

A Brief History of the School at Mammoth Hot Springs, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming.  
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Officials at Yellowstone National Park have found a grade school to be necessary for park employees since at least 1884 (Congress established Yellowstone National Park in 1872). While no personnel with school-age children were present at Mammoth until the 1880s, sometime during the period 1881-1884 (and probably in 1884 proper), civilian park superintendents established a school of sorts at park headquarters (Mammoth Hot Springs). All subsequent iterations of this school have been located at Mammoth.

The first known mention of a school in Yellowstone appeared in the *Livingston* (Montana) *Enterprise* on November 29, 1884. It appears from this article and the snippet below from a Wyoming school superintendent that this school was the first one ever established in the park. The article stated:

The Park school commenced last Tuesday with seven scholars. There are, at present 30 children in the Park, of which number about 20 will attend school this winter. Miss [Lillian] Pickering is teaching the young ideas [about] how to shoot. Mr. [Trevanion] Hale deserves thanks for his untiring efforts in organizing the school. G.<sup>1</sup>

From other contemporaneous items in the *Enterprise*, it appears that Lillian Pickering was present as teacher at Mammoth for the entire winter of 1884-1885. Trevanion Hale was a constable for Yellowstone—technically a county official under the Uinta County, Wyoming law that applied briefly to Yellowstone in 1884-1886—and so he was in place at this time at Mammoth. His school-aged children were William and Susan, ages eight and four at the time.

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<sup>1</sup>. G[L. Henderson?], "Park Notes," *Livingston* (Montana) *Enterprise*, November 29, 1884, p. 3. See also the untitled written history of Yellowstone Park School, from "Park Historian's office, August 19, 1964," in Box MSC-71, file "School File," YNP Archives. School principal John Whitman (1963-2002) wrote a short history of the school in 2002 entitled "Yellowstone National Park School: A Brief History and Information about the Funding Sources and Appropriations in its 124-Year History." Although brief and uncited, it has been used here too. A copy may be found in the Park Historian's files for 2008.

It develops that Uinta County Superintendent of Public Schools F.L. Arnold appointed Trevanion Hale to actually start the school system in Yellowstone. Arnold's directive stated: "I have appointed Trevanion Hale [as?] my deputy to organize a school district at Mammoth Hot Springs; also the said Trevanion Hale is authorized to examined [*sic*] and grant teachers certificate [*sic*] to any one who may apply to teach [at] said school. The School District shall be known as School District No. nine (9)."<sup>2</sup>

While the record on these early schools at Mammoth is incomplete, a few general items are known about the park headquarters' school situation prior to the formal establishment of a school there in 1921 by the National Park Service. The U.S. Army, which took over administration of Yellowstone in 1886, assigned a soldier to teach students whenever a soldier could be found who was qualified. Whenever no such person was available, parents of school children banded together to hire a teacher. These two methods seem to have alternated and thus resulted in schooling at Mammoth for most years during the period 1886 to 1920.

Some details are known. Mammoth resident George H. Ash recalled in 1963 at a late age that he attended school at Mammoth—sometime during the period 1893 to 1906—and that his teacher was Annie Trischman, who later became Mrs. Anna K. Pryor, the owner of Pryor's Stores in the park. Current best evidence is that Ms. Trischman taught school at Mammoth sometime 1906-1909.<sup>3</sup> Clarence "Pop" Scoyen, born in the Norris blockhouse on Mammoth's

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<sup>2</sup>. Uinta County Clerk, microfilm "Commissions and Appointments," November 27, 1884, at Wyoming State Archives, Record Group 1005, Cheyenne, Wyoming. Thanks to Steve Mishkin for bringing this document to my attention.

