

The Donner Summit

Heirloom

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society and the most historically significant square mile in California.

March, 2022 issue #163



The story of the Donner Party is more than the sensational which has gotten all the attention. It's also about heroism, tenacity, and self-sacrifice for others. It's about the very best of the human spirit. The story is an inspiring counterpoint for our cynical time.

Bill Oudegeest

The Donner Party Rescue Expeditions: the 2022 Reprise

Here, for the first time in Heirloom history, we have an editorial.

Last year we spent a lot of valuable Heirloom space on the reprise of the Forlorn Hope (see the December, '20 and January, '21 Heirlooms).

Now we come to 2022. Last month we spent valuable space on the background of the Donner Party Rescue Expeditions with the expectation of filling this month's issue with the 2022 reprise. Of course all four issues have other stories because the Heirloom is not single-minded.

What's the point? Many people, with the exception of discerning Heirloom readers, think history is dry, boring, already happened, and a waste of time. The Donner Party participants are all dead and buried and turned to dust. Why would we want to spend time on the story of failures? The Donner Party took the wrong turn (twice). They fought with each other. They followed bad advice. They made bad decisions. They deserved what they got. There are a lot of other things that deserve attention beyond the Donner Party.

Then there is the reprise in 2022 of the rescue expeditions that saved about half of the Donner Party in 1847. Who'd be nuts enough to go more than a hundred miles, camp outside in mid-

winter for four nights, and experience the attendant discomforts and dangers? There are better things to do with our time than pay attention let alone actually participate.

Of course that's all wrong.

History is the story of human beings, people exactly like us who laughed, cried, told jokes, loved, and had every day cares just like we do today. Their stories can be interesting and, more importantly, hold lessons for us today who follow.

Certainly the Donner Party is about mistakes, excess pride, mendacity, evil, and even murder.

There's a bigger story too, though, worthy of celebration and worthy of the attention of the four extreme athletes who took on the 2022 reprise.

If you are reading this you are probably living comfortably and happily, warm and snug. The Amazon delivery person delivers right to your door. Television and digital tablets bring the world to you along with the switch to shut off access. Smart phones connect us. Social media lets us keep track of friends and family as well as other things. There are few worries for us.

Story Locations in this Issue

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DONNER SUMMIT

Find us on 



Donner Memorial State Park pgs. 11/24/25/28

picture pg 21

Finding Your Way Through Donner Summit History

We've now passed 150 issues of the Heirloom: thousands of pages, thousands of pictures, and hundreds of subjects. You've probably begun to realize that you cannot keep all the history in your head. Even if you remember it all, retrieval is difficult.

Fortunately John Albert Index invented the index* and one of the choices we made back at the birth of the DSHS was to index all our Heirloom articles and pictures. We've diligently kept up the indices so that they are many pages long, full of alphabetized titles and subjects. Go to our website and to any of the Heirloom pages (one for each year) and you'll find links to the Heirloom indices.

One of the strengths of the DSHS is the incomparable historical photograph collection of Norm Saylor, our president. The collection is thousands of pictures and again the sheer number makes finding anything in particular, difficult. Avoid the long URL by going to our website and clicking on the "photographs" link and then to the "historic photo collection link." A third link, to the Flickr URL will take you to those thousands of searchable historical photographs of Donner Summit. Have fun.

*historical society humor

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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

Suppose, though, there was a crisis. How would we react? What can ordinary people do in extraordinary circumstances? The Donner Party was faced with terrible choices. Imagine Mrs. Reed who had four children. They all left Donner Lake as part of one of the rescue groups. Two of her children could not continue. How could Mrs. Reed decide what to do? Should she go back to the lake with two and leave the other two in the care of the relief party? Should she go on with the two who could travel and trust that the two who went back would be cared for in a camp with almost no food? Imagine Patty Reed, one of the daughters who couldn't go on, saying upon parting, "Good bye, Momma. If I don't see you again, just do the best you can."

Imagine Tamsen Donner, whose husband, George, could not travel. Should she go with her children or stay with her husband?

How do we make choices like that?

Faced with emergencies, how can ordinary people cope?

The Forlorn Hope left Donner Lake in a quest to save others. It took thirty-three days and only seven of fifteen survived. Their sacrifices jump-started the rescue expeditions. People of the rescue parties then left their homes to travel over the Sierra in mid-winter, carrying heavy packs, facing danger in an effort to save strangers.

Then there are the members of the Donner Party. They'd made bad decisions over and over. They had not worked together but they survived the horrors of near starvation and then summoned the will to accompany their rescuers a hundred miles to California.

The 2020 expedition team is celebrating how human beings can rise to challenges. They are celebrating self-sacrifice. They are celebrating the heroism of common people. They are telling us a lot about ourselves.

They are giving us hope in a cynical time when it seems like the opposite is being celebrated.

Donner Centennial Heralded as Success

Party's Fortitude Cited as Example During Memorial

"As We think of the hardships and the difficulties they encountered on their journey... the privations caused by hunger, thirst and cold... may their fortitude inspire us with fresh courage and undaunted faith in bravely meeting the problems which confront us in our day and generation."

Bishop Noel Porter of Sacramento
keynoted the Donner Centennial
memorial service at the Emigrant monument
Sierra Sun September 26, 1946



Signs at the site of Johnson Ranch, near Wheatland, CA. The signs were placed by the Wheatland Historical Society.





Above: the Donner Relief Expedition reprise, 2022 heads off from Johnson Ranch in Wheatland, CA. They are on the original, still visible, Emigrant Trail.

Right: Jen Hemen and friend.
Below: Elke Reimer and friend.



The original relief expeditions of 1847 started their treks on horses and mules but it was not long before deep snows meant leaving the animals behind. The men then put on huge packs to continue on snowshoes more than one hundred miles to Donner Lake.



Above: Tim Tweitmeyer and friends.

Left: Bob Crowley and friend being interviewed by KOLO Channel 8 from Reno





It did not take long for the 2022 Donner Relief Expedition to disappear from sight over the hill.

The Donner Party Relief Expeditions: 2022 Reprise

The background story for this story is in last month's [Heirloom](#) on the DSHS website

The horses and mules were ready and saddled. The trekkers were well-dressed in their period clothing. The clothing had been properly and professionally stressed (see page 16). The support team and vehicles were ready. Equipment was packed and secured. The route had been carefully mapped, section by section, after years of study and field trips. The news media had been briefed and press releases had found their way into new reports. Activities have been set up along the route. It would all culminate five days and more than 100 miles later at the Donner Memorial State Park just outside Truckee, CA. A website had been set up ([forlornhope.org](#)) with an interactive animated map and “expedition tracker” so fans could follow the trek in real time. The Reno ABC affiliate was present and filming. Photographers were photographing, reporters were harvesting quotes from the principals, and the [Heirloom](#) staff was writing, desperately writing, to capture the event. Enthusiasm and expectations were up. There’s a lot that goes into executing an expedition.



Everything was in order this mild February morning. NPR reported on the coming event as well-wishers and press approached the start and that seemed like a good omen. Then, just as the trekkers were about to trek, a golden eagle soared overhead, circled, and then headed east. Could there be a better omen?

Above, the crowd at the send-off and below, everyone wanted pictures.

A lot of preparation had gone into the Donner Relief Expedition of 2022. The 2022 expedition followed the 2020 reprise of the 1846 Forlorn Hope trek (see the December, '20 and January, '21 [Heirlooms](#)). Fifteen members of the Donner Party had crossed the Sierra in a



cont'd on page 8

Below: Alice Osborn, all the way from No. Carolina. She's written a number of very creative songs having to do with the Donner Party: aliceosborn.com.

She played at Donner Ski Ranch and at the State Park.



Above: the team at historic Rainbow Lodge in front of a roaring fire with the team photographer, Keith Sutter, behind. Left to right: Jen, Elke, Bob, and Tim.



Above, Dan Rosen and Frank Mullin at the Rainbow Lodge. Dan is the author of the [Donner Party Diary](#) and an extensive website. Frank is the author of [Donner Party Chronicles](#).



Catching the team on the trail at the edge of Summit Valley. From left to right: Bob Crowley, Jen Hemen, Elke Reimer, and Tim Tweitmeyer.



