

The Donner Summit

Heirloom

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

May, 2013 issue #57



History Preserved Pt III

Van Norden and the Dam, and Summit Valley Ice

This month we return to the theme of History Preserved with the acquisition of Summit Valley by the Truckee Donner Land Trust. We first tackled the Native American presence in the valley in our February issue and then the geological history in our March issue. Here we take a look at the Van Norden Dam and the Summit Valley Ice Co. Still to come in future issues about Summit Valley: the sheep industry, the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd., the Emigrant Trail and the proposed memorial trail, pictures of Summit Valley, and Norm Saylor's reminiscences.



For decades I drove by Van Norden, or Summit Valley, on Old Highway 40 in ignorance. I did not know what riches the valley held, but then it was all private property and access was restricted.

Last summer we had a good feeling that fund raising would be successful and began the discovery of Summit Valley. It is biologically the richest part of the Donner Summit area because it has so many different habitats. But The Heirloom is only an historical newsletter so we will not cover anything about the 500 plant species, more than 100 bird species, the amphibians, the mammals, or the hundred plus butterfly species. We'll stick just to the history.

Donner Summit is the richest historical area in California and maybe the entire Western United States. There has been a parade of history across the pass. Native Americans used the pass to travel and used Summit Valley as a summer home and a meeting place for trade. The first wagon train to reach California with wagons came through the pass and through Summit Valley, led by 80 year old Caleb Greenwood. Many more emigrants followed including the various rescue attempts to save the Donner Party. The first transcontinental railroad, the first transcontinental highway, the first transcontinental telephone line, and the first transcontinental air route all went across the pass and through the valley (the air route had beacons and a weather station overlooking the valley). The first crossing of the Sierra in a motorized vehicle, besides trains, was through Summit Valley. Then there are all the stories that go with those events and much more.

Now that we have access, Summit Valley is not just a pretty spot along Old Highway 40. It is so much more. Here I encourage you to pick up our new brochure, "Summit Valley," available at fine businesses on Donner Summit and available for your perusal on our website on the "brochure" page.

Van Norden Dam

This month we cover Van Norden Dam and separately, the Summit Valley Ice Co. Driving by Van Norden over the years I'd idly wondered who Van Norden was and why the name was stuck on the valley. Was he a railroad pioneer? Did he run a local hotel?

The story of the find starts with the State of California showing up one day and demanding that what is left of Van Norden Dam be notched to reduce the volume of the lake behind it. Someone had called the Office of Emergency Services in Nevada City and said the remnants were out of compliance. The OES notified the Division of Dam Safety in Sacramento and so the Land Trust, with an offer on the table to buy the valley and the rest of the 3,000 acres of Royal Gorge property, acquired a headache.

The order from the State set research wheels in motion: into the files at the Division of Dam Safety, onto the internet, and into



obscure sources like the 1905 History of the New California and a 1903 issue of the Journal of Electricity, Power and Gas. There was a little serendipity too.

P G & E had owned Summit Valley until 1999 and had used the dam to keep water in the valley. Towards the end of each season the water would be let out to even out the flow to the Drum Forebay Power Plant which is down the Yuba River. As the water receded the grasses in the meadow grew and nurtured the sheep that came to Summit Valley each season. That's a future story.

P G & E documents said the dam was built in 1916 but the California Department of Water Resources said the dam was built in 1900. Those sources sounded authoritative although contradictory. How does one decide?

Further research turned up more sources including an article

The First Dam in Summit Valley

"Arrived at the summit of the Sierra Nevada on the line of the railroad, there are many delightful pedestrian and horseback excursions to be made in various directions, and the finest points are fortunately the least hackneyed. At Summit Valley (which is associated with the relief of the tragically fated Donner emigrants, and is only three miles from Donner pass) there is an odious saw-mill, which has thinned out the forests; an ugly group of whitewashed houses; a ruined creek, whose water are like a tan-vat; **a big sandy dam across the valley, reared in a vain attempt to make an ice-pond**; a multitude of dead, blanched trees, a great, staring, repellent blank. And yet this valley is not unlovely. It's upper end, still a green meadow leads to the base of peaks 10,000 or 12,000 feet high, whose light-gray summits of granite, or volcanic breccia, weather into castellated forms, rise in sharp contrast to the green woods margining the level meadow. A little apart from the noisy station, the woods are beautiful, as we have described them, and the boulder-strewn [sic] earth reminds one of the pasture dotted with sheep."

"Summering in the Sierra" pg 175
Benjamin Avery of Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine February, 1874

written by Rudolph Warner Van Norden in 1903. He said the demand for water by miners required canals and dams to be built because the Sierra streams and rivers "became mere rivulets – but pitiful contrast to the swollen and turbulent torrents which course through the grand canyons and meadow-like valleys for the remainder of the year." The various canals and reservoirs were owned by separate companies. For example, the South Yuba Canal Co. constructed their South Yuba Canal in 1865 to provide more water for the Bear River Canal and for the mines in Grass Valley and Nevada City. The South Yuba is the river that gets its start just above Summit Valley, in Sugar Bowl, next to Bill Klein's Schuss run, just below Mt. Judah and just below the Pacific Crest Trail.

One of those early companies, the South Yuba Canal Company, "gradually extended its field of operation by occasionally absorbing a less prudent rival. For fifty-two years this process of gradual absorption and expansion has brought under the main head of the South Yuba Water Company the larger part of the individual enterprises of Nevada and Placer Counties."

This accumulation of water facilities was used to supply the mining but then the State of California banned hydraulic mining in 1886. Just at that time the California fruit industry was developing and provided a “ray of hope [for] the now despairing company.” More orchards were planted and more irrigation canals were needed. There was demand for the product of the South Yuba Canal Company. It was during this phase that Rudolph Van Norden said the Van Norden Dam was built, in 1890, and not 1900 or 1916. Since it was his dam at the time of his 1903 article, that seemed like pretty good evidence.

Then electricity arrived and there was a new use and demand for canals and water. The South Yuba Canal Co. formed a new company in 1905, the Central California Electric Co., to supply electricity and the first powerhouse was installed at Newcastle. In 1896 electricity reached Sacramento. By the time of the 1903 article the South Yuba Canal Co. had 450 miles of canals, flumes and pipelines, had 20 reservoirs, and had 150 square miles in its watershed supplying 200,000,000,000 gallons annually.

There it seemed we had the definitive answer to when the Van Norden Dam was built, 1890. After all, who would have known better than the son of the guy in charge of the company? Case closed.

