

The Donner Summit

Heirloom

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

May, 2023 issue #177



Summit Soda Springs Part II

In our last exciting issue we told the Summit Soda Springs Story focusing on what life was like at the resort, Summit Soda Springs, in the late 19th Century. We'd previously covered the resort's general history in an article by Nick Chickering in our February, '14 [Heirloom](#).

This month we go up the road a bit, to the Cedars and then go back to Summit Soda Springs for some contemporary articles and an interesting article about a local character.

Mark Hopkins, one of the Central Pacific Railroad's (CPRR) Big Four, initially bought eighty acres of land at the North Fork of the American River for a summer house. The land lawyer for the CPRR, A.C. Freeman, bought another adjacent eighty acres.

Hopkins built Summit Soda Springs Hotel so his wife could have San Francisco society friends come visit. Mark Hopkins died and the land went to his adopted son, then the Stanfords of Stanford University, and finally to the Chickering's where it resides now. Parenthetically, the Chickering Family was one of the four founders of Sugar Bowl. (see the [Heirloom](#) article and picture indices for a number of articles on the subject.)

The hotel burned in 1898 leaving a hole in the lives of many of the regular summer visitors. In 1901 a few of them bought land from the Government and the railroad to which they've added over the generations.

The North Fork Association was incorporated on October 21, 1901 by families that held the land jointly. They built tent platforms and stayed in tents initially, but over the years cabins, a

club house, and more members were added.

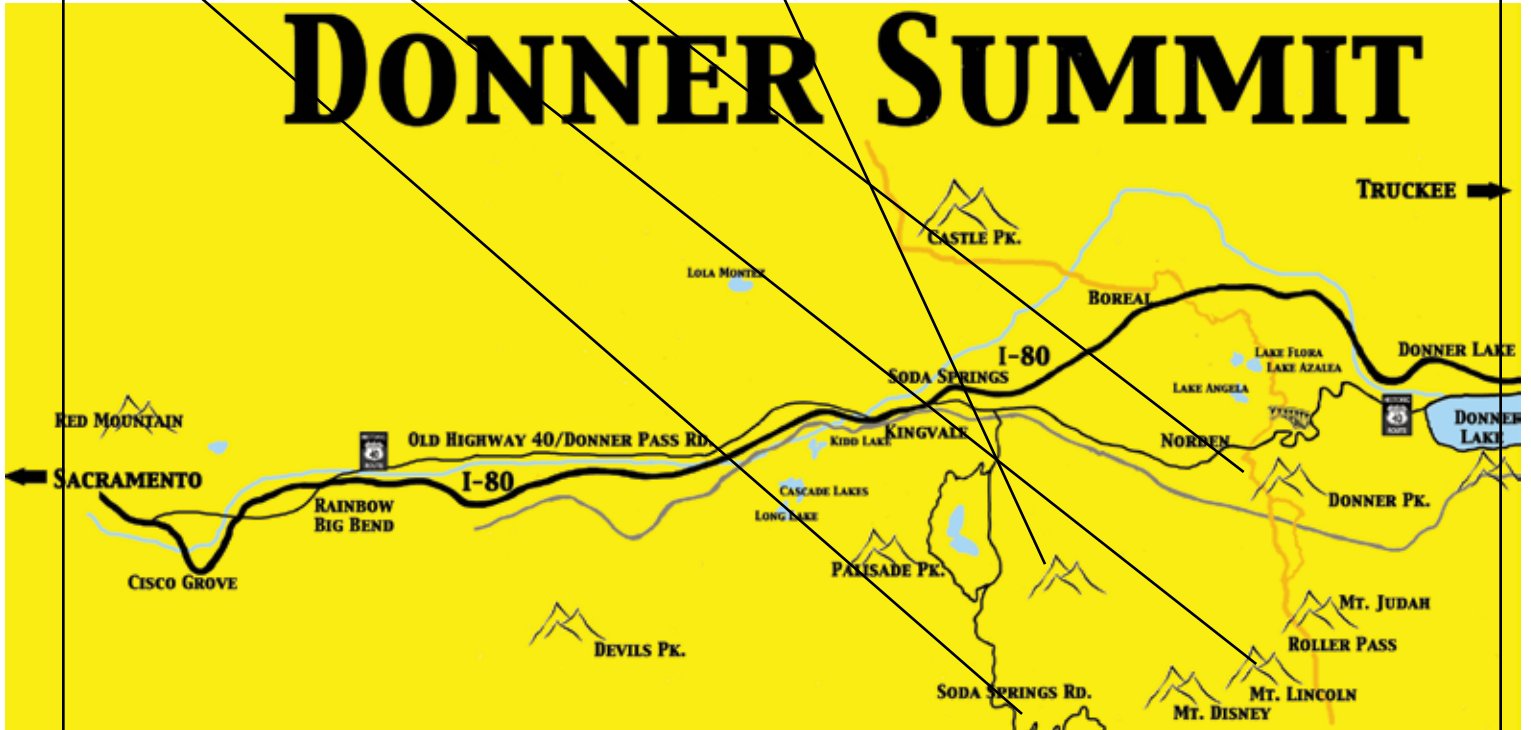
It makes no sense for our general readership to reprise reminiscences of those early days at the Cedars (the name for the North Fork Association community). The area is private, sightseeing and even parking on the road are actively discouraged, and the landmarks described in the various histories of the Cedars make no sense to those unfamiliar with the local geography and who can't visit anyway. There is a rich litany of stories in those histories about children's hijinks, various improvements, new cabins, summit activities, who had the first bathroom, tragedy, and even songs and poetry. We've been given those various histories but they are not for the [Heirloom](#).

What might be more interesting for our readers is what it was like coming to Donner Summit in the early 20th Century. The Cedars people peppered their histories with lots of stories and some of the stories talk about travel in those days.

Mary C. Wilbur wrote a barbeque skit for the Cedars in 1976 using something she'd found in a cupboard from fifteen years before. There's a brief sketch about the Cedars in the 20's (that would be 1920's). Mary Wilbur remembered coming up from Palo Alto to spend the summer of 1922 at the North Fork of the American River which is where the Cedars is. She said it took twelve hours of "hard driving by car" to get there. They left Stanford University at 6 AM and arrived about 6 PM. There were no bridges over the Bay so they had to go through San Jose, Livermore, Tracy,

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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.

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Stockton, and Sacramento. The highways and the auto routes went through each town rather than around. From Roseville up the road crossed and re-crossed the railroad tracks and the family was frequently held up by trains. "Busses squeezed by us on the narrow roads and we boiled and boiled [meaning the engines overheated and the radiators boiled over] on the grades. When we approached the Snow Sheds [sic] a child usually hopped out and peered cautiously up and down the tracks before we ventured across them."

The summer of 1923 Mary Wilbur was among the first to arrive for the summer. Since the road was unusable she and her new husband (Ray Lyman Wilbur, future president of Stanford University and future Secretary of the Interior for President Hoover) came up by night train to the Summit Hotel. After an early breakfast she and her husband put on packs and climbed up Mt. Lincoln so they could descend to the Cedars below the south side of the mountain. The mountain was still covered by snow. It must have been difficult because she says they "dragged into camp." Indeed, that would be quite a hike.

There was no refrigeration, gas or ice. The creek kept things cool and meat was hung in the meat house to age. By then the stage was motorized and cost two dollars from the railroad when the road was open. It "brought in a well shaken passenger or two, many of whom wondered if the ride was worth the two dollar fare." Nearby was a shepherd and his cabin. He ran sheep in the area. At one time Soda Springs was one of the largest sheep shipping centers in the U.S. (See the August-October, '13 [Heirlooms](#).)

After the Summit Hotel burned in 1924 people arriving by train on the way to the Cedars disembarked at Soda Springs Station, three miles closer than the Summit Hotel had been.

Another longer reminiscence is by an unknown author and goes into more detail. His or her first year at the Cedars had been 1914 when two years old. His or her family came to the Cedars very differently. They came by Delta Queen or King paddle wheeler to Sacramento. There they would drive off the boat and head for the Cedars. The running boards of the car were packed with lunch and gas and oil. Three tires were on the back of the Cadillac "all of which we would use on the way up." Later, as automobiles and roads became more reliable, the family would leave Oakland at 6AM and head up to Rodeo where they'd take the ferry across to Vallejo. They'd get to Colfax in the afternoon. Traveling on dirt roads "was rather slow traveling at best." After Colfax the road got very windy and narrow and then came the snowsheds. "One would have to stop at each snowshed..." Someone would get out and stand on the tracks to listen. The big engines would coast downhill "whispering" so crossings could be dangerous. Hearing no approaching trains the car would cross the tracks through the snowshed. At Emigrant Gap "you would begin to run into sheep and herds of cattle." You had to go through very carefully honking your horn and noting the Basque herd-

ers "raising their arms and yelling at you in Spanish."

