

Clanton Hotwell
By Derric Scott
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Clanton – Hotwell

By Derric Scott

Clanton was a new town and growing rapidly in the 1880s. It got state-wide, even national, attention when a "Hot Well" was discovered a little south of town. The hot water in the ten feet wide thirty-five feet deep well was supposed to be able to cook eggs in minutes and was said to have healing properties.

Mr. S. A. Blassingame had mortgaged the property from the L & N Railroad in 1878 and had paid off the mortgage and owned the property by 1884. In 1885 Blassingame began serious promotion of the Hot Well, including building rooming accommodations and leasing lots. Newspapers in areas such as Birmingham, Montgomery, Blount County, Selma, and Bibb County carried many articles about the wonders of the Clanton Hot Well all during the year.

The publication "**Mining and Manufacturing Journal**" ran a story on the Hot Well which the **Chilton View** reproduced November 5, 1885. It said:

An analysis by Prof. William Gesner shows the water to be highly charged with carbonic acid gas and strongly impregnated with soda and magnesia. He says this is a mild saline water and its high temperature in the well is of subterranean origin, being attributable, as in the case of hot springs and wells, to contact with rocks under the influence of volcanic lava. Its thermal condition assimilates that of Hot Springs, Arkansas, which registered from 98 degrees to 160 degrees Fahrenheit. A bath house has been erected and many wonderful cures effected by its use both by drinking and bathing. Eggs let down in the well are cooked hard in ten minutes. While the well was first being dug, for the first twenty feet the temperature was the same as that of any other well, but at 50 feet it suddenly rose to 162 degrees Fahrenheit.

However, even as all of these positive reviews were being printed, a small note in the **Troy Messenger** and one in the **Montgomery Advertiser** in June 1885 suggested that the Hot Well was heated by a pipe run from a nearby sawmill...

But town lots continue to sell at a rapid rate, going for about \$240 per lot, all through 1886 and 1887.

In March of 1887 Blassingame stopped free access to the water and began charging for access and bottling it for sale. About this time Dr. A. J. Massey, a travelling dentist that had been doing business in Chilton for many years, leased two lots for ten years, at \$1000 per year, and built two boarding houses.

There were still doubters and Dr. Massey so believed in the well that he began to arrange for a demonstration and test of the well. He was going to pump the well dry and allow it to be investigated. A large party was organized for September 2nd, 1887 with a basket dinner and a committee was formed that included Dr. Green of Opelika, Robert Douglass, R. Holder, W. W. Wadsworth of Mountain Creek, and James M. Ponder.

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After three days of investigation and discussion, it was determined that the water was heated artificially by a one inch pipe that was run from Blassingame's nearby sawmill.

Needless to say, Dr. Massey's and others' investments were lost. For many years, that area was called "the Hot Well Community," or "the Round O," or later, "Blassingame's Point."

So, exactly where was the Hot Well?

Blassingame owned the 40 acre tract in south Clanton that is currently where the original Clanton Walmart, the current Clanton Post Office, and the US 31 and 6th Street intersection are located ("Blassingame's point"). The Chilton County Map book #1 has a small insert that shows the "Location of Hot Well." The railroad and "Main Street" are shown but the other streets are not labelled. From the property location above and the map segment it is pretty clear the Hot Well was likely between 6th and 7th Streets near the point where they come together.



Map from Chilton Map Book #1, ca1897, showing the "Location of Hot Well."

The history of this property indicates it was owned by the railroad before being purchased by Blassingame. He sold it in 1894 to "Schloss & Kahn" (a large grocery in Montgomery whose owner had been active in Clanton for years, participating in the creation of the Peoples Savings Bank in 1902). About a year later they sold it to F. A. Gullede. Gullede kept the property for years, until he sold it to Alex G. Dake in 1904-05. Dake sold it to the Frasers in about 1909-10 who kept it for ten years and sold it to E. M. Jones. The Jones family kept the property for decades until it was sold to Walmart for the original Clanton location.

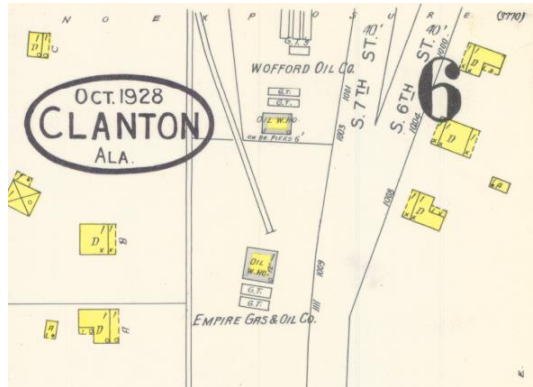
The Union Banner mentioned in July 1923 that the new Woco-Pep depot site was finalized and the spur off the railroad was set to be constructed. The location of the lot "is between the highway and the railroad just across the creek below town, on the old Hot Well property."

<p>WOCO-PEP A SURE THING</p> <p>During the past few months much has been said about Woco-Pep gas and oil being sold in Clanton, but this time we have the straight dope on the proposition. Mr. Williams, a representative of the Wofford Oil Company has been in Clanton this week and made arrangements for the spur track to be built on the lot which Mr. Ellis originally bought for that purpose some five months ago.</p>	<p>This lot is between the highway and the railroad just across the creek below town, on the old Hot Well property.</p> <p>Mr. John T. Ellis is going to handle these products here through his filling station. There has been a considerable delay in getting this proposition through on account of the action of the railroad company, but we are pleased to state that the required arrangements have been made. Everybody knows what Woco-Pep is, and we are sure it will find a ready sale here to our many motor vehicle users.</p>
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Union Banner, July 26, 1923 indicating location of the "old Hot Well property."

Comparing this spot to the property description of the land owned by Blassingame indicates it is the northwest corner of the forty acre tract.



1928 Sanborn Fire Map of intersection of 6th and 7th Streets and Wofford Oil (WoCo)



Visible tract owned by Blassingame in ca 1940 and modern satellite views.
Exact location in this tract of the HotWell is unknown, but from the above, like the northwest corner between 6th and 7th Streets.

NOTES:

Ben Roberts note: Chilton County Map Book #1, page 19 (see image above), shows location of the Hot Well described in Deed Book 7, page 377 (chart also in the Deed Book). Also shows the Depot Plan for 1881 in Block 9.

References

Facebook groups *“U know u lived in CLANTON as a kid,” “WE GREW UP IN CLANTON, ALABAMA”* and others.

Union Banner: