



THE AMADORIAN

Quarterly Publication of the Amador County Historical Society

President's Corner

Happy New Year to all of you from myself and the Board of Directors.

Hopefully we will have another year of many successful projects and events just as we did in 2015. Of course, the success of this organization depends on each of you thru your membership and participation.

We will be discussing projects, events, and speaker's programs at our monthly board meetings so please contact us if you have an idea or suggestion regarding any of these subjects.

Our annual meeting was well attended but we still had room for you if you missed it. Our speaker, Eric Costa, was excellent as were each of the previous presenters during the year. And please thank the Giurlani family for their generous donation of providing the dinner free to the Society thus making it our best fundraiser of the year.

We have also received a number of other generous donations this past year which helped us complete several projects. We are most grateful for your generosity.

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Early Sierra Snow-Play in Amador County

Snow returns to the Sierra's and so does the wonderful winter fun that it brings. Growing up a skier myself I often wondered when did skiing actually begin in our Sierras? Reading through *Logan's Alley*, my favorite Amador historian Larry Cenotto's recall in picture and prose, suggests that it might have been at Dewdrop station in the 1930s. But that snow-play area eventually closed. The first commercially skied area was likely Peddler Hill, which started after World War II with a rope tow.

No doubt, the 1960 winter Olympics at Squaw Valley inspired the thrill of racing down a snow-capped hill. For me, it was my uncle John who took my brother, Marshall, and me up to Peddler Hill for our first experience. Uncle John was member of the National Ski Patrol, so we were the first on the slopes and the last to leave. We were fortunate to ski many of the mountains in the area.

Newcomers to Amador County might not know that Highway 88 was only open just to Peddler Hill until the early 1970s when the Kirkwood development negotiated with the state of California to pay for snow removal and necessary maintenance stations.

(Continued on Page 2)

Early Sierra Snow-Play in Amador County (cont.)

You see, this same Uncle John who was known by many as “Cappie” also worked for CalTrans during the expansion of Highway 88 around the other side of Red Lake to provide winter access to Kirkwood valley and ski resort. He would tell my brother and me, “just wait; we will soon be skiing the most fantastic mountain in the Sierra’s”. And we did. Kirkwood opened the winter of 1972-73 and we were amongst the first to look out from the Kirkwood summit, point the skies downhill and traverse the terrain.



The Mormon Emigrant Trail passes through the Kirkwood mountain area, winding up over the saddle just south of Thimble Peak, following approximately the same route as one of chairlifts. Although I have not seen them personally, I am told that to this day, rust marks from the iron wagon wheels can be seen on the granite rocks along the route. Some scars on the trees made from the ropes and pulleys used to haul the heavy wagons up over the rugged terrain still remain. The trail continues around Emigrant Lake, located just south of Kirkwood’s Iron Horse Chair #3, and then easterly along the south side of Caples Lake and up and over Carson Pass.



Generations of skiers have since seen that grand Sierra scape between mad plummets down the run. But do any, as perhaps Historian Cenotto did, “visualize not downhillers but emigrant wagons sidling up the snowbank near the summit, or solitary packers trudging, or assorted mules, oxen, horses snorting up the incline?”

Best regards, Jeana (Cova) Hultquist,
Amadorian Editor

* Early pictures of Peddler Hill circa - 1940/50: Cenotto, Larry: Logan’s Alley: Amador County Yesterdays in Picture and Prose; Vol. IV, Pages 108-109

President's Corner (cont).

We have several ongoing projects that we hope to make good progress on this year. First is to complete the museum inventory and make it available online. Second, is to begin the design of a new livery barn and pursue funding for its construction. This will be a multi-year project. We also hope that we can finish the pantry in the museum so that it can be a functional display area.

Again, we welcome your ideas and your support and look forward to visiting with you soon.

Keith Sweet, ACHS President

Early Sierra Snow-Play Areas¹

The snow goddesses permitting, ski resorts hope that their season can start by Thanksgiving week and weekend. Of course, these cutting-edge days, some resorts, including Kirkwood, produce their own snow.

Should we pity the goddesses for being downsized? Save it. For the same money, they're working less. They now need only make it cold enough for snow making, something that mere humans are still perfecting.

Snow or no, did you ask how long there's been snowplow and skiing in our neck of the Sierra? Or, for all that, anywhere?

The frost-bitten for(e)bear (sic) of today's Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Finnish skiers were snowshoeing about 5,000 years ago, give or take a millennium. But the leather-covered, elongated and curved frames they wore served mostly utilitarian rather than recreational purposes.

