

The Donner Summit

Heirloom

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HISTORIC
CALIFORNIA
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ROUTE

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

August, 2019 issue #132

The Superiority of the Donner Summit Route to Virginia City Race Between Railroads, 1864

Since this year is the sesquicentennial of the railroad it makes sense to use this article this year rather than have it wait its turn and get saved into a future Heirloom folder. We were also impatient to show off more of our investigative reporting, something this august historical periodical is famous for.

It was not always so friendly in the California Sierra. There was a time, surprising now, when there was competition between Donner Summit and the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. route over the Sierra and the route that goes through South Lake Tahoe to Placerville. We take it for granted today, based on incontrovertible evidence, that the Donner Summit route is superior.* The 19th Century was not so enlightened and that can seem shocking to us.

One example of the competition was the Lincoln Highway, the first transcontinental highway. This is the only area of the country where the Lincoln Highway has two routes: one over Donner Summit to Auburn and the other over So. Lake Tahoe to Placerville. Clearly the Lincoln Highway people were misguided but that was later corrected. U.S. 40 goes over Donner Summit as does Interstate 80. Everyone makes mistakes.

In the 19th Century the continual fight was over which route was better for getting to Virginia City and its silver mines and then for where the route of the transcontinental railroad would go. Once Theodore Judah laid out the route of the railroad over Donner Summit you would have thought the argument was done. The connecting link of California to the rest of the country, the route opening California to the country and the world, was over Donner Summit. What relevance would there have been in another route?

People are stubborn though.

The people in Placerville continued to agitate for their route, and the Sacramento Valley Railroad (SVRR), before the Big 4 and the CPRR acquired it, fought to have their route from Folsom over the Sierra be the main route to Virginia City. By 1864 the Central Pacific had started laying track and reached the foothills in Auburn. The Sacramento Valley Railroad had tracks

*It is the richest historical area in California and maybe the entire Western U.S. We had the first wagon trains to come to California, the first transcontinental railroad, the first transcontinental Highway, the first transcontinental air route, the first transcontinental telephone line, the first Sierra bicycle crossing, the first Sierra automobile crossing, the first Sierra motorcycle crossing, etc. We have biological diversity: 500 species of plants, 115 species of butterflies, 100+ species of birds, and dozens of mammal and amphibian species. We have world-class recreational activities. We have unparalleled scenery. The Placerville route is, sadly, only a distant competitor.

to Latrobe, forty miles east of Sacramento. The Sacramento Valley RR hoped to increase business by introducing a 24 hour trip from San Francisco to Virginia City. Customers would take the steamboat from San Francisco to Freeport, south of Sacramento. There they would hop on the train to Latrobe and then take the stage over the Sierra to Virginia City.

Not wanting to be left out, the Central Pacific, which advocated the route over Donner Summit, decided to offer a like opportunity with their steamboat stopping in Sacramento. Passengers would then take the train to Newcastle, followed by a stage ride over the Sierra. The Central Pacific also decided to undercut their rival's

inaugural event by racing over the Sierra to Virginia City to prove the superiority of the Dutch Flat Rd. This would be great publicity for their route, business, and traffic.

The race idea must have caught on with the public because the many newspaper articles were clearly prejudiced including commentary along with reporting. The story is told in successive San Francisco and Sacramento newspapers by special correspondents and fellows with noms de plume such as "Old Piute" and "Pioneer."

The Daily Alta California (August 21, 1864) headlined an article, "San Francisco to Virginia City in Twenty-Four Hours" as their special correspondent clearly took the side of the SVRR.

"...a direct route from the seaboard metropolis to the chief city of the silver land beyond the Sierra Nevadas, will be formally opened to-morrow. All other lauded routes of travel are bound to be completely eclipsed by this new and direct line of communication with Virginia City."

There followed an outline of the trip. The steamer would arrive at Freeport at 11 PM. Passengers would embark on the railroad and head east to Latrobe. Pioneer Stage Co. coaches would then take people on to Placerville (arrival at 3 A.M.) and Virginia City (arrival at 4 P.M.). Total time: 24 hours.

This would be such a time saver and there were other advantages as well. Passengers would cross the Central Valley at night, saving them from the heat of the day. There was also the "romantic and majestic scenery" and Lake Tahoe, "the Geneva of the West" could be viewed in daylight. The article also said that according to "the Old Piute," engineers were

busy surveying "a line of road over the Sierra Nevada" that would be an extension to the SVRR. So you are not kept in suspense, that was "hype." There were no engineers surveying railroad routes over the Sierra on the Placerville route. "Fake news" has a long history.

On August 23rd, the steamer Chrysopolis arrived at Freeport and discharged its Sacramento Valley Railroad passengers. A locomotive was ready to go. "It was the design of the managers to show the best time between San Francisco and Virginia City ever made". (Sacramento Daily Union August 23, 1864)

It was 11:15 when the SVRR locomotive left Freeport.

Meanwhile on the Central Pacific or Donner Summit route, "The locomotive of the Pacific Railroad Company left Sacramento at 12:04." (Sacramento Daily Union August 23, 1864)

In the Sacramento Daily Union's "News of the Morning" column (August 24, 1864) the next part of the story was described. Passengers had landed from their steamship "at the site selected for a tule metropolis at a witching hour of the night," ready to leave the "levee of the imperiled city" (floods were an issue in Sacramento). "The fate of Sacramento trembled upon the issue." Sacramento wanted the cross Sierra route to go through Sacramento and not Freeport.

The Pioneer Stage (just to keep us straight in the confusion of the race, this is the Placerville route) ran into rain which had been falling heavily, "Causing a trial of speed". To continue to race would have compelled "the driving of stock to an unwarrantable

rate of speed in order to make programme time." The fellow in charge "promptly said that he would not risk the lives of his passengers to ensure a triumph, which could at any other time be easily achieved without personal danger or cruelty to his stock. The drivers were accordingly instructed only to make "ordinary time." Today we call this "spin."

"Heavy rains—heavy roads— heavy loads" was telegraphed.

Meanwhile the California Stage Co.'s stage (this is the Donner Summit route) left Newcastle for Virginia City over Donner Summit. The mud was "five or six inches deep" which slowed the travel. At some points, at team changes, the "fresh" horses had just come west and not rested, been watered or fed. On

"The most bigoted advocate of the Dutch Flat Wagon Road, freely concedes the fact of the surpassing grandeur of the scenery in that portion of the Sierras lying along the Placerville route. In no other part of this magnificent mountain chain are to be seen such lofty peaks, yawning chasms, lovely valleys, beautiful lakes and crystal streams. Your correspondent, on his journey hither, entered the fastnesses of the eastern ridges at daylight. Clouds, dense and watery, completely obscured the summits, and hung far down the slopes. Other banks drifted through the gorges, whilst here and there giant pines could be discerned for a moment in the misty distance, only to disappear again in the cloudy columns as they came sweeping by."

August 24, 1864
Front page Daily Alta California

approaching Virginia City a man with a telescope announced the arrival. "When it reached town it was welcomed by such a crowd of citizens as had seldom if ever been seen at an impromptu gathering in the city before." The CPRR stunt had paid off. Their passengers arrived in Virginia City after 21 hours five minutes of travel.

The SVRR's passengers arrived in Virginia City after "twenty-nine hours and fifteen minutes of travel."

Clearly the Donner Summit route was better.

