

History: Snowshoe Thompson did more than deliver mail

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By Sheryl Morris

Tales of Snowshoe Thompson, logging days and the pre-logging era at Lake Tahoe and stories of heavy winters were recalled Wednesday night by Arnold Trimmer of Genoa, Nevada.



Trimmer was addressing members of the Lake Tahoe Historical Society and telling them of some of his recollections from the early 1900's and relating some of the stories passed on from other family members.

"My great-grandfather used to tell us of an incident involving himself, a number of other men from Carson Valley, and Snowshoe Thompson," Trimmer said.

It was in the 1850's when Snowshoe was carrying the mail from Placerville to Carson Valley. While traveling around the south end of Lake Tahoe during the winter of 1857, Thompson came upon James Sessions, who had been caught by the snowy weather. He was suffering from frozen feet, Trimmer said.

Since Snowshoe couldn't help him alone, he left Sessions in a cabin and went to the Carson Valley for help. His call was answered by Trimmer's great-grandfather and some other men from the area.

The group, traveling on skis, hauled Sessions out in a hand sleigh. It took them four days. Sessions' frozen feet had to be amputated but before the surgery could begin, Thompson set

out in search of some anesthetic, Trimmer explained.

Snowshoe went first to Placerville. When there was no anesthetic there, he traveled on to Sacramento and then returned with the medical supplies to the Carson Valley. He made this entire trip without sleep, the speaker added.

"He traveled in shirtsleeves," the speaker explained. "He always said he moved fast enough to keep warm."

Thompson was also a farmer and cultivated acreage in Diamond Valley east of Woodfords for some 20 years. In 1876, while sowing a wheat field with the aid of Trimmer's grandfather, Snowshoe took sick and died.

The Genoa man also spoke of the days before the logging industry invaded Lake Tahoe Basin.

"I can remember my great-uncle telling of trees 100 feet tall. The forests were so thick the trees were like a blanket keeping the sun out," Trimmer commented. He said he also remembers of his uncle telling of going down to the lake in the Stateline area and seeing a trout that must of weighed 32 pounds. Trimmer had numerous humorous stories of the logging days at Tahoe. He explained that July 4th was always the date of a big celebration with the big event being held at Meyers Station.

"There were horse races in the afternoon. The loggers spent the morning drinking and betting on the horses. By the afternoon they were all so drunk they couldn't remember which horse they had bet on, but they were all sure it was the winner. You never saw so many fist fights in your life," he added.

In recalling some of the stories of hard winters in the Tahoe area, Trimmer singled out 1889-90. A logger and his wife from Genoa stayed that winter at Edgewood House. They had to crawl out the third story window to go out and milk the cow. After a

couple of weeks, when the snow had been packed down, they crawled out the second story window.

Trimmer concluded by telling of High Meadows. This Tahoe area property has been in the Trimmer family since the early 1920's.

"We bought it for grazing range cattle," Trimmer said. He noted that at one time they grazed 250-300 head of cattle in the area, driving the herd up Kingsbury, down Pioneer Trail and then up to the meadows via the Sierra House turnoff.