and Ice Lakes would have been one of the first winter resorts since it's just off the major trans-Sierra route.

On the other hand the same newspaper tells just how long the express train trip to the Sierra was on the newly completed transcontinental line. The trains left daily from San Francisco at 7 A.M., got to Sacramento at 1:50, Colfax at 5:25, and (extrapolating back from the Reno arrival) perhaps to the summit at 9 P.M. That would accommodate only the most dedicated ice skaters especially since there wasn't much in the way of hotels. The second class trains left even later and went slower but the fare was (again extrapolating) perhaps only \$20.00 and you could take 100 pounds of luggage free!



Hand drawn map of part of Donner Summit that includes Ice Lake (next to the "1" and "2"). The section numbers are in the centers of the squares. The "RR's" indicated railroad owned land. The lines within the sections with numbers show land patented from the Federal Government.

## How Much Sawdust

Sawdust makes a pretty good insulator since it traps air. It was also convenient to use in the old days since it was readily available. So the ice houses of the Sierra used sawdust as insulation. A curious mind might then wonder that in a given size ice house, just how much sawdust insulation was there? To save you the calculations we can figure that an ice house the size of the Summit Ice Company's (a "substantial shed 450 feet long by 80 feet in width over the surface of a small lake" with twelve foot ceilings) would have contained 48,729 cubic feet of sawdust or 1804 cubic yards. Now if we figure that a dump truck holds 10 yards, that comes to a lot of dump trucks full of sawdust. Since they didn't have dump trucks just imagine the number of horse drawn wagons.

Take a look too at the dimensions. 450 feet long is one and a half football fields and 80 feet wide is just a little narrower. If they tried to span the 80 feet the way they would have down in Sacramento... no wonder the ice house collapsed.

No. 235 Receiver's Office at Sacramento August 16<sup>th</sup> 1869.

RECEIVED from Fitz William Redding one of the heirs of  
Fitz William Redding deceased  
of Placer County California the sum of Four

Hundred dollars and \_\_\_\_\_ cents; being in full for the

North East \_\_\_\_\_ quarter of Section No. 34 \_\_\_\_\_ in Township

No. Seventeen North of Range No. Fourteen East containing

one hundred & Sixty acres and \_\_\_\_\_ hundredths, at

\$2.50 per acre.

\$400

Wart Fellows Receiver.

1869 Receipt to Fitz William Redding for his son's purchase of 160 acres of Government land on Donner Summit for \$400 or \$2.50 per acre.

## It Was Better Down in Truckee

Ice harvesting did not last long on Donner Summit. Summit companies and others started up operation in the Truckee area:

"The Truckee basin is the paradise of ice men. On the eastern slope of the Sierras [sic] the snow falls to a much less depth than at the summit, and the cold is much more intense than on the western slope. During the intensely cold weather of December, 1879, the thermometer marked 38° below zero, and the mercury refused any longer to perform its functions."

History of Nevada County 1880 pg 166

## Why Ice Companies Had to Consolidate

"There are now seven ice companies engaged [in the ice business]...the Summit Ice Co. [to become the Union Ice Co. in 1882]... These companies have a storage capacity of 60,000 tons, an amount that is far in excess of the consumption of that portion of the coast to which ice can be profitably shipped. At least three times the quantity that can be consumed here is annually in store, some of it kept over year to year."

History of Nevada County 1880 pg 166

"The Gazette has made some effort to ascertain the quantities stored by the different companies on the Truckee and vicinity and find that there has already been gathered more than sufficient for two or three years."

Reno Gazette  
January 24, 1879  
by B.B. Redding

## It Sounded Like a Good Idea

Lumber and water were both transported in flumes to great advantage. So it was thought that cakes of ice could similarly travel.

An 1873 experiment was tried sending a cake of 11" thick ice down a 3 mi. flume. It was only 3" thick at the end so the idea was abandoned.

