

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom

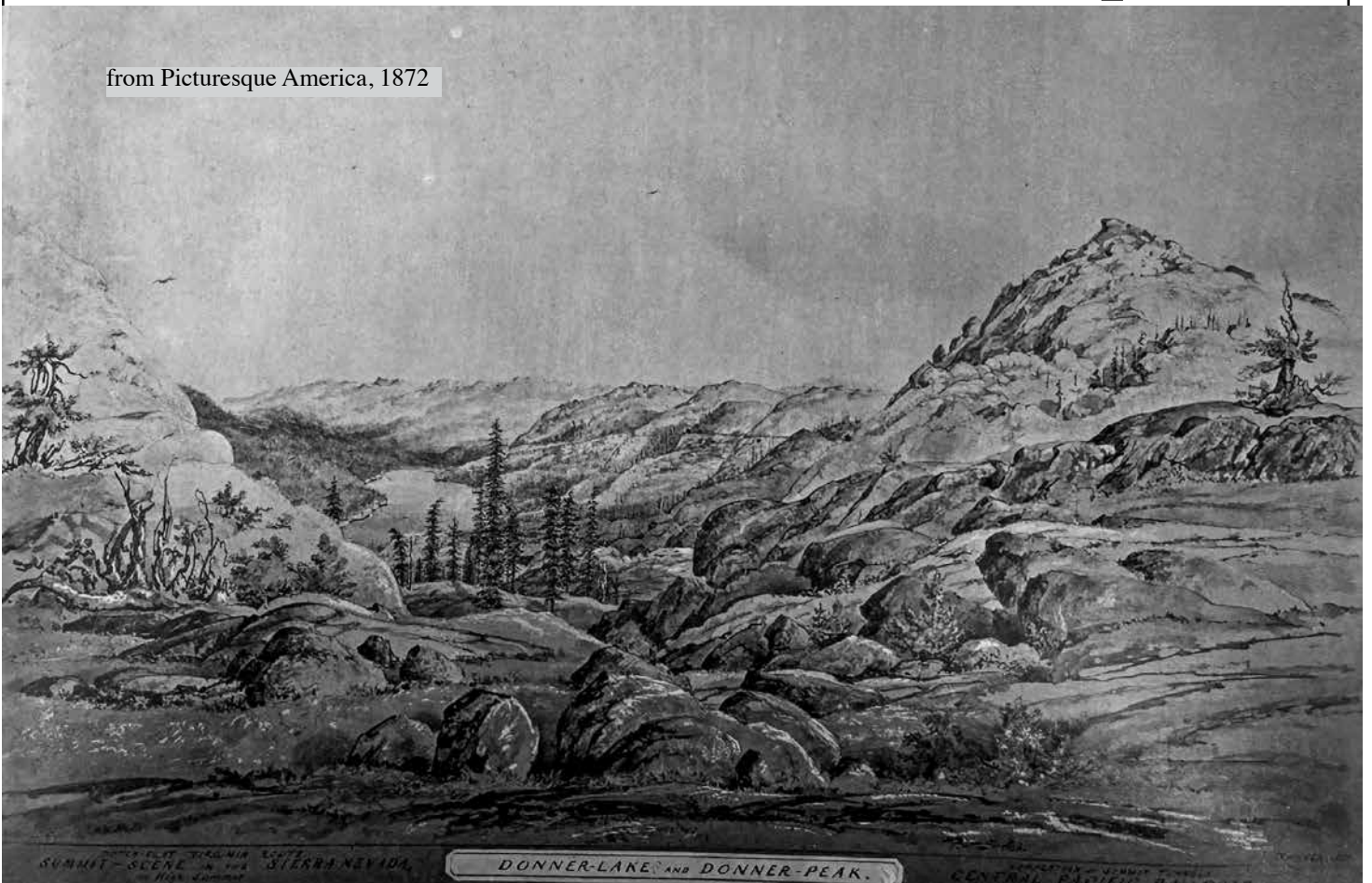
History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society and the most historically significant square mile in California.

June 2024 issue #190



## More Donner Summit Landscape Art

from Picturesque America, 1872



California is the paradise of the artist, picturesque lakes and streams, rivers that drop from the sky and lose themselves in mist, sublime mountain peaks and magnificent mountain scenery, giant trees that seem like supports to the tent of heaven, rocks that rise like castles along the shores and in their gloomy grandeur frown darkly on the vain onslaughts of the furious wave battalions that are waging eternal war; hills of snow and valleys where flowers never die, balmy airs and countless other allurements all contribute to make the Golden State a genius-inspiring Eden.

San Francisco Call January 5, 1896

# Story Locations in this Issue

paintings/pictures pg 1, 7   Tunnels 6/7   pgs 4/5   Western States Trail pg 20   Soda Springs ski area pg 16

## DONNER SUMMIT



## Finding Your Way Through Donner Summit History

We're closing in on two hundred 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 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.

Find us on the the DSHS YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJenAxPCb47Y14agmVGI-zA>  
Find us on FaceBook where we place a new historical picture daily.

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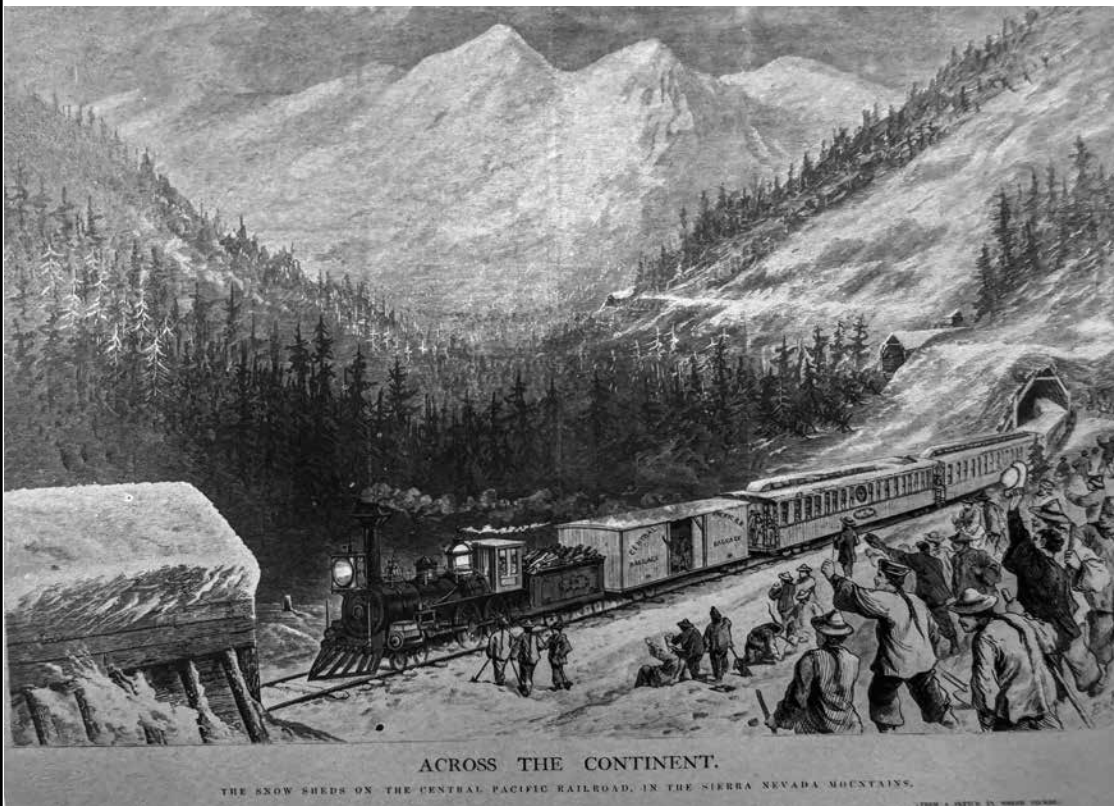
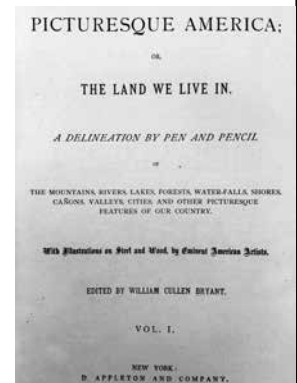
# More 19th Century Donner Summit Landscape Art

