



Donner Summit Historical Society

January, 2011 issue #29

Newsletter

Caricatures from the 40's

This story started in one direction but then went in another. One day we are going to do a series of articles on Donner Summit art and artists because Donner Summit was the subject for many famous artists and photographers (take a look at some of the photographs in our November edition to see some views they painted). Among the artists are some you have heard of like Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran and many more you haven't like Norton Bush and William Keith. They painted the peaks and lakes and Soda Springs. Photographers like Eadweard Muybridge and Alfred S. Hart also came to the Summit to photograph. Muybridge did pictures of the natural beauties and Hart was a railroad photographer. But that's all to come in the future. We're working on getting permission to use digital representations of paintings in our newsletter.

If you have any information about Summit artists we could add to our research we'd sure appreciate hearing about it. And if you own any originals.....

We'd heard that after a day's skiing in the old days, people went to the public spots on the Summit to socialize. Sometimes there were caricaturists who, for a fee, would draw caricatures. Unfortunately we couldn't find any surviving caricatures done in that way. People took them home. We did find the cartoons printed here which are in the Starr Walton Hurley Collection and in Bill Klein's collection. Bill Klein was featured in our 11/09 newsletter. He was one of the pioneers of modern skiing and ran the Sugar Bowl ski school and ski shop for many years. The caricature to the right was done by "Snuffy" O'Neil and shows Bill on skis. On page three is another of "Snuffy's" cartoons. "Snuffy" was in the 10th Mountain Division along with Bill Klein during World War II.



Eric Johnson is the artist who did the set of cartoons beginning on page three. You can see larger versions in a special gallery on our website. Eric was on the Summit in the 40's, 50's, and early 60's before heading off to Dodge Ridge to be manager there. He was a ski instructor, ski racer, ski reporter for KGO, and newspaper ski columnist. That was his Summit life. He was also a graphic artist and for a time, had an ad agency in the Bay Area.

Stan "Bud" and Madelyn Walton started the Donner Ski Ranch in 1946 with the Chuck Wagon building you can see here. They'd gotten the money from Herstle Jones, Madelyn's uncle who built

go to page three

Art Clark Is Still Looking

You will remember that last month we ran a story about Sierra Ski Ways, the Forest Service ski trails in the 1930's. Art Clark has been scouring the Summit area for old ski trail signs. Just a couple of weeks ago he was up on Red Mountain and found a couple of signs. About the one here, Art says, "I had seen that little sign a few years back

(2005?) and never got a picture of it until yesterday. Can't help but wonder who placed it and when. It's not far off the PCT in a little group of old trees, and nearby were two wooden Skiway markers."

If you have any knowledge of it or others like it, let us know. Wouldn't it be fun to re-establish one or more of the old trails?

If you missed the story, the December newsletter is in our newsletter archives on our website and information about the Sierra Ski Ways is also on our website.

You can reach Art Clark at clarkaw@syix.com



reproduction sign to remark the Sierra Skiway - Art Clark

Sierra Sun 6/6/40

Telephoning Seems So Friendly

The service itself is friendly. The operators always have time to say 'please' and 'thank you.' And the act of telephoning is friendly. It is a personal way of reaching others at short distance or long.

**Pacific Telephone and Telegraph
Commercial Row
Telephone Truckee 50**

editor:
Bill Oudegeest
209-606-6859
info@donnersummithistoricalociety.com

Rainbow Lodge and Nyack Lodge (Oscar Jones built the Soda Springs Hotel). That's "Bud" out in front on page 5. Bud ran the operation and Madelyn ran the restaurant where she cooked hamburgers and chili on a big oil fired stove, according to the daughter, Starr (see Starr's story of the Silver Belt in the 12/09 newsletter). That Chuck Wagon building still stands. If you look at Donner Ski Ranch's current lodge, there is a road to the right. The second building is what was the Chuck Wagon.

1940's Apre Skiing

In 1946 skiing was in its infancy. Many people skied on WWII surplus equipment. Skiing was different in those days and not just because of equipment, technique, and how people got up the hills. In those days people stayed in lodges with mostly dormitory arrangements for sleeping. You've seen the lodges: Clair Tappaan, Heidelman, Cal, Hutchinson. They still attract skiers. You've seen or heard of the ski Clubs: Oakland, Viking, Peninsula, and Travis. Across from the Ski Ranch today is also a building that was Vanderford's, a privately owned lodge.

