

“A Hodgepodge Where, Instead, There Should Be Uniformity”

Mission 66 in Yellowstone National Park 1941–1965

The war years were difficult ones for the nation and the park. Attendance figures plummeted from 581,761 visitors in 1941 to 64,144 in 1943, leading to a curtailment of services provided by both concessioners and the National Park Service (NPS). The number of NPS employees also dropped, as many rangers entered military service and recruitment of seasonal employees became all but impossible. Furthermore, Yellowstone’s infrastructure suffered as the federal government diverted attention and money away from park maintenance and construction to the war effort. There were also threats to national park resources, as military officials sought ways to acquire timber, minerals, and rangeland to fuel the war machine. When attendance figures rebounded more quickly than anyone expected after the war, Yellowstone was poorly equipped to serve those visitors.¹ Concession and government services were inadequate both in terms of quality and quantity, causing many visitors to complain to their congressmen. The NPS’s response took the form of a service-wide modernization program called Mission 66. The legacy of Mission 66 was a series of programs and structures designed to serve large numbers of visitors and to move them efficiently, and with as little impact as possible, through the nation’s parks. Another legacy of this program, which clearly favored the development side of the NPS’s mandate, was the negative reaction it generated from supporters of wilderness and historical values in the national parks.

Educational programming, or interpretation as it came to be called, and natural resource management also expanded and changed in the postwar period. Torn between the dual pressures of preservation and provi-



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Superintendent Edmund Rogers. 1951.

sion of enjoyment, park officials moved during the later years of this period from providing for enjoyment and protection of resources to recreating “vignettes of primitive America,” and emphasizing wilderness values. Park officials also grew to understand that the survival of an individual species was dependent upon the health and survival of its ecosystem—the larger and much more complex system of interconnectedness between organisms and their surroundings. Thus, the park’s protection policies became more focused on ecological awareness and the conviction that rather than individual species, it was their habitat, as well as ecosystem processes, that required protection. At the same time, park officials came to believe that Yellowstone’s forest resources and certain of its wildlife species (such as ungulates), both of

which had been actively protected for so long, actually required less protection. The latter years of this period brought major changes to the park's longstanding policies of maximizing visitor accommodation and promoting the well-being of selected species, as managers began to question whether the park could be developed in a way that would absorb visitation without damaging its natural treasures, and whether merely "protecting" those same treasures would really lead to their preservation. The challenges faced by Yellowstone's superintendents in those years of increased development and philosophical change required every bit of experience those leaders had amassed.

Leaders of the World War II and Postwar Period

It was up to Edmund Rogers to help the park adjust to the deprivation of World War II and the first shocks of the postwar period. For ten years after the war ended, the park tried desperately to welcome and entertain its war-weary visitors, who were ready for a vacation. Rogers's administration oversaw the first stages of construction at Canyon Village and made important decisions with respect to wildlife policy.

When Rogers became special assistant to the director of the NPS in 1956, his replacement was Lemuel Alonzo "Lon" Garrison, who arrived in the park after the 1956 summer season. Born in 1903 in Pella, Iowa, Garrison worked for the U.S. Forest Service throughout his college years. Upon graduation in 1932, he took a job at Sequoia National Park as a seasonal park ranger and then worked his way through several lower-level NPS jobs and assistant superintendent positions in Glacier and Grand Canyon national parks to the superintendency of Big Bend National Park in 1952. In 1956, Garrison became the first chief of conservation and protection for the NPS, and chairman of the steering committee appointed by Director Wirth to oversee implementation of Mission 66. That November, Garrison was asked to orchestrate Mission 66 in Yellowstone, and to serve as the park's superintendent. His effectiveness at dealing with a range of perspectives led to his becoming known as "the spokesman for the conservation movement in the northern Rocky Mountain region."² When he left the park in 1964 to head the Midwest Region of the NPS, he was replaced by John S. McLaughlin, another NPS veteran.

McLaughlin was born in 1905 in Fremont, Ohio, and graduated with a degree in forestry from Colorado State University. He went to work for the NPS in 1928, coincidentally as a ranger in Yellowstone National Park. After rising to the rank of assistant chief park ranger in 1930, McLaughlin left Yellowstone in 1931, only to return as superintendent 33 years later. He spent the intervening years as assistant superintendent of Rocky Mountain National Park, second lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force, and superintendent of three national parks: Mesa Verde, Grand Teton, and Grand Canyon. He also served as assistant regional director of the NPS's Midwest Region for five years. He dedicated his three years at the helm of Yellowstone, as Haines put it, to finishing Mission 66 and determining "further objectives" in the park.³

Yellowstone's superintendents faced new hurdles during and after World War II, when issues of staffing, land use, development, and management philosophy, and their attendant political pressures, all became more complex and intense. These issues played themselves out on almost every level of park management during the postwar years, making the superintendent's job highly challenging. The first task to accomplish after the war, however, was to get the park back on its feet.

The Effects of War on Yellowstone National Park

In addition to the severe drop in visitation, the first half of the 1940s was marked by closures of both private and public operations in Yellowstone. The park's last two remaining CCC camps closed in 1942, and many concession operations did not open during the war. In May 1942, the park's nursery, operated at the Game Ranch, closed. Prior to plowing, harrowing, disking, and seeding the area with crested wheat grass, CCC workers shipped 27,000 lodgepole pine transplants to Glacier National Park and transplanted some trees to the Mammoth area.⁴ Also in 1942, the U.S. Weather Bureau, which had operated in the park since 1903, ceased its activities. Rangers continued to make weather observations, however, by sending their data to the nearest station at West Yellowstone, Montana.⁵

In June 1943, NPS Director Newton Drury announced that the agency would comply with all federal policies brought on by the national emergency. Drury acknowledged that a definite curtailment of facilities,

both concession- and park-operated, would occur, but he wanted the parks kept open for the enjoyment and relaxation of the armed forces and for those people who could reach them under the current tire and gasoline rationing.⁶ Furthermore, he wanted it understood that the protection and the administration of the parks had not been reduced. Throughout his administration, Drury strove to prevent national park timber, mineral, and grassland resources from being commandeered for the war effort.⁷

As could be expected, park development projects were postponed during the war years. Several areas slated for change in the park's master plan of 1941 were put on hold. One notable change planned in 1941 was a revision of the traffic pattern at Madison Junction. Park officials envisioned a road system running completely outside of the "sacred area" designated in 1933 around National Park Mountain and the campfire site where, supposedly, plans had been discussed in 1870 to create the nation's first national park.⁸ At that time, the road from Madison Junction to Old Faithful ran between the museum and the Madison River before crossing the Gibbon River to follow the Firehole River to the Upper Geyser Basin. The idea of moving the road farther east was finally executed after the war, when manpower and funding returned to the park.

Also slated for change in 1941, but not actually accomplished until long after the war, was the relocation of the Norris road away from the geyser basin. Managers actually wished to relocate the road less out of concern for the thermal area than for visitor safety; the existing road required visitors to park near the museum and then cross the main highway to get to the geyser basin.⁹ Other changes recommended in the master plan of 1939 and again in 1941, such as the proposed revisions for the checking stations at both the North and West entrances and the new village development at Canyon, were also not implemented until after the war.

Another proposed alteration was the removal of park headquarters from the Mammoth area to the North Entrance. Initially considered as a way to conserve rationed items such as gasoline, tires, and other materials, the idea was much discussed, but did not come to fruition. In September 1945, Regional Director Lawrence C. Merriam asked Superintendent Rogers to make a recommendation about the proposed removal and provide alternative proposals to reduce Mammoth-area traffic congestion, should he not favor the removal.¹⁰ Rogers did not advocate the move. Arguments for

moving the headquarters arose again in 1960, when the *Billings (Montana) Gazette* reported that Wyoming's U.S. representative Keith Thompson (R) had sought House approval for moving park headquarters to Lake—a more central location, and one that would require park roads to kept open year-round, thereby increasing revenue opportunities for the park's gateway communities.¹¹ While the issue of keeping roads open did not disappear, efforts to move park headquarters ended after Director Conrad Wirth opposed the relocation plan.¹²

Construction work also slowed to a snail's pace until after the war. Only a few buildings were added to the roster of park administrative structures during the war and postwar periods. In 1944, the park's protection department received a new snowshoe cabin. The Nez Perce Snowshoe Cabin, built by the CCC and located just north of Nez Perce Creek about three-quarters of a mile east of the Madison-to-Old Faithful road, was remodeled and made ready for winter use. This was the only historic snowshoe cabin not made of logs; a 1939 decree restricting the use of logs for park structures resulted here in a frame, as opposed to a log structure. Although the Nez Perce Cabin retained most of the features of cabins built in the 1930s, including log porch posts that supported an extended front porch and exposed log rafter tails and purlins, it was made of lumber. The plan did call for log trim wherever possible, however, to carry forth the rustic style of the 1930s cabins.¹³

After the war, the prospect of welcoming a record number of visitors to facilities that had been virtually neglected for the previous several years was disturbing to both park management and concessioners. When a record 814,907 people entered the park in 1946, incentives to resume construction soared, but suffered immediately from a dearth of financial resources. During the 1930s and early 1940s, park staff had relied on public works programs, particularly the Civilian Conservation Corps, for much of the maintenance work and many of the small construction activities, and on the Public Works Administration for help with larger construction projects. In 1946, however, Yellowstone's superintendent had to pay his regular staff to improve and maintain park facilities from an all but empty purse.¹⁴

One postwar construction project that did receive funding was housing for park employees. Work on employee housing at Lower Mammoth resumed after park landscape architect Frank Mattson assessed the condition of housing in the area and called for "modern housing for all year use" in 1946. The master plan was revised in

1946 as well.¹⁵ But for three years after 1956, the situation again looked grim, and park employees took matters into their own hands. In response to inadequate park housing, many permanent and seasonal employees in 1957 brought their own mobile homes to the park, causing numerous problems for park management. Parking the mobile homes too closely together at the site of the old Mammoth CCC camp presented safety problems, in addition to unsanitary conditions due to lack of sewer connections. Citing these problems, and noting that the park was losing employees because of the housing situation and lack of laundry facilities, park officials called for a modern laundry facility with shower and bath to be built in the area, sewer and water connections to be installed, and for the purchase of ten new modern mobile homes.¹⁶ The housing problem was alleviated somewhat in June 1959, when the Cop Construction Company of Billings, Montana, was awarded a contract to build ten single-story, three-bedroom, frame residences, with full basements and attached garages at Lower Mammoth for a cost of \$176,700. The new residences were designed by Orr, Pickering Architects of Billings.¹⁷

