

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

November, 2012 issue #51

# T. C. Wohlbruck, Entrepreneur and Visionary A Legacy in Photos

Normal daily activities are just not preserved for posterity. They are not of much consequence. In the past it was the same. A lot of people's day-to-day activity in the old days has disappeared because it was ordinary. No one thought to write it down

and save the pieces. Historians though, wish that people in the old days had recorded more of their lives, their experiences, and their challenges.

One person's day-to-day activity did survive. His entrepreneurial spirit and vision are interesting. His legacy is fascinating.

T.C. Wohlbruck was in the right place at the right time and he had the vision to see it. His creative vision and entrepreneurial spirit filled a need for the public and left us with a wealth of material to enjoy.

Wohlbruck was born in 1879 New Jersey and lived initially in Massachusetts but he spent most of his adult life in California. In Massachusetts he learned the art of photography and saw a niche to fill by traveling from school to school taking class pictures. Getting a divorce in Reno brought him to the West in 1912 where he remarried.

He continued to travel from school to school in California taking class pictures but he also looked for other opportunities. The automobile was becoming popular and with it, auto travel. Automobiles did not travel the roads of the day very rapidly or very

Right: one of T.C. Wohlbruck's photographs as a postcard of the PGE lookout point at Emigrant Gap overseeing Lake Spaulding.



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reliably. T.C. could see they needed services and their drivers needed refreshment. So he opened some of the first "Quick Marts," a series of "canteen service stations." His first one was at Emigrant Gap where P.G.&E. had placed a lookout so people could see the Spaulding Dam construction. The second was at Echo Summit and the third was at the Pioneer Monument (now Donner State Park) in Truckee.

Class photography probably takes a skill to get energetic youngsters to pose for group portraits where all the students look good at the same time. Technically, though, it's day-to-day work.

T.C. clearly saw more potential in photography than just class pictures. He began traveling California recording what he saw and sold the resulting photographs as postcards in his "canteen service stations." Those postcards are the fascinating legacy of day-to-day life in the 1910's and 20's and they are what follows.



Top, the lookout at Emigrant Gap (one of the signs inside offers lunch for 15 cents), center, the lodge at Emigrant Gap (people did not expect many amenities in those days - note the lack of satellite dish), and bottom, the service station at Emigrant Gap. All are T.C. Wohlbruck's photographs as postcards. DAB-LOOKOUT POINT HOTEL EMISTANT BAP-DA.





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Unless otherwise noted, the photographs and other historical ephemera in The Heirloom's pages come from the Norm Sayler collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society CANTEEN STATION CO. UNIQUE SERVICE FOR TOURISTS' COMPORT RESORTS, REFRESHMENT AND SOUVENIR STATIONS CANTEEN SERVICE CANTEEN SE

CANTEEN STATION C PLACENVILLE SUMMIT HEYERS, LAKE TANOS, GAL. MORE TO FOLLOW THE T. C. WOHLBRUCK CO. 251 POST STREET SAN FRANCISCO NANUFACTURERS, IMPORTERS AND JOBBIES IN LEATHER, NETAL AND WOODEN SOUVENIRS SOUVENIR FOST CARDS PENNANTS, BOOKS PENNANTS, BOOKS

CALIFORNIA SCHOOLS SINCE 1914

left 22 421.

## The Pioneer Monument and T.C. Wohlbruck



Left: Pioneer Monument and Lodge at Donner Lake.

Below: the Pioneer Monument

Both are T.C. Wohlbruck postcards.

Although it seems obvious today that the emigrants' travels to California over Donner Summit should be memorialized, it was a twenty year effort to do so.

Chester Warren Chapman was a 37 year old dentist in Nevada City and he was chosen to chair the Donner Monument Committee in 1901. There started years of discussion about design and costs. In 1909 Chapman proposed that a monument pedestal be 22 and a half feet high, the level of the snow during the Donner Party encampment.