Just at that point in our investigations, Art Clark (Then and Now’s) was busy discovering spots on the 1915 State survey maps (see our March issue) and we came across the picture of Soda Springs circa 1870 or so. A piece of that photograph, by Alfred A. Hart, is on page one of this issue. We were excited to find that picture and the others (also in the March issue) that showed Soda Springs in the latter part of the 19th Century.

They were the first we’d seen of old Soda Springs. Then we looked closely at the picture on page 1. There was clearly a dam – much earlier than 1890 - right at the end of the thoughtfully placed arrow. Also serendipitously, an old article from Overland Monthly Magazine in February

Right: "Van Norden" (written on the rear) "Tahoe 9/20/41 Looking across Lake Van Norden toward Sheriff and P G & E land which gov't should acquire" (and which the USFS will acquire in a year or two.

Courtesy Placer County Archives



Above: Lake Van Norden 1903 from Journal of Electricity, Power and Gas pg 60 January 1903. The picture on page two of two gentlemen enjoying Van Norden comes from the same journal.



Above: Lake Van Norden in the mid-1920's approximately where the old campground used to be. That may be T.C. Wohlbruck's automobile on the shoreline. See The Heirloom Oct and Nov 2012



Naming Van Norden

Lake Van Norden was named for Charles Van Norden the scion of a wealthy family that could trace its New York roots back to 1640. His brother, Warner (see below), had made an extended visit to California and was apparently impressed with investment opportunities for his Van Norden Trust Company. He invested in the South Yuba Canal Co. and Spaulding Dam by forming the South Yuba Water and Mining Co. The canal company supplied water and electricity to farmers, miners, and towns after mining operations were restricted. Eventually the company had 450 miles of flumes, canals, and pipes along the CPRR route downhill to the Central Valley, as well as 30 reservoirs.

Warner didn't stay in California and one can imagine the discussions over fancy family dinners in New York about keeping an eye on the family investments. Charles Van Norden, Warner's brother, was at loose ends and one source said he had health problems. He came to California to represent the family. Rudolph, of the 1903 article, was his son and a Stanford graduate.

Charles, was a scholar, writer, student, philosopher, and litterateur of "more than ordinary ability." He was also a Congregational minister, had been president of Elmira College, and once escaped death at the hands of the Ku Klux Klan in New Orleans where he had been a minister. In 1893 he came to California as the resident director of the canal company and later, president of Central California Electric Co. Charles is the namesake of Lake Van Norden.

of 1870 appeared. That described a dam in the valley (see page 2). Apparently it was first built about 1870, but what for? Perhaps, like the article excerpt says, it was part of an ice company but that seems unlikely – see the next story, "ICE! ICE!". Maybe it was part of a logging operation. The construction and running of the railroad as well as the construction of 40 miles of snowsheds pretty well exhausted the local forests. Perhaps the dam impounded water for railroad construction and running. That last seems implausible because Lake Angela was used for steam engines and how big a lake is required for other railroad construction operations? We just don't know why the dam was built, but built it was – before 1890.

California Gas and Electric eventually became part of PG & E in 1907. PG & E probably did enlarge their dam in 1916 even if they didn't built it in 1916. They owned the dam until 1999 when the valley was sold to Royal Gorge and Sugar Bowl.

Next: the recent history of Van Norden and what's next.



Lake Van Norden 1943 From the Division of Dams scrapbook on Van Norden. Note there are no trees on the dam.



Warner Van Norden

Mr. [Warner] Van Norden has been specially fitted for the great burden of work imposed upon him by his extended interests, by the possession of a magnificent physique and robust constitution, inherited from his sturdy ancestors. Moreover, he has never irritated these natural powers by the use of tobacco or ardent spirits. In addition to shrewd business ability and religious activities, Mr. Van Norden is possessed of rare social qualities.

Refined, agreeable in manner, with a mind well stored with information by travel, observation and reading, and possessing a racy humor, he is in demand both as a conversationalist and an after dinner speaker. His home is beautified with rare works of art, showing a cultivated taste, but the atmosphere of family affection which pervades it is its rarest and most enviable adornment. He is deeply devoted to the welfare of the metropolis and has contributed his share in maintaining those two notable institutions, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The American Museum of Natural History.

Successful Men of Affairs
An Encyclopedia of Contemporaneous Biography
THE NEW YORK TRIBUNE- 1895

ICE! ICE!

At Lower Prices Than Ever Before Sold

SUMMIT VALLEY ICE COMPANY

261 First Street, Near Folsom

Office at the Miners' Foundry

J.L. Moulthrop, Agent

☞ Office open at all hours of the day ☜

An ad for the Summit Valley Ice Co. in Summit Valley, near Soda Springs. This ad ran almost continuously in Sacramento newspapers in 1870

Along with the railroad, civilization came to Summit Valley on Donner Summit. The valley had been populated in summers by Native Americans for thousands of years (see [The Heirloom's](#) February, 2013 issue) but there were no permanent settlements.

We don't know who the first permanent settlers were in Summit Valley. An 1861 railroad survey map shows a cabin at the confluence of Castle Creek and the Yuba River. With the coming of the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd. and then the railroad, settlers began to arrive. They built hotels along the road to service travelers and there were a number of stage stops. Others built businesses to service travelers and the railroad. At one time there were three sawmills operating in Summit Valley along with dairies and orchards for the hotels. Rooming houses and houses were built for the railroad workers and along came stores, telegraph offices, post offices, livery, etc. The picture on page 1 shows some of those businesses at Soda Springs Station. Close ups (see our March, '13 issue) at that spot show there was a hotel, bar, store, and train station.

The ad at the top of the page here, which was reset so it could be enlarged, is for one of the more interesting companies in the valley. The first ice Californians could put in their drinks came from Massachusetts around Cape Horn in clipper ships. That was expensive and as soon as ice was discovered in Alaska that became a source. That's ironic given the nearby Sierra. The Sierra ice had to wait for the railroad and once the railroad got to the Summit ice production followed. Summit Ice Co. (not Summit Valley Ice) began operations at Ice Lakes in 1868 (today Serene Lakes) and operated there for two years. You can see what happened to them in the letter from the Old Sacramentan on the next page. The full story is on our website, "The Ice in Ice Lakes" on the "Stories" page. Summit Ice produced ice using ice ponds. The Nevada and Mountain ice Co. also produced ice on the Summit at Devil's Peak Lake (now Kidd Lake according to our best analysis because the names of lakes changed and switched from map to map), Lake Mary, and Lake Angela.