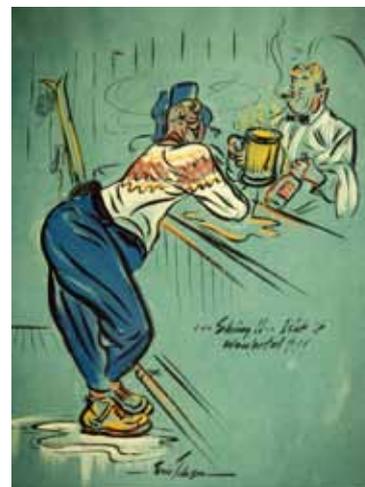
After a day of skiing people would head for local congregating places to socialize. "There was dancing....Skiing was social at that time. People hung around more... people knew everyone" says Starr Walton. Today of course, people ski lots more runs getting up the hills on high speed quads, maybe get more tired, and then head home in their 4 wheel drives on I-80 or head to their second homes. The many places people used to go to socialize are not open in the evening or not open at all: The Ranch, Soda Springs Hotel, Beacon Hill Lodge, etc.

It was harder to get off the Summit in those days. Old 40 was a two lane road, clearing was not as good as today and everyone had chains on their cars. If you were lucky you got behind the snowplow and got a "wonderful track" to drive on, as Starr describes it. No one went faster than the slowest driver. Imagine the frustration!

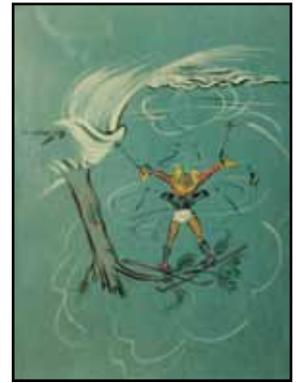
The Ranch was a "hot" place in those days. They were ahead in the ski business installing the second T bar in California (the first was in Yosemite). In the evenings the lodge was the place to go. There was dancing, singing, and drinking of course. There was a jukebox and a slot machine and a "beautiful bar."



the letterhead on Snuffy's cartoon above refers to Camp Hale, the 10th Mountain Division's training camp in Colorado where many Donner Summit skiers did their military training for WWII.

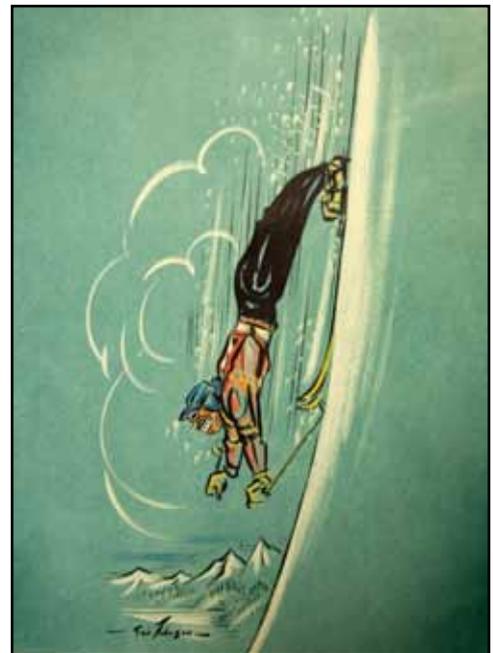


Eric Johnson loved skiing and hung out on the Summit. He was known for his artwork and so Madelyn engaged him to decorate the knotty pine covered walls of the Chuck Wagon. Eric went to work and “drew what he saw on the mountain....the antics he saw.” From these illustrations you can get an idea of skiing and apre-skiing in the 1940's.



When the current Ranch lodge was built in 1949-50 the artwork migrated over and later to Starr's home after her parents sold the Ranch.

The Waltons lived on the top floor of the current lodge building. Later they would also own, again, one of the stone buildings across from the Soda Springs Hotel, but those buildings, built for sheepherding in the 30's, are another story for another newsletter (something you can look forward to).





The Chuck Wagon at Donner Ski Ranch - the first building of the current "ranch" where Madelyn ran the restaurant and cooked hamburgers and chili on a big oil fired stove.



Eric Johnson, cartoonist, wasn't always cartooning. He was an avid skier and loved Donner Summit.



Stan "Bud" Walton built Donner Ski Ranch with his wife with support from his uncle in law, Herstle Jones who built Rainbow Lodge and Nyack Lodge. Herstle's brother, Oscar, built the Soda Springs Hotel.