In the April and May 2024 [Heirlooms](#) focused on 19th Century landscape art and its importance to society at the time. To make the point much art was included including illustrative art that was found in books. There 19th Century readers could satisfy their desire to see more of the mysterious and romantic West. People had been exploring and moving west for decades but most of the population had to content itself with vicarious visits.

Here we have one last example of the illustrative art found in books, [Picturesque America](#), (1872) edited by William Cullen Bryant. For the [Heirloom](#) readers this is a good book to focus on because of the many Donner Summit art works. They are not sharp and clear because of the medium but if you look closely you'll see details that might make you wish you could see the original photographs.

In [Picturesque America](#) Mr. Bryant wonderfully describes the scenery as the train rises from Truckee, over Donner Summit, and down the other side at sunrise. So in this issue we are also not done with "Painting in Prose."

"There can be no more perfect scene. The [rail]road winds along the edges of great precipices, and in the deep cañons below the shadows are still lying. Those peaks above that are snow-covered catch the first rays of the sun, and glow with wonderful color... All about one the aspect of the mountains is of the wildest, most intense kind... This is grand; it is magnetic; there is no escaping the wonder-working influence of the great grouping of mountains and ravines, of dense forests, and ragged pinnacles of rock."



"Across the Continent" also called "Snowsheds on the Central Pacific Railroad in the Sierra Nevada Mountains" is a copy of a Joseph Becker painting - see page 6.

The painting celebrates the technological superiority of America. There was nothing like the trans-continental railroad and its snowsheds in the world. Here the Chinese workers who built the wonder cheer its arrival.



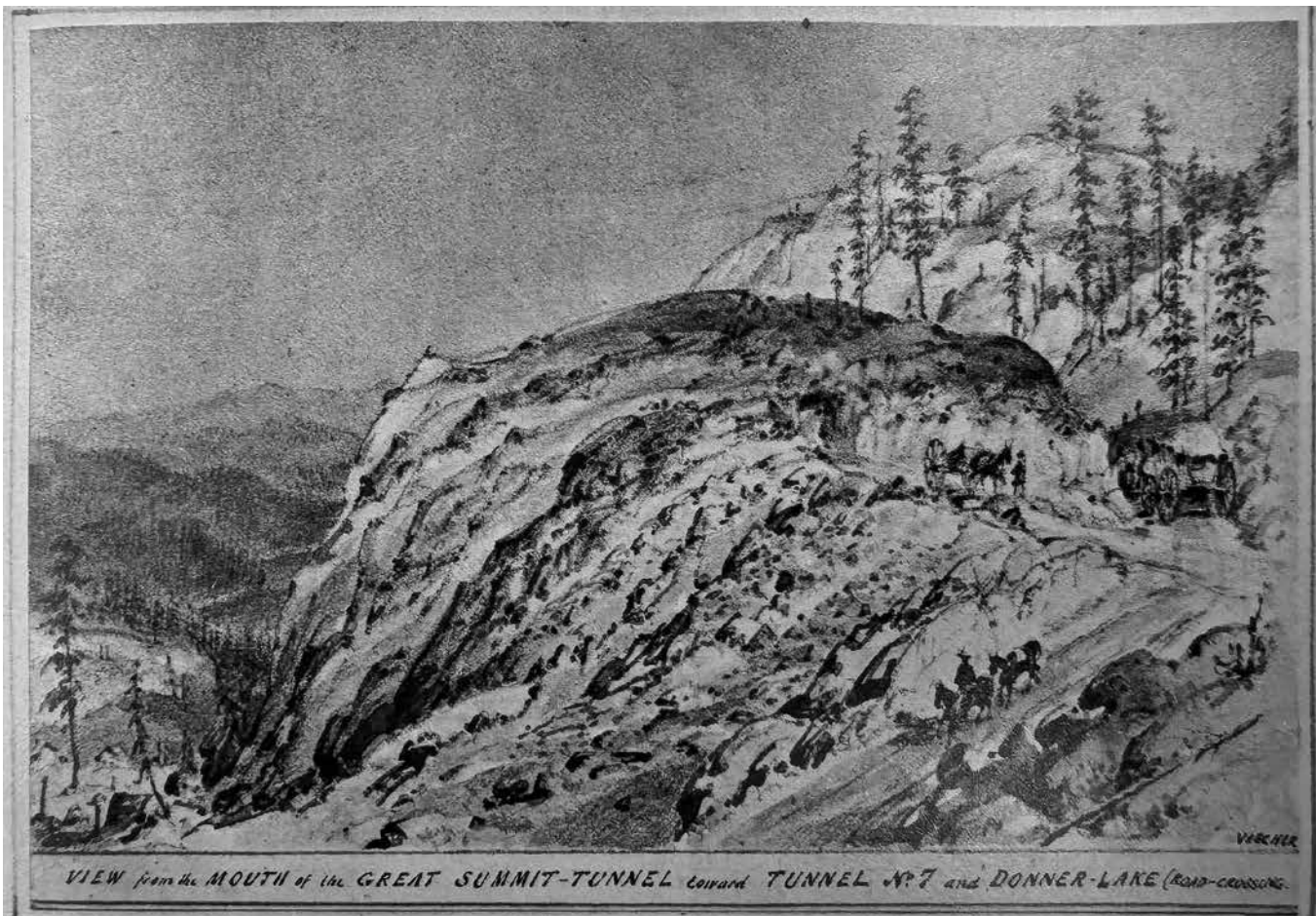


Approaching Tunnel 8 from Tunnel 7 with China Wall just over the lip to the left.

east end of Tunnel 6



Work Camp 38 above Cisco.

