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Articles of historic interest on Southern Maryland are requested for possible publication in future issues of **The Record**. Please send your typewritten manuscripts and other communications to: Editor, **The Record**, Box 583, La Plata, Maryland 20646.



# The RECORD

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Mr. Michael J. Mazzeo, Jr., *President*

Elwood M. Leviner, *Editor*

## The Healing Waters of Ye Coole Springs

by Bernard J. Beary

The story of the Coole Springs at Charlotte Hall in near-by St. Mary's County recalls a brief but fascinating episode in Southern Maryland history. For a couple of years, nearly 3 centuries ago, the Springs became a center of attention because of their reported curative powers. Since then, not much is heard of cures, but the Springs did amply supply the water needs of the Charlotte Hall School (Academy) during much if not all of its 202 year existence. To this day, they are gushing and flowing vigorously, although a tourist would not presently find the water safe to drink.

The central facts are pretty well known, certainly to people in the area, but also to untold numbers of visitors to the site over the years. Less well known are the particulars of the "cures," and the contemporary thinking as to why the waters were so special. The chief purpose here is to highlight those aspects of the story. But first, to put things in perspective, a "recap" may be in order.

In the period 1697-1698, there was an epidemic or pestilence in the Province of Maryland, of uncertain nature but apparently of considerable severity. Mortality was high.

As early as Oct. 23, 1697, the Governor's Council took note of the *Coole Springs*, on land owned by Capt. John Dent of Charles County. The waters were said to be lately discovered to have a very medicinal and healing quality, for all sorts of ailments. Reportedly, people *flocked there daily* for cure, and received great benefit. Capt. Dent and his neighbors were called upon to make a strict inquiry into the facts, write them down, make oath thereto, and send a copy promptly to the Governor.<sup>1</sup>

On June 4, 1698, Mr. Philip Lynes appeared before the Council and gave an account of some cures. Several decisions were taken at that meeting: a) the Governor will provide 10 Bibles for use of the "poor people" at the Springs; b) Capt. James Keech and Mr. Lynes are to engage some sober person to read Prayers there twice a day; c) the Governor will furnish certain books of Homilies and Devotions from which the Reader will read to the people on Sundays; d) Keech and Lynes are to ask John Dent, owner of the house and land, for permission to install a reading desk and some benches in the house, at the Governor's expense; e) Governor will donate every Sunday a Mutton and some Indian corn for the poor people; f) the Reader is to keep account of the cures.<sup>2</sup>

Reports from the Reader were detailed as to the names, county of residence, ailments, and time at the Springs. They indicated that people came from some distances, and stayed for up to a month or more, which suggests that some facilities were in place before the Government took an interest in Coole Springs.

In the autumn of 1698, steps were taken to purchase 50 acres of land at the Coole Springs, by eminent domain or the equivalent, and a purchase subsequently was made, at 25 Pounds. Funds were provided for small "tenements" on the grounds, in the nature of a hospital. At about this same time, the wave of sickness in the Province was deemed to be over, thanks to Almighty God and in part to the "healing springs of water called the Coole Springs." For this and other reasons, a day of public thanksgiving was set aside throughout the Province.<sup>3</sup>

Here is might be useful to comment upon the term *hospital*. It need not have meant that medical services were to be provided, in the sense in which we view "hospitals" today. One dictionary definition is: "a charitable institution for the needy, aged, infirm or young."

We don't know the exact nature of the "epidemic," nor whether the hospital at Coole Springs was ever built, nor for how long after 1698 there were any reported "cures" at those waters. The land deal fell through in July 1699, Capt. Dent denying that he ever agreed to it, and he refused to sign a formal conveyance of the land.<sup>4</sup> A further search of the land records might reveal when the land actually changed hands. Almost concurrently with his refusal to convey the land, Capt. Dent asked the Assembly for *exclusive* right to have an Ordinary there, ". . . in Compensation of his loss at the Coole Springs . . ." This was refused.<sup>5</sup>

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In early June 1698, one John Davie (or Deine?) was appointed Reader. His report to the Governor, with a date of June 12, 1698, listed cures since he was invested as Reader. Another report, same date, presumably from the same person, described a number of cures *before* he was invested as Reader, as gleaned from people at Coole Springs.<sup>6</sup> Under date of July 28, 1698, James Keech made a report<sup>7</sup> to the Governor, based on information from the Reader.

