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## Mineral springs hotel okawville illinois

By Troy Taylor
Right next to illinois highways, and hidden in the shadow of cornfields in the lower region, is the small town of Okawville. To travel its quiet streets today, one can hardly imagine that this was once one of the most lively small cities in southern Illinois. However, from the late 1800s to the middle of the 20th century, people came here from all over the country to take in the almost magical waters of the mineral spring that still exist beneath this city. In its heyday, a number of cheap hotels and health resorts existed here, offering healing baths for those who suffered from rheumatism, digestive diseases and all the problems of diseases, but today only one still remains. The original Springs Hotel is still resting on North Hanover Street in Okawville and today, it is the only continuous operation of spring minerals in the state of Illinois. It is a place of history and mystery that still attracts people from the surrounding area and beyond. This continue to come here hoping to experience not only the rejuvenating waters of ancient spring, but also the strange and powerful aura of the place itself. There are many secrets here and according to some, many ghosts as well. Many of the visitors, and staff members, are unable to explain the strange attraction that they have for this place --- the same way are often unable to explain why so many spirits have chosen to stay here. Is it just water that is secreted under the old building or is it strange, almost magnetic, the qualities that this water seems to have? I think in this water are the true mysteries of the Original Springs Hotel...
THE HISTORY OF THE MINERAL IZVOARES OF OLAWVILLE
The mysterious waters of Olawville were first discovered in 1867. Rudolph Plegge was the owner of a harness shop and saddle near the corner of Walnut and Hanover Streets in Okawville and looking for a water source for his business, he began digging his own well. In the process, he came on the water, but there is nothing in the old accounts to say he knew there was something unusual about him at first. It was only later that he began to have problems with leaks forming in one of his tin cups. He took the object to the local blacksmith, Michael Vogele, to complain about his inferior products and Vogelle replaced it with copper, which also began to leak. Curiously, a local physician, Dr. James McIlwain Sr., decided to test the water and discovered that it had a high mineral content. A local trader, August Schulze, who was a partner in a general merchandise store in the large brick building across the street from the saddle store, put up \$25 for a more thorough water test. A delivery cart that made regular trips to St. Louis took the water to Professor Enno Sanders, who did his own tests and found the presence of eight with the highest content being iron. The water, it was reported, was comparable to Baths in Germany and the famous Thermal Springs of Arkansas, although it was not warm when it came out of the ground. When Dr. McIlwain heard about the test, he made arrangements to have one of his rheumatic patients, who was not responding to other treatments, to come and bathe in the water. The man was almost immediately healed. In a short time, Plegge got in touch with a German farmer who once worked at the Carlsbad Baths in his native country and together they set up a small bathroom, which was opened on 16 September 1868. The business prospered locally and was expanded several times. However, it was never really promoted outside the immediate area and Okawville (called Bridgeport until 1871) was not really prepared to handle the crowds of visitors. The city had a population of only about 600 at the time and few places to eat or shop. In addition, there were only a handful of rooms in the various guesthouses available and were best suited for overnight stays by traveling vendors than for visitors making extensive visits. Another disadvantage at that time was the lack of transport. It was very difficult to reach the small community before the arrival of the St. Louis & Southeastern Railway in 1871. By 1872, it took just an hour to get to Olawville from St. Louis by train and at this time, several small hotels had appeared, including South Okawville Hotel and Henry Klauke's hotel, general store and lounge, Okawville House, a guesthouse and a salon, opened on North Hanover Street in 1873, but none of these buildings offered bathing facilities for mineral springs. Rudolph Plegge dreamed of building his own three-story brick hotel for several years, and in 1875 began collecting sand to start a foundation, but the project did not rise from the ground. He did his business growth bathing during the 1870s, but it wouldn't be until the second part of 1880 that someone would combine hotel, restaurant and bathing business to change the face of the city forever. At one point in 1884, the wife of the Reverend J.F. Schierbaum of Edwardsville came to Olawville to take in the waters. At that time, she was said to be a hopeless invalid and visited all the best doctors in St. Louis, who offered her no relief from her pains and illnesses. She came to Okawville, bathed in water and was restored to perfect health. She was so excited that she persuaded her husband and other ministers of the German Evangelical Church to buy Plegge's business and build a hotel on the site. By September of that year, plans had been made to build the hotel. It was supposed to be a grand brick structure that held dining rooms, a large kitchen and 46 rooms. The work began immediately, but tragically, the brick design would turn out to be too and the hotel was built of wood. The new Mineral Wells Hotel was dedicated on 28 May 1885 with a large crowd of ministers, their congregations and the general public in Things started great and by 1886, business was so good that rev. Schierbaum realized he would have to increase the hotel before next season. In those days, the hotel and bathrooms were closed during the late autumn and winter months and thus, by spring, the building was expanded by almost 10 meters. Not only was the hotel expanded, but a new and luxurious bathroom was also built, as well as an engine room to provide heat. Schierbaum bought a third-engine engine for the engine house, but unfortunately exploded, scalding it, C.L. Schulze and a man named Meier, who later died of burns. This was the first death that occurred on the site, but it wouldn't be the last. Schierbaum and Schulze recovered from injuries and a new engine was acquired in St. Louis. The