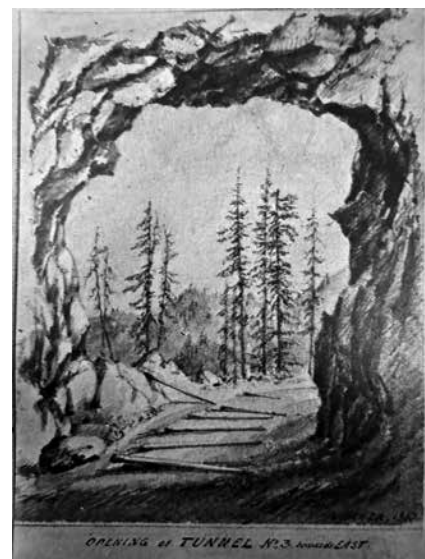


from the mouth of Tunnel 6 looking east.



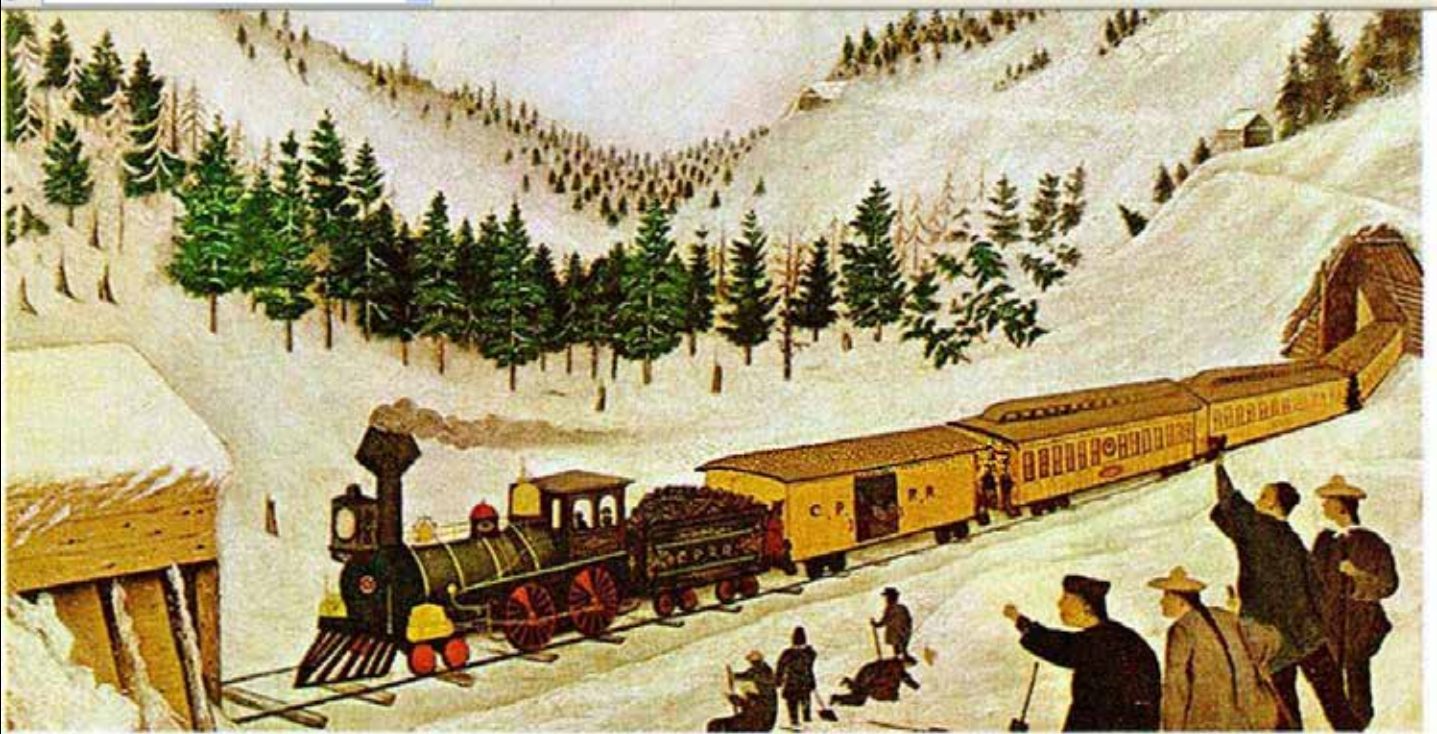
The west end of Tunnel 6

Tunnel #3, above today's Cisco Grove





# Joseph Becker



THE FIRST TRAIN ON THE CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD

BY JOSEPH BECKER

"Across the Continent" or "The Snowsheds on the Central Pacific Railroad, in the Sierra Nevada Mountains" or "First Train Coming Through The Central Pacific Railroad."

Joseph Becker was born in 1841 in Pennsylvania. At age 17 he went to work for Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper as an errand boy. Working at the newspaper he came into contact with many artists who did the illustrations for the Illustrated Newspaper and he set his sights on becoming one. As he mastered the basics he became to make illustrations in earnest. With the completion of the transcontinental railroad he was sent to California in secret to "scoop" the competitors to illustrate the marvel and especially the Chinese who'd done the work. On October 10, 1869 Becker reached Donner Summit and the snowsheds. The picture appeared in a couple of Frank Leslie's magazine editions and was used in a number of other publications (page 3 for example) with various titles. This version comes from the Bancroft Library, the Bancroft (BANC PIC 1963.002.0808-C)

This is another kind of landscape art for the "stay at home" public back east to see what the west and Donner Summit were like. In particular Becker's work was aimed at unlocking the mysteries of the New West. In this case the "mysteries" for the public were the snowsheds, forty miles of which protected the tracks from heavy snow, the coming of the transcontinental railroad which seemingly broke the barrier of time, and the Chinese railroad workers. Note here the many stumps represent some of the cost of the railroad. The cheering Chinese, and others, show the esteem in which the public held the new railroad that could cross the continent in days instead of months.





from Southern Pacific railroad guides 1890--1900

Railroad publicity, Donner Lake 1915.

Both pictures are examples of landscape art used commercially to sell the west as well as show people what it was like.



# Painting in Prose II

Last month we included a collection of prose that painted word descriptions of Donner Summit as a kind of complement to all the artwork we'd shown. We thought it would have been a bit much to include the comprehensive collection so here is the second part of the group: more celebration of Donner Summit in prose. Readers may find the 19th Century prose fun to read. As you read the descriptions of Donner Summit imagine what the scenes were like.

