

Fallen Leaf Lake and its people come to life in book

By Linda Fine Conaboy

With each book I read about Lake Tahoe and its early settlers, I am reminded that this lovely region isn't made up of just a few parts: Lake Tahoe, Fallen Leaf Lake, Desolation Wilderness and all the bodies of water there, Glen Alpine Springs, Mt. Tallac, Homewood, Freel Peak, Emerald Bay and so many more intriguing places. It's all intertwined and the early tales let us know that the sum of these parts made, and even now if you look at the whole scheme of things, still makes a perfect whole.

Janet Beales Kaidantzis, in her just-published book "Fallen Leaf: A Lake and its People 1850-1950," presents this beautifully. And she was wise enough to enlist the memories of Bill and Barbara Craven, among others, who, after many years at Fallen Leaf Lake still reside there.

In his forward, Bill Craven says: "Fallen Leaf Lake's happiest years occurred during the one-hundred-year period of this book. For most of that time, the Lake was unknown and sparsely populated. It took great effort to get here; those who made the trip were hardy types who appreciated nature and simple living."

Amen.



Barbara and
Bill Craven
with Janet
Kaidantzis at
the Lake Tahoe
Historical
Society book
signing.
Photo/Tom
Beales

As I read this book, I wondered, how did they do that, those early settlers? And where did they get the pluck, the resolve to make a life there? And best yet, from Kaidantzis' viewpoint, it seems they actually had a good time mucking out a life in some incredibly harsh conditions.

During a recent book signing at Lake Tahoe Museum, I had the good fortune to interview Kaidantzis and the Cravens. Kaidantzis' family goes back five generations to her great-grandpa Arthur Steadman, who helped subdivide a tract of land on the east side of Fallen Leaf Lake in 1925.

"He built a cabin and that cabin has been cherished and passed down from year-to-year," Kaidantzis said. "We go every summer and winter. In the old days we cross-country skied; I was brought up there as a baby."

Kaidantzis said her grandparents met at Fallen Leaf, as did her parents, Tom and Marcia Steadman Beales. Additionally, her father's parents honeymooned at the lake; in the mid-40s, Bill Craven met his future wife, Barbara Granger, at Fallen Leaf.

A book's beginnings

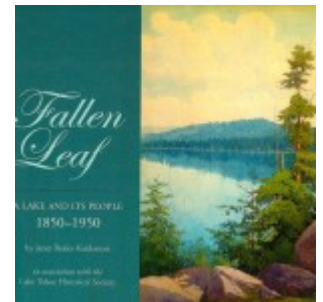
"This book started as a family project," Kaidantzis said. "It started when I wrote an essay for my mom's birthday about our experiences at Fallen Leaf, starting in 1925, and the history

of our cabin.”

That’s all it took. Kaidantzis was hooked; there was more to be said. When she finished the essay and realized all that remained to explore, her enthusiasm and motivation for the project spurred her to write more expansively.

“I wanted to share with a wider audience so I spoke to everyone I knew at Fallen Leaf – the old-timers.” She said the support she received from the Lake Tahoe Historical Society was invaluable as was the information she gleaned from Tahoe Heritage Foundation.

Bill Craven, who was a good knowledge source for the book and the grandson of Bertha and William W. Price, founders of Fallen Leaf Lodge, is an authority on all things Fallen Leaf. It doesn’t hurt that he isn’t stingy with his knowledge. Bill and Barbara managed the lodge from 1972 to 1985.



The book begins with Fallen Leaf Lake’s earliest inhabitants – the Washoe people, who also maintained summer camps at Taylor Creek, Camp Richardson and Glen Alpine Springs. In fact, history shows the Washoe inhabited these areas as many as 10,000 years ago.

Their seasonally adjusted lives continued until just beyond living memory, Kaidantzis reports, which is a good way of saying some of the old-timers at the lake still recall “a small group of Washoe women, children and elderly men camped for the summer in the 1930s between Glen Alpine Creek and the shoreline.”

Fallen Leaf’s vibrant settlers

Bill Craven recalls in the book that his grandparents, William and Bertha Price, employed Washoe women and men at Fallen Leaf Lodge.

From the discovery of Fallen Leaf Lake by Col. John Calhoun Johnson and his Delaware Indian guide, Capt. Falleaf sometime between 1850 and 1858, to the discovery of Glen Alpine Springs by Nathan Gilmore the history is nicely detailed and obviously carefully researched.

Kaidantzis reports in depth on the often-heated rivalry between Lucky Baldwin and Gilmore, a feud lasting until Gilmore's death. She details not only Gilmore's vast influence on the area as well as those of the colorful, if not always honorable, Baldwin and his legacy of wild exploits.

She includes Lucky's daughter, Anita, and her impact on Fallen Leaf, including the rise and fall of her estate on the lake's west shore. Under the provisions of the property's transfer to the U.S. Forest Service, Anita's home and most of the outbuildings comprising the estate were demolished in 1953.

Craven, during my interview, said the Anita Baldwin house, which she named Nid Ji Eh Wa Ri (a Hopi Indian word meaning "House on the Lake"), would have made a memorable museum. If you're up for an easy hike along Fallen Leaf's west side, not far from the lake's dam at Taylor Creek, you'll come across the foundation of Anita's home and one or two of the outbuildings. It's worth the walk, and if you sit for awhile on the old foundation, you may find yourself imagining what life was like for a woman of privilege at Fallen Leaf Lake.

There are chapters on John Steinbeck's sojourn at Fallen Leaf; a nice overview of Glen Alpine Springs; Angora Lakes Resort and the fire lookout at Angora Ridge; Camp Richardson and its founder Alonzo Richardson, as well as several of the other early inhabitants, all of whom made their mark on this area.

Read the book as you would a novel, but watch out, tomorrow

you'll find yourself hiking to Glen Alpine Springs (a tough trek), or at least making the trip on the once oiled, now paved, but always breathtaking road into the lake and its environs.

Oh, and don't forget to visit the little chapel constructed by William Price and described by Kaidantzis in Chapter 10. He named it for the patron saint of wild birds and animals, Saint Francis of the Mountains. It's a fitting place to contemplate Fallen Leaf Lake and the folks who left their marks here.

The book

"Fallen Leaf: A Lake and its People 1850-1950" sells for \$18.50 plus tax and is available at Lake Tahoe Historical Society and Museum. It can also be purchased at the Fallen Leaf store, Angora Lakes Resort store, the Baldwin Museum store at Tallac Estates, the USFS Visitor's Center at Taylor Creek and the LTBMU office in South Lake Tahoe, and online.