

# SERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOL 3 NO 2 3210 JULY 28, 1971

Great Blue Lead  
Traveling the Early Trails  
Wild Fourth in Downierville  
Stampede—Before the Big Water  
Membership News



THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

JULY 28, 1971

VOL. III, No. 2

THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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## HISTORY OF DISCOVERY OF GREAT BLUE LEAD

After the first pass at the rich surface stream placers, the more enterprising of the gold-rush prospectors turned their attentions to the perplexing but highly productive "hill diggings." The shrewder miners, like Chips in the narrative below, figured out that these were the remnants of ancient fossil rivers. The author of "Early Annals of Downieville and Vicinity," chapters of which have appeared in these pages in recent months, participated in the hill diggings boom of the 1850's, up on the ridge south of town.

In Chapter Six of "Early Annals," reprinted from the Tuolumne Courier (1860), he expands on his favorite theme and records some of the events that took place in this boom. The discerning reader will recognize this chapter as the source of the oft-quoted tale of the short but illustrious mining career of "Chips," the English ship carpenter, Alleghanian M.A. Singleton wrote Bancroft the historian, in 1862, that Chips' real name was Wilson. But posterity undoubtedly will continue to think of him as just Chips, and the big hydraulic scar as "Chipses Flat" will long endure as a monument to the part he played in the goldrush in south Sierra. Likewise, the Smiths' name has been fittingly retained to designate the corresponding flat on the Alleghany side of Kanaka Creek. The narrator of "Early Annals" would have done far better to have joined the Smiths rather than try to find another Blue Lead on upper LaFayette Ridge. That strike turned out to be just a high bench remnant of a channel, whereas the Smiths had stumbled onto the breakout of the main Blue Lead. But we should let our chronicler tell the story in his own words.

--William Pickiepoche

In July 1852, the hill diggings of Minnesota were discovered by Old Joe Taylor, Chips, and Mike Savage, as they were prospecting in Taylor's Ravine, near its head. Chips, whose right name, as far as I am able to tell, was never rightly known, was supposed to be an old English sailor, a ship carpenter by trade. He was an original sort of a character, living alone in an old dirty cabin, and hardly ever sober; but one of the luckiest prospectors of this vicinity. Chips, then, whilst prospecting on the Ravine, observed an outcrop of blue gravel, and informed his partners, Taylor and Savage. Starting a tunnel here, they soon found it to pay extremely rich; and as such men could not long keep their secrets, it was not a great while before others got scent of the wealthy claims in this vicinity. This was the starting of the Blue Tunnel, the Irish claim, the Wisconsin Tunnel, and the Minnesota Drift.

At first, it was thought that the rich hill claims were only peculiar to this ravine; nor did they look further than the outcrops, for diggings, for some months. But, as ground became scarce, the miners tried other localities, even commencing in the solid rock. Chips, who could never sit down to regular hard work, but who was, perhaps, the best prospector of the whole district, now began to prospect on the opposite side of the ridge; rightly arguing that as both the creeks were rich, the lead must be in the center of the hill. Accordingly, selling out to his partner, Taylor, he commenced at, or near to, what is now known as Chips' Flat, nearly opposite to his old claim, the Blue Tunnel, with the avowed intention of running a tunnel so as to meet the other and make an opening from Minnesota



Flat to Chips' Flat; the understanding being that each company should own to the center of the hill.



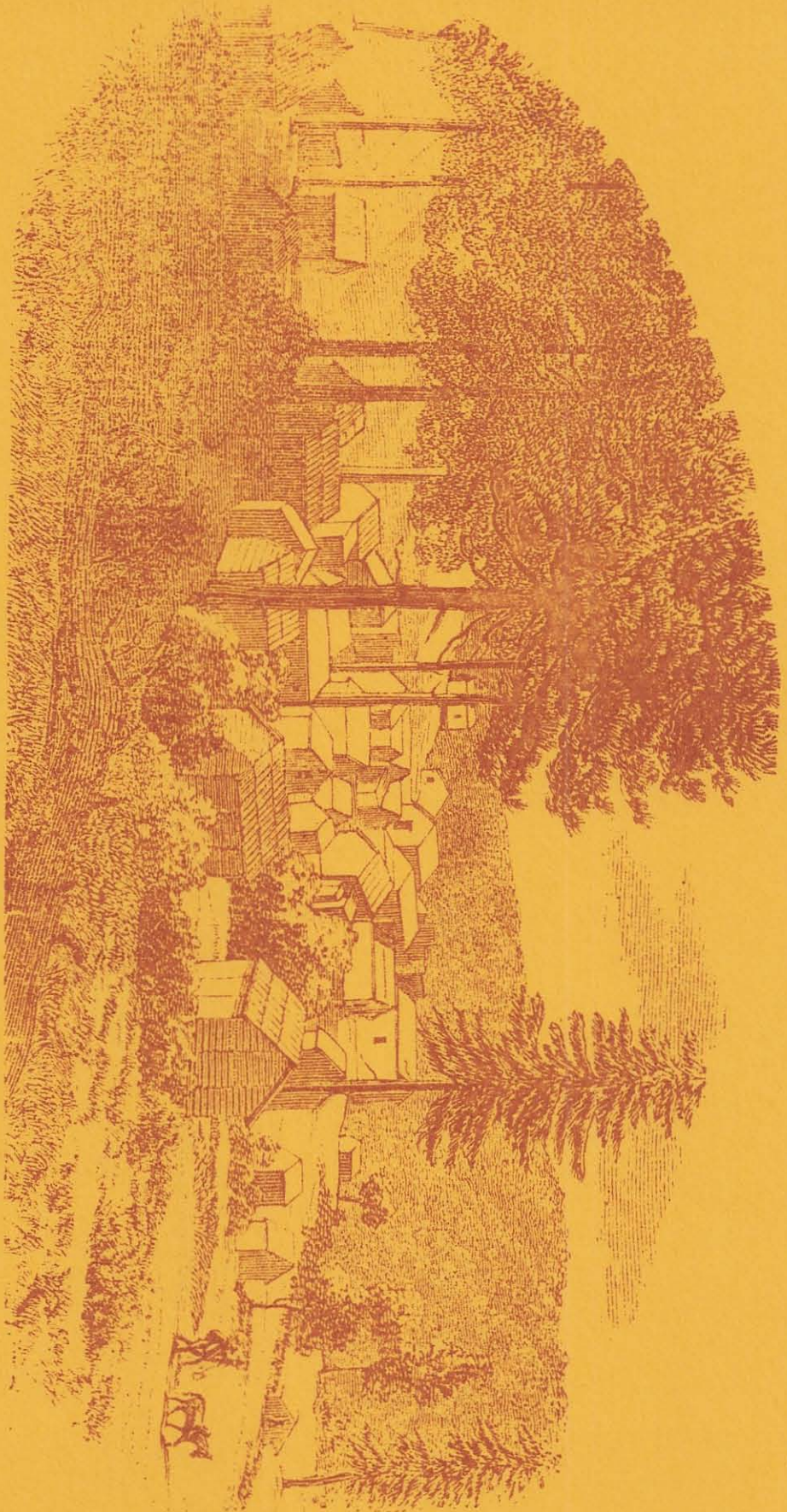
MINNESOTA - MID FIFTIES

(Courtesy of Mrs. Doris Foley)

Chips soon struck richer gravel than had been struck before by any company, and his fame spread accordingly. He sold shares in his tunnel to anyone disposed to buy, bought others in different parts of the hill, and was in a fair way of becoming a millionaire; but this ruined him, as will be seen hereafter.

Fred O. Smith and Henry Smith, taking the hint from old Chips, now commenced on the flat on the top of the hill opposite to Chips' Flat and directly above the Forks of Kanaka Creek, and finding the soil and rock similiar, commenced tunneling with good prospects. The Smiths, finding that the surface dirt would pay expenses, determined to run a bedrock tunnel until they struck gravel. Most persons at this time, thought them insane, and the movement more than doubtful; but nothing daunted, these enterprising men determined to invest their all in this speculation, which everyone deemed to be chimerical. The writer himself, who was personally acquainted with the Smiths, went seven miles expressly to try and induce them to abandon the project. Fred Smith, in reply said, that he might possibly never personally derive any benefit, but he was sure someone would, and offered me an interest in his claim, if I would only lend my countenance to the project, so as to induce others to do the same. I deemed him crazy, and left him with feelings of compassionate





VIEW OF CHIPS PLANT.

California Historical Society of San Francisco

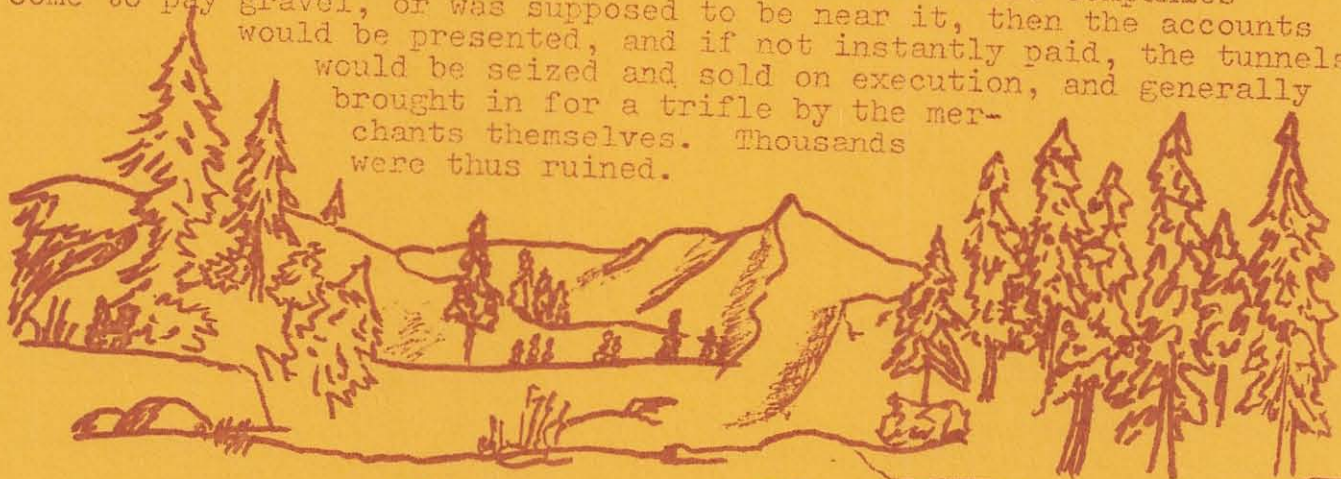
1856 Sacra Union



sorrow for his crazy hobby. This was in 1853.

Meanwhile, Chips had struck it extremely rich, at Chips' Flat, and was almost constantly drunk; his partners wished to buy him out, but he refused steadily to sell. They now went about on the other tack; and as they could not buy him out, determined to let him kill himself with Strychnine whiskey. Accordingly, they procured a barrel and made him a present of it. He soon died, and at the Coroner's inquest it was stated that he killed himself by drinking. A certain quack doctor from Downieville, whose name, if I read it right in my notes, was Craigge, stated under oath that he made a post mortem examination of the body, and that he died of Delerium Tremens, and the jury so found. But, on the other hand, Dr. Wm. Randall, an English surgeon, who had been Surgeon General to the British Naval Squadron, in the celebrated Opium War in China, and later a Surgeon to the American Army in Mexico, denied that Chips had died of Delerium Tremens, boldly stated at the inquest that he distinctly found opium, both in the stomach and brain. Randall, in fact, was the one who had opened the body; as Craigge was so incompetent as not to know how to commence the operation. And what makes it the more probable that this was the truth of the case, is, that Chips' share of the tunnel, after deducting the expenses of the funeral, was escheated to the other partners, by the general vote of the company. Thus ended the life of poor Chips, a man who had done more than most men to develop the resources of Sierra County.

In 1854, a perfect rage for starting bed-rock tunnels commenced all along the different divides. The Red Star, Blue Star, Typhoon, Hook and Bull, Maidhead, and various other tunnels were now started; all of which, at first, were started too high up on the mountain. Every hill was now covered by bands of prospectors, starting tunnels and shafts in all sorts of places, both practical and impractical. As a consequence, many companies were ruined; although many had nothing to lose but their time and were not hurt much after all. The usual practice was to go to the merchants and offer them a share, on the condition of their furnishing necessaries. Almost all agreed to this, but it was the most ruinous policy that could have been pursued, as the sequel showed; for no sooner had these companies come to pay gravel, or was supposed to be near it, then the accounts would be presented, and if not instantly paid, the tunnels would be seized and sold on execution, and generally brought in for a trifle by the merchants themselves. Thousands were thus ruined.





By 1855, the celebrated Blue Lead had been traced as far as Mariposa County; and now the rage for hill diggings had increased, it was extended northerly. Forest City had been struck before, as I mentioned in a previous number; Star Hill, opposite or west of it (this was the hill between Alleghany and Wet Ravine); American Hill, on the east; Mount Vernon, south (actually east); and Monte Christo, on the north. Besides these discoveries, others were continually making for miles north of these hills until, in the winter of 1859, the same lead had been traced to Quincy, in Plumas County. (The author of these lines didn't realize that there were several separate Tertiary river systems, not just one "Blue Lead." - W.P.) In 1855, Chapparal Hill, one and one half miles north of Monte Christo, was struck.

South of Minnesota, on the opposite ridge dividing the Middle Yuba, the miners were not idle in the meantime. Successively, Snow Tent, Moore's Flat, and the New Orleans Flat had been struck, both as to hill and hydraulic diggings; and in 1855, the amount of gold taken out on this ridge fell but little short of the other rich ridges north of it. But in the fall of 1855, quite a disaster occurred, between Moore's and Wolsey's Flat, by the breaking of a dam, which swept away nearly a quarter of a mile wide of the soil. Yet it is doubtful whether the injury was greater than the benefit, because it developed the rich Blue Lead, extending southerly.

In the summer of 1854, LaFayette Hill was struck by the writer; but it has been only for a few months that it could be worked, on account of the scarcity of water. No less than five different companies had attempted to bring water to the hill, but owing to a very deep gap, it was found so difficult to accomplish, that they successively abandoned the project. At last a company was formed, who have, at very extraordinary expense, succeeded in carrying the water two thirds of the way up the slope, from the bottom of the gap, onto the hillside, and by winding around the hill, have accomplished the bringing of water upon the top of the ridge, one mile below the gap. This is as high as water can be brought, and other companies are obliged to use other expedients to get their dirt to water. Large "shoots" are formed, below the level of the ditch, and thus they succeeded tolerably well in washing the dirt. LaFayette Hill promises to be one of the richest - if not the richest - ridge that has hitherto been struck. The next richest, is probably the Mount Vernon divide, which passes through Plum Valley, and extends past, and parallel to, the gravel range of Camptonville. New discoveries in this extremely rich section are still, in 1860, being made. At Plum Valley, on the ranch of Mr. Bope, a stratum of some kind of clay, having no grit, has lately been found, richer than anything reached before.





Editor's Note: At the March, 1971, meeting of the Sierra County Historical Society, Mr. A. Strang of Sierraville gave an interesting address on the early modes of transportation in and out of Sierra Valley. We felt that his remarks were of special interest and so are presenting his address as an article in your Bulletin. Notes concerning the author, Mr. Strang, may be found in Vol. I, #2.

### EARLY TRAILS AND TRANSPORTATION

Apparently the first white men to set eyes on Sierra Valley was a group of deer hunters from the mining camps around Downieville. Led by A. P. Chapman, they were hunting on Haskell Peak and from there sighted Sierra Valley. This was in 1850. They returned to Downieville and reported their find. In 1851, Mr. Chapman and another party came back via Mohawk Valley to the "Great Valley" he had sighted the year before. This time he, Joseph Kirby, John Gardner, and I. K. McClannin posted claims for a ranch apiece. From the description of the Chapman site, it would appear to be the old Devine ranch.

As winter came on they returned to Downieville, and in the spring of 1852 brought men with them and proceeded to build log cabins on their claims. This same spring Jim Beckworth built his place at the north end of the valley. Other claims were taken up at the Randolph area. The first permanent home built in Sierraville was by John Lipscomb, who built on the creek back of the lot between the present home of Mrs. Barrington and the Cold Creek Tavern. He later sold this to William Arms in 1857. Mr. Arms later built a store and a hotel and was also Sierraville's first postmaster.



In 1854 the Smith Mining Company went in to the Smithneck area, built houses and corrals, and planted five acres of wheat. The Indians raided them, killing an ox and burning the buildings. The men escaped to Randolph, and Smithneck was abandoned. The field of wheat was given to T. S. Batelli, who cut it with a hand sickle and harvested it. He lived on the ranch now owned by M. J. Bony, and gave his name to the street that runs north from Main. Two years later David B. Patterson again opened up the Smithneck area, building a log cabin at a spring just west of Loyalton. This cabin was later incorporated into the house that still stands on the ranch owned by the Grandi brothers. During the Civil War, so many volunteers joined the Union Army from this place that the town's name was changed to Loyalton.

With more settlers moving in and more permanent homes being built, many supplies were needed, and so started the many pack trails and stage and freight lines about which I wish to talk.

Nathaniel Strang came to the Valley in 1856 - coming across the Isthmus of Panama - and eventually up the Yuba River to Downieville. He took up his claim along the creek that flows through the center of the valley (still called Strang Creek). Two years later his son brought a pack train in from Downieville to get hay for his stock.



The trail then went from Downieville up the river, behind Sierra Buttes and around Haskell Peak, entering the valley at the Chapman place. They cut the hay with scythes, raked it by hand, and baled it with a "dead-fall" baler. This was a weighted lever mortised into a tree stump which tamped the hay into a wooden frame. The resulting bales were taken by mule back - 150 pounds to each mule - and taken back over this torturous route.

In 1864 he drove a herd of cattle from Downieville to Sierra Valley for a Mr. Bailey. This was sort of like taking Mahamet to the mountain. It was easier to bring the cattle to the feed. He blazed a shorter trail, coming in over Yuba Pass and entering the valley through Turner Canyon.

In 1872 Heartwell Franklin and Henry Turner (of Sattley) took a contract to build a wagon road over this route for \$20,000 (a twenty mile stretch). It followed, essentially, the same route of our State Highway 49, presently in use. Supplies came in this way, as well as by Beckworth's line from Chilcoot summit to Quincy and over Buck's summit to Marysville. This also drew much business to and from Long Valley and Honey Lake, the main freight depot being at Summit (near Chilcoot).



With the discovery of gold and silver in Virginia City in 1859, it became necessary to haul huge amounts of supplies from the boats at Marysville. Their wagons came up the Yuba River to Freeman's Crossing (just below Camptonville) and over the Henness Pass. This followed the high crest of the ridge from the crossing at Freeman's - past Weber Lake, Kyburz Flat, Sardine Valley - through Dog Valley to Verdi and on to Reno. These early road builders liked to stay on the crests of the

ridges for two reasons. First, there was less grade, as the ridges hold to a fairly constant elevation, and, second, the winds kept the very top blown clear of snow, the drifts piling up just over the crests. As traffic moved over Henness Pass it eliminated much of the use of the Yuba Pass road, it being a much shorter distance to meet the supply trains at Kyburz, and coming down the Cold Creek canyon, a relatively easy route.

But Progress doomed the Henness Pass road in its turn. The Southern Pacific railroad was opened in 1869, the first train moving through Truckee on May 10th of that year. Freight came into Truckee by rail and the road to Kyburz was extended over Sagehen into Truckee.

Sierraville became the hub of a network of lines, with the wagon trains coming in from Truckee and branching out into three main lines: one to Johnsonville, one to Sierra City and Downieville, and one to Summit through Loyalton. At this time Randolph sported one hotel, one livery stable, a grist mill, saw mill, two saloons, and a blacksmith shop, while Sierraville had two hotels, three saloons, and three livery stables. It was a busy, bustling, noisy place.

In 1890 a narrow gauge railroad called the Sierra Valley Railroad was built in from Reno Junction (where it met the N.C.O.R.R.) - over Beckworth pass to Vinton - on to Clairville and Clio. This brought freight, mail, etc.,





closer yet, and Vinton (formerly called Cleveland) was the pick-up spot with a shuttle network of teams and pack trains feeding into the established lines.

In 1901 another railroad was built from Boca to Lewis Mill - about half way between Loyalton and Sardine Valley. This replaced the old steam traction wagon trains then in use in the logging and lumber operations. These were steam powered, with two huge cleated rear wheels and one small driver wheel in front. It pulled a string of wagons - logs or lumber.

This railroad was later extended into Loyalton and was known as the B & L (Boca and Loyalton). At this time there were five saw mills and three planing mills in Loyalton. When they pushed on across the valley to join with the Sierra Valley rails at Horton Junction (near Hawley), a spur continued on to Horton's landing and another to the ice pond at Gulling or Grizzley Creek.

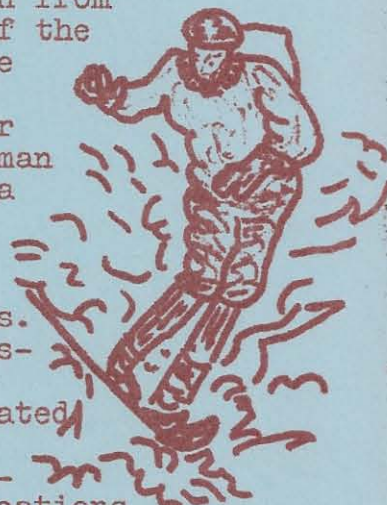
Many spurs ran from all these many lines into mills and logging camps - one of the longest being from Horton's landing into Clover Valley. This operated until 1957 when the big trucks took over the log hauling.

Distance was being eliminated all the time. Freight, passengers, and even the mail came in to Loyalton, except in bad weather when the letter mail came via Vinton - as snow created a problem on the B & L. In 1910 the Western Pacific built the second trans-state railroad up the Feather River Canyon - crossing the north end of Sierra Valley. This compounded the troubles the B & L were having and they discontinued operation on December 1, 1916. However, the W. P. bought the section running from Hawley to Loyalton and continued operation of it - Clover Valley sharing its use until 1957. This is the only section of the old B & L still in existence.

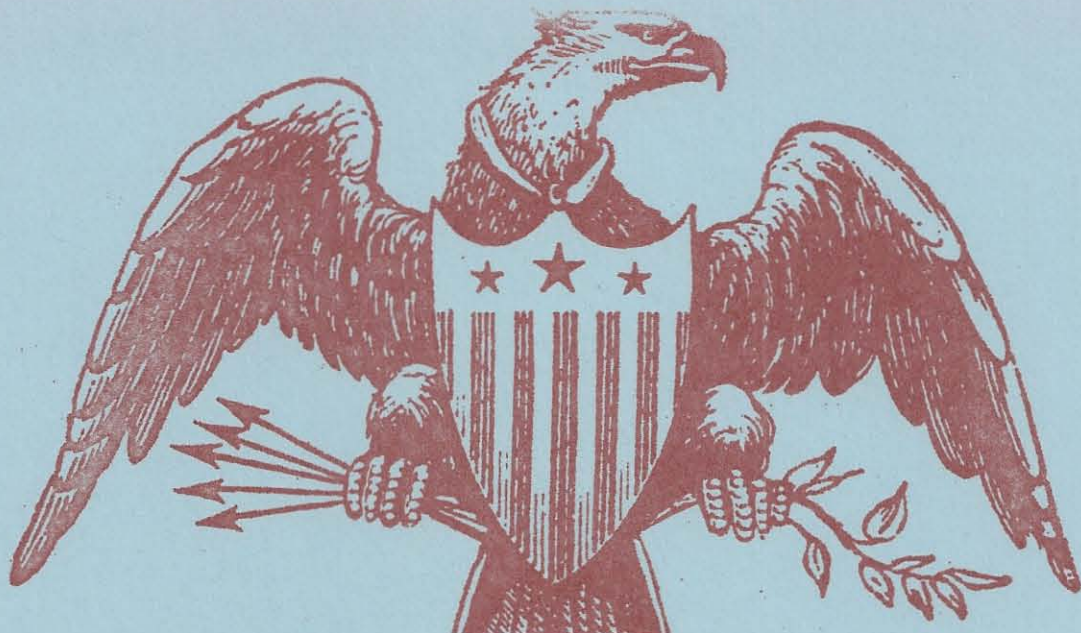
Charles Duboirdieu was the last of the old stage lines to operate under horse power. He followed such old timers as Laity, Linus, Dolley, and A. S. Nichols. Between 1912 and 1915 the stages modernized and motorized - but still served the surrounding communities.

Most of the mail to Downieville still comes in from Chilcote and over Yuba Pass, though without most of the early hardships. Now a rotary snow plow clears the way, whereas it used to go on skis in the winter time. One legendary man by the name of Tom Sawyer carried the mail for many winters. He was a huge man and could carry 100 pounds a trip, skiing to Sierra City one day and back the next. Snowshoes on horses and even an early model of a snowmobile were used. This contraption had two tank-like, bullet-shaped runners with spiral, grooved surfaces. Ever working towards faster and more improved transportation!

Now we sit in heated comfort and enjoy our "instant" communications and wonder at the stamina of the men our mountains produced. How did they do it?







(Previously printed in the Magazine Section of the San Francisco Chronicle, July 3, 1960)

THE DAY THE DRUMMER FELL OUT OF THE WINDOW--  
By Blanche Somerville

1885

The boom of the old cannon on the point below Downieville, and the firing of anvils at the blacksmith's shop below us, awakened us early that morning. We (my older sister, younger brother and I) dressed hurriedly, but lingered for a look at my treasurers, the firecrackers and other things that had taken 50 cents of my 4th of July money.

Our house was high on the hill above town, and as we looked down the sun was rising and the flag just being raised on the flag pole at the Plaza. The town was gaily decorated, for it had invited the country around to a gala celebration.

As we looked, a buggy drawn by a spanking team of bay horses whirled up to the hotel, and the occupants alighted. The men helped the women over the mud and steps to the sidewalk. Both men and women wore long dusters; the women were heavily veiled for mountain roads were dusty then. Many other vehicles were to follow, for the neighboring towns sent their delegations to help celebrate the glorious Fourth.

I hurried into the house to get ready for my part in the day's program. The younger girls were to be states in the float representing the United States of America. So, dressed in my white dress, all decorated and starched, flounced and be-ribboned, I made my way down to the Plaza, where we assembled to take our places on our float, which was decorated with red, white and blue bunting.

As I went on, excitement grew and thrills raced through and through me. Fir and spruce trees lined the streets, their fragrance mingling with the smell of freshly sprinkled streets, laced through with the odor of bombs and firecrackers---the unforgettable 4th of July smell. There is nothing like it now.

Up at the Plaza all seemed confusion. Would we ever be ready? Then our States' names were draped over our shoulders and across



our fronts. I was New Jersey, wishing to be New York instead. We were lifted to our places, lining the float both sides, equally. Then came our beautiful Goddess of Liberty, blond hair flowing; gold-crowned, white robed, she occupied her throne. Beside her stood Uncle Sam, with striped trousers, blue coat, tall hat.

Now the Grand Marshal rode by on his prancing black horse, getting the parade in order. Leading, a vehicle bearing several youths with the colors. The breeze lifting the flags to reveal the red, white and blue. Then the brass band, the drummer with his big bass drum. He seemed about as round as his drum.

Everyone was contributing his part that day, Native Sons and Daughters, civic and fraternal orders, school children, horseback riders, and to be seen later, The Clampers. All had a part in the wonderful parade.

Ready at last, the drum gave the signal, "Left, left, left-right-left." Then swinging into a march, the band went on, and soon we followed. The driver seemed hardly able to hold his four horse team.

Past China Town, the brewery, the upper light bridge, the foundry, the old school house, the residences, to the rear corner, then across the upper bridge where two branches of the Yuba unite, and into town again. Then across the lower bridge to the Court House, where the Sheriff and aides greeted us. The band responded with a number, I think it was "Hail Columbia." Back to the Plaza we disbanded for an interval to rest and find rest and find refreshments.

I retrieved my handkerchief with the money tied in one corner, and then went to the ice cream parlor for home made ice cream and cake, Mrs. S. had made. How good it was!

The patriotic program was held in Armory Hall, above the livery stable, and so my parents gathered us together as it was a "must" to attend that. How right they were!

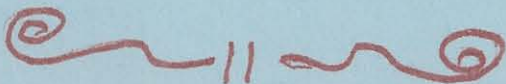
The hall was well filled as we entered, the dignitaries chosen for the occasion seated on the decorated rostrum, a table with a water pitcher and glass at hand. The chairman introduced the officers and guests of the day, then a soprano soloist came on to lead in the "Star Spangled Banner." The band playing the melody softly. We stood for that.

The band was present taking their places in the upper right corner of the hall near an open window. The drummer, mopping his face took his seat in the open window.

The reading of the Declaration of Independence followed. It seemed very tiresome to me, but we heard it, all of it. The chairman said he was to present "a few remarks." As often happens, those few remarks went on and on. It was very warm, the benches were hard, my feet didn't touch the floor. I went to sleep.

Awakened by a sudden commotion, up near the band, I saw the sun shining through the open window where the drummer had been. He had been sleepy too, and fell backward onto a shed roof far below. We waited silently until word came back he was not seriously injured. But the chairman had lost the thread of his "few remarks" so he introduced the honored speaker of the day.

The speaker was given the courtesy of complete attention which he held by his charming manner, so genial, friendly and sincere. I suppose there was much I did not understand, but as he finished I knew one thing; I was glad and proud to be an American. That speaker





was Tirey L. Ford, later to become Attorney General for the State of California.

Then the chairman read some announcements; there would be a picnic lunch served at the grounds up the river, followed by sports, games, contests, and baseball. In the evening another big event, a Clamper parade.

The little minister said the benediction, then we stood to sing "America." We welcomed the free period of the afternoon.

We enjoyed the afternoon with our guests. Everyone seemed ready for the picnic lunch, most of all the cold pink lemonade.

Now at least there was time for our fireworks. We had fire-crackers, big and little, sparklers, whirling pin wheels, shooting stars, and a number of punks, or joss sticks with which we lighted our treasurers. No matches!

About 5 o'clock mother called us in for the traditional 4th of July dinner. We had fried chicken and cream gravy, new potatoes, peas, corn, a vegetable salad and for dessert, chocolate cake or cherry pie, and best of all, watermelon.

But the celebration was only half over. As it grew dark, there was a half-hour of fireworks, a grand display we thought. Then came the Clampers' parade, a feature unique to the mountain communities.

It was a torchlight procession, like a combination circus parade and masquerade. First a vehicle bringing the Noble Grand Humbug and a companion with huge horn, the Clampers' hew-gag; there was a raucous band, the unpredictable goat, a donkey and clown, a two-humped camel with human feet. Other animals and features joined the fun.

Near the end came a rooster opening and closing his yellow "beak" --I was sure I knew who that was. At the very last a blue devil, with horns and tail, and pitch fork.

