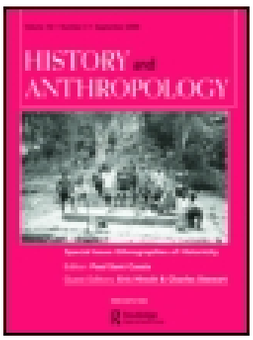

History and Anthropology

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ghan20

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To cite this article: Daniel E. Pierce, Anthony P. Farace & Dana M. Lewis (2021): America's Haven of Health: Hydrotherapy and tourism at Excelsior Springs, Missouri, USA, History and Anthropology, DOI: 10.1080/02757206.2021.1901286

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2021.1901286

Published online: 19 Apr 2021.

HISTORY AND ANTHROPOLOGY
https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2021.1901286

America's Haven of Health: Hydrotherapy and tourism at Excelsior Springs, Missouri, USA

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ABSTRACT

Once known as America's 'Haven of Health', the city of Excelsior Springs, Missouri, USA was home to an estimated 40 unique mineral spring and well sites. This collection of mineral waters is one of the largest in the world. After the discovery of the first spring in the late nineteenth century, the reputation of its therapeutic potential quickly spread. Subsequently, hundreds and thousands flocked to the area daily to enjoy the various health spas and recreational facilities. This study includes the results of archaeological excavations at the most prominent of the springs in the city, Regent Spring. Though once hosting scores of visitors per day who sought health, relaxation and socialization at the spring and associated park, all remnants and features of it have been completely lost to time. Analysis of artefacts recovered at the site illustrate a history of early 1900s health tourism and hydrotherapy. As well as archaeological analysis, primary documents in the form of contemporaneous postcards reveal the motivations and perspective of visitors to this water-centric town. Through these multidisciplinary analyses, this study explores how attitudes towards hydrotherapy and health tourism changed over time and how this town addressed this evolution by shifting focus from mineral springs, to recreation and eventually to state-of the art medical facilities.

KEYWORDS

Historical archaeology; mineral springs; hydrotherapy; health tourism; Missouri

Introduction

Hydrotherapy dates back at least to the ancient Egyptians (Bahadorfar 2014; van Tubergen and van der Linden 2002). This form of alternative medicine utilizes water for pain relief by controlling temperature, pressure and mineral content. Not only can it be used for therapeutic baths, massages and flushes, but advocates have further argued that specific waters may also be drunk for particular ailments (Albertini et al. 2007; Nocco 2008). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this form of therapy was particularly popular (Benedetto and Millikan 1996; Walton 1873). In numerous locales throughout the world, such as Saratoga Springs (United States), Lisdoonvarna (Ireland), Bath (England) and Vichy (France), locals capitalized on naturally occurring

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springs and their perceived therapeutic and restorative properties to promote health tourism (Bender, Balint, and Balint 2002; Goodrich and Goodrich 1987). One other such place to be fortunate enough to have an abundance of mineral springs was the city of Excelsior Springs, Missouri (USA). There, those seeking treatment flocked to the city by the thousands to partake in the various forms of hydrotherapy. At this aquatic boom town, water became so ingrained in the local culture that the entire economy was rested upon it, dubbing the city 'America's Haven of Health' (Bullard 2004).

Excelsior Springs has a much different feel today. In this city of just over 11,000 residents, most of the springs have been capped and the spring houses and pavilions are largely gone. Still today, the city celebrates its water-filled past with popular events such as the city's 'Waterfest' held each summer and the NCAA Division II Mineral Water Bowl football game. The city government is even housed within the defunct hydrotherapy spa known as the Hall of Waters. Nonetheless, throughout the city, much of the physical remnants of this once nationally renowned health mecca have been lost to time as memories of them continue to fade with the passing generations. The local historical society has worked tirelessly with a cadre of volunteers to preserve this history, but it remains largely unknown outside of the region. Now, the call for preservation and revitalization of the fading memory and decaying structures of Excelsior Springs couldn't be more urgent. After decades of flooding and economic hardships from the second half of the twentieth century onward, even the city's famous Hall of Waters is in desperate need of repair. The U.S. National Trust for Historic Preservation recently listed this structure as one of the top 11 most endangered historic places in America (National Trust for Historic Preservation 2020), requiring an estimated $16 million in repairs; a sum far beyond the means of a small city budget (Douglas 2020). In these dire times, it is therefore even more critical to illuminate the city's storied past, before it slips into obscurity. Fortunately, there are numerous methods that can be used to highlight the glory days of Excelsior Springs beyond the relatively fragmented historical record. In this article, we discuss recent efforts made towards these ends using multiple analyses.

Traditionally, there has been little scholarly attention paid to the historic subcultures of the post-settlement Midwestern United States by anthropologists. Rather, this topic typically lies within the purview of historians, often relying upon the historical texts and primary source documents; many of which have been written by contemporaries who would see incentive in giving a particularly rose-tinted perspective due to social, political, or economic interests. More recently, with the increasing acceptance of postmodern critical theory in anthropology, a growing emphasis has been placed upon emic perspectives (Lindlof and Taylor 2002), historical particularism (Harris 1968), and Boasian cultural relativism (Boas 1887). It is within this framework that we here attempt to go beyond the historical narratives written by those wishing to romanticize the features of the time. Rather, we seek to dig into the past ourselves to better understand the people of Excelsior Springs during this critical point in their history based upon what they themselves have left behind.

A Middle Range Theory approach such as this (Merton 1968) can thus incorporate anthropological as well as historical perspectives to situate the behavioural patterns in Excelsior Springs within the broader situational trends of the late nineteenth through the twentieth century. By considering aspects of technology, leisure, health and power-dynamics, we are able to gain a fuller, more nuanced perspective of the city's history

as well as the broader health tourism industry. This type of multidisciplinary approach is critical to a subject such as this. While discrete events and time periods can be understood through historical research, oftentimes questions regarding the broader human condition are left to be addressed through other means. These anthropological foci may include specific ways in which people behave in certain environments, and how they adapt to a changing world around them. It is precisely these issues that we were interested in exploring here. We have sought to not only understand the history of Excelsior Springs and its greatest mineral spring, known as Regent, but to use the information gained through archaeological excavation as well as primary source documents to better understand the visitors themselves. In other words, this study was intended to understand the people (and the behaviours) behind the artefacts in their own historical context based upon the cultural, social and economic environment in which they lived.

This project was initiated in 2015, when University of Missouri-St. Louis archaeologist, Daniel Pierce, began a series of archaeological excavations in Excelsior Springs to recover some of its forgotten history. From 2015 to 2017, he led a team of undergraduate archaeology students in excavations at the location of one of the most prominent springs of the city, Regent Spring (Pierce, Farace, and Channel 2018). At its peak, this particular spring hosted thousands of visitors per day (Bullard 2004). Yet today, the area is little more than a wooded hillside; the once large and beautiful pavilion (Figure 1(A)) with other concrete and stone features now completely reclaimed by vegetation and soil (Figure 1(B)). Nonetheless, through these excavations, the UM-St. Louis team was able to reconstruct the associated park and its features, despite the decades of neglect and periodic flooding.

In the excavation of the Regent Spring site, no artefact type was more informative than the recovered glass bottles. Using diagnostic features, we were able to identify age ranges and function for many of them. From this information, we were then able to track diachronic behavioural change at the site. Though the analysis of glass led to initial conclusions about Regent Park, questions yet remained unanswered regarding the broader history of the city itself. What were the motivations of visitors to Excelsior Springs? And how may have these motivations changed over time in relation to attitudes about hydrotherapy in general? As with any excavation, the archaeological record is fragmentary. Therefore, to better understand how the city was viewed and how perceptions may have varied through the years, the team then analysed over 1000 contemporaneous postcards

Figure 1. (A) Regent Spring pavilion ca. 1910. (B) Members of the UM-St. Louis team reviewing the overgrown step feature (Photo courtesy of Kevin Morgan).

from the city. Using postmarks to determine when they were written, transcriptions of the personal messages provided insight into their reasons for visiting the city and how people may have viewed the city in their own words. Through the combination of these analyses, we have proposed that there was indeed significant variability in the motivations of visitors and how the city itself was viewed at different points in time. Seemingly, emphasis shifted from the specific springs themselves as a symbol of health and the utility of their waters for therapeutic purposes, to more of a vacation and relaxation atmosphere city-wide. By the middle of the twentieth century, visitors were increasingly drawn by the city's numerous hospitals and health clinics where water played a more medically prescriptive yet diminished role.

