

Mineral Springs College

*Colleges Never Die
From When the Bells Rang*



Ruben Coyle drank from a spring, noticed its rust colored rocks and foul smell, figured he'd drank poison water, and sat down to die – only he didn't. Instead he'd discovered a mineral spring which, at that time in history, made the village of Sodaville a most sought out and famous town. In 1880 the state accepted the property on which the spring was located, making it the first state park in Oregon. Into this historic community and setting Mineral Springs College was formed. It was one of the first colleges in the Willamette Valley. It was organized by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and began in 1895. The building had been previously used as a private academy.

Mr. J. R. Geddes was made president of the college. He was a graduate of Carleton College in Minnesota and an experienced teacher. Everything was turned over to him. He was more than a teacher. His ability to see possibilities in a student, to inspire the student to make the most of these, and to encourage him to realize his potential was what made Mr. Geddes outstanding. He made it possible for students to go to college. Boys could work out their tuition by splitting wood and other chores. The girls could bring food from home. Such items included fruits, vegetables, meat – whatever they could contribute. Girls also did domestic work around the building and in the dormitory. Boys “batched” in cabins that were used in the summer by visitors at the Spring. The girls stayed in the dormitory or lived with nearby families.

Many students became successful. At a reunion one man said, “I came to Mineral Springs College with a bag of beans, another of dried prunes, and 50 cents in my pocket. I was able to stay in school until I graduated.” At the time he told this he was manager of one of the large lumber companies in the state.

In 1963 Ethel Starr Mack (former graduate) stated, “It was Mr. Geddes who allowed things to happen. He gave the students attitudes toward life, the ambition to be something, the confidence to try, and the feeling of being worthwhile.” In a reunion speech twenty-five years after the college closed, Mr. Geddes stated “Colleges Never Die!”

Old Sodaville School

After the college was closed, the residents of Sodaville attempted to continue using the building for a community school. Eventually the building was closed and later demolished.

Ref: From a paper written by Ethel Starr Mack, July 1959, as well as news articles in various newspapers. Drawn from an old photo printed in the Linn Benton E.S.D. newsletter, “The Bridge”, 1982.



*Mineral Springs College
By Angela Carter
From When the Bells Rang*

Despite the size of Sodaville, in the present, it was once a budding community. Its popularity came from the mineral filled springs in the center of town. Mineral Springs College fulfilled the demand for higher education within the Sodaville community. Only a few years later the halls were empty and the school was closed down.

The existence of Sodaville began in the late eighteen hundreds with the discovery of the mineral springs. The discovery was made by some passing pioneers as they were traveling south. The pioneers' oxen had wandered off and was found again by this spring. The strong and bitter taste of the natural spring is what the town and college is named for. This spring was thought to have had healing powers, although this quackery soon ended. Before this discovery, the spring was an attraction to the old and sick. This attraction to the spring caused the population to increase.

With the increase of population the need for higher education evolved. Therefore, Mineral Springs Seminary was founded. Due to the population growth, Cumberland Presbyterian Church overtook Mineral Springs Seminary and created Mineral Springs College. The school reached the height of enrollment at one hundred students. The school enrollment consisted of both women and men from various backgrounds and diverse ages. The nature of classes were centered around teacher training. These classes include science, music, elocution, business, poetry, and teacher training. The school remained in service to the public for about eighteen years. Unfortunately the building did not last through the declining of the popularity of the spring.

The truth had finally come through about the spring, it had no such healing powers as was advertised and was now polluted. The realization depleted the amount of people gathered for remedial powers. The absence of people left hotels, restaurants, stores as well as the school, vacant. The lack of funding was the main ingredient in the closure of Mineral Springs College. The school building was burned down, and the vacant hotels, restaurants, and stores followed. The women's dormitory was salvaged and later turned into the Crowfoot Grange Hall. It is unknown why the main college building was not salvaged for historical purposes.

Clearly, Mineral Springs College might have been a historical monument to the community of Sodaville. Sodaville was once a prosperous town with the help of the college, and the wandering oxen who found the mineral springs in the first place. The contribution to the education of Sodaville was generally focused on teaching, thus making the teaching profession a wide spread opportunity. Mineral Springs College is a valuable piece of history for Sodaville.

Dunn, Patricia. Lynn County Historian, Lebanon, Oregon. Personal interview. 3 April 1994

Parrish, Alma. "Students at Old Sodaville Seminary Had Rugged Time Compared to Today." Albany Democrat-Herald 17 August 1955: page 18, 22.

Parrish, Alma. "Mineral Springs Seminary Holds Reunion." Albany Democrat- Herald 21 May 1963: page 11.

Angela Carter, class of 1995, moved in the spring of 1993 into an area near Sodaville. Being just outside of Sodaville sparked her interest in its history. She is interested in working with students and the community. Teaching is an interest she has always been a great influence to her.