

The Gar Woods Story

Garfield Wood did as much for the sport of boating as any single individual in history. He was a noted engineer, industrialist and inventor, but perhaps he is most renowned for his unique, sleek and handsome racing power and pleasure boats. In piloting the Gar Wood crafts through boating history, Gar Wood and his mechanic, Orlin Johnson, captured the British Harmsworth Trophy from 1920 through 1933. His quest for building the fastest power boat in the world came to pass in 1930 by piloting "Miss America X" to a new world's record of 102 miles per hour. That particular boat harnessed four supercharged Packard engines which produced some 6,400 horsepower!

In the early 1920s, Gar Wood developed a line of pleasure craft and runabouts that were an offshoot of his successful racing hulls. These elegant boats were produced through the 1940s, and featured beautiful mahogany exteriors, luxurious appointments, and powerful engines. They were created with the speed and reliability that made Gar Wood boats the premier crafts of pleasure boating. Several Gar Wood boats, originally delivered to Lake Tahoe in the early 1920's are still in superb condition and can sometimes be seen from the pier at Gar Woods. These grand boats sporting around the lake are Wild Cat, ToTo, Challenger, Tamarack, Cheecog, Tallac, Hi-Ho, Aunt Lu, Hey There V, Tecolote, and Dispatch.

Gracious Carnelian Bay was a popular spot for boat racing and recreational boating in the 1930s and 1940s. It seems only fitting that the restaurant that bears the name "Gar Woods" be found on this particular spot on Lake Tahoe, close to the Sierra Boat Company. "Kathryn", a 1931 Baby Gar, was the second to last 33-foot runabout built by Gar Wood. She was purchased and launched by Arthur Bourne at Obexers under her original name "Dispatch". Sold to Stanley Dollar and renamed "Wychwood" in the 1950s, she was purchased in 1971 by B.C. "Short" Wheeler who named her after his lovely wife Kathryn. Now owned by Gar Woods and maintained at Sierra Boat Company, she again wears the name "Dispatch" and is on display at the pier on calm days.

Carnelian Bay (originally "Cornelian Bay"), named in 1860 for the Chalcedony (semi-precious yellow and red stones) found on its shoreline, has a background steeped in marine, resort and recreational history. In 1871, "Dr. Bourne's Hygienic Establishment" was constructed on the bay, promoting the rarefied, pure mountain air and hot and cold mineral springs at Carnelian Bay as the answer to healthful living. Dr. Bourne, a bit of an eccentric, tried to change the name of Lake Tahoe to "Lake Sanatoria" and professed that his greatest hope was to live to be a blooming century plant on the shores of the bay. However, he died in the mid 1880s, quite short of the 100 year mark— and of becoming a century plant.

By the spring of 1876, the Carnelian Bay Hotel had become a regular stop for the steamer "Governor Stanford." Excursionists combed the shoreline for carnelian stones and many opted to take Dr. Bourne's "water cure."

In 1889, Carnelian was listed as one of Lake Tahoe's permanent settlements. A stage and wagon road running between Tahoe City and Hot Springs passed through Carnelian Bay, making it accessible by land as well as by water.

By 1896, three brothers by the name of Flick had acquired most of the Carnelian Bay land fronting the water. Their holdings included Dr. Bourne's old establishment, later known as the Carnelian Bay Hotel, the post office, general store, cottages and wharf. The brothers fished commercially on the lake until they sold their holdings in 1910, realizing a huge profit. The Carnelian Bay Improvement Company was founded and embarked on an extensive subdivision program, including a large hotel, inland harbor, streets and cottages. Water was piped in from a mountain spring; "gasoline buggies" bounced over the dirt roads; a market and store lent self-sufficiency to the bay; and the steamers "Tahoe" and "Nevada" seasonally took turns dropping off mail and supplies.

Today Carnelian Bay, embracing a curving sweep of shore on Lake Tahoe, is a gracious hostess with her captivating views. Time, of course, has changed the scope of the bay. The old hotel, which became the White House Restaurant, was burned to the ground in favor of the Carnelian House. In 1988 it became Gar Woods- a comfortable dining environment that captures the nostalgic ambiance of Tahoe's classic wooden boat era.