

Camping Gains a Foothold 1892–1899

Politics involving the park reached new intensity in 1892. For much of the year, Washington and Yellowstone Park Association officials were embroiled in arguments over and new legislation for the leases in Yellowstone. Congressional hearings revealed the extent to which politics affected staffing, strategic road construction, appropriations, and protection of resources, all of which had implications for concession development.

In 1891, the Department of the Interior changed the owner of the lease for the transportation privileges in the park. The Yellowstone Park Association had met with Silas Huntley, the new operator, and had reacted positively to his character. However, within a few weeks of the park's 1892 opening, Yellowstone Park Association Vice President and General Manager W. G. Pearce wrote, "A great many complaints are being made against the Huntley transportation..."¹ Acting Superintendent Captain George Anderson reported to Secretary of the Interior John W. Noble, the only major complaint was the lack of stop-over privileges and suggested that perhaps tourists who wanted more time than a regularly scheduled park trip allowed should use the camping-party approach. While Anderson expressed serious misgivings about the independent camping companies, he believed that "these parties be given greatest latitude consistent with proper park management."²

The most organized and long-term company of this type was the Wylie & Wilson Company operating out of Bozeman, Montana. The company planned to introduce a new type of accommodation to supple-

ment their tent camps, a McMaster Camping Car. W. W. Wylie advertised the camping car, which was slightly wider and longer than an omnibus, as being "thoroughly equipped" for the normal 12-day trip, which allows one "as much time as desired at all points of interest." Wylie boasted that he frequently camped at excellent trout fishing points and that his cost of \$5 per day per person was cheaper than what a hotel guest had to pay (\$10) for a hotel and stage ride.³

Wylie, who had operated in the park since the early 1880s, tried to negotiate reduced rail line tickets for his customers who traveled to the park on the Northern Pacific branch line. He argued that his advertisements on the East and West coasts yielded large numbers of customers for the Northern Pacific Railroad. The Yellowstone Park Association flatly rejected Wylie's request for lowering rates by stating "we would not care to excite their [investors—Northern Pacific Railroad] comment by extending special favors to parties proposing to handle park tourist business on a plan antagonistic to their interest." Wylie responded in a letter that he understood the company's position, but that he was also very aware of past illegal actions in selling liquor. This so angered the Yellowstone Park Association that the company declined to respond.⁴

In May 1892, the Norris lunch station burned, which left the manager providing service to visitors in tents. Acting Superintendent Captain Anderson favored rebuilding the Norris facility. Although the Yellowstone Park Association had its architect, R. Cummins, draw plans for a building at Norris, at



Erecting Lunch Station chimney. 1905.

the end of the season the company instead put its efforts toward getting another site near the geyser basin rather than building on the old site. The lunch stations located on the Grand Loop Road provided a noon-day stop on the scheduled park tours. In addition to the one at Norris, there was a lunch station at Trout Creek, which operated for several years (1888–91). In 1892, it was abandoned when the Old Faithful to West Thumb road was completed, but a new lunch station opened at Thumb.⁵ Another lunch station operated from Carroll Hobart’s “shanty hotel” for about 10 years. (The hotel was built in 1884 and burned in 1894.)⁶

A change in president and a new Secretary of the Interior, Hoke Smith, encouraged the Yellowstone Park Association to make additional proposals in 1893. Not knowing how Congressional legislation would affect the Association, Charles Gibson made plans to approach the Secretary with a proposal to form a new company that would authorize the existing leases and return the transportation company to the Yellowstone Park Association. Just before the season began, however, the Department granted numerous transportation privileges to a variety of others and denied these privileges to the Yellowstone Park Association in its lease in the Lower Firehole. The Yellowstone National Park Transportation Company headed by Silas Huntley had the exclusive lease and license for carrying Northern Pacific Railroad passengers, and George Wakefield was granted the same privilege for carrying passengers coming in through the west entrance from the Union Pacific Railroad terminus. Additional grants were given to W. S. Dixon of Livingston, M. R. Johnson of Bozeman, A. L. Ryan of Bozeman, and A. W. Chadbourne of Livingston. W. W. Wylie

also received a permit to conduct camping parties throughout the park.⁷

Financial problems faced all of the park lessees in 1893. After the decline in the U.S. gold reserve below the \$100 million mark, the Yellowstone Park Association warned its bankers to “be particularly careful this year about your bank balance. Some of the western banks may be in trouble.” The company advised its western banker to keep only a small balance and transfer any excess to the Yellowstone Park Association office in Minnesota.⁸

