



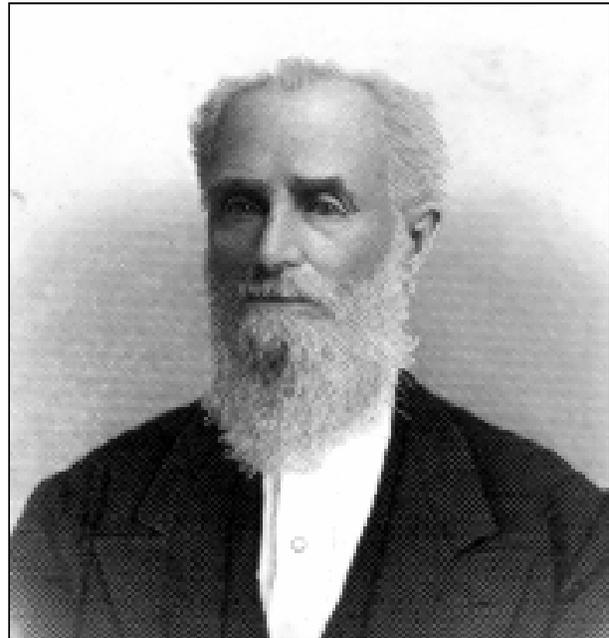
THE HEYDAY OF WHITTINGTON PARK 1897- 1914

"...charming and romantic lakes [can be found in the] Reserve Park on Whittington Avenue. This park is about half a mile long and forms the center of Whittington Avenue for that distance with the boulevard on each side...[It is] filled with fine old forest trees and the government has planted fine shrubbery and flowers, built arbors and pavilions and splendid entrances...Romantic walks wind through its whole length."

Photograph caption

The Herald, Illustrated Edition, February 1901

Whittington Park was named in honor of Hiram Abiff Whittington, an early Hot Springs resident born on January 14, 1805, in Boston, Massachusetts. He moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, in December, 1826, where he worked as a printer for several years until Little Rock merchant John McLane offered him the opportunity to operate a store at the hot springs.



Hiram Abiff Whittington circa 1880s

Whittington left Little Rock in 1832, settling into a log cabin in Hot Springs and establishing McLane's store there.

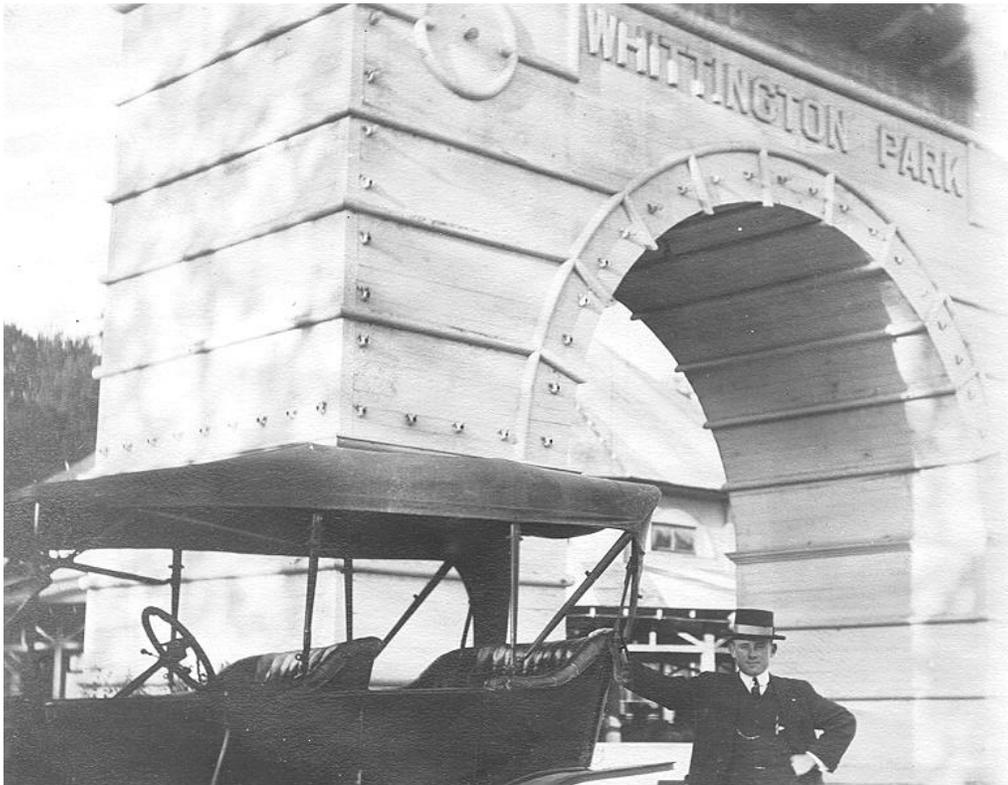
When G.W. Featherstonhaugh visited the Hot Springs in late 1834, he stayed with John Perciful in one of the settlement's four log cabins and also visited the store. As he put it, these cabins, "...in one of which was a small store, contained all the accommodation that these springs offered to travelers."

