

The Donner Summit

Heirloom

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

April, 2023 issue #176



I wish all Sacramento could get one full breath of this pure air and have a drink of these delicious waters.

Sacramento Record Union July 24, 1896

I have found it. Six thousand feet above the fervid plains of the Sacramento lies a little green valley, blossoming in beauty, encircled by the craggy peaks of the high Sierras. In the midst of it bubbles the spring which gives name to the place and is one of the many attractions which are bringing hither a yearly increasing crowd of health and pleasure seekers.

Sacramento Union July 16, 1875

Summit Soda Springs

It's ironic that our readers had to wait until Heirloom issue 176 before we arrived at Summit Soda Springs, the original Soda Springs. Since it is the original Soda Springs we'd have expected it to make its appearance in the Heirloom years sooner. Nevertheless, having accumulated a lot of sources, here it is. Our research department has been collecting Soda Springs items ever since the DSHS was founded fourteen years ago. We include in this and the next Heirloom text, stories, newspaper articles, pictures, ads, and maybe something else. We'll see what's in the files. We may spill over into the June issue too, issue #178.

We covered a lot of the history of the original, or Summit Soda Springs, in our February, '14 Heirloom article by Nick Chickering, a member of the family that owns the area today. We won't rehash what he said there; that's what our website's Heirloom indices and posted past issues are for. We don't want to waste valuable current Heirloom space with that which has been done. So here, we'll delve into Summit Soda Springs, as it used to be called, when it was a fashionable resort for the well-heeled members of high society during the latter part of the 19th Century.

To begin with one very helpful source was Nick Chickering's February, '14 article. Another was volumes I and II of The Inside Man, a biography of Mark Hopkins (reviewed in our June '19 Heirloom), who built a summer home and hotel there. Then there were contemporary photographs, newspaper articles and ads, letters, and paintings, some of which you'll see here or in the next two issues.

Today's Soda Springs is not the original Soda Springs. Today's Soda Springs, on Old highway 40, was called Soda Springs Station in the old days (and Tinker's Station before that). It was there that train passengers left the train and embarked on a four-hour stage journey south to Summit Soda Springs, a resort on the north fork of the American River. Parenthetically that road, Baker Ranch Soda Springs Rd., which was built in 1852 by Placer County to lure immigrants that way down to Auburn, continues on down to Auburn. It's an interesting trip past old mining towns sites and interesting geology, among other things, but that's another story.

Although today's Soda Springs Station does not have soda springs, Summit Soda Springs does and has been settled in summers for thousands of years. There are petroglyphs in many places incised in the granite by the Martis Culture from about 2,000 B.C.E. to 500 A.D. They are fascinating but deserve their own story in some future Heirloom. Stay tuned.

Story Locations in this Issue

Summit Soda Springs Today's Soda Springs Ice or Serene Lakes pg 3



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. 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.

editor:
Bill Oudegeest
209-606-6859
info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

Proofread by Pat Malberg, Lake Mary, Donner Summit

*historical society humor

Find us on 

Norton Bush (American, 1834-1894), Soda Springs, Sierra Nevada Mountains, 1868. Oil on Canvas, 30X48 inches. Crocker Art Museum, E. B. Crocker Collection 1872.674



We don't know which white man was the first to "discover" the original soda springs, originally called Soda Springs Valley and then Hopkins Springs. There was a miner's cabin there as early as 1862, and [The History of Placer County](#) (1882 pg 406) notes "At this place too, in 1864, did the prospectors rush and form a district, and locate many claims, with high sounding title, for mining purposes." In 1866 there were more mining claims but no riches were ever found. You can see the 1862 cabin in the earliest painting of the area by Norton Bush, above. In the background you see Anderson Pk. on the left and Tinker Knob on the right. Let's deal with Mr. Bush in a sidebar at the end of this article though, so as not to distract from the story.

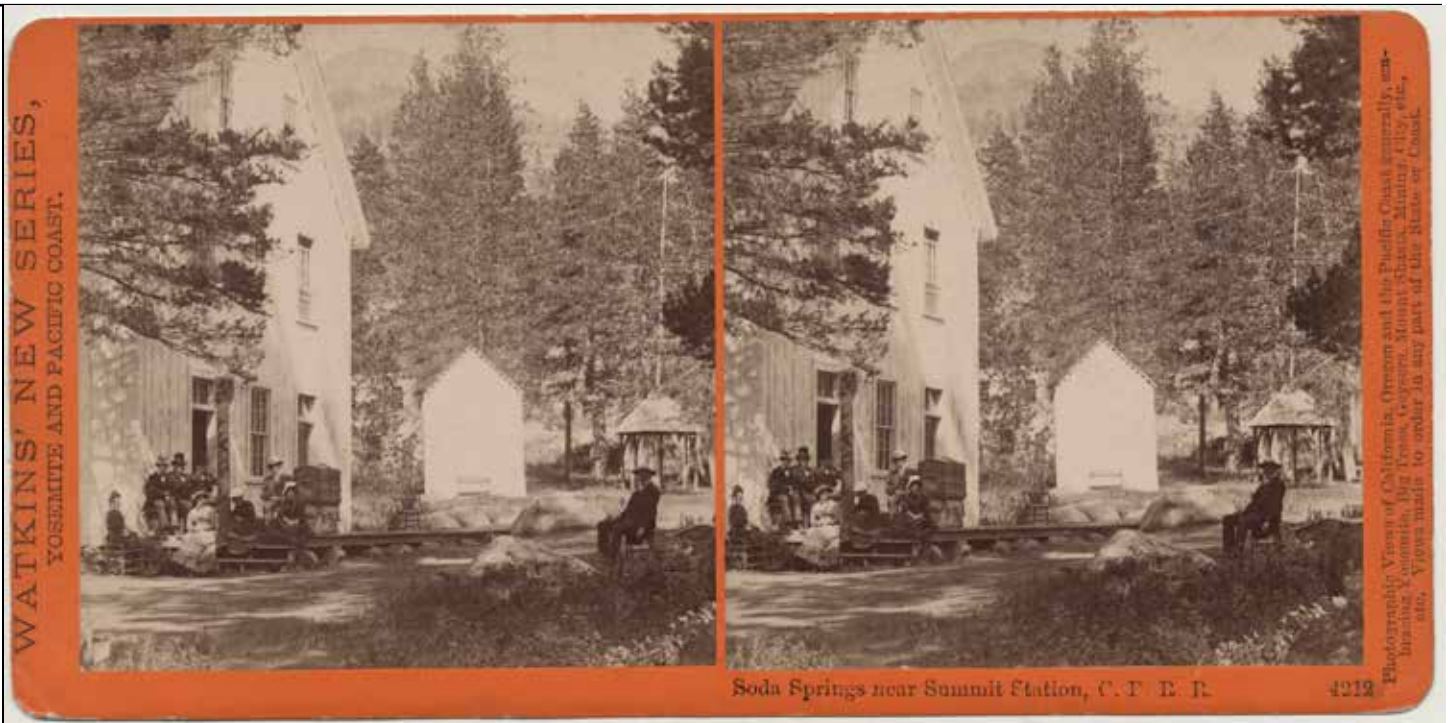
We can imagine that as the transcontinental railroad was being laid out railroad people were exploring the huge grants of land the Central Pacific had been given by the Federal Government: every other section of land ten and then twenty miles deep on each side of the route. The railroads could sell the land, which they did and do, even into the modern era. Benjamin Bernard Redding (BB) was land agent for the Central Pacific and we know he explored the area, noting that he'd caught 200 fish in a day in the North Fork of the American River at what would be called Summit Soda Springs. The route down to the springs goes by what were three little lakes, which became known as Ice Lakes. We can guess that B.B. is the one who told his 20 year old brother about them. Fitzwilliam Redding Jr. then patented (bought from the Federal Government)

"A mineral spring...only eight miles south of Summit Valley a soda spring has been found, equal in purity and deliciousness to the water of an artificial fountain. A very short time must elapse before both of these springs will be become the resort of the invalid and pleasure-seeker.

[The Central Pacific Railroad or '49 and '69](#) by Old Block (Alonzo Delano - see the [Heirloom article index](#)), 1868

the land which would today be about half of Serene Lakes. He planned to settle there and he built a small cabin in 1866. About then he did the first fish stocking there. Unfortunately he died the next year and that sent his father scrambling to save the patent. B.B., with some business associates, then started up Summit Ice Co., an ice harvesting enterprise on the Ice Lakes that lasted until 1872 when they decided it was better down in Truckee where it was colder and there was less snow. That's all for another [Heirloom](#) (so see the March and May, '21 and May, '13 issues) too.