Instead of the expected increase in visitation due to the World’s Fair, there were fewer visitors than the year before. Foreign travelers dominated the guest registers, a fact that company officials anticipated when they ordered an ample supply of European wines, noting “indications are that our travel will be nearly all foreign this year, and as that is the case, we must be prepared to take advantage of their taste for wines and to make some money out of it.”⁹

Visitation prospects for the 1894 season appeared bleak as spring floods along the rail lines in the Northern Pacific’s Western Division and other rail service completely stopped until the third week in June. About the time the trains began to move again, the “Debs strike” stopped rail service from Ohio to California from June 26 to July 18. Of course, with a general economic depression in the country, many people did not venture far from home. At the end of the year, the Yellowstone Park Association reported a decrease in visitation from 1893, which had been a poor year. Nevertheless, 1894 year-end financial figures indicated that the company was free of debt and even had a small cash balance.¹⁰

In addition to the decrease in visitation due to weather and economic conditions, Captain Anderson noted that perhaps the lack of information about the park and lack of interest in it, even among the better educated and informed, could account for some of the decline. He noted that 60 percent of all foreign travelers came from Germany where the importance of the scientific aspects of Yellowstone was taught in the public schools. He urged Secretary Smith to consider that “some means be adopted for bringing the mass of the people to realize what a store of wonders and beauties they have within their boundaries. It would be valuable to them as a part of an education, even if they should not be able to see the Park for themselves.”¹¹

Captain Anderson believed that the best way to

see the park was by camping and traveling on horseback, especially for local people and those who could not afford the “hotel way.” There were, however, negative sides to camping parties—their carelessness about camp fires, the fact that they often left camp sites untidy, and that many campers wrote inscriptions on park features. For these reasons, Anderson opposed establishing semi-permanent camping facilities for fear that the areas would turn “into ill-kept, unsightly structures, fit breeding places for vermin of all kinds.”¹²

Despite low visitation, much transpired in the park that year. Good news came to the Yellowstone Park Association in August 1894. The long-awaited legislation covering leases in the park was signed by the President Cleveland. Many changes in the act gave the company the conditions it desired, including an increase from 10 to 20 acres for one lessee or company and a decrease in the distance of a leased tract from geysers (from $\frac{1}{4}$ mile to $\frac{1}{8}$ mile). These changes now allowed the construction of a good hotel at the Upper Geyser Basin. A few months later in November 1894, the old hotel in the Upper Geyser Basin, which had also been used as a lunch station, burned.¹³

F. Jay Haynes and John Yancey were each given new leases in 1894. Haynes in turn signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Yellowstone Park Association, which granted him the privilege of continuing to operate his shop within the Mammoth Hot Springs hotel as well as exclusive privileges in the other company hotels, with the exception of the Grand Canyon Hotel, where water colors and oil paintings of other artists could be sold.¹⁴

Also during 1894, a small parcel of land at Mammoth Hot Springs was leased to Postmaster George Ash to erect a post office and small store.¹⁵ Finally the park hotels were inspected by C. S. Bihler from the Chief Engineer’s office of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Bihler recommended an improvement program for the hotels. He suggested ways to correct problems with the “V-crimp roofing” used on all hotels, pointed out the costs of relocating the Fountain Hotel to the Upper Geyser Basin (\$33,500 as opposed to constructing a new hotel for \$42,000), and compared the costs of remodeling the Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel (\$51,700) to the construction of a new modern hotel (\$85,000).¹⁶

Good weather greeted visitors at the opening of the 1895 season, but visitation still had not reached the 7000+ figures of the early 1890s. The Yellowstone Park Association lowered the daily hotel rate

from \$5 to \$4 in hope of attracting more guests. Huntley’s transportation company made a generous attempt to relieve the previous stop-over schedule problem, now allowing passengers to choose routes and dictate some schedules.

Among the new permits issued in 1895 was a permit allowing Ole Anderson to construct a small building to house his specimen-coating business. He built an attractive cottage for his business on a site immediately north of the commissioner’s new residence. Mr. Roseborough, who took over the mail route from Mammoth to Cooke City from Mr. French, was given a permit to erect a small building at Mammoth with the understanding that it would be removed upon the Superintendent’s request. (It remains today, on a



Ole Anderson's coated specimens site on Mammoth Hot Springs. 1883 or 1884.



Fountain and Specimen House, Mammoth Hot Springs. ca. 1900.



Mail carrier residence. 1917.

site just north of the Mammoth Clinic.)

