

# Golden Nuggets

SACRAMENTO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FEB 2013, NO. 2



Chris's Cottage Cheese was one of many dairy-related businesses along Y Street/Broadway. Chris Fulster, Jr. runs the Bait Shop on Broadway today.

Tuesday, February 26, 2013

Social Time: 6:30 pm, Presentation: 7:00 pm

**From Sacramento to Donner Summit**

**Norm Saylor**

Sacramento Valley Medical Society Building

5380 Elvas Blvd., Sacramento

*Norm Saylor, president of the Donner Summit Historical Society, takes us on a journey from his Sacramento childhood through 46+ years as manager (and president) of the Donner Ski Ranch and his devotion to preserving the history of Donner Summit.*

Norm Saylor was born in Sacramento in 1933, at Sutter Hospital. His father owned the barbershop at 28<sup>th</sup> and Broadway, when it was still Y Street, a two-lane road and a great place to roam. He would roller skate down Whiskey Hill and eat ice cream at White Stop, Gunther's or Shasta Ice Cream Company.

"I can still vividly recall most of the businesses on the street. Stop-N-Shop Market, the 7-Up Bottling plant, Chris's Cottage Cheese Factory at 2432 Y Street and eating Chinese. When I went into Ding How Café, which was often, the waiter would yell out to the cooks - "Norman want pan friend noodle!"

Norm remembers a time when it was possible to walk across the sandbars connecting the Sacramento and American Rivers and streetcars went *everywhere*.

About 1954 Norm made his way up the mountain, past the rolling hills east of Sacramento, through Rocklin,

Auburn, to the steep climb of Dutch Flat and on up beyond the timberline (the old railroad guys used to call it "The Hill") to Donner Summit, where he was in charge of the Donner Ski Ranch.

He was instrumental in old Highway 40 being designated as an historical highway, helped found the Donner Summit Historical Society and proposed the "20 Mile Museum", a series of interpretative signs along old Highway 40 which, when complete, will explain the region's history and list activities available along the way.

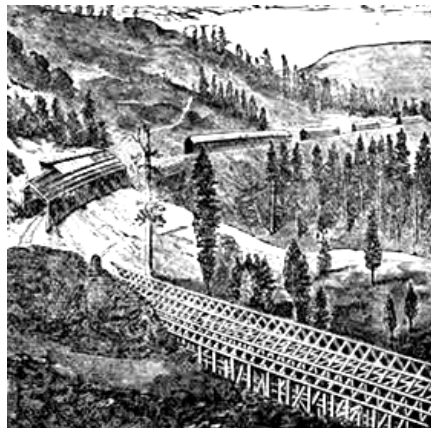
Most of us are aware of Donner Summit (aka Donner Pass) because of its well-known and macabre history - the place where George Donner and his party got stuck in the winter of 1846 and were forced to resort to cannibalism to survive.

However, Norm says there is much more to the story. For many centuries Donner Summit was reached by foot, later by wagon, then by train and most recently, by automobile. Native Americans left the grinding stones in Van Norder Meadow and many petroglyphs scattered about the Summit. In 1844 the first wagon train full of emigrants crossed the Summit. Two years later the survivors of the ill-fated Donner Party managed to reach Sutter's Fort. Many came seeking their fortune. Some left. Some stayed.

In the 1860's Sacramento merchants longed for a better way to transport goods across the mountains. The first transcontinental railroad and the first transcontinental highway used the Donner Summit route to carry goods to the farthest reaches of the country. In 1867, Chinese workers built a railroad tunnel that is still a renowned attraction for tourism in the area.

Improved highways transformed the Summit from a place along the way to a destination where you stayed to ski. Many pioneers of modern skiing lived on Donner Summit. The first chairlift in California was erected at Sugar Bowl;

Olympic skiers trained and competed there.



Come hear the stories direct from Norm. His perspective elucidates why the Donner Summit is such an important gateway to California and the fulfillment of so many people's dreams.

## Hold the Date

### Annual Dinner - Dante Club, Tuesday, April 9, 2013

Every year the Sacramento County Historical Society holds an annual event to recognize contributions to the heritage of Sacramento in education, historic preservation and publications. It's a wonderful opportunity for our members to get together over cocktails and conversation, a sumptuous dinner, and postprandial dessert and coffee.

Most years we hold the event in March, but the Dante Club, one of Sacramento's most respected social institutions, and the site of last year's highly successful event isn't available. Hold, **Tuesday, April 9, 2013** on your calendar and we'll notify you in the March newsletter, all the specifics - menu, price, and how to purchase tickets.

