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United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

JAN 23 1990

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16).

1. Name of Property

historic name Bon Aqua Springs Historic District other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number Old Highway 46 city, town Bon Aqua state Tennessee code TN county Hickman code 081 zip code 37025

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private (checked), public-local, public-State, public-Federal. Category of Property: building(s), district (checked), site, structure, object. Number of Resources within Property: Contributing (6, 1, 7, 14), Noncontributing (1, 1, 1, 3 Total). Name of related multiple property listing: N/A. Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0.

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets (checked) does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official: Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission. Date: 1/19/90.

In my opinion, the property meets (unchecked) does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official: State or Federal agency and bureau.

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is: Entered in the National Register (checked). determined eligible for the National Register (unchecked). determined not eligible for the National Register (unchecked). removed from the National Register (unchecked). other, (explain:). Signature of the Keeper: Date of Action: 2/23/90.

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

AGRICULTURE: agricultural outbuilding

HEALTH CARE: resort

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

DOMESTIC: secondary structure

VACANT/NOT IN USE

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

No Style

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE

walls weatherboard

STONE

roof TIN

other STONE

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

The Bon Aqua Historic District is comprised of buildings and structures associated with the Bon Aqua Springs Spa in Hickman County, Tennessee. Bon Aqua Springs Historic District is located thirty-two miles southwest of Nashville and one-half mile south of Bon Aqua. The resort is in the isolated northeast corner of Hickman County nestled among forest-clad hills along Big Spring Creek, a tributary of the Piney River. The mean elevation of the district is 1,050 feet above sea level.

Extant resources on the property mostly date from circa 1865 to circa 1925. Buildings and structures include houses, spring houses, a cottage, corn crib, bridges, a dam, a swimming pool, and a reservoir.

Most of the resort is laid out along Big Spring Creek, a strong perennial stream. This creek and the many small rivulets which feed it, mostly issuing from springs, is a cold clear stream; watercress is very abundant in the stream. On the north side, a long ridge overlooking the valley is occupied by the two houses, a cottage, the stables and a corn crib, the reservoir, and a cemetery. South of the stream is another tall ridge which once was the location of several cottages, none of which survive. Many of the original cottages were only intended for use in summer and fall, but some had fireplaces and were used year-around. All of the cottages were plain buildings of no identified style.

The chemical springs themselves (#13) are located in the middle of the central valley to the south side of Big Spring Creek. An open wooden frame structure once covered the spring; today the springs are defined by concrete foundations and spring fonts. Just south of the springs is a stone structure serving as the entrance to the "blowing cave" (#14), which cooled the croquet grounds located in front of the cave.

Downstream, ninety yards from the chemical springs and on the south edge of the valley, is a circa 1880 stone spring house (#15) for a freestone or limestone water spring. Below this is a circa 1975 wooden bridge (#16) that replaces an earlier bridge built circa 1925.

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Further downstream on the north side of Big Spring Creek are the foundation ruins of the Bon Aqua Springs Hotel (#17). This gargantuan wooden frame structure contained more than one hundred rooms and was built on the site of two former hotels.

Upstream from the chemical springs is a long stone dam across Big Spring Creek, its purpose to form a pleasure lake upstream and to divert water to a stone swimming pool on the south side of the structure. Farther upstream is a small circa 1925-1940 suspension bridge giving access to the Clark farm and to resort properties on the north bank. The Clark farmstead on the rise over the north bank of the creek consists of a circa 1880 saddlebag plan frame house (#8) and an accompanying chicken house (#9).

North of the chemical springs on a westward extension of the ridge is a circa 1860 Thomas-White House (#1), added to the resort property by the mid-1920s. The one-story central-passage plan house is distinguished by a portico, constructed in part from Tuscan columns salvaged from the third Bon Aqua Springs Hotel. Behind the Thomas House on the hillside is a single cottage (#3) once part of a cluster of four cottage rows. The simple weatherboard frame structure is laid out on a rectangular plan and has a full-length porch across the front. Additional rows of cottages were located farther north on the hilltop.

Northeast of the cottage is a large circa 1900 stone reservoir (#6) that provided for a gravity-fed water supply for the resort. This circular structure is thirty feet in diameter and five feet high. East of the reservoir is a small cemetery (#7) containing approximately ten graves, four of which are marked by tombstones. Some of these graves may pre-date the establishment of the resort.

The ridge to the south of the creek once contained a number of cabins and summer cottages. Although none survive, the setting of several of these can be roughly determined by the presence of occasional foundation stones and chimney falls, and by the route of existing roads.

The area north and east of the surviving cottage (#3) was laid out for a golf course and for the development of additional cottage rows and summer homes. Although the golf course was never established and many of the homes were never built, occasional ruins do indicate that some cottages were erected on the property.

