

# YELLOWSTONE SCIENCE

volume 12 • number 2 • spring 2004



## Old Faithful Inn Centennial

Old Faithful Inn: A Beloved Landmark

Robert C. Reamer's Yellowstone Architecture

Firestorm over the Inn

*100 Years*



The Old Faithful Inn and Geyser, depicted here in an extremely rare Manz postcard, circa 1908–15.

# The View from the Mezzanine

*“In Old Faithful Inn and in the camps along the rivers and valleys, awhile mortals sleep, the geysers stand vigil, giving to Yellowstone the dramatic touch that breathes, and arouses emotions and imaginings that linger in the memories of a lifetime.”*

—Joe Mitchell Chapple,  
from *A’Top O’ The World*, 1922

This year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Old Faithful Inn. To commemorate this milestone, this issue of *Yellowstone Science* features an excerpt from Karen Reinhart and Jeff Henry’s new book, *Old Faithful Inn: Crown Jewel of National Park Lodges*. Their efforts offer new insights into the physical structure of the building, its construction and evolution over time, and the perspective of those that have worked at or visited the inn throughout its first 100 years. One of these people is Ruth Quinn. Each day every summer since 1995, Ruth provides public tours of the inn, sharing her knowledge and love of this National Historic Landmark. As an inn scholar, she examines, in these pages, the life and work of its creator, architect Robert C. Reamer, revealing his many contributions to Yellowstone and his lasting influence on rustic architecture.

By any measure, the Old Faithful Inn is an extraordinary structure. It is also a repository of memories for many that have walked through its massive red doors over the past century. Oddly enough, I don’t recall seeing the inn on my first visit to Old Faithful in 1965. The image of a black bear wandering by our campsite in what is now the east parking lot, and our family’s chaotic retreat into our travel trailer with chicken on the grill in hand, was, I’m afraid, about as much as this seven-year-old boy’s imagination could retain.

When I returned as a college student, 12 years later, I did notice the remarkable building that, at the same time, both blends in with and helps define the landscape in which it is set. My view was primarily of the back side of the inn, where as a Yellowstone Park Company employee, I delivered dirty linens to the laundry room each day. In the evenings, however, I often retreated to the second floor mezzanine to write letters home—a welcome respite from the noisy, rambunctious, but good fun life in a summer dorm. It was here where I saw then President Carter on his visit to Yellowstone and made my way through a crowded lobby to shake his hand. It was here I came as a young ranger and, at the request of the inn manager, crawled out on the metal catwalk to reset the time and re-start the great clock that graces the stone fireplace. It was here, years later, in one of the Old House rooms, where I proposed to my wife and where we celebrate anniversaries still today.

With this issue, and in the commemorative events of this summer, we invite you to celebrate the anniversary of this grand old place with us. But when the crowds have gone and the day has passed, take some time to sit in the mezzanine, reflect on the memories of the past, and build a few of your own.

*Rogan Anderson*

# YELLOWSTONE SCIENCE

a quarterly devoted to  
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on the cover:

The Old Faithful Inn and Geyser,  
circa 1922. Courtesy Yellowstone  
Archives, YELL 129062.



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM, F.J. HAYNES COLLECTION

A Robert Reamer pencil drawing, proposed alterations of Old Faithful Inn, circa 1920.

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The man who designed and built the Old Faithful Inn and other Yellowstone buildings revolutionized architecture in national parks.

*Ruth Quinn*

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# NEWS & NOTES



NPS

## Rare Combination of Events Cause Bison Deaths

In a very rare event, a combination of concentrated toxic gases (hydrogen sulfide and carbon dioxide) and unusually cold, dense air appears to be the most probable cause of death for five bison found at Norris Geyser Basin by Bear Management Office (BMO) staff on March 10, 2004. Personnel noticed the animals while doing routine research in the area. The bison, estimated to have been dead for approximately a week, were found lying on their sides, with their feet perpendicular to their bodies. The unusual position of the carcasses indicated that the bison died very rapidly, as a group.

It seems likely that the bison (two adults, two calves, one yearling) were grazing and resting in a snow-free ground depression along the Gibbon River near multiple geothermal gas vents in the Norris area; they died downstream and downhill from gas vents along both sides of the river. Areas with multiple gas vents are typically associated with thermally-baked ground, minimal vegetation, and sulfur deposits. Cold, still air from a cold front that passed through the area around March 1 probably caused the geyser basin's steam and toxic gases to remain close to the ground, overwhelming the animals.

In the investigation following the deaths, Yellowstone Center for Resources geology staff measured hydrogen sulfide gas ( $H_2S$ ) in some vents exceeding 200 parts per million (ppm), far above safe limits for humans or animals. The gas is classified as a chemical asphyxiant and is better known as "rotten egg" gas because of the smell. Since it is heavier than air, on an unusually cold, still night, it could

concentrate and overwhelm animals breathing it. Humans, who can easily detect the smell of the gas at the minute level of 1 ppm, are able to escape an area well before it reaches a toxic level. Generally, the fairly constant winds in the Yellowstone area dilute and disperse gases so that it would be almost unheard of for a park visitor to be overcome by toxic fumes as the bison were.

Although rare, incidents such as this have occurred previously in the park. In 1889, several dead animals (six bears, one elk, some squirrels, pikas and other small animals and insects) were found by geologist Walter Weed in an area known as Death Gulch in the upper Lamar River valley. A second geologist, T.A. Jaggar, visited the area in 1897 and noted seven dead bears. A cursory survey of Yellowstone Research Library data indicates that many other people have recognized the dangers of toxic gases within Yellowstone.

In an ongoing effort to learn more about the gases in the Norris Geyser Basin area, park staff plan to continue taking random air and vent samples of gases. For more information, go to [www.nps.gov/yell/nature/geology/reports/norrisbison.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/yell/nature/geology/reports/norrisbison.pdf).

## Bison Released from Stephens Creek Capture Facility

On Tuesday, April 6, 2004, 198 bison that were being held at the Stephens Creek facility along the park's northern boundary were released back into the park. Factors in the timing of the release included the melting of snow cover, which exposed residual forage, sufficient amounts of new forage, and the impending birth of calves.

Upon release, all 198 bison moved rapidly in a southern direction toward the park's interior ranges. The group will be closely monitored during their reacclimation process.

In 2004, operations as part of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) resulted in the capture of 464 bison. Of those captured, 198 bison tested seronegative and were held at the Stephens Creek facility until their release; 1 adult bull bison tested seronegative and was released after testing earlier this spring; 207 bison tested positive for exposure to brucellosis and were transported to slaughter; 1 bison died while awaiting transport to slaughter; and 57 were taken to slaughter without being tested. One adult



S&P

Bison near the Boiling River, after being released from the Stephens Creek facility.

bull bison was lethally removed.

The IBMP was signed in December 2000 by the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Park Service; the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service; and the State of Montana's Departments of Livestock and Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Goals under the IBMP are to preserve a viable, wild population of Yellowstone bison; reduce the risk of transmission of brucellosis from bison to cattle, maintain the brucellosis class-free status for the state of Montana; and protect human life and private property.

Under the IBMP, a variety of methods are used along the north and west boundaries of the park to manage the distribution of bison and to maintain separation of bison and cattle on public and private lands. The IBMP also allows for some bison to remain on certain public lands adjacent to the park where cattle are not grazed.

In the first phase of management, bison are hazed when they approach the north boundary to keep them inside the park. Hazing has occurred over the past several weeks on numerous occasions and will remain the first line of management when feasible. However, if attempts at hazing become ineffective and unsafe, capture operations may again be necessary.

### West Entrance Environmental Assessment FONSI Signed

On March 19, 2004, Intermountain Regional Director Steve Martin signed and approved the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)/Decision Notice for the *West Entrance Project Environmental Assessment (EA)*. The EA and FONSI are posted on the Internet at [www.nps.gov/yell/technical/planning](http://www.nps.gov/yell/technical/planning).

The NPS plans to reconstruct the

West Entrance station as outlined in the EA's preferred alternative. It will construct a new entrance 800 feet further inside the park and expand the visitor contact portion of the Chamber of Commerce building in nearby West Yellowstone, Montana.

The new entrance will feature an additional traffic lane (which would also be an express/employee lane), four new kiosks, a new administrative building for entrance station staff, and improved ventilation systems for all buildings. The existing canopy will be moved, reassembled, and remodeled on the new site. The Chamber of Commerce expansion will include enlarged visitor service areas, a 50-person auditorium/meeting room, office space for NPS interpretive staff, and additional public restrooms. Construction may begin as early as late 2004.

### Natural Resource Awards

#### Bruce Sefton wins maintenance award

Lake District Maintenance Supervisor Bruce Sefton has been named the winner of the Director's Award for Excellence in Natural Resource Stewardship through Maintenance for 2003. Bruce was nominated for the award by YCR's Natural Resources Branch Chief Tom Olliff and Supervisory Fisheries Biologist Todd Koel because throughout his 15-year tenure as the Lake District Maintenance Supervisor, he has demonstrated a remarkable commitment to protecting resources, supporting



Bruce Sefton received the Director's Award for Excellence in Natural Resource Stewardship through Maintenance.

resource stewardship programs, and working across division lines to ensure that the park's resource stewardship mission is achieved.

#### Dr. David Mech wins research award

Dr. L. David Mech, Senior Scientist for the U.S. Geological Survey, was awarded the 2003 Director's Award for Natural Resource Research, after being nominated by YCR's Doug Smith and Tom Olliff. Dr. Mech, who is based out of the University of Minnesota, recently capped a 40-year career with the 2003 publication of the "new wolf bible," *Wolves: Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation*. He is the acknowledged leader of the worldwide wolf scientific community, and almost single-handedly blazed the way for modern-day wolf research. Many of the contemporary ideas in the wolf scientific literature can be traced back to his thinking and concepts.

The awards were presented at the annual meeting of the NPS's Natural Resource Advisory Group, which provides feedback on natural resource issues to Mike Soukup, Associate Director for Natural Resources Stewardship and Science.

YS



# Old Faithful Inn

## Centennial of a Beloved Landmark

*Karen Wildung Reinhart*



*“Suddenly...sitting in a pool of light was the most beautiful object I had ever seen in my life—the Inn. Oh my God, my heart stopped. Upon entering the Inn I can remember going round and round as I looked up and up and up...I swear it was the biggest and most beautiful building I had ever seen.”*

*—Cathy Baker Dorn, 1970,  
Old Faithful Inn employee*

MILLIONS OF PEOPLE have walked into the lobby of the historic Old Faithful Inn over the past 100 years. Their heads tilt back as eyes look up and up and up—in an instant they are smitten with the creative grandeur of the lodge. Wonder and awe of how such a distinctive structure was built—in the wondrous setting of Yellowstone National Park—may creep into their minds.

Behind all human-made objects of beauty lie stories of creative inspiration, hard work, and appreciation. With the driving force of the railroad and concessioner entrepreneurs, the leadership of expert architect and crew, and the skilled employees that make it all possible, the inn has responded to the needs of the Yellowstone visitor. It has expanded and adapted, but has remained the framework for countless impressions, stories, and adventures. The Old Faithful Inn has charmed a multitude of lives and is unforgettable to nearly all who walked through its massive red doors.



This article is excerpted from the book *Old Faithful Inn: Crown Jewel of National Park Lodges*, copyright © 2004 by Karen Wildung Reinhart and Jeff Henry. The authors have over 40 years' cumulative experience in Yellowstone National Park.

Since the opening of the Old Faithful Inn in 1904, this hostelry of simple luxury has stood the test of time in a land of extremes: high altitude heat, cold, snow, and wintry winds have relentlessly assaulted its towering presence. Further challenged by its location on the enchanted ground of the Upper Geyser Basin, the inn has survived the effects of earthquakes, wildfire, and the homage of millions of visitors.

### The Child and Reamer Team

The story of the Old Faithful Inn begins more than 100 years ago. Visitor tours around the turn of the nineteenth century proceeded according to the location of hotels and lunch stations throughout the park; stagecoaches could only travel limited distances per day. Tourists visited the renowned Upper

**“Alone, Child lacked funds to build the long-awaited hotel, but...he thought it prudent to build a hotel near Old Faithful Geyser before his competitors could capitalize on a similar venture.”**

Geyser Basin only on a half-day basis—not nearly enough time to stroll casually through the colorful geyser basin, peer into the seemingly endless blue pools, and feel the famous power of Old Faithful Geyser. Hence, park visitors frequently complained about their rigid touring schedule.

Early park regulations disallowed building any structure within one-quarter mile of a natural object of interest. Builders of the rickety predecessors of the inn blatantly ignored this rule. But in 1894, when managers changed the rule to

one-eighth of a mile, the prospect of building a legitimate hotel near the Upper Geyser Basin became more appealing to investors. Even so, it would be another decade before the inn offered its upscale services to park visitors.

The Northern Pacific Railroad had long been involved in the development of Yellowstone National Park's transportation and hotel industries, though before the time of the inn it was a reluctant participant in the less profitable hotel business. The railroad sold its interests in the Yellowstone Park Association in 1901 to three men, in part to avoid building a hotel in the Upper Geyser Basin. After one year, only one of these men, Harry W. Child, retained stock. Alone, Child lacked funds to build the long-awaited hotel, but as president of the Yellowstone Park Association (and the Yellowstone Park Transportation Company), he thought it prudent to build a hotel near

Old Faithful Geyser before his competitors could capitalize on a similar venture. He managed to obtain financial backing from the Northern Pacific Railroad, and the reluctant railroad found itself back in the thick of things. After 21 years of Upper Geyser Basin hotels of questionable quality, railroad money finally made a distinctive and commodious hotel possible.

Harry Child needed to find someone to help make his dreams come true in Yellowstone. In San Diego, California, he discovered the talents of Robert Chambers Reamer, who was employed at an architectural firm there. Reamer was 29 years old when Child brought him to the park to design the railroad station near the park's North Entrance at Gardiner, Montana, and an inn at the Upper Geyser Basin.

Before construction of the hotel could begin, builders needed timber and supplies on the site. In 1901, the Department of the Interior granted Child permission to harvest local building materials for construction of a new hotel. In early December 1902, Child communicated to Northern Pacific officials his intention to haul lumber by horse-drawn sledge over snow to the Upper Geyser Basin—an experiment he hoped would prove



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 147897

The Shack Hotel, shown in 1887, was built in 1885 by the Yellowstone Park Improvement Company within one-quarter mile of Old Faithful Geyser, which was prohibited. In 1894 the Hayes Act decreased the building limit to one-eighth of a mile. The Shack burned down in 1894 and was replaced by a ramshackle facility, but became the site of the inn in 1903–04.



far-sighted; heavily loaded wagons could mire in spring muck until late June, stalling progress on the new hotel.

Reamer labeled his architectural drawings “Old Faithful Tavern,” though even during the building phase locals branded the hotel the “Old Faithful Inn.” On May 28, 1903, the Department of the Interior approved Reamer’s blueprints.

Even before Reamer’s blueprints received the green light, Child borrowed money for the project. Yellowstone Park Association records indicate that Child secured a \$25,000 loan on March 18, 1903, from the Northern Pacific Railroad, for the Old Faithful Inn and for improvements on the Lake Hotel. Less than two months later, he borrowed \$50,000 more. These loans propelled his hotel projects forward—probably allowing the purchase of preliminary supplies—but by October 6, 1903, Child procured another \$50,000 loan from the railroad. The railroad would eventually loan Child a total of \$200,000 for both projects.

## Construction Begins

Two clues have suggested where Child’s men cut the new hotel’s timber. The only timber harvest noted by the army stationed in the Upper Geyser Basin was on June 8, 1903: “patrolled south of station where timber is being cut for new hotel[,] distance about 8 miles.” Lodgepole pine for the inn was also harvested from forests next to the Mesa Pit Road above the Firehole Cascades north of Old Faithful. Construction reportedly began shortly thereafter on June 12.

Perhaps the project had developed enough momentum to begin local timber harvest before June 8. Reamer wrote to a client a few years later: “Any logs that you wish to have the bark on, cut before the sap begins to rise.” To satisfy Reamer’s first-floor requirements for unpeeled logs, perhaps workers did just that. Winter log-gathering over snowy frozen ground would have fit Child’s scheme of “making hay while the skies snowed,” and the logs would have undoubtedly suffered less from scrapes. Once the tree’s life force had risen—about

mid-May—greater care would have been necessary to protect the softer, sap-filled logs from scarring. Men most likely hand-carried the logs to the waiting wagons during June harvest rather than skidding them with horses.

Reamer used huge volcanic rocks quarried from rhyolite cliffs near Black Sand Basin to lend basal support to the Old Faithful Inn. After the army located suitable rock for the new hotel, they inspected the cutting work: “mounted patrol to Black Sand Basin to where masons are cutting rock.” An igneous rock, rhyolite is a relic of the latest cataclysmic volcanic event in Yellowstone country. Just as Yellowstone National Park’s awe-inspiring thermal oddities are its reason for existence, the historic inn too, is anchored by native volcanic boulders, giving visitors a feeling of its profound sense of place.

After laying the foundation, workmen probably fashioned the massive rock fireplace and kitchen next, probably in summer 1903; this would have provided workers with fireplaces for cooking, warmth, and a blacksmith’s forge. Perhaps the kitchen stove served carpenters warm nails to keep frostbite at bay, a clever strategy documented seven winters later during the building of the Canyon Hotel. Even so, an on-site nurse thawed and doctored frostbitten digits during the Canyon Hotel project, evidence of the men’s trials with disagreeable weather. The conveniences of electricity, steam heat, and flush toilets were probably available to inn workers by mid to late winter.

Reamer used native rock and trees to seat the Old Faithful Inn in its Yellowstone environment, but imported other building materials to the job site. Plumbing, electrical, and heating system parts and supplies, cedar and redwood shingles, nails and spikes, window glass, furniture, and more traveled from both the east and west coasts before final incorporation into the inn. Supplies and food for workers and horses were also hauled many miles.

The need for some of these materials and supplies during winter necessitated arduous oversnow travel. Horse teams, drivers, and heavy freight-bearing sleighs delivered goods from



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 36626

The history of this photo is unknown, but perhaps it is the beginning of the building of the Old Faithful Inn.



