

The Lithia Spring

In 1892, a well was driven into the ground on the north side of Lick Creek in search for gas or oil. Mineral water containing hydrogen sulphide was discovered at a depth of about 250 feet while a second vein of water containing lithia was found in blue shale at a depth of 1,055 feet. Combined, the two veins produced a flow of about two gallons per minute into a stone basin at the base of a pipe later installed. Realizing the growing value of mineral waters to the public during the late 1890s into the early 1900s, the discovery was capitalized on as a method to attract guests to Paoli. Similar resort developments had occurred in other parts of Orange County at West Baden and French Lick. Between 1893 and 1894, gazebos were erected over the wells and parks were developed around them along Lick Creek south and west of downtown Paoli. A lake, named for American journalist and author, Stanley Waterloo (1846-1913), was formed by damming the creek below the spring south of town. Waterloo and his wife spent time in Paoli resting and studying birdlife.



Enterprising businessmen from Paoli, John Maris, Amos Stout, Joseph P. Throop, Charles L. Boyd and Samuel R. Knox, formed the Paoli Mineral Springs Company and began to bottle and ship the water to Chicago. After a large fire on the Paoli Public Square in 1894, the Paoli Mineral Springs Company purchased three vacant lots on the southeast corner of the square and constructed the elegant three-story Mineral Springs Hotel "for the express purpose of a resort and sanitarium." Mineral waters were piped into the building for bathing from the well as an attraction for guests with the hope of turning Paoli into a resort community. The hotel opened to the public on April 1, 1896 and featured billiard halls, bowling alleys and ball rooms along with accommodations for 100 guests. To enhance the hotel's cultural attractiveness, an opera house was located in the main lobby.

Invited to analyze the water for its mineral qualities, Dr. W. A. Noyes, Professor of Chemistry at Rose Polytechnic Institute (later Rose-Hulman) in Terre Haute, affirmed the exceptional qualities of the water by 1903. This permitted the bottling company to tout their claim as having the world's finest water, rivaling even the famous spas of Europe. The taste was a "sweetish saline" and the proprietors advertised it as "being unexcelled as an eliminator of diseased conditions of the system and as a blood purifier and remedy" for 38 named diseases. By 1903, the mineral spring water sold for \$2.50 per case of 24 quart bottles.

A second corporation, the Paoli Lithia Springs Hotel Company, had grander visions of a large sanitarium and hotel and new bottling facility. The new bottling plant, with a building stone carved with "HEALTH AND HAPPINESS" was constructed in 1920 at 401 West Main Street on the bluff overlooking Lick Creek. The corporation purchased the hotel on the square but maintained plans to build a new resort. The company, however, went into receivership and Paoli's goal to become a resort community quickly vanished. The bottling plant closed in the early 1920s and was sold in 1925 to the Evangelical Brethren congregation who converted it into a church. The sulphur and lithia springs were capped and the land surrounding the lithia spring was designated a park named in honor of Anna Marea (Riddle) Radcliffe (1901-1966) who promoted the beautification of the area between Lick Creek and Main Street. The Mineral Springs Hotel on the square continued to serve guests until 1958, during which time it also served as a Greyhound bus stop for the community. The hotel and bottling plant serve as lasting landmarks to Paoli's brief but exceptional mineral springs' and resort heritage.



Beautiful Paoli

"Here are the things which healthfulness abet; Here is a biding place from city strife; Here is the forest, with its creatures yet; Here are the spring which give a stronger life."

Stanley Waterloo