

Fordyce Bathhouse

The site of Fordyce Bathhouse was home to several bathhouses and shops. Sam W. Fordyce had an interest in the Central Bathhouse on the site. The bathhouse burned in 1878, and the site was subsequently awarded to Sam W. Fordyce et al for a new bathhouse. The Palace Hotel was erected on the site in 1880, and razed in 1914 to make way for yet another new bathhouse, the Fordyce.



Palace Bathhouse

The Fordyce opened March 1, 1915. Designed by Little Rock architects Mann and Stern and constructed under the supervision of owner Sam Fordyce's son John, the building eventually cost over \$212,000 to build, equip, and furnish. Sam Fordyce deliberately waited until Maurice's bathhouse was

complete to build his own, determined to improve on whatever amenities the Maurice offered. Totalling approximately 28,000 square feet, the Fordyce is the largest bathhouse on the Row. It has three main floors, two courtyards, and a basement under most of the building. The building's second and third floor windows have ornate ivory-glazed window surrounds of sculpted terra cotta with the bust of Neptune centered atop each of the second floor windows in the front. The interior features marble walls, benches, and stairs; terra-cotta fountains; stained glass skylights and windows; a wood-paneled coed gymnasium (at the time said to be the largest of its kind in the state); and private staterooms. Even the basement was bustling with activity, with its bowling alley and its quartz-crystal ornamented spring display. The bathhouse provided more services than any other bathhouse on the Row. In addition to the standard hydrotherapy, electrotherapy, massage, and mercury treatments, the management offered a full range of chiropody services, a beauty parlor, a shoe shine stand, an elegant assembly room complete with grand piano, a pool table in the men's parlor, iced thermal water, Zander exercise machines, a roof garden, and many other amenities. The Fordyce became the first bathhouse on the Row to go out of business when it suspended operations on June 30, 1962, but it was extensively restored by 1989 and is now enjoying a renaissance as a historically furnished museum. It also functions as the park's visitor center.