SPR

The rock foundation of the inn is believed to have been quarried from cliffs near Black Sand Basin.

the railroad station in Gardiner, Montana, to the Upper Geyser Basin. Each journey by supply-loaded freighter and team took six days round trip. Seven years later, it took 50 drivers and 200 horses to transport one railroad car's goods to the Canyon Hotel building site.

The Old Faithful Inn was further along that winter than some historians have previously thought. A photo of the inn's construction—one of only two—clearly shows the inn's progress as quite advanced in 1903. The framed-up roof and walls tower above the main floor's log construction. There is a revealing lack of snow, indicating a photograph taken in late summer or early fall. The bulk of the structural work was apparently complete before grueling winter weather set in.

Though much of the remaining work was indoors, workers still had to contend with winter's inconveniences. Interior finish work, including electrical, plumbing, and fancy wood and ironwork, would have kept Reamer's team and contractors busy during winter. In early January, plumber E.C. Culley left Livingston, Montana, for the Upper Geyser Basin to complete his contract on the new hotel.

A winter visitor indicated that the inn's progress was advanced less than a month later:

*"The new hotel at the Upper Geyser basin is a marvel of beauty and comfort... Guests will be as comfortably located there as in the finest of the modern hotels in New York... The building will be completed in about thirty days... The kitchen is commodious and furnished with every modern contrivance known to the culinary art."*

He also described in detail the inn's lobby and dining room.

Reamer and later architects and managers did not insulate the inn, probably because it was never intended to be open during the winter. Even though the building was roughed-in, it would have been a cold workplace in winter's deep sleep. Frigid mornings and biting wind chills assaulted the titanic building, and a mammoth amount of cordwood must have been offered the "fireplace gods." Winter on Yellowstone's volcanic plateau is not kind; 10 feet of snow can accumulate and drift, burying familiar landmarks. Nighttime temperatures can plummet to hazardous lows. Brutal wind chills can further hinder human endeavors. Upper Basin Station weather records of the winter 1903–04 document -20° Fahrenheit, though it is uncertain whether these records are minimum

temperatures. Between 1904 and 1960, the Old Faithful area averaged about 17 inches in snow depth and 17° Fahrenheit in December. The record low during those winters was a sobering -50° Fahrenheit.

Under the creative genius of architect Reamer, approximately 45 hardy artisans of log, stone, and iron erected perhaps this country's most famous western lodge. According to some authorities, some of the workers may have been "on loan" from the railroad, that had a vested interest in the inn's timely completion.

A circle of seasons passed while architect, builders, and contractors worked their magic on the inn. Why urge architect, journeymen, carpenters, blacksmiths, and stone masons to wield their tools—pencil, axe, adz, hammer, saw, anvil, and drawknife—in the cold of winter? According to inn historians Susan Scofield and Jeremy Schmidt, time was of the essence for businessman Child and his railroad backers. Their goal was for the Old Faithful Inn to welcome paying customers that rode the rails to Yellowstone by June of 1904. Perhaps local workers were also eager to have otherwise scarce winter work.

One thing is certain. These men were exceptional in their craft and their tolerance of difficult working conditions. A 1973 National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form noted:

*"Men of their stamp, possessing mastery of ax, adz and drawknife, independent and accustomed by their lifestyle to free use of their own initiative, can still be found today—but almost certainly not in sufficient numbers to so quickly build a structure of such dimensions and complexity... despite snow and cold."*



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 40319

Construction of the inn continued all through the long, cold winter of 1903–04.



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 18746

The only known photo of the inn's construction crew. These hardy men worked June 12, 1903, through June 1, 1904.

The Old Faithful Inn is certainly one of the West's most important icons of park architecture, yet scant clues have been unearthed thus far about its craftsmen. (Blacksmith George W. Colpitts is the exception; see below.) Bernard O. "Pete" Hallin, originally from Spokane, Washington, worked as a carpenter on the inn during its construction. Ten years later, he supervised the construction of the inn's East Wing for the Yellowstone Park Company. Thomas J. and Thomas Clyde Huntsman, father and son carpenters from Missouri, also labored on the inn.

Historians discovered other workers' names in an unusual way. Apparently, on April 23, 1904, a workman tucked a note inside the finial ball of one of the inn's flagpoles. Fifty years later, it was found. Four workmen's names (H. Butler, C. Has-

**"remarks—snowed like hell. Drank 4 quarts of booze. Can see about 118 poles."**

leman, W. High, and F. Carmody) were scribbled in pencil on a small piece of paper along with: "remarks—snowed like hell. Drank 4 quarts of booze. Can see about 118 poles." Though inn builders accomplished a great deal in a short time, they apparently did take time off.

Some of the workers also made time for clandestine activities. Betty Jane Child recalled a dinner conversation with Bernard "Pete" Hallin in the 1950s. She remembered Pete telling the following unsubstantiated story:

*"The [builders] working on the Inn in the winter of 1904 would supplement their income by killing elk and buffalo—which was not allowed—and hide the hides in the far reaches of the Inn until they could get out to Mammoth and sell [them]. This was a good source of additional income to many of the workers."*

Clues in other places have also revealed who some of these men were. Engraved into the concrete patio under an "Old House" (the local name for the original 1904 part of the inn) window are the initials "MLG" and the date "Oct. 6, 1903," a lasting testimony to one builder of the inn. "Melvin Campbell" carved his name on a wall in 1903. A scrapbook margin identifies a "McManis" as a stone mason for the inn's fireplace. During the fall of 2000, a workman's signature was found on one of the inn's uppermost window frames. It was written in thick pencil—perhaps a carpenter's pencil—with the name "Albert Rock or Roch[e]" and the date May 7, 1904.

YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES



The inn in 1912. Here you can see the naval searchlights used to illuminate Old Faithful Geyser (see page 45). There were originally eight flags: the U.S. flag; the state flags of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming; two that read "Upper Geyser Basin"; and two that read "Old Faithful Inn." Two poles were removed around 1927, and another around 1954. Today there are five.

Historians and fans of the Old Faithful Inn hope that more accounts of these skilled men will emerge from the “woodwork,” giving people a better sense of its story. Perhaps the mystery keeps the magic of the inn alive and well. The Old Faithful Inn captures the imagination of the park visitor like no other building in Yellowstone National Park and, for some, perhaps the entire park system.

Builders of the inn used hand tools but also employed modern power tools of the day, such as power saws and lifts. The signatures of 100-year-old tools mark the passage

of time—still visible on the inn’s walls. A steam-powered generator probably provided electricity for these tools and later supplied heat and hot water for inn guests. These early generators were no doubt fueled by indigenous lodgepole pine (*Pinus contortus*).

Reamer also used lodgepole pine, the predominant tree species of Yellowstone. Throughout the inn, lodgepole pine logs serve as beams, rafters, railings, posts, balconies, balustrades, staircases, and decorative supports. The ceiling was veneered with pine slab wood—perhaps the leftover slivers from the inn’s flat sawn wall logs. A *Haynes Guide* noted “there are over ten thousand logs in its lower story.”

The Old Faithful Inn has been called the “world’s largest log structure.” Indeed, the whole massive structure appears to be constructed entirely of log, lending support to the above claim. However, to dispel that myth, only the first floor of the Old House was constructed of load-bearing unhewn logs. The first floor is eleven logs high; each log was scribe-fitted and saddle-notched, requiring practiced and patient workmanship. Workmen tucked “oakum,” an oily, hemp rope between the logs to serve as chink, chasing away drafts and improving privacy.

The second and third floors were traditional wood frame—a construction scheme much lighter in weight than log. Both floors were cantilevered two feet beyond the first floor’s perimeter, a design that would have been impossible with the continued use of log walls. Reamer kept to his vision of a log-like building by sheathing the two upper floors’ exterior

“...construction costs for the Old Faithful Inn totalled only about \$140,000—an absurdly low sum in today’s world, especially considering the pleasure and comfort that it has afforded so many visitors and guests.”

walls in half-log and cedar shingles respectively. The shingles are 6 inches wide by 36 inches long. The lower two courses, laid out in a diagonally-carved chevron pattern, decorated the windows’ top edge and the second level’s bottom edge with a “fringe” of craftsmanship. This attention to detail was echoed handsomely within.

With the exception of the north wall’s large plate glass windows, the Old Faithful Inn’s windows and their panes vary whimsically in size and shape. Pane shapes creatively bounce among diamonds, squares, and rectangles, and emphasize Reamer’s supposed desire to harmonize with nature’s lack of geometric symmetry. Inn tour guides have theorized that the assorted window sizes and shapes admit light into the lobby like “light through a forest canopy.”

The inn also deviates from the human tendency toward visual balance—dormer placement on the great sloping roof is of an unbalanced nature. Historians and architects don’t know the “why” of the tale but know that the inn’s builders followed different specifications than those on Reamer’s original blueprint. His original drawing illustrated four small dormers flanking the row of windows to the east and two on the west. Their final placement is quite different from his blueprint, perhaps due to lighting and/or stair and landing requirements within.

Of greatest curiosity are the two dormers on the sloping roof just above the third floor. They give the impression of functionality, but do not admit light into the lobby and were apparently built over the finished roof as mere decoration. The remaining windows and dormers above the third floor do not open up into guest rooms either, but they do send soft shafts of sunlight to the cavernous space below. Like any creative process, the Old Faithful Inn evolved as its building progressed. Reamer’s genius logically unfolded with it.

Early hand-colored Haynes postcards indicate that the inn boasted a decidedly red roof. The inn’s creators originally coated the roof’s shingles with a red mineral paint, believed to hinder flammability—a practice that continued through 1932.



This rare H.H. Tammen Co. postcard shows the inn’s original red roof shingles, which were painted to hinder flammability.

COURTESY RUTH QUINN



Burled pine branches and electric candlestick lights, dappled by sunlight filtered through the windows, help to create the woody atmosphere of the inn.

## Finishing Touches

Reamer sketched instructions on a shingle and gave directions to his crew to find particular and peculiarly shaped pairs of pine branches. Subsequently, they searched for crooked limbs of lodgepole pine wherever they could find them. Reamer and his team of workers matched up sets of similar bends and twists to create the lobby's picturesque pseudo-supports, giving the lobby its woody atmosphere. These contorted branches may have grown in response to insect and disease invasion (possibly caused by wounds inflicted by neighboring trees or wandering wildlife), or perhaps, due to heavy snowfall.

Reamer awarded the contract for the inn's fancy wrought ironwork to George Wellington Colpitts in December 1903. Born in New Brunswick, Canada, in 1855, Colpitts became a U.S. citizen in 1880, moved to Billings, Montana, and learned the blacksmith trade there. The U.S. Army hired him as a blacksmith in 1886. He worked at Yellowstone Park Headquarters at Mammoth Hot Springs.

Colpitts hammered out the inn's ironwork in his Livingston, Montana, shop. But the Old Faithful Inn iron project was huge, prompting him to open a second shop in Livingston. He hired two additional men and also used space in a Gardiner blacksmith shop. Colpitts owned a traveling forge and probably did some of his ironwork on location.

In addition to forging the ironwork for the lobby's large clock, Colpitts also fashioned four sets of fireplace andirons,

screens, tongs and pokers, and the popcorn popper. He hammered out the front door and dining room hardware, chandelier, porch ceiling lamps, electric candlestick lights that encircled log posts and illuminated guest rooms, guest door numbers, hinges, knobs, and mortise locks, as well as the hefty wrought iron band that wraps the clerk's counter. Colpitts's iron art is a legacy that lives on today, pleasing the public as it did in yesteryear.

Blacksmiths, sawyers, and carpenters did much of the work on location—a practical and cost effective approach to the isolated project. Amazingly, construction costs for the Old Faithful Inn totalled only about



The warmth of the fireplace makes the huge lobby more friendly, and the clock is a work of art in itself.

\$140,000—an absurdly low sum in today’s world, especially considering the pleasure and comfort that it has afforded so many visitors and guests.

The Arts and Crafts Movement, popular in America at the time, influenced the choice of floor coverings and Mission Style furniture for the unpretentious Old Faithful Inn, providing comfort without excessive ornamentation. Child’s wife Adelaide reportedly oversaw the procurement of furniture, rugs, and curtains. The Yellowstone Park Company spent \$25,000 to furnish the inn’s lobby, balconies, porch, and original 140 rooms.

The Old Faithful Inn’s furnishings had already bounced by rail to Gardiner from lands afar. A newspaper article of mid-May revealed: “The hotel at Mammoth Hot Springs is filled with furniture, to be placed in the new hotel at Upper Geyser Basin.” Ten days later, the newspaper reported: “Supplies for the various hotels have been freighted...through bad roads, snow drifts and under the most difficult of conditions. The furniture for the Old Faithful Inn...is not yet completely installed.”

Adelaide Child outfitted the inn’s lobby and balconies with cushioned davenports, settees, armchairs, and rockers, probably made from oak and/or hickory. Substantial leather-topped wooden tables complimented the seating arrangements. Early photos show wicker chairs, rockers, and round wooden tables on the porch and veranda, with spittoons conveniently placed for gentlemen. Guest rooms boasted an iron bedstead, wood-framed mirror, wooden table, chest of drawers, woven chairs, and wash stand.

Some of the original Mission Style pieces from 1904 still grace the Old Faithful Inn. A few heavy oak wooden-armed davenports and chairs in the lobby are original to the inn. The second floor mezzanine’s green octagonal tables originally occupied the upper floor bedrooms but now hold guests’ beverages. Today, a few original drop-front chests of drawers furnish Old House rooms. Refinished versions are used in the gift shop for display. Some of the original wash stands, manufactured by Charles Limbert of Grand Rapids, Michigan, still adorn guest rooms in the Old House. The Old Hickory Chair



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES: YELL 133521

The guest rooms had a rustic coziness.



PUBLISHED BY THE ACHESON PHOTO CO., CHICAGO. RUTH QUINN

The second floor veranda’s rocking chairs and round tables. The deciduous trees were introduced by artists.



COURTESY RUTH QUINN

The volcanic stone “bubbler” (drinking fountain), on the left.

Company of Indiana crafted the original plaited dining room chairs, which are still in use. Chair seats and backs have been rewoven as needed.

Early postcard images of the second floor balcony show double writing desks that have a simpler design than today’s desks. A 1929 furniture inventory listed some of the attractive oak-partner writing desks that are still in service today. Each desk sports a green stained glass lampshade with copper overlay in the shape of pine trees and an owl, coupled with a privacy screen above. In the old days, visitors wrote letters and “souvenir postals” here, much as they do today.



Other accoutrements rounded out the inn's decorative statement. Workmen crafted a "bubbler," a drinking fountain, from volcanic stone to match the registration desk's foundation. Both were originally located in the lobby's southwest corner. Electric candlestick fixtures and chandeliers conveyed a pioneer mood, in keeping with the rest of the building. The lobby's mailbox was a miniature log cabin; the shoeshine stand was of rustic pine as well. On a "grand" scale, a piano promised to fill the inn with music, as it does today during dinner.

Total cost of the construction and furnishings of the Old Faithful Inn in 1904 was a paltry \$165,000. That sum one hundred years later would inflate to approximately 3.2 million dollars; even today, the Old Faithful Inn is an incredible bargain. To compare, the nearby Old Faithful Snow Lodge cost \$28 million in 1998. Though the Snow Lodge is smartly constructed, the Old Faithful Inn is far more compelling in its architectural statement than the newer hostelry. Today's architects intuitively knew the Snow Lodge should not and could never overshadow Reamer's vision—Old Faithful Inn is a log and shingle treasure.

## Opening Season

When the inn opened in late spring of 1904, its Upper Geyser Basin location delighted guests immediately, but the comfort and security afforded visitors in the wilds of Yellowstone was a positive too. The heavy plank double doors, their bold red hue the universal color of welcome, suggested the rustic grandeur within. Strapped in heavy wrought iron and bejeweled with more than a hundred iron studs, these 6½-foot by 7-foot doors were supported by heavy iron hinges and fitted with iron lock, key, and peephole grill, all hand-forged by Colpitts and other blacksmiths under the direction of Reamer. The 15-inch key and lock reportedly weighed a hefty 25 pounds. This massive hardware conjured up images of secure medieval castles, while Reamer's practical use of local logs was reminiscent to some of a frontier fort.

On the inside of the double doors, there is a wrought-iron apparatus:

The key to Old Faithful Inn's front door, shown here at actual size. It was removed from service in 1993 because it was breaking down the lock. It has four holes punched through it (three of which can serve as fingerholes). There are traces of black patina on the handle. Courtesy Yellowstone Archives, YELL 88789.



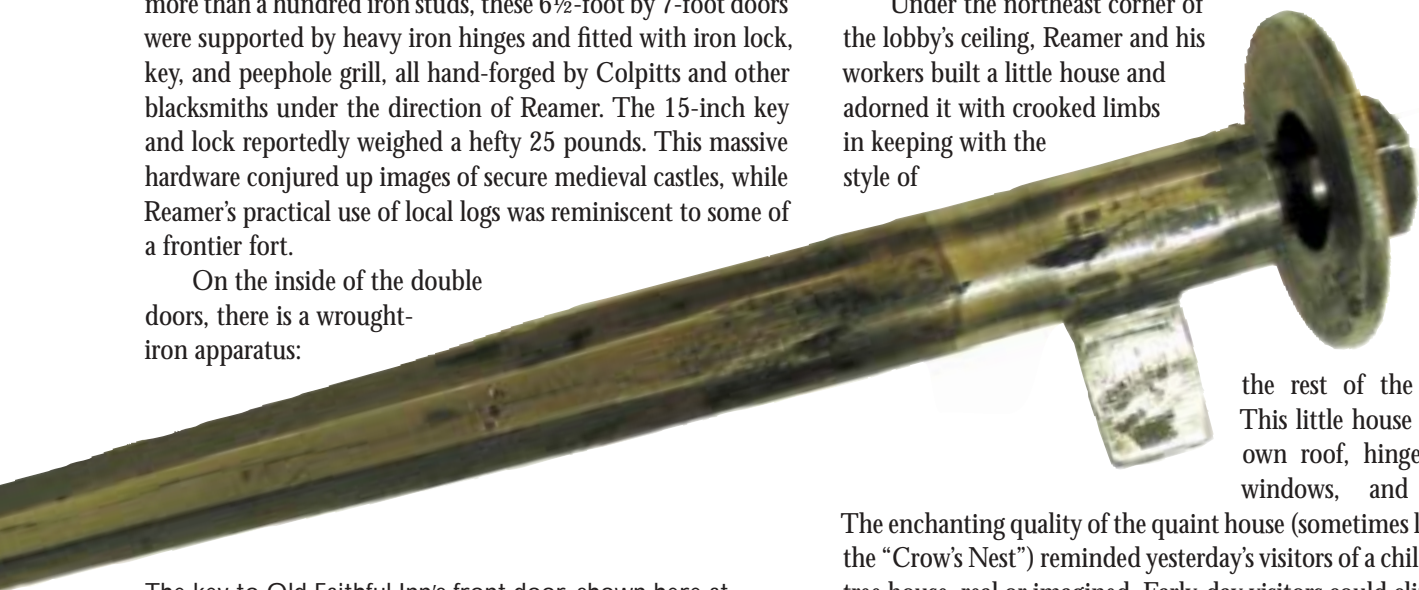
COURTESY RUTH QUINN

The original sunken area around the fireplace felt homey.

an old-fashioned coil spring and round clapper that once served as a door bell for tardy tourists. Local lore has it that in its early days, inn staff locked the doors at night; but if you were a late-arriving registered guest, you merely had to pull the dangling cord that was on the outside of the door to ring the bell and gain admittance to the comforts within.

