

**NOTE: Numbers in RED are loaded into the online Truckee-Donner Historical Society Image Collection.**

**Dr. Johan V. Hultin Donation to  
Truckee Donner Historical Society, October 11, 2018**

*“I believe that history belongs to everybody.”*

-Johan Hultin

Following is a list of photographs and other documentation of two donations to the Donner Museum (now called Donner Memorial State Park) made by Johan Viking Hultin, M.D. (1924- ) and his wife Gunvor O. Hultin (nee Sande) (1924-2011) in approximately 1964. These donations were:

- a) **“Wagon Wheel Group” (WW):** a partial wagon wheel and iron wagon parts procured by the Hultins on the Hastings Cutoff in the Great Salt Desert in September, 1963 and donated in 1964;
- b) **“Tree Stump Group” (TS):** one tree stump from the Donner Family Camp believed to be cut at snow height by Donner Party members at Alder or Prosser Creek. Located, procured and donated by the Hultins in 1964.

Dr. Hultin is donating this documentation to the Truckee Donner Historical Society to provide provenance for the two groups described above. This includes photographs, slides, negatives, proofs, a book and a framed map. They are housed in a photo album and a digital version of each photograph, proof, slide and negative can be found on the thumb drive in folders labeled: “Wagon Wheel Group”, “Tree Stump Group”, and “Hultin Family”. The narrative below is based on the photographs themselves, the order they occur on the negative strips, recollections of the Hultin children and interviews with Dr. Hultin conducted by his daughter Ellen Swensen on August 2 and September 3, 2018. Gunvor Hultin passed away in 2011.

### **Background**

Dr. and Mrs. Hultin immigrated to the United States from Sweden in 1949. Hultin was very interested in America’s historic western migration and especially the Emigrant Trail. The Hultins had themselves “immigrated” to the Midwest in 1949 and then “emigrated” to California in 1957. The Hultins studied all available literature about the pioneers, including books about the Donner Party. Sources included Stewart’s *Ordeal by Hunger*, J. Goldsborough Bruff’s illustrated writings and Kelly’s *Salt Desert Trails*. Busy as a San Francisco pathologist, Hultin, his wife and children spent ‘long weekends’ exploring the Emigrant Trail in the early 1960’s. Referencing books such as those listed above, they followed the Trail including trips to the City of Rocks, Lassen Cutoff, Nobles Road, Great Salt Desert, Hastings Cutoff, Pilot Spring (now Donner Spring), the Black Rock Desert, Alder Creek Camp and Donner Lake. The Hultin family has photographs of these areas from the early 1960’s that can also be donated if there is interest.

### **Wagon Wheel Group (WW)**

In the book *Salt Desert Trails* by Charles Kelly (Document number WW1), Hultin found on page 140 (WW2) a photograph of abandoned wagons attributed to the Donner Party by the author. Hultin believes the photograph in the book was taken in 1904. Using this photo and the mountains in the background as landmarks, Hultin believed he could use a compass to determine the approximate location of the abandoned wagons, which were

on the Hastings Cutoff. He also referenced photographs on pages 21, 157 and 160 of *Salt Desert Trails* (WWnegI).

The framed map of the Great Salt Desert (WW3) and photos WW4 and WW5 show how Hultin used his compass and Swedish military training to determine what he believed to be the location of the abandoned wagons. Note that he used Silver Island and Floating Island\* as landmarks, as seen in the WW2 photo. The figures *W1*, *W2*, *W3* and *W4* on the map stand for wagon numbers. In May 1963, Hultin traveled to the location with his wife Gunvor and children to look for evidence of the abandoned wagons. He and Gunvor returned to the site in September 1963 to search for remnants of the abandoned wagons. His supplies included a metal detector. The Hultins found a partial wagon wheel just below the desert's surface (WW7 and possibly WWnegL1) and used the metal detector in the vicinity to locate and dig for iron wagon parts (WW16).

Photographs WW 6-22 show the Hultins' dig site, the partial wheel in situ, the partial wheel with adjacent digging and Gunvor Hultin digging in the background, Hultin using his metal detector, the iron wagon parts, the wagon parts handled by Hultin, Gunvor holding the partial wheel, the wheel in Gunvor's backpack, and Gunvor on the desert floor during lightning. Photo WW23 shows Hultin believed to be a decomposing ox with Floating Island\* in background.

