

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

August, 2018 issue #120

# Happy Birthday DSHS Happy Birthday Heirloom

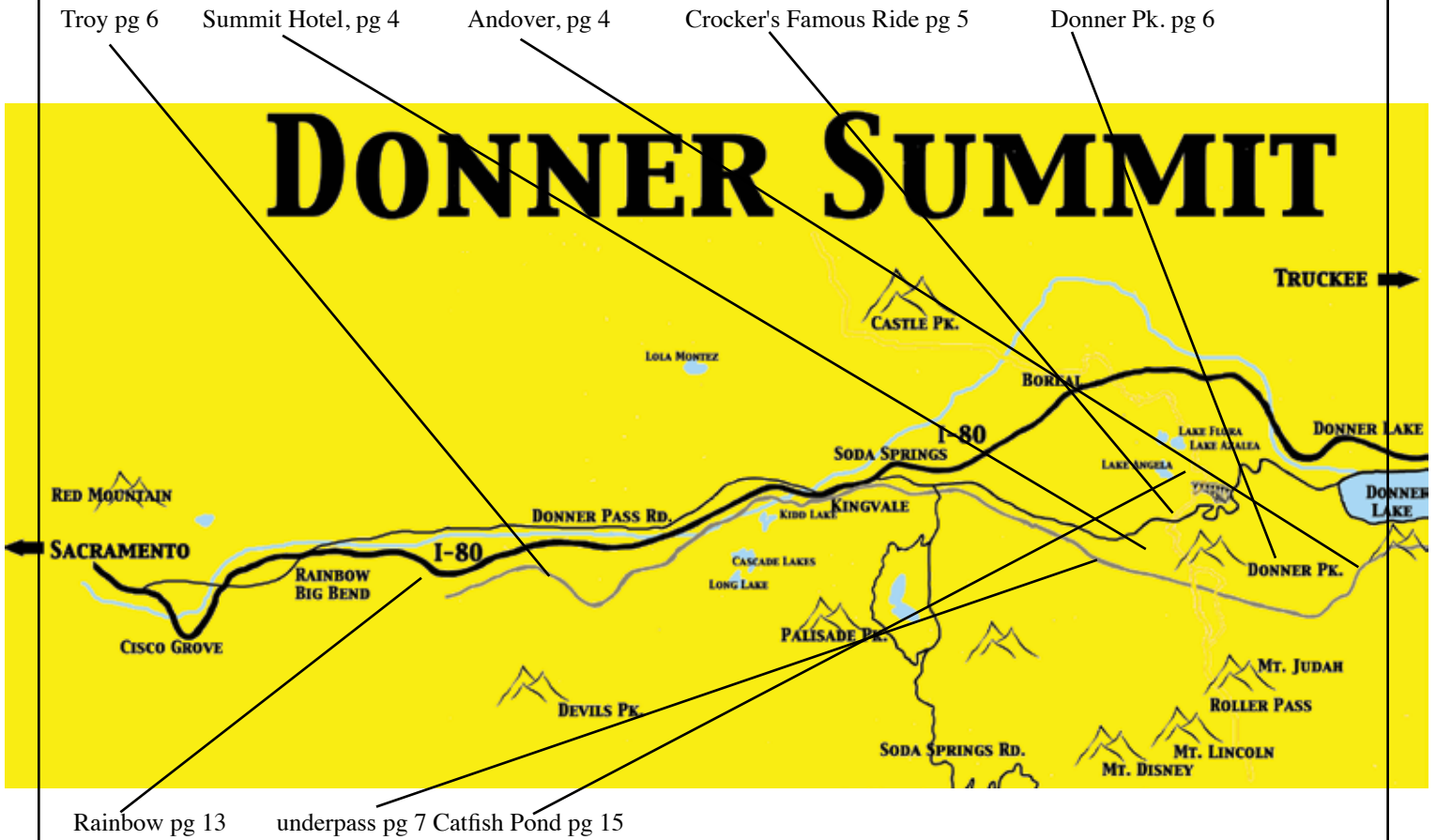
Donner Summit is the most historically significant square mile in California\* and maybe the entire Western United States. When the DSHS was formed ten years ago one of our objectives was to spread the stories of this unique area. To do that Norm's (Norm Saylor, president of the DSHS) incomparable collection of historical photographs and objects became the center of the museum at the blinking light in "downtown" Soda Springs. We also developed a website which by now has almost 400 pages. The Heirloom, our free monthly history letter, was also key and this month we have reached 120 issues – ten years' worth. Our issues have ranged in size from 12 pages to 24 pages but let's assume there have been an average of 15 pages per issue. That would mean we've published 1,800 pages of Donner Summit history in the last ten years. (Someone might want to add up the actual numbers so we can have the same accuracy in our achievement in pages as there has been in history).

That's a lot of history. But there's still more to go. You may be one of our original subscribers in which case the lists that follow are familiar. Most of our 817 subscribers (not counting those who access the Heirloom from our website, FaceBook, or friends - some people keep bound copies on their coffee tables) came on later and maybe haven't gone through our indices. The lists here might spur you to go searching for interesting stories. The lists here are just a small part of the 1800+ pages of history in the Heirloom. There are some rules before you go on. To each list you can add a few "etc.'s" but rather than be redundant or waste digital ink we left those out. To get to these, consult our indices on the Heirloom pages on the website. All of the Heirloom issues

---

\*Native Americans crossed for thousands of years, the first wagon train to California to arrive with wagons came over Donner Summit. The summit is the site of the first transcontinental railroad, the first transcontinental highway, the first transcontinental telephone line, and the first transcontinental air route.

# Story Locations in this Issue



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

Proofread by Pat Malberg, Lake Mary, Donner Summit

Unless otherwise noted, the photographs and other historical ephemera in The Heirloom's pages come from the Norm Saylor collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society

are on line as PDF's.

We've covered the big topics of Donner Summit history in a number of multi-part stories: the Chinese, the transcontinental railroad, the Donner Party and Donner Summit, Cisco, Clair Tappaan Lodge, Sugar Bowl, Roller Pass, the Summit Hotel, the sheep industry, and the snowsheds.

Then there are the stories that come singly: emigrants, the Lincoln Highway, petroglyphs, the "Up Ski" boat sled at Cisco, Rainbow Tavern, Sierra Ski Ways, a couple of murders and robberies, the Mole People of Norden, the coming of modern skiing, some frozen men, "Frenchie the Dog," The Norden Store, bucking snow, bicycling over the summit in the old days, and circus beasts.

There have been stories about so many firsts: first wagon train, first transcontinental railroad, first transcontinental highway, first transcontinental air route, first bicyclists, first automobiles, first locomotive over the summit, first passenger train over the summit, and the first motorcycle.

