

My interest in Poland Spring and its mineral water bottles began in 1984. A longtime bottle collector friend and his wife, Bill and Loretta Zimmerman, suggested that we go on a week's vacation to Poland Spring. We had rooms in the Presidential Inn, built in 1913.

We did this trip for three years and while Bill and I did some bottle hunting, Lillian and Loretta enjoyed the many other pleasures available there.

The history of the spring, and the family that started it all, is very interesting, but a very long story. I can only bring out the highlights here.

It began in 1650, when George Riccar and his brother Maturin left Saxony (present-day Germany) and settled in Dover, N.H. They had 13 children, and in the course of the years, they scattered into the neighboring states. Jabez Riccar, grandson of Maturin, moved into the area of the present site of Alfred, Maine, where he became a farmer.

The story goes that one hot day, he and his horse, Emily, started for Augusta and soon they were lost, hungry and thirsty. Jabez knew to give the horse his head and he would take them to water --- so soon they were both drinking from a beautiful cold spring. Before they left that spring, Jabez vowed to make that spot his home.

It was owned by a group of Shakers. Soon a bargain was struck and Jabez owned the land that was to become the Poland Spring.

Soon they sold the farm and his family of 12 (he had married Molly, and they had a dozen children before she died in 1838 at the age of 96) moved to his new land in anticipation of developing a farm near the spring, but that land was unsuitable for farming. They built a small cabin for a home, and lived in despair.

On May 4, 1791, a stagecoach stopped at their cabin to water the horses. Mrs. Riccar invited the three passengers and the driver to have lunch. Soon the news spread of how good a cook Molly was, and how

good the water was. Soon they had a nice business going, and their fortune was made.

One day in the spring of 1795, Jabez told his oldest son, Wentworth, that he was to build an inn and tavern to accommodate guests, and by 1797, the inn was completed. On one of his trips to buy supplies, Wentworth met Polly Phipps, married her and one of their five children was Hiram Riccar, the architect and planner of Poland Spring as a resort. This inn became the famous Mansion House.

There are many stories about the curing powers of Poland Spring. Wentworth's younger brother, Joseph, was a blacksmith who made every nail, hinge, etc., that went into the Mansion House.

On Dec. 25, 1800, he became very ill and the doctor finally told them that Joseph was now in the hands of the Lord. Polly then let him drink all the spring water he wanted, and Joseph survived to live 52 more years to die at the age of 80. In 1827, Wentworth had a severe kidney ailment, and again, doctors gave up on him. Remembering his brother's recovery, he also began to drink spring water and was cured to live 10 more years until 1837.

Now we finally get to the main character of this story, Hiram, born in November of 1809 as the fourth son of Wentworth and Polly. Hiram had a nasty disposition, was quick to fight and was disliked by most people, including his family.

As Hiram grew, so did the fortunes of the Riccars. During the War of 1812, the Riccars were prime suppliers of horses, timber, etc., to the army and became very wealthy as a result. In 1820, as part of the Missouri Compromise, Maine became the 23rd state in the Union.

Prior to this time, the area was called Bakerstown. Why the name was changed to Poland is unknown. Later, when the spring became famous, that part of Poland was officially renamed Poland Spring.

Wentworth constructed the road (now Route 26) to connect that area with other nearby places. In February of 1827, Jabez died at the age of 86. Molly died in 1838 at age 96. Their graves can be seen in the Riccar cemetery, near the Mansion House. Perhaps there is something in that spring water after all.

There is a story about Hiram that needs telling here. With Jabez deceased, Wentworth was in control, and by 1833, he had enough! He made plans to leave on the 13th anniversary of Maine statehood.

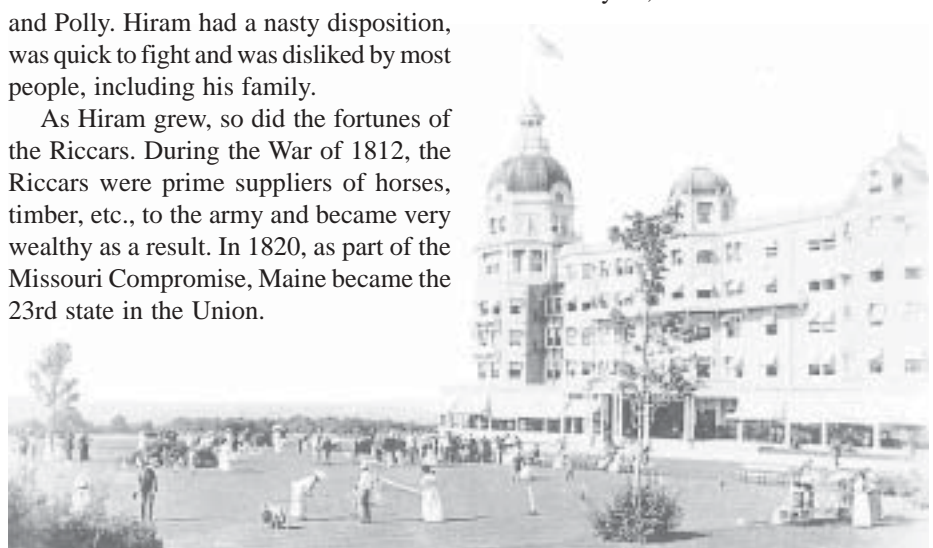
Hiram saved \$6.00 to paint the town red, arrived in Portland on March 15th, and used up all his money on whiskey.