Donner Summit, 1940

January 18, 1940 Sierra Sun

“Fully 5000 automobiles crowded the three mile stretch of Highway 40 between Soda Springs... and Donner Summit Sunday in the greatest single day movement of traffic ever observed in this section. Two State highway patrolmen were kept busy for ten hours conveying single lines of traffic over the three miles for ten hours of the day.”

“Augmenting the many thousand who came by cars, the Southern Pacific ran a special train from San Francisco which carried many winter sports enthusiasts so the snow.”



“...The weekend was the first this year that afforded fans an opportunity to ‘strut their stuff.’ [Indeed, Sugar Bowl had not been able to open for its inauguration as planned the month before due to lack of snow.]

"All resorts in the region from the new Sugar Bowl to the smallest service station were doing a capacity business...."

Headlines One week later...

“New Record set as 15,000 Enjoy Summit Sports

“...more than 15000 fans congregated on Donner Summit last Sunday to frolic in the ideal snow and enjoy the exhilarating atmosphere” January 25, 1940

Have No Doubts of Popularity of Summit

Cars were double parked on both sides of the highway for three miles. Southern Pacific ran 406 trains daily. Ski huts



[Berkeley Ski Hut, Norden Ski Hut, Southern Pacific Ski Hut] were popular and inadequate to handle huge crowds. “...toboggan sled was popular to those sports fans...the snow mobiles were taxed to capacity from early morning to late at night. More additions are prospects for next year. It is authoritatively reported that one or two new highway hotels are to be erected in the early summer.” February 15, 1940 pg 2

Given the popularity, one can imagine that the roads were more crowded than the pictures here show. Imagine keeping the roads clear of snow and imagine digging your car out over and over and over.

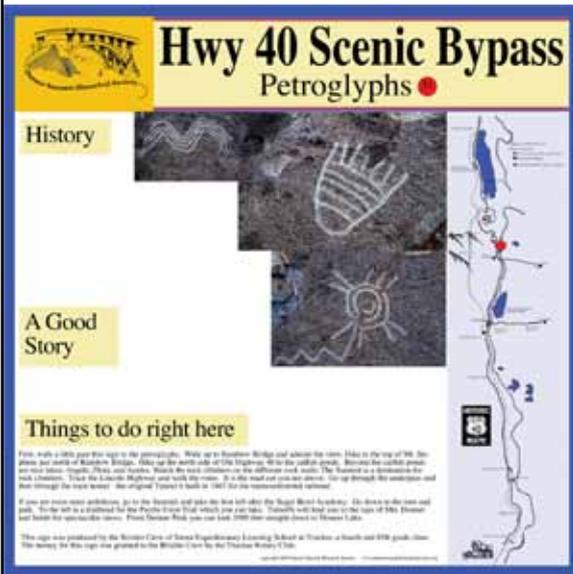
Brisbin Crew Joins 20 Mile Museum

The 20 Mile Museum, extending from the Eagle Lakes exit from I-80 to below Rainbow Bridge below Donner Summit on Old Highway 40 has become a well-visited visitor amenity on Donner Summit. If you have not seen the interpretive signs, now stored for the winter to protect against high snow and sign crunching snowblowers, you can see the signs on our website on the 20 Mile Museum page. Next June you will be able to see them in person again, re-installed and re-produced in a new process with brilliant color and ten year guarantee.

The Sierra Expeditionary Learning School is a Truckee Unified School District charter school, initiated by some district parents. The school is in its first year this year. Students are admitted through a lottery. Our historical society had the



pleasure of meeting some of the students some months ago. Julie Brisbin's fourth and fifth grade class was looking for an "expedition" for the Fall semester tied to their social studies curriculum. They were looking for active applied learning (as opposed to the standard reliance on textbooks) having to do with history, hence Mrs. Brisbin's contacting the Historical Society.



The 20 Mile Museum seemed like a good starting place. Each sign interprets an aspect of Donner Summit history and includes a good story and activities to do in each spot. It's a good family activity. The first 26 signs, put into place during the summer of 2010, proved popular and the idea of adding to the list for 2011 was attractive first to Mrs. Brisbin, and then to her charges. They chose to work on a petroglyph sign to be placed near the Donner Summit petroglyphs on Old 40 just below Rainbow Bridge.

