Finding aid of the Sempervirens Club of California Records

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Descriptive Summary

**Title:** Sempervirens Club of California records,  
**Date (inclusive):** 1883-1966  
**Date (bulk):** (bulk 1900-1945)  
**Collection number:** 1979-2628  
**Creator:** Sempervirens Club of California  
**Extent:** 6 linear feet (12 boxes and 1 oversized folder)  
**Repository:** History San Jose Research Library.

**Abstract:** The Sempervirens Club Records document the activities of the Club from its inception in 1900 to the early 1960's. The Sempervirens Club was founded to save old growth Redwoods in Santa Cruz Mountains of California. The lobbying efforts of the Club resulting in the creation of Big Basin State Park. The Records also document many activities of Sempervirens founder and professional photographer and painter Andrew Putnam Hill of San Jose California.

**Physical location:** For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the History San Jose Research Library.

**Language:** English.

**Access**
The collection is open for research.

**Publication Rights**
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**Preferred Citation**
[Identification of Item], Sempervirens Club of California Records, [Box no.,] History San Jose; Research Library.

**Acquisition Information**
The bulk of the Sempervirens Club Records were donated to the City of San Jose by Herbert C. Jones, then president of the Club. A receipt for one photo album, One P.N.A. book, and a collection of scrapbooks, minute books and records of the Sempervirens Club is signed by Clyde Arbuckle on behalf of the San Jose City Landmarks Commission in September of 1954. The Records were later moved to the new San Jose Historical Museum in the early 1970s. Sometime in 1979 the materials were inventoried and given their present accession number. It is unclear what Sempervirens Records came in 1954 and what may have come at a later date. In May 2001 the materials were archivally processed. The accession number 1979-2628 was retained for continuity. All research materials relating to the Sempervirens Club found in the collection were included in the 2001 processing. HSJ institutional records are sketchy for this earlier time period and therefore likely that a selection of these materials came from other donors beside the original 1954 donation. It is likely that History San Jose also has in its artifact collection Sempervirens materials that came in the 1954 donation or later under a different accession number.
Historical Note

Andrew Putnam Hill was a San Jose artist and photographer who is credited with saving the old growth redwoods of Big Basin, located in the Santa Cruz Mountains of the California central coast area. Hill first saw the big trees of the redwood forest in 1899 when he was hired to photograph them for a magazine story. When he learned that they were to be logged, he was inspired to work to prevent their destruction. From then on, much of his life was devoted to the cause of preserving the redwoods and to the creation of a public park at Big Basin.

Hill was born in 1853 in Indiana. At the age of 14 he came to California with his uncle, attending preparatory school at Santa Clara College. He later studied art at the California School of Design in San Francisco. In 1878 he moved to San Jose and opened a portrait studio. He also painted landscapes, including historical scenes. He moved back to San Francisco in 1880. In 1883 he married Florence Watkins and they made their home in San Jose. They had three sons, the first one dying three days after his birth. Although his paintings were well received, he was not able to gain adequate income from his work. In 1889 he began a career in photography.

In 1900 Hill gathered together a group of influential persons from San Francisco, San Jose, and Santa Cruz for a camping trip in Big Basin and it was then that the Sempervirens Club was founded. The Sempervirens were to become pioneers in the conservation movement. The club motto was “Save the Redwoods”. The first officers were Charles W. Reed, president; Carrie Stevens Walter, secretary; J. Q. Packard, treasurer; W. W. Richards, sporting secretary; and Andrew P. Hill, official artist. Their first order of business was the passage of state legislation that would provide for the purchase of Big Basin for a state park. They were able to enlist the support of many prominent people in politics, journalism, and education. Local papers, such as the Santa Cruz Sentinel, the San Francisco Chronicle, and the San Jose Mercury Herald, supplied favorable publicity for their cause. In 1901 California governor Henry T. Gage signed the appropriations bill providing for the purchase of 2,500 acres at the price of $250,000. In 1904 the California Redwood Park was officially opened to campers, becoming the first state park in California. The name was later changed to Big Basin Redwoods State Park.

The Sempervirens Club continued to work for park expansion and development. In 1908 they investigated rumors that redwoods were being logged in the park. When this was discovered to be true the Santa Cruz Grand Jury stopped the logging. This scandal caused the park to be once again placed in the hands of the Redwood Park Commission, a citizen group, rather than the State Board of Forestry.

Subsequent activities of the Sempervirens Club included the passage of legislation to acquire more land, to build a road from the east from Saratoga to Big Basin, and to build a road from the coast to Big Basin. They supported other conservation efforts, notably that of the Save the Redwoods League, which was concerned with preserving redwoods in the northern part of the state. The Sempervirens Club grew to 300 members, with branches throughout the state. It was officially incorporated in 1907.

Club members also enjoyed social activities. In addition to many barbecues and hikes, they gathered in Big Basin for an annual club camping trip. In 1919 some of the members formed the Forest Play Association. They produced an original play performed in Big Basin entitled “The Soul of Sequoia, A Forest Play.” This was intended to be an annual event, but only lasted one more year.

