

Percy Priest Eclipses 1900's Gay Spa

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SMYRNA—The last link to Jefferson Springs, gay spa of the early 1900s, was broken this week when the bridge over Stones River was dynamited by the U.S. Corps of Engineers in preparation for waters of the Percy Priest impoundment.

Located four miles northeast of Smyrna in Rutherford County, Jefferson Springs, often called Sulphur Springs, has long been somnolent, and could be described as completely deceased since early in 1967.

But it was not always thus. Many residents of Middle Tennessee can recall the days when summer vacationers swarmed to the Springs. Its popularity began back in the horse-and-buggy days when canoes and small boats were used to take visitors across the river.

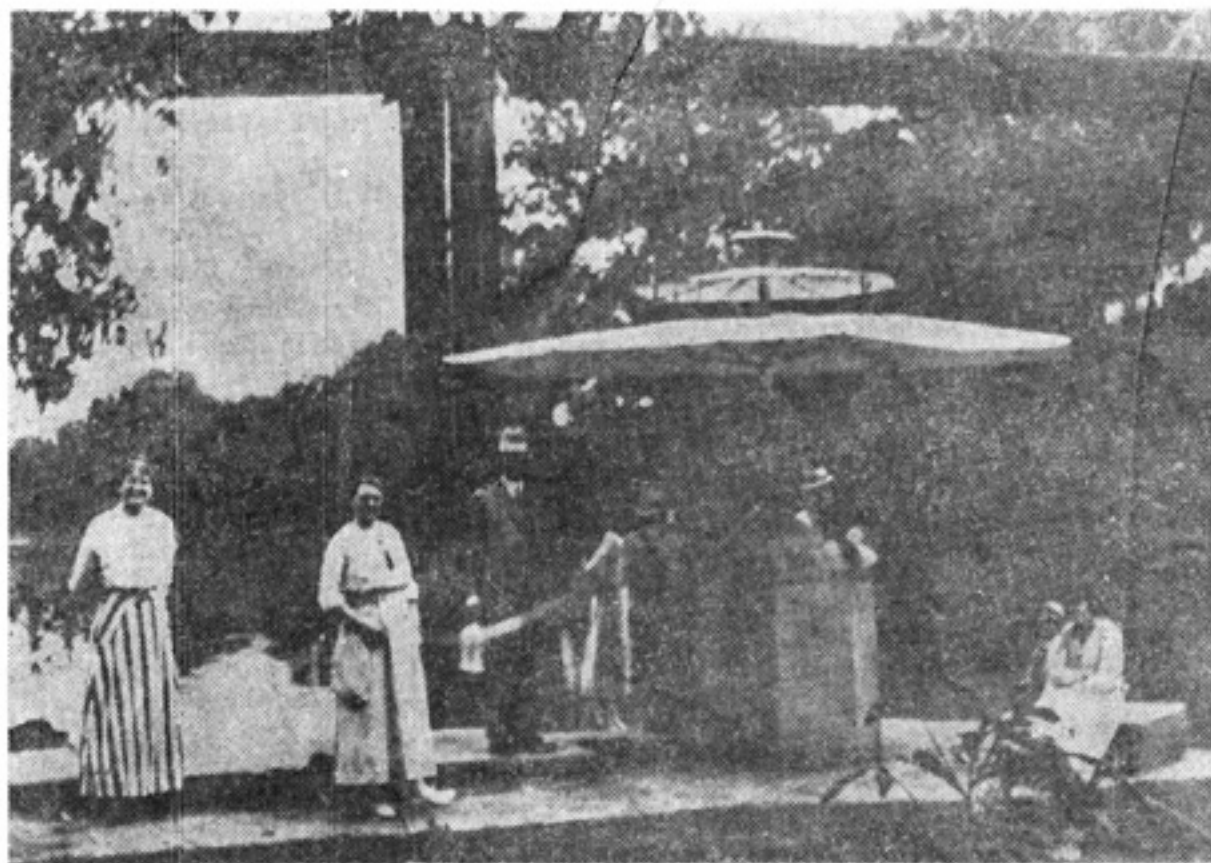
The story is told that cows were the first to discover the sulphur spring. When people noticed that cattle went out into the river every day to a certain spot, they investigated and found the spring of strong sulphur water bubbling up from the bottom of the river, about 15 feet from shore.

Built Dam

Some enterprising persons built a coffer dam around the spring, and with a concrete fill, brought the water to the surface and constructed a rock pier to it for pedestrians from the shore and boaters on the river.