At the summit travelers would gas up for the final drive to the Cedars. About six or eight o'clock at night they would arrive.

She/he remembered that before the time of the automobile they'd go by train with the whole train ferried across the Bay to Benicia, "which was quite a thrill." They'd arrive at the Summit Hotel and stay in the "old barn of a hotel, freezing cold even in summer." The bathroom was three stories high and had a child's seat along with the adult seat. The author and his/her brother were always afraid they'd fall through. "I can still remember being terrified of it. The biggest kick was listening to what was happening as it would drop three stories and go plop..." We can wonder about the "biggest kick" today and whether it would have been more popular than video games.

The next morning they'd have breakfast and listen to the Chinese railroad workers who were separated by a board wall that did not go to the ceiling. That sounds exactly like how the South separated races in those days.

Then it was time for the stage ride to the Cedars. Steamer trunks, which everyone used then, were fastened on. Women wore full dusters which enclosed them entirely including their hats. The kids got to ride on top with the driver. It would take "between three and four hours" to the Cedars. Summer resident families expected to stay a couple of months. The men would come later and on weekends. They'd also take the train and then "walk over the Crows Peak Trail and arrive for breakfast." In today's terms that means taking the trail over Crows Nest and down the south side a few miles to the Cedars.

In our pile of materials relating the history of the Cedars is a paper called "Cedars History 1910-1920." On page 4 there is an aside reporting on a meeting in 1911. One item was the removal of the word "male" from the by-laws that had read, "male person only eligible for membership." That had been added the year before. The paper reported also that the minutes made arrangements for the "tri-weekly stage-coach trip from Summit to the Cedars. Then there is a curious note, "Nothing was to be done about Mabel, the hermit who lived in a small shack above Ice Lakes and rowed across to get her mail from the stage coach driver. Little was known about her but it was remarkable the way she maneuvered in her heavy skirts and high boots out of the boat and across the mud and granite." Ice (now Serene) Lakes is a tough place to live. One must like snow since an average of 34 feet falls each winter. We can wonder how a hermit survived. The Cedars are quite a bit lower in elevation and so receive less snow, but residents there pack up and leave for the winter, leaving a caretaker behind. We wrote a little of the mystery of Miss York in the March, '17 [Heirloom](#).

FUN IN THE MOUNTAINS.

Incidents of a Climb to the Top of Tinker's Knob.

Sacramentans Who Are Having Jolly Times— Scenes at a Fish-Bake by Moonlight.

Summit Soda Springs, Aug. 7.

Eds. Record-Union: Since my last letter was written we have had such a round of festivities that I feel impelled to write you once more, especially as a large proportion of the guests here are residents of Sacramento, and their friends who are not fortunate enough to be here with them will no doubt be glad to know how they are passing the time at this delightful retreat near the summit of the Sierra Nevada.

Last Sunday evening we had a musicale, under the direction of two young ladies well known in Sacramento. The programme was long, varied and extremely classical—that is, made up largely of college songs, in which all joined. Nearly all of the guests contributed in some way to the entertainment. As every number was enthusiastically encored it was quite late when the first part was finished, and the performers and audience repaired to the club

house, where the concluding portion of the entertainment was given. This included an excellent story, well told, by one of the young lady guests and a short reading by one of the young gentlemen. It was then too late to formulate and pass a set of resolutions thanking the young ladies for their timely and successful efforts to amuse the guests, but they received the individual commendation of all.

Monday a party of fourteen left the Springs at 1:15 P. M. for the top of Tinker's Knob, one of the highest peaks of the Sierra Nevada range. The elevation is nearly 10,000 feet above sea level [actually it's 8949' and is officially named "Tinker Knob"]. Taking it slowly and enjoying the scenery all the way, the first nine of the party reached the top in two and a half hours. The last five required three hours to make the trip, owing to the fact that one of the ladies found it almost impossible to keep up with the rest. At last someone suggested that she take hold of the tail of the pack horse. Adopting the suggestion she found it an immense assistance,

The meeting minutes of 1911 also considered other items like sanitary toilets and whether sheep should be still allowed to graze in the area. The vote to ban sheep lost but six months later it came up again and the vote was passed to allow sheep but only in the form of lamb chops. You can see they must have been a fun group with that little joke in the reminiscence.

The first auto was driven in to the Cedars in 1911 registering 10.6 miles from the Summit Hotel. The trip took one hour and 14 minutes.

In the histories there are some other small stories. Ray Lyman Wilbur was a member of the Cedars and a good friend of Herbert Hoover. In the middle of the night a strange car arrived at the Cedars from the Summit Hotel. President Harding was sick in San Francisco at the Palace hotel. Herbert Hoover had sent for Lyman to attend Harding. Harding of course died.

R.L. Wilbur was President Hoover's Sec. of the Interior. He brought future President Hoover to the Cedars a few times, at least once in 1917 and another time in 1919. One reminiscence has President Hoover and Dr. Wilbur sitting beside the road resting.

Another reminiscence remembers as children being called to the clubhouse to witness the signing of the million dollar check to start the Hoover Dam project.



The view of Tinker Knob the people at Summit Soda Springs would have had prior to heading up to Tinker Knob. It looks the same today as it did. The view is magnificent even all the way to Lake Tahoe. It is better approached from the north from the Pacific Crest Trail from Donner Summit. Summit Soda Springs is about 5844' elevation and the Knob, 8949'.

though she evidently had a dusty experience, judging from the condition in which she arrived at the summit of the Knob. The bangs around her face, which had been, presumably, short, now hung down below her ears, while her face, eyes, nose and mouth were covered with dirt. Each cheek had several paths from temple to chin which the joyous perspiration had made as it ran lightly down the dusty road. The wind, blowing a gale, made the stray locks (and indeed they were nearly all stray locks) look like the arms of a scare-crow. The other ladies of the party arrived in fine shape, with but little dust, due—perhaps, to the fact that the horse had but one tail.

It is a long, hard climb, and your correspondent would advise ladies to think twice before attempting it, unless they are accustomed to climbing in high altitude—and, then, by all means, take a horse and ride.

The gentlemen of the party on arriving at the top at once proceeded to build a fire, over which we made coffee and then had lunch. You may imagine that it was a hungry party. The lunch was prepared for us by the obliging steward at the hotel, and I can assure you we found nothing lacking.

We waited for the sun to go down and watched the shadow of Tinker's Knob as it gradually crept across to Lake Tahoe, then over the lake to the mountains beyond, where it was lost in the mist. The scene from the top of the knob is indescribably grand and picturesque, especially as seen just at sundown. Though the journey to the top is a fatiguing one if made on foot, yet one is well repaid for the journey. Looking over toward Summit Station you can see the snow sheds, and, following them with the eye, you soon see the railroad as it winds its way over toward Truckee and the little towns along the line, which are plainly visible from the top of this wonderful mountain. You cannot help feeling a sense of awe as you look down 3,500 feet below to the hotel and cottages, which look like small white dots upon the green landscape. Over to the right, and farther away, you can trace the line of the railroad, which stands out as a grand testimonial to the great men of great brains and perseverance who built it. We wended our way down the mountain by moonlight, consuming only an hour and a half, and arrived at the springs at 8:45 o'clock.

Last night we had a fish bake. A large fire served the double purpose of warming the guests and baking the fish. The latter were served on shingles and eaten with a stick. After everybody had a sufficiency of the delicious trout, cooked in this primitive manner, all joined hands and danced around the fire, singing songs and making the surrounding mountains ring with their peals of joyous laughter. You should leave the humdrum of city life for a time and come up here and see how we enjoy ourselves.

The sportsmen among the guests are still having splendid luck. Two Sacramento gentlemen caught 109 trout in one day.
Rosalind

August 10 1894 Sacramento Daily Record Union

Snow Slide in Summer.

Our correspondent at Summit Soda Springs, who described, a day or two ago, a trip to the top of Tinker's Knob, one of the highest peaks in the Sierra Nevada, appears to have omitted one detail. A Sacramento ten-year-old who was with the party of fourteen ladies and gentlemen, in writing to his father about the trip, says: "On the way home we found a snow bank. We slid down on the seat of our pants, and when we got up our pants were all wet."

August 11 same paper

In the High Sierras.