Lots of Donner Summit locations have appeared in the Heirloom along with their stories: Red Mountain, Cisco, Van Norden, Soda Springs, Norden, Roller Pass, Catfish Pond, Crater Lake, Van Norden grinding rocks, and Meadow Lake.

We've covered famous people, kind of famous people, and people who should be famous. In the first category are the Big 4 of the railroad, Hannes Schroll of Sugar Bowl, the author George R. Stewart, Mark Twain, Moses Schallenberger, photographer Eadweard Muybridge, artist Albert Bierstadt, Charlie Chaplin, Theodore Judah, and Lola Montez. In the second category would fit: Auburn Ski Club's Wendell Robie, Alfred A. Hart, and Carleton Watkins. In the last category are people like John Stark, a true hero; Margie Powell who initiated the DSHS; Norm Saylor whose collection became the DSHS; T.C. Wohlbruck; and Scotty Allen.

There is also a whole host of characters who passed by: the first bicyclist across the Sierra, the country and around the world; the people who drove the first automobiles over the summit each spring; the artists who visited the summit; those who built dams and hotels or drove the stagecoach; Willis Gortner who cataloged Native American petroglyphs; and Louis Payen the PGE archeologist who cataloged the historic sites around Van Norden.

There have been lots of miscellaneous stories like Norm's historical matchbook covers, old ads, the turkeys, "Hootin Scootin", "the Madman of Donner Summit", and a spy at Sugar Bowl.

Whimsical stories have had their places too: dragons on Donner Summit, the Sword in the Stone, and the DSHS MX1000 historical rejuvenator,

There have been almost seventy five book reviews and about eight movie reviews in the Heirloom. Art Clark has contributed 90 Then and Now's. Others have contributed various articles over the years too.

Most of the stories in the Heirloom come from old-fashioned research: into Norm's archives, old newspapers, modern and old books, diaries, and various things people have written or remembered. A whole set of articles comes from the Mobile Historical Research Team (MHRT) whose members have gone into the field to find where early autoists drove over the snowsheds; found grinding rocks, petroglyphs and arboglyphs; explored emigrant routes both possible and actual; done drone work; found old signs; plotted hike routes; and explored various historic sites for stories. The team has even put itself at risk such as when members reprised the Charlie Chaplin "Gold Rush" movie's ascent of the Palisades at Sugar Bowl. It was only afterwards, and after careful analysis of photographic evidence, that they discovered the movie extras used ropes in 1925. That would have been a good idea. The team lived to go out again though.

When the Heirloom first started production Margie Powell, founder of the DSHS, thought each issue should not exceed ten pages and that might be pushing it because one day we'd run out of history and it took time to savor the history. That running out of history is a valid observation because nothing except the universe is infinite. There's so much history screaming to come out though. It was hard to deny stories. It was harder and harder to keep anywhere close to ten pages and there are lots of issues that are over twenty pages.

To be honest, we are beginning to run out of history, or at least the first versions of stories. What should we do? Here's where a thoughtful reader would "weigh in" with suggestions - see the bottom left of page two.

Before you panic and cancel your subscription there is still a lot of history sitting in the DSHS Heirloom computers. In future Heirlooms look for: "Piracy on Donner Summit," going under Donner Summit, the great transcontinental bicycle relay that went over Donner Summit in 1896, the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd., Arthur Foote's quest for the silver cup, the Oakland Ski Club, the original Soda Springs, the location of the buildings at Soda Springs Station, and the first automobiles of spring. Of course there are an almost unlimited number of old photographs with which to populate Heirloom pages too that come from Norm's collection. So keep up your subscriptions.

You can help too. If you have stories, articles, information please share them. For example, we had a request for the history of the Oakland Ski Club. We had to demur but then a fellow from Donner Lake came into the DSHS with a binder full of things. That may work out. We'd love to do more histories of the local ski clubs but there is a lack of information - so far.



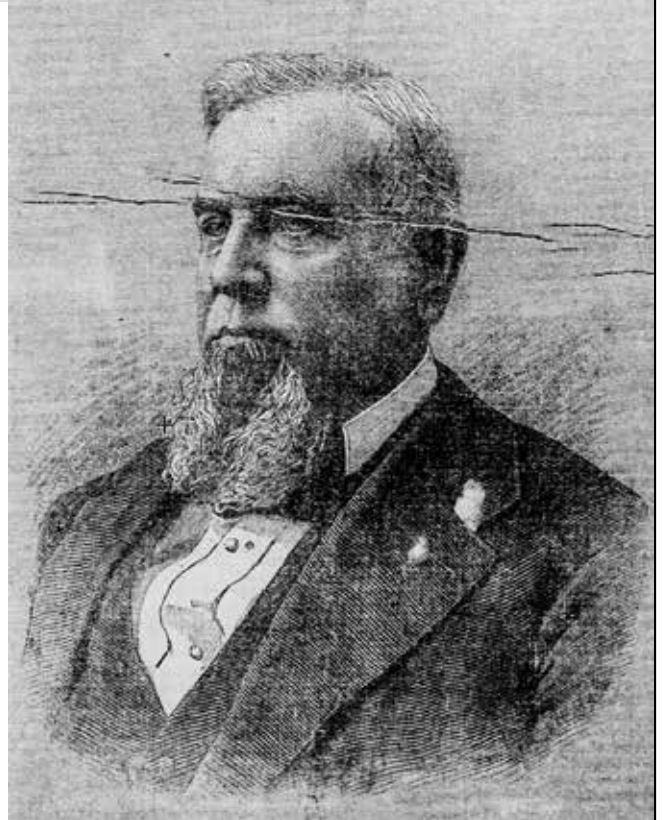
# From the DSHS Archives

"The ride down the Donner Lake hill  
was something never to be forgotten."

To get to the quote above a little background is required:

First, to put this 1888 article in context you have to know that it was part of a more than two page spread in the Daily Alta California reporting on Charles Crocker's death and funeral. As one of the "Big Four" who built the transcontinental railroad he (right) was pretty significant.

CHARLES CROCKER  
Died 14th August, 1888  
Aged  
65 years and 11 months



The casket was copper lined and "of the best order of workmanship," and carried by "eight colored men who have been longest in the employ of the Southern Pacific Company." All kinds of high powered people attended the funeral including the governor and the ex-governor, judges, an ex-senator, the mayor of San Francisco, etc.. "[I]mmense throngs" of people also gathered outside the San Francisco church to see what they could see. Inside the church "there was not even standing room" because more tickets had been sent out than mourners accommodated. Police guarded the doors and the sidewalks to keep out "improper persons" but also those with tickets who could not fit inside. In the funeral cortege there were 36 carriages. The ceremony was impressive and in the eulogies we learned about Mr. Crocker: he was a "'shining example," "a most estimable and enterprising citizen," he had "indomitable perseverance, pluck, and energy," he was a friend of Sacramento, he had robust vigor and "Unimpaired manhood," he was a "stupendous business titan," he was a "genial, jolly, and good-natured soul," etc. Funerals bring out the best in their subjects.

