

From Camps to Lodges 1923–1928

Visitation jumped 41 percent in 1923, with 138,352 people enjoying Yellowstone National Park. Rail traffic accounted for 44,806 of the tourists; about 75,000 tourists used the public campgrounds. The service by the concessioners was considered excellent with many new improvements completed prior to the opening of the season. The Yellowstone Park Transportation Company, which had a difficult time keeping up with the demands, purchased an additional 20 new 11-passenger cars, two new 25-passenger cars, one new two-ton truck, and they bought nine touring cars from the Yosemite Park Company.¹

Taking into account the major investments of the Yellowstone Park Hotel Company, the Yellowstone Park Camping Company, and the Yellowstone Park Transportation Company, the Department issued new

20-year contracts beginning January 1, 1923. George Whittaker received a 10-year contract to operate stores and filling stations at Mammoth and Canyon. C. A. Hamilton received a 10-year contract to operate stores and filling stations at Lake, Old Faithful, and West Thumb. Jack Haynes was operating on a 15-year contract that would end in 1936; Pryor and Trischman's contract would end in 1926, and Henry Brothers's contract for the swimming pool and baths operation at Old Faithful would end in 1924.² Near the end of the 1923 season, the Department sent approval for a new camp company lunch station to be built just inside the east entrance on site of the old Wylie camp. This would become the Sylvan Pass Lodge in 1924.³

In order for the National Park Service to keep abreast of the many different franchises and permits



Charles Hamilton in front of Lower Geyser Basin Store. n.d.



Hamilton's Auto Camp Store—Old Faithful. 1929.

issued across the system, Francis Farquhar was hired at a salary of \$6,000 a year to be the official accountant. While the work was not needed for the full 12 months, an annual scrutiny was felt necessary to “enable the service to function intelligently and decide upon questions of rates, returns to the United States, earnings and the like in complete justice and fairness to the operators, the public, and the Department of the Interior.”⁴

Knowing that the Yellowstone Park Boat Company privilege would be up for renewal, William Nichols understood that it was the time to either invest in more boats for better service or lose the contract. Although the company had provided very poor service and had had few returns in the past, Nichols was optimistic that the company could be salvaged with the new Lake Hotel being open and more visitors staying in the area. Recognizing that the existing facilities were an “eye-sore,” Nichols proposed con-



Stairs and skids at Yellowstone Park Boat Company. 1936.



Boats at Lake. 1922.

structing a new boathouse and purchasing new boats to augment the speed boat purchased in 1922. Nichols admitted that the boat company’s stock “isn’t worth the paper it is written on,” but he bought partner Warren Delano’s stock from the Warren Delano Estate for \$100. The executor of the estate thought the estate came out ahead! H. W. Child was willing to pay the Northwest Improvement Company \$100 for their stock.⁵ At the end of 1923, Superintendent Albright stated in his annual report that the boat company had made no improvements that year, thus their franchise (which was extended for the 1923 season) would not be renewed unless the company reorganized its finances and purchased equipment to run a general boating business.⁶

In 1924, Pryor and Trischman received a temporary permit to operate a stand to serve cold drinks and ice cream to visitors on the terraces; it was known as the “Devil’s Kitchenette.” They were also given a 10-year contract starting in 1924 to continue operating their curio and ice cream shop, an extension allowing them time to make needed additions to the store.⁷ Henry Brothers was also given a 10-year contract in 1924 for the operation of his bathhouse and swimming pool at Old Faithful.⁸

Due to failing health, Howard Hays sold the Yellowstone Park Camping Company to Vernon Goodwin of Los Angeles. Upon his departure, Albright praised Hays, “Very few men in America know more of the national parks than Mr. Hays does. He has visited nearly all of them, and is familiar with their problems. There is still a broad field in the national parks for his boundless energy, fine personality, and great activity...”⁹ Goodwin, who immediately took over, inherited an aggressive improvement program.¹⁰

In 1925, the Eighth National Park Conference was held in Mesa Verde National Park. In the sessions on concessions, it was noted that the large numbers of camping tourists now expected to find housekeeping-type facilities in the national parks like those in municipal campgrounds. The conversion of the housekeeping facilities (addition of running water and some limited type of kitchen facility) would put an additional financial burden on some of the operators. Nevertheless, Mather believed this kind of service should be offered, and it was up to each Superintendent to deal with his specific concessioner on this issue. Mather told the group that the housekeeping service had already been started at Yellowstone. Mather cited a lodge development in Jasper Park, Canada, as

a good example for the parks; he felt the lodge being built in Zion was also “admirable.” During the meeting, it was noted that the sanitation developments in the parks were good examples for the country in general. (In the previous year, incinerators and new water systems had been built in several areas in Yellowstone¹¹ and during 1925, all of the concession dump grounds in Yellowstone were cleaned up, with tins and glass buried and all other garbage not eaten by the bears burned. As well as tin crushers, incinerators were used at Upper Geyser Basin, Lake, and Canyon.¹²)

A disastrous fire occurred March 31, 1925, at the Yellowstone Park Transportation Company facilities in Mammoth. It destroyed 53 buses, 35 touring cars, trucks, spare parts, and the important machine shop. The company immediately ordered replacement vehicles and by the opening day, 90 new buses and 10 new trucks were delivered. Albright praised the company in his annual report:

This remarkable performance resulted in giving the transportation line more facilities for the opening than it would have had had the fire not occurred. The officers of the company are to be commended for the courage and vigorous action in making the great expenditures necessary to completely reestablish the transportation facilities in time for the accommodation of park visitors.¹³

Meanwhile, the new steel and concrete, fireproof transportation facility at the north entrance was nearing completion. The big storage garage was finished



Devil's Kitchenette. 1929.

and the new machine shops would be finished shortly.¹⁴

Visitation in 1925 showed a small increase of 10,124 people for a total of 154,282, and the rail service also showed a slight increase with 44,786 visitors.¹⁵ As a result of several years of improvements and much cooperation among landscape architect Dan Hull, Horace Albright, and the different concessioners, the park's developed areas began to take on an attractive appearance. A park visitor wrote, “One thing im-



Yellowstone Park Transportation Company. 1917.



