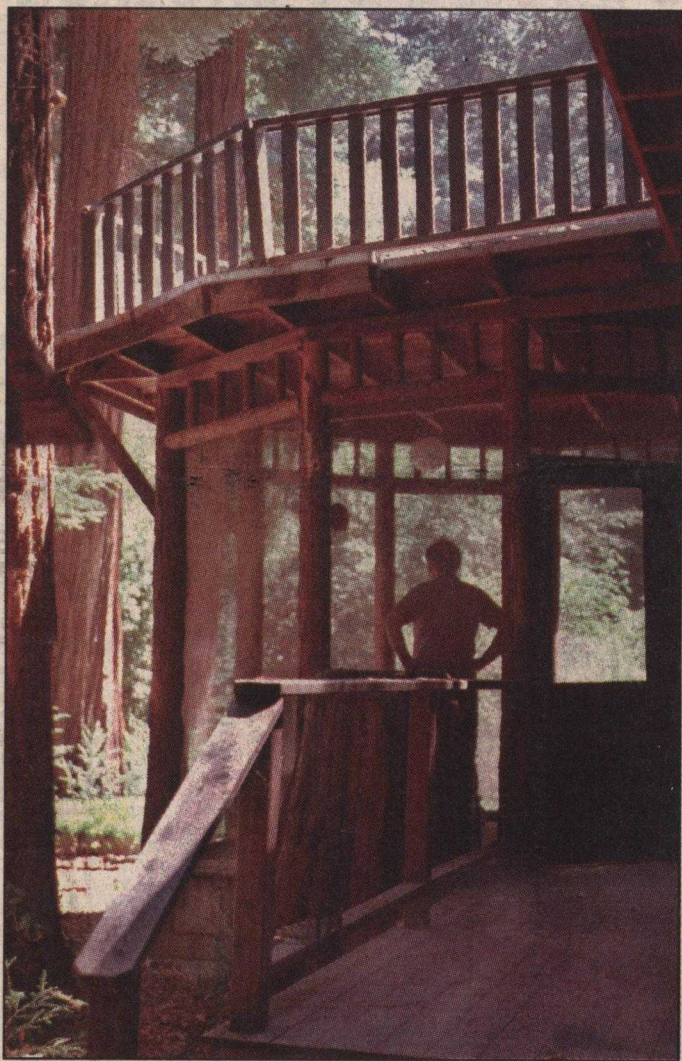




Dan Coyo/Sentinel photos

A view of the back of the Capwell house reveals an old fountain recently discovered under overgrown plants.



A rustic screened porch overlooks the river at the former Capwell home.

The dance pavilion remains, although in disrepair. The clubhouse was sold last year.

Brookdale getaway 'Huckleberry Island' was social retreat

By **ROBIN MUSITELLI**
Sentinel staff writer

For decades, families from the Bay Area and hot inland valleys flocked to the shady glens of the San Lorenzo Valley during the summer.

They pitched tents, built cabins, and in the case of "Huckleberry Island," built some luxurious summer homes among the redwood trees.

Huckleberry Island isn't really an island at all, but rather a fat-fingered peninsula in the San Lorenzo River at Brookdale.

In 1902, Arthur Breed, the city auditor of Oakland and later a state senator, bought the 38-acre peninsula, known then as Redwood Island or the Island.

Breed subdivided the property and called it Huckleberry Island. He split it up into half-acre lots marked by painted posts and foot paths with beaches. In the center is a wooded five-acre common area studded with huge redwood trees, never logged. A dance pavilion and gazebo were built for evening entertainment.

The next year, a house for the Breed family and four other rustic style cottages with verandas were built.

Eventually, 14 homes were built.

Breed wanted suitable buyers, ones of similar backgrounds, to build on the island to make it a harmonious place, socially and architecturally.

Most of the first residents came from the East Bay, including Dr. Warren Wakefield, the first physician to use scopalamine or "twilight sleep" for women in childbirth, and the Capwells of the former Capwell department store.

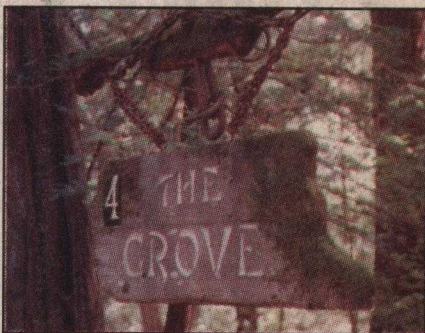
The Capwells hosted huge parties for

their store employees. In 1921, a nine-passenger train with 500 employees came to Brookdale for a barbecue. The train depot was just across the bridge from the island in those days.

During the week, while their husbands worked in the city, the women who spent summers at Huckleberry Island would play bridge at a clubhouse on the island, built in 1926 with funds raised through bridge parties, dances, bingo and dinner parties.

The dance pavilion remains, although in disrepair. The clubhouse was sold last year for use as a residence.

Many of the homes are now owned by third- and fourth-generation de-



Aging signs announce homes.

scendants of the original residents.

The Capwell house, a two story California mission-style home, now belongs to Robert and Ruth Rees, who bought the property — furniture and all — three years ago.

During the past year, the couple has cleared brambles and poison oak. Their efforts have revealed formal gardens, fountains and footpaths to the beach. "It's a wonderful place — very pleasant," said Robert Rees.