

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom

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HIGHWAY

HISTORIC  
CALIFORNIA  
U.S.  
40  
ROUTE

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

November, 2019 issue #135

## This is an Important Picture



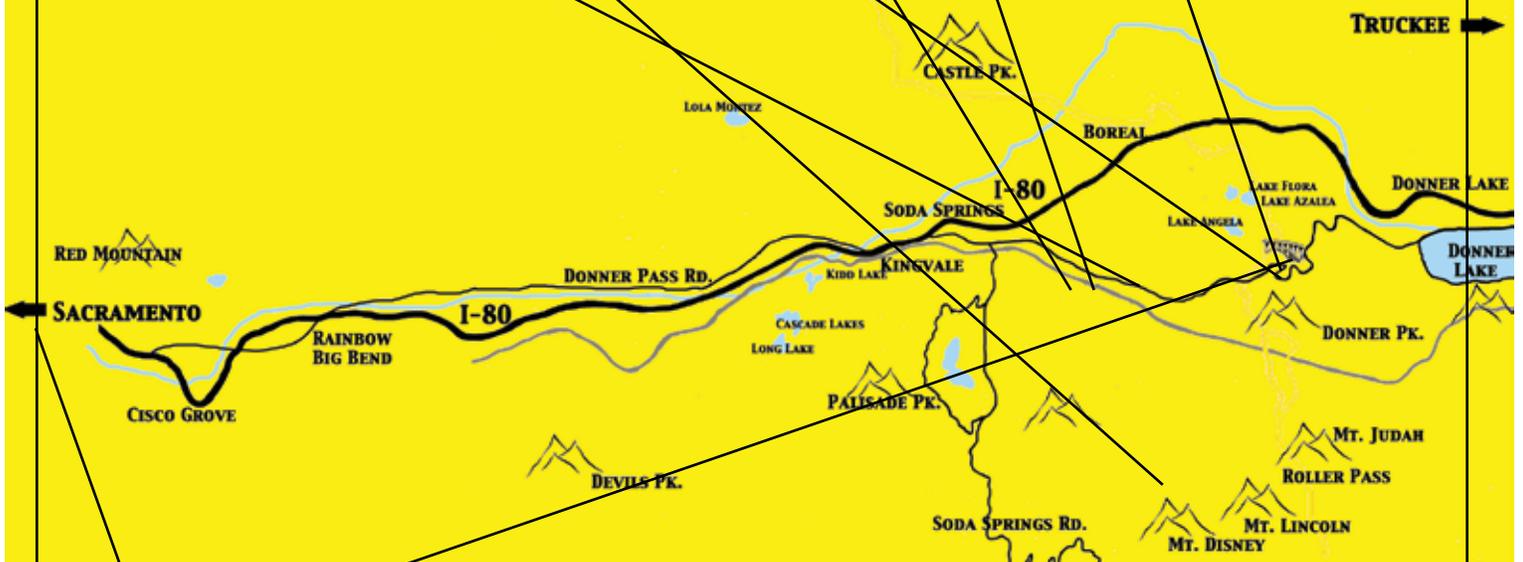
Last month we ran a story about a box of 1952 photographs brought into the DSHS by Hank Goodrich of Cisco Grove. Virtually all of the 200 pictures are from the winter of 1952.

In amongst the pictures there were a couple that do not fit the collection's theme. Here, above is one, with the center enlarged in the inset to the right. In January of 1931 the Auburn Ski Club invited the State legislature to Cisco Grove for a skiing competition. Then the Club publicized the event and the legislature's acceptance of the invitation. A monumental traffic jam resulted as four thousand cars and their occupants arrived also. That convinced the legislature that winter sports in sunny California were important and they voted to keep Highway 40 clear in winter. Here we have a picture dated 1931-32 of the highway being cleared that first winter.

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## DONNER SUMMIT



tunnel pg 19

bridge pg 11

from California Highways and Public Works January-February, 1952

### Snow Depths

Listed below are a few of the recorded snow depths at Norden for December and January:

December 25, 1951.....	57 inches
January 1, 1952.....	121 inches
January 10, 1952.....	118 inches
January 17, 1952.....	218 inches

During the period January 10th to January 17th a snowfall of 138 inches was recorded.

Find us on 

editor:  
Bill Oudegeest  
209-606-6859  
info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

Proofread by Pat Malberg, Lake Mary, Donner Summit

Unless otherwise noted, the photographs and other historical ephemera in The Heirloom's pages come from the Norm Saylor collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society

# Snow Removal - 1952

Snow removal is tough on Donner Summit. We get an average of 34' of snow each winter. That's the amount of snow that falls. Then the winds blow the snow into drifts that can be much higher. When the snowstorms come from the north the snow is dry and can be very light. The storms that come from the west, across the Pacific, are a different matter. We affectionately call the snow dropped by those "Pineapple Express" storms, "Sierra Cement." No one on Donner Summit has to go to the gym during winter.

Fortunately snow removal equipment has improved a lot since people first started removing snow. Today we have snow blowers in addition to shovels. Almost every home on Donner Summit has a small snowblower or two.

For the streets and highways there are behemoth-sized machines that remove the snow. Those blowers can blow the snow sixty feet or more, depending on the snow type. One person operates each machine and clears everything in front in one pass.

