

Malvern, Arkansas

A brick railway station in Malvern, Arkansas represents the twin economic drivers of the community throughout its history: rail travel and brick-making. The city would not even exist in its present location, but for the rail line constructed in 1870. The first residents had previously lived near the Ouachita River, but upon realizing that riverboat commerce would be replaced by railroads, the community moved lock, stock and barrel to this trackside location 21 miles from Hot Springs.

At that time, health seekers from around the country regularly endured uncomfortable stagecoach rides to the Hot Springs American Spa. A wealthy industrialist from Chicago named Joseph Reynolds grew tired of the long, bone-jarring ride when he traveled to Hot Springs for rheumatism treatment. Mr. Reynolds built a narrow gauge railway from Malvern to Hot Springs which became known as the Diamond Jo line, and for 15 years, this was the only railroad into Hot Springs. In 1900 another railway from Little Rock opened and took much of the business from the narrow gauge line.

Since Malvern was, and is still, the closest railway stop to Hot Springs, the town sustained some tourism business. But the citizens established another solid and lasting economic venture. The area's clay deposits were put to use making bricks, and in time three Acme brick plants were operating. The city dubbed itself the Brick Capital of the World, and continues to celebrate this important aspect of its heritage by holding a Brickfest every June. In addition to enjoying music and food, at the festival folks compete in a brick toss, brick car derby and best-dressed brick contest.

Today if you're traveling by Amtrak to Hot Springs National Park for a visit to the historic bathhouses or a soak in the hot mineral waters, you can rent a car at Malvern for the 21-mile drive. You might want to plan your trip for the end of June and try your hand at the brick toss.

Source(s):

Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism. (2011). Malvern, Arkansas. Retrieved February 4, 2011 from http://www.arkansas.com/city-listings/city_detail.aspx?city=Malvern.

Wikipedia. (2011). Malvern, Arkansas. Retrieved February 4, 2011 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malvern,_Arkansas

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