Joseph Graham, ass't. engineer for the Union Pacific from A High Road to Promontory



# How the Research was done

The research for the articles in the March and April, '21 [Heirlooms](#) about the ice industry on Donner Summit was an adventure. The adventure started with the question of who was the first settler at Ice Lakes? At the time we didn't even know why Serene Lakes had been called Ice Lakes. That was 1997 which was a time when, although there was an internet, there was not much on it. The adventure required using an old method of historical research, visiting institutions called libraries.

Prior to 1997 none of the history in these [Heirloom](#) issues had been written down and in order to put it all into a good set of stories required following a convoluted path. It was all pieced together one small clue at a time. One seemingly little thing would just be a chance lead to something else that would be really important. For example, I was looking for one person ignoring others who had the same common last name. Surrounded by stacks of books in the State Library's California History Room, I was ready to give up. Records of normal every day things from the old days just aren't common. Nobody ever thought to write them down. Then, there it was in the last book I was going to pick up. It wasn't even really a book – just a binding of typewritten\* sheets by the Daughters of the American Revolution. The index contained a small reference to the name I wanted. I turned to the page and thought I had failed again because the page was about the Haley Family about whom I couldn't have cared less. After scanning the page twice, I saw one reference to the name I wanted, Fitz William Redding. That small reference opened up a family history and connected to another name and then another. I'd found the guy, B.B. Redding, who started the ice company at Ice Lakes and that was just a small part of his fascinating life. He was connected to the Haley family through an 1849 business venture.

Little things led me to the State Archives for ice company records. Down some rickety metal corkscrew stairs under the State Capitol I followed a wizened old man whose pale leathery skin looked like it hadn't seen daylight in generations. He moved with a remarkable speed that belied his age and an unerring sense of direction in the darkened corridors. The scent of old papers, of treasure to be explored was exciting. At the bottom of the stairs he chose one of many passage ways between stacks of records and took off even faster. I could see that some patrons might have trouble keeping up. Did he ever lose people by outpacing them? Were they still down there? He slowed to consult his memory once or twice and each time put out a gnarled index finger which he followed like a water witch following a divining rod. The finger bent left and we went left; the finger went right and so did we.

We followed that finger to my total confusion and I was sure if the old fellow died down there so would I because my sense of direction had already died in the dimly lit passageways. I wanted to slow down and explore the many old boxes we were passing. What treasures do they contain? Suddenly the old man put his hand in my chest stopping me abruptly. He thought a second, consulted his memory, his eyes widened and he nodded. He smiled slightly and turned left down an even smaller corridor. Mid-way down the finger found a box and then paging through the documents he extracted the incorporation papers of the Summit Ice Co. (see last month's [Heirloom](#)).

That's not quite how the research was done. When you show up at the Bancroft Library, the State Library's California History

## Sources

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California State Library  
Placer County Recorder's Office  
Bureau of Land Management  
U.C. Berkeley map room  
Sacramento City library  
Sacramento City cemetery  
federal archives (by mail)  
Boalt Hall library  
U.C. Davis law library  
Yarmouth County Museum, Yarmouth, Canada  
Searls Library, Nevada City

Room, the Sutro Library in San Francisco, the State Archives, the California Department of State, or many of the other repositories of what we can call deep history, you turn in a request and someone goes off and fills it. There's no browsing allowed and you're not even allowed to see what you might like to browse. The "pickers" in the libraries only bring back what you request and that's maybe a good thing. Were it not the case, people would live in the archives and become pale for lack of sunshine. On the other hand is it fair for these denizens of the archives to have exclusive browsing rights?

Enough digressions.

Research started, as I remember, with The History of Nevada County. That turned up some names involved with Summit Ice. The Bureau of Land Management came soon after to find out who bought land from the Federal Government on Donner Summit. With those names the U.S. Government Archives were next because there they have interviews done with applicants wanting to patent land (buy land from the Federal Government). There we begin to get personal. These were actual people who were just like us. They had moved to California to better their lives and each had a story to tell.

