

LIFE IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY ROCKBRIDGE BATHS

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From the mid-1800's until the turn of the century Rockbridge Baths was a flourishing, bustling community. All phases of life -- economic, intellectual, religious and especially social -- witnessed unprecedented success. It is the aim of this paper to examine and describe these phases.

## I

In 1843 only one building, a small cabin, stood on the north side of North River \* which flowed through an area known as the Cedar Grove and Strickler's or Letcher's Springs Country. Yet, a few people would occasionally spend part of their summers at this cabin for pleasure and recuperation of health. The attraction was a thermal pool fed by bubbling springs. Rockbridge Baths owes its name and notoriety to this watering place which supposedly possessed curative powers. <sup>1</sup>

A hotel to accommodate bathers was built in the 1850's. According to W. Cole Davis in an address to the Rockbridge Historical Society, the name Rockbridge Baths was first used in 1857 as it became associated with the hotel that was incorporated into "The Rockbridge Baths Company" around 1857. <sup>2</sup>

For a brief time previously, the Baths had been known as Jordan's Springs after William Jordan who built rows of cottages for summer

\*Today, the Maury River

visitors at the pool. <sup>3</sup> Ostensibly, Jordan's Springs existed for about one year, 1856. <sup>4</sup> Yet, a copy of a letter addressed to Jordan's Springs in 1862 suggests that common usage of the name Rockbridge Baths did not occur until sometime after 1862. <sup>5</sup>

In 1868 a hotel brochure described Rockbridge Baths as a place nestled in a valley two miles wide and two and one-half miles long between Buncomb and Marble Mountains on the east and Hogback and Jump Mountains on the west. According to the advertisement, the valley was "laid off into small and well-cultivated farms, interspersed with neat farmhouses, and thickly settled by a population kind, hospitable, moral, industrial and intelligent." <sup>6</sup>

Fertile lands made farming lucrative. In 1873 the Rockbridge Citizen reported Baths farmland selling for one hundred dollars per acre. <sup>7</sup> Twenty-five years later, the Lexington Gazette credited Rockbridge Baths with some of the finest land in the valley, still valued at one hundred dollars per acre. The Gazette also stated that tobacco and corn crops were raised on farms that were well-kept with many outbuildings, suggesting a "thrifty, industrious and well-to-do population." <sup>8</sup>

Descendants of the Scotch from Northern Ireland and the Germans from the Palatinate, the people of Rockbridge Baths did prosper. <sup>9</sup> In his History of Bethesda Church Elder John Horne reported that church members, initially settlers on small farms along the river, had built thirty-five new houses in the Baths between 1854 and 1884. Horne also stated that another forty homes in the area contained male heads who were not church members. <sup>10</sup>

## II

As the area of settlement expanded so did the Baths economy. Besides farming, a list of white voters in 1889 noted the following occupations of Baths residents: miller, blacksmith, undertaker, carpenter and shoemaker.<sup>11</sup> A letter to the editor of the Rockbridge County News in 1885 also provides information about the prosperity of the Baths. The correspondent, Nebuchadnezzar, scolded the paper for neglecting news about Rockbridge Baths. In his complaint, he cited these evidences of a self-supporting community: a flourmill, sawmill, two cabinet shops, two blacksmith shops, a shoeshop, one store, and a good postmaster and wife with a millinery shop.<sup>12</sup>

Other businesses at the Baths, unlisted by Nebuchadnezzar, included a pottery, tailor and cooper shop. An optimist, Nebuchadnezzar believed that his village of about one hundred citizens would soon be incorporated into a town.<sup>13</sup>

The Baths never became a town although ~~she~~<sup>it</sup> boasted valuable mineral deposits for some time. A marble quarry of superior quality was opened on the farm of J.A. Logan near Rockbridge Baths in 1867.<sup>14</sup> On July 30, 1873 the Rockbridge Citizen reported the following:

A correspondent of The State Journal writing from the Rockbridge Baths, says that among the handsome farms in that section which show thrift and comfort are those of Joseph M. Adams, Dr. McCorkle, and the Philadelphia Marble Co. This company has bought a fine farm, bordering on the North River, on which is found quarries of very beautiful translucent marble, with a view of working it out for the market. Hays Creek comes rushing down from the mountain gorges from the North and joins North River at this place; and on its banks are also found one of the marble quarries near here of fine quality.<sup>15</sup>

Of much greater fame than the marble deposits were the two iron works of Rockbridge Baths. The Lebanon Valley Forge, whose products aided the Confederacy during the Civil War, stood directly across the North River from Bethesda Church. "The hammer, which must have weighed seven hundred pounds, marked the forge's location years after the river had washed all other vestiges away. About 1894 Dr. Samuel Brown Morrison placed the hammer in his front yard. Dr. Morrison's grandson, Robert Steel Hutcheson, finally gave it for scrap during World War II. As Bernard Bangley stated, 'the Lebanon Valley Forge helped the United States during two wars.'"