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In addition to the resources listed above, the district once contained a number of support structures, including tables, cribs, and outbuildings. Extant resources are listed in the inventory below. Although some of the historic buildings, notably the Big Springs Hotel, have been dismantled since the resort closed, the site of Bon Aqua Springs Historic District is reasonably intact. The remains of the resort still reflect its original plan and no major intrusions have been built within its boundaries. Its archaeological potential remains unevaluated.

Properties at Bon Aqua Springs were surveyed April 24, 1989, by Richard Quin, Regional Historic Preservation Planner for the South Central Tennessee Development District. The nomination itself was prepared from survey notes and historic accounts in early May.

INVENTORY

1. Thomas-White House. circa 1865. This one-story weatherboard frame house was built during the Civil War by General John Thomas, later president of the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railway. The rectangular house is laid out on the central passage plan and is constructed on a continuous stone foundation with full cellar. The side gable roof is covered by composition shingles. The wraparound porch was remodeled about 1945 by the addition of Tuscan order columns salvaged from the Bon Aqua Springs Hotel. Windows are double-hung sash with 4/4 lights. At the rear of the structure is a shed addition built in 1941. (C)
2. Garage. 1973. Just behind and to the northeast of the Thomas House is a small garage constructed for Mrs. H. L. White. The rectangular plan structure is covered with synthetic siding and has a poured slab floor and a front gable asphalt roof. Access is provided by a roll-up metal door. (NC)
3. Cottage. circa 1895. The last part of one of four rows of attached cottages is this small rectangular plan residence. The weatherboard frame house has a stone pier foundation and a side gable tin roof. An integral shed porch supported by braced posts, the roof formed by a forward extension of the gable eaves, runs across the entire front. Doors are of simple batten construction, and the sash windows have six-over-six lights. A heavy stone interior chimney breaks the roof near the center. (C)

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4. Corn Crib. circa 1880. This small structure is rectangular in plan, rests on stone piers, and is topped by a front-gable tin roof. The board and batten frame structure has a plain batten door on the south gable end. (C)
5. Stable. circa 1940. On the hillside behind the corn crib is a stable. The long rectangular plan frame structure is covered with board and batten siding and is capped by a tin shed roof. Access is by sliding batten and wooden panel doors and a long shed porch extends across the front. This structure was built by Harry L. White. (NC)
6. Reservoir. circa 1900 or earlier. At the crest of the hill behind the Thomas House is a large stone reservoir built to provide sufficient water and, because of its elevation, water pressure for the resort. The reservoir is constructed of limestone laid five feet high with flared sides. The structure is round and approximately thirty feet in diameter. (C)
7. Cemetery. East of the reservoir is a small cemetery containing approximately ten graves. Four of these are marked by memorial stones or fieldstones. One of the marked graves is that of Leroy Perkins (1815-1873). Some of the stones are missing, but sunken graves suggest that about ten people were interred here. The cemetery was established prior to the resort and is not directly associated; therefore, it is a non-contributing resource. (NC)
8. Clark House. circa 1880. This small farmhouse, originally the residence of the Clark family, is a one and one half story saddlebag plan house of weatherboard frame construction, is built on a stone pier foundation, and is topped by a side-gable standing-seam roof. Across the front extends an integral half-hip porch supported by turned post. Behind this are two four-panel wooden doors, set to either side of center. Windows are double hung sash with six-over-six lights. At the rear is a small one-story gable ell extension containing kitchen and service area. (C)
9. Chicken House. circa 1900. Thirty yards northwest of the Clark farmhouse is a low vertical-board frame shed, probably used originally as a chicken house. The small rectangular plan building rests on stone piers and is covered by a tin shed roof. Access is, for humans, by a batten door, and for poultry, by hatches that could be closed with sliding Yorkshire lights. (C)

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10. Suspension Bridge. circa 1925/1940. Located over Big Spring Creek, the bridge was reconstructed circa 1925 and replanked circa 1940. The bridge is supported by heavy poles sunk into the banks with iron cables holding up the wooden plank floor and providing a sort of hand rail. The plank floor is in very poor condition. The original bridge at this location was built circa 1900. (C)
11. Dam. circa 1885. This mortared stone dam across Big Spring Creek was built during the 1880s as it appeared in photographs from that period. It may have been built soon after the Civil War in the first period of improvements to the springs. The eighteen-foot-high structure had a flared base and central gate at center. This gate, formed by a rectangular opening in the dam, has an iron gate which could be lowered to close the dam, diverting water to the adjacent swimming pool. The dam has a slightly higher abutment on the east bank. The structure had largely silted up in recent decades, but the dam itself is unaltered. (C)
12. Swimming Pool. circa 1885. The dam was almost certainly constructed to divert water to this 50' X 100' swimming pool. The rectangular pool is of mortared stone block construction with flared base. The earth bottom slopes gently toward the creek. (C)
13. Spring House Ruins, circa 1880, and Chemical Springs. The chemical springs were the *raison d'etre* for the resort. They were first developed by William Locke Weems, and one of the spring fonts is marked 'W. L. Weems, 1837', though this may have been done at a later date. By the 1870s or the 1880s, an ornate wooden spring house was constructed over the Springs. Photographs show that this was an open lattice work structure with decorative vergeboards and an octagonal central pavilion. The spring house was razed about 1940. The present stone retaining wall surrounding the springs was a part of its foundation. (C)
14. Cave Entrance. circa 1885. Down the valley a short distance from the chemical springs is a natural cave running back into the south ridge, a small rivulet issues from its mouth. At its mouth is a stone entrance structure. This small structure is rectangular in shape and is topped by a barrel vault roof. The wooden lattice door has been broken by vandals. This 'blowing cave' supposedly cooled the lawn in front, which was used as a croquet ground. (C)

