

Taking the Waters: A Hydrological History of Health and Leisure in Hot Springs National Park, 1832-1932

By

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Abstract

“Taking the Waters: A Hydrological History of Health and Leisure in Hot Springs National Park, 1832-1932,” analyzes the many-textured relationships between humans and the thermal waters of Hot Springs, Arkansas. It defines Hot Springs as a cultural laboratory where Americans used the waters to gain a better understanding of popular ideas surrounding health, leisure, representation, and race, both locally and nationally in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hot Springs’ hydrological advantages brought together a diverse group of private and public interests, all pursuing the waters’ medicinal and recreational properties. Men and women, the rich and the poor, medical professionals and perceived charlatans, along with millions of patients and patrons representing different racial and ethnic identities, all descended upon this curious valley. These groups clashed over control of, and access to, this precious natural, national resource. Hot Springs Reservation (later Hot Springs National Park), situated in a liminal space between the local and the national, where all corners of the nation were represented, became a place where Americans negotiated nature’s changing role in their lives.

This dissertation offers a new history of this national landscape. It presents an idea of the national parks as places of health and healing and interrogates how officials embedded that concept in the nation’s most protected landscapes. At Hot Springs, these ideas manifested themselves on mountainsides, in bathhouse pools, doctors’ offices, and hospital wards. Hot Springs served as a pivotal site where a growing administrative state wrestled with their power of, and control over, natural resource use, public health, the government’s role in leisure pursuits, and understandings of who constituted “the public.” “Taking the Waters” expands outside the historiographical niche of national parks to address larger discourses in American history around the role of the state, natural cures within the history of medicine, and racialized landscapes.

Acknowledgements

From afar, a dissertation seems like a solitary endeavor. The arguments, claims, and style are my own, created through a long and arduous process. When describing the dissertation to friends and family, I often compared it to a puzzle with a missing piece. It was my job to not only figure out the image on the piece, one I had never seen before, but then construct the piece anew so that it fits into the larger puzzle perfectly. Oh, and that'll take roughly five years to complete. Crafting and recrafting such a project often took place by myself, on an uncomfortable couch that I inexplicably preferred over a desk or office. On the wall across from the couch hung a copy of M.C. Escher's "Drawing Hands," where two hands rise out of the paper from their initial sketches to compete their counterpart in an endless, paradoxical loop. At times, writing the dissertation felt one of Escher's mobius strips. So yes, from a distance, a dissertation appears as a lonely undertaking, but I never felt alone in those five years of research and writing. I produced this dissertation through my efforts and the support, encouragement, and advice of so many others. I am lucky to have the chance to acknowledge and thank some of them here.

My research took me all across the country, to archives large and small. I want to thank the archivists and curators for their talents, as well as their patience. At the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland, I met archivists who sat a naïve and energetic graduate student down to explain foreign terms like "researcher identification card," "pull request form," and "reference request slips." They made my trip productive and unforgettable. I also traveled to a NARA site in Fort Worth, Texas. There, archivist Michael Wright uncovered sources with me, helped track documents through time and space, and introduced me to a researcher's best friend: weighted bags to flatten records that had remained folded for over a century. And I traveled to Arkansas many times in order to learn from the land,

its waters, and its people. I visited Little Rock, Fayetteville, and online repositories across the state. I'd like to thank the archivists and special collections curators, specifically Casiday Long who guided me through the University of Arkansas' collection system and request program.

Hot Springs felt like a second home these past five years, in large part because of the warmth, openness, and hospitality given to me by the Hot Springs community. I never left the Valley of Vapors without a smile on my face and a belly full of good food and thermal waters. I must thank two people who went above and beyond to support me through my research: Liz Robbins and Tom Hill. Liz, as Executive Director of the Garland County Historical Society, not only possesses a wealth of knowledge about the town and its people, but her hope to share history with the public is contagious. She not only endorsed my research and writing every step of the way, but provided opportunities to share my work with the Hot Springs community. My first meeting with Tom, Museum Curator at Hot Springs National Park, set me on a path that ultimately led to this dissertation. Tom said that at Hot Springs, "it's all about the water." I jotted this at the top of a piece of paper in all caps. His affirmation gave me the confidence to pursue this project to the end. Tom trusted me to explore the park's archives that have brought the dissertation to life. But I am most grateful for spending hours in his office, learning from him. I rarely wrote things down, opting instead to listen. His passion for the park and public service came out in his words and actions. Meeting Liz, Tom, and so many others testifies to the collaborative process that comes from research. I will never be able to repay you all.

Writing the dissertation was the result of tireless work between myself and other scholars, colleagues, and friends. I first want to thank the people and resources at the University of Kansas. The History Department, my adopted home, created and sustained an academic community where I could be myself, let my voice be heard, flesh out ideas, and be comfortable

exploring new paths. Thanks to Amanda, Mary, Eve, and Luis for creating such a space and welcoming me into it. I'd like to also thank Richard Godbeer and the Hall Center for the Humanities for supporting my research and writing for providing me with a generous travel award that they quickly renewed during the Covid-19 pandemic, when dissertation "travel" amounted to walking from my couch to a bookcase in my apartment and back to the couch. The Hall Center gave me an avenue, through its Nature and Culture Seminar, to share early drafts of chapters with a community of university scholars within and without KU. The reception and feedback were invaluable. I never thought I would call Kansas home, but I'm glad I can now.

My dissertation committee is responsible for helping craft the ideas and arguments that appear in this complicated and interconnected hydrological history. I'd like to thank Andrew Isenberg, Beth Bailey, Shawn Alexander, and Andrew Denning for their input and feedback throughout the years. They helped me take a raw and undefined stump of a research project and cultivate it into a blossoming dissertation, branching out in directions I never initially considered. Whether through classroom discussions, questions and comments, office visits, or casual conversations, every encounter helped me craft that missing puzzle piece. With their guidance, I grew to not only understand Hot Springs but learned to effectively join its history to larger narratives of the American past. Sheyda Jahanbani came onto the committee in the past year and immediately helped connect disparate chapters into a coherent dissertation. I have worked to convince Sheyda that hydrology matters for nearly four years; I hope this dissertation provides that necessary evidence. Lastly, Sara Gregg guided me through this project from day one. Sara has felt as much like a partner in this project as a primary advisor. We may have wandered from the path a few times, but through every error or dead end, Sara was there to offer new strategies and kept me focused on the task at hand. She dedicated her time to this project and that effort is

revealed in the following pages. She has made me a better writer, scholar, and person. Choosing to work with Sara was the best decision I could have made.

And while my committee members and other scholars contributed to the content of the dissertation, my work ethic and drive are the result of sparring with, working with, and especially laughing with my fellow graduate students. We are all in this solitary endeavor together. We live through each other's successes or failures and grow from them. Cohorts often experience deadlines and exams together. My cohort of Preston, Emily, Amy, and Eric also shared breakfasts and dinners that I will remember well after the exam dates pass for us all. The university's environmental history grad students offered input at every stage of my graduate career. PJ, Ariel, AK, Wen, Titus, Paul, Hayden, and Steve, you all witnessed the evolution of my project first-hand and contributed to that growth in enormous ways. And to Andrew, Paul, Sam, Adam, Phillip, and Marjorie, you made me truly cherish my time at KU. You demonstrated a successful stint in graduate school involves both chapter revisions and raucous nights on Massachusetts Street; lectures and losing at pool; teaching and trivia. You are, and always will be, my friends. I am lucky to have such friends in my life, here in Kansas and across the country. Dave, Chrissy, Erik, Joe, Megan, Chip, Adele, Kristy, Andrew, Meghan, Steve, Greg, and so many others, yinz gave me the strength and courage to pursue and accomplish my goals.

And to my family, to whom I dedicate this dissertation. Your love and unyielding support through this journey leave me forever indebted to you. You never read a word of the following dissertation and you never had to. You had faith in me as I left an industrial furnace warehouse to pursue a career in academia; you encouraged my unsure self as I worked towards my M.A. in History; and you remained steadfast in your support as I grew into the scholar I am today. With your help, I finished the marathon. And because of you, I enjoyed every minute.

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Introduction

In March of 1895, the writer Stephen Crane took a trip south from his home in New York. Throughout the early 1890s, Crane was making a living writing for newspapers and an assignment for the *Philadelphia Press* brought the traveler to “the great pine belt of Arkansas” where he quickly became intoxicated by “the resinous air” of the Ozark and Ouachita Mountains. As Crane approached his destination, he encountered a stream “that looks like a million glasses of lemon phosphate brawl[ed] over the rocks” along with “tawny roads” blowing up dirt and soil that matched “the hue of a lion’s mane.”¹ The naturalistic and impressionistic style Crane employed to describe the variables in the Arkansas landscape would soon become more well-known to American and international readers. Later that year, he published his Civil War novel *The Red Badge of Courage*, immediately vaulting Crane to the heights of American literary acclaim.

But war was not on the mind of Crane during his March excursion. Instead he conveyed to his readers the frenetic excitement created by the town of Hot Springs, Arkansas, a cosmopolitan settlement 50 miles south and west of Little Rock that, by 1895, was full of visitors from across the country, and around the world, drawn in by the town’s famous thermal waters. Crane repeatedly felt the need to connect the natural aspects of the landscape to the humanity and culture of the times. Meandering through the depot, replete with “howling dervishes” in the form of insistent stage drivers, bag men, and smooth-talking advertisers, Crane came upon “the calm

¹ Stephen Crane, “The Merry Throng at Hot Springs,” *Philadelphia Press*, 3 March 1895.

turrets of the innumerable hotels and, still further back, the green ridges and peaks of the hills” where the curative thermal waters bubbled from beneath Hot Springs Mountain.

The bustling atmosphere extended beyond the Hot Springs railyard to the town’s bathhouses. Years of engineering projects in Hot Springs had conveyed the thermal waters from the hillside into a system that brought the resource directly to both patients and patrons. Crane captured life in these Victorian establishments by noting “a man became a creature of three conditions” in the bathhouse: “He is about to take a bath – he is taking a bath – he has taken a bath.” He also deftly noticed other social realities in the bathhouses as “Negro attendants scramble at the bidding of the bathers” who wore “enormous bath robes” as “the curling masses of vapor... rise slowly in the heavy air.” After documenting the town, its inhabitants, its visitors, and the waters, Crane made an astute and revealing observation about Hot Springs:

It undoubtedly typifies the United States better than does any existing thoroughfare, for it resembles the North and the South, the East and the West. For a moment a row of little wooden stores will look exactly like a portion of a small prairie village, but, later, one is confronted by a group of austere business blocks that are completely Eastern in expression. The street is bright at times with gaudy gypsy coloring; it is gray in places with dull and Puritanical hues. It is wealthy and poor; it is impertinent and courteous. It apparently comprehends all men and all moods and has little to say of itself. It is satisfied to exist without being defined or classified.²

Stephen Crane captured a snapshot of the cultural and environmental landscapes in Hot Springs (Fig. I.1). This dissertation interrogates those landscapes and offers the definitions and classifications that alluded Crane and so many others after him.

² Ibid.

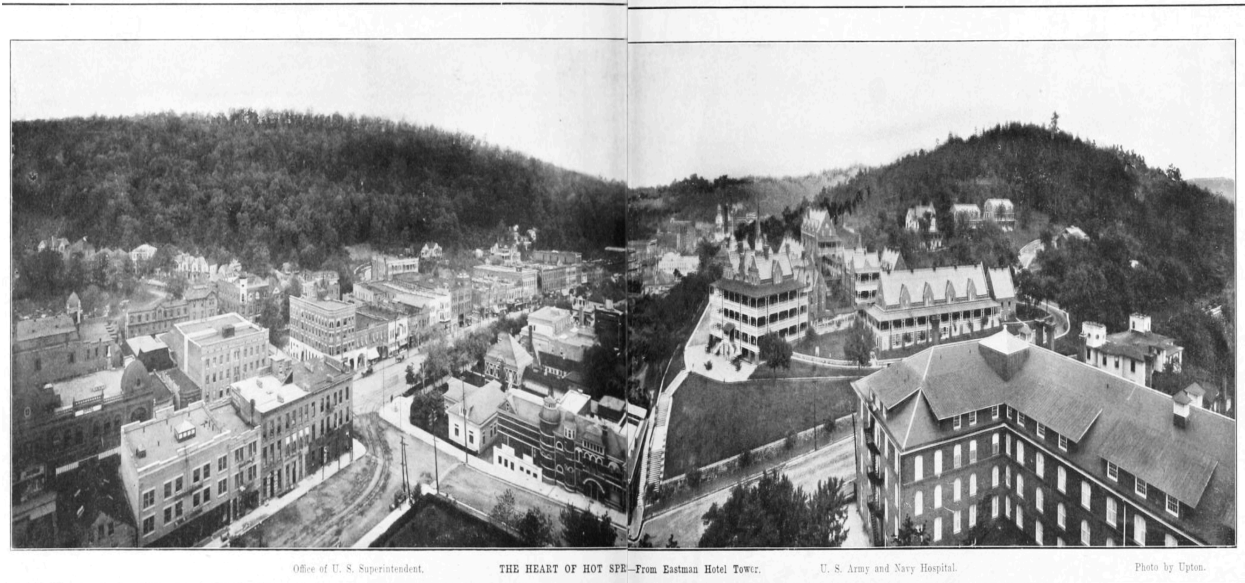


Fig. I. 1: “The Heart of Hot Springs,” panoramic photograph of downtown Hot Springs from Eastman Hotel Observation tower. Hot Springs Mountain is the peak on the right; Charles Cutter, *Cutter’s Official Guide to the Hot Springs of Arkansas* (Hot Springs, Charles Cutter & Son, 1914), 32-33.

Crane’s acknowledgement of the relationship between nature and culture in Hot Springs was, in part, a product of the many-textured relationships between humans and the thermal waters of Hot Springs, Arkansas. Congress reserved the springs and the surrounding landscape as a natural reservation in 1832, protecting the land and waters for public use. This legislation was the first of its kind, predating the creation of Yellowstone National Park by 40 years, and the Yosemite Grant by 32 years. A contingent of supporters and promoters of the thermal waters’ healing properties generated enthusiasm surrounding the landscape and piqued the interest of sick and weary travelers in the subsequent decades. Invalids braved harsh conditions to journey to Hot Springs throughout the 1800s. By the end of the century the town catered to a wide range of visitors curious about the springs. The thermal waters “not only heal those who are ill,” noted a magazine correspondent in 1894, “but they boil out the tired feeling, and make life seem the more agreeable to the man or woman who escapes for rest from the press of business or the

exactions of society.”³ These visitors used the thermal waters in bathhouses on and off the reservation, up-to-date establishments for a modernizing world. Hot Springs’ hydrological advantages brought together a diverse group of private and public interests, all pursuing the waters’ medicinal and recreational properties. These groups often clashed over control of, and access to, this precious natural, national resource.

“Taking the Waters: A Hydrological History of Health and Leisure in Hot Springs National Park, 1832-1932,” presents Hot Springs not merely as a tourist site of consumption or a medicinal oasis in the Ozarks. It demonstrates how Americans used the thermal waters to gain a better understanding of popular ideas surrounding health, leisure, representation, and race, both locally and nationally in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In effect, Hot Springs became a cultural laboratory where visitors, politicians, boosters, entrepreneurs, medical professionals, private and public organizations, as well as the federal government experimented upon the town’s interconnected hydrological and social landscapes. Americans experienced the natural world in this protected space, and imprinted the cultural trends and logic of their day and age on the land, in the waters, and in the history of the town. Changing hydrological conditions not only invited new characters and opportunities to Hot Springs, but also influenced the way visitors understood and used the water. Hot Springs Reservation (later Hot Springs National Park) sat at the nexus of popular ideas surrounding health, leisure, representation, and race, both locally and nationally in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At Hot Springs, situated in a liminal space between the local and the national, where all corners of the nation were represented, Americans negotiated nature’s changing role in their lives.

³ “Our Own Carlsbad,” *Godey’s Magazine* 128, no. 764 (February 1894), 16.

“Taking the Waters” distills the variable experiences of visitors at Hot Springs National Park over the span of nearly 200 years. This analysis embodies the utility of an expansive interpretation of the meanings of the nation’s parks. By resituating Hot Springs within the national park project, it extends this rich history back into the early nineteenth century, when Americans understood nature not simply superficially, through the representation of scenic beauty deserving of preservation, but materially, through a focus centered on the sublime experience of nature’s power to heal.

One of the overlooked features of national parks, and one especially timely in the twenty-first century, is understanding these landscapes as sites of health along with consumptive leisure. National parks, argued John Muir, were places where “thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that... mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life,” where visitors could “enrich [our] little ongoings with those of Nature, and to get rid of rust and disease.”⁴ In the light of nineteenth-century Americans’ relationship to nature cures, it is important to trace the material landscapes where Americans travelled to make Muir’s nature-cure clarion call a reality. Scholars have argued that “Health... occupied a prominent role in the growing consumption of nature in late nineteenth-century America” at the same time national parks crept onto American maps.⁵ This confluence is ripe for new interpretations. Hot Springs’ history demonstrates that park policymakers had a wide understanding of the national park project, not solely one based on the

⁴ John Muir, *Our National Parks* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1901), 1.

⁵ Gregg Mitman, “Hay Fever Holiday: Health, Leisure, and Place in Gilded-Age America,” *Bulletin of Historical Medicine* 77, no. 3 (2003), 635; see also Martha E. Geores, “Surviving on Metaphor: How “Health = Hot Springs” Created and Sustained a Town,” in Robin A. Kearns & Wilbert M. Gesler, *Putting Health into Place: Landscape, Identity, and Well-Being* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 36-52; C. Brenden Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Double-Edged Sword* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007); Neil S. Oatsvall, “Bottling Nature’s Elixir: The Mountain Valley Spring Water Company, Environment, Health, and Capitalism,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 1-31.

larger parks in the American West. In Hot Springs, Department of the Interior officials enacted similar strategies to protect natural landscapes that interfered with previous land uses. Hot Springs' history also introduces a wider variety of characters who influenced park policy. Moving far past the traditional debates in the scholarship, "Taking the Waters" introduces debates raging between businessmen and the poor, professional physicians and "quack" doctors, and black and white individuals and organizations, all trying to control and define the thermal waters and the park landscape. Allowing these historical actors their rightful place in the story offers an expanded lens to view struggles over national park lands in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Introducing the Waters

In order to draw connections amongst such a sorted cast of characters, and to articulate a full picture of how Hot Springs grew as a town, park, health center, spa, and national park, I situate thermal water as a central agent in Hot Springs' natural *and* human histories. Hot Springs' thermal water is the product of specific geological conditions. The mountains, their composition, and millions of years of erosion are responsible for the waters' heat, a trait that has fueled its cultural power (Fig. I.2). Water flowing from park spigots in the twenty first century is emerging from a 4,400-year geohydrological journey. Around the same time the Egyptians constructed the Great Pyramids of Giza, a storm came over the hills and valleys of present-day Arkansas. That rain fell upon a number of rolling ridges covered by dense timber. It then moved slowly down the trees and seeped into the ground, where it encountered dynamic root systems along with Novaculite rock, a sedimentary rock found only in the Ouachita Mountains of Arkansas, eastern Oklahoma, and Texas. Layers of Novaculite, along with other chert (incredibly hard sedimentary

rock) layers folded over softer layers of shale. This event, defined by geologists as the Ouachita orogeny, took place between 218 and 271 million years ago when the early North and South American continents collided. These folds and ridges make up the Zig Zag Mountains in Arkansas today. The small chain derives its name because the hills are composed of soft and hard layers of rock which have folded over top of one another. Lastly, as hard rock compressed soft rock and buttressed up against bedrock, fissures and fault lines formed underground, creating a space for rainwater to descend deeper below the surface. One of these fault lines sat beneath what would become Hot Springs Mountain.

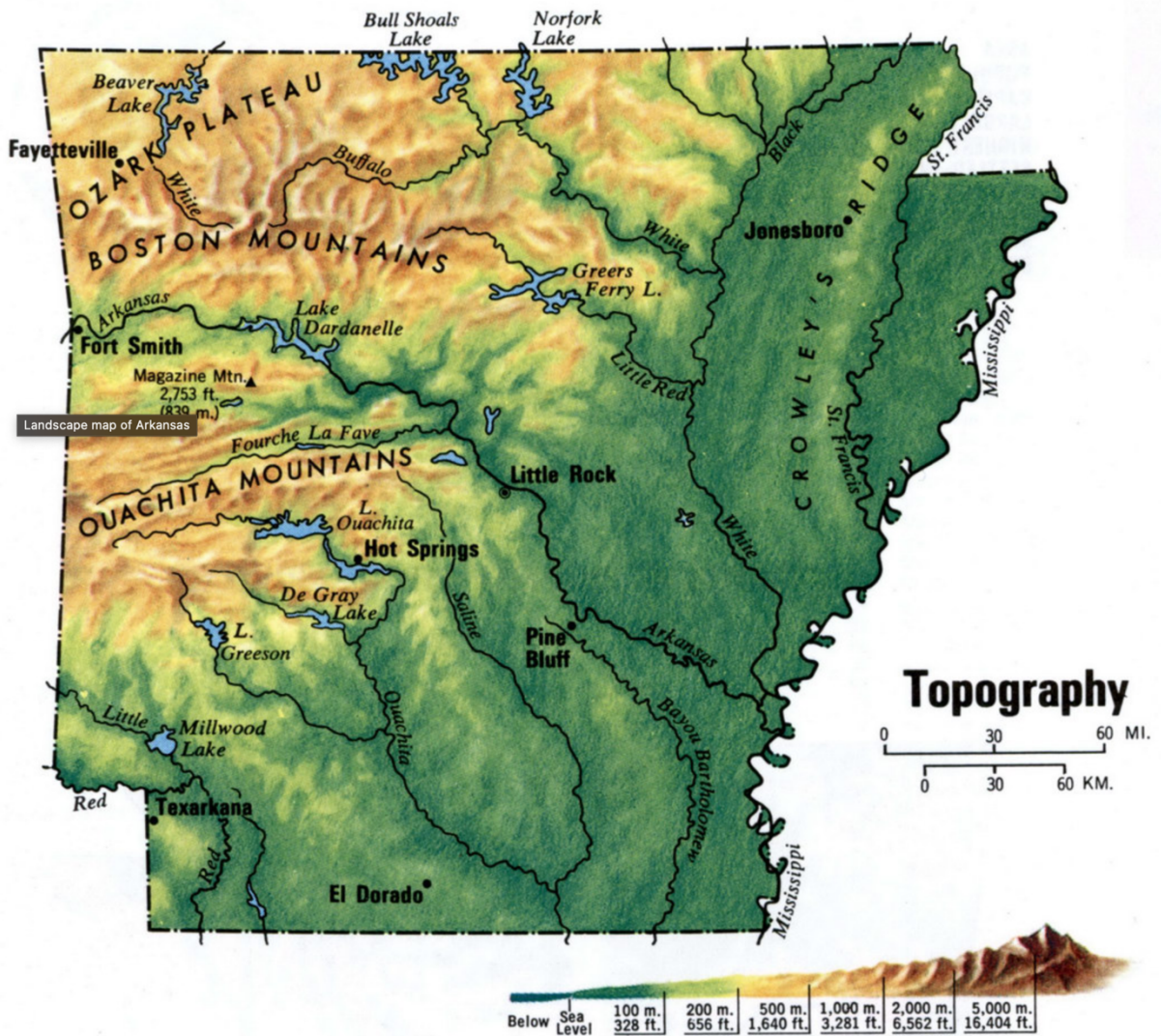


Fig. I.2: Topographical map of Arkansas. Note the varied landscape of the state, with the alluvial Mississippi River lowlands to the east and the mountainous regions to the northwest. Different geographies contributed to divergent social histories across the state; “Topographical map of Arkansas State,” Road Atlas of USA and Canada, accessed March 13, 2022, <https://us-canad.com/landscape-of-arkansas.html>.

But how does the water get so hot, hotter than any mineral spring site east of the Rocky Mountains on the North American continent? The water is heated by rocks as it travels further into the earth, a natural process called geothermal gradient. At around 8,000 feet, and 4,000 years after first falling as rain, the waters find an impenetrable layer of bedrock, along with a prominent fault line, and then travel quickly (roughly 400 years) up to the surface once again, flowing from the side of Hot Springs Mountain at an average temperature of 143 degrees Fahrenheit (Fig. I.3). During the waters’ journey, as it flowed over and around rocks, it acquired small concentrations of different minerals like calcium, magnesium, bicarbonate, and sulfate. When the calcium and carbonate interact with the atmosphere, tufa is formed on the landscape. This porous rock covered most of the lower third of Hot Springs Mountain, deposited as the waters cascaded down the hillside and into in a creek on the valley floor. The waters then flowed south into the Ouachita, then Mississippi Rivers and into the Gulf of Mexico. This wooded and steam-enveloped valley existed unadulterated for millions of years.⁶

⁶ The Hot Springs region has been a focus of scientific expeditions since white settlement of the area in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. See M.S. Bedinger, F.J. Pearson, Jr., J.E. Reed, R.T. Sniegocki, and C.G. Stone, “History of Spring Development and Scientific Study,” in *The Waters of Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas – Their Nature and Origin* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1979), C2-C6; for most recent geologic analysis and summary, see National Park Service Geologic Resources Division, *Hot Springs National Park: Geologic Resources Inventory Report* (Fort Collins, CO: US Department of the Interior, 2013).

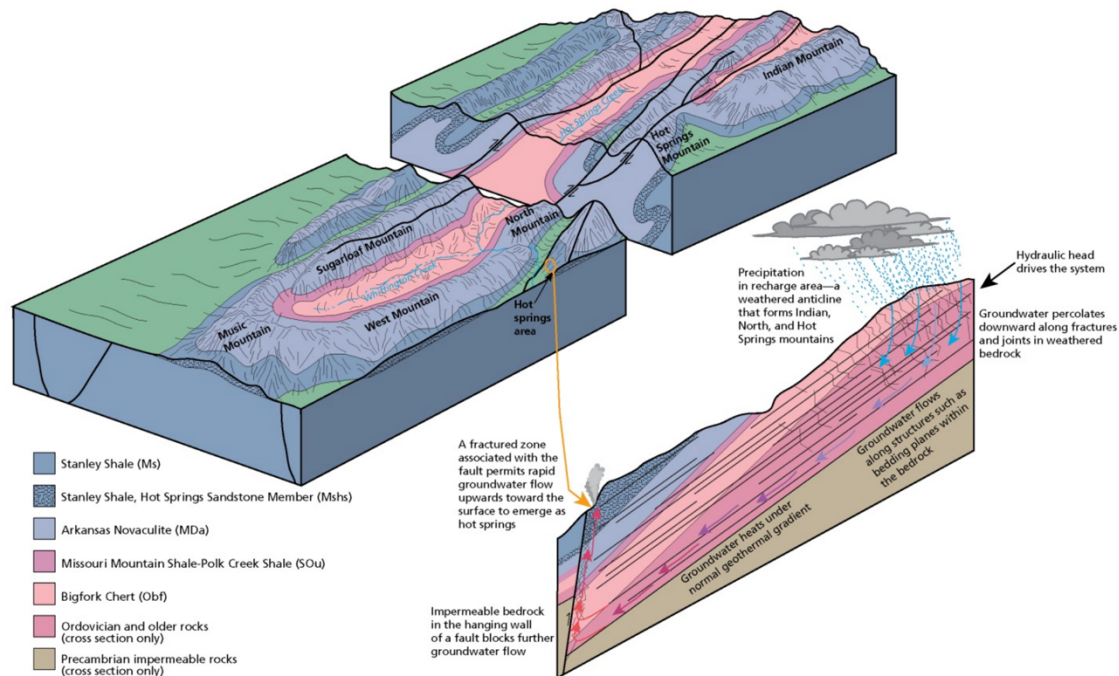


Fig. I.3: Representation of natural hydrologic process in Hot Springs, Arkansas; National Park Service, *Hot Springs National Park: Geologic Resources Inventory Report* (Fort Collins, Colorado: US Department of the Interior, 2013), 8.

The human history of Hot Springs is as influential to the hydrology of the thermal waters as the natural history below the Zig Zag Mountains. The Quapaw, Natchez, Caddo, and Osage nations are the original residents of present-day Arkansas. The Quapaw, whose territory stretched from the Mississippi River lowlands to the Ozarks, used their fertile lands to cultivate a variety of crops like corn, beans, and squash that sustained both their own population and offered subsistence and trade goods for Spanish and especially French traders throughout the seventeenth century.⁷ The Quapaw and others also quarried Novaculite in the mountains, using the rock for arrowheads and knives. Disparate European parties latched onto the social, economic, and

⁷ Joseph P. Key, "An Environmental History of the Quapaws, 1673-1803," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (Winter 2020), 316; see also Susan C. Vehik, "Dhegiha Origins and Plains Archaeology," *Plains Anthropologist*, 38 (November 1993), 231-252; Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

political frameworks created by Indigenous communities, creating a mixed-race frontier that included Spanish and French traders across lower Louisiana. Early European settlements were more a gathering place of white and Native inhabitants than a settler colonial outpost. Historian Morris S. Arnold described these Europeans as “immigrants rather than invaders” during this time due to the dwindling numbers of both groups across the landscape. The Arkansas Post, the first permanent French settlement established in 1686, began as a mixed-race (*métis*) settlement with intermarriages occurring between the Quapaw and French traders.⁸

There is little in the way of an archeological record for the area, but it appears conclude Native groups never established a permanent settlement in Hot Springs. By the late seventeenth century drought, intensified land use in the mountainous foothills, and New World diseases, specifically smallpox, combined to decimate Indigenous populations in the area. The Quapaw, estimated by scholars at between 3,500 to 7,500 in the late seventeenth century, dwindled to between 500 to 700 surviving inhabitants by 1800.⁹ As the Quapaw’s strength diminished, migrant Indigenous nations, including the Cherokee and Choctaw who came west as white settlers expanded throughout the United States, settled in Arkansas. These changing demographics led Indigenous groups to form new alliances as interest by white settlers grew around the springs.

The turn of the nineteenth century was an age of territorial exploration in the United States. President Thomas Jefferson authorized four expeditions to explore the major waterways

⁸ Morris S. Arnold, “Indians and Immigrants in the Arkansas Colonial Era,” in Jeannie M. Whayne, Thomas A. DeBlack, George Sabo III, and Morris S. Arnold, eds., *Arkansas: A Narrative History* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 62; the fur and slave trade had a significant effect on Indigenous cultural life, see Daniel H. Usner, Jr., *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Robert P. Wiegers, “A Proposal for Indian Slave Trading in the Mississippi Valley and Its Impact on the Osage,” *Plains Anthropologist*, 33 (May 1988), 187-202.

⁹ Joseph Key, “Quapaw,” *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, updated December 16, 2019, <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/quapaw-550/>.

throughout the recently acquired Louisiana Territory. Explorers hoped to document and engage with the diverse human and non-human worlds now under the imagined purview of the young American Republic. Though Meriwether Lewis' and William Clark's adventures along the Upper Missouri and Columbia Rivers are etched into popular culture, the other journeys yielded valuable information as well. One of these other expeditions, led by William Dunbar, a prominent resident of Natchez in the Mississippi Territory, and Dr. George Hunter, documented for the young American nation a "natural Curiosity" of intriguing ecological, medicinal, economic, and political value.¹⁰

Both Dunbar and Hunter brought with them requisite skills that benefited the expedition. Dunbar had surveyed lands in Spanish Florida. As a man of letters, his natural histories not only led him to create the Mississippi Society for the Acquirement and Dissemination of Useful Knowledge in 1803, but his publications brought him into similar spheres with Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson requested Dunbar lead the expedition through lower Louisiana due to his training as a naturalist and familiarity with the region.¹¹ George Hunter's medical qualifications gave him some realm of expertise to discern the thermal waters' medicinal qualities. While both were comfortable with early nineteenth century frontier life, with Dunbar residing in the southern hinterlands and Hunter conducting previous expeditions through Kentucky, Illinois, and the Ohio River Valley, the men still relied on the expertise of Spanish and French traders who had settled in the area during their respective nation's ownership of the land. The expedition departed from St. Catherine's Landing on the Mississippi River on October 16, 1804, travelling north, and reached Hot Springs via the Ouachita River on December 10. Accompanying the men were

¹⁰ William Dunbar to Thomas Jefferson, undated, from Trey Berry, "The Expedition of William Dunbar and George Hunter along the Ouachita River, 1804-1805," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (Winter, 2003), 399.

¹¹ See Trey Berry, "The Expedition of William Dunbar and George Hunter along the Ouachita River, 1804-1805," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (Winter 2003), 390.

thirteen soldiers, as well as Dunbar's entourage, including his son, two enslaved men, and a servant.

The expedition party must have stumbled onto quite a scene that December morning. Local guides who brought the springs to the men's attention led Dunbar to write to Jefferson that the area contained "boiling springs" shooting up out of the ground like a "fountain."¹² Upon arriving in the valley, Dunbar described the landscape simply as "very serene."¹³ At 26 degrees Fahrenheit according to his journal notes, the valley must have been encased in vapor from the thermal waters contacting the freezing air, the steam trapped within the sharp valley between two mountains. Dunbar chronicled the flora, fauna, and makeshift appearance of temporary, seasonal shacks, but he focused specifically on the thermal water, in particular the temperature. He noted the temperature of the four principal springs he saw on the hillside, collecting precise readings of 150, 145, 136, and 132 degrees, respectively.¹⁴ Dunbar described the waters scientifically in his journals; his measurements were not meant for the everyday Americans but for the president and other learned men.

Other scientific expeditions fueled interest in Hot Springs and its waters. In January 1818, Major Stephen Long stopped in Hot Springs along the route of his expedition to survey the Rocky Mountains for President James Monroe. Evoking similar language about the springs as "remarkable" and "a curiosity of the first magnitude," Long interspersed scientific measurements

¹² Ibid., 392.

¹³ "Monday 10th," in Dunbar Rowland, *Life, Letters, and Papers of William Dunbar of Elgin, Morayshire, Scotland, and Natchez, Mississippi* (Jackson, Mississippi: Press of the Mississippi Historical Society, 1930), 272.

¹⁴ "Wednesday 12th," in Rowland, *Life, Letters, and Papers of William Dunbar*, 275; later accounts regularly challenged Dunbar's readings with hyperbolic claims of the hot springs during the nineteenth century. Estimated temperatures ranged from 180-200 degrees in periodical reports. Some newspaper editors abandoned formal readings and relied on practical comparisons, stating that the waters "will readily scald the hair from hogs," "Hot Springs of Arkansas," *Christian Watchmen* 10, no. 50 (December 11, 1829), 200.

with practical knowledge to describe the water's temperature and strength.¹⁵ Long wrote to Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill, a physician and naturalist whom Long thought would be "greatly indebted" knowing about the existence of the healing hot springs. Mitchill then read the report aloud at the Lyceum of Natural History in New York in April 1818 and it made its way into the June issue of *American Monthly Magazine*, providing a national audience information on a natural attraction that, according to Long, still did not have any permanent occupants.

Soon the nascent town and its waters became inseparable as early boosters dubbed the town "Thermopolis," offering those "in search of health or pleasure" to "frequent the Hot Springs on the Washita."¹⁶ This interest drew action from Congress, which reserved the springs for public use in 1832, setting an ambiguous and volatile precedent. Over the following decades, the backwoods outpost and antebellum natural wonder transformed into "Uncle Sam's Sanitarium," a place where medical professionals prescribed the waters to the nation's sick and suffering, and later to ailing soldiers and sailors. As hundreds of thousands of patients, patrons, and curious tourists visited the "American Spa" in the twentieth century, the town's namesake ran true: "Hot Springs bathes the world."¹⁷ The thermal waters brought these people together, changed the trajectory of the town, and brought Hot Springs' history into larger conversations about health, leisure, access to natural resources, as well as into the ideas Americans held towards the natural world.

¹⁵ Stephen H. Long, "Hot Springs of the Washitaw," *American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review* 3, no. 2 (June 1818), 85.

¹⁶ "The Hot Springs," *Arkansas Gazette* (Arkansas Post, Arkansas Territory), 9 July 1828, 5.

¹⁷ Ron Cockrell, *The Hot Springs of Arkansas – America's First National Park: Administrative History of Hot Springs National Park* (Omaha: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2014), 1-2; "All is Serene at Uncle Sam's Big Hospital," *Hot Springs New Era*, April 23, 1914, 1; Dee Brown, *The American Spa: Hot Springs, Arkansas* (Little Rock, Rose Publishing Company, 1982); Clyde Covington and Isabel Burton Anthony, "Centennial Celebration: The 100th Birthday Celebration and the Creation of America's First National Park April 25-30, 1932," *The Record* (2007): 33-41.

Hot Springs: Conduits of History

Stephen Crane’s metaphor of Hot Springs, that “it resembles the North and the South, the East and the West,” provides a useful interpretive map documenting “Taking the Waters” historiographical interventions. Considering Hot Springs’ history as a health resort adds to new understandings of nature’s impact on the history of medicine and medical knowledge, as embedded in northern cities and centers of education. Turning south, the hydrological landscape intersects with the work of historians who have developed understandings of Southern lands, interjecting this understudied racialized landscape into scholarly conversations. In the east, the seat of American government, an analysis of Hot Springs contributes to a growing literature on the ways in which the federal government created new environmental and social landscapes throughout the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. The work of the Interior Department in Hot Springs also creates a bridge to the West, where scholars of the national parks have neglected or dismissed Hot Springs’ contribution to the national park project.

- North

The professionalization of the medical field began in the halls of Northern and Mid-Atlantic universities in the late nineteenth century. Stringent new medical school curricula at Harvard and Johns Hopkins, coupled with an emphasis on science and research in clinical laboratories, endowed physicians at the turn of the twentieth century with the cultural authority to supplant the local and regional healers from previous generations.¹⁸ But before the advent of

¹⁸ Scholars of the history of medicine have documented and analyzed the professionalization of physicians closely; see Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine: The Rise of a Sovereign Profession & the Making of a Vast Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); Kenneth M. Ludmerer, *Learning to Heal: The Development of American Medical Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

modern medicine, people often used their environments to make themselves well as it was the only option available. It is easy to view large aspects of medical geography as nonsense; past medical cures have often crumbled under contemporary scientific scrutiny. But, as the historian Gregg Mitman confessed, presentism “fail[s] to consider scientific knowledge as a historic product of time and place.” As common knowledge of disease changed from miasmas to germs to ecology, technologies changed with it. This new knowledge also had spatial and social consequences. Historical landscapes of health wither and die if scholars fall into the trap of “dismiss[ing] such knowledge because it fails to accord with contemporary medical opinion.”¹⁹

Environmental historians have situated themselves well to address these concerns, as disease, health, organisms, and the environment have a long and interconnected history.²⁰ The field offers methodologies that center environmental change and ideas about the natural world into the development of medical knowledge. The historian Conevery Bolton Valenčius argued the social interactions between historical actors and their landscapes created a “geography of health” which influenced settler demographics, as well as political and economic histories.²¹ Valenčius’ work foregrounded how the relationship between the environment and the field of health and disease enabled American settlers to develop strong connections between themselves and the health of their newly inhabited landscapes in the early nineteenth century.²² Mitman

¹⁹ Gregg Mitman, “In Search of Health: Landscape and Disease in American Environmental History,” *Environmental History* 10, no. (April 2005), 198.

²⁰ Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972); Howard Simpson, *Invisible Armies: The Impact of Disease on American History* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980); Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1997); J.R. McNeil, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²¹ Conevery Bolton Valenčius, “Histories of Medical Geography,” in Nicolas Rupke, ed., *Medical Geography in Historical Perspective* (London: Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine at UCL, 2000), 25; see also; Susan D. Jones, “Body and Place,” *Environmental History* 10, no. 1 (Jan., 2005): 47-49.

²² Conevery Bolton Valenčius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 6; Linda Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment,*

further argued the confluence of environment and health made “place [] not simply a location, but a landscape that is produced and acquires meaning through social interaction.” Historians have been eager to map these abstract geographies. And if, as Linda Nash concluded, “the environment is more than an object upon which change is enacted” and instead is “an agent of sorts that acts upon the bodies inhabiting it” then, “The history of disease, because it lies at the nexus of the human and the nonhuman, offers a useful means... for reconsidering how we divide and write our histories.”²³ Others, including Christopher Sellers, see ripe opportunities for environmental history and the history of medicine: “As more historians take up topics touching upon both environment and health, this cross-fertilization and blurring of boundaries between the two fields are bound to continue. And they should,” concluded Sellers, “so that we may forge an understanding of medicine’s past that better matches the environmental attunement of today’s medicine.”²⁴

A hydrological history of Hot Springs offers such an opportunity for the blurring of historiographical boundaries the town’s waters and landscape were paramount to developing therapeutic treatments. Scholars have studied other mineral spring sites to chart changes in Early American society and culture as well as the rise of health tourism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²⁵ Hot Springs was a landscape of health known to American settlers,

Disease, and Knowledge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Gregg Mitman, *Breathing Space: How Allergies Shape Our Lives and Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

²³ Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies*, 8.

²⁴ Christopher Sellers, “To Place or Not to Place: Toward an Environmental History of Modern Medicine,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, Volume 92, no. 1 (Spring 2018), 42; some works that have successfully worked within both fields are Nancy Langston, *Toxic Bodies: Hormone Disruptors and the Legacy of DES* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Sarah Ferber and Sally Wilde, eds., *The Body Divided: Human Beings and Human “Material” in Modern Medical History* (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2012).

²⁵ Thomas Chambers, *Drinking the Waters: Creating an American Leisure Class at Nineteenth-Century Mineral Springs* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002); Vaughn Scribner, ““The happy effects of these waters””: Colonial Mineral Spas and the British Civilizing Mission,” *Early American Studies* 14, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 409-449; for health tourism, see George Weisz, “Historical Reflections on Medical Travel,” *Anthropology and Medicine* 18, no. 1 (April 2011): 137-144; Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995); Mitman, “Hay Fever Holiday.”

medical professionals, and the US government, a site with a salubrious environment and a medicinal natural resource in the thermal waters, claimed by physicians to cure invalids of a wide range of diseases from rheumatism, gout, and ulcers, to venereal diseases such as syphilis, and even deadly maladies such as alcoholism and cancer. Private and public officials sought to improve upon Hot Springs' hydrological advantages in order to better use the waters to heal those travelling from across the country or around the world. At Hot Springs, nature's role in the history of medicine did not fade away by the turn of the twentieth century, but instead remained a significant reason why so many visitors traveled to the Valley of Vapors. When the accepted value of the medicinal properties of the waters did wane, government officials, boosters, and local residents redefined the waters' potential to keep the resource relevant.

- **South**

Scholars have long been attentive to the role of health and disease in urban and rural landscapes in the American South, a region with distinctive social and environmental conditions. Some analyses have chronicled pathogenic influences on Southern society, where "Climate and frontier conditions... combined to account for the continued presence of" diseases like yellow fever and malaria," led to peculiar cultural and environmental paths compared to the rest of the nation.²⁶ Scholars including Christopher Morris have argued that the region's histories of health and disease have enabled environmental historians to blaze new trails into southern history's

²⁶ James Breeden, "Disease as a Factor in Southern Distinctiveness," in Todd L. Savitt and James Harvey Young, eds., *Disease and Distinctiveness in the American South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 10; the South continues to adapt to new diseases produced by distinct climatic features, see Craig E. Colten, *An Unnatural Metropolis: Wrestling New Orleans from Nature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); John McNeill, "Aedes Rides Again: Mosquitos and Flaviviruses in the Americas," *American Journal of Public Health* 106, no. 4 (April 2016), 596-97.

exclusive historiographical niche.²⁷ As he analyzed water conflicts across the South, Christopher Manganiello concluded, “the American South is not exceptional. Historic water problems, such as flooding and droughts, are the products of material environmental conditions” similar to those in the West or New England.²⁸ Just as hydrology transcends delineated political boundaries, centering water in historical analysis can intellectually work to transcend historiographical constraints. This dissertation complements more classic analyses of the New South focused on the promise and failure of manufacturing and the region’s industrial potential.²⁹

Scholars have positioned Southern sites of health and leisure as racialized landscapes, affecting access to nature’s cures and refreshments. Public places became contested spaces where powerful individuals, organizations, and governments inscribed standards around purity onto landscapes within a social system dominated by white supremacy. As an example, the historian Margaret Humphreys used malaria deaths and public health reforms responding to yellow fever to track contours of race and class dynamics in bustling southern cities such as New Orleans and Memphis.³⁰ This cultural work took place in and out of the South. Interestingly,

²⁷ Christopher Morris, “A More Southern Environmental History,” *Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (August 2009), 595; see also Mart A. Stewart, “If John Muir Had Been an Agrarian: American Environmental History West and South,” *Environment and History* 11, no. 2 (May 2005): 139-62; Mark D. Hersey, “Environmental History in the Heart of Dixie,” *Alabama Review* 70, no. 2 (April 2017): 99-111.

²⁸ Christopher J. Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power: How the Politics of Cheap Energy and Water Scarcity Shaped a Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 204.

²⁹ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); William D. Bryan has further complicated the ideals and consequences of New South industrial projects across the region in *The Price of Permanence: Nature and Business in the New South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018).

³⁰ Margaret Humphreys, *Malaria: Poverty, Race, and Public Health in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Margaret Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992); see also John H. Ellis, *Yellow Fever and Public Health in the New South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992); for the lower Mississippi, see Ari Kelman, “New Orleans’s Phantom Slave Insurrection of 1853: Racial Anxiety, Urban Ecology, and Human Bodies as Public Spaces,” in Andrew C. Isenberg, ed., *The Nature of Cities: Culture, Landscape, and Urban Space* (University of Rochester Press, 2006), 3-23.

water has oriented the focus of many scholars as sites where black and white citizens clashed over public space and resources, from public water fountains to beach access to water rights.³¹

Hot Springs, as a national reservation / national park, was one such public space where race dictated many of the social norms for decades and influenced the transformation of the park's hydrological environment. Early histories of the parks, written by white settlers and boosters, caricatured Indigenous populations who, through disease and forced migration, struggled to repel encroachments into their ancestral territories. And as the waters bubbled up from the ground, they flowed through a Southern town, and following Reconstruction, pumped into Southern buildings, ultimately falling under the reign of Jim Crow in Arkansas. The regime of *de facto* and *de jure* segregation repeatedly threatened to stifle African American access to the natural, national resource. This hydrological and social environment created a racialized landscape of health and leisure. From Indigenous erasure to the engineering of Hot Springs infrastructure and the struggles faced by the town's African American community, race is a central strand within the park's hydrological past. Lastly, the active and resistive legacy of African Americans working to enjoy the waters in Hot Springs opens new historiographical doors by highlighting the role of black users and fraternal organizations in creating and sustaining points of access to the waters through black-only bathhouses in town. These

³¹ Victoria Wolcott, "Recreation and Race in the Postwar City: Buffalo's 1956 Crystal Beach Riot," *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 1 (Jun. 2006): 63-90; David E. Goldberg, *The Retreats of Reconstruction: Race, Leisure, and the Politics of Segregation, 1896-1920* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); Andrew W. Kahrl, *Free the Beaches: The Story of Ned Coll and the Battle for America's Most Exclusive Shoreline* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Winston Holland, *Black Recreation: A Historical Perspective* (Chicago: Burnham, 2002); Mark S. Foster, "In the face of 'Jim Crow': Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure, 1890-1945," *The Journal of Negro History* 84 (Spring 1999): 130-149; Myra B. Young Armstead, *Lord, Please Don't Take Me in August": African Americans in Newport and Saratoga Springs, 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Brian McCammack, *Landscapes of Hope: Nature and the Great Migration in Chicago* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017); For clashes over public space in a southern city, see also Ari Kelman, *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

uncovered narratives shed light on alternative paths of black leisure and black capitalism in the early twentieth century.

- **East**

“Taking the Waters” flows through distinct periods in American history, from the age of internal improvements and the antebellum era, to Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, and culminating after the Progressive Era and the onset of the Great Depression. There are countless political, economic, cultural, or environmental tracks to trace in each of these historical eras, but central to all of these is the growth of the state and its relationship to Hot Springs. This negotiation took place even as the federal government worked “out of sight” in the early nineteenth century.³² Hot Springs’ 1832 enabling legislation offered minimal protections to the local environment and zero enforcement mechanisms; there was little federal presence in the town until 1877, after the end of Reconstruction in the South. By the 1870s, the “island communities” that sustained the early American social and economic growth disappeared, according to the historian Robert Wiebe, replaced by new social, economic, and cultural institutions supporting a rapidly industrializing and stratified America, endorsed by the federal government.³³ These changes led to diverse and uneven regional growth across the country.³⁴ By the time the Interior Department established a permanent foothold in Hot Springs, the “Yankee Leviathan” launched by the Civil War had already created the foundation for a strong central

³² Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

³³ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York, Hill and Wang, 1967).

³⁴ The variety of region is a major theme in Richard White, *The Republic for which It Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2017); Heather Cox Richardson argued that a growing middle class “harnessed a newly active national government to their own interests” that included government programs endorsing individualism and economic harmony while demonizing initiatives that promoted the interest of workers, business, minorities, and activist women; see *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 1-7.

government elsewhere in the nation and in most Americans' lives.³⁵ Hot Springs, encompassing aspects of north, south, east, and west due to the shifting whims of federal administration and its wide array of visitors, offers openings to analyze these uneven changes across the nation in one place.

The federal government, specifically the Department of the Interior, increasingly took administrative control and implemented transformative policies concerning the nation's natural resources by the turn on the twentieth century. The department became a modicum of Progressive-Era ideals made manifest, with conservation work practicing a "gospel of efficiency" through agencies like the Forest Service, National Park Service and the Reclamation Service.³⁶ Again, water played a significant role in federal decisions and actions. "Water," argued the geographer and urban scholar Matthew Gandy, "is a brutal delineator of social power which has at various times worked to either foster greater urban cohesion or generate new forms of political conflict."³⁷ The Department of the Interior harnessed the power of western rivers to facilitate economic developmental policies around extractive industries demonstrated American power in the pursuit of natural resources beyond the borders of the United States.³⁸ Scholars have recently returned to strategies of control over the nation's natural resources in an effort to articulate the rise of a modern administrative state.³⁹

³⁵ Richard Bense, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859 – 1877* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

³⁶ Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1959).

³⁷ Matthew Gandy, "Rethinking Urban Metabolism: Water, Space, and the Modern City," *City* 8, no. 3 (2004), 363.

³⁸ Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); see also Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986); Gerald D. Nash, *The Federal Landscape: An Economic History of the Twentieth Century West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999); Megan Black has reevaluated the pursuits of the Interior Department, challenging previous interpretations of an inward-facing administrator to situate its actions globally, *The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

³⁹ See Brian Balogh, "Scientific Forestry and the Roots of the Modern American State: Gifford Pinchot's Path to progressive Reform," *Environmental History* 7, no. 2 (2002): 198-225; Bruce J. Schulman, "Governing Nature, Nurturing Government: Resource Management and the Development of the American State, 1900-1912," *Journal of Policy History* 17, no. 4 (2005): 375-403; Jeremy Vetter, *Field Life: Science in the American West during the*

Hot Springs, with its significantly smaller hydraulic society, is relevant to this robust historiographical conversation. Most significantly, it complements the work of Donald J. Pisani, who in his study of water policies in the early twentieth century, argued that “government is a series of interlocking institutions and a process of negotiation, not just a set of formal policies,” illustrating how the growth of state and federal control over natural resources did not result in a complete disregard of local voices and input.⁴⁰ Scholars have not fully addressed the role Hot Springs played in shaping water policy during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Hot Springs, the dialogue between federal park superintendents and private individuals and organizations created a laboratory where ideas about health and leisure were negotiated and inscribed upon Hot Springs’ hydrology and landscape from the top-down as well as the bottom-up. Through the thermal waters Americans experimented with what the nation might be and the responsibilities the state owed its citizens.

- **West**

Many of the federal government’s most visible modifications to the American landscape occurred in the West, and a turn to the west also introduces the national parks the conversation, creating a natural bridge between the region and Hot Springs. Western landscapes, containing some of the nation’s most unique natural and cultural landmarks, have long been part of the federal government’s administrative apparatus as well as a pull factor for new residents, visitors, and capital investment. National parks are popular places not only for tourists to visit, but also

Railroad Era (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016); James C. Scott, “High Modernist Social Engineering: The Case of the Tennessee Valley Authority,” in Lloyd I. Rudolph and John Kurt Jacobsen, *Experiencing the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ Donald J. Pisani, *Water and American Government: The Reclamation Bureau, National Water Policy, and the West, 1902-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 292.

for scholars to examine a variety of changes in American history. National parks historiography is robust and has rarely waned since the 1960s. Early histories of the parks portrayed the federal government a triumphant savior of nature, protecting the “worthless lands” in the parks in perpetuity for future generations.⁴¹ Later scholarship challenged this narrow approach, fueled by the advocacy of National Park Service historian Richard West Sellars, instead connecting park landscapes as cultural sites of national identity, consumption, worship, and tourism.⁴² Others have looked towards the “hidden history” of these spaces, interrogating park officials’ role in dispossession and erasure of local and Indigenous histories.⁴³ Lastly, the most recent scholarship dedicates entire analyses to particular units in an effort, according to historian Terence Young, “to exhume the people, events, and environments that gave the place its unique character.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Alfred Runte’s “worthless lands thesis” argued that the economic potential of future park landscapes created a space for government intervention and ultimate preservation; Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (New York: Taylor Trade Publishing, 1979); for early park system histories, see John Ise, *Our National Park Policy: A Critical History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1961); Duane H. Hampton, *How the U.S. Cavalry Saved our National Parks* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971). Ronald A. Foresta, *America’s National Parks and Their Keepers* (Washington: Resources for the Future, 1985);

⁴² Richard W. Sellars, “National Parks: Worthless Lands or Competing Land Values,” *Journal of Forest History* 27, no. 3 (July 1983): 130-134; for examples of the expansive path in parks’ history, see Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Polly Wells Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman’s Voice: A History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996); Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2001); Mark Daniel Barringer, *Selling Yellowstone: Capitalism and the Construction of Nature* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Lynn Ross-Bryant, *Pilgrimage to the National Parks: Religion and Nature in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Hal K. Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

⁴³ See Theodore Catton, *Inhabited Wilderness: Indians, Eskimos, and National Parks in Alaska* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997); Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Karl Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Sara Gregg, *Managing the Mountains: Land Use Planning, the New Deal, and the Creation of a Federal Landscape in Appalachia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁴⁴ Terence Young, Review of *National Park, City Playground: Mount Rainier in the Twentieth Century* by Theodore Catton, *Environmental History* 13, no. 2 (Apr., 2008), 376; for examples of this trend, see David Louter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington’s National Parks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Jerry J. Frank, *Making Rocky Mountain National Park: The Environmental History of an American Treasure* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013); Chris Wilhelm, *From Swamp to Wetland: The Creation of Everglades National Park* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2022).

Hot Springs has received little scholarly attention in the field of national park historiography.⁴⁵ The unit's distinctive social and environmental history has put it at odds not only with traditional scholars of the parks, but has not fit well into contemporary interpretations of these landscapes either. Historians in the 1960s and 1970s acknowledged Hot Springs, but also drew distinct lines between the Arkansas unit and other parks. John Ise, in his review of park policy through the middle of the twentieth century, acknowledged the reservation at Hot Springs in 1832, asserting, "but it was not a 'park' in the strict sense of the word. It was not scenically important." Even though Hot Springs earned national park designation in 1921, Ise concluded, "It should have remained a reservation."⁴⁶ Tracing the importance of wilderness to the national park idea, the historian Roderick Nash hoped to situate the birth of the park idea in the Yosemite Valley when Congress granted the land to the state of California in 1864. But Nash admitted "Technically, the Yosemite grant of 1864 was not the first federal act. In 1832, some hot springs in the state of Arkansas were set aside as a national reservation. The area was tiny, however, heavily developed, hardly scenic."⁴⁷ Twenty-first century scholars have continued this scenic and "monumental" focus on the parks, dedicating mere sentences to analyzing the complicated history of Hot Springs, summing up the landscape as nothing more than "our national hot tub."⁴⁸ Even as historians have innovatively moved past such a narrow interpretation of park landscapes, Hot Springs has never become a central site of analysis.

⁴⁵ This is not to say that scholars have produced no work on Hot Springs. Local historians have documented the growth of the town; see Francis J. Scully, *Hot Springs, Arkansas and Hot Springs National Park: The Story of a City and the Nation's Health Resort* (Denver: Hanson Co. Publishing, 1966); Dee Brown, *The American Spa: Hot Springs, Arkansas* (Little Rock: Rose Publishing Co., 1982); the most comprehensive administrative history of the park comes from Ron Cockrell, *The Hot Springs of Arkansas – America's First National Park: Administrative History of Hot Springs National Park* (Omaha: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2014).

⁴⁶ John Ise, *Our National Park Policy*, quotes on 13 and 245.

⁴⁷ Roderick Nash, "The Value of Wilderness," *Environmental Review* 1, no. 3 (1976), 18.

⁴⁸ Dennis Drabelle, *The Power of Scenery: Frederick Law Olmsted and the Origin of National Parks* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 28.

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Visitors, patients, patrons, proprietors, and government officials focused on how they could access the precious resource. Therefore, each chapter pivots around episodes where individuals or institutions aspire to “take the waters.” The phrasing carries two meanings. The first follows the popular phrase tied to spa treatments in the nineteenth century. But this hydrological history of Hot Springs also follows the paths of institutions as they physically took the water from one place to another, in the process connecting the physical journey of the waters to new ideas, people, and places. The hydraulic system was ultimately the by-product of changing political, economic, and cultural trends around Arkansas and across the United States throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The first two chapters flow chronologically. Chapter 1 traces the thermal waters’ journey from natural curiosity in the early nineteenth century to a contested commodity at the end of Reconstruction. Hot Springs chartered a unique path when compared to other mineral spas in early America as a result of Arkansas’ liminal space in the borderlands between the South and the expanding West, its accessibility issues, and most importantly federal intervention in 1832, reserving the springs and the land surrounding them for future public use. This federal presence, whether imagined during the antebellum era or through career government administrators in the 1870s, set a precedent that connected a small Southern hamlet like Hot Springs to national conversations about protecting and conserving natural resources that were otherwise tied to the natural wonders in the West.

Chapter 2 surveys the contested Hot Springs hydraulic landscape of the late 1870s and early 1880s in which parties with an interest in using the waters camped out both literally and

figuratively in the valley in order to access and control the medicinal and profitable natural resource. The reservation superintendent realized, that instead of a dominating command upon the landscape and its people, federal officials had to negotiate with established bathhouse owners and local physicians in order to control the waters and define access to them. Interior Department administrators wrestled with preserving the purity of the waters – an essential trait to ensure its healing qualities – against natural and social impurities that polluted the hydraulic landscape. Their solution was to contain the waters in a new, manufactured hydraulic system of reservoirs, pipes, and pumps. This system sent waters to establishments on and off the reservation to a “public” they helped define through granting or denying access to the waters.

Chapters 3-5 then travel to three locations in town where interest groups successfully secured use of the water from the Department of the Interior and worked to define the waters on their own terms for their own means. Chapter 3 moves to the Hot Springs Army and Navy General Hospital. Constructed by the War Department in 1887 to deploy the healing potential of the waters on the wounded bodies of soldiers and sailors, this first military hospital built in peacetime housed medical officers who developed thermal water treatment regimens for soldiers fighting in modern wars in dangerous new environments. The hospital and its programs performed the vital work of legitimizing the medicinal qualities of the thermal waters. In an era of medical professionalization, nature cures and elixirs were often sidelined to a sphere of quackery performed by dishonest charlatans. Threatened by this general trend, physicians who made a home, and niche business, in Hot Springs allied with medical officers in the hospital and the officials on the government reservation, to ensure continued research into the healing properties of the thermal waters as well as a steady stream of patients into the Valley of Vapors.

While Hot Springs grew as a health and pleasure resort, it also bowed to the brutal injustices of Jim Crow through practices and policies that restricted thermal water access to African Americans. Chapter 4 tracks these struggles and subsequent paths of resistance. Black men's and women's primarily experienced the thermal waters through their labor in service industries in Hot Springs for much of the nineteenth century. African Americans who could access the waters had to visit during off hours or use the free baths that were oftentimes in disrepair and did more harm than good. But the new hydraulic system constructed by reservation officials in the 1880s, the same network of reservoirs and pipes that sent the waters to bathhouses that hindered black access, provided opportunities for African American organizations to send the waters to welcoming establishments. The rise of black bathhouses in Hot Springs, designed and managed by powerful fraternal organizations, offers an overlooked site of black leisure where proprietors and visitors mapped the cultural significance of the thermal waters and their bathhouses across a growing network of African Americans migrating out of the South.

Chapter 5 situates Hot Springs' elevation to a national park status in 1921. Congress reserved Hot Springs in 1832, the same year artist George Catlin, upon studying the Great Plains and its Indigenous inhabitants, suggested the creation of a "nation's park" to preserve the scenery and culture of the land for generations. Nevertheless, Hot Springs has never fit neatly into histories of the park that trace through lines of scenic preservation from Catlin to landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, to the creation of Yellowstone and Yosemite and other examples of nature's sublimity and grandeur. Hot Springs officials successfully navigated through the Progressive Era reorganization of the National Park Service by stressing both the health and leisure benefits of the waters. Leaders in the new National Park Service, specifically Director Stephen Mather, believed in the healing potential of the waters and endorsed Hot

Springs' inclusion in the park project. Hundreds of thousands of visitors still traveled to Hot Springs to take the waters for their health, and as more tourists traveled by automobile to the parks, administrators yet again altered the park's terrestrial and hydraulic landscape to accommodate new visitors.

The dissertation concludes by returning to the themes analyzed at these three distinct locations, the thermal waters' medicinal legitimacy at the Army and Navy Hospital, African American thermal water access and resistance to Jim Crow in the black bathhouses, and the significance and cultural power of the national parks on the reservation. Carrying these threads through the Great Depression and its aftermath, the project concludes by reevaluating each locales' ultimate fate in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

“Taking the Waters” explores how, and why, visitors attached so much cultural significance to thermal spring water bubbling up from the hills in Arkansas (Fig. I.4). My focus on the waters joins a centuries-long list of others pulled to this unique site nestled in the Ouachita Mountains. Like a newspaper editor in the Arkansas Territory who, in July 1828, predicted Hot Springs was “destined, at some future period, to become a town or city of no small importance.”⁴⁹ In one way or another, visitors have come from near and far to experience and attempt to understand the waters of Hot Springs. The waters fascinated explorers and offered suffering invalids a possibility of recuperative salvation. They intrigued Stephen Crane to comprehend how all of America somehow fit onto Central Avenue. And the national park continues to attract millions of visitors every year to a valley constructed, literally and figuratively, to “bathe the world.” What follows, therefore, is an analysis of that important town, its people, its park, and its waters, a hydrological history.

⁴⁹ “The Hot Springs,” *Arkansas Gazette* (Arkansas Post, Arkansas Territory), 9 July 1828, 5.



Fig. I.4: F.C. Boving rendition of Hot Springs Reservation, c. 1888. Escaping steam on mountainside are spring discharge sites. An elaborate system of troughs and pipes convey the waters to the bathhouses. Army and Navy General Hospital is on hill to the right; Hot Springs National Park Archives.

Chapter 1: From Curiosity to Commodity: Cultivating a Landscape of Health and Healing in Hot Springs

In 1835 Hot Springs, Arkansas, was “a spa on the border of civilized settlement” in the words of the German botanist and physician George Engelmann. Engelmann predicted that “Before this half of the century is past... the hot springs will offer more comfortable accommodations for its guests, competent doctors and better bathing facilities for its patients, and entertainments for those who seek diversion.”⁵⁰ The scientific expeditions led by Dunbar and Hunter and Stephen Long had defined the hot springs as the latest natural wonder in the young United States, and “Those springs, situated in a wild and as yet almost uninhabited quarter of our country,” noted an essayist writing for the *American Athenaeum: A Repository of Belles Lettres, Science, and the Arts* in 1825, “are worthy of being classed among the greatest natural curiosities on the continent.”⁵¹ With this publicity at hand, along with rudimentary chemical analyses of the waters, town promoters felt confident claiming Hot Springs’ thermal waters could cure a variety of diseases, from rheumatism, gout, paralysis, syphilis, headaches, and ulcers, to opium addiction and alcoholism.

Hot Springs, however, was not a typical spa town during the early nineteenth century. In fact, it was the furthest thing from a relaxing and recuperative space espoused by early boosters.

The same year Engelmann espoused the virtues of Hot Springs, the geologist George

⁵⁰ George Engelmann, “The Hot Springs in Arkansas,” in Jerome Jansma, Harriet H. Jansma and George Engelmann, “George Engelmann in the Arkansas Territory,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (Autumn, 1991) 245-246.

⁵¹ “The Hot Springs of the Ouachita,” *American Athenaeum: A Repository of Belles Lettres, Science, and the Arts* 1, no. 34, 352. A note on “Ouachita.” Until the first decades of the nineteenth century, Ouachita was spelled a few different ways, including “Washitaw,” “Washita,” and “Ouachitta.” All of these referred to the river south of the hot springs, not the Washita River in present-day Oklahoma.

Featherstonaugh found only “wretched-looking log cabins” unfit for the healthy, let alone the sick: “We had never seen anything worse or more unpromising... How invalids contrive to be comfortable, who come to this ragged place, I cannot imagine.”⁵² Featherstonaugh and others touched upon the realities of Arkansas’ antebellum landscape where the population was more transient than permanent. Even the correspondent for the *American Athenaeum* noted the absence of humanity in Hot Springs. In stark contrast to the extravagant spa towns in the eastern United States such as Saratoga Springs, the Ballston Spa and the Virginia Hot Springs, the author found “a rude and grotesque village or encampment” built by those who “had been rendered wretched and useless.” There were no well-travelled roads, no urban infrastructure, and barely any permanent establishments.

But optimistic perspectives like Engelmann’s ultimately proved prophetic. By the 1870s, Hot Springs boosters advertised their prized thermal waters as a well-defined medicinal commodity consumed by thousands of visitors every year. After 1876 the town offered rail accommodations that connected the small town to the rest of the nation. Patients and patrons had access to a wide range of hotels where they could relax between treatments. And most importantly, the town’s thermal waters were accessible to the masses. Six permanent bathhouses replaced the crude and temporary establishments patronized in prior decades. Here, visitors paid to experience the “miraculous” and “wonderful cures performed by the use of these thermal waters.” Hot Springs, according to one early booster for the town, was now “a place of business.”⁵³ The hot springs became Hot Springs.

⁵² George W. Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion through the Slave States, from Washington on the Potomac to the Frontier of Mexico; with Sketches of Popular manners and Geological Notices* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844), 108.

⁵³ Charles Cutter, *The Hot Springs as They Are. A History and Guide* (Little Rock: W.H. Windsor, Book and Job Printer, 1874), 50.

How did individuals at the local, regional, and national levels successfully transform Hot Springs' thermal waters from a natural curiosity in the early nineteenth century to a well-defined and commodified resource by the 1870s? In the end, boosters succeeded when capital, consumers, and infrastructure, three variables vital for spa growth, arrived in Hot Springs after the Civil War. With the aid of these tools, promoters' unrealized dreams became reality. But from the 1820s to the 1870s, Hot Springs adherents laid the groundwork for this growth as they experimented and negotiated the thermal natural resource's role in their changing lives, changes produced by transformations in transportation, communication, and markets. Boosters tried to situate the thermal waters in these larger conversations. They believed their town could mimic Northern and Mid-Atlantic mineral spas in a Southern setting. By constructing a therapeutic narrative based on contemporary science and myth, they cultivated an imagined landscape of health at Hot Springs, connecting the springs to a long history of therapeutic mineral waters. Defining Hot Springs as an idyllic "garden-spot" while contrasting it with the miasmatic and dangerous landscape of the mid-century American South, town supporters hoped the waters, country, and climate of the town could attract visitors.⁵⁴

But boosters' imagined landscape, the idyllic "spa on the border of civilized settlement" clashed against the harsh realities of antebellum Arkansas. Promoters conceived of Hot Springs as a rival to New England and Southern spa resorts, but the truth was they were comparing makeshift shacks to opulent mansions. The depredations of the Civil War laid waste to boosters' idyllic representation of Hot Springs as raids and fire fights wiped the town off the map. With Hot Springs as a municipal tabula rasa after the war, boosters again exaggerated and fabricated perceptions of the town's history, this time accompanied by an influx of people, capital, and

⁵⁴ "Fourth of July at Hot Springs," *Arkansas Times and Advocate* (Little Rock, AR), 16 July 1838, 3.

infrastructure characteristic of the New South. Entrepreneurs and investors worked to seize upon this interest and commodify the thermal waters. Lastly, The U.S. Supreme Court settled previous land disputes between settlers and the federal government dating back to before the Civil War. In 1875, the Court affirmed federal control of the waters in a series of legal cases known as the Hot Springs Cases. Ultimately, booster narratives prevailed in defining Hot Springs as a landscape of health, and by the 1880s thousands of visitors and desperate patients came to this exciting, unexplored, and unexploited quadrant of the country.

Hot Springs' antebellum boosters created strategies and tactics that situate their work in conversation with other promoters from across the country who were developing the pillars of a growing health tourism sector in an industrializing United States. A new middling class of Americans began to explore the rapidly interconnected country in order to reach aspects of nature that afforded them relaxation, recreation, and most importantly, recovery.⁵⁵ These experiences often took place in what would become America's first national parks. As white settlers moved further into the interior of the nation, they sought places to heal their bodies and pull travelers to remote western locations as well as space to define themselves in an industrializing world. Hot Springs was one of the first health tourism sites west of the Mississippi River. Scholars have given the location little attention, possibly due to the slow development of the resort town. But boosters' strategies in Hot Springs offer more similarities to Western resort sites than those along the East Coast, demonstrating both reasons for boosters' early failures along with an early template for Western health tourism.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ George Weisz, "Historical Reflections on Medical Travel," *Anthropology and Medicine* 18, no. 1 (April 2011): 137-144; Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995); Gregg Mitman, "Hay Fever Holiday: Health, Leisure, and Place in Gilded-Age America," *Bulletin of Historical Medicine* 77, no. 3 (2003), 600-635.

⁵⁶ Western health tourism focused on the same combination of transportation infrastructure, capital, and a steady flow of middle-class and wealthy visitors; see Janet Mace Valenza, *Taking the Waters in Texas: Springs, Spas, and Fountains of Youth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist*

Boosters' Ideal Landscape in Hot Springs

Nineteenth-century Americans spent much of their lives trying to understand nature and the role it could play in their lives. Some manipulated the natural landscape, transforming it into a tool to facilitate market growth and industrial development. This process took place most dramatically in the Northeast, where industrial capitalism became, according to the historian Theodore Steinberg, “not only an economic system, but a system of ecological relations as well.”⁵⁷ Some rejected the Market Revolution and sought refuge in nature, assigning natural resources spiritual and medicinal power. Others across the South and the newly settled West were unable to bend nature to their will and learned and negotiated the value and danger nature afforded their families in what Conevery Valenčius described as a new “medical geography.”⁵⁸ These pathways often overlapped as consumers and capital moved across the North American continent.

One consistent trend that dates back to Indigenous land use patterns, and expanded during the colonial era was assigning medicinal and social significance to mineral spring sites. Water cures and mineral springs have a long history tied to health and leisure. From Homeric times, through the Renaissance, and into the Victorian Era, European travelers flowed towards thermal

Attractions in the Nineteenth Century (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 122-181; Martha E. Geores, “Surviving on Metaphor: How ‘Health = Hot Springs’ Created and Sustained a Town,” in Robin A. Kearns and Wilbert M. Gesler, Eds., *Putting Health into Place: Landscape, Identity, and Well Being* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 36-52; Gregg Mitman: *Breathing Space: How Allergies Shape Our Lives and Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007): 10-41.

⁵⁷ Theodore Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated: Industrialization and the Waters of New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), 11; see also John Lauritz Larson, *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁵⁸ Conevery Bolton Valenčius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); “Taking the (southern) waters: science, slavery, and nationalism at the Virginia springs,” *Anthropology and Medicine* 18, no. 1 (April 2011), 7-22.

and mineral water towns across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East for the resources' curative properties, placing their faith in facts supported by the latest medical knowledge at the time. In Bath, England, the springs contained a 2,000-year history of conquerors and commoners taking the waters. The town later became one of the fashion and cultural centers of eighteenth century British high society.⁵⁹ Colonists in British North America used their own spring sites and spas to culturally connect themselves to the societal metropole across the Atlantic while simultaneously developing a space that was uniquely American.⁶⁰ Virginia colonists, after discovering a close-knit group of hot and warm springs in the Appalachian Mountains, named the region Bath County. The historian Thomas Chambers described the Virginia hot springs as "a calming antidote to society's tensions" where mountain and spring water healed visitors bodies and spirits.⁶¹ In New England, Connecticut's Stafford Springs attracted visitors and invalids by advertising itself as "the New England Bath."⁶² Along the Hudson River in New York, Saratoga Springs and the Ballston Spa became sites of health and leisure for early Americans yearning to compete and surpass British culture at the onset of the Revolution. The springs were not merely regional attractions either. In Saratoga, the mercantile elite from New York and Boston shared space with southern planters and "commercial gentlemen" from "any of the West Indian islands."⁶³ Spa development not only brought visitors to these hydrologically distinctive places, but also brought the infrastructure of tourism alongside these guests. Some of the earliest turnpikes in the South connected growing urban centers to resort towns in Hot Springs, North

⁵⁹ Wilbert M. Gesler, "Bath's Reputation as a Healing Place," in Kearns and Gesler, Eds., *Putting Health into Place*, 17-35.

⁶⁰ Scholars of health tourism in the United States have done excellent work tracing connections between North American colonists and their attachments to health tourism back in Europe and new enterprises in America; see Scribner, "'The happy effects of these waters'"; Weisz, "Historical Reflections on Medical Travel."

⁶¹ Chambers, *Drinking the Waters*, 28-31, quote on 28.

⁶² Scribner, "'The happy effects of these waters,'" 447.

⁶³ Brown, *Inventing New England*, 36.

Carolina, and across the southern highlands. These became sites not only of health and healing, but, according to the historian C. Brenden Martin, presented “entrepreneurial potential” for opportunistic visitors.⁶⁴ Spa towns dotted the eastern seaboard during the Revolutionary Period and the Early Republic. By 1860, there were at least 53 spring sites advertised in western Virginia alone and Saratoga Springs had made itself indispensable to the New England aristocracy.⁶⁵ Mineral springs in United States were as much centers of culture and society as they were oases of health and healing, places where Americans negotiated how best to use the beneficial aspects of nature.

Early expeditions to Hot Springs, which brought national attention to the area, positioned the site as the latest landscape of health in America. Thomas Jefferson received William Dunbar’s notebooks and reports in early 1806, the first reports of the hot springs in the new Louisiana Territory. In a letter to Congress on February 19, Jefferson highlighted the “remarkable hot springs” discovered by “Mr. Dunbar, of Natchez, a citizen of distinguished science.”⁶⁶ Jefferson was himself knowledgeable of mineral springs and their potential, having documented the “very much resorted” springs of his home state in *Notes on the State of Virginia* in 1787.⁶⁷ Outside of the halls of Congress, George Hunter gave an interview to the *New Orleans Gazette* describing his visit to the “hot springs of Ouachitta and found among them the greatest natural curiosities in the country.” The newspaper concluded that from Dr. Hunter’s testimonial on the waters’ “extraordinary medical virtues... there are few parts of Louisiana, that hold out

⁶⁴ Brenden Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Double-Edged Sword* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 3.

⁶⁵ Chambers, *Drinking the Waters*, 1-27; C. Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South*, 1-22

⁶⁶ Thomas Jefferson, “Message to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States,” February 19, 1806, in Andrew Marschalk, printer, *Discoveries Made in Exploring the Missouri, Red River and Washita, by Captains Lewis and Clark, Doctor Sibley, and William Dunbar, Esq.* (Natchez: Andrew Marschalk, 1806), 4

⁶⁷ Thomas Jefferson, “Query VI,” *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 33; <https://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/jefferson/jefferson.html>.

greater temptation to emigrants.”⁶⁸ As Hot Springs gained a reputation for healing “visited by persons from all the Western States for health,” boosters hoped to include Hot Springs in the company of leading mineral spa towns across the United States.⁶⁹

Early accounts portrayed Hot Springs as an appealing destination for white planters in the Mississippi River floodplain. In an account of his travels down the Mississippi and into the South in 1819, Thomas Nuttall wrote that Hot Springs offered a “delightful and rational amusement” to “those southern gentlemen who pass the summer in quest of health and recreation.”⁷⁰ Nuttall’s travel account not only highlighted Hot Springs’ allure to Southern gentlemen, but how “wealth will ere long flow, no doubt, to the banks of the Arkansas” due to its soil and climate.⁷¹ The hot springs stoked interest regionally and nationally and interested parties hoped the unusual environment could create a pull factor into the new territory. Charles Pierre Bertrand, editor of the Little Rock *Arkansas Advocate*, envisioned increasing Hot Springs’ reputation across the South by making sure the thermal water curiosity made it into other newspapers. He suggested to “Editors in the Southern States, and particularly in Louisiana and Mississippi” that they use some of his Hot Springs articles in their papers, in order to make citizen readers “aware that there are comfortable accommodations at the Hot Springs.”⁷² Bertrand no doubt was thinking of accounts like one from a visitor who documented “a journey of upwards of one thousand miles” to the springs, and reflected:

⁶⁸ *New Orleans Gazette*, 14 February 1805, in Trey Berry, Pam Beasley, and Jeanne Clements, *The Forgotten Expedition 1804-1805, The Louisiana Purchase Journals of Dunbar and Hunter* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), xxxi.

⁶⁹ Timothy Flint, *The History and Geography of the Mississippi Valley. To which is appended a condensed physical geography of the Atlantic United States and the whole American Continent* (Cincinnati: E.H. Flint & L.R. Lincoln, 1832), 267.

⁷⁰ Thomas Nuttall, *A Journal of Travels into the Arkansas Territory, during the Year 1819: With Occasional observations on the Manners of the Aborigines* (Philadelphia: Thomas Palmer, 1821), 112

⁷¹ “Nuttall’s Travels,” *American Watchman and Delaware Advertiser* (Wilmington, DE), 27 September 1822, 2.

⁷² “Hot Springs,” *Arkansas Advocate* (Little Rock, Arkansas Territory), 7 April 1830, 4.

When we contemplate the Hot Springs with reference to the population on the Mississippi, including New Orleans, who are almost compelled to seek a retreat from the unwholesome atmosphere where they reside – and consider their easy access by the Arkansas and Red rivers, and include in our estimate the immense body of planters spreading over the rich soil of Texas – when we take into view also their almost miraculous healing virtues, which will cure visitors from every quarter... we may with confidence assert that the Hot Springs of Arkansas will, at no very distant period, become a place of much greater resort than any other watering place upon the whole surface of the globe.⁷³

Hot Springs waters could offer Southern planters a cure to the environmental dangers of impure air and stagnant water produced found on the plantation and in Southern urban cities. By 1829, these promotional strategies had born fruit, as a resident in town conducted a crude survey of visitors and found that the waters brought together 61 patients and patrons from Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Florida, Missouri, and Texas.⁷⁴

Local Arkansas political figures sought to amplify the medicinal properties of the waters, a theme familiar to Americans in the early nineteenth century, in order to sustain national attention and bolster travel to the region, as well as protect the precious resource from outside exploitation. As early as 1820, elected representatives for the Arkansas Territory petitioned Congress to protect the waters as “they might be quickly rendered of great advantage to the afflicted of every portion of that emence [sic] country which is watered by the Mississippi.” The memorialists feared that without some preemptive protection, this “bountifull [sic] gift of nature” could be “monopolized by individuals,” whether French, Spanish, or Indigenous, who might “withhold their aid from the afflicted poor.”⁷⁵ By 1830, the Arkansas Territory’s representative to Congress Ambrose Sevier, a member of one of Arkansas’ most powerful political families, made clear the need for Congress to act on behalf of the waters, “to render [the springs] more

⁷³ “Hot Springs of Arkansas,” *Arkansas Advocate*, 24 April 1835, quote from 1 May 1835 issue.