The team is only a small presence in the immensity of the Sierra. They are coming down the draw about one third of the way from the left edge of the picture and about center up and down. Mt. Stewart and Stephens Pk. are in the background.



This is a closer view of the trekkers in about the same place as in the top picture. There are seven, the team having been augmented by three for the hike down the canyon. That way there would be seven arriving at the State Park as there were in the 1847's first relief party. The three additions were Jen Hemen's daughter, Sophia; Discovery Channel's Josh Gates; and a staffer.



The picture above is just about a couple of hundred yards east from the pictures on the previous page.

33-day quest to get help for the beleaguered families at Donner Lake.

The Forlorn Hope's arrival in California set the relief expeditions in motion ultimately saving about half of the Donner Party. The 2020 reprise of the Forlorn Hope was a celebration of tenacity, heroism, bravery and self-sacrifice. It was a celebration of the very best of the human spirit. It was a celebration much needed in this cynical time.

The 2020 trek led to the 2022 reprise of the Donner Relief Expeditions which took a different route to Donner Lake, the route of the original 1847 relief expeditions. Those men, traveling on snowshoes, shouldered huge packs carrying food across the Sierra in mid-winter. The men braved hardship and discomfort fighting cold and snow to save strangers. They were heroic.

On Valentine's Day, February 14, 2022, four trekkers set off from the site of Johnson Ranch near Wheatland, CA and headed for Donner Pass and Donner Lake beyond. This was the site at which the Forlorn Hope arrived in January, 1847 and the same site where the 2020 reprise ended. Nearby was the site where Wm. Eddy, supported by two Native Americans, knocked on the door of a cabin. The door was answered

by seventeen year old Harriet Ritchie who broke into tears at the site of the emaciated, exhausted, and cadaver-like man.

The original Donner Relief expeditions used mules until snow got too deep so the 2022 trekkers started with horses and mules, for historic accuracy, but left them a few miles away out of range of the cameras. They also changed from their period clothing into modern hi-tec clothing suitable for an expedition today.

Bob Crowley's journal of the 2022 reprise described the scenery and the work,

"Our first day was a grind, we trekked and ran through the undulating foothills, rewarding us with occasional broad glimpses of the Sacramento Valley atop a roller, then sending us back into obscurity to siege another hill. But the day also opened to stunning sun drenched fields of green, happy livestock with playful calves spotting the hills surrounding us."

After thirty miles, and just before dark, the team arrived at their campsite.



The team, enlarged by two additional members for the last six miles in order to make up a group of the same number as in 1847 for arrival at the park. Donner Lake is in the background.

The second day was twenty-five miles to Mule Springs where they entered the Bear River Canyon. Here Bob Crowley's journal describes the effort,

"We arrived at the bottom and wove our way across the river rock bottom of the hollow, striding in and out of ankle-deep frigid mountain water. At first the chilly flow felt good on our weary feet, then it became irritating and finally a burden."

That wasn't the worst, continued Bob.

"We'd lost meaningful time picking our way down the ravine and across the water. Now, an ominous obstacle, a steep wall, 1,200 feet tall loomed. There

was no clear path to the top. A fire had destroyed the slope and lay asunder everything in its path. Our way out would be climbing over charred log after log and downed debris, through thick thicket which had grown up to replace the forest floor, and up a 40 degree, 1/4 mile slope.

"What should have taken 30 minutes, added another 90 minutes to our day. And it sapped the soul from our bodies. It was a brutal struggle."

The campsite at Mule Springs was a welcome relief at sunset.

Two Important Notes

The Friday Panel Discussion at the State Park can be seen at <https://www.facebook.com/SierraSPF/videos/660543408480724>

Unless otherwise noted, pictures in the story here are by the author/editor. Truly professional pictures by Keith Sutter can be found at: <https://sutterphoto.egnyte.com/fl/OQRdguBjch#folder-link/Press/Wednesday>

Day three was difficult and harrowing according to Bob's journal.

"By mid-afternoon we found ourselves hanging by our fingertips and snowshoe spikes, traversing across a 100 yard snow and ice wall with a precipitous drop below. We huddled to decide if and how we were going to navigate the situation and then patiently and deliberately inched our way across, single file, using each other's footholds which we created by digging our snowshoes into the icy snow ledge. A typically 15 minute trek became a 90 minute harrowing experience, followed by successive heavy snow steep climbs. When we arrived at camp we were spent."

After twenty miles the trekkers arrived at Rainbow Lodge and were welcomed by a small group of invitees and much needed rest. See the page 6 picture of the team sunk into the deep couch in front of the fire. They again camped outside.

Day four saw the group approaching Donner Summit. There was a press conference at Donner Ski Ranch for a crowd of several dozen people. It was an interesting way to tell the stories of both the 1847 original treks and the 2022 reprise.

Day five was easy – all downhill to Donner Lake (pictures pages 7-9) where more than a hundred people gathered at the Emigrant Monument. The trekkers placed their tribute cards (see next page) at the monument's base and then met with the enthusiastic crowd and the media.

Upon entering the auditorium at the State Park for a panel discussion the trekkers were met with a long standing ovation. The audience seemed to be on the same wavelength - we need to celebrate the best of the human spirit. The trip was about the theme of both the Forlorn Hope and the Donner Rescue Expeditions' sacrifice and heroism as a relevant story for our time. Indeed, Heidi Doyle, representing the State Parks Foundation, encouraged people to take the lesson to heart and go out and do something for others.

Differences from 1847 to today Increasing Appreciation

We must acknowledge that the reprise of the 1847 Donner Rescue Expeditions is a monumental feat. It's something only these extreme athletes could do in just a bit more than four days. That leads us to comparisons though, which make our admiration and appreciation for the original rescue parties grow.

In 1847 the members of the four rescue expeditions had it much tougher than today. The rain snow line was much lower and so there was much more time spent traveling over snow. 2022 is also a drought year, putting the arrival at the snow line even later than normal. Our team, except for some events along the way and at the end, wore hi-tec clothing. They slept on insulated pads in insulated sleeping bags. The 1847 trekkers wrapped blankets around themselves and slept sitting on logs. Our 2022 team had high calorie food, a very efficient support team, GPS, maps, and good equipment. In 1847 the expeditions followed the Emigrant Trail which was covered with snow. They lit dead trees afire to use as markers for their return journeys. They had to carry extraordinarily heavy packs. When they arrived at Donner Lake their job was less than half done. They still had to come back herding emaciated rescuees.



Above the team, enlarged by three people to make up the number of people in the 1847 first relief expedition, approach the Emigrant Memorial. From left to right: Brian Gates (Discovery Channel personality); Jen Hemen; Jen's daughter, Sophia; Elke Reimer; a member of the Discovery Channel team; and Tim Twietmeyer.

For contrast, 2022 is a drought year and the snow above was only inches deep. In 1847 there was so much snow that when the relief party arrived they saw only snowfields. Then, suddenly, a head popped up out of the snow “Are you men from California or are you from heaven?” a woman asked.

The Donner Party survivors were living in brush and ox hide covered caves deep in the snow.

Reasin Dan Tucker of the relief party wrote, “At sundown we reached the Cabins and found the people in great distress such as I have never witnessed there having been 12 deaths and more expected every hour the sign of us appeared to put life into their emaciated frames.”

A few days later the first rescue expedition left the lake with 23 survivors. Others would come out with later rescue expeditions.

Eventually about half of the Donner Party was rescued by the four relief expeditions.

Below, the team made up tribute cards for each of the people involved in the various 1847 relief expeditions. The front had a picture or silhouette of the person and the back a biographical summary. The team placed the cards at the base of the monument upon their arrival at the State Park.



Period Dress for 19th Century Emigrants

You don't just run down to the store to pick up clothing from the mid-19th Century. We dress a bit differently from how people dressed in the old days. There were two sources guiding the 2020 reprise of the Donner Party Rescue Expedition. One was a guide, "Period Clothing Information" put together by the Sutter's Fort Environmental Living Program. The URL is at the bottom of this page. The other source was a Masters thesis by Maria McMartin called "The Dress of the Oregon Trail emigrant: 1843-1855." Ms McMartin wrote her Masters thesis at Iowa State University in 1977. You can find it at the URL at the bottom of the page too.

