



The Healing Hills of Fairfax
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Nestled in the hills just west of Fairfax is the Bothin Youth Center (Camp Bothin), a Girl Scout summer camp that has been in existence since 1948. However, in the first few decades of the twentieth century, the site was partially home to the Arequipa Tuberculosis Sanatorium. It owed its existence to the remarkable work and dedication of caring nurses and doctors and their philanthropic friends who wanted to provide long-term, quality care for wage-earning women suffering from the early stages of tuberculosis.

Henry E. Bothin was a San Francisco industrialist and real-estate developer who also had a great desire to use his wealth to help those in need. In 1903 he had purchased over 1000 acres outside of Fairfax from Phoebe Hearst. In a chance meeting on a ferry returning to San Francisco from Marin, Bothin met San Francisco nurse and social worker, Elizabeth Ashe and ended up donating part of his Fairfax land for her to establish the Hill Farm / Bothin Convalescent Home for mothers and their children recovering from illness and surgery.

One of the Bothin Convalescent Home's board members was Dr. Philp King Brown, a well-respected San Francisco physician and tuberculosis (TB) expert. Philip had long been concerned with the devastating effects that tuberculosis had on families, especially those in the more crowded, underprivileged neighborhoods of San Francisco. After the 1906 earthquake and fire, TB rates skyrocketed and Brown realized that the crowded, poorly ventilated tenements and factories were breeding grounds for the disease, especially for women as they either worked inside their homes or in factories, not outside as most men did. He wanted to establish a

sanatorium for these women to get them out into fresh air where they could rest, eat well and not infect their families, which was the only way to combat TB at that time.

Through his friend Ashe, he met Henry Bothin who donated a portion of his Fairfax land to Dr. Brown for the sanatorium. Phoebe Hearst and other wealthy San Francisco families raised the funds to build the sanatorium. Many of the doctors and all of the nurses were women who could perfect their craft while treating the patients who often stayed for 2 years or more. The Arequipa Sanatorium charged patients only \$1 per day, accepted women of all races, and pioneered the idea of “occupational therapy”, giving patients the opportunity to learn a skill or craft while filling their days with rewarding work and meaningful contact with each other. Most notably, the sanatorium established a pottery program for patients that was managed by well-known pottery artisans. That program produced the Arequipa line of pottery that became world-renowned for its glazes and designs. The sanatorium, supported by annual fundraisers and donations and the products sold from the patient’s labor, served Bay Area women well into the 1950s. In 1957, as new drugs were developed that killed the TB bacterium, Arequipa closed and the entire property was leased to the Girl Scouts who now own the property courtesy of a 1988 bequest from the Bothin Foundation.

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