

Billy Dool—a BC pioneer who helped preserve Big Basin area

(Editor's Note: One of the major figures in early Boulder Creek history—and a driving force behind the efforts to preserve Big Basin State Park—was "Billy" Dool. His grandson, Don Waters, has written the article below giving more information about the energetic Dool and adding some sidelights about Boulder Creek history.)

By Donald A. Waters

William Henry "Billy" Dool was the only mayor of Boulder Creek and one of only four men who could legitimately claim to being a founder of the Big Basin State Park. For these and another reason which I will later detail, W.H. Dool was a most significant personality in those Boulder Creek "glory days" of the latter nineteenth century.

Born in Canada in 1860, Billy Dool left home at age 14, worked his way across 'the states' and arrived in Boulder Creek in 1875. His first employment in Boulder Creek was as a flume walker, which incidentally was his only connection with the flume. He later owned and operated a butcher shop and was very active in local and state politics.

In February, 1902, Billy Dool was elected mayor of Boulder Creek by a group of optimistic people who apparently felt that Boulder Creek, being one of the leading producers of lumber, saloons and houses of ill repute, would certainly grow to bigger things. It was to soon learn one of the economic facts of life—that a small town (800 souls at that time) cannot be financially independent.

After Mr. Dool's tenure as mayor, Boulder Creek was disincorporated, never again to be carried away with delusions of financial grandeur. This short excursion into the unreal world was the high water mark for Boulder Creek in terms of lumber exports, saloons, and bordellos.

The four men who could be credited with the founding of Big Basin were Thomas Maddock, Andrew P. Hill, H.L. Middleton, and Wm. H. Dool.

Tom Maddock (grandfather of Newell and Robert Maddock and Lois (Clement)

Browne, all of Santa Cruz) was the first settler in Big Basin. Maddock's cabin, in the twenties and thirties, was one of the daily programmed hikes on the Big Basin summer schedule and I remember as a youngster, on several occasions, joining a group of hikers to that monument to a true pioneer—the discoverer of Big Basin.

Andrew P. Hill was a well known artist-photographer from San Jose. About the time Billy Dool was mayor of Boulder Creek, A.P. Hill decided to come to Santa Cruz Big Trees and photograph them. My references do not reveal whether Hill had any prior agreements with the owners, but it is clearly documented that when Mr. Hill arrived at Big Trees he was firmly denied access to the property. Frustrated and embarrassed, Hill headed to a place northwest of Boulder Creek called Big Basin, where he had been told there grew some great redwoods. Upon arriving at Big Basin, Hill soon discovered that not only were the redwoods larger than at Big Trees, but there were a great many more of them.

Hill cheerfully called this fact to the attention of the public with his outstanding photos. Hill was a true artist with a camera—he would normally spend an entire day shooting a scene from a single location, then select only one for publication. (Hill was also, and most importantly, the chief lobbyist for the bill submitted to the state legislature which established the funds required to acquire land for the park.)

Concurrently, Big Basin, the largest remaining stand of virgin redwoods in Santa Cruz County, was being threatened by lumbermen—one in particular, Henry L. Middleton of Boulder Creek.

H.L. Middleton was truly a business tycoon, the only real tycoon to my knowledge ever to make his permanent home in Boulder Creek. "H.L." built the magnificent Madrone Villa on property located at the confluence of Bear Creek and the San Lorenzo River. It was not unusual for Middleton to import entire San Francisco opera companies to his home for the entertainment of his guests.

I have reviewed documents which



Emily and William Henry Dool

revealed his ownership at one time or another of dozens of corporations, several in partnership with then Senator and formerly Governor Leland Stanford and manufacturing tycoon, Timothy Hopkins. H.L. Middleton counted among his closest friends, one Billy Dool.

Billy Dool loved Big Basin and by this time had witnessed the ravages of the redwoods over a period of thirty years. (I remember him tell of a fallen redwood near the Pea Vine flume which he had measured to be over 400 feet in length.)

It must have been obvious to him that we were in danger of obliterating the virgin Sequoia Semperivirens. In this time period, Middleton's lumber company was approaching Big Basin from the east and he had every intention of cutting all of the timber on his property, which included the heart of Big Basin.

