LAKE TAHOE FACTS

Surface Elevation - 6,229 feet above sea level
Length - 22 mi.; Width - 12 mi.
Shoreline - 71 mi. (Calif. 42 mi.; Nevada 29 mi.)
Capacity - 122,160,280 acre/ft. of water
Surface Area - 193 sq. mi. (122,200 acres)
Depth - Maximum 1,645 ft.; Average 989 ft.
Surface Temperatures - Max. 68°F; Min. 41°F;
Only outlet - Truckee River at Tahoe City

AND . . .

Lake Tahoe is as long as the English Channel is wide. he Panama Canal, 700 feet wide and 50 feet deep, could e filled with Tahoe's water even if it circled the globe at he equator -- and there would still be enough water left ver to fill a canal of the same size running from San rancisco to New York. — —

If Lake Tahoe was tipped over, the water would cover California to a depth of 14½ inches. (Texas would only be overed to a depth of 8½ inches.) Try it, you'll see.

An average 1,400,000 tons of water (or one-tenth of n inch) evaporate every day. That's more than is released hrough the Truckee River, or enough to supply the daily ater requirements of 3,500,000 people.

While ice may sometimes form along shoreline inlets, ake Tahoe has never been known to freeze over.

Many drowning victims are never recovered from ake Tahoe. The cold water at lower depths preserves the odies and prevents the formation of gases that would therwise float them to the surface.

As an "interstate navigable waterway" Lake Tahoe is rotected by the U.S. Coast Guard (and is rumored to be he most desireable Coast Guard duty station in the world).

Our Tahoe Heritage

Gatekeeper Controlled Tahoe's Water Level

By Carol Van Etten
Courtesy of North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

Though many tributaries feed their chilly offerings into Lake Tahoe, the lower Truckee River, commencing at Tahoe City, is the Lake's only outlet, and has thus been the focus of attempts to artificially control the Lake level, beginning with a crib dam built in 1870 by Col. A. Von Schmidt.

In 1910, in anticipation of the construction of a new concrete dam, a log gatekeeper's residence was built on the southern bank of the outlet. The new dam was completed in 1915, and W.S. Simmonds was hired as the first dam tender. The nine original floodgates (there are now 17) were operated by hand-winch, based on Simmonds' on-site observations of fluctuations in the Lake level. Manual adjustment of the gates continued until 1968, when computerized equipment was installed, eliminating the necessity of a resident gatekeeper by transferring control of the system to Reno.

In September of 1978, arson claimed the empty cabin. A ten-year effort by the North Lake Tahoe Historical Society to acquire the 2½ acre grounds and obtain permission to restore the cabin for use as a museum had seemingly suffered an impossible setback. But, as a result of the untiring efforts of a few devoted members of the Society, the historic dwelling was rebuilt in 1980 under the direction of Art Thiede.

The cabin was dedicated in July of 1981, and today houses a growing collection of historical artifacts and memorabilia, supplemented this summer by several special loan exhibits, including a 34" model of the Steamer Tahoe, a collection of antique children's toys and games, and a colorful assortment of haberdashery belonging to the Pomin family.

Lectures on alternate Monday evenings throughout the summer, commencing on June 27th, with a talk by Julie Carville on "Wildflowers of the Sierra," are part of the museum's expanding program of historical offerings. In addition, several instructional sessions in the art of basket making from native materials are scheduled for June 28, and July 11 and 12. The museum is open daily, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. For further information about exhibits, programs or membership in the North Lake Tahoe Historical Society, contact the museum at (916)583-1762.

2 Early Day Vactioners Didn't Have Much Choice

Resorts > Hotels > North Shore > Multiple
Carol Van Etten Collection

NORTH TAHOE WEEK through June 22 1983

Our Tahoe Heritage

Early Day Vacationers Didn't Have Much Choice

By Carol Van Etten
Courtesy of North Lake Tahoe Historial Society

Visitors to Tahoe's north shore this summer may find themselves bewildered by the myriad of choices available with respect to lodging. The Sierra vacationer of 50 years ago was not so overburdened, as an imaginary motor trip toward Crystal Bay from the Tahoe City "Y" will demonstrate.

Following the highway through Tahoe City, on its northeasterly course, the 1933 traveller came immediately upon Carl Bechdolt Sr.'s "Tahoe Inn" on the bluff above Tahoe City's Commons Beach. The 70-year-old structure was to burn to the ground the following April, but was quickly rebuilt and managed to open for the 1935 summer season. Today, the establishment is known as Victoria Station.

Heading on over Dollar Hill, there was little (save conifer forest and scattered private residences) to greet the motorist until he reached Carnelian Bay, where a hotel of the same name furnished lodging and meals.

Tahoe Vista was so little developed in 1933 that the neighborhood hotel on that side was simply alluded to as "Tahoe Vista," the word "hotel" being understood.

To the east, Kings Beach was establishing itself as a community. There, provisions had been made for those hardy campers who had braved all manner of inconvenience on the auto ride to the lake over those 1933 roads (perhaps 50 years haven't brought as many changes as one would wish). Kings Beach had been subdivided into 25-foot lots or "tent sites," and for a nominal down payment, "property owners" could pitch their canvas dwellings on wooden platforms and enjoy the convenience of running water, piped through a crude above-ground system to the entire tract.

Continuing on the highway toward North Stateline, the traveller would have come upon Harry O. Comstock's "Brockway Hotel" (and Hot Springs) at the foot of the Brockway grade, with an already 60-year reputation among healthseekers as an ideal location to "take the cure" for all manner of physical ailments. The resort offered swimming, golf, and riding, as well as fishing and boating (and of course the restorative mineral waters).

In those days, word of mouth and brochure advertising were the primary sources of enticement to the vacation crowd. The Tahoe Tattler was still two seasons away from being reintroduced (after a 53-year hiatus) to local newsstands, and the "Tahoe-Sierra Association," later to play an important role in familiarizing potential visitors with Tahoe's many charms, was still several years from formation. In the absence of a mouthpiece, many local businessmen turned winter attention to thumping their individual drums, for their own benefit and that of local commerce in general. In spite of the enthusiasm generated by these local proprietors and by returning vacationers, the region continued to grow slowly until after World War II, when the lake began to experience a "boom" which helped to establish many local businesses still in existence today. Next issue: a tour of west shore lodgings of that bygone era, and a discussion of some other means of transportation to the lake available in 1933.

The early-day vacationer attracted by the lure of Dame Fortune could find her plying her trade just up the grade. Here, the north shore's gaming industry had gotten underway in rustic style with the opening of the original Cal-Neva Lodge in 1927. The lodge burned to the ground in May of 1937, but was rebuilt in 31 days in time to open for the summer season.

The lodgepole pine decor was highlighted by massive outcroppings of native granite, bordering an indoor stream which was stocked with impressive specimens of rainbow trout. The summer of 1933 was the final gasp of Prohibition, for though the repeal of the 18th Amendment had been proposed in February of that year, the final ratification did not occur until December 5, and in the meantime, the nature of the liquid refreshments at the "line," as elsewhere, was dependent on the proximity of the local law enforcement authorities.

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY:

June 12, 1901 - A post office was officially established at Lakeside (south stateline)

June 15, 1887 - Bliss and Yerington's steam tug "Emerald B" was launched at Glenbrook

Tahoe Tattler – July 7, 1983

Our Tahoe Heritage

The View From The Slammer

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

Centrally located just northeast of the Tahoe City "Y," Commons Beach is a popular gathering place for locals and visitors alike. However, many may not be aware that at one time the pleasant expanse of beach and picnic grounds was occupied by the structures of a number of enterprises and operations, both public and private.

At one time these included a 600' steamer pier (on which sat J.B. Cambell's "Custom House" and Davis and Noeware's General Merchandise Store - later Bliss' Tahoe Mercantile), and a jail.

In 1900, the new narrow-gauge railroad line laid by the Lake Tahoe Railway and Transportation Company from Truckee to Tahoe City and the Tahoe Tavern was in full operation. Maintenance shops at the northeast end of the Commons were provided access by a trestle which ran the length of the Commons, making use of more than 15 rock-cribbed piers to span the high water. In the early years of this century, the beach was hardly an inviting spot for picnickers. The trespass of the railroad was tolerated on the grounds that it was an asset to local commerce of all kinds.

Mr. Bittencourt, who gave his name to several tracts of land north and west of the golf course, had quitclaim deeded the Commons to the people of Tahoe City prior to 1900, and following legal efforts to quiet Community Title, the property came under the custodianship of the Superior Court of Placer County. Buildings and other tangible forms of trespass were ordered removed within a fixed time limit.

In August of 1937, a branch library had opened in the old Mercantile building, by then the home of the Federated Women's Club. The building went up in flames in October of that year - a blaze rumored to be incendiary in nature.

Shortly thereafter, a group of citizens founded a non-profit organization for the purpose of constructing a building on the Commons bluff to house a Community Center, post office, and library. The two-story frame structure, designed and built by Norman Mayfield, was completed the following summer, for an actual cash outlay (much of the work was donated) of $6,000.

Since relocation of both the library and the post office, the old Community Center building has provided accommodations for offices of the P.U.D. and the Parks and Recreation Department. Next door, the Tahoe City Fire Station occupies the extreme southwest corner of the Commons property. Both the original tenants of the Community Center building and the Fire Protection District were able to secure the blessings of the Superior Court on the grounds that their presence benefitted the people of Tahoe City.

A block building at the base of the bluff, about 10' northeast of the Community Center, at one time housed the local jail. Affording a spectacular view of the beach and beyond, its repository of casual and desperate prisoner alike was best suited to summer repose, the structure being both unheated and without indoor facilities. Comprising two cells, the hoosegow was for many years the responsibility of Constable (Deputy-Coroner, jailer) Harry Johanson, who often took prisoners across the street to the Tahoe Inn for their meals. In 1960, the present Sheriff's Substation and County offices were completed. The old jail remains vacant.

South of the Commons, on land which subsequently became a Swedish Farmhouse, was the encampment-headquarters of Dat-So-La-Lee, the world-renowned Washoe basketmaker. From this site emanated many marvelous woven and twined creations of hers and her several companions. The purity of the clay deposit which lies directly offshore was also the source of a Washoe pottery manufactory and outlet.

While special interests continue to seek the use of the popular site for their own purposes, commercial development of the Commons has been lawfully forbidden. The long-standing efforts of the local American Legion to construct a Memorial Facility on the location have been approved by the Court, but await release of funds by the County. The proposed structure would include an indoor sports center to benefit the youth of the community - a valuable asset to winter recreation.

In spite of the extensive development of surrounding land, the Tahoe City Commons continues to provide a convenient retreat for the enjoyment of all - a pleasant return from the days when commercial activity threatened to rob the community of one of its chief natural assets.

Our Tahoe Heritage

North Tahoe Dining 50 Years Ago

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

Eating establishments in and around the Tahoe City of fifty years ago did not present the beleaguering alternatives facing the contemporary diner. In 1933, the old Tahoe Inn represented the only "dinner house" in the town proper, supplemented by two "sandwich shops" on the main boulevard.

"Bennie's Inn," operated by Olga ("Bennie") and Bill Mayhew, had its beginnings about 1911 in a tent next door to (downhill from) the Tahoe Inn. The success of the enterprise soon justified a more permanent structure, and a white frame building gradually took the place of the original canvas. The eatery was popular with the railroad men - the L.T.R. & T's tracks still crossed Common's Beach, and their terminal yard and maintenance shops lay a short hike across the road. Featuring homemade apple and raisin pies and 5 cent coffee, "Bennie's" was definitely a "hot spot" of the day.

Another well-established business in 1933 was "The Squirrel House." This building, originally the Bickford family residence, was built in 1912 and sat behind Sadie Bickford Morrow's former home (now "Ed Friel's Contemporary Styles"). The Krone family subsequently purchased the Bickford house, and in the low-water year of 1924 took advantage of the ready-made clientele generated by the major local construction project of that summer, underway at the lake outlet - that of installing a huge temporary pump system and sandbag horseshoe around the mouth of the outlet in an effort to convey water over the natural sandstone rim and into the dry bed of the Truckee River. "The Squirrel House" continued to be a popular haunt for several years thereafter, and the building remained on the Tahoe City skyline until 1963.

Lake Forest was (and remains) the destination for a superb Italian dinner. George and Josephine Bacchi's produce stands - one near the Tahoe Inn and another in Lake Forest - were the family's original venture. But by 1932, Mrs. Bacchi's spaghetti had earned such a wide and glorious reputation that a small restaurant (on the site of Snyder Lumber) was opened on a "drop-in" basis. The following year, the menu had been expanded to include several other entrees. From her teens, daughter Sarah was a major factor in the success of the business, making the ravioli herself and overseeing the many other tantalizing machinations of the kitchen.

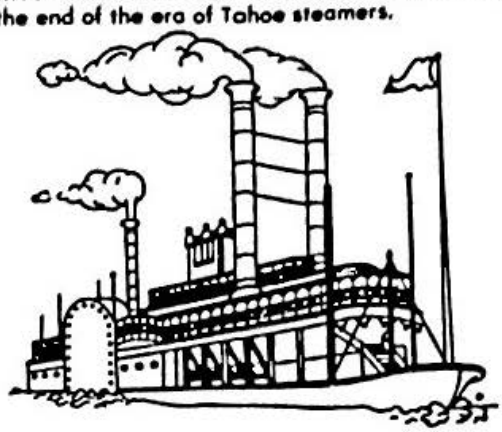
It was several years after the establishment of "Bacchi's" that another premiere dinner house began to take shape on the west shore. What is now "Clementine's" had its beginnings as the private residence of Mr. and Mrs. Everett Prusso, whose prior restaurant experience had been a highly successful venture in Atherton. The Prussos first camped on the site ("a setting of quiet charm on Ward Creek") in 1920, and in 1926 purchased the land and built a small home. Following nearly a decade of planning and preparation, they opened 'Prusso's Forest Inn,' and it immediately became 'the' place to go for an elegant luncheon or dinner.

A few miles farther south (at the north end of Homewood where the Farris Tahoe Realty office is now located), Ben Callendar's "The Hut" was a less formal but equally popular eatery and bar. Ben's delicious hamburgers are well-remembered by those who made 'The Hut' a stop on their way back to town after a dance at Meeks Bay, Moana Villa or the Homewood Hotel, and the inscription above the bar - "IITYWYBAD" - was an amusing source of revenue for the proprietor. To inquiries about the meaning of the curious cryptograph, the bartender would reply, "If I tell you, will you buy a drink?"

In 1924, a restaurant had been built at Meeks Bay, and though it catered primarily to guests staying at the Resort, its reputation for pleasantly-appointed dining with a spectacular view (the dining room was built directly on the beach) drew customers from a much larger area, offering breakfast, lunch and dinner in the early years of its operation.

Resorts and hotels of 1933 generally provided meals for their own guests, and the ensuing decade saw the establishment of many new restaurants, but fifty years ago, the tourist in search of a meal was largely unencumbered with the weighty decision of where to eat, and could expect the finest cuisine for something less than $3 per person, including gratuity.

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY:
June 1, 1934 - The gas-powered cruiser "Marina B.," captained by Daniel M. Brodehl, took over the mail contract from the steamer "Tahoe," marking the beginning of the end of the era of Tahoe steamers.



Our Tahoe Heritage

You Auto Be Glad

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

Visitors to the Lake Tahoe area have no doubt noticed (perhaps with abrupt suddenness) the deterioration of local highways in the wake of a record-setting winter, and may have experienced annoying delays at various points in their travels around the lake.

Road conditions during the winter season generated a lively verbal competition between rival "teams" in Tahoe City and Truckee (closely followed by readers of Letters to the Editor in local papers), with each team claiming the dubious honor of having the deepest and least-navigable potholes in their respective towns. An article appearing in the Tahoe World last spring reported a car "losing both front tires at the midway bridge between Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows," and another car "losing two tires on the passenger side of the car while driving in Tahoe City."

Fortunately, these obstacles to reasonable headway are under repair, but their existence calls to mind the days when the pace of travel was not so convenient.

The first automobile in the Lake Tahoe Basin arrived in 1911. Prior to that time, visitors relied on rail and stage service to reach the lake. Southern Pacific rail had surmounted Donner Summit in 1868, immeasurably improving access as far as Truckee. In 1900, a narrow-gauge line was completed from there to Tahoe City and the Tahoe Tavern. With this improvement, a relatively comfortable journey could be made to any point on the lake, as the tracks ran out onto the Tavern's one-quarter mile trestle pier, where travelers could board the steamer "Tahoe," which circled the lake stopping at all then-existing resorts.

There were, of course, the hardy few who chose to brave the bone-rattling trip down the west shore on the byway of the day, known as the Tahoe City, McKinney's and Meeks Bay Toll Road. This was completed in mid-summer, 1893, the construction work having been performed by a group of about 100 Chinese laborers (whose experience in establishing the roadbed for the SP line over Donner Summit well-qualified them for the new task). The toll road generally followed an existing Indian trail, and was maintained by the Toll Road Company for 10 years, at which time the inconvenience of the original right-of-way near the Tavern caused a rerouting. A further rerouting near the Tavern during its proprietorship by Matt Green established the present course of the highway.

Snow removal was up to the local residents in those days, and parties set out from Truckee and Tahoe City about the first of April each year to sand the road over Donner Summit as well as the rail line connecting the two towns, which followed the Truckee River. The late E.H. "Ernie" Pomin, a lifetime resident of the Basin, described the annual effort to speed up the natural melting process as totally volunteer, using sand (sometimes buried under 4 to 5 feet of snow) taken from hillsides and under trees ("the darker the sand, the faster the snow would melt") on the narrow-gauge tracks. A week's work (all by hand) was usually sufficient to reach "Billy's," a way station and bar located near the present site of Big Chief Lodge (about 2 miles north of the Squaw Valley entrance), where the Tahoe City group was sometimes met by Truckee's contingent.

What would seem a monumental effort today was considered a hard-earned blessing of no small consequence to local residents in the early days of the century, hastening the return of access with the outside world by a week or 10 days. The toll road which also connected the two towns was allowed to clear itself with the coming of the summer season.

The road around Emerald Bay was opened in 1913 through the efforts of a determined gentleman by the name of Banberry (by whose name the road was originally known) and later Jim Dahey. The late George Murphy, a west shore pioneer, described the road as being one-way, "with turning-out places to wait for a car to pass if it could be seen down the road. In those days, if three automobiles passed over the road in a day, it was considered a "crowd."

Another obstacle to around-the-lake travel had been overcome half a century before with the completion of the Lake Bigler Toll Road in August of 1863. This 14-mile stretch of highway between Zephyr Cove and Virginia City skirted the lower side of Cave Rock. One mile of the thoroughfare, which included a 100-foot trestle bridge below the site of the present tunnel, cost $40,000 to complete, exceeding even the later Emerald Bay portion of the "Rim of the Lake Highway" in difficulty and expense of construction. The present route of the highway is through a 200-foot tunnel which was blasted through the granite "cave" (largely destroyed in the process) in 1931, according to E.B. Scott, author of The Saga of Lake Tahoe.

So, Mr. and Mrs. Motorist, temper your displeasure with the delays and inconveniences you may experience in your vacation travels with a thought about what a similar trip would have been like in the days when all the highways were of dirt and gravel, and barely wide enough for two automobiles to pass, and . . .enjoy the scenery!

Our Tahoe Heritage

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

Headwind? Breaker? Elephant Band? From these names by which local bands have chosen to identify themselves, it would seem that music of the 1980's does not include romance among its attributes. (Metal, thankfully, does not reproduce itself.) However, the dance bands and orchestras which played the Lake during the summers between the Great Depression and World War II were very much concerned with the romantic mood, and in the years when Swing was King, a large number of musicians - from the nationally-known artists to college boys out to earn their winter pin money - entertained the annual crowds.

The credentials of each band were highly touted, any network radio or movie experience receiving mention in the billing. For the 1937 season, the featured act at Ta-Neva-Ho (a bar-casino and lounge at Crystal Bay) was nightly dancing to "the clever music of the popular Beachboys" (no relation to Brian Wilson's group) who were, claimed the ad, "widely known for their motion pictures." Equally prideful of their top billing, the Tahoe Tavern's Coral Bar and Green Room in July of 1938 was featuring Cleo Brown, "sensational colored Pianist and Song Stylist . . late of Rudy Vallee and Fred Allen programs."

The dance at Bijou (held in an establishment variously known as Bal Bijou Club and Club Bal Bijou) was for many summer seasons considered to be one of the two centers of swing on the south shore (the other being Globin's over-water "Chalet"). In the banner year of 1936, Freddie Nagel and his 14-piece "collegiate orchestra" opened the Bijou season, and were soon augmented by the special guest appearance of Eddie Duchin, who notified the management in advance that he would play Chopin's Nocturne in E Flat, to stifle observations which limited his talent to the popular field.

Also appearing at the Lake during that 1936 season was the orchestra of Dick Jergens, whose first engagements at Tahoe had been played in the late 1920's at Meeks Bay. In those early days, Jergens led a three-piece combo which featured a saxophone, a drummer, and his own mellophone, an instrument resembling a French horn (but with the keys on top as with a trumpet) - rarely seen in such a small combo (of that or any other era).

During the course of the evening's entertainment, a bucket would be lowered on a rope from the open-beam, knotty pine rafters of the resort's dance hall - encouragement to the dancers to lighten their pockets of any paper or metal ojbects which might be impeding their gyrations on the floor.

By about 1933, Jergens had established his own Swing Band, expanding on his college-day summer experience. In that year he played such dates as the Pasadena Civic Auditorium, though his engagements were principally in the Bay Area.

The lyric to Jergen's theme song, "Daydreams (Come True at Night)", was originally sung by Stan Noonan (a pop and semi-classical vocalist also widely known in the San Francisco area). Later Eddie Howard (author of "Careless" and later a maestro in his own right) supplied the vocals for Jergens.

There were other bandleaders and artists whose popularity was of a more local nature. Gene Englander held sway at Bal Bijou for the 1937 season, later moving to

The bandstand at the Cal-Neva, circa 1940. We suspect that the bandleader is someone well-known, but none of us at NORTH TAHOE WEEK is old enough to remember who it is. Do you? [Photo courtesy of North Lake Photo, Tahoe City.]

the Tavern's Coralounge, where his orchestra was a fixture as late as 1941. Buddy Maleville was another bandleader whose popularity proved portable, working the 1938 season at Bal Bijou, and then splitting the following season between that stand and the one at Stateline Country Club.

