
THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE (AND HEALTH) AT MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY MINERAL SPRINGS IN KENTUCKY AND WEST VIRGINIA

Art Wrobel
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Among the Dicken-Troutman-Balke Family Papers ([hereafter cited as Dicken](#)) is a sequence of five sonnets, written anonymously, that traces the history of Drennon Springs (Henry County, Kentucky) from its primordial origins through its triumphant apotheosis as a mineral resort in the mid-nineteenth century to its melancholy decline. Clearly, these verses lack grace and technique; evidently written without Erato's aid, the poet instead turned to fondly remembered recollections for inspiration, most notably those of the pleasures and gaiety that this establishment offered its guests. The second sonnet conveys Drennon's atmosphere during its heyday as it no doubt does that of other popular spas:

I hear again, O Drennon! treading feet;
But not the feet of flocks and herds are they;
Thy woods are felled, thy vines are cleared away,
And in their stead thy stately buildings greet
The morning's sun with pride and splendor meet;
And still the glory of thy primal day
Doth crown thee solidly; and neath thy sway
The golden hours on gilded pinions fleet.
For in thy voiceful chambers dance doth reign
And Music's magic spell dispenseth powers;
And though the sick thy quickening waters quaff,
Seeking from them relief unto their pain,
Thy halls are loud with mirth and merry laugh,
And Love's acknowledged sovereign of the hour.

Indeed, sundry amusements, glittering dances and the promise of flirtations, rich boards and excellent wine selections, all found in elegant surroundings and among genial company, had as much drawing power for some as the mineral waters had for invalids hoping to find relief by drinking and bathing in their purportedly curative properties.

Originally, the healing virtues of these sites lured early settlers who, no doubt, took their cue from the behavior of animals near these waters. One reminiscence described the response of a rider's horse to the water of the Black Sulphur Spring at the same Drennon Springs:

The water of the Black Sulphur Spring is very salt and sulphurous with a strong smell like burnt powder or burning coal. All animals become very fond of it. Many times in after years, I have had to sit firm and hold my horse as we reached the ford, so eager was he to get to the water. The stream is very cold, and the horses would thrust in their

noses and drink and drink, then take a long breath and drink again as if they could never get enough . . . All the cattle are fond of it and it is very good for them, and it was sought after by the buffaloes, deer, bears, panthers and smaller beasts, that used to get there in great numbers. ([Dickens](#))

Speculators and entrepreneurs, readily recognizing the enhanced value and potential of the land on which these licks and springs were located, developed it and, in an astonishingly short period of time, established fashionable resorts modeled after the great eastern resorts such as Ballston Springs and Saratoga which, in turn, imitated the great spas of England-Bath and Harrogate-and those of the continent.

Attracting patrons became a highly competitive affair, each resort issuing promotional tracts and running newspaper advertisements that included appreciative testimonials written by the formerly sick and now miraculously restored, descriptions of newly-added amenities, facilities, and entertainments; and the chemical analyses of the waters by medical authorities who invariably and favorably compared the waters to celebrated European spas: for instance, the waters of Harrodsburg or Graham's Springs (Mercer County) measured up to Seidlitz in Bohemia ([Drake 147](#)), Lower Blue Lick (Nicholas County) to Stachelberg in Switzerland ([Matson 208](#)), Olympian Springs (Bath County) to Kaiserquelle at Aix la Chapelle ([Matson 205](#)), Graham Springs to Baden-Baden ([Medical Historical Research Project 54](#)). The most common mineral springs were salt, white, black, red, and salt sulphurs, chalybeate, vitriol, alum, copperas, iodide, and Epsom, which were used as diuretics, cathartics, and sudorifics ([Coleman 12n](#)). Springs with more than one type of mineral or sulphur could attract invalids with various disabilities without their having to travel to other spas. For instance, Paroquet Springs "boasted three springs which were impregnated with combinations of epsom, salt, sulfur and magnesia" ([McDowell 404](#)). Taken either internally or used externally, the curative properties of these waters were said to be efficacious in treating a whole panoply of ailments, the most common being "diseases of the stomach, liver and kidneys, as well as . . . asthma, jaundice, skin diseases, consumption, 'brain fever,' enlargement of the joints, chronic rheumatism, bronchitis, 'bilious disorders,' general debility, 'female weakness,' ague, 'autumnal fevers,' dropsy, gout, neuralgia, dyspepsia," ([Coleman 13](#)) and any number of other diseases. It would seem, from scanning the promotional brochures the spas issued, that sulphur waters constituted the whole of the nineteenth century's *materia medica*.

