

The Donner Summit

Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

December, 2021 issue #160

Pot Pourri

We received a package in the mail last March from Sue Ward. She and her sister had previously visited the DSHS and donated a large amount of digital material about Crampton's Lodge and their grandfather, C. B. Crampton. That, along with other material, was mentioned in the February, '20 [Heirloom](#) and featured in the May, June, July, November, '16 [Heirlooms](#), and the December, '18 [Heirloom](#). Crampton's Lodge sat where the Rainbow exit from I-80 is today and the coming of the freeway was the end of the lodge.



C.B. and Ethyl Crampton in the little store they ran at Crampton's lodge.

Last March Sue had finished going through her grandfather's things and had a few more things to donate and that's what we have here in this [Heirloom](#) issue. We should note at this point, that you should read the sidebar here to the right. We gladly accept all accolades for our hard working staff. We also accept historical items you may want to donate or have us copy. Then, you too, might be in the [Heirloom](#) as Sue Ward just appeared above.

We've titled this issue "Pot Pourri" because it is an eclectic collection of pictures and other things, many coming from the Crampton Collection.

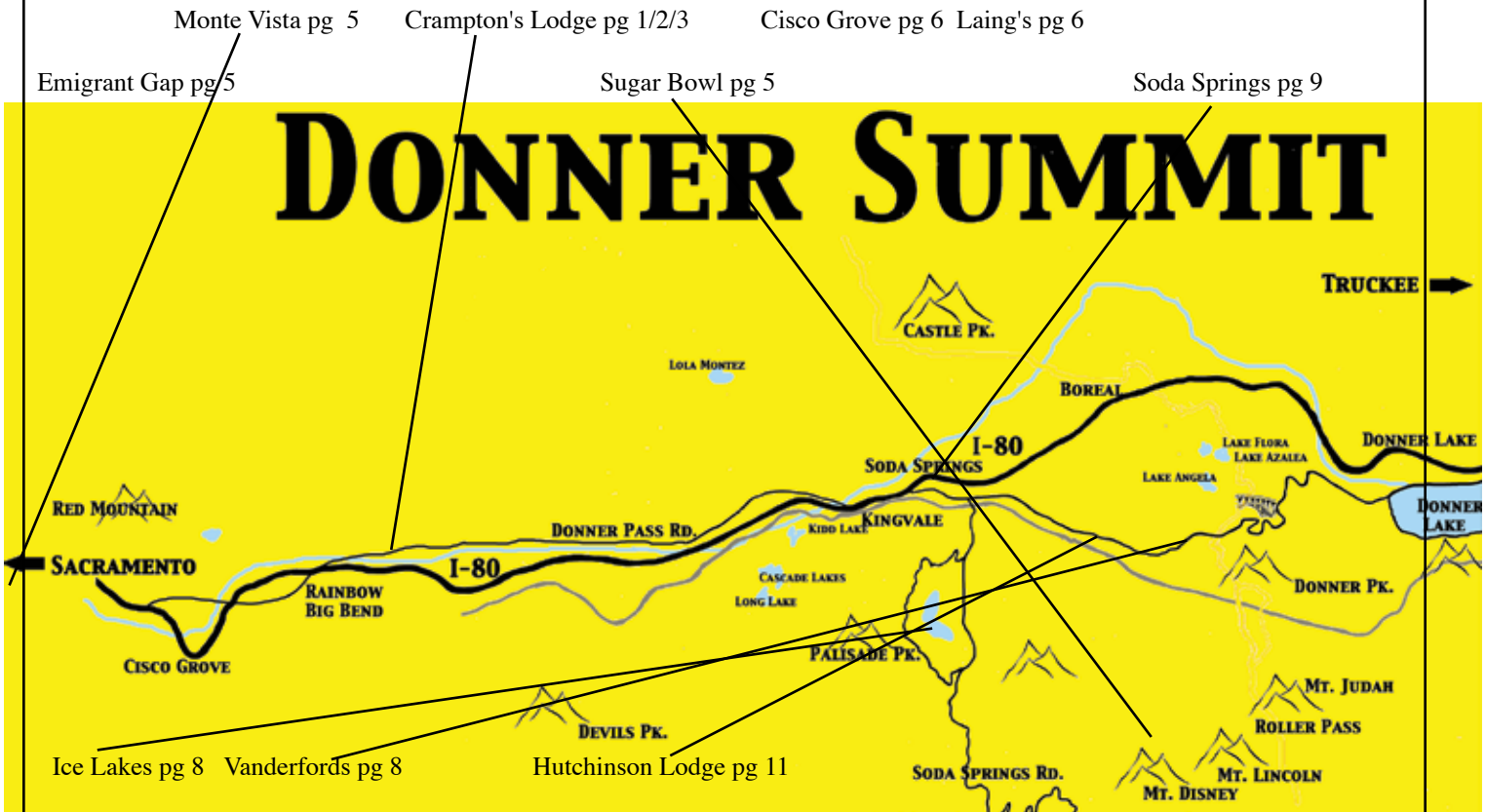
Also in this issue, we have some other miscellaneous items that have been sitting patiently in folders awaiting [Heirloom](#) exposure.

"It's so nice to see the history of the area preserved in the museum plus the informative newsletter that bring the history of the area alive. My compliments... for... such an excellent job in producing the monthly newsletter.

"Thanks for all your hard work in keeping the history of the Donner Summit area available to the public to enjoy."

