

CHICK SPRINGS -- 1840 to 1941

MISS JEAN MARTIN FLYNN

The story of Chick Springs is the story of the constancy of change -- political, economic, and social. When the Federal Convention met in Philadelphia in 1787 to draw up the Constitution which made possible a national government, the land on which Chick Springs is located was still State land.

It was not until December, 1819, that the governor of South Carolina granted a tract of 692 acres "on both sides Lick Creek and two small branches of the waters of Enoree River" to Hananiah Ray.¹ In September, 1823, the sheriff of Greenville District seized the tract at a suit commanding that the "goods, chattels, lands and tenements of Hananiah Ray be sold to levy the sum of \$61.43 damages and costs." At public sale, the property went to Edmund Waddell [sic], the highest bidder, for \$61.43.²

Waddell, who opened the first resort hotel at Greenville Court House around 1815,³ sold the Ray tract to Asa W. Crowder for \$50 in December, 1831.⁴ It is somewhat surprising that Waddell did not develop the sulphur springs as a resort.

It was already known. In his 1809 *History of South Carolina*, Dr. Ramsay wrote of the "spring impregnated with iron and sulphur issuing from the side of Paris Mountain."⁵ And in his *Statistics of South Carolina*, Robert Mills described the perfectly clear water which "smells strongly like the washings of a gun barrel." Mills said the water and the black earth at the bottom of the spring proved effective in treating "desperate cases of ringworm."⁶

In the February 25, 1832, issue of the *Greenville Mountaineer*, the editor predicted that if the spring were improved, it would "be resorted to by persons in the summer season." Eight

¹Greenville RMC, Grant book K, No 8, p. 353.

²Greenville RMC, Deed Book R, p. 14.

³*Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁴David Swain, *The History of South Carolina from its Settlement in 1670, to the year 1800*, 2 vols. (Newberry: W. J. Duffie, 1858), II, 295.

⁵Robert Mills, *Statistics of South Carolina* (Charleston: Worthing and Lloyd, 1826), p. 571.

years later, Dr. Burwell Chick, a physician from Newberry District, started developing Chick Springs.

According to a story that Alfred Taylor, the founder of Taylors, who died in 1912, told A. J. Bull, who bought an interest in the springs in 1903, Dr. Chick had come to the area to hunt deer. Chick stopped at the home of Asa W. Crowder, who lived on what is now St. Mark's Road. Crowder hired two or three Indians from their village on the Enoree River to carry Chick to Lick Spring where deer came frequently at night. The story goes that the Indians told the doctor they would "make up a bright light" to shine in the eyes of the animals so he could kill one or two. They also told him the ground around the spring would heal a sore.⁴

Dr. Chick acquired 192 acres more or less of the Crowder property including the springs. In June, 1839, he and Mrs. Chick joined the First Baptist church in Greenville, and in 1840, the resort at Lick Spring opened.⁵ In addition to the main spring, there were two small ones: a sulphur spring between the spring house and the road and an iron spring at the foot of the hill near the present Bull home.

An article in the August 6, 1841, issue of the *Mountaineer* reported that Lick Spring was "already the resort of many invalids with the water very salutary in every case we have heard of."

In July, 1842, a "large and commodious hotel, constructed expressly for the comfort and convenience of boarders" was ready for the season. There were stables "well-provided with horsefeed and attended by careful, attentive ostlers." Board was \$1 a day or \$5 a week with children and servants charged half price.⁶

Privately owned cottages lined Main Street and clustered along the lovely little slopes rising above the springs. The Chicks sold with the stipulation that the buyers would not "receive

⁴Account of J. A. Bull (1915 in possession of Miss Margaret Bull, Taylors, S. C., hereinafter cited as Bull Account).

⁵Lawrence Fay Brewster, *Summer Migrations and Resorts of South Carolina Low-Country Planters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1947), p. 77.