Treatments included douches, tub baths, steam baths, enclosed immersion pools, and/or the imbibing of considerable quantities of glasses of water (some doctors recommended drinking as many as twenty glasses of water a day ([Roomet 2](#)), though Dr. Daniel Drake urged "moderation" ([144](#)). Sallie H. Wooley, writing to her father Robert Wickliffe, described her early morning routine at Blue Licks so: "Margaret [her sister] and I are getting the full benefit of the water-We rise a little after four o'clock and walk two miles drinking the water both going and returning; besides taking it occasionally through the day.-We have fixed upon this daily walk. ([Wickliffe-Preston Papers, Box 38, Fol. 8, hereafter cited as Wickliffe](#)). Dr. Drake also urged perseverance in drinking the water-understandably so. By all accounts, the water, because of its high sulphur content, tasted very nearly as vile as it smelled ([Meeks 6](#)), users most commonly describing it as having the taste of burnt gunpowder. Constantine S. Rafinesque, a Transylvania University scientist, described the water at Big Bone Lick as having "a bluish cast-an abominable taste, although readily drunk by the idlers who come-to loiter, drink, bathe, and kill the game-very plenty yet on the hills" ([qtd. in Coleman 62](#)).

However, what undoubtedly contributed more to the restoration of health than glasses of water and body wraps was the society, the entertainment, the activities that these resorts provided. Here men struck business deals while both men and women diverted themselves with the business of snaring mates or flirting outrageously. In an August 23, 1837 letter to William Preston (later Ambassador to Spain, Brigadier-General, and Confederate Ambassador to

Mexico), Robert Wickliffe, Jr. (later chargé d'affaires to Sardinia who also fought a duel with Cassius Clay) writes:

The company at the springs was almost entirely from Kentucky, the poor Southerners finding Mississippi more healthy this year than formerly. I never met at any watering place so much beauty refinement and intelligence. Louisville was well represented. Besides your party [Preston's mother and family members], there were several ladies from that place that were the cynosure of many eyes. For myself I flirted with Mrs. Ford & fell in love with Mrs. Fitzhugh. Indeed, Mrs. F. is a very sweet & interesting lady, & I more than once took her to task for her haste in tying the knot John Preston & myself were roommates & unequivocally looked upon ourselves as the handsomest in person, more elegant in dress & more irresistibly eloquent & fascinating with the girls than all the rest of the *cravatted* bipeds that crowded the Ball Room I might fill up a whole sheet in describing the beauties & scenes occurrences & anecdotes that I met with
([Wickliffe Box 40, Fol. 1](#))

Planters and their families came to the springs to escape the periodic outbreaks of yellow fever and the malarial months between late May and early September that oppressed the deep South around New Orleans and the gulf coast. These planters would join guests from Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, the Carolinas, Arkansas, the mid-west and even New York. Kentucky was the furthest north ventured by families who brought with them their black coachman and maid, as many did. Appreciative guests wrote home or recalled brilliant balls, masquerades, stage productions, lavish boards, imported French wines and liquors, croquet, lawn bowling, horseshoes, shooting competitions, riding, hunting, gaming, and walking. Indeed, the line separating the mineral spas from hotels and downright pleasure resorts is difficult to draw.