⁷⁴ “Visiters [sic] at the Springs,” *Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Arkansas Territory), 5 August 1829, 3.

⁷⁵ “Memorial to Congress by the Territorial Assembly,” February 15, 1820, in Clarence Edwin Carter, *The Territorial Papers of the United States, Volume XIX: The Territory of Arkansas, 1819-1825* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1953), 149.

comfortable” so that “diseased invalids may resort thither.”⁷⁶ Sevier, born in Greene County, Tennessee, only 30 miles from Hot Springs, North Carolina, likely understood the medicinal and cultural power of spring sites and the possibility they offered for rapid development.

Territorial representatives sought support from the General Government, as their vision for the resort town would also aid the nation’s poor who “arrive without means of support... from almost every part of the Union.”⁷⁷ Sevier remained diligent in advocating for this project before Congress, pushing the protective legislation through the House Committee on the Public Lands. On April 20, 1832, he succeeded. Tucked into a law concerning salt springs in the territory, section 3 stated, “the hot springs in said territory, together with four sections of land including said springs... shall be reserved for the future disposal of the United States and shall not be entered, located, or appropriated, for any other purpose whatsoever.” Alternately described by scholars as both “an accidental park” and “America’s First National Park,” the Hot Springs Reservation was neither in 1832.⁷⁸ Instead, it was designated through legislation that was the product of an effort by Hot Springs supporters who believed the Arkansas valley would soon become the latest iteration of a fashionable spa town situated in the western fringes of the young nation. Arkansas, still a territory in 1832, fell under the direct authority of the federal government its territorial representatives believed the General Government held primary responsibility for improving the springs. With the hot springs protected (on paper) from private influences (both foreign and domestic), boosters and influential Arkansans used the thermal waters to bring visitors to the territory.

⁷⁶ “Tuesday, January 26, 1830,” *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States, Twenty-first Congress, First Session* (Washington, D.C.: Duff Green, 1829), 212.

⁷⁷ “Memorial to Congress by the Territorial Assembly,” 3 November 1831, in Carter, *The Territorial Papers of the United States, Volume XXI: The Territory of Arkansas 1829-1836 Continued* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1954), 415.

⁷⁸ W. Cane West, “Learning the Land: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in the Southern Borderlands, 1500-1850,” PhD Diss., (University of South Carolina, 2019), 161; Cockrell, *Administrative History*.

Boosters used newspapers to drum up interest in travel to the Arkansas Territory and Hot Springs, especially after the reservation act. The editors of these papers, men such as Albert Pike, were some of Arkansas Territory's first boosters (Fig. 1.1). Originally from Massachusetts, Pike, a learned man and schoolteacher, travelled across the West before settling in Arkansas in the early 1830s. Pike's life is not only representative of the influx of Northerners visiting and settling in Arkansas during the territorial period, but also how seemingly distinct regions of the nation were establishing lines of communication between one another through the rise of newspapers and periodicals. Pike wrote for the *Advocate* and purchased the newspaper from Charles Bertrand, himself a transplant from New York, in 1835. That April, Pike visited Hot Springs for the first time, writing to a friend that "experience is daily showing the value of these waters."⁷⁹ As a staunch Whig and rival of President Andrew Jackson, Pike's editorials tied the success of Hot Springs to larger "internal improvement" projects throughout Arkansas.⁸⁰ He noted how future railroads could connect East Coast travelers to Arkansas, where an "unrivaled locomotive" system would bring "five hundred persons, visitors [sic] to the celebrated Hot Springs of the Washita."⁸¹ As editor of the *Advocate*, and a one of Little Rock's first lawyers, Pike made a name for himself in Arkansas' social and political worlds for decades.

⁷⁹ Walter Lee Brown, *A Life of Albert Pike* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 63.

⁸⁰ Mark Fiege situates Whig Party internal improvements through an environmental lens, stating the party "proposed government-sponsored environmental modifications that would help citizens achieve their individual and public ambitions" in the form of steamboats, canals, and trains; a "network of exchange that would unite the nation." Fiege, *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 164. See also, Larson, *Internal Improvement*.

⁸¹ "Notes from the Editor," *Arkansas Advocate*, 21 August 1835, 2.

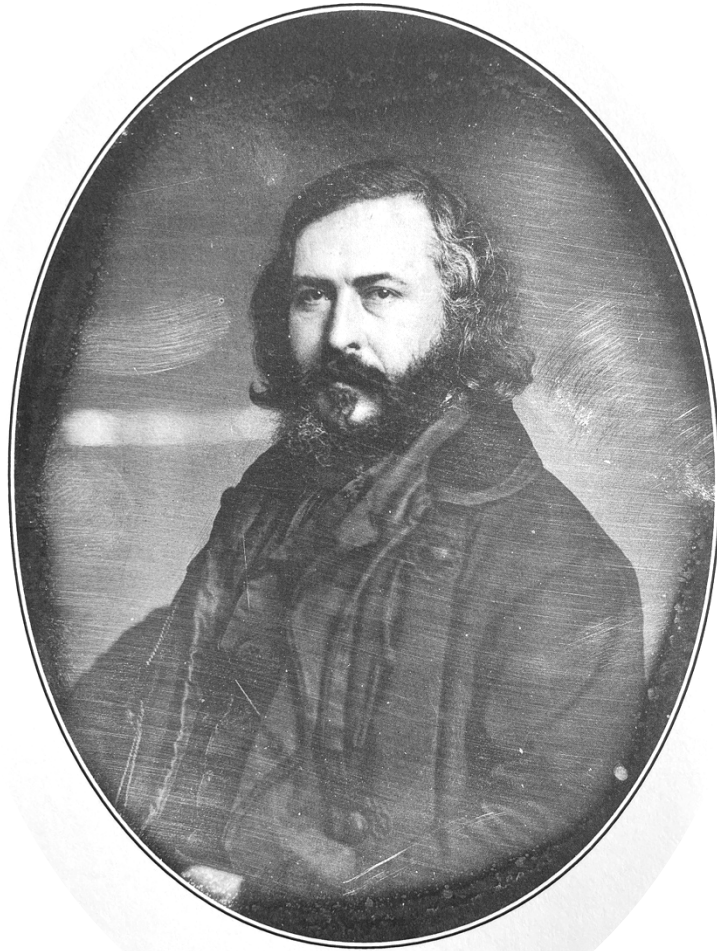


Fig. 1.1: Albert Pike, undated photograph; Supreme Council Library; in Brown, *A Life of Albert Pike*, frontispiece material.

Boosting the hot springs was not a partisan issue either. The Democrat William Woodruff, editor of Arkansas' first newspaper, the *Arkansas Gazette*, ran weekly articles noting not only the scientific reports surfacing about the hot springs, but the allure of such a curiosity in the territory. In a series of letters to the newspaper in 1829, a correspondent for the *Louisiana Advertiser* described how the spring water shot forth from the ground, creating a modern-day "Fountain of Hygeia" in Arkansas. By referencing the Greek goddess of health, the author felt

authorized to highlight the reputation the waters had for improving invalids' health and how the "healthy region" of the Ouachita Mountains could soon "become a general resort." Next the author described the physical spring sites as related to the "Kettle of Medea," where magical properties bubbled from the waters and were responsible for healing visitors, "white and Negro," of afflictions ranging from crooked backs to fatal liver diseases.⁸²

The journeys of men like Pike, Bertrand, and others demonstrate how boosters circulated information about the hot springs to curious and interested parties across the country. Most of Hot Springs earliest residents and later generations of boosters all immigrated from outside Arkansas to settle in the valley in ways similar to Massachusetts-born Ludovicus Belding and Hiram Whittington. Belding, upon hearing of the thermal waters while in Indiana in the 1820s, visited to Hot Springs to heal his rheumatism. He permanently settled in Hot Springs in 1828 and established the town's first inn. Belding hoped to change the name of the town to "Thermopolis" to draw visitors to the site.⁸³ Whittington moved from Brooklyn, New York, to Arkansas to work for Woodruff's *Arkansas Gazette*, but poor health after arriving in the territory sent him to Hot Springs in 1832. Whittington took advantage of Hot Springs' natural advantages, developing a Novaculite factory to export whetstones and a boarding house for other invalids visiting the springs in the 1830s. Lastly, Asa Thompson, originally from Pennsylvania, came to Hot Springs in 1830 and established one of the first bathhouses in the village, charging one dollar for three baths.⁸⁴ On the heels of statehood in 1836, Hot Springs helped to bring new citizens into Arkansas to settle and improve the country.

⁸² "The Hot Springs," *Arkansas Gazette*, 26 August 1829, 1; LaFauci examines how planters were concerned with liver diseases and often referred to mineral spring relieving liver pains; "Taking the (southern) waters": 7-22.

⁸³ "The Hot Springs," *Arkansas Gazette*, 9 July 1828.

⁸⁴ Forrest M. Benson and Donald S. Libbey, "History of Hot Springs National Park," c. 1952, 14; Microfilm scan from Southwest Regional Office, National Park Service Library, Scanned May 5, 2005, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/hosp/hot_springs_history.pdf.

Readers who absorbed Pike's paper and other publications where information about Hot Springs appeared were part of a nascent middle class growing across the North and South. They were men and women who, according to the historian Jonathan Daniel Wells, used newspapers and periodicals from the different regions to develop an independent class consciousness.⁸⁵ Pike apparently understood this cultural endeavor, writing to a friend in Massachusetts in 1835 that, living in Arkansas, "we are not *quite* on the edge of the world... at length we are in the habit of getting regular mails from the East. All this gives us a claim to civilization."⁸⁶ Pike, along with promoting internal improvements and manufacturing to readers in the South, situated Hot Springs and its waters into a larger narrative of what it meant to be middle class in the South. Boosters hoped papers like Pike's would pull those from the literate middling class of physicians, dentists, lawyers, teachers, and manufacturers to the valley alongside wealthy southern planters. More than merely "Community Diaries," the celebratory articles about Hot Springs' waters made their way into Eastern papers like Washington's *National Intelligencer* and the *Philadelphia Advertiser*, both of which informed Americans about the springs and created a mental map of the new western territories and states.⁸⁷

As Americans settled more of the continent, they continued to associate Hot Springs and its waters with sites of health and healing, in no small part due to the explosive rise of hydropathy in Europe and the United States. Pioneered by Vincent Priessnitz in the Silesian Alps in the mid-1820s, hydropathy focused on the external application of water through baths, douches, rubbing with wet towels, and internal application by drinking large quantities of water.

⁸⁵ Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); 1-40.

⁸⁶ Brown, *A Life of Albert Pike*, 85.

⁸⁷ Michael Dougan, *Community Diaries: Arkansas Newspapering, 1819-2002* (Little Rock: August House, 2003); Ruth Irene Jones, "Hot Springs: Ante-Bellum Watering Place," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Spring, 1955), 14.

The process supposedly eliminated ill humors from the body and restored the supposed natural equilibrium that kept humans healthy and happy. Advocates in the United States, to distinguish themselves from Great Britain and establish their own medical tradition, latched onto hydrotherapeutic regimens.⁸⁸ Hydropaths formed medical societies and American physicians developed their own ideas about water cures. Like Joel Shew, the first president of the American Hydropathic Society, they used mineral springs as sites of education and practice. Texts such as Shew's first book, *Hydropathy, or, the Water-Cure* (1844), articulated the benefits of spring water as "contrivances of nature" that "result[ed] of divine wisdom," and argued that natural healing invigorated citizens of a burgeoning nation amid a Market Revolution.⁸⁹ By the mid 1850s, at hydropony's zenith, there were roughly twenty-seven hydropathic sanitoriums at or near mineral and thermal springs in the United States spread between urban centers and the hinterlands. These varied from spartan establishments in small towns in the mountainous regions of the Appalachians to the extravagance of Saratoga Springs.⁹⁰

Hydropathic knowledge did not remain in medical texts, however. Hot Springs boosters brought the latest hydropathic techniques to the public, not through books or medical societies, but through newspapers. From October to December 1841, an observer under the pseudonym "Douche" issued weekly reports from Hot Springs that highlighted medicinal bathing practices. His goal was to inform Arkansans not only about the "most agreeable and delightful" accommodations at Hot Springs, which many readers probably knew about, but also how Hot

⁸⁸ See Susan E. Cayleff, *Wash and Be Healed: The Water-Cure Movement and Women's Health* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); Annette Nolte, "The Ebb and Flow of Hydropathy: The Water-Cure Movement in Europe and America, PhD Diss. (University of Texas at Arlington, 2001).

⁸⁹ For cultural significance of hydropony and springs, see Harvey Green, *Fit for America: Health, Fitness, Sport, and American Society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986): 54-76, quote from p.62.

⁹⁰ Hilary Marland and Jane Adams, "Hydropathy at Home: The Water Cure and Domestic Healing in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 83, no. 3 (October 1, 2009): 499-529; Marshall Scott Legan, "Hydropathy in America: A Nineteenth Century Panacea," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 45, no. 3 (May-June 1971): 272.

Springs was connected to a long legacy of European spa culture. The text also detailed bathing techniques offered at Hot Springs, including modern spout baths and hot douches. The pressurized sprays, according to the report, had been “a very favorite bath at the springs this season, and many very wonderful stories are told of its cures.”⁹¹ But in part because of its location, situated in the edges of settlement in Arkansas for much of the antebellum era, Hot Springs did not appear in many national and international hydropathic publications. In 1831, John Bell, an Irish surgeon in Philadelphia and an early proponent of hydropathy, sought to inform others on the similarities between American and European mineral springs. Covering much of the country from New England to the Ohio River valley and into the Southern States, Bell established his credibility “Having visited some of the mineral springs in the western States” as well. Bell described his publication as offering “fuller and more connected details, for the guidance of the invalid, and the information of the physician, than can be obtained from any other source at this time,” and yet Hot Springs did not appear in his 550-page volume.⁹²

Without the initial endorsement of early hydropathic experts, Hot Springs promoters worked tirelessly to demonstrate the power of place by highlighting the salubrity or healthfulness of the waters *and* the surrounding landscape. Settlers travelling west were concerned about the “health” of any new settlement and how their bodies would react to foreign airs and waters.⁹³ Boosters often paired reports on Hot Springs curious and medicinal waters with positive comments on the Arkansas climate that sought to both inform visitors and allay their fears of a dangerous environment. As more visited Hot Springs, some, like an Evansville, Indiana, physician, wrote home praising the healthful environment for his improved constitution claiming

⁹¹ Douche, “No. 8 – Hot Springs of Arkansas,” *Arkansas Gazette* 8 December 1841, 2.

⁹² John Bell, *On Baths and Mineral Waters in Two Parts* (Philadelphia: Literary Rooms, 1831).

⁹³ See Valenčius, *The Health of the Country*; She argues how “Springs were a selling point in the many varieties of boosterism that animated nineteenth-century discussions of borderland territory,” 152-58.

that through Hot Springs “waters and salubrious air” he had “been fully rejuvenated.”⁹⁴ In 1830, Asa Thompson took out an ad in the *Arkansas Advocate* to highlight not just the waters as a “natural curiosity,” but also emphasized “Their situation in a valley, through which a refreshing breeze is continually blowing,” which was understood to protect Hot Springs against miasmas that settlers believed resided in lowland areas and stagnant cities.⁹⁵ Those with a vested interest in a successful Arkansas pitched the Hot Springs Reservation as a salubrious sanctuary for Southern elites as well as those invalids who had grown anxious over their daily bouts with the unhealthful environments that surrounded them.

Advertisers and Hot Springs supporters explicitly contrasted the naturalness of the springs to other artificial spas in the United States and abroad. A Baltimore men’s journal included an article on Hot Springs in the 1830s, concluding, “We recommend to the afflicted a visit to this romantic spot” and immediately differentiated it from more popular spas by declaring “Compared with the Hot Springs of Arkansas, Saratoga and Ballston are hardly worth naming.” The paper’s editor then mused, “What will our migratory birds of the South, who have been accustomed to luxuriate, in the dog-days, in the pine-groves of Saratoga, say?”⁹⁶ “Hot Springs,” according to George Engelmann in 1835, “will be just as fashionable a spa for the west and south as Saratoga now is for the north and east.”⁹⁷ Engelmann also compared Hot Springs to other spa towns such as Karlsbad and Alexisbad from his home country, ruminating. “But how much artifice has been done there” at the German spas, ruining the experience through lavish and gaudy architecture? At Hot Springs, noted Engelmann, “man follow[s] the tasteful guidance of

⁹⁴ “Local and Miscellaneous,” *Evansville Daily Journal* (Evansville, IN) 9 August 1858, 3.

⁹⁵ “Hot Springs,” *Arkansas Advocate*, 7 April 1930, 4.

⁹⁶ “Hot and Sulphur Springs of Arkansas,” *Baltimore Young Men’s Paper*, 23 May 1835, 216.

⁹⁷ Engelmann, “The Hot Springs in Arkansas,” in Jansma, et. al., “George Engelmann and the Arkansas Territory,” 246.

nature.”⁹⁸ In 1843, a report from a Cleveland, Ohio, correspondent noted that the way in which the thermal water cascades into Hot Springs Creek “forms a beautiful pool, which surpasses any artificial bathing place.”⁹⁹ Hot Springs wild and natural properties separated it from the established spas across the country and around the world.

Booster narratives of the thermal waters’ curative properties stemmed not only from Western antiquity but also European conquest of the North American continent, evident through the exoticism of Indigenous cultures interacting with the thermal waters. It is important to note that all mention of Native use of the hot springs comes from white men either relaying earlier myths or perpetuating their own in an effort to detail the long-held importance of the waters to different cultures. George Engelmann did both as he incorporated imaginary Native voices into “The history of these western lands.” “We know,” declared Engelmann, that Indians regarded Hot Springs “as a holy place, where everyone must lay down his weapons, if he did not wish to invoke the wrath of the great spirit.”¹⁰⁰ While neither the oral traditions of Indigenous nations like the Caddo or Quapaw, nor the archeological record support these claims, Engelmann’s valley of peace did endow Hot Springs with a constructed spiritual legacy.¹⁰¹ Engelmann probably heard these tales during his visit to Hot Springs since stories of the town as “a neutral ground” were retold by “the old French inhabitants and Indians” and appeared in territorial newspapers.¹⁰² As some focused on Greek and Roman mythology or European settlement as a

⁹⁸ Engelmann, “The Hot Springs in Arkansas,” in Jansma, et. al., “George Engelmann and the Arkansas Territory,” 236; While unmentioned in his 1831 treatise on mineral waters, by 1855, John Bell’s update on the subject included a long description of Hot Springs’ thermal waters, comparing them not to eastern mineral waters in the United States, but placing their medicinal qualities “in the same class with the famed [European] ones of Baden-Baden, Wiesbaden, Teplize, and Carlsbad,” John Bell, *The Mineral and Thermal Springs of the United States and Canada* (Philadelphia: Parry and McMillan, 1855), 313-314.

⁹⁹ “Hot Springs,” *Buffalo Daily Gazette* (Buffalo, NY), 13 April 1843, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Engelmann, “The Hot Springs in Arkansas,” in Jansma, et. al., “George Engelmann and the Arkansas Territory,” 235.

¹⁰¹ Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 4.

¹⁰² “The Hot Springs, No. II,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 26 August 1829, 1.

starting point to connect Hot Springs' history, while others sought to assert that the waters' romantic traditions began even earlier with its Native inhabitants.

The inclusion, and subsequent disappearance, of faceless Indigenous peoples was a tactic Hot Springs boosters borrowed from others who advertised mineral springs and spa towns in the eastern United States. According to the historian Vaughn Scribner, the English perceived natural mineral springs as an untamed and uncivilized wilderness, incompatible with English bodies, and dangerous until controlled and improved by colonists. It was only when the towns, including Saratoga and Massachusetts mineral spas, redesigned through infrastructure projects and reconstructed with European knowledge systems that colonists could take the waters safely.¹⁰³ George Engelmann referred to this European anxiety when describing Hot Springs as a dangerous, "wild and nearly unsettled region" where "the Indians roam about."¹⁰⁴ In 1841, "Douche" included in his letter to the *Arkansas Gazette* the long history of Hot Springs, a place "resorted to in every stage of society, from the wandering savage of the woods and prairies to the polished inhabitant of the city."¹⁰⁵ Boosters often inserted Indigenous men and women into the prehistory of Hot Springs, quickly supplanted by white settlers, all in search of a water cure.

The emblem of the fountain and the theme of healing magic never faded from the imaginary boosters concocted around the springs and the waters. They replaced the earlier imagery of Hygeia's bowl, used to describe the springs in the 1820s, with the more recognizable historical fount pursued by Ponce de Leon in his excursions through Florida in subsequent decades. "Had the infatuated De Leon penetrated a little farther westward," reported an Antebellum Arkansas newspaper, "he would have discovered here more than the Atlantis of his

¹⁰³ Vaughn Scribner, "'The happy effects of these waters'": 409-449.

¹⁰⁴ Engelmann, "The Hot Springs in Arkansas," in Jansma, et. al., "George Engelmann and the Arkansas Territory," 243.

¹⁰⁵ Douche, "Hot Springs of Arkansas," No. 2," *Arkansas Gazette*, 27 October 1841, 2.

delusive hopes.” Hot Springs offered to all “his ‘Fountain of Immortal Youth.’”¹⁰⁶ Others rewrote Hot Springs as central to Hernando de Soto’s well-known entrada through Arkansas in the 1530s and 1540s. While contemporary scholarship refutes the assertion that de Soto ever visited Hot Springs, nineteenth century promoters used the conquistador’s meandering trek through the state as permission to detail a hypothetical encounter.¹⁰⁷ Writing a popular account of the entrada in 1859, the journalist Lambert A. Wilmer documented a tale in which de Soto (whom he named Ferdinand), advised by nameless “Indians,” succeeded in guiding his “sick Spaniards” to “the salutiferous fountains.” “It is possible,” pondered Wilmer, “that some of De Soto’s companions, at the first view of these fountains, flattered themselves with the belief that they had found the very object of Ponce de Leon’s long and unsuccessful search.”¹⁰⁸ Hot Springs, endowed with a long history of white European discovery, use, and settlement, now contained a centuries-long provenance of health and healing (Fig. 1.2).

¹⁰⁶ “The Hot Springs,” *The True Democrat* (Little Rock, AR), 30 May 1854, 2

¹⁰⁷ Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 2.

¹⁰⁸ Lambert A. Wilmer, *The Life, Travels and Adventures of Ferdinand De Soto, Discoverer of the Mississippi* (Philadelphia: J.T. Lloyd, 1859), 485-6.



SPANIARDS DRINKING AT THE HOT SPRINGS IN ARKANSAS.

Fig. 1.2: Illustration of Hernando de Soto at the hot springs. The vapor from the springs steams up the left side of the illustration. Nameless Indians make up the background, as well as an exaggerated depiction of the Ouachita Mountains, made to resemble the sharp peaks of the Rockies for dramatic effect; from Wilmer, *The Life, Travels and Adventures of Ferdinand De Soto, Discoverer of the Mississippi*, 486.

By the 1830s, Americans were wrestling with how to define different aspects of nature in their lives. These recurrent negotiations were products of rapid changes to communication lines and transportation in a larger Market Revolution. In 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville noted in the second volume of his examination of *Democracy in America* how these changes instilled a restiveness in Americans, stating that “a man carefully builds a dwelling in which to pass his declining years, and he sells it while the roof is being laid; he plants a garden and he rents it out just as he was going to taste its fruits; he clears a field and he leaves to others the care of harvesting its crops.” De Tocqueville concluded that at year’s end, after this chaotic pace of

work, “he carries his restive curiosity here and there within the vast limits of the United States. He will thus go five hundred leagues in a few days in order to distract himself from his happiness.”¹⁰⁹ Travelers to Hot Springs, at these outskirts of settler civilization, found that same spring-loaded energy in the curious valley they visited. Located in the wilds of Arkansas for much of the antebellum period, boosters, territorial politicians, newspaper editors, and local residents compensated by creating an environmental history and legacy of health and healing for the town and its waters. George Engelmann, in 1835, concluded “Here as everywhere in America the future is a quickly realizable one, overlooking the insufficiencies of the present and filling the spirit with joyful hope.”¹¹⁰ In an era in which Americans connected their health to their surroundings, the hot springs were a safe place in the Southern wilderness. Boosters seized upon this understanding and experimented with ways to market the waters, the town, the state, and the region. They also positioned the valley as a superior rival to any American mineral spas, popular since the Revolutionary Era, and on par with European spa towns; the perfect location for a growing middling class of Americans produced by American restiveness and market forces. Boosters imagined an ideal Hot Springs; they just needed visitors to flood into the valley to make their dreams a reality.

Arrested Development: Environmental and Social Peculiarities in Hot Springs

Boosters in antebellum America celebrated Hot Springs thermal waters as “Blessings that Heaven has encompassed” beneath the “hills and narrow vales!” of Arkansas.¹¹¹ There remained

¹⁰⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Volume II, Section 2, Influence of Democracy on the Feelings of Americans, Ch. 13, Causes of the Restless Spirit of Americans, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/816/816-h/816-h.htm#link2HCH0034>.

¹¹⁰ Engelmann, “The Hot Springs in Arkansas,” in Jansma, et. al., “George Engelmann and the Arkansas Territory,” 246.

¹¹¹ “Hot Springs of Arkansas,” *Arkansas Advocate*, 24 April 1835, 3.

an enormous gulf, however, between the perception of Hot Springs as a southern Saratoga Springs boosted by interested parties and the reality of the town for much of the Antebellum era. The peculiarities of Arkansas' human and environmental histories stunted Hot Springs growth, and the landscape still deemed "wild" by many visitors. In the seats of power, the state was administered by unsure politicians who lacked the administrative reputation to control their state. Boosters' idyllic site of salubrity and stability faced off a stark reality of chaos and fragility.

Much of Arkansas remained in an undeveloped state well after its admission into the Union in 1836. Some of this arrested development was a product of the state's liminal space between the alluvial lowlands in the east along the Mississippi River and the mountainous regions to the northwest. These landscapes attracted a wide variety of planters, but also farmers, and traders who were too late, or too poor, to grasp more promising opportunities in the Ohio River Valley and Missouri. The state's variable geography attracted diverse set of settlers, all with opposing ideas about government and representation. As slaveholders in the eastern part of the state consolidated political and cultural power in Arkansas by the early 1840s, they, in line with other slaveholders across the South a decade earlier, delayed state-run internal improvement projects relating to roads and river travel because they were concerned increased taxes to support public works and manufacturing would ultimately weaken slave society.¹¹² Suspended projects not only injured farmers who desperately needed to get their raw materials to regional markets, they also slowed potential patients and patrons from visiting Hot Springs. This imbalance of infrastructure weakened the political power of those in the highland and mountainous regions of the state, and the disputes between regions sometimes proved lethal. In 1837 House speaker John Wilson from the eastern part of the state, upon "having words" with state representative Joseph

¹¹² Larson, *Internal Improvement*, 195-224.

Anthony from the west about the financial issues plaguing the state, escalated the argument and stabbed Anthony, fatally wounding him.¹¹³

The social character of Arkansas contrasted sharply with the genteel nature visitors found in more developed spa towns in the eastern part of the country. An editor in a Van Buren, Arkansas, paper wrote that “A typical Arkansan is... a person in a semi-barbaric state, half alligator, half horse... armed to the teeth, bristling with knives and pistols, a rollicking daredevil type of personage, made up of coarseness, ignorance, and bombast.”¹¹⁴ Visitors to Hot Springs described similar social conditions upon arriving in town. These testimonies painted a less idyllic portrait than the one proposed by boosters. Most of these accounts, like the booster literature, were exaggerated or fabricated tales, but they speak to the nature of impermanence in Hot Springs. Southern planters found the town “extremely annoying and disagreeable” as they were forced to share cramped social space with men who came “here with a pocket full of rocks,” ready to fight at the slightest challenge, as described in the *New Orleans Picayune*.¹¹⁵ Visitors considered these brawl-ready men the town “natives,” populating “the many log shanties which are sprinkled along the valley... redolent with life and *spirit* in summer.”¹¹⁶ An observer named “Bally,” travelling through Arkansas, described a literal den of sin where the local Hot Springs

¹¹³ Thomas A DeBlack, “‘The Rights and Rank to Which We Are Entitled’: Arkansas in the Early Statehood Period,” in Wayne, et. al., *Arkansas: A Narrative History*, 113; for rationale behind frontier violence, see Elliott J. Gorn, “‘Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch,’: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,” *American Historical Review* 90, no. 1 (Feb. 1985): 18-43.

¹¹⁴ *Arkansas Intelligencer* (Van Buren, AR), 3 November 1849, in C. Fred William, “The Bear State Image: Arkansas in the Nineteenth Century,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (Summer 1980), 99.

¹¹⁵ “‘A Pocket Full of Rocks.’ Fun at the Hot Springs of Arkansas,” *Staunton Spectator* (Staunton, VA), 4 February 1841, 1.

¹¹⁶ Thunder, “Fighting the Tiger,” *Spirit of the Times: A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the Stage* 16, no. 5 (March 28, 1846), 58, emphasis in original; see also “Life In the West,” *Wilmington Journal* (Wilmington, NC), 7 November 1851, 4.

preacher held down his Bible with a Bowie knife and derringer pistol to keep it from blowing away during Sunday service.¹¹⁷

Gambling became a serious problem in Arkansas' urban centers in the 1830s. Little Rock's newspaper editors and politicians formed anti-gambling associations and endorsed lynch law for suspected gamblers, a solution employed in neighboring Mississippi.¹¹⁸ Gamblers flowed out of the capital and into Hot Springs, taking advantage of the town's more transient population. By 1835, George Engelmann described Hot Springs' large gambling ring as "their own class of people," preying upon the sick "with rigged card and dice games" meant to "fleece the inexperienced."¹¹⁹ While reporting on the sick invalids "from all parts of the country," a correspondent for the local *Hot Springs Sentinel-Record* also shared how the town housed "hundreds of persons here afflicted in no way except in lack of the proper sort of brains," who came to Hot Springs "to gamble, to drink brandy and to do murder."¹²⁰ This setting proved ruinous for Hot Springs early development. While other mineral spas in the South boasted thousands of visitors throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century, Hot Springs received just 150 visitors during the 1834 season.¹²¹ This dangerous social landscape contrasted sharply with the Eden-like "perfect paradise" espoused by Hot Springs boosters at the same time.¹²²

Arkansas' physical landscape and lack of infrastructure in the antebellum South disabled and frustrated many travelers hoping to take the waters in Hot Springs. The floodplains to the

¹¹⁷ Bally, "Scenes in Arkansas," *Spirit of the Times* 19, no. 35 (October 20, 1849), 415.

¹¹⁸ Brown, *A life of Albert Pike*, 82-84.

¹¹⁹ Engelmann, "The Hot Springs in Arkansas," in Jansma, et. al., "George Engelmann and the Arkansas Territory," 245.

¹²⁰ Quote from Wendy Richter, "The Impact of the Civil War on Hot Springs Arkansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (Summer, 1984), 128.

¹²¹ "George Engelmann and the Arkansas Territory," 243.

¹²² *United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), 28 February 1835, 2.

east and the Ozarks in the north always made for a difficult trek even with a perfect combination of good weather and ideal river conditions. “The country... is extremely hilly and broken,” wrote Stephen Long in 1818.¹²³ Steamboats could not travel up the shallow Ouachita River for much of the nineteenth century, making the Arkansas River and Little Rock, 60 miles from Hot Springs, the nearest location for river travel. And gullied roads were a debilitating prospect for those who sought relief at Hot Springs. Emphasis on road infrastructure to the small town dated back to the territorial era. William Trimble, Speaker of the Arkansas Territorial Assembly, wrote to Congress in 1831 petitioning for more roads in the state. He tied Hot Springs to the construction projects, remarking that roads were necessary for “all those persons who are increasing in numbers Annually, from Louisiana and the southern part of Mississippi, who resort to the Hot Springs of Arkansas for their Health.”¹²⁴ Political gridlock in early statehood led to little or no state road construction. “But to get there! Aye, there’s the rub,” lamented a New Orleans’ planter who traveled to Hot Springs in 1857 to heal one of his enslaved persons who suffered from a crippling disability. He described the nineteen-and-a-half-hour coach ride to Hot Springs as “anything but pleasant... the road is rough and mountainous.” The two arrived in Hot Springs “tired, dusty, hungry and uncomfortable.”¹²⁵ Until the Civil War the steamboat and stagecoach were the only way to travel to Hot Springs. Even though the United States accelerated railroad construction during this time, laying 9,000 miles of tracks by 1850 and 22,000 miles by 1860 (9,000 of which were built in the South) Arkansas did not have one mile of railroad track laid prior to 1850, and by 1860 had less rail milage than any state in the Union except Oregon. At the

¹²³ Long, “Hot Springs of the Washitaw,” 86.

¹²⁴ “Memorial to Congress by the Territorial Assembly,” 3 November 1831, in Carter, *The Territorial Papers of the United States, Volume XXI*, 412.

¹²⁵ “Letter from Hot Springs, Arkansas,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 21 April 1857, 1.

onset of the Civil War, the state remained isolated from an industrializing and interconnected South and nation. (Fig. 1.3).

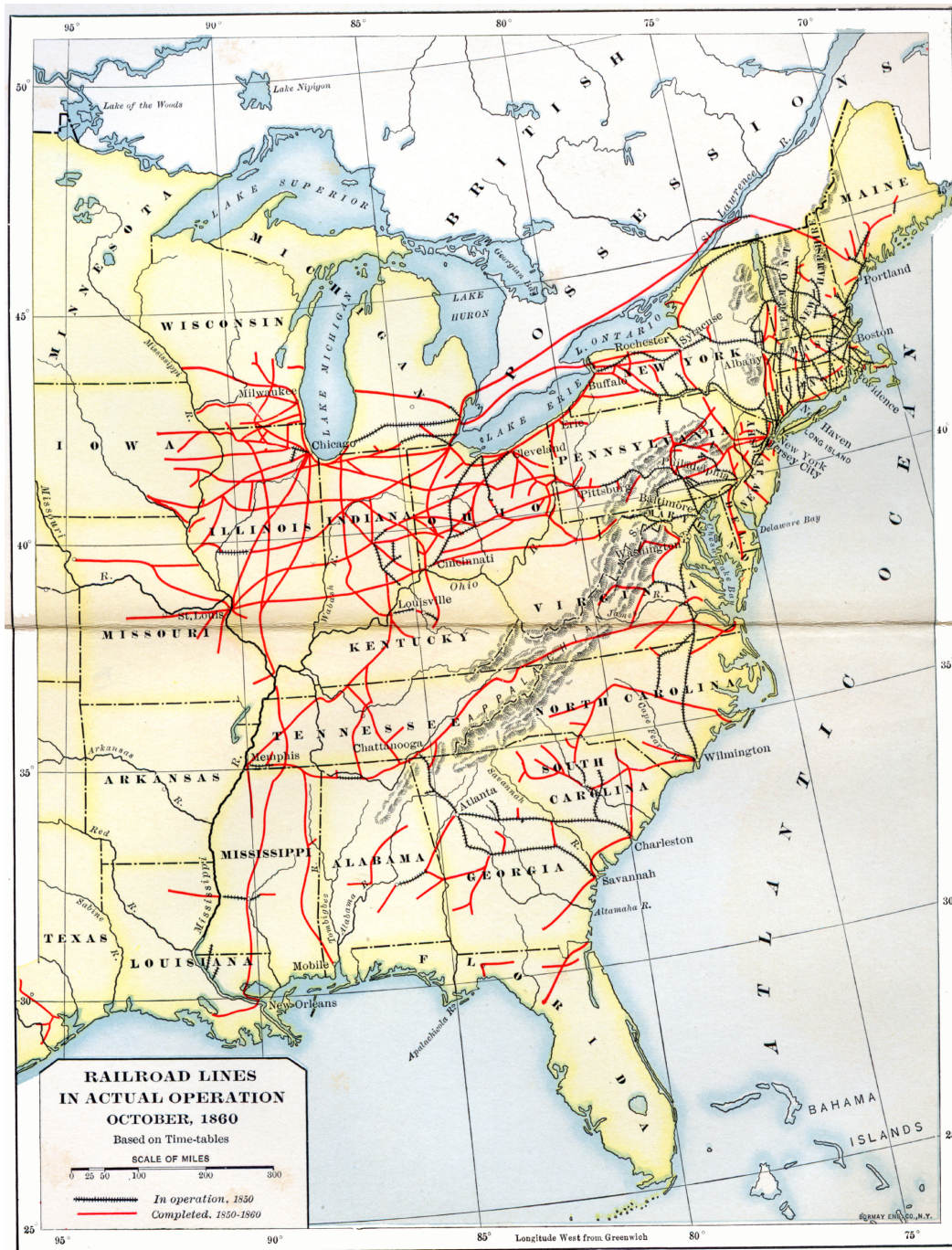


Fig. 1.3: Railroads in the United States in 1860. From S.E. Forman, *Advanced American History* (New York: Century Company, 1919).

Once a visitor arrived in Hot Springs, dusty and exhausted after a long journey, they confronted local flora and fauna that, for some, was as exotic as the vapor escaping from the side of the mountain. In search of a health cure before departing for battle, one Kentucky cavalry officer, en route to Mexico in September 1846, made note of the diverse and unwelcoming creatures endemic to Hot Springs: “Barring the snakes, centipedes (I saw the first one this morning,) tarantulas, and ticks, this is as pleasant a place as one need wish to be at.”¹²⁶ Ticks were a recurring seasonal issue for patrons and patients, exploding in sync with the hot and humid conditions coupled with unrestrained numbers of animal hosts and few humans to cull the animals. During the summer months, backcountry hunter and writer Friedrich Gerstäcker wrote in 1838, “seed-ticks, smaller than poppy seeds, cover the bushes by millions, and I have often almost lost myself under them.”¹²⁷ Since most visitors took the waters right on the mountain side, travelers were fully exposed to the insect predators that emerged in the valley every year.

In another complication, accommodations were difficult to come by in Hot Springs, further suspending development in town. Both William Dunbar’s and George Hunter’s and Stephen Long’s expeditions noted the absence of settlement at Hot Springs. Long stated that during his visit, he came upon “14 or 15 rude cabins constructed” in the valley, continuing, “at present, none of them are occupied except one.”¹²⁸ Reports reaching a national audience often complained that accommodations continued to lag behind demand, noting with “regret” that “visitors find no accommodations” in Hot Springs.¹²⁹ Bathhouses quickly emerged as the most popular and socially acceptable way for visitors to use the waters. Intrepid entrepreneurs built the

¹²⁶ “Hot Springs of Arkansas,” *Sunbury American and Shamokin Journal* (Sunbury, PA), 19 September 1846, 1.

¹²⁷ Kimberly G. Smith and Michael Lehmann, “Friedrich Gerstäcker’s Natural History Observations in Arkansas, 1838-1842,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (Spring 2014), 27.

¹²⁸ Long, “Hot Springs of the Washitaw,” 86.

¹²⁹ Louis Bringier, “Hot Springs,” in W.D. Williams and Louis Bringier, “Louis Bringier and His Description of Arkansas in 1812,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (Summer, 1989), 124.

first generation of bathhouses with little capital. They modified the spring's discharge site by excavating the tufa and digging a hole that collected the thermal waters in mud baths and erected temporary structures to contain the vapors. Some charged a fee to profit from others in search of the waters' curative properties. Bathhouse owners publicized their establishments by highlighting their ability provide easy access to the springs' pure healing waters. Prominent booster John C. Hale constructed the first permanent bathhouse on edge of the creek in 1854. Hale came to Hot Springs in 1820 and adamantly believed the spring waters healed several ailments he suffered on his travels. Hale's bathhouse set a trend for others to construct structures at the bottom of the mountain. He advertised his facility as the only place which utilized the waters correctly to heal customers' pains. Putting his advertisement to verse, Hale declared, "Let such come here, for here alone, / Exists the power to save; / Here tottering forms, but skin and bone, / Are rescued from the grave."¹³⁰ Hale tapped the water from the spring directly and transported it to a tank to the rear of his bathhouse via a system of wooden troughs. Hale's strategy sparked competition in town as crude infrastructure sprung up around the bathhouses created by those like Hale, Henry Rector, the future governor of Arkansas, and Lydia Belding, daughter of Ludovicus, who ran one of the first boarding houses established in Hot Springs.

Boosters such as Albert Pike hoped that 500 visitors a year could enjoy the medicinal qualities of the thermal waters, but those visitors could choose from few options to stay and bathe. The term "bathhouse," used by Hale and others, might conjure images of elegant establishments patronized by the upper class. By contrast, the structures in Hot Springs usually consisted of shacks built out of spare lumber found in the town by anyone willing to put in the work to construct one (Fig. 1.4). They were described by one early guest as "entirely deficient"

¹³⁰ February 24, 1847, Little Rock *Arkansas Banner* article, in Jones, "Hot Springs: Ante-Bellum Watering Place," 20.

and “not fit for cattle.”¹³¹ In 1858, the geologist David Dale Owen, son of the utopian socialist Robert Owen, was appointed by the governor to conduct Arkansas’ first geological survey and performed an analysis of the thermal waters in Hot Springs as part of his survey.¹³² In the sections concerning Hot Springs, Owen detailed his chemical analysis of the waters, but he could not help but describe the constructed landscape: “everyting [sic] about the baths, Hotels and boarding-houses is of the most temporary character and the baths are not arranged as they ought to be.”¹³³ The realities on the ground in Hot Springs that boosters worked tirelessly to omit or conceal were products of environmental and economic conditions in this borderlands area, as well as Arkansas’ political and cultural instability during the Antebellum Era.

¹³¹ *Arkansas Gazette*, 28 August 1839, in Jones, “Hot Springs: Ante-Bellum Watering Place,” 17.

¹³² Walter B. Hendrickson, “David Dale Owen Visits the Hot Springs,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (June, 1942), 142.

¹³³ David Dale Owen, *First Report of a Geological Reconnaissance of the Northern Counties of Arkansas, Made During the Years 1857 and 1858* (Little Rock, 1858), in Hendrickson, “David Dale Owen Visits the Hot Springs,” 144.

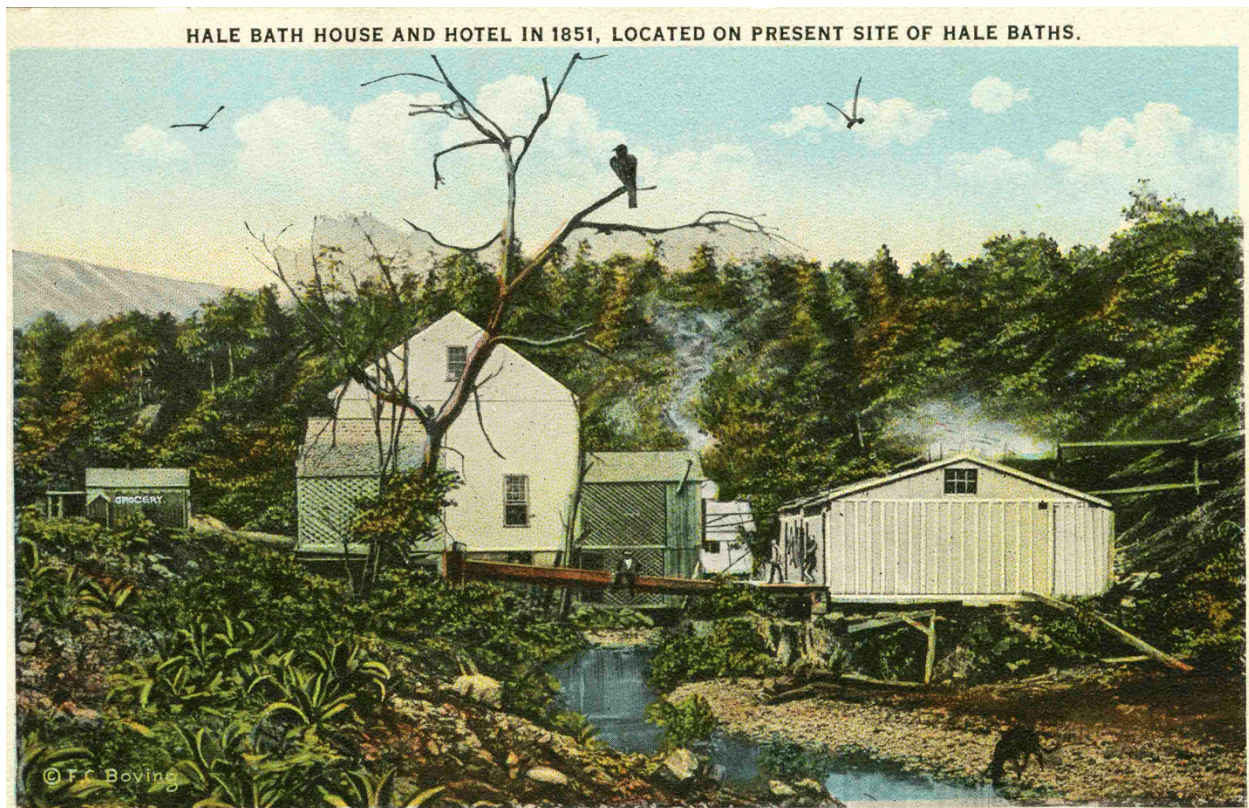


Fig. 1.4: Artist rendition of Hale Bathhouse, as it was before the Civil War. Early entrepreneurs piped thermal water into the establishments (see right side of postcard) or built directly on top of springs; Hale Bath House and Hotel in 1851, ASA postcard collection, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas.

Residents of Hot Springs soon came to blame the underdeveloped nature of the town upon the US government's 1832 reservation legislation. By reserving the springs and the land surrounding them for public use, Congress, on paper, defined the land as off limits to settlement. But aspiring entrepreneurs, lured to Hot Springs by booster literature throughout the antebellum and post-war years, seized any available opportunity to control the precious resource. The establishments they constructed, and the haphazard town blossoming around the springs, were in clear violation of the original legislation. But without federal officials providing guidance or support on the ground in Hot Springs, residents continued to shape the landscape according to patient and patron demands. Buildings like the ones in other spa towns "cannot be expected" in

Hot Springs, concluded a visitor from Philadelphia, “until the title to the land on which they are [to] situate (it being still in the United States, but contended for by various claimants), shall be settled.” Then, and only then, could developers construct establishments “suited to the fashionable visitors who would annually flock to them.”¹³⁴

Boosters and residents argued they, not the government, were the ones who brought the waters to the attention of the American people, and thus could improve the landscape through capitalist enterprises. As people moved into the state in the 1830s and later, many claimed land using pre-emption rights, a term in land law that refers to a settler’s right to purchase federal lands from the government before said land was surveyed and went up for auction through the General Land Office. Congress passed a comprehensive Pre-emption law in 1841, fueling an accelerated movement of whites to western, federal lands. That same year Arkansans pleaded “that the attention of the Government may be drawn to the Hot Springs of Arkansas, and proper means taken to secure their benefits to the public.”¹³⁵ But beneath requests that claimed to speak for the voiceless invalids visiting Hot Springs, investors tied improvements in Hot Springs to their own economic independence. Southern Whigs protested that the reservation was “a very wrong policy” since it hindered “permanent improvements” because “no person would invest his capital in erecting buildings or improve land, which is subject to be taken from him at any moment.”¹³⁶ Men like Lawson Runyon, a businessman who submitted a pre-emption claim to the government, believed the reservation designation threatened his interests in town, while the lack of enforcement of supposed government land allowed squatters to “exercise as full and complete

¹³⁴ *Philadelphia Advertiser*, 18 April 1835, in Jones, “Hot Springs: Ante-Bellum Watering Place,” 14.

¹³⁵ Douche, “No. 5 – Hot Springs of Arkansas,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 17 November 1841, 2.

¹³⁶ “Hot Springt [sic], Arkansas, September 2, 1844,” *Central Journal* (Kosciusko, MI), 29 March 1845, 2.

control over [the springs] as they could with full title, to the exclusion of others” like himself.¹³⁷ Residents saw opportunity, and thought “that extensive improvements and accommodations may be made here, and, through competition and otherwise, be made cheap and reasonable for all who visit these springs for their health,” but feared losing their investments due to competition with other claimants or with the US government.¹³⁸ In this framework, local efforts to eradicate government control of the hot springs was a step toward ensuring boosters’ goals of commodifying the waters, creating not only a landscape of health and healing, but a place of profit.

The federal government showed little to no interest in turning over a resource becoming more valuable season after season. Upon complaints from claimants in the late 1840s, the newly established Department of the Interior reviewed the pleas from residents like Runyon, as well as boosters such as Henry Rector, John Hale, Lydia Belding, and others in 1850. The department sought advice from past commissioners of the General Land Office (GLO), the previous government organization with administrative control over the reservation. Described by contemporaries as an overwhelmed department and a “den of thieves and robbers,” the GLO, according to the historian Richard White, “lacked the staff to process the paperwork and issue the patents – land titles – that rapid settlement required.”¹³⁹ Claimants’ petitions languished in the offices of the department for years. In 1850 GLO Commissioner Justin Butterfield informed Interior Secretary Thomas Ewing that past land officers had “never given any decision on this

¹³⁷ Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 18-19; squatting was a common occurrence in Arkansas’ early statehood. The historian Charles Bolton noted how roughly two-thirds of American settlers squatted on government land. With such an endemic practice, it is not surprising that powerful families and energetic entrepreneurs figured they were safe squatting on land the General government reserved in 1832. See Thomas A DeBlack, “‘The Rights and Rank to Which We Are Entitled’: Arkansas in the Early Statehood Period,” in Whayne, et. al., *Arkansas: A Narrative History*, 118.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 19

¹³⁹ Richard White, *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States During Reconstruction and the Gilded Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 144.

claim because of the reservation of the land” in 1832.¹⁴⁰ For his part, Ewing hoped the issue would be resolved in the courts and similarly did not act upon any of the claimants’ complaints. Local newspapers were disappointed in the secretary’s decision, “suggesting” that Arkansas congressional representatives work towards “obtain[ing] a donation of the property to the state.”¹⁴¹ Over time, the unresolved land disputes garnered national attention, and an article appearing in an 1848 issue of *Scientific American*, the author noted not only the springs’ curative properties and “medicinal virtues,” but also summarized how even as “The United States claim the Hot Springs as a reservation; individuals claim them under pre-emption.” “The consequence,” according to the report, is that “only temporary improvements are made, or will be made, until the title is confirmed.”¹⁴² Recurrent land disputes and a recalcitrant government stymied much of Hot Springs’ antebellum developmental potential.

By the 1840s and 1850s, as residents and boosters worked within the economic and political constraints surrounding the Arkansas landscape, they situated Hot Springs within a larger racialized reality dominated by chattel slavery in the American South. At first glance, Arkansas’ geography and demographics did not recommend it becoming a plantation society like other states in the Old South. For example, in 1830, Arkansas had a total population of only 30,388. Neighboring Mississippi contained over twice that many enslaved persons alone (65,659). This trend continued through the antebellum period. By 1850, Mississippi’s enslaved population had risen to 309,878 whereas Arkansas’ total population reached just 209,897 (162,797 free white and “colored” and 47,100 enslaved).¹⁴³ But these Census statistics do not

¹⁴⁰ Justin Butterfield to Thomas Ewing, May 29, 1850, in *Report of the Secretary of the Interior in Answer to A resolution of the Senate relative to the Hot springs of Arkansas*, 31st Congress, Senate Committee on Public Lands, Executive Document No. 70, September 9, 1850, 116.

¹⁴¹ *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 10 January 1852, 4.

¹⁴² “The Hot Springs of Arkansas,” *Scientific American* 3, no. 52 (September 16, 1848), 410.

¹⁴³ “Table LXXVI – Male and Female Slaves,” in 1850 Census, “Chapter V., Slave Population of the United States,” 82, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1850/1850c/1850c-04.pdf>.

detract from the fact that slavery was pervasive in Arkansas and structured many aspects of society.¹⁴⁴ By 1835, Arkansas had enacted its own set of slave codes that mimicked similar legislation across the South. These laws forbade enslaved persons from carrying guns, assembling in large groups, and buying and selling any commodity. They also increased surveillance on those who desired to leave the plantation. The enslaved population was primarily in the eastern lowlands of the state where longer growing seasons and rich soils made cotton and rice cultivation prolific and profitable. In 1840, 20.43 percent of Arkansas' population consisted of enslaved persons; the highest proportion was in Chicot County on the Mississippi River, at 70.89. There, life mirrored the slave society across the river. Whippings were a common form of punishment for enslaved persons who "didn't keep up" in the fields. Elisha Worthington, whose property holdings included 543 enslaved persons by 1860, fathered two children with an enslaved woman. Miriam Hilliard, the wife of another Chicot County planter, believed "Negroes are nothing but a tax and annoyance to their owners... I believe it to be my duty, as long as I own slaves, to keep them in proper subjection."¹⁴⁵ Slavery became a natural social condition across the entire state, to varying degrees. In Yell County, just north of Hot Springs in the Arkansas River valley, the enslaved population quintupled between 1840 and 1850 to 13 percent (424) of the total population.¹⁴⁶ And in the mountainous northwest counties like Carroll, similar in size to

¹⁴⁴ Charles Bolton, "Slavery and the Defining of Arkansas," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (Spring, 1999): 1-23; Bolton contends Arkansas became, what Ira Berlin has defined as a "slave society," where slavery "stood at the center of economic production, and the master-slave relationship provided the model for all social relations;" Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 8; I agree with this position and argue Hot Springs became subsumed into the state's larger slave society.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas A. DeBlack, "Prosperity and Peril: Arkansas in the Late Antebellum Period," in Whayne, et. al., *Arkansas: A Narrative History*, 142-149, quotes on 145 & 148.

¹⁴⁶ John Solomon Auto, "Slavery in the Mountains: Yell County, Arkansas, 1840-1860," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (Spring, 1980), 42.

Chicot, enslaved persons were just 4.82 percent of the total population, working on small farms and often rented from larger plantations in the valleys.

Hot Springs' history with slavery was a product of boosters' dreams for the town. Hot Springs County had an enslaved population of 249 (13.06 percent) in 1840; 361 (10 percent) in 1850; and 613 (10.8 percent) in 1860. These percentages were consistently below the average for the state.¹⁴⁷ Of the 29 slaveowners in Hot Springs township in 1850, only two owned more than 10 enslaved persons. Most worked in the growing service industry in town, a stark contrast from the agricultural labor of other enslaved persons. Abigail Sabin enslaved three people who, as she and her husband owned "a house for the accommodation of invalids," likely worked in the establishment. John Hale owned one enslaved person.¹⁴⁸ Joe Golden, born an enslaved person, recounted decades later how his enslaver "rented me and my pappy and my mother" to James Sumter, listed as a "hotel keeper" in the 1860 census, during the late 1850s to assist with Sumter's growing boardinghouse business.¹⁴⁹ As the town expanded into a market center in a rural part of the state, slave auctions became more commonplace in the Hot Springs, and runaway ads concerning enslaved persons passing through Hot Springs appeared in regional Arkansas papers.¹⁵⁰ And enslaved persons used the waters as well as worked with them, albeit under their enslavers' watchful eye. The Louisiana traveler who complained about his dusty 1857 trip made the trek so that his "very faithful servant almost entirely paralyzed from the

¹⁴⁷ "Arkansas Slave Census Compared to Total Population: 1840, 1850, 1860 (By County)," in "Slavery," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, compiled by Carl H. Moneyhon, last updated February 10, 2020, <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/slavery-1275/>.

¹⁴⁸ Bobbie Jones McLane, "1850 Hot Spring County, Arkansas Slave Schedule Summary," *The Record* (1991), 49, Sabin quote in Jones, "Hot Springs: Ante-Bellum Watering Place," 18.

¹⁴⁹ Interview of Joe Golden by Mary Hudgins, *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 2, Arkansas, Part 3, Gadson-Isom*. 1936, 48; Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn023/>.

¹⁵⁰ "Executors' Sale of Negroes, &c.," *Arkansas Gazette*, 16 August 1850, 4; "Runaway," *Arkansas Gazette*, 31 May 1849, 3.

effects of rheumatism” could take the waters at Hot Springs.¹⁵¹ A.N. Sabin advertised his hotel and bathhouse, staffed by enslaved persons, as a place where “invalid Negroes sent to our care will be well attended, and forwarded to their home, in any part of the country.”¹⁵² By 1860, the number of slaveholders in Hot Springs had increased to 43 of the town’s 201 residents (21.39 percent), though Census data recorded only permanent residents. While booster material appeared in medical journals waxing poetically about the thermal waters as Mother Nature’s gift to humanity, “free for all, without restraint, / She gives her waters pure,” the injustices of slave society in the surrounding region did not evaporate once visitors set foot in the valley.¹⁵³

As sectional disputes escalated in the 1850s, boosters firmly situated Hot Springs in the cultures of the antebellum South. They appealed to the power of the region and to Southern planters’ pride in place. In an 1848 selection in *De Bow’s Commercial Review of the South & West*, one correspondent noted that Hot Springs offered “no more eligible resort” for “citizens who, after the severe labors [sic] of the commercial season feel the necessity of recruiting their strength.”¹⁵⁴ Specifying “citizens” meant that while boosters aimed to draw as many visitors to Hot Springs as they could, social and racial codes still applied to all who made the journey. Previous comparisons between Hot Springs and other spa towns in the Northeast became referendums upon the respective virtues of each region by the 1850s. In 1856, the editor of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* mused about Northern merchants losing the business of aristocratic Southern health and pleasure seekers. “Our object,” hoped the editor, was “to induce our people to stay at home – to keep Southerners in the South – to spend our money here.”

¹⁵¹ “Letter from Hot Springs, Arkansas,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 21 April 1857, 1.

¹⁵² “The Arkansas Hot Springs,” *Weekly Arkansas Gazette*, 19 January, 1856, 3.

¹⁵³ “The Hot Springs of Arkansas,” *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 36, no. 24 (July 14, 1847), 485.

¹⁵⁴ “Art. VIII – Northern Louisiana and Arkansas,” *De Bow’s Commercial Review of the South and West* 5, no. 1 (January 1848), 72.

Boosters advised planters to abandon “fashionable watering places” like Niagara, Saratoga, Newport, and Nahant, Massachusetts, for Southern “places of summer resort and pleasure” like Virginia Springs, Blue Lick in Kentucky and Hot Springs.¹⁵⁵ Residents and boosters clung to the possibility of creating a Southern escape for the plantation elite, envisioning a diverse community of visitors, as their preferred clientele mixed with sick and dying invalids, who dominated the visits to Hot Springs by the 1850s. By the end of the decade, roughly 3,000 visitors the arduous trip to the valley annually.

Ultimately, any and all progress on developing the region that had been made by boosters in Hot Springs vanished after 1861. The Civil War, a period the historian Thomas DeBlack described as “the most divisive and destructive event in Arkansas history,” obliterated the imagery of Hot Springs as an idyllic Southern paradise. The war brought Union and Confederate forces into direct combat in the state at the battles of Pea Ridge and Prairie Grove, leading to important strategic victories for the Union in the trans-Mississippi West; Union forces occupied Little Rock beginning in September 1863. But, more importantly, the “total war” that came to Arkansas and its citizens destroyed people, property, and for Hot Springs residents, the work they had forged through decades of setbacks.¹⁵⁶ Seasonal ambushes and guerilla warfare attacks by paramilitary pro-Union “Jayhawkers,” a term referring to pro-union militiamen from neighboring Kansas and Missouri, and pro-Confederate “Bushwhacker” forces caused destructive havoc in the town beginning in 1863. These roving militias razed establishments boosters had hoped would attract travelers to Hot Springs. “The Yanks and Jayhawkers got into Hot Springs and were destroying everything,” recounted the Confederate soldier Charles T.

¹⁵⁵ “Going North,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 19 May 1856, 2.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas A. DeBlack, “‘Between the Hawk & Buzzard’: The Civil War in Arkansas,” in Whayne, et. al., *Arkansas: A Narrative History*, 166.

Anderson.¹⁵⁷ After one such raid in July 1864, Lydia Belding wrote to her son Henry that “You would hardly know this place nearly all the Houses have gone to ruin... Feds burned Mrs. Sumter out and we are expecting them back every moment. They say they will burn the whole Valley.”¹⁵⁸ Writing to President Lincoln, General Christopher C. Andrews informed the Commander in Chief that the “country seems to have degenerated into bushwhackers. It is hardly safe to go out of our lines a mile. I believe Union People are suffering more to-day in Arkansas than ever before since the war commenced.”¹⁵⁹ No one in the conflict felt safe in Arkansas.

By war’s end the fighting had nearly wiped Hot Springs off the map; only five structures remained standing in Hot Springs. The war and its destructive power did not only affect Hot Springs, of course. Union troops led by William Sherman bombarded and burned Atlanta, Georgia, and Confederates destroyed their own cities like Charleston, Columbia and Richmond as they withdrew from encroaching Union forces.¹⁶⁰ These acts erased each urban center’s growth and prosperity from the antebellum era. At Hot Springs, the raids by Union and Confederate sympathizers laid bare the decades of harsh realities boosters fought against in their effort to create a Southern spa destination. Lastly, the racialized landscape boosters advertised to planters materialized at a marginal pace, further keeping wealth out of the valley, and disappearing entirely after the war.

Litigation and Legislation: Creating Order through Capital, the Courts, and Congress

¹⁵⁷ Richter, “The Impact of the Civil War on Hot Springs Arkansas,” 132.

¹⁵⁸ Lydia Belding to Henry Belding, July 10, 1864, in Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 24.

¹⁵⁹ Quote from Daniel E. Sutherland, “Guerrillas: The Real War in Arkansas,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (Autumn, 1993), 285.

¹⁶⁰ See James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction*, 3rd ed (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2001), 478, 497, 510, 517.

“The capabilities of ‘the valley,’” opined the pseudonymous “Douche” in the *Arkansas Gazette* in 1841, “are great. Nature has made [Hot Springs] one of the most beautiful places in the world, and with but little labor and expense it may be made one of the most agreeable and delightful.”¹⁶¹ Boosters often levied blame upon the federal government for their inability to reach the “capabilities of the valley.” Dating back to the 1832 reservation act, and coupled with the subsequent lack of any type of enforcement mechanism by the government, Hot Springs land and waters remained contested resources, pitting invigorated private investments against the newly strengthened federal government.

After the military fighting ceased a new community of investors quickly descended upon Hot Springs, ready to rebuild and rebrand the town as a phoenix rising out from the ashes. *De Bow's Review* deemed Hot Springs one of the South's “untold treasures,” continuing to emphasize sectionalism in health tourism even after the Confederacy's defeat in the Civil War.¹⁶² *De Bow's* pitted the elite of Northern spa towns against the egalitarian nature present in Hot Springs, attacking “Boston erudites” and “exclusives” for maintaining “the same narrow orbit of self-conceit and self-worship” for their regional spa and beach towns. To them, concluded the dismissive editor, “I have not a word to say.” “Meantime,” at Hot Springs, a place that “Nature seems to have designed as a watering place,” he argued all are welcome: “the earth will revolve on its axis, and for the benefit and healing of all else requiring medical aid the Arkansas hot springs will continue to pour fourth their exhaustless volumes of pure, life-giving waters.”¹⁶³ In 1867, just two years after Appomattox, a visitor from Louisiana commented on the refurbished

¹⁶¹ Douche, “No. 3 – Hot Springs of Arkansas,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 3 November 1841.

¹⁶² William Bryan, *The Price of Permanence: Nature and Business in the New South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 4.

¹⁶³ “Art. IX – The Hot Springs of Arkansas,” *De Bow's Review, Devoted to the Restoration of the Southern States* 4, no. 1&2 (July & August 1867), 93-94.

town, with buildings “all new, having been built since the war.” These included seven hotels, twelve boarding houses, along with a post office, two schools, and two churches.¹⁶⁴

The growth after the war was dramatic, led by an infusion of northerners and their capital. The population of Hot Springs had increased from 201 in 1860, declined to a literal handful during the Civil War, and surged to 1,276 in 1870, with one quarter of the town’s new population born outside the former Confederacy.¹⁶⁵ Many of Hot Springs new residents were drawn to the town because of the war. Men like Dr. Prosper H. Ellsworth: Born in Canada in 1838, Ellsworth settled in Illinois before the war. He shuttered his practice as hostilities rang out and became the surgeon of the 106th Illinois Infantry. The division was sent to Arkansas during the war and Ellsworth, enamored with the reputation of the springs, moved to Hot Springs in 1866, building a home and opening a new practice. Ellsworth, understanding the need for patients, became involved in boosting for the town and became a director of the Hot Springs Railroad Company in 1875.¹⁶⁶ Carpetbaggers such as Ellsworth and others brought their families and their credit reserves to Hot Springs, creating stability for further investments. A correspondent from the *Arkansas Gazette* reported in 1867 of “No less than sixty thousand dollars have been expended by parties in the erection of these various and indispensable establishments.” These additions, noted the report, gave Hot Springs “a newness and neatness of appearance, I do not remember that it possessed before the war.”¹⁶⁷

Part of what drove this resurgent growth were new railroads in the South that connected a recovering Hot Springs to a nation eager to explore the waters. Throughout Reconstruction, more

¹⁶⁴ “Interesting Sketch of the Hot Springs in Arkansas,” *Baton Rouge Gazette and Comet* 25 July 1867,

¹⁶⁵ Richter, “The Impact of the Civil War on Hot Springs Arkansas,” 142.

¹⁶⁶ “Office of the Hot Springs R. R. Co.,” 7 April 1875, in Henry S. de Linde, “Joseph ‘Diamond Jo’ Reynolds: A New Historical Perspective,” *The Record* (2011), Exhibit 1-11, 41.

¹⁶⁷ “Arkansas Hot Springs,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 4 June 1867.

railroad tracks were laid in the South than in any other region in the country. This business not only brought Southern growers and manufacturers in contact with outside markets, but creating tracks and ties as well as feeding and housing thousands of work crews throughout the region fueled internal markets as well.¹⁶⁸ By 1870, the Missouri Pacific Railway had laid tracks to Malvern, Arkansas, just 20 miles from Hot Springs. The Malvern stop was part of a larger network of tracks that cut diagonally through Arkansas and connected the state to major depots in Memphis, St. Louis, and Kansas City. The Missouri Pacific later used Hot Springs prominently in its advertisements, reminding riders from across the country that the Missouri Pacific Railway's Iron Mountain Route had "The only direct line to the Hot Springs of Arkansas" (Fig. 1.5 & 1.6)¹⁶⁹ In 1875, the New-York-born "Diamond" Joe Reynolds, who had amassed a small fortune manning a fleet of mid-century Mississippi River steamboats, waded into the railroad industry after visiting Hot Springs for his rheumatism and arthritis. He became a director in the Hot Springs Railroad Company, along with P. H. Ellsworth, and his infusion of outside capital funded the completion of the narrow-gauge passenger rail to ferry invalids and curious visitors the last twenty miles to Hot Springs. And with these new routes, interested parties flooded into town. The *Arkansas Gazette* reported on the first passenger train that arrived in Hot Springs in 1876. Along with 500 spectators, "The band was out in full force," noted the reporter, "and gave vent to its pent-up feeling in strains of sweet music that sent a thrill of enthusiastic delight to the hearts of all present." The paper sent "many good wishes for Diamond Jo Reynolds and the Narrow Gauge Railroad."¹⁷⁰ Whereas thousands had managed to travel to

¹⁶⁸ Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 9-13.

¹⁶⁹ Rand McNally and Company; St. Louis, Iron Mountain, and Southern Railway Company, "Iron Mountain Route" (Chicago, Rand McNally, 1886); from David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

¹⁷⁰ "Railroad News," *Arkansas Gazette*, 4 March 1876.

Hot Springs every year prior to the railroad, more than that amassed monthly, with tens of thousands of visitors arriving in town to take the waters by the middle of the decade.

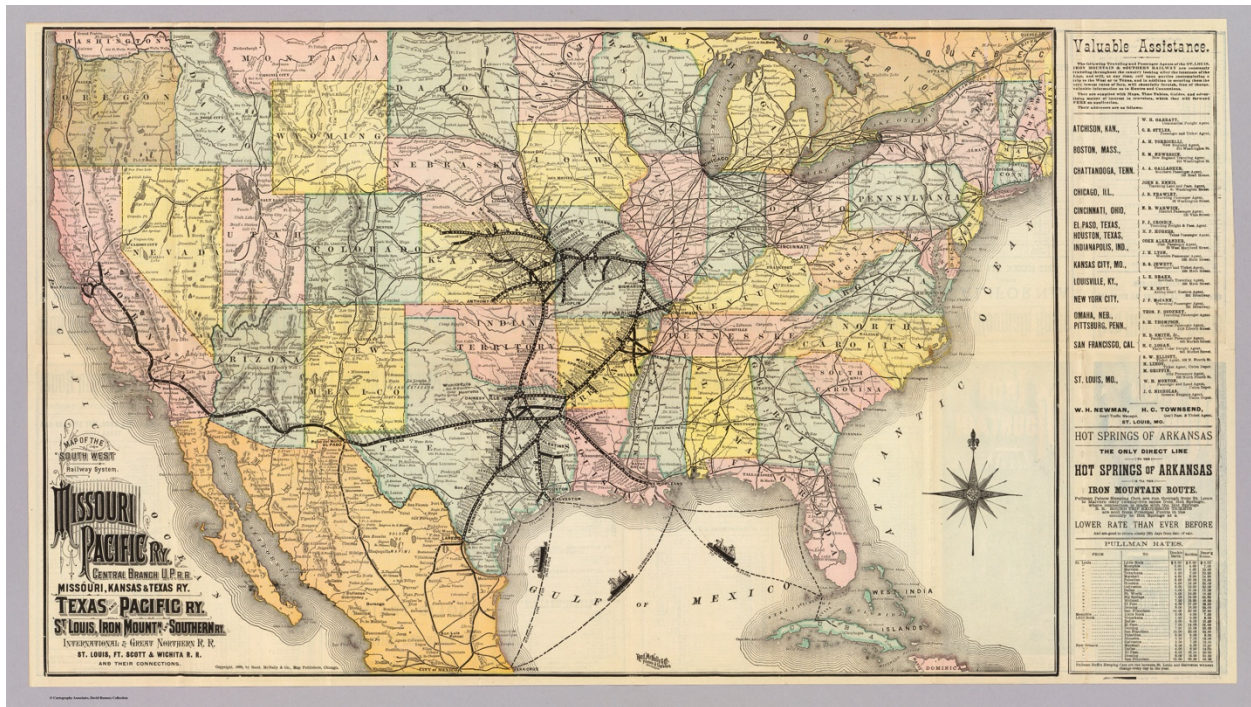


Fig. 1.5: 1886 Map of Rail lines for Missouri Pacific Railway. Note the advertisement for Hot Springs in the bottom right corner; Rand McNally and Company; St. Louis, Iron Mountain, and Southern Railway Company, “Iron Mountain Route” (Chicago, Rand McNally, 1886); from David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

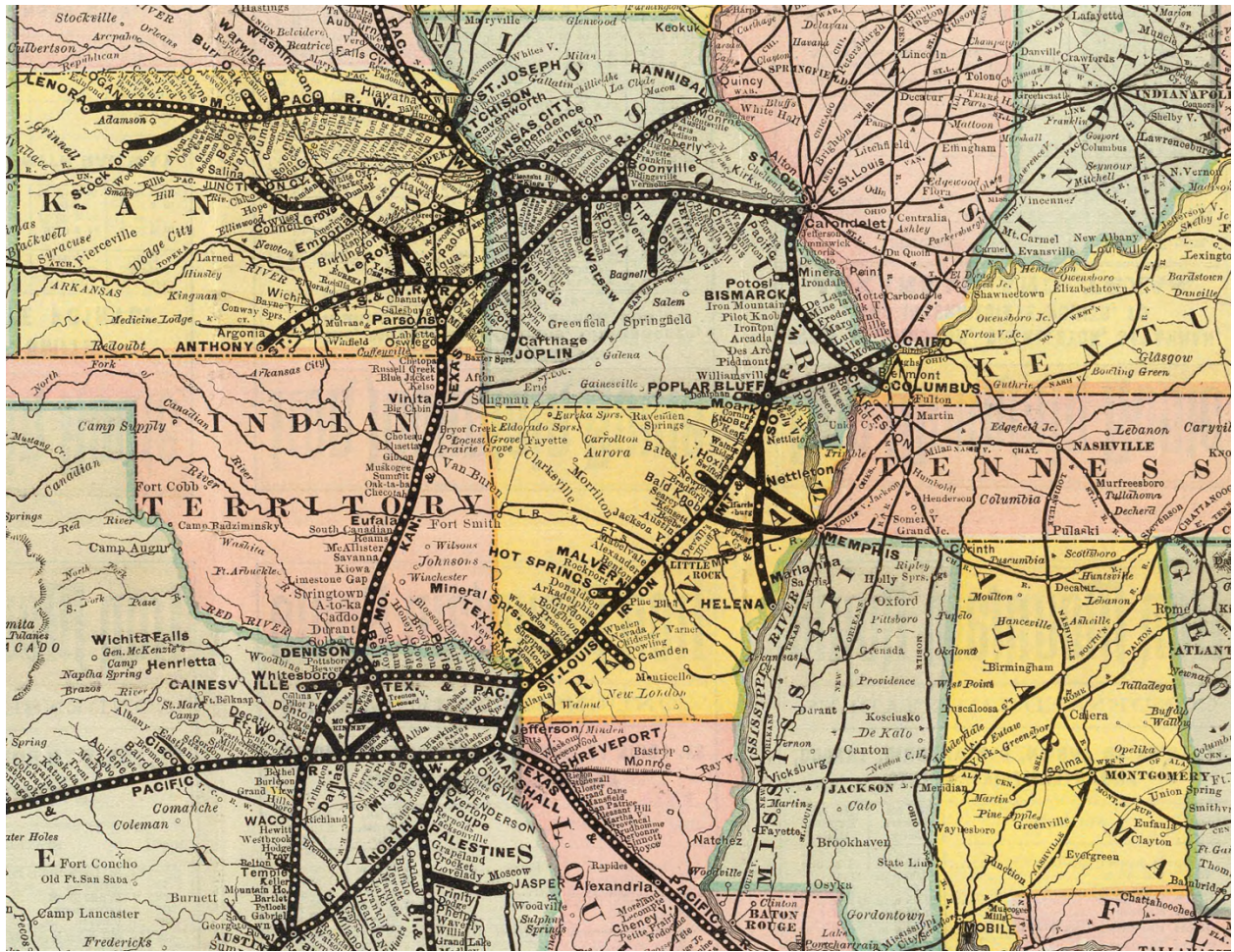


Fig. 1.6: Magnified view reveals network of railways connecting Hot Springs to markets outside Arkansas and the South; David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

What had previously been a dusty and cumbersome 19-1/2 hour stagecoach ride from Little Rock to Hot Springs, “over a road, which at best is a rough and rugged one,” could now be completed in 3-4 hours from the comfort of a train car, with furnishings made of maple, walnut, and ash, fixtures plated in silver and gold, and cushioned velvet seats, “comfort in the extreme.”¹⁷¹ Regional newspapers documented the impact of new transportation lines that brought thousands of visitors from across the country, not just the South, to Hot Springs.

¹⁷¹ “The Hot Springs,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 19 May 1875, 4; “Excursion,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 23 November 1875, 1.

“Notwithstanding the pressure of the times,” noted a correspondent from a St. Louis newspaper, alluding to the fallout of the Panic of 1873, “and in almost total stagnation of business in other parts of the states, Hot Springs is rapidly improving and to-day enjoys the finest local trade of any town in Arkansas.”¹⁷² By 1876, Reynold’s line was running two trains a day to Hot Springs. Boosters returned in full force after the Civil War to promote and advertise the rapid changes occurring in Hot Springs. The railroads figured prominently in their imagery of the new town. Correspondents waxed eloquently to their readers how Hot Springs “will soon be united by iron bands with all the principle [sic] cities of the land,” connecting the town and its waters “with all points east, north and south.” The booster Charles Cutter analogized the railroads into the changing hydrological landscape in Hot Springs, noting how the same pipes and troughs that bathhouse owners used to provide thermal waters to their customers “cross and recross each other on the mountain side in all directions, reminding one of a railroad map of the thickly settled sections of the West.”¹⁷³ The infusion of capital, infrastructure, and visitors introduced the waters to more individuals and organizations, allowing visitors to endow the waters with cultural and economic value.

By the 1870s invalids were no longer the only visitors travelling to Hot Springs anymore. “Now that we can reach Hot Springs so easily,” remarked the editor of the *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, “we trust EXCURSION PARTIES will be made up both here and there, and that the people will become better acquainted.”¹⁷⁴ Newspapers continued to report not only the medicinal efficacy of the thermal waters, but also printed stories highlighting the high-profile visitors to Hot Springs. Business leaders, financiers, politicians, and foreign dignitaries. Boosters fueled

¹⁷² “The Hot Springs,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 19 May 1875, 4

¹⁷³ Cutter, *The Hot Springs as They Are*, 9.

¹⁷⁴ “Hot Springs Looming up and Crowded with Visitors,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 8 March 1876, 3.

this demographic shift by working to cure Hot Springs of its earlier lurid history. “Hot Springs as a Resort for Ladies” read a banner in Charles Cutter’s 1874 pamphlet promoting the town. Cutter commented how “many gentlemen now bring their wives and daughters with them,” noting that “many families” travelled to town together, suggesting how Hot Springs had evolved past its days of lawlessness and transitioned into a landscape of sophistication and class. “Ladies need have no delicacy in visiting these Springs; that day is past,” declared Cutter. “Money and time will accomplish wonders,” making Hot Springs “not only [] an invalids’ retreat, but a fashionable watering place.”¹⁷⁵ And while the rails connected Hot Springs to the rest of the nation, that did not ensure everyone an equitable opportunity to travel. Prices for long train trips were still well out of the reach of working-class Americans: A ticket from Chicago to Hot Springs was \$30.15 in 1874 (\$760.60 in 2022 dollars); Atlanta was \$32.90 (\$840.89); and Washington, D.C. was \$42.15 (\$1,077.31).¹⁷⁶ These expenses did not stop tens of thousands of indigent visitors from reaching Hot Springs by any other means in search of nature’s cures. But improved infrastructure throughout the South changed who decided to take the waters.

Boosters revived old tactics for new audiences in the 1870s. Writing in 1874 to a national audience, Charles Cutter reemphasized the salubrity of the landscape. “The Climate and Health of the Country” received a full section in his nationally distributed material, exploring “The advantages of climate, throughout the entire year” along with “the pure, rarefied mountain air,” and “the delightful waters.” Cutter proclaimed, “We are unacquainted with any country, in the same latitudinal relations, that has more advantage for health.” He also continued to exoticize Indigenous peoples in an effort to demonstrate the rapid growth of Hot Springs, noting how “It

¹⁷⁵ Cutter, *The Hot Springs as They Are*, 23-25.