⁶*Greenville Mountaineer*, May 27, 1842.

boarders but were allowed privileges of wood and water."⁹

Among local owners were Josiah Kilgore and Philip C. Lester, joint operators of Buena Vista, the small cotton factory at Lester's Ford on the Enoree River. The factory was in operation by 1822.¹⁰ Kilgore's son, Dr. Benjamin Franklin Kilgore, also owned a cottage. Dr. Kilgore was a delegate to the Secession Congress and a signer of the Ordinance.¹¹

Many Low-Country families built cottages on the surrounding hills. Chick Springs also drew wealthy and educated people from New York to Florida.

As the watering place prospered, Dr. Chick's son, Reubin S., and his "Lady" superintended the hotel. The season opened in 1847 with increased, renewed attractions. A fine billiard table and ten pin alleys were put in operations for the guests, who were forbidden to gamble.¹²

Tavern keepers had to pay \$50 for a license to operate a public billiard table. Billiards were so frowned upon that Columbia would not allow a table to be set up within fifteen miles of the city.¹³

However, the Chicks were "courteous and liberal-minded men well-fitted for their occupation." They made the parlor available on Sunday for Catholic and Protestant services. A priest who came each summer recorded that one Sunday, he spoke to the guests in the morning on the "holy sacrifice of mass." That afternoon, a Baptist clergyman from Charleston who was a "good orator in Furman University in the neighborhood" preached. The latter condemned the amusements of the place, especially the dancing in the ballroom. According to the priest, the Baptist preacher affirmed that "all at the place were irretrievably lost."¹⁴

⁹Greenville RMC, Deed Book AA, p. 688.

¹⁰Federal Writers Program, *A History of Spartanburg County* (Spartanburg: Band and White, 1940), p. 77.

¹¹John Amasa May and Joan Reynolds Faunt, *South Carolina Secedes* (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1960), pp. 170-171.

¹²*Greenville Mountaineer*, July 16, 1847.

¹³Josiah J. Evans, *A Digest of the Road Law of the State of South Carolina* (Columbia: A. S. Johnston, 1850), p. 35.

¹⁴Jeremiah Joseph O'Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia: Leaves of Its History* (New York: D. and J. Sedler and Co., 1879), pp. 368-370.

When Dr. Chick died in 1847, two of his sons, Pettus W. and Reubin S., bought in the Sulphur Spring tract including the hotel and its furnishings for \$3,000. Listed among the inventory were 4 settees valued at \$20 each; a piano, \$250; a set of casting, \$3 and a set of coin, \$14; and of course, tablecloths, sheets, blankets, 25 bedsteads, and 50 mattresses.¹³

In 1857, the Chicks sold the resort to Franklin Talbird, an architect and builder from Beaufort District, and his brother-in-law, John T. Henery of Charleston District, for \$15,000.¹⁴ The new owners advertised they would "spare no efforts to make the Springs all that can be desired whether to the invalid seeking health or those in quest of pleasure."¹⁵ Father O'Connell, the visitor for many summers, wrote that the number of invalids was fewer than the "gay and youthful in quest of pleasure or matrimonial alliances."¹⁶

Talbird and Henery ran a daily stage to the city. When Dr. Chick opened the resort in 1840, the trip from Columbia to Greenville took two days by public stage coach. In 1853, it took 13 hours. Travelers catching the train in Columbia at 7 a.m. reached the head of the railroad just below Laurens Court House around noon. Hacks from the hotel met the passengers and delivered them to the springs around 8 p.m.¹⁷ The next year, the train line extended to Greenville, and travelers could board the cars in Charleston in the morning and reach Greenville in the afternoon.¹⁸ In 1859, Alfred Taylor, who was born in the fourth house above the Seaboard Coast Line Railroad bridge on West Main Street and lived all his life in the area, took over the hacking and in 1860, became hotel manager.

¹³Will of Burwell Chick, Apartment 11, File No. 73, Greenville County Probate Judge.

¹⁴Greenville RMC, Book V, p. 173.

¹⁵Charleston Daily Courier, June 1, 1857.