Newspaper correspondents then analyzed the event based on their prejudices. Even though meticulous planning had gone into the SVRR's inaugural trip, "Heavy rains, heavy roads and heavy loads intervened," but that was not all that "intervened." The race had been rigged even though the SVRR had planned things and the CPRR's attempt was "impromptu." The CPRR and the California Stage people had cheated. They hadn't waited for the steamer to come from Freeport to Sacramento. Instead they'd raced ahead of the steamer with San Francisco newspapers (proof of the start) to Sacramento by horse. The Alta California said that was because the CPRR had been afraid the Chrysopolis would take its time going slowly from Freeport to Sacramento giving an unfair advantage to the Pioneer Stage Company. Besides, said the Alta, dishonest people always accuse others of dishonesty. The Sacramento Union said the CPRR train was not really a train since it carried no heavy cargo and had only five passengers. That enabled the locomotive and tender's speed to "resemble that of the frightened quadruped with an enemy at his heels." They hadn't used a regular stage from Newcastle either, but rather a "buggy express." The CPRR had also exhausted their animals, driving them "as fast as horses could run" and because of that, the stages the following day were all late because they'd been left with exhausted horses. The Pioneer Stage Co., a more reliable company, was trying to meet its goal by running a normal stage journey. The California Stage Co. was driving for speed over comfort, so much so, that the superintendent, Charles Crocker, one of the Big 4 whose idea this race was, was so thoroughly worn out by the trip that he was "unfit for duty." The Union also pointed out that the "obese superintendent" was of some "three hundred pounds avoirdupoise [sic]."

The Pioneer Stage Co. was sure the public had sufficient

"Sagacity" to know that the "braggadocios, now so jubilant" did not provide safe reliable and comfortable service. The "offshoot" company (neither newspaper deigned to mention the actual names) could not possibly compete long-term with The Pioneer line's "superior advantages."

"Onward and upward flew the crowded coach, drawn by six spanking bays, which literally drunk in the morning air. Soon the mist assumed definite shape, and the drops began to patter on the oilcloth cape and rubber cloak. From the leaves of the trees, and from the jagged promontories overhanging the road, aqueous globules slowly fell to the parched earth. [It was raining.]

"Still upward sped the panting horses, and yet along a grade broad and of gentle acclivity. The Jehu looks at his watch— he is 'on time' this morning, but there is ugly weather ahead, so he plies the lash to his leader's flanks, and in a few moments the six steaming steeds are reined up at the breakfast station, on the south fork of the American."

Pioneer.
August 24, 1864
Front page Daily Alta California

The California Stage Co. was sorry to hear "that a brief rain produces such an effect on the Placerville road, causing a trial of speed, which had been heralded by advertisement and editorial in the Bay papers, to come to such a deplorable conclusion" and that despite planning, the stages at Latrobe had been late. The condition of the Placerville road was an issue too. "The Donner Lake road is new, and comparatively soft, one would suppose ; but it seems to stand fast travel like a well-kept racing track." On that road "heavy rains" did not lead to "heavy roads." It's geographic location was superior, it was kept in good repair and well-sprinkled (for dust), and it's grade very gentle. Likewise the rolling stock of the CPRR was "splendid" and gave the "Newcastle route a great advantage."

The race results tell all and the Sacramento Daily Union (September 19, 1864) summarized

The Placer County's view of it all by saying,

"This road was opened for travel this last Summer, and soon after the California Stage Company put on a daily line of horse stages, running from the present terminus of the railroad to Virginia City, Nevada Territory; and, in consequence of the superiority of the roads, they have been able regularly to make the trips in from four to six hours less time than any other company by any other route. A recent trial of speed between the two rival routes, in which the time over the Placer County beat the El Dorado route about nine hours, has settled the question of the superiority of our route. All travelers over the new roads speak of them in the highest terms of praise. Hotels, dwellings, saw mills and other improvements are being rapidly erected through the county along the line of this road, and we may well look to a rapid increase of our reputation and taxable property by this means. Already a large proportion of the freight over the mountains passes over this new route, some teams taking ten

tons to a load. As its advantages become better known, and the railroad is extended, we may expect soon to see all the immense trade of Washoe, Reese River and Humboldt passing through our county."

"Let the steamboat company give Sacramento, the Pacific Railroad and the California Stage Company a fair shake, by making the same time between Freeport and Sacramento they do between San Francisco and Freeport, and the public will soon see whether any rival concern will be privileged to boast much."

August 26, 1864
Sacramento Daily Union

Nevada Senators Race to San Francisco

The summer, 1864 race was not the last proof of the superiority of the Dutch Flat route for travelers. The DSHS would never allow one example to suffice proving the superiority of the Dutch Flat route. That would open us to accusations of prejudice. Our exalted reputation would be at risk. A further perusal of 19th Century newspapers turned up another example.

Four months after the inaugural race, won by the Donner Summit route, the newly elected Nevada senators, Governor Nye and William Stewart headed off to Washington D.C. to take up their duties. Nye traveled by Pioneer Stage Line over the Placerville route. It was a safe journey except for the coach overturning and Nye hurting his wrist. He had started twenty-four hours ahead of his colleague, Senator Stewart.

Stewart took the California State Co. using the Donner Lake Dutch Flat route. He arrived in San Francisco at the Orleans Hotel "at the same time with the Governor, who was not a little surprised at meeting his colleague."

The Daily Alta (December 29, 1864) copied an article from the Sacramento Union reporting Stewart's arrival and saying, "As a general thing, stages by the Dutch Flat route have brought their passengers through from Virginia City, since the rains commenced, in 24 hours less time than those of the Placerville route."

Then The Alta concluded, "The Union don't tell the whole story. The stages by the Placerville route stop one night in Strawberry, and also at Placerville, while the stages by the Dutch Flat route, when they can come through at all, run all night. We are informed that after each storm, thus far, no stages come through on the Dutch Flat route for several days after. This much for the Union's fairness."

Through in 24 Hours,
BY
Pioneer Stage Company's
EXPRESS LINE,
Via California Steam Navigation Company's Boats
to FREEPORT; Placerville and Sacramento
Valley Railroads to LATROBE;
thence, by Pioneer Stages,
to Virginia City.

ON AND AFTER MONDAY, 22d AUGUST, passengers leaving San Francisco by California Steam Navigation Company's boats **TAKE CARS AT FREEPORT,** on arrival of boat; change to stages at **LATROBE,** (38 miles from Sacramento) crossing the Mountains by daylight, and arriving in Virginia City in 24 hours from San Francisco.

RETURNING,
Leave Virginia City by Afternoon Stages, take Cars at LATROBE; next day at noon, Steamboat at FREEPORT, arriving at San Francisco in 24 hours from Virginia City. (Sacramento passengers by this line connect with Noon Train at Folsom.)

Accommodation Line.
The usual stage connections will be made between Sacramento and Virginia City, as follows:
Leave Sacramento, by Sacramento Valley Railroad, at 6:30 A. M., connecting with stages at LATROBE, for Virginia City. Leave Virginia City at 6 A. M., connecting with Railroad at LATROBE, next morning, at 6:30, arriving at Sacramento at 8 o'clock A. M.

LOUIS McLANE & CO.,
Proprietors.
H. MONTFORT, Agent,
Office, What Cheer House, Sacramento, and

Daily Alta California September 7, 1864

RAILROAD TRAVEL.

CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD.



ON AND AFTER WEDNESDAY,
July 20, 1864, until further notice, the trains of the
Central Pacific Railroad will be run as follows:

UP TRAINS LEAVE

Sacramento at 6:15 A. M., arrive at Newcastle at 7:30 A. M.
Sacramento at 1 P. M., arrive at Newcastle at 3:10 P. M.
Sacramento at 5:30 P. M., arrive at Newcastle at 7:30 P. M.

