

# History: Hwy. 50 has been closed on and off through the years

**Publisher's note: *This is reprinted from the July 1975 Lake Tahoe Historical Society newsletter.***

Fred (Fritz) Perry shared his experiences and pictures collected over more than 30 years as "Bug Inspector" at Lake Tahoe at the March LTHS meeting.



His first job as a Plant Quarantine Inspector was a seasonal job at Smith River in 1931, in connection with the opening of a bridge which shut down the last ferry on Highway 101 between San Francisco and Portland.

He came to the Tahoe area at the Truckee station in 1937 and after a session or two of desert living came to the South Shore in May, 1944 when the Agricultural Inspection Station was located generally at the site of the present Union Oil Station at 4102 Lake Tahoe Blvd. (corner of Poplar). The original California-Nevada stateline – the Von Schmidt line as it became known – was in this area. A later survey placed the line at its present location.

The Inspection Station, at the end of a 20 year lease period in Stateline was moved to its Meyers location in May, 1952, when the State purchased five acres for \$3,600 from the Celio family.

Mr. Perry recalled the light traffic of the Forties. (His log for Saturday, April 20, 1945 showed clear weather, first car by at 8:30 a.m., second arrive at 10:20 a.m.). Gas rationing severely restricted summer travel and Highway 50 was closed

over Echo Summit at the first big snow storm. Two men were assigned to road work, picking up rocks falling down, etc., as long as the road was open. One year, the two, particularly anxious to spend Christmas with their families, were elated when the first foot of snow fell about December 20th. One of them, "Dutch", was instructed to plow the highway from Stateline down to the "Y" where the plow was stored; then they could go home. When Dutch passed Globin's, Frank Globin asked him to make a run around the resort and then invited him in for a bit of pre-Christmas cheer. As a result, Dutch forgot to stop at the "Y" and plowed the road all the way up to Twin Bridges. Consequently the men had to stay on duty until after the next snow sometime after January 1st.

1943-33 was the first winter Highway 50 was kept open over the Summit. However, the following year the Army ordered that the State keep Highway 50 open 24 hours a day, or they would keep it open, taking it over as a Military Highway. All snow equipment was then moved to the Truckee area and Highway 50 was closed in the winter until after World War II. Although construction started before the war, the "new" or present route of Highway 50 over Echo was not completed until the close of hostilities.

The Inspection Station endeavored to cooperate with the government agencies during the war years, but had some difficulty with the OPA who were concerned with restricting recreational travel. The log books of the station were always open to the OPA people, but the personnel were not able to testify to the accuracy of their entries. The OPA attempted also to stop cars along the road; however, in a spirit of helpful friendliness the men at the station managed to get the word around that drivers were not obligated to stop for them.

Inspectors were also requested, unless they were too busy, to report to the Board of Equalization occasions when their inspection disclosed more than two bottles of whiskey or more than three packs of cigarettes in a car. Although, ever

anxious to cooperate, the inspectors always seemed to be too busy, as can readily be noted from the April 20, 1945 log entry quoted earlier.

Further entries in Fritz's log book showed the first scheduled Greyhound bus of the year went through the station on June 5, 1945; however, there was no regular bus service until many years later. An entry for August 16, 1945 noted the end of gas rationing.

He recalled the personalized service of the crank-style telephone system of the day. The telephone office located between Camp Richardson and Taylor Creek, was operated by Chick and Doris Ernst who rigged up a signal for the fisherman at Taylor Creek whenever they saw the game warden pass.

Fritz also told of early days at the Stateline casinos including the night he thought the inspection station was on fire when he first saw the red reflection from the Neva Club's new sign – the first neon sign on the South Shore. Anecdotes of his meeting with baseball's famed Ty Cobb and millionaire Max Fleischman were related. One of Mr. Perry's summer assistants was Gene Farmer, now a well known television writer and associate producer of "That's My Mama". Farmer ran away from an orphanage at 15, lied about his age to join the Marines. After the Korean war he worked at the bug station to help pay his way through college, eventually receiving his Ph.D. from Stanford. During that time he also worked for the Perry septic tank service, known as "GERANIUM". Mr. Perry boasts of having the only septic tank truck operator with a Ph.D.

One year the inspectors cared for a doe struck by a car. When she recovered it was too late in the season for her to migrate and she stayed at the station, becoming completely tame. She developed a passion for tobacco and was constantly stealing the inspector's cigarettes. She was given to the Richardsons the following year and remained with their private herd until

they could no longer support the herd. She eventually was hit by a car and killed in front of the lodge.

Although regulation governing plants brought into California have not changed, the inspection of cars been curtailed for economic reasons. Just before he retired, Mr. Perry said he was required to operate seven stations on a 3-day a month basis.