In addition to its usual entertainments, Crab Orchard Springs (Lincoln County), offered summer and fall racing at the near-by Spring Hill Race Course; Graham Springs at Harrodsburg had cotillion parties conducted by a "professor of dancing" ([qtd. in McDowell 391, 392](#)); Greenville Springs in Mercer County announced a "regular theatrical company of respectable performers" as well as "the best band of music that can be procured" ([qtd. in Coleman 38](#)). Dr. Daniel Drake, sounding a bit stuffy, warned invalids against "the dissipation, which is so commonly practised by those who visit watering places for amusement only" ([143](#)), and a bit priggish when he upbraided proprietors of these resorts for tolerating gambling and, especially, the presence of the "gambling banditti, who periodically infest these places. These," he wrote, "call off the attention of husbands, fathers, and brothers, from those whom they had conducted thither for health; they draw the unwary into their snares with the greater facility, because of the idleness which prevails at such places; in fine, the very rumour of their presence, is offensive to the taste and feelings, of moral and religious invalids; and has often banished them from the springs, before a proper trial was completed" ([161-62](#)). He wasn't that far from the mark. Cerulean Springs (Trigg County), originally a black sulphur spring until the 1811 earthquake changed its color to light blue (hence the name), offered bowling and ten-pin alleys and an upstairs barroom called "Poker Flats" where, so rumors circulated, guests won and lost crop money, horses, and servants ([Coleman 52-53](#)).

As the emphasis on entertainment and gaiety gradually usurped the business of health management, the facilities were not only enlarged to accommodate the greater press of guests but also the increased opportunities for amusement. For instance, the main building at Lower Blue Lick Springs was 670 feet in length, three stories high, with about 1,800 feet of gallery; the dining room 100 by 36 feet, the ball room 80 by 26. The hotel accommodated as many as 400 to 600 guests at a time ([Collins 2: 654](#)). Harrodsburg Springs were located on approximately 280 acres. "During the late fall of 1842 and first months of 1843, there was added a new brick hotel, 'full four stories high,' with 'a massy colonnade, rich capitals, and lofty entablature' acclaimed to be 'the finest edifice in the West.'"

It included a ballroom, fifty by one hundred feet; and bowling alleys, walks, an artificial lake and "an elegant saloon for the accommodation of patients who may wish for other kinds of physical exercise" completed the adornments. Dr. Graham announced that the springs were "'now capable of accommodating one thousand persons,' at the rate of twenty dollars per month for board. These additions completed, the Harrodsburg Springs became an establishment so extensive that when illuminated at night it might be seen for miles" ([VanArsdall 403-04](#)). Lewis Collin's *Historical Sketches of Kentucky* (1847) added more to the description of Harrodsburg Springs:

The grounds are elevated and extensive; adorned with every variety of shrubbery grown in America, interspersed with some of the most beautiful and rare exotics from Europe and Asia, and traversed by wide gravel walks, intersecting and crossing each other in every direction. A small and beautiful lake, three hundred yards long, one hundred yards in width, and fifteen feet deep, lately excavated, is well stored with fish of the finest flavor, and its glassy surface enlivened by the presence of many wild and tame waterfowls. ([qtd. in VanArsdall 404](#))

Describing his reaction to Harrodsburg Springs the evening of his arrival, N. Parker Willis concluded that "I had stumbled upon a most unexpected mixture of paradise and public-house" ([220](#)). Facilities also included bath houses for the clientele, warm showers and vapor baths, and avenues of private cottages often built by wealthy southerners who brought their families and servants for the entire watering season ([Dickens](#)) which usually ran from mid-May to mid-September.

Drake's moral sniffing about card-playing and the pursuit of excessive pleasure, evidently, fell on the collective deaf ears of proprietors who vied in outdoing one another to provide the most entertaining distractions, many of which would seem to undermine the very reason for attending a health facility. Indeed, Nathaniel Parker Willis noted the genius of Dr. Christopher Columbus Graham, the famed proprietor of "The Saratoga of the West," namely Harrodsburg Springs, for first recognizing the connection between the pursuit of health and pleasure; Willis called this now-widespread phenomenon "*the general siamese between hydropathy and watering-place*." He went on to observe that "Few belles have papas and mammas of undamaged constitutions. Few flaunt in lace in the evening, who would not be fairer as well as healthier for a 'pack in a wet sheet' in the morning." The amenities, par excellence, for a successful watering spa, Willis wrote, included "a ball-room, a water-cure establishment, and a good table . . . ; [These] are the three supplied to combine, for a world that employs its summer solstice to flirt, freshen and fatten" ([225](#)).