Sue Ward
C.B. Crampton's
granddaughter

Story Locations in this Issue



Crampton's 1940's

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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

Find us on 

Here is some of C.B. Crampton's philosophizing

Thoughts of a Hill Billy

It's six o'clock – and it is Sunday evening.
A hillbilly sits by the fireplace – alone --- meditating
An airplane is droning overhead.
The Lodge is quiet – and dark – and dismal like.
The Lodge – here in the High Sierras of California – is my home.
But it takes more than one person in a house to make it a home.
And tonight I'm alone – and I'm lonely
Circumstances beyond the control of myself and my family requires
That I be alone most of the winter – excepting on week ends.
The fire – crackling in the fireplace – has sounded more cheerful on other evenings—

Even my dog is forlorn – sitting outside, looking down the road –
Wondering what it's all about – folks coming and going –
Always coming and going.
Only a few hours ago loved ones were feasting – talking and
Laughing – and such a feast!
Outside it's snowing – one of Nature's ways of smiling on a dismal world.

Life is a funny proposition!
It takes so little to make one happy – so little to make one sad.
Wonder why loved ones can't be together --- always!
Wonder why there has to be WAR!
Wonder why there have to be so many dreams that never come true—
So many fond hopes shattered – so many disappointments!
Then comes slumber – and all is forgotten
Tomorrow the sun will shine again!

Written by C.B. Crampton
At Crampton's Lodge
Soda Springs, California
Winter of 1951-1952



Crampton's Lodge



Donner Summit Bridge, 1939 by John Quimby. All pictures on this page are from the Crampton Collection



Caught near Crampton's Lodge on the old Donner Trail.

Fish from the Yuba River about 1945

Nyack Lodge below. When the freeway arrived the lodge building was put on wheels and taken to its current location on the south side of the freeway at the Nyack exit. This is a postcard.



Public Camp at Hampshire Rocks Calif. opposite Crampton's Lodge, An Ideal Vacation spot on U.S. Highway No. 40. 55 miles west of Reno Nevada.

John Quimby took this picture of Hampshire Rocks campground in the 1930's, judging from the cars in the background. Sign on the trailer says, "Worms for Sale." The picture says this is an "ideal location spot" "opposite Crampton's Lodge." Today you take the Rainbow exit from I-80 and find this spot on the south side of the freeway along the river.

EVERYONE STOPS AT—
MONTE VISTA INN

Spend your holidays at Monte Vista! Just a few minutes to the west's finest skiing! All the comforts of smart living at prices that are a pleasant surprise. Make your reservations now!

Cocktail Lounge	American and
Coffee Shop	European Plan
Modern Rooms	Phone Dutch
Gift Shop	Fiat 5-J

65 Miles Above Sacramento On Highway 40

ROGERS & ROGERS GEORGE A. NOVAK



WINTER SPORTS



EMIGRANT GAP!



On Victory Highway 40 and the Southern Pacific Main-Line! Seven Hundred Ft. Ski Hill! Equipment for Rent

Restaurant, Cocktail Bar, Dancing!
 Always a Pleasant Week-end Assured

Hotel Accommodations \$3.50 and \$4.50
 Per Day, Including Three Meals

ELEVATION 5,218 FEET

EMIGRANT GAP HOTEL
 Joe GORTOPASSI—Evelyn

Ads from 1940
 from the Crampton
 Collection

Ski at the ...

SUGAR BOWL

California's Number One
 Ski Resort. Modern Lodge.
 Accommodations at low
 rates. Chairlift and two
 rope tows. Average snow
 depth, fifteen feet.

Season, December to June

*Dress Up!
 Holidays ahead!*

Styled by Brandon!

**Sale! Men's
 \$21.75 Suits**

Pay
 Monthly! **1975**

Who says you can't afford a new suit for the Holidays? Let Wards show you how little it costs to dress the way you want to! Enjoy smart patterns, perfect fit, long-wearing fabrics.

A Gift He'll enjoy Wearing!

Leather Jackets

At Wards Lower Price!

Try to match this smartness for less than \$6 elsewhere! Fine, smooth suede leather, amply cut and handsomely tailored. Knit bottom; full slide fastener front

598

Ask about Wards Christmas Gift Coupon Book
MONTGOMERY WARD

**AT LAING'S . . .
EXCELLENT
SKI HILL!**

HIGHWAY 40



Accommodations, \$3.50
per day . . Fine Ski Slope . .
Rope Tow . . Toboggans
and Skis for Rent.



**LAING'S
PIONEER
CAMP**

One Mile East of Emigrant
Gap. Write Now For Reserva-
tions. Elevation 3,280 Feet.

Laing's, 1940. Laing's sat
at the bottom of the valley
below Emigrant Gap

There used to be small "mom and
pop" ski hills all along Highway
40 but they've disappeared over the
decades in favor of the larger re-
sorts with longer runs and modern
amenities like chair lifts. Today
you wouldn't think of building ski
runs where they used to be because
the rain/snow line has moved up
the hill and areas where there were
ski hills, there is little snow.

SKI AT CISCO!

Complete Winter Sports Facilities

Modern Hotel Accommodations

\$3.50 to \$5.00, American Plan.

Easily Accessible. All Snow

Equipment Available for Rent

CISCO GROVE

DIRECTLY OPPOSITE AUBURN SKI CLUB

Cisco Grove was a vibrant little community along Highway 40 with houses, general store, souvenir store, gas station, and lodging. A few hundred yards east on 40 was the home of the Auburn Ski Club. The freeway went through the Auburn Ski Club which moved to Boreal and left Cisco Grove isolated because tourists didn't stop anymore. The commercial buildings were torn down to reduce taxes leaving some vacation cabins and two cute stone buildings.