<sup>3</sup>. According to historian Aubrey Haines's brief 1964 notes on the school, George L.H. Ash was interviewed in 1963, reportedly at age 76, which would make his birth year 1887. But that age must be incorrect because he would thus have been too old to have been at Mammoth School when Anna Trischman began teaching. Anna Trischman, born in or about 1884, did not come to the park with her family until 1899. If she began teaching at age 22, her earliest teaching year would have been 1906. George L.H. Ash's father George Ash married Jennie Henderson Dewing in 1893, so, assuming legitimacy, George would have been of grade school age during the years 1899-1906,

Capitol Hill in 1907, recalled attending school at three different locations at Mammoth. Scoyen's earliest location was the U.S. Army's Canteen building (built in 1905 and still standing) in the southwest basement room (the Women's Library in the early 1960s). Scoyen remembered that the teacher was an army private detailed to that duty and that the school did not cost his parents anything. He stated that at times no army soldier was available qualified to teach, so the parents had to arrange for their children's schooling. Scoyen remembered that school was held one winter in the "Beehive" house at Camp Sheridan and that the teacher then was a Mrs. Brandon, the wife of a plumber. She was a good teacher, according to Scoyen, who was paid by the parents of the children. There was no school in 1910, as the community could not obtain a teacher, so some Mammoth children were sent out of the community for schooling.<sup>4</sup>

This was the pattern of the Yellowstone Park School through 1920. Congress established the National Park Service in 1916, but records of any Yellowstone school that the agency promulgated then have not come to the attention of historians. It appears that the new NPS had its hands too full to worry much about the (existing) arrangements for Mammoth School. Many problems faced the new agency: the pull-out from the park of the U.S. Army, the admission of automobiles and the prohibition of stagecoaches, park roads that were not ready for automobiles, the coalescing of numerous park concessioners into single companies, and the agency's need generally to figure out how it should function. Responsibility for schooling continued to fall on Mammoth area parents. "Each family paid a predetermined amount for each school age child," noted one short history of the school, "and the National Park Service provided a building; almost

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placing him possibly in eighth grade when Annie Trischman was his teacher. Haines, untitled history of Mammoth School, 1964, p. [1].

<sup>4</sup>. Haines, untitled history of Mammoth School, 1964, p. [1]; Aubrey L. Haines, *The Yellowstone Story* (Boulder: University of Colorado, 1977, 1996), II, pp. 181-182.

always that building was the [army's] Canteen.”<sup>5</sup> As will be seen, this arrangement was not to change for twenty-eight more years—until 1948.

A 1939 letter from the park's assistant superintendent explained how the new National Park Service organized the Mammoth School in the early 1920s and how the school functioned through the 1930s:

The school as now set up was originally started in 1921 by Stephen T. Mather, Director of the National Park Service and Mrs. Horace W. Albright, wife of the then Superintendent of the park, by donations and their yearly contributions were augmented from time to time by other members of the community, including the operators [park concessioners such as Hamilton Stores and Yellowstone Park Company and forebears]. For the past ten years the school at Mammoth has been operated by the parents and is headed by a school board consisting of three members appointed by the Park Superintendent. The school board employs the teachers and assess[es] the parents sending children to school an average of \$10.00 per month per family. The school rooms are located in the Canteen building at Mammoth and are maintained as a community activity. The quarters for the teachers are furnished by the Mountain States Telephone Company who lease three rooms in the barracks building but use them only during the summer months.<sup>6</sup>

Thus teachers rented quarters from the telephone company during the winter, because telephone company employees used those quarters only during the summer, an arrangement beneficial to both the community and the telephone company. The Mammoth School followed the Montana course of studies but received no direct supervision from either the state of Montana or the state of Wyoming. Park officials were never successful before 1948 of getting either state to contribute any monies toward the upkeep of the school, although efforts were made on numerous occasions to obtain such assistance. Park officials also requested assistance through the Bureau of Education in Washington, but it was to no avail.

Beginning in the 1930s, park officials and school board members increased their efforts to obtain financial assistance for the Mammoth School. A letter to Montana U.S. Senator Burton

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<sup>5</sup>. John Whitman, unpublished ms. “Yellowstone National Park School,” p. [1], in Park Historian's Files (H Boxes), 2008.

