

Loss of a Sacred Shrine: How the National Park Service Anguished over Yellowstone's Campfire Myth, 1960–1980

Lee H. Whittlesey

SINCE ITS ESTABLISHMENT IN 1916, the National Park Service (NPS) has been empowered by Congress to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects” in the nation’s national park system and to manage them “in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for future generations.”¹ To generations of park rangers, that *high decree* has meant preserving the country’s special places with a *high degree* of care—in the protection of places of unusual natural beauty and celebrated historical sites. Yellowstone, established in 1872 some thirty-four years before the National Park Service, was the first of these “special” places and the first national park in the world. Congress’s setting aside of Yellowstone not only started the nation’s national park system, it also inaugurated the “national park idea,” another concept considered sacred by NPS.²

The “national park idea” is the notion—essentially unheard of before Yellowstone—that a federal government should run a park. Historically, parks were run by lower governments, such as cities, states, provinces, or counties. From Nebuchadnezzar’s “Hanging Gardens of Babylon” to England’s town deer parks to Central Park in New York (a city park dating from 1857) and Yosemite Park in California (granted to the state in 1864), parks run by governments below the federal level had been the historical models.³

Because Yellowstone—known very early as “Wonderland”—was the first national park in the world, the National Park Service has always considered its origins almost sacred. Although it was visited earlier by various Indian tribes, fur trappers, and prospectors, Yellowstone was formally “discovered” in 1870 by the Washburn-Langford party. That party left numerous accounts of its travels, but one account, written by N.P. Langford and published thirty-five years later, became the book that held sway over the NPS’s interpretation of Yellowstone’s origins for some seventy-five years. Because of Langford’s 1905 book, NPS’s “take” went like this, in what became a cherished story: The idea for Yellowstone National Park originated with one man on a specific day, because the area was discovered by the 1870 Washburn-Langford party, whose members discussed around their campfire at Madison Junction the idea of not only protecting Yellowstone from private ownership but also the idea of it becoming a “national park.” Because of this story, the NPS long believed that Langford’s party members were the first to vocalize that “national” idea.⁴

Thus when Congress established NPS in 1916, the bureau quickly learned—if its members did not already know—that Yellowstone’s origins were related to its own origins.

Without Yellowstone, there might have been no NPS, and Horace Albright, one of the first NPS officials, latched on to that fact early. When Albright was appointed superintendent of Yellowstone—only three years later—he took that consciousness with him to Yellowstone and “mortared it into place” by telling the Langford story in the park, encouraging others to tell it, and accepting it as fact in his capacity as park superintendent. That made it the *de facto* (and essentially official) origin story for the park. Albright served as Yellowstone’s superintendent for nearly a decade.⁵

This was the scene in 1928, when Albright succeeded in obtaining money for four new Yellowstone museums. Inspired by officials who had done that in Yosemite (which was added to the national park system in 1890), Albright wrangled \$118,000 from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller memorial “for the development of educational activities in Yellowstone National Park.”⁶ From this money, the NPS built four trailside museums in the park—at Old Faithful, Madison Junction, Norris Geyser Basin, and Fishing Bridge—during the period 1928 to 1931. One of them, the Madison Museum, was intended by its designers with Albright’s blessing to tell the “sacred” story of Yellowstone’s (and indirectly NPS’s) origins. Architecturally, the four Yellowstone museums were (and are today) very significant in the national park system, because they were “unlike anything that came before” and because they “added new meanings to landscape scenery in the twentieth century” by opening for Americans “the experience of places to new dimensions of appreciation.”⁷

These museums—all survive today except for the one at Old Faithful—were really the beginning of NPS’s formal attempts to tell the stories of (interpret) Yellowstone. Besides Albright (who would soon be leaving the park anyway to become national director of NPS), three men were the leading spirits behind Yellowstone’s four trailside museums. The men were an NPS field naturalist, Carl Parcher Russell; a founder of the American Association of Museums and its first president, Hermon Carey Bumpus; and an architect, Herbert Maier.⁸ Even though his Ph.D. was in ecology, Russell would spend his life specializing in frontier history, would “set the basic pattern for museums in the national parks,” and would produce several major works, including *Guns on the Early Frontier* (1957) and *Firearms, Traps, and Tools of the Mountain Men* (1967).⁹ Bumpus was a former director of the American Museum of Natural History, a leading authority on national park museums, and a professor of biology at Brown University.¹⁰ Maier was a San Francisco architect who began working on modest building projects for the national parks in 1922. The park museums that he created—inspired by Yellowstone’s earlier Old Faithful Inn—were, according to architectural historian Ethan Carr, “more than any other . . . the ideal expression of [National] Park Service Rustic style.”¹¹ With these three men, the NPS “in one fell swoop” (1) accepted rustic architecture as its overriding building design for national parks, and (2) established the Madison Museum as the linchpin or host vehicle for telling both Yellowstone’s and the national park idea’s origin stories (Figure 1). Madison Museum, even in these planning stages, was already headed for “shrinehood.” But perhaps the fact that there was not an academically trained, professional historian in this group should have been a warning to NPS.

Each of the four new museums was to have a theme, and Madison’s theme was to be history.¹² Small though it was with groundbreaking and beautiful architecture, that was not the most important element at Madison. Bumpus stated in 1930 that the new Madison Museum



Figure 1. The completed Madison Junction Museum, probably in 1930, showing its west-facing window. YELL photo no. 44347, Yellowstone National Park Archives.

would celebrate the place where “the Washburn party, in 1870 ... resolved that this part of the public domain [Yellowstone] should be preserved inviolate.” In addition, he attributed the national park idea to that party—thus helping to further instill that part of the myth into NPS—and noted that “in its function as an historical monument, the [museum’s] southerly wall, by means of a large transparency, will depict the Washburn party encamped at the near-by confluence of the Firehole and Gibbon Rivers.”¹³

Sure enough, this large transparency—erected over a southern window so that light could shine through it in an almost religious fashion—served as the museum’s main exhibit until about 1971. It, along with a sign on the museum’s east wall, effectively turned the small building into a monument to the origins of the park and the national park idea. The sign read: “The purpose of this museum is to outline the history of the Yellowstone and to consecrate the setting aside of large areas for the benefit and enjoyment of the people” (Figure 2). Bumpus and Russell actively used, or acquiesced in the use of, the word “shrine” to refer to Madison Museum and a number of their roadside nature exhibits, which they called “nature shrines.”¹⁴ Now they were using the word “consecrate”—a word which means “to make or declare sacred or holy.” Words like “shrine” and “consecrate” made it clear that—in their minds at least—this “trailside shrine” known as Madison Museum was to “shine forth” for the public with a dazzling, almost religious aura. It was an image that would instill pride in both park visitors and National Park Service rangers for some forty years.

