

# The Story of the West Baden Springs Hotel

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"The Eighth Wonder of the World"—that was the phrase which drew thousands of guests to the West Baden Springs Hotel in southern Indiana during the early decades of the twentieth century. The hotel may not have justified this extravagant claim to fame, but it was indeed an unusual building. Its unique circular structure displayed the world's widest unsupported dome, two hundred feet in diameter, surpassing in breadth the majestic St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome on which it supposedly was modeled. Even today visitors to West Baden College, now housed in the former hotel building, marvel at the strength and beauty of the dome of this colossal "roundhouse."

The history of the hotel-college is as interesting as the building itself. It mirrors trends in American social history and touches the larger stories of George Rogers Clark, Thomas J. Taggart, "Scarface Al" Capone, and the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus, whose lions, tigers, and elephants performed upon the hotel's beautiful marble mosaic floor. The hotel's transformation into a seminary in 1934 seems to have added finality to its history. At that time the spacious dining room was changed into an austere monastic refectory, the lobby was transfigured into the seminary chapel, and the band shell under the dome of the Pompeian Court was replaced by a life-sized figure of the Savior.

In 1783 the Treaty of Paris made the area which included what is now Indiana a part of the United States. The young American nation, however, soon faced serious problems in this frontier land, especially in and around the Vincennes settlement. Besides ineffectual local government and friction between the French settlers and incoming Americans, there simmered the explosive mixture of whiskey and Indian temperament. By August, 1786, Indians of the Old Northwest were threatening to go on the warpath, and American lives and property were unsafe. When the Congress of the Confederation failed to take strong measures to halt the trouble, the Kentucky authorities, fearful for the safety of

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the whole frontier, appointed George Rogers Clark head of an expedition directed against these Indian uprisings. This force of nearly one thousand men met in the summer of 1786 at the Falls of the Ohio to march over the Buffalo Trace to the source of the trouble.<sup>1</sup>

The Buffalo Trace led overland from the Falls to the Wabash River at Vincennes.<sup>2</sup> This trail had been established by the American bison in their search for water and salt when they came east from the western prairies during the late spring or early summer. The sulphur springs in the West Baden area, later to be important in the growth of the West Baden Springs Hotel, seem to have drawn as many as five hundred buffalo during the summer months. This trace, already cut through the wilderness and therefore easy to follow, became a natural overland route to Vincennes as that settlement began to attract Americans. The good hunting usually to be found at the "licks" was another reason for following the trail. It was natural, then, for Clark to choose it for his expedition. On his way overland he camped at French Lick, less than a mile from the future site of the West Baden Springs Hotel, and thus his expedition, by the hand of Captain Bernard Gaines, gave us the first authoritative record of the white man's presence in that vicinity.<sup>3</sup>

After the Clark expedition the area which was to be Indiana moved gradually toward statehood. As the early pioneers arrived, they needed salt to preserve their meat. In their search for salt they soon gave attention to the salt crusts left by the springs in the West Baden area. The Enabling Act of 1816 granted to the state a maximum of thirty-six sections of land for saline reserves, to be controlled by the state legislature and not to be leased for any period longer than

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<sup>1</sup> See L. C. Helderman, "The Northwest Expedition of George Rogers Clark, 1786-1787," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXV (December, 1938), 317-334.

<sup>2</sup> See George R. Wilson and Gayle Thornbrough, "The Buffalo Trace" (*Indiana Historical Society Publications*, Vol. XV, No. 2; Indianapolis, 1936), 183-279.

<sup>3</sup> "During the march, at a place called *French Lick*, there was a *Meeting of the whole of Col. James Barnett's Command* respecting a horse which had been taken for the adjutant general to Ride." Captain B. Gaines, Woodford County, Kentucky, to Mann Butler, City of Lewisville, Kentucky, December 17, 1833, Draper Manuscript Collection, 9J238, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison. See also Joseph S. Karol, S. J., "The French at French Lick: Fact or Fiction," *Indiana Magazine of History*, L (June, 1954), 139-144.

ten years.<sup>4</sup> The land surrounding West Baden springs was selected for a reserve.<sup>5</sup>

The early lawmakers hoped that the saline reserves would be a plentiful source of salt for the settlers, but their hopes were in vain. In less than two years after the reserves had been set up, even the governor realized that they would be of no value in the manufacture of salt and he promptly suggested their sale to the general public.<sup>6</sup> In 1833 Doctor William A. Bowles bought the saline lands. A native Marylander, Bowles had moved to Indiana and later implicated himself with the Knights of the Golden Circle and became with Milligan one of the defendants in the famous *ex parte Milligan* decision of the United States Supreme Court.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps, as a doctor, he felt that the saline waters might be of some use as medicine. At any rate, in 1845 he founded the first hotel in the springs area, a hotel which eventually blossomed into the fabulous French Lick Springs Hotel of Democratic boss Thomas J. Taggart and which is today the French Lick-Sheraton Hotel.

