

Page 8 NORTH TAHOE WEEK February 28 - March 6, 1985

# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

## Winter Carnivals Not so New

In the upper reaches of the Sierras, the difficulty of attracting sufficient winter business to justify operation (or, in more recent times, the presence of non-essential services) has been overcome by local business people in a variety of ways. The most recent of these promotional efforts, Snowfest, is commencing its 4th Annual visitation on Friday, March 1.

The Sierra region suffered for many years from lack of winter access. In spite of the fact that the Central Pacific railroad first arrived in Truckee in 1868, it was not until 1894 that the nimble intellect of Charles F. McGlashan, then-editor of the town's newspaper and guiding spirit in the early development of Truckee, hit upon a plan by which the snow could be put to the town's advantage rather than serve as a deterrent to commerce.

McGlashan had met with difficulty in transporting a "cultured" monster icicle of his making to the San Francisco midwinter fair, concluding that it would henceforth be more practical to take advantage of Truckee's trackside location and bring the spectators to the spectacle.

Plans for a winter carnival soon took shape. McGlashan urged his fellow businessmen to refrain from "hold up" prices, as the chief aim was fun and not profit. And fun was indeed the order of the day. From McGlashan's sixty-foot icicle grew a collection of events and attractions which included a toboggan slide, ski jumping contests and dogsled races all against a backdrop of icy splendor known as "Ice Palace."

This huge frame structure, covered with chickenwire and sprayed with water to form walls and roof of ice, originally occupied a prominent place in the very middle of the "downtown," and was the dazzling scene of ice skating on a 200 by 700 foot rink. If the skaters should become chilly, they could warm themselves at the several open fireplaces in the building. There was

even night skating around a rink lit by sparkling incandescent bulbs.

By the mid 19-teens, the name of the annual winter festivities was changed to Fiesta of the Snows, and by that time had already been the subject of national news coverage. Though weather occasionally entered the picture and ruined the best-laid plans, in general these promotional activities were quite favorable in their effect on Truckee's winter commerce.

The Sierra Dog Derby, an event of national prominence in sledding circles, was another promotional venture which helped establish the Truckee area as a winter sports destination. Participants included such notable drivers as John Johnson, two-time Alaskan Sweepstakes champ and 1915 winner of the Truckee event. Another popular driver in the early years of the races was "Scotty" Allen, who gained yet more fame in later years with his own brand of dogfood.

Allen himself proved a local attraction, camping with his malamute team on the grounds of the Tahoe Tavern during the winters when that hostelry, located half a mile south of the lake outlet in Tahoe City, was open for winter business.

The Southern Pacific Railroad, which at that time owned the Tavern, capitalized on the successes in Truckee and initiated "Snowball Special" — rail service to the high country for such events as the National Ski Jumping Championships, as well as for similar exhibitions on many winter weekends.

Guests were also offered sleigh riding and tobogganing, and ice skating could be attempted on the rink which was formed by flooding the floor of the Tavern's garage — the space not needed for automobiles as the highway was blocked by snow.

So you see that Snowfest, with all its variety and enthusiasm, takes its place in a long line of promotions which provide something for all comers.

# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

## "Plagued by Gossip"

The publisher of the magazine you are now reading includes in his masthead (that's the little box on page 3 in which are listed the staff members' names, etc.) the admonition "Don't nobody bring me no bad news" In a resort area like Lake Tahoe, there is a stronger-than-normal tendency among the local business population to endorse Johnny Mercer's musical mandate and "accentuate the positive" In light of the local economy's reliance on the goodwill of visitors for its continued fiscal health, this is only sound business practice. But at times the best laid plans of the basin's entrepreneurs have gone astray. And as modern-day basin businessmen know, sometimes the fly-in-the-ointment might as well be a no-seem for all that can be done to isolate and squash it.

Tahoe businessmen in the year 1937 were to experience just such an insubstantial menace, owing to some "bad press" given the area prior to the start of the season by unknown sources. Though later unequivocally dismissed as groundless by health authorities, reports of the discovery of bubonic plague in certain Sierra rodents had a noticeably adverse effect on local tourism that summer.

In a front-page article appearing in the first issue of the *Tahoe Tattler* that season, the report was categorically debunked. "Absurd rumors have been circulated that certain mountain areas have been 'quarantined.' Nothing of the kind has occurred, and has not even been contemplated." The paper quoted the Secretary of the Nevada Board of Health who joined in disclaiming the "anxious reports and reassured the visiting public that "until a few days ago, when their last reports were received, they had not found this year one single rodent among the thousands which they had trapped and examined, which was infected with any disease that could be transmitted to a human being."

However, rumor and hearsay often tend to enjoy an unwarranted longevity, and the topic continued to be an

issue as summer wore on. According to an editorial in the August 6 *Tattler*, a "rather sensational" report had been generated by "unscrupulous resort owners who would divert tourists to areas yielding personal profit." This rather indirect and garbled statement was intended to suggest sabotage, and the *Tattler* went on to note the use of "such lurid phrases as 'plague-infested,' 'under quarantine,' 'bubonic plague' and other bogies."

"That a mountain was made out of a molehill," the *Tattler* continued, "was plainly evidenced in the findings of health officers' subsequent investigations. Yet sensational news stories were built up from one case of a dread disease remotely connected to Tahoe."

The local business community, suffering from an understandable touch of paranoia as a result of bad publicity generated by the hoax, took the defensive in their own advertising efforts, as the following item, which appeared in an August issue of the *Lake Tahoe News*, suggests. Note that along with unqualified claims of local perfection, it is also mentioned that those two blights on vacations taken elsewhere — poison oak and rattlesnakes — were nowhere to be found; this statement perhaps offered to assuage doubts in the minds of vacationists still reeling from the contemplation of plague.

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Ironically, on the same page of the paper which included this coupon offer there appeared a thinly veiled demand, directed at the California State Highway Commission, to complete the project of painting a center white line on the road around the Lake. The author noted that her remarks were prompted by "another accident . . . on hazardous Hogpen Hill" (a stretch of road between Tahoe City and Lake Forest, long since straightened and levelled).

While as a rule the Fourth Estate is not guilty of perpetuating the type of malicious reports which characterized the campaign described here, local entrepreneurs of the modern day continue to labor under misrepresentations which do just as much harm.

The sentiment which holds that weather and road conditions reports in and around the Tahoe Basin often fall somewhat short of complete accuracy is not a new one. Local enterprise has always suffered from those who speak with authority, yet do not have all the facts at their disposal, a regrettable state of affairs in this age of electronic communication.

*Our Tahoe Heritage***A MAN AND HIS**

by Carol Van Etten

**Courtesy of the North Lake Tahoe Historical Society**

As this year marks the 50th anniversary of the completion of Boulder Dam (since renamed for ex-president Herbert Hoover), it seems only fitting that we note the local activities of a major participant in that formidable hydraulic adventure: Henry J. Kaiser, Sr. Fiscal force behind Kaiser Steel, Permanente Cement and the Kaiser Foundation (to name only a few of his exploits), Kaiser was also among the chief executives of the Six Companies which collaborated on the construction of the dam.

Kaiser doubtless had a hand in the selection and purchase of the Tahoe Pines property which constitutes the Southeast corner of Grand Avenue's junction with Highway 89, originally intended for use by the Six Companies. By the mid-1930s, "Henry J." (as he was known to his associates) was already an avid participant in the Tahoe summer scene, and when this enthusiasm was not shared by his fellow executives, he acquired the property for his personal use. With characteristic impatience, Kaiser soon put his dollars to work, pushing for the swift transformation of the 14.4 acre lowland into an estate to rival any on the Lake.

Being much involved in the activities of the Tahoe Yacht Club (he had risen through the hierarchy to Commodore in 1938), Kaiser included among requisite structures in his compound a stone boathouse and a "harbor house," the one suitable to the accommodation of his boats, and the other to the entertainment of his many marine-minded guests. The boathouse included four drive-in stalls, and was the scene of operations for Kaiser's numerous bids for Lake racing titles over the years.

Kaiser was frequently criticized by his racing competitors for his unabashed quest for trophies, backed as it was by unlimited funds. He almost invariably entered more than one regatta event, and while most competitors did the work on their own boats (keeping the competition on a



The newly-completed Kaiser estate reposes beneath

relatively amateur level) the speed-obsessed steel baron was able to finance professional mechanics, a circumstance which incurred the wrath of those who felt that his sense of fair play left something to be desired.

It was thus that some responded with a scarcely-concealed mirth to several misadventures involved in the construction of the estate. Prior to Kaiser's development of the property, it had been the marshy retreat of local waterfowl. Before any of the actual construction could begin, an untold quantity of topsoil, dredged from the delta formed by the confluence of several tributaries of Blackwood Creek, had to be trucked in to raise the elevation of the plot several vital feet.

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# TAHOE CASTLE



photo courtesy of Lillian Vernon Farr

inter's white mantle in March of 1938. (C.W. Vernon)

This engineering project was deemed a foolish tampering with Mother Nature by some, and their criticism was given certain credence when a flood swept down Blackwood Canyon a few years later, causing \$55,000 damage to the Kaiser property.

Perhaps the greatest blunder of the project resulted from a miscalculation of the fluctuating Lake level. In determining the positioning of the estate's lakefront structures, the Lake's natural rim was taken as potential high water. Following several seasons in which drought conditions had necessitated the pumping of the Lake in order to supply downstream users of the Truckee River with water, this appeared to be an adequate precaution against changes in the Lake level. Yet the planners' calculations overlooked the established reservoir, maximum legal limit of which was six feet above this natural rim.

The oversight proved an unfortunate mistake, for in the high-water years which followed, the original electrical service to the boathouse and harbor house had to be abandoned, and a false floor built several feet above the original, putting headspace in the bar at a premium.

Several sources give 1939 as the year of the estate's original construction. However, a point of history should be once-and-for-all clarified by a *Tahoe Tattler* story of August 30, 1935, which called attention to the local building boom that season, and specifically noted the newly-

constructed Kaiser estate, "... with its main lodge and guest houses, boathouse, bridges and heavy stone rustic fence, set among the pines and aspen of the Lake Shore." An accompanying photo identifies the property conclusively as the future Fleur du Lac.

The selection of this Teutonic title, which means literally "Flower of the Lake," was the result of a rather lengthy deliberation. The July 9, 1937 issue of the *Tattler* supplies some insight into the matter. "No longer is the picturesque Henry Kaiser estate nameless, proclaimed the paper. "Today it is christened 'FLEUR DE LAC' (sic). It took the Kaisers several years to hit just the right name. Spurred on, they settled down and named the guest cottages and everything is running smoothly. Over the fourth of July weekend, 25 guests enjoyed their gracious hospitality."

Kaiser was an annual summer resident of Tahoe Pines through the early post-war years, and (as is common with ostentatious displays of wealth) was the subject of considerable local gossip and speculation. In the mid-1950s, following the death of his son, Henry, Jr., Kaiser turned his Tahoe interests over to the Kaiser Foundation, relocating in Hawaii, where he oversaw the development of his famous pink Hawaiian Village.

The foundation in turn sold to Peter DeMaria, who leased the property to the Fleur du Lac Academy, a private school which had originally used as its campus the facilities of nearby Chambers' Lodge (now Chambers Landing). The school failed to live up to expectations on the Tahoe Pines site, and again relocated - this time to a campus on the Feather River.

James Viso, guiding force of the Academy during its occupancy of the Tahoe Pines campus, acquired the Fleur du Lac property from De Maria in 1968 with the expectation of constructing condominiums on the site. Viso's plans, which originally included the construction of a 60-unit, three-phase development, were thwarted at every turn by state, federal and regional agencies. Following almost a decade of court battles, approval was finally given for a portion of the original plan in exchange for Viso's abandonment of the proposed third phase, which would have included a restaurant atop Eagle Rock, on a parcel of land across Highway 89.

In the fall of 1973, a brief lull in the litigation gave way to a flurry of activity at Fleur du Lac, chosen as a major location in the filming of "Godfather II." Scores of locals made their movie debuts as extras in the Paramount production, when the estate became the proverbial Sierra hideaway of the Sicilian brotherhood. Locally-owned vintage autos and water craft helped to lend flavor to the illusion, and the former grandeur of the estate was given vibrant - if flickering - life.



A beaming Henry J. Kaiser, Sr. receives the prized Lake Championship trophy from Edwin Letts Oliver following the 1935 Tahoe Yacht Club Regatta. (C. W. Vernon photo courtesy of Lillian Vernon Farr)

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However, the episode ended on a sour note for Viso when, following the departure of the Paramount production crews, it was discovered that some of the estate's unique furnishings, including several ornate light fixtures and tapestries (gifts to Kaiser from European royalty who had been his guests) turned up missing. Viso sued the studio and eventually recovered \$300,000 in damages, though none of the articles in dispute were ever returned.

The legal expenses incurred by Viso in the long battle to acquire permits for his proposed development eventually proved fatal to the fulfillment of the dream - at least by Viso himself. However, whittled to 22 units, the project saw fruition under the regime of Fred Sahadi and Fred Andrews, who took title to the property in 1979. Andrews has since bowed out of the partnership, and today Fred Sahadi guides the destiny of the opulent development.

Architecture of the new construction, described as "Tahoe Normandie," bears a certain similarity to Kaiser's original structures, and while the property has seen many changes in the half-century since the international king-pin first developed it, Fleur du Lac retains something of its quality as an island, cut off from surrounding Tahoe Pines by a formidable rock wall such as Kaiser himself might have built, were he still its owner today.

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# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

California's mineral wealth, though not its primary claim to riches, has historically been a vital factor in the state's development. The Sierras and their foothills have proved the most important source of these geological treasures, and the Tahoe area owes its first real population "boom" to the quest for precious metal.

In the summer of 1863, the Truckee River corridor was the scene of a mass influx of treasure seekers, their arrival sparked by the rumor of a rich assay of ore discovered there. Knoxville and Claraville, were two habitations which sprang up in the vicinity of the diggings, and for a few feverish months of activity boasted a combined population of 800 souls. These momentarily vibrant villages consisted chiefly of canvas- and brush-roofed structures. The only edifice suggesting permanence was a log cabin store operated by one James Tracy, the remains of which survived (in a roofless and rather dilapidated condition) into the 1930s.

Knoxville (named for one of the two miners who staked original claims on the site) and Claraville folded as fast as they had risen when the quality of ore failed to justify initial expectations. The short-lived shanty town did have a certain progressive effect on the area, however, exposing a great number of people to the wonders of Lake Tahoe, a mere eight miles distant. Disenchanted with mining prospects in general, a few stayed on to establish the community of Tahoe (its name was not officially changed to Tahoe City until 1949).

One of these miners-turned-settlers was William Pomine, a native of Alsace-Lorraine and more recently a resident of Forest Hill, at the western end of what would become Placer County. When the Truckee River boom towns faded, Pomine moved to Tahoe's lakeshore, where he established the Tahoe House about half a mile north-east of the Lake outlet.

Pomine's nephew "Ernie," in a recorded interview conducted in 1966, recalled another incidence of "gold fever" which he and brother Frank, then schoolboys, observed with great amusement. This later hoax - intentionally per-

petrated, occurred almost a generation later in Glenbrook, causing the immediate desertion of local lumber mills in favor of the promise of bonanza riches. For a time, the local storekeeper (who was responsible for generating the totally-unfounded rumor) did a thriving business in picks, shovels and gold pans. But once again, the "rush" died almost as quickly as it was born, and the disgruntled momentary miners returned to their regular livelihoods - wiser, if not richer.

"Ernie" Pomine, born in Glenbrook in 1879, was witness to much of the settlement of the Tahoe region, and observed several such stampedes after fleeting wealth. He noted that though gold has been discovered in all directions surrounding the Lake, there had never been a significant strike inside the Basin. The California foothills had produced the precious ore in quantities sufficient to populate the state with ore-hungry immigrants from all corners of the globe, and two decades later the Nevada mines proved among the richest in the world. To the southeast lie the Nevada mining districts, containing a variety of mineral deposits. Yet the Tahoe Basin itself has proved virtually devoid of geological treasure.

In the early 1930s, a group headed by Lee Noonchester launched still another attempt to prove this theory false. Having discovered a vein of gold on the mountainside southwest of Homewood, they began to develop a horizontal shaft on the site. This was known as the Noonchester Mine (or Tahoe Treasure Mine), and the company called itself the Consolidated Mining Company.

Don Huff, Sr., at that time owner of Homewood Resort, recalls a party of potential Big City investors who visited the site on an autumnal inspection tour. Though the group did verify the existence of a vein of gold, they left without committing any capital to the project. At that time, gold was valued at \$32 an ounce, and in spite of the day's comparatively low wages, the cost of extricating and processing the ore prevented the operation for several years, the shaft was finally abandoned when the company filed for bankruptcy.

In spite of several efforts to discover and develop Tahoe's mining resources, it appears that the greatest concentration of precious metals are to be found at the north and south ends of the Lake, where they daily drop into the mouths of hungry slot machines. Perhaps the Creator felt that Tahoe had already been blessed with enough riches of other sorts - scenic, vegetative and aqueous - and saved geological riches for other locations. Or perhaps the mineral wealth of the Tahoe Basin has simply escaped the scrutiny of ore-seekers and has yet to be discovered?

from being financially  
successful; The operation  
continued for several years,  
until...

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## Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten

Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

Tahoe City wasn't much of a town in 1927. The year-round population numbered less than 50. Several restaurants managed to exist on a seasonal basis (one in a tent), and an inn, a garage-filling station, a grocery and an open-air produce stand rounded out the community's commercial activity. Such was the status of this isolated Sierra habitation when Myrtle Gallinger, lately of Oakland, stepped off the train in March of that year, accompanied by Ernest and Northrup Pomin, Trustee and Clerk of the local school board.

The Pomin, while vacationing in San Francisco, had contacted the Kent Teacher Agency in regard to the hiring of a replacement for one Mrs. Fleckenstein, the former (and exclusive) teacher at Tahoe Lake School. Mrs. Gallinger, whose husband Phil had stayed behind to dispose of their Bay Area business property, was soon duly installed in a little white three-room cottage on the lower corner of the intersection of Grove Street and Highway 28 (now the site of the Village Store).

In an interview given in November, 1984, Mrs. Gallinger recalled an early incident in her Tahoe City career which revealed her lack of experience with high-country living. "One night," she recalled, "I came home from school and - horrors! - in the kitchen was a stack of wood that went clear to the ceiling. I thought, 'Oh - this in the kitchen? What will I ever do?' Well, I found out before long that it was a wonderful thing to have that wood. "Grandpa" (Robert Montgomery) Watson (local Constable at that time), while I was at work, had brought the wood and poured it in that kitchen. He knew exactly what he was doing. I soon found out."

Mrs. Gallinger soon demonstrated that she, too, knew exactly what she was doing. Her adaptability, positive attitude and gift for teaching were evident from the start. She is quick to credit a measure of her success to the support of the community, especially in the person of Mrs. Northrup "Northie" Pomin. "Before I even went into the

school," she remembered, "I can see her trudging up that (Grove Street) hill in boots and skiwear, carrying a big mopbucket and water, scrubbing that school thoroughly to be ready for opening Monday."

To Mrs. Gallinger and the students fell the duty of building and maintaining the fire in the woodstove that heated the school. This was somewhat mitigated by the fact that prior to 1950, the local academic year ran from March to early December, though the early and late portions of the school calendar included plenty of short, cold days.

The curriculum was strictly outlined in an impressive volume titled "Manual and Course of Study for the Placer County Schools," presented to the new teacher on her arrival. But as time went on, Mrs. Gallinger began to supplement the basic plan with activities and projects inspired by local circumstances and opportunities. In one occasion, the children made and sold jelly to raise money for another of their projects - the construction of an outdoor fireplace. One year, Mrs. Gallinger arranged for her students to meet with two Washo Indians - seasonal residents of Tahoe City - from whom they purchased two baskets.

Dramatic presentations were a popular school activity, with nursery rhymes, historical pageants and original works among the school's many productions. Tahoe Tavern Manager Tim Butler was generous with the use of the resort's facilities, where the fledgling thespians' efforts were given a professional aura when performed on the Casino stage.

Physical education was a rather spontaneous affair during Mrs. Gallinger's tenure. Outdoor activities included games of baseball and One-O-Cat, sledding and skiing (with pupils furnishing the equipment) and swimming in summer. On warm days, the whole student body would walk down to the Commons Beach, where Lou Ehret, a Red Cross volunteer, conducted swimming lessons.

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## Our Tahoe Heritage

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Typical field trips took students to many local points of interest: the cross on the hill above town, the remains of Knoxville (an abandoned mining camp on the Truckee River) and the Fish Hatchery. In 1939, Mrs. Gallinger was instrumental in organizing an all-school trip to San Francisco to visit the International Exposition, a memorable experience especially for students who had never been outside the Tahoe Basin.

