



Donner Summit Historical Society

Issue #2 October, 2008

Newsletter

The purpose of the Donner Summit Historical Society is "to ... help the community learn the history of Donner Summit and the surrounding area, and to collect and display artifacts relative to the history..." (articles of incorporation, December, 2007). The historical society is a 501(c)3.

Donner Summit Service Stations (and then more inside)

For decades there has only been one gas station on Donner Summit and with the closing of the station on Soda Springs Rd. and Highway 80 there are, at this writing, none. That was not always the case as the pictures here show. At one time there were nine service stations on Donner Summit to gas and service the thousands of automobiles that crossed the Summit on Old Highway 40 every day.

Here are the nine service stations along with a few pictures and anecdotes.

The first service station sat at what is now the corner of Old 40 and Highway 80. Of course there was no Highway 80 in those days. It was a 76 station and built by Bill Vail.

Bill Vail "was quite a person in the [Donner Summit] community," says Norm Sayler. He was the man most responsible for the new water and sewer plant, now DSPUD, and also most responsible for the coming of the volunteer fire

department (now part of Truckee Fire District). He found the first fire engine at Standard Oil in the L.A. area and brought it to the Summit in the 1960's. Steve Lieberman and Norm Sayler were also integral to acquiring the engine.

Bill Vail also built the original chair lift at Sugar Bowl in the 1930's and managed DSPUD for years. He lived in what is now the "Always Inn" at the base of the Soda Springs Ski Hill and before that, above gas station number 7 below.



Station Two was at Donner Summit Lodge, pictured here with the "Standard Dealer" sign in front and the black car to the side. It was run by Bill Rutherford and Tony Donadeio.

Station Three sat where the Gates Building was on Old 40 and what is now Pomo Lane until it was torn down a few years ago. It was opened by Charlie Pratt and was called Pratt's Garage.

Station Four, the Crest Garage and Lodge, was next to Pratt's Garage. It burned down in 1957.

Just up the street where Tinker's Station is now (corner Old 40 and Lola Montez), was Station Five which was part of the Soda Springs Grocery and Soda Springs Post Office. That was just across the street from the current store and post office. That station is pictured here with a Gibson Lines bus in front. The Soda Springs Grocery was also the terminal for that bus line. It was run by Fran and Art Couillard. He was the postmaster for many years.

Virgil Jones ran Station Six just across from the Soda Springs Hotel which is now condominiums. Virgil was the son of Oscar Jones who built the hotel. His uncle Herschel built Rainbow Lodge. This was a Shell station.

Station Seven was also built by Bill Vail (see Station One above) and sat next to the Soda Springs

Station.

The Norden Store and Post Office hosted Station number Eight. This station was a Texaco station and was run by Herb and Lena Fredericks. Two pictures of this station are shown here, below and at the top of the next page. The back of one of the postcards mentions the Fredericks' unfulfilled plans for their station and store. Their 1938 plans for a two hundred room hotel may seem too ambitious but their business was a viable concern given all the traffic on Old 40. That is printed with the text on page 4. The station and store also sat across from the entrance to the Norden train station, the disembarkation point for all the skiers arriving by train (see our last issue for a picture and a little description). Note that in the picture of the Norden station that Old Highway 40 was concrete at that time. To pave it with concrete the highway department had moved all the traffic off of Old 40 and sent it down the old dirt road that had been the Lincoln Highway and now runs alongside Van Norden. Traffic left old 40 almost at the very top and rejoined old 40 after going through what is now the Soda Springs Ski Hill parking lot and linking up at the Donner Summit Lodge.

The final station, Station number Nine sat in the garage of the Magic Carpet at Sugar Bowl. It was a Standard station and did serve gas to customers. It was called the Magic Carpet Garage.

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Good story to go with Gas Stations:

“Hootin Scootin,” Ralph Rowton, was the owner of gas station number seven, right at the corner of Soda Springs Rd. and Old 40.



