Nashville's Hidden Spring by the Fairgrounds

Imagine walking through the Nashville Fairgrounds for a moment: the bright lights, the smell of funnel cakes frying, and the exhilarating rides. But, did you know, just a short distance from the crowds, a piece of Nashville history is hidden right under our feet?

Rains Spring, a natural fresh-water source, still flows underground beneath the pavement. In fact, after a heavy rainstorm, this stubborn spring still bubbles up and makes an appearance.

Long before this area became a fairground, this spring was one of the main reasons South Nashville was settled. In the winter of 1779, a pioneer and scout named Captain John Rains brought his family and livestock across a frozen Cumberland River to claim this land. Because finding clean water was a matter of life or death, Rains built a fort called Rains Station directly around the spring in 1784. By putting the walls around the water source, it guaranteed that the pioneers and their animals had a safe supply of drinking water during attacks when it was too dangerous to go outside.

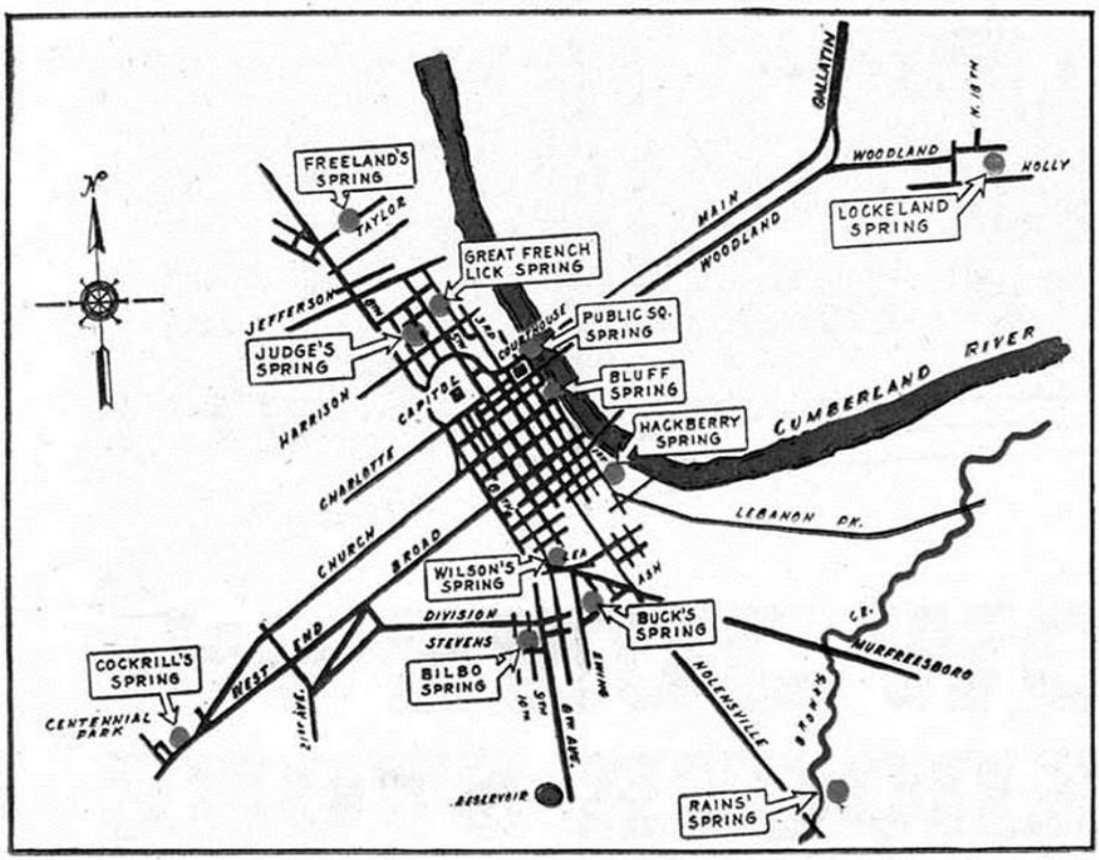
Captain Rains' original 640-acre land grant included the area that makes up the modern fairgrounds. John Rains was given the land by the United States as a reward for service to the Revolutionary War. His herds of cattle and horses grazed along Brown's Creek which flows directly through the Fairgrounds. Rains made his home here until his death in 1834.

For decades, natural springs like this one were Nashville's primary lifelines and water source. Before the city had a modern water system, clean water was a business. Freelance workers called water carters drove horse-drawn wagons out to clean springs, filled up large wooden barrels, and sold the water door-to-door to residents. Families typically paid 12½ cents for a 25-gallon barrel. This comes out to exactly half a cent per gallon and about $45 per year to keep the family cistern full. More than a hundred years later, that cost is surprisingly still the same in today's dollars! Thanks to Metro Water Services, Nashville households still receive roughly 2 gallons of treated water for just a penny.

This bit of history is especially perfect for this year's event because the Nashville Fair's theme is Water! It is a great chance to look back at how water has shaped our city, growing Nashville from a few pioneer cabins into the city we know today.

As you explore the exhibits and enjoy the rides, say hi to Metro Water Services at our table! We will be right there celebrating the journey from pioneer water barrels to the modern system that keeps Davidson County running today. Stop by to learn about our services or just chat about the history flowing right beneath our feet.

Stay Tapped In!



OLD SPRINGS OF NASHVILLE, about which a city grew. Today's installment tells the story of French Salt Lick. Water from the Bluff Spring, center, was available to the pioneers inside the original stockade of Fort Nashborough. Cockrill Spring, left, often regarded as the northern terminus of Natchez Trace, once flowed from near the big oak which still stands just off West End Ave., in Centennial Park. You might like to keep this map, in connection with stories to follow.

(Editor's note: This is the first in a series of four articles about the storied springs of Nashville.

in each gallon before the bright idea of drilling the well.

Many of our citizens today can

Annual expeditures for civilian health and medical services in the United States are estimated to be about $94 a person.