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Structures

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BATHHOUSE ROW
Hot Springs National Park

Introduction:

A large number of Bathhouses have occupied the area adjacent to the thermal springs. With no other thermal occurrences in the central part of the country a succession of buildings provided baths, not only for the well-to-do, but for an enlarging middle class and for the poor.

At one time the whole city thrived on the quest for health and the pleasant diversions attendant to it. Only part of the physical representation remains. Within the park the solidly built structures on one side of Central Avenue are recognized as the finest assembly^{AGE} of bathhouses in the country. In an Historic District these bathhouses await restoration to their prime appearance in the 1920's and 1930's. For many an adaptive use is necessary to preserve them.

As time goes on it is hoped the human drama continues to unfold. For it is only with people taking the thermal baths that the brick, stucco, marble, stained glass and fountains can remain vibrant and vital.

Bathhouse Row:

For a long time after the building of the first bathhouse in 1840, bathhouses spring up everywhere. They were built wherever the hot water could be ~~lead~~ led or carried. They occupied both sides of the meandering Hot Springs Creek. Some extended partially or completely over the water and in high water fared badly. A few fronted on a narrow roadway but most could be reached only by paths and planks or bridges precariously stretching across the creek.

All this changed with the channeling of the creek in a tunnel in 1883. The placing of a deep gravel fill and widening the street made the Federal presence felt. For the first time an orderly arrangement of bathhouses became possible. The Victorian wooden bathhouses soon filled all available space and thus established what became known as Bathhouse Row.

Victorian Bathhouses:

Although the wooden bathhouses had no claim to permanence they were ornate and colorful. Most of them sported the decorations then in vogue. Fancy wood turnings and intricate, ~~xx~~ brightly painted trim garnished the basic wood framework. Several had bulging bays while most had something of a domelike structures topped with railed "widow walks". The sunporches functioned as lounges.

Paint schemes included about all of the colors of Autumn foliage but the striped canvas awnings stuck with basic red and white. For all of the staidness associated ^{with} ~~to~~ Victorian customs, conservatism did not apply to furnishings and buildings. Each bathhouse sought a competitive advantage by being different and eye-catching for the choices for patrons were ~~many~~ numerous.

The Arlington Hotel:

Arlington Lawn received its name from the existence of ~~the~~ two hotels successively occupying the north end of Bathhouse Row. Both hotels had bathhouses, served by springs nearby. The first Arlington Hotel - a wooden building - lasted a useful lifetime. In order to make way for the substantial masonry improvement, the old Arlington was torn down.

In 1893 the new Arlington, as it was called, spread over a large area. Besides having electricity and the finest services, including the indispensable ballroom, it had fire escapes from ~~each~~ each floor, extending to the adjacent tufa terrace. Those rampways inadvertently had some use for the building perished in flames in ¹⁹²³~~1931~~.

The 3rd Arlington Hotel subsequently moved across the street. Mimicing some of the architectural elements of the new Arlington, the new "new" Arlington had 50 rooms plumbed with thermal water, as well as having a central bathhouse. Maintaining tradition the Arlington Trail leads to the park from the 5th floor.

The Army-Navy Hospital:

Parelleling the history of the first pair of Arlington Hotels there have been two sets of the principal building at the Army=Navy Hospital. The first Army=Navy Hospital of brick with expanses of wooden porches continued to treat veterans until it was replaced with the imposing building looming on the skyline today. As the largest edifice in the city, being a monument to the use of the thermal water, it is noteworthy in another aspect. It was planned to be in architectural harmony and as a framing structure to Bathhouse Row. The other building serving the same function is the existing Arlington Hotel.

The Army-Navy Hospital had their own source of the hot water, using enormous quantities of it from a well. With use of the Army-Navy Hospital declining the entire complex of buildings became a state operated Rehabilitation Center in 1960.

