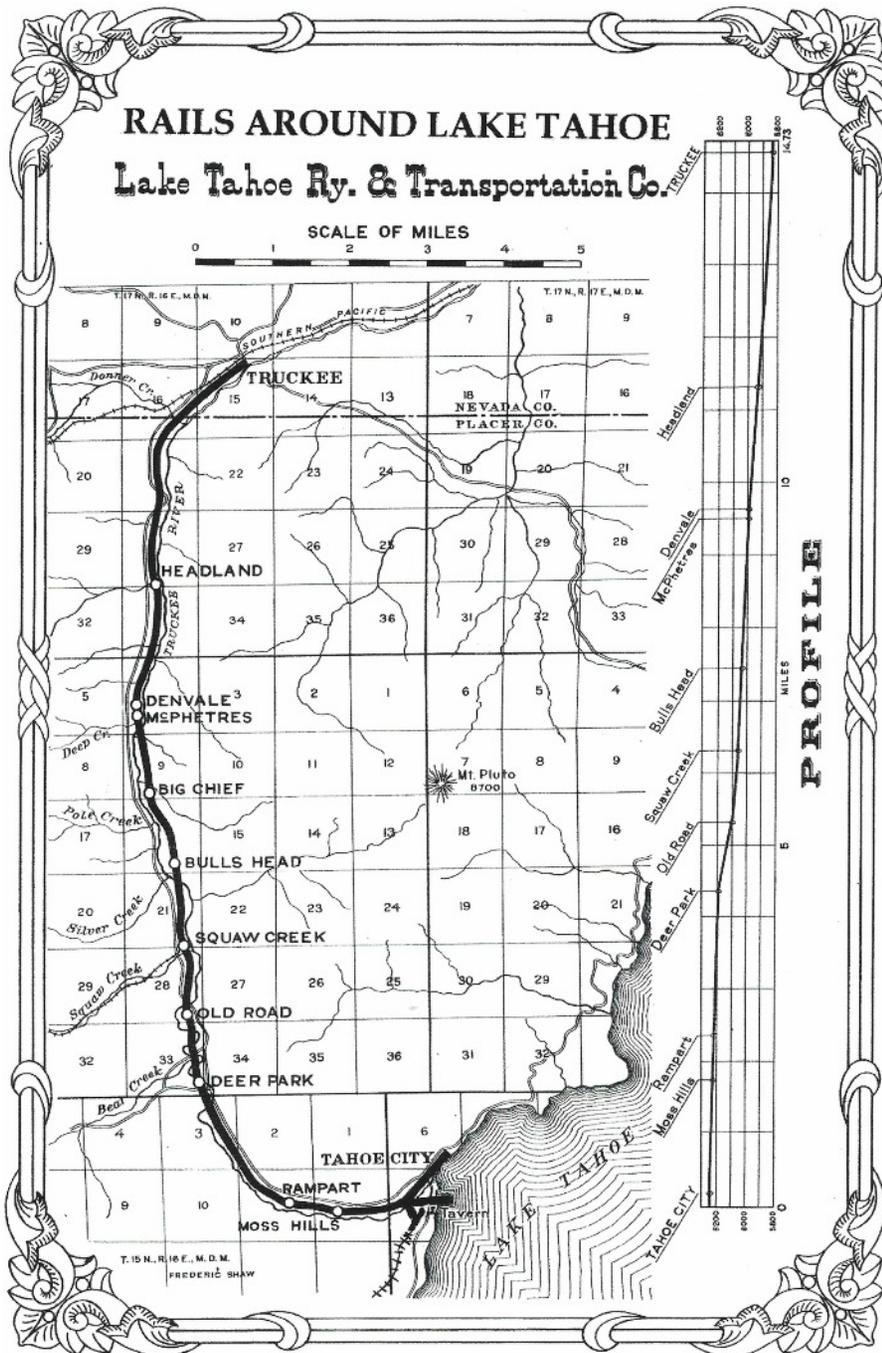


# **How Southern Pacific and Lake Tahoe Railway Saved Lake Tahoe**



**Roger Staab**  
**[psrhs.org](http://psrhs.org)**



**Lake Tahoe Railway  
Route from Tahoe City  
to Truckee**



**Bliss Logging, Steamships & Tourist Railroad**

# Lake Tahoe Railway & Transportation Co.

- 1875 - Duane Bliss – Glenbrook Logging
- 1898 - Bliss Family Moved to Tahoe City
  - Tourism Focus
- Built Tahoe Tavern at the Lake
- Started steamship cruises on Lake Tahoe

# Lake Tahoe Railway & Transportation Co.

## Built a Narrow Gauge Railroad

- Connect Tahoe Tavern with Truckee
- Passengers changed trains at Truckee Depot
- Destination - Tahoe Tavern or Steamship Wharf

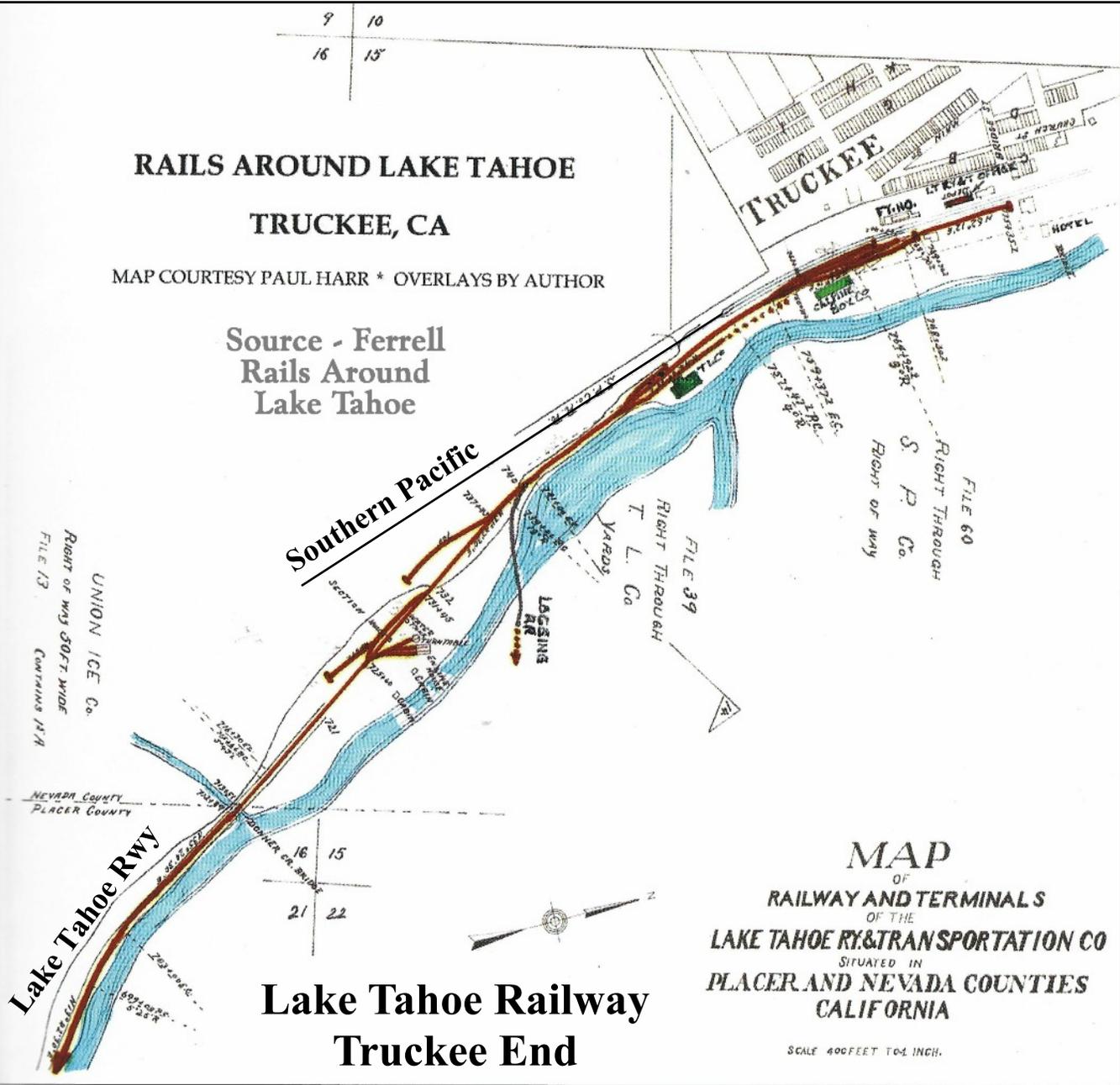
9 10  
16 15

# RAILS AROUND LAKE TAHOE

## TRUCKEE, CA

MAP COURTESY PAUL HARR \* OVERLAYS BY AUTHOR

Source - Ferrell  
Rails Around  
Lake Tahoe



# Lake Tahoe Railway Truckee End

**MAP**  
OF  
**RAILWAY AND TERMINALS**  
OF THE  
**LAKE TAHOE RY & TRANSPORTATION CO**  
SITUATED IN  
**PLACER AND NEVADA COUNTIES**  
**CALIFORNIA**

SCALE 400 FEET TO 1 INCH.



**Lake Tahoe Railway No. 1 at Truckee**



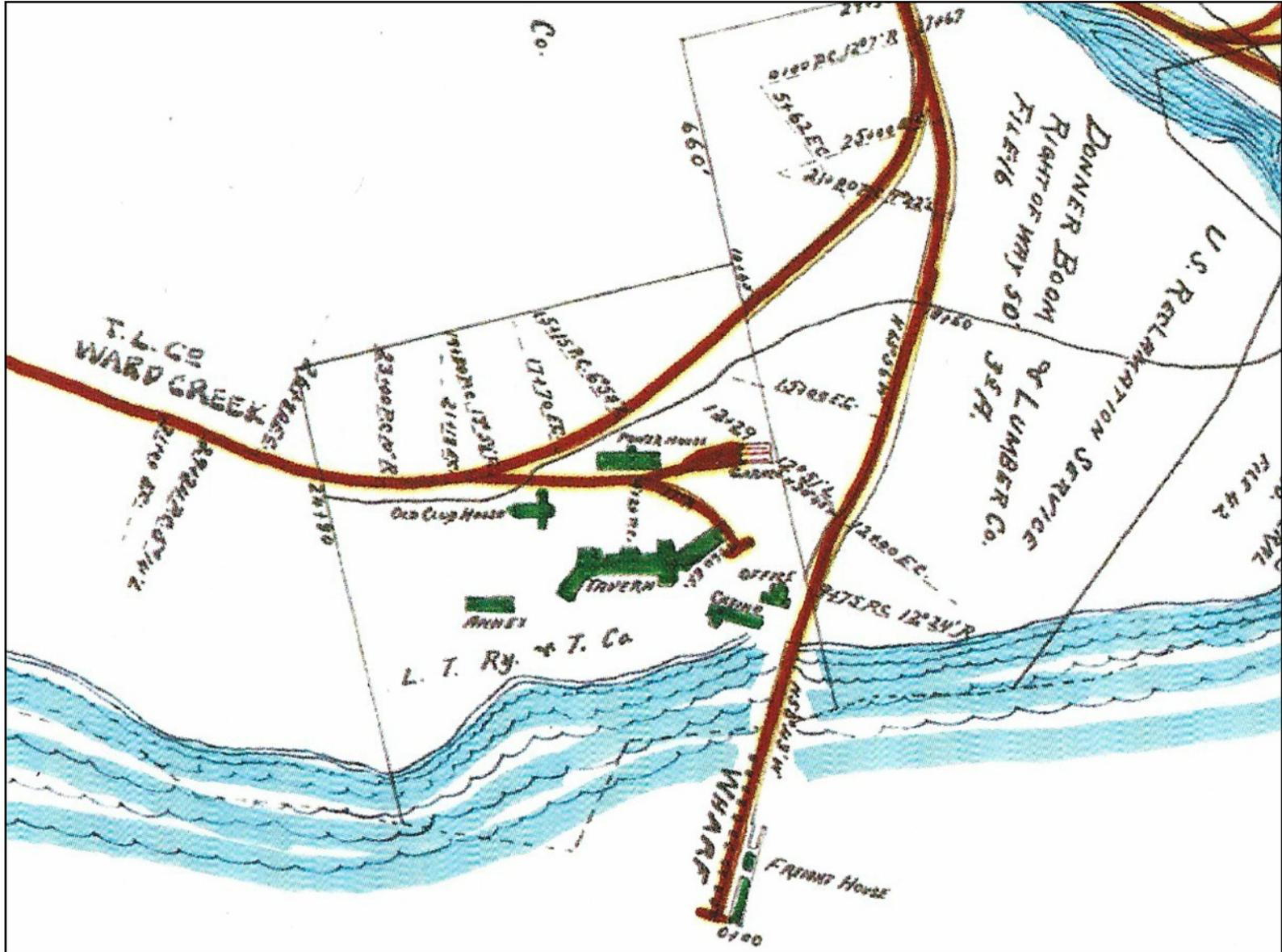
**SP Tracks at left, Lake Tahoe Railway Tracks at right,  
Truckee in Distance**



1374 - Lake Tahoe Train and Truckee River, California.

**Lake Tahoe Railway Along Truckee River  
Note Limited High Water Clearance**





**Tahoe Tavern and Steamship Wharf, Tahoe City**



**Tahoe Tavern Built by Bliss Family in 1901**



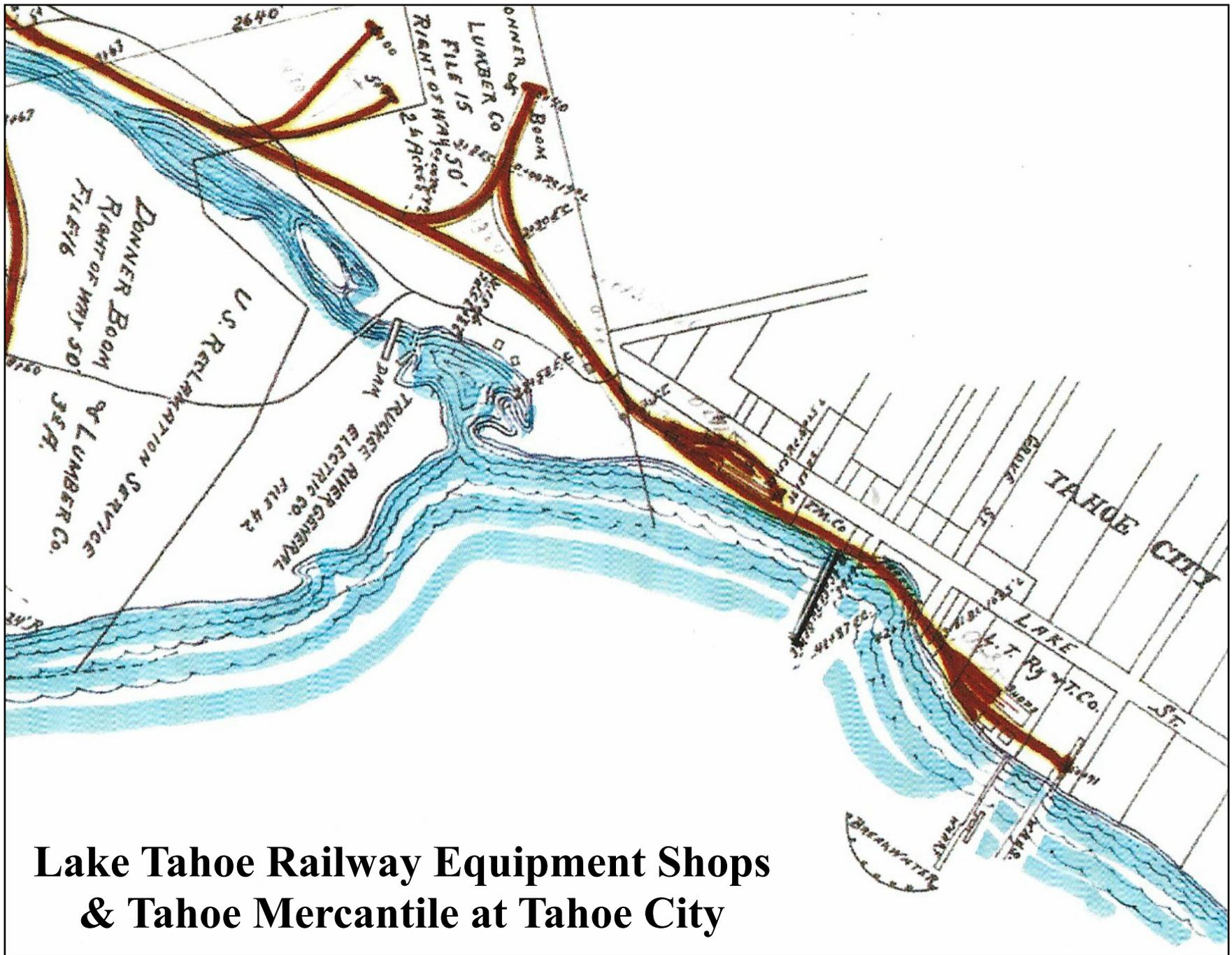
**Lake Tahoe Railway Train on Steamship Wharf near Tahoe Tavern**