The cavernous lobby, Reamer's "main office" in the blueprint plans, stretches nearly seventy-seven feet to the ceiling's apex. Balconies with whimsical pine rails and supports encircle the second floor while the third floor balcony services only the lobby's north and east edges. More hand-hewn log stairs and catwalks ascend beyond the third floor and snake up to lofty platforms and a fanciful tiny house. More than one hundred steps transport guests from floor to zenith of this great room.

Under the northeast corner of the lobby's ceiling, Reamer and his workers built a little house and adorned it with crooked limbs in keeping with the style of



the rest of the lobby. This little house has its own roof, hinged airy windows, and door.

The enchanting quality of the quaint house (sometimes labeled the "Crow's Nest") reminded yesterday's visitors of a childhood tree house, real or imagined. Early-day visitors could climb up to this haven through the lobby's forested environs and peer down at goings-on far below. Musicians sometimes entertained from the lofty Crow's Nest and other balconies, as guests celebrated and danced on balconies below.

The inn's lobby space could be overwhelming—making a person feel small and insignificant—but Reamer and Mrs.

Child created a homey feel with the rough, quirky architecture and the rustic, comfortable furniture. Throughout the inn, cozy ornamental nooks grounded the massive space and invited visitors to settle in with a good book or conversation. Strategic lighting added to the pleasing allure of the inn. Ingenious candlestick electric lights and candelabras lent light to the vast yet intimate space around the clock. During daylight hours or moonlit nights, a multitude of windows further illuminated the lobby from without.



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES

This photo postcard was taken shortly after the inn opened in 1904.



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 547

A stagecoach in front of the inn, no known date.



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 3198

In 1915, Acting Superintendent Brett took a trip around the park to determine the feasibility of letting autos enter.

Visitor Clifford P. Allen remembered his warm welcome by the illustrious Larry Mathews, first manager of the inn. He recalled Larry as an Irishman bedecked in his best hat, a Tipperary (skull cap), who made Allen and other guests feel welcome with his heavy brogue and hearty, warm greeting.

Allen recalled another colorful moment with the inn's first manager. In 1904, church services were held one evening in the inn's lobby. After repeatedly checking his timepiece, manager Mathews announced to the assembled worshippers that Old Faithful was about to erupt. In response to the preacher asking for more time for closing hymn and benediction, Larry said, "You cannot have them[;] the Geezer waits for no mon [man]." That was the end of the church service, as everyone filed out to watch the geyser play under the illumination of the inn's spotlights. According to Allen, "Old Faithful geyser came to time to the minute" and Larry was praised more than the preacher was!

The behemoth, 15½-foot wide, eight-hearth fireplace, crafted from 500 tons of native volcanic stone, sits in the lobby's southeast corner and was a favorite guest gathering place from the beginning. Imagine how workers must have pried the gigantic boulders from their earthly resting spots and hefted them mightily into place, one atop the other, as the monument climbed to soaring heights. The tapering fireplace stretches 42 feet before pushing another 40 feet beyond the roof. Its original exterior stack was brick, sheathed with log cribbing similar to the chunky porch piers. Today, a self-supporting steel stack extends beyond the roof.

Early visitors warmed body and soul at the four large hearths circumventing the stone obelisk. Rocking chairs welcomed guests in a sunken area encircling the fireplace, which helped create the inviting ambience of the inn. Twenty-two years after the inn opened, a concrete floor was poured around the fireplace area to raise it from its original recessed state. Before 1927, a partial rail served to isolate guests from passersby in the cordoned area.

The comforting sounds and smells of fresh popcorn popping often filled the lobby in the hotel's infancy—a welcome treat after a long day of geyser gazing. A railroad historian wrote in 1905:

*"Fires of big logs are kept going constantly in the large fireplaces, and every evening a massive specially-made, swinging corn popper is brought into play and the guests regaled with popcorn passed around in a large dishpan."*

This after-dinner custom of heaping up a "great snow bank of popcorn" continued at least through 1914. The authentic wrought-iron popper still hangs from the fireplace wall today. Absent is the hollowed-out knot with a hinged lid that used to house a handy shaker of salt.

On the front of the fireplace, the 20-foot-long clock, designed by Reamer and hammered out by Colpitts, still



# 1959: Nature Challenges the Old Faithful Inn

**J**UST BEFORE MIDNIGHT on Monday, August 17, 1959, while most inn guests slumbered, one of the most severe earthquakes ever recorded on this continent rattled the Yellowstone area. Its tremendous force measured 7.5 on the Richter scale. The quake's epicenter was one to two miles inside Yellowstone's northwest boundary; seismic waves radiated out from there.

West of the park, a mile of road

that caused havoc upstairs.

Visitors discovered that they were trapped in the park. Many roads were blocked and phone lines were down. To curtail panic, a ranger announced over a patrol car loudspeaker that no one was to leave. Instead, guests were given the option of spending the night in their automobiles or going to the Old Faithful Lodge.

The Old Faithful Inn was closed the day after the earthquake, but surpris-

peppered the roof with 40 holes, and the dining room fireplace cracked to within four feet of its hearth. Two fireplace rocks crashed through the south dining room ceiling and created gaping four-foot holes. They broke sprinkler system pipes (causing serious water damage), then continued through the floor. As a result, the south dining room's oak floor had to be replaced. The fireplace was dismantled down to the arch over the hearth, not to be

*“Standing in the inn was like standing on a bowl full of jelly.”*

and river was buried in the Madison Canyon when 80 million tons of mountain gave way. The landslide triggered hurricane-strength winds that tossed people, cars, and trees into the air. The waters of the Madison River reversed their natural course, rushing upstream in a cacophony of water, rock, trees, and earth, and completely overwhelmed a campground, Rock Creek, creating Earthquake Lake.

That night, 28 people lost their lives. Nineteen were presumed buried by the slide.

The Old Faithful Inn creaked, groaned, and popped. Broken water pipes in the East Wing sent water running down the hall. The inn was evacuated, but chaotic. Guests on the first floor jumped out windows. A bellman remembered, “Standing in the inn was like standing on a bowl full of jelly.”

A bellman that evening remembered that the relatively quiet lobby suddenly filled with milling guests in various states of attire. Those most anxious to leave eagerly paid the going rate of 20 dollars for bellmen to run up the stairs and down the wobbling halls to hurriedly pack their belongings. Hazardous duty also beckoned bellmen to the bowels of the inn, where they shut off the sprinkler systems



*The dining room chimney collapsed and the fireplace cracked in the quake.*

ingly, a handful of guests were permitted to occupy rooms in the West Wing on Tuesday, without meal service. An exodus of 7,000 visitors fled the park the next day. Many employees left for home, driving east over passable roads. The inn reopened for two days, then closed for the remainder of the season.

The inn's exterior chimney collapsed and bricks tumbled into all but two of the eight chimney flues. After that, the lobby fireplace could no longer host fires in all the hearths that encircled its girth. The lobby fireplace shifted one and a half inches from plumb. After the quake, crews removed the cribbing and replaced the brick chimney with a 40-foot-high steel stack supported by guy wires.

Shortly after evacuation, the dining room chimney collapsed. Flying bricks

rebuilt until the 1980s.

If the earthquake had rattled the inn earlier or later, many lives might have been lost. Less than three hours before, the dining room had been full of guests. If the quake had hit just 29 minutes later, bellmen and porters, eating sandwiches and soup in the dining room after their shift, might have died or sustained serious injury. The only known injury was a sprained ankle as a

guest leaped out of bed after the first tremor.

Amazingly, the Old Faithful Inn sustained relatively little damage from the quake, though repair work continued for two months after the hotel closed. Sixteen years before the quake, lobby roof purlins had been bolstered with diagonal timbers after 93 inches of snowpack was recorded one winter. Heavy snow loads gave the inn's props—both inside and outside—new purpose: crucial structural integrity.

Restoration architects discovered that the earthquake traveled diagonally through the inn's lobby—from northwest to southeast. The wings helped stabilize the Old House. If the quake had rippled through the lobby south to north, the Old Faithful Inn would probably have been lost.

YS



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, HANNES FOUNDATION COLLECTION

The lobby filled with guests in 1936, J.E. Haynes photo. Note the musicians in the lower right corner.

evokes curiosity and admiration 100 years later. In September 2000, craftsmen Dave Berghold, Mike Kovacich, and Dick Dysart restored this failing icon. Before this team created its new endless rewind system, generations of bellhops cautiously clambered out on Colpitts's narrow iron scaffolding—nearly three flights up—to wind the clock, putting weekly trust in Colpitts.

The five-foot diameter clock face, its 18-inch, red Roman numerals, the 14-foot pendulum with copper disk, and the wrought-iron counterweights and brackets are all original. The revived clock now has yard-long metal arms (replacing wooden ones) and new works. In the wee hours of the morning or late in the evening when most folks are courting dreams, the loudest sound in the Old Faithful Inn is the slow, two-second rhythmic *tick tock*, helping to mark time in this timeless hostelry.

When the Upper Geyser Basin's grand hotel hosted its first guests in June 1904, a visitor could book a room with bath down the hall for \$4. (A century later, with inflation, this room would cost about \$77.)

Stockholders sang the praises of the inn's opening season. Its total gross earnings topped \$45,000 that season, turning a much-needed profit. Historically, hotel operations in Yellowstone had been a losing prospect for

the Northern Pacific Railroad's interests. Child, the Yellowstone Park Association, architect Reamer, his craftsmen, and of course, the employees and paying guests, all played important roles in the inn's initial success.

### Expansions and Renovations

Nearly 14,000 people visited Yellowstone when the inn opened in 1904, but over the next 10 years, their numbers pushed upward to an average of 21,500 visitors annually.

The railroads brought more and more people to the park, so Child commissioned Robert Reamer to design a three-story east wing addition to the inn. Apparently, Reamer decided that the unique architectural statement of the Old House was not to be contested, so the East Wing was designed with a flat roof. Like the Old House, it had a native stone-veneered foundation with exterior walls sheathed in cedar shingles, and its corners were finished with log cribbing. But the treatment of the interior walls was lath and plaster, which lacked the romance of the Old House's rough sawn plank or half-log walls. The East Wing joined the Old House by way of a two-story passageway, its top floor a breezeway.

For two seasons beginning in 1920, waitresses served hungry guests under a makeshift canvas-roof addition south of the original dining room. Reamer completed a much-needed dining room addition in 1922. Five years later, he built yet another dining addition along the eastern flank of the original dining area. In 1962, this multi-sided addition was converted into today's Bear Pit lounge.



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 94285

The Bear Pit, with its unique cartoon panels on the walls in back.

The registration desk now sits in the lobby's northeast corner, relocated in 1923 from its original southwest location to decrease congestion in front of the dining room. A bell desk was installed opposite the registration desk that same year. Before 2004, the activity desk in the lobby's southwest corner was the original registration desk. After the 2004 restoration project, a new volcanic rock counter will occupy that space and serve as a hostess stand instead.

The sidewalk immediately outside the front door, under the inn's porte cochere, was originally the drive-through area. While enlarging the lobby in 1927, Reamer pushed the red entrance door, and its wall with large plate glass windows, out approximately 30 feet. He added plate glass windows to the end walls, flooding the one-story-high entrance area with additional natural light. He also removed the exterior walls of five guest rooms and extended the space outward, creating the inn's present gift shop. Visitors today encounter a plaque just a few feet inside the door declaring the inn's establishment as a National Historic Landmark in 1987. The plaque marks the location of the original exterior wall.

Reamer also added the breezy veranda above the porch extension in 1927, and it quickly became a popular place for geyser gazers. This is in contrast to what some historians and architects speculate was Reamer's original intent—to keep inn and geyser basin somewhat separate. This veranda, accessible from the second floor balcony, allows visitors to anticipate Old Faithful Geyser from engraved, long, wooden benches. In very early morning, the veranda's sounds and sights tantalize the senses with nature's gifts. Chickadee songs, robin chirps, and the swish of swallows swooping between the tepee-like cross logs of the third floor dormers, blend in concert against the geyser basin's steaming resonance, like a musical ensemble with background continuo.

The Old Faithful Inn underwent colossal changes in 1927 and 1928. Besides the lobby enlargement, open-air veranda, and east dining room projects, Child requisitioned Reamer to design a west wing addition to the inn, again in response to increased park visitation and railroad pressure. As with the East Wing, Reamer proposed a practical, flat roof design, again not wanting the new annex to compete with the architectural presence of the Old House.

Park officials balked at his design; arriving tourists would see the proposed West Wing simultaneously with the Old House, compromising the towering visual impact of the original building. Letters and telegrams flew among park headquarters in Mammoth Hot Springs, the National Park Service in Washington, D.C., and Reamer's Seattle office in June 1927. Reamer wrote to Child about what he considered unacceptable design changes proposed by officials:

*"I told you in my wire that I was as much interested in the appearance of Old Faithful Inn as the Government, and I will go further, and say it means a lot more to me...I hope*



The 1927 dining room addition. J.E. Haynes photo, 1928.

*that you will pardon me if I write rather feelingly about Old Faithful, but it was my first hotel, Child, and I am a bit sentimental about it."*

After the sparks of heated discussion blinked out, park officials gave Reamer's original design the green light. Like the East Wing, it would have cedar shingles covering its exterior and a flat tar roof, but the pitch of the mansard roof's overhang would be steeper than on the East Wing, and would sport a series of small dormers. The four-story West Wing joined the Old House by an enclosed two-story lobby space.

Unlike the Old House and the East Wing, the West Wing was a summer construction project. Construction of the expansive, four-story, Y-shaped West Wing began in late June 1927 and was complete by the season's end, adding 150 rooms with 95 baths to the Old Faithful Inn's ability to please its customers. Now an even more imposing guardian of the geysers and keeper of guests, the Old Faithful Inn boasted an outside length of approximately 836 feet and offered a total of about 340 rooms. Child obtained loans from four railroads for the \$210,000 project.

The railroads were financially faithful to Child's ventures because those projects served them well. Reamer, "the Yellowstone Architect," was also faithful to Child's requests. He returned again and again to the Old Faithful Inn to do additions and renovations. His last project for the inn, the "Beguiling" Bear Pit cocktail lounge (now the Pony Express Snack Shop) was sandwiched between the kitchen and the western edge of the lobby.

The National Park Service's decision to end an 18-year hiatus on liquor sales, made three years after prohibition was lifted nationally in 1933, prompted the Bear Pit project. Reamer commissioned Chicago cartoonist Walter Oehrle to design and etch Douglas-fir panels as wall decorations using a bruin theme. These intricately carved cartoons featured a dancing moose, a bighorn sheep waiter, a pelican guest, and bears as bartender, wait staff, musicians, and customers. The Bear Pit served libations and featured light breakfast and buffet sandwich selections.

When the Bear Pit was relocated to the east dining room in 1962, workers removed, stored, and forgot these panels. Through a stroke of good fortune we can all be thankful for, the panels were unearthed during a 1980s restoration project, and five of them were brought back to life in their rightful home.

In the inn's early days, the bark of the lobby's lodgepole pine forest was intact, giving it an even more "woody" feeling than today. In 1940, the bark was removed; the local legend was that bark peelings created a foot-deep "carpet" on the lobby floor! The logs were debarked to reduce a potential fire hazard or, according to one source, because "too many guests were complaining that the rough logs were snagging their suits and the housekeepers were complaining about how hard it was to dust them." Debarking exposed the intricate lacy tracings of one of Yellowstone National Park's small, unsung creatures—the pine bark beetle. In 1971, workers cleaned all the lobby woodwork with compressed air and meticulously coated it with protective varnish.

Guests today can melt into the inn's timelessness and indulge in self-pampering by using one of two original bathrooms in the east wing of the Old House. Paved in petite black and white tile, the rooms showcase enameled cast-iron accoutrements: claw foot tubs and large sinks with backsplashes. A woven slat table rounds out the antiquated ensemble. Eight Old House rooms have private baths, as they did in 1904—old-fashioned water closets with wall-mounted tanks.

Today, in keeping with an Old House tradition, most guests use "down-the-hall" bathrooms, as they did when the inn first opened. The second and third floors of each Old House wing have complete bathrooms: showers, sinks, and toilets. There is only one shower on the first floor, located in the east wing. Today, the privilege of a bath or shower is part of the price of a room, but the inn's first guests had to pay 50 cents for cleanliness. That may not seem like much, but half a dollar in 1904 is just shy of a 10 dollar bill a century later!

The majority of guests in the East Wing addition also used bathrooms down the hall. Those rooms were not outfitted with bathrooms until 1967. Guest rooms in the Old House and the East Wing were updated with sinks, replacing the old-fashioned pitchers and bowls, in 1924.

Public restrooms probably became more necessary as park visitation increased after World War II, when the Old Faithful Inn itself became a destination. In an attempt to provide more public restrooms, the park superintendent approved pay toilets for the inn in 1947. In March 1948, the director of the National Park Service authorized "three pay toilets in the men's public washroom and five pay toilets in the women's public washroom." One free toilet remained available in each restroom. Auditor Jo Ann Hillard remembered collecting nickels from pay toilets in the 1960s. The women's restroom was on the first floor and the men's was in the basement.

