

2.1. This pen-and-ink drawing of "The Fortsmouth" originally appeared in Porte Crayon's serialized travelogue, "The Adventures of Porte Crayon and His Cousins," in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, December 1854.

Burner's Springs Resort and Post Office

Well after dark they reached Burner's Sulphur Springs, also known as Shenandoah Springs, where they experienced "a hospitable welcome, a blazing fire, and a keenly-appreciated supper...followed by a deep, unbroken sleep of some ten hours' duration."³ Built in 1850 by Noah J. Burner, son of Jonas and Sally Ortz (Artz) Burner, by 1853 the springs resort had already become one of Virginia's premier vacation spots and a source of some pride to Fort residents. On the day following its arrival, Crayon's party strolled the grounds and nearby hills, after which the great illustrator began to sketch the Springs' premises. The next morning they took the stagecoach west through Woodstock Gap and over Powell's Mountain to the town of Woodstock. Although delighted with the view of the main valley from the mountain, Crayon remarked that they found the town below to have "the merits of a singed cat, that of being much better [at heart] than it looks...," and thus headed on down the Valley Pike toward Weyer's Cave.⁴ Crayon later described the main Fort Valley attraction, the Springs themselves, in his article for *Harper's Magazine*.

³ Ibid., 10.

⁴ Ibid., 11.

In a small, bowl-like hollow, and within a circle whose radius is probably not more than a dozen paces, are these seven fountains, all differing in character. The central spring is a fine white sulphur; within a few feet are two other sulphurs differing in temperature and chemical analysis. A few paces distant are Freestone, Slate, and Limestone springs, each decided and unmistakable of its kind. The seventh is called the Willow Spring, but we do not know what are its virtues and qualities.⁵

Noah Burner had purchased the plantation on which he built his stylish "three-story frame hotel and ballroom, guest cottages, and bathing houses," from Charles W. Lovell and wife on 31 August 1848.⁶ Although the 1850 census simply lists Burner as a farmer—he and his family lived on a farm west of the main Fort road near the fork in the present-day Dry Run/Boyer Road—local legend maintains that he had made a fortune in land speculation during the post-Jacksonian depression of the early 1840s and that he had decided to use his wealth to enter the hotel business.⁷ When he learned of the different kinds of mineral water on his new property—he was well aware that dozens of enterprising businessmen were then turning Virginia springs into health spas—Noah is said to have reveled in his good fortune. Six different kinds of mineral waters lay within an acre; he found the seventh, a chalybeate spring, up on the mountain and brought its water down to the spa through pipes made of medium sized hollowed-out willow trees bound together with iron collars.⁸ (A section of this log pipe is currently on display in the Fort Valley Museum.)

In building the hotel, Noah chose a practical but elegant architectural style with ample room for his intended guests. The three-story frame building measured 100 feet by 40 feet, with long cool verandas, each "wide enough to make it a convenient promenade," stretching the entire length of the façade on either side. The hotel complex contained a spacious ballroom, a number of detached cottages with large fireplaces (some may have been suitable for year-round occupancy), pavilions, and the inevitable bathhouses.⁹ The construction work was done by several local carpenters and numerous slaves. Once the building phase was complete, Noah continued to rely on slave labor for many of the resort's daily operations. This announcement appearing in a Rockingham County newspaper on 25 July 1850 may have been his first advertisement:

SHENANDOAH SPRINGS. Having purchased the property [on] which the springs are located, will be prepared to receive a few boarders.... [It has] a ten pin alley and other means of amusement, [is] situated about eight miles east of Woodstock in Powell's Fort, in the Valley between the Fort and Massanutten Mountains, at the northern base of the latter, and consists of white, blue and black sulphur, chalybeate, limestone and slate waters. Noah J. Burner.¹⁰

⁵ Ibid., 10. The seventh was a chalybeate spring, its waters heavy with salts of iron.

