

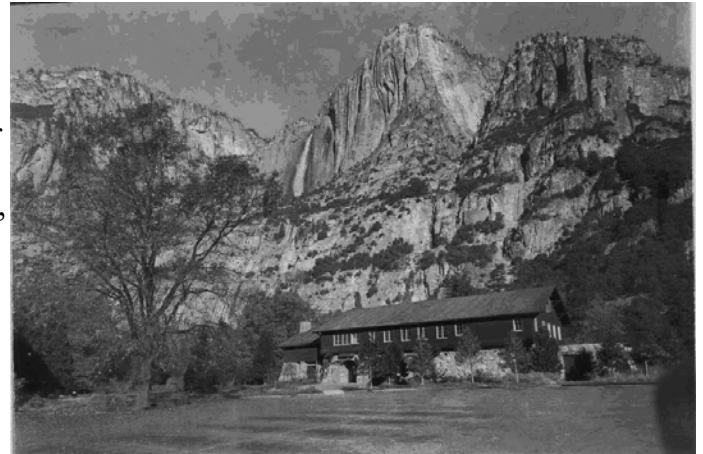


## Yosemite Museum

### Why is the Yosemite Museum special?

The Yosemite Museum was completed in 1925, designed by architect Herbert Maier in the newly emerging National Park Service Rustic Style. Though few realize it, the Yosemite Museum was the first building constructed as a museum in the National Park Service, and its educational initiatives served as a model for parks nationwide. The partnership created to fund the Museum is also significant. The Yosemite Museum Association was formed to handle the funds for building construction

in 1923. This association was the first nonprofit cooperating association for the National Park Service, serving as a model for the associations that now exist for parks nationwide. This association later became the Yosemite Natural History Association and is now the Yosemite Association, a continuing park partner.



Yosemite Museum, 1938

### What is the Rustic style of architecture?

The National Park Service Rustic Style became a cornerstone of the National Park Service's belief that buildings should blend in with their natural surroundings and that natural settings could influence architecture. Indigenous building material such as native rocks, logs, and shakes (wood shingles) were utilized for all visible exterior parts. The architectural philosophy was that *"(Rustic style) gives the feeling of having been executed by pioneer craftsmen with limited hand tools. It thus achieves sympathy with natural surroundings and with the past."* The Yosemite Museum is exemplary of Rustic style. It was constructed in the heart of an emerging village center, in which all buildings were to have a unified architectural theme. Museum architect Herbert Maier described the relationship between the Museum and its natural surroundings by saying, *"The elevation of the museum stresses the horizontal—that seemed the logic of the situation...to attempt altitudinal impressiveness here in a building would have meant entering into a competition with the cliffs."* Maier went on to design many structures that are considered exemplary Rustic style. In 1933, Herbert Maier was hired by the Park Service as the regional director for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) work in state parks. In this capacity, Maier helped develop guidebooks to assist state park designers in using Rustic design principles. These books were widely distributed and influenced design of park structures nationwide at a time when hundreds of new parks were developed with CCC labor.

### When was the Museum built?

In May of 1922, a collection of Indian baskets valued at between ten and fifteen thousand dollars was donated to the museum. This donation intensified the desire for a new museum building, specifically a "fire proof" structure to protect the growing and valuable collections. The entire first floor is constructed of concrete to create a "fireproof" vault for the collections which was considered adequate by the standards of the time. Construction for the Museum building began in 1924, was completed in April 1925, and was opened to the public on May 29, 1926.

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## How did the Museum serve as an educational model?

The Museum plan was designed to encourage visitors to view the exhibits chronologically, beginning with geological exhibits describing the formation of the Valley and proceeding through time to the stage coaches that brought early visitors to the park. The Geology room occupied the first exhibit space to the right as visitors entered the foyer. From there, a U- shaped path of travel led visitors through to the Natural History exhibits, the Life Zone room, and the Indian Room, then out the back door to the stage coach and wildflower exhibit which were located on the covered rear porch.

While the Museum and its exhibits served as a model for other parks to follow, the building also served as an incubator for developing ideas about the role of parks in education. The Yosemite Field School of Natural History, founded by Dr. Harold C. Bryant, was headquartered at the Museum. This Field School embodied the principle of parks as a place for education and study. It was the first such field school for the National Park Service and provided seven weeks of intensive study for nature guides. Ansel Hall, the Information Ranger who had first conceived of a larger, fireproof museum to house Yosemite's displays, and Dr. Bryant went on to play leading roles in applying these education concepts developed at Yosemite nationally within the Park Service.

The Museum was also a catalyst for the creation of a cooperating partnership with the Yosemite Natural History Association, later to become Yosemite Association. Among other projects and publications designed to stimulate naturalist activities, the association published "Yosemite Nature Notes," maintained the Yosemite Research Library, and helped support the Yosemite Field School of Natural History, as well as the Junior Nature School. This cooperative partnership continues to this day with many innovations including the initiation of the first NPS outdoor educational courses, and the creation of a fundraising entity called the Yosemite Fund, the first modern fundraising program of its kind in the national park system.

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## What does the future hold for the Museum?

The Museum building is now over 80 years old. Over the years, the interior of this building has been modified to accommodate staff and storage needs. A new Museum Masterplan is now underway. The Museum Masterplan considers options such as restoring the interior to its historic character and consolidating museum functions.

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## Public Participation

Public participation is essential for the success of this and all other park projects.

Here are some ways to stay involved in the park:

- **Attend a National Park Service public open house** to talk with project specialists and obtain more information on this topic. Visit the park's planning website (listed below) for upcoming dates.
- **Add your name to the park's planning list** and receive the *Planning Update* newsletter as well as other planning- related notices. You can also submit your email address to receive the park's periodic electronic newsletter.
- **Additionally, you can submit comments with your thoughts about this topic or any other project in the park by any of the following means:**

**Mail:** Superintendent  
P.O. Box 577  
Yosemite, CA 95389

**Phone:** 209/379-1365; **Fax:** 209/379-1294

**E- mail:** Yose\_Planning@nps.gov

- **Visit online:** [www.nps.gov/yose/planning](http://www.nps.gov/yose/planning)