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A SURVEY OF THE ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES

of

HOT SPRINGS, ARKANSAS

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Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas is rich in architectural resources of great value. There are three groups of buildings, which give the area a unique charm, both in the National Park and in the town around it. These include the unique group of bath houses in the Park, the fine commercial buildings in the downtown area, and the handsome series of late Victorian houses in the residential areas of the city. These buildings are set in valleys amid green hills, which form a setting of great beauty.

✓✓ Taken as a whole, the group of buildings on Bath House Row, is of importance to the nation as well as to the state. They seem to be unique, built between 1912 and 1925. Combined with beautiful planting, careful landscape design, fine old trees, and backed by the Promenade, the bath houses are of a period and design to be found in no other American spa. With the decline of bathing as a form of medical treatment, these buildings become of even greater importance.

Most of the bath houses were built in a style which Hollywood and California made popular in the early years of this century, and to the author's knowledge no other spas were built in this manner. This could also be called the Cecil B. DeMille style, as it swept the country along with the silent films before 1929. Besides the bath

houses, a handsome example is the Arlington Hotel, which is of outstanding design, rivalled only by the famous Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs, built in 1918. The bath houses are here discussed in order, beginning at the north end of Bath House Row.

#### THE SUPERIOR

The Superior Bath dates from about 1920, and it is in the Edwardian style, which refers to classically designed buildings of the first decade of the 20th century. It has pilasters on both the forward projecting sun-porch and on the two-story portion of the building. The pilasters in both cases are set out from the mass of the building with ornamental tile and brick patterns. The vaguely Doric pilaster capitals are inset with a center medallion of green tile, as are the pateria over the pilasters in the friezes of the upper and lower cornices. Both the sunporch and the two-story portion of this bath house are topped with brick parapets. The building is in good condition, and the interior is functional and efficient.

#### THE HALE

The Hale Bath House is on the site of an earlier one that John C. Hale and his wife, Sarah Gardiner Hale, had built in 1854. They had come to Arkansas in 1836, and in 1840 built the first bath house, which was a two-story hotel.

The present building is a handsome example of the Spanish-Italian revival, which was primarily a western revival and had little influence on the East Coast. Men who made the style famous were George Washington Smith, Van Pelt and Maybury, Reginald Johnson in

California, and J. J. B. Benedict in Colorado. Regional variation of note is the New Mexican Revival led by Hendrickson of Rapp and Rapp, and John Gaw Meem of Santa Fe.

The facade is treated with an arcuated series of windows, and pilasters with terra cotta capitals, and a terra cornice. On both floors the openings are used to suggest arcades with piers with capitals. Over the entrance there is a double curved parapet, and the name of the bath house worked out in terra cotta. On either side of the entrance there are small windows, barred by handsome wrought iron grilles. There is a great hipped roof of red tile, which admirably finishes off the building. The entrance arcade, or arcade, forms a kind of sun-room, where guests sat, and rocked. Similar spaces are devoted to this activity in most of the bath houses, and sun-rooms were to be found on most American houses 1900 - 1950.

This is a particularly good example of the Spanish Revival, which had such influence in America 1910 - 1940. It is simple in design, but the adroit uses of the upper and lower arcades to tie the design together is noteworthy. While the interior is plain, the good proportions here reflect those on the exterior. The building is in excellent condition, and needs little repair. While its planting is beautifully developed, it is important as it forms one of the eight structures, which make up Bath House Row, a unique survival of the era of the great American spas.

## THE MAURICE

Hernando de Soto the Spanish explorer visited the Hot Springs in 1541, and La Salle, the French explorer, claimed it for France in 1682. It was part of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, when President Jefferson sent the Dumbar-Hunter expedition there in 1804 to analyze the chemical contents of the spa's waters. There have been bath houses on this site since 1830.