E. C. Waters's boat operation on Yellowstone Lake was running smoothly, transporting guests from Thumb to Lake, and he also provided a side trip to Natural Bridge, just west of the Lake area. Waters also ran a small shop where he sold grocery items to camping parties and provided blacksmithing to those parties.¹⁷

The officials of the Yellowstone Park Association spent much of the year in debate over the issuance of a dividend; thus, no construction occurred in 1895. Without a lease at the Upper Geyser Basin, some of the officials were worried that another operator might get a foothold in the area. However, the company did erect a temporary lunch station. The company relinquished its hotel leases at Norris and Thumb but wanted permission to run lunch stations at both locations.¹⁸

In September 1895, F. Jay Haynes requested a

lease for a tract of land at both the Upper Geyser Basin and at Canyon. It was not long before the Yellowstone Park Association objected to the site that Haynes had selected at the Upper Geyser Basin. While acknowledging the fact that it did not have a lease in the area, the company still objected to the site that Haynes had selected stating that it was immediately in front of the plot they desired. Surprisingly, the year ended with the Yellowstone Park Association "working in perfect harmony in this matter" with Haynes.¹⁹

In April 1896, Haynes received an eight-year lease for two acres at the Upper Geyser Basin with permission to erect a building or buildings from plans approved by the Department of the Interior. Just four days before the agreement was signed, J. H. Dean, the Yellowstone Park Association General Manager, wrote to the Association president about a rumor that Haynes and Huntley were planning to erect log cabins at the Upper Geyser Basin to accommodate guests, but the cabins were never built.²⁰

Visitation during the 1896 season did not improve, and Captain Anderson began questioning the theory that the country was in a depression since all of the Atlantic steamers were filled with American tourists going abroad. He noted that the visitors who did come to the park were staying longer and that more people were entering the park from Wyoming via the recently improved road from the south entrance, which he felt called for some sort of guest accommodations at Thumb. He also suggested that consideration should be given to providing accommodations near Soda Butte and constructing a better hotel at Tower or near Yancey's.²¹



Steamer E. C. Waters, Yellowstone Lake. n.d. Collection of Mary Shivers Culpin.



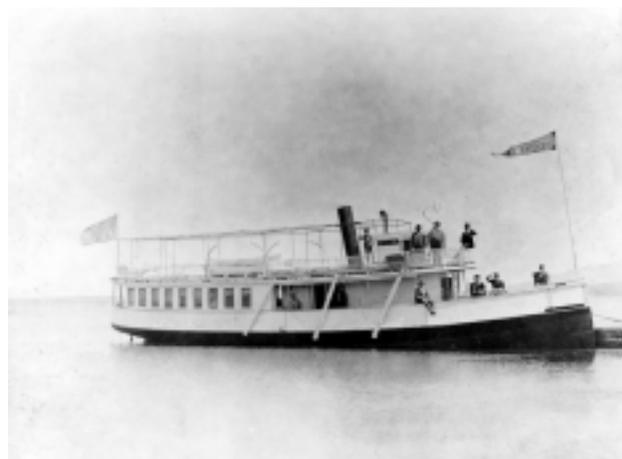
Old Boathouse—Lake. n.d.

Much to Captain Anderson's regret, W. W. Wylie was given permission to erect four permanent tent camps. While praising all of the lessees in a report to Secretary Smith, Anderson did state he believed that having so many operators with different objectives would be harder to manage. He strongly favored the idea that "all the interests in the park should be placed under a single management."²²

Silas Huntley disliked the Yellowstone Park Association's idea of guests being encouraged to stay longer at the different hotel locations as this would benefit the hotel company, but not his transportation company.²³

While tourists liked to take Waters's boat trip from Thumb to Lake, they disliked paying extra for it. Waters received permission to build several small landing docks, including one on Dot Island where in 1896 he placed some bison, mountain sheep, and elk (all of which he obtained from outside the park).²⁴

Various other concession improvements were made during 1896. Mammoth Hot Springs storekeeper, Mrs. Jennie Ash, built a small cottage from which she was permitted to sell notions and needed supplies for the tourists. Immediately thereafter, the old log post office was torn down. After many years of claims being submitted by J. C. McCartney, Matthew McGuirk, and J. C. Baronett, a bill to reimburse the men, which had passed the Senate and received a positive report in the House, was moving forward. They were to be reimbursed as follows: McCartney—\$4,000, McGuirk—\$1,000, and Baronett—\$5,000. Captain Anderson felt the claims were just and hoped the bill would be signed.²⁵ Captain Anderson also



Steamship Zillah. 1890. The steamship ran between West Thumb and Lake Hotel.

approved the operation of the "Tourist Supply Store" managed by E. F. Allen, an Idaho outfit, at the Lower Firehole Basin. It is not known whether this was in the Fountain Hotel or at another location. Mr. Allen advertised groceries, provisions, vegetables, fruits, and all kinds of camper's supplies.²⁶ And, as a new potential for income, Yellowstone Park Association President Pearce suggested a trial period of renting bicycles.²⁷ It is not known if the company did indeed rent bicycles at this time.

