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## EastBrook Springs Resort Restores Huntsville Landmarks

*by*  
*George Harsh*

**"Home of Famous Green Water and Dr. Herbert Harsh, COME! DRINK! BE WELL!"**—so reads the sign that once pointed the way to the EastBrook Springs Hotel. Dr. Harsh was my grandfather and a medical doctor who never practiced medicine after he returned to Nashville, Tennessee, from Indian Territory, Oklahoma, around the turn of the century. He had gone there with a brother and cousin to “seek his fortune,” but he returned about 4 years later in ill health and with no fortune—in fact, with no funds at all. Despite this, he seemed to live fairly well while experiencing numerous losing business ventures—a broom factory, a feed and grain store, a phosphate mine, and the “skateboard” (50 years ahead of its time) distributorship for the southeastern United States. In recent years, my Aunt told me that her father simply borrowed money for all of these ventures.

In the 1920's, Dr. Harsh purchased the EastBrook Springs Resort near Estill Springs, Tennessee. As I understand it, from the late 1800's to about 1920, there were several springs (hotel resorts/spas) in that area and people from the lowlands of Mississippi, Louisiana, etc. would travel there by rail during the summer to escape the mosquitoes. In addition, some of the locals from Estill Springs recall northern “bigwigs” coming down south to EastBrook. The automobile essentially put these resorts out of business as people could easily travel to higher elevations such as Sewanee, Tennessee, or the Great Smoky Mountains.

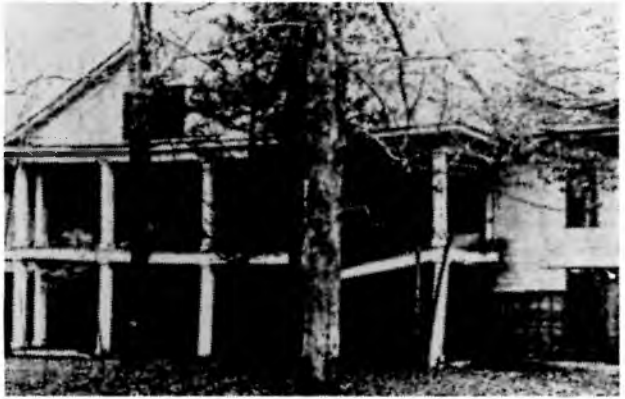
My grandfather operated EastBrook as a camp for boys and girls in the late 1920's and early 1930's; however, this also was a losing venture with few customers and the camp



*EastBrook Springs Resort in its original condition.*

*EastBrook Springs Hotel, December 1985.*

*From an article in The Herald-Chronicle, Winchester, TN.*



*Welcome to EastBrook Hotel — March 1971.*

folded after 2 or 3 summers. The camp “staff” consisted of his young nieces and nephews from the Chitty family in Jacksonville, Florida. In later years they recalled having a great time as cleanup required less than an hour each day and the rest of their time was spent swimming, horseback riding, and so forth. To this day, Arthur Ben Chitty remains in the area as Historiographer for the University of The South at Sewanee. The last occupancy of the hotel was during World War II when Camp Forrest near Tullahoma, Tennessee, overflowed and some of the soldiers and their spouses spent a winter there.

The EastBrook Springs Resort on the Elk River had some unique features. A Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway 1909 Summer Resorts Brochure states, “EastBrook is charmingly situated among the foothills of the Cumberland Mountains, in the very midst of the “Spring region” for which this range has long been noted,” and that “the celebrated EastBrook Springs “Green Water” has a long established national reputation for its great virtue in all diseases of the stomach, bowels, liver and kidneys ... and quickly eradicates from the system all malarial poisons.” The Hotel itself was a two story building with about 30 rooms, connected to it by a breezeway was the large dining hall/kitchen. There was a cottage row and a two-story dormitory/dance hall. In the ravine behind the dining hall was the East Brook, where old Indian lore says it’s good luck and

*Mary Kathryn  
Harsh in front of  
the Dance Hall at  
EastBrook Hotel,  
January 1980.*



will cure any disease to take a bath in a brook flowing to the east. Next to the brook was the sulfur spring from which my grandfather bottled the water and sold his “famous green water” up North. The brook also fed a large swimming pool until it was destroyed by a gully-washer. Lawn tennis, horse-back riding, fishing, boating, and a double ten pin alley were available for recreation. The chemical analysis of the “famous green water” by Professor N. L. Lupton, State Chemist of Alabama, was posted in the dining hall on a wooden placard that remains in our family.

ANALYSIS OF FAMOUS GREEN WATER	
	GRAINS
Sodium Carbonate. . . . .	8.970
Lithium Carbonate. . . . .	0.066
Calcium Carbonate. . . . .	6.617
Magnesium Carbonate. . . . .	3.775
Sodium Phosphate. . . . .	0.104
Sodium Disulphide. . . . .	12.346
Sodium Chloride. . . . .	5.837
Sodium Sulphate. . . . .	7.763
Potassium Sulphate. . . . .	2.592
Alumina. . . . .	0.408
Silica. . . . .	0.137
Iodine, trace. . . . .	
Sodium Bromide, trace. . . . .	
Total solids to gallon. . . . .	48.614
Sulphurated Hydrogen Gas (cu. in.) . . . .	3.66

My first remembrance of EastBrook is from the late 1940's when my family would drive down from Nashville each July 4th weekend to visit my grandmother who spent the summer in one of the cottages. My sisters and I would play in the empty hotel—racing through the hallways and rooms. Each room had a night stand, iron bed frame, and a dresser complete with wig cabinet and mirror. The wash basins and pitchers in each room and anything else easily carried had long since disappeared. Many of the dressers contained a mouse's nest, and my Dad used to say that whenever some

mouse brings in a match, the whole place would burn down. The foundations and roofs were kept in good repair by my grandmother and the “caretaker” who appeared in 1941; otherwise the buildings would have probably fallen in during the 1960’s.

