

Tales of the Wasatch

In 1871 William Stuart Brighton, a native of Scotland, claimed 80 acres at the top of Big Cottonwood Canyon. He, his wife Catherine Bow, and their children spent the summer living there in a tent. The horses, cows, and other farm animals they brought with them found plenty to eat in the meadows around the lake. The following summer William built a one-room cabin, adding to it over time. Because of booming mining activity in Alta and Park City, men traveled over the mountains on foot or horseback between the two camps. They found the Brightons' place a convenient halfway point to rest and eat. Catherine, an excellent cook and fisherwoman, served them fresh trout she had caught in Silver Lake or mutton obtained from a shepherd and hot buttermilk biscuits with freshly churned butter. One sojourner, Joseph R. Walker, suggested that the Brightons open a hotel for summer guests.

The first Brighton Hotel, built in 1874, was a two-story wooden structure with seven small bedrooms, a dining/sitting room, and a lean-to kitchen. White muslin covered the raw lumber of the bedroom walls. Eventually, several one- and two-room cabins were built for vacationing families. Each cabin had a wood-burning stove and candle lanterns made out of large tomato cans.



Guests at the first Brighton Hotel. It stood about where the current Silver Lake Visitors' Center stands today. Photo by permission of the Utah Historical Society

The Settling of Brighton 1870



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The second Brighton Hotel built in 1893. When it was torn down, much of the lumber was used in the construction of the current Alpine Rose Lodge in the Brighton Resort.

As more people sought escape from summer's heat in the Salt Lake Valley, the Brightons built a three-story wooden hotel of rustic design in 1893. It was a "new and commodious structure with fifty light and airy rooms" available for \$2 a day. New summer cabins dotted the area around it.

Travelers to Brighton could take the stagecoach from downtown Salt Lake City, a trip of about seven hours, or ride the Utah Central Railroad to Park City and then transfer to Kimball's Stage Line for the rest of the journey...about five hours total time. Guests were advised to bring their flannels, overcoats and wraps for the canyon's cool nights. Wildflowers and songbirds added to the beauty of the lakes, rugged peaks, and wooded slopes. Here the "toilers of the valleys" would find health and rest. There were campfires, taffy pulls, and dancing in the hotel dining room to the music of a fiddle and an accordion. William Brighton opened the first store in his original cabin. Later amenities included a post office and a telephone.

Summer residents and visitors still catch fish in the lakes. It's doubtful, though, that many anglers enjoy the success of Catherine Brighton. Her record haul on a summer day in 1895 was 63 fish...hailed in with her apron.

Written by Miriam B. Murphy for the History Blazer Magazine