On May 13, 1846, the United States declared war on Mexico. Three days later the Secretary of War called upon the governor of Indiana to furnish three regiments of volunteers. Among the many to respond was William A. Bowles, who promptly was elected a colonel by the Indiana men gathered at Camp Clark.<sup>8</sup> It was probably at this time that Bowles leased the French Lick House and its property to John A. Lane, a traveling salesman of patent medicines.<sup>9</sup>

Lane prospered during the years he held the French Lick House and probably enjoyed the security of an existence more stable than that of an itinerant salesman. As his lease ran

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Kettleborough (ed.), *Constitution Making in Indiana* (3 vols., *Indiana Historical Society Collections*, Vols. I, II, XVII; Indianapolis, 1916-1930), I, 76.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* Also Orange County, Tract Book 3 (Paoli, Ind.).

<sup>6</sup> Logan Esarey (ed.), *Governors Messages and Letters* (3 vols., *Indiana Historical Collections*, Vols. VII, IX, XII; Indianapolis, 1922-1924), III, 67, 68.

<sup>7</sup> Orange County, Tract Book 3, p. 48. For a rather complete story of Bowles, see Richard W. Haupt, "History of the French Lick Springs Hotel" (unpublished Master's thesis, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1953), 30-77.

<sup>8</sup> R. C. Buley, "Indiana In The Mexican War," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XV (September, 1919), 270.

<sup>9</sup> Practically the only source of information for Lane's early life is his obituary in the *Paoli Republican*, March 26, 1884.

to a close Lane determined to build a rival inn just a mile north of French Lick House as soon as possible. It was probably in 1855 that Lane's Mile Lick Inn opened its doors for the first time.<sup>10</sup> Located on lower ground than French Lick House, it occupied a less desirable site. Lane, however, went to work with vigor and, inspired by his success at French Lick, set out to make Mile Lick just as successful. In addition to his original capital he borrowed \$1,800, built a sawmill, and from its lumber constructed his frame hotel and a bridge across French Lick Creek.<sup>11</sup> Later Lane changed the hotel's name to "The West Baden Inn." This change, he felt, would make the inn more attractive to guests and at the same time disassociate it from French Lick House.

By 1860 both inns were well established and were considered among the more prosperous mineral spring resorts in Indiana.<sup>12</sup> Lane and his successors continued to spend money improving the West Baden Springs Hotel, as it was known by this time. During these early years the hotel was open only during the summer months, the "watering season," and drew its guests almost exclusively from the southern Indiana region.

A turning point in the story of the West Baden Springs Hotel came on April 1, 1887, when the Louisville, New Albany, and Chicago Railroad—"The Monon"—completed the construction of its line to the springs.<sup>13</sup> Accounts in the *Paoli Republican*, the newspaper of the county seat, gradually grew ecstatic as the West Baden proprietors found their business improving. The reports began with modest surprise when

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<sup>10</sup> Although Joseph S. Karol, S. J. in his article, "Mile Lick Milestones," *Indiana History Bulletin*, XXX (July, 1953), 116-119, accepts 1852 as the date for the founding of the hotel, it seems more likely that 1855 is the proper date according to the Orange County records, The Tax Duplicate and Delinquent List, 1853 (Paoli), 69; Orange County, The Tax . . . List, 1854, p. 86; Orange County, The Tax . . . List, 1855, p. 112; Orange County, The Tax . . . List, 1856, p. 117; Orange County, Deed Record Book 15 (Paoli), December 21, 1852, p. 135. For a discussion of the point see the author's "The Story of the West Baden Springs Hotel" (unpublished Master's thesis, Loyola University, Chicago, 1957), 15.

<sup>11</sup> Weston A., Leroy C., and Charles L. Goodspeed, *History of Lawrence, Orange and Washington Counties* (Chicago, 1884), 394.

<sup>12</sup> Haupt, "French Lick Springs Hotel," 60-61.