AT THE END OF THE RAINBOW

**WINTER
SPORTS
MECCA!**

Just 180 miles from San Fran-
cisco, 86 miles from Sacramen-
to, on Highway 40.

Finest type Jay Bar Ski Tow
in the area! 1320 feet long;
many down-runs!

Smart cocktail lounge and at-
tractive stone and knotty pine
dining room.

Hotel rates, American or Euro-
pean plan, start at \$2.00 per
person, European.

Ice-skating in our own pond,
weather permitting. Instructor
in attendance.

Good equipment rented at mod-
erate prices. Ski school direc-
tion of Hannes Schroll!

- ◆ HERE IS THE
- ◆ ULTIMATE IN
- ◆ WINTER RESORTS

HERSTLE JONES'

**RAINBOW
TAVERN
AND TROUT FARM**

Meet your friends at Rainbow! Make your reserva-
tions now with Herstle Jones, host of the Sierras.
Here are all the beauties of the snowclad mountains,
all the comforts of home, and enjoyment that will
stay with you for all time . . . at Rainbow Tavern!

Write, Telephone, or Wire Collect for Your Reserva-
tions to Herstle Jones, Rainbow Tavern—

SODA SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

This Is The Very First Issue of The Sierra Sentinel

VOLUME 1—NUMBER 1

DUTCH FLAT, CALIFORNIA, DECEMBER 14, 1940

—151

PRICE 5c



PANNINGS

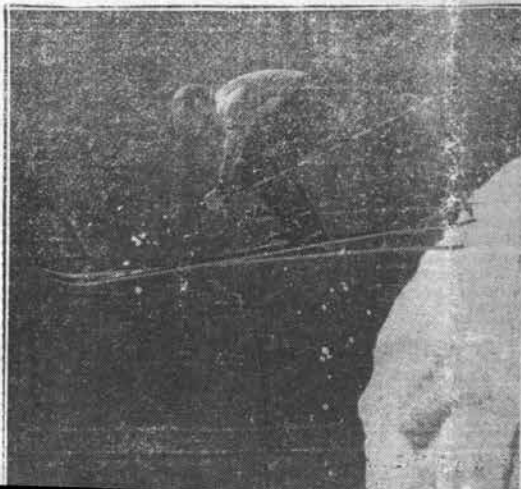
By THE OLD MAN
OF THE MOUNTAIN

From Petaluma there comes a report of a hen that sings. Probably "a lay a day."

The quest for gold these days can generally be summed up in the three words, mine, miner, minus.

SKI FANS ON EDGE FOR FIRST BIG SNOW

HERE HE GOES!



FUN ON ROUTE 40

Sierra Resorts Set To Entertain Happy Holiday Throngs

AS THE CHRISTMAS holiday season draws closer, eyes of the winter sports fraternity are turned expectantly toward the Donner Summit. The question on thousands of lips is:

"When do we get snow?"

Scores of resort owners, who have been spending months in intensive preparation for the winter influx of ski enthusiasts, crawl from between the blankets each morning to cast appraising eyes skyward in the hope of detecting a break in the uniformly clear weather which has prevailed for weeks.

ALL READY FOR SNOW

Everything and everybody is ready for snow but Mr. J. Pluvius, who apparently, doesn't give a hoot one way or the other.

More than a month ago the old timers along Route 40 were pre-

spending the holiday in these parts, don't delay too long in getting yourself set, or you may meet with disappointment.

Many of these regular winter

The Sierra Sentinel was a newspaper that had its debut in December of 1940 in Dutch Flat. According to the Colfax Record (July 18, 1941) the newspaper was started as a "winter sports and recreation weekly" and it proved that "such a paper could be of real value to the area covered by U.S. Highway 40, known as the Donner Trail." The founder, Stuart Dunbar, died and his wife and daughter tried to carry on but "other duties now require Miss Dunbar's full time..." and so the paper was taken over by the Colfax Record. Mr. Dunbar only ran the Sentinel for five months before dying of a heart attack at age 45 or 55, depending on the newspaper article reporting his death. The Record, under Colfax ownership, promised to support the Donner Trail Association and work to carry out the "promotional ideas" of Stuart Dunbar. "There is much promotional work to be done toward the upbuilding of this great recreational area..." The Auburn Journal included a short article a day earlier saying that the reason Miss Janet Dunbar couldn't keep the paper going was because she'd accepted a position at the Ice Lakes resort "which made it impossible for her to supervise the continued publication of the paper." The Ice Lakes resort, of course, is on Donner Summit. In 1941 the real estate professionals had not yet renamed it "Serene Lakes" which is the more attractive name it has now. There is no more resort but there are more than 800 houses around the two Serene Lakes. The first settler at Serene Lakes, or Ice Lakes will be coming to the Heirloom in a few months. Keep up your subscription.

The Sacramento Bee (November 17, 2005) reported a story about Janet Fonseca who had been Janet Dunbar before she married. In 1942 she eloped with a neighbor, Bill Fonseca.

It is from this issue, that was part of the Crampton Collection, that the ads on the previous pages came.

Holiday Season Drawing Closer

Sierra Resorts Set to Entertain Happy Holiday Throngs.

December, 1940

Resort owners had been intensely preparing for the coming season and everyone was wondering whether there would be snow to welcome the "influx of ski enthusiasts." The "ski enthusiasts" "Crawl from between the blankets each morning to cast appraising eyes skyward in the hope of detecting a break in the uniformly clear weather which has prevailed for weeks." It should be noted here that the season before, Sugar Bowl was slated to open in December, 1939 but the opening had to be postponed to January because there was no snow. There's a little known fact you can file away courtesy of the [Heirloom](#).