With the death (in the early 1970’s) of EastBrook’s “caretaker”, who had guarded the premises like they were his own, it became obvious that vandals would soon destroy or cart off everything. Within months, the large curved front desk was gone and most of the windows were broken. By this time my wife, Eleanor, and I were members of Historic Huntsville Foundation, had met Ralph Allen of the Foundation’s Board of Directors. My sisters and family, who now owned EastBrook, decided to start donating parts of the buildings to the Foundation Warehouse for use in restoration in Huntsville.



*Windows, etc.  
stored in the  
basement of Harrison Brothers.*

The Warehouse provides a storage and sales area for items that are available at a decent price to those who are restoring structures in Huntsville. The Foundation’s first Warehouse was in an empty building off Washington Street, downtown. When this unlocked building became unsatisfactory, a small space behind Jones and Herrin Architects was utilized until the Foundation purchased Harrison Brothers Hardware on the square. At that point, the Warehouse moved into Harrison Brothers basement and upper floors. It is operated by “Warehouse Volunteers” and is open on a limited basis—usually the first and third Saturdays of each month.

The first salvage operation to EastBrook in the 1970's consisted of Ralph Allen and myself in his pickup truck. We removed what remained of the hand-blown glass from the windows and it now resides in the Alabama Constitution Village. Ralph and I would make two trips per year—early spring and late fall—loading his pickup with doors, door frames, window frames, baseboard, trim, flooring, porch railing, beaded pine siding from the interior and poplar siding from the exterior. The crew soon expanded—on one trip we had 5 pickups and 13 workers. Some were removing items for use in their own homes; however, it always amazed me how many would show up just to enjoy the company, have a good time, and contribute by dismantling the old buildings for use in restoring homes in Huntsville. Even though thoroughly enjoyable, it was always a long, hard day with a couple of coffee breaks and one lunch break. Once, after spending all day removing the dance hall flooring, I was so dirty and grubby looking that when Eleanor and I stopped on the way home at a fast food outlet, they would not take my order until I first paid!

The majority of EastBrook items are in homes about the same age as EastBrook on Walker, Holmes, Randolph, and Clinton Avenues, and Steele and Smith Street in the Old Town Historic District. While the porch railings, columns, and poplar siding are easily seen from the outside, to really





*Columns and railings from the Dance Hall were used in restoring this old home and the one on the previous page. Here the front doors are the ones that were on the hotel.*

appreciate how EastBrook has been put to use by “Old Town Craftsmen,” one needs to look inside, especially at the pine flooring and beaded pine siding. The pine siding was essentially in a natural state (no finish) and has been used in several kitchens, bathrooms, and living rooms with a clear finish that is striking. (See photo next page.)



*Here is a door from the hotel. The whole frame, including the top windows, are from EastBrook. The door is 4-paneled (the bottom 2 panels cannot be seen). This type of door is no longer made and thus, greatly increased this home's value. These people split the doors so that they bend to provide more space in the bathroom.*



At the Railroad Depot, all of the window and door frames in the two wood frame buildings are from East

*An example of some of the paneling from inside the hotel used in restoring a bath-*

*room of an historic home. Notice the difference between this picture and the one of the front desk.*



Brook. In the Twickenham Historic District, some of the dance hall porch columns, beaded pine siding and pine flooring are on Eustis, and the Weeden House has a board door. Doors and door locks are on Franklin, bulls eyes (door corner trim) on Locust, and one of the hotel's more classical elements, a palladian window, now resides on White Street.

Today, EastBrook "stands" as a stark reminder of days and memories from days gone by and somewhat of present day neglect. The dining hall has collapsed; the hotel is essentially a skeleton of exposed beams, floor joists, etc.; the dance hall stands without its porch and dance floor, but with some siding, two of the three cottages remain; Tims Ford reservoir now covers the brook and the sulfur spring; and the grounds are overgrown with weeds, trees and bushes. However, we feel fortunate that some mouse did not bring in a match years ago, that the campfire on the front porch from the "motorcycle gang" did not destroy it, and that we were able to donate much of it. We are especially indebted to Ralph Allen, the Historic Huntsville Foundation, the Foundation's Warehouse, and all the many people who helped "move" EastBrook to Huntsville. So the old Hotel is not dead—it lives again as it has helped, and continues to help, restore many Huntsville landmarks.



*Window and door frames — at the Railroad Depot.*

*RIGHT AND BELOW:  
The home of Joe &  
Carolyn Harris,  
122 Walker*



*Palladian window  
from the home of  
Kyle Johnson,  
313 White Street.*



*Bulls eye from a home on  
Locust Street.*

*Interesting use of  
wall paneling  
from inside the  
EastBrook Hotel.  
Tony Daily,  
119 Walker.*



**(Pictures for this  
article were pro-  
vided by Toney  
Daly and M. K.  
Harsh Beaty.)**



Ms. H. Harsh, Dietitian, Secretary and Treasurer

## "OUR SONG"

*It will all be sun in the long run,  
Open the door of your heart.*

*Take in the best, shut out the rest:  
It will pay in every way.*

*Merry as a bird, busy as a bee,  
With sunshine in your heart:*

*Makes you gay and lights the way  
For a bright and happy day.*

*Copyrighted by H. HARSH.*



Dr. H. Harsh, Owner and Business Manager



*315 White  
Street circa  
1910 or  
1920.*

*RIGHT: Front of  
house in 1975.*



*BELOW: Front of  
house in 1994.*

