



Anything BUT Natural

*The Rustic
Furniture Movement
& Mount Rainier
National Park*

BY SARAH ALLABACK

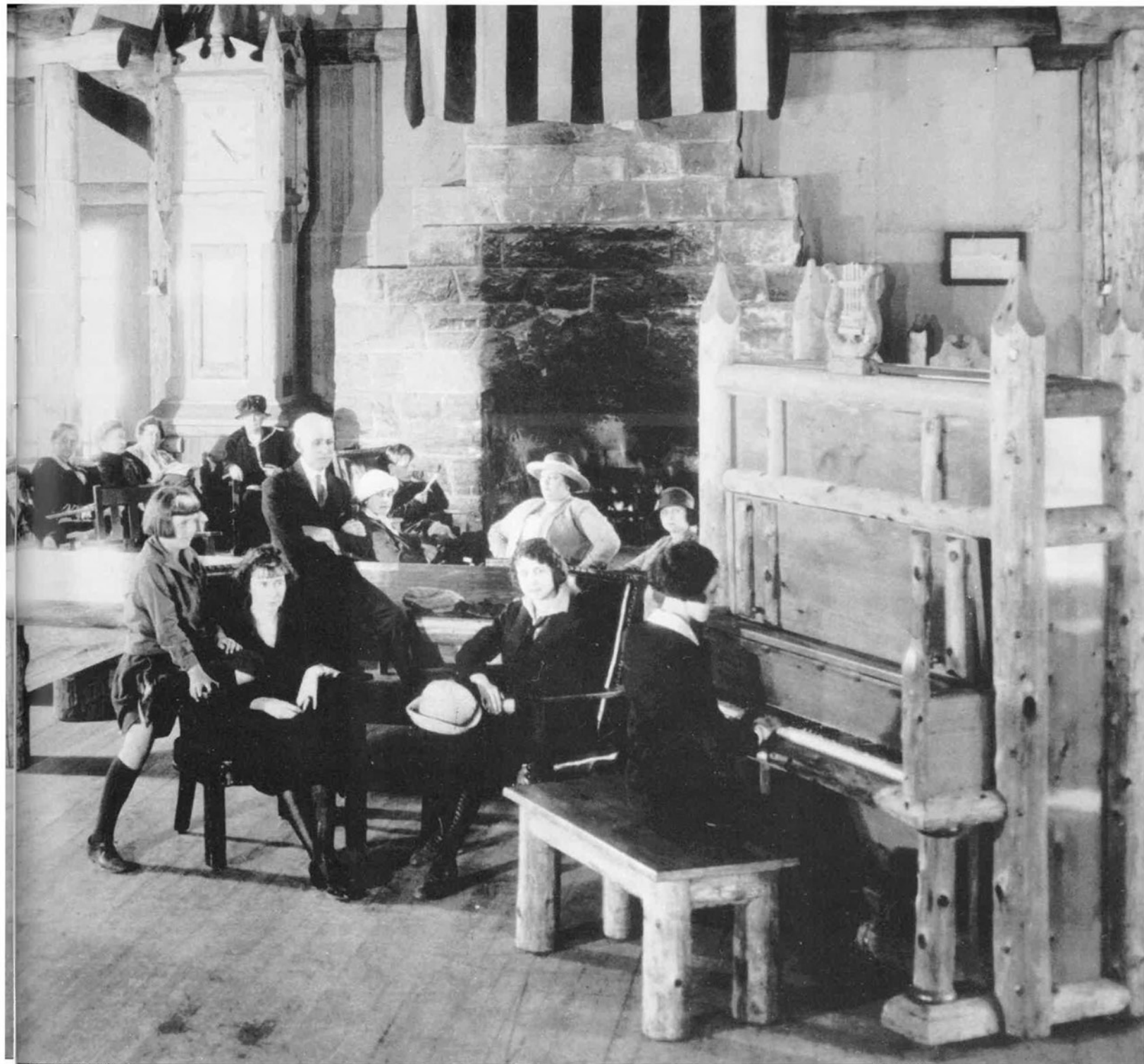
When Hans Fraehnke, a German carpenter, began his first trek through the snow from Longmire to Mount Rainier in March 1916, he probably had second thoughts about the prospects for work up on the mountain. At that time the Paradise Inn resort was in its earliest planning stages, and John Reese's primitive tent camp provided the only lodging for visitors. But Hans Fraehnke was not interested in mountaineering, skiing or any other winter sports; his trip to Paradise was on business. Even before the inn was complete, Fraehnke was designing unique rustic furniture from native Alaska cedar. His massive tables, throne chairs, clock, piano, and other pieces were hand-crafted in larger-than-life scale.

