

Part 1: Existing Building and Site

Building and Site History

Excelsior Springs, Missouri is located in within a beautiful landscape of rolling hills, rock outcroppings, underground caverns and picturesque streams and rivers which wind through the vast, rugged landscape. The first settlers built cabins and cultivated the imposing land into a village around 1880. According to popular belief, settler Travis Mellion discovered the first spring water, Siloam Spring (originally named Excelsior Spring) of ferro-manganese water, and gave it to his ailing daughter suffering from a serious tuberculosis illness. His daughter Opal's condition improved after drinking the water for a few days, and supposedly was cured within a few weeks. Another farmer, Fred Kugler, was also supposedly cured of a terrible leg wound and rheumatic knees after using the spring water. Reverend John Van Buren Flack traveled to the area in 1880 after hearing of the medicinal properties of the spring and encouraged Anthony W. Wyman, the local land owner, to have the water analyzed and the land platted.¹ Flack and Wyman are credited as founding partners of the town and originally had tried to name the town "Excelsior"; however, there was already a town with this name in Missouri. Officially incorporated as a town on July 12, 1881, the valley was beginning to see an influx of activity with new houses, churches, schools, boarding houses, an opera house, livery stables, hotels and stores.² The town was originally named Vigniti until 1882 when it was renamed Excelsior Springs.

The City of Excelsior Springs is known for its spring waters and their medicinal qualities. Very early on the city established itself as a health resort destination. People traveled from all over the country to experience the medicinal spring waters. The city is credited with having the world's greatest collection of natural mineral waters in one location of which include 20+ separate natural springs of a variety of mineral combinations. The waters were bottled and shipped worldwide. During the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, Excelsior Springs and its mineral waters were recognized on the national stage when medals were awarded to the Regent Spring Water and Soterian Ginger Ale.³ Known as "America's Haven of Health", Excelsior Springs, Missouri continued to grow even during the Great Depression when other small Midwest towns were declining.

During the Great Depression, the City of Excelsior Springs petitioned the U.S. Government in 1933 for a loan and grant through the Federal Public Works Administration to build the Hall of Waters on the site of the Siloam Pavilion and the Sulpho Saline Building as a complete mineral water treatment center. Prior to construction, the City of Excelsior Springs and the community united ownership and management of the spring water wells under the City of Excelsior Springs to ensure proper maintenance of the wells, and centralized sale and distribution of the waters. This was a requirement by the federal government as a condition of the loan agreement. The rights to the springs were mortgaged to the Government and run by the City with the profits going to the federal government until the loan was paid off.⁴

¹ Excelsior Springs Chamber of Commerce, History of Excelsior Springs, 2012

² Wikipedia, History of Excelsior Springs, Missouri, 2012

³ Information from the City of Excelsior Springs, Missouri website, 2012

⁴ Hall of Waters, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, 1983



Fig. 1 Photograph of the Hall of Waters under construction, Nov. 6 1936. Source: Hall of Waters history exhibit in the Hall of Springs.

In 1935, the City of Excelsior Springs and the Federal Public Works Administration began the \$1,000,000 project. The Hall of Waters was built to bottle the mineral waters and to function as the finest modern health resort structure in the United States. This project was the most ambitious and expensive WPA project to take place in the State of Missouri. Ground-breaking took place in 1936 amidst national excitement and ceremony. CBS transmitted the event to 62 stations across the country. The ceremony was attended by many visitors, citizens and well-known celebrities of the day and concluded with the laying of the cornerstone of the Hall of Waters into place.⁵



Fig. 2 Photograph of the bronze plaque located at the base of the stairs leading up to the north entrance of the building. (SRJA 2012)

⁵ Wikipedia, History of Excelsior Springs, Missouri, 2012

During construction, the George E. Kessler designed Siloam Spring Park and Siloam Pavilion slowly disappeared as the new building design included the demolition of the pavilion and grounds located south of Broadway at the entrance to Siloam Park.⁶ The Siloam and Sulpho Saline springs (located on the Hall of Waters site) along with waters from all the main springs, were piped into the building and sold from what became known as the “longest mineral water bar in the world” in the Hall of Springs. The ‘Water Bar’ as it is commonly known today, was first opened to the public in 1937 while the structure was only partially complete.



