

FORT YELLOWSTONE

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Presented to the Denver Posse of Westerners
May 24, 1978

On March 1, 1872, President U.S. Grant signed the bill that created America's, indeed the world's, first national park—the Yellowstone. This new park was placed under the control of the Secretary of the Interior. However, in its wisdom, the U.S. Congress failed to pass any appropriation for the management of the area.

Two months later, Nathaniel P. Langford accepted the first superintendency of the park, without salary. During the five years he held this position, Langford visited the park on a couple of occasions. One of these occurred in 1872, when he visited Mammoth Hot Springs. There he found James McCartney running his hotel, which was a one-story log cabin measuring 25 by 35 feet, and having an earthen roof. The Hot Springs had about 300 visitors that year, many of them coming because of their rheumatism and other aches and pains.

Of course, being without funds, Langford was powerless to either develop or protect the park and its resources. It is also possible that he was not much interested either. At any rate, visitors kept themselves busy by chopping off mineral deposits from the hot springs, shot at animals and birds indiscriminately for sport, and set forest fires. An army engineer, Capt. William Ludow, visited the park in 1875 and became so alarmed at the lack of protection of its resources that he recommended the stationing of army troops there and the transfer of the park to the War Department. But the captain was a little ahead of the times.

In 1877 Langford was replaced as superintendent by a colorful character, Philetus W. Norris. The next year, Yellowstone got its first appropriation—\$10,000, and Norris set out with a will to improve matters. In addition to constructing roads, if they may be called that, he erected the park's first government buildings. On Capitol Hill at Mammoth Hot Springs, Norris constructed a rather romantic blockhouse.

Perhaps mindful that the Nez Perces had marched through the Yellowstone country only two years earlier, Norris built his headquarters in a substantial manner. The two-story log building measured 40 by 18 feet. Leantos stood on three sides. On top of the roof stood an 8-foot-high

turret, or gunroom, with rifle loopholes on all of its eight sides. Through the middle of the entire structure there arose a 53-foot high flagstaff from which flew the Stars and Stripes in Mammoth's brisk breezes. Historic preservation not being highly developed at the time, this first national park structure was demolished in 1915. But traces of its existence still remain atop Capitol Hill, including the base of that glorious flagstaff.

If Norris was anything, he was energetic. And such measures as he tried to carry out to keep Yellowstone as a national park, made him many enemies. He was replaced as superintendent in 1882. Before leaving Norris, and his dramatic buckskins, another of his characteristics might be noted. He loved his name and he loved attaching it to things. One early visitor recorded this bit of egotism.

Take the Norris wagon road and follow down the Norris fork of the Firehold River to the Norris Canyon of the Norris Obsidian Mountain; then go on to Mount Norris, on the summit of which you will find Monument Park, the Norris Blowout, and at its northerly base the Norris Basin and Park. Further on you will come to the Norris Geyser plateau, and must not fail to see Geyser Norris. The Norris Falls of the Gibbon are worth a visit. The next point of interest is the Gibbon half a day's ride from the Norris Hot Springs.

Bad times fell upon the Yellowstone after Norris was forced from office. Succeeding superintendents were political hacks. The first of these, Patrick Henry Conger, brother to a U.S. Senator from Iowa, was a weak, inefficient, and cowardly man. During his regime, monopolies gained control of the park's growing facilities. His successor, Robert Carpenter, was even more unfit for the position. Also the brother of an Iowan politician, Carpenter looked upon Yellowstone as an instrument of profit for those who were shrewd enough to grasp the opportunity.

The fifth and last pre-army superintendent of Yellowstone was David Wear from Missouri. Although capable and honest, he came to the Yellowstone too late to undo the evil of his predecessors. An angry Congress settled the matter in 1886 by refusing to authorize any money for the park. The Secretary of the Interior was forced to ask the Army for troops for Yellowstone's continued protection. The War Department agreed. For the next 30 years, army officers assigned to the park wore two hats: that of commanding officer of the post and that of acting superintendent of Yellowstone.