*There is observed a tradition to create
beautiful Landscape.*

The Formal Entrance:

Formerly, carriage access to Hot Springs Mountain wound through the grounds of the Army-Navy Hospital. To emphasize the importance of Bathhouse Row and to create monuments befitting the regard held for the Hot Springs Reservation, a whole new entrance was built. Robert Stevens, with the Army Corps of Engineers, planned the gateway in depth. For starters, there were winged stone pylons with perched eagles at the top. In addition, some distance back stood a stairwayed balustrade. Farther back and on the hillside the entire scene became Capped with the bandstand.

The visual impact of this array of imposing monuments left no doubt about the importance of Bathhouse Row and the mountain from which the thermal water insued.

Maurice Bathhouse:

Among the Victorian buildings, one bathhouse stood out among the rest. It occupied a very favorable position, being ~~be~~ surrounded by government architecture. The formal entrance on the South side added an element of prestige. To the North, at a site infested with springs, lay the Maurice Historic Spring with its popular cup spring. Entrepreneur W. G. Maurice constructed a bathhouse in keeping with favored surroundings and saw to it that the roof became boldly emblazoned with his surname.

When it came to building fire and rot resistant replacements later on the Maurice Bathhouse Company became the first to comply. The massive ~~new~~ new Maurice, opening for business in 1911 set an example quite difficult to follow. Besides its enormous capacity for serving bathers it offered superlative surroundings. Three of the ceilings in the mens bathing rooms showed

~~complimentary~~

off complimentary mythical sea scenes in stained glass. Another panel decorated the ladies side. The elegant Roycroft room, with stained glass of an Indian motif underneath a gigantic skylight, had fine wicker furniture and a pool table.

Elsewhere, furnishings consisted of mission oak furniture in keeping with the California modern style of the building. Most distinctive feature, -
expanses of blue tile on complicated rooflines, visible from all sides.

Gold and tan arched awnings brightened the front and shaded loungers on the narrow porch and the more spacious sunporch. The intricately patterned paintings on the woodwork called for an artistic hand and eye. When the Roycroft ~~room~~ became a well equipped gym later on, the game room Inherited the pool table and an artist placed a hunting scene canvas completely around the walls.

Many famous people visited Billy Maurice and took the baths. Jack Dempsey trained in the gym. The Maurice had numerous small private rooms for letter writing and dressing for the gym. It had a hot water pool in the basement. The new Maurice maintained its reputation as being the finest bathhouse in Hot Springs.

Fordyce Bathhouse:

Colonel Samuel Fordyce, besides being prominent in building railroads, had many land holdings in Hot Springs. He owed his recovery from a serious disease to the hot water and carried on business, political and social activities in his adopted city thereafter. One of the bathhouses he owned was the wooden palace immediately to the south of the formal entrance.

Although an attractive structure it paled in comparison to the newly built Maurice. Colonel Fordyce intended to build a monument in gratitude for recovery of his health. More than that, he intended to surpass the Maurice

and, in fact, to build the finest bathhouse in the world. No other name than Fordyce was considered.

Money and effort were no restraint in accomplishing that goal. Having seen the spas in Europe, while green-eyeing the Maurice, Col. Fordyce made plans that were superbly executed. There hadn't been anything like the brick patterning of the Spanish-Italian structure in Hot Springs or in the region for that matter. The highly sculptured window surrounds, following classic designs, captured the essence of the sea as did other elements of the building. The copper-clad marquee, suspended by chains, with stained and pressed glass facing showed expensive and tasteful attention to the entryway. With glass covering the top of the marquee the open sunporch offered a protected yet airy element ~~xx~~ popular in the California building styles.

The Fordyce became awash with stained glass having an association with water. Lotuses and pondwater occupied the transom spaces in the lobby. In the ceiling of the men's bathhall swirled the underwater world of the sea. Among the ~~xxx~~ abundant creatures in the gigantic panel swam a merman and two mermaids. ~~o~~ ^{opal glass} ~~opal~~ glass on the ladies side copied country scenes. The stained glass on the third ~~g~~ floor lounge harmonizes a music theme. That room offered a grand piano for nearby listeners. From this room and on the roof garden strains of music ~~xxx~~ could be heard from the bandstand on the hillside above.