But some time before 1850 when the same Scandinavians decided to recreate, compete or just frolic on snow, outdoor winter sports were born. About then, too, a Norwegian named John Albert Thompson (Thomson) emigrated to the United States, and miners in La Porte, Plumas County moved about in winter on "long snowshoes."

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Snow-Play (cont.)

Those “snowshoes” or skis, I read, were initially made from barrel staves, but then came Scandinavian sailors to the mines who had jumped ship in San Francisco. They fashioned better ones. Later, those prodigals in La Porte became *sports*, too, and in 1867 formed the Alturas snow shoe club which scheduled the first formal skiing competition in the United States.

In those days, anything humans attached to a foot to walk on or slide over snow as a “snowshoe,” however unlike the snowshoe of webbed, woven rawhide which the Indians employed. So shod were Washoe Indians in 1844 when Fremont’s men spotted them in the Carson pass area heading for Salt springs and presumably a salt supply.

Besides the Indians, the first to “snowshoe” or ski in our Sierra was the fabled John Albert “Snowshoe” Thom(p)son, the legendary mail man of the Sierra. From 1856 until his death two decades later, Thom(p)son in winter crossed the Sierra on “snowshoes” between Placerville and Genoa to deliver mail and lighter packages of freight.

Thom(p)son was living along Putah creek in 1856, when he noted an ad in the Sacramento *Transcript* for a mail courier job. Winter or no, the mail needed to be delivered between Placerville and Genoa in Nevada territory.



This old illustration purports to be Snowshoe Thompson on his famed snowshoes or skis.

Thompson, remembering “snowshoes” in his native land, made out of oak logs an elongated pair between seven-and-a-half and 12 feet long, weighing 25 pounds!

Traveling with 100 pounds of mail, light freight, survivalist food and no shelter, he made two round trips every week!

Thompson’s route took him from Carson Valley, through Carson canyon into Hope Valley, and over Luther and Echo passes to the south fork of the American. That he followed as highway 50 does now until leaving it for Placerville.

Did Thompson ever snowshoe or ski in the Carson pass area? Probably so. In November 1861, Thompson wrote the Sacramento Union from Genoa that he had just gone out to scout a route for the proposed trans-Sierra wagon road between the headwaters of the east fork of the Carson river, and the north fork of the Mokelumne. No doubt he covered areas more adjacent to Carson pass, too.

Except for Thompson, other “foot expressmen,” Washoes, and the starving Fremont expedition in 1844, no one penetrated or crossed the central

Sierra during the winter. Travel even on wagon roads pretty much stopped at the snow line.

Over 30 years ago, when this writer settled, Highway 88 in winter still closed just beyond Peddler’s hill and remained closed usually until memorial day weekend or even later, depending

Snow-Play (cont.) upon the snow depth. The highway wasn't open year round until 1972-73.

In about 1930 the winter sports craze hit California and the wanna-be state ballyhooed the Sierra as the nation's number one snowplow region. Chambers of commerce or other booster and service groups, aided by local and state governments, developed winter sports areas primarily for tobogganing, but also for limited downhill and nordic skiing.

Winter sports areas helped the local economy, too. Valley and bay area snowplow enthusiasts spend money on food, gas, sometimes even lodging, and in Jackson's case, helped them lobby and agitate for better highways. Thus, in 1932, with many counties and cities up and down the Sierra already boasting of and promoting winter sports areas, Amador decided to join them.

Who here pushed the idea first? For now, let's credit the Jackson Lions club, then, too, a community bulwark, supporter, leader. That October, president Walter Taylor² and other Lions began to push the idea.

II

A church acquaintance remarked, "I read your column but I need a map to find places." So noted. Expect more "reader friendly" columns.

Dewdrop, that location on highway 88 down ridge from Cook's station, may have been state forest fires station since the 1940s. (Someone needs to look it up.) But historians know it as Antelope spring(s).

Miners named Antelope and other creeks feeding the Mokelumne's north fork in the early 1850s. Probably named Antelope spring(s), too. In 1852, Volcano and Stockton merchants constructed the first wagon road between the Carson emigrant

trail and the "Crater City", i.e. Volcano. Their road went by the spring. Near that spring early on some enterprising fellow erected an inn and attached the spring's name to the place.

In the 1860s, during the turnpike boom, Antelope spring became junction for both ridge from Lockwood's up - and the Pine Grove turnpikes. Moreover, the trans-Sierra Amador-Nevada wagon road started there.

