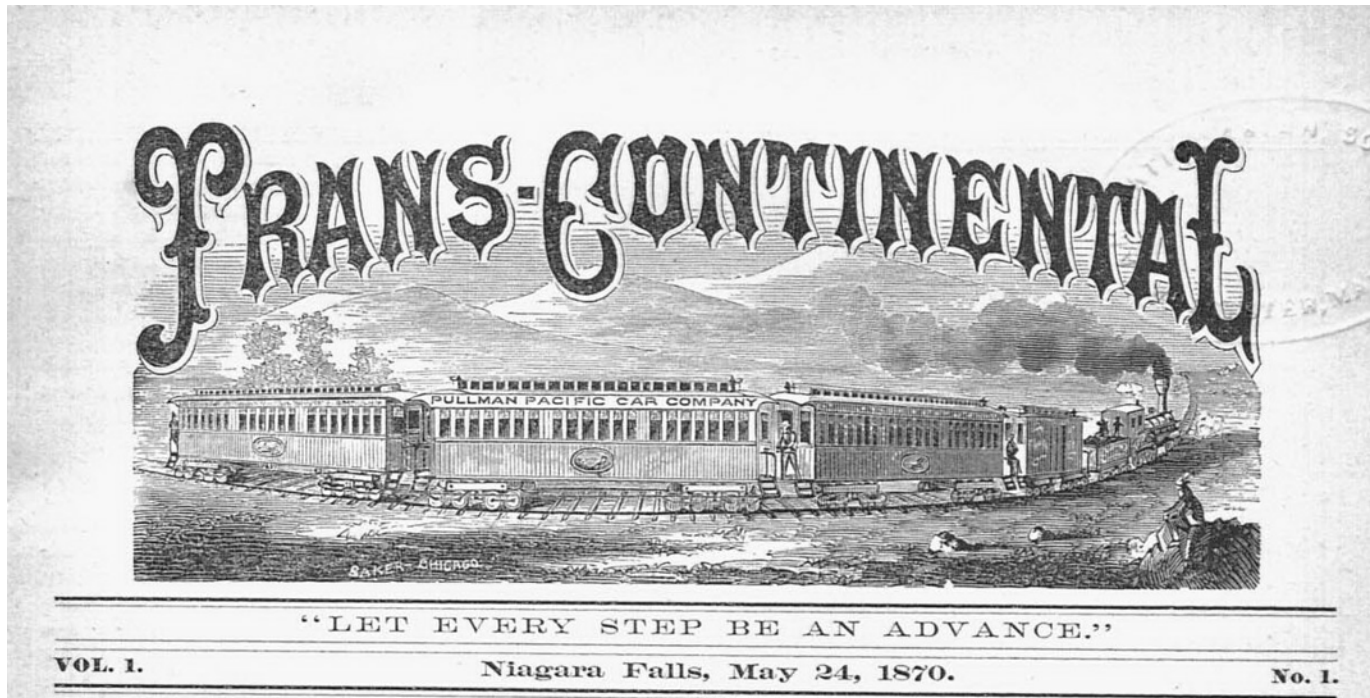


DONNER CROSSINGS



A Publication of Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society
Issue No. 4, April 2009



Preserving Railroad History along the Donner Pass Route

From the Editor:

While researching information for the previous issue of Donner Crossings, I chanced on a document in the Kansas State Library archives. This book described an 1870 all-Pullman Trans-Continental excursion train, that was likely the first truly transcontinental train to run from coast to coast, shortly after the Pacific Railroad was completed. This train was chartered for members and guests of the Boston Board of Trade, and would carry the excursion party in relative luxury from the Atlantic Ocean in Boston to San Francisco on the far Pacific shore.

Unique to this journey was an on-board printing press and editorial staff to produce a newspaper documenting the excursion. In fact, the reference I found in the Kansas Library archives is a compilation of the editions of this paper, the *Trans-Continental*. This publication presented a description of the train itself, and traced the progress of the train as it traveled westward, providing glimpses of life on board, and experiences at several stops along the way.

Those interested in reading the full account of the journey can download the summary document from the Kansas State Library Archives web site

<http://wt.diglib.ku.edu/titlepages/rhc7375.htm>

In This Issue:

We follow this 1870 transcontinental all-Pullman journey from Boston to San Francisco, through the words of W.R. Steele, the editor of the *Trans-Continental* newspaper that was written and printed on board the train. Actual text from the publication is shown in quotes.

The newspaper *Trans-Continental* was also published on the return trip to Boston, but that portion of the trip is not included in this issue of Donner Crossings. The interested reader can view all the editions of the *Trans-Continental* on the Kansas State Library web page.

-Roger Staab, editor

ou are invited to submit feature articles and/or photos for future issues of Donner Crossings. Please contact Roger Staab, email rsrr@exwire.com, or by mail at PSRHS, P.O. Box 1776, Colfax, CA 95713. Assistance is available to format your information or photos into final form for publication.

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The First Transcontinental Through Train?

All Aboard for San Francisco! If you responded to this call in Boston, Massachusetts, prior to 1869, you would be anticipating a long ship journey around the tip of South America, or perhaps a combination of train and wagon trip across the wild western regions of the country between the developed east and California. But the 1869 completion of the Pacific Railroad connection from Omaha, NE to Sacramento, CA changed all that. One could now travel from coast to coast on railroad cars.

For many years to come, however, most travelers would have to change cars and railroad companies at several points along the journey. Even the newly completed portion of the route required changes at Omaha, to Union Pacific cars, which would then carry the passengers as far as Ogden, Utah, where a transfer to Central Pacific cars was necessary to continue the journey west to California.

The thought of traveling from coast to coast was enticing, though, and in 1870 officials of the Boston Board of Trade organized an all-Pullman-car through train which would take its members and guests from Boston to California without changing cars. This train, the Trans-Continental Excursion left Boston on May 23, 1870, and arrived in San Francisco on May 31. This excursion was likely the first through train to travel from coast to coast over the new Trans-continental route.

After the travelers were treated to side trips in California, they reboarded the train on June 23 for the return trip, arriving in Boston July 2nd.

One feature that made this transcontinental journey especially noteworthy was the presence on-board of a full printing press, and several editions of the newspaper *The Trans-Continental* were published by editor W.R. Steele while en-

route across the country on the “Pullman Hotel Express”.

The Trans-Continental

The first edition of the *Trans-Continental* was published on May 24, 1870, dateline Niagara Falls. The newspaper contained items from around the world, along with events of note related to the train excursion.

This first edition of the *Trans-Continental* contained a description of the train itself:

“Our Train”

“Comparatively few of those who may receive copies of the *Trans-Continental* will have an opportunity to see the train upon which it is printed. We therefore give a brief description.”

“The train is made up of eight of the most elegant cars ever drawn over an American railway. They were built by the orders of the Messrs. Pullman, to be completed in time for the present excursion, and to be first used in conveying the members of the Board of Trade of the city of Boston, and their families, from their homes on the Atlantic Coast to the shores of the Pacific.”

“The train leads off with a baggage car, the front of which has five large ice closets, and a refrigerator, for the storing of fruits, meat and vegetables. The balance of the car is for baggage, with the exception of a space in one corner, where stands a quarto-medium Gordon Press, upon which this paper is printed.”

“Next comes a very handsome smoking car, which is divided into four rooms. The first is the printing office, which is supplied with black walnut cabinets filled with the latest styles of

type for newspaper and job work. This department, we may say without egotism, has been thoroughly tested, and has already turned out some as fine work as can be done by those of our brothers who have a local habitation. Adjoining this is a neatly fitted up lobby and wine room. Next comes a large smoking room, with euchre tables, etc. The rear end of the car has a beautifully furnished hair-dressing and shaving saloon.”

“Following this come the two new hotel cars, the ‘Arlington’ and the ‘Revere’, both of which are completely and elegantly furnished, and are thoroughly adapted to the uses for which they are destined.”

“Two magnificent saloon cars, the ‘Palmyra’ and ‘Marquette’ come next.”

“The train is completed by the two elegant commissary cars, the ‘St. Charles’ and ‘St. Cloud’, each of which is finished in all of its appointments as any of the other carriages noticed.”

“The entire train is equipped with every desirable accessory that may tend in the least to promote the ease of the passengers – elaborate hangings, costly upholstery, artistic gilding, and beautifully finished woodwork marking every portion of their arrangements. Among the new features introduced with these cars are two well-stocked libraries, replete with choice works of fiction, history, poetry, etc., and two of the improved Burdett organs. These instruments are complete in every detail of stops, pedals, double banks of keys, etc.”

