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ARLINGTON

This spot was the center of life in early Arlington. How the city is bringing it back

By Kailey Broussard

November 29, 2021 5:30 AM  Gift Article

Arlington's historic Old Mineral Well will receive a nod in a commemorative clock tower and art installation downtown. The original well was drilled in 1893 and became a focal point for the young city until 1951, when the fountain was razed to accommodate motorists. The clock tower will feature four lion sculptures by local artist Janice Hart Melito, and water will flow from the lions' mouths. J. W. Dunlop Photograph Collection, Special Collections, UTA Libraries

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A reminder of historic Arlington is headed downtown, between the George W. Hawkes Downtown Library and City Hall.

The green patch between the two public buildings will become the new home of a clock tower and fountain commemorating the old mineral well that once served as a water source and gathering place for a once-quaint town. The tower will stand about 40 feet tall and look down West Main Street, and peek out over neighboring buildings. Water will flow from four hand-sculpted lion heads, an homage to the fountain atop the mineral well, and the plaza will include seating space.

“We are hoping that it will bring back the memory of the well, it would allow people to collectively remember the well and what it meant,” said Mitali Mandlekar, park project manager and landscape architect for the city.

While the project remains in design phase, Mandlekar said construction could begin as early as summer.

The city selected Dallas firm Mesa Design Associates to craft the space, [and local artist Janice Hart Melito to sculpt](#) the lions, according to city records. David Newman, a principal associate with the design company, said the Dallas-based firm wants to recreate the feel of the fountain down to a limestone finish.

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The project draws \$1 million from the Arlington Tomorrow Foundation, the city's quasi-governmental trust. Mandlekar said the city hopes the plaza will add another tourist spot in the city's rapidly redeveloping downtown.

The original well was drilled in 1893 at the corner of Center and Main streets, two years after local businessman Rice Wood Collins launched a campaign to drill a public water source for the city when it was a farming and cotton-ginning community, according to the city [Convention and Visitors Bureau](#). The community built around the well over the decades. The well became a community gathering site.

Arlington women placed a concrete basin around the well for people's horses, and the Commercial Club — the predecessor of the Greater Arlington Chamber of Commerce — funded the construction of two ornate fountains. One fountain took the shape of a four-sided pyramid where water flowed through lion heads, while the second fountain watered animals.

[The well became a tourist attraction](#) as people across the country flocked to mineral water for its healing properties, according to the Texas State Historical Association. The well was one of 100 mineral springs that drew thousands of visitors to Texas per year, though it drew less people than the [Baker Hotel in Mineral Wells](#), according to the CVB. Arlington's mineral water had a reputation among some residents for its rank smell.

Part of the platform around the fountain was enclosed and transformed into a display room for Arlington Crystals, a tourist attraction. The city razed the fountains and capped the well in 1951 to accommodate increasing traffic.

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Kailey Broussard was a reporter covering Arlington for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram until 2021.

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