The celebration was to be concluded with a grand ball, held in the Amory Hall. Mother said we could go look for a while. The hall was quite filled when we came in, the ladies in their beautiful gowns, escorts in black or dark suits. The musicians were getting their instruments ready, softly tuning violins and cello with the piano. An odd looking thin man with clarinet seemed to be ready.

The caller announced the Grand March, then here they came, led by lovely Eva and her tall escort. She wore a gown blue as her eyes, her dark hair piled high on her head. She was graceful and dignified. I loved her petite sister who followed, brown hair brown eyes, in a cloud of pink tulle. And as all the rest came on I knew many of them: The stately judge, with his slender wife, Tirey Ford and his sparkling brunette partner--the gay, red-haired lawyer with his companion--and all the rest, a goodly company indeed.

The music changed, they swung into the quadrille, directed by the caller. The "round dances" followed, waltzes, polkas, schottisches, versovian, with an occasional quadrille. Gaiety increased, as they danced the Virginia Reel, then the hilarious Paul Jones. The rhythm, the melody, the light and color and gaiety were entrancing but finally my father said, "Time to go home."

Reluctantly, I stumbled down the narrow stairs, out onto the board sidewalk; past a darkened doorway, where a figure huddled, apparently asleep. He had celebrated too well.

We went on into the black velvet darkness, the strains of "Over The Waves" coming to us faintly. The end of the day for us, and perhaps, almost the end of an era.

Blanche Sommerville

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The Sierra County Historical Society is pleased to present to our readers the Historical Survey of the Stampede Reservoir Area In the Little Truckee River Drainage District by Prof. W. Turrentine Jackson, Prof. of History at the University of California at Davis. This work was done through the Historical Section of the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. We are publishing the work, in three parts, with the permission of Prof. Jackson and the Department of the Interior. The historical survey is divided into four sections;

- I. Immigrant Routes Traversing the Area,
- II. Roads for Wagons, Freighters, and Stages,
- III. Summer Dairy Ranches in Sardine, Stampede, and Hoke Valleys,
- IV. Logging and Timber Operations; Railroads



The first portion of the survey follows:

I. Immigrant Routes Traversing the Area:

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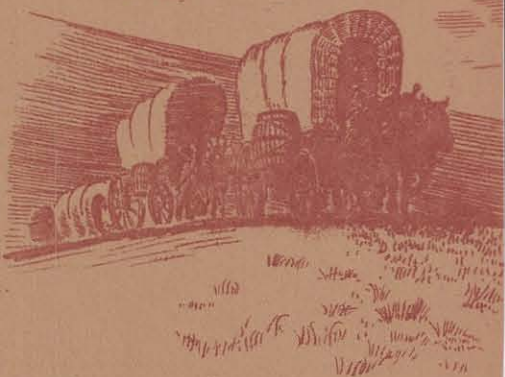




## HISTORICAL SURVEY

### I. Immigrant Routes Traversing the Area

The California Trail was opened by the John Bartleson-John Bidwell Party in 1841. After traveling across present Nevada along the Humboldt River to its sink, the group traversed the desert to the Walker River, ascended one of its tributaries, crossed the Sierra in the vicinity of Sonora Pass and finally reached the headwaters of the Stanislaus River on the Western Slope. The first crossing of the Sierra Nevada by a party of pioneers was far to the south of the Little Truckee River Drainage Basin, the area of present study. As a part of the "Great Migration" of the year 1843 the Joseph Chiles-Joseph R. Walker Party came to California, but their routes were even farther away from the geographic area being examined. Chiles attempted to skirt the Sierra to the north by following a route along the Malheur and Pit rivers and Walker led his wagon train through Owen's Valley and Walker's Pass into the southern San Joaquin Valley.



#### 1. Opening the Truckee River Route, 1844:

The so-called "Truckee River route" was discovered and traversed by the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy Party during 1844. The ascent of the Truckee River was a difficult route that involved interminable crossings from one bank of the stream to the other and at times it was necessary to follow a jolting passage up the stream bed itself. The standard account of this venture by Moses Shallenbarger, a member of the party, says:

...At first it was not discouraging. There was plenty of wood, water, grass and game, and the weather was pleasant. The oxen were rested, and for a few days good progress was made. Then the hills began to grow nearer together, and the country was so rough and broken that they frequently had to travel in the bed of the stream. The river was so crooked that one day they crossed it ten times in traveling a mile. This almost constant traveling in the water softened the hoofs of the oxen, while the rough stones in the bed of the river wore them down, until the cattle's feet were so sore that it became a torture for them to travel. The whole party were greatly fatigued by the incessant labor. But they dared not rest. It was near the middle of October, and a few light snows had already fallen, warning them of the imminent danger of being buried in the snow of the mountains. They pushed on, the route each day becoming more and more difficult. Each day the hills seemed to come nearer together and the stream become more crooked.

They were now compelled to travel together in the bed of the river, there not being room between its margin and hills to furnish foothold to an ox. The feet of the cattle became so sore that the drivers were compelled to walk beside them in the water, or they could not be urged to take a step; and, in many instances, the teams had to be trebled in order to drag the



wagons at all. On top of all these disheartening conditions came a fall of snow a foot deep, burying the grass from the reach of the cattle, and threatening them with starvation...<sup>1</sup>

Shallenberger was probably recalling the events along the stretch of the trail beyond present Reno, especially above Verdi, where the very difficult upper canyon of the Truckee begins. After the first traverse of the canyon that proved so difficult, it was always bypassed in the future by immigrant parties. Shallenberger's narrative continues...In this manner they dragged their slow course along until they reached a point where the river forked, the main stream bearing southwest and the tributary almost due west. Then arose the question as to which route should be taken. There being an open space and pretty good feed at the forks of the river, it was agreed to go into camp and hold a consultation.. After considering the matter fully, it was decided that a few of the party should leave the wagons and follow the main stream, while others should go by way of the tributary, as that seemed to be the more promising route ~~for~~ vehicles.

The pack party followed up the Truckee River to its head and were the first white travelers to reach the shore of the Lake Tahoe, so far as is presently known. The group moved along the west shore of the lake and according to Shallenberger they "struck across the hills to the headwaters of the American River, which they followed down to the valley." George R. Stewart has been more specific in suggesting that the group went up McKinney Creek to its head, struck the Rubicon River beyond the divide, followed that stream, and in turn the Middle and North Forks of the American River, and finally reached the Sacramento Valley. Of greater interest to our investigation was the wagon company. Shallenberger states, "The party with wagons proceeded up the tributary, or Little Truckee, a distance of two miles and a half, when they came to a lake since known as Donner Lake." Traveling with this group was Old Caleb Greenwood and his two sons, John and Brit. John Greenwood resolved to re-locate the route in an attempt to avoid the upper canyon of the Truckee.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The Migration of 1845:

A party of fifteen men set out from Sutter's Fort on May 12, 1845 headed eastward with news of the opening up of the crossing by way of the Truckee River and Lake Tahoe. William H. Winter has provided us with an account of this 1845 west-east party of men mounted on horseback. Concerning the passage through the Sierra, he writes:

Immediately upon reaching the summit, the whole eastern side of the mountain burst upon the view: and a sudden thrill of joy, awakened in every bosom, and flashed in every eye...Down the mountain we could see a green spot, at the further end of a beautiful lake [Donner Lake], which spread out in a broad crystal sheet below us.... Descending the Eastern declivity, we came to the lake, and passed around the Northern side, to the further extremity, where we found the grass, which we had seen from the summit of the mountain, in abundance, and of a very good quality....The distance from the forks of the Juba River to the lake, is about ten miles; and in this lake

15



the South branch of Truckies River (Donner Creek) has its source. This stream was called, by the emigrating party that went to California, in the Fall of 1844, after the name of an Indian, who piloted them across the mountains.

Leaving the lake, and the river which flows from it, to the right, we bore off to the North East, for a wide, deep gap, through which we supposed that we could both pass, and leave the mountains. At ten miles, we crossed the North branch of Truckies River (Prosser Creek), a stream of considerable size. We traveled eight miles further, to the head of a stream, running to (from) the North West, which we called Snow River (Little Truckee River); as a heavy fall of snow, here obscuring our course, compelled us to halt. Snow continued to fall during this, and the succeeding day; and we remained in camp. When it ceased, we again proceeded on our journey, leaving the gap for which we had been steering, and bearing to the East, through a break in the mountain which follows the course of Truckies River, and which is a spur of the main California chain. Having crossed this mountain, we came again, at five miles, to Truckies River, which we crossed and traveled down on the South side--passed across a barren plain [site of Reno], ten miles in width, and at fifteen miles, came to the Burnt Mountains. These are a succession of several high, perfectly barren, and very rocky ridges. The distance across is about thirty-five miles, and the way was very tedious and toilsome.<sup>3</sup>

According to Dale Morgan, John Greenwood was apparently responsible for the improvement in the route during the Spring of 1845 because of his dissatisfaction with the trail of the 1844 emigrants who, after reaching the site of Verdi, had followed the Truckee in the right-angle bend it makes, up through the canyon to where Donner Creek enters the Truckee River. By the Fall of 1845 the present Prosser Creek, termed the North branch by Winter, was being called John's of John Greenwood's Creek. Winter's Snow River, the present Little Truckee, by 1846 was known as Wind River.<sup>4</sup> The party went around the north end of the Verdi Range via Dog Valley and their trail from the Little Truckee to Dog Valley undoubtedly passed through a portion of Stampede Valley. Thus, it can be ascertained that the horseback party of the spring of 1845 including William H. Winter, Overton Johnson, and E. A. Farwell, Old Greenwood and his two half-breed sons, were the first to cross Stampede Valley and they were traveling from west to east.

Old Greenwood returned to California in the late summer and early fall as a guide to the so-called Swasey-Todd Party. Jacob R. Snyder has left a diary of the passage across the Sierra.

Thursday 18th [Sept] Packed this morning at 8 o'clock [Snyder is traveling with a party of ten who left the main group with the wagons in the Burning Mountains between present Reno and Wadsworth]. Crossed the river many times this day. Passed a number of Indian signs. Fresh. One of the oxen of the forward company of waggons had 6 arrows shot into it by the Indians at night. Came in sight of a range of mountains that were smoking in many places. Encamped on the river. Traveled 25 miles this day. Here we cross a bottom about 12 miles wide [present Reno] and widest bottom of this river. Here the river



runs into the mountains of California. One of our pack horses missed here in crossing a bad slough.

