

The Donner Summit

Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

September, 2018 issue #121

A Happy Story

Showing Relevance of the DSHS to Modern Life.

In June of 2015 Daniel David sent an email to the DSHS from New York City. He started out in a way guaranteed to touch the heart of any editor, “My compliments to you as editor of the Donner Summit Historical Society Newsletters. They are a treasure trove of history and I’m so happy to have stumbled upon your website. Thank you so much for including so many terrific photos from the past, and for working so diligently to preserve the exciting history of this extraordinary place.”

He’d read in a 2008 [Heirloom](#) about Kingvale in the 1930’s and 40’s. The article was “School’s Out It’s Time to Go to Kingvale,” by Lois Shane (all of our past issues are on-line for your convenience). That article was the spur to get him looking for the cabin his grandfather and father had built in Kingvale in 1939. He included a picture of the structure. He said the family had vacationed there for years.

On Father’s Day in 2015, when Daniel’s father, Cliff, was 86, Daniel pulled out pictures of the Kingvale cabin and there was a “flood of great memories for our whole family.” They tried GoogleEarth to find the cabin but memories had faded and that didn’t work. Daniel concluded his request for help finding the cabin with, “What a wonderful surprise it would be to actually locate the cabin for my Dad, confirm that it still stands, and arrange a “bucket list” visit for him! You should have seen his eyes light up when I suggested such a trip might be possible.”

Daniel got into contact with Lois Shane, the author of the Kingvale article. Not only was Lois Shane able to pinpoint the cabin but she also put the Davids in contact with the current owners. Here perhaps Daniel’s words are better than an [Heirloom](#) editor’s.



The Kingvale cabin "then" and in 2015

Story Locations in this Issue

DONNER SUMMIT



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DSHS Birthday Revisited

In our anniversary issue last month we said, "Our [Heirloom] 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)."

Art Clark is a stickler for accuracy and puzzle solving. He did not let the challenge go unanswered, " Found a website that will count words in a PDF. Only works on files up to 2 mb, but I ran issue 120 through it and came up with nearly 9000 words. That times 120 is 1,080,000.

"Congrats on going over a million!"

For accuracy's sake someone might want to do the other 119 issues (120 issues now that September has "hit the stands.")



On the Margie Powell Hike just below the transcontinental air route's weather station site.

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

Find us on 

“When the current owner and his young son invited my family to come from New York and re-visit “Grandpa’s Cabin” last year, it turned into an awesome trip down memory lane. In short, the cabin still stands... proudly and handsomely... on Nathan Lane... a wonderous time-capsule and, quite literally, a tribute to my family. My grandmother’s curtains still hang in the kitchen window, Grandpa’s mounted buck above the mantel still watches over every moment, and the progression of my father’s teenage growth is still marked on the kitchen doorjamb. Thanks to you, my family has re-connected to all that. And, sweetly, our family story has become meaningful to the next generation of Kingvalians on Nathan Lane.

“Although Dad was not well enough to travel with us, he loved our reports and photos when we got home. Coming full circle on this subject meant the world to him at the end of his life.

“Dad passed away in December. He had no regrets and no undone business. One of his last wishes was for us to return to Kingvale Cabin with his ashes. He wanted a good final swim with the rainbow trout in the South Fork of the Yuba, which is exactly where he landed... just last week.” Last week was Late May, 2018.

Daniel has written an evocative story about reconnecting with the Kingvale cabin, “Mornings at the cabin were a feast for the senses: a fire snapping in the hearth; finches singing in the eastern light; the gurgle of water rushing past us down the south fork of the Yuba River; the scent of bacon frying in Grandma’s pan; and the sweet mustiness of a wooden structure...”

There’s some of Grandpa’s philosophy in the story, “The goal of a mountain hike is to admire the beauty that can be found ... Stop along the trail to appreciate what you see.”

The whole story is a bit long for an [Heirloom](#) but we have it on our website. You can type the whole following URL into your browser or you can go to the DSHS website and then to the 2018 [Heirloom](#) page and in September's list of articles you'll see the article, "The Next Prince." The article is copyrighted by its author, Daniel David. It’s a fun read as the Davids explore the cabin they’d not seen in fifty years still furnished by his grandparents, “almost as if the clock had spun back a half-century and my grandparents had never left. I exhaled and.... felt their presence.” It’s got old pictures in it too including that of the sombrero (you’ll have to read it).

“Like the familiar hug from a long lost friend, that elusive feeling I’d known as a child (the one I thought I’d lost forever) was suddenly upon me.”

Margie Powell Hike, 2018



The seventh annual Margie Powell Hike went out in early August to historical sites on the north side of Old Highway 40. Above, hikers are at Catfish Pond. Photo by George Lamson.

What's in Your Closet?

