

Brief History of Markham Springs and The Fuchs House

Like so many Ozark Springs, Markham Spring was viewed by earliest settlers as a source of power. Early on, the spring was impounded and its waters were used to power a mill. Both sawmilling and grain milling were carried on at the site for about 90 years. Then the spring was “retired” from commercial use, but powered an electrical generator. In recent years the spring has been retired from that use too, and the spring pond today is basically a reflecting pool for a pretty scene.

Land passed for government owned wilderness to private ownership by means of what were called patents. In 1837, patents were issued to Valentine Richards and Lee M. Byrnes for two 40-acre tracts that now make up most of the Markham Springs area. Records are not precise, but sometime before 1850, Byrnes built a mill at the site. The spring bubbles up from beneath a steep hillside in Black River’s valley, and must have flowed leisurely to the Black River.

To gain enough height for the water to produce power by falling on a wheel, the spring was enclosed against the hill by a levee, creating a larger, higher spring pool. The pool also could be used to “store” water when the mill was not operating. It was 20 feet high and water flowed over a wooden flume to the wooden water wheel. The mill was used for sawmilling first, and a grist mill was added about 1850. The 1860 census said the mill employed four, produced products valued at \$3,000, and two-thirds of the income was from lumber.

Eagle Bluff, above the spring was an important natural vantage point during the Civil War, so Markham Spring saw a lot of military activity. Byrnes, reportedly a confederate sympathizer, was said to have been murdered by Union forces early in the war. Manson Duckett ran the mill for Byrnes’ widow during the war. When she married Andy Plunkett, however, he apparently took over the operation of the mill. At least he is listed as the proprietor by the 1880 census.

The Dehaven Brothers, from Illinois, purchased the mill after Plunkett’s death and undertook a major refurbishing. This included rebuilding the mill structure and installing modern equipment. They ran the mill until 1901, and at that point the name Markham family came to the site.

A Jefferson Markham purchased the mill in 1901. Besides operating the mill, he was a timber man, farmer, and had a distillery at the mill. It was during his ownership that another 750 acres was added to the property that was then known collectively as Markham Spring. But full-time milling ended about 1907.

A 1929 history of Williamsville describes the mill as a two-story structure; “about 60 feet long and 30 feet wide” built of the best of lumber. The hand-made mill was 14 feet tall, of the overshot type. By 1929, however, the wheel was in disrepair. A pipe through the levee had brought water to the wheel. Some of the milling equipment was moved to the other mills, and some was apparently sold as scrap metal.

The people who owned the mill through the years apparently didn’t live there, but in 1929, Markham’s, son Snow took up residence in a house north of the springs. With his new bride, they struggled through the Depression by fishing and farming. By this time, the mill building was being used as a barn and for storage.

About this time the recreational potential of the site was apparently recognized. The state stocked the mill pond with trout, and some “St. Louis capitalists” tried to buy it. At first, the

Markham's rejected the offers, but before the Depression was over, Rudolph Fuchs, a St. Louis area businessman, purchased the site for \$37,000 and an apartment building in St. Louis.

Then as now, St. Louisans streamed south to the Arcadia Valley and further, the recreation Fuchs had learned of the Markham Spring site while returning from a fishing trip in Arkansas. Fuchs was the son of Swiss emigrants. He got into the hardware business in 1920 and did very well. He employed several St. Louis tradesmen as well as local stone masons to build buildings and a home at Markham Spring. Fuchs planned to build not only a home, but a resort. He hired a drag line to dredge and revamp the spring pond, tore down the old mill building. He had a new masonry mill building constructed, with concrete spillway, and a steel wheel.

The house was begun in 1939. It was to be a single-story, modest summer home. But, Fuchs was unable to be at the site for the first six months and when he did get there, he found a large, two-story stone building taking shape. He fired the contractor, but in the end the building was finished at a reported cost of \$22,000. Native stone was used in the construction and stone from nearby hillsides in still a much-sought after building material. Pallets of the flat sandstone slabs are shipped far and wide.

The Fuchs family spent summers and weekends at the spring. In 1946, Fuchs sold his business in Pine Lawn and moved to Markham Spring permanently. But he did not stay retired long. He purchased a hardware and lumber business in Williamsville and began improving the Markham Spring property. He built farm buildings, raised hogs and cattle, farmed and he had a truck garden.

Black River was a popular float-fishing stream, and Fuchs developed a resort called Old Mill Stream Lodge. At one point there were six cabins, boats to rent, a dock for river access. The Mill Pond itself held bass and bluegill. The resort never really boomed, however, Fuchs only advertised by word of mouth and did not upgrade the cabins to meet changing times.

Construction of Clearwater Dam on Black River, two day's float upstream, reduced the frequency of massive floods. But, it also changed the nature of the river to the point that to this day, there are no prospering resorts along its banks. Instead of flood waters coming and going, the flood control dam releases flood waters slowly, sometimes keeping Black River too high to be used recreationally for months at a time.

In 1966, the site was sold to the U.S. Forest Service. The Fuchs family moved to Williamsville and the development of the present recreation area began to take shape. The Forest Service has revamped the flow from the pond to by-pass the mill house. Today, the branch flows through a wooded picnic area where the mill once stood. The 5 bedroom stone and concrete house stands proudly reflecting in the pond waiting for new life.

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