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15. Spring House. circa 1885 or earlier. This structure was used to garner fresh freestone water and to refrigerate foods. The small rectangular plan random ashlar stone structure is covered with a side-gable tin roof and has a lattice work door on the north front. The gable fields are covered with lattice, as well. (C)
16. Wooden Bridge. circa 1975. The present bridge uses the stone abutments from the original bridge built circa 1925 in this location. The bridge consists of two large iron beams extending across the creek from the stone abutments, with a wooden superstructure with diagonal wooden boards as flooring and wooden post hand rails. (NC)
17. Ruins. During the initial survey, a number of foundations and ruins were noted on the property. These included parts of the stone foundations for the one-hundred-ten-room Bon Aqua Springs Hotel, collapsed privies constructed by the Works Progress Administration, cottage foundations, old embankments for roads and paths, and the sites of numerous cottages and small structures. These sites and ruins may be able to yield more information on the use and significance of these structures, but no investigation by a qualified archaeologist has been undertaken. (C)

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G N/A

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1837-ca.1930

Significant Dates

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Bon Aqua Springs Historic District in northeastern Hickman County, Tennessee, is nominated under National Register criterion A for its importance in recreation. The resources in the complex form an inter-related group significant to Hickman County and Tennessee for its association with the nineteenth and early twentieth century water spa phenomenon. The resort was one of the largest health spas and summer resort hotels in Middle Tennessee, and, accordingly, is important for its recreation role, as it relates to the economic growth in Hickman County.

The springs were apparently identified in the early 1810s, but did not attract attention until 1823, when the land was acquired by William B. Ross, who located near what was later Johnsonville on the Tennessee River to the West.<sup>1</sup> Ross, who ran the county line between Hickman and Dickson counties, did not develop the property and left it for hunters, trappers, and citizens to camp there for as long as they wished.

In 1827, Jacob Humble, Millington Easley, and James D. Davis, of Pine River; Garrett Lane, of Vernon (then the county seat); and General William D. Williams of Maury County spent the summer at the springs in four crude log cabins. Others came to the springs, spending their summers in wagons, tents, crude shelters, and cabins.

William Locke Weems (1792-1852), a native of Prince Georges County, Maryland, was the first to recognize the value of the springs and established the first health resort there. In 1826, he was living near Vernon, in Hickman County, then moved the next year to the William McEwen place in the Third district, where he lived until<sup>2</sup>1839. In 1837, he purchased the springs, which he named "Bon Aqua."<sup>2</sup> With the springs, Weems

<sup>1</sup>He established Ross' Ferry there about 1835.

<sup>2</sup>Bad Latin for Good Water



**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A  
 preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  
 previously listed in the National Register  
 previously determined eligible by the National Register  
 designated a National Historic Landmark  
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 125 acres

UTM References

A 

1	6	4	7	1	0	2	0	3	9	7	8	1	6	0
Zone	Easting		Northing											

B 

1	6	4	7	1	7	6	0	3	9	7	8	0	0	0
Zone	Easting		Northing											

C 

1	6	4	7	1	7	2	0	3	9	7	7	6	0	0
Zone	Easting		Northing											

D 

1	6	4	7	1	1	6	0	3	9	7	7	4	4	0
Zone	Easting		Northing											

See continuation sheet

Lyles, TN 49NE

**Verbal Boundary Description** The Bon Aqua Springs Historic District is irregular in shape and contains 125 acres, bounded generally as follows: beginning at a point at the intersection of Old Highway 46 and the Bon Aqua Road, then 500' NW; thence generally N to Old Highway 46; east southeast along the highway 500'; then along property lines north and east for 1400'; then east southeast 1000'; then south 2000'; then west northwest 1200'; then south 250' to the Bon Aqua Road; then northwest along the road 350' to the beginning at the intersection of the road with Old Highway 46.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

The nominated area contains most of the property historically associated with the Bon Aqua Springs resort; the boundaries contain sufficient land to protect its historical resources.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Richard Quin, Regional Historic Preservation Planner  
organization South Central TN Development District date May 1989  
street & number P.O. Box 1346 telephone 615-381-2040  
city or town Columbia state Tennessee zip code 38402-1346

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acquired four hundred six acres of land, later adding to this until he owned approximately 1,800 acres. This additional land was purchased from McKenzie and Long and from Dickey and Long, holders of extensive grants from North Carolina.