<sup>13</sup> "On March 1, 1886, the Louisville, New Albany and Chicago Railway bought the Orleans, West Baden and French Lick Springs Railway, and completed the construction of this important 17-mile line by April 1, 1887." John W. Barriger, *A Hoosier Centenarian*, "The Monon" (New York, 1947), 18.

guests arrived at the hotel as early as April. The *Republican* reported, "Several guests are already visiting the Springs, and the owners are expecting the biggest season yet."<sup>14</sup> By June the prospects were even brighter and the *Republican* now reported, "In consequence of the advantages offered by a railroad, this place is daily receiving new guests, . . . a great many of whom have never been here before."<sup>15</sup> And finally in July the newspaper announced, "The hotels at both places have never had such a run of custom [*sic*] as they have this season. . . . Both places are going to build large additions as soon as the present season closes. . . . A building boom has struck this place."<sup>16</sup>

The railroad brought many new guests to the West Baden Springs Hotel, but none of greater importance to it than Lee Wiley Sinclair from Salem, Indiana. Sinclair had the vision and courage to transform the hotel from a country inn into an American resort in less than a decade. Local residents were surprised when it was announced in February, 1888, that Sinclair had bought one-third interest in the West Baden Springs Company for \$28,000. Before the summer season was over Sinclair bought another third interest in the hotel for \$33,333, thus gaining controlling interest in it.<sup>17</sup>

"Colonel" Sinclair, who served for a full sixty days in the G. A. R. as a private,<sup>18</sup> went to work immediately to make the West Baden Springs Hotel one of the outstanding hotels of the country. During 1888 it was open for the entire year instead of merely during the watering season. That same year Sinclair built a laundry and an engine house.<sup>19</sup> The next year he took out a \$50,000 mortgage "for improvements on the West Baden Springs property."<sup>20</sup> In 1893 an Opera House

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<sup>14</sup> Paoli *Republican*, May 1, 1887.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, June 1, 1887.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, July 27, 1887.

<sup>17</sup> Orange County, Deed Record Book 38, March 20, 1888, p. 505, and Deed Record Book 39, July 30, 1888, p. 84. See also the Paoli *Republican*, February 22, 1888, and July 18, 1888.

<sup>18</sup> *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Indiana* (8 vols., Indianapolis, 1865-1869), VI, 269. Sinclair served his sixty day enlistment in the Seventy-Eighth Regiment, Company A.

<sup>19</sup> Paoli *Republican*, June 5, 1889.

<sup>20</sup> A copy of this mortgage is kept in the files of the Father Minister, West Baden College, West Baden Springs, Ind. It was held by the Bank of Salem, Salem, Ind., and is dated August 6, 1889.

was built on the grounds.<sup>21</sup> In 1894 a "commodious and tasty new hotel office" was added, and an addition was made to the hotel which increased the number of rooms by about two hundred, making it possible for the hotel now to accommodate between six and seven hundred guests.<sup>22</sup> By 1895 a casino was finished on the grounds; the entire first floor was a ball-room; the second floor contained the clubrooms; and on the third floor were the offices of the *West Baden Journal*. The *Journal* was a "sparkling" weekly newspaper which was subsidized by the hotel and reported its doings with all the care and affection of a doting father.<sup>23</sup> The hotel was now served by another railroad,<sup>24</sup> and was equipped with five hundred rooms which were lighted by electricity, heated with steam, and connected with the lobby by a system of electric bells.<sup>25</sup> Even "Mr. Dooley" (Finley Peter Dunne) saw fit to mention West Baden in the same breath with Paris as a rendezvous for the weary rich when he said, "If these people didn't let go iv their coin here [Chicago], they'd take it away with thim to Paris or West Baden, Indiana, an' spind it instid iv puttin' it in circulation amonst th' florists an' dhressmakers an' hackmen they'll have to hire."<sup>26</sup> Dooley paid West Baden a high compliment, and suggested that the dream Lee Wiley Sinclair had dreamed a few years earlier had almost come true.

Then tragedy struck the hotel. Early in the morning of June 14, 1901, a fire broke out in the kitchen and within minutes raced through the dry, old wood of the West Baden Springs Hotel. Fire and terror suddenly snatched the hotel

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<sup>21</sup> *West Baden Journal*, November 26, 1895, and November 28, 1899. The *West Baden Journal* began publication in March, 1894. Sinclair soon saw in it a potential publicity organ for the hotel, and in May, 1894, bought the paper and put W. J. Prow in charge as editor. The paper was a success as subsidized by the hotel and continued publication until September 24, 1918. It is to this newspaper, more than to any other single source, that we owe our knowledge of hotel life and management. The only known complete file of the paper is in the West Baden College Library.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, November 6, 1894.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, August 14, 1894.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, June 23, 1896. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad announced a through Pullman sleeping car from Saint Louis to the Springs for weekend guests.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, November 26, 1895.

