論　文

Taking the Waters: Tracing the History of Mineral Water Use in the United States from the Age of the Colonists to the Middle of the Twentieth Century

by

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INTRODUCTION

The use of mineral springs in the United States has a long history. Native Americans used hot and cold mineral springs for bathing as well as for curative and ritual purposes for hundreds of years before the Europeans arrived in America. After people began to immigrate to the North American continent from Europe, they made use of the springs in their daily lives, and eventually created towns around them as well as social gathering places in the tradition of European spas. Moving westward into the frontier, mineral springs became an integral part of the lives of the pioneers as they settled and built towns in locations blessed with water sources.

As time went on in the settling of North America, people used the waters for drinking and bathing, believing in their curative and restorative powers, as well as for social gathering places. Springs all over the country were developed into established resorts, and people traveled from near and far to take the waters. These resorts became popular in the middle of the 1800s with the upper classes, and reached the peak of their popularity with the masses in the late 19th century. The consumption of bottled mineral waters became a huge business, and the dishonest business of selling these waters may have instigated the eventual demise of the practice of using mineral waters for health and recreation in the United States. After the turn of the 20th century, mineral spring use declined drastically due to distrust and a fading belief in their effectiveness. Mineral spring facilities in the United States never recovered their popularity and most resorts closed down altogether by the middle of the 20th century.

THE EARLY HISTORY OF MINERAL WATER USE IN AMERICA

There is no doubt that humans have made use of mineral waters for consumption and bathing, in rituals and in daily life since the dawn of civilization. The ancient Greeks believed hot mineral springs to be sacred, and the Romans followed by building opulent bathhouses and creating a culture of bathing for social as well as health purposes. Spas were flourishing and trade in mineral waters was a vigorous business in Europe by the

time Columbus arrived in America.

When the colonists arrived, they quickly found their own mineral water sources, noting that Native Americans often built communities around these sources, especially the thermal ones, and used them in rituals and cures as well as sources of water and salt. The colonists, following the trend in Europe at the time, used these mineral springs for leisure purposes, creating resorts early on in the history of the American colonies. By the end of the 17th century, several spring locations, such as Lynn Springs, Massachusetts and Stafford Springs, Connecticut had been developed into social resorts. Americans continued to model their resorts after the famous spas in Europe, evident in the number of American resorts whose names were taken from European spa towns. While at this time most mineral spring facilities in America were quite primitive, entrepreneurs sought to build up these resorts to match the grandeur of the most famous spas on the other side of the Atlantic.

During the 18th century, interest in and knowledge of mineral springs continued to increase, and "in 1747, Thomas and Phineas Bond produced for the *Philadelphia Gazette* the first scientific survey of American healing springs" (Bullard, 2004:16). By this time there was a flourishing culture of consuming and bathing in mineral waters, and the developed resorts had become social and leisure centers for the upper classes throughout the colonies. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson both bathed in mineral water for its curative effects and participated in the blossoming spa culture of the time. In fact, the West Virginia mineral springs resort known today as Berkeley Springs was founded by George Washington and named Bath in 1776, and he continued to visit for nearly fifty years to take the waters (Mozier, 1999:54).

Along with the social and leisure uses of the springs, by the time of the American Revolution (1775-1783), mineral spring resorts throughout the colonies were advertising and promoting the healing and medicinal benefits of the waters. During the Revolutionary War, many mineral spring facilities were appropriated by the militia and used as hospitals and infirmaries, and the healing springs continued for long after to be used for rehabilitation. While the wealthy population still frequented the spas of Europe for leisure, American resorts were quickly being developed to accommodate the wealthy class in high style and would soon gain the reputation of rivaling their European counterparts. Visiting spas on both sides of the Atlantic, wealthy Americans "cultivated the same cultural values and standards as the English gentry, (and) developing an American spa culture helped define the American national elite and its place in the Atlantic world" (Chambers, 2002:3).

THE GOLDEN AGE OF MINERAL SPRINGS RESORTS

Mineral springs and spas reached what could be called a golden age in the 1800s. The first large hotel at a spa resort was constructed at Saratoga Springs, New York in 1803, and Stafford Springs, Connecticut and Bath, Virginia (present day Berkeley Springs, West Virginia) continued to be among the most prominent spa resorts. "Spa touring" became a popular pastime, and resorts were built up to include drinking,

gambling, theater, and other leisure facilities. In the 1820s, the so-called Northern Tour of mineral springs became popular among those in New England, and by the 1830s, "spa tourists knew of the 'big six', a group of famous resorts clustered among the folds and ridges of the Appalachians in Virginia and West Virginia." These six included Warm Springs, White Springs, Red Springs, Salt Sulphur Springs, Hot Springs, and Sweet Springs, and "could all be visited during a single summer by following a looping, 170 mile route" (Bullard, 2004:18).