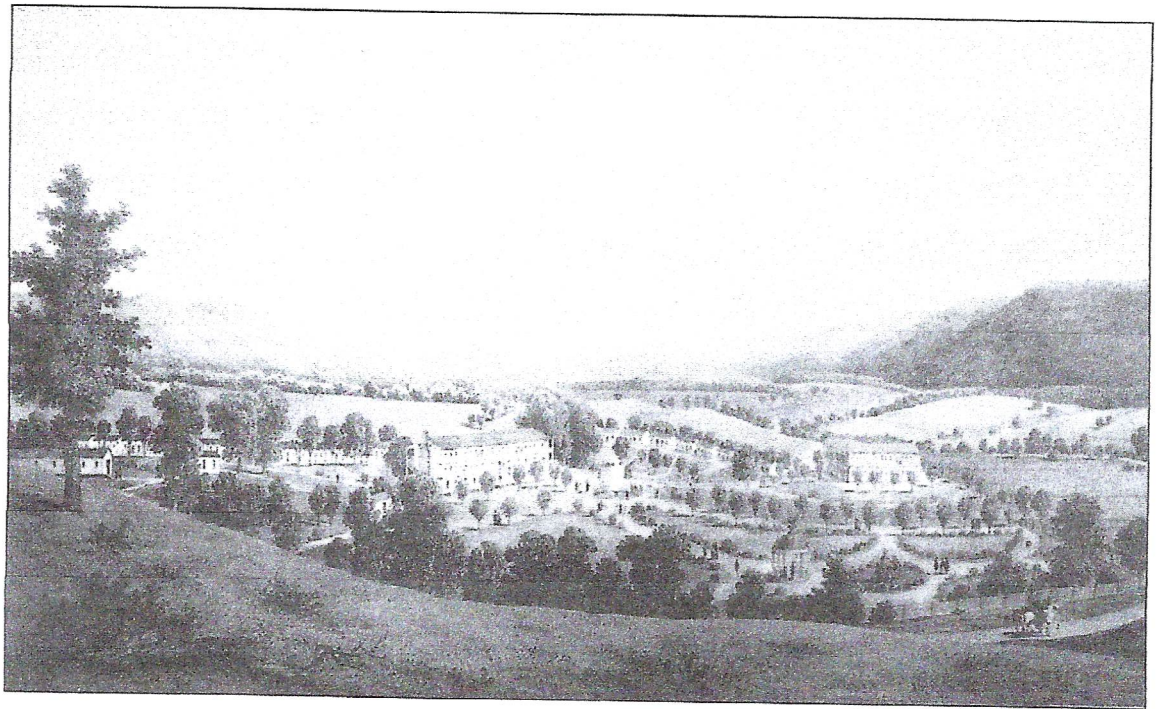
⁶ Joseph B. Clower, Jr., ed., *Glimpses of the Past in Shenandoah County* (Woodstock, VA: Woodstock Museum of Shenandoah County, 1984), 27. The Job Combs family, who owned the plantation until 1828, had already cleared most of the land; Solomon Van Meter was the landowner from 1828 to 1837.

⁷ The 1850 Census lists: Noah J. Burner, age 32, farmer; Mahala Burner, 33; Randolph Burner, 10; Francis M. Burner, 6; Lary Laura Burner, 2; Lemuel Burner, 3 months. It states that 2 of the children had attended school within that year. U. S. Census Bureau, 1850. Family Tree Maker On-Line, Shenandoah-Smyth mf 976 (Disk 6), 58th District, Shenandoah County, VA, 137. He owned 2 properties in Fort Valley valued at \$3,650.

⁸ Samuel Mordecai, in his 1857 *Description of the Album of Virginia; or, The Old Dominion Illustrated*, which was quoted in the 1995 *Shenandoah County Historic Resources Survey Report*, claimed there were actually 8 kinds of mineral water, and that many patrons came from Baltimore to Winchester via the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in order to reach the spa. Cited in James Massey, et al., *Shenandoah County Historic Resources Survey: Survey Report* (Richmond, VA: Virginia Dept. of Historic Resources, 1995), 53.

⁹ Col. Harry Gilmor, *Four Years in the Saddle* (1866; reprint, Baltimore, MD: Butternut and Blue, 1987) 118-19. During the Civil War, Col. Gilmor used the resort as his base of operations on several occasions.

¹⁰ TL, Rockingham County, VA, 25 July 1850. Burner's license for "a ten pin alley" cost him \$45 in August 1850. Painter, *Shenandoah County and Its Courthouse*, 120.



2.2 Edward Beyer's "Burner's White Sulpher Spr. Shenandoah Co.," from his *Album of Virginia*, plate 7. Library of Virginia; used with permission.

