

The Donner Summit

Heirloom



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

March, 2023 issue #175

Donner Summit Fun 1930

As a discerning reader of the [Heirloom](#) you've no doubt been wondering what people did for fun in winter on Donner Summit in December, 1930. It's easy to guess that there was a lot of skiing and other winter sports. Keep in mind, though, that 1930 was before Highway 40 was open in winter and before it became all-weather. Before then things were pretty isolated in winter. Trains traveled and there were Summit stops but there was nowhere near the level of traffic that would come with the opening of Highway 40

in winter. (Here you might want to open up the April, '20 [Heirloom](#) to read about Wendell Robie and his working to make winter sports mainstream). See the story on page 10 about the opening of the highway in winter.

It turns out that people were looking for things to do and people came up from Truckee to do those things. Here we have reports that show the fun they had. It's also an example of how the Auburn Ski Club was working to popularize winter sports.



From the Associated Press (AP) "A NEW WINTER SPORT IN CALIFORNIA GLIDER FLYING IN THE SNOW" [1/5/1931]

"Glider flying is becoming very popular in the high Sierra in California this winter. Recently the Truckee Glider club made its first flight, finding an ideal location at Soda Springs. The glider plane took off on the snow-covered slope, and landed on a frozen lake. Dogs helping to tow the plane after it landed on the frozen lake at Soda Springs, California." [sic]

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DONNER SUMMIT



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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.

*historical society humor

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

Proofread by Pat Malberg, Lake Mary, Donner Summit



The Chico Record (1/31/31) was more emphatic with its headline, "'Glider-Joring' Newest Sport Fad In Lake Tahoe Mountain Country." The Record reported that the sport had its start with E.B. Laferty, a former naval aviator, who "flew his glider more than a mile above the sea [elevation on Donner Summit is about 7,000 feet] skimming along the top of tall evergreens." Some people from Utah were so impressed that they "have determined to take up the novel sport in their own mountains."

The AP didn't have the whole story though. First, the dogs actually launched the glider. Second, The Nevada State Journal (12/21/30) reported that there was going to be an additional "wide variety of events" that would launch the winter sports season. People from Truckee and Reno were expected on Donner Summit for the festivities.

The Journal said that gliders would be launched both by saddle horse and dog teams. The saddle horse was to be ridden by Mrs. James McIver (see the June, '13 Heirloom for McIver's Dairy) and the dog team belonged to Scotty Allen (see the February, '18 Heirloom). There would also be ski races with both dogs and horses pulling people (this is ski-joring) and "old fashioned New England cutter races." The cutter races would be the first ever in the west and Old Vermont cutters would be used. Each cutter had to have not just the driver but also "a feminine companion." The "course includes many sharp curves, the winner must cross the finish line with cargo of occupants, robes, whip, etc. intact despite the certain spills on the turns."

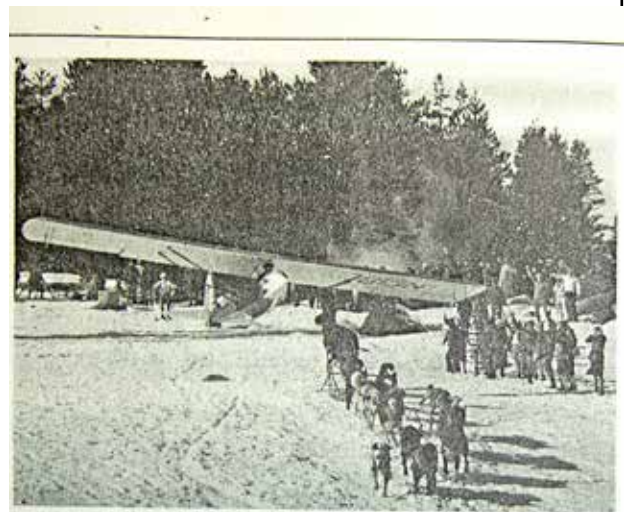
Donner Summit was not the only place for the winter fun. The Tahoe Tavern at Tahoe City was reported in the Nevada State Journal to be preparing for a "winter rodeo that would furnish thrills" with some of the most "exciting events yet devised." There would be New England cutter races there too, ski joring with skiers pulled by horses with girls in the saddles, dog team races, eight seater sleigh contests, with spectators used as 'ballast,' a toboggan slide, a Jack Frost hippodrome, and many other diversions."

That's not Donner Summit, though, and should be left for some other historical society's periodical.

Apparently the Soda Springs winter event was the first ever event there or maybe elsewhere. Afterwards, the Auburn Journal (12/25/30) said that hundreds of witnesses came to view the "initial hop of the glider" and responded with "shouts and applause." Indeed, the dog team was able to get the glider off the ground which seems to be a feat. Many winter sports luminaries were on hand along with the crowd and members of the Auburn Ski Club and Wendell Robie.

The paper concluded, "Interest has been keen in winter sports in California and with proper advertising, will become one of the biggest out-of-door features of the entire year. In a state where out-of-door sports can be enjoyed the year round, this will mean something to this section of the state." This sounds like PR from the Auburn Ski Club which was pushing the idea of winter sports and would in a couple of weeks make a coup by bringing the State legislature to the Sierra to show off the popularity of winter sports – see page 10. Auburn Ski Club members were, parenthetically, exhorted by the paper to wear their club sweaters in order to add color to the moving pictures that would be part of the glider launching event. Where did the moving pictures end up?

In another examples of how the winter fun of 1930 was aimed at Sierra winter tourism, the vice president of the glider club was a manager for Southern Pacific's "winter sports bureau" aimed at getting people on the train to come to the Sierra (see the



Scotty Allan's Malamutes Launching Glider at Soda Springs

SODA SPRINGS HOTEL
SODA SPRINGS, CALIF.
Offers Every Facility for Winter Sports—On Top of the High
Sierra—Elevation 6757 Ft.—Southern Pacific
Main Line Station 75 Yards from Hotel.
Home of Scotty Allan's Kennels of Alaskan Dogs

Soda Springs Hotel using the glider fun in advertising

One of the newest winter sport attractions for Reno's Sierra region was inaugurated Sunday when the glider, "Maude Maynard," shown above, took the air at Soda Springs, just over the Donner summit. Scotty Allan, famous Alaskan dog driver, hitched his team to the glider, in which E. B. Laferty was prepared for a hop. This new pastime of the snows is called glider joring.

Nevada State Journal 12/25/30

Southern Pacific winter sports brochure information on the next page.

Although the glider romp was a great success and reported upon in many newspapers as far away as Los Angeles, it was not great enough for a repeat in 1931. More papers reported on the formation of the Mile High Glider Club (also Truckee Glider Club and Sierra Gliding Club depending on the source) but nothing more was heard of whatever it was called after its debut in 1930-31. The next winter Highway 40 would be open most of the winter and maybe gliders were just an unnecessary complication compared to skiing, tobogganing, etc.

