

The Yellowstone Archives and its Affiliation with NARA

Through special arrangement with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Yellowstone National Park is classified as an affiliated archives of NARA. This arrangement, reached through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in 1978, means that the park is permitted to retain physical custody of all those records that would normally be transferred to a central NARA repository in accordance with normal federal records disposition procedures. Records covered by the MOA document the administration and operations of the park from 1882 to the present and include records from the era of Army administration and records created or received by the National Park Service, certain other government entities, and some park concessionaires. The photograph collection includes work by such noted photographers as William Henry Jackson, Henry Bird Calfee, W.I. Marshall, and F. Jay Haynes. Video and audio tapes, maps and drawings also fall under the agreement, and are subject to NARA standards for the care and management of records.

The MOA, which is the only such agreement that has been reached between NARA and the National Park Service (NPS), came about largely because Yellowstone found it impossible to meet park management goals and the numerous and extremely varied demands of outside researchers without having its records onsite.

Each year, the park archives and museum staff receive nearly a thousand reference requests. Many researchers visit the park personally, as their projects involve both field work and research in the archives. Studying a park feature—whether a geyser, waterfall, historic hotel, or a long-abandoned hotel dump—then having immediate access to the photographs, reports and other records that document its history, is an opportunity cherished by outside researchers and park staff alike.

Approximately half of those using the archives each year are park employees.

Landscape architects rely heavily on the archives, having used its holdings most recently to draft Design Standards for the park (to ensure that future design, construction and maintenance projects respect and harmonize with park resources); to document and teach about changes in cultural landscapes over time; to document the existence and extent of nurseries and other abandoned agricultural operations within the park; and to discover important details of historic cultural landscapes, such as lighting fixtures, fences, benches and landscaping. Maintenance and historic preservation workers study historic building materials and techniques, sometimes referring to actual samples from the museum collection in conjunction with photographs. Both park interpreters and concessions employees with education responsibilities make extensive use of the historic photograph collection in creating slide programs for the public. Exhibit planners continuously draw on the archives in developing and designing waysides and other interpretive media. Park rangers consult historic photographs before undertaking maintenance or alteration of historic backcountry cabins. Having park records at hand and readily accessible has also improved the park's ability to produce reports, plans and other documents on its most contentious issues, including bison and wolf management, grazing on the park's Northern range, and

Tourists in car and bus at Jupiter Terrace.





Yellowstone Rangers at Mud Volcano. Skis and poles on ground behind them.

Photos courtesy Yellowstone National Park Archives.

the illegal introduction of non-native fish into Yellowstone Lake.

Scholarly researchers, including college and graduate students and professional historians, make extensive use of the archives year-round. Histories of fire in the Yellowstone ecosystem; park patrol cabins; nearby Jackson Hole, Wyoming; and the Canyon Hotel, an extraordinary arts-and-crafts-style building designed by Robert Reamer (architect of the Old Faithful Inn), completed in 1911, but sold to wreckers in 1959 for reasons that remain controversial, are just a few of the research projects currently underway. **In recent years, hundreds of film makers, documentary producers, journalists, and other members of the media have used thousands of images from the archives in their films, television specials and articles focusing on Yellowstone, the NPS and the history of national park movement.** The history of the visitor experience and the history of resource management in Yellowstone have been dramatically illustrated through photographs from the park's archives.

In addition to its many routine, practical uses, **the archives plays a role in raising funds in support of park goals.** Information and images from the archives relating to the park's historic partnerships with various companies is in the hands of the recently-formed, non-profit Yellowstone Park Foundation, in order to assist its staff in its fundraising on behalf of the park.

The MOA with NARA requires the NPS to provide trained professional staff to care for and manage the park's archives. Currently, a full-time, permanent Archivist and Supervisory Museum Curator are assisted by part-time librarians funded by the park's cooperating association; term and seasonal museum, archives and library technicians on special projects funding; and an assortment of

volunteers, interns, and Student Conservation Association (SCA) Resource Assistants. The archives and library staff manages approximately 2,000 linear feet of records, as well as an oral history collection of over 200 tapes, and other magnetic and electronic media which are as yet unmeasured. The photograph archive contains nearly 100,000 images—some of which fall under the MOA and some of which were donations to the NPS—and is managed as part of the park's museum collection.

In entering into the MOA, the park also had to demonstrate to NARA its ability to care for its records. The basement of the Albright Visitor Center in Mammoth Hot Springs (park headquarters) was refurbished to provide a secure home for the park archives, museum collection, and research library. In recent years, however, both collections and researcher demand have outgrown this space. On busy days in the summer and early fall, it is not unusual to see researchers working on every available surface in the library, archives and curatorial workroom, and including staff desks and even, on occasion, the floor. The facility also became the subject of an Office of the Inspector General audit which found it lacking adequate environmental controls. **To address these problems, the park has begun planning for a new museum, archives, and library facility in Mammoth Hot Springs.** In addition to providing additional storage, the building or buildings will include exhibition space and visible storage that will allow more of the collection to be displayed to the public.

In the meantime, the park staff is seeking other ways of making collections more accessible to the public. Last year, during Yellowstone's 125th anniversary, reproductions of various photographs and documents were provided to museums mounting exhibits with Yellowstone components, including the National Gallery of Art and the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Yellowstone's archives inventory was added to the park's official Web site last year, and plans are underway to add images to the site as well. Park staff also collaborated on a 125th anniversary photo album book. Published in 1997, *A Yellowstone Album* contains hundreds of rare historic views of the park. Proceeds from sales of the book go the Yellowstone Park Foundation and benefit park projects.

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