

Hot Springs National Park
Overview of Historical Research:
Annotated Bibliography and Review of Plans for Future Studies

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- This Overview of Historical Research for Hot Springs National Park has been prepared for the Regional Historian in the Southwest Region of the National Park Service. It consists of a critical review of historical research completed to date, a discussion of research currently in progress and research proposed in the Park's planning documents, and a concluding statement assessing the historical research program at Hot Springs National Park.

The review of completed research is concerned primarily with studies prepared by National Park Service historians, and studies prepared by other institutions specifically for the National Park Service.

L. Research Completed.

1. Benson, Forrest M. and Donald S. Libbey. History of Hot Springs National Park. n.d. (probably 1955). Pp. 43. Unpublished.

This is an amateur history: it treats the history of Hot Springs, from the earliest Indian occupation to the mid-1950s, in the most general terms. Very few primary sources have been used and there are no footnotes.

The study is useful as a basic introduction to the history of Hot Springs. (Actually, the Park interpretive booklet, "Valley of the Vapors," by M.S. Bedinger, is more useful for such purposes.) Benson and Libbey's work cannot be considered a professional historical study of Hot Springs.

2. Cromwell, Neyland, Truemper, Millett, and Gatchell, Inc. Historic Structures Report; Hot Springs National Park. November 1973. Pp. 169. Unpublished.

This report is really a preservation guide for Bathhouse Row. All eight bathhouses, as well as the Park Administration Building and the Promenade, are treated. The current physical condition of each structure is discussed and documented, recommendations for repair and preservation treatment are made, and cost estimates for the work are given.

This work should not be called a Historic Structures Report. There is no Historical Data Section; virtually no historical data are offered for any of the structures. It is also unsatisfactory as the Architectural Data Section of a Historic Structures Report, for information is limited to existing conditions; there is no discussion of architectural changes over time.

3. Cromwell, Neyland, Truemper, Levy, and Gatchell, Inc. Fordyce Bathhouse and Maurice Bathhouse: Interior Preservation Guide. December 1975. Pp. 71. Unpublished.

This report includes, for each bathhouse, a description of the building and its present physical condition, marked drawings and written descriptions of specific problem areas, and specifications for repair and preservation work to be accomplished by subcontractors. Virtually no historic data on the two bathhouses are given.

4. Special History Report: The Maurice Spring, Hot Springs National Park. 1978. Pp. 3 + illustrations. Unpublished.

This report was prepared by Hot Springs National Park staff in connection with National Park Service plans to relandscape the plaza between the Maurice and Hale Bathhouses. In the course of

this relandscaping, the Maurice Springs and thermal water reservoir (dating from 1896), a masonry wall, and a cup fountain will be exposed and restored to their appearance during the 1890s. The report provides documentation to support that restoration.

A "Historical Background" section sets forth what documentary information exists regarding the dates of construction of the Maurice Spring Reservoir. The question of when electric lights were installed near the Spring, and the question of when the Spring area was closed to the public, have proved more difficult to answer. Statements of older residents of Hot Springs indicate that the Spring was in use until some time in the 1920s or 30s. Park staff members are continuing to research the matter, and intend to find more definite dates for the installation of the lights and the closing of the spring. When they do so, the two gaps in the Historical Background section, in which reference is made to specific dates but the dates are not offered, can be filled in.

Three historic photographs provide clear, complete evidence of the appearance of the spring area around the turn of the century.

While the report as presently written is flawed by the absence of concrete data on the later history of the Maurice Spring reservoir and by the absence of definite dates for the two photographs, nevertheless it is quite adequate to support the planned program of relandscaping and restoration.

II. Research in Progress

1. Several research projects are being carried out by the interpretive staff at Hot Springs National Park. One of the interpretive themes at the Park is "The Story of Stone," or the story of man's use of novaculite from prehistoric times to the present. Ongoing efforts to research historic uses of novaculite have included interviews with local residents, correspondence with companies involved in the manufacture of abrasives, and documentary research.

2. A photographic archive is being developed by the interpretive staff. Slides are being made of each historic photograph in the Park's collection. The collection is being augmented by duplicating photographs in private and other public collections.