The third ice company on the Summit was the Summit Valley Ice Co. located where the train tracks cross today's Castle Creek (see the black dot on the map on the next page). There was no ice pond needed. Water flowed from Castle Creek through a pipe into the building. Holes in the pipe allowed water to drop down ropes and form 200 lb. icicles. When the ice was ready for harvest it could be picked and shipped.

Apparently production was not as efficient as the "Old Sacramentan" thought and Summit Valley Ice went out of business after just a couple of years, out-competed by the ice companies in the Truckee basin. This method of production was novel as you can see from the patent on the next page. The patent was issued to Robert Seeley Egbert, the brother in law of Tom McAuley, the owner and who is pictured on the next page with his wife. Family stories relate that the patent idea was McAuley's but was financed by Egbert so it was issued in Egbert's name.

The process didn't work as patented. Without pressure to create a spray the water didn't freeze. McAuley then strung strings from ceiling to floor a each hole in the pipe. The water flowed slowly down the string and had time to freeze.

The patents, pictures, and ice information for this story came from Tom Macauley, the grandson of Summit Valley Ice Co.'s MaCauley. The current Tom earned the nickname, "The Iceman," because for some decades he has been researching ice, ice companies, and the icemen who formed them. Someday, hopefully soon, his research will appear in a book. One day we'll run an article on ice companies and ice production on the Summit but not yet.

A NOVEL ENTERPRISE

- A gentleman just down from the mountains gives us a description of a novel enterprise recently entered on by parties who propose to supply San Francisco with ice from the summit of the Sierra Nevada. They have constructed an ice house capable of holding 800 to 900 tons of ice, near the railroad track between Tinker's Station [today's Soda Springs] and the Summit. From a stream on the hillside above a flume has been run to the top of the ice house, where the water is allowed to fall in small jets or spray into the building below. In this manner they expect to gradually form a mass of solid ice which will fill the entire building. The thing can be done, unquestionably, but here comes in a doubt. Supposing the building to be thus filled, how are they going to get the ice out and send it in suitable shape to San Francisco? That is what puzzles outsiders.

[Daily Alta California](#)
December 28, 1868

ICE! ICE!
 At Lower Prices than Ever Before Sold.
SUMMIT VALLEY ICE COMPANY,
 261 First Street, near Folsom,
 Office at the Miners' Foundry.
J. L. MOULTROP, AGENT.
 Office open at all hours of the day. mh25-1m2p



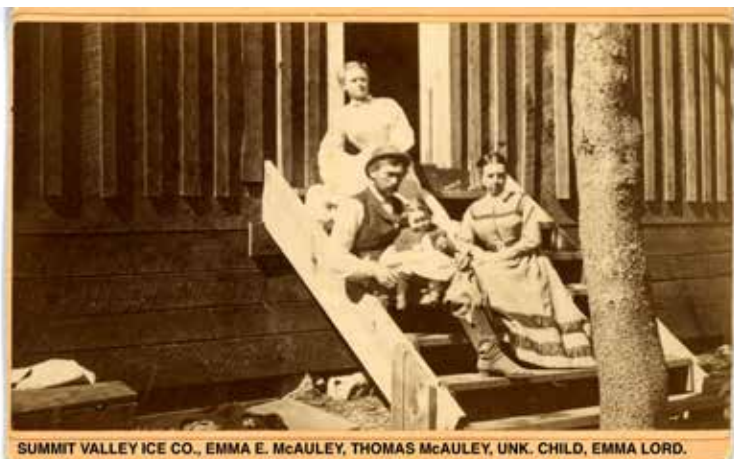
Above left Tom McAuley the Summit Valley Ice Company pioneer with his wife. Below, McAuley and his wife. Photos courtesy of Tom Macauley, The Iceman, of Reno, NV

LETTER FROM SODA SPRINGS, PLACER CO.,

...About a mile and a half from Summit Valley there are two beautiful lakes [today's Serene Lakes], with some ice houses broken down by last winter's snow, and abandoned by the company who have removed to Prosser Creek, where they have as cold weather but not so much snow. At Summit Valley, close to the railroad, I visited the ice house of McAuley, who is independent of the snow, and gets along without labor of cutting the ice and raising it to his warehouse. He runs a little stream of clear water into the upper story of the ice house, and it trickles through small holes into a room below, which has open windows to let in the freezing air and from each hole an enormous icicle hangs to the floor and increases in thickness until they touch each other and freeze solid, when the work is done and windows are closed. McAuley has a patent for the idea, and I think it could be introduced with great profit in any city north of St. Louis, nothing is wanted but a few nights with the thermometer below freezing and a stream of clear water, such as any water works could supply. I think in New York that an ice-house just in the outskirts of town would save the expense of transportation and loss of ice on the way, and the labor of men employed in scraping snow off the ice, and the cutting and storing away in the ice house. In the hands of a man of energy and capital, I know of nothing which would be more certainly profitable. But I have let my letter run on longer than I intended...

An Old Sacramentan.