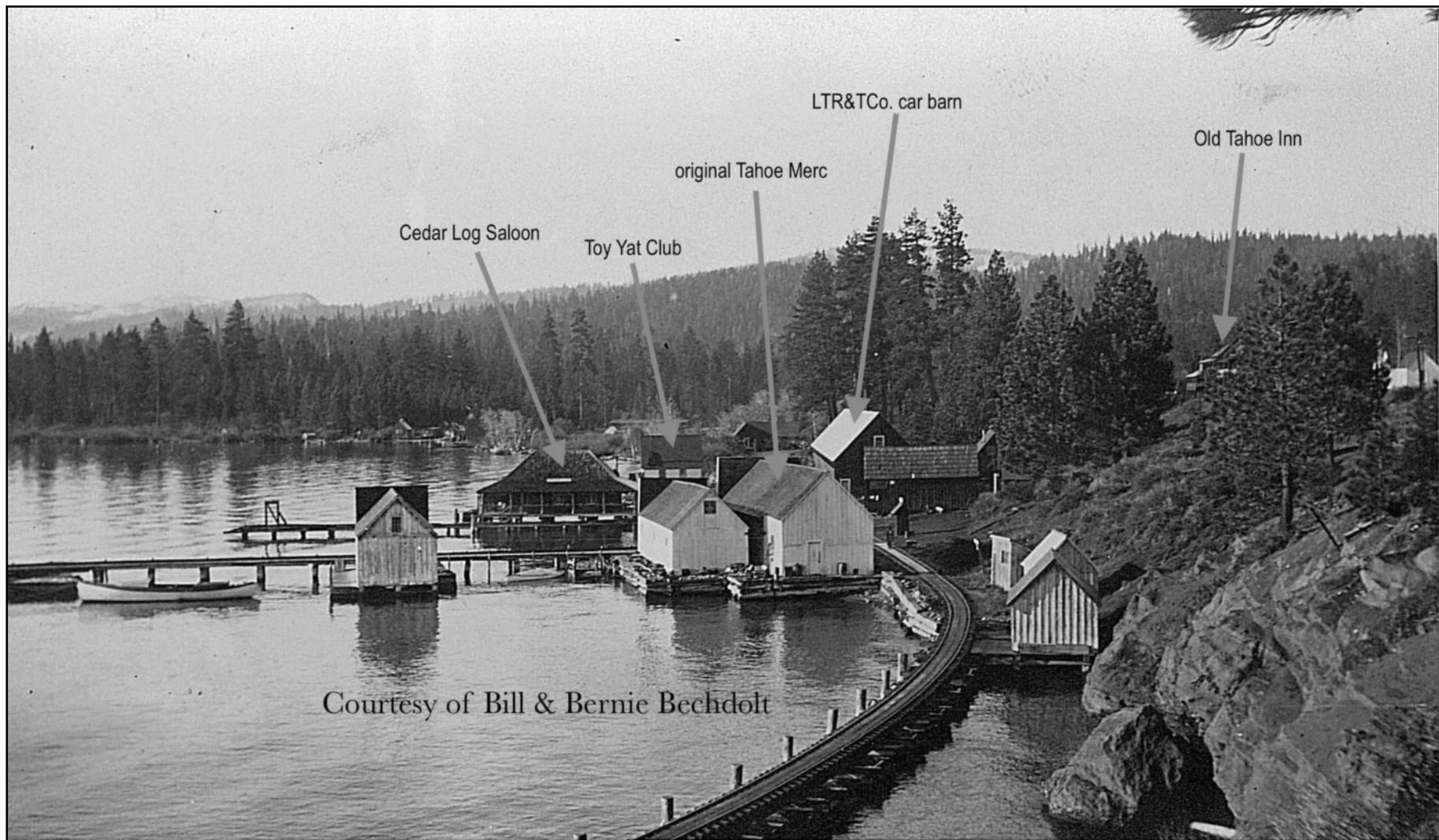
**Waiting for Steamship on Tahoe Tavern Wharf; Casino at Left**



**Visitors Could Choose Train, Steamship, or Stroll to Tahoe Tavern**



**Lake Tahoe Railway Equipment Shops  
& Tahoe Mercantile at Tahoe City**



**Railroad Shops Access Past Tahoe Mercantile  
Track Crossed Water on Causeway**



**Railroad Maintenance Buildings and Repair Shop, Tahoe City**



**Mixed Train Preparing to Depart Tahoe Mercantile for Truckee**

# Tahoe Water Wars

- 1902 - Reclamation Act of 1902
  - Reclaim Land Through Irrigation
- 1903 - US Reclamation Service
  - Approved Truckee-Carson Project  
(Pilot Project – Success Important)
- Irrigate 450,000 acres of Nevada Desert  
Using Truckee & Carson Rivers
- Viewed Lake Tahoe as Irrigation Reservoir

# Tahoe Water Wars

- 1913 - Tahoe Dam rebuild completed
  - raise lake level up to 6 feet
- Additional proposals to enhance irrigation & power generation for wet & dry years
  - Raise dam higher
  - Lower Tahoe natural rim
  - Create “bathtub ring” around lake

# **Tahoe Water Wars**

## **Reclamation's View of Lake Tahoe**

“To the extent that we have a prosperous farming community in Nevada dependent upon increase of the Tahoe storage, the summer resort and pleasure interests at the lake will have to yield.”

Reclamation Service Counsel John Truesdell to all major federal reclamation officials in 1918.

Orsi, Sunset Limited, page 268

# Tahoe Water Wars

The reclamation movement's sense of Manifest Destiny, as stated by a Nevada irrigation official:

“It is my belief that rain and snow water were primarily intended by the Creator to fructify our fields. And since God Almighty in creating the earth, took pains to form the mountains and valleys so as to cause Lake Tahoe to overflow into Nevada, He meant for us to have it, and the attempt by some California residents, to contravene God's design to me looks pitiful in the extreme.”

Orsi, Sunset Limited, page 270

# Tahoe Water Wars

## Conflicts Arise

- 1912 - Attempt to lower lake's natural rim blocked by Bliss & Others

# BATTLE IN COURT FOR TAHOE WATERS

Property Owners Would Enjoin Power Company From Lowering Level.

PLACERVILLE, Sept. 28.—The battle of property owners and residents of Placer and El Dorado counties, to forestall the Truckee River General Electric company in its purpose to use the waters of Lake Tahoe to develop power has culminated in a suit to restrain the company from proceeding with its work.

A complaint has been filed with the County Clerk on behalf of the Western company, a corporation, praying that a restraining order be issued against the Stone & Webster Construction company and the Truckee River General Electric company. The Western Company is a corporation heavily interested through ownership and mortgages in land fronting on Lake Tahoe. William S. Tevis is president of the corporation.

Oakland Tribune  
Sep 28, 1912

The plan of the electric company is to provide a waterway six or more feet deep and 100 feet wide, so that an additional flow of water will find its way down the Truckee river. At the present time the only outlet of Lake Tahoe is the Truckee river. This outlet is five feet deep and ten feet wide. A crew of men, alleged to be in the employ of Stone and Webster Construction company, the Truckee River General Electric Company and the reclamation department of the United States, is at work widening this outlet by the use of dynamite to increase the flow of the Truckee river, from which the electric company is to derive its electric energy.

If the defendants are allowed to proceed with their plans Lake Tahoe will be drained to such an extent that its level will be four feet lower than extreme low water. The effect of this would be to leave a disfiguring shore line varying in width from fifty feet to one-half mile. The money damage that would accrue is set down as \$50,000, and, according to the complain, plaintiff has no adequate remedy at law.