With Bumpus and Russell having built the Madison Museum as a shrine in 1929, and with the museum not yet open to the public, NPS decided at the time of the death of its founder Stephen Mather in 1930 to elevate the “shrine” idea one step further. One can almost picture their thinking. Madison was already a shrine to both the establishment of the



Figure 2. The new Madison Museum’s interior about 1940 exhibited a sign proclaiming: “The Purpose of this Museum is to outline the history of the Yellowstone and to consecrate the setting aside of large areas for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.” It hung between other signs that announced significant years in park history. Photo from William E. Kearns, “A Suggested Plan for Madison Junction Historical Museum,” 1940, Yellowstone National Park Archives.

first national park and the national park idea, so why should it not also be a shrine to the agency that managed them? No doubt officials wanted the agency, new though it was, to receive a place in the history of Yellowstone and no doubt they wanted to commemorate Director Mather’s recent death, but the idea that the Madison Museum could also be a monument to NPS as well as to Mather fit right into the shrine concept. Horace Albright, as former superintendent and now national director, was in a convenient position to help make it happen. Thus Albright, Yellowstone superintendent Roger Toll, and assistant superintendent Guy Edwards joined Bumpus and Russell in spearheading the erection of a metal plaque celebrating Stephen Mather’s life on a twelve-ton boulder just outside of the Madison Museum. Dedicated on July 4, 1932 (Mather’s birthday) and still there today, the plaque—embossed with a sculpture of Mather—proclaimed the following:

Stephen Tyng Mather, July 4, 1867–January 22, 1930. He laid the foundation of the National Park Service defining and establishing the policies under which its areas shall be developed and conserved unimpaired for future generations. There will never come an end to the good that he has done.¹⁵

The NPS’s ceremony to dedicate this “Mather memorial tablet” involved speakers and around seven hundred members of the public, and it is clear from the many words expended at the ceremony and from the guests who attended it that the Park Service considered the

new tablet a very important monument (Figure 3). Director Albright could not attend the dedication, but his telegram to the park made it clear he believed it significant for NPS. He called Mather “one of nature’s noblemen ... [who] brought about expansion of our [NPS’s] activities in Yellowstone.” NPS Landscape Architect Thomas Vint recommended placing the Mather plaque “within the Historical Shrine at Madison Junction”—his capitalized words showing awareness that the Park Service already considered Madison a shrine—but the Mather Appreciation group wanted to place it outside the building. Eventually the NPS placed similar monuments to Mather in at least 23 national parks and 33 national monuments. Madison Museum thus became one of the Park Service’s earliest iterations of this shrineage to Mather.¹⁶

Meanwhile, NPS rangers at the new Madison Museum were busily delivering their message to park visitors, and so were the museum’s exhibits. The aforementioned transparency—created by park photographer Jack Haynes and erected over the museum’s southern window—boasted a panoramic photo of contemporary re-enactors of the 1870 Washburn party camped at the foot of National Park Mountain. Under it was text that was headlined “The Beginnings of the National Park Idea” (Figure 4) Many years later, naturalist Don Stewart still remembered this conspicuous “Haynes Window” as being the center of the museum’s displays and general appeal. Stewart—a dedicated ranger who worked at Madison from 1955 through 1962 and believed fervently in it as a national shrine—saw the window

Figure 3. Dedication of the Stephen Mather plaque by NPS and other officials at Madison Junction, Yellowstone National Park, on July 4, 1932. Left to right are park superintendent Roger W. Toll, E.V. Robertson (representing Governor Clark of Wyoming), Struthers Burt (chairman of Stephen T. Mather Appreciation group), D.W. Greenburg (Mather Appreciation group), Samuel T. Woodring (superintendent of Grand Teton National Park), and U.S. Commissioner John W. Meldrum. The park’s main road, shown in the background here, no longer goes past this spot. YELL photo no. 32745-3, Yellowstone National Park Archives.





Figure 4. The Madison Museum’s south wall around 1940 utilized photographer Jack Haynes’s beautiful transparency to point up the site at Madison Junction then believed to represent the origin of Yellowstone and the national park idea. Photo from William E. Kearns, “A Suggested Plan for Madison Junction Historical Museum,” 1940, Yellowstone National Park Archives.

as the main “*raison d’être*” (reason for being) of the Madison Museum. Stewart described it as follows:

The museum’s other beautiful window, on the south wall, was not so large as the picture window, but it was the premiere attraction of our building. In 1930 Jack Haynes, official Yellowstone Park photographer, took several shots of men dressed in the costumes of 1870 as they gathered around a campfire near the confluence of the Gibbon and Firehole Rivers. Mr. Haynes selected the one he thought best and then enlarged it into a black and white positive on a plate of glass coated with a photographic emulsion. After the black and white positive was developed on the large plate of glass, Mr. Haynes and his people tinted it, supplying the appropriate blues, yellows, pinks, and other colors needed. Finally, he put a translucent pane on the emulsified side of the plate of glass to protect it. The finished picture was then framed and set in place in the Madison Museum. The picture confused many people. They would stand before it exclaiming how beautiful a painting it was—the brush strokes were visible in places—but remarking how lifelike the figures seemed! Few knew, of course, that such a thing as a combination photograph and painting even existed. . . . But eventually [after doing other things at Madison] we were always drawn back to Jack Haynes’ impressive memorial to the birth of the national park idea. No person who ever came to Madison Museum failed to notice it. It was the first thing he saw as he stepped into the museum, and it was the last thing to catch his attention as he left. And when we had told each park visitor the event it commemorated, he left with a sensation of having been at a place significant in the history of his country.¹⁷

This, then, was the continuing message conveyed by rangers at Madison Museum from 1931 through about 1970. From 1935 through 1939 alone, at least 282,881 visitors came to the museum—and those were lean years for park visitation because of the Great Depression.¹⁸ Thousands if not millions more received the Madison Museum’s message during the succeeding quarter century. They joined Don Stewart and his fellow rangers in paying homage to the place where Yellowstone was ostensibly established, the place where the national park idea was supposedly born, and one of the places where Steve Mather and his National Park Service rangers received consecration for preserving America’s special places.

