

Tallac Site – Tahoe from more than a century ago



The kitchen at the Pope estate, left, was separate from the main house for fear of fire. This was customary during that era. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

CAMP RICHARDSON – Do you have what it takes to work for the wealthy on a seasonal basis along the shore of Lake Tahoe?

A new tour this summer at the Tallac Historic Site is designed to give visitors a glimpse into what it was like to be part of the hired help at the estates.

“The Servant’s Tour is from the perspective of the servants. They act like you are there for a job,” Tami Africa, who works for the U.S. Forest Service at the Tallac Site, told *Lake Tahoe News*. She said visitors find out what was expected of

people who worked for the Popes.



Pets in 1880 came via these carriers.

While it's the maid or butler who gives the tour of the Pope estate, other servants at the time would have included a nanny, tutor, cooks, gardeners, blacksmith, seamstress and others.

The Pope, Baldwin and Heller estates make up the Tallac Historic Site on the South Shore near Camp Richardson. The 150 acres have been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1986.

While the site is open year-round to meander through, the buildings are only open seasonally.

These sprawling lakefront compounds were summer homes for wealthy San Franciscans in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

At one time Lucky Baldwin, who was the first president of the Pacific Stock Exchange, had 8,000 acres on the South Shore. He also owned more than 50,000 acres in Southern California.

He came into the Tahoe property in 1880, and developed what was there into a resort that included a hotel and outbuildings

that could house 250 people. Remnants of the tennis court still exist. And long before men with the name of Harrah and Gross built casinos in Stateline, Baldwin has his own in Tahoe – in California.

What is now the museum at the Baldwin property was the home Dextra Baldwin, granddaughter of Lucky Baldwin, had built in 1920 when she was 19. Her bedroom has been turned into a gift shop. Another room is devoted to the Washoe Indians who before the wealthy arrived called the shore of Lake Tahoe their home.



The main house on the Baldwin estate.

But even the expanse of the kitchen and what are now antiques prove these were people with money who could afford a 5,000-square-foot home.

The Pope house remains more like it would have been nearly a century ago. (Tours are available.) George Tallant built it in 1894, with George Pope acquiring it in 1923. It is the largest of the three estates. The main house is also more ornate than the others.

Walter Heller built Valhalla in 1924. Today it is better known as the Grand Hall – which is used for weddings and other events that Tahoe Tallac Association puts on.

The TTA also uses the old boathouse on the property as a theater for summer performances.

Today the U.S. Forest Service owns the Tallac Historic Site. A cadre of volunteers keeps it running and helps maintain the grounds.

—

Things to know:

- Baldwin Museum is open daily through Sept. 2 from 10am-4pm, then Thursday-Sunday from Sept. 5-Oct. 6 from noon-4pm.
- Pope tours run daily through Sept. 2 except Wednesdays. Times are 11am, 1pm and 2:30pm. Cost is \$8 for adults and \$3 for children.
- Servant's Tour is weekends at 3pm and Wednesdays at 11am and 2:30pm until Sept. 1. Cost is \$5.
- The Tallac Site is $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of the Y in South Lake Tahoe on Highway 89.