Mark Hopkins was at least an acquaintance of B.B. Redding and even if B.B. didn't tell Hopkins about the soda springs he probably told others. We know too, that Mark Hopkins, one of the transcontinental railroad's big 4; A.C. Freeman, the railroad's land lawyer; a Native American guide; and Bill Derrick, a local with a fascinating history that ought to be in a sidebar here (but instead, you'll have to wait for the [May Heirloom](#)), visited Soda Springs in 1869. Mark Hopkins was quite taken apparently, and leased eighty acres from the railroad in 1871 (or 1875, depending on which footnote in [The Inside Man](#) you want to believe). He couldn't outright buy it because title had not been transferred from the Federal Government to the railroad yet. [The Inside Man](#) says Mark Hopkins wanted to make his summer house at Soda Springs in 1872 (parenthetically just as Summit Ice was leaving Donner Summit for Truckee). Hopkins "built a modest five window log cabin. The first floor of his two story



Carleton Watkins New Series, Soda Springs near Summit Station, CPRR ca. 1875. Pictured here is the Summit Soda Springs hotel built by Mark Hopkins. This is a stereo opticon (also stereo viewer or stereograph), a very popular 19th Century form of entertainment. People would sit around sharing stereo views from around the world.

summer retreat was divided into two rooms: a sitting room and a bedroom. The central feature of the sitting room was a large stone fireplace supported by a rail from the Central Pacific's track, and a sunken bathtub near it..." As a modern convenience the fireplace had an iron bar that supported kettles over the coals. The kettles could be rotated out from the fireplace to provide "running" hot water for the bathtub. It's all still there along with other buildings and they are all part of the National Historic Register. Title was finally transferred in 1887 for \$400, or \$5 an acre.

Many other people had found Summit Soda Springs before Mr. Hopkins. Alonzo Delano (pen name "Old Block" - see our July and September, '20 [Heirlooms](#)), a social commentator, author and banker, visited and wrote in his 1868 booklet, [The Central Pacific Railroad or '49 and '69](#), "A mineral spring... only eight miles south of Summit Valley a soda spring has been found, equal in purity and deliciousness to the water of an artificial fountain. A very short time must elapse before both of these springs will become the resort of the invalid and pleasure-seeker."

A very short time did elapse. James Cardwell, proprietor of the Summit Hotel on Donner Summit, across from today's

Donner Ski Ranch, first took guests to Summit Soda Springs in 1870. His guests would admire the scenery, see the Indians camped there, and drink the "healing mineral waters." ([The Inside Man](#))

"Tis a singular place," the miner said, when telling his friends of his discovery of Soda Springs. "Tis a singular place; dog on my skin if it ain't, whar sweet and sour water comes out'n the same hole, one bilin' hot, to look at it, but cold as ice: the other looking warm and quiet, but cold enough to freeze a feller to death."

[Crofutt's Transcontinental Tourist Guide](#), 1871, describing Summit Soda Springs.

Alexey Von Schmidt, who is also a fascinating story for another [Heirloom](#) (see the May, '21 [Heirloom](#)), built a couple of cabins in the area in 1872. (Nick Chickering, "The History of Soda Springs" ([The Heirloom](#) February, '14) and [The California Spirit of the Times](#), June 1885)

Mark Hopkins' wife was a San Francisco socialite and she found the area too remote. So her dutiful husband built a hotel nearby in 1873, just down the road from his cabin (see picture above). It was three stories and accommodated 85 guests. The hotel soon became a favorite of the upper classes and lasted until 1898 when it burned down and the clientele had to find somewhere else, nowhere near as attractive of course, but that's also another story and not for a future [Heirloom](#). In 1875 Hopkins Springs got a post office and became Summit Soda Springs.

That's a brief background. Now, what was life like at Summit Soda Springs?

Train passengers would arrive at Soda Springs Station or Summit Station (the Summit Hotel) and embark on the stage for Summit Soda Springs. Arriving at Summit Soda Springs, "There is nothing very imposing about the place, nothing very grand about the hotel. First a plain clapboard house of two stories [sic], then a few paces distant a little log hut, and close to it another two-story clapboard building. Add to these the spring house and bath room [sic] and you have the hotel complete... The hotel is situated close to the bank of the

American River, which is now a roaring torrent. The lower house contains a parlor, dining room and sets of sleeping apartments; the upper house contains sleeping rooms only... the log hut is the lounging and card room. Up the side of a slightly rising hill, and reached by a narrow path, there is another log hut, which you are told was the mountain residence of the late Mark Hopkins." The California Spirit of the Times and Underwriters Journal June 13, 1885)

The rooms are nicely furnished "and with a generally wholesome air about it. The lunch bell rings and you find in the dining room a genuine surprise." The table is "bright with plate and glass, fragrant with flowers... the linen is spotless "and the menu as varied as it is wholesome." The tables are all occupied by families.

Everyone appears in excellent health and dressed sensibly and "pleasantly familiar with each other." "The Struggle for the most stylish toilet is unknown here, and rivalry in extent of wardrobe is not dreamed of." (California Spirit of the Times Magazine June 13, 1885)

Newspapers of the time carried many articles, letters, and ads about Summit Soda Springs. It was, among other things, "one of the loveliest and most enchanting spots on the face of the earth." (Sacramento Daily Union July 3, 1895) or "positively

SUMMIT SODA SPRINGS HOTEL.

Situated on the American River, in the
HIGH SIERRAS,

THIRTEEN MILES FROM SUMMIT
Station, C. P. R. R. Various improvements recently made, including a

LARGE NEW LOG CABIN.

This well-known Summer Resort will be
open to guests JUNE 20TH,

GOULDEN & JACOBS, Proprietors,
DONNER P. O.

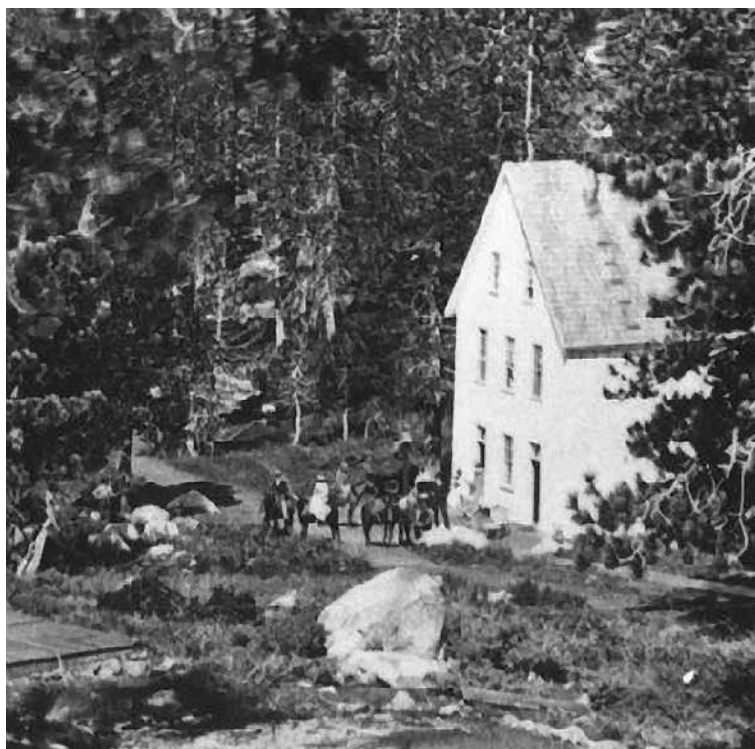
Sacramento Daily Union

July 16, 1895

magnificent" (Daily Alta California January 24, 1869). People came year after year and some stayed entire summers. Even the stage ride from Summit Station was one of "wondrous charm" (Sacramento Daily Record August 3, 1897). The scenery was wonderful, "In natural beauty, picturesque scenery, and romantic landscapes it stands out unique and wonderful in all features that compose it, surrounded by lofty mountain peaks,

with their bare, rugged granite sides exposed, and with shaded depressions filled with snow" (History of Placer County, 1882, page 406). "The scenery along the stage road... is grand and picturesque." (Sacramento Daily Union June 15, 1897) The mountain scenery was unsurpassed in grandeur and there was supposedly mineral wealth (Sacramento Daily Union May 30, 1866). Finally the Sacramento Daily Union (June 30, 1891) said "the scenery is grandly beautiful, and there is not a more picturesque spot in the Sierra Nevada Mountains than that in which the Summit Soda Springs Hotel is located."

The resort was not only picturesque, it was easy to get to, "a lady or an invalid can reach the place without fatigue..." via the railroad and then by "first class road." Daily Alta California January 24, 1869



There were a myriad of activities once the visitor had arrived. Fishing was at the top of every list. An 1893 visitor described scrambling over "many beautiful dark pools and sunny ripples from which the trout would eagerly leap as the flies were swung above or trailed lightly along their surfaces. The fishing was exceptionally good, and we found no trouble

Another view of the Summit Soda Springs Hotel.



