History of Magnesia Springs near Hawthorne, Florida

Quarterly 3-Minute Oral History presented by the Alachua County Historical Commission for the BoCC Meeting March 22, 2016

Speaker: Robert Moore, member of ACHC

From the late 1920s to 1970s, the historic 4th magnitude Magnesia Springs, located near Grove Park and Hawthorne off CR 2082, was one of the most popular recreational destinations in Alachua County. With a kiddie (wading) pool and large pool fed by a natural spring, picnic areas, concession stand, and pristine surroundings, people from all over the region could spend an entire summer day frolicking in the crystal-clear, blue, 72-degree (really COLD!) water.

The Magnesia Springs property was included in the 1817 Arredondo Land Grant and has passed through many owners since then. Some development of this property began between 1873 and 1882 with owner Cicero A. Simmons. In 1882 Simmons platted 97 acres with the plan to create a town and he is also credited with building the first pool at Magnesia Springs. John L. Brown from Indiana bought the land in 1882 for the springs’ reported healing powers; he was severely wounded in the Civil War. He planned to create a resort to include a sanitarium, hotel, and boarding houses to treat various ailments. His plans fell through, primarily due to extended legal entanglements. The Brown and Kelley families owned Magnesia Springs for the next 82 years. Brown’s daughter, Nellie, married G. Hartwell Kelley from Windsor, who built and maintained the two concrete pools for which Magnesia Springs became famous. Nellie restarted the former 1914 Magnesia Springs Water Company in 1929. The year Hartwell died (1965), his sons (Harvey and George) sold the property to David Reber, who continued to operate the pools for public recreation. Between 1974 and 1977, Reber leased the springs to a nudist colony. After they defaulted on the contract, Reber reclaimed the property, but was unable to make a go of it. Dr. Charles W. LaPradd acquired the land through auction, finalized in 1982, and kept it as private property. That was the end of public access to the springs. Gary Junior (former Gainesville City Commissioner and Mayor) bought Magnesia Springs in 1997 and restored it, but the springs remained closed to the public. Thomas Dorn, the current owner, bought Magnesia Springs in 1999. According to his wife Melinda Dorn, nothing has been done to the site since they acquired the property. There have been various opinions about the viability of returning Magnesia Springs to public use. Magnesia Springs is an important historical/cultural vestige of the 20th century in this southeastern rural area of Alachua County. If present circumstances change, there may still come a day when the public will again be able to enjoy this not forgotten hidden jewel.
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