Norm Saylor, as you know from our last issue, worked the ski hill in Soda Springs. He was at the top using his binoculars one day and he saw a cattle truck go off the road on Old 40 about where the Snow Lab is today. The truck kept going but three cattle fell out.

Norm called Milt Hogle, Soda Springs Ski Hill owner, and told him to call “Hootin Scootin” at the Rowton Garage. Then, since there were no skiers on the hill, Norm skied down to the gas station.

“Hootin” took the tow truck up to where the cows had dropped off the truck. Two were dead and one “was still kind of hollerin’.” Ralph took a .38 pistol out of his tow truck and asked the cattle truck driver, who’d returned, if he should shoot the beast. The driver agreed and the cow was soon

dispatched. Then the driver asked, “Do you want the cows?”

Rowton said yes. “We picked up the first one with his tow truck” and took it to the service station where it was raised up on the old lift and hung. “Hootin” returned for the other two cows and all three were then hanging from the car lift in the gas station’s garage. The next two days were spent butchering the cows in the gas station. Many people came to help and the meat was given to the community.

“Hootin’ Scootin” was an old time cowboy who came from a ranch in Nevada to work on Donner Summit.

Another story that doesn’t really have to do with gas stations but is fun anyway.

Norm Saylor was again at his post on the Soda Springs Ski Hill when he saw a motorcyclist have an accident. He raced down to see if the guy was alright. Although the rider was “lying there...blood all over,” he wasn’t hurt badly. So Norm asked him if he still wanted the motorcycle. The guy stuttered a bit so Norm said, “I’ll give you \$50 for it.

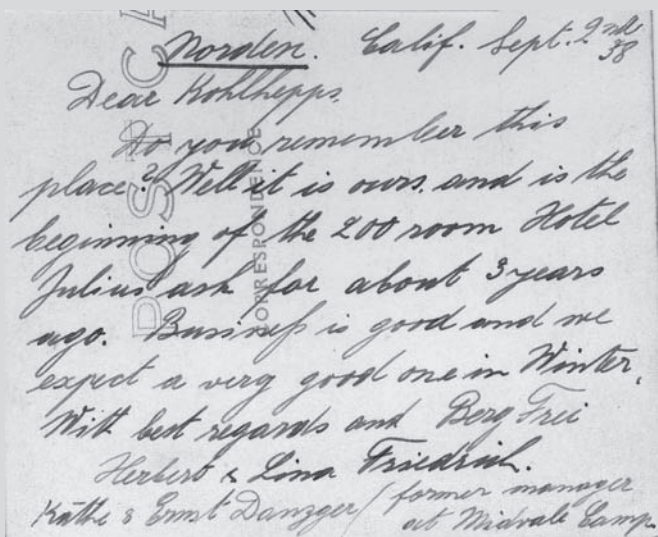
That started Norm’s love of motorcycles that, of course, eventually had him hosting motorcycle races at the Donner Ski Ranch. The motorcycle, by the way, was a 1945 Harley VL which was ten years old. Details are important to historians.

Norm took the motorcycle to where the Always Inn stands today at the base of the ski hill, where the Bueks lived (see our last issue). Dick Buek was there. “I got this motorcycle...I need help,” said Norm. They put the motorcycle into Norm’s pickup and took it up to “Old” Tony Girard the Southern Pacific blacksmith who was across from the Donner Ski Ranch because the front end was bent.

“Old” Tony, chewing and spitting tobacco, came out to look at the bike. “I’ll have it fixed tomorrow.” The next day Norm was riding his “new” motorcycle.

Donner Summit was a close knit community in the 1950’s. People worked together and helped each other.

As an aside, because historians like those too, “Old” Tony Girard was old in 1955. He had run the first “tow truck” on Donner Summit in the early days of the twentieth century. It wasn’t a modern tow truck, since it was powered by horses.



Here printed is the back of the postcard mentioned at the bottom of page two. Errors are the writer's.

