

Fallen Leaf Lake

Somewhere between 1850 and 1858 two travelers from the East made their way down to the shore of Fallen Leaf Lake in California near Lake Tahoe and claimed its discovery. One was an adventurous businessman, and trailblazer named Col. John Calhoun Johnson (1822–1876) also known as Cockeye Johnson." Another was a Delaware Indian guide and warrior named Captain Fallleaf (1807-1880) who had earlier led Johnson across the Great Plains to California. The two explorers were reported to have stood by the water's edge and tossed pebbles into the lake which Capt. Fallleaf pronounced "much deep." Johnson named the lake after his companion probably out of thanks for affording him safe passage across hostile lands.

When the Indian war of 1850 broke out 800 militia men along with Captain Fallleaf and six other Delaware Indians bivouaced on Johnson's ranch for several weeks. Johnson served as military assistant during the short-lived conflict. The episode a Johnson's ranch is largely forgotten, but it was a historic moment for Fallen Leaf Lake. Captain Fallleaf whose name means, He who walks when leaves fall, was one of the great war captains and scouts of the Delaware or Lenape people. His name alludes to his seasonal habit as a hunter but he was foremost a warrior. In recognition of his leadership on the battlefield the Delaware gave him the traditional honorary title of captain.

Captain Fallleaf traversed the country many times guiding military officers and leading his own Delaware men in military campaigns including the Mexican war of 1846-1848 and the Civil War in 1861. He was under the command of Maj. Gen. John Charles Fremont who had discovered Lake Tahoe two decades earlier. Captain Fallleaf appears throughout the history of the westward expansion Delawares were sought after as scouts by early explorers, trappers, and US military leaders because of their trustworthiness and familiarity with the West. Captain Fallleaf made the discovery of gold near present-day Denver which set off the Colorado gold rush of 1859.

Indigenous to the Delaware River region of North America, the Delaware tribe was forced westward by European colonists and eventually onto a reservation in Kansas by the United States government. Then the government again relocated the tribe to the reservation within Cherokee nation in Oklahoma. Captain Falleaf and a faction of 300 Delawares under his leadership resisted. They held out for six months until starvation forced the few survivors to move. Captain Falleaf died in 1880 and was buried in the Fallleaf Jackson Cemetery in Oklahoma is many descendants have carried on his tradition of military service.