¹⁷⁶ 1874 prices from Cutter, *The Hot Springs as They Are*, 82-83; inflation values from “Inflation Calculator,” Official Inflation Data, Alioth Finance, 27 Feb. 2022, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/>.

was not an uncommon sight as late as fifty years ago to see Indians here from a half dozen different tribes.”¹⁷⁷ “Tradition and history,” surmised a Hot Springs physician in 1876, “render it certain that the healing power of these waters were known to the aboriginal Indians long prior to the discovery of our country by the whites.” “The Indians carried their sick and aged people” to Hot Springs “and they may be called the first settlers,” concluded a pamphlet written by a railroad company with nearby access to Hot Springs in the 1870s.¹⁷⁸ Railroad boosters sustained the De Soto myth in their promotional material, “informing” their readers: “That De Soto found [the springs] there can be no doubt, as the evidences are indisputable that he was at one time encamped on the banks of the Ouachita.”¹⁷⁹ As the American press described the warfare in the Black Hills and across the Great Plains as battles between “savagery” and “civilization,” boosters in Hot Springs took the language of the day to emphasize the salubrity and safety of their mineral spring town.¹⁸⁰

By the 1870s Hot Springs was neither the “oasis in a mountainous desert” documented by Antebellum travelers nor the desolate hellscape during the Civil War. New infrastructure and a powerful and influential class of bathhouse owners created a new, improved, and socially segregated town. “To the lover of nature, to the invalid needing out-door exercise,” and to curious sightseers, “Hot Springs and vicinity offer every inducement” according to an 1877 railroad promotional pamphlet.¹⁸¹ “Business is looking up” in Hot Springs, concluded the editor of the *Arkansas Gazette*. “The hotels are overflowing, the doctors, and everybody for that matter (except the invalids), smiling and happy.”¹⁸² After stating that “For more than thirty-five years I

¹⁷⁷ Cutter, *The Hot Springs as They are*, 9.

¹⁷⁸ St. Louis Iron Mountain & Southern Railway Co., *The Hot Springs of Arkansas. America's Baden-Baden* (St. Louis: Woodward, Tiernan & Hale, July, 1877), 1.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ White, *The Republic for Which It Stands*, 303-304.

¹⁸¹ St. Louis Iron Mountain & Southern Railway, *Hot Springs of Arkansas: America's Baden-Baden*, 7.

¹⁸² “Through By Rail – Hot Springs Looming Up and Crowded with Visitors,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 8 March 1876, 3.

have given special attention to the investigation of the nature and medicinal applicability of mineral waters,” Dr. J.J. Moorman of White Sulphur Springs admitted to readers, “The Hot Springs of Arkansas, commonly known as the Washita Springs, are among the most remarkable thermal fountains in the world.”¹⁸³ Finally, the Hot Springs waters made their way into contemporary hydropathic texts.

The last piece necessary for securing the expansion of Hot Springs came in the conclusion to the decades-long land disputes produced by the reservation legislation in the 1830s. The continued legal fights among competing claimants had bred instability. Dr. Algernon S. Garnett, a Hot Springs physician, wrote a medical treatise in 1874 on his town’s thermal waters, and warned readers “the prosperity of the town of ‘Hot Springs’... is in dispute.” The town remained “covered with temporary structures” and only when “capitalists” could go about “erecting costly and permanent stone buildings” could the man-made aspects of the valley complement “The beauty of the location, the salubrity of the climate, and the value of the waters.”¹⁸⁴ P.H. Ellsworth, in a letter to his wife, wrote “When I first came here we all thought the government would settle the titles to this property long before this; hence we have lived in hope and in turmoil and unpleasantness.”¹⁸⁵ By 1875, Joe Reynolds implored members of the Arkansas Legislature “to memorialize congress to have soon settled the long, muddy and clouded title to the reservation.”¹⁸⁶ That same year a correspondent visiting from Texas questioned whether “deluded patients” suffered rather than improved in such a chaotic town like Hot Springs, concluding the decades of litigation “keeps every thing in a stir or a broil like the

¹⁸³ J.J. Moorman, *Mineral Springs of North America; How to Reach, and How to Use Them* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1873, reprint of 1867 edition), 213.

¹⁸⁴ Algernon S. Garnett, *A Treatise on the Hot Springs of Arkansas* (St. Louis: Van Beek, Barnard & Tinsley, 1874), 26.

¹⁸⁵ P.H. Ellsworth to Sarah Ellsworth, letter, 23 August 1872, in Garland County Historical Society, Vertical File “Ellsworth, Dr. P.H.”

¹⁸⁶ “The Excursion,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 23 November 1875.

water.”¹⁸⁷ Ambiguity surrounding the thermal waters’ ownership began to affect its curative properties and medicinal virtue.

But by the 1870s, the federal government had developed a better understanding of its role in protecting and preserving unique aspects of the American landscape. As American surveying parties traveled west and experienced the lands that would soon make up some of the first national parks, Congress worked to protect these places. In 1864, Congress granted the Yosemite Valley and a grove of nearby giant Sequoia trees to the state of California as a means of fending off private exploitation of the land. In 1872, James Mason Hutchings, who had settled in the valley and created a successful life for himself as a booster and hotel proprietor, claimed preemption. In *Hutchings v. Low*, the court unanimously ruled against Hutchings since he had settled on the land before it was surveyed by the government.¹⁸⁸ That same year Congress created Yellowstone National Park, the world’s first national park. The Hutchings’ case was on the minds of lawmakers as they devised the bill. Supporting the bill and urging the federal government’s stewardship of the land, Illinois senator Lyman Trumbull hoped to “except it [Yellowstone] from the general disposition of the public lands, and reserve it to the government.” And he warned that the “wonderful Yosemite valley” was being fought over in the courts, “which one or two persons are now claiming by virtue of preemption,” hoping that this sort of legal battle be avoided in the future.¹⁸⁹

Within the context of these newly established precedents, the land disputes in Hot Springs arrived at the U.S. Supreme Court. The legal battles over developers’ claims to space

¹⁸⁷ “Hot Springs of Arkansas – Medical Treatment,” *The Science of Health* 6, No. 3 (Mar. 1875), 107-9.

¹⁸⁸ Jen A. Huntley, *The Making of Yosemite: James Mason Hutchings and the Origin of American’s Most Popular Park* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014); Dennis Drabelle, *The Power of Scenery: Frederick Law Olmstead and the Origin of National Parks* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 101-106

¹⁸⁹ Drabelle, *The Power of Scenery*, 156.

within the reservation culminated in 1875-76 when the Court ruled against a group of claimants composed of Henry Rector, John Hale, and William Gaines, “one of the largest planters on the Mississippi river” who married a daughter of Lydia Belding and assumed control of her claim.¹⁹⁰ The Court ruled that each co-plaintiff had produced evidence of a land claim that dated back to colonial times when the land was not the property of the United States, but controlled instead by the Spanish, French, or Quapaw Nations. As a consequence, and building upon land law precedent dating back to the Land Ordinance of 1785, the Court opined that the land in question would have needed to have been surveyed before the federal government could legally disperse the public lands. The federal land survey was not completed in Arkansas until 1838. Therefore, “this [1832] act clearly rendered void all subsequent appropriations of land... none of the claimants are entitled to the lands in question.” The 1832 reservation act also preceded the first federal pre-emption legislation in 1841, thus eliminating claims to squatters’ rights. The springs and the waters remained under the authority of the United States government.

The Court did consider the long, contested, and convoluted history of inefficient federal oversight over Hot Springs in its ruling and offered a remedy. Justice Joseph P. Bradley recognized this decision may create “hardship” for the claimants and others in Hot Springs who had illegally resided on government land for years or decades. He mandated that Congress act with all due haste in handling “the future disposition of those lands.”¹⁹¹ Hot Springs residents expressed their anxieties after the ruling. “We are all quite excited here in regard to the existing state of affairs here,” wrote Alice Evelyn Scott, wife of Algernon Garnett, less than two months after the Supreme Court decision. Her feelings represent a theme of government distrust that

¹⁹⁰ Charles Cutter, *Cutter’s Guide to the Hot Springs of Arkansas* (St. Louis: Slawson & Co. Printers, 1883), 8.

¹⁹¹ Hot Springs Cases, *Rector v. United States*, 92 U.S. 698-716 (1875).

different groups in Hot Springs would harbor towards the federal government decades after the ruling:

This [the court's decision] is generally regarded as most unjust and illiberal on the part of the government, and the receiver will be literally "Monarch of all he surveys" here. No sovereign of a petty dukedom in Germany will be possessed of more power so far as it goes and for this hard state of affairs it seems there is to be no redress until Congress sees fit to pass some law for the relief of the distressed settlers in Hot Springs. It does indeed seem hard that for our house which we built with our own money, oh so handily carved! that we should be obliged to pay a heavy rent or be turned out and see some one else occupying it.¹⁹²

Congress responded to the Supreme Court's direction, and the fears of residents like Alice Scott, by creating the Hot Springs Commission in 1877. President Rutherford B. Hayes chose Aaron H. Cragin, former senator from New Hampshire; former congressman John Coburn of Indiana; and former Governor Marcellus Stearns of Florida to serve on the commission because they were, according to Hayes, "men of integrity who had no previous experience with the place and its contentious issues," situating them as neutral arbiters in contested disputes¹⁹³ Congress charged the commissioners to manage the land disputes in Hot Springs.

The commissioners' work altered the administrative and physical environment in Hot Springs. The men arrived in the spring of 1877 and remained in town for over two years until they settled the disputes. The commissioners were amenable to selling off reservation land, but had no authority to part with the thermal springs or their waters, viewing them as a public resource. They condemned 179 structures built within the new reservation boundaries so that no individuals would disrupt the thermal waters in the future.¹⁹⁴ The result of settling these claims also drastically changed the administrative boundaries of the Hot Springs Reservation. The size of the reservation shrank by 90 percent, from 2,560 acres to just 265 acres in 1880 (Fig. 1.7).

¹⁹² Alice Evelyn Scott to her mother, letter, 15 June 1876, copy in Garland County Historical Society, Vertical File "Doctor A.S. Garnett."

¹⁹³ "Notes from the Capital," *New York Times*, 1 April 1877.

¹⁹⁴ *Final report of the Hot Springs Commissioners*, 14.

This decision created a recurring tension between city and park that would bubble over for the next 100 years.

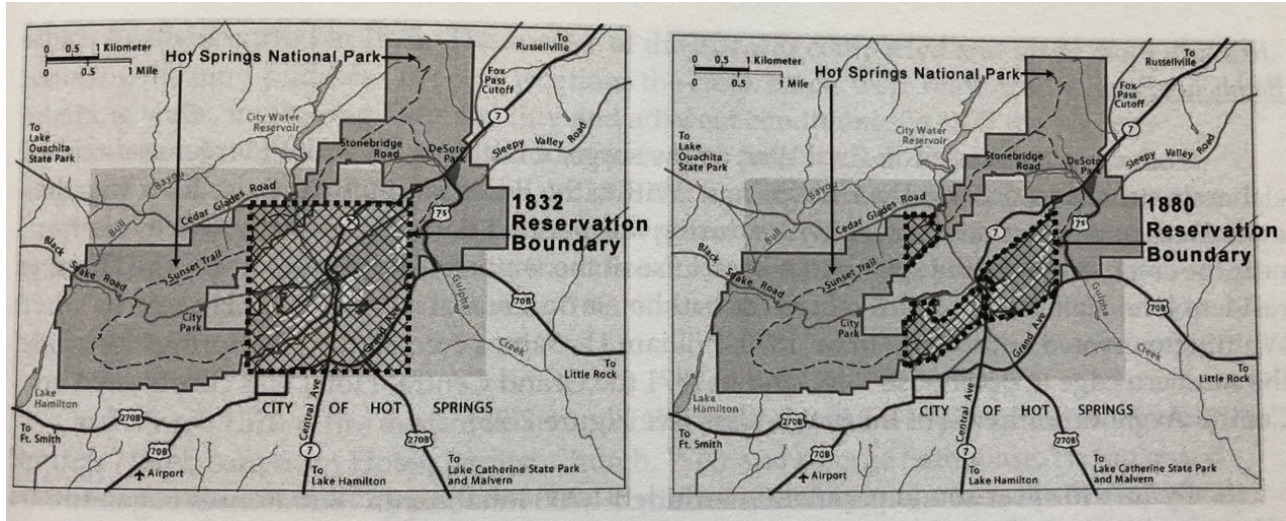


Fig. 1.7: Map of the 1832 reservation boundary and the new boundary after the 1877-79 Hot Springs Commission. Dotted line represents boundary lines, cross-stitched pattern represents government reservation; from Evans, *Cultural Landscape Report*, Ch. II, p. 31.

The impact of the commission’s work was enormous: it “adjudicated 897 claims, approved the right to purchase for 657 claims, laid out a city with a system of streets, and defined the [new] boundaries for world-famous Hot Springs on a 265-acre permanent U.S. reservation,” reshaping the urban setting where between 3,000 and 4,000 inhabitants resided.¹⁹⁵ As the people of Hot Springs settled land claims with the commissioners, wealthy bathhouse owners took initiative and built more permanent structures for high society visitors. In 1877, surveyor George M. French built his Big Iron Bathhouse for \$18,400. In the first 16 months, the bathhouse collected almost \$34,000 in receipts and produced a profit of \$20,000.¹⁹⁶ Lastly, to enforce these

¹⁹⁵ Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 30-39.

¹⁹⁶ Testimony of George M. French, 48th Congress, 1st Session, *Testimony Taken Before the Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department, Relative to Certain things connected with the Government property at Hot Springs, Ark.*, June 17, 1884, 28-36 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 71; \$20,000 in 1877 accounts for a little over \$500,000 today, adjusted for inflation.

new rules and regulations, the commission directed Congress to appoint and fund a superintendent to reside in Hot Springs, employed as a federal steward for the waters. The commission listed several duties for the reservation's new superintendent, charging him to guard the springs "Against the presence of anything that may tend to create a nuisance, or affect the purity of the waters."¹⁹⁷ Other tasks included protecting the landscape against efforts to remove trees, shrubbery, or rocks, and acts of vandalism.

The ultimate outcome of the Hot Springs Cases and the commission was that they re-ordered the situation on the ground – and below the surface. After decades of disputes, the Supreme Court ruled that claimants and bathhouse owners could build on property ceded by the commission, but emphasized that the federal government owned the precious thermal water. On paper, the commissioners' work furthered the vision of an ideal landscape pined for by boosters for decades. The federal government was not responsible for any activity in the City of Hot Springs, only the stewardship of the thermal waters. In the following years, bathhouse owners signed water leases to use the thermal water. The money paid for the leases went into a revolving fund towards future improvement projects on the reserve. For George French, his Big Iron Bathhouse paid \$2,400 a year to use the waters.¹⁹⁸ The lease payments also paid the salary of a permanent superintendent for the Hot Springs Reservation. This relationship allowed entrepreneurs to promote the permanence of the waters and the establishments into which they flowed, developing legitimate competition with spa towns along the East Coast and in the Mid-Atlantic states.

¹⁹⁷ Hot Springs Commissioners John Coburn and M. S. Stearns to Secretary Schurz, letter, 16 July 1877, RG 79, Box 3, Entry 1, in Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 42.

¹⁹⁸ "Testimony of George M. French," 24-36.

Absent any federal guidance until the 1870s, boosters and promoters had been the developers of a national landscape of health and healing in Hot Springs. Boosters set an early precedent of situating newly “discovered” thermal springs within an industrialized health tourism market in the nineteenth century. They, and others like them, exported the ideas that made Hot Springs successful to other locations across the rapidly populating Midwest and West. Charles Cutter, who sold his Hot Springs guide to tens of thousands of visitors every season, took his marketing strategies to Mount Clemens, Michigan “and its world famous mineral baths.” Cutter deemed 1873, the first year he travelled to Hot Springs, as “the starting point of Mount Clemens as a health resort” emphasizing how the erection of the town’s first bathhouse aligned with his credentials as an expert on the curative powers of mineral waters.¹⁹⁹ In the Dakota Territory in 1879, as thousands poured into Arkansas for the healing waters via the railroad, white settlers, upon discovering a set of springs in the Black Hills, used the Lakota name Minnekahta, meaning “Hot Waters,” to establish a new resort town. They ultimately changed the name to Hot Springs, distancing the health-giving waters from any association with hostile Indigenous groups, but also, according to the geographer Martha E. Geores, to take “advantage of the reputations of Hot Springs, Arkansas.”²⁰⁰ When a railroad branch came to town in 1890, as the Indian Wars ended in the territory, railroad promoters in South Dakota compared the springs they had recently purchased from “squaw men” to Carlsbad, Baden, and other European spas.²⁰¹ Hot Springs boosters had not only succeeded in commodifying their thermal waters, but their strategies were copied by others to lure new settlers, residents, and tourists to the nation’s western reaches and wonders.

¹⁹⁹ Charles Cutter, *Cutter’s Official Guide to Mount Clemens, Mich and Its World Famous Mineral Baths* (Mt. Clemens, MI: Chas. Cutter & Son, 1912), 3.

²⁰⁰ Geores, “Surviving on Metaphor,” 43.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

* * * * *

With the town and its healing waters drawing the attention of people from across the country, litigation and legislation secured an apparent sense of order in town, this new development and order created an exclusive landscape of health and healing with the federal government at the helm. Near the end of Reconstruction, visitors to the parks and elected representatives began associating the natural wonders in national parks, places under their growing jurisdiction, with restorative health and government control. When Scottish travel writer Constance Frederica Gordon Cumming visited Yellowstone National Park and came upon its hot springs, she believed the park would blossom into “a center of medicinal baths, among which even the revolting mud-pools shall do their part for the healing of mankind.”²⁰² Missouri senator George Vest described Yellowstone as “a great breathing place for the national lungs,” repositories of health relieving Gilded Age Americans.²⁰³ Reserved forty years before the creation of Yellowstone National Park, in Hot Springs the federal government had lacked the administrative capacity and imagination to effectively manage the Arkansas hot springs or articulate itself as a steward over the nation’s unique landscapes. Once Congress began to craft its rationale for federal management of unique American landscapes for the good of all the people, and the U.S. Supreme Court confirmed federal ownership of the Arkansas springs, Congress redefined the hot springs as a site of public healing and established a basis for a permanent government presence in town. It deputized federal officials to flex their administrative muscle who took over where local and regional boosters had left off.

²⁰² Sears, *Sacred Places*, 176.

²⁰³ Drabelle, *The Power of Scenery*, 171-72.

Hot Springs thereafter became a laboratory for the government to experiment with its growing power, influence, and responsibilities. By 1877, the new Hot Springs Commission, believing that “The curative springs should be regarded as the gift of nature to the whole people,” advised the federal government “to retain control of all medicinal waters here for the benefit of the general public, and had directed that all the thermal springs should be reserved” because “It was evident that the public benefit to be derived from the interest thus retained by the government.” This, the commission believed, was a matter of “national importance.”²⁰⁴ That same year, Interior Secretary Carl Schurz, “believing that medicinal springs should, wherever possible, be placed beyond the cupidity of speculators so that rich and poor can alike share their benefits,” recommended the government reserve the Pagosa Hot Springs in Colorado, citing the recent actions in Hot Springs as precedent.²⁰⁵ Prior to this era, the federal government did not have the administrative or rhetorical mechanisms to manage the curious valley under its authority for nearly half a century. With expanded jurisdiction, power, and authority, government officials waded into Hot Springs to control and administer the thermal waters.

²⁰⁴ John Coburn and M.S. Stearns to Secretary Schurz, 16 July 1877, Record Group (RG) 79, Records of the National Park Service, Box 3, Hot Springs General Correspondence, Entry 1, at National Archives Records Administration (NARA) College Park, MD.

Aaron H. Cragin, M.L. Stearns, and John Coburn, *Report of the Commission Appointed Under the Provisions of Act of Congress of March 3, 1877, Regarding the Hot Springs Reservation in the State of Arkansas*, U.S. Department of the Interior to U.S. Congress 45-2 (November, 1877), 807.

²⁰⁵ Carl Schurz, *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1877), XLVIII.

Chapter 2: Contested Waters: Navigating Hot Springs Hydraulic Landscape, 1878-1888

General Benjamin Franklin Kelley arrived in Hot Springs in late 1877. Working as a freight agent for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad before the Civil War, Kelley earned the rank of major general during his service to the Union. After the war, Kelley served as an internal revenue collector. He was appointed by President Rutherford B. Hayes, who served as a colonel under Kelley, as the first superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation. Kelley, now 70, may have thought he arrived in the nineteenth-century “Thermopolis” espoused by those boosters almost half a century earlier (Fig. 2.1).²⁰⁶ New bathhouses lined Hot Springs’ main thoroughfare, Central Avenue, built almost monthly and increasingly extravagant. These establishments catered to a growing, national clientele every season. Kelley may have felt more-than-ready to tackle his congressional mandate: clearing the landscape of human and non-human nuisances. In one of his early correspondences from the reservation in January 1878, Kelley wrote that “I have nothing of importance to report this month.” He quickly noted how the reserve was “now entirely rid of the former population” consisting of poor residents taking the waters at the springs. He instead filled the account with a weather report describing a blustery winter and hoped conditions improved enough so he could begin landscaping the diminished reservation with walks, drives, shrubs, and grass.²⁰⁷ By 1882, Kelley applauded “The wisdom of the government in retaining control of this reservation and these wonderful waters,” which was “manifested daily,”

²⁰⁶ “The Hot Springs,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 9 July 1828.

²⁰⁷ Benjamin F. Kelley, “Report for January 1878,” Record Group (RG) 79, Records of the National Park Service, Box 3, Hot Springs General Correspondence, Entry 1, at National Archives Records Administration (NARA) College Park, MD.

evidenced by “The number of guests and patients is constantly increasing from year to year.”²⁰⁸

Kelley’s enthusiasm came from the growing popularity of the city as well as the federal government’s control of the thermal waters that brought visitors to the Arkansas valley.

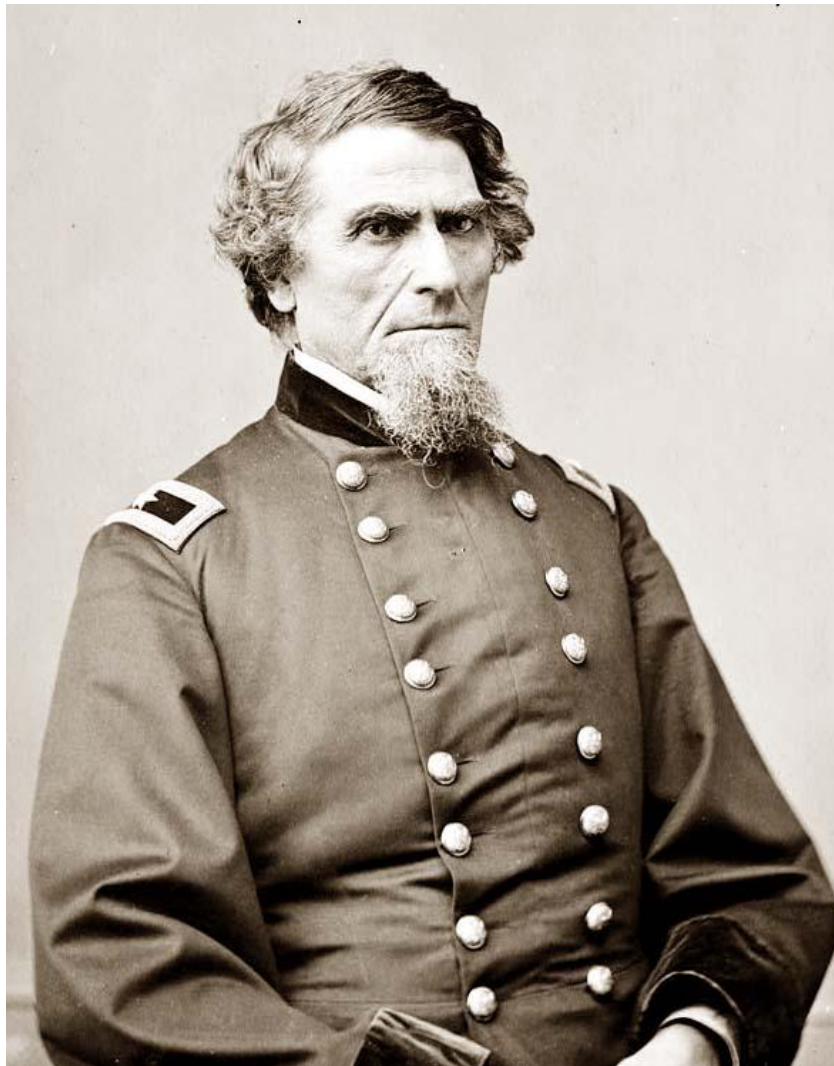


Fig. 2.1: Superintendent Benjamin Franklin Kelley, c. 1865; National Archives.

²⁰⁸ Benjamin Kelley, *Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation*, October 1, 1882, 993

But the apparent order Kelley saw upon first reaching Hot Springs, influenced by popular accounts of the town, was neither complete nor entirely accurate. As Kelley congratulated himself and the Interior Department, many in Hot Springs still demanded more be done in the Valley of Vapors. An 1883 petition to Interior Secretary Henry Moore Teller signed by a number of prominent Hot Springs citizens, including the town's former mayor, T.F. Linde, current aldermen, and the chief of police, along with the county treasurer and sheriff similarly cited the increase in visitors, growing "greater than ever before." The petitioners concluded "The rapid growth and popularity of this city as an invalid resort suggests the necessity of further improvements of the permanent reservation."²⁰⁹ In the subsequent ten years, 1878-1888, reservation officials embarked on a number of improvement projects. Reservation officials designated a spring, the "Mud Hole," where the thermal waters pooled, as a place where the poor could bathe free of charge, creating the first Government Free Bathhouse on the reservation. The second major improvement performed by the federal government at Hot Springs was covering Hot Springs Creek with a masonry arch. The waterway ran along the valley floor, and as more residents and visitors surrounded the springs, the creek quickly, in the busiest parts of the season, became "the common sewer for the town,"²¹⁰ affecting the sanitary and social environment in Hot Springs. The arch project, which lasted from 1882-1884, protected the purity of the waters and ensured the medicinal virtue of the waters and the town. Lastly, the popularity and efficacy of the thermal waters convinced Congress to appropriate moneys in 1882 for an Army and Navy General Hospital in Hot Springs to help and heal ailing soldiers, sailors, marines, and American veterans, legitimizing the curative powers of the waters that Superintendent Kelley and others effused so widely to the public.

²⁰⁹ Petition to Henry Moore Teller, Secretary of the Interior, 15 May 1883; RG 79, Box 7, NARA College Park.

²¹⁰ A. Van Cleef, "The Hot Springs of Arkansas," *Harper's Monthly* (January, 1878), 12.

But these three transformative events on the reservation in the late 1870s and the early 1880s were not the result of a clear mission by the superintendent or the Interior Department. As the reservation superintendent and the Interior Department waded into a hydraulic landscape where they were one of many groups interested in the waters. There were Hot Springs prominent citizens: influential local politicians, physicians, and bathhouse owners who had boosted the waters and their town to national acclaim and reaped the benefits. Below this veneer of genteel resort life limped thousands of indigent invalids who had routinely travelled to Hot Springs since the beginning of the nineteenth century. During their stay to take the waters, thousands of poor visitors made their home directly on Hot Springs Mountain, believing the rhetoric coming from the government and boosters that “The curative springs should be regarded as the gift of nature to the whole people.”²¹¹ Lastly, the Department of the Interior was not the only government organization interested in the curative power of the waters. The War Department sought access to the waters to heal the officers and enlisted men they sent to the valley.

The Mud Hole, the Creek Arch Project, and the construction of an Army and Navy General Hospital were never part of the Department of the Interior’s initial designs for the Hot Springs Reservation. These moments demonstrate that reservation officials were far from the sole authority in Hot Springs. Instead, by understanding Hot Springs as a contested landscape full of rivaling factions centered around access to, and control of, the town’s precious resource, Interior’s actions look more like reactions to suggestions and rivalries manifested amongst influential and established groups in Hot Springs. Each of these interests, or “camps” competed to control and define the hydraulic resource. And they camped, literally and figuratively, on and around the reservation, to ensure their voices shaped Hot Springs’ new landscape.

²¹¹ John Coburn and M.S. Stearns to Secretary Schurz, 16 July 1877; RG 79, Box 3, Entry 1, NARA College Park.

The trials of Interior Department officials in Hot Springs align with similar struggles faced by administrators in early national parks in the American West, and purity became a theme underlying federal efforts to regulate national park lands. In most of these efforts, the federal government sought to preserve a landscape they perceived as pristine: full of grandeur and natural wonders, and without people bent on exploiting nature. This ideal forced those that defiled these idyllic, natural conditions in the parks, local interests and Indigenous nations recently defined as “squatters,” off the land. The purity of the land figured prominently in this dispossession. Upon taking his family horseback riding through Yellowstone National Park in 1886 to help cure his daughter’s lung disease, sportsman George Wingate declared, “The Indian difficulty has been cured, the Indians have been forced back on their distant reservations.”²¹² Park superintendents labeled Indigenous hunting parties “an unmitigated evil” as they set fire to the grasslands, poisoning the scenic beauty of the Yellowstone landscape in the eyes of officials.²¹³

The purity of Hot Springs’ thermal waters became a fixation for each camp fighting for control and access to the resource. Boosters, bathhouse owners, and physicians not only pressured reservation officials to divorce the waters from any natural contaminants, but worked tirelessly to define social plagues and regulate physicians who could and who could not administer the waters to patients and patrons. Powerful bathhouse owners convinced Superintendent Kelley to conceive of Hot Springs as the Southern Saratoga that boosters had advertised for decades, rigidly stipulating and enforcing who could access the waters.²¹⁴ Lastly,

²¹² Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 55.

²¹³ Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University Press of California, 2001), 88.

²¹⁴ See Kathryn Carpenter, “Access to Nature, Access to Health: The Government Free Bathhouse at Hot Springs National Park, 1877 to 1922,” Masters’ Thesis (University of Missouri – Kansas City, 2019); Carpenter connects access, health, and technological change in the creation of the Government Free Bathhouse.

the construction of the Army and Navy Hospital introduced another powerful and popular administrative body to town, the War Department, and forced the Interior Department to fight off, using words and actions, an attempt to wrest thermal water control away from the department. These dramatic moments represented reservation officials' attempt to map some semblance of order over this contested landscape. Their outcomes ultimately legitimized the federal government's control of the thermal waters and systematized water use at Hot Springs for decades.

“Miserable Shanties” and Monopolies: Class Struggles on Hot Springs Mountain

Benjamin Kelley used the early years of his superintendency to define who could access the waters on the Hot Springs Reservation. While the 1877 Hot Springs Commission's final report stated that their goal had sought to create a reserve with regulations and restrictions “for [the springs'] preservation” and that these new rules worked to “prevent the possibility of a monopoly, and affect equally all those who seek to use these healing waters,” in practice, the commissioners' work reinforced an exclusive landscape of healing for the middle class and wealthy imagined by bathhouse owners and boosters. Bathhouse owners, while losing in the Supreme Court to own the springs, kept their bathhouses and continued to assert a level of control over access to the thermal waters. Superintendent Kelley envisioned a Hot Springs as the place advertised by boosters and powerful bathhouse owners: a Southern resort town for paying customers. Under this assumption, and supported by physicians and bathhouse proprietors who profited from paying customers visiting the town, Kelley embarked on purifying the reservation landscape, ridding it of human and non-human contaminants and defining who was allowed to use the thermal waters.

The problem with boosters' perception of Hot Springs, and Kelley's first assessment of the town in 1877 and early 1878, is that it woefully, and at times willfully, ignored the complex and contested social environment that accompanied the unique natural environment. An unstable and at times dangerous social world was unacceptable in promotional literature. These contests quickly caught up with Kelley. From time immemorial, the thermal waters of Hot Springs had served any and all visitors who journeyed to Ouachita foothills. Quapaw stories tell of using the springs, and other neighboring nations surely visited the waters. Later, antebellum travel accounts often commented on the poor (both in health and status) state of the individuals residing in Hot Springs. As Hot Springs began to recover from the ravages of the Civil War, sick patrons ascended the same railroad cars as wealthier visitors, but experienced the waters differently. The wealthy patronized the elaborate bathhouses in Hot Springs, described by Kelley in 1880 as "ornaments to the permanent reservation and to the town... not surpassed by any sanatorium on the continent or perhaps the world."²¹⁵ In contrast to the elegant new establishments on the valley floor, the poor congregated at the discharge sites on the side of the mountain. One of the most popular, and supposedly effective, springs was called the Rhal Hole.²¹⁶ Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, invalids had dug small pits in the mountainside to let the thermal waters collect where they could soak in the pools. The Rhal Hole was located directly behind some of the newest bathhouses on the reservation.

The Civil War and its aftermath produced a growing population of sick and injured indigents who flooded to Hot Springs in the 1870s seeking recovery or simply relief. The war

²¹⁵ Benjamin Kelley to A.R. Smith, 29 December 1880; RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

²¹⁶ Rhal Hole or Ral Hole. Many of the springs were named for the taste and smell emitted from the springs, for example Egg Spring or Arsenic Spring. Other spring sites were named for the diseases their waters were most effective at curing, like the Corn Hole healed corns on men's and women's feet, and the Rhal Hole, short most likely for neuralgia, causing tingling, pain, numbness, or chronic unpleasantness due to nerve damage.

maimed and hobbled an entire generation of men. For example, in 1866, Mississippi appropriated 20 percent of its state revenues to artificial limbs for veterans.²¹⁷ Booster material in Hot Springs could not entirely ignore this population and offered a variety of opinions surrounding the indigent class who visited Hot Springs. Some glossed over the thousands of diseased poor travelling to the town every year. In his nationally circulated handbook on the springs in 1875, J.M. Morrison made the Hot Springs appear as a heavenly health resort for the upper classes of the era, noting that “The visitors who come here are, mainly, from the first circles of society” and “need not fear being brought in contact with improper characters.”²¹⁸ Others, like Charles Cutter’s popular guide, addressed the scores of poor visitors in the best possible light. Cutter contrasted bathhouse patrons with Rhial Hole visitors, the latter being those who bath in nature “through choice, believing them to be more efficacious.”²¹⁹ Cutter also did not equate the diseased lives of the poor with any moral failings, reminding his readers that many of the poor invalids come to Hot Springs “without money or friends” and “are either unable to work or cannot find employment.” He concluded if the federal government sought to “keep the waters of these wonderful Springs for... the use of the people” then it was its “duty” to “make some provision for this class of their citizens, and not allow the burden to be borne by a few hundred that live in this Valley” (Fig. 2.2).²²⁰

²¹⁷ White, *The Republic For Which It Stands*, 28.

²¹⁸ J.M. Morrison, *Morrison’s Hand Book of the Hot Springs of Arkansas* (Chicago: C.W. Magill, 1875), 10.

²¹⁹ Charles Cutter, *The Hot Springs as They Are. A History and Guide* (Little Rock: W.H. Windsor, Book and Job Printer, 1874), 8. By 1883, Cutter noted that “wild boys” could learn a “moral lesson” visiting Hot Springs, interacting with the men and women trying to cure their syphilitic rheumatism; Charles Cutter, *Cutter’s Guide to the Hot Springs of Arkansas* (St. Louis: Slawson & Co. Printers, 1883), 27.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.



Fig. 2.2: “Man Seated in Wooden Wheelchair;” from J.F. Kennedy, *Stereoscopic Views of Hot Springs and Surroundings, 1872-1887*; copy acquired from Hot Springs National Park Archives.

During the 1870s, prominent social and political figures associated the growing indigent populations across the country with filth and disease. The Panic of 1873 sent the nation into its worst economic crisis to date. A 65-month stock market contraction led to widespread unemployment across all sectors of the economy and affected every region in the Union. In New York City, the unemployment rate was estimated at 33 percent in 1874. Walt Whitman

connected this underclass as a threat to the healthfulness of the nation, describing the unemployed as “poor, desperate, dissatisfied,” and “nomadic.” If this class persisted in society they would “steadily, even if slowly, eat[] into us like a cancer of lungs or stomach.” Then, according to Whitman, “our republican experiment, notwithstanding all its surface successes, is at heart an unhealthy failure.”²²¹ These roving populations of recently defined “tramps” looking for work were often malnourished and prone to disease and sickness, just the type of desperate individuals pulled to the thermal waters. In Hot Springs, Kelley, less artfully than Whitman, drew clear and classist lines concerning who should benefit most from the thermal waters and defined the poor on the side of Hot Springs Mountain as unfit. From the time he first arrived in Hot Springs, Kelley’s directives tended to associate the indigent poor living on the side of Hot Springs Mountain with impurity, suggesting that they contaminated both the hydraulic and social landscape. Kelley, tasked to keep the reservation land “clear of all squatters, and clean from all filth,” fixated on the thermal water’s purity and connected the virtue of the water to the ones taking the waters.²²² He associated squatting invalids as the primary on the reservation, equating the poor bathers to the to “filth” he was tasked to clear by the Hot Springs Commission.

On October 20, 1877, just three months after arriving in Hot Springs, Kelley issued a public notice that he distributed around town and throughout the shacks on the mountain stating “All persons, either residents or owners of temporary structures on the Hot Springs Reservation, commonly designated as ‘Rhal City,’ or ‘Hot Springs Mountain,’ and all other shanties, tents or encampments within the limits of the reservation are hereby required to remove the same within thirty days.” Kelley also banned future construction of any temporary buildings near the thermal

²²¹ White, *The Republic For Which It Stands*, 271.

²²² Commissioner’s report quoted in Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 42-43.

waters.²²³ In response, the majority of the affected visitors moved to the eastern side of the mountain. While a short walk of less than a mile, the poor visitors were separated from the thermal waters, as they only discharged on the western side. They called their make-shift village “Kelleytown.” The *Arkansas Gazette* contrasted the pure and “picturesque grove” on the reservation with Kelleytown’s newest residents, “a colony of unwashed, drunken tramps.”²²⁴ The poor, defined by parts of the community as physically and morally unclean, did not leave town; they merely hunkered down for the winter and tested Kelley’s resolve and power over the landscape the next year.

It soon became evident to Kelley that far from being the only one in control of Hot Springs, the federal government was but was one of many interests that had a stake in the thermal waters. As 1878 moved on, Kelley learned of the seasonality that came in visitations to Hot Springs. Very few patients or patrons made the harrowing journey to town in the winter. By the summer and fall, however, thousands of indigent invalids began to camp on Hot Springs Mountain, usurping the federal presence in town. By the fall of 1878, Kelley made his most decisive, and divisive action regarding the ongoing class struggles straining Hot Springs. The proximity of rich and poor congregating so close together dismayed Kelley. Citing “the constantly increasing number of patients visiting here, and bathing in these waters” in an 1877 letter to Interior Secretary Carl Schurz, Kelley asserted that the town needed a “more convenient and elegant class of Bath houses.” And illustrating his concern with preserving “the heat and electricity of the water” for more affluent users, he added that these bathhouses “should be constructed as near the springs as possible,” including where the Rhal Hole sat. Kelley feared

²²³ Notice by Superintendent B.F. Kelley, October 20, 1877, copy on display at Hot Springs National Park Visitor’s Center, Hot Springs, Arkansas.

²²⁴ “Tramp,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 27 May 1880, 8.

that without government action “the growth and prosperity of this most important health giving place will be retarded beyond any reasonable estimate.” Kelley’s language became increasingly dire as throughout 1878 as Kelletown residents, numbering over 1,000 and containing, according to Kelley, “almost every nationality, both sexes, white and colored,” had moved back to the Rhal Hole.²²⁵ According to the 1880 census, Hot Springs’ population came to 3,554 residents. While not counted as permanent residents, the number of indigent poor began to overwhelm Kelley and local authorities.

Kelley based his judgments on the Rhal Hole and its patrons upon the most influential voices in town. The burgeoning medical community had nothing but caustic opinions of the unclean and diseased visitors who could not afford to patronize their offices. In correspondences to the Secretary of the Interior Kelley based his judgment on the water’s virtue in proximity to its discharge sites on “all the physicians here” in Hot Springs.²²⁶ In a separate letter written to Schurz in 1878, men endorsed by Kelley as “the prominent physicians of Hot Springs” focused on the purity of the waters and the impurity of the Rhal Hole bathers. The physicians noted that the Rhal Hole’s geology, “comprised of porous tufa,” allowed the water of the spring to “impregnate the water of nearly all the springs” on the mountainside. “In this hole,” complained the physicians, “diseased paupers have been bathing to the detriment of the prosperity of Hot Springs, and to the disgust of all persons of refinement and intelligence who have visited this watering place.”²²⁷ Dr. F. Hartmann of Hot Springs described the Rhal Hole as “a disgrace to civilization,” a “nuisance” that housed the “headquarter of a great number of thieves, tramps, jail-birds ruffians, deadbeats and roughs.” Hot Springs physicians fought hard to connect the

²²⁵ Benjamin Kelley to Carl Schurz, Secretary of the Interior, 15 November 1878; RG 79, Box 3, NARA College Park.

²²⁶ Benjamin Kelley to Carl Schurz, 1 February 1878; RG 79, Box 3, NARA College Park.

²²⁷ A.S. Garnett, et. al. to Carl Schurz, 2 October 1878; RG 79, Box 3, NARA College Park.

indigent class in town to impurity and a nuisance to both the town and the waters, issues directly under the purview of the reservation superintendent.

Concessionaires and the forces of local capital worked to influence access policies and shape the natural and social landscapes in Hot Springs.²²⁸ The proprietors of the largest pay bathhouses in town, which included Henry Rector, who had failed in his bid to secure title to the springs in 1875, appealed to Interior Secretary Schurz with requests similar to those of Hot Springs' physicians. Rector and others classified the Rhal Hole and other common pools as "filthy and offensive bathing places" and believed these features "contaminated" Hot Springs' thermal waters. They accused the residents of Rhal City of dumping waste and refuse into the wooden troughs that brought thermal water from the springs to their bathhouses, sometimes even defecating in them to pollute the waters for paying customers.²²⁹ But the bathhouse owners viewed this peculiar "situation" through the lens of their profit lines. This contamination meant "Hot Springs loses [sic] the patronage of thousands annually" because visiting customers "refuse to drink from any of the springs or bathe in the water." These men also felt "defrauded" because Kelleytown residents were not paying for using Hot Springs' water, a privilege that cost bathhouse owners "a very heavy tax" as they paid out annual water rents to the government based upon the number of tubs in each establishment, \$50/tub. Drawing clear class lines in their argument, the proprietors begged the Interior Secretary, "We, and all the better element of society... request, yea, beg of you that you direct Supt. Kelley and cause these miserable shanties

²²⁸ This strategy occurred throughout the national park system; see Mark Daniel Barringer, *Selling Yellowstone: Capitalism and the Construction of Nature* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Jen A. Huntley, *The Making of Yosemite: James Mason Hutchings and the Origin of America's Most Popular Park* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014); Jerry J. Frank, *Making Rocky Mountain National Park: The Environmental History of an American Treasure* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013).

²²⁹ A. Van Cleef, "The Hot Springs of Arkansas," *Harper's Monthly* (January, 1878), 12.

to be torn down and those filthy pools to be filled up.”²³⁰ The town’s bathhouse owners also fought hard to rid the reservation of the poor invalids.

With the support of Hot Springs’ most powerful groups, and the endorsement of the Secretary of the Interior, Superintendent Kelley burned down the Rhal Hole “shanties” on September 25, 1878. The residents of “Ral City” scattered throughout the town, many returning to Kelleytown while others settled on the town’s outskirts. But these men and women did not remain silent or helpless in their struggle for thermal water access. The group, numbering over 1,000, rallied amongst the charred remains of the temporary establishments at the Rhal Hole numerous times after Kelley razed it. On September 30, just five days after the destruction of the Rhal Hole building, the town’s indigent bathers, organized by Hot Springs’ former mayor, T. F. Linde, circulated a petition pleading to Interior officials in an effort that they may understand the plight of the poor in Hot Springs (Fig. 2.3). The request secured over 1,000 signatures. Linde directed his charges at Kelley and the bathhouse owners, those “who are so anxious to do away with free baths.” Linde claimed these alliances “are prompted solely through selfish notions in hope of monopolizing these waters to the lasting detriment of thousands of poor, suffering invalids.”²³¹ In an interview Linde gave to the a Little Rock newspaper in October, he declared Kelley’s destruction of the Rhal Hole was “a disgrace to public humanity.”²³² Charles Matthews, editor of the local *Hot Springs Sentinel*, witnessed some of these meetings and became alarmed when the crowd “made threatening and communistic speeches directed at Gen. Kelley.”

²³⁰ H.M. Rector, et. al. to Carl Schurz, 6 August 1878; RG 79, Box 3, NARA College Park.

²³¹ Theodore F. Linde, Petition to Carl Schurz, 30 September 1878, 3; RG 79, Box 3, NARA College Park.

²³² “Razed Ral Hole; An Interview with the Representative of Twelve Hundred Citizens,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 21 October 1878, 1.

Matthews made clear in his letter to the Secretary of the Interior the class dynamics at play, noting how “the good citizens” in Hot Springs “have taken no part” in the protests.²³³

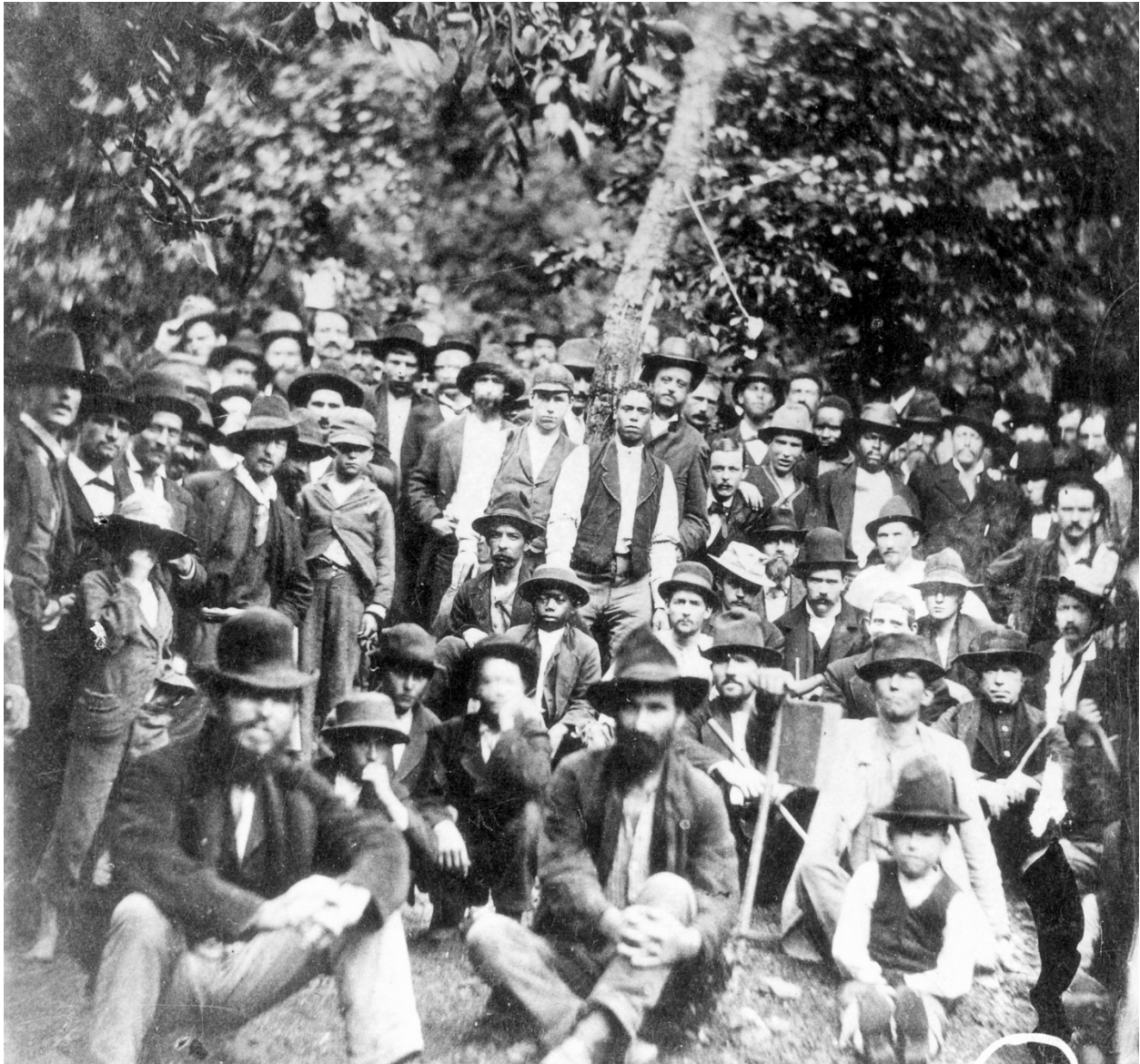


Fig. 2.3: “Indignation Meeting” on Hot Springs Mountain to protest Superintendent Kelley’s destruction of Rhal City; “Indignation Meeting,” Hot Springs National Park Archives, file no. HOSP 6129.

Kelley and other influential parties in Hot Springs clearly defined this “floating population” as physical and moral vagrants, but what did these men and women think of their

²³³ Charles Matthews to Carl Schurz, 2 October 1878; RG 79, Box 3, NARA College Park.

journeys to Hot Springs and how did they view their relationship to the thermal waters?²³⁴ While it is difficult to ascertain the motivations of all who soldiered their way to Hot Springs during this time, the few surviving sources offer a glimpse into the lives of these men and women as well as their conceptions of Hot Springs thermal water as a common resource, where need defined access, not status. The signatures of the petitioners demonstrate the extent of Hot Springs' popularity and reputation as a health and healing center for invalids. While most noted their residence as Hot Springs, other petitioners came from 26 of the 38 states in the Union. Large minorities arrived from Texas, Missouri, and Mississippi, realizing the Southern spa dream of past boosters and promoters. But the railway ties Hot Springs developed in the 1870s also connected it with the larger nation allowing invalids to travel great distances for their health; at least 15 cited their hometowns in New York, while other signatures came from residents of Maine, California, and individuals travelling internationally from Canada (Toronto), Mexico, and the United Kingdom (London).

Written correspondence from suffering invalids of limited means and those representing their cause wondered aloud about the allegiances of Superintendent Kelley, drawing connections between government control of the waters and the promise of free access that public ownership insured. Writing to a colleague in town, resident Z. L. Hearsey supported Linde's petition, singling out "These doctors" and "General Kelley" as interested only in the pay bathhouses, their "only wish to make these waters subservient to there [sic] interest at the detriment of thousands of afflicted people."²³⁵ Writing to the Interior Department about "the condition of us poor sufering [sic] men here in Hot Springs," one visitor George Wilkinson thought it vital to inform the federal government as to the thermal water access issues the poor faced on the reservation.

²³⁴ Benjamin Kelley to Carl Schurz, November 10, 1878; RG 79, Box 3, NARA College Park.

²³⁵ Z.L. Hearsey to Husted, October 1878; RG 79, Box 3, NARA College Park.

Wilkinson not only echoed attacks on Superintendent Kelley's failed leadership, but also, and more importantly, emphasized the importance of access to the thermal waters as a privilege for all in Hot Springs:

Sir in the name of God and the name of our glories country will you please try and see if some things cannot be don [sic] for us poor men for we clame protection under the Star Spangell Banner as true loyal sitizens of the United States [.] they have turned the best of the water from us and given it to the rich[.] are we not in a christan land any longer [?] my God we must be.²³⁶

Wilkinson asserted that federal ownership of the hot springs and their waters guaranteed any citizen, regardless of social standing, an opportunity to use this national, natural resource.

Superintendent Kelley believed the pressure of those threatening his visions of an elegant natural reservation. Writing that local authorities were inadequate to quell the rebellious indigents, Kelley requested a detachment of federal troops to help secure the pure springs, waters, and reservation property. On October 4, 1878, after Kelley burned down the Rhal Hole structures and Linde prepared his petition, Captain H. C. Pratt led a federal infantry unit of twenty-one men to Hot Springs from Little Rock. In a missive to his superior officers, Pratt quickly saw the class distinctions in the dispute, relaying that the "mob" was comprised of "tramps and low people" and "I think the majority of the citizens and of the better class are against the action of the party of Mr. Linde." Pratt concluded that due to the presence of the federal soldiers, "I think there will be no opposition."²³⁷ The removal of individuals and groups from parklands was nothing new for either the Interior Department or the U.S. military. Similar practices took place in the Northeast and the West before and during the time of Kelley's actions.²³⁸ In Hot Springs, reservation officials focused on the purity of the thermal waters and

²³⁶ George Wilkinson letter to Secretary of the Interior, 27 May 1879; RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

²³⁷ Captain H.C. Pratt to Assistant Adjutant General, 12 October 1878; transcription of report in Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 49-50.

²³⁸ See Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*; Louis Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

the resource's connections to health and healing. This mindset reinforced the need to protect the waters from human and non-human contaminants.

Kelley was pleased with the detachment sent to Hot Springs, writing that “We have had no riotous demonstrations in the last few [sic] days... The moral effect of the presence of the ‘Blue Coats’ will prevent any further trouble... All now will be peaceful and safe.” From then on, Kelley felt able to discharge his duties on the reservation.²³⁹ Those duties, according to Interior officials, consisted of securing the spring sites with fencing “in order to keep out loafers and filth-making intruders,” returning focus to the purity of the water and the impurity of some visitors.²⁴⁰ Kelley kept a small detachment in Hot Springs until 1881, believing that “as long as the U.S. Troops are here I will have no difficulty in protecting the public property.”²⁴¹ It is not surprising that Kelley called upon the military for assistance. As a former Union general, he understood the force regimented companies could command. It is ironic how some Southerners welcomed federal troops to Hot Springs in 1878 upon the heels of those same troops officially withdrawing from the South and ending Reconstruction. Some of the town's most influential residents were former Confederates. Henry Rector was the Governor of Arkansas during the war; William Gaines, who owned over 165 enslaved persons before the Civil War, made a new life for his family as a bathhouse owner in Hot Springs; and physicians such as James M. Keller and Algernon Garnett were Confederate doctors. But it appears present interests outweighed past sectional resentments. These men envisioned Hot Springs as a new node in upper-class spa culture, affixed with the most elegant and modern improvements. Indigent invalids from across

²³⁹ Benjamin Kelley to Carl Schurz, 9 October 1878; RG 79, Box 3, NARA College Park.

²⁴⁰ J.B. Clark to Carl Schurz, 12 June 1879; RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

²⁴¹ Benjamin Kelley to Samuel J. Kirkwood, Secretary of the Interior, 12 August 1881; RG 79, Box 5, NARA College Park.

the country tainted that image. The public, according to Kelley and some of Hot Springs' most powerful individuals and organizations, did not include everyone.

But Kelley's actions also drew sustained criticism from those within and without the reservation, leading to realignments in the reservation's natural and cultural landscape. One of the paramount duties presented to the superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation was "to secure the greatest benefit to the largest number" according to the original directive issued to Kelley in 1878.²⁴² According to many, Superintendent Kelly had not accomplished this foundational objective. The thermal water provided to the Kelleytown pools on the opposite side of Hot Springs Mountain was often inadequate, with "a very small stream flowing from the supply pipes, and that even being cold water."²⁴³ The class disputes and military involvement forced Congress to respond quickly to the social tensions arising in Hot Springs. Approved on December 16, 1878, less than three months after Kelley razed the Rhal Hole on Hot Springs Mountain, Congress codified into law that "the superintendent shall provide and maintain a sufficient number of free baths for the use of the indigent."²⁴⁴ Interior officials outside of Hot Springs took seriously the charges of unequal treatment between the rich and the poor in town. Amos Hadley, Interior's Chief Clerk, visited Hot Springs to investigate these allegations and reported that "a large number of invalid poor at Hot Springs come from all sections of the United States" to "rid themselves of disease through the agency of the springs." The government,

²⁴² *Instructions to the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation of Arkansas*, in Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 42.

²⁴³ Amos Hadley to Carl Schurz, 27 January 1881; RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

²⁴⁴ *An Act to correct an error of enrollment in bill making appropriations for sundry civil expenses of the Government for the fiscal year ending June thirtieth, eighteen hundred and seventy-nine, and for other purposes*, 20 Stat. 258, in Hillory A. Tolson, *Laws Relating to the National Park Service, The National Parks and Monuments* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1933), 228.

according to Clark, should provide the same privileges to these individuals as the patrons are afforded at the pay bathhouses.²⁴⁵

Superintendent Kelley responded to Hadley's guidance by surveying the landscape and assigning the Mud Hole as the spring for the town's visiting indigent invalids. He designated James L. Barnes, a deputy U.S. Marshall, to manage the Mud Hole. Later superintendents noted Barnes' law enforcement credentials as necessary for the job, as "owing to the classes that bath here." The Mud Hole "requires competent management" because its visitors were "more difficult to control than those who patronize the private bath houses. If not firmly controlled, it would soon become a filthy nuisance."²⁴⁶ Barnes constructed, with his own funds, a crude but effective bathhouse directly over the Mud Hole, and the building was segregated by sex, but not race. The Mud Hole was an immediate success. Barnes described the watering hole as "a splendid place, where those who have not the means are permitted [to] bathe without cost."²⁴⁷ In the first few months, J.B. Clark, Interior Secretary Carl Schurz's personal assistant, visited Hot Springs and reported that 2,000-3,000 free baths were taken monthly in 1879.²⁴⁸ The Mud Hole averaged 80 baths per day in 1880 (totaling 29,200 for the year), second only to the Big Iron Bathhouse, the largest bathing establishment in Hot Springs.²⁴⁹ The use of the Mud Hole only grew; in 1881, the total number of baths at the Mud Hole climbed to 33,325 and in 1882 it skyrocketed to 57,688 (6,924 women and 50,764 men).²⁵⁰

²⁴⁵ Amos Hadley to Carl Schurz, 27 January 1881; RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

²⁴⁶ Superintendent Samuel Hamblen to Interior Secretary Henry M. Teller, 27 June 1883; RG 79, Box 7, NARA College Park.

²⁴⁷ "Free as Water; An Interview With the Manager of the Free Mud Hole Bathing House," *Arkansas Democrat*, 2 November 1878, 1.

²⁴⁸ J.B. Clark to Carl Schurz, 12 June 1879, RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

²⁴⁹ Amos Hadley, "A," "Schedule of Bath Houses at Hot Springs, Ark." J.B. Clark to Carl Schurz, 12 June 1879, RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

²⁵⁰ Totals from July to June of following year; 1881-82 statistics, RG 79, Box 5, NARA College Park ; 1882-83 statistics in RG 79, Box 7, NARA College Park.

The relationships between Kelley and Hot Springs' most influential circles also warranted investigation. The second orienting tenet given to the reservation superintendent by the Hot Springs Commission was to oversee an "equitable and just" distribution of the water "as to prevent a monopoly."²⁵¹ As Kelley's perceptions of the reservation routinely aligned with the town's bathhouse owners, accusations quickly arose from residents complaining to the Interior Department of unfair treatment. Some residents articulated complaints that the same men who had sued the federal government over ownership of the springs and thermal water, men such as Henry Rector, described by local residents as an "unyielding rebel;" or Albert B. Gaines, son of William Gaines, were now using a federal official to control who had access to them.²⁵² By 1888, Gaines owned at least a one-quarter share of seven of the twelve bathhouses on reservation property and a controlling interest in six.²⁵³ Rector, Gaines, and the other proprietors of the pay bathhouses organized the Hot Springs Bath House Association in 1880. By pooling their resources, they attempted to control the bathhouse business in Hot Springs.

Residents and federal officials became interested and alarmed at these private-sector tactics to control and define Hot Springs' waters. Hot Springs resident J.J. Sutton testified before Congress that the Bath House Association was attempting to subvert federal control of the reservation for their own profit: "They are wealthy and well organized. They control the Newspapers. They employ or retain all the attorneys, and by employment, patronage and intimidation, they influence many citizens to silence... The bath-house men, and the rings they have formed, will acquire... all the waters of the Hot Springs." In his report to the Interior Secretary, Amos Hadley concluded that while the new organization of bathhouse owners worked

²⁵¹ Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 42.

²⁵² Henry H. to Stephen W. Dorsey, 27 December 1880; RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

²⁵³ John Paige and Laura Harrison, *Out of the Vapors: A social and Architectural History of Bathhouse Row* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1987), 290-295.

to improve upon the city and the reservation, “it may readily be seen that such an association would soon develop a monopoly which would have absolute control over these springs, and which would demand extortionate prices for bathing.”²⁵⁴ Former Arkansas Senator Stephen W. Dorsey, who had spent his time in Congress proposing legislation for equitable distribution of Hot Springs’ waters, wrote to the Interior Secretary in February 1881 that the increased prices for baths at Hot Springs proposed by the pool were a cause for concern. By 1881, four of the nine bathhouses had increased a charge for a single bath to 50 cents, with a full schedule of 21 baths at \$10.²⁵⁵ These increasing prices, defined by Dorsey as “a most exorbitant tax upon the property that belongs to the United States.” Dorsey concluded that if the Interior Department lost control of, and access to, the waters, “all our efforts to make the Hot Spring reservation free and equal to all the people of this country have failed.”²⁵⁶ This line of reasoning, similar to the arguments for the Mud Hole / Government Free Bathhouse, resonated with Interior officials. The department endorsed legislation that set a cap of 30 cents for the price for a single bath at any of the establishments that received thermal water.

Lastly, the tenure of Benjamin Franklin Kelley came under increased scrutiny as a result of his alliances in town. Outside observers, noting the rush to install federal troops on the reservation and the animosity that action created with local residents and visitors, along with his personal preferences that created rifts in town and on the reservation, suggested replacing Kelley. Residents often accused Kelley of playing favorites and awarding coveted water leases to influential members of Hot Springs society.²⁵⁷ While Interior officials concluded these

²⁵⁴ Amos Hadley to Carl Schurz, 27 January 1881, 7; RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

²⁵⁵ \$271.17, adjusted for inflation; CPI Calculator.

²⁵⁶ S.W. Dorsey to Carl Schurz, 2 February 1881, 3; RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

²⁵⁷ For evidence of these accusations, and Interior’s conclusions to their inaccuracies, see RG 79, Box 3&4, NARA College Park.

accusations were meritless, some still recommended Kelley's removal. In an 1881 report to Alonzo Bell, Assistant Secretary of the Interior, Special Agent Edward Renaud assessed the situation and concluded that reservation responsibilities were "a task too heavy" for Kelley, now 74, "bowed down by age." Mr. Kelley," concluded Renaud, "has been placed in a position where he could not possibly do justice to himself" due to the physical and political demands such a position demanded. Renaud's suggestion for Kelley's successor spoke to the themes of purity and improvement that dominated this stage of Hot Springs' development:

The place should be given to some man who has a knowledge of the constructions and conduct of public works or buildings, some one who is not controlled by the 'ring' politicians of Arkansas; some man who comes from another state entirely, who has not lived at the springs and cannot be used by any factions there; some one who is not too old to run about the Reservation at all times to see personally all that is going on; an active and energetic business man in fact; and one who, above all, will rule the various discordant elements of the springs - that nest of concentrated guile and deviltry - with a just but firm and most decided hand.²⁵⁸

Within a year of Renaud's report, Kelley was replaced by a younger civil engineer, Samuel Hamblen. Hamblen, 47, while a resident of Hot Springs since 1877, appeared as a reasonable replacement for Kelley, securing the job through his work on the Hot Springs Commission and not through political patronage.

Kelley's superintendency set a number of significant precedents in Hot Springs. By both evicting and ultimately providing a location for the visiting poor to take the waters, Kelley insured that Hot Springs' fate would not follow that of a Saratoga or White Sulphur Springs.²⁵⁹ The creation of the Mud Hole / Government Free Bathhouse guaranteed a public landscape where bathhouse patrons and inhabited the same space as the indigent poor. Wealthy visitors, promenading along the reservation after their baths, more than likely crossed paths with a

²⁵⁸ Edward Renaud to Alonzo Bell, 23 May 1881, 10-11; RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

²⁵⁹ At the same time as Kelley's work in Arkansas, Hot Springs, South Dakota, was growing in popularity as well, and would ultimately become a wealthy retreat for Western tourists. See Geores, "Hot Springs equals 'Health.'"

crippled health seeker, waiting his turn at the Mud Hole. This scenario was unthinkable at other fashionable mineral spa resorts. Kelley's actions also demonstrated the power and influence of Hot Springs' most powerful factions. Bathhouse owners and the medical community aimed to control and define the waters in many of the same ways they had prior to the federal government's presence in Hot Springs. Kelley often sided with these groups, supportive of their vision of Hot Springs, demonstrating a perspective on access that contrasted with the realities on the ground as thousands of rich, poor, Black, and white flooded into town to use the thermal waters.

Defending the Waters' "Virtue" through Technology and Professional Medicine

Upon addressing issues of human contaminants affecting the purity of Hot Springs water, officials and the town's more powerful factions worked to "improve" the landscape of Hot Springs in order to preserve the purity of the waters and ensure continued success of the spa town. These brief years in the early 1880s witnessed the most dramatic changes upon the Hot Springs' hydraulic system. By the middle of the decade, Hot Springs Creek, the waterway that carved itself through the Zig Zag Mountains and flowed along the valley floor, had disappeared from view, covered by an arch project to protect the waters from impurities. The waters rarely interacted with the air anymore. Reservation officials repeatedly requested a new collection and distribution system that stored every drop of thermal water in pipes and reservoirs, utilized for the thousands arriving in town every year. All these changes, according to Interior and local officials, was in an effort to preserve the purity of Hot Springs waters and sustain the town as a healthy space for visiting patients and patrons.

Hot Springs Creek, the town's other prominent water feature, became central to early improvement projects on the reservation. Early visitors noted the steaming waterway in their travel journals, as the creek became the natural depository of the thermal waters before human interventions. In 1874, booster Charles Cutter described Hot Springs Creek as "A beautiful mountain stream" flowing through town in an effort to draw patrons to the salubrious Arkansas town.²⁶⁰ But not all saw the creek as the bubbling brook belied by Hot Springs supporters. Reporting for *Harpers Monthly* in 1878, A. Van Cleef described to his readers the need for change in Hot Springs. He listed the myriad instances of polluted waters in town and drew detailed attention to Hot Springs Creek. He concluded that the creek, "which derives much of its volume from the overflow of the springs" became "the common sewer for the town"²⁶¹ Van Cleef also informed readers to those using Hot Springs' waters in their work, not for their health. He reported extensively on "many picturesque bits of negro genre" in and around Hot Springs Creek, specifically the "washin'" services offered by African Americans in town in a burgeoning laundry industry. Run almost exclusively by Black women, these residents used the already-hot water to build a consistent business in town. Van Cleef did not directly equate these working women with the pollution he noticed in the Creek, but the creek and its inhabitants appeared incongruous with the work of healing the sick in Hot Springs.²⁶²

Government officials came to similar conclusions reached by Van Cleef as to the deleterious conditions surrounding Hot Springs Creek. The creek became a focus for all of Hot Springs' superintendents. In his first year on the reservation, Benjamin Kelley connected the health of the town to the health of the waters in the creek. Fearing that a yellow fever epidemic

²⁶⁰ Cutter, *The Hot Springs As They Are*, 9

²⁶¹ A. Van Cleef, "The Hot Springs of Arkansas," 12.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 11.

sweeping the Southern states could reach Hot Springs in 1878, Kelley ordered the creek “thoroughly cleared out, so as to give the water a clear and swift passage.”²⁶³ As more reports funneled to the Secretary of the Interior describing the creek as “an open and hideous eye-sore,” officials concluded the “Urgent necessity for improvement of the Hot Springs Creek.”²⁶⁴ By 1882, Secretary Henry Moore Teller, less than one month on the job, requested that an officer from the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct a preliminary survey on the creek and present his findings. The War Department assigned Captain Thomas Handbury for the project (Fig. 2.4). Handbury was a veteran of the Corps of Engineers, with experience on projects from California to New York and Maryland. He described the creek as “the common depository of all offal and refuse” from the town, including “the waste from the baths, the contents of water-closets, privies, and cess-pools.” Handbury, while an outsider to Hot Springs, immediately connected the unhealthy conditions of the creek with the advertised salubrity of the town:

I am told that during the summer months the odors that assail the nostril while in the vicinity [of the creek] are anything but pleasant. Such atmospheric conditions would eventually impair the health of a well person if obliged to live under them. How can the invalid, then, hope to be benefited by a sojourn here, however efficacious may be the waters of the springs?²⁶⁵

Handbury’s “remedy,” was to straighten the “torturous course” of the waterway which often widened during seasonal floods that inundated the valley.²⁶⁶ The project shored up the creek with granite walls. He also sought to cover the creek with a masonry arch, protecting the waters and airs of the town.²⁶⁷ Handbury later testified before Congress that “I think That Hot Springs is a

²⁶³ Benjamin Kelley to Carl Schurz, 15 November 1878, 4; RG 79, Box 3, NARA College Park.

²⁶⁴ Edward Renaud to Alonzo Bell, 23 May 1881, 13; Amos Hadley to Carl Schurz, 27 January 1881, 19; both in RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

²⁶⁵ Thomas Handbury to Henry M. Teller, 9 May 1882, in *Testimony Taken Before the Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department Relative to Certain things connected with the Government property at Hot Springs, Ark.*, 294.

²⁶⁶ Thomas Handbury to H.M. Teller, 18 September 1882, 1; RG 79, Box 6, NARA College Park.

²⁶⁷ This solution was first suggested by J.B. Clark during his 1879 visit to Hot Springs; see J.B. Clark to Carl Schurz, 12 June 1879, p. 4; in RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

place worthy of Government attention, and worthy of improvement... Those waters are unequalled for certain diseases by any other in the world, and every means should be taken to preserve Hot Springs in a healthy condition.”²⁶⁸ The purity of the waters of the town became the paramount interest of Interior officials.



Fig. 2.4: Captain Thomas Handbury, undated photo; *Forty-Eighth Annual Report of the Association of the Graduates of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York* (Saginaw, MI: Seemann & Peters, Inc., 1917), 32.

²⁶⁸ Thomas Handbury, *Testimony Taken Before the Committee on Expenditures*, 29 April 1884, 275.

Officials aimed to improve upon the natural landscape in Hot Springs in order to facilitate economic growth. In the early 1880s, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Alonzo Bell travelled to all the early national park sites and provided the Interior Department with recommendations on protecting parklands natural resources and encouraging visitation to the infant park units. At Hot Springs, Bell arrived just as Handbury was beginning work on the creek arch project. Bell noted that “the people of Hot Springs are anxiously awaiting for new improvement of the creek.” He claimed that the completion of the creek arch project “will be a boom not only to the residents of the place but to the thousands of invalids who yearly visit in search of health... This will hail the inauguration of the new work as the beginning of a new era of prosperity.” Bell also highlighted the new responsibilities of the federal government concerning national parks: “If the government intended to make the Springs... the great Natural Sanatorium, no better evidence of its intentions could be given than the early prosecution of this long needed improvement.”²⁶⁹ The federal government’s stewardship role over national park lands would later become enshrined in law and practice, but in the early 1880s, officials continued to experiment with their reach and power over the landscape.

The initial phase of the creek arch project began in 1882 and focused only on the portion of the creek located on reservation property, roughly 2,500 feet of the 2-mile creek. The budget for the creek arch ballooned from an initial appropriation of \$34,744.78 to \$136,744.78 after 1887.²⁷⁰ There were a number of reasons for these price differences. First were delays, sparked by disputes between Handbury and Superintendent Hamblen. Hamblen, a civil engineer, believed granite walls were too expensive and unnecessarily strong for the creek project. The two debated

²⁶⁹ Alonzo Bell to H.M. Teller, 30 September 1882, 13-14; RG 79, Box 6, NARA College Park.

²⁷⁰ *Papers touching the work of improving the Hot Springs Creek*, and “Annual Report on Hot Springs by Secretary of Interior – Improvements Made,” *Arkansas Democrat*, Dec. 6, 1900, 6

this issue for months. Handbury, described by his contemporaries for his “Judicious management, economy in time and labor, [and] constant effort to secure the greatest result with the least possible outlay,” ultimately resigned his commission because of these disputes, giving Hamblen full control over the project in 1883.²⁷¹ Hamblen often received outside advice from Hot Springs’ influential class hoping to control the outcomes of the project. In January 1883, Henry Rector wrote to Arkansas’ newly elected governor, James H. Berry, to inform him of an “urgent and pressing necessity” in Hot Springs. Rector said the creek must have an arch over it to protect the public, his waiting customers. “If it is not covered over,” urged Rector, “it will be an open sewer merely poisoning the whole valley as it does now with its pestilential odors.”²⁷² Other initial estimates, like the pipe sizes needed to transport the thermal waters as well as the town’s sewerage issues, repeatedly changed during construction, caused delays, and increased the projects overall cost.

The purity of the thermal water remained paramount throughout the project. Handbury argued that as Hot Springs thermal waters represented “the purest water that flows from or on the face of the earth,” it was vital for the reservation’s improvement projects to protect the waters from outside influences.²⁷³ He argued that residents no longer use the creek to deposit waste, stating, “That channel should be reserved for the surface drainage only, in the state approximating to its natural purity as nearly as possible.”²⁷⁴ But as construction commenced, such a massive project in a relatively small town created tension between the reservation and the city of Hot Springs. Members of the medical community balked at the “shamefully defective”

²⁷¹ *Forty-Eighth Annual Report of the Association of the Graduates of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York*, 34; for Handbury’s resignation, see Chief Clerk, War Department to H.M. Teller, 24 July 1883; RG 79, Box 7, NARA College Park.

²⁷² Henry Rector to James H. Berry, 26 January 1883; RG 79, Box 6, NARA College Park.

²⁷³ Thomas Handbury to H.M. Teller, 18 September 1882, 10; RG 79, Box 6, NARA College Park.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

work being done to the creek. George W. Lawrence, a Hot Springs physician since 1859, claimed that the project unearthed 25 years of organic “filth” in the creek, and dumped it onto the side of the road. When asked by New York Congressman Sereno Payne about the healthfulness of the city, the lifeblood of Hot Springs’ success as a health resort, Lawrence answered, “I break down every summer. I have had to leave here suffering from the effects of a malarious atmosphere... It is not healthy at this time.”²⁷⁵ These on-the-ground reports from residents contrasted sharply with Hamblen’s short official correspondence to his superiors reporting one month prior to Lawrence’s testimony in March 1884 that “Everything related to the creek work looks well.”²⁷⁶

The creek arch project, completed in 1884, demonstrated officials’ attempts to divert the waters from the growing city around them. Construction crews completed the work on the creek fronting the federal reservation in 1884. The project, according to Superintendent Hamblen, was necessary in order to “fully utiliz[e] the hot waters.” The creek arch widened and strengthened Central Avenue, the main throughfare in Hot Springs. New bathhouses did not have to create bridges over the creek for patients and patrons anymore; the arch hid the creek from view of the public. Protected from the filth of an urbanizing tourist town, the waters and the reservation retained its healthful allure. Charles Field, who succeeded Samuel Hamblen as Hot Springs’ superintendent, stated in 1885 the work on the creek improvements “stands above all other” reservation projects “heretofore undertaken in importance and usefulness.”²⁷⁷ The project to protect the waters also laid bare the continued weaknesses of reservation officials when they

²⁷⁵ Testimony of G.W. Lawrence, 48th Congress, 1st Session, *Testimony Taken Before the Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department, Relative to Certain things connected with the Government property at Hot Springs, Ark.*, June 17, 1884 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 65.

²⁷⁶ Samuel Hamblen to M.L. Joslyn, Acting Secretary of the Interior, 10 March 1884; RG 79, Box 7, NARA College Park.

²⁷⁷ Charles W. Field, “Report on the Hot Springs Reservation,” 23 September 1885, in *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1885), 877.

faced off against powerful local interests. Field became superintendent as Charles Hamblen ultimately lost the trust of Interior officials. In his disputes with Handbury, Hamblen replaced the proposed granite wall with a sandstone from a local Hot Springs quarry. During a congressional investigation over accused improprieties, the committee found that Hamblen was “at least a passive instrument in the hands of those who were interested in having this new material adopted,” materials that were “brought about in an improper manner.”²⁷⁸ Hamblen ultimately did not wield the “firm and most decided hand” necessary for a Hot Springs superintendent, as suggested by Special Agent Renaud just three years earlier. Local influences and powerful interests outside the Interior Department still dictated much of the work done in and around the reservation.

As reservation officials became fixated on preserving the purity (and corresponding value) of the thermal water, Hot Springs’ community members focused on the health of the city to ensure a constant stream of patients and patrons. As the resident population of Hot Springs exploded by 4,000% from 1860 to 1890, and visitors arrived in the tens of thousands each year, the town’s infrastructure was taxed to the extreme. Reservation officials hoped to contain some of the town’s new pollution problems with the Creek Arch project. But Hot Springs residents feared the creek arch simply covered over the issue instead of addressing the root cause.

Bathhouse owner George Latta presented Congress with such an argument via a November 1883 article from *The Sanitary Engineer*, a New York publication interested in the “sanitary revival” sweeping the nation’s cities.²⁷⁹ The article, noting that while turning a brook into a sewer is often

²⁷⁸ House Miscellaneous Document, No. 58, 48th Congress, First Session, in Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 57-58.

²⁷⁹ Sanitary conditions were an increasingly important issue for city and town officials across the United States as the nation became hyper-industrialized throughout the 1880s and 1890s. See Martin Melosi, *The Sanitary City: Environmental Services in Urban America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).

the easiest route to eliminate public waste, “The channel of a small natural stream through a town or village ought never to be converted to a sewer.” The “bottled up” and covered stream traps the filth of house wastes to the detriment of the entire community.²⁸⁰ A month later, the local *Hot Springs Horse Shoe* reprinted the *Sanitary Engineer* article and the paper’s editor, M.C. Harris, echoed the article’s sentiments that the government project created a “pestilential breeding pool whose noxious gases and foul odors cannot fail to have the most disastrous effect upon the health of the entire valley.” What the town needed, concluded the editor, is “a thorough and complete system of sewerage.”²⁸¹ The creek arch project facilitated and accelerated the town’s modernizing sanitary infrastructure; the reservation and town remained connected, seeking the same goal to make the landscape as healthy as possible.

It was not only the creek arch project where Hot Springs’ waters were guarded against human and non-human contaminants by officials and influential interests. In the early 1880s superintendents concentrated their efforts to separate the waters from their natural systems entirely, encasing the thermal water in large reservoirs and transported to bathhouses through a system of underground pipes. Reservation officials, like many others in Hot Springs, believed that it was imperative, for the health of invalids and visitors, to make the thermal waters “available in precisely the condition in which it issued from the ground, with all its virtues unimpaired.”²⁸² With Hot Springs oftentimes infected, according to those in power, with the thieves, gamblers, and morally (and physically) infected invalids loitering around town and trespassing on the reservation, the waters no longer could interact with the environment and needed protection from the outside world. Only through these actions could officials within and

²⁸⁰ “Brooks as Sewers,” *The Sanitary Engineer*, New York, 15 November 1883; submitted by George G. Latta, in *Testimony Taken Before the Committee on Expenditures*, 291-292.

