

Cure-all Water Draws a Crowd: Blasing Springs, Riley County, Kansas 1882-1943

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This is a short history of the hotel and mineral springs community that once existed on land owned by the William Blasing family, Zeandale Township, Riley County, Kansas. Although not actually a town, Blasing Springs was a thriving enterprise employing family members and local residents for many years. The hotel was destroyed by a series of tornados in the 1940s. The author used field work, newspapers articles and advertisements, interviews, maps, and biographical studies.

A New Beginning

America's Great Plains were a much sought after destination. People traveled from the eastern and southern states to get their very own plot of land on which to farm or start a family. Some made an even farther journey; coming over on ships from Europe. One of those brave immigrants was a man by the name of William M. Blasing. Born and raised in Essen Castle, Germany, Blasing came to the United States to avoid being conscripted into the Prussian Army.¹ On June 6, 1853 William married another German immigrant, Miss Cornelia Hausman, whom he had met on the boat trip over.² Several years later, William became naturalized, officially gaining U.S. citizenship on October 26, 1859.³



William Blasing



Cornelia (Hausman) Blasing

William Blasing (left) and his wife, Cornelia Blasing (right).

Source: Riley County Genealogical Society, *Pioneers of the Bluestem Prairie: Kansas Counties, Clay, Geary, Marshall, Pottawatomie, Riley, Wabaunsee, Washington*. (Manhattan, Kan.: Riley County Geneal. Society, 1976), 282

¹ Riley County Genealogical Society, *Pioneers of the Bluestem Prairie: Kansas Counties, Clay, Geary, Marshall, Pottawatomie, Riley, Wabaunsee, Washington*. (Manhattan, Kan.: Riley County Geneal. Society, 1976), 281.

² Winifred Slagg, *Riley County, Kansas. a story of early settlements, rich valleys, azure skies and sunflowers* (Manhattan, Kansas: Kansas State University, 1989), 102.

³ Riley County Genealogical Society, *Pioneers of the Bluestem Prairie: Kansas Counties, Clay, Geary, Marshall, Pottawatomie, Riley, Wabaunsee, Washington*. (Manhattan, Kan.: Riley County Geneal. Society, 1976), 281.

After marrying, the happy couple moved from St. Louis to Calloway County, Missouri, and purchased their first plot of land: 40 acres near a steam boat docking on the Missouri River. Here they stayed for several years, planting an apple and peach orchard. The orchard yielded a plentiful harvest and Blasing would sell wheel barrows full of extra fruit at the boat landing two or three times per week.⁴ Also during their time in Calloway County, Cornelia gave birth to eight of their ten children. One died as an infant and three more were later born in Deep Creek.⁵

The family had a good life in Missouri, tending to the orchard and raising children, until 1861 when the start of the Civil War brought armed guerillas (known as “bushwhackers” at the time) to Missouri. After a series of home invasions, robberies, arson, middle-of-the-night hangings, and personal threats, Blasing concluded that his family was not safe there and decided to move away from the violence. At first, they stayed at small camps along the road with other families trying to escape the madness of the Civil War.⁶ However, the threats on the Blasing family continued and so Blasing decided to leave his wife and six of his children behind while he and his eldest son, Henry, went on ahead to prepare a permanent place of residence.⁷

William and Henry, who was ten at the time, found and bought a 75 acre stretch of land near the head of Deep Creek, in Zeandale Township southeast of Manhattan, Kansas. After building a small cabin, they sent for Cornelia and the other children.⁸

⁴ Riley County Genealogical Society, *Pioneers of the Bluestem Prairie: Kansas Counties, Clay, Geary, Marshall, Pottawatomie, Riley, Wabaunsee, Washington*. (Manhattan, Kan.: Riley County Geneal. Society, 1976), 281.

⁵ Lowell Jack, *Neighbors of the Past: A Sesquicentennial Project of the Manhattan Mercury* (Manhattan, Kan.: Manhattan Mercury, 2005), 79.

