

The Rise and Fall...

Scenic Hot Springs Hotel

As destination properties go, it is hard to imagine any in Sky Valley, perhaps any in the entire state, with a more colorful history than Scenic Hot Springs Hotel. It preceded Carson Hot Springs by a few years, and Salish Lodge at Snoqualmie Falls by two decades, so this stop roughly seven miles east of Skykomish on Great Northern Railway may also have been the first destination resort in the state.

The hot springs itself is said to have been discovered by John F. Stevens and C.F.B. Haskell as they surveyed the routing for GNRy around 1890. Within a few years after the rail line was completed in 1893, an impressive 3-story establishment called Great Northern Hot Springs Hotel opened to serve a public seeking healing waters. A brochure published early on stated, "No other medicinal water in the West is so effective for the cure of rheumatism, stomach, liver, bladder, blood and skin diseases!"

With "Great Northern" in the name one can't rule out that Great Northern Railway was a player in establishing the original resort, but Skykomish Historical Society (SHS) Collection Manager Bob Kelly has researched this idea at GNRy archives St. Paul, MN, and to date has found no materials to support it.

An article by a founder and key player in the early years of SHS, Bob Norton, paraphrased a November 15, 1903 article in the Seattle Post Intelligencer as saying J. V. Prosser and George Murphy purchased the hot springs and the hotel from I. G. McCain, and that the new owners planned to change the name to Scenic Hot Springs and enlarge the hotel from its present capacity of 50 persons to 100. All SHS photos of this expanded building carry the name Scenic Hot Springs Hotel. A Seattle newspaper reported it was finished in oak and had electric lights, steam heat, call bells, and the best of dining room service; guests could play billiards, lawn tennis, handball, croquet, and basketball.

The hot springs themselves were up the hill a significant distance from the hotel which was located near the tracks for traveler convenience. The water flowed down through "pipes" made by boring 4-inch holes lengthwise through 8-foot cedar slabs that were somewhat larger than a fence post. It is believed the use of wood was because it is an excellent insulator and kept the miracle, healing waters hot. The SHS Museum in Sky has one of these "pipes" in the side room near where the bottle collection is on display. It is not particularly impressive in itself, but its interest and value as an artifact is considerable once one knows what it is.

A very early postcard shows a single building, an arc of GNRy track, and very little else except wilderness. The initial hotel was built in the late 1890s and could accommodate 50 guests.



The expanded hotel offered accommodation for 100 guests and numerous indoor activities in addition to pools and tubs for soaking and bathing.

On Nov 9, 1908 the new hotel burned to the ground. One patron broke a shoulder jumping from a second story window and owner J.V. Prosser was badly burned trying to save valuable papers and the safe containing money deposited by staff and guests, but there were no deaths.

Remarkably within six months an entirely new hotel with a totally new chalet-style design was erected on the site and opened for business 9 June to coincide with the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition opening in Seattle.



POST CARD

This Space for Correspondence

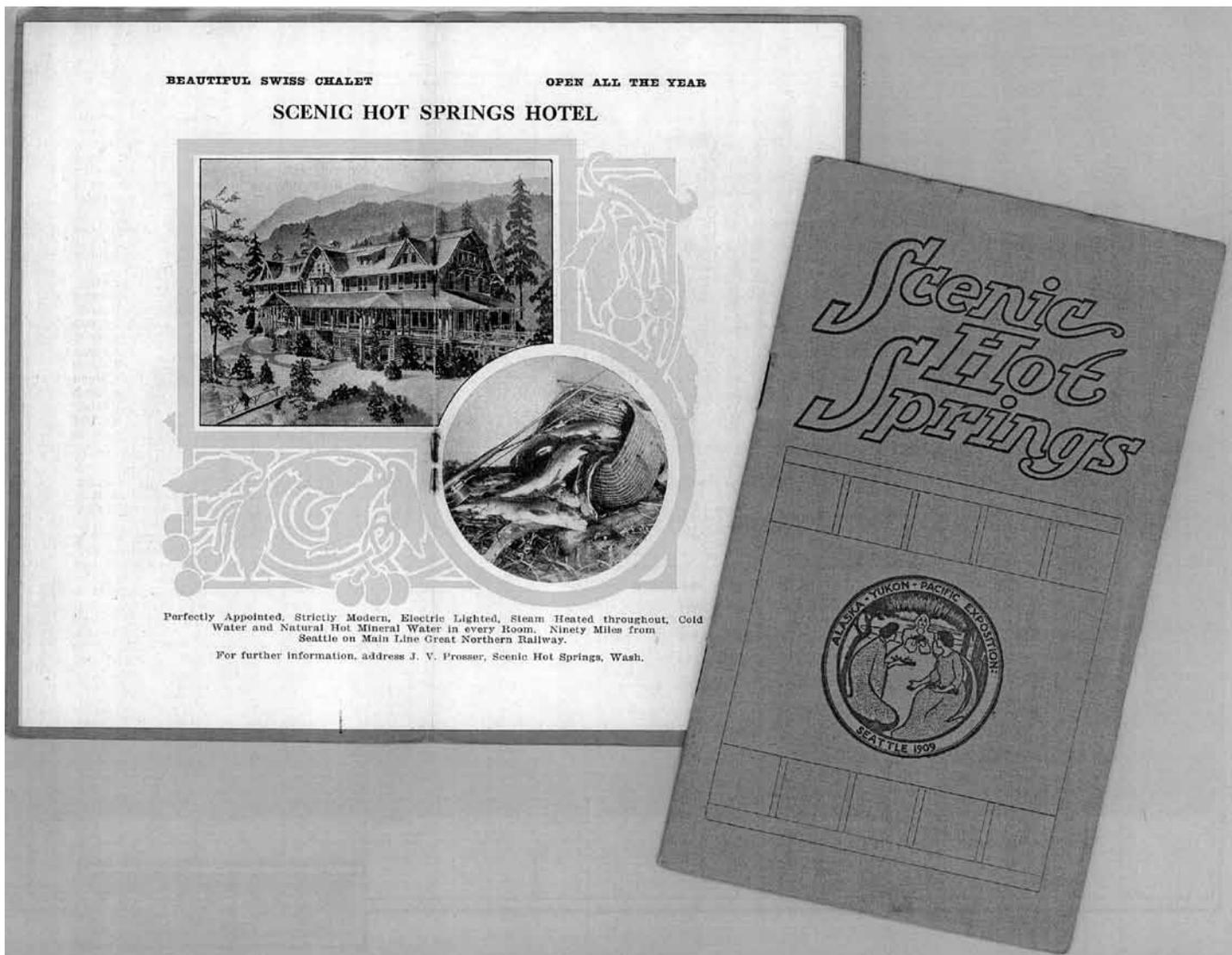
MR. J. V. PROSSER announces the completion of his modern Swiss Chalet Hotel, Scenic Hot Springs, on the main line of the Great Northern Ry. Complete with steam heat, electric light, hot and cold water in every room and concrete bath departments with modern equipment.