The Summit Soda Springs Hotel, situated on the American River, in the high Sierras, thirteen miles from Summit Station, on the Central Pacific Railroad, is now open for the season and is already filling up rapidly. This delightful resort is a great favorite with Sacramento people and already a great many of our people have secured accommodations there. The scenery along the stage road between Summit and the Springs is grand and picturesque.

A sensible girl will not keep a lot of cosmetics and drugs on her toilet table, but there are a few articles she should always have in a convenient place. She should have an array of glass-stoppered bottles containing alcohol, camphor, glycerine or vaseline, alum, borax and ammonia.

The largest school in the world is the Jews' free school of Spitalsfield, England, which has a daily attendance of 2,800 pupils.

Eagles rarely change their mates, as other birds. They usually mate for life.

Boils and Blotches.

DR. RUSH'S Sarsaparilla eradicates them and other ailments that come from impure blood and a disordered state of the system. 75c.

CALL FOR IT.

Some miscellany from the
Sacramento Daily Union June 15, 1897

Fire at Summit Soda
Springs.
**NARROW ESCAPE OF GUESTS
MOST OF THEM LOSE THEIR WARDROBES.**

Proprietor Jacobs and Two Waitresses
Badly Injured by Leaping
From Upper-Story Windows,

Special Dispatch to The Call.

AUBURN. Sept: 2:--The Summit Soda Springs Hotel, located about fifteen miles southeast. of Summit station, in Placer County, was destroyed by fire this morning at 3-o'clock. Besides the large three-story hotel the log cabin used for dancing and a smaller building were burned. The guests to the number of over a hundred barely escaped with their lives, and most of them lost their wardrobes..

Samuel Jacobs, one of the proprietors, suffered from partial suffocation and was seriously injured by jumping from a second-story window. Two waitresses who were sleeping in the third story of the caravansary were obliged to drop from story to story by the aid of bed clothing. They are badly injured and were dragged away from the burning building in a state of complete collapse and bleeding profusely from the mouth.

A number of San Francisco people were at the springs and among them were two nephews of the late Adolph Sutro. Both young men distinguished themselves in the saving of life and limb.

Summit Soda Springs are among the most fashionable resorts of the mountains. They are owned by Jacobs. & Goulding, whose loss will not be less than \$10,000.

San Francisco Call September 3, 1898

HAVING A GREAT TIME. Sacramentans and Others at Summit Soda Springs.

'GAIETY HALL," A NEW LOG CABIN, APPROPRIATELY DEDICATED.

Music, Dancing and a Most Tempting Collation Add to the Good Cheer of the Guests-Enjoyable Trips to the Top of Tinkers' Knob and Pearl's Peak, With a Down-Hill Slide on the Snow.

[Occasional Correspondence Record-Union.]

Summit Soda Springs, July 21. —Did they have "a time" here last night? Well, I should say so! The occasion was the dedication of the new log cabin, which has been very appropriately named "gaiety Hall." In the new building is a music, recreation and dancing hall thirty five feet long. The floor is as smooth as in any of the dancing halls in your city, and was in excellent condition on Saturday night.

This is the most enjoyable place on the coast, and there are people here from all parts of the State. They are sociable and know how to be happy themselves and make others happy, so on Saturday night, on the completion of the first floor of "Gaiety Hall," they had a dance! There was a long programme... and participated in by as many as the floor would hold. Violin and piano music was furnished by the guests.

During the afternoon the ladies had gathered a large collection of the beautiful mountain wild flowers, which in such profusion here, and decorated the hall in an artistic manner. The little yellow tiger lilies and small sunflowers were a feature of the floral display...

About 10:30 o'clock the "genial land lord," Sam Jacobs, had refreshments served in the old log cabin. The steward and waiters of the hotel seemed to take pride in their work, and they set forth a most tempting collation of cold meats, salads, fruit, etc. A handsome bowl of claret punch added color to the decoration on the tables. A speech was demanded of the "genial landlord," and he acquitted himself in his characteristic style and was warmly applauded.

Henry Merrill came in for a large share of praise for the violin music, which added so much to the pleasure of the occasion.

The accommodations at this favorite mountain summer resort are better than ever this year, and everything possible is done for the comfort and pleasure of the guests. Next month the place will be captured by Sacramentans, who have nearly every room engaged, both in hotel and cottages, except those occupied by bay people who come early and stay through the whole season.

A large party of ladies and gentlemen climbed to the top of Tinkers' Knob one day last week. They took lunch with them and enjoyed the trip immensely.

Another party, mostly from Sacramento, made a trip to the top of Pearl's Peak. After sliding down hill on the snow for an hour and a half they ate lunch, rested awhile and returned to the hotel with very little fatigue. ...

July 23, 1895
Sacramento Daily Record

Bill Derrick of Summit Soda Springs

Tim Derrick

I am a big fan of [The Heirloom](#), the Donner Summit Historical Society's monthly newsletter, passionately curated by Bill Oudegeest. His research and writing bring to life the history and lore of Donner Summit for all of us. As a homeowner at Serene Lakes, and lifelong appreciator of history, I have become one of [The Heirloom's](#) most avid followers.

An article in one of last year's [2021] issues prompted me to follow a link to the [Heirloom](#) archives where I read with fascination how Mark Hopkins of Transcontinental Railroad fame founded a hotel and personal retreat at Summit Soda Springs in the upper valley of the North Fork of the American River in the 1870's. It struck me as curious that one of Donner Summit's first active settlements was a 3 hour, bumpy stagecoach ride from the train, or the "Soda Springs Station" which lends its name to the community we live in today. Mark Hopkins' hotel at Summit Soda Springs was frequented by a veritable "who's who" in Northern California history. The fact that this enclave was so far off the beaten path and still privately owned along with its neighbor, the Cedars, contributes to the mystery and allure of the upper valley of the North Fork of the American River, an area I have come to love.

The Chickering family bought the Summit Soda Springs property from the nephew of Leland Stanford in 1927 and it has remained in their family ever since. Nick Chickering wrote about its origins in the February 2014 [Heirloom](#), "One of the "Big Four", Mark Hopkins, discovered the Valley through the services of an Indian, (or Bill Derrick, whomever you choose to believe). Mark was a recluse who wanted to get away from The City and the pressures of being treasurer of the Central Pacific Railroad. He built his log cabin there in 1875, but he first built a hotel where he and his friends stayed so that, as the story goes, his wife, Mary, would not be lonely."

The first line of that paragraph caused me to pause. My father and grandfather were both named Bill Derrick and, though I had no known family connections to California, there are not so many Derricks around of that spelling and I asked myself, what are the chances that my family had some connection to Bill Derrick?

A few paragraphs further on, the story got even more interesting.

"Another character in the Valley was Bill Derrick, who worked there in 1899 and at The Cedars until sometime during Josiah Stanford's ownership. Mary Chickering Erdman knew him when she stayed with the Stanford's during their ownership. His life story is poignant: Young Bill Derrick was 10 years old when his family came across the prairies in a

covered wagon. One day in what is now Utah, he took his rifle out to shoot a prairie chicken (sage hen) and became disoriented from where they had stopped for the night. His parents were frantic when he didn't come back and spent three days looking for him, all in vain. Finally, the family decided that he probably was taken by Indians, and they pushed west, taking the fork in the road to Oregon. Meanwhile, young Bill apparently waited patiently on the road which led to California, and when his parents never arrived, gave up and was taken to California by a passing wagon train. He grew up an orphan and never saw his family again, landing in Summit Soda Springs where he remained in his later years."

Wow, what a story of high drama and tragedy on the great western migration! Could this story of a 10 year old lost on the prairie possibly be true? I reached out to Nick Chickering to learn more ... and he reported a few additional details:

"We do know that the Bill Derrick lived at Summit Soda Springs and at The Cedars between 1873 and at least 1914, probably later. Bill Derrick was there every summer and lived in a camp on a bench above our cabins, mostly cutting wood and a little caretaking. He was clearly a bachelor, had an old horse, and was on the edge of poverty all his life. There are references to Bill Derrick riding into the old Soda Springs with Mark Hopkins, though Thompson & West say it was an Indian who showed him the valley. In either event, Bill Derrick was a fixture there for more than 4 decades doing odd jobs, getting supplies, and living a hardscrabble life. He also spent time at the Lost Emigrant Mine down river of The Cedars."

