



In 1879, a rail route was surveyed southward from the Southern Pacific (original Central Pacific [1869]) railhead at Truckee to Lake Tahoe, but the line was not built for another 20 years, when the Lake Tahoe Railway and Transportation Company was formed primarily to promote tourism but also to transport timber and freight. Construction crews began work in April 1899 and the 16-mile narrow gauge Lake Tahoe Railway was formally opened to Tahoe City (this location) on May 1, 1900. The company already had a fleet of lake steamers, several wharves and a machine shop. Recreational activities at the lake were advertised in Reno and San Francisco and as many as four excursions a day were conducted. The narrow gauge trains ran out on the Tahoe Tavern Pier (visible in this photo), where passengers could board a waiting steamship for a cruise around the lake. The railroad operated under the Lake Tahoe moniker until 1925, when it was leased to the SP, which converted the SP Lake Tahoe Branch to standard gauge in 1926. The SP bought the property outright in 1933 and abandoned the line in 1943.

Southward view of the Tahoe Tavern Pier, which has been rebuilt since the days when trains from Truckee ran over the water to transfer tourists onto steamships. The "Tavern" was built as soon as the railroad arrived and opened the following year (1901). The Tahoe Tavern was an opulent, 225-room, gabled four-story structure with plush lawns, a waterfront boardwalk, a luxurious lakeside dining room, a casino, and of course the pier at the end of the line. The Tahoe Tavern burn down in 1964 and the area was re-developed as the Tavern Shores condominium complex. All evidence of the Lake Tahoe Railway has been obliterated.

