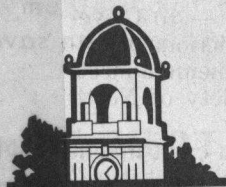


Resort hotel generated headlines

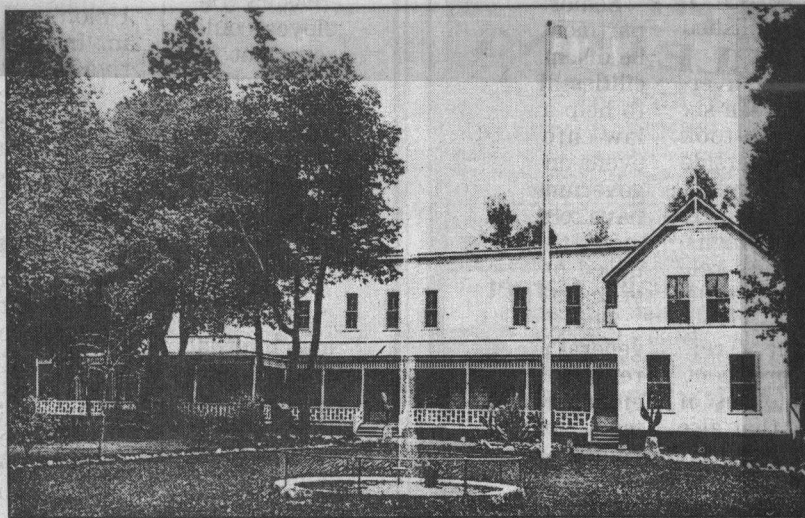
BY ROSS ERIC GIBSON
Special to the Mercury News

Hotel Ben Lomond was a popular mountain resort whose heyday was under the ownership of

Fred A. Cody, a relative of Buffalo Bill. Yet when Buffalo Bill visited Santa Cruz with the circus in 1914, the dramatic



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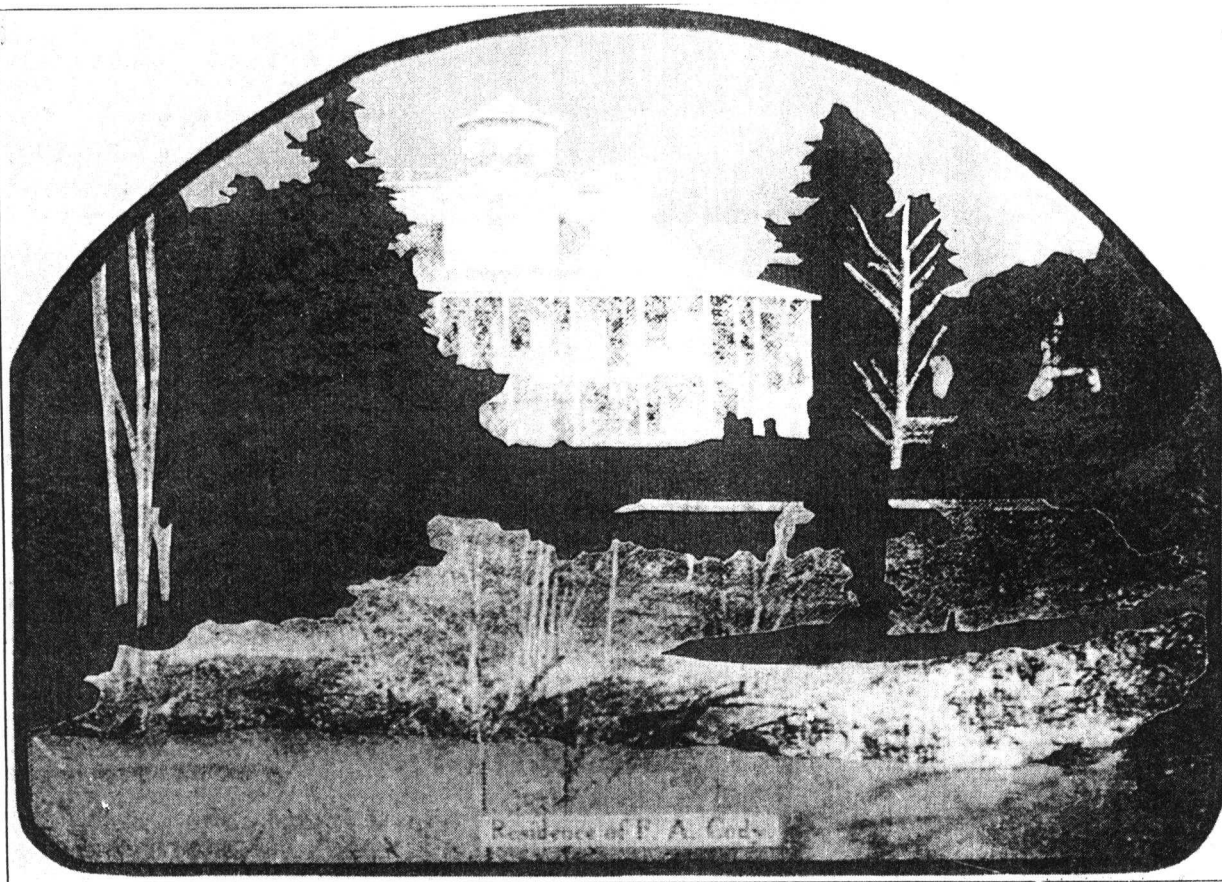
The first hotel in Ben Lomond occupied a scenic riverside grove.