III. Research in Program

1. One of the archeological research projects proposed in the Hot Springs Resources Management Plan (approved 8/77) involves historical research. This is Archeology Project No. 1, titled "Archeological Survey of Hot Springs National Park" (p. 8). It calls for an intensive

archeological site survey of the Park, including test excavation of selected sites. Discovered sites are to be flagged and placed on an archeological base map. A historic site survey will be conducted as part of this survey.

10-238 Package 156 has been prepared and was approved 10/77. The Package, titled "Conduct Archeological Investigations and Surveys," agrees with the project description in the Resources Management Plan. The Package describes the survey as a "comprehensive archeological and historical site survey of entire park area." It calls for the photographing of sites, and for a scientific report of the survey, which would "identify the total range of cultural history for each environmental zone."

This project is listed as Priority 4 in the Outline of Planning Requirements (approved 3/1/77).

2. History Projects 1 and 2 in the Resources Management Plan are closely related. History Project 1 is "Formulation of Historic Structures Maintenance Plan" (p. 14), in which it is proposed to prepare such a plan "for each of the bathhouses on Bathhouse Row." History Project 2 is "Formulation of Historic Structures Reports" (p. 15), in which it is proposed to prepare a Historic Structures Report for "each of the buildings along Bathhouse Row including Park Headquarters."

The proposals have been incorporated into the general plans for the structures on Bathhouse Row. For each of the nine historic structures on Bathhouse Row - the eight bathhouses and the Park Administration Building - a comprehensive 10-238 Package has been prepared. The packages call for rehabilitation, and in some cases rehabilitation and conversion, of the structures. Included in each package are plans for the preparation of a Historic Structures Report and a Historic Preservation Guide for the structure. (Some of these 10-238 packages will probably be revised, since they call for actions that are no longer appropriate.)

Thus, a Historic Structures Report and Historic Preservation Guide for Maurice Bathhouse are called for as part of 10-238 Package 138, "Rehabilitation and Convert Maurice Bathhouse to Auditorium," approved 10/74. The project is Priority 7 in the Outline of Planning Requirements.

As HSR and HPG for the Administration Building are called for as part of 10-238 Package 141, "Convert Administration Building/Visitor Center to entirely Administration Building," approved 9/77. This project is Priority 8 in the Outline of Planning Requirements.

An HSR and HPG for Superior Bathhouse are called for as part of 10-238 Package 146, "Superior Bathhouse Heat Exchange," approved 11/74. This project is Priority 12 in the Outline of Planning Requirements.

An HSR and HPG for Lamar Bathhouse are called for as part of 10-238 Package 148, "Lamar Bathhouse," approved 11/74. This project is Priority 12 in the Outline of Planning Requirements.

An HSR and HPG for Ozark Bathhouse are called for as part of 10-238 Package 149, "Ozark Bathhouse," approved 11/74. This project is Priority 12 in the Outline of Planning Requirements.

An HSR and HPG for Buckstaff Bathhouse are called for as part of 10-238 Package 150, "Buckstaff Bathhouse," approved 11/74. This project is Priority 12 in the Outline of Planning Requirements.

An HSR and HPG for Hale Bathhouse are called for as part of 10-238 Package 151, "Hale Bathhouse," approved 11/74. This project is Priority 12 in the Outline of Planning Requirements.

An HSR and HPG for Quapaw Bathhouse are called for as part of 10-238 Package 152, "Quapaw Bathhouse," approved 11/74. This project is Priority 12 in the Outline of Planning Requirements.

Historic Structures Reports on the three Bathhouse Row structures owned and operated by the Park Service--the Fordyce, the Maurice, and the Administration Building--should be prepared before any others. Specifically, priority should be given to HSR's for the Fordyce and Maurice, as work on restoring these structures should begin as soon as possible. It should be noted that the two studies completed by Cromwell, et al., Historic Structures Report, Hot Springs National Park (1973) and Fordyce Bathhouse and Maurice Bathhouse: Interior Preservation Guide (1975), do not qualify as completed Historic Structures Reports for the Maurice and Fordyce. Very little information on architectural changes over time is offered in either study. Both studies are essentially interim preservation guides.

History Project 2, in addition to calling for the formulation of Historic Structures Reports for each of the structures on Bathhouse Row, also states that "a separate Historic Structure Report will be prepared for all other historic structures within the park". Currently, the only other plans for preparation of HSR's involve the Ricks Estate. It is stated as part of Priority 11 in the Outline of Planning Requirements that a Historic Structures Report and Historic Preservation Guide will be prepared as part of 10-238 Package 147.

