

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL ASSESSMENT OF AN ISOLATED SPRING, RURAL DEWITT COUNTY, ILLINOIS

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July 17, 2000

SUMMARY OF ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

The springhead is located on the NE1/4, NW1/4 of Section 12, in Township 19 North, Range 2 East of the Third Principal Meridian (Texas Township), De Witt County, Illinois. The United States General Land Office (USGLO) map for Texas Township depicts this tract as being located within a broad band of timber bordering Salt Creek and shows no structural improvements upon it or in the surrounding area (USGLO 1823). The survey from which this map was produced preceded permanent Euro-American settlement in Texas Township by nearly a decade. Thomas Davenport and his family, who settled on Section 4 in 1829, are considered the first settlers in the township. Many of the families who established homesteads there after the Davenports were from Kentucky originally (Pioneer Publishing Company 1910:422). The NE1/4, NW1/4 of Section 12 was purchased from the United States by Benjamin L. Cundiff on December 10, 1836. This acquisition expanded Cundiff's landholdings in Section 12 to 80 acres, since had purchased the NE1/4, SW1/4 the year before (March 25, 1835) (DeWitt County Entry Book:22). Even though Cundiff is not mentioned as one of the early settlers of Texas Township in the 1910 *History of De Witt County*, there is a good chance that he established either his own homestead or a tenant farmstead on the lands he owned in Section 12. Cundiff owned NE1/4, NW1/4 and NE1/4, SW1/4 for an exceptionally long period of time (36 years), and when he did finally sell the tracts, he did so at a price high enough to indicate that they were significantly improved. He served as Collector of taxes in Texas Township in 1859-1860 (De Witt County Deed Record L:346).

Cundiff sold the NE1/4, NW1/4 and NE1/4, SW1/4 of Section 12 to George Hartsock for \$4900 (\$61.25 per acre) on September 14, 1872 (De Witt County Deed Record 6:569). Born and raised in Ohio, Hartsock was a relative newcomer to Illinois, having only arrived in the state ca. 1863.¹ He purchased land in Texas Township before leaving Ohio, so the family had a place to

¹ An 1891 biography of William H. Hartsock, George's son, relates that the family left Ohio for Illinois in 1853. Yet, census and genealogical records indicate that another son, Charles, was born in Ohio in 1860, while the two children who were younger than him were born in Illinois. Based on this information, we suspect that the 1853 date provided in the biography is a mistake and potentially represent a misprint of "1863" (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1880; Family Bible Records).

settle as soon as they arrived. Their first home in Illinois was described “little log cabin.” With time, however, the family prospered (Clarke 1901:369-70). The 1875 *Atlas of De Witt County* designates George Hartsock as the owner of 280 acres of land in Sections 11 and 12 of Texas Township. Slightly over half of this acreage is depicted as improved, while the remainder is timbered. The NE1/4, NW1/4 of Section 12 is depicted as being almost entirely covered with timber, except for a small clearing around a house located on tract’s western edge, adjacent to a public road. This house is one of two that the atlas illustrates on Hartsock’s land; the second house is positioned one-quarter mile south of the first, on the SW1/4, NW1/4 of Section 12 (Warner and Beers 1875). Based on the placement of their household in the 1880 population schedule for Texas Township, the Hartsock family is believed to have been occupying one of the two residences depicted on their land on the 1875 atlas.² The other residence may have been rented out to a tenant. The 1875 atlas does not show a spring anywhere on the NE1/4, NW1/4 of Section 12, though it does show illustrate numerous other springs throughout Texas Township.

By 1880, George Hartsock had increased his landholdings in Texas Township to 385 acres. This acreage was divided between 205 acres of tilled ground, 105 acres of permanent meadow, pasture, or orchard, and 75 acres of woodland. The total value of these lands and the buildings upon them was assessed at \$11,200. Hartsock also owned \$200 worth of agricultural equipment and livestock valued at \$1134 in 1880. These figures were significantly higher than those reported by his neighbors --as was the \$2596 in farm products he generated for the year June 1879-June 1880-- and they attest to the considerable success he enjoyed as a farmer (U. S. Agricultural Schedule 1880:3). It was around this time that George Hartsock turned over active management of the farm to his sons James and William. James and William were still residing the family home as of 1880, as was their older brother Emerson and three younger siblings. The household had one other member as well: a servant named Mary Garriot. George Hartsock died on December 27, 1899, at the age of 71 or 72. At the time of his death he reportedly owned 440 acres of “improved land” in Texas and Creek Townships (Clarke 1901:369; U. S. Bureau of the Census 1880).

Within a week of their father’s death (January 2, 1900), George Hartsock’s children signed a quit-claim-deed to approximately 200 acres of land in Sections 1, 11, and 12 of Texas Township in favor of their mother, Emily Hartsock. In return, Emily paid a nominal sum of \$50 and waived her rights to the widow’s dower and homestead that was allowed to her by law. One of the tracts she acquired title to was the NE1/4, NW1/4 of Section 12.³ The terms of the quit-claim-deed were to remain in effect for the remainder of the mother’s life; upon her death, the lands were to be returned to her children, as the heirs of George Hartsock. The remaining acreage in the estate was divided between the heirs, with each sibling receiving approximately 40 acres (De Witt County Deed Record 45:141, 44:642-4, 46:1-2). Instead of remaining on the family farm after her husband’s death, Emily chose to relocate to Clinton, the county seat. As of

² The households preceding George Hartsock’s in the 1880 census are William Greer, Benjamin F. Mitchel, Felix Owens, and Henry Zeigler. The household following are Benjamin Hill, George Bloyie, Charles Zorger, and Evans Willis (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1880).