DOWN TRAINS LEAVE

Newcastle at 6:30 A. M., arrive at Sacramento at 8 A. M.
Newcastle at 10:15 A. M., arrive at Sacram'to at 11:45 A. M.
Newcastle at 5:30 P. M., arrive at Sacram'to at 7:30 P. M.

The 6:15 A. M. and 5:30 P. M. up trains connect at the
junction with the cars of the California Central Rail-
road for Lincoln.

The 5:30 up and down trains both connect at the
Junction with the California Central Railroad from Fol-
som, at 6:20, conveying passengers from Folsom to Sac-
ramento or Newcastle. The 10:15 A. M. down train
connects at the same place with the cars from Lincoln,
and at Sacramento with the boats for San Francisco.

On Sunday one train only will be run, leaving Sacra-
mento at 6:15 A. M., and Newcastle at 10:30 A. M.

Stages for Virginia City, Dutch Flat, Nevada, and in-
termediate places connect with the cars at Newcastle at
7:30 A. M. Stages for Marysville and other points north
connect at Lincoln at 7:30 A. M.

C. CROCKER,

Superintendent C. P. R. R.
[Papers having our notice will change as above.]

SACRAMENTO VALLEY RAILROAD.



SUMMER ARRANGEMENT.

On and after MONDAY, JULY 11th, Trains will leave
Sacramento as follows:

Leave Sacramento at 6 1/2 A. M., 1 and 5 P. M.
Leave Folsom at 7 A. M., 11 A. M. and 5 1/2 P. M.

ON SUNDAYS, ONE TRAIN ONLY.

Leaves Sacramento at 6 1/2 A. M.; Folsom at 11 A. M.
The 1 P. M. and 5 P. M. up trains connect with
cars for Lincoln.

Passengers for Placerville, Coloma, Georgetown,
Jackson, Carson City, Virginia City and all places east
of the mountains will connect by Stages at Folsom
with 6 1/2 A. M. up train and 12 M. down train.

Freight by every up train to Folsom, and by every
morning down train to Sacramento.

J. P. ROBINSON, Superintendent.

June 10, 1864. al
[Papers having our notice please make change.]

Both ads, for the two railroads, were in the
Sacramento Daily Union August 15, 1864

THE CALIFORNIA STAGE

COMPANY HAVE DAILY
lines of Stages to all parts of California,
Oregon and Nevada Territory, carrying
the great UNITED STATES MAIL AND WELLS,
FARGO & CO.'S EXPRESS.

LIGHTNING LINE!

DAILY LINES OF SIX-HORSE CONCORD COACHES
FROM SACRAMENTO TO VIRGINIA CITY, VIA
DUTCH FLAT AND DONNER LAKE WAGON ROAD.

THE SHORTEST, SAFEST, BEST Route to Virginia!

Passengers from San Francisco and Sacramento
take the cars of the CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD at
6:15 A. M., arrive at Newcastle at 7:15 A. M., where
they take the coaches of the CALIFORNIA STAGE
COMPANY, arriving at Virginia City at 11 P. M., same
day, being

**Only Seventeen Hours from Sacra-
mento to Virginia.**

THE CALIFORNIA STAGE COMPANY also run a
SIX-HORSE DAILY LINE OF CONCORD COACHES
from Sacramento to Virginia City,

VIA HENNESSY PASS ROUTE.

Leave Sacramento on Central Pacific Railroad at 6:15
A. M., take the Coaches of the Company at Newcastle
at 7:15 A. M., arriving at Nevada at 11:30 A. M., and at
Virginia at 2 A. M. next day.

Passengers by this line pass through Auburn, Grass
Valley, Nevada and Eureka. The only Daily Line to
MARYSVILLE, Oroville, Red Bluff, Shasta, Yreka and
Portland (Oregon), connecting with the Central Pacific
and California Central Railroads.

OFFICE OF THE COMPANY, Sacramento, corner
of K and Front streets, directly opposite Landing of
Boats of California Steam Navigation Company.

A. G. RICHARDSON, Superintendent
California Stage Company.
A. WAGENER, Agent.

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Red, White and Blue—Style Changed

AND PRICE REDUCED—In order to protect consum-
ers against counterfeits and imitations, the GENUINE
FISH'S INFALLIBLE HAIR RESTORATIVE will here-
after be put up in ROUND BLUE PINT BOTTLES
with the words "FISH'S INFALLIBLE HAIR RE-
STORATIVE" blown in the glass on the side, and "N.
MILLS" (the original proprietor) on the shoulder of the
bottle. The same has a Red, White and Blue label.

Retail Price, (\$1 25) One Dollar and Twenty-five
Cents.

REDINGTON & CO.,

n24-1m

Wholesale Agents.

Sacramento Daily Union December 5, 1864

Sacramento Daily Union August 8, 1864

Where Exactly Did the First Wagon Trains Go? II

The Further Adventures of the MHRT*

Faithful readers and local history aficionados have considered the idea of where the first emigrants surmounted Donner Pass in 1844, 1845, and part of 1846. In 1846 emigrants discovered Coldstream Canyon and first Roller Pass and then Coldstream Pass.** Those were way better than having to take your wagons apart as the emigrants had to do using Donner Pass. (See right).

The standard view is that the emigrants worked their way up Summit Canyon on the south side going through what is now covered with China Wall and generally following the old Lincoln Highway and Dutch Flat Wagon Rd. route. See the map on the next page.

One quest of those who want to trace the emigrant route up Summit Canyon is to find where exactly the small cliff is that stumped the Stephens Party for awhile in 1844 and was mentioned by travelers the next year too (painting to the right). Moses Schallenberger*** spoke to George R. Stewart when Moses was older and described coming to that cliff in 1844, "Then they came to a ten-foot cliff and could go no further. They were stuck. Finally a cleft was found in the rocks to allow the oxen to go up one at a time. The oxen were chained to the wagons and the men lifted from below and so got the wagons up over the cliff." ([Opening of the California Trail](#) review in the December, '15 [Heirloom](#)) The DSHS members of the MHRT fall into the group that wants to see the Stephens Party cliff.

There are a number of candidates for that spot according to emigrant trail buffs with each "buff" advocating a different cliff. That's a little exaggerated but there is no consensus among all the "buffs." I've been out and had hike leaders say with certainty that the rock we were facing was the cliff. Then the next fellow said the same thing on a different hike at a different rock. We may never know but stay tuned. We might have something next month. So, the curiosity of the MHRT has not been satisfied.

There is another view of where the emigrants went through

*The DSHS Mobile Historical Research Team

**Rather than list previous emigrant trail articles just go the indices on the [Heirloom](#) pages on our website and look for "emigrant," "roller," "Coldstream," etc. There are too many to list.