Soda Springs near Summit Station, C. P. R. R.

4314

in filling our baskets-each fifteen pounds-with fine fat trout, mostly of the rainbow species..." <http://www.northforktrails.com/RussellTowle/NorthFork/Soda/SodaSprings.html>

The Sacramento Daily Record Union (July 16, 1898) said there was excellent fishing with "well filled creels... brought in daily by the devotees of the rod."

Beyond the fishing, there was lots to do: climbing "old bald-headed" Tinker's Knob, sometimes there were visits by live bears, there was the joy of sliding on snowbanks in these "American Alps," social gatherings, games with prizes, trail riding, strolling along Indian trails, (Sacramento Daily Record August 3, 1897), dancing, music (Sacramento Record July 24, 1896), something called "a Most Tempting Collation" (Sacramento Daily Record July 23, 1895) at the celebration of a new log cabin named Gaiety Hall. There was also hunting (Sacramento Daily Record 8/6/86), bonfires with refreshments, singing, tamale parties, camping (Sacramento Daily Record August 13, 1896), guest performances with enthusiastic encores, story telling, readings, fish bakes, campfires (Sacramento Daily Union August 10, 1894), reading, visiting the springs, viewing petroglyphs, croquet, cards, and visiting a nearby Indian encampment (California Spirit of the Times Magazine June 13, 1885).

Finally there was just relaxation, There are lunches in the wood where there are never cares about business or other "sordid considerations." Everything brings health and "buoyancy of spirit to those whose energies have become impaired in the long chase after the nimble and elusive dollar" (Sacramento Daily Record July 16, 1898).

There was nature: "flowering plants, and shrubs, where the

The gazebo over the soda springs touted for their health giving properties and good taste. Even today's summer residents say the waters are wonderful. The author, however, disagrees. The picture is dated about 1875,

SUMMIT SODA SPRINGS-ONLY 13 miles from summit, Central Pacific Rail road, altitude over 6000 feet, assuring cool and bracing climate: complete and most beneficial change for residents of our valleys and coast: incomparable mineral waters; grand scenery: in immediate vicinity of hotel are Keith's Alps, Anderson and Berkeley peaks, all over 9000 feet high; fine trout fishing: deer plentiful forests; no poison oak; saddle horses, \$2 per day; guide. \$3 per day; board and room, 810, \$12 and \$15 per week according to room. Analysis of springs yields following in a wine gallon:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-------|
| Carbonic acid (18,635 cubic inches). | 43.20 |
| Bicarbonate of lime | 4.20 |
| Carbonate of magnesia | 9.50 |
| Carbonate of soda | 3.20 |
| Chloride of sodiun | 23.05 |
| Oxide of Iron. | 1.75 |
| Silica | 2.07 |
| Alumina | 1.76 |
| Potassia (trace) .. | |
| Total..... | 88.68 |

J. GOULDEN, Proprietor.

San Francisco Chronicle
July 6, 1889

Summit Soda Springs Hotel in background behind the pool. Picture dated about 1875



deer come to drink at the salt-licks, and the piping of quails is constantly heard, alternating with the scolding cry of jays and the not unpleasant caw of the white-spotted Clark crow. Just in the rear of the public house kept at this locality, the river tumbles in slight falls and cascades over slanting or perpendicular walls of richly colored granite, shaded by beautiful groves of cedar and yellow pine, which grow in the clefts of the rock to the very edge of the stream, and crown the dark cliffs above." (California Pictures in Prose and Verse, Benjamin Parke Avery)

"Here all winter the snow lies white and deep, nurturing in earth's warm bosom the germs of thousands of flowers which in early summer make the ground like a gay carpet at your feet." (Sacramento Daily Union July 10, 1875)

Then there were the health giving waters which people took apparently very seriously given the newspaper analyses of the water at Summit Soda Springs (see the sidebar on the previous page for an example) . "The first and principal well sits under a conical roofed shed [see the previous page - there's still a version there today]. You drop the miniature bucket into the well and fill the two glasses" (the writer was visiting with another person) (Sacramento Daily Record July 16, 1898). "The waters are sharply cold, and have a biting taste.... Your lips are smarting, your mouth is almost raw, a bitter taste hangs around the palate..." It sounds terrible but they say, "stay here a few days and [drink] as often as you conveniently can," you'll change your mind. "The place is regarded an excellent one for invalids in the early stages of phthisis... the carbonate acid gives it a place in torpid digestion and certain dyspeptic troubles, while the association of its elements makes it efficacious in diseases due to a scrofulous diathesis, especially of the intestinal canal, in rheumatism and in cases requiring its diuretic action." "...its invigorating influence... proves effectual as a tonic and restorative in some nervous diseases in debility and in convalescence from acute disease." (California Spirit of the Times Magazine June 13, 1885).

The Daily Alta California (January 24, 1869) also touted the medicinal effects, "These springs, we are told, possess great medical virtues in the cure of afflictions of the kidneys, dysentery, and dyspepsis. The water is most agreeable and appetizing."

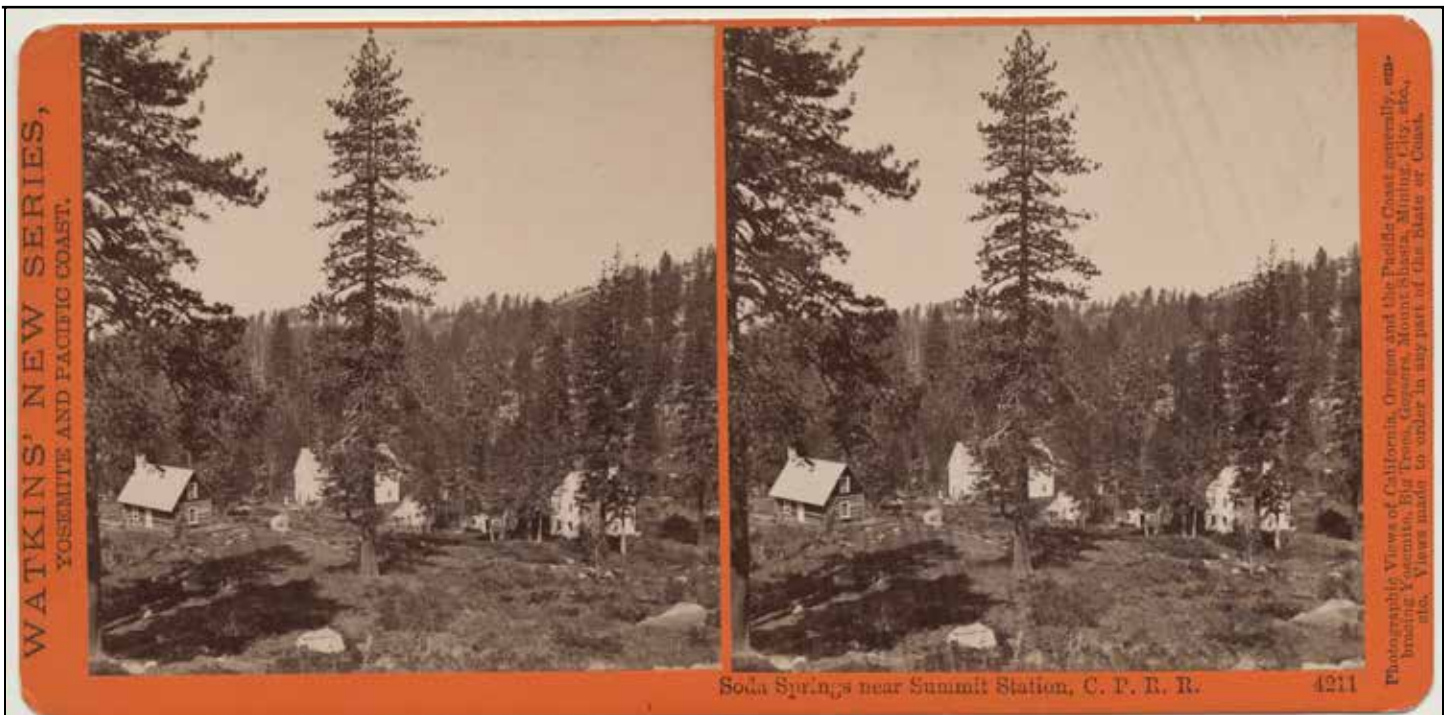
In an 1898 article titled "Life at the Highest of all Resorts" the July 16, 1898 Sacramento Daily Record said the resort was "A Veritable Summer Paradise in the Very Heart of the Sierra Nevada... This delightful resort, in the very heart of the Sierra Nevadas, is again the scene of a large gathering of health and pleasure seekers from the cities and valleys who have come here to escape the heat of summer, drink the health-giving mineral waters, and by rational recreation counteract the effect of a long season of close application to business or the demands of society."

