

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Paso Robles Hot Springs

Paso Robles Hot Springs, longtime favorite as a California health resort, has been chosen as the historical No. 9 Keepsake in the series, "Resorts of California" published for the membership by the California Book Club during 1957. W. W. Robison, vice president of the Title Insurance and Trust Company of Los Angeles, is the author. Robinson is also the author of "Ranchos Become Cities" and numerous other articles on California history, and a director of the Book Club.

Paso Robles Hot Springs took its name from El Paso de los Robles - apt designation of Spanish days. Mr. Robinson claims that even the bears, swinging through the bubbling liquid from the tree branches overhead, found satisfaction from the pleasant and curative values of the ever-flowing waters, as did the natives and the Indians.

It is always thrilling to note that almost all early California history eventually brings one back to Monterey. In this story of Paso Robles Hot Springs, we learn that after the secularization of the missions the valley was open to private ownership. Mexican Governor Micheltorena in 1844 granted Rancho El Paso de los Robles to Pedro Narvaez, a Mexican naval lieutenant then in charge of the port of Monterey.

Another Californio. Petronillo Rios, later acquired Narvaez' rancho (along with a half interest in abandoned Mission San Miguel). Rios' title to the rancho, but not the mission, was confirmed by the United States. To him a patent for 26,000 acres was issued.

Americans entered the picture in 1857. For \$8,000 the rancho was bought by D. D. Blackburn. James H. Blackburn, and Lazare Godchaux. Soon the owners were the two Blackburns and D. W. James, our author relates. These three Americans determined to make the place an outstanding resort. Finding pools at the principal springs still banked with logs of mission days and with bear tracks at the edge, they built around it white stone walls. Here the hot water arose, bubbling with gases, to be diverted where the owners wished.

A village for guests was constructed. The central building was the hotel, with detached buildings

containing parlors, bedrooms, a store, billiard saloon, express and telegraph offices, a post office, reading room, barber shop, and physician's office and residence.

Near the main spring was a long, double row of bathrooms. For First-class guests there were cottages and separate dining rooms. Into the two plunge baths which they built - one for men and one for women - flowed 4,500 gallons of water per hour from the wall enclosed spring. Mud baths too were provided.

The advertisements concerning Paso Robles Hot Springs were amusing. The owners called in analysis, mineralogists, and physicians, as well as writers. Reports on the virtues of the springs were issued.

"The diseases for which these waters are particularly adapted," it was announced, "are rheumatism, syphilis, gout, neuralgia, paralysis, erysipelas, intermittent fever, eczema, and diseases of the liver and kidney." Likewise, the waters are said to be good for "gentlemen whose long and assiduous devotion to Bacchus has at last resulted in worn out stomachs and shattered nervous systems" - as well, as those "addicted to the excessive use of opium and morphine."

One need not be more than middle age, writes W. W. Robinson, to remember the huge hotel started in 1889 and burned to the ground in 1941 - the main middle-point hostelry between San Francisco and Los Angeles. Stately, formal, high-ceilinged, and high-priced, it had a solarium, a bathhouse, a ballroom, elderly waiters and elderly guests. Today the successor to this famous resort hotel, the Paso Rubles Inn, caters, not to invalids and the elderly, but to the fast-moving, motoring public. The management now offers a swimming pool instead of sulphur and mud baths and the old hot springs have been capped - another advancement to progress.