## The 2004–06 Renovation Project *A Birthday Present for the Inn*



**I**N 2001, the National Park Service determined that the Old House needed significant upgrading to meet today's standards of seismic safety. Through the years, walls had been moved or removed to better service guests, but at the sacrifice of Old House stability. The 1959 earthquake separated Old House walls from its foundations and wing additions. The foundation beneath the great fireplace was structurally inadequate.

The restoration team perceived the project, slated for fall 2004, as a "birthday present" for the inn. They will pull the historic hotel back together, anchoring the East and West Wings to the Old House and providing critical support with foundations and new walls. Architect James McDonald projected the inn's condition after the project: "The inn will still move, but will act as one, instead of in pieces."

Planners considered a propane conversion of the great fireplace, but decided that the Old Faithful Inn fireplace should continue to burn lodgepole pine as it has since its creation—a tribute to architect Robert Reamer, his stone masons, and a century of contented guests.

Because of the historic nature of the fireplace, restoration architects will strengthen its base almost invisibly. During the off-season of 2004–2005, they will pour a new foundation beneath the giant hearth, to encompass its existing rubble support system. Four concrete piers will consume the four corner fireplaces, anchoring the fireplace to its new foundation and substantially increasing its seismic stability.

Workers will extricate chimney brick that fell into two of the four large flues during the 1959 earthquake. They will then scour all four large flues clean and line them with a reinforced concrete wall. Future bellhops, like their predecessors, will be able to tend a blaze on all four large hearths, and guests will once again enjoy the glow in Reamer's behemoth masonry heater at the east, west, north, and south.

Reamer apparently envisioned the hearth experience as an intimate one. Early postcards clearly show a sunken and railed area around the fireplace. This cordoned area will be reinstated by the start of the 2005 season.

Carpenters will also replace the worn and weary lobby floor, maple planks installed in 1940. Nails have popped up

through the floor boards, their heads sanded and worn away by the shoes of guests and employees. Since the beginning, guests have paused a few paces inside the inn's welcoming doors and pondered the lobby. Evidence of their wonder, like a well-worn backcountry trail, will be erased by fresh maple boards that guests will tread upon for the first time July 1, 2005.

Old House east wing rooms are slated for renovation by the inn's opening date in summer 2005, and west wing rooms a year later. Though internet service will be available in the breezeway and rotunda connecting the East and West Wings to the Old House wings, Old House rooms will remain without phone jacks, preserving the early-day guest experience.

Workers will increase insulation wherever feasible to boost privacy, and will update electrical and fire suppression systems concurrently with the lobby and room projects. Much of this infrastructure will lie buried in the floor, but guests will still see the antiquated cloth-covered electrical wires, safely disconnected, snaking along logs in the lobby's upper reaches.

By project's end, three of the current guest rooms will become two rooms that are accessible to persons with disabilities. All floors of the Old House, the sunken fireplace area, the gift shop, and the updated and enlarged public restrooms will likewise be accessible, either via the West Wing rotunda elevator or ramps. One housekeeping room and two administrative offices will return to their original purpose as guest rooms. With these changes, the inn will gain two guest rooms, bringing the room count to 329.

By July 1, 2005, returning guests will notice the return of two second-floor mezzanine walls and the outward shift of the Pony Express's east wall into the lobby. These walls will resume their original load-bearing positions and strengthen the inn's defense against earthquakes. The remodeled Pony Express Snack Bar will offer an updated menu, and diners will enjoy the remaining fir-carved cartoon panels, which restoration experts will bring back to life and return to the snack bar. Workers will carve out additional room for the first floor's renovated public restrooms from the snack bar's previous ice cream space. Lobby wanderers will still be able to buy ice cream in the Pony Express, but it will probably be in the shape of "geyser bars."

By the same date, the new registration desk will parallel the old check-in area, extending into the lobby. Its length will double, stretching northward into the 1927-1928 lobby extension area. To increase building stability, a log wall will replace one large plate glass window on the east wall behind the new desk. Guests will be able to check in and make activity reservations at any of the new desk's seven stations.

The bell desk will remain in its current location. A new hostess counter will match the volcanic rock and banded wrought iron of the registration desk (the new desks' stonework will not bulge out at the base, making them more user friendly). The location of the native stone water fountain, or "bubbler," along the lobby's west wall, will once again match views depicted in historic postcards.

During the last phase of the restoration, crews will tackle the exterior of the Old House. The roof and related log work have deteriorated and will be replaced. Workers will add hidden steel supports to the roof for protection against snow loads and earthquakes. As a finishing touch, both wall and roof shingles will be coated with protective oil (the rotted porte cochere floor will be replaced by July 2005). The widow's walk will remain the same except for the removal of the electrical wiring that powered the searchlights before 1948.

The restoration will mimic the efforts of the inn's builders 100 years ago: the work will be done in the off-season. Architects and contractors will brace the historic hotel and themselves against the challenges of winter. The project will begin in mid-October 2004 and end by spring 2006. It will probably approach \$20 million in cost. Guests will continue to occupy the inn during the summer. The process of appreciation begun anew, people will no doubt pause in the same spot that lobby guests did before them.



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*To increase seismic stability, the four corner "kindling" fireplaces will be filled in with concrete piers.*

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## The Charm of the Inn

Guest rooms had an easy-going coziness—the rooms' walls and ceilings were wrapped in the warmth of rustic, unfinished wood. Old House first-floor rooms had unpeeled log walls and ceilings, while upper-story rooms had rough-sawn board paneling. Fresh mountain air and the whiff of geysers came in through curtained windows, reminding visitors they were in the world's first national park. Novel lighting, flowers in a vase, rugs, and simple furnishings made guests feel at home. Pegs for parasol, hat, or cloak were usual room embellishments. Each room differed from the next in size and accents, and a few featured cushioned window seats.

Reamer cleverly positioned the Old Faithful Inn so visitors could enjoy a grand view of Old Faithful Geyser upon arrival, but this view wasn't available to guests once inside. Perhaps he was encouraging guests to wander outdoors and engage in the richer pedestrian pilgrimage needed for true appreciation of the geyser basin.

For those visitors who were exploring the wonders of the geyser basin, there was once a bell atop the hotel that declared dinner one-quarter hour before sit-down time. Upon hearing the dinner bell, visitors scurried back to their rooms to freshen up. There they found fresh water in tan, floral-patterned pitchers and bowls on the copper-topped wash stands in their rooms (matching chamber pots rested on the table's bottom shelf). Clean white towels and washcloths hung from the simple rod above.

The original dining room formed half an octagon 62 feet in diameter; later additions would better serve the abundance of guests. The dining room decor was in keeping with the lobby's. It had rustic log walls, a copper and iron chandelier, candlestick electric lights, and a long, patterned rug that led to the large stone fireplace at its southern end. Unlike the hotel lobby, the dining room had log scissor trusses that supported its ceiling. A log partition screened the swinging doors between kitchen and dining room, and is still in use today.

Everyone ate communally, or "family style," from two long tables artfully set with china of a blue willow pattern and sparkling silver. Brass and copper accessories completed the table setting. Ladies and gentlemen dressed in fashionable gowns or suits and ties, a sharp contrast to today's casual attire. A few seats afforded a popular view of Old Faithful



COURTESY RUTH QUINN

A guest in Room 46 of the Old House in earlier days.

Geysers, but after 1913, the East Wing addition blocked that view.

A government inspection report of 1916 gives clues about the dining room, kitchen, and larder. In the dining room, discipline prevailed and service was prompt. Large iceboxes cooled by ammonia and brine held beef, pork, lamb, corned beef, ham and bacon, tongue, and brook trout. There was also a supply of canned goods, fresh vegetables, and fruits. A French chef was in charge of a "competent crew." Meals in the opening season cost the company about 65 cents from larder to table.

Evening meals were accompanied by the soothing sounds of a string quartet from the small gallery overlooking the dining room on the lobby's second floor balcony. Later ensembles changed to include popular music. Seven musicians who played there in the mid-1920s wrote their names for posterity near the tiny balcony. In the 1960s, modern quartets also entertained guests from this balcony, keeping the tradition alive.



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, HAYNES FOUNDATION COLLECTION

One of the many services available to guests was the barber shop. J.E. Haynes photo, 1916.

After dinner, inn staff arranged regular entertainment for guests' enjoyment or participation. Merriment sometimes included reading poetry or singing around the piano. An account of a "perfect climax to a perfect day" in the inn's "friendly living room" mentioned guests "gathered about the piano [on] the balcony." They sang "the best loved songs of north and south and east and west."

When it was time to dance, early-day rugs were rolled up and, along with furniture, were pushed back to the periphery and the fun began. Musicians reportedly climbed to one of the mezzanines above or to the inn's lofty playhouse to send notes floating through the inn's lovely space to dancers below. The Fred Gebert Orchestra played from the elevated balcony along the inn's front wall from 1928 to 1932. This required musicians to hike with instruments nearly to the Crow's Nest. The group would occasionally play for private dances in the dining room.

Dancing was customary six nights a week at the Old Faithful Inn, as it was later at the Old Faithful Lodge, built in the mid-1920s. By 1937, most dances were held at the lodge recreation hall. However, national sorority conventions occasionally occupied the inn. On these occasions, the lobby filled with lovely girls dressed in formal gowns ready to dance. Small musical ensembles continued to give concerts in the inn on Sunday nights, on an elevated platform in the southwest corner of the lobby, through at least the 1930s. A flyer that advertised guest services for the inn in 1967 mentioned "occasional evening entertainment."

Early on, the Old Faithful Inn was a full-service hotel. It offered services beyond the simple necessities of food, water, and shelter. The front desk staff naturally made reservations for hotels and concessioner tours, but mail, laundry, and tailor services were also available. A guest in need of libation could find stool and bartender in the inn's nether regions from the beginning (at least until prohibition). By 1912, and perhaps earlier, the inn offered other luxuries to its patrons, services they were accustomed to finding in the East's grand hotels. For the guest who was infirm or ill, there was a dispensary and nurse. A guest in need of a trim could get a haircut in the barber shop. "Saddle horses, divided skirts and leggings" were also "for hire." A visitor could communicate by telegram around the world, or by telephone within the park. By 1916, a beauty shop was in operation. Top-shelf cigars, newspapers, and a shoeshine stand were also available.

Additional buildings and employees arrived to provide support services for the inn: an engineer's cottage, carpenter and plumbing shops, and a chicken house, greenhouse, fire pump house, hose house, and laundry facilities. Other necessary infrastructure included sewage and water systems, roads, utility tunnels, bridges, fences, pathways, a wood lot, and horse stables that could accommodate 125 head.

A herd of about 45 milk cows kept the Old Faithful Inn and its northern neighbor, the Fountain Hotel, supplied with fresh milk; their guests consumed 60 to 70 gallons per day in 1914. Three men managed the herd, near the Lower Geyser Basin. Swan Lake Flat was pasture for cattle that supplied fresh

beef to the park's hotels. There was a chicken house just south of the inn that supplied fresh eggs for the dining room. In summer 1914, an ice machine at the inn supplied both geyser basin hotels, making seventy to eighty 100-pound cakes daily to keep perishables cold.

The Old Faithful Inn had a laundry from its beginning. Initially small, it was enlarged in 1926, and a new facility was completed in 1958. It served the inn through 1985. In later years, when not all locations had their own laundry facilities, laundry was trucked from other locations in the park to the inn. (The laundry building still stands behind the inn and is currently used as a staging area for recycling). One million pieces of laundry were done each year at the Old Faithful Inn alone.



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, HAYNES FOUNDATION COLLECTION

Dancing was customary six nights a week in the lobby. J.E. Haynes photo, 1937.

The number of inn employees varied through the years. A 1914 report tallied 130 employees. According to two later concessioner pamphlets, 250 people worked at the inn after the West Wing's completion. Today, about 350 people work at the inn.

In the Old Faithful Inn, Reamer blended modern comfort with charm, grace, and original rusticity. In his use of native materials and his ability to meet guests' expectations, Reamer's vision was simultaneously practical and grandiose. Anticipating the park's legislative

**“As the inn of long ago kept out the unpredictable wilds of Yellowstone, in the twenty-first century it shields people from their stressful lives, helping to build precious and magical memories.”**

For many visitors today, the relaxed atmosphere of the Old Faithful Inn settles in after dark, like gently falling snow after winds that brought the storm. There are no more bustling crowds scurrying in and out with cameras and ice cream. Peaceful comfort floats over the inn's guests like a warm blanket. During those last daylight hours at the Old Faithful Inn, it is joyful to read contentedly, play a game, or engage in conversation with friends or family while sipping a beverage from the espresso cart or mezzanine bar. As the inn of long ago kept out the unpredictable wilds of Yellowstone, in the twenty-first century it shields people from their stressful lives, helping to build precious and magical memories.

mandate to achieve both natural preservation and public enjoyment, Reamer intuitively understood that success was realized through balance, years before the National Park Service was created to protect that balance. If Yellowstone National Park is the crown jewel of the park system, then the Old Faithful Inn is the crown jewel of its lodges.

The influence of the Old Faithful Inn has spread beyond the grateful folks who have actually admired and felt its native presence. Reamer's gift of architecture to the world was even more profound. The inn stands as the first large-scale example of what is now called “parkitecture,” or park buildings that are designed to harmonize with nature. Because of that, the Old

Faithful Inn was a recipe for success that future national park architecture emulated. Park architects looked to their natural surroundings for inspiration and adapted their buildings to the tranquil scene the parks were there to protect. Many lodges and other buildings crafted from native log and stone sprang up around the West as a tangible tribute to Reamer's triumph.

The Old Faithful Inn is a keeper of secrets. The wooden walls and floors sometimes creak and groan like lodge-pole pines swaying in a Yellowstone breeze. Perhaps it will speak to you if you stop and listen with care. Few stories of the people that created and treasured the inn a century ago have been told. Inn tour guide Betty Hardy said it well: “The inn is a building of history and a building of mystery.” Historians hope to uncover more of these mysteries of the inn, but perhaps it is these untold stories that draw people to the bosom of the historic hotel.

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## Endnotes

Space constraints prevent us from listing the numerous citations and sources included in this article as originally submitted. For a complete list, please see the book *Old Faithful Inn: Crown Jewel of National Park Lodges*, © 2004 by Karen Wildung Reinhart and Jeff Henry. Roche Jaune Pictures, Inc., 171 East River Road, Emigrant, Montana 59027, (406) 848-2145, (406) 848-7912, wildhart@imt.net, rochejaune@imt.net.



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 142573

A large-scale model of the inn housed a restaurant during the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition at the world's fair in San Francisco, California.



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Karen W. Reinhart has worked 12 years as a National Park Service Interpretive Ranger in the Lake area of Yellowstone.



# OVERCOMING OBSCURITY

## The Yellowstone Architecture of Robert C. Reamer

Ruth Quinn



A Reamer drawing of the proposed Canyon Hotel, built in 1910.

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“His friends know he appears to be looking down, while he builds looking up...The effort to impress is not his. He is too busy looking down...creating.”



COURTESY RUTH QUINN



FIRST-TIME CALLERS to the Xanterra Central Reservations Office in Yellowstone frequently make their first request a stay at the Old Faithful Inn. They do not always know what to call it; they say “Old Faithful Lodge” more often than not. Yet it is the lodging facility in Yellowstone that everyone seems to know. It may well be the second most famous feature in Yellowstone, after Old Faithful Geyser itself.

By contrast, last summer a woman came into the inn looking for the plaque bearing the architect’s name—and, rare among visitors, she already knew it. She was visiting from Oberlin, Ohio, the place of Robert Reamer’s birth. Unfortunately, she found no such plaque at the Old Faithful Inn. It is difficult to find Reamer’s name anywhere around the park, even in the Yellowstone building that has come to be so powerfully linked with him—the building that has for many people come to define what they admiringly, if inaccurately, think of as the “Reamer style.”

Ten years ago, when I first read that Robert Reamer had designed more than 25 projects for the park, I was astonished and puzzled.<sup>1</sup> As a student of Yellowstone history, I could only



name a handful. Most of us are aware of his contributions to the Old Faithful Inn, the Lake Hotel, the Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel, and the demolished Grand Canyon Hotel. His name is also well associated with the Executive House at Mammoth. (He has also received credit, in error I believe, for the Norris Soldier Station, the Roosevelt Arch, and the Lake Lodge.) But these well-known projects account for only a part of the work he did for Yellowstone, work that should arguably have made his name among the best-known in the history of the park. In order to know that work, we must first learn more about the man.



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 89301-10

*“To be at discord with the landscape would be almost a crime. To try to improve upon it would be an impertinence.”*

—Robert Reamer

### A Quiet, Reserved Man

It becomes more difficult with the passage of time to locate people who knew Reamer personally. Seattle architectural historian Lawrence Kreisman interviewed several men who worked in the offices of the Metropolitan Building Company of that city with Reamer at the end of his career.<sup>2</sup> Historian Richard A. Bartlett made contact with W.H. Fey, an associate of Reamer's near the end of his life, and also interviewed Jane Reamer White, the architect's only child, who provided further insights into her father's nature and history.<sup>3</sup>

All the resulting accounts of Reamer describe a serious, modest, reserved man who did little to promote or evaluate his own work. Betty Cox, of Arcanum, Ohio, a childhood friend of Jane Reamer, recalled that “he wasn't flamboyant in any way.”<sup>4</sup> The writer of a “pen portrait” included in Kreisman's study said that “His friends know he appears to be looking down, while he builds looking up...The effort to impress is not his. He is too busy looking down...creating.”<sup>5</sup> His reticence has contributed to his remaining historically obscure.

According to a short biography of her father compiled by Jane Reamer White, her father took the “C” as a middle initial in tribute to his father, named Chambers.<sup>6</sup> Today we commonly refer to the architect as “Robert Chambers Reamer,” but it does not appear that he used the entire middle name. His correspondence and architectural plans are signed either “Robert C. Reamer,” “Robert Reamer,” or “R.C. Reamer.” At the time she knew him, Betty Cox recalls that his family simply called him “Rob.”