Fig. 3 Photograph during construction of the demolition of the Siloam Pavilion, date unknown. Source: Hall of Waters history exhibit in the Hall of Springs.



Fig. 4 Postcard of the Hall of Springs. Source: Ancestry.com

⁶ Excelsior Springs Chamber of Commerce, Hall of Waters & Cultural Museum website, 2012

In addition to the grand Hall of Springs, the First Floor contained the women's bath department, a sunroom, a covered porch, a grand foyer, offices for the management of the springs and for the chamber of commerce. Located on the Ground Floor was a swimming pool within the Great Hall known as the 'Great Bathing Pool' which was filled with saline water from the local spring. The pool was used as a physical therapy treatment facility and for major sporting events including A.A.U. championship swimming events. This double height space opened to outdoor terraces and had an upper mezzanine which could seat up to 500 patrons for swimming events.⁷



Fig. 5 Postcard of the Hall of Waters pool. Source: Ancestry.com ca. 1944

Adjoining the pool in the south wing was a special hydrotherapy department, devoted to research into the uses of the waters and treatment of chronic cases of different ailments on prescriptions of licensed physicians. A dedicated physical therapy pool, also known as the 'Polio Pool', was built on the Ground Floor adjacent to the large pool for special therapy purposes. The men's and women's hydrotherapy departments were located on different floors of the building and served men in the morning and women in the afternoon. Each department administered mineral water baths as treatments for various ailments as a part of an eight step process and could handle up to 300 patrons at any one time. The water bottling department was located on the east side of the Ground Floor. Up to five varieties of mineral waters were bottled in the Hall of Waters Processing and Bottling Plant and shipped all over the world. At the height of its popularity, over 10,000 people a day visited the Hall of Waters which helped to establish an economic base for the community.⁸

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.



Fig. 6 Postcard depicting the health spa amenities. Source: CardCow.com ca. 1943

The Hall of Waters is an excellent example of the Art Deco and Depression Modern architectural styles, both of which were common to the Depression era buildings built by the WPA.⁹ The Hall of Waters however is unique from other buildings with its imagery and decorative detailing which was influenced by the Mayan Indian traditions of water and water gods. These influences can be seen in the exterior carved limestone, interior bass relief bronze panels, elevator doors, and interior glazed tiles. The Hall of Waters was designed by the Kansas City architectural firm of Keene and Simpson for the United States Public Works Administration. The structural engineer for the project was Erwin Pfhul. This company survives today as Structural Engineering Associates, Inc. who are serving as the structural engineering consultant for this study. Black & Veatch, consulting engineers in Kansas City, were retained to develop the plans for the Mineral Water Development of Excelsior Springs. This involved pipes designed especially for each type of mineral water and a system to bring all of them to the site of the proposed Hall of Waters. From 1936 to 1938, architects Keene & Simpson, along with W.L. Cassell, mechanical engineer, and Hare & Hare, landscape architects, created the plans for the Hall of Waters.¹⁰ The Hall of Waters was placed on the Clay County Historical Landmark Register in 1981 and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on June 9, 1983. The building is also a contributing property within the Hall of Waters Historic District, designated in March of 2007. Additional information about the Hall of Waters Historic District can be found on the City of Excelsior Springs website: www.eshpc.org.

⁹ Hall of Waters, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, 1983

¹⁰ Information from "The Idle Hour" website under Hall of Waters History, 2012



Fig. 7 Postcard depicting an aerial view of the Hall of Waters. Source: Cardcow.com ca. 1940's



Fig. 8 Postcard of the exterior of the Hall of Waters. SRJA Personal Archive.

