

Richardson Springs

The Richardson brothers who gave the name to the Richardson Springs were sons of Thomas B. Richardson, who was born in Virginia in 1800, and Eliza Chamberlain whom he married in 1831 in Indiana, her native state. Fourteen children were born to them between 1832 and 1854, all in Indiana, prior to their moving to Missouri in 1854 and to Centerville, Iowa in 1856. While we know nothing of his younger life, after marriage he seems to have always lived on farms and was also a distiller. Of the fourteen children, ten lived to become adults and nine eventually became Butte County residents.

It was from Centerville, Iowa that two of the brothers, Pierce C. and Jared V. left April 1864 to join an overland train to California. Dissatisfied with delays on the trail, they left that train and forged ahead, passing several others. In Carson Valley they bargained with a freighter headed for Chico to exchange their bedrolls for a ride on his wagons. Their first night in Chico in November 1864 they slept in a wagonload of wood at the present First and Main Streets. Not finding work, they set out afoot across the Colusa plains for Calpella, Mendocino County, where they found work and engaged in several pursuits.

Pierce returned to Chico on horseback in December 1866. The following summer he ran a roadhouse in Humbug Valley, then found employment on farms with several established ranchers near Chico. Jared passed through Chico accompanied by brothers Alonzo, Joseph and Orlando. In 1870 the oldest brother, William, joined them.

They first leased Spanish Ranch at the mouth of Butte Creek for several years, then the Thomasson Ranch on Edgar Slough and Shasta Road. With Pierce's purchase of the McKee land preemption on which the Richardson Springs resort property now stands, they transferred his stock there and set up residence. The association and partnership known as Richardson Brothers lasted until 1903. They gradually acquired the lands surrounding the original purchase through homestead and purchase until; they had 5000 acres. They also had winter ranges in Grizzly Valley, Humbug Valley, Chico Meadows, and Butte Creek Meadows. In 1875 their parents, brother Elisha and sister Caroline joined them here in Butte County.

In the following year, 1876, Caroline married Nathaniel Thomasson, who had led a party of Thomassons and Bruces to Butte County in 1854. He was a well established and prospering rancher. The father, Thomas Richardson, died in 1878, brother William in 1880, and the mother, Eliza Chamberlain Richardson in 1889. The brothers were hard working men, noted as being free to camp and make use of the waters. In some cases, mud baths in the swampy outflow were taken, mostly by persons with crippling rheumatism.

In 1898, Jared opened a hotel with office, kitchen, dining hall, and fourteen rental rooms, and twenty-five rental cottages on the grounds. The resort business was launched. Meanwhile, Joseph, better known as Redman, had proposed to Alice Aldersley, the teacher over the hill at Rock Creek School. One of her conditions was that he leave this partnership, about which she could learn nothing, as to where and how they would stand after the marriage.

The brothers were aging. All considered the Springs range too rough for older men to handle as stock range. They agreed to dissolve partnership, each to take his allotted share and go his separate way. In the division of property, Redman was allotted the Richardson Springs, not at all his desire. However, his practical common sense,

coupled with the quiet and diplomatic but decisive executive ability of his wife, Alice; together with the genial and friendly ability to meet the public, which was the contribution of Lee Richardson, a nephew who became manager, the development of Richardson Mineral Springs was underway.

By 1919 the management announced a remodeling program and had it well underway when, at the height of the season, August 1921, a fire destroyed the hotel, the annex and the dormitory for the Chinese kitchen crew. As the result of remarkable efforts and cooperation, breakfast was served to guests and employees in an improvised dining hall, and business was continued as nearly as possible. Reconstruction was begun and the present 200 room hotel was to have its formal opening in May 1924, when another fire destroyed the barns, garages, the stage and service buildings, thus delaying the reopening until September. By then the resort had taken on much of its present appearance, though terracing, reconstruction of the spring plaza and bathhouse went steadily along through several years.

In the course of this work the residence of Redman and Alice Richardson was built. It still stands. The home of Lee and Jean Richardson was built on the site of Mudd Creek House, which had been built in 1875 for the arrival of the parents of the brothers.

The business thrived and at one time an offer of \$1,000,000 was quickly declined. The depression days affected the resort business, but the resort remained open all year round. World War II, with its shortages, disruptions and regulations took a heavy toll. The Springs had long been famous for its facilities for conventions, lodge meetings, fraternity and sorority parties and similar affairs: hundreds of participants having fond memories of those days. Baseball clubs came here for winter training, notably the Detroit Tigers. It was also widely known as a place to go for a dinner out, as the food provided by the Chinese chef, An Kay, and his crew was excellent, the atmosphere informal, homey and relaxed. The drive of a few miles onto the hills was an escape from the business worries and heat. And at the Springs, one was certain to meet someone he knew and have a nice visit.

Time brought changes. Age, accidents, and deaths brought about changes in the management. In 1937, Harry Mulock, well-liked assistant manager for many years, left for an investment business of his own at Challenge, California. His position was filled by John Parks, and, after a few years, he was succeeded by Ned Richardson, oldest son of Lee. The owner J.H. Richardson (Redman), passed on in 1938, leaving ownership to his wife, Alice and nephew, Lee.

It was found advisable to incorporate under the title Richardson Mineral Springs, Inc., Lee being the president, and Alice, vice president. In 1945, upon the death of Lee, Alice became president, Ned vice president and general manager. Lee's younger son, Robert L. (Bob) Richardson became vice president and manager of Richardson Cattle and Land Co., a subsidiary. Alice was the active head of the concerns until her death in 1957, though totally disabled during the last two years. Ned and Bob continued the operation, personally managing the hotel and resort, with the aid of their wives, Lucian and Kay.

During the period following WWII, the changes brought about in living conditions and especially travel and vacation concepts, had disturbing effects upon resort businesses, in general, certainly including that of Richardson Springs. It became unfeasible to remain open during the winter months. Even the gates were locked because

of liability insurance costs. In time it was made known that the Springs were for sale, but years passed before an interested buyer was found.

A religious group, interested in establishing a non-denominational meeting ground for conventions and retreats, took a lease in 1968 with a right to purchase after a year, which they exercised in 1969 when Richardson Springs passed into the hands of Springs of Living Water, Inc. Ned Richardson passed away 17 March 1970. Bob lives in semi-retirement at Palm Springs.

Larry Richardson, March 1971