In 1960, park officials brought back Carl P. Russell—retired and now thirty years older but known in history circles for his books *One Hundred Years in Yosemite* and *Guns on the Early Frontiers*—to re-examine exhibits at the Madison Museum with an eye toward changing or upgrading them. Not mentioned, but perhaps present in at least some minds, was the fact that Yellowstone’s one hundredth anniversary would occur in twelve more years. The question of what messages and exhibitry the NPS should proclaim and display in its Madison Museum on that celebratory occasion must have occurred to Russell if not to others. Many if not most believed that the museum’s aging exhibits needed upgrading to make certain that the national shrine would continue to proclaim—if not radiate dazzlingly—its message celebrating the supposed origins of Yellowstone, the national park idea, and the National Park Service.¹⁹

Also on the minds of some was the fact that historian Aubrey Haines’s research was gradually revealing that the famous Madison campfire story was not historically accurate. Haines’s research was already having an impact on other historians, and Carl Russell was a subscriber. In touch with Haines through letters and probably telephone calls, Russell did not mince words to park officials about his general agreement with Haines. With regard to proposed new exhibits at Madison, Russell called it unrealistic and unfair to the American people to repeat the mistaken story about the Madison campfire birth of the national park idea. “It is not necessary to make such an unsupported claim,” he wrote, “in order that Yellowstone National Park might be lighted by an extra blaze of glory.”²⁰

But regardless of Russell’s support of Haines, Haines’s findings were not “sitting well” with other NPS officials. The main one of these was Ronald F. Lee (1905–1972)²¹ in NPS’s Washington, D.C., office. Lee, an academically trained historian, had served as NPS’s chief historian and chief of interpretation, and in the early 1960s he was an NPS regional director in Philadelphia. Spearheaded by Lee, an internal NPS dispute began to arise, at first between Lee and Haines but eventually involving numerous other personalities. The most noteworthy of these—although his influence often occurred behind the scenes—was Horace M. Albright.²²

The dispute centered on the Madison campfire story—the traditional park story suggesting that the idea for Yellowstone National Park originated with one man on a specific day (Cornelius Hedges on September 19, 1870). Historian Aubrey Haines, during his long research into park history beginning in 1938, discovered that these assertions were problematic at best and downright wrong at worst. The story could be traced to N.P. Langford’s 1905 book,²³ a “reconstructed account” which claimed that Langford’s party originated around their campfire the idea of preserving the area as some kind of “national park,” that

Cornelius Hedges suggested that there “ought to be no private ownership” of the area, and that the national park idea itself was born from this campfire conversation.

Haines discovered that problems with this story were numerous. First, exactly what was discussed by 1870 party members at their campfire could not be confirmed or ascertained. Second, there was uncertainty as to whether the party even discussed the momentous idea of preserving Yellowstone as some kind of park, let alone whether it would be a “national” park or whether the members would work toward such a goal. Third, both the process by which the national park was established and the national park idea itself did not seem to have sprung directly or indirectly from any such campfire conversation. Fourth, Langford’s description of the party’s alleged conversations did not appear until 1905—thirty-five years after the fact. Fifth, Langford’s 1905 discussion contained alleged direct (and lengthy) quotations from party members of the type that make historians suspicious. Sixth, Langford’s handwritten 1870 diary was found to be the only one in a long series of his diaries that was missing from the Minnesota Historical Society, so it could not be used to confirm his reconstructed 1905 account of the campfire conversation. Seventh, even though there existed at least seventeen written accounts by members of the 1870 party, not one of them corroborated Langford’s story of the alleged campfire discussion or of the idea of preserving Yellowstone or creating a “national park” in 1870, including two earlier accounts by Langford himself. Finally, the public-spirited sentiments attributed to the park’s alleged founders were seen to be *not* the only motivators driving their actions.²⁴

Not surprisingly, the story had defenders who refused to believe historian Haines²⁵ or to “let the story go.” They went so far as to denounce Haines and to castigate him for daring to disparage a sacred story that was cherished by the National Park Service. This writer and a co-author have noted that no one should have been surprised to learn that “stories this deeply embedded in the thinking and self-perception of so many people do not yield to easy disregard.” Instead the story had become a much ingrained “part of the historic and even the psychic fabric of the National Park Service and of the conservation community.”²⁶

As the one hundredth anniversary of Yellowstone in 1972 approached, NPS officials argued among themselves as to what to do about Madison Museum exhibits and what to say at the upcoming ceremony, which was to be held there at Madison. Some, especially Ronald Lee, urged that the campfire story be a centerpiece of the celebration as it had been fifty years earlier at Madison (Figure 5), but Haines stood firm in his historical interpretation. “Aubrey was a stone in a lot of people’s shoes,” says Haines’s former boss John Good, “and he just would not back down on that campfire myth.”²⁷ Ordinarily this kind of dispute would have settled into a long, slow debate so that Haines’s theory could have had time to be sorted out and confirmed by fellow historians. However, NPS did not have such time because the anniversary celebration was soon to occur. Washington officials resolved the problem with a compromise: the wording of the new sign at Madison Museum was made vague to give recognition to Haines’s theory while also allowing Lee to acknowledge Cornelius Hedges. Meanwhile, new exhibits in the museum would also become somewhat vague with regard to the Madison campfire.

The new sign at the museum that was to be erected for the 1972 festivities—one whose wording was apparently much argued about—was written to acknowledge that some kind of



Figure 5. C.W. Cook and Yellowstone superintendent Horace Albright, 1922, at Yellowstone's fiftieth anniversary celebration at Madison Junction. At that time NPS believed that both Yellowstone's preservation and the national park idea began at Madison. Yellowstone National Park slide file no. 03018.

campfire discussion had taken place and that at this campfire, "there emerged an idea, expressed by Cornelius Hedges, that there should be no private ownership of these wonders but that the area should be preserved for public enjoyment." "Others shared these views,"

continued the sign in a key vague statement, “and on March 1, 1872, President Ulysses S. Grant signed the act establishing Yellowstone as the world’s first national park.” Eventually Haines’s historical view prevailed. Regardless, this somewhat vague wording remains today on the sign located just west of Madison Information Station that overlooks Madison River and National Park Mountain.²⁸

But in 1960, Carl Russell was twelve years away from that decision by his superiors, so his recommendations for Madison Museum gave a mere nod to Haines’s new theory while offering suggestions for museum upgrades. Notwithstanding his “extra blaze of glory” statement, Russell had not sorted through the abstract elements buried in the alleged 1870 events. He still believed enough in those events at Madison to state that the Langford campfire was “an occasion so great in America’s social history as to make of the site a national shrine.” He, like others in NPS, was conflicted about the Madison campfire story. While recognizing that Haines was probably right in his historical interpretations, Russell could not bring himself at this late date in his life (it was 1960 and he was 66 years old) to summarily abandon his long-held idea that the Madison area was “sacred.” Thus his report gave a chronology of historical events that he believed should be interpreted at Madison Museum and toned down the campfire story (a little), but he could not completely “let go” of the “sacred national shrine” concept.²⁹