In 2010, the historian Salvador Ramirez wrote and published a 1,400 page tome titled [The Inside Man - the Life and Times of Mark Hopkins](#) [see the review in the June, '19 [Heirloom](#)] in which he briefly commented on Bill Derrick's role guiding Mark Hopkins to the old Soda Springs:

Their destination was an area twelve miles from the Central Pacific Summit Station, later named Summit Soda Springs, still covered in many places by the heavy snow fall of the preceding winter—a snow fall reportedly comparable to that of the disastrous winter of 1867-1868. The area had first come to Hopkins' attention through Sacramento attorney Abraham Clark Freeman who extolled

the area's beauty, its sparkling and healthful mineral waters, and its unparalleled peaks. Sometime after 1869 the two men, accompanied by Bill Derrick and an Indian guide, toured the area on horseback. Hopkins was, apparently, taken by its beauty as well as its remoteness.

I have always regretted not having a better knowledge of my family history. Three out of four of my grandparents died before I was born, and the oral and written versions of our family history were limited. I was vaguely aware that the Derricks had been in Missouri at some point, and that my family moved from there to Texas. My own family moved around a lot and ended up in the Adirondack Mountains of New York State where I grew up. I like to think I am part of the small minority of Americans who migrated in the opposite direction, West to East, like a salmon swimming upstream. The colorful image of Bill Derrick lost and left behind as a child on the prairie, growing up as an orphan in California, and being a fixture for 4 decades at Summit Soda Springs near my current home in Serene Lakes fully captured my imagination. Given my love for this corner of the Sierra Nevada, the search was on.

To explore my roots and this story about Bill Derrick, I decided to enlist the help of an online genealogy platform, Ancestry.com. There I gladly discovered that what would have taken genealogists months if not years of thumbing through dusty county records could now be done mostly online since many historical records have been digitized and are readily searchable. That was both good and bad news. My initial search turned up about 30 William Derricks who roughly fit his profile. So, I ended up taking a different approach, researching my family history first, with the hope of deciphering where Bill Derrick from Summit Soda Springs fit in.

In the course of that exploration, I learned that the Derricks had gotten their start in North America when Simon Dürck (whose name was changed to Derrick shortly after arriving to Philadelphia from Northern Germany in the 1700's) settled in the Pennsylvania Dutch country organized by William Penn. The Derricks, like many American immigrants, quickly absorbed the frontier spirit, moving westward every generation or so to the next "new" frontier, first to the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia, then Roane County in Tennessee, then to Missouri in the 1840's.

Missouri was a tumultuous place in the antebellum era, with loyalties split between north and south. Missouri in the 1840's and 1850's provided ready access to the superhighways of the day as the Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio rivers all converged there, and the Oregon and California Emigrant trails, the Pony Express, the Butterfield Overland Stage, and the Santa Fe Trails all began there. When the Donner Party started their journey from Springfield, Illinois in 1847 and passed westward through Missouri, they found themselves already behind the other parties leaving out of Independence, Missouri, the

starting point of the California and Oregon Trails, where many wagon trains were provisioned and launched.

Sorting out one's roots from the early American frontier is not easy. I grew to admire the diligence and attention to detail of early American census takers, but their records revealed interesting, if not confusing patterns. Family size often numbered at least 10 children (sometimes plenty more) offset by frequent infant mortality and generally a short life expectancy (particularly for the women who bore all those children!) Generations could be separated by as little as 15 years and naming patterns appeared to follow family conventions. The Derricks seemed to have at least one William, Sarah, John, James, or Elizabeth in each subsequent generation. I encountered a case where two Derrick cousins born in Missouri in the same year, living in the same county, named their children almost exactly the same, as if it were a sign of loyalty to the clan, but creating a complicated mix of historical doppelgangers in the process. It suffices to say there were a lot of William Derricks born in Missouri in the 1840's and 50's. A few stayed there, but for most, Missouri was a weigh station on their westward American journey.

I was able to establish that my great grandfather, James Wesley Derrick, headed south from Missouri to Texas around 1870, hence my lack of familiarity with any of my family's California history. If I were to find Bill Derrick of Soda Springs, I had to shift my focus to the branches of the family who headed to California and Oregon around the time of the Gold Rush. And there were quite a few!

I found a distant relative and historian who described the Missouri Derricks as "all cracked on mining." The California Gold Rush attracted argonauts from around the world, but Missouri was one of the easiest jump-off points for the gold fields of California in 1849, and some of the Derricks were quick to join the throng.

The first evidence of California's gravitational pull on the Derricks was revealed in an interesting quirk in the 1850 Census. My great grandfather's first cousin, Jesse Cunningham Derrick, showed up twice in the 1850 Census, once in Missouri, and once in the gold camps of Placerville, CA (or Hangtown as it was aptly called given its reputation for lawlessness at the time.) Jesse either made a very fast trip in the 2 months that separated the two census counts, or his wife felt obliged to cover for him (he was the town's Methodist preacher after all) during his unexplained absence to California in 1850. But Jesse returned to Missouri in 1852 and brought his family back to California, settling first at Walnut Grove in Sacramento County, then in Carson City, Nevada, and later in Sonoma County, attracting his father and many of his siblings and cousins to join him.

It was at this point that I discovered my first potential lead

in the search for Bill Derrick of Summit Soda Springs. The following is an account of Jesse's father, Andrew Derrick, who had 16 children including one named William, and many grandchildren named William:

Andrew Derrick was born in 1798 in Hawkins County, Tennessee. After several of his children moved to Missouri, and then further on to California and Oregon, in 1860 at the age of 62 Andrew went by train to New York with his wife and three of his young children and then to Panama where they crossed over to the Pacific Ocean, then took another ship to California. They went to California to look for gold and spent 2 years there. Leaving one son behind in California, Andrew then traveled to Oregon by wagon train to join other members of his family already settled there. Andrew died in Umatilla four years later in 1868.

Here was a reference to a son "left behind" in California while his family went to Oregon. Was this code for losing his child in the Utah desert? (If you have 16 children, I suppose this story becomes slightly more plausible.) Could this be Bill Derrick of Soda Springs? Some parts of the story compute, but others do not. If Andrew came by way of Panama to California, then traveled on to Oregon, how could he have lost a child in Utah? Further research confirmed that Andrew's son William a.k.a. "Wild Willy" Derrick actually made it to Oregon and died there. It was back to the drawing board on my search.

Armed with a bit more family background, I doubled back to looking for Bill Derrick in Placer County in the 1870-1910 timeframe. If he worked at Summit Soda Springs for 4+ decades, surely there had to be some historical record of him.

There were at least 3 William Derricks who appeared in Placer County census and voting records over this period. Strangely, two were named William H. Derrick, and two were born in the same year, 1855.

William Heffington Derrick showed up in the 1900 Placer County census as a 52 year old living in a boarding house in Auburn. This was a perfect fit. He was a single male, born in Missouri, his father born in Tennessee, living in a boarding house in Auburn with easy access to Donner Summit. If he had guided Mark Hopkins into Summit Soda Springs in 1870, he would have been about 22 years old at the time. I thought I had found Bill Derrick (again) ...but then I checked the date of the census: July 3, 1900. If he spent each summer at Summit Soda Springs, what was he doing in Auburn in July? There were also few other records of this William Heffington Derrick in Placer County, and he died in 1900 in Woodbridge in San Joaquin County.

The second William Derrick was born in Walnut Grove on the Sacramento River, a son of Jesse Cunningham mentioned above, who worked for a period in Placer County, but records

establish that he moved to Sonoma County and lived there the rest of his life.

A third William Derrick appeared in the 1870 census as a 15 year old living in "Pino" (later renamed to Loomis) with his father John D. Derrick and 4 brothers and sisters. John Derrick's family was also recorded in the 1850 Census living in Dallas County, Missouri, 5 years before William was born. Unfortunately, there was no record of them in the 1860 census. While the age could be right, the fact that William had a family didn't comport with the story of being left behind in Utah and growing up an orphan in California while his family went to Oregon.

This William, William Henry Derrick, continued to show up regularly in Placer (and Yuba) County records. He lived in Rocklin in the 1880 Census where his occupation was listed as a "livery stable keeper." By 1890, his residence had changed to "Indian Springs" near "Westville", a hardscrabble mining community in the mountains, about halfway between Foresthill and Summit Soda Springs along the old Foresthill-Soda Springs Road above the Royal Gorge and the North Fork of the American River. Westville had a post office from 1889 to 1919 and was only 10 miles away from the Lost Emigrant Mine (where Nick Chickering had mentioned Bill worked) and 17 miles from the Cedars and Summit Soda Springs.



Westville, CA Westville Hotel

In the 1900 Census, William was living in Oregon House near Marysville in Yuba County with his sister Sarah and her family. Sarah Elizabeth was one year older than William, and also appeared in the 1870 Pino Census. Sarah's husband, Evan Phelan, died in 1892 leaving her with 6 children to care for. It appears that William spent at least some of his time living in Oregon House, perhaps just the winters, supporting his sister and her family. She never remarried.