The Gibraltar Forge can be claimed by the Baths even though its site rested on the Davis farm one mile south of the village. This forge made the hearths, fireplace bricks, nails and spikes for the Davis house.

After 1850 the iron ore forges declined as anthracite and ore replaced the charcoal furnaces. Most furnaces lasted through the Civil War and then closed permanently.<sup>16</sup>

Like the iron works, the gristmill at Rockbridge Baths contributed to the Civil War by making flour for the Confederate Army. The flour was shipped by packet boat down the North River to the James River to Richmond.<sup>17</sup>

Besides making flour, the mill, operated by William Foutz, ground rye, oats and corn into meal for bread, feed and use at local distilleries.<sup>18</sup> Prices for these products varied little between 1856 and 1873. The Foutz Mill Ledgers from March 29, 1856 through November 1, 1873 showed the following changes:

December 18, 1856:	3 bushels of bran - .50	
December 28, 1856:	2 bushels of corn - \$1.25	19
February 13, 1870:	1 barrel of flour - \$5.50	
	2 bushels of feed - \$7.00	20
October 27, 1873:	1 barrel of flour - \$7.00	
November 1, 1873:	4 bushels of meal - \$3.00	21

The greatest price fluctuations appear to be in flour which increased \$1.50 per barrel in three years. The barrels for the mill were made at a nearby cooper shop. <sup>22</sup>

A tailor shop existed near the present residence of Mrs. Leona Newcomer. <sup>23</sup> According to the shop's ledger, the business prospered between 1852 and 1880. The tailor, Mr. James M. Webb, bought the property from Mr. Stewart Taylor for two bonds of one hundred twenty and one hundred forty-five dollars. Mr. Webb, like Mr. Taylor, also served as postmaster of the Baths.

Mr. Webb's duties as tailor included making and "making over" vests, coats, pants, and suits out of such materials as tweed, linen and corduroy. <sup>24</sup> Costs of the above services were as follows:

July 12, 1852:	cutting a vest - .25	
	making a coat - \$2.00	
April 25, 1853:	making white pants - \$2.75	
	1854: making a suit - \$5.00	
	1868: making a suit - \$6.00	
	1871: making pants - \$7.00	25

Customer payments consisted of cash and/or pork, beef, flour, etc. <sup>26</sup>

The general store represents the only nineteenth century economic institution to survive modern times. A legend exists of an Irishman digging the foundation for the first store at Rockbridge Baths. When someone inquired of his actions, he replied "I am digging a hole to



bury Cedar Grove in." Cedar Grove, a nearby hamlet , did die but not due to the Baths. <sup>27</sup>

After moving from Cedar Grove, Joseph Adams erected the first store around 1845. Waller Anderson built the present structure in 1870 and operated it until his death when his son, Tom Anderson, assumed ownership. <sup>28</sup> Today Mrs. Connie Wieman owns and manages the business.

Apparently some of the Store's prices seemed too high in the 1880's since Nebuchadnezzar's aforementioned editorial in the Rockbridge County News encouraged merchants to establish another enterprise in the Baths. Nevertheless, Nebuchadnezzar stressed that "our merchant is a gentleman in every respect." <sup>29</sup>

The Rockford and Hays Creek Bridges helped perpetuate the Baths economy by providing access to outside areas. In their January 15, 1868 edition of the Gazette and Banner, the editors congratulated the "substantial and thriving" citizens on their accomplishment of getting a new bridge near the Baths. Encouraging people to contribute, the writers emphasized the importance of a good thoroughfare from Goshen to Lexington. <sup>30</sup>

The Rockford Bridge, which crossed North River in front of the present day Berry residence, must have been the editorial subject. This bridge replaced a covered one that contained no pier in the middle. <sup>32</sup>

In a contract between John Woods and the Bridge Committee on March 14, 1868, Mr. Woods agreed to "build the wood structure of an arch bridge across North River at the Rockford, one hundred and thirty-seven feet long with projections of eight feet at each end, with a roadway threw(sic)...<sup>32</sup>

The construction cost \$1850.00. Five hundred dollars would be paid when the frame was raised; the rest would be paid with the visible completion of the project -- contracted for October 1, 1868. <sup>33</sup>

On the east end of the Baths, Hays Creek posed problems for bridge contractors. The Lexington Gazette carried complaints in 1877 about late mail arrival, due to the dangers of crossing this bridge. <sup>34</sup> By 1889 a new iron bridge stretched across Hays Creek making traveling more enjoyable -- at least for awhile.