**Truckee River General Electric Co.  
Wanted to Lower Natural Rim to  
Provide More Flow for Downstream  
Power Generation – \*Blocked in  
Court by Bliss & Others\***

# Tahoe Water Wars

## Conflicts Arise

- 1924 - Lake Tahoe Railway objects to pumping – overruled
- 1924 & 1929 - Pumping done in low water years

# Tahoe Water Wars

## 1930 – Another Low Water Year

- Pumping Request Denied
- Steam shovel & crew sent to lower lake rim
- Met at Lake by angry mob and restraining order
- Pumping agreement negotiated

# TAHOE DYNAMITE BLAST IS FOILED

**Pumping Request Denied  
Crews Arrive at Night with  
Steam Shovel to Lower Rim**

**Met by Angry Mob with  
Restraining Order**

**Calmer Heads Prevail &  
Agreement Reached**

**Sacramento Bee  
July 28, 1930**

## **TAHOE RESORT OWNERS USE GUNS, CLUBS**

Nevadans Attempt to Turn Lake  
Into Truckee River

CITIZENS GATHER AT 3 A. M.

Huge **Steam Shovel** Used To  
Plow Through Bank

By STEVE GEORGE  
Staff Correspondent

TAHOE TAVERN, July 27.—  
Open warfare between **Tahoe** re-  
sort owners and residents of west-  
ern Nevada broke out early this  
morning when a call to arms was

# Tahoe Water Wars

## 1935 – Truckee River Agreement

- Max Surface Elevation 6229.1,  
6 ft above natural rim with existing dam
- Natural Rim not to be altered without  
consent of California Attorney General



**Center of Conflict - Dam at Outlet of Lake Feeding Truckee River**



**Outlet of Lake Tahoe Showing Natural Rim**

# Transfer of Lake Tahoe Rwy to SP

(What is commonly reported)

- Bliss Family Profits Off – Competing with Autos
- Train change required in Truckee
- Lake Tahoe Railway didn't have resources to standard gauge the line
- 1925 - Bliss Family Approached SP about Standard Gauging Lake Tahoe Railway
- SP secured Long Term Lease at \$1 per year in return for standard gauging the line

# **Transfer of Lake Tahoe Rwy to SP**

**But Wait a Minute!**

**Did SP's involvement dampen  
the Water Wars issues ???**

**Why did the Bliss family  
“give away” their railroad ???**

# SP Company History with Reclamation Projects

- SP Land Company supported Irrigation
- Saw Problems with small poorly envisioned irrigation districts
- SP Emphasized Science over Wishful Thinking
- Often became “adult in the room” helping projects succeed

# SP Company History with Reclamation Projects

## SP had supported Truckee-Carson Project

- Central control by government likely to succeed
- SP Held Extensive Land Holdings in Nevada
- Irrigation Increased Land Value

# Southern Pacific Helps Save Lake Tahoe

- 1899 – SP proposed Lake Tahoe Nat'l Park
- 1918 – SP began doubting Truckee-Carson Management
- SP worked in background to aid efforts to save Tahoe tourism
- High water flows threatened SP operations in Truckee & canyon

# Southern Pacific Helps Save Lake Tahoe

- Reclamation tried to force  
Lake Tahoe Rwy to rebuild or sell
- SP and Lake Tahoe Rwy hatched plan  
to standard gauge line
- SP Accelerated standard gauging  
to block condemnation actions
- SP Lawyers Now Involved

# Southern Pacific's Tahoe Branch

- 1925 – SP Long-term lease of Lake Tahoe Rwy
- Sep 1925 - Reclamation blocked SP's permit for part of Lake Tahoe Railway
- SP waived claims from Truckee River flooding
- SP accelerated standard gauge conversion
- Jun 1926 - SP completed conversion & purchase
- Promoted Through-Pullman Service  
Oakland to Lake Tahoe (no car change)

# Now . . . Through Pullmans to Lake Tahoe

Southern Pacific Lines' Lake Tahoe Branch will be in operation on and after May 28. The new broad-gauge line, which has just been completed, gives easy access, without change of cars, to this sky-blue sea at the top of the High Sierra.

### To Tahoe Overnight

Your Pullman to Tahoe will leave San Francisco [Ferry] at 6:20 p. m. A delicious dinner in the Southern Pacific dining car, then a night's restful sleep—and you'll awake at Tahoe Tavern station next morning! Similar service returning, with arrival in San Francisco in time to start the day.

Take advantage of this new convenience in planning your vacation trips. Low fares make it easily available to you—only \$13.25 roundtrip to Tahoe Tavern; low summer fare ticket for use any day and good for 16 days. Also season tickets with three months limit. Any Southern Pacific agent will gladly make your Pullman and Tahoe Tavern reservations and secure tickets for you.



### By Day

Starting May 29  
leave 7:40 a. m. daily;  
coaches, lunch car,  
parlor observation  
car. Similar service  
returning.