Art interest of the Fordyce centered in sculptured fountains. The lobby has a ^{pair of} cherubs where a shell and a fish spout water. Immediately below the stained glass in the central courtyard is a fountain representing a dominant DeSoto meeting a subservient Indian maiden. It appeared several years after the building was opened for business in 1915, necessitating making several holes in the floor for plumbing. Lavish use of marble and ceramic tile throughout the bathhouse served to decorate and waterproof the decor.

Very specialized functions existed in the Fordyce. The electro-mechano room had various gadgets to stimulate nerves and muscles, the beauty shop restored ladies soaked hair, the chiropody room took care of foot problems, a nearby shoeshine stand, ^{the} ~~the shoes~~ shoes. A ceramic Hubbard tub handled the severely handicapped or the heavy weights. The roomy high-ceilinged ^{540 R 4, 150} gym shapranadd reflexes and imparted the benefits of exercise. The state rooms of the Fordyce, of course, had to be larger and more private than those in the Maurice. There was a bowling alley in the basement.

There were lounges scattered about the bathhouse but one became specialized in educating and entertaining guests. This room had cases full of Indian artifacts to allow visitors to admire the Fordyce collection. The ^{BILLIARD} ~~brilliant~~ room appealed to recreational tastes.

Everything in the bathhouse was planned in the minutest detail, including the painting of the walls. Along moldings near the ceiling varigated and shaded paint added a hand-done touch. To announce the achievement of such excellence, the paint company and the Fordyce Bathhouse published a booklet extolling liquid velvet paint. The Fordyces also published a graphic booklet about the entire bathhouse and like everything else it reflected interest in quality.

The Fordyce Bathhouse offered exceptional services at a somewhat higher cost. Ironically, the bathhouse offering the most and doing the best to serve its patrons was the first on bathhouse row to "throw in the towel". It closed its doors for business in 1962; its arch rival persisted a dozen years longer.

The Government Free Bathhouse:

Hot Springs owes its longevity and general appeal to the fact all classes of people were invited to partake of the waters. In 1878 a law took care of indigent bathers by making it possible for those without funds or unable to ^{obtain} ~~receive~~ them, to take the baths in a government bathhouse. Sites for the first two bathhouses for the poor were around the mud spring, a distance from bathhouse row. The first amounted to an improved shack previously built by individuals feeling ~~a regard~~ ^{pity} for the people with no place to soak. Later a large domed masonry building copied with a bigger demand. An addition took care of more people but the supply of water didn't hold up. With no room nor water to expand the huge new government free bathhouse went up several blocks east of Bathhouse Row. In 1958 the Government Free Bathhouse became the Libbey Memorial Physical Medicine Center, managed by an arrangement among all of the bathhouses. Free bathing then was distributed among other bathhouses including those on Bathhouse Row.

The building of the Quapaw was possible only by eliminating the walkway to the Government Free Bathhouse, going from Bathhouse Row sidewalk onto the hillside.

The Quapaw Bathhouse:

Additional adjustments besides those dealing with the Government Free Bathhouse rampway had to be made to provide for the spacious Quapaw. Building the large masonry bathhouse required the demise of two wooden buildings - the Horseshoe and Magnesia. With this arrangement the Quapaw sprawled over the widest frontage of any on the Row.

Selection of the name turned out to be an appropriate one. It derived from a name used by another tribe for the Arkansas Indians. This tribe legally possessed the Reservation encompassing the springs, which caused the Supreme Court to disallow private claims to the springs, prior to the Hot Springs Reservation Act of 1832. The bathhouse naturally had a golden Indian head sculpture just above the bronze lettering on the front. The Indians formerly enjoyed treating skin conditions in the mud spring just above the bathhouse and they were prominently mentioned as peaceful first users of the hot water. The name was a definite business asset, especially when the Indian cave was uncovered in the excavation of the basement.

