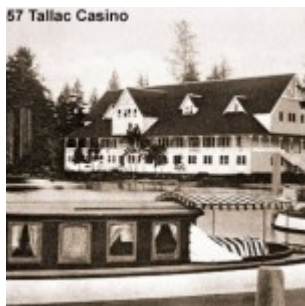


History: Cascade Lake's owners interesting past

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By Marie Walsh

"In 1897, my grandfather's tax bill on 1,300 acres of land, from the middle of Emerald Bay to Baldwin Beach and including Cascade Lake, was \$155. By 1938, it had grown to \$399. And by 1968, it had jumped to \$36,000 – for only half of the original property!



"That pretty well explains what's happened up here at Tahoe, and why it's become prohibitive for me to keep my 730 acres at Cascade in private ownership."

So remarked Harold "Shrimp" Ebright during his talk to an overflow audience at the April 30 meeting of the Lake Tahoe Historical Society.

Ebright, a man who's become somewhat of a living legend at Tahoe, is the familiar owner of Cascade Lake, nature's snow-water basin at Tahoe's southwest end.

Cascade Lake has been privately owned by the Ebright family ever since the 1880s when Shrimp's grandfather, Dr. Charles Brigham, internationally famous San Francisco surgeon, purchased the glacial amphitheater for the fishing it afforded, as well as for its adjacency to his Lake Tahoe frontage.

Originally a Franco-Prussian war doctor, Brigham had migrated

to San Francisco from his native Boston. Soon thereafter, he was acclaimed as the first doctor to perform successfully a complete stomach removal, although the operation itself wasn't perfected until after World War II.

In the spring of 1882, Brigham came to Lake Tahoe and purchased his first property here – a small acreage to the east of Cascade lake. On the bluff where Cascade Stables stands today, he built a large summer home, complete with a steamer landing that was frequented by such celebrities as Mark Twain, John Muir, and the Governor of Nevada.

Over the years Brigham added to his holdings, and by 1892 his property not only included Cascade Lake, but continued over the ridge (present-day Highway 89) to the southeast shore of Emerald Bay, and then south along Tahoe's shoreline to Tallac Meadow where it met with Lucky Baldwin's property.

"You'd be amazed at how much property my grandfather bought for the little amount of money that was spent," Shrimp said.

At the time, of Brigham's death in 1903, his 1,300 acres were inherited by his wife, Alice Babcock. Upon her death in 1934, the estate was acquire by Brigham's two daughters, Alice Wyer and Kate Brigham Ebright, and then subsequently by Kate's two sons Shrimp and the late Charles Ebright.

Shrimp himself was born in San Francisco. As a youngster, he came to Cascade every summer with his family.

"We always stayed a couple of months past the opening date of school, so my mother would always arrange for a tutor to compensate for the missed school days.

"Charles and I never did have the same one twice, though – they couldn't stand us! But, one of our tutors was John Steinbeck. My mother had hired him in 1926 as a caretaker for the winter, as my grandmother's chauffeur for the summer, and as our tutor during the fall.

“Steinbeck wrote his first book, ‘A Cup of Gold,’ while he was at Cascade, but we never saw much of him after that. And he certainly wasn’t much of a worker. When one of our buildings caved in from the snow, all he did was salvage a couple of books out of it.

“My grandfather was kind of a stubborn fella,” continued Shrimp. “I particularly remember the time when the telephone line was supposed to go in atop Cascade Falls. The phone company had come out and informed him of their plans, and he had said ‘fine, but wait ’til I get back from Europe.’ Upon his return, he’d learned from the caretaker that the phone people had already started to put up the lines. He was livid, and he immediately called his lawyer who told him that as long as the lines weren’t in yet, he could take down the poles. Today, those 6×6 redwood poles are still lying there.

“We always had Indians working for us,” Shrimp said. “They also seemed to just always be around, I guess because they usually gravitated to where they were fed. We had a working deal with Celio’s slaughterhouse to buy cuts of meat for those that were around, and one day when my mother asked for ‘30 pounds of Indian meat’ the reply was ‘Madam, we stopped killing Indians 100 years ago.’”

Shrimp mentioned that during the 1930s and ’40s, Cascade Lake was a much-sought-after motion picture locale, particularly because at that time Hollywood’s interest lay in producing wilderness pictures.

He said that Will Rogers made his first movie, “Lightnin,” at Cascade. “To my brother and me, Will was the greatest thing that ever walked – he always had time to ride with us, and take walks with us.”

In 1936, “Rose Marie,” starring Jeannette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy, was filmed at Cascade. And in 1956, the 170-foot-deep glacial lake was the backdrop for “A Place in the Sun”

starring Elizabeth Taylor, Shelley Winters and Montgomery Clift.

Additional aspects of life at Cascade included:

- Fishing at Cascade – “To tell the truth, I’ve never thought of it as a great fishing lake. I know in the old days the guests from Baldwin’s Tallac House used to fish it, and it was quite good. But in my lifetime it’s been spotty as all get out. Some folks have caught 24-inchers, not even 100 feet off shore, but that really doesn’t happen very often. For the most part, the trout that are in there are a rare strain known as Lahontan trout, or local native Tahoe trout, and they tend to be long and skinny. They’re a good fighting fish, but they’re just consistently skinny, even with age.”

- Emerald Bay Road – “When it first went in, it was a real narrow two-lane road. If you ever met another car, there were some real hellish argument over who would go forward, and who would go backwards!”

- His father – “My dad was the sort of man who could get his point across without using any profanity – something I’ve just never been able to do! He was the one who would build the road going into present-day Emerald Bay State Park.”

- The old steamers – “Prior to 1915 everything, including the mail, was delivered by water. Grandfather had built a steamer landing directly in front of his house, and the steamers were always docking at his doorstep. The ‘Tahoe’ had to stay out in relatively deep water, but the others pulled in right alongside the dock with hay, supplies and everything else we needed.”

- Baldwin Meadow Dairy – “At the northernmost end of what’s today the Baldwin Beach parking area, there was once a dairy. It was quite a going concern, and it continued in operation up until 1925, having to employ an old Chinese cowboy and local Indians of the James family.”

- Horse and cattle drives – “In 1955, only 18 years ago, we quit driving horses down the middle of Highway 50. We ended our cattle drive down the highway two years before that.”

Shrimp and his wife continue to spend nine months out of the year at their rustic, lake view home in Cascade Properties. The remaining months are spent at their ranch in Novato, in Marin County.