Floorshows were in vogue during the seasons of the late 1930's, advertising such top-billing favorites as Anson Weeks (at the Stateline Country Club in June of 1939) and, at the "Castle in the Air" (Cal-Neva), "the sweet swinging rhythms of Cally Holden and His Orchestra."

The variety acts of the day were true to their names. An up-and-coming ventriloquist by the name of Paul Winchell was appearing at the Stateline Country Club in July 1939, following a limited engagement by the Ambassadorettes ("America's Prettiest Girl Acrobats") and John Tio and His Talking Parrot. On the same stage in July of 1941, the bill included such notable performers as Fran Ryan ("Sensational Comedy Soprano"), Barbee and Gray ("Outstanding Comedy Ballroom Dancers") and Patti Collette ("The Darling of the Dance World"). Paul Chubb deftly manipulated Bal Bijou's Electric Hammond Organ during that 1939 summer season.

Music, then as now, was an essential aspect of local entertainment. But those who can still recall dancing to the melodies of those groups and artists as occupied the stands on those moonlit evenings of another era have a treasure which has perhaps been lost in the flicker of the strobe.

Our Tahoe Heritage

Dot So La Lee

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

On the curve of land which comprises the northern bank of Tahoe's Truckee River outlet, on a wooden floor with the materials of her labor spread at the perimeters of her voluminous skirts, an Indian woman often used to sit with her front door open to catch the light necessary for the fineness of her work. Here, beside the lapping waters, she went about her task of weaving baskets at a steady, untiring pace, enlisting fingernails, awl, lips, and teeth to subdue the nature of the willow, birch and fern.

Debuda was the Indian woman's given name, meaning "the quiet one," but her chosen weaving name - Dot So La Lee - is the one by which she is best known. Though it has been written that this name is translated "Big Hips," the claim - in view of her great vanity - is merely etymological coincidence. The name was actually derived from that of Dr. S.L. Lee, the first admiring white man to take an interest in her work.

It was common practice among the Indians to take the names of friends or employers - not wishing to reveal their given names to the white man - and her appropriation of his name speaks of an admiration and friendship which was lifelong. Her las piece of work was the repair of a Paiute basket belonging to the doctor, who greatly admired her works, not only collecting, but cataloging each treasure as he acquired it.

Another admirer of her work was Abe Cohn, whose parents Dot So La Lee worked for in Monitor (Alpine County) in 1871. Cohn operated the Emporium in Carson City, and began selling her baskets there about 1895. He recognized the artistry of her work, and soon provided her with a house and keep in exchange for her baskets. Cohn maintained a register of her woven pieces. His notes include information on stitches, colors, size, legend, time in weaving, and each of the 120 baskets he catalogued are prefixed with the initials L.K., denoting Luisa Keyser, the name Do So La Lee took when she married Charley Keyser.

At the beginning of each summer, Dot So La Lee, Charley, and her little dog would make the trip over the pass from Carson. They would cross the lake by steamer to Tahoe City, where Jeremiah "Johnny" Hurley's boathouse at the mouth of the Truckee River had been rented by Cohn for their use. Cohn had two summer curio shops at the Lake - one at the Tahoe Tavern and one around the curve of land northeast of the boathouse (near the south boundary of Commons Beach), from which he built a boardwalk connecting it with the boathouse.

Lois Facha displays the Dat So La Lee (Also spelled Dot So La Lee) basket now being exhibited at the Gatekeeper's Museum, Tahoe City.

Those who traversed the wooden causeway across the intervening marshlands were not always respectful of the artist at work, oblivious or unconcerned with her ability to comprehend their rude observations about her ample proportions, poor grammar, or lack of cleanliness. Do So La Lee's sensitivity was affronted many times, as recalled by Lillian Vernon Farr, whose mother once paid a visit to the boathouse to find the woman in tears. It seemed the previous visitors - two white women who had left their manners at home - had called her dirty. Mrs. Vernon was at length able to console the mystified Dot So La Lee, who continued to protest, "Me not dirty. Me put on clean dress this morning."

Cohn's entrepreneurial abilities soon spread the fame of Dot So La Lee's skill, and, in 1918, he and his fearful charge travelled by train to the St. Louis Exposition, where she and her baskets were displayed for the first time before an admiring art world.

An appreciation for Indian art - notwithstanding a continued contempt for the artist - was growing during the early 1920's, and the superior skill evident in Dot So La Lee's baskets soon began to command four-digit pricetags. Yet, she continued to live out her inglorious days in the employ of Abe Cohn, weaving the legends of the Washo people into beautiful, mathematically-intricate creations to adorn the homes of white people who had no true appreciation of the dying culture the baskets represented, nor of the patient and gifted weaver who believed that her hands were spiritually guided in their machinations with the reed and fibre.

In her later years, Dot So La Lee suffered from dropsy, and in late October of 1925, refusing the help of a white doctor, she sought out instead a Woodford's medicine man, Tom Walker, to oversee a four-day pre-death ritual (the Washo version of the "last rites") which she believed would renew her spirit for its final days of earthly work. Refreshed by this vigil, she returned to complete those small tasks still at hand, and on December 6, 1925, she died.

Oldest of a proud sorority of Washo basketmakers (some of whose skills may have equalled her own), she remains the best-known of a group which included her sister-in-law Ceese, Lizzie Peters, Jennie Bryant Shaw, Tillie Snooks, Lena Dick, Lillie James, Maggie Maya James and Sarah Jim Mayo. Her legacy is rich both for its artistry, and for the light it sheds on the story of the Washo people prior to the innundation of their culture by white men. It is not so very difficult to believe, when viewing one of her many msterpieces, that a spirit of wondrous strength did indeed guide her dainty hand to its great work.

(A Dot So La Lee basket on loan from Mrs. Lois Facha may be viewed at the Gatekeeper's Cabin museum through July 30.)

Our Tahoe Heritage

Sierra Hollywood

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

Lake Tahoe's scenic beauty has, for more than a century, enjoyed fame of international proportions. Mark Twain's 1871 travel book, Roughing It, was the first publication to bring the lake to the attention of readers around the world, highlighting the author's experiences at the lake in the early 1860's and extolling the virtues of the region.

Since that time, amateur and professional artists alike have flocked to the basin in vain efforts to capture the marvels of this celestial body of water and its beautiful surroundings. The fledgling motion picture industry was quick to turn its attention to Tahoe's rare landscapes, which, over the years, have been the breathtaking backdrop for a considerable number of films.

The first of these in the Tahoe area, according to an article appearing in the August 11, 1927 issue of the Lake Tahoe News, was "Son of the Stars." "Numberous scenes," says the News "were shot five miles below the Tahoe Tavern on the Truckee River near Rampart. Warren Kerrigan was leading man and the Tahoe City camp of the movie people was named "Camp Kerrigan." Indians played an important part in the picture, a pioneer-type flicker. One night a lot of us fell in the river during scene shooting when some horses stumbled. The water was COLD. The month was May and snow was still on the ground in patches."

"Rose Marie," M-G-M's 1935 extravaganza starring the mellifluous duo of Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy, is perhaps the best known of Tahoe's early films. Employing a huge cast of extras—many of whom were local residents—the picture was another of the many vehicles used during the period to showcase the vocal talents of the popular pair, and was set in the Great Northwest (at that time a locale of rugged intrigue to the film audience), with Mr. Eddy cast as a Canadian Mountie.

In addition to the much-photographed set at Emerald Bay (on the northwest shore near Nelson L. Salters' Emerald Bay Resort), several other locations were employed in the filming. The Christmas issue of the Tahoe Tattler recalls that a "quaint French Canadian village was constructed on the shores of Carnelian Bay. It was here that the major part of the drama was produced . . .other scenes were photographed at Emerald Bay, Carnelian Lake, and in the Five Lakes in the Rubicon vicinity."

Props for the picture became great treasures among the locals, and totem poles used in some scenes eventually found homes at Lakeview Lodge in Emerald Bay and in front of Bechdolt's Tahoe Inn in Tahoe City. The same issue of the Tattler describes the gift of the massive carvings as "a gracious gesture from the M-G-M officials in appreciation for the cooperation lent by the Bechdolt organization during the filming . . ."

Another local resident who had a hand in the success of the production was Jake Obexer, who, in the summer prior to shotting, had given a party of M-G-M scouts a boat tour of potential locations, and later served as marine chauffeur for William Van Dyke, director of the high-altitude spectacle. Herb Obexer relates that his father's involvement with the picture had a happy ending. During the filming, it had been Jake's assignment to take his Gar Wood speedboat to Zephyr Cove each morning (where Mr. Van Dyke was lodged) and deliver the director to that day's location. A friendship developed between the two men, and when the shooting at the lake was concluded, Mr. Van Dyke thanked Jake for his excellent services, presenting him with a copy of the novel Trader Horn, an adaption of which was to be the director's next film. Jake was a bit disappointed at what he felt to be a somewhat meager gratuity. However, in the course of reading the novel, he had occasion to alter his original assessment, turning a page to discover a check made out to him in the amount of $5,000.

Countless films of the 1930's and 40's employed the sweeping azure vistas of the lake for their backgrounds. "Lightnin'," a Will Rogers pictures of the early 1930's, included scenes shot at Cascade Lake and Cal-Neva Lodge, where the massive rock which had been incorporated into the old lodge (removed when it was rebuilt following the 1937 fire) was a focal point of shooting at that location.

Sierra Hollywood cont'd.

Cloud scenes for the M-G-M film "The Good Earth," an adaption of Pearl S. Buck's popular novel, were shot in the basin and the Carson Valley in 1935.

A Universal Studios film about the 1811 John Jacob Astor fur hunt starring Nigel and Carol Bruce, Walter Brennan, and Franchot Tone, was filmed primarily at Incline Beach, where, the Tattler reported, "a log stockade and Chinook Indian village were settings . . ."

The films mentioned here are representative of those made at Tahoe. In more recent times, "Godfather II," which used the Tahoe Pines estate of Henry J. Kaiser ("Fleur du Lac") as one of its locations, is remembered by locals who participated in the filming. However, with the march of "progress," local vistas which have not been encroached upon by the "improvements" of man become fewer and farther between, forcing the filmmaker to more pastoral locations.

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Our Tahoe Heritage

Private Lands Go Public

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

The changing profile of land use in the Lake Tahoe Basin has, in recent years, leaned decidedly toward the public domain. Claims to basin lands by various government entities and agencies now represent approximately 87 percent of the Lake Tahoe watershed, including about 60 percent of shoreline property.

With the intent of preserving for future generations their portion of Tahoe's pastoral wealth, a number of thoughtful landowners have, over the years, donated or sold to the U.S. Forest Service (at sacrificial discounts) their large lakeshore holdings, some of the property finding use as state parks or campgrounds.

Public acquisition of these lands has influenced the density of population in the basin by severely limiting the area available to private interests.

Three instances of personal benevolence, accounting for several thousand publically-held acres, are notable on the west shore. Earliest of these gifts, a donation of 744 acres at Rubicon Point by Mr. and Mrs. Duane LeRoy Bliss in 1929, became D.L. Bliss State Park (eventually comprising 957 acres). The park includes 14,640 feet of shoreline, extending south as far as Emerald Bay's Eagle Point, featuring miles of scenic trails and a broad expanse of white sand beach.

The world-famous summer residence of Lora Moore Knight at the head of Emerald Bay (including the island) became a part of the public domain through the benevolent efforts of Harvey West, a Placerville lumberman and philanthropist. "Vikingsholm" (as the authentically reproduced Scandinavian castle is known) and its 239-acre grounds had become the property of Nevada rancher Lawrence Holland following Mrs. Knight's death in 1945. Holland owned the property for a little over a year before selling to Mr. West, who, in turn, offered Mrs. Knight's original acreage (along with adjacent prior holdings of his own) to the State of California in return for half the land's appraised value. This transaction was completed in 1953, and the residence and grounds are now maintained by the state park system.

Another west shore residence which subsequently became state property was the Ehrman estate, located on Sugar Pine Point. It was here in 1903 that work was completed on Isaias Hellman's "Pine Lodge," a residence of truly grand proportions. On Hellman's death, the property passed into the ownership of his daughter, Esther Ehrman (Mrs. Claude Lazard). Mrs. Lazard sold her family's 1,989-acre estate (which included substantial holdings west of Highway 89) to the state in 1965.

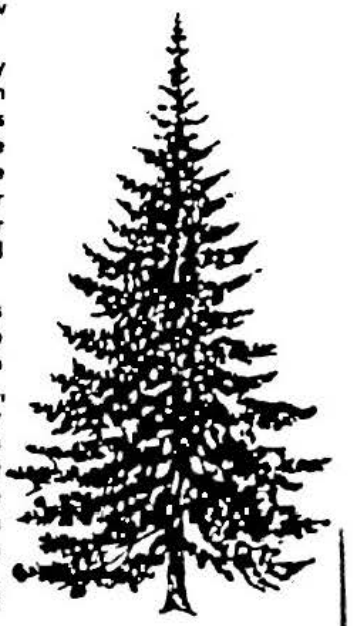
In 1970, as a result of increasing agency demands regarding operation of private commercial ventures, the Kehlet family sold their 50-year-old Meeks Bay Resort to Macco Corporation (a subsidiary of Penn Central Railroad)., Soon after, financial problems of the parent company caused suspension of plans for a highrise condominium project on the site, leaving the future of the popular resort in doubt, until Palo Alto industrialist, and long-time summer resident, William Hewlett put up $3.1 million as a holding action against such development in the bay. The Forest Service acquired the property from Hewlett in 1974, and subsequent use has been as a public campground operated on lease to private concessionaires.

Some property owners whose intent of private ownership were thwarted by the persistence of the Forest Service have become unwilling benefactors of the public-at-large. Chief among these was George Whittell who lost 5,300 acres of his extensive Nevada shoreline holdings to the USFS in a 1967 condemnation suit. The Nevada state government compensated Whittell $3 million for this usurpation of his property, which has since been turned into a state park.

It is noteworthy that private land continues to lose ground against the encroachment of government on all levels, competing with private enterprise for visitors dollars while limiting the individual's ability to make private use of the land or sustain the added tax burden brought about by the deletion of such large acreages from the tax rolls.

The $85 million state bond act passed in the 1982 general election, which promised to buy out "environmentally fragile" lands in private ownership in the Tahoe Basin, seems to have hit a snag in recent weeks. A question of increasing perplexity in the minds of many is: if such fragile lands are considered unusable by the private land owners, to what possible use will the same lands be put by government? Implementation of the terms of the buyout plan would ostensibly involve the purchase and fencing off of these "fragile" private holdings, benefiting the former property owners financially but the general public not at all.

Another potential detriment of implementing these voter-approved policies would be the necessity of adjusting county tax rolls to compensate the loss of revenues from these formerly private lands. At the present time, Nevada's Douglas County, facing bankruptcy from the diminished tax base, is sueing the TRPA in an attempt to recover the lost revenues, and other counties in the basin are contemplating similar action. Future public acquisition of private lands, whether through philanthropic or legislated means, would seem a problematic endeavor at best.



Our Tahoe Heritage

Historic Site Preservation

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

This summer's demolition of Blyth Arena, site of the hockey and skating events of the 1960 Winter Olympics at Squaw Valley, may generate a renewed concern over the fast-disappearing landmarks with which locals and visitors alike associate the Lake Tahoe area.

Awareness on the part of the general public and vocal opposition by a group of concerned citizens was insufficient to rescue this historic structure - engineering marvel of another generation - from the assiduous advance of "progress." Blacktop will soon obliterate any trace of the building, making room for more cars and more people (whose appreciation of the international significance of their vacation playground must now be through photographic record and memory).

Sometimes the loss of a tangible piece of our local heritage is through a slow and comparatively painless process of erosion, and sometimes through swift and unexpected causes. In September of 1978, a single week saw the destruction of two historic west shores structures by arson. First to burn was the Gatekeeper's Cabin at the Lake's outlet in Tahoe City - on the eve of final legal efforts of the North Lake Tahoe Historical Society to purchase the site for use as a museum and park. Furor and dismay over this thoughtless act was intensified the following week when the Meeks Bay Lodge and Post Office Building, dating to the 1920's, went up in flames.

Tireless efforts by Historical Society members raised sufficient funds for the reconstruction of the Gatekeeper's Cabin. However, Forest Service plans did not include rebuilding of the Meeks Bay structure, and once again memory must suffice the reminiscent.

Some points of historical interest - many within a block of the highway - remain hidden treasures, except to the few who are familiar with their silent stories. Such a case is the Murphy cabin, built in 1908 at the Meeks Bay head of the Tahoe-Yosemite Trail. This log structure, with its native stone fireplace and timeworn board floors, is on the typically-massive scale of pioneer dwellings.

The Murphy brothers had first come to Meeks Bay in June of 1872, where they opened a dairy (the area subsequently became known as "Buttermilk Bay"). By about 1876 or 1877, all available timber in the bay had been felled and "boomed" to the Glenbrook mills, so that the surrounding property - now a shady, occluded hillside - at that time afforded a sweeping panorama of the shoreline. Still owned by descendants of the pioneer family, the cabin is within easy view of the highway, across from the former site of the Meeks Bay Theater Building (torn down by the Forest Service following collapse of the roof in April of 1975).

The disregard for history demonstrated by the most recent remodeling of Constable Harry Johanson's former residence (next door to North Lake Photo in Tahoe City) represents another means by which pieces of the past become lost. This structure, originally built in Glenbrook as a residence for the Sumpter family, was moved by barge to Tahoe City during the relocation of the Bliss lumbering operations around the turn of the century, and later became Constable Johanson's home.

The massive stone fireplace, with its hand-carved inscription bidding guests a warm welcome, was incorporated into the plan of the building's first commercial use ("Tomfoolery's"), but has sadly disappeared from the current decor, taking with it a charm which no amount of fanfare and trumpeting can hope to restore.

Constable Johanson's occupational predecessor, Robert Montgomery Watson, was builder and owner of another structure in Tahoe City, currently threatened with irreversible deterioration. Watson, who first arrived in Tahoe City in 1875, left the basin for the Yukon goldfields in 1897, returning several years later to take a prominent place in the development of the town. Among the structures built by Watson were a school (on the present site of the Pepper Tree Inn) in 1896, the log cabin which now houses The Potter's Wheel (designated as a historic site), and the "20 Below Discovery Cabin," a little-known structure situated on Tahoe Street in the shadow of the Pepper Tree Inn and phone company buildings in Tahoe City. The cabin, a replica of the dwelling built by Watson during his residence in the Yukon, seems in danger of neglectful decay; weeds in the surrounding yard furnishing the only apparent sign of life.

Misplacement of priorities, malice, and Mother Nature often seem to join hands to bring about the loss of local treasures, but perhaps none of these causes is so regrettably destructive as the ravages brought about by apathy. The uttering of exclamations over the latest loss must give way to some constructive action before what is not already lost becomes so. The process of recovery and restoration of what can still be preserved is tedious, and at times unrewarding. Yet, the axiom "nothing ventured, nothing gained" was never truer than in the case of our local treasures, as a visit to the site of one of these remaining pieces of history will prove to anyone who will take a moment to pay one.

Our Tahoe Heritage

Anniversary of "Tahoe" Sinking

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

Since this week is the anniversary of the scuttling of the Steamer "Tahoe," it seems appropriate that a few words be said about the final days of the grand old ship. Best known of the steamers which plied the Lake between 1863 and 1940, was the Bliss family's "Tahoe." She proudly reigned as "Queen of the Lake" for four decades, and continues to be the subject of mystery, legend, and controversy 43 years after her sinking.

The "Tahoe" carried mail during the summer season from the time of her launching on June 24, 1896 through the fall of 1933. (One of several smaller steamers - usually the Bliss family's "Nevada" - was used for mail delivery and limited passenger service during the winter months.) By the early 1930's, gradual improvement of basin highways and the consequent influx of auto traffic had begun to diminish the importance of boat travel. Tahoe's splendid pleasure resorts had seen their heyday around the turn of the century and were fading from prominence.

On July 1, 1934, the contract to carry the mail was awarded to Captain Daniel Martin Brodehl, whose gas-powered cruiser, the "Marian B.," represented a financially feasible means of operating the marine postal route on a year-round basis.

And so, except for several special charter excursions during the two seasons which followed loss of the mail contract, the "Tahoe" sat idle, becoming such a wharf-side fixture at the Tahoe City maintenance yards that the Tahoe Tattler of August 20, 1937 remarked: "Although countless picture postcards bear witness to the contrary, there are visitors who wonder if "that boat over there ever ran on Tahoe." Enamored of her brass fittings and ornate accouterments, vandals took them for souvenirs, leaving in their stead an undignified array of litter, graffiti, and filth.

The Steamer had become the property of the Lake Tahoe Development Company in a liquidation of the Bliss west shore interests in 1927, but a potential sale of the ship for scrap aroused strong family sentiment, and they bought her back with the intent of putting her forever beyond the thoughtless grasp of the public.

Courtesy of North Lake Photo, Tahoe City

A recounting of the several versions of the scuttling of the "Tahoe" might easily exceed the space of this column. Some purportedly first-hand descriptions refer to the use of dynamite to explode the flotation tanks (a recourse which these witnesses believed to have destroyed a large portion of the deck and pilothouse). However, recent film footage of the Steamer (taken on the lake bottom with a "remote submersible" camera) appears to show these structures intact, lending credence to a more peaceful account of the sinking.

Without contradicting any eyewitness accounts or attempting to draw conclusions regarding the "facts" of this subject, it may be said that on the quiet summer evening of August 29, 1940, the Steamer left Tahoe City under tow by the launch "Quit-Cha-Kidding," bound for Glenbrook. There, in almost 400 feet of water, her watertight compartments slowly filled and she slipped beneath the waves.

Plans afoot to raise the "Tahoe" have met with varied reaction. One opinion holds that public curiousity is rightfullly served by the recovery of the ship from her icy grave, while some feel that it should be beyond the province of man to tamper with legends lying in state. Members of the Oceaneering International team (whose expertise is being sought in the recovery phase of the project) met at Camp Richardson two weeks ago, where it is reported that actualization of plans to raise the Steamer should begin within the month. Whatever the outcome, the "Tahoe" will always reserve a permanent, well-earned place in the annals of local history, though whether that "history" be living or confined to the pages of books remains to be seen.