Besides honoring outstanding achievement, we always offer an insightful talk, great entertainment, a superb meal, and the Dante Club is large enough for dancing to the Harley White Orchestra, for those so inclined. The Dante Club is located at 2330 Fair Oaks Blvd.



### President's Corner

Hello. I'm Greg Voelm, taking over from Pat Turse as President of the Sacramento County Historical Society. With your help, I hope to build on the tradition of informative historical events and publications so wonderfully brought forward by Pat, William Burg, Maryellen Burns-Dabaghian and everybody else on the Board of Directors. The 150<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Transcontinental Railroad on January 8<sup>th</sup> was a

terrific evening and we have a great Awards Dinner lined up at the Dante Club in April.

When you are lucky enough to be the Historical Society for The City that Brought You the Gold Rush (and the Transcontinental Railroad) it's natural to tell exciting stories. The Historical Society is history itself - we go back more than a third of the way to the day the Railroad laid the first rail. When the Historical Society was founded, the Gold Rush was barely 100 years old.

From the night Sacramento shocked the Rolling Stones, through the Settlers Revolt, all the way back to Nisenan villages, we'll have fun exploring the arc of history together.

### The Sacramento Prune Bear

by William Burg

*Note: SCHS Vice-President William Burg answers the SCHS voicemail and general email accounts, and occasionally receives requests for information about local history that result in strange and amazing historical discoveries. "Tales from the Voicemail" will be a semi-regular newsletter feature sharing some of the unusual stories of Sacramento's past that arrive at our telephonic doorstep.*

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, American cities showed their stuff by holding elaborate fairs. They showcased the host city with specially designed fairgrounds and elaborate exhibits. First popular in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, they reached new heights with the Chicago Columbian Exposition in 1893. National in scope, these fairs featured exhibits from around the country. Trends in architecture, agriculture, transportation, entertainment, technology and urban planning were set at these fairs, and a successful fair could bring great honor, investment and immigration to the host city. In 1904 and 1905, two separate but related fairs were held in St. Louis, Missouri and Portland, Oregon. California was well represented at both events, and one of the most memorable exhibits was the "Prune Bear" provided by the Sacramento Valley Development Association.

The 1904 St. Louis fair was held to honor the centennial of the Louisiana Purchase, an event that became the setting for the 1944 Judy Garland film *Meet Me in St. Louis*. During this era, California was still establishing itself as an agricultural powerhouse. Only two million people lived in California, but our agricultural output was prodigious. The San Francisco Bay Area was known for its orchards, and the citrus crops of Los Angeles were already becoming symbols of California's true gold. Irrigation and levee improvements in the Central Valley facilitated a transition from cereal grains to fruit and vegetable production, and California's wine industry was just starting to make a name for itself.

At the 1904 fair, Santa Barbara County built a tower 100 feet tall of olive oil containers. San Francisco's "California Fruit Cannery Association" created a display of canned fruit, meats and soups, while the city of Redlands provided a display of jams, jellies and marmalades. Los Angeles County, the state's leading

agricultural producer, built a booth resembling a Mission style building of enclosed plate glass counters of crystallized fruits, canned and potted meats. Santa Clara County also built a Mission style display of prunes and apricots, and drew visitors by giving free samples of California prunes, and a pamphlet of prune recipes, to every visitor.

In 1900, representatives of the 12 counties making up the greater Sacramento Valley formed the Sacramento Valley Development Association to market the valley's agricultural products. Each county sent one director, and Sacramento, the urban center of the region, was always strongly represented. The Sacramento Valley display at the 1904 fair showed the



full bounty of the valley's agricultural products, but its centerpiece was a life-sized model of a grizzly bear reared up on its hind legs, made of prunes. The "Prune Bear" had gleaming teeth and flashing electric eyes, attracting visitors to enter the

exhibit. Visitors were given a folder promoting the Sacramento Valley and could enter a contest, guessing the number of prunes used to construct the bear. Winners took home large boxes of choice prunes. This much-maligned fruit already had a bad reputation, and the term "full of prunes" was considered the equivalent of "full of hot air," but marketing efforts like the Prune Bear and Santa Clara's display were intended to popularize the product and their regions.