demise of the Hotel Ben Lomond had become a circus in itself.

Ben Lomond was named by James Pierce, who developed the

town from a lumber mill in 1887. He named the town after a nearby mountain. Pierce left the town

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Fred Cody's home in Ben Lomond. Cody was proprietor of Hotel Ben Lomond at the turn of the century.

Hotel Ben Lomond generated an arson courtroom drama

■ HISTORY

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site unlogged, including long stretches along the roadside, for eventual resort development.

He built the 1891 Hotel Ben Lomond in a riverside grove stretching from the upper bridge and bounded by Filmore, Fairview and North streets. The Southern Pacific Railroad ran through the grounds just north of the bridge. Alpine stick-style buildings were white with flowerpot-red trim, and had interiors reminiscent of Old West hostleries.

The two-story main building had a long front and side veranda, with a homey lobby around a wide-mouthed fireplace, and a sunny, fern-and-flower-filled dining hall. The hotel's clubhouse was also two stories, with a game room for cards and billiards, a bowling alley and a ballroom, where concerts and plays were also held. The hotel served 150 guests in upstairs suites or separate cottages, which were unique for the time in all having private indoor bathrooms.

A panorama of the grounds was enjoyed from a rustic observation deck atop a redwood stump. The horseshoe-shaped front driveway (now Fairview Avenue) entered a spacious lawn with central fountain, and nearby rose and cactus gardens. Some of the swings gave a thrill, flying out over cliffs or streams. Croquet and tennis courts were available, with horse and carriage rentals for local exploring.

A dam created the town reser-



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voir behind the hotel, named Loch Lomond (a name reused on a later reservoir a mile and a half away). This created a popular swimming and boating pond, with dressing tents along the bank. Trout fishing was a major draw.

The hotel was often run as an excursion destination for different Santa Cruz hotels. Its managers included W.J. McCollum of the Pacific Ocean House, John T. Sullivan of the Sea Beach and J.J.C. Leonard of the St. George. Then in 1901, Fred Cody bought the hotel, with Miss Eliza Cody as co-manager. The resort was enlivened with pictures, posters and artifacts of his relative, Buffalo Bill Cody.

Cody added electric and telephone connections to every room, becoming Ben Lomond's first electrician. He improved the hotel-owned water system and donated a Main and Mill street lot for the 1905 volunteer fire station. He expanded the hotel, and in 1904 built a 2½-story, 12-room house, the finest home in town, on hotel grounds by the bridge.

This golden era ended when Cody sold the hotel in October 1913 to Fresno County banker C.A. Cooper and real estate agent

Ellsworth Beeson. Five months later, the main building caught fire, raining sparks on the other structures. Fortunately, Cody's fire department kept the flames from spreading, and only the main building was lost. Because the hotel was closed for winter, only caretaker Bert Blackwell was there.

An investigation led to the arrest of Blackwell, an alias for Walter Everton, on charges of arson; he also faced a Fresno warrant for attempted murder. Beeson also was investigated and found to have the hotel's insurance with three companies, amounting to \$30,000.

This was paid to both Beeson and Cooper, and phone records showed Everton called Cooper right after the fire. All three were jailed.

The trial revealed that Everton received a note March 5 that only said, "Hurry!" The policies were soon to expire, so Everton torched the hotel.

That summer, the trial in Santa Cruz became sideshow to a Sells-Floto Circus visit, which featured 68-year-old Buffalo Bill. The Cody House was still there for him to see, but the hotel grounds became a subdivision, with the clubhouse and several cottages as homes. That year, a former manager of the Hotel Ben Lomond built the Dickinson Hotel south of the lower bridge, to replace the lost resort.

Local historian, architectural consultant and author Ross Eric Gibson writes a weekly history column for the Santa Cruz/Monterey edition.