Note that photograph WW7 was taken at the same perspective as WW2, the photograph on page 140 of *Salt Desert Trails* with the same mountain landmarks in the background. This photograph may help validate the Hultins' dig site as the location of the abandoned Donner wagons. Hultin believes that this part of the Great Salt Desert is now underwater. In support of this idea, in the 1980's archaeologist David Madsen planned to dig for the abandoned wagons before the area was to be "flooded by a Great Salt Lake pumping project", according to a newspaper article. That expedition was called the Silver Island Expedition and appears from photographs available on the internet to have been conducted near the Hultins' 1963 dig.

It appears that the Hultins returned to their San Rafael, California home with the partial wheel and iron wagon parts, as proof strip WW24 shows the Hultin children making Easter eggs in their kitchen followed by a photograph of the wheel and iron parts laid out on a sheet, which Hultin recalls he had done at home. This may date the Hultin's donation of the Wagon Wheel Group to the Donner Museum not to September 1963, but to after Easter, 1964.

Photograph WW26 shows the partial wagon wheel and iron wheel hub being delivered to a Donner Museum ranger with the Hultins in the picture and the famed Pioneer Monument in the background. Photograph WW27 shows a display case at the Donner Museum with one partial wagon wheel and then (WW28) with the Hultin partial wagon wheel added to the display.

The Hultin family has tried unsuccessfully to determine whether the Donner Memorial State Park still has the Wagon Wheel Group and where it is stored.

\*There appears to be some confusion about which is Crater Island, and which is Floating Island. On photo WW2, Kelly states that the dark mountain with the notched peak on the left is Crater Island, though it appears from maps and other sources that it is Floating Island. Hultin used Floating Island (not Crater Island) as one of his landmarks to locate the abandoned wagon site, as can be seen on map WW3.

### Details of Wagon Wheel Group Donation

Document Number	Description and Approx. Date	Approx. Dimensions
WW1	Green leather-bound book: <i>Salt Desert Trails</i> by Charles Kelly, 1930. Signed by author to Dr. Hultin September 13, 1967.	6.25" x 9.25" x 1"
WW2	Page 140 of <i>Salt Desert Trails</i> book: photograph of abandoned Donner Party wagons with pen notation made by Hultin.	6" x 9"
WW3	Framed original map of the Great Salt Desert with Hultin compass notations showing estimated location of abandoned wagons. Notations <i>W1</i> , <i>W2</i> , <i>W3(k)</i> and <i>W4</i> may indicate wagon locations. 1963.	Frame 10.5" x 12.5" Map 7.5" x 9.5"
WW4, WW5	Two black and white (B&W) proof strips containing five photos of Great Salt Desert map WW3. 1963.	4.5" x 1.5" with three photos 3.5" x 1.5" with two photos
WW6	B&W photo of Gunvor Hultin beginning the search. Floating Island in background. Sept. 1963	3.5" x 5" glossy
WW7	B&W in situ photo of partial wagon wheel uncovered in the desert surface with shovel. Silver Island visible in background and comparable to WW2 photo. Sept. 1963. WWnegL1 may show wheel as originally seen in the desert surface.	4" x 5"
WW8	B&W in situ photo close-up of partial wagon wheel. Sept. 1963	4" x 5"
WW9	B&W in situ photo of wagon wheel with digging nearby. Gunvor Hultin digging in background. Sept. 1963	4" x 5"
WW10	B&W photo of Gunvor Hultin holding partial wagon wheel. Appears to be Silver Island in background. Sept. 1963. Note Gunvor's Chinese hat, which she bought on one of the Hultins' many world travels.	4" x 5"
WW11, WW12	Two B&W photos of Gunvor Hultin with wagon wheel in her backpack. Sept. 1963	3.5" x 5" glossy Scanned- no original
WW13	B&W photo of Gunvor Hultin on desert floor in lightning storm. Note two shovels used as lightning rods. Sept. 1963	3.5" x 5" glossy