History of Building Related Changes

Chart of Building Changes

Year	Hall of Waters Building Related Events
1965	Gas fired boilers installed at Ground Floor, coal burners abandoned in sub-basement
1967	Water bottling operates at a loss of \$25,000 per year
1968	Patio outside pool area installed
1972	New lay-in ceiling for pool area
1972	New filtering system for swimming pool
1972	City jail in basement level abandoned for Public Works Department new use
1972	Remodeling of Council Chambers and Court Room on Second Floor and First Floor Offices
1973	Mechanized bottling operation installed on Ground Floor in order to continue bottling mineral water
1977	Modifications to steam heat system
1978	New elevator switching and cables
1979	Painting of interior spaces on First Floor
1980s	Improvements to the bath departments by Dr. John Teale
1990s	CDGB funding: Cleaning, sealing and repointing of exterior façade, glass block repair to the tower, upgrading the elevator to meet ADA standards, skylight improvements, upgrades to the exterior entrance doors, upgrades to the restrooms and miscellaneous electrical and plumbing upgrades
1997	New windows in Hall of Springs

Fig. 9 Chart of Building Changes. Information Courtesy of The Idle Hour Website, City of Excelsior Springs and Chamber of Commerce websites, Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, 1983.

Excelsior Springs Development

The development of the City of Excelsior Springs is inextricably linked to the ebb and flow of the springs themselves. The height of popularity for the spring waters was in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By the late 1950's and early 1960's the popularity of the Hall of Waters and other local spas and clinics began to decline as tourists ventured other places. In 1967, the mineral water bottling facility in the Hall of Waters was operating at a loss, but continued operations regardless. 1971 was a pivotal year for mineral water bottling. The Missouri State Health agency ruled that the community must cease and desist all bottling operations due to health safety concerns over the bottling process. Bottling and capping of the waters was done by hand at that time which was a violation of state law. In response, new mechanized bottling equipment was purchased and the operation was moved to a new facility on Isley Boulevard across the Fishing River directly south of the Hall of Waters. The facility was in operation for a brief time. In the 1980's, an increase in mineral water demand prompted continuation of mineral water bottling and spa baths. The community has continuously promoted the waters for these commercial opportunities to private investors. Several out-of-town companies have bottled the mineral water for resale; however, these operations were not profitable and have all closed.

The Hall of Waters water bar and bath departments remained in operation until the early 1990's. The City of Excelsior Springs moved their city offices, council chamber and county court chambers into the Ground, First and Second Floors of the Hall of Waters in the 1990's.

The City of Excelsior Springs, Missouri is a Certified Local Government with the State of Missouri, and as such is eligible for community development block grants (CDBG) and other types of funding. Shortly after the flood of 1993, the city received a CDBG grant for the restoration of prioritized projects at the Hall of Waters including: window replacement in the Hall of Springs, cleaning and sealing of the exterior façade, repointing of mortar joints, glass block repair to the tower, upgrading the elevator to meet ADA standards, skylight improvements, upgrades to the exterior entrance doors, upgrades to the restrooms and miscellaneous electrical and plumbing upgrades. Capital Improvement funding for the restoration of the swimming pool was allocated in 2003 for an assessment and feasibility study to determine the costs of restoration of the pool in addition to determining the cost of building a new community center. The costs for restoring the pool and building into a new community center were more than financially feasible.

History of Hydrology and the Hall of Waters

The Hall of Waters is located directly adjacent to the Fishing River and consists of a variety of terraces and levels both above and below grade. Over the years, flooding has been a serious problem for the Hall of Waters and many major site changes have been made to attempt to improve the site conditions. The area was known to flood as far back as 1903 with anecdotal evidence given in newspapers from 1941 from "Oldtimers" who "watching the torrents said the water was the highest they had seen it in the park since 1915, and some said it was the highest since 1903 when all the Missouri river valley was inundated. It went over the high dike along Siloam Park."¹¹

The United States Core of Engineers have worked on the hydrological issues of the river for many years and were responsible for the construction of the dike which has helped to somewhat quell the massive flooding events occurring frequently but has never eliminated flooding completely. The main reason for the flooding is due to flash flooding of the Fishing River and the building's location both above and below grade and close proximity to the river. Newspaper research into flood events at the Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives found that the Hall of Waters has had one major flood event (causing damage enough to close the building) at minimum every 10 years since it was built. The most recent major flood event was the "Great Flood of '93" from which the building has never fully recovered. Water flooded the Basement, and Ground Floor up to the Ground Floor Mezzanine. The waters caused permanent damage to the interior, pool and pool equipment, and mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems. Since the flood, the pool has been closed along with the majority of the Ground Floor, the entire Ground Floor Mezzanine, and basement levels. At this time, the spa closed and has never reopened.