In 1905, Portland hosted, the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition, a bookend to the 1904 fair commemorating American explorers' arrival on the west coast. California was well-represented at this fair, subsidized by \$100,000 from the state legislature. A special California building was designed with four entrances, each designed to resemble a different California mission. Many of the 1904 exhibits were duplicated, while others were embellished. Alameda County brought a display of their fruits and vegetables. San Francisco provided displays of Spreckels sugar, a 20-mule team made entirely of borax. Pacific Portland Cement Company built a

concrete fountain simulating the Vernal Falls, with running water. Los Angeles sent a display of game ducks, leather and citrus fruit. Santa Clara County recreated their popular Prune Castle, featuring San Jose's "Fig Prune Cereal Company." Ventura County sent an elk made of dried beans, and the Southern California Walnut Growers' Association built a dramatic life-size elephant made entirely of walnuts. A pavilion A temple to Bacchus showcased California wineries, including Sacramento's J.H. Hayden strawberry wine and California Winery's "Cordova" brand, endorsed in 1905 by President Theodore Roosevelt. Southern Pacific Railroad provided discounted rates for exhibits traveling to Portland, and the California railroad giant had its own display.

According to the final report of California's participation in the Portland fair, Sacramento County featured more items than any other county display, including a model hop farm constructed of hops by Lovdal Brothers of Sacramento, a pyramid of beer bottles from the Buffalo Brewery in the shape of a giant beer bottle, a 12-foot high mural of the Great Seal of California made entirely of beans, and a model of the California State Capitol constructed of nuts. Other Sacramento products included pickles, pasta, and pepper sauce. In the California Building's central rotunda, guarding the Capitol Building model, stood a new Great Prune Bear. In addition to its electric eyes, the 1905 Prune Bear featured a "graphophone" in its jaws (an improved Edison gramophone that played wax recording cylinders.) Reports do not document whether the graphophone played music, spoke a pre-recorded speech, or simply emitted bear-like growls.

After the Fair, some of the displays, photographs and exhibits were stored at Sutter's Fort for use in future fairs and exhibits. Others were more temporary in nature and either disassembled, discarded, or perhaps eaten. The fate of the Great Prune Bear is unknown, but its legacy remained, as it was one of only a few displays of the 1904 and 1905 fairs photographed for stereograms and other publications reporting on the Fair. Newspaper reports and later accounts of both Fairs often mentioned the bear, so while its existence was ephemeral, many found its regular presence at both fairs profoundly moving.

(Note: This story was inspired by a request for information about the Prune Bear from Andrew Weymouth of "100 Tacks," a radio documentary based in Portland, Oregon. More information about the show can be found at <http://onehundredtacks.tumblr.com/> and it should shortly include the radio program about the Prune Bear!)

Please deliver by February 5, 2013

See this newsletter in color at the  
 Newsletters link on our web pages above.

Guest Editor & Layout: Maryellen Burns

Moral Support: Joy Gee



## Out & ABOUT

DATE	TIME	EVENT	PLACE & CONTACT
March 9, 2013	Social, 5:00 pm; Dinner and Talk 6:00 pm.	<b>Sacramento Book Collectors Club Dinner</b> <i>Enjoy a repast inspired by the clubs 1939 origin. Award winning author and Capital Public Radio contributor Elaine Corn will share stories about her journey as a food journalist. \$45</i>	Mulvaney's B&L 1215 19 <sup>th</sup> Street, Sacramento. <a href="mailto:booktalk@me.com">booktalk@me.com</a> or 916.456.8692. 75th Anniversary
Sunday, February 24, 2013	1:00 to 2:30 pm.	<b>Beginning your family research</b> with Karen Von Aspern-Parker at the Central Library. Registration preferred	SPL, 828 I Street, Sacramento West Meeting Room. <a href="http://Saclibrary.org">Saclibrary.org</a> , 264-2770
Saturday, March 9, 2013	7:30 am to 2:00 pm	<b>2013 Sacramento County History Day.</b> Hundreds of area students will present their papers, documentaries, plays and exhibits. Judges still needed.	Inderkum High School 2500 New Market Drive, Sacramento Dylan McDonald, Center for Sacramento History. <a href="mailto:dmcdonald@cityofsacramento.org">dmcdonald@cityofsacramento.org</a>
Tues. through Saturday thru March 17, 2013	11 am to 4pm	Folsom History Museum exhibit: <b>Folsom in the '50s</b>	Folsom History Museum 823 Sutter Street, Folsom Adults \$4, Students \$2 Contact: (916) 985-2707