Weems thought that the development of the springs might be a profitable enterprise and he erected fifteen cabins of hewn logs. He began to advertise his property as a health resort and, from that time, Weems' Springs or Bon Aqua was known as an important watering spa.

In 1840, the springs were being managed by William H. Deadman, a native of Virginia who lived on Leatherwood Creek to the southeast. After this year, Weems assumed personal management of the undertaking, in which role he continued until his death in 1852.

At this time, the property went to the youngest son, Philip Van Horn Weems. The young man operated the springs complex until the outbreak of the Civil War. In May 1861, he enlisted in Bateman's Company of the Eleventh Tennessee Infantry, later becoming its captain. Acting as colonel of his regiment, in July 1864, he was mortally wounded in front of Atlanta.

Little information is available on the Bon Aqua area during the Civil War, but the accompanying civil unrest had repercussions at the springs. In 1863, Captain Dick McCann of Nashville, camped near the springs with his body of independent rangers, was surprised and captured by a federal company. One of McCann's men was killed during the attack.

During the later part of the war, one Perkins shot two men, Moore and Gracey, just below the springs. There had been trouble with Perkins over a horse, and a posse had sought to arrest him. Perkins, who seemed inclined to take over the springs against the remonstrances of the manager, a Mr. McMinn, turned on his the posse and shot the two men, before making his escape. Perkins escaped. Another killing took place at about the same time, when Union soldiers executed Jesse K. McMinn at his home near the springs.

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<sup>3</sup>W. Jerome D. Spence and David L. Spence. History of Hickman County Tennessee. 1900; reprint Columbia: P-Vine Press, 1981, p. 69.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. p. 70.

<sup>5</sup>McCann told his captors that, while his capture might be an unpleasant result, as far as he was concerned, anything was pleasant to him, just so that it was a change. (Spence, 71).

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After the close of the war, the property was purchased by the Bon Aqua Springs Association. This joint venture made many improvements on the grounds. Nice frame cottages replaced the rough log cabins, and a hotel was constructed at a cost of \$40,000.<sup>6</sup> Bon Aqua took its place among Tennessee's great watering spas and entered an era of great prosperity.

Maury Countians, who flocked to the springs in great numbers, were divided on their choice of a Hickman County watering spa. Some chose Primm Springs, others Beaver Dam Springs, and others chose the most elegant of the Hickman County spas, Bon Aqua.

Twice a week, a hack ran between Primm Springs and Bon Aqua Springs. Some people visited several springs during the 'season,' and the two springs, twelve miles apart, shared many visitors. In 1872, a visitor to Bon Aqua noted that "with a good horse and some encouragement," and by blundering around back roads around Kinderhook and Sante Fe, a man could reach Bon Aqua in six hours.<sup>7</sup> In 1877, parties were making the circuit in carriages. Other hacks met the trains at the Bon Aqua depot on the Centerville branch of the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railway, one half mile from the springs. Proprietors worked out special discount ticket arrangements with the railway, and travel agents in Atlanta, Chicago, Cincinnati, Dallas, and St. Louis arranged trips to Bon Aqua.

So many people from Maury County visited Bon Aqua Springs in the summer that the Columbia Herald ran a weekly column from the springs.<sup>8</sup>

In 1873, a correspondent reported that there were two billiard tables, a ten-pin alley, and a croquet ground cooled by a blowing cave. Hill's Band from Nashville played every evening for dancing. There were about forty or fifty cottages on the hillside, built in a square, and all<sup>9</sup> connected by a porch in the front. Drinks were kept in the trout stream.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Jill K. Garrett. "The Era of the Water Spa." The Daily Herald (Columbia, Tennessee), March 31, 1973, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

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The resort was a largely self-sufficient complex in which chickens, hogs, and other livestock were raised and fruit trees were grown. Produce was raised on the resort farm and in irrigated gardens. Meats were received by rail from Kansas City.

There were four types of mineral springs. One old-timer reminiscencing in 1972 recalled five types of water being touted, one called "beauty water." The springs' waters are of the saline-calcic and magnetic-sulphur type, commonly known as white sulphur. The chemical content of the springs' waters was noted in an 1895 advertisement for the resort:

Spring No. 1, with a temperature of 59 degrees Fahrenheit and contains all of the ingredients of Spring No. 2, though in smaller quantities.

Spring No. 2, marked "Weems," has a temperature of 58 degrees Fahrenheit and is a bolder stream than No. 1. One gallon contains carbonate of lime, .960 grains; chloride of sodium, .400 grains; sulphate (sic) of soda, .200 grains; sulphate (sic) of magnesia, 19.526 grains; sulphate (sic) of lime, .880; phosphate of magnesia, .560; phosphate of lime, .480; protoxide of lime, a trace. Total, 54.600 grains.