In 1950, Mrs. Gallinger retired from teaching, having also served as the County Board of Education's first Tahoe representative. During the later years of her career, she had had occasion to teach many children whose parents had been her early pupils, and 20 years after her retirement, they all turned out to honor her at a gala reunion at the Tahoe Inn (now Victoria Station).

Her former students and members of the community at large continue to sing her praises. In a letter to Lillian Farr in 1971, former Tahoe Lake student Nellie Pomin noted the careers of several local educators, concluding with the remark that "when I think of Tahoe teachers, there was only one - dear Mrs. Gallinger. And strangely enough, she wasn't even one of my teachers."

Myrtle Gallinger has left her mark on the Tahoe City community, not simply by the competent performance of her duties as local educator, but through the exemplary attitudes and actions which have governed her own life. If, as it is said, children learn by example, then the children of Tahoe City's yesteryear have been blessed with lessons of truly rare quality.

## Government Acquisition of 64 Acres

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# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten

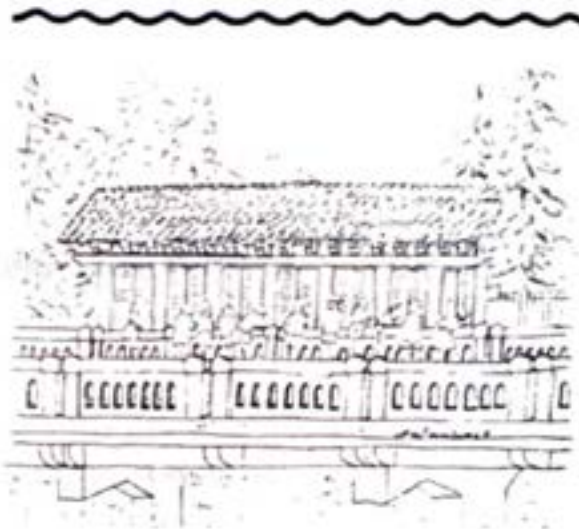
Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

Recent local excesses of precipitation have tended to draw public attention to the prudent management of this questionable beneficence. The level of water in the Tahoe Basin has, since the arrival of "civilization" on its western perimeter, been the subject of perpetual - and often heated - controversy. In fact, within a decade of the founding of a settlement at the Lake Outlet, attempts to improve on Mother Nature's allocation of water were already in force.

Initially, these efforts took the form of crib dams, the construction of which made Tahoe, in effect, a reservoir. The first of these rather crude structures, built by one Colonel Alexis Von Schmidt in 1870, was located several hundred feet downstream of the Outlet, and was intended as a means of backing up sufficient water that accumulations of logs could be "flushed" down the river to Truckee mills on the opening of its five gates. This structure was succeeded by another of like purpose, built by the Bliss Company at the Lake Outlet.

By 1900, lumber interests had given way to a seasonal economy based on tourism, and the construction of Tahoe Tavern (half a mile south of the outlet), along with a growing number of lakefront summer homes, led to increasing concern over the maintenance of a water level within certain limits. The importance of a constant supply of water for communities along the Truckee River corridor (and for farms which owed their existence to the Newlands Reclamation Project) pointed to government control of the Lake Outlet.

Department of the Interior files regarding Federal acquisition of the land surrounding a proposed "outlet works" reveal a lively correspondence between its own Geological Survey, the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Attorney's office. Earliest of these letters, dated October 7, 1902, makes reference to the recent sale of the property in question and recommends prompt action in the matter of Federal acquisition, whether by purchase



LAKE TAHOE OUTLET GATES AT FANNY BRIDGE.  
(drawing by William Frances Bisbee)

agreement with the owners (noted inaccurately in this initial correspondence as the Filfriston Pulp and Paper Co., the Truckee River General Electric Co., Nevada Power Co. and Truckee River farmers) or by condemnation proceedings.

A decided emphasis on the urgency of the acquisition was spelled out in this preliminary letter, authored by Geological Survey Director Charles D. Walcott: "There can be no mistake in purchasing it, because it must be

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controlled at an early date in the development of irrigation from the waters of the Truckee River . . . There is a continual danger, if the title is not in the U.S., of complications of one kind or another which may become quite serious."

According to a subsequent letter of Mr. Walcott's to the Secretary of the Interior dated May 11, 1903, a group which included brothers Mortimer and Herbert Fleishhacker, Messrs. Schwabacker (junior and senior), Mr. Heckman and P.L. Flannigan of Reno claimed title to the property. The Donner (Lumber and) Boom Company, contracting with one Murray F. Vandal(l), actually controlled the outlet, with the intent of utilizing the water for power purposes.

The Fleishhacker group noted, according to Walcott, that they had acquired this property for the marvelously discounted price of \$10,000, owing to the expediency required in the division of an estate of which it had been a part. The land's actual value, they felt, far exceeded this investment, and their asking price to the government was \$100,000, a figure arrived at only in the face of the pending condemnation suit.

Negotiations and legal maneuvering continued for some time, with neither side willing to give any ground. Exactly how the change in ownership finally transpired will perhaps never be known, as no correspondence between July of 1904 and June of the following year is included in the Department of the Interior files. However, a letter of June 22, 1905, recommending the award of a contract for construction of a concrete dam, evidences the government's inevitable success in securing title.

In the end, the legal basis of Federal acquisition of the property hinged on Tahoe's bi-state status. While the Lake's outlet (as well as nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of its surface area) is firmly in California, the Truckee River's eventual terminus is Pyramid Lake, Nevada. Thus, control of Tahoe Basin waters remains under Federal jurisdiction, a status that continues to this day.

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# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

## "Homewood: All The Name Implies"



Guests enjoy a leisurely morning on the Hotel Homewood porch, about 1913. (Photo courtesy of Gerald R. Jonsson, Jr.)

While a countless number of Lake Tahoe's west shore resorts have bloomed and faded over the years like so many fragile blossoms, several such enterprises have managed to span half a century, their appeal surviving changes of ownership and the whims of the vacationing public. One such Homewood hostelry can trace its origins back over three quarters of a century to the summer of 1910.

It was in the spring of that year that Arthur and Annie Jost of Woodland, California, began construction of their Hotel Homewood, an imposing three-story structure on

the lakeshore between Fawn Avenue and Silver Street. The hotel property consisted of the parcels numbering 87 through 94 in a tract of land subdivided by George McConnell in 1896. The ground floor of the Jost's new building consisted of a kitchen and a dining room, with the two upper stories devoted to sleeping accommodations for up to 42 persons.

A pier constructed during the Jost's first summer of operation became the delivery point for the Homewood post office, established the year before, and thereafter the Jost's pier was the bustling hub of local transportation and



communication. Since no road passable by automobile connected Homewood with Tahoe City, travel was almost exclusively by boat, and the Steamers TAHOE and NEVADA, which shared duty as mail packets, also carried passengers to points around the lake, for excursions as well as to appointed destinations for extended vacations.

Hotel Homewood was from the first an affordable alternative to such posh retreats as Tahoe Tavern (six miles to the north) and The Tallac (a dozen miles to the south), and the popularity of the Jost's high-mountain hostelry grew each year. A number of cabins and platform tents soon dotted the hotel grounds, providing all manner of accommodations to suit the requirements of almost any visitor.

Recreational activities included sunning and bathing on the resort's acclaimed pebble beach, rowing, fishing, hiking and - in the evening - dancing. A large, open-air platform adjoining the hotel was initially the scene of these nocturnal activities. However, this location proved to be too close to the hotel for guests who had elected to retire early, and within a few years the Josts had completed an indoor dance pavilion on one of the parcels across the highway. Dances held in this commodious hall, festooned with Chinese lanterns and draped with bunting, were a popular diversion which drew crowds from up and down the west shore and beyond. Over the years, many different musical groups occupied the bandstand, the best known being Eddie Howard, a Woodland native who went on to national fame as a vocalist and bandleader. Even after he had gained a wide following, Howard continued to return to the Resort each fall for several weeks of relaxation before returning to San Francisco to begin his long-running winter engagement there.

Arthur Jost passed away in the early 1920s, but with the help of a hired manager, Mrs. Jost continued to operate the concern (by then known as "Homewood Resort") into the late 1930s. However, ill health was beginning to take its toll, and following a stroke, Mrs. Jost determined to sell the property.

It was about that time that Don and Bernice Huff, also of Woodland, heard of the resort being for sale, and in the fall of 1938, they completed negotiations to purchase the property. The following spring was a busy one for the Huffs, who contracted with local builder Norman Mayfield for an extensive remodelling of the hotel. This main building had seen little in the way of renovation since the

**HERITAGE** Continued on page 16

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#### **HERITAGE** continued from page 12

Josts first opened their doors to the public in 1910, but now it put on a brand new face. The former kitchen was paneled in knotty pine and became the bar (a facility not available on the premises in Mrs. Jost's time), while the dining room, formerly in the center of the building, was moved to the lake side, affording diners a sweeping panorama of Upson Bay.

Another of the Huff's additions to an already popular list of amenities was the Snack Shack, a food concession located at the head of the Resort pier. Here guests and day-use visitors could procure a delicious hamburger, an ice cream cone or a postcard without leaving the beach area.

Across the highway, on the foundation of the Jost's former dance pavilion (which had collapsed under the weight of heavy snows the winter prior to the sale of the Resort) the Huffs built a commercial structure which housed a beauty salon and barber shop, a dress shop and a curio store. Today the building is part of the Homewood Ski Area - the cream colored commercial structure situated on the highway directly below the ski hill. An express office and Union 76 filling station were also on this property, offering visitors all the conveniences of home away from home.

In 1964, after 25 years of operating their thriving business, Don and Bernice Huff sold the resort to Helen Alrich. Mrs. Alrich's plans included the demolition of some of the property's hopelessly aged structures and the upgrading of others, with the construction of additional accommodations to follow. However, it was about this same time that construction of the Basin-wide sewer system was moving through Homewood. The staggering cost of connecting the resort to the sewer on a per-unit basis, plus the seemingly insurmountable pile of agency-generated red tape, finally dissuaded Mrs. Alrich from pursuing her objective. In 1963, she abandoned her plans and sold the property to the Topol brothers - Nathan, Peter and Steven.

Since that time, the resort has begun to show signs of a rebirth, with the renovation of the Huff's old Snack Shack into a charming lakeside cafe, and the revegetating of the resort's grounds - balding from years of trampling feet - with truckloads of native plants. Perhaps the future holds yet more marvels for visitors to Homewood Resort, harkening to times past, when Homewood was, in the words of Mrs. Jost, "all the name implies."

NORTH TAHOE WEEK March 27 - April 2, 1988 Page 8

# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Eiten  
Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

## "Get 'em While They're Hot"

The rarified air found at Tahoe's high altitude is notorious for inducing a hearty appetite in even the most indifferent eaters, and what better cure for the mile-high munchies than a delectable donut, tasty turnover or flaky croissant?

Down through the ages, men have hungered after fresh-baked delights, yet in Tahoe's early days, such goods were hard to come by. A few local coffee shops offered homebaked pie, with an occasional donut trucked in from Sacramento to break the monotony, yet the Tahoe area could not boast a proper bakery prior the mid-1930s.

However, during the latter half of that decade, local entrepreneurs made up for lost time with the almost simultaneous opening of two bake shops at the north end of the lake. About 1935, followers of raised dough were delighted to discover a fledgling bakery at north stateline. In 1937, after several successful seasons at the original location (in what is now the Crystal Bay Steakhouse), this business, known as the Brockway Bakery, moved to the foot of the Brockway grade, where a well-earned reputation for fine baked goods continued to grow.

In 1956, The Brockway Bakery was purchased by the Wainscoat family who continue, 30 years later, to offer a delectable assortment of baked marvels at the same storefront established nearly half a century ago.

A second North Tahoe raised dough dispensary, started about the same time as the Brockway Bakery, was Hoyt's Doughnut King. Located in Brockway Vista (now better known as Kings Beach), the business advertised "The Same Famous Doughnuts You Have Enjoyed From Coast To Coast," and boasted full fountain service in addition to their baked goods. However, this wayside stop, managed by Roy D. Kelly, did not enjoy the popularity of its competition and faded from view after only a few years of operation.

No discussion of local bakeries would be complete without mention of the Tahoe City Bakery, founded by Leonard Bury in 1951. Originally located in the Vernon Building (in the storefront now occupied by North Shore Travel), the Bury's marvelous bakery quickly earned a reputation as

the place to go for a tasty variety of treats as well as convivial conversation. With the construction of the Safeway Shopping Center in Tahoe City, the Burys moved to new quarters, their proximity to the new Post Office enhancing the appeal of an already popular community gathering place. Bury sold his thriving business one year prior to a second relocation, caused by the development of the Lighthouse Center. Now located on the other side of the Post Office, the bakery continues an active trade under the ownership of Brian and Lynn McKeever.

A comparative newcomer in the realm of local pastry palaces was the Starz Bakery, located in the Waterwheel building next to Fanny Bridge in Tahoe City. Bill and Bonnie Starz, who first opened The Starz Restaurant in 1975 (in the building which had originally been Donaldson's Restaurant - later Old Tahoe Junction Land Company and now Squaw Valley Sports) featured homebaked breads and desserts as part of their regular menu.

The overwhelming popularity of such items as their 13-grain bread and carrot cake suggested the feasibility of a separate retail bake shop, and several years later, their bakery opened for business just down the street. Assisted by Ralph Taylor (whose Taylor's Bakery in Tahoe Park had been a popular stop in the 1960s), the Starz operation was a growing concern, employing as many as five bakers during the busy summer months.

Mr. and Mrs. Starz sold their business in 1981 to the Harringtons, formerly of New Orleans, with Mr. Starz staying on to instruct the new owners in the fine points of high altitude baking. However, under the new ownership, business did not continue with its original success, and the bakery recently closed its doors.

Today half a dozen bakeries can be found between Tahoe City and north stateline, with several more specialty bake shops in Squaw Valley. And, in spite of the increasing emphasis on diet, with its prohibitions against such indulgence, the urge to indulge with a strawberry torte or a cheese croissant is as strong as ever among advocates of culinary gratification, assuring a healthy future for our local bakers.

Page 6 NORTH TAHOE WEEK through May 28, 1986

## Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

# NO ONE CALLED T:

In the realm of trailers and housecars, the last few decades have wrought some marvelous changes. The very designation "trailer" hearkens back to the days when archetypes of the modern motor coach were little more than transient sheet-metal teardrops which limited one's maximum legal speed to 25 miles per hour.

Half a century ago, the seasonal nature of Tahoe life in general joined forces with the austere designs of the early tow-behinds to encourage their strictly temporary use. Trailer Camps were the rule, with nightly and weekly rates available. Trailer living at that time actually bore a decided resemblance to camping, as the first models merely provided weatherproof portable storage for one's belongings rather than any actual shelter for their owners.

However, the fledgling industry was responsive to the buying public, and enlargements and modifications soon rendered the state of the art habitable, at least on an overnight basis. Tahoe's brief building season encouraged the proliferation of these haul-in haciendas, and by the late 1930s, permanent trailer "parks" existed in both Kings Beach and Tahoe Vista.

Today's Tahoe Vista Mobile Estates, a 62 space park now managed by Howard and Jan Wilson, has had five or six owners during its half-century of existence. Kings Beach boasts no less than six trailer and RV parks, the largest and oldest being North Shore Mobile Home Park, managed by Sue and John Stafford. An addition to this park, in the 1950s increased its capacity to 45 spaces, including some for RVs. Several Kings Beach facilities offer trailer spaces as a supplement to their rental cabins. These include Blue Waters Lodge and Trailer Park, with 14 spaces and the Barber family's Hand of Fortune Trailer Park, with 12 RV spaces in addition to its four rental cabins. O'Brien's Trailer Park, Rainbow Court and Whispering Pines round out the facilities available in Kings Beach.

Since the early 1970s, a diminutive Tahoma trailer park, begun by Paul Silvia, has provided northeastern El Dorado County with a limited number of mobile home spaces. Located on 10th Street, this seven to ten space facility is now owned and operated by Bob Campbell, who purchased the operation on Silvia's retirement. As early as the mid-1920s, contracts for deeds issued on the sale of some west shore subdivision property specifically prohibited the presence of trailers, even on a temporary basis, and as a result, Tahoma is the only west shore community where mobile homes can be found.

Art Frodenberg initiated the first trailer park in Tahoe City in the early 1950s. Between 1949 and 1960, Frodenberg had the job of gatekeeper of the outlet dam in Tahoe City. Frodenberg supplemented this income not only by an accounting and tax preparation business, but by renting out trailer spaces on the grounds surrounding the Gatekeeper's residence. The sweeping blacktop lane by which his tenants gained access to the trailers is still in evidence today, forming a circle around the property, which is now a State Park.

Frodenberg's son-in-law, Daryl DeWalt, was his successor in the job of Gatekeeper, and continued to operate the trailer park until 1968, when responsibility for control of the gates came under the jurisdiction of the Federal Watermasters Office in Reno and a resident gatekeeper was no longer needed.



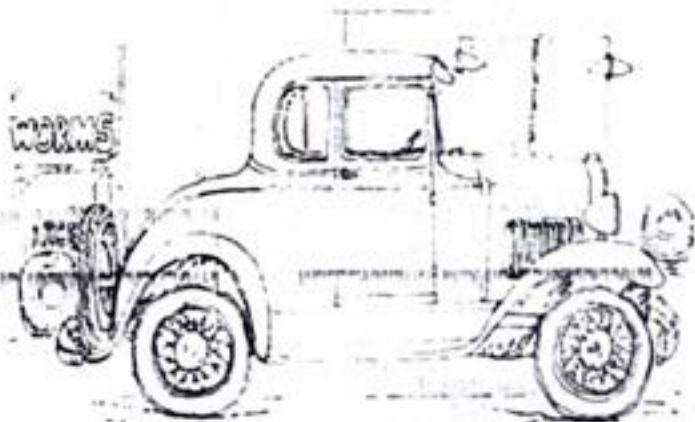
The popularity of Frodenberg's trailer park kept it operating at capacity, suggesting the practicability of a second such enterprise in Tahoe City. About 1955, the potential for another park was realized when the partnership of William Cook and Jim Williamson undertook the development of a 150-space facility on the property directly across the highway from Tahoe Tree Company. This venture, known as the Tahoe City Trailer Court (not connected with the present Tahoe City Trailer Court) lasted about three years, making up in color for what it lacked in longevity. But the enterprise eventually succumbed, leaving a void that was soon filled by the efforts of another partnership.

# HEM RVs

In 1959, with the Squaw Valley Winter Olympic Games less than a year away, the Tahoe area was experiencing a tremendous "boom," and new residents seeking year-round housing were pleased to discover a new Tahoe City Trailer Court, offering accommodations which were both convenient to town and economical for recent arrivals, who were at the mercy of Tahoe's seasonal job market. The new facility, owned and operated by Earl Peterson and Mel DeLuca, thrived under their management, the constant occupancy of its 100 spaces attesting to the local need for low cost housing.

Some vocal Tahoe City residents condemn the only remaining trailer park. Others point to the great number of senior citizens who reside there, retirees for whom the trailer court represents the only local housing within their financial means. In any event, this largest of North Tahoe's mobile home parks will keep a date with destiny this fall, when the Forest Service takes over the property on which it and a number of other businesses are presently conducted. November 23 is the deadline by which all residents of the park must vacate the premises - a monumental task to be sure, especially in view of the non-mobile status of many of the park's "mobile homes."

The closing of the Tahoe City Trailer Court will mark the end of an era in the realm of local trailering, for though the operation of other parks on the north and west shore is sure to continue, the closure will leave the Tahoe City community totally without such facilities. And whether the reader considers the demise of this park an aesthetic improvement or a social setback, there can be no denying that the change will have an important effect on the demography — as well as the demeanor — of the community.



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# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten

Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

## OFF THE BEATEN TRACK"

The placid community of Lake Forest is a reminder of Tahoe's earlier days, though the site's early development suggested a more bustling future. First settlement of the area came about 1859, when Homer D. Burton laid claim to the lakeside meadowlands of the creek which now bears his name.

Burton contributed his fair share to local color, fabricating for his visitors endless grand tales which took up where his own marvelous exploits left off. Burton provided the Lake's first scheduled mail service, sailing (or rowing) his seven-ton sloop, EDITH BATTY, in a counterclockwise route which took him a week to complete. When the "schooner," as he preferred to call her, was retired from service in favor of a faster boat, Burton used his fair craft as an excursion and fishing boat.

