

Greetings from Indiana Landmarks

By Suzanne Stanis

I'll never forget my first visit to the West Baden Springs Hotel. As a college senior, I toured the building with an owner who dreamed of restoring it to its splendor as a resort. In spite of its overgrown grounds, deterioration and the unsightly furnace protruding through the atrium wall, we found a magical place that captivated our imaginations and transported us back in time.

Standing in awe of the magnificent dome, I had no idea that a year later I would work for the organization that would play an integral role in saving the West Baden Springs Hotel. In 1985 I joined Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana (now Indiana Landmarks) as their Preservation Historian, nominating properties to the National Register of Historic Places and researching Indianapolis architecture.

While my appreciation for Indiana's historic architecture grew, the West Baden Springs Hotel continued to deteriorate. In 1991 water damage caused a large portion of the building's exterior wall to collapse. In 1992 Indiana Landmarks funded stabilization work to prevent further damage, but the property's future remained uncertain. Ultimately the Cook family of Bloomington stepped in to complete the restoration of not only the West Baden Springs Hotel and grounds, but the French Lick Springs Resort. This "miracle" ultimately included an investment of over \$5 million for both hotels and approval from the Indiana legislature and Orange County residents to establish a casino.

After completing the Master of Library Science program at IUPUI in 1992, I became the librarian for Indiana Landmarks and now serve as the Director of Heritage Education and Information. My work includes overseeing our reference collection on historic preservation and Indiana architecture. We regularly help the public discover appropriate paint colors or interior decorating schemes for their historic homes, assist students with research papers, provide support for our staff and develop materials

for educators incorporating historic places into their curricula. We welcome the many referrals we receive from Indiana's public, academic and special libraries.

Our network of nine regional offices provides professional staff to promote our mission of "revitalizing communities, reconnecting us to our heritage and saving meaningful places." Last year our speakers' bureau reached over 2000 people, providing topics such as Indiana architectural styles, historic house research, endangered places and courthouses. Our staff also promotes local history and preservation through hands-on workshops like wood window repairs and barn rehabilitations.

The next time you're in Orange County, we hope you'll take our tours of the West Baden and French Lick hotels. You'll learn the history of two fascinating communities and experience the magic of a space that has captivated people since 1902.

For more information on Indiana Landmarks and our tours of the West Baden Springs Hotel and French Lick Resort, visit our website at www.indianalandmarks.org

About the Author

Suzanne Stanis is the Director of Heritage Education for Indiana Landmarks. She has a bachelor's degree from Hanover College and a master's of Library Science from Indiana University. Suzanne regularly provides assistance to people researching and restoring historic houses. In addition to managing the library, Suzanne develops lectures and workshops for adults, classroom materials for educators, and children's camps. She also supervises the organization's Morris-Butler House and Indianapolis heritage tourism program. During her 27 years with Indiana Landmarks, Suzanne has researched and nominated over fifteen buildings and neighborhoods to the National Register of Historic Places.