

## Steve Larimore Presented “Johnson Cutoff Emigrant Trail” History At January Meeting

Steve Larimore narrated a DVD of the “Johnson Cutoff Emigrant Trail” at the January 17th dinner meeting.

The Johnson Cutoff was developed as a short cut off the Carson Trail. The Johnson Cutoff went south of Lake Tahoe, far south of the Carson Route. In most areas, Highway 2 follows the Johnson Cutoff.

The video deals with the efforts made by researchers to identify events and landmarks along the trail. Often letters and diaries are used.

Finding the starting spot of the Johnson Cutoff from the Carson Trail was difficult. The Johnson route began at a bend in the river at Empire, Nevada about four miles east of Carson City. When emigrants reached this point, they had to make a choice. Continuing on the Carson Trail took them south over Carson Pass and on to Placerville. The new Johnson route made it a shorter distance to Placerville. Needle Station was one of the key points on the route. It was a rest stop where emigrants would have water and get advice on the new route.

About a mile above Needle Station, emigrants talked of “taking to the hills”. The route was very difficult for their wagons. From Johnson’s standpoint, he wanted to get emigrants off the Carson route and into a situation where going back was just too difficult. If emigrants knew what was in front of them (the Kings Canyon Summit), they would have returned to the Carson Route.

Exploring the Johnson route enabled researchers to find Mark Twain’s camp near Lake Tahoe. In letters Twain wrote to his mother and sister, he described two peaks he had dealt with on his way to Lake Tahoe. He also described a large granite rock that he used as his dining table. It was at this time that Twain accidentally caused a forest fire. Through research on the Johnson Cutoff, both peaks and the granite rock have been identified.

After Schooner Summit, the Johnson Cutoff dropped down Glenbrook Creek, climbed up Montreal Canyon, and over another summit. Trail traces have been located along this section.

An area was found where a ford had been developed. In cooperation with the Forest Service, metal detectors were used in the area. A cast iron pot was found.

The trail wandered down to Chimney Rock, dropped down to Edgewood near State Line where it intersected with the Georgetown Trail and on to the Queensbury Toll Road.

The Johnson Cutoff went through the Tahoe basin following the present day “Pioneer Trail” to the Upper Truckee River and met Johnson’s Pass. Johnson literally followed a trail straight up the side of the mountain and ended near the present day Echo Lake Road. This part of the journey was like climbing a tree with wagons, only worse. Later travelers eased the pull by using switchbacks.

In 1855, Mr. Holly connected the old Windsor Pass Road to the Johnson Cutoff. The Holly Grade went from the top of Echo Summit down to the base of the valley for about 1.25 miles. This took some of the steepness from the old Johnson Pass. The Pony Express used this route for about 15 months.

A drive up present day Highway 50 brings you to Johnson Pass Road. Johnson Pass Road proceeds to the Echo Lake Road. The Johnson Trail proceeds along Highway 50 west down to present day Camp Sacramento.

Eventually Johnson Trail dropped into Slippery Ford, a granite area in the river. The Trail continued on to the Strawberry area and Georgetown Junction. From there the trail turned north, up a hill, and followed the ridge west for 3.5 miles. Johnson’s Trail then continued to Telephone Ridge and dropped down.

Supposedly Johnson and Bartlett had a way station in this area and sold hay and grain. The precise spot cannot be located as it was washed out in 1855.

Johnson Trail connected with Carson Trail at Junction House. At this point, several directions were possible. One choice was to follow the ridge into Hang Town, passing by Johnson’s Ranch.

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## Museum News

January 22 - April 20, 2013: What’s in a Name? Tracing Our Valley’s Early Families.

Adventurous men and women traveled to California beginning in the 1840s. They moved to Alamo, Danville, San Ramon and the Tassajara Valley and, today, we see their names on roads, canyons, schools and home developments. Displaying the Museum’s archives, photographs, clothing, agricultural equipment, saddles, and flags.

This exhibit provides insights into the lives of our founding families.

April 27 - June 29: Perspectives of Mt. Diablo

Featuring equipment, art, and nature by Mt. Diablo Surveyors Historical Society, Artists of the Valley,

Mt. Diablo Interpretive Association, and the Museum of the San Ramon Valley.