The Naturalist Department also suffered extensively during wartime, as custodial and protective activities became the overriding concern of park administrators. While all museums remained open during the 1942 season, all but the one at Mammoth closed in subsequent seasons. Auto caravans, lecture series, guide services, campfire meetings, and the publication of *Yellowstone Nature Notes* were terminated, and many fewer naturalists were available for site interpretation or assistance of any kind as their numbers and departmental funding shrank to their lowest levels in years.¹⁸

Several visitor programs related to wildlife also stopped during these war years. For example, the bear shows were discontinued after the 1941 season; the Otter Creek bear feeding grounds did not open for business in 1942, or any year after that. While this closure could be called an unexpected result of wartime conditions, park officials had been looking for a way to close this chapter of the park's history for several years. The ostensible reasons for not opening the feeding grounds—the closure of most Canyon facilities, the shortage of ranger-naturalist talks, and the lack of park bus travel—were secondary to Superintendent Rogers's desire to put an end to what he considered an unnatural practice. Wartime conditions, with low visitation, limited services, and the nation's attention diverted, provided the perfect opportunity.¹⁹

In part, Rogers was responding to the findings of

wildlife biologists George Wright, Joseph Dixon, and Ben Thompson, who, in their 1930s series, *Fauna of the National Parks*, had entreated NPS officials to find less artificial ways for visitors to interact with wildlife in the parks. Other wildlife studies also influenced park policy during the war years. As a result of research by biologist Olaus J. Murie, for example, further changes were made to bear management, including the prompt removal and pit-burial or burning of all garbage, a practice started in 1943.²⁰ According to Rogers, Murie's research results were "very valuable in formulating a program which [would] discourage bears from frequenting the areas of human habitation and thereby reduce the friction between the visitors and the bears."²¹ In 1946, the bear feeding ground at Otter Creek was razed and the site graded. Superintendent Rogers called it "the end of a feature . . . [that has] provided a spectacular exhibition for those persons who were privileged to witness it." Rogers hoped that the end of the bear shows would "give the animals a chance to live in a more natural existence in keeping with the park and . . . tend to carry out the general policy of the NPS to allow all of the park wildlife to carry on without the assistance of man."²²

In the master plan of 1941, park officials also proposed changes to the Lamar Buffalo Ranch, provided that the buffalo herd could be proven self-sustaining. By 1944, as park officials became more confident that the herd no longer needed human assistance, they were ready to settle questions of whether further development of the ranch was necessary. Park managers also changed buffalo feeding practices. Use of the large pasture at Antelope Creek was discontinued, and fences, including the enclosure assuring visitors a view of buffalo and the drift fence near the ranch, were removed in April 1944.²³ According to Rogers, the drift fence had been used in connection with summertime buffalo roundups and wintertime reduction programs.²⁴ Such changes reflected a new approach to managing the park's natural resources.

By 1947, most of the vacant naturalist positions had been filled, and the new position of park biologist was occupied when Walter H. Kittams transferred to the park from the Billings, Montana, offices of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Naturalist Division was back to pre-war staffing and initiated a new program for children from 6 to 14 years of age that involved nature trips and some nature craft work.²⁵ In 1949, Naturalist Wayne Replogle researched the route of the Bannock Trail by hiking into the backcountry and interviewing long-time residents in the area, particularly in West



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Hay operations at Lamar Buffalo Ranch.

Yellowstone, Montana, and the Henry's Lake area of Idaho. By this time, all museums were operating on a normal schedule, though visitation numbers indicated that Fishing Bridge Museum, which was off the main travel route, received fewer visitors than the others. The outdoor exhibits were receiving rave reviews, especially the one at Artist Point and another devoted to beavers in the park.²⁶ But all was not necessarily well with the protection of the park's treasures.

After the war, as visitors returned to the park in droves, their large numbers taxed the Naturalist Division's ability to both interpret the park's splendors and protect them from overuse and abuse. According to historian Denise Vick, the new concerns were basically twofold: how to educate such large groups about correct park behavior, including instilling an appreciation of its many fragile areas, and how to protect the park (in particular, its thermal formations) from erosion caused by foot traffic. One solution—to increase the number of ranger-naturalists so groups could be smaller—was not implemented until 1953. These additional rangers came too late, and their numbers were easily offset by increases in interpretive program participation.²⁷

In 1949, park managers proposed an interesting solution to the problem of thermal-area erosion: the park would install movable, wooden "duckwalks" over the older trails, both to encourage visitors to stay on the trails and to lessen the impact of "aimless wandering about the thermal areas." These prefabricated walkways (4' x 8' wooden sections) proved popular with the visitors, offered improved safety, and protected these fragile zones from trampling. Plus, prefabricated sections, unlike older blacktopped walkways, were easily rearranged to accommodate changing conditions in thermal areas.²⁸

One goal of park officials during the postwar

period was to preserve the park by educating the public about how to appreciate its treasures. Vick attributed this thinking to a "system-wide concern for park values that reflected the philosophical stance of . . . NPS Director . . . Newton Drury."²⁹ Drury, director from 1940 until 1951, when the Eisenhower administration took office, was a preservationist. As past director of the Save-the-Redwoods League in California, Drury believed that the NPS should provide primarily custodial care of the parks, developing them as little as possible. This attitude was evident in Chief Park Naturalist C. Max Bauer's 1946 report decrying the extensive destruction of the park's formations and other features that occurred after the war. The "average visitor this year shows less appreciation or understanding of park values than ever before," wrote Bauer. His solution was an educational program that "emphasized some of these points rather than to emphasize the attractiveness of the parks for the purpose of getting more visitors."³⁰ This approach would change drastically beginning in 1951, however, with the appointment of NPS Director Conrad Wirth, creator of Mission 66, who remained in office until 1964.

Mission 66 in Yellowstone National Park

Mission 66 was the brainchild of Director Wirth. Wirth, who had studied landscape architecture under Frank Waugh at Massachusetts Agricultural College, and who had been strongly involved with the NPS's CCC programs, began conceptualizing the program almost as soon as he became director.³¹ Any serious program, he realized, would require congressional support and active compliance on the part of concessioners. In 1953,

he discussed a long-term building program with one important concessioner: Yellowstone Park Company president William Nichols. These discussions pertained to improvements in the proposed Canyon Village and Lake Lodge areas.³² The Yellowstone Park Company was entering the negotiating period for a new contract at the time.

In 1955, Director Wirth wrote to Nichols proposing changes in concession operations, as well as in the arrangement of existing facilities. He suggested that “drastic measures” might need to be taken at Old Faithful, including moving eating and sleeping accommodations out of the Upper Geyser Basin. Wirth realized that implementing any such “dream plan” would require sufficient private funds and government appropriations, and he told Nichols that for the NPS to meet the desires of the public for the next ten years, each park would have to examine its particular needs. Concerning his proposed program, Wirth declared,

This new look at the parks I am calling ‘Mission 66.’ I have outlined ‘Mission 66’ to the Congressional committees and the Department. They have shown considerable interest, and I am certain it will go forward. ‘Mission 66’ gets its name from the fact that the National Park Service will be 50 years old in 1966. The best way to celebrate that year will be to have the park organizations and facilities as they should be to meet the visitor needs. We have ten years to do it.³³

Wirth’s ten-year, multimillion-dollar plan was approved by President Dwight Eisenhower in January 1956. Designed to remedy the backlog of construction and maintenance projects in the nation’s parks and to bolster woefully inadequate concessioner facilities, the plan, as one agency publication put it, was “to meet the needs of a much greater number of visitors and at the same time safeguard fully the wilderness, scenic, scientific and historic resources entrusted to the National Park Service.”³⁴

The tension between the NPS’s dual mission of preservation and use increased under Mission 66, and took a definite turn toward use. According to historian Linda McClelland, the plan “unequivocally emphasized use over preservation and endeavored to enhance the quality of the visitor’s experience through the development of modern facilities.” She noted that Wirth’s own words pointed to the idea of preservation for enjoyment’s



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NPS Director Conrad Wirth. 1956.

sake: “Protection, then, while an absolute requirement, is not an end in itself,” Wirth insisted in promotional material for his Mission 66 program, “but a means to an end—it is requisite to the kind and quality of enjoyment contemplated in the establishment and perpetuation of parks by the Nation. Thus, we complete our concept of park purpose: The primary justification for a National Park System lies in its capacity to provide enjoyment in its best sense, now and in the future.”³⁵

In an NPS manual for Mission 66, the Department of Interior clarified the connection between protection and use: “The law [the 1916 National Park Service Act] insisted that these areas were to be so managed that their natural qualities would remain unimpaired; for only if thus protected would they provide the fullest degree of enjoyment and inspiration for present and future Americans.” In these terms, protection of the park was important primarily as a means of achieving public use and enjoyment. As the manual described it: “Without the concept of public use and enjoyment the function of preservation and protection is without meaning.”³⁶ This passage emphasized an anthropocentric ideology of nature and preservation, indicating that the human need for recreation justified preservation.³⁷

According to author Brian C. Kenner, the Wirth administration could emphasize use of the nation’s parks because it added the word “maximum” to the mandate; the manual describing and justifying Mission 66 read, “It is the task of the National Park Service . . . to assure the American people opportunity for *maximum* beneficial use and enjoyment” [emphasis added]. As Kenner noted, “The use of the word ‘maximum’ perhaps best reveals

the approach of the Wirth administration toward park use. The word had not been used in policy statements prior to Mission 66.³⁸

To ensure “maximum beneficial use and enjoyment,” new facilities were planned in many parks to house visitors and employees and to instruct visitors. Campgrounds, sanitary facilities, and roads would be improved, updated, and added where necessary, and educational or interpretive programs expanded. What shape would this new cultural landscape take? Whereas the emphasis during the 1920s and 1930s was on constructing rustic, non-obtrusive structures, Mission 66 planners, envisioning their program “as a bold and forward-looking initiative,” rejected these “picturesque prototypes” of the past, opting instead for newer, “modern methods of landscape and architectural design.”³⁹

Designers of these new structures, working under the guidance of William G. Carnes, head of the Mission 66 staff, placed a premium on efficiency, modernity, and cost-effectiveness. Wirth directed architects to “disregard precedent, policy, present operation and management procedures, traditions, and work habits,” to remember “only the fundamental purpose of national parks,” and to design projects that would move visitors quickly and efficiently through the park while getting the “greatest benefit economically” by saving “labor costs, materials, and equipment.”⁴⁰ Indeed, the Landscape Division, according to Wirth, had an important role to play in Mission 66. Landscape architects were “to see that, through the techniques of designing [and] constructing . . . the parks,” the visitor would obtain the “supreme enjoyment” of the national parks. These park officials, with the master plan as road map, would “steer the course of how the land [was] to be used.” The end result would be “an orderly and well-conceived development plan.”⁴¹