Goicoechea Edition

The Ski Inn today - June, '18
- just west of the Sugar Bowl
gondola



Ski Inn, "Then" in
July-October, 1947



The Ski Inn

There's a lot of history out there still to be discovered and saved. One such discovery was Vince Goicoechea (goi kə chee uh) and Louise Sorensen who came up to Donner Summit to "connect the dots," said Louise.

Vince's father was Joe Goicoechea, center of the picture above, who served during World War II with one of the Vinn brothers (Charlie and Red also above). At some point after the war they decided they wanted to build a ski lodge on Donner Summit. Why, exactly, has been lost to history. Vince speculates that "I think they just got a wild hair." Perhaps they were sitting drinking beer and the idea seemed like a good one.

The three built the Ski Inn in 1947 after purchasing the property the year before. The inn opened December 27, 1947. It was a dormitory style inn (which included a kitchen, dining room, residence for management, and a couple of private rooms. They ran the inn until the winter of 1952-53 encouraged them to reconsider. That was a particularly snow-filled winter and was the winter the City of San Francisco Streamliner got stuck near Yuba Gap for three days. Following the adventure with



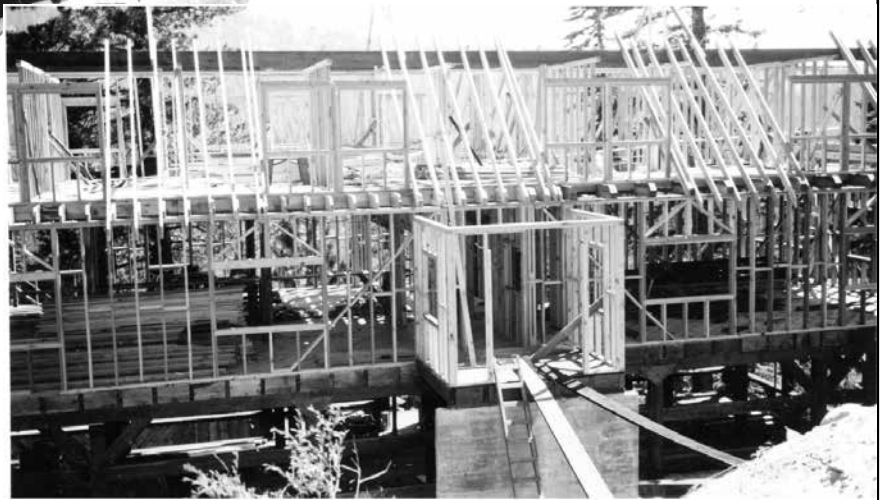
The Goicoechea album cover

the inn Joe relocated to Reno which is where Vince was born. Vince never got to see the inside of the Ski Inn although he saw the outside often enough on ski visits to Sugar Bowl. Ironically it was not Joe but Louise who had been in the inn. She stayed there as a small child during winter visits to Donner Summit and remembered the fireplace (then and now to the right) and sticking her tongue out at her father. She was the one who wanted to connect the dots and of course connecting historical dots on Donner Summit means talking to Norm Saylor.

They had a good conversation while sharing two photo albums Vince and Louise had. Vince remembered lots of stories of his father's such as tunneling everywhere in winter: tunneling to the Norden station to get the train and tunneling to the Norden store to get food. He also had his own stories like filling his pocket with quarters to ride the Disney lift at Sugar Bowl which was a quarter a ride in those days in the single chair. The cost of a ticket today might be a bit more than a pocket full of quarters even with inflation factored in.



Ski Inn under construction, summer, 1947

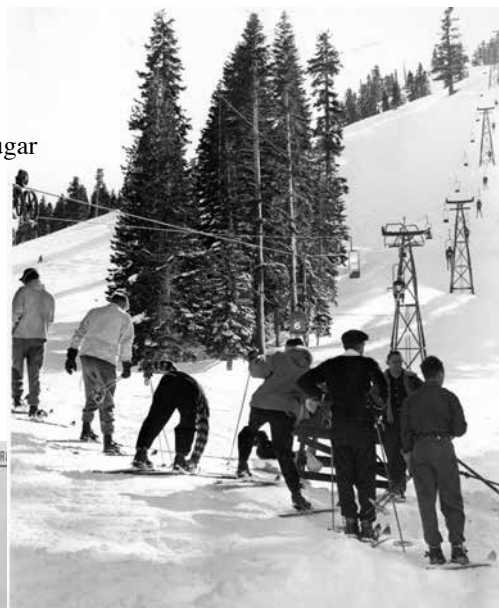


Top picture comes from the scrapbook. Bottom one from Louise, taken when she and Vince got to go inside.