People came from Nashville, Murfreesboro and

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—Photo Courtesy Walter King Hoover

Vacationers are "taking the waters" from the sulphur spring at the gay spa of Jefferson Springs in northern Rutherford county in the early 1900's. In the background is the bridge built in 1914, which was destroyed this week by the U.S., Corps of Engineers to prepare for the rise of waters of Stones river behind the Percy Priest dam.

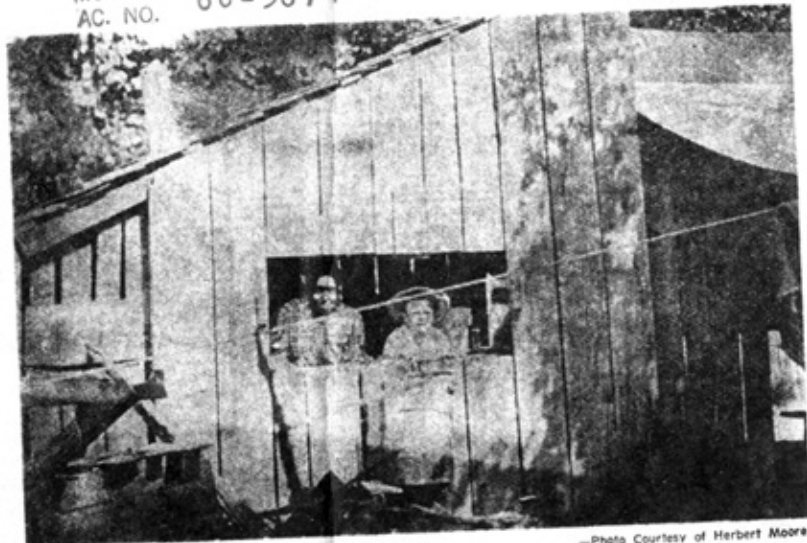
Jefferson Link Falls With Bridge

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—Photo Courtesy of Walter King Hoover

The late W. G. Denny, grandfather of Mrs. Walter Hoover of Smyrna, operated a campers' hall, store and bowling alleys at Jefferson Springs during its heyday.



—Photo Courtesy of Herbert Moore

Camping tent and cook shack of Herbert Moore, right, at the Jefferson Springs resort, early 1900's.

Percy Priest Eclipses 1900's

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even farther away, to take the waters, which they claimed lessened or cured whatever complaints they may have had. Families who could afford to do so, built, bought, or rented cottages at the Springs, which they occupied mainly during the summer. Some took bottles of the water home.

In the early days Tommy Wrather ran a store there, and John Foster Baskin had a rooming house. There was a dance hall on the bluff across from the spring.

Mrs. John Valley White of Murfreesboro built several cottages which she rented for many years. Four were built by Charles W. Moore.

Dance Hall

After the bridge was constructed, J. J. Anderson, now dead, built a new, larger dance hall over the river bluff, and operated other promotional developments.

By the late 1920s, Jefferson Springs was booming. In 1931 there were a store, a restaurant, two

side of the river where bathing suits and toboggans could be rented. The latter were used to slide down the toboggan slide into the river with a gay splash. Across the road from the north end of the bridge was a park for camping, ball games, croquet, and picnicking.

The Smith family operated a two-story hotel on the south side of the river. Wide concrete steps had been built down the river bank to the spring. Many romances developed into engagements during the summers at Jefferson Springs.

Cottages

Cottages were in great demand during the summer season. On the Fourth of July it was difficult to find a place to park a car within a mile of the resort. The river bank swarmed with bathers and picnickers. Toby's Tent Show was a regular summer visitor.

For those in the cottages bedtime never came before midnight, and sometimes it was much later. The air was truly filled with music—the blare of jazz from the dance hall; and there was the continuous crack, crack of the falling duck pins in the bowling alleys.

Beasley Smith's orchestra from Nashville furnished dance music each Saturday night. They came

met and furnished transportation to the Springs. Geny Smith's local band often played for dances there, too. At other times the juke box blared and thumped incessantly.

Fishing and boating were enjoyed by those preferring more quiet pastimes.

Better Transportation

Improved roads, faster cars, and the airplane contributed to the death of Jefferson Springs as a resort. People began going to Daytona Beach for their summer vacations. During World War II, with its shortage of housing for Sewart Air Force Base personnel, the cottages were again in demand for use of military families. After that the resort became almost deserted.

The land along the river has been taken by the government for the Percy Priest Dam impoundment. The cottages, store, hotel, all are gone. Robert Rion, last man to operate the store there, gave up his business last May. Water will cover the spring and all the land on the south side.

But the area has a few good things going for it. Besides the fisherman's paradise, to rise and cover the nearby area, there is a new road just north of the old resort site. So, as one local resident remarked, "Who knows? Jefferson Springs may come back to life!"