That's not always been the case, especially in high snow years. As it happens Hank Goodrich, of Cisco Grove, came in to the DSHS with a "wad" of pictures. He'd worked for Cal-Trans and somehow had acquired a bunch of pictures of snow removal in 1952, mostly on Donner Summit. The pictures had just been sitting for all the decades since and the collection had devolved into a wad of curled pictures. He was going to throw them out when he got the idea that the DSHS might like them. He was right and Norm Saylor, president, was ecstatic. As he perused the pictures he carefully straightened them and put each in its own plastic envelope.

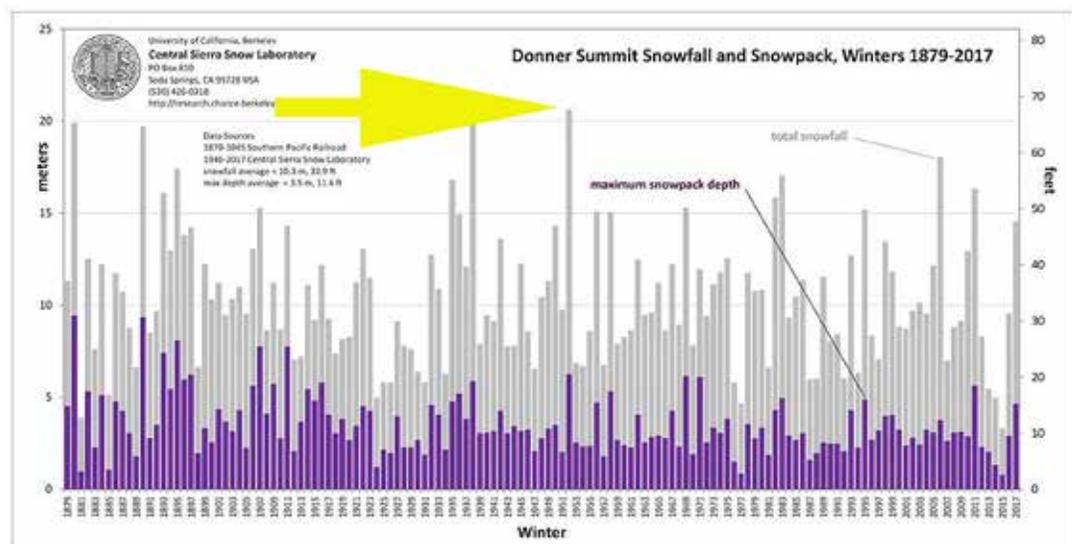
To digress for a moment, suppose you have some pictures or artifacts sitting in your closet that have to do with Donner Summit. We'll take them or make copies no matter what their condition. We'll take care of them.

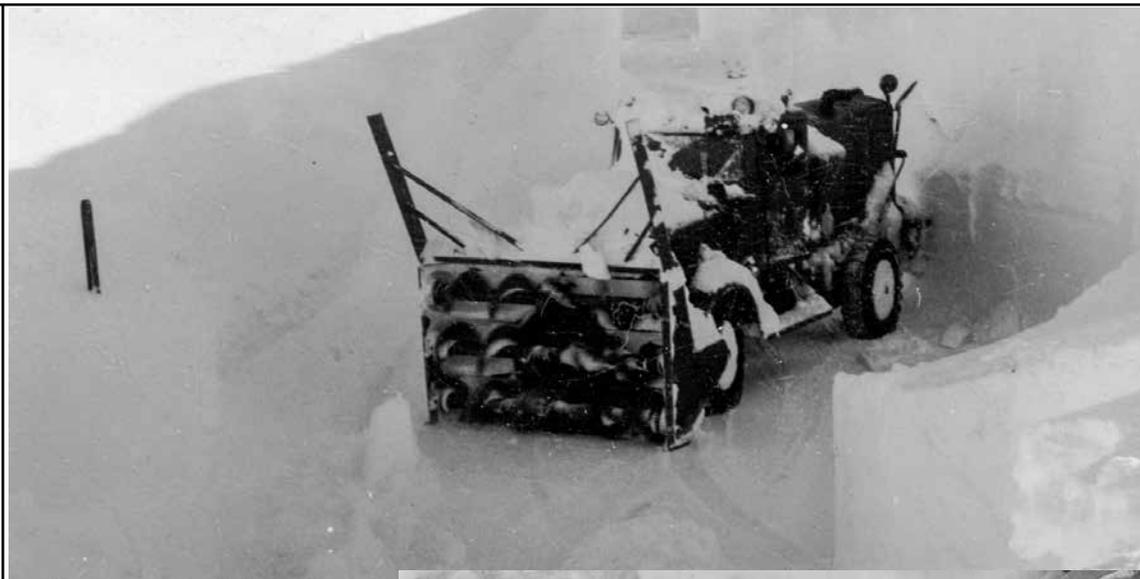
In the collection of snow removal pictures we have a record of how snow was removed in 1952, twenty years after the State started clearing Highway 40 in winter. There's one more piece of information needed before looking at the pictures. 1952 was the same year the City of San Francisco Streamliner was stuck for six days near Emigrant Gap. Snowfall that year was almost 70 feet (see below). That puts the snow in the pictures in context.

Here we have snow blowers and graders just as we do today but they were obviously less powerful because they needed the help of men poking holes in the snow for dynamite, men digging, and men sawing at the snow. The men all stand above the roadways breaking snow so it falls into the paths of the snowblowers. The sides are dense and high. Looking at the pictures we can see where machines went perpendicularly into the snow to break it up for the snowblowers. We also see graders coming along with steel arms slicing the snow that's too high for the snowblowers and cutting the snow so it falls into the roadway. Then, too, there are bulldozers feeding snow into the snowblowers. In some pictures we see convoys of snowblowers. Finally we see the same State car in many frames. We can imagine it was driven by State supervisors keeping the snow removal teams on track.