And flirt and freshen and fatten they did. Without a doubt, one of the most comprehensive and detailed descriptions of social life at a nineteenth-century spa (for which reasons I will quote extensively from it) was left by R. Wickliffe Preston (aged 20), the only son of General William Preston and Margaret Wickliffe Preston. In this letter of July 26, 1871, written from Greenbriar White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, he wrote the following to his sister Jess:

Sister Peggy and I are having a most delightful time, the Springs, having exceeded even our anticipations in point of gaiety. We have Germans in the morning and Balls in the evening, so you see we would be kept busy even if we had nothing to do but dance. There are however a variety of other amusements almost equally as pleasant-and so we are in a rush nearly all the time It is livelier today than ever, for there is to be a large fancy-dress ball, tonight, and this fact has attracted crowds A costumer is here from Washington with quite a variety of fancy dresses most of which he has hired. The majority of gentlemen however . . . will appear in full-dress evening suits. The costumes will only be worn by those men who either through negligence or

necessity have failed to bring their dress-suits with them. Sister Peggie will wear her dress impersonating "Winter" which you are already familiar with, and I have no doubt but that she will look very well, though she appeared a little fagged at dinner, from having talked too much in the parlor this morning I will now close, as I must take a short nap having fatigued myself by playing billiards & ten pins all the morning. Besides there are three card tables of noisy old gentlemen in full blast around me, which circumstance is not conducive to good letter writing.

Two days later, Robert Preston reported to his mother not only his morning's activities, but described the aforementioned ball in a letter dated Friday, July 28, 1871:

At nine o/c. the ball commenced, and continued with the exception of thirty minutes for supper, without intermission until three o/c. in the morning. The costumes generally speaking were very beautiful, and there were as usual quite a number of Black Princes, Hamlets, peasant & flower girls, kings, queens, sultanas, Turks, &c &c. Also costumes "au naturelle" such as "Night," "Winter," &c. In addition to this there were quite a number of buffooning costumes such as newsboys, boot-blacks, Ethiopians, Harlequins, etc. all of the latter wearing masks. There were also numerous martial impersonations, such as Indian warriors; stately cavaliers, liberally booted and spurred; and Captains and Generals with epaulettes broader than their shoulders and swords longer than their legs:-All of these affected the majestic, and stalked about grandly mashing corns, and tearing dresses in the most terrific manner. In fact they were all a nuisance to themselves and everyone else. The Harlequins were also annoyingly agile, and in endeavoring to carry out their characters destroyed many yards of muslin and tarleton, and received very withering glances from the owners thereof. We all had a most delightful time however, notwithstanding these slight drawbacks.

Sister Peggie's dress was beautiful as you yourself know, and was as much admired I believe as any in the room. She enjoyed herself greatly, and was looking very well, barring a slightly jaded look, which is attributable to the late hours she has recently been keeping. She and Mary Dudley both make the mistake of going with too much of a rush. Any one to see their eagerness for all manner of amusements would imagine they were here for only a week, instead of a month. Every day at dinner they invariably inform us that they "have had the nicest time today, since they arrived at the Springs."! This remark has now been repeated for seven consecutive days, so it is needless to say it is growing slightly monotonous One of the most amusing features of our fancy-ball was an amateur brass-band and corps of jig dancers who took possession of the ball-room floor, and danced a break-down to an amateur version of "Shoo-Fly." After this performance the whole company (about five hundred in number) adjourned to the dining-room, where they partook of an excellent supper furnished by the Hotel, gratis. After supper the square-dancers were driven into the corners, & the "German" was initiated with a musical flourish. The figures were very well selected, and the dance well led by a competent Richmond beau. We commenced at one o/c. and danced till three, at which time the ball ended. I saved my dress-suit so as to wear it for the first time on this occasion, though now that it has been so auspiciously broken in, I shall wear it every night. Another circumstance which conduces no little to my pleasure is that the patent-leather gaiters Marshall made me are as soft and comfortable as an old glove, and I can dance in them to the best advantage. They are the only pair of easy boots I ever knew or heard of his making. The matter of easy boots is no inconsiderable item to me for I believe I dance twenty, or at least fifteen miles daily. Every night we have a dance which is in reality a ball, and we have morning German's three times a week. There are fewer good dancers here however that I expected to find. In fact there