We look back at the Transcontinental Railroad and think of it as the first railroad in California and that, because it was built, it was the natural thing to have happened. Besides the building, which had challenges given that it was crossing the Sierra, there were other problems. One was a fight over who was going to do the building of a railroad. The Central Pacific and the Sacramento Valley railroads were in competition for who could deliver passengers to Virginia City faster using their railroads and stage lines. That would be good publicity for the winner. The Sacramento Valley RR wanted to damage the Central Pacific and perhaps prevent it from becoming the transcontinental railroad. They were going to prove the point that they were faster by sending a stage from San Francisco to Virginia City, using their rail route when they could which at that time went to Folsom. The Central Pacific heard of the attempt and sent Charles Crocker in a stage along their own route using their own railroad. The Central Pacific stages and railroad beat the Sacramento Valley people by four hours. That brings us to:

## "Mr. Crocker's Famous Ride"

"From there we took the stage, first stopping six miles beyond Auburn, and the stations were laid out about eleven miles apart from there to Virginia City. We landed in Virginia City at five minutes past one o'clock that afternoon, making the trip from the foot of K street to Virginia City in thirteen hours and one minute.

"Mr. Crocker carried a memorandum book, in which he took down the time and called it out. We had six-horse stages all the way and the longest time we were at any station, from the time we stopped until we were on the move again, was four minutes

# From the DSHS Archives

and a half. I am the only one left out of the party of six, including George Wood who occupied the box with the different drivers. Even with the railroad they have never landed passengers from Sacramento in Virginia City in so short a time.

"We passed Donner Lake at half past six in the morning, and the ride down the Donner Lake hill was something never to be forgotten. The horses were all on a dead run the whole distance and it was something frightful. I would not have made the trip again for a thousand dollars.

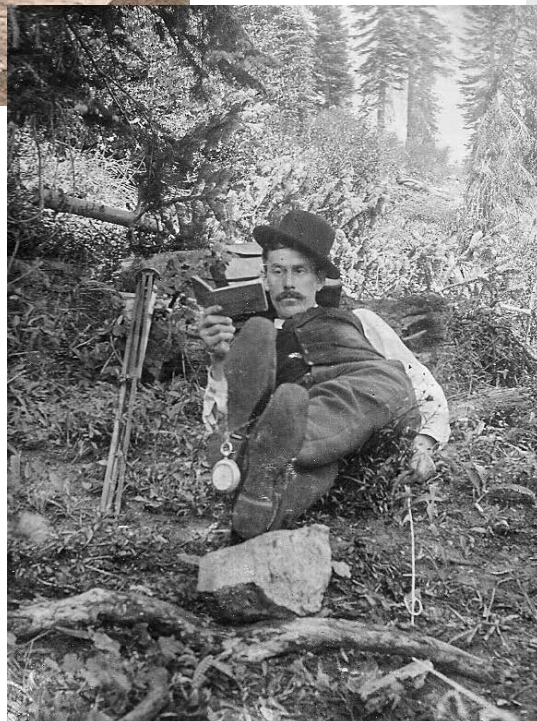
"The other stage party did not reach Virginia City until about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. It was composed of Charley McLean, owner of the Pioneer Stage Line; J . P. Robinson, George F. Bragg, President of the road, and a representative of the San Francisco Alta. I think his name was Livingston."

Sacramento Daily Union August 21, 1888  
The actual year of the ride was not given.



A couple of years ago the Truckee Donner Historical Society gave the DSHS an album of pictures most of which were of Donner Summit circa the 1910's. The album had been found in the attic of a house in Truckee with no information in or on it. Unfortunately most of the pictures were not labeled and those that were, were not labeled very completely. There's a moral in that for your picture albums.

Here are two pictures from that album. Since there were a number of pictures of Donner Pk. it's possible the picture above is Donner Pk. and we can imagine the mother and son, or nanny and boy, resting after climbing to the top. Who were they? Whom did the boy grow into? Where did they live? Had they climbed the peak before?



## Another Accident Near the Summit By Freight Train

E. Bini was struck by a freight train near Troy, a small station beyond the summit, and was mangled to such an extent that it was difficult to recognize the remains. The accident occurred Monday night when he was a passenger on No. 23 which leaves this town [Truckee] westward bound at 9:35. As he was walking along the track after his arrival at Troy, a freight train which passed that place immediately after No. 23 had passed caused the fatal mishap. A light engine brought his body back to town.

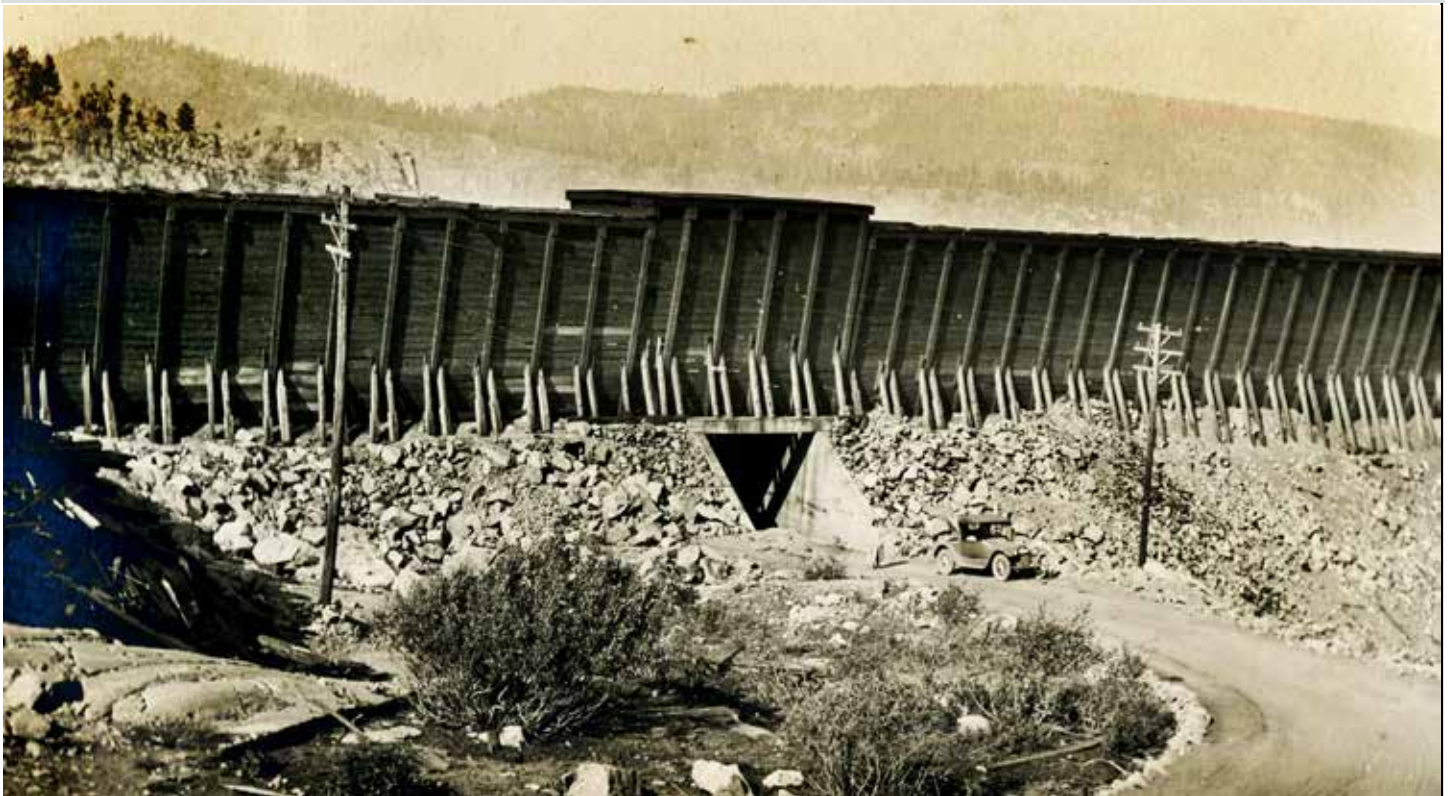
....  
Enough money was found on his person to defray the funeral expenses.