The chipmunks' activity of Fall, 1940 had old timers predicting an early and severe winter. By mid-December the predictions had not come true. It looked like, to the editors, that it was like Hitler's predictions of an early German victory, "the forecasts of the old timers appear to have been a little on the off side." Still the [Sentinel](#) predicted that there would more likely be snow than Hitler would be in London by Christmas.

Every major resort along the Victory Highway (Highway 40) was ready: Getty's at Long Ravine grade; the Log Lodge, Monte Vista Inn, Dutch Flat Hotel, Emigrant Gap Hotel Laing's, Cisco Grove, Rainbow Tavern, Soda Springs Hotel, and Sugar Bowl Lodge has had "heavy holiday bookings" but there was still space and here we see differences between 1940 and today. There was lots of lodging on the way to Donner Summit and people lodged differently than today. Today people visiting the summit visit for the day and head home on the Interstate or they rent single family houses. In 1940 there were a lot of simple lodges and people stayed communally. Given the state of roads and automobiles, traveling back home after a day was not something people did.

Rainbow Tavern had rooms and dormitories for 85-90 visitors. Herstle Jones, the proprietor, had just installed an "up-to-the-minute ski shop." He had more than 100 pairs of skis ready to rent and Hannes Schroll, Sugar Bowl founder, was the director of Rainbow's ski school.

The Soda Springs Hotel, run by Herstle's brother Oscar, had doubled its capacity and could accommodate 200 guests. Many of the new rooms had individual baths and showers. There was a new modern kitchen, "featuring a charcoal broiler." There was a "handsomely appointed dining room

"and a completely re-furnished and re-decorated lobby and cocktail lounge." They would also have three modern rope tows in operation.

Sugar Bowl also had many improvements including six new rooms in the lodge and an expanded dining room. They had two new rope tows "in addition to the popular chair lift and a fleet of deluxe sleds" specially built to provide adequate and comfortable transportation" from the railroad and the highway since there was no gondola in those early days.

On Page three the [Sentinel](#) reported that F. H. Thorison of San Francisco was building two "attractive Swiss chalets at Ice Lakes [today that's Serene Lakes]." One was almost done. "Both embody every modern convenience and are fitting additions to the many winter sports lodges that are making their appearance in the higher snow areas adjacent to Route 40." Another ski lodge, being built by two fellows who worked for Gumps (a high-end department store in San Francisco)

Sugar Bowl "promises to be one of the gayest spots in all California

[Sierra Sentinel](#)
December 14, 1940

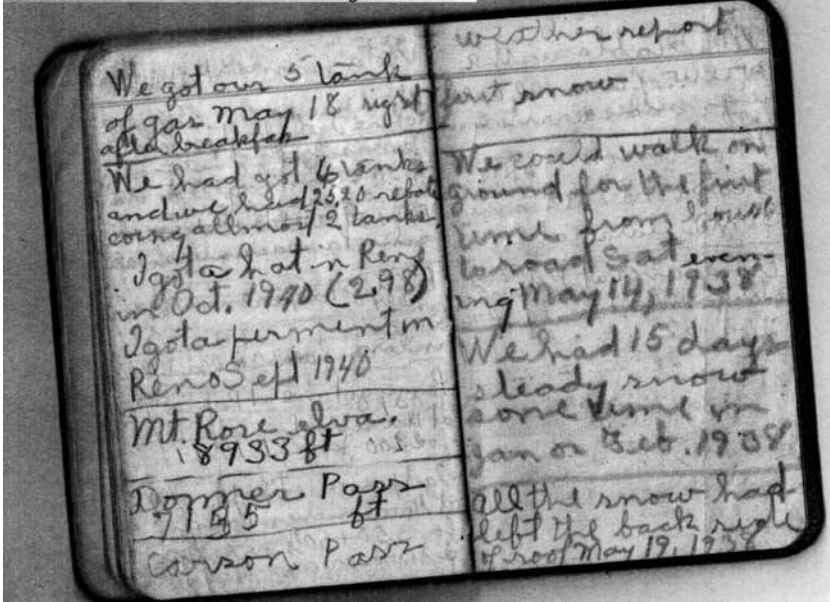
was being completed in Cisco Grove. Both of the fellows were "ardent winter sports enthusiasts and the new lodge promises to be the scene of many gay weekend holidays during the current season."

In other news Herstle Jones at Rainbow Tavern reported that he'd sold 24 building lots near the Tavern (you can see them today along Old Highway 40, Donner Pass Rd.). At Sugar Bowl "six new privately owned lodges of Tyrolean design have been erected and are ready for occupancy this winter." (Those lodges are still there - take the gondola in and walk around.)