Old Faithful Lodge. 1928.



Old Faithful Lodge lobby. 1928.



Old Faithful Lodge cabins. 1983.



Old Faithful Lodge recreation hall. 1928.



Old Faithful Lodge dining room. 1929.

pressed me as I traveled about the park and that was the unique and picturesque method in which the buildings were built. They were of such simple and rough style that they formed a unit and part of the scheme of things there in the forests.” The visitor then requested information or plans for the log and frame cabins for his use as a design for a cabin on the Housatonic River.¹⁶

In moving towards a four-tier level of accommodations in the park, major improvements and new construction at the permanent camps transformed them into lodge-type developments. Hotels, existing lodges, the existing housekeeping cabins, and the free public auto campgrounds were also improved. The use of the term “lodge” as suggested by Superintendent Albright received much attention from the



Old Faithful Lodge employees. 1928.

concessioners as well as from the Washington office. Albright wanted to change the name “permanent camp” to “lodge” in order to distinguish these facilities from camping in the public auto campgrounds. He believed the term “camp” was overused and confusing to the travelers. With the “permanent camps” now offering a central building, which housed a dining room, lobby, and recreation hall, Albright argued that the term was outdated. The different railroad officers, the officers of the Yellowstone Park Camps Company and the officials of the different touring groups were all consulted. Most agreed with the new term “lodge.” Albright sought permission from the Department to make the change. He thought there would be no problem with the YP Camps Company as they had already changed the sign in the window at their Livingston office to “Yellowstone Lodges and Camps Company.”¹⁷

In addition to the visitors’ changing preference for accommodations, other changes in 1920s society were reflected in the park. For example, the hotel company questioned the mandatory rule that men must wear a coat at dinner. In response to William Nichols on the applicability of the rule, Albright said:

I think the National Park Service has full power to regulate anything it desires to undertake in

the national parks and there will be no question but that we can insist upon the abrogation of the coat rule if we want to do this and at the present time it is our disposition to have the rule abrogated. Mr. Mather was particularly strong about this matter as he had it brought to his attention by a very prominent Congressman.¹⁸

Albright also suggested that the company purchase an ample supply of “new and good-looking coats and have them available at each hotel.”¹⁹

Again the question of the boat company had not been settled, and the company operated on a year-to-year permit. Albright believed that the Department should demand “a complete financial liquidation,” and that if the company did not reorganize, it should voluntarily withdraw and allow the Department to seek another boat service.²⁰

In 1926, visitation once again increased significantly (by 18 percent). A total of 187,807 tourists came to Yellowstone. The striking change in the type of Yellowstone visitor is seen in the fact that 125,000 people preferred to camp rather than to stay at the hotels and lodges. A small increase in rail travel was noted.²¹

Before year’s end, the question of allowing rental cars in the park arose. An organization called “Drive

Your Own” was pushing for rights in the park that Child thought should be killed before it got started. He was also concerned that the Hertz Drivurself Company and “every other jitney outfit in Montana and the surrounding states would demand the same privilege and how Albright could operate Yellowstone Park with this bunch of bandits, I do not know.” Child knew that Albright was against the rental car schemes but feared the political influence of General Motors. In a meeting held with park concessioners from across the system, railroad officials, National Park Service officials and car representatives, the rental car people said they wanted to target the arriving rail passengers. Mather feared putting urban drivers onto the park roads without any experience in mountain driving. He believed it was because of the Yellowstone Park Transportation Company’s careful operation that only one fatality had been recorded since buses had been allowed on the Yellowstone roads in 1917. Albright added that if someone drove across country to get to the park, he was probably used to the conditions; however, a few motorists had not been allowed in the park after the rangers “sized up” their abilities. Other issues concerned Mather and Albright as well, such as the protection of the Yellowstone Park Transportation Company, which had invested heavily in equipment

and facilities; their objection to the “more go-as-you-please autoist” hurrying through the parks without seeing them; the problem of unloading at the hotels at unexpected times; the lack of preparation on part of petitioners; the national policy against introducing competing interests into parks; and the apparent lack of demand for “drive yourself” cars. Albright stated that there had never been a request in Yellowstone for that type of service. The issue was resolved with the understanding that the Yellowstone Park Transportation Company might consider providing “drive yourself” cars if a demand arose.²²

A major landscape improvement occurred in 1926. The National Park Service and the Yellowstone Park Hotel Company jointly removed all of the telephone lines along the road between Mammoth Hot Springs and Lake Hotel via Norris and Canyon. New lines were installed in less conspicuous areas through the forests or in locations some distance from the road.²³

Improvements continued at the campgrounds and the lodge areas. The old Fountain Hotel and old Norris lunch station were taken down and the sites cleaned. As the 1920s ended, the physical appearance of the park began to improve.