



Founded July 24, 1968 and
designated a 501(c)(3) in July 1971

Truckee Donner Historical Society
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530-582-0893
www.truckeehistory.org

ECHOES FROM THE PAST

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dear Members

As I step down from President to Worker Bee, I want to say Thank You for all your support these many years.

The Society has grown and progressed in so many ways but, in all honesty, we couldn't do what we do without your support.

We have partnered with the Truckee Donner Railroad Society to create a new non-profit: The Truckee History-Railroad Museum, and are making progress on creating a fractional walking museum area in the downtown center.

We are in the beginning stages of a partnership with Donner Summit Historical Society and Truckee Donner Railroad Society to present a multi-month event starting in May 2019 to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Golden Spike Transcontinental Railroad. Our theme is "It all started because of the train". Our goal is to educate everyone on how important the train was to the development and growth of Truckee and the surrounding areas, and

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**Celebrating 50 years
1968 - 2018 !!!**

to honor everyone who built the railroad and the Town.

Please stay tuned as there will be many events to highlight this major event.

Again, thank you for all your support of the Society.

Respectfully, Chaun Mortier

CALENDAR

Events will be posted online at our website

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Echoes From The Past Newsletter

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Truckee-Donner Historical Society ("TDHS") Board meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of each month at 2:30 p.m. at the Joseph Research Library at 10115 Donner Trail Road, Truckee. Board meetings are open to the public.

Notice to Members

In 2015, the TDHS Board of Directors approved a change in membership renewal to reflect the Society's bi-annual renewal schedule - January or July. For specific details, please visit our website.

We hope you have been continuing to enjoy this quarterly newsletter. We realize that sometimes printed copies are much easier to grab, but we will continue to distribute our Newsletter electronically. As always, the newsletter will be readily available online and accessible on a quarterly basis. If you are a TDHS member, an email will be sent to you advising you of posting.

Editor's Note: This Newsletter is interactive - it is designed to be read *online* and contains links to relevant source material and in many cases, links to larger images for easier viewing.

TDHS does not accept responsibility for the accuracy of the information in these articles. TDHS retains the right to republish submitted material. Please contact TDHS for permission to use any content in this publication.

*Please get involved with your
Truckee-Donner Historical Society (TDHS).
The only way we can offer programs and events is if YOU, as a
volunteer, step up and get involved. TDHS is an all-volunteer,
501(c)(3) organization so any and all donations are gratefully
appreciated and tax deductible.
Our mailing address is Truckee-Donner Historical Society,
P.O. Box 893, Truckee, CA 96160.*

Echoes From The Past Newsletter

TRUCKEE ROCKING STONE: APPLICATION

10214 High Street (APN 19-090-01-000), located in Truckee, California, encompasses two adjoining structures of historical significance – the Truckee Veterans Memorial Building (TVMB), or more commonly known as the “Veterans Hall”, and the Rocking Stone Tower (“the Tower”). Today, the Stone is enclosed in an open-air metal pavilion structure built to mimic the original design.

Although the 1893 Rocking Stone Tower of wood survived the 1934 fire that totaled the attached McGlashan Mansion, the Donner Party artifacts and the McGlashan Butterfly Collection were removed. The deteriorating wood Rocking Stone Tower was replaced in 1959 with a single story steel canopy constructed by the Miners Foundry in Nevada City (Nevada County Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes, 1959) using Kaiser Steel). (See photo next column). The canopy has 14 columns and arches that are similar to the design of the McGlashan Rocking Stone Tower. The columns are placed near the original cement foundation.

The Rocking Stone in the Tower is considered to be a geological formation. In a scientific explanation promulgated by John Muir, it was concluded that the Rocking Stone was considered to be a geological formation. Muir concluded that the Rocking Stone was similar to other area geological formations and referred to it as a “glacial wonder”. It has also been referred to as “a glacial erratic”, ice-transported boulders which have been dumped on glacially polished surfaces in high areas”. (Harden, 2004, p. 207). See Figure 1. See Muir’s 1911 book, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, pp. 134-135 and photograph. Compare Yosemite’s “glacial deposit” with our Rocking Stone. (See comparison next column).

TDHS submitted an application for National Historic Status for the TVMB and Rocking Stone Tower which has yet to be approved. We are still actively working on it.

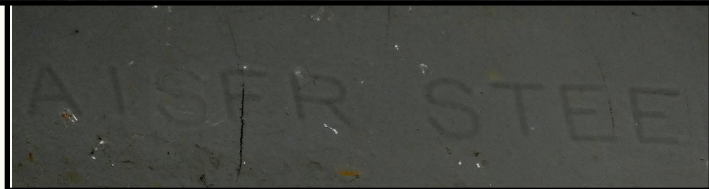
E Clampus Vitus, Chief Truckee Chapter No. 3691, erected a wooden plaque on the Rocking Stone on

July 15, 1967. A replacement bronze plaque was rededicated on July 4, 1977. The text reads:

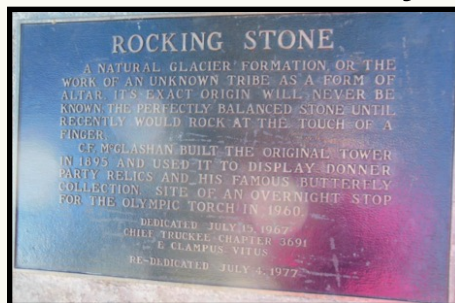
A natural glacial formation, or the work of an unknown tribe as a form of altar, it's [sic] exact origin will never be known. The perfectly balanced stone until recently would rock at the touch of a finger.

C.F. McGlashan built the original tower in 1895 and used it to display Donner Party relics and his famous butterfly collection. Site of an overnight stop for the Olympic torch in 1960. (Photo below)

In 1894, Troops from Company B who had been assigned to guard the railway tracks through the Truckee area visited the Rocking Stone Tower while off duty. These troops also protected the tracks from strikers affiliated with the Pullman strike in the east.



(Above) Courtesy of the Donner Summit Historical Society's magical MX-1000 rejuvenator machine, our viewers are now able to view the actual name, KAISER STEEL, on the columns in the Rocking Stone Tower.



(Left) Dedication Plaque for the Rocking Stone.

Click on the image to see a larger copy.

