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A Bit of Eden in Rincon Canyon...

Stanley Park

By Jennifer Shively

Where did an early 1900s resident of Santa Barbara County go to escape the hustle and bustle of daily life?

Stanley Park—the perfect getaway.

Stanley Park Mountain Resort, situated in Rincon Canyon three miles up Rincon Creek from the ocean, was what you might call the original luxury campground and a bit of Eden, all rolled into one.

The facilities were located on Stanley Park Road, off what is now Casitas Pass Road where it begins to wind into the hills from Carpinteria toward Ojai.

When Stanley Park was built, this was the main road connecting Carpinteria, Ojai, and Los Angeles.



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Far left, pg. 38... Stanley Park's original two-story hotel included unique sheltered porches and a dining room that could seat 100.

Left... John Henry "Doc" Shepard moved from Iowa to Carpinteria to be near his brothers, who had come "west" before him. He married Harriet "Hattie" Lillard of Goleta in 1897. This photo was taken a year or so before Doc died in 1942.

Above... Guests could "rough it" in the tent cabins shaded by great oaks and sycamores.

John Henry and Harriet Shepard — "Doc" and "Hattie"—started the famed campground just a mile up the canyon from Shepard's Inn, a renowned stop on the stagecoach route that catered to road-weary travelers (see *Montecito Magazine*, Fall 1998, "Shepard's Inn—Paradise From Humble Beginnings"). Competition? No—it was all in the family. In 1898, Doc and Hattie had moved to the canyon to be close to Doc's brother, James Shepard, who owned the inn. That same year their son Stanley was born along with another good idea—Stanley Park. Doc had decided to go into the hospitality business.

Naming the resort after his son, Doc embarked on the labor of love that was to become synonymous with carefree fun. Construction started in 1902, and the Stanley Park compound came to comprise a two-story hotel with a dining room that could seat 100 people, a scattering of nicely furnished cottages among the oaks, and several "tent cabins"—foundations with wood floors that supported tents. Guests were welcome to stay in the cottages or they could "rough it" in the tent camps, each of which had its own inviting name: Camp Lookout, Camp Do Little, Camp Tarry a While, Escondido, Fern Camp, Camp Out and In. They could either eat meals in the dining room or cook their own over a campfire.

Stanley Park was a bit off the beaten track—you had to cross Rincon Creek six



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times by bridge to get there—and though visitors came from all over, most guests were locals of the Carpinteria/Santa Barbara area. On July 24, 1907, a Santa Barbara paper, the *Morning Press*, printed this description of the rustic yet refined resort:

The fame of Stanley Park, the canyon resort of quiet and restful beauty, has gone abroad and people from all parts of the state are there. The popularity of the place is such that in four short years it has developed from a wild mountain gorge to a modern, thoroughly up-to-date resort entertaining at present 150 guests. The camps, where the simple life is lived, are picturesque and convenient. The cottages are daintily furnished cozy little buildings, where one finds rest and quiet, listening to the gentle murmur of the brook, and lounging about on the long porches or wandering about beneath the cool shade of the great oaks and sycamores.

The main hotel has a surprise in store for one who expects to find the equipment of the ordinary country hotel, for this popular hostelry is ahead of times. A very pretty and appropriate style of architecture, with roomy, sheltered porches and great landscape windows, has been chosen. The furnishings are rich and in perfect taste. The living room, of generous size with its

heavily beamed ceiling of dark wood, deep wainscoting, [and] mission furniture, all combine in harmonious beauty. A large red open fireplace at one end of the room offers cheer and comfort to the traveler.

Guests were also offered sulphur baths and the use of the park's tennis court, skating rink, and croquet ground. True outdoorsmen were taken on hunting and fishing outings farther up the canyon.

Summers were crowded with social events: tea parties, dinners, and picnics were almost daily occurrences. A July 1906 advertisement noted that there was home cooking, such as the fine turkey dinner served on July 4th at 75 cents per plate. Not bad, especially since the food was known for its excellence, in part due to the bounty the extended Shepard family shared among themselves: Shepard's Inn a mile down the road was known far and wide for its cuisine, produce, and service. The strawberries grown on the Shepard's Inn property were legendary, as were the other garden fare and oranges. Hattie Shepard did the cooking at Stanley Park, and apparently she served up some fine meals.