Today Cal-Trans sends out one guy per machine and the mighty machines clear the snow. There are no shovelers, dynamiters, or snow sawyers. There are supervisors, however.

To put the pictures that follow in context, here is the Soda Springs Central Sierra Snowlab's snowfall chart. The yellow arrow tells you what you need to know about snowfall that winter.





Top: your typical 1952 snowblower

Center: The blowers had to be preceded by trucks that knocked down the snow too deep for the blowers so multiple passes were needed.

Bottom: cars parked in Soda Springs.

Bulldozers were used to push the deep snow into the blowers.



Snowblowers in action. In the photo below note the shadows of the guys waiting to get in and shovel more snow from the snowbanks for the blowers to blow.



The supervisor presumably because the car appears in many pictures.



Blower operating. Crew of guys on the snowbank ready to shovel snow into the blower.

Right: grader knocking down the snow from the snowbanks for the following grader.

Below: dozer pushing snow into a blower.





Here we have the human component.

Top and bottom right: guys sawing the dense "Sierra Cement."

Center: driving holes into the snow into which to put dynamite to loosen the "Sierra Cement."

Bottom left: Worker crew waiting for the blower to blow away what the workers have pried loose from the snowbanks. Then they can go to work again.



# What's in your Closet?



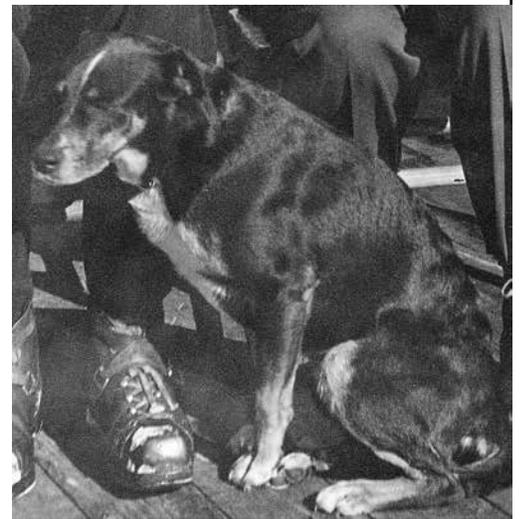
Milli Martin used to spend a lot of time on Donner Summit visiting her aunt and uncle, Herb and Lena Frederick, who ran the Norden Store and lodge (above before 1946; there are a number of entries in the [Heirloom](#) indices). Milli, who now lives in Homer Alaska, donated a trove a materials to the DSHS. This small "trovette" is just kind of fun and came later.

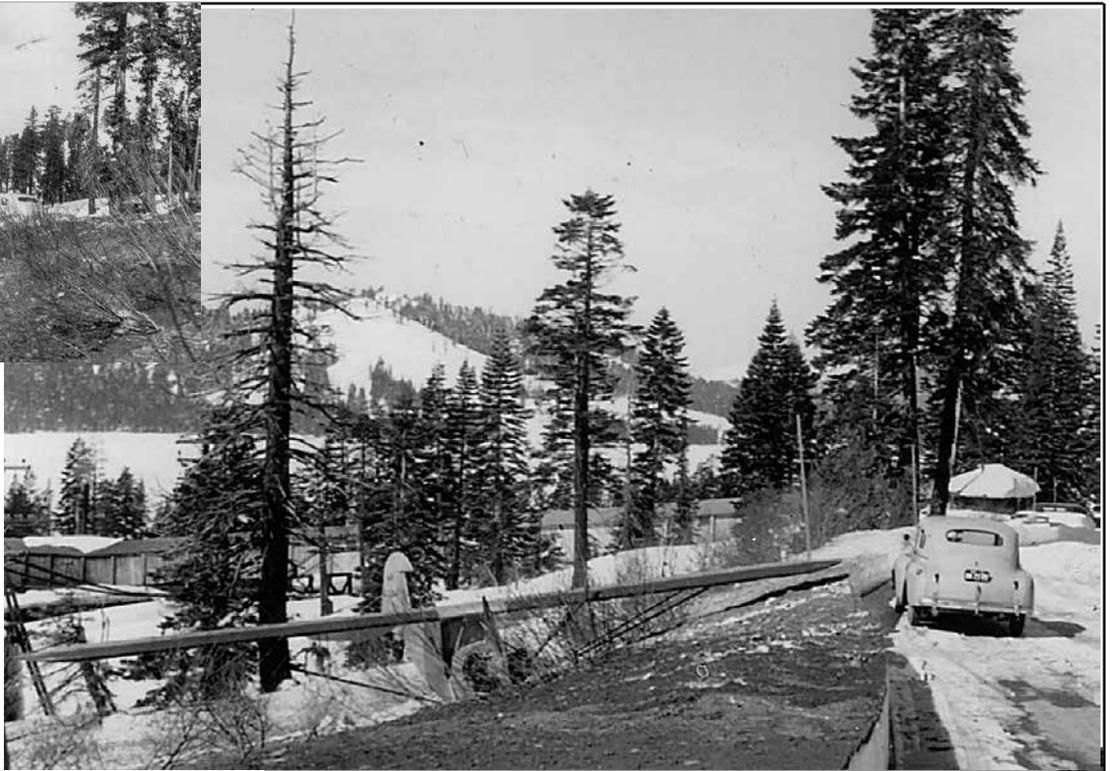
First, there's the plan crash just off Old 40 near the Norden Store at the top of the next page. In the background of the larger picture there is the snow tunnel entry to the Norden Station. In the left hand picture there is a fellow standing, perhaps disconsolately, next to the plane. Maybe he's the pilot. There's no date on the picture but the car can give us a clue.