³ The other tracts were the SW1/4, SW1/4 of Section 1, the SW1/4, NW1/4 of Section, the SE1/4, NE1/4 of Section 11, and the NE1/4, SE1/4 of Section 11.

1904, she residing at 308 South Center Street in Clinton, along with her son Ralph and daughter Etta Mary, neither of whom was married (Skelley and Redfield 1904:43). Her son Charles had taken over the old family “home place,” while William was working on a 140-acre farm of his own in nearby Creek Township and Emerson was involved in the grain business. The fourth brother, James, had moved to Dayton, Ohio at some point previous (Clarke 1901:369).

Emily Hartsock died on August 25, 1906 at the age of 72 (De Witt County Death Register 1:177). Her will called for her Clinton home to be given to her daughter Etta M. and the remainder of her real estate to be divided equally between the children (De Witt County Probate Record No. 4831). This division was effected through a series of deeds signed on December 12, 1906. James Hartsock received 18 acres off the full south side of the NE1/4, NW1/4 of Section 12 (which included the site of the springhead) as well as 36 acres off the full north side of the SW1/4, NW1/4 of Section 12 (De Witt County Deed Record 51:535). How long James retained ownership of the southern 18 acres of the NE1/4, NW1/4 remains to be determined. Considering that James lived in Ohio, he may have quickly sold the land—or perhaps rented it for a time-- to his brother Charles. Charles had received the northern 22 acres in the NE1/4, NW1/4 of Section 12 when the estate was divided and still farmed in the immediate area, so it would not have been surprising if he had an interest in the property. Charles apparently did acquire ownership of the entire quarter-quarter-section eventually. On April 13, 1912 he sold the southern 16 acres of the tract, along with the SW1/4, SW1/4 of Section 1 and the SW1/4, NW1/4 of Section (minus 4 acres off the south side), to Ralph U. Hartsock for \$19,500 (De Witt County Deed Record 66:49). During this period, Ralph was still residing in the town Clinton, though he did list occupation as “farmer” in the local directory (Samson 1913).

The 1915 atlas of De Witt County designates Ralph Hartsock as owning the southern 20 acres of the NE1/4, NW1/4 of Section 12, but depicts no structural improvements upon the tract (Ogle 1915:47). Chain-of-title research failed to determine how long Ralph retained ownership of the property. By ca. 1939, the entire NE1/4, NW1/4 was owned by the Nellie Hartsock Estate (Hixson 1939[?]). The State of Illinois’ ownership of the tract post-dates the State’s acquisition of Weldon Springs Park in 1948.

Table 1
Simplified Chain-of-Title
NE1/4, NW1/4 Section 12

United States of America	to 1836
Benjamin L. Cundiff	1836 to 1872
George Hartsock	1872 to 1899
Emily Hartsock	1900 to 1906
James Hartsock	1906 to unknown
Charles Hartsock	unknown to 1912
Ralph Hartsock	1912 to unknown
Nellie Hartsock	unknown to post-1939
State of Illinois	post-1948

Weldon Springs Park was the precursor to present-day Weldon Springs State Recreational Area. The Weldon Springs Park Association established the park in 1897 on a 40-tract (NW1/4, NE1/4 of Section 12) that was leased from Judge Lawrence Weldon. Aside from serving as a popular local recreation area, Weldon Springs was the site of an annual 10-day Chautauqua that was held between the years 1901 and 1921 (Illinois Department of Natural Resources 1999). The park was named in honor of Judge Weldon and in recognition of the natural springs that abounded within it. Describing these springs, the 1904 Chautauqua program noted:

Groves of oak and other trees make an abundance of shade, and go into almost any part of the grounds you may, a spring may be found gushing forth its abundance of bright, pure, invigorating water to quench the thirst of the pleasure seeker. Many of these springs have been developed, hundreds of them not. They are constant no more or less whether the season be wet or dry. This would indicate that they are deep-seated and will be never failing (Weldon Springs Chautauqua 1904:6).

The waters from these and other De Witt County springs were characterized by a high sulphur content. One of the larger springs in the park was named the "Twin Springs" and reportedly emitted as much as 120,000 gallons of water in a single day. The Twin Springs was promoted as one of the main attractions at Weldon Springs (Pioneer Publishing Company 1910:108,333). Other attractions at the park included a man-made lake (complete with boat house and diving tower), picnic grounds, a pavilion, an indoor auditorium, and a series of walking trails and bridges. During the annual Chautauqua, the park grounds turned into a virtual "tent city," with as many as 325 families camped out to enjoy the ten-day program of events and speakers. In 1937, the Weldon family donated the original 40-acre park grounds, plus an additional 10 acres, to the City of Clinton. The State of Illinois assumed management in 1948 (Illinois Department of Natural Resources 1999).

SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING

The archaeological survey around the springhead site was conducted over two days and involved two tasks: recording the structure that surrounds the springhead; and shovel testing in the area around it in order to determine the approximate age of the structure and whether or not it represented an isolated feature or was part of a larger site. The structure that surrounds the springhead comprises three distinct sections: a central well curb of poured-concrete; an outer structure of plank cribbing; and a narrow zone of rock and soil fill in between. The well curb is rectangular in shape, measures 2'-0"x3'-1", and has an 1'-10"-diameter shaft through which the waters of the spring can be drawn. A thin, steel ring surrounds the shaft opening. The depth of the shaft could not be determined due to the high water table, though probing suggests that it minimally exceeds 3'. Fragments of the wood planks that were used for forms during the pouring of the well curb remain around the periphery of it. These planks are nominal-sized 1" boards (3/4" actual) and appear to be either yellow pine or cypress. Running parallel to, and 3-1/2 to 4" outside of, the well curb is a line of full-dimensional, 2" planks that are set on edge. These planks, which are a hardwood (possibly oak) form a slightly irregular rectangle that measures 3'-0" to 3'-4" north/south and 4'-0" east/west. The narrow void in between the outer

planking and well curb is filled with packed, rocky soil. It is uncertain whether the outer planking represents cribbing associated with the excavation and pouring of the well curb, or an earlier effort at developing the springhead that was later improved upon by adding the concrete well curb. The use of oak—as opposed to the yellow pine/cypress used to form the well curb—suggests the latter scenario, though it does not rule out the former either. A fragment of corrugated steel found adjacent to the springhead may be indicative of a past effort to cover the shaft opening, perhaps in order to keep out debris. The shaft is filled with leaves and trigs, though the spring water still bubbles up freely. A walking survey of the area immediately around the springhead did not find any evidence for any additional structural features that might be associated with it. Similarly, probing conducted beyond the outer line of plank cribbing did not indicate the presence of any subsurface foundations or piers.

During the first visit to the site, four shovel tests (T1 through T4) were excavated adjacent to the springhead. These tests were placed fairly close to the springhead structure in the hope of finding artifacts that might aid in determining the approximate date of its construction and its period of active use. Two of the four tests were positive. Test 1, which was placed less than 1 m north of the springhead, produced two large fragments of soft-mud brick that were buried 35-40 cm below the ground surface. Test 3, which was positioned approximately 3 m east of the springhead (on account of a tree fall and wet soil conditions adjacent to the springhead), produced two machine-cut nail fragments. Even though the number of artifacts recovered was limited, the fact that they were likely nineteenth-century in origin and were buried some distance below grade encouraged additional shovel testing across a wider area in order to assess the possibility of the springhead structure being a component of a larger site and not simply an isolated feature. An additional twenty shovels (T5 through T24) were excavated. These were placed at 15 m intervals along four transects. The limits of the survey were determined largely by topography. Two streams restricted the western and southern limits of the survey, while a marshy area and relatively steep slopes confined it on the east. Only one of the second series of shovel tests that were excavated proved positive. This was Test 13, which yielded a single machine-cut nail fragment. None of the tests excavated at 5 m intervals around Test 13 were positive. On account their limited number, the artifacts that were recovered during the shovel testing were inventoried in the field and left on site.

Table 2

Artifact Inventory

T1	2 brick (soft-mud)
T3	2 machine-cut nail fragment
T13	1 machine-cut nail fragment

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the limited artifact material recovered during the survey, the springhead structure appears to represent an isolated feature rather than being part of a larger historic site. This impression is strengthened by the fact that the few artifacts found were located in fairly close proximity to the springhead and were architectural in character, rather than obvious

domestic-related material, such as ceramics or container glass. It is possible that the brick and nails may have been deposited during the construction episodes that have occurred around the springhead. Even though none of the visible structure around the springhead is brick, it is possible that the lower portion of the shaft is brick-lined or perhaps that an earlier effort at cribbing around the springhead was made with brick. Similarly, machine-cut nails may have been used in the construction of the plank cribbing that surrounds the well curb. The nail fragments found during the survey might also be associated with a fence that has since deteriorated. Remnants of an old fence are evident on the opposite side of the stream, and it is possible that this fence line shifted from the north bank to the south with time, or perhaps that both banks of the stream were lined with fences at one time.