Ice Lakes was being touted as having the best skating conditions in years. The paper said thousands were awaiting the first signs of snow but Old Man Winter had arrived at the lakes. Oscar Jones said many skating parties "have taken advantage of the splendid opportunity to indulge in this zestful winter sport." Given the clear dry weather the Ice Lakes were easily accessible"

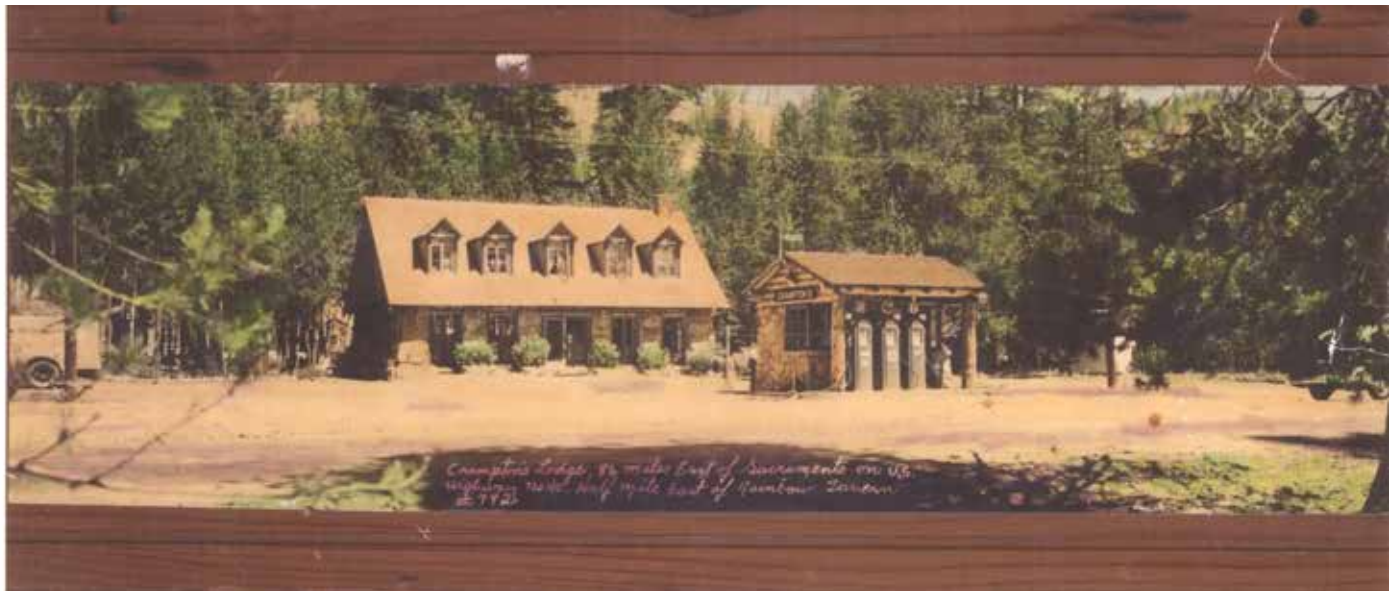
The House of Vanderford was "A brand new winter sports resort, designed to meet the needs of modest or even slim incomes." It offered "every comfort and convenience, in addition to one of the finest ski hills in this section of the

From Ethel Crampton's journal



Also in the new materials in the Crampton Collection were pages from Ethyl Crampton's journal. Here we learn they had gas deliveries, Ethyl got a hat in Reno in October, 1940 (it cost \$2.98) and a permanent in September, 1940. Mt. Rose has an elevation of 8933 ft. The second page is the "weather report" where she says "We could walk on ground for the first time from house to road Sat. evening May 14, 1938." The snow had all left the roof on May 19, 1938 They got a lot more snow down there in those days apparently. In 1938 there were also 15 days of steady snow in February or January. Snow varied. Bare ground could be walked on March 22 of 1940.

On another page the first snow in 1939 fell on September 13 and in 1938 the first snow came on October 12. In 1940 that was October 9.



Crampton's Lodge about 1940.

Hutchinson Lodge

Hutchinson Lodge on Donner Summit was built by Lincoln and James Hutchinson and friends. The brothers and their friends were avid outdoorsmen. They bagged Sierra peaks in the summer and skied in the winter. Once they added skiing to their hiking and adopted skis as their official wall decoration, they called their group "The Sierra Ski Club."

As we were looking for more information about something or other, Ingrid Wicken, director of the California Ski Library in Norco, CA (<http://www.skilibrary.com/>) sent us an article about Hutchinson Lodge, "The Homemade Sanctuary of Brotherly Love," from the December, 1926 issue of California Monthly. California Monthly is the U.C. Berkeley Alumni Association's magazine.

The author touts the story as a kind of Christmas story but more relevant to the week after Christmas because that is the time when "thirty more or less prominent California men expect to hibernate each year during the interval between the Christmas turkey and the last of the hash." The hibernations would take place at the "masculine retreat" "known as the Mountain Sanctuary of Brotherly Love." That sanctuary would be the home of an "exceedingly esoteric organization known as the Sierra Ski Club." The reason to retreat there, according to the author, was to have "freedom from the decorative atrocities" that accompany St. Nick.

By 1926 the Sierra Ski Club had been in existence for fifteen years and each year at Christmas time members had taken "jaunts into the mountains during Christmas week." 1926 was the first year they would not have to worry about lodgings. Up until 1925 the group had annually retreated to the Summit Hotel, but that burned down in 1925. It was at that point the group started to think about building their own building. Overcoming "nay sayers" noting the lack of money, Lincoln Hutchinson said they'd build it themselves. During the summers of 1925 and 1926, over twelve weeks total, the group built the stone and timber building (see right). The author said that the building was a victory of brain over brawn and rivaled the Taj Mahal, the pyramids and the Chinese Wall.

A listing of the club members and builders



Above and below, Hutchinson Lodge today.



of the lodge is a trip through the Cal Berkeley campus: Moffitt, Le Conte, Barrows, Hildebrand, Sproul, etc. and included other prominent men in various professions, including, unaccountably, a Stanford professor.

Walter Radcliff was the architect and he designed the structure to be a bit like the Faculty Club at Berkeley but with “Strength specifications approximately one hundred and fifty times standard requirements.” That seems to have worked out well since the building is still standing while others on Donner Summit have collapsed during heavy snows.