⁶ Riley County Genealogical Society, *Pioneers of the Bluestem Prairie: Kansas Counties, Clay, Geary, Marshall, Pottawatomie, Riley, Wabaunsee, Washington*. (Manhattan, Kan.: Riley County Geneal. Society, 1976), 281.

⁷ Lowell Jack, *Neighbors of the Past: A Sesquicentennial Project of the Manhattan Mercury* (Manhattan, Kan.: Manhattan Mercury, 2005), 79.

⁸ Riley County Genealogical Society, *Pioneers of the Bluestem Prairie: Kansas Counties, Clay, Geary, Marshall, Pottawatomie, Riley, Wabaunsee, Washington*. (Manhattan, Kan.: Riley County Geneal. Society, 1976), 281-282.

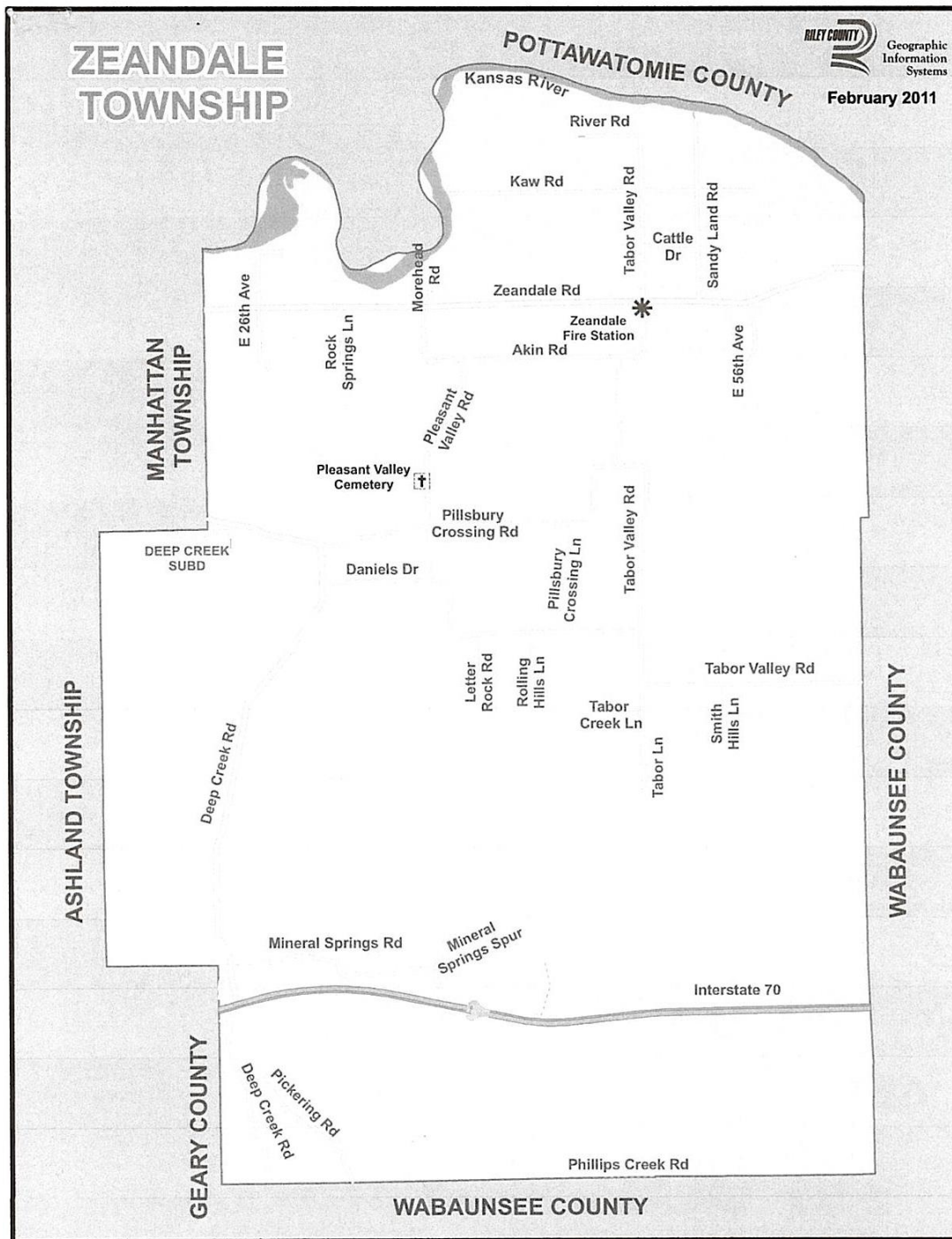


The Blasing frame house after moving from log house in Blasing Springs, Kansas. Lived here until hotel was built. Notice the Blasing Children standing out in front of the building and the man driving a horse and buggy. The is likely what Blasing used to travel to and from his shop in Manhattan.

Source: Winifred Slagg, *Riley County, Kansas. a story of early settlements, rich valleys, azure skies and sunflowers* (Manhattan, Kansas: Kansas State University, 1989), 103

Imagine miles and miles of prairie and rolling hills as far as the eye can see with grass so tall it could hide a grown man.⁹ This is what the Blasing family saw as they looked out at their Flint Hills land in southwest Riley County.

⁹ dRiley County Genealogical Society, *Pioneers of the Bluestem Prairie: Kansas Counties, Clay, Geary, Marshall, Pottawatomie, Riley, Wabaunsee, Washington*. (Manhattan, Kan.: Riley County Geneal. Society, 1976), 282.



A map of Zeandale Township that shows the general location of the former Blasing Springs Hotel on Mineral Springs Road. CivicPlus Content Management System © 1997-2016 CivicPlus. All rights reserved. All content © 2006-2016 Riley County and its representatives. All rights reserved.

The 75 acres of land were untouched by the hand of man and were quite a find for the family. At first, they were all alone in the area, but they eventually gained a few neighbors in the Deep Creek area. But because the homestead was so far from any actual cities, the family would often find themselves with little more to eat than cornbread and sorghum molasses, and

