

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 2, 1957

Tassajara Hot Springs

The Book Club of California has just delivered to the membership the third group in the series of Keepsakes for 1957 which consists of four folders each containing a reproduction of an early California resort. Two resorts of early Monterey County are pictured and discussed in this series: Tassajara Hot Springs and Del Monte Hotel. Professor Edith M. Coulter, retired reference librarian and lecturer in the School of Librarianship, University of California, author of several books and editor of numerous manuscripts relating to California history, is the writer of the Tassajara Springs comments. The Black Vine Press printed the series as designed by the owners, Harold Seeger and Albert Sporisen. Mrs. William J. Hippell is credited with the courtesy of loaning the old-time photograph of the original Springs hotel.

Miss Coulter writes the following description of Monterey County's most famous springs: "Tassajara Hot Springs, located in the Santa Lucia Mountains, Monterey County, about 45 miles from Salinas and an equal distance from Monterey were known to the Indians and later to the Spaniards. Legend tells us that local Indian tribes made pilgrimages to the area. The springs received their name from a Spanish-American word 'Tasajera', meaning a place where meat is cut in strips and hung in the sun to dry.

"On the southern bank of the Arroyo Seco Creek, for a distance of 200 yards, 17 hot mineral springs issue from the mountainside at a temperature of 140-150 degrees. They contain sulfur, sodium, magnesia, iron, and phosphates and are reported to be effective remedial agents.

"The only approach to the springs in early days was by a steep and hazardous trail. Due to the difficulty of access, accommodations were limited and bathing facilities crude. In the 1890's, a road was built permitting the use of horse-drawn stages. These ran from Salinas taking 10 to 12 hours for the trip, horses being changed three times.

"In 1904 a sandstone hotel was constructed. Improvements, consisting of tub and plunge baths with improved vapor baths, were added yearly. A better road by 1912 allowed automobile passenger service, reducing the length of the journey to two and a half

hours. Bathhouses and outdoor plunges, the latter filled continuously with hot mineral water, added to a moderate climate. Free of fog although only 18 miles from the Pacific, combine to attract vacationers and health seekers.

"The mountains along the creek are covered with trees - maples, oaks, and sycamores. Nearby are well-stocked trout streams, and the encircling mountains abound in wildlife. The ride up the Carmel Valley across the mountains and down into the canyon provides a beautiful approach to adequate accommodations and health-giving waters.

"Over the years, names associated with Tassajara Hot Springs as owners or managers, are C. W. Quilty, James and William Jeffery, Mrs. Helen Quilty Holohan, and currently, Frank B. Sappok."

"The location in the Los Padres National Forest, the comfortable hotel and cottages, continue to make the Springs an excellent vacation resort from May until October."

Writing in 1876, Jack Swan, the builder of California's First Theater. "I first heard of Tassajara Springs in the early part of 1843 while hunting in the Carmel Valley. I met a large band of Indians coming up the valley, some being on horseback and others on foot. The leader who had been educated at the missions, spoke good Spanish. He stated that he and his tribe were bound for Tassajara Springs to take the waters for a rash or skin disease that had broken out among them. They would build a sweat hut of mud and branches over the place where the hot water flowed from the ground and then remain there until they got so weak the medicine man would have to carry them out, after which they would scrape their bodies with the ribs of a deer or some other animal."

Further describing the Springs, Swan wrote: "Frequently there would be several tribes there at one time but because of the great abundance of wild game of all kinds, and fish, they had no trouble living. In fact, there was so much game there, in addition to its being an ideal spot to dry meat, that the Indians gave it the name of Tassajara meaning a place where meat could be dried." It is pronounced "tass-a-har-a" and has been repeatedly used as a place name in California. It is a Spanish-American word.