[He was known to a few people in the area including his brother.]

August 20, 1914  
Truckee Republican

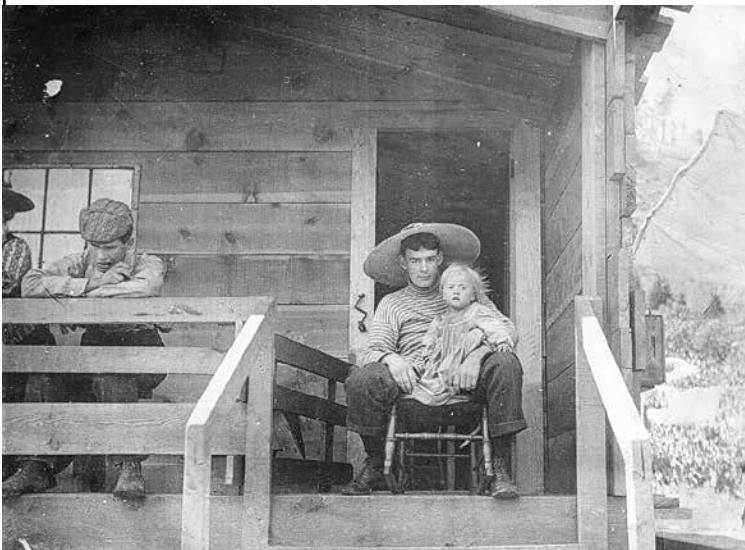
The picture to the left is "Mr. Davis." Who was he? What's he reading? Who are his descendants?

# What's in Your Closet?



Bill and Diane Kirkham were cleaning out some old family things and came across some albums of pictures, some of which were of Donner Summit. The Serene Lakes couple immediately thought of the DSHS and asked if we were interested. Of course we were and are.

If you come across old photos, or other things, we're in the the business of saving Donner Summit history and telling the many stories. If you can't scan, we can do that and return your photos to you almost immediately.



These two pictures also come from the TDHS album. There were pictures of worker housing in the railroad complex near Tunnel 6 and so it's reasonable to think the picture to the left is one of those.



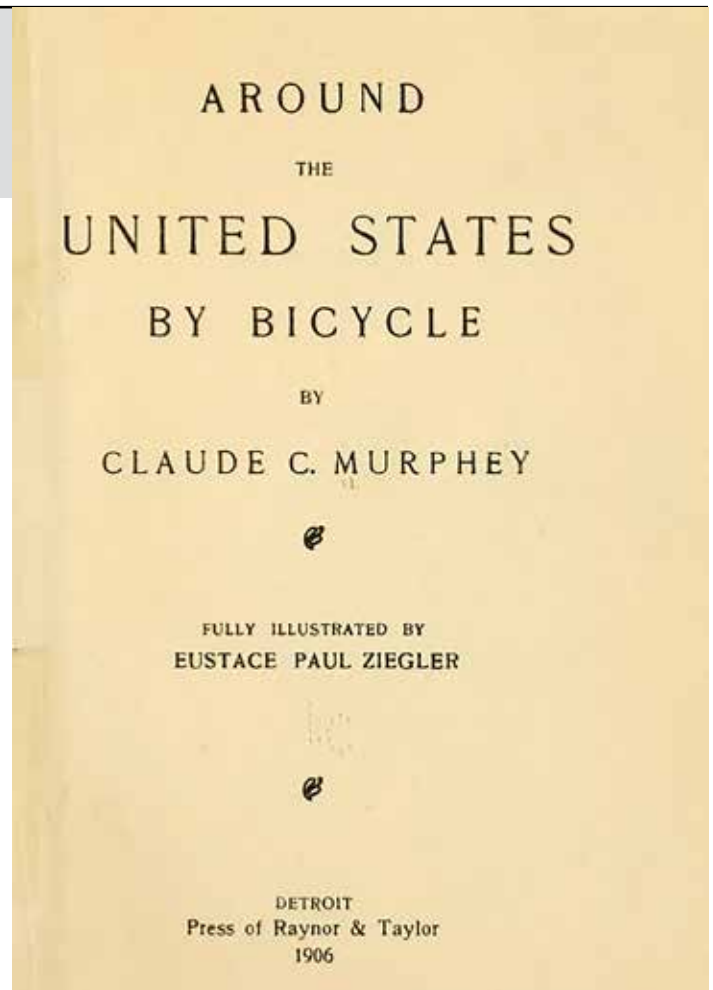
Who were the young women in the forest? What were their hopes and dreams? Did hopes and dreams come to fruition?

# Book Review

## Around the United States by Bicycle

Claude C. Murphy, 1906 356 pages

Clarence Darling and Claude C. Murphy were 19 and 20 years old when their adventure began and they left their Michigan homes in 1904 to travel around the United States by bicycle. They had thought about some kind of trip like that by foot, train, or other conveyance for some years but hadn't gotten to any planning. Then "the hand of providence intervened" when they heard about a bet some "eastern sportsmen" were wagering. Could a trip be made by bicycle through every state and territory within one year and six months? To complicate matters could "The traveler... start penniless, neither to beg, work, borrow, nor steal, and to make all of his traveling expenses by the sale of... some little trinket..." The two intrepid fellows "gladly hailed this opportunity... to gratify and satisfy our desire to 'see the country'" and to win \$5,000. To prove compliance the men had to see mayors or city officials around the country and collect affidavits of their visits. They also had to get postmarks from every post office they passed. Finally they had to make an accounting of expenses and "souvenirs" (the trinkets) sold. Claude said that all the "red tape" would have "made even a preacher use some very strong language." But if you want \$5,000 you have to make sacrifices.



