

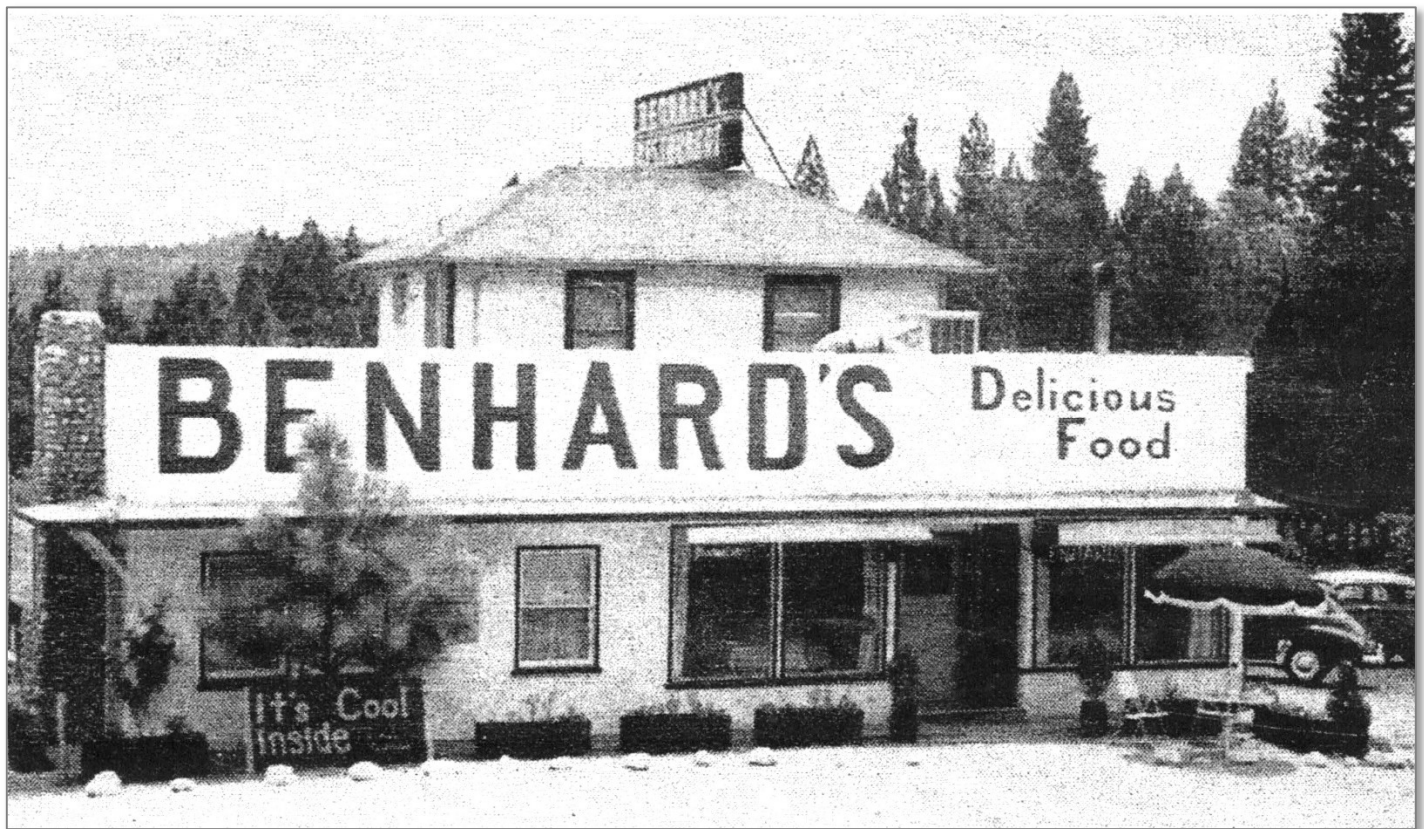
COLFAX COBBLESTONES

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Benhard's of Colfax in the 1940s was Famous for Its Bulletins about Road Conditions in the West

