

The Donner Summit

Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

June, 2019 issue #130

In our April [Heirloom](#) we covered a Model T on the Lincoln Highway on Donner Summit in 2018. In the May issue we covered how you can walk portions of the Lincoln Highway today. This month we have the story of the most documented crossing of the Sierra. The year was 1911 which was two years before the Lincoln Highway was born but that highway was assembled from existing roads rather than actually built as the first transcontinental highway. So the road traveled in the most documented crossing was the same road that would be used by thousands of people later on as part of the first transcontinental highway.

23 miles in 7 days – by auto – travel was harder in the old days Plucky Trophy Chasers* win race

Before the “all weather” road came along with winter snowplowing in 1932, each spring people in Truckee and Tahoe would anxiously wait for the road and then the highway over Donner Summit to open. It brought automobile tourists. To speed things along there were snow shoveling bees, ashes and soot were saved by townspeople and spread on the snow, and workers were paid to shovel trenches in the snow to increase the surface area and speed melting.

For some years in the early 20th Century The Tahoe Tavern, an upscale resort in Tahoe City, held a contest awarding a silver trophy to the first automobile over the Summit. The silver cup attracted adventurers each year in the quest. The attendant publicity in all the newspapers put Lake Tahoe and Truckee in the fore of readers’ minds just as the summer season was being thought about. Autos were new too, and the public was hungry to read about their exploits. The annual quest for the silver cup was another endurance trial for automobiles and “autoists” to show what the new machines and their drivers could do. Headlines frequently mentioned contestants’ automobile models.



Today we pack up our families into our cars and travel quickly over the Sierra insulated from the noise, the heat, and the cold. The modern interstate is mostly a smooth trip. Traveling over the Sierra in early days was a trial. George Wyman, who was first to cross the Sierra by motorcycle said in 1903 that the road over the summit was the “vilest road that mortal ever dignified by the term.” Thornton Round crossed the Sierra with his family in 1914 and said crossing the Sierra “turned out to be the toughest one-hundred miles I have ever driven... the road was narrow... There were dangerous unfenced gaps... and no warning signs...” In 1901 Alexander

*[Grass Valley Union](#) June 11, 1911

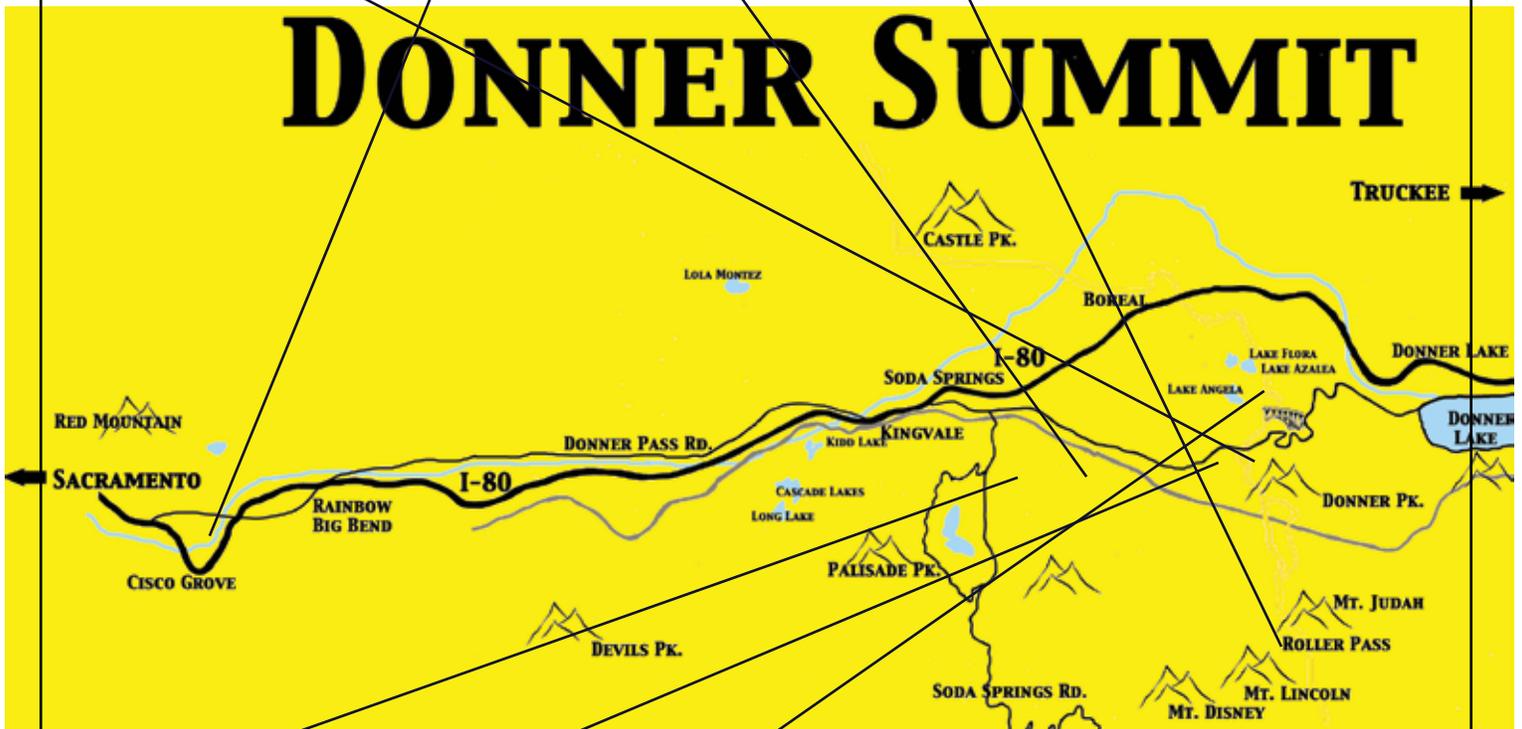
Story Locations in this Issue

picture page 1

picture page 3

picture top page 5

Roller Pass pages 6-8



pictures pages 10 & 11 Summit Hotel ad page 12 Catfish Pond page 20

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Winton and Charles Shanks were the first to cross by automobile. Shanks wrote about the experience in Scientific American. His description sounds just miserable. In the whole day before reaching the summit they were only able to travel 17 miles. They were drenched and freezing from continually digging the car out of the snow. He used words like “punishment,” a “supreme and awful test,” “fearfully,” “abuse and hardship,” “ugly nightmare,” “frightful experiences of that day,” and said the “trails” were “dangerously slippery.” Note he used the word “trail” and not “road.”

Then there were the things people were urged to carry in those days: axes, shovels, block and tackle, rope, pistols, etc. They belied any kind of easy trip.

That was all for traveling fairly normally. The silver cup from the Tahoe Tavern had to be earned by the first automobile to cross the Sierra in the season. That meant trying to get over the summit before snow melt. Reading about those travels sounds nothing like adventure. It was lunacy.

Arthur Foote lived in Nevada City and worked as a mine superintendent. He decided he wanted the Tahoe Tavern silver cup and thought crossing the Sierra would be a good challenge. It would be difficult though, so he gathered three friends, a doctor, a mechanic, and an attorney, to help him get his Model T to Lake Tahoe.

The party left Sacramento, the starting point specified by the rules, on June 2. They ran into snow a few miles past Emigrant Gap and then travel got harder. Drifts were sometimes fifteen feet high. They soon learned to travel early in the morning when the snow was hard. As the snow softened the car slipped into crevices and had to be freed by block and tackle. The drifts were so deep that the last two miles to Cisco took all day.

When they got to the Yuba River at Big Bend they found the bridge had washed out. They camped and got up at 3:30 A.M. so they could use the firm snow. First they built a raft so Foote could get across 100 feet of roaring flood waters. Foote poled across. He attached a 5/8" cable to a tree and the car was brought across suspended from the cable. Each of Foote's partners came across the river on a rope sling. On the other side they took out a portable telephone and tapped into the telephone line to let people below know they were okay. Then they removed the cable leaving their following competitors

Foote & Friends in the newspapers:

The car “is caught in the ice and snow of the high Sierras.” The party forced the car “...over ice, snow and torrents. Fifteen feet of snow were encountered in places and the snowsheds were utilized for a short distance.”

San Francisco Call
June 7, 1911

“A telephone message received tonight from the top of the snowbank at a point above Cisco, stated that the expedition had advanced four miles today and expected to gain the summit by morning. The party carries a portable telephone outfit...The party is spending the night in the snow 40 miles from habitation.”