When not engaged in marine activities, Burton found time to cultivate a large garden, the produce from which he used to supplement the bill of fare for his seasonal boardinghouse and campground. Bountiful crops of buckwheat, timothy hay and oats added to the reputation of the Island Farm as a fertile meadowland.

In the 1880s, Burton sold his 300 acre farm to Antone Russi, whose name graces the upstream meadows of the Burton Creek drainage. Russi, a dairyman who perpetuated the area's agrarian theme, died in the 1890s. Russi's widow married Frank Walker, a relative of her first husband, and the family's holdings became known as the Walker ranch, the main house of which stood near the present site of Tamarack Lodge.

In the era before roads rimmed the basin, Lake Forest was the refueling stop of the Lake's steamers, and a huge wharf near the present Coast Guard pier was an overwater cache for cordwood consumed in the vessels' voracious fireboxes. The wharf was approximately 300 feet long, and expanded from a shore width of 25 feet to a terminal width of 50 feet. The steamer TAHOE alone, in the days before she was converted to an oil burner, consumed over four cords of wood per day, so the process of supplying her

fuel was monumental. Much of this wood was harvested nearby and skidded to the wharf by teams of horses.



**WOOD WHARF** FEW ON STILL REMAIN THIS LAKE FOREST WHARF WHERE THE STEAMERS STOPPED DAILY TO TAKE ON FUEL. IN WINTER BURTON CREEK'S FROZEN SURFACE APPROVED A HANDY SHORTCUT FOR LOGS BROUGHT OUT OF THE CANYON ABOVE. HORSES PULLED THE LOGS TO THE WHARF WHERE THEY WERE BUCKLED, SPLIT AND STACKED TO CARE ON THE 200'-X-300' OVER WATER WOODLOT FIREBOX. ON THE STEAMER "TAHOE" CONSUMED 4 1/2 CORDS DAILY AND KEEPING IT SUPPLIED WITH DRY PULP WAS AN ODDJOB OCCUPATION (IN FACT, IN HER LATER YEARS, THE "TAHOE" OF THE LAKE" WAS CONVERTED TO OIL BURNER. REMAINS OF SEVERAL OF THE PIER'S PILING CAN STILL BE SEEN OFFSHORE, JUST WEST OF THE COAST GUARD STATION.

Illustration by Carol Van Etten

No discussion of Lake Forest would be complete without mention of the Fish Hatchery. The hatchery operation, established in 1910 in a building closer to Tahoe City, was moved in the 1920s to the formidable, green-roofed facility, where the rearing of fish once provided a summer's employment for fledgling journalist John Steinbeck.

It was not until the 1930s that Lake Forest could boast any serious commercial activity. Etta Tyler's Lake Forest Grocery was among early local enterprises dating to the late 1930s. Several motels and a filling station also sprang up about this time, and the building of a growing number of seasonal residences was aided by the founding of Snyder Lumber Company in 1939.

An ad which ran in *Tahoe Topics* during the summer of 1946 reflected the commercial upswing which Lake Forest enjoyed in the early postwar years. Seven businesses participated in the advertising campaign, including Bacchi's Bar and Restaurant, Pascal's Grocery Store, Finger's Beauty Shop, and Iturrena's Lake Forest Restaurant, owned and operated by Gracian and Marguerite Iturrena. Though Lake Forest has always been primarily a summer habitation, a sense of some permanence was established with the opening of a branch of the post office on April 16, 1947, with Lucille Heuga as postmistress.

Perhaps Lake Forest would be quite a different place today had it not been for a decision of the California Division of Highways to shorten and straighten the Tahoe City approach to the Dollar Grade. In about 1954, the sweeping, shaded horseshoe now known as Lake Forest Road ceased to be part of Highway 28, and with the closing of the post office soon thereafter, the community was virtually assured future absorption from the hubbub and bustle of neighboring Tahoe City.

Page 8 NORTH TAHOE WEEK through June 25, 1986

## Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

# "Back To The Biltmore"

History does repeat itself, and this spring, several local investors are in the process of proving true the old adage by bringing back a piece of the past. The object of their attention, the famous North Shore gaming establishment which during the last quarter-century has been known as the Nevada Lodge — has assumed its original business name: Tahoe Biltmore.

It was 40 years ago, in the summer of 1946, that Joseph Blumenfeld and his brothers opened the doors of their new hotel-casino, the Tahoe Biltmore Hotel. This formidable new structure, occupying a lofty position on the north shoreline slope, was built by the A.E. Erickson Construction Company, and featured a cone-shaped rotunda at the east end of its three-story facade.

Unfortunately for the Blumenfelds, the success of their north shore gaming venture fell short of expectations. An item in the August 21, 1952 Sierra Sun noted the results of bidding for the purchase of the defunct Biltmore: Sanford "Sandy" Adler, whose thriving Cal Neva club across the highway had doubtlessly been a factor in the Blumenfeld's disappointing debut — was the Biltmore's new owner. Adler, who renamed his new enterprise the Cal Neva Biltmore, operated it successfully for half a

decade, selling it in 1956 to a group composed of Eddie Hoppis, Jackie Gonn and David Crow. This trio, formerly partners in a New York advertising agency, lasted only a year on the North Shore casino scene before selling out to Hers and Lincoln Fitzgerald (of Fitzgerald's in Reno) in 1957.

Under the Fitzgerald's ownership, the Biltmore became Nevada Lodge, and began to enjoy a period of rejuvenation and development. With Carlton Kalarinka (Mrs. Fitzgerald's brother) as general manager, Nevada Lodge soon became the center of North Shore civic affairs. The Nevada Room was the scene of the annual Snow Ball and the North Tahoe Chamber of Commerce-sponsored Miss Sierra Snowflake Pageant, with such emcees as Regis Philbin and Soupy Sales lending an air of celebrity to such occasions. Also appearing onstage in the Nevada Room were such early-50s headliners as Phyllis Diller, Rowan and Martin, Helen O'Connell and Rudy Vallee.

So successful was the Fitzgerald's operation that in 1959, they were able to absorb their smaller next-door-neighbor to the west, Joby's Monte Carlo. This diminutive club, founded by Joby Lewis in the early 1950s, provided adjacent square footage



Flip Brandt

for expansion of the Nevada Lodge's thriving operations.

In 1964, the Fitzgeralds opened a second showroom — the Topaz Room — this for the staging of a French revue named "Vive Les Girls" — the likes of which the North Shore had never seen. John Carrollon, now with Hirsch's in Reno, was the musical director of this first-of-its-kind extravaganza. The novelty of its spectacular choreography — or perhaps its lineup of bare female torsos — helped sustain the act as a popular North Shore attraction for five years.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, the Fitzgerald's hotel-casino shared to some extent the misfortunes which have plagued other businesses during those years. Closures of competing clubs — for a variety of reasons — have affected the community's ability to draw crowds. However, a revitalization of the area is on the horizon, with the Nevada Lodge's transfer of ownership (and resumption of the original Tahoe Biltmore name) playing a key role in the area's economic recovery.

Frank Martin, new general manager of the Tahoe Biltmore, brings 16 years of experience in the casino industry to his new position. Martin promises that the facility will once again pay host to exciting local events. "We intend to put the fun back in the Tahoe Biltmore," says Martin, and to that end, the gradual upgrading of the hotel-casino's 95 rooms and dining facilities have already begun.

A completely remodelled kitchen will soon be turning out breakfast, lunch and dinner buffets. Many other subtle revisions — within and without — are in the Biltmore's future. So far, only the show marquee bears witness to the changes to come, but soon new signs will proclaim the facility's return to its past, to reassume the place in history it first began 40 years ago.

# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten

Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

Only a few can still recall the structure, rising beside Highway 89 on the curve of the road which marks the northbound motorist's last, over-the-shoulder view of Rubicon Point. It was a building of unusual design, for its two-stories had yet a third level perched above the enclosed portion, this compact symmetrical appurtenance giving the whole facade the look of a country schoolhouse with belfry. This resemblance, however, was fleeting, for though Bill Warwick's Tower was intended for certain educational purposes, it was actually a glorified sandwich shop, which combined with its simple bill of fare an open-air public observatory of marvels visible through its two lofty telescopes.

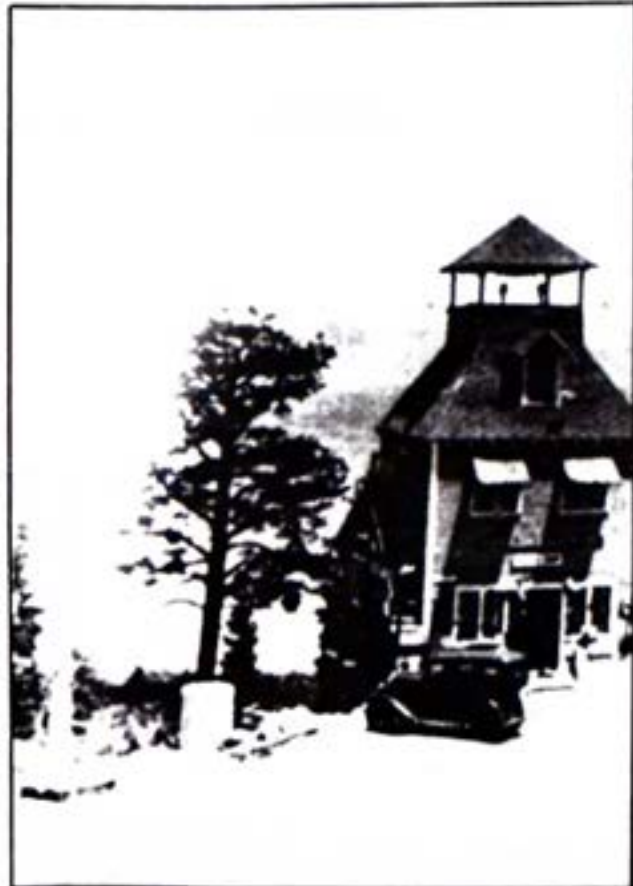
It is no wonder that the Tower represented something of an oddity. By the time of the building's construction in about 1930, its progenitor had long since earned a reputation for the unusual, and so its appearance on the local horizon was the cause of perturbation rather than surprise among some area residents. That the structure was built at all was owing to Warwick's persistence in presenting his plan to Oswald Kehlet, who with his sons, George and Fred, was at the time shaping the destiny of nearby fledgling Meeks Bay Resort.

It was on a site in the Kehlets' Meeks Bay Vista subdivision (actually around the point in Rubicon Bay) that Warwick sought permission to build his Tower. Just above the subdivision entrance, two adjoining lots fronting on the highway afforded a sweeping panorama of the Lake and surrounding mountains — the perfect location, argued Warwick, for a roadside cafe. Perhaps against his better judgement, the Senior Kehlet finally agreed to Warwick's proposal, providing the visionary with sufficient lumber and other materials to construct the roadside marvel. Warwick would be responsible for the building and operation of the eatery-observatory, and in turn, Kehlet would receive a percentage of the proceeds.

The prominent placement of the telescopes had been calculated to attract daytime business from the motorists passing on the highway. The evening trade, it was hoped, would be comprised of the lively crowd looking for a bite to eat on the way home from an evening of dancing at Meeks Bay Resort or Hotel Homewood's Pavillion. While customers enjoyed their sandwiches, donuts and coffee, they could admire the marvelous Lake vista, brought significantly closer by feeding the telescope one thin dime.

Unfortunately for Warwick, the popularity of his establishment was not sufficient to clear a profit. Following only a few seasons of operation, the enterprise was officially pronounced dead. George Kehlet's son, Fred, recalls the demolition of the building, which he and Phil Gier undertook during several cold spring days in 1934. The lumber

## On a Clear



was trucked back to Meeks Bay Resort, where it was used in the construction of several rental cabins.

Actually, Warwick's greatest contribution to the West Shore scene was made inadvertently. Change came more slowly half a century ago than now, but talk among local residents in the early 1930s portrayed his restaurant-observatory as an unwelcome precedent to further commercial development in Rubicon Bay. In 1939, the threat of just such development prompted a petition drive to restrict all commercial development in Rubicon Bay through zoning ordinances (the first in El Dorado County). It did not come to fruition for nearly another decade, but the groundwork had been laid, owing in part to the brief existence of Warwick's Tower.

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# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten

Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

How to conduct a successful merchandising business at Lake Tahoe? Many a hopeful venture into the realm of local retail sales (whether billed as boutique or bargain basement) has come and gone in the wink of any eye for want of a workable answer to that question. But purveyors of dry goods and gew-gaws at the Lake must all tip their hats to the Squirrel's Nest, which since its founding a decade and a half ago has been something of an institution on the west shore.

Regrettably, this is the final week of that glorious enterprise, which closes its doors for the last time within the next few weeks. Meanwhile, the mad urge to make one last pilgrimage to the shrine of the squirrel is proving irresistible to the many loyal patrons who feel a sense of loss at its impending departure. "BYE BUY BUY" proclaims the display window, for next week will be too late.

From the start, the destinies of the Squirrel's Nest have been guided by the creative imagination of Jack Johannsen, whom owners John and Cathrine Jane Metcalf describe as "the soul of the business." In the dim, far-off days of 1971, when the Metcalfs conceived the idea of a west shore retail enterprise which would be something out of the ordinary, Johannsen seemed eminently qualified to oversee the venture. Employed at that time by Saks Fifth Avenue, Johannsen had precious little time to devote to the establishment of a store from the ground up, but found the new project such a pleasant detour from his City responsibilities that he became increasingly involved in its operation.

Both Johannsen and the Metcalfs were soon combing the Mother Lode country for suitable merchandise to fill the racks and shelves of their original store front, an unassuming structure at the southeast end of Meadow Park Resort (now the location of George Langston's real estate office), across the highway from the Meeks Bay campground. However, the largest part of the inventory was comprised of Johannsen's selections from San Francisco gift shows, sprinkled with the spoils of the Metcalf's European buying expeditions.



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Within a few years of the store's founding, Meeks Bay Resort was purchased by the Forest Service, and the uncertainty of the entity's plans for the property suggested to the Metcalfs that the time was opportune to relocate. Urch's Plumbing Shop, at the south end of the Homewood business district, had been sold to another plumber following Mr. Urch's death, and as the new owner had not enjoyed his predecessor's success, the

ge



## OMEWOOD, CALIFORNIA

property was again for sale. Built in 1932, the improvements actually included two structures: a shop connected to an adjoining warehouse by a covered breezeway. In the first few years of the Squirrel's Nest's operation at the new location, the warehouse portion of the complex was leased to local building contractor Claude Cowan, who used the space to store his heavy equipment. "At that time," explains John Metcalf, "we had no warehouse as such. As our merchandise came in, it was all put out on the shelves." However, this arrangement could not persist for long in the face of the buying public's enthusiasm for the gloriously unique enterprise, and after a few seasons, the "Nest" expanded into the warehouse formerly leased by Cowan.

More changes were in the wind, for about that time Saks Fifth Avenue was sold to the American Tobacco Company, prompting Jack Johannsen to leave the firm in favor of full-time employment at the Squirrel's Nest. The expansion of the business also had provided space for the addition of a kitchen, serving an open-air restaurant tucked behind the two buildings amid towering conifers.

Continued on page 15

## Continued from page 14

Jackie Cook, whose Soupcon Restaurant in Sausalito already enjoyed wide popularity, was put in charge of culinary operations. Under her able direction, the restaurant was an immediate success, nearly always sold out, and often serving lunch to as many as 200 guests in a single day. Some menu entries bore the names of celebrated guests, including Judge (Thomas) MacBride, Gail Schlesinger, Brooks Walker, and a personage simply referred to as the "Old Yellow Dress." "Squirrel Juice," a popular house beverage, was a decoction of lemonade and fresh fruit. Jackie's desserts, however, were perhaps the most memorable of the grand luncheon fare, each so indescribably delicious that choosing among them was a dilemma of weighty import, and later the talk of Trim Gyms here and abroad.

In the early years, day-to-day management of the retail business was in the hands of Elaine Wilcox and her husband Bill, an ex-marine whose persistent study of the store's merchandise quickly compensated for his initial unfamiliarity with antiques and related wares. Elaine Wilcox managed the store for several seasons, but the difficult winters aggravated Bill's heart condition and the couple finally had to bow out of the operation.

Management of the store was then assumed by Maureen Edlestein, who stepped up from her position as a salesperson. Shortly after her promotion, Maureen married Craig Kjelte, and when their son George was born, she retired from the job in order to devote more time to her family.

In recent years, Johannsen's genius for display design and Ms. Cook's wonderful culinary skills have been complemented by the able management of Nancy Williamson, who like Mrs. Kjelte was also a former salesperson at the store. Now in her fifth season at the "Nest," Nancy looks back over the experience with fond reflection. "We have not been a store of necessity," she explains. "We sell everything people don't need."

It is to the store's non-essential nature that she attributes its popularity, adding that patrons have looked forward to a visit there as a social event as much as a shopping expedition. The Squirrel's Nest includes among its regular clientele a number of well-known celebrities and members of Society. On any given day, amid the bustling throng of shoppers may be found a few famous faces, agog, like the rest, with the marvelous decor.

But soon it will be only a memory. Jack Johannsen, whose uniquely whimsical animal portraits (a major feature of the store's displays) are finding increasing favor with collectors, plans to devote more time to his painting. And though over the last several years the Metcalfs have made some effort to find a buyer for their business, they could discover no suitable successor to continue under the Squirrel's Nest name.

WEEK July 17 - 23, 1988



## Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake  
Tahoe Historical Society

# If Stones Could Speak...

Half a century ago, it was still fairly common to come upon native Americans - alone or in small groups - afoot along some local byway, treading the same paths trod by their ancient ancestors down through time. Each spring, for countless springtimes past, the Washo tribe had made its way from winter encampments in the Carson Valley up over the high passes into their summer ranges on the west shore of Tahoe's "Big Water." However, with the arrival of European types on the local scene, the lives of the Indians were inalterably marked for change.

By the mid-1930s, the west shore establishments of that era - Hotel Homewood, Chambers' Lodge, Meeks Bay Resort and Fallen Leaf Lodge - still carried out their symbiotic relations with the stragglers of these groups, providing food, old clothes and other cast-offs to their resident Indians in exchange for laundry and kitchen services rendered by the squaws of the party. Residents of the Washo campodries situated in the meadowlands and canyons west of these resorts had by that time come to depend on resort-provided gratuities as a major aspect of their existence, abandoning the old ways in favor of three squares a day and a warm wrap to ward off the chill of a Carson Valley winter. A generation before, the cuisine in these encampments had still featured the pine nut as its staple ingredient, and the gathering, gleaning and preparation of this commodity was the basis of daily life during the summer months. The laborious process of refining these stubborn nuts into an edible state required the action of stone on stone, and this commodity was nearby in ample supply in the form of granite boulders. Natural depressions in such rocks were worn smoother and deeper each season by the ceaseless grinding of smaller stones against the hollows, pulverizing the tenacious morsels to a malleable mash. Over time these shallow basins became veritable craters, some more than a hand's breadth deep and wide.

As work forms the basis of communal existence, these grinding rocks were the center of tribal society. At such a

rock, the women of the tribe would gather during the day to perform their work, each at her own station on the rock. The sense of community attendant on these gatherings has been described by Ranger Jim Stewart of Sugar Pine Point State Park, who discovered a marvelous example of an Indian grinding rock near the Park's campground. Though vegetation at the site now obscures the sense of the ancient scene, Stewart notes that the rock, at which as many as half-a-dozen squaws once sat working of an afternoon, actually overlooks a meadow area. Here, Washo youngsters must once have frolicked under their mothers' watchful attention, while the business of the camp went on amid exchanges of gossip from the group of assembled women.

Stewart has also discovered a large grinding rock underwater just offshore of the Park's Ehrman Mansion, a location which suggests that the lake's nineteenth century elevations were low enough to allow the Washo grinders to use this alternate shoreline site as well.

Another perennial Indian encampment, located on the banks of the Lake Outlet in Tahoe City, proved to be the site of another Indian grinding rock, revealed by the low water of 1924. Discovered by Constable Robert Montgomery Watson just offshore of the Gatekeeper's Cabin, this three-hole rock was moved to the Watson cabin on the bluff above Commons Beach (now the Potter's Wheel). In later years, the rock was moved again by Watson's relatives, this time to the family's old mill property in Lake Forest, where it can still be found today.

Along the Truckee River corridor, between Squaw Valley and Truckee, the presence of a two-hole rock suggests that this may have been a stop on the long trail from Carson Valley to the Lake. Obviously disturbed from its original position, the rock now seems to gaze skyward, as if searching the heavens for its former companions.

Cal-Neva Point is the location of a sizable egg-shaped boulder in which is worn a single hole. High on the sloping hills-side, in full view of the Lake beyond, this rock's situation afforded its grinder early knowledge of any approaching enemy, be it bear or bad weather. At nearby Brockway Hot Springs, another such rock, just above the current high water level, evidences the presence of an encampment on the present grounds of the condominiums project.