There is no indication that the springhead ever was exploited commercially like the well-known “Twin Springs” at the adjacent park. The springhead is not depicted on any of the historic atlases of the area, nor is it mentioned in written records. Also, the land on which the springhead is located wasn’t incorporated into Weldon Springs State Recreation Area until post-1948, well after the annual Chautauqua had ended. More importantly, there is no structural evidence suggestive of commercialization. Commercially developed mineral springs often had springhouses built over them. These springhouses could vary greatly in size and accretion, but typically consisted of an open-sided, pagoda-like structure inside of which were a springhead and a catch basin from which the spring water could be drawn. The interior floors were usually finished with stone flagging and/or concrete. Built-in benches, designed for the comfort of the patrons using the spring, might also be present. Springhouse construction reached its greatest elaboration at resorts promoting the therapeutic benefits of mineral spring water. Started as health retreats, many of these resorts eventually expanded into major recreation and vacation centers. The most famous resort of this kind in the United States was Saratoga Springs, New York. Other prominent resorts included White Springs, West Virginia, and Hot Springs, Arkansas. Illinois had its share of mineral spring resorts during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries as well. One of these was Siloam Springs, which is located on the border of Pike and Brown Counties and has since been developed as a state park. Springhouse No. 2 at Siloam Springs was documented through an archaeological investigation conducted by Fever River Research in 1993 (see Mansberger 1994). Weldon Springs contrasted to these resorts in that, while a recreation area, it neither was a health spa nor were its mineral springs its chief attraction. The Twin Springs was but one of a series of features at Weldon Springs Park that were promoted in contemporary literature. Hence, it never had a springhouse constructed over it. Nonetheless, the Twin Springs was landscaped around in 1901, in conjunction with the development of the park. The landscaping included the construction of a stone retaining wall adjacent to the mouth of the spring, a catch basin for the water, a lined gutter running from the spring to the lake, and a set of steps and a sidewalk to allow access pedestrian access to the (Weldon Springs Chautauqua Association 1904, 1905, 1911; *Daily Pantagraph* 27 August 1938). The Twin Springs clearly was the most prominent and most developed font at Weldon Springs. The other springs that were tapped on the park grounds presumably were less elaborate and more utilitarian in character. These lesser springs may very well have been tapped with structures similar to that found around the springhead documented in this report. Yet, even they should have evidence of commercial or public use archaeologically, via the artifact material found around them. The springs would have seen intense use during the annual 10-day Chautauqua (besides being used for day-picnics during the off-season), and it is highly probable

that a midden developed around them over time. Excavations at Springhouse No. 2 at Siloam Springs, for example, found a wide range of artifacts indicative of picnic, camping, and recreational activities (Mansberger 1994:20-2). No artifacts of this kind were found at the springhead.

Ruling out the springhead as a commercialized mineral spring associated with the Weldon Springs Chautauqua, we suspect that the springhead probably served as a farm stock well during its period of active use. The agricultural use of mineral springs is noted in the 1910 county history, which wrote: "Perennial springs abound in various parts of the county but are mainly found along or near the water courses. A few, however, appear upon the open prairies.... In dry seasons these provisions of nature are of almost incalculable value to the farmer and stock raiser" (Pioneer Publishing Company 1910:108). The materials used to construct the existing springhead structure suggest that it was developed during the very late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. It is possible that the springhead may have been developed following the division of the George Hartsock's estate between his children in 1906. Once separated from the large farm to which it had been attached for over a quarter century, the NE1/4, NW1/4 of Section 12 may have seen more intensive use. As noted previously, however, the structure we see today around the springhead may represent but one of a series of efforts at tapping its waters. No further work is recommended at the springhead.

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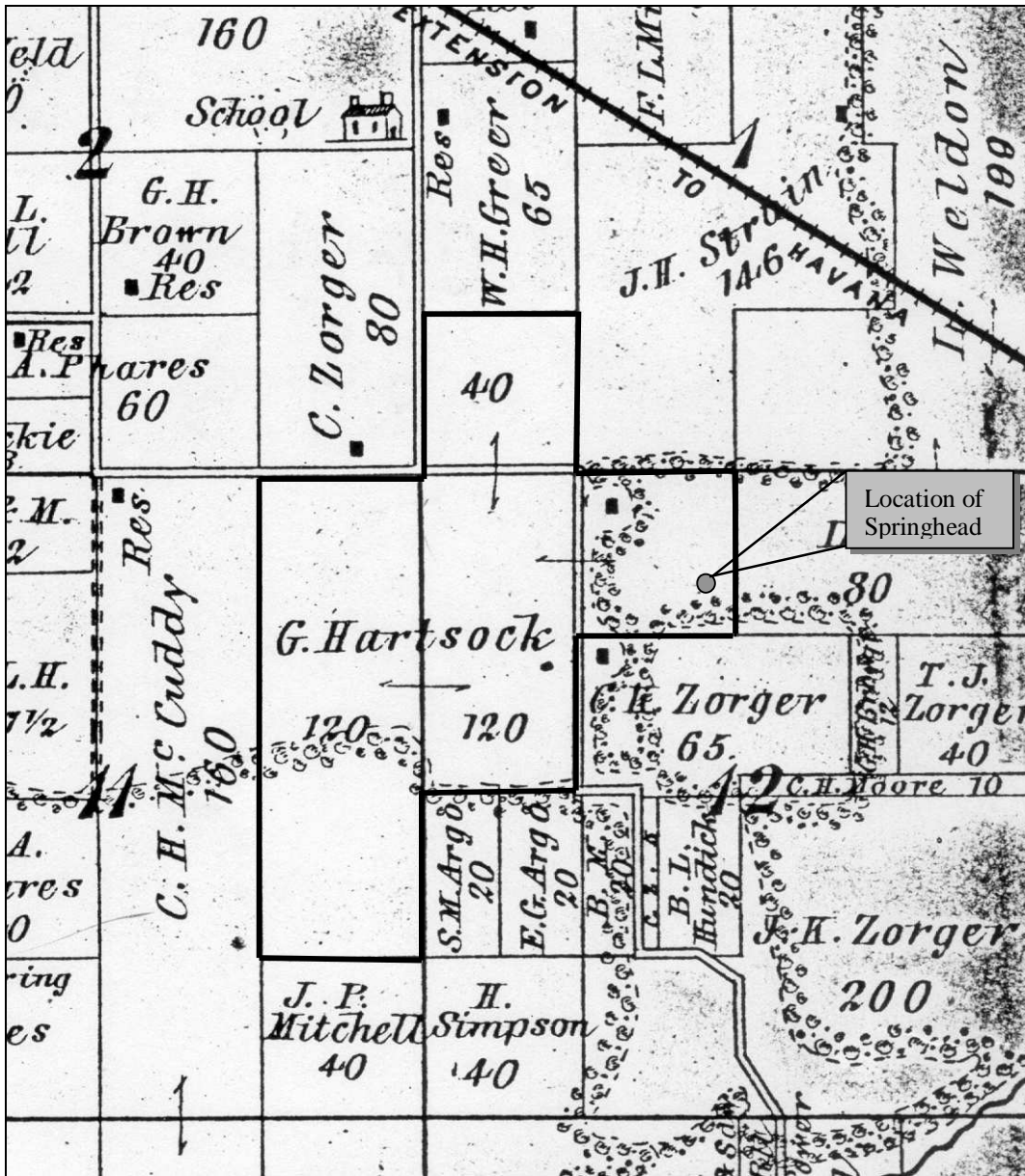