Bonnie Milne, the daughter of Stanley Shepard (the park's namesake), remembers, "My grandmother was a wonderful cook.



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Far left, pg. 40... *The Stanley Park brochure from the early 1900s listed a page full of resort activities that included “dancing, lawn tennis, pool, croquet and other amusements... Buggies, saddle horses and burros to rent.” The redwood skating rink was a favorite among Carpinteria children.*

Left and above... *Some of the deluxe tent cabins had solid roofs with canvas covered sides. Guests could dine al fresco or enjoy more formal dining in the hotel restaurant.*

She didn't always use recipes—it was more like a handful of this, and a spoonful of that. And rich—butter, cream, you know, like they used to do. And if somebody ordered trout, my dad would go and catch it!”

Word of Stanley Park spread. It was a lively place, hosting dances (square dancing, most likely) almost every Saturday night, that attracted guests from Carpinteria, Montecito, and Santa Barbara. In June 1909, young mining engineers from Stanford University camped there while they studied the geology of the area. A report recounted the visit: “Last night the guests were serenaded, the rousing college songs ringing sweetly to the accompaniment of the guitar and mandolin.” The new Santa Barbara Motorcycle Club was also known

to bike up routinely to the park and spend the day there.

Albertine Rodriguez, a Carpinteria historian who had worked at Shepard's Inn as a young girl, had this to say about Stanley Park in one of her many newspaper columns:

They had a large skating rink where I think everybody in Carpinteria learned to skate (it was made of redwood). I will always remember a young boy who was learning to skate there. He started at the top of the rink, went right out the door clear to the creek and fell in. He really could have hurt himself, but it was so funny to see him flying through the air, that we all stood and laughed. He came back in and stayed with it until he learned how to skate.

We'll never know what whispered in Doc and Hattie's ear to sell the property.



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Maybe the hospitality business had worn them out—it was never-ending, exhausting work. Or maybe Doc wanted to spend more time attending to his horticultural pursuits—experimenting with beans, walnuts, and lemons. Whatever it was, in 1913 Doc and his wife sold Stanley Park and moved to a large tract of land near downtown Carpinteria where they grew lemons and avocados. Their original ranch property now incorporates both shopping centers at Casitas Pass Road and Highway 101, as well as the area across the freeway where avocados are still grown.

Stanley Park's new owner, Robert Fowler of Los Angeles, planned to continue the resort's tradition of hospitality. But nature, which had been kind to the Shepard family, soon turned fickle. A January 1914 flood damaged Stanley Park extensively. No historical account tells us if this incident proved too much for Robert Fowler, but the resort did not reopen under his management.

When Stanley Park did reopen in August of that year, it did so under a new owner, F. B. Ross. The main hotel building had remained intact, but Ross had to rebuild the tent cabins and cottages

What could be better than a little siesta in a hammock outside your cabin at Stanley Park?

on higher ground. The community welcomed the rebuilt park with open arms, and the resort was back in business.

The *Morning Press* reported on August 29, 1914, that: "The Santa Barbara Chamber of Commerce was host to an excursion of businessmen from the northern part of the county; members entertained their guests by taking them to Stanley Park for a splendidly served feast." The paper also reported that Carpinteria socialites were still entertaining their friends at Stanley Park with brilliant affairs that included instrumental music and other amenities.

But the new Stanley Park had barely finished hosting its first season when disaster struck again. On November 19, 1915, fire destroyed the hotel and other buildings, paving the way for another change of ownership. Plans for rebuilding were announced in May 1916 by the new owner, Henry Muzzall (a forest ranger) and his wife, Lora. They built a bathhouse with porcelain tubs that offered hot and cold sulfur baths. The tent houses were



Marvin Windows Ad



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Above... *Guests arrived via stagecoach or their own buggies during Stanley Park's early years. Round trip by stage from the local train station was \$1.00. As auto travel became more prevalent in the 1910s and '20s, the resort was a recommended stop along AAA auto tour routes. Many visitors would stay between two and four weeks, paying around \$18 per week.*

Left... *You had to cross Rincon Creek via six wooden bridges to reach Stanley Park.*



PHOTO COURTESY BONNIE MILNE

rebuilt once again, and guests came even before the main building had been finished, still pleased with the natural charm of the place. The lovely resort was again reopened, and the facilities continued to operate with no further accounts of natural calamity appearing in local papers.

