

Collection #
P0201

WEST BADEN SPRINGS HOTEL COPY PHOTOGRAPHS, CA. 1925

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Processed by

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 half size document case of photographs

COLLECTION DATES: Ca. 1925

PROVENANCE: Grace Rarick, Bloomington, Indiana, 1993

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: West Baden Springs Hotel cirkut photographs (P0164)

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1993.0500

NOTES: Historical Sketch researched and written by Robert W. Smith

HISTORICAL SKETCH

French explorers discovered mineral springs during the eighteenth century in the frontier area that was to become Orange County, Indiana. The following century sanitariums sprang up to accommodate patrons and invalids who came for relief from arthritis, rheumatism, and stomach ailments. In 1851 Dr. John Lane, an itinerant medicine peddler, erected the first resort in the town of Mile Lick and renamed it West Baden for the famous spa in Germany. In 1881 when the Monon Railroad completed its line to the spring's wealthy guests from near and far visited the resort.

After Lee Wiley Sinclair of nearby Salem visited the hotel he liked what he saw and gained controlling interest of it in 1888. Sinclair, born in Cloverdale in Putnam County, Indiana, had moved to Salem, Indiana, where he established a large woolen mill. He foresaw the potential in the area for a national health and recreation resort.

In 1901 a fire completely destroyed the hotel. Tom Taggart, owner of the nearby French Lick Hotel and an influential Democratic National Committeeman, was determined that West Baden would not rebuild, thus competing with his own facility. Sinclair had other plans. He hired Harrison Albright to build his dream hotel. Albright was born near Philadelphia and educated there in his early years. He apprenticed for a while in the City of Brotherly Love, but moved (1891) to West Virginia where he worked for the state. The goateed architect specialized in steel and reinforced concrete buildings, a valuable asset for the hotel because of their superior strength and fire resistance.

After 277 days Albright finished the hotel, including the large free-standing dome encircled with guest rooms, and it opened in September 1902. The formal dedication on April 16, 1903, brought Indiana Governor Winfield Durbin and Sen. Charles W. Fairbanks (the next year elected U.S. Vice President) to do the rhetorical honors. A Phoenix to early twentieth century guests, this "Eighth Wonder of the World" had risen from ashes to the delight of thousands.

Sinclair died in 1916 at which time his daughter and son-in-law assumed ownership and operations. They completed the renovation of the hotel begun in 1913 in the beaux arts style. Guest rooms looked out over the light filled domed atrium, now called the "Pompeian Court," with its tiled mosaic floor, gilded wall paintings, and classical statuary.

In time they sold it to Charles Ballard of West Baden under whose leadership the hotel flourished until the stock market crash in 1929. In December 1930 the average daily number of guests was five, forcing the closure of the facility the following year. Some feared a permanent demise.

In 1934 the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) assumed ownership and converted it into an educational institution for the Order's students called West Baden College. They removed all items bespeaking luxury or a worldly spirit. Inner rooms were stripped of furnishings, and bookshelves replaced ornate wallpaper. Two classrooms and a large auditorium emerged from the former ballroom, while the dining room, without its carpet,

accommodated a large centrally placed pulpit from which the Scriptures and other religious books were read during mealtime.

In June 1964 the Jesuits closed the doors and in 1966 it was donated to a private college, the Northwood Institute. The college maintained a campus there until 1983. The facility was then sold to a real estate developer but the site continued to deteriorate even though it was elevated to National Historic Landmark status in 1987. Beginning in 1992 a massive effort between Indiana Landmarks and the Cook Group restored the buildings and grounds with much of the expense born by William and Gayle Cook of Bloomington, Indiana. In May 2007 the hotel finally opened and today is an upscale resort with casino.

Sources:

Detroit Historical Society

Dunn, Jacob Piatt, *Indiana and Indianans*. Chicago: American Historical Society, 1919, II, 853

Indiana Magazine of History. 1 (1954), 139ff; liv (1958), 342 and 365–80

Journal of San Diego History xliii, No. 2 (1997)

Structure Magazine (September, 2007).

<http://www.historiclandmarks.org/Pages/default.aspx>

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection is comprised of copy photographs showing 112 images of West Baden Springs Hotel and grounds ca. 1925. The original source is not known.

The photographs were in no particular order so the processors organized the images into groups by scenes or activities and numbered each image. The activities and scenes are described in the Contents section and the range numbers of photos is given.

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[Views of entrances to the dining room, mineral springs, and golf course]

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[Interior views of the atrium with various statues]

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[Exterior views of the hotel and towers]

Photos 23–25

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[Views of the veranda/porch]

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[View of the exterior towers]

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[Views of the gardens, fountains, pond, and outer buildings]

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[Exterior view of the natatorium]

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[Exterior view of the veranda/porch]

CONTAINER

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CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog:
<http://opac.indianahistory.org/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, P 0201).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.