San Francisco Call
June 9, 1911

“...the success of these three men in first crossing the Emigrant pass summit shows that the late winter touring afforded by the Sierras is making an appeal for the first time to private owners. Heretofore, the earliest crossings have always been made by dealers with intent of demonstrating their cars.”

San Francisco Call
June 15, 1911

...News of the accomplishment of the perilous feat was received here with much joy and pleasure and the record they have made is one that will be heralded from every section of the nation. The deep snows were almost insurmountable, but the plucky trophy chasers did not relax their efforts and were confident from the start that they would win the cup.

Grass Valley Union
June 11, 1911

out of luck.

After a fourth day of effort the men headed back to Grass Valley for more equipment. Returning to the car by train, the men continued to fight the snow. The front of the car was put on runners but that didn't work because it kept slipping sideways. They wrapped one-inch rope around the tires to work as primitive chains. Still the car got stuck over and over with the men pulling and digging. The bumping as the car went over frozen snow bending the steering rods but the men kept straightening them and replaced one set.

A week after they'd started, the men had gotten to Soda Springs and then the Summit Hotel after pushing on all night. They camped there until dawn. The actual road down from the Summit was hidden under huge snowdrifts and the drop was so steep the men didn't think they could keep the car from tumbling down the snowfields to Donner Lake. So they used the block and tackle to pull the car to the top of a snowshed at 2 AM. There they snubbed off the car with rope on a rock and let the car slowly down the slope "bucking deep, soft snow, with all helping turn front wheels every foot or so to keep headed straight downhill" down to Donner Lake. (See page 1.) "...at least we are going downhill.... shore of Donner Lake ahead at last!" "Breakfast at Donner City Hotel." "Hurray! We have made it over!... On to Truckee... Lake Tahoe here we come!"

At the lake there was no more snow and they made good progress arriving at the Tahoe Tavern by noon, days ahead of competitors.



Rules for Participating in the Silver Cup Race

"The Tahoe Tavern cup is one of the most-sought-after trophies in this part of the state. The conditions under which it must be won make it one of the hardest imaginable tests. on every part of the car, as well as on the driver."

"The rules to be followed in competing for this prize are: The car must be fully equipped; it must make the entire trip over the Emigrant Gap state road on its own wheels and under its own power; no paraphernalia to help the engine to be used, except that which is carried in the car. The only time the motor is allowed assistance is when the road is blocked impassably and detour is necessary. The car must proceed on its own power, however, as soon as it is again on the road."

Oregon News June 21, 1914

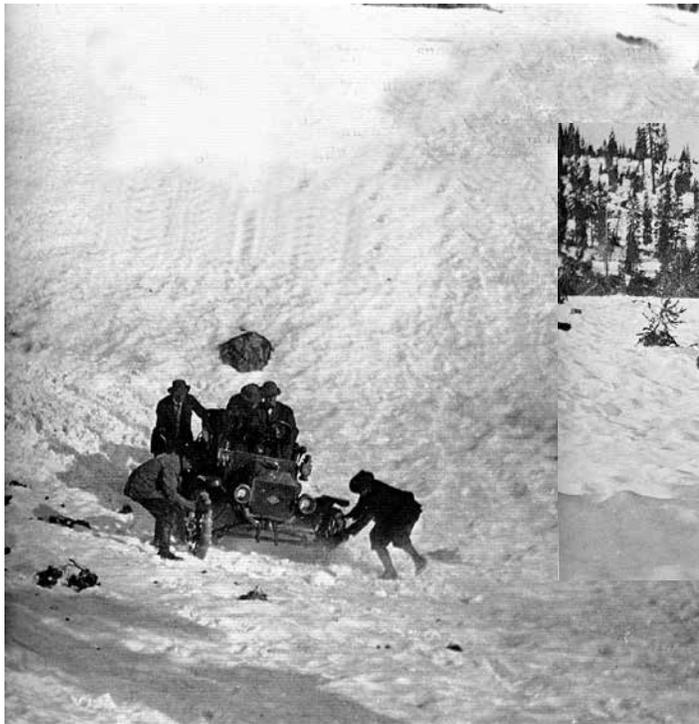
above from page 3, June 15 Heirloom talking about the 1914 winner



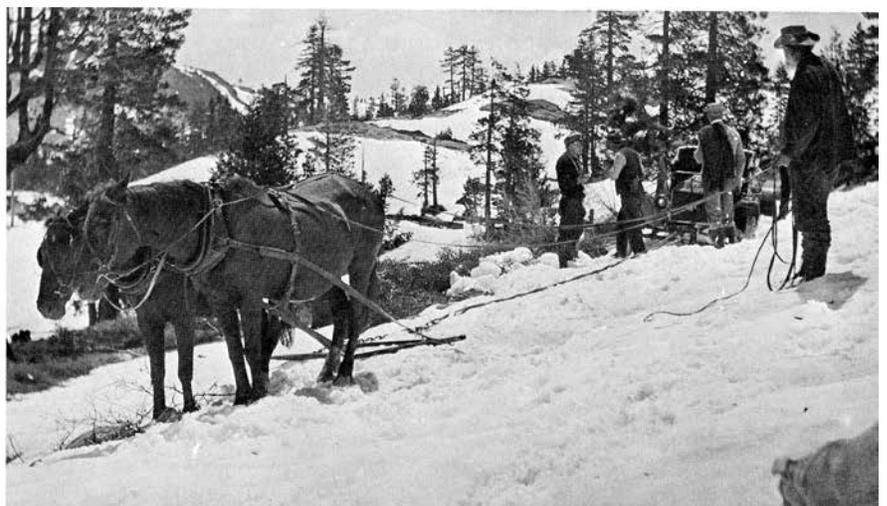
Note the 150' of 1" rope wrapped around the tires to give the car better traction.



More pictures of the Foote journey. Right shows the Model T in Summit Valley. Today's Soda Springs ski hill is in the background.



Most of the pictures come from the Searles Library in Nevada City, with permission.



Roller Pass



In Search of the Elusive Switchback at Roller Pass

Further adventures of the MHRT*

As emigrants traveled across the continent the journey was not terribly difficult until they reached the deserts of Utah and Nevada. Arriving at Truckee Meadows, today's Reno, they must have felt great relief even if they'd had to abandon wagons, household goods, and dying animals. Maybe there was even relief after having buried family members. They'd survived. The desert had been hard but now they were closer to California, closer to their dreams, closer to the end of the journey.

In Truckee Meadows there was forage for the animals, water, and a chance to rest and recuperate.

Having recouped energy, people and animals were ready for the last part of their journey. They did not go far before the next hurdle towered in their way: the Sierra Nevada. They didn't know it yet, but it would be the hardest part of the whole journey. Looking at the Sierra from the east, its peaks visible, they must have cursed or just shook their heads in disbelief. All that they'd gone through, and now this. How would they get over that barrier?

In 1846 Edwin Bryant called the Sierra a "formidable and apparently impassable barrier..." In 1845 David Hudson called them "terrible." William Todd, also in 1845, called them "tribulations in the extreme." William Tustin in 1846 said, "When we struck the main ridge of the mountains, every heart was filled with terror at the awful site [sic]." We can only imagine.