<sup>26</sup> Finley Peter Dunne, *Mr. Dooley in Peace and in War* (Boston, 1899), 158.

into their grasp, and threatened to destroy all life within it. Next morning the headlines of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* screamed that two hundred persons had lost their lives in the blaze.<sup>27</sup> The truth is that most of the guests made an easy escape, even amid the confusion and darkness, and all of them were safely outside the flaming building within fifteen minutes after the alarm had sounded. In spite of the sensational *Tribune* headlines, there were no deaths or serious injuries.<sup>28</sup>

But Sinclair was not entirely consoled by the fire's failure to claim any lives. The blaze, at the cost of five hundred thousand dollars, had voraciously devoured the dream of a lifetime and had left Sinclair nothing but a few gaunt chimneys and blistered fire-escapes.<sup>29</sup> To add to Sinclair's troubles, Thomas J. Taggart, three-times mayor of Indianapolis and rising star in the Democratic party, had gained control of the French Lick Springs Hotel just ten days before the fire, and now threatened to crush the rival hotel in a million-dollar flourish of extravagant remodeling and advertising.<sup>30</sup>

Sinclair lost little time in deciding what to do. Within a week he determined to raise a new hotel from the ashes of the old. And the new hotel was to be a unique structure, completed within a year from the date of the fire.<sup>31</sup> It would

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<sup>27</sup> *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 15, 1901, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> *West Baden Journal*, June 18, 1901, and *Louisville Courier Journal*, June 15, 1901, p. 1. Also, *West Baden Springs* (West Baden, ca. 1905), 5; this brochure is kept in the files of the Father Minister, West Baden College.

<sup>29</sup> The Sinclair Questionnaire. This typewritten questionnaire from the Continental Bank of Chicago to the West Baden Springs Company, November 1, 1901, contains the handwritten replies of L. W. Sinclair, president of the West Baden Springs Company. This document gives Sinclair's estimate that he sustained a loss of \$500,000 in the fire. The questionnaire is kept in the files of the Father Minister, West Baden College. The Hickman Testimony, New York, 1920, is a sworn statement of Henry Hickman, associate of Thomas J. Taggart in the French Lick Springs Hotel, and states the following concerning the West Baden property: "This property, as it then stood after the destruction by fire, without buildings or improvements of any value . . . was offered for sale with the purchase price fixed at \$700,000." This document is kept in the records of the French Lick-Sheraton Hotel.

<sup>30</sup> Haupt, "French Lick Springs Hotel," 99-101.

<sup>31</sup> The Sinclair Questionnaire, "When do you expect it [the new hotel] will be completed?" "A. Contracted to be completed by May 21, 1902."

be circular and support the world's widest dome.<sup>32</sup> Sinclair's friends and family insisted that he was mad to attempt to complete his building in so short a time, and architects argued that it was impossible to construct a safe dome of such great diameter which would be able to stand the effects of expansion and contraction.<sup>33</sup> But Sinclair forged ahead, persuaded a young architect named Harrison Albright to undertake the job, and signed with a contractor to carry out his wishes.<sup>34</sup>

And so the work began. On October 1, 1901, all preliminary arrangements were completed and the contractor agreed to accept \$414,000 for "work and materials" and to accept a penalty of one hundred dollars per day for each day over two hundred needed to complete the new hotel.<sup>35</sup> On the first anniversary of the fire, June 14, 1902, Lee W. Sinclair moved into his apartment in the new hotel and had Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Callahan of Chicago as his guests for breakfast.<sup>36</sup> His triumph was complete.

The new hotel had an outer circumference of 1,010 feet. The inner rooms formed a perfect circle around the Pompeian Court and rose in circular tiers to the height of six stories. There were 708 rooms, each guest room being supplied with bath, lavatory, telephone, hot and cold water, steam heat, and electric lights. The Pompeian Court and dome, however, were

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<sup>32</sup> The West Baden *Journal*, October 21, 1902, denies that the building is patterned after any historical structure. The original blueprints in the West Baden College files indicate that the basic design is Sinclair's. The persistent legend, however, is that Sinclair conceived the structure as a combination of the lines of the Roman Colosseum and Saint Peter's Cathedral dome. Haupt, "French Lick Springs Hotel," 103, cites Raymond P. Stout, late president of the Paoli State Bank and friend of Sinclair's, as maintaining that Sinclair got the idea during a trip to Europe before the fire. Mr. Stout died in 1955 before the author was able to check with him. Mr. William W. Cave, president of the French Lick State Bank, life-long resident of French Lick, and business acquaintance of Sinclair's indicated his acceptance of this explanation in an interview on June 30, 1955. Others also have accepted it, but no conclusive proof is available.

