

**Mineral Wells Along the Meridian Highway**

Mineral wells are naturally-occurring springs that contain mineral salts, elements, or gases in their water which have healing properties. These wells were a popular aspect of American culture prior to the introduction of penicillin and other modern medicines in the 1940s. People traveled to the springs, either by train or automobile, and bathed in or drank the water (referred to as “taking the waters”) in efforts to cure common ailments, such as arthritis, rheumatic diseases, skin diseases, circulatory diseases, and many more. For instance, Sam Houston visited both the sulfur springs in Piedmont, Grimes County, and Sour Lake in Hardin County to heal his wounds, and Davy Crockett reportedly visited Texas Sour Wells in Caldwell County. In conjunction with the rest of the United States, Texas offered visitors numerous locations, including multiple spots along the Meridian Highway, to partake in the healing properties of the water.

**History of Mineral Springs in Texas:** The first mineral springs resorts appeared in Texas in the 1830s. According to Dr. Valenza’s *Taking the Waters in Texas*, the “Golden Age” of the resorts lasted from approximately 1880 to 1919, when over 100 new resorts were established (Figure 45, right). During these years, the railroad aided in the success of many resorts as railroad companies produced illustrated brochures that advertised the “aesthetic and healthful features” of towns along their routes. Many of these routes were later followed by the Meridian Highway and other named auto trails, thus prolonging the success of some of the larger resorts and towns, including Mineral Wells, Marlin, and Hot Wells in San Antonio.

**Marlin:** Discovered in the early 1890s, heavily mineralized hot artesian water quickly drew tourists and health seekers to the town of Marlin. Almost overnight, people began to flock to the town in order to “take the waters.” In response to the increasing numbers of tourists, Marlin constructed a pavilion that included a continuously flowing hot water fountain, benches, and in the early days, a mineral water and soda stand. During summer hours, an orchestra played at the pavilion every other night. In addition to the pavilion, Marlin offered other activities for tourists either arriving by rail or via the Meridian Highway. There were two large lakes (including one located within the Marlin City Park), an opera house, and dancing arenas. In the 1930s, 80,000 people reportedly visited Marlin each year. This increase in tourism led Conrad Hilton to open his eighth hotel—the Falls Hotel—in 1930 (Figure 46).



Figure 46. Historic postcard showing the Falls Hotel in Marlin, 1957. Source: Ebay.

The Falls Hotel, which featured a miniature golf course in the hotel garden, operated under various names and owners until finally shutting its doors in 1984. Today, it sits vacant and serves as a reminder of the opulence that once graced Marlin. One lasting element of this time does remain, though – visitors to the area can still drink from the hot water fountain located in the 1916 Hot Well Pavilion on Coleman Street.