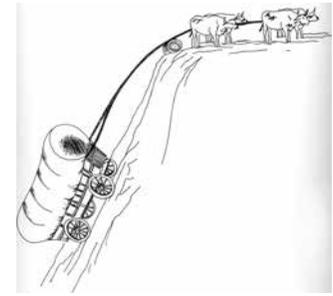
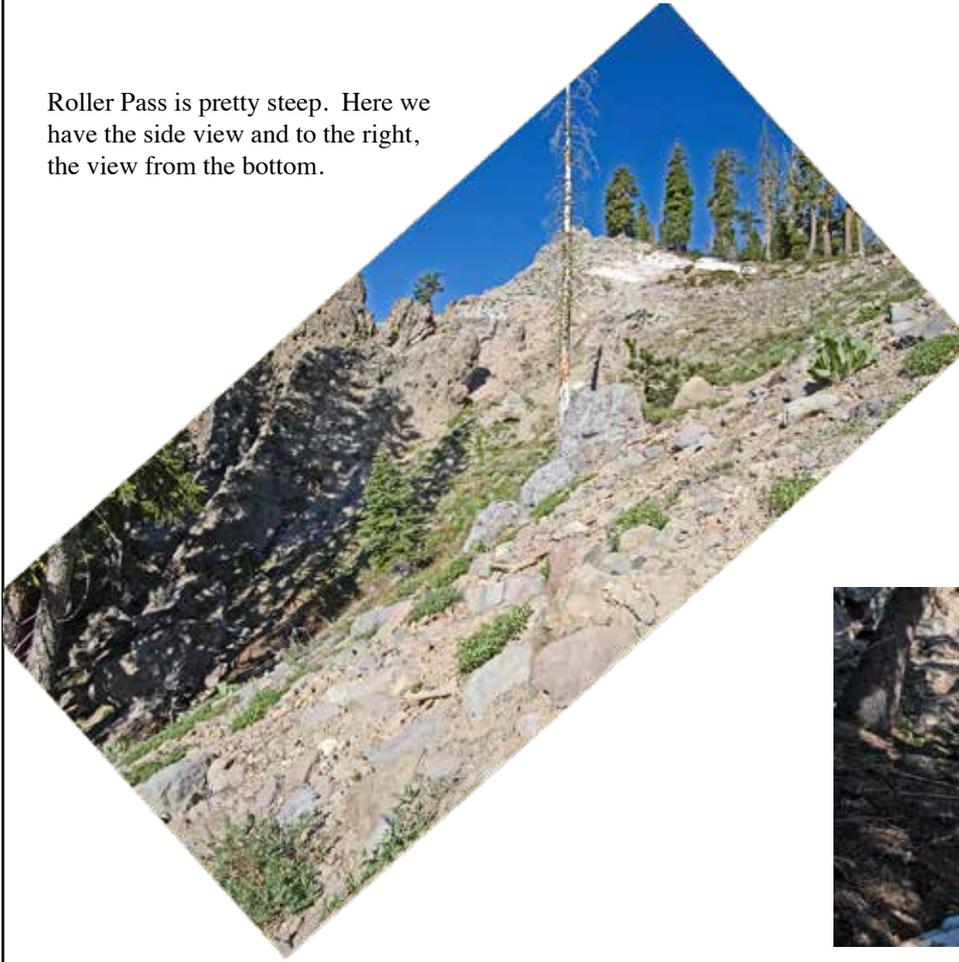
The first emigrants went up Donner Pass but that required some wagon disassembly to get over the rocks. In 1846 emigrants discovered Roller Pass which did not require disassembly but was in Joseph Hackney's eyes in 1849, "as steep as the roof of a house."

We covered Roller Pass in the April, '12 (the discovery), July '13 (comparison to Coldstream Pass), February, '12, and May, '13 (Roller Pass in 1849) [Heirlooms](#). We even dealt with the math of Roller Pass in the November, '11 [Heirloom](#). (It has, for example, a 30° slope.) So we're not going to cover basic Roller Pass again. Space is too valuable in this august historical publication where so many Donner Summit history topics vie for inclusion.

This story is not about the ordeal emigrants had coming straight up Roller Pass either. This is about the switchback that some emigrants used and our attempt to find it.

*Mobile Historical Research Team

Roller Pass is pretty steep. Here we have the side view and to the right, the view from the bottom.



Emigrants coming through Coldstream Canyon saw the barrier ahead, looming higher and higher the closer they got. At least to begin with, emigrants went straight up Roller Pass. Many of a wagon train's oxen were assembled at the top and "tied" in a group to wagons with chain, rope and even branches. The rope was placed over a log at the top that acted to reduce friction – hence "Roller Pass." (See the little drawing above.) Oxen pulled and emigrants pushed and guided the wagons up the incline. It's hard just to try scrambling up Roller Pass on all fours today. Imagine carrying your household goods because the wagon was too heavy. Imagine carrying young children, pushing oxen along, and guiding wagon wheels.

At some point, and we don't know when, because emigrants were strangely more interested in getting their wagons up and on to California than they were in providing us with needed details, some emigrants made a switchback. The switchback route is longer of course, but the incline is less (22° vs. 30°) and the steepest inclines are shorter than Roller Pass which is all steep incline. We can imagine that many or most emigrants went straight up Roller Pass. Winter was approaching and they were in a rush to get out of the mountains. Straight up looked like the quickest. Imagine though, a wagon train of few wagons, either because the members crossed the country in a small party or because wagons had to be abandoned in the desert. The smaller train would not have had the resources

to stretch rope and chain the length of Roller Pass and there was no getting wagons up without them. Their only alternative was to try the switchback variation that required shorter lengths of rope and chain. Art Clark, MHRT member, says, "They took the path of least resistance, among a lot of poor or difficult choices."

Fall had just arrived in mid September (2018) when the MHRT went out looking for the switchback which we'd been told by some OCTA** visitors earlier in the summer was easy to identify. Apparently the members of the MHRT are amateurs at finding emigrant trails because the switchback was not too easy to find. So we decided to put ourselves in the heads of emigrants with short chains (see above). How would we have gotten up the pass? Apparently we'd not make good wagon train leaders either. We went back and forth across the area just north of Roller Pass. The pictures, maps, and diagrams here show what we found.

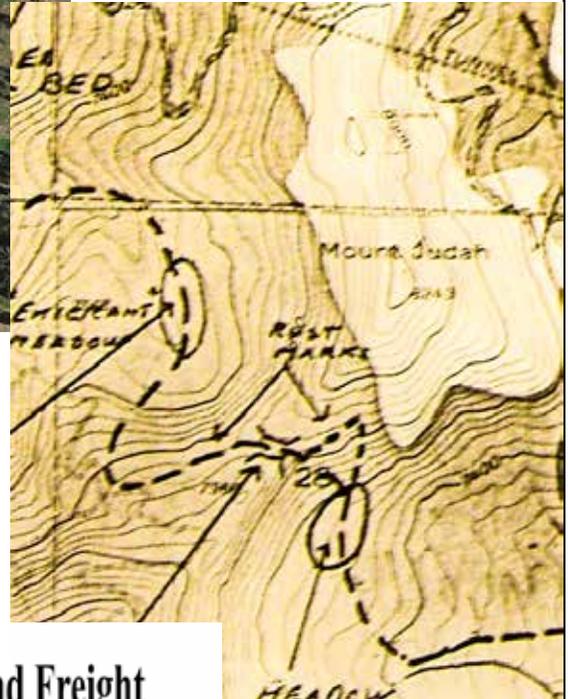
You may want to go out and explore yourselves or get some real experts now that hiking season is almost here. Take the PCT up to Roller Pass, between Mt. Judah and Mt. Lincoln. Get to the edge of the pass and look left. That's where the switchback is/was.

**Oregon California Trails Association

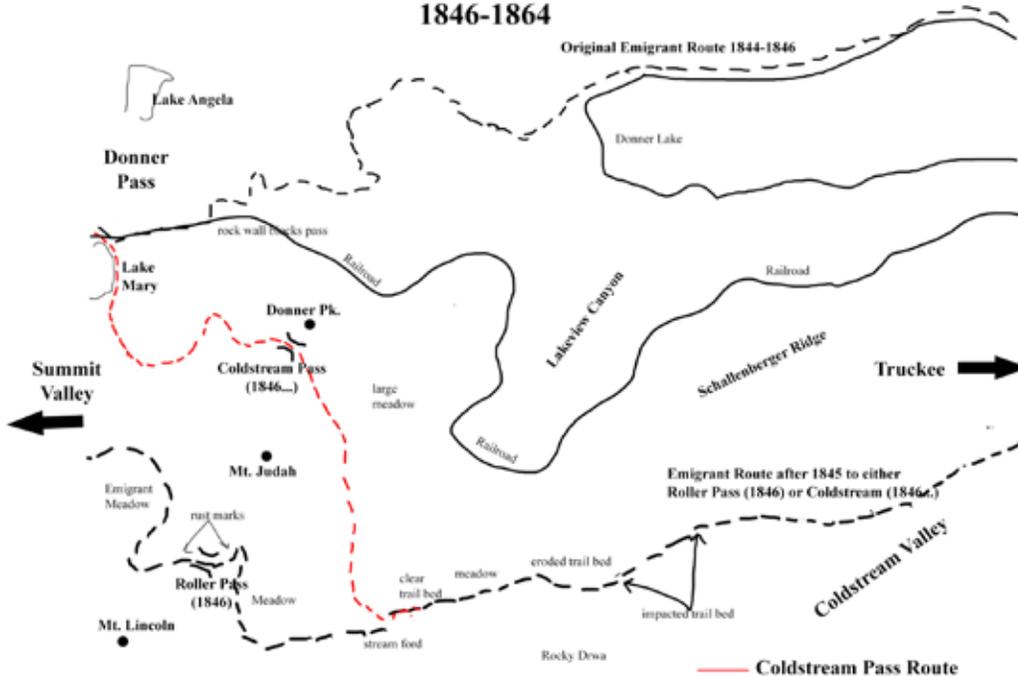


Here Art Clark has used GoogleEarth to show in yellow the Roller Pass standard route. In red he's outlined the switchback route.

