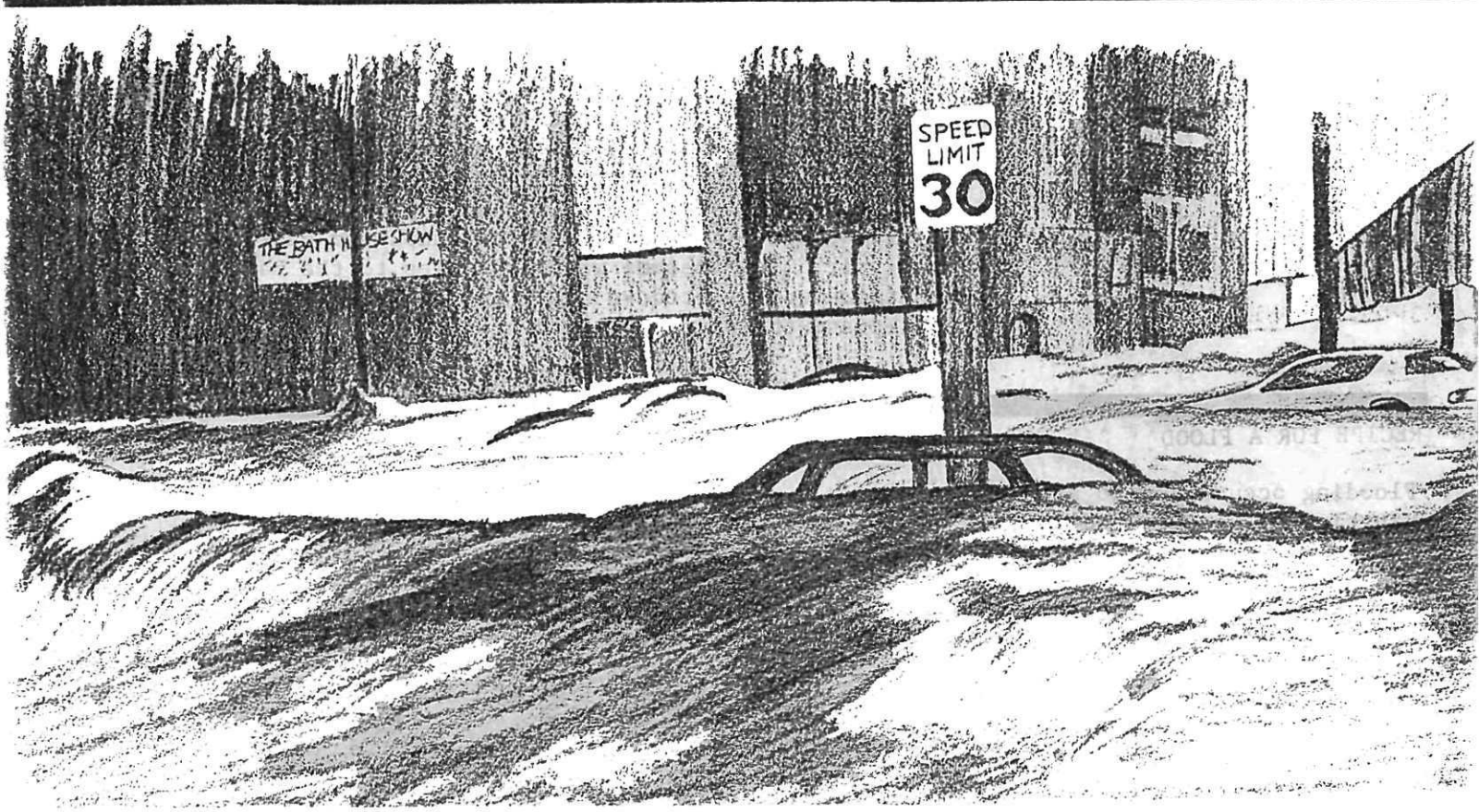
HOT SPRINGS

National Park
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



THE FLOOD OF 1990

Hot Springs National Park and the historic downtown area of the City of Hot Springs experienced a major flash flood during the night of May 19-20. Nearly 13 inches of rain fell in less than 24 hours, most of it within a 7 hour period. The rapid runoff created a river of water which travelled down Central Avenue, inundating basements and filling ground-level buildings to a depth of 3 feet in the Bathhouse Row area. Several landslides occurred in the surrounding mountains.

The force of the flowing water pushed cars along Central Avenue, broke storefront windows, knocked out doors, bent parking meters and rails, carried off cement curbs and uprooted trees and shrubs.

Look for evidence of the flood. Close observation of the buildings' outside walls will show high water-marks. Imagine the wooden sign outside the Fordyce Bathhouse Visitor Center completely underwater!

RESULTS OF THE FLOOD

One life was lost as a result of the flood and property damage was extensive. Many shops and businesses experienced near-complete loss of merchandise and furnishings. In spite of this, most stores had reopened within five days.

