

## Past Perspectives November 2017

### Spring Houses

In the days before Bella Vista became a retirement village and then the City that it is today, it was a summer resort around Lake Bella Vista surrounded by farms. Those farms had no electricity so they had to rely on other methods to store and preserve food.

Even when electricity first became available in Northwest Arkansas, most farmers could not afford it. Per the website [www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net), the first major effort to provide electricity to rural Arkansas began with the passage of the federal Rural Electrification Act in 1936. However, that was a costly endeavor since rural areas averaged few customers per mile of electric line, so the private utility companies had to charge more than for urban residents, which resulted in farmers using fewer kilowatts hours per month than urban residents.

Farmers continued to depend on other methods, such as wells and spring houses, to store their food that needed to be kept cold. A spring house, as defined by [www.wikipedia.net](http://www.wikipedia.net), was a “small building, usually of a single room, constructed over a spring. While the original purpose of a springhouse was to keep the spring water clean by excluding fallen leaves, animals, etc., the enclosing structure was also used for refrigeration before the advent of ice delivery and, later, electric refrigeration. The water of the spring maintains a constant cool temperature inside the spring house throughout the year. Food that would otherwise spoil, such as meat, fruit or dairy products, could be kept there, safe from animal depredations as well. In settings where no natural spring is available, another source of natural running water, such as a small creek or diverted portion of a larger creek, might be used. In addition, some people put jars of milk in a bucket suspended by a rope in a ‘open-mouth’ well during hot weather.”

Dawna Howard Cawood, now a resident of Springdale, grew up on a farm just west of where the Bella Vista Historical Museum sits now. Their house stood about where the 17th green of the Kingswood Golf Course is now located. Dawna remembers in the summer time when she and her brother would take quarts of milk to store in the spring house that stands behind what is now the American Legion building. Her mother sold the rest of their milk to Kraft (and its predecessor) in Bentonville, putting the cans of milk in a wash tub to keep them cool until the milk company picked them up every morning. As soon as Dawna’s family could afford it, they purchased an ice box, then Dawna and her brother didn’t have to take milk to the spring house any more. The Ice House in Bentonville delivered blocks of ice to their farm house. They put a card in the window to say how much they wanted delivered. Even if no one was home, it didn’t matter, since no one locked their doors in those days, so the delivery men would bring in the ice and put it right into their ice box. The Ice House also provided lockers for people to store larger quantities of meat since ice boxes were too small to hold very much. In the early 1940’s, the Howard farm got electricity so they no longer had to deal with an ice box.

The website [www.history-magazine.com/refrig.html](http://www.history-magazine.com/refrig.html) gives an interesting history of refrigeration, crediting Maryland farmer Thomas Moore with first coming up with that term.

Those of us old enough to remember the days of spring houses and ice boxes are very appreciative of the modern day convenience of refrigeration.

*Lucas is a docent at the Bella Vista Historical Museum, located at the corner of Highway 71 and Kingsland, next door to the American Legion. Visitors are welcome, Wednesday through Sunday, 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. Admission is free. For more information, see [www.bellavistamuseum.org](http://www.bellavistamuseum.org) or the museum's Facebook page.*



The spring house behind the American Legion building, which has been incorporated into their attractive landscaping, formerly served several nearby farms.



This spring house is located behind the POA Golf Maintenance Facility just north of the 100+ year old barn that still stands on the edge of the Berksdale golf course. The spring house was located behind the old farm house that was burned by the Fire Dept in a training exercise in September 1988.





The spring house still stands on Manchester Road, across from Cooper School, that served the old farm house with the barn that later became the Bella Vista stables, prior to the construction of the school.



Picture 4: The barn remaining from the Wishing Spring Ranch still stands up on the hill above what is now McDonalds on Peach Orchard Road. The spring house up there served the house that was part of that ranch, and the spring provided water that was gravity fed down the hill across the road to the Wishing Spring dairy barn, now the Wishing Spring Art Gallery.