Our Tahoe Heritage

California Gambling

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

Though organized forms of gambling at Lake Tahoe have, by statute, traditionally been the province of the Nevada portion of the basin, the popular appeal of this indoor recreation, combined with an attitude of indulgence common in remote (and thus difficult-to-police) geographies, gave rise in the early 1930's to a varied assortment of extra-legal gaming enterprises on the California side of the lake.

In spite of the illicit nature of such operations, none were what could be considered clandestine. Slot machines sat in plain view at Bay View Resort (above Emerald Bay), Meeks Bay Resort, Pomin's Lodge in Tahoma, Obexer's Market, Ben Callender's Hut and Don Huff's Homewood Resort in Homewood, Sunnyside, Tahoe Tavern, Bechdolt's Tahoe Inn, Rayburn's Buckhorn Inn in Kings Beach, in the Village Store in Tahoe City (as well as in a restaurant which then occupied a part of the store building) and in Congers (now the Family Tree).

Several establishments, including Tahoe Tavern, Lake Inn (now Pfeifer House) and two buildings in Kings Beach - one now occupied by Los Tres Hombres and one by Western Auto - were "hot" local gambling houses with "craps," "21" tables, and roulette wheels.

Hundreds of machines were scattered over the north and west shores, with several individuals and partnerships providing equipment and repairs for owners of local businesses. In a taped interview made in 1966, the late "Ernie" Pomin described Dick Joseph's partnership with several west shore proprietors in which they split the "take" from slots Joseph provided.

Joe King (for whom Kings Beach was named) and Larry McKelvy "leased" their machines on the same terms, King to customers on the north and west shores and McKelvy along his route from Emerald Bay to Soda Springs.

Enforcement of the state law prohibiting gaming was sporadic, and bore a discernible relationship to the physical proximity of concerned officials. Intermittent raids on local establishments were customarily preceded by warnings, which allowed sufficient opportunity to remove the offending paraphernalia to more secluded locations "for the duration."

Earl Warren's term as State Attorney General, with its promises of reform, proved to be a period of lip-service enforcement of statutes on the books. The late C.E. "Bill" Vernon's memoirs include a recollection of the 1935 confiscation of gambling equipment from a Kings Beach business - apparently the only instance of intervention by law enforcement authorities until 1937. In that year the Tahoe Tattler reported raids on three resorts by Constable Harry Johanson and his deputies in which two slot machines and two horseracing machines were impounded. Kennedy's Barbeque in Homewood, Carl Bohme's place in Tahoe Vista, and Freeman's place in Kings Beach were the targets of the raids.

Attorney General Warren's participation in an Echo Lake skeet shoot in July of 1939 prompted the swift disappearance of local machines from their places of prominence at various local establishments, but the reform was temporary. It was not until Warren paid the basin another visit, in July of 1941 (this time to the uncomfortable proximity of Tahoe Pines), that local businesses were again coerced into removing the machines from view.

Following World War II, improved access to the basin and the consequent mushrooming growth of tourism had brought about a greater stringency in the enforcement of gaming laws. A bill before the California State Legislature in the early 1940's, which would have legalized gambling on the California side of the basin, had gone down to defeat, thanks primarily to strong opposition from Nevada gaming interests - a strength then only beginning to make itself felt locally.

In 1947, Fred Ichelson, who then operated the Tahoe Tavern, appeared before the Judge of Township II (the same Mr. Vernon mentioned earlier) with a plea of guilty in the matter of possession of gambling machines. His conviction marked the beginning of the end for illicit gambling operations on Tahoe's California shore.

Our Tahoe Heritage

Read All About It!

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

The recently-celebrated 20th anniversary of the Tahoe World prompts some recollections of its predecessors, which (though not blessed with such longevity) played their various roles in the chronicling of local history. While a great many small, local-interest newspapers began to issue from crude presses dotting the lower reaches of "the Western Slope" in the mid-1800's, three more decades passed before the first periodical appeared in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

First on the local scene was a miniature tabloid called the Tahoe Tattler, the format of which was reminiscent of a postage stamp. R.E. Wood, editor of the diminutive daily, collected news from guests arriving and departing from the bustling hamlet of "Tahoe" (now Tahoe City) by steamer and stage, filling out the balance of the four-page sheet with liberal doses of local advertising.

Wood's enterprise, which began on July 9, 1881, managed to survive until January of the following year, when he found it obligatory to explain to his readers that his "healthy stomach. . .could not be satisfied by faith without dumplings."

In the 54 years which followed the failure of Wood's enterprise, the region was without a newspaper. However, revival of the Tahoe Tattler in June of 1935 by managing editor Frank E. Feliz brought the paper back as a weekly publication "during the season." Feliz was an aspiring student of local history, and featured on each of his front pages the brief account of a local "old timer," recalling the early days of white settlement in the Basin and capturing, however vaguely, many aspects of local history which might otherwise have gone unrecorded.

Later editors Harry Blanchard, H.O. McKay, Jr., and Gurney Breckenfeld, carried on the traditions instituted by Feliz, including columns devoted to natural history, facts and statistics about Tahoe, local fishing, society news, and a chronicle of local activities, both public and private. The Tahoe Yacht Club was in its heyday, with previews and results of the annual races at Chamber's Lodge and Tahoe Tavern dominating the headlines.

Tahoe journalism in those days had quite a different flavor from that of current local offerings, reflecting a slower and less self-conscious time when Regattas and road improvements provided the chief news. In the seasons following its rebirth, the Tattler enjoyed the blessing of having virtually no competition, but the area's seasonal news market represented growing promise, and on July 27, 1937, the initial six-page offering of Kenneth L. McLaren's Lake Tahoe News appeared on local stands.

Cal-Neva Lodge had just been newly rebuilt (in record time) following a fire on May 16 of that year which destroyed the original structure (built in 1927), and the promotional benefits of a newspaper which would give voice to the pleasures of North Stateline and Reno nightlife were obvious. McLaren's publication thus devoted itself primarily to news of "the Line" and "the Biggest Little City in the World," boasting a variety of columns (one from a "stringer" as distant as Talloc), as well as entertainment and society features of general interest to the gambling "vacationist." A full-page ad appeared weekly on the back coversheet, picturing the admirable view from Cal-Neva's Continental Bar and Cocktail Lounge, where the sweet swinging rhythms of Cally Holden held perpetual sway.

The maiden issue of another local journalistic effort appeared May 17, 1946, calling itself Tahoe Topics. Ruth Powell Pool of San Francisco, with H.D. Blanchard as her Managing Editor, published a rather more cosmopolitan product than the folksy Tattler, including the latest from Walter Winchell, legislative news from Washington D.C., and smatterings of local history, news and politics.

The war years, which diminished both the community's resident and transient populations, had brought about a second collapse of the Tattler in 1941. It was not until after 1945 that the Tahoe region was again "booming." In part due to an influx of ex-servicemen returning with their wives and families to settle permanently in the scenic paradise where they had spent treasured hours of leave during the war. It is surprising that a second revival of the Tahoe Tattler did not appear until 1957, this time published by Kathleen Starratt and under the editorship of Gordon "Oz" Butterfield, with photos supplied by staff photographer Bill Briner, who was recently named Director of Parks for California.

The appearance of the "new" Tattler" coincided with bidding for the site of the 1960 Winter Olympics, recounting the selection process and subsequent plans for, and progress on, the new Olympic facilities. Following the brouhaha generated by these preparations for the international event (and the glorious Games themselves), the Tattler retreated once again to the shelf, its third disappearance, paving the way for today's voice of the north and west shores, the Tahoe World.

The echoes of a quaintly different Lake Tahoe still reverberate in the pages of its early newspapers, recalling picture-postcard days of unhurried repose. Photocopies of some of these old newsprint treasures are available for your perusal upstairs in the Gatekeeper's Cabin Museum. You'll find a moment taken to see these fleeting memories of the past both entertaining and rewarding.

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Our Tahoe Heritage

Fish Farms of Lake Tahoe

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

The old two-story, bark-sided building with the green roof, which stands on a gentle slope where Lake Forest Road joins Highway 28 is commonly known as the former site of state fish hatchery. However, few people are aware that this was only one of about half a dozen locations in the Lake Tahoe vicinity where fish were reared in an effort to replenish the supply, which, less than 100 years ago, was described as "unlimited."

The Lake Forest Hatchery, in fact, was actually a comparatively recent site of fish-raising activities. The first such enterprise had been founded as early as 1868 at the lake outlet by two gentlemen named Pringle and Hurley. Their operation is known to have survived for at least four years, providing area anglers with an enhanced supply of pan-sized trout as their "Piscicultural Establishment," where visitors could watch the voracious fingerlings feeding for the considerable sum of 25 cents.

A second hatchery site was established in Tallac in 1882. This employed a system of 18-inch steel pipe to carry water from Taylor Creek to a square diversion basin, from which emanated a number of pipes that fed the individual rearing tanks. Located on land owned by Lucky Baldwin, somewhat upstream from the present Taylor Creek bridge (site of the Stream Profile Chamber on Highway 89), this hatchery was remodeled and upgraded in 1932. Materials were used from the dismantling of another hatchery operation, this one on Blackwood Creek near Tahoe Pines.

The Blackwood Hatchery, located about a mile upstream from the highway, raised fingerlings to a length of three to four inches, planting the "fry" in local lakes and streams by tank truck and later by plane.

Another hatchery, established in 1893 on the Truckee River about four and one-half miles downstream from the town of Truckee, was the work of private individuals—members of the San Francisco Fly Fishing Club. In the interests of improving and maintaining local fishing, these gentlemen purchased hundreds of acres along both sides of the river, constructing a hatchery facility and lodge on the site. Moving water for the hatchery's rearing tanks was provided by a wooden viaduct and flume system, the remnants of which are still in evidence today.

Through an agreement with the State Department of Fish and Game, this club has taken upon itself the work of stocking the Truckee River between the Truckee mill and the Nevada state line. At one time as many as 100,000 fish yearly were planted in this stretch of water.

Due to the necessary proximity to fast water, this hatchery suffered numerous floods over the years, especially prior to the completion of Lake Tahoe's outlet dam in 1915. A fire swept through the "Rainbow Lodge" building in 1923, but it was rebuilt in 1924. Today the building is preserved in much of its original state for the use of members and their guests.

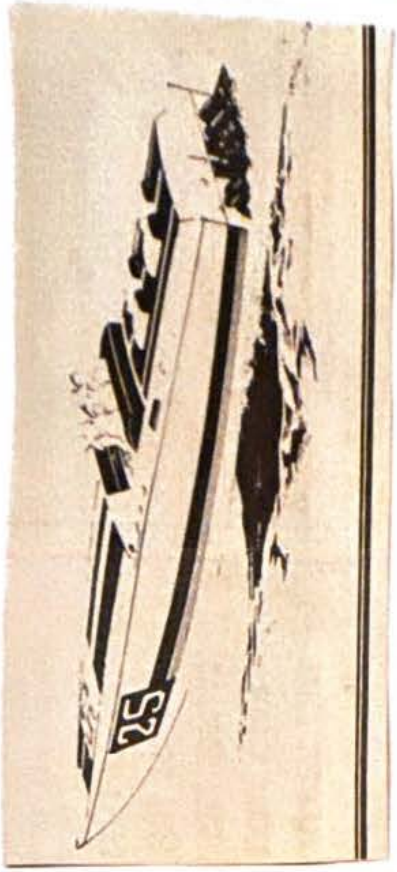
The club continues to carry on its worthwhile planting activities, though today the approximately 6,000 fish planted annually are supplied by the Mount Lassen Fish Company near Chester. The club now imposes a catch-and-release policy on its members, allowing only half of the legal limit to be taken. A sign posted near the lodge advised "Pinch the barb and give the fish a chance."

The Lake Forest Hatchery, best known of the local fish-rearing sites, was built in 1920. Originally it was used as a maintenance building before the State Department of Fish and Game took it over, adapting it to the purpose of raising fingerlings (three to four inch fish). Famed author John Steinbeck worked at the hatchery from 1926 to 1928. It operated until 1957, when policy held that Tahoe had an adequate number of fish. Since that time, the Fish and Game Department has maintained offices in a portion of the building, with a U.C. Davis research project occupying the balance of the quarters.

During the last half-century, a controversy has raged regarding the proper size and number of fish which should be planted, with local individuals and groups voicing their opinions on the subject. In 1939, a drive to restock the lake with big fish began in earnest. The Lake Tahoe-Sierra Association spearheaded a petition campaign, which asked the State Legislature to spend approximately $100,000 to plant large fish in Tahoe waters.

The program outlined by the association was motivated chiefly by an interest in increasing tourism. It was estimated that its effect would be "to lengthen the summer vacation resort season to five months instead of the present two or two and one-half." The petition recommended that no fish under three inches be planted—a policy which has proved less than desirable and is being reversed today by current Fish and Game policy.

The Lake Tahoe Basin and Truckee River, have been plagued with over-fishing and flagrant violations of limit and size. These waters have lost their international reputation as prime fishing locations, yet they continue to provide the skilled angler with finny rewards for his efforts with hook and line.



Our Tahoe Heritage

Sierra Boat Racing

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

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In the era when improved and expanded roads in the Lake Tahoe Basin were beginning to make marine transportation obsolete, a growing number of powerboat owners were discovering the recreational uses of their boats. The Tahoe Power-Boat Club, (a predecessor of the Tahoe Yacht Club,) was founded in 1925, chiefly for the purpose of organizing their casual competitions into regularly-scheduled annual races. The initial races, held at the Tahoe Tavern pier, became so popular that a second day of racing was initiated at Chambers' Lodge.

The throngs of marine racing enthusiasts who crowded shoreline and pier to watch the annual races were presented with a bill of fast-paced fare, which typically included seven or eight events.

The "stock" events (those limited to displacement hulls not exceeding a given horsepower) initially included 165 hp-and-under and 200 hp-and-under races, plus a competition for boats built by Stephens Brothers of Stockton (also known as the 100 hp race), which featured Carroll Skinner's "Florence M," Gustav Knecht's "Margus III," Gordon Lacy's "Lady Constance," and Spencer Grant's "Blanche G" as regular, closely-matched competitors.

In addition to these hotly-contested events, there was usually a handicap race, a relay, and a popular hodge-podge known as "Bang-and-Go-Back," in which contestants gunned their engines at the firing of the pistol and were off at their honor-bound best until a second shot signalled the return to port - first boat back taking the prize. High-schoolers Ann and Pierce Milton, in their short-turning "Skip-It," placed in this event several years running, with Henry J. Kaiser Jr.'s "Jr. III" taking top honors in the 1937 and 1938 Tavern races.

Special feature on the 1938 Tavern racing form was a short-lived Long Distance race, testing the stamina of boat and driver alike. An 18-mile course took the four entrants from the Tavern pier to Chambers' Lodge, returning them to the starting point by way of Obexer's. Stan Dollar, Jr., in his "Baby Skipalong," was first boat back to port, with an elapsed time of 20 minutes, 30 seconds. Dollar was followed by Henry J. Kaiser, Jr., in his "Jr. III" and T.E. Anderson in the "T.E.A." A distant fourth place went to Henry J. Kaiser, Sr.'s "Miss Comfort," which, reported the *Tahoe Tattler*, got so hot that the automatic fire extinguisher went off, completely smothering the motor for a few minutes."

The 1936 card included a special "Sister-Ship" race, in which two identical 200 hp Gar Woods belonging to George A. Osen ("G.G.") and E.L. Oliver ("Hey There III") proved the company's consistency-of-manufacture of finishing in successive dead heats.

Over the years, new events, based on ever-increasing maximum horsepower, supplemented or replaced those for which fewer and fewer boats existed. In 1938, the 200 hp event became the 225, and the following year a 300 hp-and-under displacement contest was added to the racing agenda, accommodating such boats as E.L. Oliver's new "Hey There IV," John Metcalf's "Tecalote," Henry Kaiser, Sr.'s "Lemme Go First," Frank Fuller's "Water Wagon," and Randolph Walker, Sr.'s latest "Ranjac."

Foremost event on the racing program was the Championship "Free-For-All" race, which had no limitations regarding horsepower or size of entries - the field consequently including a wide variety of craft. Stock runabouts such as Henry J. Kaiser's "Bess" and E.L. Oliver's "Hey There III" were early contenders.

In the late 1930's, rapid advances in marine engineering were evidenced by the list of "Free-For-All" competitors. Wooden runabouts entering the Lake Championship gradually began to be dominated by such modified hydroplane hulls as Kaiser's "Hornet II" (a 450-hp Liberty-powered hydro), Stan Dollar Jr.'s "Mercury" (an aluminum-hulled speedster powered by a 610-hp Curtis D-12 engine) and Lou Fageol's "So Long," an 800-hp streak which had been clocked at 90 mph on the Lake.

The war brought a temporary halt to local boat racing, though as the 1946 season opened, plans for resumption of annual races were well underway. Greed for speed was rapidly being accommodated by post-war technology, and step-hydroplanes began to come into their own, leading to the initiation of the Mile High Regatta in 1953. Several years later, this competition was expanded to include a Gold Cup race, sponsored by Charles Mapes of Reno hotel fame.

In addition to the standard racing events, these proceedings featured unlimited hydroplane competition, with an increasing number of nationally-prominent entrants to supplement the local field. Local competitors were J. Phillip Murphy and his "Breathless," Henry J. Kaiser, Sr. and his string of "Hawaii Kai's," Stan Dollar's "Short Snorter," Morlan Visel's "Hurricane IV," (driven by Bill Stead), Harry Hush Magee's "Lucky Strike" and "Flash," Herb Fleishacker, Jr.'s "Mabee Not II," and Stan Barbee's "Saxon Jr."

Final heats for these races were 30 miles in length, and gave spectators many thrills as the high-powered boats bounded and slapped and skidded over the course, threatening to capsize with each new set of waves encountered.

The Tahoe Yacht Club continues to sponsor an annual powerboat competition, part of a busy calendar of local marine events. Though the club's activities have ceased to be the stuff of front-page news (as they were in the late 1930's and early 40's), the thrills and excitement of those early races continue to delight modern-day spectators each summer.

Our Tahoe Heritage

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

Ham on the Hoof

From man's earliest ventures into the High Sierra Region, pigs (the four-legged variety) have played a role in the area's development. Originally, the population was the salted, in-the-barrel variety, travelling over the passes by wagon to be delivered to the Nevada mining districts and Tahoe's lakeside outposts.

Homer Burton, whose Lake Forest acreage proved the viability of local, small-scale farming prior to 1870, undoubtedly kept a few pigs, as they would have made good use of the surplus milk from his dairy. A "weaner" could be raised to butcher weight in the course of a summer, and fall profits were enhanced by the cured pork put by for the long winter.

Maisie Carnell, a lifetime local resident whose family purchased Burton's Lake Forest acreage in the 1880's, remembers her grandfather's and father's ventures into hog-raising, which were conducted in the lowlands at the foot of what was then known as "Hog Pen Hill." A turn (since engineered out of the highway) near the entrance to Rocky Ridge led down to the hog pens.

Maisie remembers her father's trips to the Tahoe Inn in his Model T to pick up the garbage saved for his pigs. And, according to one local authority, the operation of the Inn itself included at least some temporary care of pigs. Lillian Farr, whose family moved to Tahoe City in the 1920's, recalls a number of pigs kept in pens behind the Inn, where they did double service as Carl Bechdolt Jr.'s unwilling steeds.

In those rural days, before unionized meat jobbers making semi-weekly deliveries, it was common for local eating establishments to raise their own supply of meat for the table. Matt Green, proprietor of the Tahoe Tavern for many years, arranged for the care of a small herd of the cloven-hooved "disposals" at two locations on Tavern property.

One site is recalled by a number of Tahoe City residents as having been downhill from the present Granlibakken entrance, between the Truckee River and the cabins known collectively as "Moss Hill" (each one later burned by the Forest Service). A pile of rusting and rotting refuse remains to this day, about 100 yards uphill from the river.

Another site of Green's hog-raising operations, according to Jim Williamson, was the island off Lake Forest beach (a Tavern holding at that time - now in private ownership). Designated on USGS maps simply as "rocks" (due to its on-again-off-again status as a piece of dry ground), the part-time property is still known to some locals as "Pig Island" (referred to by others as "Green's Island").

This piece of real estate, listed on the tax rolls as four-tenths of a deeded acre, provided enough dry ground in some years to accommodate a modest herd of pigs. Their day reached its zenith with the arrival of their bargeload of garbage, toward which the whole tribe would gallop with an enthusiasm only hogs-at-mealtime can generate.

The barge, a 12 by 30 foot shallow-draft affair which Green later sold to Williamson, also proved the porkers' undoing, for they eventually had to pay the piper for their Continental keep, sacrificing their luxurious accommodations for the distinction of providing the ham, bacon, chops and sausage for the Tavern's elegant table.

Early public dumpsites at Tahoe City and King's Beach, operated by the Hulbert brothers, Tom and Noel, profitably employed the accommodating beasts for many years. When snow closed the dumps each fall, the Hulberts would haul their herd down to Gardnerville, where they would be slaughtered. Maisie Carnell believes the four-legged critters were still hard at their appointed occupation at the top of Jack Pine Street in Tahoe City until sometime in the 1950's.

The density of the human population has driven this curly-tailed species from its formerly-enjoyed territory, and it seems that the only local survivor in this long line of swine is Pork Pent of the North Tahoe Fine Arts Council's monthly publication, "Artifacts." But alas, Pent's origins being comprised of 99 percent inspiration and one percent printer's ink, he remains but a lingering shadow of the procine population which formerly flourished at Tahoe.

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Our Tahoe Heritage

WINTER

White on White . . . Tahoe Style

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

Like it or not, winter will soon be upon us. As we watch the inevitable first flakes drift down, speculation as to the intensity of the impending onslaught is everywhere in the wind. Will it be a winter to remember? Some foresee a long, wet siege, while others hold with late snow and no "real" (white) weather until Christmas.