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Nothing can be more charming than the woods of the Sierra summit in June, July, and August, especially in the level glades margining the open summit valley...The pines and firs, prevailing over spruces and cedars, attain a height ranging from 100 to 200 feet, and even more. Their trunks are perfectly straight, limbless for fifty to a hundred feet, painted above the snow-mark with yellow mosses, and ranged in open, park-like groups affording far vistas...Huge boulders of granite relieve the vernal coloring with their picturesque masses of gray, starred with lichens... Thickets of wild-rose and other flowering shrubs occur at intervals, giving an almost patristic variety to the woodland scene. The crimson snow-plant lifts its slender shaft of curious beauty... Sparkling springs, fresh from snowy fountains, silver-streak these forest meadows, where birds come to bathe and drink, and tracks of the returning deer are printed. Once more the quail is heard piping to its mates, the heavy whirring flight of the grouse startles the meditative rambler. and the pines give forth again their surf-like roar to the passing breeze, waving their plumed tops in slow and graceful curves across the sky wonderfully clear and blue... Here beauty and happiness seem to be the rule, and care is banished. The feast of color, the keen pure atmosphere, the deep bright heavens, the grand peaks bounding the view, are intoxicating. There is a sense of freedom, and the step becomes elastic and quick under the new feeling of self--ownership. Love for all created things fills the soul as never before. One listens to the birds as to friends, and would fain cultivate with them a close intimacy. The water-fall has a voice full of meaning. The wild-rose tempts the mouth to kisses and the trees and rocks solicit an embrace. The spirit worships in an ecstasy of reverence. This is the Madonna of a religious without dogma, whose creed is writing only in the hieroglyph-ics of beauty, voiced only in the triple language of color, form, and sound....

Plunge into the unbroken forests- into the deep canons; climb the high peaks; be alone awhile, and free. Look into Nature, as well as at Nature, so that the enjoyment shall be not merely sensuous but intellectual.

from "Summering in the Sierra" Part I, January 1874  
Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine

While I was upon the point where a bucket of water turned upon the ground would divide, one part running toward the great basin, and the other toward the ocean, I witnessed a sunset whose grandeur [sic] was at most inspiring. Before me were peaks of mountains each side of the Yuba, becoming lower and lower as they receded to the west. They were in the Sacramento Valley! How many slow and tedious hours, and days, and months of toil had I undergone to enter it! Here it lay before me. The parting rays of sunset gilded the craggy mountain peaks of this golden valley, imagination converting their fantastic crags into castles and turrets at pleasure. Durrand is the only artist living who could represent it upon canvass – the warm almost hot – misty atmosphere of his picture, which I never before thought quite natural, and which is so unlike the clear pure air that pervades the pictures of Thomas Cole, enveloped the whole landscape After feasting my eyes with enchanting scene, I began the descent into the Yuba valley.”

Austin Howard 1849  
from Tail of the Elephant page 191

Winter came. The “last glance at sunset...the stream dancing along its narrow channel...the lakes whose crystal waves reflect the golden hues...the next morn the scene is changed. The icy hand of winter has been laid on the landscape, and the beholder, dazzled and astonished, does not see what enchanted him the previous evening.” “The stillness and repose of death now reign where only a few weeks before all was life and animation. The mountain tops are shrouded in robes of white; the tall pines, with their snowy wreaths and pendant icicles, wear a strange and spectral appearance; the babbling brook is frozen into silence, and the lake lies cold and motionless... The scene, now weird and desolate, is no longer beautiful – it has become sublime.”

from Bean's History and Directory Nevada County, 1867



...Nearby "...the visitor can find a scene of loveliness and sublimity not surpassed on the habitable globe. Let him, on some dewy morn, climb to the top of Old Man Mountain,.. from those rocky battlements the soul expands as it contemplates the beauty and grandeur of nature. Look well – for the picture which spreads before you has been drawn by the hand of an Almighty Artist. In one direction repose a cluster of lakes, whose clear waves mirror the fleeting, fleecy clouds of day – the star-lit firmament of night. Their shores, rising into gentle hills, are crowned with stately forests, and decked with flowers as fair as the dews of earth very nourished. Down the mountain sides roll in silvery threads a thousand fine streams, find rest in the bosom of some placid lake, or mingling with the sparkling waters of the rapid rolling Yuba. Glancing in another course, at the base of Old Man Mountain, the dazzled eye beholds a landscape of a sterner character. Huge boulders of everlasting granite, trees standing apart and in solitary majesty, and frightful, yawning chasms make up a picture, wild, weird and desolate, but grandly sublime." Bean waxes rhapsodically for a while longer before concluding, "To the invalid in search of vigorous health; to the tourist, longing to sojourn awhile amid scenes of unsurpassed grandeur; to the weary dweller in the city, or on the plains, who would exchange, for a brief season, the conventional restraints of society for the free life of the mountains, Excelsior [mining district in Nevada County that included Meadow Lake and Truckee] offers inducements to a visit, beyond any spot in California."

from Bean's History and Directory Nevada County, 1867

But a few hours ago we were passing through a region in which desolation reigned supreme ; a region of sage brush and alkali dust, of bitter water and unkindly skies. Still more recently the icy winds of the snow-crowned Sierras had chilled us to the bone. The transition was sudden and the transformation magical. The sun descended in a flood of glory towards the Pacific Ocean, while the train was spinning down the ringing grooves of the mountains. The canopy of azure overhead, unflecked by a cloud and spangled with myriads of brilliant stars, surpassed in loveliness the brightest and most serene sky which ever enchanted the dweller on the luxuriant shores of the blue Mediterranean. No Italian air was ever more balmy, nor evening breeze through vineyard or olive grove more grateful to the senses than the soft wind which, tempered by the coolness of the distant ocean and odorous with the rich perfumes of the neighbouring plains, now fanned our cheeks and gave a fresh zest to life

From Westward by Rail, 1971

"Summit (1671 m.) 7017 feet above the sea, the highest point of the railway, the highest point... reached as yet by the iron horse and the iron road in any quarter of the world. We are not, however, at the summit of the Sierra Nevada range, but only the elevation of the mountain-pass... the prospect is one, nevertheless, unequalled for extent and grandeur. We stand on the watershed of several mountain-torrents which, after taking the most irregular and capricious fancies, and winding by rock and valley, pour their tribute at last into the one great receptacle of the Sacramento River. Towering mountain peaks are all around, their brightness contrasting with the mysterious shadows of profound ravines; which the murmur of falling waters is on the ear, and ever and anon comes the flash of a mountain lake, like that of a diamond, set in an emerald ring.

From The Central Pacific Railroad –

A Trip Across the Continent from Ogden to San Francisco, 1870

...The scenery is grander and more rugged. It is awe inspiring, especially at the Summit. The road leads up to the highest point which is readied just before the snow sheds are entered. It is a sharp decline, and as the [train] car comes out of the sheds there is one of the grandest pictures that one could imagine. The road skirts one side of the Donner Lake on the way to Truckee. The lake, with its tragic history, made an impression on the motorists who had never seen it before. The roads from Auburn are splendid for mountain thoroughfares.

San Francisco Call October 8, 1910 10/8/10

There is no grander scenery in the Sierras, of towering mountains, deep gorges, lofty precipices, sparkling waterfalls and crystal lakes, than abound within an easy distance of this place. The tourist can find scenes of the deepest interest and grandest beauty; the scholar and philosopher, objects of rare value for scientific investigation; the hunter and the angler can find an almost unlimited field for his amusement; the former in the gorges of the mountains, where the timid deer and fierce grizzly bear make their homes; the latter among the mountain lakes and streams, where the speckled trout leaps in its joyous freedom while around all, is the music of snow-fed mountain torrent and mountain breeze, and over all is the clear blue sky of a sunny clime, tempered and softened by the shadows of the everlasting hills.