Built in 1911, the Maurice is a good example of what might be called California Modern, as seen in the works of Louis C. Mullgardt and others of the Bay Region School. Of brick and stucco with inset colored tiles, it has the good proportions, simplicity of design, and lack of an eclectic style that marked the best examples of this type. There is a kind of portico, or porch, set in antis between two pavilions. The five bay motif is used again on the third floor in the central block. The exterior needs little besides paint to restore it, and the heavy awnings should be removed as they spoil the design of the portico.

On the interior there is some particularly fine design. There is a handsome stained glass skylight, and a gymnasium of exceptional interest. It has paneled walls, and an inglenook type of fireplace with a pair of flanking seats, all suggesting the early work of Frank Lloyd Wright, or the California Modern. There is a handsome paneled lobby, treated with Ionic pilasters, which should be restored, and left just as it is.

As interest in the great burst of energy which characterized the architectural scene during the early years of the 20th century develops, the Maurice will have a noteworthy place in the history of our Modern American Architecture. Its interior is of particular interest, and with the Fordyce, is the most unusual design of the Bath House Row.

Either this building or the Fordyce could be preserved as a living museum of the World of Spa. It could be restored and could house a museum of the Springs of America, and baths could still be given in it. ✓

#### THE FORDYCE

The present original appearance of the Fordyce Bath House marks it as one of the handsomest on Bath House Row. Built 1914 - 15, it is in the Italian - Spanish Revival.

Built of tapestry brick in a losenge pattern, and terra cotta, a favorite building material of the style, the design is marked by good proportions and the overhanging Italianate roof. The marquee is of glass and copper, and has a parapet enriched with Greek motifs. Under the cornice the heavy frieze is embellished with a vase design, and the first floor is treated with rustication in terra cotta. The windows are of special interest, as the upper parts of them -- that is, the third story windows are arcuated and are treated with the Gibbs surround, or the heavy rustication which the Englishman Gibbs borrowed from the Italians. Richly worked balcony separates

these windows from the second floor ones which are more in the manner of the Spanish Plateresque, having colonettes on either side of a lintel enriched with a carved head. The ends of the building are finished with curvilinear gables. All the exterior needs is a good washing, as it is in excellent condition, and under no circumstances should it be sand-blasted as that would destroy the surface of the brick.

Designed by Mann and Stern, architects of Little Rock, the interior was given special attention. There is a large atrium which forms a kind of atrium, lighted by a skylight, which has a notable stained glass design in the skylight. There is a spacious "museum" room, which has a vaulted ceiling, and is treated with carefully detailed woodwork, and the entrance lobby is also worthy of note. It has pilasters and rich decoration, and carefully cleaned and restored, would make a handsome entrance to this fine building.

As few of the great spas of the 19th century in America are still in existence, the Bath House Row in Hot Springs takes on additional significance. This building is the finest of the group, and is an outstanding example of the Spanish-Italian Revival. The entire group, with their beautiful planting, and the fine Italian Revival fountain which adjoins this building, is the finest row of bath houses left in America. With the new master plan, of which this survey is a part, this building could easily be restored, and with added functions, become an important part of the new master plan. It would make a handsome restaurant, utilizing the atrium, and it could also house

small shops, or boutiques. As the American public tires of the infinite standardized motel, such variations as Bath House Row take a new significance and importance, as a valuable part of our heritage. It is also one which the American public is taking a renewed interest in, as it travels more and can afford longer vacations.

#### THE QUAPAW

Health Services, Incorporated (originally called the Quapaw) was built in the 1920's. It is in the Spanish Revival style, and the most impressive exterior detail is the dome, which is inset with colored tile, and surmounted with a decorative cupola. The dome rests upon an octagonal base, which has a ventilator in the form of a quatrefoil. The entrance is punctuated with a wide arch for the entrance, flanked by two smaller arches. This frontispiece is set between two sets of pilasters; the upper pair, topped with finials, suggest the Spanish plateresque. The parapet is finished with a double curve, and in the center is an Indian head set in a cartouche. Piers are carried up on the second floor behind this frontispiece, and they are also terminated with finials.