Whatever pattern the winter of 1983-84 assumes, technological advances in the realm of snow removal will guarantee a degree of comfort not enjoyed by the hearties who braved all seasons a generation ago. At that time, wintering in the Tahoe Basin represented a serious commitment to self-reliance—hardly the casual, come-and-go lifestyle which generally prevails today (except during the meanest of storms).

In the throes of harsh weather, access and means of travel take on an importance only casually esteemed in summer. Those who bemoan road closures which detain them as little as a few hours would certainly have felt inconvenienced by the conditions which prevailed during the winter months of 1951-52. Six weeks of almost continuous snow made prisoners of basin residents, reducing travel to the progress one could make on skis.

A handful of resident caretakers made up the winter census on the north and west shores at that time, with an equally sparse population "in town." Each estate had its own boat, which provided transportation to town in all but the roughest weather. This marine access was supplemented by Constable Harry Johanson and his team of dogs. Periodic runs were made to distant habitations, delivering food, medicine and other essential supplies, as well as carrying emergency medical cases to Truckee to meet the train bound for Reno (then the nearest hospital). When the six-week deluge closed the river road to auto traffic, Harry and his sled became the only link between Truckee and Tahoe City.

It was not long into the winter when both of the rotary plows (which at that time comprised Placer County's entire fleet of snow-removal equipment) became the victims of serious mechanical problems. The plow assigned to clear the highway from Dollar Hill to Kings Beach needed a new rear end, while the machine which patrolled the Tahoe City to Dollar Hill stretch of the road required a new transmission. Though phone lines were down and out, the local "road department" managed to contact Auburn by radio phone, arranging for a double airdrop of the necessary parts to Tahoe City and Kings Beach.

Somewhat impromptu preparations for the airdrop included the use of parachutes designed to support a human payload (with the intent of slowing the descent of the parts). Since each package weighed in the vicinity of 800 pounds, the chutes did little to break their falls. As a result, the first package hit the Tahoe City Golf Course like a bullet and promptly disappeared, requiring much digging, construction of a wooden platform, and use of come-alongs to extricate it from its depression.

On recovery of the package, it was discovered that the transmission destined for Tahoe City had instead been dropped neatly through the roof of a two-story house in Kings Beach, settling snugly in the mud of the basement. A sort of game resulted from this error, whereby parts from the Tahoe City package were loaded in a boat and rowed to Kings Beach, there to be exchanged for pieces of the Kings Beach payload. This process was repeated until all the parts were properly situated and the plows could once again be put in running order.

Snow removal on local roads continued at a steady pace well into spring. Progress was held to about one city block per day by frequent encounters with immense trees and boulders which had been swept down onto the road by moving snow.

The whole scene seems a bit remote with rain still predominating over the fluffy stuff, but signs nailed high on trees—one on Commons Beach and one above the Tahoe City Golf Course—attest to the law of averages. This year, we have the law on our side . . . though sometimes not even that advantage is enough to insure dry feet.

Our Tahoe Heritage

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

The Bear Facts

Sierra winters are the stuff of legends - beautiful, but ominous in their potential for severity. Yet, the malicious outpourings of Mother Nature are occasionally less than spectacular.

During the winter of 1946-47, 16-year lows hit Donner Summit's snowfall and snowdepth measurements attesting to the unusually mild weather of that season. Meager precipitation in the Tahoe Basin that year not only disappointed local ski-sport enthusiasts, but guaranteed that the following year would be a lean one for forest creatures.

Lack of life-giving water meant that little food was available, and some animals starved to death, while others - in desperation - ventured much closer to civilization than they would have dared in a more bountiful year. Precipitation the following winter was only average, and short rations persisted, driving animals down from the high country in search of food.

In Yosemite, the usually docile bear population began to create havoc in the park. State Fish and Game officials, after considering various means of dealing with the menace, finally settled upon a plan to capture and remove the worst offenders to an area not populated by humans. That fall, the "renegade" bruins were rounded up, loaded onto cattle trucks and driven north into the Lake Tahoe Basin, with the eastern edge of the Desolation Valley Wilderness Area planned as their new home.

However, winter snows came too early to insure the success of the plan, blocking the (southwest of Homewood) to vehicle traffic somewhat short of the burly cargo's anticipated destination. It was not long before year-round west shore residents began to discover that their proximity to the actual "release point" was potentially hazardous to their health.

It seemed that the bears, their faces boldly dashed with yellow paint (applied as a form of identification rather than an assessment of character), had found the pickings in the backwoods slim indeed, and the alluring aroma of local dumps, espcially those maintained by nearby Chambers Lodge and Tahoe Tavern, began to draw them toward civilization and inevitable encounters with humans. Restaurants, markets and private homes also became the targets of the famished bruins' quest for sustenance.

Posters advertising a $500 fine for shooting one of the beasts had been widely circulated by the Department of Fish and Game, though most west shore residents were ready to risk the verdict of a jury of their peers rather than die at the hands of a yellow-faced bear. Some went about the defense of their lives and property with a frenzied passion.

One local resident who gave serious attention to the matter of self-defense was Herb Haley, then caretaker of the Ehrman estate at Sugar Pine Point. The diminutive Haley was a friend and frequent host to Tahoe City Constable Harry Johanson, and it was not long into the siege of the "bad news" bears that Johanson made a trip down the west shore, stopping at the estate to pay Haley a friendly visit.

When he failed to find the caretaker in the main house, Harry began a systematic tour of the outbuildings. Pausing before the door of one, he pulled it slightly ajar in preparation to call out a greeting. But, before the Constable could utter a word the point-blank discharge of both barrels of a shotgun rigged to eradicate ursine prowlers sent him on his way with quite a different cry on his lips. Though Harry declined to press charges, the incident definitely put a strain on the relationship, as well as forever curing Harry of entering a premises without knocking.

The only slightly less frightening experience of coming face to face with "Old Brin" (or one of his near-relations) became commonplace in the months following the arrival of the four-legged troublemakers. By the summer of 1949, the local bear population was little-diminshed. The **Sierra Sun** continued to report frequent sightings of bears, including an incident involving Miss Carolyn Bolton, daughter of the then-proprietors of Waleswood Lodge (still in operation in Tahoe Park). "Miss Bolton," said the **Sun**, "heard a noise at the back door of their home and upon opening the door to investigate, came face to face with a startled bear. Each ran in different directions, one as frightened as the other."

Eventually, most of the transplanted bears wended an erratic way into their extended range in Desolation Valley. Recent sightings of the beasts are infrequent compared with those of a generation ago. However, the local population of these shaggy brutes is by no means extinct, and the encroachment of man into what was once Bruno's exclusive domain still occasionally results in a hair-raising, heart-stopping surprise for the individual who chances to meet one.

Our Tahoe Heritage

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

For most of the year, the 250-year-old pine tree which straddles the highway centerline in Tahoe City is cursed as a threat to traffic safety as often as it is praised for its stately grandeur. However, for the last 35 years, the arboreal obstruction to vehicle progress, saved from removal in a 1940 road widening project by a petition campaign, has taken on a special significance and beauty which overshadows its hazardous aspect.

Each December since 1947, the spreading branches of the Big Tree have been strung with hundreds of colored lights, signaling the arrival of the holiday season and marking the site of a Tahoe City tradition. Kathleen Starratt, editor of the revived Tahoe Tattler, organized a visit from Santa Claus that year. This has become an annual event.

Sierra Pacific Power Co. and the Tahoe City Public Utility District provided the initial decorations and funding for the Big Tree's illumination, and the Tahoe City Federated Women's Club and the Tahoe City Rotary Club supplied gifts for all the children of the community.

Constable Harry Johanson was first to do the honors as Santa, having been transported to town in the one-horse sleigh belonging to "Bud" Jones, the old wrangler who operated the Squaw Valley stables until his tragic death in a 1962 fire. Jones' efforts to fend off the winter chill during his open-air trip into town included the consumption of quantities of distilled spirits. More fortification was provided on Jones' arrival at the Tahoe Inn (now Victoria Station), where he was greeted by a crowd of well-wishers whose enthusiasm nearly threatened to call a halt to the planned proceedings on more than one occasion.

Santa's grand entrance was traditionally launched from the Inn, and proceeded up the hill to Congers (now the Family Tree). There, free donuts and hot drinks, donated by the restaurant, and a bonfire in the parking lot (now the site of the Big Tree Center) generated cheery warmth for the local youngsters while they waited their turn to confide in Santa.

Some years later, when Jones' vehicle was no longer available for Santa's hire, Johanson put his own special brand of transportation into service. His handmade sled pulled by a four-dog team of huskies and malemutes revealed his identity to the children, to whom he was a well known friend, but did nothing to dampen the enthusiasm of the occasion.

Johanson eventually relinquished the honor of playing Santa to Ralph Bly, the jovial, well-liked contractor who was the Constable's crimson-suited passenger for several years. The reign of Bly's successor, newspaperman Dave Stollery, instituted the use of the local firetruck as a means of transportation. More recently, Santa has employed a flatbed truck belonging to Don Snyder as his portable headquarters.

The weatherman has not always been cooperative, and there have been years when a "black Christmas" has required adaptions to Santa's conveyance. Johanson's sled had to be fitted out with wheels for several of his local visits, owing to lack of snow. One year it rained so hard that the celebration had to be moved up the hill to Tahoe Lake School. Rounding the corner on its way up Grove Street, Santa's sleigh turned over, depositing the jolly gentleman and his driver unceremoniously along the roadside. Santa's attire was doubtless "all tarnished with ashes and soot" that year.

In the early days, owing to the sparse population of local smallfry, the gifts could each be more expensive and the recipients included children all the way up to the eighth grade. Even the youngest of children were not forgotten, as long-time resident Masie Carnell recalls. One year, she was expecting the imminent arrival of the stork. Attuned to her delicate condition, Santa had even included a gift for the yet-to-be-born baby.

What started as a close-knit community gathering had gradually become a major undertaking for the groups involved in its staging. The members of the Rotary Club now string the lights, with the TCPUD picking up the tab for the tree's illumination, and Santa's view from his platform beneath the Big Tree is a huge crowd of half-familiar onlookers. Yet, the spirit of Christmas which first prompted the tree's seasonal adornment and Santa's annual visit to Tahoe City lives on in the smiles of wonder and delight on the little faces of those who partake of the season's special magic beneath its spreading branches.

Our Tahoe Heritage

By Carol Van Etten

Courtesy of the North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

The last three decades have witnessed steady growth of all manner of "suburbs" around Lake Tahoe's north and west shore "hub" communities. One local habitation of unusual color - long since faded from the skyline - was Moss Hill, an ephemeral settlement across the Truckee River from Tahoe City and along the road which once connected Granlibakken with Highway 89 at the site of Spitsen Lumber (now Tahoe City Lumber Company).

Located uphill from the site of a summer-only hobo camp, which flourished along the south bank of the river in Depression days, Moss Hill was a community of squatters which began to take shape near the beginning of the second World War. At its zenith, there were five humble cabins - none of which enjoyed the refinements of electricity or running water. These glamorless dwellings were populated by a small, but diverse assortment of pensioners and escapees from other lives who had squatter's rights in the actual - if not the legal - sense.

Prior to the establishment of this "community," a group of six men had occupied a caboose abandoned by the Lake Tahoe Railway and Transportation Company near the present site of the Tahoe City firehouse. Following their eviction from this site, some of the men moved on down the river to settle along a spur track designated by the railroad as "Moss Hill." Here, their more-or-less permanent occupation of what was Forest Service property, without benefit of documentary permission, was officially overlooked during the period of their residence.

Life at Moss Hill was hardly one of luxury. Each of the shacks had been built by its occupant with materials scrounged from construction jobs and local dumps. Roofing was generally of five-gallon cans, cut open and flattened, or of shakes skimmed off fallen cedar trees. Newspapers were the universal insulation.

In spite of their dubious claims to local residence, inhabitants of Moss Hill did not feel the stigma of being regarded as outcasts in the larger community, but rather were generally accepted and trusted, often being called upon to do construction or maintenance work for local businesses. Chief among their employers was Bill Bechdolt, former director of Tahoe City Public Utility District, whose father's dealing with their hobo predecessors two decades before had taught him their value as workers and friends.

Another frequent contact of the Moss Hill residents in the larger community was Basil Kehoe (television-appliance store owner). His market was at one time the only grocery operating in town. He extended the squatters credit and otherwise looked after their welfare, taking mental notes on the regularity of their comings and goings, and visiting their encampment with "care packages" if they strayed inexplicably from their appointed schedules.

Kehoe often called upon the services of Gus Bauer, one Moss Hill resident, to babysit for his three sons, payment being $5 regardless of Kehoe's hour of return.

John Cunningham, a gravel-voiced longshoreman of some elegance and education, was the second arrival. Cunningham is remembered as a gentlemen of habit who would dress for town on the days when his pension check was expected, making the trip on foot to cash his voucher and replenish the supply of food, kerosene (used for lighting) and (most important) spirits.

Evidently, Cunningham's past included more variety than his longshore retirement suggested, for Mazie Carnell (retired Tahoe Lake School librarian) tells the story of being stopped by a woman while shopping one day at Kehoe's Market and asked if she knew his name. She said that she knew him as Cunningham, whereupon the woman said that she was now sure she recognized him as the same man who had been a prominent banker in Philadelphia, but had one day quit his job and disappeared from view, leaving a wife and family behind.

"Shorty," a relative late comer to Moss Hill, was able to economize on construction efforts when he built his shack. Being barely five feet tall, he made his dwelling just high enough to accommodate his own stature, much to the discouragement of visitors.

Two other residents, "Whispering Peter" and "Blackie," were not so familiar to the community. "Blackie" was a loner, dying a loner's death on Christmas Eve in 1964 when his trudge home through the snow was cut short by the effects of exposure—he was discovered along the roadside too late to be revived.

Though the presence of the squatter's settlement was tolerated during the lifetimes of the original inhabitants, it became the policy of the Forest Service that when a resident of the settlement died, his cabin would be burned down in an effort to discourage would-be immigrants. And so, by the process of attrition, the community finally gave up the ghost about 1970, when the last of the squatters passed on to his final rewards in the county hospital in Auburn. Remnants of the former dwellings are still in evidence, though the essence of the squatter's hamlet—the freedom to take up residence on public land without interference—is gone forever.

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Our Tahoe Heritage

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

Ice Skating Days

Difficult though it may be for some to imagine, not everyone loves to ski. Some advocates of the brisk and breezy winter actually prefer the ankle-numbing rapture of skating to any other cold weather pursuit. And even among hard-core enthusiasts of the daring downhill sport, there are cases on record of individuals trading in their boards for blades on occasion and taking a few turns around the ice (this phenomenon occurring with especial frequency in years when cold has prevailed over wet, and skimming over the frozen surface of a local body of water has had to suffice the disgruntled skier).

With the demolition last summer of Squaw Valley's Blyth Arena, site of the skating events of the 1960 Olympic Winter Games, the North Lake Tahoe-Truckee area is once again without an ice rink, and those who would skate must, as in long ago days, arrange for their own facilities.

Fifty years ago, this privation was overcome primarily by the enthusiastic efforts of Andrew "Red" Anderson. It was Anderson and his wife, Ann Starratt Anderson, together with A.M. "Joe" Henry and his wife, Marie, who were chief instigators of skating activities locally. These two couples helped organize skating parties which initially took place in a frozen lagoon formed when Anderson and Henry built a jetty near the outlet dam.

When this location proved to be too much at the mercy of the elements, the group secured permission from the Dollar family (for whom the Dollar Point subdivision was named) to make recreational use of their private water source, located on the hillside about a mile above their residence. Dollar Reservoir (or "Dollar Dam," as the site is referred to by those who remember its heyday as a skating rink) was the scene of many outings in the late 1920's through the late 1930's.

In low-water years (those when meagre precipitation caused the lake level to drop near or below its natural rim of 6,223.1 feet, Lake Tahoe Datum), skating was possible along the Truckee River. One site which was much-used in the 1920's and early 1930's was the wide, flat area just below Spitsen Lumber (now Tahoe City Lumber Company). Here, and farther downstream in the shady pools about midway between Tahoe City and Squaw Valley, almost to Deer Park, wide expanses of ice afforded adequate space for the group's activities.

The first commercial rink in the area came into being about this time — part of the winter sports facilities offered by the Tahoe Tavern, which opened for winter business in the late 1920's, and continued to operate during the winter into the mid 1930's.

"Snowball Express" trains ran on weekends and holidays, bringing throngs of winter guests to the Tavern from all over California. The parking garage, being thus otherwise unused, was flooded with several inches of water, turning its cement floor into an indoor rink. Along the Tavern shoreline, behind a sort of jetty which lay between the pleasure pier and the railroad trestle pier, winter guests could enjoy the sparkling scenery as they glided over a second, outdoor rink.

On another piece of Tavern property — the hillside behind the town of Tahoe City, more local skating history unfolded. What longtime residents refer to as "Sucker Creek" (a stream which crosses the highway at the Tahoe City Texaco Station and enters the lake between the Lighthouse Center and the Boatworks Mall) is fed by a little-known reservoir which was originally formed for use as the Tahoe Tavern's water source. Local youngsters skated on this storage pond, occasionally restricting its outlet even further with a board, which had the effect of raising the water level one half to one inch overnight, "resurfacing" the pond to a glassy smoothness.

Our country's entrance into World War II effectively brought to a close the era of do-it-yourself local skating. The boys who marched off to war returned to find that the areas where they had formerly skated were now off-limits. The Tahoe area was booming, and the attitude of the average American was changing. Fear of lawsuit in the event of injury was beginning to cause land owners to avoid any potential liability by posting their property.

In the ensuing years, several revivals of the open-air variety of the sport have enjoyed brief popularity along the Truckee River when the lake fell below its natural rim. Standing water in the riverbed froze solid, allowing for the use of heavy equipment, which made quick work of scraping the snow off the surface. This process, plus periodic flooding of the pond, produced many pleasant hours of skating during the 1956-57 season. The same location again became an outdoor ice rink in the "drought" year of 1976-77.

Though it is not on the horizon, an exceptionally dry year sometime in the future will once again produce the conditions necessary for skating on the river.

Our Tahoe Heritage

Early Local Skiing Adventures

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

As vacationing skiers inched down Highway 89 during the 1983-84 holiday week, crawling to and from their favorite local slopes, they may certainly have had occasion to reflect upon those thrilling days of a generation or so ago, prior to the area's "discovery" and emergence as a world-class ski mecca. The winter vacation experiences of skiers during the late 1940s and the early 1950s were quite different from their modern counterparts. Compensating the visitor for lack of variety was a sense of freedom and mobility which today's traffic and lift lines tend to destroy.

Squaw Valley, which sprang into international prominence as a result of the VIII Olympic Winter Games in 1960, had begun operations as a ski area over a decade earlier under the management of Alex Cushing. Cushing's initial commercial ski venture was a rope tow, powered by a four-cylinder Wisconsin engine which drove the cable by means of two three-grooved pulleys.

The banner year of 1949 saw the addition of the area's first chairlift - Chair #1. Bob Heron, a Denver engineer with experience in lift construction, was responsible for the installation of this lift, which, at the time, was noted as being the world's largest. The first paying passengers to use the lift did so on November 30, 1949, with appropriate hoopla and fanfare attending the grand opening.

Squaw Valley, however, was not the first local ski area. During the winters of the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Tahoe Tavern at Tahoe City's west shore had remained open, offering its guests a variety of snow activities. In addition to a toboggan hill (located one mile west of the Tavern property), much was made of "Olympic Hill," a ski jumping "trajectory" (as they were then called) built in 1927 under the direction of seven-time national jumping champion Lars Haugen. Here, jumping exhibitions were held, culminating with the Olympic trials for the 1932 Winter Olympics. Local jumpers, as well as those of international prominence, made use of the jump during those years. After the Tavern ceased winter operations, the jumping hill was no longer maintained.

However, about the same time that Squaw Valley was initiating its ski operations, another commercial ski venture was taking shape near Tahoe City, one mile off Highway 89, under the supervision of Kjell "Rusty" Rustad. He was a Norwegian who saw the natural north-facing bowl as a perfect spot for the development of a small, family-oriented ski area. Fir trees, cleared from the hillside in preparation for its use as a ski slope, were used to build three log structures. One building served as a warming hut and the others provided housing for Rustad and his family, and quarters for overnight guests.

Rustad named the "new" ski area "Granlibakken" (Norwegian for "a hillside sheltered by fire trees"), and offered two rope tows, and a huge fireplace and snack bar in the ski hut. Access to the area was initially by "Weasel," a vehicle originally designed as a Pacific Theatre landing craft. With flotation devices removed, the "Weasel" proved a useful means of over-the-snow transportation for Rustad — a necessity in those days, as only the main highway was plowed in winter.

Another West Shore operation of the same period — this one of a non-commercial nature — is recalled by Bill Breuner (of furniture fame), whose family owned a portable rope tow which saw a great deal of use in those years. The tow was placed at the north end of the present Homewood Ski Area. It employed a toboggan-mounted Briggs and Stratton engine which would be dragged up the hill with snow anchors, the conveyance doing its work from above.

Anyone who might happen along with a pair of skis was cheerfully offered the use of the lift. During the war years the number of users was not large, but it was nevertheless a gesture of long-gone (pre-litigation) community spirit when Don Huff, then-owner of the slope (part of his Homewood Resort) donated free use of the property for recreational purposes, allowing the Breuners to put their "toy" at the disposal of the general public.

The merry hours this pastime afforded were many during the winter holiday weeks and weekends from about 1942 to 1947, and surprisingly did not generate any life-threatening injuries, though Bill Breuner admits to a broken leg sustained on the hill on New Year's Day, 1942. Modern interpretations of liability have brought an end to such carefree pursuits.

The typical Sierra ski holiday has undergone sweeping change in the last 35 years. Though the element of adventure is now characterized by attempts to make the maximum use of vacation time for the least cash outlay, the principal ingredients of a delightful ski vacation — snow and sun — are as available as ever.

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

Lake Level? - (No, It's on Tilt)

A regular front-page feature of the old Tahoe City World (now the Tahoe World) was a brief report — under the heading which also serves this article — concerning fluctuations of the lake level. The weekly report included the rate of release of water through the gates of the outlet dam located at the mouth of the Truckee River in Tahoe City. Measurements of the lake's current level were given as well as readings for one week prior and one year prior. Beyond these cold numerical pronouncements the newspaper rarely found it appropriate to venture, leaving to others the long-standing controversy over Tahoe's proper elevation.