From Croft's New Overland Tourist and Pacific Coast Guide, 1879

"I witnessed a sunset whose grandeur was at most inspiring. Before me were peaks of mountains each side of the Yuba becoming lower and lower as they receded to the west. They were in the Sacramento Valley! How many slow and tedious hours, and days, and months of toil had I under-gone to enter it! Here it lay before me The parting rays of sunset gilded the craggy mountain peaks of this gold valley, imagination converting their fantastic crags into castles and turrets at pleasure... After feasting my eyes with this enchanting scene, I began to descend into the Yuba valley..."

Gold Rush Diary, a letter from Jerome B. Howard in 1850  
At the Sierra Divide on Donner Summit,

"the deep blue of the sky joining the light gray rounded and polished cliffs and the purpled and browned pines in the distance the green foliage and yellow-trunked trees of the foreground, together with the clear pure waters of the lake. Gaudy butterflies; bees droning and humming in the summer air; winged insects of different kinds – all unite to make a picture which indelibly impresses itself on the mind. Breathing in such beauty with the pure air, free from taint of every kind, no wonder that to the echoes sounded their returns joyously on and up through the glittering sunshine, sparkling on every twig and rock and leaf, dancing back from the surface of laughing and gurgling brooks. We seemed to float on ethereal wings up and up, until, looking back, the deep dark lake appeared to have engulfed [sic] the sunlight.

Nature takes kindly to her children, if they would leave their swaddling-clothes of conventionality and submit themselves to her influences – leave...cares and come to the mountains, for a little while at least.

Wm. Keith in an "Artist's trip in the Sierra" I, II in Overland Monthly  
August, 1875 198-201

It is pleasant...to reach loftier ridges...Here Nature seems to re-assert herself as in the time of her unbroken solitude, when the trees grew, and flowers bloomed, and birds caroled, when the bright cataracts leaped in song, and the hazy canon-walls rose in softened grandeur, indifferent to the absence of civilized man; though the civilization which has made these superb heights so easily accessible for our enjoyment ...The rocky promontories, jutting into blue abysses and giving sublime pictures of mountain lines sweeping down to the plain, are finer for the iron rail which lies along their dizzy edges, surpassing the Appian way of the Romans or the Alpine road of Napoleon. Here we have the sensation of ballooning without its dangers. Flying over deep gulches on trestles 100 feet high, and along the verge of canons 2,000 feet deep, we look out on the air and view the landscape as from a perch in the sky. ... If the time is winter,... The woods are grand with their drooping plumes – white on the upper, green on the lower surface – and the massive trunks are clad on one side with a thick garment of greenish – yellow moss extending to the limbs, which often trail long pendants of gray or black moss from bark or foliage. Higher up, the treeless peaks and slopes of granite, dazzlingly white, send down roaring torrents. ....

Let the pilgrim to these Sierra shrines.... Plunge into the unbroken forests – into the deep cañons; climb the high peaks; be alone awhile, and free. Look into Nature, as well as at Nature, so that the enjoyment shall be not merely sensuous but intellectual. A less exclusive and jealous pilgrimage than this, however, will make a man better, physically and mentally. He will realize...the value of high mountain exercise in restoring wasted nervous energy and reviving the zest and capacity for brain-work. He will find in it a moral tonic as well, and come back to the world, not loving men better, perhaps, but more patient and tolerant, more willing to accept work with them as itself better than the things worked for.

"Summering in the Sierra" Part I,  
January 1874 Overland Monthly volume 12

"The Sublime altitude of the mountains, their granite and barren heads piercing the sky; the umbrageous foliage of the tall pines and cedars deepening in verdure and density as the forest approaches the more gentle and grass slopes along the banks of the lake, the limpid and tranquil surface of which daguerreotypes distinctly every object [sic], from the moss-covered rocks laved by its waves to the bald and inaccessible summit of the Sierra – the scenic object." pg 230

What I Saw in California (1846),

We reached the summit two hours after dark, when its wild, gloomy grandeur is far more impressive than by day. It is boundless mountain piled on mountain unbroken granite, bare, verdureless, cold and gray.

Through the biting night air we were whirled down the eastern slope for three miles to Donner lake, blue, shining, and sprinkled with stars, while from the wooded hill beyond glared an Indian fire like a great fiendish eyeball. The lake is an exquisite body of

water, though less impressive than Tahoe; and the reflections of snowy peak, pine forest, clear sky, and minute twig and leaf in its depths, seem almost miraculous. The illustration, as faithful to nature as artist and engraver can make it, is far less vivid than the original photograph. In that, concealing the boat, figures and trees in the foreground-water, it is almost impossible to decide which side up the picture should be -which are the real hills, snow and forest, and which the reflection.

From Beyond the Mississippi pg 464

"This beautiful mountain-retreat is situated immediately east of and in full view of the crowning granite summit of the Sierra Nevada at Donner Pass. The lake is three miles long, and a little over one mile in width. Its water, clear as crystal, reflects mountain and pine forest as perfectly as the finest plate glass mirror. The air is clear and pure, and eminently invigorating. A moonlight sail on the lake is a glimpse into the weird beauty of fairy land. Nothing disturbs the slumber of nature here, save the murmur of falling waters, the sighing of pines, and, since spring, the hoarse yell of the locomotive as it goes clattering through the railroad snowsheds above the lake.

Seen from the heights, the lake is of an intensely blue color, owing to its great depth which, in one place, is said to reach 1,500 feet. The surrounding mountains rise to 2,000 feet above the lake. A purple haze overspreads these mountains in the evening; while nothing can be more beautiful than to see the soft yellow sunlight gradually steal down their sides in the early morning, covering the trees, the rocks, the earth, and even the dead stumps, with a flood of golden light. Nature paints colors and arranges combinations of harmony in this, one of her great natural temples, such as no painter ever succeeded in approaching."