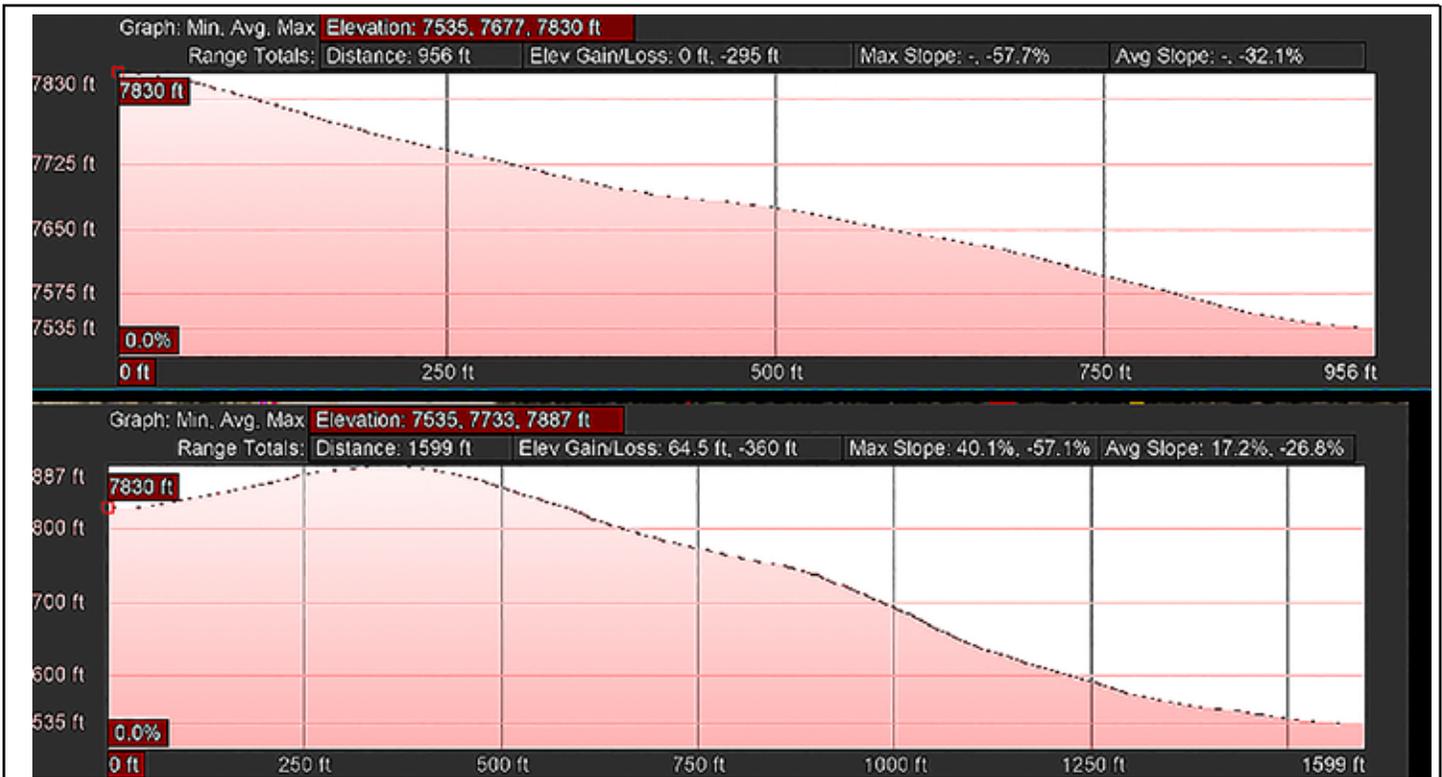
Below is a piece of a map by Charles Graton from his book, Trail of the First Wagons over the Sierra Nevada. You can see under the "rust marks" label the switchback.



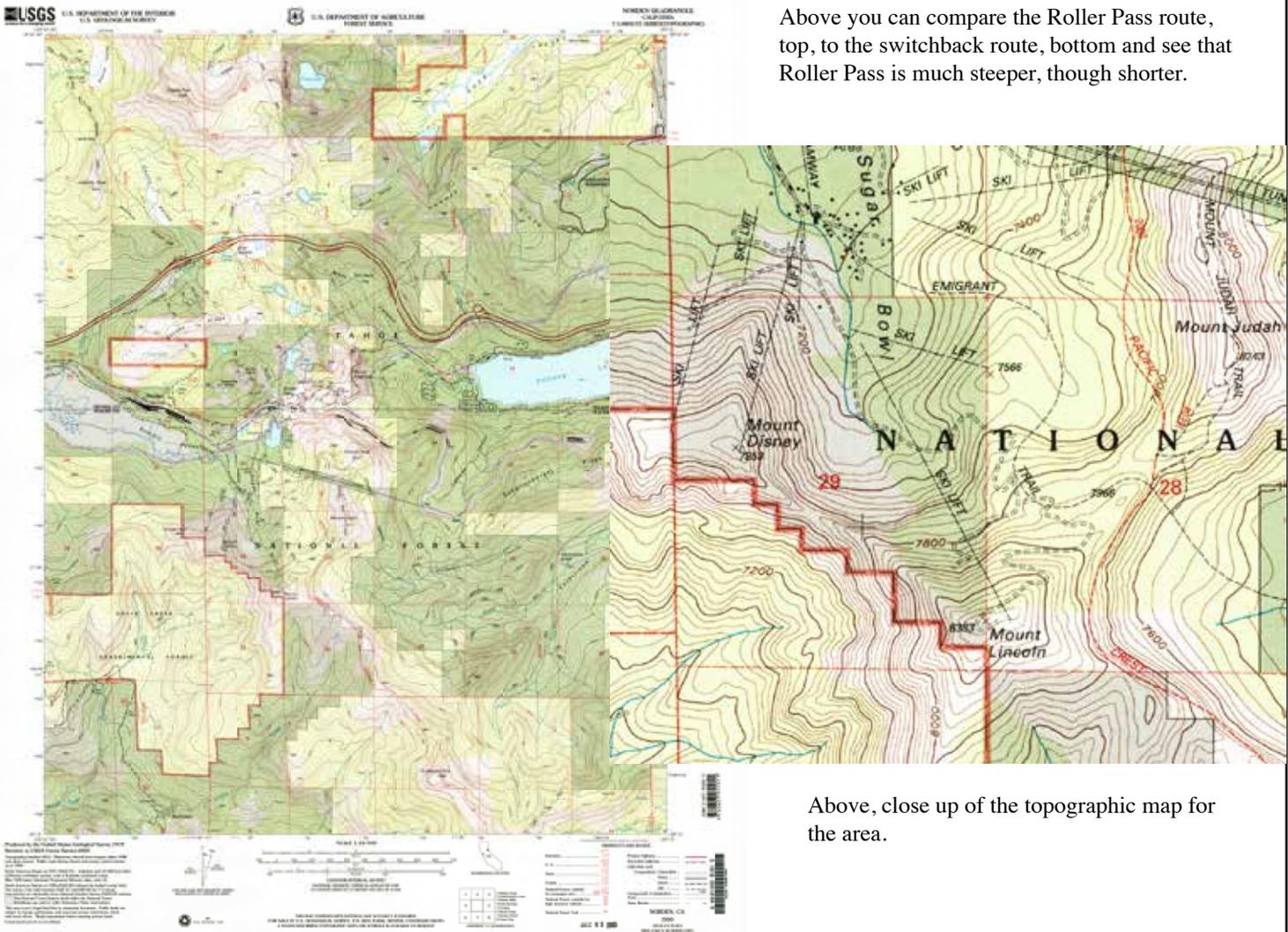
The Coldstream Pass Route for Emigrant, Stagecoach and Freight 1846-1864



Left, the lower dashed line shows the switchback route. The red dashed line shows the trail or road over Donner Summit until the Dutch Flat Rd. was finished in 1864.