Croftutt's 1871 Great Transcontinental Railroad Guide said "The water is pronounced to be the best medicinal water in the State. It is a delightful drink, cool and sparkling, possessing the taste of the best quality of manufactured soda water."

"The Soda spring, which gives name to the place, is highly recommended for its curative properties, and is a very agreeable drink, cold as ice, with a little taste of iron, a very strong flavor of soda, and a pungency, due to the presence of considerable carbolic acid gas." (Sacramento Union July 10, 1875). The San Francisco Chronicle (July 6, 1889) pronounced, "incomparable mineral waters" and the Sacramento Daily Union (May 30, 1866) said the waters had "extraordinary strength and invigorating qualities." No wonder, look at the make-up of the water – see the previous page.

For awhile there was a commercial operation bottling Soda Springs water. (See our April, '17 Heirloom).

The weather was also an attraction noted in publications, "The weather here is simply perfect, and the guests are enjoying life as it can only be enjoyed in a delightful retreat like the Summit Soda Springs at an elevation of many thousand feet above the valley (Sacramento Record Union July 16, 1898). "...there is not a more enjoyable spot to be found than the Summit Soda Springs... the climate is delightful,



Carleton Watkins New Series #4211 Soda Springs near Summit Station, CPRR

warm, but not hot in the middle of the day, the evenings and mornings are cool and the air at once balmy and invigorating. Alike to the weary invalid and the overworked businessman it brings daily rest and strength” (Oakland Tribune August 12, 1881).

There was great service at the hotel. A letter titled, “In the Mountains Letter from Soda Springs” to the Sacramento Daily Record (July 24, 1896) said “Anyone coming here can be sure of perfect cleanliness in the rooms and an excellently good table, waited upon in a prompt and efficient manner by thoroughly competent waiters, for Sam Jacobs, the ‘genial landlord,’ fully realizes the things most necessary for the comforts of his guests. as the return of so many of the same people year after year clearly indicates.”

“Man cannot live by scenery alone; but here, while the sense of sight is feasted, the others need not suffer famine. Ample accommodations of the very best are provided for the visitor. The hostess is unrivaled in her capability for giving a home-like aspect to her house, and her table is all that could be desired, and more than one could reasonably expect at such a distance from the centers of supply. I have visited many of our prominent watering places, and do not hesitate to place this in the first rank” (Sacramento Union July 10, 1875).

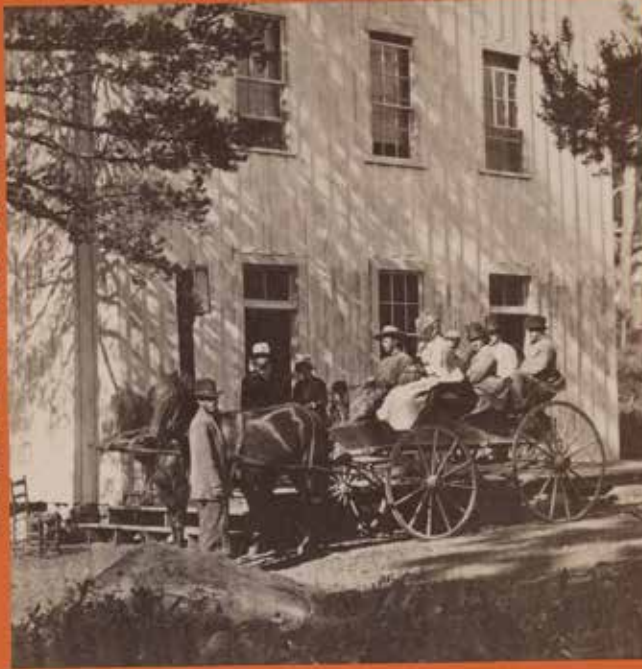
“The table is well served and amply provided with the best the market affords, the products of a neighboring dairy being particularly delicious” (Daily Alta California August 11, 1889). There was a dairy at the Summit Hotel at Donner

Pass.

You would run into consequential people at Summit Soda Springs like the justice of the Supreme Court that one correspondent saw walking along a path in 1897 (Sacramento Daily Record August 3, 1897). Here are just some famous names that can be found in the hotel register, now the property of Nick Chickering and his family, who today own what was the Hopkins Estate. The June Heirloom will carry that story.

- Mrs. George Hearst and servant,
- Dwinelle (Dwinelle Hall at UC Berkeley),
- Guggenheim,
- Sather (Sather Gate at U.C. Berkeley),
- Mills (College),
- Ghirardelli ,
- Folger (coffee),
- Searls(library in Nevada City),
- Albert Gallatin (U.S. Secretary of the Treasury),
- Flood (San Francisco Society),
- Sproul (Sproul Hall U.C. Berkeley),
- Bidwell (Chico and descendant of first wagon train to California – but without wagons),
- McAllister (street in San Francisco),
- B.B. Redding (California Secretary of State, State Printer, Central Pacific land agent, ice company at Serene Lakes.

Then, besides the famous guests, the ordinary visitors were



Soda Springs near Summit Station, C. P. R. R.

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Carleton Watkins New Series #4243 Soda Springs near Summit Station, CPRR

a reason to come. "Somehow the people that come to this Alpine paradise seem to get along better with one another than is usually the case at summer resorts. A sort of fellow-feeling seems to animate all the guests. Every one enjoys himself individually, and all enjoy themselves together." (Sacramento Daily Union July 16, 1898)

All together Summit Soda Springs was clearly an attractive destination. "Those who have tasted the water and seen the surroundings say that the Summit Springs are destined to become the Saratoga of the Pacific, and that they will be thronged with pleasure seekers next summer." (Daily Alta California January 24, 1869)

Two ladies wrote a letter to the Daily Alta California newspaper about their summer 1889 visit to Soda Springs. They waxed almost lyrically about the visit and then left for Lake Tahoe. They were anticipating something grand, "but found it in no feature equal to that of Summit Soda Springs." They showed good taste and we're glad the Heirloom is here to immortalize their words.

In September, 1898 there was a fire in the hotel and the entire establishment burned down.

In "Mountain Hotel Fire" the San Francisco Call (September 3, 1898) said, "The hotel at Summit Soda Springs... and five cottages near by were burned at 3 o'clock [sic] this morning." The more than one hundred occupants had narrow escapes and lost all their personal "effects and valuables. While the buildings were burning the half dressed guests stood around

in the freezing night air and suffered severely from the cold." Two nephews of Adolph Sutro (Sutro Tunnel at the Comstock and Sutro Baths in San Francisco) distinguished themselves "in the saving of life and limb." Two waitresses were living on the third floor and found the stairs blocked and so went out the windows lowering themselves from floor to floor with bed sheets. They were badly injured and had to be dragged away from the burning building "in a state of complete collapse..." The article or variations thereof was repeated in other newspapers. There was no insurance for the building and it was not rebuilt.

Explore more of Carleton Watkins:

www.carletonwatkins.org/list-page42ns.htm

for stereographs of soda springs and other things like the photographs in this article.

See also the August, '20 and December, '16 Heirlooms for two book reviews about Carleton Watkins and lots of pictures.



Carleton Watkins New Series Mark Hopkins Cottage Soda Springs.

Miscellaneous Stories

Bear Killed at Springs Springs.