In 1836 Whittington returned to Boston to marry Mary Burnham, but he brought his bride back to Hot Springs and opened a hotel which operated until 1849. He eventually built a large Victorian home on Park Avenue, close to the intersection of Whittington, Central, and Park Avenues.

Whittington served as postmaster and county clerk in Hot Springs, and in 1835 he held office as councilman in the Arkansas General Assembly. An American Civil War veteran, Whittington was a highly respected citizen of Hot Springs until his death in 1890.



Entrance to Whittington Park in Hot Springs Reservation



Entrance to the city's Whittington Park in 1920s



Paths and bridges in
Whittington Park

The Whittington Park acreage was purchased in 1896 and increased the park's size to 911.63 acres. Robert Stevens, an Army Engineer in charge of Hot Springs Reservation improvements, envisioned landscaping improvements that would make the park a paradise. Hot Springs Reservation Superintendent William J. Little evidently agreed and ordered a set of architectural drawings to guide the beautification of the newly acquired area. These were approved on July 14, 1896 by Hoke Smith, then Secretary of the Department of the Interior, and carried out before the end of 1897. Bridges and a pavilion were to set off each of two narrow lakes, and visitors could take boats out over the water (see photograph below).





Tennis court and viewing stand

Tennis grounds with two pavilions of their own added to the park's amenities, while a five- room cottage housed the park caretaker. A bandstand was strategically placed among the paths and other landscape features. The entire park was enclosed within a substantial iron fence and approachable via iron gates with stone pillars.

Lake after draining.
planted with elephant ears



Problems soon surfaced. The lakes could not be as deep as originally planned because excavators encountered solid rock some five feet below the surface. The shallowness of the lakes, coupled with the seasonally diminished flow of Whittington Creek, turned them into stagnant, malodorous swamps in the summer. Reacting to the complaints of citizens in the neighborhood and the persistent threat of such diseases as malaria, Reservation officials and the Department of the Interior decided to eliminate the lakes.

They were filled in in 1905 under the direction of Dr. Martin A. Eisele, reservation superintendent from 1900 to 1907. The creek banks were stabilized with rock and concrete, the area was landscaped with trees and flowers, and in 1910 the concrete bridges which can still be seen today replaced the old wooden ones.

Superintendents Harry H. Myers (1909- 1913), and Charles R. Trowbridge (1913- 1914) were enthusiastic enough about Whittington Lake Reserve Park to suggest and carry out such improvements as additional bridges, a comfort station, and further landscaping. In 1920 a six- room brick residence replaced the old gardener's quarters in the park (see photograph below).



Superintendent William P. Parks (1914- 1922) was much less enthusiastic; in fact, his annual reports to the Secretary of the Interior consistently included recommendations that the area be returned to the city. The largest of the park's pavilions was removed in November, 1932; in September of 1944, the last pavilion was removed. A physical fitness trail was added in 1980 but is no longer maintained. Today the bridges over Whittington Creek are the only reminders that Whittington Park was once an elegant pleasure- ground, but it remains an oasis of shade and greenery that creates a pleasant transition between the residences to the north and the Whittington Avenue entrance to West Mountain.