

The management of The News-Record wishes to express appreciation to The Newport Plain Talk for giving us permission to republish the following feature written by Bob Hurley.

Hot Spring's Changing Scene



HOT SPRINGS

Health resort since 1800. Name changed from Warm Springs, 1886. Internment camp for Germans in World War I was here.

By BOB HURLEY

Driving East from Newport, one can be at a plate in around 30 minutes that once attracted the world's kings, queens, nobles and princes.

It was, at one time, a gathering place for the world's richest personalities. It offered unparalleled catering to the wealthy. It was considered by many to be one of the foremost resort towns in America.

Later, when times were not so good, it was used as an internment (confinement) camp for nearly 2,500 Germans, thus still attracting the attention of the whole world. And it still maintained its status of catering to wealthy people because the Germans were from the upper crust of the German society.

The Germans had been rested when the luxury liners in which they were passengers

were seized at United States harbors just after the outbreak of World War I.

Today, Hot Springs, N. C., is seldom thought of as any of the above except by those still living there who remember the hey days of nearly a century ago.

Progress By-Passed It

The Madison County village's most recent fatal blow came when it was completely bypassed by a super interstate system of highways. It had been hoped that Interstate 40 would be constructed near the town and the talk of the town once indicated that it would be so, citizens reasoning that a course adjacent to the French Broad River would be very practical, not to mention the tourist trade that would be made available.

The planners of the road indeed agreed upon the path of a river to follow through the rugged mountains but it was not

the French Broad. The interstate was built along the banks of the Pigeon River.

That action not only took away any hopes of a bright future in tourist trade but it averted the greatest per cent of the traffic that normally flowed down main street of the town, on U.S. 25.

All Is Calm

The village has now settled down, without the clamour of a bustling hotel, the mainstream of traffic, or a colorful social life. Fanfare is left for the other places that have claimed the glory once rightly owned by the springs, the hotel, and the people there.

Some industry has moved into town but most of the people in the area still earn a livelihood much the same way as they did a century ago — by farming.

The grandeur of the hotels has given way to weeds and locust. The water that bubbles from the springs that became world renowned for their health giving and restoring powers is of little value to those outside the village. The bath house that covers the main springs is in ruins, the doors locked, the lawn covered with vegetation.

An Old Problem

The problem is nothing new to those living near the springs. Hot Springs and Madison County officials have wrestled with the facts for years. It is a common understanding that the springs offer a unique opportunity to gain tourist dollars but every recent attempt to draw the tourists has failed.

Committees have been appointed. Programs have been instituted. Visits have been made. Negotiations have been tried—all with little or no success. The fact that restoration "could" attract multiplied throngs of health and resort seekers will perhaps continue to enhance some to talk about and even attempt such a program.

But these are all current problems and the Hot Springs citizenry who remember the past agree that the glory is not in the present but in the past. They agree that current problems have clouded their minds, bedraggled their spirits, but have enhanced their memory of the golden era, an era when Hot Springs outshined just about every resort town in the southeastern United States.

Indians Used It

The hot water that spews from the ground and from below the bottom of the hurrying French Broad River has hardly ever been considered a secret.

Legends credit their discovery to 1778 but it is commonly accepted that the Indians knew about the value of the hot, precious chemical water for years before that.

Countless people became acquainted with and convinced of the value of the springs long before the Revolutionary War because the main route between Tennessee and the Carolinas was nearby.

A Winning Combination

The real key to the success of Hot Springs, however, was not realized until the coming of the hotel. The term, hotel, is often used in identification with the springs but the building that now stands at the springs is at least the fourth one. All the others have perished due to ill-fated fires.

The springs themselves never seemed to be enough to attract—but with the hotel, they worked magic, drawing thousands from around the world. Of course it is also assumed that without the springs, the hotels that have graced the spring lawns would have been nothing more than a place to spend the night.

Hot Springs folk like to think of the two as inseparable, one dependant upon the other, and, putting the two together, the whole idea of a resort is put in the right perspective.

The World Stops By

People that were to become prominent in the history of North Carolina, and, in fact, the entire nation, were to become involved in the establishment, growth and success of the hotels. Zebulon B. Vance, Civil War Governor of North Carolina, served as a hotel clerk while the town was still called Warm Springs prior to 1830.

Wade Hampton, Civil War Confederate hero and later Governor of South Carolina, built a summer cottage behind the main hotel with brick that had been shipped from England

and hauled from the coast by ox cart. The village still stands grown up, in ruins, and not easily identified as a historical landmark.

The Pattons of Asheville are generally credited with starting a beautification program at the spring that was to become the attraction of the place. Their sound management policies resulted in a thriving influx of upper class citizens.

When they bought the land around the springs, there was nothing more than a roadside

tavern on it. As early as 1833, it has been said that over 1,000 visitors were attracted nightly to the hotel ballroom. Social life at the hotel was not to be surpassed. If it was "happening," it was at Hot Springs.