Above you can compare the Roller Pass route, top, to the switchback route, bottom and see that Roller Pass is much steeper, though shorter.



Above, close up of the topographic map for the area.

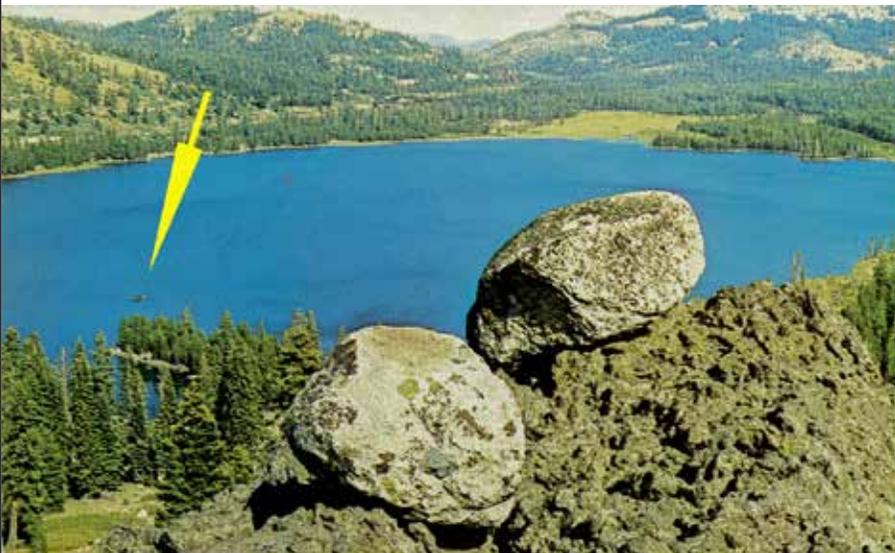
Good 1849 quote about Roller Pass

Up, up we toiled wondering every five minutes how “the dickens” ox teams & wagons can get over here, & it is a wonder indeed, until at 3 P.M. we arrived at the foot of the terrible “Passage on the backbone.” For half an hour before arriving we could hear the shouts of teamsters urging their cattle up the steep & when we were near enough to see through the forest we could look up nearly over our heads & see wagons & cattle looking like pigmies, & as if almost suspended in the air. The “Pass” is through a slight depression in the mountains being some 1500 or 2000 feet lower than the tops in its immediate vicinity. As we came up to it the appearance was exactly like marching up some immense wall built directly across our path so perpendicular is this dividing range & the road going up to this very base turns short to the right & ascends by a track cut in the side of the mountains till two thirds up when it turns left again & goes directly over the summit.

from The Gold Rush Diary Being the Journal of Elisha Douglass Perkins on the Overland Trail in the Spring and Summer of 1849.

For more on Roller Pass see the Heirloom: November, 2011, April and February, 2012.

From the DSHS Archives



Left is a famous picture in Norm Saylor's (president of the DSHS) collection of Lake Van Norden when it used to be full of water at summer time. The rocks in the foreground are on the Soda Springs Ski Hill. Donner Pass is center background.

We use the picture on hikes to point to the black dot at the end of the arrow. That was Norm Saylor's water ski jump.

Up until the dam was breached in 1976 the larger Lake Van Norden hosted fishermen, campers, boaters, and water skiers. As lake water receded at the end of each summer, grass grew and fed the arriving sheep. At the end of the fattening season the sheep were loaded on rail cars and then trucks and taken to their last destinations.

Even after the breaching Lake Van Norden was a beautiful lake hosting thousands of birds, fish, and amphibians. What happened to even the smaller lake is another and very sad story.



Here is Norm Saylor water skiing and jumping in Van Norden.



From the Archives of the DSHS

June in the old days

Truckee Republican June 21, 1882

H. F. Judell writes us from Cisco, under date of the 17th: I write to inform you that we have crossed the summit —just got here, 9 o'clock p.m. Please inform the people not to attempt crossing the summit from your side with wagons. There is over 20 feet of snow there yet, and we (H. L. Judell and E. Sklarek, a traveler for Michalotschke Bros., and the latter with Weil, Leifer & Co.) had to have our wagon bodily Carried by 6 men for half a mile over the trail, over the top of the snowsheds and tunnel No. 7, with the kind assistance of Capt. Joe Goulden from the Summit Hotel. It was the first vehicle that ever passed that way.

San Francisco Call June 21, 1911

Motorcyclist Off for Record --- According to advices received by C.C. Hopkins, manager of the Hendee manufacturing company's Pacific coast branch, P.C. Beaman, and Indian rider, is now on his way east in an endeavor to make a record between here and New York. Beaman endeavored to cross the summit of the Sierras, but found the snow too deep and made his way to Truckee through the snowsheds. [sic]

Sacramento Union June 6, 1920

Auburn – Reno Road Over Sierras Opened

Special to the Union.

RENO, Nev., June 5.--- Official opening Of the road over the summit of the Sierra via Auburn was made yesterday by a car from the Auburn Commercial club. The car was piloted by Verne M. Ford. In addition there were in the car G.O. Moskovics, W.M. Jones, secretary of the Auburn Commercial club, and W.E. Banbrock, photographer. [sic]

The car left Auburn at midnight and arrived without difficulty at Summit about daybreak. Only one bad place between Summit and Truckee was found. This was a large drift of snow which has not been removed from the road. There is a detour, however, and the bank does not offer much of an impediment.

Arrived at Truckee, the pioneers went to Lake Tahoe and then returned to Truckee and completed the trip to Reno. The motorists report that the road will be in excellent condition for travel within 10 days or two weeks.

Looking for a place to go this summer?

SUMMIT HOTEL

Altitude 7015 ft. ; highest station on the S. P.
Glorious scenery ; good hunting and fishing. Plenty
Of fresh milk and cream.

J. GOWLING, Prop., Donner, Placer Co.

Readers when communicating with this resort
Will please mention the "Chronicle."

San Francisco Chronicle June 26, 1912

Book Review

The Inside Man The Life and Times of Mark Hopkins of New York, Michigan, and California

Salvador Ramirez 1982 in two volumes and 1382 pages.

The first thing to say is that The Inside Man... was heavily researched and that's most clearly shown by the 250 pages of footnotes the two volumes contain. Another thing to say at first, is that the title is "...Mark Hopkins..." but you get so much more. The detail in the book is astounding.

Mark Hopkins was one of the Big 4 who built the Central Pacific portion of the transcontinental railroad. The railroad opened California to the world and initially developed Donner Summit and Truckee. The railroad set the stage for what was to come: the transcontinental highway, the transcontinental air route, the transcontinental telephone line, and the coming of winter sports and tourism.

Hopkins had an even more direct connection to Donner Summit. He owned Summit Soda Springs, the original Soda Springs along with a hotel there just eight miles from the railroad in the north fork of the American River Canyon. He helped start the tourist trade on Donner Summit. It was that reference that brought the book to the attention of the DSHS. We were researching the original Soda Springs (which will get into a future Heirloom one day) and came across a reference to a footnote in The Inside Man. We had to get the book to see the source of the footnote and thought that a book about Mark Hopkins might be a good addition to the library. He was the least well-known of the Big 4 and given the accomplishment of the railroad and all that must have gone into it, his story must be compelling. What kind of person could do that?

Unfortunately the book is not about Mark Hopkins. There are references to Hopkins but there is little about Hopkins beyond what we can infer. Instead, the book is another one about the transcontinental railroad, the other railroads the Big 4 acquired or built, and a lot of detail about a lot of things. This book does not come at the railroad in the traditional way however. It is really a compendium of conflicts that led to the railroad, conflicts during construction, conflicts during operation, and then further conflicts afterwards. Money is one of the driving forces behind railroads and so the conflicts almost all have to do with money – in excruciating detail.