²⁸¹ “Seeking Light,” *Daily Horse Shoe* (Hot Springs, AR), 11 December 1883, 1.

²⁸² Samuel Hamblen to H.M. Teller, 8 February 1883, 2; RG 79, Box 6, NARA College Park.

without the reservation guarantee the purity and virtue of the waters' medicinal properties to visitors.

Residents and officials routinely made arguments to take the thermal waters out of nature in order to protect them. The "primitive" system of wooden troughs used by private bathhouse owners since the antebellum era was not only the target of sabotage, but also did not insulate the hot waters, arriving at the bathhouses lukewarm and therefore impure and ineffective. Bathhouse proprietors, responding to their customers' demands, urged the federal government to design a collection system to help maintain water quality and temperature for their private businesses. In 1880, George French, an engineer and owner of the French's Hotel across the street from the reservation, wrote to Superintendent Kelley that "the only practicable way of making the hot waters of the seventy two springs here most available is to concentrate them into reservoirs for distribution to the various bath houses."²⁸³ Other bathhouse owners, like Henry Rector, ardently supported a collection system, arguing that the "protected" water "would not in my estimation suffer the slightest deterioration in quality but would retain all the eliminating and subtle gases so essential in the removal of disease." A collection and distribution system ensured "utility – economy and convenience," according to Rector.²⁸⁴ In 1880, Kelley awarded a \$1,200 contract to George French to construct one of the first permanent reservoirs on the reservation.

The initial reservoir project alleviated some of the thermal water shortages on the reservation. In 1881, both Amos Handley and Alonzo Bell reported on the promise of the reservoirs. Handley surmised the new reservoir supplied six bathhouses on the reservation and was "of great advantage." Bell noted that "I heard no complaint of the scarcity of water," a product of the reservoirs used by the superintendent. But Bell ultimately concluded "The time

²⁸³ George French to Benjamin Kelley, 28 April 1880; RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

²⁸⁴ Henry Rector to Benjamin Kelley, 22 May 1880; RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

will doubtless come when a more enlarged system of storage and distribution will be a necessity.”²⁸⁵ Bell’s assessment rested on the capacity of the current hydraulic system. Scientific reports concluded that the springs on the side of Hot Springs Mountain discharged roughly 500,000 gallons of water every day. French’s one reservoir only had a capacity of 30,000 gallons. Most of the water continued to run into Hot Springs Creek and meandered its way into the Ouachita River. During the creek arch project, Thomas Handbury noted that the “present mode of distributing” the thermal waters on the reservation was “very primitive and unsystematic and must in time be remedied.”²⁸⁶ In 1884, Samuel Hamblen described the “present system” of thermal water distribution as “the crudest possible.”²⁸⁷ The creek arch project and subsequent controversies over its construction dominated reservation business, and by 1885, Superintendent Field reported how over half the precious thermal water “runs to waste,” warning that until the federal government appropriated the funds for the total collection and distribution system, “neither the Government nor invalids can reap any benefit from the work thus far completed” at Hot Springs.²⁸⁸

Reservation officials envisioned system where the water did not make contact with the outside world, a world they could not control. The waters, free from human contact, would flow through insulated pipes into “one reservoir below the level of the waters,” then “pumped thence to a distributing reservoir on the mountain” where it became available to the bathhouses and accessed through gravity.²⁸⁹ Superintendent Frank Thompson pleaded for a new reservoir system after an increase in visitors to hot Springs in the late 1880s: “It appears to be almost certain that

²⁸⁵ Alonzo Bell to H.M. Teller, 30 September 1882, 31-32; RG 79, Box 6, NARA College Park.

²⁸⁶ Thomas Handbury to H.M. Teller, 18 September 1882, 9; RG 79, Box 6, NARA College Park.

²⁸⁷ Samuel Hamblen to H.M. Teller, 11 January 1884, 6; RG 79, Box 7, NARA College Park.

²⁸⁸ Charles W. Field, “Report on the Hot Springs Reservation,” 29 September 1886, in *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1886), 1068.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 647.

unless some important changes and improvements be made within the next few months, the Government will find itself under obligations to furnish more hot water than it can control and distribute under the present system. I therefore respectfully call special attention to this subject.”²⁹⁰ Persistence paid off as Congress allocated \$31,000 to the reservation “for providing a system of reservoirs, pumps, and piping and for other purposes necessary to the economical distribution of the hot water.”²⁹¹ Completed on June 8, 1891, Superintendent Martin Eisele reported the new system was “well cared for” in his 1892 report.²⁹² Hot Springs’ thermal waters, the nation’s natural, national resource, were now completely contained, with access protected for the paying classes as well as the patrons of the Government Free Bathhouse.

Throughout the first decades of sustained federal presence in Hot Springs, reservation officials worked to ensure the purity and virtue of the thermal water by creating a hydraulic system independent from the changing cultural landscape occurring in the small Arkansas town. As the popularity of Hot Springs increased dramatically, more patients and patrons hoped to take the waters and cure themselves. These variables worried not only reservation officials, but influential members of Hot Springs society whose livelihoods depended upon the waters.

Improvements upon the reservation became entwined with the need for similar changes to the social and rhetorical landscape in Hot Springs. As reservation officials worked to protect the waters from outside contaminants through the creek arch project and early thermal water collection systems, Hot Springs politicians, physicians, and the town’s most influential residents hoped to create a town of “comfort and convenience” for the “visitors whose numbers are greater

²⁹⁰ Frank M. Thompson, *Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation*, U.S. Department of the Interior, August 14, 1889, 166.

²⁹¹ Legislation language from Frederick W. Cron, “Mineral Water at Hot Springs, Arkansas,” *The Military Engineer*, March-April 1939, 3; RG 79, Box 1208, NARA College Park.

²⁹² Martin A. Eisele, *Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation*, U.S. Department of the Interior, August 10, 1900, 555; Frank M. Thompson, *Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation*, U.S. Department of the Interior, July 1, 1892, 642.

than ever before.”²⁹³ A select few of the town’s prominent and well-connected physicians defined who could and should be able to prescribe Hot Springs’ water to visitors. Like the work on the reservation, these nuisances were both non-human and human.

As city officials improved upon the city’s physical infrastructure, local physicians and government officials routinely worked to define the virtue of Hot Springs’ waters. Supporters’ thermal water claims sometimes waded into hyperbole, such as Charles Cutter, who wrote in his yearly guide to the Arkansas town, that “The curative qualities of the waters are sufficient to give them a *world-wide reputation*. There are hundreds of thousands of afflicted human beings whose diseases have babbled the most skilful [sic] physicians, who can, with intelligent use of these medicated waters, be cured.”²⁹⁴ This kind of rhetoric was common from boosters, but the same language came from physicians. Dr. George W. Lawrence travelled across the country endorsing the healing potential of Hot Springs waters.²⁹⁵ He was presented as “one of the pioneers of Hot Springs” in an 1884 hearing concerning Hot Springs in the House of Representatives, and emphasized similar grand properties endowed in the waters by stating “I regard the waters in our region of Hot Springs as among the most valuable known anywhere; certainly there is none superior on this continent, and perhaps none superior on the other hemisphere.”²⁹⁶

These exaggerated claims came under scrutiny from medical officials within and without Hot Springs, some of whom decried the waters as ineffective and at times, dangerous. While his treatise on Hot Springs’ waters emphasized the merits of thermal springs and the diseases they treated, Algernon S. Garnett began one chapter asking, “In what consists the remedial value of

²⁹³ T.F. Linde, et. al. to Henry Teller, 15 May 1883; RG 79, Box 7, NARA College Park.

²⁹⁴ Cutter, *Cutter’s Guide to the Hot Springs of Arkansas*, 10.

²⁹⁵ “Important Correspondence,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 27 December 1868, 2.

²⁹⁶ Testimony of G.W. Lawrence, 48th Congress, 1st Session, *Testimony Taken Before the Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department*, 63.

the waters of the ‘Hot Springs?’” He answered, “I am compelled, by candor, to confess in my inability to answer, satisfactorily, this enquiry so frequently made.”²⁹⁷ Garnett was not alone in his honest assessment as other Hot Springs doctors were unable to definitively assert what made the waters such an effective therapeutic tool.²⁹⁸ James M. Keller opined that due to “humberging” by illegitimate doctors and their associates in town gave doctors outside of Hot Springs “little confidence in any good results to patients sent to such places, and that they go so far in most cases as to urgently advise against their patients” taking the waters.²⁹⁹ This opaqueness opened the door for strong critiques of the medical profession in the Valley of Vapors. An 1875 article in the nationally circulated *Science of Health*, a medical bulletin focused on “Nature’s remedial agencies” warned of the “quackery” practiced on susceptible patients in Hot Springs. Noting the lack of documentation that could substantiate claims that Hot Springs’ waters provided any cures. The author attacked the town’s physicians for employing a number of deceiving practices to heal patients when they knew the “solemn and potent truth that there is really NO VIRTUE IN THE WATER; that it possesses no medical properties by itself.” He concluded that Hot Springs, instead of a health resort, would best be used “for a large washing and laundry establishment.”³⁰⁰ Hot Springs’ physicians did not have an organized strategy to combat these attacks.

Nationwide, a growing physicians’ class relied on a strengthening network of professionalization produced by a larger organizational push across all aspects of society after the Civil War. Prior to this concerted effort physicians had rarely held an authoritative role in

²⁹⁷ A.S. Garnett, *A Treatise on the Hot Springs of Arkansas* (St. Louis, Van Beek, Barnard & Tinsley, 1874). 35.

²⁹⁸ Testimony of R.H. Taylor, *Testimony Taken Before the Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department*, 43.

²⁹⁹ J.M. Keller, “The Hot Springs of Arkansas as a Health Resort; Their Waters as Remedial Agents,” *St. Louis Medical and Surgical Journal* (August, 1879), 10-11.

³⁰⁰ “Hot Springs of Arkansas – Medical Treatment,” *The Science of Health* 6, No. 3 (Mar. 1875), 107-9.

American society. A Hungarian physician, visiting New York City in the 1870s, gave an unflattering opinion of the city's doctors: "The rank and file of the profession were – as far as general education went – little, if any, above the level of their clientele."³⁰¹ "The ignorance and general incompetency of the average graduate of American Medical Schools... is something horrible to contemplate," concluded a dejected Charles Eliot, President of Harvard in 1871.³⁰² American universities responded to this deficiency by instituting rigorous medical school curricula that replaced the hodgepodge of entry and exit requirements. This system gave patients faith in a uniform education standard for practicing physicians. The new education focused on scientific study, laboratory experiments on disease, and peer-reviewed research. State medical boards, who previously used the institution to line the coffers of corrupt politicians, tied success at these new medical schools to their accreditation process. This gatekeeping mechanism created a new class of reputable and professional physicians practicing medicine across the country. This new class spent the next 40 years establishing themselves against charlatans and quack physicians, individuals these new medical men defined as members of "The Great American Fraud."³⁰³

The South often lagged behind the medical and professional advancements of the greater medical profession, situated predominantly in the northeast. Sectionalism persisted in Southern medical ranks into the 1870s. In 1873 South Carolina physician Mark Reynolds argued ideas from "another latitude" were incongruous with "Southern practice." He recommended the "fixed and settled views" of Southern practitioners, "the result of our own experience."³⁰⁴ Poverty, both

³⁰¹ Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine: The Rise of a Sovereign Profession & the Making of a Vast Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 81.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 113.

³⁰³ Samuel Hopkins Adams, *The Great American Fraud* (N.P.: Collier & Son, 1905 and 1906).

³⁰⁴ Steven M. Stowe, *Doctoring the South: Southern Physicians and Everyday Medicine in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 264.

among citizens and state governments, and the endemic nature of disease across the region stifled early efforts at professionalization; without results the public did not trust many physicians. Despite these inadequacies and challenges, physicians and state boards of health in southern states began to form the same professional organizations and structures as their northern counterparts.³⁰⁵ But in Arkansas, the state's support for doctors lagged woefully behind other Southern states as the legislature failed to enact legislation that could weed out local healers prescribing dangerous "cures." At one point, the Arkansas House resolved that "surgery and medicine are Humbugs, and that all medical colleges should be declared nuisances injurious to the health of the Commonwealth."³⁰⁶ In 1870, a group of doctors across the state formed the Medical Society of the State of Arkansas. One of the goals of the organization was to guard against "the impositions of charlatans and montebanks" across the state. Hot Springs physicians followed suit, creating the Hot Springs Medical Society in the late 1880s. The society was an exclusive minority of influential physicians in town, and by 1893, the society had 21 members in a city of over 100 registered physicians. Society members described themselves as doctors of "honor and ability," distinguishing their work from their disreputable counterparts.³⁰⁷

Physicians in Hot Springs toed the line between these two worlds. On the one hand, they clung to an idea of professional medicine dating back to the eighteenth century, where, according to the historian Paul Starr, "the best doctors could do was to assist the healing powers of nature."³⁰⁸ At the same time, they positioned themselves as contemporary professionals in an

³⁰⁵ See John Harley Warner, *The Therapeutic Perspective: Medical Practice, Knowledge, and Identity in America, 1820-1885* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); James O. Breeden, "Disease as a Factor in Southern Distinctiveness," in Todd L. Savitt and James Harvey Young, *Disease and Distinctiveness in the American South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 1-28.

³⁰⁶ *Arkansas House Journal* (1883), 1032, quoted from David M. Moyers, "Quackery to Qualification: Arkansas Medical and Drug Legislation, 1881-1909," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 35, No. 1 (Spring, 1976), 8.

³⁰⁷ "Members of the Hot Springs Medical Society," *Hot Springs Medical Journal* 2, No. 11 (November 1893), 255.

³⁰⁸ Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, 31.

effort to secure a foothold in prescribing the waters to patients who expected modern physicians. A small group in town created the *Hot Springs Medical Journal* as the official voice of their pleas, prescriptions, and complaints. The journal, which ran from 1892 to 1907, became a platform for Hot Springs' doctors to assert their professionalism in hydrotherapy as well as use that expertise to legitimize the medicinal qualities of the town's prized thermal waters. These men, the journal iterated, practiced at "the largest sanitarium in the country, where they can see rare and interesting cases" from the thousands who visit every year.³⁰⁹ Local physician J.C. Minor wrote that "There is, perhaps, no medical school in America which affords as much material for clinical instruction" for a myriad of medical maladies than the "annual influx of visitors to Hot Springs."³¹⁰

The journal's early issues became a vessel for Hot Springs' tight-knit class of influential doctors to denounce the town's reputation for quackery, separating those who identified themselves as legitimate physicians from the treatments practiced by unqualified and fraudulent doctors. P.H. Ellsworth, who sat on the board of the Hot Springs Railroad, served as the society's first secretary. In an editorial on "The Hot Springs Physician," editor James M. Keller painted a frustrating portrait that most physicians across the country carry "an erroneous idea" that Hot Springs is a town "composed entirely of charlatans and quacks." Keller reminded readers that the members of the town's medical society were "composed of the cream of the profession in Hot Springs" (Fig 2.5).³¹¹ Journal editors made sure to note when Hot Springs appeared in other, well-circulated journals, as in 1894 when the editor of the *New York Medical Journal* commented how Hot Springs, once thought of as a town "infested by gamblers, lewd women,

³⁰⁹ J.M. Keller, "The Hot Springs Physician," *Hot Springs Medical Journal* 2, No. 12 (December 1893), 281.

³¹⁰ J.C. Minor, "Urethral Strictures," *Hot Springs Medical Journal* 3, No. 6 (June 1894), 166.

³¹¹ Keller, "The Hot Springs Physician," 281.

and quack doctors,” was now a “remarkable success” due to “the physicians at this place” and their “intelligent treatment” and “methodical application of these waters, which possess peculiar therapeutic properties of their own.”³¹² After an article by a Dr. Allan McLane that criticized the practices and people of Hot Springs appeared in *The Forum*, a late nineteenth-century journal rivaling the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harpers*, the *Hot Springs Medical Journal* editors responded with a mix of facts, hyperbole, and selective omission. The editorial reply highlighted the curative properties of the waters, citing as evidence Senator John Logan and his “personal knowledge of the wonderfully curative powers of the water and the air” of Hot Springs. The editor highlighted that while “victims” of “debauchery, drunkenness, and dissipation” seek therapy from the waters, “they are very largely a minority.”³¹³ The truth was that the hospital cost less than the \$250,000 claimed in the editorial while the medical journal itself had recently claimed Hot Springs was “a mecca for syphilitics in America,” a disease with both moral and medical risks.³¹⁴ Though the *Hot Springs Medical Journal* continued to assert the thermal waters’ medicinal legitimacy, at times it became one of a number of different booster publications for Hot Springs, gilded with the veneer of medical professionalism.

³¹² T.M. Baird, “Editorial,” *Hot Springs Medical Journal* 3, No. 12 (December 1894), 393.

³¹³ “Hot Springs of Arkansas, as a Health Resort,” *Hot Springs Medical Journal* 3, No. 6 (June 1894), 172-74.

³¹⁴ Elliott Bowen, *In Search of Sexual Health: Diagnosing and Treating Syphilis in Hot Springs, Arkansas, 1890-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020), 1.

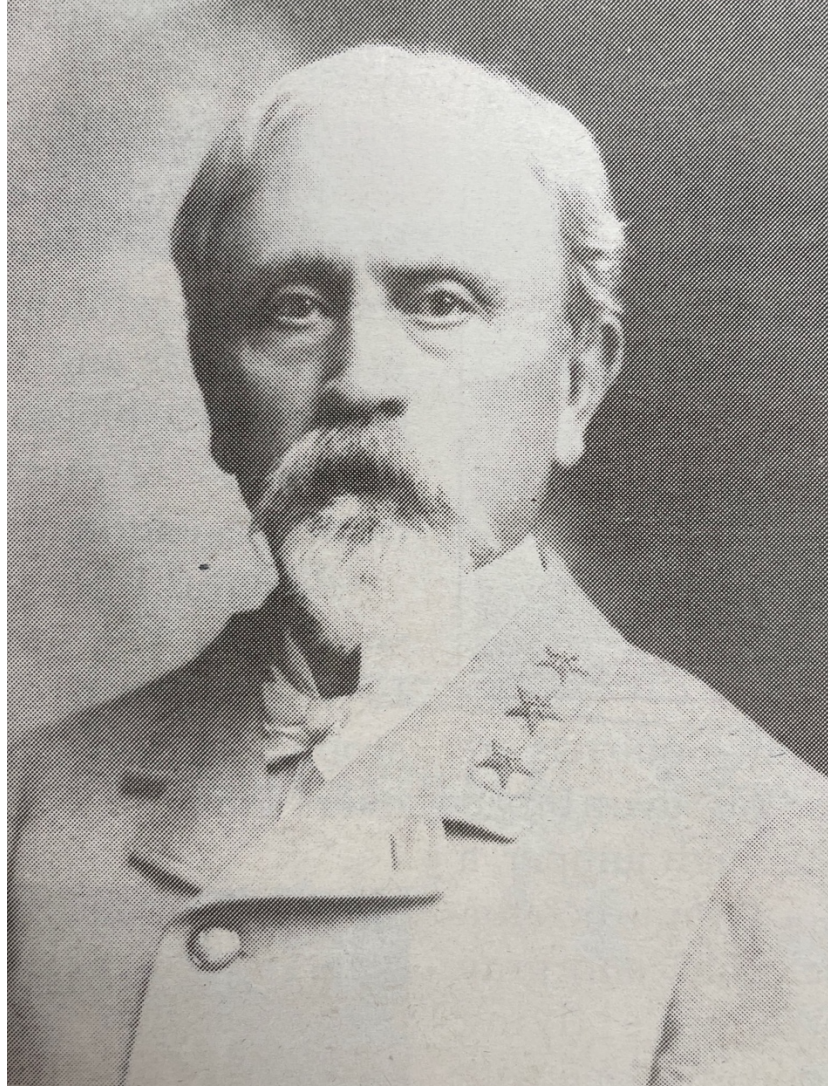


Fig. 2.5: Dr. James M. Keller; photocopied from Garland County Historical Society, Vertical File
Doctors: Keller, James, M.D.

The members of the Hot Springs Medical Society were not just “composed of the cream of the profession,” but were also men who had deep personal and financial relationships to the success of the natural reservation. It made sense for physicians to create relationships with bathhouse owners and managers. If a doctor prescribed a thermal water treatment to a patient, the sufferer took in the waters at one of the bathhouses on federal property. Therefore, the business interests of physicians and bathhouse owners often overlapped. Doctors sometimes owned stakes

in bathhouses. James Keller was the majority owner of the Rammelsburg Bathhouse in 1880.³¹⁵ A.S. Garnett held shares of a number of leases to different reservation bathhouses in the 1880s.³¹⁶ Later, other doctors were employed directly at individual bathhouses, as was the case for Drs. J.T. Jelks and T.E. Holland, co-editors of the *Hot Springs Medical Journal*. Both men were hired as the primary physicians of the newly opened Ozark Sanitarium in 1898. The doctors were there to assure patients they would be “under direct oversight of physicians at all times.”³¹⁷ Legitimizing Hot Springs’ thermal waters not only profited physicians’ practices with new and returning patients from out of town, but also as they involved themselves in the bathhouse business.

Who Owns Hot Springs’ Water?: Battles for Control at the Army and Navy General Hospital

The last challenge reservation officials faced in this contested landscape did not arise from any influential group in Hot Springs. Instead, the Department of the Interior faced off against another federal agency, the War Department, for control of Hot Springs waters. The creation of the Army and Navy General Hospital, the first permanent military hospital during peacetime in the country, demonstrates how Hot Springs boosters, physicians, and other powerful supporters began to legitimize the virtue of the waters. The clashes, both verbal and physical, over the hospital’s construction and thermal water control, ultimately represented who should be able to benefit from the waters. The War Department (and some influential residents in Hot Springs) believed the order and discipline from the War Department was necessary to

³¹⁵ Henry H. to S.W. Dorsey, 27 December 1880; in RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

³¹⁶ George G. Latta Testimony, *Testimony Taken Before the Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department*, 170-1.

³¹⁷ Ad for Ozark Sanitarium, *Hot Springs Medical Journal* 7, No. 10 (October 1898), 319.

administer the reservation and the waters. The War Department also privileged recovering soldiers, sailors, and marines in access to the thermal waters, whereas by contrast the Interior Department continued to focus on the representing the public, holding the waters in trust so that the greatest number could benefit from the virtues of Hot Springs' waters.

Earlier efforts to construct a national hospital in Hot Springs had come up empty. In 1831, the Arkansas Territory, “relying upon the humanity, munificence and Phylanthropy [sic] of the General Government,” hoped Congress would appropriate funds for a hospital in Hot Springs. Territorial Representative Ambrose Sevier informed the House of Representatives of the medicinal properties of these “Celebrated Springs” along with the influx of invalids who braved the frontier journey to visit “from almost every part of the Union... their numbers are increasing annually.”³¹⁸ The House Committee on the Public Lands reviewed the petition, but Hot Springs never received federal funding for a hospital.³¹⁹ Other organizations made similar efforts in the 1850s and 1870s, but to no avail. Charles Cutter asserted it was the “Duty of the Government” to “take immediate steps to build a Hospital for soldiers and sailors who are diseased” and could be cured through applying the thermal waters.³²⁰

Assisted by an era of domestic military hospitals after Reconstruction as a result of the casualties of war, the Army and Navy General Hospital became a fast-moving reality in the Valley of Vapors due to a campaign led by influential veterans of the Civil War. Veterans, both Union and Confederate, settled in Hot Springs after the fighting subsided. One of them, former Union Captain Samuel W. Fordyce, visited Hot Springs after the war hoping the thermal waters

³¹⁸ “Memorial to Congress by the Territorial Assembly,” November 3, 1831, in Clarence Edwin Carter, Editor, *The Territorial Papers of the United States, Vol. XXI The Territory of Arkansas 1829-1836* (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1954), 415.

³¹⁹ Proceedings for Monday, February 6, 1832, *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States* (Washington, D.C., Duff Green, 1831), 294-95

³²⁰ Cutter, *The Hot Springs As They Are*, 86.

could alleviate some of his combat-inflicted pain. Fordyce, after recovering in the thermal waters, became an enthusiastic convert, moved to Hot Springs in 1876, and quickly became involved in Arkansas Democratic party politics.³²¹ Understanding the medicinal and political value of the springs in Reconstruction-era Arkansas, Fordyce enlisted Algernon S. Garnett, former Confederate surgeon, and others to build support for a military hospital in Hot Springs. In April 1882, the two men hosted Senator John Logan who sought treatment for his own ailments with the help of the thermal waters. Logan, a veteran of both the Mexican War and the Civil War, was chairman of the Senate Committee on Military Affairs in 1882. Logan's visit, treatment, and warm reception made him a believer in the medicinal utility of Hot Springs' thermal waters. Logan returned to Capitol Hill where he fast-tracked appropriations for a military hospital on the reservation property when he returned to Capitol Hill. On June 30, 1882, just two months after Logan's visit and recovery, Congress appropriated \$100,000 to build military hospital in Hot Springs.³²²

Accessing a constant supply of thermal water became paramount to War Department officials as they prepared plans for the hospital in 1883 and 1884. Under the agreement with the Department of the Interior, the War Department submitted plans for the hospital complex they intended to build on the reservation. At that time, reservation officials continued to "improve" the springs and the endless changes on the reservation were difficult to maintain, even for seasoned Hot Springs veterans. Samuel Hamblen became the second superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation on January 1, 1883. Serving as Hot Springs' city engineer, Hamblen had

³²¹ Judy Byrd Brittenum, "What War Has Joined Together: Samuel W. Fordyce's War Experience Influence the Establishment of the Hot Springs Army and Navy General Hospital," *Garland Country Historical Society: Record* (2013), 5.6.

³²² "Establishment of Army and Navy hospital at Hot Springs, Ark.," *Public Acts of the Forty-Seventh Congress of the United States*, Ch. 254, (June 30, 1882), 121.

intimate knowledge of the reservation's thermal water collection projects.³²³ But two days before his first day on the job, December 29, 1882, the War Department submitted their first plans for the Army and Navy General Hospital. The sprawling thirteen-and-one-half-acre complex consisted of an administrative building, mess hall, annex, multiple hospital wards, and a bathhouse. The proposed plan had the War Department take control of three bathing establishments, the Ozark and the Rammelsburg Bathhouses, along with the Mud Hole, the only free establishment for the invalid poor. Most important, the plan gave the War Department control of a cluster of thermal water springs (Fig. 2.6). Military officials were quick to affirm the importance of controlling a sizeable share of the waters for their own use. In a letter to the Secretary of War, Surgeons General Robert Murray and Francis F. Gunnell of the Army and Navy, respectively, stated that the "purpose and intent" of the new general hospital was "the treatment of certain classes of diseases, mainly, by the use of the hot mineral spring water, for which these springs are famous." It was "imperative," noted both men, "that an ample and adequate supply of this water be assured for hospital use, before the premises can be occupied."³²⁴ This prerequisite meant the War Department needed to secure thermal water access for the hospital by way of the Interior Department's new hydraulic system.

³²³ Samuel Hamblen to B.F. Kelley, 15 March 1881; RG 79, Box 5, NARA College Park.

³²⁴ Robert Murray and Francis F. Gunnell to William Endicott, 20 May 1885, RG 79, Box 8, NARA College Park.

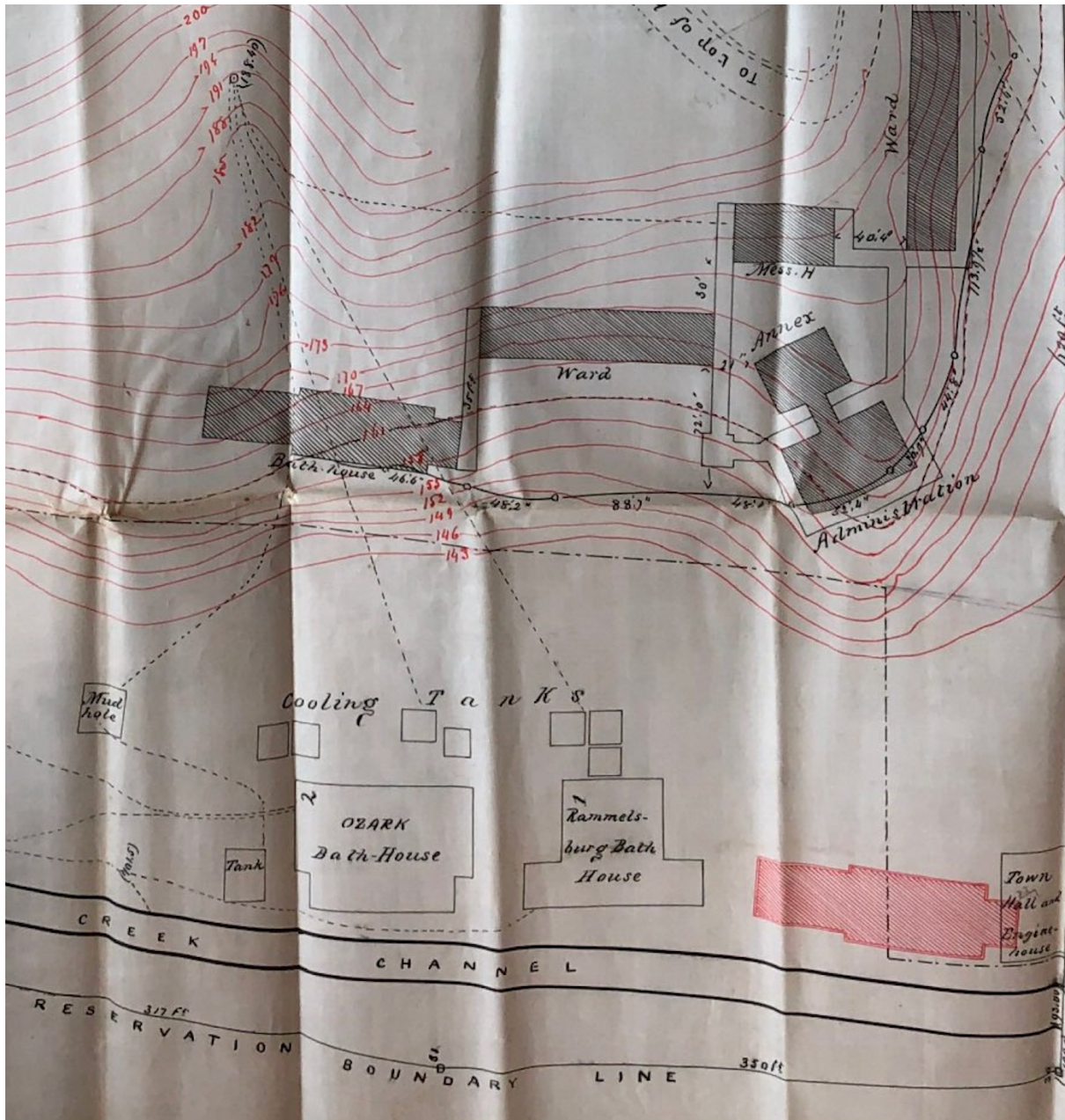


Fig. 2.6: August 1883 drawing of proposed Army and Navy General Hospital. Hospital buildings shaded gray. Note the spring site (188.40) in top left. Dotted lines signify 1882 pipes taking thermal waters to bathhouses and Mud Hole; “Map of the Portion of Hot Springs Reservation Proposed by Surgeon John S. Billings and Medical Inspector A. Hudson to be set aside for the Army and Navy Hospital,” RG 79, Box 6, NARA College Park.

Hamblen initially appeared caught off-guard by the developments. He wrote to Interior Secretary Henry M. Teller that he was not prepared to issue a recommendation about allocating

water to the hospital until he gathered more information.³²⁵ As Hamblen fumbled for a response, the War Department lined up a set of endorsements to grab control of both the waters and the bathhouse establishments. Upon learning that under the proposed boundary, the War Department could collect up to 65,000 gallons of thermal water every day, the Surgeon General of the Army suggested the hospital grounds needed as large a footprint as possible for “sanitary and hygienic purposes.”³²⁶ These were not entirely outrageous claims as Superintendent Hamblen himself noted that due to “the classes that bathe” at the Mud Hole, “it would soon become a filthy nuisance in the community... if not firmly controlled.”³²⁷ And reservation officials were not always able to administer over the Mud Hole properly. The site often did not receive adequate attention or funds and was subservient to the improvements regarding the pay bathhouses. In one instance during March 1884, reservation officials, while blasting rock to create the foundation for a new pay bathhouse, affected the subterranean flow of the thermal water and cut off the Mud Hole’s thermal water pool. Sympathetic newspaper accounts opined how “Invalid paupers gathered as usual yesterday” to take the waters, “but there was no water and the poor fellows, some with tears in their eyes, felt this disappointment most keenly.”³²⁸ But, per arrangements made after the Interior Department gained a physical presence in the 1870s, Congress passed legislation mandating reservation officials provide free baths to travelling invalids. The Mud Hole satisfied this requirement and War Department officials did not guarantee the establishment would remain open, violating not just the law but the public rhetoric defining Hot Springs as a public resource held in trust by the federal government.

³²⁵ Samuel Hamblen to Henry M. Teller, 17 January 1883; RG 79, Box 6, NARA College Park.

³²⁶ Thomas Handbury to Brig. Gen. Horatio G. Wright, Chief of Engineers, 29 December 1882, RG 79, Box 6, NARA College Park; Charles H. Crane to Secretary of War Robert Todd Lincoln, 25 January 1883, RG 79, Box 6, NARA College Park.

³²⁷ Samuel Hamblen to Henry M. Teller, 27 June 1883, RG 79, Box 7, NARA College Park.

³²⁸ Ellis Woolman, “Destructive Policy,” *Hot Springs Daily Sentinel*, 3 March 1884.

Influential bathhouse owners in town were also ready to combat the perceived overextension of the War Department's boundaries. After fighting tooth and nail with the Interior Department, members of the Bathhouse Association were not ready to restart negotiations with a new party. The Association's secretary Albert B. Gaines wrote to Secretary Teller in 1885, noting not just how the "free baths" would be disrupted by this change, but also the possibility of profitable future bathhouse leases on the disputed grounds.³²⁹ Gaines himself held a controlling interest in a number of current bathhouses and future leases on the reservation. With their finances at stake, bathhouse proprietors would not relinquish the ground they had gained in Hot Springs. Gaines' reasoning for confining the Army and Navy General Hospital was more than just financial gain, however. It also spoke to the thermal waters' conservation. In his letter to Teller, Gaines surmised:

I fully recognize the importance of the hospital, and have no desire to throw the slightest obstacle in the way of its full efficiency, but it should also be considered that the Army and Navy constitute a very small proportion of the nation. The greater portion of invalids, that seek the benefits of these waters are, and will continue to be, from all classes of people. It would therefore be a manifest injustice to the people to deprive them of these privileges, by reducing the area which can be used for bathing purposes, which, in the near future, will, as it is, be found too limited.³³⁰

Money, power, the law, and questions on proper natural resource use converged in this debate between the War Department and Interior.

Local physicians believed the establishment of an Army and Navy Hospital at Hot Springs strengthened the case for the medicinal value of the thermal waters. Local physician T.M. Baird wrote in the *Hot Springs Medical Journal* that since the federal government chose

³²⁹ A. B. Gaines to Henry M. Teller, 15 July 1885, RG 79, Box 8, NARA College Park. It is possible this point appealed to Teller. Since 1877, the reservation had shrunk by almost 90 percent from 2,560 acres to just 265 acres. The Hot Springs Commission "adjudicated 897 claims, approved the right to purchase for 657 claims, laid out a city with a system of streets, and defined the [new] boundaries for world-famous Hot Springs on a 265-acre permanent U.S. reservation," affecting between 3,000 and 4,000 inhabitants. Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 30-39

³³⁰ Albert B. Gaines to Secretary of the Interior, 15 July 1885, RG 79, Box 8, NARA College Park.

the location of its new hospital “after careful inspection of all points in the United States,” then “no better testimonial can be given.”³³¹ Local doctors roundly supported not just the construction of the installation, but petitioned that the War Department oversee all thermal water issues on the reservation. During an investigation by the House of Representatives reviewing corruption claims on the Hot Springs Reservation in March 1884, a number of physicians recommended the War Department take complete control of the government property. Dr. G.W. Lawrence, between waxing rhapsodic over on the medicinal properties of the thermal waters, believed the prized resource was wasted by Interior Department officials and “should be placed in the hands of men who are efficient, who have character, and who know nothing but duty,” concluding “If Hot Springs is intended as a home for the soldier of the Army and Marine, it should be placed under the War Department.”³³² James M. Keller agreed. He testified to the same House committee that bathhouse owners wielded too much power in town. His solution: “transfer this thing [Hot Springs Reservation] from the Interior to the War Department... wherever the Army is in possession the people of every country feel safe in going there.”³³³ The physicians’ complaints echoed a chorus of other Hot Springs residents, from business owners to civil engineers who similarly faulted Interior Department officials for misusing the thermal waters and endorsed the War Department’s control of the reservation.³³⁴ The House investigation did not find any specific instances of corruption, but they did conclude that superintendents “have been subjected to local and political influences” and recommended the reservation “should at once be

³³¹ T.M. Baird, “Hot Springs as a Location for Sanitariums,” *Hot Springs Medical Journal* 4, No. 1 (January 1895), 26.

³³² Lawrence Testimony, *Testimony Taken Before the Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department*, 65.

³³³ J.M. Keller testimony, *Testimony Taken Before the Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department*, 136.

³³⁴ Testimonies from Ellis Woolman and George Latta, *Testimony Taken Before the Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department*, 160 & 178; C.W. Fry to A.B. Gaines, 14 May 1885, RG 79, Box 8, NARA College Park. E. H. Johnson Testimony, *Testimony Taken Before the Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department*, 27 and 270.

placed under the charge and superintendence of an officer of the Army,” but reporting to Interior, not the War Department.³³⁵

Unresolved boundaries led to physical altercations as construction began on the hospital grounds. Captain Joshua W. Jacobs was assigned to oversee the project and routinely felt hampered by the slow-moving improvement projects around the reservation and the correspondences between government departments. In April 1884, Jacobs took matters into his own hands and planned to remove all pipes emanating from the spring on hospital property, writing to Superintendent Hamblen that they “interfere with the construction of the bathhouse of the Army & Navy Hospital.”³³⁶ Jacobs began using the waters for construction purposes. Hamblen, concluding that Jacobs sought “full control of the spring,” informed the Secretary of the Interior. Secretary Teller’s response to his superintendent was unambiguous: “You must not allow the water to be diverted from the free baths,” and ordered that “no interference be had with these pipes, or the water supply.”³³⁷ This did not sit well with Jacobs. He wrote to the Secretary of War a day after receiving Hamblen’s letter that “I find it absolutely necessary to use all the water that I can get from *our own springs*” (my emphasis) to complete construction on the hospital. He declared that reservation officials’ “authority upon the hospital reservation is eliminated.”³³⁸

Jacobs’ attempt to take “full control of the spring” almost turned violent. In early September Jacobs removed all the pipes from the spring, which left “the free pools disabled, and

³³⁵ Hiram Casey Young, Report No. 1846, *Investigation of Certain Things Connected with the Government Property on the Hot Springs Reservation, Arkansas, U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department*, June 17, 1884, 16-17.

³³⁶ S.W. Jacobs to Samuel Hamblen, 10 April 1884, RG 79, Box 8, NARA College Park.

³³⁷ Samuel Hamblen to M.L. Joslyn, 10 September 1884, RG 79, Box 8, NARA College Park; Telegram to Superintendent Hamblen, June 3, 1884, in “Synopsis of the correspondence in relation to action of Capt. Jacobs in cutting off the supply of water to free pools at Hot Springs Ark.,” 1, RG 79, Box 7; Samuel Hamblen to J.W. Jacobs, August 28, 1884, RG 79, Box 8, NARA College Park.

³³⁸ Copy of Telegram from J.W. Jacobs to Secretary of War, 29 August 1884, RG 79, Box 7, NARA College Park.

two of the bathhouses crippled,” according to Hamblen.³³⁹ The War Department initially endorsed Jacob’s actions, with the department’s chief clerk writing to Secretary Teller to “give instructions to the agents of your department to refrain from interfering with this work which is of great importance and which has already caused great trouble.”³⁴⁰ “Trouble” continued, however, and almost turned violent. The Interior Department asked Hamblen to ensure water for the free baths on the reservation, as was the law, and to “enforce it if possible by peaceable means.”³⁴¹ The superintendent sent men and materials to replace the pipes on September 9, 1884. The crew was met by Jacobs, who “assaulted the men engaged in the work” and “took position on the spring with a double barrelled [sic] shotgun.” Jacobs then “menaced the workmen” until they “retired leaving the work undone.”³⁴² After news of these threats made their way to Secretary of War Lincoln, he wrote to Interior that “The necessities of the case do not warrant the action taken by Captain Jacobs.” He also recommended that Jacobs restore the pipes which furnished water to the Mud Hole and two pay-bathhouses.³⁴³ Jacobs stayed on the job, continuing to supervise the new installation in Hot Springs though tensions continued to bubble up from below. In the meantime, Secretary Lincoln accepted Interior’s continued control of the hydrology on the Hot Springs Reservation. The secretary’s submission allowed work to proceed on the construction of what would later be deemed “Uncle Sam’s Big Sanitarium.”³⁴⁴ The factious and undefined nature of thermal water control on the ground in Hot Springs helps explain the differences between the more cordial negotiations between department secretaries and the physical confrontations taking place in town.

³³⁹ Samuel Hamblen to Joslyn, 10 September 1884, RG 79, Box 7, NARA College Park.

³⁴⁰ Chief Clerk, War Department to H.M. Teller, 2 September 1884; RG 79, Box 7, NARA College Park.

³⁴¹ Telegram to Superintendent Hamblen, 5 September 1884, “Synopsis of correspondence,” 6, RG 79, Box 7, NARA College Park.

³⁴² Samuel Hamblen to Joslyn, 10 September 1884, Box 7.

³⁴³ Letter from the Secretary of War – September 10, 1884, in “Synopsis of correspondence,” 6, RG 79, Box 7.

³⁴⁴ “All is Serene at Uncle Sam’s Big Hospital,” *Hot Springs New Era*, 23 April 1914, 1.

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By the end of the early superintendencies in Hot Springs, the town could very well have become an upper-class enclave in the Ouachita Mountains that attracted wealthy patrons and health seekers from across the country, similar to other spa towns in the United States and abroad in the nineteenth century. That project was well under way through the creation of nearly a dozen elegant bathhouses at the foot of Hot Springs Mountain by the 1880s. But federal ownership of the springs and the thermal water, as legislated by Congress in 1832 and confirmed by the Supreme Court in the 1870s, created a wrinkle in this imagined landscape. More numerous than the upper crust of society filling trains to Hot Springs were indigent invalids seeking relief from the waters that were owned and controlled by their government. While the poor men and women visiting Hot Springs often did not receive adequate care or attention, they did continue to demand access to the waters.

As a result of these demands, Interior Department officials sometimes hesitantly, but generally consistently, reaffirmed their stance guaranteeing access to all and complicating the vision of entrepreneurial bathhouse owners. In 1882, the last year of Benjamin Kelley's tenure, a tenure hostile to the invalid poor visiting Hot Springs, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Alonzo Bell concluded the mission of the Hot Springs reservation was to "control of these waters" in order to ensure "the greatest number the greatest possible good." Subsequent regulations put in place by reservation officials "prevent[ed] the possibility of extortion" and monopolies. Most importantly, Bell concluded that "The Springs were the property of the States, the common heritage of all the people, free from local management, prejudice, or sectional control. They were purely national in their character." The class struggles boiling over in Hot Springs and the

creation of the Government Free Bathhouse at the Mud Hole in the late 1870s and early 1880s produced outcomes that not only endowed the federal government with more power and control on the reservation, but also anticipated the dominant ideology of American scientific conservation endorsed by Gifford Pinchot in the first decade of the twentieth century. Government officials' new conception of Hot Springs' waters representing a national and natural resource seeped into contemporaries' understanding of the reservation's long history and later natural resource use in the United States. Superintendent Charles Field described the stopgap 1832 legislation that initially created the reservation framed by new, Gilded-Age rhetoric, claiming Congress reserved the Hot Springs "In order to thoroughly insure its source against the destruction resulting from the greed and rivalry of individuals or corporations."³⁴⁵ Hot Springs continued as both an alcove and escape for wealthy health seekers and a refuge for the nation's indigent invalids.

Similarly, the hydraulic changes enacted by the Interior Department created lasting impacts on the natural and cultural environments in Hot Springs. The new hydraulic system that arched over the creek and encased the waters in iron pipes responded to the growing popularity and increased demand for access to the waters. Booster Charles Cutter made a deft comparison between the reservation's new hydrology and a rapidly changing American culture, noting in 1883 that "These pipes cross and recross each other on the mountain side in all directions, reminding one of a railroad map of the thickly settled sections of the West."³⁴⁶ The work on the creek arch guaranteed a pure resource for every visitor, a sentiment exemplified by Arkansas congressman Jordan E. Cravens when he connected taxpayer dollars with a larger project of

³⁴⁵ Charles W. Field, "Report on the Hot Springs Reservation," 27 July 1887, in *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), 1285.

³⁴⁶ Cutter, *Cutter's Guide to the Hot Springs of Arkansas*, 13.

protecting and utilizing natural resources in 1882. He wrote, “Every citizen who contributed a cent of the \$33,744.78 will be interested in and derive benefit from the proposed work... The appropriation recommended by the Secretary is favored as a measure beneficial to the owners of this property, the whole people, and both beneficial and just to the citizens of Hot Springs.”³⁴⁷ Officials connected the environmental and hydrological changes resulting from the creek arch and other improvement projects to a larger discussion about the germinating idea of national parks, the larger idea of natural resource use, and their benefit to public enjoyment. But in Hot Springs, those benefits were made manifest by the actions taken by both reservation officials and others in town.

Lastly, the administrative and physical confrontations between the War Department and the Interior Department over the reach and responsibility of the new Army and Navy General Hospital again demonstrate reservation officials as anything but commanding and all-powerful in Hot Springs. Their control of the thermal waters was often tested in the first decade of the federal presence in town, sometimes through angry letters, petitions, or at the end of a gun barrel. The success of reservation officials maintaining control of the thermal waters insured the public nature of the waters as a benefit for all visitors, not a resource utilized by military men or the wealthy.

But by the end of the 1880s, Hot Springs’ hydrology created new issues. The prize of Hot Springs’ allure was entirely contained in pipes, reservoirs and bathhouses. This system of promised the waters remained pure and its virtue, a prerequisite for their medicinal value according to physicians and visiting patrons, never deteriorated. But by containing the waters in this new system, reservation officials altered the thermal water experience in Hot Springs. No

³⁴⁷ Jordan E. Cravens, *Report: The Hot Springs Reservation in Arkansas*, 47th Congress, April 11, 1882, 3.

longer could visitors receive the same regiment of open access to the waters their predecessors had experienced before the federal government arrived; the thermal waters pools like those of the Rhal Hole and others of the antebellum- and Reconstruction-Era Hot Springs were no more. Encased in iron pipes and pumped into Southern establishments created new access issues for many arriving after the 1880s. In creating a new system to distribute the thermal waters, the resource now transcended reservation boundaries, opening up possibilities for new users and consumers to experience the waters. At three different locations, the Army and Navy General Hospital, Hot Springs' Black bathhouses, and the circuitous routes to bathhouses and clinics on the reservation, users imbued the thermal waters with new characteristics specific to these new locations. These sites, like the changing hydraulic system in Hot Springs, were a product of the contested landscape whereupon the waters bubbled up from deep underground.

Chapter 3: Natural Allies: The Army and Navy General Hospital and the Professionalization of Thermal Water Medical Care

Affirming that the reservation's thermal waters "possess wonderful remedial virtues, and are capable of being made the most important water cure in the world," the Hot Springs Commission endowed the Department of the Interior with power to control and distribute the thermal waters bubbling up on the side of Hot Springs Mountain.³⁴⁸ In an environment of rival interests fighting for control of the waters, reservation officials diverted the resource into a system of pipes and reservoirs, distributing the waters to private establishments that catered to patients and patrons. The new system was necessary, according to Superintendent Samuel Hamblen, because the thermal waters' medicinal reputation had grown quickly by the early 1880s. "For this reason," Hamblen concluded, "the utmost economy in the use of the waters should be insisted upon, which in all cases should be held strictly under control of the [Interior] Department."³⁴⁹ By harnessing the thermal waters in a new hydraulic system, officials believed they could control who used the waters, and how they administered them. And after a tense confrontation between members of the War Department and the Department of the Interior on the side of Hot Springs Mountain, the thermal waters soon flowed into the Army and Navy General Hospital (Fig. 3.1).

While a military presence on national park land is not surprising, the cultural and environmental variables in Hot Springs created a unique relationship between the War

³⁴⁸ John Coburn, A.H. Cragin, and M.L. Sterns, *Report of the commission appointed under the provisions of act of Congress of March 3, 1877, regarding the Hot Springs Reservation in the State of Arkansas*, November 1, 1877, Serial Set 1800 H.exdoc 1/17, 812-13.

³⁴⁹ Samuel Hamblen, *Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation*, June 30, 1884, in *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1884), 647.

Department and the thermal waters. In most park lands in the late nineteenth century, the War Department, in coordination with the Department of the Interior, used these landscapes to create, strengthen, and sustain a federal presence in the American West, acting as protector of natural resources as well as manager and enforcer of federal policy, a policy that often involved the forced removal and cultural erasure of Indigenous populations.³⁵⁰ The military's managerial style varied depending on the experience of the soldiery coupled with the extraordinary environments present in national parks.³⁵¹ In Hot Springs, the War Department never took control of the landscape. Secretary of War Lincoln acknowledged that Congress placed the reservation's superintendent and the Department of the Interior in control of the thermal waters. Unlike other national park lands in the West where the military took control of the land from non-white inhabitants by force, here military officials waded into a highly contested landscape of American citizens. In Hot Springs, local, regional, and national interests had already laid a strong claim to Hot Springs thermal water and were moving quickly to define the waters' utility and to determine who could access the resource. As the War Department settled the boundary disputes on the reservation and enclosed itself in the hospital grounds, medical officers began to similarly define how best to use the thermal waters for the nation's injured soldiers, sailors, and veterans.

The thermal waters and their incorporation in treatment plans was the hospital's *raison d'être*. "These waters," asserted John Logan on the Senate floor, "are peculiarly adapted to the

³⁵⁰ H. Duane Hampton, *How the U.S. Cavalry Saved the National Parks* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971); Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Christopher McGrory Klyza, "The United States Army, Natural Resources, and Political Development in the Nineteenth Century," *Polity* 35, No. 1 (Autumn, 2002): 1-28; Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

³⁵¹ Harvey Meyerson, *Nature's Army: When Soldiers Fought for Yosemite* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001); Peter Coates, Tim Cole, Marianna Dudley, and Chris Pearson, "Defending Nation, Defending Nature? Militarized Landscapes: Military Environmentalism in Britain, France, and the United States," *Environmental History* 16 (July 2011): 456-491; Thomas C. Rust: *Watching Over Yellowstone: The US Army's Experience in America's First National Park, 1886-1918* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2020).

cure of rheumatism, neuralgia [a stabbing, burning sensation caused by an irritated or damaged nerve], and diseases which are prevalent in the Army.” To support his claims, Logan produced a letter from Joseph K. Barnes, Surgeon General of the U.S. Army, who believed the waters were “so beneficial” and a hospital that used them effectively “would save to the Army many good soldiers who otherwise would be discharged.”³⁵² In October 1882, just four months after Congress appropriated funds for the military installation, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Alonzo Bell predicted the hospital “will give to the government the opportunity to collate facts in the treatment of disease that must prove of incalculable advantage in the future use of these waters.”³⁵³ A military hospital would not only bring soldiers, sailors, and marines to Hot Springs to recover, but, according to Interior officials like J.B. Clark, could offer the security the springs desperately needed. With an influx of servicemen, Clark concluded, these men would be “able to do police duty, who if made subject to the orders of the superintendent, would be all the military force the interests of the Government would require.”³⁵⁴ Local boosters applauded the new hospital as “a great benefit to Hot Springs.” By 1883, Hot Springs booster Charles Cutter believed a military hospital was necessary for recovering servicemen, believing the use of thermal waters in treatment “will be the means of saving many valuable lives.”³⁵⁵ Officials and others believed the Army and Navy Hospital served as a catalyst for growth in Hot Springs.

More than simply a boon to local business, the Army and Navy Hospital served as a bridge between thermal waters treatments, conceived by the medical community as a place-based curative process situated firmly in nineteenth century medicine, and the modernizing push away

³⁵² John Logan, “Debate on Army Appropriations Bill,” June 6, 1882; *Congressional Record Containing the Proceedings and Debates of the Forty-Seventh Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1882), 4570.

³⁵³ Alonzo Bell, *Report on the Hot Springs of Arkansas* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, U.S. Interior Department, 1882), 27.

³⁵⁴ J.B. Clark to Carl Schurz, 12 June 1879, 8; RG 79, Box 4, NARA College Park.

³⁵⁵ Charles Cutter, *Cutter’s Guide to the Hot Springs of Arkansas* (St. Louis: Slawson & Co., 1883), 75.

from environmental variability and into controlled environments like hospitals and clinics.³⁵⁶ By constructing the hospital in Hot Springs, and piping the thermal waters into the installation, place was still a critical factor in treatment and recovery. Medical officers created their own thermal water treatment plans for ailing soldiers, sailors, and veterans. These regimens responded to the specific conditions of crowded and diseased army bases, as well as to new diseases officers and servicemen encountered during military campaigns overseas. The success rate at the Army and Navy General Hospital made reservation officials rethink their standoffish approach to the new thermal water user and soon sought the help and advice of medical officers. The hospital's medical officers worked with reservation officials and the self-proclaimed "legitimate" medical community to define appropriate uses and users for the precious resource.

Understanding these contestations and negotiations illustrates the centrality thermal water control held in Hot Springs. While this fractious environment led to verbal and violent disagreements, it also demanded new and innovative ways to define and use Hot Springs' waters. The creation of and treatment regimen in the Army and Navy General not only suggests a new and unexplored "militarized landscape" in the Arkansas town, but also offers an illuminating insight to how these contested waters flowed through an ever-growing network of interests in Hot Springs.³⁵⁷ The growth of the hospital, supplied by a steady stream of soldiers, sailors, and veterans, in the early twentieth century worked to legitimize the medicinal efficacy of the waters. This came at an opportune time in Hot Springs as medical professionals in town performed similar work. They contrasted the beneficial results at the hospital with the ruinous state of affairs in town where confidence men, illicit activity, and drumming up business for quack

³⁵⁶ Christopher Sellers, "To Place or Not to Place: Toward an Environmental History of Modern Medicine," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 92, no. 1 (Spring 2018).

³⁵⁷ Chris Pearson, Peter Coates, and Tim Cole, Eds., *Militarized Landscapes: From Gettysburg to Salisbury Plain* (London: Continuum, 2010).

doctors affected the “purity” of the town and therefore its precious resource. Where once the hospital and the reservation fought each other at gunpoint, now the institutions worked together to sustain a healthy and salubrious environment. Medical officers, local physicians, and the newly created Medical Director for Hot Springs Reservation formed a strong alliance to insure who could and should best administer Hot Springs’ waters.



Fig. 3.1: Postcard for Army and Navy General Hospital (1905). Hot Springs Reservation in the background with bathhouses lining the far left of the postcard; Garland County Historical Society, File: Army and Navy Hospital, 3-268.2.

“Returned to duty – Cured”: Defining Thermal Water Use in the Army and Navy General Hospital

While the dinner between Senator John Logan, veterans Captain John Fordyce and Algernon Garnett, and other prominent Hot Springs residents spurred the senator back to Washington to create legislation for the establishment, it is important to situate the hospital in

more national trends in the medical world in the 1880s. The rise of hospitals exploded across the country after the Civil War. In 1873, the United States had fewer than 200 hospitals. That number reached over 4,300 by 1909, and by 1920 there were more than 6,000 institutions.³⁵⁸ The War Department joined in this movement. The Army and Navy Hospital was the first general hospital constructed in peacetime in the United States but there would be two more general hospitals in San Francisco and Washington D.C. built in 1899 and 1909 respectively.³⁵⁹ Medical officers were also asserting a more visible role in military matters. In wake of their profound work during the Civil War and the rise of scientific advancements professionalizing the field by the 1880s, medical officers, according to the historian Bobby Wintermute, “increasingly identified themselves as *men* of action... the ‘firing line’ was extended beyond the field of battle, to the barracks, hospital ward, encampment, and line of march.”³⁶⁰ Lastly, Americans’ perception of the hospital changed as citizens became more familiar with the institutions. Throughout most of the nineteenth century “hospitals,” according to historian Paul Starr, “were regarded with dread, and rightly so. They were dangerous places; when sick, people were safer at home.” Focused on cleanliness, ventilation, and professionalization, post-war hospitals no longer resembled the “sinks of human life” perceived by many Americans.³⁶¹ It was with these new initiatives that War Department officials embarked and encamped themselves in Hot Springs.

Between 1882 and 1887 the War Department appropriated the funds for the hospital and defined how best to use the thermal waters. By 1883, the War Department had contracted the

³⁵⁸ Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine: The Rise of a Sovereign Profession & the Making of a Vast Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 73.

³⁵⁹ Elliott Bowen, *In Search of Sexual Health: Diagnosing and Treating Syphilis in Hot Springs, Arkansas, 1890-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020), 78-79.

³⁶⁰ Bobby A. Wintermute, *Public Health and the US Military: A History of the Army Medical Department, 1818-1917* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 46.

³⁶¹ Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, quotes on 72 and 154.

work out at a cost of \$86,335.³⁶² A later report in 1885 on the hospital's costs showed 8 percent was dedicated exclusively to the supply of the "hot mineral water" for "bathing, medicinal, and cooking purposes only."³⁶³ As personnel constructed and completed the hospital but before the hospital's first patients filling its wards, military officials defined the waters' medicinal utility in combatting ailments and diseases which hindered military operations. In a December 20, 1886, War Department circular, Adjutant General R.C. Drum articulated the utility of the reservation's thermal waters. These circulars provided some guidance for how medical officers planned to use the thermal waters. Drum emphasized, "the Hot Springs water acts by stimulating all secretions and organic functions, increasing appetite, promoting digestion and assimilation, favoring tissue change and excretion of waste products, relieving internal congestions and stimulating the blood-making function." Drum then listed over a dozen conditions which supported treatment through the thermal water at the Army and Navy Hospital, including gout, rheumatism, neuralgia, and even cancer.³⁶⁴ This list of ailments aligned with diseases medical professionals around Hot Springs believed were best treated with the town's waters.

Along with defining the medicinal role Hot Springs' waters would play in the hospital, officials in the War Department and Interior formally negotiated thermal water access. As Hot Springs became an increasingly popular health and pleasure resort, more establishments off the reservation lobbied for thermal water access, decrying the exclusive water use of Bathhouse Row establishments a monopoly. In response, Congress authorized the Secretary of the Interior to grant leases to access the thermal waters off reservation property. The joint resolution had one caveat: water could be leased to new establishments "Provided, That furnishing such bath houses

³⁶² *Annual Report of the Secretary of War, Vol. 1* (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1883), 560.

³⁶³ J.G. Chandler, W.K. Van Reypen, and D.L. Huntington, "Explanation of estimates for 'Army and Navy Hospital, Hot Springs, Ark.,'" November 11, 1885, Estimates for Deficiencies in Appropriation, *Congressional Serial Set*, 40.

³⁶⁴ R.C. Drum, *War Department Circular*, 20 December 1886.

shall in no way interfere with the supply of hot water necessary for the use of the Army and Navy Hospital” as well as the bathhouses on the permanent reservation.³⁶⁵ By July 1887, the reservation’s new superintendent, Charles W. Field, responding to the new federal mandate and in an effort to “remove every chance for question or misunderstanding as to the amount of hot water needed by the hospital at any time,” allotted a specific spring to funnel thermal water directly to the Army and Navy Hospital’s bathhouse.³⁶⁶ The hospital received patients with a constant supply of thermal water by the middle of 1887. The War Department employed different tactics to secure access; lobbying and legislation replaced the double-barreled shotgun from three years earlier.

Under a negotiated truce with the Department of the Interior, War Department officials moved to construct and complete the hospital. When the Army and Navy General Hospital admitted its first patient on January 17, 1887, medical officers began to use Hot Springs Reservation’s thermal waters as part of their treatment regimen. Military physicians relied on contemporary hydrotherapy treatments as well as new insights in turn-of-the-century medicine to administer the waters to their patients. The hospital admitted thousands of ailing soldiers, sailors, and veterans, enlisted men and officers, providing a wide variety of circumstances and medical histories for medical officers to explore the thermal waters’ medicinal virtue. Isolated from the contested landscape outside the hospital, medical officers incorporated the thermal waters into their treatment plans, employing a thermal water regimen that evolved from traditional water

³⁶⁵ Joint resolution to authorize the use of hot water off the Government Reservation at Hot Springs, Arkansas, No. 14 (March 3, 1887), *The Statutes at Large of the United States of America from December 1885 to March, 1887*, Vol. 24 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), 647.

³⁶⁶ Charles W. Field, *Annual Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation*, U.S. Department of the Interior, July 27, 1887, 2.

cure treatments in the nineteenth century to hydrotherapeutic prescriptions focused on maladies the military experienced at home and abroad.

But until military physicians began seeing and treating patients it was unknown exactly how the thermal waters healed patients at the hospital. Even after the hospital began admitting servicemen and veterans, there was little in the way of statistics that escaped the walls of the hospital. The lack of published information did not deter the public from praising the Army and Navy Hospital and touting its national healing utility and medicinal value. The modern facility, and bathhouse in particular, drew the attention of reservation officials. Superintendent Field noted that soldiers and sailors arrived at a hospital that was “most comfortable, not to say elegant.” And the bathhouse was “in advance of similar establishments” in town.³⁶⁷ An 1892 article in the Little Rock *Daily Arkansas Gazette* claimed the hospital’s bathhouse, distributing the thermal waters to officers and enlisted men, “is one of the most complete of the many at Hot Springs.” The military installation was, the paper argued, “one of the finest improvements erected by the Government, and speaks well for the care the United States takes of its soldiers and sailors.”³⁶⁸ Newspaper editors from across the country emphasized the waters’ power to return debilitated soldiers and sailors to duty. When speaking of the Army Navy Hospital, the Great Bend, Kansas *Daily Item* published “the record of cures” at the military hospital “reaches the astonishing figures of 90 per cent. It was on account of these health-giving waters that this site was decided on by the army and navy authorities.”³⁶⁹ Groups from outside the military had plenty to say about the use and utility of Hot Springs’ thermal water in the Army and Navy

³⁶⁷ Field, *1887 Superintendent Report*, 2.

³⁶⁸ “Army and Navy Hospital,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 5 April 1892, 1.

³⁶⁹ “At the Famous Hot Springs of Arkansas,” *Daily Item*, 11 August 1902, 1; see also “National Editors Meet,” *Mower County Transcript* (Lancing, MN), 30 April 1902, 1; “At the Famous Hot Springs of Arkansas,” *The Columbus Telegram* (Columbus, NE), 8 August 1902, 2.

Hospital. But what did military officials and actual patients think of the waters' healing potential?

Medical case files from the Army and Navy Hospital offer excellent answers to this fundamental question. These records show that *every single patient* at the Army and Navy General Hospital, regardless of their specific ailment, used the thermal waters as part of their treatment regimen. In an effort to continue scholarly work on the “therapeutic encounters and questions of medical practice” in Hot Springs, most recently examined by the historian Elliott Bowen, interrogating hospital case files reveals how medical officers wrestled with the ultimate medicinal value of the thermal water.³⁷⁰ They altered treatments as their experiences became more numerous and their time in Hot Springs lengthened. Booster literature discussed the healing properties of the waters in abundance, but these medical records elucidate how medical officers, and water users in Hot Springs more generally, understood the nature of treatment with, and the restorative power of, this resource.

In the hospital bathhouse, medical officers focused their attention and budget on offering the thermal water resource to patients. Records show a fixation by surgeons around the number of baths patients received at the hospital. Progress reports in patients' case files repeatedly have examining doctors noting exactly how many baths a patient received. It does not appear the number of baths, whether large or small, changed the treatment plan for patients. In May 1890, Major R.S. Vickery, commanding officer at the hospital, singled out the “special treatment of the baths here” in improving the condition of a retired naval lieutenant commander.³⁷¹ By 1892 Charles Sutherland, Surgeon General of the Army, requested an extra \$7,960 for hospital

³⁷⁰ Bowen, *In Search of Sexual Health*, 16.

³⁷¹ Case number 21, Black, Charles H., Record Group (RG) 112, Records of the Office of the Surgeon General, 112AR-6, Medical Case Files of Patients, Box 5, NARA Fort Worth, TX.

improvements, an appropriation he deemed “absolutely necessary.”³⁷² The request dedicated one fifth of the funds for new hot water pipes which brought more thermal water to the hospital bathhouse. The appropriation came shortly before an 1893 War Department circular that changed the admission rules for the hospital which allowed more servicemen to access the resource. Adjutant General Robert Williams concluded “The success which has followed treatment by the waters” in Hot Springs “has brought it in great favor among officers of the Army... and we may with reason expect in the future a much larger number of applicants.”³⁷³ Post surgeons sent more soldiers and sailors to Hot Springs for the town’s healing resource. Admission rates bore out the new interest in the treatment facility. In 1887, its first year, the hospital averaged 18 daily patients, but that number more than doubled to 38 by 1890.³⁷⁴ In that same period, total U.S. military manpower dropped from 38,763 to 38,666.³⁷⁵

At times medical officers at the hospital diverted their treatment plans compared to the local physicians in Hot Springs. One significant difference was accepting soldiers or sailors with venereal diseases. Hot Springs had a long history of syphilitics sojourning to the small Arkansas town to heal the sores, muscle pains, and neurological issues that come with the stages of syphilis. The thermal water treatment was an appealing substitute to treatments involving large quantities of mercury that were absorbed topically, rubbed into patients’ skin. Dr. Eugene Carson Hay, President of the Hot Springs Medical Society, published a piece in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1897 that “the Hot Springs of Arkansas enjoys the reputation

³⁷² Charles Sutherland, *An estimate of appropriation for the improvement and maintenance of grounds about the Army and Navy Hospital at Hot Springs, Ark.*, House of Representatives, 52nd Congress, March 2, 1892, 2-3.

³⁷³ Robert Williams, Adjutant General, *War Department Circular No. 5*, War Department, Surgeon General’s Office, February 18, 1893.

³⁷⁴ “Federal Hospital Here is Valuable Asset to Resort,” *Hot Springs New Era*, 1930, Garland Country Historical Society, file name “Army Navy Hospital,” folder 1.

³⁷⁵ “U.S. Military Manpower, 1789 – 1997,” *Big Book of Warfare, Statistics, General*, accessed at https://www.alternatewars.com/BBOW/Stats/US_Mil_Manpower_1789-1997.htm.

of being such a Mecca to all syphilitic subjects.”³⁷⁶ Medical officers originally treated syphilitic patients at the hospital, and reported that “these specific cases were much benefited by the baths, combined with mercurial treatment.” But by the 1890s, military officials changed course and took a position that venereal disease poisoned not only bodies, but military readiness. The military as an institution would continue to fight VD in its ranks.³⁷⁷ Syphilitic patients, according to officials, brought a pernicious “odium” to the prestige of the hospital. In order to maintain this stellar reputation, the hospital disseminated a circular to medical officers across the country directing post doctors to send patients to the Army and Navy Hospital with cases that the waters had “an established reputation in benefiting, except that cases of venereal disease will not be admitted.”³⁷⁸ The hospital maintained this policy for decades. For example, in 1908, soldier Coleman McGray, upon informing the examining medical officer he sought treatment for a venereal sore, was rejected, with an explicit “NOT ADMITTED” inscribed on his medical file.³⁷⁹ The medical officers at the Army and Navy Hospital were defining just how best to use the waters and who could access them.

Hot Springs’ thermal waters offered a unique avenue of treatment which servicemen sought when other, more traditional treatment plans did not heal them of their ailments and pain. Post surgeons were the first medical officers to see patients on bases scattered across the country. Records show that when they exhausted treatment options on-base, they sought new methods at

³⁷⁶ Eugene Carson Hay, “The Advantages in the Treatment of Syphilis at the Hot Springs of Arkansas,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 28, no. 6 (1897), 251-53.

³⁷⁷ See Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States Since 1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Nancy Bristow, *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering during the Great War* (NYU Press, 1996); George Walker, *Venereal Disease in the American Expeditionary Forces* (New York: Big Byte Books, 2014); Adam Russon, et. al., “Venereal Disease and the Battlefield: From America’s First Cultural Export to Military Run Brothels,” *Journal of Urology* 206, no. 3S (September 10, 2021); 232.

³⁷⁸ *Manual for the Medical Department, United States Navy* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1906), 80; in Bowen, *In Search of Sexual Health*, 80. Bowen has concluded that while officially syphilitic patients were barred from the hospital, many still were admitted and treated.

³⁷⁹ Case file Coleman McGray, RG 112, Box 35, in Bowen, *In Search of Sexual Health*, 81.

Hot Springs. Fort Thomas, Kentucky's post surgeon, J.C. Worthington, believed it "improbable that Sergeant [Edward] Carey can ever sufficiently recover to be fit for active duty" through the sergeant's current treatment. He sent Carey to the Army and Navy Hospital in 1895 because Worthington believed "that he would be benefited by a course of treatment at the Hot Springs Hospital." The physician on-post was following orders from the War Department concerning admissions to the hospital that stated, "medical officers and physicians should recommend only those that are serious and obstinate, and which there is a reasonable possibility that the facilities there [the Army and Navy Hospital] will materially aid in the rapidity and permanence of recovery."³⁸⁰ Carey spent three months at the hospital and returned to duty "greatly benefited."³⁸¹ A post surgeon at Fort Brown in Texas sent a private to Hot Springs in the spring of 1896 after he experienced only "partial relief" from his rheumatism at the fort. Major and Surgeon H.O. Perley, the Army and Navy Hospital's commanding officer, noted the soldier "left hospital cured," and returned to Texas having benefitted from treatment he received in Hot Springs.³⁸² In 1898, Utah's Fort Douglas post surgeon noted that "on account of [1st Sergeant Alexander Williams'] long and faithful service it was thought best that he be given a trial at the Army and Navy General Hospital" and ordered him to Hot Springs.³⁸³ Williams arrived on December 20 and returned to duty on February 8, 1899 "Cured," according to his medical log. A growing national network of medical officers designated the thermal water treatment regimen at Hot

³⁸⁰ *Manual for the Medical Department, United States Navy* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1914), 75.

³⁸¹ Letter from J.C. Worthington, Major and Post Surgeon to Assistant Adjutant General, January 18, 1895, in Case File: Edward Carey, RG 112, Box 7, NARA Fort Worth.

³⁸² Case number 1043, Joseph Branson,, RG 112, Box 7, NARA Fort Worth.

³⁸³ "Clinical History of 1st Sergeant Alexander Williams, case number 1516, Alexander Williams, RG 112, Box 2, NARA Fort Worth.

Springs as “special” and sent soldiers and sailors to central Arkansas where they secured a “greater stability of health” (Fig. 3.2).³⁸⁴



Fig. 3.2: Officer's ward at Army and Navy General Hospital; Charles Cutter, *Cutter's Guide to the Hot Springs of Arkansas* (St. Louis: Slawson & Co. Printers, 1883).

Veterans also began to utilize the national, natural resource in Hot Springs. In the spring of 1898, Captain J.M. Dick, a veteran of the American Civil War, lamented that his condition, *locomotor ataxia*, a disability leaving the patient unable to precisely control their bodily movements, forced him to quit his job at the U.S. pension office in Washington, D.C. But as a veteran, Dick sought treatment at the Army and Navy Hospital. Three months after his arrival, Dick claimed his time in Hot Springs “has almost entirely cured the *locomotor ataxia* as far as it

³⁸⁴ Lt. Col. Dallas Bach to Lt. Col. and Deputy Surgeon General A.A. Woodruff, December 15, 1894, case file for Lt. Col. D.W. Benham, RG 112, Box 3, NARA Fort Worth.

affected my limbs and spine” and “I can walk now as well as I ever could.” Captain Dick not only commended the skill of the physicians and staff for his recovery, but also the thermal water utilized by the hospital. Both served to “wholly eradicate” his debilitating condition.³⁸⁵

Meticulous record-keeping was often a safety precaution for veteran patients. Aging veterans were on strict schedules from medical officers not to stay in thermal water baths too long and to remain monitored as they cooled down afterwards.³⁸⁶ New York City resident and veteran James Rudolph learned of the thermal waters’ medicinal effects on his crippling rheumatism through an army officer. He returned home from his 1898 hospital visit without pain, stating that “the army officers are well posted regarding the effects of the hot waters.”³⁸⁷ A year later, in 1899, Congress appropriated \$25,000 to add another ward to the hospital grounds, one designated solely for veterans.³⁸⁸

While the many patients sought relief for joint and muscle pain (diagnoses of articular rheumatism, neuritis, neuralgia, and lumbago), treating sailors, but especially soldiers, tested the thermal waters’ curative power on diseases associated on bases and in new wartime environments. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, army camp sicknesses such as typhoid, yellow fever, dysentery, and malaria began to appear as the primary diagnosis for admitted patients. Some of these diseases were endemic in other parts of the country as a result of crowded and unsanitary locales as well as environments across the country, both rural and urban that bred disease-carrying insect vectors. Army posts remained hotbeds for these diseases as the close-quartered and unsanitary conditions remained, feeding the highly contagious nature

³⁸⁵ “Talks with Visitors,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 11 July 1898, 5.

³⁸⁶ Case number 3018, James Adams (age 77), RG 112, Box 1, NARA Fort Worth.

³⁸⁷ “Chats with Visitors,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 13 October 1898, 3.

³⁸⁸ “Varied Amusements: Pythian Sanitarium – Chats With Visitors – Hospital Improvement – Shooting and Golf,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 13 March 1899, 3.

of the illnesses while public health initiatives tried to fix these same issues in cities by the end of the nineteenth century.

The Army and Navy General Hospital began to receive more patients afflicted with these recurrent diseases. First Lieutenant Francis Beach of the U.S. 7th Cavalry displayed the characteristics of one of these patients. After contracting malaria on Fort Sill in Oklahoma in 1897, Beach had undergone the “usual course of treatment” for the disease with “little or only temporary improvement.” The post hospital surgeon thought a course of treatment in Hot Springs “would be conducive to his more rapid recovery.” Records show Beach stayed at the hospital for two months and returned to duty “much improved.”³⁸⁹ What is as informative as Beach’s overall health outcome is that malaria patients in the Army were being “recommended” to visit Hot Springs and take in the thermal waters to treat the disease. If we step outside the hospital grounds, the Hot Springs medical community did not occupy itself with malaria as a significant reason patients visited the Arkansas town. In 1896, the *Hot Springs Medical Journal* published a survey of nineteen of the town’s physicians. When asked about malaria and its treatment in Hot Springs, J.M. Keller responded, “I seldom ever find [malaria] complicating diseases of invalids who come here for treatment.”³⁹⁰ Malaria did not appear in any of the physicians’ responses when asked which diseases were “most favorably treated in Hot Springs.”³⁹¹ Treatments at the Army and Navy Hospital were expanding the breath of the thermal waters’ medicinal utility.

Prevalent army base diseases overlapped with diseases servicemen experienced in new tropical locations. As the United States expanded its global reach at the turn of the twentieth century, it sent soldiers and sailors to new and exotic locations. The 1898 Spanish-American

³⁸⁹ “Special Report in the case of 1’Lieut. Francis H. Beach, 7’ U.S. Cavalry,” Francis Beach, RG 112, Box 7.

³⁹⁰ “Upon the Use of Hot Water – With Special Reference to Hot Springs, Arkansas,” *Hot Springs Medical Journal* 5, No. 12 (December 1896), 412.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 413.

War, the Philippine-American War (1899-1902), and the unincorporated Panama Canal Zone stationed soldiers in locations where disease and unsanitary conditions presented constant combatants for the military. Typhoid fever, malaria, and yellow fever made up 80 percent of US military deaths throughout Spanish-American War.³⁹² Scholars later argued the Army Medical Department was unprepared to handle the influx of these diseases.³⁹³ The military occupations also forced soldiers and sailors in closer quarters in preparation for deployment. Medical officers used Hot Springs' Army and Navy Hospital to test the thermal waters effectiveness on diseases decimating servicemen.

Dysentery plagued scores of servicemen at home and abroad. Men returned to the Presidio in San Francisco with abdominal pain and debilitating diarrhea. A military post originally erected by the Spanish in 1776 to protect their California land claims, the United States took control of the Presidio in 1850 after the Mexican War. By the Spanish-American War the installation became the military center for training and deploying forces overseas as well as receiving returning men from multiple tropical battlefronts.³⁹⁴ The overwhelmed post hospital sent many of these men to Hot Springs. Patients received mixed results "curing" dysentery with the thermal water treatment at the hospital. Private Wharton Anderson received the "ordinary treatment" for dysentery contracted in the Philippines at the Presidio "without more than temporary benefit." The private arrived in Hot Springs in May 1901 and left one month later "cured" and returned to duty.³⁹⁵ Private George Allen or 1st Sergeant Allen Williams, arriving at the Army and Navy Hospital in 1900 and 1902 respectively, both contracted dysentery while

³⁹² Col. Kenneth E. Hall, "The Dangerous Decline in the Department of Defense's Vaccine Program for Infectious Diseases," *Air & Space Power Journal* 25, no. 1 (January 2011), 102.

³⁹³ Vincent Cirillo, *Bullets and Bacilli: The Spanish-American War and Military Medicine* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 30.

³⁹⁴ Lisa M. Benton, *The Presidio: From Army Post to National Park* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 15-38.

³⁹⁵ Case number 2403, Wharton J. Anderson, RG 112, Box 2, NARA Fort Worth.

stationed in the Philippines. The men received the same treatment, and both stayed in the hospital for over three months. Similarly, both men were discharged from the hospital with surgeon's certificates of disability. In the case of 1st Sergeant Williams, his weekly report showed absolutely no sign of improvement from his thermal water treatment. This small sample of the documentary evidence suggests that while post surgeons at the Presidio sent a number of soldiers to Hot Springs to cure this malady, the treatment plan at the Army and Navy Hospital did not always offer the same healing results as other satisfied servicemen.

Hospital cases in which medical officers used Hot Springs' thermal water to treat these diseases appeared in national medical journals. In 1901, Captain and Assistant Surgeon Joseph J. Curry published an article in the *Journal of Medical Research* describing the increased number of soldiers diagnosed with Malta Fever who arrived at the Army Navy Hospital. The two soldiers and two sailors in Curry's study were initially diagnosed with acute articular rheumatism when they arrived at the hospital, a common condition treated by the thermal waters. Treated as such with "hot baths, massage, and the administration of salophen and iodide of potassium" the men showed no sign of improvement.³⁹⁶ Curry went on to describe the breadth of Malta fever as these four men came from Cuba, the Philippines, and Central America. Curry made a note that he discovered four additional cases of Malta fever in the hospital after his initial study. These men had also not received any benefit from the hospital's treatment plan. Even as the thermal water treatment failed these men it helped illuminate new diseases and subsequent regimens as soldiers and sailors continued to engage with new environments in war. Hot Springs' doctors also joined the war effort, obtaining medical officer commissions and bringing their knowledge of thermal water treatments those same new environs. James C. Minor began practicing in Hot Springs in

³⁹⁶ Joseph J. Curry, M.D., "Malta Fever – A report of four cases of Malta fever in the United States Army and Navy General Hospital, Hot Springs, Ark.," *Journal of Medical Research* 6, No. 1 (July 1901), 243.

