

COBURN'S STATION

I. Earliest Land Survey

Although William Brewer¹ led a geological survey party through the high Sierra in 1863 the area near what became Coburn's Station and later, Truckee, is not described in Brewer's published field notes. However, in 1865 the Surveyor General, General Land Office, ordered a survey of the high Sierra which included Section 15, Township 17N, Range 16E, Mount Diablo Meridian.² This land contained the site of the future Coburn's and Truckee. The general description of the township began: "The surface of the E. part of this Township is generally rolling hills--that of the Western part, high hills, especially near the West boundary. The timber in the West is Fir, Yellow, Pitch and Sugar Pine and Larch. In the East, Yellow and Pitch Pine and Larch."³ Section 15 of the survey is shown on the next page.

A. Truckee River

The survey map and field notes show the Truckee River entering Section 15 in the SW 1/4 of the SW corner (11.68 chains from the SW corner of the section) bearing N25°E.⁴ At this point the river is 2.5 chains or 165 ft. wide). The river flows through the section, passing just NW of its center and exits across the section's eastern boundary bearing northeasterly 67.25 chains from the section's SE corner. The river is 1.25 chains or 82 feet wide at that point.⁵

B. Dutch Flat Road

The Dutch Flat and Donner Lake Wagon Road was built to facilitate the construction of the transcontinental railroad through the Sierra. The road enters Section 15 at its western boundary in the NW 1/4 of the NW 1/4 (62.40 chains from the section's SW corner) bearing due E. The road passes partially through Section 15, gradually turning NE as it passes midway through the center, and exits the section across its northern boundary 62.40 chains from the NW corner bearing N20°E.⁶

C. Comparison of Road and River

The road crosses Section 15 approximately 50 chains north of the Truckee River. From midway across the section until the road exits at the northern boundary, the road is about 20 to 25 chains north of the river, running approximately parallel to it. The bearing of river and road along this segment is about N20°E to N25°E.⁷ This wedge of land between the road and river falls mainly within the NE 1/4 of Section 15.

D. Other Features

Just west of the midline of Section 15, an unnamed road bears N-S between the Dutch Flat Road and the Truckee River. A fence and log house is shown just north of the point where the Dutch Flat Road crosses the section's northern boundary into Section 10. (This may be Joseph Gray's fence.) No other fences or cabins are shown on the survey map, but the Field Notes indicate a fence crossing the western boundary in an E-W

¹ William H. Brewer, *Up and Down California*, ed. Francis Farquar, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974.

² Field Notes and Survey of Township 17N, Range 16E, Mt Diablo Meridian [hereinafter 1865 Survey], by E. Dyer for Surveyor General, San Francisco, CA; General Land Office, U.S. Dept. of Interior, 1865, microfiche of original documents photocopies at U.S. Bureau of Land Management, branch office, Folsom, CA, 2002.