Some general thoughts about 19th Century emigrant clothing from the State Park's "Period Clothing..."

- People of the 1840s wore more clothing than we do – high necks, long sleeves, long trousers for men and long skirts for women.
- Because there was no sunscreen and most people did not own sunglasses (although some early versions did exist), men wore hats and women wore bonnets to protect themselves from the weather.
- Most people of that period did not have as many clothes as we have; a farm woman might have only two dresses – one for everyday and one for good.
- Most people of that period did not discard their clothes when fashions changed; they might dye a dress, remake a dress or change the decorations (lace, braiding, etc.) to give a dress a new look.
- The first commercially viable home sewing machine was not patented until 1846, so clothing was all hand-sewn.
- Women generally let their hair grow. They wore it down as girls and up as adults.
- Closures such as zippers and snaps had not been invented. Buttons, hooks and eyes, and tapes (to tie things together) were commonly used. Also, some clothes were just pinned together.
- The industrial revolution had changed textile production – people in the 1840's wore a combination of garments made from handspun, handwoven cloth and from factory made cloth.

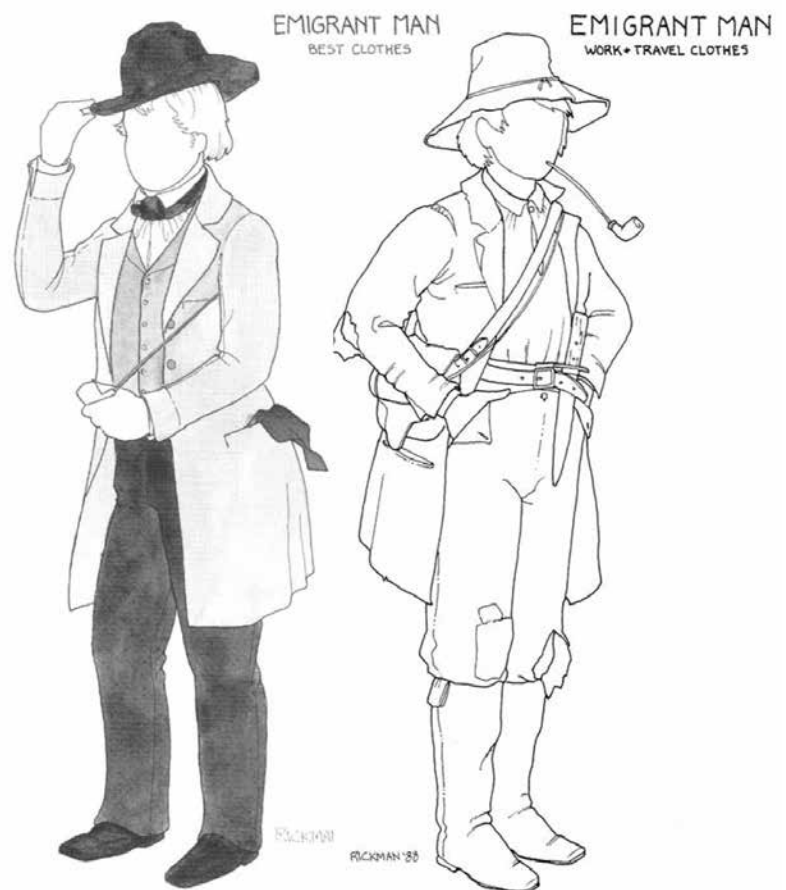
Sutter's Fort "Period Clothing Information"
<https://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/485/files/C.%20Period%20Clothing.pdf>

Maria McMartin's Masters Thesis
<https://www.sidmartinbio.org/what-clothes-did-pioneers-wear-on-the-oregon-trail/>

Maria McMartin's thesis goes into more depth about dress in the 19th Century saying it "contributes to an understanding of the social and cultural history of midwest America during the 1840s and 1850s. This historical study of costume provides an insight into the life and times of people as they migrated more than 2,000 miles across the continent to colonize a new land." That makes it more interesting than just, "what did they wear?"

McMartin did a lot of research in her quest to discover what emigrants wore. She visited costume collections at histori-

Emigrant Man



cal societies and museums and read references to clothing in manuscripts, diaries, journals, and reminiscences. Her research showed that fashion was modified to account for durability and functionality. Garments were homemade and sewed by hand using domestically manufactured fabrics. Those fabrics were cotton, calico, jeans, wool, linen, and linsay-woolsey (wool and linen). Emigrants couldn't, generally, afford more expensive fabrics like linen or fine woolsens.

Pioneer women wasted nothing in making their clothing. They used old clothes and fabric scraps as well as store bought fabrics. Patterns did not necessarily match nor did fabric grain. Left over fabrics were also used for children's clothing and in quilts.

Dry good stores sold the needed additions: fasteners, buttons, etc.

On the emigrant road women wore everyday dresses with "the following features: narrow collar band; fitted bodice with shoulder seam set back and slanting down from the neck to the arms; full sleeves gathered to the dress and to a narrow band at the wrist; center front opening that buttoned; corded piping applied to the neckline, arms, and waist for strength and decoration; and a full long cartridge pleated skirt..." Surprisingly some preserved clothing "showed evidence that stays were part of the bodice." One can only imagine the discomfort during the active emigrant crossing. That no stays have been found may indicate that women dispensed with them quickly.

Women also wore skirts, sunbonnets, and aprons. There were also gloves and half-mitts (gloves ending at the first knuckle). In the cold there were also shawls, knitted mittens, hats, and cloaks. Presumably there was also underwear but it is never mentioned. There were, of course, shoes too but as they wore out women then went barefoot or wore Indian moccasins

Men wore pants, vest, and coats made from cotton, jean, or wool. There was a fly opening in the front secured by buttons. Pants were held up with suspenders and belts. Shirts were of various fabrics and closed with buttons. Vests and coats were for evening wear. The front and back of vests were of different materials. There was a buckle to adjust the vest around the waist and vests were completely lined. There were pockets too. When weather was really cold men wore heavy over-coats.

There were also hats but McMartin found no examples or references.

Shoes and boots wore out quickly leaving some men to go barefoot. Fortunately Indians "clustered around forts and sold moccasins to the travelers."

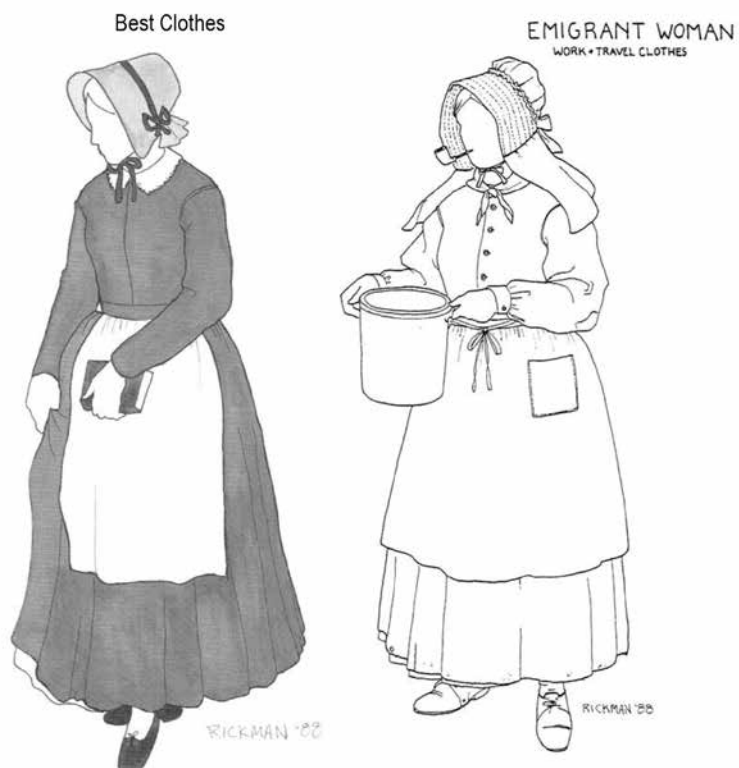
The emigrants started their journeys in presentable fashion but by the time they reached their destinations they were pretty "tattered and torn." McMartin quotes Dilis Ward's account of arriving in Oregon, "Having reached the end of our long and trying journey, we were footsore and weary, every thread shred of our clothing begrimed and filled with the alkali dust of the plains."