WW14	B&W close-up of Gunvor on desert floor. Sept. 1963	4" x 5"
WW15	B&W photo of Hultin setting out with equipment. Sept. 1963	3.5" x 5" glossy
WW16	B&W photo of Hultin using metal detector. Appears to be Silver Island in background. Sept. 1963	4" x 5"
WW17, WW18	Two B&W close-up photos of iron wagon parts, one from side and one from above. Sept. 1963	4" x 5" 4" x 5"
WW19	B&W photo of Hultin holding two of the iron wagon parts. Silver Island in background. Sept. 1963	4" x 5"
WW20	B&W photo of unknown wood artifact in situ. Might be wheel as originally found in situ. See WWnegL1). Sept. 1963	3.5" x 5" glossy
WW21	B&W photo of Hultin holding wagon parts. Sept. 1963	3.5" x 5" glossy
WW22	B&W photo of animal bones(?) in situ with Hultin's glasses. Sept. 1963	3.5" x 5" glossy
WW23, WW23A	B&W photo of possible decaying ox with wagon tracks. Note ring of amino acids due to breakdown of muscle protein; Scan of photo with Hultin notations.	4" x 5" 8" x 10" scanned photo
WW24	B&W proof strip showing: Gunvor, Viveca and neighbor; Hultin children in San Rafael kitchen at Easter; Partial wagon wheel and iron wagon parts on a sheet. Easter 1964?	4.5" x 1.5" with three photos
<b>WW25</b>	B&W proof strip showing partial wagon wheel and wagon parts on a sheet. Easter 1964?	1.5" x 1.5" with one photo
<b>WW26</b>	B&W photo of the Hultins presenting the partial wagon wheel and iron wagon part (wheel hub?) to Donner Museum ranger. Note Pioneer Monument in background. Other items may be animal bones. After Easter 1964.	4" x 5"
<b>WW27</b>	B&W photo of Donner Museum display of a partial wagon wheel. 1964	4" x 5"
<b>WW28</b>	B&W photo of same Donner Museum display with Hultin partial wagon wheel added. 1964	4" x 5"
<b>WW29</b>	B&W photo of another Donner Museum display on the same date. 1964	3.5" x 5" glossy
WWnegA	Negative strip for WW4, WW5	1.5" x 7.5" with five negatives

WWnegB	Negative strip with storm near Floating Island	1.5" x 6" with four negatives
WWnegC	Negative strip of exploring near Floating Island, lightning rod, stuck in mud	1.5" x 6" with four negatives
WWnegD	Negative strip with stuck in mud photos	1.5" x 6" with four negatives
WWnegE	Negative strip with exploring photos	1.5" x 6" with four negatives
WWnegF	Negative strip with exploring photos	1.5" x 4.5" with three negatives
WWnegG	Negative strip including WW15	1.5" x 4.5" with three negatives
WWnegH	Negative strip including WW6, WW23, WW13	1.5" x 6" with four negatives
WWnegI	Negative strip for pp 21, 157 and 160 of <i>Salt Desert Trails</i> book, used by Hultin as location references.	1.5" x 6" with four negatives
WWnegJ	Negative strip including WW22	1.5" x 4.5" with three negatives
WWnegK	Negative strip including WW16, WW19	1.5" x 4.5" with three negatives
WWnegL	Negative strip for WW20, WW9, WW8, WW7	1.5" x 6" with four negatives
WWnegM	Negative strip including wagon parts WW17, WW18	1.5" x 6" with four negatives
WWnegN	Negative strip including WW24, WW25	1.5" x 6" with four negatives
WWnegO	Negative strip including WW26, WW27, WW28	1.5" x 6" with four negatives
WWnegP	Negative strip for TS14 and close-ups of donated wagon parts	1.5" x 4.5" with three negatives
WWnegQ	Negative strip including WW29	1.5" x 6" with four negatives
	22 miscellaneous related B&W photos and eight color slides, Sept 1963 and 1964.	3.5" x 5" glossy photos 2" x 2" slides

### **Tree Stump Group (TS)**

During the Hultin's research of the Donner Party, they learned about the trees that had been cut to snow height by the Donners and other party members camped at Alder Creek (now called Donner Family Camp). Unfortunately, the tall tree stumps still remaining in the early 1960's had not been well protected. While today we have laws protecting historical sites, there appeared to be little protecting the tree stumps at that time. Some stumps had fallen over, and many had been harvested for firewood by campers. Hultin heard that there might be only one stump remaining and, in about 1964, he located a stump ("Stump #1") near the Donner Family Camp. The location was identified by a sign on a large dead tree and a bronze plaque as seen in photo TS1, and a sign reading "Path to George Donner Camp" (TS2). Though the Donner Family Camp's "official" location is said to be at Alder Creek and the TS1 photo shows two Hultin children standing by the Alder Creek dead tree and sign, Hultin says that he found the stump "nearby", possibly at Prosser Creek.