The business situation between the Yellowstone Park Association and the Northern Pacific Railroad remained unclear, thus, no substantial progress was made on a building program in 1896. However, the company did not delay planning for the future. The well-known architect Cass Gilbert was sent to the park to assess hotel needs, to make suggestions for improvements to existing buildings, and to present ideas for new construction.²⁸

The deteriorating relationship between some stockholders of the Yellowstone Park Association and the railroad resulted in the hotels closing in September rather than the normal date of October 1. The stockholders, led by Charles Gibson, resented the railroad's position of not needing to make a profit on the hotels as long as they made a profit on the railroad service. Because visitation was poor for several years, the Association continued to lose money.

The business situation did not change at all in 1897, but the visitation numbers increased dramatically, from 4,659 in 1896 to 10,825. Organized camping parties and private parties with their own transportation increased, forcing Captain Anderson to limit the campers to two days at any one spot. By the beginning of August, all camping and stock grazing between Mammoth Hot Springs and Gardiner had to be banned to save the grass for the wintering mountain sheep and antelope.²⁹

In 1897, Captain Anderson's replacement, Colonel S. B. M. Young, who served only from June to November 1897, issued new rules for persons traveling through the park, including specific directions on how to leave a campsite (clean, with trash either buried or removed so as not to offend other visitors); a ban on camping within 100 feet of a road; a ban on hanging clothing, hammocks, or other similar articles within 100 feet of a road; and a ban on bathing without suitable clothes near a road.³⁰ Colonel Young also issued instructions for the lessees at Mammoth to not use any of the previous "dump piles" but to haul such



Klamer Store at Upper Geyser Basin. Before 1907.

matter “to a general dump over a cliff above the Gardiner [*sic*] River, opposite the Government ice house.”³¹

A number of construction projects were completed in 1897. Haynes erected his log building at the Upper Geyser Basin. Anderson called it “the most beautiful and most appropriate in the park.” H. E. Klamer built a two-story frame building at the Upper Geyser Basin (the present Lower Hamilton Store) for use as a house and store. At Mammoth Hot Springs, the old dairy buildings about one mile from the hotel were torn down and the debris burned. A new dairy facility was erected at Swan Lake Flat out of sight of the road and in a safe drainage area.³²

By the end of the 1897 season, Yellowstone Park Association officials believed that a new location for a hotel should be considered in the Tower Fall area and that a lease should be obtained prior to the Mount Washburn road being completed.³³

Just as the year ended, F. Jay Haynes and W. W. Humphrey sought permission to transport passengers through the west entrance, most of whom were expected to arrive at the park via the Union Pacific Railroad. Hoping to operate under the name “Monida & Yellowstone Stage Company,” the men assured the Department of the Interior that they had \$20,000 cash on hand with available resources of up to \$50,000, if needed. They had a verbal agreement with the Union Pacific that the railroad would advertise and sell tickets for the stage company provided there was an agreement with the Department of the Interior.³⁴ Haynes and Humphrey (a 15-year stage business veteran and for the past five years the superintendent of Silas Huntley’s Yellowstone National Park Transportation

Company) proposed to start their service for the season of 1898 in Monida, Montana, 60 miles west of the west entrance to the park. The company planned to operate in relays with an overnight stop at the Grayling Inn at Dwelle’s, west of the park. They would use the latest Concord Coaches, Hill Manufacture harnesses, and the best horses obtainable. They proposed relays throughout the park to allow visitors more time at different points. A stocktender would service each station, and the drivers would be trained to act as guides with no extra charge for side trips. Because this route would be quicker than the Northern Pacific Railroad route by two days from New York and because of the probability that they would attract the Colorado- and California-bound tourists, Haynes and Humphrey predicted that the company would handle 75 percent of the transportation business in the park in less than five years. (In 1897, 5,000 tourists had used first-class service on the Northern Pacific Railroad while only 125 came via Union Pacific Railroad.) The two men received an affirance from the Union Pacific.³⁵

