



## **The History of Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs Resort & Spa** *Celebrating 140 years as one of the oldest natural health resorts in the U.S.*

*SPA is the acronym for the Spanish phrase “Salus Per Aguas”, which means “health through water”.*

Steeped in myth and legend, these ancient springs have been a gathering place and source of healing for hundreds, even thousands of years. The use of the waters can be traced back to the earliest human settlements in the region. Ancient people, believed to be the ancestors of today’s Native American Tewa tribes, built large pueblos and terraced gardens overlooking the springs. Posi or Poseuinge, “village at the place of the green bubbling hot springs” was home to thousands of people.

Because of the work of archaeologists Adolph Bandelier and Edgar Hewitt, we know that Posi was a vibrant center of activity in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Surrounding the springs today is substantial evidence, including clay shards and arrows, of prehistoric civilization in the ruins of the cities populated before the birth of history.

In the 1500’s the Spaniards, in their quest for gold and the Fountain of Youth, also discovered the Springs. One explorer’s record cites, “The greatest treasure that I found these strange people to possess, are hot springs which burst out at the foot of a mountain... so powerful are the chemicals contained in this water that the inhabitants have a belief that they were given to them by their gods. These springs I have named Ojo Caliente” (literally translated means “warm eye”, but more commonly known as “hot spring”).

Enter explorer Zebulon Pike (Pike’s Peak discoverer), who while under arrest in 1807 for exploring New Spain without permission, was marched to Santa Fe, passing through Ojo Caliente and observed the hot springs as “the greatest natural curiosity”.

Antonio Joseph, a man prominently connected with the history of New Mexico, and recognized as one of the most influential citizens of the Territory, next noticed these unusual waters. Born in Taos in 1846, his parents moved there from Missouri and opened the first general mercantile establishment in that area. Enduring hardships, the family remained, but sent Mr. Joseph to be educated by Bishop Lamy in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Afterward he was a student in Webster College in Missouri, for four years, and completed the commercial course at Bryant and Stratton’s Business College of St. Louis.

In 1868, Mr. Joseph, now responsible for managing the family business, was also named the first Territorial Representative. It is at this time as well, that Mr. Joseph moved to Ojo Caliente, New Mexico, where he opened Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs as the first natural health spa in the country. Joseph’s Ojo became a hub of activity by providing overnight lodging, a Post Office, and a general store where historical ledgers show Kit Carson frequently purchased supplies.

At Ojo, Mr. Joseph built a sanitarium, which soon became known throughout the country as a place where thousands of invalids were annually cured. Many structures have been built since throughout the decades. The oldest building on record is the Co-ed Bathhouse built in the 1860s; later followed by the Historic Hotel, built in 1916, and the Adobe Round Barn in 1924. All three buildings have been lovingly restored and are listed on the National Registry of Historic Places.

His fellow citizens, appreciating his worth and ability, frequently called Mr. Joseph to public office. He served as County Judge of Taos County for 6 years, served as Senator in the Territorial Legislature for a similar period, and by the General Assembly was elected to the 49th Congress, where he remained for ten years. A broad-minded and honorable man, whose public and private life were above reproach, Mr. Joseph is remembered as a heroic native son of the Territory he served that has now become New Mexico.

The famous and the infamous have taken these waters. Volumes of testimonials filled with declarations of miracle cures abound. Whether unproven folklore or not, generations of the faithful continually make the pilgrimage back to these special waters. This remarkable combination of four different types of mineral waters: lithium, iron, soda and arsenic, over 100,000 gallons a day, still come steaming to the surface, revitalizing those who soak in these legendary waters.