little more to drink than wheat or rye coffee.¹⁰ During this hard decade of the 1860s: many settlers experienced drought and near-starvation.

With some savings, the Blasings were able to purchase two milk cows, a pig, and a few bee hives.¹¹ But even with these new additions to the farm, food was scarce, and so William decided to go back to work as a boot and shoe maker in order to bring in some much-needed revenue and to purchase food from town when necessary. His shop was on the 200 block of Poyntz Avenue in Manhattan, Kansas.¹² William stayed and slept above his shop during the week and on Friday, his sons Henry and August, would walk to town with the family's pony. The three would then purchase some groceries from town and carry them home. Blasing later bought himself a horse and buggy.

Back on the homestead the Blasings planted a small variety of crops. The yield of the farm was very unpredictable due to lack of expertise and wild weather. It was also very hard work because everything had to be done with an axe and hoe after the cows died from eating too much green corn. Slowly, through trial and error came success. By the third year the Blasings had broken 15-20 acres of crop bearing land and owned a team of oxen to help lessen the load.¹³

Even with these improvements in food and labor, the work was hard and so in 1873, Mr. Blasing decided to try his luck at drilling for water. When they started to drill, after the first twelve feet, water from Deep Creek flooded in and all progress came to a halt. In 1878 the drilling was continued to 22 feet but was stopped for the same reason. Finally, in 1879, they struck underground water at 120 feet below the surface.¹⁴

By the time the first well was finished Blasing and his eldest son were in very poor health. The rest of the family, too, had become dreary and listless. But after drinking the water they all miraculously began to feel a heightened sense of wellness. Finding no other explanation, William concluded it must be the water from the underground artesian springs.¹⁵

The Minerals in the Spring

¹⁰ Riley County Genealogical Society, *Pioneers of the Bluestem Prairie: Kansas Counties, Clay, Geary, Marshall, Pottawatomie, Riley, Wabaunsee, Washington*. (Manhattan, Kan.: Riley County Geneal. Society, 1976), 282.