(CONTINUED)

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THE HEALING WATERS OF YE COOLE SPRINGS  
(CONTINUED)

Much of his report duplicates the Reader's June 12 report, but it adds something and helps in deciphering words in the other. What follows here is taken from the reports of both dates.

It seems that yawes, gout, itch, and pain in the limbs were the most common ailments for which cures were attributed to the Coole Springs. The dictionary<sup>8</sup> defines *yaws* as an infectious contagious tropical disease caused by a spirochete and marked by ulcerating lesions with later bone involvement. It could have been something else in Maryland in 1698. Reading the list which follows, a person might wonder what connection some of the ailments could have had with a "pestilence" or wave of sickness.

Jeane Miles, Bush River, cured of the Yawes. Her daughter had pain in her limbs 9 years, cured in 5 weeks. Graves Garrett and wife, Somerset County, cured of Yawes in 3 weeks. Sarah Barnaby's infant, St. Mary's Co., cured of fever, ague and itch; was at the Springs 3 months. Jacob Taylor's wife, Kent Co., had pain in her limbs 2 years, for 1/2 year could not lie in her bed, cured in 12 days. Charles Skinner, Kent Co., came with her, was at the Springs 12 days, cured of a pain in his limbs. A sucking child of Dennis Connell, Charles Co., was "cutt to the windpipe", cured in 2 days. Thomas Marley, Stafford Co. (Va.), cured in 10 weeks of a "watery humour Following his Legg halfe a year." Ignatius Sewall's (or Savell's?) wife and sucking child, Calvert Co., at the Springs 8 days, cured of the Itch. Thomas Hously, Stafford County, cured of the "wind Goute". Jarvis Burgam (Burgoney?), of Accomack, cured of the Grypes in 11 days. Wm. Smith, Sailor, of the ship *Cumberland* lying in Nangemoye, cured of a pain in his knee in 10 days time, having the pain from childhood. John Barnes of Accomack, cured in 11 days of gout in his shoulder and hand.

Richard Tull's wife Elizabeth, Somerset Co., had pain in stomach and back for 2 years, cured in 7 or 14 days (*Keech* report: 7 days; *Davie* report: forenigh). George Lane's wife Sarah, of the same place, cured in same length of time, troubled with pain in her back for 3 years and could not stoop. John Weeks, same place, cured in same length of time, had a pain in his arm and back 3 or 4 years. The same man had a very great sore on his leg which had been scalded 16 years earlier: in a fortnight's time it was reduced to no bigger than his fingernail. Margaret Gray (Graves?), wife of Myles, also of Somerset Co., having a pain in both her arms 19 years, was cured in 7 (or 14?) days. John Betts'

wife, Pr. Geo. Co., had pain in her limgs one year, cured in 6 days. A child of Sam'l Williamsom, St. Mary's Co., having yawes in both his nose and eye, cured in 3 or 4 days time *washing*.

Mrs. Wilkinson, Talbott Co., cured of *yaws* in five weeks. Col West of Accomack, being troubled with the Gout, was at the Springs a week, told the Reader that when he came he could not go over a (nee?) and at week's end he could go he said very well, and he carried near a hundred gallons of the water away with him. (Possibly means he could not cross his legs?)

Reported cures prior to investment as Reader:

A Negro Boy of one Mr. Bozeman, Somerset County, was cured of blindness. Edmond Casteel, residence not known, cured in one week of a pain in all his limbs. John Hubbard of Stafford Co., cured of a "Scald head". Thomas Jones, servant to Mr. Mitchell, of ye Clifts in Calvert County, cured of a scald head. Capt. Dixon, Somerset Co., lost the use of both hands for 2 years by the "gripes", cured in 3 days. A servant of Master Tawney, Charles Co., last fall in 3 weeks was cured of ye Kings Eville (i.e., scrofula). Abraham (Henisstond's?) wife, living less than 2 miles from Coole Springs, "being a most miserable Spectacle to behould last fall was cured in Three months of ye Yaws one fortnight being at ye Springs and ye Rest of ye time having Water brought home".