Below are excerpts from newspapers and a chart of major flood events chronicling the flooding at the Hall of Waters. Additional research into the flooding at the Hall of Waters may turn up more flood events and it is recommended that additional research be performed in order to solidify the exact time table of events. For more information about site and hydrological issues, refer to the Site/Civil portion of this report.

¹¹ "Hall of Waters Is Damaged by Flood." *The Daily Standard* [Excelsior Springs, MO] 9 Oct. 1941, Vol. 56-No. 238 ed., Cover sec.: 1. Print. (Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives).

Chart of Major Flood Events

Year	Month	Flood Event Description
1941	October	The Fishing River overflowed its banks, and before the flood ended 20 inches of water in the Hall of Waters basement did close to \$10,000 damage, and water rose to the 32-foot mark on the sides of buildings. ¹²
1943	June	Fishing River flooded the Hall of Waters and surrounding site. Water filled the bottling works and boiler rooms causing extensive damage. ¹³
1947	June	'Worst Flood in History' Extensive flooding from the Fishing River caused \$25,000 to \$50,000 of damage was done to the Hall of Waters. Water 'covered every floor except the Hall of springs, reaching an elevation 7 feet higher than the 1943 flood. Loss of all tank room equipment, bottling equipment, filters for the pool, ventilation system for the building.... Extensive damage to downtown Excelsior Springs. ¹⁴
1951	July	Massive flood submerging much of downtown Excelsior Springs and impacting the Hall of Waters. ¹⁵
1955		Potential flood event – Needs confirmation. Levee work, The Hall of Waters site was altered for the construction, many sidewalks and stone walls were removed.
1957		Brick panels replacing patio doors on the pool level were installed due to damage during flooding and prevent water from entering the pool deck.
1969	July	Flooding again impacts the Hall of Waters flooding the building. Corps of Engineers to provide report on flood and Fishing River flood prevention. ¹⁶
1974		Potential flood event – Needs confirmation.
1977	September	Floods caused \$1.8 million damage. More than 30 cars were submerged, four bridges were damaged, water and sewer mains broke, more than 50 homes and two floors of the Hall of Waters suffered damage, and water was chest-high in Roosevelt Field. ¹⁷
1993	August	"Great Flood of '93" Massive flooding of the site and the interior of the building permanently altering the Hall of Water's use and appearance. ¹⁸
1993	September	Hall of Waters and Police Station flood again. ¹⁹

Fig. 10 Chart of Major Flood Events. Information Courtesy of The Idle Hour Website, Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, 1983.

¹² "Hall of Waters Is Damaged by Flood." *The Daily Standard* [Excelsior Springs, MO] 9 Oct. 1941, Vol. 56-No. 238 ed., Cover sec.: 1. Print. (Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives).

¹³ "Heavy Flood Damage to Hall of Waters." *The Daily Standard* [Excelsior Springs, MO] 8 June 1943, Vol. 55-No.112 ed., Cover sec.: 1. Print. (Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives).

¹⁴ Newspaper Article Courtesy of the Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives: Unknown. "Vast Damage Is Done at Hall Waters." *The Daily Standard* [Excelsior Springs, Missouri] 23 June 1947, Flood Extra No.1 ed., Cover sec.: 1. Print.

¹⁵ "Begin Cleaning Flood Mire at Hall of Waters." *The Daily Standard* [Excelsior Springs, MO] 8 July 1951, Vol.63-No.134 ed., Cover sec.: 1. Print. (Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives).