UPDATES FROM PRIOR ECHOES ISSUES

Our most recent *Echoes* issue, June 2018, had a lengthy article on Concrete Arrows and Beacons. To our surprise, CNN reported on this same topic in a late July 2018 article, <https://goo.gl/qK1fJr>.

<https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/concrete-arrows-america/index.html>

Also relevant to the Concrete Arrows article, we came across an audio recording of former forestry maintenance manager, **Nelson Stone**, who was also mentioned in a May 21, 1976 *Bonanza & Sierra Sun* article by Jerry Herrmann. We learned from the audio recording that Mr. Stone was hired to maintain the **16 beacon lights** between Auburn and Reno, and that sadly, but necessarily, much of the steel that was used to construct the beacon towers for the airmail routes across America in the 1920s was appropriated for the war effort (World War II). The newspaper reporter wrote that:

Also, two days after Pearl Harbor, the airways mechanic and Stone were notified to get the beacons extinguished immediately. That took the two men two days and two nights to get them out. That was also the first time that Stone had come face to face with a bayonet on the end of a rifle as they went through the railroad tunnels guarded by soldiers.

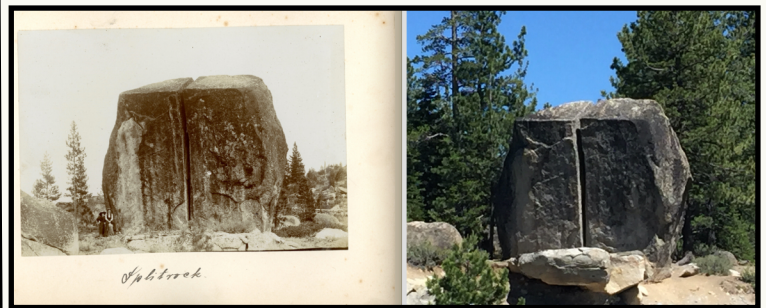
Another of our members, Dave DePuy, discovered this 1955 USGS map which clearly shows an Airway Beacon on Alder Hill - in the Tahoe Donner area. See this map link to explore an excerpt of the area.

History is indeed fascinating!

We also reported that the **Masonic Arch** at the Old Jail Museum is a recent designation as a Nevada County Historical Landmark. To read a review of that successful effort, please see this shortened link, <https://goo.gl/C2yGWY>.

Split Rock Revisited

After seeing an H.K. Gage 1890 photo of the giant Split Rock, several of our TDHS members were fascinated. They wanted to locate it wondering if it still stood. A colleague, Greg Palmer, located it and several of our members trekked out to see it. We located Split Rock beside the train tracks. In the photo on the left, there are two individuals standing to the left of the rock. So you decide: could the train go to Split Rock or did these fine folk walk out there from Truckee?



To see a larger comparison of the two images of Split Rock above, click on the image.

Current google aerial view of the image on the right

To see a larger image of the 1890 photo on the left, click on this link.

40 years ago ... in 1978

We came across a *Sierra Sun* article dated December 29, 1978 titled "1978 at a glance - Growth was big issue; weather caused disasters. See how many of these issues you remember or are aware of.

- * Fierce winds caused a skiing tram disaster which claimed 4 lives at Squaw Valley when a safety cable tore through the cabin of the tram car at 4 pm;
- * Ice on Interstate 80 was blamed for the deaths of four women in an automobile accident;
- * Low Nevada taxes lured many Renoites to the northeast corner of Lake Tahoe; Reno immigrants moved westward because they found property less expensive in Truckee than in Reno;

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- * Sadly, a 16 year old Boy Scout was found dead after becoming separated from his troop while on a weekend outing;
- * Walt Disney had plans for an \$80 million year-round resort at Independence Lake, but those plans were suspended due to an "irresponsible proliferation of delays" on the part of government agencies;
- * Lake growth was limited when then Nevada Governor Mike O'Callaghan put the skids on while an air quality plan was devised to bring the basin into compliance with federal air standards;
- * A gasoline tanker exploded on West River Street April 3 while unloading, causing evacuation of about 100 people on Commercial Row; four nearby storage tanks which held 700 gallons of fuel also exploded during the fire;
- * Four people were killed when their private plane crashed into Lake Tahoe;
- * About 600 acres of timber were burned in an August 24 fire near Polaris Campground, east of Truckee; 17 state and local fire suppression agencies were involved in extinguishing the fire, including the use of two Forest Service aerial bombers; parts of the residential areas of Glenshire Heights and Olympic Heights subdivisions were evacuated, as was the Truckee-Tahoe Airport; trains were also delayed;
- * Two minor earthquakes, a 3.75 and a second 4.25 - 4.5 on the Richter scale, but caused no damage;
- * Juveniles (allegedly) set fire to two historical buildings, the Gatekeeper's Cabin in Tahoe City and Meeks Bay Resort, both of which were totally destroyed; and
- * Districts included in the Tahoe-Truckee Sanitation Agency (TTSA), then only a year old, requested that a sewage treatment facility be expanded by 50 percent; two districts, North Tahoe and Tahoe City Public Utility Districts reached their sewage capacity allotments and implemented building moratoriums.

'GATEWAY CABIN' = THE JOSEPH RESEARCH LIBRARY CABIN

Some of our readers may know that our little library research cabin was formerly part of the Gateway Motel complex. We came across a 1991 letter addressed to then TDHS President Rich Stafford summarizing the history behind the cabin. We thought you might be interested in the origins of our "Joseph Research Library" cabin.

In 1989, a development company set its sights on the property at the junction of Highway 89 and Donner Pass Road in Gateway, west of Truckee, California, for a commercial center. The Gateway Motel complex on that property once served travelers visiting the Truckee area and consisted of 27 peaked-roof cottages. Richard Joseph, after whom our Cabin is named, purchased 310 acres in Gateway from the Union Ice Company in 1935. In 1939, he opened the motel for business. While the Cabins did not meet the significance criteria for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places at *that* time, which would have required preservation, the Cabin was nonetheless considered to possess design value reflective of the era.

A community effort, including our own Truckee-Donner Historical Society (TDHS) as well as assistance from the Nevada County Historical Society, supported the ultimate preservation and relocation of two of these Gateway Motel buildings, hoping to save at least a sample of the 1930's-era motor court buildings from demolition. The motel office and a larger duplex cabin were donated by the developer. The Truckee-Donner Recreation and Park District (TDRPD) and the Truckee-Donner Public Utility District (TDPUD) donated the site area for the location of the 2 units. Our Joseph Research Library cabin is the "old" Gateway Motel office, and the nearby Gateway cabin is operated by the TDRPD as a restroom facility for nearby Meadow Park.

