

Blue Sulphur Springs - A Little History

Blue Sulphur is located on what was a main route of travel from the Lewisburg area to the Kanawha Valley from the Indians till the development the Midland Trail. General Lewis followed Indian traces along this route when taking his army west to Point Pleasant. Civil War troops went back and forth via this route to the Kanawha Valley.



Beyer's rendering of Blue Sulphur Springs from his Album of Virginia. 1857. VA

Confederate troops camped here to guard against Union troops using the route to invade Virginia. Confederate General Robert E. Lee obtained his famous horse Traveller in the area of the Blue Sulphur Spring.

Sundays ride takes you to Blue Sulphur, but to see the actual spring location you will have to take a couple mile detour (one out and one back), but it is a flat out and back. The Spring is located on property originally patented to James Patterson in 1789. His daughter Nancy Patterson inherited it. The Blue Sulphur Springs Company was formed in 1834 for the purposes of building a resort and George Buster became the owner. The building of a hotel and other facilities commenced and the name "Blue Sulphur" was given because the water was "blue as the Sea of Galilee." See the excerpt from the book below for and the period illustration to get an idea of the facilities. Dr. Alexis Martin, a former surgeon in Napoleon's Army came in 1840 to be the physician and operate the bath houses.

Though it is considered a remote location now, one period literature listed is as "being on the main road from White Sulphur to the Guyandotte." Business fell off in the 1850s and the Baptist Church bought the facilities in 1859 to start a school later known as Allegheny College. The main hotel burned in 1860 but the main part was rebuilt. The Civil War doomed the college and during the war, both armies visited the area. During the winter of 1862-63, several hundred Georgia troops camped there and eighty-nine died during a typhoid epidemic. They are buried on top of the hill and traces of the burial site have been lost. The troops would have camped here to block access to Virginia from the Kanawha Valley. There presents here reaffirms that the road was a major thoroughfare during the period. Union troops burned the facilities to the ground in 1864 and it was never rebuilt.

The roof was rebuilt over the concrete pillars of the Grecian Temple at the Spring in 1966, by the property owners. To learn more about the various Spring resorts, read *Historic Springs of the Virginias - A Pictorial History*, by Stan Cohen

Below is a pre civil war description of the spring.

The Mineral Springs of Western Virginia with Remarks on Their Use, and Diseases to Which They are Applicable.

By William Burke, Second Edition, New York: Wiley and Putnam, 161 Broadway, 1846.

CHAPTER XXI
BLUE SULPHUR SPRING

"THE Blue Sulphur Spring is situated in the County of Greenbrier, in a beautiful valley, through which flows a streamlet bearing the unclassical name of Muddy Creek. It is twenty-two miles, in nearly a western direction, from the White Sulphur, on the road to Guyandotte and thirty-two miles north by east of the Red Sulphur, with which it is now connected by a fine turnpike road. The improvements consist of a brick Hotel-180 feet long, and 50 feet wide, 100 feet of which is three stories, the remainder two stories, with a portico 12 feet wide the whole length. Attached to this building is another, two stories high, 90 by 32 feet ; and adjoining this latter is a two story brick building, 150 by 17 feet, also having a two story piazza. The whole of these piazzas connect ; making a continuous piazza of 420 feet. This range of buildings affords a dining-room 180 by 30 feet, two large receiving rooms, a ball and drawing-room, bar-room, counting-room, and a large number of very comfortable chambers, most of them having fireplaces. At the north end of the Hotel are several brick cottages containing two and three rooms each, for families; and several frame cabins in the lawn. We think the establishment can comfortably accommodate 220 persons. We said that this valley is beautiful; we should, perhaps, have said, it has been. Fuit Ilium. Never have we seen bad taste more unfortunately illustrated than here. It seems as if the designer had his brain obfuscated by mint-julap. What man in his sober senses could have ever thought of spoiling a lovely valley like this, admitting a prospect of several miles, by throwing across it from hill to hill a long line of buildings which could have been so easily and so gracefully ranged along the sides ; not only obstructing the view, but also preventing the delightful current of air which otherwise would have fanned it in the dog-days? Not content even with this piece of botching, they must permit Dr. Martin to erect his tartarean ovens also across the valley, leaving the Temple containing the Spring, and the lawn in which it stands, bounded by brick walls and mountains. We found Dr. Martin a polite old gentleman ; but we wished he had been a bird of passage, and could have carried his nest in his bill, never again to mar this charming valley. We were angry enough to throw him into his own boiler, or worse, to consign him to the care of Dr. Moorman, who might cause him to evolve gas in the stomach, for such an act of barbaric taste. Notwithstanding all that has been done to spoil this place, it is still interesting and beautiful : indeed it will compare favourably with any of the watering places in this region. The Spring rises in the centre of the vale, and is covered by a well-designed but badly executed Temple. The fountain is enclosed in marble slabs, is five feet in diameter, and one of the most beautiful objects imaginable. The sides are covered with a brilliant pink deposit, and the dear, cool, crystalline water seems to say, " Come and drink me." It flows off in a large stream, and is conveyed by pipes to Dr. Martin's baths. It appears that after the Temple was built, our old friend Major Vase (our informant is Dr. Martin) undertook to arrange the fountain so as to square with the building; but at that very time, a hail-storm, mingled with mountain-dew or fog, happened to set in, which so blinded himself and workmen, that notwithstanding the remonstrances of the said Dr. Martin, (who happened to be sheltered from the storm by one of the columns, and could, therefore, see the work was not square,) the angles of the fountain were made to deflect some 18 or 20 degrees from their intended position; the Major, all the time, swearing all was as straight as a shingle.