Throughout the history of the club, women played a pivotal role. They were among the founding members and the earliest officers. Laura White, a veteran of the suffrage campaign, became president in 1903 and served until 1906. Kate Moody Kennedy was president from 1907 to 1908. Carrie Stevens Walter was one of the original members and the first secretary. Hill became president of the club in 1908 and continued until his death in 1922, at the age of 69. He worked tirelessly, often using his photographs of primeval forests and logged-out land to gain support for forest preservation.

Herbert C. Jones was another influential member of the club. He was the son of Louise Jones, one of the founding members. When he was elected to the state Senate in 1912, he became a powerful advocate for the causes of the Sempervirens Club. He later became president of the club, serving from 1945 to 1968.

The Sempervirens Club attained many of their goals. One of their last objectives was to preserve nearby Butano forest as a state park. After beginning the campaign in earnest in 1945, under the leadership of Herbert C. Jones, they finally succeeded in 1956 when the state purchased a portion of the land. In the 1960’s, the club’s activities diminished as its leadership aged or died. In 1968 a new group of activists perceived a threat to the forests by developers, and formed the Sempervirens Fund, based on the vision and goals of the original club. The Sempervirens Fund continues to work for land conservancy and has succeeded in augmenting the size of Big Basin, notably the Berry Creek area, as well as adding to state park preserves nearby.

Scope and Content

The Sempervirens Club Records document the activities of the club from its inception in 1900 to the early 1960’s. The records are divided into five series and total 6 linear feet, in 5 manuscript boxes (1-5), 6 flat boxes, plus one oversized box (6-12), and one oversized folder.
The first series, Andrew Hill Papers (8 folders) are the personal papers of the club's founder, including letters to and from Hill, miscellaneous papers written by Hill, business papers, and biographical news clippings covering 1883 to 1922. Much of the correspondence is of a business nature, including Hill's photography business and his financial interest in Ingomar Consolidated Gold Mining Company. There are Hill Family papers and papers dealing with fundraising for the purpose of the purchase of Crossing the Plains, a large (7 ft. by 10 ft.) painting by Hill (4 folders). The painting depicts California pioneers on their westward journey of 1849. A committee made of Sempervirens Club members and others felt that this painting should hang in the state capitol and undertook a fundraising campaign for its purchase. A large part of this subseries is the letters from 1920 to 1921 from the various parlors of the Native Sons of the Golden West, in response to the requests for funds. The painting was eventually purchased for $3,500, much less than the original price of $15,000, and presented to the state to be exhibited at the capitol.

The second series is the Sempervirens Club Records. A large subseries is Administrative Records, 1900 to 1949, which is made up of General Administrative Records, Financial Documents, Meetings, and Club Correspondence. Club correspondence, 1900 to 1949, is comprised of 11 folders, including club related correspondence of Andrew P. Hill, and his son, Andrew P. Hill, Jr. The annual report of the officers begins in 1905 and ends with 1919. Two brief handwritten reports, one undated and one from 1900, are included. Club minutes consist of three books, detailing club goals and activities from 1902 to 1946. The second subseries is Social Activities, including the Forest Play Association, which existed from 1919 to 1921.

The third series is the Sempervirens Big Basin/Redwood Park Papers. Subseries are Park Acquisition and Preservation, Saratoga-Big Basin Road, Park Development, Andrew Hill Memorial. Park Acquisition and Preservation includes legislation on park creation and the documentation of the 1908 scandal when protected park trees were logged. An important campaign for the Sempervirens Club was to lobby for public access to the park. There are three folders about building a road into the park from Saratoga to Big Basin, with the bulk of the material dating from 1907 to 1914.

The fourth series is Miscellaneous. This includes papers on Save the Redwood League, Butano State Park, and Renaming Portola State Park. There are also various histories of the Club, written by members and non-members. In addition are three scrapbooks of news clippings from 1900 to 1918. A variety of topics are covered, including social activities, the road to Big Basin, and founding of Big Basin Redwood Park. The earliest scrapbook was begun by Carrie Walter Stevens and includes a hand-written history of the club and records of the first meetings.

The series also includes materials created by activities at Big Basin Park. Of note is an extensive Works Progress Administration hand-made book, Pictorial History of Redwoods, Concluding Master Report, State Parks Redwoods, Work Number 3873. It was produced in 1937 and sponsored by the State Division of Parks. Part 1 (21 leaves) concerns Mt. Diablo State Park. Part 2 (167 leaves), is the Pictorial History of Redwoods, showing their scientific, economic and historical aspects, portrayed by relief artists. It documents the production of an exhibit at Big Basin Redwood Park. There are mounted photographs of the park, the exhibit, the W. P. A. artists and their artwork. The cover is of hand-carved and hand-painted redwood. Also included in this series are park ephemera and a 1950 natural history written by Don Meadows, a former park naturalist.

Oversized materials and photographs, the fifth series, includes maps, blueprints and plans. An album of photographic prints by Andrew P. Hill shows many aspects of Big Basin. Please see the attached inventory of oversized materials and photograph catalog for a complete list of these materials.

