

Archives—An Answer to Your Questions

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Following the verification of Yellowstone's unique properties by the Hayden Expedition in 1871, Congress established Yellowstone National Park on March 25, 1872. Despite their infinite wisdom, Congress created the world's first national park without appropriating funds for the management of the park. For 14 years the administration of the park fell into the hands of well-intentioned and often-ignored civilian superintendents. As knowledge of the wonders of Yellowstone and population in the region expanded, it became apparent that good intentions and noble efforts were not sufficient for the protection of "Wonderland." In 1886, Captain Moses Harris arrived at Mammoth Hot Springs with Company M of the 1st U. S. Cavalry to rescue the park from a fate of destruction through ambivalence. Not only were the blue clad champions armed with sabres and Spencer carbines, they brought in their caissons an arsenal of bureaucracy. Bureaucracy which allows us to know that the first task of the arriving troopers was to fight fires burning in the northern portion of the park.

The arrival of the cavalry brought an administration to Yellowstone which created extensive records pertaining to the management of Yellowstone National Park. These records reflect, in detail, daily activities and management decisions, and provide baseline data concerning the natural resources of Yellowstone National Park.

The records generated by Captain Harris and subsequent military superintendents have been preserved largely because of luck and foresight. In 1916, when the army was turning the administration of Yellowstone over to the newly created National Park Service, Horace Albright was on hand to insist that records pertaining to the administration of the park remain in the park. For years to follow, the army records and early National Park Service records were stored in closets and sheds and other inappropriate locations throughout the park. To prevent such a fate the National Archives and Records Administration was created with the objective of providing a systematic and centralized process for the preservation of records which document government administration. In Yellowstone, this resulted in only a half-hearted and less than ideal management of the historic record.

Yellowstone's records continued to be loosely managed, often placed out of sight and out of mind, until the 1960s when park historian Aubrey Haines began consolidating the records from scattered locations and systematically collecting retired records from central files. Prior to Aubrey's efforts there were a couple of cases when records packed for shipment to the National Archives were inadvertently sent to the incinerator. However, the surviving records provide a remarkable

wealth of information which documents the park operations, resource management programs, special events, and evolving management philosophy.

Because of the importance these records play in our knowledge of the park's administrative history and the need to retain these records in Yellowstone, since 1977 Yellowstone National Park has shared a special relationship with the National Archives and Records Administration. Through a cooperative agreement Yellowstone serves as a satellite branch of the National Archives. The uniqueness of this relationship and the significance of the records in the Yellowstone archives is made apparent in recognizing that only four other collections hold this satellite status. They include West Point Military Academy, Annapolis Naval Academy, the Spanish Land Grant records in New Mexico, and the Five Civilized Nations records in Oklahoma.

In order to maintain the provenance of the records and best facilitate research efforts, records in the Yellowstone National Park Archives are organized into 13 series which reflect the management of Yellowstone National Park by the U. S. Army between 1886 and 1916 and the National Park Service from 1916. In addition, the Yellowstone archives holdings include records of the Yellowstone Park Company, which was the principle concessioner in Yellowstone until 1969.

These records provide an abundance of information. Within the grey, acid-free, 5"-deep letter or legal size record boxes, are documents such as the monthly reports of the superintendent. The monthly reports, spanning the years of 1916 to 1967, provide a condensed view of the park for the first 50 years of National Park Service management. These records are an incredible source for understanding priorities and objectives and providing detailed information concerning physical property and operations. The building of roads, structures and utilities, master plans and development projects are reflected in the historic record.

While most of us think of the archives as a natural resource for historians, it is important to note that much about our park's natural resources have a recorded history. The management of natural resources is specifically reflected in three series. Probably no singular event in the history of Yellowstone has been as thoroughly documented as the 1988 fires. The Forestry series includes over 200' of records created during the 1988 fires. Lands and Recreation Planning records are the primary source for issues relating to water rights and boundaries. The Natural and Social Sciences series facilitates research on the broad issues of elk and bison management programs or specific data such as coyote stomach contents between 1927-1938 and pocket gopher management in 1946. Whatever the scope of research, there is probably a historic record which will pertain to the topic.