In 1817, John H. Steel published *An Analysis of the Mineral Waters of Saratoga and Ballston*, and "was the first springs-related publication... to include extensive information on the history, geology, and attractions of the general area" (Chambers, 2002:57). From this time forward, many books were published about mineral springs and spring resorts which differed from earlier publications in that they were less focused on the scientific aspects of the springs and more on the leisure and curative uses of them. "Travel accounts of people's visits to the springs had long been popular, whether published or circulated privately, but the emergence of the Northern Tour in New York State during the 1820s and the Virginia springs circuit in the late 1830s triggered the publication of a new literary genre: guidebooks" (Chambers, 2002:5). Many authors rushed to get in on the booming trend, but "perhaps the first guidebook to deal specifically with American mineral springs was Gideon Miner Davidson's *The Fashionable Tour: Or, A Trip to the Springs, Niagara, Quebeck, and Boston, in the summer of 1821*" (Chambers, 2002:5).

Among many other guides to mineral springs and mineral spring resorts published during this time, Dr. John Bell published *On Baths and Mineral Waters* in 1831. Bell described twenty-one prominent mineral springs in the United States and explained the different types of mineral waters and their effectiveness in healing and cleanliness and was at the time thought to be "the seminal work on the mineral waters of the United States" (Chambers, 2002:61). These guidebooks sold very well, attesting to both the affluence of the American elite and the popularity of mineral springs in the culture of the wealthy during the second quarter of the 19th century.

By this time, the culture of taking the waters was well established and the vast majority of visitors frequented springs resorts for pleasure and society rather than cures. Resorts still remained popular as destinations for rest and relaxation and were still fashionable for status seekers. All sorts of facilities for the leisure and amusement of visitors were provided, and the actual waters themselves became of less and less importance. From morning until late into the night, patrons of the more fashionable resorts such as Saratoga Springs could amuse themselves with entertainments such as bowling and billiards, dancing and shows, with lavish meals provided throughout the day.

IMPROVEMENTS IN TRANSPORTATION AND WESTWARD EXPANSION

Improvements in transportation in the first half of the century facilitated comfortable access to the various springs, as steamboat travel on the various rivers and canals shortened distances, railroad lines were laid, and roads were built all over the country

during this period. "In both Virginia and New York State, mineral springs proprietors stood at the forefront of efforts to improve internal transportation networks, and their resorts became key points on the newly developing turnpikes, river networks, canals, and railroads of early nineteenth century America" (Chambers, 2002:15).

At the same time, pioneers continued their expansion westward, often basing settlements on locations of mineral spring sources. Mineral water sources were often found by pioneers who noticed gatherings of animals or Native Americans around them for the water as well as for salt and other minerals. Because salt was as precious and necessary to the pioneers as water itself, these sources naturally became sought after locations in building settlements. As these and surrounding settlements became more established towns, they then often developed into leisure resorts.

Early on, in what was then considered the West, "Harrodsburg, Kentucky, one of the first permanent white settlements in the Western country, was founded at a mineral spring" (Bullard, 2004:19), as was Hot Springs, Arkansas. Hot Springs "featured an interesting geologic setting and a long history of medicinal use, including that of the Spanish conquistador Hernando de Soto in about 1542. Developers established the first bathhouses there in 1830" (Bullard, 2004:19). It became the nation's first designated national preserve by President Jackson in 1832. Other popular mineral spring resorts during the early and middle 19th century in the western region were Dreunon's Lick, Ohio as well as West Baden and French Lick, Indiana.

The mid 1800s were a time of great prosperity in America, and this fueled the spa industry, including both resort patronage and bottled water sales. Simple wooden bathhouses of the previous century were replaced by facilities which offered individual bathtubs as well as large, opulent bathing pools. Other variations included "magnetic baths, galvanic baths, mud baths, carbonic acid baths, peat baths, Russian baths, and Turkish baths, among others" (Bullard, 2004:77-8). John Bell published a revised and expanded edition of his mineral water resort guide in 1855, this time including 181 sites. Unfortunately, the Civil War (1861-1865) began shortly afterwards, temporarily or permanently causing many resorts to close down, and while some resorts recovered their earlier glory, many others never did. It is said that the golden age of mineral spring resorts had ended by the closing of the Civil War.