You can imagine my excitement when part of the historical research bore some specific fruit. Sitting in the State library's California History Room, I'd opened a booklet published by the Union Ice Co. in 1943. They boasted of their contributions to help the war effort, talked of all their activities and partners, and then, describing their history, they remarked that the company had first been called the Sierra Lakes Ice Company. The Sierra Lakes they were talking about were the Ice Lakes on Donner Summit. It was a small error on their part though, because the literature misnamed the company. That brought up Benjamin Bernard Redding which led to Fitz William Redding and then Fitz William Redding Jr. That took me, via mail, to the Yarmouth Co. Museum in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia and the story began to tell itself.

\*mechanical device for transcribing thought to paper by means of pressing keys attached to letters.

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## Ice Lakes - The Novel

**N**ow that we've got the bare facts, imagine the story we could write about the young man coming to Ice Lakes with his big plans in 1866. First there were his formative years - hearing about the twenty year older big brother he barely remembered and his adventures in California. Then there was the family's trip to California and Fitz William's getting to know the new land and the Sierra during his travels through 1866 California.

Traveling along the transcontinental rail route then being built, he came upon those beautiful three lakes. How long did it take him to decide settling there was what he wanted to do with his life? What arguments and discussions were there with his parents and what was the final argument that got dad to agree not only to his moving there but to pay for the land? \$400 was a lot of money. Did mom finally approve or was she still against it, weeping as he rode off with his bedding and plans?

Imagine what it was like building the cabin and clearing an acre or so of land. Imagine the people he met on the Summit. With whom did he interact? Did he get into any card games? What were the hangers-on of the railroad construction crews like? He must have met some of the railroad bigwigs through his brother who was the land agent and friend of at least some. Perhaps he met the first Government surveyors who surveyed the lands for patenting by people like him. What was it like watching the railroad being built, seeing the exotic Chinese workers and their strange customs, meeting the first Government surveyor the month after he settled (is that when he got the idea to buy - had he just been squatting - or had he staked it out just waiting for the surveyor?), seeing the beauty of the area, planning his dreams?

Was there a girl down in Sacramento (named Serena with a twin sister named Sybil or Dulzura? (The later names of the three lakes) just waiting for him (all good novels have a love angle)? How did he transport fish to put them in the lakes? He certainly didn't herd them - although there was a lot of herding going on in those days. And what about the trip up? Was it getting late? Did he have to rush? Was he accosted by fish rustlers or hungry bear? Did his first try end with the fish dying for lack of oxygen?

How much was he influenced by his brother and his success? How much was he in competition with his brother who had already been mayor of Sacramento and California Secretary of State? Did he despair of ever measuring up? We know he must have listened to his brother who was an advocate of fish culture. What was it like living alone on the shores of Lake Dulzura? Whom did he see passing by on the stage across the bridge between the lakes on the way to Summit Soda Springs? Did he go down to Soda Springs with Mark Hopkins to the soon to become famous estate being built there? Did he have the same stormy adolescent relationship with his father that his brother had had? Was he worried about trespassers?

Then he settled in for the winter having gotten a lot done but probably not as much as he had wanted to, but did the snow rise too high unexpectedly or did he miss the girl in Sacramento, or was he just lonely? Returning from Sacramento in the spring of 1867 did he take the train to Cisco and what were his thoughts about linking the continent with the railroad's ribbons of steel soon? What did he find when he returned to his cabin? Could he find it? Donner Summit averages 34 feet a snow in winter. Did he have to camp out while searching for it digging down where he thought he'd left it, or had it collapsed? He returned to Sacramento one final time, apparently very sick and died, age just barely 21.

But the novel has to go on from there: the scramble to get title to the land, the coming of the ice houses, the snows, the stage to Mark Hopkins' hotel piloted by Mr. Tinker, and "Tinker's Defeat" where he crashed on a sharp turn. We'd have to cover the mysterious railroad grade depression that runs the length of Serene Lakes' east side and up and over the hill to Soda Springs. Who built it for what and why?

