

Western York County's Pool of Siloam

The Pool of Siloam in ancient Jerusalem was claimed to have miraculous powers to heal when an angel disturbed the water. Well, right here in Western York County we have our own "Pool of Siloam" That needs to only to be discovered again.

The first we hear of these healing springs that lie in the far northwestern corner of the county, near the York-Cherokee county line, is in an 1820 newspaper advertisement. At that time a Hugh Cain was offering to sell a piece of real estate that contained mineral springs with healing properties. Since Cain mentioned that seven small buildings had been built near the springs for the comfort of visitors. Since the springs are mentioned so early in the history of the area we might imagine they were soon discovered by the earliest settlers who arrived in the 1750s, probably learned from Native Americans living in the area.

Mineral springs were not unusual in the South Carolina Piedmont, over time large resorts were built at the more popular locations and were visited by people from the low country and sand hills who needed to "take the cures." By the mid nineteenth century, when it became fashionable to visit mineral springs, entrepreneurs with financial backing built hotels and resorts, known to us today as spas. Where there were no public accommodations, visitors often boarded with local families. Mary Davis Brown of the Beersheba Church community recorded in her diary in the 1850s about a woman from Winnsboro who came to stay a week in order to "take the cures."

Attorney Xerxes X. Cushman, the editor of two of York County's first newspapers, the *People's Advocate* and the *Yorkville Encyclopedia*, both of which preceded the *Yorkville Enquirer* visited "Cain's Springs" in 1827 and was convinced of their medical qualities. In fact, he was so convinced, that he was sure if someone like General Andrew Jackson, the Vice President of the United States, or the governor honored the springs with a visit they would be off and running as a tourist attraction. But no such dignitary that we know ever came to the springs, but it did have a grand hotel at one time.

About 1900, Paul V. Gaffney was suffering from some deterioration of his health, and had grown desperate when no medical treatment restored him to his usual vigor. Eventually, the young man was convinced to go to the springs to see if it would help. He later said that after several weeks of drinking and bathing in the springs, he regained his strength.

Seeing an opportunity to help others and make money at the same time, he decided to build a health resort. Young Gaffney obtained an option on the land and convinced a number of businessmen in Gaffney to join him in the enterprise. They received a charter from the state and were authorized to sell \$20,000 in stock to build a spa. His plan was not haphazard, but well thought out, even to the exact site of the hotel. Built on a hillside, the two-story hotel had wide piazzas and hallways. It was located east to west so that at no time of the day the sun did not shine on the piazzas allowing guests might leisurely rock away the time and enjoy cool breezes. The hotel offered cuisine from fresh foods and the guests received accommodations comparable to other spas hotels. Litha Springs Hotel attracted people from around the state.

There were a number of springs on the site, each one having a particular mineral and healing properties. Spring "Number One" was said to have a high content of lithia and beneficial to those who suffered from bladder and kidney ailments. One man, it was told, passed a kidney stone the size of a pea after only a week drinking from the spring. James L. Strain from Cherokee County testified the water was not unpleasant to drink, and a pint to a half-gallon could be consumed at a time "without inconvenience." Supposedly the water quickly passed through the body and soon you would be ready to drink another half-gallon. Another testimony came from a man who arrived at the spa having to use a cane. After two weeks he threw away his cane and was "climbing the hills like a boy and dancing in the ball room like a French dancing master."

The arsenic or "beauty spring" was mostly used by women to wash their faces and hands. This spring was claimed to have enhance beauty. Whether it was the water or what--a number of men agreed it was the place to see pretty women. The Litha Spring was the most popular, enjoyed by sexes, children and adults. Here, the guests lounged around and enjoyed each other's company while receiving it curative powers.

For those who wanted to take water home with them a type of bottling plant was built on the property. Originally, black labor was used to collect and bottle the water, William Spencer, a master mechanic, devised a labor saving apparatus. He constructed a dam, race and water wheel making all the pulleys, shafts and gears. Not only was it labor saving, it was a visual novelty for those staying at the spa.

By the mid 1930s the American society was experiencing tremendous changes and mineral springs fell out of fashion for most. Cain's Springs, sometimes known as

White Diamond Springs and Piedmont Springs, faded into time. But within those woods the springs run quietly waiting for an angel to stir its waters or to found by some entrepreneur with a vision.