expansion of the hotel helped the entire city to thrive. A liveee stable was built in the city at the corner of the front and third streets and operated horse-drawn buses for many years, bringing passengers and their luggage from the station to Mineral Wells. Until 1887, there were two separate companies offering this comfort. The new arrivals helped other businesses thrive. William Friedman, who operated a salon and dance unit called Apollo Hall, also opened a recreation area called City Park behind the nearby City Hotel. The park presented band night concerts during the summer and was said to be patronizing by the best society as well as Mineral Wells guests. The success of mineral fountains also gave rise to imitators. In 1889, Gottlieb Rolf, who operated Beidefeldt Store &amp; Hotel, discovered a mineral spring on its property and renamed the Washington Mineral Springs Hotel. He began to offer baths in a small way, but later would add a lot to Olawville's reputation as a health resort. In 1890, Mineral Wells Hotel was sold to J.W. Schreiner in St Paul, Minnesota. He traveled earlier to Illinois to take in the waters and was so relieved of his problems with rheumatism that he offered to buy the hotel and bathroom. He and his brother, W.A. Schreiner, took over the operation and began to grow. J.W. Schreiner became heavily involved in the local community and served as fire chief and later as mayor of Okawville. In 1891, Schreiner wanted to try to surpass the 9,000 baths they gave the previous season and thus expanded the bathroom building to double its capacity. They had another extremely successful season, but then, in November, after the hotel closed, disaster hit. In the early hours of the morning of November 8, a horrific fire engulfed the building and reduced the place to a collapsed ruin. The fire was blamed on a lamp that exploded, but to this day, the real cause of the fire remains a mystery. However, in 1892, word spread that it was actually the result of arson. Apparently, someone held a grudge against the former hotel owners and did not that it was bought by schreiner, penetrated and spread charcoal from the oven on the wooden floors. Whether this story was true or not was never discovered. The fire did not give back the Schreiner brothers for long and made immediate plans to rebuild the hotel before the spring and summer season following. The blackened remains of the old hotel were cleaned in December and sand and brick were towed for the new foundation. Work began on the first bathroom was mostly completed by February 12. The new structure was two floors high, with an extra room in the center of the upper floor to contain large, hot and cold water tanks. The bathroom contained 40 rooms, but the planned hotel was expected to be much larger. By May, this building was also erected and was expected to be ready for the June rush. They did, but barely. The hotel was completed on June 10 and opened shortly after and as a newspaper put it and none too early either, for the irresistible flood of bath comes quickly and taxation the capacity of hotels and hostels here. A great celebration took place in July, which combined the day of holiday independence and the reopening of Mineral Fountains. Placed was booked to capacity, as were other local hotels and private homes that took advantage of the popularity of the city's mineral baths to make some extra money renting sleeping rooms. The Washington Hotel about the time it was taken over by the Morgan Mineral Wells brothers continued to do huge business that season and the following seasons. Unfortunately, though, the fire was actually helpful at the Washington Springs Hotel, which was opened during the time that Schreiner were rebuilding. The business of this institution was also booming, and in March 1894, M.A. (Alex) Morgan rented and then bought the Washington Springs Hotel &amp; Bathhouse from Gottlieb Rolf. Morgan was a backer of a local coal mine and two years earlier, planned to open another hotel next to Morgan's Lake in the city. This plan fell through and so decided to buy and improve on Washington Springs instead. Morgan and his brother Andrew began promoting the business so successfully that they made plans to build a larger hotel building. The following month, the Mineral Wells Hotel changed its name to a variant of the one it still has today - Owவில் Original Mineral Springs. He began to appear this way in all his advertising. With the new competition coming on stage, Schreiner wanted to make sure everyone knew that their hotel and bathroom were in town first. The ads continued to trumpet the hotel healing benefits of Original Springs, as opposed to the inferior qualities of its imitators. Of course, after readers have already guessed, the water all came from the same mineral fountains. Washington continued to thrive under its new property and near cures have started to be reported in the newspapers. The free advertising that came from these newspaper reports brought even more business to the hotel. Washington also had another advantage over Mineral Springs in that it offered something for its patrons to do during evening hours in the sleepy little city. Other than drinking in a local tavern, which did not interest most who came to Okawville for health reasons, there was very little entertainment in the city. With this in mind, the hotel's owners have turned Lake Morgan into a private amusement park for their guests, offering boat rides, fishing and dancing in a large pavilion that had been built on the lake. Later, other businesses began to accommodate visitors during the evening and an opera house was opened, along with an ice cream parlour and the Rex Theatre. Throughout the off-season of 1894-1895, Morgan continued to expand and improve on the Washington Hotel. Perhaps the biggest of these improvements was the installation of electric lights, the first to be installed in Olawville. The announcement was made that the hotel's new building would contain 300 incandescent lights, and in February 1895, the hotel was opened to the public. According to the newspaper's report on the celebration, the new Washington was flooded with a fire of glory. The hotel was opened for the 1895 season in April and enjoyed its greatest success to date. Summer was a fog of band concerts, dances, ice cream socials and boat rides and at the end of the season, the lake and park were also illuminated with electric lights. The progress and success of the Washington Hotel have not been well with the owners of Original Springs. In the spring of 1896, they also wired their buildings with electricity and naturally installed