On August 17, 1886, Capt. Moses Harris and his Troop M, 1st Cavalry, arrived at Mammoth Hot Springs from Fort Custer, Montana Territory. The cavalrymen immediately pitched camp at the foot of the hot springs terraces.

Forest fires, deliberately and innocently set by enemies and visitors, greeted Harris. The captain promptly issued orders to his command for the management of the park. These rules included a prohibition on cutting timber, damaging the mineral deposits, hunting and trapping, and the sale of liquor except at the hotels. This was strange work for soldiers and Harris directed them to be civil while enforcing the regulations: "They will in the enforcement of their orders conduct themselves in a courteous and polite, but firm and decided manner."

Almost immediately the soldiers came under criticism; but most of these charges were made by people whose illegal activities in the park were now being threatened.

By September, Camp Sheridan, a temporary post, was taking shape at the bottom of Capitol Hill and east of the hot springs. The buildings were typical of any frontier post: barracks, storehouse, stables, guardhouse, headquarters, hospital, and officers' quarters. All were frame and completed at the least possible expense. The detachments in the different parts of the park returned to Mammoth for the winter of 1886-87, one of the worst in the northern plains for many a year.

During that winter Lt. Frederick Schwatka, U.S. Cavalry, already well known for his adventures in Alaska and the Yukon Territory, undertook a ski expedition through the park. After reaching Norris, Schwatka took ill and was forced to give up. The expedition continued, under great difficulties, and reached the Grand Canyon, then back to Mammoth, more dead than alive. With the party was the pioneer photographer, Frank Haynes, who photographed the majesty of a Yellowstone winter.

In the late winter, 1887, Captain Harris dispatched a patrol to Norris Geyser Basin, where it apprehended and arrested a poacher, William James. Harris had only the authority to expel James from the park, which he did. But the proof was now evident that poachers were no longer secure in the back country winters to do their wont. The Army soon developed a system of winter patrols throughout the park, a practice that is still carried out today.

Like so many other temporary posts, Camp Sheridan far outlived what might be considered a normal life span. Even when Fort Yellowstone was founded in 1891, the camp lived on. From 1892 to 1897 it housed the additional cavalry troop that had been assigned to the park. Also, the U.S. Engineer Officer assigned to Yellowstone made use of a number of its buildings until he got his own in 1902. Still later the quartermaster pack train was established there. Not until 1915 were the dilapidated structures removed. The commanding officer then writing, "thereby greatly improving the appearance of the landscape at that point."

While Camp Sheridan was still park and post headquarters, two other commanders followed Captain Harris, Capt. F.A. Boutelle, and Capt. George S. Anderson. Boutelle, who as a young lieutenant had fired the first

shot of the Modoc War in the Lava Beds of northern California, had a rather short tour of duty at Yellowstone. Always outspoken and somewhat vain, he did not hesitate to criticize the Interior Department for any deficiencies he noted. The Secretary of the Interior soon let it be known that a replacement for Boutelle would be welcome.

Before he departed, Captain Boutelle had a number of cabins constructed in the remote sections of the park to provide shelter to the winter patrols. Some of these Snowshoe Cabins, as they came to be called, remain standing. Others have been added over the years.

Also, several Soldier Stations were constructed in critical areas of the park. Here, a detachment of soldiers, usually under a junior officer or a sergeant, would make its headquarters during the summer season. From here it would daily patrol the geyser basins, protect visitors, answer questions, fight forest fires, and carry out all the mundane duties assigned to today's ranger. One of the first of these Soldier Stations is that at Norris Geyser Basin today. Designed by the same architect who planned Old Faithful Inn, Robert Reamer, it has recently been restored by the NPS. It should be noted that this handsome structure came to be because two dissatisfied privates had set fire to an earlier soldier station at the same site.

In February 1890, the Secretary of War, having concluded that the troops assigned duty at Yellowstone required a permanent post, submitted to Congress an estimate of \$50,000 for the work. Construction of Fort Yellowstone, as it was named, began in April 1891. Troop I of the 6th Cavalry moved into the handsome frame quarters in November of that year. Located on the eastern side of the great and ancient terrace of Mammoth Hot Springs, the first buildings consisted of two duplex officers' quarters, a barracks, guardhouse, administrative building, commissary storehouse, quartermaster storehouse, granary, bakery, stables, noncommissioned staff officers' quarters, and a root house.