Ground was broken for the statue in 1910 that would memorializet the pioneers,t

"a type of men who possessed courage, determination and endurance to suffer physical and mental strain, reaming steadfast and resolute to triumph over difficulties under which others succumb. I would want the figure that surmounts this pedestal to show by attitude and mien that he had experienced terrors and strain. I would want the eager, searching gaze to show a realization that the goal was near, and I would like the face to show the light of the conqueror's soul that never fails except through death, no thought of which could be gleaned from the steadfast gaze toward the promised goals. I would not have those who leave its present exclaim that it was beautiful. I would have them square their shoulders and say, "I CAN AND I WILL!"

In 1913 the sculptor was chosen and contributions from the State and citizens began to come in. The pedestal was done in 1917 and the monument was dedicated 1918. The cost was \$25,000 (\$380,000 today).



Once the monument was built in 1919, a caretaker was needed because members of the public were stealing the stones from the monument's face. T.C. Wohlbruck proposed to lease the area around the monument for a dollar year from the Native Sons of the Golden West who owned the monument. There was some confusion about ownership but eventually Wohlbruck leased 8 acres around the monument, acing out the Donner Lake Development Company which wanted to develop that eastern end of the lake.

Wohlbruck's contract stated that he could sell light lunch, have a tea room, soda fountain, souvenir stand and living accommodations for an attendant. He could provide afternoon tea, sodas, ice cream, fruits, candies, cigars and tobacco, photographs, curios, and souvenirs. The souvenirs included 5,000 vials of wood splinters from the Murphy cabin (Donner Party) for \$1 each. He paid \$1 rent to Donner Monument Committee to lease the one acre his canteen and service station sat on and had a 25 year lease. The Native Sons of the Golden West got the proceeds from the Murphy Cabin souvenirs less 25%.

This venture at the monument, called Pioneer Donner Park or Pioneer Lodge, led to Wohlbruck's contribution to modern life. He was one of the first to develop the gas station convenience store with his three "canteen service stations." He built the first one at Emigrant Gap, (A); the second, (C), at Echo Summit; and the third, (B), at the Donner Park. Those designations are not typos. At the Donner Site Wohlbruck also developed a campground as well as the service station canteen.



1920 saw 3500 visitors in his guest register. Wohlbruck also wanted to build

cabins but apparently Donner Lake Camp did not want the competition and prevailed on the Native Sons of the Golden West not to allow the cabins. Picturs of Donner Lake Camp come next month.

Wohlbruck saw two things. One, tourism was on the increase as were automobiles which enabled it. Tourists would need places to camp and get supplies. Second, automobiles were not reliable and needed gas. There had to be service stations to serve them. Remember when cars carried water bags on the front bumpers to fill leaky radiators?

TC hosted at the lodge in summers answering questions and selling books, souvenirs. He also displayed artitacts.

The Pioneer Lodge was remodeled many times over the years.

### About the Pictures:

Wohlbruck was a photographer as well as service station entrepreneur. He had made a living first in Massachusetts and then in California taking class pictures in schools. He also took other group and scenic photos. It was a natural connection to take the photography and sell it to tourists in the form of postcards. All of the photographs in this story are postcards.



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To prevent competition with his gas station T.C encouraged Chapman and the Native Sons to buy land from Pacific Fruit Express that was adjacent to the monument. In 1922 the Native Sons got 18.54 acres surrounding the monument for \$50 but title was not conveyed for some years.

The State Park came along to Donner Lake in 1928 and with it came the end of T.C. Wohlbruck's service station empire. More acres were added to the park and T.C.'s concession was canceled by state in mid 1930's. The canteen and service station was converted to park headquarters.

#### At Emigrant Gap

At Emigrant Gap Wohlbruck was worried about a shack being erected that would "ruin the aesthetic and business applcation of his lookout" so he purchased one hundred acres from the Allen Family who ran the Emigrant Gap Hotel. That land would later become the I-80 freeway and before that, the Nyack Lodge, built by Herstle Jones of Donner Summit built in 1946.