Figure 1. Detail from the 1875 atlas of De Witt County, showing the location of the springhead and the landholdings of George Hartsock. Note the residence located west of the springhead (Warner and Beers 1875).

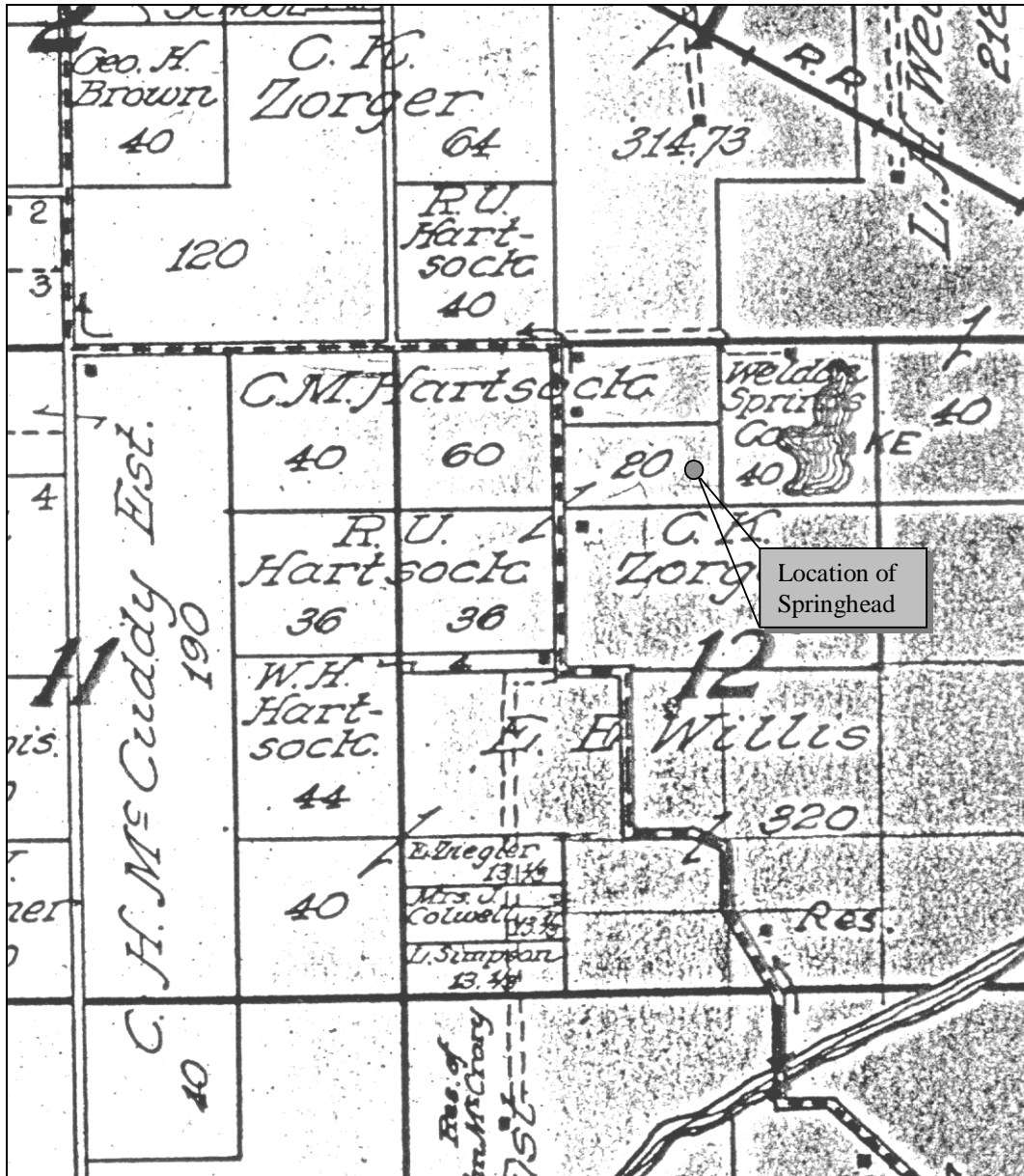


Figure 2. Detail of a 1915 atlas of De Witt County showing the approximate location of the springhead. By this date, the tract on which the