<sup>33</sup> West Baden *Journal*, November 4, 1902, and April 21, 1903.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, November 4, 1902.

<sup>35</sup> The contract with Caldwell and Drake, contractors from Columbus, Ind., October 1, 1901, reads: "Article VI. The Contractors shall complete the several portions of the work comprehended in this agreement within two hundred (200) working days. From [sic] Oct. 1, 1901, or forfeit one hundred dollars (\$100) for each day completion postponed beyond the expiration of that time, this basis being agreed upon as liquidated damages for delay." The contract is kept in the files of the Father Minister, West Baden College.

<sup>36</sup> West Baden *Journal*, October 21, 1902.



the hotel's most striking and unique features; the dome was two hundred feet in diameter, and six hundred feet in inner circumference, and was a hundred and thirty feet high. The hub of the drum of the big dome was itself ten feet high, sixteen feet in diameter, and weighed eight and one-half tons. From the hub of the dome twenty-four ribs of steel, each weighing four and one-half tons, radiated to the pillars which supported them. Later a pavement of over twelve million marble mosaics would be laid in an intricate and beautiful design, and a wainscotting of Hauteville marble twelve feet high would cover the facade of brick.<sup>37</sup>

The hotel's day of formal christening came on April 16, 1903.<sup>38</sup> Overcast and chill after three days of steady rain, the day dawned glorious nonetheless. Eight large American flags flew triumphantly in the breeze from atop the Moorish towers, and this octet was fittingly crowned by an enormous flag flying from atop the dome of the Pompeian Court. The hotel swarmed with dignitaries and sightseers. Ceremonies began at 2:30 in the afternoon with speeches in the Court, as Governor Winfield T. Durbin and Senator Charles W. Fairbanks marveled, wondered, and exclaimed with delight.

Governor Durbin's address, an elaborate eulogy of Sinclair, was typical of the event and the times:

I myself wrote him a letter on the subject, in which I used every argument I could possibly employ to convince him of the hazards involved in this plan. Afterwards, . . . I had a personal interview with him along the same line. . . . He told me in that interview that practically every friend he had in the world was opposed to his project, but that in spite of all opposition he was determined to go on.<sup>39</sup>

The keynote had been struck. A dream had come true. The *Journal*, in its quaint Victorian way, caught the spirit of the hotel's resurrection as well as anyone: "The new West Baden stands today, risen like the Phoenix from the ashes of despair to the very acme of its olden joy. The new hotel building of the West Baden Springs Company might very properly be called the eighth wonder of the world."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, October 21, 1902, and April 21, 1903. Details also obtained from original blueprints in West Baden College files, and from measurements made by J. Peter Deane, S. J., October 5, 1957.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, April 21, 1903.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, October 21, 1902.

Guests came to the West Baden Springs Hotel, so it was said, to make use of the mineral springs. The water from these marvelous springs "cured or helped cure" over fifty ailments, ranging from "alcoholism and asthma" to "sprains and sterility."<sup>41</sup> The general program prescribed for anyone "who wanted to get the full benefit from the waters" was "two or three glassfuls before breakfast, three or four glassfuls in the forenoon, and a like quantity in the afternoon, with an interval of fifteen or twenty minutes between each glassful. A brisk walk, not too tiring, after drinks aids the action of the waters."<sup>42</sup> It would take the Muckrakers, the Pure Food and Drug laws, and the growing spirit of public criticism of medical quackery to push the springs and their miraculous medicinal powers into the background and force the hotel to place greater emphasis upon its recreational facilities. Until then the hotel could continue to bottle its "Sprudel Water"<sup>43</sup> as a lucrative business enterprise, and continue happily to quote the tributes of cured sufferers like Mr. C. L. Pratt of Chicago who said, "West Baden waters, beyond a doubt, for all chronic troubles, are the best in America, and if all the poor sufferers knew the truth as I do, the hillsides would be covered with the multitudes."<sup>44</sup>

Guests came to the hotel for rest and recreation as well as for health, and the hotel had to cater to their wishes. Amid the polished marble of the Pompeian Court a guest would see a portion of mid-American society, where, as Katherine Blake of the Chicago *Daily News* described the scene, "Diamonds are spread abroad—it is the proper thing to wear a white sweater with a large diamond in the front, or if perchance an alderman, an aldermanic star."<sup>45</sup> Here were the playboys and politicians, the athletes and show people who made the West Baden Springs Hotel their second home, and who gave to it some of their own color and glamour. At different times the hotel played host to many of America's notables: the governors of Indiana and Illinois, especially

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<sup>41</sup> *Carlsbad of America, 1892-1894* (West Baden, 1893), 13. This brochure and others similar to it are in the files of the Father Minister, West Baden College.