equipment larger than their competition had, with machines capable of lighting 500 incandescent bulbs and a dozen springs. Soon, most of the business on Hanover Street was illuminated with electricity from the Original Springs, and a few years later, the hotel even provided street lights to the city. The owners of Washington, always looking for something to stay before Original Springs, introduced a concept in 1898 that had not previously been tried - bottling water from springs. Shortly after the introduction of a small bottling operation, the water was transported to St. Louis in a specially constructed wagon. Later, it was also carried out by train and received quite a text in the larger city. Water would remain popular for years and bottling made by Original Springs would last until the late 1980s. At the time, the health department said the water could only be bottled if it was taken in a separate building from which the bathing took place. The owners decided that it was not and thus the bottling was interrupted. However, if you visit Original Springs, I encourage you to drink as much of the water as you can. extra its restoration powers, boasts an unusual taste and texture that my friend Brady Kesner said was like drinking air. Amid all these increases and successes, a terrible event took place in October 1898, when Alex Morgan went to the train depot to meet some st. Louis shareholders and accidentally stepped in front of a moving train. He was killed on the spot, leaving the entire community in a state of shock and disbelief. Morgan was well-liked by everyone, even his competitors, and was well-known as a lawyer, village board member and Illinois legislator. He was only 48 when he was killed and his death left a big void at the hotel. His brother, Andrew, took over, but by that time he was already spending much of the year in Texas. He soon moved there permanently and left the hotel in the hands of various staff members. In 1909, it was sold to local businessman William G. Frank. Meanwhile, several changes have been made to Original Springs as well. Although the exact date is unknown, at some point around 1900, the Schreiner brothers sold the hotel back to reverend Schierbaum. There doesn't seem to be any explanation as to why this occurred, but it could have been because of J.W. Schreiner's death. He disappeared from historical records at about this time, although his brother remained in Olawville for about a year after the sale and then moved to St. Louis in 1901. Rev. Schierbaum immediately began working to continue the improvements at Original Springs. In December 1900, he made arrangements with the village council to provide water to splash the city's dirt streets with in the summer months and began expanding the nearby Schulze Mill pond, which provided water for the hotel boilers. The pond will be used for recreational activities for guests. He also put in a larger electric generator plant and agreed to supply Olawville with 40 street lights over the next 10 years at a cost of \$600 a year. Back in Washington, managers hired by Andrew Morgan worked to continue competing between the two hotels. They raised a pavilion over small Superior Springs for hotel guests and the area has become a small park for many years. The band's concerts began to take place here, hosted by the Oawville Silver Coronet Band, and the City Park Orchestra will offer dance music on alternate evenings. Original Springs started its own park around this time and rented the block over Hanover Street to the village for a City Park. Before long, a strip gazebo was erected and the park became the place of church socials and local events. According to newspaper reports, 1902 was a year for Okawville. The spring and summer season have passed with hotels being filled to capacity, baths always busy and local make a lot of money from the steady flow of visitors. Okawville's fame is constantly growing, the newspapers said, and the growth of the village is constant and while not in any sense a boom. In May 1904, rev. Schierbaum died after a two-week illness, which was not considered very serious. The family continued to run Original Springs, though, with various members responsible for different aspects of the place. Mrs. Schierbaum was general manager until her death in 1911. The early 1900s were a further era of expansion for Original Springs and Washington Hotels. Several additions were built and other businesses, such as ice cream salons and theaters, prospered during this period of growth. Original Springs built a large addition that was two storeys high and contained 24 new rooms in time for the 1907 season. This addition can be seen today starting from where the porch ends and inside, take the visitor on a short flight of stairs to a slightly higher level. Original Springs so look circa 1910 One of the most praised features of the addition was a large dining room that was located in the basement. The room featured highly decorated tin walls and extravagant décor and became quite popular. Around 1910, the owners tried to turn this part of the hotel into a gambling salon, but their license was refused by the village council. After his mention, Washington was sold at the beginning of the 1909 season to a consortium led by local businessman W.G. Frank. His brother-in-law, John Voegelé, soon left the salon business to manage it. At the end of the season, they destroyed the dance pavilion that Alex Morgan built on the lake and saved the materials they used while building a new bathroom on the hotel. The new wing was added to the west side of the building and was connected by a short, closed walkway. While Washington has been building this new but rather ordinary bathroom, the owners of Original Springs have also been hard at work. The old frame bath here was moved to the southeast corner of the lot and built was started on a new brick bath, which still exists today. The local masonry had to work around the clock in 1910 to provide enough bricks for construction. The hotel was forced to deal with the old bathroom until the new date could be completed, about halfway through the next season. At the end of the 1911 season, another large construction project took place at the Washington Hotel. The owners have to tear down the old bathroom building, which was also the first building of the hotel, and built an extra three floors, which was called the Annex. The hotel has now expanded from one end of the block to the other, but this was as big as it would ever get. The owners had no idea when the days in Washington were numbered. Business continued to be fast during the 1911 season for