In the early 1900's, William Derrick appeared regularly in Placer County voting records which reported him living in "Donner City" in the "Summit Precinct." I learned that "Donner City" was the former name of a small enclave at the west end of Donner Lake, most of which is in Nevada County. The voting place for the Summit Precinct was at the old Summit Hotel, near today's Donner Ski Ranch, and run by Joseph and Isabella Gowlings from 1881 until 1920.

After 1910, William's place of residence returned to Oregon House in Yuba County. His sister, Sarah died there in 1922. William died there 10 years later in 1932 at the age of 77, and was buried alongside his sister under the same headstone in the Brownsville Cemetery.



The consistency of the Placer County records in the areas of Donner Summit and the Valley of the North Fork aligns closely with the stories of Bill Derrick's enduring presence in Summit Soda Springs, and his engagement with the Lost Emigrant Mine up from Westville. After several months of digging, I am confident that I had found the right Bill Derrick. As it turned out, William Henry Derrick was the first cousin of my great grandfather, James Wesley Derrick, or in genealogical terms, he was my first cousin three times removed.

This still left unanswered the question of Bill Derrick being left behind in Utah. Was this just a tall tale, woven into the narrative of man who must have become a legend working in the Valley for half a century? And how did Bill Derrick come to guide Mark Hopkins into the upper valley of the Upper North Fork of the American River? I am not sure we will ever know the answers to these questions, but the historical records point to some clues.

William's father, John Derrick and his wife Rebecca traveled with their children from Dallas County, Missouri across the prairies in 1857 after the initial wave of the Gold Rush, and before the outbreak of Civil War. They traveled on the California Trail, likely through Donner Summit, and the most common route of the California trail didn't pass through Utah (setting aside the Donner's ill-fated Hastings cutoff!) Besides, William would have been only 2 or 3 years old in 1857, certainly not quite old enough to go off hunting sage grouse.

Wagon train records during this time are spotty, but it is likely that John Derrick's family traveled west in 1857 with his cousin, Joseph Derrick, who lived in a neighboring town in Missouri. Joseph Alexander Derrick, a wagon maker and

veteran of the Mexican War, settled with his family first in Walnut Grove near Sacramento (recorded in the 1860 Census with his brother Jesse Cunningham), then later in Sonoma County. Bill Derrick's father, John and his two older brothers, remained close with Joseph's family, and later lived on adjacent parcels, farming together in Healdsburg.

Given Joseph's military experience and his trade (it's always good to have a wagon maker along on a cross-country wagon trip), he apparently guided multiple wagon trains west during the 1860's and his family accompanied him on some of these trips. It is possible that William's father, John, and Joseph were jointly involved in these later trips during this, the most active, and final decade of westward migration by wagon train before the completion of the transcontinental railroad. Because no record of John Derrick's family could be found in the 1860 Census, it's possible they could have been in transit or on the trail at that time. Here is an account written by one of Joseph Derrick's grandchildren, whose mother Julia was about the same age as Bill Derrick. It gives a flavor for elements that could have contributed to William's "lost in Utah" story:

I'll relate some stories about the Joseph Alexander Derrick family. He brought wagon trains to California later in 1866 and 67. Joe took his family back to Missouri and brought them out with his next wagon train. Julia was eight or nine years old when she came on a wagon train trip to California. She recalled when meat was scarce, her father would shoot prairie dogs for meat. She would say "pass the dog" at meals to tease her mother and she would then refuse to eat it. Her brother Columbus or "Lum" claimed the Indians attacked them. Elizabeth, Joe's second wife, was a teacher from Ohio. She started on the wagon trip west when she was ill and was not expected to live. She said she would not stay behind and just to bury her along the trail when she died but she got well and arrived in California. She walked most of the way due to the discomfort of riding in the wagon. Julia went to Los Angeles and they slept in a stockade with the big doors closed at night for safety. The other women spoke only Spanish so she learned some Spanish during her stay. Joe later settled down farming in Dry Creek Valley (near Healdsburg.) He was a great hunter and would go back into the hills and he would be gone for days. He just took parched corn and jerky to eat. He would return carrying a deer. If he could find a bee tree he would bring home some honey. He could walk all day carrying a deer and his rifle.

Imagine taking your young family across the country by wagon train not once but a few times! With Joseph's military experience in the Southwest (he was apparently wounded in a battle in New Mexico during the Mexican War) and one of their destinations being Los Angeles, they were likely guid-

ing on the Santa Fe Trail which ran through Utah and Nevada to Los Angeles. If William had been on one of these journeys with his cousin Julia, he would have been 11 or 12 at this time and, already a talented hunter, responsible for supplementing the wagon train's lean rations.

William's mother, Rebecca, died from a "disease of the stomach" in Pino in 1869 when William was 14, leaving John alone to raise his younger children in Placer County. John remarried and moved with his elder two sons to Sonoma County shortly thereafter, and there is no record of William accompanying them. While not orphaned per se, Bill Derrick must have learned from a young age how to fend for himself.

He also grew up with the transcontinental railroad and the Central Pacific Railroad being staged, built and supplied in his backyard from 1865-1869. The 1870 census in Pino shows that William's closest neighbors were Chinese laborers who would have to come to California to work on the railroad. Irving Stone reports in his classic, Men to Match My Mountains that labor was so scarce during the early construction of the railroad that boys as young as 12 were employed to drive freight wagons up the Dutch Flat Road to supply the constant construction activity to get the railroad through the Sierras. Bill Derrick would have been 10-14 during that period of construction

The following assumptions are pure conjecture, but it's not hard to imagine William as young teenager, left largely on his own, self-reliant, a seasoned hunter and horseman, with perhaps multiple wagon trips across the country under his belt (including one where he may have been left behind in Utah,) and possibly work experience building the railroad over the Sierra. With the railroad freshly completed in 1869, one can picture young William jumping the train or riding his horse from Loomis up to Donner Summit in the summers where he took to exploring the spectacular wilderness, perhaps looking for gold, and certainly hunting, fishing and living off the land for periods of time.

As reported by Bill Oudegeest in the Heirloom, there were a handful prospectors in the upper valley of the North Fork of the American River in the 1860's, so it's plausible to think that Bill Derrick also explored the valley while still a teenager. One can also imagine Mark Hopkins, one of the wealthiest men of that era, hiring young Bill Derrick to guide him into the upper valley of the North Fork of the American River to the site of the old Soda Springs which up to that time was known only to the Native Americans, a handful of prospectors, and perhaps a young teenager from Loomis who knew the land as well as anyone.

Given that his occupation was listed as "livery stable keeper" in the 1880 census, he must have had familiarity with horses from an early age and was rarely seen in his later years without his "old horse" in Summit Soda Springs. As described in the journals of Josie Freeman, an early landowner in Summit

Soda Springs ca. 1905, one of Bill Derrick's primary roles was escorting guests on the 3 hour stagecoach ride in and out of the valley, and resupplying the summer residents with an occasional deer, fresh fish, as well as mail and goods from the railroad stops at the Soda Springs and Donner Summit stations.



Someone once said, "at the heart of every legend, there are a few grains of truth." If my research is on target, William "Bill" Derrick was the son of early California pioneers who grew up on the frontier, always living close to the land, learning from a young age how to navigate, hunt, fish, manage horses. He never married or settled down, but remained close to what little family he had. He worked for legendary figures in California history, and spent almost half a century caretaking for the mountain homes and families of the newly minted California gentry, hunting and fishing whenever he could in one of the most beautiful valleys in the Sierra Nevada. His role is recorded only briefly in the annals of California history, yet he carved out a humble, but enduring place in Donner Summit history.

When I ride my mountain bike down to the Cedars on the Soda Springs Road, I imagine young Bill Derrick guiding Mark Hopkins by horseback into the Valley for the first time, or later in life, shuttling distinguished guests of the Hopkins, Stanfords, and Freeman's back and forth from the railroad station to Summit Soda Springs across the "land bridge" that separated Lake Serena and Dulzura, the route of the old stage road. As I look out across the lakes, I wonder how many times Bill Derrick and his old horse passed this way.

Thank you, Bill and Nick, for your stories about Bill Derrick, and inadvertently prodding me to discover some unknown California roots, and a distant family connection to this colorful figure in Donner Summit's history.