“The cars of this train are lighted during the night in a new and novel manner, there being under each an ingeniously constructed machine which produces from liquid hydro-carbon, a gas equal in brilliancy to that made in the ordinary way. The apparatus is furnished by the U.S. Gas Light Company, whose offices are at 155 West Twenty-Ninth Street, New York. The generator

is so arranged that it provides gas for any required number of burners in the car and no more, and when the burners are all turned off, the generator ceases to act until they are reopened. Geo. P. Ganster, Esq., represents the company and accompanies the train as far as Chicago.”

The newspaper goes on to list the members of the Board of Trade’s excursion party, along with officers of the Pullman Car Company, Union Pacific Railway, and Central Pacific Railway.

Some additional notes from this first issue:

“Messrs. George M. and Albert B. Pullman accompany our train from Boston to Chicago, and we are pleased to learn that the latter will accompany us all the way to California.”

“Five thousand Bostonians came to the old Coliseum grounds to cheer and wave adieu to departing friends on Monday morning.”

“A Pullman Palace train is a triumph of civilization.”

“Before leaving Boston, where our train left the actual borders of the Atlantic tide water, in Massachusetts Bay, a bottle of sea water was filled in the presence of the party, to be taken to San Francisco and there emptied into the Pacific Ocean. As this train will be the first through entire train which has ever crossed from Atlantic to Pacific direct, every car going through with only through passengers, the incident is not without interest historically.”

“Wanted in the ‘Revere’ car a Tenor and Bass.”

“Officers of the Great Western Railway of Canada met our train at Niagara Falls, and will accompany us over their road. Their road is in excellent order, and we shall cross Canada the rate of 40 miles per hour.”

To Chicago and Beyond

The second issue of the *Trans-Continental* was published May 26, dateline Omaha, Nebraska.

It was originally thought when the excursion started that the train would make stops only for wood and water before reaching Omaha. However, the trip was drawing considerable attention, and numerous dignitaries took part in ceremonies and rode on portions of the trip as the train passed through their region or on their company's rails.

The Chicago Board of Trade contacted the excursion by telegraph, inviting the party to stop in Chicago as guests of the Chicago Board. Agreement was reached to spend Tuesday night in Chicago. Excursion members were put up in hotels for the night, and the next morning, treated to breakfast and carriage rides through the city's "attractive and beautiful avenues", before boarding their train for departure at noon on Wednesday.

A large crowd was on hand for the train's departure from the Chicago and Northwestern depot. "Our train left Chicago by the Galena Division of the C&NW, hauled by engine 'Henry Keep'." Numerous dignitaries were on board, including George Pullman, officials of the C&NW RR, the president of the Chicago Board of Trade, and the General Superintendent of Western Union Telegraph Co. The dignitaries rode as far as Sterling, where a crowd gathered to hear speeches presented from the rear platform, honoring the Pullman Palace cars and their inventor.

The paper added its praise for the Pullman Palace Cars, "by which travelers may have all the comforts and luxuries of a first-class hotel, while flying through the country at a rate of forty miles per hour." The editor went on to predict that "It will not be long before every good road in the country will be equipped with both their

sleeping and dining cars, and the traveling public will heartily welcome the extension of their lines in the East as well as the West."

Further notes from this second issue:

"The running time of our train over the Great Western Railway of Canada was five hours and fifty-three minutes, a distance of 229 miles."

"Those of our party who keep their watches on Boston time will find them three hours and twenty-eight minutes fast when reaching San Francisco, ... we change our apparent time one minute for every fifteen miles ... traversed."

"Over the Michigan Central Railroad our train was drawn by the locomotive, 'Ruby', which was most tastefully decorated with flowers... Her tender was covered with a panoramic landscape of the trip from Boston to San Francisco ... On either side between her driving wheels, the arms and shields of Massachusetts and California were painted ..."

"At four o'clock yesterday afternoon we crossed the Mississippi River on the new iron bridge about a mile wide. Our passengers crowded the windows and platforms, and greatly enjoyed the site of this memorable Father of Waters. A patent drawbridge in the center, 250 feet wide, is moved by a steam engine overhead. The current of the river is about four miles an hour."

"Several children on the train, and some of a larger growth, amused themselves last night in one of the saloon cars by playing leapfrog and other games. We are like one great family, full of fun and frolic, and having a good time."