Dear Kohlhepps,

Do you remember this place? Well it is ours and is the beginning of the 200 room Hotel Julius ask for about 3 years ago. Business is good and we expect a very good one in Winter.

With best regards and Berg Frei

Herbert and Lina Friedrich

Historical Society Website

The Donner Summit Historical Society's website is now up:
www.donnnersummithistoricalsociety.org

pictures maps
stories information
links archives
our dream
Be patient: we're just starting.

Historical Society Needs

Participate in the historical society and help save Donner Summit history for the future:

We need

1. someone to convert 8mm movies to DVD and a device to view 8mm films
2. publicity person
3. fundraiser
4. grant writer
5. online store operator
6. coordinator of local community information, contacts, and research - to follow leads to information.
7. pictures of the Kit Kat Club in Kingvale and the Crest Garage and Lodge in Soda Springs
8. office work and cataloger

Society Newsletter

Free

Free monthly digital historical society newsletters: stories and pictures. Subscribe at:
info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org



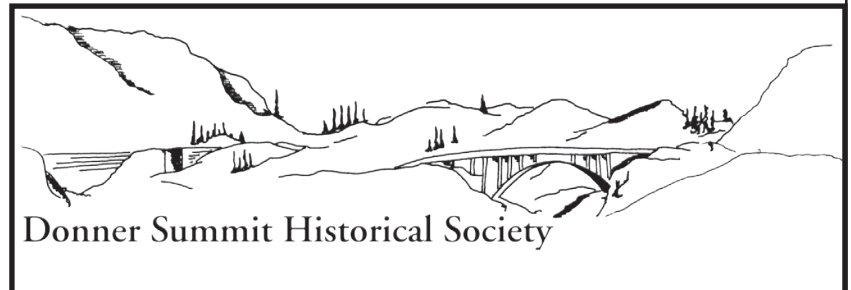
Letterhead Inspiration

Our letterhead, reduced below right, is a great example of why an historical society for Donner Summit is so appropriate. The picture above shows four historical spots on Donner Summit in one panorama. From left to right there is the Chinese Wall, a ravine of fill constructed by the Chinese workers on the Transcontinental railroad; the tunnel for the railroad; Rainbow Bridge, the 1923 bridge for the transcontinental highway; and Mt. Stephens, named for the first wagon train across Donner Summit in 1844. Ironically the Stephens Party wagon train crossed the Sierra without their wagons, having left them at Donner Lake. Schallenburger Ridge is named after a 17 year old in their party – but that’s another story.

Those historical spots are obvious but there are others as well. Just behind Rainbow Bridge is a granite surface covered with petroglyphs made by Native Americans thousands of years ago (see the petroglyph story on the historical stories page of our website donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)

How does one make such a panoramic picture? You have to drive and hike all over looking for just the right perspective. That’s not so easy. You have to try different views.

The best place is just across the canyon but unfortunately that’s the freeway. I drove up and down a few times and then got up early for the morning light and less traffic. Driving back up from Truckee looking for just the right place, I found a convenient old construction trail. I pulled over and backed down and then set off on foot over the hill. I was still too far away from an optimal view though. I got back in the car and drove further up the highway. Pulling over, I scrambled up the almost vertical loose rocks above the passing cars. I discovered I needed a tripod, so back down the face and back up again. Finally I took a couple of pictures that would overlap and then put them together into one panorama in Photoshop.



Help build a Donner Summit historical museum:

Help us achieve our long term goal: a museum on Donner Summit:
Contribute to the Donner Summit Historical Society, a 501(c)3 organization.

Purchase our first reprint, a copy of the Army and Navy Club brochure circa 1935 with pictures of the Summit and the proposed club for Army and Navy personnel. This is a limited printing reproduction of the original brochure. Only 100 will be printed. Go the store on our website - www.donnnersummithistoricalsociety.org

Our First Acquisitions

Some day we will have a Donner Summit museum and there will be displays. We have Norm Saylor's huge archive of historical photographs and documents that he's accumulated over years of searching, cajoling, and gathering. We also have promises of historical equipment, machinery, and artifacts, but we actually took possession of our first artifacts in August (2008).