This, with a little embellishment, is Dr. Martin's version of the story, which he narrated with the grace of a French comedian ; if the worthy Major give his version in time for the next edition, we shall insert it with pleasure. The temperature of this water is about 53 degrees : it is pleasant to the palate, but it is a heavy water : it imparts not the agreeable feeling to the stomach which is imparted by the White Sulphur ; nor does it possess that light tranquillizing property that characterizes the Red Sulphur. Our opinion of this water is founded on a slight acquaintance, and therefore we desire that it may be taken only for what it may be deemed worth ; but we have taken this impression with regard to it, that it cannot be drunk in as large quantity as either the White, or Red, or Salt, with equal advantage. We are perfectly satisfied it is a valuable water; but dyspeptics, especially, may do well to begin, at least, with small potations, and if they find it agree, it is easy enough to increase the quantity. Indeed, it would be well if this course were pursued with all those waters; but unhappily this view is taken by a very limited number of those who visit mineral waters. A peculiar

merit is claimed for this water in regulating certain periodical secretions ; but we are disposed to think its power in this respect is exaggerated ; at least, that it has no specific action different from other sulphur waters. Let the ladies try, though, and judge for themselves. Dr. Martin, a Frenchman, has, as the reader is already aware, erected a Bathing establishment at this place. His arrangements are quite extensive and well contrived, and enable him to give plain or medicated baths of any temperature. There can be no question of the utility of these bths, if judiciously administered; they would be equally deleterious in the hands of an empiric or a selfish, disingenuous man. The only knowledge we have of Dr. Martin is derived from a brief acquaintance, during which he was most agreeable and attentive, and we understood this is his uniform manner. He is courteous, affable, communicative, and on the subject of Vapour Baths he is always fluent, nay, sometimes eloquent. We could perceive he was an especial favourite with the ladies. And, now, we owe the Dr. an apology for being so rude as to wish him subjected to the manipulations of Dr. Moorman. Indeed, Dr., we were joking! We are sure you prefer your own odoriferous vapours to those evolved by your learned neighbour.

The Blue Sulphur property is owned by a company of gentlemen, one of whom, George Buster, Esq., resides at the place, and conducts the establishment. It would be doing great injustice not to say that the style of living here is more elegant than we have met with at any of the Springs. The furniture is better, and judge for themselves.

Dr. Martin, a Frenchman, has, as the reader is already aware, erected a Bathing establishment at this place. His arrangements are quite extensive and well contrived, and enable him to give plain or medicated baths of the appearance of the table is neater, and every thing bespeaks comfort and attention. We have seen quite as good things at other Springs, but nowhere as well served, except, perhaps, at the Warm Springs and Salt Sulphur. Mr. Buster himself made a favourable impression on us, and our inquiries satisfied us that our prepossession was justified, by his uniformly estimable deportment. We trust he will reap the just reward of his attention in an annually increasing company. "