Courtesy Mount Rainier National Park Archives



The lobby in the new Paradise Inn featured Alaska cedar furniture hand-crafted by Hans Fraehnke—a throne chair, long table, grandfather clock, and an upright piano encased in a rustic framework.

The furniture was rough yet refined by the skill of an artisan trained in the German apprentice system. Knots, burns and other irregularities in the natural wood were incorporated into the finished designs. Although Fraehnke may have been unaware of contemporary furniture styles, the carpenter's work satisfied the stylistic requirements of the Rustic Furniture movement, an early 20th-century fashion closely related to the Arts and Crafts movement. Rustic furniture was embraced by some of the most popular furniture makers of the day, including Gustave Stickley and Charles Limbert. For such Arts and Crafts promoters, Fraehnke would have embodied the myth of the unschooled, folk artisan inspired by nature and natural materials. However, the



Rustic Furniture movement was anything but natural. Be that as it may, the interior furnishings at Mount Rainier National Park represent a cultural interest in rustic things that has become characteristic of America's national parks.

THE RUSTIC FURNITURE MOVEMENT

Although American handcrafted wood furniture dates back to the nation's beginnings, rustic furniture developed as an artistic movement during the late 19th century. The interest in things rustic was, in part, a response to America's increased urbanization; the percentage of the population living in metropolitan areas rose from under 20 percent in 1860 to over 45 percent by 1910. The growth of cities, improvements in

education, and the availability of railroad transportation meant new opportunities for an expanding middle class. Tourist travel, previously confined to the wealthy, was suddenly within reach of ordinary working Americans, and a "back to nature" movement encouraged this new group of travelers to venture forth and experience the benefits of outdoor living. Essays like C. D. Warner's *In the Wilderness* (1878) described the pleasures of camping to a public eager to explore the American landscape. By the turn of the century, dramatic adventure stories like Jack London's best-selling *Call of the Wild* (1901) supplemented travel advice guidebooks.

The romanticized camping and hunting fantasies of wilderness literature came to life in the great camps of the



Adirondacks. During the late 19th century wealthy industrialists established settlements of elegant summer lodges among the forests and lakes of northern New York State. Most famous for popularizing the rustic log building style was William West Durant, whose “chalet-style” Pine Knot camp on Raquette Lake had inspired a small colony of camps by 1881. Interiors featured massive boulder fireplaces, elaborate branch-work balustrades and bark-covered woodwork. Furniture-making was a winter pastime for caretakers of the summer camps. It was considered proper etiquette for craftsmen to build furniture out of whatever they could find on site, preferably a sturdy piece of birch with the bark still attached. According to one historian, the National Park Service buildings designed by architect Gilbert Stanley Underwood for the Grand Canyon, Bryce and Zion in the 1920s would have been perfectly comfortable in the Adirondacks.

The great camps influenced the architecture of national parks, but not until developers and tourists could reach the new wilderness destinations. After completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, entrepreneurs had a powerful ally in the promotion of tourism. Not surprisingly, the first hotel developments in the national parks resulted from partnerships between private groups and the railroad. In 1903 the Northern Pacific Railroad combined resources with Yellowstone Park Association, a former subsidiary, to finance the construction of Old Faithful Inn. The seven-story hotel was organized around a central lobby with gnarled wood balustrades, rustic candelabra hanging from log columns, and a stone fireplace containing a “massive wrought-iron and brass clock” custom designed by the architect, Robert

Reamer. Mission style lobby furnishings included settees, rockers, armchairs, wingback chairs, tables and writing desks. The dining room currently contains chairs purchased in 1906 from the Old Hickory Chair Company of Martinsville, Indiana. The Old Faithful Inn set a high, and very rustic, standard for succeeding park lodges and mountain resorts.