The building was built by the members and the cost was divided among members with contributions to be paid in labor or cash. Volunteer work was credited at \$2 a day along with “3,000,000 rubles, paid in Russian currency from a trunkload brought back from Europe by the Imperial Skeezicks* Lincoln Hutchinson.” You can see what a fun group this must have been.

Although the group was not made up of geologists, they did learn about the proper classification of local rocks: one-man rocks, two-man rocks and scenery boulders. During construction reveille was at 6:15 and breakfast was served at 6:30. The work day began an hour later and went until 3:30 with two hours for lunch. The work was hard causing sore backs, blisters, and sunburn, but it was worth it and the author concludes that “one is forced to the conclusion that this work needs, not so much eternal peace and prohibition for its salvation, as bigger and better ski clubs where all of us can retire during Christmas week or any other hectic interval such as that created by a visit from the other side of the family’s relations.”

By the 1950’s, with the members aging and use of the lodge diminishing, the lodge and lands were given to the Sierra Club.

*term for the guy in charge.

Previous Heirloom appearances of Hutchinson Lodge: 9/11, 1/20, and 9/11

Also 20 Mile Museum sign for Hutchinson Lodge on our website or on Old 40 at the Hutchinson Lodge turnoff.

See also 4/17 and 5/17 for history of Clair Tappaan

Our 20 Mile Museum sign for Hutchinson Lodge



The front door

From the DSHS Archives



March 27, 1938 "Pick a hump in the snow, dig into it, nick the paint off a car and hope it s [sic] yours. Thats [sic] the price paid for parking along the Donner Summit Highway this week. Forty eight hours of snow did the camouflaging job." Mt. Judah is in the background. This can still be a fun activity in 2020.



The Cheesestore, 1977, in downtown Soda Springs. In other incarnations the building was a gas station, laundromat, and ski rental business.

From the DSHS Archives

In a Snowstorm A Woodlandite Who Enjoys the Unusual Experience

Miss Bertha Miller Writes an Enter- taining Letter Describing Her Trip to Carson

Carson City, Nev., December 14 [1900].

A week ago today we left Woodland cold and foggy, and in winter attire, for the "sagebrush" State, expecting, of course, to find the same wintry climate here, but my surprise was very great on arriving in Carson City to find a bright sunshine to greet us. We left Sacramento enveloped in thick fog and this lasted until we reached Newcastle. Here the sun shone bright and warm above the mist, and we have enjoyed its genial warmth every day until today. Although bright this morning, a brisk wind is coming up and a snow storm is expected tonight.

While climbing through Blue Canyon we left the car window open to enjoy the beautiful scenery and cool air, so refreshing after spending several hours in the warm cars. This enjoyment was soon ended, as the shadows of night fell soon after passing Tolle, the busy lumber center. We were again obliged to content ourselves with reading matter until we reached the Summit. It was just as well, as snow-sheds shut off any view we might have had.

Every time the train stopped we could hear the snow water dropping on the cars. As it was Friday, the travel was very light; in fact, we had the car to ourselves. I think the conductor took pity on us and tried his best to help pass the time pleasantly, pointing out the chief places of interest, among them Rocky Pass, where the entire train had once dashed over the canyon that looked miles beneath us. The wreck was never recovered. The conductor treated us to snow, and we rewarded his kindness by snowballing him when his back was turned.

At the Summit the elevation is over 7000 feet, and through snowshed windows we caught glimpses of scenery we could never forget. The moon was full and so bright that even the smallest detail was visible. Donner Lake, nestling among a hundred snowy peaks, gleamed like a silver star. The snow, piled high, covered every object, and from the way the wind had drifted it in little heaps, looked just like rippling water. The only thing to mar the illusion was the glimpse of pine trees drooping under their snow-laden branches.

Reaching Truckee, we could see its distant lights far above us, and from the car a wagon track and the footprints of some patient animal could be plainly seen in the snow.

Most of the stations we passed seemed to have a very lively and busy appearance. No doubt as soon as the train passes they settle back into the dull routine. Not so with Truckee, however, for we know it is lively for at least twenty-five minutes. Such a ringing of bells, banging of pans and blowing of horns as we heard would put China New Year to shame. We had a cup of coffee here and the very high elevation no don't bring up prices, as we only paid \$1 for our coffee, 50 cents a cup. We will forgive them, however as we really enjoyed the bright moonlight and a brisk walk in the cool air. We passed several more stations all brightly illuminated with electric lights, and were told that they worked all night as well as day in the paper mills, etc.

We reached Reno about 9:30 and spent the remainder of the night there. Reno is a lively city and growing rapidly. The Truckee river flows through the center of the town and seems to have a great fall. The university is here and brings bright young men and women from both California and Nevada.

The next morning we left for Carson City, a distance of twenty miles, on the narrow-gauge railroad. The elevation is still pretty high, so the prices do not lower, and we parted with \$2 for a few minutes' ride. We once more started to climb, as Carson City is 2000 feet higher than Reno. On the way we passed Steamboat Springs. For about a mile steam is seen coming up through the ground like heavy smoke. We were told that water has high medicine value. New bath-houses and other improvements have just been completed. Strange to say, a slight earthquake that occurred a few days ago has caused the water to disappear, and the owners are quite worried over its non-appearance.

Carson City is a very pretty place with fine government buildings, wide streets and altogether very near appearance. It is surrounded on all sides by acres of sagebrush. In the summer the town, owing to its many shade trees has the appearance of an oasis in the desert.