Antelope Springs sits close to the El Dorado border at 4300 feet, an elevation to almost guarantee winter-long snow in normal years.

By fall, 1932, when the Jackson Lions led a campaign to establish a winter sports play area, the site was still Antelope spring but also Dewdrop, probably because a bistro or inn by that name there served the motoring public.

The Lions ramrodded the project, but sought and got other help. They organized an Amador county ski club, planned and promoted a first annual winter sports carnival, and eventually incorporated the Amador county recreational club.

Winter sports then meant finding a snow-covered slope to sled or toboggan down. Not that many skied. Thus, a tobaggan slide would be the principal feature of the new snowplow area. Toboggans? Maybe seven feet long, seating four.

The Lions development committee, headed by P. L. Cassinelli, ordered 10,000 feet of lumber. By mid-November they were clearing trees in the 100X1200-foot wide swath, on a site owned by Charles F. Ruggles and associates, uphill a half mile from the inn.

By November 22 a construction crew including Dino Buonacorsi, Carl Knauer, Paul DeVecchio and unemployed men from Mt. Zion completed

Snow-Play (cont.)

the double-track, 1200-foot long double slide or toboggan runs.

To promote its opening, the Lions on December 7 relocated their usual Wednesday luncheon from Jackson up to the new winter sports area. They found, besides slides, a 16X40-foot clubhouse, refreshment stand, and off-highway areas for turning and parking to accommodate the expected crowds.

By mid-December about two feet of snow had fallen at Dewdrop, and many opted to frolic at the new area before the kickoff festival or official opening scheduled for January 15. "The highway was being kept open...the event was announced on KQW in Stockton," and thousands were expected.

Governor Rolph proclaimed the week starting January 1, 1933, the official opening of winter sports statewide, promising that California would be national winter sports leader. He also celebrated the "greatest sales in history of colorful ski suits, tams, mufflers" to outfit those flocking to the new toboggan slides, ski fields and snow shoe trails opening all over the state.

But December's snow had mostly melted and little fell in early January, forcing postponement of the festival. Soon after, storms dropped four to five feet of snow, closing the highway, and again delaying the carnival until January 29!

Reported the *Ledger* on February 16, "about 150 cars last Sunday got to Buck Horn Station," considerably short of the new snowplow area.

The following week, "a huge crowd on a one-way road." A week later, "the road IS open both ways."

Finally, according to the *Ledger*, the oft-delayed winter carnival came off on Sunday, March 12, featuring a short, cross-country ski race, and toboggan race.

How long did Dewdrop operate? Not sure. Probably long before skiing was "in" and a scion of the pioneer Amicks opened the county's first ski resort, Peddler Hill, in the 1940s. It too was on highway 88 but at 7,000 feet. It's two tows, ski lodge, lights for night skiing, and that beautiful view of Bear river basin and reservoir served Amador skiers for years. Families also found fun on the long, steep slope for sliding below the road.

In 1972-73 Kirkwood opened and, for the first time in history, highway 88 over Carson pass became an all-year trans-Sierra route. But old-timers may argue that opening Dewdrop 40 years before was a bigger event in the county's winter sports history.

1 - *A Look Back*, 18 Nov 1996, *Amador Ledger Dispatch*.

2 - *The same who married Elva Kirkwood and eventually became owner of Kirkwood and its acres.*



Skiing near the toboggan runs at Dewdrop in the 1930s. At left is Cathy Daneri and far right, Carleton Ball. Amador County archives photo.

ACHS 2016 - Board of Directors

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Board Meetings are held on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 3:00 p.m. at 225 Church St. (Amador County Museum)

Members and friends are invited to attend.

Amador County Historical Society - 2016 Member Events

- ***July - BBQ at the Museum***
- ***Sept - Wine & Cheese at the Museum***
- ***Nov - Annual Dinner***
- ***TBD - Event at Ione Depot***

Amador Central Railroad -

- ***2nd Saturday of each month (weather permitting) - Work Day & Inspection Run***

Check back for more details



Kennedy Mine Model Tours

Tours of the Kennedy Mine Model are on-going every Friday, Saturday and Sunday in the building adjacent to the museum... come on down, bring your friends, see how the "Hardrock Miners" brought the gold up from more than a mile from under the earth.

See the headframe, the Stamp Mill and the Wheel in action with mechanized motors...it is like a little show lasting about 45 minutes, with live narration and tape presentation.