To read the complete contents of the letter from Archaeological Consultant Susan Lindstrom, see this [link](#).

MAP DONATIONS

The Society has been the fortunate recipient of two incredibly old maps from two separate donors. Courtesy of TDHS member and friend Ron Rettig, in June, 2018, Steve **Corrigan** generously donated the first **map from 1854**. It is titled "Approved & Declared to be THE Official Map of the State of California by an Act of the Legislature, passed March 25th, 1853", compiled by R.A. Eddy, State Surveyor General; published for R.A. Eddy, Marysville, California by J.H. Colton No. 786 Cedar St. New York. Here is a link to a photo of the map. To view the map in its entirety, and to appreciate the dimensions and the cartography that went into making the map, you will have to visit the Joseph Research Library cabin. There are several remarkable key legends that are enlightening: the Census of California taken in 1852, and the key legend indicating "Diggins, Bar, Ferry, Creek and Island" - benchmarks that at that time were definitive area landmarks. Of note is that Pyramid Lake in Nevada is marked as "Pirimide Lake". However, most remarkable about this map is that upon examination, the *entire* Truckee River flows *through* the State of *Nevada*, NOT California. Hmm... and that Lake Tahoe was then Lake Bigler.

Our second map donors, Steve and Marilyn **Disbrow**, generously donated an **1886 Railroad and County Map** of California.

Both of these maps may be viewed at our Joseph Research Library on most Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., or by clicking on the links below. The images in these links are not spectacular, but we hope our readers will get an idea of just how valuable and informative these maps are. Enjoy.

1854 Map

1886 Map

UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF HISTORY (AND THE BATHROOM DOOR!!)

BY KATIE HOLLEY

Secrets from the past are sometimes locked in people's memories, and sometimes they are not locked up at all, just tucked away in a file drawer awaiting discovery.

Sometimes, being locked away is even more literal.

At the end of a full summer's day of research and office work at the Joseph Research Library at Meadow Park, I was looking forward to going home and letting evening breezes cool my skin while I sat on my back porch. All the other cabin volunteers had left hours before, so at 4:30 p.m. I had been on my own in the building for some time. Preparing to leave, I set my cell phone and keys with my things by the front door. Computers were shut down, blinds closed, lights off, and a quick trip to the bathroom was the last task before heading out. Business completed, my hand gripped our recalcitrant bathroom door knob to turn it in its illogical direction toward the doorjamb, which is the only way to get the mechanism to engage properly. But it didn't engage. I released the knob and tried again, turning the knob again to the left, towards the jamb. Nothing. Turned to the right. No release. Jiggled the knob, turned the button to lock and unlock the mechanism, but nothing changed.

The door was not going open.

I was in an 8-foot square tiled bathroom with no way out. The door mechanism was jammed. The 6-pane window had been painted shut 25 years ago and would not budge. Even had I wanted to destroy the historic window, I still would have had to break through the thick acrylic protective panel on the exterior frame. It was firmly attached with washers and screws every six inches around its 10-foot perimeter.

It was hot in the bathroom. And it had been hot all day in the cabin. I was hot. I was trapped. And my cell phone was neatly placed with my belongings on the

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other side of the door.

I weighed my options for getting out:

1. Bash through the window. NO.
2. Kick down the door. Hahahahaha. One kick convinced me that that my body's integrity was more important to me and less durable than the door.
3. Wait until my dear husband realized that I had not come home, knowing that he would come to my last known location, would see my car in the parking lot, and would investigate. (There was a concurrent option, namely, praying that one of the Thursday cabin regulars would realize that they had left their coffee thermos behind and would return to get it. This did not happen.)

I considered my advantages:

I had access to water.

I had access to facilities.

The tile floor was cool and refreshing beneath my bare feet.

I lowered myself to the floor (glad it was recently mopped) and considered what I might do until rescue came. I knew that I was not in any danger, I was merely inconvenienced.

I was instantly bored. The Twenty-first Century antidote to boredom, the usually ubiquitous cell phone, was not available. (If it had been, I would have been calling for help, not looking at email.)

I pushed up off the tiles and turned to scowl at the door handle. It did not respond. I considered that a better tactic would be to try to remove the handle. Yes! Surely in our cabin bathroom where we store artifacts and supplies I would find something that could serve as a screwdriver to release the screws on the handle.

A quick glance into the four-drawer metal filing cabinet used for housing artifacts delivered the first possibility: an unused artifact tag with metal ring. I twisted the ring open, but its end was too small and its width too great to fit into the Phillips' head screws. The first aid kit on

the open metal shelves behind me yielded scissors, but the blades were too thick to insert into the screw heads.

I lowered myself again on the (now slightly less cool) tiles in front of the artifact file cabinet, wondering if there could be anything within that I could employ against the lock without causing damage to the artifact. With little optimism, I pulled open the bottom drawer and saw something beautiful: white bedsheets with "Gateway Motel" embroidered in pink thread, identifying the name of the complex of cabins that once filled the area just east of the intersection of Donner Pass Road (then called Highway 40) and State Route 89.¹ My cell of solitary confinement was in one of those very cabins.

I sighed. The lovely but useless linens were not going to help me escape from the bathroom. And yet, seeing that reminder of the first purpose of the cabin in which I was trapped did help me escape from the resignation I felt.

Curious now, my fingers searched below the housekeeping supplies of the Gateway Motel. I gently lifted out a stack of thin, fragile, stapled volumes. Line-drawing cover images of a radio tower with zigzag lines to indicate transmission introduced me to the Meadow Lake Union High School (MLUHS) newsletter of 1934-40: *The Static*.

I relaxed against my wooden prison door, opened the first issue of *The Static* against my upraised knees, and began to read.

Names familiar to Truckee historians filled the pages: Titus, Waters, Gini, Kearney, Cozzalio, Joseph, Bartlett, Giovannoni, Digesti, Saibini² -- some were people whom, in the 10 years since we moved to Truckee, I had met as elderly men and women and who now were here in these pages, vibrant and young, full of energy and humor. People I had only heard or read about became alive, became teenagers who teased their teachers, who had crushes on their classmates, and who wrote essays and stories and poems for their school publication.³ A regular feature in *The Static* was a report on plays and skits

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performed by the high schoolers, such as Karl Kielhoffer and Adolph Schmidt performing in "The Christmas Dinner."⁴

Students at Meadow Lake Union High School came not only from Truckee, but also from neighboring mill towns on the wane such as Boca, Floriston, and Hobart Mills. A few families still lived in these communities although the mills had shut down by 1936.