The verbal and legal battles over this 114-year-old issue presently rage loud and hot, owing to an unusual series of record-setting winters which more than amply replenished the reservoir that sits on top of the lake proper. Yes, Lake Tahoe is actually a reservoir, created in the late 1870s by the construction of the first dam at the outlet. The dam is a crib structure capable of impounding water above the lake's natural high-water mark — a sandstone rim the elevation of which has been determined to be 6223.0 feet, Lake Tahoe Datum. Construction of the present concrete dam, completed in 1915, raised the static storage capacity to 6229.1 feet, Lake Tahoe Datum — six feet above the natural rim.

With the dubious aid of the weatherman, the legal capacity of the reservoir was reached and exceeded within three years after the completion of the existing dam. Immediately a barrage of protest came from property owners whose shoreline real estate consequently suffered serious erosion. Photographic evidence documents the demise of hundreds of mature conifers which toppled when rising lake waters washed away vast expanses of formerly dry land.

Public outcry (and a succession of milder winters) soon brought stricter adherence to the 1915 federal decree which established the original level of 6223.0 feet, as the high-water mark and 6.1 feet as the maximum legal depth of the reservoir. However, extremes of precipitation have continued to plague those whose business it is to regulate the elevation of the reservoir. Many factors are brought to bear on the much scrutinized numbers of the Truckee-Carson Irrigation District — the entity currently charged with the management of waters released from the outlet gates.

The man whose official decisions are central to the lake level controversy is Federal Watermaster Claude Dukes, overseer of any and all adjustments of the outlet gates. Dukes must consider such diverse interests as lakeshore and river corridor property owners, rafters, fly fishermen, Reno residents within the 100-year flood plain, Nevada farmers and the Indians of Pyramid Lake, in addition to further "rules" laid down by the 1944 Truckee River Agreement. The list of individuals and groups with bones to pick over mismanagement of the reservoir is seemingly endless. The watermaster is aided in his thankless decision-making by long-range weather forecasts and computer projections of spring runoff.

Measuring devices of increasing sophistication are used to determine the daily elevations of Lake Tahoe and the Truckee River. A device located on the Coast Guard pier at Lake Forest allows an immediate visual readout for Tahoe City resident Jim Miller. He is responsible for taking the daily readings and phoning the information to the Fallon, Nev. offices of the T.C.I.D. A permanent record of the changes in elevation is made on a drum-mounted graph located inside a wooden box for protection against the brunt of elemental

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disturbances. In spite of this insulation from the direct force of wind and weather, the reading sometimes reflects variations as much as five one-hundredths of a foot when wind-driven water actually creates a lake which is "on tilt."

The T.C.I.D. forwards the readings provided by Miller to the watermaster's offices in Reno. When fluctuations in elevation are sufficient to warrant adjustment of any of the outlet gates, Dukes notifies Miller, who makes the necessary adjustments using an antiquated electric apparatus inside the dam — not the computerized system erroneously described recently in publicity regarding the dam.

All this seems a far cry from the days when the gatekeeper (who at that time resided in the log cabin on the bank of the lake outlet) would stroll over and take the day's readings, give a few moments consideration, and then — on the strength of his own good counsel — would make such adjustments as the latest fluctuations suggested were necessary. However, in spite of modern technology, final decisions regarding the raising and lowering of the outlet dam's 17 gates — within the limitations set by the 1944 Truckee River Agreement — are still made on the same basis as in the dam's early days: the educated guess of a human, taking into account past experience, current conditions and future projections to arrive at a decision which cannot possibly please everyone, but which strives to uphold the law and please the greatest number.

Our Tahoe Heritage

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

A New Slant on Incline

As communities may be said to reflect a sort of personality, Incline Village offers itself to the world as a fair picture of affluence-at-leisure. At the foot of Slide Mountain, where the property values are as steep as the surrounding geography, it seems hardly possible that 100 years ago the local population was almost universally comprised of blue-collar workers employed in various capacities by the timber industry (on which the very existence of the community at that time depended).

It was all of 100 years ago last week - January 12, 1884 - that the burgeoning community of Incline finally considered itself to have come of age. On that date, this center of lumbering operations on Lake Tahoe's north shore was established as both an election precinct and fourth-class post office.

The town's growth followed the same pattern as other local fledgling habitations which owed their existence to the rich mines of the Comstock and their insatiable appetite for timber. In the summer of 1878, Walter Scott Hobart organized his Sierra Nevada Wood and Lumber Company. He purchased and leased timber sections (eventually totaling 10,000 acres) in the Incline area as well as along Tahoe's south shore and as far west from Incline as Pine Grove Station (Tahoe Vista).

Hobart appointed as his general manager Captain John Bear Overton, who at the time was superintendent of the Virginia City and Gold Hill Water Company. Overton (a man of proven mechanical ability) set to work constructing a mill, located near the present site of the Ponderosa Ranch, about a mile east of Incline Village proper. Two years later, a shortline railway had been completed, connecting the mill with Sand Harbor, the staging area for incoming log booms.

Logs were cut at many locations around the lake and skidded or carted to the lake shore. There they were chained together, forming huge wedge-shaped rafts or "V-booms." These floating lumber yards were then towed to Sand Harbor, chiefly by Hobart's steamer Niagara, an 83-foot former passenger vessel (launched in 1875 under the captaincy of D.W. Avery) appropriated for use as a tug when she proved too phlegmatic for her initial commission.

Once the logs reached Sand Harbor, they were pulled out of the water and up wooden ramps by teams of oxen. An oversized timber tripod facilitated their being loaded onto railcars bound for the Mill Creek mill or stacked for temporary storage.

In spite of this great show of industry, however, the timber operation could never have proved a financial success without the addition of one crucial element, supplied by the expertise of Captain Overton. Timber abounded in the Tahoe Basin. Large tracts of land were available for $4 an acre or less. The only detriment to capitalizing on a fortune was the expense of transporting the product to the consumer over a range of mountains lying between the lake and the Comstock Lode. So it was that the most noteworthy among Overton's construction projects came into being: the Great Incline of the Sierra Nevada, representing a unique solution to this seemingly insurmountable obstacle.

Basing his design on his familiarity with other cable-driven systems employing the principle of a counterweight, Overton engineered and supervised the construction of a 4,000-foot tramway (with an 1,800-foot vertical rise) up the side of the mountain which lay east of the mill. This continuous cable railway was founded on timbers (10 inches by 20 inches in size) bolted to solid rock, with two sets of tracks leading straight up the fall line to the summit. There the cable turned around one of the tramline's two bullwheels (each 12 feet in diameter), the huge pulley anchored in concrete. In its climb up the almost 67 percent grade, the 40 horsepower steam engine, which raised the cars, was assisted to some degree by the weight of the empty cars descending on the adjoining track. Each load of cord wood (or the equivalent amount of lumber) took 20 minutes to make its ascent. The carrying capacity of the system was 300 cords per day.

At the top of the Incline, lumber and cord wood were discharged directly into a V-shaped flume which carried them down the other side, passing through a 4,000-foot tunnel enroute to Lakeview Station. Here, they were loaded onto cars of the Virginia and Truckee Railroad and freighted to Virginia City.

When the fortunes of the Comstock began to play out in the early 1890s, Tahoe's lumber industry faded with them. There was little standing timber left in the Basin. During the summer of 1896, Hobart concluded his operations at Incline, relocating in the heavily-wooded backcountry north of Truckee—the new settlement soon becoming known as Hobart Mills.

In the interim, the clearcut hillsides left behind by the former residents had "healed" and the former beauty of the location was restored. Blessed with a climate considered quite mild in comparison with neighboring communities to the west, "the Village" has earned the satisfaction of its residents and the envy of its visitors.

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Our Tahoe Heritage

Our Tahoe Heritage

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

Tahoe's Peace-keeping Forces

In these days of specialization, it is the rare individual whose expertise is marked by any great diversity. However, such was not the case in the early days of this region, when its rugged and unforgiving nature was a perpetual source of struggle to its residents, forcing them to excel by the very act of survival. Regarding the maintenance of law and order, local conditions were particulary demanding, and yet there were those who rose to meet the challenge.

The area's first constable, Robert Montgomery Watson, epitomized the qualities of character desirable in such a crucial frontier office. A resident of Tahoe from 1875 to 1897, Watson absented himself briefly to sample life in the Yukon gold fields, returning to settle permanently in Tahoe City just prior to 1900.

By 1904, North Shore residents had begun to consider Truckee too distant to suffice as the nearest outpost of the law. The first of several Tahoe City jails was constructed - an unadorned cement box with small air vents for "windows" which, with screens removed, also provided convenient orifices through which accomplices might pass bottles of wine to prisoners disposed to drinking away their confinement.

Notes made by Judge Vernon, Tahoe City's original historian, give 1904 as the year Watson become the town's first constable, a position he held until his death at age 77. By incredible coincidence, it was on the very day of Watson's burial in 1932 that the man, destined to take up where the "Old Pioneer" had left off, arrived in town.

Immediately following Watson's death, Carl Bechdolt, Sr., owner of the Tahoe Inn (now Victoria Station) had been named acting constable to serve until such time as a new man could be duly elected. Henry Wehrman was the choice of the voters, but being unable to raise the bond required, Wehrman found it necessary to decline the office. And so it was in 1935, three years after Watson's death, that Harry Edward Johanson, a much-travelled young Swede with experience in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, assumed the office of Tahoe City constable, a job he was to hold for the next 32 years.

The novelty of Johanson's version of law enforcement was soon legend. Expanding on a personal interest in dogs and dog sledding, Harry put his skilled teams of huskies (and later malemutes) to great advantage during the winter months, when much of his "beat" took him beyond the reach of plowed roads. In those early days, the delivery of mail, food and supplies to persons isolated by snow was a much-appreciated effort.

Prior to the era of the "modern" snowplow, Harry's dog team was occasionally the only means of transporting the community's sick and injured to Truckee. The River Road was often closed for days at a time following severe storms. Prisoners apprehended far from town were also passengers in the sled, with all nine dogs ready to defend their master's point of view, should need arise.

A dramatic increase in local population following Worl· War II soon had the predictable effect of increasing th crime rate. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, much wo

Constable Harry Johanson and two of his sled dogs, Yukon, left, and Sitka. (Photo courtesy of Tahoe City Library)

made of the impossibly large territory for which Harry was responsible and the lack of physical and financial assistance provided him by the county. In spite of a Grand Jury investigation, no immediate action was taken to alleviate the personnel shortage.

The much-postponed completion of the town's new jail came in August, 1946, great simplifying the constable's duties. A proposed hoosegow had first been designed by Harry (an architectural draftsman by formal training) in November, 1938, but delays (blamed on a wartime scarcity of materials) had kept the constable shuttling back and forth to Truckee and Auburn jails for almost eight years. The creation of two separate judicial districts further relieved Johanson by bringing the area from Dollar Hill north to stateline under the jurisdiction of Kings Beach Constable Dick Lavery. More "progress" was made with the completion of yet another new jail in Tahoe City in 1962, which operated as a substation of the Placer County Sheriff's Department.

These and other developments had the effect of reducing the workload of the local constable to the dispensation of local civil matters. Heroic missions into the hinterlands in pursuit of treacherous felons or disoriented damsels had become the stuff of yesteryear by the time Harry retired in 1967. As a result, neither Johanson's immediate successor, Adam Sabat, nor Mickey Daniels, our current constable, have achieved anything like the color of their predecessor's administration.

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Our Tahoe Heritage

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

VISITING DAVY JONES' LOCKER

(Tahoe's Unknown Depths)

Our recent winds out of the east, which in high water can be the ruin of north and west shore piers and beaches, call to mind the considerable violence of which this lake is capable. Those who have witnessed firsthand the wrath of near-ocean-sized waves breaking over the bows of their suddenly insignificant craft, will attest to the healthy respect which this magnificent body of water must be accorded.

Thanks to the establishment of a Coast Guard station at Lake Forest the likelihood of fatal marine incidents has been greatly reduced, but woe be he who ventures casually forth on the lake without regard to the proven forces of its dual sierran nature. Tahoe's treachery is in its ability to suddenly change mood, bursting upon the sailor almost unawares – a fact to which the deaths of many who misjudged it attest.

The recollections of the late Ernest Henry "Idlewild Ernie" Pomin document the lake's potential ferocity. "Ernie" was among the first white children born in the Tahoe Basin. He was one of a family of sailors from which came the captains of many of the lake's early steamers. "Ernie" himself was a fireman, and later acting captain, on the steamer Tahoe. He occasionally experienced storm waves of fearsome proportions.

"At times," Ernie recalled, "the 169-foot steamer Tahoe drove into heavy seas that battered her pilot house, some 25 feet above the water, and forced the ship to turn and run for her home port." In view of this remark, it is not difficult to understand how the lake could claim as many as 10 victims in a single year and perhaps several hundred in the century and a quarter which comprise its recorded marine history.

Statistics for drownings and suspected drownings in Lake Tahoe are not maintained, per se, by any single entity. The Coast Guard makes note of only those incidents to which they respond, and though the sheriffs' departments for each of the five counties surrounding the lake keep records of boating fatalities, these numbers do not reflect "disappearances" in which no body was recovered, nor do they isolate Tahoe drownings from those in the counties' other bodies of water.

And even were the communications of these several computers made public, the precise number of souls who have taken up local residence with Davy Jones can never be known, owing to a phenomenon associated with the lake's chilly alpine waters. The brisk temperatures found at the lower depths of such lakes as Tahoe prevent the usual decomposition of submerged bodies, gases from which ordinarily buoy victims to the surface after several days.

warmer) shoreline area of the lake can often be seen and recovered, even these may remain submerged for inordinately long periods without deteriorating. Such was the case with a sailor on leave at Tahoe during the late 1940s who was reported missing, only to be found several weeks later (seated on the bottom in 30 feet of water) when the flapping collar of his uniform attracted the attention of a fisherman top-lining off the shore of the Kaiser Estate (now Fleur du Lac).

If the lake were to be somehow drained dry, the ghoulish landscape revealed would be populated by perhaps several hundred "brave hearts", preserved virtually as they "landed" on the bottom (Or perhaps the "Big Macs" - reputedly cannibals - find our species palatable and have left only the bones?)

This known physical tendency of the lake to retain its corpses certainly recommends it as "the" drink in which to disappear. There is evidence to suggest, in fact, that this "asset" has been put to more than one illicit purpose; in one case by so-called "victims" of the lake who in fact have done their slipping beneath the waves by proxy, and are – quite to the contrary – waiting out their seven years in some serene Baja backwater.

Not so fortunate are those in whose behalf the underworld has allegedly established a bi-state boneyard on the lake bottom, thereby saving themselves the trouble of digging innumerable holes.

A drowning, or perhaps two, constituted the lake's annual tally up until the population boom which followed World War II. More recently, the number has averaged about half a dozen per year. While many factors contribute to the tragedies behind such statistics, unquestionably the greatest single cause of drowning is poor judgment. Those who underestimate the wrath of Tahoe put themselves at great risk. Don't be one! The lake level is high enough already.

Our Tahoe Heritage

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

Tahoe's Only Hot Springs

Many are the natural wonders of Tahoe, but perhaps none so practical as the hot springs which bubble forth from a group of rocks located along the shoreline between Brockway and Stateline Point. In this age of hot tubs and spas, it seems surprising that the first use of the property did not involve development of the springs. However, it was rather the cutting of a stand of wild timothy hay which occupied the attention of the area's first white inhabitants in 1862.

Bill Campbell, who later opened Campbell's Custom House on the wharf at Tahoe City, was first to make commercial use of the natural thermal springs. In 1869, Campbell entered into a partnership with George Schaeffer of Truckee for the purpose of constructing a road between the mill town and the hot springs, completing the project in a month. By late August of the same year, Campbell's 63-acre "resort," comprised of several cottages and a 20-foot square bath house enclosing the springs, was open for business.

The summer of 1870 saw Campbell and his new partner, Henry Burke, adding a hotel of the saltbox design to the list of improvements, as well as two more cottages. Having enjoyed moderate success in the several years following, the pair leased their hostelry and hot springs to C.A. Richardson in 1874. Campbell and Burke concentrated on the operation of a stage line to Tahoe City via the newly completed wagon road over Dollar Hill.

The following season, the hotel lease went to Reverend R.A. Ricker, who offered a daily sermon for those who felt any misgivings about their retreat being other than strictly spiritual. The North Shore was acquiring a reputation as the province of the pious. Burton's Island Farm in Lake Forest and Dr. Bourne's Hygenic Sanatoria in Carnelian Bay were other destinations in great vogue among clerics-on-holiday.

The development of a local social calendar was given a boost during the summer season of 1877, when a weekly evening cruise of the steamer Niagara stopped at the hot springs to take on passengers for an over-the-lake whirl and twirl of dancing and merriment.

By 1899, (according to E.B. Scott, author of The Saga of Lake Tahoe) the improvements were "falling into a state of disrepair." To the rescue, as the century turned, came Frank B. Alverson and his wife, Nellie, who purchased the resort for $3,500 and began working to put it to rights. Frank Alverson's middle initial stood for Brockway, the name which has served the locale for over 80 years.

The Alverson's noteworthy efforts to keep the hot springs afloat were shortlived. The construction of a narrow-gauge railroad between Truckee and Tahoe City in 1900 certainly had its effect on the traffic over the Martis Valley Road connecting Truckee with the hot springs. The new rail line's enclosed car delivered passengers directly onto the wharf at the new and magnificent Tahoe Tavern, where the steamer awaited boarding to all points.

Thus it was that in spite of the Alverson's hard work, Brockway Hot Springs went up to public auction in 1909 and was purchased on the steps of the Placer County Courthouse in Auburn by the partnership of Lawrence and Comstock, owners of the grand Tallac resort.

Harry O. Comstock, son and nephew of the original partners, soon became the primary force in the development of Brockway. Initial development in 1917 included a dining room and overwater casino, followed in 1920 by formation of the Brockway Golf Club and construction of the Woodvista Golf Course at the junction of Highways 28 and 267 in Kings Beach. Comstock and his partner, Robert P. Sherman, formed the Brockway-Tahoe Club, subdividing a portion of the holdings and advertising lots for sale.

Comstock bought out Sherman in the late 1920s, and from that time until his death in 1954, "Harry O" (as he was widely known) guided the destiny of "Brockway Hotel and Hot Springs" with an able hand. His daughter, Gladys Comstock Bennett, and her husband, Maillard "Pete" Bennett, carried on the tradition of fine service in naturally-blessed surroundings established by Comstock, continuing operation of the resort until 1970. Following its

sale, the buildings of the resort were razed to make way for condominiums developed under the name of Brockway Springs Resort.

Of the several springs that were once used commercially, only one is presently in operation. Due to the spring's own natural inconsistencies of temperature (it averages 112 degrees) maintenance within a comfortable range is accomplished only with great difficulty.

The appeal of the site on Tahoe's sunny North Shore, remains as ever, though its medicinal effects are now almost solely solar.

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Our Tahoe Heritage

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

Snow And More Snow

Local folks of comparatively recent standing like to reminisce about how they survived the perilous winters of 1981-82 and 1982-83, a double-whammy of meteorological misfortunes with few recorded precedents. It is a far more select group of residents who are able to recall the prior visitation of the "Big Snows," which occurred 30 years earlier in the winter of 1951-52.

In that season, a scarcely imaginable 65 feet of snow fell on Donner Summit, with the snow pack reaching a depth of 26 feet. Thirty-seven feet fell in Truckee. It is difficult to comprehend just what these statistics actually meant in terms of life as it was lived in the Sierras that season. Deprivation took many forms, some of which not even old-timers could have predicted. Though none could have known it at the time, a storm which hit a few days before Thanksgiving, leaving about three feet of snow, portended the monumental winter to come.

Further foul weather held off until Christmas week, when it began to snow hard. On Dec. 26, 1951, power in the Tahoe Basin was lost due to a slide which wiped out high voltage towers as it swept down the mountain. Though skies cleared on New Year's Eve, Highways 40 (now Interstate 80) and 50 remained closed, and the respite was short-lived.

On Jan. 10, a weather disturbance (later billed as "the worst Sierra storm in 60 years") began. Suddenly mobility could be gauged by the distance one could travel on skis. Traffic in and out of the Basin ceased, and on Donner Summit, the Southern Pacific train, "City of San Francisco," was stuck fast in the grip of confectionery drifts.

That winter, snow removal equipment owned by Placer County consisted of two rotary plows, one of which maintained Highway 28 from north Stateline to Dollar Hill, while the other kept the road clear from Dollar Hill south to Bliss Sate Park in Rubicon Bay. With equipment breakdowns (helped by nearly round-the-clock operation) adding to the obstacles created by Mother Nature, the snow removal task proved impossible, and conventional access between Tahoe's California shore and the outside world remained sporadic at best for the balance of the winter.

A great number of year-round residents were caretakers, living in blanketed isolation during the winter months. As storms closed highways to vehicular traffic for undetermined periods, contact with "town" consisted primarily of visitations by Tahoe City Constable Harry Johanson and his dog team. Consequently, most caretakers maintained rowboats equipped with small outboard motors in readiness on the beach - alternatives in more urgent circumstances.

While most residents had the foresight - born of past experience - to provision themselves for confinement of several weeks duration, few were adequately prepared for the 50-plus days during which storms raged almost constantly. Another short respite in late January was followed by heavy snow beginning February 1, which again knocked out power and limited foodstuffs to what could be found in the larder.

A week of spring-like weather followed, allowing some "digging out" and restocking of depleted stores of staples. But Feb. 15 brought another storm, and little was seen of the sun between its departure and the arrival of the next weather system. The first three weeks of March saw snowfall statistics for the season almost double, causing the use of second-story windows as temporary front doors. What was ordinarily a few minutes' stroll became a labor of a full day in 10 feet of powder snow.

An airdrop of 10 crates of essential foodstuffs was arranged by Constable Johanson. Tahoe City Golf Course was the site of the drop, from which Johanson and Frank Slater of Tahoe Park distributed the goods by dog sled and boat to those in need.