*** look him up in the indices too.

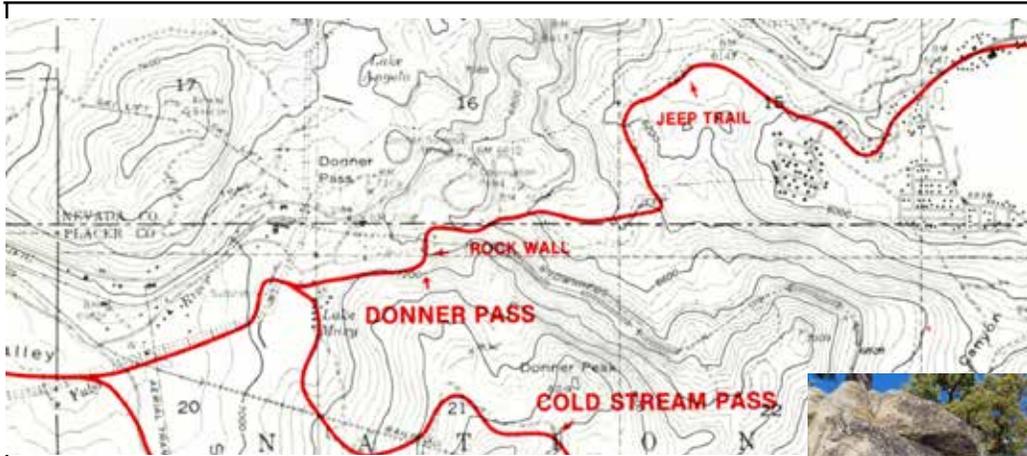


Harold Von Schmidt painting at the Donner Memorial State Park of the Stephens Party's crossing of Donner Pass in 1844

Donner Pass and that is to the north side of old Highway 40. For a discussion of that possibility see our October, '11 [Heirloom](#).

That then brings us to last October's outing (there was no point in putting this in an earlier [Heirloom](#) since we get a lot of snow on Donner Summit and you couldn't try this out yourself until summer anyway. Besides there were a lot of other stories to tell.) David Fullerton of the Oregon and California Trails Association (OCTA) took a group of people out to explore alternative routes of the emigrants including up the north side of Old 40. Naturally the MHRT had to come along.

Keeping in mind that most trail experts think the south side of the pass is the more likely route, David makes good points for his point of view. He and OCTA friends have found rocks and logs that look to have been piled to enable wagons to travel. They've found rust marks maybe coming from wagon



Traditional route thinking from Trail of the First Wagons Across the Sierra by Charles Graydon.



tires rubbing on granite and they've found artifacts.

Before skipping to the pictures we should also consider human nature. Everyone left for California at the same time of the year. They'd been waiting at their starting points for the ground to dry out and the grass to grow. So if everyone made good progress they were traveling in groups of wagon trains separated by not much distance. There are plenty of stories of people switching trains, visiting with other trains or helping other trains with medical issues. Hence emigrants would have arrived at Donner Pass all at about the same time unless their name was Donner.

Imagine you are in a wagon train that's been following another up the Truckee River Canyon or following someone along the Dog Valley route from what's now Reno. You might get very tired of eating dust and be quick to take any other possible

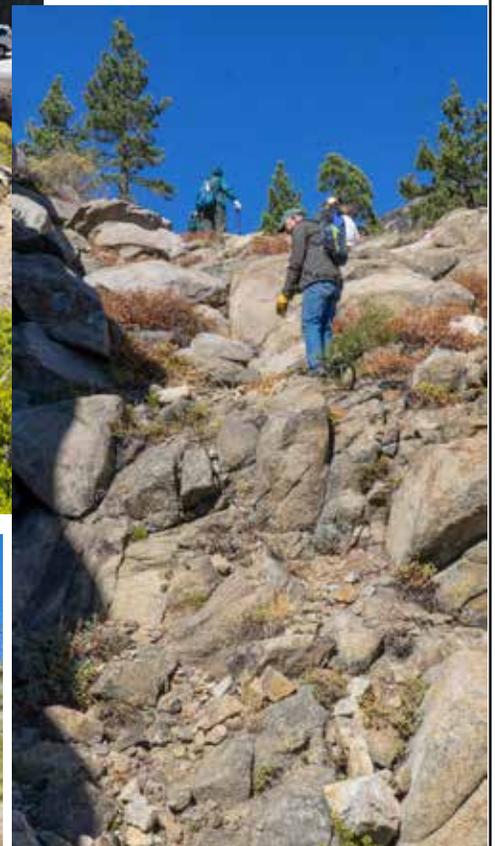
The pictures on this page are of a possible wagon train route on the south side of Old 40. The top left picture looks down at a passage between the rocks. Top right is the same passage from below. Center right is the notch filled with people. Bottom right is a wider view from below. Wherever the wagons went it was hard. Could some have taken this route? There would have been less brush in the old days.

route that presented itself. Some just might think they know better than other people and be quick to take an alternate route as well. Note that the Donner Party, using Lansford Hastings' advice, did exactly that. James Reed, member of the party, was sure Hastings' route was the way to go and off they went to trouble. Had they followed the accepted route there would have been a different ending to the story and Donner Pass might be called Stephens Pass and Donner Lake, Truckee Lake.

So, it's possible that wagon trains came up Donner Pass both on the south side *and* on the north side. It's kind of an academic question since in 1846 a much better route was found up Coldstream Canyon. We're only talking about two years. It would be kind of satisfying to know, though, where exactly the Stephens Party or the Donner Party went.

That sets the stage for the pictures here of our October outing. To see maps of the generally accepted route pick up [Trail of the First Wagons Across the Sierra](#) by Charles Graydon (reviewed in the August, '15 [Heirloom](#))

The pictures here that follow will come in two groups. The first, pictures of our exploration below Old 40 and then above Old 40.



The pictures here are of the possible alternative route on the north side of Old 40 starting just above the bridge. The top left is where you'd leave the road if you want to follow in our footsteps and possibly the footsteps of the emigrants. Could one take wagons up the draw above right or to where the fellow with the red jacket is above?



To help decide if this is a possible route one must also take the accepted route and see which is less onerous.

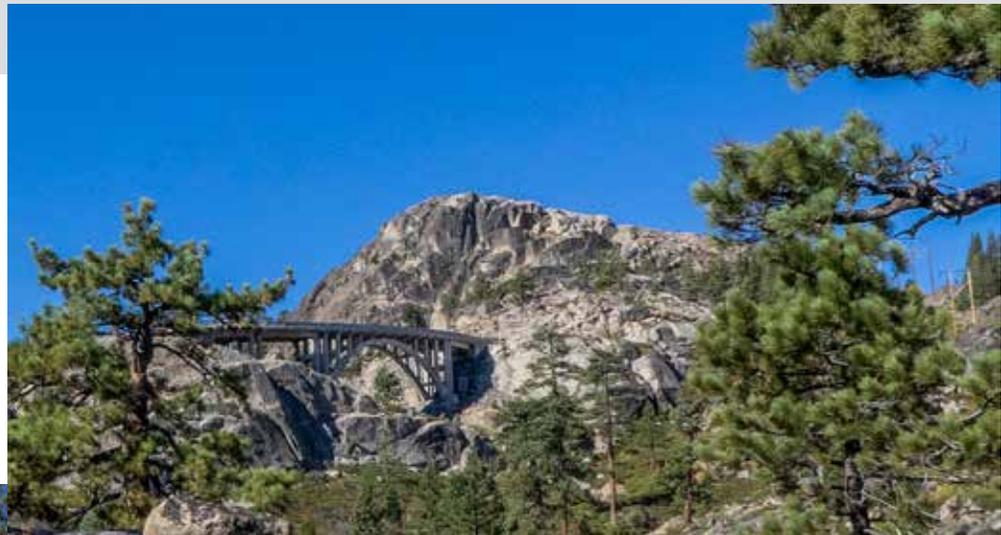


The emigrants had great views whichever way they went.

