

THE

LADIES OF THE CABIN

by

Lillian Vernon Farr



North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

THE
LADIES OF THE CABIN

by

Lillian Vernon Farr

THE STORY OF
THE GATEKEEPERS' WIVES



The North Carolina Society
Lanes City, N.C.
1882

**Our gratitude to Jennifer Deane of the
'North Tahoe Week' for the typesetting**

**Published By
The North Lake Tahoe Historical Society
Tahoe City, Ca.
1985**

As the gates of the newly completed Federal Dam were spewing out the controversial waters of Lake Tahoe and the Gatemaster was clocking the cubic feet and cataloging lake levels, a warmer and more personal drama was evolving within the log cabin.

In August of 1915, Emma Smith, First Lady, was enjoying the federally instituted luxuries of the high box flush commode, griddle-topped enameled wood stove and the one and only telephone connection from Tahoe City to Truckee. Emma was entertaining the ladies of Tahoe City at her embroidery clutch with rich coffee brewed from freshly ground beans, shipped from San Francisco, home baked apple cake and sweet melon from Fallon, Nevada.

The devotion of Emma's Tahoe City friends can only be dramatized by the advent of the flu epidemic of 1918. As Emma lay dying on a couch in front of the fireplace in March of that year, her husband, Art, and friends carried out Dr. Bernard's prescribed treatment via the government telephone between Truckee and the cabin. In the shed behind the Watson cabin in Tahoe City, Bob Watson constructed Emma's coffin while the women sewed all night, designing the silk liner with its ribbons and lace. On this sad night, the men kept bonfires burning on the gravesite to thaw the ground for the digging of Emma's grave. The next morning, Emma was laid to rest under the pines of 'Trails End' with a loving tribute and service given by her friend, Arthur C. Delbow. Between the passing of Emma in 1918 and the coming of the Second Lady, it is claimed by undisclosed sources that many a lady's step echoed across the threshold of the Smith's lonely cabin, but not one legendary lady left a name to be remembered.

Elvie Paul, the Second Lady, with her husband Leroy and their two children, George and Virginia, (ages four and three) moved into the cabin in 1923 or 1924. Unlike her predecessor, Mrs. Paul was not involved in Tahoe City Society. Her energies were devoted to her family. The dangers of the gate, locks, cranks, and the unpredictable waters swirling through Tahoe's exit were her concerns during the family's short stay. Leroy Paul, graduate engineer of the University of Nevada, finally moved on to a surprising new calling and became a minister in Texas. Stella Watson visited with Elvie in Texas in 1963 and found her very happy with her life there.