Original Springs, but in October year, Anna Schierbaum died after a long illness. She has been managing the hotel since her husband's death and fell to her son, Ben, who has been an official for years to take over. The following year, Ben married Alma Schulze, daughter of C.L. Schulze, who ran a shop in the brick building opposite the hotel. Their marriage was apparently a rocky one, and although no details of their troubles were found, Alma left Ben in November 1916, shortly after the hotel closed for this season. With no idea where she went, he spent a few days searching for her, ending up in Shelbyville. About three days later, he returned home, was depressed, and one evening he went to see his parents at the shop across the street. They couldn't or didn't want to help the young man, and he went back to the empty hotel. Five days later, a street vendor, who was looking for the Ahring Hotel and was directed to Original Springs by mistake, entered the lobby of the place. Even though the hotel was closed for the season, he found the front door unlocked and shouted to see if anyone was around. The reception was deserted, so it started in the main lobby, next to the office and the hotel office. After walking a short distance, he noticed a corridor that stopped left, which was then a passagethat led to the bathroom. He took just a few steps when he saw the huge puddle of dry blood on the floor. Scared, he looked to see a man, who would later be identified as Ben Schierbaum, fallen against the wall. Blood was sprayed all over the hallway and much of his head was missing. In his lap was a double-pipe rifle, and next to it was a curtain rod that had been used to pull the trigger. Several letters and his wife's photograph lay on the floor. Nearby, out of reach of blood, was a letter that had been written by its father-in-law, Mr. Schulze, asking him to call the coroner and his brother Dan, and then forget the whole matter. Ben took his life in despair because he lost his girlfriend Alma. His body was left in the hotel for days after the suicide, but unfortunately, with Alma gone, no one realized he was missing. However, a strange story emerged after the body was found. According to a teamster named George Garbs, a few days before Ben was discovered, his horses resisted passing the hotel because they apparently felt the blood had been spilled inside. Before his marriage, Ben attended medical school and then commercial college for another year. When his records and accounts were examined, they all seemed to be in order, but it was assumed that he was depressed because of his marital problems. His funeral turned out to be the largest ever held in Oawville, with more than 1,000 people present. Ben was only 28 at the time of his death. What has become of Alma is unknown, but there are some who believe that Ben is still persistent behind the Original Springs, which will be discussed later. The city of Oawville enjoyed a period of great prosperity the next few years. Modern transport of from the station to the hotels came about when the local man booked, Charles Mohr, bought a new international truck chassis and had a car manufacturer build a body that would carry 16 people. This sounded the death bell for horse-drawn carts that had been used in previous years. But the event that took place that really put Olawville on the map took place in 1919 and then was repeated again in 1924 and 1928. These years were the annual conventions of Egyptian hustlers, which were held in different cities in southern Illinois every summer. Egyptian Hustlers were an organization of traveling vendors and businessmen. They took their name from Egypt, popular names for Southern Illinois and they hustled products for mostly St. Louis companies. When they came to town, stuffed hotels, there were dances and stage performances, carnivals and meetings and almost something happens every minute. Crowds and cars came from all over the region and while no less than 30,000 were expected in the first year, the presence was slightly lower due to rain. Even so, the crowd literally overflowed the city at every opportunity and later conventions brought a circus, a miniature fair world and even plane rides to the city. In November 1919, A. Sodini bought the Original Springs from the Schierbaum heirs for \$40,000. He planned to make a number of changes to the hotel and start operating the place throughout the year, although this did not occur. However, he had the porch extended over the north end of the building and probably lined up the front steps with the front doors, so they appear today. Sodini only hung on to the hotel for two years. In 1921, the big news in the city was that the Washington Hotel had bought Original Springs, making it the largest real estate business in The History of Olawville. This would put an end to competition between the two entities, the distinctions of which were not always friendly. The years that followed were times of business decline for larger hotels. The Original Springs did not open until July 1921, and a fire severely damaged Washington in 1923. A year later, a corporation was founded in St. Louis that took over the two hotels, as well as The Oawville Light &amp; Ice Plant. They announced plans to build a third hotel, but this did not come to pass. The highlights of the next few years were the return of the Egyptian Hustls in 1924 and a conference held in October of that year by bankers from Southern Illinois. The business were tapered off otherwise, though and a hint of wistfulness appears in a newspaper report from the 4th of July festivities in 1925. The reporter commented that the weekend at the big hotels looked like it used to be with crowds. In 1926, two Bank robbers from St. Louis were captured at the Original They were recognized by a police officer outside Madison's service who was sitting there and called the St. Louis authorities. But they wouldn't be the only criminals to come. Come. Original Springs and were certainly not the most famous. In the mid-1920s, Original Springs was a frequent meeting place for the infamous southern Illinois gangsters Charlie Birger and the Shelton brothers, Carl, Earl and Bernie. Later, people declared war on each other and engaged in a series of bloody battles and assassinations in the region. However, in 1923, they joined forced to oppose the Ku Klux Klan, who moved into the area to break on bootleg liquor, which Birger and Shelton all dealt with , which made Okawville a valuable meeting place. It is also likely that the hotel managers were customers of the Shelton brothers, as alcohol is believed to have been available here