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ALLEGHANY COLLEGE
BLUE SULPHUR SPRINGS, VIRGINIA
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Few people have ever heard of, and even fewer know anything about Alleghany College, a Baptist institution established in 1859 at Blue Sulphur Springs, Virginia, in the building formerly occupied by the famous Blue Sulphur Springs Hotel.

If you visited Blue Sulphur Springs today in the southwestern section of Greenbrier County, West Virginia, you would see nothing unusual except a large twelve pillared square structure. It sits alone in pasture and reminds one of a Grecian temple after which it was undoubtedly modeled. It is completely out of place in the surrounding broad pastoral valley of Kitchen Creek, a tributary of Muddy Creek. You would see good grass land and grazing herds of fine Greenbrier cattle. On the North and South are small mountains. A few well-kept farm homes are nearby.

The imposing Grecian edifice was and is the housing of Blue Sulphur Springs. In its center is the sulphur spring of a bluish tint. it's all that remains of what was a great mountain resort visited by patrons from a large area of this country and Europe to drink of and bathe in the supposedly healing water. The Blue Sulphur Spring water[,] so the eminent medics of the 1800's advised, was a remedy for liver and skin diseases; it was wonderful for irritation of the kidneys, bladder, prostate gland and irregular menstruation. If one had none of these troubles but had an enlarged spleen or jaundice the water would cure them.

The other sulphur and thermal springs such as White Sulphur, Sweet, Red Sulphur, Salt Sulphur, Sweet Chalybeate, Warm and Hot Springs, and a number of others now almost forgotten, made similar claims to cure almost every ailment except ingrown toenails. Some of the springs had physicians in residence. "The Blue" had the renowned Dr. Alexis Martin to advise as to the proper administration

of the evil smelling water. A former surgeon in Napoleon's Army, he established a most elaborate medical facility. He had a contract with the Blue Sulphur Springs Company dated February 10, 1835 for one acre of land on the hotel grounds where he dispensed sulphur water and provided warm, hot and vapor baths. He had a splendid medical reputation.

However spurious were claims of the curative powers of the many springs there was one really healthful reason to visit them. There never were any cholera or yellow fever in the mountains. These dread diseases raged in the heavily populated eastern and southern states during the 1800's. Those fortunate ones who lived in the mountains, or could flee to the mountains, escaped cholera and "yellow jack." The reason was that the water flowed away from the mountains both east and west and did not carry cholera vibrio. Also, the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito, the carrier of yellow fever, liked a warmer climate.

The histories of the great resort, "The Blue," and of the community of Blue Sulphur Springs are entwined with that of Alleghany College, the principal topic of this paper.

Blue Sulphur Spring's first white owner was James Patterson who obtained a patent to 490 acres from the Commonwealth of Virginia [in] March 17, 1789. His daughter became owner of 24 ½ acres of the land upon which was the Blue Sulphur Spring which became known as the "Nancy Patterson Sulphur Spring."² The first mention of a hostelry there is in the minutes of Greenbrier County Court, August, 1829, when Anson Allen was granted a license to keep a house of private entertainment. The property changed hands several times until January 30, 1834.³ Joseph Martin and his wife, Catherine, sold the property to George W. Buster.⁴ Until then the various sales were for small amounts. This Deed was for \$6,000.00 indicating Martin had made considerable improvements and probably before him, Charles Carroway.

George W. Buster and others incorporated The Blue Sulphur Springs Company and great improvements were made. Looking at the place now it is hard to imagine the fine hotel and accommodations that were built in that now isolated valley. The main hotel was a three-storied brick structure 180 feet long and 50 feet wide with a

12 foot portico on each floor. Extending on each side were two story wings with similar piazzas connecting with the main hotel. One was 90 feet long and 32 feet wide and another 150 long and 17 feet wide. The connecting porticos or piazzas were all under roof so a guest could take quite a walk in any weather and by going up or down a flight of stairs, walk some more. All the public rooms were comfor-

¹ The Influence of Epidemic Diseases on the Virginia Springs. James P. Baker, M.D., Greenbrler Historical Society Journal, 1965.

² Deed Book 1. page 234. Office of Clerk of Greenbrler County Court.

³ Deed Book 6, page 230. Office of Clerk of Greenbrler County Court.

⁴ Deed Book 13. Page 160. Office of Clerk of Greenbrler County Court.