At the bottom of the next page is an accident on Old 40 just over the pass and above the bridge. The DSHS photo enlargement lab pulled out the wreck and enlarged it to show the man investigating and the license plate number. If it's a California plate perhaps someone with access to the State DMV archives could flesh out the story by looking up the owner.

If you have old photographs and/or artifacts of Donner Summit we'd love to have a look, take a donation, or make copies.

Pictured right is Schnapsy, Herb and Lena's dog. Here he is part of photograph we misidentified as Herb and Lena. Fortunately for our credibility, our fact-checking committee contacted Milli before publication. Milli identified the people and then said, "That dog visited the whole neighborhood, and knew when the trains came and dropped off skiers, he would run behind the sleds into the Sugar Bowl. Everyone knew him." So we left out the misidentified people.





wreck dated November 17, 1940

Right is the first chair lift in California. Note it was a single seater. Imagine how long the lines must have been. The Sugar Bowl Lodge is in the background, an historic structure designed by William Wilson Wurster, a famous architect for whom a building is named at U.C. Berkeley



Sugar Bowl Ski Patrol about 1947.





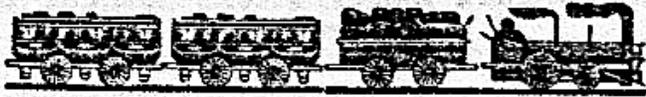
Right, an itinerant photographer and friend capturing scenes for post cards like the one above, the one to the right, and the middle on the previous page. The auto on the right has a spare tire covering (inset) saying "..... Studio ..... Calif" The insets here just show that those mystery shows where they enlarge the newspaper date a million times are nonsense.



Another accident on Old 40 near the Norden Store. The tow truck from the Thornton Garage (inset) in Truckee is there to the rescue. We can't quite make out the phone number.

# From the DSHS Archives

## GRAND EXCURSION



## TO THE SNOWY MOUNTAINS!

THE CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY, having been earnestly solicited by many citizens to run an Excursion Train to the Mountains while the snow is still at its greatest height, and thus afford an opportunity for ALL to see the Sierras clad in wintry garb, will,

**On Sunday, April 21st,**

Run an Excursion Train from Sacramento to Cisco and return, One Hundred and Eighty-six Miles,

**At the Low Fare of Three Dollars!**

Tickets from Auburn and all Stations west at \$3; from Colfax and Stations east at \$2.

This will probably be the only opportunity this season to enjoy, at so cheap a rate, the "swift transition" from the flowers of the valley to the "Arctic realm of the Sierras."

Cisco is 5,960 feet above the level of Sacramento, or 680 feet over a mile in perpendicular height, and there is now a greater depth of snow than was ever before known, and the Scenery between Colfax and Cisco is grand beyond conception.

The Tickets will be ready for sale on and after Thursday—number limited to 2,000. Passengers not provided with Tickets will be charged \$4.

Cars will leave Sacramento at 8 A. M.; Junction, 8:45; Rocklyn, 9; Pino, 9:15; Newcastle, 9:50; Auburn, 10:05; Clipper Gap, 10:20; Colfax, 10:50; Gold Run, 11:20; Dutch Flat, 11:30; Alta, 11:40; arrive at Cisco at 1:20. Returning, leave Cisco at 2:30.

a17-td  
O. CROCKER, Superintendent.

The right hand article here did not fill the page leaving some extra space. Knowing readers want their money's worth we insert this ad from 1867.

In 1932 The State began keeping Highway 40 clear in winter (See the July, '19 and the August, '10 [Heirlooms](#) - pages 2 and 11). Before that there was no highway winter travel after snow fell. Here is an article from the year before the Auburn Ski Club invited the State legislature to Donner Summit for a skiing competition which occasioned the largest traffic jam anyone had seen (see the above [Heirlooms](#)). It's a slice of life from 1930 on Donner Summit.

## Motorists Warned Against Attempting Donner Summit

"State highway officials have officially announced that the Donner summit on the Auburn-Tahoe highway is now closed, with approximately 30 inches of snow being reported at the summit.

T.H. Dennis, state highway maintenance engineer, issued the official statement to clear conflicting statements made regarding the condition of the road.

"The road at Donner summit," Dennis said, "has not only been blocked to traffic, but equipment sent there to rescue machines caught in Sunday's storm has been withdrawn. The public is warned that any attempt to negotiate the summit is extremely dangerous."

"About 25 cars were caught last Sunday by a sudden storm, which left huge drifts of snow along the highway. Most of the passengers took refuge at the Soda Springs hotel, or at cabins nearby, and thus escaped suffering any ill effects.

"A snowplow and other equipment were sent to the summit by the state to rescue the marooned cars. All have been gotten out of the area," Dennis said.

"The department also announced that bids have been called on \$65,000 worth of snowplows to be used in keeping California's major mountain highways open as long as feasible.