MINERAL SPRINGS BECOME POPULAR WITH THE MASSES

But at the same time, railroads were changing the structure of society, and with an increasing number of lines and more reasonable fares, travel became possible for those who had not had the means before. Mineral spring resorts became accessible to the masses, and so while they lost their place as a playground for the upper classes, these resorts gained popularity among a greater segment of the population. In Missouri, for example, "the number of mineral water spas in the state mushroomed in the 1870s and 1880s. During this heyday, nearly eighty mineral water sites in the state operated as resorts, and in scores of locations companies bottled and sold mineral spring or well water" (Bullard, 2004:22-23). A great number of places around the country became

quite popular during this time, including Sulphur Springs in Oklahoma, Baxter Springs and Bonner Springs in Kansas, and Mineral Wells in Texas.

At the same time, the railroads brought increasing westward expansion, and with this a number of mineral springs in the far West were developed during this period. Among other resorts, "the Santa Fe Railroad constructed one of the grandest hotels in the West- the Montezuma, in Las Vegas, New Mexico- in the early 1800s" (Bullard, 2004:23). By this time, resorts such as Palm Springs, California were also flourishing, as was Manitou Springs, Colorado, which "attracted thirty thousand visitors annually by 1880 and two hundred thousand by 1890" (Bullard, 2004:23).

The Gold Rush brought a mass influx of people out West to California and Nevada in the late 1800s, but long before then the mineral springs had been used by the peoples inhabiting the territory. The Native American population is known to have made use of the many springs in California for medicinal and ritual purposes, and when the Franciscan missionaries came in the late 1700s they found constructed bathing pools around a number of mineral springs. The El Camino Real connected the Franciscan missions throughout California went directly through the region known as El Paso de Robles, already known for its mineral springs.

In 1813, Padre Juan Cabot "had a rough shelter built over the hot springs... While many mission padres prohibited Indians from bathing in hot springs because of the similarity to traditional mystical Indian ceremonies, Mission San Miguel, under the leadership of Padre Cabot, who may have had rheumatism, had a more understanding approach. Cabot believed that the hot mineral water relieved the suffering of many diseases, including arthritis and rheumatism, common ailments among people living in the area at the time" (Bowler, 2003:6-7). By the second half of the 1800s, the Gold Rush was bringing thousands of people to the area and the stagecoaches were making daily trips up and down the length of California, the Hot Springs Hotel had been built in Paso Robles and was a popular stop along the journey. By the turn of the 20th century, the railroad traversed the state and Paso Robles was booming, along with other mineral spring resorts in California and Nevada such as Harbin Hot Springs, Walley's Hot Springs, Curry's Warm Springs, and Steamboat Springs, among many others.

Dr. Albert Peale of the 2nd U.S. Geological Survey published *Lists and Analyses of the Mineral Springs of the United States* in 1886. "His monumental survey counted 2,822 mineral water localities across the United States and territories and 8,843 individual mineral springs. Mineral waters served resorts in 634 places and were bottled for sale in 223 localities" (Bullard, 2004:45). This survey shows just how big a business the mineral water industry was at the time, and after its publication even more entrepreneurs sought out sites for further development. While the golden age of hot springs resort was said to have passed, there was great exploitation of mineral springs during this period, and the vast majority of resorts in America were built during the final quarter of the 19th century.

THE BUSINESS OF PROMOTING RESORTS AND BOTTLED WATERS

At the time, mineral spring resorts and waters were promoted relying on "two basic pieces of evidence to bolster their claims of medical utility: chemical analyses and patient testimonials" (Chambers, 2002:61). Various publications, from scientific reports to guidebooks to promotional materials abounded and were used by people to "make informed decisions as to which spring best suited their ailments, and springs proprietors could compare their water with that of their competitors" (Chambers, 2002:61-2). By this time there was a clear link between specific mineral content and medical cures, and testimonials by patients who had been cured by specific springs provided convincing proof of the miraculous curative powers of mineral waters.

Because of these publications and testimonials, Americans during the 19th century continued to be convinced of the various curative and therapeutic effects of mineral waters, especially in digestive disorders, skin diseases, rheumatism, and similar ailments, just as peoples throughout the civilized world had for centuries before them. And because of their curative properties, there was general agreement among scientists and doctors that water cures should be attempted cautiously, under the guidance of a physician. Although for the most part the practice of mineral water therapy was unregulated, many resorts employed medical professionals to guide patrons.