Background

A brief history of mineral springs

Excelsior Springs can be viewed as part of a broader worldwide phenomenon dating deep into antiquity. Mineral waters are distinguished from natural waters due to the inclusion of certain elemental components (DiMarco et al. 2020). The fortuitous inclusion of these properties facilitates a utility beyond simple hydration in that they can also be particularly useful in certain kinds of relaxation and therapy. For example, sodium and magnesium sulphates in water can have a laxative effect when consumed, while the intake of iron imbued water can help with anaemic conditions through the accelerated production of haemoglobin and red blood cells (Weber and Weber 1896).

Prehistoric peoples identified the unique utility of mineral waters (Muttoni et al. 2011), but there is scant archaeological evidence to inform us how exactly these waters were used therapeutically. Nonetheless, we can be sure that their value became particularly evident once permanent cities were founded. One of the most well-known examples is the complex in Bath, England. Here, ancient Britons, and later Romans, famously used the site for its healing properties. The complex included a multi-bath facility and an associated temple to the Celtic goddess of healing waters, Sulis, and later to the Roman goddess Minerva (Taylor 1923; LaMoreaux and Tanner 2001). Although we do not have written records of specific uses of the waters, evidence exists in the physical remains. Roman cemeteries in Bath, for example, indicate that soldiers sought the baths for recovery from their injuries. The therapeutic value of the waters of Bath has continually been recognized ever since. In 1738, The Mineral Water Hospital (now known as the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases) was founded at Bath to accommodate the many visitors seeking treatment (LaMoreaux and Tanner 2001). The hospital remains in operation to this day.

More recently, places such as Lisdoonvarna in Ireland have attracted scores of visitors for their waters, celebrating their virtues and therapeutic qualities through drinking and bathing (Drew 1996). Like Excelsior Springs, an array of different mineral wells, such as the Copperas Well, Magnesia Well and Sulphur Well could be found at Lisdoonvarna (Luke 1919; Studdert and Plunkett 1875–1877), which were thought to help with ailments such as skin disease (Drew 1996). Early on in America, the curative properties of mineral waters were equally sought out. Bostonian visitors made their way to Red

Spring in Lynn, Massachusetts as early as 1660 to take the waters for the relief of ailments such as 'scorbutic and pulmonary afflictions' (Bridenbaugh 1938). Later, in the years surrounding the American Revolutionary War, seasonal migrations to mineral springs became even more common with those who had the means. One such visitor who is known to have made multiple trips to 'take the waters' of a Virginia spring was America's first president, George Washington (Bridenbaugh 1946). Yet still, until the nineteenth century, visitation to these springs and tourism in general was largely limited to the elite class (Weiss 2004). This changed in the Victorian Era following the Industrial Revolution as leisure time, disposable income, and recreation in general became increasingly accessible (Ferguson 1995; Towner and Wall 1991).

Given their popularity, interest in the identification and study of mineral waters grew in much of the world throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This led to the early creation of numerous volumes that mapped and chemically characterized the many mineral waters throughout Europe and the United States (for example, Bell 1855; McNutt 1888; North 1855; Walton 1873; Weber and Weber 1896). Particular interest was expressed by the scientific and medical community who looked to understand the effects of hydrotherapy as it relates to the mineral constituents on the human body. The medicinal focus offered empirical credence to the intuition of the curative properties of mineral waters and resulted in scores of written works detailing the efficacy of their use as a treatment for a wide array of ailments.

The therapeutic appeal of mineral springs across the United States was augmented by their recreational potential. As European health spas offered various activities beyond physical rehabilitation, those in the U.S. looked to have similar success by promoting springs as tourist attractions. Like their European counterparts, the waters of these springs were utilized for bathhouses, swimming facilities and health and wellness clinics in which visitors could bathe and 'take the waters' (Braden 1988). These activities were particularly popular with the leisure class following the Industrial Revolution, as well-to-do city dwellers looked to escape the increasingly crowded and drab urban spaces and headed to more rural locales for excursions promoting recreation and well-being (Braden 1988; Veblen 1899; MacCannell 1976). The decades following the U.S. Civil War (1861–1865) featured numerous cultural, technological and economic developments which facilitated this new leisure class throughout the country (Braden 1988). Along with increasing levels of disposable income, many were able to work fewer hours and thus had more available free time. While not on the job, workers often sought avenues to wind down in the fresh open air as a getaway from the bleak industrial factories (Braden 1988; Cross 2009). In many ways, these spring towns gave visitors a welcomed change of scenery and a leisurely place to focus on health and relaxation far removed from the hustle and bustle of city life. This newfound interest in leisure travel was then further promulgated by the publication of travel guides, booklets and postcards which gave needed publicity to the burgeoning tourism industry. Using publications such as these, various towns began to promote their own natural attractions such as mineral springs. Other new technologies of the nineteenth century, such as photography, also promoted leisure travel, as people began to be enticed to visit faraway places after seeing photographs of wondrous natural scenescapes (Hannavy 2012). The resulting thirst for relaxation, recreation and excursion therefore provided great incentive for the promotion of unique natural resources at any locale that was fortunate enough to

have them. With minimal investment, these fortuitous natural phenomena could infuse significant amounts of revenue into fledgling local rural economies, and increase prosperity city-wide with secondary industries such as hotels, boarding houses, restaurants and bars.

Increased transportation options also enhanced these recreation centres' availability. While ferries carried revellers to places such as Montesano Springs near St. Louis (St. Louis Post Dispatch 1884) and Cedar Point in Sandusky (Francis and Francis 2009), advances in the carrying capacity and speed of trains led to a further ease of travel and more widespread economic accessibility (Braden 1988). Vacationers were now able to travel to more distant locales with comparative ease. Subsequently, recreation and leisure, as well as the various tourist attractions themselves, soon became a part of the American zeitgeist. As we entered the twentieth century, tourism became even more accessible to the middle class with Henry Ford's mass production of the Model T and the subsequent success of the automobile industry (Cocks 2001). Further, the nationwide economic prosperity in America following World War II and expansive highway systems created even greater accessibility, making leisure travel a possibility for nearly everyone (Lay and Vance 1992).

The popularity of leisure travel in conjunction with a fondness for mineral springs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries led to a booming health-tourism industry as 'spring towns' flourished in many locations throughout the U.S., such as Avon Springs, NY (Salisbury 1845), Buffalo Springs, VA (Jordan 1874) and Hot Springs, AR (Bedinger et al. 1979). Hot Springs, in particular, shares numerous traits with Excelsior Springs. Most notably, it features several different mineral waters (sulphur, magnesia, iron, etc.) which are available at thermal springs (U.S. Department of the Interior 1912). The waters here were reported to treat a slew of conditions including gout, rheumatism, malaria, alcoholism, anaemia and many others (Bedinger et al. 1979). At first, operations at the resort were limited to primarily the summer months, but due to the high demand of patrons looking to escape the winter cold, the springs soon welcomed visitors year-round. Like so many other similar resort towns, its early success was made possible by the expansion of the railroads with lines extending from large cities such as St. Louis and Chicago.

Within Missouri, spring resort towns thrived from the 1880s into the 1930s and 1940s. The publicity from celebrities such as Thomas Hart Benton and Harry S. Truman helped many spring towns in the state such as Loutre Lick and Excelsior Springs thrive (Bullard 2004). Nonetheless, negative experiences at some of the spring towns in Missouri and across the United States, such a lack of upkeep, failing medical treatments and raucous crowds, eventually led to poor reputations and subsequent declines in attendance at many spas and springs (Braden 1988; Smith 1963). Local press described Saratoga Springs in New York, for example, as attracting 'dense, democratic, and vulgar' people in the early 1900s, in contrast to the more genteel and orderly visitors of the late 1800s (Dix 1911). Meanwhile, hydrotherapy was falling out of favour in lieu of more scientific cures by the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Further, more proximal options for recreation and health within the large urban centres made the prospect of travelling to the sometimes secluded spring towns less appealing (Bullard 2004). Subsequently, the industry collapsed in the mid-twentieth century.

