

THE BEST LAID PLANS

Submitted by Village of Richfield Springs Historian Harriett Geywits

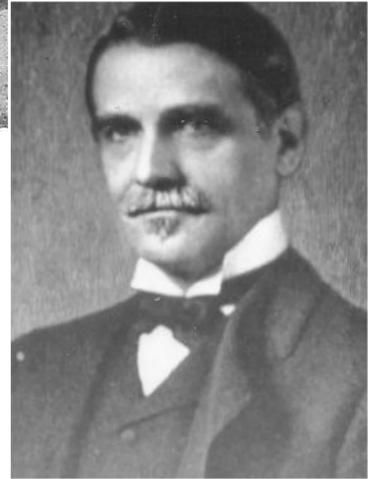
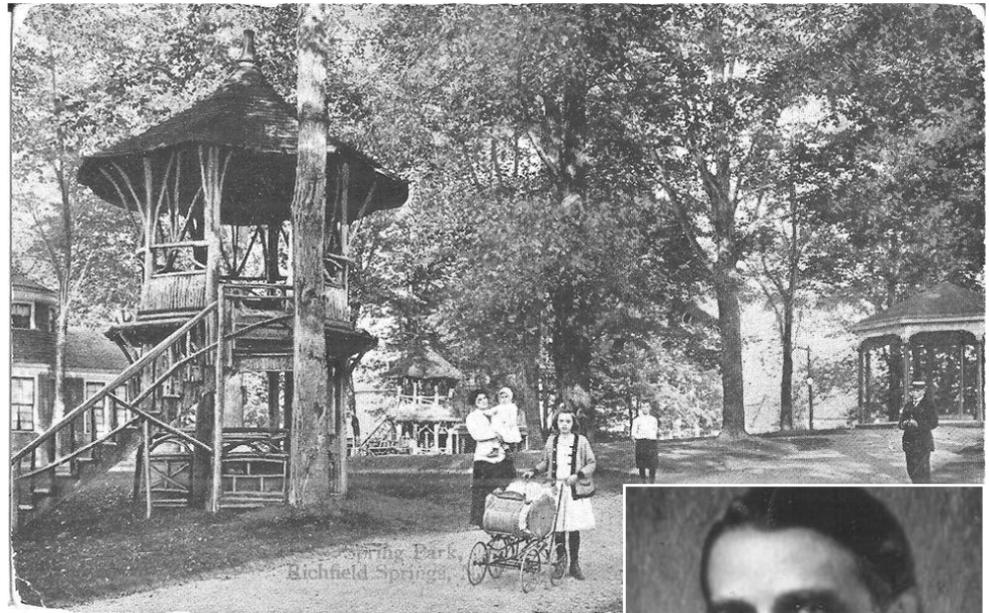
In July 1885, the MERCURY published an article saying that: "With all the advantages possessed by Richfield as a popular and fashionable watering place, we are somewhat surprised that a permanent sanitarium has not been established here, considering the healthful and favorable location of the place with all its natural and very superior advantages. A medical institution properly conducted would doubtless be abundantly sustained throughout the entire year. This suggestion is a good one and deserves the attention of our enterprising landlords. For the past few years, several people afflicted with rheumatism and other diseases for which the mineral waters here are a specific help, have remained during the winter months and derived much benefit from the treatment they received while staying at private residences. If a sanitarium should be erected and devoted exclusively to the care of invalids, many who go to places provided with such institutions, but with inferior advantages, would come here. This subject is not new but has often been before our people. We hope this will receive more than a passing thought and that an institution worthy of our village may be speedily forthcoming." The interest increased when the Spring House Hotel was destroyed by fire in 1897, leaving a vacant area in what is now the Village Park. It was hoped that owner T. R. Proctor, would rebuild, but that was not to be.

During the period of the late 1800s to early 1900s, what was called the Great White Plague (commonly known as consumption or tuberculous) was prevalent in New York State and it was very common for those who were able, to spend a time of hoped for recovery at a sanatorium offering rest, fresh air, and other treatments that were considered necessary to relieve their pain.

The hope for the erection of such a sanatorium was again mentioned in 1906 in the following article, again from the MERCURY: "The house now being built upon the property of Dr. Alfred R. Crain, Monticello Street, is simply a temporary, rough-working men's quarters and not for sanitarium purposes. There is under consideration, however, for another year, the erection of such a sanitarium which will accommodate from 150 to 200 patrons. the architecture is modern in every respect, steam heated and electrically lighted. It will have wide verandas with two large solariums at its eastern and western exposures. The bathing departments will be of the latest accepted European ideas and under the direction of selected and skilled attendants. The baths will be open to the public day and night remaining open the entire year. There are five well-known New York physicians who are interested in the project and who, together with Dr. Crain, hope to make the same a success. The Dr. believes that he has selected one of the best sites for accessibility, fine views and the best waters and good air to be obtained about Richfield Springs." No building resulted.