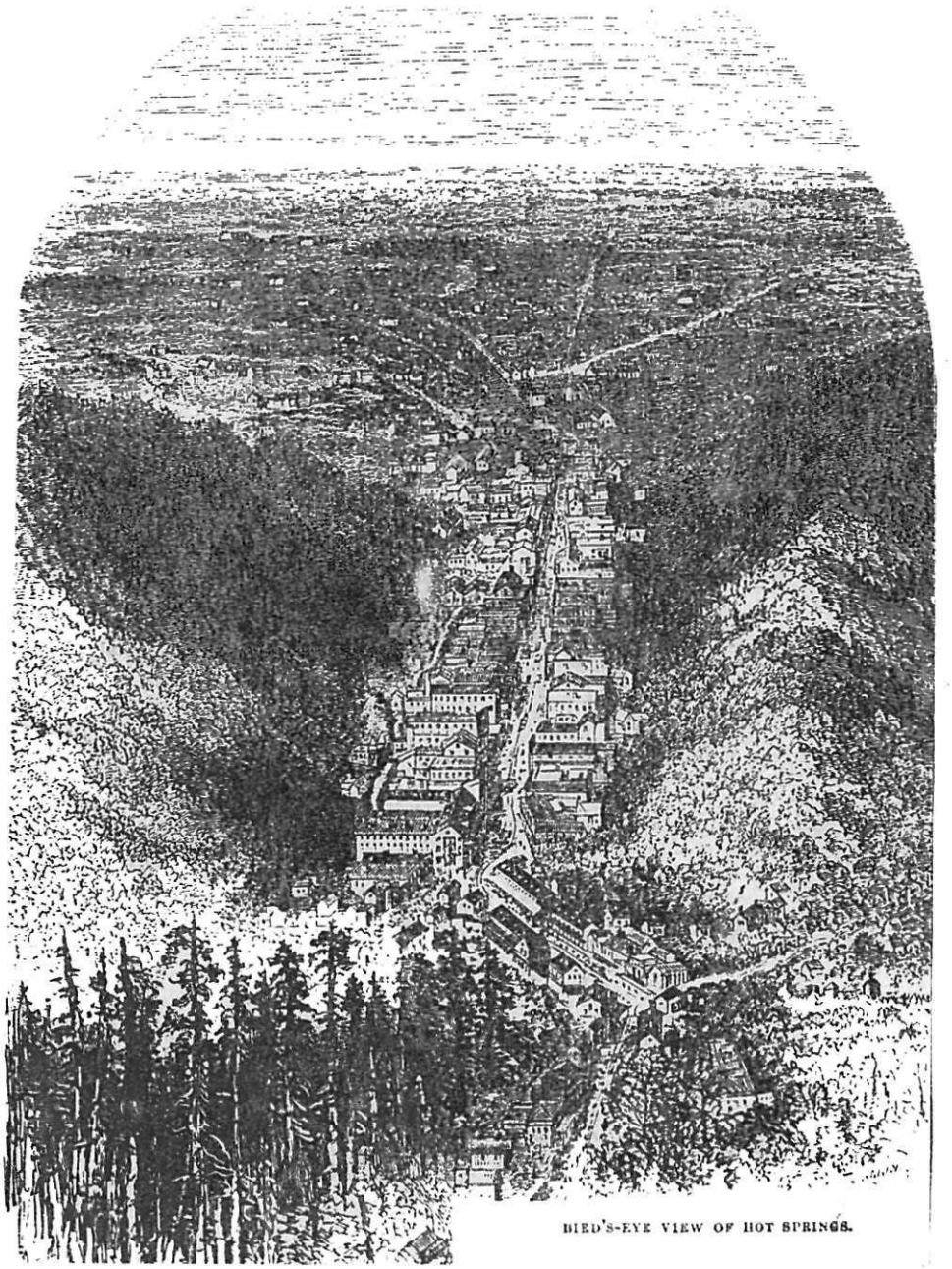
The basement of the year-old Fordyce Bathhouse Visitor Center flooded to a depth of over nine feet, engulfing the public restrooms, storage areas, and panels and controls for the building's heating, air conditioning and electrical systems.

Within the park, the greatest concern was for the thermal water supply. The basement of the administration building at the south end of Bathhouse Row, which contains the thermal water collection reservoir, was inundated. The flood waters covered the two main distribution pumps and contaminated the reservoir. The thermal water supplies to the bathhouses and fountains were shut down until the water system was decontaminated and the pumps repaired.

RECIPE FOR A FLOOD

Flooding occurs due to a combination of weather and local topography. The Bathhouse Row area lies within a narrow V-shaped valley, a fact somewhat hidden by the tall buildings lining Central Avenue. Hot Springs Creek, which historically flowed through the center of the valley, now lies within a tunnel under Central Avenue. The creek arch cannot hold the excessive runoff caused by torrential rainfall; the result is a river of water which flows above ground along Central Avenue.

Floods are a part of Hot Springs' history. Periodically, minor floods occur in the downtown area. The last "great" flood was in 1923, when floodwaters also knocked out storefront windows and propelled vehicles and other large objects down the avenue.



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF HOT SPRINGS.