In Truckee, entrepreneur and early developer Dick Joseph wanted to establish a motor lodge. He was able to purchase the materials from the houses in Hobart Mills that were then standing empty. Jack Wohlert constructed the 27 cabins that became the Gateway Motel using those materials. He created Dick Joseph's cottages by reusing the lumber and doors and windows from the homes of Hobart Mills. *Including my 6-pane window.*

I rose and walked the two steps over to the west-facing window, pausing at the sink to splash water on my overheated face and neck. Although the sun was lower in the sky, the heat on the west side of the building was more intense. Surely someone will come soon, I hoped. What can I do besides wait? How could I alert a passerby, a neighbor, anyone?

Tired, hot, and feeling dulled, I opened another issue of *The Static* and browsed through a column entitled "DOT .-.-. DASHES," which reported on and speculated about every romance amongst the student body. "John Saibini and his henchmen are collecting the notes of the romantic freshmen,"⁵ and "Imagine: Tina Gini without Petey."⁶

I laughed out loud when I realized the gift I had been given. Those youthful long-ago romances had shown me a possible way out!

No longer resigned, I snatched up a small cylindrical can from the shelf of cleaning supplies and began rapping on the window (carefully, as I did not want to break the pane) in the pattern my dad had taught me from his days in the Coast Guard. Three rapid taps: Dot Dot Dot. Three slow taps: Dash Dash Dash. Three rapid taps: Dot Dot

Dot. Morse code for S.O.S.

I continued reading, standing at my post, holding the newsletter in one hand and tapping with the other. The room was hottest next to the window, and a heat rash appeared on my neck and chest. I had not eaten in hours. My energy was flagging, and my enthusiasm for this adventure was waning. Things did not feel as optimistic as they had only an hour or two before.

Dot. Dot. Dot. Dash. Dash. Dash. Dot. Dot. Dot. I tapped, glancing listlessly out the window.

Then a flash of movement! An errant ball from a soccer game at the park brought a player into view. I tapped harder and shouted to get his attention, and relief filled me as he jogged up to the window. He listened to my explanation of my predicament and promised to go for help. Within minutes, friend, neighbor, and TDHS board member Patricia Featherstone had arrived at the cabin, followed shortly after by my dear husband, Michael. It could have been a scene from a skit performed by the Meadow Lake students in 1937: "Enter the Hero!"⁷ Tools at the ready thanks to Patricia, and door off its hinges thanks to Michael, I was at last free after 2 hours and 40 minutes in the sweatbox bathroom.

I was relieved to be out, overjoyed that my tapping had summoned help, glad no longer to be alone in my bathroom prison. Strangely, though, I had not ever felt entirely alone during those hours; I'd had the company of Karl and Adolph, John and Tina and their friends, and had been privileged to time travel right into their engaging young lives.

In the next issue of Echoes I will share more of what I learned in my captivity -- but in those first moments of freedom, my emotions were best summed up by the title of the senior class play of 1939: "Happy Days!"⁸

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Want more history? Go to truckeehistory.org, or visit the Joseph Research Library, 10115 Donner Trail Road, Thursday, 10 am - 2 pm.

Some Students in the 1930s

Lilio Guidi	Dorothy Snider	Bob Bowers
Eva Moro	Bill Otis	Frank Titus
Flori Digesti	Jim Thomas	Kenneth Back
Harry Digesti	Ida Stewart	Mary Pierce
Eloise Everett	Elaine McCallen	Wallace Watkins
Marjorie Everett	Alice Gordon	Margaret Gordon
Dot Barrett	Betty Shone	Mildred Hale
Doug Barrett	Antonette Sala	Pearl Byers
Azad Joseph	Dolly Petroni	Robert Cheller
Yvonne Joseph	Rosie Petroni	Anna Schmidt
Patricia Carson	George Zorich	Hank McLeod
Bud Zorich	Theresa Gordon	Barbara Bolendar
Laura Angelini	Ruth Morre	Leo McLain
Barbara Schortgen	August Sassarini	Frank Giovannoni
Ruth Mae Cozzalio	Butch Sassarini	

Some faculty

Miss Anna Marie Munro, *The Static* advisor

Mr. Hofmann

Miss Marion Lothrop

Mr. Otis

Mr. Bovee

Miss Reynolds

Mr. Angelini

Several high school sites

Meadow Lake Union High School operated from 1901 to 1952. Initially, students met in a spare room at the

grammar school. Enrollment increased significantly when MLUHS received accreditation in 1901, which prompted the School Board to fund construction of a two-story high school located on High Street just west of the site now occupied by the Veterans' Memorial Building. This high school burned down in the early 1930s, and was replaced with a one-story structure. A name change came in 1952 with the construction of the Tahoe-Truckee High School on Donner Pass Road.

Footnotes

¹ The cabin that houses the Joseph Research Library (JRL) was moved from its original location (now home to Safeway and other businesses) to Meadow Park in 1991 during the presidency of Rick Stafford. Photographs of this move are on display at the JRL. TDHS and community volunteers refurbished the cabin for use as a research center.

² Special thanks to Scott Saibini, who donated a collection of issues of *The Static* to TDHS in 2016. Scott's father, John, and his Uncle Ray attended MLUHS while living at Boca.

³ See sidebar for a partial list of student and faculty names that appear in the issues cited.

⁴ *The Static*, 21 January 1938.

⁵ *The Static*, 5 May 1937.

⁶ *The Static*, 19 March 1937.

⁷ *The Static*, 5 May 1937.

⁸ *The Static*, 31 March 1939.

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MARK TWAIN IN TRUCKEE????? ...**By Stephen Harris**

Samuel Clemens was an enthusiastic traveler, as any perusal of his life story will affirm, although some of his travels remain disputed to this day.

Twain arrived in Nevada territory in August 1861 with his brother Orion Clemens, who had been installed as Secretary to the Territorial Governor. After a brief post as a poorly paid 'secretary to the Secretary', Sam determined in this new and wild setting to make a career as a writer.