¹¹ Winifred Slagg, *Riley County, Kansas. a story of early settlements, rich valleys, azure skies and sunflowers* (Manhattan, Kansas: Kansas State University, 1989), 104.

¹² Lowell Jack, *Neighbors of the Past: A Sesquicentennial Project of the Manhattan Mercury* (Manhattan, Kan.: Manhattan Mercury, 2005), 79.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Riley County Genealogical Society, *Pioneers of the Bluestem Prairie: Kansas Counties, Clay, Geary, Marshall, Pottawatomie, Riley, Wabaunsee, Washington*. (Manhattan, Kan.: Riley County Geneal. Society, 1976), 282.

¹⁵ Ibid.

To find out what it was in the water that gave it its curative properties, Blasing took a sample to Professor G. H. Failyer of Kansas State Agricultural College (now Kansas State University) for analysis. Professor Failyer boiled down the water until the only thing left was a white powder.¹⁶ This white powder later gave Blasing the idea to boil it down for himself to sell along with the mineral water itself. After some testing, Professor Failyer came back with the results: in various amounts, it contained sodium chloride, magnesium chloride, magnesium sulfate, calcium carbonate, barium sulfate, ferrous carbonate, and silicic acid.¹⁷



The mortar and pestle used to grind down the powder that was left after boiling the mineral water at Blasing Springs. The mortar and pestle is now on display at the Riley County Historical Museum in Riley County, Kansas.

With the professor's official analysis and with friends and neighbors to attest to the wonders of the water, Blasing decided to start a resort and spa and sell the magic mineral water.¹⁸

¹⁶ Riley County Genealogical Society, *Pioneers of the Bluestem Prairie: Kansas Counties, Clay, Geary, Marshall, Pottawatomie, Riley, Wabaunsee, Washington*. (Manhattan, Kan.: Riley County Geneal. Society, 1976), 281.

¹⁷ Lowell Jack, *Neighbors of the Past: A Sesquicentennial Project of the Manhattan Mercury* (Manhattan, Kan.: Manhattan Mercury, 2005), 80.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

MINERAL WATER

from Blasing's Springs.

which are in reality Artesian Wells, at a natural temperature of 54 degrees. (Analysed at Kansas State Agricultural College and subject to natural changes.)

| | |
|------------------|---------|
| Magnesium | 2.4754 |
| Calcion | 27.9083 |
| Sodion | 0.4147 |
| Di-gerrion | 0.1811 |
| Coloridion | 1.8400 |
| Sulphainon | 73.629 |
| Silica | 0.9346 |

Qualitative reactions were also found for Aluminum, bromine, Manganese, Lithium and boric acid.

These may be regarded somewhat as follows:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| Sodium Chloride, (common salt) | 1.0572 |
| Magnesium Chloride | 1.6063 |
| Magnesium Sulphate | 15.1574 |
| Calcium Sulphate | 87.1886 |
| Barium Sulphate, etc. | 0.3621 |
| Calcium Carbonate | 5.5665 |
| Ferrous Barbonate | .3738 |
| Silicic Acid | 1.2266 |
| | Total |
| | 112.5385 |

"Bottled at the Springs and Controlled exclusively.

Guaranteed under the Food and Drug Act, May 26, 1913.

One advertisement that lists the minerals which gave the water its curative properties.

Blasing and his sons prepared for the sale of the water by building a cement trough in the shape of an "L" into which the water was piped. Here the water was easily accessed to fill cups and bottles with the clear, cool water. After that was finished, they built a small bath house nearby. Inside the bath house, an oil heater and several large tin washtubs were installed so that people could take hot baths in the mineral water.¹⁹

¹⁹ Winifred Slagg, *Riley County, Kansas. a story of early settlements, rich valleys, azure skies and sunflowers* (Manhattan, Kansas: Kansas State University, 1989), 106.