### III

The two churches at the Baths guided and directed the lives of their members. Sermons about the realities of hell admonished sinners to "fear God, his saints, and you will then have nothing else to fear." <sup>36</sup>

Lambert's Meeting House, built by Tobias Lambert on his property, furnished the Methodists with a place of worship until the Civil War. During the war the church split into two factions. Soon afterward, a new brick church was built near the old site and the Methodist Episcopal Church began. <sup>37</sup>

On May 23, 1907 the McCurdy heirs sold three acres and a house to the Methodists, and Ebenezer Church moved to its present location on the north side of North River, about one-half mile north of its original establishment. <sup>38</sup>

One of the Methodist's most notable members was William Taylor. An evangelist, Taylor traveled in the United States, Canada, England, Ireland, Australia, Africa, the West Indies and British Guiana. In the 1870's the people of India and South America benefitted from his work. Supposedly, Mr. Taylor began the educational work of the Methodist Episcopal Church

in South America. Released from the ministry in 1896, William Taylor retired in Palo Alto, California where he died in 1902. <sup>39</sup>

Bethesda Presbyterian Church was organized at Strickler's Springs in 1821. The Reverend A.B. Davidson held services at the springs and local schoolhouses until an arrangement was made with the Methodists who already had a meetinghouse. According to the agreement, the Presbyterians could worship in the Methodist building every other Sunday if they repaired the structure. Spending two hundred dollars, the Presbyterians fixed the windows, roof and pulpit of the log house. <sup>40</sup>

However, the following incident, recalled by John Horne in his History of Bethesda Church, ended the aforesaid relationship:

One day a man by the name of Edward a Methodist preacher got in the pulpit and commenct (sic) shoveing (sic) out his elbows for some time not saying a word after some time, he said they wanted room, they must have room and they would occupy (sic) all the time. The majority of our people was (sic) at church on that memorable day. It was too much for their Scotch Irish blood, . . . <sup>41</sup>

At that point the Presbyterians decided to erect a church of their own, and in 1843 their new building was dedicated. Installed on November 13, 1875 the Reverend C.W. Humphries oversaw the construction of the present church. <sup>42</sup>

During the late 1800's Bethesda grew in ranks. From 1869 until June 7, 1880 the church received eighty-two new members by examination and twenty-four by certificate. By February 17, 1884, one hundred and sixty-four new members had been received. <sup>43</sup>

In addition to providing religious activities, the churches

sponsored social functions for the Baths community. The March 3, 1869 edition of the Virginia Gazette carried an advertisement for a dinner and fair at the Baths to be sponsored by the ladies of Bethesda Church. Dinner, costing fifty cents, would be served at one o'clock. The announcement promised "a bountiful table and plenty of innocent amusement." 44

To pay off a church debt, the ladies of Ebenezer Church gave an oyster supper and concert on December 26, 1879. A pleasant affair, the concert was under the management of Mr. F.B. Neal. 45

#### IV

Intellectual life in the Baths centered around the Riverside and McElwee Schools and, for a short time, the local newspaper. On July 31, 1872 the Rockbridge Citizen announced the acquisition of two copies of the Rockbridge Baths Review. The Review was a triweekly published at the Baths by Brown Ayers, a multi-talented genius. The Citizen lauded Ayers' "spicy, readable" and well-printed publication. 46

Surviving the triweekly by three-quarters of a century, the Riverside School opened its doors around 1879 or 1880. Originally a three room, one-story structure, 47 the school was built on land deeded by William and Martha L. McCurdy to the School Trustees of the Walker's Creek District on September 8, 1879. 48

Although no information could be obtained about the instruction at Riverside in the 1800's, a report card, diploma and graduation announcement of the early 1900's suggest what might have occurred. In

1917 a Riverside report card cited data about deportment, attendance and performance in spelling, English, Latin, Algebra, History, Agriculture and Civil Government.<sup>49</sup> As today, the announcement of the commencement exercises of Francis V. Hileman for May 22, 1918 at eight o' clock included a name card, class motto, colors, flower and roll.<sup>50</sup> Academic excellence must have been stressed as the Rockbridge County News carried periodic announcements of those achieving the honor roll at Riverside.<sup>51</sup>