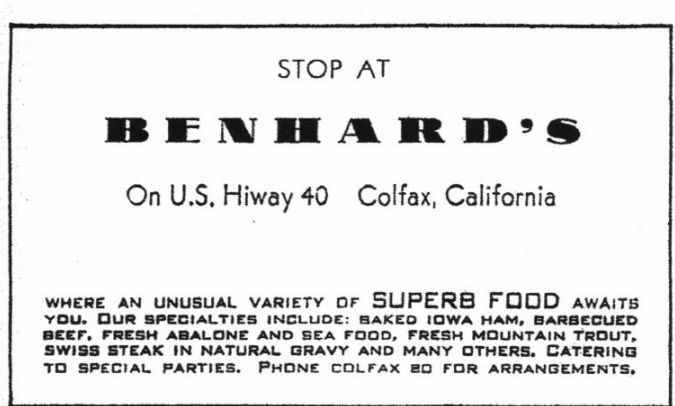


Benhard's restaurant, Colfax, California, 1940s. All photos courtesy of *American Restaurant Magazine*, December 1949.

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Benhard's restaurant in Colfax was famous in the 1940s for two things: its delicious food and its mimeographed Road Information Bulletins that were distributed throughout the western states. The bulletins provided road information about U.S. Routes 40 and 30, describing road conditions across the United States from California to Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York.



The front of Benhard's business card.

Each issue of the bulletin “gave the motorist what he wanted and needed first,” according to an article about Benhard’s that was published in the *American Restaurant Magazine*, December 1949.

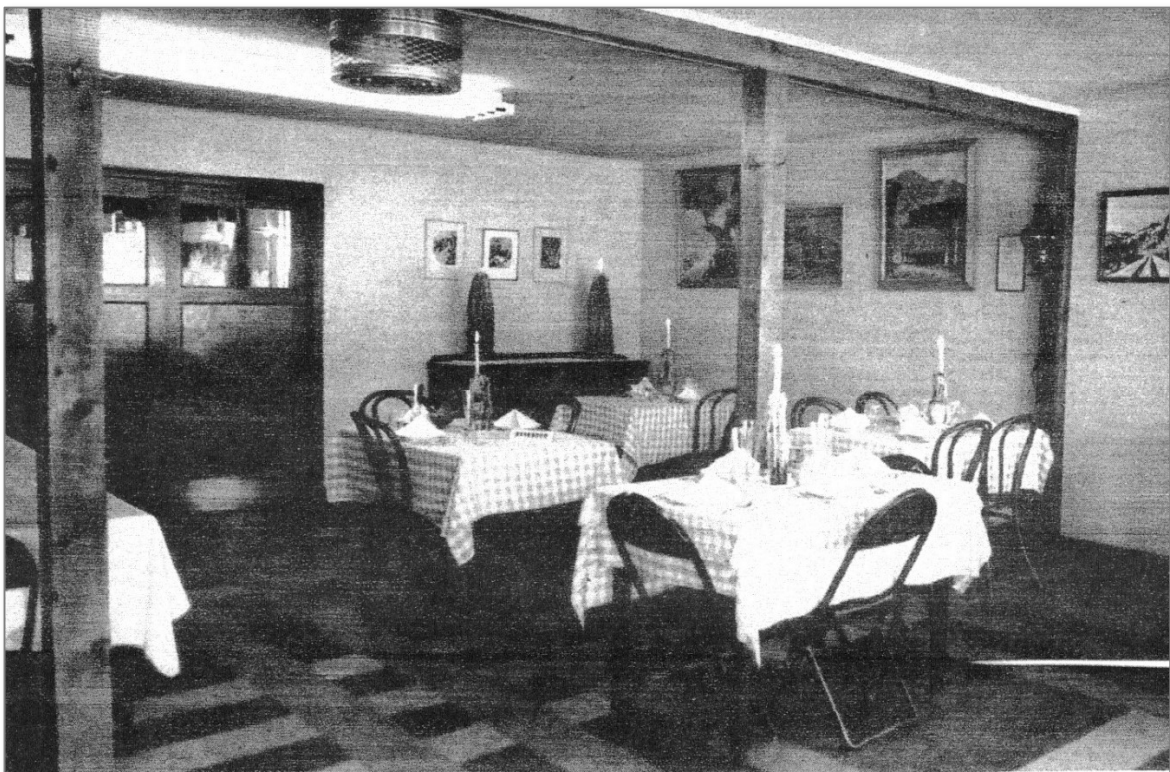
Each issue began with a short overview of the cross-country driving conditions, and then it went “into great detail telling exactly what road conditions” were, identifying detours and possible rough spots, and calling attention to road

stops that had “most of the facilities of civilization.”