Oakland Tribune November 22, 1930

# From the DSHS Archives

In the March, '19 [Heirloom](#) we covered the underpass on Donner Summit next to China Wall that eased crossing the railroad tracks. Until the underpass was put into service in 1914, people either drove over the snowsheds when the snow was too high or drove through them from barn door to barn door, perhaps 100 yards along the track. Naturally that was a dicey proposition given the size advantage trains have over cars. There were people too who drove, bicycled, or motorcycled through the snowsheds for various reasons. One tourist guide recommended a nice walk through the snowsheds (December, '15 [Heirloom](#) - see the sidebar on page 15) but this is not an activity our editorial staff recommends for snowsheds that have tracks in them.

Headline in the [Truckee Republican](#) November 20, 1913

## **F. J. MAUPIN AND R. L DOUGLASS\* ARE HIT BY A FREIGHT TRAIN LAST SUNDAY NIGHT AS THEY WERE ATTEMPTING TO GO THROUGH THE SNOW SHEDS IN A NEW 1914 STUTZ AUTOMOBILE**

### **Douglas made the Statement that he Passed Through the Same way Before**

E. J. Maupin, a mechanical and electrical engineer of Fallon, was taken home from Reno last Monday morning suffering from injuries received on Sunday afternoon near Soda Springs, when the automobile in which he and R. L. Douglass, capitalist, politician, banker and rancher of Churchill county, Nev., were riding was struck head on by a west-bound freight train and demolished. That Douglass and Maupin escaped being killed instantly is considered almost miraculous. Douglass escaped without a scratch and Maupin's injuries consist of a dislocated collar bone, a sprained ankle and a sprained wrist, in addition to bruises and a severe nervous shock.

The men entered the snowsheds at Soda Springs intending to follow the railroad track in their car and get over the hill, the snow which was two feet deep making it impossible to follow the county road. They had proceeded about one hundred yards when they heard a freight train approaching at an alarmrate [sic] of speed. Douglass jumped in front of the automobile and managed to wedge himself in between the snowshed timbers, and escaped injury in this way.

Maupin was driving the car, a seventy-five horse-power Stutz racer just purchased by Douglass, and jumped behind it. Just at that moment the locomotive struck the machine. Maupin was dragged about thirty feet before the engineer could halt his train. Maupin says he thought "his whole front was caved in" when the crash came but found that he was not seriously hurt when he was taken from the wreckage of the automobile and revived sufficiently to realize his condition.

A light engine was sent out from this place immediately upon receipt of the news of the accident with Dr. Bernard and several others on board who went up to see what they could do for the victims of the accident. The injured man was made as comfortable as possible under the circumstances, and was placed on No. 24 and taken to Reno.

Parts of the wrecked automobile were sent to San Francisco and Douglass says he thinks that portions of the engine may be used to put into another machine. Monday morning Douglass received a telegram from Maupin's people at Fallon directing him to bring the injured man home and they left Reno on NO. 6.

The steering wheel, or what was left of it, of the demolished automobile was taken to Reno by Douglass. Only half the rim remained and the spokes were broken out of that. It will be kept as a memento of the experience.

The men say they had no knowledge of any train having left Summit when they entered the sheds. Trains travel silently after leaving Summit going west and the locomotive was almost on top of them before they knew it. Douglass says that portions of the locomotive were torn away as a result of the collision and the snow-sheds were torn down for a distance of fifty feet.

\*The original article spells Mr. Douglas' name with both one and two "s's". Without some research we don't know whether Mr. Douglas is just Douglas or is Douglass.

Here is another source gleaned from a footnote. Travel guides were apparently a popular form of literature in the late 19th Century, given the number of them. Here is an excerpt from another guide describing the wonders of Donner Summit, "a region fit for the residence of the gods."

## Travels West

Wm. Minturn 1877

If the traveller has sufficient and to spare of that most precious coin in these days of rapidity in all things-time, let him stop here [Donner Summit] for a few days, devoting himself to the congregated beauties and sublimities which these tall, majestic mountains, deep and solemn gorges, lofty peaks, glancing, foaming waterfalls, and smooth, crystal lakes, afford the beholder in such rich abundance.

The accommodation is said to be good at Summit House [Summit Hotel], but whether good or bad, the tourist will be obliged to make his headquarters here, since this is the only hostelry unless indeed he has a natural preference to camp out upon the bleak mountain side, or by climbing a trifle higher, say 4,000 or 5,000 feet, he might enjoy the novelty of "posting" himself- in more senses than one - upon the snow covered saw points (this being an exact translation of the Spanish name of this chain of mountains, Sierras Nevadas) [sic], where, if he succeeded in reaching them, and there taking up his residence, it would be apt to be very permanent indeed.

As you stand at the foot of one of these frowning peaks, whose summit is covered with a sugarloaf cap of everlasting snow, and gaze upward-your head being in that position which the practised [sic] beer-drinker almost unconsciously assumes when draining a foaming tankard of ale you begin humanity is beside the infinitely grand in nature. ...

At Summit the train enters a number succession, so close together that you can the other ends. Of snow-sheds there are at for a distance of about forty-five miles. These were found necessary to protect the road often twenty feet deep-but likewise from spring rush down the mountains, and sweeping over the sloping roofs of the sheds, dive with a frightful plunge into the awful chasms, thousands of feet below the narrow ledge whereon the track is laid.

Summit Valley,...  
a region fit for the  
residence of the gods

of tunnels and snow-sheds in scarcely tell where one begins and this point an almost continuous line sheds, solidly built of heavy timber, from, not only the great snow-fall the mighty avalanches which in

Emerging from the tunnels and snow-sheds, the train, like some huge snorting serpent, curves and winds around the base of lofty mountain-peaks; then shooting straight forward over the bleak ridge, affording on either hand snatches of scenery grand and impressive ; then, without warning, it plunges into the gloomy recesses of a dense forest of giant trees, in whose deep shade we continue our journey until we arrive at Cascade, six miles west of Summit.