According to architectural historian Sarah Allaback, landscape architects of the Mission 66 era abandoned the rustic style of the past in favor of what has come to be called “Park Service Modern,” for several reasons: first, to construct a rustic structure in the 1950s and 1960s on a scale befitting the times would have cost the government considerably more than it could afford for both labor and materials. The CCC and PWA workers of the 1930s had provided cheap labor in a time when logs and stone were readily available and relatively cheap. By the 1950s, glass, steel, concrete, and asphalt, were significantly cheaper than the traditional materials. Second, the lines of modern, low-lying, and functional architecture were actually considered less conspicuous than a rustic

structure of a size appropriate for the increase in visitors using the facilities.⁴² Mission 66 buildings, at least at the outset of the program, were intended to be “simple contemporary buildings that perform[ed] their assigned function[s] and respect[ed] their environment[s].”⁴³ The Park Service Modern Style, argued Allaback, merely “reinterpreted the long-standing commitment to ‘harmonize’ architecture with park landscape[s].” At its best, Park Service Modern architecture, she wrote, harmonized with its setting in a new way: by being more “understated and efficient” than rustic design, and providing “more programmatic and functional space for less architectural presence.” Allaback also pointed out that if the Mission 66 structures had been designed in the rustic idiom, they “would have taken on the dimensions and appearance of major resort hotels”—hardly non-obtrusive structures.⁴⁴ Third, while rustic architecture had begun to take on “negative connotations of [being] dated, inadequate, and even unsanitary,” Park Service Modern architecture represented a forward-looking mentality of efficiency, hygiene, progress, and innovation—all values the NPS was eager to show it possessed.⁴⁵

The first structure built in Yellowstone during this period, a combined checking and information station for the West Entrance, was not a Mission 66 building per se, but discussions regarding its construction prefigured problems that lay ahead. When park officials corresponded in 1954 with Regional Director Howard Baker about the style of architecture planned—a prefabricated metal structure—they struck at the heart of the argument against modern architecture in the park. “The general design and appearance of the buildings, we believe, are admirable as buildings without considering their surroundings or use,” Rogers wrote. The design and materials “would appear to be very appropriate for an airport,” he wrote, but Rogers doubted their appropriateness for a national park. Rogers’s main concern was that the building did not look sufficiently park-like. “Our architects,” Rogers added, “have suggested that the park visitor or those seeking admirable park building styles should look to the parks for fresh and vital ideas. In other words, the parks should be the source for the best there is in rustic architecture.” “These [buildings] are the front door to the park,” Rogers reminded Baker. They should be welcoming visitors to a special place, a place that should feel different from its surroundings, he argued. A metal structure at the front door would not help create this impression. Furthermore, such an impression was harder to create in Yellowstone, where

the surrounding landscape was similar on each side of the boundary. Consequently, Rogers continued, the NPS depended largely on its roadsides and buildings to create a sense of difference and specialness.⁴⁶

Rogers was also concerned about the precedent the metal structure set. Would concessioners want to follow suit? What answer, after all, could NPS officials provide concessioners if the latter “point[ed] to these metal buildings and inquire[d] whether they could do something similar”? To park visitors, Rogers noted, officials could explain that the buildings were simply cheaper, but to the concessioner such an answer would not suffice.⁴⁷

Final plans for the information station and checking booths were revised several times, resulting in wooden frame structures designed by architects Francis R. Roberson and Robert B. Kemp that, while intended to be temporary—they were part of a pilot project assessing the best layout of a national park entrance area—were to have “design merit,” because visitors would not “of course be conscious that this [was] a pilot or experimental study.”⁴⁸ “We would like to have a building adequately designed, not an unworthy assemblage of CCC panels,” Baker wrote to Rogers in his letter introducing the architects.⁴⁹ The structures would also be on skids so they could be rearranged to assess which order of buildings—checking station before information station or vice versa—worked best for processing incoming visitors.⁵⁰ When word of the experimental layout got out, the superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park asked for copies of the plans to use as a guide.⁵¹

An interesting issue regarding the checking—or permit—stations was whether to keep the rangers standing in the booths or to let them sit. Regional Director Baker believed that the rangers should stand, because, as he put it, “uniformed personnel present their best appearance while standing.” He did not see any objection to “providing some sort of seating arrangement for slack periods,” however.⁵² Superintendent Rogers agreed that “a ranger on his feet makes the better ‘front’ for the Service than one sitting,” but he did not want “to preclude the operations being handled from a seated position.”⁵³

NPS officials believed information stations to be important parts of entrance areas or “toll plazas,” as they were called.⁵⁴ In a sense, the information station was an embryonic form of what would later be called a “visitor center.” The purpose of the station was to help visitors “orient themselves to the size, features, facilities, accommodations, scenery, wildlife and of very great value, an

introduction to the importance of conservation of the park,” wrote Acting Superintendent Warren Hamilton to the superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park. Because the information created an opportunity to make visitors aware and supportive of conservation, Hamilton believed that “the cost to the Service of this operation would then be well returned.”⁵⁵ Information and checking stations were completed in fall 1954; exhibits were made and installed the following summer. While the exhibits pleased NPS personnel, use of the information station proved disappointing, leading park managers to decide not to build any kind of larger visitor center in the area.

The information and checking stations at the West Entrance were not officially part of Mission 66, but they fit in with the overall pitch of the program: enhancing visitor enjoyment of the park through development. While the implementation of Mission 66 in Yellowstone had the effect of encouraging more development—the goal of the program, after all, was to accommodate increasing numbers of visitors—the intent of the program, in Wirth’s mind, was environmental preservation. Concentrating and directing use of important and fragile areas would, in effect, preserve them from “random” use, which was tantamount to abuse. Thus, while conservation groups complained about Wirth’s “aggressive construction program that included the development of recreational facilities (including . . . boat marinas),” Wirth defended it on the grounds of “upholding the visitor’s right to visit the [park] and do so in large numbers,” and claimed that the program’s landscape design and construction components would effectively preserve and protect the natural environment.⁵⁶ “[T]here is no surer way to destroy a landscape than to permit undisciplined use by man,” he wrote in an article for *National Parks* magazine in 1958, “and roads, trails, campgrounds, and other developments are one means, perhaps the most important one, of localizing, limiting, and channeling park use.”⁵⁷

Yellowstone’s official vision for Mission 66 appeared in April 1955, in the form of a report called “Statement of Current and Future Park Visitor Needs for Accommodations and Facilities in Yellowstone National Park.” While most of the document focused on concession development, the NPS’s role of providing campgrounds and picnic areas was also reviewed. In general, the committee that prepared the report called for planned development that would decrease “the infringement upon sacred areas as the need develops.” As



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Bridge Bay Marina, post-1961.

part of the review, the group suggested that development at West Thumb be abandoned in favor of a new facility to be called “Thumbay.” Here, the government would construct a public use building, an amphitheater, a campground, employee housing, roads, and trails, and provide the utilities. Ultimately, this development became Grant Village. Out of concern over excessive intrusion on the geysers and thermal features at Old Faithful, the group recommended a new developed area in the Lower Geyser Basin called “Firehole Village.”

The committee also recommended work at Bridge Bay, where the government would construct roads, trails, a boat landing, docks, employee housing, utilities, and an administrative center; at Tower Fall, where the campground would be relocated to the Tower Junction area; and at Madison Junction, where a new campground, new housing for rangers and naturalists, and a new amphitheater would be built, the museum would be enlarged, and the road camp would be relocated.⁵⁸

By the end of the decade, park officials published “Mission 66 for Yellowstone National Park,” a pamphlet outlining the NPS’s plans in the park. Arguing that the program would safeguard Yellowstone for future visitors, the pamphlet’s authors advocated a three-pronged plan. First, the park’s trails and roads would be improved, which meant relocating some roads “to improve views and opportunities for interpretation, and to reduce their intrusion on fragile and scenic features.”⁵⁹ Second, the authors planned for more facilities designed to accommodate visitors. Specifically, they proposed “more than twice the present campground capacity, double the present lodge accommodations, increased picnic areas,

and comparable increases in other visitor facilities.” Campground capacity would increase to nearly 1,500 campsites, and “rental trailer courts” would be available. Overnight accommodations would rise “to about 14,500.” But because, according to the authors, “visitors prefer[red] other than hotel-type accommodations,” no new hotels were proposed. “All present hotels will remain during their useful life,” the report stated, “but will ultimately be replaced as part of a future far-reaching plan.”⁶⁰ Finally, the NPS would improve its educational infrastructure and programming—its roadside information areas, amphitheaters, and visitor centers—to “enhance the visitors’ enjoyment” of park features.⁶¹

First on the list of new developments was Canyon Village, which had been initiated prior to Mission 66, closely followed by changes to Fishing Bridge that would include “an enlarged and modernized . . . campground . . . [and a] new rental trailer court,” and the completely new development, “Thumbay.” After those developments were completed, park officials planned to begin on “the new Bridge Bay area” and the removal of “encroaching facilities from the Old Faithful area to a proposed new Firehole Village.”⁶² The rationale behind these developments was “conservation . . . through preservation of the scenic and natural character of the Park,” and “developments for human comfort provided on lands of lesser Park value.”⁶³ The NPS estimated projected costs for the program to be approximately \$55 million, not including concessioners’ projected costs.⁶⁴

The idea of directing use away from fragile natural areas was not new to Mission 66. For years, Yellowstone officials had been planning to direct use away from

several “sacred” sites (in the parlance of prewar master planning), and they had outlined a plan to remove development around the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone to an area they called Canyon Village in the 1939 master plan. Furthermore, some park officials—resident landscape architect Frank Mattson for one—had also been concerned about development around West Thumb. While master plans for the early 1940s indicated the intention to expand development around West Thumb and call it West Thumb Village, there was active resistance to this idea. In 1946, Mattson met with Thomas Vint, chief of the Washington Office of Design and Construction, to discuss a proposal to move development away from West Thumb, but nothing happened officially until April 1955, with the “Statement of Current and Future Park Visitor Needs.”