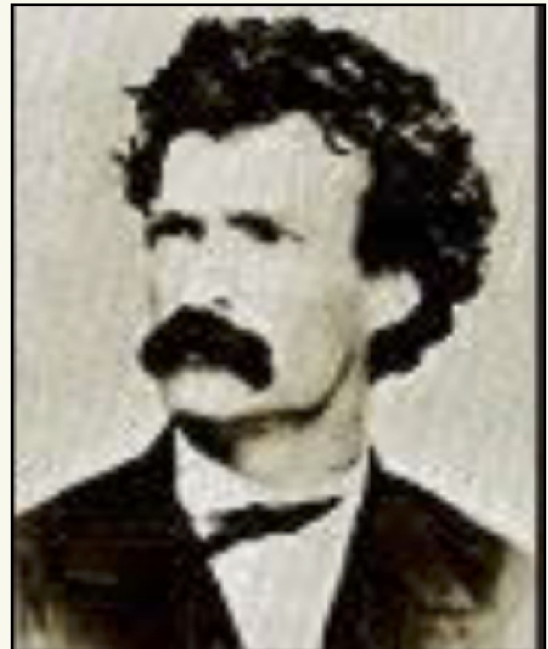
While writing for various local papers under various local aliases, Clemens traveled widely about the northern California-Nevada region, soon securing employment with the Virginia City *Territorial Enterprise*. He eventually gained employment with the *Alta California* as well, having taken up a San Francisco residence in 1864, and traveled fairly regularly between his two new 'home' towns. During this period he adopted the endearing pen name "Mark Twain".

Did Twain ever visit Truckee in his travels?

One would expect that he became familiar with places all along the route between the two cities -- but by which route did he travel? In the stagecoach days of the late 1850s, the Henness Pass route, some 20 miles north of Truckee, was the most often-traveled. It vied with the Johnson Pass route which veered south of Lake Tahoe through Placerville by the early 1860s. Use of the Henness route began to decline, and the more rugged and arduous Donner Pass route, hardly navigable by ox-cart, much less by stage, was used by more frugal and hardy pioneers on foot and horseback. Stories of the fate of the Donner Party may have further discouraged travelers from taking this route. (see D. Barrett, *Sierra Sun*, Nov. 5, 1976)

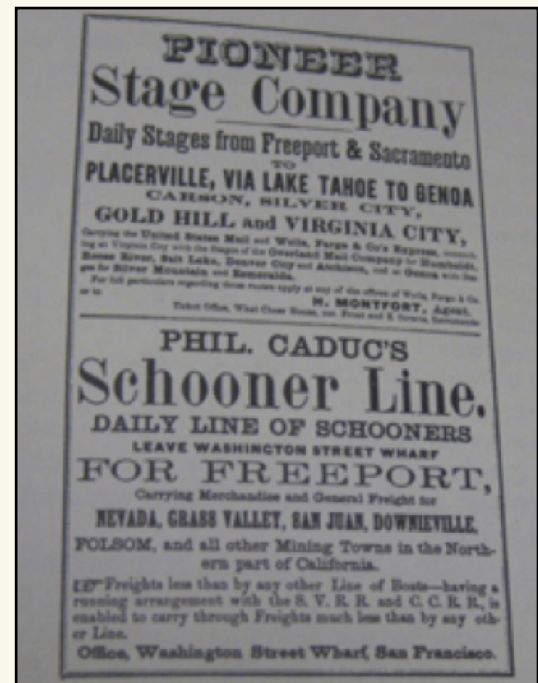
Given the predominance of the Placerville route in the year of his arrival, we might suppose that Twain never went through Donner Pass at all. Accustomed to the southerly route, he would have had little reason to depart from it. The Donner Pass route, however, was

also the path of the first telegraph from Virginia City into Northern California - important for communications with editors.



April - June 1868 in San Francisco; Carte de visite photograph of Clemens taken at the studio of Bradley and Rulofson, S.F.; Mark Twain papers, The Bancroft Library (CU-MARK).

http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/Exhibits/mtwest/call_sf1868slc.html



(Source: G. Kraus, *High Road to Promontory*)

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(Source: G. Kraus, *High Road to Promontory*)

But by June of 1864, with the completion of the Dutch Flat-Donner Lake Wagon Road, travel by stagecoach was finally expedited over Donner Summit. Many more began to choose that route (at least at the outset), as it was a quicker and cheaper route than through Placerville.

One might propose that Twain passed through Coburn's Station (later Truckee) on stagecoach trips over Donner Pass between Virginia City and San Francisco, 1864-67, before the railroad made the wagon road obsolete. However, biographers to date have not confirmed such an event; documentation has yet to be provided. Twain left the West in the summer of 1868, purportedly never to return. It is therefore conceivable that he never passed through Truckee at all, or even if he did, never stepped out of the coach, walked about, conducted business, or bought a drink.

But in the spring of 1868, after his return to San Francisco from travels as correspondent for the *Alta* in the Near East, a remarkable notice appeared in the *Territorial Enterprise* --

We received the following telegram...last night dated at

Coburn's:

To Joseph T. Goodman per Telegraph Operator
23 April 1868 * Coburn Station, Calif.

"I am doing well. Have crossed one divide without getting robbed anyway. Mark Twain."

Harriet E. Smith, associate editor of Twain's Collected letters, comments: "Clemens had just crossed the Sierra Nevada by way of Donner Pass". She notes:

Goodman printed this telegram on 24 April, and the next day also published the following item: "Mark Twain arrived here at 5 o'clock yesterday morning in good health and without meeting a single footpad on the way. He will lecture at the Opera House on next Monday and Tuesday nights — sure ("Arrived," *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, 25 Apr 68, 3).

[Mark Twain's Letters, A Publication of the Mark Twain Project of The Bancroft Library, General Editor, Robert H. Hirst, University of California Press, 1988 p. 211]

Further confirmation of this journey is readily available from his personal correspondence, by which most of his travels during this time can be pieced together. To Mary Mason Fairbanks of Cleveland, Twain wrote in early May:

I have just had the hardest trip over the Sierras. Steamboat to Sacramento (balmy summer weather & the peaches & roses all in bloom)—railway to the summit (snow thirty feet deep & 100 in the drifts)—6-horse sleighs to Donner Lake—mail coaches to Coburn's—railway to Hunter's—stage coaches to Virginia—all in the space of 24 hours. Distance 150 miles.