The introduction says Clarence and Claude adhered to all of the conditions and "met with adventure of every description, in some of which the hideous countenance of Death stared them in the face..." The trip took one year, three months, six days, and forty-five minutes. They covered 13,407 miles. Of course, since this article is in the Heirloom, the guys went over Donner Summit.

Presumably to keep away competition all planning of their trip was in secret until the week before they left. At that point it was a "bomb-shell." Some said the guys were candidates for the insane asylum. Others gave it no credence. Even the people who thought it would be a good experience expected failure.

To finance the trip the men had little souvenirs of their ride which they were to sell on the journey. That was the only money they could have.

Their bicycles were standards "roadsters" which weighed 28 lbs. Loaded they weighed 75 lbs. The frames were 22" and had

## **In the snowsheds**

"We hear it slowly and laboriously ascending the grade behind us... Soon it approaches with a deafening and thunderous puff and chug-chug of the engines, sparks, fire, and dirty black smoke... fire shooting from beneath the fire boxes... every sound made a thousand-fold louder by being enclosed in such a small space. To us, with our nerves at their highest tension, eyes nearly bulging from their sockets, it seems as if we shall never live through the ordeal..."



no brakes. Their bicycle handles were turned up so they could ride almost erect. Their baggage included a small typewriter for writing up reports and correspondence. The men wore "regulation bicycle suits." Their sweaters were purple and yellow with scarlet insignias of the YMCA on the front and they wore bright orange bicycle stockings with whitish shoes. Their outfits were "such a dazzling display of color... [as if] part of a rainbow had broken loose and was perambulating around the country."

Murphy and Darling had many adventures: a couple of times almost hit by trains in tunnels (once there was only three inches to spare -"The train had passed, leaving us limp masses of flesh, quaking in every nerve.") or on trestles (being half way along a long trestle and hearing a train approach they climbed over the edge and hung on holding their "machines" - the framework of the trestle groaning, creaking, and vibrating "with the awful strain and weight, so that we are nearly shaken from our positions."), confrontation with a hobo which ended when the men drew their guns, impassable roads, rain and mud, a Republican convention, carrying their bicycles to avoid cacti, running out of money, good hosts and bad, desert sun, storms, welcomes by bicycle enthusiasts, rescuing a horse from a burning barn and being accused of being the arsonists, riding through a forest fire ("a terrific bombardment, huge trees falling every minute, while the rush and roar of the flames are sufficient to strike terror into the stoutest heart... the heat was blistering"), broken bicycles, etc,

Over 13,000 miles there were a lot of adventures, most important to readers of the Heirloom is the crossing of the Sierra at Donner Pass. See the next story.

A lot can happen in 13,000 miles; 15 months, six days, and forty-five minutes and Mr. Murphy included most of that in an almost day-to-day description. That can make the reading a bit tedious at times because one town is much like another and one smaller incident is much like another. One can skim though.

This book is also a slice of America in 1904. Murphy and Darling had no problem walking up to a house and asking to pay for dinner and to stay the night. It seems to have been a common thing. Their bicycling the country got a lot of attention in the towns they visited and selling the souvenirs of their around-the-country trip went well, at least to begin with. I can't imagine those things today. Imagine someone coming to your door one evening begrimed by the road and

## Caught in a tunnel by a train

"Every moment made breathing more difficult, until it seemed that unless we could get a breath of fresh air we should suffocate. We could stand it no longer, and panic-stricken, we turn and flee toward the entrance again as fast as our shaking limbs will carry us. Several times we were nearly overcome by the gas, but by extraordinary effort we shook off the lethargic feeling, knowing that our only hope was in reaching the mouth. Suddenly we hear another thunderous roar, and, instantly divining its cause, we quickly place ourselves and the wheels [bicycles] at the side out of harm's way, just as a monster of steel, a single engine, rushes past.

"Three inches of space between our bodies and the steam chest, as the first engine hissed by us!"

asking to stay the night and that you provide dinner. That said, I must admit that a couple came to our door one evening on their way walking across the U.S. and we accommodated them on Donner Summit.

Prices, life, living conditions, local industries, the killing of a "negro" the body allowed to lie waiting for the coroner who never arrived ("Well, there's another nigger got rid of"), how much "negroes" were paid in Louisiana (65c/day), what cities and towns were like, the use of snuff by women ("This is a most disgusting and loathsome habit, especially for the fair sex.") and the way things were done are all interesting.

There is also the casual racism that Mr. Murphy exhibits about "negroes" ("the population consists of negroes, with which



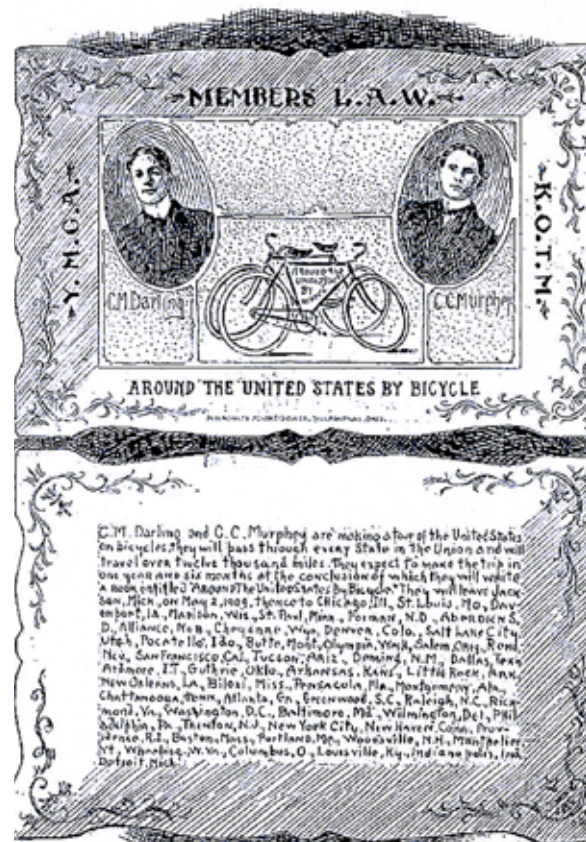
the streets are crowded, lounging here and there; about everything there hangs an air of indolence and sleepy repose” – Arkansas), the Chinese (their accents), or “Hebrews” (“hooked nose”), and his disparagement of some locals in “Indian territory” (“... a neglectful and dingy air hung about them... The inhabitants generally seemed to be an ignorant and indolent class, inclined to talk and gossip rather than work.”. – Texas). It was a different time and the young men were products of their time. It’s interesting to see how far we’ve come.