¹⁶O'Connell, p. 367.

¹⁷Greenville Southern Patriot.

¹⁸Ibid.

That season on June 26, there were 4 guests and on October 14, 4 guests. From August 7 to September 7, over 100 boarders were registered every day with a high of 156 on August 17.²¹ Often in his diary, Taylor writes that "Main Street was black with people."

When Taylor began the 1861 season in June, the War Between the States had been in progress about six months. After the Battle of Bull Run, Taylor noted in his diary that there was "great excitement" over the war and "great anxiety from the battle."²² Most of the guests left Chick springs, but by August, 133 full boarders had returned.

Evidently, there were no guests after the summer of 1861, and in November, 1862, the hotel caught fire around 2:30 p.m. and was completely burned by ten minutes past four.²³ Because of the War, which was testing the Constitution framed in 1787, the skeleton ruins of Chick Springs lay untouched.

In August, 1864, a few hundred yards from the forlorn, deserted spring, people in the community organized the Chick's Springs Baptist Church. Several of the women who helped in the organization were refugees from the lower part of the State. One wrote an article for the September 28, 1864 issue of *The Confederate Baptist* on the protracted meeting during which the church was constituted. In it, she said, "Many of them [the members] are our soldiers' half-clad barefooted wives and children stealing away after a weary toilsome day, by the fitful gleaming of their pine torches to our little Gothic church."

The first member to die was John Baily, who joined the church October 19, 1864.²⁴ a few weeks later, he fell at Franklin, Tennessee, "in battle facing the enemy." The next spring, Mr.

²¹Alfred Taylor, "Diary I, June to September, 1860" (MS., hereinafter cited as "Alfred Taylor, Diary." The five bound manuscript volumes contain Alfred Taylor's diary from March 20, 1857 through October 1, 1912. Volume I, March 20, 1857 to December 31, 1859; Volume II, January 1, 1860 to December 31, 1859; and Volume III, January 1, 1860 to July 30, 1909, are in possession of A. B. Taylor, Jr., Spartanburg. Volume IV, August 1, 1909 to October 1, 1912, is in possession of Thomas H. Taylor, Taylors).

²²*Ibid.*, July 22, 24, 1861.

²³*Ibid.*, November 4, 1862.

²⁴Minutes of the Chick's Springs Baptist Church, October 19, 1864 (MS., Recorded in Day Book of Firm of Taylor and Green, in possession of Church Clerk, Taylors First Baptist Church).

Taylor recorded a second death and wrote -- "Our beloved brother W. W. Flynn, who died March 17, 1865, and our beloved brother, Jack Baily, both of which we have good reason to believe were true believers and humble followers of our Lord and Master."²⁵

The War that tested that Constitution brought political, economic, and social change. In 1868, the Chick brothers took the property back from Talbird and Henery, but they did not rebuild the hotel.²⁶

Had the resort remained open, perhaps the shift to the present center of town would not have taken place. What brought it about was the coming of the Airline Railroad. Residents voted for the railroad in June, 1870, and in April, 1873, the first excursion train ran from Charlotte to Greenville. On the return trip, a big crowd gathered along the tracks at Taylor's Turnout, a spur in front of the present lumberyard. The excursion train pulled eight or nine coaches carrying about 200 persons. The trip from Greenville to Spartanburg required one hour and twenty minutes at a speed of 20 miles an hour.²⁷

Last November, when I stood across the road with some 1500 other people to see the Freedom Train pass, I had the idea that the scene probably resembled that first morning. There we were -- old and young even to babies in carriages -- black and white. Little boys and girls put pennies on the tracks for the train to flatten. Other little boys with their ears on the rails strained to catch the vibrations. From time to time, the cry was raised -- "It's coming! It's coming!" and the noise would turn out to be a plane in the sky or a huge truck on the highway. But finally, the rolls of black smoke piled up above the trees and the smokestack at the mill. And then, there she came!