History of Excelsior Springs

Advertised on postcards and brochures throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as 'America's Haven of Health' and 'America's National Health Resort', Excelsior Springs, Missouri has been inextricably linked to its mineral waters since its inception. The city was founded in 1880 by Rev. John Van Buren Flack, a merchant and preacher, along with Anthony W. Wyman. Wyman was a local landowner who had a mineral spring on his property near the Fishing River. Various stories surround this spring, first known as 'Excelsior' and later named 'Siloam' in 1881. Several sources credit an African American farmer, Travis Mellion, with discovering the healing properties of the iron-rich spring (Wolfenbarger 2012a). Allegedly, drinking and bathing in the spring's water alleviated the symptoms of skin disease in Mellion's young daughter Opal. Meanwhile, another local resident, Frederick Kugler, purportedly cured an old Civil War knee wound using water from the spring as well. Other accounts claim that it was instead Kugler's horse that was cured (City of Excelsior Springs 2006). Nonetheless, these first rumours of healing waters led to chemical analyses of the springs which would soon put Excelsior Springs on the map.

The town was officially mapped out in 1880. Originally named Vigniti, the city quickly changed its name to Excelsior Springs only two years later. After Siloam, many more springs were soon discovered in the surrounding area (Crook 1899). Regent Spring, identified by Captain J.L. Farris, was the second mineral spring to be discovered and would remain the city's most prominent. Located on the East bank of the Fishing River, Regent Spring produced iron-manganese water like Siloam Spring. Eventually, at least 40 mineral spring and well sites were identified in the decades surrounding the turn of the century (Figure 2) (Wolfenbarger and Morgan 1993). Following each new spring's discovery, chemical analysis determined its mineral content and potability (Excelsior Springs Chamber of Commerce 1930). The water was then marketed for its presumed healing properties based upon its composition and sold by the glass or bottle. Excelsior Springs featured five primary water types: iron-manganese, calcium bicarbonate, sodium bicarbonate, sulfur and saline. The diversity and number of springs brought national prominence to the town as one of the largest concentrations of different mineral waters in the world, paving the way for a local tourism industry to rival the largest health spa towns in the United States and abroad.

Many of the springs, including Siloam and Regent, had associated sales pavilions and/or pagoda-like structures, each with their own unique style. Pavilions were typically made of wood with shingled roofs and often featured a large open area for seating. There, visitors congregated to partake in some water drinking, relaxation and socialization. Photographers would often visit these pavilions to document the large crowds several times a week (Figure 3) (Wolfenbarger 2012b). Initially, private ownership of the wells was the standard throughout the city, with several, including Siloam and Regent Springs, owned by the Excelsior Springs Company, who also operated the first Elms Hotel (Wolfenbarger 2012b). Some wells were even incorporated directly into storefronts, such as the Jones Soda Water well on Excelsior Street, one of the main thoroughfares of the downtown area (City of Excelsior Springs 2006).

The grand appeal of Excelsior Springs was rooted in the combination of hydrotherapeutic methods available. In addition to drinking the various mineral waters, visitors

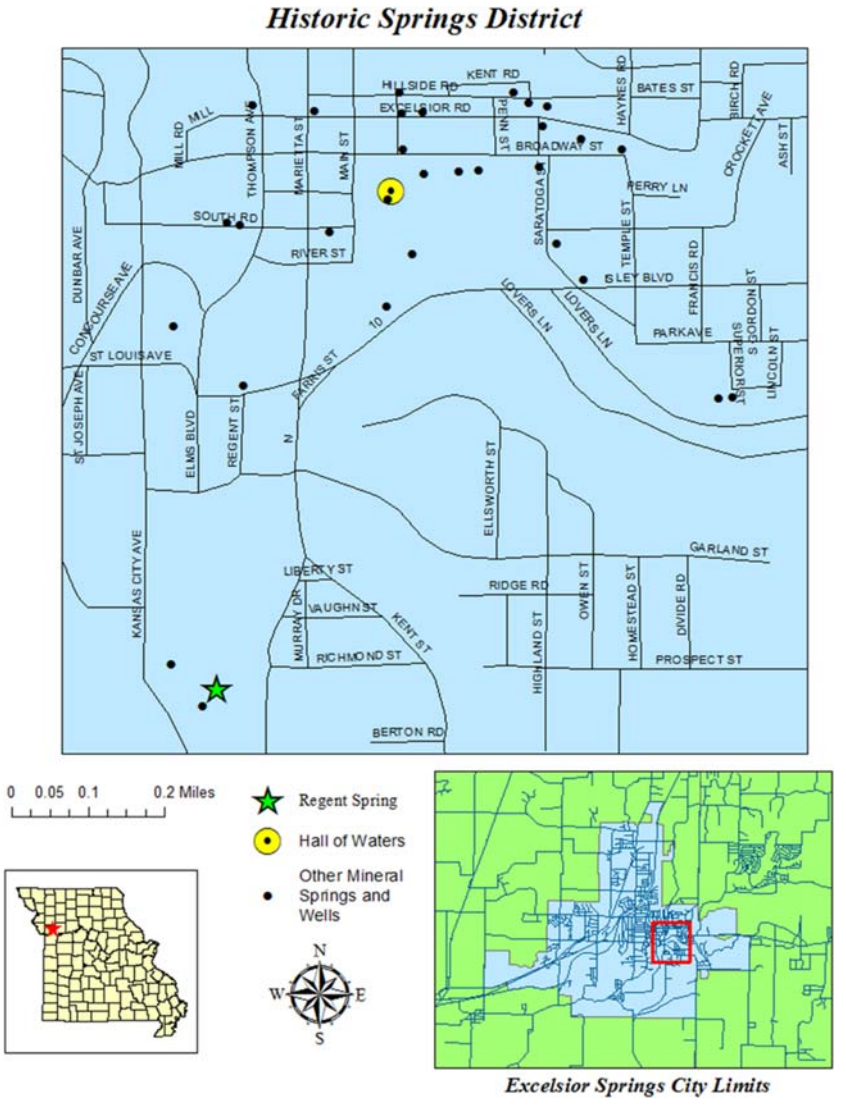

Figure 2. The locations of historic springs over modern streets.

could also bathe in them, and receive other spa treatments. Throughout the city, stand-alone bath houses came first, followed shortly thereafter by those installed in larger hotels including the Elms, Snapp (later Oaks) and Royal. But not every attraction in Excelsior Springs was health related. Other amusements were available as well (for example, an amusement park, lakeside roller skating rink, music hall, bowling alley and golf courses). Trains, streetcars, and rapidly expanding road networks also fueled tourism through increased accessibility. Over time, Excelsior Springs experienced dynamic changes in tourist interest, reflective of shifts in national attitudes, economic environments and technological developments. Though the waters remained a major draw, the recreation oriented outings popularized by the turn-of-the-century leisure class (Veblen 1899; MacCannell 1976) soon gave way to more pragmatic medical tourism

Figure 3. Crowd at Regent Spring pavilion. ca. 1915 (Photo courtesy of Excelsior Springs Museum and Archives).

beginning in the second quarter of the twentieth century as full-fledged health clinics became more commonplace. At this time, attendance at the springs themselves had begun to decline as the local clinics were seen as more suitable for treatment of certain ailments, particularly those related to gastro-intestinal disorders (City of Excelsior Springs 2006).

Any understanding of Excelsior Springs and the accessibility of tourism during its florescence should also be situated in the overall power dynamics of the period. One cannot ignore the racial tensions within the Midwestern United States at the time. Similar to places all across the nation, many aspects of the city and its services remained racially segregated from the town's inception through the 1930s. The health tourism industry itself was similarly affected with the segregation of services and spaces such as bath houses. However, illness does not discriminate. As such, there was still a desire to seek out the healing waters within the African American community as well. Consequently, many African Americans became important players in the history of Excelsior Springs. Though owned by a white man, the city's first bath house was operated by an African American man named Robert Spence Eweng (Excelsior Springs Daily Call 1904). Soon thereafter, an African American physician by the name of Dr. D. A. Ellett left his medical practice behind to manage the Elms Hotel Bath House and then went on to own and operate his own bath house, known as the Star Bath House, in 1892. By this time, there were already at least five bath houses catering specifically to African Americans within the city limits (Wolfenbarger 2012c) with multiple others opening in the early years of the twentieth century (U.S. National Park Service 2009; Rice 2003).

The different springs were likely also segregated. Due to Regent Spring's location in an affluent part of the city and its connection to the luxurious Elms Hotel, the spring itself and associated park were likely frequented primarily by the more economically affluent white clientele of the hotel (U.S. National Park Service 2009). Clearly, African Americans were involved in many aspects of the health tourism industry as visitors, managers and even owners, yet racial as well as socioeconomic factors would have certainly been a factor in how the healing waters of Excelsior Springs were used and to what degree they would have been available.

