

Montvale Springs

Contributed by Administrator
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In the late 1800s many prominent ladies and gentlemen came to the Smoky Mountain area to enjoy the luxurious and beautiful surroundings of the Montvale Springs Hotel, known far and wide simply as Montvale. The hotel's main attraction was the healing effects of the sulfurous spring located nearby and the many leisure activities provided for the guests by the hotel operators. A day's activities included croquet, fine dining, hiking, hunting small game, a lush garden, music, and socials. Unorganized pastimes included chatting about the day's events in rocking chairs on the front porch and time spent in the hotel library.

Guests stayed all summer; often bringing maids to help with their children. Usually the guests returned year after year for a summer of leisure and good health the spring at Montvale provided. The waters were good for many ailments including "anemia, serula choloris, dropsy, gravel, gleet," as well as for restoration of youthfulness. Also, the summer getaway provided for relief from fevers and illnesses that were common in the larger cities of the period.

The path to the springs was well traveled as were the paths leading to Look Rock, which was a favorite spot for courting youth and provided spectacular views of the valley and surrounding mountains. Atop Chilhowee Mountain, over 2,000 feet above sea level one could see 50 to 60 miles of the valley of East Tennessee edged by the Cumberland Mountains in the distance. A spectacular view of the most peaceful surroundings.

It was because of this peaceful leisure that so many prominent families came during the years 1832 to 1933. Guests included politicians, diplomats and a writer by the name of Sidney Lanier, whose first novel "Tiger Lilies" was inspired by Montvale.

In 1933, Montvale burned. A loss that devastated the owner financially. This combined with the decreased interest in healing springs and summer-long stays was the end of an era. The hotel was never rebuilt. However, the spirit of Montvale Springs lives on at the site. A YMCA camp was built after World War II and is still in use. The spring remains as well as the stone steps to the front door of Montvale. One can still visit the place where Montvale stood and learn why so many longed to spend their summers there.

The first hotel was established and operated by Daniel D. Forte in 1832 as the first roads were being built in the area. The building was built completely out of logs and Forte was the first to promote the healing effects of the springs and began to draw the celebrities and politicians.

In 1853, Asa Watson became the proprietor. Watson replaced Forte's log hotel with a larger grandiose hotel he dubbed "The Seven Gables Hotel" because of the gable construction. The hotel contained 125 rooms and 40 cottages built around the main building. Great pains were taken to landscape the grounds with exotic trees from many of the countries that Watson visited. Today, the trees not native to this region still stand.

The well advertised resort was soon called "The Saratoga of the South" by the thousands who visited each year. Because of the Hotel's popularity, a stage line from Knoxville to Montvale was established. The Verandah Hotel in Maryville was the official stage stop for guests on their way to Montvale. The Verandah was torn down in 1894.

Watson sold the Montvale Spring Hotel to Sterling Lanier and Abraham Watt. Sterling Lanier was Sidney Lanier's (author of "Tiger Lilies") grandfather. Sidney Lanier was charmed by Montvale and wrote most of his book while he stayed at Montvale. Guests of this period anxiously discussed the politics of the time and debated the integrity of the Confederacy. When Tennessee voted not to stay a part of the Confederacy, the Lanier's sold the property.

One of the most notable events of the Lanier's ownership was a visit by the Swiss Geologist, Arnold Guyot, in 1859, who came to survey the southern mountain country. Guyot enjoyed his stay so much that he named Clingman's Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park after Thomas Lanier Clingman, a close Lanier relative and Mount LeConte was named after a dear friend of the Lanier's, Joseph LeConte.

In 1901, the Hotel was operated by Andrew Gamble. Many plantation families retreated here from the oppressive heat of the Mississippi Delta. The last owner, Ludwig Pflanze, suffered a great financial loss when the Hotel burned in 1933.

Montvale Springs Hotel touched many hearts and affected many lives in its day and still does. The property is located in Blount County, Tennessee at the end of Montvale Road.