Stu Treon has been in Serene Lakes on Donner Summit for many decades. His wife's family, the Wallins, had been coming to Serene Lakes even before there were houses, camping at what was called the Sierra Lakes Club. His father-in-law, Fred Wallin, on one of his explorations along the old emigrant trails, found half of an ox shoe among other things. Ox shoes protected ox hooves of course, and come in two parts as opposed to horseshoes which come in one part. Oxen were preferred for use on wagon trains; few trains were pulled by horses. Oxen were also used in the lumber industry which was extensive on Donner Summit. Stu Treon has donated his half of an ox shoe to the Donner Summit Historical Society. It's pictured to the right.



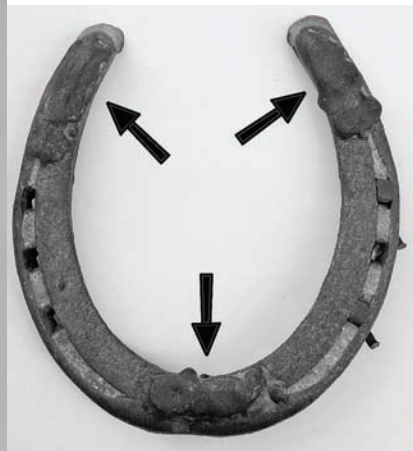
Since we have half of a shoe, pictured here, I thought it would be good to get a picture of a whole shoe, in place preferably. Well there are no oxen near Donner Summit. Strangely though, there are also no ox shoes. The Donner State Park museum has no ox shoes. Next I tried Big Bend. There are no shoes there either – on display. So, first, our historical society has for our first artifact what no one else has – on display.

Phil Sexton, ranger at Big Bend, said that even though they didn't have an ox shoe on display, there may be one in the "archives." We took a quick trip over to the "archives" where there was none of the rigmarole big museums have, such as wearing cotton gloves before handling artifacts. Phil rooted among boxes. Ah, here's a heavy one, he said, pulling out a box with "iron" on the side. After awhile, half an ox shoe appeared, but only half. A little PhotoShop magic gives us the pictured full shoe to the left.



Margie Powell, society treasurer, received from Stu a huge horseshoe as well pictured below. It must have belonged to a large draft animal. This shoe is not just a normal horseshoe however. It has lumps of metal welded to it

to give its owner traction in the snow. You can see the lumps in the picture here where the arrows are: primitive snow chains for the vehicles of the time.



This is just the second of our stories about Donner Summit history. There will be more – regularly, but we could also use your help. If you have information, stories about chasing girls or boys on Donner Summit, if you have memorabilia, if you can help bring Donner Summit history alive, or you just want to call Norm Saylor a liar, let us know: contact the webmaster at donnersummithistoricalsociety.org.



Rainbow Post Card

This 1930's card from Norm Saylor's collection just looked like it would be fun to put in here along with the back so you can see the old prices.

Rainbow Tavern

... The exclusive summer and winter resort of the High Sierras
 Schedule of Winter Rates
 December 1st to April 1st

American Plan. All rates are for 24 hours, Meals Included
 Room without bath — Single \$6.00, Double \$10.00 per day.

Room with shower but not private toilets— Single \$6.50, Double \$11.00 per day.

Room with shower but not private toilets— Twin Beds—\$12.00 per day.

Room with private bath, tub or shower and toilets, Double or Twin Beds—\$6.50 each for two persons, \$18.00 for three persons or \$22.00 for Four.

No reduction for meals not consumed.

Phone (ask for Rainbow Tavern, long distance) or write Rainbow Tavern, Soda Springs Post Office, Calif.

Make your reservations early for your outing in the snow, and meet your friends here.