"This morning we cross the Missouri River, and after visiting the extensive work shops of the Union Pacific Railroad start from what is strictly speaking the initial point of the great Pacific Railroad across our Continent."

Council Bluffs, Iowa

Since the train was due to pass through Council Bluffs, the *Trans-Continental* compiled a description of the area from *The Trans-Continental Railroad Guide*.

“Council Bluffs ... is situated about three miles east of the Missouri River, at the foot of the bluffs, and contains about 11,000 inhabitants. It is four miles distant from Omaha, Nebraska, to which city it is connected by railroad and ferry.”

“The railroad interests of Council Bluffs are almost identical with those of her “twin sister” Omaha – with which she will shortly be connected by the railroad bridge now building by the U.P.R.R. Co.” (*completed in 1872 – ed.*)

Omaha and the Pacific Railroad

The third issue of the *Trans-Continental* was published May 27, dateline Cheyenne, Wyoming. Much of the first page of this issue was devoted to a discussion of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific Railroads and the building of the Pacific Railroad, again gleaned from the pages of the *Trans-Continental Railroad Guide*. The first page also included a discussion on the history of Omaha, concluding with the statement, “The inaugurating of the U.P.R.R. gave (Omaha) an onward impetus, and since then the growth of the city has been almost unparalleled. There are many evidences of continued prosperity and future greatness.”

The second page of this issue described the reception the excursion received when they arrived at Omaha. “Col. G.C. Hammond, Gen. Supt. of the Union Pacific railroad, was in waiting to welcome us, and took our entire party by special train to the extensive workshops of the company, every portion of which was visited, and the opinion was universal that they were the most complete car works and machine shops to be found in the Western States. It indeed seemed

a marvel that such completeness and perfection has been reached in a place so recently a wilderness.” The special train then took the party to the 9th street station, where the “Mayor of Omaha was there to receive us, with carriages sufficient to convey the entire party on a tour of inspection around the city.”

Numerous speeches followed, along with a tour of a private farm where members of the party were allowed to pick flowers. Lunch was served upon returning to the city, and “just before dark, the entire party re-embarked on our palace train, now west of the Missouri, for the far West.” “...Chas. W. Mead, Asst. Gen. Superintendent of the Union Pacific Railway, ... accompanies us over their road.”

“An interesting incident occurred just after the arrival of the train at Council Bluffs. A very pleasant looking gentleman appeared at one of the car windows, where a young lady was sitting, and presented her with a beautiful bouquet, prefacing the presentation with the following: The compliments of the State of Iowa to the State of Massachusetts, by an old resident of Mass. The young lady thanked him politely, whereupon, lifting his hat and bowing gracefully he withdrew.”

This issue concluded by giving a brief description of the stations encountered between Omaha and Cheyenne, including Grand Island, Kearney, and North Platte, then “a place of a few hundred inhabitants. The railroad company here have a roundhouse and a machine shop; also a fine hotel.” (*A portent of things to come for North Platte, later a major yard and repair shops for U.P.R.R. – ed.*)

Appearing in this issue were advertisements for Bank of California, Kohler & Frohling California Wines and Brandy, Pullman’s Palace Car Company and Pacific Car Company, and Pontoosuc Woolen Manufacturing Co., manufacturers of Sleeping Car Blankets.

Cheyenne to Ogden

Issue 4 of the *Trans-Continental* was published May 28, dateline Ogden, Utah. The first page included a description of Cheyenne, “the largest town between Omaha and Corinne....The streets are broad, and laid out at right angles with the railroad. Cheyenne contains 3,000 inhabitants.”

“On the fourth of July, 1867, there was *one house* in Cheyenne, no more. At one period there were 6,000 inhabitants in the place and about the vicinity; but as the road extended westward, the floating, tide-serving portion followed the road, leaving a permanent and energetic people behind them.”

“Cheyenne is the great central distributing point and depot for the freight and travel destined for Colorado and New Mexico, and the vast country of the Cheyenne plains.”

The *Trans-Continental* newspaper again drew on the *Trans-Continental Railroad Guide* for a brief description of the stations along the 516 miles of railroad between Cheyenne and Ogden. The paper notes that “there are but few settlements or towns of importance, but much of the scenery is grand, and several of the points full of interest for the tourist.”

One structure, Dale Creek Bridge, 650 feet long and 126 feet high, spanning Dale Creek from bluff to bluff, is described as “the grandest feature of the road.”