Stump #1 was still standing and appeared to have been cut with an axe at about six feet snow height (TS1). Hultin visited the Donner Museum, spoke to a ranger and offered to bring it to the museum. The ranger said he would be happy to have it. The ranger, who Hultin recalls had a Scandinavian last name, accompanied the Hultins to the site and assisted with digging up the stump. An unidentified male also assisted, as seen in the photos. Once Stump #1 was removed from the ground (TS7), the Hultins drove it to the museum in their truck, with Gunvor Hultin acting as a counterweight to keep the stump in the truck (TS8). Hultin may have affixed a

galvanized metal plate to it with his name on it. He may also have had the ranger mark on a map exactly where it was found. Stump #1 is the most photographed of the Tree Stump Group.

There may have been other stumps (Stumps #2-5) identified and/or procured at the Donner Family Camp by the Hultins or others:

- Photos TS12 and TS13 show two additional stumps (Stumps #2, #3) in situ that are not necessarily contemporaneous with the Stump #1 photos. There is a photo of Viveca Hultin standing next to a narrower, taller stump in situ (Stump #2- TS12) wearing different, warmer clothes than those in her TS3 photo with Stump #1.
- There is a photo of another stump in situ in the snow that may have a see-through split in it (Stump #3- TS13).
- Photo TS14 is a photo of Gunvor Hultin, wearing the clothes she wore when donating the Wagon Wheel Group, viewing a stump outside the museum with a larger, gnarled root ball, which may be Stump #4. TS14 is in the same negative strip (WWnegP) as WW26, which shows the Hultins donating the Wagon Wheel Group. It is unclear whether this stump was donated by the Hultins or if Gunvor was just viewing it. One of the stumps currently in the museum's administration building appears to be Stump #4, as it closely resembles photo TS14.
- Photo TS14 also shows a short stump (Stump #5) lying on its side on a pallet.

The Hultin family has tried unsuccessfully to determine whether the Donner Memorial State Park still has Stump #1 and where it is stored. All photos should be compared to the stumps currently in the possession of Donner Memorial State Park to identify Stump #1 and others pictured in this donation.

#### Details of Tree Stump Group Donation

Document Number	Description and Approx. Date	Approx. Dimensions
<b>TS1</b> <b>TS1B</b> <b>TS1C</b>	B&W proof strip showing: Hultin children with "Site of Geo Donner Camp" sign and bronze plaque at Alder Creek site; Gunvor Hultin standing by "front" of Stump #1 in situ. Gunvor was 5'6" tall; Close-up of axe cuts at top of stump. 1964.	4.5" x 1.5" with three photos 3.5" x 5"
<b>TS2</b>	B&W proof strip showing: Close-up of axe cuts on "back" of Stump #1 in situ; "Back" of Stump #1 in situ; Hultin truck near site where Stump #1 found. Note "Path to George Donner Camp" sign and possible felled stump at center. 1964	4.5" x 1.5" with three photos
TS3	B&W proof strip showing: Hultin children with Gunvor (unknown site); Viveca Hultin with Stump #1 in situ (two photos). 1964	4.5" x 1.5" with three photos

<b>TS4</b>	B&W photo showing Donner Museum ranger next to front of Stump #1 in situ. 1964	3.5" x 4.5" glossy
<b>TS5</b>	B&W proof strip showing: Donner Museum ranger next to front of Stump #1 (same as TS4); Unidentified friend next to Stump #1 in situ. (Two photos). 1964	4.5" x 1.5" with three photos
<b>TS6</b> <b>TS6C</b>	B&W proof strip showing: Johan Hultin next to front of Stump #1 (two photos). Hultin was over 6 feet tall; Donner Museum ranger digging at base of Stump #1. 1964	4.5" x 1.5" with three photos
<b>TS7</b>	Color slide showing back of Stump #1, felled and lying on ground. 1964	2" x 2"
<b>TS8</b>	B&W proof strip showing: Unidentified friend digging at base of Stump #1; Donner Museum ranger with Stump #1 in truck (two photos) Note Gunvor Hultin sitting at top of tree as ballast. 1964	4.5" x 1.5" with three photos
<b>TS9</b>	B&W proof strip showing: Hultin with unidentified friend and Stump #1 in truck (two photos); Hultin handling rope with Stump #1 in truck. 1964	4.5" x 1.5" with three photos
<b>TS10</b>	B&W photo showing Hultin, Donner Museum ranger and unidentified friend celebrating with Stump #1 tied to sawhorses outside Donner Museum. 1964	3.5" x 4.5" glossy
<b>TS11</b> <b>TS11a</b>	B&W proof strip showing: Donner Museum ranger with Stump #1 outside Donner Museum; Hultin, Donner Museum ranger and unidentified friend with Stump #1 tied to sawhorses outside Donner Museum (three photos). 1964	4.5" x 1.5" with four photos
TS12	B&W proof strip showing: Taller, narrower stump in situ (Stump #2); Viveca Hultin standing in front of Stump #2? in situ. 1964. Note: Hultin labeled "At (old) Pass Rd."	4" x 1.5" with two photos
TS13	B&W proof strip showing: "Stump #3" in situ at a snow patch with possible see-through split. Note snowy	3" x 1.5" with one photo