Canyon Village was perhaps the best-known Yellowstone example of the NPS’s efforts to relocate development away from a fragile area to an “area better suited to such developments and [where one could] . . . allow expansion on a well ordered scale.”⁶⁵ Plans for Canyon Village included the relocation of all tourist facilities to the new village and the construction of a new ranger station near the “proposed retail area with possible museum wing and general contact station.”⁶⁶

Historian Mark Daniel Barringer has contended that when Yellowstone became the “showpiece” of Mission 66, Canyon Village became its “cornerstone.”⁶⁷ Others have agreed that Canyon Village was “presented as an example of what [Mission 66] would do for the national parks.”⁶⁸ Because work on the necessary roads, as well as water and sewer conduits to the village had been started years before Mission 66 was conceptualized, the village’s tourist facilities could be expedited relatively quickly and thus, for publicity’s sake, be ready for occupancy soon after inception of the program.⁶⁹ Thus, the village’s highly publicized groundbreaking ceremony on June 25, 1956, meant that Mission 66 “was finally, undeniably, underway.”⁷⁰

The Canyon Village project, formally dedicated in August 1957, proved problematic on several fronts: first, tourists preferred the old Canyon hotel, even though it was more expensive, to the new concrete-block-and-glass architecture. In response to this reluctance to patronize the new facilities, as well as the discovery that the hotel was structurally unsound, the Yellowstone Park Company partially closed the building as a way to “encourage” people to stay at Canyon Village. Second, the Yellowstone Park Company was experiencing such

serious financial trouble before, during, and after the construction process that it was reluctant to undertake other Mission 66 projects planned for the park.⁷¹ Thus, work on the other “villages” was either begun much later than planned, as in the case of Grant Village, or never got further than the planning stage, as in the case of Firehole Village.

The distaste expressed about the architecture of Canyon Village was reminiscent of the earlier debate concerning the West Entrance information station.⁷² In May 1956, a doctor from Billings, Montana, wrote to President Nichols of the Yellowstone Park Company, U.S. Senator Mike Mansfield (Montana), and the Department of the Interior to state “one man’s protest against the ‘chicken coop’ style architecture of the facilities to be built at Canyon Village.” “Such style of architecture is fine for Las Vegas gambling halls,” he chided, “but hardly fits in to our National Parks.” The writer preferred the rustic beauty of older park facilities. On a separate note—hastily penned on an unused prescription form—he commented that he had found no one who disagreed with him, but he doubted “if many [would] register a protest.”⁷³

In response to this criticism, Acting Director E. T. Scoyen assured Senator Mansfield that the design of park buildings was determined by a cadre of “architects, landscape architects, engineers, and administrative personnel of the National Park Service” who made “every effort to get the best solution of our problems considering all of the factors including that of cost.” Scoyen also reminded Mansfield that the project was not yet finished, and offered that the doctor’s opinion might be different if he saw the final result, including landscaping.⁷⁴ Scoyen made a point of noting that the NPS had not abandoned efforts to build structures that harmonized with their surroundings. Quite to the contrary, in fact: “We appreciate [the doctor’s] interest in maintaining the rustic beauty of the architectural facilities in the parks,” he told Mansfield, “and we wish to assure you that we shall do everything possible to guard all of the national parks against the construction of park structures which will not be compatible with their naturalistic surroundings.”⁷⁵

Complaints about the Park Service Modern Style continued, however. In 1961, an article appeared in *Atlantic Monthly* that put the lie to NPS claims that modern structures were harmonious with park environs. The article criticized the agency for disturbing the “proper atmosphere” of the parks. “Under Mission 66,” author

Devereux Butcher wrote, “too many of the parks are being cluttered with buildings of freak and austere design. No longer are the architects concerned with producing structures of beauty and charm that help to create a proper atmosphere and are inconspicuous and harmonious with their surroundings. Rather they seem obsessed with designing monuments to their own inventiveness. Widely criticized, these buildings are unlike any others in the parks and are creating a hodgepodge where, instead, there should be uniformity.”⁷⁶

The new Thumbay development did little to convince Butcher—or anyone else—otherwise. In 1957, Superintendent Garrison outlined detailed plans for Thumbay, known later as Grant Thumb in honor of President Ulysses Grant, and finally as Grant Village.⁷⁷ There were several reasons why NPS managers wanted the West Thumb development moved to this new site, 1.5 miles south of the existing facilities. First, they wanted to stop development from encroaching on the hot springs and pools in the West Thumb area. Second, they considered the soil and terrain in the West Thumb area too poor for “large capacity development,” which is what the agency was after. While West Thumb had been a small development, the new village, Garrison claimed, would have “provision for about 4,500 visitors in campgrounds, trailer courts and cabins.” Third, the NPS wanted to provide a more protected staging area for tourists eager to boat and fish on the lake.⁷⁸

As with the Canyon development, park officials wanted Thumbay to be an area of concentrated development. In early spring 1957, Superintendent Garrison communicated his approval of a “shopping center” type of arrangement to officials at the Western Office of Design and Construction (WODC), as it would allow visitors to move around the complex easily on foot.⁷⁹ He also wanted an NPS structure, instead of a gas station as originally planned, to have the strategic location at the junction with the main park road. “[T]hese [gas] stations are a general source of public information and [because] they do not have trained personnel to provide informational service,” he wrote, “the Park Service should have a strategic location of this nature for the best service to the park visitors.”⁸⁰

While Garrison appeared positive about the project in public, privately, he harbored some concerns. The project would, as Garrison put it, result in significant changes to the area. For one thing, the site would require “considerable alteration to fit it for use, as it [was] heavily timbered.” About 80 acres of trees would have

to be cleared. In addition, considerable dredging and re-channeling of the shoreline—to accommodate the planned harbor with its boat landings, docks, and marina—would be necessary.⁸¹ On one level, such changes to the environment troubled Garrison. “I cannot help wondering,” he told the regional director in April 1958, “if this is the proper kind of a development to introduce into a National Park—if we are not defeating the very basic purpose of Park protection and preservation by frankly concentrating so much use in one spot.”⁸²

But while he was troubled about the idea of reserving space for concentrated development, Garrison was even more concerned about sprawl. He realized that the alternative to concentrated development for meeting the park’s projected needs for 1966 would mean development scattered across the park that would actually result in more development per se; planners had estimated that less park space would be used if development were concentrated. Furthermore, the site for Thumbay (hereafter Grant Village), which stretched for two miles along Yellowstone Lake, was suitable for construction, and, while attractive, not so splendid that it necessarily merited preserving for scenic reasons. The “forest cover is basically about the same as that on a million or more acres nearby,” he wrote. For these reasons, Garrison felt that building Grant Village was, in some ways, the lesser of two evils.⁸³ Thus, work on Grant Village proceeded.

The development planned for Grant Village would resemble Canyon Village. Garrison called the site beautiful, “one of the choice locations scenically and recreationally, in the entire Park, and [thus one that] should have appropriate tone and treatment in the over-all development.” Accommodations would range from free public campgrounds to “more expensive cabins similar to modern motels outside the Park.” No hotels were planned for the area, but a lodge was later built. There would also be “three classes of eating services plus a lunch counter, a general store, a picture shop, a marina, saddle horses, camping and picnicking grounds, service station, footpaths and saddle horse trails, a visitor assembly hall which may be combined with an employee recreational room, visitor center with an amphitheater and auditorium, medical services, post office, ample public restrooms, public laundry and showers, employee residences and dormitories, public garage, ranger stations, utility buildings and services, storage space, and public telephones.”⁸⁴

The government would provide roads and utilities for both government and concessioner installations.

With these provisions and “no land purchase investment” on the part of the concessioner, Garrison felt, there would be “enough offset to the higher construction costs in this isolated location and with the short season to make this concessioner investment economically feasible.” If contracts were let for site clearing in 1958, the site would be ready for further government and concessioner development by 1960, Garrison believed.⁸⁵ However, the opening date was continually postponed—primarily by concessioner financial problems—until 1963, when the first phase of the village was dedicated in the form of a 383-unit campground, picnic area, and boat launching ramp.⁸⁶ Both the harbor and boat launch failed due to poor design, and although constructed, were never functional. Subsequent development, both on the part of the government (a visitor center and amphitheater, trailer village, and ranger station) and the concessioner, was accompanied by controversy and financial problems that continued to thwart the development’s progress. In fact, the final result differed significantly from original plans and did not come about until more than three decades after Mission 66 planners first imagined the development.⁸⁷

Mission 66’s “village” projects in Yellowstone clearly met with mixed success. In fact, Grant Village remained a problematic development at least until 1982, when lodging units were finally completed; and the third relocation project—the removal of most of the development around Old Faithful to the Lower Geyser Basin, where it would be called Firehole Village—was ultimately shelved by a committee of NPS personnel. Historians Barringer, Haines, and Richard Bartlett have contended that the stories of Canyon and Grant Village illustrated the role that concessioner resistance played in the questionable achievements of Mission 66 in Yellowstone National Park.⁸⁸ But other issues also led to the critical reconsideration of Mission 66, especially the changes in the NPS’s understanding of its mandate of protection and use, which in the 1960s shifted away from development and toward preservation.

Before those issues can be examined, it is important to look at two intertwined and longstanding achievements of Mission 66: the rise of the visitor center and the concomitant growth of the education department—or, as it increasingly came to be known, the Division of Interpretation. As McClelland wrote, “Education and interpretation took on particular importance in Mission 66. . . . For national parks the role of interpretation expanded from the communication of

a park’s natural history to become an important tool for park preservation.”⁸⁹ Central to this focus on education and interpretation was the rise of the visitor center, an innovative concept “designed as the hub of each park’s interpretive program.”⁹⁰

Museums and Ranger Stations Merge to Form Visitor Centers

The visitor center was intended to serve as the fulcrum for balancing use and protection in the nation’s parks by centralizing use and managing circulation of visitors. It was also meant to enhance visitor appreciation of the park. One Mission 66 publication, *Our Heritage*, described the visitor center as “one of the most useful facilities for helping the visitor to see the park and enjoy his visit.”⁹¹ In its early stages of development, the visitor center was referred to as an “administrative–museum building,” a “public service building,” or a “public use building.” Allaback claimed that the range of names considered “suggests the Park Service was struggling not only to combine museum services and administrative facilities but [also] to develop a new building type that would supplement old-fashioned museum exhibits with modern methods of interpretation.”⁹²

Anticipating a problem with the proposed construction of many of these new administrative–museum buildings, park headquarters, and public-use buildings across the country, Director Wirth called for uniformity in building terminology. He wanted all new public-use buildings and administrative–museum buildings to be called “Visitors Centers.” In a memorandum to NPS staff, Wirth asked that they use the term “visitor center” even instead of “park headquarters” when headquarters were located at major sites of visitor concentration.⁹³ At a design conference two years later, it was noted that the term proved confusing to visitors unfamiliar with the new facilities, who might be inclined to associate the term with shopping centers.⁹⁴ Confusion notwithstanding, the name stuck and has survived to the present.