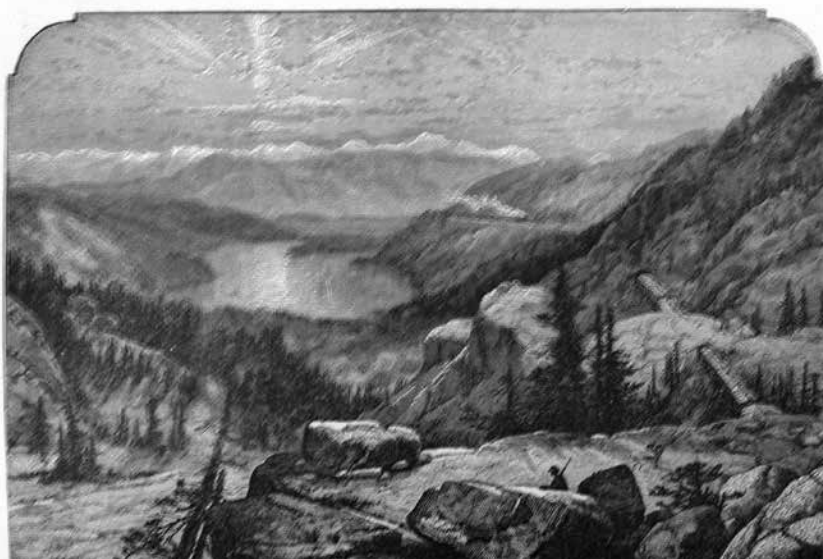
Visser's Pictorial California page 62

Half an hour's easy, scarcely perceptible ascent from the Summit House, a path between rocks and thickets, leads to the very top of the dome opposite Donner Peak; and there, with a foreground of stupendous rocks, and some of the lordliest specimens of the forest reaching up out of a neighboring ravine, a picture of magnificence unfolds itself before our eyes. It speaks to the mind with the full impressiveness of weight and breadth and power of awe-inspiring solitude: a panorama of the central high Sierra, a study of the great outlines of its mighty ranges; and, near by, as imposing specimens of the material it is built of, picturesquely grouped, there is Donner Peak, and Mount Lincoln, with its massive flanks and patches of perennial snow, rising in the south; on the other hand, dominating the nest range, Fremont Peak [now Castle Pk.], with its castellated forest, and further on, summit on summit, extending towards the Downieville Buttes and Lassen's Peak; the Truckee Nevada range in the east, and Donner Lake sweetly nestled in the forest depth; and everywhere, through rock and timber, the charming surprises of the wilderness: occasional glimpses towards the Cali-fornian slopes, with dark blue mountain lakes, set in roseate granite ledges, reflecting, mirror-like, the belts of timber lining these somber ravines down to the very water's edge.

Hard by, though chastely hidden in the forest depth, is Angela Lake, so baptized in honor of the queen of a merry party from Sacramento, the guests at the surveyor's camp on the shore of that lovely expanse of water; and truly, a more romantic spot than that summit lake cannot be imagined.

Also Vischer's Pictorial of California pg 62

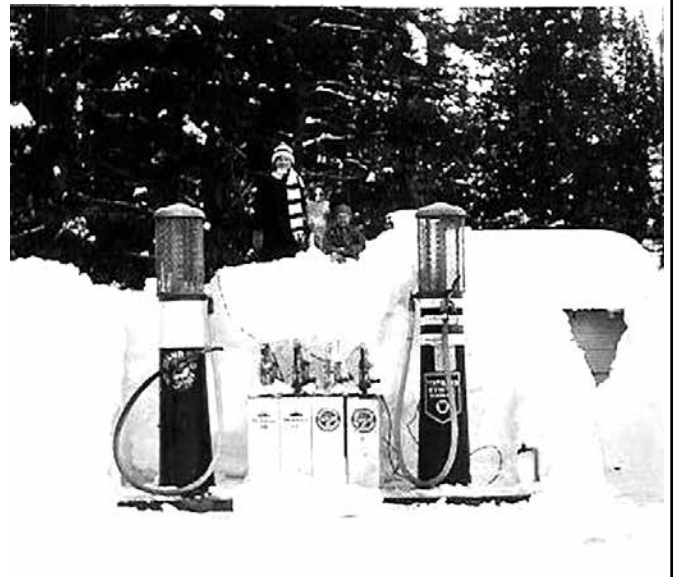
No. 42.-Donner Lake [below], from the Summit of the Sierra Nevada. on the Dutch Flat, Virginia Road.  
A DESCRIPTION OF DONNER LAKE (AUTHOR UNKNOWN).





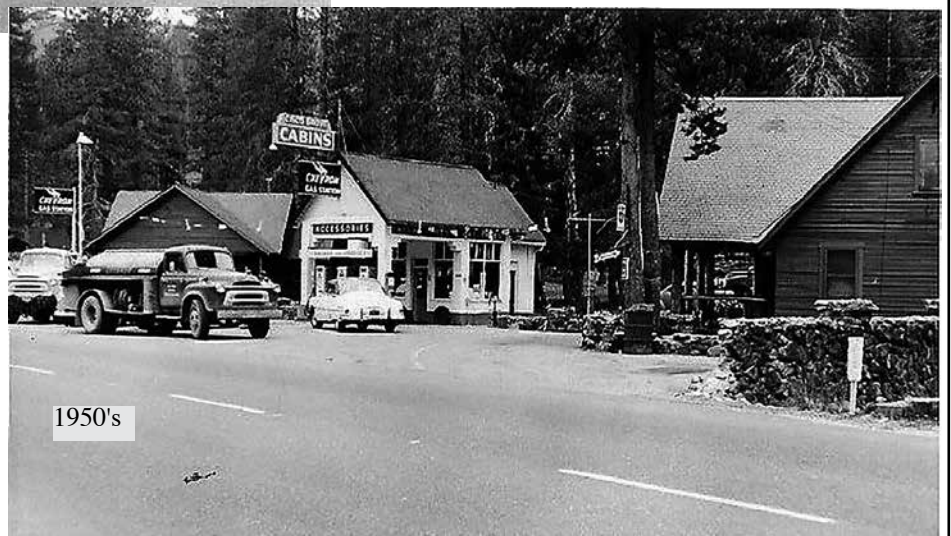
# From the Placer County Archives

In the February and March, 2024 [Heirlooms](#) we shared the contents of the Cisco Grove binder from the Placer County Archives. We weren't done though. Here are some more pictures to share, courtesy of the Placer County Archives. The pictures are all of Cisco Grove.





# From the Placer County Archives





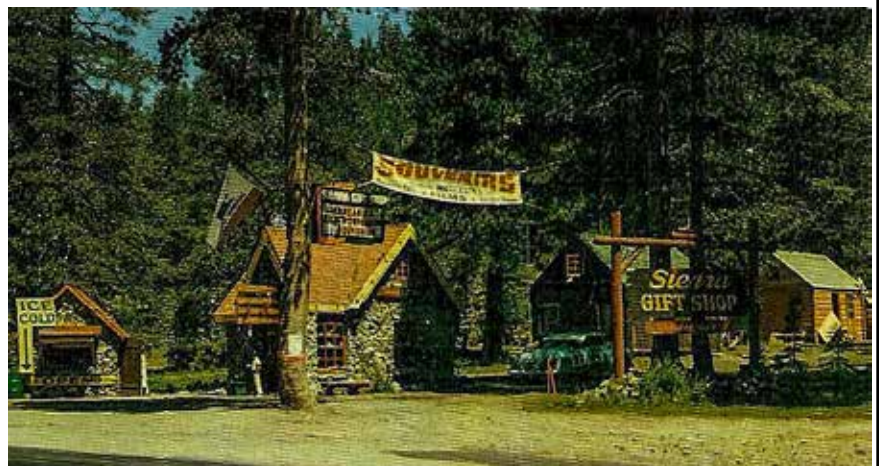


1930's



Left, Highway 40 had businesses and little communities all along it servicing the traveling public. The coming of I-80 put an end to most business establishments on 40.

The Sierra Gite Shop (or Forest Gift Shop in another life) is a rare example of buildings that did not disappear with the coming of I-80. The two buildings to the left are still in existence and part of Gould Park. They serve the sightseeing public as something to get out and see but not patronize. One of our 20 Mile Museum signs tells the story there.