The sun room on the first floor is treated with an arcade resting on piers with capitals. The roofs are of tile.

The interior is notable especially for an underground grotto in the basement from which a hot spring emerges. This is a romantic and mysterious place, and one that would appeal to tourists, if properly developed.

### THE OZARK

The Ozark is another bath house, built circa 1920. It is also in the Spanish Revival style, and it is a good example of this period. On the front there is the ubiquitous sunporch, so much a part of building in the first third of the 20th century. It has wide French casements and is enriched with colored tile spandrels. It is set between low towers whose windows have frames made up of three receding planes, which suggests the coming Art Deco movement, which began about 1925 with the Paris Exposition of that year. Over these windows there is a cartouche. The second floor of the towers behind the small one-story towers is also treated with windows which have the Art Deco frames and above are small flat panels in the same mode. The towers are finished with flat pilasters flanking open arches, and they are topped with tile roofs and finials. This building is also covered with a tile roof.

The interior is a straight-forward bath house, without any elaborate or unusual features.

### THE BUCKSTAFF

The Buckstaff is one of the best preserved of all of the bath houses on Bath House Row. It is of brick with white stucco and wood trim, and is in the style called Edwardian.

Built circa 1920, it has a colonnade of colossal white Doric columns, which frame seven bays. This colonnade of engaged columns is set in antis between brick pavilions. In front there is a wide



sitting terrace embellished with a low parapet and classical urns, feilled with small trees. There are brick parapets over the pavilions and over the third, or attic story. The main cornice suggests the Roman Doric order with paterae over each column. They are carefully designed, as they have entasis. On the attic story, over each column is a white urn, and there is another classic cornice over it, but slightly smaller in scale. The interior is typical of the other bath houses. This building is an important element in the group which makes up Bath House Row.

#### THE LAMAR

Rather similar in character to the SUPERIOR BATHS and built also about 1920, the LAMAR is more interesting stylistically. It indicates the California school, or Bay Region school, of modern American architecture. The sun porch windows are of the three part time, with a wide center bay, that has come to be known as the Chicago window. The entrance is expressed by a flat pediment, which is repeated also over the two-story rear portion. There are very simple cornices in stucco, and the whole building is also in stucco. The parapets and the pediments are finished with a row of tile.

The present Park Service Building is an exceptionally good example of the Spanish Revival, and should be preserved with the rest of the group. It could be devoted entirely to offices with visitor theatre, shops, and exhibits housed in the other bath houses.

It is strongly recommended that additional fountains be added to

the area, and particularly that the cascade of steaming water planned some years ago by the Park Service, should be built leading from the Promenade down to the street.

It is my recommendation that the old bath house row be turned into a modern health resort with emphasis on exercise, weight reducing, and executive physical fitness programs, rest and recreation, along the lines of Elizabeth Arden's very successful Main Chance in Arizona. Such programs could be easily integrated with the big hotels in the area in a program to rejuvenate the downtown of Hot Springs.

*Conclusion*

Another important architectural resource along Central Avenue are the superb group of late Victorian metal and iron-front commercial buildings. These include the Douglas Building, and the Iron Block of 1891; the latter a particularly outstanding example of this period. These buildings are as good as any of the same variety in Colorado or California, where they are important tourist attractions. The Black Orchid, the Oyster Bar, and Doug's Restaurant of 1889, are also important examples. The latter is identical to the old Opera House, now demolished, and may be by the same designer. At any rate, it is out of the same metal catalog. Nearer Bath House Row are the exceptionally interesting Gothic Revival Plaza Hotel, and the Club. Other important buildings of this kind are clustered at the far end of the block opposite the National Park Service Building. This is another fine group of late Victorian Buildings, but the area between these buildings and the Park Building could then be converted to a park or shopping mall. One advantage of these false-fronts is that they were

only meant to be fronts, and today we can upgrade the buildings behind them without paying much attention to the building, so long as the fronts are preserved. It is unfortunate that Milwaukee Hotel is to be demolished, as this is the sort of building that was revitalized with such splendid results in Larimer Square in Denver. However, the open square in front of this edifice could form a new shopping mall to break the linear form of Central Avenue.