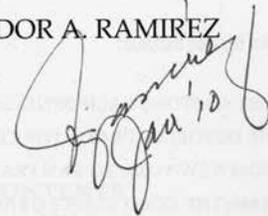
Using conflict as the theme, we can list the conflicts as fights

Salvador A. Ramírez

The Inside Man

*The Life and Times
of
Mark Hopkins
of
New York, Michigan,
and California*

SALVADOR A. RAMIREZ



THE INSIDE MAN

THE LIFE AND TIMES
OF
MARK HOPKINS
OF
NEW YORK, MICHIGAN, AND CALIFORNIA

Volume One



Courtesy of Stanford University Archives

Mark Hopkins, c. 1855

with newspapers, politicians (in California and Washington D.C.), other railroad people, among the Big 4 themselves, with business men, with the public and with rate payers, and dealing with lawsuits. The subjects of controversy were again and again financing, Goat Island, subsidies, grants, laws, where the terminus should be at different times, buy-outs, elections, fares, and deals/deals/deals.

We know that the ordinary reader is not going to read most of the books we review, particularly the 19th Century books and so we use the reviews as a way to talk about more history rather than just the books themselves. In this case however, there is so much detail about so many conflicts and other things, that the reader's head will begin to swim.

We do get an introduction to Mark Hopkins at the beginning of the book in a recital of facts that covers ninety pages or so. He was 35 when he and his brothers left New York for California in 1849. Ramirez says Hopkins was meticulous, had good judgment, didn't gamble, smoke or drink, was responsible (he took care of his younger brothers), and was ambitious. He thought California looked like a good opportunity. To get to California Hopkins joined a joint stock company that invested in what would be needed there and gave people more strength

than if they went singly. It was a common way of going.

He arrived in San Francisco after 194 days at sea on August 5, 1849. He went up river to mine and experienced "six of the hardest days work ever performed anywhere" which led Hopkins to say I'll "dig my gold some other way." That is the most personal piece about Hopkins in the entire book. Hopkins became a traveling merchant selling supplies to mines and then opened stores in Placerville and Sacramento. The stores were an immediate success and so Hopkins started buying land and renting it. He went back to New York a couple of times and married a cousin.

That first part, getting to California and setting up businesses, is good background and through it we can infer many qualities about Hopkins and what made him successful. None of that is discussed or elaborated upon. He must have been as Ramirez says, ambitious, had good judgment, been responsible, and meticulous (since he was a numbers guy). He was a public servant serving in a couple of municipal capacities which is a good characteristic. He must have had other important qualities too: hard working and he must have been a chance taker since he put a lot at risk in the railroad venture and in starting multiple businesses. At one point he tried to prevent slaves from being sent back to Mississippi so he must have been moral and willing to defy authority. He was the conscience of the Sacramento City Council in terms of dealing with budgetary problems. He provided money for a school for black children but would not do so for Chinese children so he was not completely moral in our terms or completely willing to defy convention. He adopted two children in 1862. Those items all let us infer what kind of person Hopkins was.

Where in that background is a discussion of the man, Mark Hopkins? Where is analysis of "what made him tick", what was important to him, how he made choices, what drove him, etc. Why did he support the black children and not the Chinese? Thousands of people came to California in similar circumstances for similar reasons. What induced him to take the big chance to go to California beyond that it looked like, in his words, a "good opportunity?" What induced Mark Hopkins to cut his losses in mining and go into business and make several successes? What induced him to join the CP venture which changed California and the country and made him extremely wealthy? What was his character beyond what we can infer from cold rendition of facts? Why did he feel responsible for the community and do community service? Was the CPRR gamble part of that? What doubts and fears did he have on the way? Why did he feel he should adopt two children? When building the railroad was the toughest going, how did he deal with the challenges?

Even the beginning background, which covers other subjects, is only ninety pages or so of the thirteen hundred page book.

Once the book has set the background it moves on to politics, backgrounds of the other Big 4, and the railroads. Mark Hopkins is left behind except for some gratuitous mentions to keep him in the picture. For example, the first sentence of chapter 18 says, "Eighteen sixty-seven dawned for Hopkins, and his associates, with an air of great expectancy." It seems to be just an added sentence to remind us who's on the title.

There is just too much detail in the book. For example, in the first part of the book there is an introduction to Mark Hopkins serving as an elected official but instead of introducing Mark Hopkins, public servant and why he decided to enter local politics, there are pages of other things: descriptions of U.S. political parties, ballots and how people used them, and then a long discussion of Sacramento city finances. The upshot was that Mark Hopkins was fiscally prudent but it goes on way too long since the detail does not add to anything about Mark Hopkins' character, motivations, or even what he did.

Besides the railroad, the book covers a lot of other topics: floods in Sacramento and levees, hydraulic mining, getting to California, raising Sacramento, setting up businesses, the Red Cross, the backgrounds of his various partners, and quite a bit about State and Federal politics. One topic covered heavily is Hopkins' background and people in his family (you need a scorecard to keep track of the all the Hopkins during that section). Again, little is said of Mark Hopkins.

Besides the book being titled, The Life and Times of Mark Hopkins, and then never approaching the man and mostly spending the time on building and acquiring railroads, there are a couple of other niggling issues.

There are a lot of suppositions in the book with some form of "most likely," "probably," etc. They became so frequent I started listing the pages and collected 26 of those between pages 78 and 303. If it's not an important fact and there is no supporting evidence the suppositions should be left out. They take away from the historical research.

Irrelevancies take up space. For example, track had to be inspected prior to awarding of government bonds. At one point there were three initial inspectors, but one was unsatisfactory and had to be replaced. So what? And what has that to do with Mark Hopkins? That shows the huge amount of detail that Ramirez has found, but it all didn't have to be put into the book.

Then there is the issue of James McClatchy, founder of the Sacramento Bee. This is referenced a couple of times in the first volume and puzzled me until I realized

that it should be James McClatchy. That was fixed in Volume II. There is at least one chapter named one thing in the text but another in the footnotes. Most books have a little bigger margin on the inside of the pages than on the outside to account for binding. This book doesn't and so reading is made difficult unless one continually breaks the spine which of course is bad for the book.

Another problem is that the book is not linear. It skips around leaving the reader unsure in which year she is unless she checks a nearby letter or article's dates in the footnotes.

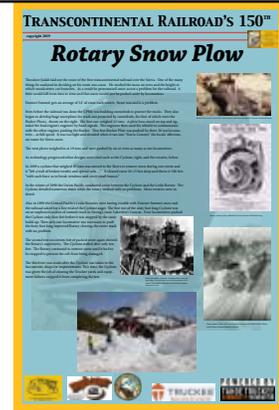
To end on a better note, we take the TCRR for granted but there were lots of hurdles besides the Sierra to get over. Laws had to be passed, people convinced, support lined up, material had to be shipped, thousands of miles around the Horn, labor had to be procured and financing secured. To do the latter a complex combination of Federal bonds, State support, county subscriptions to stock and individual stock sales had to be concocted. There were lots of conditions to be met. The railroad could not be paid for example, until track was laid but how do you pay for all the materials, equipment and labor with no money? That was all complicated but then there were the hurdles thrown up by the Sacramento Valley Railroad which didn't want the CPRR to succeed over Donner Summit and preferred their route over So. Lake Tahoe. The SVRR fought with lawsuits, appeals, injunctions, skullduggery, and political chicanery. Some author could do a good legal thriller over the machinations of the SVRR and the CPRR responses tied to the character of someone who could accomplish all that is in the first part of this paragraph. Someone like that could be a true hero. That was never covered in this book though.