The journey is further confirmed by this notice, which connects Mark Twain with 'Special Correspondence':

THE CHICAGO REPUBLICAN, May 31, 1868 LETTER FROM MARK TWAIN.

The Summit of the Sierras -- From Flowers to Snow Drifts.

Special Correspondence of the Chicago Republican

Twain article continues on page 12

Echoes From The Past Newsletter

Twain article continued from page 11

The paper carried this text:

UP AMONG THE CLOUDS

....The other day we left the summer valleys of California in the morning -- left grassy slopes and orchards of cherry, peach and apple in full bloom -- left strawberries and cream and vegetable gardens, and a mild atmosphere that was heavy with the perfume of flowers; and at noon we stood seven thousand feet above the sea, with snow banks more than a hundred feet deep almost within rifle-shot of us...We had been running alongside of perpendicular snow-banks, whose upper edges were much above the cars. At Cisco the snow was twenty or thirty feet deep..... (p. 153)

Twain biographer David Antonucci summarizes the April 23 trip:

Twain boarded the 6:30 am Central Pacific train in Sacramento for the 89-mile ride on the rails to the temporary terminus at Cisco, Calif. at an elevation of 5,923 feet. At Cisco, the rail passengers transferred to sleighs drawn by four horses for the 24-mile trip on the Dutch Flat-Donner Lake Toll Road to Truckee. Sleigh passengers crossed over the summit at Donner Pass, and then descended the eastern escarpment of the Sierra Nevada to follow the northern shore of Donner Lake to Truckee, just east of the lake. ... At Truckee, passengers made yet another transfer, this time to a stagecoach that took them to the Henness Pass Road and eastward into Nevada. (Antonucci, *Fairest Picture, Mark Twain at Lake Tahoe*, Art of Learning Publishing, Lake Tahoe, California (2012) pp. 153-55).

But this is not all. After spending a week or so in northern Nevada, on May 2, 1868, Twain dispatched to the Chicago newspaper and to Mary Fairbanks notice of his intended return trip over the Sierras from Virginia City to San Francisco by the very same route:

I rather dread the trip over the Sierra Nevada tomorrow. Now that you can come nearly all the way from

Sacramento to this city by rail, one would suppose that the journey is pleasant enough, but it is not. It is more irksome than it was before -- more tiresome on account of your being obliged to shift from cars to stages and back again every now and then in the mountains. We used to rattle across all the way by stage, and never mind it at all, save that we had to ride thirty hours without stopping.

(This final remark, "We used to..." **suggests** the possibility of previous journeys through Truckee -- had the Donner route then indeed been taken.)

At any rate, these messages make for indisputable confirmation of Twain's presence in Truckee (Coburn's Station), not once, but twice, in April-May of 1868. Twain traveled not only over the Summit to Coburn Station and Nevada from San Francisco in April of 1868, but traveled back again to Coburn's and San Francisco from Virginia City in early May of 1868. He had thus both departed Coburn's by train and arrived at Coburn's by train within a dozen days.

How long did he tarry on these visits? Probably just a few minutes, given the necessary coordination of stages, sleds, and locomotives --but possibly longer: Antonucci (*op. cit.*) notes that on his eastbound trip,

*Twain has enough time in Truckee to send a telegram to the **Territorial Enterprise**...*

-- and enough time to walk over to the telegraph office and compose and pay for it. Did he have time to pay a visit as well to one of the local taverns? By then, Twain was a drinker, and in 1868 the town was quite well appointed with drinking establishments. In fact, no fewer than 25 saloons were within a few blocks of the railway station. In what kind of conversations might he have engaged? What other brief business might he have conducted? Twain was possibly more familiar with Truckee than commonly believed. Perhaps more evidence of his visits will turn up one day... perhaps even a photograph ... (*Truckee Tribune*, 19 September, 1868).

The snowbound railroad which Twain encountered in April, then seven miles short of reaching Coburn

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Twain article continued from page 12

Station from the summit, was by mid-June nearly ready for continuous travel over the mountains into Nevada. As author George Kraus relates:

On June 15, 1868, the gap between Cisco and Truckee was finally closed. Three days later the first passenger train eastbound left Sacramento for Reno--a distance of 154 miles--and a reporter for both the *Alta California* in San Francisco and the *Territorial Enterprise* in Virginia City, Nevada was aboard. (***High Road to Promontory, Building the Central Pacific Across the High Sierra***, George Kraus, American West Publishing Company (1969), p. 196.)

Although many dates may be cited as the 'official' naming of Truckee, perhaps the most appropriate would be that memorable day when the very first freight, mail, and passenger train rolled non-stop from Sacramento to Reno on June 18, 1868. Before then, no train had passed *through* the town, meaning that "Coburn's" was still viable as a stagecoach and wagon stop for travelers over Donner Pass, thus meriting its old livery-stable name. From that day onward, the stage line and wagon road became commercially superfluous: nearly everything and everyone traveled by rail.

Historians may quibble over the date of the 'official' naming of Truckee and the completion of the railroad through it, but a far more tantalizing question emerges here:

Was Mark Twain the reporter on that first train through Truckee?

Although Twain's earlier April-May visits are confirmed beyond doubt, confirmation of a June 18 visit by train would be truly historic. The consensus of historical authority maintains that Twain never returned to Nevada after his journey back to San Francisco in early May, 1868. As Antonucci writes:

Following his lectures in Virginia City and Carson City in late April 1868, Mark Twain lingered to visit with old friends. He left Nevada on May 4. Though he vowed to return, he never did. (*op. cit.*, p. 243)

Proof to the contrary would upset existing academic research. Evidence for such a journey, though not conclusive, is nonetheless compelling.

First, consider the implications of Twain's changing travel plans in the months before June 18. From March through June 1868, he had said repeatedly that he intended to sail back to the East Coast. (Twain's Letters, *op. cit.*) In a letter sent from New York to Fairbanks, dated March 10, he writes of his intended return to that city in June: "**Consequently I have packed my trunk this afternoon, & sail for California to-morrow, to return in June.**"¹ [He arrived in S.F. on April 3]

On May 2 he wrote in the *Chicago Republican*:

*"I came very near starting overland to Chicago today, with the Nevada delegates to the convention. But I will wait till June."*²

Then he writes to Elisha Bliss from San Francisco, May 5:

*"I am steadily at work, & shall start east with the completed [manuscript] about the middle of June."*³

On 12 May, also from San Francisco, he writes Frank Fuller: "I go east the 1st of July."⁴

And he writes to Mary Fairbanks from San Francisco, 17 June 1868: "*No, I am not going to Europe yet. . .*"⁵

Then to Elisha Bliss, Jr., he writes from San Francisco, on 5 July 1868:

I waited over, one steamer, in order to lecture & so persecute the public for their lasting benefit & my profit—but I shall surely sail to-morrow, & shall hope to arrive in New York per steamer "Henry Chauncey" about July 28.⁶

Why all the delays?