Friday 19th. Packed this morning at 1/2 past 8 o'clock. We follow the river after leaving the bottom; cross on the right; again on the left & again on the right, and then take the mountain [north around the Verdi Range] leaving the river on the left. It is about 6 miles from where we strike the river at the bottom to where we take the mountains. The general course is northwest until we descend a ridge into a valley [Dog Valley] where we find a spring branch and grass. The mountains are thickly covered with pine and redwood. It is a pleasing sight after traveling so long over sandy plains & barren hills. We keep a mountain on our left as we cross to the valley. Encamped on the spring branch. Traveled 18 miles.

Saturday 20th. Packed this morning at 1/2 past 8 o'clock. Our course lay up the valley we were in, over a ridge into an other valley. Our course was between southwest & west. Obviously through a portion of Stampede Valley.) The best guide is a mountain on the left bare of timber. It is 8 miles to Wind River [Little Truckee] from the spring branch where we camped, 9 miles from Wind River to Johns River [Prosser Creek], & 6 miles from Johns River to the waters of Truckeys River [near present Truckee]. By keeping the Bald Mountain on the left and pursuing the most eligible route, Truckeys River cannot be missed. We struck Truckeys River & camped about 1 mile from the point where we struck it. Near the point where we struck it are two large isolated rocks in the valley.<sup>5</sup>

Morgan notes that Snyder in the above quotation has described the relocation of the emigrant trail from present Verdi to present Truckee, north around the Verdi Range via present Dog Valley. Thus, the Swasey-Todd Party is traveling the route into California that had been traversed in the spring by the States-bound party piloted by the Greenwoods.<sup>6</sup> During 1845, the emigrant route through Stampede Valley had been traversed in both directions.

Thomas Knight, another emigrant of 1845 with the Swasey-Todd Party, tells of reaching the Truckee River after having crossed the Forty-Mile Desert and then remarks, "here the guide informed us that the previous year 1844 the little party with him traveled directly up this stream & where the canon was verry bad in the stream itself-- that being verry bad it was proposed to cross it to the north and west through the high ridges coming from the hills or Mountains, sloping East This was adopted & was the road thereafter traveled.<sup>17</sup>

Jacob Snyder's Diary gives further evidence connecting the experience of the 1844 migration with that of 1845. He writes:

Sunday 21st. Packed this morning at 8 o'clock and followed the river on the right side until we struck a lake [Donner Lake] at the foot of the declivity of the Back Bone of the California Mountains. This Lake is 3 miles long & from 1 to 1 1/2 miles wide. We passed a log cabin built by the Emigrants of last year [in which Moses Shallenberger wintered.] Their wagons were left until spring before they were taken over. At this lake we commence ascending the rugged side of the mountain. It is composed of masses of granite.





### 3. Overland in 1846:

Lansford W. Hastings was part of the 1845 migration to California, and in April, 1846 he was ready to re-cross the Sierra headed eastward apparently hoping to divert much of the Oregon-bound migration of that summer to California. He was accompanied by the famous scout and guide, James Clyman. Though travel was slow the Hastings-Clyman Party reached the summit on May 1 having trudged through snow from three to eight feet in depth. Clyman's brief diary records the crucial events of the next four days:

[May] 2 Proceeded down the valley of Truckees River [Donner Creek] through open pine woods and here we first saw the plains covered with sild sage. The chain of mountains we have Just past is the same called the cascade chain in Oregon...we made a short days travel and camp on Johns [John Greenwood's] creek [Prosser Creek] to recruit our half starved animals who had been three days and two nights without a mouthfull of forrage having traveled not more than 6 miles....

3 Proceeded on Early about 4 miles to a fine vally [Russell Valley] of green grass where we unpacked again for the day to give our animals a chance to recruit after their long and hard fatigue.

4 as the snow covered all the grass we packed and ware early on the way crossed Cuite a large creek [Little Truckee River] which has been called wind River a tributary of Truckeys River and proceeded to cross a considerable of a ridge and descended again into a small rich vally [Dog Valley] 8 miles from our former encampment....

5 A cool night proceeded S Easterly about 4 miles and came to the main Truckies River [near Verdi] where it first leaves the timbered mountains and Enters the open Bald hills which would be mountains in any other country. 8

This west-east crossing of the Sierra in the early spring of 1846 was a prelude to the migration along the Truckee River route headed for California during August and September of that Year. At least five men left records indicating that in all probability they traveled the route up the Dog Valley Grade, around the Verdi Mountains, and on to the Little Truckee by way of Stampede Valley before arriving at Donner Lake: William E. Taylor, Nicholas Carringer, Edwin Bryant, James Mathers, and Leonard Heinrich.

The following is a pertinent excerpt from the sketchy Taylor Diary:

[August] 20 traveled all day and all night passed some Boiling Springs quite salt distance 40 miles making 60 miles that 8 of us had 12 gallons of Water Extreme suffering Reached Trucky

21 Lay by all day Tem 100 Fah.

22 Entered the Sierra Nevada or Cascade mts up Trucky vally 15 miles Tem 87 deg of Fah.

23 Traveled 18 miles Bad Road

24 " 10 miles came to timber Tem 94 deg Fah

25 Crossed a spur of the mts 12 miles Tem 84

26 Travelled 12 miles good Road Tem 32

27 " 8 miles Trucky Lake Tem 30 9.

Dale Morgan has suggested that the "spur of the mts." crossed on August 25 lies just to the west of present Verdi and that Taylor was moving to the west side of the ridge where the Little Truckee River flows and in all probability he followed the established trail by way of what was by that time generally called John Greenwood's Creek, now

*18. 18. 18.*



Prosser Creek, to Donner Lake. 10

During these same days of August, Edwin Bryant was in the same vicinity; on August 23 he camped at the Truckee Meadows site of present Reno. His account, beginning the next day, reads as follows:

August 24...We resumed our march at the usual hour. Following the river two and three miles further up, we turned abruptly to the right, crossed its channel about the thirtieth time, and, through a ravine or gorge, ascended a range of mountains on our right. We reached the summit of the range by a comparatively easy and gradual ascent, passing over some rocky but not difficult places....

We reached the summit of the gap that afforded us a passage over the mountain, about eleven o'clock, and descended a long and very steep declivity on the other side [Dog Valley Grade] bringing us into a small, oval-shaped and grassy valley, with a faint spring branch of pure cold water running through it. This hollow is entirely surrounded by high mountains. The soil is rich, and the grass and other vegetation luxuriant...

The trail here turns to the left again, taking a nearly south course, over a rolling country, heavily timbered with pines, firs, and cedars, with occasional grassy openings. At three o'clock, P.M. we struck a small stream, flowing in a southwest course, a tributary of the Truckee river. [Little Truckee River?] We camped in a small fertile bottom on this stream.

August 25...Crossing the stream we traveled in a south course, over low hills and a rolling or undulating country, heavily timbered, principally with the yellow pine...About one o'clock P.M. we descended a steep declivity, and struck a stream, which I first conjectured might be one of the tributaries of the Sacramento; but after examination of its current, I discovered that it ran the wrong way, and was compelled, reluctantly, to believe that we had not yet reached the summit of the Sierra Nevada; and that the stream was a tributary of, or the main Truckee River. [Prosser Creek?]

About two o'clock P.M., we suddenly and unexpectedly came in sight of a small lake, some four or five miles in length and about two in breadth. We approached this lake by ascending a small stream which runs through a flat bottom. [Donner Creek]. On every side, except this outlet from it, the lake is surrounded by mountains of great elevations, heavily and darkly timbered with pines, firs and cedars. The sheet of water just noticed is the head of the Truckee river, and is called by the emigrants who first discovered and name it, Truckee Lake. 11

The following month of September, Nicholas Carringer was in the area. His brief account of four days' travel is as follows:

19



[September] 17 thence Crossing the river [Truckee] 4 times then up the river 16 miles very bad road

18 thence crossing the river and mountain 16 miles to wind river [Little Truckee River] [the distance and mountains indicate the route around Verdi mountains via the Dog Valley route]

19 thence to John Greenwoods Creek [Prosser Creek] 9 miles very good road

20 crossing a small hill thence (past Donner Lake) a good [road] to the foot of the mountain 12 miles.<sup>12</sup>

Dale Morgan, who has edited this account, notes in particular the use of familiar geographic names such as Wind River and John Greenwood's Creek. The latter, as we have noted, had been referred to as "John's Creek" by James Clyman on May 2, 1846 and T. H. Jefferson on his map has used the name Pine Creek for the same stream.<sup>13</sup>

James Mathers and T.H. Jefferson traversed the area along the Little Truckee River in early October, 1846. While Jefferson left his significant map; Mathers left a brief diary:

Thursday October 1st Traveled 3 m to a wide valley covered with grass thence across the same 4 m--thence over a sandy and stony ridge 4 m and encamped by the river Grass scarce & poor --The Road extremely bad except on the valley--There is pine timber on the river and the mountains to the westward--Some of the trees quite large General course to day West.

F 2nd Continued up the river 6 m--found a patch<sup>5</sup> of good grass--road bad Course W. 6 m.

Sat 3rd Traveled 2 m to where the road leaves the river and passed over a very high mountain covered with lofty pine and cedar and encamped in a small valley by a spring--Course W.N.W. There is less stone on the mountain than along the river and the road is not very bad--over the mountains. 5m. 7m.

Sabbath 4th Traversed 7m to a creek and from thence to a small valley of grass and Springs 5 m. road good general course S.S.W.<sup>12</sup>

M 5th Traveled 12 m and encamped in a forest of small pine trees in the mountains near the head of a branch of Truckee's River--road generally good--passed several patches of grass and creeks or Springs of water General Course S.W. 12 <sup>14</sup>

Dale Morgan has made a careful correlation of Mather's written statements with Jefferson's map and suggests that on October 3 they reached the bend of the Truckee at present Verdi and turned northwest with the road to camp in Dog Valley, termed "Lawn Valley" on Jefferson's map, while circling the Verdi Range, designated "Steep Stoney Hills" by Jefferson. Both men noted the pine forests here. On the 4th, Morgan suggests the travelers went to the Little

20.