Riverside served a social as well as intellectual role in the Baths. On January 30, 1885 the Rockbridge County News proclaimed nightly meetings of the YMCA at the school.<sup>52</sup> Also, an oyster supper to be given by the Oddfellows at Riverside was advertised by the News on January 2, 1889.<sup>53</sup>

Unlike Riverside, the McElwee School was privately operated by Mrs. William Meek McElwee. A great community influence, Mrs. McElwee began a school at the home of Mr. Samuel Gibson where she and her husband, The Reverend William M. McElwee, lived before occupying the Bethesda parsonage. In 1889 the McElwees moved to the parsonage near the church and Mrs. McElwee established a school in the church basement called "Mrs. McElwee's Private School."<sup>54</sup>

About twenty pupils from five to twenty-four years of age attended the school which opened with prayer and Bible stories or reading followed by Bible verse recitation. Primary grade subjects, Latin and Algebra were taught thoroughly. A strict disciplinarian, Mrs. McElwee conducted a successful school due to her impressive personality and the subsequent occupations of her pupils which embraced business, medicine, farming,

engineering and the ministry. <sup>55</sup>

V

Even when the resorts, the Baths and Wilson's Springs, were closed, the people of Rockbridge Baths enjoyed a varied and exciting social life. Tournaments, fox hunts, concerts, plays, fraternal organizations, dancing and "rectifying houses" provided ample entertainment. For example, on July 17, 1872 the Rockbridge Citizen reported the following event: "The Baths has a tournament today. We can't promise for the riding and the ringpoking, but we will bet on Brown doing his part in providing handsomely for those who attend." <sup>56</sup> Obviously, Brown was Brown Ayers, editor of the previously mentioned Rockbridge Baths Review. The April 3, 1885 edition of the Rockbridge County News exclaimed that the Baths boys beat the Timber Ridge boys in a fox chase. It must have been fun since another one was to be arranged in April. <sup>57</sup>

At least two bands supplied enjoyment in the Baths. A cornet band held regular meetings on Tuesday nights in 1886, <sup>58</sup> and a brass band led a "pounding and serenade" on January 2, 1889. <sup>59</sup>

The Rockbridge Baths Lodge of the Odd Fellows organized on February 3, 1885. <sup>60</sup> Meeting on Monday nights at 7:30 p.m. at the Riverside School, the Odd Fellows sponsored many social events such as plays and oyster suppers. <sup>61</sup> The play "Ten Nights in a Barroom" was performed at 7:30 p.m. on March 31, 1893 at the Riverside School to benefit the I.O.O.F. <sup>62</sup>

Some behaviors, namely profanity, drinking and dancing, met the

consternation of the church. The greatest impropriety was drunkenness, perhaps because its practice predominated since Rockbridge Baths had a saloon or rectifying house. In April 1881 Joseph M. Adams applied for a retail license to sell liquor at his rectifying house.\*<sup>63</sup> If one wished to bypass the saloon, there was always the local distillery. On April 3, 1885 Mr. H.A. McCormick informed readers of the Rockbridge County News of the near completion of another building where "he will dispense 'bug juice' by the gallon."<sup>64</sup>

To fight intemperance, the YMCA, Temperance Society and prayer meetings evolved. Bethesda Church had its own weapon -- the Session. Acting as an informal civil court, the Session called those members suspected of misconduct before them for a hearing. In one case, Mr. Robert F. Selby was requested to appear as he had been "using language unbecoming a Christian, fighting, carrying a rock as a concealed weapon and intoxicated at sundry times." Mr. Selby had also visited the bar-room paying for spirits for other parties.<sup>65</sup>

Besides the above weaknesses, Mr. Selby also had trouble with punctuality. The Session first issued a citation for Mr. Selby to appear on October 14, 1876 at one o'clock. When he did not appear, the Session sent another citation for October 21, 1876. Again, he did not come. Finally, on October 24 Mr. Selby went before the Session, explained his nonappearances, confessed his actions, asked for forgiveness and prayers and promised to thereafter follow the church rules.<sup>66</sup>

Not all members were as compliant as Mr. Selby. On December 22, 1877 Mr. W.E. Day appeared on charges of drunkenness. After demanding to hear who reported him and foregoing a formal trial, Mr. Day confessed,

\* This must have been application for a license renewal since a later reference refers to Mr. Adams' bar in February, 1881.