The coarse meal produced by this grinding process was used in a variety of ways, including a crude cake and a delicacy known as pine nut soup, the preparation of which was liberally described in a 1930s issue of the *Tahoe Tattler*. And though the Feast Days of the Washo for which these dishes were prepared are no longer celebrated on Tahoe's west shore, the rocks which played such an important role in their preparation remain behind to remind us of what is gone.



"This grinding rock, discovered along the Truckee River, must have provided a workbench for Washo squaws."

## Our Tahoe Heritage

### On The Waterfront

What more delightful spot to enjoy day's fading light than at the edge of Tahoe's watery expanse, perhaps sipping a cool beverage while listening to the lap of waves against the pilings supporting an over-water lounge? This sentiment is hardly a new one. In fact, the tradition goes back over a century to the early 1870s, when residents and visitors to the Tahoe scene were already delighting in the liquid refreshment dispensed by two over-water bistros then in operation.

The earliest of these was established by J.B. Campbell and James O. Forbes about 1873. The saloon was given the name Campbell's Custom House, as it was the popular custom of gentlemen waiting for the steamer to indulge in a drink to while away the time before boarding. Campbell's structure, supported by a crib pier, also housed the community's post office, and featured further entertainment on the premises in the form of a two-table billiard parlor (one table for men, the other for ladies). According to E.B. Scott's *Sage of Lake Tahoe*, the Custom House structure (by the turn of the century under the proprietorship of Campbell's brother, Amasia Franklin Campbell) was destroyed by the high water of 1907.

The demise of the Custom House left only one over-water bar on Tahoe's California shore. This was John McKinney's clubhouse, built in 1875 on the wharf of his Hunter's Retreat. McKinney had settled the West Shore site (located midway between the present communities ofTahoma and Homewood) a dozen years earlier, carving from the wilderness a rustic resort which soon grew to a full quarter-section of land, including 13 acres of lakefront. From the first, McKinney's two-story clubhouse was a popular watering hole for steamer passengers and resort guests alike, this popularity continuing unabated under the proprietorship of Dave Chambers, who purchased the property in 1920, changing its name to Chambers' Lodge.

By 1900, two more over-water drinking establishments had made their debuts at the Lake. The first of these was a

structure located on Sugar Pine Point, part of a short-lived enterprise known as Bellevue. Founded by Captain W.W. "Billy" Lapham, this hostelry was another of the half-dozen west shore steamer stops of the day. In addition to its saloon, the overwater clubhouse also featured a barbershop and post office, the mail drop being officially designated "Sunbeam."

Lapham's venture, which opened in the spring of 1888, was virtually wiped out five years later when a fire swept through the premises, leveling all the shoreward structures, including a two-and-one-half story hotel, several cottages and a horse livery. Though the wharf and clubhouse were saved, this conflagration brought an end to Lapham's operation, and the clubhouse building was sold to Ephraim "Yank" Clement, whose own hostelry (Cascade House) had met the same incendiary fate several years earlier. Clement barged the clubhouse to his property at the south end of the Lake, where, situated firmly on dry land, it became his second Cascade House.

Beginning about 1899, E.J. "Lucky" Baldwin's hostelry, The Tallac (originally owned by Clement and then known as Tallac House) provided over-water cocktail service at the south end of the Lake. Here two bars on the wharf offered resort guests a tempting array of liquid refreshments, served in elegant style by white-coated barkeeps. "The Saratoga of the Pacific," as Baldwin's resort came to be known, faded from the scene shortly after his death in 1908, and in spite of his daughter's efforts to revive the concern, it closed its doors forever within a few years and was torn down in 1927.

While a number of local establishments still dispense spirits from lakeside locations, only a select few can actually claim to serve their customers on the water. Oldest of these (by a full century) is the Chambers' Landing Bar, which continues the tradition established by John McKinney in 1875 and perpetuated by Dave Chambers half a century later. This historic structure, in spite of its several renovations, retains something of its original flavor with a decor which recalls its earlier days. The interior walls are covered with over-sized photo-

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By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake  
Tahoe Historical Society



posters which depict the enterprise in years gone by. This historic bar can be reached either by boat or by car, and is open to the public daily. Situated in the lee of tall conifers, Chambers Landing Bar is a pleasant spot to enjoy a cocktail, with dinner available a few short steps away at the site's own restaurant, also open to the public.

Considerably more recent in origin, yet destined to make its own place in history, is the Tahoe Vista lounge known as Captain Jon's. Proprietors of this establishment, which is adjacent to the La Petit Pier restaurant, invite customers to take their boats to dinner. The invitation is enthusiastically accepted, for on any summer night in the enterprise's ample marina float a variety of vessels, ranging from classic mahogany runabouts and launches to the latest in fiberglass sailboats and cruisers. While marine patrons enjoy a sunset cocktail on Captain Jon's carpeted breakwater, they can keep a watchful eye on their precious watercraft. The bar and restaurant also provide valet parking for those arriving by more conventional transportation.

While a number of other restaurants and bars - some accessible by boat - offer spirits, steaks, seafood and sandwiches at the water's edge, only a few can boast the special thrill of a drink or dinner on the water. A visit to one of these concerns recalls the day when steamers delivered privileged clientele to their drinking and dining destinations ... a tradition which, with a little imagination, can still be enjoyed today.

Page 10 NORTH TAHOE WEEK July 31 - Aug. 6, 1906

# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten

Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

## THE LAKE TAHOE SHORELINE SURVEY

Lake Tahoe enjoys a long-standing reputation as a mecca for shutterbugs. Statisticians report that Emerald Bay is Number 2 in popularity as a subject in family vacation albums the world over, and other local views draw their share of camera-toting visitors. In the earliest years of its settlement, the Tahoe Basin already had its measure of glass-plate chroniclers, and its status as a bi-state navigable waterway led to its early photographic documentation, the scenic value taking a back seat to legal concerns.

A reconnaissance effort conducted by the Lake Tahoe Photographic Shoreline Survey during the summer of 1916 preserves a record of the Lake's legal high water level, exceeded that year as the reservoir filled behind the newly-complete outlet works. The survey was conducted for the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Reclamation as a result of litigation initiated by a scattered group of lakefront property owners who had suffered the ravages of illegally impounded water at several points along their portion of the shore zone.

Continued on next page



Emerald Bay camp. Dr. Law's house and boat house in left center. Lake Tahoe Shore Line Survey, July 18, 1916.



Dr. Law's house, boat house to the left. Lake Tahoe Photographic Shore Line Survey, July 18, 1916.

PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY

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The class action suit preferred by these owners, which came to be known as the "Five Cases," focused the federal camera lens on spots where high water had brought damage to improvements. For this reason, the early survey provides a valuable record of some of the Lake's earliest habitations and habits, capturing old Tahoe in all its marvelous simplicity. Through the lens of a long-ago public servant, we see a tranquility long lost to history. Clapboard and canvas prevail, while here and there a bit of gingerbread or cedarbark-siding gives a hint of permanence. The paths are lined with the granite droppings of the Gods, and peeled sapling rails guide strolling vacationists out onto tentative finger piers.

Brockway Hotel is building a new bath house in the summer of 1916, and in Emerald Bay, campers look forward to the daily arrival of the Steamer TAHOE while they mess about in wooden rowboats, fish and sun along the willowed shore. In the distance, the vista is all immortal handiwork, for Lora Moore Knight has yet to place her Vikingsholm castle at the headlands of the Bay like a crown jewel. The time is other - slower. The pace is serene. Members of the survey party, dressed in their working garb, seem hardly to intrude into the idyllic view.

In contrast, a follow-up survey conducted in the fall of 1930 is a much more thorough record of the shoreline than its predecessor. During the 14 intervening years, the number of shore zone structures has increased astronomically. The national mania for auto travel encouraged the completion of a passable road around the Lake, giving rise to countless resorts and camps. The subdivision of shoreline property soon followed, and the desire for

access to the water — still the main artery for transportation — brought new shore zone development of all kinds.

The results of the 1930 survey are therefore momentous: a two-volume compendium of photos and other data nearly four inches in total thickness. The carefully catalogued photos document a much lower water level that year, following several drought seasons. While infinitely more extensive, this collection lacks the charm of the earlier survey. Perhaps the declining weather of the fall expedition was a factor in this contrast. By late November, 1930, Tahoe had already had its first dusting of snow at Lake level, and the impending winter evident in these photos lends a gloom to the local scene.

Another change which significantly alters the aesthetics of the later collection is that the discreet definition of the characteristic of the old flat-finished, large-format views of 1916 are replaced in the 1930 study by half-size glossies. A magnifying glass is required to pick out detail in these photos. This survey, too, is nevertheless a treasure, noting structures within the shore zone which existed more than half a century ago, many since destroyed by the forces of the Sierra weather.

Had litigation brought against entities of the Federal government not necessitated this study, perhaps no such lovely documentation would have come into existence. In some cases, the survey photos may represent the only record of since-vanished private wharves and other shore zone structures. And though this in itself has a bearing on modern legal considerations, the survey is perhaps even more important as a window on the past which can now be enjoyed by all.



Bath house under construction next to the Brockway Hotel on the left, Lake Tahoe Photographic Shore Line Survey, July 18, 1916.

Page 14 NORTH TAHOE WEEK August 7 - 13, 1986

## Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

### Lake Tahoe's Log Cabins

The idea of residing in a log cabin holds a romantic appeal for many people. Perhaps it is the thought of living surrounded by trees in their near-natural state which beckons the rustic in us to return to a simpler time. Certainly the aspect of simplicity was an important element in the use of log construction by early settlers of this and other forested areas, though their concerns were utilitarian rather than aesthetic. Logs were plentiful and easily adapted to use as a shelter, and in the absence of a mill they had no backwoods equal as a building material.

The oldest structure still standing on the West Shore was predictably built of logs. Located near the mouth of General Creek (now part of the property of the Sugar Pine Point State Park), this cabin was constructed by General William Phipps in 1870, the second log residence built by Phipps on the quarter section of land to which he had first laid claim a decade earlier.

The original Phipps cabin, also of log, had been built in 1862-3 across the creek to the north from the later site. The first structure, with its accompanying log barn, was built with decidedly less care than its successor, being comprised of sawlogs placed with only passing attention to fit or chinking. In contrast, Phipps second West Shore residence represents the laborious efforts of a backwoods craftsman. In this structure, each massive log has been hewn to squareness with the broad blade of a skillfully-wielded adze, and thus fitted to its neighboring log with great precision.

The only other known building at the Lake which uses this type of log construction is found at the Cascade Stables, south of Emerald Bay. Built in the Hope Valley (south of the Lake Tahoe Basin) before the turn of the century, this small log structure was one of several such cabins hauled by the Ebright family to their stables property about 1920. Today, it is the only survivor of the original group, now serving the Ebrights as a storage building for riding tack and equestrian supplies.

Tahoe City is the present-day location of several log cabins, the oldest being the Watson Cabin, next to the Big Tree in the Street in the center of town. Now the site of The Potter's Wheel, this building was originally built in 1900 by Robert Montgomery Watson as a honeymoon cottage for his son Bob and new bride, Stella. Following the Watson's occupancy, the building became Hunt's Gift Shop, where Fern and "Musky" Hunt sold Indian wares for a generation. Today, the two-story cabin is listed in the National Register of Historic Buildings.

A second Watson-built log cabin is located several blocks away in the shadow of the Pepper Tree Inn. This broad-eaved, one-story structure was intended to duplicate the Yukon cabin occupied by Robert M. Watson during his adventure in the Klondike Gold Rush, and is appropriately named "20 Below Discovery Cabin." Both Watson cabins are constructed of closely-fitted round logs, with the interstitial spaces stuffed with oakum. This material, made of treated rope fibers, was a sort of early-day insulation which compensated for the lack of conformity between logs.

Meeks Bay was the site of several log cabins. The brothers-in-law country ranchers there until 1892, when Jim's brother, George, left from the Westhold. Dave Chambers



Built in 1870, the General Phipps Cabin, located at Sugar Pine Point State Park, is still standing on the West Shore.

# Heritage

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Shore Historical Society

## Log Cabins

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Meeks Bay was also the scene of two pre-Depression log cabins. The older of these was built in 1920 by brothers-in-law, Jim Murphy and Luke Morgan, gold country ranchers who had taken title to a section of land in the bay in 1884, operating a dairy in the meadowlands there until 1892, when the partnership (which also included Jim's brother, George Murphy) leased McKinney's Resort from the Westhoff family. On the sale of McKinney's to Dave Chambers in 1920, Jim Murphy and Luke Morgan

Continued on next page



built in 1870, the General Phipps Cabin, located at Sugar Pine Point State Park, is the oldest structure still standing on the West Shore.

Page 16 NORTH TAHOE WEEK August 14 - 20, 1984

## Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten

Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

# "Sidney Ehrman Day"

The usual focus of this column is on events and personalities of the past, with little mention given the modern day (save occasional brief references necessary to bring local history into better perspective). However, an event on this week's calendar intends such a marvelous journey into our local yesteryears that it deserves mention here. Saturday, August 18, the date of this step back in time, to be held at Sugar Pine Point State Park, approximately one mile south of Tahoma on Tahoe's West Shore.

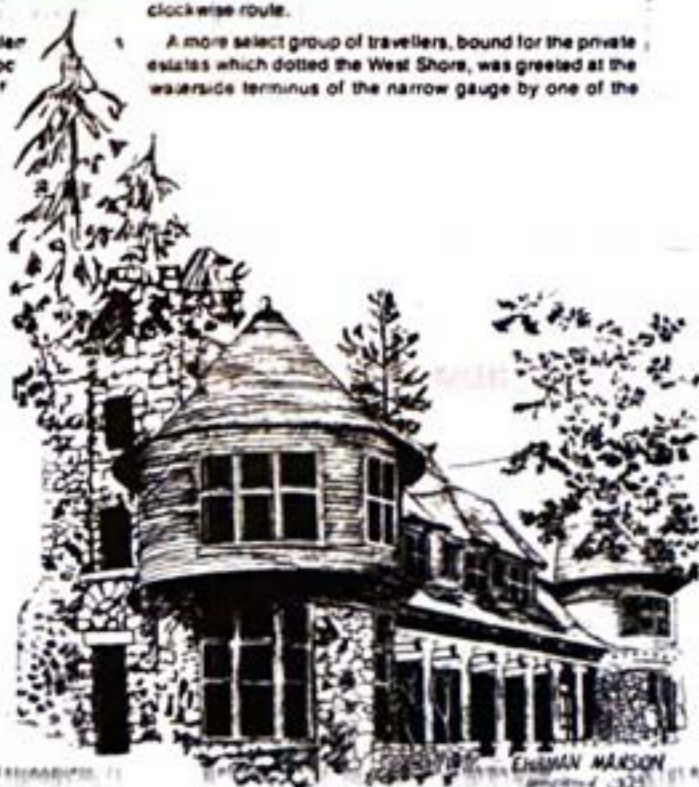
This event, billed as "Sidney Ehrman Day," is an attempt to recreate the ambient atmosphere of a West Shore summer of half a century ago, as it was enjoyed by residents and guests at Pine Lodge. Originally the summer retreat of the Isaias Hellman family of San Francisco, this massive granite lodge and the 1,989 acre property which surrounds it were acquired by the California State Park system in 1965. It was following the marriage of Hellman's daughter Florence to Sidney Ehrman that the property became popularly known as the Ehrman Estate.

From the Tahoe Basin's earliest settlers played an essential role in the lives of local being the only suitable means of local

prior to the development of a paved highway circling the Lake. By 1903, the year Pine Lodge was completed, the quickest and most comfortable trip to the Lake began by rail. Southern Pacific service extended as far as Truckee, where passengers transferred to a narrow gauge line which brought them the remaining 14 miles to the Tahoe Tavern. This majestic lakeshore hostelry, located one mile south of the Lake outlet in Tahoe City, was designed by Walter Danforth Bliss, the same architect retained by Isaias Hellman to design Pine Lodge.

Four-score years ago, the cowpath which connected Tahoe City with the West Shore made overland travel all but impossible, and so from there, the trip continued by water. Commercial passenger service was available to the general public in the form of steam boats, most famous among these being the S.S. TAHOE. A veritable floating palace which circled the Lake daily in summer, the stately TAHOE picked up and delivered passengers, mail and freight at well over a dozen stops along its counter-clockwise route.

A more select group of travellers, bound for the private estates which dotted the West Shore, was greeted at the waterside terminus of the narrow gauge by one of the



## *Heritage* Continued from page 18

private launches, cruisers or sedans maintained by each estate for the convenience of its residents and guests. These handsome craft were the floating limosines of the Lake, smaller yet no less opulent than their commercial counterparts.

The Ehrman estate was well-represented by vintage watercraft, with two of the most famous family boats still alive and well on the Lake. The older of these, custom built for the Ehrmans in 1922 by Fellows and Stewart, is a 36-foot cabin launch known as the COMET. This sleek eye-catcher, now owned by the Owen Owens family, once transported the Ehrmans and their guests to and from their appointed destinations in grand style.

An open forward cockpit placed the COMET'S marine chauffeur out of earshot of the passengers, who rode further aft, either in a separate enclosed cockpit or in an open lounge in the stern. The boat's appointments included wicker furniture and a large oval life ring affixed to the roof of the enclosed cabin, against the possibility of a marine disaster.

The Ehrman's daughter Ester's taste in boats ran more toward speed than stateliness, and a few years after purchasing the COMET, Pine Lodge took delivery on one of the newly-popular runabouts then being manufactured by the Belle Isle Boat and Engine Company. This gleaming three-seat speedster, known as a Bearcat, shared its model name with an automobile counterpart built by Stutz. Featuring a raised deck, the boat was fitted with brass hardware, since in 1925 (the year of her manufacture) chrome was not yet available.

In keeping with the local popularity of Indian appellations, the Ehrmans christened their runabout

**Continued on page 27**

CHEROKEE, a name she retains to this day. The original four-cylinder Hall-Scott engine, not suited to the increased horsepower requirements of Tahoe's high altitude, has since been replaced by a larger power plant, but the boat is otherwise essentially unchanged, and today can still be seen in West Shore waters with owner Lawrence V. Metcalf at the wheel.

Both the COMET and the CHEROKEE will be on display at the State Park pier on Saturday in the company of a number of their mahogany contemporaries. In addition to this marine display, vintage autos such as those which might have visited the estate in the later pre-war years will also be shown. Some participants will be wearing period costumes, and a trunk showing will be presented. The Reno Brass Quartet is scheduled to perform music of the period, and a photo display on the history of Lake Tahoe's mail boats will be on view.

Hours of the Sidney Ehrman Day festivities are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Your attendance at this event will be well rewarded by a variety of activities which can be enjoyed by the whole family.

*slay*

Page 14 NORTH TAHOE WEEK August 21 - 27, 1966

## Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

### Captain Richard Barter Hermit of Emerald Bay

Of all Lake Tahoe's wonders, there is none so well known nor widely sought out by visitors to the region as Emerald Bay. Even its name suggests enchantment, yet most who make their pilgrimage to the charmed inlet would agree that any name bestowed by man falls short of adequately describing the site's magnificence.

While modern-day throngs gather to witness this beautiful scene first-hand, the site was in earlier days the domain of a single soul, whose isolation earned him the nickname "Hermit of Emerald Bay." "Captain Dick" Barter was the name of this singularly-blessed individual, hired in 1863 to oversee the property of Ben Holladay, Jr., son of the overland stagecoach baron.

As the sole year-round resident of the alpine retreat, Barter had no permanent neighbors within 15 miles. Holladay's own five-room, two-story residence at the northwest end of the Bay was only occupied in summer, and so the adjacent cottage which served as Barter's digs was effectively cut off from "civilization" for the balance of the year. A second residence built by Barter on the south side of the Bay's rocky island put him even further out of communication with the outside world.

Barter, an old English seaman whose reputation for a prodigious alcoholic capacity soon became legendary, seemed to thrive in his isolated surroundings, venturing out by skiff or on his self-built sloop when weather permitted. The changability of local meteorological conditions sometimes worked to Barter's detriment, however, and many a night saw him progressing through angry seas, propelling himself by alternate pulls on oars and jug until he had gained the wharf and made fast.

Barter had more than one brush with death related to just such inebriated journeys. One such trip in 1870 resulted in his capsizing off Rubicon Point, having been

blown far off course by an unexpected gale. While not fatal, this mishap cost the "old salt" several toes, which became frozen and gangrenous as a result of his having spent a number of hours submerged in the Lake's chilly waters. Following his self-amputation (aided by the same spirits which had contributed to the necessity of the operation), Barter kept the toes in a box, displaying the gory specimens to visitors to illustrate the story of his narrow escape from the clutches of death.