1900. He gained a commission in 1900 and was stationed in the Philippines until 1903. While stationed, Minor endorsed local thermal water treatments and published his findings.³⁹⁷

It is important to note that diseases such as dysentery, typhoid, or yellow fever did not appear on the original 1887 War Department circular distributed to post surgeons stating the diseases which Hot Springs' waters could benefit a soldier or sailor. After exhausting medical treatment at the bases, post surgeons often made the decision to see if the thermal waters could alleviate or cure their patients. According to hospital records many of these men returned to duty, improved or cured. The apparent success of the thermal water treatment for these new diseases made it into promotional literature for Hot Springs Reservation and the town's bathhouses. Harry Hallock, Hot Springs Reservation's Medical Director, listed malaria as a treatable disease by the government's thermal waters in a July 1913 article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.³⁹⁸ A brochure for the Maurice Bathhouse listed "malarial infection" as one of over a dozen diseases cured by the thermal waters. The bathhouses cited "Records of the Army and Navy General Hospital" as their evidence, a place where "science can explain results."³⁹⁹

As medical officers saw more patients and familiarized themselves with the thermal water resource, the hospital systematized its thermal water treatments. By 1902, the case files for patients at the hospital dedicated specific space for the examining physician to note how long the patient had spent in a tropical climate. This addition was a product of the military's expanding global reach and the kinds of diseases that flooded into the hospital. For patients suffering from the more common joint pains and paralysis diagnoses, servicemen and veterans usually received

³⁹⁷ Bowen, *In Search of Sexual Health*, 130-32.

³⁹⁸ Harry M. Hallock, M.D., "Some Aspects of Hydrotherapy in the United States," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 61, No. 4 (July 20, 1913), 261.

³⁹⁹ Brochure for the Maurice Bathhouse, RG 79, Box 1215, National Park Service Central Classified File, 1933-1945, Hot Springs 620-630, NARA College Park; also see brochure for Hale Bathhouse, RG 79, Box 0741, General Records, Administrative Files, 1949-1971, folder C18, NARA College Park.

the same thermal water treatment: an “ordinary” bath at 95-98 degrees Fahrenheit either daily or every other day. This remained relatively standard and unchanged throughout the first decade of the 1900s. By 1909, however, this record-keeping changed drastically. Medical officers now offered eight different thermal water bath treatments to patients. These new techniques allowed surgeons to try myriad combinations to alleviate debilitating conditions. One example shows that in 1910, retired sergeant Cecil Abbott was diagnosed with neurasthenia, a general weakening of the nerves over one side of the body, in Abbott’s case his right side. He received the standard 96-degree bath Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, but also received a pressurized thermal water hose treatment on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays (Fig. 3.3 & 3.4). Abbott left the hospital after a month “improved.”⁴⁰⁰ Some patients received different treatments on the same day to heal their affliction.⁴⁰¹ The records also show medical officers changing treatment plans during a patient’s stay.⁴⁰² These experiments demonstrate how medical officers did not abandon treatments with the thermal waters as the medical practice rapidly modernized at the turn of the twentieth century. In fact, medical officers incorporated the thermal water treatments into an evolving therapeutic arsenal.

⁴⁰⁰ Case number 7396, Cecil Abbott, RG 112, Box 1, NARA Fort Worth.

⁴⁰¹ See case number 7429, James M. Adams, RG 112, Box 1, NARA Fort Worth.

⁴⁰² Case number 6421, Richard Addison, RG 112, Box 1, NARA Fort Worth.

Army and Navy General Hospital. -- Directions for Baths, Massage and Electrical Treatment.

Name Abbott Rank _____ Ward 4

Baths.	Massage.	Electrical Treatment.
Monday <u>1</u>		
Tuesday <u>3</u>		
Wednesday <u>1</u>		
Thursday <u>3</u>		
Friday <u>1</u>		
Saturday <u>3</u>		
Hour.....		
Remarks:		
Date <u>9/17</u> 191 <u>1</u>	<i>[Signature]</i>	Capt
	M. D.	Medical Corps, U. S. Army.

Fig. 3.3: Front of Cecil Abbott's bathhouse treatment card. Issued to every patient, the card listed the type of thermal water prescription. Medical officers' decades of experience at the hospital let them expand the types of thermal waters treatments; Case number 7396, Cecil Abbott, RG 112, Box 1, NARA Fort Worth.

Baths.	Electrical Treatment.
<p>No. 1. Temperature 96 for 5 minutes, followed by fan: douche at 70, and 15 pounds pressure over entire body for 30 seconds.</p> <p>No. 2. Tub Sweat Bath. Temperature 102 for 5 minutes, followed by dry pack, (hot sheet and hot blanket) for 10 minutes, followed by circular spray at 96 for 15 seconds.</p> <p>No. 3. Scotch Douche. Pressure 15 pounds, distance 6 feet; alternating hot and cold hose thus: Hot Hose. Temperature 105 for 20 seconds. Cold Hose. Temperature 70 for 20 seconds. Hot Hose. Temperature 105 for 20 seconds. Cold Hose. Temperature 70 for 20 seconds. Always begin with hot and end with cold. Playstream over entire body, front and rear.</p> <p>No. 4. Spinal Douche. Pressure 25 pounds, distance 6 feet; temperature 70 for 1 minute.</p> <p>No. 5. Tub at 102 for 10 minutes, followed by vapor at 130 for 3 minutes, followed by circular spray at 96 for 15 seconds.</p> <p>No. 6 Tub at 94 for 3 minutes.</p> <p>No. 7. Overhead shower and circular spray at 90 for 30 seconds.</p> <p>No. 8 Sitz Bath at 100 for 10 minutes.</p>	<p>1. Static.</p> <p>A. Crown Breeze. B. Spark. C. Roller. D. Point. E. Leyden Jars. F. Morton Wave.</p> <p>2. Oudin.</p> <p>A. Direct. B. Brush. C. Point. D. Ring. E. Surface Vacuum.</p> <p>3. Tesla.</p> <p>A. Direct. B. Brush. C. Point. D. Ring. E. Surface Vacuum.</p> <p>4. Thermo-faradic.</p> <p>5. D'Arsonval.</p>

Fig. 3.4: Back of Cecil Abbott's bathhouse treatment card providing details for the baths and sprays prescribed on the front.

The success of the hospital forced medical officers to again change their admission rules for the hospital. In 1910, while the hospital averaged over 92 full beds/day, well below its normal capacity of 169, the Surgeon General of the Army, Brigadier General George H. Torney,

wrote a memorandum to the Secretary of War concerning the number of military personnel using the Government Free Bathhouse on Hot Springs Reservation. 32 officers, 55 enlisted men, and a staggering 625 veterans used the facility throughout the year. Torney used this data to suggest expanding the hospital and requesting more appropriations from Congress.⁴⁰³ It is probable, however, that the majority of these individuals patronized the Government Free Bathhouse after their hospital applications were rejected due to the presence of venereal disease. Torney knew the complications of this strict, decades-old rule because a year earlier, in 1909, Torney suggested medical officers “relax” their strict rules regarding VD at the hospital.⁴⁰⁴ After 1910, with the knowledge of servicemen and veterans waiting at the door of the hospital and a reconsideration of the moral impurities of venereal disease, officials at the hospital dissolved the old rule. By 1914, the average number of occupied beds had risen to 102 and then 130 by 1918.

By the start of the twentieth century the Army and Navy General Hospital situated itself as a primary user of the reservation’s thermal waters by treating hundreds of ailing soldiers, sailors, and veterans every year. The continued and increased attendance at the hospital demonstrated the “special treatment” available at the Hot Springs hospital proved useful. The Army and Navy Hospital relied on an extensive network of post hospitals from across the country and a steady stream of bodies to ensure the continued success of the hospital as well as opportunities to adjust treatments and develop entirely new thermal water regimens for diseases not previously associated with the waters (Fig. 3.5). By 1915, the federal government had spent over \$464,000 upon the Army and Navy General Hospital.⁴⁰⁵ Once seen as a combatant fighting

⁴⁰³ Brigadier General George H. Torney, “Memorandum for the Secretary of War,” 8 January 1912, RG 79, Box 079, NARA College Park.

⁴⁰⁴ Bowen, *In Search of Sexual Health*, 92.

⁴⁰⁵ William Parks, *Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, August 13, 1915).

for thermal water control by the Department of the Interior, reservation officials attempted to rebrand their relationship with the hospital to both expand the popularity of Hot Springs nationwide and to continue to legitimize the healthful benefits of the waters.



Fig. 3.5: Bathhouse at Army and Navy General Hospital, cooling room. Patients administered by hospital medical officer (middle); Lt. Col. James M. Loud Collection, Garland County Historical Society.

Combatting the “Hydra-Headed Monster”: The Crusade Against Drumming that Legitimized Hot Springs’ Medical Community

With a legitimized medicinal product flowing from the pipes and pumphouses of the government reservation, and with the renewed cooperation of medical officers at the Army and Navy Hospital, Hot Springs’ medical community fought against quackery and unprofessional thermal water business practices. At the same time, as Hot Springs grew as a health and pleasure resort, gambling, confidence games and other illicit activity flooded into the valley, sparking outrage amongst the professional community and the reservation. Local physicians and

concerned citizens worked to combat the impure social environment in Hot Springs and the park officials hired a medical director for the first time in its history, a military man, to bring a sense of cleanliness and order to the regulations on the reservation.

The distinctive history of Southern medicine, one that emphasized airs, waters, miasmas, and later non-human disease vectors, was quite familiar to local Hot Springs physicians. They incorporated these old concepts into new organizational and professional structures to legitimize their work with the thermal waters. They also worked to use the new professionalization tools in modernizing medicine, state boards of health, licensing, and medical societies, to legitimize thermal water treatments, incorporating them into the discipline. The Hot Springs Medical Society fully supported these new national requirements coming from leading medical organizations, noting “This move is in the right direction, and we feel sure has the endorsement of the best element in the profession.”⁴⁰⁶ But Hot Springs doctors, however hard they tried to modernize their thermal water regimens, encountered doubtful colloques. Addressing the Arkansas Medical Society in 1898, Randolph Brunson, president of the Hot Springs Medical Society, chided his colleagues because statistics revealed few Arkansans actually visited Hot Springs, leading him to assert “that the medical profession of Arkansas, as a whole, does not appreciate the grandest and most productive of cures” enacted through the thermal water treatments. Brunson continued:

It does seem propitious and most fitting to me that the Arkansas Medical Society should meet here, for if there is any one place in the world where medical men should be interested and especially the physicians of this state, it is Hot Springs, for the reason that more sick people come here to be cured of ills than any other place of the same size on the face of the globe, and we, the profession, want to practically demonstrate to you, gentlemen, that the poor sufferer does not knock at the gates of our National Sanatorium in vain.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁶ “Editorial,” *Hot Springs Medical Journal* 7, no. 9 (September 15, 1898), 283.

⁴⁰⁷ Randolph Brunson, “Address of Welcome To the Arkansas Medical Society during its Annual Meeting at Hot Springs, May 14, 15 and 16, 1901,” *Hot Springs Medical Journal* 10, no. 5 (June 15, 1901), 162-63.

The Hot Springs Medical Society sent a number of bills to the Arkansas Legislature proposing new standards for practicing medicine focused on education and the scientific practice of hydrotherapy. These bills, argued society members, were “solely for the good of the people of the state.”⁴⁰⁸ The Hot Springs Medical Society situated itself as a bastion of medicinal legitimacy in Hot Springs.

Drumming tested the social hierarchy cultivated by reservation officials and Hot Springs’ most influential citizens. Drumming was a long and enigmatic problem in Hot Springs. The “evil” described by visitors and local businesses involved “drummers,” fast-talking and persuasive confidence men, who aggressively lobbied sick visitors to use the service of a specific “physician” in town, a physician who had a financial arrangement with the drummer. The drummer then received a percentage of the exorbitant medical bill charged by the physician.⁴⁰⁹ The town’s doctors and professionals deemed drumming public enemy number one. In an 1884 congressional testimony, physician S.W. Vaughn thought it a good idea to hang every suspected drummer in Hot Springs.⁴¹⁰ A front-page 1890 article in a Memphis paper reasoned that since “hundreds and even thousands of people” pass through the city on their way to Hot Springs every year, it needed to inform the public of these “marauders” and “assassins.” “Marauders because like restless and hungry hyenes [sic] they are ever seeking a victim” and “Assassins because they drag the already half dead invalid into the office of the quack doctor, who generally puts on the finishing touches.”⁴¹¹ Frustrated doctors railed against drummers and the “charlatan doctors” who employed them, calling them out as community “leeches” who sucked “every cent” from

⁴⁰⁸ “Editorial,” *Hot Springs Medical Journal* 10, no. 4 (April 15, 1901), 125.

⁴⁰⁹ “The Drumming Evil,” *The Evening Bulletin* (Maysville, KY), 21 September 1883, 1.

⁴¹⁰ S.W. Vaughn Testimony, *Testimony Taken Before the Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department*, 252.

⁴¹¹ “Robber of Invalids,” *Memphis Public Ledger*, 11 October 1890.

their victims and drained the town of legitimate medical practice.⁴¹² A visitor to Hot Springs in 1908 wrote to Secretary of the Interior James R. Garfield that upon entering the town limits, “30,000 gamblers” and “human vampires... prey upon the sick, the crippled, and the infirm both in body and mind.”⁴¹³ Officials and visitors focused on the moral and financial drain the drumming industry wrought on Hot Springs. Part of the legitimization project of the greater medical profession at the turn of the twentieth century was maintaining the appearance of propriety and respectability.⁴¹⁴ In Hot Springs, in order to legitimize the medicinal use of the waters, the physicians administering them had to obtain the same qualities. Drumming hindered that goal and poisoned the medical community’s reputation.

The anti-drumming crusade was another way to draw clear lines concerning who could use Hot Springs waters and who could not.⁴¹⁵ The most powerful of Hot Springs’ physicians took the lead in defining drumming and ensuring their position as Hot Springs’ eminent healers. James M. Keller wrote an ordinance in 1893 that was adopted by the city council attempting to register drummers. Two years later the mayor of Hot Springs circulated pamphlets to all railroads with lines coming to Hot Springs warning visitors of the enigmatic “smooth stranger.”⁴¹⁶ The escalating problem led the local medical journal to dub drumming a “hydra-headed and unscrupulous monster” in 1895⁴¹⁷ A decade later, reservation officials were using the same comparison for drumming as Superintendent Eisele described the “laudable effort to destroy this hydra-headed monster.”⁴¹⁸

⁴¹² “Notice,” *Hot Springs Medical Journal* 3, No. 10 (October 1894), 324.

⁴¹³ Letter to J.R. Garfield, Secretary of the interior, 31 December 1908, RG 79, Box 333, Entry P 10 [Hot Springs] 208-08 Liquor Traffic to 501-03 Newspaper Articles, NARA College Park.

⁴¹⁴ Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, 85.

⁴¹⁵ Bowen describes the drumming fight as a “boundary-making device” that “speaks to the porous, fluid, and fuzzy distinctions between charlatany and professionalism”; *In Search of Sexual Health*, 57.

⁴¹⁶ “The City and the Drummer,” *Hot Springs Medical Journal* 4, No. 9 (September 1895), 282.

⁴¹⁷ “The Practice of Doctor Drumming,” *Hot Springs Medical Journal* 4, No. 6 (June 1895), 186.

⁴¹⁸ Martin Eisele, *Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation*, July 31, 1905, 738.

In 1902 a group of “citizens and reputable physicians” formed the Visitors’ Protective Association (VPA), as one way to utilize the new organizational tools of professionalization and respectability to combat drumming. While the new organization sought to protect visitors from “the most subtle [sic] and seductive” class of drummers, the VPA also fought to protect certain physicians from slander. In 1903, its first full year of operation, the VPA defended the reputation of T.E. Holland. Holland was part of the professional class of Hot Springs physicians; he previously sharing an office with J.T. Jelks and worked with him at the Ozark Sanitarium. Holland was also the editor of the *Hot Springs Medical Journal* in 1902. In 1903, when a grand jury indicted Holland for drumming, the VPA vehemently denied the accusations for him in the local press as well as national publications, inserting a defense of Holland in the *Journal for the American Medical Association*. The VPA upheld Holland’s professional virtue while denouncing his accuser as an “an enemy to good government, a violator of the law against drumming, and a personal enemy of the aforesaid physician.” The motive of these slanders, according to the VPA, was to discredit the organized methods of procuring patients” in Hot Springs.⁴¹⁹ The town’s self-anointed professional healers, in an era where the medical profession, especially in the South, was still finding a firm footing, created space for personal squabbles to fester publicly. Physicians joining the push for professionalization fought to outlaw what they believed were inappropriate users of the thermal waters while defending their own expertise in the Valley of Vapors.

The city-wide fight against drumming grew as the Interior Department, War Department, and Hot Springs’ medical professionals allied with each other to form the Federal Registration Board in 1903. Reservation officials first suggested the creation of a three-member board in 1898

⁴¹⁹ “Medical News – Arkansas,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 60, no. 20 (November 14, 1903), 1213.

consisting of one Army and Navy medical officer and two local physicians to create a list of doctors qualified to prescribe the thermal waters to visiting patients. Officials believed the Board could continue to focus the fight against drumming on professional and moral grounds. Professional physicians often connected morality to medicine during this time, defining their fight against drumming as a “crusade” in the early 1900s.⁴²⁰ Drumming doctors, according to Superintendent William Little in 1898, “either lack a proficiency in his profession or the want of sufficient moral character.” He believed the “duty” of the Registration Board was “to examine all physicians who desire to practice medicine on the Government reservation, both as to their qualifications and moral standing in the medical profession, and to issue certificates only to those of good moral and professional character.”⁴²¹

Officially formed in 1903, the Federal Registration Board became a new form of thermal water gatekeeping in Hot Springs, this time with direct contributions from the medical officers at the Army and Navy Hospital. Upon receiving an application from a physician, the board compared it to any complaints they received from visitors on the reservation. They then sought testimony from other Hot Springs doctors on the reputation of an individual. For Dr. N.A. Haizlip, upon being accused of drumming, one interviewed doctor, W.F. Simpson, doomed the applicant, responding “Would not trust him” when asked if he considered Haizlip a “man of honor and integrity.” And when asked if Haizlip would engage in fee-splitting with a drummer, Simpson answered “I believe he would – judging from his remarks some time ago.” The Registration Board did not approve N.A. Haizlip that year.⁴²² The first year, of the over 200

⁴²⁰ “State News,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 12 November 1902, 2; “Doctor Drumming,” *Hot Springs Medical Journal* 11, No. 12 (December 1902), 405; “Visitors’ Protective Association,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 29 October 1903, 1.

⁴²¹ William Little, *Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation*, June 30, 1898, 947.

⁴²² Interview of W.F. Simpson; Hot Springs National Park Archives HOSP 19266, Series II: Concessions Records, 1879-1998, undated, Box 45, folder 7, Inactive Physicians, 1907-1918.

names that appeared in the local town directory as a “physician,” only 77 were entitled to registration by the board. By 1905, that number had climbed to 124, with seven physicians given temporary status as the board reviewed affidavits against them, and seven convicted of drumming. In 1907, in an effort to “prevent their [visitors’] falling into the hands of drumming doctors,” reservation officials began displaying the names of registered physicians on the reservation and endorsed their distribution around town (fig. 3.6). This strategy was the government’s most concerted and public effort to define who could prescribe its thermal waters.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT RESERVATION

Office of the Superintendent,
Hot Springs, Ark., October, 1913

The following named resident physicians are registered in the office of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation under approval and direction of the Honorable Secretary of the Interior, according to the provisions of Rules 10 and 11, of the regulations for the government of all bath houses receiving hot water from the U. S. Reservation.

BAILEY, W. T.	HALLMAN, V. H.	RANDOLPH, J. P.
BARRY, W. H.	HARDISTER, H. N.	REAMY, SANFORD
BARRY, L. H.	HARRELL, M. L.	RIDER, E. B.
BATTLE, C. P.	HEBERT, G. A.	ROBERTS, C. M.
BEEBE, J. A.	HENDERSON, W. B.	ROWLAND, J. F.
BERROW, A. W. (D. O.)	HICKSON, W. H.	ROWLAND, ROSA B.
BIGGS, O. E.	HIGHTOWER, T. A.	ROBERTSON, J. A.
BLAYDES, J. A.	HOLLAND, E. D.	
BLAYDES, R. O.	HOLLAND, T. E.	
BONNIWELL, H. M.	HOOPER, O. K.	
BREDLOVE, B. W.	HORNER, J. S.	
BRYAN, J. W. (Col.)	HUBER, E. D.	
BURTON, O. H.		SANDERS, T. E.
BUSH, J. W.		SHAW, A. D.
	JELKS, F. W.	SHAW, J. B.
	JELKS, J. T.	SHELTON, T. H.
	JOHNS, P. W.	SHIPPEY, E. A.
CASADA, B. F.		SHORT, Z. N.
CHESNUTT, J. H.		SIMPSON, R. A.
CHOATE, W. G.		SIMPSON, W. F.
COLLINGS, H. P.		SLAIGHT, J. L.
COLLINGS, S. P.	KELLER, J. M.	SMALE, W. W.
CONNELL, W. H.	KING, J. H.	SMITH, J. W.
COOK, A. H.	KOCH, G. C.	SMITH, W. K.
COOK, E. T.		SNEED, A. L.
GOWLE, FANNIE W. (Mrs.)		SNIDER, W. L.
COX, W. E.	LAW, W. V.	SPEER, B. N.
CUMMINGS, L. (D. O.)	LIVINGSTON, J. J.	STEELE, S. B.
CURTIS, J. W. (Col.)		STEER, S. L.
		STRACHAN, J. B.
DAKE, CHAS.		
DAKE, F. B.		
DAKE, WALTER M.	MARTIN, E. H.	TAYLOR, R. H.
DAVIS, R. G.	MERRITT, J. F.	THOMPSON, E. L.
DeWOODY, L. C.	MINOR, J. C.	THOMPSON, M. G.
DIMON, R. B.	MOBBS, BERT	TORRENCE, A. C. (Col.)
DRENNEN, C. T.	MOUNT, M. F.	TRIBBLE, A. H.
DUREN, V. E.		
	McADAM, ROBERT	
EASTMAN, E. H.	McCLENDON, J. W.	VAN LEER, S. C.
EDWARDS, A. J.	McCONNELL, A.	VAUGHAN, P. T.
ELLIS, A. C.	McCONNELL, C. A.	
ELLIS, L. R.	McDONALD, W. J.	
ELLSWORTH, E. H.	McLAIN, WALTER	
ESTES, L. B.		
	ORR, E. M.	WADE, C. M. (Col.)
FEWKES, JOHN		WALKER, DA COSTA
FIFE, J. D.		WALKER, S. G. (Col.)
FORBES, W. O.		WALLACE, H. C.
FORDHAM, L. H. (Mrs.)	PARKER, W. E.	WEIL, S. D.
FOUCAR, F. H.	PAYNE, J. B.	WESTMORELAND, J. W.
	PHILIPSON, J. W.	WHITACRE, J. C.
	PHILLIPS, J. A.	WILLIAMS, A. U.
GARNETT, A. S.	PHIPPS, H. H. (Col.)	WILLIAMS, F. M.
GRAVES, R. B.	PROCTOR, J. M.	WINEGAR, E. F.
GRAY, D. A.	PURDUM, E. A.	WOOD, J. S.
		WOOTTON, W. T.
		WRIGHT, L. B.

Charles R. Trowbridge, Superintendent.

Fig. 3.6: 1913 List of Registered Physicians. These were posted in town, on the reservation, and at the bathhouses; Hot Springs National Park Archives, Box A7615, Folder A7615-1903-1913.3.1

The Federal Registration Board attempted to build a coalition of like-minded medical reform organizations to strengthen its dragnet over Hot Springs. Within the first year, they sought assistance from Hot Springs Men's Business League, the precursor to the town's Chamber of Commerce, the Hot Springs Medical Society, and the Hot Springs Druggists' Association. "Your members," pleaded Board President W.H. Barry to the Hot Springs Medical Society, "should be in harmony with the policy" of the Federal Registration Board because society doctors "suffered at the hands of those physicians who employ drummers." With the help of like-minded, reputable doctors, "the hot water, the basis of our prosperity, can be made known in its intelligent uses wherever the flag of Uncle Sam floats."⁴²³ The VPA took notice of this new system, promising to "turn loose their accumulated funds for the purpose of assisting and supplementing the work of the government." With this new ally, the VPA promised at a town meeting that "drumming doctors will now be confronted with the most persistent and effective campaign against them that has ever been instituted."⁴²⁴ Barry wrote to the VPA three weeks after three weeks after the meeting praising the rhetoric and work of the organization and hoped to "co-operate" because the "devious methods used to get a visitor to a drumming doctor require constant vigilance and close investigation."⁴²⁵ While medical officers at the Army and Navy Hospital were exploring new ways to use the reservation's thermal waters in their treatments, they also moved outside the hospital grounds and took part in organizations like the Federal Registration Board that sought to legitimize individuals prescribing thermal water and hydrotherapy treatments in town.

⁴²³ W.H. Barry to Hot Springs Medical Society, 30 November 1904, HOSP 19266, Box 45, Folder 5.

⁴²⁴ "Protective Association Meeting," *Arkansas Democrat*, 10 November 1904, 6.

⁴²⁵ W.H. Barry to Visitors' Protective Association, 30 November 1904, HOSP 19266, Box 45, Folder 5.

While men such as James M. Keller, T.E. Holland, and other “reputable” physicians tried to define and eradicate drumming throughout Hot Springs; they were often unsuccessful. More often than not, the fights between established physicians and accused drummers “boil up the pros and cons of the medical jumble” that flowed throughout the town during this era.⁴²⁶ “You have heard it said that too many cooks spoil the broth. I say for a fact that too many doctors spoil this wonderful resort,” complained Michael Healy, a 30-year resident of Hot Springs. Healy also attacked the Federal Registration Board in a 1909 letter to the Interior Secretary, accusing registered physicians of “using the government as a shield to enable them to practice medicine.” Healy did not think of drumming in terms of medical malpractice but financial security. “The drummers are as much needed as policemen,” he said, because “the small hotels and rooming houses needs drummers and it is an inconvenience for them to be without them.”⁴²⁷ While professional physicians considered drumming a moral evil, many in Hot Springs did not and some relied on the system for their economic survival. Board members admitted that because drumming “has so ramified the business interests of this city... it will necessarily be a somewhat slow process to eradicate it for all time.”⁴²⁸

Early initiatives against drumming failed from lack of local enforcement, frustrating the professional medical community. “Thus far there has been no assistance from the patrol officers or the detective department of the City of Hot Springs,”⁴²⁹ complained the Federal Registration Board in 1905. That same year, the state’s anti-drumming legislation was initially ruled unconstitutional until the Arkansas Supreme Court reversed the ruling a year later. Local

⁴²⁶ “The Medical Mix-Up,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 31 January 1904, 1.

⁴²⁷ Michael Healy to Frank W. Pierce, 21 January 1909, RG 79, Box 333, NARA College Park.

⁴²⁸ W.H. Barry to Business Men’s League of Hot Springs, 30 November 1904, HOSP 19266, Box 45, Folder 5.

⁴²⁹ W.H. Barry, President of Federal Registration Board to Secretary of the Interior, 17 January 1905; Hot Springs National Park Administrative Archives 2, Box A7615, File No. A7615.1903-1913.4, “Protection – Health and Safety, Medical Service, 1903-1913, Hot Springs, Arkansas.

reporters viewed the ruling as drumming's "death blow." The *Journal of the American Medical Association* asserted "that the supreme court's decision... fairly settles the question and should be effective in eradicating disreputable practices and practitioners from that popular health resort."⁴³⁰ These overly ambitious assertions about drumming's demise contrasted with the realities on the ground, however. Reservation officials only had jurisdiction over federal land; they had no control over the train depot or physicians' offices where drumming took place. In 1908, Hot Springs officials were still fighting the "drumming evil." "Substantial results have ensued," reported W. Scott Smith, "but the votes of the drumming element are a great factor in local and county elections."⁴³¹ When federal officials contemplated taking extraordinary actions, they met fierce resistance from local residents. Like in 1909, when a small group of reform-minded Hot Springs residents traveled to Washington to meet with the Assistant Secretary of the Interior. Relaying the continued presence of gambling and drumming in town, their complaints connected the social issues plaguing the town to the thermal water resource: "scores of men who go to Hot Springs for their health are inveigled into snares, whereby their money is taken, thus defeating the ends of the hot waters."⁴³² Upon a threat to turn off the thermal waters to leased establishments by reservation officials, and the Interior Secretary ordering Hot Springs' mayor to clean up the city, local authorities pushed back. Democratic newspapers addressed Washington officials in regal terms, dubbing the Assistant Secretary of the Interior "His Majesty" and saying how reservation officials "probably overlooked that this is not a monarchy we are living in, but a government by the people." The editorial concluded by declaring "Hot Springs won't be ruled

⁴³⁰ "Death Blow for Practice of Doctor-Drumming," *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 30 January 1906, 4; "The Hot Springs Decision," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 66, No 7 (February 17, 1906), 516.

⁴³¹ W. Scott Smith, "Report of the Superintendent of Hot Springs Reservation, October 1, 1908" in *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1908, 539.

⁴³² "Uncle Sam to see that Laws are Enforced," *Daily Arkansas Democrat*, 14 January 1909, in RG 79, Box 333, NARA College Park.

under the ‘big stick,’” a direct challenge to Republican President Theodore Roosevelt that revealed Southern Democrats ongoing frustration with his apparent federal overreach.⁴³³ Battles over Hot Springs’ hydrological and social purity worked its way into national political currents during the Progressive Era.

Pushback against gatekeeping by alleged drumming doctors kept the issue alive well after drumming’s death knell was proclaimed by local and regional officials. Two publicized instances represent how lines of legitimacy were drawn in town around proper thermal water use and the consequences of those battles. In early 1904, Dr. Daniel McSwegan brought a \$10,000 civil suit against twelve physicians in the VPA alleging the organization conspired with the Federal Registration Board to declare him a drumming doctor. The Little Rock *Arkansas Democrat* described the twelve VPA doctors as “the best-known practitioners in the city.”⁴³⁴ McSwegan fled Hot Springs before the judge ruled in the case for fear of retaliation from patients and physicians. The doctor’s concerns for his life were not entirely unbelievable. Three years after the civil court ruled against McSwegan, in May 1907, Dr. A.U. Williams, “one of the wealthiest and most prominent physicians of Hot Springs.” stabbed Dr. Thomas B. Rider, described by locals as the “acknowledged leader” of Hot Springs’ drumming doctors. The stabbing resulted from “The long-fought and bitterly-waged war between the ‘ethical’ and the ‘drumming’ doctors of this resort,” according to witnesses.⁴³⁵ Physicians had constructed a livelihood around the thermal waters, for some a quite successful life. But a doctor’s success rested on keeping himself and the thermal waters legitimate, a pursuit some were willing to kill to maintain.

⁴³³ “What an Opportunity,” *Hot Springs Sentinel-Record*, c. 1905-1911, in RG 79, Box 333, NARA College Park; for attacks on Roosevelt federal overreach see “L’Etat, e’est Moi,” in *Puck* 56, no. 1434 (August 24, 1904).

⁴³⁴ “Suit Against Physicians,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 27 January 1904, 1.

⁴³⁵ “News from All Over Arkansas,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 12 May 1907, 3; “Dual With Knives,” *Fort Smith Times* (Fort Smith, AR), 12 May 1907, 13.

As medical officers at the Army and Navy Hospital created modernized treatments incorporating Hot Springs' thermal waters, "professional" physicians failed to create clear boundaries surrounding thermal water use in Hot Springs. The Federal Registration Board, with the help of the VPA, hoped that it could find physicians in Hot Springs with the "necessary qualifications and character" to administer the waters, waters held up as legitimate by the decades-long work in medical journals across the country. But pushback from "drummers" whose practices fell outside the prescribed boundaries blurred just who could use the waters.

Natural Allies

In the 1880s the officials on the ground representing the War Department and the Department of the Interior clashed over control of the thermal waters in Hot Springs. After the success of the Army and Navy General Hospital and Hot Springs' medical professionals organizing themselves and situating hydrotherapy as a legitimate and modern medical treatment, reservation officials in the first decades of the twentieth century reassessed their relationship with the hospital and its medical officers. Intent on protecting the virtue of the thermal waters for visitors and unable to enforce laws outside of its federal jurisdiction, the reservation sought a similar thermal water regimen as endorsed in the Army and Navy Hospital. The creation of a new position, Hot Springs Reservation Medical Director, brought about lasting changes to thermal water use on the reservation and committed Hot Springs as a health resort moving into the twentieth century. Simultaneously, reservation officials and boosters blurred the administrative line between the Army and Navy Hospital and the reservation to bolster the modern and legitimate cures and treatments arising out of the Valley of Vapors (Fig. 3.7).



Fig. 3.7: Panorama of Hot Springs. Army and Navy Hospital on the hillside and the reservation bathhouses beneath it; Lt. Col. James M. Loud Collection, Garland County Historical Society.

Administrators remained unable to counter the drumming evil that beset Hot Springs. They applauded the small victories, like the Federal Registration Board, as it “examined a large number of applicants who desired to establish themselves here [in Hot Springs] and prescribe the use of the hot waters, many of whom were found devoid of proper medical knowledge.” But Superintendent W. Scott Smith frustratingly reported that “A good many of those who failed remained here and became street fakers,” selling rainwater or river water to desperate invalids and visitors, thereby harming the curative brand of the thermal waters on the reservation.⁴³⁶ By 1912, Interior officials admitted to frustrated citizens that “this Department has no control whatever over the affairs of the City of Hot Springs... the Government is powerless to render assistance in the premises.”⁴³⁷ Gambling and drumming would continue to be a problem for reservation and national park officials throughout the twentieth century.

Reservation officials turned inward to shore up the medicinal legitimacy of the thermal waters on federal property. Reports from private individuals as well as government agencies

⁴³⁶ Smith, “1908 Superintendent Report” in *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, 540.

⁴³⁷ Assistant Secretary of the Interior to William Burgess, American Vigilance Association, 7 October 1912, RG 79, Box 333, NARA College Park.

demonstrated the endemic nature of drumming in Hot Springs. “I declare the Federal Medical Board a farce and therefore of little or no benefit whatever in eradicating the evil of drumming,” declared Dr. James C. Minor. Minor was one of the town’s respected physicians, serving overseas and endorsing thermal water treatments abroad. Describing the reservation as “unsanitary,” Minor faulted bathhouse owners, noting that “ignorance or indolence prevails in the bathing houses,” leading to “No progress in the scientific use of the waters” pursued by Minor and the other “well meaning doctors in advancing or exploiting the true value of the waters.”⁴³⁸ Minor’s complaints were echoed by a 1910 official report by Robert Maitland O’Reilly, former Surgeon General of the U.S. Army, sent to conduct a thorough inspection of the reservation. Maitland was familiar with the thermal water regimens coming out of the Army and Navy Hospital from 1902-1909. His visit to Hot Springs sounded an alarm to reservation officials:

The dressing and cooling rooms [in the Government Free Bathhouse] are foul, infested with vermin and crowded with a horde of people, black and white, some with open ulcers. The attendants are ignorant of their duties, some are illiterate. The atmosphere is indescribable. Filthy rags, soaked with pus from syphilitic ulcers, are found on the floors.

This dire situation forced reservation officials to reassess how visitors took the waters. The War Department suggested deploying a full-time medical director to the reservation to administer treatment of the waters to patients and patrons. The Interior Department endorsed the War Department’s idea, as well as its candidate: Major Harry M. Hallock.

Harry Hallock was born in Jersey City, New Jersey, on October 14, 1867. He graduated from New York’s College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1890, progressing through the ranks as the profession was just beginning to organize and modernize medical practice. He served as a medical officer in the Army from 1892 until 1908, when injuries, which had plagued him for

⁴³⁸ James C. Minor to Frank W. Pierce, 6 January 1909, RG 79, Box 333, NARA College Park.

most of his life, forced him into an early medical discharge. Upon receiving the medical director position in the summer of 1910, Hallock immediately went to work under his charges to supervise sanitation, hygiene, and hydrotherapy for all visitors using the waters on and off the reservation; to administer the Government Free Bathhouse; to educate and oversee training for bathhouse attendants; and to determine the fitness, physical and educational, of all present attendants (Fig. 3.8). Hallock approached these duties as a doctor examining a patient in need of recovery. Speaking to superintendents from across the country at their annual National Park Conference in 1911, Hallock's plan for Hot Springs included "Symptomatic treatment of existing evils and objectionable conditions will result in improvement."⁴³⁹ To secure this result, Hallock recommended razing the Government Free Bathhouse, citing the fact that the reservation administered nearly 4,000,000 baths to indigents since 1890 and the excessive use created deteriorating conditions.

⁴³⁹ Harry M. Hallock, "The Medical Side of the Hot Springs Reservation," Proceedings of the National Park Conference Held at Yellowstone National Park, September 11-12, 1911, <http://npshistory.com/series/symposia/npc/1/sec5.htm>.



Fig. 3.8: Major Harry M. Hallock, Hot Springs Medical Director, 1910-1913; National Park Service, from Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 192.

Hallock was a staunch advocate for Progressive policies that not only emphasized a faith in expertise to implement policy, but also in enforcement strategies that increased the federal government's role in individuals' daily lives in order to quell societal ills. For example, while crusades against drumming routinely stalled as reservation officials lacked jurisdiction in Hot Springs, Hallock repeatedly suggested federal control over the entire city. In 1911, Hallock proposed the creation of a health officer for the town and "a sanitary squad for the city of Hot

Springs,”⁴⁴⁰ mimicking language used by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, founded just three years earlier. Hallock absorbed these lessons and wrote them into the Hot Springs landscape. Hallock also overhauled the requirements for bathhouse attendants on the reservation, the majority of which were African American. Interior’s Chief Clerk Clement Ucker warned if Hallock “undertake[s] to be peremptory and dictatorial or have a harsh and critical manner,” the attendants “will in all liklihood [sic] oppose you and trouble will result.” Ucker framed his warnings under racist assumptions: “these bathhouse attendants, as I said, are all negroes, and if they should be pushed too closely to the wall, there is a possibility that they might strike.”⁴⁴¹ Hallock apparently did not focus much on the wants of attendants, and moved forward with sweeping new requirements for workers. He created and enforced a strict application process for bathhouse attendants that required applicants to complete classes and pass written exams to be certified. Those who failed, 59 of the 178 applicants, according to Hallock, suffered from “varying degrees of illiteracy, alcoholism, lack of attention to duty, and persistence in wearing old, unsightly, and dirty clothes” imbuing a social requirement coupled to therapeutic knowledge.⁴⁴² The new regulations forced out many men and women, all in Hallock’s crusade to preserve the virtue of the waters.

Lastly, Hallock worked to legitimize the medicinal virtue of the thermal waters. In 1912, he wrote to the Secretary of the Interior that “Many representative nonresident practitioners view the therapeutic resources of hot springs with distrust” and “It is evident that there is a suspicion

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Clement Ucker to Harry Hallock, 29 July 1910; Box A7615, File No. A7615.1903-1913.5, Hot Springs National Park Archives.

⁴⁴² Harry M. Hallock, “Report of the Medical Director of the Hot Springs Reservation, Ark.,” 22 August 1911, in *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), 761.

in the minds of some that the water of the hot springs has no curative properties.”⁴⁴³ He reinforced the curative knowledge built by years of boosters, officials, and physicians by obtaining confirmation from medical professionals from across the country. Hallock deemed the investigation “absolutely essential.”⁴⁴⁴ He obtained support for an investigation from physicians at the preeminent medical schools in the United States as well as executive members of the American Medical Association. In his appeals, Hallock tied in the work of the Army and Navy General Hospital, suggesting that cooperation with the installation would “determine the legitimate therapeutic value of the water, and to secure the respect and support of the medical profession.”⁴⁴⁵

Residents met Hallock’s actions with anger as well as praise with fault lines developing between scorned physicians in town and the reputable class of Hot Springs doctors. Hallock boosted requirements for physicians as well, endorsing an examination as part of the Federal Registration Board application. The exam consisted of a wide range of topics from *materia medica* to surgery, as well as a section dedicated to hydrotherapy. V.E. Duren, upon failing his exam in January 1912 with a score of 66% and therefore unable to appear as a registered physician in town, took to the press months later to air his grievances. He, according to the *Arkansas Democrat*, “vigorously assailed what he termed the arbitrary power of the Federal registration board.”⁴⁴⁶ On the other side of the debate, James C. Minor argued to the editors of one of Hot Springs’ local papers that Medical Director Hallock should be in charge of the

⁴⁴³ Harry Hallock to Secretary of the Interior, 19 April 1912, in “Appendix: Physiological and Therapeutical Effects of the Waters of the Hot Springs of Arkansas,” “Report of the Medical Director of Hot Springs Reservation” in *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1912), 840-841

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁵ Harry Hallock to Secretary of the Interior, 8 February 1912, “Appendix: Physiological and Therapeutical Effects of the Waters of the Hot Springs of Arkansas,” 852.

⁴⁴⁶ “Dr. Jernigan Heads Eclectic Physicians,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 15 May 1912, 3; For Duren’s examination score his removal from the registered physicians list by Hallock, see Harry Hallock to Secretary of the Interior, 4 January 1912, HOSP 19266, Box 45, Folder 7, Hot Springs National Park Archives.

reservation. “A superintendent alone,” reasoned Minor, “has proven of no value in past years either in gaining the respect of the nation for our waters.” More importantly, past officials had proven unable to express the “greatest of all points of development” in Hot Springs: “that of arriving at any conclusions with regard to the study of the hydro-therapeutic values of the waters.”⁴⁴⁷ Minor and other professional physicians in Hot Springs sought the work and results coming out of the Army and Navy Hospital, but on the reservation and in town.

Unfortunately, Hallock was unable to complete many of the monumental projects he began. On May 19, 1913, after fighting through more surgeries on his failing body, Hallock left a note on his desk stating, “Have been fighting melancholia for weeks, and can no longer resist impulse to destroy my family and myself.” Witnesses reported a man in military attire carrying a package and walking up West Mountain on the reservation. A search party found Hallock’s body on the mountainside that afternoon, killed by an apparent gunshot wound to the head (Fig. 3.9).⁴⁴⁸ Interior did not appoint another medical director. This omission was partly a political maneuver as Woodrow Wilson, a Democrat, had just taken office and appointed a new department secretary, Franklin K. Lane, who declined to appoint a new director. It also stemmed from three years of tension administrative tension between Hallock and the reservation superintendent, Harry Myers. Bickering between the two over who held absolute authority tried the patience of Interior officials, who contemplated summoning both men to Washington.⁴⁴⁹ After Hallock’s death, Myers and subsequent superintendents assumed control of Hallock’s responsibilities and park records do not reveal any petitions for a new medical director.

⁴⁴⁷ James C. Minor to Editors, Hot Springs Daily News, 9 September 1912; Box A7615, File No. A7615.1903-1913.4, Hot Springs National Park Archives.

⁴⁴⁸ “Major Hallock is Victim of Gun,” *Hot Springs New Era*, 19 May 1913, 1; “Medical Director H. M. Hallock Kills Himself on the Mountain Side,” *Hot Springs Sentinel-Record* 20 May 1913.

⁴⁴⁹ Clement Ucker to Harry Myers; letter Box A7615, File No. A7615.1903-1913.4, Hot Springs National Park Archives.

EXTRA

HOT SPRINGS NEW ERA.

EXTRA

CIRCULATION RECORDS AND ACCOUNTS OPEN TO ADVERTISERS TO PROVE LARGEST CIRCULATION IN HOT SPRINGS

VOL. VII.—NO. 231.

MONDAY AFTERNOON, MAY 19, 1913.

PRICE FIVE CENTS.

MAJOR HALLOCK IS VICTIM OF GUN

MEDICAL DIRECTOR OF U.S. RESERVATION DEAD

Body Of Prominent Army Officer Found By Friends Who Were Searching For It Near Whittington Park.

THE NOTE WHICH STARTED THE SEARCH.

Have been fighting melancholia and an impulse to destroy myself and family.

The above note was found on Major Hallock's desk by Superintendent Harry Meyers of the United States Reservation, which caused him to start a search for Major Hallock.

Major Harry M. Hallock, medical director of the Hot Springs United States Reservation, was found dead about 4 o'clock this afternoon near the Ostrich Farm.

The body was found by Harry Meyers, Superintendent of the Reservation; and Mr. Nelson, who had conducted a search for Major Hallock, who had been missing since morning.

The place at which the body was found is a lonely spot in the woods about a half mile north of the Ostrich Farm and Whittington Park.

The causes of death were gunshot wounds and it is believed, poison, as an empty bottle was found near at hand.

A bullet from a .45 calibre Colts pistol had entered the right temple and come out at the back and top of his head.

The hands were crossed on the stomach and the gun lay at the side of the body.

Consul General Harry Moore of the United States Depart-

WOODMEN UNVEIL MONUMENT SUNDAY

Ladies of the Circle and Members of the Two Camps Take Part

Very impressive ceremonies were held in Hollywood cemetery yesterday afternoon by the ladies of the Circle and the men of the two camps, jointly, at the unveiling of the monument erected by the Woodmen of the World to the memory of Mrs. Mahala Church, Mrs. Margaret M. Smith and George F. McClendon.

All taking part in the program acquitted themselves well. Particular mention is accorded the work of the trio and quartette and of the officers and members of the circle and camp; the excellent appearance and drill of the uniformed detachment under Captain Olin; the recitation of Miss Artie Orr and the oration of Post Commander J. S. McConnell.

Ledgerwood's band was present with appropriate selections, which temptingly shortened the distance on the march to and from the cemetery.

W. T. Hawkins served as master of ceremonies and as usual tried to have each participant in the exercises in place at proper time and see that the program was carried out smoothly.

The day being an ideal one for an occasion of this kind, everything seemed to happen happily and seemed to be the most successful gatherings ever held in this jurisdiction.

GRAND JURY MEETS TODAY

Every Justice of Peace in Garland County is Summoned Today

The Garland County Grand Jury met this morning at the Court House. It is thought that much important business will come before the jury.

To Advertise Hot Springs On An Automobile

Party of Local Men to Ride In Auto from Kansas City to San Diego

Joseph Mills, W. S. Booth and T. L. Fugitt, formerly of the Arlington Studio, left yesterday for Kansas City, where they will secure an automobile and leave in a few days for Denver, Cheyenne, Ogden, Utah, San Francisco and San Diego, Cal. They will carry a banner on the automobile advertising Hot Springs. Views will be taken all along the route and sent back to the Business Men's League.

A big banner on the automobile will read from Hot Springs to San Diego. They will remain in California until after the fair and then return to this city. They expect to be on the road about eight months.

ARE ENFORCING SANITARY LAW

J. H. Blair is the First Arrested For Violating the Ordinance

The first arrest for violating the sanitary ordinance was made Saturday. J. H. Blair was arrested and fined \$5 in Police Court this morning.

This is the only arrest made so far for not obeying the ordinance that Mayor J. W. McClendon announced he will have enforced strictly.

Thursday was "Clean Up Day" in Hot Springs. Mayor J. W. McClendon said that all residents who didn't have their premises free from trash and filth after that day would be arrested.

The Civic Club has been doing a whole lot toward the enforcement of the law. Each citizen has been asked to see that his neighbor keeps

TRY W. M. WOOD FOR DYNAMITING

Multi-Millionaire Owner of Woolen Mills to Face Charges Today

BOSTON, May 19.—Charged with conspiring to plant dynamite in an attempt to discredit the Lawrence textile strikers in 1912, William M. Wood, multi-millionaire president of the American Woolen Company, sometimes call the "Woolen Trust" and alleged to have been a powerful factor in the writing of the Payne-Aldrich tariff's schedule K, today was placed on trial in the Suffolk Superior Court.

Unlike previous trials in which there has been labor on one side and capital on the other, the trial of Wood presents the reversed aspect of capital the defendant and labor the accuser. Facing Justice Brown with Wood, were Frederick E. Atkinson, a Boston manufacturer of textile mill accessories, and Dennis Collins, a Cambridge dog fancier. The three men were indicted last August by a special Grand Jury called to investigate the matter shortly after John J. Breck, an undertaker of Lawrence, Mass., and school commissioner at the time, was found guilty of planting the dynamite and was fined \$300 after he refused to take the stand in his own behalf.

Before the trial opened today great crowds filled the court house. Prominent labor leaders and Socialists were among those who literally stormed the doors to get into court. Evidence of the intense interest in the proceedings was shown in the installation of telegraph wires in the court house for the first time in the history of court hearings in Boston. District Attorney Joseph C. Pelletier and his assistant, A. C. Webber, appeared for the defendants. Since his indictment Wood has been at liberty on \$5,000 cash bail. The same bail was set for the other two defendants.

CITY COUNCIL TO MEET TONIGHT

Will Hear Report by Board of Health on Garbage Plant

Neighbors Have Complained That Unhealthy Odors Come From Plant

A special meeting of the City Council has been called tonight by Mayor J. W. McClendon for the purpose of hearing a report by the Board of Health on the garbage plant on Galusha Creek. The members of the board made the inspection Saturday.

Much complaint has been registered against this plant during the past few weeks. The residents in the neighborhood say that bad odors come from the place and that it is a menace to the health of the neighborhood.

The matter was brought to the attention of Mayor J. W. McClendon and he ordered the Board of Health to make an inspection to ascertain if the conditions complained of existed and called a special meeting of the City Council for the purpose of hearing this report and taking some definite action on the matter.

The plant in question is located near the edge of the city on Galusha Creek. It is operated by H. Murray under contract with the city to burn all garbage. It is supposed to be odorless.

Much complaint was made against the plant some time ago and the City Council bought a site on the Ouachita River and ordered it moved there. It was supposed to have been moved by March 1.

COUNTY FARM TO SOON PAY

HOOR OF HANGING HAS NOT BEEN SET

Sheriff Hogaboom Says He Will Give Schumann All Time Law Allows

EVERYTHING IN READINESS

Execution Has to Take Place Between Sunup and Sundown Friday

The hour at which Clarence Schumann, convicted of killing his wife just June, shall be hanged Friday, May 23, has not been set by Sheriff C. C. Hogaboom. The death warrant reads that he shall be hanged by the neck from sun up to sun down until he is dead.

"I will not set the hour of Schumann's execution until I have heard definitely from Governor Puttrill whether he intends to interfere," said Sheriff Hogaboom. "In case I have not heard from the Governor by Friday, he will not be hanged until the last moment the law allows in order to give the Governor time to commute his sentence if he intends to."

The usual hour for hanging is high noon. The Sheriff would not state if he intended to carry out the order of the court at that hour in case the Governor says he will not interfere.

Everything is in readiness for the execution. The gallows has been constructed and every preparation made. Several have informed Sheriff Hogaboom they know how to make the hangman's knot, but he has not yet accepted their services. However, he intends to see that everything goes off without a hitch.

The gallows was constructed by C. C. Markham, C. Brown and E. M. Martin. It was designed by Sheriff Hogaboom and Martin. The Sheriff made a sketch to be followed by the carpenters. It is modeled after the gallows used in this State with a trap door supported by a lever.

Fig. 3.9: Front Page of *Hot Springs New Era* extra edition reporting Harry Hallock's suicide; "Major Hallock is Victim of Gun," *Hot Springs New Era*, 19 May 1913, 1.

Hallock's tenure changed the hydrological and social makeup of the Hot Springs Reservation and blurred the distinct boundary lines between park, military hospital, and Southern town. His attention to the sanitary conditions on the reservation caused the first real regulations for the pay bathhouses. Soon the push for clean establishments forced most bathhouse owners to completely raze their former structures and build new, modern facilities, in line with the publicity endorsing the success rate of thermal water treatments at the Army and Navy Hospital.

But Hallock also opened opportunities for more to access the thermal waters. In 1911, he highlighted the “great need for some form of hospital service to afford relief to those who come to avail themselves of the privileges of the Government free baths.”⁴⁵⁰ Following up on Hallock’s recommendation, Congress appropriated monies for the Levi Memorial Hospital. The charitable facility, opened in 1914, supplied thousands of baths every year, creating another point for indigent travelers to take in the waters.

Originally adversaries fighting over control of the thermal waters in the 1880s, by the early twentieth century the Army and Navy General Hospital and Hot Springs Reservation both made health and the virtue of the thermal waters a primary concern. While the reservation and the hospital were two distinct locations, administered by two different government departments, as the waters transcended park boundaries visitors equated the successes of soldiers, sailors, and veterans at the hospital, a place off-limits to civilians, with their relief and recovery on the reservation and in the bathhouses. In 1895, citing a report from the surgeon in charge of the Army and Navy Hospital, Superintendent William J. Little stated that 82 percent of soldiers and sailors treated at the hospital returned to duty which “conclusively prove the value of the hot waters in the treatment of the diseases for which they are recommended.”⁴⁵¹ Later, Superintendent Martin Eisele noted that the hospital stood as “a testimonial to the progressive medical department of the U.S. Army in its recognition and advocacy of these thermal springs as a valuable adjunct in the treatment of many diseases incidental to army life.”⁴⁵² James Rudolph, an Army veteran who benefited from his stay at the Army and Navy Hospital, told the *Arkansas*

⁴⁵⁰ Harry M. Hallock, “Report of the Medical Director of the Hot Springs Reservation, Ark.,” 22 August 1911, in *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), 759.

⁴⁵¹ William J. Little, *Annual Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation*, U.S. Department of the Interior, June 30, 1895, 805.

⁴⁵² Martin Eisele, “Historical Sketch of the Army and Navy Hospital,” undated, Garland County Historical Society, vertical file “Army Navy General Hospital,” Folder “Hospital: Army / Navy Hospital Holiday Menus (1926-1958) (1916 ALSO).

Democrat in 1898 that “If Hot Springs were better advertised undoubtedly more would come from my part of the country... and I have observed that physicians are unable to cure it [rheumatism] permanently unaided by the hot waters.”⁴⁵³ Reservation officials used the success and patriotic fervor of the period to connect the Army and Navy General Hospital to the Hot Springs Reservation. On paper, the two establishments were mutually exclusive, neighboring installations managed by two distinct departments in the federal government. The Army and Navy General Hospital was a military facility. Visiting patients and patrons could not explore the grounds of the hospital the same way they could the government reservation, with walk along the landscaped Promenade after a bath or a hike up Hot Springs Mountain. But boosters and reservation officials used the thermal waters to couple these neighbors together under one public message of rest, recovery, and national health.

It did not take long for Hot Springs advertisers to blur the distinct line between the reservation and the Army and Navy Hospital. Boundaries became as fluid as the thermal water resource traversing the two locales. Hot Springs businesses believed the curative success rate at the Army and Navy Hospital was a winning sales’ strategy to bring more citizens to town and take in the thermal water resource in any of the bathhouses along the world-famous Bathhouse Row. Newspapers from across the country repeatedly drew on one symbol to bring the two establishments together: Uncle Sam. A 1912 ad for the Chicago & Alton’s Iron Mountain Route, a track which claimed, “The famous Hot Springs of Arkansas are reached ONLY by this LINE,”⁴⁵⁴ showed Uncle Sam directing visitors on “the road to health,” pointing towards the Army and Navy Hospital instead of the federal reservation as an injured soldier checks in to take the thermal water treatment at the hospital. Could the ad be directed towards veterans across the

⁴⁵³ “Chats with Visitors,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 13 October 1898, 3.

⁴⁵⁴ Ad for the Missouri Pacific Railway, *Topeka Plaindealer*, 20 July 1900, 3.

country, as it then claimed, “96 per cent [of servicemen] are returned to duty”? Not likely, as in the same breath, the ad asked, “**If only ONE soldier and sailor** out of 25 treated is *not* returned to duty... is not HOT SPRINGS the place for *you* to come for those **Rheumatic Pains?**”⁴⁵⁵ The ad then listed the secretary of the Hot Springs Men’s Business League as its contact, not a medical officer at the hospital (Fig. 3.10). Local boosters often used Uncle Sam iconography and allusions when describing Hot Springs since the federal government had a presence in the town since 1832. Booster John Cutter declared, “‘UNCLE SAM’ INVITES YOU OVER,” advertising Hot Springs as “The World’s Greatest Health and Pleasure Resort Town Owned and Controlled by the United States Government.”⁴⁵⁶ “Uncle Sam’s Hot Springs,” the local Arkadelphia *Southern Standard* reported in 1916, were a public resource open to the nation, where “Not a drop of this water is sold. From the various springs one may drink it by the cup and carry it away by the gallon.”⁴⁵⁷ These outlets viewed the hospital as an appendage of the federal reservation, hailing the installation as a refuge “for Uncle Sam’s sick and infirm.”⁴⁵⁸ Hot Springs’ thermal waters represented a national restorative resource which healed all Americans, whether they fought a personal disease at home or a foreign enemy thousands of miles away.

⁴⁵⁵ Chicago & Alton Railroad Ad, *Chicago Tribune*, 7 January 1912, 66.

⁴⁵⁶ Charles Cutter, *Cutter’s Guide to the Hot Springs of Arkansas* (St. Louis: Slawson & Co., 1910), excerpt appears in *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 16 May 1911, 44.

⁴⁵⁷ “Uncle Sam’s Hot Springs,” *Southern Standard* (Arkadelphia, AR), 4 May 1916, 2.

⁴⁵⁸ “Hot Springs,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 17 August 1897, 4.

The Hot Springs of Arkansas
OWNED, CONTROLLED AND SUPERVISED BY THE
United States Government



**Two Hundred Thousand
Visitors Took the Baths
Last Year**

Army and Navy Hospital



**Uncle Sam Points
the Road to Health**

The World's Greatest Cure for Rheumatism

Soldiers and Sailors of the United States in any part of the world, when attacked by rheumatism are sent to the Magnificent Army and Navy General Hospital at the HOT SPRINGS of Arkansas.

Result: 96 per cent are returned to duty.

ACCOMMODATIONS range from the highest class, most up-to-date hotels in America, to small and moderate priced boarding houses. The **Golf Grounds** are said to be the best situated, naturally, in the country and are kept up to a high degree of perfection. **Golf, Tennis** and all out-door sports can be indulged in here more days in the year than anywhere else in America. **Automobile and Carriage Roads**, surrounded by the unexcelled scenery of the Ozarks abound—while horse-back riding, in and around Hot Springs, is at its best.

If only ONE soldier and sailor out of 25 treated is *not* returned to duty, and the records show that even this *one* was benefited, (making the record 100 per cent benefited) is not HOT SPRINGS the place for *you* to come for those **Rheumatic Pains?**

For further detailed information, address or send the Inquiry Coupon, to
 GEO. R. BELDING, Sec'y, Business Men's League, Hot Springs, Ark.



**Daily Through Electric-Lighted Sleeping Car via
Chicago & Alton—Iron Mountain Route**

on the famous Alton Limited, leaving Chicago Union Station at 11.25 A.M. daily, running as Hot Springs Special via Iron Mountain Route from St. Louis. Arrives Hot Springs 10.05 next morning. Excellent dining car service (meals a la carte). For reservations, berths, tickets—and a beautiful booklet on railroad service and Hot Springs itself—address either of the ticket offices below.

Low Round-Trip Rates

Chicago & Alton
H. K. McEVROY, A. G. P. A.
Clark and Monroe Sts., Chicago, Ill.

Missouri Pacific Ry.
ELLIS FARNSWORTH, D. P. A.
110-12 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill.

Take the Baths at Hot Springs, Ark.

INQUIRY COUPON

Mr. George R. Belding,
Sec'y Business Men's League,
Hot Springs, Ark.

Please send, without cost or obligation to me, your booklet of views, and descriptive matter pertaining to Hot Springs. Also full information as to rates in hotels and boarding houses, prices of baths and other details that are of interest to a prospective visitor.

Name.....

Address.....

Town..... State.....

Fig. 3.10: Ad for Chicago and Alton Railroad's Iron Mountain Route; *Chicago Tribune*, January 7, 1912, 66.

The medical expertise of the Army and Navy Hospital did not remain confined to the War Department installation either. By the turn of the twentieth century, animosities between reservation and hospital officials had cooled and the departments found common ground to work together, along with the local medical community. One of these initiatives was a free dispensary at the reservation's Government Free Bathhouse. The general hospital's commanding officer, H.O. Perley, administered the dispensary's work. Perley arrived in town in 1895 and since then had, according to Hot Springs' physicians, "endeared himself to the profession in our city by

courteous treatment and his splendid qualifications as a practitioner of medicine.”⁴⁵⁹ It is not surprising then that Perley staffed the dispensary with “able” Hot Springs physicians like J.C. Minor and Paul Turner Vaughan; both men were members of the Hot Springs Medical Society and regularly contributed to the town’s medical journal. Superintendent Little tied the work of Perley and the local physicians on reservation property to the public project of thermal water treatments. Touting how the waters in the Government Free Bathhouse have “cured hundreds upon hundreds of helpless, indigent people and put them on the road to become again at least self-sustaining if not useful citizens,” Little believed the added dispensary was “at once the greatest and most far-reaching of any charity in the United States, and one of which the Government has a great reason to be proud.”⁴⁶⁰ In just a little over a decade the space around the Army and Navy Hospital had transformed from a contested landscape between government departments to a shared space where thermal waters improved the physical and social lives of patients.

Visitors absorbed public material that blurred the boundaries between the reservation and the hospital, presenting Hot Springs as a peaceful place for rest, recovery, and recreation. Boosters again attached national restorative rhetoric to the reservation and the military installation as foreign wars again brought the Army and Navy General Hospital into full view. As the Mexican Revolution raged near the United States’ southern border and the rumblings of war moved across Europe by the spring of 1914, a reporter for the *Hot Springs New Era* calmly asserted, “but at Uncle Sam’s big sanitarium, the Army and Navy Hospital, all is serene.”⁴⁶¹ That same year, the hospital received a \$60,000 appropriation for general improvements, one third of

⁴⁵⁹ “Editorial,” *Hot Springs Medical Journal* 8, No. 9 (15 September 1899), 283.

⁴⁶⁰ William Little, *Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation*, June 30, 1899, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/reports/hosp/1899a.htm.

⁴⁶¹ “All is Serene at Uncle Sam’s Big Hospital,” *Hot Springs New Era*, 23 April 1914, 1.

which went to a “new bathing establishment” containing “the latest and most scientific hydro-therapeutic facilities.”⁴⁶² Boosters touted the Army and Navy Hospital as the local par excellence institution in town as the nation prepared to receive injured men from any battlefield. Little Rock’s *Arkansas Democrat* claimed “Uncle Sam’s big hospital in ‘the valley of vapors’ will be found ready and fully equipped to take care of those wounded or injured. The doctrine of ‘preparedness’ has not been preached in vain by President Wilson where this great institution is concerned. It is ready.”⁴⁶³

A coordinated effort by medical officers in the Army and Navy General Hospital, self-proclaimed medical professionals in Hot Springs, and reservation officials like Medical Director Harry Hallock created and sustained the thermal waters’ therapeutic success in the first decades of the twentieth century. As the fight against drumming reached a state of arrested development in the city of Hot Springs, reservation officials looked inward to improve visitors thermal water experience. The reforms by Medical Director Harry Hallock aligned the thermal waters with larger Progressive-Era themes of sanitation, hygiene and social control. Sharing in a concerted effort to legitimize the medicinal virtue of the waters, the hospital and the reservation, once staunch adversaries in the 1880s, became allies, bolstered by boosters who worked to blur the line between separate administrative entities in an effort to create a larger valley of health.

* * * * *

Whereas scholars have argued that “The reworking of medical schools... effectively crowded out environmental thinking in what many clinicians were taught,” the hydraulic system

⁴⁶² “Improvements Being Made on Big Army and Navy Hospital,” *The Journal and Tribune* (Knoxville, TN), 8 June 1914, 2.

⁴⁶³ “Army and Navy Hospital at Hot Springs is Ready to Receive Wounded from Mexico,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 22 June 1916, 4.

in Hot Springs piped unique environmental resources directly into the hospital.⁴⁶⁴ Outside of the Army and Navy Hospital, self-proclaimed medical professionals in Hot Springs battled to legitimize themselves and the thermal waters against outside claims of quackery and internal fights with “drummers” intent on using the waters along with accepted professionals. Understanding the permanence and popularity of the hospital, reservation officials and local advertisers used the park’s thermal waters to blur the previously rigid political boundaries and welcome medical officers and the hospital into a larger thermal water community promoting rest, recovery, and recreation.

In fact, the Army and Navy Hospital in Hot Springs set a precedent for other military installations that took advantage of the nation’s thermal water resources. Boosters in Hot Springs, South Dakota, mimicked the strategies and language from their Southern counterpart to make the Black Hills site a popular place of health and leisure by the late nineteenth century. In the 1890s, as veterans made the trip to Arkansas to take the waters at the Army and Navy Hospital, Captain Henry E. Palmer, on the Board of Managers for the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, an organization established immediately after the Civil War to assist injured volunteers, began suggesting ailing veterans travel north to the South Dakota hot springs as well. The Board “thoroughly investigat[ed] all health resorts of the country.”⁴⁶⁵ At Hot Springs, they witnessed the curative powers of the thermal waters at work under the management of medical officers and professionals. In 1890, the board voted unanimously for a hospital reserved only for veterans in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Of the 22,000 disabled soldiers in Soldiers’ Homes, 3,500 were in hospitals, “their leading afflictions was rheumatism,” according to the Board. “Perhaps 2,000, would, without doubt, be benefited by treatment at a sanitary branch of

⁴⁶⁴ See Sellers, “To Place or Not to Place,” 11; Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, 112-123.

⁴⁶⁵ “Battle Mountain Sanitarium for Disabled Soldiers of the United States,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 26 May 1907.

the National Home established at Hot Springs, Ark.” With the Army and Navy Hospital fully operational and already catering to veterans, Congress rejected the resolution, and Palmer and the Board moved on to other thermal spring sites.

They settled on South Dakota. Palmer secured funds from Congress, \$800,000, to build the 4,000-acre Battle Mountain Sanitarium in 1902. Situated directly above the elegant stone bathhouses in town, the layout and purpose were a carbon copy of Hot Springs, Arkansas (Fig. 3.11). Opened in 1907, newspapers deemed the installation “Uncle Sam’s Hospital for his soldiers.”⁴⁶⁶ The spring waters again served to focus the attention for the hospital’s purpose. Described as “medicinal” by reports, the waters flowed into baths for veterans, leased by private interests who controlled the resource. In almost identical language to Hot Springs, Arkansas, boosters for the Black Hills also used the hospital as a tacit endorsement of the power of the waters. The Chicago and North Western Railway proclaimed “A most notable recognition of the value of Hot Springs as a health resort is the fact that the United States Government has here built a national sanitarium for disabled soldiers.”⁴⁶⁷ Its first year, the hospital averaged 180 full beds, half its 356-bed capacity. By 1914, that number had risen to an average of 200.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁶ “Uncle Sam’s Great Hospital for His Soldiers,” *Buffalo Sunday Morning News*, 5 May 1907, 14.

⁴⁶⁷ Chicago & North Western Railway, *The Black Hills South Dakota: The Richest Hundred Miles Square in the World* (Chicago, Chicago & North Western Railway, 1909), 16-19.

⁴⁶⁸ Figures come from annual reports of *National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers*, Figures for 1907 on 523 of 1907 report; for 1914 on 231 of 1915 report.

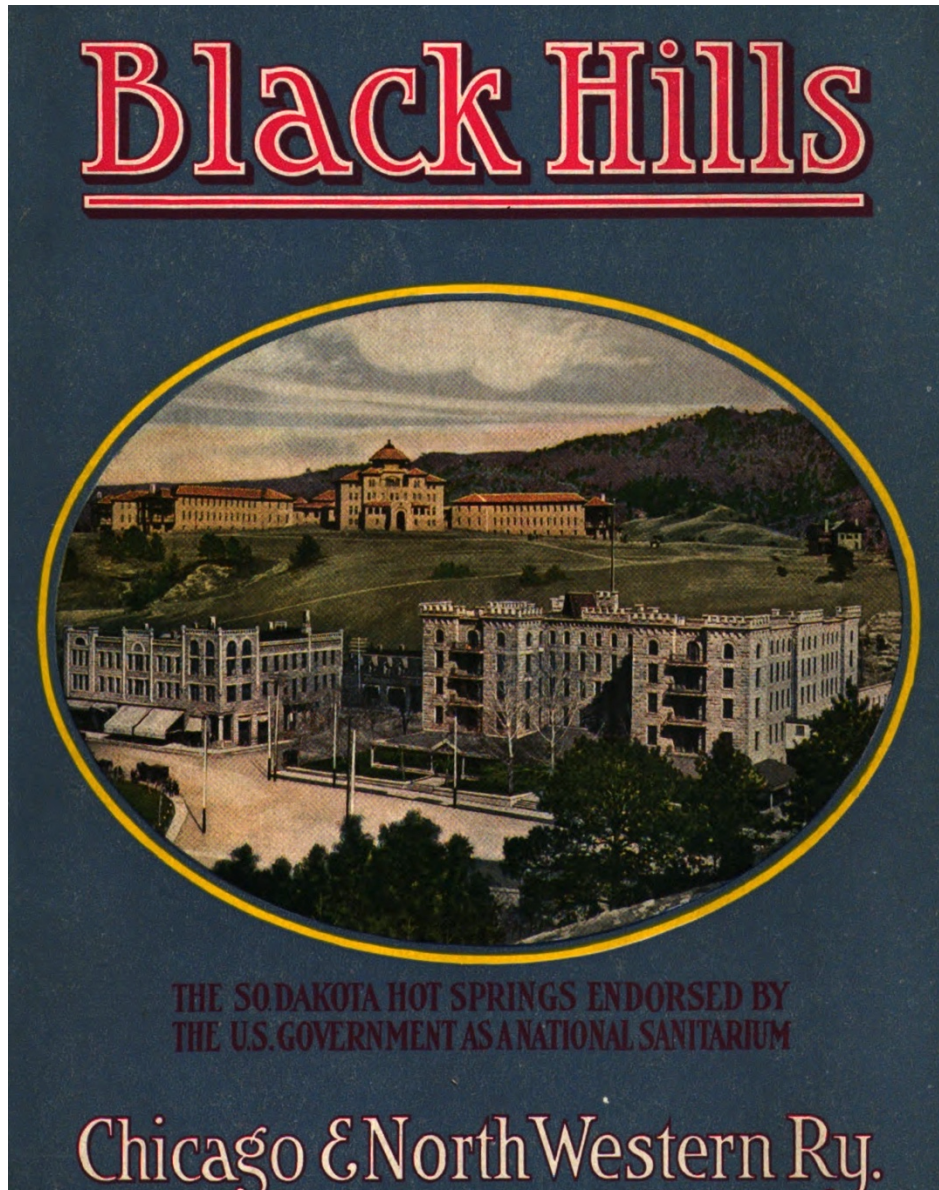


Fig. 3.11: Cover of Chicago & North Western Railway brochure for the Black Hills, 1909. Look at the similarities between Battle Mountain and the Army and Navy Hospital (Fig. 3.7); Chicago & North Western Railway, *The Black Hills South Dakota: The Richest Hundred Miles Square in the World*.

The example of Battle Mountain demonstrates how ideas about the medicinal value of thermal water in a modernizing medical profession first incubated in Hot Springs flourished at the start of the twentieth century. Medical officers, the town's professional physicians, and reservation officials experimented with how best to administer the waters and who could best serve the needs of patients, whether they be soldiers, sailors, veterans, or civilians.

Superintendent Martin Eisele recounted the “adverse assaults, jealous rivalry and narrow political prejudice” surrounding the early years of the Army and Navy Hospital after he retired in 1907.⁴⁶⁹ But it was these exact assaults, rivalries, and prejudices were necessary in order to create the idea of Hot Springs’ water as a legitimate medicinal resource, endorsed by the federal government, that physicians marketed to curious patients and patrons, in Hot Springs and into the West.

⁴⁶⁹ Martin Eisele, “Historical Sketch of the Army and Navy Hospital,” 1; Vertical File “Hospitals: Army and Navy,” Garland County Historical Society, Hot Springs AR.

Chapter 4: Out of the Fire and into the Water: Access, Identity, and Hydrological Mobility in Hot Springs' Black Bathhouses

In the winter of 1925, Tony Langston, a veteran reporter for the *Chicago Defender*, needed to get out of the Windy City. The long-time theater and blues critic at one of the nation's largest African American newspapers told his readers he felt "bawled out" in Chicago and escaped to "the heart of the Ozarks." Travelling south in the 1920s was a treacherous endeavor as Langston, like many other African American men and women, faced restrictions of their civil rights and the threat of racial violence. In his previous travels, Langston often stayed in establishments in the South he described as "humiliating," products of Jim Crow where African Americans were often shut out of capital and uplift opportunities. To his great relief, however, Langston found the obverse when he arrived in Hot Springs, Arkansas. There he came across the elegant Pythian Bathhouse, built by the Knights of Pythias of North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa, one of the nation's Black fraternal orders, in 1914. The establishment housed a fifty-six-room hotel as well as a ten-room sanitarium "with one of the finest operating rooms in the world," alongside a world-renowned bathhouse. Hot Springs' thermal waters had long been renowned for their medicinal and therapeutic qualities, which Langston acknowledged by stating "the beneficial effects of the baths and water are too well known to need comment." He predicted, "It is great stuff and we hereby resolve that we will make Pythian bathhouse our Mecca once during each winter." The reporter had at last found his reprieve.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁷⁰ Tony Langston, "Bawled Out in Chicago and Boiled Out in Hot Springs," *Chicago Defender*, 24 January 1925, 6.

As Langston “boiled out” in Hot Springs, he encountered visitors from all across the country including Oklahoma, Florida, Georgia, Ohio, Massachusetts, New York, and even Washington State. The journalist lauded the Pythian as “an institution of which the K. of P.’s are justly proud and of which the members of the Race as a whole might boast without appearing ridiculous.” He added the Pythian “is so thoroughly appointed that it surpasses many of the great baths maintained for members of the opposite race on celebrated ‘Bathhouse Row.’”⁴⁷¹ By the 1920s, Hot Springs was, according to one Black periodical, the “garden spot in the Arkansas desert” for African Americans, a safe space produced by access to therapeutic thermal water, and the allure of bathhouses representing examples of racial pride.⁴⁷² In these establishments, Black fraternal organizations invested their growing capital reserves and established new revenue streams for their associations. The Knights of Pythias hoped their bathhouse would serve “folks desiring to take advantage of [the thermal water’s] health-giving accommodations” without the strictures of segregation.⁴⁷³ These bathhouses also secured access to the healing waters of Hot Springs National Park. How did this transformation happen and why did Hot Springs become such an important location for African American health and leisure?

Hot Springs thermal waters had not always been easy for African Americans to access. By the early twentieth century, the federal government drastically altered the hydrology of the town’s springs. Spring water emanating from deep below Hot Springs Mountain no longer remained at its discharge site on the hillside but was now contained in an elaborate system of collection reservoirs, pipes, and pumping stations which funneled the water to the town’s bathhouses. Previous chapters demonstrated not only where the water moved in this new

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² “Town Topics,” *The Light and “Heebie Jeebies,”* 3, no. 16 (March 12, 1927), 18.

⁴⁷³ Langston, “Bawled Out in Chicago and Boiled Out in Hot Springs,” 6.

hydraulic system, but how users connected the resource to changing trends around hydrotherapeutic health and a growing leisure discourse surrounding American national parks. As the new hydrological conditions preserved the purity of Hot Springs' thermal waters, the only places for visitors to access them were in buildings. These same establishments, however, were susceptible to the reality of segregation in the American South. Federal officials did not make top-down decisions about Hot Springs' thermal waters in a vacuum. "We are ruled by race in Arkansas," noted the historian Grif Stockley.⁴⁷⁴ Race and perceived racial difference had a long history in Arkansas and those same ideas seeped into Hot Springs, pervading ideas about the waters' purity, access, and health effects.

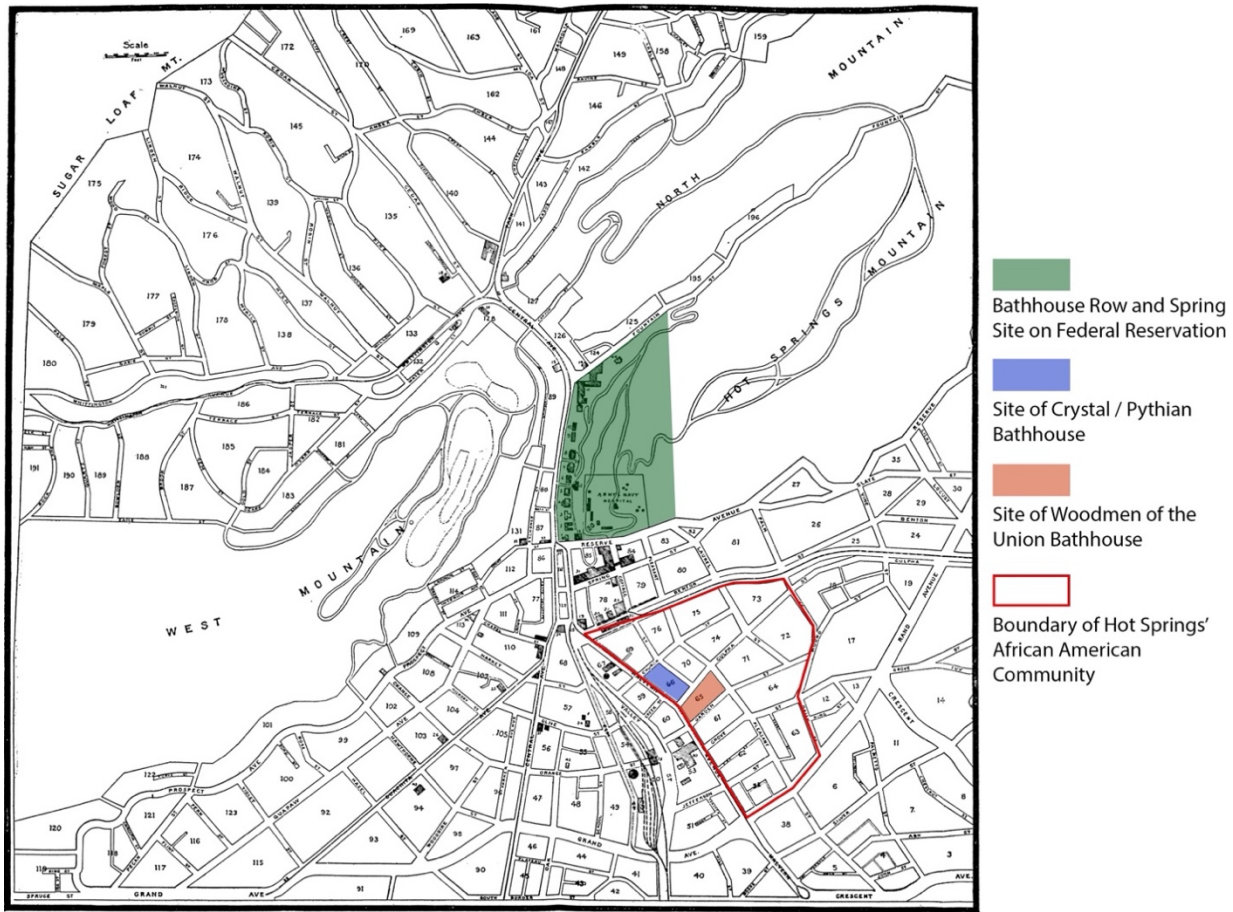
Hot Springs was a public space where race dictated many of the social norms in town and on the reservation. This relationship had parallels to other public recreational spaces in and out of the South. Interestingly, water orients many examples of black and white citizens clashing over public space and resources, from differences surrounding water fountains to beach access to water rights.⁴⁷⁵ Hot Springs offers a site to study the ways technological change intersected with Black resistance strategies to take the waters, a public resource, but also introduced new actors to

⁴⁷⁴ Grif Stockley, *Ruled By Race: Black/White Relations in Arkansas from Slavery to the Present* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2009), xv. See also Nan Elizabeth Woodruff, "The New Negro in the American Congo: World War I and the Elaine, Arkansas Massacre of 1919," in Charles M. Payne and Adam Green, eds., *Time Longer Than Rope: A Century of African American Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 150-78; Richard Allan Buckelew, "Racial Violence in Arkansas: Lynchings and Mob Rule, 1860—1930," PhD Diss (University of Arkansas, 1999).

