

# The Odd Fellows Home in Thermalito

Presented by the Butte County Historical Society




**The Odd Fellows Home in Thermalito, Calif.**

# The Thermalito Land Colony

The Thermalito Land Colony had been founded in 1886 by Edward W. Fogg, Albert F. Jones and Frank McLaughlin – a banker, an attorney and a mining engineer – who laid out a community with “12 miles of graded avenues” and 40 acre lots, expecting to sell acreage for fruit orchards to eager newcomers.





The 'centerpiece' of the Thermalito Land Colony was to be the Bella Vista Hotel, a magnificent building on the high bluff overlooking the Feather River. Construction began in 1888 with the expectation that the hotel would open in 1889.

They broke ground for the grand hotel in 1888, with hopes of completing it the following year. However, the project was undercapitalized, the large-scale sale of land in the new Land Colony did not materialize, and the general US economy was heading into the depression of 1893. As a result, the Hotel project faltered and work stopped, with a lien of \$3,000 against it.

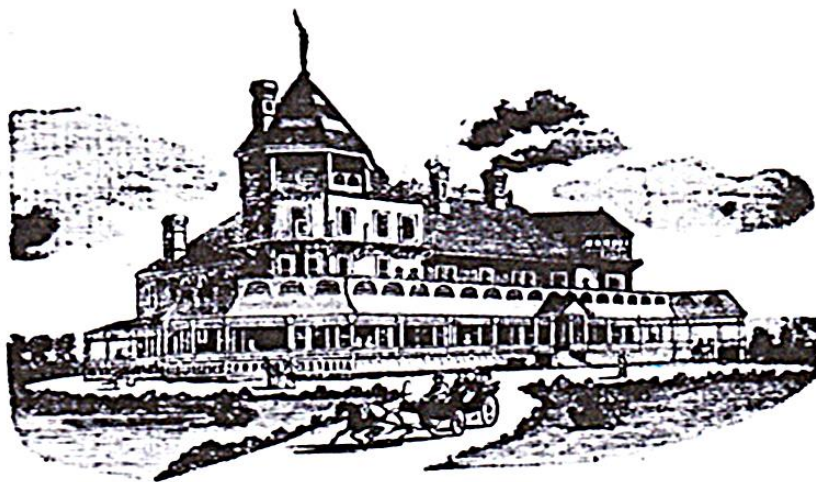
The partners attempted to sell the unfinished hotel, but by 1895 they still had no buyer. Jones, Fogg and McLaughlin, all Odd Fellows members, decided to give the building to the I.O.O.F. In 1895 it was deeded to the organization. as "a free gift" and the \$3,000 lien was paid by individual citizens of Oroville so the gift would be entirely debt free.

What was to have been a grand hotel became a beautiful home for elderly members of the I.O.O.F. and a community landmark.



Note the palms in the foreground.

The Odd Fellows completed construction on the former Bella Vista Hotel in 1896; 79 applications from “aged and indigent Odd Fellows and their wives” from around the state were approved. Of these, 69 were admitted to the Home. In 1897 additional property was purchased, increasing the land holding from 8 to 85 acres. A 40-room annex was added to the Home along with a laundry, storehouse, barn, stables, and a cemetery.



**The Odd Fellows' Home, Thermalito, California.**

The Odd Fellows' Home at Thermalito, Butte county, is to have an addition of two stories and attic, to contain about fifty rooms for patients, baths, smoking rooms, etc. Plans are by Hartman & Swain of this city. — *S. F. Bulletin.*

The above from our contemporary indicates the popularity and good work being accomplished by the Odd Fellows' Home. There are now probably sixty aged members of the Order supported at this institution, and supported in a manner not only reflecting credit upon the institution and its management, but appealing to the pride of every Odd Fellow in the State. It is a home—neat, comfortable, pleasant, inviting—where the aged can spend their declining years in comfort.

Feather River  
Bulletin 9/3/1896

There was always a certain amount of discontent that the Home was situated in Oroville. Odd Fellows in the Bay Area were promoting from the beginning to have a new home constructed in Santa Clara County. Even so, improvements were made to the Oroville facility. A hospital was built in 1905. It burned in 1908 and was rebuilt a year later.




By 1907 the Home was the residence of 320 people.



Residents of the Odd Fellows Home (often referred to as “inmates”) enjoyed sitting on the broad porches. Hogan Photo below







The property along the river was leased out for gold dredging in 1908.

In the wake of complaints about the summer heat and swarms of mosquitoes, the statewide Odd Fellows organization decided to abandon the Thermalito site. In 1913 all of the residents were moved to a new home that had been constructed in Saratoga. The Oroville community was saddened by their departure, and many local residents accompanied the Odd Fellows to the train station.

Many Oroville residents were saddened by the closure of the Home, but there were some who felt that it was a detriment to the local community.

A buyer was found for the long vacant property in 1918 and many of the buildings were torn down.

**ODD FELLOWS HOME  
SOON WILL BE RAZED**

The historic Odd Fellows Home at Thermalito, near Oroville, is to be torn down. A contract has been let by W. W. Gingles and W. C. Putnam, its present owners, to E. K. Ford of Oroville for razing the building. The site will be converted into a modern farm. The home was abandoned by the Odd Fellows about ten years ago and sold recently to its present owners.

A fire in 1927 destroyed much of what was left. However, it still provided an "attractive nuisance" for the children of Thermalito to play in until its final fire in the 1970s. Today only the cemetery and the palms along the original drive remain.

The palm trees are still visible.



More information is available in *Calling out from the Past: the First Odd Fellows Home in California* by Peter V. Sellars. It is available for \$15.95 through the BCHS stores.



We Hope You Enjoyed The Presentation!

**Butte County Historical Society**