Here the tourist has in store for him one of the chief joys of physical existence, provided he is strong enough to enjoy it. For all he has to do is to make terms with one of the rough but good-natured mountaineers, whose snug dwellings are nestled in the loftiest of the Sierra valleys, known as Summit Valley, and he may live in a region fit for the residence of the gods, as far as pure air and the luxury that pure air can supply are concerned ; how great is that luxury, people "in cities pent" have but a feeble conception. This is a very paradise for stockraisers and dairymen, whose habitations are found in this mountain valley, and who are rapidly bringing this place into celebrity, on account of the fact that they have demonstrated that beef and ham can be cured here all the year round. This fact, in connection with the nearness of the railroad, is bringing to this place a large and increasing business, and must ultimately result in making this point one of considerable importance.

Near the bottom of Summit Valley are situated the Soda Springs, which are large and numerous, and said to be the finest water for medicinal purposes to be found in the State...

TRAVELS WEST.

BY  
WILLIAM MINTURN.



NEW EDITION.



London:  
SAMUEL TINSLEY,  
10, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.

## Walking Through the Snowsheds

"The tourist who stops a few days at Summit Valley, will find a walk along the railroad, through the snow-sheds, peculiarly entertaining. These sheds, covering the track for thirty-five miles, are massive arched galleries of large timbers, shady and cool, blackened with the smoke of engines, sinuous, and full of strange sounds. Through the vents in the roof the interstices between the roof-boards, the sunlight falls in countless narrow bars, pallid as moonshine. Standing in a curve, the effect is precisely that of the interior of some of Gothic cloister or abbey hall, the light streaking through narrow side-windows. The footstep awakes echoes, and the tones of the voice are full and resounding. A coming train announces itself miles away by the tinkling crepitation communicated along the rails, which gradually swells into a metallic ring, followed by a thunderous roar that shakes the ground; then the shriek of the engine-valve, and, in a flash, the engine itself bursts into view, the bars of sunlight playing across its dark front with kaleidoscopic effect.

from the December, '15 [Heirloom](#)

# A Hazard of Historical Research

We don't let opportunities go at the DSHS and in reading [The Chinese and the Iron Road](#) (see page 16) we came across a quote that held great promise for a source of some Donner Summit history. Count Ludovic de Beauvoir took a voyage around the world in 1867 and published a book about the trip in 1872. During his journey he traveled to Donner Summit and was there when the Chinese went on strike against the transcontinental railroad. His book, the third of three volumes, [The Conclusion of a Voyage Around the World](#), might be full of historical treasures for [Heirloom](#) readers. It took awhile to find the requisite volume but then we dove in.

De Beauvoir arrived in San Francisco coming to the end of his trip around the world in June 1867. From there he took a stage to Mariposa where he saw the redwood trees, the "great trees" of the "Yo-semite valley... the two wonders, apparently, of California." They'd left the "hideous plain" of California and entered "dense pine forests" and "green undulating country." This abrupt shifting of scenery was as abrupt as the inhabitants "are in their manners," De Beauvoir said. De Beauvoir and friend saw fabulous scenery, lots of wildlife and then a tree on fire like a "gigantic candelabrum." Their Mexican guide had "amused himself setting fire to a fine tree for the mere pleasure of destroying a beautiful thing." There was so much detail and wonderful prose we could hardly wait to get to his descriptions of Donner Summit.

De Beauvoir was so impressed with the redwood trees that he found some saplings to take back to France. He carried them dangling from the pommel of his saddle in a little tin box. They were bundled in ferns and his only linen shirt. He kept his "collection" watered at every stream, "If I can only get them home alive!" he said. Then he described Yosemite and our expectations for Donner Summit descriptions increased, "Yo-semite valley appeared suddenly, a thousand feet straight below us!... This valley has something diabolical and wild about it which seems to overpower all detail, leaving only the most marked feature visible.... It is the grandeur of naked and barren rock! One might think that the Creator, in a moment of anger, had with one great blow of a sword cut through the gigantic block of granite." He goes on and then says, "It is one of those views that impress without charming, and almost inspire terror. The great sword-cut has interrupted the course of foaming rivers, and in a moment they have become colossal waterfalls..." Imagine what he will say about Donner Summit!

Traveling north the Comte and his traveling companion spent twenty consecutive hours in the stage-coach passing through various Sierra foothill towns. Everywhere the search for gold was "diabolical." They saw more redwoods in Calaveras and continued with the "stage-coach" to Newcastle where they took the train, "in a few hours of slow progression" to Sacramento. Sacramento he said, was "very ugly, desperately dull, and extremely dirty." Worse it was 101 degrees and "myriads of mosquitoes and bugs... devoured us." Those creatures were the only ones who enjoyed themselves," he said.

Form there it was off to the "summit of the Sierra Nevada." We're getting close.

Up to Colfax there was nothing special but "from this point onwards the route soon becomes very interesting:" Bold turns, abrupt curves, frightful gradients, "ascent at full speed over suspension bridges, hung at the giddy height of a thousand feet above the

empty space below,... a medley of pines, red granite, white sand, snow, and auriferous gravel” all the way to Cisco. It took three hours to travel 87 miles on their special train, thoughtfully provided by the railroad - perhaps hoping for good publicity.

