

BEARD FAMILY COMPANIES

The success of the Beard Family Companies cannot be attributed to a single person or even a single generation, but the seed that sprouted into one of the Central Valley's successful families—and business enterprises—bore the name of Elihu Burritt Beard, who arrived in California in September 1850 hoping to earn his fortune in the gold fields.

Elihu and his wife, Ann Eliza Kennan, had seven children, the eldest of which, T. K. Beard, inherited his parents' vast holdings and, in 1915, closed his contracting business to focus on managing his and what had previously been his parents' assets in Stanislaus County. T. K. and his wife, Grace Ada Lewis, had ten children, ensuring the perpetuation of the Beard family name and sowing the seeds for what would become a successful family of companies.

Elihu can be credited with much of the success of the family and its business holdings. It is because of him that the family moved to the Modesto area in the first place. But the Beard family history extends beyond California and can be traced as far back as around 1710, when John Beard, his wife, and their two sons, Richard and John, immigrated from Devonshire, England, arriving on Nantucket Island, Massachusetts. The island's inhabitants



Right: Thomas Kennan 'T. K.' Beard and Grace Ada Lewis's wedding day on September 17, 1878.

Below: T. K. and Grace's house built in 1888, one mile east of Modesto. This photograph was taken in 1893. This location is now Santa Cruz Avenue.

included the Wampanoag Indians and several Quaker families, who had fled religious persecution in England. The Beard family, who were also Quakers, lived on Nantucket Island until troubles between Massachusetts and the British threatened to boil over into violence.



Many Quakers, who were pacifists, fled the impending Revolutionary War for Guilford County, North Carolina. This included Richard Beard, Jr., and his family, who made the exodus in 1767. Richard Beard, Jr.'s son, thirteen-year-old George Beard, was destined to become, among other things, Elihu's grandfather. The Beards and other Quaker families did not settle permanently in the South. Their anti-slavery stance made them unpopular among their Southern neighbors, and so, in 1817, three generations of the Beard family moved to the border area of Indiana and Ohio.

George Beard settled in Wayne County, and his son, William Beard, settled just to the south near Liberty in Union County, Indiana. William served as a preacher in the family's new church, treated his neighbor's injuries and illnesses, and farmed their 1,000-acre spread. It was on this farm that William and his wife, Rachel, gave birth to Elihu, who adopted his middle name while attending college to honor Elihu Burritt, a Quaker leader in the international peace movement.

Rachel Pierson Beard, Elihu's mother, was born in Rowan County, North Carolina, to a Quaker family. Although they did not have Nantucket Island roots, they too left North Carolina and settled in Indiana, two counties to the north of where William and Rachel settled.

Cincinnati, located on the Ohio River, served as the transportation hub for the region. Since the river served as the boundary between slave and free states, the city became the focal point for the Underground Railroad, which spirited escaped slaves to freedom. Elihu's father, William, served in the leadership of the Underground Railroad.

In 1826, Levi Coffin, also a Quaker, moved from Guilford County, North Carolina, to Indiana, settling thirty miles north of the Beard family near Newport, Indiana. Both he and William, who were cousins, became leaders in the Underground Railroad, offering their homes as stations in the network of safe houses providing refuge to escaped slaves.

Elihu entered college in 1845, spent five semesters at Oxford College in Miami, Ohio, (now Miami University), taught school for six months, and returned to school to finish his education, graduating from Farmers College in

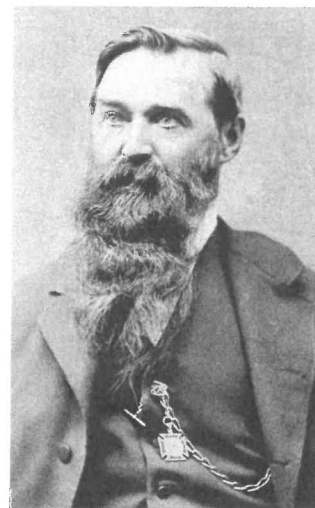
what is now College Hill in 1849. Then, like many others at that time, he was drawn to California and the recently discovered gold fields. Elihu worked to raise the funds needed to make the journey, tending livestock for a group headed for California. They followed the Oregon Trail through Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Idaho before arriving in California in September of 1850.

Elihu began his prospecting career in El Dorado County and for the next two years worked there and in Tuolumne and Fresno Counties. In 1852 he purchased his first parcel of land on Dry Creek in what was then Tuolumne County and would later become Stanislaus County. He planted grain and grazed sheep. After the land became part of Stanislaus County, Elihu was elected county assessor and first county superintendent of schools. Four years after purchasing land on October 7, 1856, Elihu married Ann Eliza Kennan, originally from Missouri.