At Laramie City, “directly to the east of this place can be seen the old Cheyenne Pass wagon road – the old emigrant route.”

“Ogden, the western terminus of the Union Pacific railroad, ... is situated at the mouth of Ogden Canyon, one of the gorges that pierce the Wahsatch Range... It has a population of about 5,500... The town is strictly Mormon, there being no schools or churches excepting those

which are under the control of the church of the Latter Day Saints... The town presents the usual appearance of Mormon towns, the houses being widely scattered, with fine gardens and orchards filling up the intervening spaces.”

This issue of the *Trans-Continental* included descriptions of the reception the excursion received in North Platte and Cheyenne, along with a sunset ceremony observed by the party after the train made its slow ascent up the grade to the summit at Sherman near Cheyenne. “There, 8,242 feet above the coast line, our party disembarked; then, ladies and gentlemen all congregated upon the topmost rock and sang America with a pathos that awakened a thrill in every heart. Then followed The Star Spangled Banner, John Brown, and a Doxology, after which Gov. Campbell, standing on the highest point, spoke words of welcome to the party, after which three cheers were given for the Summit of our native land. Pikes and Longs Peak were visible, covered with snow, nearly 175 miles distant. We were far above the line of vegetation on the Alleghanies, and considerably higher than the summit of Mount Washington.”

The *Trans-Continental* also played homage to the importance of the telegraph on the long cross-country journey.

“As we advance farther and farther into the heart of the Continent, exchanging civilization for the broad and luxuriant prairies, a greater realization of the power and mystery of the telegraph is impressed upon us. That this wonderful agent should be so strong a channel of communication between our train and our friends at home, as to transmit information from each to the other in the twinkling of an eye, ... annihilating distance and almost outrunning time... The facilities of the Western Union Telegraph Company enable us to do this even at the lonely station on the Plains.” “One of our party who had telegraphed ... to learn if his wife was well, received ... forty seven miles further west, the reply, ‘all well’.”

Into the Salt Lake Valley

Issue 5 of the *Trans-Continental* was published May 30, dateline Salt Lake City, Utah. The issue started with a description of the journey through the Wahsatch Mountains, from Echo City into Weber Canyon, through the Narrows and past the One Thousand Mile Tree, across the bridge near Devils Gate Station, “50 feet above the seething caldron of waters, where massive frowning rocks rear their crests, ... No time for thought, as to how or when this mighty work was accomplished, ... but onward, with quickened speed, down the right hand bank of the stream; ... on to where yon opening of light marks the open country; on past towering mountain and toppling rock, until we catch a view of the broad sunlit plains, and from the last and blackest of the buttresses which guard the entrance into Weber, we emerge to light and beauty, to catch the first view of the Great Salt Lake – to behold broad plains and well cultivated fields which stretch their lines of waving green and golden shades beyond.”

“Through Weber and Echo Canyons, the UPRR car of observation was taken on behind our train. Its internal arrangement much resembles an open sleigh, and afforded a fine opportunity to gaze on the picturesque and strange scenery so noted on this section of the road.”

“We have found a constant variety of excitement, sometimes by watching for buffalo, or gazing on groves of graceful antelopes coursing over the plains, and occasionally in watching prairie dogs, and their singular community of dwellings.”

“Through Echo and Weber Canyons, on Saturday last, the open “car of observation” on the rear of our train, was crowded, to view the wild grandeur of scenes, enclosed in their narrow passes, as our train thundered through their tortuous course at a speed never surpassed. Bold and rocky cliffs; eccentric forms worn by water

and by time; present to the eye, shapes resembling ancient cathedrals and feudal castles.”

“Saturday evening most of our party attended the Salt Lake Theater, which is a large building; was well filled; and the performance, by native artists, was truly excellent.”

The travelers spent Sunday in Salt Lake City, attending a service at the Mormon Tabernacle, which “has seats, we are told, for 13,000 persons, and is certainly a remarkable edifice.”

The editor describes speeches by Brigham Young and others, and the impressive organ music they heard performed in the tabernacle.

The Route over the Sierra to Sacramento

“Indians are now seen at most every station. They are the friendly Pawnees, Bannocks, and Shoshones.”

“This morning we met, at Monument Point, the California excursion train, containing 300 school teachers, bound for the Atlantic States to spend their summer vacation.”

“Today many of our party have seen Chinese laborers for the first time.”

