

History: Looking back at time on Tahoe's beaches

Publisher's note: *This is reprinted with permission from the August 1976 Lake Tahoe Historical Society newsletter.*

Several months ago, our newsletter carried a report of Linda Mendizabal's interview with Mrs. Meliba Vallet Meier, whose father was chef at Tallac House some 65 years ago and whose playmate at the time was Gladys Comstock. Since that time we have had correspondence from Velma C. Eden further commenting on the time of which Mrs. Meier spoke. From her letters, we quote:



February 25, 1976

You asked about the 'fabled beach tents'. My personal knowledge of Tallac is from the period September 27, 1900 to late fall 1913, the last year my family lived at Tallac. To my knowledge, there never were any tents on any of the Tallac beaches. However, much as I seem to be a slayer of myths, I hesitate to do so in this case, since there was a lot of going on in the 80's and 90's of which I had no knowledge. I have taken the time to reread some of my father's memories painstakingly written down by my stepmother when he was a very old man. In speaking of the year 1885, he recalls "There was a fine sandy beach at Tallac and below the hotel, but not in sight of it, was creek named Taylor Creek."

This would have been west of the old (original) Tallac House. In Scott's Saga of Lake Tahoe, No. 1 Pg. 154, he mentions a

quote, "Tallac is rustic and comfortable as well as commodious with a white sand beach one-half mile west."

However, on pg. 156 of this same book, Scott mentions that the bathing activities were moved to a beach in front of the Tallac Hotel, a little to the east. This would have been after the Hotel Tallac was built in 1898. This is the beach I remember and not a very good or sunny beach. There was a slightly rickety wooden bathhouse at this beach, and very little used. Why, do you ask, was this beach used instead of the very fine one which I think now is called Baldwin Beach? Alas, the swampy area at the mouth of Taylor Creek was used as the Tallac sewage dump, and this would have influenced the removal of the swimming activities. We should not be too fast to criticize these early arrangements, as the early timers were face with many problems and had to face them any way they could.

It is entirely possible that there may have been some tents at the early beach to the west, but I do not know of them at first hand. Strange to relate, neither my sister nor I learned to swim while we were at Tallac. Our lives seemed to have been full of horseback riding and hiking and shooting. When very little I can remember playing in the sand at the beach. No one taught us to swim. When we moved to Brockway in 1915 we both learned to swim there and my sister, in her Senior year at U of California made first place in diving. I learned to swim well enough to feel very much at home in the water and still swim anytime I get the chance ..."