The great golden ceramic-covered dome shining in the sun commanded favorable attention. Requiring precise and tight scaffolding the construction background of proprietor C. A. Callahan came into play in seeing that all went well. Sometimes architectural features of adjacent bathhouses were considered. The lateral ends of the roof resembled those of the adjacent Fordyce Bathhouse. With a red tile roof and gold, orange and green striped awnings, the attractive Quapaw easily handled a good business. The large amount of space on one floor appealed to people who had difficulty moving around. In recent years the Quapaw operates during hours when the other bathhouses on Bathhouse Row are not operating, its gold dome dimmed by city dirt.

Common Ground:

The privately owned bathhouses operate as concessioners on Government land. Their rates, services, and hours of operation are subject to government approval. The construction, modification of their buildings, hiring of personnel, record keeping, advertising and signing are all subject to regulation. Historically, the pressure to keep all competitors on an even basis, the failure to encourage diversification from the traditional tub bath

Conclusion
(see summary)

and the general decline of bathing caused several bathhouses to close operations. When the businesses close the government acquires the buildings, not a desirable situation.

The park plays a substantial part in keeping Bathhouse Row looking uniform. Maintenance crews trim the hedges, prune the Magnolia trees, and shape the American Holly trees. Bathhouses, on the other hand, mow the grass and keep up other plantings.

The cohesion of the whole area is recognized by having the bathhouses and their environs comprise an Historic District. The thrust of the General Management Plan is to cause the park and bathhouse management to work toward restoring the buildings to their prime appearance in the 1920s and 30s.

Ozark Bathhouse:

The Ozark is another bathhouse in which the wooden predecessor had the same name. Ideally, situated on the Row ^{IN AN OUTWARD} ~~because~~ a bend on Central Avenue and being opposite an entry street, it benefitted from high visibility.

Named after the geographic region, the Spanish Revival bathhouse once had three sets of 3-dimension gold names with foot-high letters. Besides the name on the front facing west there were those on each side of the front extension facing north and south. Originally planned as a much larger facility, these plans were scaled back. When increased business brought expansion the filling in of both sides of the front displaced the space for two sets of names. No side plaques were possible because of the rounded ~~corners~~ corners. Three side plates, typically gold foil letters on black enamel, were a discreet advertisement on the side of a building.

A pair of towers provided the most distinctive architectural feature. They serve no other purpose than decoration, although visitors often equate them with bell towers. To the ~~question~~ query "Where are the bells?" there is the reply that none ever existed. The Quapaw sported a similar tower which, unlike those of the Ozark, provided a hatchway to get to the outside of the dome. The entry exists only for daredevils. The Ozark towers are roofed with red rounded tiles, as are the primary roofs facing the front.

Unlike any of the other bathhouses the Ozark lacks arched windows of any kind. The wide awning on the front, having broad red and white stripes, can be rolled out to various lengths, while the smaller striped canvas awnings could only be retracted with drawstrings. When more durable aluminum awnings were placed on several bathhouses much of the color and interest in the buildings faded.

Like most of the bathhouses, the Ozark has a sunporch, but smaller than most. Red tile spandrels with blue designs brightened the external appearance considerably. The flower planters in season offered a changing and striking attraction. The lobby has the most elaborate tile pattern found on Bathhouse Row.

Buckstaff Bathhouse:

The Rammelsburg Bathhouse, the predecessor of the Buckstaff, like several of the wooden bathhouses, looked like three small buildings close together and filled in behind their fronts. That was their general design along with the slanted ^Amossard roof and high tower in the center. The Edwardian brick ~~B~~ Buckstaff had a tower, too. A giant steel framework high in the sky holds ^{up} the letters of the name. In time, this bold advertisement, so out-of-keeping with the architecture, came down.

Of 1920 vintage, rows of huge Doric columns and ponderous planters gave the building an appearance of sturdiness. Two sets of parapets at the upper third of the building suggest the great weight the columns appear to be ~~is~~ holding up. The building is not so massive as its appearance might indicate, and for all its size the lobby of the Buckstaff is the smallest. Visitors definitely notice the brass handrail in the front, which requires daily polishing. The Buckstaff varies by having 4 bronze front nameplates instead of two. The front porch is completely open - fully in the sun in the afternoon. The sunroof has the most useful space of any on the Row with parapets protecting against the ~~is~~ wind.