F. S. McGINNIS,  
Passenger Traffic Manager  
San Francisco

## Southern Pacific Lines

Ferry Station

55 Geary Street

Third Street Station

Phone Downtown 4000

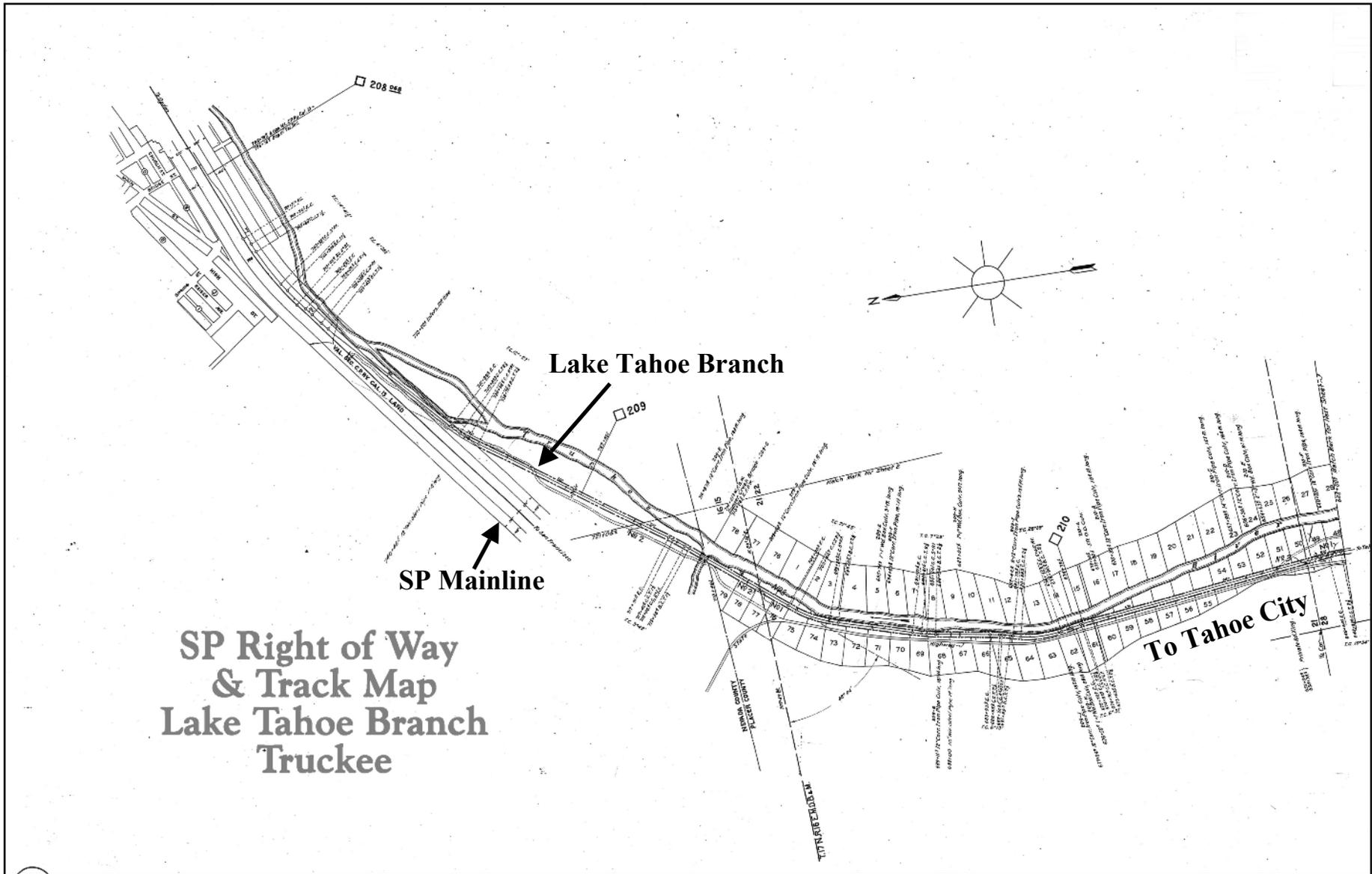
13th and Broadway  
Lakeside 1420

OAKLAND OFFICES:  
1st and Broadway Station  
Oakland 7960

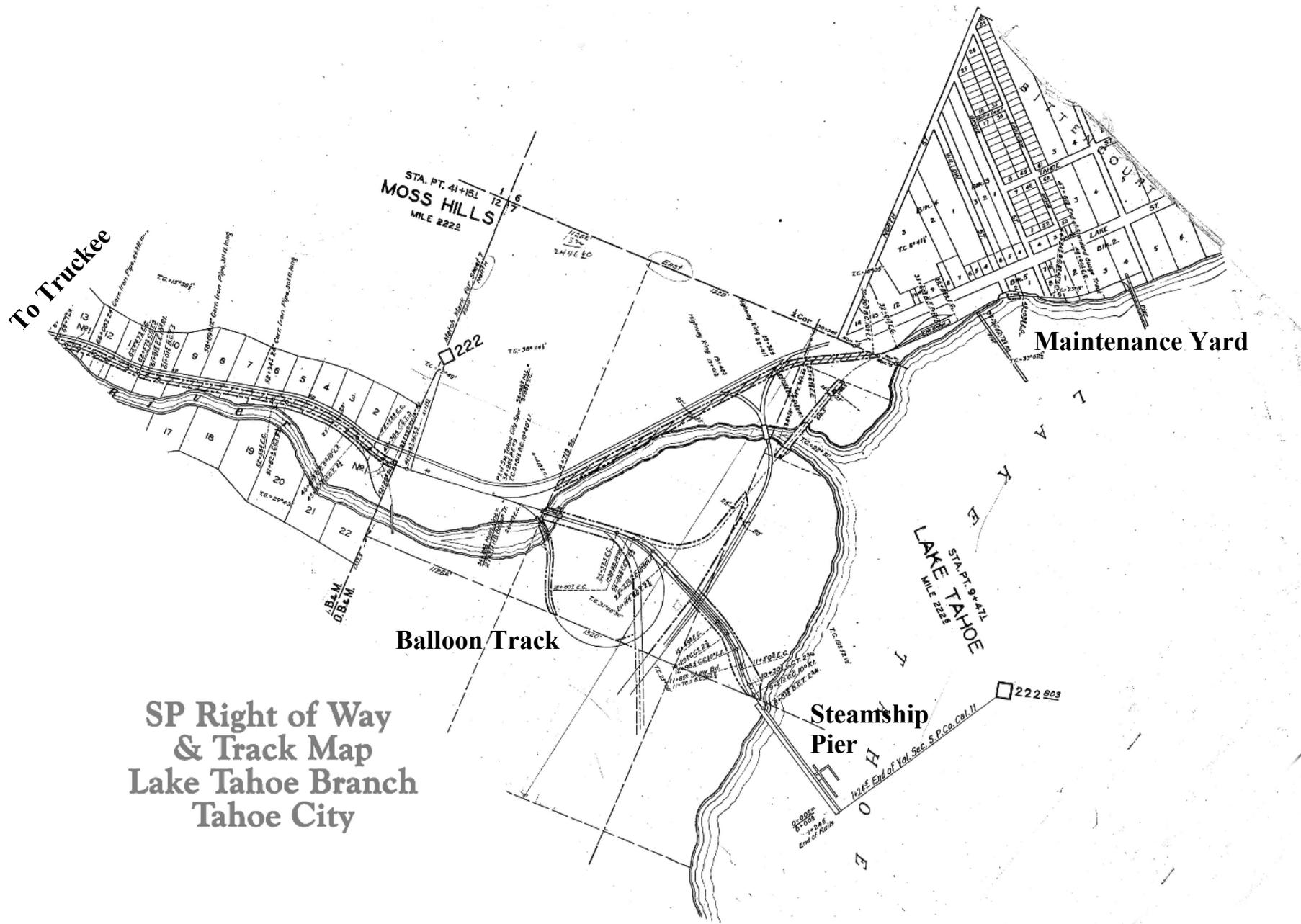
16th Street Station  
Lakeside 1430



SP Ad May 27, 1926  
Thru Pullman Service  
Oakland to Lake Tahoe  
No Car Change Needed