- Tim Derrick

1860 United States Federal Census for J C Derrick

California > Sacramento > Georgiana

SCHEDULE 1—Free Inhabitants in *Georgiana Precinct* in the County of *Sacramento* State of *California*, enumerated by me, on the *23* day of *June* 1860. *W. H. Hallowell* Post Office *Donner*

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Color	Profession, Occupation, or Trade	Value of Real Estate		Value of Personal Estate		Total Value	Whether Blind, Deaf, or Dumb	Whether Sick or Convalescent
						Owned	Rent	Owned	Rent			
1	John Derrick	M	27	W	Farmer	100	0	0	0	100		
2	Mary Derrick	F	25	W	Wife	0	0	0	0	0		
3	John Derrick	M	10	W	Child	0	0	0	0	0		
4	Mary Derrick	F	8	W	Child	0	0	0	0	0		
5	John Derrick	M	5	W	Child	0	0	0	0	0		

California, U.S., Voter Registrations, 1900-1968 for William Henry Derrick

Placer County > 1900-1922 > 405

INDEX TO Summit Precinct

No.	Name	Party	Occupation	Address
1	Allen, Evan Rittenhouse	Soc.	Telegraph Op.	Donner City
2	Allen, John Flag McDuffy	Rep.	Lineman	Donner City
3	Allen, Mrs. Olive	Soc.	Staff Op.	Donner City
4	Andree, Rudolph	Rep.	Farmer	Donner City
5	Baxter, Elmer Micah	Prog.	Supt. Construction	Donner City
6	Baxter, Mrs. Mabel Agnes	Prog.	Housekeeper	Donner City
7	Bennett, Frank Robert	Dem.	Carpenter	Donner City
8	Billings, George Elmer	Dem.	Signalman	Donner City
9	Brown, Mrs. Alice Bell	Soc.	Housekeeper	Donner City
10	Brown, George Thomas	Soc.	Telegrapher	Donner City
11	Bundy, Archibald	Rep.	Telegraph Op.	Donner City
12	Burns, John Henry	Dem.	Laborer	Donner City
13	Bushman, Charles Oscar	Rep.	Miner	Donner City
14	Bybee, Ralph Wayland	Prog.	Telegraph Op.	Donner City
15	Cannon, Tiffin Porter	Prog.	State Hwy. Fore.	Donner City
16	Connors, Daniel Frank	Prog.	Lineman	Donner City
17	Consigliari, Alessio	Rep.	Carpenter	Donner City
18	Corey, Thomas Franklin	Rep.	Teamster	Donner City
19	Costello, Daniel Joseph	Rep.	Timekeeper	Donner City
20	Courtney, Michael	Dem.	Laborer	Donner City
21	Crosby, George Augustus	Rep.	Teamster	Donner City
22	Davis, Mrs. Celia Estelle	Prog.	Housewife	Donner City
23	Davis, James	Rep.	R. R. Conductor	Donner City
24	Derrick, William Henry	Rep.	Laborer	Donner City
25	Duffey, Miss Genevieve	Dem.	Telegraph Op.	Donner City
26	Dusher, Frank J.	Soc.	Telegraph Op.	Donner City
27	Dusher, Mrs. Helen	Soc.	Housewife	Donner City

1870 United States Federal Census for William Derrick

California > Placer > Township 9

Page No. 1. Schedule 1—Inhabitants in *Donner Precinct* in the County of *Placer* State of *California*, enumerated by me on the *22* day of *August* 1870. *W. H. Hallowell* Post Office *Donner*

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Color	Profession, Occupation, or Trade	Value of Real Estate		Value of Personal Estate		Total Value	Whether Blind, Deaf, or Dumb	Whether Sick or Convalescent
						Owned	Rent	Owned	Rent			
1	John Derrick	M	32	W	Farmer	100	0	0	0	100		
2	Mary Derrick	F	30	W	Wife	0	0	0	0	0		
3	John Derrick	M	15	W	Child	0	0	0	0	0		
4	Mary Derrick	F	13	W	Child	0	0	0	0	0		

census forms for the Derrick story found by Tim Derrick.

1920 United States Federal Census for William Derrick

California > Yuba > Parks Bar > District 0179

STATE *California* COUNTY *Yuba* TOWNSHIP OR SUBDIVISION OF COUNTY *Parks Bar* NAME OF INCORPORATED PLACE *Donner* DATE OF CITY INCORPORATION *1860*

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE—BUREAU OF THE CENSUS
FOURTEENTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES—POPULATION

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Color	Profession, Occupation, or Trade	Value of Real Estate		Value of Personal Estate		Total Value	Whether Blind, Deaf, or Dumb	Whether Sick or Convalescent
						Owned	Rent	Owned	Rent			
1	William Derrick	M	48	W	Laborer	0	0	0	0	0		
2	Mary Derrick	F	46	W	Wife	0	0	0	0	0		
3	John Derrick	M	20	W	Child	0	0	0	0	0		
4	Mary Derrick	F	18	W	Child	0	0	0	0	0		

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. s

Sacramento Daily Union July 16, 1895

SUMMIT SODA SPRINGS

MOTEL,

Situated on the American River, in
the High Sierras.

THIRTEEN MILES FROM SUMMIT
station, C. P. R. R.
Numerous improvements have been
made this year.

LARGE LOG CABIN

Set apart for Dancing Hall and Social Pur-
poses.

This unrivaled Summer Resort is now
open to guests.

GOULDEN & JACOBS Proprietors,
Donner P. O.

MAGNETIC SPRINGS

Sacramento Record Union July 14, 1897

SODA SPRINGS HOTEL, PLACER COUNTY.

THIS DELIGHTFUL HEALTH RESORT IS situated in the high Sierras, with Bracing Air, Magnificent Scenery, Unsurpassed Mineral Water and Excellent Fishing and Hunting. The house is situated close to the bank of the American river, and is reached via the C. P. R. R. and Soda Springs Station; thence to Springs ten miles by stage, being an interesting and attractive drive. The Hotel at this Summer Resort is now open. JOHN MILLER, Proprietor.

B. F. BOST, Clerk.

Sacramento Record Union August 6, 1896

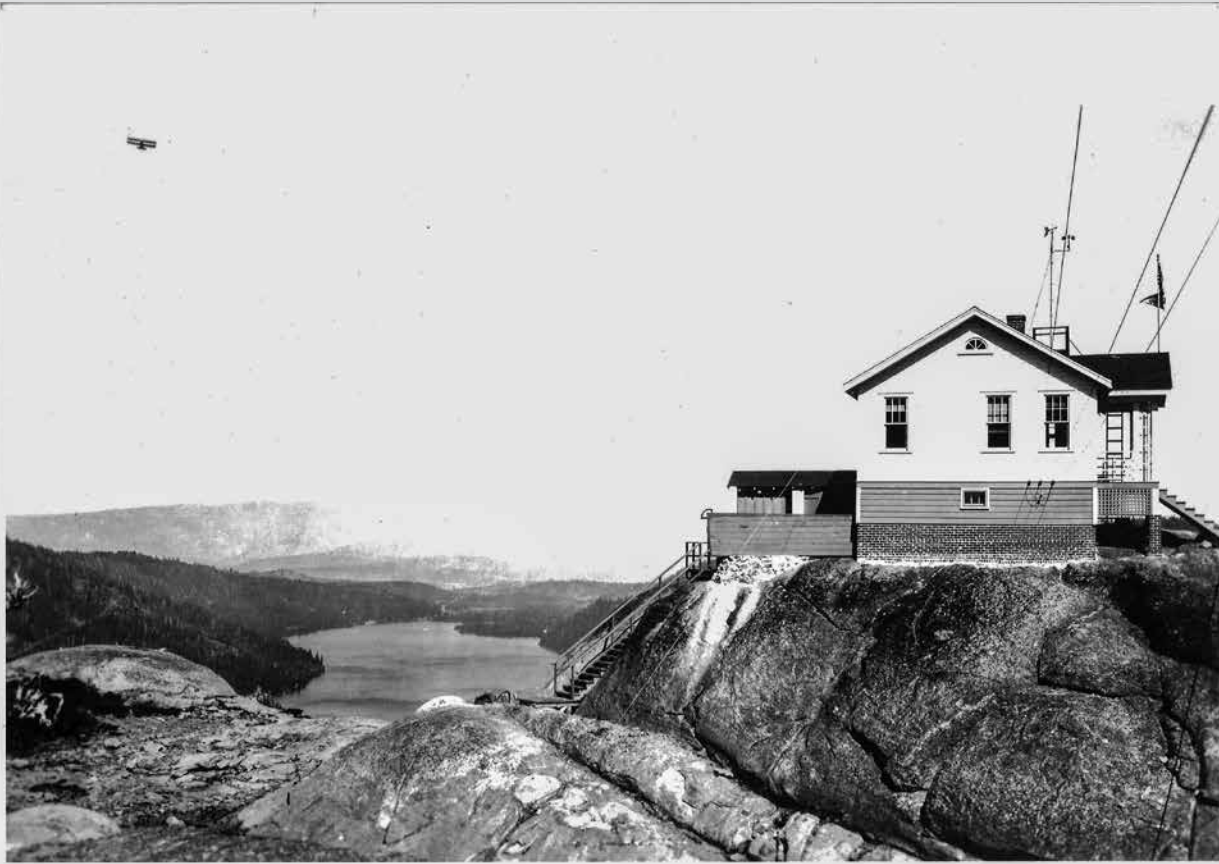
About Visiting the site of the Summit Soda Springs:

First, it's all private property and closed to the public.