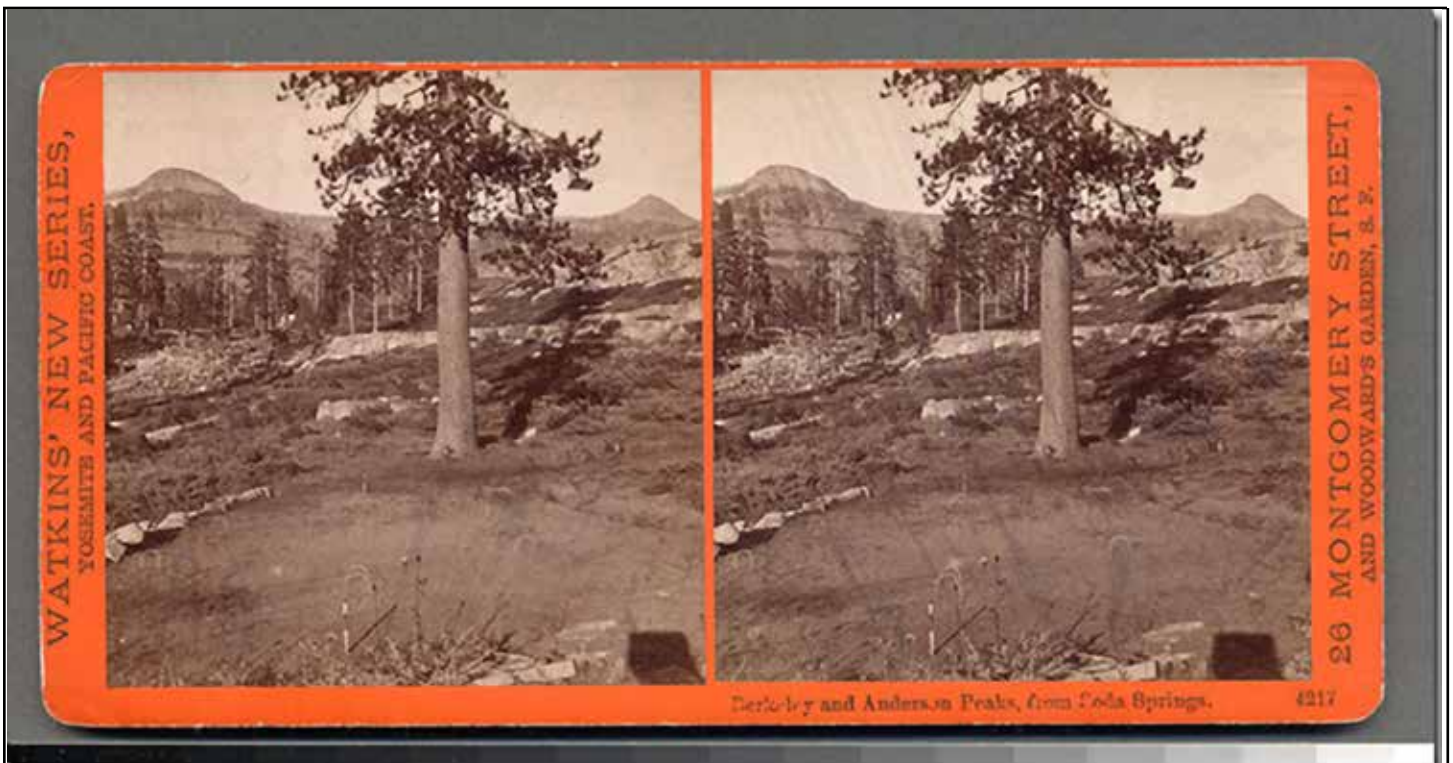
Will Clark, of Roseville, killed last Saturday, the 15th, a large cinnamon bear, near Soda Springs. His tusks and claws showed that many a snow had fallen on his head. Old hunters pronounced him one of the largest, if not the largest, they had ever seen. Clark was the hero of the camp that eve, and had to repeat his adventure and close combat with the old fellow several times, as not only the campers, but men and women from the hotel, came to look at the huge, ugly old fellow, as he lay stretched across the horse. Artist Jackson took a sketch of him, and at the same time of Mr. Chapman's horse and three deer that he brought in with him, the result of one day's hunt.

Ice is piled on the stage of a Kansas City theatre to make the audience feel cool. [No mention of whether it worked.]

August 25, 1885
Placer Herald

Despite the coming of civilization to the Sierra, there were still dangers. The Sacramento Record Union reported that although Soda Springs was a nice place to rusticate there were still dangers. Three fellows came down from the springs saying that a member of the "bruin family" had caused the loss of his horse after he'd lost another to snake bite. The men had gone down to fish and picketed their horses near where the snake bit horse had died. There were a lot of bears in the neighborhood and "one of these chaps" came to feast on carrion. One horse took a look at the bear and took off at full speed. Unfortunately the rope holding the horse was strong. The horse was jerked against a tree and broke his back. The horse's owner was looking forward to bagging some bears.

The Sacramento Record Union July 30, 1885)



Carleton Watkins New Series #4217 Berkeley and Anderson Peaks, from Soda Springs. Berkeley Pk. is now Tinker Knob. The reason for including this picture is that the cleared area in the foreground is a croquet court. Can you spot the wickets?

Accidents at the Summit.

While George Lorenz, son of Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Lorenz, was whittling a stick at the Summit Soda Springs, he let the knife slip, inflicting a wound just below the ribs on the left side. The wound is not thought to be dangerous. Alice Gardner, the oldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles F. Gardner, slipped and fell in the creek while playing with a number of children. The accident gave two little boys, Master Harmon Bonte of Sacramento and Stratton Oakel of Suisun, a chance to display their courage and gallantry.

Sacramento Daily Union (August 20, 1894)

What an innocent time that this is all they had to worry about and report in the newspaper.

From Nick Chickering, The first phone line that was put into the Old Soda Springs was in 1908. It was a party line, and connected Timothy Hopkins (heir to Mark Hopkins and then owner of Old Soda Springs), the Cedars, and A.C. & Josie Freeman (who owned 410 acres between The Cedars and Old Soda Springs, was the Big Four's land lawyer, and wrote most of California's early real estate laws).

Bill Derrick was a guide, hunter and fisherman who knew every inch of the area around Summit Soda Springs. That's not remarkable. What is remarkable is his background. He'd come across the country in a wagon train with his parents. One day he went out hunting and lost the train. His parents searched for him for three days before accepting that he'd probably been captured by Indians. The wagon train resumed its journey to Oregon. Bill was picked up by a passing train and ended up in California. He never saw his family again and ended up at Summit Soda Springs.

Just wait for next month's "Bill Derrick of Summit Soda Springs."

THE SUMMIT SODA SPRINGS.

LIFE AT THE HIGHEST OF ALL THE RESORTS.

A Veritable Summer Paradise in
the Very Heart of the Sierra
Nevada.

Sacramento Record Union
July 16, 1898

THE SACRAMENTO, SATURDAY, JULY 16, 1898. THE SUMMIT SODA SPRINGS. LIFE AT THE HIGHEST OF ALL THE RESORTS.

A Veritable Summer Paradise in the Very Heart of the Sierra Nevada. A correspondent of the "Record- Union," writing from the Summit Soda Springs, says:

"This delightful resort, in the very heart of the Sierra Nevada is again the scene of a large gathering of health and pleasure seekers from the cities and valleys who have come here to escape the heat of summer, drink the health-giving mineral waters and by rational recreation counteract the effects of a long season of close application to business or the demands of society.

"The weather here is simply perfect, and the guests are enjoying life as it can only be enjoyed in a delightful retreat like the Summit Soda Springs, at an elevation of many thousand feet above the valley.

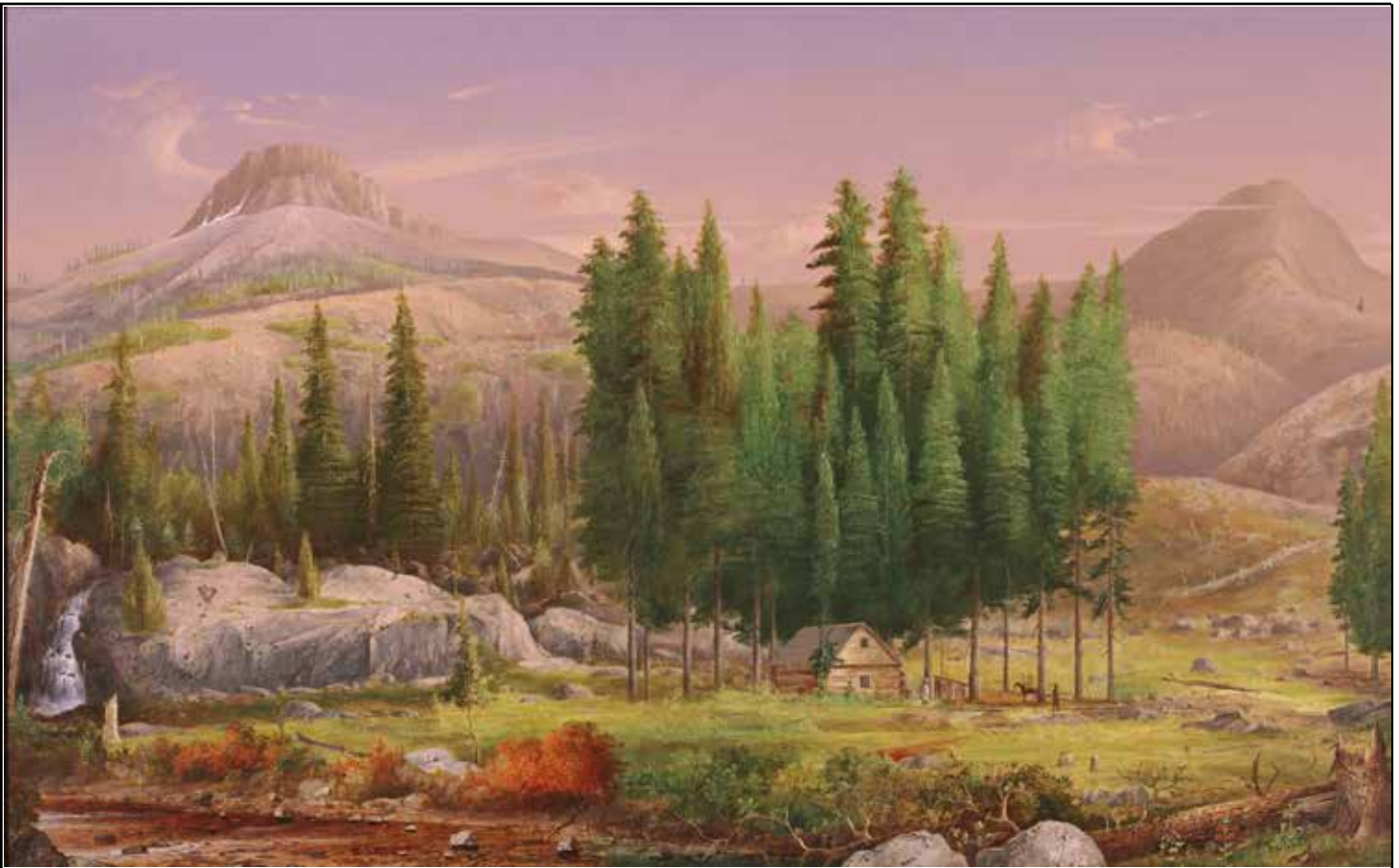
"In no former year have the arrangements for the accommodation and comfort of guests been better than they are this season, and somehow the people that come to this Alpine paradise seem to get along better with one another than is usually the case at summer resorts. A sort of fellow-feeling seems to animate all the guests. Everyone enjoys himself individually, and all enjoy themselves together.