As the enormous Old Faithful Inn rose among the geysers, the Fred Harvey Company was planning a hotel in Grand Canyon National Park. This prolific early concessionaire of chain restaurants, hotels and gift shops followed the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad as it headed farther west, leaving “Harvey Houses” along its tracks. Fred Harvey hired a young architect, Mary Jane Coulter, to design Hopi House on the canyon’s south rim. The stone and wood structure imitated an Indian dwelling and actually housed Hopi employees. Over the next 32 years Coulter designed eight more buildings in Grand Canyon National Park using a mixture of Indian, Medieval and Western themes to create imaginary but convincing expressions of regional culture. Coulter’s Hermit’s Rest included tree-stump porch furniture, log chairs, wrought-iron candelabra and a fireplace with a remarkable “face-like” central stone. If somewhat theatrical, her work for Fred Harvey epitomized the effort to market rustic simplicity in national parks. The park service may have been most concerned about preserving the natural environment, but for visitors in search of a civilized vacation, rustic park buildings and furnishings were more a part of the “back to nature” experience than nature itself.

Perhaps the most dramatic railroad-sponsored park development occurred at Glacier National Park. Between 1910 and 1915 the Great Northern Railway Company constructed the Many Glacier Hotel, a network of chalets along the park’s

trail system, and Lake McDonald Lodge. Designed in the alpine or Swiss style, the buildings were promoted as rustic outposts in the "American Alps." Despite heavy timber framing, cedar columns and open lobby space, Lake McDonald Lodge exuded a refined aura with its precise exterior balconies and gingerbread "Swiss" trim. The lobby and porch contained rustic chairs and tables accompanied by mission furniture and Navajo rugs. Hunting trophies were mounted throughout the lobby, along with chandeliers and "lanterns" with Indian motifs.

The early rustic camps and hotels were eccentric buildings, often with furnishings bordering on the luxurious and fantastic. In contrast to such excess, as well as the architectural indulgences of the Victorian era, the English Arts and Crafts movement extolled old-fashioned good craftsmanship accompanied by high moral standards. In America, Gustave Stickley publicized the English movement through *The Craftsman*, a magazine he edited from 1901 to 1916. *The Craftsman* adapted the principles of social and architectural reform to an American readership already inundated with wilderness literature and obsessed with its own natural wonders. The Craftsman bungalow was put forth as an ideal representation of the simple, unencumbered life. The sturdy Craftsman homes, imbued with the new athletic, rugged mentality, required appropriately crafted home furnishings. These included the simple pegged furniture pictured in Stickley catalogs and, at least out-of-doors, rustic furniture fashioned from bark-covered twigs and logs. Rustic furniture may not have been quite refined enough for the typical Stickley customer, but its unadulterated wood posts and seats satisfied the movement's criteria of "truth to nature."

The Old Hickory Chair Company influenced the work of Stickley and Charles Limbert, another Arts and Crafts designer, possibly providing the inspiration for the use of spindles in mission-style furniture. *The Craftsman* tolerated rustic furniture as it might a bothersome younger sibling,

OPPOSITE PAGE: When the inn opened in 1917, the primitive tent camp at Paradise was supplemented by comfortable accommodations for hundreds of guests. By the time this photograph was taken (c. 1950s), Paradise Inn had become a popular "wilderness" retreat.

RIGHT: The Longmire Clubhouse, 1911. Constructed by the Tacoma Eastern Railroad in 1911, the clubhouse was originally for patrons of the National Park Inn. Note the Old Hickory chairs on the porch. Today the building serves as the park concessionaire's general store.

#21800, Ashbel Curtis Collection, Special Collections, Washington State Historical Society



Sunrise to Paradise Lecture Series at the Washington State History Museum

In conjunction with the exhibit *Sunrise to Paradise: The Story of Mount Rainier National Park* and the park's centennial, the Washington State History Museum is offering the following free, mountain-related programs through the end of 1999:

Thursday, September 23, 1999, 6:30 P.M. "An Evening with Bruce Barcott." Acclaimed local author and journalist Bruce Barcott reads from his book *The Measure of a Mountain: Beauty and Terror on Mount Rainier*.

Thursday, October 21, 1999, 6:30 P.M. "Volcanic Mount Rainier." Geologist Pat Pringle talks about volcanoes and seismography. He is a geologist with the state and author of an upcoming book on the geology of Mount Rainier.

Thursday, November 18, 1999, 6:30 P.M. "An Evening with Dee Molenaar." Local artist, climber and former Mount Rainier ranger Dee Molenaar shares some of his Mount Rainier experiences.