THE GLIDER

THE LATEST innovation in winter sports in the TRUCKEE-TAHOE REGION is the thrilling flight by glider. The take-off is unique in that the glider is launched by dog team. The glider is equipped with snow skids and is easily launched. A glider club has been formed at Truckee and visitors to the Truckee-Tahoe region will see gliders soaring out from the ski hills and over the vast expanse of virgin snow. What next?

Text that went with the ad for the Soda Springs Hotel on the previous page.

Ephemera Pt II

Last October The Heirloom carried pages of historical graphics. We thought it was just a nice collection from the old days. There were some more things in the small collection and here we print some of those here on the next few pages.



REAL COOL—Cars line up on Highway 40 near Donner Summit as heavy snowfall interrupts flow of traffic. This jam was complicated by collision which blocked right of way entirely for a while. Scene is looking west from Donner Ski Ranch.

from the San Francisco Examiner January 28, 1958. Here you can see the popularity of winter sports along Highway 40, just a few years before I-80 was built. The people on the left are shoveling out their cars.

Western Skiing March, 1946 - imagine having this in your car ready to go - a rope tow anywhere.

Above and below: Western Skiing, February, 1946

Southern Pacific Encourages Winter Sports

This bit of historical ephemera, circa 1960, goes right along with some of the rest of this Heirloom issue. The Auburn Ski Club was instrumental in improving access to winter sports in the Sierra. Their major effort was making Highway 40 a year-round highway. They also worked to popularize winter sports by hosting competitions, setting up exhibitions like ski jumping in Berkeley (see the 12/12 Heirloom) and Treasure Island (see the 2/13 Heirloom), teaching, having ski competition and jumping teams, and of course publicity and advertising. Others were doing it too like the merchants in Truckee and the people who put on the glider joring on Donner Summit (see page 1).

In the mix was the Southern Pacific too. Today the railroad is concerned exclusively with freight leaving only a few passenger trains to Amtrak. Railroads used to be a major source of transportation in the days when not as many people had automobiles. That is what this bit of ephemera is about – using the train to access winter sports. Here we should also parenthetically say that the Southern Pacific manager of their winter sports bureaus was also the vice president of the glider club in Truckee that put on the event on page 1. That was one of the ways Southern Pacific was trying to increase ridership to winter sports.

One of Southern Pacific's brochures was, "This Time, Try the Train... to double the pleasure of your ski trip." There is no place like the High Sierra, touts the brochure, and to go with the "diversified skiing" there is a "wide variety of accommodations." "Countless rooms are available" and there are dormitories too. In order to get there, you need the train to take you directly to Soda Springs and Norden (there were other destinations too but this is the Donner Summit Heirloom). Don't wait. Pack up now. It's safe and inexpensive.

You could travel by day leaving San Francisco before lunch and arrive at Truckee at dinner time. Wonderfully, "each passenger gets an individual, reserved, foam rubber parlor cars seat" the whole way to Truckee for only \$6.75. Round trip was only \$12.15. Norden was one of the stops.

Another train let travelers travel at night. It left San Francisco after dinner and arrived at Soda Springs and Norden "first thing in the morning." That would leave the traveler with the whole day to ski.

The inside of the brochure listed the ski areas. Soda Springs had "one of the best equipped ski hills in the West" with a new chairlift, a J-bar, and four rope tows. The rope tows could accommodate 7,000 people an hour for 25 cents per ride or \$2.50 all day. You could stay at the Beacon Hill Lodge, Donner Summit Lodge, Ice Lakes Chalets, Rainbow Tavern, or Soda Springs Hotel. Today none of those accommodations are available. Times have changed which is another subject.

Norden was the gateway to the famous Sugar Bowl and various ski clubs nearby. You could also stay at the Kiski Lodge, Norden Ski Lodge, or the Ski Inn. None of those exist anymore.

Sugar Bowl was "tops" among the West's finest skiing. Weasels (WWII era tractor like machines) and tractor drawn sleighs took passengers to Sugar Bowl. Sugar Bowl lodge captured the "charm and comfort as well as gaiety and spirits of the Tyrolean Alps." Rooms were \$7.50 a night and dormitory space was \$2.50. Sugar Bowl Lodge is still open as a hotel.

The Southern Pacific also mentioned Squaw Valley, Mt. Rose, etc. but for the Heirloom they are really irrelevant.



SNOW TRAIN SCHEDULES

Skiers, who either don't have cars or don't want to make the drive up Highway 40, can make the trip easily and comfortably by train. The Southern Pacific has two trains which fit nicely into a skier's week end schedule.

One leaves from San Francisco at 8:05 p. m. and gets into Norden station at 5:40 a. m. It also stops at Emigrant Gap (4:40) and at Cisco (5:07). Returning the train leaves Norden at 12:51 a. m. and arrives in San Francisco at 8:50 a. m. All stops on Highway 40 are flag stops.

The other convenient train is the Overlander, which leaves San Francisco at 11 a. m. and arrives in Truckee at 5:40 p. m. Returning, the Overlander leaves Truckee at 12:09 p. m. and arrives in San Francisco at 6:50 p. m.

The coach fare round-trip to Norden is \$10.01 with tax. The Pullman rate round-trip with lower berth, including tax, is \$21.06.

SKIERS FROM ALL OVER THE WEST
COME HERE BECAUSE IT'S "TOPS"
FOR WINTER SPORTS ENJOYMENT.

CONVENIENTLY REACHED ON BEAUTIFUL
STATE HIGHWAY
FROM RENO OR SACRAMENTO.

CORDIAL ALPINE ATMOSPHERE.

CONVENIENT TO MANY SKI SLOPES
WITH LIFT FACILITIES.



THE SKI SCHOOL IS DIRECTED BY
BILL KLEIN, ASSISTED BY SLIM MABERY.

AND REMEMBER US FOR YOUR SPRING
AND SUMMER OUTINGS, TOO.
AMERICAN OR EUROPEAN PLAN.

BUD AND BETTY HORAK, MANAGERS

Donner Summit Lodge no longer takes guests. It is employee housing for Sugar Bowl.

TRAVIS LODGE

SUMMER SPORTS

- SWIMMING
- FISHING
- SPORTS

WINTER SPORTS

- HIKING
- BOATING
- TAHOE-ING
- SKIING
- TOBOGGANING
- FIRESIDING
- SKATING
- SNOWBALLING
- RENO-ING

RELAX AT THE BAR (S.Y.O.L.) — DANCE TO THE RECORD PLAYER
FINE FOOD — WATCH YOUR WEIGHT
REST — RELAX — AND HAVE FUN

Mountain Fun
IN THE BEAUTIFUL SIERRAS

Travis Lodge used to sit on Old Donner Summit Rd. It was originally built for Air Force personnel.