By the middle of April, the much-welcomed sun had reduced the snow level on the flat in Tahoe City to a mere 100 inches (just over eight feet). Things were improving. By herculean effort, the state's highway crews were able to meet the traditional Memorial Day opening of the Emerald Bay road, cutting through snowbanks as high as 16 feet at some points along the route.

Melting snow revealed new horrors wrought by the winter. Roofs of homes and businesses, groaned and sank under the tremendous weight of the snow; property damage was considerable. The body of an employee of the Squaw Valley Land and Livestock Company, reported missing following an avalanche near Tower 20 on Dec. 29, was not recovered until late June, so deep were the drifts in the valley.

Though some would contend that 1951-52 was a winter best forgotten, those who lived through it are not likely to ever lose the memory of it.

Our Tahoe Heritage

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

With winter's white mantle draped in deep folds across the Sierra Nevada, it is chilling to recall that this month marks the 140th anniversary of white man's first documented sighting of Lake Tahoe. A party headed by Captain John C. Fremont and guided by Christopher "Kit" Carson first came upon the apparition-like beauty of the lake on Valentine's Day, 1844.

However, the vision of "Mountain Lake" (as Fremont chose to call it) seems scarcely adequate recompense for hardships endured by the party as they trudged mile after weary mile through the deepening drifts. The trip was all the more exhausting due to tedious progress enforced by the company's 12-pound brass cannon (the weight here referring to the size of the ball fired). In Fremont's mind, possession of the impressive field piece was a show of strength likely to go unchallenged, and indeed the expedition met with no human opposition.

But adverse conditions and the party's waning strength, as it plunged back and forth across the divide in waist-deep snow, finally imposed the necessity of abandoning the 350-pound howitzer. the party's exact location, when it relieved itself of its artillery power, is still the subject of dispute, though most accounts agree that the site was east of the Walker River, in the general vicinity of Coleville, CA., southeast of Lake Tahoe.

Following the cannon's "rediscovery" in the mid-1860s (the specifics of the incident having become rather clouded by time), it came into the possession of Captain A.W. Pray, a prominent resident of Glenbrook. Pray fired the cannon regularly on Independence Day and for special local events: the marriage of Captain J.A.Todman of Glenbrook in the mid 1880s and the launching of the steamer, Tahoe, on June 24, 1896.

In the late 1890s, Captain Pray's widow was on the point of selling the old field piece for scrap when posterity-minded Glenbrook residents Dick Hesse, John Griffin and Jack Quill hid it under a local chickenhouse. When the tangible aspects of the Bliss family's business operations in Glenbrook were relocated to Tahoe City at the turn of the century, the cannon was among the miscellaneous cargo barged to the company's new center of operations near the lake outlet.

Soon after its arrival in Tahoe City, Ernie Pomin and Gus Rother, two transplanted Glenbrookians, were responsible for mounting the brass barrel on a massive timber and placing it on the bluff overlooking the Tahoe City Commons. Excessive packing with rags for the firing at Captain Todman's wedding had caused a dangerous bulge in the barrel. Following the cannon's final use at the wedding of Ernie Pomin in 1901, the firing mechanism was rendered inoperable when Rother drove the narrow end of a file into the touch hole.

Display of the celebrated cannon on the Common's bluff soon brought its existence to the attention of several local historical groups, each of which claimed rightful possession. Out of fear of losing the relic, local citizens felt compelled to secrete it beneath the stairs leading to the employee's quarters at Tahoe Tavern, where it was to remain until the Tavern was sold in 1927.

At that time, the weapon's whereabouts became the exclusive knowledge of two men whose growing concern over its proper disposition resulted in several furtive relocations during the next few years. A.M. "Joe" Henry's garage on Front Street in Tahoe City is reputed to have been the repository at one time, as was a spot under the turntable of the railroad roundhouse (the present location of the Tahoe Boat Company).

An editorial which appeared in the Tahoe Tattler on July 31, 1936, urged that the hiding place of the famous cannon be revealed and suggested the creation of a small local museum to house such "interesting historical relics." As the enthusiasm of the local citizenry proved inadequate to see this project through, Ernie Pomin eventually contacted Will M. Bliss of Glenbrook, son of the pioneer lumbering family, offering to donate it for preservation at Glenbrook.

Bliss then contacted the Nevada State Museum at Carson City, which gladly accepted custody of the celebrated weapon. Today it remains a fixture on the museum ground to be enjoyed by visitors to the region from all over the world.

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Our Tahoe Heritage

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

North Shore Business Always Linked to Visitors

Considering the number of business ventures which are embarked upon locally each year - and the discouraging rate of attrition - operating one's own commercial enterprise in the Tahoe Basin must have some rewards other than the tangible. In this vicinity, three years of continuous proprietorship is generally regarded as the basis of "institutional" status, perhaps because the recollective abilities of many "locals" do not extend much beyond that time frame.

Prior to the 1960 Olympics at Squaw Valley, local businessmen did not consider their enterprises to be anything other than seasonal. Customers could be expected to begin straggling back up into the high country about Memorial Day - the weekend many summer residents traditionally set aside for "opening up the cabin". Archaic, above-ground water systems serving shoreline subdivisions were in most cases drained each fall and were not restored to service until the last weekend in May. The prospect of hauling water in buckets deterred the majority from an earlier annual visit.

The real "season", however, lagged a full month behind this initial activity, really getting underway with the Fourth of July. Suddenly, on that date, the "season" was in full swing, and for the following nine weeks (until Labor Day brought the curtain down with a resounding thud), local proprietors were all on a hectic dead run for their share of visitor dollars.

Factors associated with the brevity of the local season were those cited by proprietors of vacation-oriented businesses elsewhere: many schools remained in session until the latter part of June; Little League baseball was blamed for a further lag in the arrival of summer guests. Fluctuations in the economy certainly had their effect on local commerce as well, keeping "vacationists" (as they were once called) home in some years.

However, in an historical overview of seasonal enterprise in the basin, one factor stands out: Tahoe's weather. Both real and imagined - machinations of the weatherman have always been the single greatest bugaboo of local businessmen. Week after week of rain, as experienced during the summers of 1965 and 1982, can have a devastating effect on local business, spelling financial setback for even the most astute entrepreneur.

While an afternoon shower leaves the "vacationist" refreshed and reveling in his own ingenuity and pioneer spirit for having dealt with damp duds and developed diversions, a steady downpour of days' duration has quite the opposite effect, driving discouraged visitors away in droves.

Of course, a heat wave in the Sacramento Valley generally has the opposite effect, luring the lowlander away from his swampcooler and up into the luxurious cool atmosphere of the High Sierra. But this meteorological corollary is not frequently cited, as it is apparently considered to be a "given" which "comes with the territory". Proprietors of many years standing know the fallacy of such assumption.

Barring the effects of bad weather, heavy advertising gradually became the means by which local businesses expanded -- or at least managed to stay afloat. Under the leadership of H.F. Droste (partner with Major A.P. Crist in the Tahoe Realty Company), and with able help from George Kehlet of Meeks Bay Resort, A.L. Richardson of Camp Richardson Resort, Dave Chambers of Chambers' Lodge and other local businessmen, the Lake Tahoe Sierra Association was formed in the Spring of 1939.

Members devoted the off-season to distribution of circulars and word-of-mouth promotion of the association's chief interest: Tahoe and its wonders. Southern California, the winter home of many of Tahoe's summer proprietors, was the target of much of this spirited drumbeating. The Association's strategy and hard work produced results not only for the original membership, but for those who came after, hoping to assume a share of the business these early efforts generated.

But in spite of this vigorous program, the pattern of successive proprietorships is a significant factor in discussing the history of local commerce. It is interesting to note that of all the business establishments which have ever operated between Camp Richardson on the south shore and stateline on the north shore, only two have managed to remain under the same ownership (within the family) continuously for over 50 years. Herb Obexer, son of the late founder of the family's operations at Homewood, and Bill Hunter, grandson of the originator of Bacchi's Restaurant in Lake Forest, own the only such businesses still in existence.

Life is indeed rough in the mountains!

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Our Tahoe Heritage

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

Curiosities Of Homewood

Homewood has always been a hamlet with a reputation for tolerance of whimsy-in-public. No one can say with certainty just how this attitude came into being, but perhaps its chief progenitor was Walter Scott Hobart, Jr., son of the lumber baron. His widespread operations were largely responsible for the denuding of North Tahoe hillsides in the 1870s and 1880s.

Though the name Hobart is most often associated with activities at Incline and Sand Harbor (on Tahoe's east shore), the 1920s saw construction of a remarkable multi-story structure in Homewood which managed to accommodate the less industrious pre-occupations of the younger Hobart, who indulged himself in fast boats, fast women, and fast-acting spirits.

The new building, a family "playhouse" of sorts, was large enough to provide shelter for the impressive array of Hobart boats as well as the family and their entourage. By use of a double-track marine railway system, the Hobart fleet -- mostly large, mahogany-hulled craft incorporating the latest word in mechanical devices -- could be effortlessly launched.

The building's top story, a promenade hallway which overlooked the boats, had a number of apartments, each furnished with a basin, a potty, and bed. Mohair furniture and beads in the doorways attested to the sumptuous predilections of the wealthy in the 1920s.

Access to this upper floor was gained by means of an ancient Otis elevator which, like the rest of the electrical system, operated on DC current, with power supplied by a pelton wheel located at a small private reservoir west of Homewood.

Jake Obexer acquired title to the property (including all improvements, furnishings, and contents) in the late 1930s. He used the building primarily for boat storage. A young mechanic for Obexer, on moving into the building's front deluxe apartment in the late 1940s, found the original furnishings to be totally intact, though lack of a source of DC power had rendered the elevator inoperable. However, rewiring restored the electrical system to use.

Today, the faded, barn-red structure continues to occupy a prominent place on the Homewood shoreline, standing in mute testimony to a livelier period in the community's history.

Foremost present day example of Homewood whimsy is the delightful experience that is the Squirrel's Nest. The current enterprise, which, from 1929 to 1964 housed the storefront and warehouses of Urch's Plumbing, has come with age to a history of its own, having its nutty beginnings in a commercial building in Meadow Park (across the highway from Meeks Bay) in the early 1970s, and blossoming into a picnic-luncheon-and-what-have-you which draws curiosity-seekers from near and far.

Almost across the road from the "Nest" is yet another piece of local whimsy: an orange double-ended vessel with dragons guarding bow and stern which has occupied the same small portion of local real estate for well over a decade. Originally built for a Viking festival in Indiana, it was later shipped to Newport Beach, where it came into the possession of Loren Holmwood, a nonagenarian of Scandinavian descent, who has made Lake Tahoe his summer residence since the 1940s.

Holmwood had the boat brought to Lake Tahoe, but repairs necessary to render the craft (damaged in transit from Indiana) seaworthy were never made. Herb Obexer eventually acquired possession in lieu of many years' storage bills. And so it sits, waiting for a chance to sail Tahoe's vast blue.

There are many local sights about which visitors to the area may have occassion to wonder, yet perhaps nowhere on the West Shore are the curious more likely to find so many closely gathered curiosities than in Homewood.

Our Tahoe Heritage

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

High Sierra Gardening

Spring is in the air, and as the snow recedes and native plants bud and begin to leaf out, thoughts turn naturally to the cultivation of non-indigenous flora. The High Sierra, though not traditionally associated with gardening (much less farming), has been known to produce a wide variety of vegetation to delight the eye, the palate, and the wallet.

The earliest of local agricultural efforts blossomed from the need for animal feed. Prior to the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1868, oxen, donkeys and horses supplied the motive power for all freight bound for the Sierra. The Comstock Bonanza in Virginia City prompted a pervasive rags-to-riches philosophy and the eager quest for quick wealth chafed against sometimes unconquerable meteorological limitations.

While the work in the Comstock mines was not itself seasonal, access to the mining districts was severely curtailed by snow and mud for as long as six months of the year. Even during the months when the roadways were considered passable (a comparative term in light of today's standards), wagons often mired down to the hubs, requiring that they be winched out of the thoroughfare to give other vehicles the opportunity to progress.

Intermittent access to the Tahoe Basin drove freight prices up beyond all reason. Silage with which to feed the teamsters' beasts of burden brought $250 per ton in 1860, a price considered high even on the current market. Thus, a booming sellers' market developed. While some sought their fortunes hauling hay and straw on the "Great Bonanza Road to Washoe", others exploited Tahoe sources of these essential commodities. Soon acreage in and near the Tahoe Basin was producing hay for sale.

Squaw Valley's expanse of meadow was blessed with a natural stand of Timothy hay. The partnership of Fish Ferguson, Coggins and Smith cut and hand-pressed a substantial crop as early as 1860, transporting it by high bed stake wagon to Tahoe City. There the hay was loaded aboard the "Iron Duke", a sixty-foot, two-masted sailing vessel owned by the partnership.

This double-ended vessel, proudly known as "The Duke", had a freight capacity of 125 tons. It also served the fledgling hay market within the Basin, stopping at the present sites of Incline, Brockway, Tahoe Vista (then Pine Grove Station), Carnelian Bay, Chambers' Landing (then McKinney's Hunters' Retreat) and Meeks Bay (then the headquarters of Murphy Brothers and Morgan).

The same difficulties attendant upon the importation of stock fodder were experienced by purveyors of vegetables in the Sierra. The needs of local hostelries and encampments were soon supplemented by truck gardens, some of rather grand proportions.

Captain Homer D. Burton of Burton's Island Farm had what was perhaps the largest and most successful of local gardens. Burton was a character given to superlatives, and, taking advantage of the constant sun on the Lake Forest island which he cultivated, he astounded visitors and residents alike with his crops.

According to E.B. Scott in his two-volume history, *The Saga of Lake Tahoe*, "One white turnip out of Burton's well-tended garden ran a whopping 16-and-a-half inches in diameter. Buyers in Truckee swore it wasn't possible even though they had seen it with their own eyes. His crop of oats grew to a height topping eight feet one season and he vowed it would have gone another three feet if Burton Creek hadn't gone dry".

Lake Forest has continued its reputation as an agricultural center locally, even producing corn in some good years. Other North and West Shore locations which are favored with constant sun enjoy similar productivity. Mile-high gardiners looking for success would be well-advised to emphasise short-season crops (such as peas, spinach, and lettuce) and root crops (carrots, potatoes, turnips, radishes, and beets), which are less susceptible to inclement weather than the melons, peppers, and tomatoes of flatland gardens. However, as proved by former Tahoe farmers, almost any crop can be successfully raised, given the proper blend of meteorological luck, location, and . . . a green thumb?

Our Tahoe Heritage

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

Had the reader been a member in good standing of the Tahoe City Federated Women's Club in 1932, the radiant highlight of the year's social calendar would have been the l ·t meeting to be held in the smart new domicile of Mrs. Ru , Mayfield. Built for her under the supervision of her husband, North Shore contractor Norman O. Mayfield, the elegant dwelling was located on Grove Street, Tahoe City (across from what is now the outfield of the town's lower baseball diamond).

Mayfield-built homes have a reputation for enduring quality, and his own residence is no exception. Its roof, built of 24-inch clear white cedar shakes from Oregon (which were dipped in a linseed oil stain), has survived over half a century of Sierra weather with no more strenuous maintenance than an application of graphite every five years or so.

Mayfield is a man of similar endurance. He is now in his 96th year of full and active life. He and his wife first came to Lake Tahoe in 1925. They spent their initial summer in a 20-by-20 foot tent near Skylandia in Lake Forest -- at that time the location of a Methodist girl's summer school. Though no more than a seasonal habitation had been planned, what began as a retreat soon became a permanent residence.

Mayfield engaged in his trade, constructing tennis courts for affluent devotees of the booming sport. In the next three seasons his crew completed 13 courts on the North and West shores. William Wallace Mein had the local franchise on the asphalt, which was shipped to Tahoe in barrels. One man was assigned to continually stir the mixture in a mortar box, as it came "real lumpy", according to Mayfield, and would "set up" if left unattended. Mayfield recalls one afternoon when the accumulation of black goop on George Heron caused the legs of his overalls to be stuck together, necessitating the garment's removal with a knife.

About 1930, Mayfield purchased a narrow strip of lakefront from Standard Oil, using its existing boathouse as the basis of an expanded marine sales, service and storage facility known as the Tahoe Boat Company on the site of today's Roundhouse Mall. Mayfield added two more boat houses. Between 1932 and 1935 he undertook the construction of a three-sided "crib" breakwater, the curved shelter of which eventually extended over 620 lineal feet across the water.

As the lake bottom along that stretch of shoreline is solid rock and pilings cannot be driven, the breakwater was designed using 16-foot lengths of six-by-eight timber with the middle tiers secured by bolts. The "cribs" thus formed were filled with rock to anchor them. Surprisingly enough, this commodity had to be hauled from the Nevada side of the lake. For this purpose, Mayfield employed the Shamrock, a diesel tug purchased from Matt Green (then owner of Tahoe Tavern).

The cribbing was built on rollers, and as each section was completed, it would be "launched" and set in position with the aid of a hoist with a 30-foot boom. Mayfield built this cribbing a little at a time, owing to the difficulty of construction and to his involvement in other business activities.

The boat company blossomed. Mayfield represented Chris-Craft and sold Hackers (another fine wooden speedboat of the 1930s) by special order. Fred Main, Mayfield's marine manager and eventually co-partner in the boating concern, would often accompany him on his annual trek to Argonaut, Michigan, where he would have a look at the new models of Chris-Crafts and place his order for the coming season.

The boats Mayfield bought in Michigan were then shipped by rail to Truckee, where they were transferred to the narrow-guage railroad line and freighted directly to Tahoe City dockside.

By the time the first boats slid down the marine ways of Tahoe Boat Company, Mayfield's contracting business had already established a name for itself, owing in large part to the skill and care of his able foreman, John Burns.

A registered civil engineer, Burns is remembered as a huge, elegant man who wore a white shirt and tie in his daily work, finding them no impediment to his sheer genius. This master builder "signed" his work with oak dowels, which he used to pin the timbers of his structures together. Examples of his artistry are today prized North and West shore residences.

In spite of consuming business activities, Norman Mayfield found time to be involved in the founding of the Lake Tahoe Ski Club. He also deserves credit for the persistent enthusiasm which gave force --and eventual success-- to Tahoe City's bid for selection as the site of the ski jumping trials of the 1932 Olympics. For three days in

Our Tahoe Heritage

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

If the reader's familiarity with Tahoe City does not span more than a decade, he will doubtless fail to recall that the building which now houses Victoria Station was, until 1974, known as the Tahoe Inn. Progenitor and first proprietor of that business, Carl "Pop" Bechdolt, Sr., had taken over the Tahoe House (no relation to Peter Vogt's current pleasant dining experience of the same name) from Robert Montgomery Watson in the late 1920s. Watson, later constable of Tahoe City, had purchased the Tahoe House from William Pomin, its original founder, in 1887.

It was 50 years ago this month, in 1934, when a fire (which "Pop" insisted was the result of the negligence of Wong, his cook) levelled Pomin's original building as well as an adjacent commercial structure known as Log Cabin No. 1. The undaunted entrepreneuer quickly organized efforts to rebuild. Crews working around the clock miraculously managed to have the establishment open for the summer season.

The new inn contained not only a restaurant and lodging facilities, but also a bar, lounge, and barbershop. The lessee of the latter concession, tonsorial artist Chester "Chet" Longenstein, was also an accomplished banjo player. He was prone to entertain passers-by from the steps of the inn when business was slack.

Following World War II, a new feature of the Inn developed under the guidance of "pop's" younger son, Bill, who by that time managed the establishment. What had for many years been the dingy green employees' dining room was painted a powder blue, resulting in its being dubbed "The Blue Room". The clientele of this new gathering place was expanded to include locals -- by invitation only. In spite of this policy (or perhaps because of it), the eatery soon established itself as the unofficial "Town Hall" of Tahoe City.

The Blue Room offered meals from the time the kitchen opened for breakfast often until the wee hours. As seating was limited to one large table and about a dozen chairs, standing room only was often the rule. The Blue Room adjoined the inn's kitchen, allowing the cook to double as a waiter most of the time.

Dinners in the Blue Room, which included soup and salad and usually offered a choice of two or three entrees, were initially priced at 37 cents -- quite reasonable, even by standards of the late 1940s. However, it was Bechdolt's unwritten policy that those who could not afford to pay even this nominal charge were assessed what they could afford or allowed to work off the expense of their meal. This

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humanitorian gesture provided sustenance for many temporarily-down-and-out souls and kept the inn's dishes washed, plumbing repaired and outdoor totem poles painted in the mean time.

Although it became the town's soup-kitchen, the Blue Room also catered to the local elite. It provided the setting for the financial transactions of such Northshore wizards as Henry J. Kaiser, Stanley Dollar and the W. W. Meins. When Squaw Valley Corporation was being organized in 1947, Bill Bechdolt offered Alex Cushing the use of the Blue Room.

By 1974, when Bill Bechdolt sold the Tahoe Inn, the price of a dinner in the Blue Room had inched its way upward to $1.77 -- still an amazingly low price. On March 15, 1974, a gala farewell party revived the original drink prices (15-cent beer and 30-cent highballs), and brought bigwigs from as far away as Sacramento and Reno to celebrate the demise of the decades-old establishment. The guests included politicians, old-timers, and long-time friends of Bill's father, Carl Sr., whom the festivities were intended chiefly to honor.

The era in which the Tahoe Inn figured with such prominence is long gone now, but for those who frequented its exclusive dining room (perhaps on the basis of a few hours of hard work in exchange for a meal), it recalls memories which in this age of liability and skepticism are not likely to be revived.

The Shooting Of Lake Tahoe!!!

by Carol Van Etten

Early Camera Artists Preserved Local Scene

Photography provides us our most incontrovertible - and interesting - record of the events, faces, and places that shaped our yesterdays.

Evidence suggests that Tahoe's first "knights of the box-and-shroud" arrived on the local scene prior to 1870, yet selecting and dating an "earliest photo" of Tahoe's north shore amounts to conjecture. Itinerant photographers probably deserve credit for our less-than-peripheral peek at the region's raw youth.