Note:

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

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

You might even want to do a review for us.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS, DONNER SUMMIT-TRUCKEE TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD SESQUICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION MAY-AUGUST 2019

- May 4-5, Truckee Tahoe Community Choir (<https://www.truckeechorus.org/>), Presenting Historical Review
 May 10, Ribbon Cutting Kickoff at The Truckee Train Depot, 12 Noon.
 May 10, Truckee Public Arts Commission Reception, 8924 Donner Pass Rd., Truckee Donner Recreation and Parks Community Center, Opening show of the celebration of the Railroad. 5 PM
 May 11, Historical Talk, the Meaning of the Railroad. 7pm, Truckee Tahoe Airport Conference Room
 May 18, Historical Talk, businesses and History of Old Highway 40, Donner State Park Visitors Center, 5:30pm
 May 20, Dedication of Plaque, George Wyman Foundation. First Motorcycle over Donner Summit. Also, a Memorial Motorcycle ride from the site of the Summit Hotel to the Visitors Center, Train Depot Truckee. Time to be announced and weather dependent.
 May 18 Truckee River Railroad for Kids and Adults Truckee Regional Park 11-3PM
 May 20 George Wyman Dedication visitors' center downtown Noon
 May 31, Music on China Wall. Truckee Tahoe High School band to have a concert on China Wall, Donner Summit. 6PM
 June 2019
 June 1, Historical Talk, Discussion of the "Firsts" that occurred over Donner Summit due to the railroad Truckee Tahoe Airport Conference Room, 7:00pm,
 June 8 Tunnel 6 Clair Tappaan Lodge on Donner Summit - 5PM (optional BBQ dinner follows at 6:15 - RSVP 426-3632 - \$15)
 June 10 Locomotive technologies Pizza on the Hill 11509 Northwoods Blvd Truckee 6 PM
 June 15, Interpretive Walk, Town of Boca site. 10:00am
 June 15, Historical Talk, Boca Brewery, Steam and Beer. Donner State Park Visitors Center. 5:30 PM
 June 22 Historical Talk, Chinese and their Importance to the Railroad. Truckee Tahoe Airport Conf Rm., 7:00pm
 And Bill George video "Sacramento and the Transcontinental railroad"
 June 29, Historical Talk, Snow Sheds-Fires and other Related Subjects. Truckee Tahoe Airport Conf Rm. 7:00pm
 June 29 Truckee River Railroad for Kids and Adults Truckee Regional Park 11-3PM
 July 2019
 July 4, Town of Truckee Annual Parade. Theme: Transc. RR 150th Anniversary. Starts 10:00am at the High School
 July 6 Truckee River Railroad for Kids and Adults Truckee Regional Park 11-3PM
 July 18, Historical Talk, History of the Construction of the Railroad, Tahoe Donner Giving Fund Dinner
 Tahoe Donner Lodge 12850 Northwoods Blvd. 5:30 PM
 July 20, Historical Talk, Lincoln Highway. Donner Memorial State Park, Visitors Center. 5:30 pm
 July 20 Truckee River Railroad for Kids and Adults Truckee Regional Park 11-3PM
 July 27, Historical Talk, Logging Railroads. Truckee Tahoe Airport Conference Room, 7:00pm
 July 28, Trestle Tour Drive/Walk. Meet at 9:00am at the Railroad Museum, 10075 Donner Pass Road, Truckee
 Driving/Walking Tour of old Logging Trestles.
 August 2019
 August 3 Truckee River Railroad for Kids and Adults Truckee Regional Park 11-3PM
 Aug 3, Historical Talk. Truckee Lake Tahoe Railway. Truckee Tahoe Airport Conference Room. 7:00pm
 Aug 10, Historical Walk. Jibboom Street, History of the Red-Light District. Time Pending
 Aug 10, Historical Talk, Art Truckee, Red-Light District of Truckee, History of the Women, Time Pending
 Aug 17, Historical Talk, Vigilantism. Donner Memorial State Park, Visitors Center. 5:30pm
 August 17 Truckee River Railroad for Kids and Adults Truckee Regional Park 11-3PM
 Aug 24, Historical Talk, Henness Pass, Truckee Tahoe Airport Conference Room. 7:00pm
 Aug 31, Final Picnic, Truckee River Railroad, Regional Park Truckee, 11-3PM.
 Sept. 14 Truckee River Railroad for Kids and Adults Truckee Regional Park 11-3PM
 Sept. 14-15 Donner Party Hike event (Mt. Judah Lodge Sugar Bowl and the State Park) donnerpartyhike.com
 Sept. 28 Truckee River Railroad for Kids and Adults Truckee Regional Park 11-3PM

Updated listed available on Facebook: "Donner Summit-Truckee Golden Spike Celebration" Or via: <https://www.goldspike.org/>

Subject to change. Updated March 29, 2019

Stepping Into Paradise

At the DSHS offices we get a variety of emails mostly related to queries about local history, which is not surprising given our mandate.

One day, some months ago, we received an email from Alice Osborn (right) who is a singer/song writer in North Carolina who has an interest in the Donner Party. It turns out that Tamsen Donner taught school there and Jacob and George Donner were born there. Alice gives talks as Tamsen Donner. Her interest led her to write a song "Stepping Into Paradise: For Tamsen Donner." Then Alice thought it would be nice to share the new song with the Donner Summit Historical Society. Loyal readers will know that even though the Donner Party was not on Donner Summit and the Donner Family was not at Donner Lake, Donner Summit is relevant to the story. Take a look at our article index on our website for various references including a series of articles about the Donner Party and Donner Summit.



Eventually Alice wants to write more songs "about the Donner Party, tell their story of resilience and choices, and also play songs on guitar, fiddle, and banjo that the wagon train would have played while traveling through the Plains." That sounds like good goals. Alice is also working on a novel, see the next page. There is also a "bio" on the next page in case you'd like to follow up.

Stepping Into Paradise: For Tamsen Donner

Wagons filled with books and wonder
Dear husband navigates in thunder
In the fall I'll build a new school
Teaching girls math and the Golden Rule.
We sped west in the spring of '46
Started too late, opportunities missed
Broken axle, your infected hand,
You're dying, in this strange land

Paradise, guide us around the bend,
Please, let this winter end
Stop the sky from falling
The cold from calling
No, sir, I cannot leave
Please save my children
Some dreams weren't meant to be

The girls in cloaks step out dry and true
Papa and Mama will be along someday too
When I gave up you believed in me
And now your soul is mine to keep.
We shiver in this garden of thorns
Under a blanket, thin and worn
Dreaming our sweet daughters are safe
Let's shed this skin, I'm not my pain.

Paradise, guide them around the bend,
Please, let this winter end
Stop the sky from falling
The hell from calling
By your side for eternity
Some dreams weren't meant to be

The silence so harsh and cold
All my words eaten up by snow
Eggs, apples, corn and milk
Will our daughters grow up without guilt?

Paradise, guide them around the bend,
Please, let this winter end
Stop the sky from falling
Death from calling
Farewell, goodbye
Why did my dreams turn into lies?

I hear hummingbirds, meadows warm in the sun
Almost like Carolina where we come from
I float over the cabins and creek.
Girls—you've made it to Paradise without me.

Alice's Novel Synopsis: Searching for Paradise

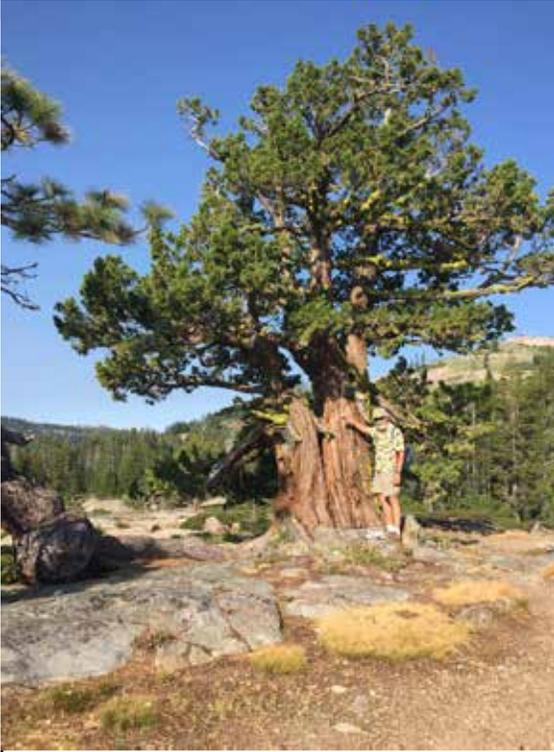
"At the time of her white estranged father's death in 2096, Ellie Anderson doesn't have a clue her eight-times-great-grandfather was one of the survivors of the ill-fated Donner Party. She's too focused on paying her bills and blames her mixed race on her sad romantic state. She returns from California to her home in Myrtle Beach with her ancestor's William Eddy's rifle, pocket watch, and tobacco pouch that have miraculously survived two and a half centuries, bringing the items back to his home state as well. She considers selling the items in order to gain passage to the Andromeda Galaxy, but instead keeps them, and dives deep into Eddy's life, discovering that he was both a hero and liar who lost all of his loved ones in the Sierra Nevada during that horrible winter of 1846. Thanks to an inheritance and proceeds from shoplifting fine jewelry, Ellie leaves behind everything she knows, not realizing she's rushing headlong into her own Donner Party adventure with her fellow shipmates. Told from both Ellie's and Eddy's points of views, this is a story about family, redemption, and the power of human resilience"