is so far, only one really good dancer here, and this is a Miss Williams from Staunton, who not only excels in dancing but is also very pretty and entertaining. There are numerous Washingtonians, Baltimoreans, Philadelphians, and New Yorkers here, & with one single exception they all dance abominably. This exception is a Miss Sprague of New York, who (mirabile dictu) is sensible enough to wear very loose shoes, and is both pretty & graceful. The men are more skilled in the art of Terpsichore (or rather Turp-sip-ry, as Sister Peggie will spell it,) though I can already see that their steps like my own are being spoiled by the clumsy girls with whom they dance. Dancing in my eyes is as much of a Fine Art as painting and music, and should be respected accordingly. When I am dancing with a girl like Miss Williams, on a smooth and nicely waxed floor with the "Beautiful Blue Danube Waltz" in full blast I believe I am as perfectly happy as it is possible for me to be. But when I get with a partner who goes with a hop, skip, and a jump, and who does not know exactly what she wants you to do, or what she wants to do herself, I believe I am as much exruciased as a painter can be, whose brush loses its hairs, and whose colors will not mix; or as a musician, who is compelled to play on a squeaky violin; or a piano without tune. The moral of this (as Jess would say) is that girls should either dance well, or not at all . . . I find I grow more and more fascinated with this place every day, for I believe I could enjoy myself even if there were no girls, nor ball-room, nor music, for I would still have ten-pins, billiards, pure water, & Sulphur-water baths, beautiful walks, rides and drives, & congenial young men of my own age with whom to associate. In fact I never led a life that suited me more exactly, and I can imagine that a life passed in this manner would be even more luxuriously delightful than that which Tennyson ascribes to his lotus-eaters. At any moment you can be perfectly gay or perfectly solitary, which two qualities strike me as being about the most necessary requisites to earthly happiness. Were it not for one fact I would almost imagine myself in Paradise, but that fact is sufficiently material to banish all such ideas. It is simply that you can hardly pass a minute here without feeling in your pockets for greenbacks. Every thing is extra from boot-blacks, waiters, & dining room servants, to the expenses of the German, for which we pay the band & ball-room attendants extra. Everything drinkable from Spring-water to Champagne is extra, and everything eatable that's at all good (except for venison of which there is an abundance) is extra . . . Such luxuries as hacks, saddle horses, billiards & ten-pins are of course extra, and even a Sulphur bath is extra to the amount of seventy five cents. So you see this is most decidedly an extra place, though everything is conducted on such a delightfully grand scale, that almost everyone is willing to put up with a slight amount of imposition.

The last stanza of "The Song of Saratoga" written in 1869 at Highgate Springs, Vermont,-captured well the world of these spas:

In short--as it goes in the world-
They eat, and they drink, and they sleep;
They talk, and they walk, and they woo;
They sigh, and they ride, and they dance
(with other unspeakable things);
They pray, and they play, and they pay,-
And that's what they do at the Springs.
(qtd. in Roomet 4)

*I am profoundly indebted to Ms. Randolph Hollingsworth who not only directed my attention to many of the letters and documents from which I have so liberally quoted, but for providing me with the details of the

genealogies of the Preston and Wickliffe families.

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([Wickliffe Box 40, Fol. 1](#))

Planters and their families came to the springs to escape the periodic outbreaks of yellow fever and the malarial months between late May and early September that oppressed the deep South around New Orleans and the gulf coast. These planters would join guests from Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, the Carolinas, Arkansas, the mid-west and even New York. Kentucky was the furthest north ventured by families who brought with them their black coachman and maid, as many did. Appreciative guests wrote home or recalled brilliant balls, masquerades, stage productions, lavish boards, imported French wines and liquors, croquet, lawn bowling, horseshoes, shooting competitions, riding, hunting, gaming, and walking. Indeed, the line separating the mineral spas from hotels and downright pleasure resorts is difficult to draw.