# From the DSHS Archives

## A RACE FOR LIFE

The Truckee Republican relates the following :

An exciting scene took place last week in the long snow shed this side of the Summit. As the Eastern bound freight train had just emerged from the tunnel the engineer saw a deer some ways ahead on the track. The frightened animal was flying ahead of the engine at a breakneck speed. The attention of all hands was immediately called to the flying deer. The whistle commenced to scream, and then followed one of those highly exciting scenes which excite even the dullest to the highest pitch.

There was no alternative for the pursued and timid fawn but to keep straight on down the track. The gloomy cavern formed a narrow race track, and the flitting openings through which the gleaming light entered added to the wildness of the adventure.

For over half a mile the hissing monsters, with their vitals of fire, rushed onward toward their defenseless victim. On down the narrow, cheerless passage way, puffing, groaning and bellowing forth their angry impatience, eager for the life of the fleeing little innocent. For a time the result seemed almost certain -the pursuers gaining steadily on the pursued. 'The deer never left the track, but sped onward as straight as an arrow.'


The game was almost within the clutch of the iron horses, and in a few moments would have laid lifeless and mangled beneath the wheels. All hands were on the edge of expectancy. The eager anticipation for the prey settled almost into a conviction.

'The brakes were loosened and full steam applied, when just ahead a small opening caused by last Winters heavy snow was seen by the frightened animal. Like a dart it shot through it, and up the steep side of the rocky mountain, while a shout of good natured disappointment went up from the crew on the train, and the great engines still continued to groan and puff, but it seemed to be with chagrin and disappointment.

Grass Valley Morning Union September 1, 1876

### Old Time Sunday Drive


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



#### HISTORIC ROUTE 40

Historic Towns  
Interesting Scenery  
Fascinating History  
Picnic Spots  
A Slower Pace

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



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

# Email to the Editor

Here is an example of an artifact found on the "California Revealed" website. This particular artifact is a 16 page "Visitors guide to California" including Donner Lake and how to take the train from San Francisco to Truckee and then stage coach to Lake Tahoe.

Dave DePuy, a DSHS member and friend, found the gem and said, "I am sure that there are more gems here, but I was so giddy I had to share."

<https://californiarevealed.org/do/47527908-3893-48a6-9f20-d4103915de83>

LAKE TAHOE, Placer Co. by S. P. Co., to Truckee, leave S. F. 3 P. M. 210 miles and stage 14 miles, fare \$12, round trip \$20--or return ticket via Carson and Reno \$25, in order to stage from Truckee to Lake Tahoe, 14 miles, thence by steamer across the lake to Glenbrook and stage 14 miles to Carson City (a delightful trip) then by R. R. from Carson to VIRGINIA CITY and the COM-STOCK MINES; visit and inspect these mines, depth 3,200 feet--return by R. R. to Reno and S. F. Time 3 days including one day in the mines -Lake Tahoe can be visited in one day en route East- The altitude of the Lake is 6,216 feet, its length 30 miles, width is miles, depth from 5 to 1,700 feet and it affords the best trout fishing on the Pacific Coast. The Grand Central Hotel, overlooking the lake, offers board and lodging and the use of boats for \$2.50 to \$3.00 per day, and \$14 to \$17.50 per week- The great lumber flumes, hot sulphur springs, the silver mill at Empire, and many other objects of interest in this section of country make it worth a lengthy visit.

DONNER LAKE, Nevada Co. by S. P. Co., to Summit Station, 195 miles, and stage 2 miles, fare from S. F. \$9.70 -a pretty little lake amidst the wildest Sierra Nevada scenery, at an elevation of 7,000 feet- The George Donner party of emigrants were snowed in here in 1846 and 34 persons perished.

Taber [photographic studio in San Francisco] Welcomes strangers, and will show them the beautiful State of California, her products, and most noted citizens, mirrored in his photographs.

Jan Muff found this picture at a garage sale and shared it on FaceBook.

To that post Donald Meyers said, "Soda Springs used to have a race called the Flying 30's. We'd hike up as far as possible on that run. A little above that was lift served. Shove off, point'm down and drop into a tuck. Rumor was if you clocked a run under 30 seconds, you would hit 60 mph. Lots of Fun!"



## Hints to Strangers.

WHERE TO GO WHILE IN CALIFORNIA.

There is a mass of information in this Condensed Guide, compiled from the most reliable sources. I hope it will be of some service to you, and that you will visit my establishment whether you may intend to purchase or not.

8 Montgomery Street. *Taber* San Francisco, Cal.

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(2)

# Book Review

A first look at the cover of States The Places We Run would say there is little reason to be in the Heirloom. Even if most readers are runners or joggers almost no one is an ultrarunner. Those are the people who get up and run 50 miles before breakfast, or in this case 100 miles in 24 hours.

There are two reasons to include Places We Run. First, the authors were featured in the Heirloom in December '20 and January '21 (reprise of the Forlorn Hope), March 22 (reprise of the Donner Party rescue expeditions), and January and February '23 (the missing axe). You can look those up on our website and/or you can go to <https://historyexp.org> which is the authors' website for their expeditions.

The second reason is that the book is a compendium of historic sites along the Western States Trail from Palisades (formerly Squaw Valley) to Auburn. The area is rich in history and adjacent to Donner Summit. Our editorial staff suggested the readership might be interested. The authors encapsulate the book in, "Along the way, history has been laid upon the trail, enriching its meaning and creating stories... We hope you enjoy learning about the places we run as much as we delighted in researching over 75 distinct places." The places are a combination of historic sites with captivating names like Last Chance, Deadwood or Murderer's Bar, spots on the Western States Trail such as Pucker Point (a spot on a canyon rim that will make you want to pucker in fear), and old roads and trails like Dead Truck Trail.

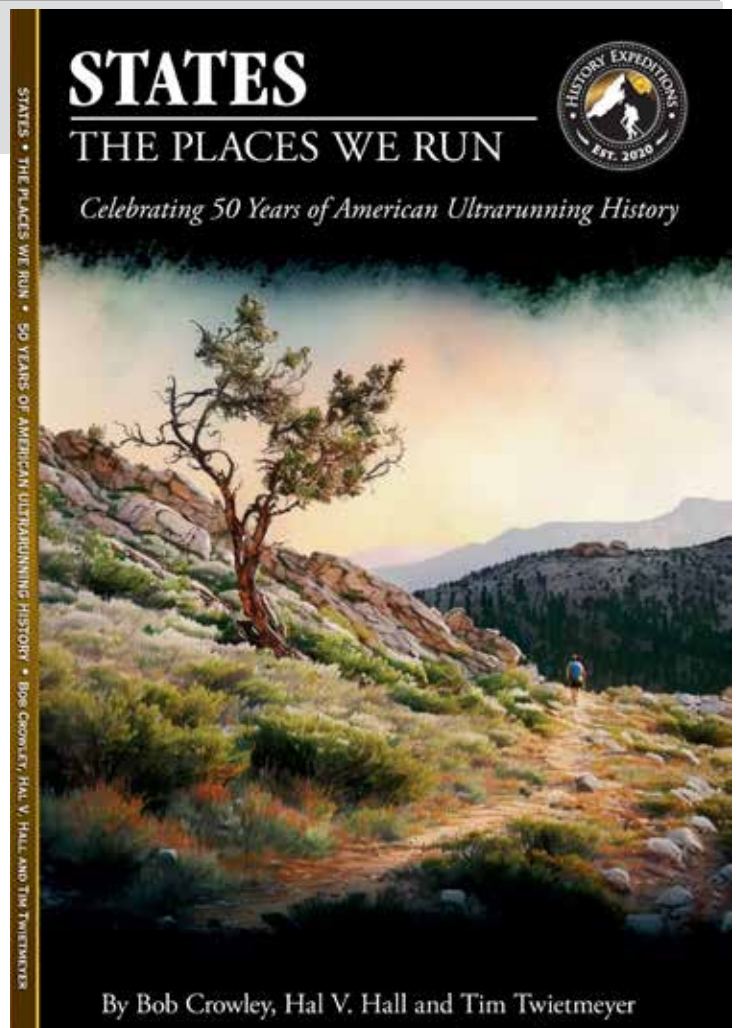
Each of the "75 distinct places" has its own little story in the book and so that's a lot of local history.