The bottom two pictures here are the "holy grail" of trail experts. Here are examples of how emigrants piled rocks, dirt, and tree trunks to make very crude ramps so they could get wagons up the terribly rough terrain. There are a number of these on the north side of Old 40. None, however, are connected on any possible continuous route where one might have gone from one to the other. (See our October, '11 Heirloom's MHRT adventure) Still, who put them there if the emigrants didn't?



Bonus Pictures



Our editorial staff decided to include these bonus pictures just because they are nice and you never know what you'll find when you're out exploring.

Above of course is Donner Summit Bridge from the east with Mt. Stewart in the background.

Left is Art Clark, founding member of the MHRT enjoying a swing someone installed. The view from the swing of Donner Lake is magnificent and not recommended for agoraphobes. In the background is Mt. Stewart.



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

Subject to change.

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.

September 2019

- 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

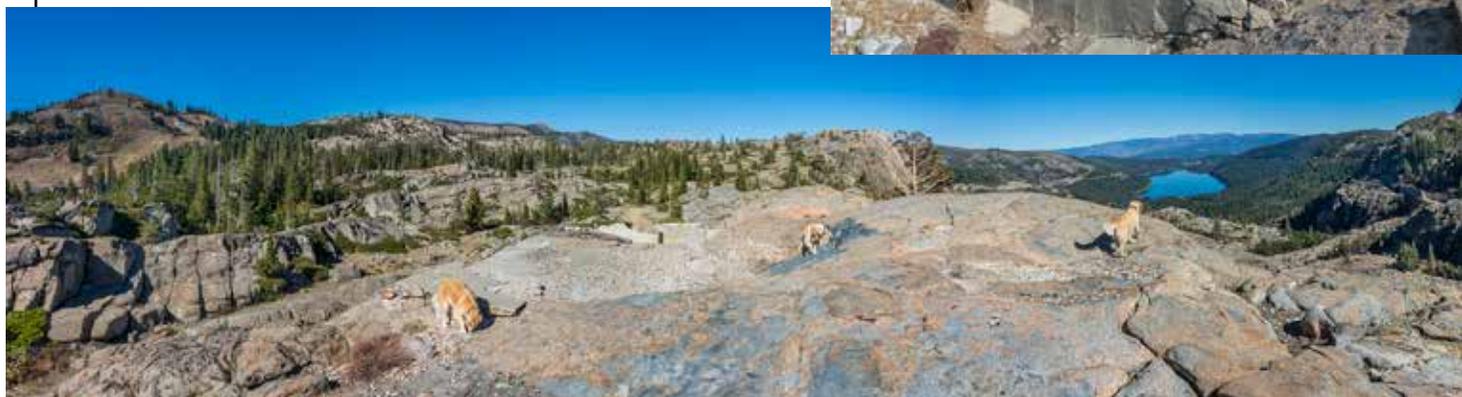
Updated listed available on Facebook: "Donner Summit-Truckee Golden Spike Celebration" Or via: <https://www.goldspike.org/>

From the DSHS Archives

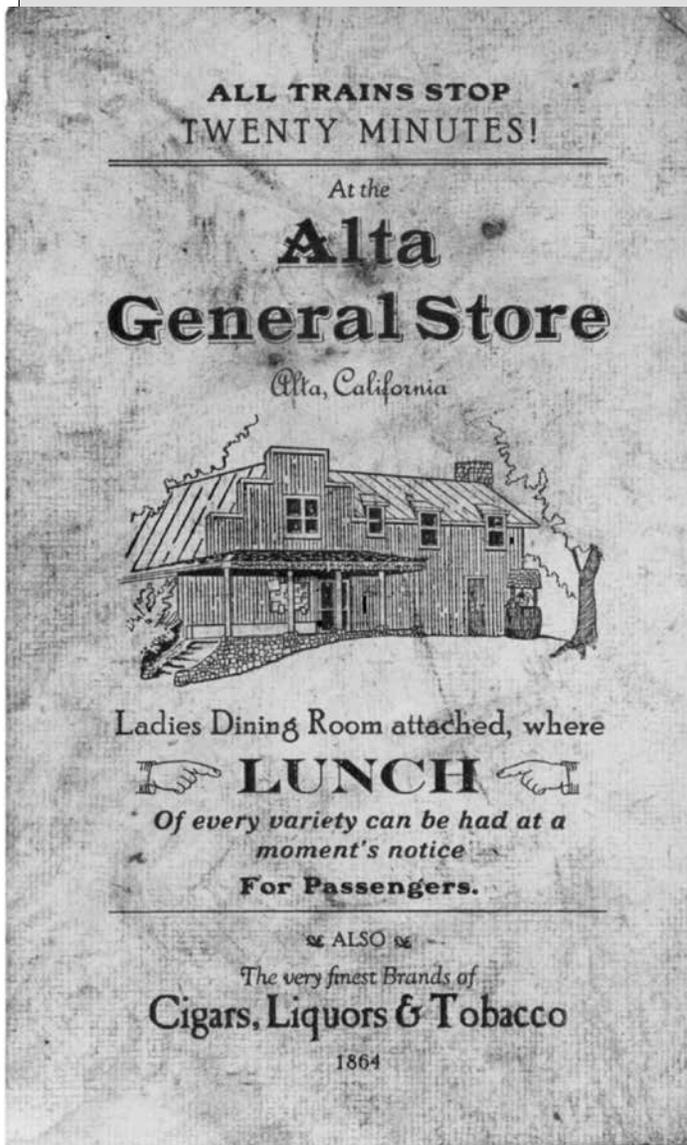
The postcard to the right is of the top of Donner Pass. Highway 40 is the dark strip. The skiers are on Donner Ski Ranch's Signal Pk. The round building in the center of the photograph was the equipment building for the Division of Highways. That collapsed in the early 1980's. The current Summit Haus is just beyond that building. Donner Pk. is above.



The point of the postcard, beside being a nice picture is the close up above. At the ends of the arrows are the transcontinental air route weather station (right) and dormitory for the workers (left). Those buildings are not there now, the station having been decommissioned in the early 1950's. Below is a picture by George Lamson of where the foundation remnants for the weather station are with Donner Lake in the background. To the right are hikers just below the foundation remnants doing the Margie Powell Hike last year (photo also by George Lamson). This year's hike will go down Summit Canyon. See page 20 at the end of this [Heirloom](#).



From the DSHS Archives



These pictures were sitting in the computer and have nothing to do with Donner Summit but they are interesting. Above left the trains stopped at Alta and ladies could be treated well in the "Ladies Dining Room" in 1864.

On the right are three photographs of Baxter, just down the freeway. Bus travel was much more common in those days and buses stopped at all the small spots along Highway 40.