In addition to its usual entertainments, Crab Orchard Springs (Lincoln County), offered summer and fall racing at the near-by Spring Hill Race Course; Graham Springs at Harrodsburg had cotillion parties conducted by a "professor of dancing" ([qtd. in McDowell 391, 392](#)); Greenville Springs in Mercer County announced a "regular theatrical company of respectable performers" as well as "the best band of music that can be procured" ([qtd. in Coleman 38](#)). Dr. Daniel Drake, sounding a bit stuffy, warned invalids against "the dissipation, which is so commonly practised by those who visit watering places for amusement only" ([143](#)), and a bit priggish when he upbraided proprietors of these resorts for tolerating gambling and, especially, the presence of the "gambling banditti, who periodically infest these places. These," he wrote, "call off the attention of husbands, fathers, and brothers, from those whom they had conducted thither for health; they draw the unwary into their snares with the greater facility, because of the idleness which prevails at such places; in fine, the very rumour of their presence, is offensive to the taste and feelings, of moral and religious invalids; and has often banished them from the springs, before a proper trial was completed" ([161-62](#)). He wasn't that far from the mark. Cerulean Springs (Trigg County), originally a black sulphur spring until the 1811 earthquake changed its color to light blue (hence the name), offered bowling and ten-pin alleys and an upstairs barroom called "Poker Flats" where, so rumors circulated, guests won and lost crop money, horses, and servants ([Coleman 52-53](#)).

As the emphasis on entertainment and gaiety gradually usurped the business of health management, the facilities were not only enlarged to accommodate the greater press of guests but also the increased opportunities for amusement. For instance, the main building at Lower Blue Lick Springs was 670 feet in length, three stories high, with about 1,800 feet of gallery; the dining room 100 by 36 feet, the ball room 80 by 26. The hotel accommodated as many as 400 to 600 guests at a time ([Collins 2: 654](#)). Harrodsburg Springs were located on approximately 280 acres. "During the late fall of 1842 and first months of 1843, there was added a new brick hotel, 'full four stories high,' with 'a massy colonnade, rich capitals, and lofty entablature' acclaimed to be 'the finest edifice in the West.'" It included a ballroom, fifty by one hundred feet; and bowling alleys, walks, an artificial lake and "an elegant saloon for the accommodation of patients who may wish for other kinds of physical exercise" completed the adornments. Dr. Graham announced that the springs were "'now capable of accommodating one thousand persons,' at the rate of twenty dollars per month for board. These additions completed, the Harrodsburg Springs became an establishment so extensive that when illuminated at night it might be seen for miles" ([VanArsdall 403-04](#)). Lewis Collin's *Historical Sketches of Kentucky* (1847) added more to the description of Harrodsburg Springs:

The grounds are elevated and extensive; adorned with every variety of shrubbery grown in America, interspersed with some of the most beautiful and rare exotics from Europe and Asia, and traversed by wide gravel walks, intersecting and crossing each other in every direction. A small and beautiful lake, three hundred yards long, one hundred yards in width, and fifteen feet deep, lately excavated, is well stored with fish of the finest flavor, and its glassy surface enlivened by the presence of many wild and tame waterfowls. ([qtd. in VanArsdall 404](#))

Describing his reaction to Harrodsburg Springs the evening of his arrival, N. Parker Willis concluded that "I had stumbled upon a most unexpected mixture of paradise and public-house" ([220](#)). Facilities also included bath houses for the clientele, warm showers and vapor baths, and avenues of private cottages often built by wealthy southerners who brought their families and servants for the entire watering season ([Dickens](#)) which usually ran from mid-May to mid-September.