They saw and did a lot such as: the many, many memorials, statues, exhibits, and battlefields of the Civil War; the sights in the big cities; the subway; climbing the Washington Monument and the Statue of Liberty; seeing the Cliff House in San Francisco; visiting Coney Island; seeing Niagara Falls; etc.

Besides the distance it was a hard trip braving deep mud; carrying their bicycles for miles many times; enduring -29 degree cold; wading through icy streams; “roughing it” sleeping on floors, porches, or the ground; dealing with rain; navigating flood waters; trying to walk through “sticky adhesive clay, in which one sinks at least a foot at every step, and from which it is almost impossible to extract one’s foot;” and having to relay over and over when one of the bicycles was unusable.

By the time the men reached Maine they were down to \$1 in funds. The East Coast had not been a good market for their souvenirs. By Vermont they were out of money. No one was of any help and by the time they reached Montpelier they’d been without food for days. In order to sell their souvenirs there they had to procure a \$3 license, “This is the last straw, and we see that Fate is indeed against us...” They told their tale of woe to a lunchroom proprietor who agreed to feed them and let them work off the meals’ cost by doing dishes. The work, of course, violated the conditions of the wager after thousands of miles and 334 pages of text.

“It was with heavy hearts that we filled out the report which told of our inability to live up to the conditions of the wager, and thought of the times without number when we had nearly lost our lives, of the innumerable sufferings and hardships which we had been forced to endure in order to cover all but three states, Ohio, West Virginia, and Kentucky, of every state in the Union, and now virtually on the ‘home stretch,’ and almost within sight of home; and now it had all come to naught. Surely the cup of defeat is most bitter!”



FAC-SIMILE, FRONT AND BACK, OF SOUVENIR.

The souvenir the fellows sold to pay for the trip, “an aluminum ash tray with the photographs of the travelers in the convex and an itinerary of the trip on the reverse side.”

Anaconda Standard Montana August 24, 1904

They decided to continue their tour, however, even though they’d “failed to win the five thousand dollar purse.”

They pulled into their starting point one year, three months, six days, and forty-five minutes after they’d left.

This book is available as a reprint or for free as some version of “E” book on the internet.

Left: map of the route.



# Over Donner Summit, 1904

## Riding through a forest fire

"...a burning fire-brand fell upon my shoulders, setting fire to the light cloth of the khaki suit, and before I was able to extinguish it, it had burned a large hole."

One of a few articles from a weekly newspaper in Georgia that struck Mr. Murphy's fancy:

"Married-Miss Sylvia Rhodes and James Canaan, Saturday evening, at the Baptist parsonage. The bride is a very ordinary town girl, who don't know any more about cooking than a rabbit, and never helped her mother three days in her life. She is not a beauty by any means, and has a gait like a fat duck."

## Commentary

"All over the South we find that the negro is not considered as a human being, but more as a chattel, something made to work like a machine, with no human feelings or desires such as the white man possesses. He is treated with contempt and scorn, with the result that a negro lives in abject terror of a white man. So closely is the color line drawn that in all public places a separate compartment is always reserved for the negro. At all railroad stations and all trains signs of 'Waiting Room For Colored Only,' and 'This Car For Colored Passengers Only,' will be seen."

## New York

New York where they spent "three and half very pleasant days":

"After we see the city on a weekday, when Broadway at almost any point is a hurrying, rushing, and jamming mass of clanging street cars, wagons, drays, automobiles, runabouts, and almost every other kind of vehicle, and through this maze seemingly in danger of life and limb, pedestrians thread their way, surely this hardly seems the tranquil and peaceful street which we beheld but yesterday."

We reach Truckee, walking the track the entire distance, in a continuous downpour of rain. This town boasts of a thousand inhabitants, and is a collection of saloons and gambling dens, with not one store in the place which did not partake of the nature of a dive, truly a cesspool, and headquarters for gamblers and criminals.

Two miles from Truckee we enter a continuous thirty-five mile stretch of snow sheds and tunnels, practically a subterranean passage, as but little light is admitted, all being in a state of semi-darkness. This chain extends over the summit and half way down the other side of the Sierra Nevadas.

These snow sheds are very large, and built of heavy and massive timbers. The top forms a solid roofing, but the sides have openings of several inches between each timber, through which some of the light of day penetrates; during the severe winters upon these mountains tons upon tons of snow fall upon these sheds.

The track makes the most erratic twists and turns, the grade is very great, causing even three engines on a train to make but very slow progress.

We have been traveling in the snow sheds but a short time, when we have our first hair-raising experience, as one of the Southern Pacific Flyers passes us.

We hear it slowly and laboriously ascending the grade behind us, and take steps to place ourselves and our machines in a safe position on the sides. Soon it approaches with a deafening and thunderous puff and chug-chug of the engines, sparks, fire, and dirty black smoke belching forth from the smokestacks, fire shooting from beneath the fire-boxes on each side of the track, for on these engines oil is burned, every sound made a thousand-fold louder by being enclosed in such a small space. To us, with our nerves at their highest tension, eyes nearly bulging from their sockets, it seems as if we shall never live through the ordeal. It seems an age until the two foremost engines pass us, and then comes the long string of passenger coaches, which gives us a chance to recover and be prepared for the puffing and hissing monster which brings up the rear. But there is an end to all things, and at last as from a dream we find ourselves to be staring vacantly after the departing train.

Before we reach the summit we have many such experiences, trains passing us frequently, coming from each direction. Great watchfulness had to be exercised in listening for trains coming down from the summit, as the grade was so great, that the momentum would carry the train swiftly and it would approach almost noiselessly, so that it would be upon us before we were aware.

We pass through many tunnels, ranging from four hundred to thirteen hundred feet in length. In one of these, which was almost semi-circular, it was as dark as Egypt, and as we had no light nor torch, we could see nothing whatever; by walking the rails we manage to keep in the track. There was no room on the sides, so that we knew that if we should be caught by a train, we should immediately be made into mince-meat. As we get well into the center, we find our courage oozing out at our toes, our knees knock together, hair stands on end, and perspiration springs from every pore at the slightest noise which resembles the "chug-chug" of a locomotive. Nevertheless, we arrive at the other end in safety.

This is indeed almost one continuous tunnel, even the telegraph stations being built into the sides of the sheds.

"We reach the summit, which has an altitude of 7,017 feet, to find that while it has been continuously raining lower down on the mountains, here a fierce snow-storm is in progress, there being a covering of fifteen inches of the beautiful, accompanied by a freezing temperature.

Owing to the many fires occurring in the snowsheds, a fire train stands at the summit in readiness to respond to an alarm.