Deciding to participate, the class began studying petroglyphs, Native Americans, and Donner Summit. The kids made a number of field trips to the Summit to see the Historical Society's museum in Soda Springs, the petroglyphs on Donner Summit, some of the 20 Mile Museum (to learn for example about ice harvesting at Ice Lakes and wagon trains), and then to spend an overnight to Long Lake.



They are an enthusiastic and bright group and Mrs. Brisbin is an inspiration in a time when the public seems to have declared open season on teachers and schools. Elementary teachers have a tough job, dealing with so many individuals and their needs, dealing with kid behavior, while delivering a rich curriculum. Mrs. Brisbin does it with aplomb. The class dove in to the project which included making a presentation to the Truckee Rotary Club to pay for the sign's production from the class' text and chosen pictures.



The sign is not the end of the project however. The class is producing a book about the 20 Mile Museum: activities for kids by kids which will be a nice addition for visitors next year. The book is a compendium of puzzles, each puzzle focused on

By Kaya Wooley

Charlie Chaplin's Gold Rush

Find these words in the puzzle below:

Gold Rush Charlie Boiled Shoe Little Tramp Chaplin Big Jim

C	H	A	R	L	I	C	E	C	H	A	P	L	I
B	N	M	A	D	E	H	S	T	L	F	N	V	M
O	P	O	V	E	A	S	T	N	O	N	T	O	
L	M	O	L	D	R	U	S	H	F	B	H	I	
L	A	S	M	O	V	L	I	F	S	I	H	E	A
E	R	T	E	H	J	I	S	S	G	H	O	T	M
D	T	A	D	E	O	E	U	T	O	F	L	I	
S	E	C	O	B	I	C	I	E	F	D	J	H	D
H	L	D	E	O	M	M	G	F	L	T	N	N	
O	T	S	L	P	D	O	J	S	J	M	G	S	K
F	T	J	K	F	C	H	A	P	L	I	N	T	G
V	I	K	H	N	A	A	O	T	T	E	G	T	F

After finding all the words, read the message left behind!

(-----) (random letters after this)

Draw a line between related items:

- Charlie: Hat
- Gold: Hall Girl
- Little: Millions
- Silver: Nails
- Licorice: Bowl
- Denise: Chaplin
- Dinner: Rush
- Sugar: Tramp
- Big: Boots

Unscramble the words below:

- hancpl: _____
- "dghsra": _____
- Setlnoievm: _____

a different 20 Mile Museum sign. you can see two examples here.

In December they had pretty much completed their sign which you can see on the previous page and which will be installed when the snow melts. Students voted on the pictures to include and voted on the layout. The text will be added when it's finalized and will include the history and a Washoe creation story.

Pictured here too are some of the interesting characters in Julie Brisbin's Brisbin Crew at the Sierra Expeditionary Learning School. On this page are two puzzles, one about the Charlie Chaplin interpretive sign by fourth graders Kaya Wooley (top) and Monique Fellow (below).

Soda Springs Store

By Monique

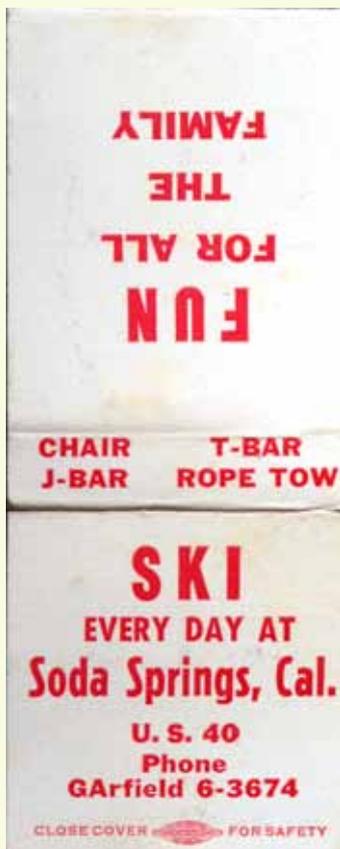
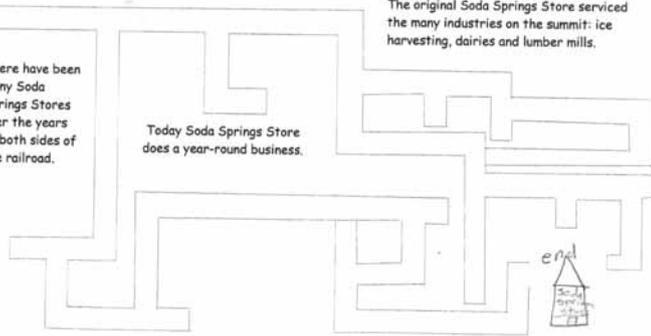
Oh-nol Somebody needs help finding the Soda Springs Store.
Help that person find the store!