T.C. Wohlbruck about his Canteen Service Stations:

"unique service for tourists' comfort – resorts, refreshment and souvenir stations"

#### Pictured on these two pages:

top of the previous passe the fireplace in the Pioneer Lodge at Donner Lake,. Bottom previous page, the Pioneer Monument and the Pioneer Lodge. Bottom of this page, one of T.C.'s postcards, Lake Mary on Donner Summit.



©Donner Summit Historical Society



Left, the canteen service statino at Echo Summit. Below, an ad from the <u>Reno Evening</u> <u>Gazette</u> August 2, 1923

#### REGISTER

WOHLBRUCK'S LOOKOUT POINT ROOMS - ANOTHER - MEALS PIONEER DONNER MONUMENT Visit the Relic Room FREE PLAN - STILL ANOTHER - NOW OVER NIGHT - SEE SUNSET - 30 MILE VIEW ECHO SUMMIT LODGE AT 50 MILE STONE PLACERVILLE ROAD ROOMS \$2:00 UP TWO PERSONS T.C. WOHLBRUCH 251 POST STREET.S.F.

DATE..... NAME STREET CITY

### **Resorts** Echo Summit Lodge

**FOR RENT** - Furnished two and five room housekeeping cottages at Summit. Placerville road, commanding an unsupassed view Lake Tahoe. Brand new excellent beds, linen, silver complete. Substantial reduction blance season, also weekly rentals. Adddress T.C. Wohlbruck. Echo Summit Lodge, Meyers Lake Tahoe.

> Next Month: T.C. Wohlbruck: Collector, and more photographs.

Left: postcard of the snowsheds and town at Emigrant Gap. The Allen House is on the left. The Allens sold T.C. 100 acres so he could keep out competition.



## **Just for Fun - Emigrant Gap**

### the site of T.C.'s first canteen/service station

Since we're talking about T.C. Wohlbruck and his service stations, a quick look in the DSHS archives tuned up some more photographs of Emigrant Gap.

T.C.'s first canteen and service station sat at Emigrant Gap just where the Cal-Trans overlook is on the north side of the freeway.

P.G.E. had build the first overlook and it was there that T.C. put is first service station.



On this page you can see the changes from then to now.

Above is the Old Lincoln Highway at Emigrant Gap.

To the left is the Nyack Lodge and service station. It sat right at the overlook. That's Lake Spaulding in the distance.

When the freeway was built in the early 60's, the Nyack building was put on wheels and taken up the road to where it sits now and is still a service station and convenience market. It also houses a Burger King and some old photographs showing the building being moved as well as other things. Our furthest west 20 Mile Museum sign is on the wall there.

ACK LODGE

MIGRANT GAP, CALIF.

To the right is the freeway and overlook in the 1960's looking much like the away it looks today.



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### **From the DSHS Archives**

cabin at Lake Angela from the Lawrence Houseworth collection a the Society of California Pioneers.



The article below comes from the November 20, 1867 <u>Daily Alta California</u>

You can see a more complete account of the episode related below from anotheer newspaper at the end of this issue if you like to read about thieves getting their comuppances.

#### A Rascal Killed by Chinamen.

The wild life of these mountains does not fail to bring out many of the hard characters whose doings remind us of old times. Day before yesterday, November 5th, four men, two of them unknown, and two other worthies, severally known as Johnny Kelley and Johnny-behind-the Rock robbed several Chinese on the Truckee of about \$40, and then crossed over the summit, and half a mile below Summitville they overtook a Chinaman on horseback and took him off his horse and robbed him of the animal and \$47. Next they entered a Chinese ranch near by, the inmates of which were ready for them, and proceeded to go through the Chinamen, who offered the wretches \$50 to be let alone; this offer was refused, and the ruffiansthreatened the lives of the Chinamen, whereupon they attacked the robbers with shovels and drove them from the house, killing John Kelly, and battering "Johnny-behindthe-Rock" so badly that he could not escape, and was captured by the Sheriff; the other two were subsequently arrested at this place and have been sent below. The body of Kelly was still lying on the snow where the Chinamen left him, the Coroner not having arrived, and nobody apparently being willing to take any trouble about the poor dead wretch. The men are all well known, and "Johnny-behind-the-Rock" is notorious as the man who murdered Hennessey on the Truckee three months ago. E. M. S.