**Truckee - SP Mainline & Lake Tahoe Branch are Standard Gauge**



SP Right of Way  
& Track Map  
Lake Tahoe Branch  
Tahoe City

**SP Lake Tahoe Branch - Tahoe City Facilities**



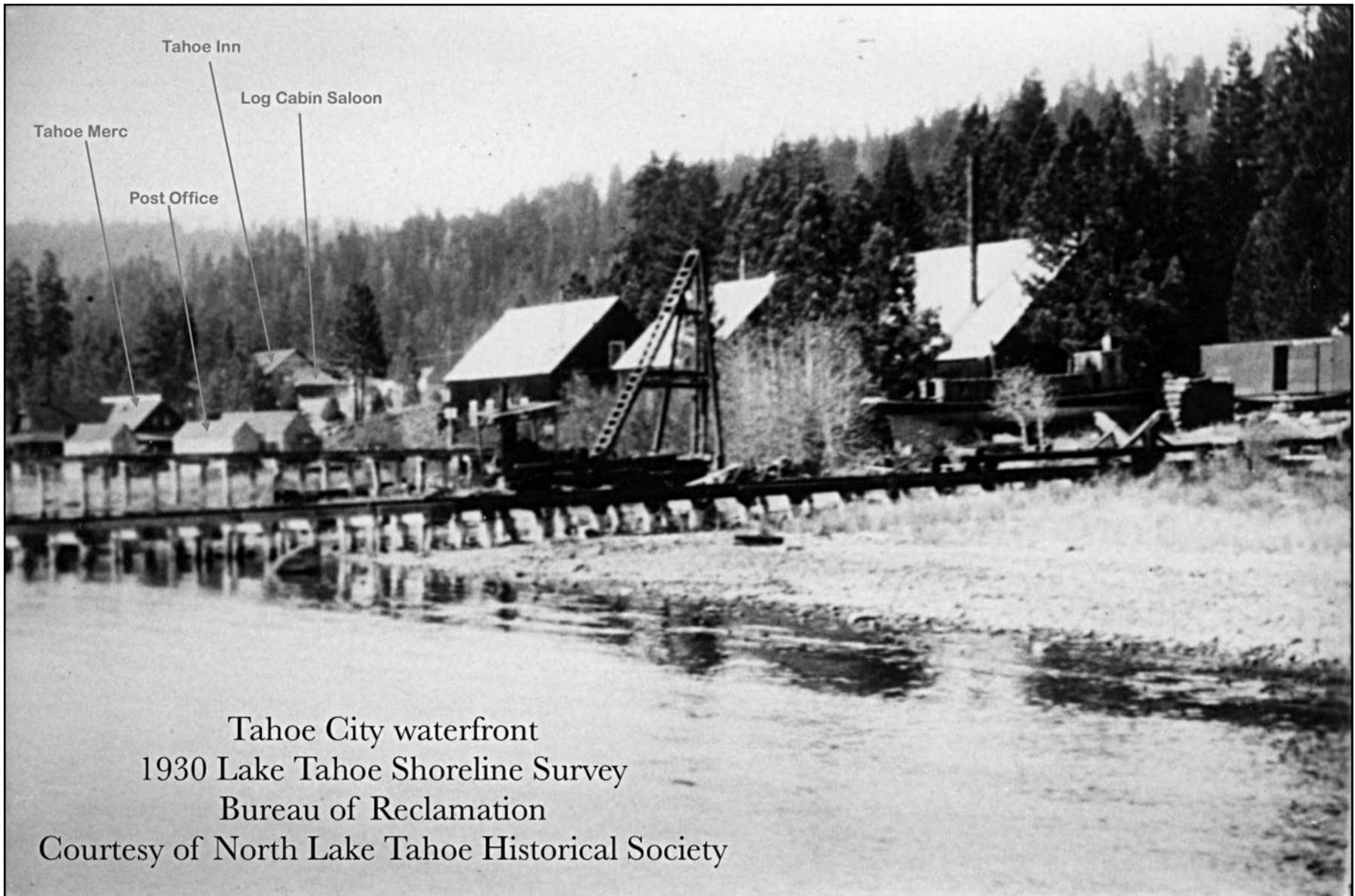
**SP Standard Gauge Train on the Lake Tahoe Branch**