Following the Federal Records Disposition Schedule established by the National Archives and the National Park Service, all permanent records are usually transferred from central files to regional record centers. When the record is 30 years old, it is then transferred to the National Archives. Because of our status as an affiliated archives, records are transferred from central files

(Archives—continued on page 32)

(Archives—continued from page 31)

directly to the park archives when eight years old. In addition, the archives serves as a repository for retired field records which are often used as primary sources for resource inventories and research. Records which are most vulnerable to loss are those not included in the Federal Records Disposition Schedule. These would include the primary data collected in research, inventory, or survey efforts and maintained in park offices rather than central files. A recent accession to the archives is 140 field books reflecting surveys in Yellowstone from the 1880s to 1950s. For years these irreplaceable records have quietly rested on the shelves of a bookcase in the hall on the third floor of the administration building. At any time an indiscriminate cleaning effort could have resulted in the loss of this material.

The volume of records maintained in the Yellowstone archives is rapidly growing. We presently manage approximately 1,500 linear feet. Over 300 linear feet at the Rocky Mountain Regional Record Center are to be repatriated in the near future. As new records are accessioned they are appraised, inventoried, described and organized. A printed inventory is created in order to assist researchers. To help facilitate the research effort the *Yellowstone National Park Archives - User's Guide* provides a record box listing of these records.

The creation of the Yellowstone archives was justified by the demonstrated use of the records and the importance of the records remaining in the park (instead of Washington, DC) to facilitate ongoing research. These records have played a consistent role in cultural study and research concerning the park's natural resources. From the records held in the Yellowstone archives we can often determine who did what, when, and where. While there will always be the occasional frustration of not being able to find a particular "why" or "who," the records are an amazing reflection of past operating procedures, resource management programs, and management philosophies.

With growth in the discipline of environmental history and recognition for the value of inter-disciplinary research, the utility of the historic record proliferates. The methodologies employed by researchers today and in years to come will have stunning implications on the archives and greatly enhance the value of the historic record. Database software, GIS programs, and CD ROMs are increasing the ease of manipulating the data contained in historic records. As technology advances, soldier station reports can be seen in dimensions far beyond their intrinsic value. While they will always represent a window to the cultural past, these reports also provide information which can be compiled and manipulated to reveal comparative data on wildlife populations or movement. As historians gain a better understanding of how they might assist scientists, and as scientists become more dependent on historic research and methodologies, the resulting inter-disciplinary cooperation will result in profound uses of the archives.

Yellowstone is in a unique situation, but the advantages we find in maintaining an archives could be recognized by any park, and efforts are underway to make

this possible. Under the present policies and guidelines of the National Park Service, most records created in the management of our national parks are eventually destroyed or have been identified as "official record" with its final disposition being with the National Archives. In many cases the final disposition of records pertaining to resource management activities is not defined by NPS-19 as permanent and these records are particularly vulnerable to being lost and destroyed or quietly stored in diverse or inaccessible files, desks, boxes, and closets. As is evidenced by the value of archives maintained in Yellowstone and other parks, it has become apparent that the National Park Service needs to deal with the issue of insuring the preservation of resource management records in the parks in a more systematic manner. In order to resolve problems created by the loss of vital resource management records, the Chief Curator's office has recently undertaken the task of revising NPS policies and guidelines concerning the final disposition of these resource management records, which are vital to a well informed management and sound decision making.

While the volume of records will vary from park to park, the standards will be consistent within the National Park Service.

The new guidelines and revisions of the *NPS Museum Handbook* will insure that not only the final disposition of these records are clearly identified, but that the management of the records will not compromise the long-term preservation. Curators will be charged with the responsibility of accessioning these records, insuring archival storage, and providing reference assistance. Revisions to cultural and natural resources management guidelines will be forthcoming. Those of us who consider the historic record vital to our understanding of the parks we work in and have experienced the frustration of not being able to find the information necessary for informed decisions, the efforts of the Chief Curator's office will please us. In keeping with the preservation mandate of the National Park Service, the efforts to gain greater intellectual and physical control of the historic record is not only beneficial to us but will be for the "benefit and enjoyment of future generations."

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