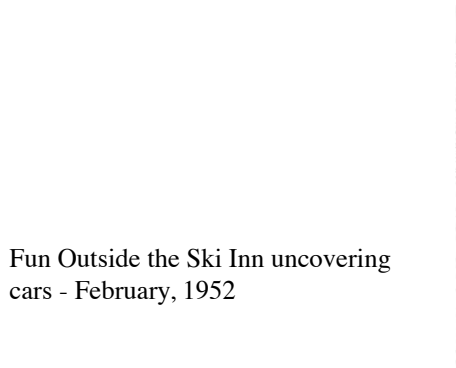
Fun inside the Ski Inn

Fun outside the Ski Inn at Sugar Bowl - 1947



More fun at the Ski Inn

Left, Joe Goicoechea, left; C. Vind, right; Mrs. J. Goicoechea in the stretcher; J Vind back right? (That's what's on the back of the picture.) 1949. There is no notation about why Mrs. is in the stretcher.



Fun Outside the Ski Inn uncovering cars - February, 1952



The Ski Inn on Highway 40, 1948





Ski Inn, April, 1948



Ski Inn 1949 with closeup right.

Ski Inn, summer, 1991



Trail Marker Mystery Solved

For those of you that have hiked the Truckee Route of the California Trail you may have come across small green trail markers that are nailed onto trees. These occur mostly between Alder Creek and Emigrant Gap. They were placed by Bruce Turner of Concord, CA between 1985 and 2005.

The markers are 4" metal discs painted green and hand lettered "EMIGRANT TRAIL" in white. Bruce did extensive diary and trail research and consulted with the late Charles Graydon and fellow members of OCTA and Trails West to determine the best location for these markers.

Previously placed markers by P.M. Wettdell, Wendell Robie, the Boy Scouts, and others are all but non-existent nowadays so Bruce started out researching and placing his markers. And by the way, Bruce was of the school-of-thought that the 1844 Stephens-Murphy route at Donner Summit went up the south side to Lake Mary not the north side to Lake Angela. One day Bruce was vacationing with his wife Barbara and two young sons when he stopped at the old Big Bend Ranger Station. The exhibits there combined with Bruce's love of history got him hooked on researching the Truckee Route emigrant trail. He began collecting maps and reference books and took more family vacations back to the same areas to explore the trails. Finally the Turners bought a cabin that was up for sale on the Old Wagon Road across Hwy 40 from Big Bend Ranger Station.

This vacation home gave them a base to work out of for their trail research. One day while discussing the trail location with Phil Sexton, the ranger at Big Bend, the topic of guided trail walks came up. When Phil realized how much Bruce knew about the emigrant trail in the area and the Murphy family that camped there he suggested that Bruce and Barbara lead history walks through the area. This became a popular event on weekends and holidays and Bruce and Barbara eventually started wearing period costumes for their guided walks.

Bruce's interest in the Truckee Route was just the California portion from Dog Valley to Johnson's Ranch. One time he had a pilot fly him up and back through this section of the trail just to get a birds-eye view of the terrain. Another time Bruce led an auto tour through this section of trail. It took three days, over three weekends, to complete. It started just east of Dog Valley and finished after the third day at Johnson's Ranch. The cars would stop at historically significant locations and Bruce would get out and narrate. What made it special at Johnson's Ranch was that Jack Steed who wrote the book [The Donner Party Rescue Site](#) and discovered the real location of Johnson's Ranch was there. This is on private land but Steed got the group into the area. The Turner's love of the emigrant trail took another turn when they bought a real covered wagon. Earl Mosier, who owned a John Deere dealership and a big farm south of Sacramento, had a late 1800s covered wagon for sale. It was an original wagon that was well kept and being pulled in parades and horse shows by Mosier's big black Percheron horses. Bruce bought the wagon, trailered it home to Concord, and began an extensive restoration.

Picture above is the trail marker at Big Bend at the bottom of the granite slab wagons were inched down. Left is Art Clark noting an Emigrant Trail sign at the top of Coldstream Pass. Picture to the left is by George Lamson