This ad ran in the Sacramento Daily Union for weeks in November and December, 1867. Note the reward if you find the horse. So it may benefit you to go loooking

## **From the DSHS Archives**

Ski Season is Coming - First some Skiing from the Old Days



All along Old 40 in the old days, there were small ski areas with rope tows and small hotels and ski lodges. The social life was much different then with people bunking dormitory style and hanging out in the community areas of the lodges rather than going home to their individual hotel rooms or cabins. People took public transportation to the slopes using the bus and the train. The train used to stop on Donner Summit. Wouldn't that have been fun?

Above is the old Norden Store and Lodge in 1936 with the Pacific Greyhound bus in front.

Below is a story From <u>Ski Heil</u> Magazine, 1939 Courtesy of the Auburn Ski Club library

#### We Go to Cisco

Then there was that time in 1936 when Bill Stensaas, Fred Earle, and I decided to try the Cisco slopes. We stopped at the quaint Cisco Hotel, perched high atop a hill and accessbile only through the second story windows thanks to the heavy snowfall. About nine in the evning, some of the boys decided to ski in the moonlight, down to a nearby dance. What a run that was!.

The snow was too icy for my comfort. After picking myselft out of several "shadows", which turned out to be gulleys, I got to the the bottom of the hill. There, to make things tougher, a ripplling "rivulet" had to be crossed via a six inch plank. Stensas fell in. We all laughed, and everyone felt happier - except Stensaas.

### **Then & Now with Art Clark**



Art Clark has made so many Then and Now's that they are backing up in our "to be used" archives. So this month we'll run two. This shows the snowsheds between Tunnels 6 and 7. Note the chimneys on the originals so smoke could escape. The originals were made of wood which created great hazards in the summer from sparks. Miles of sheds would burn at one time and fire trains were kept on standby. Riders on the train would have been deprived of light, fresh air, and the great views of the lake below and mountains above. Location: 39° 18.941'N 120° 19.303'W

See more of Art's work on our website where the old pictures automatically "morph" into the new and back. For more about Fire Trains, see our August, 2010 issue and Red Mountain in our July, 2010 issue. A major set of stories and pictures about snowshed will be coming next summer maybe so don't let your subscription lapse.

### **Then & Now with Art Clark**



#### Teaming down the Summit.

In the 1860's and 1870's, several photographers spent a lot of time near Donner Summit. This view, published by Thomas Houseworth, was taken from between Tunnel Six and Seven. Wagons can be seen heading down the road. A nearly identical shot was made by A. A. Hart and later also distributed by C.E Watkins. That view had only one wagon but was otherwise the same. It was labeled "121. Grant's Peak and Palisade Rocks, from Western Summit." I'm not sure which was imitated by the other. Here is the same scene 150 years later, and I'm imitating both of them. Isn't imitation the sincerest form of flattery?

Photo location 39° 18.957'N 120° 19.361'W

785 Teaming down the Summit **Donner Lake Dutch Flat Wagon Road** 



### **from Jimmy White** Every Wonder When You Will Die?

#### By Jim L White (padhorski@wavecable.com)

It was snowing so hard that the sky and air around us was a dark soupy grey. We were driving in the afternoon along the Dutch Flat-Gold Run road that parallels the railroad track near the old gold diggings. Thru the heavy snowfall I saw the bright headlight of a locomotive parked on the railroad siding. I hit the warning blinker lights and parked along the edge of the road, grabbed the Nikon and trudged thru the foot of new snow up the embankment to the railroad track. The train's black engine with its headlight gleaming thru the heavy snowfall looked like a monster waiting to pounce. I could hear the hiss and shriek of the air pressure valves on the engine as they released. I stood next to the mainline rails and zoomed



thru the Nikon viewfinder to frame the train's engine with the curve of the rails in the foreground. Was the shutter speed fast enough? The f stop small enough? I peered thru the viewfinder and fired.

