

History: Tourist accommodations used to be less inviting

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It was never the most exclusive, the grandest or the most beautiful resort on Lake Tahoe but it had a prime location. The first hotel on the lake was built in 1860, a two and one-half story hewn log building with only eight rooms and saloon. It was the first in a long line of tourist establishments in this area. Writer J. Ross Browne described it as "tolerably good-sized shanty" with an unsavory reputation. It sat in its grove of yellow pine, drawing teamsters, drovers, gold and silver seekers more for its wide open saloon than for its Spartan overnight accommodations.



This hotel came to be known as Lake House as changes in ownership were frequent in the early days. The property was used for farming, cattle, lumbering, shops and other businesses as well as hotel operations in the ensuing years. In 1866 it was bought by Tom Rowland who expanded it, rebuilt the hotel and turned the saloon into a dance hall and casino. This over-the-water Pavilion was opened in August of 1870 with a 'thoroughly wet and highly successful ball' as reported in the Carson City Appeal.

In 1907, Al Sprague purchased the property, including the dance pavilion which had collapsed in the heavy winter of 1889-90. Choosing a site a bit further inland, he built a well-equipped hotel in what was said to be the healthiest spot in the basin. He drew a more stable and genteel clientele than

the original Lake House had, though they were usually neither wealthy nor in need of ostentatious accommodation. Al Sprague dubbed the place Al Tahoe, forever identifying it with himself especially when a post office was established here in 1910.

Fifteen years later the developing complex, including hotel, bungalows, lots and dance hall, was bought by Frank and Esther Globin and called Globin's Al Tahoe. This was the most stable and lasting of the resorts on this site, continuing in operation for over thirty years. It was a comfortable place, homey and not too expensive, the small separate cabins underscored the feeling of being surrounded by nature and the forest. The summer visitor could swim, fish, sail or horseback ride in the daytime and dance in the evening to live music at the over-the-water Chalet.

The Al Tahoe Inn is gone yet the name persists today as a large street, a post office and an area in the middle of the town of South Lake Tahoe. On part of its grounds are Regan and El Dorado Beaches, several businesses and small resorts as well as boat ramps and camping grounds. On what was once Rowland's eight hundred acres, there are now private homes. All traces of Lake House are gone, as are the chalet, the casino and the saloon. Yet is it still being enjoyed by people of modest means. It has remained a truly egalitarian area.