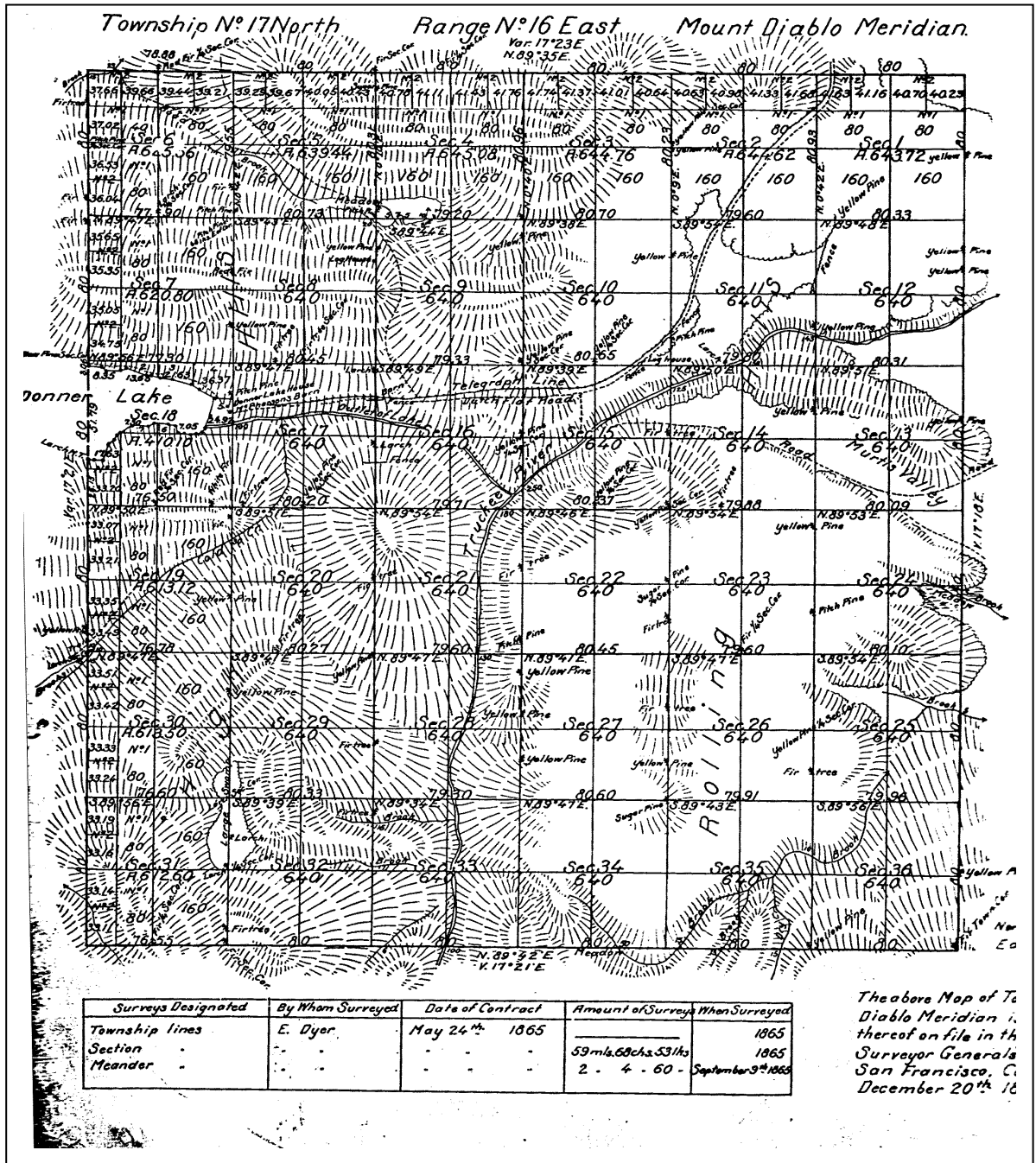
³ The survey was performed by E. Dyer under contract dated 24 May 1865.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Field Notes, p. 19 describes the western boundary of Section 15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Field Notes, p. 11 describes the eastern boundary of Section 15.

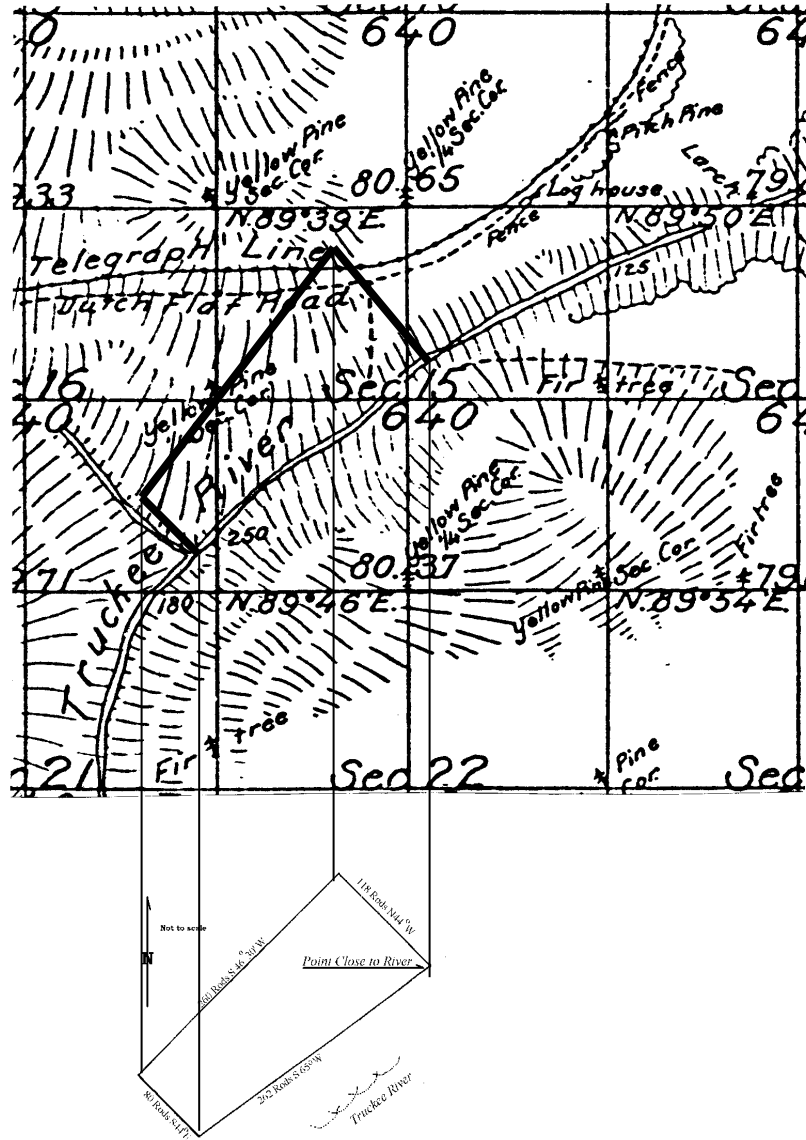
⁶ *Ibid.*, Field Notes, p. 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Field Notes, p. 19 and visual inspection of map. The only bearing given by Dyer is that for the road as it crosses the northern boundary. The approximate bearing of road and river midway in the section is implied from the map.