throughout Prohibition. The current owners discovered a hatch and a hidden camera at the bottom of the hotel, where the drink is believed to be hidden. Claude Monroe, a local employee who is now 90, recalls the days when the Birger and Shelton gangs met in Original Springs. They were nice guys, he said, as long as you didn't upset them. He recalled the gang leaders meeting in the bathroom and using the massages and baths that were offered. However, when they met there, they always met alone, requisitioning the entire bathroom for their own use. Men with machine guns were always parked in front of the door and at the end of the walkway leading from the hotel to the bathroom. In 1928, Egyptian hustlers returned to Okawville for the last time, but the event has now held the little fanfare. The much smaller convention held at Kugler's Park and while it did offer a carnival, competitions and other attractions, the crowds were certainly not as big as in previous years. Interest in mineral springs seemed to wane, although hotels still managed to fill up every weekend. By the end of 1929, Conrad Paeben, a member of the consortium that operated both hotels, was put in charge of Original Springs and organized a series of meetings to outline major changes for the hotel and seek public support. Much of the remodeling took place in the winter of 1929-1930, but many of the other changes it proposed did not occur. The plans were created just as the American was entering the Great Depression, which no one realized would be as long or as severe it turned out to be. The hotel could be open all year round, which has been talked about from the beginning. The biggest change, however, was the transformation of Original Springs into a country club. Lifetime subscriptions sold for 100 dollars each and nearly 300 people joined, mostly from St. Louis. Paeben Paeben a bus that made trips to St. Louis every day and brought club members and their guests to and from the city. The influx of money made it possible to update the hotel décor, adding new paper to the rooms and putting in a hardwood floor in the dining room. Additions were made to the bathroom, including the installation of Burdich American Special (Turkish) bathroom cabinets. The hotel as a country club was opened on May 1, 1930 and plans were set in motion for a golf course and tennis courts. These things didn't happen, but a short-lived mini golf course existed for a while in the hotel's courtyard adjacent to the bathroom house. Despite the worsening depression, Original Springs was in the middle of a business boom. The shameless promotion of the Paeben club to radio and print stations, using the phrase Where Rheumatism Meets its Waterloo, brought large crowds from St. Louis and the surrounding area. The hotel was constantly filled and more than 3,000 baths were given during the 1930 season, using more than 225,000 gallons of miraculous water. Another 250,000 gallons of water were soaked and used for washing, cooking and assorted uses in the hotel. This water came from two walled and arched tanks, which are now located under the floor of the banquet hall at the northern end of the pool. You can still find access to the tank by touching your foot on the floor of the banquet hall and listening to the empty sound. A special bus was purchased for Original Springs Country Club, which would pick up and deliver members to St. Louis on a daily basis Unfortunately, although after only one year, the country club failed. In 1931, the hotel changed its name to Original Springs Health Resort. The country club seemed to have been a good idea, but it couldn't have come at a worse time for the nation, and the region., the economy. It continued to exist as a social organization and some special privileges were granted to members for some time afterwards. More evidence of the worsening depression was shown by the fact that the old bathroom at the corner of the lot, which contained about 20 rooms, was renovated in rooms for those who were unable to afford regular hotel rates but still wanted to take in the waters. Several cottages were also built with the same plan in mind and were located on the property for a number of years. By 1933, things were very grim in Okawville. On March 23, an announcement was made that there would be a sale by a lighting trustee at the Original Springs Health Resort, although an April 13 issue of the newspaper said the sale had been withdrawn pending negotiations. Things didn't improve and in May Conrad Paeben committed suicide by poisoning himself. The hotel's management was taken over by two of its employees, Tom Rogers and Louis Elardin. With of W.G. Frank, a local banker and head of the organization that controlled both hotels, were to keep the hotel open. Later that year, they changed their name back to the Original Mineral Springs. Tom Rogers, who came from Chicago and joined hotel staff in 1931 as chief clerk and auditor, was both mind-mind community and a cunning businessman. He wrote editorials for the newspaper and lectured on business and tourism improvement in Okawville. He would later eam a reputation for being quite eccentric, but that would be in a time to come. At this point, he wanted nothing more than to bring more people to the hotel and in February 1934, he began a series of Saturday night dances that were well received by visitors and community. Dances started at 21:00 and ended at 13:00 so that hotel guests could retire without disturbance. After the dance was over, the club's rooms were open ed. Drinks were also served and there was no specification as to what these drinks were, although advertising for events ensured everything that nothing would be allowed, which would offend the most particularly or be unacceptable to any citizen of the community. Later that spring, the Original Springs Orchestra also began providing musical entertainment and beer was free for those who paid a 45-cent entry. A woman from St. Louis was hired to direct the orchestra and later a show was added upstairs. By July, the hotel reported record crowds on weekends. Rogers continued to promote the hotel for the next few years and also became involved in the local Democratic Party. Meetings were frequently held at the Original Springs, as well as at the victory festivities. In the spring of 1938, Rogers came up with another idea to drum up the business at the hotel, opening Okawa Pleasureland in the hotel park across the street. A dance floor was installed and music was often provided by Gottlieb and his German band, Dixie Blue Boys, King City Wildcats and others, Pleasureland also featured a horseshoe pit, ping-pong