springhead is located was owned by Ralph Hartsock. Note Weldon Springs Lake to the east of the springhead (Ogle 1915).



Figure 3. Photograph of the springhead, looking north (2000). The upper part of the concrete shaft surrounding the springhead has deteriorated on its south side.

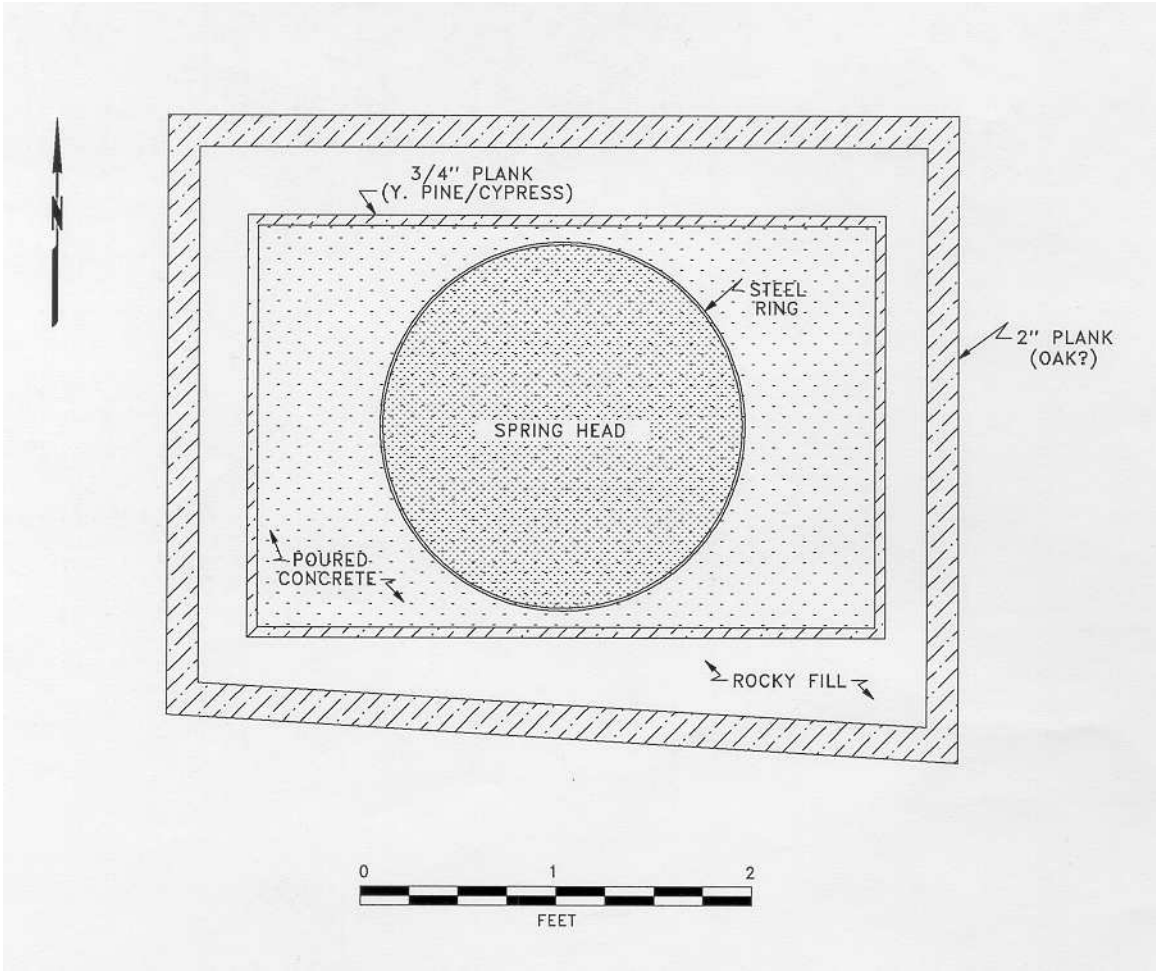


Figure 4. Plan view of the springhead, showing it as constructed.