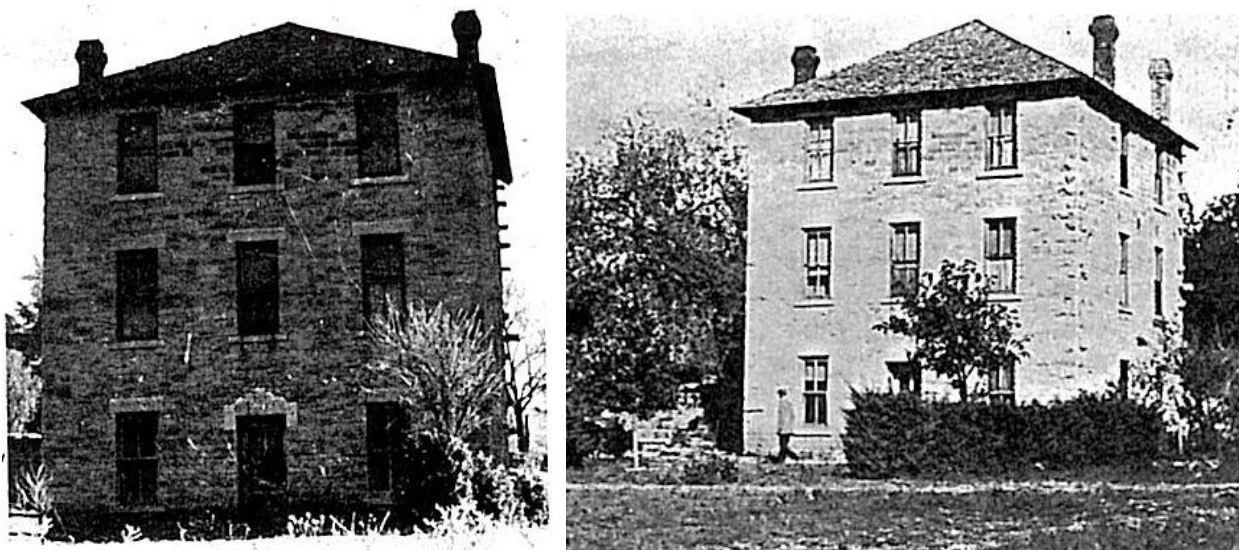
The “L” shaped trough (close up). Notice the pipe in the center that the water is coming through and what looks like a metal cup to the left of the trough.

Source: Winifred Slagg, *Riley County, Kansas. a story of early settlements, rich valleys, azure skies and sunflowers* (Manhattan, Kansas: Kansas State University, 1989), 105

In 1882 Blasing drilled a second spring at a depth of 180 feet. The well discharged water nearly 800 gallons an hour at a constant 55 degrees Fahrenheit.²⁰ Also in, 1882 the resort was opened to the public. Once print advertisements were made and word of mouth began to spread, people poured into Blasing Springs almost as fast as the water poured into the troughs. More and more people came, some from more than one hundred miles away, in search of the fabled Blasing Spring Mineral Water and the health benefits that were promised. Some came out of curiosity, and some to cure their ailments, covering the property in campsites.²¹

²⁰ Lowell Jack, *Neighbors of the Past: A Sesquicentennial Project of the Manhattan Mercury* (Manhattan, Kan.: Manhattan Mercury, 2005), 80.

²¹ Winifred Slagg, *Riley County, Kansas. a story of early settlements, rich valleys, azure skies and sunflowers* (Manhattan, Kansas: Kansas State University, 1989), 106.



The Blasing Springs Hotel. A three story, twelve room building made from limestone. Notice the trees around the building, probably planted by the Blasing family over twenty years before. This area was tall grass prairie with a timber growth only along Deep Creek.

