

More About Big Basin

The Man Behind The Park

One man's indignation was the start of Big Basin State Park.

That man was Andrew P. Hill of San Jose—artist and photographer. Hill is not alive today to tell his story. But it is being kept alive by friends and acquaintances who worked with the dynamic, black-bearded artist to save the redwoods.

Today there is a drinking fountain at Big Basin which was placed there in memory of Andrew P. Hill. Hill was the real "father" of the first California State Park.

Few people who pause to drink there know that after leading the brave battle to save the redwoods, Hill lived as a poor man, in the back room of a dingy hotel in Sacramento. He existed on 15 cents per day for a long while. One day he had a single orange to eat.

But lack of money didn't keep Hill from his destiny. It started in 1899 when a British publication assigned him to photograph and write about the redwood trees of California. He boarded the narrow gauge railroad in San Jose with Felton as his destination. There he located a spectacular stand of the giant trees, set up his camera and started shooting.

Hill's happy absorption with his work was shattered by the angry voice of the owner of the trees—a man named Welch. Welch demanded the negatives on the grounds that Hill had trespassed without permission. He also told Hill the trees were soon to be cut into posts and pickets.

Hill refused to surrender his films. And he boarded the train for the return trip to San Jose, convinced that "trees like these should be preserved as public property for everyone to enjoy."

Back in San Jose, still fuming with anger, Hill contacted reporter friends and started a campaign in the Santa Cruz Sentinel and other area newspapers, urging the public purchase and preservation of the redwoods. Hill also lectured about the redwoods to the Santa Cruz County Chamber of Commerce which, in return, informed him that even bigger and better redwoods existed in Big Basin, north of Felton.

By this time, Hill had raised such a storm that sounds of the battle had reached the ears of prominent men like Dr. David Starr Jordan of Stanford University, former Lt. Gov. William T. Jeter and Santa Cruz Sentinel Publisher Duncan McPherson.

On May 1, 1900, Hill's first "save the redwoods" conference was called at Stanford University. On May 16, the first exploration party entered the basin by horse and "carry-all" to take a look at the "bigger and better" redwoods.

Two evenings later, sitting around a campfire, the group organized themselves into the Sempervirens Club, passed the hat and collected \$32. "Save the Redwoods" was adopted as the club's official motto.

From this first exploration of Big Basin, the campaign to save it spread far and wide like ripples from a small stone thrown into a vast pool.

But the fight for preservation was just starting.

People thought the great redwood forests were inexhaustible.

They thought it was "foolishness" to spend money for a public park. They also thought Big Basin was "at the end of nowhere."

Priest Tells About Trees

Two priests — 132 years apart — played important parts in discovering and preserving the California redwood sempervirens.

In 1769, Fray Juan Crespi entered what was then Alta California, with the Portola Expedition, the first land exploration by the Spaniards.

Father Crespi served as diarist for the expedition and near what today is Watsonville, he made his first diary entry about the redwood trees. He called them "palo colorado"—or "red wood."

In 1901, 132 years later, Father Robert Kenna played a key role in the acquisition of Big Basin. Father Kenna was president of the University of Santa Clara and no doubt had other pressing financial matters on his mind.

But a majority of the 33 state senators in 1901 were not in favor of a bill to purchase acreage in Big Basin for a state park. Reporter-photographer Andrew P.

Hill was worried. He convinced Father Kenna that the priest was needed as a speaker on behalf of the bill.

Father Kenna visited the State Senate and made an impassioned speech — "simple, beautifully worded but determined delivery . . ." When he finished, there were 32 favorable votes out of a possible 33.

Later, just before he died, the priest personally raised money for a survey and map of the basin with a view to constructing access roads. He had the survey made at a time when the State Park Commission had no funds for such work.

A newspaper article of December 6, 1912, states the facts: "This survey is the one made at the instigation of the late Rev. Robert E. Kenna, S.J., and personally paid for by him while he was on his death bed. It is considered Father Kenna's legacy to the State of California."

They Lived In Big Basin

In addition to Natt Day, early tan bark operator in Big Basin, there were other men who worked or settled there.

Joseph C. Mello worked for Day in 1879; brothers Frank, Dan and Warner Porter cut and hauled 2000 cords of tan bark to the Kirby Tannery in Santa Cruz.

In 1876 Tom Maddock brought his family to the basin and built a cabin. At first it had one room and was open in front. Later a summer kitchen was added and an arbor.

By 1881 Maddock had met the requirements for land claims and received a deed to a quarter section of land

in the basin. In 1902 the State of California bought it back from him at \$10,000.

Soon after the Maddock family settled in the basin, Tom Maddock's brother-in-law, James Sinnott, and his family came down from San Rafael. They built a cabin above Sempervirens Falls. In the spring, Sky Meadow which was then called Flea Potrero (pasture), was a favorite gathering place of the families for picnics.

Later, Patrick Sinnott, another brother-in-law, came there to take up two claims to land.

Tom Maddock died in Boulder Creek in 1920. His descendants live there and in Santa Cruz today.



The history of Big Basin is a long one. In order to give a more complete picture of the park, The Sentinel is backing up today's special edition on Big Basin with these additional stories in the Good Life section.

A Thrilling Chapter

Josephine Clifford McCrackin dipped her pen in fire and helped write one of the thrilling chapters in the history of Big Basin State Park.

Mrs. McCrackin lost her own beautiful mountain home to a forest fire before she moved into Santa Cruz and began to write for The Sentinel. Perhaps that was why she so eagerly took up the fight to preserve Big Basin as a state park.

It was just before the turn of the century that a wall of forest fire roared over her home, Monte Paraiso, located near Wright's Station, high in the Santa Cruz Mountains. It took her beloved grove of redwoods, and drove away the quail, doves and wild rabbits she hand-fed in her garden. Mrs. McCrackin had lived there 24 years and the loss of the place was a blow from which she never fully recovered.

"Those trees can never be

replaced," she wrote sadly of her beloved redwoods.

Mrs. McCrackin was born in Prussia, came to St. Louis, Mo., where she met and married Lt. Clifford. Tragedy surrounds the story of her married life with Clifford. She finally escaped from him with the help of his fellow-officers who smuggled her away, across the western desert in an army ambulance to safety. In later years she married Jackson McCrackin and their happy marriage ended only with his death.

Before she married McCrackin, she had made a name for herself as a writer for the old Overland Monthly. She was associated with Bret Harte, Ambrose Bierce, George Sterling, Jack London and Joaquin Miller.

When the fight for Big Basin loomed, Josephine again took pen in hand and wielded it as mightily as a sword.

She fought well.

Big Basin In The 1870s

By 1870 there were a few scattered cabins and squatters' timber claims being worked in the Big Basin area. The town of Boulder Creek was then called San Lorenzo, and was developing into a mill town and trade center.

At the lower end of China Grade Road was an area known as Sequoia District, a small residential and agri-

cultural section. Natt Day had a homestead there and about 1875 he built a road running up alongside Boulder Creek and into Sky Meadow, in Big Basin. This was a tan bark road. Day also built a small cabin.

Day's old tan bark road was the only entry into Big Basin, except by trail, until after the park was established.