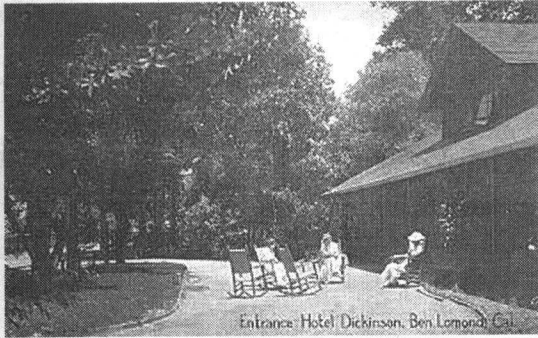


Undated Photo of Hotel Rowardennan



Hotel Dickinson, early 20th century.

# Santa Cruz County Has a Long History as a Camp Destination

*Camps*  
by Linda Fridy

Santa Cruz County's breathtaking beauty along with its cool red-wood forests and refreshing ocean breezes has long attracted visitors hoping to escape crowded and hot cities. While some of the earliest resorts catered to the well-to-do, soon camping became a getaway for families and a place for children to reconnect with nature.

Summer camps for children grew out of two trends of the Industrial Revolution. There were a growing number of children who were not kept busy at family farms during summers when school was not in session. Children needed to be kept busy, entertained and educated. Additionally, parents and society reacted to the growth of industry and big cities with a reverence for the beauty of nature.

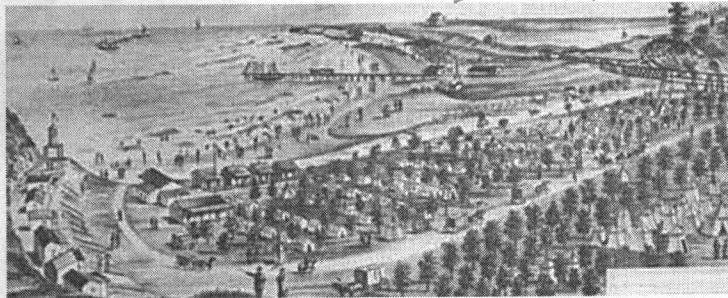
Those trends were evident here in Santa Cruz County.

## At the Beach

One of the county's cities started its life as a camp. Frederick A. Hihn named the resort he first designed in 1869 "Camp Capitola."

The hotel, cottages, bath houses and stable officially opened July 4, 1874. An early illustration shows the area that is now Capitola Village lined with neat rows of tents.

At the same time, the idea of children's summer camps was being born on the East Coast of the United States, according to the American Camping Association.



Camp Capitola in the late 1870s, before the first hotel.

The first organized American camp is generally considered the Gunnery Camp, formed in 1861 by a Connecticut couple who ran a boys' school and took their charges on a two-week camping trip.

By 1874, the Philadelphia chapter of the YWCA founded a camp in Asbury Park called Sea Rest to give young working women a place to relax. Two years later Dr. Joseph Trimble founded the first private camp in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains.

## Among the Trees

Here on the West Coast, a local mill superintendent and postmaster led the effort to create camps in the Santa Cruz mountains.

Lumber mill owner James Pierce saw the worth of the beauty of Ben Lomond's redwoods along with their value for timber and shingles. He left swaths of trees untouched for future visitors, and founded the town along with his mill superintendent, Thomas Bell.

Bell had the vision for a natural retreat, and created the 300-acre Rowardennan Redwood Park. Unlike the resorts that brought the look and feel

of well-groomed mansions to the wilds, he favored natural materials.

Bell rented equipment for camping and horses to explore the trails.

He also created the retreat that would become Mount Hermon Christian camp, the first local camp that focused on younger people.

Mount Hermon evolved from Bell's resort known as Arcadia. Its beauty attracted a group of non-denominational Christians, who bought the site in 1906 and created a retreat built on the Methodist Chautauqua movement.

"The tent chautauquas were traveling summer schools, bringing education, culture and religious training throughout the country, with special programs for young people," wrote historian Ross Gibson. "Mount Hermon started with a tent-roofed auditorium, in use for many decades."

By 1910, the group that would become the American Camping Association was founded to create a model for camps for young people. Today, ACA estimates that as many as five million children attend camps each summer. ■