

# NORTH STAR HISTORIC CONSERVANCY

# THE STAR

## NEWSLETTER

Winter 2022-2023

## To Tahoe Tavern: Sonny Foote's Wild Ride by Maria Hetherton

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

This article first appeared in the Spring, 2018 newsletter. It was written by Maria Hetherton, editor of the newsletter.

A good story deserves to be  
re-told once in a while!

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.

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—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?



*Sonny Foote descending toward Donner Lake.  
Central Pacific Railroad snow sheds in background.  
Photo: Searls Historical Library*

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## President's Message *Larry Dulmage, President*



Happy New Year to all of you!

Our North Star volunteers are eager to get back to working on restoration projects in the house and prepping the grounds for reseeding work. (Yes, it's time to work off all of those holiday meals and desserts.)

The Restoration Crew is primed to bring a few ongoing ground floor projects closer to completion: Installing a large window in the Mary Hallock Foote study; tackling the ceiling restoration in the Library; and putting a segment of the living room wall back in place after electrical upgrades.

Demolition work continues on the second floor, removing plaster and clearing out everything that has to be removed, so that the new work on the second floor will go faster and more smoothly.

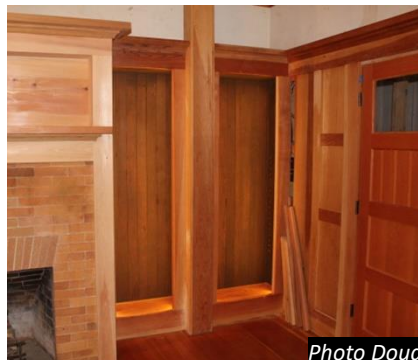
The North Star Historic Conservancy Board of Directors thanks all of our supporters for making it possible to continue the extensive and at times challenging process of restoring this community treasure.



## Restoration/Construction Highlights

We all celebrated the completion of the shingling on the outside of the house.

While all NSHC volunteers were excited about this milestone, it was especially significant to the Reconstruction Crew, who celebrated with lunch in the dining room.



LEFT: In the Mary Hallock Foote room, the bookcases on either side of the fireplace are nearing completion. They will have interior lights and glass doors, with displays inside.

Note the new sconce on the left.

RIGHT: Work continues on the Library ceiling. Bringing down each piece of wood from the semi-ornate ceilings requires a lot of time and patience, plus enough crew members to handle the long, *old* pieces of wood with great care.

Photographers for this and following pages:

Doug Young    Mariann Boll-See  
Lisa Robinson    Sherian Kutzera  
Joan Clappier





## Out and About at North Star



Photo Doug

LEFT: We're hoping the owl houses will become home to barn owls, who can help keep the gopher and ground squirrel population under control.

RIGHT:  
Heritage Garden heads  
into winter



Photo Doug

BELOW:

Severely overgrown Hawthorn hedge had not been tended in about 25 years. It had grown to >20 feet and was a thorn-riddled jungle that took a huge amount of volunteer time to get under control.

RIGHT: View  
of hedge  
from house,  
at lower edge  
of the lawn.



Photo: Joan



Photo: Joan

In addition to the house, we maintain many acres.

### Board of Directors

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recipient. It's a terrific way to  
support our efforts to refurbish  
The North Star House.



Earn!



## Decorating the House for the Holidays

Each year, volunteers decorate the North Star House for the Holidays. Lisa Robinson put her interior decorating skills to work leading the effort. This year, she spent a lot of time designing and creating new decorations. Her husband Frank helped install the decorations. Others who worked on it included Sherian, Marrilee, Arlene, and Nadine.

Nice work, everyone!



Photo Sherian

*Lisa and Frank decorating the Dining Room Buffet*



Photo: Joan

*The buffet at night, with trays of treats*



Photo Doug

*Decorated trees, clustered on the terrace to leave more room inside for partying.*



Photo Doug

*A snowy village adorned the library bookcase.*



Photo: Lisa

*Dining Room Table*

## We're Decorated, So It Is Party Time

We decided to have a North Star Holiday celebration.

We invited the Grass Valley Cornish Carol Choir to sing.

We invited the public to come enjoy some refreshments and music.

The North Star House was filled with many visitors, music, joy, and comraderie.



LEFT: Bob Haas is the Town Crier who introduces the Cornish Carol Choir each Friday night during Cornish Christmas in downtown Grass Valley. He led in the choir at the North Star House, too ... with his ever-present bell and cheerful demeanor.

RIGHT: Local historian Gage McKinney is well-steeped in Cornish history and sings in the choir. He introduced each carol with some history.



ABOVE: Eleanor Kenitzer has been the director of the Cornish Carol Choir for 33 years. The choir is all volunteer ... singing for the joy of singing and to preserve this part of Grass Valley history.

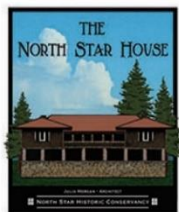
Miners in Cornwall had centuries of experience in deep, hard-rock mining of copper, tin and other metals. They had developed tools, techniques, and experience that were invaluable to neophytes at new mining locations around the world, including California.

In addition to bringing us their mining expertise, the Cornish brought us their music. Singing was a big part of Cornish life. These carols were passed on from father to son. (The high parts are now sung by women instead of boys.) Grass Valley is proud to have preserved and to present the carols from over 150 years ago

BELOW: Sherian and Marilee welcomed visitors and choir.







## NORTH STAR HISTORIC CONSERVANCY

P.O. Box 1538, Grass Valley, CA 95945

www.TheNorthStarHouse.org 530-477-7126

Our Vision is to restore the unique rural roots of Julia Morgan's North Star House as a center for exchanging ideas, nurturing the arts and fostering learning. Your support makes this possible.

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