

Photo of the Month

Park Springs Park
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Park Springs Park
Bentonville, Arkansas
Neg: N019960
Courtesy of Randy McCrory

In the 300 block of NW “B” and NW “C” streets in downtown Bentonville you will find a humble little park by the name of Park Springs Park. When you arrive you see a modest pavilion and a few signs telling about the Burns Arboretum/Nature Trail. Never would you suspect that nearly 100 years ago it was a bustling hotel and sanitarium and just 70 years ago it was the site of the Ozark Bible College.

Since the late 1800s the park, known as Springs Park, was already a place for the community to gather and in 1893 the State Confederate Veterans Reunion was held at the park. It was only when two therapeutic springs were discovered on the site that it became an idea to place a hotel there. Sometime in the early 1900s A.T. Still opened a sanitarium and changed the name to Park Springs.

J.D. Southerland purchased the property in 1913 and converted the hotel and sanitarium to a resort location. Describing itself as a “beautiful two-story rustic structure” where “families escape the hot weather in the cities” with unbelievable healing properties it was easy to see the lure of the grounds. Soon it became known as the “Famous Park Springs Radio-Active Water” and offered medical treatments for “kidney, bladder, and stomach diseases, diabetes, and rheumatism” by “drinking, inhalation of steam or vapors, douches, irrigation of accessible organs, and applied externally by various kinds of baths, packs, showers etc.”

Southerland also enticed visitors by having the Frisco Line run directly to the Park Springs Hotel. It ran on the AR&NW Railroad on the main Frisco line every hour. Southerland himself owned the line and the motor coach, which was reported to be “red, trimmed in black, and had gold lettering” and could seat 130 passengers. Many guests of the hotel would come for weeks and sometimes for an entire month, and the hotel offered the luxurious service of delivering a guest’s luggage from the train straight to their rooms.

Unfortunately, in 1916 Mr. Southerland began having business troubles and sold the land to George and Clara Crowder. The Crowder’s took over the hotel but a little after three months of owning it, on July 24, 1920; a fire broke out and destroyed the entire building. That didn’t deter the Crowder’s though and the next year, on June 3, 1921, they reopened the business. They continued to run the hotel until Clara’s death in 1924.

The building is said to have been used as a nursing home for several years until it was closed down. The land then sat empty for several years until purchased in 1940 by the Ozark Christian College. On June 24, 1942 the Bentonville location of the Ozark Bible College opened, which offered both occupational and Bible training. It ran there for four years until the location was transferred and is now where it sits today in Joplin, Missouri.

After that, the building once again became a nursing home until it too closed. Sometime later the land went back into the ownership of the City of Bentonville and was converted into the park that is now there. In 1996 the Burns Arboretum/Nature Trail was dedicated by the Bentonville Rotary. The project was coordinated by Bob C. Burns, Rotarian and President of Northwest Arkansas Community College. On the trail there is 43 different trees marked with green painted numbers, and 22 shrubs/plants marked with red. While some of the trees are only 8 years old, it also holds a tree that stands as Arkansas' oldest and tallest; the White Oak which was sprouted in our nation's most prominent year, 1776.

Today if you go out driving down NW "B" street in Bentonville you will find rows of houses and one park. At first glance there is nothing special about it, just a small play area, pavilion, and restroom. But if you decide to venture down onto the trails, you'll find so much more. The bridges, waterfall, and old cement structures can only provide a small glimpse into what once was a prominent location so many years ago. While nothing remains of what used to be, except maybe an old rotted nail, or a handprint left in the cement, there are so many new memories and new moments that are being had every day. But if you go out walking down the trails on a nice quiet day, you can almost see everything Park Springs Park used to be.