"Captain Dick" believed that he might have the good fortune to die a natural death, and to that end he labored countless hours on Emerald Isle, hewing a tomb out of the unyielding granite prominence. He built a small frame structure over the excavation to shield it from the weather, and let it be widely known that it was his wish to be buried in the island grave.

Such was not to be his fate, however. In October of 1873, another of Barter's illustrious expeditions in search of drink and companionship spelled his end. En route from Tom Rowland's Custom House on the south shore, Barter's faithful sloop NANCY was once again driven off course, only to be dashed against the rocky Rubicon Point.

A search party reported sighting the remains of the splintered craft, and recovered a single oar found floating nearby. The second oar did not materialize until four months later, causing local inhabitants to speculate that Barter had taken it down with him, and only later released it to return to the surface.

Though never officially recognized by cartographers, the name "Dead Man's Island" remains in popular use by many to this day, a memorial to the plans and preparations of Richard Barter which proved to be no match for Tahoe's awesome displays of weather.

## Our Tahoe Heritage

# CASTLE IN THE

In recent years, the on-again-off-again of Lake Tahoe's North Shore casinos have encouraged many Sierra-bound gamblers to seek the south end of the Lake. Yet some observers with an eye to the future believe that the North will rise again, citing as strong evidence the reopening of Cal-Neva Lodge, Tahoe's oldest casino.

Even before Tahoe became widely known as a mile-high gaming paradise, Cal-Neva was engaged in a healthy trade with quite a different basis: real estate promotion. It seems a common sales tactic of the day prompted the construction of the first Lodge, which included a dancehall and cabins among its rustic offerings.

In an interview conducted by the Oral History Department of the University of Nevada, Reno, north shore legend Norman Biltz (one of Cal-Neva's long line of owners) described the club's humble beginnings: "Bob Sherman built the Cal-Neva as a guest house," Biltz explained, "so it wasn't open to the public. It was where they took prospects to sell real estate to."

"The Cal-Neva was opened in May of 1927," Biltz went on. "I got there during that month, or maybe early June. I'd saved up a little money - I had a few thousand dollars, but I got gambling. It didn't take long - here I am, broke again. Not only broke, but I had written some checks I couldn't cover. So owing Sherman this money, I went to work."

The arrangement worked out well, according to Biltz, and soon he was busy peddling real estate for Sherman. "We had thirty or forty thousand lots drawn out on paper," Biltz recalled. "We used to sell them off the map. We had what they call 'flat stores' in San Francisco, Fresno and Bakersfield - all over the state of California. We'd have lunch sometimes, with lectures every half hour. We'd get people in there and then we'd show them photographs of the Lake and sell them with a low down, and pay for their ticket to Tahoe."

"The only way to get there then with any degree of time or safety was by train," Biltz explained. "The train ran right into Tahoe City. And then we'd get them up there and maybe they'd buy a \$350 or \$400 lot that would be probably half way to Truckee . . . I remember that year we sold 17,000 lots up at Lake Tahoe. This was great until the Depression came, and then we got it all back!"

Biltz proved to be a whiz at the real estate game, and before long Sherman owed him about \$45,000 in commissions. Unable to pay, the developer finally agreed to sign the Lodge over to Biltz. In need of cash for bigger and



The Cal-Neva's Main Lodge destroyed in 1927 by fire.

better promotions, the new owner in turn sold the property to the partnership of James McKay and William Graham. This time the price was \$65,000, and the partnership gave Biltz ten per cent down, with the balance due at the end of the season.

Things seemed to be going Biltz's way until the club's gala reopening, when he once again let the gambling bug get the best of him. The next afternoon, still groggy in the wake of the merry celebration, he learned that his previous evening's losses had erased the debt completely. "I'd lost the \$58,000," said Biltz, "but they were very good to me. They loaned me \$500 to get out of town. It was a very lovely spot, Cal-Neva, in those days."

McKay and Graham would have been quick to echo that sentiment. Their fortunes were in flower, for persistent lobbying efforts in favor of legalized gambling in Nevada finally paid off early in 1931. According to Biltz, his successors were the first to capitalize on the new legislation, opening the doors of their formerly-illicit casino to the general public. Business boomed.

Built on the boundary between California and Nevada, Cal-Neva enjoyed a unique location — and one not overlooked by the press. During the winter of 1931, a popular Broadway play called LIGHTNIN' took for its setting just such a line-straddling structure. With the arrival of good weather, the film version of author Frank

# SKY

Bacon's stage play was shooting on location at Cal-Neva with Will Rogers (by that time a figure of international celebrity) playing the lead.

The Lodge's rustic interiors served as a perfect backdrop for several scenes in the film. Lichen-covered granite formations protruded into the Lodge's dining room where it met the rugged slope of the hill, and unpeeled logs formed both exterior and interior walls, rising to exposed rafters from which quaintly contrived chandeliers were suspended. Rainbow trout was the house specialty, its freshness assured by the presence of a rock holding-pool in one corner of the dining room into which flowed a continuous cascade of bubbling, stream-cold water. While popular musicians held sway from the bandstand beside the immense stone hearth, dancers crowded the floor, down the center of which was painted a line purporting to divide the two states.

The fame of the enterprise, spurred on by its association with a popular movie, brought increased business and still more fame. Will Rogers and a number of other Hollywood luminaries had been frequent visitors on the north shore during the production of *LIGHTNIN'*, and of these, some returned in later years, helping to enhance the reputation of the enterprise.

But the glitter and glamor attracted another sort of element, and a certain unwelcome infamy began to be associated with the Lodge when frequent visitation of underworld figures inspired rumors of shady in-house pursuits. In 1937, a fire swept through the main Lodge, leaving it a pile of ashes, and speculation of arson was given impetus by the existence of bunks of lumber all ready at hand in the Lodge parking lot on the night of the blaze - materials from which the new Cal-Neva was quickly built.

Though a conclusive case for the McKay-Graham partnership's connection with the underworld was never developed, investigation eventually established enough evidence to convict the pair for mail fraud, and their long-time manager, Elmer "Bones" Remmer became the owner of record. Under Remmer's guidance, business continued to boom, with the shady aspect of the establishment helping to increase its fame. Luxury amid rustic elegance was the byword. While "Cally" Holden's Band ("from Movieland") played "smart music," diners enjoyed the unequalled cuisine of "The Castle in the Air," or tumbled in

Continued from page 12

the Lodge's Continental Bar, which overlooked rocky state-line point and the expanse of pristine lake beyond.

Under Remmer's successor, "Bandy" Adler, the quality of entertainment improved still further, and the bookings began to resemble a Tinsel Town *Who's Who*. George Jessel, Judy Garland, Nat Cole and a host of equally-famous stars headlined at the Lodge, drawing standing room only crowds from the Fourth of July to Labor Day.

However, the club's popularity as an entertainment paradise reached its peak during the reign of Adler's successor, the King of the Rat Pack - Old Blue Eyes. During Frank Sinatra's term of proprietorship, the entertainer and his loyal handful of friends lent their unique style to the establishment, seeming to thumb their noses at authority in all its forms. But the enormous appeal of these premier entertainers could not overcome what the Nevada State Gaming Commission viewed as illicit associations with organized crime. Overruling Sinatra's legal appeal, the commission revoked his gaming license, forcing his sale of the Lodge and bringing to an end a colorful era at the North Shore.

Cal-Neva's fortunes have risen and fallen since. Fresno businessman Rod Cloud lost his gaming license after only two years of operation over a slot-cheating scandal, and when San Mateo wheeler-dealer Jon R. Perrotton arranged to buy the business for \$17 million, his fraud in the securing of a loan for purchase squashed the deal.

As 1986 began, Charles Bluth acquired the famous property, and since that time has been working to return Cal-Neva to its former glory. Earlier this month, Bluth was granted his gaming license, and the Lodge is now in full operation. Bluth's intent to revitalize the operation includes renovation of the "Indian Room" to its original



Sumptuous meals were served in "The Castle in the Sky" while diners

Continued on next page



The bustling Cal-Neva Lodge during its heyday.

appearance by removing a facade built over the native rockwork during Cloud's tenure, and an upgrading of other facilities. Long-time patrons of the grand establishment look forward to these changes in the Lake's oldest gaming establishment — a return to the days when Cal-Neva was truly "The Castle in the Sky."



...danced to music by "Celly" Holden's Band.

# Our Tahoe Heritage By Carol Van Etten

Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

## The Year Round Club

The first flakes may yet be far off, but the passing of Labor Day, traditionally, the hallmark of approaching autumn, has nevertheless imbued the atmosphere with a finality which cannot be denied. The majority of casual residents have "left the hill" for the season, while retirees and others enviably oblivious to the school calendar stay on, enjoying the breezy sun of September.

As the days grow shorter, the leaves of quaking aspen along the Truckee River are suddenly yellow, and will soon shade only the worms. Business activity slows noticeably, yet commerce is not contemplating closure - quite the contrary. Excepting the marine concessionaires and other seasonal enterprises, the business sector is rather regrouping - and dreaming of snow.

How very differently the community greeted fall half a century ago, as departing vacationers fastened shutters in place, slowed porch chairs and made final preparations against the forthcoming seasons of their absence. In those times, one could sit on one's Front Street (Hwy. 26) porch of a Labor Day afternoon and wave to a steady procession of cars heading out of town — until next year.

Not that the year's revenues were strictly limited to summer. By the early 1930s, some businesses did reopen briefly for the winter holidays. In fact, that idea had been given impetus in the late 1920s by the Tahoe Tavern's regularly scheduled "Snowball Specials" — passenger trains which ran direct from San Francisco to the Tavern's doorstep on winter weekends and holidays. But in spite of this brief flirtation with tourism, the local business community generally drowned through the white season, awaiting the promise of spring.

By the late 1930s, however, the seed of an idea had begun to germinate in some progressive minds. What about winter, anyway? Snow had already been demonstrated to possess recreational properties. Why not inform the public of Tahoe's ample endowment? To this end, a late-summer editorial in the *Lake Tahoe News* spoke enthusiastically of the coming season: "There are many plans for bigger and better winter sports in the lake region now ready to be carried out for the coming show season." Confided the editor, "This year will be an ideal one to introduce

yourself to the pleasures of a White Christmas."

And the winter of 1937-38 did indeed prove a memorable siege ... doubly so for any adventurer who might have joined the local populace that year, for snows approached record depths and sensational accounts in San Francisco newspapers of the Tahoe community's near-starvation prompted an airdrop of fresh foodstuffs on the Tahoe City Golf Course to spare further (fictitious, it developed) suffering.

The bigger and better winter plans alluded to in the editorial were never made clear in the pages of the *News*, for that publication failed to answer the bell for the 1938 season, leaving the *Tahoe Tattler* once again Tahoe City's only newspaper (and that on a publishing schedule which ran only from Memorial Day to Labor Day). Winter tourism in the Basin was still a campaign for the future, but "boosterism" had become an important aspect of Tahoe area commerce, and the fame of the region began to grow steadily.

Increasing ease of travel and the gradual return to black ink in the wake of the crippling Depression were getting the public out on the open road, and several local entrepreneurs began to explore ways to assure that the white sidewalks pointed in their direction. In this pursuit, they increasingly shared with each other the wisdom gained from their successes and failures, hoping to improve their mutual visibility.

In the spring of 1939, the formation of the Lake Tahoe - Sierra Association helped to give direction and unity to publicity efforts. The fledgling drumbeaters soon developed what was to prove a long and happy relationship with the Automobile Club of Southern California, through whose offices they distributed publications which extolled the virtues of the Lake Tahoe Region.

But the Lake Tahoe - Sierra Association had scarcely begun its campaign to make Tahoe a household word when along came World War II, postponing the public's opportunity to enjoy their new discovery. Yet in spite of this immediate obstacle to business success, the word was out - in local foxholes overseas and in less mortal

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scenes on the home front. Memories of the High Sierra paradise helped keep less idyllic thoughts company in many minds for the duration.

At War's end, crowds flocked to the Lake in unprecedented numbers. Commerce was enjoying a sharp upswing, and the number of local businesses mushroomed. "ALL YEAR HIGH GEAR," sang the *Lake Tahoe Tribune*. What about a year-round, all-weather road over Echo Summit? It was only a matter of time.

In 1946, the *Tahoe Topics* (a newspaper which survived slightly over a year of weekly publication in the early postwar era) inaugurated their Year Round Club. In that far-away fall of 1946, according to the newspaper's survey, there were as many as 35 Tahoe City and North Shore businessmen who elected to remain open all winter, braving what might come (or perhaps rather what might NOT come) in the spirit of the pioneers.

That winter, public transportation left the driving to Greyhound, and once arrived, whether by bus or private car, the visitor could be confident of finding lodgings and dining facilities, a grocery, a druggist, a filling station and an automotive repair shop which could get his car running well enough to make it back over the hill.

The campaign to keep the commercial cobwebs brushed away was not an immediate unqualified success, and many lean winters ensued. In order to survive, tenacious residents found it necessary to dabble in a diversity of employments, with wintertime work exceedingly hard to come by. It was actually not until 1949 that a growing public interest in downhill skiing led to the development of the Squaw Valley and Granlibakken Ski areas, which in turn generated some new jobs. What we now know as the Granlibakken Ski Area (originally the Tahoe Tavern's Winter Sports Grounds) had already enjoyed its share of fame in 1931 as the site of the ski jumping trials for the Lake Placid Olympics, but Squaw Valley was yet to have its moment in the international limelight.

That moment, the staging of a local Olympics at Squaw Valley in 1960 - was the beginning of the end for the significance of the Year Round Club. Interstate 80 over Donner Summit, an all-weather, four-lane highway, was completed the following year, providing much-improved access for winter sports enthusiasts. And so with nothing to discourage its success, the concept of Two Seasons was off and running.

Page 4 NORTH TAHOE WEEK through October 1, 1944

# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

## Victor Wikander — Wilderness Resident

Wilderness used to begin with a small w. Too many generations ago, the term served to define anyplace lacking a resident human population. However, as westward expansion lay its sporadic claim on the land, man's encroachments began to ascribe to wilderness a more definite shape, and finally to subdivide it into areas (into which today more than a casual intrusion is regulated by permit).

Our own local backcountry, to the west of Lake Tahoe's western shore, is an unusually rugged and lonely terrain — hence its name Desolation. And though each year large numbers of city-stressed visitors come to partake of the pastoral benefits of the land's vast unspoiled reaches, it has been the privilege of a special few to know any part of it as intimately as did Victor Wikander.

This 19th Century native of the Finnish woodlands was not a casual sojourner into our local wilderness. Wikander knew the territory as a resident, for beginning in 1922 (and for more than three decades thereafter) he actually lived the best part of each summer far from the advances of "civilization" in his hand-built cottage on the smaller of Buck Island Lake's two serene stools.

By the early 1920s, Wikander had already spent a great deal of time in Desolation. He had "discovered" Lake Tahoe in 1909 at the age of 28, when as a hydrographer for the San Francisco firm of Stone and Webster, he began taking readings on a weekly winter route between Georgetown and McKinney's (now the site of Chamberland Landing) — a round trip of 130 miles on skis. Traversing this considerable distance was nothing extraordinary to the former Finnish National Cross Country Ski Champion, and during the next three winters, he continued to make these weekly trips through the little-known upland, adding immeasurably to his knowledge of — and love for — this piece of wilderness.

In a 1946 issue of the *Tahoe Topics*, columnist Ethel Joslin Vernon (writing under the nom de plume Shark Twaine) interviewed Wikander for her regular column "True Tales of Tahoe." In that interview, the skier-scientist recalled his stint as a traveling data-gatherer. "I carried a pack consisting of a Price Current Meter with weights," he explained, "besides my own outfit for the trip. I traveled alone, and my first skis I made for myself, but finally I sent to Finland for a pair."

Wikander's marriage to Cecile Alice Boyd in 1916 did nothing to diminish his enthusiasm for the backwoods, which his new wife shared. To celebrate their mutual devotion to the outdoors, they spent their month-long honeymoon hiking and camping along his former ski route — a practice which they perpetuated (with variations in the route) over the next half-dozen years.

In 1922, the Wikanders homesteaded the one-acre island on Buck Island Lake, an isolated location approximately eight air miles due west of Rubicon Point on Tahoe's west shore. The site presented some unique construction problems over all of which Wikander proved master, each in its turn.

The most basic obstacle to construction was the difficulty of access. All building materials had to be brought in as far as the Rubicon Springs Hotel by way of the old Rubicon Stage Road. Before the turn of the century, this rutted, rockstrewn thoroughfare connected McKinney's "Hunter's Home" with Georgetown and the mining districts of the Western Slope.

Beyond the dilapidated Hotel, horsepower gave way to manpower. From this point, Wikander had to carry each armload of lumber, box of nails and squares of shingles nearly two miles to the lakeshore. The final leg of the tedious journey was by rowboat — a small wooden craft previously packed in by Wikander.

The western shore of the island was the site of the couple's original cabin, and by 1928, two guest cottages had been added to the list of improvements. Above the doorways in rustic letters, Wikander fashioned "Finland" and "Ireland" in honor of his Finnish father and Irish mother.

Over the years, the Wikanders achieved many pleasant refinements in their surroundings, including over a third of a mile of stone-bordered walkways (the 57 tons of sand for which Wikander rowed over from the mainland one load at a time). A rock-walled cellar built by Wikander at water's edge adequately served the retreat's needs of refrigeration, and lanterns illuminated the cottages in the evenings.

The severity of local winters did not deter Wikander from enjoying an annual snow-season visit of several weeks, though the trips in and out on skis were extended by the fact that the roads were rarely plowed beyond Tahoe City. In spite of the hardship inherent in such activity, Wikander never tired of these winter jaunts, and at the time of his 1946 interview, at age 64, he expressed the desire to find "a young snow sports enthusiast" with whom to share ski trips "over the white skyland trails in the season of the big snows."

Victor Wikander's handiwork is all gone now, returned nearly to its created state by the forces of agencies both natural and manmade. But there is something of his spirit alive in those who seek out his brand of serenity today. Though in the present age we are all visitors in the wilderness, by making the effort to seek it out we can still experience the same sense of wonderment which Wikander enjoyed over half a century ago.

Page 6 NORTH TAHOE WEEK through November 26, 1966

# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

## COFFEE SHOPS

The heart of a small community must surely be its coffee shops, for it is over the counters of such establishments that its essential business is truly conducted. The coffee shop (or sandwich shop, as they were known in the early days) is a fairly recent culinary tradition, dating exclusively to this century. Backwoods hotelkeepers were obliged to provide meals for their guests, but such offerings aspired to the same grand elegance of the accommodations they provided.

It was not until the increased mobility afforded by the automobile and the rise of family resorts brought "vacationists" of more moderate means to the Lake that the coffee shop could be born. The less formal aspirations of the new style of restaurants suited this crowd perfectly, and it was only a matter of time before several had found their way into business.

Oldest of the town's blueplate eateries to operate independent of a hotel or rooming house was Bennie's Inn. Its proprietor, one Olga Bennvelt (sp.) was a lean, spunky widow who, in 1911, began her business in a tent on Front Street (now Hwy. 28), pitched propitiously between the Tahoe Inn (on the uphill side) and Bickford's Lumber Company (now Truckee-Tahoe Lumber) on the downhill side. Here she plied her hot dogs, ice cream, pie and

coffee to all comers.

Many of Bennie's customers were laborers and tradesmen engaged in the construction of the Outlet Works, and in the absence of any competition for this clientele, the business thrived. In 1916, Mrs. Bennvelt married Billy Mayhew, a former employee of neighboring Tahoe Inn, and together they continued to operate the eatery with great success. A few boards at a time were added to the original canvas, and gradually the Bennie Hot Dog Emporium (as it was also known) evolved into a frame structure which survived well into the 1930s.

Hoping to capitalize on the popularity of the eat-and-run repast, the Tahoe Inn added a roadside Sandwich Shop on its uphill side. Here dust-choked visitors could order a sandwich and a cooling beverage from the fountain without intruding on the cooperative elegance of the Inn's main dining room. Long-time local resident Lillian Farr recalls that when the Tahoe City Mercantile (which had also housed the post office) burned in 1937, the Sandwich Shop became the temporary mail distribution point for the town, until the new Community Center building could be completed.

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## *Heritage* Continued from page 8

By the mid-1930s, the rôle of the railroad in the Tahoe City Community was in decline. Private autos were becoming the most-used means of transportation into the Basin, and within a few years, growing public sentiment against Southern Pacific's encroachments on the town Commons and the need for salvage metal for the war effort combined to drive the railroad out of town. However, a few scattered cars remained. One of these, parked at roadside near the vacant lot west of Luckys, became Ernie's Pioneer Pullman Diner, perhaps Tahoe City's oldest theme restaurant.