That morning in April, 1873, there she came! And perhaps most people felt as we did when a man first stepped on the moon. I imagine everyone stood watching the last of the smoke perhaps with the intense heat of shagbark hickory or the sizzle

²⁵*Ibid.*, April 23, 1865.

²⁶Greenville EMC, Deed Book AA, p. 686.

²⁷Greenville Enterprise, June 4, 1873.

of pine resin. There was a woodrack at the turnout, and the train used wood at the rate of ten to thirteen cords a day in 1882.²⁸

With the train, the center of economic life became Taylor's Station. The post office moved to Taylor's. The schoolhouse was cut in parts and transported on light wagons with standards.²⁹ The church moved in 1885.

The same year, George Westmoreland, an Atlanta lawyer, bid in the estate of Reubin S. Chick at the Master's sale for \$2750.³⁰ In a series of transactions, he bought the other half interest from members of the Chick family, the last heir to whom the property was entailed having died.³¹ Westmoreland built a small hotel and several cottages. He advertised thus: "Summer Health Resort, Chick Springs, Taylors Station, Greenville County, S. C., on the Southern Railway."³²

In 1903, he sold to the Chick Springs Company, made up of area businessmen. Dr. W. S. Pack was president; S. F. Lowery, vice-president; William Goldsmith, Jr., secretary; and H. Y. Thackston, treasurer.³³ The company planned to operate the hotel and bottle and sell water. For the local market, they bought an attractive white wagon with gilded letters on the side for their door-to-door delivery of fresh water.

An advertisement in the *Greenville Daily News* for July 19, 1903, advised: "Get the habit. When you get up feeling badly, don't drink a glass, drink a half gallon bottle of Chick Springs water before breakfast. You'll have an appetite. You'll feel better all day." The man responsible for the advertising was J. A. Bull, Greenville merchant. He first operated a fancy grocery store on Main Street where Heyward-Mahon stands and later on the corner where the Daniel Building rises today.

²⁸"Alfred Taylor Diary," III, February 1, 8, 1882.

²⁹"Taylors Community Proud of New Grammar School", *Greenville News*, December 13, 1936.

³⁰Greenville, RMC, Deed Book RR, p. 100.

³¹Greenville, RMC, Deed Book 22, pp. 545, 592, 755, 810.

³²*Greenville Daily News*, June 21, 1900.

³³*Ibid.*, May 7, 1903.

Bull and his father built a hotel in the winter of 1905 and the spring of 1906 by adding to the Westmoreland structure. It was a three-story hotel shaped like the letter E with all rooms on the outside. Dining room and ballroom occupied the first and second floors of one wing. There were 119 big 16x12 double bedrooms in the hotel and dozens in the cottages and the annex. In 1906, 4,000 guests registered from May to October. The grounds covered 117 acres with pavilions, summer houses, croquet grounds, tennis courts, golf links, archery, and target shooting. The hotel had long distance telegraph and telephone lines, several mails a day, and the New York and Washington papers on the evening of publication.³⁴ The Greenville Auto Company offered round trips to the Springs in the new conveyance -- the auto. In 1904, there were five automobiles in Greenville.

In December, 1907, the unoccupied hotel went up in flames with a loss estimated at \$40,000. The Springs had its own water-works and fire-fighting apparatus, and men attracted by the flames saved the cottages and the annex by using wet blankets.³⁵

In 1913, Chick Springs was sold to J. Thomas Arnold and Associates, who built a hotel of 100 rooms. Again, war changed the course of the resort. The hotel opened in 1914 shortly before the outbreak of World War I. Within days, the hotel emptied, and the Arnold enterprise went into receivership and was sold in April, 1916.³⁶

The leading man in the new corporation was J. A. Bull. One of the first things he did was to lease the property from September to May to a Greenville group for the Chick Springs Military Academy. Major W. D. Workman was the first commandant, and after he entered service, C. B. Martin became superintendent.³⁷

The next fall, the annex burned, and the cadets were moved to the main building. During the winter, the academy closed

³⁴*Ibid.*, May 9, 1906.