Thursday, December 9, 1999, 6:30 P.M. "An Evening with Otto Lang." Otto Lang has lived a full life, from starting the ski school on Mount Rainier to being a Hollywood producer and director. This presentation will be of interest to ski enthusiasts.

Sunday, December 12, 1999, 2 P.M. "Two Views of Mount Rainier: Ruth Kirk and Jean Walkinshaw." Ruth Kirk has recently authored a Mount Rainier book for University of Washington Press, and Jean Walkinshaw directed a Mount Rainier documentary film for KCTS Channel 9. The two share their experiences with the mountain.

Sunrise to Paradise runs through January 9, 2000. The museum is also hosting a brown bag lunch series at noon on September 16, October 14, and November 4. Call 1-888-238-4373 for more information.

The exhibit *Sunrise to Paradise* and all related programs are sponsored by TCI Northwest, Inc., at the Pinnacle level and *The News Tribune*, REI, and the Washington State Lottery at the Summit level.

stating that, although full of "individuality," the furnishings "should be used only rarely or they will prove annoying." Despite this patronizing attitude, *The Craftsman* acknowledged the popularity of making rustic furniture and its "special appeal" to the amateur carpenter. Rustic furniture required less technical skill than more refined styles, its deliberately rough carpentry proving easier for beginners.

Stickley's use of hickory furniture on Craftsman bungalow verandahs suggests this limited enthusiasm for things rustic. During the early 20th century, when Arts and Crafts furniture was most popular, the two styles were used in conjunction to furnish hotels and homes alike. In *Bungalow Magazine* (1909), the hickory furniture familiar to hotel guests became prominent on bungalow porches, including "Old Hickory furniture, which coordinated effectively with reed porch shades and Mourzouk cocoa-fiber rugs or Crex wire-grass carpets." An exotic eastern touch was often added to this cultural mix, as Arts and Crafts designers frequently emulated the appreciation for the wood and woodworking techniques of traditional Japanese architecture.

A MOUNTAIN RESORT

Resort development at Mount Rainier began in 1884 when James Longmire built a cabin at a natural mineral springs about six miles inside the current park boundary. Longmire's enterprise attracted hardy tourists from throughout the region—those willing to make the grueling pilgrimage to the site by horseback or wagon. By the turn of the century it was a popular retreat, with several cabins, bathhouses and a hotel. In 1906, encouraged by Mount Rainier's new park status, the Tacoma Eastern Railroad constructed the National Park Inn on two acres of property south of the Longmire development. Another hotel, the National Park Inn Annex, the model for the present reconstructed inn, was built by the Longmire Springs Company between 1915 and 1917. Rustic chairs lined the two-story hotel's front verandah, facing the spectacular mountain view. The visitor clubhouse was crowded with hickory armchairs designed by the Old Hickory Chair Company (now the Old Hickory Furniture Company).

The completion of the road to Paradise in 1915 transformed Paradise Valley into an easily accessible tourist destination. By the following year Stephen Mather, director of the newly established National Park Service, encouraged a group of Tacoma businessmen and park supporters to take advantage of the anticipated increase in tourism. After the incorporation of the Rainier National Park Company, construction began on Paradise Inn. The two-and-a-half story, 100-room hotel was designed by a local Tacoma firm—Heath Grove and Bell—as part of a tourist complex that was to include a tent camp, ski lift and guide house. Early accounts of the building's construction note the Alaska cedar from the nearby silver fir forest, hewn for the inn's timber frame, and the massive native stone used in foundation and fireplace.

The first lobby furnishings for Paradise Inn were purchased from Tacoma's old Stratford Hotel just before the building's demolition and included leather upholstered wood-frame chairs similar to those offered in Stickley catalogs around 1910. More distinctive furniture began to appear within a year of the inn's opening. Two massive throne chairs, handcrafted from Alaska cedar, and an enormous cedar table occupied one end of the lobby. These were the first of many rustic pieces built for the inn by Hans Fraehnke. Beginning in 1916, Fraehnke hiked through the snow to Paradise each March for seven successive seasons, staying until November weather made work impossible. Fraehnke built some of his wares at a workshop in Fife, where he also made furniture for local residents.

