

Folks came from miles around for Wooley Springs' healing waters

By Rebekah Davis
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It all started with a herd of fattened cattle.

The year was 1820, and Joel Wooley was settling into his brand-new estate in northeastern Limestone County. The North Carolina transplant had just bought the land from another Carolina native, Lewis Tillman, and he noticed that his cattle were getting nice and plump on their new grazing land. A young serving girl told him that she thought it might have something to do with the water they were drinking. It smelled awful, but it ended up being great for you: It was full of minerals, particularly sulphur. In fact, later tests revealed that the water's minerals were identical with those at another well-known springs at the time, White Sulphur Springs in Greenbrier, West Virginia.

Joel Wooley knew a gold mine when he saw one, and he immediately set out to make Wooley Springs a tourist attraction. He built a hotel on the spot, and soon folks were coming from miles around to soak in the warm mineral water and enjoy the activities. The dining table was famous for its country cured ham, fried chicken, fresh vegetables and fruits, pies and cakes, and the front porch was famous for its after-dinner contests. In one drinking contest – of the stinky sulphur water – the winner beat her competitor by one pint, guzzling down three gallons and a pint in one day.

The hotel was never considered anywhere close to four-star, but it still stayed full year-round, and the demand for rooms increased to the point that every year, Wooley was adding a new addition to the hotel.

By 1881, Wooley had decided to get out of the mineral springs business. He sold the estate to Dr. William A. Milhous and moved to the northwestern part of Limestone County, but the springs kept his name, as it does to this day.

Soon Milhous also reported that he was having more applicants than he could accommodate. His solution was to build a saw mill nearby to help with the new buildings, and each summer would find a new building added to an existing one. When the final building was completed, the complex included 30 guest rooms, dining and sitting rooms and a kitchen.

Milhous Hotel operated at least through July 1916, when Dr. Milhous announced the season opening of Wooley Springs at \$8 per week or \$30 a month.

Today, the Milhous Hotel is long gone, and a home stands on the site, but the legacy of Wooley Springs remains in the name of the community along Ala. Hwy. 251 that boasts churches and more by that name. And if you search out the spring, who knows? You may still find healing in its waters!

About the Archives:

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