Truckee, shown as "Raven C." on Jefferson's map, then again south to a camp in "Moss Vale," north of Prosser Creek, identified on the map as "Pine C." Though Mathers does not mention either the Truckee River or Donner Lake in his entry for October 5 he does refer to Donner Creek. Jefferson, however, shows on his map both the lake and the house Moses Shallenberger had occupied at its foot in 1844-1845. Camp was apparently made this day in Coldstream Valley south of the lake; Jefferson used the name "Summit Creek" for Cold Creek.<sup>15</sup>

Heinrich Lienhard also traversed the Truckee route across the Sierra in October, 1846. His daily journal entries close on Oct. 1, just as he was leaving the Truckee in the vicinity of present Verdi. Some years later he recalled the events of the next three days:

My daily entries stopped here. The daily chores were so tiring that I was glad to get some rest in the evening. I recall the route and our campsites exactly for the next few days. For several of the later days I am not quite certain. Still I remember most of it, and this I shall record now.

On the second of October we started out early in the morning; the road, though not very good, was nevertheless better than the one the day before. We drove through high forests alternating with open, usually moist meadows. On one of these meadows we pitched camp. The stock found an abundance of grass, and if the season had not been so far advanced, a rest of several days would have been very beneficial to the animals.

On the third of October the road again went through damp meadows and then again through forests. We stopped to rest at noon at one of these meadows. Before us again stood a forest of slender firs and other conifers, through which our road brought us, closer and closer to the so-called high summit. We hoped to reach it that afternoon. From the place where we stopped at noon we could see the summit across the tops of the tall firs. We were very much astonished to see what appeared to be several covered emigrant wagons on the tops of trees and could not understand how they got there. Only later did we realize that the wagons were not on the top of trees but on the highest ridge beyond the trees. The road wound its way higher and higher around various curves, and we got a good foretaste of how the road through the Sierra Nevada would be later on. We traveled all kinds of bad roads, but we began to believe the worst was yet to come, and in this we certainly were not mistaken.

It was probably between three and four o'clock when we arrived at the base of the summit. The wagons were left standing when they came to this point. The summit lay two to three hundred feet higher....<sup>16</sup>

These reminiscences of Lienhard provide little specific information on the route traveled; they are chiefly valuable for dramatic description. However, scholars are of the opinion that his party attempted to follow the established trail located by John Greenwood.

#### 4. Evidence Relative to the Donner Route:

Perhaps the most graphic description of the plight of the Donner

21



Party in the Sierra in late October, 1846 is that penned by C. F. McGlashan:

The delay at the Truckee Meadows had been brief, but every day ultimately cost a dozen lives. On the twenty-third of Oct., they became thoroughly alarmed at the angry heralds of the gathering storm, and with all haste they resumed their journey. It was too late! At Prosser Creek, three miles below Truckee (below?) they found themselves encompassed with six inches of snow. On the summits, the snow was from two to five feet in depth. This was October 28, 1846. Almost a month earlier than usual, the Sierra had donned its mantle of ice and snow. The party were prisoners. All was consternation. The wildest confusion prevailed.<sup>17</sup>

McGlashan describes how the Breen family moved into the old Shallenberger cabin and states that Keseberg, another member of the party built a sort of half shed on the west side of this cabin for his family. The Murphys erected a cabin nearer Donner Lake, about 300 yards from the shore, using a large stone that was perpendicular from the ground for ten or twelve feet for one side of the structure. The Breen and Murphy cabins were about one hundred and fifty yards apart. The Graves family built a house close to Donner Creek, between a half and three-quarters of a mile farther down the stream. Adjoining this, forming a double cabin, the Reeds also built. Some what removed from these three cabin locations housing five families, the Donner brothers, Jacob and George, together with their families, were encamped in Alder Creek Valley, six or seven miles from Donner Lake. Concerning this encampment, one participant later wrote, "We had not time to build a cabin. The snow came on so suddenly that we had barely time to pitch our tent, and put up a brush shed, as it were, one side of which was open. The brush shed was covered with pine boughs, and then covered with rubber coats, quilts, etc. My uncle, Jacob Donner, and family, also had a tent, and camped near us."<sup>18</sup>

Our primary concern is the route traveled by the Donner Party, particularly between October 23, 1846 when the snow first began to fall and October 28 when the party was on Prosser Creek. George Stewart has made the following statement concerning the route of the party along the Truckee River:

For the first time, from Stanton's story, they had some detail of the road ahead. A day's journey above the meadows it crossed the river for the forty-ninth time in the eighty miles, then swung sharply to the right, left the river to avoid another canyon, and crossed a fairly easy range of mountains. Next it descended into a beautiful little valley, crossed a divide, and went southward over rolling, heavily forested country [italics mine] with the main range of the Sierra looming up on the right. Then it came to a cabin built two years before by winter-bound emigrants. A quarter of a mile above the cabin was Truckee Lake, and from the lake you could look up at the great wall of the pass.<sup>19</sup>

Upon inquiry about the documentation for "Stanton's story" the author of this report was informed by Professor Stewart, "You have taken me too literally about Stanton's story. I was only using a device to



bring to the reader what Stanton must certainly have told."20  
The route of the Donner Party can not be ascertained on the basis of documentary evidence currently available. The diary of James Frazier Reed is abruptly interrupted on October 4, the day prior to his fatal altercation with John Snyder on the trail. There is no daily record by a member of the Donner Party covering the travel by the company from the time Reed's diary breaks off to the time that Patrick Breen's begins on November 20, when the majority of the party were encamped at the lake. With no written record of the route traversed, the scholar must examine the two map sources that are available: the James Frazier Reed Map and the T. H. Jefferson Map. Although the former is of little assistance, Dale Morgan has concluded, "I think there is small doubt that the Jefferson map displays their route from Verdi to the vicinity of Donner Lake, and that the route was the same used by all other travelers of 1845-1846."21 Thus, Stewart and Morgan agree that the Donner Party followed, in general, the route around the Verdi Mountains by way of the Dog Valley grade and thence across the Little Truckee River to Prosser Creek, Alder Creek, and on to Donner Lake. To trace the exact route one can only examine the terrain with the Jefferson map in hand.

#### 5. The Migration of 1847:

Four men have left a record of their migration across the Sierra by way of the Truckee River route during the 1847 season. Three of these were moving in a west-east direction: Nathaniel V. Jones, Henry Smith Turner and Robert S. Bliss. Both Turner and Jones were traveling with General Stephen W. Kearny who was homeward bound after participating in the American conquest of the Southwest and California. Sargeant Jones' diary, published first, commented upon the party's discovery of the remains of the Donner Party:

Monday, June 21:--Struck the head of the Truckee River. Here is a small lake, one mile in width and three miles in length. We camped near the head of the lake.

June 22:--We came down the lake to some cabins that had been built by some of the immigrants last fall. They were overtaken in the snow. There were eighty of them in number, and only thirty of them that lived. The rest of them starved to death. The General called a halt and detailed five men to bury the deserted bodies of the others. One man lived about four months on human flesh. He sawed their heads open, ate their brains and mangled up their bodies in a horrible manner. This place now goes by the name of Cannibal Camp. While we were stopped here the men came up with our pack mules. Col. Fremont passed us here, the first time we have seen him since we left Fort Sutter. After we had buried the bones of the dead, which were sawed and broken to pieces for the marrow, we set five to the cabin. I started about two in the afternoon came seven miles and camped. One mile above here there was another cabin and more dead bodies but the General did not order them buried.22

His diary for the next few days contributes no information concerning the route of the military pack train after leaving the lake.

June 23:--This morning Jigly shot himself through the arm.

Thursday, June 24th:--Left Col. Fremont at the crossing of the Truckee.

Friday, June 25:--Came twelve miles down the river from where



we camped last night. Indians plenty. About two miles from here up the river there had been one wagon and load cashed [cached]. It was dug up by the Indians. They wasted everything.

The journal of Henry Smith Turner, recently published, indicates that he traveled in the same party with Jones and he does record some specific information concerning the route followed by Kearny and his men.

June 20.--March 12 miles to Bear Valley, unpack and remain in camp until 3 p.m. March 7 miles further to a green valley, the head of the American fork; patches of snow near the road.

June 21.--Marched 30 miles about 20 of it over snow from 5 to 25 feet deep, travelling very laborious, in consequence of melting snow and mud. Encamp on the Trucky Lake [Donner Lake] having crossed the Sierra Nevada.

June 22.--Reached the "Cabins," where 25 or 30 of a party of emigrants, in attempting to pass the last winter, had perished from starvation. Their bodies & bones were strewn about, presenting a revolting and distressing spectacle. The Gen'l directed Maj. Swords to collect these remains & inter them, which having been done we continued our march 10 miles further; & encamped on Greenwood's Creek. [Prosser Creek].

June 23.--Cross Greenwood's Creek & Wind River (Little Truckee River), the bottom of both boggy & difficult to get over. After a march of 20 miles encamped on Trucky river, which having been much swollen from melting snow we found deep and rapid.

June 24.--Got over Trucky river after much detention & difficulty, continue our journey 18 miles, & encamp on the Trucky. In descending this river the emigrant road frequently crosses it, but owing to its present bad state we find it necessary to continue on its south side, the traveling in consequence laborious.

June 25.--Compelled at starting to travel 15 miles out of our direction in consequence of an impassable swamp. Encamp on Trucky after a march of 28 miles. The country extremely broken and wholly destitute of timber.

June 26.--18 miles and encamp for the last time on Trucky, where the emigrant road leaves it for the waters of Mary's river [Humboldt River]. 23

Another member of the Mormon Battalion, Robert S. Bliss followed the Truckee River route on his return journey to Salt Lake, but his diary does not clearly delineate the route:

Thur. 9th Sept 1847 Came over a Mt. to the Trucky River continued down the Same about 25 miles & encamped where the river puts through a Mt.

Frid 10th continued our March down this River 30 miles & encamped to day met the Emigration for California some 35 waggon & the road up this River crossed it 28 times we wet our Provisions to day some in fording so much.

Sat 11th Sept 1847 This morning the most of our company left in order to reach the Bluffs this fall we lay by till 4 O'clock to rest our animals for we have 40 miles to go without Grass or water; at 4 O.C we started & left the Trucky River across the desert about dark met Emigrants for California and reached the hot springs about mid night...we unpacked our animals to rest them as there was no Grass having come 20 miles in the morning boild our Coffee in the Spring & continued our Journey



25 miles further being  
Sund the 12th Sept....<sup>24</sup>

The only known westbound record of the migration of 1847 along the Truckee is that of Chester Ingersoll:

Boiling Springs, Marey's Valley  
September 11th, 1847

This spring I described in my last letter. From this spring to Truckee river is 20 miles, the last 8 miles, sandy.