Concurrently, there had been a 'save

the redwoods' effort growing in the Boulder Creek area and in other locations including the Semperivirens Club of San Jose.

In spite of these efforts, H.L. Middleton's lumber company rolled into Big Basin's Flea Potrero (located on the eastern edge of Big Basin), when, according to my sources, Billy Dool prevailed upon his friend Middleton to preserve the redwoods by selling his Big Basin property to the State of California.

The only catch was that the state did not have the necessary funds (less than one hundred dollars per acre). In spite of this, H.L. did cease cutting (very suddenly—the coded notches which designate cutting priorities exist today on trees west of Flea Potrero). The state did produce the necessary funds and Billy Dool later managed Big Basin State Park for over 20 years.

Shortly after Big Basin was officially

designated a state Park, a booklet was published which assigned the credit to the Semperivirens Club for the acquisition of Big Basin.

As regards the funding of the acquisition, this claim is unchallenged. However, H.L. Middleton did have prior rights to cut his timber, and he was so politically powerful that he certainly could have withstood any pressure that the Semperivirens Club could have mustered (conservation groups then had little of the power they now enjoy).

The presentation from my source is that it was the persuasion of a close friend, Billy Dool, that steered Middleton from the destruction of Big Basin and was thus the key element in the establishment of Big Basin State Park.

In any event, all four men, Maddock, Hill, Middleton, and Dool, were involved in the beginning of Big Basin State Park. Which man was the most truly instrumental in its derivation is a matter of subjective arguments; however, one thing is certain, that using contemporary criteria, the name of the park would probably be the H.L. Middleton State Park.

Billy Dool had an interesting idiosyncrasy which placed him apart from his fellow man. He was a 'walker' nonpareil. History records people who have had no alternative but to walk—Eskimos, soldiers, Indian guides, etc.

Billy Dool was unique in his preference for foot locomotion at a time when other forms of transportation were available. It involved his every logistic activity. He transitioned from the horse and buggy well into the days of automobiles and decent roads, yet, during his entire life, his preferred means of transportation was walking.

He walked not only for recreation, but also in the performance of his duties. His first job in Boulder Creek was as a flume walker, averaging over 20 miles of walking a day.

Many times he walked from his house on the 'school hill' in Boulder Creek to Big Basin and then walked back to Boulder Creek, performing a walking inspection tour of the park.

His daily habit for the six to seven months of the summer season when he and his wife lived in Big Basin was to arise at 5 and, with a nailed stick, pick up litter from the area near the park headquarters. Several miles were daily toured in this fashion until the inn opened for breakfast.

All of the business at the park which required him to be at some location remote from his office saw him walking to that location. Another example of his disdain for the automobile was his occasional breakfasts with Governor C.C. Young who had a summer house on the coast. Even in those days it was less than an hour's ride by car, yet he took a short cut (nine miles) via Gazos Creek and hiked the distance in time to have breakfast with the Governor and then hike back to Big Basin, arriving well before noon.

These instances are only a few of my own personal observations. I have been told that in earlier years his dislike for horses paralleled his dislike for automobiles.

It was only natural, therefore, that he would 'walk himself to death.'

At the age of 72, in 1932, he walked up the hill from town with Martha (Fritch) Pilger, apparently trying too hard to keep up with the young lady, because shortly after reaching his home on top of the hill, his heart suddenly stopped.

Although I was born and raised in Boulder Creek, military service, most of my adult life, has kept me on the east coast and in Europe. I have had few opportunities to visit Boulder Creek.

On each of these infrequent trips home, I had, until recently, looked forward to sharing a few cigars and a chat with the late George Cress. On one such occasion he remarked... "some great men settled this (local) country and Billy Dool was one of them."

In Boulder Creek there remain two monuments to Billy Dool, both originated by him in 1887 when he was married—a giant English walnut tree and a sturdy East Lake style house. It is reported to be the oldest two-story residence in Boulder Creek and the only such residence to survive the 1906 earthquake undamaged.