

THE WILLOWS WAS ALPINE'S REFUGE IN THE MOUNTAINS

“... The particular charm of this place—and it has a charm all its own—is hard to describe... One who wishes freedom and rest, free from mosquitoes and fleas in a perfectly delicious mountain atmosphere and clean, wholesome table service, should go to the Willows...”

For more than fifty years, people from all over the country came to The Willows to sit in the shade of the old oak trees, play croquet on a smooth dirt course and stay in housekeeping cabins with names such as “The Rocky Road to Dublin,” “Oakleigh,” “Fir-Staid,” “The Strollers” and “Mother of Them All.” The Willows was a nationally known resort on the highway through the mountains—what is now Historic Highway 80—three miles east of Alpine.

The founders of the resort, the late Fredric and Bevie Walker, bought the Willows property when they arrived in Alpine in 1894—with no idea of establishing a resort. They built an adobe home and settled down. In 1902, a traveler stopped by and asked the family if she could spend the night. The Walkers offered their hospitality and the lady was so pleased she passed the word to others. Soon more and more people came and the Walkers decided to build some cabins—one sprouted up after another and before long there were 20 cabins of varying sizes.

A brochure, from which the beginning quote in this article was taken, shows the rates to be \$2 to \$2.25 a night or \$12 a week. The Walker children were pressed into service. Daughter Dorothy waited tables and welcomed the guests. Her sister, Nean did all the cooking. Sons Douglas and Donald and daughter Lucille also helped with the operation of the resort. Everything was fresh from their garden. The Walkers had their own cows for milk, chickens for eggs and fried chicken and vegetables and fruit in abundance. The famous Sunday fried chicken dinner was \$1.50 for many years.

There was no planned entertainment at The Willows. A library and a music room, which contained a grand piano, a croquet court and a small golf range provided opportunities for guests; however, the resort was mainly a place to lie in a hammock, sit in the shade or dangle feet in the creek. The willow trees that abound along the banks of Viejas Creek, which flows through the property, gave the resort its name.

The Willows thrived, particularly after the highway through the mountains was paved in the 1920's and automobiles replaced the stagecoaches and wagons. Frederic Walker died in 1922 and his wife Bevie in 1931. The Walker children continued to operate the resort until 1950. The dining room closed to the public in 1938; however, it continued to serve resort guests. Two of Frederic and Bevie's grandchildren, Don Walker and Shirley Dyer, told tales of The Willows at the August meeting of the Alpine Historical Society to the delight of everyone in attendance.

As one drives east down Willows Road toward the Viejas Casino and Outlet Center, The Willows property is on the right side of the road. Some of the cabins still exist; however, much of the original property was consumed by the freeway. You may best identify it by the sign “Noble's Nest,” erected by Dorothy Walker Markley's daughter, Betty Noble—another of Alpine's heroes. We'll talk about Betty in another article.

Note: Much of the information in this article was obtained from an article by Jim McVicar which appeared in *The San Diego Union* on July 26, 1970.

If you have stories to share about Alpine history, or need to know something about it, please e-mail or call me and I'll pass stories along and research questions.

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Leisurely games of croquet were played before huge stand of live oak trees at The Willows.