Second, running through what was the Hopkins Estate and is now owned by the Chickering Family, is the Painted Rock Trail. This explanation below comes from Nick Chickering, family spokesman and sometimes contributor to the Heirloom.

The Painted Rock Trail is a public trail which was granted by the Chickering family to the public more than a 1/2 century ago. The Chickering's own 98% of the land through which the Painted Rock Trail passes, and appreciates that the hikers for which the trail benefits will respect the rights of the private property which the family has owned since 1928. Virtually all the land has an Open Space Easement which the family dedicated to the University of California Natural Land Reserve System in the mid 1970's, which accounts for the magnificent first growth forest. The buildings are not open to public inspection or access, and you should remain on the trail.

From the DSHS Archives



Weather station that sat atop a knoll just above Donner Pass. This was part of the first transcontinental air route. Note the biplane in the upper left. This picture was shared with the DSHS by the Truckee Donner Historical Society

Wardrobe change

The fellow right is from movie "Two Faced Woman (see the January 10 [Heirloom](#).) The fellow is Barry Bruce, resident of Donner Summit who had a bit part in the movie. The setting is Sugar Bowl. The movie starred Greta Garbo and Melvyn Douglas.



From the DSHS Archives



The mighty Yuba River at Big Bend. The road to the left with the rockwork is the old Lincoln Highway along which you can take a nice walk today. The road to the right is Highway 40, now Donner Pass Rd. Missing is the freeway, I-80, which has an overpass over the Lincoln Highway, the river, and Donner Pass Rd. today in the background. The Cisco Buttes are the far background. The picture comes from U.C. Davis' Eastman Collection.

Below, also from U.C. Davis, is Cisco Grove in the early 1960's presumably before I-80. The road is Highway 40. The sign in the distance entices travelers to take Highway 20, the "next right turn."



Most of the property was owned by the Gould Family who razed the buildings with the coming of the freeway in order to save on taxes since traffic on Old 40 has pretty much stopped. Today there are only vacation homes nearby and some ruins where the buildings in the picture sat.

With the coming of the freeway travel was better but little communities disappeared all along the route changing lives for both travelers and residents.

Book Review

The California Days of Ralph Waldo Emerson

Brian Wilson 244 pages (192 without the various notes) 2022

We at the Heirloom have noted before that the number of books at least mentioning Donner Summit is limited. Since we've done more than a hundred book reviews of books at least mentioning Donner Summit we would eventually come to an end of the library. With the California Days of Ralph Waldo Emerson we move to a book in which readers of history and the Heirloom might be interested but neither Mr. Emerson nor his traveling friends mentioned Donner Summit.

The impetus for picking up this 2022 book was simply that Ralph Waldo Emerson might have gone over Donner Summit on his way to California. Then, too, his impressions of California in 1871 might be interesting. What was California like in 1871? What was the cross-country train travel like just two years after completion of the Transcontinental Railroad? Might Emerson also weigh in on the railroad's influences and the changes it made? That all would be real history, the service the Heirloom provides.

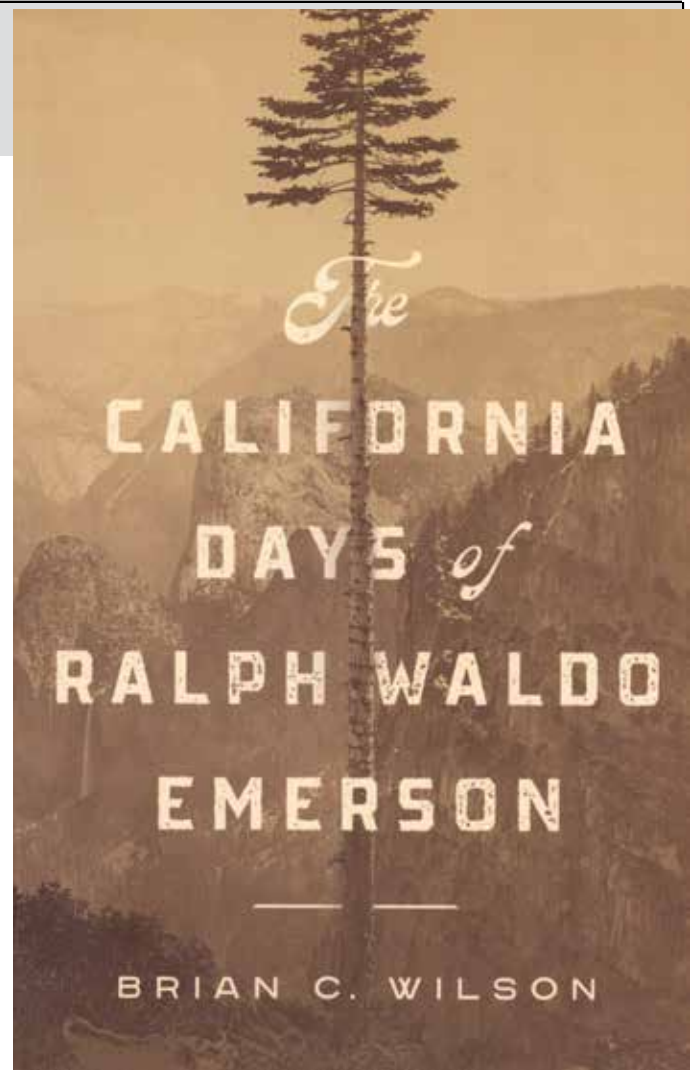
Emerson's trip was at the suggestion of a friend who also underwrote the costs of the Pullman Palace Car in which the group traveled and which was attached to regular trains. We can imagine how different the luxury trip on the party's own railroad car was from the trip to which ordinary travelers were consigned.

The preface is a nice introduction and foreshadows the trip with a list of luminaries Emerson met: Brigham Young, Carleton Watkins, George Pullman, John Muir, Thomas Starr King, and others.

Unfortunately Emerson either did not memorialize the trip in letters home or the letters have been lost over time. We have to rely on the letters of others in the group and other sources the author uses.

The book is not just a report on the trip. It's also a travel through the 19th Century West which is enhanced by other sources giving fuller descriptions, background, and little stories and asides. One amusing example is a letter by John Muir "many years later" describing how he tried to convince Emerson to camp out with him in the Yosemite Big Trees grove countering the objection that "Mr. Emerson might take cold". "In vain I urged, that only in homes and hotels were colds caught, that nobody ever was known to take cold camping in these woods, that there was not a single cough or sneeze in all the Sierra."

The description of the trip west is full of details of the trip: who was in the group, smoking, who slept where in the Pullman car,



a menu (see the sidebar), topics of discussion, and the speed of the train (22 mph).

The topics of discussion were fairly heady. For example one reported conversation said "Emerson talked extensively of Goethe, Schiller, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Tom Paine, pointing out that the latter two were not his favorites because he felt their critiques of Christianity were unfair." Another summary said, "Literary themes were on Emerson's mind as usual, and talked about the Elizabethan poet Fulke Greville, the biographer of Philip Sidney; about Boccaccio, who despite Thayers' objection to the Decameron's 'excessive coarseness,' Emerson defended because of his faithfulness to Italian life and manner."

For 21st Century readers it all sounds like a foreign language. Clearly letters had much more detail in those days than emails do today. There are even some little jokes like the guy who was supposedly eaten by an alligator in California.

The author embellishes the details with little stories like the man who was publishing Emerson's lectures without

permission but, due to the then state of copyright laws, there was nothing Emerson could do so he edited them.

The description of the Emerson party's trip west is enhanced by asides as background: who built the bridge, Emerson escaping a fire, the lecture circuit of the 19th Century, Pullman cars, Mr. Pullman's background, etc.