¹⁶ "Springs Area Flooded By Fishing River." *The Daily Standard* [Excelsior Springs, MO] 2 July 1969, Vol.81-No.129 ed., Cover sec.: 1. Print. (Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives).

¹⁷ "City Submerged By Flood." *The Daily Standard* [Excelsior Springs, MO] 13 Sept. 1977, Vol.89-No.181 ed., Cover sec.: 1. Print. (Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives).

¹⁸ Kincaid, Janis. "Downtown Flooded." *The Daily Standard* [Excelsior Springs, MO] 12 Aug. 1993, Vol.105-No.157 ed., Cover sec.: 1. Print. (Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives).

¹⁹ Hanson. "Downtown Flooded Again." *The Daily Standard* [Excelsior Springs, MO] 22 Sept. 1993, Vol.105-No.185 ed., Cover sec.: 1. Print. (Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives).

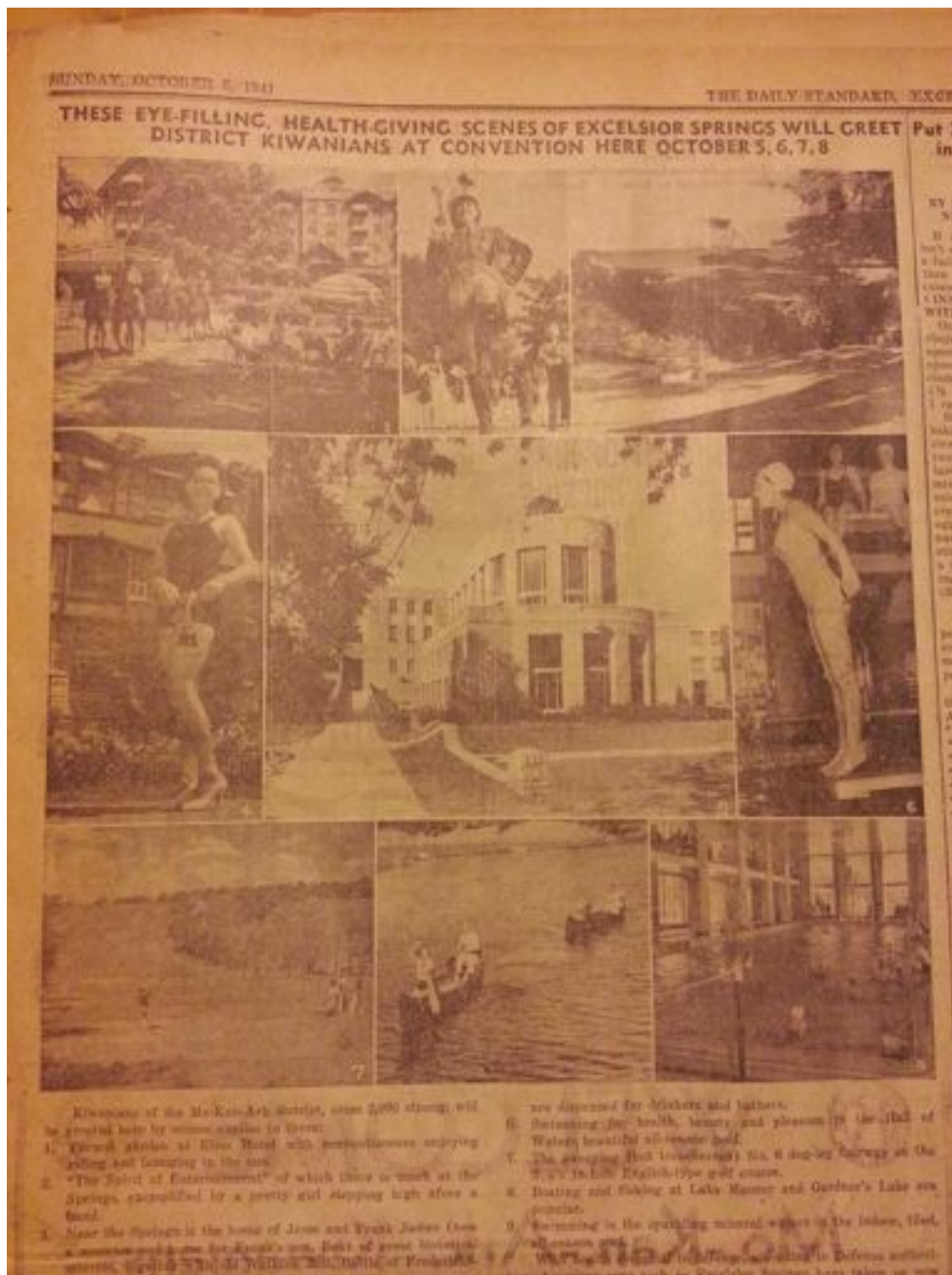


Fig. 11 Photographs of Attractions in Excelsior Springs, Missouri. Source: "These Eye-Filling, Health-Giving Scenes of Excelsior Springs Will Greet District Kiwanians at Convention Here October 5, 6, 7, 8." *The Daily Standard* [Excelsior Springs, MO] 5 Oct. 1941: 5. Print. (Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives).



Fig. 12 Photograph of 1941 Flood newspaper article. Source: "Hall of Waters Is Damaged by Flood." *The Daily Standard* [Excelsior Springs, MO] 9 Oct. 1941, Vol. 56-No. 238 ed., Cover sec.: 1. Print. (Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives).