⁴⁷⁵ Victoria Wolcott, "Recreation and Race in the Postwar City: Buffalo's 1956 Crystal Beach Riot," *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 1 (Jun. 2006): 63-90; David E. Goldberg, *The Retreats of Reconstruction: Race, Leisure, and the Politics of Segregation, 1896-1920* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); Andrew W. Kahrl, *Free the Beaches: The Story of Ned Coll and the Battle for America's Most Exclusive Shoreline* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Winston Holland, *Black Recreation: A Historical Perspective* (Chicago: Burnham, 2002); Mark S. Foster, "In the face of 'Jim Crow': Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure, 1890-1945," *The Journal of Negro History* 84 (Spring 1999): 130-149; Myra B. Young Armstead, *"Lord, Please Don't Take Me in August": African Americans in Newport and Saratoga Springs, 1870-1930*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Brian McCammack, *Landscapes of Hope: Nature and the Great Migration in Chicago* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017); James C. Scott, "High Modernist Social Engineering: The Case of the Tennessee Valley Authority," in Lloyd I. Rudolph and John Kurt Jacobsen, *Experiencing the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

narratives concerning African American access to nature, specifically Black fraternal organizations.

African Americans were routinely cut off from accessing Hot Springs' thermal waters in the nineteenth century. Their relationship with the water was often laborious rather than recuperative, and almost always segregated from white patrons and patients. As the federal government refined its legal and physical control over the Hot Springs Reservation in the 1870s it created a new hydrological landscape, leasing out the prized thermal water to private bathhouse concessionaires. Federal intervention in Hot Springs did not provide equitable access to the thermal waters, and, in fact, further codified segregated spaces. But under the new hydrological system, piped water could also transcend traditional park boundaries, moving thermal water outside the reservation and into areas that enabled African American access. It was only when African Americans built bathhouses for their own and exclusive use that they were able to gain unencumbered access the national resource. Hot Springs' Black bathhouses were then the product of new hydrological conditions as well as the ingenuity and creativity of Black fraternal associations who brought networks of clientele and capital to town. Moved into safe, Black-owned spaces, African Americans arrived at these establishments as patients, patrons, or curious sightseers. As more mobile middle-class African Americans began travelling to Hot Springs, the bathhouses gained a national reputation as a southern site of rest, recovery, and uplift in an era of hardening racial boundaries. The thermal waters also spread throughout these new networks and African Americans incorporated the restorative resource into their lived experience and struggle (Fig. 4.1).



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 MAP OF A PORTION OF HOT SPRINGS.
 Fig. 4.1: Map of Hot Springs illustrating the distance between Bathhouse Row and the Black bathhouses. Dr. William P. Parks, *Superintendent Report of the Hot Springs Reservation* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915); shaded by the author.

Restrictions to African American Thermal Water Access

Every decision and action African Americans made fell under the shadow and influence of Jim Crow segregation policies in Arkansas. Arkansas followed a late nineteenth-century Southern trend creating a segregated, hierarchical society through law. Arkansas' state legislature passed a number of statutes in the 1880s, including an anti-miscegenation and Segregated Coach Law for railroad travel, which solidified African Americans as second-class

citizens in white-dominated society and politics.⁴⁷⁶ In Hot Springs, African Americans lived and worked predominantly in a corridor straddling Malvern Avenue, three blocks south of Bathhouse Row. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries African Americans faced limited access while trying to partake in the thermal waters on park property. In 1878, the travel writer A. Van Cleef visited Hot Springs and reported his excursion in a feature-length article for *Harper's* magazine. While commenting on the chemical properties of the waters and the makeup of the town, Van Cleef dedicated ink and illustrations to the local Black population (Fig. 4.2). In and around Hot Springs Creek, the author depicted “many picturesque bits of negro genre.” The primary way African Americans accessed Hot Springs’ thermal water was through laundry services, “washin’,” performed almost exclusively by women. Van Cleef drew a stark distinction between those *working* and those *recovering*. African Americans used the 140-degree Fahrenheit waters and built an “industry” around Hot Springs’ waters while the town’s bathhouse business was still in its infancy.⁴⁷⁷ While Van Cleef did not mention the race of the invalids and visitors taking the medicinal properties of the waters, he distinguished them from African Americans working with the waters.

⁴⁷⁶ See John William Graves, “Jim Crow in Arkansas: A Reconsideration of Urban Race Relations in the Post-Reconstruction South,” *Journal of Southern History* 55 (August 1989): 421-448.

⁴⁷⁷ A. Van Cleef, “The Hot Springs of Arkansas,” *Harper's Monthly* (January, 1878), 10-13.

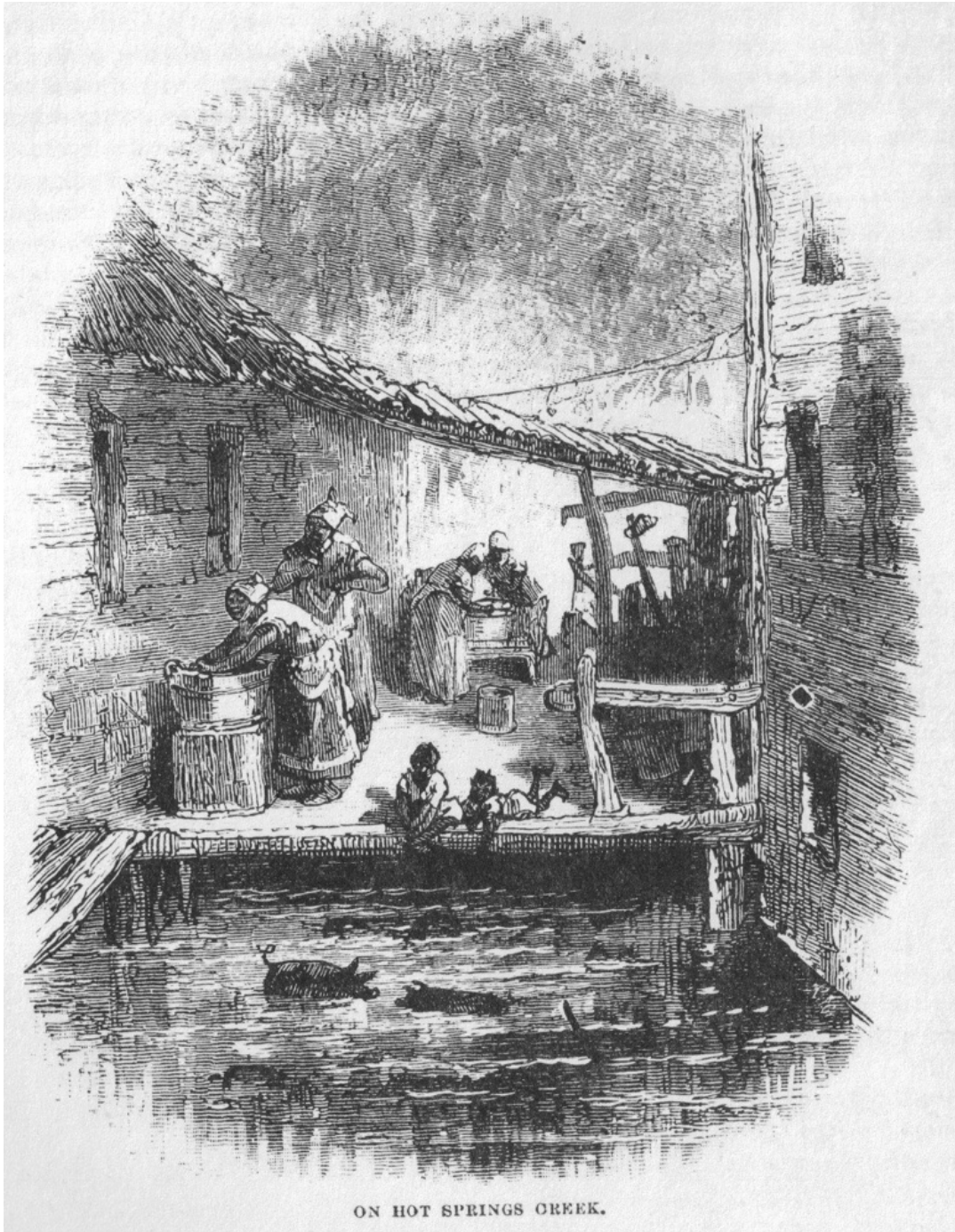


Fig. 4.2: Illustration of African American laundry business in Hot Springs; A. Van Cleef, “The Hot Springs of Arkansas,” *Harper’s Monthly* (January, 1878), 10-13.

In 1882, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Alonzo Bell boasted that the hydrological modifications to the reservation improved both the purity of and access to Hot Springs’ national, natural resource, stating, “The design of the government in retaining in itself the control of these

waters was to afford to the greatest number the greatest possible good, and by wise regulations prevent the possibility of extortion. The Springs were the property of the States, the common heritage of all the people, free from local management, prejudice, or sectional control.”⁴⁷⁸

Twelve bathhouses resided on the reservation, one being the Independent. In an 1884 Congressional testimony, local African American businessman Jackson C. Page believed the Independent adequately served African Americans in Hot Springs. Page agreed that those willing to pay for a bath, as opposed to the indigent-filled Government-Free Bathhouse, were able to “bathe as freely as white people when they want to” at the Independent.⁴⁷⁹ Page soon became manager of the Independent. Little information remains on the overall impact the bathhouse had on the African American community.

The same 1884 congressional hearing, however, highlighted that the Independent faced mounting issues. A number of African Americans in town testified before Congress that reservation officials refused to acknowledge their concerns and petitions for a bathhouse built solely for African American use.⁴⁸⁰ The specific line of congressional questioning suggest that national representatives were primarily concerned if there was at least some place where African Americans could access the reservation’s water. Any answer, regardless of access restrictions, seemed to satisfy the congressmen as they quickly moved on to a new line of questioning. It is also obvious that Page could not compete with the expanding extravagance of the other Bathhouse Row establishments catering to a white clientele. By 1890, Hot Springs Superintendent Frank M. Thompson declared the Independent “Old and worthless. Unfit for use

⁴⁷⁸ Alonzo Bell, *Report on the Hot Springs of Arkansas* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, U.S. Interior Department, 1882), 26-27.

⁴⁷⁹ *Certain Things connected with the Government property at Hot Springs, Ark.*, 128.

⁴⁸⁰ U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department, *Certain Things connected with the Government property at Hot Springs, Ark.* (48th Congress; Misc. Doc. No. 58) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1884); for a thorough summary, see McDade, “The Crystal Bathhouse,” 81-82.

as a public bath house. Should be condemned and ordered removed.”⁴⁸¹ Within a year Page sold the property and the water lease to Charles Maurice. Maurice reopened a whites-only establishment in line with other bathhouses on reservation property. Bell’s initial idea for open access to Hot Springs’ thermal waters contrasted idyllic hopes with the social realities of the Jim Crow South. Tighter restrictions for African American thermal water access coincided with an increased presence of the federal government in Hot Springs. In the 1870s and 1880s, federal officials were still wrestling control of the springs and thermal waters from individuals as well as private and public institutions. This allowed African Americans to continue to use the waters for laundry in Hot Springs Creek as well as establish quickly-built bathhouses. But as the hydraulic system became more systematized by the end of the 1880s, the waters moved less freely and were subject the federal control and local custom. Thermal water access, like any other social endeavor, became a difficult process for African Americans in Hot Springs. African Americans faced repetitive roadblocks affecting their full access.

Specific thermal water access was not the only issue plaguing African Americans’ peaceful and equal existence in town. Black visitors witnessed racial segregation and exclusion. As the railroad became the main transportation source for patients and patrons to visit Hot Springs by the 1880s and 1890s, travel soon fell within the sphere of Jim Crow. In 1891, the Arkansas legislature passed the Separate Coach Law. The Arkansas law forced railway companies to provide separate accommodations to Black and white travelers. The legislature leveled fines upon people and companies who failed to comply. The Separate Coach Law mirrored similar segregated railway laws enacted across the Deep South and former Border

⁴⁸¹ Frank M. Thompson, *Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation* (U.S. Department of the Interior, August 18, 1891), 615.

States during the same time.⁴⁸² Themes around purity and access remained central even for a law segregating train car passengers. White Proponents deemed the law essential as they argued African American Arkansans were generally considered unclean and unable to coexist with whites. The editor of the *Fort Smith Times* argued Blacks and whites must be separated while travelling as “A Saturday night train out from Little Rock to Pine Bluff is hardly safe, to say nothing of the fact that not one in eighty [Negroes] uses Pear’s soap or any other kind.”⁴⁸³ African American Arkansas leaders strongly opposed these derogatory stereotypes, arguing the Separate Coach Law was a fearful response to uphold white supremacy. John G. Lucas of Pine Bluff quickly saw past false claims for the law, asking “is it the constant growth of a more refined, intelligent, and I might say more perfumed class, that grow more and more obnoxious as they more nearly approximate to our white friends’ habits and plane of life?”⁴⁸⁴ At a time when Hot Springs superintendents touted the waters as pure and healthful, it became all the more imperative to segregate the water from any perceived physical or social impurities. This mindset sustained and strengthened racial divisions in Hot Springs and across the state of Arkansas.

Travelling to Hot Springs meant visitors had to endure separate and unequal treatment through the 1891 Separate Coach Law and other new restrictive policies of the era. As African American businessmen such as Jackson Page pleaded with Congress to support access for Black patrons in Hot Springs, those patrons faced an embarrassing, but familiar, ordeal when crossing into Arkansas from out-of-state. This trend was not limited to laws arising from state capitols, but from private companies as well. For example, while Missouri’s legislature never passed a

⁴⁸² Gilbert Thomas Stephenson, “The Separation of the Races in Public Conveyances,” *The American Political Science Review* 3, no. 2 (May, 1909), 190-191.

⁴⁸³ “Letter from the Editor of the Fort Smith Times,” *Arkansas Gazette*, January 22, 1891, from John William Graves, “The Arkansas Separate Coach Law of 1891,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (Summer, 1973), 154-55.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

statute stipulating separate accommodations for African Americans on railways, the state supreme court ruled in favor of white businesses segregating their establishments in the 1890s.⁴⁸⁵ One such company, the St. Louis Iron Mountain Railway, maintained a monopoly on rail travel to Hot Springs in the 1890s, servicing “the only route to the famous Hot Springs of Arkansas.”⁴⁸⁶ The Supreme Court affirmed the company’s segregated railcar policy in 1892.⁴⁸⁷ While the railroad improved the speed and comfort visitors experienced in travelling to Hot Springs as compared to stagecoach travel decades before, that same technical advancement led to demeaning treatment in separate establishments for Black passengers who came to Hot Springs to take the waters.

In town, officials made themes of purity and access central to the reservation’s changing hydraulic system, another product of technological advancements. And, like the railroad, Black bathers struggled to use the waters under this new system. While officials within and without the reservation heralded the modern reservoirs, piping systems, and bathhouses which made Hot Springs’ thermal water more accessible, African Americans continued to face issues on reservation property. The Government-Free Bathhouse provided one temporary solution, however. Constructed to provide free baths for the nation’s indigent who travelled to Hot Springs for the waters’ healing capabilities, the Government-Free Bathhouse was the most visited establishment on the reservation. But by the early 1900s, it suffered from overuse and a lack of continued funding. In 1910, medical examiner Harry Hallock reported “The present building can never be made sanitary... the water service, including the tanks, will soon need extensive

⁴⁸⁵ Thomas Stephenson, “The Separation of the Races in Public Conveyances,” 191.

⁴⁸⁶ “Iron Mountain Route,” *Washington Republican* (Washington, Kansas), 17 October 1890, 6.

⁴⁸⁷ The plaintiff in the case, Mary Jane Chilton, refused to give up her seat and was kicked off the train and abandoned in rural Missouri; see Barbary Y. Welke, “When All the Women Were White, and All the Blacks Were Men: Gender, Class, Race, and the Road to Plessy, 1855-1914,” *Law and History Review* 13, no. 2 (Autumn, 1995): 261-316.

repairs.”⁴⁸⁸ Officials solved this overuse problem by creating an oath of indigence for any individual who requested access to the Government-Free Bathhouse. The federal law stipulated any person who wished to use the establishment “shall be required to make an oath... that he is without and unable to obtain the means to pay for baths” and “making a false oath as to his financial condition shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor” carrying a fine of twenty-five dollars or thirty days in jail.⁴⁸⁹ Single baths at other bathhouse establishments on park property and around town ranged from 25-50 cents. While this does not seem like a serious financial burden, poor whites and Blacks who used the Government-Free Bathhouse for their regular bathing felt the effects of the new law immediately. The new system proved effective for park officials. Visitation statistics show that the attendance at the bathhouse dropped from 220,435 in 1911 to 157,664 in 1912. African Americans who used the thermal water for regular bathing and enjoyment dropped 34 percent from 58,994 in 1911 to 39,350 in 1912.⁴⁹⁰ In their social history of the national park, John C. Page and Laura S. Harrison argued: “Many blacks refused to go to the government bathhouse because they had to perjure themselves by signing a pauper’s oath to obtain baths there.”⁴⁹¹ Poor and working-class African Americans now faced the double burden of access restriction. They encountered segregated access in the town’s pay-bathhouses and by the 1910s faced an added social and legal restriction to the Government-Free bathhouse.

As the federal government began to codify a thermal water access regime in Hot Springs in the end of the nineteenth century, a system that was restricting Black access, African

⁴⁸⁸ Harry M. Hallock, *Report of the Medical Director of the Hot Springs Reservation, Ark* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911), 764.

⁴⁸⁹ *An Act Limiting the Privileges of the Government free bathhouse on the public reservation at Hot Springs, Arkansas, to persons who are without and unable to obtain the means to pay for baths, U.S. Statutes at Large* 200, 61st Congress (1911), 1015.

⁴⁹⁰ Baths administered at the Government free bathhouse for the fiscal year 1910-1911 and 1911-1912. Charts appear in yearly Report of the Medical Director of the Hot Springs Reservation, Ark, p. 764 for 1911, p. 835-6 in 1912.

⁴⁹¹ Paige and Harrison, *Out of the Vapors*, 136.

Americans sought other opportunities to prosper in town connected to the waters. Many worked in the bathhouses, or more often, in the growing number of hotels and boarding houses patronized by visitors from across the country. The writer Stephen Crane, upon visiting Hot Springs in 1895, described the “Colored Servants” he encountered as “good-natured and not blessed with the sophistication that one can see at a distance.”⁴⁹² But looking closer, African Americans worked to take advantage of the changing town. Joe Golden was born a slave in Hot Springs, and watched the town grow up around him. Returning after the war, Golden worked in the bathhouses. He disclosed that “Hot Springs was a good place to make money. Lots of rich folks was coming to the hotels.” Golden claimed he sometimes made \$4-\$5 / day as an attendant, shoe shiner, and runner.⁴⁹³ Some, like Clara Walker, brought her laundry services inside after the thermal waters moved into permanent structures in town. Walker’s husband worked to build the Arlington Hotel, one of the first establishments to receive a thermal water lease. Parts of the new hydraulic system were often constructed by those who were unable to access it.⁴⁹⁴ African Americans retained a close relationship with the town’s thermal waters as bathhouse attendants were almost exclusively African American. In 1911, 119 people, four percent of Hot Springs’ adult Black population, worked as bathhouse attendants. Every male and female bathhouse attendant for the Government Free Bathhouse was Black in 1915, with a yearly income \$600 and \$480, respectively.⁴⁹⁵ Fanny Johnson was a cook and began travelling to different resort towns across the Midwest and South, earning a steady income in the 1890s. “In the winter I’d come

⁴⁹² Stephen Crane, “The Merry Throng at Hot Springs,” *Philadelphia Press*, 3 March 1895.

⁴⁹³ Interview of Joe Golden by Mary Hudgins, *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 2, Arkansas, Part 3, Gadson-Isom*. 1936, 48; Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn023/>.

⁴⁹⁴ Interview of Clara Walker by Mary Hudgins, *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 2, Arkansas, Part 7, Vaden-Young*. 1936, 26-27; Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn027/>.

⁴⁹⁵ It is important to note that the head male attendant and manager of the free bathhouse were white, earning 40 and 80 percent more per year; salaries from William P. Parks *Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation* (U.S. Department of the Interior, August 13, 1915), accessed at https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/reports/hosp/1915.htm.

down to Hot Springs” from Eureka Springs and other resort towns in Oklahoma. “Somehow I always come back to Hot Springs... That was the way to make the best money.”⁴⁹⁶ In an era of curtailed rights, Black men and women used the reservation and its ancillary businesses to reassert some independence.

Moments of success in town contrasted with a consistent current of racial violence African Americans faced across Arkansas and throughout the region by the early twentieth century.⁴⁹⁷ Through both law and custom, whites systematically excluded African Americans from Southern political and social life. They often employed violence to ensure such ostracism.⁴⁹⁸ Arkansas, while on the outer limits of the traditional South, was little different in its systemic exclusion of African Americans. According to one scholar, “the doctrine of white supremacy was so thoroughly imbedded in every inch of Arkansas soil from the swampiest part of the Delta... to the hardest rock in the Ozark Mountains.”⁴⁹⁹ Government officials, members of the Ku Klux Klan, as well as rouge squads of vigilantes used different forms of mob violence against Black men and women (mostly men) to maintain this racial hierarchy from Reconstruction well into the twentieth century. Between 1860 and 1936, whites lynched 318 Black men and women in Arkansas; this number is likely lower than the actual figure.⁵⁰⁰ Arkansas was also the site of two events, the Harrison Riots of 1905 and 1909 and the Elaine Massacre of 1919, that demonstrated the brutality of race relations in the state for outside visitors. In Harrison County, north Arkansas, a failed railroad line bankrupted the area’s white

⁴⁹⁶ Interview of Fanny Johnson by Mary Hudgins, *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 2, Arkansas, Part 4, Jackson-Lynch*. 1936, 89; Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn024/>.

⁴⁹⁷ It is important to note that racial violence was not confined solely to the South. See NYC in 1863, Springfield, IL in 1908, East St. Louis in 1917 Washington, D.C. and Chicago in 1919, Tulsa in 1921; note supporting material.

⁴⁹⁸ Woodward and others here. Elizabeth Nan Woodruff, *American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003)

⁴⁹⁹ Stockley, *Ruled By Race*, 138.

⁵⁰⁰ “Appendix I: Lynching in Arkansas, 1860-1936: A Comprehensive Listing,” in Buckelew, “Racial Violence in Arkansas: Lynchings and Mob Rule,” 233-254.

and Black population. White residents and regional law enforcement took their frustrations out on the Black community, making up roughly 15 percent of the county. Years of ambushes, mob rule, and intimidation drove all but one African American resident from the County. In Elaine, Arkansas, on the banks of the Mississippi River, old legacies of white supremacy in Arkansas' Cotton Belt clashed with newer animosities growing out of labor organizing. These disputes came to a disastrous and murderous end in September and October 1919. After a shootout between Black union guards and whites left a white security guard dead, 500-1,000 whites descended upon Elaine to quell, according to white citizen groups, a Black "insurrection." What followed, according to eyewitnesses was nothing short of coordinated and indiscriminate murder. H.F. Smiddy testified that a group of white Mississippians crossed the river and "shot and killed men, women, and children without regard to whether they were guilty or not. Negroes were killed time after time again."⁵⁰¹ After U.S. troops secured the town for the Arkansas governor, 5 whites died. Local and national organizations never officially documented the number of dead African Americans, but estimates range well into the hundreds, making the Elaine Massacre one of the deadliest displays of white supremacy during the Jim Crow era in the South.

Hot Springs was not immune from the South's brutal culture of lynching history. Two confirmed lynchings in the early decades of the twentieth century demonstrate the hazards African Americans faced as they tried to access Hot Springs' water resources. On June 19, 1913, a white mob lynched Will Norman for the alleged assault and murder of Garland Huff, daughter of C. Floyd Huff, a prominent Hot Springs judge. The neighboring *Pine Bluff Daily Graphic* lived up to its namesake, deeming Norman a "negro brute" who was hanged by a street lamp post

⁵⁰¹ Stockley, *Ruled By Race*, 163; see also Steven Anthony, "The Elaine Riot of 1919: Race, Class, and Labor in the Arkansas Delta." PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, 2019; Guy Lancaster, ed. *The Elaine Massacre and Arkansas: A Century of Atrocity and Resistance, 1819–1919* (Little Rock: Butler Center Books, 2018);

in the center of town, and “The body was also riddled with bullets and later burned.”⁵⁰² Local newspaper reports stated that moments before his death, Norman admitted to the murder, but the same newspaper account stated, “The only evidence that the negro committee [sic] the dastardly crime is the fact that he was seen running from the house.”⁵⁰³

Nine years later, another white mob lynched Gilbert Harris on August 1, 1922, in connection to a local murder. The scene was overtly similar to Will Norman’s death as mobs lynched both African American men at the same town square. The response to Harris’ murder, however, suggests a growing sense of middle-class respectability politics at play influencing the town’s nationally perceived image by the 1920s. Many white residents looked past the murder of a man without a trial and viewed the lynching as a stain on the town’s tourist appeal.

Commenting on the crime, the *Daily Arkansas Gazette* believed there was “a special and peculiar reason” why Southern racial violence had no place in Hot Springs. The town “is not a city that lives to itself,” but “a national resort and a national gathering place.” The town needed to “make sure that men and women from all over America... should never look from their hotel windows and see the horrid spectacle of a man hanged high with the noose of the gibbet.”⁵⁰⁴ In June 1922, white resident George R. Belding spoke to a Black and white audience welcoming the principal of the Tuskegee Institute, Dr. Robert Moton, to Hot Springs. The local Negro Business League invited Moton to town to speak about race relations. Belding’s speech highlighted an apparent racial harmony in Hot Springs: “When an undesirable citizen of either race comes into our midst and threatens to disturb the good relations, we show them the nearest railroad.” The African American *New York Age* went on to report “Belding said that Hot Springs had not had any

⁵⁰² “Negro Brute Hanged and Burned at Hot Springs,” *Pine Bluff Daily Graphic* (Pine Bluff, AR), June 20, 1913, 1.

⁵⁰³ “Norman is Lynched – Is Strung Up at Ouachita Junction,” *Hot Springs New Era*, June 19, 1913, 1.

⁵⁰⁴ “The Hot Springs Lynching,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, August 3, 1922, 6.

lynching or mob outbreaks, and that good citizens of this community would not tolerate lawlessness.”⁵⁰⁵ Six weeks after this statement, Gilbert Harris hung from a streetlight in the center of town. While Hot Springs advertised itself as a world apart from the horrors of Jim Crow, reminders of the region’s horrors were often on full display for Black visitors.

African Americans faced routine and systematic restrictions as they aimed to access Hot Springs’ thermal waters, a natural and purported national resource. Instead of arriving in the Valley of Vapors as curious visitors, patients or patrons, Black men and women more often encountered the thermal waters in their labors surrounding the bathhouse industry, especially after the federal government took full control of the reservation in the late 1870s and contained the thermal waters in a new hydraulic system by the 1880s. This system, argued reservation officials, preserved the purity of the thermal waters. But the waters’ purity standards mixed with laws and customs designed to sustain white supremacy. Restricting Black access to the waters was a product of producing pure thermal waters for guests. But African Americans devised ways to harness the new hydraulic system for their benefit even as they were excluded from direct access on the reservation.

Building Black Bathhouses

African Americans faced multiple restrictions and constraints as they attempted to access the thermal water on Hot Springs Reservation / National Park. But this declensionist and defeatist narrative is inadequate and incomplete. Moments arose which brought African Americans and the healing waters into close and constant contact. And while the history of exclusive Black bathhouses in Hot Springs corresponds with the rise of a northern African

⁵⁰⁵ Albon Holsey, “Moton Urged Arkansans To Cultivate Pride of Race,” *New York Age*, July 1, 1922, 2.

American middle class in the twentieth century, there already existed a strong history of African Americans adapting to the social and hydrological constraints in Hot Springs.

The most important event affecting African Americans' sustained use of the reservation's thermal waters occurred in 1887. After the federal government formally took control of the Hot Springs Reservation in 1877, officials dedicated their efforts to preserving the purity of the federal resource by piping the spring water into bathhouses on reservation property. As officials changed the hydrological conditions of the park and demand increased from outside visitors, Congress passed a resolution authorizing the secretary of the Interior to lease out government water "to the Bath Houses located off the Permanent Reservation at Hot Springs, Arkansas," as long as the bathhouses on reservation property maintained adequate water for visitors and patients.⁵⁰⁶ Herein lay the promise of exclusive and unencumbered African American thermal water access in Hot Springs. The same system of reservoirs, pipes, and pumping stations which took the thermal waters out of nature and into segregated social establishments on reservation property could now allow the same thermal water to transcend park boundaries to Hot Springs' African American neighborhood.

Early attempts at exclusive Black bathhouses demonstrated the promise of access as well as the difficulties that arose for establishment proprietors. The Crystal Bathhouse was the first attempt to establish an African American bathhouse off reservation property. Michael H. Jodd and Albert P. Aldrich, white men, built the establishment and owned the water lease to the Crystal. But the men were adamant to Superintendent Martin Eisele that their requested tub lease was for an establishment patronized exclusively by African Americans.⁵⁰⁷ Recommending the

⁵⁰⁶ *Joint resolution to authorize the use of hot water off the Government Reservation at Hot Springs, Arkansas, U.S. Statutes at Large* 14, 49th Congress (1887), 647.

⁵⁰⁷ McDade, "The Crystal Bathhouse," 85.

construction of the Crystal Bathhouse in 1903, Reservation Superintendent Martin Eisele stated he was “so anxious and desirous of having a bath house for colored people” in Hot Springs.⁵⁰⁸ A reporter in town stated that “With the establishment of a bathhouse for their [African Americans’] exclusive use, the surreptitious bathing in the houses reserved for white people, it is believed, will cease.”⁵⁰⁹ Situated at 415 Malvern Avenue, along the town’s “Black Broadway” business district, the bathhouse took center stage in and around community events.

Opened in 1904, the Crystal appeared to satisfy the need of the local African American community who hoped to take in the Hot Springs waters without incident, harassment, or humiliation. In 1910, the African American population in Hot Springs stood at 3,827. That same year the Crystal provided 12,258 baths.⁵¹⁰ It is not known exactly who bathed in the Crystal’s tubs, but it appears that the management of the bathhouse did not succeed in publicizing their establishment outside of Hot Springs to bring in travelers, tourists, and patients. Attendance, measured in baths given, hovered steadily between 10,000-12,000 for the first few years of the Crystal’s operation. For a point of comparison, the Ozark Bathhouse served 90,570 baths and the ten bathhouses on reservation property averaged 44,022 baths in 1908.⁵¹¹ Of the twenty four establishments receiving thermal water in town, the Crystal offered the fourth fewest baths (10,096) that year.⁵¹² By 1908, reservation officials recommended discontinuing the water lease.⁵¹³ Superintendent W. Scott Smith wrote to the Secretary of the Interior in 1909 stating that

⁵⁰⁸ Superintendent Martin A. Eisele to Secretary of the Interior Ethan Hitchcock, June 15, 1903, in Cockrell, *The Hot Springs of Arkansas*, 145.

⁵⁰⁹ “Negro Bath House at Hot Springs,” *Arkansas Democrat* (Little Rock, Arkansas), July 21, 1903.

⁵¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, *1920 Census of Population, General Report and Analytical Tables*, Table 19, Color or Race, Nativity, Parentage, 77; Sharon Shugart, Hot Springs National Park Museum Specialist “Tables Showing Annual Total Number of Baths Given at Each Operating Bathhouse, 1898-2004,” chart access via email with Hot Springs National Park Museum Curator Tom Hill, August 18, 2018, 4.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁵¹² Shugart, Hot Springs National Park Museum Specialist, “Tables Showing Annual Total Number of Baths Given at Each Operating Bathhouse, 1898-2004,” 3.

⁵¹³ McDade, “The Crystal Bathhouse,” 89.

there were other issues hindering the Crystal's growth. He noted that "without publicity," other bathhouses in town "allowed colored people to bathe outside the regular bathing hours, at a price less than charged at the Crystal Bath House."⁵¹⁴ The Crystal's facilities did not allure Black health and pleasure seekers to the establishment and some visitors decided to confront segregated treatment in one of the town's elegant bathhouses than patronize the Crystal.

African American fraternal organizations played a significant role in expanding the reach of Hot Springs' Black bathhouses. These associations were the latest manifestation of Black organizing in the South by the turn of the twentieth century. During slavery and immediately following the Civil War during Reconstruction, African Americans created community and regional organizations to adjust to their new social standing as well as form and solidify political networks.⁵¹⁵ Black fraternal associations complemented these previous social systems. Whether paralleling white fraternal organizations which excluded African American participation, or creating distinctive Black fraternal groups, scholars argued "African American fraternal associations bridged classes and locations and offered many opportunities not only for group self-help but also for public assertion and leadership on social and civil rights concerns."⁵¹⁶ The rise of fraternal associations and mutual aid societies grew more necessary in African American communities, however, as Jim Crow laws became endemic throughout the South by the 1890s and de facto segregation permeated outside the region. African Americans throughout the country were known to support multiple fraternal organizations at the same time during this time

⁵¹⁴ W. Scott Smith to James R. Garfield, 25 January 1909, in "Parks, Reservations, and Antiquities, Hot Springs Reservation, Leases, etc., Bath House – General," RG 79, Box 079, Central Files, 1907-1939, Entry P9, Hot Springs [Leases, Bathhouses, General] to Hot Springs [Maps, Blueprints, and Tracings], NARA College Park.

⁵¹⁵ For more synthetic works on this era and topic, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1979); Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁵¹⁶ Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Lynn Oser, "Organization despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations," *Social Science History* 28, no. 3 (Fall, 2004), 371.

period. The historian David Fahey has calculated that “at one time or another in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century a majority of Black men and women probably joined either a fraternal or mutual benefit society.”⁵¹⁷ These networks were often tied directly to Black churches, creating a firm and lasting imprint on the community.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Black fraternal associations had joined a growing and overlapping network of community support strategies that provided social safety nets for its members. Scholars have addressed the economic, social, and political power these organizations mustered in the fight for racial equity and equality. Some Black fraternal associations also aimed to provide medical assistance to members as well as leisure opportunities. Hot Springs, Arkansas, and the town’s world-famous thermal waters, provided these fraternal groups the chance to offer members a new avenue to pursue health, recreation, and create sites of local as well as national racial pride. One organization that took an interest in the struggling Crystal were the Knights of Pythias of North America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia (Pythians or Knights of Pythias). Founded in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1880, The Pythians held annual conventions in Hot Springs in 1885, so some had a knowledge of the social and hydrological environment in town. Some believed the bathhouse could serve the dual purpose of bolstering the group locally across Arkansas and nationally as well as provide a resource to fellow African Americans. The Arkansas branch of the organization first proposed building a national sanitarium utilizing the thermal waters in 1899.⁵¹⁸ Hot Springs Superintendent Martin A. Eisele took “great pleasure in giving this enterprise my endorsement” in 1903.⁵¹⁹ Five years later,

⁵¹⁷ David Fahey, *The Black Lodge in White America: “True Reformer” Browne and His Economic Strategy* (Dayton: Wright State university Press, 1994), quote from Skocpol and Oser, “Organization despite Adversity,” 403.

⁵¹⁸ C.M. Wade, J.B. Gabe, and W.C. Cox, “Committee on National Sanitarium,” 9 September 1899, in S.W. Green, et. al., *History and Manual of the Colored Knights of Pythias N. A., S. A., E. A., A. and A.* (1917), 175

⁵¹⁹ Martin A. Eisele to Special Committee on Sanitarium, Colored Knights of Pythias, 29 August 1903, in Green, et. al., *History and Manual of the Colored Knights of Pythias*, 200.

after collecting the funds, and with interest of the purchase making front-page news in the local *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, the Pythians secured purchase of the Crystal in 1908.⁵²⁰ Superintendent W. Scott Smith wrote to the Secretary of the Interior that “I believe this change of ownership will prove beneficial to the colored people and solve a perplexing problem regarding the bathing of their race here, which has existed for a long time.”⁵²¹ The goal of the sanitarium, according to the Pythians, was to provide “hotel facilities and a medical department affording sick members of the order... the best accommodations and treatment.”⁵²²

The Pythians sought to make their establishment a hub of Black health and leisure. But the organization still had to navigate a landscape still dominated by white supremacy. The Pythians’ attorney, S.A.T. Watkins, said the organization had to be “extremely cautious” in Hot Springs because they were arriving in a Southern town “that in all probabilities might become some day hostile.”⁵²³ In an effort to quell these outside fears, in 1911 the Pythians leased the building and its management to Dr. Claude Wade and John T.T. Warren, pillars of Black health and leisure in town. Wade was Hot Springs’ first Black physician, moving to town from Topeka, Kansas, in 1899 (Fig. 4.3). Elected as the president of the Arkansas Colored Medical Association, he appeared on the Federal Registration Board’s list of physicians qualified to administer the thermal waters every year in the 1900s.⁵²⁴ Wade was also a Pythian, and was influential in the Black community. Warren was one of the more well-known bathhouse attendants in town. He was the head attendant at the bathhouse in the Park Hotel, arguably the grandest establishment in Hot Springs. He was also an undertaker and property owner, prominent

⁵²⁰ “Negro K. of P.’s to Have Sanitarium,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, August 18, 1908, 1.

⁵²¹ W. Scott Smith to Secretary of the Interior, 30 August 1908, Hot Springs National Park Administrative Archives #2, Box C3823, Folder C3823.1903-1913.

⁵²² Knights of Phythians Consumate [sic] a Deal,” *Freeman* (Indianapolis, IN), 21 November 1908.

⁵²³ S.A.T. Watkins, “The Sanitarium Property at Hot Springs,” in Green, et. al., *History and Manual of the Colored Knights of Pythias*, 304.

⁵²⁴ “Societies,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 37, no. 9 (August 31, 1901), 595.

to all in the Black community. These men, believed Superintendent Smith, “can increase the business of the Crystal Bathhouse very materially as they are both well known and prominent among their race.”⁵²⁵



Fig. 4.3: Dr. Claude M. Wade; Green, et. al., *History and Manual of the Colored Knights of Pythias*, 979.

But the Pythians faced challenges getting the bathhouse off the ground. Black patrons were unhappy with the facility and felt forced to pursue past options open to African American bathers in Hot Springs. Residents and visitors also chose to use the Government Free Bathhouse on the federal reservation, further stifling business. In 1912, The Crystal offered 12,953 baths while a total of 39,350 Black men and women (28,062 baths for men and 11,288 for women,

⁵²⁵ W. Scott Smith to Secretary of the Interior; 21 September 1911, Box C3823, Folder C3823.1903-1913.

respectively) secured baths at the government bathhouse.⁵²⁶ The Crystal's new owners and manager also fought with Reservation Medical Director Harry Hallock, whose new regulations irked the entire bathhouse establishment in the early 1910s. In an effort to find time for sanitizing the bathhouses, Hallock recommended the bathhouse owners close on Sundays for cleaning and repairs. "We do not and cannot approve," wrote Wade, the Crystal's and J. Warren to Hallock in 1912. They cited "the peculiar class of people to whom we have to cater," men and women who work jobs during the week and rely on the Sunday baths for their nourishment and sanitation. The men believed they would be doing their customers a "great injustice by depriving them of their only opportunity to bathe as well as depriving ourselves of that revenue which is very essential to the successful running of our plant."⁵²⁷ The Pythians' early strategy focused on Hot Springs' local Black community; it was not a strategy aimed at bringing in visitors from outside Hot Springs.

Even as African American individuals and organizations utilized piped thermal water, moving it outside of the park and into safe Black spaces, failure and access issues again arrived at Black Broadway's doorstep. On September 5, 1913, a devastating fire tore through Hot Springs, Arkansas. Some reports highlighted that the fire began in a "negro shanty" in the segregated African American part of town.⁵²⁸ Strong winds quickly turned the fire into an unstoppable inferno (fig. 4.4). Reports stated, "Fifteen minutes after the fire started it was beyond the control of the Hot Springs fire-fighting force... water, dynamite and every available

⁵²⁶ Harry M. Hallock, "Report of the Medical Director of the Hot Springs Reservation, Ark.," August 23, 1912, 835-36.

⁵²⁷ C.M. Wade and J.T.T. Warren to Harry Hallock, 27 November 1912, in RG 79, Box 079, Central Files, 1907-1939, Hot Springs [Leases, Bathhouses, General] – Hot Springs [Maps, Blueprints, and Tracings}, Entry P9, NARA College Park.

⁵²⁸ "Hot Springs Swept by Most Disastrous Fire in History of Arkansas; Property Loss \$10,000,000," *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, September 6, 1913, 1.

means of fighting the fire had failed to check the flames.”⁵²⁹ Little Rock, 55 miles away, sent their fire officials to assist Hot Springs. By midnight, multiple fire departments had the blaze under control. The next day rains helped finally subdue any rogue hot spots, but the damage was done. The fire left roughly 17 percent of the town homeless, about 2,500 people. Most of the damage resided in the town’s African American neighborhood. The destruction was almost unimaginable. “It was pretty awful,” recounted Henry Long, who was working on Malvern Avenue the day the fire broke out. “It burned just about everything out there.”⁵³⁰ The fire destroyed most, if not all, of the town’s African American infrastructure, including churches, grocery stores, hotels, garages, saloons, as well as countless apartments and houses.⁵³¹ Some newspaper reporters were quick to point out that the crown jewels of the town, the famous bathhouses on federal reservation property, survived the conflagration. The local *Daily Arkansas Gazette* stated that of the 21 bathhouses under the supervision of the federal government, “not one was injured.”⁵³² This did not tell the entire story, however. Amongst the estimated \$10,000,000 in damages, the fire destroyed the only bathhouse exclusive to African American patrons, the Crystal. African Americans against felt the sting of restricted access to the thermal waters.

⁵²⁹ “Flames Swept Health Resort,” *The News Journal* (Wilmington, Delaware), September 6, 1913, 1

⁵³⁰ Interview with Henry Long, Conducted by Mary Hudgins, *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 2, Arkansas, Part 4, Jackson-Lynch*. 1936, 287 Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn024/>.

⁵³¹ “700 Buildings Burn in Hot Springs Fire,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, September 9, 1913, 5.

⁵³² “Reports on Big Fire,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, October 11, 1913.



Fig. 4.4: Hot Spring's fire, 5 September 1913. Onlookers watched as fire engulfed structures on Malvern Avenue, nicknamed Hot Springs' "Black Broadway;" from "Photos from Rockafellow Bathhouse, September 1913," RG 79, Box 079, NARA College Park.

Reservation officials were aware of the sudden bottleneck the Crystal's destruction brought to Black thermal water access. On September 6 Acting Superintendent C.R. Trowbridge wrote to the Secretary of the Interior chronicling the bathhouses that the fire destroyed the day before. Trowbridge was immediately concerned with where Black bathers could patronize: "Attention is invited to the fact that the Crystal is the only pay bathhouse in the city for colored people, the only other place they can bathe being the Free Bathhouse." "I request instructions," pleaded Trowbridge, "as to what action to take in regard to bathing patrons of the Crystal Bathhouse at the Free Bathhouse and whether or not to treat them as indigent persons."⁵³³

⁵³³ C.R. Trowbridge to Secretary of the Interior, 6 September 1913, RG 79, Box 079, NARA College Park.

Interior advised that, even though the building had just burned to the ground, the owners of the Crystal Bathhouse “should provide temporary accommodations for patrons until permanent structure erected. Colored people cannot be bathed in free bathhouse unless indigent,” as a result of the 1910 legislation.⁵³⁴ Wade and Warren were apparently unaware of the indigent-oath legislation as they asked, “It is understood that colored persons were bathed [at the Free Bathhouse] before construction of the Crystal. Why cannot the same arrangement be made now?” only to be rebuked again.⁵³⁵ Ultimately, the Interior department directed the superintendent to “discreetly ascertain” whether African Americans could use the empty Superior Bathhouse on park property.⁵³⁶ The 1913 fire was but another frustrating obstacle to Black thermal water access in Hot Springs. But the community stalwartly cleared the ash heaps and rebuilt their bathhouse with the increased help of national Black fraternal associations. These groups added more establishments to the neighborhood as demand increased from within and without in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Black fraternal associations, through their organization and capital, proved integral to building back the Black bathhouses in Hot Springs. These groups “expressed and fostered entrepreneurial talents, paid wages to Black employees... owned \$20 million worth of property, including grand headquarters buildings, banks, and hospitals and social-welfare institutions” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries⁵³⁷ The new Pythian Bathhouse assumed a central role in building up the African American community after 1913 fire destroyed Hot Springs’ African American neighborhood. Dr. Claude Wade, whose motto was “Wading through

⁵³⁴ Assistant Secretary of the Interior to Superintendent Trowbridge, telegram, 8 September 1913, RG 79, Box 079, NARA College Park.

⁵³⁵ C.R. Trowbridge to Secretary of the Interior, 18 September 1913, RG 79, Box 079, NARA College Park.

⁵³⁶ Assistant Secretary of the Interior to Superintendent Trowbridge, telegram, 22 September 1913, RG 79, Box 079, NARA College Park.

⁵³⁷ Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos, and Marshall Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006), 13.

Difficulties,” promised the Pythians would rebuild the bathhouse, rising from the ashes, “Phoenix like.”⁵³⁸ The Pythians convened a meeting of their Sanitarium Commission in Hot Springs, on October 23, 1913, just one month after the fire, and voted unanimously to rebuild the bathhouse.⁵³⁹ The new stewards rebuilt extremely fast when compared to other construction projects in the fire-ridden district. Before the conflagration, the stretch of Malvern Avenue where the Crystal resided contained a plethora of businesses, boarding houses, and churches, all of which facilitated and sustained the community. By 1915, the block remained barren except for the new Pythian Bathhouse along with two saloons, a barber shop, and two small office buildings (Fig. 4.5 & 4.6). Compared to other businesses in Hot Springs’ African American community, the speed at which the Pythian opened its doors after the 1913 fire suggests its importance in the neighborhood and town, as well as the influence of outside capital in constructing the establishment.

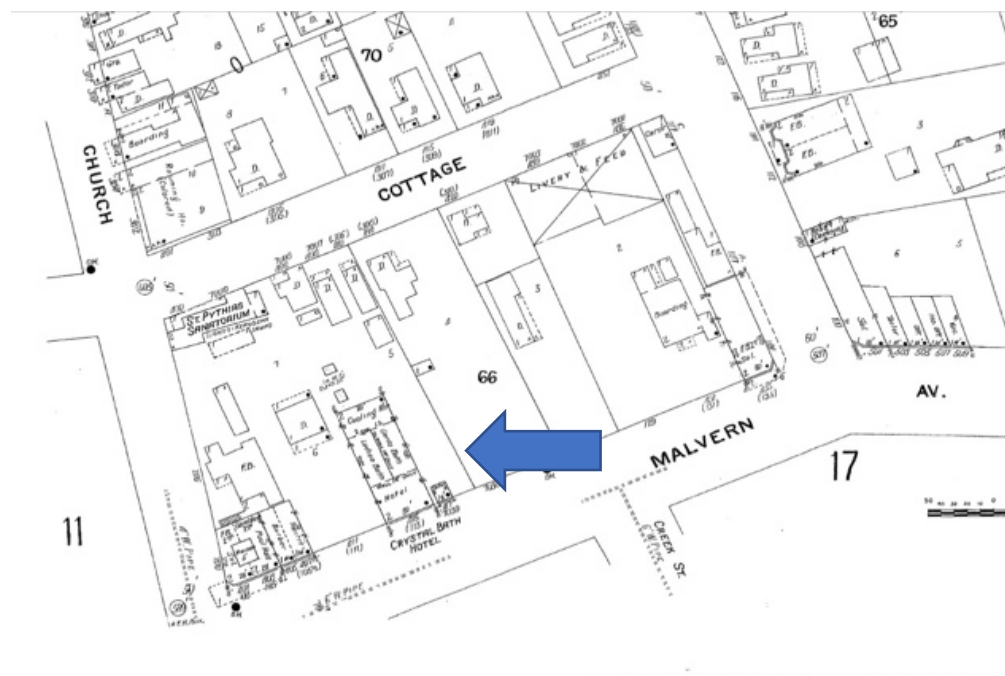


Fig. 4.5: 1908 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map illustrates the vibrancy of Hot Springs African American community, populated with stores, shops, and businesses.

⁵³⁸ Frack [sic] C. Long, “News of Colored People,” *Hot Springs New Era*, 16 September 1913, 4.

⁵³⁹ Green, et. al., *History and Manual of the Colored Knights of Pythias*, 414.



Fig. 4.6: 1915 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. Roughly two years after the fire, the African American community had managed to rebuild few establishments. The new Pythian Bathhouse stood out after the conflagration.

The demand from Black patrons as well as Hot Springs Reservation officials provided further incentive for the bathhouse's quick reconstruction as well. Local newspaper reports articulated the excitement for the new bathhouse after a year without access to the reservation's thermal waters. Frank C. Long, the principal of the local African American high school and a prominent figure in the Black community, edited a column in the *Hot Springs New Era* dedicated to news pertinent to Hot Springs' African American citizens. The "News of Colored People" appeared daily beginning in September 1913. The information in the column, Long stated, was "devoted strictly to the educational, religious, industrial and fraternal phases of the negro's life." The news kept readers abreast of the developments concerning the opening of the Pythian Bathhouse, believing Black bathhouses and other exclusive African American establishments

could impress upon the general public “that the negro is giving more evidence every day that he is a worthy and potent factor in our civilization.”⁵⁴⁰ In March 1914, as citizens continued to clear debris from the fire, Long described the town’s excitement for the new bathhouse. He predicted: “There will be some of the most highly polished and best educated men of the race here as well as some of the strongest and most cultured women of the race” patronizing the new bathhouse.⁵⁴¹ Meanwhile, reservation administrators informed Department of Interior officials in Washington about the “embarrassing situation” unfolding in Hot Springs and how the Pythian could solve it.⁵⁴² Jim Crow was firmly in place in town, as well as on the bathhouses on the government reservation. A 1914 ad for the newest Bathhouse Row establishment, the Buckstaff, advertised in the local paper, “The entire force... is composed of experienced **white** persons and the service is unexcelled.”⁵⁴³ Adolph C. Miller, Assistant Secretary of the Interior, relayed to his superiors that since the Crystal burned to the ground Hot Springs was paralyzed by the “inability to provide for colored people at any of the bathhouses.”⁵⁴⁴ Officials in Hot Springs and in Washington acknowledged the restrictions African Americans faced, and while they did not try to correct access issues on Bathhouse Row, they did quickly approve the Pythians’ plans and supported the quick construction of the new bathhouse.

The new Pythian Bathhouse became a popular destination and visitation statistics show that within one year of opening, the Pythian surpassed the most baths ever given by the Crystal

⁵⁴⁰ Frank C. Long, “News of the Colored People,” *The New Era* (Hot Springs, AR), October 17, 1913, accessed at the Garland County Historical Society, Index File: Black Newspapers, “News of the Colored People.”

⁵⁴¹ Frank C. Long, “News of the Colored People,” *The New Era*, March 9, 1914, 2.

⁵⁴² Superintendent Charles R. Trowbridge to Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane, 26 January 1914, “Hot Springs Public Utility Operators and Privileges – Knights of Pythias – Buildings, *Record Group 79, Central Classified File, 1933-1949, National Parks, Hot Springs, box no. 1243, in National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) College Park, MD.*

⁵⁴³ Charles Cutter, *Cutter’s Guide to the Hot Springs of Arkansas* (St. Louis: Slawson & Co. Printers, 1914), 25.

⁵⁴⁴ Adolph C. Miller to Elliott Woods, Superintendent U.S. Capitol Building and Grounds, 29 January 1914, *RG 79, box 1243, NARA College Park.*

and in three years it almost tripled the number of baths the Crystal provided before the fire, averaging just under 30,000 baths between 1918 and 1921.⁵⁴⁵ Outside funding from the Knights of Pythias certainly helped accelerate the construction of a new bathhouse. The Pythians closed the deal to purchase the Crystal in August 1908, and bought the building for \$22,000. The organization also transferred the water lease to the Pythians after the 1913 fire when the Crystal's original 10-year lease expired. Ten years later the Knights of Pythias put another \$75,000 into the establishment to renovate and enlarge the bathhouse.⁵⁴⁶ It is important to recognize the funds needed to buy and build bathhouse establishments for a growing Black middle-class clientele. Individual or local entrepreneurial organizations did not have the requisite capital for such an investment.

Though African Americans benefited from a steady salary as they worked in the thermal water industry as attendants, they still faced the social constraints of racist assumptions in the South. In 1905, Superintendent Martin Eisele, while adamant and excited for an exclusive African American bathhouse two years prior, believed Black bathhouse attendants lacked the “special training or skill” to perform hydrotherapeutic tasks like in the white establishments.⁵⁴⁷ Social realities followed African Americans as they worked and played in Hot Springs. In stark contrast to the support and accolades African Americans provided the Black bathhouses in Hot Springs, the federal government painted a more subdued portrait. Federal officials concerned themselves more with the facilities on Bathhouse Row, providing scant comments about bathhouses off park property, especially Black bathhouses. Upon its opening in 1914, Superintendent William Parks briefly mentioned the Pythian as “a good house... the

⁵⁴⁵ Shugart, “Tables Showing Annual Total Number of Baths Given at Each Operating Bathhouse, 1898-2004,” 3-4.

⁵⁴⁶ “Famous Pythian Bathhouse,” *New Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), December 16, 1933, A7.

⁵⁴⁷ Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 154.

administration of baths there will compare favorably with baths given in other low-priced houses.”⁵⁴⁸ That regimented description of the Pythian articulated only surface observations, erasing the significant impact these establishments played on a local and national level. It also subdued the growing relationship African Americans were creating between themselves and the reservation’s thermal waters.

Interest and demand remained high enough that additional Black fraternal organizations built new bathhouses in Hot Springs. The Woodmen of the Union (WoU), founded around 1905 in Natchez, Mississippi, formed the second pillar supporting African American access to Hot Springs’ thermal waters. It was not merely the organizational structure that allowed fraternal associations to flourish in Hot Springs, however. The drive and ingenuity of its leaders created opportunities for access as well, most notably John L. Webb, the Custodian of the Woodmen of the Union and the catalyst who brought the WoU to Hot Springs (Fig. 4.7). Born in Tuskegee, Alabama in 1877, Webb attended the town’s famous African American technical school, the Tuskegee Institute, founded by Booker T. Washington, after serving as a corporal in the Spanish American War. Margaret James Murray, Washington’s wife, noted that in Webb, “we never had a more earnest, a more honest person, or one more determined to accomplish something in life.”⁵⁴⁹ Making a life as a successful contractor in Louisiana and Mississippi, Webb involved himself in a number of fraternal associations, including the Pythians and the Masons. After a \$10,000 contribution to keep the floundering Woodmen of the Union afloat in Mississippi in 1913, Webb became the association’s Supreme Custodian in 1916. Under Webb’s first six years

⁵⁴⁸ William Parks, *Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation* (U.S. Department of the Interior, August 13, 1915), accessed at https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/reports/hosp/1915.htm.

⁵⁴⁹ Sutton Griggs, *Triumph of the Simple Virtues: or, The Life Story of John L. Webb* (Hot Springs: Messenger Publishing Company, 1926); in Cheryl L. Batts, Janis F. Kearney, and Patricia W. McGraw, *John L. Webb: The Man and His Legacy* (Hot Springs, P.H.O.E.B.E. Publishers, 2013), 39.

of leadership, membership in the Woodmen of the Union skyrocketed from 82 in 1913 to reportedly over 42,000 by 1922.⁵⁵⁰



Fig. 4.7: John L. Webb; Batts, et. al, John L. Webb: *The Man and His Legacy*, 1.

John L. Webb brought capital and connections to the Woodmen of the Union. It appears Webb took advantage of Tuskegee's massive network throughout the South and the midwestern states to create broad support for the Woodmen of the Union. Webb brought in agricultural expert, national figure, and Tuskegee professor George Washington Carver to address the WoU

⁵⁵⁰ Griggs, *The Life Story of John L. Webb*, in Batts, et. al, John L. Webb: *The Man and His Legacy*, 48; "\$200,000 Bath House Built At Hot Springs for Negroes," *New York Age*, July 1, 1922, 1

convention during their first year in Hot Springs in 1920.⁵⁵¹ Webb also hired fellow Tuskegee graduate and architect W.T. Bailey to design the bathhouse, hospital, and headquarters. With a larger base of support, Webb decided to move the organization's headquarters to Hot Springs, hoping the Valley of Vapors offered better opportunities and community support than what had transpired in Mississippi. It seemed a perfect match since the WoU slogan was "clean homes, clean bodies, clean lives." Under Webb, the fraternal organization sought to use the world-renowned thermal waters in Hot Springs to create, according to New York Age reporter Albon L. Holsey, "one of the strongest orders of its kind in the country."⁵⁵²

The Woodmen of the Union began construction on its headquarters, which included an auditorium, hospital, and 75-room bathhouse and hotel in 1921. It opened in 1922 as the second bathhouse dedicated exclusively for African American use. The \$500,000 building took up almost an entire block of storefront on Malvern Avenue. One elderly woman passing through the hallways of the bathhouse remarked "I 'clare to gracious, it shure is grand."⁵⁵³ The facility was described by national Black newspapers as a "modern" hospital where "the famous health-giving waters of the National Hot Springs [are] at our disposal."⁵⁵⁴ Webb solicited Dr. John E. Eve to run the Hospital. Eve, born in South Carolina in 1884, graduated from Meharry Medical College, the first medical school for African Americans in the South. Eve arrived in town in 1921 and moved his practice into the WoU building when it opened. Webb made Eve the supreme medical director for the order in 1922, further solidifying his place in the order and the significance the WoU placed upon its hospital and thermal water treatments. The author and pastor Sutton Griggs

⁵⁵¹ "Woodmen of Union Holds Its 15th Supreme Lodge Session," *New York Age*, October 2, 1920, 2.

⁵⁵² Albon L. Holsey, "Woodmen of the Union Formally Dedicate New Bath House," *New York Age*, 16 September 1922, 1.

⁵⁵³ "Woodmen of the Union," *The Black Dispatch* (Oklahoma City, OK), 7 September 1922, 8.

⁵⁵⁴ "\$500,000 Home is Dedicated at Hot Springs," *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 23, 1926, 2.

commended the Woodmen of the Union for “play[ing] the part of the giant oak and surviv[ing] the storm while the fields about were covered in wreckage,”⁵⁵⁵ alluding to the years of struggle African Americans faced trying to access the thermal waters through fires and white supremacy. The WoU Bathhouse lived up to its “giant oak” moniker. The establishment not only served as a bathhouse, pumping national park thermal water to Black visitors, but it also served as the national headquarters for the Woodmen of the Union. By the mid 1920s Hot Springs now had two establishments offering healing thermal water to local and national African American visitors, tourists, and patients.

The Black bathhouses, while off the Hot Springs Reservation in the town’s Black neighborhood, remained under federal supervision and surveillance since the establishments piped government water into their establishments. Black physicians were not immune from accusations of drumming and impropriety that plagued doctors all across town. Park records note that visitors repeatedly charged Claude Wade with drumming. In 1908, he relied on his standing in the local medical community to refute the charges, enlisting letters of support from Black and white registered physicians in good standing with the Department of the Interior. Ultimately, the park superintendent suspended Wade from administering the waters for one year in 1918 “on account of a charge of drumming being sustained against him.”⁵⁵⁶ John L. Eve also faced accusations of drumming. In August 1921, Emma Buckner and her mother travelled to Hot Springs “to get the benefit of the wonderful curative powers of this water.”⁵⁵⁷ Eve prescribed Buckner a series of baths to alleviate her partial paralysis. After six weeks passed and Buckner felt no improvement, she accused Eve of malpractice, as he charged her \$50 for his services that

⁵⁵⁵Griggs, *The Life Story of John L. Webb*, in Batts, et. al, John L. Webb: *The Man and His Legacy*, 48.

⁵⁵⁶ “Negro Doctor Off,” Hot Springs New Era, 26 February 1918, 4.

⁵⁵⁷ Emma Buckner to William P. Parks, 20 October 1921; Hot Springs National Park Archives HOSP 19266, Series II: Concessions Records, 1879-1998, undated, Box 39, Folder Employees: Eve, Dr. John E., 1921-1922.

she said would “cure” her.⁵⁵⁸ “I do not think he treated me fair after taking my money,” wrote a disheartened Emma Buckner to the Hot Springs Reservation superintendent.⁵⁵⁹ After the Federal Registration Board notified the new doctor in town, Eve relied on the networks created by the Black fraternal orders and their bathhouses to clear his name. He asked Dr. H. H. Phipps, the Pythian Bathhouse’s resident physician, to endorse his practice. Phipps testified that he considered Eve “a man of honor and integrity.” When asked to judge Eve’s standing in the Black medical community, Phipps wrote “very high indeed.”⁵⁶⁰ Eve also drew support from Dr. Ellis A. Kendall, Supreme President of the Woodmen of the Union, who similarly praised Eve and his integrity. These endorsements countered Buckner’s malpractice allegation and the Board ended their investigation with no punishment. The thermal waters connected Hot Springs black physicians to a larger network of thermal water practices waged between doctors in town for decades.

Hot Springs’ Black bathhouses positively affected the fraternal organizations and energized the town’s African American community. The Pythians reported their Hot Springs order was “the liveliest and most substantial Order in the State.”⁵⁶¹ The bathhouse intrigued visitors from around town and across the state to join the organization, paying dues and contributing to the success of the order. Bathhouse attendant Myrtle Cheatham commented that the Pythian “stayed crowded, there, because it was the only place we had to bathe, at the Pythian Bathhouse.”⁵⁶² In the exclusive Black bathhouses, the Woodmen of the Union Bathhouse and Hospital not only provided thousands of baths and medical treatments to patients and visitors,

⁵⁵⁸ “Statement of Mrs. Emma Buckner,” 24 October 1921; HOSP 19266, Box 39, Folder Eve, Dr. John E.

⁵⁵⁹ Emma Buckner to William P. Parks, 20 October 1921.

⁵⁶⁰ Dr. H.H. Phipps questionnaire for John E. Eve from Federal Registration Board; HOSP 19266, Box 39, Folder Eve, Dr. John E., 1921-1922.

⁵⁶¹ “John T.T. Warren,” in Green, et. al., *History and Manual of the Colored Knights of Pythias*, 960.

⁵⁶² Myrtle Cheatham interview, conducted by Hot Springs National Park Ranger Toni Cooper, March 10, 1993, 3.

but it also brought jobs and stability to the local African American community. Ellis Kendall recalled the growth of jobs and community in Hot Springs as a direct result of the Black bathhouses: “The advent of the Woodmen of the Union had a marked impact on the make-up of the Hot Springs African American community. It led to a significant increase in the number of Black professionals, as well as an increase in businesses in the Malvern Avenue area.”⁵⁶³ The Black bathhouses in Hot Springs became a central node in the growth of the community because it provided access to previously restricted aspects of health and leisure as well as professional job opportunities to African Americans.

“Hot Springs Water Sure Run Good and Hot”: Cultural Significance of Black Bathhouses

At first glance Hot Springs’ two African American bathhouses were similar to the two dozen bathhouses in town at the turn of the twentieth century, which provided the reservation’s thermal waters to the public. Hot Springs’ officials and boosters lauded the white bathhouses as spaces “Where nature and your government unite to make you well.” Bathhouse Row offered “Uncle Sam’s Hot Water,” allowing visitors and patients to “See America First” and take in all the natural beauty the nation had to offer.⁵⁶⁴ But African Americans attached unique social and cultural significance to these structures of brick, mortar, plaster, and pipe as well as the water that flowed through it. Segregation restricted access to culturally and legally defined white facilities and institutions in the South. These policies excluded African Americans from spaces in

⁵⁶³ Audrey Wenger McCully, “The Men Behind The Woodmen of the Union, Ellis Kendall, Sr., M.D.” in Batts, et. al., *John L. Webb: The Man and His Legacy*, 120-121.

⁵⁶⁴ “Where Nature and Government Unite to Make You Well,” Hot Springs National Park Chamber of Commerce, 1936, in Hot Springs National Park archives, Booklet and Collection series, sub-series 1.5: HOSP 7241, 1; “Uncle Sam’s Hot Water,” *Wyandott Herald* (Kansas City, Kansas), March 8, 1900, 2; for the identity and nation-building via the national park project, see Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington: Smithsonian Press, 2001).

the natural world designated as public sites for rest and recreation. Hot Springs' Black bathhouses provided new access points to a public, natural, and national resource, a "playground of the Southland" where African American associations offered "constructive rest and upbuilding to thousands yearly."⁵⁶⁵ These recuperative and recreational establishments became more than a "good house" for local African American patients and customers. Black visitors intertwined themes of access, leisure, and racial pride to these establishments.

A growing national African American middle class utilized their geographic mobility to patronize Hot Springs' Black bathhouses as well. This helps answer the question of just who partook of the park's thermal waters. They used these establishments to better their health, engage in new class-based leisure pursuits, and create a node of racial pride for the African American populace. As the establishments on the world-famous "Bathhouse Row" succumbed to Jim Crow segregation laws and predominantly served only white tourists and patients, Hot Springs' African American community cherished their town's bathhouses as they provided the only true access point to freely take in the publicly owned thermal waters in the early twentieth century. According to the 1920 census, the African American population of the town was 2,811. The Pythian provided 32,425 baths that same year, which suggests that African Americans were travelling within the region as well as into the South to take in the healing waters offered by the park.⁵⁶⁶

It is also important to trace the geographic reach of these Black bathhouses. The Pythian and the Woodmen of the Union Bathhouses were certainly popular in Hot Springs. The buildings became centers of African American life in town. But a number of factors made these Black

⁵⁶⁵ "Business Men at the Woodmen Bathhouse," *Chicago Defender*, April 12, 1930, 2.

⁵⁶⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, *1920 Census of Population, General Report and Analytical Tables*, Table 19, Color or Race, Nativity, Parentage, 77; Shugart, "Tables Showing Annual Total Number of Baths Given at Each Operating Bathhouse, 1898-2004," 5.

bathhouses more than just local jewels. Hot Springs' bathhouses were not the only widely known establishments offering spa treatments for African Americans. Sites on the east coast and throughout the Midwest sustained a growing Black clientele in search of rest, relaxation, and recovery. But the combination of social networks and federal control of the thermal waters produced a continued demand for thermal water baths in the 1920s. The hard work of Black fraternal associations at the turn of the century created a vast communications infrastructure which moved patients and patrons into these establishments yearly. Second, the Pythian Bathhouse and the Woodmen of the Union Bathhouse and Hospital routinely connected their establishments to the national park. By claiming their property, and the thermal waters, were under the supervision of the federal government, the bathhouse owners and managers distanced themselves and their businesses from local realities under Jim Crow. Advertising this relationship was one way to draw down visitors from the North and Midwest who were nervous of visiting or returning to the South.

The growing clientele visiting Hot Springs and enjoying the waters connects the town and its resource to one of the largest social movements of the early twentieth century: the Great Migration. Historians attribute part the rise of a northern Black middle class to the increased economic opportunities for an estimated 1.6 million African Americans who left the South for the North between 1910-1940.⁵⁶⁷ During that time, these southern emigrants flowed into northern metropolises, accrued surplus income, and were ready to spend it. Then, according to Myra Young Armstead, "blacks who could afford to patronize hotels and other new vacation

⁵⁶⁷ See James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-30* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); James Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

spots joined a new class of wealthy Americans created by nineteenth-century industrialization.”⁵⁶⁸ As African American migrated out of the South, they visited established resort towns and created their own.⁵⁶⁹ The clientele of these new spa resorts was almost exclusively middle- and upper-class, in part because the standard stay in one of these towns was a few weeks at minimum stretching to a few months. Members of the working-class could almost certainly not sacrifice the salary to pursue such prescriptive or leisure stays. In Hot Springs, middle-class Black patrons attached cultural significance to the town’s Black bathhouses through a network of newspapers, associations, physical connections, and word of mouth that made the establishments more than mere buildings but part of a national racial narrative of uplift, success, and well-being.

Now just *how* did African Americans travel to Hot Springs as more and more moved outside the South and into Northern urban centers? Answering this helps demonstrate regional and national patronage patterns connecting African Americans to the thermal waters at Hot Springs. One way to trace the impact of the Black bathhouses on the national African American community is to follow railroad lines. Jim Crow segregation restrictions continued to make railroad travel difficult and demoralizing for Black patients and patrons in the 1920s and 1930s just as it had at the turn of the century. A January 1927 article in the *Pittsburgh Courier* noted that some travelers continued to face “pathetic” travelling conditions moving throughout the

⁵⁶⁸ Myra B. Young Armstead, “Revisiting Hotels and Other Lodgings: American Tourist Spaces through the Lens of Black Pleasure-Travelers, 1880-1950,” *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 25 (2005), 138.

⁵⁶⁹ Young Armstead, “*Lord, Please Don’t Take Me in August!*”; see also Young Armstead, “Revisiting Hotels and Other Lodgings”; Lewis Walker and Benjamin C. Wilson, *Black Eden: The Idlewild Community* (Lancing: Michigan State University Press, 2002); Ronald Jemal Stephens, *Idlewild: The Rise, Decline, and Rebirth of a Unique African American Resort Town* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013); Brian McCammack, *Landscapes of Hope: Nature and the Great Migration in Chicago* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 60-101; Andrew Kahr, “‘The Slightest Semblance of Unruliness’: Steamboat Excursions, Pleasure Resorts, and the Emergence of Segregation Culture on the Potomac River,” *Journal of American History* 94, no. 4 (March 2008): 1108-1136; Andrew Kahr, *The Land was Ours: How Black Beaches Became White Wealth in the Coastal South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

South on the railroads. The report listed Arkansas as one of “The worst states in the United States for the Negro to get first class accommodations.” The author did note that some white and Black businessmen in Hot Springs and Little Rock specifically had demanded better treatment and had received it anecdotally. But the reporter concluded that these unfair standards hampered large numbers of African Americans from visiting Hot Springs and taking the waters: “I know hundreds of men and women who would spend from one week to two months at Hot Springs each year, if it were not for the ‘Jim Crow’ service to Negroes.”⁵⁷⁰ Black men and women from across the Midwest used the Missouri Pacific’s Iron Mountain Line. In 1900, the railroad ran an advertisement in the African American *Topeka Plaindealer* that “The famous Hot Springs of Arkansas are reached ONLY by this LINE.”⁵⁷¹ A map of the Iron Mountain Line shows terminals in a number of Midwestern cities. Local African American newspapers in these towns confirm the interest and importance of Hot Springs’ Black bathhouses. While Black visitors confronted familiar, embarrassing, and still often dangerous, ordeals on railcars throughout the Jim Crow era, they chose to make the journey back south in order to congregate with fraternal members, seek unique medical treatments from the bathhouses’ medical staffs, and take the waters.

Chicago was one important locale that brought in a number of African American patrons to Hot Springs’ Black bathhouses. Travelling from Chicago, Tony Langston compared the Pythian Bathhouse to the other elegant establishments on national park property. He boasted the building “is backed up by the finest and most modern equipment and is so thoroughly appointed that it surpasses many of the great baths maintained for members of the opposite race on

⁵⁷⁰ The Arkansas Traveller, “Arkansas Traveller Describes South’s ‘Jim Crow’ Travel,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 8, 1927, 5.

⁵⁷¹ “Ad for the Missouri Pacific Railway,” *Topeka Plaindealer*, July 20, 1900, 3.

celebrated ‘Bathhouse Row.’”⁵⁷² Another correspondent for the *Chicago Defender* believed so many Black Chicagoans enjoyed their time in Hot Springs that the Pythian Bathhouse would soon “become a Chicago colony” in the South.⁵⁷³ The idea of “colonizing” Hot Springs was a common thread for both white and Black middle-class tourists who hoped to establish seasonal relationships in town as patrons visited year after year.⁵⁷⁴ Floyd J. Calvin of the *Pittsburgh Courier* claimed in 1928 the Woodmen of the Union building was “A Mecca for Tired Business Men” Where prominent Black Chicagoans like Oscar De Priest, a member of the Chicago city council and first African American elected to Congress from outside the South in the twentieth century, and banker Jesse Binga visited and took in the thermal waters as “This is the place where the ‘big’ men of the race come when they are sick, or when they want to rest.”⁵⁷⁵

Another important node in the national web of African American support for Hot Springs’ Black bathhouses was Topeka, Kansas. Topeka is an interesting location because while the town connected to the Iron Mountain Route and shared a strong affinity for Hot Springs’ Black bathhouses, there were other mineral spring resort towns much more easily accessible to middle-class Kansans. Excelsior Springs, Missouri, provided similar mineral baths to patients and patrons as Hot Springs National Park in Arkansas. Visitors praised the healing properties of the Excelsior waters and noted there were establishments in town friendly to African Americans. A reporter argued African Americans could enjoy hydrotherapy in Excelsior Springs “without being Jim Crowed” as in Hot Springs.⁵⁷⁶ But Topeka residents had ties to Hot Springs linking the two towns. A number of prominent Black Topeka residents moved to Hot Springs in the

⁵⁷² Tony Langston, “Bawled Out in Chicago and Boiled Out in Hot Springs,” *Chicago Defender*, January 24, 1925, 6.

⁵⁷³ “Chicagoans Enjoy Live at Hot Springs,” *Chicago Defender*, February 19, 1915.

⁵⁷⁴ “Many Added to St. Louis Colony,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 18, 1903, 14.

⁵⁷⁵ Floyd J. Calvin, “The Woodmen Union Building a Mecca For Tired Business Men,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 23, 1928, A1.

⁵⁷⁶ C.A.R., “Excelsior Springs Is a Wonderful Health Resort,” *Chicago Defender*, February 16, 1918, 10.

beginning of the twentieth century and established themselves as influential members of the local community, including C.M. Wade.⁵⁷⁷ With these strong relationships intact, information about Hot Springs' Black bathhouses flowed continuously into Topeka's middle-class African American community. On September 6, 1923, almost ten years to the day of the devastating 1913 fire, a reporter for the *Plaindealer* reported the Pythian Bathhouse was "the last word in beauty, elegance, and comfort... The bathhouse may never pay the Pythians on the basis of money invested, but one thing is certain, they have erected a monument to their order which will make every member of the organization proud."⁵⁷⁸ The physical, social, and cultural ties between individuals and Hot Springs' Black bathhouses created a physical and cultural alcove for African American travel, leisure, and restorative health.

African American travelers responded to a culture of Southern white supremacy and racial violence by creating systems to ensure safe and secure travel that was designed to offer protection from dangerous situations in unfamiliar communities. These adaptive strategies were strengthened by the advent and availability of the automobile as it provided middle-class African Americans a quick and cost-effective way to travel to Hot Springs. The historian Mark Foster argued African American pleasure-seekers employed the automobile "as a liberating device, permitting them to establish their own timetables and change destinations at their whim."⁵⁷⁹ In 1930, African American educator Lorenzo Johnston Greene and four Howard University students traversed the summer months in a Ford Model A selling Black history books to African Americans in the South. Greene described Hot Springs as a "surprise," noting the elegant

⁵⁷⁷ "Our Friends in Arkansas," *Topeka Plaindealer*, March 9, 1906, 2; Joseph T. Hill was formerly the pastor in Topeka and took over preaching at Hot Springs' famous Roanoke Baptist Church, in "Hot Springs," *Topeka Plaindealer*, July 26, 1918, 1.

⁵⁷⁸ "Side Lights on N.N.B. League Meeting," *Topeka Plaindealer*, September 7, 1923, 1

⁵⁷⁹ Mark S. Foster, "In the face of 'Jim Crow': Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure, 1890-1945." *The Journal of Negro History* 84 (Spring 1999), 141; see also Winston Holland. *Black Recreation: A Historical Perspective* (Chicago: Burnham, 2002).

Bathhouse Row establishments. But for Greene, the “most outstanding as well as gratifying” part of the trip was when he set his eyes on the town’s Black bathhouses (Fig. 4.8). “The Woodmen of the Union building... is the most beautiful building I have ever seen owned by Negroes. The Pythian Building in the block above it is not so pretentious from the exterior, but outdoes the Woodmen’s from the interior.”⁵⁸⁰ The automobile remained a fixture in accessing Hot Springs’ Black bathhouses, driving newly mobile African Americans towards the park’s thermal waters.

The national park in Hot Springs attributed to this distinctive social reality for Hot Springs’ African American community. Greene’s trip to Hot Springs not only demonstrated the cultural force of the bathhouses that first struck a visitor. He also noted in his diary how many classmates from Howard he met in town who either lived in Hot Springs or were visiting as well. His journey allowed him to explore cities all throughout the South, allowing the educator to comment how Hot Springs was a place apart from other African American communities. He attributed this unique social vibrancy and respectability to the fact that in Hot Springs, “the Negro resident here gets contact from all over the world.”⁵⁸¹ The allure of the thermal waters brought together African Americans, with the means to travel, from all across the country. In the waters they were able to share memories about their pasts and possibly discuss ideas about the future of the race.

