

Celebrating Clay County History: Winters Spent at the Spring

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The winds of the Civil War had barely died out when tourists began flocking to Green Cove Springs, Florida. The feel of the warm spring waters beckoned them. At first, they came for the “water cure”. Normally, spring water feels frigid to us Floridians in the summer, but when the air is colder than the water temperature the spring feels warm. The tourists loved it!

Dr. Applegate completed the construction of the Clarendon Hotel in the springtime of 1872. Today, Green Cove Springs City Hall sits where the hotel was once located. The good doctor was from Indiana and was assigned to Florida after the Civil War in 1867 with the Freedmen’s Bureau. Bureau operations were located at the Magnolia Hotel during Reconstruction.

Dr. Applegate later collaborated with John H. Harris, coordinating the operations of the Clarendon Hotel in Green Cove Springs as well. While Harris managed the bottled water business from New York, Dr. Applegate lectured on the benefits of sulphur water to those who sought the “cure”. The “Water Cure Company” flourished thanks to Dr. Applegate’s lectures, prescribing, dispensing and even shipping of the sulphur water from the spring in Green Cove to New York. While the Clarendon Hotel was destroyed by fire on April 3, 1900, Applegate and his wife, Jenny, resided in Cottage A of the hotel until his death in 1919. Cottage A is now the River Park Inn B&B, next door to city hall. The hotel was replaced by the Qui-Si –Sana and that stood till city hall was built.

Several other hoteliers discovered the spring and Florida’s great winter weather. They built a dozen hotels and boarding houses in the area surrounding the spring. Sadly, none of those buildings exist anymore due to fire, storms, lack of maintenance and development progress.

Wintering in Green Cove Springs became quite popular with wealthy northerners from places like Massachusetts, Philadelphia and New York. The most prominent of these visitors was the Borden Family of Borden’s Condensed Milk fame. The family owned several houses in town and even purchased a dairy out in the countryside. Penelope Borden’s home is still standing on Walnut Street and is the school district’s Professional Development Center. When it came time for the county to build a new jail and courthouse, the Bordens donated the land those buildings stand on today.

The 1890 Historic Courthouse and 1894 Old County Jail are decorated for the 2021 holiday season. Everyone is invited to come see the lights on the oak trees, buildings and lamp posts.

Visiting ladies, many who were here for the entire season, formed the Village Improvement Association (VIA) which remains the oldest woman’s club in Florida. Their clubhouse is at 17 Palmetto Avenue in Green Cove Springs and is a hub for community activity year round. The gents spent time golfing, hunting and fishing. Both genders enjoyed the nature excursions the hotels offered – the beginnings of eco-tourism in Clay County.

Some visitors loved it here so much they retired here, just as they do today. Today the spring pool isn’t open in the winter, the reverse of the original use schedule. The only visitor in the spring in the winter is our juvenile manatee.

INVITATION

TO GREEN COVE SPRINGS, FLORIDA.

“Ah stranger! linger yet, awhile,
And unto my voice hark:
Depart not hence 'till you have viewed,
The “Marion Borden Park.”
It is a bit of elfin-glebe,
Of wonderous beauty wild;
The fairies named it, from a sweet
And guileless little child.
But never leave our Green Cove Springs,
Until you've ta'en a bath.
And with some pretty, bright-eyed lass
Stroll'd thro' St. Davids Path.
Then go your ways most cheerily,
A wiser, happier man;
And when you think of what you've left,
Forget us, if you can.”

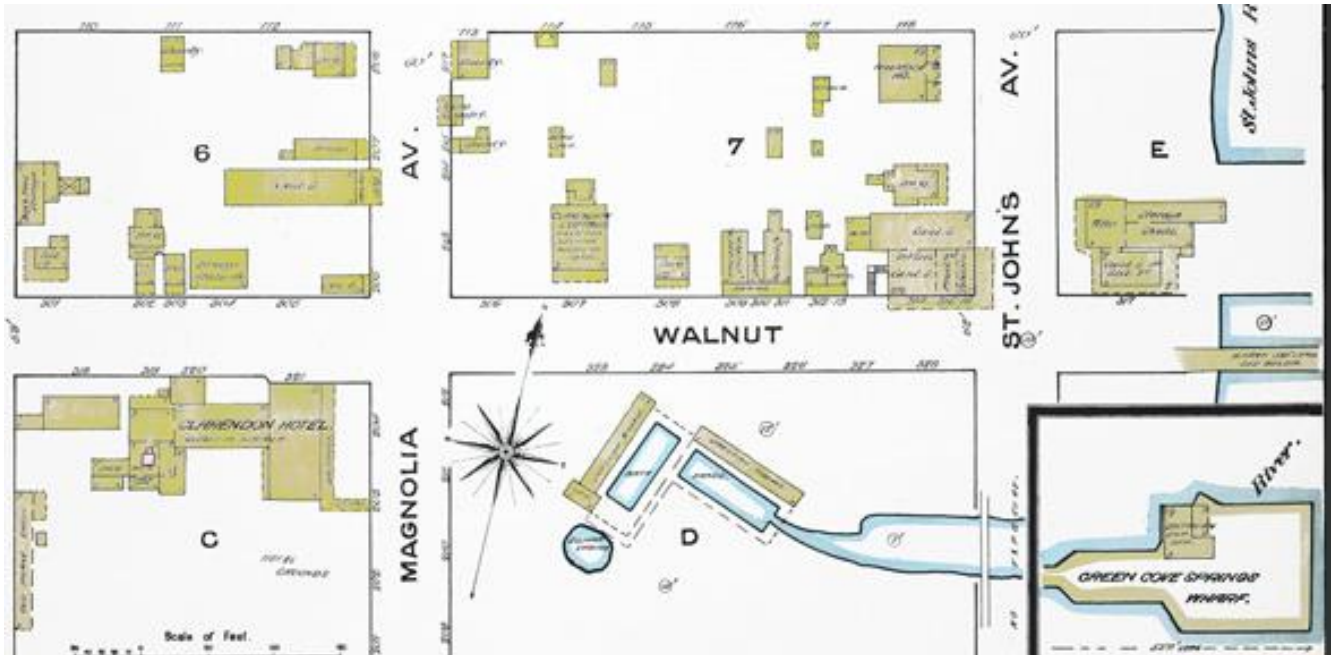
POET LAUREATE.