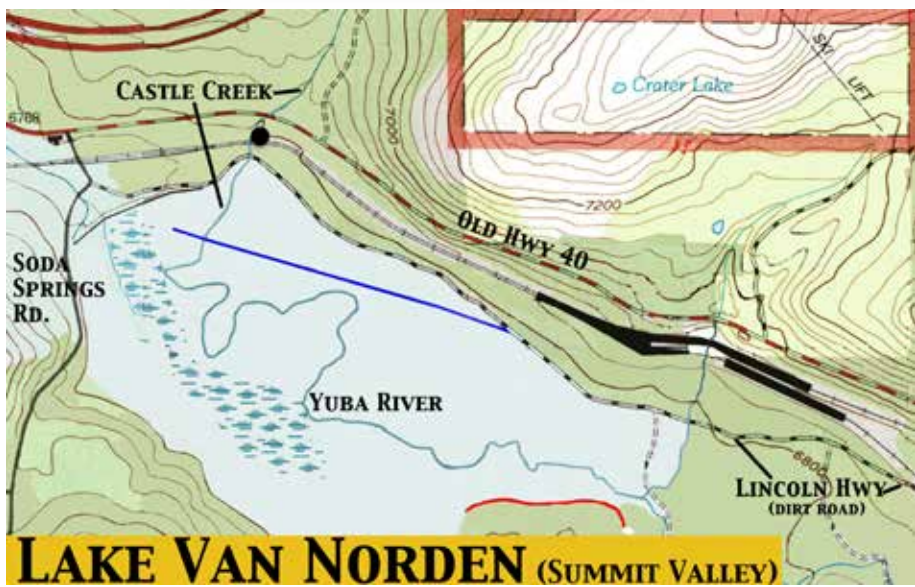
Sacramento Daily Union August 26, 1872

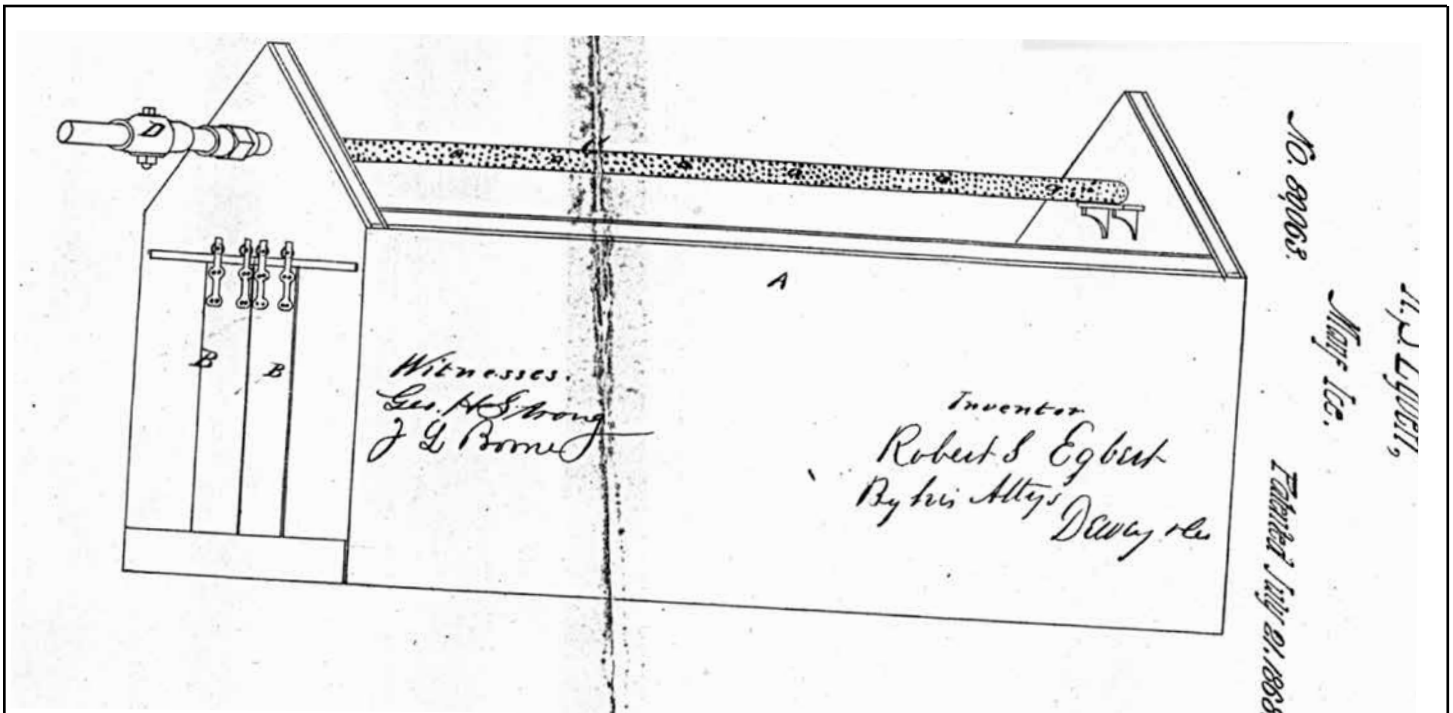


The idea described above by "Old Sacramentan" sounds like a great one. The idea never took off and ice continued to be produced with ice ponds around Truckee. Summit Valley Ice only continued a little while longer before competition beat it. Tom MacAuley, the owner, ended up relocating down to Truckee and producing ice with the "tried and true" ice pond methods.

Tom Macauley, the Iceman of Reno NV, is the grandson of McAuley in the article above. He supplied the newspaper article above and the patent on the next page.

The Summit Valley Ice Co. ice house sat at the black dot on the map to the right on Castle Creek.





from the Robert S. Egbert patent for the **“improvement in the manufacture of ice”**

The nature of my invention is to provide an improved method of filling ice-houses, by forming ht ice in the house or inclosure [sic], and thus avoid the necessity of cutting and transporting the ice from field or ponds in it crystallized state. . . . I employ a house or inclosure constructed with suitable doors and openings for admitting cold air, and extend through it longitudinally a water pipe or pipes pierced with small holes, and the water passing through this pipe and the perforations, drops in the form or spray or otherwise, and congeals as it falls, the aire being intensified in the inclosure or house, especially in the night time, by removing certain portions of the inclosure for admitting a freezing atmosphere from the outside.

A represents a suitable house or inclosure, with sliding doors B. B. Openings may be made in the sides of the house and through the roof for admitting outside aire, especially at night-time, when the temperature is lower on the outside of the house than it is inside.

A horizontal pipe, C, passes through the house, the opposite end of which is closed, and may rest on a shelf or bracket, and may be supplied with wit a cock, so that a continuous stream of water may pass through it. This pipe is pierced with small hoses a a, and is connected by a union-coupling , to a pipe leading to a hydrant or reservoir. A stop=cock, D, is placed between the coupling and hydrant or supply=pipes, to regular the discharge of water through the perforated pipe, so as to allow no more water to pass through the sprinkler into the ice-house than will readily congeal and not freeze up the sprinkler

Forming artificial ice in houses or receptacles by spray, sprinkling or dropping water through a pipe or pipes, C, or vessels pierced with holes a a, or their equivalents, substantially as described.

In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal.
Robert Seeley Egbert

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

ROBERT S. EGBERT, OF COLFAX, CALIFORNIA.

IMPROVEMENT IN THE MANUFACTURE OF ICE.

Specification forming part of Letters Patent No. 80,063, dated July 21, 1868.

To all whom it may concern: Be it known that I, ROBERT S. EGBERT, of Colfax, county of Placer, State of California, have invented an Improved Method of Forming Ice and Filling Ice-Houses; and I do hereby declare the following description and accompanying drawings are sufficient to enable any person skilled in the art or science to which it pertains to make and use my said invention or improvements without further invention or experiment.

The nature of my invention is to provide an improved method of filling ice-houses, by forming the ice in the house or inclosure, and to avoid the necessity of cutting and transporting the ice from the fields or ponds in its crystallized state.

To accomplish this object I employ a house or inclosure, constructed with suitable doors and openings for admitting cold air, and extend through it longitudinally a water pipe or pipes pierced with small holes, and the water, passing through this pipe and the perforations, drops in the form of spray or otherwise, and congeals as it falls, the air being intensified in the inclosure or house, especially in the night time, by removing certain portions of the inclosure for admitting a freezing atmosphere from the outside.