Eventually, the city took ownership of many of the springs in the 1930s and subsequently consolidated ten of them through a federal Public Works Administration funded project (Short and Stanley-Brown 1939). This culminated in the construction of the 'Hall of Waters' and the razing of several pavilions. The consolidation of the springs, along with the economic hardships of the Great Depression, effectively ended the pavilion period in Excelsior Springs. Yet, despite the economic devastation of the times, the city was able to stave off financial collapse. As well as providing jobs and a state-of-the-art city-owned spa facility, the federal subsidization of the Hall of Waters effectively countered much of the lost tourism revenue from the reduction of as many as 100,000 annual visitors compared to the decade before (Bullard 2004).

The Hall of Waters, first opened in 1937, functioned as a health spa and water bar. It was designed by the Keene & Simpson architectural firm in an Art Deco style featuring Native American motifs. These stylistic embellishments were meant to highlight the local continuity from the distant past to the present, much like other world famous health spa towns in Europe such as Bath. This imagery reflected a prevailing theme utilized by civic boosters of the time, which was meant to legitimize the prehistoric lineage of Excelsior Springs by co-opting Native American imagery in the creation of the advertising icon 'Chief Wapoo' (Chalfant 2017). Though the Hall of Waters serves as Excelsior Springs City Hall today, it originally housed the city's main bottling operations as well as the 'World's Longest Water Bar' which facilitated the sale of waters from ten different springs from a single room (Daily Standard 1987). Today, as well as functioning as the main city administrative building, the Hall of Waters is also a museum of sorts, welcoming modern tourists with historical displays and exhibits as an attraction in its own right.

Regent Spring

Regent Spring was perhaps the most significant of any spring in the city. Initially called Empire Spring, its story broadly mirrors that of the entire town of Excelsior Springs. When first discovered, it was accessible only from the East side of the Fishing River, but soon became a popular focal point of the city after the addition of a swinging bridge over the river connecting to the Elms Hotel property. To accommodate the visitors, the site featured a large pavilion (see Figures 1A and 3) at which crowds congregated daily. Regent Spring was such a draw, in fact, that the Kansas University Glee Club even performed there every morning for several summers to crowds of hundreds gathered on the veranda of the nearby bottle works and the spring pavilion (The Daily Standard 1930). As a premiere spring of the city, Regent brought notoriety to Excelsior Springs when its bottled waters won a gold medal at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, along with a Soterian Spring ginger ale (City of Excelsior Springs 2006). Both of these waters were bottled at the Excelsior Springs Mineral Water Co. adjacent to Regent Spring (Chalfant 2017). While the West side of the river had the bottling works and the Elms Hotel, the East bank featured the grand pavilion and an amusement park (Figure 4).

Regent Spring's period of usage spans the late 1880s through 1936. During this time, the surrounding landscape was altered several times. Flooding in 1915 damaged the swinging bridge and park, while the pavilion was in disrepair by the 1920s. In 1925, the

Figure 4. Regent Park Amusement Park. ca. 1910 (Image courtesy of the Excelsior Springs Museum and Archives).

site was repaired when it was acquired by the city with public funds earmarked for tourism promotion (Wolfenbarger 2012b). The nearby Excelsior Springs Bottling Co. was similarly a city staple and operated from 1889 until the mid-1920s. At its peak, as many 10,000 bottles of Ginger Ale and mineral waters were produced here (Excelsior Springs Daily Call 1905). After being decommissioned as a bottling factory, the building was used for storage until it was eventually destroyed by fire in 1930 (The Daily Standard 1930). With ownership held by the city, Regent became one of ten waters piped into the Hall of Waters. Once the mineral water was redirected from Regent, the pavilion was razed and the park area was left generally unused.

As early as the 1970s, Regent Spring was reportedly 'lost to time', with any remaining features of the site crumbling and covered by thick vegetation and soil. Other spring sites shared a similar fate. Today, only rusty pipes and concrete slabs, or in Regent's case, fragments of a concrete steps, mark the former popular hangouts (Duncan 1976). At Regent, the ever-changing banks of the Fishing River and erosion/deposition cycles have accelerated its disappearance (Wolfenbarger 2012b). The ephemeral nature of once formidable structures in the face of the march and time is reflective of the fate of the city, which now exists as a minor suburb of Kansas City with a tourism industry a mere shadow of what it once was (Smith 1963). Today, the structures of this bygone era have all but disappeared. The waters no longer flow from the springs to the Hall of Waters, and the myriad of health clinics which once welcomed thousands of ailing visitors to the city into the 1960s have been shuttered. Since then, the tourism dollars have largely dried up like the now capped springs.

Perhaps the most significant factors in this demise, however, were the streams of negative publicity due to an exposé published in the *Saturday Evening Post* (Smith 1963) and the increased reliance upon more scientific approaches in lieu of hydrotherapy. In this investigative report, journalist Ralph Lee Smith posed as a book seller who was experiencing back pain. In his ruse, he contacted one of Excelsior Springs' most popular health clinics, the Ball Clinic, and scheduled a visit. After telling the doctor that a knee pain had migrated to his back, he received a 'medical' evaluation consisting of nothing more than a few taps on his back and legs. Immediately following this evaluation, he was diagnosed as being a sufferer of fibrositis (fibromyalgia), a disorder causing musculoskeletal pain with secondary symptoms such as stiffness, pain along one's spine, fatigue, headaches, numbness and irritable bowel syndrome (Wolfe 1986). Subsequently,

he was prescribed a strict diet, a two week stay at the clinic, and various treatments such as 'Professional Service' (chiropractic and physical therapy), 'Radio wave' and 'Colonics'. This treatment cocktail earned him a total bill of over $380 plus room and board for his non-existent ailment; an equivalent to over $3300 today. The entire ordeal was then described in the popular nationwide publication. Expectedly, this exposé irreparably tarnished the image of the city and caused many to question the sincerity of the city's health tourism industry.

Methods

Archaeological excavation

In May of 2015, the UM- St. Louis team of archaeologists began excavating the upper shelf of Regent Park overlooking the Fishing River. The team set up excavation units along the edge of the wooded hillside sloping towards a 90° river bend below. Work began with clearing of overgrowth to identify architectural features that may be left protruding from the soil. During this initial clearing, the team discovered several small concrete remnants, mostly buried but with portions slightly exposed. From these observations, the location of five separate excavation units were selected. The team focused there attentions on (1) A buried set of steps, (2) The remains of what was likely a concrete bench and (3) The area directly above the steps leading to the park.

Soil was excavated stratigraphically in 10 cm levels from each 1 × 1 m unit. All soil was screened through ¼ inch mesh hardware and collected artefacts were bagged separately based upon their vertical and horizontal provenience. For each excavation unit, maps were drawn to better recognize soil changes and to record context of artefacts and features. Later, these individual unit maps were aggregated to better visualize the site as a whole. For excavation units at the steps, soil was removed until the concrete was fully exposed. Elsewhere, excavations continued until sterile soil was reached. When sterile soil was reached, a new unit was begun nearby. In the end, an approximate area of 10 m^2 was excavated on the upper shelf with multiple units directly over the stairs. A secondary area was also excavated approximately 25 m North of the steps where other concrete features were identified.

Excavations were carried out over two week periods in the month of May each spring for three years. During each session, 8–12 students worked onsite every day, rain or shine, for the two weeks. In the evenings and weekends, all recovered artefacts were washed and re-bagged for curation at the UM- St. Louis archaeology lab. This excavation served as an Archaeological Field Methods course for credit towards an undergraduate degree in anthropology and a certificate in archaeology at the university. At the end of each two week session, all excavation units were backfilled to prevent further site deterioration and erosion.

When not excavating, the crew also enjoyed 'bottle hunting' on the lower shelf. Here, students searched the river banks and the shallows of the Fishing River for glass remains that may have either eroded from the soil or have been washed downstream from elsewhere. Of course, the context of these bottles is lost. But valuable information can yet be learned from them. Specifically, this often produced larger bottle fragments than could be recovered from excavations. In many cases, these artefacts are essential, because only on

these larger bottle fragments can diagnostic traits regarding manufacture method and date be identified. Later, students catalogued all artefacts recovered from these excavations as part of Pierce's Archaeological Lab Methods course at UM-St. Louis.