but added that he did no one harm. A lecture by the Session followed and Mr. Day then promised not to drink any more "as a general thing" after New Year's. At that point, more pressure was applied to Mr. Day to promise to stop drinking immediately. In reply, Mr. Day said that "I will not bind myself with a promise not to take drams occasionally when I feel like it." Mr. Day was thereupon suspended from Bethesda. <sup>67</sup>

John Anderson was called before the Session to answer charges of "sinful cursing and profane swearing." Becoming very angry, Mr. Anderson justified his actions, requested the removal of his name from the church records, and stated "that the church was full of hypocrites." <sup>68</sup>

The general repertoire of offenders brought before the Session consisted of penitence, promises to change and appearance again within several months. Even the sternest of reprimands effected only temporary modifications in behavior.

Anyone distilling or selling liquor also suffered Sessional reprimands. On February 12, 1881, the Session moved to ask Mr. J.M. Adams to stop his bar due to its bad influence. <sup>69</sup> In a letter to New Monmouth Presbyterian Church, the Session asked New Monmouth to accept Mr. Herbert Van Derver into its fellowship because of his operation of a distillery at the Baths. New Monmouth refused Mr. Van Derver since acceptance implied support of his conduct. <sup>70</sup>

Along with intemperance, the church reproached frivolities and settled civil disputes. In her book Mrs. McCulloch's Stories of Ole Lexington, Mrs. Charles McCulloch related the following experience:



"I was playing 'Chopsticks' with two fingers on the piano with several children . . . A minister approached and said 'Now is that something to play on Sunday?'" Horrified, Mrs. McCulloch did not appear until late the next day. <sup>71</sup>

Anyone known dancing at parties or public events had their names read from the pulpit and placed on the church's reserve roll until they appeared before the Session and promised abstinence. <sup>72</sup>

A civil dispute between Frederick Mohler and William Foutz was resolved by the church. Mr. Mohler was charged with cutting a locust tree not belonging to him upon the property of William Foutz. The Session acquitted him since no established boundary line, deed or plot was produced by Mr. Foutz. <sup>73</sup>

In addition to the church, the Home Guard tried to influence and control behavior -- toward the Negro and Confederacy. On April 20, 1861 a Home Guard organized at the Baths and adopted the following resolutions concerning conduct: 1) It was one's duty to break up Negroes (more than 3) gathered together off their master's premises, except for church. 2) Any white talking suspiciously with a Negro, or even heard talking from a good source, would be arrested and taken to a justice of the peace. Anyone disloyal to the South would be approached and warned. If the conduct continued, he or she would be reported to the authorities. <sup>74</sup>

During the summer, social life focused upon the two allurements of the Baths -- its resorts. As previously mentioned, the Rockbridge Baths referred to a thermal pool of bubbling springs. Having ostensibly curative effects, the pool attracted persons desirous of relaxation and

therapy. To accommodate visitors bathhouses, cottages, and a hotel were built.

The earliest bathhouse was described in the following manner by the Rockbridge Citizen in 1873:

The bathhouse consisted of a square pen made of rough boards or slabs set up endways, and without any covering. Privacy, and not style, was evidently the sole object of the rude structure. The toilet table of the bather was a big sandstone, kept clean by the rains from the heavens, and if he or she did not take the precaution to provide themselves with a towel, comb or brush beforehand, they would find they were in a bad way. The pebble bottom of the present day was then a bed of boulders ranging from the size of a half bushel and upward. <sup>75</sup>

Mrs. Lucinda Smith was the first known person to open the Rockbridge Baths Hotel. No one knows exactly when the Hotel began except that Mrs. Smith enlarged a building, cleared away bushes and erected a plank fence eight to ten feet high. <sup>76</sup> William Jordan succeeded Ms. Smith as owner of the resort until 1857 when it was incorporated into the "Rockbridge Baths Co.." The corporation made it financially possible to build two bathhouses and enlarge the hotel. <sup>77</sup>

On July 16, 1857 the Lexington Gazette announced the purchase of the Rockbridge Baths Hotel by a "Company of enterprising gentlemen who have erected additional buildings." Citing ample accommodations and new attractions, the Gazette encouraged its readers to visit the Baths. <sup>78</sup> At this time, the boarding rate was ten dollars per week which included all expenses. <sup>79</sup>