Chief circumstance contributing to the expansion of local photographic records was the completion of the Tahoe Tavern in 1901. Located one mile south across the Truckee River from Tahoe City proper, the "Tavern" catered to the style-conscious wealthy, who appreciated having their activities recorded, and offered such on-premises conveniences as a resident photographer. In this capacity, the hostelry employed C. O. Valentine, who maintained a studio as well as offering for sale a selection of "views" which could be conveyed to friends back home in the form of postcards and frameable reproductions. Valentine was an artist no less than he was a faithful recorder of history, squeezing the well-aimed shutter on countless scenes of classic composition as well as historic import.

In the course of his employment by the Tavern, this master of the lens had occassion to record on film the devastation wrought on the local shoreline by the impoundment of waters above the legal high-water mark following the completion of a concrete dam at the lake's outlet in 1916. Needless to say, the evidence provided by Valentine's carefully labelled photos stands today as irrefutable documentation in the ongoing litigation over who should control the Tahoe reservoir.

Ethel Vernon's character photography included this shot of husband "Bill" poised for action near Watson Lake in 1933

Valentine's retirement from business helped launch a new photography concern conducted by the husband and wife team of C. W. "Bill" and Ethel Vernon. Mrs. Vernon, who shared her husbands talent with the camera, strove to record the more spiritual aspects of local life, while Bill dealt with such subjects as local winter sporting events and summer regatta activity. Mrs. Vernon was a regular columnist for Tahoe Topics (a Tahoe City-based publication of the early postwar years), and her photographs graced not only its pages, but also those of the Sacramento Bee, Reno Gazette-Journal, and Truckee Republican.

One of the most exhaustive chroniclers of the North Shore was Michael Benning, a school photographer whose "route" took him over the face of northern California during the winter months at a grinding pace which included visits to as many as 300 schools per year. However, Benning's summers were spent pursuing the more leisurely duties of proprietor of Benning's Resort Cabins in Kings Beach, a collection of pale stucco units still standing across the highway from the North Lake Tahoe Community Center. It was owing to his annual residence that so many of Benning's 17,000 photos (recently donated to the California State Historical Society by collector Mead Kibbey) were of the Tahoe region.

In addition to the array of commercial photographers who plied their trade on Tahoe's North Shore, the region saw a growing number of individuals whose amateur status did nothing to limit their benefit to history. These were the historians-by-accident who recorded (with rare regard for posterity) not only the hum-drum affairs of citizens on a scenic outpost of civilization, but the area's business community in the throes of its birth.

Treasured glimpses into the Eden that was this basin's yesteryear speak volumes, luring us back to an era of unselfconscious tranquility. We can consider the access provided by these early-day photographers to be a piece of great luck, bringing to life a past of interest not only to the serious historian, but to the casual student of local history and visitor alike.

Original stone buildings of Fleur du Lac, the Henry Kaiser estate, formed the core of what is today an exclusive residential development. C. W. "Bill" Vernon's 1938 photo records for posterity the estate's newly completed marine facilities.

C. O. Valentine, well-known for his scenery photos, also documented the havoc of high water on Tahoe Tavern's shoreline in 1917.

This family portrait, taken by amateur photographer Claire T. Van Etten about 1929 looks south along the shore of Rubicon Bay. In the distance are a lone boathouse and pier belonging to the George Newhall estate.

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Our Tahoe Heritage

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

North Shore's Lumbering Past

Lumbering activities at Lake Tahoe are most often associated with Glenbrook, Incline, and the South Shore. Yet many other communities were involved in early logging operations. Some had their beginnings as wood camps or terminal points for skid chutes which brought raw timber from surrounding slopes to the lakeshore.

The voracious consumption of wood products, first in the form of ties for the transcontinental railroad and later as timbers for the Comstock mines, was largely responsible for the development of Tahoe's lumbering industry. The first sawmill of record in the Tahoe Basin, known as Woodburn's Mill, was built in 1860 in Lake Valley near what is today South Lake Tahoe. The following year a mill built in Glenbrook by Captain A.W. Pray began providing lumber for burgeoning Tahoe construction. By the mid-1880s, no less than five mills were operating in Glenbrook, making it the center of such activity.

Not all milling operations were confined to the east shore. Two and a half miles south of Tahoe City a concern under the direction of Augustus H. Saxton began to take shape in the fall of 1863. Settling in Ward Creek Canyon, Saxton constructed a 54 foot high overshot water wheel, after he built a diversion dam one and three quarter miles upstream and a ditch to convey water to his huge wheel.

In the spring of 1866, Saxton contracted with Collis P. Huntington, of the Central Pacific Railroad, to supply ties for the railroad line, which was proceeding slowly but surely up the western slope of the Sierra. Saxton envisioned great success for his small-scale operation. He would probably have realized significant financial reward for his industry and skill had it not been for one fact left unconsidered.

Saxton's planned method of delivering the logs was to make use of the Truckee River, "flushing" his product by a series of splash dams to Coburn's Station (soon to become known as Truckee). But, unfortunately, his green lumber sought bottom as if it were made of lead. In spite of Saxton's valiant effort to defy physical laws, the wood eventually had to be removed from the rushing water and loaded on wagons. The 16-mile overland journey to transport the logs took four and a half hours and consumed any potential profit.

Despite this initial failure, Saxton persevered and succeeded in extending his sphere of activities up the sides of Ward Canyon. Logs were delivered to his mill by means of greased chutes. Saxton eventually took as a partner a man named Edwards and later Captain J.A. Todman, who was credited with building a number of steam-powered Tahoe vessels.

The summer of 1877 proved to be the end of Saxton's mill when a forest fire between Truckee and Idlewild (near Tahoe Pines) raged unchecked for two weeks, devastating everything in its path. Though the mill itself was destroyed in that blaze, not to be rebuilt, the evidence of Saxton's operation can still be seen underwater offshore at Sunnyside Resort, where a quantity of lumber lies on the bottom, awaiting rescue by some enterprising salvage effort.

Though Saxton's was the only mill in the vicinity, logging was conducted on a massive scale along most of Tahoe's California shore. Mountainsides of incalculable boardfeet of timber were denuded. Areas of easy access were the first to be exploited, but as demand persisted, regions of lesser accessibility were harvested. This necessitated the construction of skid chutes to carry logs down to a central location where they could be loaded on wagons or diverted into existing water courses and flushed to the lake. At the lakeshore, the logs were chained together in V-shaped booms and towed to the Glenbrook mills.

Log skids, which dotted Tahoe's North and West shores 100 years ago, are poorly evidenced today. Such is the case with a skid which was located just to the west of the present site of Rocky Ridge, between Tahoe City and Lake Forest. Another chute was found at Bear Trap, where Burton Creek served to carry timber to the Lake Forest shore.

Kings Beach also served the lumber interests with a chute which ran along the present route of Beaver Street. In fact, until 1939, when many streets were renamed to correct confusion arising from the multiple uses of names, Beaver Street had been known by the dubious appellation of Skid Road.

The lumber boom, which so changed the face of the Tahoe Basin prior to the turn of the century, seems a distant event today. Although the landscape has been since altered by the healing work of Mother Nature and varying requirements of man, it remains a colorful page in Tahoe's history.

38 "School's Out Almost"

Schools > Tahoe Lake
Carol Van Etten Collection

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Our Tahoe Heritage

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

As the school year moves toward its inevitable (yet, to young minds, interminable) conclusion, we look back on local educational offerings of earlier days. It is interesting to note that the north and west shores of Lake Tahoe had been "settled" for 30 years before it was deemed necessary that a school be established.

To Constable Robert Montgomery Watson goes credit for the initial efforts to establish a school in Tahoe City. In the town's early days, families generally wintered "off the hill", many repairing to Foresthill, where a school was available.

However, in 1894 Watson made the decision to keep his wife and four children in town for the winter, and in order to provide for the educational needs of his brood, he remodeled a former residence (on the present site of the Pepper Tree Inn) for use as a school building. Here the Watson children, along with a four-year-old neighbor who constituted the fifth pupil required for public funding, received their early education.

The construction of the Tahoe Tavern, completed in 1901 just south of Tahoe City, accounted for the influx of many new residents, including children of the tradesmen and domestics who were employed there. In 1906, the Bliss family, who owned the Tavern, donated ten acres of land to the town for the purpose of constructing a larger school. The family offered not only the land, but the services of the Tavern carpenters to do the work.

The county put up the money for materials, and in a show of public support for the project the residents of the area turned out in such force that the building was completed in a single day, with the womenfolk providing a picnic for the workers.

This building served well for over a decade, but as the population of the area grew, it naturally tended to spread itself out. In the early 1920s, the Vernon and Henry families, each with two children, moved into the Meeks Bay-Tahoma area. In the summer of 1923, the Georgetown Divide School District provided a teacher and a facility for these and other local children.

Lillian Vernon Farr, a longtime Tahoe City resident, remembers attending the school, held in a Tahoma cabin which serves its present owner as a storage building. The school was comprised of eight pupils in all, including one Indian lad, and some of these walked the three miles to the school on a cedar bark road which had been built for lumbering wagons almost half a century before. The road's remnants can still be found passing through the old barbeque area of Sugar Pine Point State Park, partially covered by the wheelchair path on the grounds.

While this little rural school was short-lived, Tahoe City's facility, owing to a steady increase in the town's population, was becoming inadequate to contain the growing number of scholars, and private residences in close proximity to the school building were usurped for educational purposes.

As a result of a bond passed in May of 1934, a new physical plant, known as Tahoe Lake School, was constructed by local contractor Norman Mayfield. It opened its doors on October 1, 1935, with 55 elementary and 23 high school students. The services of Myrtle Gallanger, hired in 1927, were soon supplemented by Bliss Hinkle, the first high school teacher, and in 1937 Miss June Dyer joined the faculty.

In the early days of local formal education, meteorological considerations were paramount. In fact, prior to a reorganization of the school calendar in 1950, local students took their long vacation in winter, interruputing their studies in mid-December and remaining at liberty until early March. Summer vacation in those days was but a few weeks duration.

The population boom prompted by World War II brought many changes to local schools. In 1942, Kings Beach became the site of a second elementary school, and 1949 saw the organization of the Tahoe-Truckee Unified School District. That was the year that Tahoe City high school students were first bussed to the high school in Truckee, a practice which continued until the 1973-74 school year, when North Tahoe High School was completed.

Kindergarten was first offered locally in 1951, when Miss Geri Bean (now Geri Lawson) was hired to teach that class. Mrs. Lawson still teaches one of Tahoe Lake School's three first grade classes, and is today instructing the children of some of her original pupils.

In the 90 year history of North Tahoe schools many sweeping changes have been wrought in the visual appearance of the school facilities. Even so, the spirit of education remains as it was in the days when a single small room served to house the pupils of a prior century.

Lights - Camera - ACTION!

Tahoe/Truckee's Movie Making History

by Carol Van Etten
photos courtesy of Lillian Vernon Farr

In the 75 year history of the motion picture industry, the scenic wonders of Lake Tahoe have provided the backdrop for countless films, ranging in mood from the ridiculous to the sublime. Enterprising businessmen in the Truckee area ardently wooed filmakers in the industry's early years, resulting in the railroad town frequently being used as a location for outdoor adventure pictures in the 19-teens and 1920s.

The proximity of the natural marvel of Lake Tahoe made it a popular off camera destination for stars and stagehands alike, and many movieland luminaries made the 15-mile journey by narrow guage railroad along the Truckee River corridor to Tahoe City, where they beheld the natural blessings of local geography.

Word of Tahoe spread via the studio grapevines, and by the mid-1930s, several companies had made use of north and west shore locations, preserving in such films as "Rose Marie", "Lightnin'", "Call of the Wild", "Bless Their Hearts", "White Fang", and "The Country Beyond" glimpses of local scenery which are hardly recognizable today.

Three of the above-named titles involved the use of a dogteam, sled and driver, and Tahoe resident (later Tahoe City constable) Harry Johanson was on hand to fill the bill. Johanson's chief devotion was to his dogs, and the partnership of driver and team was responsible for many acts of heroism and self sacrifice in the service of the community.

Some footage for "The Country Beyond" was shot at Granlibakken (at that time still part of the Tahoe Tavern holdings), and featured Johanson standing in for Paul Kelly as he mushed his stalwart huskies through the drifts of the frozen near-north with female lead Rochelle Hudson by his side.

Harry appeared in seventeen films in all, and even postponed his acceptance of the job of constable of Tahoe City to finish the filming of a picture in which he was appearing, as it "paid more than a constable could make in six months".

The clarity of Tahoe's water enjoyed wide reputation in the early days. Owen McKeon, in his out-of-print "The Railroads and Steamers of Lake Tahoe", recalls that some sub-marine footage for a Buster Keaton film, "The Navigator", was shot here owing to the excellent underwater visibility. The film showed Buster in a diving suit, "working" on the propellers of the steamer "Tahoe" as he stood on the lake's bottom.

Other steamers saw service in locally filmed sequences. The "Nevada", an 85-foot steamer which for many years made the thrice weekly winter mail runs around Lake Tahoe, appeared in three different films, including "Rose Marie", with her name blacked out so as to read "Vada", and in the films "Evad" and "Ada".

ROCHELLE HUDSON, "BUCK", AND PAUL KELLY on the set of "The Country Beyond", which happened to be beyond Tahoe City at Granlibakken, circa 1936.

Longtime Tahoe City resident Lillian Farr recalls a film made by a Canadian company around 1929 which took advantage of the awesome prominence of Eagle Rock in Tahoe Pines in footage showing a dummy being pushed over its precipice.

The Brockway location of "Bless Their Hearts", a winter sports comedy starring Mary Astor and Elliott Nugent, became a disaster area for the studio when both stars, as well as many others in the cast and crew, were victims of a flu epidemic. Complications generated by unseasonably severe weather made further shambles of the proceedings when the area was left without power for several days, stranding the party and necessitating the delivery of a doctor to the film site by the mail launch Marion.

Films continue to contain footage shot in the Tahoe area, a most recent and commercially successful example being the very R-rated "Hot Dog", most of which was filmed at Squaw Valley, employing many locals as extras. However, the march of progress encroaches on local vistas with a certain tread, and studio scouts in search of sublimely pastoral scenery are increasingly obliged to go elsewhere -- beyond the realm of human "improvements".

MARY ASTOR.

ILLNESS STRIKES TWO SNOWBOUND FILM CELEBRITIES

Mary Astor And Elliott Nugent Are Victims Of Influenza At Brockway

1936

TAHOE CITY, Feb. 12. — (AP) — Dr. J. H. Bernard made a motorboat trip across Lake Tahoe to-day to aid twelve sick members of a motion picture company on location at Brockway in the high Sierra.

ELLIOTT NUGENT.

Dr. Bernard said Mary Astor, actress, and Director Elliott Nugent are among those suffering from influenza. He advised them to remain in bed until they recover fully.

Sufficient medical supplies for several days are available and the company has plenty of provisions.

The highway to Brockway is ked and telephone service also interrupted, with snow still falling.

Two feet of snow have fallen, nging the pack to nearly six feet. ake Tahoe never freezes over because of the rough water.

"BLESS THEIR HEARTS" almost broke their bodies when the flu and a 1936 blizzard visited the Brockway set.

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Our Tahoe Heritage

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

WINGING IT

Since its discovery by man, Lake Tahoe's superlative qualities have generated many myths regarding its formidability - most of which time has eventually seen fit to dispel. Prior to its "conquest" by air, the unpredictable waters of the lake were considered a prohibitively perilous destination for amphibious pilots.

The "impossible" was inevitably attempted, of course. In 1934 George Varney (Varney Airlines) made the first seaplane landing on the Lake. However, owing to general scepticism about the plane's ability to become airborne at such high altitude, Varney elected to take-off alone.

Three years later, in June of 1937, Richard Archbold and pilot R. R. Rogers set their wing-over twin engine "Guba" down at Chambers' Lodge. The Museum of Natural History was sponsoring the project - a test of the huge airplane's ability to take off and land at high altitude while heavily laden. Carrying a cargo of 1500 pounds of sand bags, the "Guba' lived up to expectations, making a smooth take-off and thus promising similarly successful takeoffs in its upcoming mission in New Guinea.

Inspired by Archbold's success, a Bristol, Pennsylvania pilot by the name of Carl de Ganahl made some test takeoffs of his own the following summer, using increasing passenger and baggage loads. De Ganahl's plane, a Fleetwing Seabird powered by a 300 horsepower, 7-cylinder Jacobs L-5 radial aircooled engine, was found to be capable of carrying a pilot, three passengers and a small amount of baggage, "if the waters were slightly roughened by winds".

Commercial aviation at Tahoe began soon afterward. In 1939 Wesley Stetson founded Cal-Vada Aircraft, the first regular seaplane service at the Lake. Stetson operated his 65 horsepower Taylorcraft out of Emerald Bay, making scheduled stops at Tahoe Keys, Zephyr Cove, and sometimes Kings Beach and Timberland.

Following World War II, Stetson flew a Republic SeaBee for hire on the same general route, continuing service until about 1964, when he sold the business to

Mike Brown. Brown still operates Cal-Vada Aircraft maintaining a seaplane base on the lake shore directly across the highway from Homewood Ski Area, where he provides a full range of marine aviation services from sightseeing to flying lessons in his DeHavilland Beaver.

Another commercial seaplane operation at the lake was Commodore Air Service, based at Chambers' Lodge. This enterprise, which began about 1955, was basically a commuter service, shuttling passengers back and forth between Lake Tahoe and Sausalito in a Piaggio P-136 L-1 Royal Gull. Bob and Alicia Laws, who owned and operated the business, also provided connections with Hurricane Bay and Clear Lake. Fares from Sausalito to Chambers' Lodge were $19.50 one-way and $36.50 for a round-trip flight.

In addition to these commercial ventures, a number of private individuals owned and operated amphibious aircraft on Lake Tahoe. Two Grumman aircraft which were familiar sights on the west shore in the late 1940s, 1950s, and into the 1960s were Frank Fullers' Mallard, based at the south end of Rubicon Bay, and Sterling Edwards' Widgeon equipped with a Ranger engine. Until about 1947, Bill Stead, for whom Stead Air Force Base (near Reno) is named, flew locally for fun in his Navy Kingfisher.

Though local pioneering in marine aviation is a matter of history, the thrill of those who first soared above the Lake of the Sky can still be experienced by those who make the pleasant decision to take to the air and "wing it" above the high Sierras.

(40)

Our Tahoe Heritage

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

Willie Arnhold, West Shore Pioneer

For Willie Arnhold, who passed away last Friday at his west shore residence, Lake Tahoe had been home for 60 of his 80 years, giving him the distinction of being perhaps the west shore's year 'round resident of longest standing. Certainly in his six decades at the lake he had seen many changes, bringing a few of his own to the local landscape, which endure to this day.

It was 1923 when Arnhold first arrived in America from his birthplace in Saxon, Germany, landing in Hoboken, New Jersey, as a passenger on the S.S. Berlin. Unable to speak more than a few words of English, he managed to catch the train for Oakland, California, taking the ferry from there to San Francisco, where he was to meet his uncle, owner of a Novato chicken ranch. The young immigrant's first job consisted of grading eggs and tending to the whims and indiscretions of his uncle's 9,000 chickens. Understandably, his enthusiasm for the enterprise soon paled, leading him to strike out on his own. He set a course for the Sierras, where he looked forward to enjoying some "scenery".

Willie found what he was seeking on Lake Tahoe's west shore, and soon secured employment as a gardener on the Ehrman estate (now Sugar Pine Point State Park), between Tahoma and Meeks Bay.

In a recent interview, Willie recalled his years at "Pine Lodge", as the grand estate was known. His recollections are of quite a different era -- a time of unhurried elegance when Mr. and Mrs. Ehrman would still walk the mile and a half to Meeks Bay to pay their monthly grocery bill, personally presenting a gratuity to storekeeper Charlie Heller before being driven back to the estate by their chauffeur.

In 1941 Willie built a residence of his own near General Creek, southwest across the highway from the Ehrman holdings. Here he lived in some considerable isolation, being without neighbors in winter (but for caretakers of the Ehrman Estate and Meeks Bay Resort) for miles in every direction. As late as the mid-1970s, his frequent visitors - often in broad daylight - were a group of coyotes, who partook of Willie's offerings of food and grudgingly consented to have their photographs taken.

Best remembered of Willie's ventures was his stocked trout pond, located adjacent to the highway at the bottom of the dip where the Chambers' Landing tennis courts now sit. Willie undertook this project (which would certainly meet with Agency opposition today) shortly after the war, hiring the Henriksen brothers to excavate and widen McKinney Creek just above its highway crossing, creating a pond of less than one acre which was eighteen feet deep at its outlet.

Willie named the concession Fish Hook Pond, and offered picnic and barbeque facilities for those who wished to "swallow their pride" and make a meal of their catches. The fish were Rainbow trout, delivered in half-ton shipments. Willie fed them a commercial pelleted ration on which they thrived, some attaining five pounds before succumbing to the persistant fishing pressure.

Arnhold operated his stocked pond for about ten seasons, eventually selling to the Perini Corporation, developers of Chambers' Landing. Subsequent renovation of the property into its present use has obliterated the former fishing hole from all but memory, causing long absent visitors to startle at the changes: a tennis court where once there was a pond!

Longtime local residents remember Willie with fondness, hard at work cutting wood, or engaged in one of the many other activities required of an early-day mountain dweller -- invariably in the company of his faithful dachsund, Sep, who shared many of his adventures. Willie and his ready grin will be missed, but perhaps he has gone to a place where the fish are always biting, as they once did - to the delight of young anglers of another generation - in his Fish Hook Pond.

Our Tahoe Heritage

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

FIRE!

As season follows season and local precipitation ranges to its inevitable extremes, (now a record snowfall, now a virtual drought), we are reminded of the special caution needed to prevent a calamitous blaze in the parched woods this year.

Forest fires (such as those which darkened local skies earlier this month) create not only an unpleasant aesthetic appearance, but a threat to life and property on a grand scale, the danger compounded by the large population which inhabits the lake basin on a typical summer day.

Such a misfortune was the so-called Donner Burn, which, for twelve days in August of 1960, raged out of control, crossing Donner Summit and eventually scarring a 23-mile swath to Dog Valley, north of Verdi, Nevada. In that tinder-dry summer, the Redding construction firm of Briggs, Conely and Dennis, under contract to the State of California to work on the new Interstate 80, determined to ignore the denial of their request for a permit to burn debris.