Bottle analysis

The analysis of glass bottles collected from Regent Spring was carried out in order to determine the who, the when and the how of manufacturing as well as the function of each bottle. Investigations were conducted using standard bottle analysis protocols outlined by the Society for Historical Archaeology (Lindsey 2020). The first key piece of information to look for in bottle analysis is the determination of manufacture date. By knowing the manufacturing methods, the bottles can be narrowed down into an approximate time range within which they were produced (Farnsworth and Walthall 2011; Hume 1991; McKearin and Wilson 1978; Tooley 1961). Different manufacturing methods can be distinguished by morphological features on the bottles, such as seams and pontil scars. Bottles were sorted into three categories: Mould-made, Machine-made and Unknown. For our discussion, we use the term mould-made to refer to those bottles that were hand blown and used a mould for formation, rather than those that used moulds for machine manufacture. Mould-made bottles are formed when glass is blown into a fitting two, three, or four-part mould (Lindsey 2020; Toulouse 1969). This will leave a seam which is diagnostic to the type of mould used. Typically, these bottles are considered to date to the post-civil war period up to the 1920s (Lindsey 2020). The shift to machine made bottles began in the early 1900s and became increasingly popular over time (Jones and Sullivan 1989; Toulouse 1967). Many of these earlier machine-made bottles exhibit a mould seam that does not extend to the entirety of the bottle, but rather terminates at the lip. Machine-made bottles may also include a neck ring, hairline or 'ghost seams', and suction scars. Other features such as venting marks, tooled vs applied finishes, embossing and distinctive maker's marks can also be used to further narrow down the date of all types of bottle manufacture. Bottles that feature embossing indicative of specific druggists or companies can also provide a unique opportunity, as the bottle's dates are necessarily limited to the company's dates of operation. Other more modern bottles often exhibit maker's marks (Toulouse 1971; Lockhart 2013) that are diagnostic of a certain production company, factory, and/or particular batch which can often be linked to a specific year or years.

Much like the assessment of date ranges, embossed bottles provide an opportunity for identifying a bottle's purpose as well. Many of the bottles collected from Regent Spring featured embossed words that could be used to distinguish specific druggists or products. This indicates the bottles were containers for a limited set of items from that particular supplier. For bottles without the aforementioned features, use was considered based upon shape and typology (Lindsey 2020; Farnsworth and Walthall 2011). Bottles were then divided into four categories based upon their suspected function: medicinal, recreational, sustenance and unknown.

Postcard analysis

To assess how visitors to Regent Spring, and more broadly the city of Excelsior Springs, viewed the waters and the tourism industry, we referred to contemporaneous postcards.

We collected data from historic postcards available online commercially. In total, data from 1003 postcards were collected. This included the recordation of the images used, postmark dates and the transcription of written text when present. While many of these postcards may have never been used, as evidenced by the lack of writing or postmark, basic information regarding the images portrayed was recorded nonetheless. For the purposes of our study, we then removed all postcards that featured no indication of date nor use from further analyses. This ensured that the card was not simply part of unsold surplus. It is worth noting, however, that the number of existing cards today may also be affected by other factors such as differential preservation and curation. But given the large sample size, the effect of factors such as these appears negligible if even a factor at all. Overall, postmark dates could be used to identify the card to a specific year in 463 cases.

After transcribing all written text, we coded them for key information for the purposes of identifying temporal trends, including location to which the card was mailed and for written content (for example, mentions of water, springs, sickness, treatment, fun and more). We then correlated specific traits to identify patterns. Key characteristics included how the images used on cards relate to the date the card was sent. We believe this reflects not only what types of images were preferred to represent the city but also which images individuals chose to purchase as a representative snapshot of their stay in Excelsior Springs. In other words, this may indicate how the city portrayed itself as well as how visitors may have seen the city. But the images alone may not suffice in fully reflecting how visitors perceived the city, as they are limited by the postcards available to them at the time.

For this reason, it is also important to consider the words written by the visitors. In many cases, the text revealed little explicit information about the city or the purpose of the visit. But an identification of keywords through the use of a word cloud can be telling. Nonetheless, a visitor's intentions can at times be made quite clear through direct firsthand accounts. After full transcriptions, we made three broad categories of themes mentioned (water, treatment and fun/relaxation). The topic of water included springs, water drinking, bathing, mineral water swimming pools and hydrotherapy. Treatment included any sort of medicines, therapy, or prescriptive actions for the improvement of illness, injury, or overall health. Fun and relaxation included references to either simple relaxation or activities such as games of golf, attending shows, visiting restaurants, or drinking alcohol at bars. These topics are not mutually exclusive, however. In many cases, more than one theme is mentioned on the same card. For example, an individual who is receiving hydrotherapy may mention water as well as treatment. In other cases, a visitor could have undergone surgery at one of the hospitals or clinics and may not mention water in any way. Conversely, some cards make no mention of any of the themes of interest. In total, 281 data points were identified based upon these three categories, all of which could also be temporally placed. We then aggregated the data by decade to identify broader trends regarding the focus of visitors during their stay. Based upon the known history of Excelsior Springs, as well as artifactual data from Regent Spring, the authors hypothesized that both text and images from the postcards would follow marked shifts from an emphasis on healing through waters to recreation and back towards more clinical healing. This shift would illustrate an overall trend from hydrotherapy at the city's onset, to entertainment in the pavilion period, and back to health with clinic based health tourism.

Results

The excavation

After three seasons, all excavation unit maps were synthesized into a comprehensive site map (Figure 5). Based upon the map and historic photos for various angles, we can reconstruct the layout of the original site. The grand pavilion would have been directly in front of the steps on the lower shelf. Nothing remains of this pavilion but with a high degree of certainty we know its precise location. The large concrete steps went up the hillside to the upper shelf. We noticed an abundance of large stones and mortar scattered just to the South of the steps. Likely, these are the remains of a retaining wall used to prevent hillside erosion. Upon excavation, we also uncovered the gravel path along the edge of the hill. Beginning at the steps, this path ran northwards parallel to the river and was little more than a few centimetres thick. Much of it has been disturbed and as such, its precise footprint remain unclear. However, synthesized mapping reveals that this path cuts North through multiple excavation units along the upper shelf and may have terminated at the now-gone swinging bridge that crossed the river to the Elms Hotel property. Future excavations may better identify the full extent and direction of this path.

Approximately half way up the steep wooded hillside, the remains of a more intact stone and mortar retaining wall can also be observed. Over time, the wall has suffered slippage and parts have been destroyed and/or become buried. At the terminus of this retaining wall, the steps meet to a larger concrete landing. From here, based upon contemporaneous images, a wooden catwalk once connected the landing directly to the pavilion. Particularly over the gravel path, erosion has led to a shallow soil profile. In most cases, 10 cm or less separates the modern surface from the layer of gravel. This resulted in minimal deposition of artefacts for much of the excavated area. Nonetheless, based upon the collected artefacts and proximity, the nearby Regent Amusement Park and the Elms Hotel likely both affected recreation at Regent Spring.

Overall, the archaeological record is extremely fragmentary at Regent Spring. This is due to the shallow anthropogenic soil and frequent erosion/deposition cycles. Based upon the superposition alone, any artefacts found above the gravel, would have been

Figure 5. Comprehensive map of UM-St. Louis excavations (2015–2017).

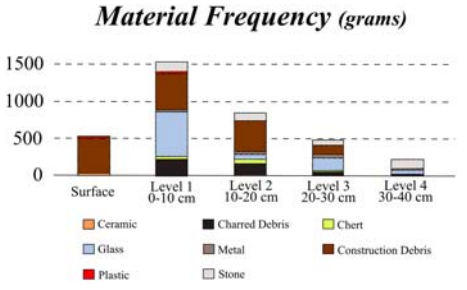

Figure 6. Stratigraphic artefact type frequency by excavation level.

deposited after the path's use, not during. However, the gravel served as a barrier preventing the deposition of artefacts during use of the park as well. For this reason, the archaeological material recovered is largely limited to more modern debitage, from after the pavilion period. Further, few temporally diagnostic artefacts were recovered at all. As such, we must rely solely upon superposition as a relative dating technique to assess diachronic behavioural patterns at the site. Overall, glass and construction debris make up the majority (by weight) of the artefacts recovered (Figure 6). Other material types found with some frequency include forms of metal, unidentified charred debris, stone and occasional ceramic and plastic fragments. We also identified minimal prehistoric artefacts at all stratigraphic levels in the form of small chert debris. Given the vertical context of these prehistoric artefacts, they are clearly not in situ and are rather secondary deposits of unknown origin. Of all recovered artefacts, the bottles and bottle fragments remain the most informative.