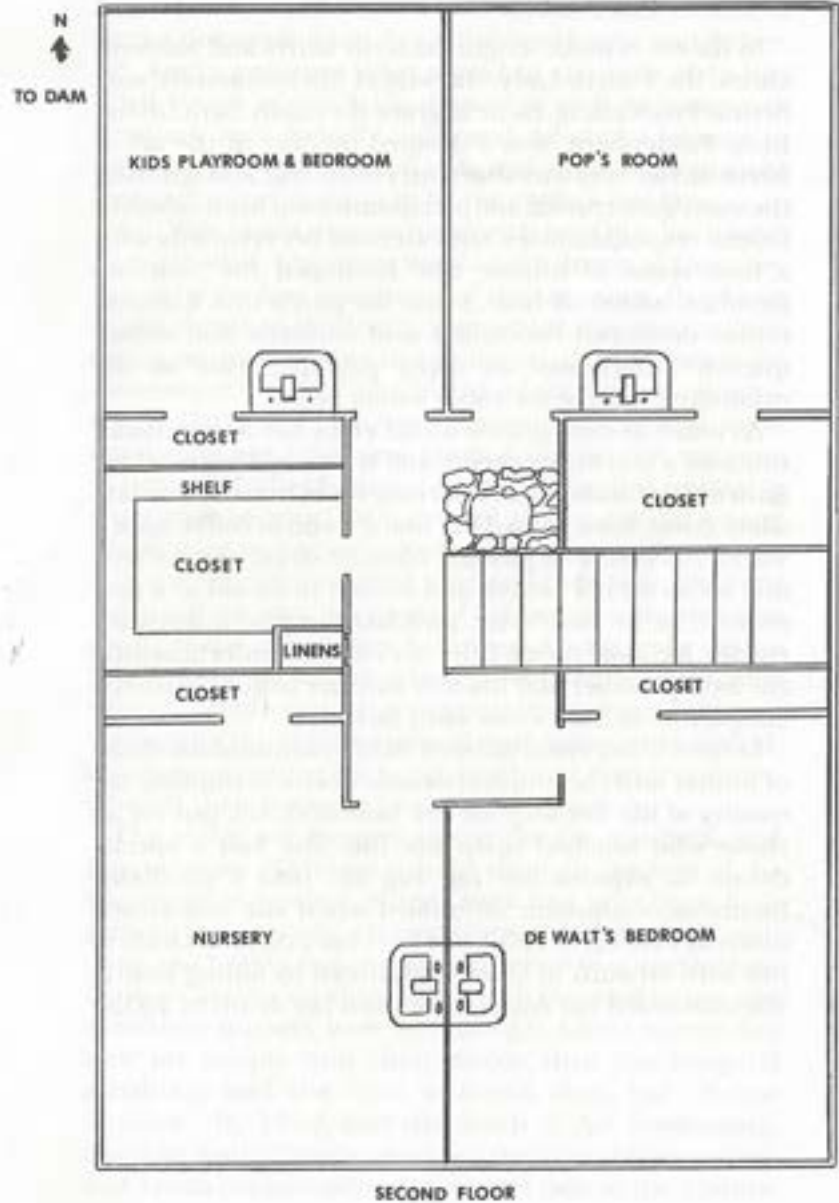
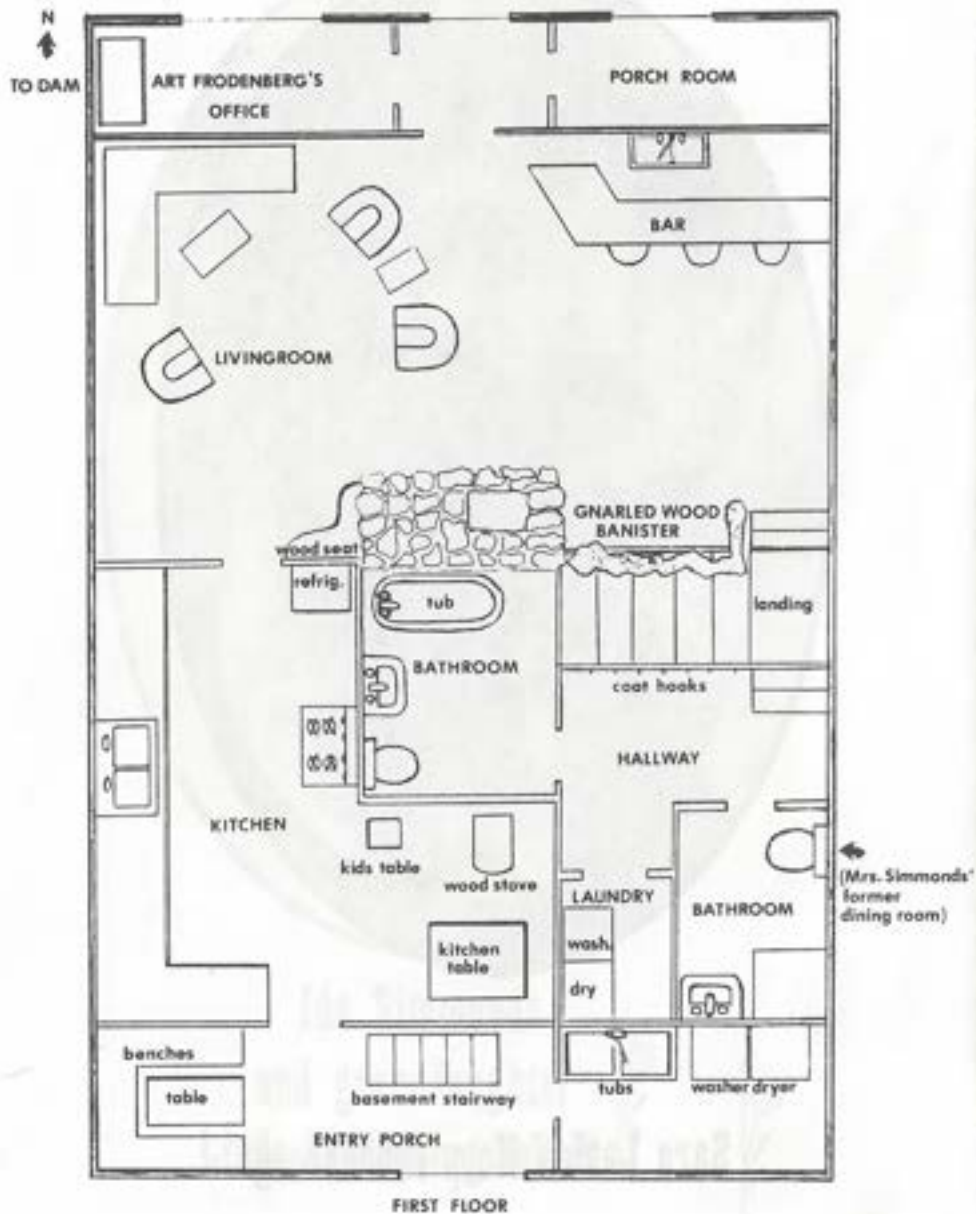
A general feeling of prosperity was in the air as the 1920s hit their stride. The open road was beginning to beckon the American public. A 12.1 mile section of highway between Incline and Glenbrook, completed in August of 1925, was the final link in an improved road around the lake.