tables, a croquet field, a softball and diamond baseball, billiard tables, outdoor bowling, canoe rentals on Lake Washington and more. Pleasureland lasted exactly two seasons before the closed. The United States was not yet out of depression and even though things began to look better in 1937, a recession set the following year, making things even sadder than they were before. Rogers made a brave effort, though, using radio and newspaper advertising to attract people to Okawville, but met with only limited success. In 1939, Rogers began to diversify his interests. He formed the Original Springs Dairy Co. and built a cheese factory. He encouraged local farmers to produce more C. which was used in the manufacture of cheese, but not for bottling. It was not necessary for them to have expensive equipment for this type of milk and many of them even bought more cows to meet the demand from the new cheese factory. Also, grew rapidly in the early years and expanded several times. It was closed in 1956. Rogers also dabbled in agriculture and pig farming on his Original Springs farms. Louis Elardin, who once had joint management tasks with Rogers at the hotel, went into the tavern business, but lost all the money. He became an employee of the farm and Elardin and another resident and permanent employee of the hotel, Tony Hilleke, raised with old equipment on Rogers' house and did routine tasks around the hotel. Both men managed to live longer than Rogers and spent their lives at the hotel, even after a subsequent change in leadership. In 1940, Rogers seemed to be more interested in other business concerns than in the hotel business and he did little to promote Original Springs. He was content to develop his dairy and raise nearly 800 pigs on his farm north of the city. Despite Rogers' low interest, the hotel boasted record crowds over the weekend. During the week, it was a different story, though. The Second World War was the focus of most people at the time and different deficits kept people close to home. Many of the rooms at Original Springs were not opened, and the corridors and dining room remained largely empty. The Washington Hotel suffered even more during and after the Depression and during the war. It was not open at all for the 1942 and 1943 seasons and was eventually sold to the Cohn brothers in 1944. They did some renovations, with plans to keep open throughout the year, but this didn't happen until 1946, when a new heating system was finally installed. That same year, they built a new kitchen and added a café open to the public. New beds have been installed in all rooms and a new neon sign has been placed across the entrance. Things seemed to be going well, but then, in 1949, a surprising announcement came - Washington was turned into a nursing home. At first, only the main floor was converted and the second floor was available to hotel guests, but this did not last long. Soon, the whole building was changed over and for a while, it was the largest private asylum in the state. Known as the Washington Springs Nursing Home, the facility operated until 1976, when changes to the Illinois fire codes forced it to close. Unfortunately, the still sound building was demolished in 1977. At Original Springs, Tom Rogers became known for being increasingly alien and eccentric. He spent most of his time focusing on his agricultural activities until they also began to decline. He seemed pleased with the few who came every year and gave up trying to promote the hotel. He wandered the empty corridors of the hotel every night One morning in March 1962, he was discovered lying dead in one of the rooms upstairs. The search for the heirs has begun, but none have been found. His wealth was established in October of that year, and the hotel was sold to Albert and Doris Krohne. If he took up the place, it has not been changed or updated in years. The only modern comfort in the rooms was a single light bulb that hung from a cable in the center of the ceiling of each room. The shared bathrooms were located on each floor. With funds available for renovations, Krohne went to work. Some rooms were equipped with sinks and toilets, although usually only by compartmentalizing a section of the room, but others were equipped with showers. For several years, there were three categories of rooms to leave at the hotel, good, better and better. The good rooms had no facilities. The best rooms had a sink and toilet, and the best rooms had showers. The tubs were later added to the deluxe rooms and price accordingly. Unfortunately, the renovations were slowed down in the summer of 1963, when Albert Krohne was seriously injured in a head-on collision with a truck. After being a carpenter and construction contractor before buying the hotel, he did a lot of work himself and underwent a long recovery. Among the injuries, he suffered a severely broken knee, which had to have a metal needle inserted into it. Later, he would credit mineral baths by helping him regain his mobility. In 1972, the Boiler Room Lounge and Restaurant was opened to the general public. Prior to this, the kitchen was only available to hotel guests. There were dances and live music at the weekend and it became quite a popular place. It remains open today and I can certainly vouch for the quality of food! In 1976, excavations for the pool began. For some time, it was an outdoor pool that was used during the summer months only, but is now closed and kept beautifully heated throughout the year. Krohne remained at Original Springs until the summer of 1974, when they sold to Robert and John Schrage, who stayed for only two years. Krohne got his place back from them in 1976. Several additions were made at the hotel in 1980. A section of rooms, as well as banquet halls, were added to the hotel in 1980 and the pool has been closed at this time. When work was being done on the swimming pool, a recreation area was built and, for the first time, the bathroom and hotel buildings were completely connected. Before that, only a closed hallway, supported by pillars connected to the main floor of the hotel with the second floor of the bathroom. It was in this hallway where the guards were stationed during the days of Charlie Birger and the Shelton Brothers and also where Ben Schierbaum had shot himself to death years before. It should also be noted that a portion of the roof above the pool was designed so that, in the months of warm weather, it could be opened with an engine and a cable machine. The mechanism has never functioned

