

# Glacier

## The Wheeler Property





## A Refuge from Politics

Montana's dynamic Democratic Senator Burton K. Wheeler rose to prominence as a Butte attorney and was one of the leading progressives of his time. He served in the Senate from 1923 to 1947. During his turbulent political career, he championed labor unions and freedom of speech, shaped key New Deal legislation, fought against entry into World War II, and successfully opposed President Franklin Roosevelt's scheme to expand the Supreme Court. Never one to shy away from controversy, he once boasted, "I've been accused of almost everything except timidity."

He first visited Lake McDonald in 1915 with his wife Lulu, who was an active and influential force in her husband's career. The following year the Wheelers purchased a cabin in the park. Although Glacier National Park offered a refuge from

politics, Senator Wheeler also engaged in working vacations. Like many of us, he at times combined work and pleasure, and was known to have contributed to significant legislations while relaxing at the lake. Wheeler also took a special interest in the park's welfare and, among other initiatives, was instrumental in securing appropriations for the Going-to-the-Sun Highway. (Now called the Going-to-the-Sun Road.)

The Wheeler's original cabin burned in 1941. Lulu immediately began to design a replacement, supervising its construction in 1942. Her plans for the new cabin captured the spirit of the family's lost landmark while following the rustic style of the National Park Service. Using local materials, she emphasized the importance of privacy, quality of view, and natural environment to reflect an unpretentious "democratic" life style.



View of Lake McDonald from the Wheeler Property



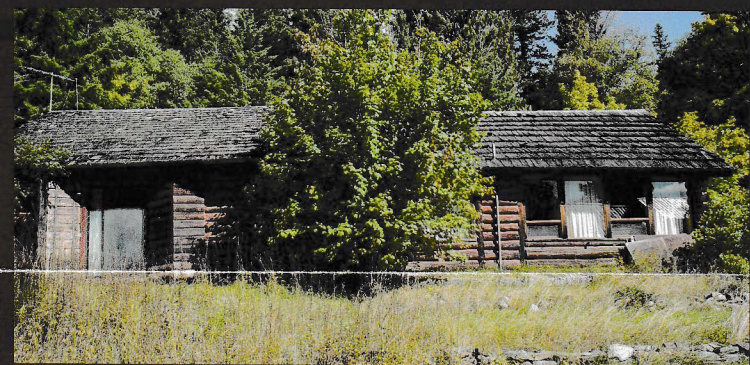
## The Wheeler Camp

Burton and Lulu had six children: John, Elizabeth, Edward, Francis, Richard, and Marion, along with fifteen grandchildren. Over the years, additional buildings were constructed and remodeled to serve the needs of the expanding family. The original cabin and its 1942 replacement were built on land that had been leased from the federal government, so although the Wheelers owned the structures, they did not own the land upon which they sat. In 1946, Lulu negotiated a “life estate agreement”

that would allow family members to use the property and buildings until the death of their last living child. Marion Wheeler Scott died in June, 2014. Shortly after her death, the “Wheeler Camp” reverted to the property of the National Park Service.

The Wheeler Camp is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It is a representative example of recreational camps, providing historic context for the development of wilderness recreation properties.

Such camps exemplified a national trend in vacationing in the early decades of the twentieth century when some people sought rustic respites from working life. The Wheeler Camp buildings include some of the last log cabins built around Lake McDonald by private individuals. All the buildings retain aspects of the traditional forms used in rustic architecture on Lake McDonald, and they form a harmonious group retaining the integrity of design, workmanship, setting, feeling, and materials.



**Left:** Entrance to the Main Cabin

**Top:** Boys (Edward's) Cabin: circa 1952. The last structure built by the Wheelers, it was intended to be shared by Richard, John, and Edward.

**Middle:** Sleep (John's) Cabin: Constructed in 1930, it provided separate and quiet sleeping quarters.

**Bottom:** Garage (Marion's) Cabin: south end built in 1940, north end 1950s

The Wheeler Camp is located next to the Lake McDonald Ranger Station, is about 1.21 acres in size, trapezoidal in shape, and fronts about 200 feet on the upper (north) end of Lake McDonald. Structures include the main cabin, boathouse, laundry/shower, and three additional cabins located slightly upslope and behind the main cabin.