Penelope Borden's home on Walnut Street.



Dr. Applegate's house circa 1950. Today this home is the River Park Inn B&B



1884 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing original configuration of the spring boil and pools.



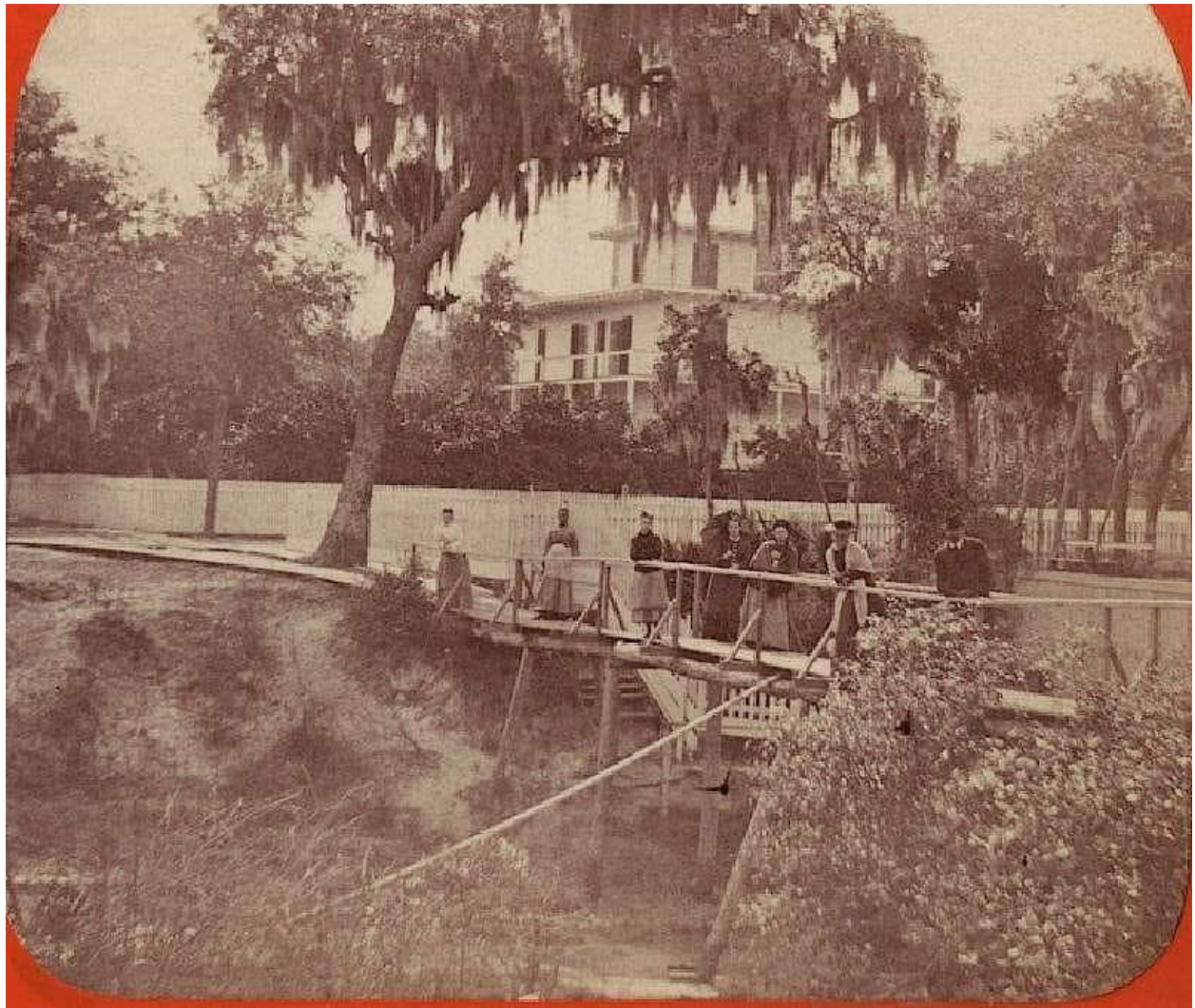
The Sulphur Springs.