Mission 66 visitor centers were prime examples of the Park Service Modern architectural style. Hailed by Allaback as “a distinctive new approach to park architecture,” Park Service Modern represented several architectural ideals: simplicity (most structures were stripped of any “overtly decorative or associative elements”); unobtrusiveness (the buildings maintained low, horizontal profiles and employed textured concrete, panels of stone

vener, painted steel, and glass to be subordinate to the landscape and to “harmonize” with its surroundings in a more understated way than rustic architecture had); and, efficiency.⁹⁵ The visitor center’s efficiency lay in its centrality, in its concentration of functions in one place. Whereas planning in the park villages before Mission 66 had been decentralized, with museums, ranger stations, administration buildings, and comfort stations often residing in separate buildings, Mission 66 visitor centers combined these functions under one roof. Serving as a control point for “visitor flow,” visitor centers could serve even unprecedented numbers of tourists efficiently and well. And, by centralizing use, they would help preserve the park’s fragile areas from “random, destructive patterns of use.”⁹⁶

Between 1957 and 1965, two prototypical Mission 66 visitor centers were built in Yellowstone: one at Canyon Village and one at Grant Village.⁹⁷ They were designed to be open and spacious, so as to accommodate large numbers of people easily. They were intended to be readily accessed by ramps and other movement-facilitating devices. Their simple designs were unapologetically modernistic. Designers of the structures embraced the same contemporary, cost-effective materials (glass, concrete, and steel). The Canyon Visitor Center was built of colored concrete block, “plyscord” siding, “glu-lam” posts and beams, and a considerable amount of glazing.⁹⁸ The architect of the Grant Village Visitor Center, in fact, “over[did] it in using masonry block,” according to Jerry Riddall, chief architect of the WODC. Riddall suggested a restudy and “the use of wood siding on gables.”⁹⁹ Both buildings maintained a low, streamlined profile, with a horizontal emphasis. They also exhibited the same philosophical emphasis on creating a “balanced, ‘harmonic’ relationship with the environment” as modern architects in the mold of Richard J. Neutra.¹⁰⁰ Finally, they both concentrated all public-use functions within one building: restrooms, administration, visitor information, museum exhibit space, and auditorium. Thus, the visitor centers built in Yellowstone under Mission 66 and soon after “not only embod[ied] new park visitor management policies, but also the spirit which looked forward to an efficient Park Service for the modern age.”¹⁰¹

The Canyon and Grant Village visitor centers were designed, and their construction supervised for the most part by private architectural firms, as were many other Mission 66 visitor centers, for reasons of expediency and economics.¹⁰² Allaback wrote that these firms most often used preliminary WODC drawings

as the basis for their designs, but occasionally came up with the design in-house.¹⁰³ The architectural firm Hurt and Trudell of San Francisco, California, designed the Canyon Visitor Center, while the Grant Village Visitor Center was a combined effort of the architectural firm Adrian Malone and Associates of Sheridan, Wyoming, and the WODC.¹⁰⁴

As the focal point of Canyon’s visitor center, park and WODC officials had hoped to secure the original Thomas Moran painting of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone that was hanging in the Interior Department’s Washington, D.C., conference room at the time. The painting belonged in the visitor center, park officials thought, “since at Canyon it would have the greatest impact upon its viewers.”¹⁰⁵ However, the park failed to acquire either that Moran or the other acceptable alternative, a similar canvas displayed at the National Gallery. Instead, it settled for a copy of the first painting.

In 1957, the WODC’s apparently garish choice of interior and exterior paint colors for the buildings—including the visitor center—at Canyon Village led Superintendent Garrison to question the veracity of Mission 66’s professed embrace of harmonious design—or in this case, harmonious coloration. The Canyon Visitor Center was constructed using pink aggregate blocks held together with dark pink mortar. In a letter to WODC Chief Thomas Vint, Garrison reminded Vint that none of the colors chosen for the Canyon Village buildings had been approved by the park, and questioned the wisdom of their choice: “The colors used on these buildings in the utility area cause us to wonder if there is a new policy in effect regarding the selection of colors for Park structures.



Canyon Visitor Center dedication. 1958.

NHP PHOTO ARCHIVES, YELL #32767-3



YNP PHOTO ARCHIVES, YELL #147304

Canyon Visitor Center. 1958.

We would like to know if it is still practical to use exterior colors which are softer and more harmonious with the surroundings.” Landscape architect Frank Mattson found the selections “good colors for a city subdivision. For use within the park, we believe they are not entirely appropriate. . . . We believe they should be somewhat darker and the colors held within the soft browns, greens, and grey or tan grays.”¹⁰⁶

Further emphasis of resistance to Mission 66 may have been evidenced when, for a period during 1960, the Canyon Visitor Center was renamed Canyon Ranger Station, “placing emphasis on ranger activities instead of interpretation.” No museum talks were scheduled at the center that year, and the audio-visual program was reported to have “seldom functioned due to mechanical failures.” While attendance figures at Canyon during the 1959 season had been carefully reported and tabulated to suggest “heavier attendance than any other visitor center,” unofficial attendance figures for the 1960 season were “disappointingly light.”¹⁰⁷ After hearing of these developments, Regional Chief of Interpretation M. E. Beatty sent a terse letter to Garrison, wanting to know why the cost of operations for naturalist services in 1960 was significantly higher than for 1959, “despite an apparent de-emphasis of naturalist activities,” and why attendance figures were not kept officially. “Without proper data,” Beatty wrote, “remedial action is impossible.” And finally, the point that annoyed Beatty the most: why had the name of the visitor center had been changed? Beatty charged that the name change, “alone, might well explain the alleged drop in attendance,” and complained that by instituting the change, park officials

were working at cross-purposes to the agency-wide goal of “getting visitors familiar with the Visitor Center as a logical first stop on their tour of an area.” Beatty suggested that “Canyon Visitor Center” be written in large letters with “Ranger Station” and “other pertinent information in smaller letters.” He also advised the use of either a tally counter or a visitor-count mat to determine visitation load.¹⁰⁸ The problems were resolved, and Canyon Visitor Center remained an important part of the interpretive program in Yellowstone.

While he did not design the Canyon Visitor Center, one of the principal architects working with the WODC during this period was Cecil John Doty, trained in architectural engineering and part of the NPS’s architectural staff since the early 1930s, when he worked under Herbert Maier at the CCC state parks program. In 1936, Doty moved from designing state park to national park structures, and in 1954, he became part of the WODC in San Francisco under Chief Sanford J. Hill and supervising architect Lyle Bennett.¹⁰⁹ His mark on NPS landscapes was a series of visitor centers throughout the West that exhibited “sensitivity toward location; a compact plan incorporating standard visitor center elements [i.e., exhibit areas, audio-visual space, a lobby, an auditorium, and restrooms]; the use of modern materials combined with wood and stone; and the impression of modesty that comes from a limited budget.”¹¹⁰ Doty drew up designs for two visitor centers in Yellowstone that were never built: at Mammoth and Madison Junction.¹¹¹

“The Mission 66 visitor center remains today as the most complete and significant expression of the Park



YNP PHOTO ARCHIVES, YELL #438799-1

Canyon Visitor Center. 1958.

Service Modern Style,” wrote Allaback, “and of the planning and design practices developed by the Park Service during the Mission 66 era.”¹¹² Doty probably would have agreed wholeheartedly. As he put it, designers of a park’s visitor center needed to be aware of the importance of the center’s effect, including its site and landscaping, on the public. In this sense, Doty was carrying forward into the Mission 66 era an important tenet of landscape architecture: just as good landscaping around a park structure could “add” to the building’s reputation, poor landscaping could just as easily detract from the structure’s effect on the public. At a visitor center planning conference, Doty warned designers that the “parking area, walks, terraces, and everything in and around the building are part of the Visitor Center ensemble, and are on exhibit as something constructed by the National Park Service.” “They can be more important than the exhibits themselves,” he noted.¹¹³

At the same time, it was the visitor center’s contents that mattered most. “The overwhelming purpose [of the centers] was luring people inside,” wrote Allaback.¹¹⁴ For this reason, the interior layout and thus general design of a visitor center was largely driven by concerns about how best to move visitors through the space while informing them about the park. Thus, NPS architects created building “circulation” or “flow” diagrams. To help them arrive at reasoned conclusions regarding circulation, park architects were encouraged to meet with the interpretation staff of a park, and other museum professionals. Thomas Vint, who remained chief of the

Washington branch of the Park Service’s Office of Design and Construction until 1961, was a major proponent of teamwork between curatorial and educational staff and the architectural staff.¹¹⁵ Thus, the surge in interest in creating visitor centers carried with it a wave of activity in the museum branch of the NPS.¹¹⁶

The location of a visitor center was also important. “Taken out of context, the visitor center had no inherent value,” Allaback contended, “but placed near a point of interest, it became indispensable to the curious park visitor.”¹¹⁷ WODC designers did not always have the final say on a visitor center’s location, but they most certainly could influence the decision. They usually chose visitor center sites in relation to a park’s overall circulation plan “in order to efficiently intercept visitor traffic,” and thus did not hesitate to incorporate the widening of park roads and the expansion of parking lots into a plan.¹¹⁸ Thus, according to Allaback, the “criteria for siting Mission 66 visitor centers . . . differed significantly from the criteria for siting and designing the rustic park villages and museums of the prewar era.”¹¹⁹ As a result, visitor centers were often located in what some critics believed to be sensitive historic or natural areas. Such siting was rationalized, however, on the basis of visitor edification and the hope that the “resulting understanding of sites would lead to greater support for preservation.”¹²⁰ The answer to the difficult question of where to locate a visitor center—close to the entrance so as to help visitors plan their park excursions, or at the site of interest to help visitors interpret a particular significant feature—was

not ever provided definitively, but many park interpreters favored placing visitor centers “right on top of the resource” to allow visitors to “see virtually everything from the visitor center.”¹²¹ As one park naturalist put it, “a visitor center should be ‘in touch’ with the feature it interprets.”¹²²

The Mission 66 visitor center embodied the NPS’s response to questions about how best to educate the public about the national parks and the need for their continued preservation in the modern age. They also affirmed the idea that the parks were to be used by the public, predicated as they were on the belief that visitor centers would instill an appreciation of a park’s natural or historical features, thereby enhancing visitor enjoyment. Thus, Mission 66’s stance on the importance of interpretation was central to its adoption of the visitor center as its core structure.

Mission 66 and the Change From Education to Interpretation

The decision to make education an integral part of Mission 66 was not made entirely by the NPS. The public had asked the agency to include it. When a public survey of attitudes concerning the park was conducted in April 1955, the need for “more information about the sights to be seen, [and] plaques, printed material, guide maps, lectures, etc.” was second only to the need for “more facilities for sleeping.”¹²³ One result was the visitor center; another was the institution of “interpretation” in the parks.