NPS officials at Yellowstone, at the regional office, and at the national office seem to have partly instituted but mostly ignored Russell’s recommendations for changing the museum’s interior. Instead, park officials, teaming with national NPS officials, moved during the period 1961–1962 (still early in Haines’s revelations) to protect the actual Madison campfire site, to increase the NPS story inside the museum, and to erect three new interpretive signs in the area. The agency removed an old bridge over the river that impinged on the campfire site, added a new campground to the area, decided not to make the Madison Museum larger, and continued for at least one more year the annual re-enactment of the 1870 party’s campfire as a scripted play. Surrounding all of these developments was what NPS believed about Madison. An NPS planner stated in early 1962 that “the primary objective at Madison Junction is to preserve this original campsite and provide adequate interpretation for the visitor[s] to instill in them the tremendous importance of the decision of the Washburn Expedition and how it has guided and influenced the entire development of the National Park Service.”³⁰ Of course even then Haines’s new conclusions were questioning whether the 1870 party had discussed anything about their discoveries around their campfire, whether they had made any such “decision” that the area should be protected, whether they would work for that decision, and whether they would call it a “national park.” All of these formerly accepted propositions were under fire by Haines.

But NPS’s three new signs nevertheless promoted the Madison area as a sacred shrine and touted the traditional campfire story as the true one. The largest new sign was erected at the junction of the roads, and it directed visitors with a huge arrow to “Madison Junction *Historic Shrine* [italics added] of Yellowstone Our First National Park, March 1, 1872.”³¹ A second sign, this time an interpretive one, was erected near Madison Museum. It attributed both the national park idea and the establishment of Yellowstone to Langford’s party on that night in 1870:

Madison Junction—The Birth of an American Idea. Across the Gibbon River, between you and National Park Mountain at the junction with the Firehole River forming the Madison a new idea in wild land conservation was conceived on September 19, 1870. Around the evening campfire, members of the Washburn-Langford-Doane exploring party agreed that this land of natural wonders must be set aside as Yellowstone National Park. The Park should be forever free for future generations and held inviolate in its natural state. Established by a benevolent Congress on March 1, 1872, Yellowstone the first national park has set a world-wide precedent for man's aesthetic appreciation of pristine beauty.³²

Park officials erected a third sign on Madison River some distance downstream from the museum and accessible to visitors from a roadside pullout. It too gave Langford's party credit for the national park idea:

National Park Mountain—In the shadows of this mountain around a campfire, the Washburn-Langford-Doane exploring party on September 19, 1870 conceived the idea of a national park. Yellowstone the first of many parks has set a precedent for this nation and the world. Great good will come to unborn generations from the wise decision of these farsighted men to preserve the area inviolate for all time.³³

But these new signs were to have short lives, because Aubrey Haines's research was already making them obsolete. Notwithstanding a "Decision of the Director" of the National Park Service in September 1962 that a new, improved Madison Junction Visitor Center would "tell the National Park Service story both nationally and internationally as well as [tell] the original concept of the National Park idea"—an acknowledgment of the idea that NPS history was part of the Madison shrine—Haines's conclusions were making things more complicated than NPS officials probably preferred.³⁴

The NPS would be carried almost kicking and screaming to Haines's side of the story in an extremely slow acceptance of the findings of one of its own historians—an acceptance that took more than twenty years. The notion that NPS was slow to accept the dismantling of its beloved campfire story has found confirmation in the writing of Barry Mackintosh, a later NPS historian. Mackintosh concluded that NPS "was its own worst enemy" at times by continuing to present the national park origin story in park after park long after Russell affirmed Haines's findings in 1960. Mackintosh also told of another NPS official, Edwin Alberts, who had become a subscriber to Haines's theory by 1964:

Investigations from the 1930s on cast doubt upon the "campfire story," but it was already firmly entrenched in Service tradition and continued to be retailed in publications, museum exhibits, and public programs. In 1964 the Midwest Region's chief of interpretation, Edwin C. Alberts, courageously dissented to his regional director: "It is obvious that the frequent attribution, with respect to 'birth of the National Park idea,' to the participants at this 19th Century campfire are based on very tenuous grounds and in view of current curiosity about the matter by more than one non-Service historian, we'd be wise to pull back on our

approach to avoid embarrassment.” The story could still be presented, argued Alberts, as a legend.³⁵

In 1971, when this author first served as a bus tour guide in the park and attended NPS campfire lectures, park naturalists were saying nothing about the Madison campfire controversy (at either Madison or other places in the park) and instead were still telling the old campfire story as if it were accepted fact. Already eleven years had passed since Haines debunked the old campfire story, and yet NPS was nowhere near to even partial acceptance of the new story.³⁶

Ronald Lee’s presence and influence were large factors in the continued delay of NPS’s acceptance of Haines’s work. Lee retired in 1966 but continued to be a writer and spokesman for national park issues during his six-year retirement. Ironically, he died in 1972, during the one hundredth anniversary year of Yellowstone National Park. But even then NPS was nearly a decade away from full acceptance of the campfire story as heroic myth rather than literal truth.³⁷

Horace Albright’s opposition was probably the largest factor in the delay of this acceptance. Albright served as NPS Director and then left the National Park Service in 1933, but lived on for fifty-four more years. He continued to wield amazing influence from afar upon NPS by meeting with its officials, writing articles, and giving speeches. He opposed Haines’s version of the Madison campfire story from the moment he heard about it. Former Yellowstone superintendent Bob Barbee was a seasonal NPS worker at Yosemite National Park in 1964 during one hundredth anniversary activities at that park on the day that Albright and other NPS “oracles” showed up for the festivities. When Albright was told that the historian at Yellowstone had determined that the Madison campfire story was a myth, Barbee says he heard Albright say, “He ought to be fired!” Of course the intent of such a statement at that early date could have been much lighter than it turned out later to be, but there is no doubt that Albright did not like hearing such news. His continuing influence within the NPS was powerful. Albright did not pass away until 1987, and there seems to be little doubt that his longevity helped to discourage the bureau from fully embracing Haines’s newer history. Most people in the NPS were reluctant to offend or speak against Albright.³⁸

With those factors operating, a memo to Park Superintendent Jack Anderson from Chief Historian Robert Utley, dated June 30, 1971, probably had a large impact upon preparations for the redesigned Madison Museum, upon plans for the upcoming Yellowstone centennial celebration, and upon the way park officials, including Anderson, ultimately treated historian Haines. Utley’s memo makes it clear that NPS regional directors (!) at a national meeting were then decrying the new findings by Haines. Here is the relevant material from Utley’s memo:

At the Grand Canyon regional directors meeting last week I was exposed to views of considerable intensity on both sides of the current campfire controversy. You should know, if you haven’t already heard, that Ronnie Lee has probed this question deeply and found a number of serious flaws in Haines’ research. I have been compelled to recede quite a distance in my

advocacy of Haines' findings. Almost certainly the Hummel committee, myself included, will conclude that the subject of public reservation was discussed on the night of September 19, 1870, at Madison Junction and that several of the people who were there later worked very effectively for the park bill. It appears that Haines has been too harsh on Hedges and Langford and that they deserve more credit than Aubrey has been willing to grant them.

