

History: Remembering summers at the Tallac House

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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:



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I was interested in reading your article about Mrs. Meier in the current issue of your publication. I was Velma Comstock, and my sister was Gladys. We were both born at Tallac, and lived there until the year 1913. Gladys was married to Maillard Bennett, had two daughters, and helped her husband manage Brockway both before and after our father died, and also, in the winter, they lived in Arizona and managed the Arizona Inn in Tucson. Gladys died very early in 1961 of a brain tumor.

I belong to your Society and, in fact, made a talk on the old Tallac about a year or so ago. I am interested in Mrs. Meier's recollections and find them very interesting. However, we have some variations.

My mother was called 'Dell' or 'Delly', not Virginia. Also,

she was a remarkably healthy woman who never seemed to have a cold, an upset stomach, or a headache. However, she was a very private person in the mornings and never appeared in public until the lunch hour when she would be all put away in whatever the fashion of the day was. A breakfast tray would be sent over to her from the hotel. No doubt a young girl would have assumed her to be an invalid. My mother loved the social life and could play poker like a pro. She could bowl and, on occasion on the fourth of July, could take off her silly high heeled shoes and do a sprint in the women's races. No, she was not a sickly woman. However, she was no athlete and did not ride well.

I remember Alice Vallett very well indeed. Alice had studied classical Parisian-type French and this is one of the main reasons that she cared for us. Earlier my father and mother had engaged French women from France who spoke no English and we just had to learn to talk French willy-nilly. (Eventually), as we got older, this was increasingly hard to accomplish, and also we were less inclined to speak a steady diet of French and nothing else. One of our constant companions at this period was the house doctor's young son, Stewart Manson. Also, my cousin Clarisse O'Brien came often to visit. We all rode horseback a great deal, sometimes went to play on the beach, although I do not remember that we were able to swim. I do not remember Alice's sister by the name of Meliba; it seems to me we had some other name for her. I can also remember Alice warning me not to copy the kind of French she spoke to her parents, as it was a patois which I was not supposed to learn.

I can remember my sister and I conceiving the idea of trading muffins and cookies which we snatched from our table to the Indians for pine nuts. My parents did not believe in an allowance so we were figuring out a way to provide ourselves with forbidden luxuries. My mother thought everything to do with the Indians apt to (be) rather dirty, although she was very good to them.

I think there were more roads than Mrs. Meier remembers. Besides the saddle horses, there were several carriages and horses who took people on trips to Cascade Lake, Fallen Leaf Lake, and around to Bijou and Al Tahoe. I often made the same trip that Mrs. Meier remembers with my family from the Pasadena area, by train to Truckee, then by the narrow gauge railroad to Tahoe Tavern, then by boat to Tallac. Usually we came very early in April and the roads (were) not open to Tahoe. However, in the fall of the year, from 1908 on, we would return by car. My father would have someone drive it up from (the) Los Angeles area when the snow was off.

I do not know about the tea being served every day at 4:00 p.m., probably because we would not have been allowed to go to it. The side dining room she refers to was known by the quaint old name of "The Ordinary", which is a kind of New England word for an every day eating room.

Yes, I remember being able to imitate bird calls when young, but I lost the ability when I was older to a great extent. Stewart Manson and I were very fond of hunting birds in the Tallac marshes, a sport which Gladys never cared very much for.

I do not remember a Mr. Brockway at all. We had many visitors to Tallac and no doubt it was one of these she remembers.

I remember the power plant which supplied Tallac with water power electricity. It was located on the outlet of Fallen Leaf Lake, which gave the water quite a drop. There was a huge pipe on a scaffolding which carried it down to the power house. Gladys and I loved to walk on this, which, of course, my mother did not know about. The soda pop was made here by the men who tended the power plant. It was mostly automatic and they had much time on their hands. Also, at this point the water was very fine and pure. Often we would stop there to have a soda as the men were happy to provide us with one each and talk to someone.

I remember when the Valletts left for Castle Hot Springs and we continued to correspond for a time. They sometimes sent us boxes of cactus candy, a luxury which we had never heard of before that time.

When my sister was still very young, somebody gave her a Brownie camera and she loved to take pictures. At an early age she began to keep an album and put in her pictures and any that were given her. I am enclosing two of these pictures from her old album which I still possess. Gladys never lost her interest in photography. One of her very fine pictures adorns E.B. Scott's Saga of Lake Tahoe, No. 1, with a picture by Ansel Adams on the rear dust cover, her on the front. The first time Ansel ever took a back seat to anyone.

Send me back the pictures sometime. I dug them out from Gladys' old album. It was interesting to red Mrs. Meier's recollections. I am a widow and live in Sacramento year round.