The remainder of Issue 5 of the *Trans-Continental* was devoted to descriptions of the route ahead to Sacramento. No mention was made of the transfer to C.P.R.R. motive power or the departure from the Salt Lake area.

Brief descriptions were given of places yet to be visited, such as Promontory Point, Elko, Carlin, Palisade, Winnemucca, and Wadsworth.

“Reno promises to be a place of considerable importance. It is 154 miles from Sacramento, has about 700 inhabitants, and is named after General Reno, who was killed at South

Mountain. There is a spicy little paper here called the *Crescent*. Reno is 21 miles from Virginia City, to which a branch railroad runs.”

“Truckee is quite a large town, has 4,000 inhabitants, mostly in the lumber trade. The town is built mostly north of the railroad. The company have large freight-houses here, and do a heavy business from this point.”

“Summit is the next station, where the traveler crosses the Sierras. A long-line of snow sheds must be gone through before reaching the summit, which is 7,042 feet above tide. There is no grander scenery in the Sierras – of towering mountains, deep gorges, lofty precipices, sparkling waterfalls, and crystal lakes – than abound within an easy distance of this place.”

“A little farther along we come to the great American Canyon, one of the grandest gorges in the Sierra Mountains. The river is here compressed between two walls, 2,000 feet high, and so near perpendicular that one can stand on the brink of the cliff and look directly down on the foaming waters below.”

“Colfax, 54 miles from Sacramento, is quite a town. The company have some good buildings, and the population numbers about 1,000.”

“Auburn is a fine town of about 800 people. It is one of the neatest towns in the country.”

“Newcastle, Pinos, Rocklin, Antelope and Arcade are all stations of little importance, and at last we find ourselves gliding into Sacramento.”

In the Sierra

The final issue (No. 6) of the westbound excursion was published Tuesday, May 31, dateline Summit Sierra Nevadas, Calif. This issue, since it was to be the last, devoted much of its space to musings of members of the excursion party regarding the journey. The Board of Trade

executives also generated (and the paper printed) a lengthy resolution of appreciation to the Pullman company, for arranging the trip and providing such satisfactory accommodations.

CPRR officials A.N. Towne, F.W. Bowen, S.S. Montague, and A. Brown met the train in Reno.

“We have passed thirty sawmills in these mountains, with abundant water power, within a distance of twenty-five miles. The frequent way stations on the entire western portion of the Central Pacific Railway, indicate a large local business, which must constantly increase.”

“Early this morning, as we ascended the Sierras, we encountered quite a snowstorm, a new incident in our trip. In Summit Valley forty-two feet of snow has fallen during a winter, and eight feet has been known to fall in a single storm. In crossing these mountains we pass thirteen tunnels cut through granite rock – the longest 1,680 feet – and through about thirty miles of snow sheds, timbered as heavy as a line-of-battle ship. “Cape Horn” and the view down the American River valley, added a majestic climax, full of grandeur and beauty, and after rising 3,000 feet, and descending 7,000 feet we shall reach Sacramento, the capital of California.”

“At Dutch Flat and Gold Run we passed in view of hydraulic mining sluices, being frequently on the very sides of our road, a rich mining district.”

The Chamber of Commerce of San Francisco wired the train that they would “meet you on the road from Sacramento, and take your train by the way of San Jose, and steam you through our city, by special privilege, to the very door of the Grand Hotel.”

The train arrived in San Francisco just before midnight on May 31, and with the permission of the City government, proceeded down Market Street to the Grand Hotel – a Grand Finale to a grand and glorious trans-continental journey.



PSRHS Mission Statement

- ◆ To research, document, and preserve the history of railroading and current operations in the Placer-Sierra area.
- ◆ To interpret the relationship and effect of railroad commerce and activities with the cultural and economic development of local communities and the region.
- ◆ To collect, curate, restore, and interpret – by way of display and operation for public view – memorabilia of local railroads.
- ◆ To work with other civic, historical, and public organizations to accomplish these goals.

Area of Focus: The Transcontinental Route over Donner Pass from Roseville to Truckee

- ◆ Monthly Presentations, 4th Thursday, 7PM, DeWitt Senior Center,
Corner of 1st & D Ave., off Bell Rd., N. Auburn
- ◆ Field Trips to nearby points of interest
- ◆ Restoration Projects
- ◆ Photo Displays



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