Survey of Township 17N, Range 16E, 1865

Detail of Section 15 from 1865 Land Survey, Township 17 N, Range 16E



**Diagram of Samuel Coburn's
Earliest Grand Deed, 1865**

Rough approximation of Coburn Deed projected on Section 15 survey*.

*Criteria: Coburn's was 1/2 mile (160 rods) west of Grays--on the river and the wagon road. Coburn's property measured about 0.8 mile (262 rods) long along the river and about 0.4 mile (188 rods) wide on a line extending northwest from the river.

direction 61.35 chains from the SW corner of the section. This fence is about 1 chain (or 66 feet) south of the Dutch Flat Road. The map shows a telegraph line 1 to 5 chains north of, and approximately parallel to, the Dutch Flat Road.

II. Earliest Coburn Grant Deed⁸

On June 12, 1865 Jackson McConnell granted to S.S. Coburn (NC Deeds 17:458) land that would become Coburn's Station. The deed describes the parcel by metes and bounds

... 'laying on the Truckee River': starting at a large pine close to the river and ten feet north of MacDonald's fence, bear N 44° W 118 rods; then S46°30W 260 rods; then S44°E 80 rods; then N53°E 262 rods.

The parcel is trapezoidal in shape, 0.8 miles in length along the river. It extends NW nearly 2000 feet or 0.37 mile from the Truckee River at its eastern boundary.⁹ Given the distance between river and road shown on the survey map, that wedge of land would accommodate the McConnell-Coburn trapezoidal parcel with part perhaps extending across the road at the eastern side. The lengthwise axis of the parcel bears between 46° and 56° compared to the river which bears about 20 - 25° at that location. The discrepancy might be accounted for by the fact that the survey bearings take into account a 17°18 E variation.

A portion of the property was homesteaded by Samuel and Julia Coburn (NC Homestead 2:256) 18 Nov 1867 which gives a general description:

...starting about 20 ft from house at northwest corner of property and extending east on the line of the Dutch Flat-Donner Lake Wagon Road 300 feet [20 rods or 5 chains] to Potter's Butcher Shop, then south at aright angles to the CPRR line (200 feet from rail bed), then west on the [rail] line to a point 20 feet west of house and back at right angle to starting point. Enclosed with picket fence, Village of Coburn's Station.

III. Early History of Coburn's Station¹⁰

Edwards' *Tourist Guide and Directory of the Truckee Basin* states that McConnell came to subject area in 1864 and occupied a site that corresponded to the site of the Truckee Lumber Company [TLC] store of the 1880s. The 1886 Central Pacific Railroad map of Truckee shows the TLC located near the river. (See Map 1, Appendix D.) Edwards states that McConnell sold the property to Coburn who used the property as a wayfaring station along the Dutch Flat Road.

A. Old Coburn Barn

A key deed refers to "The Old Coburn Barn" at Lot 11, Block A of the original Truckee townsite map. The size and location is abstracted as follows:

James Sweeney to Contract and Finance Co. (NC Deed 44, pp. 446-7) 11 Aug 1873, \$150 for town lot in town of Truckee described on the map of said Town as lot number Eleven (11) in Block A as per original survey fronting thirty (30) feet on Main Street West, the lot formerly occupied by what was known as the "**Old Coburn Barn**" [inferring the barn no longer existed in 1873].

