Making a splash
City purchase of Excelsior Springs in 1935 led to construction of historic Hall of Waters

By Shawna Scott

Prior to September 1935, the wells and springs at Excelsior Springs in western Missouri were privately owned and operated. That changed when a nearly $1 million federal PWA loan and grant enabled the City of Excelsior Springs to purchase the natural resources.

A year later, the city had begun construction for the Hall of Waters—an impressive mineral water facility that "added immeasurably to its attractions as a health and vacation resort," according to a February 1936 article in Missouri Business.

"The exterior, of modern design, will be of native stone, cast stone and Indiana limestone. The decorative features will be of Mayan and other Indian designs and will be used particularly around the tower and the doorways. Certain Indian symbols, such as those signifying the God of Waters, will also be featured," the article reported.

The building would house a bottling plant "capable of producing 40,000 bottles of Excelsior Springs waters daily." It would also serve as a central point from which water would be piped to buildings around the city.

In addition to its bottling operation and water dispersion systems, the author wrote, the facility would feature "scientifically designed hydro-therapeutic bath departments for men and women," a competition-sized swimming pool, a therapy pool for polio patients and, on the grounds, a beautiful sunken garden.

Renowned for the supposed healing properties of its waters, Excelsior Springs was a popular health and spa destination long before the Hall was constructed. The spring water's fame had spread from stories of a farmer's daughter who was healed of tuberculosis by drinking the water in 1880 and a farmer who used the water to treat an old Civil War wound. These accounts drew others to the region and soon the town of Excelsior Springs was established.

When analyzed, the various springs were discovered to contain combinations and a diversity of minerals rarely found, solidifying Excelsior Springs' reputation as possessing one of the greatest collections of mineral waters in the world.

However, by the late 50s and early 60s, the popularity of health water spas and clinics was on a downturn. According to a city website, the bottling factory was moved to a new facility — but the Hall's mineral water bar is still open to the public today. It also now contains city offices, court and council chambers, a visitor's center and a museum of local history. In 1983, the building was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Though its function has evolved over the decades, Excelsior Springs' Hall of Waters definitely makes a splash in the city's economy thanks to the tourism and historic interest it has attracted to the area since its completion in 1937. ©