Other important structures are the Hill Wheatley Hotel, of 1904, the Thompson Building and the Mountain Valley Water Building. These are excellent examples of Edwardian Neo-Classical, and they add a special charm to the streetscape. The Diamond Exchange is also worthy of note.

The Medical Arts Building has two virtues. It is a solid example of Art-Deco, a style originated at the Paris Exposition of 1925. It is carefully designed with handsome ornaments and even the lighting fixtures are in the style. It could be a part of a new vertical museum which would lead to the top of the mountain, and finally to a tower, from which the visitor could obtain a splendid view of the whole countryside. This could be a popular tourist attraction. The Wax Museum and the hotel next to it are all of architectural interest. However, the fine metal and pressed-metal buildings are well worth preserving; so by revitalizing them, adding towers and access to the mountains, a museum area, parking facilities, shopping plazas, restaurants and fountains, Central Avenue could again be restored to its earlier economic success.

The excellent group of wooden late-nineteenth century Victorian houses should be carefully restored and preserved. If opened from time-to-time, or even made into museums, they could be a great tourist attraction. Wildwood is an outstanding residence of this period in the Queen Anne-Stick style. The adjoining Lea house, and the two next to it, with their beautiful old trees, make a block of unusual distinction. There are others scattered around town, certainly enough to provide special tours that would be of great interest to visitors. In other states houses of this period are carefully maintained. For example, the Governor's House in Sacramento, California, which was of this type, was the official home of the chief executive.

✓✓ The three groups of old buildings in Hot Springs National Park, which include the Bath Houses, the commercial structures on Central Avenue, and the late-Victorian houses lend a distinction and a charm to the city which are an important resource, if they are restored, upgraded and used for modern purposes. Together with the hot springs, the beauty of the surrounding countryside, and the parks, this area could again be the center of activity of the whole region.

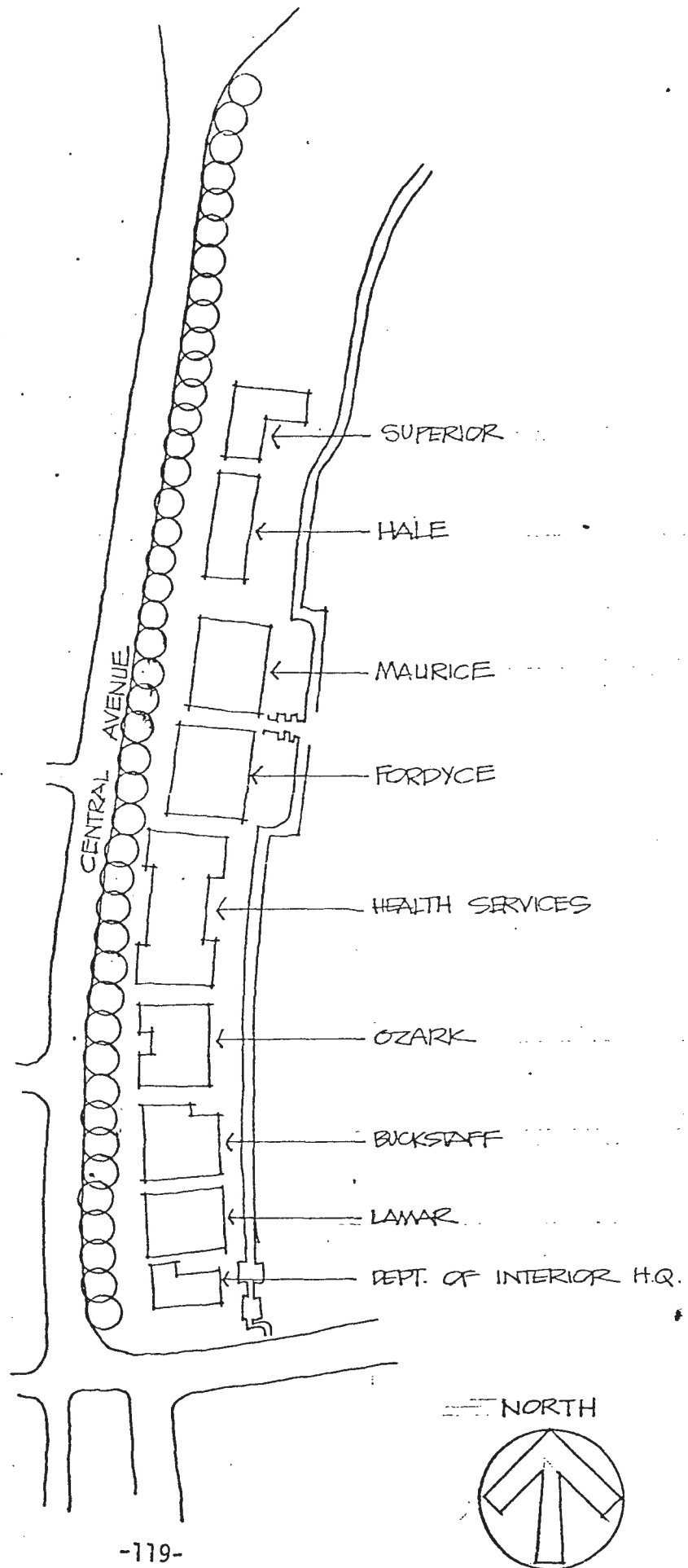
## SURVEY OF PHYSICAL CONDITION OF BATH HOUSES