Wm. Royst, Charles Co., cured last fall of a sore leg. Wm. Betty, Stafford Co., cured of a Dropsicall humour and a Deafness. John Linton, Stafford Co., cured of the Yawes and Itch. Lewis Bevin, a Saylor (Sailor?), from Stafford Co., cured of a pain in his limbs. Thomas (Hensleyes?) wife, upper end of Stafford Co., cured of the Wind Gout. Edward Shoare's sone, Dorchester County, blind 3 years, struck blind by lightning, was cured. Robert Knight, living in Virginia at Machoduik, cured of a pain in his limbs. An orphan girl of one Graves Garrett, Somerset County, Eastern Shore, "troubled with an Inward Distemper which made her Sit Crouching all of a heap with one potte of water which was carryed over to her Some She Drank and Some they washed her Stomach and betwixt her Shoulders was cured". John Gerrett, living at the same place, had the Yawes 2 years, was "cured in a fortnights time Last March when all ye Doctors he tryed could doe him noe Good".

THE HEALING WATERS OF YE COOLE SPRINGS  
(CONTINUED)

One Wm. Vernon submitted a learned report to the Governor on July 19, 1698, giving his analysis of the properties of the Coole Springs waters.<sup>9</sup> He noted that the Governor had asked for his thoughts. Mr. Vernon's treatment of the subject suggests more than an educated layman's acquaintance with medicine and basic chemistry. He visited the Springs, drank the water, bathed there, and talked with people who came to get the benefit of the medicinal waters.

Speaking of the first and coolest of the 3 springs, which the afflicted told him had cured old aches and pains in the limbs, he thought the benefits might be attributed to penetrating salts of nitre, which "is a very great fixer and astringer of ye Fluid parts . . .", and might correct the humours that are afloat. By frequent bathing, the nitrose salts little by little will cleanse by "Inbibing ye Malignity".

His comments concerning the 2nd spring are more obscure. My interpretation is this: — By often bathing in it, people find that their ulcers cauterize, indicating a styptic quality to the water, although it does not at all have a vitriolic taste.

The 3rd and last spring afforded the people their chief drink at meals. It was a sweet, cool water, very pleasant to the taste. He did not find that it had a purging quality, as some claimed, for Mr. Vernon drank two or three quarts and is "as Easily moved as any one", but could not prove any Cathartick quality it had.

Mr. Vernon's belief that the waters abounded with nitre was based on the observed effects, not a laboratory analysis. He did point out that while the medicinal qualities of the water were very good, and there were great cures, many people suffered a relapse after returning home, doubtless for lack of purging and other necessary cares. Others have had an ulcer cured in one part, and it immediately broke out in another, which he attributed to a like foulness of body. He observed that a great many bound their arms and legs with wet cloths, thinking thereby to facilitate the cure, but he thought on the contrary it would retard any cure. He closed by noting the Governor's generosity towards the sick and impotent, and if others of the upper class (ye better sort) should do likewise, the virtues of Coole Springs would be mightily assisted "and I Doubt not, but their Efforts would be as great as aney Whatsoever".

A chemical analysis of the water from Charlotte Hall was made in January 1889. This was described in an article

by J. Hall Pleasants, M.D., Johns Hopkins Univ., first published Jan. 1904 and reprinted in the *Chronicles of St. Mary's*, Sept. 1954. In summation, the water was found to have a high degree of purity. "It is not only free from organic matter, but contains a very low percentage of mineral matter."

1. Archives of Maryland, Vol. XXIII, p. 273.
2. Ibid., pp. 432-3.
3. Arch of Md., Vol. XXII, pp. 157-8, 174, 190, 208, 228-9, 279-280, 298-299, 384; Vol. XXV, pp. 12, 17.
4. Arch. of Md., Vol. XXII, pp. 319, 333, 418.
5. Ibid., pp. 293-4, 383.
6. (Md.) Provincial Deeds, Lib. WRC No. 1, fol. 877-878. June 12 could be the date of his report, or the date he became Reader. The wording is ambiguous.
7. Ibid., fol. 833-834.
8. Webster's Seventh New Collegiate, 1971.
9. Lig. WRC No. 1 (op. cit.), fol. 878.

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