

NORTH STAR HISTORIC CONSERVANCY

THE STAR

NEWSLETTER

Spring, 2018

GROUND FLOOR RENOVATION PROJECT

APPROVED BY THE COUNTY!

By Joe Heckel

One major accomplishment our Board is extremely proud of is the renovation work just completed on the 1st floor and approved by the County of Nevada Building Department. Though the hard work of our volunteer Construction Committee and with the assistance of many contractors or suppliers who discounted or donated their services or products, the lower floor is newly remodeled and open for business! Some of the major upgrades include a new catering kitchen, ADA accessible restrooms, a new office and new, but historically themed windows, doors and lighting fixtures. Our remodel work also includes new plumbing, electrical, security and heating systems for the House, allowing the interior to be available year-round for public use.

In late 2017, the County of Nevada Building Department, along with other County Departments and the Fire Marshall, thoroughly inspected and

approved these upgrades as complete and code compliant. Though there are still upgrades needed and planned for the lower floor, the approval of this renovation effort signifies a major step to achieving the community's vision to restore this historic property. It is still difficult to believe that the North Star House has transitioned from near ruin to an open and operating a historic event venue, where the interior can be now rented for receptions, retreats, educational classes and tours provided to the public.

The progress of transforming this property into a premier cultural event center continues. The recognition of such a significant milestone is a unique opportunity to build a sense of appreciation, well-being and inspiration into the core of an organization's culture. It also allows our organization, the NSHC, to say thank you to the community who made it happen.

TO TAHOE TAVERN: SONNY FOOTE'S WILD RIDE

In 1908, North Star Mine superintendent Arthur B. "Sonny" Foote bought a Model T Ford, divided into parts and shipped to Grass Valley by train. An astute engineer in the mold of his father, Arthur D. Foote, he reassembled the automobile with reference to an instruction manual, and became a fan of motoring. In 1911, the Tahoe Tavern, a rustically posh lakeside resort at Tahoe City, offered a three-foot silver trophy and extreme bragging rights to the first motorist able to arrive at the resort that spring. The route required an eastward trek from California, and involved summiting Donner Pass.

Sonny Foote saw a challenge and an adventure.

You didn't really want to drive in the Sierras, back then. Roads that did exist in the mountain passes were white-knucklers not for the faint of heart. Tahoe was best accessed by train, with a narrow-gauge rail line linking Truckee and Tahoe City. Nevertheless, entrepreneurs hoping to grow Lake Tahoe tourism saw promise in the rise of automobile travel. Thus the race to Tahoe Tavern, its promoters assuming they'd attract, in the words of Sonny Foote's daughter, Evelyn Gardner, "some big society man from San Francisco [who] would drive his Pierce-Arrow up there for the publicity." Sonny's crew included his friend, George Starr, manager of the Empire Mine, and a small cadre of helpers.

1911 was a year of record snowfall in the Tahoe region, with nearly forty feet measured at Tamarack, just southwest of the lake. And so, it was not until June 2 that Foote, Starr and crew could begin their trek. The Model T's wheels were tricked out with thick coils of rope to provide traction in the snow as they utilized a route roughly paralleling the Central Pacific Railroad tracks leading up to and beyond Donner Summit.

When the car veered into granite crevices, the team used a block-and-tackle mechanism to un-rut the hapless vehicle. When facing a washed-out bridge at the Yuba River, the team managed to suspend the car from a cable, sliding it to the other side. Of course, they took the cable with them, leaving the next wave of racers, presumably less inclined to think outside the box, stranded at river's edge.



A few days later, when the Model T was stuck in the snow, the crew had such a comfortable lead that they were able to take a train back to Grass Valley where they picked up materials to fabricate a system of runners, turning the car into a kind of sled to negotiate the snow. They slid their way toward Donner Lake, in style, at that—see picture, below—the challenging part of the journey done.

Can you imagine the puffed-up chests as the team of wonk engineers from Grass Valley cruised from Truckee to Tahoe City, brimming with tales of ingenuity and grit?

What a guy! Sonny Foote descending toward Donner Lake. the Central Pacific Railroad snow sheds in the background (Photo: Searls Historical Library)

References for "Sonny Foote's Wild Ride":

Gardiner, Evelyn. 1996, July 16. Interview by Peggy Cabrera, Willah Haberman and Jean McKeen [Tape recording]. The North Star House Archives, Grass Valley, CA.

McLaughlin, Mark. 2013. "Conquering Donner Pass by Car." *Truckee Sun*, 5/15/2013. truckeesun.com

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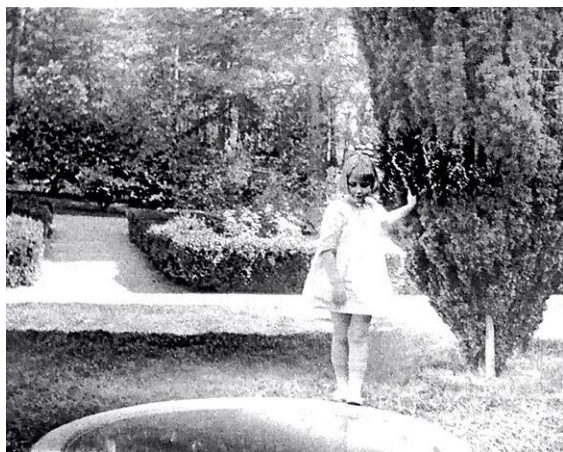
Noy, Gary. 2014. "Twenty-Three Miles in Seven Days." *Sierra Stories: Tales of Dreamers, Schemers, Bigots, and Rogues*, 83-6. Berkeley, CA: Heyday Press.