"The fishing is excellent, and many well filled creels are brought in daily by the devotees of the rod. Every day parties are formed to go fishing down the picturesque stream that dashes and splashes past the hotel and through the pine-covered mountains to the gorge some miles below, where the biggest and sauciest of the trout are found. Other parties go mountain climbing and old bald-headed "Tinker's Knob" is frequently visited.

"These daily outings, with lunches in the woods, and never a care about business or other sordid considerations, are better than 'poppy or mandragora or all the drowsy syrups of this world' to bring health and buoyancy of spirit to those whose energies have become impaired in the long chase after the nimble and elusive dollar. There is none of 'that tired feeling' here.

"Then there are all sorts of outdoor pastimes for those who are not able to climb mountains or go a-fishing, so that never a day nor an hour drags. Many of the guests drive back and forth between the springs and the Summit Hotel, twelve miles distant and others still engage saddle horses and explore the regions for miles about. ...

July 16, 1898
Sacramento Record Union



Future Saratoga of the Pacific – Fine Painting – etc.

“There is now on exhibition, in the window of a picture store on Kearny street [sic], a large oil painting of the Summit Soda Springs. These springs are situated about seven miles south of the Central Pacific Railroad line in Summit Valley. Excepting Yosemite, there is not in all the Sierra a spot of wilder magnificence or beauty. The road over to it runs through a continuous succession of natural beauties of mountain, forest, river, natural lawns and modest shrubs. The springs are close to the head waters of the American River--one of the most beautiful of our mountain streams, which leaps over many waterfalls near its source.”

The paragraph above advertises a new painting by Norton Bush (seen here) and tells of a different time, when art was advertised in the newspaper and people came to view the galleries. There were, perhaps, not so many things competing for people’s time as today. The article went on to say that Norton Bush was “one of our best landscape painters.” The sketches for the painting were done in October, “when the frost had begun to tinge the leaves with the beautiful hectic flush of decay, when the streams were low, and when modest brown was the prevailing color upon the ground. Two of the loftiest peaks of the Sierra turn up behind the springs. The only house (a rough cabin) is shown in the foreground of Mr. Bush's picture. The house has a natural setting of lofty evergreen trees. Two of the precipitous cañons for which the locality is famous are shown in the picture. These springs, we are told possess great medicinal virtues in the cure of affections [sic] of the kidneys, dysentery and dyspepsia. The water is most agreeable and appetizing. The surroundings are positively magnificent, and” the author goes on to tout the wonders of the area before coming back to the painting in the next paragraph.

“Mr. Bush has done the State a service in illustrating the marvelous beauties of this wild region upon canvas. The eye can form a better idea of it from inspection of his picture than can be given by any description from the pen. We believe that this painting is one of a number which Mr. Bush is engaged upon for one of the managers of the Central Pacific Railroad Company.

January 24, 1869
Daily Alta California

Note the similarities of the painting to the Watkins photograph on page 10

Book Review

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California A Pleasure Trip From Gotham to the Golden Gate, (April, May, June, 1877)

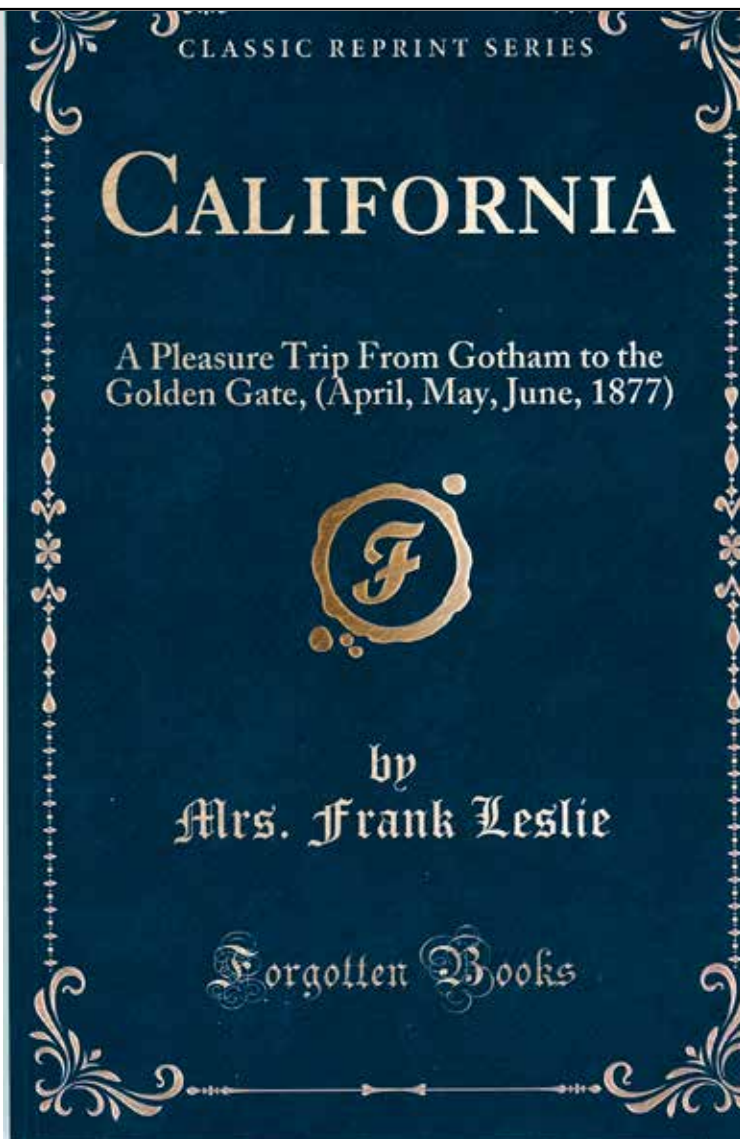
Mrs. Frank Leslie 288 pages

Reading 19th Century books opens a gate into that world for us. What was life like? What was important to the people of the time? How did they view the “Age of Wonder” (see our [Heirloom](#) article index or the June, '16, April, '19, March, '19 issues). What did they think of things we take for granted today? Is there any perspective of theirs that informs our perspective today? Then there are just good stories those people have to tell.

Frank Leslie had a stable of magazines and newspapers of various types over many years. Through his magazines and newspapers he brought his readers pictures and stories of the world. When he died his wife took over and saved the company from bankruptcy. Interestingly she also changed her legal name to Mrs. Frank Leslie. That she saved her deceased husband’s business and what she did with her fortune after she died, also make good stories you may want to follow, but that’s a different story and beyond the [Heirloom](#)’s sphere.

In 1877 the Leslies and twelve members of their staff took the train ride that is the subject of this book utilizing special luxury train cards with sleeping accommodations. The book, California A Pleasure Trip... is a slice of America in 1877. To help convey that slice the book is well illustrated with sketches. The narrative describes the sights and various stops on the way. We see 19th Century life and a bit of 19th Century prejudices. Beyond that there is no reason for the book and Mrs. Leslie approaches that weakness,

“...O critics! If you will indeed attempt to bind a butterfly upon the wheel, or anatomize the vapory visions of a woman’s memory, remember that in all courtesy you should deal gently and generously with a work proclaiming itself from the outset not so much a book as a long gossipy letter to one’s friend, and an amiable attempt to convey to the rest of the world some of the delight it commemorates, and if you



do not find a great deal in it, dear critic, remember that to competently judge a woman’s letter or a woman’s book, one must have learned to read between the lines and find there the pith and meaning of the whole.”