Spring No. 3 has a temperature of 60 degrees Fahrenheit. One gallon contains carbonate of lime, 1.200; chloride of sodium, .240; sulphate (sic) of soda, 3.600; sulphate (sic) of magnesia, .080; sulphate (sic) of lime 16.800; sulphate (sic) of potash, .960; phosphate of magnesia, .320; phosphate of lime .480; protoxide of iron, 6.560. Total, 30.240 grains.

Spring No. 4 is an excellent chalybeate water, containing traces of the other springs. The quantity of iron contained in one gallon is .14 grains.

The four springs all flow from a stratum of limestone within fifteen feet of each other. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the flow from the chemical springs was several thousand gallons per day; today, the yield is considerably reduced. Besides the chemical springs just mentioned, there are numerous limestone and freestone springs on the property.

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In 1877, W. B. Russell and J. R. Winburne, the proprietors, were advertising the medicinal effects of the chemical waters in Columbia newspapers. They claimed: "The waters are celebrated for recuperative effects upon delicate men and children, shattered and exhausted constitutions, as well as for the cure of diseases...."<sup>10</sup>

The alleged benefits of hydrotherapeutics are today considered rather dubious, but, while the resort flourished, the springs were hailed for their diuretic, diaphoretic, and aperient effects. The springs were advertised for their value for abnormal conditions of the blood; derangements of the stomach, bowels, liver, kidneys, bladder, and skin; and as a cure for dyspepsia, constipation, diarrhea, dysentery, rheumatism, gout, chronic synovitis, 'white swelling,' chronic metallic poisoning, 'summer complain of children,' phthitis, chronic bronchitis, asthma, pulmonary emphysema, and other morbid conditions. It was also claimed that the waters would "relieve the worst cases of general debility and chronic malarial toxemia."<sup>11</sup>

Recreational opportunities at the resort included tennis courts, croquet, boxball (a type of volley ball), tether ball, baseball, fishing, pool and billiards, ping-pong, card games, and flinch. Trophies were awarded for fox hunting, archery, bowling, tennis, and photography. A lake on the property was floored with a wooden board bottom to keep the guests' feet from becoming muddy. Also on the property was a large 50' X 500' swimming pool.

A rifle range equipped with targets, wind dial, target index, and marking, scoring, and signaling devices, provided yet another diversion. Weekly matches were held each summer, and silver cups and other prizes were awarded. The bowling pavilion featured two regulation alleys and, again, each summer, men's and women's tournaments were held and prizes were given to the winners.

Music was a popular amusement and the eight-piece resort orchestra gave three concerts daily and, each evening, furnished music for dancing. Dances included hops, fancy dress and masquerade balls, cake walks, and morning Germans.

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<sup>10</sup>Garrett, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup>Bon Aqua Springs in the Tennessee Highland, 9-12.

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On the Fourth of July, 1882, the Tennessee Bar Association held its first annual convention at Bon Aqua Springs. With W. F. Cooper presiding, the twenty-six members elected forty-seven new members.<sup>12</sup>

The Bon Aqua hotel apparently burned in August 1888; another account states that it was crushed by a fallen tree. The first cottages remained, however, and a new small hotel was erected over the debris of the first.

Several rows of attached cottages, affording greater privacy than the Hotel, were located on the grounds. These long simple gabled structures were named "Sunset," "Lake Front," "Paradise," and "Memphis." Today, only a part of the "Sunset" row survives.

In 1895, A. T. Russell announced that he had taken charge of the Bon Aqua Springs and was overhauling the cottages. Rates were \$1.50 per day, \$7.50 per week, and \$25 per month.<sup>13</sup>

In 1900, the last Bon Aqua Springs Hotel was built by partners Dean and Walker. It was a colossal structure with one hundred one rooms, capable of housing five hundred guests. The hotel had hot and cold baths, a large dining room, picnic grounds, and extensive verandas.<sup>14</sup> Spring water was supplied through a complex system of waterworks.

A circa 1900 postcard promoted Bon Aqua for its "fine water, swimming, boating, bowling, fox hunting, dance pavilion, tennis, and golf." A camp for girls over six years old<sup>15</sup> was held here as well, with teachers and chaperons for the children.<sup>16</sup> This was called the Bon Aqua Springs Colony for Girls.

About 1910, the property, except for the Hotel, was sold to the "Bon Aqua Resort Association," which was capitalized at \$100,000. The new owners promised many improvements, including a summer theater, enlarged waterworks, electric lighting, a sewage system, a private telephone exchange, and a proposed nine-hole golf course, which was never built.

<sup>12</sup> Information provided by G. R. Campbell, Jr., the Tennessee Bar Association.

<sup>13</sup> Bon Aqua Springs poster, 1895. Mrs. Harry White's scrapbook.