Bottle analysis

In total, 41 bottles were analysed from the site. Of these, 37 had diagnostic features that allowed for a more refined date and functional designation. Out of the diagnostic bottles, 12 were mould-made and 25 were machine-made. One bottle remained uncharacterized due to a lack of diagnostic features. Factoring the beginning date of occupation at the Regent Spring site, the mould-made group dated approximately from 1880 to 1929. The majority of the bottles (75%) were classified as druggist bottles and thus medicinal. These bottles are primarily made of thin glass, with a narrow neck and mouth. They have a variety of shapes but most are no larger than 10–14 cm in height and consist of a rectangular box frame. Many of the bottles are classified as druggist due to the embossed details (Fike 1987). For example, one particular bottle was embossed with 'PEPSIN' indicating that the contents of the bottle contained a laxative. Another bottle was used for 'Dr. King's New Life Pills' which were billed as cures for poor digestion, stomach and intestinal pain and constipation (H.E. Bucklin & Co 1894). Other bottles in this temporal group included two sustenance bottles and one recreational bottle.

Twenty-five machine made bottles were also recovered from the site. Two fall into the pre-1930s group. These consist of one recreational wine bottle and one early sustenance category *Bunte* candy jar (see Wilson, Porter, and Reiff 2005). Eight bottles fall into a date

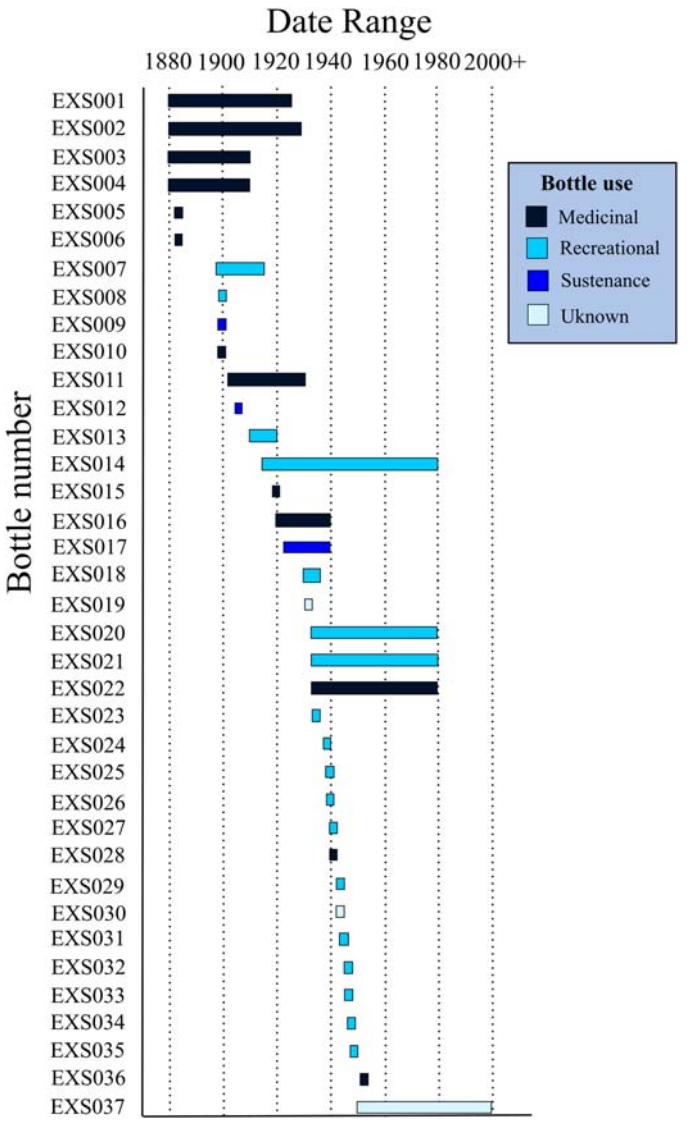

Figure 7. Temporal distribution of glass bottle types from Regent Spring.

range of 1920–1940. Half of these were classified as sustenance bottles. This includes a bottle from *Virginia Dare Flavors* who produces a variety of sauces and jellies. Two of the bottles from this time period were recreational bottles. One bottle fell into the medicinal category and has embossed lettering (Rexall Drug Store) (see Smith 2004). A final bottle type was left undefined and its date was established primarily based upon the Owens Illinois maker's mark present on the base. The rest of the bottles ($n = 14$) date to the period from 1930 to 1980. The highest proportion ($n = 6$ [43%]) of these bottles fell into the sustenance category. The remainder fell into the recreational category ($n =$ 5 [36%]), the medicinal category (2, [14%]), or the unknown category ($n = 1$, [7%]) (Figure 7).

Post card analysis

Postcard analysis also yielded several significant results, with analytical objectives separated into three primary categories: locational analysis, image analysis and textual analysis. All three of these categories can be considered in discussions of broader trends as they relate Excelsior Springs to the national trajectory of spring and health tourism by using postmarks to determine the date of the card's use. The total number of postcards used for each analysis is unequal, due to variation in the amount and types of data points available for each card. For example, postcards may have location data in the form of a handwritten receiver address, but no other text to convey purpose.

Location analysis reveals the far reach of the popularity of Excelsior Springs (Figure 8). This is based upon the postcards for which receiver address could be identified ($n = 296$). Some postcards may have been sent to places other than where the visitors themselves originated. However, based upon a lack of evidence to the contrary and the large number of cards that were sent to other nearby locations in the region, we suspect that this happened infrequently. Therefore, we believe that this analysis largely reflects the places from which visitors had come. As expected, most of the unique correspondences went to receivers from elsewhere in Missouri and neighbouring states. However, Excelsior Springs truly was 'America's Haven of Health' in the sense that its reputation was spread to both coasts, as well as states with other significant mineral and hot springs of their own, such as New York. Significantly, the states that appear most common are along critical railways. The Chicago, St. Paul, Milwaukee, and Wabash rail lines all crossed through Excelsior Springs as well as several interurban lines from Kansas City and elsewhere in Western Missouri (Zirschky 2016). As transportation options became more abundant with the increasing prominence of automobile travel, states with no access to these rail lines became more frequently represented at later time periods (Figure 9).

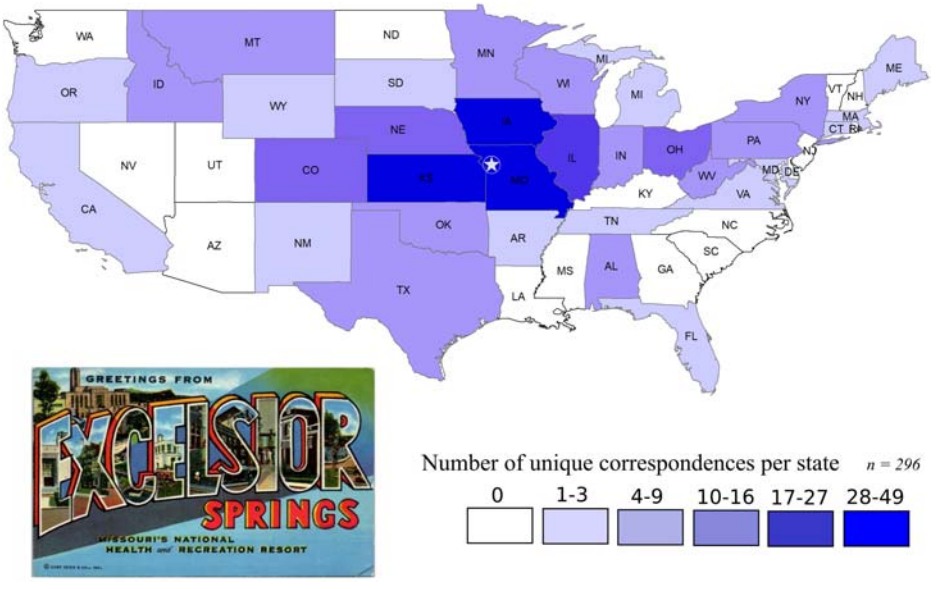

Figure 8. Unique correspondences per (receiver's) state.