properly and has not been opened since the early 1990s. Last construction in addition to remodeling and renovation, it took place in 1985, when 10 rooms were added to the hotel. In three club rooms have been added to the first floor of the bathroom to create desirable rooms side of the pool. The disaster struck the hotel again in 1988. On 30 December, the hotel was closed for the Christmas holidays and only a small maintenance staff remained on site. A faulty electrical outlet in the bar started a fire that burned through the walls and climbed to the roof before it was noticed. Several older rooms were destroyed and more were damaged. Firefighters quickly arrived on the scene, but firefighters had to cause more damage by cutting holes in the roof and tearing down windows to prevent the blaze from getting worse than it already was. The fire was estimated to have caused nearly \$400,000 in damage, but the site was cleaned up and reopened within weeks. What could have been disastrous for the historic site proved beneficial in return. In many cases, the rooms affected by the fire were extended and the walls were removed to create sleeping rooms that were more favorable to modern times. This made room for larger beds, furniture and TVs, which would not fit in the small rooms of the past. The last change of ownership for Original Springs took place in May 1990, when Krohne sold to current owners, Don and Mary Rennegarbe. Since taking over the building and continuing to this day, Rennegarbe have worked to restore the building to its previous glory. Their work was ongoing and often laborious, but it led to the hotel keeping open and its wonderful bathing facilities still accessible to the public. Original Springs has withstood fires, the Great Depression, suicides, management changes, two world wars and the changing tastes of the American people, and through it, the hotel still stands as a monument to the past. Even today, people come here from all over the region to take in the healing waters of Okawaville and enjoy some of the ambience of the past days. Healing waters and good food aren't the only things people come here to look for - some come looking for ghosts. And because of the hotel's unusual history, and the colorful parade of characters who have passed through it, ghosts are something many of them find. HAUNTS OF THE ORIGINAL SPRINGS Don and Mary Rennegarbe heard rumors and stories almost as soon as they took over the aging hotel. Staff members and office officials began to say the strange noises they heard in the building at night, including pacing steps into otherwise empty hallways, figures that were sometimes seen from the corner of the eye, doors that opened and closed by themselves, the tinkling sound of old-time music that echoed in the corridors and as one of the employees recently told me , the constant feeling of someone watching you. Len Adams & Brady Kesner (foreground) -- two of American Ghost Society with which I visited Original Springs in February In February 2004, I had the opportunity to visit Original Springs for the first time, accompanied by American Ghost Society investigators Brady Kesner, Luke Naliborski, Len Adams and his wife, Kim, and daughter, Megan. After a huge dinner in the Boiler Room, I had the chance to lurk around the place for hours, soaking history and haunting the massive old place. Mary Rennegarbe, knowing the reason for our visit, was happy to take us on a tour and was open about the strange events that have been reported by guests and staff members for many years. Mary even told us about a strange experience she witnessed right after she and her family bought the Original Springs. In 1992, the family moved into a large apartment on the second floor of the building. Having recently bought the place, they were in the middle of remodeling and renovations and found the apartment convenient for what then seemed to be an almost overwhelming task of revitalizing the business. One night, while Mary was sleeping in bed, her daughter, Nicole, came in and woke her up. Nicole was very young at the time and wanted to watch TV, even though it was very late at night. Realizing that her daughter would never return to sleep alone, Mary took her to the living room and set off a movie for her to watch. He curled up on the couch with Nicole and went back to sleep. No more than 30 minutes later, Nicole woke her up enthusiastically. She urged Mary to look up and see something that was in the corner of the room. Whatever it was, Nicole said she was flying near the ceiling. Mary looked into the dimly lit room, but she couldn't see anything. Her daughter was very excited, though, and she could obviously see something -- but what? She pointed to the figure and told Maria again and again to look at her. What was that? He couldn't say. Mary asked her, was it a boy or a girl? No, Nicole just said, she's gone. Mary was a little disturbed by it, but in the end just rejected everything as a bright child of active imagination and returned to sleep. About 45 minutes later, though, Nicole nudged her awake again and exclaimed that it was back. Mary still didn't see anything in the corner where the girl looked, so she asked more questions. Was he happy? Was it sad? No, Nicole answered, she wants to play. Moments later, according to the girl, she disappeared. Mary managed to go to school afterwards, but asked Nicole the next morning. Until then, the little girl had not remembered anything from the previous night and never spoke about the strange incident again. Mary didn't forget about it though - especially after staff members started talking about ghosts. Shortly after taking over the hotel, Mary set up her office in the part of the hotel which was added in 1980, just behind the pool where the recreation area was located. The office was up to the second level and stretches forward, front, above the pool. On this balcony, both guests and employees began reporting the sighting of a spectral woman in a white dress. She was described as wearing a long, high-waisted dress and a hat that was fashionable in the early 1900s. She was sometimes seen standing or in a rocking chair that was located there, but no matter how she was seen, her face was always shaded by the hat and remained unrecognizable. Observation near this part of the hotel continued for several years and then ceased at about the same time that Maria moved her office into a room that is located right next to the lobby. In a short time to move into her new office, Mary was working late in the hotel one night. He had just closed the restaurant and was sitting behind the desk with the clerk who was on duty. They were talking quietly when they heard an open door in the main corridor. Looking outside, they saw