



History of Hot Springs

Hot Springs, Arkansas takes its name from the world-famous thermal waters that flow into the historic downtown district of the city. About a million gallons of the 143°F water issue forth daily from 47 hot springs. The City of Hot Springs is the only American city nestled within a national park. Hot Springs National Park was established in 1921. It was first set aside as the nation's first National Reservation in 1832, due to the need for federal protection of the hot springs.

For 10,000 years before the settlement of the Europeans in the New World, Native Americans visited the area. Hot Springs became a place where various tribes came together to enjoy the healing properties they believed were contained in the magnificent and mysterious thermal waters of the springs.

In 1673, Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet explored the area and discovered the springs before claiming the area for France. After the French and Indian War ended with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763, the area came under Spanish rule. In 1800, control of the land went to Napoleon's French Empire before President Thomas Jefferson bought the land in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, doubling the size of the United States. In 1818, Quapaw Indians ceded the land to the United States during a treaty signing in St. Louis, Missouri.

Hot Springs' population severely declined due to the American Civil War (1861-1865). Most residents moved to Texas and Louisiana and stayed there until the war ended. In 1862, after the Union won the Battle of Pea Ridge in northern Arkansas, Confederate Governor Henry Rector feared that the capital city of Little Rock would soon be captured

by the Union. Accordingly, he moved his staff from Little Rock to Hot Springs. Because the Union Army did not attack Little Rock, Governor Rector moved the state government back to the capital city, only to have Little Rock succumb to the Union in September 1863. Afterwards, Hot Springs became a battleground for guerrilla bands loyal both to the Union and the Confederacy. These bands pillaged and burned the abandoned town until only a handful of buildings were left standing.

After the Civil War ended, the city underwent a construction boom of bathhouses and hotels. The population quickly increased to 1,200 by 1870. By 1873, six bathhouses and twenty-four hotels were built. In 1874, a multi-millionaire from Chicago, Illinois built a railroad that ran from Hot Springs to Malvern, Arkansas. This railroad attracted many people to Hot Springs. In 1875, an entrepreneur from Ohio named Samuel Fordyce built the Arlington Hotel, the first luxury hotel in Hot Springs.

In 1913, a fire broke out on Church Street that raced toward the business section of the city, destroying the Ozark Sanitarium. It also destroyed the utilities plant and the resulting water supply for the firefighters. A strong wind brought the fire to Ouachita Avenue, leveling the Garland County Courthouse. Firefighters were able to save Central Avenue, including the bathhouse and many hotels, through the desperate use of dynamite. Firefighters from Little Rock and other Arkansas towns arrived to find that the fire had destroyed 60 blocks of Hot Springs, with estimated damages of \$10 million.

In World War II, an Army-Navy hospital was built in 1942, where the thermal baths of Hot Springs were used to rejuvenate the soldiers waiting to return to duty. This building now operates as the Arkansas Rehabilitation Center, a downtown landmark.

The City of Hot Springs has had many notable residents throughout the city's interesting history, the most famous of which is former President Bill Clinton, who spent his boyhood here and attended Hot Springs High School. To learn more about Hot Springs history, visit the Fordyce Bathhouse & Visitor Center on Bathhouse Row in downtown Hot Springs, or visit the Garland County Historical Society Archives, 328 Quapaw Avenue.