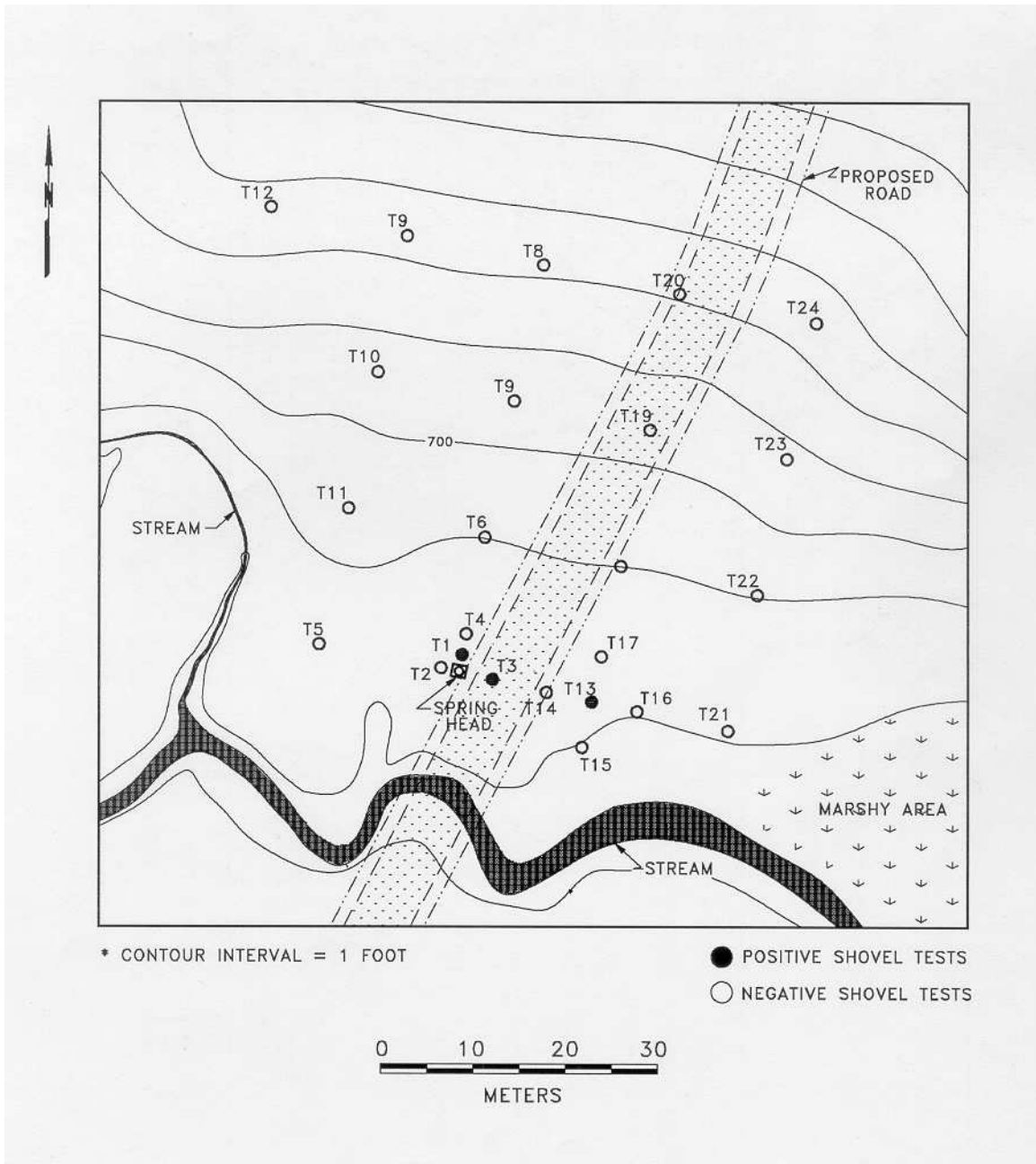


Figure 5. Figure showing the locations of the shovel tests excavated by Fever River Research around the site of the springhead. Tests are designated as either positive or negative.

