




*Tallac Hotel and guests. Although the photo caption for this image claims the date as “1886,” E.J. “Lucky” Baldwin built the Tallac Hotel in 1899. It was very modern with indoor plumbing and electricity. It had an intricate system for piped water from Fallen Leaf Lake. The electric lighting “turned night into day.” Fountains arched from pools throughout the gardens and manicured flower beds bordered gravel walkways.*

## Chapter 1: El Dorado County - Lake Tahoe, the High Sierra and vicinity

LAKE TAHOE is located on the eastern side of the central ridge of the Sierra Nevada. According to the observations of the United States geographical surveying corps, under command of Lieut. George M. Wheeler, the altitude of the lake is 6,202 feet above the level of the sea; that of Tahoe City, 6,251, and of Hot Springs, 6,237 feet. The water of the lake being shed from the solid granite and volcanic mountains that compose its boundaries by more than thirty streams, is extremely pure and clear, and when in a state of quietness, one can observe fish and other objects most distinct and perfect to the depth of from thirty to forty feet; it is of blue color and very cold, but never freezes in the winter.

Our attention will be drawn next to the timber supply of the great forests. In this respect the county certainly is not behind any part of the State, if we except the redwood forests



“An opening in the trees, a turn in the road, and Lake Tahoe is before me. Not a ripple on its surface. Surrounded on every side by snow-clad hills, whose sides are covered with pine forests, all of which are reflected as in a mirror, it looks like a painted lake. There is a sense of mystery in its unfathomable depths, a feeling of awe at this volume of water suspended six thousand feet in the air, never varying in its height, never frozen over like neighbouring lakes.”

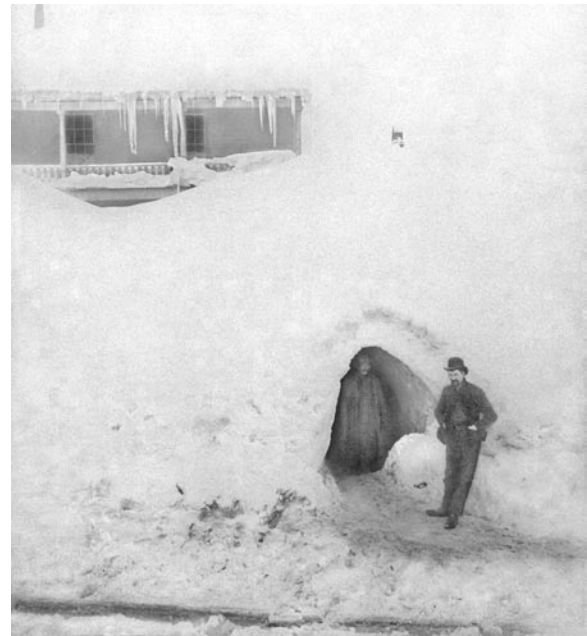
J.G. Player-Frowd, 1872



I had quite a notion I would like to go mining again, and when the excitement broke out over the mountains at Washa, Virginia City and Gold Hill, I went over there the year after the first excitement broke out, and that next winter of 1861-1862. My mining venture did not amount to much. I returned to California and had rather a severe time crossing the mountains, as the snow on the summit was over twenty feet deep. The sleighs ran part of the way, but could not cross the summit, but three of us were footing it. In going from Lake Tahoe to the next station, soon after passing Lake Tahoe Hotel, in crossing a small lake or lagoon, we broke through the ice, and the water took us up to the waist. When we got out, two of us stopped to wring the water out of our clothes, but the third poled right ahead and left me with the other man who soon gave out worrying through the snow, and I could not get him along. He would want to rest about every fifty yards. Finally night came on, and by this time I had to almost carry the man by letting him lean his weight on me by placing his arms over my shoulders. It was not long until I knew that I could not stand the burden much longer, and finally he lay down in the snow, and I knew I could not get him up or even try to

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*A little farther north near Blue Canyon, hotel guests had to tunnel their way in and out like gophers as well.*



Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

of the Coast Range, which monopolize with their product the market of San Francisco. The demands of the miners have practically divested the western half of the county of the timber for the manufacture of lumber, but there is no limit to the supply for fuel anywhere, while the new growth will soon cover the vacant lands with all the timber required for any purpose. Further east, excepting the highest peaks of the Sierra Nevada, the country is covered, with a dense growth of the finest timber in the world. We believe we are safe in saying that El Dorado county has, to-day, not less than 600 square miles of virgin forests. This consists principally of cedar, spruce, fir, several varieties of yellow pine, and the magnificent sugar pine. In the higher altitudes, tamarack is found in large quantities, while an occasional hemlock puts in an appearance.

Along the shores of Lake Bigler, and far back toward the mountain tops, the timber is being rapidly cleared away, to supply the Virginia mines and the Nevada towns in general. What the annual cut in that region is, we are unable to state. It is run into the lake and towed in rafts by steamers to Glenbrook, whence a narrow-gauge railroad has been built to carry it over the mountains.

#### INTERNAL IMPROVEMENTS.

**ROADS.** The old emigrant road entering the State and County by the way of Carson valley; the old Mormon station was considered to be the first trading post this side of the State

line; from here the road crossed the summits of the mountains, then turning around the southern end of Silver Lake, it descended passing between the head waters of the American and Cosumnes rivers, following the divide between these rivers through Sly Park, Pleasant valley, to Diamond Springs, and from there to the low-lands by the way of Mud and Shingle Springs, Clarksville and White Rock Springs into Sacramento county. This old emigrant road, or rather the "emigrant route," traced and recommended in all the guide books, and by the footprints of annual migrations to the State, for eighteen years, passed through El Dorado county from east to west, her entire length, branching off from Grizzly Flat south to Brownsville, Indian Diggings and Fiddletown; from Diamond Springs via Placerville to Coloma, Kelsey's, Spanish Flat, Georgetown, Greenwood, Centreville, Salmon Falls and all points of the northern part of the county; from Mud Springs to Logtown, Saratoga and Dry town; from Clarksville to Folsom.

Hunt, a Mormon sent out from Salt Lake in the spring of 1849, as an advance agent for the Mormons, to explore the Sierra Nevada for a route to be traveled with wagons, started out with fifteen or sixteen men and several wagons and selected the route, which, with slight modifications, was traveled after him by thousands and thousands of immigrants; a very large proportion of their number, for the period of eighteen years,

*North American Hotel on the western summit, Placerville Route, 1860s*



Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Lawrence & Houseworth Collection

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get him to help himself any more. By this time we had just gotten in sight of the lights in a house. He was down in the snow and I was rubbing him with all my might, and if I left him to go for help, I knew he would be dead before I could get back with help. Just at that time I saw a dark object in the road approaching and it proved to be the mail stage, and we dumped him in and I told the driver to go just as fast as he could, so we soon got him to the hotel, but he was entirely unconscious and had been for some time. Some time after getting him to the fire and a lot of stimulants taken inwardly with some smart rubbing on the outside, we brought him to.

When arriving at the summit we could only see smoke coming out of the snow here and there. Even the chimneys did not reach through the snow. People were living down there under the snow and had run tunnels from house to house like a lot of gophers.

Lorenzo Dow Stephens, 1849