<sup>42</sup> *West Baden Journal*, November 20, 1902.

<sup>43</sup> Trade name for the West Baden water, to distinguish it from the Pluto Water of the French Lick Springs Hotel.

<sup>44</sup> *West Baden Journal*, July 14, 1896.

<sup>45</sup> As quoted in the *West Baden Journal*, September 15, 1896.

Governor Durbin and Governor Len Small; Mayor George B. Swift, Mayor Carter Harrison, and Mayor "Big Bill" Thompson of Chicago; Richard Croker of New York's Tammany Hall;<sup>46</sup> Frank Parmalee, John J. Pershing, J. M. Studebaker, and Robert Graham.<sup>47</sup> Later, in the twenties, one of the hotel's most faithful visitors would be the chief of the Chicago underworld, "Scarface Al" Capone, who patrolled the grounds in his fabulous Lincoln with its fenders of steel and doors with combination locks.<sup>48</sup>

During the years on either side of the turn of the century the sports world made the West Baden Springs Hotel its training headquarters. James J. Corbett trained at West Baden before the Corbett-Sharkey battle in November, 1898, and followed faithfully "the usual Springs customs in the use of the mineral waters."<sup>49</sup> Thomas J. Sharkey and John L. Sullivan also were frequent visitors at the hotel.<sup>50</sup> From 1897 onwards one or other of the major league baseball clubs made West Baden its spring training quarters: the St. Louis Browns, the Chicago Cubs, the Pittsburgh Pirates, the Philadelphia Phillies, the St. Louis Cardinals, and the Cincinnati Reds.<sup>51</sup> When the hotel diamonds were not being used by one of the professional clubs, a guest might join Mayor Swift of Chicago, captain of the "Hots of [Spring] Number Seven," in leading his team to victory over the "Colds of Number Five."<sup>52</sup>

In the evenings the hotel tried to offer diversified entertainment. The Opera House was open from fall to spring, and sponsored shows such as *What Happened to Jones* and *The Banker's Child*, or perhaps one of the Schubert comedies advertised as "clean and really humorous . . . a sensational terpsichorean novelty."<sup>53</sup> During the summer months travel-

<sup>46</sup> Louisville *Courier-Journal*, December 8, 1901, pt. 2, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> West Baden *Journal*, November 6, 1897, and the Picture Album, in the files of the Father Minister, West Baden College.

<sup>48</sup> Interviews with Elmer Thacker, manager of the club rooms, and Glenn Marlette, manager of the hotel taxi stand, on June 28, 1955, and June 29, 1955, respectively. See also Emmett Dedmon, *Fabulous Chicago* (New York, 1953), 298.

<sup>49</sup> West Baden *Journal*, October 25, 1898, and January 15, 1901.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, January 15, 1901, and June 19, 1906.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, March 15, 1898; March 5, 1907; March 12, 1907; March 5, 1912; March 12, 1912; March 4, 1913.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, October 26, 1897, and November 2, 1897.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, July 17, 1906.

ing drama companies pitched their tents inside the bicycle track area on the grounds. There, for instance, the Crescent Comedy Company featured the "well known Hawthorne Sisters, Misses Kittie and Maude, who have been footlight favorites throughout the United States for the past twenty years," and added as a desperate after-thought, "beginning their stage career while quite young in years."<sup>54</sup> Or perhaps the Kritchfield Company would present its production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. If so, a hotel guest would have the distinct privilege of watching "The Best Tom, The Cutest Eva, The Funniest Topsy," all at the nominal cost of twenty five cents for adults and fifteen cents for children.<sup>55</sup>

Some evenings, of course, were highlighted by a ball. The St. Patrick's Day Ball was always a favorite with the hotel guests. Early in the afternoon, after the parade through town, a notice similar to the following would be posted:

St. Patrick's Day, General Order No. 2—All Irish Patriots (sex or color no bar) are cordially invited to visit the annual ball of the sons of Erin, to be held on Tuesday night, March 17. Grand March at 8:30. N. B. Ladies must not appear in green bloomers. Gentlemen must wear more than their complexion.<sup>56</sup>

As time went on guests of the hotel began to spend more of their evenings at the gambling casinos. By 1915 the casino of the Brown Hotel, just opposite the French Lick Springs Hotel, was in operation as one of the more famous gambling establishments of the whole Midwest.<sup>57</sup>

In 1916 Lee Sinclair died, and a few years later his daughter and son-in-law agreed to sell the West Baden Springs Hotel to Charles Edward Ballard. Ballard was a local resident who had made a fortune for himself by his connections with the two big hotels and by his ownership of the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus; for some time it had been his ambition to own the West Baden Springs Hotel.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, July 25, 1905.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, August 14, 1906.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, March 24, 1896.

