

History: Emerald Bay's beauty keeps radiating

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Translucent green water, sheer cliffs, a spectacular waterfall, pines that march down to the water's edge, Emerald Bay has always drawn visitors to revel in its beauty. Called "the most beautiful inland harbor in the world", this western arm of Lake Tahoe with its abundance of natural attributes also contains the only true island on the lake.



We do not know what the Washoe called it but it was Eagle Bay by the 1860s, so named for the American Eagles that nested on its southern shore. A pretentious villa and wharf were built at the head of the bay in 1863 by millionaire transportation magnate Ben Holladay. The care-taker of this first summer residence was the first person to live there year round.

Painters, tourists, camera enthusiasts and reporters began to spread the fame of this jewel in the Sierra about the time its name was listed on an 1874 map as Emerald Bay. It became a favorite summer resort and excursion destination by 1880. With the completion of the Rim of the Lake road, Emerald Bay could be seen from above, an even more spectacular and moving experience than entering its protected waters. By 1920, there was a permanent resort on its shores with cottages, steamer landing, post office and dance pavilion. Vikingsholm, another villa built near Eagle creek in 1928, is now open to tours and maintained by the NPS.

In 1910, a scheme was proposed that would provide water for Nevada farmers by lowering the level of the lake by almost

five feet. It was feared that this plan, abandoned for many reasons, would have cut Emerald Bay off from the rest of the lake. Over the years, its slopes have been denuded by logging and slashed by massive slides. It has frozen over and has been the site of more than one wrecked boat. It now draws more tourists each day than the roads or parking lots can handle. In spite of it all, Emerald Bay will always remain the most dramatic and scenic spot in an area of spectacular beauty.