Fire's Folly

The besetting tragedy of the hotel history has been fires. One can only wonder of how it could be at Hot Springs today if fire had never set down on the structures, described as being so magnificent that their ap-

pearances lingered forever in the minds of all those who had been there and beheld its beauty.

The first fire happened in 1838, destroying the main part of the big hotel built by the Pattons. The nearby bridge over the French Broad apparently burned at the same time. Both the bridge and hotel were rebuilt the following year, 1839.

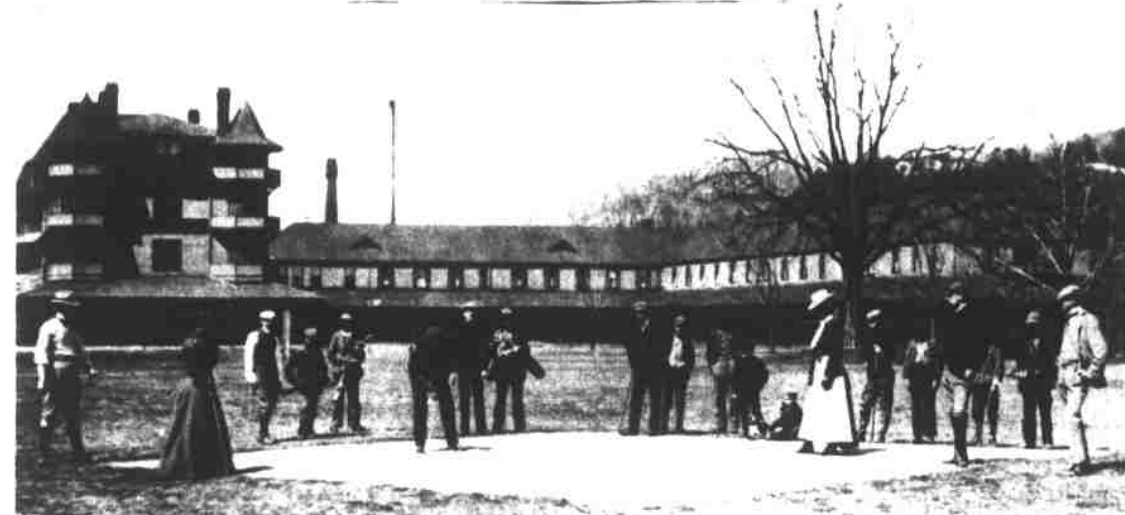
When the Pattons rebuilt the hotel, it was more magnificent than ever. It was over 500 feet

Continued On Page 3



FIRST OF THE GREAT ONES - The Hot Springs hotel business looked like this in 1864. The name of the hotel was the Patton. It burned that year, 1864. The man who owned the property, Colonel

J. H. Rumbough, a Greenville native, then sold it. The firm that he rebuilt the hotel, and after going bankrupt later, sold the property back to Rumbough.



THE GLORY OF IT ALL - Sporting one of the very first golf courses in the southeastern part of the nation, the Wana Luna, this was how the Mountain Park looked just before the last fire in 1920. After the fire, Colonel J. H. Rumbough's daughter, Bessie, who first married Andrew Johnson, Jr., and later a millionaire named

Safford, acquired the property and built the present brick structure. It has never enjoyed an era of prosperity since the fire, however. When this picture was taken, the elegance of the hotel was compared to that of the Vanderbilt palace, now Biltmore Estate, at Asheville.



DESERTED FOR YEARS - The present building, built after the last of the great fires in 1920, is hardly comparable to the other buildings that once stood in the same place. It was built by Colonel J. H. Rumbough's daughter, Bessie Rumbough Johnson Safford. It was intended to be a sanitarium but the plan never materialized. Mrs. Safford, a devout Catholic, later conveyed the property to the Society of Jesus, an order of the Roman Catholic Church, for the purpose of a rest home and retreat for priests. It was used for that purpose for a short time but was sold shortly after Mrs. Safford's death in 1940 to a private Hot Springs businessman. It is now owned by a group of Marshall, N.C. bankers.

Nowhere Have I Found
A Sweeter And More
Restful Spot'



THE COLONEL TAKES A SMOKE BREAK - Cigar in hand, Colonel J. H. Rumbough, a native of Greenville, rests in his favorite rocker in this picture, taken late in his life. In his prosperity, he probably never envisioned the fact that Hot Springs would someday be idle and in ruins. It is today.



THE COLONEL'S WIFE - Carrie Rumbough's beauty was known far and wide. Her iron will and pride was publicized around the world. The colonel, no doubt, borrowed heavily from her knowledge when it came to elegance in decorating the hotel.



Mountain Park Hotel

ON A PENNY POST CARD - The Mountain Park Hotel traveled millions of miles on the face of penny post cards around the turn of this century. The sharp looking grounds were a great asset to the mountains of western North Carolina.