The above deed presented a puzzle because until recently no townsite map had been found that showed a Block A. The lots along Donner Pass Road, also known as West Main, were not included in any lettered block. It was

⁸ Nevada County [NC] Recorder, Homestead and Deed Books, Rood Administrative Center, Nevada City, CA.

⁹ The western boundary extends 80 rods (20 chains) from the river --assuming the parcel fronts on the river it's entire length. The eastern boundary extends 118 rods (about 30 chains) from the river.

¹⁰ W.F. Edwards, *Tourist Guide and Directory of the Truckee Basin*, Charles D. Irons editor and compiler, Republican Print Shop, Truckee, CA 1881. Book is based on the "History of Truckee" by the "A" Class of Truckee Grammar School, *Truckee Republican*, 24 April 1880, 3:6.

assumed that since Coburn's Station developed in this area, that Block A referred to these lots. Lot 11 of that block corresponds to present day APN 19-09-10. This lot was on the north side of the road possibly across from the Coburn homestead dwelling. A modern map recently found at Foley Library in Nevada City confirms that Block A indeed contains the lots on Donner Pass Road. (See Map 8, Appendix D.)¹¹

On July 28, 1868 fire all but destroyed most Coburn's Station. *The Dutch Flat Enquirer* published the following description of the extent of the fire. The phrasing seems somewhat ambiguous and clouds the location of Coburn's even more.

"Fire at Coburns--A dispatch to the *Bee* dated Coburn's Station July 30th says: 'A fire broke out in this place this morning about six o'clock in the business street opposite Campbell's tavern which destroyed about 50 buildings including twenty stores. The fire destroyed all the buildings on the south side of the track except the school house and burned all nearly to the depot on the south side. Loss not ascertained but it is heavy, with no insurance to speak of.'"¹²

The relationship between the three locations needs clarification: (1) the street, (2) the south side of the tracks, (3) the 'south side.' The street (1) must be the wagon road on the north side of the tracks. The 'south side' (3) probably refers to the south side of the street not the south side of the tracks as in (2). The article also implies that the fire broke out opposite Campbell's tavern which survived. Was Campbell's tavern used as the depot?

B. Campbell Hotel

Edwards' Tourist Guide claims that Campbell relocated after the fire 'a little further east, on the west end of Main Street.'¹³ Campbell's newly built hotel was described on August 29 in the *Enquirer*.¹⁴ It served as a passenger depot for the Central Pacific Railroad [CPRR] and was situated on the south side of the rail bed opposite Block B, Truckee Townsite. Photographic, written and map evidence verify that location.¹⁵

Edwards further states that Campbell relocated to a site later occupied by the fire house in 1881. The 1885 *Truckee Sanborn Fire Insurance Map* shows a firehouse on the north side of the wagon road at the corner of Spring, and Front Streets. *Edwards* also states that Sisson and Egbert built a store east of Campbell and that Brazil Brickell built the Essex Saloon east of Sisson. The location of Sisson and Egbert as well as the Essex are well documented in deeds as being located on the north side of Front Street near its west end (now Commercial Row). Therefore it appears that Campbell owned several properties before and after the fire. Since locating Coburn's depends to some extent on distinguishing between various Campbell properties, the following information abstracted from deeds must be considered.

William B. Campbell to Margaret C. **Martin**, (NC Deed 36:104) 25 August 1868: fronting on Donner Lake Wagon Road [Dutch Flat Wagon Road]¹⁶, north side, commencing at west corner on the road at a stake on a line running through the center of a big pine stump marking the boundary between **Miller's** lot and the lot herein, thence 30 feet East on Donner Lake Road to Joseph **Fugeler's** lot; then north 100 feet to a hill; then 30 feet to Millers and back to place of beginning.

William B. Campbell to **F. Burckhalter** (NC Deed 32:704) 18 Dec 1868. Commencing at SW corner of **Weller and Morris** lot occupied by **Oasis** Saloon building; west along Front 30 feet to alley between **Essex** Saloon building and Burckhalter and Co. Store; north along east line of alley 90 feet; then east 30 ft to west line of Weller and Morris, then south 90 feet to point of beginning.

William B. Campbell to **J.F. Moody**, (NC Deed 37:302) 17 Dec 1870, for \$11,500: south side of the CPRR track, house, outhouses, sheds, buildings known as "Truckee Hotel" or passenger depot and right to free use water for hotel.