"Spend a day - a weekend - or several days in this beautiful exciting - yet restful setting breathing that wonderful mountain air. Enjoy the many recreational facilities or just rest and relax YOU'LL ENJOY YOURSELF Make TRAVIS LODGE your headquarters for summer and winter fun."

Special Rates		
FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY		
ACCOMMODATIONS	Winter 1 Nov. to 31 May	Summer 1 June to 31 Oct.
Men's 12 Bed Dorm.— Single Day Rate	\$1.50	\$1.00
Women's 10 Bed Dorm.— Single Day Rate	1.50	1.00
Family Rooms— Three Available with 4 Beds Each		
1 Day	5.00	5.00
2 Days	10.00	9.00 SAVE \$1.00
3 Days	15.00	12.00 SAVE \$3.00
MEALS—Delicious Food at Regular Mess Hall Rates		

Above: rates for Travis Lodge. Dormitory accommodations were mainstream which is quite different from today.

There was a time when bus transportation was mainstream, when not so many people had automobiles. The ad, right, was part of the Travis Lodge brochure.

If you were driving to Travis Lodge the brochure's instructions said you should take Highway 40E to five hundred feet or so past Donner Ski Ranch. Turn right between two maintenance sheds. Those sheds are our Hub today - see page 10. One was the funny looking building and the other the circular building that has since collapsed. Then follow the gravel road for a half mile to Travis Lodge. In summer the driving was easy. In winter arrivals were told to park at Donner Ski Ranch and call the Lodge. A "power sled" would pick them up.

\$2.50
THIS TICKET AND
Good for One All-day
POMALIFT TICKET

Get Acquainted with . . .
Rainbow Ski Hill

1785' Pomalift \$3.50 per Day
Rope Tow \$2.00 per Day

Children's Rates
Parking Facilities for 100 Cars
HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS

50' Behind
Rainbow Tavern

3 Miles East of Cisco Grove
on U. S. 40

H

In case you want to do some skiing at Rainbow Tavern in the 1950's.

Dancing Every Night Refreshments

The Ski-Hi

THE HOUSE OF VANDERFORD
Atop Donner Summit on Highway 40
Elevation 7,135 Feet Soda Springs P.O.
Gene & Lois Woods Ernie & Margot Nordstrom

The House of Vanderford is also an old ski lodge that no longer exists.

GO GREYHOUND

Fast, Convenient Service to all the U.S.A.

Homebound? Funbound? New Assignment? Whatever your travel requirements . . . Greyhound will be glad to assist you in meeting them quickly, conveniently, economically. Hotel reservations, too, if you need them!

You have a choice of rapid express service to leading cities of the nation . . . North, South, East, or West, with connecting service to hundreds of small communities served by no other means of public transportation. There are over 96,000 miles of scenic Greyhound routes.

ALSO TRAVIS A.F.B. SAN FRANCISCO THROUGH EXPRESSES

Only 1½ hours each way. No change of buses. Ask Greyhound for convenient schedules, as well as additional service offered by Vaca Valley Bus Lines and Greyhound.



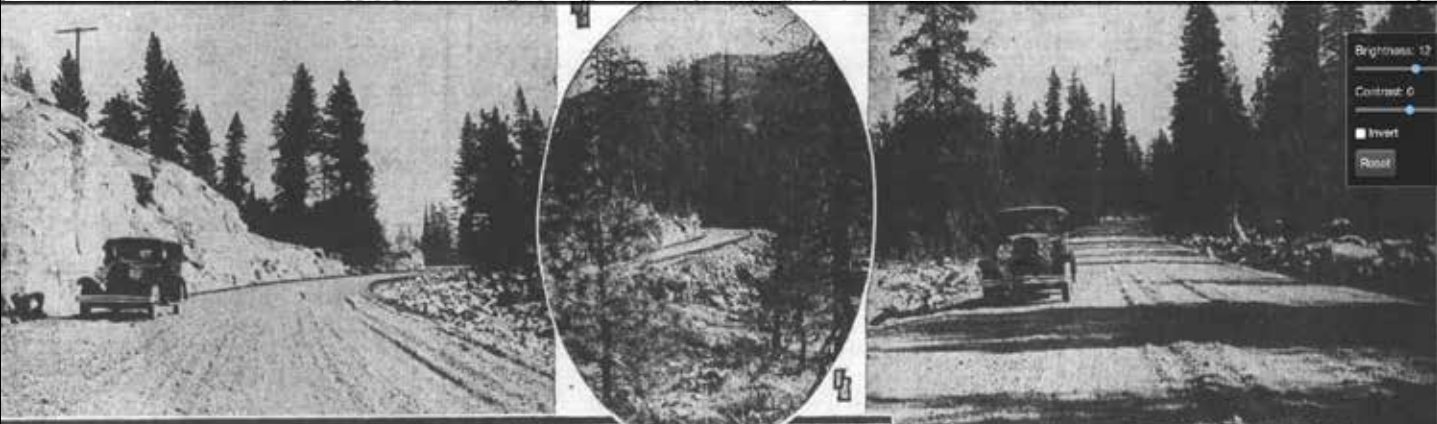
For Information and Reservations

GREYHOUND LINES

Lobby - Passenger Terminal
(E. & J. Travel Bureau)

Phone Idlewood 7-3386 • Travis A.F.B., Calif.

New Road Eliminates Steep Grades Near Sierra Summit



Auto Prices Will Increase With Advent of New Year

By H. A. ROSENTHAL

Small groups of motor cars will leave after the close of the year. The auto, however, manufacturers are already advancing the prices of their cars, and others will follow according to some opinion from the manufacturers of the United States.

The car dealers say there are a few cars left before all the cars are sold. Cars are not yet out and are waiting for buyers.

The automobile industry has advanced prices this year more than before in its history. In fact, it has advanced more than a million more than in any other year since the first year of the war.

PRICES RISE IN 1929

Auto dealers say there will be no cars left in 1929. The number of cars will be higher. When the auto production of manufacturers is turned on, production will get into the hands of the car dealer.

Auto car prices in 1929 were the highest ever. However, though prices have been advanced in the largest production in the

With advanced production and increased retail prices in 1929, the manufacturers are planning to add many new features to their cars to make them worth the increase.

SATURATION NOT YET

The automobile price in the motor car industry has not been reached, and more will be produced, and more will be sold. It is estimated by experts that there will be nearly four million cars required for replacement alone next year. This is about a four percent increase. Add to this the number of first cars which will come from the market and the manufacturers have a large-sized job filling the demand.

Manufacturers in 1929 will follow their demand more than ever. Their production of automobiles and parts will be about as abundant as last year. Production will be about 3,000,000 cars and parts. This will be more than ever before in the history of the industry and next year prices will be higher than in 1929.

