

WEST BADEN

Like neighboring French Lick, West Baden earned its fame from its mineral springs. Originally known as Mile Lick, the community was renamed West Baden, after Weisbaden, Germany, in 1888.

Since the only thing that separates West Baden and French Lick is a boundary line,

the two towns share many historical similarities and are locally referred to as "Springs Valley." The towns were built around lavish resort hotels and in West Baden it was the West Baden Springs Hotel, now referred to as the West Baden Springs National Historic Landmark.

It took architect Harrison Albright only 277 days in 1902 to complete the current West Baden Springs Hotel for owner Lee Wiley Sinclair. The structure features a 200-foot domed atrium, the largest free-span dome in the world until the Houston Astrodome was built in 1968.

Like the town of West Baden, the West Baden Springs Hotel has a European nickname. A celebrated German physician once told Colonel Fred de Funiak, who visited Europe to take in the waters of Carlsbad, that he considered the West Baden Springs Hotel the "Carlsbad of America."

Following the death of Sinclair, the hotel was purchased by local millionaire Charles Edward Ballard, who owned the Homestead Hotel across the street and seven traveling circuses. The hotel continued to thrive under Ballard, mostly because of the illegal gambling in the community.

Following the stock market crash, Ballard sold the property for \$1 to the Society of the Jesuits. The group of Catholic men owned the property until the mid 1960s when it became Northwood Institute, a small community college.



MAIN ENTRANCE, WEST BADEN SPRINGS HOTEL, WEST BADEN, IND. CARLSBAD OF AMERICA

It operated as a college until the 1980s when it changed ownership continually until it fell into near disrepair. Through an anonymous donation, Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana bought the property and still owns it today. Through the generosity of the Cook Group Foundation of Bloomington, Indiana, the public areas of the structure have been returned to its 1920s grandeur and routine historical walking tours of the grounds are conducted daily.

Until the stock market crash and the Great Depression, the town of West Baden had earned from travelers the nickname of "The Monte Carlo of America." While it was the West Baden Springs Hotel that brought the rich and famous (and even the infamous gangster Al Capone) to the area, there were other prominent businessmen who left their marks on West Baden.

E. B. Rhodes was one of those prominent business people and his home overlooking the West Baden Springs Hotel, still serves as a bed and breakfast, the E. B. Rhodes House. Rhodes built the Victorian-style home in 1899.

Before it made its way to French Lick, West Baden was the first stop in the area for the Monon Line. Wealthy travelers from cities like Chicago, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, and routinely made their way to West Baden via the Monon and B&O railroad lines.