The next proprietors of the Baths were Col. B.D. Harman and R.G. Mayo. These men operated the hotel from at least 1867 through 1869 when

it was sold at public auction. \* The June 23, 1869 edition of the Virginia Gazette advertised the "Rockbridge Baths" in Virginia for sale on July 29, 1869 at twelve o'clock in the afternoon. The property to be sold comprised thirty-two and one-half acres adjoined by the Trevey farm of eighty acres that would be sold separately. <sup>80</sup>

The Baths property was sold to Col. M.G. Harman of Staunton for \$15,000.00 and the Trevey Farm was bought by Mr. Samuel F. Jordan for \$7,052.00. <sup>81</sup>

From 1874 until 1900 Dr. Samuel Brown Morrison operated the Baths as a sanitarium. A man of renown<sup>y</sup> personality and surgical skill (a distinctive member of the Confederate Medical Corps), Dr. Morrison made the Baths a very popular place. <sup>82</sup>

Popularity was nothing new for the Baths in the 1870's. According to the Gazette and General Advertiser, there were about one hundred visitors on August 4, 1859 including Chief Justice Taney. Also Governor Wise and a large group were expected to arrive soon. <sup>83</sup>

During the Civil War, business quite naturally declined. A report of two men, who were called to war but received furloughs, recalled the Baths as having few visitors during their stay. After stating that some springs did not open at all, the men noted that "the worthy proprietor Mr. Jordan, adapts the place rather more to notaries of pleasure than to invalids. He 'feeds' too well to feed sick people." <sup>84</sup>

\*No source informed the writer of this fact. It is assumed due to a Gazette and Banner advertisement of the Baths on July 3, 1867 citing B.D. Harman & R.G. Mayo as proprietors.

To increase their business, proprietors Harman and Mayo compiled a brochure in 1868 describing the many attractions of the Rockbridge Baths. Two baths five to five and one-half feet deep provided seventy-two degree water all year to invalids, and on and after June the first to vacationers.<sup>85</sup> Containing large amounts of magnesia and smaller quantities of calcium, iron, iodine, potassium and soda, the waters supposedly helped dyspepsia, diabetes, gout, rheumatism, psoriasis, paralysis, eye infections, uterine problems, ulcers, intestinal problems, syphilitic affections and disorders of the liver, spleen, lung, brain, nerves and skin.<sup>86</sup>

Lengthy descriptions of the waters' magical effects upon specific diseases were presented as follows: "To persons suffering from the wretched form of disease technically known as spermatorrhea . . . these Baths are highly beneficial. The worst forms of gonorrhoea are immediately cured by the use of this water internally and externally, with frequent injections."<sup>87</sup> A testimonial by John Letcher, a frequent Baths visitor since boyhood, depicted the Baths as very helpful in skin diseases and invigorating in general debility cases.<sup>88</sup>

Located eleven miles from Lexington and nine miles from the Goshen Depot on the Virginia Central Railroad, the Rockbridge Baths had daily stages leaving from "Lexington, Natural Bridge, Bath Alum, Rockbridge Alum Springs. . .Staunton, Alexandria, Lynchburg, Richmond, Washington, Baltimore . . ." <sup>89</sup> On July 2, 1873 the Rockbridge Citizen predicted greater success for the Baths due to railroad improvements.<sup>90</sup>

Railroad advancements made the Baths more accessible, but the Morrison proprietorship proved a greater enticement. For twenty-six

years Dr. Morrison offered low rates, rest and relaxation. Advising persons to stay in the waters only a few minutes at first, Dr. Morrison provided morning and afternoon bathing hours. The men and women bathed separately and each had a bath attendant. The "moving spirit" for the women was Nancy Steptoe. In her recollections, Mrs. Charles McCulloch described this black woman who "looked as if she had always been old" in this manner:

She wore the bandana that people wore in those days. She was a friend of everybody and she would manage the children. If any child was troublesome at all, Nancy would settle that in about two seconds. She rubbed down the people that needed rubbing and she had several maids who assisted her. <sup>91</sup>

The male attendant, Ras Henderson, also gave great rubdowns. <sup>92</sup>

Delightful as a country place, city people came to the Baths because Dr. Morrison was continuously on call as a physician. <sup>93</sup> While managing the Baths, Dr. Morrison operated on a woman who refused surgery in Richmond due to little chance of recovery. After telling her that she ~~may~~ <sup>might</sup> die in surgery but that she would die shortly anyway, he removed a large ovarian cyst. <sup>94</sup> The woman's recovery greatly enhanced Dr. Morrison's reputation as a surgeon.