1926 was the beginning of the Third Lady's dominion over the cabin. The year also marked the conversion of the narrow gauge railroad to standard and the beginnings of the Southern Pacific Snowball Specials. The gatekeeper's cabin sat between the routes of the Tahoe Tavern sleighs carrying hotel guests up the canyon to play in the snow in what is today known as Granlibakken or East to Dollar Hill. Ida Simmonds, the remarkable wife of W. A. Simmonds, a man dedicated to waterflows, lake levels and weather predictions, was a lady devoted to her neighbors. Licensed as a Swedish masseuse, she moved about the community with loving attention, correcting minor disabilities from sprains to migraines. Ida spent fourteen active years in the cabin, made decorative changes by adding Navajo rugs and leather furnishing. As an active member of the Tahoe Women's Club, she hosted the club meetings, bridge tourneys and most elegant luncheons, using embroidered linens, bouquets of flowers and serving sandwiches made from her own freshly baked breads.


The kitchen was Ida's castle and dinner parties her self expression. Many a pioneer family hustled across the bridge on a crisp holiday evening, warmed their feet at her fireplace and awaited the final basting of her twenty eight pound turkey. Ida's date cookies and fruit breads delighted her men guests and at Halloween she surprised the kiddies with candied apples and marshmallow roasts. Not many remain who can recall her small bonneted figure whisking up Main Street, carrying her brown linen bag, hiding a fruit cake or an herb liniment for a dear friend.

Ida moved from the cabin to Tahoe City with her ailing husband in 1948, leaving the Gatemaster's duties to her son, Art Frodenberg. After the death of W. A. Simmonds, Ida moved home to her little bedroom upstairs in the log cabin. In 1958, the tiny frail Ida refused to be taken to the hospital unless aided by her friend, ambulance driver Harold Farr. She was then carried down the stairs and whisked away to Tahoe Forest Hospital and very soon laid to rest in "Trail's End" cemetery.







**Ida Simmonds
and granddaughter
Linda Frodenberg DeWalt** 



 **Sara Lavina Roop Frodenberg**

In the era of ankle length butterfly skirts and platform shoes, the Fourth Lady, the wife of Ida Simmonds' son, Arthur Frodenberg, came to grace the cabin. Sara Lavina Roop Frodenberg, was a devoted pioneer of the art of survival. Her stay was short but endearing, and ignoring the water gate, cranks, and precipitations of her husband's federal responsibilities, she extended her creativity with a bold sense of humor. She revamped the bedroom facilities, added oil heat, made the porch into a double rental, developed two toilets and showers, and subsequently entertained as many paying guests as the expanding halls of the cabin would bear.

As many as nine guests would enjoy her accommodations on a stormy weekend, and it was not unusual for Sara's little Linda to leave her cosy room to accommodate a late guest. Sara passed out many a cup of coffee, gave a warm welcome to a passing traveler, dried wet mittens and socks on her hearth and tucked in an old or a new roomer, be he bartender, merchant or just a wayward tippler. A classic memo from her letters admits boarding the local plumber and his wife in order to guarantee the completion of Sara's new bath facility.

Letters to her sister showed Sara's monumental sense of humor and the unquestionable desire to improve the quality of life not only for her husband, Art, but for all those who touched upon her life. She had a special dream to expand her rag rug art into a profitable business — a dream unfulfilled when she was struck down by cancer. In 1950, she sent her precious Linda to live with an aunt in Ohio. Undaunted by failing health, she continued her cabin hotel until her death in 1952.

After Sara's death, Linda returned from Ohio. In August, 1952, Geri Bean, a local school teacher, came to lend a domestic hand to motherless Linda and father, Art. Geri's presence filled a void in the little girl's life. Until March of 1953, the days were rich in homework sessions, long friendly talks and delightful lessons in knitting. The red-headed Linda was adjusting and quite unaware of her destiny, to be the cabin's last lady.

In 1955, Linda was reunited with her Ohio boyfriend, Daryl de Walt. She never would have dreamed that they would be the last occupants of the log cabin. Daryl and Linda eloped to Kentucky, then spent one year in Ohio before returning to live in a trailer on the premises of the Gatekeeper's cabin. The births of four sons - Steven, Larry, David and Patrick - between 1956 and 1966 hampered her activities. Linda followed the vigorous pattern of Mother Sara in making the cabin a profitable enterprise in which she catered to her guests, among whom were some cantankerous old roomers.