On the other hand, we must not let this judgment lead us back to the simplistic story of old. I fear there is a real danger of this. A balanced interpretation must acknowledge the contributions of Kuppens, Meagher, Cook-Folsom, Hayden, and the congressional sponsors as well as Langford, Hedges, and their associates. The birth of the idea, and the origins of effective action, should not be traced exclusively or even primarily to Madison Junction.

Most of us lean to Louis Cramton's study of Yellowstone as a balanced interpretation on which all can hopefully unite until the findings of Haines and Bartlett can be further tested by unhurried study. Cramton, you may know, was very close to HMA and his booklet was published when HMA was director.³⁹

"HMA" was Horace Marden Albright. Here we see Utley downplaying it but unquestionably being influenced by Albright's lobbying for the old story. Utley's use of the initials HMA instead of Albright's name certainly betokened the notion that he and other NPS staff held Albright in oracle-like esteem. We also see Albright's likely influence here upon numerous NPS regional directors—people who were arguing about Yellowstone's campfire story while occupying very high positions in the agency (few if any of them were historians). And while we see Utley's rejection here of the national park idea as having been totally born at Madison—itsself a very large step for the NPS—we do not yet see Utley siding with Haines against N.P. Langford, as he would later do.

This memo tells us a lot about the views in 1971 of high NPS officials, including Utley, regarding Aubrey Haines and the Yellowstone campfire story. It is likely that this memo and their views had strong influences on Yellowstone officials like Jack Anderson, and that those views trickled down to castigate Haines and his revisionist campfire story as the time approached for the opening of the new Madison "Explorers' Museum," the Yellowstone centennial celebration, and the Second World Conference on National Parks. Many, probably most, of those NPS officials were unwilling to offend Horace Albright and the Ronald Lee advocates by accepting revisionist history that had not yet been "tested by unhurried study,"⁴⁰ especially when a middle course could be steered by simply making the wording of a new sign a bit vague and by making the new museum into an "Explorers' Museum" rather than one touting the old campfire story. As mentioned, Utley would later change his mind about supporting Lee when Haines's research convinced him that no one could know whether a "public reservation" was discussed at the 1870 campfire or even whether discussion of anything relating to Yellowstone occurred there. And Haines had definitively shown that the national park idea itself had earlier origins.

In hindsight, many NPS officials should have been listening to Yellowstone's Chief Naturalist John Good. In 1966, Mr. Good warned of trouble surrounding the campfire story

that would come to the agency within a few years. “I am raising this rather sticky subject,” he cautioned, “because . . . I believe the Service could easily paint itself into a tight corner if we are not careful.” Sensing a problem in the arising books and films that were being produced as Yellowstone’s centennial approached, and also a problem with an NPS Director (George Hartzog) who did not believe in Haines’s new research, Good wrote—with the approval of his Yellowstone bosses—the following remarkable (and gutsy!) memo to NPS officer Bill Everhart, who had Director Hartzog’s ear:

If we say the idea of a National Park was hatched or even formalized at the famous Madison Campfire[,] we will be disregarding every bit of knowledge that exists. . . . There is so much evidence accumulated over the years and so readily available which refutes our Madison myth [that] I honestly believe the only reason no one has pointed to our feet of clay is a general lack of interest in the subject. But to the extent the Centennial is publicized[,] interest will rise and someone will clobber us.

If we were the Pinedale [Wyoming] Chamber of Commerce claiming Jim Bridger as a founding father[,] this would be one thing and nobody would mind a bit of embroidery to the story. But the National Park Service is a big boy! It prides itself on the professional standards of its historical research and interpretation. Can we afford seriously to champion what is so obviously a sham concocted by an old man (N.P. Langford) who feared his share of the Yellowstone glory was about to be lost? I hope not. . . .

If you agree [that] we should get back on the track of history, perhaps you can find a good time to discuss the matter with the Director. Mr. [George] Hartzog seems completely sold on the Madison myth, I suspect by Horace Albright, [Yellowstone Superintendent], John McLaughlin has tried to raise the matter but Mr. Hartzog did not care to discuss it—to put it mildly. Apparently the subject is an emotional one to him. . . .

A few more speeches by the Secretary [of Interior] and the Director [of NPS] alluding to “that little band of far seeing men” [at Madison in 1870]—and we will be stuck with the story until the roof falls in.

The monkey is on your back for obvious reasons. You head up interpretation and you are a historian. But most important of all, Mr. Hartzog knows you well and trusts your judgment. Your raising this matter gives it importance and urgency [that] none of us here can supply. . . . There certainly is no point in trying to show the public the lapses in Langford’s memory or worse, his prevarications.⁴¹

Whether Bill Everhart responded to John Good or approached Director Hartzog at the time to encourage him to accept Haines’s research is not known. But he *would* respond five years later.