Another quote by James Longmire says,
"my arrival in this country Oregon with torn and

ragged pants and coat, my cap tattered and torn, and with one boot on, the other foot covered with an improvised moccasin made of a piece of cow hide from one of the animals we had killed... In this garb I was to meet a party of well dressed gentlemen from Olympia... My dress was a fair sample of that of the rest of our party, and when together we felt pretty well, all being in the same fashion; but when brought face to face with well dressed men I must confess I felt somewhat embarrassed."

There are obvious reasons for clothing being so tattered. Emigrants brought few clothes. There was weather, daily work,

Emigrant Woman



river crossings, rocks, continual usage, etc. to wear out clothes. Then there was dust, as Elizabeth Geer wrote,

"You in 'The States' know nothing about dust. It will fly so that you can hardly see the horns of your tongue yoke of oxen. It often seems that the cattle must die for the want of breath. And then in our wagons--such a spectacle--beds, clothes, victuals and children, all completely covered."

Given the limited laundering dirt was difficult to remove.

drawings come from the Sutter's Fort information

What Authentically Dressed 1847 Emigrants Wore

The Donner Party headed across the continent to their new lives in 1846 as did many other emigrants. The curious often wonder about their dress. The previous article shows how the typical adult would have dressed in those days. A little bit of historical research into period dress cannot be the end of the story though, and the [Heirloom](#) prides itself on bringing you all the facts so that you too can at least vicariously experience the past. In this case there is a further opportunity of sparking a fashion trend. Stone washed jeans and purposely frayed and worn holes are so passé.*

One can't have an accurate reprise of an historical event without the proper clothing. It just adds to the verisimilitude. Obtaining the proper clothing is only the first step though, but it's an important step.

The next step is the proper distressing** of clothing. To be properly accoutered, the would-be emigrant cannot just pick up some period clothing and expect to appear authentic. That would just occasion laughter. The clothing has to be properly distressed.

Here is the recipe for properly distressing clothing by Bob Crowley, one of the four trekkers reprising the Donner Rescue Expeditions of 1847. Note that each participant is responsible for distressing his/her own period clothing. You can't just send out your clothing for distressing. Each "emigrant" has to put his/her own "flavor" into the distressing.

We should parenthetically say that the [Heirloom](#) staff admired the effort that went into the distressing and hazarded that this could well be a coming fashion trend as people hearken back to a simpler time when heroes were heroes and people dressed properly. We'd also note that distressing can be a fun and bonding family adventure in case the family wants to dress up.

The Recipe, provided as a public service provided by Bob Crowley, above right:

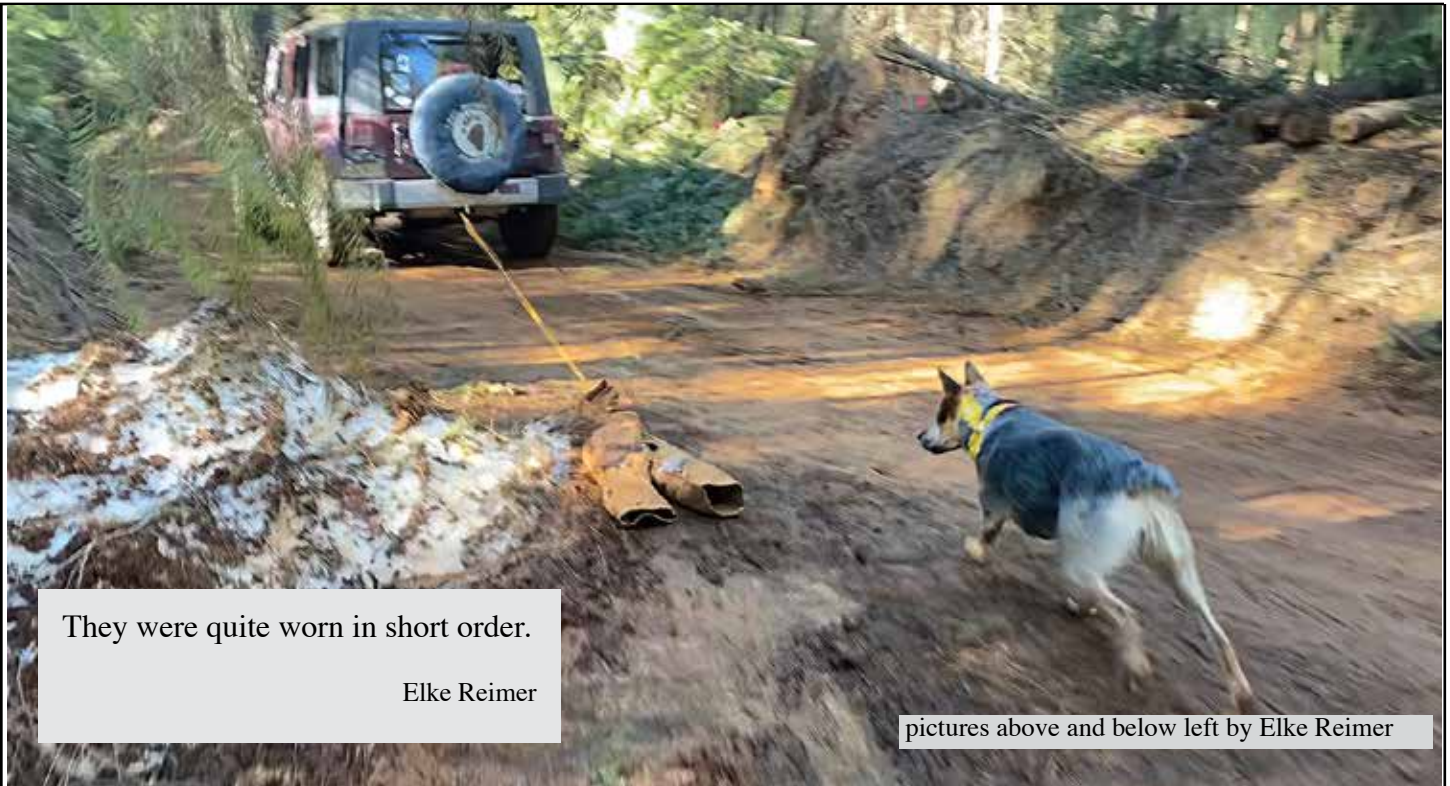
- Step 1. Buried all clothes in a dirt hole, poured water in and stirred then stomped on clothing.
- Step 2. Cold water wash
- Step 3. Coarse sandpaper at places typically worn (i.e. cuffs, collars, knees, rear, fly, pockets, etc.); vary pressure and amount for real authenticity. It's gauche for wearing to be uniform.
- Step 4. Use a coarse file on bottom of pants to fray
- Step 5. Use wire brush on drill to spin distress into knees, rear, creating deep wear, holes, and fraying (Of course distressing by hand only is more authentic)
- Step 6. For a felt hat, rub dirt into crease around hat where sweat would typically wear hat, also where one grabs hat on top
- Step 7. Drag the ensemble along the ground with rocks on top for further natural wear (the neighbors loved watching this)
- Step 8. Sandpaper all brass to wear
- Step 9. Remove all tags, labels, any brand identity
- Step 10. Try it on, see how it looks and repeat as needed!



Bob Crowley in distressed emigrant clothing

*cultural term for out of fashion

**technical term for developing very used appearances, particularly in clothing



They were quite worn in short order.
 Elke Reimer

pictures above and below left by Elke Reimer

The previous list was supplied by amateur period clothes distressor Bob Crowley who is also one of the four Donner Party Rescue Expedition reprise members.

Most publications would hesitate to share professional techniques or at least print a disclaimer, "Don't try this at home." The Heirloom, though, does not hesitate to break ground in the quest for accuracy in journalism. Bob's tested methods don't meet higher professional standards. Above we have Elke Reimer's (another of the expeditions members) professional method of distressing period clothing. Bob Crowley (also an expeditions member - see previous page) is at the wheel. Towed along behind chased by Elke's friend, Lupine Sierra, are Elke's period clothes. To add "distress" they are filled with rocks and towed down the muddy rough road. An added component is that this is at Mule Springs, along the route of the original 1847 expedition. Elke noted after the adventure above that she checked her pants and discovered "they were quite worn in short order" needing only some find tuning. Presumably the towing at Mule Springs added a bit of atmosphere and emigrant spirit to the clothing.



