

## A Scandinavian Castle in California? - Really?

### *Preclude...*

A Scandinavian resort in California is a reality and Vikingsholm is one of the finest examples of Scandinavian architectures in the western hemisphere, and sits in the south west area of Lake Tahoe, at the head of Emerald Bay. It displays a unique blend of nature's spectacular beauty and man's architectural ingenuity. This magnificent castle, built with outstanding features of the exterior typical of stone churches and castles built in the 11th century in Southern Sweden, is situated majestically among towering pines and cedars on the shores of Emerald Bay and Fanny Island. Vikingsholm is a special attraction of Emerald Bay, the bay with the most exquisite and enchanting water color, and a popular tourist destination, if you are able to stomach a 1.5 mile trail down with an elevation descent of 900ft to the lake level.

### *The people...*

Mrs. Lora Knight who purchased the land at Emerald Bay, where the future Vikingsholm castle were to be located, was not a newcomer to the Tahoe area. For more than 16 years she enjoyed her summer home at Wynchwood, at Observatory Point on the North Shore of Lake Tahoe. Through church connections, Mrs. Knight became acquainted with the William Henry Armstrong family, who owned 239 acres at the head of Emerald Bay. In 1928, she purchased the property from them for \$250,000.

She was much inspired by Scandinavian architecture from her earlier travel to the region, and the scenery around Emerald Bay reminded her of the fjords of Norway, so she chose a Scandinavian design for the house. She commissioned Lennart Palme, a Swedish architect to design Vikingsholm. In the summer of 1928, Mrs. Knight, accompanied by the Palmes, traveled to Scandinavia to gather ideas for the construction of the house at Emerald Bay. They visited many buildings dating back to 1000-1500 A.D. in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. They derived ideas and concepts from viewing 11th Century wooden churches in Norway and stone castles in southern Sweden. All that they viewed had an effect on the design of Vikingsholm. Mr. Palme reproduced many specific features of the ancient Scandinavian buildings in designing Vikingsholm.



Emerald Bay, view from H. Bliss Park



Vikingsholm, view from the Lake Tahoe



Mrs. Lora Knight  
Photo: CSPF

*The construction...*

The construction started with the laying of the foundation after the snow season in the summer of 1928 . In 1929 more than 200 skilled workmen were brought to Emerald Bay to work on the manor. They were housed in temporary barracks on the property which worked out fine as the weather is very mild in the area.

The architecture of this manor is very unusual in that it is built in the traditional quadrant layout, sod roofs, open courtyard. Carvings extended along the roof line and around doors and windows common for Scandinavian manors in the 11-12th century. The family was living in the main part of the structure, kitchen and servants were located in another wing, any animals and the garage were found in separate quarters. The main house was built with granite boulders embedded in mortar, massive hand-hewn timbers, carvings at the roof line, and sod covered roofs. Most of the material was available on the land surrounding the castle.

The interior of the castle also carried out Scandinavian features, including: decorative folk art (Norwegian Rosemaling and Swedish Kurbits painting) on ceilings and walls, fire places located throughout the manor, carved beams hanging from the ceiling in the living room with "dragon motifs", which originally hung in old Viking castles. There is also the much talked about floor clock, Selma, painted in Swedish style.

*Conclusion...*

Yes, there is a Scandinavian castle in California located at the southwest corner of Lake Tahoe at Emerald Bay. If you go there to visit make sure that you are able to manage a hike with a 900ft drop in elevation above 6000ft above sea-level. Investigate whether the guide Helen Henry Smith is still there. She spent her childhood summers at the castle and have a wealth of knowledge about the family and the castle.

*More information...*

Go to Google search and type in Vikingsholm where you are able to read much more about this Scandinavian Castle in California.



Open courtyard



Building with sod roof



Selma clock



Dining room



Helen Henry Smith  
Photo: CSPF