³⁵*Ibid.*, December 15, 1907.

³⁶Bull Account.

³⁷*Greenville Daily News*, January 25, 1917, April 18, 1917.

permanently when the cadets went on strike.⁴¹ By then, Camp Sevier had been built, and the hotel was leased to a man from New York as a year-round resort. After one successful season, he departed, leaving the hotel full of guests from Camp Sevier.⁴²

The next venture was a hospital -- Steedly Clinic and Sanitarium. Director of the Clinic was Dr. Benjamin Broadus Steedly, a native of Barnwell County. Dr. Steedly was graduated from the University of Georgia, and in 1901, received the M. D. degree from Columbia University. He did graduate study at the New York Polyclinic and further graduate work at lying-in hospitals in New York and Europe. In 1903, Cornell awarded him an M. S. degree.

From 1902-08, he practiced at Gaffney. Then in Spartanburg, he helped establish the Steedly-Zimmerman Clinic.⁴³ From 1919 until his death, Dr. Steedly was at Chick Springs. The four-story hotel of Spanish architecture was remodeled into offices, foyers, parlors, dining room, sunroom and 85 bedrooms. Four physicians were on the staff, and the school of nursing was rated by the State as a standard school. The clinic was a "happy combination of hotel and sanitarium" where one could receive "benefit of modern hospital care with the added luxuries and convenience of a resort hotel in an atmosphere free from the depressing influence encountered in the average hospital."⁴⁴

On January 12, 1932, Dr. Chick suffered a cerebral hemorrhage while visiting a Clinic patient at one in the morning and lived about three hours.⁴⁵ According to Dr. R. C. Alverson, Greer physician who was then on the staff, the Clinic closed in December, 1932.

The resort hotel was finished, but the manufacture and sale of carbonated water continued. In 1926, the Bulls built the swimming lake.⁴⁶ In March, 1929, an amusement park was started with the chief attraction the Wales Garden Ball Room. The

⁴¹Bull Account.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³David Dumas Walton, *The History of South Carolina* (New York: The American Historical Society, Inc. 1934), IV, 435, 436.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, IV, 435.

⁴⁵Greenville Piedmont, January 12, 1932.

⁴⁶Greenville News, July 24, 1926.

ballroom opened formally at Chick Springs Park on Friday, May 31, 1929, with two orchestras in a Battle of Music. The two, led by former Greenville boys, were Duke Welborn's Footwarmers and Turk McBee, Jr.'s, Recording Orchestra."

The guests from New York and Florida and the Carolina Low-Country were missing, but scores of local people danced on the beautiful floor and other scores came for the Sunday afternoon concerts. They drank the mineral water bubbling up in the center of the spring house. They sat on benches under the shady trees and waited till the last minute to climb the hill to board the cars of the Piedmont and Northern Railroad at the stop behind the hotel. All the hotels stood across the street from the spring.

In 1937, R. E. Foil, a car dealer from Spartanburg, bought the hotel property."⁴¹ In 1939, he sold five acres at the back of the property to Norris Manufacturing Company."⁴² The remaining acres Foil sold to Dr. J. E. Brunson, Taylors physician, in 1941."⁴³

When that sale was made, it had been 101 years since Dr. Chick opened the resort at the mineral spring. The original 192 acres owned by the Chicks had shrunk to about a dozen. Economic change, social change, and political change occur but the clear water of Lick Spring still runs under the rustic bridges, and the spring sends the "cold, sparkling liquid bubbling up in silvery sparkles from the generous heart of the rock."⁴⁴ And the wooded hill still rises to the crest once crowned by hotels.

Chick Springs is part of the past — the past the Greenville County Historical society seeks to preserve.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, May 26, 1929.

⁴²Greenville RMC, Deed Book 199, p. 273.

⁴³Greenville RMC, Deed Book, 212, p. 34.

⁴⁴Greenville RMC, Deed Book, 232, p. 240.

⁴⁵O'Connell, p. 367.