At Cisco they found five thousand Chinese. “You cannot imagine all that these Asiatics do in this State of the Union.” Unfortunately once on foreign soil “they soon borrow from Anglo-Saxon civilization its worst feature...” They’d gone on strike. They were paid \$34 a month and wanted \$40. “As the Company does not choose to yield, the Sons of Heaven have left their picks in the sand and lounge about with folded arms, and an insolence that is quite Western.” That was a great quote. What else might De Beauvoir have described of Donner Summit in his book? De Beauvoir and his friend then contemplated their travels through China, “stuck fast for centuries in its antiquated mould” and the Chinese in California “engaged in the greatest work that has been undertaken by modern civilization.” That was it. De Beauvoir had traveled to Donner Summit during the transcontinental railroad construction, during perhaps the most consequential episode of that construction besides the completion of the railroad and the completion of Tunnel 6. That was all he had to say, “...the Sons of Heaven have left their picks in the sand and lounge about with folded arms, and an insolence that is quite Western.” What kind of reporting is that?

Then it was off to Nevada City for the pair. There they saw hydraulic mining, the nozzles shooting water like the geysers of Iceland. Here was “truly American boldness of conception” with multiple jets of water washing away the hillsides. Just one mine, they discovered washed away 2500 tons of auriferous gravel a day. Finally they headed for San Francisco and home. What a missed opportunity.

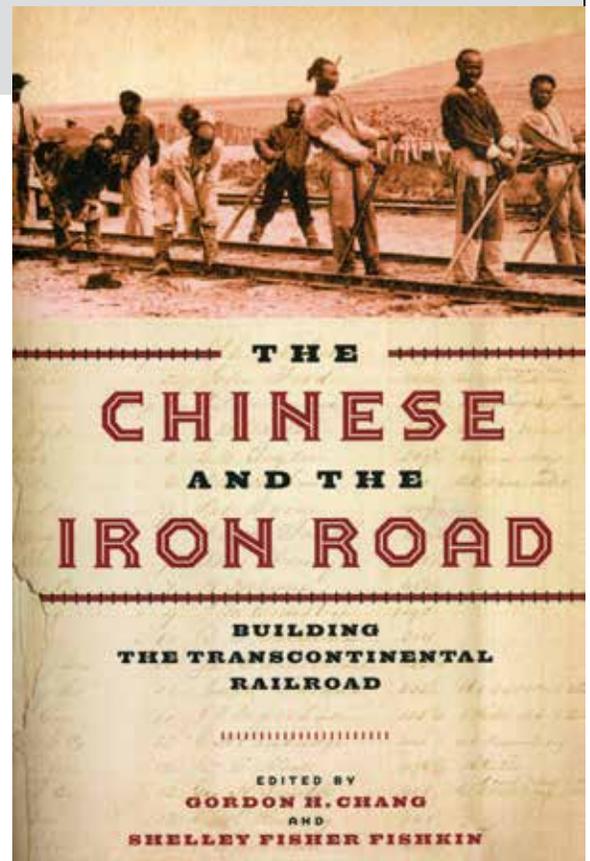
# Book Review

## **The Chinese and the Iron Road Building the Transcontinental Railroad**

Edited by Gordon Chang and Shelley Fishkin  
370 pages w/o notes 539 w/notes.

We last heard from the editor, Gordon Chang, in our review of [Ghosts of Gold Mountain](#), in the September [Heirloom](#). [Ghosts...](#) was a product of the Stanford University Chinese Railroad Workers’ Project and new sources that described more fully the experience of the Chinese railroad workers than other sources focusing on the railroad have done. [Ghosts...](#) was Chang’s own research. [The Chinese and the Iron Road](#) follows along with a compilation of essays covering different aspects of the Chinese workers’ experiences. The essays are by different authors and include Gordon Chang. This book is a little more dense than [Ghosts...](#) and is like an anthology you may have been assigned in college for a liberal arts course. It is like [Finding the Hidden Voices of the Chinese Railroad Workers](#), reviewed in our October, ’16 [Heirloom](#).

[The Chinese and the Iron Road](#) answers a number of questions about the Chinese in the Western U.S.: “Why did they come? What did they experience? How did they live? What were their spiritual beliefs? What did



“the Chinese... performed herculean feats of endurance and strength while being treated with gratuitous disrespect and hostility. During the two decades after the Central Pacific and Union Pacific met at Promontory, Chinese railroad workers triumphed over some of the most punishing landscapes America had to offer, playing a major role in building the rail infrastructure of the nation.”

they do after the railroad was completed? What is their place in cultural memory?" Chang says, "The Chinese and the Iron Road aims to recover this neglected chapter of the past more fully than ever before." A little further he says, "Despite the importance of their work, the Chinese workers themselves are a shadowy presence in much of the written history of the transcontinental railroad."

Chinese and the Iron Road answers all those questions and more. Without a focus on the Chinese one cannot have a complete picture of the railroad's building. In general, books about the railroad do cover the Chinese but the treatments are pretty superficial, nowhere near the depth Chang's books do. Here, despite the lack of primary sources about the Chinese experience, we get as close as we can get to the actual experience.

The introduction is excellent and goes beyond the rationale for the book. It describes the history of the Chinese and the railroad, working conditions, pay, how the Chinese were used, the work, and the strike of 1867 (next page).