In the renovation of the kitchen Linda beautified the beam ceiling with hangings of her teapot collection and changed the downstairs bathroom dramatically with a purple shag rug and a golden eggshell ceiling. Bedrooms were redecorated and the major space upstairs became a nursery for the children of local working parents, including those of the Perata, Long, Read, and Baxter families, who left their babes in Linda's loving care.

The coffee pot brewed all day for the mothers, and happy voices of children echoed through the logs of the Watermaster's cabin. Since Linda had only boys, little girls were especially blessed during day nursery, with curls and braids and ribbons and bows to surprise their mothers at the end of the day. As if a rooming house and a fulltime nursery were not enough, Linda spread her love for people and their needs into the hospital auxiliary and the local women's club, the "Tahoe Squaws". By 1960, and the death of Art Frodenberg, Daryl de Walt officially assumed the job of Watermaster, and Linda became officially the last lady of the historic cabin.

In the era of ankle length butterfly skirts and platform shoes, the Fourth Lady, the wife of Ida Simmonds' son, Arthur Frodenberg, came to grace the cabin. Sara Lavina Roop Frodenberg, was a devoted pioneer of the art of survival. Her stay was short but endearing, and ignoring the water gate, cranks, and precipitations of her husband's federal responsibilities, she extended her creativity with a bold sense of humor. She revamped the bedroom facilities, added oil heat, made the porch into a double rental, developed two toilets and showers, and subsequently entertained as many paying guests as the expanding halls of the cabin would bear.

As many as nine guests would enjoy her accommodations on a stormy weekend, and it was not unusual for Sara's little Linda to leave her cosy room to accommodate a late guest. Sara passed out many a cup of coffee, gave a warm welcome to a passing traveler, dried wet mittens and socks on her hearth and tucked in an old or a new roomer, be he bartender, merchant or just a wayward tippler. A classic memo from her letters admits boarding the local plumber and his wife in order to guarantee the completion of Sara's new bath facility.

Letters to her sister showed Sara's monumental sense of humor and the unquestionable desire to improve the quality of life not only for her husband, Art, but for all those who touched upon her life. She had a special dream to expand her rag rug art into a profitable business — a dream unfulfilled when she was struck down by cancer. In 1950, she sent her precious Linda to live with an aunt in Ohio. Undaunted by failing health, she continued her cabin hotel until her death in 1952.

After Sara's death, Linda returned from Ohio. In August, 1952, Geri Bean, a local school teacher, came to lend a domestic hand to motherless Linda and father, Art. Geri's presence filled a void in the little girl's life. Until March of 1953, the days were rich in homework sessions, long friendly talks and delightful lessons in knitting. The red-headed Linda was adjusting and quite unaware of her destiny, to be the cabin's last lady.

In 1955, Linda was reunited with her Ohio boyfriend, Daryl de Walt. She never would have dreamed that they would be the last occupants of the log cabin. Daryl and Linda eloped to Kentucky, then spent one year in Ohio before returning to live in a trailer on the premises of the Gatekeeper's cabin. The births of four sons - Steven, Larry, David and Patrick - between 1956 and 1966 hampered her activities. Linda followed the vigorous pattern of Mother Sara in making the cabin a profitable enterprise in which she catered to her guests, among whom were some cantankerous old roomers.

In the renovation of the kitchen Linda beautified the beam ceiling with hangings of her teapot collection and changed the downstairs bathroom dramatically with a purple shag rug and a golden eggshell ceiling. Bedrooms were redecorated and the major space upstairs became a nursery for the children of local working parents, including those of the Perata, Long, Read, and Baxter families, who left their babes in Linda's loving care.

The coffee pot brewed all day for the mothers, and happy voices of children echoed through the logs of the Watermaster's cabin. Since Linda had only boys, little girls were especially blessed during day nursery, with curls and braids and ribbons and bows to surprise their mothers at the end of the day. As if a rooming house and a fulltime nursery were not enough, Linda spread her love for people and their needs into the hospital auxiliary and the local women's club, the "Tahoe Squaws". By 1960, and the death of Art Frodenberg, Daryl de Walt officially assumed the job of Watermaster, and Linda became officially the last lady of the historic cabin.

The occupancy of the cabin by a resident gatekeeper ended in 1968, terminating De Walt's career, when decisions on control of the lake level were assumed by the Federal Watermaster.

The Gatekeeper's cabin stood vacant, the echos of children's laughter died in the rushing waters through the gates. Dark, paneless windows stared out into the empty days and lonely years until the cabin's total demise by arson fire in 1978. Through the efforts of the North Lake Tahoe Historical Society and many volunteers, the cabin was rebuilt to its original beauty and in 1981 dedicated to become North Lake Tahoe's first museum. It is unique that Linda's first son returned to be married in his childhood home and then endowed the Historical Society with the arrow point collection that he had gathered as a child on the premises.