Book Review

Iron Muse Photography of the Transcontinental Railroad

Glenn Willumson 2013 178 pages (242 with notes)

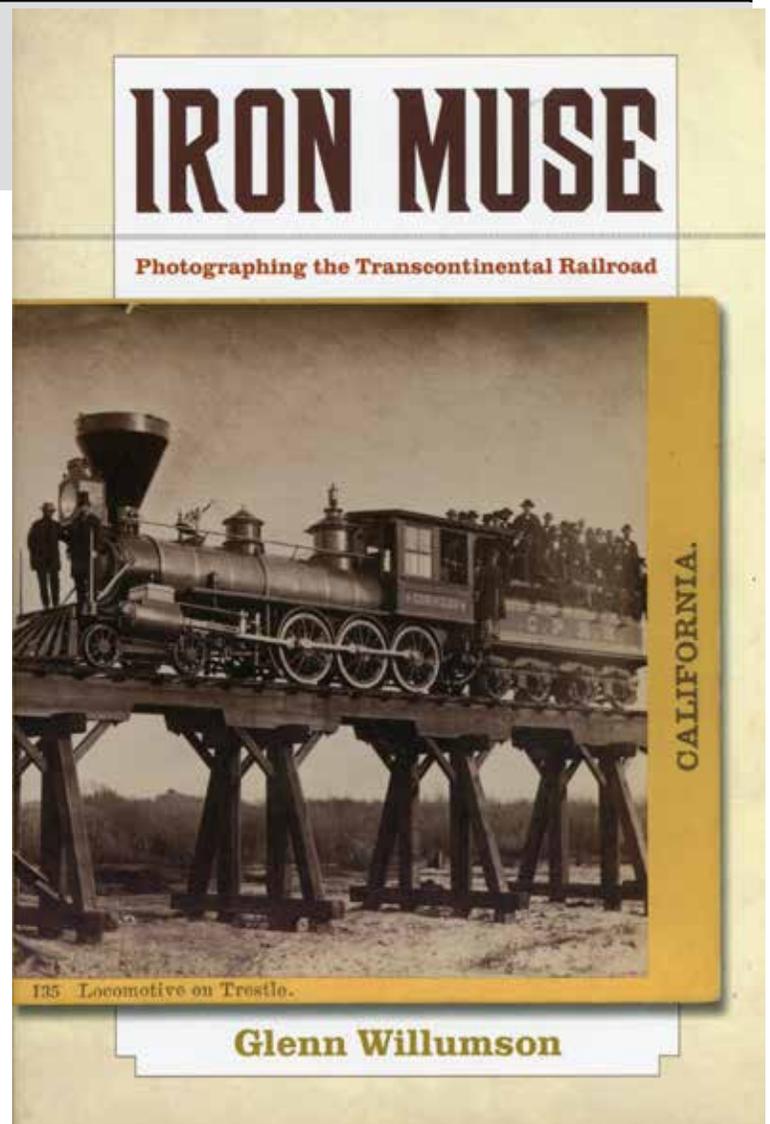
Hundreds of photographs were taken of the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad by the Central Pacific Railroad (CPRR), building west to east, and the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR), building east to west. That's not new. A lot has been written about the photographers and the construction of the railroad. Iron Muse is about the photographs, something which has not been done before.

Divided into only four chapters the book covers the general history, how the photographs were made and by whom, the development of the collections, and how the photographs were used. An epilogue finishes up things looking at how the use of pictures changed over time to accommodate societal changes.

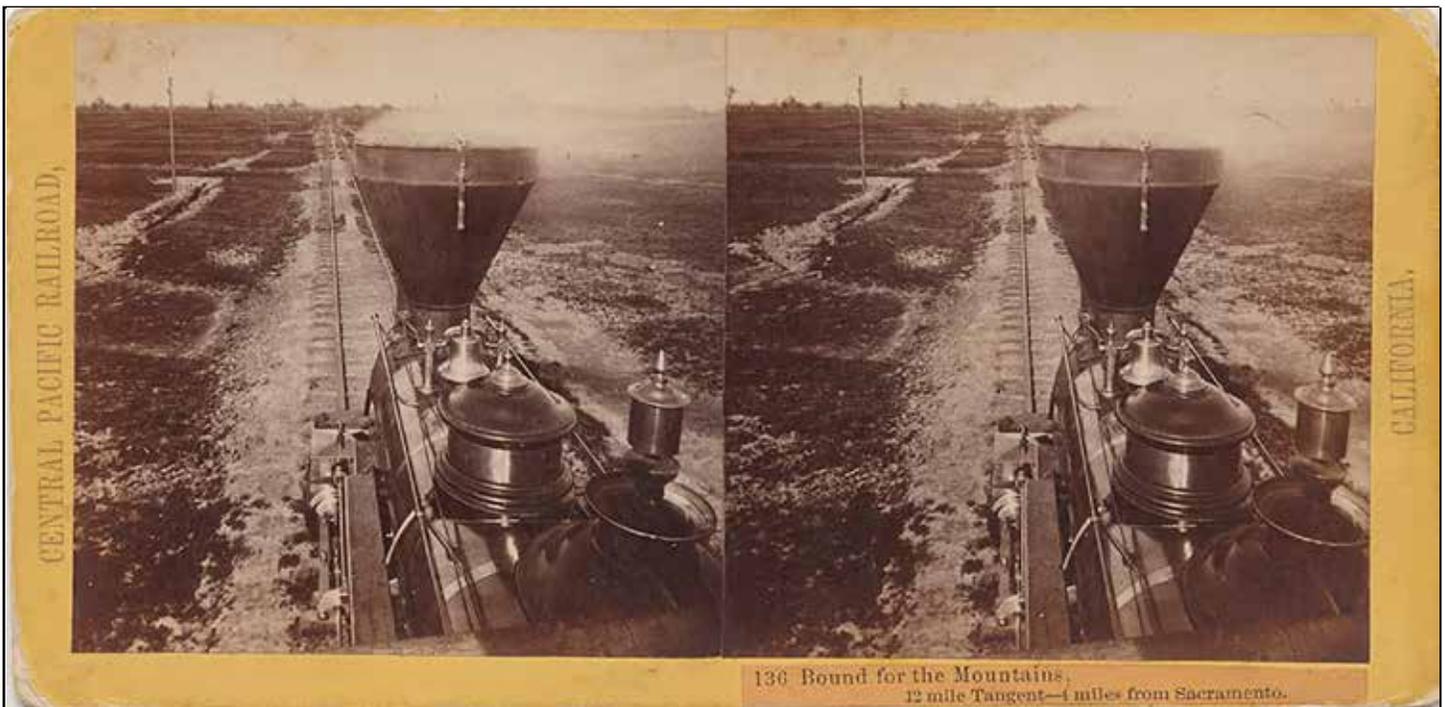
Railroad buffs may be happy having a lot of old photographs to peruse but those photos have been reproduced countless times before and any railroad buff "worth his/her salt" will have seen them. This book stands out because it is about the analysis of those photographs.

What choices did the photographers make as they memorialized the railroad in each picture? What were the titles bestowed on the pictures and why? How were the photographs used and by whom? How were the photographic archives built by each railroad? What was included and how were they used by whom? Who were the various audiences for the individual photos and for the collections? Then in the epilogue Willumson shows how the meaning conveyed by select photographs changed over time to meet the needs of current public thought or politics. All of that went into what the public saw in transcontinental railroad photographs during the mid 19th Century, the 20th Century, and what we see today. That's one set of questions. Another set of questions has to do with the negative. What was not photographed and why? What was left out of the archives and why? For example, the Chinese were the heroes of half of the transcontinental effort but in the celebratory photographs of the completion, they were, to us, conspicuously absent. People at the time saw nothing wrong or awkward with that. Nobody even mentioned it. They were busy celebrating the achievements of the White race in its various forms.*

For an example of Willumson's analysis of photographs look at Alfred A. Hart's #136, "Bound for the Mountains" (top of the next page). For the amateur transcontinental photographic viewer this is another photograph of a locomotive and track. The transcontinental railroad is being built. Willumson, though, who is a professional transcontinental photographic viewer, delves



* The San Francisco Bulletin reported Judge Nathan Bennet's speech at the San Francisco celebration. He said this triumph of railroad construction was wholly owing to the fact that his fellow Californians were "composed of the right materials, derived from the proper origins... In the veins of our people flows the commingled blood of the four greatest nationalities of modern days. The impetuous daring and dash of the French, the philosophical spirit of the German, the unflinching solidity of the English, and the light-hearted impetuosity of the Irish, have all contributed each its appropriate share... A people deducing its origins from such races, and condensing their best traits into its national life, is capable of any achievements." It was stirring.



into the photograph. The standard view of a train is on ground level at right angles to the track and train. Willumson sees Alfred A. Hart, the photographer, as a master, though. He did it differently. He climbed up on the locomotive and behind it for his view. He looked down the track, taking “advantage of the formal qualities of spatial recession inherent in the stereograph. His efforts created a dynamic composition that approached the metaphoric.” He dragged “his heavy camera equipment up and onto the roof of the locomotive cab and composed the scene on the ground glass at the back of the camera.” Willumson says that cameras and film of the time could not capture motion but Hart simulated motion with his perspective. Most of us amateurs would enjoy the photograph and the detail but would not know why or appreciate the reasons behind Hart’s art.

