

# Crazy Water

## The wondrous water that shaped Mineral Wells

*Written by Gene Fowler. Photographs by Will Van Overbeek.*



(Photo by Will Van Overbeek)

"I'll have a bottle of Crazy Water, please." Well, actually, I've already got one. Mine looks to be from about the 1940s. But I'd really like to find a much older one, like the corked medicinal bottles that were sold in the 1880s, not too long after the water at Mineral Wells was found to have some rather unusual qualities.

According to local legend, a woman suffering from a mental affliction drank from a particular well and became sane. The well became known as the Crazy Woman Well and, eventually, the Crazy Well. Health-seekers flocked to the scenic valley in the Palo Pinto hills from the 1880s

into the 1940s, and Mineral Wells—about an hour west of Fort Worth—became known far and wide as a magical place “Where America Drinks Its Way To Health.”

Whenever I hit the city limits of the “Home of Crazy,” I first head for the Famous Water Company on NW Sixth Street. There, in a century-old drinking parlor made of native sandstone and local bricks, you can still step up to a handsome antique bar and order a shot of the healthful brew straight from the source.

The Famous folks sell Crazy Water in four different strengths of mineralization. The presence of scant amounts of lithium, an oft-prescribed mood stabilizer, in the natural elixir indicates that the origin of the quirky-fun name may be more than mere lore. The water is also alkaline, and many dedicated imbibers testify that it works wonders on stomach troubles. “Lots of athletes are drinking Crazy Water now because it helps them rehydrate faster and build endurance,” adds owner Carol Elder.

The utility of Crazy Water isn’t limited to rehydration. Earlier this year, the Famous Water Company restored an historic health tradition by offering mineral water baths at its headquarters pavilion. And on October 12, when the annual Crazy Water Festival opens, you can guzzle Crazy Water Beer produced with its namesake ingredient by Rahr & Sons Brewing Co. of Fort Worth.

The Crazy Water headquarters also houses a mini-museum of vintage bottles, Crazy Water Crystals boxes, and other packaging and advertising ephemera. (Nationally popular during the 1930s, Crazy Water Crystals—mineral residue that consumers mixed with tap water to make Crazy Water—sponsored radio programs of country-western and Big Band music.) Vintage postcards and other artifacts are for sale at the pavilion; on my last visit, I picked up a souvenir reprint of the March 12, 1927, edition of the Mineral Wells Index, commemorating the opening of the Crazy Water Hotel. Still standing, the hotel building was vacant at press time.

Relics from Mineral Wells’ heyday as a health resort are on full display at the Tattered Teddy Antique Shoppe. Owners Rollie and Dianna Hudnell display and sell Crazy Water Hotel matchbook covers, Crystals boxes, wa-ter company brochures, postcards, and other mementos from the 1930s and ’40s, when dozens of water companies, hotels, and pavilions accommodated crowds that came to “take the waters.”

The Tattered Teddy sits across the street from Mineral Wells’ best-known landmark, the Baker Hotel. Rollie marvels at the visitor traffic stopping at the vacant hotel. “It’s all day, every day,” he says.

At 14 stories, the 1929 Spanish Colonial Revival hotel towers over the small town, as though it escaped from the soaring Dallas-Fort Worth skyline and headed west. Vacant for the last 40 years, the grand structure has fallen to semi-ruin. Previous restoration efforts have stalled, but a new restoration plan holds potential for breathing life back into the Baker as a spa and destination resort.

While Crazy Water draws health-conscious drinkers and bathers to Mineral Wells, visitors will also find other attractions.

Enjoying nature in the North Texas Hill Country was a big part of the bygone spa experience, and Lake Mineral Wells State Park offers camping, hiking, rock climbing, and birding. Likewise, a stroll through the 35-acre wonderland at nearby Clark Gardens Botanical Park, just east of town, proves a tonic for the soul.

On the western edge of town, Mineral Wells Fossil Park gives visitors a chance to hunt for 300-million-year-old fossils of creatures from the Pennsylvanian Period, such as urchins, clams, and sharks. Popular with paleontologists and kiddos alike, the park allows visitors to take their fossil finds home.

And hey, if you've been looking for a good washing machine museum, they've even got one of those. A place called Laumdronat doubles as a laundry facility and a showcase for antique washing machines and washboards. That's Mineral Wells for you, where the chamber of commerce says, "Our Heritage Is A Little Bit Crazy."

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