As of 1941, a quick meal could be had at the Honeybunch. Chris "Honeybunch" Boylardes and his wife, Rose, operated this culinary adventure, which was located in the Village Store building. The menu featured fountain service, pork and lamb chops, homemade chili and "spun steak" sandwiches, the latter a popular euphemism for our modern hamburger.

The postwar boom led to the establishment of a number of new local eateries, though only two of the half-dozen which got their starts in the late 1940s survive as restaurants today. When World War II ended, Bill and Shirley Conger were among the first to establish a new restaurant business in town. The boom brought prosperity to Tahoe City's commerce, and the Congers' coffee shop motel combination was a success from the beginning. Local construction workers and business people appreciated the good food at moderate prices, served in Conger's convivial atmosphere, and when the Congers sold their business to Mike LaFerriere, he continued their name and popularity. The enterprise even took on a sort of unofficial status as local history repository when Judge C.W. Vernon allowed his photo collection to be displayed on its walls. When LaFerriere moved his operations to the Cafe Cobblestone, he sold Congers to the Millers, who changed its name to the Family Tree — the only local coffee shop to survive four decades in spite of the increasing competition of recent years.

The Skookum Chuck was another post-war phenomenon in Tahoe City, offering a steamy variety of delicacies in the same building as Red Anderson's original butchershop. Al Randolph was the proprietor, choosing for its name a tantalizing appellation borrowed from an obscure Native American invocation (warning, some

patrons believed). Skookum Chuck doubled briefly as the town's bus depot, and as such enjoyed a certain transient clientele which might otherwise have chosen to overlook its exotic cuisine.

The early 1950s saw two new coffee shops open for business at the Tahoe City "Wye." About 1951, "Jack" Woods leased a parcel of riverside property from Don Del Carlo to the southwest of Fanny Bridge. Here he built a one-story structure, using scrounged materials and labor, which he called Sportman's Cafe. Woods provided counter service plus a few tables for more leisurely dining. Independent "gyppo" petroleum dealers supplied gas for the Cafe's two pumps, and business was further bolstered by Woods' acquisition of the Greyhound Bus contract. In fact, the patronage was largely transient, and several early-day customers (still residents of Tahoe City) recall the myriad of fleabites which were part and parcel of the Sportman's dining experience.

About the same time, another coffee shop was getting its start near the Wye. This venture, housed in a small block structure for the purpose by local realtor Fred Kilner, was founded by Blanche Donaldson. Under her able direction, Donaldson's became not only a stop for passing motorists, but a strong competitor with Conger's for the crucial local trade. As the decade of the 1950s ended and preparations for the coming Winter Olympics at Squaw Valley began in earnest, the construction workers who had come to the Lake to be part of the latest "boom" supplied both concerns plenty of business.

Donaldson's original block building was bursting at the seams, and Kilner replaced it with a larger and more stylish frame structure. The site's ideal location and Blanche's homey, personal attention to her patrons proved a winning combination, and when she retired in the early 1970s, turning the business over to her son Rex, she could look back on two decades of popular success in the realm of local restaurateuring.

But Rex Donaldson's dream was the establishment of his own dinner house in Tahoe City, and with that in mind, he sold the coffee shop to Bill and Bonnie Starz in 1975. The Starz enhanced the cafe menu with their own specialties, later opting to move their business across the road to pursue the baking which had been their trademark in the restaurant. The vacated Kilner building then became the offices of the Old Tahoe Junction Land Company, a

short-lived real estate operation which a few years later gave way to Squaw Valley Sports, the business which still occupies it today.

The fact that all but one of the businesses discussed here are now history points out the difficulty of commercial survival in the High Sierra. Actually, Tahoe City briefly sustained many more short-lived cafes and stands which this column does not have room to mention!

Enjoy your pie in the sky!

Page 14 NORTH TAHOE WEEK through December 10, 1966

## Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

### Tahoe City Community Center

While urban renewal is commonplace in our country's large centers of population, smaller communities usually tend to rebuild only when an existing structure is destroyed - usually by fire. Such was the case 49 years ago last month when a blaze rumored to be incendiary in nature swept through the Tahoe City waterfront, wiping out the Tahoe Mercantile, the town post office, the Cedar Log Bar (original meeting place for the Tahoe Women's Club) and several other smaller structures.

Judge C.W. "Bill" Vernon, whose residence in Tahoe City had already exceeded a decade by the time of the fire, recalled the aftermath of the horrible event quite vividly in spite of the passage of almost four decades. "I had never seen so many people at the beach as gathered later that afternoon," Vernon recalled. "They were saying, 'We will never again come to the beach through winter snow to get the mail. We will build up on the highway on our own property.'"

"They were remembering," Vernon went on to explain, "that Congress had given us (the people of Tahoe City) the entire beach front of Lot 6, containing 13 acres of land extending 900 feet along the beach front, as a people's park for Tahoe City. This beach and park, the Tahoe City Commons, was deeded to the people of Tahoe City in 1867."

A rallying of local sentiment in favor of rebuilding at least one of the burned structures was almost instantaneous. An item which appeared in the *Tahoe Tattler's* special Christmas issue of 1937 describes the mustering of community energies for the rebuilding project. "Hardly had the ashes of what once was their Clubhouse cooled," reported the *Tattler*, "when the Tahoe Women's Club met and formed plans for raising money to rebuild their clubrooms, destroyed by the disastrous fire." Though by late autumn the location for the new structure had yet to be chosen, card parties had already yielded \$134 in behalf of the project, and independent donations began to trickle in. Benefactors soon included Rotary Oil Burner Company of Truckee, Mrs. Helen Clark Slater, the H. and W. Philanthropic Club of Meeks Bay, Otto Rempier and "your own newspaper."

The assistance of local business men...



Tahoe City's newly-completed Community Center, on the bluff above Commons Beach, awaits occupancy in June, 1938. (C.W. Vernon photo courtesy of Lillian Vernon Farr)

the Women's Club) Norman R. Mayfield (project contractor) and C.O. Valentine (former photographer for the Tahoe Tavern and in 1938 proprietor of the Valentine's Cabins in Tahoe Park).

Following the 1937 blaze which destroyed the former lakeside post office, mail had been temporarily distributed from the front of Atherton's grocery store, but with the completion of the new Community Center, Postmistress Jeanette (Janet) Romin Watson moved her operation across the street and into the new postal headquarters.

A celebration marking the opening of the new facility was held on June 26, and as reported in the front-page item in the *Tattler*, more than 200 persons turned out to take a gander at the newly-completed building. "From all

Until it was destroyed by fire in 1937, this over-water structure known as the Cedar Log Bar served as the original clubhouse of the Tahoe Women's Club. (C.W. Vernon photo courtesy of Lillian Vernon Farr)



had the ashes of what once was their Clubhouse cooled," reported the Tattler, "when the Tahoe Women's Club met and formed plans for raising money to rebuild their clubrooms, destroyed by the disastrous fire." Though by late autumn the location for the new structure had yet to be chosen, card parties had already yielded \$174 in behalf of the project, and independent donations began to trickle in. Benefactors soon included Rotary Oil Burner Company of Truckee, Mrs. Helen Clark Slater, the H. and W. Philanthropic Club of Meeks Bay, Otto Rempier and "your own newspaper."

The consensus of local opinion was that a building combining several purposes would be the most practical approach to reestablishing civic entities left homeless by the Commons fire, and it was soon concluded that a new post office and public meeting hall could - and should - be contained under one roof. Judge Vernon was delegated to supervise the project, with local contractor Norman Mayfield retained to design and construct the new facility.

In order to proceed with the building on the town's chosen site, it was necessary that the project be approved by the Placer County Superior Court Judge, who was charged with the administration of the Commons parcel. The Women's Club petitioned the court in behalf of the project, and permission was subsequently granted on the grounds that the intended uses of the proposed structure would benefit all members of the community.

As the snow receded the following spring, Mayfield's crew of carpenters went immediately to work on the new structure. Progress was rapid, and on June 1, only eight months after the destruction of the former facilities, the new building was completed. Actual construction costs were \$4,000, with another \$1,500 being contributed by community members. Most of those on the job turned in their time and bills written off as donations (a brand of benevolence all but extinct today).

The new, two-story facility, built in the "Tahoe Style," sported a green shingle roof, shake siding on the upper story and a complementary rustic treatment of the street-level exterior. On the ground floor, the town's new post office was installed in its spacious new facilities, while upstairs, a meeting room complete with kitchen facilities could accommodate about 100 persons (considered a crowd in Tahoe City at that time).

Trustees of the new facility included President Henry Droste (attorney and local rector), grocer A.M. "Red" Anderson, C.W. Vernon (unofficial town photographer and co-partner with his wife Ethel in the Tahoe Novelty Shop), and Mrs. George R. (Evelyn) Bliss and Mrs. A.M. (Marie) Henry of the Tahoe Women's Club. Other members of the Board of Directors included storekeeper Walter Atherton, Carl A. Bechdolt, Sr. (owner of the Tahoe Inn), Mrs. Joe Duffee (wife of the local plumber and member of

#### Labor in Tahoe Park

Following the 1937 blaze which destroyed the former lakeside post office, mail had been temporarily distributed from the front of Atherton's grocery store, but with the completion of the new Community Center, Postmistress Jeanette (Janet) Brown Watson moved her operation across the street and into the new postal headquarters.

A celebration marking the opening of the new facility was held on June 26, and as reported in the front-page item in the Tattler, more than 200 persons turned out to take a gander at the newly-completed building. "From all over the lake they came," said the Tattler, "... to sign the register in the clubhouse, see the new building brimming with flowers donated for the occasion, to chat with the members of a welcoming committee. At day's end, the community counted 184 names on its roll, called it a good opening day party."

The rustic guest register, with its carved wooden cover, was a veritable census of the 1938 community, including the signatures and best wishes of nearly every person in the area at the time, from grade schoolers to grandparents. The register still exists, and can now be found in the Tahoe City Library.

The new Community Center was quickly to become not only a favored meeting place in town, but (unlike its present-day status as a facility of the TCPUD) was operated on a profitable basis. Rental of the upstairs meeting hall was fixed on a sliding scale, ranging from \$7.50 (for afternoon use of the hall only) to \$15 for evening rental, including use of the kitchen. At such time as rentals and donations had paid off the cost of the building's construction, it was to be dedicated to public use, with rent from the post office and county library paying the upkeep thereafter.

For over a decade following the 1937 Commons fire, book-minded citizens had been directed to the library at Tahoe Lake School to satisfy their reading needs, but this arrangement was becoming increasingly unsatisfactory as the town's readership grew. In 1950, following the death of Julia Bechdolt, her husband Carl Bechdolt, Sr. funded and directed the construction of an addition to the Community Center Building in her memory, to house a new town library. Formal dedication of the building came on May 7, 1950. In the ensuing decades, the library's holdings continued to grow, until they reached a condition of crowdedness which could induce claustrophobia in anyone who so much as peered into their bulging stacks.

But a solution was in the offing, for yet another new structure, rising against the bluff above the Tahoe Boat Company property, was to be the library's new home. In April of 1976, with the help of a donation from C.W. Vernon in memory of his wife, Ethel Joslin Vernon, the two-story edifice was completed and dedicated.



About 1962, the Tahoe City Public Utility District, experiencing the same growing pains which had caused other public entities to seek larger quarters, had moved from their offices in the Vernon Building (in the shade of the Tahoe City's Big Tree, near the corner of Grove Street and Hwy 28) into the space vacated when the post office relocated to the Safeway Center. Though not officially granted permission to occupy the facility by the Superior Court Judge entrusted with the administration of the Commons property, the PUD (which by the early 1960s still represented roughly the same boundaries as the unincorporated town) moved into the vacated offices, and it was not long before the local population, many of whom were recent arrivals to the area, were referring to the structure as "the PUD Building."

In 1978, this misnomer was perpetuated - and even amplified - when, following the removal of the library to its new quarters, the District expanded their offices into the entire downstairs of the Community Center. By this time, the PUD had taken over operations of water and sewer systems far afield of Tahoe City, and its use of the building was, by virtue of their broadened horizons, somewhat outside the guidelines of the Congressional Act which had established the commons in 1867.

Following a decade of occupation by the TCPUD, growing concern over the lack of a local civic center at last resulted in the relocation of the PUD offices to the Lighthouse Center and the former Elks building (on Fairway Drive behind the Tahoe City Golf Course). Today, the Community Center has once again assumed a status more in keeping with the original intentions of the city fathers - and mothers - who first saw to the building of a local center which could benefit all the members of the community.

NORTH TAHOE WEEK December 15-17, 1986 Page 11

## Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

All towns have their dates with destiny - milestones which mark their passage from wild landscape to settled community. When the reminiscences about such moments are handed down to succeeding generations (as they unfailingly are), their particulars become increasingly inevitable legends with each retelling, carving in stone, as it were, the way we were.

In this, Tahoe City is no exception. The high country tends to deal harshly with the hardy souls who persist in calling it home, and as a result, many of Tahoe City's magic moments - as recalled by those who lived them - have possessed elements of heroic narrative. For Tahoe City is indeed a community unique in its history of deprivations, peopled with larger-than-life characters whose bravery and persistence have triumphed over the hardship and isolation to be found here.

The machinations of Mother Nature have figured in many of the town's memories, necessitating activities and institutions outside the normal requirements of living. And since geography has isolated Tahoe City's population from the "outside world," its members have tended toward an inordinate disregard for what they consider the superfluous aspects of government (i.e. the enforcement of such civil matters as gambling and drinking), lending this town's history still more varied hue.

No single event separates Tahoe City's history into two easily discernible eras. But as World War I ended, the necessary elements were in place for a period of change and growth such as the town had not seen before. The set of circumstances which in the early years of the century had hindered development of the region now combined to



This 1938 view shows the results of an economic upswing which has continued, with few interruptions, to the present day. C. W. Vernon photo courtesy of Lillian Vernon Farr.

business in the mid-1930s, and the inn's indomitable owner, Carl A. Bechdel, Sr., lost no time in reconstructing the building - with a few changes. Carpenters worked around the clock on the new hospitality, and when the 1934 summer season arrived, a new Tahoe Inn was ready to greet the crowds of vacationists who eagerly ascended on the community as the snows receded.

A third blaze - and one which would initiate the most sweeping changes on the Tahoe City landscape - brought devastation to a number of buildings on the Tahoe Commons, a 13-acre parcel of land deeded to the people

construction of a new Community Center building. This structure, which for the next quarter century housed the town's post office, was the first of several civic buildings which now occupy the Commons parcel. Its completion ushered in an era in which Tahoe City, though still an unincorporated area, became a community in the true sense of the word - a group of neighbors working toward common goals. When wartime conditions forced a slow-down of the local economy, residents could be confident that time would reverse the trend and bring a still more vigorous resurgence of prosperity to the community.

had hindered development of the region now combined to



The original Tahoe Inn building, with its sweeping verandas and porches, was the most impressive structure on the block in 1915, when Ethel Joelin Vernon snapped this photo. Beyond the inn is the dancehall building, which downstairs housed the Vernon's novelty shop as well as the offices of Sierra Power Company. E.J. Vernon photo courtesy of Lillian Vernon Farr.

draw visitors (and potential residents) in unprecedented numbers. The return of the doughboys from foreign shores signaled a national trend toward travel, and this in turn promised boom times for the Sierra region. Additionally, the threat of influenza, which only a few years before had taken countless lives and discouraged those venturing into new territory, had now subsided. The gradual cessation of this health menace and the increased mobility afforded by the growing use of automobiles were now joining to help open up new horizons to the travelling public.

Improved roads linking Tahoe City with the Lake's north and west shores had been completed just at the outbreak of the war, and at the dusty junction of these thoroughfares, there began to grow the seeds of an established community - first the essential services, and then, tentatively, a diversity of commercial ventures. By the late 1920s, local businesses included a garage and filing station, several lodging houses and eating establishments, two markets (not Safeway and Luckys, you may be sure), a dancehall, several saloons and a dispensary of furs, curio and fishing tackle.

Growth during the Depression years was slow and sporadic with most merchants feeling lucky to continue in operation. However, in the last decade prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, the town underwent a series of face lifts, inspired chiefly by necessity. When a 1932 fire destroyed the horse and carriage barns at the corner of Highway 28 and Grove Street (where once the stock and equipment of a livery business and stage line had been stored), the era of equestrian transportation was all but over. Horseless carriages had long since become the rule, and the new stables (now a purely recreational concession) would be relocated outside of the town proper.

Two years later, the original Tahoe Inn (by then already four decades old) would suffer the same incendiary fate. However, providing lodgings for guests was a booming

business in the town. When the original owner, Carl A. Bechtolt, Sr., lost no time in reconstructing the building - with a few changes. Carpenters worked around the clock on the new hostelry, and when the 1934 summer season arrived, a new Tahoe Inn was ready to greet the crowds of vacationists who eagerly eschewed on the community as the snows receded.

A third blaze - and one which would initiate the most sweeping changes on the Tahoe City landscape - brought devastation to a number of buildings on the Tahoe Commons, a 13-acre parcel of land deeded to the people of Tahoe City by a Congressional Act of 1867. Though litigation brought by Walter Bickford in 1919 to quiet community title had resulted in clearly-worded restrictions against private encroachments on the property, a number of commercial operations had continued to occupy it, albeit illegally. And so when dawn broke on an October morning in 1937, revealing the Tahoe City Mercantile, Wentworth's market (which at that time housed the town's post office) and the overwater Cedar Log Bar in ashes, few of the townspeople were much surprised.

This third fire eventually had the greatest impact of the three, for it resulted not only in the development of the Commons lakefront as a recreational beach, but in the

structure, which for the next quarter century housed the town's post office, was the first of several civic buildings which now occupy the Commons parcel. Its completion ushered in an era in which Tahoe City, though still an unincorporated area, became a community in the true sense of the word - a group of neighbors working toward common goals. When wartime conditions forced a slow-down of the local economy, residents could be confident that time would reverse the trend and bring a still more vigorous resurgence of property to the community.



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# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

## Bill Boyle's Cross

High on the hill which serves as a sort of back fence for Tahoe City, 500 feet above the townsite, stands a white cross which, for nearly three quarters of a century, has marked the resting place of one of the town's earliest pioneers. William Boyle is the name of the man so honored — an individual of diverse interests and skills who found his way to the high Sierra settlement prior to the turn of the century.

Approaching old age by the time of his arrival, Boyle had already lived a full life elsewhere. He talked little of his past, but the other inhabitants of the community detected a definite scholarly bent in this refugee from the deep South. Not that Boyle flaunted his education, whatever it had been. The Georgia cracker's favored pursuits were fishing or (if the finny tribes waxed bashful) boat building. In both he was expert, and the fame of these talents spread as quickly as his popularity.

Commercial fishing was in its heyday when Boyle arrived in town, and from his residence, a shack on the north-west bank of the Lake Outlet (near where the Tahoe Marina Lodge tennis courts are now located), he had easy access to the fishing grounds. Boyle's hand-made boats were of the finest quality, suggesting some formal training in the craft somewhere in the gentleman's mysterious past.

Boyle had a great love of children, and when not fishing or building boats, he often baked goodies for the local kiddies. His specialty was doughnuts, and news of a fresh batch travelled fast, luring hungry half-pints from all over town.

Though Boyle's reputation for honesty, generosity and friendliness was universal among his Tahoe City friends, like many other locals who braved the long local winters, he was known to imbibe to excess on occasion. One such bout, at William Campbell's Custom House saloon, proved to be his last. In the course of downing an impropriety number of drinks, Boyle had admitted to

his friends in attendance his need of a haircut. His capacity exceeded, Boyle eventually passed out, whereupon the fun-loving confederates accommodated him by shaving his head. When he woke up and confronted the bald-pated visage in the mirror, Boyle swore off drinking for good.

In his final years, the likeable southerner developed stomach cancer, and his painful decline was a cause of great sadness in the community. When Boyle passed away in the first days of February, 1912, his friends decided to honor his wish to be buried on the hill above the Outlet, where he could "watch the fish come in in the spring." (The Outlet Dam was not yet completed, and the piscatorial population was still free to come and go at will).

On the morning of February 4, 1912, a group of Boyle's friends gathered at William Pomin(e)'s Tahoe House to fortify themselves for the trip up the mountain. Loading Boyle's mortal remains on a toboggan, they began their ascent, towing their burden over the ice-encrusted drifts. Half a century later, Tahoe City resident Ernest H. Pomin(e), a member of the party, recalled the expedition in a taped interview. Pomin(e), a teetotaler, described his growing fear, as the difficult climb proceeded, that the liberal pulls which most members of the party were taking on a jug brought along to ward off chill would prevent their achieving their destination. Part way up, on one of many rest stops, the thoughtful "Ernie" pitched the bottle into the bushes, when the others weren't looking, thus insuring the completion of the mission.