Burner reportedly borrowed money from neighbor Daniel Munch in order to build a stagecoach road east across Massanutten Mountain to Overall. As the story goes, the bag of silver coins he borrowed was so heavy that Daniel had to assist Noah in hoisting the bag up on his horse. When completed, this new road through Milford Gap brought patrons across the mountain from the Page Valley to the resort. The endeavor succeeded beyond anyone's expectations. It is unclear whether or not Noah repaid his debt before Daniel's death in August 1852.¹¹

Word of this luxury resort spread, and stagecoaches and buggies began to arrive daily in the summer months, not only over the mountain from the Page Valley, but also through the Fortsmouth divide from the railroad station at Waterlick, and over Fort Mountain to the west from Woodstock. The standard fare was twenty-five cents per person for a one-way trip.¹² "Brass Band" musicians hired for the season played for each arriving and departing stagecoach and provided evening entertainment and music for dancing in the ballroom. Entire families came to the resort for the summer and set up housekeeping in the nearby cottages, each of which contained a fireplace for heating and cooking and a loft for sleeping. In 1851, the advertised rates were: \$6.00 per week, \$20.00 per month, and \$36.00 for a two-month stay. Livery charges were \$1.00 per day or \$3.00 for the week, and the pasturage fee, \$1.50 per week. "Servants and children under 14 years of age, half price."¹³

¹¹ Although the old stage road was abandoned after the Civil War, for most of the 20th century, the Milford Trail has been a popular Potomac Appalachian Trail Club hiking trail. Today a landowner has closed the trail where it crosses his land near the top of Massanutten Mountain; the lower part of the trail provides access to several new homes.

¹² Samuel H. Thomas, Jr.; "Seven Fountains—An Elegant Establishment," in *Skyline* VI, no. 2 (May 1977), 2. Burner also owned a number of the conveyances, and the Springs hotel became a transfer point for those wishing to travel on to Woodstock from Buckton or Luray. The Buckton railway depot, just to the northeast of Fortsmouth, opened in 1854.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1, 3.

The resort property also contained a licensed ordinary (a tavern offering spirits and a set meal), a well-stocked general merchandise store, Fort Valley's first post office, Shenandoah Springs,¹⁴ and extensive gardens managed by James Kavanaugh. Slaves served the 300-600 yearly guests as chambermaids, cooks, and liverymen.¹⁵ According to the O'Flaherty genealogy, an Irish immigrant named Daniel O'Flaherty, newly arrived in New York in 1850 or 1851, learned from immigration authorities that a Mr. Burner was seeking a bookkeeper for his "Burner's Springs Health Resort." O'Flaherty accepted the position and thus several generations of his descendants became an important part of Fort Valley history.¹⁶ The presence on the Springs' premises of the general store and Fort Valley's first post office was also newsworthy, attracting many local residents to the facility. According to Orie Munch's account in *Homeplace History: Tradition and Memories*:

Mr. Burner had a good friend in Woodstock...who was a personal friend of the then President James Buchanan, who said to Mr. Burner, "...I know the President and will write you a letter of reference [to see about the post office]." Mr. Burner rode a horse to Washington, D. C.... After he finally got to see the president and presented the letter, the president began to ask questions.... Mr. Burner saying how he now had seven springs, each of a different content of mineral water and was calling it Burner's Springs. The president is reported to have said, "If you have seven springs, then why don't you call it Seven Fountains?" which they then agreed upon and Mr. Burner was appointed Postmaster.¹⁷

Despite the resort's considerable success, Noah Burner must have quickly overstretched his budget, for in the fall of 1852—a full year before Porte Crayon's journey—Isaac Wilkinson and Samuel A. Danner obtained a partial interest in the resort by loaning Burner \$12,000 with which to reimburse his creditors. In 1857, Noah was again in financial difficulty, having failed to pay some of his bills. The largest of these debts resulted in a July court case during which merchants Baker and Brown testified that, since July 1855, Burner and Borst (another of Noah's partners during the mid-1850s) had not paid them for:

...1000 pounds of hams at 14 cents per pound, and 54 pounds of dried beef at 18 cents per pound amounting to the sum of \$149.72, that the said bacon was sold and delivered to said Burner and Borst as aforesaid upon their written order in request, dated at Burner's Springs on July 11, 1855....¹⁸

¹⁴ For notice of Burner's indictment for failing to obtain the license to keep an Ordinary, and also of his subsequent payment for such license, see Painter, *Shenandoah and Its Courthouse*, 121, 126. In the *Tenth Legion* for 3 July 1852: "POST OFFICE BUSINESS. Persons who may have occasion to address the subscriber by mail will please direct by mail to 'Shenandoah Springs, Shenandoah County, Virginia', and not to Woodstock. ...Letters and papers intended for any of the citizens of Powell's Fort must be directed as above. Noah J. Burner, Post Master." Shenandoah Springs Post Office opened in July 1852, but became Burners Springs on 19 June 1857, with Samuel A. Danner as Postmaster. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁵ Official records exist for the deaths of at least 2 infants born to slaves at Burners Springs, the first registered in 1855 by Noah Burner, the second in 1860 by "S. A. Danner, Master." "Death Records for Shenandoah County, Virginia," Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA.