Then came 1910 when this article appeared: "The need of a bathing establishment which would remain open for business throughout the winter, has long been felt here and although each season has had its rumors as to keeping the bathing establishment in Spring Park open throughout the year, and the expectation of a new house on a smaller scale to accommodate winter business, nothing has ever been done in that direction. Richfield now, however, has the pleasing prospect of having such an establishment. Mr. Robert W. Tailer has a definite plan for building a bath house on Lake Street where the old Episcopal rectory now stands which shall be connected with the Waiontha, and which shall be provided with water from the Great White Sulphur Spring by means of a pipe line. The land has already been surveyed and a plan of the building has been submitted by an architect. There are a number of matters which will have to be satisfactorily arranged before the erection of such an establishment is decided upon but of all the buds of hope Richfield has had, this is the first to give any promise of blossoming into reality. The matter of railroad transportation to and from Richfield, the maintaining of a schedule which shall, in some measure at least, give prospective patrons assurance of convenient ingress and egress, must be definitely arranged before such a project can hope to be successful. The service via trolley and the New York Central as it now exists would be satisfactory and a proper service all the year including Sundays, via the D.L.&W. should be arranged.

As to feasibility and almost instantaneous success of such an establishment there can be no question. The water which Mother Earth sends up in such abundance through the Great White Sulphur Spring possesses the greatest curative powers of all the waters in this country. Other resorts which cannot compare with



Richard M. Montgomery

Richfield Springs in the qualities of their waters do a prosperous and constantly increasing business the year round. Richfield is delightful as a summer resort with its ideal climate and beautiful surrounds, but its one big asset is the sulphur waters. A large, thoroughly modern establishment in the nature of a sanitarium is needed, but an establishment such as it now contemplated would be a step in the right direction and would be welcomed by all who have an interest in the welfare and prosperity of this community."

Mr. Tailer got further with his plans than others had. It was reported that the architect's plans were on exhibition at the First National Bank and showed a magnificent building, but things came to a stop when he died in 1915.

Enter a new prospect in 1921. J. D. Sweet (1864-1942), a summer resident of the village, expressed his interest in building a modern sanitarium. He had started his career as a traveling salesman, selling tobaccos and cigars, and in 1889 organizing the J. D. Sweet Cigar Manufacturing Company of Ballston Spa. He moved to Syracuse in 1919 and organized the Associated Laundries of America, Inc., which covered many of the laundry services in the area.

He arranged to purchase the Tailer interests including the park, bathhouse, Berkeley-Waiontha hotel and the business block, organizing a company to be known as the Great White Sulphur Springs Hotel and Sanitarium with a capital stock of \$500,000 for the purpose of taking over these properties and building a sanitarium in the park in connection with the bathhouse at a cost of about \$350,000 for building and furnishings. Mr. A. L. Brockway of Syracuse was the architect involved. Mr. James Taylor of Syracuse was to be the contractor. The hotel was to contain 200 rooms. A hospital and an operating room were to be installed in connection with the bathhouse. The building was to extend from the bathhouse, west to Church Street. \$150,000 worth of stock had been subscribed and the remaining \$350,000 in stock was expected to be easily and quickly found. However ----- It was reported later that year that money for floating new propositions was not so available at the time as it would have been normally. He did not meet the terms of his option on the Tailer property, but he was sure that a similar option could be again secured.

The year 1941 was not a good choice to start a new project but that did not stop Richard M. Montgomery (1853-1942) from appearing before the village board and presenting yet another plan for the erection of a sanitarium in Spring Park. He was familiar to everyone in the area for creating the Garden of the Mills, a nearby artist colony. Montgomery asked that the board give the residents of the village the opportunity to vote on a proposition to raise \$3000 by taxation to pay the cost of initial steps in the forming of a corporation that would erect and conduct the sanitarium. The building, without land, would cost \$520,000. Equipped it would cost \$670,000. He believed that \$350,000 could be received from the Federal government toward building and equipment. The capital stock of the corporation would be \$1,400,000 made up of \$700,000 preferred stock and \$700,000 common stock. The preferred stock would pay six percent per annum.

No action was taken and again, the plans for a sanitarium were once more laid to rest.