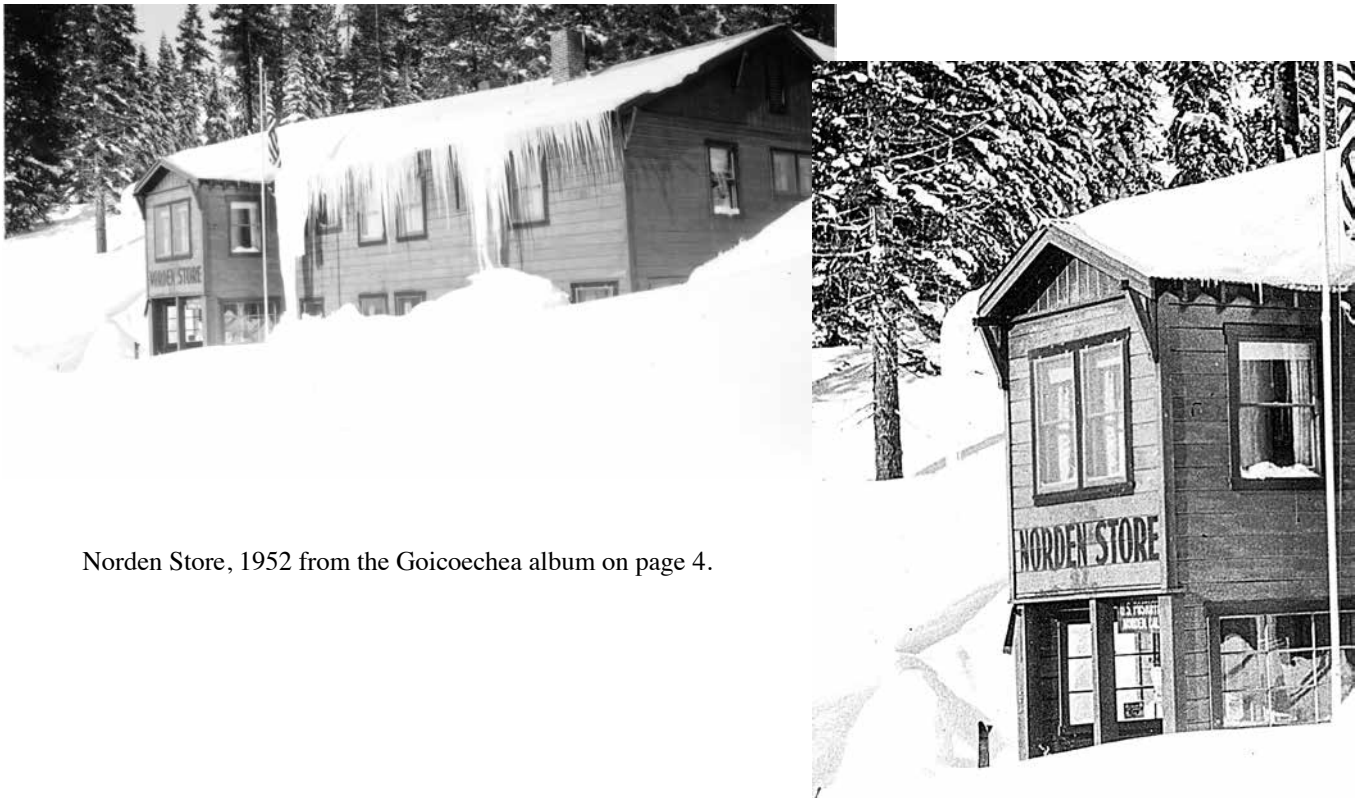
All modern fasteners and hardware were removed and replaced by black iron and hand forged pieces. Some wood pieces were replaced and a new canvas top was installed. A new custom trailer was made for it and chests, period cookware, clothing, tools, etc. were acquired to outfit the wagon. The wagon was on display at various historical events including Living History days at Sutter's Fort. For those of you that attended OCTA's National Convention at South Tahoe a couple of years ago the wagon sitting at the entrance to Harvey's Lake Tahoe Casino was this wagon.

Bruce was always coming up with ideas of a historical nature. He did much research at Donner Memorial State Park and worked closely with Gayle Green on their staff. Bruce wanted to rebuild the Murphy cabin up against the rock it originally sat on. He eventually convinced Gayle that it would be a good idea. In order to make the project look professional Bruce consulted an engineering company. He had plans, specifications, materials lists, cost analyses, feasibility studies, scheduling data, and architectural renderings done for the project. Slowly the project gained momentum and began climbing up the food chain seeking acceptance at each level. Finally in a Sacramento office the project was given a slow death.

Bruce was a great guy to be around, full of trail knowledge and a lot of fun. Unfortunately he had health issues and in March of 2009 he left us at age 56. His widow Barbara now lives in Reno but still has the cabin on the Old Wagon Road at Big Bend. So now you know who that guy was that put those round green markers up along the Truckee Route trail.

Howdy Hoover
Sacramento, CA

From the DSHS Archives



Norden Store, 1952 from the Goicoechea album on page 4.