Here we can compare the professional distressing method on the left by Elke Reimer and the amateur method, right, by Bob Crowley. We at the Heirloom can see that the everyday repriser would be happy wearing the pants at the right but the professional picture-ready repriser would have to use Elke's method.

Bob responds, "As is the nature of endurance athletes, *everything* we do is a competition!" and then later, "I was just doing what was right. It was the civil thing to do. We are all a single community of endurance athletes, we look out for each other."

It was noted that Crowley's comments sounded suspiciously similar to those given by the Donner Relief Party member he will portray, John Stark, when asked why he joined the relief party.





tools of the distressor



distressing with power tool. Note: The Heirloom recommends safety glasses and ear protection. Mr. Crowley is an expert with power tools though.



authentically distressed emigrant hat

Pictures these two pages by Bob Crowley

The 2022 Donner Party Rescue Expedition reprise wanted to enhance their experience and interactions with the public by sometimes wearing period clothing. That's not an easy task and the first few connections to period clothing, either to purchase or make, fell through. Jen Hemer, one of the expedition members, took on the job only shortly before their February, 2022 departure. She graciously shared how she acquired the team's clothing with the Heirloom. Jen wrote the following a few weeks before the team's departure from Johnson Ranch.

Obtaining Period Clothing for the Authentic 1847 Look

Jen Hemer

Finding four sets of authentic looking 1846 pioneer wear in six weeks on a budget was not unlike the annual challenge of hunting for the parts and pieces of the overly elaborate Halloween costumes my three kids routinely think of just days before the big event. I have found that the best course of action is to employ equal parts analysis, stamina, and magical powers when faced with costuming challenges.

Our goal for the Donner Relief Expedition costumes was to represent not just the clothing of the time period, but to imagine what the four distinct people each of us would be "inhabiting" for the expedition would have had for clothes.

As William Eddy, I would have arrived at Johnson Ranch almost skeletal, wearing no shoes and only tatters for clothes. With only 17 days before heading back into the mountains I would have had to borrow everything from the families living there to survive. Probably I had mis-matched, ill-fitting hand me downs and perhaps a newer hat and boots gifted to me by Mary Sinclair, the Alcade's wife or bought with funds raised for the relief party. Eddy was not wealthy and had been a carriage maker in Illinois so probably wouldn't have chosen to buy cowboy clothes or a silk scarf, especially on

credit with no oxen as collateral. In his photo, he looks to be a humble dresser.

Bob [Crowley], on the other hand, would need to look the part of John Stark. He was a strong, broad-shouldered Mormon with a wife and eleven children. His clothes were most likely well-made, stout and plain, with only some wear because he had been living in relative comfort in the warm winter of the Sacramento Valley. His wife probably routinely mended his pants and jackets and it's likely they fit him well. In his photo, he looks sharp, with a neat white shirt and black bowtie. Tim [Twietmeyer] and Elke's [Reimer] costumes required the same thoughtful analysis, and all four of us would have to look as if some of our clothing was from the same kinds of limited canvas and cotton fabrics available at pioneer outposts. We were not "mountain men", so using fur, moccasins, and animal hides for our characters would not be realistic; but the clothes would need to be "weathered", with holes, stains, red mud, and frayed cuffs.

With this analysis fresh in my mind, it was time for stamina and a little magic. With a tight budget to consider, buying all brand new, high-priced historical clothes to then trash

them with cheese graters and rocks was not going to work! So I would have to thrift.

First, I went to the Half Price bookstore and investigated the historical section. Of the dozen or so books available, of course, the "cite book" was waiting for me on the shelf. With detailed watercolors of every frontier costume imaginable, it was easy to find one or two to earmark as my guide. I noted that vests had distinct features like two pockets and collars were rounded. Then I headed to the nearest thrift store to begin the treasure hunt. I always start with the mindset that if I visualize what I need, I will find it. For men's clothing, here was my strategy: first, the men's long sleeved dress shirt racks. I thumbed two hundred shirts, pulling anything without a collar, made in a western style, or made of a dull brown or black pinstripe. I evaluated each against the picture book, knowing I could cut off a collar or hide it with a scarf if the fabric was ideal. Some I planned to cut into neckerchiefs so each costume would be different. I found 4 ideal shirts in about 20 minutes.

Second was the men's suit section, where I quickly discovered men's fashion has not changed much since 1846! I found an authentic replica "Frontier Wear" vest (\$65 online) for \$6 and two other historically correct vests in short order. Then I went to the mens and women's coat aisle and scanned for mid-length plain wool jackets with downturned shoulders, rounded or small collars in black, dark brown or dark plaid fabrics that seemed plausible for the time period. At the same time I scanned coats for pewter buttons that I could cut off and use on vests or other jackets. I found enormous jackets for both Tim and Bob (both around 6-foot tall).

I then looked at both the men's and women's pants sections but had very little luck in finding something right. We just don't wear high waisted pants above our belly button with suspenders these days, probably for good reason. Not a flattering look! I did grab some women's pants that were made of gray wool to use for making wool scarves, which for \$5 is a bargain compared to the fabric store. The last places I scanned for old, dull colored wool cloth fabric were the 3X and 2X sweater sections, as I knew I could take any 100% wool sweater and

felt it in a hot wash with lots of detergent to get a non-itchy scarf. Then, without any real hope of finding white silk for a silk necktie I scanned the women's pajama section and the dress sections... which was not successful but I believe I will soon get lucky. The most surprising magical find was a pair of worn out, handstitched, size 44 walnut colored leather pants - from Korea, of all places - that I knew instantly would make a great rucksack for one of us. Size 44 gives you a lot



distressing a shirt cuff with sandpaper

To tell the story in authentic period clothing each of the four Donner Rescue Expedition members chose a real historical member of the rescue parties to impersonate.

Wm. Eddy - Jen Hemen
John Pierce Rhoads - Tim Twietmeyer
Reason Dan Tucker - Elke Reimer
John Stark - Bob Crowley

of leather for \$5!

I repeated this at 5 more thrift stores, in between running clothes to Elke, Tim and Bob for fit. Some things just don't look right once you put them on a tall person or a tiny woman so it takes patience. The items I found amounted to 25-75% of each person's costume, all costing between \$2 and \$7 each. Three of us are still seeking to thrift a pair of old black stompers (Bob found a pair online for about \$30), and I will be studying pictures of 1840 rucksacks to try my

hand at sewing one up with a punching awl and wax string.

Next up was to buy ready-made replicas of 1840s clothes. I decided that once I had thrifted all I could, it was time to buy some pricier clothes that I could not source. Sourcing historical clothing is very easy online at the websites that were recommended to me: Historical Emporium, Wild West Mercantile, and Townsends, or by visiting a local shop if you are lucky enough to live near one. In Sacramento, we have Evangelines, which has a dedicated floor of 1840's clothing. I went to Evangelines first to support local business - and while they had very limited inventory, I was able to buy men's high waisted pants for \$65 and \$55, and



distressing a hat by working in dirt

a perfect leather lowbrow hat for \$25. I had less luck online with Wild West Mercantile, where after placing an order for an 1840s workshirt, 3 more pant sizes, and 2 canvas vests (all about \$65), they had only 4 sets of suspenders in stock until next fall. Luckily, Historical Emporium had everything in stock, including a specially made woman's high-waisted pant for Elke that fit way better than the men's version. One challenge was finding plain felt hats since they are not in fashion - so Bob and I ordered the universally recognized 1840s wide brim felt hats all men wore to keep the sun out of their eyes, brown for Eddy and a more severe looking black one for William Stark. These are \$65-80, depending on if you buy a liner, which is used to cinch it down so it won't fall off when riding a horse.