<sup>14</sup> Garrett, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Mrs. Harry L. White's scrapbook, Bon Aqua, Tennessee

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

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In 1910, a brochure published by Bon Aqua Springs noted that the resort opened for the season on June 15th and remained open until September, that a resident physician would be in attendance, and that a "long-distance" telephone was located at the hotel office. Telegraph messages could be sent to Lyles, three miles distant, which was connected with Bon Aqua by telephone. A complete livery stable would be maintained at the resort, offering the best attention to guests' horses.

By this time, the proprietors were seeking additional income by offering two hundred lots for summer cottages to be constructed. The lots were laid off in the manner of cottages in residence parks of Chautauqua and averaged 75' X 150' in size. The first lots offered were free, but those wishing to acquire a lot were required to take out stock valued from \$10 to \$100 in the Bon Aqua Springs Resort Association, and to pay a small annual fee for use of the water, grounds, free amusements, etc. Apparently, a number of small cottages were constructed on the ridge south of the Hotel, but none remain extant. They also planned to host a summer Chautauqua and summer school at the resort.

An early twentieth century poster for the resort advertised "Bon Aqua Springs Park" as "cool, refreshing, restful, invigorating." It offered "the best of meals nicely served," 110 cool rooms and cottages. The advertisement was signed "Harry L. White, <sup>17</sup>Manager." A ticket for one room for seven days and 21 meals cost \$17.50.

Water was also shipped from the springs. An advertisement stated that a case of water, containing three dozen quart bottles cost \$4.50, four dozen bottles cost \$5.75.

Each Sunday a Nashville divine delivered a sermon at Bon Aqua. In the early twentieth century, the First Independent Church of Nashville was sponsoring the "Bon Aqua Bible Assembly" at the Springs Park Hotel in Bon Aqua. In addition, the Presbyterian Synod held its conventions here for many years. Some of the church groups used the swimming pool for baptisms.

Attendance at the resort dropped off in the 1920s when the automobile gained popularity and people became more mobile. The hotel ceased operation in circa 1925 and stood abandoned until 1942, when it was judged to be unsafe and was torn down for its excellent lumber. Parts of the

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

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porch posts were incorporated into the Thomas-White House on the hill overlooking the hotel site.<sup>18</sup> In 1925, the property was acquired by financier Henry L. White and the property is still maintained by his family today. White closed the resort about 1930.

Bon Aqua Springs was one of thirty-one watering spas located in Middle Tennessee that actively promoted its mineral waters for curative purposes.<sup>19</sup> Many people flocked to watering spas in the hopes of receiving physical benefits. This reflected the nineteenth century notion of medicine that survived until the advent of modern chemistry, biology, and medicine. With the advances made in chemistry and medical sciences, the original analysis of springs proved to be wrong. This advance in science lead to the decline of the popularity of watering spas.

Bon Aqua Springs is significant for its associations with recreation. The summer season was an important social event, as many families relocated here for weeks or months to take part in the many activities the resort offered, such as swimming, dancing, hiking, and fishing. The resort reflects the leisure-time opportunities of the upper classes who were the main patrons of the resort.

The Bon Aqua Springs Historic District is one of three watering spas in Hickman County. The Primm Springs Spa began as White Sulphur Springs and, located on the Puppy Branch of Dog Creek near Jones Valley, was listed in the National Register on July 5, 1985. Primm Springs includes numerous extant resort buildings including the Estes House Hotel. In the Coble area was Beaver Dam Springs which, like the other spas, was established before the Civil War. A Presbyterian retreat now occupies the location and a few of the historic resources may survive. Bon Aqua was the most extensive of the three resorts and was considered the most elegant of the three. Although the hotel and most of the cottages are gone, the remaining buildings and structures are little altered, the grounds retain their rustic park-like setting, and the chemical springs and accompanying ruins are fine evidence of the scale of the various enterprises conducted here. Bon Aqua Springs Historic District is an excellent example of the type of growth and demise of watering spas in Middle Tennessee. "The majority of mineral spring resorts gradually evolved over a period of several years... their development [began] with primitive cabins or a rough-hewn hotel...and

<sup>18</sup> Garrett

<sup>19</sup> Thorne, Charles B., "The Watering Spas of Middle Tennessee," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, Winter 1970-1971, Vol. 29.



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acquired the elaborate inns, cottages, bowling alleys, and dance halls decades later."<sup>20</sup> The site and remaining buildings on the grounds of Bon Aqua Springs Historic District reflect an important aspect of economic growth through recreation in Hickman County.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 355.

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"Bon Aqua Springs in the Tennessee Highland." Promotional brochure issued by Dean & Walker, managers, ca. 1905. Collection of Mrs. Harry L. White.

