

# French Lick Resort History >>>



## Trolley

Trolley service first came to the resort in 1903 with the addition of an electric trolley. Guests could catch the streetcar at the steps of West Baden Springs Hotel and go all the way (a whole mile) into downtown French Lick. It was a raging success, and in 1916 the trolley set a record for carrying 250,000 people in a single year. At a nickel a ride, that's over \$300,000 in revenue. Not bad for what was billed as the "world's shortest trolley line." Be sure to check out our newly-restored trolley now running between the two hotels. Save your nickels; this one is on

## 1931 National Governors' Conference

The most notable of political events in resort history came in 1931 when it was host to the annual National Governors' Conference. It was here, in the lower level of French Lick Springs Hotel, that Franklin D. Roosevelt rounded up support for his party's presidential nomination. By the time the two-day event concluded, it was considered to be one of the most important meetings of the state governors since the annual conferences began in 1908.



## Eighth Wonder of the World

Following the Great West Baden Springs Hotel fire in 1901, Lee W. Sinclair declared that he would build a brand new hotel within a year and, it would be completely fireproof. Unknown West Virginia architect Harrison Albright took on the challenge of designing the building that would house the world's largest dome and Oliver J. Westcott, a bridge engineer, designed the dome trusses. To complete the structure before the first anniversary of the fire, a 500-man crew worked six days a week in 10-hour shifts for 270 days, at a total cost of \$414,000.

## Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus

Did you know that one of the early industries in the area was entertainment? Ed Ballard, a local businessman who controlled gambling interests in town, was a partner in the American Circus Corporation. ACC, second in size only to Ringling Brothers, purchased the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus after a devastating fire.

HAGENBECK  
CIRCUS

*From presidential nominations to professional athletes and miracle healing waters, there's no denying that our history is a storied one. So what's our claim to fame? We couldn't possibly pick just one, so here are a few of the highlights that put us on the map.*



## Pluto Water

The numerous natural mineral springs throughout the area were the real draw to French Lick and West Baden. The spring water, named "Pluto Water" after the Roman god of the underworld, was highly sought after for its purported medicinal qualities. Advertised as a cure-all miracle, sales of Pluto Water in drugstores across the country had surpassed the \$1 million mark in 1919 with 450 carloads shipping annually. Production ceased in 1971 after strong traces of lithium were discovered in the water.



## French Lick Springs Hotel

In 1845, Dr. William Bowles, a nearby physician, opened the first French Lick Springs Hotel. Bowles explored the healing properties of the mineral springs in the area. In 1901, the outgoing mayor of Indianapolis, Tom Taggart, along with a small group of investors, bought the property. It was under Taggart's imaginative direction that French Lick Springs Hotel rose to international prominence. He expanded using the yellow "French Lick" brick, luxurious furnishings and marble floors, designed two golf courses and started bottling Pluto Water for national sale. He also encouraged the Monon Railroad to lay a special spur and run daily trains between Chicago and the hotel.

## Tomato Juice

In 1917, the world famous chef Louis Perrin first served tomato juice. As luck would have it one morning he was out of oranges and could not serve the traditional orange