In a somewhat less than sober state, he went out into the nearby street where he bumped into a well-dressed man, high hat and all, and knocked him down in the mud. Soon a crowd had gathered to watch this "county bumpkin" try to help the "dandy" up.

As he arose and wiped his face, he asked, "Whom do I have the pleasure of addressing?" "My name is Hiram Riccar," he answered. "Well," said the man, "My name is Longfellow. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and you will hear more about this!"

Hiram didn't care about Longfellow, but he soon learned, and his father had him shipped off to Boston to avoid the pending litigation. Hiram apprenticed himself to a harness maker and soon learned to fear and hate the city.

After a year, he returned home to see





his ill father, and learned he was now to manage Riccar Hill. There he worked hard, developed a severe case of dyspepsia and was down to less than 100 pounds, and all due to the pressure his father forced upon him. On his 28th birthday, in November of 1837, his father Wentworth died. Now Hiram had the full responsibility of the business and the only thing that sustained his life was the spring water.

Released from the pressure of his father's demands, and with the spring water diet, he soon was back to good health. His doctor noted his recovery and started using the water for other patients. It wasn't long before physicians in Boston, New York and other cities were asking for Poland Spring Water.

Soon barrels of the Poland Water were found on ships and wagons heading west. It was then that Hiram realized that more money could be made with the water than his sheep and lumber businesses, so he turned his full attention to the sale and shipping of Poland Water.

At age 37, Hiram married Janette Wheeler Bolster of Rumford, Maine. She was the daughter of Gen. Alvan Bolster, a hero of the Revolutionary War. Their wedding was on May 26, 1846.

Right after this, things really began to happen at Poland Spring. Janette appears to have been the driving force behind

Hiram. The original inn had been expanded many times, and in 1860, Hiram advertised room and full board, plus all the Poland Spring Water one could drink for \$2.00 a week.

By 1873, 50 rooms were added. Business was fine for the Riccars, in spite of the financial panic of that time. In 1875, Hiram decided to build a new grand hotel to contain 100 rooms, but kept building and by 1876, he had completed 300 rooms, which included a dining room 200 feet long, a music room of the same size and many reception rooms.

The Grand Opening was celebrated with the wealthy people of America and the titled from Europe in attendance. Many others copied his design, but none of the 66 others survived. Riccar built the Poland Spring House to survive.

He installed the first sprinkler system installed in a public building in America. There also were fire walls and other safety features. The cost was estimated at \$300,000 in 1876.

During a trip to Scotland, Hiram saw a golf course and learned to play. In 1913, he had one built at Poland Spring, the first one built at a resort in this country. Janette died soon after their return to the U.S., and Hiram lived 10 more years. After his wife's death, he lost his drive and turned the business over to two sons, Edward and

Hiram Weston. However, the elder Hiram continued to add acreage until he had 5,000 acres.

In 1892, Hiram Riccar's work was recognized by a special award in the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. While at the event, Hiram noticed a very special building that he learned was representing Maine. It was made of Maine granite and the woodwork contained every example of wood that grew in Maine.

He wanted that building and offered \$30,000, which was accepted. Hiram had the building dismantled and shipped home. It took two years and 15 freight cars to do the job. Hiram died before this job was completed on July 1, 1895. The building was dedicated as a library and museum for the guests.

The Deans and Zimmermans spent time enjoying the beautiful building in 1984, '86 and '86.

Edward Riccar took over after Hiram's death. He and his wife had two sons --- he died in 1928. His older brother, Hiram Weston, and his wife, Vesta, had two sons. He ran the bottling plant and is credited with the now famous Moses bottles. Alvan Bolster Riccar was mostly a playboy-type and a horse lover.

With the coming of World War I, there was a great anti-German sentiment. The Riccars learned that their background





Photo from article, "Water bottler's heritage lends authenticity in crowded market," *Rome Sentinel*, April 13, 2000



would be suspect, so they quietly changed the spelling from "Riccar" to "Ricker."