This gives you an idea of Mrs. Leslie’s prose. Here the editorial staff of the [Heirloom](#), being almost completely male, turned out to be clearly incompetent at fully judging the book because we saw nothing “between the lines.” Nothing is said of consequence as she describes the various stops on the route. She describes buildings, construction methods and materials, sites to be seen, interesting landmarks, the people in the towns, and hangers on at the train stops. The trip took some months because the travelers stopped in larger towns and met with local luminaries. One particularly long stop, occasioning a lot of observation, was Utah because the Mormon religion, in particular polygamy, was something America was apparently interested in. There are many observations and appreciations of the scenery along the way, “The wild prairie, as opposed to the cultivated prairie, has to be experienced.” Mrs. Leslie also

comments on the weather, mansions, a visit to the fine arts building in Chicago, redwood trees in California, and makes observations on life.

About Chicago she notes, "It was Sunday afternoon, and the respectable bourgeoisie and family men of Chicago were out with wives and olive-branches, in wagons of every pattern and degree, in spite of the piercing wind and blinding dust. The more aristocratic part of the population was not visible, and one wondered whether the New England element in Chicago is strong enough to render Sunday driving unpopular, or whether élite preferred staging at home to dream of the Champs Elysées."

This trip was six years after the great Chicago fire, "relics of the fire meet one at every turn ; lots piled up with blackened brick and stone and dismal rubbish, and sometimes the picturesque shell of a ruin..."

"To sum up the impression produced by a careful study of Chicago, it is a city of magnificent beginnings, a thing of promise. Few American cities can boast so many noticeably handsome dwellings, or such massive blocks of stone along the business streets but the crudity of youth is as inextricably mingled with the promise of maturity as in a big-bone boy of eighteen, or blushing girl of thirteen, from whom one parts with resignation for a time, looking pleasurably forward to renewed intercourse a few years later."

Then there is life aboard the train, "...our chef, of ebon color, and proportions suggesting a liberal sampling of the good things he prepares, wears the regulation snow-white apron and cap, and gives us cordial welcome and information ; showing us, among other things, that his refrigerator and larder are boxes adroitly arranged beneath the car, secured by lock and key..."

The many stops elicit comments, such as Omaha: "We found it big, lazy, and apathetic ; the streets dirty and ill-paved ; the clocks without hands ... the shops, whose signs mostly bore German names, deserted of customers, while principals and clerks lounged together in the doorways, listless and idle."

About Cheyenne the conductor warned against "any night explorations, at least by the ladies of the party... the town swarmed with miners... many of them desperadoes, and all utterly reckless in the use of the bowie knife and pistol ; or, at the very least, in the practice of language quite unfit for ears polite..." Life was clearly different in those days.

Leslie's prose is evocative prose as this quote about the train approaching the Green River shows. "While the rapidly moving train whirls us on through this region, where Nature seems to have indulged herself in mad, purposeless exercise of her vastest powers, with little heed for man's approval or convenience. In fact, so far from calling this country a new one, it impressed us as the playground of forgotten Titans "

such lavish waste of color, of form, of power ' such gigantic forces brought to bear, and the results left idle, a mere waste of supernature energy..."

About Colorado she says, "Heaven-piercing crags above the dizzy abyss below, the glimpses of distant mountain peaks, and an undefined sense of might and majesty everywhere, which make the beholder feel that humanity is but a mere impertinent intrusion upon the scene – a pygmy, whom the slightest movement of nature might crush in the midst of its impertinent admiration."

Seeing Black Hills prospectors heading out in wagon trains Leslie described two guides.

"We saw an emigrant train of several wagons starting for the Black Hills, one of the wagons being drawn by eight mules, whose driver managed them by a single rein. A scout in a full suit of fringed buckskin was lounging about - a handsome man with long, dark curls falling from beneath his seal-skin cap, who treated our open and admiring curiosity with true aboriginal indifference."

Another guide galloped by dressed in blue cloak over a purpose jacket, high cavalry boots, and sombrero, beneath which his hair flew wildly..."

They were held up by an accident when a train plowed into a herd of cattle. "Arrived at the scene of disaster, we could not wonder at the length of the detention, for a herd of cattle, attempting to try conclusions with a steam engine, had been forced to retreat, leaving six of their number on the field of battle ; and so inextricably had the poor creatures become wedged in the complicated machinery of the locomotive, that it was hard to decide where the one ended and where the other began, or which has suffered most in the encounter."

Descriptions are vivid, "... the platform crowded with the strangest and most motley groups of people it has ever been our fortune to encounter. Men in alligator boots, and loose overcoats made of blankets and wagon rugs, with wild, unkept hair and beards, and bright, resolute eyes, almost all well-looking, but wild and strange as denizens of another world."

Salt Lake City seemed to be of a different world than other towns on the railroad. "Everywhere was thrift, care, the evidence of hard work, and a pride in ownership ; and oddly enough, these homes of rigid, yet tasteful and dignified poverty, reminded me of nothing so much as a Shaker village... a place where nobody was rich, nobody poor, nobody idle, nobody overworked, and where a certain prim love of the beautiful everywhere gilded the necessity of the useful." There was no dust, no mud, no litter of any kind.

As the train moved west the travelers began to see more Native Americans and her descriptions grate on today's ears.

Leslie draws a distinction between the “noble savage” and the Native Americans they encountered. “There are women clothed upon with filth of every shade and texture, woven or skinny ; shawls and handkerchiefs tied over their head, and about half of them carrying upon their back a formless and silent burden, which, for filthy lucre, they would unstrap and bring forward...” “The ‘burden’ of course was the papoose. At another point Leslie describes the “‘braves,’ if that will excuse the sarcasm of so calling them, were somewhat more repulsive than the women and children, being equally dirty and more dangerous; as, for instance, a sewer rat...”

Of course, it being the 19th Century there are also references to “heathen Chinese.”

What the reader of this review is waiting for is the approach to the Sierra. What did Mrs. Leslie think as she traveled over the Sierra? What did she think about the eight-year-old transcontinental railroad? What did she think of Donner Summit?

“Toward night we began the passage of the Sierras with the help of an additional engine, for the grades are as steep as can be traversed, and occasionally the train seems to be plunging head first into some Avernus[volcanic crater in Italy], from which return will be impossible, and anon scaling heights fitter for a chamois [a deer-like animal] than a locomotive. If one only knew how to say them there are marvelous things to say about this Pacific R.R... ‘If Americans were not the most modest people in the world,’ they would have, before this, convinced the public that no other piece of engineering, from Hannibal’s eating [sic]* down the Alps with vinegar, or the Great Emperor’s road across the Simplon,** to the present day, is to be compared with this passage of the Sierras from Ogden to Sacramento.... We never scientifically examined either Hannibal’s or Napoleon’s achievements, but we are very willing to accept the theory both that Americans err in lack of self-appreciation, and that the Pacific road is the road of the world and... For ourselves, let us simply note the thrill and awe and wonder” of traversing the Sierra.

She says more about the Sierra, “The worst thing about language is, that it becomes so inadequate when anything of importance has to be portrayed.... So, without attempting the impossible, we simply say to those of our friends to whom the

*apparently Hannibal in crossing the Alps heating large rocks and then dowsed them with vinegar to break them up. This appears to be a typo in the original.

**Napoleon’s engineered road across the Simplon Pass in the Alps

Alps are a bore, Appenines and Pyrenees a weariness, and the Andes a tiresome impossibility, do go and see the ... the Sierras. ... The journey is luxurious , and the expense no greater than three months abroad... It is a world above the level of the world we know and habitually live in.”

That was it. The Sierra were crossed and the group went touring by train and carriage in California and so more than half of the book tells us of California in 1877 which was fun.

There are a lot of details. The Palace Hotel, for example, occupied a whole block of downtown San Francisco. It had a huge glass covered courtyard in the center, was seven stories tall. A walk around the hotel was ¼ mile. All the corridors added up to 2.5 miles. It occupied 2.5 acres had 12 chandeliers in the dining room. There were two miles of gas piping for lighting. The hotel had 437 bathtubs and a capacity of 1200 guests. Inside there were cages of singing birds flowering plants, sofas and chairs.

There is quite a description of San Francisco. Most buildings were two stories or less because

of “shakes” (earthquakes). The climate doesn’t allow for lounging outside because of cold winds. That said, the climate was “exhilarating” apparently because of the large amount of ozone in the air. So the “brain worker can accomplish more here in a given time than anywhere else, and wear himself out faster.” There is no support for this ozone contention although a proof she says is that Thomas Starr King died of exhaustion and old age, despite being in his thirties. King was one of California’s two statues in the U.S. Capitol building until he was replaced by Ronald Reagan. Mr. King was a now forgotten famous Californian. His sister, Angela, is for whom Lake Angela is named on Donner Summit, but we digress.