Maybe too we'd have to carry it further to pre-World War I when Mifs (or Miss) York lived alone on the shore and traveled to visit friends at the Cedars, the original Soda Springs. We'd go on to World War II and the coming of the first lodge and with it the soldiers to guard the transcontinental railroad. After the war the lodge became an R & R spot of military personnel. Later there was the beginning of the Serene Lakes Club, a family camping enterprise with big plans for ski hills, horseback riding, archery, coffee klatches, etc. That failed. Then there were the lots sales in the mid-50's and the coming of the dam that reduced Serene Lakes to two lakes (goodbye Sybil), and finally the modern day. Perhaps we'd go into the future dealing with Summit growth, new developments and resorts.

Here's a good part. Mrs. Fish (summer resident of the Cedars) says her aunt, age 93, remembers visiting an old lady who lived alone at Serene Lakes in 1913 or so. Old topographic maps from the 1950's show the Serene Lakes Lodge and three other buildings: the ice houses no doubt and the location of Fitz William Jr.'s cabin, another building. There's nothing else. Just suppose Fitz had a girl. Spring of 1867 rolls around and he's headed back to the mountains but she can't go - because it would be unseemly of course for a well bred girl to... They hadn't married since Fitz wanted to get things going in Ice Lakes first - he's responsible of course - but he's enthralled her with stories of the beauty of the area, the deer drinking at the lakes at sunset, the bear that visits pawing the door. It's not that lonely - only a six hour train ride to Sacramento and there are a number of women on the summit running hotels as well as some families. Imagine her sorrow as he heads off again for the mountains - but hoping he'll soon be back - for her - no matter what her father says. Then her joy when she hears he's returned a few weeks later and her despair when she sees he's deathly ill.

He dies and she's heart broken. He was her one and only. She reaches 21 and, defying her father, moves to the cabin on Serene Lakes to be near his spirit and what gave him life. She's still there when Mrs. Fish's aunt visits on the way to the Cedars 47 years later.

It could have happened and she would have been very old. Her name of course, would have to have been Serena.

# One More Thing we Swear is True

Talk to people where the two remaining Serene Lakes come together. Island Way juts out to make a narrow strait between the two lakes but I understand that last is not the best place to see him.

In the evenings, when the light is just right, it's really quiet and there's a hint of fall or even winter in the air, when most of the season's main work is done, you'll have to look closely, and you'll sometimes see a figure standing on the shore gazing out over Lake Serena. He never answers if he's greeted; he just stands deep in thought as if he's focused on something only he can see. Maybe he's planning - but what?

Bringing up more fish, clearing more land? Where to put an ice house and how to get the ice out to the railroad in winter? Maybe he's thinking of an addition to his cabin - raising a family on Serene Lakes - not a bad idea - or taking his future sons fly fishing (which he learned from his brother). Perhaps he's thinking of a dam at the lower end; but that's not his property - the Government would only sell him 160 acres. If you're real lucky and it's really quiet, and you're open to it, you'll hear the jingle of harness and the clapping of horses' hooves approaching and then the rumble as Mr. Tinker drives his stage over the planks of the timber bridge of the road that goes between the lakes. The figure at the lake may turn and wave and if you're in the way, you'll think he's waving at you. If you see him, don't worry; he has a right to be there; he has unfinished work - the work of his dreams. He's enjoying the lakes like everyone else.

# Odds & Ends on Donner Summit

Eventually the wayfinding signs on Donner Summit were re-purposed as microwave repeaters. That happened in the 1980's when PGE needed a substation at Donner Ski Ranch. There was no direct line of sight for microwave controls and so a passive repeater was installed on Donner Pk. The Microwaves could be aimed at it and then bounced down to the substation for controls. Donner Summit gets a lot of snow which piles up. The high piles can exert pressure which sometimes changed the alignment of the repeater so the signals would no longer aim at the microwave antenna. On those occasions Norm Saylor, president of the DSHS and former owner of Donner Ski Ranch, would drive up in a Donner Ski Ranch grooming machine and move snow. The angle was fixed, communication returned. Norm was a hero.



Original 1861 wayfinding sign on Donner Summit for the Summit Ice Co.



Modern pictures of the microwave relays on Donner Pk.



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

If you find any "Odds & Ends" you'd like to share pass them on to the editor - see page 2

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



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\_\_\_\_\_



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