¹⁶ Daniel O'Flaherty soon married Mary Cullers and settled on land west of the Cross Roads belonging to her father, Daniel Cullers. Lester D. O'Flaherty, "Descendants of Daniel & Mary Magdalene O'Flaherty" (1971), 1-2.

¹⁷ O. A. Munch, *Homeplace History*, 43. Although Mr. Munch gives the date of this encounter as 1853, it probably took place in 1858, for the Post Office was not officially called "Seven Fountains P. O." until 1 Dec. 1858.

¹⁸ Baker & Brown vs. Burner & Borst, LOV, "Chancery Causes, Shenandoah County, 1857-014."

The following month, not long after part-owner Isaac Wilkinson had died of "typhoid fever and pneumonia," the Circuit Court ordered Noah to sell "the one undivided moiety of that valuable property, long and exclusively known as Burner's White Sulphur Springs..." in order to satisfy the debt. The sale took place at the Springs on Thursday, 11 February 1858, with J. W. D. Allen agreeing to pay the sum of \$7,100, with one-third down, "as specified."¹⁹ The absence of his name on subsequent purchase orders and other documents would indicate that Allen played no active role in managing the resort. Clearly, Samuel Danner retained some authority in addition to his being the official postmaster, and Noah Burner seems to have stayed with the resort until the following year, at which time Solomon McInturff became the principal business manager. Noah Burner and his wife Mahala subsequently "headed west." According to Burner's obituary—he lived until April 1895—Noah had once owned quite a bit more property in Shenandoah County, but "...becoming financially embarrassed some years before the [Civil] War, he went west where he remained until a few years ago."²⁰

Under the care of Danner and McInturff, the Burner's Springs Resort—now sometimes called Seven Fountains Resort after its post office—continued to be a popular destination for those seeking relief from the summer heat. In December 1859, it also served as the backdrop for a wedding at which Z. J. Compton officiated:

I do certify that I performed the rites of marriage between John Walters and Elizabeth Ann Nicely [Kneisley]²¹ Dec. 13th. 1859...near Noah J. Burners Springs in Powell's Fort, Shenandoah County, Va., and that the following statement shows all I know of this party.

Age of said John Walter supposed 30 yr a single man.

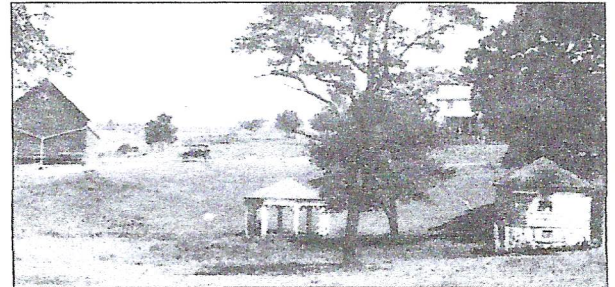
Age of said E. A. Nicely a fraction over 21 years single woman

...Occupation of said Walter's that of a "Fiddler," sometimes Rock Blaster, at this time sawing timber at Milford for N. J. Burner.

Given under my hand this 13th day of Dec. 1859

Z. J. Compton²²

During the Civil War, Fort Valley's "celebrated watering place" was much sought after by both Union and Confederate troops (see Chapter Three).²³ After the war, the Seven Fountains Resort never regained its former prominence, despite the fond



2.3. When this c. 1900 photo was taken, one gazebo and one bath house still guarded their springs on the Seven Fountains Resort property.

¹⁹ "One undivided moiety" would be an undivided half of the Springs property. In other words, Noah was to sell half of the value of this property at auction to a new owner in order to pay his debts, particularly those to a James G. Fravel. Taken from the sales brochure, "Commissioner's Sale of Burner's White Sulphur Springs," David H. Walton, Shenandoah County Commissioner, 8 Jan. 1858.

²⁰ *SH*, Woodstock, VA, 12 April 1895. A week later the *Herald* recorded the death of Noah's wife, Mahala, and related that "both funerals were preached by Elder B. F. Boyer." *Ibid.*, 19 April 1895. They, along with son Lemuel and daughter Laura and their families, are buried in the Burner-McInturff Cemetery off of Dry Run Rd., just west of the Fort Valley Museum.

²¹ There are a variety of spellings for Kneisley. The one preferred by Shenandoah County historian and Kneisley descendant Karen Cooper is used throughout this work.

²² "Marriage Bonds, Shenandoah County, Virginia, 1855-1860," mf reel 17, SC Library, Edinburg, VA. Elizabeth's parents were John and Sarah Kneisley; their property bordered the Burner land on the south.

²³ Gilmore, *Four Years in the Saddle*, 118-24, 151-4.