

# HOT SPRINGS, VIRGINIA

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## INTRODUCTION

Three major springs are located in the Warm Springs Valley of the Allegheny Mountains in western Virginia along US route 220--the Warm, Hot and Healing--all now owned by Virginia Hot Springs, Inc. The Homestead, a large and historic luxurious resort, is located at Hot Springs. The odorless mineral water used at The Homestead spa flows from several springs at temperatures ranging from 39°C to 41°C (102 to 106°F) (Loam and Gersh, 1992). It is piped to individual, one-person bathtubs in separate men's and women's bathhouses, where it is mixed to provide an ideal temperature of 40°C (104°F). Tubs are drained and refilled after each use so that no chemical treatment is necessary. Mineral water from the same springs is used in an indoor swimming pool maintained at 29°C (84°F), and an outdoor swimming pool maintained at 22°C (72°F).

Eight kilometers (5 miles) away to the northeast, but still within the 6,000-ha (15,000-acre) Homestead property, are the Warm Springs, which flow at 36°C (96°F). The rate of discharge is so great, 63 L/s (1000 gpm) (Muffler, 1979) that the two large Warm Springs pools, in separate men's and women's buildings, maintain the temperature on a flow-through basis requiring no chemical treatment. The men's pool was designed by Thomas Jefferson and opened in 1761; the ladies' pool was opened in 1836. The adjacent "drinking spring" and the two covered pools have been preserved in their original condition.

The approximate partial analysis of the Warm Springs pools are as follows (Source: undated brochure from The Homestead): bicarbonate 194 mg/L, sulphate 160 mg/L, iron 120 mg/L, sodium 5.4 mg/L, chloride 1.5 mg/L and nitrate 0.10 mg/L. Total dissolved solids are reported as 388 mg/L (calculated); however, Muffler (1979) reports 525 mg/L and 586 mg/L for Hot Springs.

Healing Springs located approximately 8 kilometers (5 miles) to the southwest of Hot Springs is reported at 30°C (86°F) with total dissolved solids of 596 mg/L at less than 1 L/s (15 gpm) flow (Muffler, 1979).

The facilities at The Homestead include 700 bedrooms, a conference center, restaurants, shops and tennis courts. Skiing and ice skating are available in the winter. It is the only Virginia spa still in operation as a public resort.

## EARLY HISTORY

The three springs have been visited for hundreds of years, with the discovery associated with an Indian brave in the 1600s (Cohen, 1981). By the middle of the 1700s, a few white settlers had found their way into the valley, and George Washington visited the area in 1755 while constructing forts

for protection against the Indians. The first recorded inn was built by Thomas Bullitt in 1766 to take care of guests who were looking for a cure from the thermal waters.

Hot Springs became one of the dominant resorts of Virginia after Thomas Goode, a physician acquired it in 1832. He was a salesman who exaggerated the benefits of the mineral waters, claiming that it would cure most diseases or relieve the symptoms (Figure 1). He expanded the resort and opened a hotel called The Homestead in 1846--the site of the present day hotel (Figure 2). He also built cabins and bathhouses that attracted many notable people. The resort became one of "the" spas on the summer circuit for the south (Cohen, 1981).



Figure 1. Early poster advertising the Hot Springs.



**Figure 2. The Hot Springs resort as drawn by Porte Crayon in 1857. The large hotel is The Homestead, built by Thomas Goode in 1846.**



**Figure 3. The spa at The Homestead, built in 1892 and still offering full-time health treatment for the guests. It has been extensively remodeled.**



## THE CIVIL WAR YEARS AND AFTER

Several battles were fought nearby during "The War Between the States" and the hotel was used as a Confederate hospital. The hotel survived the war, but was in a state of disrepair.

The modern development of the resort began in 1890 when the South-Improvement Company bought all three spas in the Warm Springs Valley--amounting to about 1,900 ha (4,700 acres). This company was part of the same syndicate that owned the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, also the owner and developer of The Greenbrier across the border in West Virginia. In 1892, a railroad spur was built to the resort, and the hotel was rebuilt and refurbished. The Virginia Hotel was also built as part of the railroad station while The Homestead was being repaired. Unfortunately, The Virginia was built in the low part of the valley with no view and polluted by the smoke from locomotives; thus, it was used little after The Homestead was finished, and is now a dormitory for workers at the resort.

Also in 1892, the present bathhouse was completed (Figure 3), modeled after the European spas, featured two main kinds of treatment--hot tubs for soaking and hot showers or "spouts" (Cohen, 1981).

In 1901, a fire reduced The Homestead and several outbuildings to ashes. It was rebuilt and ready for occupancy by 1904. The east wing was completed in 1914. It was then one of the largest hotels in the south. More rooms were added after World War I, including an imposing tower that now dominates the building.

## WORLD WAR II AND AFTER

Like The Greenbrier, The Homestead became a home for Japanese diplomats (1941-42), who were interned until negotiations could be completed to exchange them for American diplomats. The internment program proved to be

a financial disaster for the spa. The Army and Navy both considered the resort as a possible hospital; but, this option did not develop.

After the war, the resort began housing guest again. In 1948, the railroad was bought out and the holdings in the valley reached over 6,800 ha (17,000 acres), including three health spas. In 1959, snow machines brought skiing to the area to help the winter business. In 1973, the south wing with 190 guest rooms and a conference center was added.

## THE PRESENT

Today Virginia Hot Springs, of which The Homestead is the main center, has over 700 guest rooms with a capacity of 1,100 people and employs up to 1,000 people (Figure 4). The Spa provides hydrotherapy (sauna, steam, mineral baths and spout baths), aromatherapy (mineral baths, loofah scrub and herbal wraps), massage therapy (traditional Swedish and aromatherapy massages), and fitness activities. Swimming is provided for by an indoor pool and two outdoor pools.

## REFERENCES

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