Twenty-three miles more of walking brings us out of the subterranean passage of the snow-sheds, and it is still raining steadily. We had many thrilling escapes from being run down by trains which came from our rear down from the summit. Running almost without a sound they would glide around a curve bearing down upon us, causing consternation and terror, which would nearly paralyze our muscles. There we would stand unable to move; but even though each time it seemed as if this surely would be the end and that even now we were staring into the cadaverous features of Death, we always succeeded at the very last instant to avoid the danger, the train passing us leaving limp masses of flesh stunned with fright and terror.

Now that we were out from the protection of the sheds, we have the full benefits of the shower bath so unsparingly dealt by the elements, and we are soon wet to the skin. It rains nearly all the next forenoon, but sometime past noon the rain ceases and we have the pleasure of again viewing the beaming countenance of " Old Sol."

Unhidden by any snow-sheds the glorious and majestic grandeur of the Sierras lay before us. Now we find ourselves high on the side of a mountain; nearly two thousand feet below us is a seething, rushing, roaring mountain torrent angrily leaping like a thing of life. Here the track dizzily describes a complete half circle traversing a mountain but a short distance from its summit, clinging to a narrow ledge, and as one looks into the terrible abyss, a tremor shakes one's frame. Now from the heights we look down upon a panoramic view of a beautiful valley, hemmed in by mountains on each side, where across from us apparently a river seems to be flowing along the side of the mountain. Here we nervously and cautiously pick our way across a high steel trestle, where nearly a hundred and fifty feet below us the diminutive tracks of a narrow gauge railway pass under this gigantic structure.

We are nearly out of the mountains, coming down into the fertile valley of the Sacramento. Vineyards dot the slopes of the mountains.

Now beside the track is a portion of a mammoth vineyard, its other side lost in the distance. The vines are in the form of small bushes, so that the whole at a distance resembles an orchard. We hasten to drop our wheels and help ourselves to the luscious fruit, but in our haste we fail to note that the gaze of a man who carries a gun over his shoulder is upon us, until we stoop to pick some of the large bunches of grapes when we are very much surprised to be challenged by a stentorian voice, and we abdicate immediately in favor of the man with the gun.

From Auburn to Sacramento we are able to ride over a good wagon road, a pleasant change, as we have followed the railroad continuously since leaving Reno."

## Note:

You have noticed our monthly book reviews. You might want to do some reading of your own.

Stop in at the DSHS. Norm Sayler has a large collection of books for perusing, buying, or checking out.

You might even want to do a review for us.

# Odds & Ends on Donner Summit

## Ruins at Rainbow

Like a lot of little communities along Highway 40 Rainbow used to be an active place. There was the Rainbow Tavern, a garage and gas station (bottom - across the street from the Tavern), a store, cabins, etc. Here to the right are the remains of a house. Below left and right are the remains of the old electrical generation plant that supplied the lodge with power. The concrete structure held the pipe carrying the water from the impounding pond above. The actual generation was done in the little building this is now a cabin just west of the concrete.



Explore the area to see the concrete dam for electrical generation, the Lincoln Highway remains, old bridge abutments, a mystery structure, old houses, Lincoln Highway markers, the remains of the old rope tow and "j" bar, etc. There is even one of the old Sugar Bowl gondola cars on the hillside, just sitting there. You have to look closely so take your time.



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](#).

\*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](http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)

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

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

NAME(S) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ New Membership

MAILING ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Renewing Membership

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Individual Membership - \$30

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

\_\_\_\_ Family Membership - \$50

\_\_\_\_ Friend Membership - \$100

\_\_\_\_ Sponsor - \$250

\_\_\_\_ Patron - \$500

\_\_\_\_ Benefactor - \$1000

\_\_\_\_ Business - \$250

\_\_\_\_ Business Sponsor - \$1000

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_



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



Pick up or download the brochure at the DSHS at <http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/brochures.html>



Pick up or download the brochure

**46 interpretive signs along Old 40**  
<http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/20MileMuseum.html>

# Margie Powell Hike, 2018 August 11&12



Margie Powell was the inspiration for the Donner Summit Historical Society. She was also the energy behind the founding. In her memory we've held annual Margie Powell hikes in August. Our hikes have gone down Summit Canyon, up to Roller Pass, around Van Norden, and around Serene Lakes. We've covered the Lincoln Highway, the Emigrant Trail, Native Americans and what they've left behind, the 1914 underpass, Tunnel 6, snowsheds, Van Norden Dam, Soda Springs (the original and Soda Springs Station), ice harvesting

On this, our seventh year, we're going to tour mostly on the north side of Old Highway 40, Donner Pass Rd. Of course the walk will be illustrated with dozens of historic photographs and lots of stories.

On this, our seventh year, we're going to tour mostly on the north side of Old Highway 40, Donner Pass Rd. Of course the walk will be illustrated with dozens of historic photographs and lots of stories.

This year will be very ambitious for the number of stories to tell. We'll be starting at the Donner Ski Ranch parking lot and talking about Tunnel 6, the Summit Hotel and the railroad facilities right there. Then we'll cross Donner Pass Rd. and talk about Sierra Junipers, the transcontinental air route (and the remains of the weather station buildings where there is a GREAT view), the Catfish Pond or Maiden's Retreat (above), the idea that the north side of Old 40 was the Emigrant Trail and possible proof, the recent report of cadaver dogs and Donner Party, down and around to Old 40, Donner Pass Rd. to see a possible entry for wagons up to the top, back along the PCT to the Sugar Bowl Academy building to visit our newest 20 Mile Museum signs and see the "best square yard" in the "most historically significant square mile" in California.

***Do not consider going on this hike unless you are nimble because there are parts where we'll have to scramble over some rocks since there is no trail.***

The dates: August 11,12 9:30 AM each day. Meet at the Donner Ski Ranch parking lot.

## **Bring:**

comfortable shoes - no flip flops  
water  
sunscreen  
insect repellent  
camera  
hat

## **Lunch**

Both photos  
by George  
Lamson



# New Book about Donner Summit History

Stories of crossing Donner Summit - people in the old days were lots tougher than we are today. Stories, pictures, quotes, and the human spirit