### SUMMARY STATEMENT

1. Except as noted in this paragraph, all of the bath houses are soundly constructed and will hold up indefinitely if maintained. Three houses, however, have structural defects which are significant. They are also correctable. The Maurice and the Health Services Building have cracks in their exterior bearing walls, which most likely were caused by settlement shortly after the buildings were constructed. These walls can be adequately repaired by filling and grouting. The floor structure of the first floor of the Hale Bath House requires a careful engineering investigation to determine the state of deterioration of steel structural members which are exposed to a high humidity environment (see Appendix Number 2 for a drawing which shows the problem). This defect is also correctable. But the solution depends upon the degree of rusting on the web of the wide flange beams which is not visible from below.
2. The buildings are basically of masonry load-bearing construction and because of this cannot be considered highly flexible for remodeling purposes. New uses for these buildings will have to work within the limitations of the primary interior walls and columns.

3. Most of the electrical work for all of the buildings has been replaced within the last ten years and appears to be operating satisfactorily.
4. Heat for all the buildings is supplied with gas-fired boilers. Most of the houses have two boilers but rarely are they both required so that one operates as a stand-by. Boilers are regularly inspected.
5. The main underlying storm sewer, a structure approximately 16' wide and 16' high that drains the central part of Hot Springs, runs underneath the front lawn of all the buildings and in some cases under the porch footings. When the creek floods, water enters the basements of the houses and at times has flooded the basements to a height of six feet. This has occurred at least twice in the last 20 years.
6. There are springs in some of the buildings and no doubt the seepage from these springs has contributed to the slight settlement and movement of the buildings. This is not a serious problem.

PLAN OF BATHHOUSE ROW



SUMMARY OF APPROXIMATE\* SQUARE FOOTAGES, BATHHOUSE ROW

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Excluding Basement</u>
Lamar	24,000 sf	17,537 sf
Buckstaff	30,700	28,360
Ozark	19,000	14,770
Health Services	37,600	22,610
Fordyce	33,300	27,300
Maurice	26,100	19,660
Hale	15,900	10,900
Superior	14,500	9,690

\*These are gross square footages and were made from small scale site plans plus walk through sketched plans for floor to floor relationships. These numbers are approximate.



## SUPERIOR BATH HOUSE

This building is of concrete construction with exterior red brick walls. It is the least attractive of the bath houses but is basically in good condition.