

Rare opportunity to view Donner Party artifacts

By Dixie Reid, Sacramento Bee

Charles E. Davis was a one-time sea captain who, in the early 1900s, ran a dance hall and boat landing on the Salton Sea.

He was obsessed with the Donner Party, the California-bound pioneers trapped in the Sierra during the brutal winter of 1846-47. Davis believed there was more to their story than horrifying tales of survival by cannibalism.

"He thought they were mis-understood," said Nancy Jenner, curator at Sutter's Fort State Historic Park in Sacramento. "He felt strongly that the Donner Party symbolized the heroism of the early pioneers."

In 1927, Davis contacted the fort's then-curator, Harry C. Peterson, and asked for support in retracing the Donner Party route. Davis hoped to find things abandoned 80 years earlier by the Donners, Reeds, Breens and other families.

Read the whole story