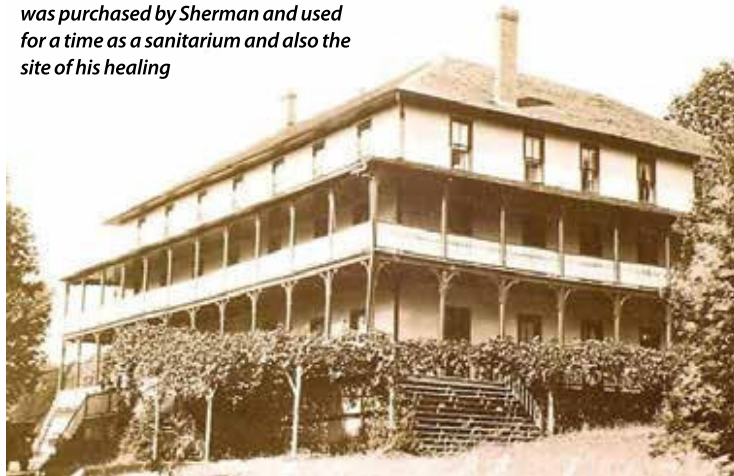




Arza and his wife were known to be travelling entertainers.

The Cedar Park Inn on Charleston Lake was purchased by Sherman and used for a time as a sanitarium and also the site of his healing



# THE ENTERPRISING AND ENERGETIC ARZA SHERMAN

By Sally Smid

One of the most colourful, inventive and industrious men in the history of Athens had to be Arza Sherman. Born in 1850, he was the son of Quakers Aaron Sherman and Johanna Robinson and had three siblings. Sherman dressed distinctively, wearing a black cutaway coat and carried a rifle or a fancy cane and had black, curly shoulder length hair. He married Charlotte Halliday and they had five children, losing two in infancy. Perhaps his first enterprise was a wood turning mill, thought to have been located on Isaac St., which produced wooden bowls, pails, and sleighs, and his business thrived. The Farmersville Reporter ad in 1888 declared him to be both a “manufacturer of cheese vats, hoops, and presses” as well as a “boiler fitter”.

The Sherman’s were also said to have travelled the country as “entertainers”. He was also known as an itinerant preacher, appearing in various rural school buildings where he “preached fire and brimstone”. Sherman was also reported to have been involved in “gold mining” near Donaldson Bay at Charleston Lake, where he secured mineral rights for 500 acres of land. He hired 20 workers, built a bunk house and

blacksmith shop and a “gold rush” ensued. While there were reports that gold was found, it turned out that what he did finally mine was quartz and sold the mine in 1901.

Perhaps his most interesting venture involved the Mineral Springs which were south of what is now Joseph St., the former Brick Works location. Near the close of the Works, as the clay was running out, timber workmen hit a spring which filled the hole with water on the property of I. C. Alguire. Eventually 3 springs were found, each having a different taste and smell. Curbing and a sidewalk from the springs were built and the water became famous for its curative powers. In 1884 a Reporter article told that the Springs were “pronounced by competent authority to be of excellent quality...It is hoped that when the B&W Railway is completed they may become the property of some enterprising adventurer who will develop this latent mine of wealth”. There was even mention of turning the “Mansion”, once in the location of the telephone building on Church St., into a sanitarium that would be connected to the Springs.

In 1907, Sherman purchased the property, also known as “The Flats” and the Reporter revealed that he intended to “develop the valuable mineral springs and make them as a health resort” and the “healing water” was marketed. A lodge was erected and a caretaker was hired. It also reported that he purchased the old Quaker meeting house east of the village and moved it to the mineral springs property.

Historian Edna Chant reported that, in his later years, Sherman discovered that “he had healing powers in his hands”. He purchased the Cedar Park Inn at Charleston Lake in 1913 and opened a clinic for patients suffering from paralysis, rheumatism, and similar illnesses. Many folks travelled to the Inn from long distances in wheel chairs, with canes and crutches and on stretchers. Many walked away under their own power. Chant wrote about how “nonbelievers claimed he got his power from an electric belt around his waist. Others claimed that he was able to transmit healing strength from his long luxuriant hair”. He also conducted clinics in the U.S. and seemed to have quite a following of wealthy Americans. His obituary attested that he travelled through Western Canada and the Southern United States as “a healer of ailments of which the flesh is heir, and became quite renowned in this line”.

Sherman died in 1918 at the age of 68 and is buried in the Athens cemetery.

At a time, even today, when rural economic development is often a concern, it is interesting to consider that over one hundred years ago an enterprising and energetic man like Arza Sherman had a vision for improvement and progress. He certainly contributed to the history of Athens in a most unique and very interesting way.

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