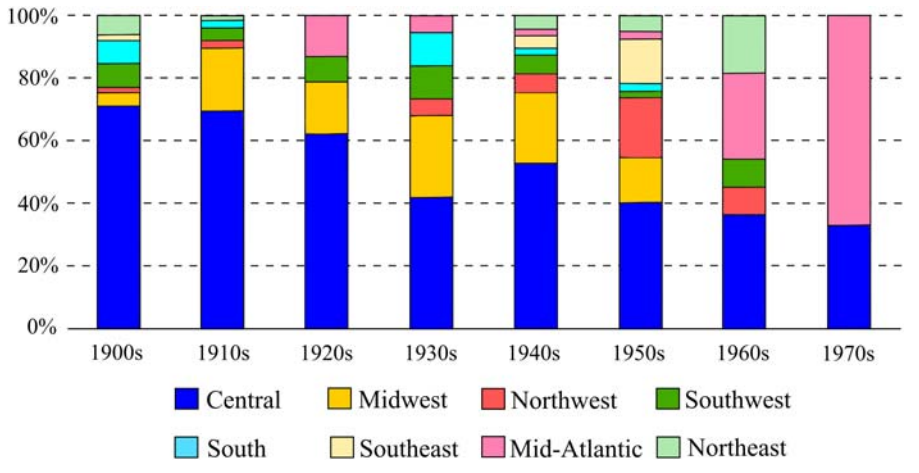

Figure 9. Postcard receiver location by US region per decade.

An image frequency analysis was completed for a total of 462 postcards which could be linked to a particular decade. Though Excelsior Springs was functioning as a tourist town in two decades prior, no postcards were confirmed to be from the 1880s or 1890s. The visual elements of these historic postcards are direct evidence of the advertising trends as both public and private entities sought to market their city to visitors. While not unsurprising, the data in Figure 10 provides valuable correlation for the phases in Excelsior Springs' history. For example, in the mid-teens and 1920s, hotels moved to replace smaller boarding houses, accounting for the significant increase in proportion of hotel imagery found on postcards from these decades, and the complete elimination from the sample size of the 'other lodging' category until the 1950s when motels tied to the new interstate system became popular (Chalfant 2017). Other significant

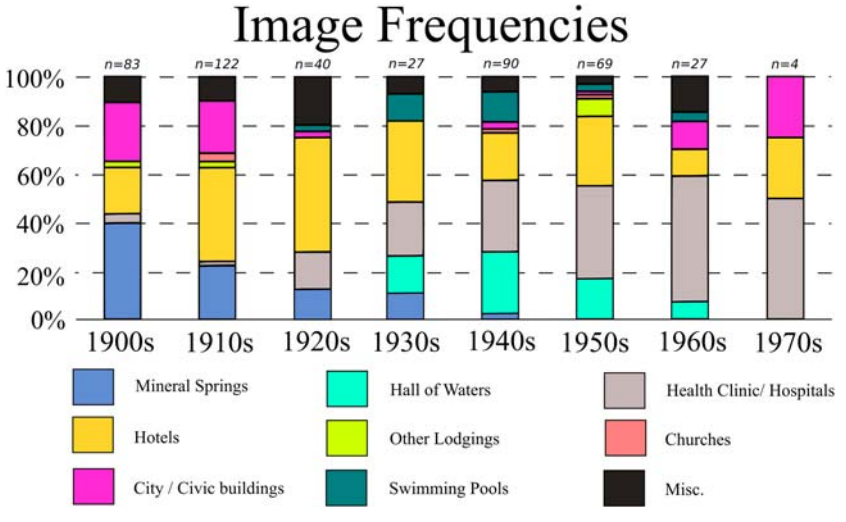

Figure 10. Postcard image frequency by decade.

proportional changes include a focus on the mineral springs themselves, reflective of the early pavilion phase up through the 1920s, and the subsequent increase and sustained presence of health clinics and hospital imagery up through the 1970s, well past the shuttering of several of the more popular locations including the Ball Clinic in 1963 (Zirschky 2016). Also notable in this dataset is the overall number of postcards per decade, with the highest being the 1910s followed by the 1940s and 1900s, and a significant drop in the 1920s and 1930s, and then again in the 1960s. This drop in total cards likely reflects a decrease in overall visitors due to nationwide trends in economics and culture.

When we consider the firsthand accounts of visitors through the transcribed texts, we can see similar trends. Overall, a textual analysis in the form of a word cloud reveals that many of the most common keywords identified in the texts relate to wellbeing (Figure 11). But this alone leaves out valuable contextual clues regarding the motivations of visitors in coming to Excelsior Springs. Further, many keywords can be equally used in different contexts. Nonetheless, it is clear that most visitors discussed their somatic experiences in Excelsior Springs, rather than descriptions of their environment.

Figure 12, on the other hand, provides this greater context through the assessment of diachronic change for the major themes being written about, such as water, treatment (health-related) and fun/relaxation. Just as in the previous discussion, the number of postcards considered varies. This is due to the fact that some postcards made no mention of any of these themes, while others may have mentioned more than one. A total of 281 coded ‘theme mentions’ were noted that could be attributed to a particular decade. As with the image frequency analysis, the number of postcards dips in the 1930s and tapers off in the 1960s and 1970s, correlating with the Great Depression and then the decreasing popularity of hydrotherapy in the mid-1960s.

Overall, it appears that ‘water’ as a topic is proportionally consistent throughout the decades. This is due to the fact that it is a common theme that transcends the different

Figure 11. Word cloud of keywords in postcard transcriptions.

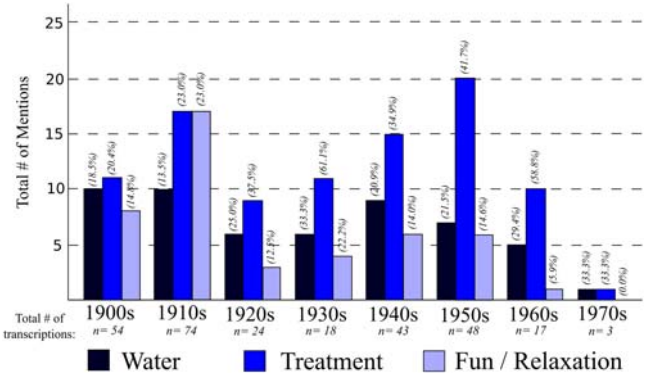

Figure 12. Frequency of themes in transcribed tests per decade.

periods and is related to both treatment and relaxation. It is most certainly the central element of the spring pavilions and hydrotherapy, but also correlates to several forms of recreation in Excelsior Springs such as the mineral water swimming pool at Maurer Lake. Based upon other evidence, diachronic change for mentions of 'treatment' is as expected – of higher and then equal frequency in the first decades of the twentieth century, and waning significantly in the 1920s as city leaders pushed for growth in recreation to supplement the ageing sales pavilions such as Regent (Excelsior Springs Chamber of Commerce 1930). Mentions of treatment then continue to increase again through the 1950s, echoing the growing number of local health clinics. Though the number of transcribed postcards drops significantly in the 1960s, treatment remains a consistent subject through the 1970s. It is important to note that in addition to several hydrotherapy clinics that continued to operate through this period, a Veteran Administration Hospital, was also in operation from 1924 until 1965 (Wolfenbarger 1996).

Excelsior Springs was marketed from the 1920s through the 1950s as a destination for recreation as well as health and healing, as revealed by the image analysis. References to fun and/or relaxation in the assemblage further indicates the success of this marketing strategy. Though these themes were most prominent in the early twentieth century during the hotel and pavilion periods, they persisted through at least the 1950s. Following the pavilion period, marketing appears to have focused more upon leisure activities and then clinical therapy. This is evident through artefactual, textual and image analyses.

Discussion

The results of archaeological excavations and subsequent analysis of bottle remains indicate a shift of behaviours at Regent Spring. The earliest bottles relate to medicinal use in some way. This is reflective of the status of the location as premiere mineral spring for therapeutic waters. Individuals came to the spring in the thousands to partake in the waters to heal their illnesses and injuries (Wolfenbarger 2012b). But despite the spring's perceived therapeutic utility, we see an increase in bottles used for other purposes over time. This illustrates the rise in popularity of this site as more than just a place for healing. Following the redirection of the spring upon the construction of the Hall of Waters, the site of the original spring and pavilion lost all appeal as a source of

health tourism (Duncan 1976). Soon thereafter, the site remained a simple park frequented by teenagers from the nearby Roosevelt High School. It is thus unsurprising that few post-1930 bottles have been identified that are medicinally related.