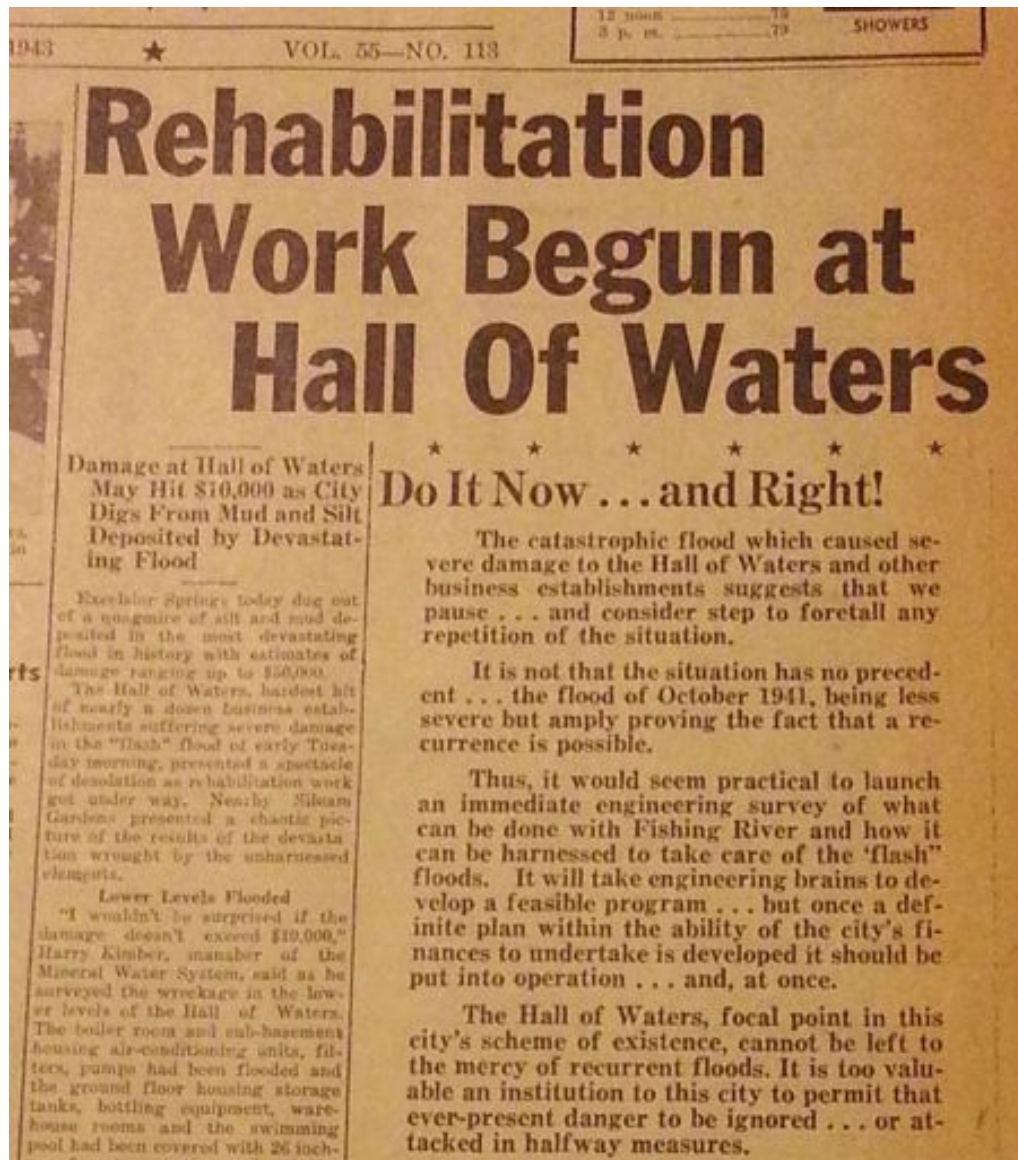


Fig. 13 Photograph of 1943 Flood newspaper article. Source: "Rehabilitation Work Begun at Hall of Waters." *The Daily Standard* [Excelsior Springs, MO] 9 June 1943, Vol.55-No.113 ed., Cover sec.: 1. Print. (Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives).



Fig. 14 Photograph of 1993 Flood newspaper article. Source: Kincaid, Janis. "Flood Called Worst Ever." *The Daily Standard* [Excelsior