



Taking the waters : Montanas early hot spring resorts
by Marilyn Johnson McMillan

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS in
History

Montana State University

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Abstract:

Montana's early hot spring resorts from the frontier years to the First World War reflected the national use of mineral waters for both health and pleasure. American hot spring resorts, located primarily on the east coast, reached their peak of popularity in mid-nineteenth century and declined as the century waned. This slow decline can be attributed to both the increased professionalization of medicine as well as a change in social and recreational interests. Montana's imitation of eastern resorts, such as Saratoga Springs, New York, came at the time of decreasing interest in hot springs. From the outset, hot spring resorts in Montana experienced frustration and lack of success.

Montana's hot spring resorts also reflected living conditions on the frontier. The copying of eastern resorts emphasized the need by early frontier residents to soften the edge of life in a remote country. The rude log structures that gradually gave way to more sophisticated buildings were a source of pride to those who feared Indian attacks and howling coyotes. The medicinal hot waters provided relief from rheumatism and other cold climate complaints that was lacking in the primitive medical care. In addition to seeking health at the resorts, Montana pioneers found the developments to be centers of social activity. Hot spring resorts readily became the focus for nearby communities.

Like so much else in Montana's history, the folly of imitating east coast fashions was once again realized. Too isolated for eastern tourists, too little populated for sufficient local support and too far out of step with national trends, Montana's hot spring resorts encouraged optimistic investments and grand openings but experienced mostly disappointments and closings.

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by

MARILYN JOHNSON MCMILLAN

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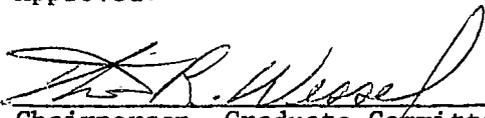
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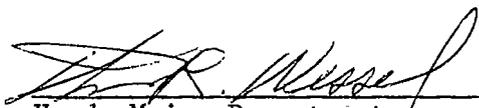
MASTER OF ARTS

in

History

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MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

June, 1982

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VITA

Marilyn Johnson McMillan was born on August 7, 1943 in Albany, California, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Stanley J. Johnson. She graduated in 1961 from El Camino High School in Sacramento, California. She was awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree in English in 1965 from University of California at Davis. She received a Master of Arts degree in English in 1967 from California State University at Sacramento.

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ABSTRACT

Montana's early hot spring resorts from the frontier years to the First World War reflected the national use of mineral waters for both health and pleasure. American hot spring resorts, located primarily on the east coast, reached their peak of popularity in mid-nineteenth century and declined as the century waned. This slow decline can be attributed to both the increased professionalization of medicine as well as a change in social and recreational interests. Montana's imitation of eastern resorts, such as Saratoga Springs, New York, came at the time of decreasing interest in hot springs. From the outset, hot spring resorts in Montana experienced frustration and lack of success.

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