

History: S.S. Tahoe made substantial contribution to lake's maritime lore

Publisher's note: *This is reprinted from the June 1988 Lake Tahoe Historical Society newsletter.*

Her deep penetrating whistle could be heard for miles across the water, echoing against the surrounding mountains. Her arrival was the highlight of the day as she brought visitors, supplies, news, mail and, above all, excitement to each community at whose pier she stopped. She was a lifeline, a connecting link between Glenbrook and Carnelian Bay, Tahoe City and Tallac House, Brockway and Homewood. She was a fixture, as much at home on the lake as the fish in the rivers or the trees on the nearby slopes.



She was not the only steamer on the lake. Before her launching in 1896, there had [been] two small steamers, Governor Blaisdel and Emerald, both launched in the 18060s. The larger Governor Stanford, Niagara, Tod Goodwin, and Meteor, all appeared in the 70s and 80s. They had carried passengers and mail, or they had been workboats, tugs and tow-boats, some fulfilled all three roles. All, except the Meteor were gone by 1896.

When the Tahoe came along, she caught the fancy of residents, guests, travelers, writers and photographers. She was almost twice the length of her predecessors. Her slim hull was as graceful as a deer. Her lavish mahogany, silken tassels and gleaming brass complements her glistening white hull. She was less than wonderful to ride in adverse weather because she rolled uncomfortably. Yet those who rode her often bragged about the experience for years.

She was as reliable as clockwork on her passage around the lake. She called at most of the communities starting for Tahoe Tavern on the west shore at 9:10 every morning and returning there at a predictable 5:00 p.m. She was delayed only once in her forty years of service when a clogged smoke stack prevented operation until repaired several hours later.

In her first quarter century, Captain E.J. Pomin, with a six man crew, guided her on her rounds, followed by Captain Edmund Hunkin for another decade and a half. Around 1910, her boilers were converted from wood to oil to increase her efficiency. Already her days were numbered.

The first automobile roads were being built up to and around the lake at this time making access easier, less expensive and more adventurous. Residents, businessmen and tourists could travel around the lake without the expense or inconvenience of waiting for the steamer. When the Tahoe lost the mail contract to the Marion B, a forty-footer equipped with a gasoline engine, it spelled the end of the era of the steamboat.

The S.S. Tahoe lies today in her natural element, sixty fathoms down in the clear, cold water in the southeast part of the lake. She is still cherished by those who saw her, rode in her or worked on her. She is also remembered by those who wish they had been so privileged.