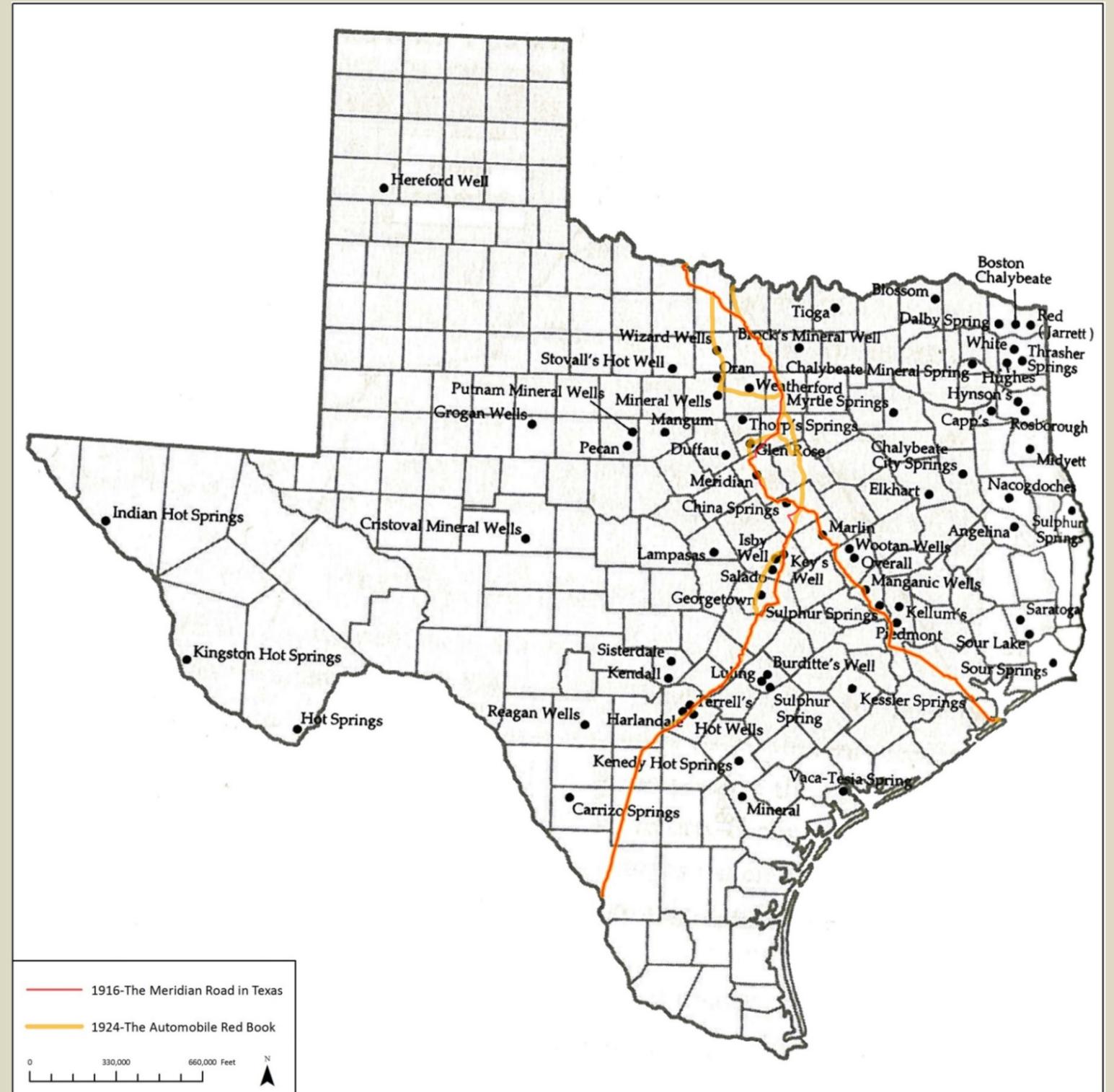


Figure 45. Map showing mineral well resorts in Texas with Meridian Highway routes overlaid. Original map source: Janet Mace Valenza, *Taking the Waters in Texas*, 2000.

### Mineral Wells Along the Meridian Highway (Continued)

#### Glen Rose

Located along the scenic route of the Meridian Highway, Glen Rose is an example of a mineral spring town that benefitted from the rise of the automobile. In 1903, the first of many sanitariums offering sulphur water baths opened within the town. Due to its lack of access to a railroad, however, the popularity of Glen Rose did not immediately reach the status of other mineral spring destinations that fell along existing railroad routes. This changed with the construction of the Meridian Highway. As stated in a 1918 article from the *Christian Courier*, "...the great value and drawing card of Glen Rose is its mineral waters.... Hundreds of automobiles will come in from Cleburne, Fort Worth, Dallas and other towns and cities, tents are stretched everywhere in the parks, boarding places are crowded—hundreds to whom this water proves a boon and a cure to the 'ills that flesh is heir to.'" Today, little remains of what was once a significant industry for the town. Stump Well, for instance, offered four different kinds of mineral waters in the 1920s, but was demolished in the 1950s. By the 1960s, the springs that once fed the well had stopped flowing. Despite this, several buildings dating to the period of significance for "taking the waters," including the Snyder Sanitarium (Figure 47) and the Glen Rose Hotel, remain in existence. In 1915, Dr. George Snyder opened the Snyder Sanitarium (currently Inn on the River), which functioned until 1962. In the 1990s, Snyder Sanitarium was turned into a bed and breakfast, and today guests can view pictures and other mementos of the building's history and swim in the mineral water-filled pool. The Glen Rose Hotel is another building that remains in operation and was directly related to the tourism brought by the mineral springs. Opening in 1928, the hotel was only in operation for a year before succumbing to the Great Depression. It reopened its doors in 1939 and frequently accommodated overflow patients from the Snyder Sanitarium that was located next door. The hotel continued to operate until the mid-1970s, after which point it became so deteriorated that many rooms were uninhabitable. In 2004, the property was purchased by new owners who rehabilitated it to reflect its former glory. Today, guests traveling to Glen Rose can stay in the old Glen Rose Hotel (now Glen Hotel) and drink mineral water from drinking fountains in the town square.