This Space for Address Only

SCENIC,
JUL
14
1909
P.M.
Wash.



Mr. J. Manville
5425 - S Warner
Tacoma, W.



A 1909 brochure features the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition logo on the front, the European “feel” of the hotel, the numerous modern conveniences and luxuries, and easy accessibility from Seattle. In the panorama at right, note the foot bridge directly from the end of the station platform to the hotel.

Throughout its lifetime Scenic Hot Springs Hotel was a summer and winter resort with regular train service, and at some point special week-end trains from Seattle and Everett were introduced. In addition to healing waters, brochures at the time touted hiking, fishing, hunting, cross-country skiing, berry picking, camping, and picnicking opportunities, all less than a 90-mile train ride from Seattle.



In late February 1910 the world's attention was focused on Wellington, a railroad town just a few miles up Stevens Pass east of Scenic. After two days being stranded by heavy snowfall at the east end station of the old Cascade Tunnel, two passenger trains came through the tunnel where they were stuck for four more days by heavy snow on the tracks in both directions. Scenic was the last stop on the GNRy line with train and intermittent telegraph service during the ordeal. A few of the able-bodied hiked out to Scenic seeking help, but the majority of passengers and crew remained with the trains, and the hotel became headquarters for track clearing and rescue efforts. March 1st, after a night of heavy rainfall and rapidly rising temperatures, a giant sheet of super-soaked snow cascaded down across the tracks at Wellington killing 96 and exploding the train cars into splinters and twisted metal. In the following days Scenic became a staging area for bodies as they were recovered, wrapped, and slid down the snow banks to connect with the railway. It took 12 days before the rail line was open, and another three before "normal" traffic could begin.

For the next 18 years Scenic Hot Springs Hotel operated summer and winter as a destination resort continuing to offer the broad range of activities mentioned above until the rerouting of the rail line to accommodate the 7.8-mile New Cascade Tunnel buried it. Almost literally. The last photo SHS has of the building shows people on the balcony at the back while rock-fill and bulkhead material from the railroad tracks cover the front of the building nearly half way up. Within months Scenic Hot Springs Hotel was torn down, never to be replaced.

The hot spring itself is still there, of course, and privately owned. In the 1990s it became a quietly popular informal destination for people who knew how to find it and had few qualms about ignoring the seldom-en-



forced no trespassing warnings. It is possible to request permission to visit, and get it on line if "scenichotsprings.blogspot.com" is as accurate and honest as it appears. The goal of the blog claims to be to help the owner get permits etc. to turn the springs back into a tourist or at least public destination, and for sure the advice about parking at trailheads and other general information seems to be right on.

The top photo was taken by legendary PNW photographer Asahel Curtis, brother of even more legendary photog Edward Curtis. A significant collection of A. Curtis pix can be found in Bellingham at the Whatcom County Museum. The lower photo depicting the last days of the hotel (see article at left) is a Lee Pickett, photographer from Index. A significant portion of the best Sky Historical Society photos are Picketts. He didn't do "snapshots" he made photographs.

This article by Warren Carlson was originally written for and appeared in *The Index Wall*