With my parka hood up I was chimping at the screen on the back of the Nikon when I thought I heard a soft, almost husky "wamp" from behind me. I turned and was almost blinded by the engine headlamp of Amtrak 59 silently coming right at me with a rush. Instantly I threw the viewfinder to my face and pushed the high speed firing button down. Seven frames and maybe eight seconds later I looked over my right shoulder and saw the wheels of the engine passing less than three feet away. I had forgotten to jump out of the way! I remember my mouth being so dry I could not swallow. I jumped to the left and stumbled down the snowy bank to my car. I

fell into the car covered with fresh snow and was exhausted. Not my time to die (March, 2012).

Jim White started skiing, fishing and hiking the high Placer County backcountry in 1944 when he lived in Sacramento. He started to learn to ski at the Soda Springs Ski Hill with lift ticket checker Carl Buek (Dick Buek's father) often letting Jim's girlfriend Shirley (now Jim's wife) ride for free.

Jim became the Fish and Game Warden for the area in 1957. He later was promoted to Patrol Captain and in 1970 was put in charge of all Fish and Game training and safety statewide.

Jim conducted cold weather survival training, wilderness horse use and snow avalanche programs in the Donner Summit area for various State and Federal agencies, private hydro- electric companies and various colleges. Jim worked on the Ski Patrol at all the ski resorts in the Donner Summit and N. Tahoe ski areas retiring from the Alpine Meadows Patrol after working there for 12 years in the 1970's. Jim retired from Dept. of Fish and Game after 36 years of service in 1990.

Jim now works as a freelance photographer and writer for several West Coast magazines. Jim (85) and Shirley (83) live in Auburn and still ski, hike, fish and camp the high backcountry of Nevada and Placer Counties. He can be contacted at padhorski@wavecable.com. Jim has written a number of times for the Heirloom. He wrote Fong the Snowshed Chef in our February, 2011 issue for example. Consult our online index for more.



Labor Day marks the official turning point from the summer tourist business to the fall and winter season. Summer visitors may still flood the state, but already a stream of winter sports information is beginning to flow into the offices of WESTERN SKIING.

#### Donner Pass

Along Highway Forty a major organizational drive is under way. One year ago the hotel operators, business people and individuals who live and labor in the Donner Summit area banded together in a Community Club project. One of their first achievements was the revival of the moribund Donner Trail Association. A new hit song, "Ridin' the Old Donner Trail," became the outward manifestation of the enthusiasm with which the project was taken up by everyone. More important to skiers than this sign of harmony, however, should be the practical improvements that can be achieved through such community efforts. A Central Information and Travel Bureau planned by the organization should be of great help in the better distribution of crowds in the Donner area. New parking facilities, first aid stations, outdoor latrines, proper accommodations for the huge crowds-all this can be gotten only through such concerted work by a community organization.

Major item of news from the Summit concerns Charles Van Evera's Mt. Lincoln development. The access road should be put in this year; next year will see the completion of two lifts, one chair and one T-bar, which will open up some of the best slopes along Highway Forty.

Members of the various ski clubs with lodges in the Donner Summit region are lucky. While working on improvements on their club properties this summer, they have been able to cool off—and keep their ski legs in trim—by taking time off from the work parties for a few hours of water skiing on Donner Lake.



Above from January, 1947 <u>Western Skiing Magazine</u>. Summit residents were bent on improvement. Today Summit residents are likewise working on improvement, aiming at revitalizing the economy which has been on a downward spiral since the completion of the Interstate in the early 1960's.

### About the next page

If this were a print edition we would not include the next page, but since this is digital the cost is free. So here, from the Sacramento Daily Union you have a more complete account of the robbery.