⁵⁸⁰ Arvarh E. Strickland and Lorenzo Johnston Greene, “Lorenzo Johnston Greene’s Book-Selling Odyssey: Touring Arkansas in 1930, Memphis to Texarkana,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 55, No. 3 (Autumn, 1996), 292.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*

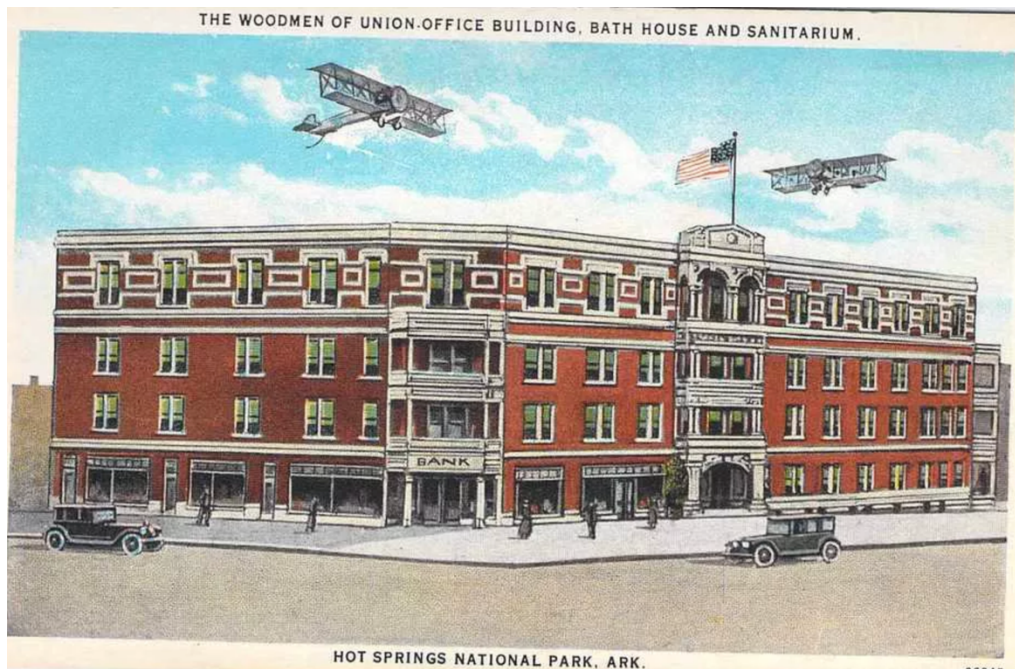


Fig. 4.8: Postcard of the Woodmen of the Union Headquarters (c. 1920s); Hot Springs National Park Archives, Postcards Collection.

Automobile travel was still not an entirely safe endeavor, however, especially in the South. African Americans again relied on innovative and collaborative networks to ensure their safety as more gained access to automobiles. Victor Green's *The Negro Motorist Green Book* provided concrete relief to this immediate concern. Green believed the book was “badly needed among our race since the advance of the motor age.”⁵⁸² The book provided an enumeration of establishments, hotels, and homes known to be welcoming to African Americans as they visited towns while vacationing. Begun in 1936 in New York City, the *Green Book* quickly expanded to cover more states. Arkansas first appeared in the book in 1939. Hot Springs had the most listings of amicable locations for Black tourists and visitors compared to other cities in the state such as Fayetteville, Fort Smith, and even the capital, Little Rock with both the Pythian and the

⁵⁸² William Smith to Victor Green, November 5, 1938, in 1928 *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, accessed at New York Public Library Digital Collections, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/the-green-book?&keywords=&sort=sortString+asc#/?tab=about>.

Woodmen of the Union listed. The *Green Book* circulated yearly until the 1960s and during that time, Hot Springs' Black bathhouses remained a fixture in the book as a place for travelling African Americans to visit, rest, relax, and enjoy the town's thermal waters.

Once African Americans arrived in Hot Springs, whether by rail or auto, visitors attached specific cultural significance to the establishments and the waters coursing through them. Black fraternal organizations understood the added benefits of the bathhouses early in their proprietorship. As soon as they bought the Crystal, the Pythians understood and embraced their role in providing thermal waters to Black visitors. The Crystal was not only "the only place in Hot Springs where members of our race may go and secure private bathing in those healing waters," but more broadly it was "a possession that no other fraternal or benefit association among our people can lay claim to" because it "is a building from which water is used to heal its members in particular, and mankind in general."⁵⁸³ Upon rebuilding the bathhouse after the 1913 fire, the Pythians described the new establishment as "a splendid monument of the genius and skill of the present generation of colored artisans."⁵⁸⁴ The Pythians connected thermal water access to their success as an organization and race. In 1909, the Committee of the State of the Order reported the bathhouse was "the place where our people may enjoy the health-giving properties of that water." "We feel," concluded the committee, "that the future holds a great boon in that building for the Pythian world."⁵⁸⁵

African American visitors and residents brought religious connotations to the city's thermal waters as well. In 1918, reporter Mattie A. Perkins, writing for the African American *Topeka Plaindealer*, associated Hot Springs' thermal waters with the healing word of scripture:

⁵⁸³ Green, et. al., *History and Manual of the Colored Knights of Pythias*, 283

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 416.

⁵⁸⁵ "Report of Committee on State of the Order," 28 August 1909, in Green, et. al., *History and Manual of the Colored Knights of Pythias*, 315.

He sendeth the spring into the valleys, which run among the hills. So sang the Psalmist enumerating the blessings of the Lord, bestowed upon man, and throughout all time, of which we have record, men have found strength and healing in the waters welling from the earth... But in all the world's history of beneficent waters there is nothing to compare with the records of the Hot Springs of Arkansas.⁵⁸⁶

Perkins believed the waters kept the African American community “brilliant, vivid, vital, and energetic.” Dr. Claude M. Wade also used religious connotations to introduce Hot Springs’ thermal waters to a national African American audience. At the Pythian Bathhouse’s re-opening dedication in 1923, Wade claimed, “These wonderful hot waters are the gift of Providence to men of all races and all creeds, without discrimination, that all ailments and suffering we bring upon ourselves may be cured and relieved.”⁵⁸⁷ Community members described the renovation and enlargement of the Pythian in 1923 as “one of the greatest events in the history of the colored citizens of Hot Springs.”⁵⁸⁸ African American visitors, patients, and patrons attached community pride as well as cultural and religious sentiment to the buildings and the thermal waters residing inside them through their labor and leisure.

Local and national commentators made similar statements concerning the Woodmen of the Union Hospital and Bathhouse. At the building’s dedication, WoU Supreme President Dr. E.A. Kendall said the establishment was “a source of pride to the order and to the race.”⁵⁸⁹ Sutton Griggs bellowed in 1926, “The money invested in this building does not represent money borrowed from capitalists, but has been gathered from the humble members of the Negro race.”⁵⁹⁰ Hot Springs was on the National Negro Business League’s short list for its 1924 convention along with Washington, D.C., Cleveland, Louisville, Los Angeles, and Chicago, the

⁵⁸⁶ Mattie A. Perkins, “Hot Springs, A City of Grandeur,” *Topeka Plaindealer*, August 16, 1918.

⁵⁸⁷ “Negro Pythians in Dedicatory Service,” *Hot Springs New Era*, January 31, 1923, 8.

⁵⁸⁸ “To Dedicate Negro Bathhouse Tomorrow,” *Hot Springs New Era*, January 30, 1923, 2.

⁵⁸⁹ Albon L. Holsey, “Woodmen of Union Formally Dedicate New Bath House,” *New York Age*, September 16, 1922, 1.

⁵⁹⁰ Griggs, *The Life Story of John L. Webb*, in Batts, et. al., *John L. Webb: The Man and His Legacy*, 50.

ultimate winner.⁵⁹¹ on his tour “Below the Mason-Dixon Line” in 1934, Pittsburgh Courier reporter Jesse O. Thomas exclaimed, “Since ‘cleanliness is next to Godliness,’ I should be a little more Godly because of the number of hot baths and scrubbing that Brother Wilson, the bath attendant at the Woodmen of the Union Bathhouse, subjected me to.”⁵⁹² The allure of the national park’s thermal water helped bring these opportunities to Hot Springs’ Black community. These bathhouses provided African Americans a space for jobs, God, health, and relaxation.

But many did not have the time or the means to visit Hot Springs. The prevalence of the Black bathhouses in the African American media provided another way for the town’s thermal waters to trickle into Black culture from afar. Correspondent reports about Hot Springs appeared in African American newspapers in Chicago, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, New York, Indianapolis, and Kansas City. Information about the bathhouses also appeared in Black periodicals. In July 1924, Pine Bluff, Arkansas resident George Thornton wrote a letter to W.E.B. Du Bois, the influential civil rights activist and editor of the *Crisis*, the nationally circulated magazine of the NAACP. Thornton believed that “the colored people should know more about the possibility of the great service that can be rendered by those bathhouses” in Hot Springs and asked if Du Bois would be interested in an article on the establishments for the magazine.⁵⁹³ Du Bois responded a month later that he would be “very glad indeed” to see an article on the Black bathhouses.⁵⁹⁴ Although the article never materialized in the *Crisis*, the magazine ran ads for the Pythian beginning in 1924 and they appeared intermittently until the 1940s.

⁵⁹¹ “All Ready, Go!” *Negro Star* (Wichita, Kansas), September 1, 1922, 3.

⁵⁹² Jesse O. Thomas, “Below the Mason-Dixon Line,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 September 1934, A2.

⁵⁹³ George B. Thornton to W.E.B. Du Bois, 28 July 1924, *W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), series 1: correspondence, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries*.

⁵⁹⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois to George B. Thornton, 23 August 1924, *W.E.B. Du Bois Papers*.

Hot Springs was also featured in a number of rhythm and blues songs celebrating the physical movement of middle-class African Americans to Hot Springs.⁵⁹⁵ As the bathhouses were also the center of the Black entertainment scene, with the Woodmen of the Union's 2,500-seat auditorium hosting the likes of Duke Ellington and Count Basie in the 1920s, it is not surprising that these entertainers took in the waters and shared their encounters with the world. In 1927, blues legend Bessie Smith was overworked and on the verge of a "nervous breakdown." Smith's strong, sensuous voice had made her one of the most famous female blues artists in the 1920s, but fame and the pressures of a daunting performance schedule had taken its toll. A friend suggested she travel to Hot Springs to recover. And the healing baths and the vibrant community in Hot Springs rejuvenated the singer. Upon returning to New York in March, Bessie Smith wrote and recorded "Hot Springs Blues."⁵⁹⁶ The hit connected the thermal waters in Hot Springs to themes that resonated within the African American community as Smith wailed, "Lord if you ever get crippled, let me tell you what to do, / Take a trip to Hot Springs, and let them wait on you. / Hot Springs water sure run good and hot. / Hot Springs water sure run boiling hot." In a world where white supremacy dominated nearly every facet of life, Bessie Smith celebrated her brief reprieve from that world, reaching the ears of thousands.

Hot Springs' Black bathhouses attracted middle-class African Americans from across the country with their promise of a unique and memorable leisure experience. Mobile African Americans were well positioned to take advantage of new modes of communication and transportation in the early twentieth century as railroads and automobiles allowed individuals, couples, and families to travel back down South to take in the waters in Hot Springs. During

⁵⁹⁵ See Charley Patton, "Spoonful Blues" (1929); Robert Johnson, "32-20 Blues" (1936); Lonnie Johnson, "Hot Springs Blues (Skin and Bones)" (1938).

⁵⁹⁶ Susannah McCorkle, "Back to Bessie," *American Heritage* 47, No. 7 (November 1997), <https://www.americanheritage.com/content/back-bessie>.

their visits, African Americans built connections with each other and with the healing powers of the waters. They shared their experiences about the bathhouses to friends and family when they returned home. For those who could not visit or vacation, they imagined the relaxation of the spa experience when they heard their favorite artists reference Hot Springs, thereby attaching cultural meaning to the Black bathhouses and thermal waters.

* * * * *

On the surface, an 1887 federal statute concerning thermal water rights on a small Arkansas natural reservation does not appear germane to the influence of national African American organizations in the early twentieth century or the wailing cries of Bessie Smith. But Hot Springs unique hydrological and social environment provided paths for these seemingly distinct movements to intersect and become inseparable. Hot Springs thermal waters traveled some distance to reach the town's Black bathhouses; Hot Springs Mountain is roughly one-half mile from the Pythian and the Woodmen of the Union Bathhouses. Hot Springs changing hydraulic system, implemented by reservation officials and influential factions in town, sought to protect the purity and virtue of the waters by containing the waters in a system of pipes and reservoirs in order to keep "filth" or "nuisances" from defiling the efficacy of the waters.⁵⁹⁷ This project, however, connected the chemical and medicinal purity of the waters to a parallel project of exclusion, preventing undeserving groups of easy access to that same resource. One such group were African Americans, shuttered from most of society through a violent cultural and political regime of white supremacy in the Jim Crow South. But that same system that contained

⁵⁹⁷ Hot Springs Commissioners' report quoted in Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 42-43.

the waters created an opportunity for the waters to transcend rigid park boundaries. in order to reach the town's Black bathhouses

The movement of the water out of Hot Springs National Park and the movement of middle-class African Americans into the town's Black bathhouses created ideal conditions for the thermal waters to seep into Black culture. In September 1922, Woodmen of the Union Supreme President Dr. Ellis Kendall, at the dedication of his order's Hospital and Bathhouse in Hot Springs, told his audience "We are struggling and working not alone for the present but for unborn generations of this race of ours." Black Hot Springs residents must have felt the weight of Kendall's admission as just one month earlier, a mob lynched Gilbert Harris blocks from the new bathhouse. But Kendall's message to the crowd revolved around hope instead of inevitable despair:

Let us settle within ourselves once and for always this question, and that is, if creditable efforts of, for, and by my people are to meet with success it will have to come absolutely and entirely through my people. Each individual must know that the future hope of the children brought into the world, the aims and ambitions of a struggling race depends entirely upon loyalty to principles for which we are contending and to the amount of cooperation shown to every worthy effort put forth by our own race.⁵⁹⁸

Hot Springs Black bathhouses represented instances of Kendall's "worthy efforts." African Americans converged on Hot Springs as a destination which simultaneously offered health, leisure, and independence in a culturally and socially constrained nation. During a period in which Southern Blacks were increasingly burdened by the political and physical pressures of Jim Crow segregation and racism, fraternal associations brought African Americans closer to the natural world by offering them a chance to relax, rest, and recuperate in racially safe spaces like the Pythian or the Woodmen of the Union Bathhouses. While boiling out in the waters, African Americans strengthened their social and economic networks across the country, and the

⁵⁹⁸ Holsey, "Woodmen of the Union Formally Dedicate New Bath House," 7.

bathhouses served as beacons of hope in an era of hardening racial boundaries. African Americans certainly faced constant pressure to take the waters in Hot Springs, but they adapted to the town's social and hydrological conditions to create a space of health, leisure, and racial pride. Hot Springs Black bathhouses not only created a generative space for Black men and women to establish their own identities, but also provided a bridge for those same visitors to build a new and lasting appreciation for the gifts and powers of the natural world.

Chapter 5: “Where Nature and Your Government Unite to Make You Well”: Health, Leisure, and the National Park Idea

Hot Springs Reservation, the land and its waters, became America’s seventeenth national park on March 4, 1921.⁵⁹⁹ The new designation was a part of Congress’ yearly sundry bill appropriating over \$1,400,000 to the national parks for administrative costs, maintenance, protections, and improvements. While the Senate rejected an improvement appropriation for \$275,000 for Hot Springs, members found no reason to question the new national park designation and the body passed the amendment without debate.⁶⁰⁰ The line item noted simply, “Hereafter the Hot Springs Reservation shall be known as the Hot Springs National Park.”⁶⁰¹ National Park Service (NPS) Director Stephen Tyng Mather made a small, but significant, note in his yearly report on the parks, stating, “Congress made fitting acknowledgement of the national importance of the Hot Springs Reservation by elevating it to national-park status on March 4 last.”⁶⁰² With this distinction, Hot Springs officially joined the likes of the Yosemite Valley, Yellowstone’s geysers and wildlife, the Grand Canyon, the mountains and shoreline of Acadia (then called Lafayette) National Park’s Mount Desert Island, and others, as spaces of unique natural and cultural value protected by the federal government as national parks.

⁵⁹⁹ A note on chronology. Presently, Hot Springs is the nation’s sixteenth national park. Congress established General Grant National Park, the nation’s fourth national park on October 1, 1890. In March 1940, the creation of California’s Kings Canyon NP subsumed the physical boundaries and administrative duties of General Grant NP.

⁶⁰⁰ “No Improvement Fund,” *Hot Springs New Era*, 25 February 1921, 1.

⁶⁰¹ *An Act Making appropriations for sundry civil expenses of the Government for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1922, and for other purposes, U.S. Statutes at Large*, 161, (March 4, 1921): 1407.

⁶⁰² Stephen Mather, *Report of the Director of the National Park Service* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921), 60.

Such a shift could have been cause for celebration. But the one-line designation mirrored the subdued response for the name change in Hot Springs. Superintendent Dr. William Parks did not mention the name change in his 1921 report to the National Park Service, focusing as he often did on bathing statistics and the thermal water's quality.⁶⁰³ As Interior officials had handled the day-to-day operations of the park in earnest since 1878, nothing changed administratively on the federal land in the Arkansas town as a result of the sundry bill. The local *Hot Springs New Era* did not mention the news in the days after the official announcement. Instead, the paper added "Hot Springs National Park, (Arkansas)" to its front pages beginning March 31, insinuating the name of the entire town changed along with the designation of the small 911-acre park.⁶⁰⁴ This editorial choice was not entirely surprising as many local and regional boosters had already attached the national park moniker to Hot Springs before March 1921. Opie Read, writing in a pamphlet for the United States Railroad Administration in 1919, concluded Hot Springs was "our first national park." Read's boosterism stated the springs "are the mecca not only of the rich and famous, but of the countless thousands of everyday citizens of this and foreign countries. Government possession has made them a universal institution."⁶⁰⁵ Local businesses across Hot Springs also attached "national park" to the town in their advertisements well before the official name change to connect their industry with the draw of the thermal waters as well as the larger national park project. Hot Springs was already a national park in the minds of many town and park officials because of their actions and efforts throughout the 1910s and 1920s.

⁶⁰³ Dr. William P. Parks, *Report of the Superintendent of Hot Springs National Park*, in Stephen Mather, *Report of the Director of the National Park Service to the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921) 140-150.

⁶⁰⁴ "Front Page," *Hot Springs New Era*, 31 March 1921, 1.

⁶⁰⁵ Opie Read, "An Appreciation for Hot Springs National Park," in United States Railroad Administration, "Hot Springs National Park – Arkansas," *National Parks Series* (Chicago: Press of W.J. Hartman Co., 1919), 6-7.

So, what's in a name? Why did Hot Springs, a natural reservation known for its salubrious thermal waters and Victorian bathhouses, become a national park? As a laboratory where officials successfully blended rhetoric of health and leisure and changed the park's hydrology and landscape to bring as many people as possible to the small Arkansas town, Hot Springs satisfied both the needs of a young National Park Service, a product of Progressive-Era bureaucratization in the federal government, while emphasizing the medicinal legacy associated with the park's thermal waters. On the one hand, town and park officials hoped the new national park moniker would bring in more visitors, both patrons and patients, to not only enjoy the thermal waters, but the other recreational opportunities central Arkansas offered, specifically man-made Lakes Catherine and Hamilton. These visitors came by rail, but more by automobile, a mode of transportation rising in popularity and accessibility in the early twentieth century. Park administrators responded to these social changes by building more roads throughout the park, altering the landscape to suit new trends Americans attached to accessing nature. Outside the park, town officials and regional boosters made sure visitors enjoyed the scenic vistas and recreational opportunities of the national park and the surrounding environment. At the same time, Hot Springs maintained itself as a health resort, making the medicinal properties of the town's most prominent natural resource paramount to a visitor's experience. A new, modern, and uniform hydraulic system in 1930 was at the heart of these cultural shifts, ensuring thermal water purity and access for patients, patrons, and tourists for decades to come. Hot Springs officials and administrators successfully adapted to an evolving American national park system by changing the hydrology, landscape, and rhetoric of the park.

Hot Springs' landscape and hydrology routinely adapted to changing trends in health, access, and purity under the Department of the Interior. By the 1910s and 1920s, the National

Park Service emphasized a new and ambitious narrative around the national parks. The NPS, argued the historian Richard West Sellars, was the latest organization to manipulate nature in the parks, ensuring tourists' enjoyment.⁶⁰⁶ By the early twentieth century, these tourists sought to "See America First" through the national parks. The slogan embodied what Mark Daniels, first General Superintendent and Landscape Engineer of the national parks, considered the central value of the parks: "1. The stimulation of National Patriotism; 2. The furthering of knowledge and health; 3. The retention of tourist travel within the United States."⁶⁰⁷ Hot Springs' history made it uniquely suited to be a shining example of Daniels' early national park idea as its officials promoted visitation while also emphasizing nature's health benefits. Mather noted in his 1921 report how "The park has continued to offer relief to those seeking health, rest, and recreation."⁶⁰⁸ Hot Springs hydrological history effectively demonstrates the material effects of these competing interests and cultural shifts, situating nature away from its healthfulness and more towards touring pleasures like recreation and leisure.

"The oldest national park" – Situating Health and Hot Springs in United States Conservation History

By first decades of the twentieth century, the national parks had become sites of consumerism and recreation. Thousands of visitors took advantage of railroads and automobiles and embarked on vacations to the nation's natural wonders. Mark Daniels concluded,

⁶⁰⁶ Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 11.

⁶⁰⁷ Mark Daniels, "Scenic Resources in the United States," *California Forestry* 1 (May 1917): 12, quoted from Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2001), 108; local boosters in Hot Springs used "See America First" rhetoric to connect the park to the project; *Cutter's Gem Souvenir of Arkansas' Hot Springs* (Hot Springs, Charles Cutter & Son, 1916), 1.

⁶⁰⁸ Mather, *Report of the Director of the National Park Service*, 60.

“Economics and esthetics really go hand in hand” in the national parks.⁶⁰⁹ But a longer history of health and its relation to conservation sat beneath the surface of this recreational rhetoric, situated well into the nineteenth century. At Hot Springs, this idea of the parks as bastions of health never dissipated.

Health remained a core theme in the utility of the national parks. One historian later noted that “Health and conservation went hand in hand” in the late nineteenth century⁶¹⁰ Officials regarded America’s first national parks as sites of health. Congress reserved the Mackinac National Park in Michigan in 1875 as a “national public park, or grounds” for visitors’ “health, comfort, and pleasure.” The *New York Times* reported to its readers that the mineral springs in Yellowstone, the world’s first national park, “possess various curative powers.”⁶¹¹ Americans flocked to the Rocky Mountains and the deserts of the Southwest for its clean air and healthful environment the same way they had retreated to the Appalachians and White Mountains a half century earlier.⁶¹² The Great Northern Railway dubbed the jagged peaks of the northern Rockies that would soon become Glacier National Park “America’s Switzerland.”⁶¹³ East and West Coast newspapers made the same “Switzerland of America” comparison when describing other mountainous, salubrious regions in the West. A trip through California took visitors through “the

⁶⁰⁹ Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History*, 28.

⁶¹⁰ Gregg Mitman, *Breathing Space: How Allergies Shape Our Lives and Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 113.

⁶¹¹ Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, 18-19.

⁶¹² Thomas A. Chambers, *Drinking the Waters: Creating an American Leisure Class at Nineteenth-Century Mineral Springs* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002); Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995); Gregg Mitman, “Hay Fever Holiday: Health, Leisure, and Place in Gilded-Age America,” *Bulletin of Historical Medicine* 77, no. 3 (2003): 600-635.

⁶¹³ Hipolito Rafael Chacon, “The Art of Glacier National Park,” Montana: *The Magazine of Western History* (Summer 2010): 56-74.

Switzerland of America,” promising a healthy “DUSTLESS ROUTE and coolest trip in summer,” according to railway ads.⁶¹⁴

Hot Springs fit swimmingly into this nineteenth century understanding of the parks. Hot Springs boosters had historically made transnational connections as well, comparing visitors’ experience to the grand tour spa towns in Europe. After the Supreme Court settled disputed land claims in Hot Springs and the federal government created a permanent presence on the reservation, that the Hot Springs Commission stated officials’ ultimate goal for the thermal waters:

It is the desire of the [Interior] Department that the water of the Hot Springs, Arkansas, should be so utilized and protected as to secure the greatest benefit to the largest number. The curative springs should be regarded as a gift of nature to the whole people and whatever restrictions are placed upon them for their better care and preservation should be equitable and just.⁶¹⁵

Five years later, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Alonzo Bell generated a report due to public interest in Hot Springs’ “wonderful hot waters.” Bell’s concluding section addressed the recurring importance Interior placed on accessing the waters, stating, “The design of the government in retaining in itself the control of these waters was to afford to the greatest number the greatest possible good.” To accomplish this, Bell argued it vital “to fully develop the possibilities of the springs” by changing the hydraulic system of the reservation, ensuring purity for patients and patrons alike.⁶¹⁶ Bell’s rhetoric of securing resources for the greatest number spoke to the subsequent strategy of utilitarian conservation undertaken by Gifford Pinchot, first Chief of the United States Forest Service, and other federal officials interested in providing

⁶¹⁴ “Ad for Canadian Pacific Railway,” *Chattanooga News*, 27 April 1903, 8; railway bought ad space in newspapers across the country, in Iowa, Missouri, Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, Alabama, Illinois, and Nebraska.

⁶¹⁵ Hot Springs Commissioners John Coburn and M.S. Sterns to Interior Secretary Carl Schurz, 16 July 1877, in Ron Cockrell, *The Hot Springs of Arkansas – America’s First National Park: Administrative History of Hot Springs National Park* (Omaha: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2014), 42.

⁶¹⁶ Alonzo Bell, *Report on the Hot Springs of Arkansas* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, U.S. Interior Department, 1882), 26-27.

access to national park resources, whether those resources included fresh air, curative waters, or scenic beauty.

By the first decades of the twentieth century, however, Americans began to understand the natural world less as a place to offer restorative health and more as a place to recreate. A rapidly industrializing society fueled this shift. By 1920, the U.S. Census concluded more of the population lived in urban centers (more than 2,500 people) than rural areas, the first time that occurred in American history.⁶¹⁷ At the “heart” of the rising conservation movement in America, argued the historian Benjamin Heber Johnson, lay two interconnected ideas: “that industrial life had badly skewed humanity’s relationship with the nonhuman world, and that this relationship had to be carefully and self-consciously remedied for the mutual benefit of society and nature.”⁶¹⁸ The national parks became escapes from this national fear and disillusionment. Responding to this cultural shift emphasizing recreation, Congress consolidated park administration in 1916 with the National Park Service. The NPS was a product of the Progressive Era’s push to manage and order the national parks under centralized federal control. Through this structure, argued conservationists, government could prevent private interests, businesses where “not one of these men cares for the forest or the general good,” from spoiling these unique landscapes.⁶¹⁹ It codified a long and amorphous relationship between the federal government and the parks. Congress created the Interior Department agency in order to “promote and regulate the use of Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, reservations... which purpose is to conserve the scenery and natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein... unimpaired for

⁶¹⁷ “Urban and Rural Areas,” United States Census Bureau,

https://www.census.gov/history/www/programs/geography/urban_and_rural_areas.html.

⁶¹⁸ Benjamin Heber Johnson, *Escaping the Dark, Gray City: Fear and Hope in Progressive-Era Conservation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 8.

⁶¹⁹ Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement In America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 165.

the enjoyment of future generations.”⁶²⁰ With the parks administered under a specific agency in the Interior Department created, according to the historian Hal Rothman, “in the spirit of the Progressive Era and promotion-oriented Jazz-age flashiness,” officials sought to control and disseminate information around an evolving national park idea.⁶²¹

The National Park Service relied on publicity to attract interest. Robert Sterling Yard was influential in introducing elected officials and their constituents to the variety of the park system. Yard, the former editor-in-chief of *The Century Magazine* and Sunday editor of the *New York Herald*, became the NPS Publicity Chief in 1916. He created pamphlets and booklets about these landscapes for wide distribution after visiting the different units under the NPS. His final product, the *National Parks Portfolio*, spoke to the new ideas around consuming and conserving scenery that dominated national park conversations by the early twentieth century. Writing to Congress in an effort to shore up support for the NPS, Yard connected the parks to nation building.⁶²² It was “the ever-widening life and activity of this Nation,” argued Yard, “To build a railroad, reclaim lands, give new impulse to enterprise, and offer new doors to ambitious capital.” But Yard added that the United States “does more” because it “furnishes playgrounds to the people which are, we may modestly state, without any rivals in the world.” Yard did not entirely abandon old ideas about the parks either. He challenged elected leaders that “There is no reason why this nation should not make its public health and scenic domain as available to all its

⁶²⁰ *An Act To establish a National Park Service, and for other purposes, U.S. Statutes at Large* 408, 64th Congress (1916), 535.

⁶²¹ Hal K. Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 68; see also Johnson, *Escaping the Dark, Gray City*, 167-197; Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy: America's Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶²² The historian Marguerite Shaffer argued that touring the parks, amongst national movements of industrialism and imperialism, “was presented as a ritual of citizenship; See *America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2001), 101.

citizens,” as he had seen in European countries like Switzerland and Italy.⁶²³ NPS officials not only tried to emphasize the grandeur and scenic beauty of the national parks, but their cultural significance to the growth of the United States.

Boosters routinely focused on the differences Hot Springs brought to an expanding national park conversation, emphasizing the reservation’s thermal waters as a national, natural resource, improving the health of a nation. “This is the only health and pleasure resort owned and conducted by Uncle Sam,” stated the Hot Springs Business Men’s League in 1900. Every visitor, they argued, “are part owners of the Hot Springs.” The federal reservation was a place “where the U.S. Government is Supreme; where crutches are thrown off; Where health and pleasure combine; and climate invites the year round.” That, according to boosters at the turn of the century, was “The Hot Springs of Arkansas in a Nutshell.”⁶²⁴ When Robert Sterling Yard visited Hot Springs in 1916, he assured a local newspaper that while “National parks are usually thought to be large tracts of land where the scenic wonders are the chief attraction... the department of the Interior intends to treat Hot Springs exactly the same as all the other national parks,” including the reservation in all future advertisements.⁶²⁵ He commented on thermal water use at the Army and Navy Hospital, arguing “The War Department’s years of experience” in town made medical officers “officially affirm the waters’ marked curative value for rheumatic and many grave ailments.”⁶²⁶

While Yard omitted Hot Springs Reservation in his *National Parks Portfolio* in 1916, in his nationally distributed *Glimpses of our National Parks* the publicist situated Hot Springs

⁶²³ “Introduction,” Robert Sterling Yard, *National Parks Portfolio*, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/nps/yard1/intro.htm.

⁶²⁴ Hot Springs Business Men’s League, *The Hot Springs of Arkansas in a Nutshell*, quotes on cover and back sleeve; <https://archive.org/details/hotspringsofarka00hots/page/n25/mode/2up>.

⁶²⁵ “Interior Department to Aid in Publicity,” *Hot Springs New Era*, 7 November 1916, 8.

⁶²⁶ Robert Sterling Yard, *Glimpses of Our National Parks* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), 46-48.

firmly in the park project. Yard first distinguished national parks from public parks: “[national parks] are not beautiful tracts of cultivated country with smooth lawns and winding paths like Central Park in New York” but “large areas which nature, not man, has made beautiful.” And continuing a common thread from past comparisons, Yard claimed, “Even the far-famed Swiss Alps are equaled, and, some travelers believe, excelled by the scenery of several of our own national parks.”⁶²⁷ When Yard arrived at his vignette of Hot Springs, he stated, accurately, “As different, almost as possible from the great scenic national parks which we have been considering, but in its own particular way as extraordinary as any of them,” Hot Springs belonged in the company of the other national parks because of the long connection Americans made between nature and health. Yard argued:

The reservation is the oldest national park, having received that status in 1832, forty years before the wonders of the Yellowstone first inspired Congress with the idea that scenery was a national asset deserving of preservation for the use and enjoyment of succeeding generations... Congress was inspired only by the undoubted, but at that time inexplicable, power of these waters to alleviate certain bodily ills. The motive was to retain these unique waters in public possession in order that they should be available to all persons for all time at a minimum, even a nominal, cost.⁶²⁸

While Hot Springs appeared to be an outlier in the new push for scenic, natural, western national parks in the 1910s and 1920s, the arguments of Yard situated Hot Springs in Americans’ evolving understanding of the natural world and national parks, places offering opportunities for health and recuperation, along with more popular themes of leisure and recreation.

National Park Service Director Stephen Mather’s commitment to Hot Springs ensured its place in the national park system. Mather had a real appreciation for Hot Springs’ thermal waters. In November 1915 Mather and his secretary, Horace Albright, toured Hot Springs in an effort to evaluate what the reservation offered the national park system (Fig. 5.1). Albright

⁶²⁷ Yard, *Glimpses of Our National Parks*, 3.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

became the first assistant director of the National Park Service under Mather, and recorded their journey south from Washington, D.C. Albright mentioned how “Mather was eagerly looking forward to experiencing the full treatment at one of the marble palaces on ‘Bathhouse Row.’”⁶²⁹ The two had a “most enjoyable” time at the Fordyce Bathhouse, taking the waters through drink, massage, and the vapor baths. “Mather became almost addicted” to the thermal water experience, Albright noted, “Several times when no one could find him, I went to Bath House Row and checked each place until I located him... always in the waters or getting a massage.”⁶³⁰ The historian Ron Cockrell noted that one reason why Mather, who made his fortune in borax before accepting the challenge to organize the national park system, enjoyed the thermal waters at Hot Springs. For much of his life Mather suffered from “melancholia,” now diagnosed as bipolar affective disorder. The waters not only relaxed the nervous man, as Albright alluded to, stating that Hot Springs “became one of Mather’s favorite spots, to which he retreated when things got too stressful.”⁶³¹ They also showed the material and cultural value of Hot Springs to the most influential individual in the National Park Service.

⁶²⁹ Horace Albright and Marian Albright Schenck, *Creating the National Park Service: The Missing Years* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 114.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, 116

⁶³¹ Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 226-227.



Fig. 5.1: Stephen Mather during his November 1915 visit to Hot Springs; National Park Service Records, Hot Springs National Park Archives, HOSP 3493.

Mather repeatedly asserted Hot Springs' inclusion in the country's national park project. In his 1918 annual report, he echoed Robert Sterling Yard's impression of Hot Springs by stating, "The first national reservation, Hot Springs was created in 1832. The name national park

had not yet been invented... The Yellowstone was made a national park in 1872 and for a long time was popularly known as ‘the national park’ in ignorance of the fact that Hot Springs had enjoyed the same legal status for many years.”⁶³² In a November 1918 visit to Hot Springs, Mather “made it plain that the United States government and himself in particular, were vitally alive to the situation in Hot Springs” and that under the improvement strategies to both the geography and hydrology of the reservation, “this resort could justly be termed ‘The Hot Springs National Park.’”⁶³³ Just two weeks after this endorsement, Harry Jones, manager of the Majestic Hotel and Bathhouse, began advertising in newspapers across the country for patients and patrons to visit “Hot Springs National Park” where “The U.S. GOVERNMENT puts the Stamp of Approval” on the landscape and waters.⁶³⁴ The Eastman Bathhouse advertised the same national park moniker in a January 1919 ad in the *Chicago Tribune*, using Director Mather’s own words from an earlier government report as a tacit testimonial Mather’s personal and professional affinity for Hot Springs brought it closer towards national park designation.⁶³⁵

Other common themes improved the reservation’s chances of becoming the nation’s seventeenth national park. First, under Mather’s leadership the NPS aimed to improve the parks’ popularity to tourists by making national parks more accessible while attempting to keep out private commercial enterprises.⁶³⁶ Hot Springs fit swimmingly into this objective. The reservation had a long history of government intervention in private endeavors concerning a natural resource and national asset. In 1918, Superintendent Parks believed that under NPS supervision and operation, “Hot Springs is destined to continue to grow in popularity as a health-

⁶³² Stephen Mather, *Report of the Director of the National Park Service* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1918), 834.

⁶³³ “Mather Advocated for Greater Resort,” *Hot Springs New Era*, 27 November 1918, 1.

⁶³⁴ “Ad for Majestic Hotel and Bathhouse,” *St. Joseph Gazette* (St. Joseph, Missouri), 15 December 1918.

⁶³⁵ Ad for the Eastman Bathhouse,” *Chicago Tribune*, 12 January 1919, 47.

⁶³⁶ Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, 58-66, Shaffer, *See America First*, 93-129.

pleasure resort and eventually stand out ahead of all others in popularity with the public, as these health-giving waters are undoubtedly a great factor.”⁶³⁷ Efforts at accessibility were all meant to allow more individuals access to the park. Assisted primarily by its urban locale, Hot Springs was routinely the most visited unit under NPS supervision. Between 1910-1921, Hot Springs was the most visited NPS unit all but three years, averaging over 114,000 visitors each year. Some years, Hot Springs Reservation accounted for over half the visitors in the national park system.⁶³⁸ By 1921, over 1,000,000 visitors had experienced the country’s nineteen national parks; a first for the National Park Service. This milestone would not have been remotely possible without including the 130,968 visitors to Hot Springs.

It should not be surprising, then, that when Hot Springs Reservation officially became Hot Springs National Park on March 4, 1921, there was no grand celebration. Located alphabetically between appropriations for Hawaii and Lafayette (Acadia) National Parks, officials and Congress did not see much debate designating Hot Springs as the country’s newest national park in 1921. For 50 years, private individuals and federal employees strove to preserve the purity of a medicinal natural resource while simultaneously acting to utilize it for the enjoyment and benefit of future generations in the United States, a core tenet in an evolving national park idea.

“A Health *and* Pleasure Resort” – Expanding Recreational Opportunities in Hot Springs

⁶³⁷ Dr. William P. Parks, 1918 *Annual Superintendent Report*, 922. After 1916, yearly superintendent reports from all national parks were collected and formed an appendix in the NPS Director’s annual report.

⁶³⁸ James Cameron, *The National Park Service: Its History, Activities, and Organization* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1922), 138.

While superintendents continued to emphasize the health benefits of Hot Springs hydrology and topography, officials and boosters simultaneously adapted to changing societal trends that directly affected Hot Springs. These trends not only dealt with how Americans consumed nature, but their access to it. Officials in and around Hot Springs put forward projects to align it with the recreational emphasis mandated by federal officials. Whereas earlier visitors consumed the thermal waters medicinally (and this process never stopped), a new, growing group of consumers sought to enjoy the curative properties of nature recreationally, situating Hot Springs National Park as a site of play and leisure.⁶³⁹ By train, but soon more by automobile, these tourists looked for other pursuits to pair with their thermal water treatments in and around the national park.⁶⁴⁰ Elbert Hubbard, who described himself as a “frequent visitor to Hot Springs National Park” in 1922, testified that “I go to Hot Springs each year, not because I am an invalid, but because I do not intend to be one.” Hubbard and other mobile tourists came to Hot Springs “to leave their cares behind – to take the wonderful baths – to play golf every day – to ride horseback – to tramp the hills – to relax.”⁶⁴¹ The town’s thermal waters remained a draw, but so did scenic vistas, camping, and fishing, products of a changing set of consumers flowing into town and the state of Arkansas.

Hot Springs officials initially attempted to stem the tide of automobiles flooding into the city and the park. Administrators faced issues with autos blocking carriage roads on the reservation dating back to 1907. Though Superintendent W. Scott Smith notified the Secretary of the Interior that the town only had three automobiles in town at the time, he recommended

⁶³⁹ For an analysis of how Americans’ views of nature focused more on leisure pursuits and recreation during the 1920s, see Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 19-53.

⁶⁴⁰ It was not only Hot Springs where the automobile changed visitors’ experience in national parks; see David Louter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington’s National Parks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 3-10.

⁶⁴¹ “The Hot Springs of Arkansas – In the Ozarks!” *Kansas City Star*, 15 December 1922, 28.

preemptive measures prohibiting automobiles on the federal reserve.⁶⁴² Acting Secretary James R. Garfield agreed with Smith, stating “To permit automobiles to traverse these mountain roads” used exclusively by pedestrians, horses, and carriages “would doubtless result in many serious accidents to life and limb.” He also iterated the current policy of the Interior department which banned automobile use in the national parks. “You will therefore give due notice,” Garfield concluded, that “automobiles will not be allowed on the road on the Government Reservation at Hot Springs.”⁶⁴³ Secretary Garfield defended his blanket auto restriction because allowing just a few cars onto park roads “ultimately turn[s] the roads over to the sole use of automobiles.”⁶⁴⁴ His reasoning proved prophetic in Hot Springs as less than ten years later, more autos brought thousands of visitors to the Valley of Vapors. There were over one million registered automobiles across the country in 1913 and by the time Hot Springs became a national park, the number neared 10 million.⁶⁴⁵ Hot Springs could not slow this influx of tourists visiting town by horseless carriage.

Change began incrementally. On Friday June 17, 1910, Superintendent Harry Myers, with permission from Interior, opened the main road leading up West Mountain, the highest point in Hot Springs, to automobile traffic for one hour the following Sunday.⁶⁴⁶ The news made the local papers, with the *Hot Springs Sentinel-Record* predicting the ride would offer “a very delightful and pleasing view of the city.” The *Sentinel-Record* reporter called these specific

⁶⁴² W. Scott Smith to James R. Garfield, 1 July 1907, in Record Group (RG) 79, Records of the National Park Service, Central Files, 1907-1939, Box 066, Hot Springs [Automobiles] to Hot Springs [Bathhouses, Free Clinic], File no. 1249, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) College Park, MD.

⁶⁴³ James R. Garfield to W. Scott Smith, July 1907, in RG 79, Box 066, File no. 1249, NARA College Park.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁵ Statistics from Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 24.

⁶⁴⁶ Telegram from Department of Interior Chief Clerk to Harry Myers, Superintendent Hot Springs Reservation, 17 June 1910, RG 79, Box 066, File no. 1249, NARA College Park.

visitors “tourists,” separate from the patients visiting the bathhouses and sanitariums in town.⁶⁴⁷ Differences arose around who was coming to Hot Springs. Those who came to consume the thermal waters medicinally were often “invalids” while those consuming the natural scenery of the reservation and the greater Ouachita Mountains were tourists.

Automobile access accelerated as national park administration consolidated under the National Park Service. Stephen Mather wanted Hot Springs to be a place “where many people go for fun, as well as for their health.”⁶⁴⁸ While Mather relished his first trip to Hot Springs in 1915, the feeling was not immediately mutual. Upon reporting Mather’s and Albright’s inspection, the editor of Little Rock’s *Arkansas Democrat* believed, “Hot Springs feels that the United States government has made it the orphan of government reservations.” Seeing the thermal waters as “one of the most remarkable of our natural resources” and “also the most useful,” he challenged Mather and others to help bring Hot Springs Reservation more in-line with a growing contingent of consumer tourists flooding parks in the 1910s and 1920s. With this added assistance, the editor argued, “Hot Springs will come into its own some day and that day should be near at hand.”⁶⁴⁹ To “come into its own” in the 1920s, Hot Springs had to be more than simply “Uncle Sam’s Sanitarium.”⁶⁵⁰ While clear restrictions remained in place concerning automobiles in Superintendent William Parks’ yearly report in June 1915, by December, he was in conversation with Mather on opening up the park roads to cars on West Mountain.⁶⁵¹ Parks recognized the impact of automobiles to the reservation and town, noting how Hot Springs was like any other city across the country or even the national parks out West adapting to cars: “the automobile is

⁶⁴⁷ “Tourists on Reservation,” *Hot Springs Sentinel-Record*, 18 June 1910; “Glidden Tourists Given Privilege Mountain Drives,” *Hot Springs Daily News*, 18 June 1910; RG 79, Box 066, File no. 1249, NARA College Park.

⁶⁴⁸ “Hot Springs Needs More Amusements,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 4 December 1915, 15.

⁶⁴⁹ “The Government and Hot Springs,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 7 December 1915, 6.

⁶⁵⁰ All is Serene at Uncle Sam’s Big Hospital,” *Hot Springs New Era*, 23 April 1914, 1.

⁶⁵¹ William P. Parks, *Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation*, August 13, 1915; William P. Parks to Secretary of the Interior, 20 December 1915, RG 79, Box 066, File no. 1249, NARA College Park.

now becoming popularized to such an extent that concessions are deemed necessary in order to get the full benefits derived from their use.”⁶⁵² Those concessions appeared as eight new regulations, written by Stephen Mather, allowing automobile traffic in Hot Springs. The regulations addressed rules like rights of way, curfews, and punishments. Mather directed the superintendent “to enforce a prompt and faithful compliance” of the new order.⁶⁵³

Newspapers reported the updates to the public as new roads on the reservation became a cause for celebration. “The drives over West mountain,” on newly surfaced roads for automobiles, “are the most picturesque in Arkansas... and afford a wonderful view of the surrounding country.”⁶⁵⁴ In late 1919 officials finally got around to refurbishing carriage roads on North and Hot Springs Mountain at a cost of just under \$1,300 (Fig. 5.2). Officials had a parade on February 17, 1920, to celebrate the first automobile up the mountain where the thermal water bubbled up from the ground. In the inaugural automobile was Selden G. Hopkins, Assistant Secretary of the Interior, and World War One general John J. Pershing, who became a yearly patron of the baths in Hot Springs. Superintendent Parks described the opening to Director Mather as “a most auspicious one” where “Thousands of people thronged Central Avenue, Fountain Street and the mountain sides to view the parade.”⁶⁵⁵ The automobile, and the tourists inside them, affected the landscape of the park as well as the rules and regulations governing it.

⁶⁵² Ibid.

⁶⁵³ Stephen T. Mather, “Regulations governing the admission of automobiles to West Mountain roads on the Hot Springs Reservation, Arkansas,” 22 January 1916, RG 79, Box 066, File no. 1249, NARA College Park.

⁶⁵⁴ “Autos are Allowed on West Mountain,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 20 February 1916, 2.

⁶⁵⁵ William P. Parks to Stephen Mather, 17 February 1920, RG 79, Box 066, File no. 1249, NARA College Park.



Fig. 5.2. Improved roads up Hot Springs Mountain. The roads were used by automobiles, carriages, and pedestrians for both leisure and exercise; Read, "An Appreciation for Hot Springs National Park," 18.

As thousands traveled to Hot Springs by rail and road, reservation officials incorporated recreational pursuits into the park's therapeutic legacy. After Medical Director Harry Hallock's suicide in 1913, it appeared that the medical direction in Hot Springs could be similarly doomed. But Interior Secretary Franklin Lane's adept pick of Dr. William Parks in 1914 allowed the role of the reservation's medical director and superintendent to fall under one person. This came at an opportune time as professionals outside of Hot Springs attacked the medicinal use of mineral waters in an age of modernizing medicine. Dr. Woods Hutchinson excoriated mineral water spas in Europe and across the United States in an article he wrote in *Everybody's Magazine* in 1913 titled, "Taking the Waters: The Humbug of Hot Springs." The practical physician, author of *Common Sense and Health*, compared the chemical properties of spa waters to well water in non-

descript locations across the country, concluding, “mineral water is nothing but a slightly exaggerated well-water.” Hutchinson went further: “It is no exaggeration to say that a gallon of ordinary dish-water with the scum off would have as much curative value as many of our world-famous mineral waters, such for instance those of the Hot Springs of Arkansas, the Virginia Hot Springs, Wiesbaden, and Bath.” Instead, Hutchinson suggested hiking and outdoor living “will do you twice as much good and give you far richer comfort, and happiness than a ‘course of the waters’ at the most famous and justly renowned bath or spa in existence.”⁶⁵⁶ As officials and physicians in Hot Springs continued their crusade to legitimize the waters, they and their practices were attacked from the outside.

Parks developed a strategy of incorporating aspects of both health and leisure into the park landscape. One example of this was the introduction and acceptance of the Oertel System of Mountain Climbing. Created in Bad Nauheim, Germany in the early twentieth century, the Oertel System used hiking and mountaineering as a therapeutic remedy for “patients whose heart action is impeded by deposits of fat.” In his 1915 yearly report, Parks chronicled the development of four trails up Hot Springs and North Mountain for patients to undertake, per a doctor’s prescription. Parks claimed the plan “is the only system of this kind in the United States.” Parks also hoped “In connection with the baths it should be a great boon to patients” coming to Hot Springs.⁶⁵⁷ An NPS pamphlet emphasized the connections between hiking and health, stating how “Much importance is attached by local physicians to the possibilities for out-of-door life.”⁶⁵⁸ But the trails attracted more than recovering invalids who incorporated the baths into their

⁶⁵⁶ Woods Hutchinson, “Taking the Waters: The Humbug of Hot Springs,” *Everybody’s Magazine* 28, no. 2, 159-172; quotes on 166 & 172.

⁶⁵⁷ William P. Parks, *Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation*, 13 August 1915; https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/reports/hosp/1915.htm.

⁶⁵⁸ *Circular of General Information Regarding Hot Springs National Park Arkansas* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1929), 6.

treatment regiments. Patrons and visitors to town could freely use the trails for pleasure, especially after officials installed a steel observation tower atop Hot Springs Mountain in 1906. The local *Hot Springs New Era* suggested that “those who wish to take up the great sport of mountain hiking” should use the “mountain roads” in the park.⁶⁵⁹ Men’s and women’s clubs visiting Hot Springs for national conventions used the new and improved trail system. A “hiking party” from the YWCA “enjoyed a fine swim and lunch out in the gorge,” enjoying a lunch “they were able to do full justice after their five-mile hike.”⁶⁶⁰ Hot Springs’ trails satisfied NPS predecessors’ perceptions of a national park: a place of unique natural beauty and curiosity offering Americans the opportunity for recover and recreate under government supervision (Fig. 5.3).

⁶⁵⁹ “Which Promises to Increase Popularity Of Mountain Hiking,” *Hot Springs New Era*, 4 January 1922.

⁶⁶⁰ “Hiking Party,” *Hot Springs New Era*, 29 July 1919, 6.



Fig. 5.3: Tourists at Goat Rock on Hot Springs Mountain. Officials improved access to the Novaculite outcrop in 1924, created a trail and steps and a bench at the overlook; “Visitors sitting along the edge of the mountain,” undated, Hot Springs National Park Archives, HOSP 19266, Series VII, Prints Box 25.

Road improvement concerning automobile regulations and expanded recreational opportunities demonstrated the material changes occurring in Hot Springs resulting from new ideas about the parks. Since his superintendency began, William Parks requested funds to improve access to the “Gorge,” a steep valley between Hot Springs, North, and Indian Mountain

created by Gulpha Creek.⁶⁶¹ In late 1924, park officials received donated land lying in a valley created by Hot Springs, Indian, and North Mountain and designated it the Gulpha Gorge automobile tourist camp. By 1925, the area had campsites, pumped water, comfort stations, a swimming pool, and electricity. Tourists had expanded options in the park now. Visitors experienced Hot Springs the same way they did more well-known national parks: they could camp, hike, and swim, along with taking the waters. Park officials expanded recreational opportunities allowing for more than invalids to consume nature at Hot Springs National Park.

In the 1920s, the work of Parks and his successors in Hot Springs fit the park into a larger project where state and regional officials endorsed recreational pursuits around Arkansas, the Natural State. Regional boosters, eyeing an opportunity to complement an increase in national parks east of the Rockies in the 1910s and 1920s, suggested reserving part of the Ouachita National Forest as a national park. Supporters relied on blending ideas of health and leisure to market the region, as boosters in Hot Springs had employed for decades. Arkansas resident Grace Trout Etchison wrote to President Calvin Coolidge endorsing the Ouachita Park idea, voicing her petition poetically: “O, come to the Ouachitas for healing, / Dreaming and living too - / Hear the brook-streams and song-birds revealing / What the land of the hills have for you.”⁶⁶² While the Ouachita National Park did not gain broad support in Washington and never materialized, park officials in Hot Springs expanded the visitor experience to incorporate recreational activities offered in other national parks. NPS literature on Hot Springs throughout the 1920s stressed the recreational aspects of the park. Every year, the Service distributed booklets of the rules and regulations for the park. In 1921 and 1923, the Service chose to show

⁶⁶¹ William Parks, “Hot Springs Reservation,” in *Annual Report Director of the National Park Service*, in *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), 921.

⁶⁶² “The Beautiful Ouachitas,” *Mena Weekly Star* (Mena, AR), in Jane Jaree Lynn, “The Ouachita National Park: A Failed Proposal from the 1920s,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (Winter, 1996), 418.

the Hot Springs Golf Course on the cover, claiming it to be “One of the recreational features of Hot Springs.” Cover photos for 1926-1930 advertised a picturesque summit photograph from West Mountain, a vista tourists could now enjoy easily through automobile access and improved roads.⁶⁶³

The waters still dominated visitors’ perceptions of Hot Springs and their experiences. After chemical analyses of the waters in 1906 and 1916 detected trace amounts of radium in the waters, physicians and boosters alike deemed the waters “radioactive.” Hot Springs doctors leaped at this discovery, with Dr. T.E. Holland declaring “we are compelled to give to radioactivity the cures which the people do not get from ordinary water.”⁶⁶⁴ The Missouri Pacific Iron Mountain Route described Hot Springs as “America’s favorite playground” where the “Wonderful curative qualities of Radio-Active waters cannot be exaggerated.”⁶⁶⁵ The bathhouses, the only place to take the waters, administered just under 8 million baths between 1910-1919 with the Government Free Bathhouse, in operation since 1878, serving the most baths every year. Parks made the Government Free Bathhouse a focus of his tenure.⁶⁶⁶ In 1916, he created a free clinic in the Government Free Bathhouse. In its first year, the clinic treated 351 patients, suffering from skin diseases, rheumatism, and venereal disease. Records showed 129, 37 percent, left “cured.”⁶⁶⁷ Parks argued to Mather that “The work,” administered by reputable physicians registered through the Federal Registration Board “has resulted in much good to

⁶⁶³ Hot Springs National Park Brochure, National Park Brochures / Site Bulletins, National Park Service History eLibrary, accessed October 5, 2020, <http://npshistory.com/brochures/brochures-h.htm>.

⁶⁶⁴ Elliott Bowen argues how Hot Springs’ medical community incorporated the radium discovery into a world of modern scientific discoveries, therefore legitimizing thermal water treatments well into the twentieth century; T.E. Holland quote from Bowen, *In Search of Sexual Health*, 145.

⁶⁶⁵ “Where the Winter Tourists Gather,” *The Lincoln Star* (Lincoln, NE), 9 January 1910, 5.

⁶⁶⁶ Kathryn Carpenter examines technology’s role in creating access issues at the Government Free Bathhouse; “Access to Nature, Access to Health: The Government Free Bathhouse at Hot Springs National Park, 1877 to 1922,” *M.A. Thesis* (University of Missouri – Kansas City, 2019).

⁶⁶⁷ William Parks, “Hot Springs Reservation,” in *Annual Report Director of the National Park Service, in Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), 893.

indigent persons who otherwise probably would not be able to secure medical treatment” in Hot Springs. The work of the free clinic highlighted the continued presence of Hot Springs’ medical community and their influence in prescribing the waters.

But a year later, Parks, citing “modern and sanitary lines,” believed it an “urgent necessity for rebuilding or reconstruction of the present free bathhouse.”⁶⁶⁸ Mather endorsed the new building and followed its development closely. Opened to enormous fanfare on November 15, 1921, the assorted audience spoke to the wide appeal Hot Springs garnered in health and leisure spheres. Along with Mather, Assistant Director of the NPS Arno Cammerer, and Horace Albright, now Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park, over 1,000 members of the Southern Medical Association attended the dedication. Stephen Mather spoke of the Free Bathhouse’s long history in Hot Springs, from the days of the Mud Hole to the modern establishment. Arkansas papers boasted that “the bath house is said to be the most advanced thing that any nation has constructed for its afflicted poor.”⁶⁶⁹ Assistant Secretary of the Interior Eugene C. Finnet, in his dedication speech, centered on the significance of the water, materially and metaphorically. “Waters are of diverse kinds,” mused Finnet: “some most valuable to bear the fleets of commerce and war, some to reclaim the desert, and some for the healing of the nations. The latter are comparatively rare, but the beautiful reservation where we now stand is signally favored in that regard.” And as “From the roots of the attending mountains pour the healing waters in not one, but many streams,” so too, argued Finnet, does Hot Springs’ clientele “not flow from a single source... knowing neither north nor south, nor east nor west, but all of

⁶⁶⁸ William Parks, Report of the Superintendent of the Hot Springs Reservation, 13 August 1915; https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/reports/hosp/1915.htm.

⁶⁶⁹ “Free Bathhouse Formally Opened,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 15 November 1921, 2.

them.”⁶⁷⁰ At Hot Springs, the government assumed responsibility for the not only the bathhouse and the waters’ continued medicinal use, but the well-being of its citizens.

The Government Free Bathhouse became a node in improving the health of the nation through the thermal waters and modern medicine. As construction of the new building was underway, Stephen Mather reached out to officials in the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) to construct a venereal disease clinic on the first floor of the new Government Free Bathhouse.⁶⁷¹ After Parks resigned in 1922, the NPS and USPHS reached a “cooperative arrangement” where a member of the USPHS would serve as Hot Springs superintendent.⁶⁷² Beginning with Dr. Clarence Waring, the next ten years saw a medical professional in charge of Hot Springs National Park. In that time, the new Government Free Bathhouse provided an average of 83,860 baths/year and admitted roughly 32,500 VD cases at the clinic.⁶⁷³ The superintendent still reported Director Mather, but the thermal waters’ medicinal utility did not fade even as Hot Springs became a national park.

Dr. William Parks brought stability to the whirlwind of changes occurring on the reservation by creating a message that unified both health and recreation objectives in Hot Springs. This strategy satisfied NPS administrators in Washington as well as local officials who built their livelihoods around Hot Springs as a health resort. Coupled with the curative powers of the thermal waters, the NPS hoped focused publicity could boost tourists to the park system’s unique Arkansas unit. Robert Sterling Yard emphasized this variety in his early publications for the National Park Service. While touting Hot Springs’ thermal waters as “Dr. Nature’s Water

⁶⁷⁰ “Free Bathhouse Dedicated With Impressive Ceremony,” *Hot Springs New Era*, 15 November 1921, 2.

⁶⁷¹ Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 242.

⁶⁷² Quote selected from Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 253.

⁶⁷³ For average baths at Government Free Bathhouse, see Sharon Shugart, Hot Springs National Park Museum Specialist “Tables Showing Annual Total Number of Baths Given at Each Operating Bathhouse, 1898-2004,” chart access via email with Hot Springs National Park Museum Curator Tom Hill, August 18, 2018, 4; for VD clinic cases, see Bowen, “Before Tuskegee.”

Cure,” Yard also advertised that “Hot Springs has much besides its curative waters to attract and hold the visitor.” Coupled with the unique hydrology, the landscape “is romantically beautiful.” Tourists could enjoy tennis, golf, ostrich and alligator farms, as well as woodland trails year-round, as “Hot Springs is not merely a winter resort” for invalids.⁶⁷⁴ Stephen Mather made these connections clear, detailing how visitors understood that the waters, “besides their curative properties in the case of various ailments, are an amazing elixir of recuperation for those who have no ills except the wear and tear of active business and social life.” The “increasing thousands” Mather described “are combining the recuperative baths with the pleasures of the Ozark foothills.”⁶⁷⁵

As local and national officials continued to issue mixed messaging in an effort to popularize Hot Springs, others in the National Park Service did not approve of Hot Springs’ inclusion in the changing park system. Hot Springs was vastly different in size and scope compared to other national parks. For example, Yellowstone National Park is 2,200 times larger than Hot Springs. And contrasted against general impressions of national parks as wild snapshots situated in an ever-expansive natural environment, one step outside of Hot Springs’ park boundaries places visitors in a busy Arkansas town. While Hot Springs publicity highlighted these stark differences, and even as superintendents made steps to highlight the recreational as well as medicinal benefits of the park, other park administrators argued the Arkansas unit diverted attention away from a focus on scenic beauty that they believed were paramount to national park popularity and longevity.

⁶⁷⁴ Yard, “The Hot Springs of Arkansas,” *National Parks Portfolio*, 5.

⁶⁷⁵ Stephen Mather, *Annual Report Director of the National Park Service*, in *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), 884.

A discussion of visitation statistics in 1926 highlight this tension. The Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce began accruing statistics on the number of automobiles entering Hot Springs and passed along that information to park officials. Administrators took those figures and factored them into the visitation statistics for the national park. By 1925, improvements in Arkansas well outside the national park continued to attract a motorized public. In July the state opened a paved highway from Little Rock to Hot Springs. The Chamber of Commerce estimated that 44,380 arrived via automobile that month, compared to 6,237 by rail and 6,942 by bus.⁶⁷⁶ Though subject to exaggeration, especially from an enthusiastic chamber of commerce tasked with providing the most flattering information about the town, the data showed the influx of automobile use and the decline in traditional rail travel. Park Superintendent Joseph Bolten credited the improved road and subsequent automobile travel as a decisive factor in Hot Springs visitor attendance increasing from 164,000 in 1924 to an estimated 265,500 in 1925.⁶⁷⁷

These numbers concerned others within the National Park Service. Roger W. Toll, superintendent of Rocky Mountain National Park, wrote to then acting director Arno Cammerer in August 1926 alerting him that attendance in his park had plummeted about 50 percent that year. Toll, looking out for the image of the parks as popular destinations, believed “that it is your desire, as well as our own, not to show any substantial loss” in park attendance. He suggested instead of an accurate number of under 100,000 visitors “I will make up our estimates” to fall in line with previous years.⁶⁷⁸ Toll settled on 225,000 in his letter to Cammerer and in the yearly report from the Director of the NPS, Rocky Mountain National Park’s yearly attendance was

⁶⁷⁶ Statistics in Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 265.

⁶⁷⁷ Joseph Bolten, *Report of the Superintendent of Hot Springs National Park*, August, 1925.

⁶⁷⁸ Roger W. Toll to Arno Cammerer, 30 August 1926, p.1, Box 093, Entry P9, NARA College Park.

225,027.⁶⁷⁹ In the same letter, while underscoring the dip in his park's visitors, his "attention has repeatedly been called during the year to the travel figure turned in" by Hot Springs. Rocky Mountain was regularly second to Hot Springs in yearly visitations. Toll argued Hot Springs' 60 percent visitation increase was as alarming as Rocky Mountain's 50 percent drop. These fluctuations, Toll believed, show "an abnormal increase over previous years and is apparently fictitious." "It would seem preferable from the standpoint of the Park Service," Toll believed, "that the total visitors from all the parks should show a normal increase" or decrease. Toll blamed "notoriously extravagant" figures from Hot Springs' Chamber of Commerce for the discrepancy and suggested Cammerer intervene to change the way Hot Springs reported visitation statistics.⁶⁸⁰

Cammerer apparently agreed with Toll's assessment and suggestion. A month later, in a September 1926 letter to Superintendent Bolten, the acting director noted "I think the figures for Hot Springs National Park are rather high" and concluded that Chamber of Commerce figures "Have not proven sufficiently authentic." Cammerer instructed Bolten to devise his own method of tracking attendance.⁶⁸¹ While Bolten argued that creating more accurate visitation statistics was nearly impossible because of Hot Springs' urban locale, he sought to develop a new method using bathing statistics along with outside information.⁶⁸² In the first year of Bolten's new method, 1927, visitors to Hot Springs dropped 30 percent to 181,523. While this new method did not alleviate the hope for smooth and consistent visitation statistics, Hot Springs fell from the second to sixth most visited park. Visitation statistics were routinely estimations for other parks

⁶⁷⁹ "Table 7. – Visitors to the national parks, 1917-1932," Appendix C – Travel, Fiscal, and Miscellaneous Statistics, *Report of the Director of the National Park Service* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932), 85.

⁶⁸⁰ Roger W. Toll to Arno Cammerer, 30 August 1926, p.2, Box 093, Entry P9, NARA College Park.

⁶⁸¹ Arno Cammerer to Joseph Bolten, 23 September 1926, Box 093, Entry P9, NARA College Park.

⁶⁸² Joseph Bolten to Arno Cammerer, 28 September 1926, Box 093, Entry P9, NARA College Park.

and would continue to be. This episode demonstrates some influential NPS officials applying added scrutiny to Hot Springs. As the popularity of the parks increased in the 1920s, Hot Springs' unique qualities in the park system, qualities that did not always align with national messaging and representation, created tensions with other park officials.

Lastly, park officials and boosters took advantage of the changing regional landscape to offer more recreational opportunities as well Southern water projects near Hot Springs in the 1920s provided new access points for visitors and tourists. In the fossil fuel poor, but resource rich, South, private enterprises sought to harness the power of southern rivers in an elaborate system of hydroelectric dams and reservoirs in the early decades of the twentieth century. By the mid-1920s, a network of Super Power Transmission stations connected many of the southern states, using water, "white coal," to light homes, power cities, and revitalize a perennially sluggish South.⁶⁸³ Hot Springs officials did not miss an opportunity to continue expanding their recreational reach as these projects moved onto Arkansas waterways.

The thermal waters in Hot Springs played a small, but interconnected role in this regional development. The waters left reservation property for decades through a series of pipes to lease-paying establishments in town. But not all the thermal water was collected by the parks hydraulic system. When the parks reservoirs filled to capacity, the constantly flowing spring waters flowed to their original waterway, a now-covered Hot Springs Creek. The creek meandered its way through Hot Springs for about three miles before dumping into the Ouachita River. By the early 1920s, Harvey Couch, head of the Arkansas Power and Light Company (AP&L) aimed to harness the Ouachita in a decades-long project of hydroelectric dams and reservoirs. Couch, born

⁶⁸³ For analysis of water control, hydroelectricity, and river manipulation, see Christopher J. Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power: How the Politics of Cheap Energy and Water Scarcity Shaped a Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

in Calhoun, Arkansas in 1877, gained his first fortune in railroads but sold his stake in 1913 to create AP&L.⁶⁸⁴ By the 1920s, Couch was one of the many “dam-crazy private energy company executives” throughout the South, as described by historian Christopher Manganiello. Couch not only founded AP&L, but also Mississippi Power and Light and Louisiana Power and Light, paralleling the shared hydroelectric partnerships across the region.⁶⁸⁵ With the capital and the necessary landscape, AP&L built Rammel Dam on the Ouachita River in 1924. The project was the first hydroelectric power project of its kind in Arkansas. At \$1.6 million, Rammel Dam stretched 900 feet and flooded 3,000 acres around the river and created Lake Catherine, named after Couch’s daughter. The dedication banquet for the project was held at Hot Springs. Guests toasted AP&L and Couch, declaring Rammel Dam “an epochal event in the history of Arkansas.”⁶⁸⁶ Couch hoped the dam and the electricity it generated would bring numerous new industries to the area.⁶⁸⁷ Supporters believed the project “will prove the ‘Open sesame’ that will unlock store-houses of treasure of which we have little dreamed.”⁶⁸⁸

Rammel Dam not only provided 9,000 kilowatts of power to Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana, but Lake Catherine opened up recreational opportunities for visitors and tourists in and around Hot Springs. Prominent town officials were close to the dam’s development and understood the new opportunities the man-made lake offered.⁶⁸⁹ After visitors had taken the waters in Hot Springs in the morning, they could fill their afternoons with fishing parties on Lake Catherine.⁶⁹⁰ YMCA camps sprung up in the summers along the lake, returning year after year.

⁶⁸⁴ For more on Harvey Couch and electrifying Arkansas, see Sherry Laymon, “Arkansas’s Dark Ages: The Struggle to Electrify the State,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (Autumn 2012): 283-300.

⁶⁸⁵ “Up the Road with Harvey C. Couch,” *Kansas City Star*, 7 March 1937, 35.

⁶⁸⁶ “State Capital Chatter,” *Osceola Times* (Osceola, AR), 9 January 1925, 7.

⁶⁸⁷ “Pine Bluff’s Business Review,” *Pine Bluff Daily Graphic* (Pine Bluff, Arkansas), 6 March 1923, 6.

⁶⁸⁸ State Capital Chatter,” *Osceola Times*, 9 January 1925, 7.

⁶⁸⁹ Col. John Fordyce, manager of the Fordyce Bathhouse, was an engineer associated with the Rammel Dam, see “Ozark Co. Gets Dixie Project,” *The Mountain Echo* (Yellville, AR), 17 December 1925.

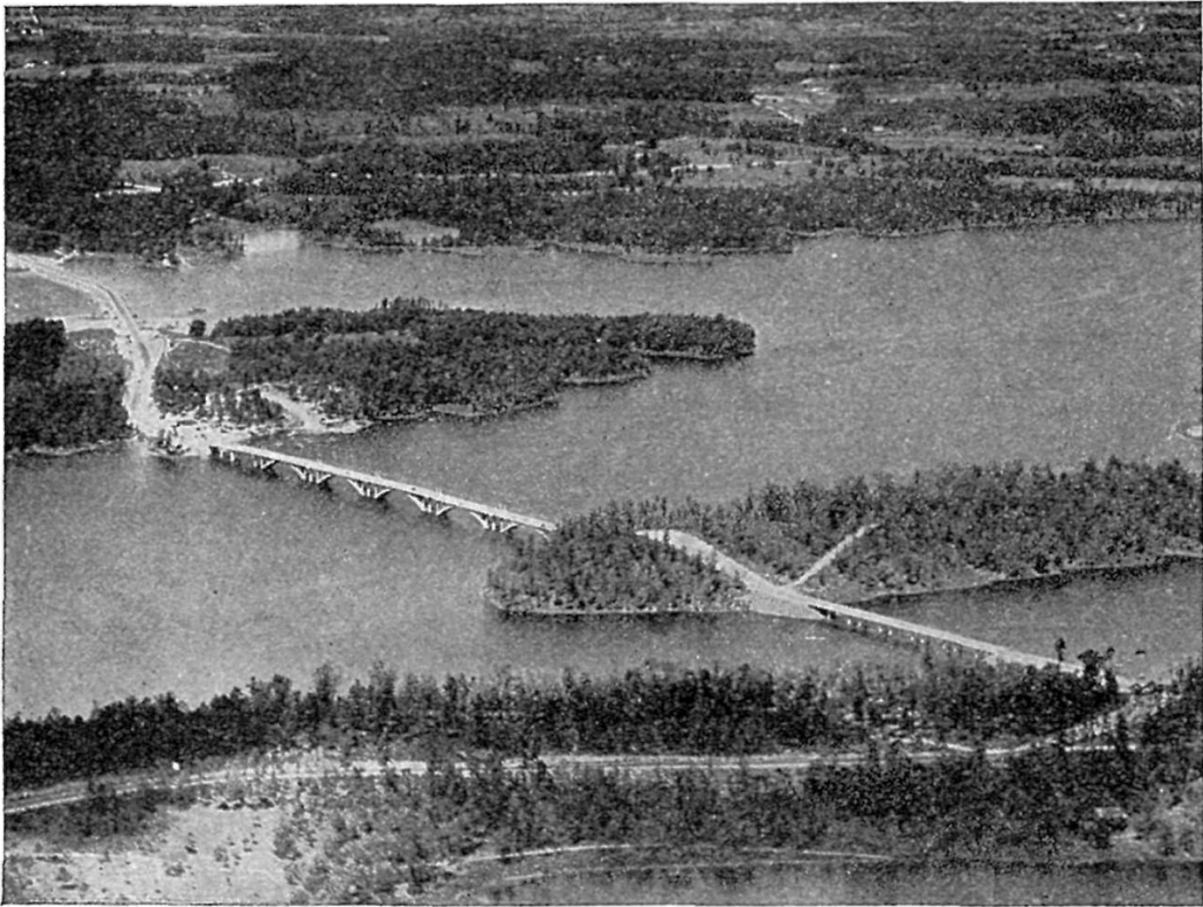
⁶⁹⁰ “Proof of Spring’s Arrival,” *St. Louis Star and Times*, 27 March 1925, 25.

One recurrent group from Shreveport, Louisiana, “is having the time of their lives” boating and fishing in 1929. The children even visited Hot Springs for a day, patronizing the same ostrich and alligator farms Robert Sterling Yard advertised ten years earlier.⁶⁹¹ By the early 1930s, Hot Springs officials connected the success of recreational opportunities on the lake with visitation to the national park. Garnett E. Eisele, President of the Chamber of Commerce, believed the new lakes on the Ouachita “will give Hot Springs and Arkansas citizens additional recreational facilities, as well as increase its electric power.”⁶⁹² By 1932, the NPS circular for Hot Springs was advertising the availability of “water sports of every sort” outside of town on Lake Catherine and Lake Hamilton, another man-made lake on the Ouachita (Fig. 5.4).⁶⁹³ Officials effectively inserted recreational pursuits into the landscape of Hot Springs by 1932. The process blended aspects of health and leisure to attract the largest group of interested visitors, satisfying both Hot Springs’ traditional conception as a source of natural recovery and newer NPS mandates for increased attendance at the national parks.

⁶⁹¹ “Shreveport Boys Enjoy Life in ‘Y’ Camp in Arkansas,” *The Shreveport Journal*, 13 June 1929, 3.

⁶⁹² “Power Dam To Be Closed Wednesday,” *Hope Star* (Hope, AR), 15 December 1930, 1.

⁶⁹³ *Circular of General Information Regarding Hot Springs National Park Arkansas* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932), 3-4.



By De Luxe Studio

AIRPLANE VIEW OF LAKE HAMILTON WITH HOT SPRINGS IN THE DISTANCE

AN INVITING PLEASURE RESORT

Fig. 5.4: Lake Hamilton: *Circular of General Information Regarding Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1932), 3.

In a final administrative effort to incorporate and confirm an expanded consumer base in Hot Springs, NPS officials took full control of the park superintendency. Since 1921, The Service had an arrangement with the USPHS for a Health Service member to hold the superintendent position in Hot Springs. After Stephen Mather's death in 1930, Horace Albright became director of the National Park Service. While Albright himself believed Hot Springs "never seemed like a national park," he was adamant to preserve and protect the gains made by

the NPS to this point, materially in the number of parks and protected land, as well as its administrative control.⁶⁹⁴ Therefore, in 1932, he ended the practice of USPHS doctors serving as superintendents in Hot Springs and appointed Thomas J. Allen in January 1932. Allen, a Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania native, worked in the National Park Service since 1920 as superintendent for Hawaii and Bryce Canyon National Parks.⁶⁹⁵ While the previous eleven years allowed Hot Springs officials to establish proper medical rules and regulations for using the park's thermal waters, Allen noted in his first annual report that Hot Springs would now "adopt[] a policy of administration and development according to full National Park standards."⁶⁹⁶ Through material, administrative, and societal change, Hot Springs continued to adapt to Americans' evolving understanding of the benefits offered by the natural world. The National Park Service was the latest administrative body to inform Hot Springs' hydrology and landscape in an effort to conform to these changing trends and make the park's thermal waters accessible and useful to the public.

1932 – 100 Years of Health and Leisure on Parade

The popularity of Hot Springs and its thermal waters was the product of local and federal officials controlling the resource's image in American culture as well as highlighting new recreational opportunities around Hot Springs. In order to accommodate this resurgent popularity and attendance at Hot Springs, officials needed to change the park's hydraulic system once again, modernizing it for more visitors seeking rest, recovery, and recreation. The park's new

⁶⁹⁴ Albright and Schenck, *Creating the National Park Service*, 114; For Albright's ambitions and goals as leader of the National Park Service, see Horace M. Albright as told to Robert Cahn, *The Birth of the National Park Service: The Founding Years, 1913-1933* (Chicago: Howe Brothers, 1985), 226-227.

⁶⁹⁵ "Pittsburgher Gets Post at Hot Springs," *Pittsburgh Press*, 29 December 1931, 11.

⁶⁹⁶ Thomas J. Allen, *Superintendent's Annual Report*, 30 June 1932, 4.

hydraulic system, constructed in 1930 provides a material lens through which we can analyze the parallel objectives officials faced portraying Hot Springs as a site for health and leisure. The new system not only emphasized Hot Springs' long history as a health resort as the collection and distribution system focused on preserving the purity of the natural resource. A new hydraulic project improved access to the waters under a complete, unified system which could handle the influx of tourists. Following precedent from its first 100 years under government control, Hot Springs officials continue to change the hydrology of the park to meet the needs of the public.

The previous thermal water collection and distribution system was an amalgamation of the previous 60 years, with troughs, pipes, and diverters piling up on top of each other under the ground. The pipes, according to Erskine M. Sunderland, an architect and engineer contracted by the Interior Department to survey the hydraulic system in 1911, often became "clogged with deposits [sic] and when this occurs the line is abandoned by the bath house owner." These "dead pipes," according to Sunderland were "not removed until such time as it may be found to be in the way of parties running new lines."⁶⁹⁷ This labyrinth of old and new pipes funneled the water to five large reservoirs installed at different points since the 1880s that collected most of the water, the largest of which, installed in 1888, "was cracked badly" upon inspection, "allowing considerable water to seep into [the earth] when it was empty."⁶⁹⁸ Some of the springs were never a part of the old collection system at all because earlier bathhouse owners built their establishments directly over a spring and used its water exclusively for their guests. This not only angered other bathhouse owners but also weakened the argument by government officials that all

⁶⁹⁷ Erskine M. Sunderland, "Report on Hot Water Distribution, Hot Springs Mountain, Hot Springs, Ark," 25 November 1911; RG 79, Box 093, Central Files, 1907-1939, Entry P9, Hot Springs [Supplies, Materials] to Hot Springs [Water Supply, Distribution], NARA College Park.

⁶⁹⁸ J.B. Hamilton, *Report of Construction of Hot Water Collecting and Distributing System, Hot Springs National Park, Hot Springs, Arkansas*, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, January 26, 1932, 14; Copied from Hot Springs National Park Archives.

patrons and patients received the same government water regardless of their preferred establishment. Old pipes, some installed in the 1880s, were damaged by an expected amount of tufa building up in the pipes, and many lacked any kind of insulation, lowering the temperature of the waters, a characteristic doctors believed necessary for their therapeutic value.

As visitors flooded into Hot Springs in the 1920s, the thermal water collection system in place since the late nineteenth century proved inadequate to meet the high water demand from bathhouses and off-site establishments. The 46 hot springs in the national park release 850,000 gallons of thermal water a day. The old system could only hold roughly 300,000 gallons. The excess emptied into Hot Springs Creek as it always had. In March 1929, a number of bathhouses ran out of water during peak bathing hours, frustrating customers and bathhouse owners. After these embarrassing instances, Superintendent George Collins declared the entire system “in [a] bad state of repair, practically worn out” and “inadequate.”⁶⁹⁹ Hot Springs’ Assistant Superintendent G.C. Bolton spoke to these recurring difficulties in an October 1930 speech to the American Railway Association who held their annual convention in the valley of vapors. The park’s thermal water infrastructure, according to Bolton, “has been at times up against it to have sufficient water.” But Bolton allayed any concerns by quickly noting that “There is a comprehensive plan on foot” to conserve all of the hot water “so we might have a head to work on during the busy season.”⁷⁰⁰ Hot Springs officials suggested a “unified system of collecting and distributing the water from all the springs to all the bathhouses.”⁷⁰¹ Previous attempts at such a unified system failed because of technological and administrative issues. The NPS hoped to

⁶⁹⁹ George Collins, *Superintendent’s Annual Report*, 20 October 1931, 6.

⁷⁰⁰ G.C. Bolton, “Address by G.C. Bolton,” in Signal Section Proceedings, American Railway Association 28, No. 2, (October 1930), 314; RG 79, Box 1208, National Park Service Central Classified File, 1933-1949, National Parks, Hot Springs 208-05 – 501-03, NARA College Park.

⁷⁰¹ Hamilton, *Report of Construction of Hot Water Collecting and Distributing System*, 2.

solve both concerns by endorsing a project that would collect all the thermal water in the park and distribute the waters to any lease-holding location. The two-year project disrupted and permanently altered the hydraulic system in the park in an effort to serve new demands placed upon the landscape by tourists, patrons, and patients.