Truckee river is about the size of the Fox river, in Illinois, but much more rapid. As you cross the river, there is good grass for on mile, then 8 miles to good grass, then 10 miles up is good grass; between the 11th, 12th, and 13th crossing, the grass is good; also between the 17th and 18th, and the road not very bad; and between the 20th and 21st, grass middling bordered with ragged hills of volcanic rock.

On the 16th travelled 15 miles and crossed the river the 22nd time. From this, for 10 miles there is no grass until you strike the river again & then scarce. At the head of a valley, pine is plenty on the hills. Road stoney. On the 17th we travelled only 6 miles and crossed river 4 times; the road was stoney and bad, with little grass. We have now crossed the river 26 times in 47 miles. It is nothing but hills and mountains, the river is rapid, water cold and clear. In 4 miles is the 27th crossing and the last--the road stoney and bad. Here you approach the region of Pine for the first time. When you leave the river, you cross a high mountain ridge 12 miles across to a valley. *[italics mine.]* This mountain is a dense forest of pine, fur, and balsam with many other varieties of timber, the name not known to us--our course west. The hills are not so rocky as the plains and the soil is good. As we descended from this hill, we came to a valley of grass; *[italics mine]* here the cursed Indians killed 2 of our oxen in broad daylight. You leave this place, and travel 7 miles to grass, then 5 miles to grass and water, then 12 miles to water and grass. This is the last encampment until you take the mountain, which is the backbone of the California Mountains. From this you descend 3 miles to the valley of Juber. Then 8 miles to grass and water, road hilly and rocky.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the available evidence proves that at least three of the travelers along the Truckee River route in 1847 are known to have traversed Greenwood's trace across Prosser Creek, the Little Truckee, through Stampede Valley, and over the Dog Valley grade to rejoin the Truckee River near Verdi. An educated guess also suggests that the fourth traveler, whose record is vague, also went along this route to avoid the difficult upper canyon of the Truckee.

There are no known diaries of migration by the Truckee route in 1848.

#### 6. Routes of the Argonauts:

Prior to the heavy migration on the California Trail in 1849, not more than a dozen pioneer parties have left records of their

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route along the Truckee River between 1845-1847 suggesting that they crossed the Dog Valley grade and Stampede Valley headed for the Little Truckee and Donner Lake: two in 1845, five or six in 1846, and three or four in 1847. By way of contrast, Dale Morgan has identified 132 diarists on the overland trail in 1849. Of these, 110 went down the California Trail along the Humboldt. Such numbers can best be interpreted through statistical calculations rather than citing from the numerous available diaries. As for those who went to California by the main Humboldt trail, a surprising number of 41 of the 110 diarists chose the Lassen Cutoff, despite the fact that none of them took this route prior to August 11, 1849. Of the remaining 69 who continued on down the Humboldt River to its Sink, 37 took the Truckee route across the Sierra, and 32 chose the Carson route. Morgan considers this pattern of choice somewhat remarkable because the reports from the U.S. relief expeditions have made clear that the Truckee route was not used at all after September, 1849. The late-comers along the trail who did not take the Lassen Cutoff without exception continued along the Carson road.<sup>26</sup> He has summarized the situation with the statement, "My statistical demonstration in the Fritchard book indicated that there was more travel by the Truckee route in 1849 than by the Carson route."<sup>27</sup> There is every reason to assume that the vast majority, if not all, of the 37 parties who left records of their entry into California by the Truckee route in 1847 followed Greenwood's Cutoff to avoid the upper canyon of the Truckee and thus traversed Stampede Valley.

#### 7. Travel of the 1850's:

Morgan doubts that the preference for the Truckee River route over the Carson route continued to prevail during the season of 1850. Many of the immigrant parties had started out too lightly provisioned, and the trading stations established in the Carson Valley could come to their relief prior to their crossing of the Sierra. Overland travel in 1851 was relatively meager, with correspondingly fewer diaries. Travel in 1852 appears to have been heavy again, but most of the immigrants who adopted the Truckee route in that year took the new Beckwourth Pass route across the high Sierra.<sup>28</sup> Thus the emigrants who arrived at the eastern slope of the Sierra at the Truckee River had the choice of three passes open to them. In addition to Donner Pass, there was Henness Pass to the north which offered a shorter route to the rich diggings of the upper Yuba River at Downieville and to all the other points between there and Marysville. Still farther north was Beckwourth Pass. All of these passes were used in the early fifties.<sup>29</sup>

Although the route along the Truckee River was favored by earlier immigrants, from 1850 the majority of the wagon trains on reaching the Sink of the Humboldt headed for the Carson River and crossed the range by way of Carson's Pass. Fremont's report which told of crossing the pass in 1844 had called their attention to this route. Moreover, many avoided the Truckee route because of the unfavorable publicity associated with the Donner Party's misfortune. As has been noted, a third factor drawing the immigrants to the Carson Pass was



the establishment of a trading post at Mormon Station, or Genoa, in Carson Valley.<sup>30</sup>

A careful mapping of the California Trail by way of the Carson Valley has been made and the text to accompany these maps has been prepared as follows, carefully indicating by cross reference the comments on specific geographic locations by well-known explorers:

From Carson and its region, destined to such fame a decade later, the pathway of the '49ers struck southward across Clear Creek (Simpson, 92) and followed near the Carson into the more fruitful country of Reese's Ranch, the present Genoa, (cf. Simpson, 26, 92; March, 275). While fate placed the highest barrier for the pioneers (The Sierras) in the last stages of their pilgrimage, yet the refreshing streams tributary to Lake Tahoe gave them the needed courage for the mountain climb beyond (Bryant, 223; Harlan, 61; Simpson, 26 92). Numerous ancient trails from Tahoe crossed the mountain ranges. The Daggett Trail, as one of these became known, branched from the main route near the Nevada-California line; it crossed Johnson's Pass to the East Fork of the American, locally known as Strawberry Creek in 1859. Another trail left the main route in the S.W. Corner of T. 12 and crossed the range to the head of the East Fork of the American; it later became (as above) the Placerville-Carson Road. From it diverged Johnson's Cut-Off in T 11, crossing the divide through Johnson's Pass, and used by wagon trains as early as 1845. Another trail followed the Truckee to Carson Pass and gained the divide as indicated in T. 9, R. 16. This route 'continuing along the foot of the Sierra Nevada for 18 or 20 miles before turning to the West' was the main trail of the 49ers. Earlier trains had also entered California by another pathway from Walker's River to the Stanislaus. The Johnson, Daggett, Placerville-Carson and "California Road" converged, as above, in the western part of T. 11, R. 13. The crossing of the Sierras is described by practically every diarist.<sup>31</sup>

In 1855, the Surveyor-General of California requested a survey of the Henness Pass route to determine the practicality and merits of the route. The following report was made, stating in part: The country examined, was from the Lower Crossing on the Truckee River, thirty-eight miles from the Sink of the Humboldt, to Camptonville, which place is forty miles in a north-easterly direction from Marysville, and connecting with the latter by a well graded road, over which two daily lines of stages pass.

Crossing to the north side of the Truckee River, at the Lower Crossing, the route continues up the north side of that stream, in a generally direct and westerly course, for a distance of forty-three miles, to what is known as the Upper Crossing. At this point the river makes a large bend to the south, and it becomes necessary to leave it. *(Italics mine.)*

Continuing my westerly course, striking off from the river and crossing a low intervening ridge, a distance of five miles further, brought me to Dog Valley, the waters of which find an outlet into the river. From this point to the Lower Crossing on the North Fork of the Truckee, a distance of eleven and three-



quarter miles, the line of survey follows up and down a series of ravines, crosses intervening valleys and low divides, with uniform and light grades, rendering but little work to make, over this portion, a road of superior quality, and with but little deflection from a straight line.

From the Lower Crossing of the North Fork of Truckee to the summit of the Sierra Nevada, the course is nearly west; the ascent, uniform and gradual, being along the valley of the creek, crossing and re-crossing to cut off bends and rising ground, that at points extend into the stream. Thus we arrive, in a distance of seventy-one miles from the Lower Crossing on Big Truckee, at the summit of the mountain, which is only 2,045 feet in altitude above the Upper Crossing of the same stream.

From the summit, the line of survey ascends (descends) the western slope of the Sierra Nevada, crossing a mountain plateau densely covered with timber, and at the distance of nine miles arrives at the Lower Crossing of the Middle Yuba River at which point is 1,200 feet below the summit, and traversed for the entire distance by descending grades.<sup>32</sup>

The surveyor continued to describe the route in favorable terms, even to the point of misrepresenting the difficulties of the terrain, and suggested that throughout the route there would be no grade that exceeded five percent. He estimated that it would cost less than \$50,000 to improve the trace made by immigrants. He noted that grass and water were abundant along the entire route and concluded, "You will see at a glance, ... its importance, and the benefits to be derived by the counties adjoining Yuba and Sierra by the constructing of a great road through them."<sup>33</sup> Thus, it is clear that the State of California was giving serious consideration to improving the Henness Pass Road four years before the discovery of silver at the Washoe mines stimulated enough passenger and freight traffic to justify the investment of private capital in a toll road.

In the next issue of the Bulletin will be Prof. Jackson's very interesting survey of the Roads for Wagons, Freighters, and Stages in the Stampede area. This portion of the report has interesting reports on the Sierraville, Sierraville-Sattley and Loyalton areas.

#### Sources:

1. H. S. Foote, Pen Pictures from the Garden of the World (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1888) included the Moses Shallenberger narrative. It was reprinted in the San Jose Pioneer, March 15 and April 15, 1893. George R. Stewart has edited the account in his The Opening of the California Trail (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U. of Cal. Press, 1953).
2. Charles Kelly and Dale Morgan, Old Greenwood, (Georgetown, Cal.: The Talisman Press, 1965), pp. 123-127.
3. Overton Johnson and William H. Winter, Route Across the Rocky Mountains, with a Description of Oregon and California (Lafayette, Indiana: 1846, reprinted Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1932)
4. Kelly and Morgan, Old Greenwood, p. 138.
5. Jacob R. Snyder, Diary of 1845, Society of California Pioneers Quarterly, December, 1931.