Educational programming at Yellowstone had changed little during the postwar and Mission 66 periods until the 1960s. Vick, for example, documented little distinction between the 1933 and the 1958 schedules of educational programming.¹²⁴ One reason may have been the continuity in leadership: C. Max Bauer, chief naturalist since 1932, was replaced in 1946 by David deLancy Condon, who remained in that position until 1959. The stability of the tenures of both men likely ensured a strong measure of uniformity during the postwar and Mission 66 periods.¹²⁵

What changed more significantly during this period was the terminology used by the NPS’s Washington, D.C., offices to refer to educational programming. The term that had evolved from “information” (1919) to “education” (1925), and then to “naturalist” (1932), finally settled in 1940 on “interpretation.” This change

in terminology was reflected in name changes in the NPS’s organizational structure. In 1938, the agency’s Branch of Research and Education became the Branch of Research and Information, only to become the Branch of Interpretation in 1941. By 1954, it was called the Interpretation Division.¹²⁶ Such name changes were reiterated in Yellowstone, where the Naturalist Department (which took over from the Education Department in 1933) became the Naturalist Division in 1942, and the Interpretive Division in 1955.¹²⁷

The term “interpretation” was chosen because instead of focusing on the presentation of information or on the intensity and rigor of education, it was “an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information,” according to author Freeman Tilden, who in the 1950s wrote several important books on the nation’s parks.¹²⁸ Tilden called interpretation “a voyage of discovery in the field of human emotions and intellectual growth.”¹²⁹

While interpretation was, in effect, an education of sorts, the NPS opted to disassociate itself from the idea of educating the public. The term “education” fell out of favor, according to Vick, because “it came to be too closely associated with formal schooling. Those involved in the educational work,” she wrote, “did not want the park visitor to think he was going to school when he came to a national park.” To associate park activities with education would, according to one park naturalist, “put the kiss of death, as it were, on what we were trying to do.”¹³⁰

Nor did the term “information” sit well with the NPS. While interpretation included information, it went much further: “Interpretation is revelation based upon information,” according to Tilden.¹³¹ There was a depth to interpretation that did not exist with the mere imparting of information, and it was this depth that Tilden and, increasingly, the NPS as a whole, appreciated. The true interpreter, according to Tilden, “[b]esides being ready in his information and studious in his use of research, . . . goes beyond the apparent to the real, beyond a part to a whole, beyond a truth to a more important truth.”¹³²

The “truth” NPS officials wanted visitors to see was the intangible value of nature. For Tilden, interpretation was “the primary means by which the National Park Service could generate an understanding of the visible and invisible values of the national parks.”¹³³ The “chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction,” Tilden wrote in

a discussion of his six principles of interpretation, “but provocation.”¹³⁴ “Through interpretation, understanding,” Vick quoted the widely known motto, “through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection.”¹³⁵

Yellowstone officials put this process of provocation to work to achieve an appreciation of the natural values integral to preserving the park. While Vick claimed that the park did not officially revise any of its interpretive programming to include this goal of achieving protection through interpretive programs before 1968, Haines wrote that the “interpretive program developed under Mission 66 was conservation oriented, stressing wilderness values and ecological relationships wherever possible.”¹³⁶ Along these lines, Superintendent Garrison planned to introduce a wilderness appreciation theme into the park’s interpretive message at Grant Village. Grant, according to Garrison, “would become the wilderness take-off point,” with trails leading to Heart Lake, the Witch Creek [Heart Lake] Geyser Basin, upper Yellowstone Lake, and Flat Mountain Arm. Garrison also planned for a trail between Lewis Lake and Shoshone Lake, and “on into the Bechler river country.” According to Garrison, wilderness was a “popular topic of planning” in the early 1960s, but there were few points of access in Yellowstone. Grant Village would remedy that. Park visitors would also learn about the importance of and need to appreciate wilderness at the Grant Village Visitor Center, where the theme would be “The Wilderness and Ways to Enjoy It.”¹³⁷ Some of these plans, at least, came to fruition.

On other fronts, however, there was little significant movement. When Chief Naturalist Condon moved to Great Smoky Mountains National Park, he was replaced by Robert N. McIntyre, who served for three years, and then by John Good, who remained chief naturalist for five years. There were significant developments in Yellowstone during McIntyre’s short tenure, but they did not alter the status quo in terms of educational programming. First, at Superintendent Garrison’s urging, the park adopted a district management concept and three districts: North, West, and South. Attempts to “run everything out of headquarters with a Chief Ranger and a Chief Interpreter and a Chief of Maintenance simply broke down,” Garrison claimed after he retired from the NPS. “They were too far apart and [there were] too many things going on.”¹³⁸ Garrison followed the model set up by Dan Beard in Everglades National Park, with district managers in three districts—the same three districts that

Horace Albright had used in his quite similar program implemented in the 1920s.

This decentralized management structure embraced “all government activities—interpretive and maintenance as well as protective,” wrote Haines, “with all three branches under the supervision of a district manager who was, in effect, a ‘little superintendent.’”¹³⁹ As Garrison put it, “We delegated to them [the district managers] the authority to run this just like it was a little park. They set up their own programs . . . they had their own budget, and . . . they selected employees.” The system worked “quite well,” according to Garrison; it “put the decision making out where the problems were.”¹⁴⁰ Haines agreed that the system had its advantages, “particularly in buildings and utilities maintenance, where sending crews from headquarters often meant excessive travel.” But, he noted, the system also had its problems: lower efficiency and insularity.¹⁴¹ As it was, Garrison’s system was abolished for unclear reasons just about the time he left in 1963. “I never did know why it was killed,” Garrison remembered in an interview a decade later. “[N]obody had the guts to tell me what was wrong with it except that Connie Wirth . . . said, no.” Apparently, Regional Director Baker told Garrison that the system was “heavy on overhead.”¹⁴²

The second development McIntyre instigated was planning for new educational sites at Bridge Bay and Grant Village, as well as for a “Fishing For Fun” program (implemented in 1961). Third, park rangers began to conduct impromptu winter interpretation activities at the Madison and Old Faithful areas beginning in winter 1962–1963, as the number of snowcoaches and snowmobiles (first allowed into the park in 1955 and 1963, respectively) increased. Finally, two new positions were established (to be “redefined” in 1968 due to budget constraints), as Mary Meagher became museum curator and Aubrey Haines became park historian.¹⁴³ But these changes, Vick argued, did not affect the actual content of educational programming.

While Good was chief, several superficial changes concomitant with a growing program occurred. For instance, there were increases in the budget and the number of seasonal ranger naturalists hired. The new educational sites became a reality at Bridge Bay (1964) and Grant Village (1966), and the following publications were introduced: a new ranger manual, *Manual of General Information on Yellowstone National Park* (1963); an in-house document, *The Yellowstone Interpreter* (1963); and a commercially printed program brochure

that outlined the summer naturalist program and was distributed for free.¹⁴⁴

The Effect of Mission 66 on Yellowstone's Campgrounds

The people behind Mission 66 also set out to improve and expand the park's campgrounds—a reversal from the thinking just years before, when park officials had toyed with the idea of curtailing overnight visitation in the park as a solution to the problem of campground overuse. When the increase in visitors after the war had a measurable impact on the already-deteriorated campgrounds, Superintendent Rogers, in 1947, selected a committee to study the “trend of use, preservation of vegetation, and administration and control of campground populations.” The committee considered limiting individual stays to ten nights at any one campsite, and strongly suggested the “greater use of facilities outside the park rather than continue their extension within the park.” They even discussed a proposal to “work toward a program which would place all of the overnight facilities outside the park, including camping.”¹⁴⁵

Most of these recommendations were not acted upon, however, and by the end of the decade, the overuse of campgrounds had grown worse. As the tremendous pressure on campgrounds continued, considerable rehabilitation and even some expansion became necessary, particularly at Old Faithful, Fishing Bridge, and West Thumb. In 1948, for example, Superintendent Rogers estimated that there was a 40 percent overuse of campgrounds. “In other words,” he wrote, “where there was room for 10 people, 14 crowded in.”¹⁴⁶ In the 1950s, mature lodgepole pine trees in the Fishing Bridge area were cut to prevent a “blow-down” on a scale with the one in 1936, when a child had been killed, several people had been injured, and automobiles had been damaged. Park officials developed plans to close parts of the camping area for restoration and to open them once new vegetation had started to grow. When visitors complained that the plans constituted spiteful or retributive behavior on the part of the NPS, Regional Director Baker responded with pleas that they understand the agency's effort to maintain camping facilities in the park for generations to come.¹⁴⁷

Park officials employed whatever methods they could to solve the campground crisis without adding to the number of campgrounds or campsites. For example,

in 1958—ten years after Rogers's committee had proposed the idea—a 15-day limit was imposed on camping at one site, which halved the length of time that had been allowed for several decades.¹⁴⁸ Assistant Superintendent Luis Gastelum further proposed a “critical analysis . . . to determine if we should set a limit on the total campers we can accommodate at one time.”¹⁴⁹ Under the influence of Mission 66's philosophy of accommodation, however, it was decided that the solution was to increase capacity, especially given the fact that park officials wanted to close the campground at West Thumb, which had become “crowded and worn out.”¹⁵⁰ A panel of experts—the park engineer, assistant superintendent, chief ranger, assistant park naturalist, park landscape architect and district ranger—rejected a proposal, scandalous by today's standards, to build a campground in Hayden Valley. The panel found the proposal unfavorable because, first, the site could not accommodate enough campsites to relieve the pressure on established campgrounds, which were primarily in the Lake area. Second, the committee felt that the area “because of animal and bird life should be kept free of intensive developments.” Third, they acknowledged that “the installation of camping developments in this [Hayden Valley] area would literally preclude any withdrawal of such use in the future and actually call for more installations.” Instead, the panel recommended establishing a primitive campground at Pelican Creek and improving the camping possibilities at Lewis Lake.¹⁵¹

Thus, a primitive campground at Pelican Creek was built in 1959, and camping opportunities at Lewis Lake were expanded. In a letter to Superintendent Garrison, Acting Regional Director M. H. Harvey noted the “suitability of the terrain and vegetation” at Pelican Creek for possibly even a permanent campground. But officials also acknowledged that development in the area should be temporary until approved in the master plan.¹⁵² They also recognized that the addition of overflow camping at Pelican Creek did not solve the overall crowding issue. In a letter to a dissatisfied visitor, Superintendent Garrison acknowledged that between lack of funds and the increase in visitation, “overcrowded conditions have in some instances resulted in unsatisfactory sanitary conditions because of our inability to properly police the area.” As he explained, the recent percentage of increase in campground use—25 percent—far exceeded the percentage of increase in total visitation.¹⁵³

The new campground at Lewis Lake opened on August 1, 1961, with 100 sites and room to add 100

more. A new campground at Madison Junction opened that same year with 320 sites, and the campground at Fishing Bridge had already been expanded to 300 sites.¹⁵⁴ In 1962, the Indian Creek Campground was further developed with the installation of water pumps and pit toilets. Garrison, suggested powering the water pump and hypo-chlorinator by small gasoline engines rather than electric motors; there was no requirement for electricity in the area because park policy “preclude[d] using comfort stations in campgrounds with less than 100 sites.”¹⁵⁵

By 1963, a record number of campers made use of the park. Camper days—the number of campers in the park on any given day—almost doubled in three years, from 450,000 in 1960 to 814,000 in 1963.¹⁵⁶ To alleviate overcrowding, officials actualized plans for a campground at Bridge Bay, which had been discussed for decades. In 1935, Superintendent Toll had asked Landscape Architect Mattson to draw up plans for a campground and boat dock at Bridge Bay. Toll recognized that obtaining a reliable, safe water supply for the area would be a major undertaking, and thus suggested that the campground “be included in the next ECW program and also be listed in the six-year program.”¹⁵⁷ But the project was put off. Finally, in the early 1960s, park employees began dredging the bay for the marina and constructing the multi-use/concessioner building and the campground loops.¹⁵⁸ The Bridge Bay Campground first appeared on the U.S. Department of Interior’s map of Yellowstone in 1965.