<sup>6</sup>. J.W. Emmert to Agnes W. Spring, January 11, 1939, in box MSC-71, file “School Legislative Efforts, 1936 to Early 1941,” YNP Archives.

K. Wheeler further explained the limbo-like situation that the Mammoth School found itself in at that time:

After the pupils have finished their elementary course of study at Yellowstone, the problem is further complicated by the present high school situation. The nearest high school is at Livingston, Montana, where the [Mammoth] parents again must not only pay the tuition for each pupil who attends but must also arrange for their transportation to and from Livingston and board and room while in Livingston. This cost is far beyond the means of the majority of the parents at Yellowstone and is one of the most serious phases of the entire situation.<sup>7</sup>

School and Park Officials explained that, while there was both a grade school and a high school at Gardiner,<sup>8</sup> it was very crowded and quite primitive with no building of its own, and Mammoth parents still had to furnish both transportation and tuition for students to attend school there. Tuition expense was great (\$72.00 per year per student for grade school in 1938) and the return relatively small at Gardiner, so Mammoth parents found it cheaper and more efficient to operate their own grade school and to send their high schoolers to Livingston. In addition, the NPS had a transportation problem:

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<sup>7</sup>. William Wright to the Honorable Burton K. Wheeler, January 13, 1939, in box MSC-71, file "School Legislative Efforts 1936 to Early 1941," YNP Archives.

<sup>8</sup>. The Gardiner (Montana) School story is, of course, separate and distinct from that of Mammoth School, and beyond the scope of this history, but because the two histories are somewhat connected, we give a bit of the Gardiner history here. Gardiner, founded in 1880, had no school until 1885, and in that year District No. 7 was organized and "served by a log building" until a rock structure was built about 1903. Because Gardiner was in the state of Montana, it (unlike Mammoth) had financial help from the state. Bill and Doris Whithorn, *Photo History of Gardiner, Jardine, Crevasse* (Livingston: Park County New, no date [1968] ), p. [21]-[22], including photos. A large high school was built in 1951, and it burned in the 1990s. Workmen erected the present combination grade school and Gardiner High School, funded by a mill levy, during the 1990s.

Bill Chapman (born 1933 and still a resident of Gardiner in 2008), whose father was Park Ranger Scotty Chapman, started first grade at Mammoth in 1939 and attended most of grade school there. In seventh and eighth grades he attended Gardiner School, which was then located on East Park Street next to the home of Jerry and Christina Jaffe-Kahrs in a building today owned by Jim Sweeney. Bill's freshman year of high school was held in the basement of the Eagles' Hall, and Bill remembers that his "graduating" freshman class that year had four students and that there were 25 in the entire school. George Alton and a "Miss Little" were the two teachers, and George served as the school administrator. For his sophomore, junior, and senior years, Bill went to Bozeman to school. "A lot of kids went to Livingston or Bozeman," he stated, "because we didn't have much here [in Gardiner] until they built the big school [in 1951]." He recalled that the county paid for the school that he attended in Eagles' Hall. Author's interview with Bill and Loretta Chapman, March 14, 2008, Gardiner, Montana.

At present the National Park Service has no buses or trucks suitable for transporting school children to Gardiner. The only thing now available would be one of our freight trucks with a canvas cover and some makeshift means of heating the truck body.<sup>9</sup>

Although the town of Gardiner was then attempting to obtain Works Progress Administration funds to build its own formal high school, that problem-solver for Mammoth was not immediately in the offing, so park officials and parents petitioned Senator Wheeler for federal help. Park officials even asked Wheeler for “some means” whereby the federal government could “advance to the school at Gardiner the tuition cost, which will necessarily be high, for the pupils from Yellowstone.” And they asked for the Government to “appropriate the necessary money for [both] school facilities at Yellowstone and also for high school tuition and transportation for high school pupils who must leave Yellowstone [to Gardiner and/or Livingston] for their education.” Officials noted that “we have in Yellowstone nearly 50 children of pre-school age, so you can readily understand that the situation in the next few years will become extremely acute.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus the reasons for the original establishment and continued existence of Mammoth School became apparent long ago. Because the park was federal, it could get no help from either

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<sup>9</sup>. William Wright to the Honorable Burton K. Wheeler, January 13, 1939, in box MSC-71, file “School Legislative Efforts 1936 to Early 1941,” YNP Archives; and “Memorandum for Mr. Emmert, Regarding School Facilities,” November 29, 1938, in same file.