<sup>57</sup> *Paoli Republican*, August 16, 1905; Edna Ferber, *Showboat* (New York, 1926), 303; interviews with Elmer Thacker and William W. Cave, June 28, 1955, and June 30, 1955.

<sup>58</sup> *West Baden Journal*, September 14, 1915. Interviews with Elmer Thacker and William W. Cave, June 28, 1955, and June 30, 1955.

Under Ballard's management the hotel attracted more conventions and used gambling more extensively as a come-on for guests. One spectacular attraction was added to the West Baden Springs Hotel during these years—circus performances in the Pompeian Court. At the west entrance was erected a regular size circus ring and, inside it, a cage with a protective top. Lions, tigers, and even elephants were brought into the Court and made to perform for the amusement of the hotel guests.<sup>59</sup> After the performance, the ring and cage would be torn down and the Court set up for a convention banquet to seat one thousand to fifteen hundred diners. In the twenties business boomed, and so did the West Baden Springs Hotel. (See insert facing page 326.)

Then Wall Street crashed, and with it crashed the little world that was the West Baden Springs Hotel. The ticker tape of Logan and Bryan, brokers, brought the incredible news to a shocked and despairing group of men who crowded into the little room just inside the "Springs Entrance." The telephone exchange outside the lobby brought confirmation of the news. It was true. The market had crashed.

Within hours guests began to check out, determined to get home and there, perhaps, find some measure of security against the utter destitution which threatened them. The trickle of departing guests swelled into something of a torrent as the panic spread. For a few days the lobby of the West Baden Springs Hotel was feverish with the rush. For a few days the bell boys, room clerks, and cabbies worked at top efficiency to keep up with check-outs and departures. Then it was quiet. In the midst of the fall season the hotel was practically empty of guests as though its life-blood had been drained.<sup>60</sup>

A reflective and pessimistic few, conscious of the growing attractiveness of Florida and the Far West, predicted that the hotel's days were over for good, but the majority of its friends

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<sup>59</sup> Details taken from "Our Christmas," *Under the Dome*, I (March 1, 1919). From October, 1918, until April, 1919, the United States government used the hotel as General Hospital 35. *Under the Dome* was published by the staff and patients of the hospital. The circus performances were continued for the benefit of guests after the hotel resumed regular operation.

<sup>60</sup> Interviews with Glenn Marlette and with Laff Prow, room clerk at the hotel from 1919 until 1932, June 29, 1955.

felt that this slump in the money market would pass and that within a few months the hotel would again be the bustling "Eighth Wonder of the World."

The fall season, ending with tremendous financial loss, stretched into winter. On January 1, 1930, one guest registered at the hotel; two registered the following day. The average number of guests for December, 1930, was five. Fewer guests than ever registered for the spring of 1931. The summer was worse.<sup>61</sup>

Finally in the fall of 1931, the hotel closed its doors. This was the first time the management had deliberately closed them since 1887, the year before the arrival of Sinclair. The hotel promised, however, to reopen for the spring season of 1932 to care for a few previously scheduled conventions and, thought the die-hards, perhaps make a fresh start. But the spring season of 1932 proved to be no better than had been the two previous ones. In June, therefore, the manager of the hotel called the heads of the various departments to his office, told them that the hotel was closing and that no one knew when, if ever, it would open again. All beds and furniture were covered with newspapers, the hotel silverware and dishes carefully stored away, and arrangements made to have the grounds tended for an indefinite period of time. On June 30, 1932, the last payments were made to the cooks, maids, florists, bell boys—to that immense army of manpower which makes up a hotel—and the hotel auditor left that same day. On July 1, 1932, the executive office closed.<sup>62</sup>

By the autumn of 1933 Ballard began to despair of finding a buyer for the hotel and intimated to some acquaintances that he might be interested in donating the hotel to some group which would use it for religious or educational purposes. The Reverend Hugo F. Sloctemyer, member of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and president of Xavier University,

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<sup>61</sup> These figures are taken from p. 111, Diary, 1934, of the Reverend Henry S. Spalding, S. J.; Father Spalding seems to have copied them from the hotel registers with a view to one day telling the hotel's story. The registers themselves were destroyed in 1955 before the author had an opportunity to check them. Since other information in the Diary is in scrupulous accord with facts known *ex aliunde*, it is reasonable to presume that its figures are correct in this instance. The Diary is kept in the files of the Father Minister, West Baden College.