1929 saw an improvement to Highway 40, according to the *Oakland Tribune*. The new highway had been “carved out of solid granite” with a route that would allow the sun to “reach it earlier in the year. That would allow traffic to move over the summit earlier each spring (this is three years before Highway 40 was plowed in winter). In 1929, just FYI, it was December 8 when storms closed the highway. In the composite picture above, the upper left picture is near Soda Springs. The center picture shows the new grade. The picture at right is near Cisco and below center is near Emigrant Gap. As of the end of 1929 the road was a “high gear” road, meaning, we suppose, you could drive in your high gear rather than needing low gear to navigate the grades. The road had not been paved.



The author went on to talk about the “wonderful time can be made by dropping down to that silent third speed” and then showed his good taste saying, “The scenery on this grip is magnificent. Both days that we crossed the summit were clear and cold. Wonderful panoramas are to be had at frequent intervals on this road. The view from the summit across the Donner Summit bridge, with Donner Lake at the foot of the grade is a sight worth driving the whole distance to see.” [There's no more room on this page so we've put a nice view on page 11]

“Turning just a bit, you can see the snowheds of the Southern Pacific hanging on the side of the adjacent cliff. These snowheds remind you of a caterpillar crawling in the mountains.”

Harrowing Summit Crossing

Our research department explores every avenue imaginable in the quest to discover Donner Summit history and then fill pages in the [Heirloom](#). It is getting harder though. This is issue 175 of the [Heirloom](#) meaning we've covered hundreds of topics in thousands of pages over fifteen years. Nevertheless, we'd been exploring the State library in Sacramento which is a repository of all kinds of things historic. Here is an excerpt from a book titled [Motor Camping on Western Trails](#) (Ferguson 1925 917.3f32). We'd thought it might be a good source with some Donner Summit history. That did not turn out to be the case but there was one snippet (historical jargon for small piece of interest) describing a family's 1925 trip across Donner Summit and the frightening experience.

"Our original itinerary had provided for a southward course on the east side of the mountains, from Crater Lake to Lake Tahoe; but we had learned that we could make better time by sticking to the highway and penetrating the range again from Sacramento. For unencumbered cars it would be but a one-day journey from the capital city to Lake Tahoe, but we had to make two bites of this cherry. On the last lap we saw some grades that might possibly have balked us had we been going in the opposite direction. There was one descent, in particular, that must be a terror to heavily laden cars attempting to climb it. The slope was 22 per cent. according to the map and about 35 per cent judged by the eye. Right in the middle of it was main-line grade crossing, where the tracks were concealed for a long distance in each direction by a completely inclosed [sic] snow-shed. Any but the most reckless driver, ascending, would feel obliged to come to a full stop at this dangerous crossing; and with a heavy trailer behind he would have difficulty in starting again.

"We had often speculated on what we should do if we encountered a grade that could not be climbed, with our load, in low gear. Ordinarily, in these circumstances a car could turn around and back up; but that would not do for us. We thought that if the emergency should arise we would hook the two cars together and drag the trailers up one at a time; but we never had to resort to that desperate measure. Once, indeed, the clutch of the passenger-car went out of business on a hard grade, and our ancient baggage car, which had seventy-five thousand miles of hard work recorded on its speedometer, was used to tow the other car and its trailer to the top, where adjustments were made. That little incident gave us great confidence."

This was 1925. By the next year the Forest Service had finished the Donner Summit Bridge which reduced the maximum grade to about eight per cent and changed the route. This was so trucks with logs could make it out of the Tahoe Basin.



There weren't an pictures of the frightening crossing of Donner Summit in the book, but fortunately the DSHS photographic department was able to turn up one version from the archives of the DSHS. In the picture above, Tunnel 6 is off to the right. Autos stopped before entering the snowshed to be sure no trains were coming and proceeded about one hundred yards inside the snowshed before emerging from the other side. See the 2/16 and 3/19 [Heirlooms](#)



The origins of the Hub building

It was not until 1932 that businessmen and women in Truckee, Tahoe, and of course, Donner Summit, got their wish for Highway 40 to be open in winter. Until then Truckee, Tahoe and the Summit were closed off when winter came. A lot of potential business stopped with snowfall. Some people did take the train and even shipped their cars over the mountains on the train but the potential for more business was one factor in getting the road open.

It was not the local business-people who succeeded in changing things though. It was Wendell Robie and the Auburn Ski Club (ASC) that did the deed. They saw the immense potential for winter sports in the Sierra if only people could get there. Winter sports would be good for business, good for the club's membership rolls, and good for popularizing winter sports. With the goal in mind, the Auburn Ski Club came up with a really creative idea.

SOLONS CAVORT IN SNOW; NIGHT' SKI JUMPS ON

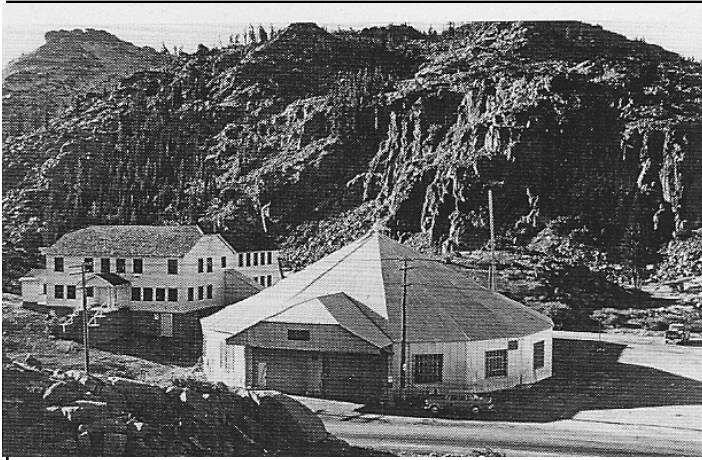
Sacramento Bee 1/19/31

On January 19, 1931 the (ASB) set up a winter sports event to which they invited the State legislature. They wanted to show the politicians the viability of winter sports and the need for an all-weather highway. The Highway Patrol escorted fifty-six automobiles full of State legislators and their families to the ASB's ski jump and race course just a few miles east of Baxter. The ASB also let the public know. The result, according to

the Roseville Press Tribune (1/21/31), was that three thousand automobiles showed up, along with the members of the legislature, as well as their skis and toboggans.

The Press Tribune said there was only eight inches of snow on the ground but people were "thrilled by exhibition jumps" and ski races. "In addition to the visitors at the Auburn Ski club hill, there were hundreds of cars packed along the highway all the way from Baxter's Camp to the [emergency] airport near Emigrant Gap,





and many informal parties were engaging in snow sports on the hills along the way.” The resulting monumental traffic jam showed just how popular the idea of access to winter sports was. Assured that the automobiles driving to winter sports would generate enough gas taxes to pay for plowing, the legislature passed the needed legislation authorizing \$750,000 to the effort. Wendell Robie said the legislature had been “entranced with the beauty of the snow and mountains’ which of course showed their good taste.

