

RESOURCE INVENTORY

HISTORY

Washoe Meadows State Park

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by

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INTRODUCTION

In-depth research was accomplished on this unit to understand the land use patterns and flow of history. In divisional files may be found extensive notes, deeds, and title chains. Only the general outline is found herein. One is directed to the file for specifics.

HISTORY

Regional History

The Washoe were the Native American people who lived in the area prior to the Euroamerican immigrants. John Fremont discovered Lake Tahoe February 14, 1844, while Dan Murphy and five others of the Stephens-Murphy-Townsend immigrant party went through the area in November of 1844 on their way to Sutter's Fort in the Sacramento Valley (Cultural and Historical Committee, 1971:1-5).

Since the mid-1800s, the lake was a summer recreation area for wealthy Californians, mainly from San Francisco and the Sacramento Valley. After World War II, however, with a more affluent society, many other economic classes of people went to the lake for recreational activities (ibid.). To these Californians, Nevadans should be added, especially during the second Comstock strike of the 1870s and 1880s when one considers the recreational use of the lake in the 1800s. Comparing county deed records and information in Scott's (1957; 1973) publications, people like Dr. Paul and Lucy Kirby from Nevada (Scott says Carson City; the deeds indicate Virginia City) may be added to the wealthy Californians.

Also, there were people who lived at the lake who were not rich (e.g., Richard Barter, the "Hermit of Emerald Bay" -- cf. Scott, 1957:121-126). And, there were other folk who provided services to workers and travellers through the area, like Ephraim "Yank" Clement, who moved his business in 1873 from present-day Meyers eight miles north to Lake Tahoe (Scott, 1957:151).

Besides recreation and the commercial exploitation of fish (e.g., see Scott, 1957:105), the massive exploitation of timber throughout the area was an important economic activity, especially in the 1870s and 1880s, to provide lumber for the Comstock mining activities and the related human needs. There were four major logging companies in the area from 1861 to 1898 (Cultural and Historical Committee, 1971:13-14). The Carson and Tahoe Lumber and Fluming Company operated on the east, south, and west shores of Lake Tahoe and Lake Valley (*ibid.*). The Sierra Nevada Wood and Lumber Company operated in the north and northeast area of Lake Tahoe, while the Donner Lumber and Boom Company exploited the northwest area of the lake. The Pacific Wood, Lumber, and Flume Company operated in the Carson range north of the basin. By the end of the Comstock's success, 1888, most of the prime, accessible trees had been logged (Cultural and Historical Committee, 1971:14).

One thing seems clear about the Euroamerican historical period at Lake Tahoe. The one great, continuous land use of the area has been and still is recreation.

History of the Washoe Meadows State Park Area

Early Lake Valley Euroamerican Settlement

Early Euroamerican economic and settlement activities in the area can be traced to the 1850s. Martin Smith built a so-called trading post in upper Lake Valley in 1851. Several people built additional log cabins in the valley after a couple articles appeared in the Placerville Herald in 1853 alleging gold strikes in the area. With the Marlette-Day Sierra wagon road route surveyed across Johnson Pass into Lake Valley (1856), there was a certain official recognition of the trans-Sierra route into Lake Valley. In 1856, Martin Smith became partners with Jim Muir, rebuilding the Martin station, which had burnt in July 1855. On a larger scale than the first station, it consisted of several buildings, corral, and stable. In April 1858, Muir sold his interest to George N. Douglass. And, in 1859, Smith and Douglass sold to Ephraim ("Yank") Clement, a name well known in the area today. "Yank's Station" became the name in common usage of the day. And, it was recognized as an excellent station with all the attributes of a "flourishing settlement". The station was assured of immediate economic success with the occurrence in 1859 of Nevada's Comstock Bonanza (Scott, 1957:191-192).