a man in bed clothes coming out of the room that was down the hall of Mary's office. The room was named the Civil War Room because of the themed setting, and Mary admitted to the man that he had checked into the hotel with his wife a few hours earlier. The man went out into the hallway and looked around puzzled. Finally, with a puzzled look on his face, he walked up to the office and asked Mary and the clerk a strange question for so late at night - did they see a woman in the lobby? They told him they didn't do it and asked him what had happened. The man explained that he was lying in bed with his wife when he started feeling uncomfortable that someone was following him. Eventually he got up and looked around the shaded room to see a woman standing near the end of the bed. She was wearing a long, white dress and had a big hat on that hidden side of her face. He stood there for a moment, looking at him, then turned around and headed for the door. She didn't hesitate before she even went through it! The man refused to believe his eyes and ran to the door and looked into the corridor, believing that he would see a flesh and blood person walking down the hall - but it was empty. From that point on, the woman in white was seen again in the same room and was also spotted in the hallway outside the room. It should be noted again that this room is located right next to Mary's office and it has been suggested that this is the explanation for why the ghostly figure appears here. She was once seen near Mary's office on the other side of the building, and apparently followed her to her new office space, right by the lobby. Could there be some kind of connection between them? Maybe - but the ghostly woman was seen elsewhere. One afternoon, a food delivery driver came into the restaurant while Mary was working. He was a regular driver on the route and came to Original Springs, traveling between St. Louis and Indiana on a weekly basis. That day, He came in, asked Mary who the woman was. That. seen looking out the window on an upper floor? She told him that no one was there that day, but he insisted that he saw a woman in a white dress and hat looking at him. Maria asked him where he saw her and took her outside and pointed to three windows on the north side of the bathroom. The woman, he said, was forgotten the one in the middle. After Mary told me later, there shouldn't have been a woman looking out that window, since she was in the men's bathroom. A quick check revealed that the bathroom was empty and the window where the woman was seen was a locked shed on the men's side of the building. Second floor of the bathroom (middle window), where the woman in white was seen by the truck driver. (photo by Brady Kesner) Strange incidents and strange occurrences continue to this day. Many of the hotel staff refuse to go upstairs and to the older wing at night. They often heard strange noises in some of the locked rooms, as well as touching footsteps in the hallways. A particular area that most find unsettling is a section on the corridor on the second floor that is currently being converted from three small rooms into a large one. It was in one of the old rooms where a guest was staying one night and asked to be moved to another floor. He claimed to have heard voices whispering and felt cold uncomfortable spots moving into bed with him. Coincidence or not -- one of these rooms was where former owner Tom Rogers was found dead in March 1962. The hotel's laundry is another area where staff members often become annoyed. Many of them have reported listening to playing music here and feel as if they are being watched. This area of the hotel is almost a maze and was once part of the rooms where the gambling salon was planned for Original Springs. Tin ornamentation still decorates parts of the ceiling, leaving a mystery behind as to whether or not the casino is ever operated or not. As slot machines have since been found that graced other hotels and businesses in the city, it seems possible that they could have been in this hotel as well. And the attic hides another mystery of the Original Springs. Here, among the charred lumber that remain from the fire of 1988, is a mysterious and puzzled room, which can only be accessed through a small door, which is located high on the wall. It seems to be nothing more than a closet of some kind, with old, original wood and hinges, but when the door is open, there is a small room behind it that, while narrow, is the height of a regular room. The problem is that there is no way to get down to the floor because the door is at least four meters in the air. Numerous theories have been suggested as to what this room might be, why it was built and what been used for but so far, the puzzle, like many others here, remains unresolved. Mysterious door in the attic that leads to a sealed room beyond Who Haunts the Original Hotel? Could the figures seen here, as well as the strange sounds that are heard, simply be memories of the past, repeating themselves over and over again? Or could there be conscious spirits from the hotel's heyday, simply refusing to cross over to the other side? Could Ben Schierbaum, Tom Rogers or other characters in the history of the building still be here? And if so, who is the mysterious woman in white who has been seen on numerous occasions? Perhaps this is Alma Schierbaum, Ben's wife, still haunting the hotel where her husband met his tragic end --- caught in guilt because it was the reason for his death. Haunting the Original Springs may be any of these things, but I think it's actually all of them. There is certainly a reason for some of the people from the hotel's past to still be here, as well as a rich history that has invited these personalities to never leave. It is possible that the energy contained in the hotel's famous water allows these spirits to manifest themselves. They draw from it what they need to make their presence known, interacting with guests and staff members. In addition, I also believe that the magnetic qualities of groundwater here have served to make the hotel into a giant battery storage. The atmosphere at the old place has been soaking up events, attractions and sounds for many, many years and as with any good residual haunts, these events replay themselves over and over again as a record. Like most locations of this type, haunts tend to fade over time, but at Original Springs, this is unlikely to happen. The hotel's secrets are connected to its enigmatic water, drawing both the living and the dead --- - to its door. © Copyright 2004 by Troy Taylor. 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