So while with more time and resources we could have sewn custom costumes based on patterns from online versions, or rented costumes from many of the Southern California western movie costume shops, we have achieved a level of authenticity that the average person could replicate for their own 1840s look without the cost or effort. We are busy dragging our newer clothes in

the dirt, dunking them in black tea, scrubbing them with wire brushes and wearing them out to achieve that red mud season look unique to the Sierras and folks who wear their clothes in extreme conditions. We can't wait to don our duds and get on the trail to honor the people who did the same 175 years ago.

Resources:

Evangelines Costume (<https://www.evangelinescostumemansion.com>)

Historical Emporium (<https://www.historicalemporium.com>)

Wild West Mercantile (<https://www.wmerc.com/cgi-bin/Category.cgi?category=3989&type=store>)

Townsend's (<https://www.townsend.us>)

[Authentic Costumes and Characters of the Wild West](#) by E. Lisle Reedstrom



Elke's page 15 pants, cleaned and authentically treated with coffee grounds.

Game On!

The Heirloom's graphics department had just finished laying out the stories about period clothing, how to distress clothing for proper authenticity, and where to get period clothing. As good journalists the reporting staff had sent Bob Crowley Elke's professional distressing techniques and asked for comment about the comparison between his and Elke's methods. You can see his original response in the middle of page 15.

Later that afternoon, apparently after a good deal of thought, feelings of inadequacy and desire to meet the public's expectations at the various events, an email arrived with pictures labeled "before" and "after." Two of those pictures you see here. The top shows Mr. Crowley's Jeep before washing and the bottom shows the Jeep afterwards.

The subject heading of the email said, "Game On!" Because I guess pictures are worth a thousand words, there was no explanation other than the only text line, "I 'washed' my Jeep with Stark's pants. Voilà!" Certainly the bottom picture's pants show the resulting suitable authenticity of Mr. Crowley's period clothing. Elke noted that the Jeep didn't look any cleaner.



HOW TO MAKE SNOWSHOES FROM OX-BOWS

Prepared by Ed Hodges; researcher from San Jose; help from: D.J. Brown; Kristin Johnson; Scott Anderson; Sean Halloran

Franklin Graves, who apparently took charge of making the snowshoes for the Donner Party, had some experience with them from his youth, and he had quite a bit of time to work on them so they may have been more carefully constructed than we generally assume. At any rate, there's no mention of any of them failing or giving out, so they must have been pretty rugged. Because he made them from the U shaped ox bows he had at hand, I suspect much of the work of constructing the frame was already taken care of for him (except that he had to delicately split the wood in half along the grain, so that each bow yielded two snowshoes and he then had to auger holes in each frame for the lacing). And we know that they used rawhide strips rather than wood for the webbing. **Daniel James Brown , author of "The Indifferent Stars Above"**

Scott Anderson located these: info@thehinefamily.com (oxbows) <http://www.eidnesfurs.com> (rawhide)

"... here I must give an understanding of how ours were made, as we were neither scienced, nor had we proper material. My shoes were the ox-bows split in two, and rawhide strings woven in, something in form of the old-fashioned split-bottomed chairs.... in many cases we were compelled to slide on our shoes as sleds. On reaching the bottom we would plunge into the snow, so that it was difficult getting out, with the shoes tied to our feet, our packs lashed to our backs, and ourselves head and ears under the snow... When this was accomplished we had to ascend a hill as steep as the one we had descended. We would drive the toes of our shoes into the loose snow, to make a sort of step, and one by one, as if ascending stair-steps, we climbed up... It would make you dizzy to look down at the water, and it was with much difficulty we could place our clumsy ox-bow snow-shoes one ahead of the other without falling." **Mary Graves; member of the snowshoe party**

A well equipped wagon train would have carried these woodworking tools necessary for making repairs: axe, *froe*, brace with bits, saw, drawknife, some planes, chisels and other basic wood working tools. **Sean Halloran; craftsman in wood**



Step 1: Ox-Bows
(we chose 12" wide bows)



Step 2: Cutting the OxBow
(chisel & vise essential)



Step 3: One ox-bow cut in two
(total cut time was 1 hour)



Step 4: Drill 3/8" holes
(30 holes/shoe; brace & bit)



Step 5: Attach tail brace
(cut, drill, glue, dowel;)



Step 6: Find a sheet of rawhide
(soak it before cutting)



Step 7: Cut rawhide into strips
(wide = strong ; narrow = fit)



Step 8: Lace strips thru holes
(20 strips per shoe minimum)



Step 9: Apply hot wax
(waterproofs the rawhide)



Step 10: Use 3 strips of rawhide
to anchor shoe to snowshoe



Step 11: Apply coat of animal fat
to the 3 rawhide strips (flexible)



Step 12: Demonstrate use
at Donner State Museum

How much time did it take to make one pair of Forlorn Hope Snowshoes ?

Saw one oxbow in half -----	30 minutes	Ed Hodges
Attach tail brace -----	30 minutes	
Drill 30 holes on one oxbow -----	45 minutes	
Cut 30 strips of rawhide -----	45 minutes	
Lace & tie 25 rawhide strips thru holes ----	60 minutes	
Apply hot wax to the rawhide strips -----	30 minutes	
Attach rawhide strips for shoe anchor -----	30 minutes	
Total Time to Build one Snowshoe -----	4 ½ hours	
Total Time to Build a pair of Snowshoes -----	9 hours	

The Oxbows and the Rawhide were located on-line

One oxbow cost me \$55; Rawhide cost me \$45

Edward Hodges; retired teacher from San Jose; ehodges1@earthlink.net



Who Are These People?

When you match an affinity for endorphins with an affinity for history you might get an interesting activity, a compelling story and maybe even a new sport - History Trail Trekking. That's what we got as spectators as four extreme athletes followed the 1846 route of the Donner Party's rescue expeditions. Over five days and one hundred plus miles, they went from Johnson Ranch, near Wheatland, CA over Donner Pass and down to Donner Lake.

Tim Twietmeyer, above left, is an engineering manager at Hewlett Packard in Roseville. For recreation he has completed hundreds of ultra running and endurance events and won many both nationally and internationally. He is the only person to have completed the Western States Endurance Run 25 times, each in under 24 hours. He is the current president of the Western States Endurance Run Foundation. Tim and his wife, Kathy, have three sons and reside in Auburn, California.

Jennifer Hemmen, second from left, is an environmental lawyer focusing on conservation projects in California that benefit endangered species, habitats and water quality. She has completed more than fifty ultra trail races ranging from fifty to one hundred miles. She has recently gotten involved in adventure racing, for example competing in the EcoChallenge Fiji, a 640 kilometer adventure race known as the "world's toughest race" requiring outrigger canoe, mountain biking, climbing and swimming as well as jungle navigation. Her love of the wilderness started when she was in high school and extended later to leading Outward Bound trips and other outdoor programs for teenagers. She has lived and worked internationally and throughout the United States.

Jennifer, her husband, Travis, and their three children live in Fair Oaks, CA, along the American River.

Bob Crowley, third from left, has been an entrepreneur all his life, starting and managing companies. Currently he works with various non-profits and mentors young entrepreneurs. His extra-curricular passion, ultra-running is an extension of his risk taking. He has completed hundreds of endurance events both nationally and internationally, including the Western States 100 Mile Race in California. Bob lives in Fair Oaks with his wife of forty years, Marcy. They have two sons.

Elke Reimer, right, is an avid outdoor person and ultra-distance runner having completed forty races from 50k's to 100 milers. She and her daughter were the first mother-daughter team competing in the Western States 100 Mile Run. She climbs, runs, backpacks, and volunteers as a trail steward for the Western States Trail Foundation and the Pacific Crest Trail Association.

Elke is the mother of two and lives in Auburn, CA with her cattle dog and mountain companion, Lupine Sierra.



Casting the Donner Monument - A Little Historical Serendipity

By Erika Mailman

Sometimes a touch of the uncanny arises, and gives us a welcomed jolt of realizing how the past still resonates. In December 2020, I was at Johnson's Ranch to watch the Forlorn Hope Expedition come in after their arduous reprisal of the original 1846-47 group's journey. There, I met Bill Oudegeest of the Donner Summit Historical Society [and editor of this august [Heirloom](#)]. After a good conversation that continued via email, I offered him a reprint of my article about the De Rome Foundry which cast the pioneer monument [that sits atop its pedestal at the Donner State Park - see page 24]. Years ago, at the original Emigrant Trail Museum, I had paused to look at a photograph of someone pouring iron down into a waiting mold, with a notation that the setting was the De Rome Foundry in Oakland. I became intrigued and embarked on learning everything I could about Louis De Rome. I wrote about him and the statue for the [Montclairion](#) newspaper in 2007 and the [Oakland Heritage Alliance](#) newsletter in 2015. Bill was interested in my article, but asked that I find out more

about the De Rome family.