Even campground comfort stations were not beyond the reach of Mission 66 Style dictates. In 1956, Director Wirth sent out a memorandum on the use of “appropriate finishes for comfort stations compatible with their environments in the campgrounds.” He suggested that ceramic tile and paint colors such as pastel shades of pink, orchid, and blue be avoided and replaced with “more virile” colors: neutral gray, buff, tan, and terracotta. He also recommended quarry tile and gray or ochre ceramic tile to minimize tracking marks.¹⁵⁹ The following year, Vint, now chief of the Division of Design and Construction, notified Superintendent Garrison that Wirth now felt “strongly against the use of ceramic tile in Comfort Stations.” The director was impressed with Formica for wainscot and Marlite wall finish, both of which had recently been used at a comfort station at Cape Hatteras.¹⁶⁰

By the middle of the 1960s, however, cracks were appearing in the synthetic surface of Wirth’s campground

expansion program. As Garrison remembered many years later, NPS officials at the beginning of Mission 66, “were still operating under the principle that every visitor that wanted to come to Yellowstone, you’d let in.” “If he wanted to camp,” Garrison said, “you tried to provide a campground for him.” But, as Garrison remembered,

We got off of that before very long because it became obvious we had to do something in restriction . . . camping, for instance. We built the Madison Junction Campground, rebuilt it, enlarged it. We built the . . . Grant Village Campground, but it was so obvious that to really meet the forward demand, we would end up with a ring of campgrounds around Yellowstone Lake from Grant Village through to Mary Bay, which was about 33 miles, and they’d be full all the time.¹⁶¹

Thus, the agency was forced once again to re-evaluate the relative importance of use and preservation identified in its mandate. As Garrison realized, the “preservation” side would perish if the scales were tipped too far to the “use” side. The continuation of the campground expansion program was, as Garrison put it, “a perversion of the purpose of the park,” and so officials finally decided to stop increasing camp capacity. In retrospect, the move to have a campground in every geyser basin was wrong, according to Garrison. “[W]hy couldn’t we leave just leave one of them alone?” he asked rhetorically.¹⁶²

From Species Protection to Ecological Management

The pendulum began to swing toward preservation in 1963, with the release of the “Wildlife Management in the National Parks,” better known as the “Leopold Report” —a study of wildlife management issues produced by Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall’s Advisory Board on Wildlife Management, chaired by A. Starker Leopold, a zoologist at the University of California at Berkeley.¹⁶³ According to Brian Kenner, “The Leopold Report can be regarded at least partly as a reaction to the rejection of Mission 66 philosophy by the interested public.”¹⁶⁴ Secretary Udall (1961–1969), himself, was no fan of Mission 66, and had told Director Wirth so soon after taking office.¹⁶⁵ With the help of a commit-



Black bear leaning on roadside barricade, with ear tag placed by bear researchers. 1965.

tee of wildlife experts, including such noted biologists as Stanley Cain and Ira Gabrielson, Leopold crafted a document that, according to historian Paul Schullery, became “much more influential and more frequently invoked in all subsequent management dialogues even than the [Yellowstone National Park] Organic Act or the National Park Service Act.”¹⁶⁶ According to one recent park superintendent, the Leopold report became “a kind of manifesto” for NPS personnel; it was adopted as official agency policy.¹⁶⁷

The Leopold Report was commissioned in response to the public outcry that occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s in response to the NPS’s culling of Yellowstone’s elk herds.¹⁶⁸ The report called for active ecological management on the part of the NPS in an attempt to recreate in the national parks “a vignette of primitive America.” Thus, wilderness values or those that would maintain or return the park to “as nearly as possible . . . the condition that prevailed when the area was first visited by white man” were to be esteemed above values emphasizing enjoyment or use of the park. “The goal, we repeat,” Leopold wrote, “is to maintain or create the mood of wild America . . . but the whole effect can be lost if the parks are overdeveloped for motorized travel.” “If too many tourists crowd the roadways,” he stressed, “then we should ration the tourists rather than expand the roadways.” “Above all other policies,” Leopold wrote, “the maintenance of naturalness should prevail.”¹⁶⁹

Maintaining naturalness, Leopold argued, would be achieved not by protection per se, or even protection of specific species, but by active management of

an ecosystem. Since it had become a national park, Yellowstone’s natural features had been “protected” through active manipulation designed to maximize the survival of certain species. For example, at various times, park officials had “protected” elk by feeding them, by exterminating predators, and by killing elk in an effort to prevent them from “overpopulating” and “overgrazing” their range after those predators had been eliminated. Before the Leopold Report became national park policy, park forests were “protected” from fire, considered the enemy of forest health; park rangers attempted to extinguish all blazes.

The Leopold Report made clear that protecting particular species at the expense of others was counterproductive and even destructive to preserving naturalness. Protection of one part of what was really a much larger system of organisms and relationships was not the way to preserve the ecosystems of which parks themselves were really only a part. Already by the late 1950s, some in the NPS had been thinking that Yellowstone’s needs might be well-served by a staff ecologist. In 1957, George Bagley, then regional chief of operations but also former chief ranger in Yellowstone, advocated hiring an ecologist. “I have reached the conclusion,” he wrote the regional director, “that an Ecologist, or a man with ecological training and some park experience, would be of more value to the Park than would a pure biologist.” An ecologist, he concluded, “would have a much broader understanding of the floral and faunal communities than do most persons trained in general biology.”¹⁷⁰

Leopold’s particular contribution to this issue was

his ability to point out that preservation required not only recognition and understanding of “the enormous complexity of ecological communities and the diversity of management procedures required to preserve them,” but also “active manipulation of the plant and animal communities.”¹⁷¹ Active manipulation was necessary because the Yellowstone ecosystem had already been interfered with, resulting in a situation in which pure protection was no longer desirable or even possible. Thus, active manipulation for the sake of protecting certain species was replaced by the notion of active manipulation for the preservation of naturalness.

From Natural Preservation to Historic Preservation

Though the Mission 66 years were largely an era of tearing down the old to make way for the new, Yellowstone’s historic buildings did attract some attention during this period. However, because Mission 66 was largely completed by the time the National Historic Preservation Act became law in 1966, the park’s actions in regard to those structures were not driven by legislation. In July 1957, NPS historian Merrill J. Mattes wrote to Superintendent Garrison about potential historic buildings in the park. Garrison readily agreed with Mattes’s opinion that the Norris Ranger Station should be considered a historic building and thus receive a degree of consideration and protection in the face of development, but proposed further study on Mattes’s two other candidates, the Cottage Hotel and the Yancey Mail Station and Hotel. Regional Operations Chief George Baggeley concurred with Garrison that the Cottage Hotel and the Yancey property were “marginal . . . and need careful study before the Service [should commit] to their preservation and maintenance as historic structures.”¹⁷² Though some observers now believe they should have been preserved, the buildings were ultimately removed.

In November 1959, Regional Director Howard Baker requested the superintendent’s views on the historical significance of the Norris Soldier Station and also a report on any damage the structure may have suffered from the Hebgen Lake earthquake that had occurred in August of that year. Baker wanted assurance that Garrison felt the soldier station had sufficient historical significance and structural integrity to be converted into a historical museum, and suggested that a Historic

Structures Report be completed. One might read the undertones in Baker’s correspondence as reflecting a negative attitude toward the proposed Norris Soldier Station project. In his closing remarks, for example, Baker wrote, “The fact that this has now been tentatively earmarked for \$20,000 should in no way influence your judgment as to the feasibility of preserving this structure from historical and architectural viewpoints.”¹⁷³

Because Yellowstone did not have its own historian until late 1960, Regional Director Baker requested that NPS historian Ray H. Mattison “make an evaluation of certain historical buildings in the park and make recommendations for their preservation or disposition.”¹⁷⁴ Mattison ascribed the urgency to evaluate the park’s historic structures to two main points: first, the buildings were deteriorating rapidly—especially after the 1959 earthquake—and measures would need to be undertaken quickly to ensure their preservation. Second, facilities proposed under Mission 66 jeopardized several of these older structures. After careful study of the structures and their history, as well as consultations with Chief Naturalist Robert McIntyre and park engineer—and soon to become park historian—Aubrey Haines, Mattison recommended that the Norris Soldier Station be “rehabilitated for use in the interpretive system at Yellowstone.” Mattison also recommended that several structures at Yancey’s station be preserved or reconstructed, that the structures at the Lamar Buffalo Ranch located at the junction of Rose Creek and the Lamar River be destroyed, but only after a complete photographic record of them had been made, and that the Cottage Hotel and Mammoth caretaker’s cottage be obliterated. He also advocated placing historical markers at the sites of several demolished but important historic structures: McCartney’s cabin, the “Norris blockhouse” or original park headquarters, Camp Sheridan, McGuirk’s Medical Springs on the Gardner River, and Baronett’s Bridge.¹⁷⁵

After he became park historian in late 1960, Aubrey Haines evaluated Mattison’s recommendations. Haines basically concurred with Mattison’s findings, and asked that several other sites be given the same consideration: “the site of the civilian cemetery on the hill north of Mammoth, the site of the old ‘town’ of Soda Butte, on the Cooke City road, the wreck of the steamer *Zillah* [E. C. Waters] on Stevenson Island, and the Chinaman’s Garden on the Gardner River.”¹⁷⁶ Haines completed his own Historic Structures Report for the Norris Soldier Station in 1961, and in April of that year, officials at the

NPS's Washington, D.C., offices and the agency's chief architect commended him for his work.

