

Preserving Our Heritage

The National Park Service is charged by Congress to "preserve and protect" the resources in each park. In order to preserve the integrity of the Bathhouse Row National Historic Landmark District, the National Park Service will lease the vacant bathhouses when rehabilitation is complete.

Negotiations with local architects Anthony Taylor and Bob Kempkes and business partner Don Harper to lease the Quapaw Bathhouse have been quite successful. They recently signed a lease and will open it as a family-style spa with pools. We look forward to this new spa business on Bathhouse Row opening in 2008.

Hot Springs National Park is also negotiating with the Hot Springs Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) to lease the Ozark Bathhouse. Reviews are underway by NPS regional leasing specialists.

If you are interested in leasing one of the bathhouses, please call the superintendent's office at 501-623-2824 or e-mail HOSP_Superintendent@nps.gov.

The Story of the American Spa

These hot springs were sought after for relief of ailments like rheumatism or arthritis from the late 1700s and were the terminus of the Dunbar-Hunter Expedition commissioned by President Jefferson in 1804.

Bathhouses or places to take a bath in private became part of the park's landscape as soon as the springs became popular in the mid 1800s. The bathhouses became bigger and better as building materials became readily available, and transportation to the area improved. By the late 1800s the bathhouses in Hot Springs, Arkansas, rivaled bathhouses at the spas in Europe.

Bathing in the springs in their natural state or in the wild was not a sought after pastime. People wanted all the convenience of a modern experience, and the owners of the hotels and bathhouses did their best to provide that. Large luxurious hotels and bathhouses catered to wealthy visitors and smaller accommodations with less luxurious amenities hosted those of average income.

Eventually the government even provided free bathing services for those who could not pay for baths recommended by their physician. A Public Health Service Clinic operating within the free bathhouse was one of the first facilities in the U. S. to use penicillin.

Bathing here peaked in the mid 1940s when close to 1 million baths were given in a year. As modern medicines became available, the demand for therapeutic baths declined. This caused economic difficulty for the bathhouses, and many closed leading eventually to the current leasing program.



These photos of the Hale Bathhouse illustrate rehabilitation work. On the left is the restoration completed recently in the lobby while on the right is a historic photo of the same space in 1938.