To more fully illustrate and describe my invention, reference is had to the accompanying drawings.

A represents a suitable house or inclosure, with sliding doors B. B. Openings may be made in the sides of the house and through the roof for admitting outside air, especially at night time, when the temperature is lower on the outside of the house than it is inside.

A horizontal pipe, C, passes through the house, the opposite end of which is closed, and may rest on a shelf or bracket, and may be supplied with a cock, so that a continuous stream of water may pass through it. This pipe is pierced with small holes a a, and is

allow no more water to pass through the sprinkler into the ice-house than will readily congeal and not freeze up the sprinkler.

The manner of operating may be described as follows, to wit: During freezing weather, or in the night-time, the doors of the ice-house are opened, and water is admitted through the sprinkler C, which, being divided into small jets, drops, or sprays by passing through it, is quickly and easily chilled to near the freezing point while falling to the floor, where it is at once frozen into a solid mass, similar to the formation of an iceberg by sleet.

The process is further assisted by so placing a few bushes or limbs of trees, on which the falling spray or water will strike before reaching the floor, so that sleet and icicles will form, which can be broken off from time to time and allowed to fall upon the floor. As ice is increased in size to a solid mass by a constant dripping from the perforated pipe.

Other devices may be employed for the above purposes, such as perforated vessels and the like; but the one described seems to me to be the best, as the object of dividing the water and spreading it out into drops or thin sheets of spray in limited quantities over a large surface, so that it may be quickly chilled, is attained.

By this means ice can be made in seasons and places where the freezing weather is of short duration, or when the nights are cold and the days comparatively warm, as the house can be completely shut up in the daytime and opened at night.

Having thus described my invention, what I claim, and desire to secure by Letters-Patent, is—

Forming artificial ice in houses or receptacles by spray, sprinkling or dropping water through a pipe or pipes, C, or vessels pierced with holes a a, or their equivalents, substantially as described.

In witness whereof I have hereunto set my

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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

From the DSHS Archives

FISH CULTIVATION.-

John Williamson, Secretary and General Superintendent of the California Acclimatizing Society, passed through the city yesterday en route from the fish farm, in San Mateo county, to **Summit Valley station**, on the Central Pacific Railroad, with 2,000 young trout, about one inch in length and apparently in the best of health, which he intends placing in the headwaters of the American river. They were hatched from eggs spawned by Eastern trout. Their style of conveyance was somewhat singular, the apparatus consisting of a cask with a cover perforated with holes, and resting upon a rim on the inside of the cask and a short distance from its top. The cask is furnished with two openings, protected by wire, through which the water can be drawn off at will, without any of the fish escaping. It is not necessary, however, to draw the water off frequently, as, by keeping it cool with ice and supplied with air, by means of an air pump with hose leading down into the barrel, it can be made to serve continuously and keep the fish healthy for months. Williamson will remain at Lake Tahoe about a month, as he intends to collect about 200,000 eggs of Tahoe trout, and also about 6,000 young trout, to bring back with him.

May 21, 1873 Sacramento Daily Union



Here are three photographs by T.C. Wohlbruck (see The Heirloom October and November, 2012). The top one is on the Lincoln Highway along the Yuba River right where the I-80 overpass is west of Big Bend today. The center one is on the Lincoln Highway just down from the Summit and the bottom one is of Old Highway 40 just after the Donner Summit or Rainbow Bridge was completed. The bridge was an engineering marvel. It reduced the steepness which had grades as much as 18% to a consistent 5% and was the first bridge anywhere with a compound rising curve. This photograph, circa 1926, shows the completion of Old 40 from Donner Lake to Soda Springs. The bridge was done at the behest of the Forest Service to facilitate truck traffic that would carry logs from the logging of USFS lands at Lake Tahoe.

From the DSHS Archives

The picture at right was in our March issue. The enlargement draws attention to a little detail at the back of the wagon. You can see the wagon is watering the dirt road.

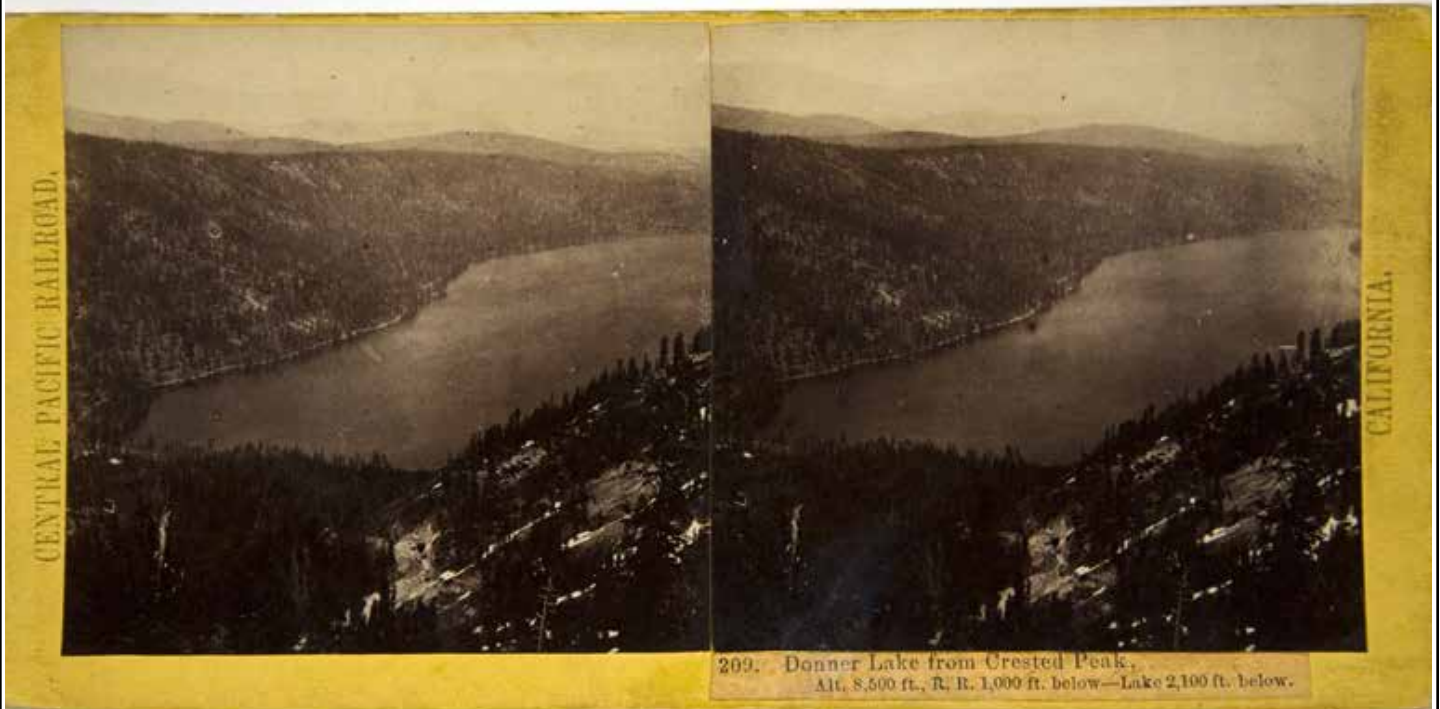
That little detail was noticed by Phil Sexton, formerly the ranger at Big Bend, and now working for the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento.