Carl Muzzall, son of Henry and Lora, ran Stanley Park for the family. Born and raised in Santa Barbara, Carl had graduated from Harvard in 1913, worked two years in the hotel business, and then took a Master's Degree in entomology, the study of insects. "Then the family bought this property," he said, "so I came to Carpinteria to live."

"We had a lot of interesting people [at Stanley Park]...many movie people," Carl said in an October 13, 1960, interview for the *Carpinteria Herald*. "Among the dinner guests were the Barrymores, Mary Miles Minter,

and William Boyd (Hopalong Cassidy)."

In the interview, Carl recalled that meals—announced with a gong imported from the Philippines—were served in the main lodge or outdoors under a rustic pergola. The lodge interior embraced an Asian motif, with Chinese teak wood furnishings and oriental rugs in the rooms. During these years, the lodge had a AAA rating and was a well-known stop for early auto touring enthusiasts. A YMCA convention once brought a group of 85 guests to the lodge, but "we were a little crowded with so many," Carl said.

In 1929, Carl left to work as an entomologist for two years in the Philippines. He later returned to Stanley Park, living on the grounds after inheriting the property from his mother. Stanley Park still hosted

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Claire Murray Ad

Whitney West Ad



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The original living room or parlor had a heavily beamed ceiling, deep wainscoting and mission furniture.

guests during the 1930s, but never to the extent it had earlier in the century. The Depression no doubt slowed business, but the biggest factor, according to current resident Alice Thompson, may have been im-provements to Highway 101 and the subsequent shift of traffic away from the mountains. "I'm pretty sure the place closed before World War II broke out in Europe," Alice remarked.

Carl Muzzall's land. Today, his daughter, Alice Thompson, lives in one of the renovated Stanley Park cabins, and she's full of enthusiasm for the old resort and its hun-dreds of stories. On her property, parts of the main lodge structure still stand sen-tinel in the quiet canyon, but the glory days of Stanley Park live on only in memory. ♦

Alice, her brother, Don Thompson, and her nephew, Charlie Thompson, all own homes on the property that once belonged to Carl Muzzall. "My family started coming to this canyon in 1954 or 1955," said Don. "We lived in Northridge, but at that time my dad, a geologist and civil engineer, was building the 'oil island' for the Richfield company just off the coast between Carpinteria and Ventura." Don's father, Charles Thompson, discovered the Stanley Park property while checking out a quarry site up Rincon Canyon that eventually supplied the huge boulders needed to build the island.



Over a number of years, beginning in 1957, Charles Thompson purchased

A Bit of Shepard Family History

In 1874, James and Belle Shepard led their family out from Iowa, the land of "corn, cattle, and contentment." Beating the crowd that headed west by a good 30 years, they arrived in Carpinteria's Rincon Canyon in the late 1870s and bought land that was just 200 yards off the stagecoach route. The coach started stopping for lunch, and to make a long story very short—the famous Shepard's Inn was born.

John Henry "Doc" Shepard, James's youngest brother, moved from Iowa to Carpinteria in the late 1890s to join James and another brother, Simeon, who owned the Shepard Mesa area in the foothills behind Carpinteria.

Doc married Harriet Lillard of Goleta in 1897, and a few years later the couple built Stanley Park a mile up the canyon from Shepard's Inn. Doc and Hattie had two sons—Stanley, born in 1898 and John Henry, born in 1917. Doc died in 1942, and Hattie, who was very active in the community, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and Colonial Dames, died in 1973. Their grandchildren still live in Carpinteria.



PHOTO COURTESY BONNIE MILNE

Harriet "Hattie" and John Henry "Doc" Shepard in the early 1930s with their two sons, Stanley, in the back, and John Henry, holding a duck, in the front.

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