Package 147 calls for the study, stabilization, and rehabilitation of the water wheel, boat house, bridge and dam on the Ricks Estate.

3. History Project #3 in the Resources Management Plan, "Investigation of Research Topics" (p. 16), encompasses four historical research topics. These are: Aboriginal Novaculite Mining, Administrative History of Hot Springs, Indian Culture of Hot Springs, and Special History Report of Bathhouse Row. Two of these topics have been programmed in 10-238's. They are the Administrative History of Hot Springs and Special History Report of Bathhouse Row.

a. The Administrative History is justified in the Project Description as follows: "The administrative history of Hot Springs extends from the 1830s to the present. While a relatively complete account of 19th century laws are available, a legislative history is needed."

10-238 Package 153 has been prepared and was approved 11/74. The Package description is brief; it says only: "Prepare needed study document, that is an Administrative History of Hot Springs National Park." The description should include the period of time to be considered in the study. Hot Springs National Park did not come into existence until 1921; however, an Administrative History should cover the entire period beginning with the movements leading to the Federal reservation of the Hot Springs area in 1832. The Resources Management Plan states that this is the proper period for study (p. 16).

The Administrative History should include a detailed account of the dispute over land titles resolved in the Court of Claims during the 1870s.

b. The Special History Report of Bathhouse Row is described in the Resources Management Plan as a "narrative and graphic record" of the various bathing facilities established since the early 1800s along the Toe of Hot Springs Mountain, in the area now known as Bathhouse Row. The RMP also states that the report should address the general phenomenon of the health resort spa in 19th and early 20th century American and European culture, as well as "a study of the Spring's alleged curative powers."

The Special History Report should be as much a social history as a structural history of Bathhouse Row. Who came to the Springs? From where? From what social class and for what purposes? All these questions should be addressed in the study, and the changing social atmosphere that prevailed at the Springs should be examined. The history of Bathhouse Row must necessarily involve some elements of the history of the greater community of Hot Springs, and such topics as transportation systems to the Springs, and other bathing establishments outside of Bathhouse Row, should be treated. The

American cultural institution of the thermal spring spa should be discussed; it seems reasonable to examine the subject of the spa in European culture only insofar as it helps explain the American cultural phenomena of the health resort spa.

10-238 Package 125 has been prepared and revised; the current version, titled "Special History Report Study of Bathhouse Row," was approved 10/77. The Package Description is brief; it says only: "Research and writing a narrative history of Bathhouse Row and its place in the history of Spas in the U.S." This does not do justice to the project description given in the Resources Management Plan. The Package Description should include the dates of the period under consideration (early 1800s to present) and more information on the topics to be explored: i.e., the changing appearance of the Bathhouse Row area, the social environment of the Hot Springs, the efficacy of the thermal water treatment, etc.

Package 125 is listed in the Outline of Planning Requirements as Priority 5, "Historic Resource Study." It is stated that "a study is needed of Bathhouse Row to identify and evaluate historic resources as a guide for future management of these resources." This is not what Package 125 calls for. Package 125 calls for a general history of the Bathhouse Row area, not for a study of the specific structures now standing on Bathhouse Row. OPR Priority 5 should be revised and made consistent with the description of the "Special History Report" given in the Resources Management Plan (p. 16) and in 10-238 Package 125.

The two other topics proposed in History Project 3 of the Resources Management Plan are "Aboriginal Novaculite Mining" and "Indian Culture of Hot Springs." No 10-238 has been prepared for either topic, and these projects are not listed in the Outline of Planning Requirements.

c. Aboriginal Novaculite Mining. As presently described, this topic involves both archeological and historical research. The project description in the Resources Management Plan states that American settlers' use of the novaculite is to be studied as well as Indian mining and trading practices. While the use of novaculite by white settlers could be studied by a historian, Indian mining and trading would be best investigated by an archeologist.