The burial was accomplished as per Boyle's wishes, putting him to rest on the site overlooking the adopted town he had come to love. Constable Robert Montgomery Watson later built (and for many years after continued to maintain) the 12 foot cedar cross which today marks Boyle's grave — a Tahoe City landmark memorializing one of the town's earliest and best-loved pioneers.

# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten

Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society



## The Lake Tahoe Skii Club Part I

The Lake Tahoe Skii Club, now nearing the end of its sixth decade of existence, is Tahoe City's oldest organization. Though many individuals contributed to the club's growth and development, the promotional efforts of one man led to formation of the club, which existed on paper before those who were to become its members ever heard of it.

In 1926, the Bliss family, builders of the Tahoe Tavern, sold their magnificent hostelry to interests which also controlled Southern Pacific Railroad. When the Tavern changed hands, Jack Mathews (who had been head chef during the Bliss regime) was promoted to the position of Manager. It was Mathews' idea to re-open the Tavern about December 1 for a winter season of several months, taking advantage of the SP's conversion to standard-gauge track on the line between Truckee and Tahoe City to bring passengers directly to the Tavern's door without changing trains.

Wintertime entertainment provided by Mathews included skating, a toboggan slide and world-class ski jump exhibitions staged on a championship "trajectory" constructed under the direction of Lars Haugen, a Norwegian who at that time held the world ski jumping title. The Tavern's winter sports facilities were located about half a mile west of the hotel proper, quaintly accessible by horse-drawn sleigh.

Mathews' second-season scheme met with only limited success, owing to the difficulty of keeping the train tracks cleared and to the competition for sales of food and accommodations offered by the trains themselves. But Mathews' ingenuity would not be denied. In the fall of 1929, the enterprising manager called a meeting of local townspeople to make two announcements. He delivered the bad news first: the Tavern was giving up its winter season. This came as no great surprise to Tahoe City's year-round residents. The idea of opening in the winter had had its share of skeptics from the start.

Mathews' good news came as more of a shock: the Lake Tahoe Skii Club had been awarded the site of the USSA Championships for the 1932 Olympics. The Tavern's winter sports facilities had been pronounced excellent by the professional jumpers hired to compete in exhibition contests staged there in the resort's first years of winter operation. But a Skii Club? Mathews explained that securing the National Championships had been contingent on sponsorship by a winter sports club, and that a group of businessmen connected with the Tavern had

met, organized a *pro forma* club, and elected officers. The success of the venture lay with the townspeople — did they want to help?

"The day after the meeting with Mathews," Tahoe City pioneer C.W. Vernon later recalled, "the local residents met to form their own Lake Tahoe Skii Club." (The Scandinavian spelling "Skii" was retained on the advice of Mathews, who explained that it lent a grander air to the name). Officers of the new organization were Norman Mayfield (Pres.), R.H. Watson (1st V.P.), Al Richardson (2nd V.P.), Weller Atherton (Treas.), A.M. Anderson (Secty.) and A.M. Henry (Chief of the Hill). Members of the Board included Carl Bechdoit, Sr., Ed Lathe, Ernest Pomin of Idilewild, Gene Rogers and C.W. Vernon. The Vernons would take care of publicity and Bert Cassidy, publisher of the *Auburn Journal* and later a state Senator, was to handle the club's finances. Wendell Robie, guiding light of the Auburn Ski Club (formed the year before), was also on hand to assist the club in its early organizational meetings.

An initial warm-up tournament was slated for Washington's birthday weekend, 1931, and Southern Pacific scheduled daily special trains to bring spectators to the event. This inaugural contest was dominated by jumpers from the Auburn Ski Club, for the local boys who would become the reigning champions in years to come were still too young to compete.

The success of the Skii Club's first tournament game encouraged those whose efforts had contributed to its staging, and preparations for the National Championships, only a year away, began in earnest. Early in 1932, the original "trajectory" was remodelled — again under the direction of Lars Haugen. The takeoff was moved farther up the hill, and the landing apron was extended to accommodate jumps over 200 feet.

All seemed in readiness for the momentous competition, scheduled for February 26-29. A series of storms which swept through the Sierras a week prior to the opening of the Championships threatened to cancel the event, but feverish efforts to clear the tracks for the arrival of special SP trains and to restore the jump hill to proper competitive condition won the day, and the much-heralded "Nationals" began, with unprecedented winter crowds in attendance.

It was a great day for Tahoe City and the Lake Tahoe Skii Club. Governor Rolph was on hand to crown popular actress Anita Page the first of many Snow Queens, and the presence of Dr. R.S. Elmer of Vermont, President of the United States Ski Association, lent an official dignity to the event. The Lake Tahoe Skii Club had staged the first U.S. National Ski Championships west of the Rockies, but the best was yet to come. The club did not rest on its laurels, but built on this early triumph to become a force to be reckoned with in the years which followed, producing champion athletes in all events and classes.

[Note: Tune in again next week for the thrilling conclusion of the history of the Lake Tahoe Skii Club (to date).]



# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

## The Lake Tahoe Ski Club Part II

When we tuned out last week, the Lake Tahoe Ski Club had just completed the successful staging of the first U.S. National Ski Championships west of the Rockies at Olympic Hill on the Tahoe Tavern Winter Sports Grounds. Those involved had hoped that their world-class jump hill would help assure their selection as the site for the 1932 Winter Olympics, and though they lost that bid to Lake Placid, New York, the National Championships at Olympic Hill in February of that year had proved the potential of both the Tahoe City facilities and the Lake Tahoe Ski Club.

Building on the success of the Nationals, the club had soon scheduled a second meet for March 4, 1933. This one-day event drew competitors from six California ski clubs, including Auburn, Yosemite and distant Big Bear. The class "A" jumping event was once again dominated by the Auburn Ski Club, whose members Roy Mikkelsen and Rolf Wigaard took first and second places, respectively. But the Tahoe City contingent had begun to prove itself in the events open to the younger age groups. Future Tahoe City Fire Chief Al Henry (at that time known as "Junior") took first place in the boys 2 1/2 mile cross country race at this tournament, and Carl Bechdolt, Jr. won the Class "D" jumping event. First prize in the women's 2 1/2 mile nordic race went to June West, a Tahoe City girl following in the ski tracks of Marie Henry ("Junior's" mother), who held the distinction of being the first Women's State Champion in 1931.

In 1934, the Lake Tahoe Ski Club again hosted the State Championships - bigger and better than ever for this fourth annual event. Snow sports were not the only attraction on the bill. A Queen Contest, sponsored by the Sacramento Bee, drew 20 competitors, among them Kathleen Starratt Anderson of Tahoe City. C.W. Vernon, who with his wife

Ethel Joslin Vernon, provided news coverage for the Ski Club, later recalled the elaborate lengths to which the club went to enhance Miss Anderson's chances for selection as Queen: "We made a float decorated with a small balsam tree and other greenery," he remembered. "On the front of the float was a simulated snowball made of chicken wire covered with cotton, large enough for Kathleen to kneel in. The float was pulled by two sled-dogs belonging to Harry Johanson. When the signal for our entry came, Harry drove the dogs towing the float out onto the auditorium floor, and Kathleen stood up to the surprise of the 4,000 spectators, who then applauded briskly. Maybe the float helped, but I like to think it was Kathleen's beauty which helped her to win over 20 other attractive contestants."

As the competitors' general skill level improved, the nordic events were gradually lengthened. For the 1934 tournament, the men's cross country race was ten miles, while the women's was extended to five miles. In addition to being chosen as Queen of the Snow Festival that year, Kathleen Starratt Anderson won this latter event, demonstrating an athletic ability to match her good looks. Carl Bechdolt, Sr. (who three years later became the youngest person in the U.S. to be elected President of a ski club) repeated his 1933 win in the Class "D" jumping, with several other local boys finishing close behind.

The athletic competition was branching out each year, resulting in the inclusion of new events. In addition to the jumping events, the 1934 tournament included a slalom race (which a newspaper account of the event reported "is gaining popularity with ski sport fans").

The Lake Tahoe Ski Club's activities during this period were not limited to tournaments and competition. An age-yellowed clipping from the Reno Gazette dated Jan. 31, 1934 recounts a typical Sunday club outing to Paige Meadows (west of the Tavern Sports Grounds) involving 30 skiers. The party (which included guests from the Reno Ski Club) carried their lunches on the 12 mile excursion, and following a midday repast on the Upper Paige Meadow, they tested their downhill skills on the steep ridges along the return route.

The number of competitors continued to increase, and 87 participants were entered in the 1936 State Championships, again held on the Tavern Winter Sports Grounds. While the Lake Tahoe Ski Club was without a competitive Class "A" jumper, Walt Mandeville of Kings Beach took a close second behind Wayne Poulsen, who (though a member of the Lake Tahoe club) at that time represented the Auburn Ski Club in the Class "B" event. Dual club affiliations proved detrimental to LTSC point totals once again when Sig Ulland, who had joined the Shasta Snowmen, was noted as a guest of the LTSC. His score consequently did not benefit either team.



## *Heritage* Continued from Page 6

Local boys continued to take honors in jumping competition through the late 1930s, both on the home trajectory and in tournaments at Cisco, Portola and Mt. Shasta. Among Lake Tahoe Skii Club jumpers prior to 1940 not already mentioned were Bill Bechdolt, Dick and Howard Carnell, Donald Cowell, Chuck and Ollie Henrikson, Howard Pyle, Doug Smith, Jack Starratt, Pete Vanni and Henry and Jimmie Worden.

The decision of the Tahoe Tavern management to discontinue winter operation and the collapse of the warming hut on the Tavern Grounds in 1936 contributed to the redevelopment of a jump hill closer to Tahoe City's residential area. The sloping parcel of land across the road from what is now the Fairway Community Center in Tahoe City had served the town's youngsters as a practice hill since ski jumping was introduced to the area nearly a decade before. In 1937, the club relocated its activities to this site. But though its proximity to the community was ideal, the site's southern exposure frequently resulted in unfavorable snow conditions, and the club subsequently returned to Olympic Hill.

Lake Tahoe Skii Club was in a state of transition. The ranks of the town's jumpers were being depleted as the boys headed off to college or began careers which limited their available practice time. But perhaps the greatest single factor temporarily retarding the continued development of the club was the global conflict looming on the horizon. The course of world events would soon put an end to ski sports competition between the clubs of the western Sierra, severely curtailing their activities for the duration.

A future column will concern itself with the development of the Lake Tahoe Skii Club after World War II when a new generation of jumping and racing competitors would aid in its revitalization and growth.



## The Old P.O.

Carnelian Bay's own Original Old Post Office Coffee Shop has a history which its name only begins to suggest. The building in which it is housed has endured well past the half-century mark, serving as a focal point of the community almost since its inception in the mid-1930s. The property on which "the Old P.O." sits was originally part of a much larger holding acquired in 1896 by the three Flick brothers, William, Joseph and Nick, for whom the bay's northern point is named. The Flick property had earlier belonged to one Dr. Bourne, a semi-reclusive type who had operated an unaccredited Health Sanatoria nearby in the 1870s. At the time of acquisition by the three brothers, the property still included several commercial structures, which the trio had a hand in operating. However, their abiding love was fishing, and to this they devoted most of their time, selling some of their catch for use on the tables of fine San Francisco restaurants.

The pace of life in Carnelian Bay in the early years of the century was lethargic. On summer days, the pebbled shore between the Flick's roadside outpost and the Carnelian Bay Hotel (later the home of The White House Restaurant and today the site of the Carnelian House) was occasionally the destination of vacationists who came by wagon or horseback in search of the bright gemstones for which the bay was named.

By the mid-1930s, the two surviving Flick brothers, then in their 80s, were ready to call it quits. In the spring of 1935, Lloyd C. Shank purchased their commercial holdings and immediately set about the development of a more ambitious venture. The June 28 issue of the *Tahoe Tattler* noted improvements made and planned by Shank: "The makeshift P.O. of a week ago has a new setting, and the Bay is now boasting a neatly stocked store, delicatessen and iced drink counter, managed by son L.C., Jr. Docking, marine and service station improvements are also on the Shank schedule."

The next several years saw further expansion of the "resort," including the construction of six rental cottages

on the lakeshore opposite the store. During the summer of 1936, Marysville contractors Helmstreet and Bell, under contract to the State Highway Department to resurface the road between Tahoe City and Brockway, had set up camp for 100 men at the bay, supplying local proprietors with a readymade clientele. But gambling losses and other improprieties of the younger Shank were the undoing of the family's operation there, and about 1938, the property was leased to Carl "Pappy" Zinsmeister.

The Zinsmeister family operated the business successfully for about four years, enjoying the same steady growth which characterized the north shore economy during this period. The route of Highway 26 through the bay had by this time been moved, elevated and paved. Prior to this upgrading, most visitors to the bay had arrived by way of the steamer, which circled the lake daily in summer. Now improved overland access was bringing private auto traffic to the area, and commercial ventures were on the upswing.

Among this new generation of summer visitors were Ray and Marge Fellows, who had first come to the Lake in 1933. Several subsequent visits convinced the Fellows that they wanted to make Tahoe their permanent home, and when

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Carl Zinsmeister was proprietor of the Carnelian Bay Store when this photo was snapped in the late 1930s. Ten years later, owners Ray and Marge Fellows would double the square footage with a sizable addition to the left side of the storefront. The resulting structure is today known as the Original Old Post Office Coffee Shop. (Photo courtesy of Mrs. Conrad J. Herlich)

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# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten

Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

The Founding of

## Tahoe Forest Hospital

In this day when professional treatment of almost any medical problem is no more than 30 miles from the most remote resident of the Tahoe-Truckee area, we tend to take such services for granted. However, less than two generations ago, those seeking medical attention were able to obtain it only at the expense of great effort.

A local resident who remembers the problem vividly is Ted Barrett, a retired union business agent who arrived in the Truckee-Tahoe area with his new bride shortly after World War II. Barrett's civic leanings soon had him involved in several local projects, one of which - the construction of our first local hospital - would benefit the entire community for all succeeding generations.

Prior to the Second World War, the sparse year-round population in the Truckee-North Tahoe area had always accepted the lack of a local medical care facility as an inevitable deprivation of their isolated existence. But the population was growing, and several local accidents which occurred shortly after Barrett's arrival provided the impetus necessary to establish a local hospital. In one of these, a member of a construction crew working on Donner Summit was operating a jackhammer when the tool struck some dynamite. The resulting explosion left one of the workman's legs hanging by a few shreds of flesh and fabric, and for the two hours it took for an ambulance to arrive from Sacramento or Nevada City, he cried out for someone to put him out of his misery.

Shortly thereafter, another medical emergency underscored the need for a local hospital. This time the victim was Billy Martin, nephew of Tahoe Vista contractor A.E. Sorenson. Martin was working for his uncle and had been sent to check a hot water heater which had gone out in a Kings Beach basement. The problem proved to be a butane leak, and when Martin struck a match to discover the source of the problem, the resulting explosion severely burned his ears, face, hands and legs. Quick-thinking bystanders extinguished the flames by sinking the man in a nearby pile of sand, but a doctor's services were unquestionably required, and the injured man was loaded into a private car for the trip to medical help. An agonizing ride brought the impromptu ambulance to Carson City, where a motel on the outskirts of town provided beds for the non-contagious sick or injured (on the condition they brought their own attendants). Here, the town's only doctor, who had been warned

of the impending arrival of the burn victim, gave the injured man a shot to relieve the pain. But no other medical facilities were available there, and the physician recommended continuing on to Reno for treatment of the burns. At that time, the brick building which is now only a small part of the Washoe Med physical plant comprised the entire hospital, and the facility did not welcome patients from out of state, though owing to the urgency of treating this burn victim, (who miraculously survived his ordeal), they grudgingly took his case.

As a result of these and several other lesser incidents which took place during the early post-war years, the need for a local hospital was firmly established in the minds of area residents, and in 1949, a group of concerned citizens took it upon themselves to initiate the process by which a hospital is built.

Early on the group's agenda was a trip to Nevada City to secure county approval to form a district for the purpose of levying taxes for hospital construction costs. Approval was given, and the county supervisors appointed five area residents to serve on a provisional board of directors. These men were: Truckee merchant Charles R. Heller (named president of the board), Raymond A. Scott (of the Truckee B of A), F.B. Sederberg (a contractor from Tahoe Pines), James A. Sherritt (of Donner Summit), and Ted Barrett (named Secretary of the group). George C. Sellon, a Sacramento architect, was retained to design the project.

Crucial to the success of the hospital construction effort was the acquisition of state and federal funds. To this end Heller, Barrett and Sellon had to make a trip to San Francisco to present their case to the state board charged with granting such funding. Government advisors recommended that the group's presentation be confined to the establishment of local need only, as Board policy considered such problems as ski and highway injuries to be outside the realm of legitimate local need.

On arriving at the San Francisco headquarters of the Board, the trio discovered that Chamberlin, their legal counsel, would not be representing them before the board. Since President Charlie Heller declined to speak in the attorney's stead, Secretary Ted Barrett agreed, somewhat reluctantly, to make the presentation. Barrett recounted for the Board the two incidents described earlier, which he felt to be good examples of the urgency of obtaining a medical facility in eastern Nevada County. Interrogation by the board brought out the fact that a new hospital was already under construction in Loyalton. But Barrett explained that though the map showed Loyalton to be only a little over 80 miles north of Truckee, snow could be expected to close the connecting highway (89 north) for as much as six months each year, necessitating a detour which nearly tripled the

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distance. As Highway 20 (the Grass Valley-Nevada City artery) was also frequently closed by snow, Sacramento or Reno actually represented the closest available medical care during the winter months.

His impromptu remarks over, Barrett took his seat once again, thoroughly discouraged about what he felt had been a very inept presentation. He regretfully conceded to Heller and Sellon that the hospital effort was to end in failure. However, he had grossly misjudged his own persuasive skills - congratulations were in order. Barrett's knowledge of the problem and his enthusiasm for the hospital project had won a positive response from the board, and about four days later, formal notice of their approval of matching funds was received. As a result of this ruling, the state and federal governments would each contribute \$150,000 to the project, matching the amount raised by the district's bond and thus providing the necessary funding to proceed with construction.

Sellon's original plans called for a 10-room, 10-bed facility, but further study revealed that by increasing the room size two feet in each direction another bed could be put in each room, doubling the hospital's capacity. The planning continued in earnest. Dr. Nelson, a new physician in town, served as an advisor to the architect, and Barrett's wife, a registered nurse, gave valuable input regarding the needs of the nursing staff.

Selection of a building site was simplified by a donation of land by Truckee resident Dick Joseph in the name of his son Levon, who had been killed in the Second World War. The donated parcel enjoyed good access to the main highway, and yet was not adversely affected by its noise, being sheltered by thick timber. After a thoughtful study of the acreage, Barrett concluded that a large granite out-

cropping on the west end of the property would make an excellent landmark around which to place a circular entry drive, and so the orientation of the new building on the parcel was decided. Nevada County subsequently agreed to build two roads - one in front and one in back of the facility and construction began, contracted by the firm of John C. Shreck and Son.

The hospital opened for business April 14, 1952, and proved the necessity of its construction. For much of the calendar year, snow and icy roads made surface-level access to the hospital difficult, and Board member Jim Sherritt was soon urging the construction of a heliport. Funds for the project were not available, but community spirit prevailed, and local individuals and firms saw to the various phases of the project on a donation basis. "Buck" Plevel, superintendent for Ralph Larsen and Son of San Francisco, cut down and removed the trees (the hospital site was heavily wooded) and the Tahoe-Truckee Disposal Service removed the debris. Teichert Construction furnished gravel for the base of the pad and runway, which was subsequently paved by Savage and Son. The Forest Service provided a windvane for the facility, and the finishing touches were 15 gallons of paint, purchased by Ted Barrett for \$3 at an Army Surplus store in Sacramento. (The cost of the paint proved to be the total cash outlay for the heliport.)

The hospital continued to grow, and by the mid 1950s the staff included doctors Brodie, King, Nelson and Peer. In 1957, a first addition was completed, and in 1978, a new emergency wing was dedicated. An intensive care unit (converted from the original ER) was operational (no pun intended) as of 1979.