Lake Valley's Continued 19th Century Economic Growth

When the Central Pacific Railroad was completed through present-day Reno (then Lake Station) in 1868, the use declined of the Johnson Pass road through Lake Valley (op. cit.:195 and 373). Nevertheless, George Henry Dudley Meyers bought Yank's Station from Ephraim and Lydia Clement June 27, 1873, in time

for the Second Comstock Bonanza (op. cit.:195; Caughey, 1970:208). Thus, it would seem that Yank's Station, in present-day Meyers, experienced a repeat of history by being sold a second time during the same year as the start of a Comstock Bonanza..

Many of the early family names are still known to local folk (e.g., Celio, Patterson), but the present-day automobile traveler would be more familiar with the names of (George) Meyers, (Samuel) Kyburz, or (Cesare) Forni. One passes through towns with the names of the first two families and by Forni Road in Placerville while traveling along U.S. Route 50. Meyers, Kyburz, and Forni, along with several other people, had owned the land, at one time or another, which is the area of the state park. Often, however, the familiarly named families owned property in Lake Valley before they bought land consisting of the department's present property.

Carlo G. Celio, for example, a native of Switzerland, was listed as a milkman in Lake Valley in 1866, although he allegedly did not "settle" in the valley until 1873 (Scott, 1957:196 and footnote 23; 1973:3). Celio was, however, a dairyman with his business in Placerville as early as the 1850s, and eventually used Lake Valley for summer pasturage in the 19th century. While Carlo Celio was active in the valley quite early, including owning land there, he did not actually buy any property in the area of the present park until 1903 when George Meyers sold to Celio. Ultimately, the Celio's owned 2,600 acres in the valley, and their butter and beef were well known in California and Nevada; also, their timber helped build South Lake Tahoe resorts and summer cabins (Scott, 1973:7).

While Meyers was doing well at the old Yank's Station with the rebirth of traffic along the wagon road due to the Second Comstock Bonanza, the area of the department's property was directly affected by lumbering to supply the wood needed by the Nevada mines and buildings (cf. Chain of Titles, on file with Cultural Heritage, Dept. of Parks and Recreation; Galloway, 1947). The project's property was originally patented in the 1870s for the most part (cf. Chain of Titles). And, during the 1870s and 1880s, both land and timber rights were sold to the Carson and Tahoe Lumber and Fluming Company or the El Dorado Wood and Flume Company (both companies were related to overlapping partners -- cf. Galloway, 1947:90).

The Carson and Tahoe Lumber and Fluming Company built two railroads into Lake Valley to get the timber out to the mines in Nevada. The first line was a broad gauge which ran from present-day Camp Richardson about four miles into the valley. 250,000 board feet per day were hauled to the lake. A disagreement between the company and the person who built the railroad caused its abandonment. The company then built a narrow gauge line along the eastern and southern edges of the valley, then to Meyers, and beyond to the Upper Truckee River (general area of the park). From here, branches fanned out into the forest (Galloway, 1947:93). During the 1870s and 1880s, the company, under direct management of D. L. Bliss, exploited the timber resources of Lake Valley, employing hundreds of men, and requiring importation of food and supplies from the Sacramento and Carson valleys (op. cit.:97-99). Although mining continued in Nevada into the 20th century, there was not the need for the tremendous supply of wood by the 1890s. Logging camps were abandoned, and the narrow gauge railroad was removed to be installed in 1899 and opened in 1990 between Truckee and Lake Tahoe (op. cit.:101-102). This railroad,

combined with steamers and barges on the lake, provided transportation for the area. This system was operated by the Lake Tahoe Railroad and Transportation Company, which was established in 1893 separate from the Carson and Tahoe Lumber and Fluming Company, although the Bliss family was involved. The latter company became a holding and liquidation company that was finally dissolved in 1947 (Carson and Tahoe Lumber and Fluming Company Archives).

After the furious activity of lumbering and cattle and dairy activities to supply the Comstock mines in Nevada, Lake Valley generally settled into a quiet way of life in the 20th century. Cattle raising and dairying were typical through World War II. In the 1950s, recreational activities started to become more important to the area, especially as such activities developed in the South Lake Tahoe area. And, from the 1960s to the present, residential developments became more prominent in the valley (Cola, 1985).

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