For example, the bulletin for October 20, 1949, contained

“...a report on highway deaths and the causes for the fatal accidents; correct information on the exact amount of snow in the Sierra Nevadas; a detailed report on the conditions of the highway; a list of service stations operating 24 hours a day; traffic comparisons on various highways to California; a warning of a speed limit reduction on the Golden Gate bridge; news of a safer entrance into San Francisco; an ‘editorial’ on courteous driving; a few other items of motorist interest; ... and then, and not till then, a message about some of the foods people drive miles to Benhard’s to enjoy.”

In 1945, Mr. and Mrs. F. H. Benhard opened their restaurant two blocks from Highway 40. They had to compete with three restaurants located next to the highway. Mr. Benhard told the *American Restaurant Magazine* that “the motorists felt our competitors served good food, too, and they did.



The interior of Benhard's restaurant, Colfax, California, 1940s.

“That left us with one dream and one restaurant and about one customer.” One of their competitors had received “considerable publicity from a newspaper column” and some of the competitors been recognized by one of the eating guides. At the same time, the Benhards saw that there was

“considerable room for improvement of road information on Route 40; road information that was up to the minute; road information that would tell the motorist exactly what to look for as he wheeled through the mountains eastward or toward San Francisco. The Benhards made an experiment—did a little prospecting, and they struck gold. They began the series of Benhard Road Information Bulletins—simple, mimeographed sheets, which they distributed through dependable service stations on the Overland Route (30 and 40) in the states of Nebraska, Wyoming, and Nevada.”

Grateful drivers visited the restaurant “by the thousands.” The bulletin’s success brought so many people to Benhard’s restaurant that the couple who owned it were able to move to a new location on highway 40.

Where is U.S. Route 40?

U.S. Route 40 is a major east-west highway connecting Utah, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey. **Originally its western terminus was San Francisco, California, but the construction of I-80 replaced the California to Utah section of Route 40.**

Route 40 itself replaced two older highways: the eastern National Road that was created by Congress in 1806 and ran from Maryland to Illinois, and the Victory Highway that was a memorial to WWI veterans and ran from Kansas City to San Francisco. (See “U.S. Route 40,” Wikipedia.)

Colfax’s Main Street Ditch

In the 1930s Colfax had a drainage ditch that ran along Main Street. The ditch required regular maintenance to keep it clear. These four photos of the ditch and some of the people who worked on it are from the Bowers-Keck photo collection of CAHS.



Main Street drainage ditch, Colfax, California, 1933.



Left, the Main Street drainage ditch, 1933. Right, a Main Street drainage ditch excavation crew, unknown year.



Main Street drainage ditch work crew, 1936.

Please support the local businesses and organizations that support CAHS

The following local businesses and organizations are members of the Colfax Area Historical Society, and we appreciate their support. We ask you to support them.

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| American Legion Colfax Post 192 P.O. Box 311 Colfax, CA 95713 | Colfax Dental Center 120 Whitcomb Avenue Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-6244 | Colfax Garden Club P.O. Box 1801 Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-6215 |
| Colfax General Store 6 North Main St. Colfax, CA 95713 rklobner@colfaxnet.com | Colfax Lions Club P.O. Box 664 Colfax, CA 95713 facebook.com/ColfaxCALionsClub/ | DACOMM Providing internet service to the Colfax Heritage Museum, Colfax Visitor Center, businesses, and residences throughout the area. (530) 545-9750 or (530) 210-9918 dacomm.net • support@dacomm.net |
| Grace Hubley Foundation 24820 Ben Taylor Colfax, CA 95713 gracehubleyfoundation.org | Kurtis H. Fox, M.D., Inc. 101 Grass Valley St. Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-2281 | Sierra Business Services 520 South Auburn St, #D Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-2455 barbkelly@foothill.net |
| Sierra Vista Community Center 55 School Street Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-8726 svcc@colfaxnet.org | VFW Auxiliary Post 2003 P.O. Box 1213, Colfax, CA 95713 President: (530) 636-4242 | |