210 pages ©2018

## Purchase a Copy:

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

## Regular Mail:

DSHS P.O. 1 Norden Ca 95724

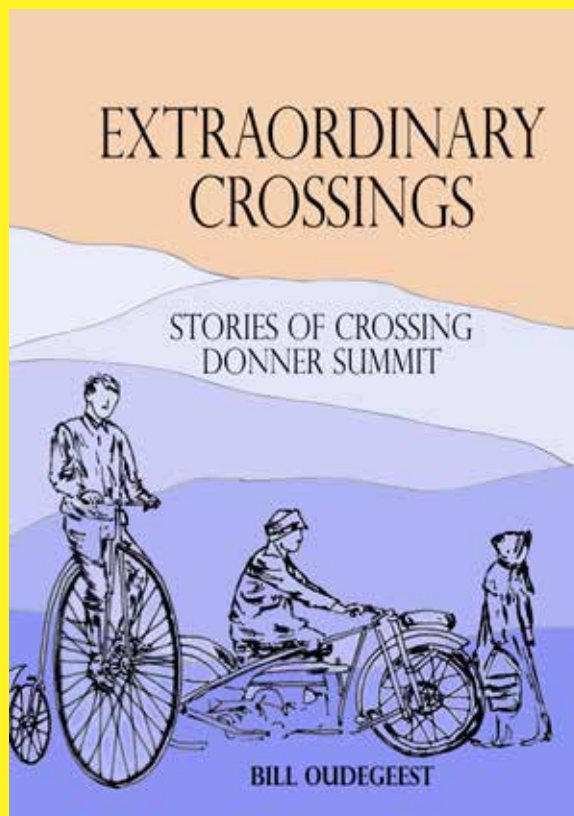
## In person:

- Soda Springs Gen. Store
- Donner Summit  
Historical Society

**\$25** includes S/H and sales tax.

## Table of Contents

Introduction	viii
Chapter 1 Setting the Stage Sierra Origins, Donner Summit - Magnificent, The Great Barrier	11
Chapter 2 Native Americans and Donner Summit	25
Chapter 3 The First Wagon Train The Stephens, Murphy, Townsend Party; Moses Schallenberger	35
Chapter 4 The Donner Party Rescuers & Escapees Forlorn Hope, Starved Camp, Heroes	49
Chapter 5 The Transcontinental Railroad Age of Wonder, The building of the Railroad, the First Locomotives over the Summit, the Black Plucked Goose, The Iron Horse, an 1869 train trip over the summit	67
Chapter 6 Motorized Crossings The First Automobile Over the Summit, the First Motorized Crossing, Arthur Foote's Quest for the Silver Cup, First Autos of the Season, and a Ghost Car Flits Across the Continent	97
Chapter 7 The Bicyclists Thomas Stevens, 1884; Summit Hotel; Bicycling Over the Sierra, 1895; Bicycle Adventure, 1901; The Greatest Thing of its Kind Ever Undertaken; Around the United States by Bicycle, 1904	122
Chapter 8 Still More True Stories Mark Twain Over the Sierra, 1866; Francis Boyd, 1868; A Stage Trip, 1865; Mission of Mercy and a Narrow Miss in the snowsheds, 1868; A Snow- shoe Horse, 1916; Effie Hotchkiss and Mom, 1915; The Van Buren Sisters, 1916; "B" Crossed Donner Summit, 1867; Riding Snowplows, 1874, 1876, & 1880; Ferocious Beasts, 1904	168



## From the Introduction

The Sierra is a great barrier and there are only a few passes through the great barrier to connect California with the rest of the country. One of those passes is Donner Pass, the area colloquially known as Donner Summit. Through that pass have funneled many stories – stories of heroism, adventure, excitement, pathos, courage, and tenacity. Those stories encompass the very best of the human spirit.

Couple that with Donner Summit being the most historically significant square mile in California and maybe the entire Western United States, and that most of the stories have almost been forgotten, their resurrections ought to be really interesting. They are.



# Donner Party Hike, 2018

The Donner Party Hike will be held this year on September 15 & 16. You get to choose among seven different hikes on Saturday, each led by a leader armed with historical photographs and history knowledge. There will be music during lunch at the Judah Lodge at Sugar Bowl followed by an afternoon presentation on the Lincoln Highway by Jim Bonar. The hike menu will include a new hike.

In the evening at the State Park Heidi Sproat and Barbara Czerwinski of the Truckee Donner Historical Society will speak on C.F. McGlashan and the coming of winter sports to Truckee.

On Sunday there will be a walk around Donner Party sites at the State Park and Alder Creek OR a bus tour of Donner Summit.

For details and to sign up see [donnerpartyhike.com](http://donnerpartyhike.com)

A promotional graphic for the Donner Party Hike 2018. The background is a photograph of a rocky hiking trail in a forested mountain area. In the upper left, there is a circular logo featuring a hiker silhouette. The text 'DONNER PARTY HIKE' is prominently displayed in the upper right, with the dates 'September 15 & 16, 2018' below it. A large, stylized sunburst graphic is on the left side. At the bottom, there are two text boxes: one on the left with the text 'Learn secrets of the Sierra as you hike with local historians.' and one on the right with the text 'FOR MORE INFORMATION: info@donnerpartyhike.com donnerpartyhike.com'.

**DONNER  
PARTY HIKE**

September 15 & 16, 2018

**Learn secrets  
of the Sierra  
as you hike with  
local historians.**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
info@donnerpartyhike.com  
donnerpartyhike.com**

# Anti-History Thieves Strike Again

The Donner Summit community has been trying to revitalize the local economy and one of the initiatives has been the 20 Mile Museum that has grown in popularity as it has grown, extending from Auburn to downtown Truckee. Each of the 47-2 signs talks about the history of the sign's location, tells a good story, lists things to do, and shows the location on a map. Each of the signs has been sponsored by a community member or community organization.



Last year an anti-history thief stole one of the 47 signs – the sign about Native American grinding rocks in Summit Valley.

Almost immediately a Donner Summit Historical Society member stepped forward to pay for a new sign.

The signs are taken down in winter to prevent damage by snow machines. This last spring, the signs had been back up no more than a week before someone stole the sign marking the well-known petroglyph site below Donner Summit Bridge. That theft was particularly poignant because it had been put together by elementary students in Truckee who had gone to Rotary for part of the cost. Not long after that theft, the grinding rock sign was again stolen in Summit Valley leaving 47-2 signs.



Above: Some of Julie Brisbin's "Brisbin Crew" installing the petroglyph sign in August, 2011. Julie teaches at the Sierra Expeditionary Academy in Truckee.

Donner Summit Historical Society vice president Bill Oudegeest says about the aggravation, "Given that the only stolen signs have had to do with Native Americans there's a great probability that the thieves are misguided trying to save Native American Heritage. The only petroglyph site noted (of dozens on Donner Summit) is the one already well-marked and visited, one which has a USFS monument. The only grinding rock site, of dozens too, is a huge mostly buried granite boulder

that cannot be damaged or stolen. It's sad because the signs are expensive, the Donner Summit Historical Society is small without many resources, and the signs and their heavy steel stands take a lot of time to make." After a pause he continued, "How about letting everyone experience our heritage rather than keeping it secret - open to only a few?"

If you've seen any heavy metal stands like the one above lying around or at the dump, please let the Historical Society know: [www.donner-sumithistorical-society.org](http://www.donner-sumithistorical-society.org). They'd be really grateful.

Meanwhile, the signs remain at least on the DSHS website and in the 20 Mile Museum brochure (available free on line) for everyone to continue to enjoy.