Springs, MO] 13 Aug. 1993, Vol.105-No.158 ed., Cover sec.: 1. Print. (Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives).

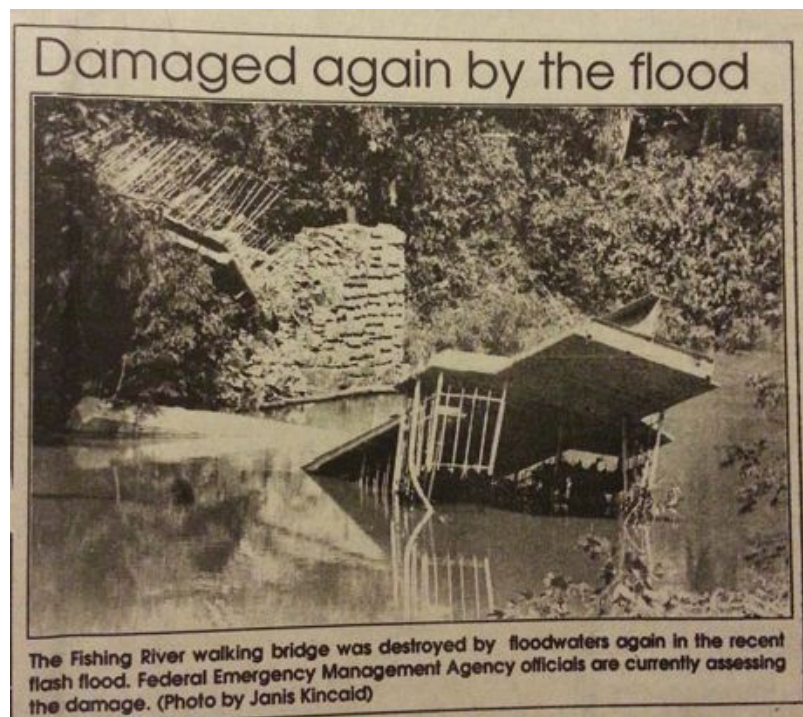


Fig. 15 Photograph of 1993 Flood newspaper article. Source: Kincaid, Janis. "Damaged Again by the Flood." *The Daily Standard* [Excelsior Springs, MO] 31 Aug. 1993, Vol.105-No.170 ed., Cover sec.: 1. Print. (Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives).