Opening Highway 40 in winter then became reason for the large gray building at the top of Donner Pass (bottom previous page when it was brown/tan) as well as the funny looking building that we’ve changed into the Lamson-Cashion Donner Summit Hub (top, previous page).

The large building on the left in the picture at the bottom of page 10 served as the dormitory for Division of Highways (forerunner of Cal Trans) workers. The Hub building, above it, served as a gas station for highway equipment. The picture above also shows a round building adjacent to the dormitory. It served as a garage for snow clearing equipment and collapsed in the 1980’s (we get an average of 34’ of snow each winter).

We don’t know what the traffic jam resulting from the legislature’s trip to the mountains looked like. The participants were apparently having too much fun to take pictures and then share them with the newspapers. Supposedly there were to be some films but who knows where they went. The picture at right is as close as we could get. It shows a 1931 traffic jam and kind of goes with then next story.

The resolution in the Senate which was introduced by Senator Mixer of Fresno and seconded by Senator Edward follows:

"Be it resolved, By the Senate that the sincere thanks of this body be extended to Senator Cassidy and the Ski Club of Auburn, for the delightful entertainment accorded the members... of the Legislature and their families who, availed themselves of the invitation to take part in the winter sports program on Sunday January 18, 1931; and be further Resolved, That the Secretary of the Senate be requested to deliver a copy of this resolution to Senator Cassidy and forward copy or the same to the President of the Ski Club of Auburn, California." The resolution which was introduced in the Assembly by Assemblyman Honnold follows:

"Resolved, That a vote of thanks be extended to Senator Cassidy and to the Auburn Ski Club for their courtesy and outing furnished to members of the Legislature and their friends on Sunday, January 18, 1931 and that the Cher Clerk of the Assembly write each a letter of appreciation."

The resolutions adopted by the Senate and Assembly were printed In the Daily Journal of the two houses on Tuesday.

Auburn Journal 1/22/31

Legislature Invited to Auburn's Ski Jump Tomorrow

The Auburn Ski Club has invited the members of the California Legislature to take part in the snow sports at the Auburn Ski Jump tomorrow. There is eight inches of snow at the jump and plenty more higher up.

Placer Herald 1/17/31



After Highway 40 was opened in winter.

Getting the State's agreement to keep Highway 40 over Donner Pass open in winter was just one thing. It turned out to be a good move as the explosion of winter sports in the ensuing years proved.

Actually keeping Highway 40 open, though, was another thing. A year after the legislature's romp in the snow at the Auburn Ski Club and the horrendous traffic jam, things were presumably in hand and newspapers reported regularly on highway conditions. The Oakland Tribune reported about the Division of Highway's working to keep the road open. At the end of November (11/29/31) the paper said that "state highway department is going to do all in its power to keep the road from Auburn to Truckee open this winter." They had six snow plows at Cisco and six at Truckee. During storms the road would be open from nine in the morning to four in the afternoon. The rest of the day would be used by the highway department to work on keeping the road clear of snow, "if it is possible to do so." Personnel would carefully track autos starting trips over the summit and if a car did not make it out the other end rescue parties could be sent out. That was just the prelude. The Oakland Tribune (1/1/32) then talked about "Man's battle to wrest Donner Summit highway from the grip of winter still rages undecided today as 15 Division of Highway snow plows bucked huge drifts in a gale which began Christmas night and will end no one knows when."

Quoting a highway engineer, "We are going to keep the state's only possible outlet eastward from the Sacramento valley open this winter, when we can and as many days as we can." That summarized "the first ambitious attempt made by the state to maintain all winter highway communication with Nevada and beyond." Thirty two men had been assigned to the task with half at Emigrant Gap and half at Donner Summit. The November storm had kept the men working three shifts a day all day long. By December 20 the snowfall had reached 270 inches (22.5 feet) and kept falling "without cessation." "Tracks of the huge rotaries and shovel plows are covered as rapidly as they can proceed." In an interesting aside one Division of Highways engineer admitted that the department "could not have picked an earlier and snowier winter for its initial venture" to keep Highway 40 clear.

In another story a little later The Oakland Tribune reported (January 6, 1932) that road crews had at last broken through the snow barrier on Highway 40 using fifteen snowplows They had been working on breaking through for almost three weeks. The Sacramento Bee, January 6, reported that the recent storm was "one of the heaviest snow storms to visit the Sierra Nevada Mountains in several decades. The summit was opened after valiant work by state Division of Highways crews working with the latest snow plow equipment at sub-zero temperatures."

As of January 6 the road from Soda Springs to Donner Summit had "been literally carved out of snow 25 feet deep in some places." There was a road cut thirty to forty feet deep "between glistening snowbanks through which automobiles must crawl." The road was only open for one-way travel and only to vehicles "not wider than 75 inches." That really limited traffic. This really limited sightseeing too the Sacramento Bee said because "traffic has to pass through a virtual snow tunnel, with snow banks fifteen feet high on each side." The previous week the mail had to go over the summit on skis.

"The view from the summit across the Donner Summit bridge, with Donner Lake at the foot of the grade is a sight worth driving the whole distance to see."

Oakland Tribune December 15, 1929.



Division of Highways picture. This goes with the story on page 8

Just for Fun

While searching for articles about the opening of Highway 40 in winter we got to see slices of 1930's life which we share here - ads from The Oakland Tribune, January 19, 1931

One popular feature in the newspaper was patterns for clothing. Apparently a woman named Clarice has a weekly column.



Here Pattern 2868 was something that a small daughter would love. It's a "little mother hubbard yoked dress. The matching bloomers are gathered in knee bands. The front of the dress joins the yoke with several rows of shirring. It is cut with sufficient fullness to give easy movement. Mother will love it, too, because it's so practical and smart and so suited to childhood activities. It's easily made and easily laundered "



Above: new Marie Dressler film. Left: Langendorf bread ad.



"This is one of the successes of the Patou collection. The material is a ribbed dress worsted, the collar and cuffs are of fancy white pique, and the belt is of black patent leather with two bars of strass."



84 AUTOS FOR SALE AUBURN, 1929, 5-pass, sedan, model 6-90. Car has had excellent care, bargain for quick disposal. Call LAKeside 4473.

1/25/31 Oakland Tribune

1865 Travel on the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd.

DUTCH FLAT AND DONNER LAKE WAGON ROAD.