Under a \$143,500 appropriation from Congress, the Department of the Interior aimed to simplify the collection and distribution of the park's thermal waters. The project created a system capable of collecting almost 1 million gallons daily. The plans sought to decommission three of the previous reservoirs while refurbishing the two largest ones. Officials then designed two new reservoirs for the park. The new reservoirs would handle most of the daily thermal water use. The first 400,000-gallon reservoir served all the pay bathhouses and Government Free Bathhouse on park property as well as the Army and Navy Hospital while the other 100,000-gallon reservoir exclusively supplied establishments throughout town.⁷⁰² The crisscrossed layers of pipes under the hillside were replaced by single pipes leading directly from the springs to the main line. These pipes were insulated with a new design consisting of "a strong circular pipe of wood lined with asbestos and bright tin"⁷⁰³ (Fig. 5.5 & 5.6). The combination ensured minimal heat exchange in the waters' journey through the system. Finally, a metering system accurately collected the rates of water consumption, providing the park with updated statistics for themselves and the public. Construction began on January 1, 1931. Assistant Engineer J.B. Hamilton chronicled the construction efforts. The system totally isolated the thermal waters, decoupling them their original natural system in an effort to guarantee purity and access standards required by the National Park Service.

⁷⁰² Ibid., 18.

⁷⁰³ Ibid., 7.



Fig. 5.5: The chaotic piping system from decades of improvements on Hot Springs Mountain, unearthed during the 1930-31 water collection and distribution overhaul project; Hamilton, *Report of Construction of Hot Water Collecting and Distributing System*, HOSP 4544-1.



Fig. 5.6: Thermal water pipes for new collection and distribution system. These pipes traveled to the main line. Note the insulation around the pipes where none had originally appeared; HOSP 4544-52.

The work was hard and hot. Construction crews worked in water that reached 135-140 degrees Fahrenheit. Men used rubber boots, but many still developed blisters from the high temperatures. Hamilton himself noted that “I would not have entered [the spring areas] for a fortune.” The men worked in short shifts and used high-powered fans so they could tap the

springs efficiently.⁷⁰⁴ The landscape also provided problems for the project. To maintain a “natural” environment, the NPS required the entire project, the massive reservoirs and pipes, be installed underground. This proved difficult not only because of the terrain of Hot Springs Mountain, but also because hotel guests complained of the use of dynamite blasting disturbing their vacations.⁷⁰⁵ Park officials believed it imperative to maintain a natural environment in Hot Springs after associating it with the national park system so heavily for over a decade. It was a place where “Uncle Sam” is “Head Physician” and “Where Nature and Your Government Unite to Make You Well.”⁷⁰⁶

The new system was an immediate success. Upon completion in September 1931, Hamilton noted that not only had the project increased the output of the springs through the new pipelines, but the park now had capacity to hold all of the resource. Superintendent Allen documented the results of the system firsthand, stating the system “operated very efficiently both in collecting and distributing water to the individual bathhouses.” Allen was also pleased that “All springs now lead directly into the government system and no house has the individual privilege of utilizing springs directly.”⁷⁰⁷ For decades the federal government had attempted to fully harness the movement of the thermal water in Hot Springs National Park. Under this system, they accomplished their goal. Engineer Frederick Cron, writing in the *Military Engineer* in April 1939 that “few of the thousands who annually come to Hot Springs National Park realize the extent of the work which has been done to put the famous thermal waters at their disposal.” “The present modern collection and distribution system,” concluded Cron, “is the product of an

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁷⁰⁶ “Where Nature and Government Unite to Make You Well,” Hot Springs National Park Chamber of Commerce, 1936, in Hot Springs National Park archives, Booklet and Collection series, sub-series 1.5: HOSP 7241, 1.

⁷⁰⁷ Thomas J. Allen, *Superintendent’s Annual Report*, 30 June 1932, 8-9.

evolutionary process stretching back over many years.”⁷⁰⁸ A significant reason why Cron made such a statement was the project remained mostly underground, in accordance with the “landscape naturalization” program endorsed by the NPS. Defined by park architect Thomas Vint as efforts “to make artificial work harmonize with its surroundings” as much as possible, by covering the corners of buildings with native flora, or using mountain stones on the sides of roadways.⁷⁰⁹ All that remained of the hot springs in Hot Springs National Park were collection tank access doors that peaked above the ground on Hot Springs Mountain (Fig. 5.7). The “evolutionary process” alluded by Cron imbued ideas of health, leisure, purity, and access, in Hot Springs’ thermal waters and its new hydraulic system.



⁷⁰⁸ Frederick W. Cron, “Mineral Water at Hot Springs, Arkansas,” *The Military Engineer*, March-April 1939, 1-3; RG 79, Box 1208, National park Service Central Classified File, 1933-1949, National Parks, Hot Springs 208-05 – 501-03, NARA College Park.

⁷⁰⁹ Linda Flint McClelland, *Building the National Parks: Historic Landscape Design and Construction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 262

Fig. 5.7: Collection boxes on Hot Springs Mountain; photo by author, 2022.

The new collection and distribution system was also fundamental to the success of Hot Springs 100th anniversary in 1932. The five-day event involved museum exhibits along pageants from Hot Springs' school children chronicling the town's history (from de Soto's imaginary expedition to the springs to the present day). There was also an enormous float parade down Central Avenue and extravagant balls in the evening. Day three of festivities was a "bath day," "one of the most unique days of the week" where town and park officials urged visitors to take the waters.⁷¹⁰ Bath Day and the centennial celebrations created increased demands on thermal water access, with more visitors using the distribution system than ever before for one day. Mayor Leo McLaughlin, in an effort to gin up as much enthusiasm as possible, instructed every city employee to participate:

Whether you need it or not, you are hereby instructed to go to one of the bath houses and take a bath in the hot thermal waters that have made this resort noted throughout the world. You will not only set an example for visitors but will be paying a just tribute to the city's greatest asset and giving proper recognition to the one factor that has been the magnet that for over a century had drawn countless thousands of visitors to Hot Springs.⁷¹¹

McLaughlin's order was just a fraction of the demand placed on the distribution system. Thousands of visitors from across the state and around the country visited Hot Springs to celebrate the history of the waters.⁷¹² Papers from across the country carried information concerning the week. Full control of the waters was paramount to effectively display Hot Springs to the world and satisfy the public appetite for the thermal waters.

⁷¹⁰ "A Pageant of History," *Weekly Kansas City Star*, 20 April 1932, 3.

⁷¹¹ "Everybody Bathes at Health Resort," *Hot Springs Sentinel Record*, 27 April 1932, quote in Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 301.

⁷¹² "'Spa' Centennial Party This Week," *Hope Star*, 25 April 1932, 3.

Organizers also wanted to remind the public how the park's centennial emphasized leisure and recreation of Hot Springs as much as the healing qualities of the thermal waters. Describing Hot Springs as "Uncle Sam's first 'playground,'" civic and social organizations advertised how golf courses, trails, and "other recreational facilities have been lavishly added until this government preserve has become a great and popular pleasure resort."⁷¹³ NPS director Horace Albright hoped Hot Springs "will attain and hold its place as one of the world's greatest recreation and health resorts" as the park project continued to evolve.⁷¹⁴ These organizations not only blurred the line between health and leisure, but also blurred the national park boundaries. There were no lakes, golf courses, or playground farms in the park, administered by the NPS, but entire town embodied the national park, just as newspaper editors had emphasized over a decade earlier.

At times the recreational pursuits around Hot Springs overshadowed the medicinal history of the town. Part of the centennial festivities included a regatta on Lake Hamilton, the product of another hydroelectric dam outside of Hot Springs.⁷¹⁵ Lakes Hamilton and Catherine brought in an increasing amount of tourists to the Ouachita Mountain region, "reaching a stage of patronage," according to Superintendent Allen, "whereby bath house business is no longer an indication of travel to this resort."⁷¹⁶ Many tourists were interested more in watersports and summer recreation activities along with taking the waters at the bathhouses. Hot Springs, in Allen's estimation, "is now increasingly being patronized as a recreational area as well as a health resort."⁷¹⁷ Officials emphasized leisure and recreation in Hot Springs' centennial

⁷¹³ "Centennial Celebration, April 24 to 30 Inclusive," *Tensas Gazette* (Saint Joseph, Louisiana), 8 April 1932, 6.

⁷¹⁴ Horace Albright to Superintendent Hot Springs National Park, telegram, 20 April 1932, Administrative Archives #2, Box A7627-A82, File no. A82.1930-1936.1, "Special Events," Hot Springs National Park Archives.

⁷¹⁵ *Circular of General Information Regarding Hot Springs National Park Arkansas* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932), 5.

⁷¹⁶ Thomas J. Allen, *Superintendent's Annual Report*, 30 June 1932, 15.

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

celebrations not only to highlight the changing trends in the area, but to weave these new trends into the history Hot Springs' visitor experience, like they had always been there since the reservation's creation in the 1832.

* * * * *

On April 25, 1932, Superintendent Thomas Allen spoke as part of the opening ceremony celebrating Hot Springs' centennial. His speech, titled, "Hot Springs Today," drew contrasts between the primitive Arkansas village in 1832 and its bustling 1932 counterpart, an urban center and national park "operated for the benefit and enjoyment of all the people of the universe." Allen first asked his audience to imagine a place of "frame shacks" littering the landscape in 1832 only to be transformed in 1932, where "we have today the most modern and beautiful bathhouses fitted with the latest and best equipment and manned by trained and experienced personnel." Along with the bathhouses, the government "endorsed" the power of Hot Springs by constructing the Army and Navy Hospital, an establishment serving "active and retired Army and Navy men," as well as "veterans of every war in which this country has ever engaged." "To Surround the entire picture of city and national park is that wondrous mountain region of the Ouachita range extending for miles in all directions," making it possible, mused Allen, for visitors to travel to the Valley of Vapors "for both health and recreation." Lastly, Allen reached "the waters themselves." "Instead of being allowed to run freely over the hillsides," Allen praised the park's hydrological changes. By 1932, the government had "collected and distributed to the various houses by a system designed to retain to the utmost possible extent their original temperature and their peculiar healing powers."⁷¹⁸ Allen would go on to surmise

⁷¹⁸ Thomas Allen, "Talk Given on the Opening of the Centennial Celebration," 25 April 1932, 1-3; Administrative Archives #2, Box A7627-A82, File no. A82.1930-1936.1, "Special Events," Hot Springs National Park Archives.

that “During the past one hundred years this area and its healing spring waters have been of invaluable service to the nation and its citizens, and have an unbroken record of aiding humanity in its search for health and strength.”⁷¹⁹ Though more tourists began patronizing the Hot Springs area in search of scenery and outdoor activities, thousands still used the waters to alleviate and cure chronic ailments.

Allen’s speech revealed the long history of material change in Hot Springs as well as the evolving cultural significance of the national parks. In his analysis of Yellowstone National Park, historian Mark Daniel Barringer described the parks as a “malleable commodity, shaped and marketed in various ways.” “As long as different beliefs about what the park was could be reflected in reality,” concluded Barringer, “visitors departed happy, their needs met.”⁷²⁰ Hot Springs, more than any other national park unit, transformed according to the will and needs of the people. Officials, treating the reservation and park as a laboratory in which to test and retest ideas about health, leisure, representation, and government responsibility, changed the hydraulic landscape above and below ground for a century in order to harness the cultural power of the thermal waters and administer them to the people. When needs changed, like when Americans developed a twentieth-century understanding of nature and the national parks constructed around themes of leisure and consumerism, Hot Springs’ landscape again changed, in material and cultural ways. Allen documented this transformation his history of Hot Springs’ past and present.

In 1932, amidst 200,000 patrons, patients, and curious tourists visiting Hot Springs during the year, Allen struck an optimistic tone to end his speech: “Altogether Hot Springs National Park and the city of Hot Springs can look back over the past hundred years with a great

⁷¹⁹ Ibid., 2

⁷²⁰ Mark Daniel Barringer, *Selling Yellowstone: Capitalism and the Construction of Nature* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 175.

pride at the changes that have occurred and the results that have been accomplished and it can look forward with confidence to the next hundred years.”⁷²¹ The next century, however, would again test the value of Hot Springs National Park and its waters, forcing officials, private and public organizations, and ordinary visitors to adjust their understandings of the waters ultimate power.

⁷²¹ Allen, “Talk Given on the Opening of the Centennial Celebration,” 3.

Conclusion

On April 29, 1932, Senator Royal Copeland of New York gave a speech concerning Hot Springs' centennial and the park's national importance. Copeland, a homeopathic physician prior to his Senate career, maintained a curiosity around the waters flowing through Hot Springs and discussed them on several occasions in the Washington. On the Senate floor, Copeland made two important points as he celebrated and defended the medicinal efficacy of the Hot Springs waters. First, he repeated the position by Stephen Mather and Hot Springs boosters that the Arkansas landscape encompassed the nation's first national park. But Copeland went further than past comments. Copeland put forward an alternative idea of what the national parks could be. By focusing on parks as sites of health and recovery, Copeland explained that with Hot Springs, the United States maintained "22 national centers of health and recreation" in its national parks.⁷²² On the Reservation's centennial, Copeland made one of the more lucid connections between the national park idea and Hot Springs, a perennial outlier in the early narrative of national park history.

Second, Copeland made Hot Springs a tool in defense of the trying economic times encountered by Americans. By 1932, the Great Depression brought the national unemployment rate to 23.6 percent. Arkansas was coming out of a string of natural and political disasters at the start of the 1930s. The 1927 Mississippi River flood had covered over five million acres of Arkansas with water, devastating over two million acres dedicated to agriculture. As the waters receded, the deluge left over 200,000 Arkansans displaced.⁷²³ After the flood, a severe drought

⁷²² Senator Royal Copeland (NY), "The Centenary of American Radioactive Spa, Hot Springs, Ark.," *Congressional Record* 75:8 (April 29, 1932), 9206.

⁷²³ Jeannie M. Whyne, "Darker Forces on the Horizon: Natural Disasters and Great Depression," in Whyne, et. al., *Arkansas: A Narrative History*, 312; John Barry, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

lasting eighteen months in 1930 and 1931 set in, further decimating the agricultural lifeblood of the area. Corruption and mismanagement of funds led to Arkansas ranking forty-sixth in per capita income and first in per capita indebtedness.⁷²⁴ Arkansas, while preaching a program of New South industry and manufacturing, had remained predominantly agricultural, maintaining poor roads and transportation networks, and wary of the work of government. Copeland noted that economic distress would soon lead to physical distress for the rich and the poor, and Hot Springs offered a potential cure. He pointed out that “As the world emerges from its present stress, it will face new needs for physical and mental rehabilitation, and more than ever before will consideration of public health be a true index of governmental intelligence.” By reserving the Arkansas hot springs in 1832, the senator believed, “the Government, in its wisdom, a hundred years ago saw fit to take over this valuable property, valuable because it contributes to the health and well-being and longevity of those who make use of those waters.” Copeland concluded by emphasizing the role of government in preserving the well-being of its citizens: “I think the act of Congress a hundred years ago dedicating this great institution at Hot Springs, the first national park, to this work of healing was a beneficent act on the part of Congress and, in many respects, far more important than thousands of other things which we have done and looked upon at the time as very significant.”⁷²⁵ Seven months after Copeland’s speech, a fellow Democrat from New York, Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt, was elected president.

Roosevelt’s subsequent endorsement of mineral waters’ recuperative potential kept the topic in the public sphere throughout the 1930s.⁷²⁶ FDR first took the waters in Warm Springs,

⁷²⁴ The historian Gail S. Murray described the time as “a study in discouragement, confusion, suffering, and political ineptness.”; “Forty Years Ago: The Great Depression Comes to Arkansas,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1970), 310.

⁷²⁵ Copeland, “The Centenary of American Radioactive Spa, Hot Springs, Ark.,” 9206

⁷²⁶ Roosevelt, along with first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, visited Hot Springs as part of Arkansas’ statehood centennial in 1936. “The President,” according to Superintendent Libbey, “was very much interested in the accommodations and bathing procedure, the chemical content of the water, the receipts from the bath houses, and future

Georgia, on October 3, 1924. He used the mineral waters at Warm Springs for his polio therapy and the president's treatments caught the nation's attention. Roosevelt embraced "The Spirit of Warm Springs," as he called it, a mindset of perseverance and recovery that, as a *TIME Magazine* correspondent reported, "Roosevelt steeps himself in quite as purposefully as he exercises in its waters."⁷²⁷ Roosevelt brought this mindset to the White House, and his New Deal policies echoed Copeland's projections regarding the expanded role of government in its citizens' health along with almost every facet of American economic, social, and environmental life.

The Depression brought into stark relief the contrast between the longer economic trajectory of Hot Springs and that of greater Arkansas. Hot Springs differed in almost every way from the state in which it resided, in large part because of the role of the federal government and the national park. Weather had little impact on the thermal waters and the town of Hot Springs, and city directories in the 1930s reveal that few businesses closed their doors.⁷²⁸ Most importantly, the park infrastructure, in an effort to provide access to visitors from across the country, moved at a rapid pace compared to the state mechanizations. The town of Hot Springs often cooperated and put up funds to match the work being done at the national park. Since the 1870s (and indirectly as early as the 1830s) Hot Springs had capitalized on government intervention, predating the increased role of the federal government in Arkansans' lives during

developments of the park." The first lady made a more succinct assessment: "We drove through the town, visited one of the bathhouses and even tasted the water which was too hot to really enjoy on a hot day." Libbey quote from Superintendent Libbey to Director Cammerer, letter, 3 July 1936, in Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 341; Eleanor Roosevelt quote from Ronald D. Greenwood, M.D., "President Franklin D. Roosevelt Visits Hot Springs," Garland County Historical Society *The Record* (2019), 4.

⁷²⁷ "The Presidency: Spirit of Warm Springs," *TIME* 33, no. 16 (April 17, 1939), <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,761044,00.html>.

⁷²⁸ Hot Springs City Directories, 1925-1940, not every year collected and reviewed; Garland County Historical Society, File Name: City Directories.

and after the 1930s.⁷²⁹ Hot Springs' officials and residents were already well accustomed to federal intervention due to the town's long history with the national park.

Events after 1932 demonstrated the ways in which thermal water destinations adjusted to changing trends around how Americans could best to use the park's thermal waters in the twentieth century and beyond. At the Army and Navy General Hospital, the development of modern pharmaceuticals altered physicians' perception of the healing potential of the thermal waters. Instead of a cure-all for a number of endemic diseases in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the waters became a hydrotherapeutic tool in easing arthritis for war-torn servicemen during and after World War II. This changing medicinal world led the Department of Defense to fully reconsider the viability of the Army and Navy General Hospital in the late 1950s. The Black bathhouses struggled mightily through the Depression, but survived, thus reinforcing the pride African Americans felt towards these establishments and the interest of the waters for African Americans all across the country. The thermal waters ultimately seeped into Arkansas' civil rights' history as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) incorporated the long history of segregated thermal water access in Hot Springs into a larger fight for integrated facilities across the state. Finally, at the national park, visitors felt distanced from the cultural and medicinal significance of the thermal waters in the interwar years and beyond. As medical professionals disassociated nature from modern health standards in the twentieth century, the hydrotherapeutic landscape lost some of its most significant cultural qualities. In their stead, tourists associated Hot Springs with illicit crime like

⁷²⁹ Arkansas received more money from New Deal programs per capita (\$398) than any state in the South. It ranked 18th out of the 48 states; see Don C. Reading, "New Deal Activity and the States, 1933 to 1939," *Journal of Economic History*, 33 (December 1973), 792-810.

gambling and gangsters, irremediably eroding the purity standards boosters had fought for so long to uphold in town.

The Army and Navy General Hospital

Since 1887, soldiers, sailors, marines, and veterans continued to flood into Hot Springs, sent to the Army and Navy General Hospital on orders or on the recommendation of a growing network of veterans praising the healing effects of the thermal waters. The national thermal waters remained a relevant therapeutic resource. “It is gratifying” noted Park Superintendent George Collins in 1931, “that interest in the use of the waters has kept pace with advances made in Medical Science.”⁷³⁰ By 1927, the hospital averaged 227 full beds per day. With a normal bed capacity of 169, and a maximum capacity of set at 300, medical officers and nurses were overwhelmed. “It was never expected this [the hospital] should be utilized to the extent that it has been,” reported the local *Hot Springs New Era* in 1930.⁷³¹ With steadily rising patient loads, medical officers at the Army and Navy Hospital needed to either restrict admissions or petition Congress for funds to expand the installation. Colonel Robert U. Patterson, commanding officer at the hospital, chose the latter. Patterson and others testified in 1930 before the House Committee on Military Affairs for an entirely new installation on the grounds.⁷³²

Patterson and others highlighted how the thermal waters fit into a modern approach to therapeutic medicine. He relied on the work of medical officers and the local Hot Springs medical community but also demonstrated the growing interest in the therapies for veterans. In

⁷³⁰ George Collins, *Superintendent's Annual Report*, 20 October 1931, 1, Hot Springs National Park Archives.

⁷³¹ “Federal Hospital Here is Valuable Asset to Resort,” *Hot Springs New Era*, 1930, Garland Country Historical Society, file name “Army Navy Hospital,” folder 1.

⁷³² “Many Improvements Made During Past Year at Army-Navy Hospital,” *Hot Springs Sentinel-Record*, 2 January 1927.

his 1933 annual report, commanding officer Colonel James D. Fife explained how the thermal water still took center stage in hospital treatments: “Like the old one established in 1883, [the new installation] was planned to utilize the therapeutic properties of the thermal waters of the Arkansas Hot Springs.” Fife believed the new balneotherapy (treatment of diseases by bathing in mineral springs) and hydrotherapy departments represented some of “the finest units available” as the departments were supplied by “the naturally hot mineral springs for which this resort is famous.”⁷³³ The House committee “derived valuable information” from Col. Patterson’s testimony “as to therapeutic value of the water and of the treatments employed in connection with the water” at the old hospital, and concluded that “Undoubtedly the naturally hot waters have a certain curative value for certain diseases, especially when in connection with appropriate medical and surgical treatments.” It recommended, and Congress approved, appropriating \$1,500,000 to the construction of an entirely new facility on the hospital grounds. The funding was part of a larger bill to finance the construction of military hospitals across the country.⁷³⁴ Completed in 1933, the new ten-story hospital dwarfed its four-story predecessor (Fig. C.1 & C.2). The hospital became the tallest building in Arkansas, and a dominating physical presence in the small town of Hot Springs.

⁷³³ James D. Fife, Medical Corps Colonel, *Annual Report of the Army and Navy General Hospital, Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas* (1933), 12, RG 112, Box 112AR-1, Annual Reports, 1930-31; 1933-39, NARA Fort Worth.

⁷³⁴ “\$1,050,000 in Bill for Beds in Spa Hospital,” *Hot Springs Sentinel-Record*, 19 December 1929.

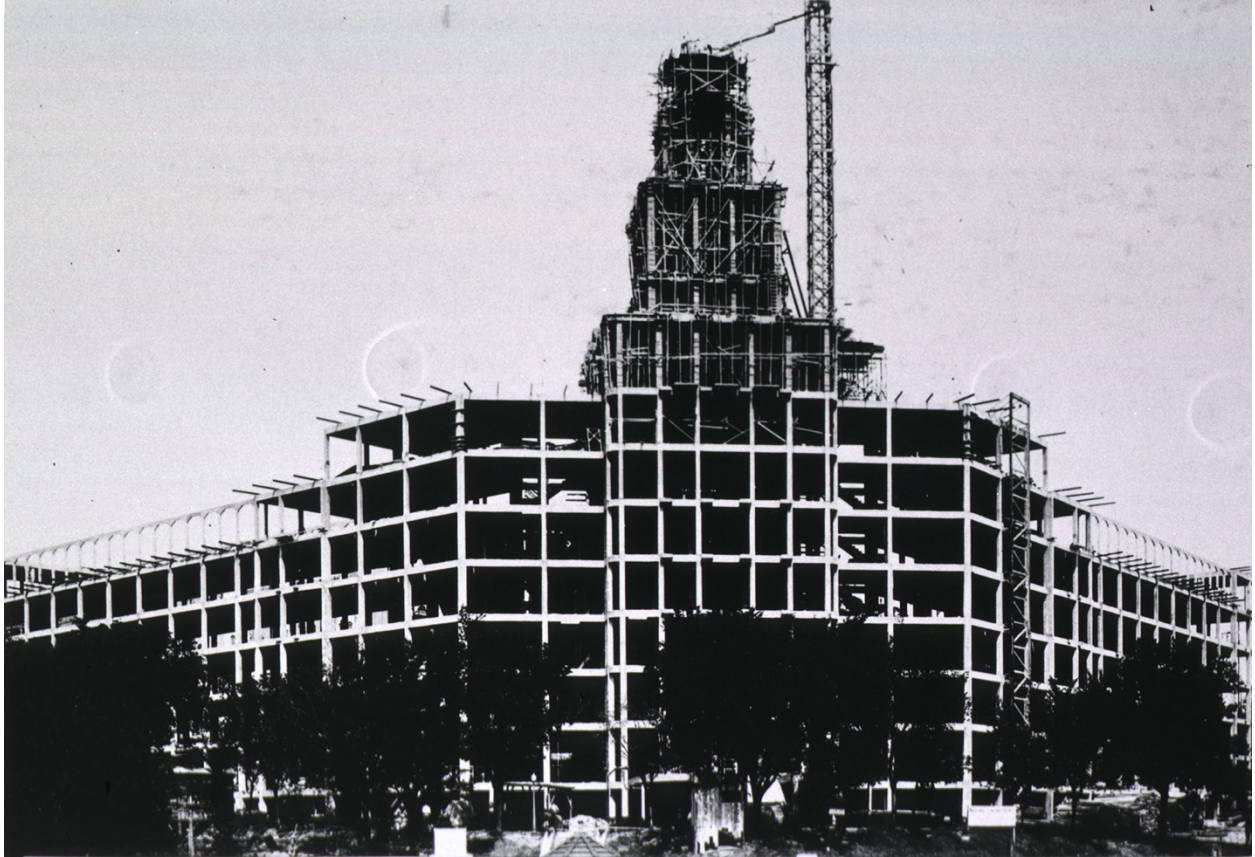


Fig. C.1: Construction on the New Army and Navy General Hospital, circa 1932; National Library of Medicine, ID 101400637.

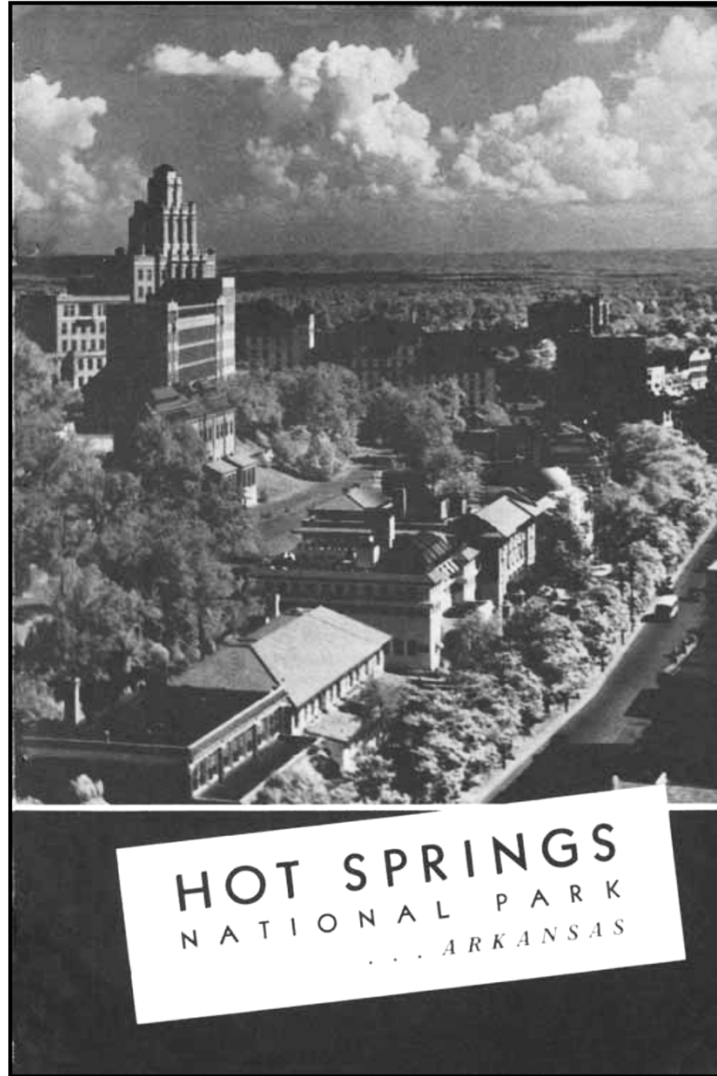


Fig. C.2: Guidebook for Hot Springs National Park, 1940. New Army and Navy Hospital overlooks bathhouses; National Park Service online library, Circulars and Information / Guidebooks / Officials Maps and Guides / Park Brochures.

As its predecessor had done in the past, the new, modern hospital legitimized thermal water use for medicinal purposes. “Uncle Sam has built here a hospital that is the last word in institutions of this kind,” wrote the editor of the *Arkansas Gazette* upon the building’s opening. “The government has given Hot Springs a very beautiful and imposing structure” he continued,

that contained every scientific advancement for best using the thermal waters.⁷³⁵ “Our National Government,” claimed an ad for the local Arlington Hotel, “shows its own faith in the healing power of Hot Springs Thermal Waters” with the new Army and Navy Hospital.⁷³⁶

Superintendent Allen believed, “This building is a modern structure in every respect and will be a credit not only to the Army and Navy but also to the park.”⁷³⁷ Regional boosters working to eradicate the centuries-old ideas of the South as nothing but an unhealthy place where it costs “a terrible lot to build roads through the swamps” singled out the new Army and Navy Hospital as a one of the “noble accomplishments” in hospitals and sanitariums across the nation.⁷³⁸

The outbreak of World War II forced medical officers and physicians across the country to rethink the best use of mineral waters and spas during wartime. In January 1942, the American Medical Association, through their recently created Committee on American Health Resorts, emphasized the “new significance” of domestic thermal and mineral spring sites “With foreign health resorts unavailable” due to the war. These spas “may be called on for the treatment of battle casualties and diseases arising out of military service.”⁷³⁹ A year later the House Committee on Military Affairs began to explore the idea of leasing space in resort towns for soldiers, sailors, marines, and pilots to rest and recover before they were reassigned to a different theater.⁷⁴⁰ The Army and Navy Hospital, among other sites across the country, became “invaluable as centers for reconstruction of those disabled in war.” One colonel in the Army

⁷³⁵ “New Hospital a Great Institution,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 30 August 1933.

⁷³⁶ “The Arlington Hotel & Baths,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 28 August 1932, 8.

⁷³⁷ Thomas Allen, *Superintendent’s Annual Report*, June 30, 1933, 4.

⁷³⁸ “Climate and Health in the Land of Ark-La-Tex,” *The Times* (Shreveport, LA), 22 January 1933, 4.

⁷³⁹ “Listing American Health Resorts,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 118, no. 5 (January 31, 1942), 381.

⁷⁴⁰ “A resolution authorizing the Committee on Military Affairs and the Committee on Naval Affairs to study the progress of the national war effort,” House of Representatives, Committee on Military Affairs (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, February 17, 1943).

Medical Corps firmly believed “the health resort centers which are being used by the Army are playing an ever increasing part” in the war effort.⁷⁴¹

As the new hospital became “overtaxed” following the United States’ entry into World War II when “sick and wounded began streaming back from the battlefields,” boosters and hospital staff once again employed patriotic rhetoric and imbued the thermal waters with powers of protecting the nation’s health, and therefore national security.⁷⁴² Full-page newspaper ads declared, “Take care of your health for victory’s sake; rest, relax, and recuperate in Hot Springs.” In a war-time speech he prepared for Arkansas Senator John L. McClellan, Hot Springs Superintendent J. W. Emmert iterated how “Hot Springs National park is proud of the fact that it is doing an important job in the face of difficulties, by improving the health, morale, and general wellbeing of war-harassed people, both in military and civilian life.”⁷⁴³ At the Army and Navy Hospital, the medical officers and staff were well aware of the connections between their work with the thermal waters and the nation’s safety. The battle cry at the bottom of every cover of the hospital’s newspaper, *The Bugle*, read “KEEP ‘EM FIT FOR FIGHTING” with the caduceus, the staff featuring two snakes coiled around it and wings attached and the official symbol of the United States Medical Corp and Public Health Service, attached as well.⁷⁴⁴

As the war dragged on, military officials used Hot Springs and other health resorts as places of rest as well as recuperation. Army redistribution stations, first suggested by General George C. Marshall, served as places where “enlisted men and officers might bring their wives

⁷⁴¹ “The Utilization of Health Resorts for Military Reconstruction,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 123, no. 9 (October 30, 1943), 564-65.

⁷⁴² “Army and Navy General Hospital, Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas,” 5, Garland County Historical Society, file name, “Hospital: Army/Navy Hospital Holiday Menus (1926 – 1558, 1916 Also).

⁷⁴³ J.W. Emmert, “Data on Hot Springs National Park Prepared for Senator John L. McClellan,” 6, RG 79, National Park Service Central Classified File, 1933-1949, National Parks, box 1209, file 501-04, Hot Springs Publicity & Statistics, Special Articles on National Parks, NARA College Park.

⁷⁴⁴ Army and Navy General Hospital, *The Bugle* 7, no. 3 (February 5, 1945), file 6-#3, folder “Army and Navy Hospital,” Garland County Historical Society, Hot Springs, AR.

for a period of ten to fourteen days before receiving a new assignment.”⁷⁴⁵ In 1944, the War Department took control of four of the largest hotels in Hot Springs and made the town one of the nation’s six Army Ground and Service Forces Redistribution Stations. “Foxholes or drafty barracks are traded for a comfortable hotel room and a bath” praised Private Al Tiefenthaler during his furlough in Hot Springs.⁷⁴⁶ In all, over 130,000 army servicemen took part in the program, with 32,368 men moved through the Hot Springs Redistribution Station during its 15-month period.⁷⁴⁷ One newspaper article reporting on the state of the Army’s general hospitals during the war effort noted how medical officers soon borrowed the national park’s slogan, “We Bathe the World;” within the walls of the Army and Navy Hospital it became “We Bathe the Army.”⁷⁴⁸ The hospital reached a peak of 1,777 full beds per day during the war, a mix of servicemen and officers moving through the redistribution station as well as injured soldiers and ailing veterans.

Hot Springs’ waters adapted to the new demands placed upon them until modern medicine and therapeutics ended the thermal waters’ powers of curing every malady faced by a soldier, sailor, marine, or veteran. The Department of Defense stopped distributing circulars to post surgeons listing the dozens of maladies the thermal waters had previously “cured” after the war. Medical officers at the Army and Navy Hospital pivoted and refocused on rehabilitating patients, specifically those suffering from various forms of arthritis. While the Army had

⁷⁴⁵ There were a total of six redistribution centers in the United States: Lake Placid, New York; Asheville, North Carolina; Miami Beach, Florida; Santa Barbara, California, Atlantic City, New Jersey; and Hot Springs, Arkansas; see John D. Millett, *The Organization and Role of the Army Service Forces* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History – United States Army, 1987), 102.

⁷⁴⁶ “Pvt. Al Tiefenthaler Now at Redistribution Station, Hot Springs,” *Carroll Daily Times Herald* (Carroll, Iowa), 1 September 1945, 2

⁷⁴⁷ Thomas Boles, Superintendent “Hot Springs National Park,” sent in letter to James W. Case, Advertising Director, Arkansas Outdoors, 19 September 1946, in RG 79, Box 1208, Hot Springs 208-05 – 501-03, NARA College Park.

⁷⁴⁸ “Hot Springs Army and Navy Hospital Specializes in Arthritis Treatment,” *Marshall News Messenger* (Marshall, Texas), 30 April 1944, 1.

expanded to 59 general hospitals across the country by the end of the war, patients still came to Hot Springs “to take advantage of all the tangible as well as psychological benefits afforded by Nature’s hot flowing springs,” a resource they could not access elsewhere. But after the war, “patient load decreased substantially” according to testimony before Congress by medical officers at the hospital.⁷⁴⁹ The military did not send servicemen to Hot Springs anymore, cutting off the constant flow of possible patients, and fewer veterans chose to make the trip to Arkansas to combat their arthritis as pharmaceutical pain management became available in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1953, Frank Krusen, a physician at the Mayo Clinic sent to Hot Springs to survey the Army and Navy Hospital, reported that “the Army decided that it no longer needed the facility.”⁷⁵⁰ The Department of Defense ultimately cited “economic reasons” when they closed the doors to the hospital on June 30, 1955.⁷⁵¹ After no federal department chose to take over and bear responsibility for the grounds, Congress conveyed the site to the State of Arkansas on September 21, 1959 and it became a state rehabilitation center.⁷⁵² “The setting is a natural,” concluded Joy Talley of the Missouri Vocational Recreation Department endorsing the acquisition by the state, because “for years Hot Springs, Ark., has been known, because of its natural resource, hot mineral waters for health baths, as a health center.”⁷⁵³ The Interior Department, ever mindful of its rhetorical and physical battles over the town’s precious resource, inserted an amendment in the legislation that reasserted Interior’s control of any thermal waters under the state facility.

⁷⁴⁹ “Background,” “Hearing before the Committee on Government Operations, United States Senate,” Eighty-Sixth Congress, First Session, May 21, 1959 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), 3.

⁷⁵⁰ Testimony of Dr. Frank Krusen, “Hearing before the Committee on Government Operations,” 14.

⁷⁵¹ Donald Libbey, *Monthly Superintendent Report*, Hot Springs National Park, January 1955, 3.

⁷⁵² Public Law 86-323, “An act to direct the Secretary of the Army to convey the Army and Navy General Hospital, Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas, to the State of Arkansas, and for other purposes, September 21, 1959.

⁷⁵³ Joy O. Talley to Senator John. L. McClellan, 6 February 1959, in “Hearing before the Committee on Government Operations,” 29.

The Army and Navy General Hospital participated in a changing hydrological landscape in Hot Springs (Fig. 2). Its first phase of construction contributed to some of the early fights for thermal water control in Hot Springs. Its medical officers worked to legitimize the medicinal properties of the waters at the turn of the twentieth century. The façade of the 1933 hospital still overlooks the national park today, catching the visitor’s eye as it did 90 years ago. But the old military installation is a shell of its former self. Many of the floors inside the building are now empty, and the basement regularly flooded (Fig. C.3). In 2021, the Hot Springs chamber of commerce suggested the federal government again step in to fix this “once-magnificent facility” overlooking the national park. “We understand this is not a good time to ask the federal government for anything because of the pandemic,” admitted councilman Clay Farrar, but “The time has come for the federal government to once again accept the responsibility of ownership and be a good steward of the complex that it built.”⁷⁵⁴ Even after 140 years, ideas about government control and responsibility spring forth at the Army and Navy General Hospital.

⁷⁵⁴ Clay Farrar, “Old hospital is a federal responsibility,” *Hot Springs Sentinel-Record*, 28 February 2021.



Fig. C.3: The spire of the nearly abandoned Army and Navy General Hospital, cloistered behind the original iron gate separating the hospital grounds from the national park; photo by author, 2022.

The Black Bathhouses

Owners of Hot Springs' Black bathhouses fought to keep their establishments open through the economic turmoil of the 1930s. The Depression affected African American fraternal organizations especially hard due as Black orders often had fewer and poorer members than their white counterparts. Concurrently, the rise of for-profit insurance companies in the 1920s and 1930s took dues-paying members away from traditional fraternal association.⁷⁵⁵ In 1932, the Pythian Bathhouse provided half the number of baths it had in 1930, dropping from 10,140 to

⁷⁵⁵ Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Lynn Oser, "Organization despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations," *Social Science History* 28, no. 3 (Fall, 2004), 421-22.

4,590. In September 1933 the bathhouse closed for repairs, and due to added financial difficulties, remained closed for the whole year. In a letter to NPS Director Horace Albright, Hot Springs Superintendent Thomas Allen relayed information he had gleaned from the Pythians' managers and explained that "There is not enough colored business arriving in town to pay for their operation even if it was open."⁷⁵⁶ Albright followed Allen's suggestion and suspended the Pythians' water lease for one year. The bathhouse eventually reopened in 1934, but continued to struggle.

The decline in visitation at the Woodmen of the Union bathhouse and hotel was more pronounced during the onset of the Depression than at the Pythian, plummeting from 8,547 in 1930 to 2,768 in 1932.⁷⁵⁷ This led Custodian John L. Webb to write to the Department of the Interior in February, 1933, requesting "much needed relief" due to "the fact that the depression has made it impossible for members of my race who would like to come here for the baths to get here."⁷⁵⁸ The WoU attempted to increase visitations by advertising 1933 as a "banner season" at the bathhouse, readying itself to host "scores of Celebs."⁷⁵⁹ The managers also reminded potential visitors of the thermal waters' medicinal value and the racial harmony of Hot Springs, declaring the government-owned water "insures that there is no discrimination in the special medicated waters which are supplied for bathing."⁷⁶⁰ The marketing pitch did not pay off as the establishment continued to run a deficit. In 1934, an audit revealed the bathhouse earned a yearly operating income of \$1,756.94 while expenses tallied \$2,919.48. This dismal result was a

⁷⁵⁶ Thomas Allen to Horace Albright, 25 February 1933, in RG 79, Box no. 1238, Hot Springs, 900 Pub. Utility Op., Kingsway, 900.02 – Lamar, 900, NARA College Park.

⁷⁵⁷ Shugart, "Tables Showing Annual Total Number of Baths Given at Each Operating Bathhouse, 1898-2004," 5.

⁷⁵⁸ John L. Webb to Superintendent Thomas Allen Jr., 24 February 1933, RG 79, Box 1215, Hot Springs, 620-630, File name "Hot Springs – Public Utility Operators – Supreme Lodge Woodmen of the Union – Contracts," NARA College Park.

⁷⁵⁹ "WoU Hotel and Bathhouse Remain Open," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 10 June 1933, 2; "Famous 'Spa' To Be Host to Scores of Celebs This Season," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 20 January 1934, 3.

⁷⁶⁰ "WoU Hotel and Bathhouse Remain Open," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 10 June 1933, 2.

combination of the low attendance at the bathhouse and the fact that Hot Springs Black bathhouses charged the least for a bath, with the Woodmen of the Union and Pythian charging 85 cents per bath in 1934 while the Bathhouse Row establishments charged between \$1.00 and \$1.25. The Woodmen of the Union ultimately closed its bathhouse in June 1935. The loss of the bathhouse was devastating to the WoU. The *Pittsburgh Courier* reported that with the shuttered bathhouse and hospital, “Thus has crumbled the empire that Webb once sought to build up.”⁷⁶¹ The Pythian Bathhouse was now the only remaining establishment in Hot Springs which provided thermal waters exclusively to African Americans.

But as long as the buildings were still standing, bathhouse managers and boosters relayed the cultural significance of the establishments to both local and national Black communities. In his reapplication for the water lease in 1933, Pythian Custodian Dr. Harold H. Phipps, recounted the “pride” he felt in the 25-year history the Pythians enjoyed in Hot Springs as well as “in the good-will [the bathhouse] has built up among the colored people of the country.”⁷⁶² After closing, the Woodmen of the Union reached out to the Pythians, hoping to pool their resources. Pythian managers believed the influx of WoU members and business as nothing but helpful during these trying times. John E. Eve agreed to move the WoU hospital into the Pythian Bathhouse, and the Pythians agreed to offer WoU members the same discounted bath rates they offered their guests at their establishment.⁷⁶³ Acting NPS Director A.E. Demaray viewed the merger of the Black bathhouses as a “success” since both organizations were able to “enjoy equal privileges in the use of the hot waters of the park.”⁷⁶⁴ The decision strengthened the Pythian as the bathhouse saw its visitation numbers reach and then surpass pre-Depression

⁷⁶¹ “Woodmen Lose Valuable Properties in Arkansas,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 8 June 1935, 3.

⁷⁶² Dr. Harold H. Phipps to Thomas Allen, 2 October 1933, RG 79, Box 1238, NARA College Park.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁴ A.E. Demaray to Thomas Allen, 6 February 1936, RG 79, box no. 1215, NARA College Park.

numbers by the second half of the decade. 1936 was the first year in over a decade that the Pythian turned a profit, which continued into the 1940s.⁷⁶⁵ Dr. Harold Phipps wrote in 1937 that “We are the only bath-house in the city for negroes” and the disappearance of the Pythian would be ruinous to the race. “Our failure,” concluded Phipps, “would be a calamity to the negroes of the country.”⁷⁶⁶ Regional newspapers deemed the Pythian the “magic health center of Malvern Avenue” where “Beauty takes a health bath.”⁷⁶⁷ Hot Springs’ Black bathhouses survived the Great Depression through adaptive strategies and the consolidation of their national reputation as places of African American health and leisure.

The old Woodmen of the Union Bathhouse eventually had one last opportunity to provide thermal water access to visiting African Americans. Still “locked and barred” and “one of Uncle Sam’s white elephants” dotting the American landscape after the Depression, national correspondents still deemed the building the “finest structure ever built by and for negroes in America.”⁷⁶⁸ After World War II, the National Baptist Convention (NBC) decided to explore possibility of purchasing the building and acquiring its thermal water lease. The NBC ultimately bought the property in 1948 and officially opened its doors in a lavish ceremony attended by Black and white Hot Springs residents in 1951. Similar to the fraternal orders earlier in the century, the NBC relied on its extensive network to bring visitors, patients, and patrons to the new bathhouse where “Here are administered the famous thermal water baths.”⁷⁶⁹ In 1952, the NBC held its annual convention at the hotel and bathhouse, bringing thousands to Hot Springs to review and enjoy the new establishment. While accruing a substantial amount of debt in

⁷⁶⁵ Hillory A. Tolson, Acting Director, National Park Service to Secretary of the Interior, 10 November 1944, RG 79, Box 1238, NARA College Park.

⁷⁶⁶ Harold H. Phipps to D.S. Libbey, 5 July 1937, RG 79, Box 1238, NARA College Park.

⁷⁶⁷ “Beauty Takes a Health Bath at the Pythian’s – Hot Springs,” *Arkansas State Press* (Little Rock, AR), 3 October 1941, 3.

⁷⁶⁸ “Hot Springs, Celebrated Winter Resort, Is Center for Sepia Society,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 18 February 1939.

⁷⁶⁹ “Bath House Announces Vacation Rates,” *Negro Star* (Wichita, KS), 13 July 1951, 2.

acquiring, furnishing, and staffing the building, \$250,000, Dr. A.M. Townsend of the NBC believed “Inestimable is the value of this investment in providing a legacy for the healthful and general welfare of our race group.”⁷⁷⁰ The *Chicago Defender* proclaimed the new bathhouse a “racial achievement!” in 1952.⁷⁷¹ The investment soon paid off as well as it only took two years for the NBC Bathhouse to outpace the successful Pythian, providing 16,565 baths in 1953 to the Pythians’ 15,648.

In the 1950s and 1960s, as African Americans continued to face discrimination in Hot Springs, thermal water access played a pivotal role in the ongoing Civil Rights Movement. While proud of the separate facilities in town, the NAACP used the elegant bathhouses along Bathhouse Row at the national park as a prime target to curtail decades of *de facto* segregation issues on park property. Dating back to the late 1940s, Black newspapers reported that white bathhouse owners were gripped with the fear “that Negroes may be allowed to take baths along with white people.” Integrated bathhouses were, according to one white bathhouse operator, “the greatest danger” as it would disrupt local precedents that either barred African Americans from the baths or accepted their tickets during off hours.⁷⁷² The local Hot Springs NAACP chapter accused the town and the national park of “Token but unacceptable progress” in desegregating public spaces and promised that “Hot Springs Negroes were ‘ready to take to the courts or the streets’ or to use any other ‘peaceful and creative means’ for obtaining equal rights.”⁷⁷³ The local bathhouses remained involved in political matters as managers for both the NBC Bathhouse and Pythian Bathhouse served on the Executive Board of the Hot Springs NAACP.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷⁰ “Bathhouse Top Topic on Agenda,” *Chicago Defender*, 12 January 1952, 2.

⁷⁷¹ “A Racial Achievement!,” *Chicago Defender*, January 19, 1952, 12.

⁷⁷² “Spas Fear Mixed Baths,” *Chicago Defender*, 23 April 1949, 1.

⁷⁷³ “NAACP Attacks Bathhouse Bias in Hot Springs Again,” 12 December 1963, Papers of the NAACP, Part 27, Selected Branch Files, Hot Springs, Arkansas Branch Operations, 1956-1965

⁷⁷⁴ “Hot Springs N.A.A.C.P. Branch Reorganized – Public Meeting,” 16 December 1962, Papers of NAACP, Part 27.

The work and planning of the NAACP culminated on March 28, 1963, when the Hot Springs branch invited M.T. Blanton, the NAACP vice president, and Henry Harden, the founder of the National Bowling Association attempted to desegregate Bathhouse Row. The two men planned to walk into the Buckstaff Bathhouse, an establishment with a history of excluding African Americans. At 9:00 AM the men entered the Buckstaff and were turned away, asked to return at 2:30 PM as “the bath halls were crowded at that time.”⁷⁷⁵ The men then requested a meeting with the park superintendent, Robert Atkinson, as well as the Buckstaff manager and the chief park ranger. After the meeting, the men successfully entered the Buckstaff and bathed without delay. Afterwards, the NAACP negotiated with the NPS to post notices on bathhouse doors along Bathhouse Row detailing that patrons would not be discriminated because of their race (Fig.). “From this day forward,” proclaimed branch president James Donald Rice, “we hope that many of the thousands of annual Negro visitors to Hot Springs will not have to leave without the baths they desire because the two Bath Houses that have always served Negroes became overcrowded, and the others refuse them service.” “All Negroes,” he concluded, “should have the free feeling as a first class citizen to know that they could have the thermal baths... It will be a better tomorrow for all of our children here, because of today’s action.”⁷⁷⁶ The episode, which the *Chicago Defender* titled “End Jim Crow At Bath House Row” became an integral part in the Hot Springs NAACP branch’s mission to integrate schools and health facilities in and around the region.⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁷⁵ Courtland T. Reid, Acting Superintendent, “Monthly Narrative Report, March 1963, Hot Springs,” 8 April 1963, 2, RG 79, General Records, Administrative Files, 1949-1971, Box 0219 Entry P-11, A2823 to A2823, NARA College Park.

⁷⁷⁶ News Release, “Negroes Plan Baths on ‘Bath House Row,’” 28 March 1963, 3, Papers of the NAACP, Part 27.

⁷⁷⁷ “End Jim Crow at Bath House Row,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 9 April 1963, 6.

The integration of Hot Springs' world-renowned bathhouses was a significant achievement as it increased African Americans access to the medicinal and recreational powers of the thermal waters. But this process took an already small subset of visitors, patients, and patrons away from the town's two Black bathhouses. After 1962, the number of baths at the Pythian decreased every year until it was forced to shut its doors permanently in 1975, providing just 1,871 baths in its last year of operation. The Pythian Hotel and Bathhouse, a Black institution in Hot Springs since the Pythians first bought the building from the owners of the struggling Crystal Bathhouse in 1908, was demolished in 1985. Unlike the 1913 fire, however, there were no plans to rebuild the building. A parking deck resides at 415-1/2 Malvern Avenue today, hiding and displacing one of the most important symbols of Black pride in Hot Springs for over 75 years (Fig. C.4).



Fig. C.4: Present-day location of the Crystal and Pythian Bathhouse, now the parking garage for the Hotel Hot Springs (in background); photo by author, 2022.

The National Baptist Convention Hotel and Bathhouse suffered a similar fate as the Pythian. Baths also decreased after 1962, though the church's network sustained the bathhouse for a little longer. The hotel ultimately closed in 1983. Alroy Puckett, the manager of the hotel and bathhouse, tied the advancements in civil rights for Black Arkansans and those from across the country to the closure of his establishment: "It's a small price to pay for integration. If that is what is killing us, let it go on."⁷⁷⁸ Over thirty years later, Elmer Beard, a leader in the Hot Springs NAACP and eight-term councilman, echoed Puckett's sentiments saying, "I hated to see it [NBC hotel] not be a bathhouse anymore, but I was proud to see integration take place at the same time... So, if we lose Malvern Avenue overall, lose the businesses to get a bath anywhere, then we lose it."⁷⁷⁹ The building is still standing in Hot Springs; the "giant oak" remains. But while "Bathhouse and Sanatarium" remain etched on the building's façade, the aging building is now a senior living facility. There is a small historical marker on the sidewalk highlighting the decades of Negro League baseball players who, like many of their white counterparts, "boiled out" in Hot Springs during the offseason at the Woodmen of the Union / National Baptist bathhouse. The walking history marker serves as a small reminder of the volume of African American history that has flowed through the town. (Fig. C.5).

⁷⁷⁸ Pat Casey, "Baptist Hotel succumbs to times," *Hot Springs Sentinel-Record*, 20 February 1983.

⁷⁷⁹ In "African American Bathhouses of Hot Springs, Arkansas," *Garland County Historical Society The Record* (2018), 8.



Fig. C.5: Present-day location of Woodmen of the Union / National Baptist Bathhouse. Historical marker in bottom right; photo by author, 2022.

Recovering the history of the Black bathhouses in Hot Springs should be paramount to the national park project. Some within the National Park Service have committed themselves to unearthing these underrepresented narratives. Robert Stanton, the National Park Service’s first African American director who served in the position from 1997-2001, spoke on the NPS’s dual responsibility as an agency. Its first is to be a responsible steward to the land. The second obligation, “equally important” to the agency, argued Stanton, was to participate in preserving and appreciating landscapes that speak to “freedom, justice, equity, and dignity for all.”⁷⁸⁰ The Pythian and Woodmen of the Union Bathhouses offer an exciting counterpoint to a long

⁷⁸⁰ Nelson Institute, “Anti-Racism in Our National Parks,” YouTube video, 1:14:54, August 27, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u065Bpdu08M&t=4019s>.

narrative restricting Black access to park spaces. While Hot Springs offered unique social and hydrological variables, it also presents a story of ingenuity, cooperation, and a fight for equal representation in public places.

Hot Springs National Park?

After 1932, Instead of riding high on the laurels of its centennial celebrations, the bathhouses and park struggled through the early years of the Depression as paid baths dipped throughout the 1930s, which resulted in fewer improvements being made to the elegant Bathhouse Row establishments. Officials such as Superintendent Thomas Allen wrote to newspapers asking them to remind readers “We have here a watering place and a medical center which equals if not betters anything found in Europe” as wealthy Americans escaped to health retreats in Germany and Switzerland during the Depression. Patronizing Hot Springs, argued Allen, was crucial to the “national recovery in this country.”⁷⁸¹

During this period, changes to the Hot Springs Government Free Bathhouse affected access to the thermal waters. As expected, the economic hardship faced by millions of Americans and thousands of Arkansans led to a sharp rise in free baths, with numbers climbing from 95,489 in 1933 to 135,498 in 1934 and finally 159,883 in 1935. Even with an improved and modernized collection and distribution system, this influx of visitors strained the park’s ability to administer thermal water to everyone. The Interior Department’s solution was to increase the penalties for those making false indigent oaths at the national park, which it had started requiring in 1911 for anyone using the Government Free Bathhouse. Interior Secretary Harold Ickes

⁷⁸¹ Thomas Allen to Frederick Babcock, Travel Editor, *Chicago Tribune*, 28 November 1933, RG 79, Box 333, Entry P 10 [Hot Springs] 208-08 Liquor Traffic to 501-03 Newspaper Articles, NARA College Park.

testified to Congress in 1936 that past enforcement of the 1911 law “have been extremely lenient” leading to “individuals who can afford to pay for their baths in the commercial bathhouses, who deliberately fail to disclose substantial assets” on their forms. What had been a maximum penalty of \$25 now became a minimum of \$25 and 5 days in prison. This change, Ickes hoped, “would discourage the making of false oaths” and “reduce this class of prosecutions.”⁷⁸² While it is unclear how many arrests park officials made after the law went into effect in 1937-38, baths at the Government Free Bathhouse dropped precipitously: to 103,493 in 1938 and 70,805 in 1940. The actions of the Interior Department created an added obstacle for Americans who sought to access the free thermal waters and was one of the first steps distancing visitors from the natural resource.

At the same time as Hot Springs officials curtailed traditional thermal water access, they worried that the trajectory of the national parks, which increasingly focused exclusively on recreation and leisure pursuits, would translate into a loss of influence and cultural significance garnered by the thermal waters over the past century. But the park’s recreational features were exactly what boosters outside the park focused on in order to attract tourists to Arkansas and Hot Springs. Newspaper editors, in the same strategic vein as their counterparts who published John Muir’s writings for public audiences a generation prior, hired nature writers like George M. Moreland to wax poetically on the “grandeur” of Hot Springs. “I think Hot Springs has been written about from every possible angle,” noted Moreland. Journalists will “meticulously assemble data about the world-famous spa; they will delve deeply into the efficacy of the health-giving water.” “But,” asked the naturalist, “how many of these journalists have ever climbed the

⁷⁸² Harold Ickes to Rene L. DeRouen, Chairman, Committee on the Public Lands, House of Representatives, 31 March 1936, “Report on Increasing the Penalty for Making False Oaths for the Purpose of Bathing at the Government Free Bathhouse at Hot Springs, Ark,” House of Representatives, 74th Congress, 2-3.

mountain trails adjacent to Hot Springs?... How many of them have tried to catch the music of the rollicking Ouachita River as it cavorts, like a lamb at play, down through the hills?”⁷⁸³ While past superintendents like Dr. William Parks insisted on the medicinal efficacy of the thermal waters, Donald S. Libbey, park superintendent from 1936-38, 1944-46, and 1951-59, focused on the “recreational outlets for visitors.” This included early efforts in his first tenure to “round out the natural features and add much to the area available for trails, bridal paths and a scenic motor road.”⁷⁸⁴ The efforts of Libbey and others aimed to bring more tourists to Hot Springs, even if those visitors were not taking in the waters.

Throughout the 1930s, gambling and illicit activities in Hot Springs, which had plagued the town and the park since the turn of the twentieth century, made travelers from across the country question how healthy a vacation in the Arkansas town could be for their minds, bodies, and souls. Illegal activities soon came to dominate Hot Springs, especially under the two-decade mayoral reign of Leo McLaughlin. A Hot Springs native, McLaughlin ran for mayor in 1926 promising to open the town for any and all illicit activities, specifically illegal gambling. Bootlegging and organized crime followed in the wake of McLaughlin’s lax enforcement policy during the Prohibition Era.⁷⁸⁵ NPS policeman James A. Cary was shot and killed by bootleggers on West Mountain on March 12, 1927.⁷⁸⁶ Gangsters from Al Capone to Charles “Lucky” Luciano took up residence in Hot Springs, protected by McLaughlin as long as they did not interfere with the gambling and liquor sales he supervised during Prohibition. In 1930 the Department of Justice passed along a report to Interior on Hot Springs from a field agent noting

⁷⁸³ George M. Moreland, “Hot Springs, With Her Beautiful Mountains and Streams,” *The Commercial Appeal* (Memphis, Tennessee), 8 January 1933.

⁷⁸⁴ Donald S. Libbey, Annual Report of the Superintendent of Hot Springs National Park, 1936, in Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 342.

⁷⁸⁵ Wendy Richter, “Leo Patrick McLaughlin (1888-1958),” *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, updated October 15, 2008, <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/leo-patrick-mclaughlin-1712/>.

⁷⁸⁶ Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 271-2.

the network of illicit activity in town. Benjamin Lamb “especially urged” the NPS to take action because as much as Hot Springs represented “a wonderful resort, Government owned and controlled,” it was quickly being recognized “as a Booze Center.”⁷⁸⁷

What concerned park officials the most was visitors’ associations of the impure illegal activities around town with the safety of national parks and the efficacy of the thermal waters. NPS Director Horace Albright wrote a terse letter to the park superintendent in 1933 relaying complaints from congressmen about the moral anguish plaguing Hot Springs, an admonishing him that “it was time that Hot Springs cleaned up its gambling mess.”⁷⁸⁸ A year later, after McLaughlin and an influential group of Hot Springs residents announced they were reopening the town’s Oaklawn racetrack for para-mutuel betting in March 1934, Superintendent Allen complained of the constant effort by officials like him to “place the national park on an independent footing from the administration and offerings of the city of Hot Springs.”⁷⁸⁹ In 1939, a sensationalized four-piece exposé appeared in the nationally distributed *Liberty Magazine*, which it chronicled the multi-year campaign the Federal Bureau of Investigation waged against members of the Barker-Karpis gang, who had settled in Hot Springs and involved themselves in the illegal gambling ring (Fig. C.6). The national press portrayed Hot Springs as anything but a safe and salubrious spot for vacationers and invalids. Author Frederick L. Collins succinctly articulated this dichotomy, writing, “Here, I said to myself, in nature’s jewel case is my long sought gem of purest ray, my Nirvana, my Valhalla. Here in Arkansas is Arcady. But I was never so wrong in my life.” “Where nature intended that there should be beauty and health, I found

⁷⁸⁷ Benjamin Lamb to Commissioner Amfilng, Acting Chief Probation Dept, Department of Justice, 14 March 1930, Box 333, NARA College Park.

⁷⁸⁸ Horace Albright to Thomas Allen, 2 February 1933, RG 79, Box 1208, NARA College Park.

⁷⁸⁹ Thomas Allen to Arno Cammerer, 3 March 1934, RG 79, Box 333, NARA College Park.

ugliness and decay,” Collins concluded.⁷⁹⁰ As patrons and patients continued to come to Hot Springs via rail and road, they were met by much more than rest and relaxation.

HELL IN HOT SPRINGS

READING TIME • 21 MINUTES 45 SECONDS

PART ONE—THE G-MEN ENTER

A SPA, as you doubtless know, is a place where people go who can afford to be sick in a fashionable manner. Usually they arrange to have their maladies reach a crisis in the spring, when they “boil out” after a hard winter, and again in the fall, when they “boil out” in preparation for another. The game is called “taking a cure.”

Until comparatively recently the pastime was confined chiefly to European watering places. Ponce de Leon’s failure to find the Fountain of Youth on these shores had apparently given the curative value of American spring water an undeservedly bad name. But nowadays our native boiling-out stations are numerous.

In California, high above the gold-green splendor of the San Bernardino Valley, we find lovely Arrowhead, with its lake in the sites and its heaven-set background on which to paint the picture of health; in Virginia, the eastern Hot Springs, a flame of azaleas and rhododendrons in the spring, a smoldering fire of foliage in the fall; in West Virginia, standing in stately elegance on the southern slope of the Greenbrier Mountains, that noble height which is White Sulphur; in Indiana, French Lick, hill-encircled like White Sulphur and quite as delightfully sulphuric; and in New York, gracious, green-lavender Saratoga, where the horses run even faster than the waters. But Hot Springs, Arkansas, if you come upon it at the twilight hour — as I did some six years ago — outparades them all.

Enshrined in a Carter setting of emerald hillsides and sapphire lakes, it is the Kohinoor of American spas.

Here, I said to myself, in nature’s jewel case is my long sought gem of purest ray, my Nirvana, my Valhalla. Here in Arkansas is Aresdy. But I was never so wrong in my life. Where nature intended that there should be beauty and health, I found ugliness and decay.

“Whosoever . . . stepped in [the water] was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.” That was what the Bible said, and that was what Hot Springs said, too; for so it was written over the portico of that famous thermal establishment on Bathhouse Row. But Hot Springs, which had cured others, could not cure itself. For a decade and a half it was the wickedest city in the United States.



Exposing the unholy alliance between law and lawlessness in a quiet Southern resort

BY FREDERICK L. COLLINS

ILLUSTRATED BY PHIL BERRY

The spectacle of officers of the law selling and bartering the very firearms used by society to protect itself against its enemies would be almost unbelievable if it were not for the fact that so many more unbelievable things in this bizarre situation were found to be true.

Another petty racket worked by Akers was to have a thief steal a particular car and hide it out until a reward was offered, then get the thief to place the car back on the streets, where he, Akers, would pick it up, turn it in, get the reward, and split it with the thief.

During the racing season each year in Hot Springs, Akers made up to criminals, racketeers, confidence men, and bookies; and any of the above-named type of gangsters who failed to pay off were immediately thrown in jail. Frequently, after arresting a man, he would search him, ascertain the amount of cash on his person, throw the man in jail, then call a lawyer friend and advise him of the amount of cash the prisoner possessed.

The lawyer would then charge the man the total amount of his cash as a fee and get him out of jail, then split with Akers.

That Dutch Akers’ traffic with women did not end with selling diamonds to them is indicated by the testimony, before a legislative investigating committee, of three youthful prostitutes—all of whom claim to have been first criminally assaulted by members of the Hot Springs Police Department, in two instances by Akers himself.

The youngest, whom we will call Tessie, testified that when she was fifteen years old and was working as housekeeper, she went into town on Thanksgiving Day, and on the way to the trolley line Dutch Akers stopped in his car and suggested she ride downtown with him, which she did. Akers asked her whether she had ever seen how the police fingerprinted people and took their pictures, and

A third man entered the room and knocked him on the head. Then the three took his money and left him.

Fig. C.6: “Hell in Hot Springs,” article by Frederick L. Collins, *Liberty* 16, no. 29 (July 22, 1939).

Lastly, Hot Springs’ thermal waters did not fit into Americans’ perception of and growing experiences in the national parks after World War II. Visitors were touring the parks almost exclusively from their automobiles now, using parking lots situated at visitor centers, campgrounds, and scenic overlooks.⁷⁹¹ When those same tourists arrived in Hot Springs, a national park from a different era, they were confused. Arriving at a tiny park, .05 percent the

⁷⁹⁰ Frederick L. Collins, “Hell in Hot Springs,” *Liberty* 16, no. 29 (July 22, 1939), 6.

⁷⁹¹ See Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (New York: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2010), 139-161.

size of Yellowstone, situated in an urban setting, and replete with drastic human change impressed upon the natural environment, tourists like Robert R. Cooke of Detroit, Michigan, did not understand what he saw and wrote a strongly worded letter to his senator, Charles Potter, denouncing what he called a “misnomer and insult to the American public.” Cooke described an October 1956 visit he and his family took to Hot Springs National Park. Instead of “the promise of natural wonders and phenomena at their unspoiled best” that Cooke had anticipated, he instead found a town of bathhouses, hotels, gambling, and “illicit liquor.” He pleaded, “Can’t something be done about this blot on our National Park System?”⁷⁹² Similar complaints came from Harry Kellert, who wrote directly to President Dwight Eisenhower in 1958 relaying his thought that “a fraud I think is being perpetrated on our people in the nation” because of the national park designation for Hot Springs. “Is this a national park or one great big gyp joint?” asked Kellert. “Either make this a national park we can be proud of or remove this name national park which it is not.”⁷⁹³ Lastly, Miami, Florida, resident Edward F. Corson was equally dismayed at the nature of the park. Feeling “fairly well qualified to evaluate our national parks” as he visited all but three by 1963, Corson complained, “I can not [sic] see anything National Park about Hot Springs... My family and I drove through the city of Hot Springs without seeing anything but the bath houses in the Park area.” The urban environment and lack of scenic vistas led Corson to conclude that Hot Springs “makes the most pitiful effort to accommodate and entertain the Park visitor. It saddens me to think you would spend the taxpayers money to perpetuate the hot baths at Hot Springs, Arkansas.”⁷⁹⁴ These frustrated visitors, like countless

⁷⁹² Robert R. Cooke to Senator Charles Potter, October 2, 1956, RG 79, Box 0373, Administrative Files, 1949-1971, Folder A3615, HOSP, NARA College Park.

⁷⁹³ Harry Kellert to Dwight Eisenhower, 22 March 1958, RG 79, Box 0373, folder A3615, NARA College Park.

⁷⁹⁴ Edward F. Corson to Elbert Cox, Regional Director, National Parks Service, RG 79, Box 0373, Folder A3615, NARA College Park.

others, could not grasp the significance of Hot Springs and the healing potential past patrons attached to the waters, let alone why it was labeled a national park.

As the National Park Service focused its attention on increasing visitation through publicizing access and scenery in the 1950s and 1960s, fewer tourists experienced the thermal waters, which pressed park administrators to reevaluate its value to the nation. In March 1954, the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings and Monuments recommended two national parks, Platt and Hot Springs, along with a number of battlefields and national monuments, be transferred to the states.⁷⁹⁵ By 1967, possibly motivated by the complaints the NPS received from visitors about the park, the agency drafted a report questioning the parks' financial and cultural viability. "Notwithstanding the springs and the lovely hills," noted the report, Hot Springs "does not bear a natural character or national significance comparable to other national park." It was the "opinion of the team that the role this park can best play will be more nearly aligned with local, State, and regional needs."⁷⁹⁶ These efforts to defederalize Hot Springs contrasted sharply with the century-long fight to sustain a federal presence in Hot Springs. But as the NPS focused solely on highlighting and preserving scenic beauty in the parks, and interest in Hot Springs, a park out-of-time, waned considerably.

The fewer experiences tourists and visitors had with the thermal waters, the further removed the resource and the park became from public acceptance and engagement. Fewer baths after the war led to struggling bathhouses, hindering access to the only places where the thermal waters were available to visitors. Hot Springs National Park suffered from the lack of confidence the NPS showed the park, contributing to a disconnect between visitors and the waters. One by

⁷⁹⁵ John Ise, *Our National Park Policy: A Critical History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), 522-23.

⁷⁹⁶ *Hot Springs National Park Interim Planning Report*, unapproved draft May 1967, 4; quote from Cockrell, *Administrative History*, 444.

one the Bathhouse Row establishments closed their doors. By the early 2000s, only the Buckstaff Bathhouse remained open. The Fordyce Bathhouse, constructed by early booster Colonel Samuel Fordyce, became the national park's visitor's center in 1989. Instead of taking the waters, tourists explored the building and peered through protected glass at the arcane porcelain tubs, needle showers, vapor cabinets, and douches used by millions of fellow visitors a century prior, and could only imagine the myriad experiences endorsed by local and national medical professionals throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Captured as relics of the past, it is difficult to understand the cultural power so many attached to Hot Springs' thermal waters from a display case, a manicured snapshot in time.

* * * * *

If there is one lesson we should take from the history of Hot Springs National Park, it is that there is much more to the national parks than scenic beauty and preserving ecosystems.⁷⁹⁷ Hot Springs' human and non-human history offer a model for such an expansive and inclusive interpretation. A common misnomer is that the national parks are "America's Best Idea," a notion where we enshrine democratic ideals within the natural landscape, has been vaguely attributed to the author Wallace Stegner and popularized by the documentarian Ken Burns.⁷⁹⁸ This idea centers the creation of the parks at the end of the nineteenth century and traces a narrow theme of scenic preservation to the present day. But the problem is that the parks are not America's best idea; they are not ideas at all. They are instead a physical representation of American history, as the historian Jerry Frank, in his effort to "read" Rocky Mountain

⁷⁹⁷ See Runte, *Our National Parks*, and Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*.

⁷⁹⁸ Alan MacEachern, "Who had 'America's Best Idea'?" *NiCHE Canada*, 23 October 2011, <https://niche-canada.org/2011/10/23/who-had-americas-best-idea/>.

National Park, concluded, the national parks are “in a constant state of creation and re-creation as our ideas, hopes, and dreams interact with dynamic and powerful environments.”⁷⁹⁹ As Americans experienced the natural world in these preserved landscapes, they imprinted the cultural trends and logic of their day and age on the land, in the waters, and in the history of the parks. Park landscapes do tell American stories of democratic ideals, of holding sacred land in the public trust and “conserv[ing] the scenery and the natural and historical objects and the wildlife therein... unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”⁸⁰⁰ But these preserved landscapes also bear witness to equally American stories of dispossession, class struggle, and representation. They reveal the extractive nature of capitalism and the consequences of climate change. These histories are just as vital to understanding the national parks, as they blur the line between nature and culture. The experiences between humans and a unique aspect of the natural world are what will always connect Hot Springs to a larger national park project.

Hot Springs officials have repeatedly had to explain the significance of the place and its waters, and offer alternatives to the traditional understanding of national parks. “Although different in a great many respects from the scenic type of park,” Superintendent Allen argued in 1932 that “Hot Springs fully qualifies through its possession of unusual healing waters as a member of the [national park] system... Certainly no other national park area can give such a lasting service to the nation as does Hot Springs.”⁸⁰¹ By 1946, Superintendent Thomas Boles wrote to advertisers comparing Hot Springs to Yellowstone National Park. While Yellowstone was the world’s first national park, Congress had reserved Hot Springs 40 years earlier in 1932

⁷⁹⁹ Jerry J. Frank, *Making Rocky Mountain National Park: The Environmental History of an American Treasure* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013), 5.

⁸⁰⁰ “An Act to Establish a National Park Service, and for Other Purposes,” *U.S. Statutes at Large*, 39 Stat. 535, August 25, 1916.

⁸⁰¹ Thomas Allen, “Superintendent’s Annual Report,” 30 June 1932, 21; Hot Springs National Park Archives.

and since then, “it remains for Hot Springs National Park to be justly proud of its healing springs that have not only conserved but have benefited man by restoring his health and thus reclaiming a citizen or maybe a neighbor.”⁸⁰² Even as interest in the park began to wane, officials emphasized the centrality and significance of Hot Springs to build a more expansive view of the national parks. NPS Regional Director Elbert Cox provided context and a more accurate picture of Hot Springs in his response to disgruntled Edward Corson in 1963. Noting how national parks generally “represent segments of the national heritage which are of outstanding national significance,” Cox then described Hot Springs’ purpose:

Unlike most of the scenic National Parks, Hot Springs was established for a more specialized purpose. It is the prescribed mission of this particular unit of the National Park System to provide the visitor opportunity for improvement of his physical welfare by use of the unique therapeutic thermal waters of the springs, along with refreshment of mind and spirit in the natural setting of a typical segment of the beautiful Ouachita Mountains.⁸⁰³

The work and logic of these officials often went unnoticed, but their emphasis on the long and variable experiences visitors, patients, patrons, and tourists encountered in Hot Springs validated the park’s existence and continued membership as a national park, but it also presented an alternative view of the parks as places of health as well as leisure.

Conceiving of the national parks as a place where Americans might regain their health, a theme long associated with Hot Springs but lost in much of the public imagination throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, received renewed attention as Americans faced new challenges and refreshed old understandings around their view of nature and the national parks. After the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the United States and the world in late 2019 and 2020, individuals and families looked for ways to stay safe as well as healthy and the parks offered one solution, a “refuge” according a 2021 article in the *New York Times*. Fifteen park

⁸⁰² Thomas Boles to James W. Case, 19 September 1946, RG 79, Box 1208, NARA College Park.

⁸⁰³ Elbert Cox to Edward F. Corson, August 29, 1963, NARA College Park, RG 79, Box 0373, Folder A3615 Pt. 1.

units set all-time visitation records in 2020.⁸⁰⁴ This idea of the parks offering a space for health and healing continued into 2022, when a new program just north of the border in Canada offered physicians the opportunity to prescribe recreating in the country's national parks as a way to take advantage of the health benefits provided by nature. "A walk in the park may be just what the doctor ordered," quipped National Public Radio (NPR) journalist Sharon Pruitt-Young when reporting the story. Yet Pruitt-Young noted that the program was "a unique concept."⁸⁰⁵ While this might seem a new feature within to twenty-first century medicine, the idea of nature's role in human health has a long history, one to which the national parks and Hot Springs have contributed to in a significant way for over 200 years.

These parallels resonate even more by recalling the experiences of some of the national parks' early proponent. In one of his nature sermons in 1901, John Muir argued that the national parks "are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life."⁸⁰⁶ The idea of the parks as places of health and healing were embedded in the rhetoric surrounding these landscapes. But at Hot Springs, these ideas manifested themselves in the bathhouses pools, doctors' offices, and hospital wards, allowing visitors to experience nature's healing potential. And the experience of Stephen Mather, the individual responsible for most, if not all, of early NPS policy, demonstrated Hot Springs' practical effect on visitors. Mather's appreciation for all Hot Springs and its waters could offer confused the historian John Ise in 1961 who, focused on a narrow construction of the parks centered on scenic beauty, stated, "For some reason Mather wanted to make it [Hot Springs] a national park."⁸⁰⁷ What Ise overlooked was the belief,

⁸⁰⁴ Kate Siber, "Get Outside and Safely Visit a National Park," *New York Times*, 12 March 2021.

⁸⁰⁵ Sharon Pruitt-Young, "A new program in Canada gives doctors the option of prescribing national park visits," *NPR*, 9 February 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/09/1079356799/a-new-program-in-canada-gives-doctors-the-option-of-prescribing-national-park-vi>.

⁸⁰⁶ John Muir, *Our National Parks* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1901), 1.

⁸⁰⁷ Ise, *Our National Park Policy*, 244.

supported by physicians and scientists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in nature's healing qualities. Mather's history of nervous breakdowns and the solace he found in retreats to Hot Springs made him a believer, touting the waters as "an amazing elixir of recuperation for those who have no ills except the wear and tear of active business and social life."⁸⁰⁸ At Hot Springs, Mather and millions of others shared in the healing experience the thermal waters offered, an experience not entirely absent today.

In 1818, Stephen Long qualified Hot Springs' thermal waters as "a curiosity of the first magnitude" during his expedition across the unexplored areas of the young republic. More than 200 years later, the waters continue to intrigue visitors who travel from across the country and around the world to recuperate, rejuvenate, and recreate with the help of the thermal waters. In 2021, as Hot Springs celebrated 100 years as a national park, officials tallied 2,162,884 recreation visits through the Valley of Vapors, surpassing its past record from 1970.⁸⁰⁹ Taking the waters has new meaning in the twenty first century, but visitors continue to be drawn to the natural wonder (Fig. C.7). Every day these waters follow their 4,400-year path from rainfall to resource. This same journey has gone on for centuries and served merely as prelude. Once the waters bubbled out from the side of Hot Springs mountain, they seeped into American culture, carrying with them promises of recovery to the body's and society's ills. Even as the hydrology of Hot Springs National Park has been reimagined and reengineered over centuries, the thermal waters have continued to flow as a central agent of historical change. Hot Springs has retained its

⁸⁰⁸ "Health and Pleasure – Hot Springs, Arkansas," *Chicago Tribune*, 12 January 1919, 47.

⁸⁰⁹ "Hot Springs National Park Breaks Visitation Records in 2021," News Release, National Park Service, 23 February 2022; <https://www.nps.gov/hosp/learn/news/hot-springs-national-park-breaks-visitation-records-in-2021.htm#:~:text=Hot%20Springs%20National%20Park%20is,since%20reporting%20began%20in%201904>.

significance as a national park – a place where men and women, the rich and the poor, medical professionals and perceived charlatans, along with millions of patients and patrons representing different racial and ethnic identities, all descended upon this curious valley to understand the waters and their restorative, therapeutic, and healing powers. Hot Springs is a national park with a truly national history.



Fig. C.7: Entrance to Hot Springs National Park; photo by author, 2022.

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American Journal of Pharmacy
American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review
The American Political Science Review
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The Bugle
*The Colored American Magazine**
*The Crisis**
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