	mountains in background. Hultin labeled this “At (old) Pass Rd.”	
<b>TS14</b>	B&W photo of Gunvor Hultin looking at “Stump #4”, which has a large, gnarled root ball. Gunvor is wearing different clothes than she wore when donating Stump #1. These clothes are the same as seen in photo WW26, when the Hultins donated the Wagon Wheel Group, and is in the same negative strip (WWnegP). Note a possible “Stump #5” lying on the pallet. 1964	3.5” x 5” glossy
TS15-17	Three color slides: Color photo of Stump #1; Two color photos of Viveca by Stump #1 1964.	2” x 2”
<b>TSnegA</b>	Negative strip including TS2	1.5” x 6” with <b>four</b> negatives
<b>TSnegB</b>	Negative strip including TS1	1.5” x 6” with four negatives ( <b>TSnegB2 and TSnegB4</b> )
TSnegC	Negative strip including TS12	1.5” x 3” with three negatives
<b>TSnegD</b>	Negative strip of TS13	1.5” x 2.5” with one negative ( <b>TSnegD1</b> )

### **Hultin Family Photos**

As background, this donation includes scanned photographs of the Hultin family (Johan Hultin, M.D., Mrs. Gunvor Hultin, children Viveca, Peder Anita, Ellen and cousin Dag) exploring the Emigrant Trail in the early 1960’s.

<b>Document Number</b>	<b>Description and Approx. Date</b>	<b>Approx. Dimensions</b>
<b>Hultin Family 1</b>	Emigrating from Minnesota to California in 1957	4” x 6” scan
Hultin Family 2	Emigrant Basin 1960	4” x 6” scan
Hultin Family 3	Emigrant Trail 1962	4” x 6” scan
Hultin Family 4	Trouble on Hastings Cutoff, May 1963	4” x 6” scan
Hultin Family 5, 5A, 5B	City of Rocks, reading Bruff’s diary, May 1963. Scan of two Bruff’s diary illustrations of City of Rocks	4” x 6” scan
Hultin Family 6	“Another Emigrant Trail”, Christmas card 1963	4” x 6” scan
Hultin Family 7	On Nobles Road, Black Rock Desert, 1964	4” x 6” scan

This documentation was prepared by the Hultins’ daughter. For more information about these images and provenance, please contact Truckee-Donner Historical Society at [info@truckeehistory.org](mailto:info@truckeehistory.org) . Dec. 13, 2018 HCS



This documentation was prepared by the Hultins' daughter Ellen Swensen (nee Hultin), with assistance from Johan Hultin and Ellen's siblings Viveca Murphy, Peder Hultin and Anita Hultin. Ellen can be reached at [swenfriends@gmail.com](mailto:swenfriends@gmail.com) or via cell at 925-286-1116. The file name of this document is "Hultin Donation to Truckee Donner Historical Society 11Oct18.pdf"

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<b>Hultin designated identification photo number</b>	<b>Online TDHS Image Collection Identifier</b>
Hultin Family 1	JHC0001
WW25	JHC0002
WW26	JHC0003
WW27	JHC0004
WW28	JHC0005
WW29	JHC0006
TS1	JHC0007
TS1B	JHC0008
TS1C	JHC0009
TS2	JHC0010
TS4	JHC0011
TS5	JHC0012
TS6	JHC0013
TS6C	JHC0014
TS7	JHC0015
TS8	JHC0016
TS9	JHC0017
TS10	JHC0018
TS11	JHC0019
TS11a	JHC0020
TS14	JHC0021
TSnegA1	JHC0022
TSnegA2B	JHC0023
TSnegA3(2)	JHC0024
TSnegA4	JHC0025
TSnegB2	JHC0026
TSnegB4	JHC0027
TSnegD1	JHC0028

- Note WW stands for Wagon Wheel and TS stands for Tree Stump in keeping with Provenance History provided by Donor Hultin. There are 132 images total of which TDHS has uploaded 28 to its online Image Collection.  
HCS 12/14/2018