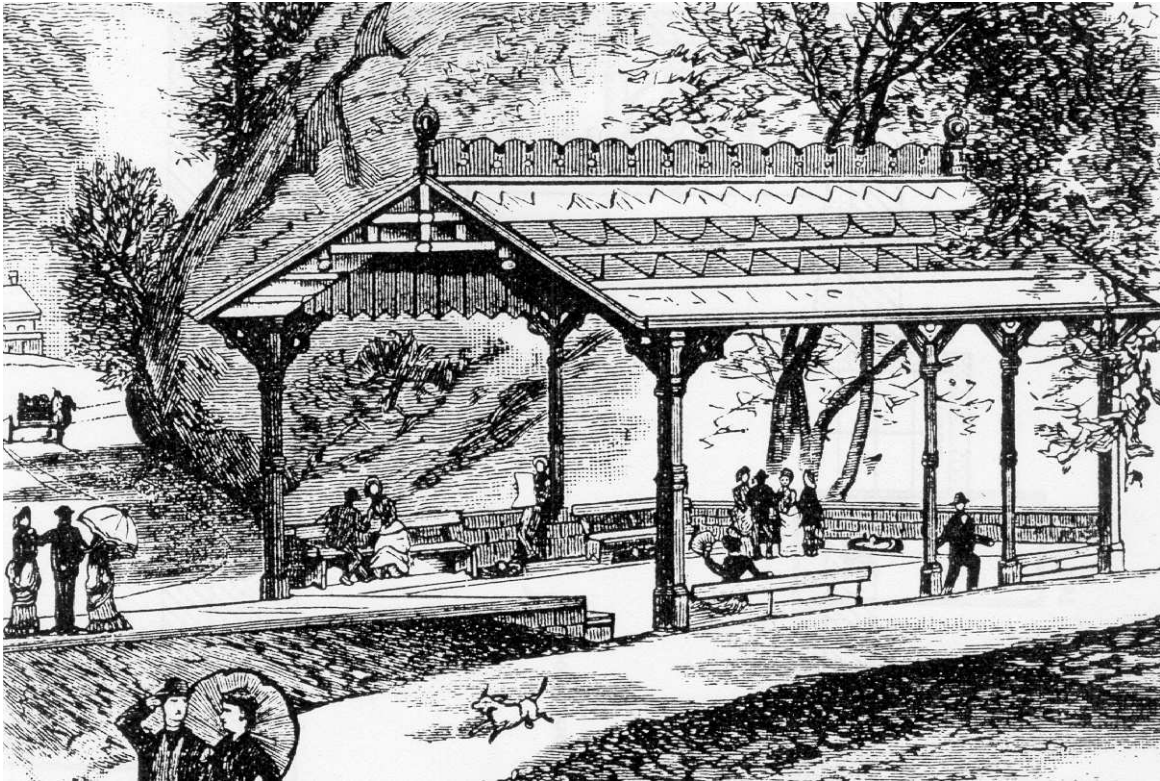


Figure 6. View of Triple Springs No. 2 at Siloam Springs (Siloam Mineral Springs Company 1886:12). This structure is representative of springhouse construction at resorts in Illinois and the eastern United States during the nineteenth century. The survey around the springhead at Weldon Springs found evidence of the features that are typical of these resort-based springhouses (i.e. perimeter foundations, catch basins, masonry floors).

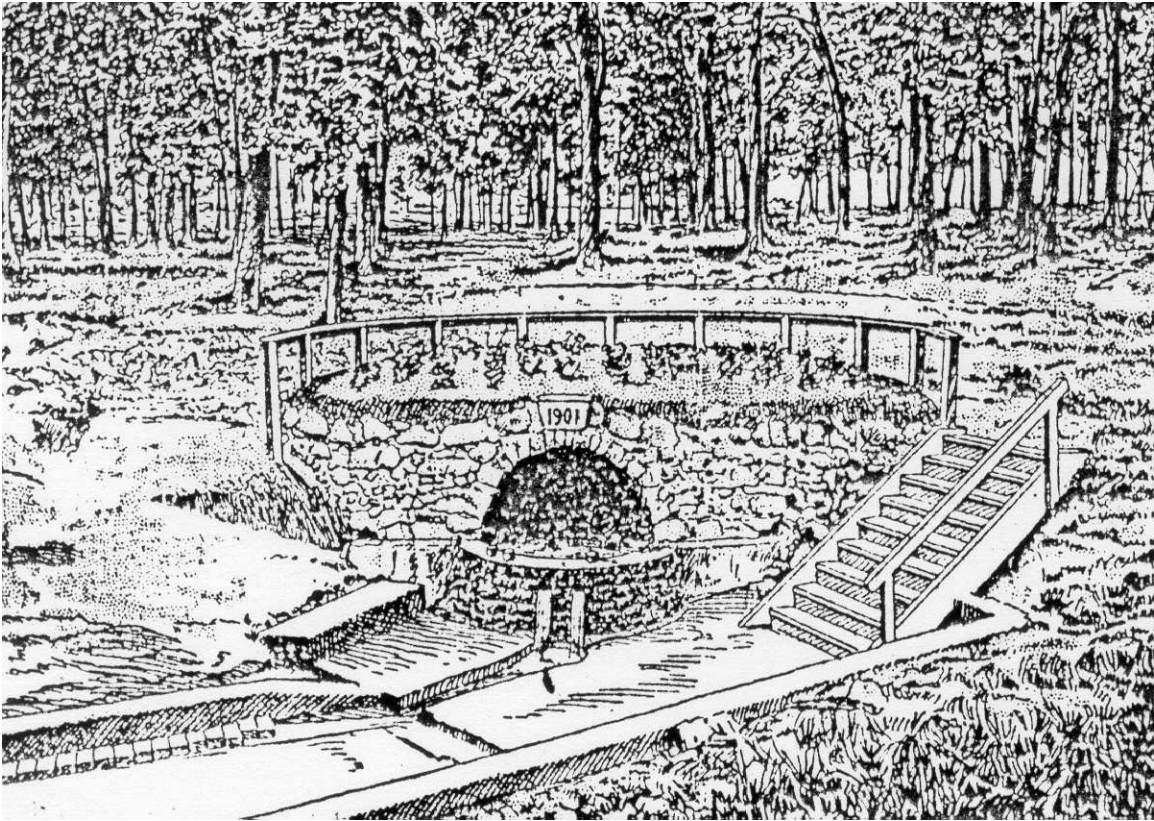


Figure 7. 1905 illustration of the Twin Springs at Weldon Springs Park (Weldon Spring Chautauqua Association 1905). The decorative landscaping used around the Twin Springs stands in sharp contrast to the utilitarian structure that surrounds the springhead.