Source: Winifred Slagg, *Riley County, Kansas. a story of early settlements, rich valleys, azure skies and sunflowers* (Manhattan, Kansas: Kansas State University, 1989), 107

Over the years, as the craze of mineral water died down, so did the whirlwind of people who came to Blasing Springs. Changes in health care and medicine lessened the popularity of “mineral springs cures.” Blasing tried to sell the hotel several times, without success, so he kept it running. After William’s death in 1898, operation passed to Cornelia and then their two unmarried children, Josephine and William E. Blasing.²⁴ In 1904, six years after Blasing’s death, a letter dated January 27, 1904 and addressed to the “Proprietor, Blasing Medical Springs” was sent to the resort. The letter enclosed an invitation to send an exhibit of the mineral water from the springs to the Universal Exposition in St. Louis and was signed by E. H. Bailey who was a member of the Mineral Water Committee for the exposition.²⁵ The hotel stayed in business until it was destroyed by a tornado on May 15th, 1943, one of seven tornadoes that struck the Deep Creek area that day.²⁶

²⁴ Riley County Genealogical Society, *Pioneers of the Bluestem Prairie: Kansas Counties, Clay, Geary, Marshall, Pottawatomie, Riley, Wabaunsee, Washington*. (Manhattan, Kan.: Riley County Geneal. Society, 1976), 283.

²⁵ Winifred Slagg, *Riley County, Kansas. a story of early settlements, rich valleys, azure skies and sunflowers* (Manhattan, Kansas: Kansas State University, 1989), 110.

²⁶ Riley County Genealogical Society, *Pioneers of the Bluestem Prairie: Kansas Counties, Clay, Geary, Marshall, Pottawatomie, Riley, Wabaunsee, Washington*. (Manhattan, Kan.: Riley County Geneal. Society, 1976), 283; "Narrow Escape for Family." *Hutchinson News*, (May 17, 1943).



The Blasing Springs Hotel after it was hit by a tornado on May 15, 1943.

Source: Winifred Slagg, *Riley County, Kansas. a story of early settlements, rich valleys, azure skies and sunflowers* (Manhattan, Kansas: Kansas State University, 1989), 110

Gone But Not Forgotten

Although the hotel and was destroyed, Blasing Springs was not forgotten. The property became a place for families, picnics, fishing, celebrate the Fourth of July, and experience nature. One of those who came just to enjoy the beauty of the great outdoors was Mrs. Virginia Bigbee, a Manhattan resident who moved to Riley County with her husband in 1941. Her husband had heard about the property from a friend, and the two took their daughter to the area when she was young. Virginia Bigbee stated that her husband loved the springs and enjoyed driving out to it on Sunday afternoons. She remembers the spring still running with clear water back when she visited in late 1950s through early 1960s.²⁷

Today, the ruins of the Blasing Springs Hotel still remain. The giant limestone blocks of the foundation still show evidence of the edge of the saw that cut them. Grass and shrubs and trees have overgrown the property, making Blasing Springs a beautiful place with a park-like feel. Although the original artesian wells are no longer flowing, the ground has depressions where the water may have pooled, and the “L” shaped troughs and pipes that directed the water are still there. Signs and plaques, as shown in the following photos, commemorate a long-successful family enterprise still remembered in Riley County.

²⁷ Virginia Bigbee, personal interview by author, May 3, 2016.



An outlet of Deep Creek in former Blasing Springs, Kansas (2016). Photograph by Breanne Kruse April 23, 2016.



A plaque that hangs above the doorway on the old trough building (2016). Photograph by Breanne Kruse April 23, 2016.



A wooden sign that displays the name of the town and hotel. Likely built after the tornado (2016). Photograph by Breanne Kruse April 23, 2016.



Some of the ruins of the Blasing Springs Hotel (2016). Photograph by Breanne Kruse April 23, 2016.

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