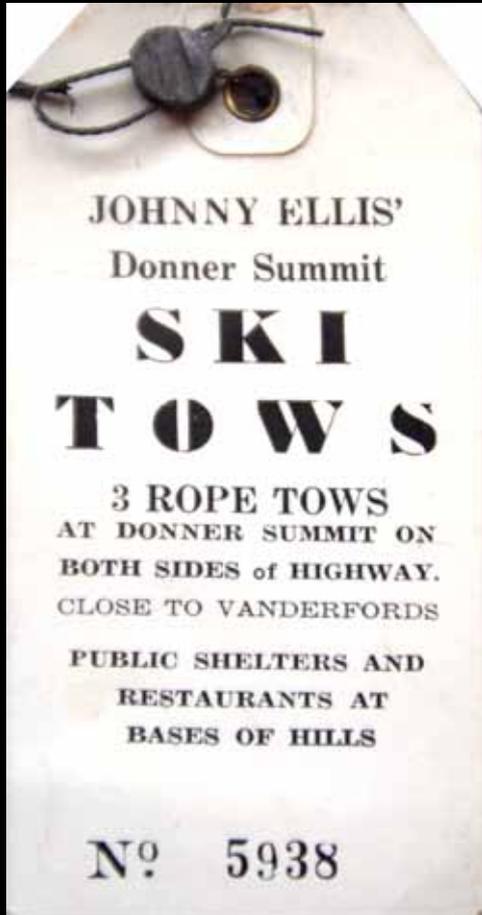
There have been many Soda Springs Stores over the years on both sides of the railroad.

Today Soda Springs Store does a year-round business.

The original Soda Springs Store serviced the many industries on the summit: ice harvesting, dairies and lumber mills.



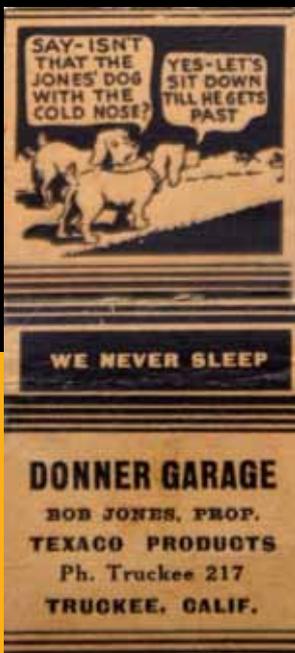
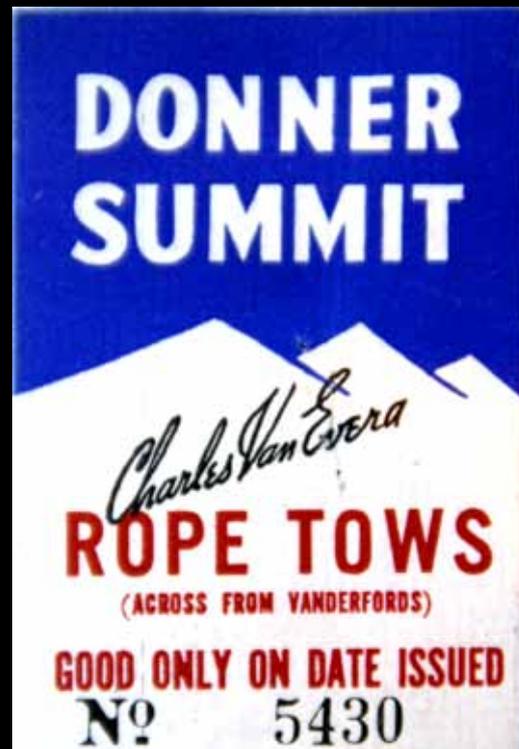
Match book covers from the matchbook cover collection of Norm Saylor



In case you are in need of some quick stocking stuffers, here are a couple of lift tickets for Donner Summit.

The Johnny Ellis ticket is for what is now Donner Ski Ranch (two tows) and Lake Mary (one tow going up Mt. Judah which Johnny named. It is pre-WWII.