This road is about sixty miles in length, and is constructed from a point on the ridge near Dutch Flat, in Placer county, over the mountains, through the Donner Pass and by Donner Lake to the Henness Pass road, near Crystal Peak and the Truckee — about thirty miles from Virginia City. The road bed is twenty feet wide, and the grade going east in no place exceeds ten inches to the rod [16 2/3 feet]. Stages and light vehicles easily make from seven to nine miles an hour over it, the track being remarkably firm and smooth.

The company that built it commenced the work in the Summer of 1863, diligently prosecuting it until driven off by the Winter snows, resuming it early in the following Spring, finally completing and opening it for travel June 15, 1864. The average number of laborers employed was about three hundred and fifty, for a period of ten months ; and the aggregate cost was about \$200,000, a larger sum than has been expended upon any other one wagon road in the State.

On July 15, 1864, the California Stage Company put on a daily line of six-horse coaches from Virginia City to Newcastle, there connecting with the Pacific Railroad to Sacramento, which has been maintained from that time to the present, being well patronized by the traveling public, and making the best time over this road of any in the State.

For the six months ending January 1, 1865, there have passed over this road :

Wagons, drawn by two to twelve animals 3,250
Buggies and one-horse vehicles 169
Horsemen 1,278
Head of loose stock 8,590

All the tolls received by the company since the road was opened have been expended in improving it, and there is now about forty miles, of well-graveled and macadamized [road with some kind of covering like gravel] road, securing a hard, firm bed in the dry and rainy seasons.

This is the most direct route from Sacramento over the mountains to Virginia City; and passing as it does along and near the line of the Pacific Railroad, it affords to the traveler an interesting view of the progress of that great national work, and full proof of the feasibility of the route for a railroad. The road is unquestionably superior to any other mountain road of equal length in the State. It has proved to be as superior for a Winter road as for Summer travel, there being less fall of snow and less liability to land slides, which have proved so dangerous on other roads. It is also free from all dangerous precipices. The mountain and lake scenery on the route is unsurpassed for magnificence and beauty. Donner lake is one of the most healthful and invigorating Summer resorts in the Sierra Nevada mountains ; the scenery around it is on the grandest scale.

The stages on this route made the trip to Sacramento regularly in the Summer in four to six hours less time than by any other road, and in the Winter they have generally made it in about twenty-four hours less time. The established Summer time over this route was eighteen hours, and Winter time thirty hours, from Virginia City to Sacramento. Notwithstanding the great severity of the Winter storms of November and December, in the mountains, the travel has been but seldom interrupted or the stages delayed.

On the 22d of August last the great race [see the August, '19 [Heirloom](#)], of railroads and six-horse coaches, came off over this and the Placerville routes, between the California and the Pioneer stage companies. Notwithstanding "heavy rains, heavy roads and heavy loads," the California Stage Company landed their passengers from Sacramento in Virginia City in thirteen hours — the quickest time ever made — beating their opponents nine hours [sic]. It conclusively proved the superiority of this road for fast travel, and its superiority for heavy loaded teams is illustrated by the fact that Reed & Ash hauled with an eight-mule team, from Newcastle to Virginia City, 19,400 pounds, which is the heaviest load ever taken over the mountains by eight mules.

Travel in the Old Days

SACRAMENTO TO VIRGINIA CITY, NEVADA (via Dutch Flat Incl Donner Lake)-Distance 156 miles. Departures at 4 A. M. by Pacific Railroad as far as Newcastle Gap, hence by stages to Summit Pass and Virginia. Time to Virginia City in Winter, 32 hours; in Summer about 18 hours.

Sacramento Daily Union January 2, 1865

Sacramento Daily Union January 2, 1865

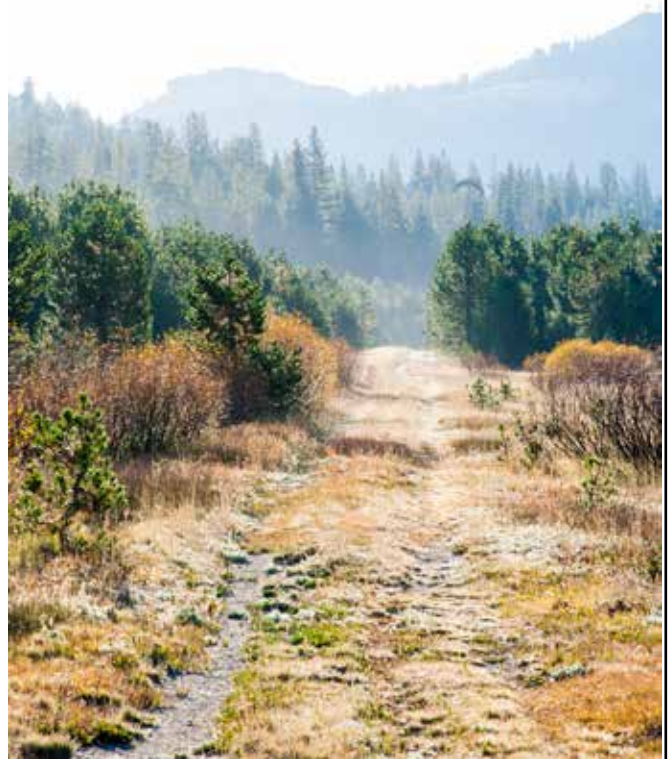
Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd.

After having read the previous page you may find yourself wanting more. Turn to the August and September, '21 [Heirlooms](#) on our website for Dutch Flat Rd. parts I and II.

Until you get to the above [Heirloom](#) issues, the Dutch Flat and Donner Lake Wagon Rd. was built by the Central Pacific's Big 4 to facilitate the building of the railroad. With its construction the Big 4 had a money maker because it served as a toll road as well as a road for bringing up workers and equipment. The road became a major route across the Sierra especially for people heading to and from Virginia City.

A lot of stories go with the road: the Black Plucked Goose and blind folded mules, the first locomotives over the Sierra, the Dutch Flat Swindle, etc. You can walk some parts of the road. One especially interesting spot is in Van Norden or Summit Valley where the remnants of the road are still so compacted that nothing can grow on them (see right).

The road saw immense traffic during the railroad building but after the railroad was finished the Dutch Flat Rd. languished. The many hotels along the way collapsed under the snows and reuse had to wait for the coming of the Lincoln Highway which used the old road's route.



From the DSHS Archives

Following that we have a couple of things, culled from many others, found by Heidi Sproat of the Truckee Donner Historical Society. She's been going through old issues of the [Sierra Sun](#). As she has come across Donner Summit items she's sent them along to us. Here you get to enjoy some of her work. These two articles tell a little about Donner Summit during WWII.