Drake's moral sniffing about card-playing and the pursuit of excessive pleasure, evidently, fell on the collective deaf ears of proprietors who vied in outdoing one another to provide the most entertaining distractions, many of which would seem to undermine the very reason for attending a health facility. Indeed, Nathaniel Parker Willis noted the genius of Dr. Christopher Columbus Graham, the famed proprietor of "The Saratoga of the West," namely Harrodsburg Springs, for first recognizing the connection between the pursuit of health and pleasure; Willis called this now-widespread phenomenon "*the general siamese between hydropathy and watering-place*." He went on to observe that "Few belles have papas and mammas of undamaged constitutions. Few flaunt in lace in the evening, who would not be fairer as well as healthier for a 'pack in a wet sheet' in the morning." The amenities, par excellence, for a successful watering spa, Willis wrote, included "a ball-room, a water-cure establishment, and a good table . . . ; [These] are the three supplied to combine, for a world that employs its summer solstice to flirt, freshen and fatten" ([225](#)).

And flirt and freshen and fatten they did. Without a doubt, one of the most comprehensive and detailed descriptions of social life at a nineteenth-century spa (for which reasons I will quote extensively from it) was left by R. Wickliffe Preston (aged 20), the only son of General William Preston and Margaret Wickliffe Preston. In this letter of July 26, 1871, written from Greenbriar White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, he wrote the following to his sister Jess:

Sister Peggy and I are having a most delightful time, the Springs, having exceeded even our anticipations in point of gaiety. We have Germans in the morning and Balls in the evening, so you see we would be kept busy even if we had nothing to do but dance. There are however a variety of other amusements almost equally as pleasant-and so we are in a rush nearly all the time It is livelier today than ever, for there is to be a large fancy-dress ball, tonight, and this fact has attracted crowds A costumer is here from Washington with quite a variety of fancy dresses most of which he has hired. The majority of gentlemen however . . . will appear in full-dress evening suits. The costumes will only be worn by those men who either through negligence or necessity have failed to bring their dress-suits with them. Sister Peggie will wear her dress impersonating "Winter" which you are already familiar with, and I have no doubt but that she will look very well, though she appeared a little fagged at dinner, from having talked too much in the parlor this morning I will now close, as I must take a short nap having fatigued myself by playing billiards & ten pins all the morning. Besides there are three card tables of noisy old gentlemen in full blast around me, which circumstance is not conducive to good letter writing.

Two days later, Robert Preston reported to his mother not only his morning's activities, but described the aforementioned ball in a letter dated Friday, July 28, 1871:

At nine o/c. the ball commenced, and continued with the exception of thirty minutes for supper, without intermission until three o/c. in the morning. The costumes generally speaking were very beautiful, and there were as usual quite a number of Black Princes, Hamlets, peasant & flower girls, kings, queens, sultanas, Turks, &c &c. Also costumes "au naturelle" such as "Night," "Winter," &c. In addition to this there were quite a number of buffooning costumes such as newsboys, boot-blacks, Ethiopians, Harlequins, etc. all of the latter wearing masks. There were also numerous martial impersonations, such as Indian warriors; stately cavaliers, liberally booted and spurred; and Captains and Generals with epaulettes broader than their shoulders and swords longer than their legs:-All of these affected the majestic, and stalked about grandly mashing corns, and tearing dresses in the most terrific manner. In fact they were all a nuisance to themselves and everyone else. The Harlequins were also annoyingly agile, and in endeavoring to carry out their characters destroyed many yards of muslin and tarleton, and received very withering glances from the owners thereof. We all had a most delightful time however, notwithstanding these slight drawbacks.

Sister Peggie's dress was beautiful as you yourself know, and was as much admired I believe as any in the room. She enjoyed herself greatly, and was looking very well, barring a slightly jaded look, which is attributable to the late hours she has recently been keeping. She and Mary Dudley both make the mistake of going with too much of a rush. Any one to see their eagerness for all manner of amusements would imagine they were here for only a week, instead of a month. Every day at dinner they invariably inform us that they "have had the nicest time today, since they arrived at the Springs."! This remark has now been repeated for seven consecutive days, so it is needless to say it is growing slightly monotonous One of the most amusing features of our fancy-ball was an amateur brass-band and corps of jig dancers who took possession of the ball-room floor, and danced a break-down to an amateur version of "Shoo-Fly." After this performance the whole company (about five hundred in number) adjourned to the dining-room, where they partook of an excellent supper furnished by the Hotel, gratis. After supper the square-dancers were driven into the corners, & the "German" was initiated with a musical flourish. The figures were very well selected, and the dance well led by a competent Richmond beau. We commenced at one o/c. and