<sup>62</sup> Interviews with Glenn Marlette, Laff Prow, and also Winifred Daley O'Neal, auditor of the West Baden Springs Hotel Company. The interviews with Messrs. Marlette and Prow were on June 29, 1955; that with Mrs. O'Neal was on June 27, 1955.

Cincinnati, contacted Ballard and told him that his Society would be interested in using the hotel as a seminary for the training of its members.<sup>63</sup> On February 7, 1934, Ballard, though not himself a Catholic, listened to Father Sloctemyer explain what he had in mind. And according to Father Sloctemyer, Ballard "was delighted with our proposition and is most satisfied with the purposes for which we wish to use it [the hotel]. Tears came to his eyes when he spoke of his satisfaction with our having it. He is a wonderfully good man."<sup>64</sup> That very day Ballard offered the hotel to Father Sloctemyer as an outright gift.<sup>65</sup> At length, on June 28, 1934, the transfer of the West Baden Springs Hotel to the Society of Jesus was made final, and its transformation from a hotel to a college was begun.<sup>66</sup>

The Society of Jesus, an educational organization of priests within the Catholic Church, was founded in 1540 by Saint Ignatius Loyola and played an important part in the Catholic Counter Reformation. The members of the Society undergo a long period of training according to strict and austere rules. The West Baden Springs Hotel had to be made to conform to the spirit of its new owners, in accordance with the instructions received from the Father General of the Society in Rome:

*Reverentiam vestram enixe adhortor ut inde ab initio ab isto aedificio sedulo amoveat non solum omnem speciem luxus, sed insuper ea omnia quae mundum quovis modo sapiunt, etiamsi ad hoc efficiendum majores expensae fieri debent.*<sup>67</sup>

In accordance with this directive from the Father General, the Jesuits set about transforming the hotel into a house of study and prayer. The inner rooms were

<sup>63</sup> Details from a letter of the Very Reverend Charles H. Cloud, S. J., Chicago, to Mr. Alfred Talley, Attorney at Law, New York, February 24, 1934, in the Archives of the Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus, Oak Park, Illinois.

<sup>64</sup> Letter from the Reverend Hugo F. Sloctemyer, S. J., New York to the Very Reverend Charles H. Cloud, S. J., Chicago, February 8, 1934, Chicago Province Archives.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Telegram from the Reverend Aloysius H. Rohde, S. J., West Baden, to the Very Reverend Charles H. Cloud, S. J., Chicago, June 28, 1934, Chicago Province Archives.

<sup>67</sup> Letter from the Very Reverend Wlodimir Ledochowski, S. J., Rome, to the Very Reverend Charles H. Cloud, S. J., Chicago, May 11, 1934, Chicago Province Archives: "... I urge your Reverence to remove immediately everything that looks luxurious or that smacks of a worldly spirit, even if it is costly to do so." Translation by the author.

stripped of their furnishings and their walls were covered with book shelves. The baths on the upper floor were torn out and converted into small chapels where the priests of the community could offer Mass each day. The grand ballroom was partitioned into two classrooms and large auditorium. The dining room was dispossessed of its drapery and carpets, and a large pulpit was installed from which Scripture and other religious books could be read to the members of the Society during meals. The lobby was made over into the main chapel, to be used for the daily devotions of the Jesuits. In the center of the Pompeian Court a life-sized figure of the Savior was erected, symbolic of the change which had taken place.

When the Jesuits announced their acquisition of the hotel, they encountered varied reactions. The local newspapers felt the change-over was a blow to the local economy;<sup>68</sup> *Time* hinted that Father Slocemyer had hoodwinked Ballard into the gift;<sup>69</sup> Will Rogers exclaimed, "And he wasent [*sic*] even a Catholic!"<sup>70</sup> But, no matter what others might think, Ballard and the Jesuits were most happy with the transaction. Ballard saw preservation for his wonderful building; the Jesuits saw continuation of their centuries-old work for God.

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<sup>68</sup> *Paoli Republican*, August 2, 1934.

<sup>69</sup> *Time*, XXIV (July 9, 1934), 28-30.

<sup>70</sup> In his syndicated column for July 22, 1934, in the *Chicago Herald and Examiner*.