The ~~interior~~ interior has expanses of marble. In efforts to modernize the building to make it diseasable and more attractive the essential values of the old building have been faithfully kept. At this time the Buckstaff is the only one to have been converted to use the thermal water for heating.

Lamar Bathhouse:

The Victorian Lamar Bathhouse rambled over its designated lot. Not symmetrical the largest portion stood on the south end. It had odd dormers and turrets and much bric-a-brac. Instead of the usual tower in the middle it had a chimney. The new masonry Lamar contrasts very sharply with the old building by being perfectly symmetrical and of boxlike proportions. The style is that of the California or Bay Region school. The large sunporch windows divide in three parts, known as the Chicago window, and having a low arch at the top. these windows create the most structural interest in that the entire space, combining the sunporch and lobby, is painted in the interior to appear to be in a spacious courtyard. Where there are no windows the paintings make it appear the stone masonry arches ^{FORM} ~~from~~ an outdoor scene. The actual windows, of course, show the current scene.

Stairways to the second floor are of reflecting silver panels interspersed with solid red sections, a striking visual effect well shown off by a skylight above. On the second floor there are two sets of gym equipment, one for the men and one for the ladies. The usual scheme elsewhere is for the gym arrangement to be together for both men and women.

Although many of the most attractive elements are inside the building the exterior had striped awnings prior to putting up the durable aluminum type and there were bright blue spandrels before they were painted over. The tendency to reduce interesting design features and give buildings the antiseptic appearance has affected a number of buildings on Bathhouse Row.

Hale Bathhouse:

The existing Hale Bathhouse has an interesting lineage. The exact sequence of changes hasn't been ~~researched~~ researched enough to really know but the basic building today ^{apparently} contains nothing more than the substance of the original domed masonry building. Over the years the management claimed the building was on the same ~~site~~ site and had some part of the wooden Old Hale built in 1854. Actually, in the 1850s there were three wooden Hale Bathhouses. The Rector & Hale Bathhouse probably stood on the ground north of the park heat exchanger. ~~The~~ The Rector, Hale and Clayton Bathhouse appears to have been where the Rector Bathhouse later stood and is now part of the Arlington Lawn. The Old Hale Bathhouse stood somewhere in the neighborhood of the existing Visitor Center on the corner of Central and Reserve. None of these Hale Bathhouses occupied the site of the present building. The wooden bathhouse of that vintage on the site would have been the northernmost of two Clayton Bathhouses. So much for tracing the lineage back to 1854.

With ~~the~~ so many bathhouses with the same name it isn't surprising though that there were two wooden Old Hales. For laying the claim to being the oldest bathhouse on the same site on Bathhouse Row, the 1880s Old Hale didn't stand up too well. The Superior, Ozark and Lamar also traced their direct line predecessors back to the same or an earlier time. With both the Hale and the Ozark no longer operating as bathhouses now, it is either the Lamar or Superior as the oldest.

The reconstruction of the partly wood and partly masonry Hale came in three phases: the loss of the dome, the redevelopment and enlargement of the sunporch and the conversion from Edwardian brick to Spanish Italian Revival stucco. No other bathhouse has undergone such extensive transformation. A major design change came in 1914, and another in 1937. The latter date marked the last move to create the Spanish-Italian, California modern compatibility of the row of bathhouses.

The transformation of the Hale changed it from a drab building to a very colorful one. The enormous red tile roof could be seen from every angle, including from a planned portion ~~off~~ of the Grand Promenade in the rear. The multicolored but predominately blue striped awnings garnished the arched windows in a Mex display. (The tera cotta name of the bathhouse complimented the overall ~~ex~~ color scheme.) Finally the broad striped front awning spiced up the entrance, which had wrought iron lamps and windows.