**Standard Gauge Train on the Tahoe Tavern Steamship Wharf  
View is from the Casino Deck**



**Standard Gauge Causeway to Maintenance Buildings**



Tahoe City waterfront  
1930 Lake Tahoe Shoreline Survey  
Bureau of Reclamation

Courtesy of North Lake Tahoe Historical Society

## Maintenance Buildings in 1930

**Southern Pacific Co.  
and  
Lake Tahoe Railway  
DID SAVE  
Lake Tahoe Tourism**

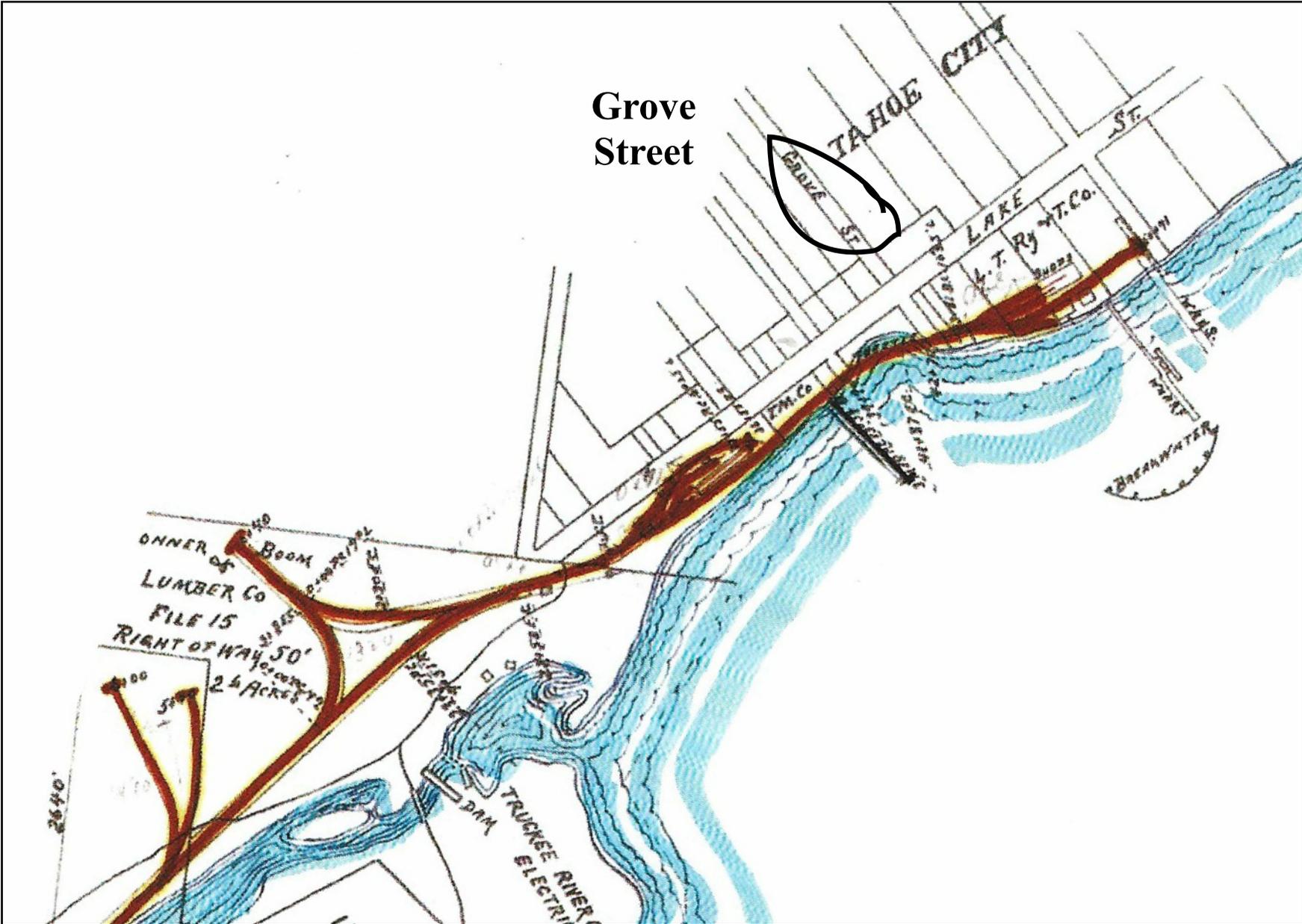


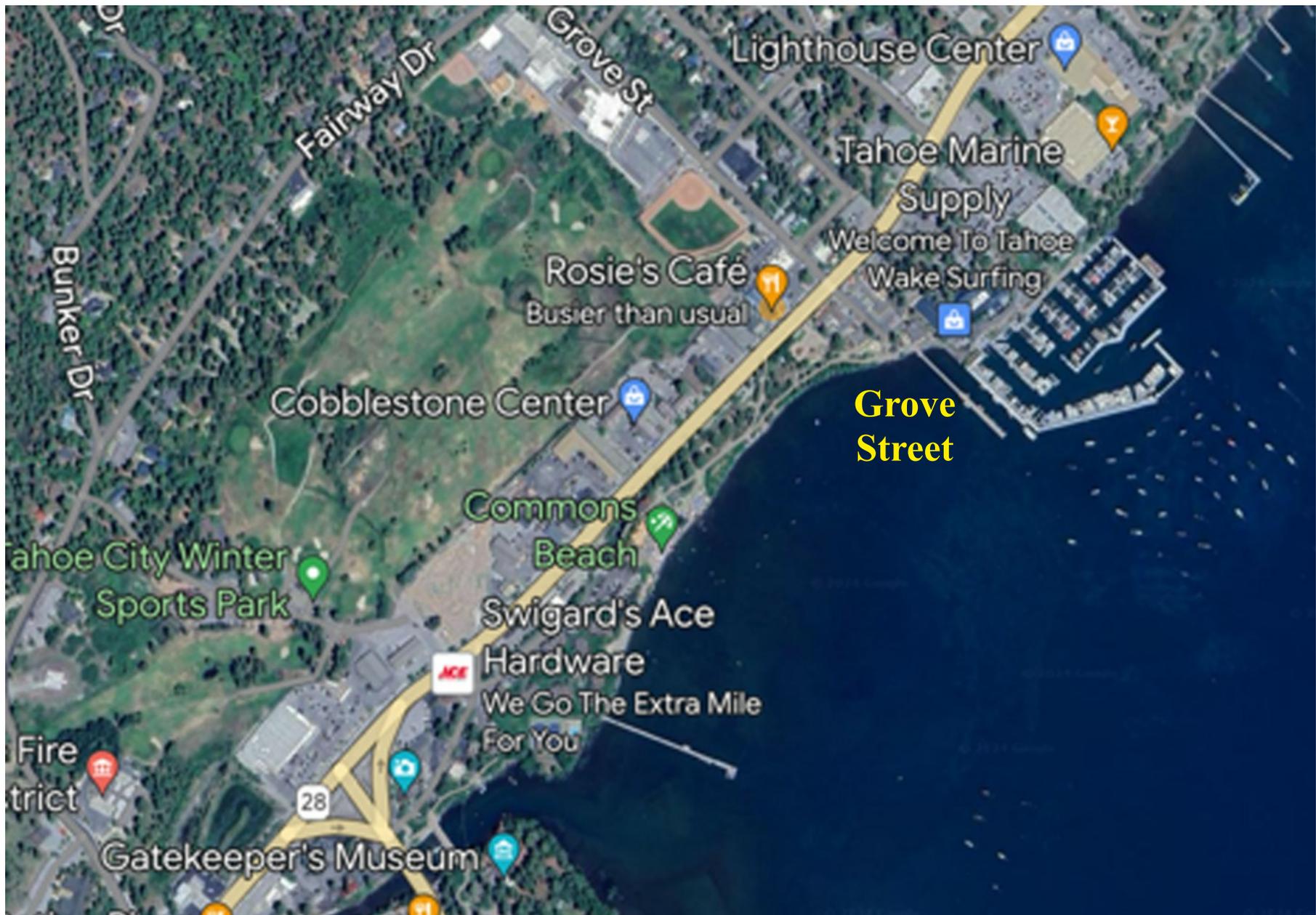
**Roger Staab**  
[psrhs.org](http://psrhs.org)

# References Used

- Herman Darr Collection
- Rails Around Lake Tahoe - Ferrell
- Sunset Limited (Southern Pacific) - Orsi – (major assist by Chuck Spinks)
- Newspaper & Google Searches

Grove Street





**Grove Street**



**Grove Street**

**Southern Pacific Co.  
and  
Lake Tahoe Railway  
DID SAVE  
Lake Tahoe Tourism**



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