Architectural historian David Naylor has pointed out that Reamer's first major commission, the Old Faithful Inn, was covered in only one contemporary professional journal, in which he was referred to as “J.C. Reamer!”<sup>7</sup> Throughout the years, his reputation has endured, despite being credited in print as Robert C. Beamer, W.A. Reamer, Ronald Reamer, R.G. Reamer, H.E. Reamer, R.H. Reimer, Robert Charles



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 89281-43

Robert Reamer on skis (photo left), and above (on left) with his foreman during the building of the Canyon Hotel.

Reamer, Robert Chalmers Reamer, Mr. Reising, Robert C. Reimer, Reamer Bros., Clarence Reamer, A.C. Reamer, R.D. Reamer, Charles Reamer, and Richard Reamer. Naylor quips: “On the occasion of Reamer's death...the *Seattle Times* printed his obituary. About the most that it did to give Reamer a place in the history of architecture was to spell his name correctly.”<sup>8</sup>

The man was born Robert Reamer in Oberlin, Ohio, in 1873. His parents, Frances Cole Reamer and Chambers D. Reamer, had an older son, Daniel A. Reamer, born in 1871. Interestingly, Daniel also chose architecture as a profession, his career taking him to Cleveland, Ohio; Chattanooga, Tennessee; and Birmingham, Alabama.<sup>9</sup> During Daniel's and Robert's childhood and youth, their father worked as a clothing merchant. Mrs. Reamer's brother ran a lumber yard in Oberlin and several other members of the extended family were involved in the building trades. Perhaps this is where the brothers acquired a taste for their future careers.<sup>10</sup>

Jane said that her father dropped out of school around the age of 12 because of severe headaches. His mother hired an art teacher for him and he studied at home for one year. The entire Reamer family left Oberlin when Robert was about 13 years old, but he did not accompany them to Birmingham, where his father was involved in real estate and, later, in traveling sales. Instead, Robert went to live with relatives in Detroit, where he obtained his first job with the architectural firm of M.L. Smith and Sons.<sup>11</sup>

About 1891, now a young man of 18 or 19, Reamer made his way to Chicago, where he designed furniture for the A.H. Andrews Furniture Company.<sup>12</sup> His paternal uncle, Daniel Paul Reamer, worked as a traveling salesman for the company and may have been instrumental in helping Robert obtain employment there.<sup>13</sup> Robert's brother was in Chicago during this time, possibly also working in the furniture industry.

From Chicago, Reamer “drifted out to California.”<sup>14</sup> Arriving in San Diego in 1895, he established a partnership with architect Samuel Blaine Zimmer with whom he worked for approximately two years.<sup>15</sup> By 1900, Reamer was working for Elisha S. Babcock, President of the Coronado Beach Company. Babcock managed the Hotel del Coronado and other San Diego business holdings of John D. Spreckels, a wealthy

tributed to his eventual obscurity. No specific single style came to be regarded as his, but National Park Service (NPS) architectural historian Rodd Wheaton observed that Reamer was a “master of all styles.”<sup>18</sup> Those who study his work become, for the most part, admirers.

He had his detractors as well, if few in number. In 1927, Yellowstone Superintendent Horace Albright, writing to

**“If there is any feature in common among all Reamer buildings, here and elsewhere, it is his creativity with windows and light.”**

San Francisco entrepreneur.<sup>16</sup> Harry W. Child, President of the Yellowstone Park Hotel Company (YPHC) and Yellowstone Park Transportation Company (YPTC), spent several weeks every winter as a guest at the luxury hotel. It was through the friendship between E.S. Babcock and Harry Child that Reamer received an invitation to Yellowstone.

### “Master of All Styles”

When most of us think of Robert Reamer and Yellowstone architecture, the word “rustic” comes immediately to mind. But even in Yellowstone, Reamer designed many projects in other styles, including the Executive House, the Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel, the Mammoth Cottages, the Thumb Lunch Station, and the rebuilding of the Lake Hotel.

Architectural historians have often speculated about Reamer’s early influences. Some notice decidedly Scandinavian influences in the Old Faithful Inn. In its interiors, the inn is strongly reminiscent of the great camps of the Adirondacks. Others see the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright’s work in the Grand Canyon Hotel and the Executive House, though no evidence has surfaced of any connection between Reamer and Wright. Upon leaving California, Reamer worked in the offices of Reid Bros., architects of the Victorian-style Del Coronado.<sup>17</sup> In all, Reamer’s Yellowstone projects have variously been labeled as originating in the rustic, Prairie, neo-classical, or Colonial styles.

Reamer’s ability to succeed in a variety of styles, depending upon the desires of his clients and the demands of the day, con-



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Light filters through the windows of the Old Faithful Inn. J.E. Haynes photo, 1911.

his supervisor in Washington, D.C., said that a prominent landscape architect remarked that the only thing that would improve the Old Faithful Inn would be to burn it down. Likewise, one derogatory description of Reamer’s 1936 version of the Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel labeled it “a glorified country fair building.”<sup>19</sup>

If there is any feature in common among all Reamer buildings, here and elsewhere, it is his creativity with windows and light. Though the dormer window has been called a “Reamer trademark,” more correctly it is his love for fenestration—the placement and design of windows—in general that distinguishes his work. His buildings abound with unmatched window configurations and shapes, incorporating diamonds, ovals, circles, iron scrollwork, and etching.<sup>20</sup>

## A Reamer-Based Tour of Yellowstone

One reason that this architect's contributions to Yellowstone are worth recognizing is that his influence here was so widespread. Robert Reamer designed buildings for every major developed area in Yellowstone except two of the smallest, Norris and Roosevelt. At the larger park villages, such as Old Faithful, Yellowstone Lake, and Mammoth, his work is still prominent and commonly known. Conversely, at West Thumb, all direct evidence of his work is gone. None of his structures remain at the Canyon, but contemporary buildings pay tribute to his genius. At Gardiner, the buildings of his that remain are classically *Reameresque*.

To fully appreciate this man's contribution to Yellowstone, we must take the tour, from site to site, until we've remembered what is gone, and seen all that we still can see of his contributions to this special cultural landscape. We begin our tour, appropriately, from the porch of the Old Faithful Inn, the construction and history of which are so well described in Karen Reinhart's article, on pages 5–22 of this issue of *Yellowstone Science*. From this great architectural landmark, we begin a tour of Robert Reamer's remarkable Yellowstone accomplishments, first by traveling east, to the shores of Yellowstone Lake.

### Yellowstone Lake

At the lake, Reamer's projects were both large and small. He had a tremendous impact on the appearance of the Lake Hotel, transforming it in 1903–1904 from a generic clapboard hostelry to the "Grand Lady of the Lake." He returned on several occasions in the 1920s to oversee further additions to the hotel, so its appearance today is largely a reflection of his ideas. Less well known are Reamer's designs for the lunch station at West Thumb and the operator's building used by the Yellowstone Park Boat Company, which stood until 1963, just downstream from the Fishing Bridge on the west side of the river.



The Lake Hotel, ca. 1895, was a generic clapboard hostelry.

### *Lake Hotel (1903–1904 renovation and addition, 1922–23 wing addition and lobby alterations, 1928 addition)*

While involved in planning the Old Faithful Inn, Reamer began to design additions to the Lake Hotel. For several years, the size of the structure at the lake had proven inadequate to the demand for rooms. Unfortunately, no direct correspondence has yet surfaced to indicate why Child and Reamer envisioned a structure for this area that was so different in style from what was under construction at Old Faithful. Perhaps the difference arose because, unlike the Old Faithful area, Yellowstone Lake was to be developed as a "resort" area, hailed for its fishing and water recreation (and planned golf course and tennis courts which never materialized) rather than its comparatively passive geyser viewing and rustic ambience.<sup>21</sup>

The original 1889–1891 plans for the Lake Hotel called for a larger structure. Due to difficulties transporting materials to the remote site, delays caused by those difficulties, and the desire to open the hotel as soon as possible, the size was



COURTESY ROGER ANDERSON

The Lake Hotel after Reamer's 1903–04 renovations became the "Grand Lady of the Lake" with its gables and Ionic columns.



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES

The ell on the rear of the Lake Hotel was added in 1903–04, and torn down in 1940.

reduced. Reamer's 1903–1904 renovations included extending the hotel from the second to the third gable and the addition of a north-south oriented ell on the east end (the ell was razed in 1940), which extended behind the structure into a portion of the area now occupied by the rear parking lot.<sup>22</sup>

Reamer made an even more significant change in the character of the hotel by adding decorative dormer windows, false balconies, fan-light windows, and oval windows. The three gables were extended, each supported with four 50-foot Ionic columns. A local newspaper, the *Gardiner Wonderland*, carried a humorous story about the Chicago company that boasted of shipping two columns together on one wagon. "They were so thoroughly imbued with the idea that they had an immense load that they had them photographed and sent the picture to the transportation company. When they were started from Gardiner all six were placed on a single wagon and again photographed...In addition to the immense weight of the pillars, 'Big Fred' was proudly perched on the top of the load with the reins of the 'fours' in his hands."<sup>23</sup>

Reamer brought his creativity back to the Lake Hotel in the 1920s, adding the east wing, the Batchelder fireplace, a drinking fountain, and an ash stand.<sup>24</sup> He also added the 1928 sun room, today known as "the Reamer Lounge."

#### ***Thumb Lunch Station (designed and built 1903, razed 1927)***

Reamer's 1903 Thumb Lunch Station was smaller, less distinctive, and unclaimed. A simple frame structure, its construction was concurrent with Old Faithful Inn construction and Lake Hotel renovation. It served as a lunch station until 1917, when automobile traffic rendered it superfluous. Charles Hamilton used the building for a few years in the 1920s as a location for his general store until he received permission to construct his own building.<sup>25</sup>



COURTESY RUTH QUINN

The Thumb Lunch Station, a simple frame structure, was razed in 1927.



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 29931

The Fishing Bridge operator's building was used as a rental facility and residence.

#### ***Operator's building, Fishing Bridge (designed and built 1935, razed 1964)***

Until the construction of the Bridge Bay Marina complex, about 1962, the Yellowstone Park Boat Company operated rental facilities at West Thumb, at a dock immediately in front of the Lake Hotel, and at Fishing Bridge.<sup>26</sup> A small, outhouse-sized cabin, which floated on a barge, was attached to the east side of the Fishing Bridge and used between 1926 and 1937.<sup>27</sup> Because of his many contemporaneous projects for the hotel company in the mid-1930s, the company asked Reamer to design a small building to serve as a rental facility for fishing tackle and small water craft and as a residence for the employee who ran the facility. This building was nestled below the hillside on the west side of the bridge and just downstream. Its construction coincided with construction of the current Fishing Bridge (1936–1937).<sup>28</sup>



**“Robert Reamer’s Grand Canyon Hotel...was a magnificent structure...  
Rodd Wheaton of the NPS considers its destruction to be the greatest  
architectural loss in the history of Yellowstone.”**

### Canyon

*Coach stable, coach shed, and hay shed for the YPTC  
(constructed 1908, razing date uncertain, 1960–1970)*

In 1908, Reamer designed a set of three buildings for the YPTC complex at Canyon. Approximately three-quarters of a mile north of the Canyon Hotel site, on the east side of today’s main highway, is an open meadow that was a bus yard until the 1970s.<sup>29</sup> The coach stable (for horses), the coach shed (for vehicles), and the hay shed all featured heavy rubble stone foundations and piers. One of the buildings was remodeled in 1922–1923 as a driver’s dormitory known as the Cody Bunkhouse.<sup>30</sup> These facilities were no longer in use by 1960, and were probably razed during the following decade.<sup>31</sup>

*Grand Canyon Hotel (built 1910–1911, addition 1930,  
demolished/burned 1959–1960)*

Robert Reamer’s Grand Canyon Hotel of 1910–1911 was a magnificent structure. Those who had the opportunity to stroll down its hallways or enjoy its massive lounge, as well as those of us who have only experienced it through photographs, mourn its loss deeply. Rodd Wheaton of the NPS considers its destruction to be the greatest architectural loss in the history of Yellowstone.<sup>32</sup>

In 1909, YPHC President Harry Child considered the success of the Canyon Hotel to be so important that he invited Reamer to join him on a tour in Europe so he could “see something of the architecture in Germany, Switzerland, England and Scotland.” They departed New York on the *S.S. Mauritania* in October 1909, returning in December.<sup>33</sup> Soon after, Child submitted his plans to the Department of the Interior for approval. Construction began in the summer of 1910 and the hotel opened (still unfinished) in June of 1911. A grand opening ball was held that August, and included a reception and receiving line that was a government and concessioner “Who’s Who.”<sup>34</sup>

As with the Lake Hotel, Reamer incorporated an earlier facility into the structure, in this case the 1890 Canyon Hotel, using the older building as a wing of his new design and altering the roof dormers to join the sections seamlessly. The massive building was 595 feet long. There were 430 guest rooms, and a long rectangular dining space on the north end of the building.<sup>35</sup>

The 200-foot by 100-foot lounge projected from the office/lobby in the center front of the building. John H. Raftery, editor of the *Treasure State* of Butte, Montana, wrote, “The whole central floor-space of The Lounge is at once a vast ballroom, promenade, auditorium or theaterium. In the pillar-spaced intervals around the open margins of the enormous room, lighted by the continuous walls of plate glass by day, and by two thousand electric lights by night, writing desks and tea-tables, easy chairs, divans, footstools and rugs will offer to the guests the perfection of privacy with accessibility, comfort and elegance, aloofness with sociability, in exactly that degree which each guest of the hotel may choose for himself.”<sup>36</sup> Reamer returned to the Canyon Hotel in 1930 to add 96 more rooms to the south end of the already enormous building.<sup>37</sup>

We can be thankful that Reamer would never know the fate of this grand structure. For decades, the building settled and shifted down the hillside; foundation problems had been noted in the original old building as early as 1896.<sup>38</sup> By 1958, supporting beams had shifted as much as five feet from original plumb, and structural cracks were too obvious to ignore. An independent engineer hired by the hotel company firmly recommended closure: “...in any large city or municipality covered by zoning codes there is little doubt that the owner of such a structure would have been ordered a number of years ago to either correct the structural condition of this building or close it down...”<sup>39</sup> The Canyon Hotel never opened after the 1958 season, and was sold to wreckers in 1959. A fire in 1960 hurried the impending demolition.<sup>40</sup>

**Gardiner, Montana**

Reamer designed a total of eight park-related projects in Gardiner, Montana, including buildings for public use, support buildings, and private residences.

***Northern Pacific station, Gardiner, Montana (designed and built 1903; razed 1954)***

This high-profile project was the first in the Yellowstone area to earn Reamer recognition. Constructed on a rough-cut stone foundation, the round log depot provided a strong first impression and “created a rustic effect that welcomed tour-



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A Reamer sketch of the Gardiner depot.



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES

The depot, circa 1903.

ists into the Yellowstone landscape.”<sup>41</sup> Containing the same distinctive features as the Old Faithful Inn (wrought iron hardware, hickory furniture, stone chimney, and massive log columns supporting the loading platforms), it proudly displayed the red and black monad of the Northern Pacific on doors, gable ends, and inlaid in the lobby floor. For more than 50 years, passengers and employees traveling to Yellowstone with the Northern Pacific Railroad detrained at the Gardiner depot.<sup>42</sup>

***Barn, coach shed, bunkhouse and mess house, Gardiner, Montana (designed and built 1906; some razed 1926, some still standing)***

Just inside the park boundary stood the rustic barn, coach shed, bunkhouse and mess house designed by Reamer for the YPTC. This complex of buildings served the horses, drivers, and equipment of the park stagecoaches. The barn and coach shed were razed in 1926. Today, the bunkhouse and mess house, joined by a breezeway, (second residence from the south) appear to be one structure. According to NPS historic architect Lon Johnson, “The 1906 bunk and mess house is an early example of the Rustic Style and the finest example in the district. The massive stone lower walls and battered corner piers rising above the eaves represent a sophisticated design for the time. When originally constructed with the stables and coach house, it foreshadowed later national park principles of consistent architectural expression, careful site planning, and strong visual relationships with the surrounding natural features.”<sup>43</sup>



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES

The Gardiner coach shed, now gone.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES COURTESY RUTH QUINN

A watercolor of the Gardiner barn, coach shed, bunkhouse and mess house.

*North Entrance Ranger Station, Gardiner (built 1924, still standing); Kammermeyer residence, Gardiner (built 1925–6; still standing); Lockwood residence, Gardiner (built 1926, still standing)*<sup>44</sup>

Three more residences in the concessioner complex illustrate a style commonly identified as Reamer's. The northernmost residence was constructed for the U.S. government as a ranger station and residence. The concrete shield incorporated into one of the front columns (and not quite the correct shape for the NPS arrowhead) indicates the building's original purpose. The structure is still a government residence. Reamer also designed the home directly south of this one (the Lockwood residence) and the two-story house closest to the present entrance kiosk (the Kammermeyer residence) for executives of the transportation company. These are still concessioner employee homes.

*Cottage, Chinese Gardens, Gardiner-to-Mammoth road (built 1909; razed 1931)*

Two and a half miles south of Gardiner, just northwest of the current 45<sup>th</sup> Parallel Bridge on the west side of the Gardner River, was another quaint Reamer structure. The hotel company built the cottage at the Chinese Gardens in 1909 as a residence for the men who tended the 7.6-acre vegetable garden. "The style," according to David Naylor, "depicted for the cottage recalls an Alpine chalet, particularly in the details such as the diamond-patterned window fenestration and the jigsaw work of the porch balustrade."<sup>45</sup>

### Mammoth Hot Springs

By sheer number, the projects Reamer designed for Mammoth outnumber any other areas of the park, but many of his designs for this popular tourist area never made it past the planning stages. In all, he created eight separate designs for the hotel at Mammoth, four known structures for the transportation company, a commissary for the hotel company, an administration building for the U.S. Government, and four residences.

*Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel (proposals 1906, 1906, 1909, addition 1913, new construction designed 1934, built 1936–1938)*

After assuming the presidency of the YPHC in 1901, Harry Child seemed unsatisfied with the National Hotel (constructed 1883–1884), which he had inherited from previous concessionaires. Every few years, beginning just after the Old Faithful Inn was begun, rumors circulated about new hotel plans for Mammoth.<sup>46</sup>

In 1906, Reamer submitted two proposals for a new hotel at this location. In David Naylor's opinion, "The strongest carryover from Old Faithful Inn" to the 1906 Mammoth proposal "would have been the tapering piers of rhyolite stone, rising full height to mark the ends of both wings and the central block, as well as framing the entries to each portion of the hotel."<sup>47</sup>

Three years later, Reamer drew a third proposal for the Mammoth Hotel, a grandiose structure on the scale of the terraces themselves. The plan featured a 50-foot high lobby, 200 feet by 100 feet in size, supported by immense trees—trunks four feet in diameter with limbs and branches still intact.<sup>48</sup> The planned hotel was 700 feet long, and would have occupied the area across from the National Hotel, facing in a northerly direction. The U.S. Army, who administered Yellowstone for the Department of the Interior in these pre-NPS days, rejected the planned site, and this rejection ultimately doomed the proposal.<sup>49</sup>

More rumors of a new hotel for Mammoth followed, but it would be 1913 before any construction materialized.<sup>50</sup> Instead of an entirely new hotel, Reamer designed a three-story, 150-room wing, attached to the rear of the 1883–4 National Hotel. Construction of this wing, which is still standing today, began early in March 1913 and finished before the summer season.<sup>51</sup> Following completion of the wing, workers dismantled the top floors of the old hotel due to instability and general aging, but the lower portions stayed in service.

Reamer's final work on a hotel facility at Mammoth took place from 1934 to 1938, when he designed the three major



Reamer's drawing of the Chinese Gardens cottage.



The Mammoth Hot Springs dining room today. Here, Reamer achieved an Art Deco Style, using roof-line dormers and trim on the windows and corners of the dining room.

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SPN





Reamer's 1906 proposal for the Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel.

MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM, F.J. HAYNES COLLECTION



Reamer's 1909 proposal for the Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel.

MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY LIBRARY, F.J. HAYNES ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS COLLECTION

buildings and the cottages that today comprise the hotel complex. During a visit to Yellowstone in the summer or fall of 1934, Reamer began planning to raze the remainder of the original hotel, while retaining his 1913 wing, and building a one-story lobby and office area at its front.<sup>52</sup>

Demolition of the old National Hotel began in the summer of 1936. Workers poured the foundations for the new cafeteria and restaurant building in the fall of that year.<sup>53</sup> Early in 1937, they completed the foundations for the "Lounge" building, which contains the lobby, Map Room, gift shop, and general offices of the hotel concessioner.<sup>54</sup> The final portions of the complex, the Recreation Hall and cabins, did not appear until after Reamer's death in January 1938.<sup>55</sup> The Mammoth-area cabins, known as cottages, were a step above the automobile cabins in lodge facilities around the park. Inspired by the bungalow style that grew out of the Arts and Crafts Movement, the cottages featured wood trellis-ringed porches with cutouts of park animals.<sup>56</sup>

One stunning architectural space that Reamer created for Yellowstone was the Map Room of the Mammoth Hotel. Finished in Philippine mahogany, it is a light, airy place fea-

turing two full sides of plate glass windows with views of Fort Yellowstone and the Mammoth Terraces. The map itself was the inspiration of Mrs. Adelaide Child, then widow of Harry W. Child. The room opened only on the north, to the hallway of the hotel rather than to the lobby. The map was originally on the west wall. By this arrangement, Reamer made the use and enjoyment of the Map Room exclusive to hotel patrons. Visitors who stayed in the cottages, as well as the general public, would not have ready access to it.<sup>57</sup>

Mrs. Child's conception of the map included inlaid pictures of state flags, state capitols, major cities, rivers,



COURTESY RUTH QUINN

The map in the Mammoth Map Room used to hang where the doors to the room are now.

railroads, and a few places significant to the Child family, such as Anceny, Montana, and La Jolla, California. Following the map's installation, Reamer learned that it showed the capitol of Maryland at Baltimore. In the original design, he correctly placed the capitol at Annapolis, but the artisan who crafted the map "corrected" his "mistake." Reamer humorously suggested that perhaps the state would like to consider moving their capitol.<sup>58</sup> The error remains to this day.

***Transportation Co. garage (designed and built, 1903; burned March 20, 1925); barn, coach shed, bunkhouse for the YPTC, Mammoth (built 1906; razed 1937)***

Reamer designed at least four buildings for the YPTC at Mammoth. None stand today. The largest, often called the "Reamer Transportation Building," was built in the spring of 1903 and served as horse barn, stage storage facility, and transportation company offices. When the building opened in early June of 1903, the company held a "barn warming" dance attended by more than 300 people.<sup>59</sup>

It is difficult to look at the photographs of this artistic structure and think of it as a barn. One park visitor described it as "...a building whose architect seems to have been inspired by recollections of the Grand Canyon in his ideas of dimension and coloring. It is quite a large barn, painted exteriorly with a number of substantial colors, among which yellow, blue, green, white and black perhaps predominate."<sup>60</sup> The building burned in an accidental fire on March 30, 1925.

Reamer designed three more buildings for the transportation complex, located east of the current Chittenden House and North District Ranger Station. These 1906 structures included a drivers' dormitory, coach shed, and barn.<sup>61</sup> They were razed in the fall of 1937, at the time of completion of the current Mammoth Post Office.<sup>62</sup> Their "footprints" extended into the divided roadway north of the Post Office.

***Commissary store for YPHC, Mammoth (construction date unverified, pre-1905; razed 1937)***

Another charming building that Reamer designed and built in a bungalow style was the commissary store for the YPHC, immediately behind the Mammoth Hotel. This building was probably constructed in 1903 or 1904, and was demolished in 1937 to make way for the recreation hall and



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL. 30466

The "Reamer Transportation Building" was built for the YPTC in 1903–04. It was large and colorfully painted.

cottages.<sup>63</sup> It has an interesting historical significance, because it served as the first place of employment in Yellowstone for Charles Ashworth Hamilton, who worked there in 1905 with L.S. "Daddy" Wells, who ran the commissary.<sup>64</sup> Hamilton would go on to establish one of the park's longest and most respected concession dynasties, the Hamilton Stores. Another successful protégé of "Daddy" Wells was Alex Stuart who later established the Texaco distribution business in West Yellowstone.<sup>65</sup>

***Administration building for U.S. Government (proposed 1911)***

In addition to the major commissions for the YPHC and the YPTC, Reamer also designed one building for the U.S. Government and at least four residences for various concessioner employees in the Mammoth area.

In 1911, he contracted with the superintendent of the park to design a park administration building. No architectural plans for this structure seem to have survived, but Reamer intended it for the corner of the parade ground just north of the present site of the now-closed Hamilton Nature Store. The Yellowstone National Park Archives hold several items of correspondence related to its planning, to Reamer's payment for his services, and to the details of its structural specifications.<sup>66</sup>



NATIONAL ARCHIVES, COURTESY RUTH QUINN

The YPHC commissary store at Mammoth, razed in 1937, stood immediately behind the Mammoth Hotel.

**Private residences, Mammoth (1906, 1908, 1908, 1924)**

Reamer designed four concessioner residences for the Mammoth area; three of these were not built. They include a cottage for the YPTC, in 1906; a home for the Child family, in 1908; and a residence for Vernon Goodwin of the Yellowstone Camps Company, in 1924. They are strongly bungalow-style in character, and the title “cottage” that Reamer used on two of the studies is an appropriate description for these quaint proposals.

The fourth residential project did see completion—the 1908 Executive House, called on his blueprints “Cottage for Y.P.T.C., Mammoth.” This well-known Reamer project has gained distinction among architectural historians, who have compared its appearance to Frank Lloyd Wright’s Prairie Style. It has been described as the only remaining example of Prairie Style architecture in the Rockies, possibly inspired by Wright’s Robie House in Chicago. “(A)ll that is missing,” pronounces architectural historian Wheaton, “is the prairie.”<sup>67</sup> Reamer built the house as the home of Harry Child, whose son-in-law, W.M. Nichols, assumed residency in the 1930s after Mrs. Child retired to California. Long-time park bus driver Joe “Popeye” Mitchell recalls seeing Mrs. Nichols, in the 1940s, ensconced at the front window, monitoring the White touring cars as they passed. Drivers without their hats, or with their sleeves rolled up, were immediately reported to



A 1906 watercolor of the Reamer cottage proposal for the YPTC.



A 1908 Reamer watercolor of the proposed Child family home.

supervisors in Gardiner.<sup>68</sup> This house remains the home of the general manager of the hotel company.<sup>69</sup>

**West and East Entrances**

*Hotel at Yellowstone, for Riverside Village on west entrance road (hotel proposal 1911); East Entrance Station and West Entrance (proposed 1917)*

These three projects appear never to have made it beyond the proposal stage. Newspapers of the time mentioned them, as did superintendent’s reports. No plans seem to have survived. Although Riverside Village, near the current West Entrance, did have a Wylie tent camp and support buildings and residences used by the transportation companies, no large hotel facility ever appeared.

When the NPS finally built log entrance stations at the East Entrance (1929) and West Entrance (1924), NPS employees drew up the plans.<sup>70</sup>

**Upper Geyser Basin**

Of course, it is the Old Faithful Inn for which Reamer is most remembered in Yellowstone, and it is fitting to conclude our tour of his Yellowstone accomplishments in the shadow of that celebrated landmark. But Reamer’s inspiration and input were also significant on the two general stores, currently operated by Delaware North, that flank the great inn.



Reamer’s Executive House, built in 1908 at Mammoth Hot Springs, has been compared in appearance to Frank Lloyd Wright’s Prairie Style. It sits next to a thermal feature named Opal Terrace. When the thermal feature started to encroach upon the historic house, park managers were faced with a conundrum—a natural resource threatening a cultural resource. It was decided to try to divert the water away from the house by building a small retaining wall.

*Old Faithful Inn (designed 1903, built 1903–1904, wing addition 1913–1914, wing addition 1927–1928, addition 1936)*

There is no need to repeat the detailed narrative provided by Karen Reinhart's article, but a summary might be in order. The Old Faithful Inn was why Reamer was hired to come to Yellowstone. As already mentioned, Harry W. Child, accustomed to spending part of the winter at the Hotel del Coronado, admired Reamer's work on several buildings there. Inquiring of his good friend E.S. Babcock (manager of the Del) he learned the name of the architect and



COURTESY ROGER ANDERSON

This postcard shows the beauty of the Old Faithful area in winter.

**“I told you in my wire that I was as much interested in the appearance of Old Faithful Inn as the Government, and I will go further, and say it means a lot more to me...I hope that you will pardon me if I write rather feelingly about Old Faithful, but it was my first hotel, Child, and I am a bit sentimental about it.”**

made arrangements to meet him. This was in January 1903, and it is likely that Reamer returned to Yellowstone with Mr. and Mrs. Child.<sup>71</sup>

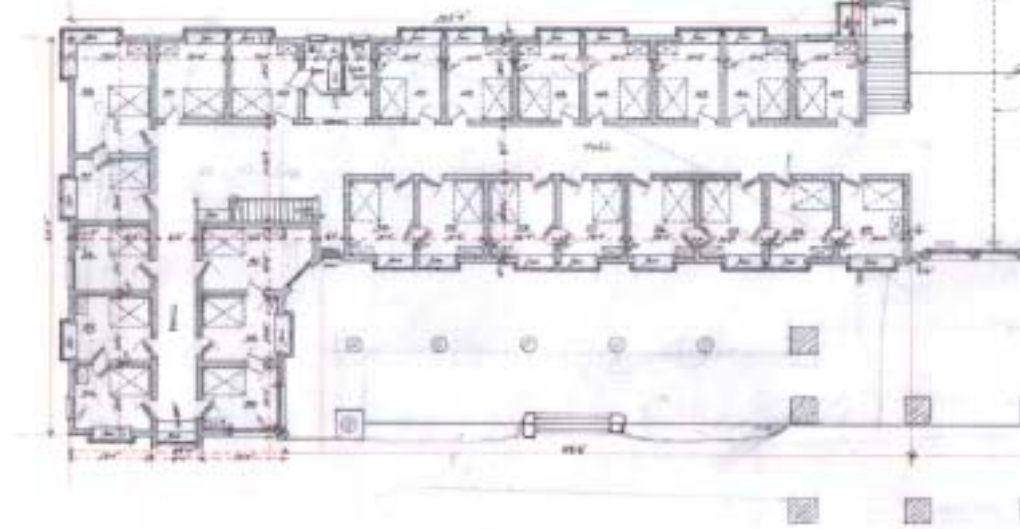
The idea of building a rustic hostelry at Old Faithful did not originate with Robert Reamer. Correspondence between Babcock and Reamer reveals that the YPHC was already planning to build in the Rustic Style. Babcock wrote, “(Y)our taste in that line would redound to your credit.”<sup>72</sup> Wood cutting for the hotel at the Upper Geyser Basin began in the fall of 1902, several months before Reamer was even hired.<sup>73</sup> William Bement, Superintendent of Buildings and Machinery for the YPHC, envisioned nine cottages containing dining facilities, a hotel office, lobby area, and guest rooms.

The plan for the cottages sounds remarkably like the future inn. “Each cottage will have a large reception hall with a large fire-place in one end. Over the hall will be a rotunda, so that people on the second floor can obtain a view of the hall...From the halls and rotundas the sleeping rooms will open.”<sup>74</sup>

Child abandoned Bement's plans upon the engagement of Robert Reamer, whose plans for an “Old Faithful Tavern” were approved in May 1903. Construction began immediately.

Reamer's work on the inn eventually

had four stages. The first was during its initial design and construction, and the second was when he returned to Old Faithful in 1913 to design the East Wing. In 1927 he designed the 150-room West Wing addition. Correspondence between Reamer and hotel company executives reveals that the Old Faithful Inn was special to Reamer. “I hope that you will pardon me if I write rather feelingly about Old Faithful, but it was my first hotel, Child, and I am a bit sentimental about it...”<sup>75</sup> Reamer's final, smaller project for the inn was in 1936–1937, when he designed the Bear Pit Lounge.



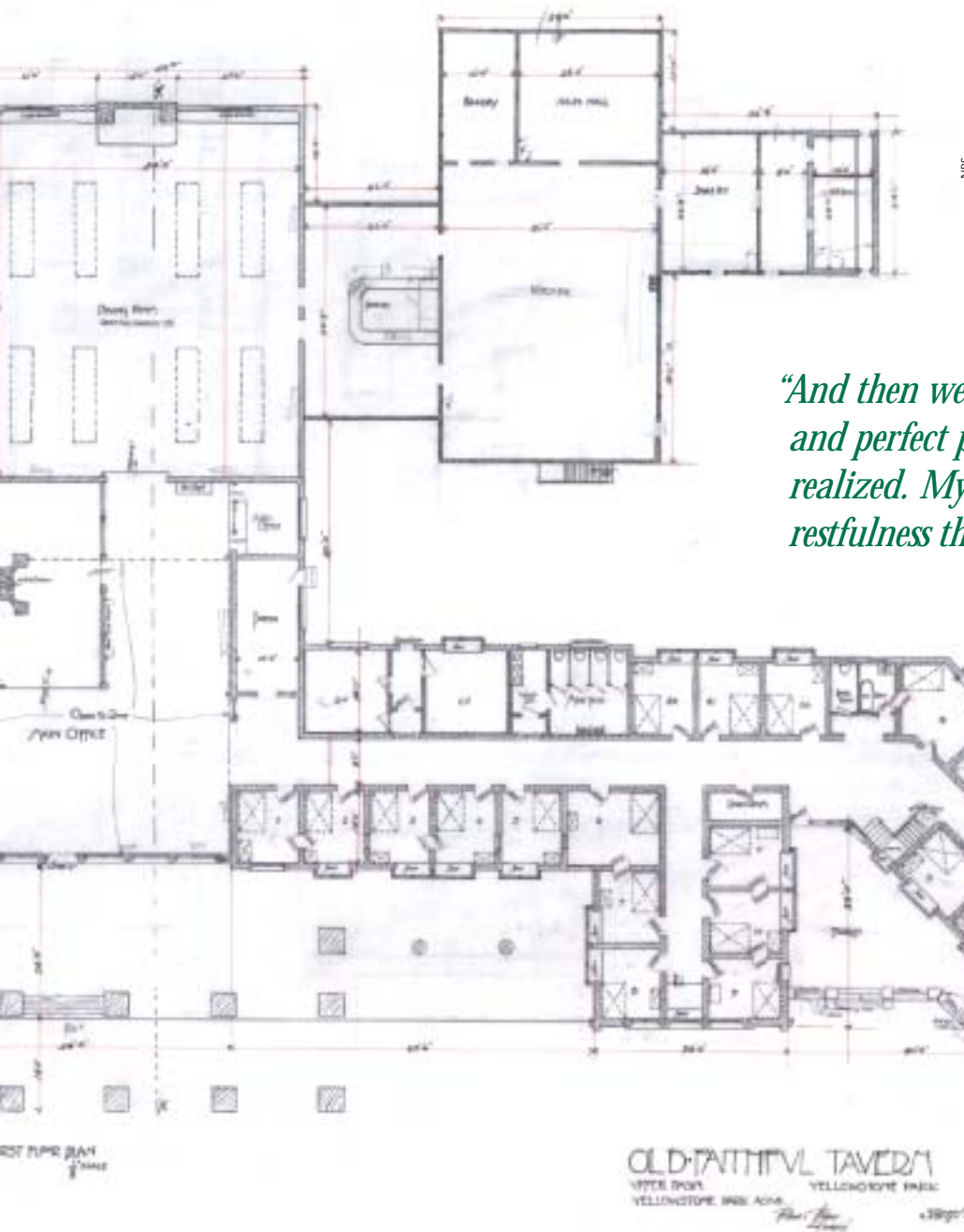
An architectural drawing of the first floor plan of the inn by Robert Reamer.



Reamer used burl pine to create intimate spaces within the expanse of the inn.



The fireplace is still a welcoming area.



