



The Dream of the “Redwood Empire”
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The Redwood Empire was an idea hatched in the early 1920s by Crescent City hotelier, A.D. Lee, who wanted to promote tourism to his city and hotel. The automobile age was transforming how people traveled and Lee, along with other Northern California county business groups, collaborated to build a “Redwood Highway” from San Francisco to Grants Pass in Oregon. Originally formed as the Redwood Highway Association, the group changed its name to The Redwood Empire Association after aligning itself with the Save the Redwoods League who campaigned to preserve California’s redwood groves by making them state parks.

By the summer of 1930 with the Golden Gate bridge in the planning stages, the Redwood Highway Association began construction on what was initially called the Redwood Highway Richardson Bay California Redwood Bridge, shortened later to the Richardson Bay Redwood Bridge. It was to run from Manzanita Junction just north of downtown Sausalito, across the western end of Richardson Bay and connect to the Alto area of Mill Valley near today’s intersection of Blithedale and Tiburon Boulevards. Construction included dynamiting away the western end of Silva Island on the Strawberry peninsula and blasting 40 feet down to bedrock to set the piers. Heralded by the *Healdsburg Enterprise* newspaper, the bridge was to be constructed of over 2.5 million board feet of redwood lumber “more enduring than stone.” When completed, the elevated bridge featured a four-lane roadway, supported by 600 redwood piers which made it the largest redwood structure in the world. It also included a 56-foot long drawbridge section that allowed for passage of marine traffic. At the dedication ceremony in

November of 1931, over 5000 people, hundreds of cars, and a host of dignitaries from local, state and federal agencies attended the opening which also featured a historical transportation pageant. It was described in the Nov. 28 *Automobile News* as, “one of the most colorful and spectacular celebrations ever staged in the north bay area.” Although its redwood construction was touted to have a lifespan “virtually unlimited”, the Richardson Bay Redwood Bridge was replaced in 1956 with a six-lane concrete and steel bridge that cost \$3.2 million dollars and would later be expanded to eight lanes. Upon its completion the old redwood bridge and viaduct were dismantled and the timbers and draw bridge were sold off.

The image above is on a 1932 postcard produced by Alexander J. “Zan” Stark who was a scenic postcard photographer. Bearing the marks Z/S or Zan, Stark produced thousands of postcards from the 1930s to the mid-1950s of California and Nevada. Looking back, the Marin hills in the background, Silva Island, and the westernmost rim of Richardson Bay are virtually undeveloped. In the ensuing decades all that would change validating the message on the Lachman Bros. furniture store sign to the right of the bridge that reads, Progress Never Ceases, Press On!

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