Before he assumed ownership of the Baths Hotel, Mrs. Stonewall Jackson, a cousin, wrote Dr. Morrison about changing the date of her gynecological examination. <sup>96</sup> On August 7, 1873 Dr. J.M. Slede from Fincastle wrote asking for advice and consultation about one of his patients, an "infernal case." <sup>97</sup>

One final attraction, the food, lured people to the Morrison place. The large dining room served a huge midday dinner. You helped yourself

to pitchers of milk, buttermilk and water drunk from large glass goblets. Supper featured cold beef, various breads and desserts. Cake made by Mrs. Morrison and preserves were unlimited. <sup>98</sup>

Amusements at the Baths included croquet, ten-pins, walks, nightly parlor readings, and piano playing and singing ended with family prayer. <sup>99</sup> According to Mrs. McCulloch, there were two parlors in the Baths Hotel. One contained a piano, the other an organ that was used on Sundays for church services after supper. Other family activities were tennis, chess, going to the store for candy and notions, and picking blackberries on Jump Mountain with tin buckets bought at the store for 10 cents. <sup>100</sup>

Tournaments and balls comprised the more pretentious forms of entertainment. On July 25, 1866 the Gazette and Banner announced a ball to initiate the tourist season at the Baths. Excellent music, a "good time generally and a glorious bath to boot" was assured to all who attended. <sup>101</sup> The August 18, 1869 edition of the Virginia Gazette reported on a Grand Dress Ball that had already occurred. At twelve o'clock cakes, fruits and ices had been served in the dining room, and dancing went on until two o'clock. The same article informed readers of two approaching balls -- a Chinese Ball for August 20 and a Masquerade Ball for August 27. <sup>102</sup>

Another reason for a ball was the tournament. On August 5, 1870 the Virginia Gazette proclaimed a tournament between the Knights of Augusta and Rockbridge. Afterward, a coronation, followed by the ball, would be held for the queen and maids. <sup>103</sup>

Visitor prominence and frequency exemplified the success of the

Rockbridge Baths. Two of the most prominent and frequent visitors of the Baths were Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. Lee. In a letter to his mother on September 25, 1865 Lee, using the baths two to three times daily, reported them as delightful.<sup>104</sup> In the summer of 1866 Lee took his wife, an invalid, to the Baths to hopefully procure relief from her pain. When he could, about once a week, Lee left Lexington to visit his wife.<sup>105</sup> In a letter to his son on July 28, 1866 Lee reported that his wife found the water agreeable as it had reduced swelling in her feet and ankles. Remarking that the Baths had given Mrs. Lee more confidence, Lee said that she now used her crutches more and longer.<sup>106</sup> Mrs. Lee stayed at the Baths for the rest of the summer.

Other notable persons to visit the Baths were the Shah of Persia on June 28, 1877 and Ulysses S. Grant and Bismark on June 30, 1877.<sup>107</sup> On August 12, 1868 the Gazette and Banner reported the reservations of Commodore Matthew Fontaine Maury and family at the Baths.<sup>108</sup>

According to the Rockbridge Baths Hotel Register, from June 6, 1876-June 3, 1882, people visited the Baths from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Tennessee, Missouri, Louisiana, New York, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, Massachusetts, West Virginia and South Carolina.<sup>109</sup> Entries from foreign countries such as France, Ireland, Africa and Spain were also included. Some of these addresses can probably be explained by the proximity of Washington and Lee University.<sup>110</sup> Of course, most travelers came from places in Virginia: Lexington, Harrisonburg, Staunton, Charlottesville, Winchester, and Richmond.<sup>111</sup>

The marginal notes of the Baths Hotel Register provided insight

about some of the visitors to the area. Besides recording the name, address, room number and number of meals taken and horses brought by the Misses Carrie Walker, Fannie Morrison, Nannie Morrison and Ida Rafifs, the desk manager noted that these ladies were "deadbeets" (sic).<sup>112</sup> Remarks about physical appearance were also common. Mrs. H. Prentis from Carrollton, Missouri was "very ugly" while Bob Brown and his wife from Jacktown, Texas were thought to be "good looking."<sup>113</sup>

Originally known as Strickler's Springs, Wilson's Springs was bought from Joseph Strickler by William A. Wilson on November 16, 1843 for seven thousand dollars. Since 1843 the land has remained in the Wilson family,<sup>114</sup> and unlike the Baths, anyone had the privilege of using the springs without expense. The deed made by the executors of Daniel Strickler to William A. Wilson granted the right of access to the springs to the public.<sup>115</sup>