*“And then we came to the Inn, the most unique and perfect place; it is the craftsman’s dream realized. My room alone is a paradise of restfulness though in a rough and rustic fashion.”*

—1905 visitor

***Addition to store, for H.E. Klammer, Upper Basin (designed and built, 1903)***

“(C)uddl(ing) like a chick under the wing of the Old Faithful Inn” is the Upper Geyser Basin’s first general store, built in 1897 as Henry E. Klammer’s Curio Shop.<sup>76</sup> It is surprising to learn from photos in the park archives that Klammer’s original building, now commonly known as the “lower store,” was a clapboard, farmhouse-like structure. This means that instead of the knotted pine of the Klammer store acting as an inspiration for the Old Faithful Inn (as was speculated for years), the opposite was true. Robert Reamer’s 1903 blueprints for an addition to Klammer’s store show that it was the inn’s architect who changed the personality of the store, adding gnarled wood to the east porch.<sup>77</sup>

Perhaps inspired by the construction he had been watching throughout the summer of 1903 on the nearby hotel, Klammer petitioned the Department of the Interior for permission to add to his store. Correspondence indicates that this request and reply occurred in the fall of 1903, though Reamer’s plans are dated simply “1903.”<sup>78</sup> There is no indication that



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 3167-1

The Klammer store prior to Reamer’s remodeling.



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 688

Reamer’s addition to the Klammer store. It was the inn that influenced the store, not the other way around.

Reamer took part in subsequent additions to the store in 1914, 1921, 1923, or 1932. The distinctive “knotty porch” of the lower store remains a landmark of the Old Faithful Historic District.

***Basin Auto Camp Store for Charles Hamilton (designed 1928, built 1929–1930)***

Thanks to recent research of retired NPS historian Mary Shivers Culpin, we now know Robert Reamer’s connection with this building.<sup>79</sup> This project is unique as the only known collaboration between Reamer and long-time general store concessioner Charles A. Hamilton.<sup>80</sup>

Reamer’s original plans for the Basin Auto Camp Store (now the Upper General Store) presented a Spanish/Mediterranean style finished in white stucco. Strong objections to this design from the Landscape Architecture Division of the NPS sent him back to the drawing board. Specific directions were given to Reamer to consider the newly built Gilbert Stanley Underwood hotel in Yosemite National Park, the Ahwahnee. The NPS landscape architects preferred Underwood’s skillful use of concrete construction to resemble wood construction. Hence, they approved Reamer’s second plan, which took this approach. The mimic log construction on the lower courses of the store illustrates this attempt to conform to requirements.<sup>81</sup>

Unfortunately, no architectural plans are now known to exist. Determining the authorship of this building is further complicated by the involvement of Hamilton’s major contractor and construction foreman, D. Rasmussen. Surviving correspondence indicates that “Ras” made numerous suggestions and alterations as the project was underway. Perhaps, like nearby the Old Faithful Lodge, this structure has many authors, notably Reamer, Rasmussen, and Thomas Vint, Chief Landscape Architect of the NPS.<sup>82</sup>

## **A Long Yellowstone Career**

Robert Reamer was certainly not the only architect who provided designs for Yellowstone. Early in the park’s history, concessioners hired eastern architects such as L.F. Buffinton of St. Paul (the National Hotel at Mammoth), Bassford and Donohue of St. Paul (Haynes Log Cabin Studio, Old Faithful), N.L. Haller of Washington, D.C. (Fountain Hotel and original Lake Hotel), and H.P. Thompson of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin (concessioner E.C. Waters’ office and residence at Lake). Even while Reamer served in Yellowstone, other architects made significant contributions to the park’s architectural scene, notably Link and Haire of Helena (Gardiner Bunkhouse, Gardiner Service Center and Laundry, Lake Hotel Annex, and Lodgepole and Juniper dorms at Mammoth) and Fred F. Willson of Bozeman (Old Faithful Lodge Recreation Hall, Old Faithful Laundry building, Lake Lodge, Sylvan Pass Lodge, Spruce Dorm, Xanterra Engineering Building at



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, J.E. HAYNES FOUNDATION COLLECTION

The Old Faithful Inn from Beehive Geyser cone. Haynes photo, 1929.

Mammoth, Gardiner warehouse, and the former Mammoth Nature Store). Architect Herbert Maier, creator of the NPS museums at Fishing Bridge, Norris, and Madison Junction (and the since-demolished Museum of Thermal Activity at Old Faithful) is considered by some NPS historians the father of rustic architecture in the national parks, even though his rustic work began long after Robert Reamer's.

But no other architect or firm had such a high-profile relationship with the park as did Robert Reamer. Naylor describes him as "akin to a court architect to Child and [the] Northern Pacific," designing for hotel, transportation, government and private purposes.<sup>83</sup>

Not only did Reamer have an impact on Yellowstone architecture that extended to nearly every park village, his working relationship with the park lasted for 34 years. From 1903 to 1937, he was involved in nearly every building project entered into by the YPHC and the YPTC. Today, the list of Reamer projects in Yellowstone tops 40. Ten of those never made it past the proposal stage. Eighteen of the projects built are still standing.

Reamer's work in Yellowstone can be divided into four phases, which are intertwined with the milestones of his personal life. He was in the park for approximately 18 months in 1903 and 1904, and was accompanied by his young wife, Mabel Hawkins Reamer.<sup>84</sup> She remained with him as he traveled to Birmingham, Alabama, in 1905, and Los Angeles, California, in 1906. She died of Bright's disease in San Diego in August 1906, after only 7½ years of marriage.<sup>85</sup>

Reamer returned to Yellowstone between 1906 and 1911

to work on other projects in the park. During this period, he met Louise Chase, niece of U.S. Magistrate John Meldrum. They married in the fall of 1911, in her adopted home of Chicago. The Reamers made their home in Boston between 1912 and 1914. The Reamer's only daughter, Jane, was born in Boston in 1913.<sup>86</sup>

The 1915–1920 period was a turbulent one for the Reamer family. Robert joined his brother Daniel in practice in Cleveland around 1916 or 1917.<sup>87</sup> He was in Yellowstone in 1917, joining an attempt to climb Mt. Moran in the Tetons with journalist Emerson Hough, park concessioner Jack E. Haynes, and others.<sup>88</sup> The west and east entrance station proposals were completed that year. Louise and Jane traveled alone to Biloxi, Mississippi, where Louise found work in a bank while her husband struggled to find career stability.<sup>89</sup> He eventually found himself in Washington State, where he obtained a civilian post in the Bremerton naval shipyards, worked as a clerk for a shipbuilding company, and finally established himself in an architectural position with the Metropolitan Building Company in Seattle.<sup>90</sup>

For the next 17 years, from 1920 until his death in 1938, Reamer continued to design projects for Yellowstone from his offices in Seattle. Jane said that she did not think a year went by that her father did not travel to Yellowstone for some project. By 1936, Reamer's health began to fail, and he was hospitalized with circulation problems in his foot, which led to the amputation of a leg. Despite continuing health problems, he kept working until two months before his death, at home in Seattle on January 7, 1938, at the age of 64.<sup>91</sup>

## Enduring Influence

Robert Reamer's influence on Yellowstone has outlasted his lifelong career relationship with the park. Structures he designed continue to earn recognition and acclaim 80 to 100 years after he completed them. The Old Faithful Inn is itself a National Historic Landmark. The Lake Hotel is on the National Register of Historic Places. Other Reamer buildings at Old Faithful and Mammoth are contributing elements to National Historic Districts.

Not all of Reamer's work in the park falls into the "rustic" category, but it is the style with which he is most associated in Yellowstone. Hiram Chittenden, U.S. Army Engineer, called him an "architect of great originality and particularly skillful in adapting his work to natural surroundings."<sup>92</sup> As already mentioned, NPS architect Herbert Maier, working with others in the Division of Landscape Architecture, refined and formalized such ideas, developing a distinctive national park style. Robert Reamer's greatest legacy is

evident today: whenever architects and planners sit down in a national park to plan a new building, they think about the Old Faithful Inn.

In contemporary Yellowstone architecture, Reamer's genius finds validation. At Canyon Village, both Dunraven Lodge and Cascade Lodge incorporate design elements of the Grand Canyon Hotel. The new Old Faithful Snow Lodge contains architectural tributes to both Old Faithful Inn and the Basin Auto Camp Store. The designers of these structures gave care to acknowledging the work of Yellowstone's brilliant architect. The current proposal for a new NPS visitor center for Old Faithful nods significantly to the Old Faithful Inn. Sixty-six years after he passed from our presence, he continues to influence architectural design in Yellowstone and other national parks. If Robert Reamer's ghost is anywhere today, he is looking up at Dunraven and Cascade Lodges or walking the halls of Old Faithful Snow Lodge, nodding his head in satisfaction.

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COURTESY RUTH QUINN

Ruth Quinn spends her summers conducting tours of Old Faithful Inn for Xanterra Parks & Resorts, Inc. She has lived in Yellowstone since 1990, and worked as a concessioner tour guide since 1992. She holds a B.A. from Bethany College in Lindsborg, Kansas, and a Master's degree from the University of Kansas. She is currently preparing a manuscript on the life and work of Robert C. Reamer.

## Endnotes

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2. Lawrence Kreisman, Reamer Biography, unpublished seminar paper, University of Washington, Fall 1977, copy in vertical files "Biography/Reamer," Yellowstone Park Library and Archives, p. 13-14.

**"Robert Reamer's greatest legacy is evident today: whenever architects and planners sit down in a national park to plan a new building, they think about the Old Faithful Inn."**



This postcard of a 1903 Reamer watercolor of the Old Faithful Inn was recently acquired by the park. It was mailed in September 1904, the first year the inn was open to guests. The last line reads, "Remembrance to anyone inquiring." Courtesy Yellowstone Archives.



3. Letter from W.H. Fey to Dr. Richard Bartlett, June 5, 1970; Letter from Jane Reamer White to Richard A. Bartlett, Sept. 21, 1970, courtesy Dr. Bartlett; Richard A. Bartlett, *Yellowstone: A Wilderness Besieged*. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press), 1985, p. 180–182, 184.
4. Personal communication to author, July 21, 1999, Old Faithful Inn.
5. Kreisman, p. 13.
6. Letter from Jane Reamer White to Richard A. Bartlett, Sept. 21, 1970, courtesy Dr. Bartlett.
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8. David A. Naylor, *Old Faithful Inn and Its Legacy: The Vernacular Transformed*. Cornell University, Master of Arts Thesis, 1990, p. 27.
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11. *The Oberlin Weekly*, December 30, 1886, January 13, 1887; "More of the Park," *Livingston Enterprise*, September 4, 1909, p. 3.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Obituary, Daniel Paul Reamer, *The Oberlin News*, January 19, 1900, p. 1.
14. "More of the Park," *Livingston Enterprise*, September 4, 1909, p. 3.
15. "Local Intelligence," *The San Diego Union*, July 10, 1895, p. 6. Jane indicated that her father may have visited Yellowstone as early as 1895, but she gave no reasons for her supposition.
16. Marcie Buckley and Stephen S. Oakford *The Crown City's Brightest Gem: A History of the Hotel del Coronado*. (Coronado, CA: Hotel del Coronado, May 1979), p. 49–50.
17. Letter from E.S. Babcock to R.C. Reamer, January 20, 1903, book 80. p. 972, Hotel del Coronado Collection, Series I: Bound Correspondence Feb. 1888–1907, Special Collections and University Archives, Malcolm A. Love Library, San Diego State University, San Diego, California.
18. Rodd L. Wheaton, "Architecture of Yellowstone: A Microcosm of American Design," *Yellowstone Science*, Fall 2000, p. 18.
19. Letter from Superintendent (Albright) to the Director, National Park Service, September 17, 1927, Box C-14; and Letter from W.M. Nichols to R.C. Reamer, March 5, 1937, Box YPC-142, Yellowstone Park Library and Archives.
20. Bozeman architect Fred F. Willson also made extensive use of dormer windows in his many projects for the Yellowstone Park Camps Company.
21. "Yellowstone Park," advertising brochure of the Yellowstone Park Association Hotels, (Portland, Oregon: The James Printing Company, 1905), author's collection.
22. For the best study of Lake Hotel history see Barbara Dittl and Joanne Mallmann. *Plain to Fancy: The Story of the Lake Hotel*, (Boulder, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart, Inc. 1987); and Barbara H. Dittl and Joanne Mallmann, "Plain to Fancy: The Lake Hotel, 1889–1929," *Montana The Magazine of Western History*, 34 (Spring 1984) pp. 32–45.
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26. Letter from W.M. Nichols to Edmund B. Rogers, July 24, 1937, in Folder: "Lake & Fishing Bridge 1935–1942," Box YPC-141, Yellowstone Park Library and Archives.
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29. Personal communication with long time bus driver, Leon Brunton, July 20, 2003.
30. Horace Albright, *Annual Report for Yellowstone National Park, 1921–1922*, no date, p. 40–41; *Annual Report, 1923*, not signed or dated, p. 46.
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48. "Hotels to be built in Two U.S. Parks," by William E. Curtis in *The Chicago Record-Herald*, Tuesday, February 23, 1909, p. 1 & 10.
49. Letter from Major, Fifth Cavalry, to Lieut. Col. H.M. Chittenden, Seattle, Wash., February 21, 1909; Document 8564, Box No. 16, Item 30, Yellowstone Park Library and Archives.
50. "Heavy Park Travel," *The Livingston Enterprise*, May 14, 1910, p. 5; "Local Layout," *Livingston Enterprise*, August 3, 1911, p. 3.
51. "Put Addition on Mammoth, Hotel in Park to be Rebuilt and Enlarged..." *The Daily Enterprise*, February 18, 1913, p. 1; "Will Build a New Yellowstone Park Hotel," *The Daily Enterprise*, March 26, 1913, p. 3; Telegram from Thomas Cooper to Howard Elliott, June 16, 1913; Folder 1, President's Subject File No. 209A, Northern Pacific Railway Records, Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, Minn.

52. Letter from William M. Nichols to Robert C. Reamer, September 24, 1934; Folder: "Old Faithful 1935–1938," Box YPC-141; Letter from Robert C. Reamer, to W.M. Nichols, October 18, 1934; Box YPC-33, Yellowstone Park Library and Archives.

53. Letter from W.M. Nichols to R.C. Reamer, August 20, 1936; Letter from W.M. Nichols to R.C. Reamer, October 5, 1936; Box YPC-142, Yellowstone Park Library and Archives.

54. Letter from B.O. Hallin to W.M. Nichols, December 22, 1936; Folder: "Construction—Gardiner 1936–1938," Box YPC-141, Yellowstone Park Library and Archives.

55. Letter from B.O. Hallin to W.M. Nichols, February 11, 1938; Folder: "Construction—Gardiner 1936–1938," Box YPC-141, Yellowstone Park Library and Archives.

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61. Letter from H.W. Child to Howard Elliott, Sept. 18, 1906; Folder 10, President's Subject File No. 209 B, Northern Pacific Railway Records, Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, Minn.

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65. J.E. Haynes Typescript of notes: Alex Stuart, Texaco Distributor, West Yellowstone Montana, Interviewed in 1954 by Miss DeFrate; File 27: Wells, Lansings S. (1856–1918), Box 158, Collection 1504, Haynes Research Files, Montana State University Libraries, Bozeman.

66. Letter Box 98, Item 46: "Proposed New Administration Bldg Mammoth. Plans by Robert C. Reamer 1910–1911," Yellowstone Park Library and Archives.

67. Naylor, p. 31; Letter from Rodd L. Wheaton, Supervisory Historical Architect to H.L. Ritchie, TWA Services, Inc., September 23, 1982, Folder H30, Box H-18, Yellowstone Park Library and Archives; Wheaton in *Yellowstone Science*, p. 16.

68. Personal communication, Joe Mitchell, Billings, Montana.

69. In at least one interpretive program, the author has heard this referred to incorrectly as the "Superintendent's House." It has always been occupied by hotel company executives.

70. Memo from Kenneth C. McCarter, Jr. Landscape architect, Week of June 15, 1929, dated June 15, 1929, Folder 8: Landscape Division Matters, F.Y. 1930, Box D-38; Letter from Horace M. Albright, Supt. to Daniel R. Hull, Landscape Engineer, March 7, 1924, Folder 4: D.R. Hull, General Correspondence, F.Y. 1924, Box D-38, Yellowstone Park Library and Archives.

71. Letter from E.S. Babcock to R.C. Reamer, January 20, 1903, Book 80, p. 97, Hotel del Coronado Collection, Series I: Bound Correspondence Feb. 1888–1907, Special Collections and University Archives, Malcolm A. Love Library, San Diego State University, San Diego, California.

72. *Ibid.*

73. Letter from H.W. Child, to Major John Pitcher, December 18, 1902, Document 4752, Item 19, Box 10, Yellowstone Park Library and Archives; "Local Layout," *Livingston Enterprise*, December 27, 1902, p. 5.

74. "A Unique Plan: Tourists Will be Housed in Log Cottage at Upper Geyser Basin," *Livingston Enterprise*, November 22, 1902, p. 1.

75. Letter from R.C. Reamer to H.W. Child, June 27, 1927, Box C-14, Yellowstone Park Library and Archives.

76. Petersen, p. 68.

77. "Addition to Store Bldg. For H.E. Klamer Esq., Upper Basin, Yellowstone Park, RC Reamer, Archt. 1903," Item #2375, Box 83: "Miscellaneous Leases," Letters Received by the Office of the Secretary of the Interior Relative to National Parks, 1872–1907; Records of the Office of Secretary of the Interior; Record Group 79, Records of the National Park Service, National Archives, College Park, MD.

78. Letter from Henry E. Klamer to Hon. E.A. Hitchcock, Secretary of the Interior, September 12, 1903, Document #4433, Box 83: "Miscellaneous Leases," Letters Received by the Office of the Secretary of the Interior Relative to National Parks, 1872–1907; Records of the Office of Secretary of the Interior, Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79; National Archives, College Park, MD.

79. M.S. Culpin, Presentation at Fourth Biennial Scientific Conference on the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, "People and Place: The Human Experience in Greater Yellowstone." Mammoth Hot Springs, WY October 12–15, 1997.

80. At the same time that Reamer drew plans for the Upper Basin Store, he was also working on plans for a new Hamilton's Store at Fishing Bridge. When construction began on that structure in 1930, it utilized another architect's plans.

