



# Genealogists learn about spiritualism and Crystal Fountain Park in Sherwood

Dec 3, 2014 0



Dan Hasch and Mary Williams are shown with a display of information about Crystal Fountain Park in Sherwood.

At the Nov. 24 meeting of the Defiance County Genealogical Society, Dan Hasch and Mary Williams gave a PowerPoint presentation about the unusual history of spiritualism at the Crystal Fountain Park in Sherwood.

Modern spiritualism had its beginnings in New York in the late 1840s and is the belief that, after death, a person's spirit passes to the spiritual world and can be contacted through trained mediums.

The movement was especially strong after the Civil War and again after World War I when family members wanted to contact their deceased loved ones who had died during wartime.

Mary Todd Lincoln was one of those believers.

In the 1880s, Thomas Wentworth brought spiritualism to the Hicksville area and set up a camp on his farm. It attracted many people, some from great distances, and in August of 1896, 12,000 people attended one of the week-long gatherings.

In order to obtain more space, the spiritualists bought property just south of Sherwood, calling it the Northwest Camp and Picnic Association. A few years later while drilling for natural gas, workers discovered white sulfur water. The association built Crystal Fountain and a sanatorium to take advantage of the white sulfur fountain's supposed healing assets. They conducted summer camps which drew large crowds from far and wide to bathe in the sulfur water. Inspirational music, lectures, sances, spirit messages, and healing services were offered as part of the camp experience.

Whether their reasons were to deepen their spirituality, to receive healing, to contact a dead loved one in sances, to satisfy their curiosity, or just to be entertained, crowds of visitors were attracted to the spiritualist camps, contributing greatly to Sherwood's economy. Therefore, to help meet the demand for housing and spa rooms, a hotel was built in 1908-1909 on Main Street in downtown Sherwood near the railroad. Sulfur water was then piped from the park to the hotel.

Despite some objection and controversy from local churches, the movement remained strong. A large auditorium was constructed in the park itself, surrounded by a few guest cabins. Supporters each paid \$1 to have his name engraved into one of the cement blocks set in the walls of the auditorium. A house was built in the camp for the association president, which included a restaurant in his basement. Then a barn was built next to the president's house, which at first housed farm animals, but later became a small hotel or dormitory for summer guests.

Visitors could also enjoy recreational activities at the baseball diamond, concession stand, and swimming pool.

As the popularity of spiritualism eventually waned, the fountain was capped off and the sanatorium bath house was torn down. However, the auditorium was saved and converted to a roller skating rink, dance hall, and community building.

The ownership of the Crystal Fountain Park was finally transferred to the village of Sherwood in 1994, ending a nearly 90-year era that made a little village in Defiance County the hub of activity and controversy.

The DCGS will not meet in December. The next scheduled meeting is Monday, Jan. 26, 2015.

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