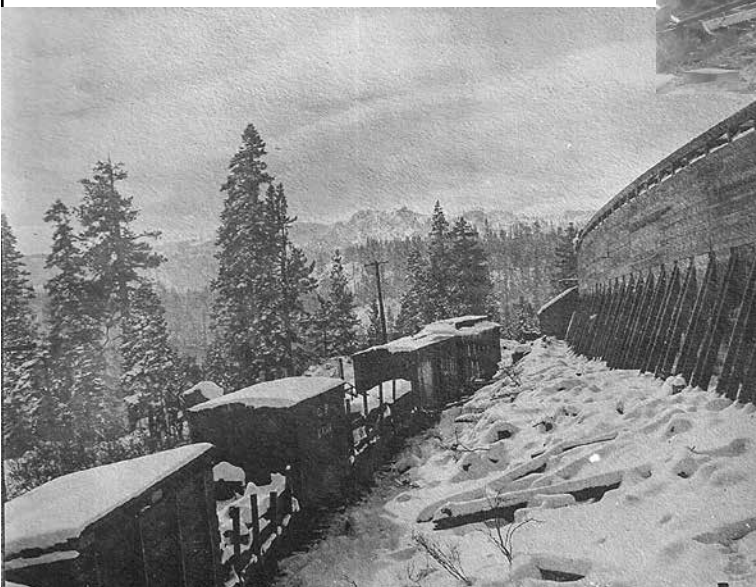
From the DSHS Archives

Actually these pictures come from an album the Truckee Donner Historical Society has and shared with the Donner Summit Historical Society. The album was found by Jeannine Karnofsky who was cleaning out the attic of an old house in Truckee. We don't know who the people were or what they did. The date of the pictures appears to be about the turn of the last century. We last saw other pictures from this album in the May, '18 [Heirloom](#)



Actually our [Heirloom's](#) Photographic Placement Team (PPT) had chosen other photographs for placement in this issue. Then it was noticed that three of the pictures in the TDHS album are of the same area taken months apart but presumably in the same year. They are widely spaced in the album bearing numbers 0002 (top), 0020 (middle), and 0043 (bottom).

Snowsheds burned regularly. They were also sometimes destroyed in train crashes (wait until next month). Here we have three photographs taken from approximately the same place showing three stages in the rebuilding of the snowsheds. This location is between Horseshoe Bend and Tunnel 41; looking towards Squaw Valley, just below Donner Summit.



Then & Now with Art Clark

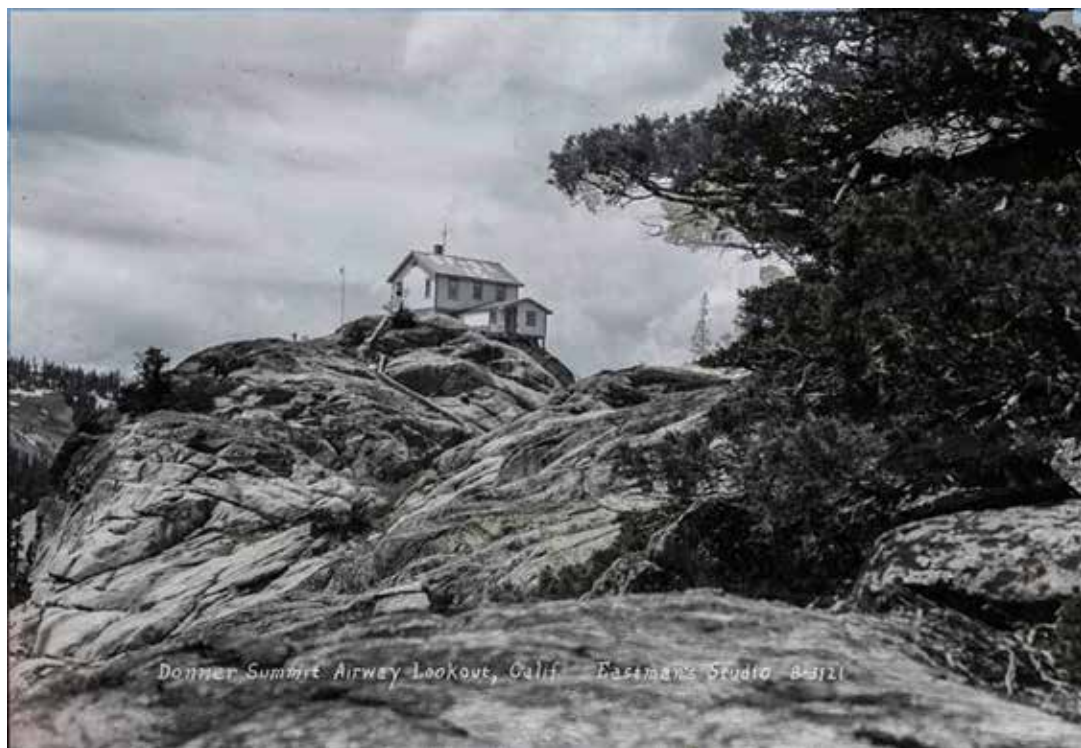


Here is the weather station that sat on Donner Summit just above the pass. Part of the first transcontinental air route, it provided information to pilots as well as served as a marker. The "15" on the roof was the 15th station from San Francisco and the "SF SL" told pilots San Francisco was in one direction and Salt Lake in the other.