The author also brings in more detail of 19th Century life by quoting from 19th Century publications such as tourist guides sometimes even comparing the descriptions of places like Salt Lake City in two publications so the reader gets a fuller picture. These help with descriptions of the sights. For example there are quotes from a couple of contemporary authors about San Francisco. The village became a metropolis. Fires devastated the city, "and the constant presence of rowdy miners and other toughs created waves of social chaos." "Villainy flourished, drinking, gambling,

Ethnocentric to a fault, Emerson not only believed in the Manifest Destiny of the United State to colonize the continent but also that New Englander – the latest and highest manifestation of the "Anglo-Saxon race" – would lead the movement.

robbery and murder held high carnival." This all led to vigilante violence "which suppressed the worst of the outrage but at a cost of perpetrating its own." "Despite this, the gold flowing in made San Francisco rich."

There are also asides about Unitarians and Transcendentalists, a retired doctor who had an

anatomical museum in San Francisco, displaying the head of the famous outlaw Joaquin Murrieta. There was a tour of Chinatown with bodyguards.

By Chapter three we get to California and Donner Summit's Summit Station, elevation is 7042. Just at that point the train plunged into the snowsheds. "As the rest of the party emerged from their berths, the train entered a series of dark snowsheds, which necessitated lighting the lamps in the car to keep everyone from bumping into one another, as, uncharacteristically, all had risen early to take in the scenery. So lengthy were some of these sheds that a few stations were built into the middle of them." You can imagine the party's disappointment and maybe, hence, understand why there was no mention in the letters.

Coming out the sheds, miles off Donner Summit, "Thayer [James Thayer, a young Boston lawyer and part of the traveling party] was enraptured by what he saw: "We passed the most wonderful scenery; one cannot describe it but he can never forget it: the air was soft and spring like and the sun struck down across the tops of the trees in the great gorges that we were looking into, drenching these tree tops with light and leaving soft mist shadows below and so you would look

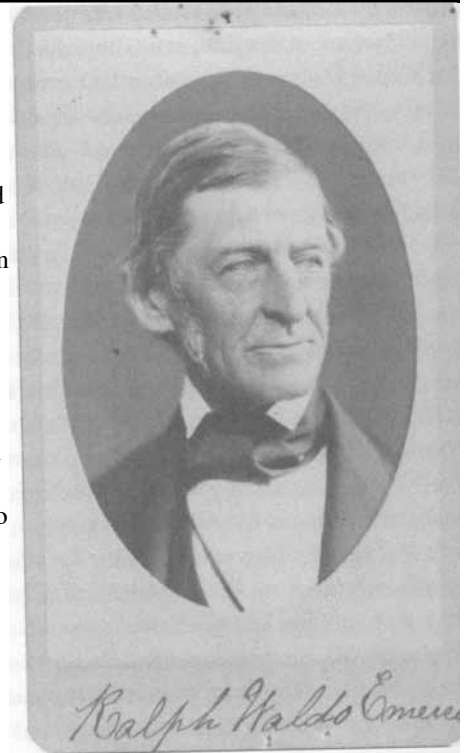
down into a ravine of a thousand feet with a mountain on the other side coming towards you like a buttress, all covered with trees and with a gorge on each side of each." You can see he had good taste.

Mr. Thayer also said, "I never passed a morning of greater delight in my life than that, as we ran on down the mountains to Sacramento."

The rest of the book is about sightseeing in California: San Francisco, the Peninsula, the North Bay and Napa (where they don't water down the wine), the Central Valley, and Yosemite. There are a lot of details about travel: inns, good and bad food, ferries, the ice cold Tuolumne River, wagon travel (overheated axles and a sign saying "Water for Horses. None for Old Wagons."), and freight movement

In many places the group saw the destructive evidence of gold mining: holes and tailings in abundance and great tracks of land dug over and the surface soil washed away by placer mining such that "only rocks remain." One interesting aside said that the Tuolumne ran muddy six days a week but because the miners took Sunday off, the river ran clear on Mondays, no mud having gotten into the river the previous day.

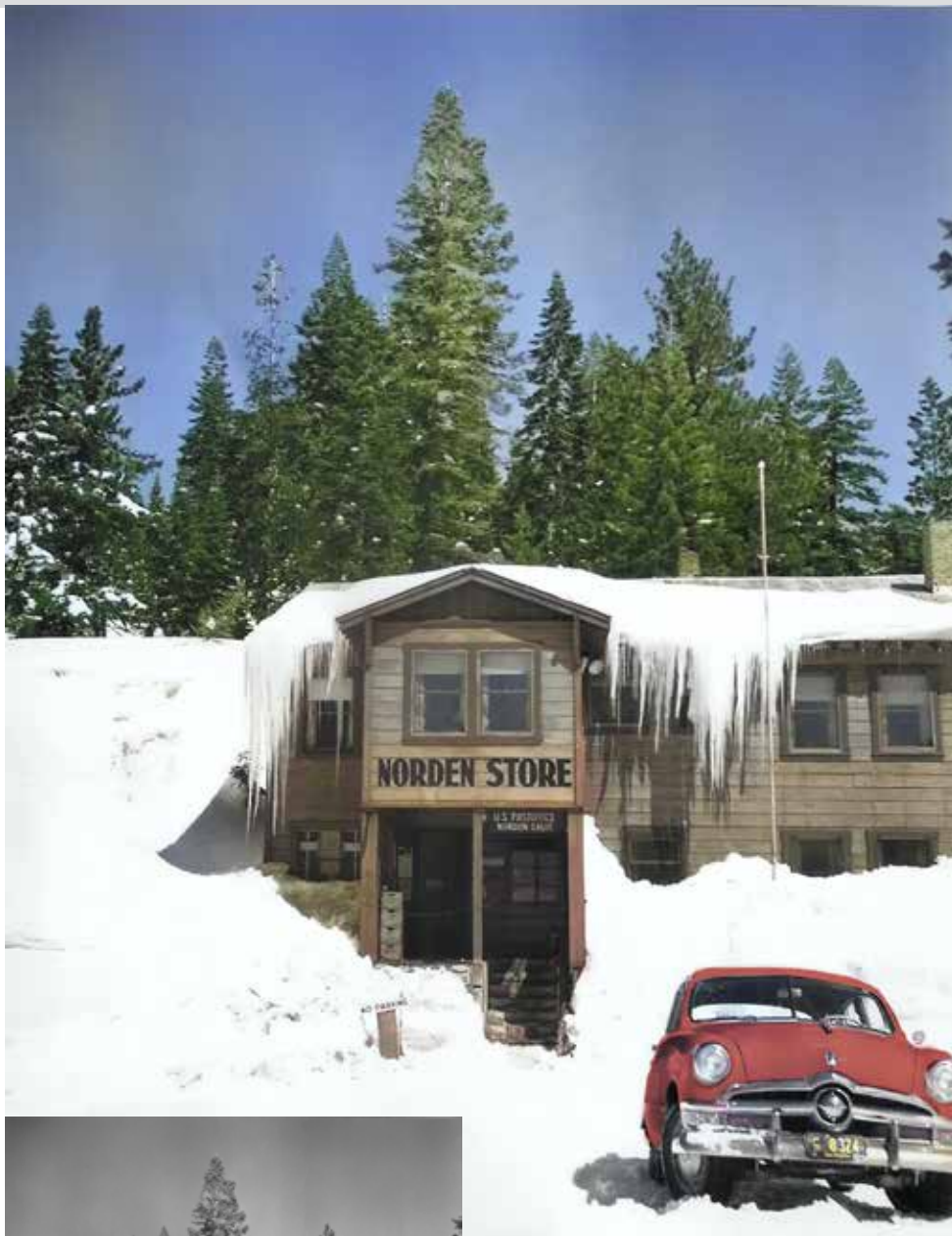
The group admired the scenery. Thayer, for example, enthused about the sheer size of the pines and firs, "four feet, six feet, and even eight or ten feet in diameter and rising, straight as an arrow, two hundred feet or more."



An apparently typical menu

As Thayer enumerated the menu, it included "soup, your choice of roast beef, roast lamb or chicken; mashed potatoes, asparagus, peas, tomatoes, canned corn, bread and butter, ice water and English ale; raspberry pie, cottage pudding, cake, nuts and raisins and coffee; oranges and bananas."

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



Norden Store circa 1952

Odds & Ends on Donner Summit



One of many markers recognizing the emigrant route put up by various people and organizations. This one was found in the 1970's by Marshall Fey, an emigrant route author and whose grandfather, parenthetically, invented the slot machine. Marshall has contributed to the [Heirloom](#) from time to time. Take a look at our [Heirloom](#) article index pages for "Fey."

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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