danced till three, at which time the ball ended. I saved my dress-suit so as to wear it for the first time on this occasion, though now that it has been so auspiciously broken in, I shall wear it every night. Another circumstance which conduces no little to my pleasure is that the patent-leather gaiters Marshall made me are as soft and comfortable as an old glove, and I can dance in them to the best advantage. They are the only pair of easy boots I ever knew or heard of his making. The matter of easy boots is no inconsiderable item to me for I believe I dance twenty, or at least fifteen miles daily. Every night we have a dance which is in reality a ball, and we have morning German's three times a week. There are fewer good dancers here however than I expected to find. In fact there is so far, only one really good dancer here, and this is a Miss Williams from Staunton, who not only excels in dancing but is also very pretty and entertaining. There are numerous Washingtonians, Baltimoreans, Philadelphians, and New Yorkers here, & with one single exception they all dance abominably. This exception is a Miss Sprague of New York, who (mirabile dictu) is sensible enough to wear very loose shoes, and is both pretty & graceful. The men are more skilled in the art of Terpsichore (or rather Turp-sip-ry, as Sister Peggie will spell it,) though I can already see that their steps like my own are being spoiled by the clumsy girls with whom they dance. Dancing in my eyes is as much of a Fine Art as painting and music, and should be respected accordingly. When I am dancing with a girl like Miss Williams, on a smooth and nicely waxed floor with the "Beautiful Blue Danube Waltz" in full blast I believe I am as perfectly happy as it is possible for me to be. But when I get with a partner who goes with a hop, skip, and a jump, and who does not know exactly what she wants you to do, or what she wants to do herself, I believe I am as much exruciated as a painter can be, whose brush loses its hairs, and whose colors will not mix; or as a musician, who is compelled to play on a squeaky violin; or a piano without tune. The moral of this (as Jess would say) is that girls should either dance well, or not at all . . . I find I grow more and more fascinated with this place every day, for I believe I could enjoy myself even if there were no girls, nor ball-room, nor music, for I would still have ten-pins, billiards, pure water, & Sulphur-water baths, beautiful walks, rides and drives, & congenial young men of my own age with whom to associate. In fact I never led a life that suited me more exactly, and I can imagine that a life passed in this manner would be even more luxuriously delightful than that which Tennyson ascribes to his lotus-eaters. At any moment you can be perfectly gay or perfectly solitary, which two qualities strike me as being about the most necessary requisites to earthly happiness. Were it not for one fact I would almost imagine myself in Paradise, but that fact is sufficiently material to banish all such ideas. It is simply that you can hardly pass a minute here without feeling in your pockets for greenbacks. Every thing is extra from boot-blacks, waiters, & dining room servants, to the expenses of the German, for which we pay the band & ball-room attendants extra. Everything drinkable from Spring-water to Champagne is extra, and everything eatable that's at all good (except for venison of which there is an abundance) is extra . . . Such luxuries as hacks, saddle horses, billiards & ten-pins are of course extra, and even a Sulphur bath is extra to the amount of seventy five cents. So you see this is most decidedly an extra place, though everything is conducted on such a delightfully grand scale, that almost everyone is willing to put up with a slight amount of imposition.

The last stanza of "The Song of Saratoga" written in 1869 at Highgate Springs, Vermont,-captured well the world of these spas:

In short--as it goes in the world-
They eat, and they drink, and they sleep;
They talk, and they walk, and they woo;

They sigh, and they ride, and they dance
(with other unspeakable things);
They pray, and they play, and they pay,-
And that's what they do at the Springs.
(qtd. in Roomet 4)

*I am profoundly indebted to Ms. Randolph Hollingsworth who not only directed my attention to many of the letters and documents from which I have so liberally quoted, but for providing me with the details of the genealogies of the Preston and Wickliffe families.

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