With urgency that seems palpable today, Good had carefully “run this material by” his own bosses, including John McLaughlin, a few weeks earlier, saying to McLaughlin that he

believed the issue of the campfire story would soon come up and laying out where the agency—at least in Yellowstone—had been was currently was with regard to the new conclusions. Good thought that the national NPS leaders would soon be forced to confront the falsity of the old campfire story by admitting that Haines was right:

If so, why not now over my signature instead of yours so that if the sky falls you can claim [blame] an overeager staff man? Lest you think I have gone crackers[,] I can't think what else to do. Dev[ereux Butcher, a book author] has asked our help; can we write back and say everything [in his book] is great when we know very well it is not? And if we do, won't we find it that much harder to change the story with the next inquiry or when the movie is made? I think there is too much at stake to continue supporting the Madison Junction myth. We know far more about Yellowstone's establishment than we have publicly let on, and if Service integrity in history means a thing[,] we can no longer plead ignorance or confusion or any other mitigating reason for not presenting the evidence we have. There are pragmatic reasons for such a letter, too. I am sure the trail is too clear not to have some sensationalist or historian pick it up between now and 1972. Can you imagine how silly the NPS would look with a \$100,000 film based on a fairy tale which we had been calling history publicly[,] knowing full well it wouldn't hold water? I know there is a chance [that] George [Hartzog] would blow his lid, but he is a smart enough man to see we are propping up a dead horse. If there were a gray area large enough to contain our story we might be justified in clinging to it, but there is not. Aubrey [Haines] knows this as does Roy Appleman, Charlie Porter, Dick Bartlett, and Ray Mattison, to name a few.⁴²

But apparently few persons in the NPS listened to John Good, and the matter continued to simmer until 1971, when Robert Utley heard the aforementioned regional directors discussing the campfire story. As Utley made clear, Albright was involved in these discussions as he maintained his campaign to discredit Haines's version of the facts. By this time, John McLaughlin had been transferred to Sequoia/Kings Canyon National Park where, like many superintendents, he continued to be in the NPS loop by virtue of expertise and authority. Yellowstone Chief Naturalist Bill Dunmire asked him in 1971 for some advice about the Madison campfire story for the upcoming centennial, and McLaughlin responded by acknowledging Albright's continuing influence in the debate:

The material you sent me on the [campfire] subject matter is very helpful and much appreciated. My reinterest in this has been "triggered" by Horace Albright, who is endeavoring to get [all] the former Superintendents of Yellowstone to support what develops to be the old "Campfire Story." He mentioned a "statement" now being issued by the Park which I gather is the one you sent me. This is roughly the one developed, I believe, by John Good or this is a facsimile thereof. In any event, although I haven't been close to the ongoing historical study since I left Yellowstone, the statement you sent me coincides with the historical information as it now stands so I have written Horace that I support the information therein.⁴³

Here McLaughlin had apparently made an effort to tell Albright that NPS was supporting a

vaguer version of the campfire story, thus becoming one NPS official who showed at least some predilection to resist Albright's influence.

Others were slowly following. Bill Everhart, still director of the NPS's Harpers Ferry Center, was finally responding to the problem that John Good had so forcefully warned him about five years earlier. Everhart appears to have taken the news to NPS Director George Hartzog that Madison Museum would become an "Explorers' Museum," and Hartzog then told Albright of that development. Said Everhart:

Talking with George [Hartzog] about the [Madison] museum project, he tells me that he has clearly informed Horace Albright that this museum will be devoted only to Yellowstone exploration and will not treat the campfire. He reports that Horace responded that he thought it was wrong not to include the campfire but he would be willing to open the museum on the explorer theme. I predict there may be some changes in this understanding.⁴⁴

It is interesting to wonder what Everhart meant by that last sentence. Did he mean merely that Albright might withdraw his vague endorsement of the museum? Or did he mean, more ominously, that he thought it possible that Albright would eventually succeed in pressuring Hartzog to return to acceptance of the old campfire story so that Hartzog could then issue a director's order forcing Yellowstone to include it in the new museum's story? A cynical observer might opt for the latter interpretation.

It is sad that many NPS officials and their advisors during the period 1966 through 1972 acted so intractably, such that, at least for some of them, saving the cherished myth became more important than the simple truth. That much can be argued because, as Good noted, three NPS historians (Roy Appleman, Charles Porter, and Ray Mattison), plus Carl Russell after a fashion, had signed on by 1966 to Aubrey Haines's version of the story, along with one academic historian (Richard Bartlett) and an NPS regional chief of interpretation (Edwin Alberts). Additionally, NPS Chief Historian Bob Utley was on board in early 1971. Therefore enough of these reputable historians agreed with Aubrey Haines by 1971 that it can be argued that NPS had adequate evidence to formally side with Haines prior to the Yellowstone Centennial.⁴⁵ On the other hand, none of these historians had produced a formal study replicating Haines, and Haines's nemesis Ronald Lee had looked into the campfire documents more than any other NPS historian. So NPS could claim—arguably without real honesty—that it was faced with the dilemma of not yet knowing what was true, even on the heels of Good's forceful memos. Good was a geologist, not a historian. Meanwhile Yellowstone officials—at least Haines's immediate supervisors—were placed in the position of having to protect him by getting him out of the line of fire while still keeping their higher bosses happy by not appearing to subscribe (yet) to Haines's new story. The situation at Madison was ultimately resolved by playing down the old campfire story, replacing it with a vaguer story, and keeping exhibits out of the new "Explorers Museum" that referred in any way to the old story. In protecting Haines and resisting Albright, John Good emerged as an unexpected secondary hero for Yellowstone.

Probably because some NPS officials (and Albright) harbored grudges against Haines, it would be many years before he was out of danger and could emerge as a primary hero.

Shipped to temporary duty at Big Hole National Battlefield, Haines retired from NPS in 1969. Strangely, either Haines was not invited to speak at the formal opening of the newly redesigned Madison Junction “Explorers’ Museum” on July 28, 1972, or else he himself decided not to participate. If NPS officials decided not to invite Haines, that is a measure of how poorly the agency was treating its own historian and of how intimidated NPS officials continued to be by Albright and Lee. Instead, with Park Superintendent Jack Anderson in attendance, the history speech was presented by Ned Frost from the Wyoming Recreation Commission, a “historian” whose working life was spent as an outfitter. Considering that Yellowstone officials with the possible exception of Anderson are known to have gone to some lengths to protect Haines from NPS higher-ups, if Haines was purposely excluded from the centennial ceremonies at Madison, the best guess is that that pressure came from sources outside of Yellowstone. Those sources were most likely to have been Horace Albright and Ronald Lee.⁴⁶

Also present that summer of 1972 was yet another symbol of NPS’s indecisiveness and irresolute thinking about its cherished Madison campfire story. This was seen in the agency’s use—at the Second World Conference on National Parks held in Yellowstone in September—of Freeman Tilden’s pamphlet “Yellowstone, the Flowering of an Idea” rather than usage of earlier literature that restated the Madison campfire story. Tilden’s pamphlet totally ignored the campfire story, not mentioning it at all. Instead the pamphlet took note of the travels of Langford’s 1870 party and vaguely stated that “from that journey and those men came suggestions setting aside Yellowstone as a national reservation.” Just as they did not appear on the new sign at Madison “Explorers’ Museum,” references disappeared in Tilden’s pamphlet to Langford’s party originating the national park idea in general and to claims that they were the first to specifically propose setting Yellowstone aside. Present at that Second World Conference on National Parks was Horace Albright. Not physically present due to ill health but very much present in influence was Ronald Lee. Both men still opposed Haines’s conclusions.⁴⁷