By the end of the 1898 season, the Monida & Yellowstone Stage Company was well on its way to an established position in the park. The company had 25 employees, 12 11-passenger Concord coaches, four three-passenger Concord surreys, 80 horses, and two Concord buggies. The company constructed barns at Upper Geyser Basin, Norris, and Mammoth Hot Springs, and with the approval of the Yellowstone Park Association they used barns at Fountain, Lake, and Grand Canyon until they could construct their own. Additional equipment and employees were kept at Monida and Dwelle’s, and plans were made to winter Haynes’s horses outside the park in the physically lower Centennial Valley.³⁶

Additional lessees, the increase in visitation, and the rise in the number of private parties and camping trips necessitated a more tightly managed park by Captain James Erwin, who had taken over as the acting Superintendent of the park in November 1897. (Col. S. B. M. Young held the post for only five months.) Captain Erwin was kept busy making inspection tours of all the different operations, and in his annual report, he was quite complimentary about all of the lessees, stating, “No better accommodations and food are furnished anywhere in the United States, under like conditions.” He also noted that all food, with the exception of meat, some dairy products, and occasional vegetables, must be shipped in. By the end

of 1898, camping parties accounted for about half of the park's visitation. In addition to Wylie's Camping Company, 23 different independent operators were given permits to guide camping parties during 1898.³⁷

Wylie established permanent camps at Apollinaris Spring, Upper Geyser Basin, Yellowstone Lake, and Canyon; he also operated lunch stations about halfway between the Lower Geyser Basin and Norris (a place called "Sleepy Hollow") and near Yellowstone Lake. E. C. Waters's Yellowstone Lake Boat Company received leases for two acres near Lake Hotel, two acres on Frank Island, two acres on Stevenson Island, one acre on Dot Island, one acre at West Thumb, two acres at the Southeast Arm of Yellowstone Lake, two acres at the Dot Island Game Corral, and an additional six acres to be located by the Superintendent.³⁸

During 1898, the Yellowstone Park Association received a lease for the Upper Geyser Basin but did not begin construction of the hotel. The company had about half the number of guests (2,207) during 1898 as during the previous year, resulting in another loss. The company estimated it would need about 4,000 guests to be self-sustaining. Despite massive advertising campaigns in both the United States and Europe and with a reduction in the daily rates, visitation remained low. Some repairs were done during 1898 but no major construction was undertaken.³⁹

After the disappointing 1898 season, the Yellowstone Park Association began to reduce spending by opening the hotels two weeks later and closing them two weeks earlier in 1899. At one point it was uncertain whether or not the hotels would be open at all. The company did not renew their leases for Norris or Thumb and abandoned the lunch station business altogether.⁴⁰ In separate unsuccessful attempts, E. C. Waters and others, as well as H. W. Child, S. Huntley, and others, tried to purchase the Northern Pacific Railroad's interest in the Yellowstone Park Association.⁴¹ As the nineteenth century ended, the Yellowstone Park Association was on unstable ground.

Although few major buildings were constructed during the past few years, the roots of a unique architectural style had begun. Very shortly after its construction, E. C. Waters wanted to copy the style for his buildings at Yellowstone Lake. Ironically, as the Yellowstone Park Association's finances became less certain, they once again had hired one of Minnesota's (and later the country's) leading architects, Cass Gilbert, to report on the architectural needs of the hotels. (Documents do not credit which particular company official hired Gilbert.) Up until that point, the hotels had been described as "barn-like," with the large buildings never having received a coat of paint. Just before the season ended in 1899, Gilbert made suggestions for both interior and exterior paint schemes for



Stereograph of Monida and Yellowstone stage. 1912.



Stereograph of Wylie Camp at Canyon. 1912.

the Canyon and Fountain hotels.⁴² Although these two buildings were frame ones, the park had numerous smaller log buildings, and those were beginning to influence architects. Seeking the advice and opinions of leading architects for the new concession buildings and the recognition that log buildings were a desirable architectural style would influence not only concessions development in the park, but also the buildings and structures constructed by the government in the park.

Despite being faced with erratic visitation and the lack of major construction projects by the concessioners during the century's last decade, many smaller concession developments did take place. Now catering to the camping crowd as well as the scheduled rail passenger guests, new permanent tent camps, new stores, new lunch stations and several permanent camps were built. The new century would see the rise in new trends for visitation.