The question of whether to preserve Fort Yellowstone also arose at this time. In his report, Mattison had recommended that only "certain representative type structures, such as the old Park Headquarters and one of the non-commissioned officers' quarters, be preserved." He wrote that while it "would be highly desirable to preserve the buildings of Fort Yellowstone if they were to be considered on their own merits" —they were after all, in his own words, "one of the best preserved and most complete late 19th and early 20th century military establishments in Region Two" —other factors had entered into the picture. It "is recognized," he wrote vaguely, "that revised landscaping factors in this primarily scenic area will make it impracticable to retain them as a group." Again, he recommended making an architectural record of the buildings before they were destroyed in case no original plans had survived.¹⁷⁷

Whether due to Mattison's report or not, rumors flew regarding the possible demolition of the fort. When former park superintendent and former NPS Director Horace Albright heard these rumors, he fired off a strong letter, softened only by its opening—"My dear Connie," he began—to Director Wirth condemning the idea of destroying the fort. "This letter of protest may not be in order because it may be based only on rumor," he wrote. "On the other hand, it may be in order, but futile because there may be no one who will care to consider it valid or important." He reminded Wirth about the fort's importance as a draw for tourists. "Tear [it] down," he warned, ". . . and twenty years from now, perhaps sooner, there will be projects developed to rebuild it in whole or in part." Besides, the Mammoth area, especially, needed all the tourist attractions it could muster, he reminded Wirth.¹⁷⁸ Seeking to offset the possibility that the fort had been damaged during the earthquake of 1959, Albright asserted, "I seriously doubt that the earthquake damaged the Fort, or that it is unsafe." Furthermore, he reasoned, there "is no more reason to tear down Fort Yellowstone than there is to tear down the old San Francisco Mint on the ground that even though it did not crumble in 1906, it might fall next time an earthquake comes along."¹⁷⁹

The style of any replacement architecture also troubled Albright. Would replacement headquarters "be of *modern* architecture, perhaps entirely out of harmony with what will be left of the Mammoth Hot Springs community?" Albright wanted to know. "I fear a new

Yellowstone headquarters may be far less attractive, or less commodious and far less interesting than the old Fort which can be made an important historical feature," he concluded. Using every tool he had, including a veiled threat, Albright admitted that "as a taxpayer," he "would regard the destruction of the Fort as a massive waste of good Government property, and the building of new headquarters as giving to Yellowstone largesse that many other park areas deserve[d] and need[ed]."¹⁸⁰

Finally, he was concerned with the bad name the NPS would acquire should it be associated with the demolition of the fort. "I honestly think that . . . the whole project is unsound from every standpoint and the Department and the Service can be seriously criticized if it secures money and goes ahead with it. Surely this project was not a part of Mission 66, and I would hope Mission 66 will not be identified with it." He asked that the agency's chief historian have a chance to study the matter before the NPS made any definitive move to destroy the fort.¹⁸¹

Almost a year later, Director Wirth responded to Albright's protest. Wirth admitted that there had been serious discussions of removing Fort Yellowstone to make room for "more orderly development of the Park headquarters and because of their possible weakening as a result of the earthquake," but, he wrote, "I don't feel that we should get hysterical about it." The first order of importance, he reminded Albright, was employee safety. "[T]he main thing is that we do not want to endanger the lives of our employees if the buildings have been weakened," he wrote. Furthermore, he added, "we have information indicating that the real old Fort Yellowstone of historical significance was removed back in the 20's and what we have there now is what might be termed the more modern Fort Yellowstone which was built after the turn of the century." Wirth concluded by agreeing that the project would be expensive and that the money was needed elsewhere, but he did say that they would "add to the Mammoth area headquarters such buildings as we need to carry on an efficient administration" and that the buildings would be "fit into a scheme that will allow us at a future date to remove the old Army buildings if it is found desirable to do so and replace them with more modern buildings that fit into a better scheme of management." The only reason to remove the older buildings, however, he reassured Albright, would be if he thought his employees were in danger from working in unsafe conditions.¹⁸²

A change that was implemented during this period,

however, was the move of the Superintendent's Office from the Corps of Engineers building to the three-story "new" barracks building built in 1909, the present home of the park's administration. According to Haines, "This move allowed grouping of the department heads close to the superintendent, creating a functional unity unknown when staff members were scattered among several buildings."¹⁸³

In 1960, Albright and others had reason to worry about the destruction of historic structures because, as Albright had noted in his letter to Wirth, the NPS's "policies with respect to preservation and interpretation" had not yet been developed.¹⁸⁴ Once the agency's mission with respect to the documentation and preservation of historic structures was established in 1966, as part of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), it became much easier to argue in favor of preserving Yellowstone's historic structures. But, as Schullery wrote, on the other side of the coin was the fact that with historic preservation, a new, costly, and often unwieldy element had been added to the NPS mission: the preservation of "structures no longer common elsewhere—from winding, low-speed auto trails to romanticized rustic architecture."¹⁸⁵ In essence, with the advent of the NHPA, the nation's parks also became "museums for really big objects." As Schullery noted, this added responsibility has proven to be an expensive challenge for parks such as Yellowstone. "While some hold that even the architectural and engineering legacy of the National Park Service itself must be preserved and protected in the parks, others worry that we risk turning too much of Yellowstone into sites for stockpiling neat old buildings, bridges, culverts, and other human constructions that were created in the first place only to enable us to enjoy other resources here." "The buildings in Yellowstone are both interesting and historic," Schullery reminded his readers, "but they were a side effect of the park's purpose. Now they have become a purpose in themselves, and one of the great challenges facing future managers will be coming to terms with that purpose."¹⁸⁶

Conclusion

The impact of World War II, with its immediate restriction on building and the lack of an adequate labor force, resulted in the neglect of buildings and structures in Yellowstone and across the national park system. When attendance figures soared after the end of the

war, the park struggled to meet visitor demands. Combined with a growing awareness of the implications of unplanned development on the natural resources of the park, a major planning effort, in the form of Mission 66, took place toward the end of this period. In Yellowstone, the program's emphasis was to move or relocate development away from significant or fragile areas of the park, resulting in the construction of Canyon Village (already planned, at least in part), the creation of Grant Village, and an unsuccessful plan for the removal of facilities at Old Faithful. With these developments came a new architectural style, Park Service Modern.

Was Yellowstone's Mission 66 program a success? Historian Richard A. Bartlett averred that the program "staved off the deterioration that was bringing the parks and monuments to the brink of disaster."¹⁸⁷ Historian Paul Schullery has written that the program's legacy is complex, and thus defies a simple thumbs-up or thumbs-down evaluation. "It did, indeed, upgrade many roads, bridges, and facilities, and no doubt visitors are now better served," he wrote, "but the program is routinely criticized for simply accommodating more traffic rather than trying to control or limit it." He also noted that environmentalists condemn the "biggest monuments of Mission 66, Canyon Village and Grant Village."¹⁸⁸ According to historian Aubrey Haines, the program's greatest accomplishments were improved access and the provision of administrative and employee facilities. "But in the matter of providing visitor accommodations," he wrote, "there was no real gain." For Haines, the unfinished components of Mission 66 perhaps "saved [the park] from unnecessary scarring."¹⁸⁹

Most have concurred, however, that the program was not perceived as a great success at its time. As Haines wrote, "Mission 66 passed quietly out of the picture," and was supplanted with a program called "Road to the Future," that de-emphasized large scale construction projects and promoted such long-range objectives as "[p]reserving the scenic and scientific grandeur of our Nation, presenting its history, providing healthful outdoor recreation for the enjoyment of our people, [and] working with others to provide the best possible relationship of human beings to their total environment."¹⁹⁰ According to seasonal park ranger Robin Smith, who wrote a historical study of Grant Village, "Mission 66 lost its cachet halfway through the program." By "1959–1960," Smith noted, "the NPS began to see what with all the roads and pillows they had added they still were not winning the battle to provide adequate facilities. To the

contrary, the situation was getting worse.”¹⁹¹

The public apparently did not perceive the program as a success, either. Indeed, throughout the Mission 66 era, NPS officials had to counter claims that the large-scale development program was hurting parks more than it was helping them. In February 1959, for example, Director Wirth sent a memorandum to all field offices asking them to expend greater effort “to present the Mission 66 program to the public in its true light.” “Specifically,” he wrote, “it is necessary that we use every available means to counter the misapprehension that Mission 66 is somehow damaging the Parks or that it is inimical to the purpose for which the Parks were created.” He called it “of the utmost importance that this concept [that Mission 66 was a program to carry out the basic purpose of the National Park Service] be firmly fixed in the minds of the American public.” Wirth asked the field offices “to develop more and better feature articles for publication designed to place the Mission 66 program in its proper perspective.” After reading the memorandum, Wirth wrote, officials were to destroy it, in an effort, perhaps, to deny that the program had ever been in trouble.¹⁹²

Indeed, Mission 66 was not popular with those who wanted the park used less and preserved more. In the end, the nation and the NPS came to see that “a continuing effort to accommodate all visitors in the traditional manner would eventually be destructive of park values.”¹⁹³ Schullery, for example, documented public sentiment in the late 1960s as being overwhelmingly in favor of limiting public activity in the nation’s parks to a level consistent with maintaining wilderness values in the park. Almost all who answered an informal survey in 1968 regarding how national parks should be run, “agreed that we should ‘determine what human influences are causing wildlife problems, and develop park management programs designed to offset man’s adverse impact.’”¹⁹⁴

Based in the modern belief that “good” develop-

ment would actually protect the landscape by concentrating use in areas less important for wilderness or esthetic values, Mission 66 was intended, among other things, to be a tool for helping protect the nation’s parks.¹⁹⁵ A park’s environment would also be preserved as the public became more informed about the need for preserving such areas; hence, the program’s push for interpretation. But the nation’s, and eventually, many agency officials’ evaluation of the program was essentially that it was anti-preservation and pro-development. According to Kenner, “the Service most certainly recognized that constructing facilities to keep up with visitation was no longer feasible, and probably also felt the need for an adjustment in policy.”¹⁹⁶ Even Mission 66 Steering Committee Chairman Lon Garrison “came to realize that, contrary to his original thinking, the NPS could not continue to expand accommodations for Park visitors.”¹⁹⁷ The park’s natural features and wilderness could not be adequately preserved if every visitor was accommodated.

While Yellowstone National Park has always boasted an eclectic architectural blend (the Prairie-Style Child House at Mammoth Hot Springs, the typical army-style buildings, the Anglo-Japanese Engineer’s Office, the Art Moderne Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel, the Colonial Revival Lake Hotel, and the former Canyon Hotel), its rustic influences outweighed these non-rustic buildings for many years. With the introduction of the modern buildings—along with modern bridges, bypasses, and the Old Faithful cloverleaf overpass—brought by Mission 66, Yellowstone began to take on another feeling and appearance. Along with these new developments was a change in the park’s approach to communicating knowledge and instilling appreciation—from education to interpretation—and later, a change in its wildlife management philosophy—from species protector to ecosystem manager—as well as its approach to historic structures. In 1965, the park stood poised for the challenges ahead, including threats to its ecology, its wilderness, and its historic buildings.