“Out of the loop” where these internal NPS debates were concerned, former park naturalist Don Stewart revisited Yellowstone in 1973 for the first time since his final summer of working at Madison ten years earlier. Walking into the Madison Museum that summer, Stewart found that the old exhibits had been “replaced by gaudy modern exhibits brightly illuminated by spotlights mounted on the interior superstructure of the building.” He was horrified and lamented that the new exhibits told “less than a quarter of the story imparted by the exhibits which once detained visitors to the museum for hours.” Old-timers everywhere often fume about changes to the world that follow their time spent, and Stewart was no different. He referred to Madison Museum as “spiritually empty” at that time and stated in his reminiscences that he could not bring himself to ever enter it again. For him, the museum was a mere shell of what he had known for so many years. Stewart apparently did not realize that the Madison campfire story had been exposed as essentially untrue. He probably would have been heartbroken, had he known in 1973 that his cherished story and the “sacred shrine” concept of Madison Museum would both be abandoned within a few years.⁴⁸

However, it was taking awhile for NPS to accept Haines’s new story. This author remembers wondering in 1974 upon the publication of Richard Bartlett’s book *Nature’s*

*Yellowstone*⁴⁹ why Bartlett had so vehemently indicted N.P. Langford and the campfire story but why park naturalists were yet saying nothing to the public about the campfire story being in disrepute. At least one of the reasons for this, it now appears, was that Haines had so toned down his discussions of the Madison campfire story in his 1974 and 1977 books (because of Chief Historian Robert Utley's requests) that uncritical readers easily missed his distrust for and dislike of Langford and hardly noticed that Haines had methodically dismantled the campfire story.⁵⁰ Indeed, one would think that the new story would have been accepted more quickly in Yellowstone than in NPS as a whole. Instead, it appears that Haines's caution in his writing (encouraged by Utley), along with Albright's and Lee's opposition to the new story, aided in delaying park naturalists and park bus interpreters from accepting the story fully for a few more years.

So just when did NPS interpreters begin relating the Madison campfire story as a myth or heroic metaphor and not as literal truth? Finding the answer to that abstract question has been a bit difficult, but neither of two long-term Yellowstone rangers remembers any kind of official NPS memo ever being issued to Yellowstone staff about how to discuss the Madison campfire story. Instead, says Linda Young, John Whitman (the park's acting North District naturalist) began telling his interpreters—in the late 1970s, Young thinks—that if interpreters wanted to tell the campfire story to be sure that they said it was a myth and then to tell the public “here's what we think really happened.” Park Senior Technical Writer Paul Schullery agrees and “seems to remember” that this way of doing things was “in place” by 1980.⁵¹

As we consider the Yellowstone campfire story, we must also consider the larger scale examined by authors Paul Shackel and Michael Kammen in their studies of the uses of history and myth over time in the United States. Shackel has noted that the past and its myths may certainly be used—and have indeed been used—to serve partisan purposes, and that history may also be used as a means to resist present change. Kammen has claimed that other National Park Service sites besides Yellowstone have participated in mythmaking too. For example, at George Washington Birthplace National Monument, says Kammen, NPS personnel were so embarrassed by their collusion in the spurious location and style of a house pushed on them by super-patriots that they long would not inform the public of “just how phony the site really was.”⁵² The use of history by super-patriots who do not want to teach or even believe anything negative about a nation or its heroes has also been studied within the purview of formal education by Gary Nash and his co-authors in their book *History on Trial*.⁵³ This type of near-religious fervor that Nash, Kammen, and Shackel chronicle, involving shrines such as Madison Museum or heroes like George Washington, “Buffalo” Bill Cody and George A. Custer, is lately generating more critics among writers who have closely scrutinized and pondered the complexities of history and who recognize that history is not simple.

At this point, astute readers who have been considering the Yellowstone story may have discerned a side to this that probably explains Albright's strident and venomous opposition to Haines's new conclusions—conclusions that were effectively dismantling the “sacred” Madison campfire story during the 1960s. Albright had originally obtained the funds for the Madison Museum and then personally and vigorously pushed and oversaw the building to its completion (1929–1931). As NPS director he had approved, if not originated and/or pro-

moted, the additional monument to Stephen Mather—and therefore to Albright’s own organization, the NPS. Hence, Albright had had great influence in the setting up of what was essentially a *triple national shrine* at Madison Museum with worldwide implications! One could even argue that Madison was a worldwide shrine, making the place even more important! Thanks in large part to Albright, Madison Museum with the entire Madison area was a shrine to the setting aside of Yellowstone as the first national park in the world, a shrine to Yellowstone and the Langford expedition as the beginning point for and the originators of the national park idea and thus for the entire national park system worldwide, and a shrine to Albright’s agency—the National Park Service—through the “boulder plaque” honoring Steve Mather. In the eyes of many NPS persons, including Albright, the establishment of Yellowstone was the direct link to the establishment of the national park idea, which started the national park system worldwide and resulted in the establishment of the U.S. National Park Service as an agency. Therefore if NPS’s “sacred” Madison campfire story were to be proven incorrect or exposed as a myth, that exposure might somehow denigrate all three entities: Yellowstone, the national park idea, and the National Park Service, to say nothing of (possibly) reflecting back onto Albright himself.⁵⁴

It seems small wonder, then, that Albright attacked Aubrey Haines’s research so vehemently! How else can we explain the vindictive pressure on Haines’s bosses to “punish” him—through his removal from his historian position (the first-ever such position in Yellowstone history), the actual transferring of him to another park, the seeming urgency to put him into retirement, and the apparent hesitancy of NPS to invite him to speak at the park’s centennial celebration at Madison?⁵⁵

John Good today does not remember why Haines was not invited to speak, but he does remember that “it was something that a lot of us wondered about at the time.” He says that he personally had nothing to do with Haines’s transfer to Big Hole National Battlefield (“It wasn’t me; I wouldn’t have done it!”). His thought about NPS’s compulsion to force Haines into early retirement is: “I’m sure that *that* pressure came from Horace Albright!” Albright, explained Good, “thought he knew everything about Yellowstone and he had not worked there in about half a century.”⁵⁶

The NPS’s handling of Haines’s research is a commentary on the dilemma faced by any organization when credible new information surfaces that cannot be quickly confirmed. Witness the problems of Congress recently with regard to White House official Karl Rove’s alleged participation in politicizing the U.S. Justice Department, Scooter Libby’s affair under Vice President Dick Cheney, and other such foibles involving President George W. Bush’s administration. Perhaps it is also a commentary on the tendency of some officials and managers to hold long grudges *against historians, scientists, and journalists* who dare to reveal certain truths, especially where losses of “shrines” or bad public relations for an organization might occur. The idea of shooting the messenger (killing an innocent person who brings bad news) has been part of reality back to the ancient Greeks, and it remains an occurrence that is often seen in corporations, clubs, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies, as reported by newspapers and television news stories.⁵⁷ All of this also illustrates a parallel problem within agencies and corporations: sometimes their managers fail to seek out and understand their own histories. Too often managers do not wish to hear from historians or

journalists that they may be making a mistake by “repeating the past.” But past events often predict the future and point to possible solutions to problems.