<sup>10</sup>. Wright to Wheeler, January 13, 1939... YNP Archives. See also “Yellowstone Park without Schools,” *Kemmerer (Wyoming) Gazette*, January 27, 1939, clipping in box MSC-71, file “School Legislative Efforts 1936 to Early 1941,” YNP Archives; and “Memorandum for Mr. Emmert, Regarding School Facilities,” November 29, 1938, in same file. The park superintendent expounded on the problems with sending Mammoth students to Gardiner in 1937: “The nearest state or county school available to residents of Yellowstone National Park is at Gardiner, Montana, which is located across the Wyoming state line, or a distance of about 5 miles from Mammoth. The children would have to be transported by truck or bus in order to attend the Gardiner school. The tuition charge is \$8.00 per month or \$72.00 per year per pupil. In this connection we have found it impracticable to send our children to the Gardiner schools. Gardiner is a small community with about 750 population, and their school is so overcrowded now that they would be unable to absorb 29 or 30 additional pupils. If such an arrangement were possible the children would have to be away from home the greater part of each day, would be required to carry lunches, and transportation would have to be provided. In addition such an arrangement would undoubtedly leave some children without schooling at all, since some of the families with several children of school age would be unable financially to pay the required monthly tuition for each child.” Edmund B. Rogers to Director, National Park Service, February 18, 1937, in box MSC-71, file “School Legislative Efforts 1936 to early 1941,” YNP Archives.

Wyoming or Montana to pay for schooling of its students, because it fell under neither state's school laws. With the federal government providing no provisions to correct this problem, it was cheaper for the community of Mammoth to hire teachers and establish its own school rather than to require parents pay for transportation and tuition to the primitive and crowded grade school at Gardiner (that would have left some children unschooled due to parents' inability to pay). And the problem of high school was ever present. Montana insisted upon receipt of its (tuition) monies whenever Mammoth (Wyoming) students were sent to Gardiner for school. The NPS was additionally faced in that period with paying for transporting its students en masse to Gardiner. A cheaper solution was to continue maintaining a grade school at Mammoth, the very program that had been in effect since at least 1884.

Unfortunately no help from Senator Burton Wheeler or anyone else was forthcoming for Mammoth, so the school continued to "limp along" for nine more years. Following World War II, "there was almost continuous agitation for government support of the school." This finally resulted in passage of the Yellowstone Park School Bill, Public Law 604, which was introduced by Congressman Wesley A. D'Ewart of Montana and heavily promoted within the park by park naturalists David DeLancey Condon and W. Verde Watson. Signed into law June 7, 1948, the law provided that the Secretary of the Interior could provide funds from the revenues received from visitors to Yellowstone National Park for the education of children living at or near the Park upon the "real property" of the United States.<sup>11</sup>

After passage of this legislation, discussions between the town of Gardiner and the National Park Service continued as to the education of children within the park. The Gardiner community decided that it wanted all Park children to attend school in Gardiner, probably so that

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<sup>11</sup>. Haines, untitled history of Yellowstone Park School, from "Park Historian's office, August 19, 1964.

it could get the tuition money, whether from Mammoth parents or from the newly empowered federal government. But most park residents wanted to keep their students within the park and to build a real school for grades one through eight. Mammoth residents expressed their concerns as being that they were unable to participate in school board elections at Gardiner, unable to have input in the ways in which their children were educated, unable to elect their own representatives to a local school board, and were ill served in a discrepancy of educational expectations between the people of Gardiner and the people of Mammoth.<sup>12</sup>