HERITAGE GARDEN ON TRACK TO BE COMPLETED IN 2018

By Betzi Hart

The late winter snow and cold temperatures have put the garden project on hold until spring ... but . we are actively looking for volunteer help, supplies, sponsors, and additional funding to complete this endeavor.

The projects we completed in late summer and early fall were largely "underground". Landscape contractor Jim Pyle and his crew were able to complete the rough irrigation, drainage and electrical work. These items are not visible as they are covered with dirt, but without them the garden could not function.



The reflecting pool was completed in late fall. It was built to emulate the original pool located in the courtyard.

A second Chinese Elm was planted. This tree, donated by Jean McKeen and her family in honor of Dave McKeen, will serve to welcome visitors at the entry of the garden. It is surrounded by the second retaining wall that will seat guests in the shade provided by this tree.

In the Spring we will receive planting soil donated by Vermicrop Organics. Chris Grant, the North Coast Territory Manager, visited the Heritage Garden site and was so excited

by our plans that he promised us all of the soil we need to complete the project!

The benches for the garden are ready for installation. We have the bricks and funding for the pathways. The gates for the front and back are built and waiting in the shed. One of the local Rotary Clubs is looking at the plans for the front arbor/trellis. Carole Miller and her rose team have been sheltering plants and original cuttings at their homes to protect them until planting.

Now it just has to warm-up and "rain" to provide a little more support in volunteers, supplies, sponsors, and donations. To volunteer, please contact Gary Emmanuel by calling The North Star House at (530) 477-7126 and leaving your name, telephone number, and email address.

If you know any business or supplier that can help us with irrigation supplies, garden equipment, plants, or just good old green cash, leave a message for Betzi Hart at The North Star House. The Heritage Garden will be completed this year and will be a local gem to be enjoyed for generations to come.

A SMALL WORLD

Volunteer Dick Vasey's connection to the North Star House began in 1959 when his forestry studies at UC Berkeley involved a field trip to the [Forest Biology Program at the Boyce Thompson Institute](#), located on the



mine property. Directing the program was renowned German forest scientist, Jeanne-Pierre Vité, whose research led to innovative measures for the protection of trees endangered by bark beetle infestation. Dick remembers staying in the mining office, and two directives: watch out for mine holes, and respect the privacy of the Foote home.

Dick was on the forestry faculty at Virginia Tech in the mid-1970s when asked to establish a student exchange program with the forestry department at the University of Freiburg in Germany. He found himself speaking long distance with a Freiburg scholar named Vité.

"How common a German surname is Vité?" asked Dick.

"Not common at all," came the reply.

"Well then, what do you know about Grass Valley California?"

There was a long pause, Dick recalls—at a time when calling Europe was expensive!

Dick retired in 1990, and he and his wife moved to Nevada City. About six years ago, he met Peggy Levine at the North Star farmers market, and told his story. She encouraged him to volunteer, and he has been part of the construction crew, sanding and sealing cedar panels, ever since. Dick has also donated his professional expertise by completing a forestry report for the fourteen-acre property.

We are grateful to Dick for his generous service, and for his North Star connection that reminds us of significant, wide-ranging endeavors conducted here over the years.

IRRIGATION WATER UPGRADE PLANNED FOR 2018

By Grounds Committee, Joe Heckel

The Grounds Committee will be embarking on an ambitious project in 2018: the replacement and upgrade of our on-site irrigation system. Our irrigation system is comprised of an on-site well, a pump and two deteriorating concrete storage tanks. All of the landscaping found on our 14-acre parcel are irrigated by our on-site system including our ornamental and heritage plants, the Heritage Garden and our lawn areas (which are used for our events). The Grounds Committee is working to replace the tanks, piping and well house as one of its major projects in 2018. Ken Bales, our Co-Chair of the Grounds Committee, will be tackling the grading and site preparation work. David Wright, a NSHC Board member, has secured the assistance of Peters Well & Pump, and Larry Dulmage, President, has enlisted Merrill and Sons, to help with this project.

The Grounds Committee is largely responsible for overseeing and maintaining our 14.6 acre property. The focus of maintenance and upkeep is on the improved areas of the property and includes landscaping (primarily lawn areas), roadways, walkways, drainage, parking areas, signage, utilities and fire protection (i.e. vegetation management). A secondary responsibility is to monitor the condition of the on-site buildings under lease or use by other parties and complete periodic maintenance. The Committee works with the Board, the on-site caretaker and other Committees to set priority for their work projects. If you like to work outdoors and wish to help as a member of this Committee, even for a few hours each week, please contact us.....there are a number of great projects for 2018!

CONSTRUCTION SCENES ...



Kika Kane at work



Rich McRay works on Dining Room walls



Marko working on cabinetry

The Julia Morgan Room ...

Coming Together



NOTE

This contains the primary articles that appeared
in the Spring 2018 issue of The Star.

This was created for our historical records and
does not include standard features such as
upcoming events, President's message, etc. that
were in the original electronic newsletter.