

Washington Heritage Trail

The Washington Heritage Trail in West Virginia



The Washington Heritage Trail is a 136-mile national scenic byway inspired by the prominent footsteps of George Washington through the three historic counties of West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle. Compelling history, spectacular scenery, geologic wonders, recreation and year 'round activities and festivals are highlighted by 45 historical sites. The trail meanders across mountains and rivers, through forests, farms and orchards as it connects five 18th century towns that remain the center of life today and offer comfortable lodging, unique shopping and fine dining. More information on attractions and services throughout the area is available at each town's Visitor Center.

www.washingtonheritagetrail.com



Courtesy of Mount Vernon Ladies' Association



AMERICA'S BYWAYS

Berkeley Springs State Park



Today's 4.5-acre Berkeley Springs State Park has always been public ground. Native tribes were known to use the springs but none called it home. Colonial owner Thomas Lord Fairfax allowed its public use. When the town was established in 1776, the area directly around the springs was retained for public use, called Bath Square and administered by Trustees.

During the 19th century, the public area was called the Grove thanks to an abundance of large oaks that framed the Promenade where visitors strolled along the springs. Under direct control of the state for most of the 20th century, it became Berkeley Springs State Park in 1970 and was later listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The buildings and monuments reflect both the eternal purpose of the area — "taking the waters" — and the changing fashion of meeting that purpose over the centuries.



An elaborate pagoda used as a bandstand covered the Ladies Spring by 1853. It was torn down in 1918. Today the spring is the prime source for the Main Bathhouse and the town water supply.

Warm Springs Run is a mountain stream that joins with springs overflow under Fairfax Street and eventually wends its way north through town to the Potomac River.

After 1784 a Gentlemen's Bath House was built on the site of today's Roman Baths. Local legend attributes its design to steamboat inventor James Rumsey. The present two-story brick structure was constructed about 1815. Original colors of yellow, cream and green are now used throughout the park. Since 1984, the Museum of the Berkeley Springs has been located on the second floor.

The Gentlemen's Spring House on pillars over the main drinking spring could date to 1816. An 1853 account describes today's structure exactly. There has been a public drinking spring or fountain in this location since 1787. The water has always been free to the public, a right enshrined by the Virginia Legislature in the 1776 law establishing a town at the springs.

Several springs are sourced in the area south of the drinking spring, filling stone pools and a spillway—the largest public display of water among all the springs that line the Blue Ridge.

The public swimming pool was built in 1951 on the site that held covered bathing pools in the previous two centuries. The Victorian pool building demolished in 1948 was a single 150-foot-long structure designed and built by Henry Harrison Hunter in 1887 while he was Park Superintendent. It was divided into two pools, one for each gender.

George Washington's Bathtub is a modern stone reconstruction of the primitive conditions prior to 1784 where early bathers, including Washington and hundreds of other summer visitors, soaked in springs-filled pools hollowed out from the natural terrain of the sandy hillside. The spring enclosed here has the highest elevation of any in the park.

Lord Fairfax's spring is hugged by rocks as it empties into the southernmost pool. Up to the 1850s there was a rough shanty over it, allegedly built by Fairfax who always reserved a spring for his own use. This spring provided water to the succession of covered bath houses and now to the outdoor pool.

The yellow brick Main Bathhouse at the south end of the park was built in 1929 on land added after the Berkeley Hotel burned in 1898. Massages have been given here since at least 1932.



The gazebo on the eastern side of the run was dedicated in 1931.

Converted to rest rooms and an office in 1930, the small brick building was once frame and described in 1787 as a Poor People's Bath. The original structure was attributed to James Rumsey.



We this day call d to see y. Fam d Warm Springs. We camped out in y. field this night.

George Washington's Diary, March 18, 1748