Further attempts were made to obtain money from sources other than the NPS. Park officials contacted the Department of Education to see whether “874” funds (federal impact monies) were available for the school, but the answer was “no” because 1) the Mammoth School already received federal money and thus did not qualify for additional funds and 2) the “874” funds were distributed by the states and neither state was willing to give Mammoth School any part of its funds.<sup>13</sup>

After much negotiation in the late 1950s, Park superintendent Lon Garrison convinced the NPS regional director that a school for grades one through six should be constructed within the Park. Thus, in 1962 as a part of the “Mission 66” expansion program, workmen began construction on the present Yellowstone Park School. The original plans called for a building with four classrooms. That was modified to five rooms, one of which was to become a library. Later it was determined that the community needed a “community” room for special functions, so a gymnasium was added to the original construction plans. In the 1970s, when enrollment of the school increased to around seventy students, it was decided to erect an addition onto the front of the gym for additional classroom space, supply storage, and a principal’s office. A few years

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<sup>12</sup>. Whitman, “Yellowstone National Park School,” p. [2].

<sup>13</sup>. Whitman, “Yellowstone National Park School,” p. [2].



later, another addition was placed on the rear of the gymnasium in order to obtain additional storage space.<sup>14</sup> This author has found no original drawings or plans for this (the present) building extant in the Yellowstone Research Library or Yellowstone Archives.

John Whitman arrived in 1963 to assume the duties of teacher and school principal for the school year of 1963-64, and he stayed for forty years, retiring after the school year of 2002-2003. David Stringfield took over the principal's duties the following year, and he finished out the school's term through 2006-2007, when it became apparent that the NPS would close the Mammoth School. Matt Holshouser served as principal during the final school year, 2007-2008.<sup>15</sup>

During John Whitman's tenure, the School Board maintained a contract with the NPS to operate the school at Mammoth. The teachers served all children within the park, including those living at outlying locations. When children lived at outlying locations, the school provided lesson plans, books, A-V materials, and other educational supplies so that parents could "home school" their children. When roads were cleared of snow, those parents transported, as they were able, their children to Mammoth so that they could participate in a regular school environment.<sup>16</sup>

Also during John Whitman's tenure, all school districts surrounding the Park were entitled to participate in the education of children living within the Park. Children whose parents were stationed at West Yellowstone, North Entrance, Northeast Entrance, East Entrance, South Entrance, Madison, Tower, Canyon, Lake, Norris, Grant, and Old Faithful all had the option of sending their children to the closest school with the NPS providing that school with additional funds for education. Gardiner, Montana usually received the greatest amount of money because

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<sup>14</sup>. Whitman, "Yellowstone National Park School," p. [2].

<sup>15</sup>. Author's interviews with John Whitman and David Stringfield, various.

<sup>16</sup>. Whitman, "Yellowstone National Park School," p. [3].

of high school students (grades seven through twelve) who lived at Park headquarters at Mammoth. Each school district had a contract with the National Park Service. Each year the elected School Board at Mammoth submitted a proposed budget to the superintendent of the park. The NPS Maintenance Division would also submit a requested budget to the superintendent indicating the amount of money it needed to maintain the school building and school grounds. Both the building and the grounds have continuously been used by a variety of community organizations and individuals during the summer. Other than for determining the amount needed to successfully operate the school, the School Board has had no other control over monies requested through Public Law 604.<sup>17</sup>

Closure of the Mammoth School occurred at the end of school year 2007-2008. Since that time, the building has functioned as the “Mammoth Community Center.”

Kent Watson of Missoula, Montana to Lee Whittlesey, anecdotal, May 30, 2008—Kent attended grade school at MHS credit union from Fall of 1945 (second grade) through seventh grade (1950-51), his last year at MHS, when he went to Gardiner for grades 8-10. He says they moved high schoolers (grades 9-12) from MHS to Gardiner in 1949-50 (estimate) because the new Gardiner High School was just built. He had Alberta Stebbins as teacher for second, third, and fourth grades (Walt Stebbins’s wife).

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<sup>17</sup>. Whitman, “Yellowstone National Park School,” p. [3].