Alice Osborn

Alice's Bio

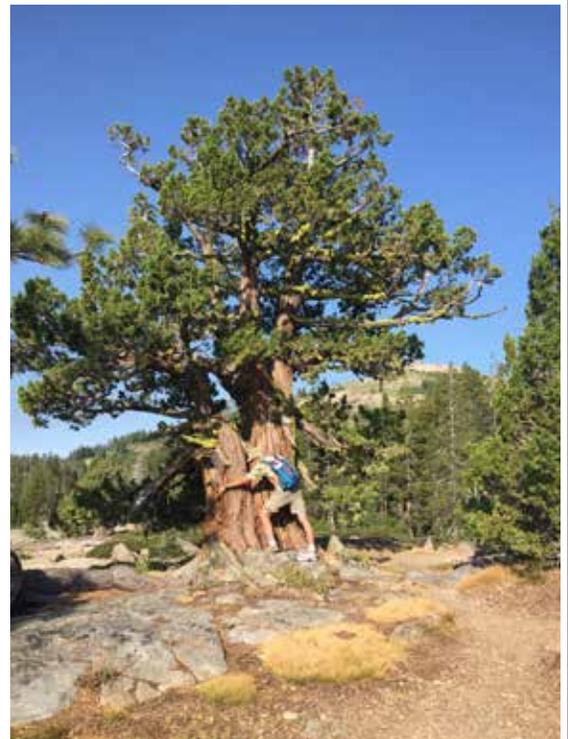
Based out of Raleigh, North Carolina, Alice Osborn's Americana music is truly homegrown. Alice is a true Renaissance woman; she is an accomplished poet, writer, singer-songwriter, song writing teacher, editor, entrepreneur, history buff, baker, and more! Celtic, bluegrass, country and rock folk all influence her Americana vibe on acoustic guitar. Heroes without Capes is her most recent collection of poetry and Old Derelicts is her most recent CD featuring crowd-pleasing originals. Previous poetry collections are After the Steaming Stops and Unfinished Projects. Alice is the recipient of a United Arts Council of Raleigh and Wake County 2019 Professional Development Grant, a Roads and Let's Talk About It Scholar for the NC Humanities Council, the artist-in-residence for the Western Wake Farmers' Market, and is a senior docent at the NC Museum of History. A NC Writers' Network, NC Poetry Society, and NC Songwriters Co-op board member and a Pushcart Prize nominee, she's currently working on a novel and songs about the ill-fated Donner Party. She also plays Celtic fiddle and bluegrass banjo. Alice lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, with her husband, two children, and four birds all named after musicians. Visit Alice's website and blog at www.aliceosborn.com and check out her music at www.reverbnation.com/aliceosborn.

Odds & Ends on Donner Summit



One of the most intriguing Odds & Ends on Donner Summit are the Sierra Juniper, some of which are thousands of years old (see the October '13 [Heirloom](#)). Here you can see the contortions Art Clark, member of the MHRT, goes to figure the age. The tree above left is at catfish pond and measures out at about 1280 years old. The one at center above is the same tree that Maryanne North (see the May, '11 and September, '13 [Heirlooms](#)) painted in 1884.

Imagine what they've seen.



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 them 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.

DATE _____

NAME(S) _____

____ New Membership

MAILING ADDRESS _____

____ Renewing Membership

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

____ Individual Membership - \$30

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

____ Family Membership - \$50

____ Friend Membership - \$100

____ Sponsor - \$250

____ Patron - \$500

____ Benefactor - \$1000

____ Business - \$250

____ Business Sponsor - \$1000

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

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

Old Time Sunday Drive

Next Time Take Scenic Old Hwy 40 instead of I-80



- Historic Towns
- Interesting Scenery
- Fascinating History
- Picnic Spots
- A Slower Pace



Take a look at our guide to Old Highway 40: turn by turn instructions from Rocklin to Truckee, broken into four legs and including pictures and history. Available on line on the brochure page of donnersummithistoricalsociety.org, at the DSHS (at the blinking light in "downtown" Soda Springs, or the visitors' centers in Truckee and Auburn.



And while you are at it, check out the 20 Mile Museum - interpretive signs from Nyack to below Donner Summit on Old 40. Information at www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org



DONNER PARTY HIKE

September 14 & 15, 2019



© ERSKINER PHOTOGRAPHY.COM



Donner Party Hike

SEPTEMBER 14 & 15, 2019

QUESTIONS? CONTACT:
Bill Oudegeest 209-606-6859
info@donnerpartyhike.com

For more information and to sign up:
www.donnerpartyhike.com



PRODUCED BY DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY.



See this beautiful trailer (video) for the Donner Party Hikes done by George Lamson:
<https://vimeo.com/332905330>

Margie Powell Illustrated* Hikes, 2019 August 10 & 11 9:30 AM each day

Margie Powell was the inspiration for the Donner Summit Historical Society. She was also the energy behind the founding. In her memory we've held annual Margie Powell hikes in August.

On this, our eighth year, we're going to go down Summit Canyon:

This hike is all downhill. We will park some cars at the end and then shuttle back uphill. This hike will start with an overview of Donner Summit history - the most historically significant square mile in California and maybe the entire Western United States. That overview has the most magnificent view! We'll talk about the firsts: first transcontinental railroad, first transcontinental highway, first transcontinental air route, first transcontinental telephone line, and the first wagon trains to California. We'll see ads painted on the rocks 100 years ago and we'll see petroglyphs incised into the granite 2-4,000 years ago. We'll have great views and lots of great stories. The hike is illustrated so there will be lots of old photographs.

Bring: lunch, snack, sunscreen, good shoes, a hat, a camera, and whatever else you need to go hiking. It's the same hike both days.

Although the hike is downhill there are rough spots and the route is three miles long.

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

The dates: August 10,11 9:30 AM each day. Meet at the Donner Ski Ranch parking lot.

*meaning lots of pictures

**Bring Hat, good shoes,
sunscreen, water, camera,
lunch, curiosity.**



Above: Margie Powell, 2011

Below: The first Margie Powell Hike in 2012 at the petroglyphs.





Donner Summit Historical Society



P.O. 1 Norden, CA 95724
530-426-3376

www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org
info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

Board of Directors

Norm Saylor
Bill Oudegeest
Starr Hurley
Cheryl Paduano
Pat Malberg

June 1, 2019

Annual Fund Raising Drive.

Last year, our tenth anniversary, was a milestone but we've not "rested on our laurels" since then. There's been another twelve issues of the Heirloom each filled with Donner Summit history. The museum has been open all year and we participated again in Placer County's Heritage Trail. We put on the Donner Party Hike event. We put up six new 20 mile Museum signs, we produced a new brochure about the Chinese Railroad Workers, the Heroes of the Transcontinental railroad, and we've been planning for the Sesquicentennial of the transcontinental railroad.

Associates

Jim Hoelter
Sharon Ruffner
Art Clark
John Loll
Judy Lieb

Working with the Truckee Donner Historical Society and the Truckee Donner Railroad Society, we've come up with quite a celebratory program from May 10, Gold Spike Day, to after Labor Day, 2019. Go to goldspike.org or look at the calendar page on our latest Heirloom. The DSHS graphics department made the 20 exhibits that will be around town in Truckee and on Donner Summit. The DSHS graphics dept. made the new Chinese RR workers brochure, and the DSHS graphics dept. made the stamps you'll use to fill your Sesquicentennial Passport (see our June Heirloom).

To continue our work we need your annual help. We have rent to pay, we have insurance to pay, and we have brochures to print. Our brochures are carried in the Auburn and Truckee visitors centers, the Donner State Park, the Colfax Historical Society, the DSHS, and the Soda Springs store. Each of the 20 Mile Museum signs was paid for by a sponsor so our annual fundraising is not for new signs but we do have maintenance costs.

In other news the Margie Powell Hikes will be on August 10 & 11. We'll probably be going down Summit Canyon. The Placer County Heritage Trail Museum Tour will again be in operation this summer. There will be 25 museums participating including those in Truckee. Our date is Aug. 3.

We'll again put on the Donner Party Hike event and the dates are September 14 & 15 (see donnerpartyhike.com or the "News and Events" page on our website). See our first video trailer for the event, done by George Lamson at <https://vimeo.com/332905330> It's really good.

Thank you for your help,

Norm Saylor, President