

MORETOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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THIS ISSUE- MINERAL WATERS IN MORETOWN VERMONT

(I'll drink to that!)

A long time ago before Vermont was known as a ski mecca and the hordes of out of state folks came to peer at the autumn colors, before the craft beer craze and roadside winery's there was another prevailing healing spirit of body, soul and mind. It was the mineral springs and spas.

From the beginning the Native Americans drank and bathed in these special waters and believed in the strong healing and curative properties. Once discovered by the new settlers, accounts of its healthful benefits caught on and even George Washington was an advocate of the water's restorative powers.

Then in the early 1800's the German idea for water treatment was brought to Vermont and the United States by Robert Wesselhoeft. He thought that if animals and birds could cure themselves in the water of the forest that the same treatment might work for humans. The idea caught on at once and the "water cure" became one of the most fashionable pursuits for the treatment of diseases.

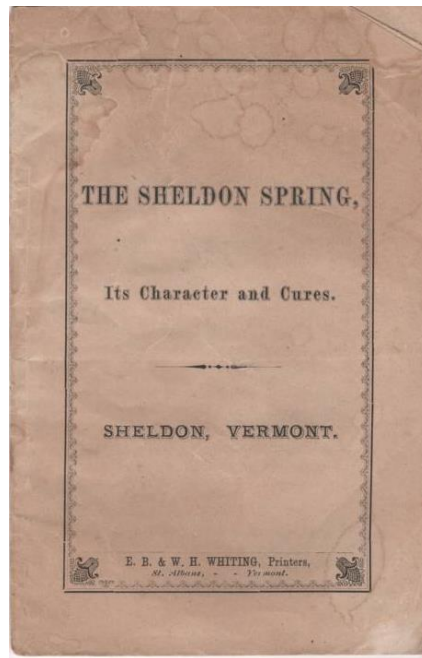
It is said there were healing springs in Moretown and it is reported by Hemenway that they were very hard to access but by "puffing and patronizing" they would be equal to celebrated ones in other parts of Vermont. We have searched maps of various hills and water ways as well as F.W. Beers atlas of 1873 but have yet to locate these "celebrated" springs.

Vermont's health water and spa's flourished from 1781 until about 1930. Mineral springs were in eleven of the fourteen counties. According to Hemenway's Vermont Historical Gazetteer of 1868 over twenty spas were known. People came from all over to be "healed" by the springs and spas. The entrepreneurs were delighted to build hotels and other accommodations for the health hungry. Before the Civil War many southerners came North in the summer for the soothing temperatures and healing waters, they often brought their slaves, which Vermont boycotted thus terminating those relationships.

The spas were said to have amazing curative powers, according to those who sponsored them (the owners). For instance the well-known Missisquoi Spring is typical of the exploitation of Vermont's "curing waters". In 1865 a fancy New York lawyer was paying his (what he thought was) last visit to his relative, Governor John Gregory Smith. The lawyer was very ill and not expected to live much longer. The good Governor's wife gave him some healing water from the "old Kimball spring". He drank it and felt a great wave of relief from his aggravating situation (cancer of the tongue). Mr. Kimball who owned the spring said that for over a hundred years the water had been known to cure all sorts of maladies and had always freely given it away.

The lawyer stayed in the area and after six weeks of "treatment" he returned to New York and resumed his law practice. His doctor and associates were amazed at his recovery. The lawyer then convinced Mr. Kimball to sell his spring for \$500.00 plus another \$24,000.00 for his farm site. This would equate to \$700,000.00 in 2015; a windfall for Mr. Kimball indeed.

The new owner had the water analyzed and began selling it under the name of The Missisquoi Springs. According to historian Louise Koier, by 1868 the springs produced about 15,000 boxes, each one holding 24 quart bottles of the “precious fluid” This was then shipped all across this country as well as into Canada and Europe.



In Sheldon three other springs became well known and in a few years the annual flow of thousands of tourists came to the ten hotels and guest houses. Besides hotels other business flourished, including restaurants, stores, livery stables, all modes of transportation and even a private hospital; however the “balloon” burst in 1870 when the main stay, Missisquoi Springs Hotel was burnt to the ground. Arson was suspected and the “crazy, moon eyed”, cook was said to be to blame. (Perhaps he needed more curative water?) The hotel had been the center of Sheldon’s health industry. The flowing profits like the health water were not to be restored.

Another area in Rutland County was the Middletown Mineral Springs. These springs were said to cure rickets, scurvy, ulcers and impotence. One indicator in 1797 that the latter was true was that there were 8 families in that town with 113 children. Not one man had more than one wife and only one set of twins were recorded.

Middletown springs were on the grounds of the great Hotel Montvert, which could house 350 people. These springs were used until about 1811 when the springs disappeared due to the aftermath of a flood.

There were also other spas and springs in: Mt. Holly, Brookline, Windham, St. Albans, Lunenburg, Barre, Clarendon, Guilford, Tunbridge and Sudbury to name a few.

Moretown didn’t build any grand hotels, nor was it on the beaten path, but it has been said that many old timers claimed to have been helped and cured of their illness as well as being able to “make a family” thanks to the healing waters. We wonder where those waters are now!

Are you chemically minded? Some of the properties of the waters were as follows:

From Hemenway's Vermont Historical Gazetteer

Carbonates of lime per gallon	15.8%
Chloride of Sodium per gallon	2.4%
Carbonates of iron per gallon	2.9%
Carbonates of magnesia per gallon	.06%
Chloride of Sodium per gallon	2.4 %

Some of the springs had an action of bubbles which would rise to the surface and burst. These bubbles upon meeting a torch held upon the surface would explode with a flame. The presence of the carbonates and sulphates probably gave the springs all the curing qualities it ever needed (except for the psychological power in the mind of the participant).



Antique mineral spring water bottles are highly collectable and one such as the bottle from Guilford VT above, sell at dramatic prices from \$50.00 to \$1,000.00. Brochures, posters and signs that are intact and of good appearance are also very desirable but difficult to come by.

The gradual decline of these curative operations after the Civil War was caused by various fires, floods, the Great Depression and immunization that fixed the problems before they stated. But perhaps we should start looking for those magic waters again?

Sources

- 1. Official History of Guilford Vermont 1678-1961 (Town of Guilford)*
- 2. Vermont Saints & Sinners (Lee Dana Goodman)*
- 3. Abby Hemenway Gazetteer*

Moretown Historical Society

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Did you know there was such a thing as a MORETOWN coffee mug? (\$20.00)

Or a MORETOWN T- shirt? (\$20.00 each or 2 for \$35.00)

How about "Drawing Logs from Dowsville" a book by Mary Gow and Kitty Werner which includes the history of the Ward Lumber Co. and lots of great pictures and other local history? (\$30.00 or \$15.00)

There is also a pamphlet of POETRY written by Moretown folks and compiled by Earline Marsh. (\$12.00)

A work by Earline Marsh on the history of the Taplin School and more. (\$18.00)

OR we also have two little booklets one written by Lydia Billings (1963) and one by Mary Reagan, (1982) which outline the history of MORETOWN (\$3.00 for one or both for \$5.00)

Please contact Mary at the Moretown Historical Society for ordering or more information. 496-2901 or MMurphy917@aol.com

Are you doing some local research? Give us a call or drop a line, perhaps we can help!

See your name or business card here; help us sponsor the MHS Newsletter.

\$20.00 for four issues

