

History: How land on the South Shore changes hands

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When Matthew C. Gardner (whose name has been given to Gardnerville, Nevada and to Gardner Mountain and Gardner Street in South Lake Tahoe) was forced into bankruptcy, his railroad and lumbering operations ceased. His land holdings of approximately 600 acres were purchased by Lucky Baldwin for \$400. Some years later, Gardner's daughter, Clara Belle, bought back a small acreage near her family's former pier in the Camp Richardson area for \$3000.



This was then sold in 1899 to William S. Tevis of San Francisco for \$6000. Here, he built a lavish summer home with elaborate gardens which kept twelve gardeners working full time all summer long. Included were rock gardens, pools, fountains, a waterfall, rolling lawns, an arboretum with imported trees and shrubs from all over the world, and a gazebo built of wood from the site.

When the Tevis family fortune declined during World War I, the estate came into the hands of George Pope whose heirs later sold it to the U.S. Forest Service. Although its former elegance is sadly dilapidated, the "Pope Mansion" today is one of the three once lavish summer homes still standing on the southwest shore of Lake Tahoe.

Some of the gardens will remain, though considerably reduced in size. There's a pool filled with lily pads, a few water bugs, and a resident frog family. The rolling lawns are gone, the gravel paths are not too well defined, and most of the

rockwork has either been carried away or has become overgrown over the years.

The young imported trees, the Sequoia, the Asiatic cedar, and the Norwegian Spruce, are now tall and imposing with neighboring shrubs almost obscuring the view of the lake.

The rustic bridge itself is gone, but the little arched stone bridge still leads into the lake side of the gazebo. Occasionally, a stray bit of wind flaps a loose piece of wood on the roof of the little old summerhouse. Step into the gazebo, sit at the weathered splintery table, and if you let your imagination wander, you can almost hear the murmur of voices, the rustle of crisp summer dresses, and the tinkle of fine china and sterling silver as the Tevis family and their guests enjoy their tea while the late afternoon calm descends over that big magnificently blue lake. And, even though you were never there at that time, somehow it seems you can look back and remember – the way it used to be ...