The Donner Summit ticket is for what is now Donner Ski Ranch. Vanderfords was a ski lodge across the highway. Charlie Van Evera was a ski lift salesman who built Sugar Bowl's rope tow and sold them their first chairlift, completed in 1939.



Here is an old matchbook cover from Truckee.

DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

Membership 2010

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

DATE _____

NAME(S) _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

____ New Membership

____ 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

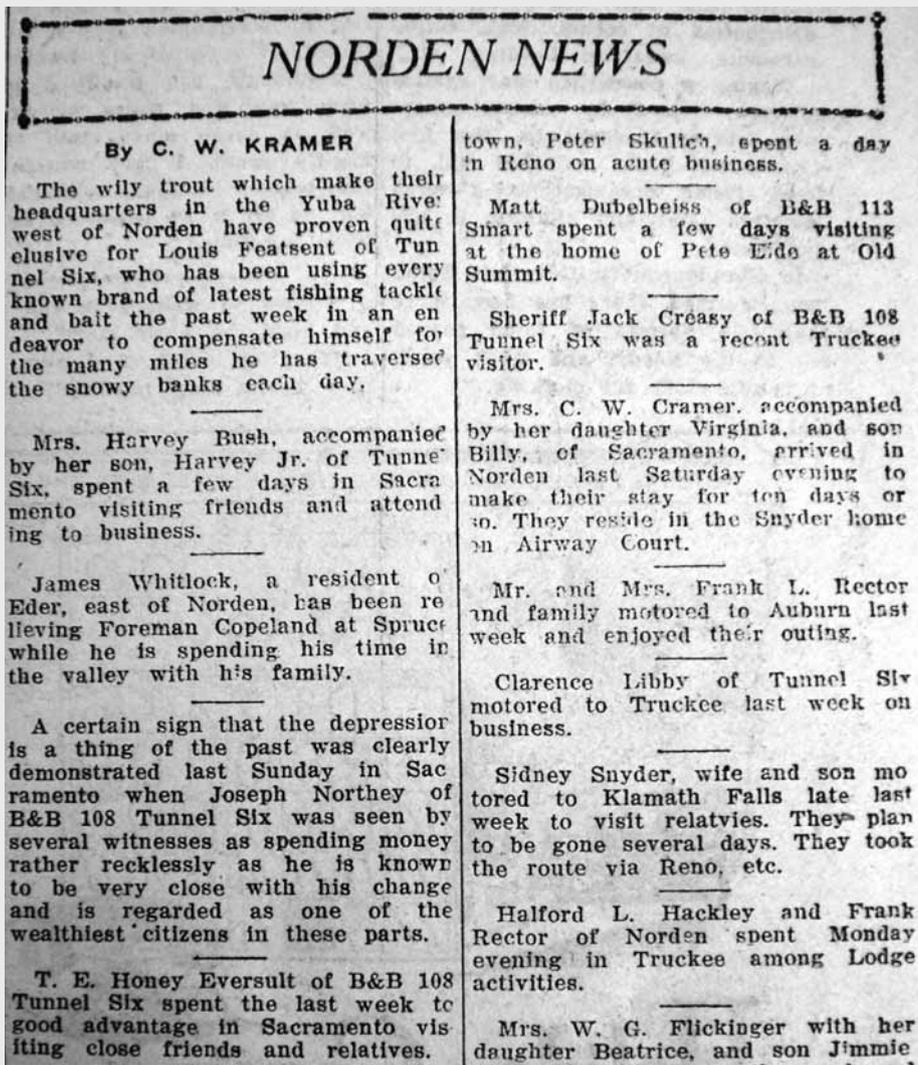
____ Patron - \$500

____ Benefactor - \$1000

____ Business - \$250

____ Business Sponsor - \$1000

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



Donner Summit was a vibrant community in the 1940's with many gas stations, stores, lodges, hotels, and houses.

One reason is that trans-Sierra traffic passed over the Summit and through Norden and Soda Springs, and another is that the railroad maintained a number of facilities. There were a couple of turn tables, housing for the helper engines that helped trains over the Summit, and maintenance facilities.

There were also many more workers than today's automated railroads need including snowshed shovelers to keep the sheds from collapsing under the 35 feet or so of annual Summit snowfall. There was housing for all of those workers (see the Norden picture in our last newsletter for an example of the many houses along the tracks).

The highway department also had lodging for highway workers.

With all that the local paper carried a weekly society page, the "Norden News."