

Sesquicentennial Celebration

2019

We take the transcontinental railroad for granted; it doesn't overtly affect our daily lives. The transcontinental railroad, though, is responsible for the North Tahoe-Truckee-Donner Summit area today. Without the transcontinental railroad this area would be very different. One past president of the Truckee Donner Historical Society says, "It all started because of the railroad."

2019 will be the sesquicentennial of the transcontinental railroad celebrating the amazing feat of spanning the continent with rails and setting in motion what became The Truckee-Donner Summit-North Tahoe area. Without the railroad there would be no Truckee, North Tahoe, or Donner Summit as we know them today. The railroad brought travelers and emigrants and made crossing the Sierra relatively painless. It enabled the local lumber and ice industries. Because of the railroad, Truckee (previously named Coburn's Station) was born. It brought artists and writers to capture the beauties of the area. It brought tourists. It made early winter sports successful and spawned the ski and snowboard industries in the area. The first transcontinental highway followed the railroad's general route as did the first transcontinental telephone line, the first transcontinental air route, and the Interstate.

In a larger sense the transcontinental railroad was immensely important to the State and the nation as well. It opened California to the country and the country to California. It enabled the products of California to get to the rest of the country and provided a larger market for the goods from the rest of the country. The railroad united the country and opened the American market to goods from Asia. The transcontinental railroad was a revolution for the area and a revolution for the country, given the change it enabled and engendered.

Given the importance of the railroad the 150th anniversary should be celebrated. To that end the Donner Summit Historical Society, The Truckee Donner Historical Society, and the Truckee Donner Railroad Society have joined to design a set of activities and events in the area from May 10 (the date of the Golden Spike's driving in 1869) to Labor Day, 2019.

The components of our sesquicentennial celebration will be: a logo contest to design a trademark for the celebration which will be open to the adult public and students. Runner up designs will become stamps (stamp pad type). Visitors and locals will be able to pick up "passports" which they will take to locations around town and on Donner Summit that have historical displays. At those locations people can get their passports stamped. All the contest entries will be displayed at an art show opening on May 10 at the Rec Center. We will have "Then and Now" displays in downtown Truckee so people can see what parts of town looked like long ago. There will be music on the China Wall celebrating the heroism of the Chinese workers. We will have weekly articles in local newspapers during the summer highlighting the history and we may compile those into a book. There will be walks, hikes, and talks and presentations during the summer in various venues. There will be downtown walking tours. There will hopefully be a book signing for the Stanford University Chinese Railroad Workers Project new book. We'd also like to have docents at historic railroad sites during summer weekends. Although the celebration is of the railroad's sesquicentennial, history experiences will not be limited to the railroad. The area's history from 1862 to 1926 will be celebrated.