81. Memo from T.C. Vint, Landscape Engineer to Mr. Albright, July 23, 1928, File "Building Construction, C.A. Hamilton, F.Y. 1929–30–31–32–33–34 and 7/1/34 to 6/30/35," Box C-28; Letter from M.F. Daum, Assistant Superintendent to T.C. Vint, August 17, 1928, Folder 7: "Landscape Division Matters, F.Y. 1929"; Box D-38, Yellowstone Park Library and

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82. Letter from Thos. C. Vint, Chief Landscape Architect to M.F. Daum, Acting Superintendent, February 19, 1929, File "Building Construction, C.A. Hamilton, F.Y. 1929–30–31–32–33–34 and 7/1/34 to 6/30/35," Box C-28, "Weekly Report of Kenneth C. McCarter, Junior Landscape Architect, June 22, 1929," dated June 22, 1929, Folder 8: Landscape Division Matters, F.Y. 1930, Box D-38, Yellowstone Park Library and Archives.

83. Naylor, *Legacy*, p. 33.

84. "Local Intelligence," *San Diego Union*, December 6, 1898.

85. R.L. Polks & Company's Birmingham City Directory 1905; Los Angeles City Directory 1906; Death Certificate, Mabel Reamer, California State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, San Diego County.

86. Reamer Wedding announcement, folder "A. Lyall," Box C-17, Yellowstone Park Library and Archives; Death Certificate, Jane Reamer White, North Carolina Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources, Vital Records Section.

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91. Letter from W.M. Nichols to Robert C. Reamer, October 1, 1935, Folder: "Lake & Fishing Bridge 1935–1942"; Letter from Robert C. Reamer to W.M. Nichols, April 14, 1936, Folder: "Old Faithful 1935–1938," Box YPC-141; Letter from Andrew Steers, Metropolitan Building Company to W.M. Nichols, January 10, 1938, Box YPC-142, Yellowstone Park Library and Archives; Death Certificate, Robert C. Reamer, Washington State Department of Health, Division of Vital Statistics.

92. "Technical Report upon the Improvement of Yellowstone National Park." There is no author or date on document, but it covers 1904 and is presumed to be written by Hiram Chittenden, p. 50, Item 69, Box No. 33, Yellowstone Park Library and Archives.

# NATURE NOTES

## A Firestorm over the Inn

### *A Personal Account of the 1988 North Fork Fire*

*Jeff Henry*

ALL PHOTOS © JEFF HENRY

*“The darkness, the winds, the embers everywhere, and the incredible pandemonium of people and vehicles and fire hoses all combined to give me a horrifyingly surreal sensation.”*

—Lee H. Whittlesey, National Park Service Ranger, recalling 1988

THE SUMMER OF 1988 marked the beginning of my twelfth year in Yellowstone. That summer I worked as a National Park Service (NPS) ranger stationed at Madison Junction, 16 miles north of Old Faithful. Though certified for law-enforcement work, most of my time was spent on resource management projects. When it became apparent in late July that Yellowstone was on the threshold of an exceptional fire season, my supervisors assigned me to photograph the fires for the park archives. Except for one day off, I spent every day for the next two months engaged in that project in nearly all parts of the park.

The North Fork Fire initially threatened the Old Faithful area shortly after a woodcutter in Idaho's Targhee National Forest started the blaze with a carelessly discarded cigarette on July 22. Although smokejumpers and other firefighters attacked the North Fork Fire on the first afternoon of its existence, the fire escaped their efforts and in a few days was throwing up tremendous columns of smoke capped by huge convection clouds as it burned across the Madison Plateau northwest of Old Faithful.

For several days in late July and early August, the smoke columns and clouds were readily visible from Old Faithful, and the fire was close enough to the complex that ash sifted down from overhead smoke onto the Old Faithful Inn and other buildings in the area. Some of the ash particles were perfectly recognizable as conifer needles or twigs; the particles retained their integrity as they burned and were swept skyward in the conflagration, then were carried considerable distances by overhead winds. They would, however, disintegrate instantly when I touched them with the tip of my finger.

Massive fire line construction along the near flank of the North Fork Fire kept it away from Old Faithful as Yellowstone's prevailing southwesterly winds swept the fire across the park toward the northeast. Ultimately, the gigantic fire would achieve a perimeter encompassing 500,000 acres, but for about a month it seemed that Old Faithful had been left safely in the monster's wake. In late August and early September, however, Yellowstone experienced a period of anomalous east and northeast winds which, in the military hyperbole so favored by firefighters,

outflanked the fire lines constructed in August to shield the Old Faithful complex. Once the fire outflanked the fire lines to the south, any reasonable person looking at a fire map could foresee that the North Fork would have an unobstructed run at Old Faithful when the normal southwesterly winds returned.

By the afternoon of September 5, and certainly by the next afternoon, it was obvious that such a run was well underway. Sunset at Old Faithful on September 6 filtered through two large fire columns to the west, and the area was bathed in an ominous orange light. Smoke from the fire columns blew directly toward the inn and other buildings in the development, and once again ash drifted down from the sky into the complex. A dry cold front with powerful winds was forecast for September 7, but Old Faithful and the rest of Yellowstone nonetheless remained open to visitors.

On the morning of September 7, I was temporarily diverted from the fire documentation project to help prepare for the fire's arrival at Old Faithful, even though some park officials publicly claimed there was only a one in

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three chance of that happening. I drove a large stake-bodied dump truck from Madison, met a crew at Old Faithful, and together we moved a large number of road and trail signs from the NPS sign cache to an empty parking lot near the Old Faithful Ranger Station. An old log structure near the forest on the west edge of the Old Faithful complex, the sign cache was one of four such structures in its immediate neighborhood. Defending the four structures so close to the trees was considered difficult and a low priority, but the signs themselves represented a large investment of labor and were considered worth saving. When the fire struck later in the day, the sign cache, while unprotected and very close to intense fire in the nearby forest, inexplicably survived. Capriciously, the fire burned two of the other three nearby cabins. The signs we removed also survived, somehow not igniting when a whirlwind of sparks and embers blew through the parking lots near the Old Faithful Ranger Station and the Old Faithful Inn later in the day.

After moving the signs, my crew and I next loaded the stake truck with firewood that had been piled adjacent to some houses in the NPS residential area on the west side of the Grand Loop Road, opposite the Old Faithful Inn. By the time we finished loading the wood, the fire's arrival at Old Faithful seemed imminent, so I parked the truck in front of the ranger station,

grabbed my cameras and headed for the widow's walk on the roof of the Old Faithful Inn.

I found two firefighters on top of the inn, each equipped with an infrared scope to see through smoke to identify hotspots in a fire. They were using the scopes to scan the timbered ridges west of Old Faithful, beyond which the North Fork Fire had created a large bank of smoke. Slurry bombers were dropping their loads of red fire retardant on the near edge of the pall of smoke, and several helicopters were flying about as well. Some of the helicopters were carrying buckets from which they dumped water on the fire, while others were unencumbered and presumably carried observers to scout the fire.

Pretty quickly after I arrived on the roof of the inn, the fire to the west became more active and organized itself into a long front. The day had been breezy since dawn, but now the winds picked up to gale force. I've heard variously that the winds were 50 to 80 miles per hour that afternoon at Old Faithful. From personal experience I can say that the winds were very, very strong, so strong that I distinctly remember thinking they would have made September 7, 1988, memorable even if there had been no fire. Case in point: a tripod has a widely braced stance and offers little sail area to the wind, but on several occasions that afternoon on the roof of Old Faithful

Inn I had to catch my tripod to keep it from blowing over.

The North Fork Fire had several weeks of momentum, it had an abundance of fuel parched by extreme drought, and on September 7 it was driven to explosiveness by overpowering winds. Behind the smoke a blitzkrieg of fire and wind was bearing down on the Old Faithful area. How high were the flames? I can't say for sure. Most of the time the flames were hidden by smoke, but once in a while the smoke parted and I could see flames I reckoned to be three or four times the height of the trees, lodgepole pines around 100 feet tall. Usually the flame presented itself as a wall, a long curtain of fire that advanced in an undulating, flickering line. But sometimes huge balls of flame flew out from the front as the wind caught a pocket of gasified fuel and flung it forward as it ignited. Some of these fireballs appeared to be several hundred yards in diameter and were hurled several hundred yards ahead, where they ignited new pockets of fire in advance of the front.

As the fire advanced it seemed to intensify. Visually, the effect became one of a gigantic rolling wave of flame as the fire sucked air in at ground level while the wind aloft, blowing in the opposite direction, blew the crest of flame forward. The flame really did roll forward and curl under itself at its base, like an ocean wave breaking in the surf. At other times I saw spinning spirals of fire, and couldn't help but think of flaming tornadoes. These visual impressions were caught in snatches, visible only when the vagaries of wind and fire opened the smoky curtain. But the tremendous roaring of the fire was always there, even when you couldn't see it.

On top of the Old Faithful Inn, the two firefighters had put down their infrared scopes—the images in the scopes had long since become too bright for their eyes to bear. And by this time we needed no special technology to see what was coming toward the



"Sunset at Old Faithful on September 6 filtered through two large fire columns to the west, and the area was bathed in an ominous orange light."



Two firefighters on top of the inn used infrared scopes to identify hotspots through the smoke. Later that day, the images became too bright for their eyes.

Old Faithful area. Also by this time, all the other people who had gathered on the roof of the inn beat a hasty retreat downward; the spotters and I were the only ones left on the widow's walk. Talking between themselves and to me while they donned protective masks and gloves, the spotters agreed that at this point there was nothing that could be done to avoid the catastrophe that in their view was now inevitable. For my part I could see no reason to disagree. From where I was on top of the inn it looked as though the buildings of the area were about to be incorporated into the firestorm and that a lot of people probably were going to die. The spotters and I left the widow's walk on top of the inn and hurried down the half-log stairs to the lobby floor. As I went out the inn's back door to the south parking lot, I thought I was leaving the building for the last time.

In the parking lot I was struck by a blizzard of sparks and embers as a billow of smoke surged just overhead and light nearly vanished from the day. There were still many visitors in the area, and I had visions of taking one or two families by the hand and leading them to the geyser plains in front of the inn, where I had further visions of squatting in the water of the Firehole River while we watched the Old Faithful Inn and other buildings burn. In the chaos that seemed certain to ensue I thought that would be the best I

could do. Fire had already entered the Old Faithful complex—I could hear explosions behind the Snow Lodge as cabins burned and heated air inside the structures expanded to the point where the cabins burst. The explosions made me think of artillery bombardment in a war zone.

Back at the inn, a large number of firefighters had gathered with hoses connected to fire hydrants. Others were on hand with water-pumping trucks. These people wet down the sides of the building as high as their hoses would spray. The sprinkler system on the roof of the inn also had been activated, and water deluged over the eaves. All this was a welcome surprise, for just a short time earlier in the day protection for the inn had seemed very sparse. I saw all this activity as I gravitated back toward the inn, waiting to see exactly what was going to happen before I made that last ditch move toward the geyser basin. Those brave firefighters, some of whom had even stationed themselves perilously on the flat roofs of the East and West Wings of the inn, deserve great credit for saving the historic structure. Without their efforts to keep the walls and roofs of the inn wet, the building certainly would have ignited in the fiery holocaust that blew in that afternoon. Indeed, the very air seemed to be on fire. Several times that day I saw isolated bits of fuel, things like upturned stumps in the geyser basins

or fallen logs on islands in the parking lot, burst into flame in seemingly spontaneous ignition, as though exhaled upon by some fire-breathing dragon. In addition to the ground blizzard of sparks and embers that swirled around our ankles and calves, larger embers showered down upon the inn like fiery ejecta from an erupting volcano.

A little-known fact is that one of the inn's outbuildings actually did catch fire that day. The old laundry building, the building now used as a recycling collection center, caught fire on its roof. Fortunately, some alert concession employees who happened to be nearby quickly put out the spot fire.

As I moved around the inn snapping pictures of firefighters at work, someone shouted above the infernal roar of the wind that there was fire on Observation Point, above Geyser Hill on the other side of the Firehole River from the Old Faithful Inn. It was true—wind-borne fire had leapt completely across the Old Faithful area, including all the parking lots and bare geyser plains, and ignited new fires on the other side of the basin. The fire above Geyser Hill grew quickly, and soon ran over the hill and out of sight beyond Observation Point. Now the Old Faithful Inn was literally surrounded by fire. Radio traffic on the NPS handset I carried confirmed the obvious, that fire now blocked the road in both directions from Old Faithful.

And so it went for some period of time; it's hard to say how long. Firefighters continued hosing the inn, a few small structures continued to blow up as they burned on the south flank of the Old Faithful development, and spot fires appeared in small plots of trees around the inn and Old Faithful Geyser. Gradually, as the afternoon wound down and the main front of the fire moved off to the east, the immediacy of the situation lessened. Slowly, it became safe to believe that the Old Faithful Inn and the other major buildings of the area were going to survive and that no one would be killed or



seriously injured in the afternoon's conflagration.

Some sources claim that a wind shift of a few degrees blew the main front of the North Fork Fire off course just before it hit the Old Faithful area, but I have never been able to find the source behind this assertion. I can't imagine anyone on scene that afternoon having the necessary equipment, or the presence of mind to use it had it been available, to make such an observation. My personal interpretation is that a long front of fire arrived at Old Faithful from the west, and that the segment of the front that would have intersected the Old Faithful Inn and the main body of the complex lost much of its awesome momentum when it encountered areas of sparse fuel between itself and the development. The main park highway, the NPS housing area to the west of the road, and the Myriad Springs area were some of the elements that created the fire break that contributed to the survival of the inn. I think the expansive parking lots adjacent to the inn were especially important fire breaks. Dichotomously, the line of fire that struck the south flank of the development burned through unbroken and heavy fuel right into the Snow Lodge cabin area, and that's where most buildings were lost. Fortunately, most



**“Those brave firefighters...deserve great credit for saving the historic structure. Without their efforts... the building certainly would have ignited in the fiery holocaust that blew in that afternoon.”**

of the buildings that burned were relatively inconsequential, several of them being employee cabins that had been slated for removal anyway.

As evening came on, a press conference was held on the steps of the Old Faithful Ranger Station (not the existing ranger station, but a building that has since been removed). I visited with some reporters present at the press conference, reviewing the incredible events we had witnessed earlier in the day. Some of the press people were veterans who had spent time in many global hotspots on dangerous assignments. It was impressive to me that at least two of these people told me that they had been more frightened that day as the fire was bearing down on Old Faithful than they had been earlier in their careers in places like Saigon and Beirut.

For my part, I circulated around the Old Faithful area for several more hours, looking around to see what had been burned and feeling thankful for what had not. Several times I returned to the inn, once even walking completely around it. Some vigilant firefighters were still on duty, standing guard through the smoky night while remnants of fire snapped and crackled in the distance. I finally decided to leave the area late that night, probably around 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning, after the road north to my summer home at Madison had cleared of fire to

some degree. As I sat in the cab of my big park service truck with its load of firewood and gave a last look at the inn, the Old House loomed large in the smoky darkness, against a backdrop of glowing spots of fire over on Observation Point. It reminded me of William Vandivert's famous photograph of St. Paul's Cathedral standing defiant amidst the smoke and dust of the London Blitz of 1940. I'm sure Londoners couldn't have been more thankful that their cathedral had survived the Nazi bombing than I was that the Old Faithful Inn had survived the North Fork Fire. I also felt very grateful for the privilege to be present at Old Faithful on such a historic day.

YS



KAREN W. REINHART

Jeff Henry has worked various jobs in Yellowstone, from fishing guide and ranger to winterkeeper and freelance photographer.

# FROM THE ARCHIVES



**Illuminated Eruption of Old Faithful Geyser**

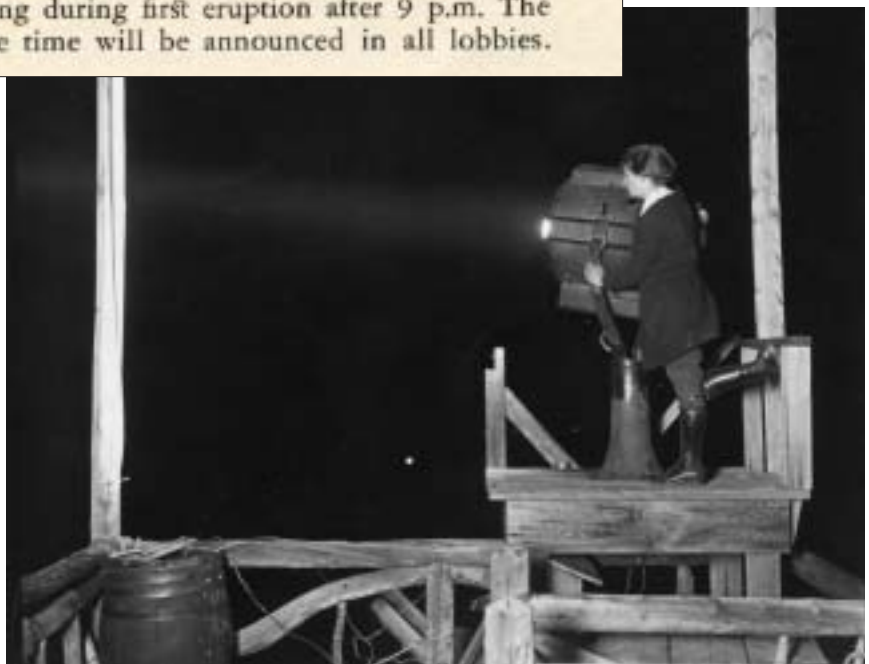


A searchlight will be played on Old Faithful Geyser every evening during first eruption after 9 p.m. The approximate time will be announced in all lobbies.

YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES

*“In the midst of all these strange sights is the Old Faithful Inn. It is an artistic triumph of rustic architecture. A perfect log palace, it alone is well worth a long journey to see.... We were loth to leave the many beautiful sights, the comforts of the Inn and its cheery good fellowship.”*

—A.H. Bell, from “A Wedding Trip to Yellowstone, summer of 1904”



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Naval searchlights on the roof of the Old Faithful Inn were once used to illuminate nighttime eruptions of Old Faithful Geyser. One light was installed in 1904, and a second was added around 1910. Both lights were removed in 1948, but the National Park Service continued to illuminate the first eruption of Old Faithful Geyser after 9 PM until sometime in the 1950s. This light was in a grove of trees somewhere near the end of the East Wing, probably on or near the site of the current visitor center.

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Look for the summer issue of *Yellowstone Science*, featuring a history of research permitting in Yellowstone.

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