

"...commemorating Events, Places, and People."

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***Grand Opening
of the
Fordyce Bathhouse
Visitor Center***

Shortly after the Fordyce Bathhouse opened in 1915 a premier publication proclaimed:

*The FORDYCE is the
MOST PRACTICAL,
COMPLETE *and*
LUXURIOUS BATH
HOUSE *in the* WORLD*

A bronze plaque in the lobby exemplified its purpose and intent:

**Dedicated to
Health and Happiness**

**Built by Samuel W. Fordyce as a grateful
acknowledgement of restored health and
dedicated to all who are weary and suffering.
May health and happiness accompany you
all the days of your life.**

Col. Samuel Fordyce came to Hot Springs from Alabama by train and then by stagecoach shortly after the War Between the States. Very ill, he recovered and prospered, living to a vigorous old age. Prominent in the railroad business, he owned hotels and bathhouses, the waterworks and street car company in Hot Springs, as well as other enterprises. With funds from these sources he built a magnificent bathhouse far out of proportion to its income generating capacity.

In addition to excellent equipment and superb services, this bathhouse, designed to serve the well-to-do, bathed the senses with splendid furnishings and distinctive art which played on water themes.

Even before entering the door the imposing exterior of patterned brick and terra cotta beckoned prospective bathers. The window surrounds featured classic faces, water containers and sea creatures viewed from above by Neptune, god of the Sea. Shields, scrolls and garlands connect separate elements. A copper clad marquee ornamented with glass, which identifies in lights the name of the bathhouse, protects those lounging on the porch. Entering the lobby the opulent image is fortified by banks of bronze lockboxes back of the service desk, and transom windows aglow in a stained glass pond of lotus blossoms. These windows in turn cast a warm tone to the light on the marble walls. At each end the cherub fountains reflect the fondness of children for water and a desire to emulate appearances of Spas of Europe.

The central Men's Bathhall sports a stained glass skylight complete with Neptune's daughter, accompanied by a man and a woman, and a host of fish, frogs and other aquatic life. The fountain below commemorates the European discovery of the Hot Springs and contact with the Indians. Massive marble benches, suggestive of those of ancient Rome, offers an overview of the scene.

The marble bench in the Ladies' Bathhall is variegated tan and white marble and the stained glass windows on the entire side suggests a sweep of peaceful country views.

On the 3rd floor, the Music Room adds more distinction. This lounge, open to all bathhouse guests, also has stained glass panels in an arch in a building full of arches. As a place richly furnished for leisure pursuits, the grand piano and billiard table appealed to differing interests. The tile floors in this room are more colorful and intricately patterned than those throughout the rest of the building. The area offered space to talk with friends and associates, read, write letters and postcards, and enjoy the surroundings. Private rooms in a bustling bathhouse offered quiet and extra service, as well as a spacious place to dress for the gym.

The highest degree of specialization is represented by the Hubbard Tub, the Scotch Douche and various gadgets in the Electromechano Room. The complete needs of the patrons were satisfied in the Chiropody Room where feet were pampered, in the gym where reflexes and muscles were trained, in the beauty parlor where improved perceptions of hairdo and skin were wrought. The bathhouse overflowed with the latest contrivances available in its day.

The usual fixtures of the bathhouse, needle showers, large tubs, Sitz tubs, vapor cabinets, pack tables and massage tables dominated large portions of the building.

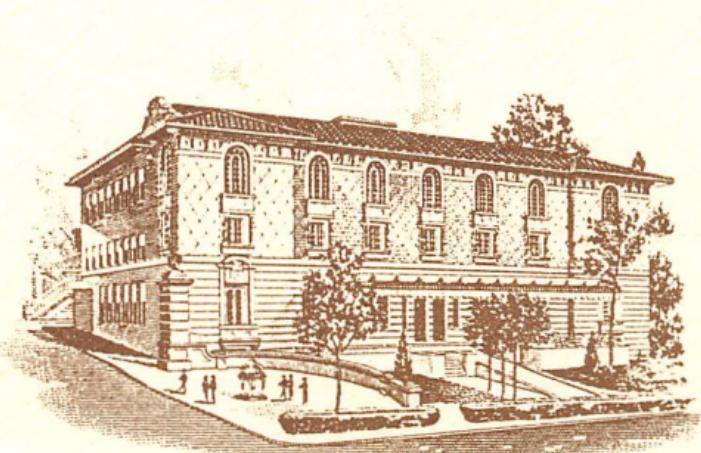
In a competitive climate in the overbuilt bathing industry, such a grand facility could not be sustained and it became the first of the bathhouses to close on Bathhouse Row. It did so in 1962.

Today, rehabilitation and conversion of the 28,000 square foot structure into the park's Visitor Center, at a cost of \$5,000,000, is many times its original construction cost of \$142,000. The essence of the original bathhouse is retained in its architecture and furnishings.

As a Visitor Center, the building contains exhibits and audiovisual aids which tell the story of the American Spa and inform visitors about the park.

Today the building is renewed as the finest bathhouse on Bathhouse Row and takes up its new role as the park's Visitor Center.

FORDYCE BATH HOUSE VISITOR CENTER



GRAND OPENING