The interior marble and tile served a more functional than decorative purpose so it was a fairly plain bathhouse. The wicker furniture and Mexican rocking chairs made the sunporch a pleasant place to wait for the baths or to lounge around after the baths. Seeing the spring in the basement, like similar ones in several other bathhouses, pleased customers wishing to see where the water came from. The water, of course, was piped into a common

collection reservoir where it was deflected from other sources before getting back to the bathhouse. Before the common plumbing arrangement the bathhouses often made exaggerated claims about the kinds of cures the individual springs could effect.

In 1981 the Hale opened briefly ^{as} an adapted ^{living} modified ^{building} ~~business~~ undergoing another of its many transformations. Most changes were in the interior.

Superior Bathhouse:

Being built in the 1920s the Edwardian style Superior followed a classical design popular in the prior decade. The obvious merit was that adaptations could be made to a classical style to serve a particular function. With bathhouses a unique activity, most buildings on Bathhouse Row are not a pure style, the Superior comes closer than most.

The present Superior follows a line of Superior Bathhouses with the Victorian building once rated as the best of the lot. The existing building contracts somewhat from the other bathhouses, being composed of dark brick and green trim. The large amount of window area is very similar to the other buildings and in this respect the striped awnings had less green and more red and orange. Except for the awnings the place is very much as it was originally built.

The interior bears special mention. The lavish amount of quality marble and the extensive amount of brass signifies the intent to be superior. The interior on one side is naturally well lighted due to the lack of a replacement of the wooden Big Iron Bathhouse on the north side. Bathhouses generally believed in sunporches, skylights and other means of natural lighting. Architectural styles assisted with the health oriented beliefs of the time - that people should look healthy indoors as well as outdoors. Where incandescent light tended to be dim, ~~fluorescent~~ fluorescent lights, which came later, tended to give everything a blue cast. Even in such relatively small matters there were unmistakable intents to

Although smaller than the others the Superior made a serious endeavor in services to surpass its ^{MUCH} ~~more~~ larger competitors, ^{WAS FAVORABLE} ~~which were regarded as~~ ^{LOCATED ON B H R,} ~~being in much better location on the Row.~~

Healthy Outlook:

Considering the great span of time bathing and the appetence of bathing have existed, recent changes have been comparatively rapid.

It is clear at this time that the decline of bathing makes it certain that the existing bathhouses are the last of a long sequence. It is essential then to encourage the continuance of bathing on Bathhouse Row, to provide the historical function always performed. The buildings need to be preserved and, ~~if~~ in fact, ~~restored~~ restored to their best appearance as a heritage of the future. There is no better or finer example of what was once a major element of American life.

Hot Springs has been different. Where most spas catered only to the well-do-do, this place served all classes of people. Having free government bathing, the intent was to serve a democratic purpose and to do it well.

In looking over the edifices on Bathhouse Row, it should be remembered that rampant infections and Chronic disease afflicted people over the greatest span of time since the establishment of the Hot Springs Reservation in 1832. In the past little could be done to favorably intervene in health matters and the baths offered the least drastic approach to the matter of disease control. Besides alleviating pain, the waters ~~is~~ were either stimulating or relaxing. Attentive attendants kept the outlook of the patron on an optimistic level. People did get well. More than that the baths seemed to be a regime for staying well. In connection with the baths, healthful exercise, pleasant diversions, good food and a pleasant social life were all part of the spa attraction.

Conclusion

Taken together, the privately owned bathhouses and the government aimed to make the benefits of the thermal water available for health purposes. Perhaps today the baths are taken more for recreational purposes than for ~~phy~~ physical ~~xxx~~ health, still the original intent is served.

Carroll

Today there is ~~xx~~ a renewed interest in the fundamentals of health. There is a return of interest in exercise which the bathhouses once firmly encouraged. Recreation has been elevated to the status of a major industry. Parks provide opportunities for open social contacts and appeal to those who like to satisfy curiosity and exercise their minds. Hot Springs and Bathhouse Row offers all of these modern interests and can be expected to do so far into the future.