A clue may be found in a letter to Elisha Bliss, dated 28 May 1868, which ended with the message:

I shall have the MSS finished in twenty days⁷ & shall start east in the steamer of 1st July. If delayed beyond that time I shall go overland. I

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have the [R.R. Co.'s] invitation to do so.

--In other words, if the editor's bracketed annotation is correct, Twain had an offer of *free* train passage eastward as far as the CP railhead! Was he in fact waiting all these weeks for the railroad to be completed into Nevada? In his last letter to Fairbanks, the date 17 June is most significant, for it is the day that the rail line between Sacramento and Reno was finally completed.

Railroad historian Wendell Huffman details the event:

By June 14 the grade between Tunnel 12 and Coldstream was ready for rail, and tracklaying to close the gap between the two segments of the Central Pacific began. The seven miles were rapidly covered, apparently by crews working from both directions, and the final spike securing the connection between Reno and Sacramento was driven at 8:20 P.M. on June 17 ... At 6:30 the following morning, the locomotive Antelope departed Sacramento with a train of one freight car, a baggage car, and three coaches; it ran all the way to Reno, arriving at 8:00 that evening—the first train to run through from Sacramento. The train returned to Sacramento the following day, and thereafter there was regular service between Reno and Sacramento, with the fare established at \$15 and the 154 miles covered in a scheduled nine and one-half hours.

(IRON HORSE ALONG THE TRUCKEE --The Central Pacific Reaches Nevada By Wendell W. Huffman, Nevada Historical Society Quarterly, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Spring, 1995), pp. 19-36).

Kraus (*op. cit.*), directly quoting the reporter, or 'Special Correspondent', from the *Alta*, corroborates the date:

On June 17th, learning that the Pacific Railroad Co. was to run their first through train across the mountains on the following day, we hastened to secure a ticket from the agent and learning that the train was to depart at 6 1/2 am., in the morning, we were on hand early.... The train consisted of one box car well stocked with freight, one baggage car also

well filled with freight and the U.S. mails, and three of the railroad Co.'s new cars just out of the shop.

The article by this special correspondent appeared in the San Francisco newspaper on 20 June 1868 with the title "Across the Sierra Nevadas". Lengthy columns of colorful prose covering the entire journey follow. Yet, no author is identified!

How many reporters were employed by the San Francisco *Alta* at the time? How many by the Virginia City *Enterprise* ? How many were employed by *both* newspapers? How many of these were living in San Francisco until June 17 1868? At least one, certainly -- Mark Twain.

Several facts suggest Twain's authorship:

He delayed his sea voyage until weeks after the rails had been laid and he well may have been granted free passage by the railroad company. After his post to Fairbanks on 17 June until 23 June, no letters from him are extant. Can Twain be located anywhere else in the world but in the Sierras on June 18, 1868?

ACROSS THE SIERRA NEVADAS

THE FIRST RAILWAY PASSENGER
TRAIN FROM SACRA-
MENTO OVER THE
MOUNTAINS.

Shovelling a Pathway Through Monster Snow-
Drifts in Midsummer—Description of the
Scenery Along the Route—Incidents of
the Trip—Accomplishment of the Grand-
est Engineering Feat Ever Attempted by
Man—Etc., etc.

FROM THE SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT OF THE ALTA.]

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The timing was right for a June excursion over the summit. He would have traveled again by river from San Francisco to Sacramento on the same steamboat schedule as in April. In fact, much of the article reads like a kind of 'd  j   vu' of his previous dispatches. We can construct many similarities and parallels with the latter account, including a 'Special Correspondent' employed by both San Francisco *Alta* and Virginia City *Enterprise* in June 1868. Additionally, an article just three weeks earlier in his 'Special Correspondence' in the *Chicago Republican* on 31 May, included descriptions of both journeys and mention a warm valley in bloom on a spring morning, followed by deep snow on the summit by mid-day. Several nearly identical descriptive phrases occur in the accounts:

April: "We left grassy slopes and orchards in full bloom"

June: "A few hours since we were among the flowers, ripe fruits and singing birds of the valley."

April: "We stood at seven thousand feet above the sea"

June: "We stand 6,800 feet above the sea". "... are 7,043 feet above the sea."

April: "We had been running alongside of perpendicular snow-banks, whose upper edges were much above the cars."

June: "The snow lies piled in immense banks... and rises in solid banks, with sheer precipitous sides, on either side of the track."

April: "Up Among the Clouds" *June:* "eyrie among the clouds"

Then, similar wording from Twain's famous quote describing his first view of Tahoe in 1862-- "... a noble sheet of blue water lifted six thousand three hundred feet above the level of the sea ... I thought it must surely be the fairest picture the whole earth affords." -- appears twice in the 1868 article:

"Donner Lake, as lovely a sheet of water as is to be found on earth, lies far below us." And-- "... mountains from the southwards, hidden in which lies the loveliest sheet of water on the earth, Lake Tahoe"

--possibly Twain's own 'signature' phrase? Or is it merely the work of an imitator?

Perhaps the best evidence of Twain's authorship is the masterful and elegant prose in which the article is written, bearing all the signs of exceptional literary talent and scholarly knowledge so typical of many of Twain's other works. Let a few passages from the June article speak for themselves:

We have scaled the great Sierra at last, and a 'non plus ultra' might be written on the granite walls of the great tunnel before us. We are 7,043 feet above the sea.

The poet wrote: "He who ascends to mountain tops shall find /The loftiest peaks most clad in clouds and snow..."