Tours are at noon and 1:00 p.m. or by appointment any day or time (subject to docent availability). Group tours, schools and organizations welcome! Located at 225 Church Street, Jackson Mine Model building in parking lot next to museum.

For more information, call the Amador County Historical Society at 209-257-1485.

ACHS Lifetime Members

Kathy Allen & Frank Axe - Richard & July Allen - Caryl Arnese - Joseph Aparicio Family - Caryl Arnese - Michael Bell - Heidi Boitano - Ray & Barb Brusatori - William Burger - Paul & Claudine Burnett - Jerry Cassesi - Robert J. & Susan L. Chandler - J.J. & D.E. Collins - Thornton & Paula Jo Consolo - Robert M. & Lorraine M. Cooper - Mary Cowan - Jeannine & Patrick Crew* - Jean Louise Dahl - Kathleen Du Bois - John Ellyson, MD - Carol Emerson - Katherine Evatt & Pete Bell - Robin Field & Carol Mischer - Wayne Garibaldi - Phillip & Jenny Giurlani - Ray & Cheryl Herndon & Bobby Keeling - Curtis & Denise Hollis - Patricia Huberty - Jeana (Cova) Hultquist & Marshall Cova - Ida Ruth Johnson - Marilyn Jones - Gretchen Kingsbury - George & Joan La Ponsie - Gary & Jaimie Little - Stan Lukowicz - Allen & Karen Martin - Jeremy & Shirley McCarty - Frances Melusky - Marshal Merriam - Joe & Alicia Miller (Giurlani) - Jean Mueller - Ron Oliverro - Katherine & William Orescan - Hazel, Jeffrey & Amy Powell - Marian & Leonard Randolph - Jeanne C. Russ - Martin Ryan - John H. & Patricia Scott - Norm Seid - Beverly Smallfield - George P. Smith - John Solaja* - Marie-Louise Solaja - Audrey Souza - Charles J. Spinetta - Ray Stacey* - Steve & Linda Stocking - Suzanne Erickson Stroy - Ed & Margaret Swift - Russell & Mary Beth VanVoorhis - Violich Farms - Grant Vogel - Sutter Creek Promotions Committee - Volcano Community Services District

About the Amador County Historical Society

The Amador County Historical Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to the research and preservation of Amador County heritage and history.

The organization brings together people from diverse backgrounds to work towards these goals. We invite all interested persons to attend our monthly meetings and encourage your suggestions and active participation in Society events and endeavors.

We also welcome guest articles for our newsletter. Unfortunately, due to limited space we can accept only those pertaining to local history. If you have any questions regarding ACHS please contact the office at (209) 257-1485.

If you would like to become a member of the Society, please fill in the membership form below and mail along with the appropriate dues to the Amador County Historical Society, P.O. Box 761, Jackson, Calif.

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Please check one of the following Membership:

- | | | | |
|-----------------|---|--|--|
| ANNUAL | <input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$20.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Family (2 or more) \$30.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Students \$15.00 |
| LIFETIME | <input type="checkbox"/> Family (2 or more) \$400.00 | SPONSOR | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor (\$1,000 up) |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron (\$500 to \$999) |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Associate (\$250 to \$499) |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

Snoopy License Plate Now Available to Benefit Museums

The Amador County Historical Society/Amador County Museum is a proud supporter of an exciting new program sweeping the state. Official California license plates featuring Snoopy, the world's favorite beagle, are now on sale at www.snoopyplate.com. Snoopy is a singular beagle. He's also a proud Californian from Santa Rosa. Those are two good reasons for him to be featured on his own license plate. But to make it even more worthwhile, the proceeds from the official Snoopy license plate will support California's museums—such as the Amador County Historical Society/Amador County Museum—through a new competitive grant program. Each plate will feature a reproduction of an original Snoopy drawing by PEANUTS creator Charles M. Schulz. Snoopy will be doing his happy dance, probably in anticipation of a visit to Amador County Historical Society/Amador County Museum. As you know, museums are for everyone. They are truly special places, anchors of communities where families, friends and neighbors can meet, learn and discover together. We're lucky in California, because our state has an incredible variety of great museums that serve a truly diverse range of interests and specialties—from art museums and aquariums to history museums, zoos, science centers, and children's museums. Sequential Snoopy license plates are just \$50. Personalized plates are \$98. So, don't hesitate! Go to www.snoopyplate.com today to sign up for your Snoopy license plate, or to get more information. And, ask your friends and family to help us achieve this goal.

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