SPECIAL ATTENTION is called to the SULPHUR SPRING renowned for its health-giving properties. Having passed into the hands of a company possessed of ample means, it will be thoroughly fitted up with convenient bathing facilities, and will prove a source of great comfort to those desiring Sulphur baths, as it is the intention to furnish every attraction required to make this one of the most beautiful and popular health resorts in the State.

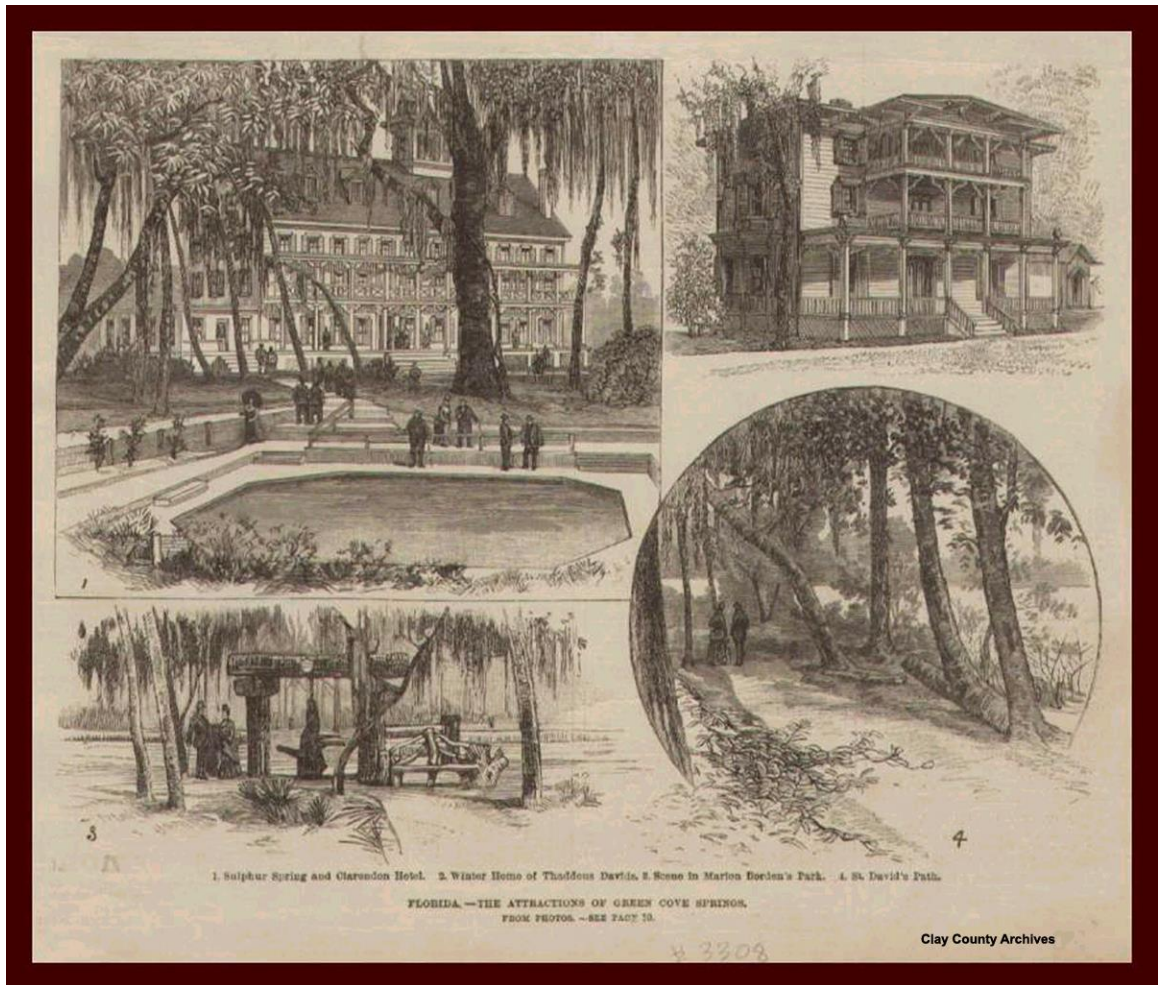
Advertisement in a booklet for the St. Elmo Hotel. The St. Elmo was one of the largest hotels in Green Cove Springs.



Two views of the spring head and bath houses 1873.



Tourists crossing the spring run. The Schulz House, in the background, still stands today.



The Clarendon and the spring, Thaddeus David's winter home, Marion Borden Park & St Davids Path.