In 1897, Fort Yellowstone was doubled in size to become a two-company post. The commanding officer at this time was Col. Samuel B. M. Young, whom we will note again. For now, he let the contracts for two more double officers' quarters, a barracks, a stable and two more NCO quarters. The new buildings were generally of the same style of architecture as those of 1891.

The Spanish-American War caused a rapid turnover in troop units and commanding officers. No one spent enough time in the huge park to become well acquainted with its management problems. Stability returned in 1901 with the arrival of Capt. John Pitcher, 1st Cavalry. He would be acting superintendent for six years.

Fort Yellowstone during these years was known throughout the Army as a comfortable place to be assigned. It was much more pleasant than duty on the hot, dusty plains or in the deserts of the Southwest despite its snowbound winters.

Pitcher set out to improve the appearance of the post. The open area between officers' row and the hot springs, which was considered to be the parade ground, was a dusty, white, level of sand, formed by the mineral springs. Pitcher had the area covered with manure from the cavalry stables, installed a system of irrigation ditches, and seeded the ground, transforming it into the grassy meadow that it still is.

Lt. Hiram M. Chittenden, U.S. Corps of Engineers, was first assigned to Yellowstone in 1891. He was responsible for the development of roads and bridges within the park and was completely independent of the commanding officer. While Chittenden possessed a strong personality and was highly skilled in his profession, he believed in cooperating with the local authorities. On this first assignment he spent two summers in the park, 1891 and 1892, and took an interest in the construction of the new fort.

Chittenden, now a captain, returned to Yellowstone in 1899. He supervised the construction of a fine new reservoir near old Camp Sheridan that provided the power for a hydroelectric plant. Street lights soon appeared at the fort.

Not being a part of the Fort Yellowstone staff, Chittenden could claim neither quarters nor an office as a matter of right. In 1902 he sought and obtained appropriations for his own buildings. He located these north of the fort and still standing is the handsome, stone U.S. Engineer's Office, known locally as the Pagoda, for its distinctive architectural style.

On the eve of President Theodore Roosevelt's visit to Yellowstone in 1903, Chittenden constructed a stone arch at the Gardiner entrance to the park, a short distance north of the fort. At the conclusion of his visit, Roosevelt laid the cornerstone for the arch, which still stands and is often called the Roosevelt Arch.

By the early 1900s, Fort Yellowstone had taken on the appearance of a busy but pleasant village. Its rougher edges had been softened by the grass that now grew on the plateau and the shade trees that framed the well-kept structures. All who lived there or visited were favorably impressed. Pitcher wrote, "this is one of the most neatly built and attractive-looking posts in the country."

In 1907, Samuel Young returned to Yellowstone. Much had happened to him since he had last been at the park. He was now a lieutenant general, U.S. Army, retired, and had recently been the first modern Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army. Young remained at Yellowstone for seventeen months. He had returned at the behest of President Roosevelt who had asked him to investigate the matter of returning the park to civil control. He came up with a plan for establishing a Park Guard with himself as civilian superintendent. However, his scheme was premature by nine years.

Because of his peculiar status, Young, like Chittenden, was not entitled to quarters at the fort. Consequently he rented rooms at the nearby Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel. On the other hand, he did not cost the Army

any money. His salary was his retirement pay. As he put it: "My work is simply a labor of love." Love was indeed on Widower Young's mind. At this time he met and married the widow of Silas S. Huntley, the late general manager of the Yellowstone Park Transportation Company.

With the completion of a railroad to the very entrance to the park, at Gardiner, in 1902, visitation increased greatly. Soon the commanding officers were requesting a doubling of the garrison of the fort from two to four companies. Finally, in 1908, the Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of War, and the U.S. Congress agreed to the increase.