Today, the Tahoe Forest Hospital has surpassed anything its founders could have imagined. Thirty-one doctors

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serve on its active staff and eight more are associate physicians. The 26-bed skilled nursing facility, new in June of 1986, has brought the hospital's acute care capacity to 42 beds, (this unit alone more than doubling the size of the original hospital facility). Ground-breaking for new surgery and intensive care units is planned for this coming spring. Though the Tahoe Forest Hospital may never be able to offer the specialized services available in the Big City, it fulfills the purpose of any community hospital: to provide medical attention to those who require it, and in doing so fulfills the dream of a generation of citizens who had the dedication and perseverance to see it through to reality. 1

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## Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten

Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

# The Coming of The Tahoe Tavern

## Part I

The role of the Tahoe Tavern in Tahoe City's history is so basic that a discussion of the town's development is incomplete without mention of it. To its patrons, the Tavern was a grand hotel — the showplace of Tahoe. Yet to the community which was its neighbor, the Tavern was also a force which provided recreational and social opportunities, trained its leaders and inspired a sense of self.

By the 1890s, the decline of the Basin's lumber industry was closing Glenbrook's mills, and a mass relocation of the once-bustling east shore community began. With the waning of the local lumber industry, Basin slopes had been almost totally denuded of timber. However, the Bliss family, whose extensive interests had dominated the Glenbrook (and the Basin) economy, had wisely spared the magnificent stand of trees around the Lake Outlet at Tahoe City, and it was to this location that they began to move the structures and materials which would be the basis of their new operations.

This new endeavor would be in the realm of tourism. The Bliss family's plans called for the construction of a hotel to rival any in the country, but preparations necessary to the success of such a grand undertaking would require the establishment of several key services previously unknown in Tahoe City. Most basic of these was a comfortable and dependable system of transportation. Prior to 1900, a jostling 15-mile stagecoach ride from Truckee was the last leg of a trip to Tahoe — a certain impediment to visitor travel. During the summer of 1898, architect William Seth Bliss (no relation to his employers) was hired by the newly-formed Lake Tahoe Railway and Transportation Company, a Bliss-owned venture. Bliss was hired to complete a survey of the River canyon, precedent to construction of a railroad which would connect Tahoe with Central Pacific's standard gauge line at Truckee. Development of this system would make the trip to the Lake possible for all but the acutely infirm — a necessity in assuring the volume of business called for by the ambitious plans.

By the fall of 1898, all the rolling stock for the new railroad had been barged over to Tahoe City from abandoned lines in Glenbrook and Bijou. The laying of track on the new 15-mile roadbed continued through the summer of 1899, and in the spring of 1900, the line was put into tentative operation.

The first engine to be used on the line was the little locomotive "Tahoe" (now redesignated No. 1), and during the first season of operation, a number of flatcars saw double duty as freight and passenger conveyances. With the new rail system in place, sightseers could travel all the way to the lakeshore by rail. But of more immediate importance to the company, the materials necessary for implementing the second phase of their grandiose plans could be efficiently transported to the site of operations.

The pages of the *Truckee Republican* (later *Sierra Sun*) for 1901 are valuable sources of information regarding the progress of the Bliss family's plans that year. An April issue reports that D.L. Bliss, manager of the new rail line, had run the first train for the engine into Truckee from Tahoe City. The 15-mile trip took several days, owing to slight repairs enroute and the diversion of snow waters from the track. However, the road was reported in excellent condition, and regular trips were scheduled to begin after May 15.

Toward the end of May, a new boxcar (the first) was added to the LTRT Co. rolling stock, and on June 15, a new observation coach was added to the two existing passenger coaches. The train left Truckee at 8 a.m. daily returning to Truckee at 5:20 p.m. after the passengers made a trip around the Lake on the steamer TAHOE. (The steamer met the train at a trestle pier 1/8 mile in length. The train would back onto this trestle for the discharge of passengers, who had to take only a few steps across the pier to board the boat.

During the 1901 season, the LTRT Co. was busy relocating their Glenbrook machine shops to the Tahoe City lakefront. Barges were again the means of transportation, roads around the Lake being totally inadequate to the portage of structures. At the time of their relocation, the buildings' encroachment on the Tahoe Commons was considered a necessary evil, for the railroad's benefit to the community was critically important to its future. By mid-July, all was in readiness for the announcement of the company's grand new undertaking. "D.L. Bliss was here yesterday,"

reported the July 13 issue of the *Republican*, "and went out to Hobart Maie today. He is going to build a hotel at Tahoe City. It is said its construction will cost \$150,000, which means a fine hotel." Time was of the essence. The bureaucratic struggle which would block a similar undertaking today was no such impediment to the Bliss Company's progress, and by late September, construction of the new hotel was well underway.

The October 12 issue of the *Republican* reported good progress, noting that a crew of 70 men was hard at work on the project. "It will be all enclosed and covered in two weeks," reported the newspaper, "providing bad weather does not set in too heavy. It is an immense affair, and will be a much-needed building for the increased tourist travel and sightseers during the summer months. There is also being put in a fine water system for supplying the houses, hotels and also in connection, fire plugs for fire purposes."

The last excursion train of the season ran the following Sunday, giving sightseers a final look at the Lake — and the new hotel — until the following spring.

To finance the construction and development of their new project, the LTRT Co. mortgaged their new rail system, borrowing half a million dollars from the Mercantile Trust Co. of San Francisco in November. The term of the loan was 30 years, with the note bearing 5% interest. Considered an enormous sum at the turn of the century, the \$500,000 loan proved a shrewd business arrangement, for the popularity of the enterprise it financed repaid the borrowers many-fold in the years which followed.



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## Our Tahoe Heritage

Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

### The Tahoe Tavern Opulence and Isolation

When the Tahoe Tavern opened for business in 1902, the diversity and durability of its success could not have been guessed at by its founders - nor, perhaps, could they have foreseen what difficulties would be involved in its establishment as an easily-accessible, self-contained resort, miles from the nearest civic center. Transportation to the isolated resort had been assured by the completion of a railway system linking it with the Central Pacific artery at Truckee. Yet, there were other, equally problematic aspects of construction still to be dealt with.

The establishment of a water system was crucial to the maintenance of the grand new resort, and not as easily accomplished as its lakeside location would suggest. The traffic of the steamers and smaller craft, which were part and parcel of the Tavern's prominence on the lake, could not help but disturb the purity of its shoreline water supply - to the extent that a potable source had to be developed elsewhere and piped in.

The nearest available water of sufficient volume to sustain a seasonal population which often exceeded 1,000 was from the distant Burton Creek drainage, on the other side of Tahoe City. Developing this source of water and delivering it to the Tavern involved the construction of two reservoirs and several miles of connecting pipeline. This relay system went overland as far as the bottom of Grove Street, and from there followed the Lake bottom in a direct line to the Tavern. There, by virtue of gravity feed, it could be distributed to the multifarious accommodations of the hotel and maintenance buildings, the daily requirements of which were easily comparable to those of a small city.

Another aspect of the Tavern's development which had to be addressed was the establishment of electrical power. In 1901, there was no electric utility at the Lake, and so those desiring this modern convenience were forced to provide it for themselves. Steam-powered generators proved the solution to the Tavern's energy needs, as well as supplying heat for the public rooms (the hotel accommodations were unheated) and power to operate the on-premises laundry - a considerable consumer in its own right. This system was the basis of the resort's electrical power until the early



The dormered, shingle-sided buildings and magnificent grounds of the Tahoe Tavern are being put in order for its final season of operation in this Bill Briner photo, taken in 1964.

Photo Courtesy of Mazie Carnell

1920s, when Sierra Pacific Power brought the community at large into the electric age.

Communication with the "outside world" was essential to the resort's sophisticated clientele, and in addition to a telegraph office, the Tavern could even boast a telephone. In 1900, a single phone line had been strung from Truckee down the river canyon to Tahoe City, and thence along the west shore of the Lake as far as Emerald Bay. Those with sufficient interest and capital were able to tie into this line, the Tavern being one of the initial subscribers. Owing to the shared line, "getting out" was sometimes a problem, but for its time, the system was considered adequate.

With these systems in place, the high Sierra hostelry was ready for business, and with the arrival of the 1902 summer season, it was off and running. For the 62 summers which followed, the Tavern held undisputed sway as "the place" to go at Tahoe (though the rivalry of Tallac, and later Glenbrook and Brockway would give it momentary competition), and to this day, the resort's longevity stands as a record which no other Basin caravansary has been able to surpass.

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## Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten

Courtesy of The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

### The Tahoe Tavern Opulence and Isolation Part II

The quality of the Tavern's clientele was maintained by decidedly steep prices, though guests were inclined to overlook the expense in view of the sumptuous hospitality. A two-week stay was minimum, and many guests considered the Tavern their personal summer residence. Over the years, the hostelry hosted an impressive list of visitors. Numerous statesmen on holiday and globe-trotting celebrities signed the guest register, as well as many from the entertainment world (including Will Rogers, Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy, Charles Laughton and Bing Crosby).

And no wonder. The Tavern's facilities were second to none in the region - or elsewhere, for that matter. Such cosmopolitan amenities as a ballroom, barber-shop, bowling alley, theatre and riding stables were all part of the Tavern facilities, and a manicurist, beautician and physician were always in residence. In later years, services were expanded to include a golf links, swimming pool ("The Plunge"), automobile garage (which later doubled as an indoor skating rink) and toboggan hill - the latter two amenities developed during the Tavern's years of winter operation.

The fame of the enterprise spread, bringing with it increased business and still more fame. While other hotels and resorts came and went, the Tavern remained, taking on the status of an institution in the rapidly changing economy of the postwar period. But a force was growing along with the economy which would shake the foundations of even such well-established enterprises as the Tavern.

By the early 1960s, the inevitability of a sewer on Tahoe's west shore was assured. The expense of connecting to this new system was especially severe for resorts and hotels, for their assessments for the hookup were based on the number of accommodations they provided. It is not surprising that the proprietors of some such enterprises concluded that the expense of hooking up to the sewer could not be justified by the three brief months of operation, and a number of local resort and hotel facilities soon wore "For Sale" signs. The future of seasonal communities, some believed, was in condominiums. After all, cried the developers, who wanted to stay in

a dank old hotel when they could own a modern lakeside residence on the same site?

Not that such blind homage to the up-to-date was universal. Devotees of the Old Tahoe raised a public outcry against the demise of the Tavern, and other entities threatened by the approach of progress. But forced to choose between sentiment and solvency, the Tavern's owners had to concede that happy memories do not keep the bills paid, and when the 1964 summer season ended, an era was ending as well, for the Tavern was closing its doors for the last time.

At an auction held September 12 and 13, 1964, treasure hunters and profit turners bid for the tangible furnishings of the grand old resort. Kitchen and dining furniture, chandeliers and rugs, bedding and bathroom fixtures went on the block, as the showplace was stripped of its finery. Following the auction, building materials were sold right off the structures, siding stripped and plumbing preempted. Windows and doors, bathtubs and boilers - all had to go to make way for the first of the area's condominiums.

A condition of sale of the property was that the six-story bell tower be saved as a landmark around which the condo project was to be built, but an arson fire levelled this last vestige of the historic compound before the new buildings could be completed, severing this final tie with the past. And so the Tahoe Tavern ceased to be anything more than a memory for the uncounted crowds who had passed through its doors during the six-plus decades of its existence.

At a moment in history when nostalgia is enjoying wide popularity, it is difficult to appreciate the philosophy of a generation ago, which equated "old" with "obsolete" and shrugged its shoulders at the demolition of some of Tahoe's most historic structures. However, fall they did, and with a reverberation which would echo long after the rubble of their demise had been cleared away.

THE TOWN OF TAHOE

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# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake  
Tahoe Historical Society

## Log Cabins

One of the Tahoe Inn's original outbuildings was a log saloon on Front Street, one door east of the Inn proper. The exact year of its construction cannot be verified, but it apparently came into being about the same time as the Inn. The rough and ready activities common to barrooms of the day were not considered proper atmosphere for ladies, and the old Inn did not include a bar - thus the separate structure.

The Log Cabin's popularity continued undiminished through the years of Prohibition, perhaps even enjoying

himself in the leg while crawling underneath the Log Cabin looking for booze."

The opportunity to challenge Lady Luck was just as readily available on the premises. The Log Cabin offered slot machines, poker tables, wheels of fortune and punchboards, equaling the variety - if not the volume - of Nevada's gaming houses. (Gambling was legalized in that state in 1931.)



Photo courtesy of Dave Renner

enhanced success by virtue of its isolation and lack of interference from representatives of the law. Local enforcement of legislation governing alcohol and gaming was notoriously lax, and the Log Cabin was able to maintain an open-door policy with impunity, relying on tip-offs from well-placed sources to prevent surprise visits from Federal officers.

During Gus Renner's management of this street-front Log Cabin (beginning about 1923 or 24), the liquor flowed freely, in spite of Prohibition. David Bienert, Renner's stepson, recalls an incident which took place in the second Log Cabin pointing up the non-cooperation of locals, who stood united in the face of outside meddling in their activities. "One of the big laughs that the people of Tahoe City had," Bienert remembers, "was when one of the Prohis (Federal alcohol enforcement agents) shot

During the years of the Volstead Act (as Prohibition was known), alcohol for the Log Cabin's bar was reputedly supplied by local sources. E.B. Scott makes mention of a "Goat Ranch" down the Truckee River, where a "hand-rocked" distillation was produced by Joe King. Another popular aging process employed the wave action of the Lake to do the work, and barrels of "working" hooch were moored offshore, under the watchful eyes of their owners, until such time as they were ready to consume (or until consumers were ready to drink them).

The 1934 fire which destroyed the Tahoe Inn also brought an end to the Log Cabin #1, but such a lucrative operation would not die so easily. By the summer of 1934, the reincarnated Log Cabin was serving customers from its new location behind the Tahoe Inn. Built by Carl Bechdolt, Sr., this post-Prohibition Log Cabin backed up to the golf course, making a handy "19th Hole" in the absence of a proper clubhouse. The Log Cabin #2 was an equally-popular haunt among non-golfers, and the row of cabins which flanked its south side provided a convenient retreat for devotees of indoor sports.

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Over the years, managers of Bechdolt's rustic roadhouse included Ed Reusenberg, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Sutton, "Big" Fred Reiselt, Chet Mickeljerd and several others. By the mid-1930s, the repeal of the 18th Amendment had eased any concerns over alcohol-related raids, but gambling continued to play a major role in the recreational offerings of the establishment until 1948, when Edmund G. "Pat" Brown took over the California Governorship. Soon thereafter, local gambling operations which had thrived during his prior term as Attorney General were forced to shut down.

In 1952, Bechdolt arranged for the sale of the Log Cabin building, and it was dismantled and moved to Crystal Bay, Nevada, where it was reassembled on a parcel just over the state line. At a four-day Grand Opening just prior to Memorial Day, 1952, new owner Bert Cochran promised to "throw away the key and be open around the clock" (with Johnny Caruso as host). The Log Cabin continued to be a successful business at the new site, until it, too, was destroyed by fire.

NORTH TAHOE WEEK April 23-May 6, 1947

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# Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten  
Courtesy of The North Lake  
Tahoe Historical Society

## The Open Road

Through the early years of this century, Sierra vacations had been the province of the wealthy. Public transportation was expensive, and accommodations in the elegant high country hostels came dear. In the next two decades, however, significant changes in the pattern of American life would bring a more varied population to the formerly exclusive domain of these summer elite, altering the local scene as nothing before it had.

By 1913, Henry Ford's assembly line technique had greatly reduced the cost of manufacturing, but with the outbreak of World War I the following year, the innovation was applied to the production of weapons and vehicles of war. However, by the time the Doughboys returned from foreign shores, America had reverted to a peacetime economy, based largely on the production of automobiles. These mass-produced vehicles, bought on time, were within the means of the average postwar family, and for the first time, the middle classes were able to climb behind the wheels of their own flivvers and take to the open road.

The effects of this development on the tourist industry were far-reaching. Auto camps and platform tent cities were beginning to spring up in rural areas all over the country, and Tahoe was no exception. "Improved" roads along both the north and west shores of the Lake had been completed just prior to the outbreak of war, and at the junction of these dust-choked byways, the seeds of an established community began to grow. By 1920, Tahoe City's businesses included a garage/filling station, several lodging houses and restaurants, two markets (not Safeway and Lucky, you may be sure), and dance hall, several saloons, a lumber company and a dispensary of fims, curio and fishing tackle.

Of course, much of the travel to and from the Lake was still by train. Prior to the construction of the Lincoln Highway, the grueling trip from the Bay Area took several days, and the final 100 miles, over the rutted grade from Colfax to Tahoe City, was a nerve-wracking, spine-jolting ordeal of five or six hours (not counting time out for flat tires, boilovers, or other mechanical problems). But many viewed the discomfort and potential perils of the motor trip as a challenging adventure which made the destination all the more splendid.

For the two decades between the wars, each passing season saw a steady increase in the summer population - on a strictly seasonal basis. The hardy few who made Tahoe City their year-round home still numbered less than 200 by the mid-1930s, and this figure would have included Lake Forest and Tahoe Park. (The 1936 graduating class of Tahoe City's branch of Placer Union High School was but a single student).

The reason for this meagre scattering of souls could be stated in one word: snow. Winter road closures prevented the possibility of a winter visitor economy - not that there would have been much to occupy a visitor in those days. Though a few summer home owners arrived on Memorial Day weekend to open their places for the season, things did not get officially underway - at least as far as the local businesses were concerned - until the Fourth of July weekend. Then after nine or ten weeks of furious activity, the season came once again to an abrupt halt with the arrival of Labor Day. Part-time residents and owners of

outlying resorts traditionally greeted this heralding of autumn by draining water lines, fastening shutters in place, slowing porch furniture and making final preparations against the forthcoming seasons of their absence. Thus on any Labor Day weekend, the town's permanent residents could sit on their porches and wave good-bye to a steady procession of vehicles heading out of town until next year. The few visitors who lingered behind did so at the risk of being snowed in, for the California Division of Highways could not be expected to clear the roads in the event of an early storm.

The unavoidable fact of this brief and clearly-defined season required unusual ingenuity on the part of local residents, and most wore several hats in order to sustain a year-round existence. Some found winter work as caretakers of nearby estates, while others engaged in a variety of white-season projects - usually the repair of equipment or the manufacture of goods which could be sold during the following tourist season. Many cut ice or firewood, and some engaged in trapping the various fur-bearing animals abundant in the area.

From October 1 to May 1, the steamer NEVADA (and later the cruiser MARIAN B) ran on a thrice-weekly winter schedule, delivering mail and supplies to the scattered habitations around the Lake, and this operation provided winter employment for a few people. So too did the job of repairing the temporarily idle rolling stock of the Lake Tahoe Railway and Transportation Company and steamer TAHOE, and later the cars and equipment of Southern Pacific. However, in spite of the willingness and industry of the local population, life remained rough in the mountains.

An early effort to balance this lopsided economy was the brainchild of Jack Mathews, who was appointed manager of the Tahoe Tavern in 1927, shortly after the Bliss family sold out to the Linnard Hotel interests. With the conversion of the local rail system to standard gauge by Southern Pacific, Mathews saw the potential for a second season of operation, and for the next half-dozen years, an arrangement with SP brought flatlanders (many of whom had never seen snow) to the Tavern's doorstep on winter weekends via "Snowball Specials" - expresses from the Bay City and Sacramento.

For the entertainment of its white-season visitors, the Tavern offered its Winter Sports Grounds, one mile west of the hotel. Horses fitted out with snowshoes front and rear were kept busy pulling sleighs full of euphoric guests to the site, where they could thrill to a ride on the fast-paced toboggan slide, or watch exhibition ski jumping on the world-class "trajectory," which in 1937 hosted the National Championships. The Tavern's automobile garage, unneeded in light of closed highways, saw use as an indoor skating rink, as did a narrow strip of shallow water between the two Tavern piers which would often freeze over in winter.

← 1935

1937 →

→ note

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Though a noble experiment, the Tavern's winter operation had not been a financial success, and when the hostelry returned to its summer-only schedule in 1934, most local businesses had no choice but to follow suit. The feasibility of winter operation had been questionable at best, and most merchants felt lucky to keep their doors open for the three months of summer - winter was generally viewed as a period of recovery and seclusion.

By decade's end, however, the memory of earlier failures had faded - at least in some minds. What about winter, anyway? Snow had already been demonstrated to possess recreational properties. Why not inform the public of Tahoe's ample endowment? To this end, a late-summer editorial in the *Lake Tahoe News* spoke enthusiastically of the coming snow: "There are many plans for bigger and better winter sports in the lake region now ready to be carried out for the coming season," confided the editor. "This year will be an ideal one to introduce yourself to the pleasures of a White Christmas."

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There were few takers that winter or in those immediately following, for how to get there - and how to get back - were still problems without a comfortable solution. Yet among those who chose to stay "on the hill" through those long seasons of isolation, shared experiences translated into a growing sense of community spirit - and the town's first real efforts at self-improvement.

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