

Hale Bathhouse

Named for early bathhouse owner John Hale, the present Hale Bathhouse is at least the fourth building to use this name, although the first Hale Bathhouse, built in 1854, was on a site south of the present building. It more than likely burned, along with most of the rest of the town, during the civil war. After the war ended, the second Hale House was constructed on the present site, with its bathhouse situated on the opposite side of the creek. Sometime before 1882 a Victorian style bathhouse was built on the site by William Nelson, who signed a water lease for the site in 1879 effective 16 December 1878 to 15 December 1883. Construction costs were only \$5,000.

Excavation for this bathhouse was accomplished by blasting. According to Henry Hecox, a local citizen during that time, Nelson said, "there is no doubt about [there being danger of losing the springs by blasting] but as I have commenced I will finish". Supt. Hamblen apparently also thought the blasting was a danger but nevertheless did nothing to stop it. Hecox and others believed the blasting had decreased the flow of some springs and made others disappear entirely.



The "Old Hale" Bathhouse circa 1875

chairs. In 1917 one of the hot springs was captured in a tiled enclosure in the basement, and this feature is still in place. This bathhouse also was connected with a thermal cave carved out of the mountainside and used as a "hot room" in the 1890s (it was rediscovered during a 1993 drainage project and is now a federally protected archeological site). In 1939 the building was redesigned by the firm of Sanders, Thompson, and Ginocchio in the Mission Revival style, and the brick was covered in

stucco to look as it does today. The Hale closed on October 31, 1978.

The present Hale Bathhouse is the oldest visible structure on Bathhouse Row. Most of the present structure was completed in 1892, as designed by George and Fremont Orff. A major 1914 remodel by the Little Rock architectural firm of George Mann and Eugene Stern significantly enlarged the red-brick building and modified its style to Classical Revival. It cost over \$50,000.

The present building has 12,000 square feet on the two main floors. The lobby arcade was used as a sunroom where guests could relax in rocking



Hale Bathhouse, 1889
(*Photograph courtesy of the Kenna Collection, Culture Center of West Virginia. Do not reprint without permission.*)