Their first house was located on Dry Creek at a site known by the family as "Graveyard Bottom," which served as the family's burial site. A road between Stockton and the southern mines ran along the property, and travelers began using it as a stopping point. To this day, descendants of Elihu and Ann own the property.

Elihu did well as a farmer and after selling his crops each year would buy land to increase his holdings and his ability to earn more money. In a ten-year period between 1860 and 1870, Elihu increased his real estate holdings by ten times. Because they owned large tracts of land, the Beards were able to enter into sharecropping contracts with other farmers or to hire farm managers. This freed them from work, allowing them to pursue other activities. For instance, Elihu was appointed as the first superintendent of schools in Stanislaus County, served in the California State Assembly for three years, and donated his time and talents to various community endeavors.

In 1873, the Beards bought a home site on the northwest corner of Twelfth and I Streets in Modesto, which later became the post office. A year later, they built a home across I Street from the Stanislaus County Courthouse, and in 1880 bought two lots in Pacific Grove for a vacation home. Beard family descendants own the home to this day.



Above: Elihu Beard at age sixty, San Francisco, 1885.

Below: Ann Eliza Beard at fifty-six, San Francisco, 1885.





Beard family home built in 1913 at the corner of Sycamore and Needham Avenues in Modesto. Sold in the late 1920s, it was torn down in 1956.

Although they fared well in business, Elihu and Ann endured many personal hardships. By 1892, only two of their seven children were still alive: T. K. and their unmarried daughter, Alice, who suffered from the same weak lungs that had claimed the lives of some of her siblings. To preserve her health, Alice eventually moved to the Kona Coast of Hawaii, and after visiting in 1901, Elihu developed pneumonia and died on May 7 at the age of seventy-five. Eleven years later, Alice also passed away, and two months after that—on November 6, 1912—Ann died from pneumonia at the age of eighty-three.

The Beard family might have faded into history had it not been for T. K., who had promised his parents their lineage would continue after their deaths. T. K. fathered ten children. They all survived their parents and lived well into adulthood, thus allowing T. K. to keep his promise.

After a four-year stint in the Pacific Northwest, T. K. and Grace returned to Modesto and built a home diagonal to the home of Elihu and Ann. Like his father, T. K. bought land whenever he could, including what is now the Beard Industrial District.

T. K. played an important role in irrigating the Central Valley. It took hard work and diplomacy to convince residents to see the value of irrigating and to invest the money in making it happen. T. K. and his son, Walter, went into business creating early reservoirs and canals. T. K. served on the Modesto Irrigation District from 1901 to 1907.

T. K. later inherited his parents' land and spent the rest of his career managing the family's Stanislaus County assets. The family's legacy lives on through two parks built on

land donated by the family—Graceada Park (given in conjunction with the Wisecarver family) and Beard Brook Park, and a Modesto school—Elihu Beard Elementary School—also bears the family name.

Following T. K.'s death in 1925, Grace lived another thirty-two years. She encouraged her children to keep the family assets together as a family corporation, which they did. The majority of the family's assets are in Stanislaus County, but it does own property in Southern California and Walnut Creek.

Today, the Beard Family Companies is led by Beard Land & Investment Company, which holds the majority of the family's real estate assets and is owned by more than 180 shareholders. Beard Land and Investment Company plays an integral role in a multitude of businesses in Modesto's Beard Industrial District, which is home to several Fortune 500 companies and employs several thousand area residents. The company continues to serve as an industrial property developer and leasing company with properties located mainly within the Beard Industrial District, which borders the City of Modesto.

Many of the industries in the Beard Industrial District, which is composed of more than 2,000 acres zoned and developed for commercial and industrial use, are food-related and most sites are rail served by Modesto & Empire Traction Company, established October 7, 1911, a subsidiary company that operates a short-line railroad within the Beard Industrial District. Although its main line is only five miles long, it operates and maintains an additional thirty-eight miles of track within the Beard Industrial District, which serves numerous customers, and facilitates rail shipping throughout North America through daily interchanges with BNSF Railway and Union Pacific.

More than 100 years later, the Beard Land Investment Company continues to be family owned and governed. Branches of the family have a representative on the board and were proud to celebrate its 100-year anniversary in 2011. To this day, the family strives to adhere to the philosophy espoused by T. K., who recorded in his journal: "And now abide us these three: Faith. Hope. Love. Causing us to look up and not down; forward and not back; out and not in; and lend a hand."



Above: T. K. and Grace Beard with their ten children, Thanksgiving Day in 1922.

Left: Grace with her ten children in 1946. It was Grace who encouraged her children to create the Beard Land and Investment Company in 1926, a year after their father's death.