Online searching quickly revealed that De Rome's home at 1076 59th Street in Oakland had sold in 2019; it was fancy enough to warrant its own website (now taken down) and an article in SF Gate—and a closing price of \$2.75 million. I sent a card to the address, asking the new homeowners if they had any information on De Rome, if perhaps historical scrapbooks or documentation had been included in the sale. I included printouts of my articles in the envelope. To this day, I have not heard from the homeowners—but within a week, with un-earthly timing, I received a message from a woman who told me she had been researching her ancestor Louis De Rome and

Here and on the next page are, pictures of the Donner Monument pieces ready to travel to Donner Lake from Oakland. Can you match the parts to the statue - pg 24.

had come across my name on articles online. Stranger yet? We already knew each other; she and I had kids in the same classroom! We don't live in Oakland or Truckee, the cities associated with De Rome and the monument.

She, Jennifer Slade, was embarking on her family history, which coincided with my efforts to learn more. When she connected with relatives she'd never met before—direct descendants of Louis De Rome—she invited me along to meet them in May. Before I talk about that visit, here's a little background on De Rome.

He arrived in California in 1858, at the age of 4. Later, after a nine-year apprenticeship with a brassworks, he partnered with Neil C. Whyte, who had been born on a ship moored in San Francisco Bay in 1852. Their firm was called Whyte & De Rome and was chugging along until their three-story foundry was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and fire. Some of their statues still stand in Golden Gate Park; they also created brass fittings for 32 of San Francisco's cable cars. We have them to thank for saving the original Mission Dolores bells rather than melting them down as originally intended. At some point after the earthquake, the firm undertook a lugubrious name change to become the Louis de Rome Memorial Bronze, Brass and Bell Foundry, and operations shifted to Oakland.



“When we went to one of the ceremonies at the monument, we met the Chapman family and they told us that the family on the statue was that of George Donner's brother Jacob,” says Susie Medhurst, De Rome's great-granddaughter.

The 18-ton monument caused much controversy. Although work commenced in 1901, the statue wasn't dedicated until 1918, long after De Rome's 1910 death. In attendance was his son Louis, who took on the family business. The name similarity is confusing. In this article, unless otherwise specified, “De Rome” will refer to the elder.



The monument purports to honor pioneers in general, but its original intent was to memorialize the Donner Party in particular, an item of contention as fundraising began. “There was considerable comment among delegates on the fact that the pioneer monument, erected on the ground made famous by the Donner party, contains no mention on either tablet of the Donner party,” reported the Oakland Tribune on June 6, 1918, when the monument was dedicated.

The other battleground was the statue's placement. Charles McGlashan, a Truckee newspaperman who first collected oral histories from survivors, wanted a memorial on the very spot of the Breen family cabin, which was burned to the ground by a military party horrified by its grisly contents. Some questioned whether McGlashan could truly identify the site after so many years had passed since the 1846-47

tragedy; he brought survivors in 1879 to where, as he stated in a 1920 testament, “the print of the foundation logs was distinctly visible, the fireplace remained intact, and about four feet from the northwest corner of the site of the cabin stood a jagged stump about eight feet high.” He performed excava-

Undoubtedly, De Rome's most enduring and unusual work is the statue atop an enormous pedestal at the Donner Emigrant Trail Visitors' Center in Truckee. It shows a man, woman with baby, and child struggling against wind (and clearly, bad fate).

tions at the site and found china and a whetstone.

It's a sad loss that official archeology did not take place, and now never can, with the monument in place. McGlashan lost a "staunch friend" in arguing over the footprint of the Breen cabin: Dr. C.W. Chapman, who unfortunately waited until 1920, two years after the dedication, to lodge his complaint. We now know from using cadaver dogs that McGlashan was right; the memorial was placed atop the Breen cabin site.

The 22 ½ -foot pedestal is meant to indicate the level of snowfall the winter that the Donner Party was entrapped in the Sierras and some were pressed into cannibalism as a desperate measure. At the dedication, 3,000 watched, and three survivors were in attendance who had been children during that wretched winter: Eliza and Frances Donner and Martha Reed, married with new surnames.

The statue was designed by John A. MacQuarrie—a great name for an artist whose visions were often rendered in stone dug up from quarries. Three "powerful service trucks" brought the statue in three pieces from Oakland to Truckee, according to the May 19, 1918 Oakland Tribune. "The Donner statue is said to be the fourth largest bronze casting ever made in the United States and the largest ever cast in California," continued the article. A large crane lifted the three sections onto the trucks, taking nearly all day to do so. Since motoring was so new in this era, the use of trucks required explanation. "Section of the service trucks...in preference to ordinary drays [pulled by horses] which have in the past been used by the De Rome foundry for similar purposes was due to a recognition... of the greater ease, speed and safety of handling such problems with a motor truck." Another article on the same page cautioned, "The truck must be considered on the same plane as a horse and not purely as mechanical,

for the motor vehicle, like the horse, will rebel at abuse." The \$40,000 price tag of the monument no doubt also influenced the care with which it was handled.

On the day of the statue's dedication, June 6, 1918, two little girls performed the unveiling: Louis Jr.'s daughter Betsy, and committee chairman C.W. Chapman's daughter Helen. The "virile" inscription on the base was written by



The Emigrant Monument at the Donner State Park at Donner Lake, as it looks today all assembled.

Benjamin Ide Wheeler, president of UC Berkeley. It may strike some as ironic that virility is emphasized when the women of the Donner Party were not permitted to vote at the important campfire council in which the men decided, against the women's entreaties, to take the infamous Hastings route that delayed their journey and played into their being stranded in the Sierra.

Another bit of irony (no pun intended: iron, get it?) involves the fact that an interesting plaque on the monument's base reads "E. B. De Rome"—that stands for Emma Birdella De Rome, De Rome's wife. "She was a dynamo from what I understand," says Susie Medhurst of her great-grandmother. "When Senior had his stroke, she took over running the foundry and just used the initials E. B. so that no one knew they were dealing with a woman. Junior would do all the meet-and-greet with any clients." Louis Jr. later took over operations and expanded the foundry. He retired in 1934 and



Susie Medhurst with some of the scrapbooks created by her daughter Jenni Quadros.

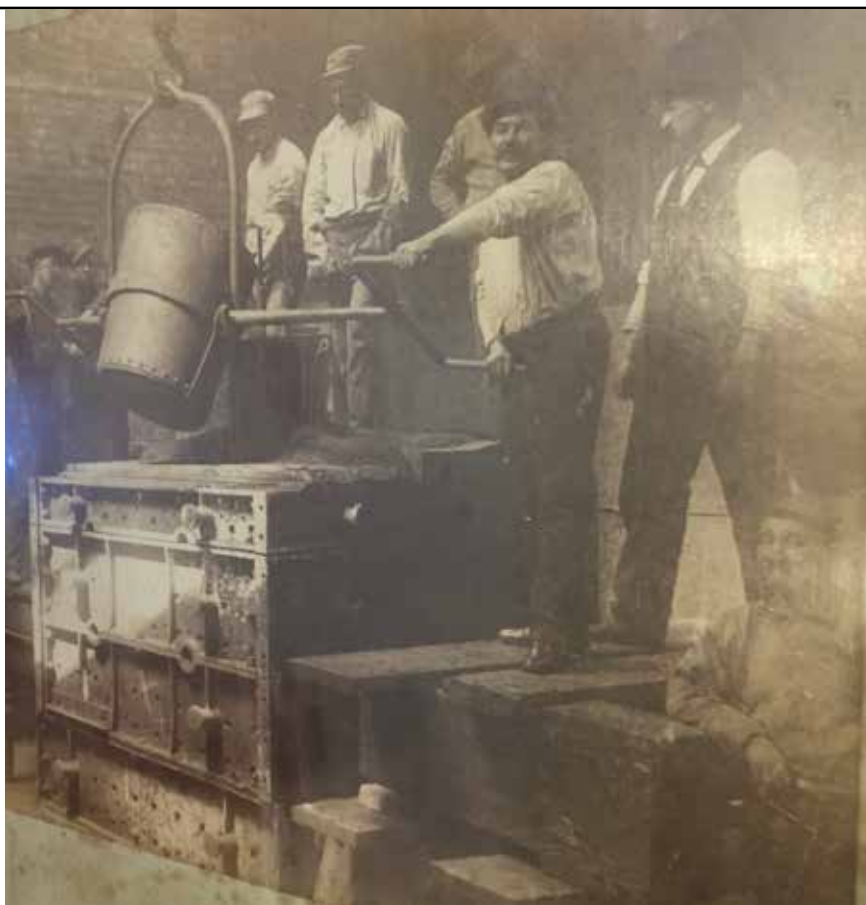
the foundry which had been next to the home was dismantled.