### CITY INTELLIGENCE.

A HIGHWAYMAN KILLED BY CHINAMEN. - On Thursday a party of four men started out on the road between Cisco and the Summit to engage in the business of robbing Chinamen. After one or two successful operations on the road they came to a cabin where five or six Chinamen were camped, and demanded their money. The Chinamen demurred, but offered, it is said, to give the robbers \$50 on condition that they would leave them without further molestation. The highwaymen refused to compromise on the basis proposed; and as they proceeded to enforce their demand, the Chinese showed a determination to resist. One of the white men was struck in the head with a shovel and knocked down. He was then beaten and cut with shove s to such an extent that he died a short time afterward. Another of the robbers was so disabled that he could not get away. The other two made good their escape. The Chinese informed the authorities in the neighborhood of the facts. The bcdy of the dead man was brought to Cisco, and yesterday the wounded man was brought from Cisco to Auburn and lodged in the Placer County Jail. We learn from F. T. Burke, who conversed with the injured man, that his name is Brannan, and that he is the person who was recently tried in Nevada on a charge of murder, for killing a man a few months ago at Crystal Peak. He was acquitted by the jury. The man who was killed was a well-known Sacramento criminal, John Kelly. Brannan told Burke that he met the other three men at Jones' house, on the road, a short time before the commencement of the robberies, and that from there they went to Farrell's, and drank considerably. When they attacked the Chinese camp Kelly and Brannan were too drunk to run. Their companions were sober and had pistols, but ran off. Some two years ago John Keliy, Festus McDonough and O'Brien were arrested by officers Chamberlin and Deal for drugging and robbing a man at a saloon which they kept on K street, near the Post Office. Keny turned State's evidence and testified as to the facts of drugging and robbing their victims, and gave an elaborate description of the various modes of drugging victims, one of which was to put snuff in their liquor, which soon settled them. McDonough was sentenced to five years imprisonment in the State Prison, and O'Brien to one year. Some time afterward Kelly was arrested by officers Harvey and Karcher on a charge of petit larceny in stealing a sack of middlings belonging to J. Heppe, at Twelfth and E streets. The sack, which was carried off in the night, had a hole in it. The middlings

were traced to Kelly's house, near Thirteenth street and the north levce. He was sentenced to four months imprisonment in the County Jail. Before the term was up he was reported to be sick. While lying at "the point of death" he was removed to the County Hospital. The removal took place in the daytime, and the patient recovered under the care of Doctor Phelan with such magical rapidity that that night he ran away from the Hos-pital, returned to his house, whipped his wife for paying him so little attention while in jail, stole her silk dress and made his escape from the city. Kelly then visited the State of Nevada, and in a short time officer Chamberlin received information that he had stolen a draft or check, forged the name of the owner on the back, drawn \$700 or \$800 at Gold Hill, and was on his way to Sacramento. Chamberlin and Chief Mariz were on the lookout for him for some time, but failed to find him. A short time afterward he was arrested by officer Ellis at San Francisco. Kelly then stated that he had passed through Sacramento and had been arrested by a person who was then but is not now in official position, and that on the payment of \$350 to the officer be was discharged. (This matter was a subject of conversation and discussion at the time in official circles, and it is understood that the facts will be submitted to the next Grand Jury.) Kelly was held in San Francisco until an officer from Nevada arrived to take him over the mountains. The officer and prisoner passed through Sacramento all right, After the train passed Colfax the prisoner asked leave to enter the watercloset in the car. The privilege was granted. He locked the door, and, although his wrists were handcuffed, climbed through the window and dropped from the car with the train under full headway and ran off. The train was stopped and the officer started in pursuit, but failed to overtake the prisoner. Kelly again returned to the State of Nevade, it appears, for we are informed that he and a man called "Frenchy" were convicted of an attempt to commit robbery and sentenced to three years imprisonment, but on appealing to the Supreme Court were discharged. Kelly seems to have been on the road to his old stamping ground in California, when he collided with the Chinese and forfeited his life in attempting to rob them.

Sacramento Daily Union 11-9-1867