You can see our 20 Mile Museum sign for the weather station at the pass, on our website or in the May, '11 [Heirloom](#). You can read about the first transcontinental air route in the July, '11 [Heirloom](#).

It's been a long time since we got a "Then & Now" from Art Clark. He's retired from the chase though after doing more than a hundred of them (see our website or [Heirloom](#) indices).

We were up on Donner Summit plotting out the Margie Powell illustrated hike in early June and carrying along some old photographs to use for illustration on the hike. Art could not help himself. He had to do a "now" of the weather station to the right to match the "then" we were carrying. We crawled all over and Art took photograph after photograph trying to line things up just right. He took his collection home and overlaid the various "now's" on the "then" looking for the best one. He wasn't satisfied and made another trip up. Finally he got the angle just right to satisfy his high standards.



You can see Art's work here of course but you may want to go to the site: N39° 19.105' W120° 19.436'. You have to admit he's pretty good at it. We of course appreciate his dedication.

Book Review

A Broken Propeller

Baz Bagby and America's First Transcontinental Air Race

2018 Betty Goerke 157 pages

Our research department came across newspaper articles about the first transcontinental air race which was held in 1919. "Transcontinental" always grabs the staff's attention because Donner Summit is the "host" of so many transcontinental crossings: the first wagons to get to California, the first highway, the first telephone line, the first air route, and of course, the first railroad. Feeling left out, the first transcontinental telegraph line left its route, over So. Lake Tahoe and to Placerville, to come up and join the others.

Diving past the headlines to the map of the first transcontinental air race showed that the route traveled over Donner Summit. Subsequent research showed that the pilots followed the transcontinental railroad from Omaha to San Francisco so that cinched it and led to the May, 2018 [Heirloom](#)'s article, "Flyers Cross Continent." We thought that was that.

Then regular reader Chuck Oldenburg weighed in with an email about a friend of his who had just written a whole book about the air race, [A Broken Propeller](#). Serendipity - and we're thankful for our readers.

There was a broken propeller in Betty Goerke's home when she grew up. It had followed the family from house to house. It was her father's propeller, from his participation in the air race. This book is about the air race which was the origin of the propeller.