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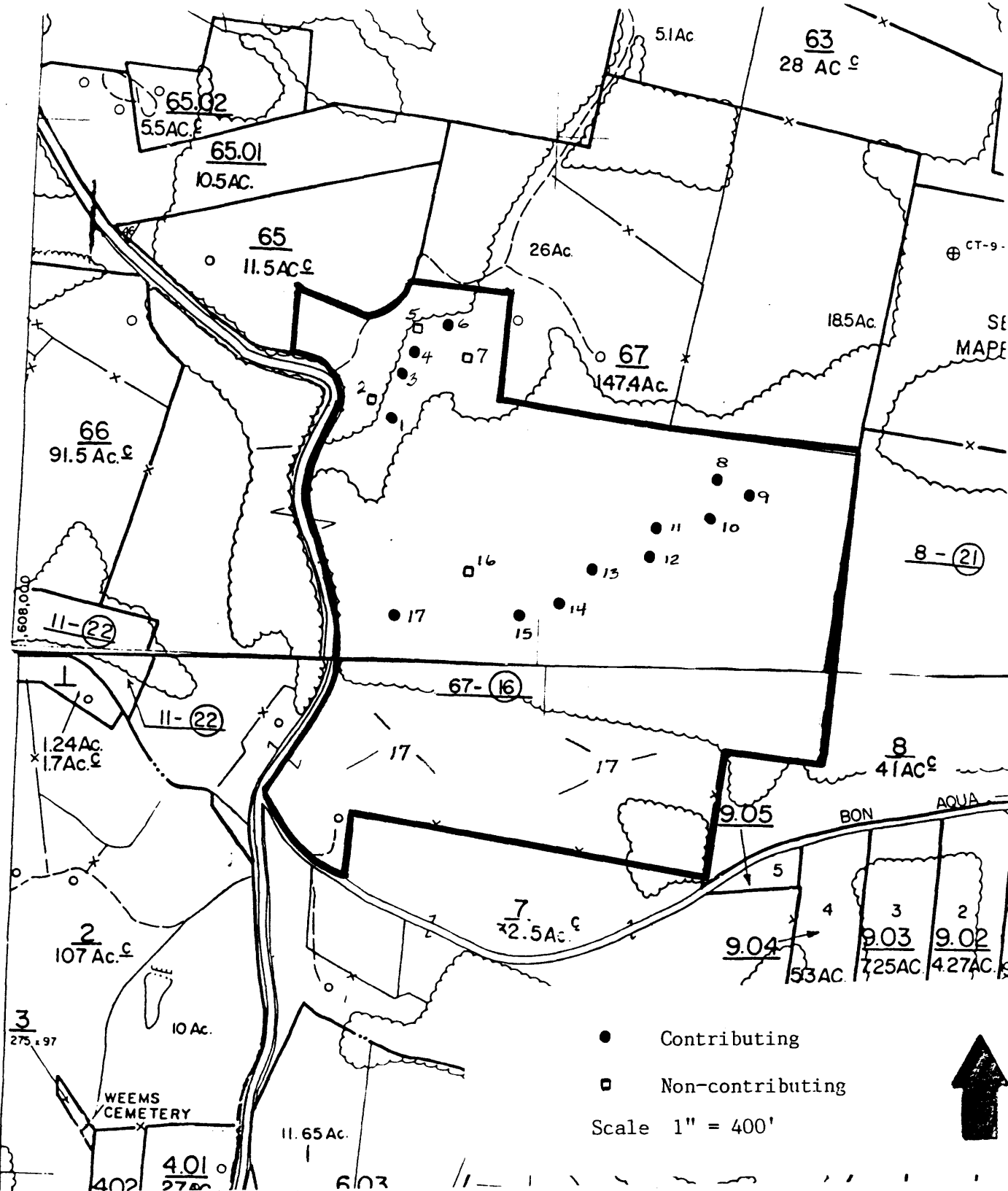
Spence, W. Jerome D. and David L. Spence. History of Hickman County Tennessee. 1900; reprint Columbia: P-Vine Press, 1981.

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White, Mrs. Harry L. Interview and scrapbook. Bon Aqua, Tennessee, April 1989.

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Bon Aqua Springs Historic District  
Old Highway 46  
Bon Aqua Station vicinity, Hickman County, Tennessee  
Photos By: Richard Quin  
Date: April 1989  
Negatives: Tennessee Historical Commission  
Nashville, Tennessee

Bon Aqua Springs Valley, showing spring house ruins, cave in foreground and dam at rear.  
Facing east  
#1 of 21

Spring House ruins  
Facing east  
#2 of 21

Spring House 2  
Facing southwest  
#3 of 21

W. L. Weems Spring font  
#4 of 21

Cave  
Facing south  
#5 of 21

Wooden Bridge  
Facing north  
#6 of 21

Dam  
Facing east  
#7 of 21

Swimming pool  
Facing north  
#8 of 21

Suspension bridge  
Facing east  
#9 of 21

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Reservoir  
Facing east  
#10 of 21