¹¹ The map was discovered by researcher Wallace Hagaman and staff of Foley Library.

¹² *Dutch Flat Enquirer*, Aug. 1, 1868, 3:1

¹³ Near present corner of Jibboom [East Main], Spring, and Commercial Row [Front Street]; see *Edwards*, p.17

¹⁴ *Dutch Flat Enquirer*, Aug. 29, 1868, 2:1 describes the nearly completed three-story Campbell's Hotel.

¹⁵ It is shown in a drawing and photo in Paul Lord's *Fire and Ice* (Sec. ed., Truckee Donner Historical Society, Truckee, 1994 pp.10-11). It is also identified on the 1886 and 1890 CPRR townsite maps and is described in the deeds shown herein.

¹⁶ The Dutch Flat Wagon Road is synonymous with the Donner Lake Wagon Road and Dutch Flat-Donner Lake Wagon Road. Within the context of Truckee and Coburn's Station documents it is also synonymous with Main Street, and Main Street West. Part of the wagon road which passed through the east of Truckee northerly of Front Street after 1868 was called Main Street East, Second Street, Back Street or Jibboom Street at various times.

C. Collateral Deeds, Homesteads, Tax Records

Information abstracted from other property records also helps clarify the locations of property in Coburn's Station.

S.S. and Julia Coburn to Franklin Glidden (NC Deed 30:407) 25 Nov 1867 for \$600. Property description: Half interest in certain town lot and the **Blacksmith Shop** thereon standing situated in Coburn Station, bounded on west by open ground or common in front of **Campbell's Hotel**; on south by CPRR, on east by lot and premises of **James Sweeney**, on north by the Donner Lake Wagon Road and by the lot and premises of **W.C. Richmond**.....¹⁷

S.S. Coburn to T. Hall and T. Welch (NC Deed 27:365) 9 Oct 1866. Property described as certain lot of land with saloon building standing thereon, on north side of Donner Lake and Dutch Flat Wagon Road opposite the **Public House** at what is known as Coburn Station, said lot fronting on said road 30 ft and extending back 100 ft. [This may be the wayfaring station that Edward's mentions in his Tourist Guide.]

1866 NC. Assessor's Book, Meadow Lake Township:

S.S. Coburn: 1 horse, 1 cow, house, barn, 2.5 mi east of Donner Lake (p. 382)

Potter and Sawyer Meat Market and stable 1/2 mi east of Donner Lake (p. 384)

Patrick Walsh: House at Coburn Station, Donner Lake Rd 2.5 mi ea of Donner Lake, as saloon (p. 387)

IV. Conclusion

The precise location of Coburn's Station remains a mystery created by conflicting public records. Most evidence suggests it lay between the site of the depot on the east and the lands of what became the Truckee Lumber Company to the west. Adding to the confusion of conflicting property records is the fact that Coburn's existed simultaneously with "Truckee Station." The boundary between the two sites was probably fluid and changing over time. The CPRR chose the location of "Truckee Station" long before rails were laid. Truckee was recognized as a station and settlement long before Coburn's burned.¹⁸

The real distinction between Truckee and Coburn's was implied by who owned the land. The extent of Coburn's was probably defined in terms of his right of title issuing from a pre-emptive claim of the previous owner, McConnell. Everything between Coburn's and its eastern neighbor, Gray's, became subject to the CPRR Patent and owned by the railroad and Charles Crocker. After Coburn's conveniently burned, the land under the ashes was simply swallowed up in the town of Truckee.

Perhaps the fact that the mysterious "Block A" does not appear on any existing CPRR townsite map, indicates that the lots on the wagon road had already been developed by private individuals prior to opening of the railroad in June 1868. Which of those individuals considered themselves residents of Coburn's and which of Truckee may never be determined. Some may have successfully retained their title in the face of the CPRR patent--some may not. The successful owners are shown above. Everything else was claimed by Crocker.

Nothing remains on the surface that can clarify the subject. Chances for subsurface exploration for artifacts disappear regularly as land in the Coburn's area is systematically disturbed or covered over in the process of accelerated demolition and development.

¹⁷ If this deed is correct Campbell's 'hotel' was located west of Coburn's before the fire. If Coburn's was located on what later became the Truckee Lumber Company, then Edwards was correct: Campbell's original tavern or hotel was considerably west of his post-fire hotel.

¹⁸ See discussion in Appendix B, Gray's Station, referring to the 1867 news article in the *Meadow Lake Sun*.