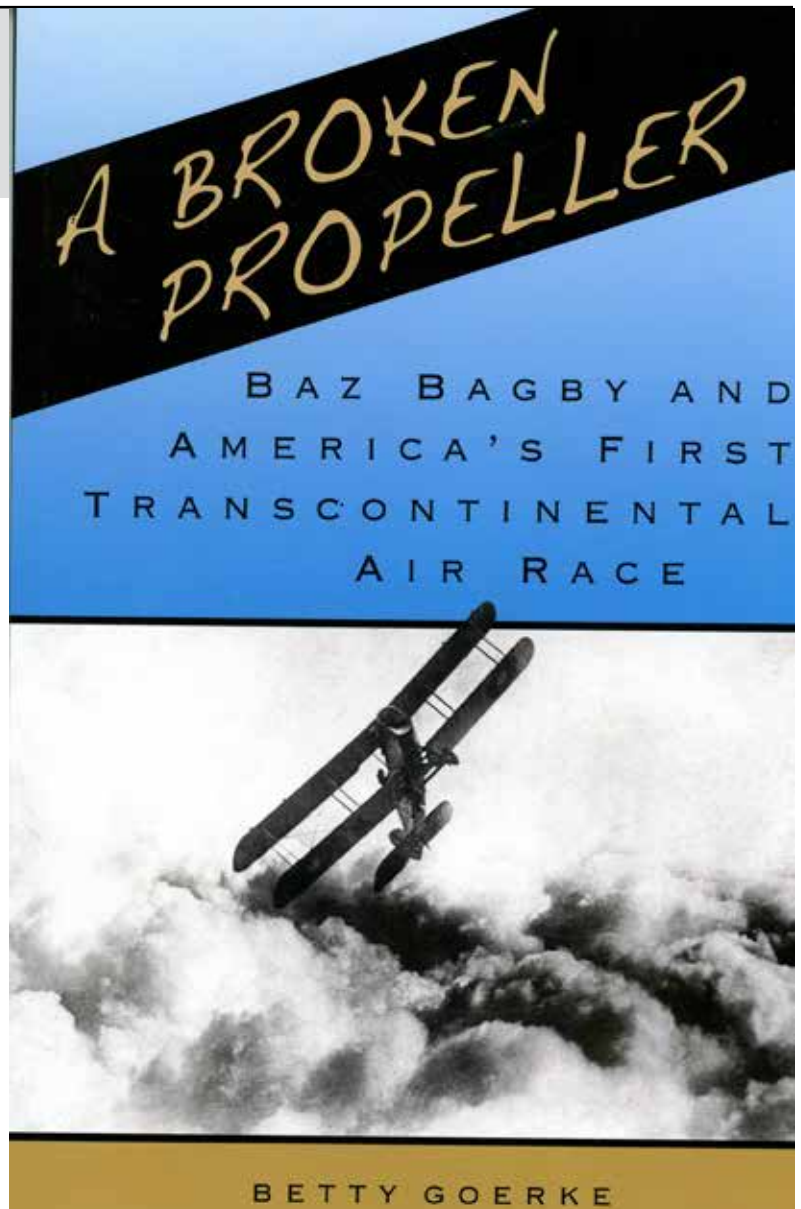


First we've got to cover Mr. Bagby, left. He must have been pretty amazing. He was a graduate of MIT, played professional baseball, had been a hobo, and had parachuted into France on D-Day while AWOL. You have to read the book for details - no "spoilers" here.

The first part of the book is a lot of background of the race: air pioneers and a quick history of flight; World War I and air power; Baz's war exploits and medals; the state of flying in those days; and then later, some information on the war: casualties, cavalry use, size of the air force, disease, etc.

Goerke also puts the race in the wider context of society by talking about suffrage, prohibition, race relations and lynching, the fear of Bolshevism, and the 1919 army truck convoy across the country which included Dwight Eisenhower.

General Billy Mitchell came up with the idea of the transcontinental air race as a way to show off the capabilities of the U.S. Army Air Service. He thought that another war was inevitable and that air power would play a key part. The race would serve to convince Congress that legislation to form an independent air force should pass.



On October 8, 1919 pilots took off from the two coasts from Long Island and from San Francisco. The object was to fly across the country and back. The race was covered by the press nationwide. Flying was still new and apparently captured the public's attention. There were crashes, missing planes, lost pilots, and deaths all of which the book details.

Baz Bagby had flown 111 missions in WWI and was co-pilot of the first race plane to disappear. By the time Bagby and his pilot had been reported missing they'd already had a forced landing due to bad weather and the plane was damaged.

Here Goerke provides a vivid description which shows how brave or foolhardy the early pioneers were.

The plane was in trouble and they had to make an emergency landing. Bagby was in the back seat and could see much better than the pilot, "...the farmer's field awash in mud. The rocking continued, even stronger, putting the plane and both men in additional peril. Baz crawled out of his cockpit and worked his way back along the fuselage toward the rudder so that his body would act as a counterweight to the nose of the plane. This desperate maneuver had already caused the deaths of two airmen en route from San Francisco... and that same day would kill another..." I had no idea they did things like that.

The race was actually titled the "Transcontinental Reliability and Endurance Test." Pilots flew across the country and some flew the return also. There were 21 required stops about 123 miles apart in order to fuel up and check planes. There was no flying on Sunday. The different models of planes were all open cockpit. The race was more difficult than just military flying since pilots landed at different air fields each night and had to take care of obtaining replacement parts and sometimes fixing their own planes. They carried no maps so from time to time pilots got lost.

After describing the rules and regulations of the race Goerke tells the back stories of some of the pilots and the stories of the race. There was the guy who was captured by the Germans twice and shot in the back once. He still escaped and went on to be an ace and be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. During the race one pilot was trapped in his plane. His co-pilot pulled him out and they continued flying in another plane even though the pilot had broken ribs. There was the plane stuck in the mud and which had to be pulled out and towed two miles by a locomotive.

Goerke reports on the litany of crashes, deaths, danger, rain, mud, mountains, and mechanical problems. She uses Bagby's

It was "flying on your nerve." "There is nothing like 100 miles of Sierra Nevada mountain peaks – with the possibility of being driven down by engine trouble, snow, fog, rain or a rip in the fabric – to keep you alert." There was no possibility of an emergency landing.

Major John Bartholf, 1919
First Transcontinental Air Race

own logs and letters. It's amazing that all that survived to tell the story. She also has clearly done a lot of research and the book is full of old photographs and quotes.

In the race to test reliability only eight of fifty-nine entries finished the round trip.

Seven men died during the race (along with another two on their ways to the race). There were fifty-four wrecks and many mechanical problems but the race did encourage the opening of a transcontinental air route for mail in 1920. That route, of course, included Donner Summit.

Instead of the good publicity Billy Mitchell was hoping for, the public focused on the accidents and deaths. There was a lot of bad publicity. Mayor LaGuardia of New York called the race, a "most pathetic display of selfish interests. The death toll in this race is beyond all expectation." The race clearly did not show flying as safe. Congress did not pass a bill forming an independent air service. That would wait a couple of decades.

The book ends with Billy Mitchell pushing to convince the nation of the effectiveness of air power. That new idea was disparaged at the time by the establishment but of course he was proved right. He was also proved right about another war and the danger of the Japanese.