Clark Farmhouse  
Facing northeast  
#11 of 21

John Thomas House  
Facing north  
#12 of 21

John Thomas House  
Facing west  
#13 of 21

Cemetery  
Facing southeast  
#14 of 21

Sunset Cottage  
Facing west  
#15 of 21

Historic photographs from collection of Mrs. H. L. White, Bon Aqua  
Photo by: unknown  
Date: circa 1890  
Copy Neg: Tennessee Historical Commission  
Nashville, Tennessee

First Bon Aqua Springs Hotel  
Facing southeast  
#16 of 21

Second Bon Aqua Springs Hotel  
Facing east  
#17 of 21

Second Bon Aqua Springs Hotel, balcony, and garden  
Facing east  
#18 of 21

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Second Bon Aqua Springs Hotel, dining room  
Facing southeast  
#19 of 21

Spring house  
Facing southeast  
#20 of 21

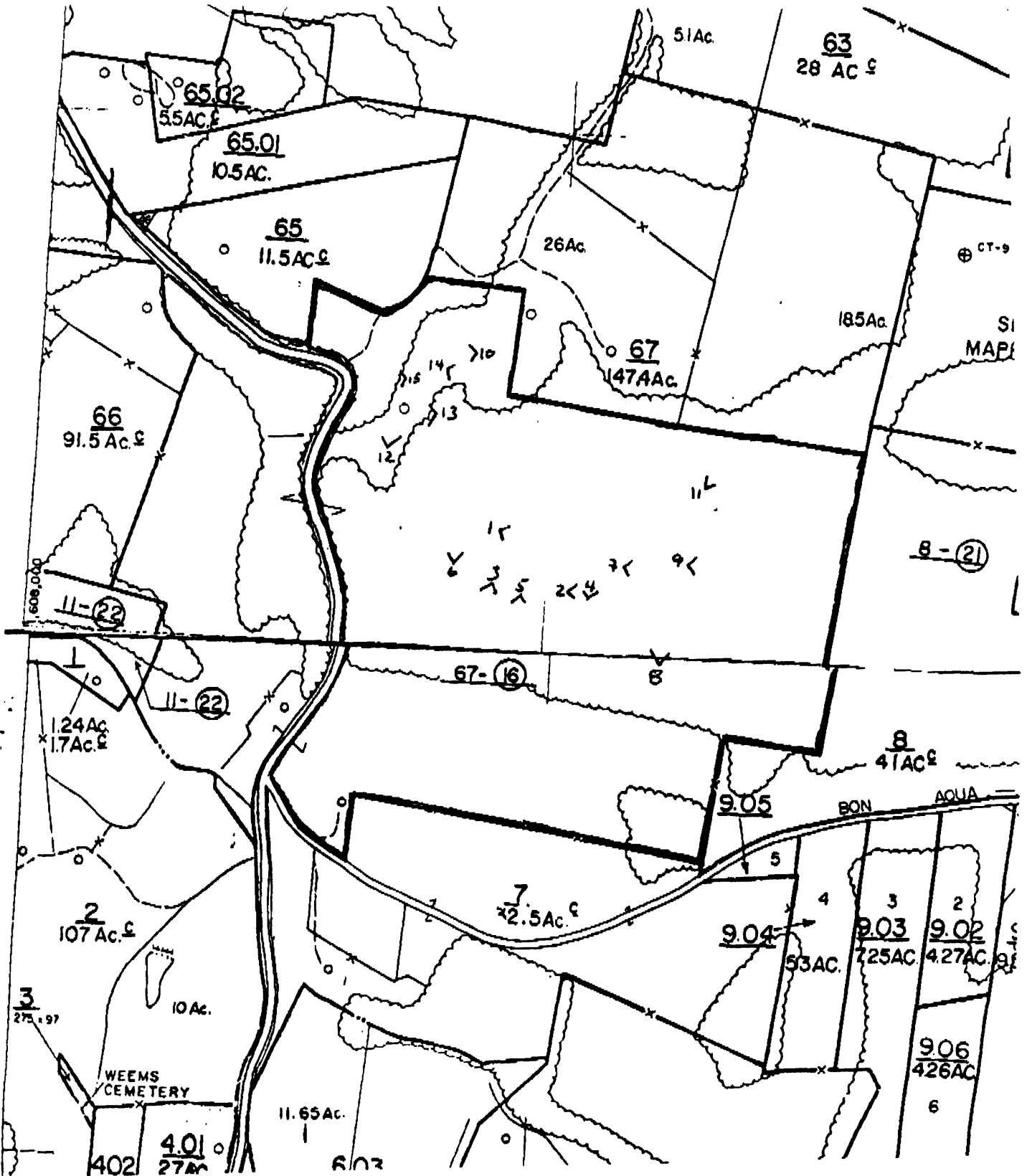
Big Spring Creek  
Facing east  
#21 of 21

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NATIONAL REGISTER PROGRAMS  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

CORRECTION:

The name Henry L. White in the Bon Aqua Springs Historic District, Hickman County, Tennessee should read Harry L. White.

Herbert L. Hoyer  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

2/15/90  
Date