Phil says the Railroad Museum is presently working on a new exhibit, to be installed this summer, of stereo views "that will provide some additional insight about stereo photography as well as daguerreotypes and how they were made. This is being curated by a professor from Florida..." Examples of "stereo views" are on pages 10 and 11. We'll let you know when we learn more.



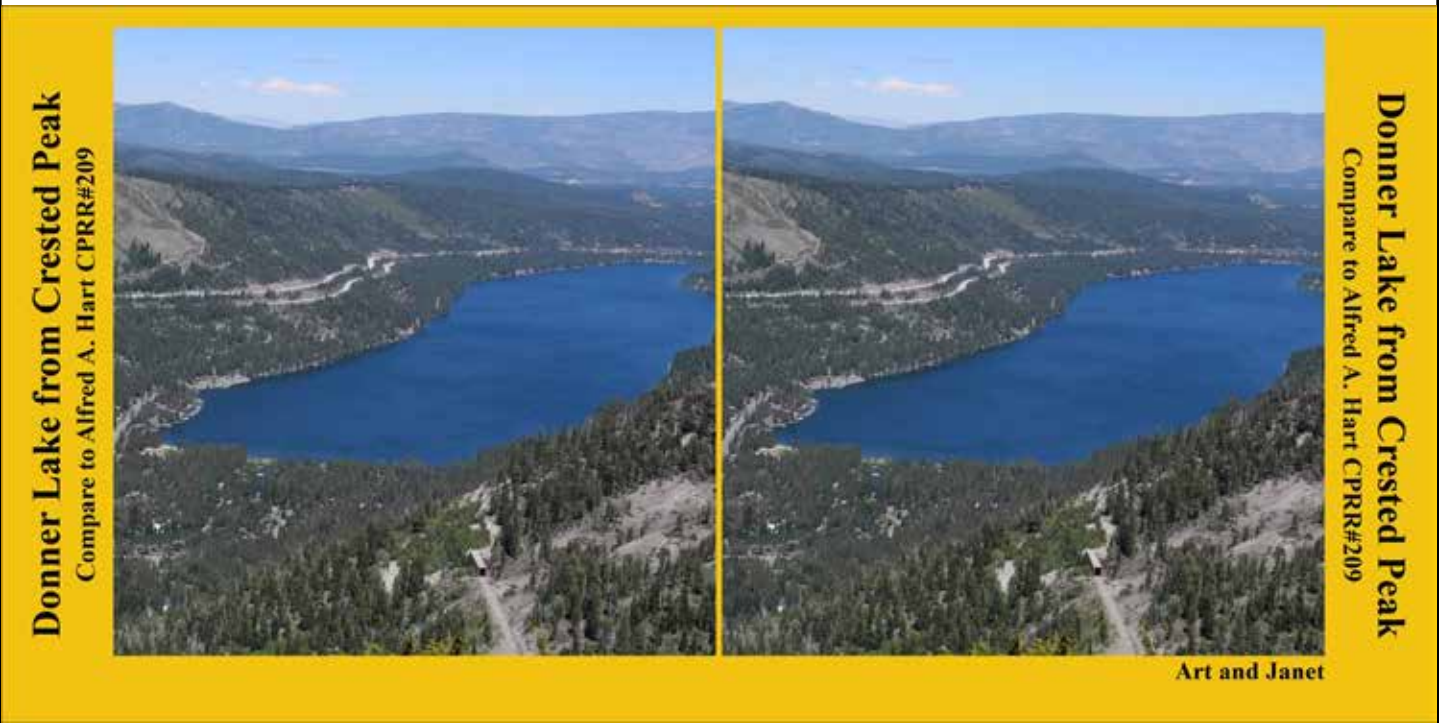
These two pictures were found by Art Clark at the University of Michigan's Lincoln Highway Digital Image Collection. Just about this time every year people in Truckee were waiting for the snow to melt and the road to open. The commercial interests were so impatient that at times they hired snow shovelers to clear the remaining snow in "shoveling bees," spread ash on the snow to speed melting, and held contests awarding prizes to the first cars to cross the summit annually. Here we have two fellow in 1910 marveling at the snow shovellers' work. What happened if someone was coming from the other direction?

