

Martinsville's mineral miracles

Wendy Winslow, Field Surveyor

When you feel sick, you probably visit the doctor before considering a trip to Martinsville. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, though, people sought cures for many ailments in Martinsville's sanitariums.

In the 1880s, explorers drilling for natural gas in Morgan County found mineral waters. Health spas—then called sanitariums—sprang up, and Martinsville became the third-largest health resort in the U.S., accessible via two rail lines and the interurban. Of the many sanitariums built in Martinsville between the 1890s and 1920s, only three of the largest remain and none operates as a spa.

The Martinsville Sanitarium, just west of the restored Pennsylvania Railroad Depot, got its start as two sanitariums—one built by Dr. W.E. Hendricks sometime in the late-1880s, and the other in the 1890s by Isaac Nutter and a Mr. Webster. A bicycle manufacturer and frequent spa visitor from Indianapolis, Mr. W. Bellis, bought the buildings, joined them with an addition, and renamed the complex the Martinsville Sanitarium. It was sold to Walter A. Kennedy, who was married to Dr. Hendricks' daughter. In 1927, Kennedy remodeled the entire place and added a brick veneer. Kennedy's widow gave the complex to the Disciples of Christ in 1957, and it now serves as a convalescent center and retirement housing.

The New Highland Mineral Springs Sanitarium on North Main Street was built in 1896 by W.C. Banta and Dr. C.J. Keegan. An annex added in the early 1920s used an inclined ramp instead of a stairway, a then-revolutionary accommodation for those in wheelchairs. Another five-story brick addition was made in early 1929. A fire on March 11, 1929 destroyed the original section of the complex, but the sanitarium continued operation in the newer portions of the building. It offered a dining room, baths, a mechano-therapy department, and a massage which used "all sorts of Swedish movements," according to a



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▲ *The Martinsville Sanitarium was two buildings until a bicycle manufacturer and spa enthusiast bought them and made them into one complex. The former health spa now serves as a convalescent home and senior citizen housing.*

newspaper account of the day. Today it is called the Morgan House and offers affordable housing for the elderly.

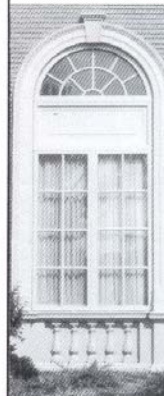
Home Lawn Mineral Springs on East Washington Street was the largest of all the sanitariums. The Hon. E. Henderson, a Martinsville native and state senator who managed Grover Cleveland's first presidential campaign, started the venture in 1889, and the building grew to keep up with the spa's popularity. A 1918 addition doubled its size. Modern baths were built of marble and tile. Visitors could bathe in or drink the mineral water, partake in salt rubs or oil rubs, and have a physical exam for a nominal fee.

Although the business enjoyed a brief comeback after World War II, the health spa industry declined. A religious community occupied much of the sanitarium property for several years, but vacated when a disastrous fire burned most of the building in 1989. An unburned part of the complex still stands on a corner of the large lot, and the property is for sale.

These sanitariums are some of the more than 1,000 sites documented during Historic Landmarks Foundation's survey of Morgan County, to be published this fall. A grant administered by the Indiana Division of Historic Preser-

vation and Archaeology funds Landmarks' survey program, with matching funds provided by local sources. For more information, call Historic Landmarks at 317-639-4534.

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