The bottle analysis may also provide us critical insight into the contradictions on what 'health' meant to those visiting Regent Spring. While the spring itself represents healing and treatment, some of the bottles found on the site do not represent what would have been considered healthy during the time. Candy, for example, was evidently enjoyed given the discovery of the Bunte Candy jar. However, candy was often see as an overindulgence even at that time (Kawash 2010). During this period, it was being consumed like never before, which led to many concerns. Criticisms of candy far exceeded dietary concerns alone and included fears such as its presumed increasingly bad quality, that it could lead children to illness due to the heightened exposure to germs from handing money, and that it would simply destroy the moral innocence of children (Kawash 2010). Consequently, the presence of glass related to sweets at Regent Spring indicate that not everyone was concerned with health. Similarly, temporal patterns in bottle use also reveal a trend towards more recreational drinking. This shows a sharp break with health and wellness and more towards the consumption of liquor and other drinks unrelated to Regent Spring itself. Perhaps, many visitors simply saw the springs of the city to be little more than a fun recreation area, and the waters were just a convenient excuse to justify their excursion.

To better understand the true motivations of the visitors, we turned to our postcard analyses. Here, we see similar shifts in not only how the town was marketed through the images chosen for the production of post cards but also in the motivations of the visitors who came to the city. Image analysis indicates a decrease in spring imagery correspondent with an increase in images of hotels through the first half of the twentieth century. When we look at the written words of city visitors, a decrease in proportionate mentions of water also occurs during this same period. This continues with a rise in mentions of overall treatment as clinics began to dominate the local health industry as nationwide attitudes about health shifted to more scientific and formal approaches.

Based upon these results, it is clear that not only did behaviours at Regent Spring shift over time, but Excelsior Springs in general, followed suit. In other words, the decline of Regent Spring, one of the city's greatest springs, is a mere reflection of city-wide and furthermore nationwide trends. The city, though founded upon the springs and the abundant therapeutic properties, quickly became a tourism magnet for numerous other purposes following the first decades of the twentieth century and the establishment of the leisure class in the United States. Soon thereafter, the focus on health at Excelsior Springs was expanded as the city sought to promote itself as a recreational haven as well. This is shown by the reduction of medicinal bottles from this time period and the shift to those used for recreational drinking. It is further illustrated by the increasing diversity of images used for postcards as well as topics discussed by visitors. As the springs themselves became less of a draw, the city's ability to attract visitors was largely maintained by a number of first class hotels and resorts. The city seized on the opportunity to control the flow of visitors and spearhead tourism efforts. By 1934 the city took control of the most prominent springs and wells and redirected them to the newly built Hall of Waters at a time when the national economic situation could have set the city to ruin. Within 15 years, four separate health clinics were in operation in the

downtown area specializing in pain relief and relaxation. Following WWII, the city become mostly known for health clinics, including the Veterans Hospital, with individuals coming from across the country for surgeries and treatments. As the therapies before, these clinics, including the Ball Clinic, the Excelsior Institute and McCleary-Thornton hospital often utilized the waters therapeutically as well, continuing the longstanding tradition of the city.

In the end, the city was successful in parlaying their abundant springs into a full-fledged tourism industry rooted in health and relaxation. The identity of the city changed with the times, from a rural getaway for natural remedies, to a relaxation and recreation capital, to eventually a state of the art medical centre. However, through all of this, the waters and their restorative properties remained the central focus. Eventually, the *Saturday Evening Post* (Smith 1963) dealt a fatal blow to the city's tourism industry, only further crippled by new federal regulations regarding the legality of advertising unscientific medical 'cures'. This legislation prohibited the city from claiming curative properties for their waters. Given these setbacks, Excelsior Springs inevitably soon faded into obscurity (The Daily Standard 1975), and has yet to return to its former glory.

The historical trajectory of Excelsior Springs did not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it is a reflection of broader nationwide trends that transpired during the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries. With the popularity of hydrotherapy and the development of the leisure class, the commercialization of the mineral water industry in the form of bottling for nationwide distribution was an inevitable result. Subsequently, the widespread availability of mineral waters led to lower prices and greater accessibility throughout the U.S. Yet, the commercialization of the industry worldwide (Nocco 2008) and the success therein is one of numerous variables that led to the decline in popularity of mineral water resorts. In making the waters available far from their source through commercial bottling, there was less of an incentive for individuals to come to the springs directly. To combat this, spring resort towns focused on secondary industries to augment their springs, such as luxury hotels, amusement parks and formal medical facilities.

Another critical factor leading to the decline of the mineral spa resorts was the widespread use of the automobile and the increasingly diverse transportation options. With greater mobility by the working class, these types of resort towns became increasingly obsolete (Bullard 2004). No longer was a person in poor health limited to therapies that could be found nearby. No longer was a vacationer limited by what locales were along one of the few available rail lines, or forced to settle with the recreation options within their own town. Rather, they could visit bigger cities further away with more amenities. They could now seek medical treatments of all kinds and broaden their therapeutic options. Soon, Excelsior Springs and similar towns were no longer only in competition with other small local rural communities that were fortunate enough to have natural springs; they were now in competition with major metropolises such as St. Louis, Chicago and Milwaukee with endless options for entertainment and recreation as well as state of the art medical facilities of their own.

Finally, the rise of modern medicine also led to a greater understanding of bacteria and other microbes in water (particularly mineral water) that could actually cause illness (Bullard 2004). Simultaneously, new scientific developments created more modern treatments for diseases that supplanted the natural and anecdotal cures such as the use of mineral waters. Over the years, mineral water's use as a hydrotherapy was increasingly

viewed by the public as pseudoscience and unreliable. This scepticism culminated in two U.S. Senate hearings on 'Health Frauds', 'Quackery', and 'Misrepresentations' (United States Senate 1963, 1964). This bought much negative attention to the already declining heath tourism industry. Overall, it is likely that not one, but many of these widespread changes led to an abandonment of mineral water, the treatments, and recreational activities provided by resort towns and spas like Excelsior Springs. The cultural, technological and economic environment of the United States was rapidly changing, and it eventually became too much for the mineral water resorts.

Conclusion

Excelsior Springs reflects broad national patterns of turn-of-the-century tourism and recreation, as well as adaptations made by similar mineral spring cities across the nation. The city itself can be seen in a microcosm with the Regent Spring site, at which archaeological analysis can be used as one of several lines of inquiry to better understand the relationship between the city's people, its waters, and the wider tourism industry. Analysis of the materials excavated during three field seasons reveal a pattern of occupation at Regent Spring that corresponds to historical documentation and indicates a strong relationship between the site and other nearby attractions. Additionally, analysis of recovered bottles indicates continual use of the site after demolition of the pavilion, but for non-water related purposes. While the footprint of the mineral spring pavilion itself has been lost to the ever-changing currents of the Fishing River, excavation and mapping confirm the location of the pavilion as well as numerous other associated features. This mapping data can subsequently augment historical postcards and photographs of the site for a presentation of a clearer picture of the park.

Analysis of historical postcards from Excelsior Springs provides further clues to contextualize the Regent Spring site. Not only was the city working hard to sell itself as 'America's Haven of Health', but the public was buying. The irony of the decline of Excelsior Spring as a destination for hydrotherapy and recreation is poignant. Sustained through the Great Depression and significant changes in national attitudes, this water based town itself fell victim to repeated flooding and negative publicity surrounding hydrotherapy as an industry. In the end, the onslaught of financial difficulties and negative press became too much for the city and the tourism dollars soon began to disappear as attractions closed down and businesses were shuttered.

Today, only documented memories, postcards, and a handful of pavilions and landmarks remain to mark Excelsior Springs' former glory. A new generation now attempts to revive the city once again through the promotion of this great past. With a 'Main Street USA' image straight from a Norman Rockwell painting, Excelsior Springs now again celebrates its water-filled past, and efforts remain under way to preserve and rehabilitate remaining structures from the golden era of health tourism and hydrotherapy. Historians are not alone in rediscovering this history as multidisciplinary methods can be particularly useful. Using archaeology to identify, map, and contextualize sparse physical remains, legacies of adaptation and change can become part of the modern story of the city once again.

Though unique in Missouri as perhaps the most notable spring city in the state, Excelsior Springs shares a similar fate to many towns across the United States. Countless small

communities throughout the country have great histories which are slowly fading into obscurity with the march of time and modernization. But in using combined disciplinary efforts of archaeology, anthropology, and history we can now help to rediscover and preserve this storied past for future generations.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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