

# Valhermoso Springs in Morgan County

Valhermoso Springs is a long ago resort located 12 miles south of Huntsville. The mineral springs here had various names in the early 1800's. Valhermoso, which means "vale of beauty" was bestowed by Jean Joseph Giers in 1856.

Sources vary as to the early names of Valhermoso Springs. It is probable that the various names were used during different time periods. Several sources state that the springs were "probably discovered by Lancelot Chunn" just after 1810. One of the first persons to receive a land patent here was a Chunn. The springs were known as Chunn Springs on an 1837 map. For an unknown period, they would have been known as Manning Springs.

The creek which runs through the bottom of the gorge has also been known by various names. An 1818 map shows the name as Guin's Creek. At some point it was called Given's Creek and yet another name was Grin Creek. "On U.S. soil maps the creek is Valhermoso Springs."

In the early 1800's, what is now AL 36 was part of the main route between New Orleans and the Northeast coast. During this time the gorge here was known as Grin Creek Gorge. Sometime between 1818 and 1823, the Manning family built a cabin on the east side of the gorge, and called it the Manning Hotel for a time.

In 1938, TVA produced a pamphlet that described the cabin. The cabin served as the White Sulphur Springs Hotel and was a gabled two stories, measuring about 50 x 100 in dimension with a double decker porch across the front. The inn would have faced the road. Like many structures of the time, there was a dogtrot down the middle. In the front yard was a geometric herb and bulb garden and the dogtrot led to a crepe myrtle grove and then to a large lawn beyond that. There would have been many service buildings located here.

Another description of what is apparently the same structure is given in *Historic Alabama Hotels and Resorts* (1960). The hotel is described as being a rectangular three-story building with double porches on one end. The third story would have been a ballroom. In the late 1820's and 1830's, when

it was the White Sulphur Springs Hotel, the balls were attended by prominent people of the Southeast.

Again, from *Historic Alabama Hotels and Resorts*:

*From the pages of the hotel register, it is found that guests included Miss Julia Tutwiler, William Rufus King, whose name is found several times along with his wife and daughter, and Mrs. Edna Earle De Gray of Scotland. There were guests from England and Switzerland, and another from the banks of the Rhine, whence came Jean Joseph Giers, the owner of the resort, who acquired the property in 1855.*

According to *Historic Alabama Hotels and Resorts*, the hotel was fifty yards north of an approximately sixty foot wide gorge. In the bottom of this gorge, is Given Creek which formed a natural pool amongst the rocks. Near this pool were various springs, each said to have produced a different type of water. This resort became a destination for those seeking the healing properties of these springs. A post office existed, briefly, from 1834 to 1835.

In 1856, Jean J. Giers purchased the land, about 1200 acres, at which time he renamed it Valhermoso. He was also postmaster when the post office reopened in 1857. Giers reopened the hotel around this time and according to John Knox, author of *A History of Morgan County Alabama*, he kept the previous name of White Sulphur Springs Hotel. At some point he renamed it the Cedar Hotel.

Apparently, the Giers were fascinating people. Jean Giers was said to be friends



with Abraham Lincoln. Gier's wife, Mary Gooch Giers was said to be a Confederate sympathizer who hid Confederate soldiers below the third floor of the hotel when federal troops came through the area. The hotel was in operation until around 1920, still under ownership of the Giers family.

As of 1938, half of the inn remained with the form of the front garden still visible. Some of the plants became naturalized. In 1938, the slave quarters still existed, but in need of repair. Because of the historic value and beauty of the gorge, there was a proposal by the Tennessee Valley Authority to create a "vacation park" here. Coinciding with this proposal was a proposal to establish a Morgan-Marshall State Forest. The TVA suggested that if established it could be enlarged to include the Valhermoso Springs area.

The hotel was struck by a tornado in 1950 and what remained of it burned that same year. As of the 1960's rock piles and some timbers were all that remained. Today, the area is marked by a Historic Marker, otherwise one would never know the interesting history of this spot.

Just to the southeast of the marker is Valhermoso Springs Cemetery between AL 36 and Road. It is a tree canopied spot surrounded by creeks, though recently some of the surrounding trees have been cleared.