Therefore, it seems advisable to divide this project into two parts. The study of aboriginal mining practices and aboriginal trade in novaculite could be incorporated into the proposed Archeology Project 2, "Novaculite Study" (p. 10 of the Resources Management Plan). The historical research project would then be limited to white American use of the stone, and, rather than focussing on the

early settler period exclusively, it should be expanded to include the entire 19th and 20th century novaculite industry. In that way, the study would address the interpretive theme, "The Story of Stone," and could complement the ongoing research into the novaculite industry currently being conducted by the Park's interpretive staff. (See above under "Research in Progress.")

d. The fourth research topic, Indian Culture of Hot Springs, is described as follows: "Considerable general information is available concerning the Caddo Indians of south-central Arkansas. But little is specifically known about the tribe in relation to the Hot Springs area. Documentation of their occupation of the region is needed, as is an understanding of their relationship to the thermal springs."

Such documentary information as is available on this topic should be synthesized with archeological information on Caddo sites gathered in the course of the archeological site survey of the Park, currently proposed (p. 8 of the Resources Management Plan, 10-238 Package 156). An ethnohistorian would be best suited to undertake this project; the study should wait until the site survey has been completed.

It may also be advisable to expand the scope of this project. While the Caddo figure most prominently in the Indian history of Hot Springs, other tribes, among them the Quapaw and Cherokee, used the area as well. A study of the relationships of these tribes to the Hot Springs would be very useful, and could be incorporated into this study of the "Indian Culture of Hot Springs."

IV. Conclusions

The current body of historical and archeological research on Hot Springs National Park is not impressive. Studies are either preliminary in nature (Baker 1975), outdated and unsatisfactory (Benson and Libbey, n.d.), or lacking in historical data (Cromwell et.al. 1973, 1975).

However, the current planning documents propose a comprehensive program of historical and archeological research. The archeological and historic site survey (Archeology Project 1, RMP) is much-needed. It will fulfill E.O. 11593 requirements while adding to our knowledge of the Park and providing material for interpretive programs.

A Novaculite Study (Archeology Project 2, RMP) is also needed; it is recommended that this study be expanded to include an analysis of aboriginal mining practices as well of the Indian novaculite trade system, thereby encompassing part of Topic 1 in History Project 3.

Much-needed Historic Structures Reports on the eight bathhouses and the Park Administration Building on Bathhouse Row will be accomplished as part of the general programs of rehabilitation and conversion of those structures. High priority should be given to Historic Structures Reports on the Fordyce and Maurice.

A Historic Structures Report should be prepared on the Park Service-owned properties of the Ricks Estate, which currently include only the water wheel and boat house. While specific plans for an HSR are not shown on the SWRO copy of the 10-238 Package 147, it seems clear that preparation of the HSR has been planned as part of the general plans for study, stabilization, and rehabilitation of these structures.

The four topics for research proposed in History Project 3 of the RMP are well-chosen. The topic "Aboriginal Novaculite Mining," should, however, be revised so that the study of aboriginal mining practices is included as part of Archeology Project 1, and the study of early American settlers' mining practices and use of novaculite stands alone.

The "Administrative History of Hot Springs " is an important historical research need at Hot Springs. Hot Springs has a unique historical background among National Parks, and its legislative history is complex. It deserves careful, scholarly treatment. The study should include discussion of the land claims cases tried in the 1870s, and of the Federal Registration Board.

"Indian Culture of Hot Springs" is a valid subject for investigation, but should be a synthesis of archeological and documentary information. It should wait for implementation until the archeological and historic site survey of Hot Springs has been completed.

"Special History Report of Bathhouse Row," is extremely important and, if executed properly, should fill many historical research needs of the Park. Such a study should amount to a social and structural history of the bathing industry at the Hot Springs, beginning with the early 1800s and continuing to the present. The American cultural institution of the thermal spring spa should be discussed.

Hot Springs' Chief Naturalist suggests another area for research which is not reflected in any planning document: an examination of the several chronicles of De Soto's expedition in the original Spanish, aimed at providing a definitive answer to the question of how close De Soto came to the Hot Springs area. Considerable scholarship has gone into the tracing of De Soto's route, but this

particular issue remains clouded. Interpretation of the documents on this question seems to hinge on a few key words which have been translated in various ways, yielding various meanings. Examinations of the chronicles in the original Spanish, by someone well-versed in 16th century Spanish usage, might give a final conclusive answer to the problem.

When the proposed research projects discussed above have been completed, we should have a thorough knowledge of the history and prehistory of Hot Springs. Several of the proposed research projects, such as the archeological site survey and the historical study of Bathhouse Row, may, through their discoveries, prompt further research. At this time, however, no needed projects in historical research beyond those outlined in the planning documents can be identified.