

The Waters of Sheldon **Margaret Crowe Kimball**

I remember well the Kimball or Missisquoi A Spring. It was one of the favorite haunts of my childhood. I remember how the waters bubbled out of the earth there to a height of about two to three inches. It was clear, cold, and soft, and it had a distinct sulfur-like taste. It was the Indians, first inhabitants of the area, who first discovered the Mineral Springs in the Town of Sheldon, and realized the water's medicinal uses. It was through them that the curative power of the water became known.

Although the Town of Sheldon can boast of no ponds, marshes or bogs within its boundaries, there are three principal streams that run through the town. They are the Missisquoi, the Black Creek, and the Tyler Branch. The Tyler Branch enters the town on the east and after running about a mile joins the Missisquoi. The Black Creek, whose source is Metcalf Pond, runs through Fairfield, enters the town on the south, and empties into the Missisquoi two miles below. The Indians gave the Missisquoi its name, which means, "Many Water Fowl". The waters of the river teemed with trout and the hills and valleys were a rich hunting ground for them. Their tribes lived and flourished here long before the first white man appeared. Although these original inhabitants have passed into history, except for the occasional finding of an arrowhead or a crude tool, their descendants still live among us and proudly preserve their identity. From the Vermont Historical Gazetteer comes this quote,

"But their name is on your waters,
You cannot wash it out".

Moses Kimball and Eleazer Draper rediscovered the most noted spring, or group of springs, situated near the banks of the Missisquoi. These springs, located on about one half acre of land, became known as "Kimball Springs" when Moses Kimball obtained a deed to them in 1817. Stories of the remarkable healing powers of the water began to spread and the sick from near and far began to come to avail themselves of the curative properties of the water. However, Moses Kimball never commercialized the springs. All were allowed to use the water free of charge.

It did not become a commercial enterprise until 1865 when C. Bainbridge Smith of New York City bought the Missisquoi Springs. Smith, a wealthy lawyer, claimed that he himself had been cured of advanced cancer of the mouth by drinking the water.

In 1868, there were a number of mineral springs in the town. The principal ones were:

- The Kimball or Missisquoi A spring as it had come to be known, property of C. Bainbridge Smith Esq. New York City
- The Sheldon Spring, property of Sheldon Spring Co., S.S.F. Carlisle, Agent
- The Central Spring, property of Green and Co.
- The Vermont Spring, Property of Saxe and Co.

At the time that the Vermont Historical Gazetteer was published in 1871, the Sheldon boom was in full swing. It was reported that the past two seasons had brought visitors from all parts of the country, very much over-crowding the accommodations. New buildings began to spring up, namely two stores and a grocery, a private hospital, (by N.R. Miller, M. D.), 10 private dwelling places, and six hotels. The hotels in town were the following: The New Missisquoi, near the Missisquoi Spring, the Sheldon, near the Sheldon spring, Goodspeed's and Langdon's near the Plank Road Bridge on the north side of the river, the Vermont, and the Keith House in the village, the Central and the Mansion in the village, the Valley House on the south side of the river below the bridge, and Fish's at North Sheldon.

Of these, the Missisquoi was the largest, having 100 private rooms and furnished in the style of the first class city hotels. Water and gas were carried to every room. The cost of furnishing alone was \$35,000.

The article goes on to boast the scenery of the town, the attractive landscape, the view of the Pinnacle, and Dunton Hill where carriages would take visitors to view the gorgeous panorama of the Adirondacks on one side and the most eastern ranges of the Green Mountain on the other. The city of Montreal was visible on that site and it was said that 70 or 80 church steeples could be counted. At that time, G.S. Simmons, Esq. of Boston, Mass., purchased land on Dunton Hill for the erection of an observatory.

At the same time, C. Bainbridge Smith was making plans for a playground near the banks of the Missisquoi for the enjoyment of the guests who came.

I don't believe that any of the plans materialized, since the Sheldon boom was so short-lived. We can only guess why it was over so quickly. Several disastrous fires destroyed some of the hotels that had catered to the many guests who summered here. The loss of these accommodations may have contributed to the boom's demise. Some say that the proprietors had become greedy and had begun to import water from other sources and that their indiscretion had been detected. Then, perhaps people may have realized that the healing powers of the springs had been overstated. Whatever the cause may have been, John Stephen Michaud deeded the Congress hall and property, which had probably become a "White Elephant", to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington on March 26, 1907. The dining room was remodeled to create a chapel and Father Joseph Campeau held Mass there for a time. Then on the night of December 19, 1908 the Congress Hall burned to the ground and in 1911, St. Anthony's Catholic Church was built on the site. Mass was conducted for the first time at St. Anthony' January 1, 1912.

Today, Route 105 goes through so close to the site on one side, and on the other side the sewer treatment plant was built. It is regrettable that so many of our treasures are lost to us in the name of "progress". Now, in my old age, I wonder if that spring is still there. I'm sure that I will be one of the last to remember how the waters bubbled out of the earth like a miniature fountain. How sad that it has slipped into history as silently and unnoticed as did our earliest inhabitants, who were the first to discover the spring and the first to use its healing properties.

Sources for the article:

The Vermont Sunday News – November 2, 1958

The Sheldon Town Report, 1949

The Vermont Historical Gazetteer, 18712