"We landed in a muddy wheat field... There is a lot of danger the ship turning over in mud, so I crawled back on the tail as the Colonel landed it and although the tail came up a little the nose did not go over and we landed successfully. We got chow at a farmhouse... So many people came out to see the plane that one of us had to stand guard over it while the other slept."

Baz Bagby

Note:

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

Stop in at the DSHS. Norm Saylor 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

Art Clark, Mobile Historical Research Team member, "came across some shots from last summer [actually it was 2016 - it's just taken a while to get into the [Heirloom](#)] up above Big Bend next to the road up to Huysink Lake. Definite marks from the drill/feather/wedges on the edges. 39° 17.802'N 120° 31.874'W." So our photographic enhancement team (PET) enhanced the stone culvert roof to bring out the tool marks on the granite (bottom picture). The ones evident are from splitting the rock. Stone masons drove small drill holes into the rock then inserted wedges. Eventually after pounding each wedge the rock would split. How old this particular stone culvert is we don't know.



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 the 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

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

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

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



Pick up or download the brochure

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

Three New 20 Mile Museum Signs



In August we added three new 20 Mile Museum signs to our collection. One sits near the central shaft of Tunnel 6 and celebrates that (left). Take a look at our [Hekroom](#) indices for articles about and pictures of the shaft. The sign sits just beside and behind the shed building at the top of the pass. The second (bottom this page) sits on the granite knoll behind the "Summit Haus" building (formerly the Sugar Bowl Academy building and before that the ASI building) at the top of the pass. These two signs are part of the grant the Donner Summit Association received from Placer County to renovate the outside of the shed building to become a "trailhead of trailheads." Among the grant provisions is that the community match 10% of the County's funds. These two signs are the DSHS's contribution to that 10%.



The third sign, below, sits in "downtown" Soda Springs near the blinking light at the new glass gallery. It is about the original Soda Springs Station and describes where the original buildings were.

With these three signs we have 48 installed signs. The number would be 50 except that two were stolen earlier in the season. That was reported last month in the [Heirloom](#).

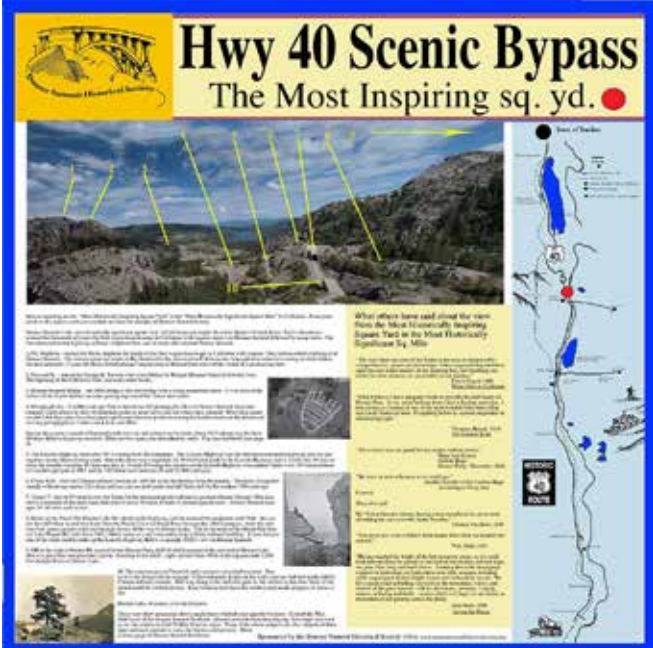
All three new signs are on our website in case you don't want to go searching in person.

This sign, left is a bit different from our other 47 signs (Or 49 if you count the stolen signs).

We all agree that Donner Summit is the most historically significant square mile in California and maybe the entire Western United States.* At the top of the knoll in the center of Donner Pass overlooking the pass we have the "most inspiring square yard" in the most historically significant square mile.

From this spot you oversee the rich history of the pass and so the sign points them all out forsaking the "good story" and "things to do" sections that all the other signs have.

*Native Americans crossed for thousands of years, the first wagon trains to California with wagons, the first transcontinental railroad, the first transcontinental highway, the first transcontinental air route, and the first transcontinental telephone line along with all the stories that go with those firsts.





Here we have B.J. Pierce delivering some 20 Mile Museum signs stands for our expansion in August. Two will replace the stolen signs. One will be for the "Knoll" (see previous page), and one is a double stand for the monument close to the freeway.

We couldn't do our work without help. If you have time to help or money or time to give, or artifacts and photographs to share, let us know.

We never stray into political issues but the steel for the stands above has doubled in price due to the tariffs recently implemented. Sometimes those large political issues affect humble (and poor) little historical societies.



Here to the left is our "Most Inspiring Sq. yd. sign installed. You can see it's a pretty spectacular or inspiring spot and ready for visitors.