ARMY TAKES OVER SODA SPRINGS AS RESORT CLOSSES

The Army has taken over Soda Springs Hotel, popular ski resort, 12 miles west of here and all civilians have been removed, according to George Stiles of San Francisco, who has been leasing the property from Oscar Jones for the past two years. The hotel will house members of a Military Police organization which has been at Vanderfords [location used to be across from Donner Ski Ranch until it burned] near by for some time. Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Brock who operated the ski tavern at the lodge are moving next door to the Beacon Hill Lodge for the balance of the winter season. Elmo Moriano, who owns Beacon Hill has been inducted into the army and Martin Johnson of Kingvale has leased the property.

[Sierra Sun](#) 1/11/43

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

From the DSHS Archives

THE BLOCKADE.

Dismal Prospects in
the Sierra.

THE IMPRISONED TRAINS.

The Railway Track Covered
With Ice for Miles.

THE FLOODS IN OTHER SECTIONS.

Washouts in the South—The Water
Turned Back at Fresno—Trains
Delayed at Tulare.

[FULL ASSOCIATED PRESS AND THE MERCURY'S
SPECIAL DISPATCHES.]

THE BLOCKADED ROADS.

A New Difficulty in the Mountains and
More Delay Feared.

Special to the MERCURY.

SAN FRANCISCO, January 27.—The situa-
tion at a late hour to-night as regards the
snow blockade on the Central Pacific and
Oregon lines is not as favorable as was
hoped for. On the former, while the snow
has almost all been cleared away, a new

NOT RAISED YET.

Trains Still Held by
the Snow Blockade.

BREAKING OF A ROTARY PLOW

The Condition of the Imprisoned
Passengers.

INDICATIONS OF BAD WEATHER.

Reports From Various Parts of the
State Show That More Rain and
Snow May Be Expected.

[FULL ASSOCIATED PRESS AND THE MERCURY'S
SPECIAL DISPATCHES.]

THE PLOWS AT WORK.

The Cyclone and Rotary Putting in Some
Good Work.

San Jose Mercury News 1/29/90

Left: San Jose Mercury News 1/28/90

Book Review

Ghost Towns of Nevada County 2021 Edition
Bernard Zimmerman 136 pages

Some many months ago The Nevada County Historical Society touted a new book, Ghost Towns of Nevada County. The ghost towns don't get as far as Donner Summit although Meadow Lake (or Summit City) and Phoenix Lake have been featured in our Heirloom's pages (see the August, September, and October '14 editions. Who else would cover them if we did not?) Since we've really run out of books deserving of Heirloom reviews even tangentially related to Donner Summit, we move on to the next category – books you might be interested in.

Ghost Towns of Nevada County is a free ebook available from the publisher, You Bet Press, (youbetpress@gmail.com) Apple Books, or via a quick Google search. It is a compilation of WikiPedia posts over the years by the author, Bernard Zimmerman.

49'ers arriving in California headed for the foothills, according to the author, especially Nevada County, which "for many years produced much of the wealth that fueled the growth and expansion of California." This book identified the towns those 49'ers established. Most of those towns, once thriving, were short lived and have "all but disappeared by the turn of the last century"

After a short introduction about the last remains of the ghost towns disappearing, a short primer on Nevada County gold mining, and maps of western and central Nevada County, the book launches into town by town descriptions. A nice feature of the ebook is that there are links to maps so that the reader can see exactly where the ghost towns sites are and then spend hours traveling the foothills looking for old town sites. There are all kinds of facts and figures: who founded the towns, the numbers voting for Lincoln vs. McClellan in 1860, population, number of students in schools, businesses in the various towns, the towns' demises, even the number of books in the Birchville school's library. There are interesting little descriptions, "Life could be pleasant in Blue Tent. Residents enjoyed ice skating when the reservoir above the town froze, horse racing, and balls at the St. Louis House." They could also take the water cure from Mrs. Stone, described as "a lady of rare capability... thoroughly versed" in the art of hydropathy."

Quote by a reporter visiting Cherokee in 1860 noting the effects of hydraulic mining which disappeared with the 1884 Sawyer Decision by the court.

"The Dr. runs a nice drug store and practices his profession as of yore. Turney keeps a hotel, Martin and Frankenheimer feed the hungry and clothe the naked, and Frank Wilder is sending acres of mud down Shady Creek, covering up ranches, destroying the navigation of the Sacramento, but putting pounds of filthy lucre in his pocket." t

Ghost Towns of Nevada County



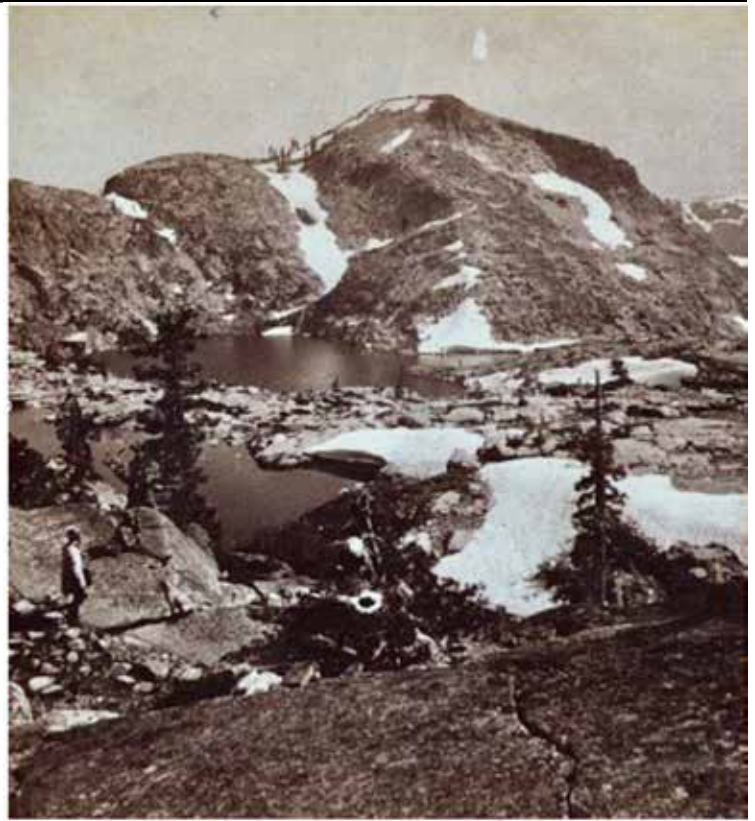
2021 Edition

Bernard Zimmerman

The amount of research is amazing and one wonders how the author was able to ferret out so much information. French Corral had the "world's first long-distance telephone line (1878). The first telephone is now in the Smithsonian. In Lake City a guy grew a one and half pound Pippin apple. Gouge Eye got its name from a resident with one eye (no details about the gouging). Relief Hill had a long-distance telephone line and after hydraulic mining was stopped in 1884 the telephone line was used to warn hydraulic miners that the State inspectors were on the way so the miners would not get caught. Then there's a little more about Relief Hill. As the town fell on hard times and moved a little ways, "husbands, crazed with gold fever, washed the foundations from under their homes, and watched the houses fall into the river, while the wives and children ran from their homes, fleeing a certain death." This was the early 1900's.