The new buildings at the fort would be handsome structures built of stone. Captain Pitcher had argued that the new construction be most substantial. "This post," he said, "is seen and visited by many distinguished people from all over the world, and for this reason if for none other it should be a model post in every way." An inspector general agreed: "It is respectfully submitted that at this station, the one which is probably seen by more foreigners than any other, save, perhaps, West Point, a more dignified shelter for the troops . . . would be in better keeping."

The 1908 plans called for substantial, masonry structures. They included a residence for a field-grade officer, a duplex officers' quarters for captains, a huge three-story double barracks for two troops, a bachelor officers' quarters having a club, and a long "double" stable. By September over 200 civilian workmen were employed in the construction.

In the next few years, further improvements were made at the four-company post. Included in these were a new hospital (1909), a new guardhouse (1911) and a handsome stone chapel (1913). All these structures, new and old, safely survived the earthquake of 1959.

Park visitors were truly impressed, just as Pitcher had foreseen: A young lady wrote:

As one enters the Springs it seems like going into a little city. There are well cared for streets and lawns, a number of pretty bungalows, and several more pretentious houses; most of them are the residences of officers, for this is known as Fort Yellowstone, in army circles. I am told that there are about two hundred cavalymen located here. The commanding officer is the superintendent of the Park but is under the supervision of the Secretary of the Interior.

The headquarters of the U.S. Commissioner is also here, as also are the Weather Bureau and the Engineer's Office . . . a handsome hospital and church are in construction.

The conduct of the soldiers as guardians of a national park was a matter of endless discussion over the years. Rudyard Kipling, on a visit to Yel-

lowstone, thought their uniforms definitely lacked spit and polish. He admitted, however, that American officers valued their men, whereas English officers set store on their horses.

Aubrey Haines tells the story of how one soldier enforced the rules when the culprit was an Englishman from the nobility:

The soldier on duty had warned him once. Even a second time the soldier asked him to desist. The third time, he collared the Englishman and started for the guardhouse. "I'll say old boy, you can't do this to me," objected the Englishman, "I'm a Count, I'm a Count." "I don't give a damn," said the soldier, "you only count one here."

Frederic Remington discovered that the troopers liked their rough life in the backcountry of the Yellowstone and that they willingly volunteered for outpost duty.

General Young was not impressed with the Army's role as park guardian. He wrote that the officers' assignments to Yellowstone were too short for them to get well acquainted with the park. As for the enlisted men, "assignment to Fort Yellowstone means only a change of posts; he soon learns the grand tour and how to cut a dash on the parkways and finished drives; he is a fine figure in a fine setting, but he neither knows or cares where the changing chances of his soldiery may take him any day."

In many ways Fort Yellowstone was a typical army post. Founded when the Indian wars had at last come to a close, it witnessed the transitions that occurred as the Army emerged from its frontier isolation to fight the Spanish-American War in Cuba and the Philippines, to be sent overseas in increasing numbers as the United States enlarged its role as a world power, and, at the end of the post's existence, to fight in France in World War I. When the Army came to Yellowstone, the most advanced means of transportation was the cavalry horse. Before the Army left the park, a soldier printed in large letters in the headquarters register that AUTOMOBILES were allowed (1915).

The troops pulled guard duty, kitchen police, target practice, and patrols (both mounted and skiiis). Reveille and retreat, stable call and inspections, all followed one another in the same sequence as at other posts.

In other ways, Fort Yellowstone was not at all typical. Its basic function was to administer and protect a national park, a far cry from a cavalry charge. Soldiers found themselves pursuing poachers, fighting forest fires, and interpreting the wonders of nature to pretty maidens. Those officers assigned to the dual positions of post commander and acting superintendent found themselves on the horns of a dilemma. The nature of the responsibilities forbade the training of their men in the arts of war. Dispersed over the park in small detachments during the summer and

snowbound at Mammoth during the winter, the troops could only rarely partake in drill, maneuvers, target practice, and the training marches of their profession. This situation caused constant worry to the officers whose *raison d' etre* was to soldier and to lead soldiers.