Willumson does not just analyze the photographs of the transcontinental railroad but also other forms of art: woodcuts of photographs and paintings. In all of his analyses he brings the reader more of the story. Typically we look at the old photographs and paintings or woodcuts and see them as records of what happened. Willumson’s analyses brings out the details and so our appreciation of the art grows and with Willumson’s instruction, we can begin to look for more in old photographs ourselves.

For example Willumson dissects “American Progress” from Crofutt’s *Western World* (1873) at the top of the next page. Here we have the movement west of the explorers, pioneers, wagon trains, and stagecoaches. The Native Americans and the wildlife are scattering before the coming of civilization. That’s obvious and an allegory of Manifest Destiny – America conquering the continent. In various forms we’ve seen it all before. Willumson goes a step further into what is hard to see. The allegorical figure of the female

is in the sky overseeing what is being accomplished. “In her right hand she holds a schoolbook, and from the crook of her arm dangles a telegraph wire. The wire originates from the Brooklyn Bridge, which... is a reminder of the technological accomplishment and an insinuation that forces directing American progress flow out of New York.” Clearly education and technological progress go together. The painting idealizes “advancement from east to west.” That kind of analysis, helping the reader see detail that is not obvious, adds to the reader’s understanding and enjoyment. Willumson does that over and over. Then he cements his ideas with summaries, “Hart’s stereographs depict the railroad by bringing life to an otherwise sterile landscape and as a harbinger of European-American civilization.”

Willumson does the same with the archives. He explains how they were used and why and what was included and what was not. That’s a detail almost all viewers would not even consider as they page through old photographs. There is much more than just the composition and the taking of the pictures. There is the editing of the larger scene by leaving views and photographs out of collections. Willumson shows how some photographs were left out of the railroad collections as the railroads edited the story they wanted to tell, but appeared in public anyway elsewhere. He also shows how the photographer or woodcut artists made slight changes so the photographs could serve other purposes. For example, the snowsheds are iconic on Donner Summit and a technological solution to a pressing problem. They deserved photographing. The CPRR, though, didn’t want the public or investors to see that snow was such a problem and so, generally left those pictures out of their archive. Willumson says, “The Central Pacific purchased stereographs that conveyed a message of progress in the railroad construction; it disregarded other subject matter



and suppressed any images that might suggest difficulties of construction.” Snow was one of the awkward “difficulties” and Willumson has a letter to prove the CPRR curated snow pictures right out of its collection. Charles Crocker writing to Colis Huntington said, “... I shall not of course have any printed” of snow at Cisco. Willumson shows how the curating extended to the titles on photographs. Titles changed over time and for different purposes. Titles included details to impress the public with the technological challenge of the railroad giving the elevation or the depth of a cut (50 feet deep is impressive). “The Central Pacific titles build on the visuality of the stereographs, relying on the public perception of the photographs as truthful copies of reality calling attention to facts and data not available in the images, and using the authority of scientific measurement to reinforce the photographic messages.”

As with any analysis of literature in prose or poetry, or analysis of art, the analysis can go too far and Willumson does a few times. For example in analyzing a Harper’s Weekly illustration, “The Pacific Railroad” which shows passengers in a Palace Hotel Car, Willumson says, “They travel on the railroad in luxury while a uniformed African-American waiter serves them. In this engraving the new

black citizens freed by the Civil War are indentured anew, serving the white passengers as they had their white masters before the war... Here the cultural force of the train creates harmony by reinforcing America’s prewar social and racial hierarchy... the message of the engravings proves to be the more accurate depiction of the tensions and inequality that would continue throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.” That sounds a bit like bringing one’s own prejudices into the analysis. There can be a fine line between exploitation and honest employment. Railway jobs were one of the few ways black workers could be paid their worth and rise in post-slavery America. There is nothing wrong with serving others and just because one does, does not mean he’s being “indentured anew.” After all, indenture precludes escape. Railway workers could leave when they chose. Just because there were few other equal opportunities does not mean they were “indentured anew,”

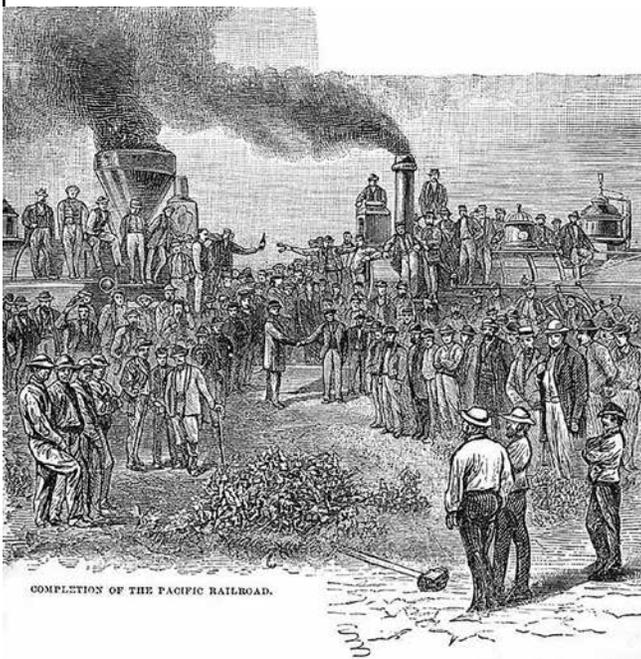
In another example, Willumson says under a photograph of a railroad train meeting a wagon train that the viewer can “read this stereograph not only as a symbol of technological progress but as an allegory for the monopolistic capitalism that the Central Pacific had

begun well before the completion of the railroad... the ceremony at Promontory was not the final act but only the latest skirmish in a monopolistic war over the control of rail commerce in the West." Certainly the railroad became rapacious and even evil as Frank Norris' The Octopus was just one example. But was that the case already at Promontory or is Willumson bringing in his own prejudices perhaps formed by later history? Perhaps Promontory was a celebration of technology with the negative ramifications of the coming of the railroad to be felt later and the abuses also to come later.

Iron Muse has a different emphasis from other books about the transcontinental railroad. The perspectives offered give a better understanding of this 19th Century technological wonder. They also provide enjoyment to the reader as she reads the analyses. That deeper view may carry over to other photographs in other collections later and so provide ongoing enjoyment.

How to Make a Photograph, ca. 1869

- Set up the camera
- Climb down to his portable darkroom
- Prepare the glass plate negative (hold the glass negative by one corner and pour collodion over the surface of the plate, rocking it to get an even coating)
- Place the plate in a holder
- Dip the holder into a bath of silver nitrate
- Put the prepared plate into a holder to protect it from sunlight
- Climb back up to the camera and slide the plate into it.
- Remove the lens cap and count the exposure.