Playboy Alvan married first a girl named Cora, who had a sharp tongue and unpleasant face, as well as a terrible temper. It was not a good marriage! She died in 1922, and Alvan married the girl of his dreams, an English nurse named Jane Jeffrey --- who was the opposite from Cora. Alvan died a year later, and Jane died in 1960 at the age of 80.

The Town of Poland was given the library by Jane Ricker, as well as a fund to continue it. It was named the Alvan Bolster Ricker Memorial Library.

During this period, many changes occurred to affect the Ricker business: (1) the 1930s depression, (2) vacation patterns changed, (3) people became more mobile, and those who used to stay all season now stayed only a week or so, (4) a new law required decent wages for employees, and (5) Laura Hobson's book "Gentleman's Agreement," which disclosed discriminat-

ing practices of "restricted hotels." These pressures began to affect the kingdom built by Hiram.

Many corporations operated Poland Spring through the 1950s, but none of them had much success. One owner, Saul Feldmen, tried to upgrade the hotel to make it more modern. He built the 86-room Executive House (the Inn) in 1962-63, with television, carpets, private baths and other amenities. He also still operated the Mansion House and the Poland Spring House.

For five years, Feldmen succeeded in attracting such guests as Jack Paar, Joan Crawford, Peter Goulet, Jimmy Durante and heavyweight boxer Sonny Liston, who trained in the dining room of the Mansion House, as well as other celebrities.

In 1967, President Lyndon Johnson developed an idea for training people for carpentry, barbering, sewing and other light industries and chose Poland Spring for his Women's Job Corps Center.

They were to train 2,000 girls there, but within three years, a new president, Richard Nixon, cut the funds and Poland Spring was left in shambles!

In 1972, Mel Robbins made plans to purchase the property, but realized he would have to bring it up to the 20th Century in order to survive. He had plans to re-open the Poland Spring House for the bicentennial celebration of 1976 --- but it was not to happen! On July 4th, 1876, Hiram Riccar stood on the front porch of the Poland Spring House, and after a long speech, he pledged his sacred word of honor that his building would stand for 100 years.

On the eve of July 4, 1975, the Poland Spring House burned to the ground! Hiram's prophecy had been off by exactly one year to the day. The owners were devastated, but turned to the Mansion House and, strangely enough, in the fall of 1976, it also burned to the ground.

Mel and Cyndi Robbins did not keep crying over the loss of those two buildings. They still had the Maine Inn, Presidential Cottage and the Motor Inn to attract guests, and it was in their Presidential Inn that the Deans and Zimmermans stayed.

The April 13, 2000 issue of the *Rome Daily Sentinel* had a nice article on the Poland Spring, which would fit nicely here in this story if space permitted. I'll go on to the subject of their mineral water bottles.

Bill and I found an old dump on the property, but the only bottles (mineral water) found were piles of blob top, green, two-quart --- no Moses or Saratoga-type were found. According to Cecil Munsey (2), it was in 1876 that the famous Moses bottle was first made. Jane S. Spillman (3), of Somerville, Maine, made some and in





bottle in amber that is of the Saratoga type. Daniel Tucker's M-38 (7).

Later, the Moses-type bottles are known in various shades of green, a rare amber, and in various sizes. On these bottles there is "Facsimile of the First Poland Water Bottle." In the 1930s, the company began to sell gin in these bottles, but they are marked "Federal Law Forbids the Sale or Reuse of this Bottle."

The first bottling plant on this site was constructed in 1845. The beautiful properties of this water was not isolated until about the 1850s, when analysis showed the composition of the minerals present. The mineral balance and purity of the spring has remained unchanged since the first analysis in 1845 (4).

References:

- (1) Robbins, Mel, *Poland Spring, An Informed History, Third Edition*, 1975.
- (2) Munsey, Cecil, *The Illustrated Guide to Collecting Bottles*, Hawthorn Books, Inc., N.Y., 1970.
- (3) Spillman, Jane S., *Glass, Vol. 2, Bottles, Lamps & Other Objects*, Published by Knoph, Inc., 1979.
- (4) Schwartz, Steven, *The Book of*



3-Gallon Poland Springs jug.

the early 1900s, Cunningham & Co., of Pittsburgh, made more.

These bottles, made in the form of a bearded man, are called "Moses Striking the Rock." They are inscribed "Poland Water" and "H. Ricker and Sons, Proprietors." This figure represents Moses about to strike the rock on Horeb. (See Numbers, Chapter 20, 8-11, and Exodus, Chapter 17, 6.)

There is another quart Poland Water



Poland Springs price list, circa 1895.

Waters, A&W Visual Library, N.Y., 1979.

(5) Rome Daily Sentinel, "Water Bottler's Heritage," Published April 13, 2000.

(6) Personal notes and memories of this author, from June 1984, '85 and '86.

(7) Tucker, Daniel, *Collector's Guide to the Saratoga Type Mineral Water Bottles*, 1986.

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