*(More Museum News On Page 4)*



# Ross Smith Reviewed Enjoyable Story Of Danville's Lost Park At January Dinner Meeting

Ross Smith, a long time Danville resident and Society member shared the story of Danville's lost park at the SRVHS during the January 17th meeting.

The lost park is behind the Montair Elementary School on a portion of undeveloped school property.

Ross's story began when walking his neighbors' dog one morning. He was passing behind Montair School when he stumbled across a plaque. "Mavis Wood Amphitheater, 1966" was the wording on the plaque. Ross contacted Don Wood, son of Mavis Wood. Mrs. Wood was the first, and long time, principal of Montair School.

With the end of WWII, Danville started to grow. By 1956, the Danville Union School District (DUSD) realized that more capacity was needed to accommodate the growing school population.

In 1957, the District bought a ten acre piece of land. Within two years, Montair Elementary School was up and operating.

In 1959, the Montair School PTA decided to build a nature park on an unused piece of school land across a small creek behind the school. Spurring the effort was Virginia Deaton and her daughter Pam. (Virginia Deaton is also Sharon Soto's mother.) Virginia led the effort to get permission and funding for the park. She is also credited with starting Hayday Celebration and being instrumental in organizing Danville's first Fourth of July Parade.

In 1960, the local Kiwanis supported the idea. In 1963, the DUSD finally approved. The Danville Chamber of Commerce did not give money, but did declare the area as Danville's first park. (Ross believes there may have been an earlier park.) The Lions Club and Rotary Club supported the park. The park was named Montair Nature Trail.

An outdoor classroom area called "the orientation circle" was built by the Rotary Club. Two wooden bridges were constructed. One bridge, the Tuttle Bridge, honored Mr. Reuben Tuttle, a school music teacher who retired in 1963. A weather station was built by the Kiwanis. An amphitheater was built on the hillside. A large concrete caisson was turned into a barbecue pit. There was a lovely picnic ground. Boy Scout Troop 256 planted trees. The Girl Scouts contributed to the building of the park.

The park was dedicated in 1964 with a picnic and hand cranked ice cream.

The facility was used by the community for picnics, plays, and musical presentations.

Then the trouble began. Local civil disobedience grew. The Montair Nature Trail suffered and fell into ruin.

The Town of Danville was not incorporated. The Contra Costa County Sheriff's Station was in Alamo. There was not much interest in answering complaints. The School management paid attention to the school but not the park.

Ross showed a series of pictures of the area today. The amphitheater is destroyed. The wood was used for firewood. The barbecue pits are destroyed. Much of the trail area is infested with poison oak. A few trees have survived and grown. The creek bed is filled with trash. The drinking fountain no longer works.

But the core of the park is there. The shaded path is still there. It is a pleasant place for a walk, but you have to be careful to not step on the metal spikes, left over from construction. There is one beautiful oak tree that has grown to the size of the Diablo Road Oak tree.

There is planning afoot to recreate part of the trail. One identified plan is to create an educational area using six gigantic boulders.

Ross spoke to the Society in November 2004 on the history of the Danville Grange. His *History of the Danville Grange, California Grange #85, Patron of Husbandry* was subsequently published. It is for sale at the MSRV for \$15.

## Museum News (Continued)

### Walking Tours

Town of Danville Tours begin in April 2013. Requested donation is \$3 per person. No reservations required.

Alamo Historic Cemetery Tours. Tours will begin again in April 2013. Open to the public, no reservation required. The requested donation is \$3 per person. Meet at the Alamo Cemetery at 10 am.

### General

When the Museum is open, a trained docent is always on duty and can provide exhibit tours for visitors who drop in. Reserved tours are available during open or closed hours by appointment. Large groups are encouraged to call ahead to assure that a docent is available specifically for your group.

The Museum of the San Ramon Valley is located on the southwest corner of Prospect and Railroad Avenues [P.O. Box 39, Danville, CA, 94526, (925) 837-3750]. Hours: 1-4 pm Tuesday-Friday, 10 am.-1 pm. Saturday.

The information above was taken from the Museum's informative website, [www.museumsv.org](http://www.museumsv.org).