Nonetheless, the officers and men selected for duty at Fort Yellowstone did, to a remarkable degree, perform their strange duties with dedication and perseverance. They forged many of the guidelines that the National Park Service was to carry on in later years. They learned by trial and error when there were few waysigns to follow.

In 1916, the Secretary of War returned the administration of Yellowstone National Park to the Secretary of the Interior. That same year the National Park Service was created.

The commander of Fort Yellowstone, Maj. Lloyd M. Brett, 1st Cavalry, made his last entry in the Post Returns: "Post Officially abandoned October 26, 1916." It may have been Brett who wrote in a report to the Interior Department that the Army's "duties have been well and creditably performed, and the 30 years of military control will be memorable ones in the history of the Yellowstone National Park."

Bibliographical Note

This paper on Fort Yellowstone is based primarily on two studies: my own research as it appears in David G. Battle and Erwin N. Thompson, *Fort Yellowstone, Yellowstone National Park, Historic Structure Report*, National Park Service, 1972; and Aubrey L. Haines, *The Yellowstone Story*, 2 vols., Colorado Associated University Press, 1977. Grateful acknowledgement is made to Mr. Haine's work, which is the definitive history of the Yellowstone.

APPENDIX

Commanding Officers and Units at Fort Yellowstone

Post Commanders and Acting Superintendents

(This list does not include officers who acted in these positions when the commanding officer was absent from the post.)

Capt. Moses Harris, 5th Cavalry, Aug. 20, 1886-May 31, 1889.

Capt. Frazier A. Boutelle, 1st Cavalry, June 1, 1889-Feb. 14, 1890.
(Boutelle actually left Dec. 19, 1889. During the interim an infantry officer, 1st Lt. John McMartin, 25th Infantry, was in charge for two weeks—the only infantryman to do so.)

Capt. George S. Anderson, 6th Cavalry, Feb. 15, 1891-ca. June 22, 1897.
 Col. S.B.M. Young, 3d Cavalry, June 23, 1897-May 18, 1898. (Actually left park in Nov. 1897.)
 Capt. James B. Erwin, 4th Cavalry, May 19, 1898-May 27, 1899.
 Capt. Wilbur E. Wilder, 4th Cavalry, May 28, 1899-June 22, 1899.
 Capt. Oscar J. Brown, 1st Cavalry, June 23, 2899-July 23, 1900.
 Capt. George W. Goode, 1st Cavalry, July 24, 1900-May 7, 1901.
 Capt. John Pitcher, 1st Cavalry, May 8, 1901-May 13, 1907. (Pitcher promoted to major, Jan. 1902.)

Acting Superintendent (only)

Lt. Gen. S.B.M. Young, Retired, May 14, 1907-Oct. 27, 1908

Post Commander (only)

Maj. John Pitcher, 1st Cavalry, May 14, 1907- July 1907.
 Maj. Henry T. Allen, 8th Cavalry, July 1907-Oct. 27, 1908.

Post Commander and Acting Superintendent

Maj. Henry T. Allen, 8th Cavalry, Oct. 28, 1908-Nov. 20, 1908.
 Maj. Harry C. Benson, 5th Cavalry, Nov. 21, 1908-Sept. 29, 1910.
 Maj. Lloyd M. Brett, 1st Cavalry, Sept. 30, 1910-Oct. 26, 1916.

Maj. Edmund M. Leary, 7th Cavalry, July 1, 1917-1918.

Army Units Stationed in Park

(Permanently or on summer duty. List does not include units that passed through park on training marches.)

1st Cavalry—Troops A, E, F, G, H, K, and M, and Machine Gun Platoon of Second Squadron.
 3d Cavalry—Troops A, B, C, D, and F.
 4th Cavalry—Troops D and H.
 5th Cavalry—Troops E, F, and G.
 6th Cavalry—Troops D, I, and K.
 7th Cavalry—Troops unknown.
 8th Cavalry—Troops E, F, G, and H.
 13th Cavalry—Troops A and C.
 Cavalry Troop 1 (provisional)
 Cavalry Troop 2 (Provisional)
 22d Infantry—Detachment from several companies.