

Deer Park Spring Water – A Garrett Tradition

Written by: **Dan Whetzel**

New Photography by: **Lance C. Bell, PPA**

Deer Park Spring Water has been enjoyed by Western Maryland residents since the early 1800's when it bubbled freely through the sand at Deer Park, Maryland, providing crystal clear drinking water. While the spring water was always cool and refreshing, only residents knew of its "delightfully palatable taste." Decades would pass before Deer Park Spring Water would become widely available to East Coast residents.

Deer Park Spring Water's notoriety grew proportionately with the town's development when in 1872 the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad constructed a major resort facility known as Deer Park Hotel. Wealthy metropolitan residents who desired to escape the heat and humidity could travel comfortably aboard a B&O coach to the Deer Park destination where a first class facility welcomed them; few hotels of the day surpassed it. Numerous cottages augmented the hotel, and the variety of accommodations attracted noteworthy visitors like Presidents Grover Cleveland, William Henry Harrison, James Garfield, and William Howard Taft. The spring water became a feature of the hotel.

Deer Park's reputation as a premiere resort facility was well-known by the late 1800's. A large amphitheatre hosted Chautauqua events, and the establishment of a religious retreat added to the attractions.

As the hotel and town developed, so did Boiling Springs, the name given to the Deer Park water source. Hotel guests continued to be served the water from bottles appropriately labeled Deer Park Spring Water. Around 1905, the B&O decided to accommodate requests from hotel guests and offer the water in its dining cars. One-half gallon glass containers were packed eight to a wooden crate and then



Deer Park Spring Water label from the collection of Bill Howes.

loaded on a train for distribution to the railroad's commissaries around its system. The bottled water was prominently displayed and served on most dining cars, although "Not for Sale" was stamped on each label, making the water an exclusive treat for B&O passengers.

Major improvements to the bottling facility and spring house occurred in 1957. A small pagoda-style spring house replaced an older structure. Complete with a cement floor and 4 x 3-foot opening that enabled samples to be collected, the new structure protected the spring's source. Also completed was a new bottling plant located one mile from the spring house and beside the B&O tracks. The facility was approximately 15x12 feet and included a platform to accommodate loading. Bottling operations were under the direction of Earle Hienbaugh, who held the titles Water Supervisor and Dining Car Department Employee. Assisting Mr. Hienbaugh was Carl Weber, a bio-chemist employed by the B&O, who checked for water purity on a weekly basis.

The bottling process began with water flowing from the spring at the rate of 100 gallons per minute. Gravity provided the force to send it through pipes to the bottling plant one mile away. Due to federal and state public health regulations, water passed through a hypo-chlorinator.

Mr. Hienbaugh assumed all daily duties at the bottling plant. His first morning assignment was to wash empty bottles by using a motor driven brush. Secondly, sterilization occurred when water covering the bottles was heated to 180 degrees Fahrenheit for a specified period of time. Clean bottles were filled through a multipost system that routed the water flow into eight bottles simultaneously. Applications of jelly caps to seal the filled bottles completed the process.

For many years B&O train Number 30 stopped at Deer Park to pick up loaded cases, providing the shipping service to Washington and other points for further distribution to feature trains. Typically, 40 cases were loaded at the bottling plant, meaning that B&O passengers were served 160 gallons of Deer Park Spring Water daily.

The B&O sold its Deer Park Hotel in 1911, and operations ceased there almost immediately. Improved roads and the availability of automobiles affected rail passenger service even at that early date. Later development of air conditioning systems made the cool Deer Park evenings less attractive, causing the town to lose its tourist base. Deer Park Spring Water operations were also affected by the changing market conditions and that ultimately lead to their demise on B&O passenger trains. The exact date spring water ceased to be used is unknown. Bill Howes, the last Director of Passenger Service for the B&O Railroad, indicates there are no written documents recording when service ended, but an important clue would be the termination of the train that picked up the wooden crates at Deer Park. According to Mr. Howes, that train “was discontinued July 4, 1964. After that, my guess is the B&O was no longer shipping water crates from Deer Park.” Mr. Howes also recalled an interesting footnote to Deer Park Spring Water

occurring between April 29 and May 1, 1971, when the Capital Limited made its final run under B&O auspices. The famous water was placed back on the dining tables to reclaim its exclusive spot one last time.

The remaining vestiges of the Deer Park Hotel fell to the wrecking ball in 1944, and other nearby historic sites have disappeared as well. However in recent years, Garrett County has once again become a premier destination site as Deep Creek Lake provides a catalyst for year round activities that augment Deer Park’s attractions. Deer Park maintains its quaint atmosphere, and several cottages from the late 19th Century remain, including the one enjoyed by President Cleveland on his honeymoon. The President Cleveland honeymoon cottage is indicated with a historical marker.

The Deer Park Spring Water continues to be sold throughout the United States to the present day, although the Deer Park, Maryland, location is only one of several sources for the current product. While its source has changed, the bottled water’s storied past will remain a constant source of pride for Deer Park residents.

Mountain Discoveries *would like to express appreciation to Bill Howes, of Jacksonville, Florida, for his expertise and cooperation in preparing this article.*



The distinctive Deer Park Spring Water bottle being used with the new holder design. This photo was taken in a B&O dining car on the Columbian (Washington-Chicago) c.1949. Courtesy Bill Howes.

Left: Deer Park Spring Water bottle, holder, and original wooden crate used to bring the bottles to the dock and onto dining cars.