Figure 47. (Above) Historic photograph of the Snyder Sanitarium in Glen Rose, 1934. The "Hotel Glen Rose" sign is also partially visible on the far left side of the image. Source: Ebay.

#### Mineral Wells

Established in 1881 after therapeutic properties were discovered in a recently dug well, the town of Mineral Wells quickly developed into a health resort. It was reported that bathhouses, pavilions, and hotels soon dominated the built landscape, and Mineral Wells contained the "largest number of structures of any Texas resort".<sup>134</sup> In the early 1900s, more than 150,000 tourists reportedly visited the town each year, and in 1910, the City of Mineral Wells shipped more than three million bottles of its mineral water to the South and Midwest. By the 1930s, when other resort towns were experiencing a decline in the numbers of visitors, the strategic location of Mineral Wells along both the Bankhead and Meridian highways helped to sustain and expand the town. The Baker Hotel, which opened in November 1929, was modeled after the Arlington Hotel in Hot Springs, Arkansas. It provided all the amenities of a modern-day resort, as well as a drinking pavilion, mineral baths, and a medical floor with physicians, a dentist, and an optometrist. The 200-room Crazy Water Hotel, although not as grand as the Baker, was constructed in 1927. It also offered many luxuries to the weary traveler, as well as a pavilion and bathhouse. Many celebrities visited Mineral Wells during this era, including Clark Gable, Tom Mix, Douglas Fairbanks, and American financier, John Pierpont "J. P." Morgan. Until World War II and the introduction of modern medicine, Mineral Wells relied solely on the health resort business. Today, there are only a few remnants of what was the town's driving force for so many years. Both the Baker Hotel and Crazy Water Hotel still stand, though vacant and reminiscent of a time long past.

#### San Antonio's Hot Wells

The Hot Wells Sulphur Bathhouse opened in 1900 on the east bank of the San Antonio River, within view of the old Mission San Jose, approximately 4.5 miles east of the Meridian Highway. The hotel, which featured an octagonal natatorium with 3 pools and 45 private bathing tubs, offered modern conveniences such as steam heat, electric and gas lights, and individual telephones in the office. In addition to the hot mineral baths, the resort offered other amenities to draw tourists from the Meridian Highway. Bowling, racing, and an alligator and ostrich farm were among some of the features offered to guests of Hot Wells. Gambling was also reported to take place in the bathhouse, where a Jockey Club bookie placed bets. The resort was quite popular during its heyday, attracting many celebrities, and even President Theodore Roosevelt. Unfortunately, multiple fires in 1925, 1988, and 1997, helped to finish off the resort. In the mid-1990s, however, sulphur water still flowed into two of the three bathing pools. Today, ruins of the one-time famous resort are still visible, although they are on private land, inaccessible to the public.

#### Memories Left Behind

Mineral wells resorts remained popular until around the time of World War II, when advances in modern medicine, such as the introduction of penicillin, turned people away from holistic healing. In addition to the destinations listed above, many other mineral spring destinations were located along the routes of the Meridian Highway. Today, little remains of a once bustling economy focused on natural healing; however, a few remnants can still be seen if one knows what to look for. These few remaining buildings are some of the physical evidence left to teach us about a former way of life that focused on the restorative properties of mineral springs. Like so much other roadside architecture, once these buildings are gone, the memories associated with them will also disappear.