Since beginning to write this letter it has started to snow, and oh it looks so pretty falling quietly and covering everything in a white robe. Yesterday sunshine, and today everything covered with snow...

Bertha Miller
Woodland Daily Democrat
December 17, 1900

Book Review

Imperfect Union

Steve Inskeep 2020 449 pgs

It is amazing that so much primary material related to John Fremont has survived from the mid-19th Century. Steve Inskeep has done a marvelous amount of research, seemingly reading all of that primary material. He extracts their stories from newspapers and a seeming voluminous amount of letters as well as other sources.

John C. Fremont was a famous explorer as most know, with many towns, schools, etc. named for him. Less well known is that he was the first Republican presidential candidate, four years before Abraham Lincoln, in 1856. Also less well known is that he had a ranch in California near Mariposa. Very few know is that he crossed Donner Summit, during his 1845 3rd expedition, and so earned a place in the Heirloom.

Although there are three maps of the five expeditions included in the book, the map of the 3rd, which went over Donner Summit is only ¼ the size of the others. Inskeep recoups that error by starting his introduction with the 3rd expedition, the one over Donner Summit.

John C. Fremont became a “social and political phenomenon of a kind we associate with modern celebrity culture.”

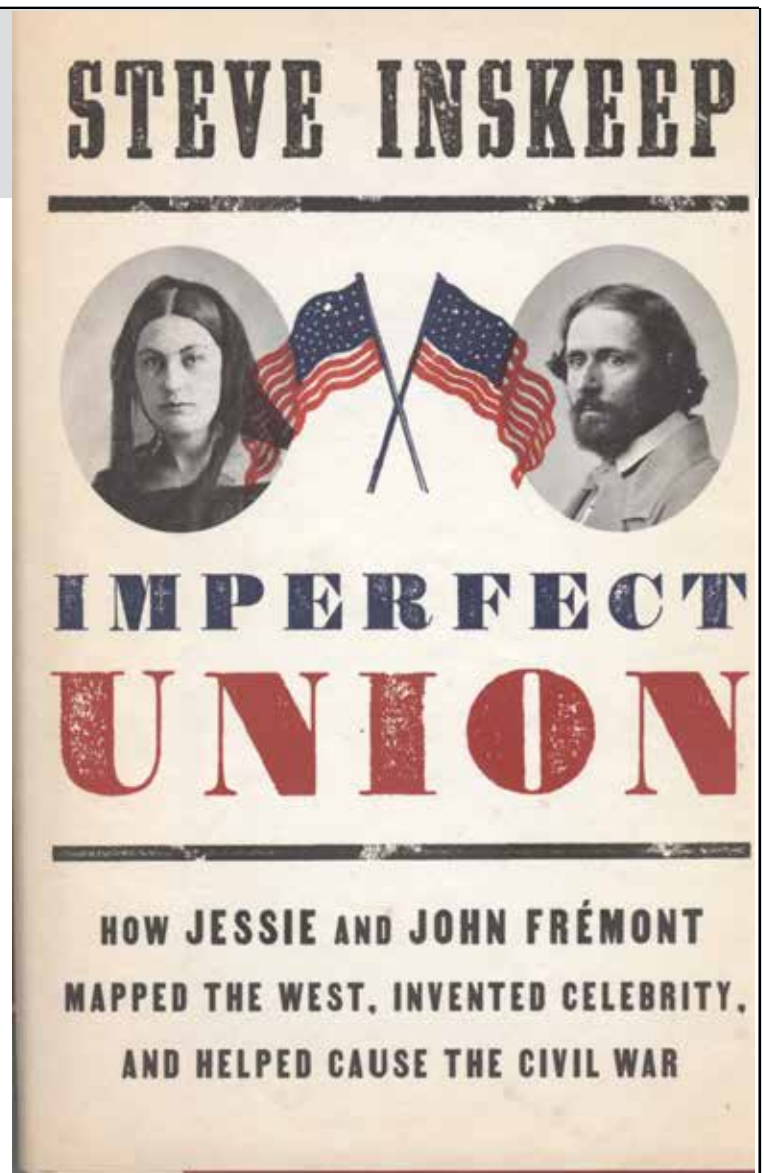
At one time he was the most popular, or close to the most popular, man in the United States. Ironically he doesn't seem particularly competent and certainly had a lot of failings. He was impetuous, arrogant, prideful, reckless, stubborn, hypocritical, and indecisive. He was court-marshaled and convicted for not following orders and he was relieved of command a couple of times by Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. He and his men killed Indians and non-combatants. He helped instigate war in California. He put men in jail without charge. Luck got him a fortune in gold during the Gold Rush but he died in very reduced circumstances.

Fremont became famous due to his accomplishments as an explorer, the conquest of California, his evocative reports, and his wife. This book is really a double biography of two people, John and Jessie Fremont. Without Jessie, John would have been a failure. She “amplified his talent for self-promotion, working... to publicize his journeys. She became his political adviser. She attracted talented young men to his circle, promoted friends, and lashed out at enemies.”

The Fremonts took the stage of American history at a divisive time – the lead up to the Civil War. Fremont's explorations upset the balance of slave and free states and so contributed to the war and creation of today's United States.

Jessie Benton Fremont was the better man of the two, far more intelligent and comprehensive.”

Elisha Crosby, delegate to the California Constitutional Convention



I am not going to let you write anything but your name.