Mineral springs were used by physicians as part of conventional treatments and were mainstream at the time, and so-called spring physicians, or those based at spring resorts, were relied upon to prescribe different courses of treatment for different ailments. Most reputable resorts had a physician available to advise, while were less scrupulous and less honest about the effectiveness of their waters and let customers take the waters as they pleased without guidance or supervision. Mineral waters were believed to be effective when used correctly, though towards the end of the century a degree of skepticism could be heard in response to the increasingly exaggerated claims of miracle cures.

GROWING SKEPTISISM IN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MINERAL WATERS

Those who came to take the waters for health benefits actually experienced mixed results. A survey of eighty-one diaries and letters of the period by Thomas Chambers shows that, "45.7 percent felt a positive improvement in their health, 29.6 percent detected either a slight improvement, no change, or a general decline, and 24.7 percent reported negative effects from the waters" (Chambers, 2002:74). Although many people remained hopeful and continued to follow mineral water therapies, this data supports the general belief that in fact the springs did not provide the miracle cures that they were promoting.

George Walton, who published *The Mineral Springs of the U.S. and Canada* in 1873, admitted that spring waters could be effective in some specific cases, but cautioned readers about exaggerations in the actual effects of the waters in general. "Springmania has come to be accepted without challenge by multitudes of unreflecting minds... (and) the unintelligent, indiscriminate flocking to watering places, going to the springs, is

essentially absurd" (Walton, 1873, as quoted in Bullard, 2004:55). He insisted that the true benefits of spring usage were mainly in what was gained by taking a break from work and getting some rest and relaxation for a while, not because of any specific or miraculous property of the water itself.

In 1882, Dr. Albert Merrell said much the same thing in his book, *Health Resorts and Mineral Springs in the West*, which was published in 1882. He noted the importance of other factors such as climate and local conditions in determining whether a resort proved to be successful or not. He also warned of the miracle cures unscrupulously promoted by some water businesses, noting that some patrons "rejoice in renewed health," while others "return home in disgust, characterizing all springs as frauds and the managers and promoters robbers" (Merrell, 1882, as quoted in Bullard, 2004:56). Scientific evidence of the actual effects of mineral waters was hard to come by, though many professionals continued to believe in the curative powers of specific springs for specific ailments. However, it was also often noted that all waters were most beneficial when used in conjunction with regular exercise, a change of scenery, and an improved diet.

Medical quackery in the United States was at its zenith during this time and the patent medicine business was booming, with mineral water promoters among its greatest swindlers. This led physicians to want to further their distance from using mineral waters for healing, as merely being associated with the business made them appear dishonest. So despite any actual benefits that could be gained, by the turn of the 20th century, the use of mineral waters in medicine had lost its credibility among professionals and was largely replaced by more scientifically based medicines and treatments. The bottled mineral water trade enjoyed a boom during these years, but in the early years of the 20th century, the exaggerations and unscrupulousness of the promoters came under serious suspicion and scrutiny.

THE END OF POPULAR USE OF MINERAL WATERS IN THE UNITED STATES

Partially in response to the rampant quackery and the unscrupulousness of mineral water promoters, the Pure Food and Drug Act was passed in 1901. Food and beverages, including of course mineral waters were now forced to be truthful in their claims and advertising. During the same period, there were several legal cases set against the mineral water companies, and the American Medical Association also "went to great lengths to expose fraud in the mineral water business" (Bullard, 2004:95). Advances in medical science during this time strongly influenced public opinion about the effectiveness of mineral waters. The press had taken issue with the mineral water industry as well, including an article entitled "Taking the Waters: The Humbug of Hot Springs," by Woods Hutchinson, which appeared in the February 1913 issue of *Everybody's Magazine*. "Hutchinson took aim at mineral water spas, admonishing his readers that the particular mineral water chosen did not really matter, because 'to sluice oneself freely with water by the gallon, internally, externally and eternally- any old water will do.'" (Bullard, 2004:95-6) Only scientists and geologists still believed in the curative properties of the minerals contained in the waters.

The consumption of mineral waters continued into the 1920s and 1930s, but it was fading fast. Resorts remained popular, but mainly for their recreation and pleasure facilities, not the water itself. And as the focus on the waters waned, it was realized that these recreational facilities could be moved anywhere, which eventually they were, to places closer and more accessible to large cities. Mineral spring resorts came to be used primarily by invalids, and the general population began to go elsewhere for their leisure. But by the middle of the 1900s, most resorts had closed down and the few that remained would never enjoy the success of earlier days. The age of mineral water use was gone forever, and while drinking mineral water has become popular again in America in the beginning of the 21st century, the practice of soaking in spring waters for health or relaxation has not returned to the mainstream.

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