At the beginning there's some history of the trail, referred to as "States," and then the book starts at the Watson Monument atop Emigrant Pass at Palisades. As you read the book you are following along the Western States Trail to Auburn. As you go there are a lot of nice contemporary and historic photographs sometimes illustrated with historical quotes and there are maps and charts. We learn how the sites along the way got their names and so it's story after story all the way to Auburn. It almost makes one want to run the trail too.

For those who are not runners the book is a fun travel guide with a lot of short stories like rescuing a horse named Kaput that fell 700 feet and survived to be pulled out by a helicopter or the site named Bake Oven where the heat can be so great in August the name is apropos.

Download a free digital copy of this book and digital GPX file for the States trail and all these places we run waypoints here: <https://historyexp.org/states/>

Take a look at the accompanying graph on the next page to show how truly rugged the trail is.





## Last Chance to Michigan Bluff

*A brief interlude to convey the historical significance of this stretch of trail between Last Chance and Michigan Bluff*



*Last Chance circa 1906 (Hal V. Hall Collection)*

Over the centuries, this segment of the forest has provided sustenance, spiritual renewal, wealth, happiness, and tragedy for mankind. For thousands of years, Native Americans utilized the trail which strafes two major canyons as a seasonal migratory and hunting route. Later, gold miners worked the land attempting to fulfill their dreams of prosperity. Today, the trail is used to commune with nature, lift spirits and remind us how fortunate we are to have such an abundance of riches open, free, and available to all.

Left and below from States... Left is an example of the pictures and text. Below shows how very rugged the Western States Trail is. One would think it would be all downhill but there are some very steep exhausting rises.

**I**N THE CENTURY-OLD SPORT OF ULTRARUNNING, STATES WAS THE FIRST 100 MILE ULTRA-TRAIL RUN: A RACE FILLED WITH BEAUTY AND TOUGHNESS, SURROUNDED BY STORIES, SOME HISTORICAL AND SOME FANCIFUL, BORN IN AUBURN, CALIFORNIA, THE ENDURANCE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD. CELEBRATE THE 50TH RUNNING OF STATES BY DISCOVERING THE ORIGINS OF THE NAMES OF THE PLACES THROUGH WHICH WE RUN ON THE WESTERN STATES TRAIL FROM OLYMPIC VALLEY TO AUBURN. THE TRAIL, THE HISTORY, THE PEOPLE; ALL PART OF THE FIBER THAT BINDS STATES TOGETHER TO BE THE MOTHER LODE OF TRAIL RUNNING.



# Making History Colorful



Charlie Chaplin, 1925, directing "The Gold Rush" the film he most wanted to be remembered for.

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

Charlie Chaplin and his film crew arrived on Donner Summit in 1925 to make the movie "Gold Rush." They built a little town at what would become Sugar Bowl in 14 years. The Palisades at Sugar Bowl became the stand-in for Alaska's Chilcoot Pass. Most of what was Donner Summit ended up on the cutting room floor with most the filming finally being done in Hollywood.

Love – Excitement – Pathos – Humor. It's all in "The Gold Rush" which was filmed at Sugar Bowl (and Truckee). "The Gold Rush," written, produced, directed, and starring Charlie Chaplin was one of Chaplin's most famous movies and was the film he is quoted as saying for which he most wanted to be remembered. The 1925 silent was the highest grossing silent comedy. Charlie Chaplin had read about the Donner Party and the Klondike gold prospectors. He combined elements of hardship and the search for gold in "The Gold Rush." Charlie, the Little Tramp, headed for Alaska where he found himself in a cabin with a criminal, Big Jim. There was not enough food and they were reduced to eating one of Charlie's boots. The cabin teetered precariously on a cliff edge. Charlie fell in love with a dance hall girl and danced the dance of the "dinner rolls." Charlie, the character, later became a multi-millionaire and met his dance hall girl again. The film is wonderful and still available



# Odds & Ends on Donner Summit

## Snowshoe Thompson skis

We last encountered Snowshoe Thompson in the March [Heirloom](#) because he'd been on Donner Summit for a winter in 1867. We were working on the April [Heirloom](#) back in November when we were invited to visit the Western State Ski Sport Museum at Boreal to see what they had related to Mr. Thompson. This was because Bob Crowley and the History Expeditions crew (<https://historyexp.org>) planned on reprising Snowshoe's route from Placerville, CA to Genoa, NV.

The museum at Boreal was in the process of boxing everything up in preparation for moving to Palisades Tahoe and their new museum which might be ready in a couple of years. Their guy, Conor Villines, was busy inventorying and preparing things but took time out to show us Snowshoe's skis (one pair of many purported to be owned by the postman in various venues), his mail bag and the kind of pole used by Snowshoe to ski. Naturally these will no longer be Odds & Ends of Donner Summit once the museum moves.

## Snowshoe Thompson's Mail Bag

Filled with mail, medicine, and even ore samples, this mail bag could weigh 60 to 80 pounds. Snowshoe usually required five days to make the mail run. On the three day, 90 mile eastward leg from Placerville to Genoa, he faced steady climbing to the Sierra crest. The return trip never took longer than two days.

*"He flew down the mountainside. He did not ride astride his pole or drag it to one side as was the practice of other show-shoers, but held it horizontally before him after the manner of a tightrope walker. His appearance was graceful, swaying his balance pole to one side and the other in the manner that a soaring eagle dip its wings."*

Don De Quille, Virginia City Territorial Enterprise



closeup of one of Snowshoe's bindings.



Snowshoe's skis and a generic pole. Skiing was done with only one pole Snowshoe used his in both hands for balance. Other skiers kind of sat on the pole and used it as a brake with the end with the circular piece of wood dragging in the snow.

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



## Membership

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

- ☐ new membership
- ☐ Renewing membership
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- ☐ Family Membership \$60
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The Donner Summit Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit

## Donner Summit Historical Society

[www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)

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\_\_\_\_\_



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



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