RUSTIC ALASKA CEDAR FURNISHINGS

Among Fraehnke's earliest pieces for the Paradise Inn lobby were two pairs of throne chairs, one set with a diamond cut-out design in the seat backs and one with a "double wave design." The chair posts and armrests are unpolished Alaska cedar, grayish in color, but the seats and seat backs are planed and varnished to reveal the wood's deep golden color and grain. The ends of the posts are also varnished, adding to the rustic contrast between rough and smooth. Fraehnke's skill as a carpenter is most apparent in the joinery of the seat pieces, which, although fashioned from several cedar planks, appears seamless. The massive lobby tables are 14 feet long and over 5 feet wide. Although the tabletops were

Paradise Inn registration desk, 1918. Guests registered for lodgings at this office inside the main lobby. German carpenter Hans Fraehnke carved the decorative cedar posts to resemble his rustic lobby furnishings.



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ASHTEL CURTIS
40211



This Alaska cedar throne chair is one of a pair furnishing the Paradise Inn lobby. The rustic planter to the chair's right is decorated with simple painted patterns, as is the post in the background.

Fraehnke's massive grandfather clock, 14 feet tall, still stands in the Paradise Inn lobby. The clock was constructed in the carpenter's Fife workshop and its three sections reassembled on site.

made from tree trunks cut in half, they appear to be a single slab. After construction it took eight men to move one of the tables.

Emphasizing the contrast between natural Alaska cedar stripped of its bark and planed, varnished wood, Fraehnke created highly refined rustic furniture on a scale appropriate to the mountain. Perhaps the most impressive of Fraehnke's designs is the remarkable 14-foot-tall grandfather clock presiding over the Paradise Inn lobby. The clock was constructed in three sections, transported from the Fife workshop by truck, and assembled on site. The top of the clock has a broken pediment design with a central finial culminating in a spherical point. Each side of the top is decorated with an unbroken pediment. The middle portion of the clock opens like a cabinet, complete with keyhole, and once contained the brass works, striker and a 36-inch pendulum.

The upright piano, manufactured by Schmoller and Mueller of Omaha, is a unique example of "rusticating" a traditional piece of furniture. For several years the piano was an ordinary instrument, but around 1919 Fraehnke encased it in a rustic framework of cedar paneling. The main rectangular section is surrounded by natural cedar posts on all four corners. A lid fashioned from three log pieces rolls back to reveal the keyboard. Early photographs of the piano show a small ornamental harp on top of the instrument. A focal point of the lobby since its rustication, the piano was played by President Truman on his visit to the park in 1945.

The hotel registration desk also received a rustic treatment of log sections, varnished beam ends, and pointed cedar posts. A log veneer covers the base of the desk in a vertical pattern reminiscent of frontier architecture. The clerks' windows are divided by cedar posts with triangular wood caps over the tops that give them an alpine appearance. The unique "stump" mail drop (later painted and ornamented with a plastic plant), the cedar mail sign, and stump planter demonstrate the breadth of the carpenter's skill. In the inn's

early days "a picturesque desk corner" completed the ensemble.

OLD HICKORY FURNITURE

When the inn opened in 1917 the remarkable Alaska cedar furnishings were accompanied by equally distinctive hickory chairs, tables and settees. These rustic pieces were manufactured by the Old Hickory Chair Company, the largest dealer of rustic furniture at the time and suppliers of furniture to state and national parks throughout the country. Founded about 1898, by 1914 Old Hickory advertised handmade rustic furniture for "country clubs, lodge rooms, summer camps, golf clubs, hotels, verandahs, lawns, bungalows, roof-gardens and airdromes," although the furniture was deemed appropriate "everywhere, in all climates and under the most strenuous conditions." Company catalogs and labels featured a picture of Andrew Jackson's head with a rustic chair, suggesting the pioneer character, endurance and patriotism of its namesake.

The process of building hickory furniture was, in itself, an exercise in patience and craftsmanship. During the company's early days, private citizens would cut and gather young hickory saplings in the winter, when the sap was down and the bark closely bonded to the wood. These poles were harvested in lots of about 300 a day, loaded onto horse-drawn wagons, and delivered to the receiving door of the company plant. Pole harvesters were paid between one and three dollars for each 100 poles, depending on the size of the "good straight" second-growth saplings. Once in the factory, the wood was dried in a kiln, treated for insects, and soaked in very hot water. The soaked wood could then be bent around steel molds shaped into the desired furniture components.