Jessie Fremont

John Fremont was born illegitimately to poor unmarried parents. He rose from poverty to be educated until he was expelled from college for “incorrigible negligence.” That “negligence” was a girl. He went to sea for awhile and then began his rise using his uncanny ability to choose mentors who taught him and gave him opportunities. From one of those mentors he also got a wife when he eloped with Senator Thomas Hart Benton’s 17 year old daughter. As a member of a survey party he was introduced to the west. He joined the Army as a second lieutenant in 1838 with a mentor’s help. As a topographical engineer he was charged with filling in some of the blanks on the map of what would become the Continental United States. That he did over five western expeditions.

Jessie Fremont had the opposite background. She came from a large and distinguished family. She was brought up in various places where her senator father had business and/or houses, including Washington D.C. There she met the powerful people of the time. She was introduced to the west by her father and his ambitions for it and the country.

It is through the stories of Fremont’s western expeditions that we learn his character and how Jessie turned the liabilities of the various stories into public relations that would increase his fame and eventually propel him to the candidacy for the presidency of the United States. The Fremonts’ story is told in chapters of a couple of years’ increments each. Fame increased with each trip west, the newspaper reporting that followed, and then the reports that were published, dictated by John and written by Jessie.

The book also covers some contemporary politics: elections, events leading to the war with Mexico, nativist sentiment, slavery, the pressure to enlarge the country, etc. Of particular interest for us is the train of events leading to Mexico’s loss of California in which Fremont played a major part, but which also got him convicted in a court-marshal. Ironically Fremont was pretty indecisive during the whole California affair until it came time to accept the orders of a newly arrived general.

He preferred the previous commander, a naval admiral, who had named Fremont governor.

John Fremont was an unsavory character but he overcame the deficit with a brilliant and energetic young wife, luck, and good public relations. Coupled with his determination it was enough to make him famous and respected.

"This day we proclaim California a Republic."

Wm. B. Ide after accepting the surrender of General Vallejo

“Rarely in history had so much land been arrogated by so few; Ide’s little force claimed ownership of an empire, displacing several thousand Mexicans who themselves had never wrested more than a portion of it from its several hundred thousand natives.”

Steve Inskeep.

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.

Odds & Ends on Donner Summit

All over Donner Summit there is history. Here are two dates put into concrete. We'd love to be able to tell you where they can be found but for the life of me, I have no idea where I took these pictures. One may be on the dam for the little Southern Pacific lake above Cisco but to ascertain that would require a bit of a hike. If you stumble across either or both please let us know.



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' bottoom left hand corner.

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

Two Mini-Stories from Nick Chickering

Nick Chickering is an [Heirloom](#) subscriber with a long history on Donner Summit. His family is one of Sugar Bowl's founding families and they own the Chickering estate next to the Cedars. That used to be the summer residence of Mark Hopkins, one of the Big Four of the Central Pacific Railroad. Nick saw the stories about 1952 in last mont's [Heirloom](#) and contributed these two mini-stories.

Bill, FYI, I was trapped with my family at our Sugar Bowl cabin when the train was stopped. We were snowed in for more than a week, and photos show that the snow was level to the 3rd floor, and we had to slide down a shute to get in the upstairs front door. (I believe depth was 32') I was 10 years old at the time.

Downey Clinch, the long time owner of Alpha Hardware and Alpha Explosives in Nevada City, told me he went up to the summit to dynamite the snow off Highway 40 as it was too deep and hard for snow removal equipment of the time. For many days, they would tamp dynamite down on Hi 40 and explode it until they reached the pavement. (Dynamite seeks its least form of resistance, so did not damage the pavement.)

Maybe you too have some mini-stories to contribute? See page 2's bottom left hand corner.

@ the Museum



Ski School Bell from Soda Springs Ski Area.

You may have tripped or stubbed your toe over the large bell above. It's just inside the door of the DSHS. It weighs a ton. You can't miss it.

It used to occupy a place of pride on a steam locomotive but then it was acquired by Jim Winthers (Camp Winthers on Donner Summit). It spent some years at the Soda Springs Ski Area. Look closely at the picture to the right. At the left side of the Soda Springs Ski Area building there is a bell tower. Look inside, or through the magic of modern technology at the picture below right, and you'll see the bell.

Then when Ed Vierro went to Donner Ski Ranch to run the ski school there in the early 60's the bell went with him. When Norm Saylor left Donner Ski Ranch in 2008 he took the bell, which had not been used in years, with him.

We don't worry about it getting stolen because it weighs several hundred pounds which is maybe why steam engines got lousy mileage. On the next page is another view of the Soda Springs Ski Area. The sign on the side of the building says, "Ski School is good insurance." Half day lessons were \$3.00 and full day were \$5.00. Private lessons were \$7.50.





To fully illustrate the small story on the previous page, the fellow on the right is Jim Winthers. The picture was taken at Rainbow. The fellow on the left is Phil Gross.

Old Time Sunday Drive

**Next Time
Take Scenic
Old Hwy 40
instead of I-80**



Historic Towns
Interesting Scenery
Fascinating History
Picnic Spots
A Slower Pace



Take a look at our guide to Old Highway 40: turn by turn instructions from Rocklin to Truckee, broken into four legs and including pictures and history. Available on line on the brochure page of donnersummithistoricalsociety.org, at the DSHS (at the blinking light in "downtown" Soda Springs, or the visitors' centers in Truckee and Auburn.



And while you are at it, check out the 20 Mile Museum - interpretive signs from Nyack to below Donner Summit on Old 40. Information at www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org



DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Donner Summit Historical Society.org

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

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



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<http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/brochures.html>

50 interpretive signs along Old 40
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