While thirty of the company's crew (lunching near the worksite) watched, the wind stirred the sparks of the fire, the velocity of which was soon beyond the powers of mere men armed with hand tools to contain.

An oppressive smoke darkened the sky to a constant daytime twilight, and electrical power in the basin and beyond was lost for a week as 60-mile-per-hour winds (generated by the fire itself) whipped the inferno rapidly east, threatening the town of Truckee for a time before a merciful shift in direction.

A crew of 3,500 firefighters, from every major forest in the country, were flown in to battle the blaze. They were aided by 80 tankers and 110 bulldozers, while overhead nine aerial tankers, five helicopters, and a spotter plane did their parts to suppress the spreading flames.

When it was all over (Forest Service firefighters continued to patrol the ashes for 53 days following the fire's outbreak), 43,000 acres had been blackened.

Precedent to the Donner Burn, the most recent large fire in the area had been the Floriston blaze of 1924, which had its origin near Gray Creek (a tributary of the Truckee River). This conflagration, the scars of which are still visible along Highway 80, consumed 18 miles of timber and sage as it spread toward the town of Reno, on the outskirts of which it was finally extinguished.

In spite of a string of "wet" seasons immediately prior, the month of August, 1896 saw several forest fires raging near Tahoe. The *Truckee Republican* reported that valuable timber at Swift's Station belonging to Ed Sweeney of Carson City had been destroyed by fire. The *Republican* further stated that "a large fire is still in progress on the hill Incline (the site of Incline Village today). Five fires started on the western shore last Wednesday were doubtless of an incendiary origin, and more are at the southern end of the lake. Large numbers of men started for the scenes of the fires and in part stayed the progress of the flames".

Mark Twain, of course, was initiator of perhaps the largest forest fire ever to sweep the area. In 1861, as a young and footloose vagabond camping on the lake's north shore, he and a companion failed to adequately oversee their evening's campfire, which they suddenly found "galloping all over the premises".

Driven to the lake's shore by the blaze's intense heat, they watched the steady encroachment of the flames, which "went surging up adjacent ridges - surmounted them and disappeared in the canyons beyond - burst into view upon higher and farther ridges...till as far as the eye could search the lofty mountain fronts were webbed as it were with a tangled network of red lava streams. Away across the water the crags and domes were lit with a ruddy glare, and the firmament above was a reflected hell!"

As Twain's visit predated any lumbering activity in the basin, neither the event nor the regretful recollection of it quoted above (from his book *Roughing It*) ever generated any legal repercussions for him, though from his description of the extent of the fire, it must certainly have represented a considerable loss to the industry which, in the next generation, transformed the basin into a bustling source of timbers to shore up the mineshafts of Virginia City.

But simply rowing off into the sunset, as Twain was at liberty to do, is not presently an option of careless campers, and so those whose activities in the Lake Tahoe area involve the use of fire would be well-advised to exercise extreme caution. The forest they save may be their own!

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Our Tahoe Heritage

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

The Name Game

Perhaps no feature of the Sierra landscape has suffered under such a succession of names as the body of water we know today as Lake Tahoe. During the 140 years since John C. Fremont's first sighting of the lake on Valentine's Day, 1844, the big blue of this inland sea has been blessed popularly -- if not officially -- with seven different names, and as many more have been publically suggested (some with editorial tongue firmly in cheek) as alternative appellations.

The protocol of wilderness exploration dictates that discoverers have the right of naming their discoveries. In keeping with such etiquette, the lake is properly known as "Lake Bonpland", the name given to it by Fremont in honor of Aime Jacques Alexandre, the French botanist who accompanied the von Humboldt party on an earlier expedition west.

In the decade which followed Fremont's discovery, the designation "Bonpland" was favored in publications appearing on the Continent. However, the map drawn by Charles Preuss, cartographer for Captain Fremont's party, notes it simply as "Mountain Lake". In those days, few found themselves in a position to care.

Those who did care found themselves further confused by Baker's 1855 "Map of the Mining Regions", which showed the lake as "Maheon", Bartlett's "Guide", another source of the day, referred to "Big Truckee Lake", with yet another casually-placed cognomen burdening the pristine alpine paradise.

In March of 1853, California's Surveyor General, W.A. Eddy, had initiated the use of what would 17 years later become the "legal" name of the lake -- "Bigler". Yet from the start this name was destined to meet with widespread disfavor, with its most active opponents suggesting that John Bigler, the former democratic governor of California for whom the lake had been named, was less than worthy of such an honor.

Controversy over Bigler's merit as a namesake waxed hot when the outbreak of the Civil War led to charges that he entertained Confederate sympathies. Several substitute names were promptly offered up. The Unionist party mounted an unsuccessful lobbying effort in April of 1861 to rechristen the lake with the exotic "Tua Tulia". Fanning the foolishness the following year, the "Sacramento Union" suggested "Largo Bergler" as a more suitable name, "as it would stand as a punishing illusion to the bibulous habits of 'Honest John' Bigler when he was governor of the State"

In February of 1862, public sentiment against Bigler found expression in the form of an Interior Department map brought out under the direction of William Henry Knight, the department's chief cartographer. Knight enlisted the linguistic skills of Dr. Henry DeGroot, a "Sacramento Union" correspondent whose efforts to communicate with Washoe Indians had familiarized him with the rudiments of their dialect. "Ta-hoe", according to Dr. DeGroot, was translated "Big Water" or "Water in a high place". And so, in the name of superior aesthetics, the name by which the lake is known today was established in the white man's vocabulary.

However, the controversy raged on, refusing to be silenced even by the passage of a bill in the California State Legislature on February 10, 1870, giving legal status to Eddy's original designation of "Bigler". Various vassals of the Fourth Estate continued to offer their suggestions as to a more suitable epithet, among them fledgling correspondent Mark Twain, then connected with Virginia City's "Territorial Enterprise". Twain found himself drawn irresistibly into the fray, occasioning to comment that "Ta-hoe", in the dialect of the Digger and "Pi-ute" (sic) tribes meant "grasshopper soup", which, he contended, was among their delicacies.

In light of public sentiment and popular usage, it is amazing that the name "Bigler" continued as a legal geographical designation until a mere 39 years ago. But it was not until July 18, 1945 that a bill was adopted in the California State Legislature officially changing the name to "Lake Tahoe".

In addition to its impressive cavalcade of cognomens, this mile-high marvel has acquired several nicknames, including "Lake of the Sky" and "Jewel of the Sierras". But for all the variety of its names, running the gamut from complimentary to condescending, the native population's original appellative serves best, and seems most likely to endure.

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Sailing At 6200

On a typical summer afternoon at Tahoe, with the fair breezes providing impetus for dozens of sailboats of many classes, it is amazing to recall that a brief generation ago the lake was generally considered to be "unsailable". Large, displacement-hulled vessels numbered among the lake's first watercraft, hauling supplies, silage, and even mail to the basin's remote outposts as early as 1860. Yet, hoisting a sail was considered an act of idiocy for many years following its original decline in popularity.

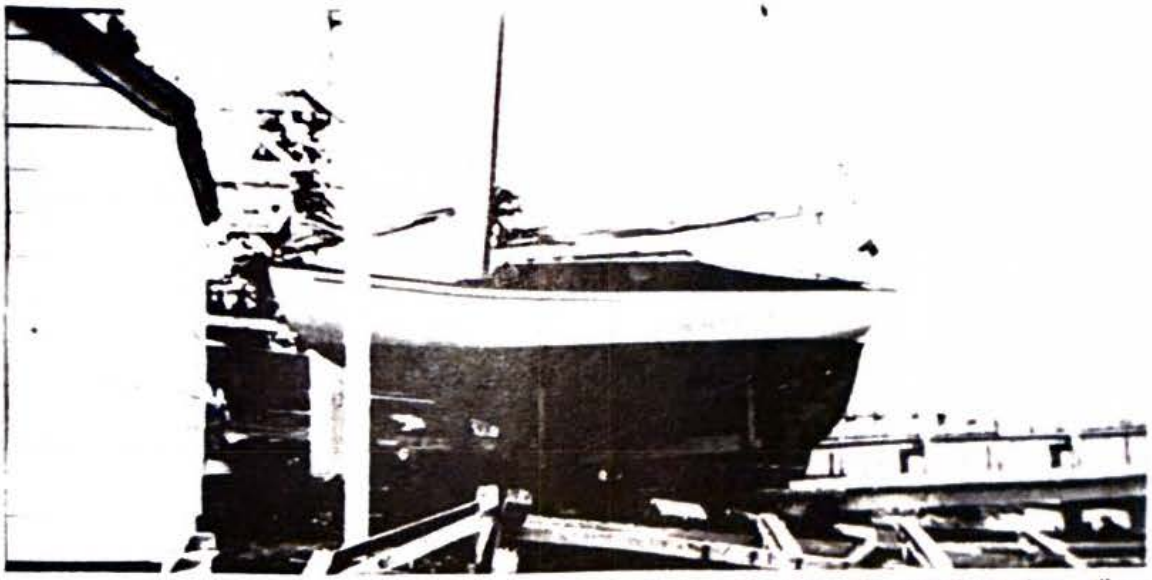
By Carol Van Etten

Courtesy of North Tahoe Historical Society

Photos courtesy of Norman Dewhurst

Among the first of the lake's wind-propelled boats was the MINNIE MOODY, a vessel of the "plunger" type captained by Fred Eliot of Tahoe City. This 34-foot craft was advertised as having a capacity of 30 passengers, but in those bustling days of Tahoe City's infancy, she usually carried a lesser number in favor of some additional freight.

Some early uses of sail were not all so strictly commercial. Dr. Paul T. Kirby, who, with his wife Lucy operated Emerald Bay Resort during the 1880s, was an avid sailor who treated the resort's guests to excursions in his sloop, the MOLLIE BAWN, or to thrilling rides in his racing yacht, the FLEETA.



The POLARIS, Kjell "Rusty" Rustad's first Tahoe sailboat, was a 24 foot Behr boat built by Nunes Brothers of Sausalito -- shown here at Sunnyside about 1950.

Homer Burton's EDITH BATTY, first of the lake's packet boats, made weekly mail deliveries out of Lake Forest in the 1860s, and could be counted upon to complete the around-the-lake journey in three days -- if the Sierra Zephyrs cooperated.

Fish, Ferguson, Coggins and Smith's IRON DUKE was the most formidable of early sailing vessels of record at the lake, transporting hay from Tahoe City to Bijou, Glenbrook, and other budding settlements along the lakeshore. The sixty foot, two-masted DUKE had a wide beam and could accommodate an amazing 125 tons of the precious animal fodder in a single load.

Casual boaters of the period generally tended to throw caution to the winds, hoisting a piece of canvas above practically anything that would float. Keel-less craft better suited to rowing or paddling were pressed into service as "sailboats", and the results were always disappointing and sometimes tragic. An overabundance of alcohol in the systems of some sailors contributed to several catastrophic marine mishaps which received wide publicity, discouraging further adventure.

The MERCURY, an open-cockpit tempest class sailboat used by Rustad in his early sailing excursions at the lake, was an 18 foot plywood-hulled craft owned by McClatchey.

Increased use of steam power on the lake during the lumbering heyday of the 1870s and 80s also helped bring about a decline of local sailing. (Few residents gave the area much thought as a recreation spot.) By the beginnings of the motorboat era in the 1920s, a belief had sprung up that the capricious winds of the lake were too dangerous to be challenged with impunity.

However, in 1939 a *Tahoe Tattler* interview with Dr. L.G. Kolisch, a summer resident of Carnelian Bay, noted the rebirth of local sailing. Dr. Kolisch, a native of Austria, had imported two boats of the Star class from Balboa Harbor in southern California. The boats were each equipped with half-ton keels and reefing devices which provided the necessary stability for trans-Tahoe sailing. Kolsch declared the lake "ideal" for yacht racing, having by that time already spent two years experimenting with uncertain winds.

The sight of Kolisch's sleek hulls gliding along over the lake was apparently too much for other local "old salts" to observe idly. In 1949 a retired Norwegian sea captain named Kjell "Rusty" Rustad, then in the process of developing Granlibakken, effectively launched the modern era of local sailboating on Tahoe's west shore. Using a borrowed 18-foot, open cockpit Tempest class belonging to McClatchey, Rustad became convinced of the lake's "sailability", and he soon took delivery on a 24-foot Behr boat manufactured by the Nunes Brothers of Sausalito.

The launching of the POLARIS, as this boat was christened, was a gala occassion, appropriately celebrated with flowing champagne and waving flags. Before too many years had passed, the boat's hull, which was of vertical-grain douglas fir, succumbed to dry rot due to inadequate venting, but Rustad soon replaced her with another sleek hull, which he dubbed the CHERRY PIT.

Rustad's success encouraged others to try their skill, and the Sunnyside/Tahoe Pines area soon boasted a number of sailboats, mostly of the 20 to 24 foot variety. Bill Briner, now Director of State Parks and Recreation, was active in the early days of local sailboat racing, initially with a 20 foot Clipper class boat and later with a 19 foot Rhodes hull.

Briner's step-father, Ralph Sears, was at that time owner of Sunnyside, and, as such, had a marine concession which sold Higgins motor boats (and later, at Briner's suggestion, the glass-hulled line of O'Day sailboats). Sears was amiably derogatory in his comments regarding sailors, generally referring to the number as "ragpickers". But he saw his restaurant business thrive as a consequence of the development of sailing which centered itself in his harbor.

Thanks to the enthusiam of Rustad and Briner, the sport continued to gain momentum locally, and by the late 1960s the roster of local sailboat owners had grown to include such names as Charles Crawford (with his 29 Ranger, the SALLY G), Ed Wallis (with his Cal 30, the X-L GREEN SUIT), Les Bartlett with his MARVA LES (still racing), and Paul Mooney, whose Coronado 25 was the first on the lake.

Another sailor of note was Ray Skerry, whose 21 foot Aurora, the BLUE CHIP, was a familiar sight at local races for five or six years before he purchased a 23 foot Ranger, the BEAR PAUSE (the name suggesting a temporary escape from his Big Bear Burgers, at that time located on the highway above Tahoe Boat Company. (The eatery is now known as Fast Eddie's.)

Henry Kaiser entered Tahoe's yachting scene with his 36 foot aluminum hulled catamaran sporting a predictable coat of pink paint.

Henry J. Kaiser's answer to sailboating was this 36 foot catamaran (featuring predictably-pink aluminum pontoons), shown here in front of the Kaiser's rock boathouse in Tahoe Pines (now Fleur du Lac) about 1950.

The ranks of local sailors continued to grow, including such names as Ray Hellman of Reno, who originally sailed a Sabre, Sam Mersames, Trevor Martin, Greg Felich and Dave Fritschi with his BLACK LOTUS.

Sailing on Lake Tahoe is today a pursuit which, while no longer enjoying the status of perilous idiocy, still draws those whose inclinations tend toward the daring. And on any Sunday you can see them, scudding over the bounding main of Tahoe's deep blue, from point to point and home again.

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Our Tahoe Heritage

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

A Gentleman's Gentleman

The recent passing of Brooks Walker, Sr., a summer resident of Tahoe's west shore for over 70 years, saddened a wide circle of friends and associates who remember the gentleman with great fondness. Walker's San Francisco-based business and philanthropic activities are well known, yet a relatively small group is aware of his founder's role in the Tahoe Yacht Club and the development of local recreational boating, or as spokesman for the interests of lakefront property owners - activities to which he brought the same enthusiasm and style he accorded his official duties (among these president of Shasta Forests Company, director of League to Save Lake Tahoe, and trustee of the California Academy of Sciences).

A transplanted Minnesota family, the Walkers found Tahoe in the early 1900's, thrilled to have discovered such an ideal substitute for the abundant water of their former state. In 1915, Walker's father, Clinton Walker, acquired his first Tahoe boat, the DOROTHY. It was behind the wheel and wake of this 25-foot launch (which his family renamed the HESPERUS), that Brooks began his life-long love affair with boating.

By the mid-1930's, newspaper accounts of the Tahoe Yacht Club regattas were already referring to "long-time champion" Brooks Walker, renowned for his victories in the hydroplane category (which with Harry Hush Magee and Lou Fageol he helped pioneer). The PSYCHE, a step hydroplane powered by a Hall-Scott aviation conversion, was a sensation in the early 1920's, attaining speeds in excess of 60 miles-per-hour.

In the 1935 Tahoe Tavern Regatta, then-Rear Commodore Walker entered the PSYCHE II, a 450 horsepower hydro, racing against Edward Letts Oliver's LETTS GO and another contender piloted by Walter McGee.

For pleasure, there was the SARGENT, a Garwood product which featured an enclosed forward cockpit (for the convenience of ladies who preferred to keep their hairdos intact while enjoying a spin). This craft was followed by the PSYCHE III, an early 1950's model Chris Craft Custom Sedan, and the last of Walker's wood-hulled fleet.

Walker was a celebrated early aquaplane rider, and helped initiate a specially featured race of the 1940 regatta. Contestants would be towed from Obexer's to Chambers' on their choice of aquaplane or waterskis. In addition to Walker, who took the trophy, competitors included Carl and Billy Bechdolt of Tahoe City, Pierce Milton of Tahoe Pines, Homewood's John Saunders, and "pros" Roy and Strand Mikkelson, winter Alpine aces who had pioneered the sport of waterskiing at Tahoe three years before.

But Walker's association with Lake Tahoe was not all pleasure. As a lakefront property owner, Brooks occasionally found himself concerned with the issue of lake level, one such instance calling for his appearance in court. Local resident and Walker's long-time friend Tim Sullivan tells the story of Walker's arrival at the Auburn courthouse with an armload of ski poles. Beginning at the rostrum, Walker paced off down the aisle and out the door (periodically leaving a pole behind as a marker) and proceeded down the courthouse steps to a spot somewhat beyond the fountain. This distance, he explained to the court, represented 360 feet, the amount of his real estate which was encroached upon by the artificially-impounded waters of the Tahoe "Reservoir" at its maximum legal limit. After that, said Sullivan, the government didn't bother him any further on the subject.

His activities and affiliations were myriad, benefiting a great many people he never knew. But by those here who knew him, Brooks Walker will be remembered in all that he did as a gentleman's gentleman whose role in history is secure.

Our Tahoe Heritage

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

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Carol Van Etten Collection

Rodeo - At Lake Tahoe?

The Sierraville Rodeo, Nevada County's big summer equestrian event, took place last weekend. This week brings many of the same contestants to Truckee for that community's "horse happening" August 11th and 12th.

Though it has been a full generation since such an event has been staged on Tahoe's north shore, some can still remember the rodeos of Glenbrook and Lake Forest, which brought together crowds of enthusiastic spectators for a day of western style entertainment.

Prior to their use as recreational mounts, horses, of course, played an important early part in bringing white settlers to the basin. The presence of these beasts of burden was essential to logging operations of the 1870s and 1880s, providing the power to skid logs down the canyonsides to wagon or rail transport routes which converged at the lakeshore. However, the local labor force in those days was comprised mostly of woodsmen -- not cowboys, and what little leisure time was available was not given over to equestrian pursuit.

Following the decline of the lumber industry, as Tahoe began to be developed for recreational purposes, horses served the cause of early tourism in several capacities. Until the narrow-gauge railroad linking Truckee and Tahoe City was completed in 1900, all transportation between the two towns was by horseback, stage, or wagon.

But once horses ceased to be necessary for transportation, they were adapted for recreation. Amenities provided by many hotels and camps soon included guided trail rides, or at least horses-for-hire.

And rodeo, a popular western spectator sport of the 1890s, had found its way to Glenbrook, a former "hub" of lumbering activity (and more recently transformed by the blossoming of Glenbrook Inn and Ranch). In those early contests, "pro" cowboys (as well as some decidedly "am") drew a crowd from near and far, composed of elegant guests and millhands alike.

When this eastshore community became a virtual ghost town with the relocation of the Bliss family's tangible assets to Tahoe City at the turn of the century, the annual celebration ceased, but the sport's continued popularity, combined with a resurgence of local tourism, sparked several annual "revival" rodeos in Glenbrook four decades later. The first of these, held July 16, 1939 in the meadow near Glenbrook Inn and Ranch, was directed by slow-spoken Johnny Vance, and emceed by local celebrity Major Max Fleishman.

Glenbrook residents Will Bliss and Fay Shannon, organizers of the event, were so delighted with the size of the crowd of "nearly 250", that they scheduled a second roundup for July 30. Attendance of over 350 at this second event was considered to be cause for staging a third no-admission show on August 20, and the result was another sharp rise in attendance, leading the organizers to promise a slate of even bigger and better shows the following summer.

In August of 1940, three rodeos were held in a single week. Camp Chonokis (near South Shore) and Drackert's Stables in Kings Beach joined Glenbrook in hosting a rodeo, the local popularity of the sport having reached its zenith. Pre-publicity for the summer's innaugural event, set for July 14 at Glenbrook, promised a 9-event bill, featuring 25 to 30 professional cowboys on holiday from the regular circuit. The $200 purse, shared by Johnny Vance and Johnny Gardner, both of Glenbrook, was in addition to $123 raised for the local Red Cross.

It was about that same time that Lake Forest became the site of a north shore rodeo. Local resident Mazie Carnell, whose father, Tom Walker, ran a dairy in Lake Forest, remembers the many hours she spent picking up rocks on the rodeo grounds (in those days located uphill across the highway from the old hatchery building at the corner of Lake Forest Road and the main highway, near the cabin with corrals). Mazie recalls that each of the local counties was represented by a queen, and a Rodeo Queen was selected from the group.

World War II temporarily put a stop to such recreation, but the early 1950s saw a rebirth of local rodeo activity, chiefly through the efforts of Bob Skates, who at the time operated a stable on the present site of the Lake Forest Coast Guard station. Skates would invite his broncbusting friends to participate in the various contests, with spectators viewing the action from bales of hay placed around the perimeter of the arena.

Martha Snyder, whose husband Don furnished the lumber necessary to construct the makeshift enclosures, remembers taking her girls (then grammar school age) to the event, dressed in appropriate western garb, down to cowboy boots.

Though rodeos on Lake Tahoe's north shore and at Glenbrook are perhaps never to be revived, today the western outdoor enthusiast can do his spectating at the annual rodeo still held in Truckee -- this year's contest to be staged this weekend at the community park. See you there!