After the chair pieces were drilled, fitted and nailed at the joints, the seats and seat backs were assembled. This process involved stripping hickory wood from trees in great 50-pound rolls that were then boiled and cut into strips while still flexible. The sawn strips went through a leather splitter and emerged the required thickness for weaving into seats. Most of the weaving was done by women. In 1914 chair seats and backs featured "stout inner bark," "as strong as rawhide," but by 1931 the 40th anniversary catalog noted that "unless oth-



In 1917 visitors to Paradise Inn enjoyed this view of the alpine meadows and mountain beyond. A few of the Old Hickory chairs seen here are still in use on the inn's mezzanine.

erwise specified all orders will be furnished in flat reed weaving material."

In 1996 the Paradise Inn mezzanine contained five types of hickory chairs, a settee and two types of tables, most of which probably occupied the main lobby before the mezzanine's construction in 1925. Other examples of Old Hickory, including several rockers, are scattered throughout the park; the oldest of these may have been rescued from the National Park Inn after the 1926 fire. The inn's small, reconstructed lobby is currently furnished in a newer line of Old Hickory produced by the Old Hickory Furniture Company, which traces its lineage back to the first recorded hickory chair.

RUSTIC AMBIANCE

When Paradise Inn first opened to the public in 1917, the lobby was lit by jaunty Japanese lanterns alternating with rustic triangular log fixtures. The lanterns were spherical and decorated with Japanese characters and flower borders. Smaller, oval-shaped lanterns hung high among the rafters. The rustic fixtures had traditional lightbulbs under each corner and tiny globular bulbs in faux candlesticks above. These (or original fixtures like them) currently hang in the dining room. The Japanese lanterns were replaced with cylindrical parchment shades, probably during the 1930s when the inn underwent significant remodeling. The imagery on the early parchment shades ranged from delicately painted berries and fir trees to bright, dramatic renditions of Indian paintbrush, and were clearly decorated by several different artists. Sometime later the rustic triangular fixtures were removed and additional cylindrical shades installed; these were replaced with reproductions in 1989.

Paradise Inn was the setting for a variety of activities organized by the Rainier National Park Company "to provide for the interest and entertainment" of hotel guests. In 1919 the concessionaire planned nightly programs, including "music, dancing and cards in the big lounging room and balcony of Paradise," and

glued to profit from its tourist investments, but the battle against severe weather and promotional hardships finally proved too difficult. In 1952 the company sold out to the National Park Service.

A CONTINUING TRADITION

Two of the park's original buildings in the rustic style of architecture—the community building (1927) and the administration building (1928)—contain some rustic furnishings, although these were most likely designed for other locations. Both buildings feature the timber-frame, cedar-shingle gable roof and glacial boulders that came to characterize the National Park Service rustic style of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Rustic light fixtures, designed to appear pitted with age, hang from the exposed rafters. The community building was designed as a gathering place for the Longmire Public AutoCamp and continues to fulfill a social role for the park service community. The administration building was the height of modern park headquarters upon its completion in 1930. When this role was superseded by the new administration building in Tahoma Woods (1968), the building continued to house ranger and maintenance offices.

The influence of the rustic style can be seen in modern furnishings throughout the park. Visitors lounge in reproduction Adirondack chairs outside the Henry M. Jackson Memorial Visitor Center and gaze up at the mountain from Old Hickory chairs caned in yellow plastic. The replica of the Longmire cabin includes two built-in pieces of furniture, imaginative models of what might have stood in the earliest park buildings. These and other examples of modern park furnishings clearly demonstrate the continuing importance of the rustic style at Mount Rainier National Park.

Sarah Allaback is an independent scholar with a doctorate in architectural history and theory from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Formerly a historian for the National Park Service in Washington state, Washington, D.C., and Denver, she is currently completing a history of visitor centers designed during the park service's "Mission 66" development program.

COLUMBIA

The Magazine of Northwest History

A quarterly publication of the



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♻️ PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

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FRONT COVER: Edgar Paxson's 1905 oil-on-canvas painting of Sacagawea captures her realistic bone-weary physical stance and tired facial expression, and, typical of early 20th-century romanticist renditions, shows her in full Indian finery. The historical record, however, in no way supports that she wore such fancy dress during her tenure as interpreter with the Lewis and Clark expedition. The cradle-board on her back is also depicted inaccurately. These are just two of numerous instances where the facts about this remarkable woman were wrongly romanticized, leading to her popular though erroneous public image. (Courtesy Coeur d'Alene Galleries, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.)