Then & Now with Art Clark

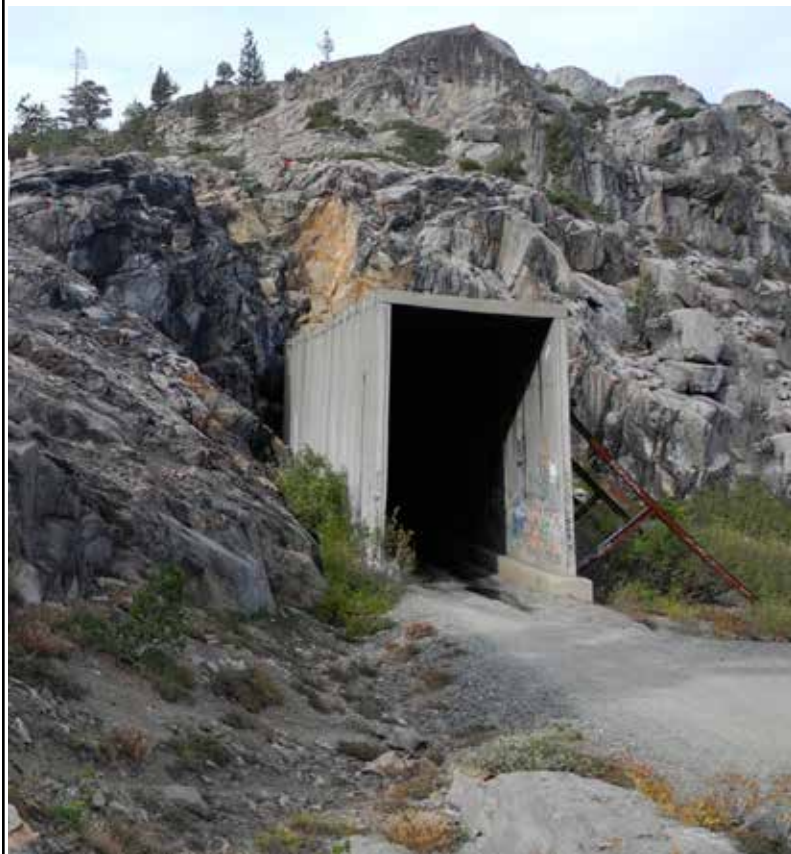


Donner Lake viewed from Crested Peak, now named Donner Peak.
From the original Alfred A. Hart Stereo card: "Alt. 8,500 ft., R. R. 1,000 ft. below - Lake 2,100 ft. below."
Most noticeable change is the route of I-80 across the opposite mountainside.

Photo shot from 39° 18.547'N 120° 18.744'W



Then & Now with Art Clark



Hart/Watkins 118 Summit Tunnel Eastern Portal Length 1600 feet

This view is looking at the east portal of the Summit Tunnel. Visible in the original is the Dutch Flat - Donner Lake Wagon Road, built to facilitate the building of the railroad. The beginnings of the heading for the tunnel is visible as a dark patch above the worker. On the left side is a 1866 version of a street sign. The wagon road continued down and to the right on its way to the lake.

Photo location 39° 18.951'N 120° 19.376'W

Roller Pass 1849

from The Gold Rush Diary Being the Journal of Elisha Douglass Perkins on the Overland Trail in the Spring and Summer of 1849. For more on Roller Pass see The Heirloom: November, 2011, April and February, 2012.

Saturday Sept. 15. Morn very cold, night do, ice made 2 in. thick. Thermometer I should suppose would have stood about 15 degrees. The ground our bed packs &c. were perfectly white with frost...We were camped in a valley near a Miss. train. ...I found a soldier...on his way home & brought us news from Cal. new & interesting. The prices of provisions & clothing low, Gold was not as abundant as had been represented, miners & emigrants disappointed & going home in great numbers &c.....

Start at 9. The wolves kept up a great howling all night & this morning one lingering about our camp Cross undertook to shoot him for soup & roast, but did not succeed. Soon after leaving camp we came to the huts built by the unfortunate Donner Party...where so many of them perished...The roofs have fallen in & nothing stands but the square enclosures with patches of newspaper hanging to the logs on the inside with which they built their huts & to keep out cold around were scattered shreds of female dresses and some scraps of jeans cloth, bones of all descriptions, human & other animals they had eaten. Pieces of iron &c. &c.....

The road from Donner huts has been changed, instead of going around Truckee's Lake as formerly it begins to ascent the mountain immediately... The Lake is some two mile to the right & was described to me by those who visited it as a beautiful sheet of clear water.... The ascent to the pass from Donner cabins is about 5 miles over rocks & steep bluff & through majestic forests of fine cedar....The journey is wild and magnificent beyond description. I was perfectly in raptures during the whole of the toilsome ascent, & wished often that some of my enthusiastic friends at home, who go into ecstasies over our hills could by some air balloons or other labor saving machine be placed by my side. The trees exceeded anything I had ever seen & full realized my expectations of a Cal. forest. Hundreds of them were six feet in diameter & standing so densely together that I could hardly get myself & mule through them. The road in finding a passage through the trees & among the rocks lengthened the distance to the foot of the pass at least by half.

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

The distance to the top of the pass I should judge to be about ½ mile, & and in this short space the elevation attained is somewhere near 2000 feet!.... the road is...red clay & stone, which by travel & sliding animals feet has been much cut & powdered up making a deep dust on the first half of the steep.. At the foot of the ascent we found the Missionary Train from Indiana, preparing for the Enterprise. One wagon had already started with 13 yoke of cattle attached, the load in the wagon not exceeding 600 lbs, & they could get but a few yards at a time stopping to rest their team. We leading each his mule, began to scramble up sometimes on "all fours" like our animals, & glad enough were we to stop "to blow" several times before reaching the top.

At last the summit was gained & we attempted 3 cheers for our success which unfortunately failed for want of breath, but sitting down for ½ hour we enjoyed the magnificent prospect on either side of us. Our route back could be traced back for miles, & the mountains among which we had been winding our way. Far below us was snow in vast quantities which never melts & on either side were peaks some thousands of feet higher than our position. Before us we could see the mountains of the Bear River & Yuba Valleys ...& the Yuba Valley some 5 or 6 miles distant with its green grass & camps, lay almost under us. I could have spent hours on this spot so many thousand feet higher than I ever was before or ever expect to be again, but the coldness of the air though it was Sept, & an bright sun shining compelling us to "button up" to the chin, & the growing lateness warned us to be moving.

Descending the west side of the Pass was, tho very steep nothing compared to the Eastern ascent, & we encamped some 2 or 3000 feet below our recent elevation, near a large train which crossed the day previous...The time usually occupied by an ox team to get to the top of the pass if from 1 ½ to 2 hours. About 8 in the evening some of the Missionary wagons which had made the ascent came down by torch light it begin rather uncomfortable lodging on the top, & the effect of the blazing pine knots in the dense forest above us, the shouts of the men & rumbling wagons &c was picturesque...

We had quite a treat this evening – a man belonging to the train near us struck up some lively tunes on valve trumpet, the notes of which rang & echoed among the hills & trees most gloriously seeming much like "sounds from home."

DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

www.donnersummithistoricalociety.org

Membership 2012

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

DATE _____

NAME(S) _____

____ New Membership

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CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

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

____ Individual Membership - \$30

____ Family Membership - \$50

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____ Sponsor - \$250

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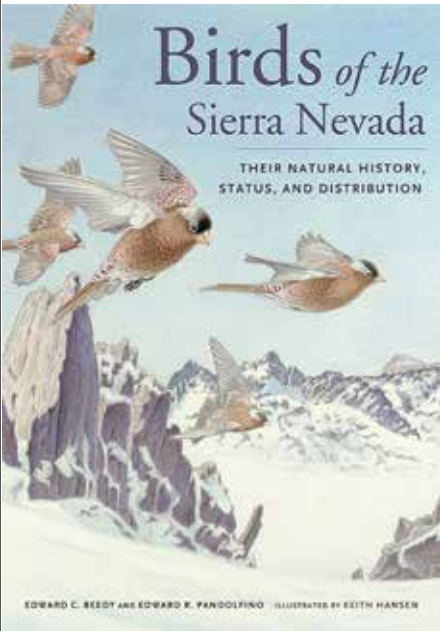
____ Business - \$250

____ Business Sponsor - \$1000

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

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

New Bird Book Available



This notice strictly has no place in our historical newsletter but it may be that some of our readers are outdoor enthusiasts or "birders" and so would be interested.