8. Sketch of Hussey Mine-Chalk Bluff-circa 1880



1. Old Man Mountain-circa 1865

Along with the research finding information about the various towns there is the research to find the many historic pictures. There are also contemporary pictures of sites that still have visible remains and there are also some interesting then and now pairs of pictures.



36. Hydraulic Mining Relief Hill-circa 1870

Description of Summit City/Meadow Lake, the closest of the ghost towns to Donner Summit. The site of which nothing remains lies north of Fordyce Reservoir

The township of Meadow Lake, established in 1866, included what is now Truckee.

Mark Twain visited in 1866 and described it as: “the wildest exemplar of speculation I have ever stumbled upon...they have built a handsome town and painted it neatly and planned long wide streets, and got ready for a rush of business, and then -jumped aboard the stage coaches and deserted it!... A bright, new, pretty town all melancholy and deserted, and yet showing not one sign of decay or dilapidation. I never saw the like before!”

“By 1869, the population of Meadow Lake had dropped from 4000 to 60. It, along with Baltimore and the other towns in the area, were soon abandoned. In 1880, Baltimore was described as a town “which once had five or six buildings, but whose site is now marked by one lonely and deserted house.”

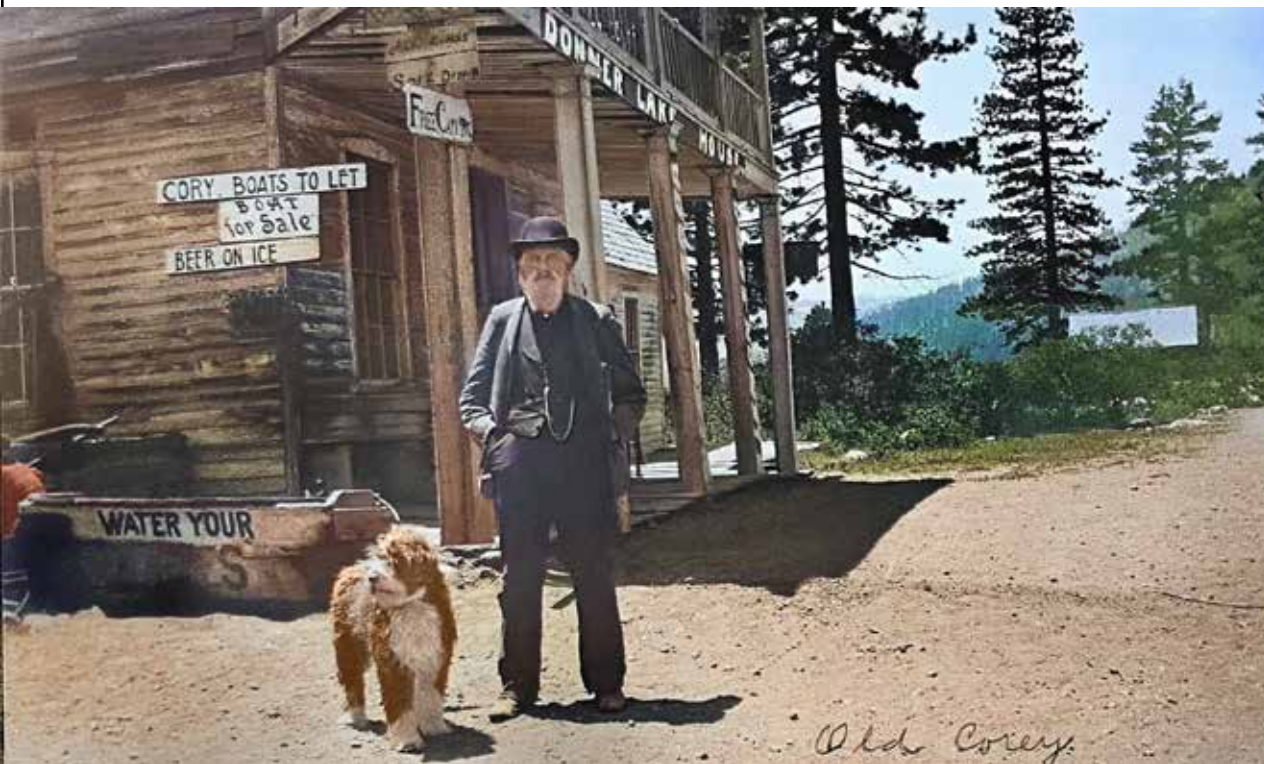
“By late summer [1865], Summit City reportedly had 10 stores, five lumber yards, 10 hotels, five blacksmith shops, many, many bars, gambling houses, a brewery, a book and stationary store, a cigar store, a barbershop, a church, and a ten-piece brass band. An excursion vessel ferried revelers to four hurdy-gurdy houses (dance halls) at the lake’s upper end. Summit City had more businesses than any town in Nevada County except Nevada City and Grass Valley. About 150 houses had been erected. A stage ran daily to Virginia City and a tri-weekly Pony Express ran from Nevada City. Toll roads spidered out from the town in various directions, including to the Henness Pass road, and to the Central Pacific Railroad in Cisco. Prominent residents included Mark Twain’s brother, lawyer Orion Clemens. The town had a court, presided over by Judge Jones, a jail, a marshal and several other lawyers.”

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.

George Lamson



"Old Cory" at Donner Lake House with dog. Donner Lake House sat at the west end of Donner Lake on the Dutch Flat Rd.

Odds & Ends on Donner Summit



The Sword in the Stone Is Back

Being well-attuned to Donner Summit as a reader of the [Heirloom](#) you will remember our April, '18 short story about the sword in the stone on Donner Summit and the mythology around that féted landmark. You were probably disappointed when some "do-gooder" broke the sword off so people could not longer enjoy it.

In 2022 someone put a new but old sword in a new stone not too far from the previous one. Here are pictures. Hiking season will be back and we expect this may be a fun family activity. The sword is not on the trail. The best hint without making the finding too hard is to take the trail to Lakes Flora and Azalea and look around not too far from the previous sword's location.

You might also like to go looking for the dragon in the story, "The Dragons of Donner Summit," to learn a little known story of Donner Summit. See the April, '14 [Heirloom](#). See below.



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.

Donner Summit Historical Society

www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

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

- new membership
- Renewing membership
- Individual Membership \$40
- Family Membership \$60
- Friend \$100
- Sponsor \$250
- Patron \$500
- Patron \$500
- Benefactor \$1000

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

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

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



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



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50 interpretive signs along Old 40

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