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| <p>To join the Colfax Area Historical Society, fill out this form and mail it with a check to: CAHS, PO Box 185, Colfax, CA 95713. Your subscription will begin with the next quarterly issue.</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____ ZIP _____</p> <p>Phone _____ Email _____</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$20 Individual membership (one person)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$25 Family membership (including children)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$35 Business or Non-Profit Organization membership (includes an ad in each issue of <i>Colfax Cobbles</i>)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Receive the newsletter by email. We will send a copy of each newsletter to your email instead of mailing you a copy.</p> |
|--|--|

Current CAHS Officers and Assignments

President: Dirk Gifford

Vice President: Nancy Hagman

Treasurer: Barbara Kelly

Recording Secretary: Joann Geist

Membership Chair: Chris Miller

Corresponding Secretary: Not filled at this time

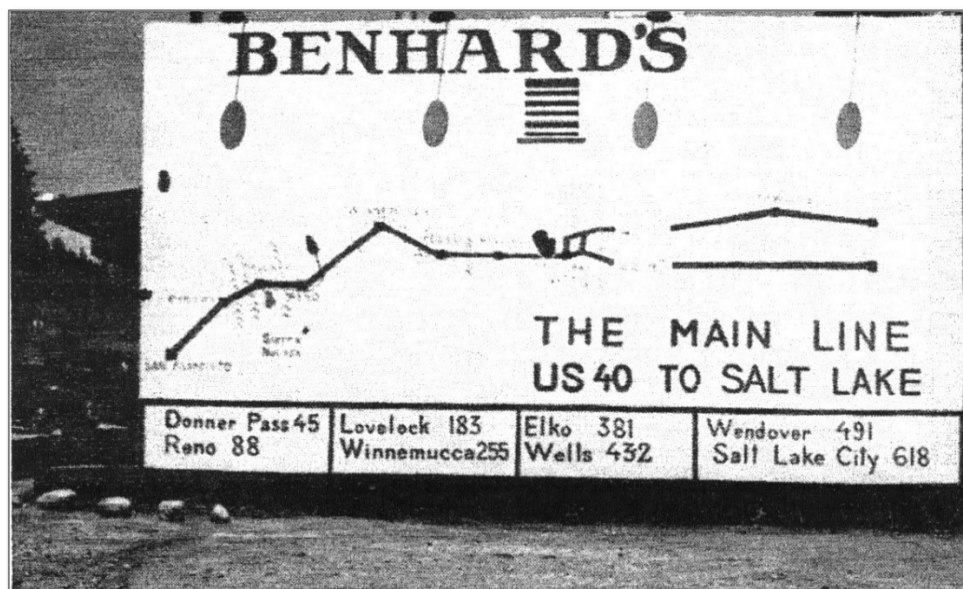
Archives Director: Swend Miller

Museum Director: Irene Allen

Member-At-Large: Roger Staab

Cobbles Editor: Dirk Gifford

Webmaster: Dirk Gifford



| DISTANCES | |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| from BENHARD'S on | |
| U.S. 40 at COLFAX, CALIF. | |
| TO— | Miles |
| Sacramento | 52 |
| San Francisco | 142 |
| TO— | |
| Donner Pass | 45 |
| Reno | 88 |
| Fernley | 122 |
| Lovelock | 183 |
| Winnemucca | 255 |
| Battle Mountain | 308 |
| Elko | 381 |
| Wells | 432 |
| Wendover | 491 |
| Salt Lake City..... | 618 |
| Cheyenne | 1090 |
| Ask for Benhard's Road Information | |
| Bulletin Covering The Overland | |
| Route (U.S. 40/30) | |

Left, a billboard for Benhard's restaurant, Colfax, California, 1949, showing distances from Benhard's to cities in Nevada and Utah on U.S. Route 40. Right, the back of Benhard's business card, showing distances from Benhard's to cities in California, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming.



The Colfax Area Historical Society

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Colfax CA 95713

Phone: (530) 346-8599

Email: museum.colfax@gmail.com

USPS mail: Mail for both the Colfax Area Heritage Museum and the Colfax Area Historical Society is received at PO Box 185, Colfax, CA 95713.

Museum location: The Colfax Heritage Museum is physically located at 99 Railroad St, Colfax, California, in the restored SP Passenger Depot.