In May, I joined Jennifer Slade, her two sons, and Susie at the home of Susie's daughter Jenni Quadros, where these two sets of De Rome descendants met each other for the first time. Welcoming and friendly, everyone gave hugs and was soon chatting away. Jennifer had created a homeschool curriculum on family history that day for her kids during this pandemic year, and a fun moment arose when the boys tried on Charles De Rome's Oakland fire captain's helmet. Charles was another one of Louis Senior's sons.

Jenni's living room includes prime placement of De Rome memorabilia with beautifully framed photographs and patents. Because, yes, De Rome was also an inventor! He worked on some sort of bicycle attachment and a furnace. On a specially-created shelf rests De Rome's notebook with handwritten recipes for his chemical foundry mixtures. On the staircase ledge are several miniature creatures from the foundry. This family is doing a great job of preserving its history—even before the scrapbooks came out, worthy of a small museum's collections. In the scrapbooks are photographs, receipts from the foundry, paperwork regarding the various commissions De Rome fulfilled, and letters.

Susie had some memories of the Oakland home, such as that a "De Rome Social Club" took place on Fridays with people gathering to play pool inside the house, and the fact that Louis Sr. was born in an upstairs bedroom. In the formal living room downstairs, she was only allowed entry on Sundays, and that with her arms held behind her back to not touch anything. Her strongest memory of Louis Jr. was he would have her whip cream to make butter while she sat on his lap. She remembers finding arrowheads in the yard.

She was 8 years old when the house was sold after Louis Jr. died. She recalls that her mother wanted to keep it, but her widowed grandmother felt it was too big of an undertaking for her and



Inside the San Francisco foundry, workers prepare to pour the molten bronze into a waiting form. Louis De Rome Sr. is the man in the black vest to the right of the pourer



Interior of the San Francisco foundry with workers surrounding the box with the mold inside it. Louis De Rome Senior is in the middle of the three suited men behind the box.

sold it to a non-family member. Susie's mother Katherine Birdella (Betsy) De Rome told her stories of her grandmother Emma Birdella De Rome spreading a blanket on the front lawn in the early hours of the morning and star gazing. She knew all the constellations. Emma passed in 1936.

The house went through many hands. At one time, it became a hippie commune, and “they trashed it,” Susie says. The Oakland Museum of California has some of the De Rome furniture and once had a display of it. The home was purchased by LeAnne Calixtro in 2014. “She not only saw the potential in restoring it, but loved the history behind it. She was so into the history that the family welcomed her in and even called her Cousin Lulu. She started the Friday night get-togethers, naming the events The De Rome Social Club,” says Susie. We have Cousin Lulu to thank for restoring the home to its incredible beauty, and also for finding some negatives of De Rome family pictures.

After Susie’s parents died, she started going through boxes in the third bay of their El Cerrito garage and discovered a wealth of materials she had not known existed. Her daughter Jenni took them over and created the fantastic photo and scrapbook albums that I saw during my visit. Unfortunately, it is hard to identify some of the people in the photographs because no notations were on the back.



We believe this is a picture of Betsy and Louis Jr. a few years before the unveiling ceremony as she looks much younger than the 1918 images.

Susie is amused that the two girls who pulled the rope to reveal the Pioneer Monument in 1918 were well-established society girls, yet they looked adorably waifish. At the 2018 centennial service at the new Donner Memorial State Museum which had opened in 2015, she replicated the big hairbows the original girls wore and had two modern-day relatives, Louis Junior’s great-great granddaughters, wear them. At that event, she also met other relatives she had not

known of previously, who got up to speak and identified themselves as De Rome descendants.

Many fascinating anecdotes arose as we talked. For instance, if anyone knows the 12-foot statue honoring Chief Solano now to be found in Fairfield, cast by the De Rome foundry in 1934, its nose was fashioned on Louis Jr.’s



This Globe foundry in San Francisco predated the Oakland foundry. It appears that this photograph may show some of the earthquake damage that prompted the move across the bay.

nose. Several thousand people attended its unveiling in Suisun Valley, and many more saw it when it was placed on display at the 1938 World’s Fair on Treasure Island. William Gordon Huff was the sculptor. As there were no photographs of Solano for Huff to work from, he referred to a bas-relief image of him made by Platon Vallejo, General Mariano Vallejo’s son. The 32-page program for the event makes no mention of Louis Jr.’s role in the statue’s creation, but certainly using a white man’s nose for a Native American man’s face was an odd choice.

I began this article with talking about coincidental connections with the story, and will end with a final one, courtesy of Jennifer Slade, the woman who had contacted me just when I was trying to reach the De Rome homeowners in Oakland. Two years ago when her son was a fourth grader required to research one of the California missions, he somehow chose the San Gabriel Mission, focusing his attention on the bells...which his ancestor cast.

Many thanks to Kathleen DiGiovanni for research assistance long ago at the Oakland History Center. This piece was adapted from a longer version which appeared in the Winter 2015 issue of the [Oakland Heritage Alliance News](#). My article about the

Forlorn Hope Expedition appeared in [Atlas Obscura](#). Finally, I'm a historical novelist; learn more at www.erikamailman.com.



The hairbowed kids at the 1918 dedication from behind



On the day of the statue's unveiling on June 6, 1918, Louis De Rome Junior's daughter Katherine (Betsy) Birdella De Rome, 6, poses with an unknown boy.

Betsy De Rome and Helen Chapman, the daughter of C.W. Chapman, the chairman of the monument committee, together pulled the rope that unveiled the statue. Here they are either before or after performing that duty. There is also an extant 1918 photo of Louis Jr. himself at the base of the monument, but it is blurry and overexposed.



In recreated costumes Louis Junior's great great granddaughters stand in front of the Emigrant Monument at the 2018 Centennial celebration

Erika Mailman, her Bio: Erika Mailman is the author of [The Witch's Trinity](#) [a good read - ed.], a [San Francisco Chronicle](#) Notable Book which Khaled Hosseini called "gripping"; [Woman of Ill Fame](#) which Diana Gabaldon of the [Outlander](#) series called, "one of the best books I've read in a long time," and the award-winning [The Murderer's Maid: a Lizzie Borden Novel](#). She holds an MFA in poetry and has been a Yaddo fellow and Bram Stoker Award finalist. Under the pen name Lynn Carthage, her young adult trilogy includes [Haunted](#), [Betrayed](#) and [Avenged](#). Her articles have appeared in [Smithsonian](#), [Washington Post](#), [Rolling Stone](#), [Lit Hub](#), and more. www.erikamailman.com



Sculptors create miniature versions of projects called maquettes to study and revise before going large. Here is the maquette, front and back, for the Truckee monument.



Susie Medhurst keeps a small collection of animals made by the De Rome foundry. This wolf shows fine detailwork.



It's unclear why the number changed; perhaps street renumbering can explain it. The line of workers includes some very young boys.



Three men pose at the Whyte & De Rome establishment. Chalk markings on the brick wall and door show mathematical calculations made during the workday.



De Rome's four children, Viola, Louis Jr, Charles, and Merle with a statue of a man and infant seemingly flying or floating in a cloud.

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