The rest of book covers lots of subjects in the various essays: putting Chinese workers into the international context, they were leaving China for many other places than just California; documents related to the Chinese workers migration that are in China and in Chinese, which offer interesting perspective and insight; how the overseas Chinese remitted money home, what it was spent on, and the effects on local Chinese economies; archeological contributions to understanding the Chinese railroad workers' experiences, including Donner Summit; health; religion; relations between Chinese and the Native Americans; photography of the Chinese; U.S. textbooks' historical representation of the railroad workers; what happened after the railroad was done; etc.

Those essays provide interesting insights not seen in other books about the railroad. For example, on the subject of remittances. Chinese workers usually incurred debt to come to California. Passage was about \$70 and had to be repaid in monthly installments from wages of about \$30. The loans were guaranteed by the Chinese who stayed in China. Beyond paying off the loans the Chinese workers also sent money home, remittances. Remittances sent home, paid for the workers' travel loans and then food and clothes for the family, followed by land, houses, and paying for the marriages of descendants of the overseas workers.

Those remittances also had bigger effects than just on workers' families. "In China remittances from railroad

workers and other migrants transformed the landscape of Guangdong Province in the nineteenth century, sponsoring public works, such as schools, orphanages, hospitals, assembly halls, roads, bridges, and even railroads."

"The workers who built the railroads constructed far more than a new means of commercial transportation. The identities and communities they formed reshaped the fabric of social life in North America and China, and the wealth generated by their labor continues to influence commerce, education and

philanthropy today." There's nothing like that in other books about the transcontinental railroad.

Another effect of the migration of railroad workers out of China was on the society in general. Most of the emigrants were men and that changed the role of women giving them more control with men gone.

The book includes poems and ballads of the Chinese expressing hopes, failures, accomplishments, and grief and those also show the effects of workers' migration. With the migration new social constructs were necessary, for example when a family lost a son overseas. The family might then buy a daughter-in-law who was "married" with a rooster acting as proxy for the dead man. Then the woman could move into the family house. The family might then buy a son to keep the family line going.

One interesting essay describes European travelers' accounts of the Chinese railroad workers. The reader gets a wider view and more insight of what it was like to build the railroad and people's perceptions. In describing the 1867 strike one traveler says,

"...the Sons of Heaven have left their pickaxes buried in the sand, and walk around with arms crossed with a truly occidental insolence.

"We stayed a few hours in the middle of the Chinese camp, our minds taken up completely by thoughts that brought to mind both our recent memories of the Middle Kingdom, frozen for centuries in its own backward mould, and the sight of these Chinese who were brought in to accomplish the greatest endeavor ever undertaken by modern civilization."

Another visitor described the camps, "The camp of the Chinese, on the other hand, consisted of many small individual huts, in which an ordinary man could hardly stand erect. Their dining hall was a simple platform, on which they

"The fraught relationship [between the Chinese and their employers] is emblematic of the general experience of the Chinese in nineteenth-century America as a place for them that was both 'Gold Mountain' and a 'land without ghosts,' a soulless place of tragedy, humiliation, and cruelty."

"As an artist with shovel or drill, wheelbarrow and cart... the Chinese railroad worker has proved himself unsurpassed."



squatted with folded legs.” This was after describing the rest of the camp with its many buildings, even one with enough stalls for eighty horses. The point being that the Chinese facilities were decidedly inferior even to those for horses.

One detail I’ve never read is about the work day.

“Bells rang at 5 o’clock each morning to announce the beginning of the day... After taking care of watering the horses and setting up the tip carts, everyone had breakfast together. There was a hearty piece of beefsteak, potatoes, fresh bread and coffee. The Chinese had their rice, their meat, and their tea.”

“Starting at 6 o’clock all the workers gathered for a roll call. After that, horses were harnessed, tools were handed out, and then all started walking across the dirt roads, often wading through knee-deep feces, to our worksite about a mile away...”

One visitor left advice for Americans saying that although the Chinese labor was a boon “Californians should remember the story of Goethe’s sorcerer’s apprentice and not forget the formula which can be used to send the servile ghosts/spirits back to where they come from... in order that this Chinese tribe does not become rooted in this country.”

Other visitors were more fair. “All laborers employed in this hardship work, except foremen, were Chinese. Their docility, their zeal, their dexterity and finally their intelligence were all the more appreciated in that they hardly receive a dollar and a half for a day’s labor, instead of the three or four we had to give to US workers.”

There is also a part about Summit Camp on Donner Summit in the essay titled, “Living Between Misery and Triumph.” Given the living conditions and the work, that’s an apt title.

## 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.

# Odds & Ends on Donner Summit



One day UP will send along one of their steam engines and as it emerges from the west side of Tunnel 35, it will be a beautiful shot. The tunnel was built in 1924 and sits just east of the Highway 20 exit from I-80

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.

## Route 66 Pix

<https://www.rt66pix.com/preservation>

This is a beautiful website about Route 66 and "other famous American roads..." It calls itself "The Mother Lode of American Road Pix™." The reason for its inclusion here is that our article about the Emigrant Road map done by T H Jefferson in our September, '19 [Heirloom](#) occasioned some comment. One of the comments came from a Texas reader, Frank Gifford. He said, "A new article on my site throws a different light on the western migration by using the National (Cumberland) Road as a benchmark. Perhaps this would be of interest to other members."

Go to the P"reservation" page, <https://www.rt66pix.com/preservation> and scroll down to "TRAILS AND TRIBULATIONS" There is an article with very nice pictures about various historic roads across America and their place in the emigrant experience. It a good article and the pictures all over the site are wonderful.

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\_\_\_\_\_



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