The snow lies piled in immense banks above the tunnel, and rises in solid banks, with sheer precipitous sides, on either side of the track. The water pours down in torrents from numberless [sic] crevices and seams in the granite walls and roof of the long, dark, cavernous tunnel...and at last we hear the prolonged whistle of the good locomotive "Antelope", which has drawn us to the summit of the Sierra, ... and the train moves slowly on. The snow-banks come down so close to the track that the eaves of the cars rake them on either side. It is the closest fit imaginable...

And now the train with accelerated speed moves steadily downward towards the valley of the Truckee. The steam is shut off, the brakes put down, and as the eagle sets his wings and floats noiselessly down, down, down, through the realms of air towards the earth from his eyrie among the clouds, we slide swiftly and smoothly down the acclivities of the mountains into the Great Basin of Nevada. Donner Lake, as lovely a sheet of water as is to be found on earth, lies far below us among the pine-clad hills, its bosom unruffled by a breath of breeze, and as blue and calm as the heavens above it.

Now we descend rapidly, on one of the most beautifully smooth roads on the continent, into the romantic valley of the Truckee, whose mountain

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torrent comes rushing and roaring out of the mountains from the southwards, hidden in which lies the loveliest sheet of water on the earth, Lake Tahoe.

As the first passenger train sweeps down the eastern slope of the Sierra, John [Chinaman] comprehending fully the importance of the event, loses his natural appearance of stolidity and indifference, and welcomes with the swinging of his broad-brimmed hat and uncouth shouts, the iron horse and those he brings with him. Well may he shout! ...Nature erected between East and West a barrier such as in other lands "divides countries and makes enemies of nations," ...and John with his patient toil, directed by American energy and backed by American capital, has broken it down at last, and opened over it the grandest highway yet created for the march of commerce and civilization around the globe.⁸

The correspondent then records a prescient observation upon reaching the town itself:

The whistle sounds a long shrill scream, and the train arrives at Truckee Station -- Coburn's, 119 miles from Sacramento and 5,860 feet above the sea.

This passage essentially identifies the name change from Coburn's Station to Truckee along with the simultaneous completion of the summit railroad and the demise of the Donner Pass stage line:

The portion of the trip between this point and Summit Valley had until this day—June 18th—been made by stages. As we pass we see the jaded horses looking wonderingly, and, as it seems to us, joyously at the swift-speeding train; their weary toil through mountain snows and mud is over, and now the stagemen will pull down their stables and pack up their traps, the drivers will "fold up their tents like the Arab," and horses and men will "as silently steal away," to be seen no more here forever.

Elegant prose indeed, certainly suggestive of Mark Twain's pen. But does this narrative, along with the late-hour travel adjustments, the similar phrases and

'déjà vu'-like parallels with his April excursion, provide evidence to make a credible case for Mark Twain as the 'Special Correspondent' for the San Francisco *Alta* on June 18, 1868? Can the case be proven? We may never know—and until we do, reader and writer alike must be left to wonder.



<http://cpr.org/Museum/Locomotives/index.html>

CPRR Diamond Stack Locomotive #29 "Antelope" c. 1867

[4-4-0, built 1867 by Mc Kay & Aldus Iron Works of East Boston, Mass. This engine was chosen by Leland Stanford for the Golden Spike Ceremony but was damaged by logs near Truckee and the "Jupiter" took its place at Promontory Summit.]

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(for Chicago Republican material)

<http://www.twainquotes.com/18680531.html>

For Wendell Huffman article:

http://cpr.org/Museum/Iron_Horse_Along_Truckee.html

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<https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=DAC18680620.2.9>

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Williams, III, George. *Mark Twain: His Life in Virginia City, Nevada*; <https://amzn.to/2Ph1ZOG>

Footnotes

¹ p. 14 quote Consequently ... from

<http://www.marktwainproject.org/xtf/view?docId=letters/UCCL00200.xml;style=letter;brand=mtp>

² p. 4 quote But I will wait till June <http://www.twainquotes.com/18680531.html>

³ p. 14 quote Bliss middle of June

<http://www.marktwainproject.org/xtf/view?docId=letters/UCCL02731.xml;style=letter;brand=mtp>

⁴ p. 14 1st of July

<http://www.marktwainproject.org/xtf/view?docId=letters/UCCL02782.xml;style=letter;brand=mtp>

⁵ p. 14 not going to Europe yet

<http://www.marktwainproject.org/xtf/view?docId=letters/UCCL02735.xml;style=letter;brand=mtp>

⁶ p. 14 Henry Chauncey

<http://www.marktwainproject.org/xtf/view?docId=letters/UCCL02739.xml;style=letter;brand=mtp>

⁷ p. 15 I shall have the MSS finished

<http://www.marktwainproject.org/xtf/view?docId=letters/UCCL02733.xml;style=letter;brand=mtp>

⁸ p. 15 long quote We have scaled ... <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=DAC18680620.2.9>

(Right) Sample telegram from Mark Twain to Goodman 23 April 1868. "Have crossed one divide without getting robbed anyway."

From the Mark Twain project letters, available at this link.

The opinions expressed in this Twain article are those of the author. TDHS refrains from reaching the same definitive conclusion as has the author, but his arguments are indeed "compelling".

Samuel L. Clemens, aged 32

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To Joseph T. Goodman
per **Telegraph** Operator
23 April 1868 • Coburn Station, Calif.

(Paraphrase: Virginia City
Territorial Enterprise, 24 Apr 68)

We received the following telegram from him last night dated at Coburn's: "I am doing well. Have crossed one divide without getting robbed anyway. **Mark Twain**."¹

¹Coburn Station (now **Truckee**, California) "came into existence when the Central Pacific surveyed the route across the pass in 1863-64"; it was named for the owner of a local saloon (Gudde, 328). Clemens had just crossed the Sierra Nevada by way of Donner Pass, which ostensibly reminded him of the bogus holdup perpetrated on him by Denis McCarthy and Steve Gillis (disguised as highwaymen) while he was crossing a lesser "divide" on his way from Gold Hill to Virginia City in November 1866, toward the end of his first lecture tour (*Roughing It*, chapter 79; *LI*, 366-67 n. 4). Clemens was not amused by this practical joke and had departed Virginia City without forgiving his tormentors. Goodman printed this telegram on 24 April, and the next day also published the following item: "**Mark Twain** arrived here at 5 o'clock yesterday morning in good health and without meeting a single footpad on the way. He will lecture at the Opera House on next Monday and Tuesday nights—sure" ("Arrived," Virginia City *Territorial Enterprise*, 25 Apr 68, 3).

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