Ted Beedy is a local biologist and expert on Sierra birds. His new book, Birds of the Sierra Nevada will be available for purchase from Amazon and U.C. Press in May.

The book presents our Sierra birds: information, natural history, name origins, habitats, how they communicate and interact, abundance, and conservation. The book is rich in illustrations, contains maps, and includes more than 160 rare species.

Ted Beedy will be speaking at Serene Lakes August 17. You can email us for information if you'd like to attend - it's free. See page two.

You can pre-order the book at Amazon, just search for the title. The U.C. Press page is <http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520274945> or:

to order on line from UCPress: ucpress.edu/9780520274945
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THE HERITAGE TRAIL
Placer County Museums Tour
19 Museums from Roseville to Tahoe!

HT 2013

August 10th & 11th

Get information about the HeritageTrail at www.theheritagetrail.blogspot.com

Van Norden Meadow on Historic Hwy 40




The nice illustrated map above was done by George Lamson to show the new 20 Mile Museum signs going into Summit Valley this summer. George and his wife, Linda Cashion, sponsored the Van Norden dam sign to the right.

As you know we are also helping Truckee out with a McIver Dairy sign to go across from the nursery where the dairy used to be at Gateway - just east of the hospital on Donner Pass Rd. (Old 40).

The Truckee Donner Historical Society wants one at the west end of Donner Lake to note Wally Gillate and the Donner Lake Camp.

Norm Sayler would like another 20 Mile Museum sign at the State Park to commemorate T.C. Wohlbruck's contributions and the Pioneer Monument construction. If you would like to sponsor it, let us know (bill@donnersummithistorical.org). You can read about T.C. Wohlbruck in The Heirloom's October, November, and December, '12 editions. Sponsorships are a tax-deductible \$500.



Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

Lake Van Norden Dam



History


There has been a dam at the end of Summit Valley since the 1870's as you can see if you look closely at the top photograph here. To the left of the dam you can also see the buildings that used to be the "downstream" Soda Springs Station where there was a hotel, bar, store, and livery. We don't know who built the first dam or what it was used for although a passerby said it had been built, "in a vain attempt to make an ice pond."

Later, the South Yuba Canal Co. used the dam to impound water for irrigation and then for electrical generation. The dam evened the flow of the Yuba River later in the season when Sierra rivers "became mere rivulets - but painful contrast to the swollen and turbulent streams which come through the great canyons and meadows like valleys for the remainder of the year." As the lake drained each year, grasses grew and sheep arrived for their final fattening before boarding trains at Soda Springs Station and continuing their journey.

The dam was named for Charles Van Norden who came west to manage his family's investment in the South Yuba Canal Co. and later the Central California Electric Co.

P.G. & E. took over the dam in the early 20th century and operated it and the lake behind it until 1976. P.G. & E. wanted to enlarge the dam but discovered it sat on gravel, not bedrock. If there was an earthquake 5800 acre feet of water would flood down the Yuba River. Rebuilding was deemed too expensive so the State required the dam be notched, letting out the water and emptying the lake that had provided recreation and water for generations.



A Good Story

When P.G. & E. discovered the dam was sitting only on glacial till, or gravel, they first wanted to rebuild the dam 100 feet east. The original dam had been constructed by wagnon spruikling dirt, layer upon layer, until the dam was built up to 25 feet high. Earth filled dams need to be constructed of compacted earth. If the current dam was compacted to modern standards and safety, it would occupy only 1/3 of current volume.

Things to do right here

Since you are right here you really should walk along the top of the dam and then along the dirt road on the north side of the meadow. That's the old Lincoln Highway and you will find some more 20 Mile Museum signs there. Continue on your way and completely circumnavigate the meadow. Look for Native American mortars. Look for wildlife. Can you find beaver signs?

This sign is sponsored by George Lamson and Linda Cashion

Images courtesy of the State Archive Collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society. Copyright: 2012 Summit Valley Historical Society. www.donnersummithistorical.org

2nd Annual Margie Powell History Hike

Last year's first annual Margie Powell hike, which was in Summit Canyon, was a huge success. We explored the petroglyphs, the Lincoln Highway, the 1914 underpass, China Wall, and the railroad.

This year's second annual hike will be a circumambulation around Summit Valley. We'll explore the mortars and metates and learn about the Native Americans, learn about Summit Valley Ice Co., the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. and walk the remnant, learn about the dam first built about 1870, see the sheep industry remnants, see a hotel and cabin site, and more.

This year we will offer the hike on two days,

August 10 & 11 2013

Stay tuned for time and meeting place.
Bring lunch, water, sunscreen, comfortable shoes, and a hat.
The walk is a flat and easy four miles.

NATIVE AMERICANS OF DONNER SUMMIT AND SUMMIT VALLEY



New Brochure

Coming soon will be a new brochure about the Native Americans who occupied Donner Summit in the summers for a couple of millenia and left evidence of themselves in the mortars, metates, basalt chips, and petroglyphs that can be found in many places. It will be at the printer's by the time you read this.

No one knows for sure what happened to the Martis Culture and that makes a great mystery.

The Most Beautiful Sign Stands



As you know we are adding some new signs to the 20 Mile Museum this year. Five are going along Van Norden: Van Norden Dam, Sheep Pens, Native Americans, Dutch Flat Wagon Rd., and Summit Hotel. One is definitely going to Truckee, McIver Dairy. We have another one for the Pioneer Monument at the State Park and the Truckee Donner Historical Society is talking about one at the west end of Donner Lake.

In order to do that we needed sign stands to put the signs on. For that we had an offer from BJ Pierce of Rio Linda to weld them up for us. We paid for the steel and the paint but he did the welding and got the stands painted. The welding is beautifully done. Welding is an art, more than just a skill, if it's done properly and these are done wonderfully. The paint is a powder coat, way better than the spray painting job our sign department was doing.

Above you can see B J after delivering the signs to Soda Springs. They are even wrapped in plastic for protection. According to BJ's aunt, Sharon Ruffner (DSHS advisory board member), BJ has a connection to the Summit, " his great grandfather William Sietz was a plumber on the SP railroad and lived at Norden in the tunnel housing."

You will be pleased to see these signs when you come out to take a look this season.