Leslie spends some time on the people. “One feature of the street scenery in this city is the large proportion of foreign physiognomy and the accents of almost every language under the sun...” All of those peoples are catered to with many different shops, theaters, etc. and especially restaurants. Here the book becomes a little tour guide of restaurants for the Frenchman, the German, etc.

It must have been a very liberal city since young ladies could visit various restaurants unaccompanied and maybe even “risk of occasionally encountering a male acquaintance. Still Leslie says that “on the whole, we would not advise the widowed mother of a family of lads and lassies to carry

them to San Francisco for social training.” Some of those with fewer social graces were “shading into” the “large class of charming, unexceptional, and rigidly moral society.” Even though the days when every man “was a law into himself” there still was a “certain recklessness and willfulness... pervading every circle.”

Street dress was “gay and showy” and people promenaded on the main streets.

In the old days Leslie said “murder and debauchery of every sort ran riot, and it is surprising that out of such vile soil the fair flower and fruitage of the present city could ever have grown.”

The travelers visited, among other things, the Cliff House, the Board of Brokers, a Chinese restaurant, Chinatown, an opium den then went down the peninsula and north of San Francisco where we even learn how Santa Rosa got its name.

The description of the Board of Brokers, which was like a commodity or stock trading floor, was interesting. “The scene was one of the wildest excitement, reminding the young lady of a gladiatorial arena, the sultana of a flock of hungry chickens, to whom some corn had been thrown, and myself of that fact that I was only a woman, and could never hope to join in such a soul-stirring combat – for surely combat is but a mild term to apply to the jostling, yelling, frenzied, purple-faced struggle, roused into new vigor at each call of a new stock the bidder crowding to the centre, gesticulation, pushing, ready to tear each other to pieces, or themselves fall down in a fit of apoplexy.”

One interesting spot the group visited was Woodward' Gardens, a kind of amusement park in downtown San Francisco that cost only a quarter for entry. Mr. Woodward was “one of those happy individuals who have had the opportunity given them of leaving the world undeniably more beautiful than they found it.” He had put together a “terrestrial Paradise.” There was a museum with “every sort of curiosity.” There were shady groves of trees, lawns, flowers, swings, trapezes, merry-go-rounds, a theater for various kinds of performances, a refreshment room, a zoo with “a fine collection of wild animals,” fresh and salt water aquariums. If the [Heirloom](#) had a broader mandate than Donner Summit it would surely cover Woodward's.

Then it was down to Big Trees, Yosemite, and Los Angeles before heading back to Stockton, Sacramento and the Sierra. One “last glimpse of its beauties was taken as we dashed past Donner Lake, a beautiful, still, oval sheet of water, bedded deep in dark, steep hills ‘then we plunged into a snow-shed, and slid down the steps of memory into a profound sleep, which made recollection once more reality.”

Oh, Doctor Gets a New Name

MOVIE FOLKS MOVE
TO RAINBOW HOTEL

The Universal movie company of 35 members which has been filming the new Abbott and Costello picture, Oh, Doctor, at Soda Springs, moved last week to Rainbow Tavern after orders were received to evacuate the popular Soda Springs hotel which will be taken over by the army military police company now located at Vanderford's. It was not immediately learned when the transfer of the troops will be made nor what will happen to the post office and other business interests at Soda Springs,

Sierra Sun 1/28/43

The article above may look familiar since it was in last month's [Heirloom](#). Our research department, having come across it was enthused. Here was another movie made on Donner Summit to add to our collection (see the [Heirloom](#) article indices). Further research, or just a little research, showed that we are more efficient than we knew. The movie noted above, "Oh, Doctor," was not one we did not know about. We just didn't know the name of the movie when it hit the theaters. That was "Hit the Ice." You can read a review of it and see pictures of Abbott and Costello's hijinks in Castle Valley in the December, "14 [Heirloom](#).

Making History Colorful



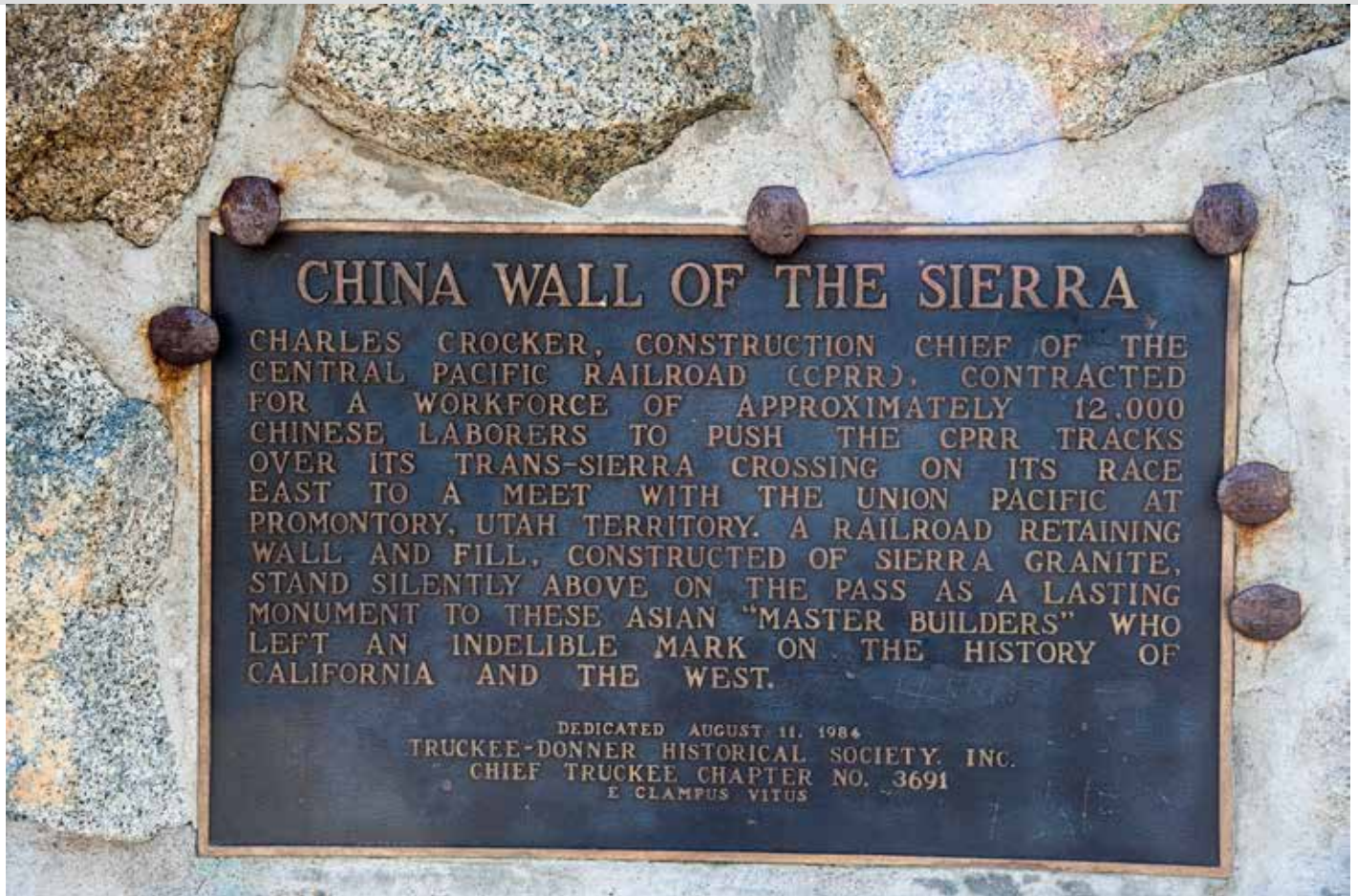
Today, due to advances in computer graphics technology, there may be a solution to the color limitations of our historical black & white images. Computers are remarkably adept at manipulating photographic images. Algorithms developed for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning have been adapted to image technology to give almost magical results such as the colorization of black & white images. Algorithms are “trained” by looking at millions of color and black & white versions of photos to “learn” how to add back colors to a black & white image. The algorithms learn how to find a sky and make it blue, find a face and make it flesh colored, find a tree and make the leaves green. They develop highly sophisticated models that can do amazing transformations. Amazingly this technology is now available on desktop computers.



Construction of the Norden snowsheds circa 1923

George Lamson

Odds & Ends on Donner Summit



China Wall plaque on Old Highway 40 below China Wall at the climbing rock. There are plaques in many places on Donner Summit recognizing the railroad, emigrants, etc.

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

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

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

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www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

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