After the Wilsons moved there in 1843, the name Wilson's Springs gradually evolved. There were ten springs, but the sulphur ones became the most famous. The Wilsons cleared the land and improved the main house -- previously a two room log cabin with a "lean to kitchen." More rooms were added and one room with a piano was reserved for the ballroom. The ballroom later became the men's quarters or den.<sup>116</sup>

Like the Baths, the main attraction of Wilson's Springs supposedly lay in the waters from the sulphur and chalybeate springs that rose from a small island in the middle of North River. One reached the springs by crossing a long footlog. The route held little danger since the water was only a few feet deep.<sup>117</sup> At first, mainly farming families



of Rockbridge County came for three weeks of changed routine after the harvest and the corn "laid by." This influx of farmers occurred the last two weeks of July and the first week of August. <sup>118</sup>

According to Oren Morton in his work Rockbridge County, Virginia, the farmers arrived in four-horse drawn covered wagons equipped with beds and supplies. They slept in their wagons, did their own cooking and ate on benches on the front porch. <sup>119</sup> During the Civil War, rows of log cabins were built opposite the sulphur springs. The cabins quartered Confederate soldiers who guarded the east end of Goshen Pass. After the war, families used the cabins and constructed more. The area on which the cabins stood became known as "the green." <sup>120</sup> Located across from the sulphur springs, the crude cabins generally contained two large rooms, one for the men and one for the women. Although the people slept on straw-filled "ticks" no recorded complaints of "roughing it" exist. <sup>121</sup>

The food at Wilson's Springs became as famous as that served at the Baths. Fried ham, bacon, coffee, homemade pickles, jellies, preserves, watermelons, cantaloupes, fresh vegetables and fruit bought locally adorned the tables at mealtime. <sup>122</sup>

The social life at the Springs offered as great an attraction as the sulphur waters. Women visited in cabins and under oak trees while girls flirted, swam and picked huckleberries. The children waded in the river or played in the sand. <sup>123</sup> The men fished for black bass and silver perch and hunted bear. If a bear was killed its meat and hide were seldom used since the real purpose of the quest was female adoration. <sup>124</sup>

Other forms of pleasure at the Springs consisted of croquet, tennis, and dancing on a platform in the middle of the Green to the accompaniment of a banjo and fiddle. Walks provided a good excuse for youthful straying.<sup>125</sup> Yet swimming was segregated, and a guard accompanied the ladies and gentlemen to the river to insure proper decorum.<sup>126</sup>

Since the river was used for pleasure, bathing and sewage disposal, typhoid fever caused many deaths in Rockbridge County in the 1800's. The fly also carried the fever and August dinner tables were "black with flies" as no screens existed. A swinging brush of long strips of paper three feet above the table helped protect the hotel's food.<sup>127</sup>

At its heyday Wilson Springs' Green housed two hundred and fifty guests while the Hotel accommodated seventy visitors.<sup>128</sup> This may be slightly overstated since the June 28, 1878 edition of the Lexington Gazette reported the Springs as "full to overflowing" when a gentleman there counted one hundred and forty people at the Hotel and cabins. The article also predicted that the Springs would always have visitors since its hotel rates were very low and the cabins were like staying at home.<sup>129</sup>

Home was a great distance for some of the Springs' visitors. Along with entries from England, Scotland, France, Norway, South America, Alaska and the West Indies,<sup>130</sup> the Hotel Register of July 4, 1892 through September 15, 1899 showed guests from Texas, Canada, Ohio, Massachusetts, California, and Pennsylvania.<sup>131</sup> Local travelers came from

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Staunton, Alone Mill, Lexington, Spottswood, New Monmouth, Fairfield, Collierstown, Walker's Creek, Raphine, Buena Vista, Waynesboro, Hays Creek, Kerrs Creek and Richmond. <sup>132</sup>

Resembling the Baths Register, miscellaneous notes supplied information about the visitors to Wilson's Springs. For example, on June 30, 1897 the Reverends F.C. McConnell, C.J. Thompson and J.B. Johnson from Lynchburg and T.A. Johnson from Lexington stayed at the hotel while on a bicycle tour. <sup>133</sup> Fourteen people stopped "off for a picnic" on May 25, 1899. <sup>134</sup>

The advent of the automobile, which emancipated farming families, ended the success of Wilson's Springs. <sup>135</sup> As the prosperity of the Springs waned, the popularity of Rockbridge Baths also declined.. With the exception of the houses, only the general store, obsolete school-house, two churches and part of Wilson's Springs remain -- faint remembrances of a bygone era.

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