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6. Kelly and Morgan, Old Greenwood, p. 173
7. Recollections of Thomas Knight, 1872. Manuscript, The Bancroft Lib.
8. James Clyman, James Clyman, Frontiersman, edited by Charles L. Camp (Portland: Champeog Press, 1960).
9. Diary of William E. Taylor, in Morgan, Overland in 1846 (Georgetown, Cal.: The Talisman Press, 1963), I, pp. 128-29.
10. Morgan, Overland in 1846, I, pp. 376-377.
11. Edwin Bryant, What I Saw in California (N.Y.: D. Appleton and Co., 1848), pp. 223-227. Bryant's account has far greater literary value than those prepared by his associates on the trail, but is confusing relative to distances and direction traveled. His effusive description also makes it difficult to ascertain his exact route. However, Dale Morgan has written the author "Offhand I would suppose that after leaving the Reno area on August 23, 1846, and separating from the Truckee River near Verdi next day, he traveled the same route taken in 1845 by William H. Winter and Jacob Snyder, and in 1846 by Clyman." February 28, 1967. The author is of the same opinion.
12. Morgan, Overland in 1846, I, p. 158.
13. The Jefferson map can be examined in Carl Wheat's Mapping the Trans-Mississippi West, 1540-1861. (San Francisco: Institute of Historical Cartography, 1957-1963).
14. Morgan, Overland in 1846, I, p. 234.
15. See notes of Dale Morgan on the Mathers Diary in Overland in 1846, I, pp. 424-425.
16. Heinrich Lienhard, From St. Louis to Sutter's Fort, 1846. Translated and edited by Erwin G. and Elizabeth K. Gudde (Norman: U. of Oklahoma Press, 1961).
17. C. F. McGlashan, History of the Donner Party. A Tragedy of the Sierra. (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft, 1881), p. 56.
18. McGlashan, History of the Donner Party, pp. 62-66.
19. G. R. Steward, Ordeal by Hunger (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1960), p. 75.
20. W. Turrentine Jackson to George R. Stewart, March 3, 1967; Stewart to Jackson, April 12, 1967. Stewart writes, "There is no question about the route. As far as I know, only the Stevens Party of 1844 ever used the Truckee canyon above Verdi. They had a terrible time in it, and were almost stalled. Then, early in 1845, Greenwood and others went east and explored the route through Dog Valley. As far as I have ever seen any evidence, all wagons afterwards went through Dog Valley." This may be true concerning the general route between the Verdi area and Donner Lake, but the specific trace traveled is uncertain, particularly in the case of the Donner Party.
21. Dale Morgan to the author, February 28, 1967.
22. "Diary of Nathaniel V. Jones with the Mormon Battalion, Utah Historical Quarterly, IV (January, 1931), pp. 19-20.
23. Dwight Clarke, editor, The Original Journals of Henry Smith Turner, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), pp. 129.
24. "Diary of Robert S. Bliss with the Mormon Battalion, Utah Historical Quarterly, IV (January, 1931), pp. 120-121.
25. Chester Ingersoll, Overland in 1847 (Chicago: Black Cat Press, 1937), pp. 41-43.
26. Dale Morgan, The Overland Diary of James Avery Pritchard, 1849 (Denver: Old West Publishing Company, 1959), p. 31.



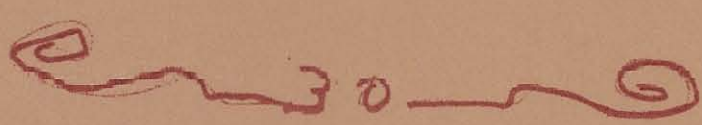
27. Morgan to the author, February 28, 1967.
28. Ibid.
29. Owen Coy, The Great Trek (Los Angeles and San Francisco: Powell Publishing Company, 1931), p. 86.
30. Stewart Mitchell, "Crossing the Sierra," California Highways and Public Works, September 9, 1950, p. 50
31. The Crown Collection of American Maps, Series IV, "The California Trail, Fort Hall to Placerville." Maps No. 39 and 43 in this collection indicate clearly the meaning of the above legend of description.
32. D. B. Scott to P.C. Rust, "Report on the Henness, or Downieville, Route, Marysville, Nov. 10, 1855," in Report of the Surveyor General of California, 1855, pp. 191-192.
33. Ibid.

NOTICE NOTICE NOTICE

NEXT REGULAR MEETING OF THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY WILL BE ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 19,  
IN LOYALTON AT THE  
NEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 1:00p.m.  
"POTLUCK" LUNCH!

MINUTES OF THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
MEETING OF JUNE 11, 1971, AT ALLEGHANY, CALIF.

The meeting was called to order by Pres. Jeanne McMahan. The minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved. The treasurer reported a current balance of \$681.00. James Sinnott gave a report on historic place markers. Due to vandalism and theft, it was decided to table the project until the fall meeting. It was moved by James Sinnott, seconded by Bill Copren, that we discuss with Mr. James Trigg the possibility of having some of the markers made in the high school shop. Motion carried. The Etta post-office in Sierraville was discussed. It was decided to write to Mr. Lincoln and get a commitment in writing as to what we can have. Mr. McMahan reported that only one wall of the building was usable. He suggested that the building be torn down and all good lumber be used in a new building. There was some discussion of money making projects to raise funds for this building. Some of the suggestions were: a flea market-county wide, raffles, bake sales, and selling fur lined gloves. The trip to the north of Sierra County was set for August 15th. One person in each town is to make posters. Georgene Copren offered to send notices to members.





It was suggested that we might make some money by selling one or two pages of ads in our bulletin. This will be discussed with our editor, Mr. Gottardi.

The secretary was to be instructed to buy cards, have necessary information pertaining to meetings printed on the cards, and send them out to members for notices of meetings and trips.

It was decided to budget \$50.00 per year to send a delegate to the semi-yearly meeting of the California Conference of Historical Societies.

The Meeting (next regular meeting) will be held on Sunday, Sept. 19, at 1:00 p.m. in the New Elementary School in Loyalton. Georgene Copren is to ask Mr. Dixon for use of school and a slide projector. The meeting will be a "pot luck" lunch.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned. Georgene Copren, Secretary pro tem.

#### NEW MEMBERS SINCE OUR SPRING PUBLICATION

1. Florence Alcorn  
1011 Arlington Blvd.,  
Arlington, Va. 22209
2. Arlene Amodie  
Sierraville, Ca 96126
3. Al Anderson  
Loyalton, Ca 96118
4. Clarence Bateman  
Downieville Ca 95936
5. Mary Bechen  
Sierraville, Ca 96126
6. William Bishop  
Downieville, Ca 95936
7. Laurie A. Caen  
7677 Greenridge Way  
Fair Oaks, Ca 95628
8. A.B. Cecil  
350 S. Ham Lane  
Lodi, Ca 95240
9. Winslow Christian  
65 Montclair Terrace  
San Francisco, Ca 94109
10. Estelle Deir  
2809 King Edward Dr.  
El Dorado Hills Ca 95630
11. May Deller  
Sierraville, Ca 96126
12. Donald R. Dickey  
840 Powell St.  
San Francisco, Ca 94108
13. Mrs. Theresa Elorza  
Beckwith, Ca.
14. Roy E. Freeburg  
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Tiburon, Ca 94920
15. Williard P. Fuller,  
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16. Mabel Greig  
Loyalton, Ca 96118
17. Greenberg, Jack  
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San Bruno, Ca 94006
18. John R. Gottardi  
163 Bret Harte Ave.  
Reno, Nevada 89502
19. Lola Gilmer  
Loyalton, Ca 96118
20. Vera S. Gladding  
670 M. St.  
Lincoln, Ca 95648
21. Elizabeth L. George  
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Grass Valley, Ca 95945
22. Roy H. Hutchison  
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23. Mrs. J.O. Hayes,  
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24. Hugh E. Hayes  
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Stockton, Ca 95204
25. L.L. Huelsdonk  
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26. Hugh Herrington  
Sierra City, Ca 96125
27. Carl Horn  
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28. W.B. Johnson  
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29. Judge John Keane  
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30. Vera J. Koehler  
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31. E. L. Labadie  
2690 Las Aromas  
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32. Margaret E. Lambert  
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33. Gwen Lynch  
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34. E. J. Little  
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35. Marian R. Lavezolla  
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39. Patricia May  
Loyalton, Ca 96118
40. Jeanne M. Moses  
Loyalton, Ca 96118
41. Winnonne Mapel  
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42. Charles McDermid  
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43. Marilyn Nessler  
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44. Arlene V. Nelson  
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45. Marcella M. Ponta  
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46. Georgie M. Peterman  
Downieville, Ca 95936
47. Lorraine M. Peirce  
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Quincy, Ca 95971
48. James Sinnott  
Downieville, Ca 95936
49. Lillian H. Stoner  
Star Route  
Loyalton, Ca 96118
50. Morland E. Stevens  
421 Aeolia Drive  
Auburn, Ca 95603
51. Dr. Hollis Snell  
4105 Puente Way  
Sacramento, Ca 95814
52. Arthur M. Strang  
Sierraville, Ca
53. Erma Strang  
Sierraville, Ca 96126
54. Vernon Taylor  
291 Riverside Dr.  
Napa, Ca 94558
55. James T. Turner  
Sattley, Ca 96124
56. James Trigg  
Loyalton, Ca 96118
57. Freda Turner  
8567 Phoenix Ave.  
Fair Oaks, Ca 96124
58. Auburn White,  
Loyalton, Ca 96118



59. Dr. Robert J. Winchell  
Loyalton, Ca 96118
60. Barbara B. Wright  
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61. Roy White  
Loyalton Ca 96118
62. Lynn White,  
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63. Charles Wilmoth  
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68. Bert Whittaker  
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69. Amy Bowman  
Sierra City, Ca.
70. Anabel F. Higgins  
415 Aeolia Drive  
Auburn, Ca 95603
71. Vernon G. Lust  
Davis, Ca 95616
72. University of California  
Serials Dept.  
General Library  
Berkeley, Ca. 94720
73. Chico State College  
Chico, Ca 95926
74. Associated Students  
Loyalton High School  
Loyalton, Ca 96118
75. California State Library  
Box 2037  
Sacramento, Ca. 95809
76. University of California  
Acquisition Dept.-Library  
Davis, California

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The Staff of the Sierra County Historical Bulletin wishes to remind our readers that the staff does not check on the historical correctness of the information submitted to us for publication. If any of our readers notice errors in our historical facts, we would appreciate you letting us know so these errors can be corrected. The Staff of the Bulletin welcomes articles of interest on Sierra County or related areas.

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# SPECIAL TOUR THROUGH NORTHERN MINES AREA PLANNED

A special tour through the northern area of Sierra County is being planned for August 15th. More information concerning this very interesting trip will be sent to our members. PLAN TO TAKE THE NORTHERN MINES TOUR ON AUGUST 15--1971.

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