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection.

**Subjects**

Sempervirens Club of California

Hill, Andrew Putnam

Nature conservation--California--Santa Cruz Mountains

Big Basin Redwoods State Park (Calif.)

Parks--California--Santa Cruz County

Conservation of natural resources--California--Santa Cruz County

Redwood--California

Forest Conservation--California

Redwood Industry--California

Related Material at History San Jose;
The History San Jose Collection also includes additional photographic portraits and original oil paintings by Andrew Putnam Hill.

Andrew Putnam Hill Papers

Personal Papers

- box 1: Business cards, receipts, letterhead, expenses, 1883, 1908, 1912-1914
- box 1: Letters from Hill, 1916, 1920-1922
- box 1: Letters to Hill, 1892, 1900, 1908-1922
- box 1: Hill family papers, 1922-1924
- box 1: Biographical notes, clippings, dates vary
- box 1: Miscellaneous, dates vary
- box 1: Various writings by Hill, 1912, n.d.

Crossing the Plains

- box 1: Correspondence, 1920-1922, 1947
- box 1: Story of the painting, ca. 1920
- box 1: Parlor letters, Native Sons of the Golden West, 1920
- box 1: Parlor letters, Native Sons of the Golden West, 1921

Sempervirens Club Records

Administrative Records

- box 1: General Administrative Records
  - Report of officers, 1900-1919
  - Stationery, receipt forms, 1906, n.d.
  - Administrative news clippings, 1927-1938
  - Lists--membership, committees, etc., 1900-1930
  - Articles of incorporation, notes on founding, 1906-1907
  - Membership Lists, n.d.
- box 5: Receipt books, membership lists, 1921-1924, 1929-1935, 1938-1945
- box 8: Large ledger book embossed with “Sempervirens Club of California, W. W. Richards, Financial Secretary”, 1902-1905

Financial Records

- box 1: Receipts, 1899-1948
- box 1: Tax bills, 1918-1927
- box 1: Bank statements, 1908-1927

Meetings

- box 2: Meeting cards, 1927-1932
- box 2: Petitions and resolutions, including park creation, 1900, 1920, n.d.
- box 2: Minutes, 1902-1906
- box 2: Minutes, with clippings, 1906-1914
- box 2: Minutes, with clippings, 1915-1946

Club correspondence

- box 2: From A. P. Hill, 1908-1922, n.d.
- box 2: To A. P. Hill, 1908-1922
- box 2: A. P. Hill, Jr., 1927
- box 2: Correspondence, 1900
box 2  Correspondence, 1901-1911
box 2  Correspondence, January to June, 1912
box 3  Correspondence, July to December, 1912
box 3  Correspondence, 1913-1920
box 3  Correspondence, 1921-1929
box 3  Correspondence, 1930-1945
box 3  Correspondence, 1946-1949

Social Activities

box 3  Clippings, 1907, 1928, n.d.
box 3  Forest Play Association, 1919-1921

Sempervirens Big Basin/Redwood Park Records

Park Acquisition and Preservation

box 3  Legislation, including creation of park, 1901, 1911-1946
box 3  Legislation, including creation of park, 1901, 1911-1946
box 3  Miscellaneous news clippings, 1910-1943, n.d.
box 3  Logging in Park, 1908
box 3  Acquiring additional land, report on timberlands, 1911-1917

Saratoga-Big Basin Road

box 4  Legal documents, 1913-1914
box 4  Correspondence, 1907-1914, 1966
box 4  Legislation, clippings, miscellaneous, 1912-1914

Park Development

box 4  Water and sewage, 1908-1914
box 4  Fire escape road, 1922-1929, n.d.
box 4  Proposed fees, 1923-1926

Andrew P. Hill Memorial at Big Basin

box 4  First memorial--correspondence, 1922-1924
box 4  Second memorial--correspondence, 1946-1947
box 4  First and second memorial--plans, clippings, miscellaneous, 1924, 1946

Miscellaneous

box 4  Butano Forest, 1923-1965
box 4  Park ephemera created by Park staff, dates vary
box 5  History and Biology of the Big Basin Redwood State Park by Meadows, Don, 1950
box 5  Renaming Portola Park, Iverson, Chris, 1946
box 5  Big Basin Redwood Park--reports on the park and its creation, booklet, photo print, 1927, n.d.
box 5  Sempervirens Club--histories miscellaneous, 1903-1946, n.d.
box 5  Save the Redwoods League, 1921-1966
box 6  Scrapbook--news clipping, 1900-1912
box 7  Scrapbook--news clipping, 1908, 1911, 1914, 1916-1918
box 8  Scrapbook--news clipping, 1909-1913
box 11  Works Progress Administration Project, Pictorial History of the Redwoods, [Box 1 of 2]1937
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<td>Box 10</td>
<td><strong>Andrew P. Hill Photo Album of Big Basin--90 photographs, ca. 1900-1922</strong></td>
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