Just for Fun - Where Is It?

This will become a regular feature of our Donner Summit Historical Society newsletters. This one is quite easy. Figure out where on the Summit this picture was taken. The answer will be in our next issue although if you are really curious, you can call Norm Saylor at 530-426-3376.

Ads

If you would like to place an ad in our newsletter, business card or quarter page size, please contact us at info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org.

We reserve the right to refuse ads.

Next Issue:

Our next issue will have lots of pictures from the terrible winter of 1951-52 when the train, the City of San Francisco, was stuck for three days and the highways were completely closed. The pictures came serendipitously from someone in Kingvale. Also: The first house in Kingvale. The old days on Donner Summit. Misc. history. Etc. You won't want to miss it. Tell your friends to sign up for free digital newsletters.

DSHS is growing:

More than 100 people have signed up for free monthly digital newsletters. If you have friends interested in Donner Summit history, have them sign up. If you have historical materials sitting around gathering dust, share them by contacting us: info@donnersummithistoricalociety.org

Imagine, Donner Summit: 1882

This is from History of Placer County, California (1882 edition) available in the 900's section of the library,

"Among the wild animals of the high Sierra are four distinct varieties of bear - cinnamon, brown, black, and an occasional grizzly. The black bear invariably has a white spot about the size of a man's hand on the breast. The cinnamon differs from the brown bear in that it has a longer and differently shaped head, and next to the grizzly, is more dangerous to attack than the black or brown [someone would be that crazy?! - ed.] Trappers in the mountains number among their captures the following fur-bearers: fishers, pine martin, mink, otter, and black, red, silver-gray and cross fox; muskrats have also been caught in the Truckee River.

To the larger game may be added, deer, gray squirrel, grouse, and mountain quail, in the high Sierra; valley quail, doves, and wild pigeons, in the foot-hills and valleys. When the region was first occupied herds of antelope, numbering thousands in a body, fed on the plains, and elk, and deer, and coyotes were quite plentiful, and all the streams abounded in fish. Now the game is confined to the mountain, and mining has driven the fish from the rivers."

JACOB HOEHN,

Dealer in

ICE, COAL AND MINERAL WATER,

OFFICE, 149 I STREET,

Between Fifth and Sixth streets, Sacramento

AGENT FOR

SUMMIT ICE COMPANY,

Summit Mineral Water, and

ROCKY MOUNTAIN COAL COMPANY.

The ad above is for the Summit Ice Co. which was the ice company in Ice Lakes for two years. Jacob Hoehn was one of the partners in the ice company that lasted only a couple of years on Donner Summit before moving down to Truckee. For the full story see our website: <http://www.donnersummithistoricalociety.org/pages/historystoriesetc.html>.

TRUCKEE TAHOE STAGE LINE

J. F. MOODY, PROPRIETOR.

*Carrying U. S. Mail and Wells, Fargo & Co's
Express.*

Stages leave Truckee for Tahoe Every Morning, making close connection at Tahoe City for McKinney's, Tallack, Rowland's, Glenbrook, and other points on the lake, thus enabling passengers to make the trip around the lake and return to Truckee in ONE DAY.

The Most Romantic Route on the Coast.

*Private Conveyances, with or without Drivers, for
Tahoe, Webber and Independence Lakes, and
Sierra Valley. Furnished if Desired.*

Donner Summit Museum



Although the historical society has a large treasure trove of materials collected from people on and off Donner Summit and from Norm Sayler's expeditions to EBay, the state of the archives is in trouble as you can see in the picture to the left. We need to do something about preserving and displaying the materials so people can enjoy them. One very large goal of the historical society is to build a museum on Donner Summit, but not just any museum, but a museum, community, and educational facility. Wouldn't it be great if it included a train station as well? Help the Society with its goals and save our archives.

Norm Sayler, founder and president of the historical society, in the Donner Summit Historical Society archives.