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CORNER OF SECOND AND J STREETS,
To Buy your Furs!
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Cheap!! Cheap! Cheap!
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DO NOT FORGET
Lamott's Furs,
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 ARE ALL THE GO. SO ARE HIS
 n24 **Children's New Style of Caps.** 1m

Sacramento Daily Union December 5, 1864

Special Notice.—The Undersigned,
 thankful for the liberal patronage bestowed for many years upon the Firm of
A. Despecher & Field,
 Respectfully inform their friends and the public in general that, having purchased the spacious Salesroom,
Nos. 75 and 77 J street,
 Are prepared to furnish every article usually kept in the best regulated establishments of the Eastern cities and Europe, such as
Fine Groceries, English Oilman Stores, Wines, Brandies and Liquors of every description.
 Dealers and consumers are most respectfully invited to call and examine our stock before purchasing elsewhere, being confident that satisfaction will be given in each and every case as regards price and quality.
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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.

Fan Mail

Good afternoon

I just discovered your website with the incredible collection of newsletters you have so cleverly crafted and put together, eras of history and mystery!

I would love it dearly if I was allowed the honor of receiving such publications. Absolutely brilliant!

Warmest regards May 24, 2019

Video Review

Sacramento and the Transcontinental Railroad

26 minute video from Nimbus Films' Bill George

This can also be streamed on "Passport" the video streaming app from KVIE and PBS (If you stream the video it can be found in the "View Finder" programs of KVIE (season 25 episode 15)

Bill George, producer, director, and author of this video is a prolific producer of history*. Just in time for the Sesquicentennial of the transcontinental railroad he's brought us another video. Everything he produces is good and "Sacramento and the Transcontinental Railroad" is no exception. George combines lots of historic pictures, contemporary pictures, historian interviews and his own narration to tell the story of

"how the people of Sacramento built the railroad across the nation." George says, "The Sierra Nevada stands there like a dare"

"The Sierra Nevada stands there like a dare."

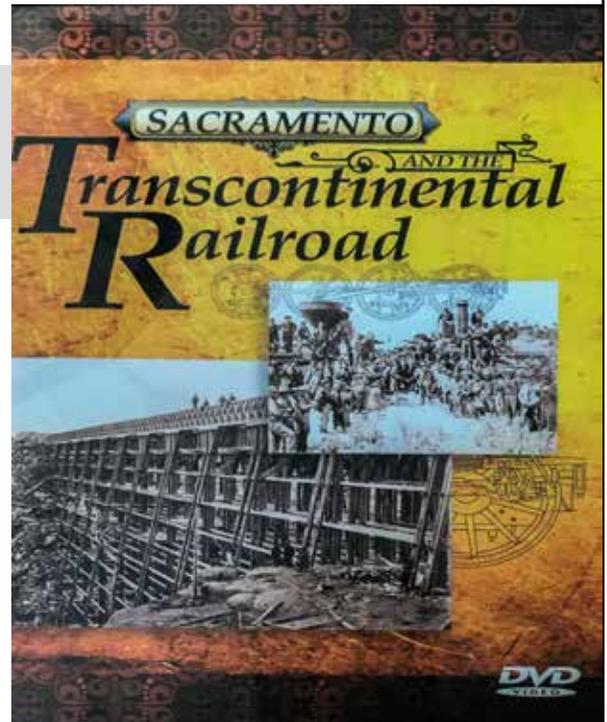
which is a perfect introduction to the difficulties posed, and the old pictures and contemporary video of the route show what a "dare" it was.

Besides showing the dare the video gives a good introduction to the first transcontinental railroad and explores many aspects of the story: Theodore Judah who laid out the route, how money to build the railroad was acquired, the background, the Gold Rush, the first railroad in California (from Sacramento to Folsom), how the railroad was built, the ramifications of railroad for California and the nation, and Sacramento as a major railroad shop. That's a lot in 26 minutes but the story is not rushed.

The best part of the video is the collection of historical photographs George includes. They are fun showing the construction of the railroad, the Chinese, and California when photography was new. A close second is the overhead footage as the video travels the transcontinental route from Sacramento over the Sierra. There are a lot of good views that make the story come alive and make you ponder, how could they have done that and done that by hand?

*see Rails, Tales, and Trails in the April, '14 Heirloom, "The Chinese Builders of Gold Mountain" in the January, '16 issue for example, or "Hidden Wonder of the World" in the June, '12 issue.

To order a DVD, please send a check for \$19.95 to Nimbus Films, 4520 Shari Way, Granite Bay, CA 95746. Or Visit <http://billgeorge1.com/dvds-for-sale/> to order online. The price includes shipping and handling.





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

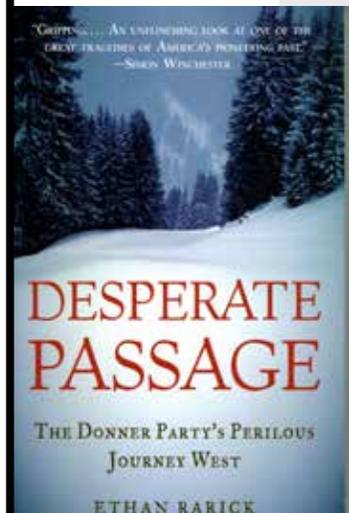


PRODUCED BY DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

Ethan Rarick to speak at Donner Party Hike Event

Ethan Rarick is the author of Desperate Passage The Donner Party's Perilous Journey West. It is arguably the best book written on the Donner Party and it's worthy of reading even if you have read other Donner Party books or seen Donner Party videos. He set out not to re-relate what happened but to delve into the human equation and the fateful decisions they made. He relies on new archeological evidence as well as research on starvation, snowfall, and primary sources.

Rarick enlivens the story with his story telling skills to explore the human element. At Starved Camp Peggy Breen's son becomes unresponsive and may be dead. She rubs him and shakes him. We can feel the mother's desperation. She pushes some sugar into his mouth and.... you'll have to read the book. James Reed ends up carrying his daughter through the snow and feels her dying. He scrapes the very last crumbs from the inside of a food bag and puts them in his mouth to warm them before putting them in Patty's mouth. That is drama.



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.

**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
[Donner Summit Historical Society.org](http://DonnerSummitHistoricalSociety.org)

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

_____ New Membership

_____ Renewing Membership

_____ Individual Membership - \$30

_____ Family Membership - \$50

_____ Patron - \$500

_____ Benefactor - \$1000

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_____ Business Sponsor - \$1000

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

DATE _____

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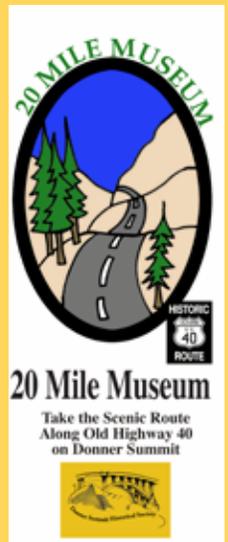
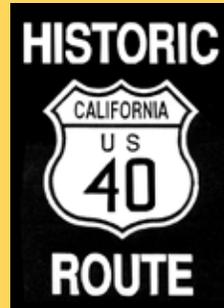
(Please mail this card with your check payable to DSHS to Donner Summit Historical Society, P.O. Box 1, Norden, CA 95724)

_____ Friend Membership - \$100 _____ Sponsor - \$250

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Take the Scenic Route: Donner Summit's Old Highway 40



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