Lincoln Highway

PBS will be broadcasting a special about the Lincoln Highway on October 29 (check local listings - on Sacramento channel 6 - 8 PM). Since the Lincoln Highway goes up and over Donner Summit and since we'll be writing about the Rainbow Bridge two issues from now, we thought you'd like to know.

22 Left 1935 Army Navy Club Brochure Reproduction

1935 Brochure for the Army Navy Club at Ice Lakes (24" X 36") is available for \$150.00.

You can see our ad and some pictures reproduced from it at our website: <http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/PDF's/newsletters/advertarmynavy.pdf>

Winners

Robert and Nancy Link on Serene Rd in Serene Lakes are the lucky winners in a drawing held in the busy Donner Spitz offices of Norm Saylor. He laid out slips of paper for his many snow clearing clients and then an unbiased observer drew one lucky name. Robert and Nancy Link were chosen and their entire driveway clearing fee for the winter has been donated to the Donner Summit Historical Society in their name by Norm Saylor.

Placer County Courthouse Museum Film Exhibit

Donner Summit is featured at a soon to be unveiled exhibit at the Placer County Courthouse Museum in Old Town Auburn to open in late October. The exhibit, part of the ongoing series "History on the Go" highlights the locations of four notable films shot in Placer County, a bit of background on each, and where they were shot.

Charlie Chaplin's "The Gold Rush" shot in 1924 and released in 1925 was shot in the mountains that we know today as Sugar Bowl Ski Resort near Roller Pass and the Immigrant Trail. The most famous scenes from this masterpiece re-enacted the climbing of the treacherous Chilkoot Pass. Those 1000's eager to reach the Alaskan goldfields in 1896 had to repeatedly climb the ice chopped steps ferrying their personal belongings in stages up the icy slopes.

The exhibit offers a brochure with a map for the museum visitor inviting them to explore these locations on their own. The museum also has plans to show each of the selected films during the upcoming year in various venues in Auburn. Several winters ago the son and grandson of the cinematographer, and a Chaplin historian were escorted by Sugar Bowl officials to some of these remote stretches that are not open to the public in the winter time.

Beverly Lewis

Another Acquisition:

Dennis Drew has donated a large file of information and pictures of one of the original Soda Springs cabins. Built in the 1930's by Dr. Reynolds the cabin, which sits in the woods north of the blinking light, had tennis courts and a swimming pool.

The inside had many murals and small paintings. All but one of the murals was painted over during WWII because of their Bavarian style and the fear of prejudice. The swimming pool and tennis courts are still there but require some careful looking to find. At some point you can expect articles and pictures. If you have old equipment, brochures, pictures, stories, let us know.

Movie Making in old Truckee,

This is from History of Placer County, California (1924 edition) available in the 900's section of the library and serves as a warm up for an article coming in the future from Beverly Lewis about movie making on Donner Summit.

"Truckee, a lively railroad town, is three miles from the lake, located on the Truckee River. The deep snows of this place enable it to reproduce many an Alaskan and Canadian scene, with its sleds, huskies and long-lashed whips, whose snap one fancies he can almost hear.

Hollywood beauties, in their long fur coats and moccasins, look half willing to be run away with by some fur-capped voyageur who looks suspiciously like a Boca ice-cutter.

Those fur-capped voyageurs, we admit, are good actors, as they dash down and across the Truckee River in their canoes, on their errand of love or murder. That great ocean steamer, as it swings up to the long wharf and unloads its Alaskan passengers, looks much like the main steamer of a certain transportation company that makes daily trips around the top of the world at an elevation of 6225 feet [there did indeed used to be a steamer on Donner Lake - ed].

All of which goes to prove what a wonderful county we have, reeling off an Alaskan drama, snow, dogs, sleds, voyageurs, fur caps and overcoats, ocean steamers, Hollywood beauties, moccasins and all." pages 220-221 [The Gold Rush starring Chaplin Chaplin was made in Truckee in 1925]