Apparently fearful of losing their “sacred shrine”—Madison Museum—and their cherished campfire story, certain officials in and outside of NPS treated historian Aubrey Haines very shoddily, but others, especially Haines’s Yellowstone bosses, stood by him through the fiasco. Haines himself, while personally deeply hurt for awhile, ended up believing that “it came out all right.” His own statement on the subject, made many years later, concerned the ramifications of his dismantling of NPS’s sacred Madison campfire tale:

It cost me my historian position and that caused me to retire early, but that wasn’t all bad. I continued to work on Yellowstone’s history, and on other good projects, from the basis of a secure retirement (I am in the twenty-ninth year of that retirement now), so I don’t see that they hurt me much. Frankly I was sustained by the fact that Yellowstone Park supported me—put me in the then open position of Naturalist-Geologist, George Marler’s slot, vacated by his retirement—so I could finish *The Yellowstone Story* after my historian position was terminated. The NPS historians in Region II and the Washington office (Mattes, Tompson, Appelman [sic], Utley, and Mattison) were supportive and helpful. It came out all right.⁵⁸

As this writer and his previous co-author Paul Schullery have noted, controversies in Yellowstone have often generated rudeness on the part of participants, and “it is probably past time that some participant in a Yellowstone controversy is guilty of being too polite.”⁵⁹ In this statement, Haines was certainly polite. We naturally do not want to be accused of any of the rhetorical excesses and careless thinking that characterized the early defenses of the Madison campfire story, and which often demeaned Haines. If Aubrey Haines himself could be so forgiving, we are probably wise to follow his example. But we also need to learn from these examples and try not to repeat the mistakes.

Hindsight being “twenty-twenty,” we know today that Haines’s revelation of the truth about the Madison campfire story has had few negative consequences in Yellowstone except to change the status of Madison Museum from triple national shrine to simple information station. Instead, Yellowstone itself, the national park idea, and the National Park Service all march blithely along, with history proceeding in its usual “merry unpredictable way.”⁶⁰ Yellowstone is still celebrated and preserved as the world’s first national park, even if we do not know whether Langford party members discussed around a campfire its preservation or whether they would work toward that end; the national park idea is still celebrated as a uniquely American idea, even if it did not begin with the 1870 Langford party; and the National Park Service is still revered by the American public as its favorite government agency. Horace Albright, Ronald Lee, and their supporters within the National Park Service need not have worried. With regard to the Madison Museum and its campfire myth, all was and is still well in Wonderland.

Endnotes

1. National Park Service Organic Act, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, vol. 17, chapter 24, pp. 32–33, as reproduced in Aubrey L. Haines, *The Yellowstone Story* (Boulder: University

of Colorado Press, 1977, 1996), vol. II, pp. 471–472.

2. For example, Hermon Bumpus, one of the creators of the Madison Museum, noted in 1930 at Madison that “here originated the national park idea—an idea that has since been adopted by many civilized nations.” H.C. Bumpus, “To Messrs. Demaray, Yeager, Jones, Kelly, McDougall” [on pink paper], January 30, 1930, pp. 7–8, in box K-18, file 833-05, “H.C. Bumpus 1930,” Yellowstone National Park Archives. For another example, when the Steve Mather memorial tablet was placed at Madison Museum in 1932, Superintendent Roger W. Toll stated that the museum itself “was built on this spot because it seemed most fitting to locate it at the birthplace of the national park idea.” R.W.T[oll], “Draft of a Talk for the Dedication of the Mather Plaque at Madison Junction, July 4, 1932,” in file 111.1, “Director (Stephen T. Mather).” This file is currently located in “Biography (Mather),” Yellowstone National Park Library vertical files, but it will eventually be moved to Yellowstone National Park Archives.
3. Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 2–4. Hot Springs National Park in Arkansas was a special case. Although it was established in 1832 as a “federal reservation,” it originally was not a national park in the strict sense of the word because its establishment occurred to allow *commercial use* of its hot spring waters. Its receipt of the title “national park” in 1921 was a purely political matter. Runte, *American Experience*, pp. 217–218.
4. The complete story of N.P. Langford and the Madison campfire “myth” is in Paul Schullery and Lee Whittlesey, *Myth and History in the Creation of Yellowstone National Park* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004). The present study can be seen as an extended “footnote” to that book. The “one man on a specific day” statement was touted not only by NPS interpretive signs in the early 1960s but also for a much longer time in the well known *Haynes Guide* from 1906 through 1966. See for example Jack Ellis Haynes, *Haynes Guide Handbook of Yellowstone National Park* (St. Paul: Haynes, Inc., 1939), p. 74; 1966, p. 75.
5. What Albright believed about Yellowstone’s origins and the Madison campfire story can be seen in his book *Oh, Ranger!* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1928), p. 121, and it is the standard Langford story, taken from Langford’s 1905 book.
6. Haines, *Yellowstone Story*, II, p. 310. For the details of this gift, see Beardsley Ruml to Secretary of Interior Hubert Work, March 2, 1928; and H.C. Bumpus to Horace Albright, February 9, 1928, both in box K-18, file 154.3 “F.Y. 1928,” Yellowstone National Park Archives.
7. Ethan Carr, *Wilderness by Design: Landscape Architecture and the National Park Service* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), pp. 144–145.
8. Kiki Leigh Rydell and Mary Shivers Culpin, *Managing the “Matchless Wonders”* (Yellowstone National Park, Wyo.: National Park Service, Yellowstone Center for Resources, 2006), pp. 100–101.
9. During his thirty-four years with the National Park Service, Russell (1894–1967) would also serve as chief naturalist and superintendent of Yosemite National Park and regional director of NPS. His personal papers are at the University of California–Berkeley. “Yosemite Park Superintendent Envisions Great Western History Museum for St.

- Louis,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 21, 1949, p. 1; Ralph H. Lewis for National Park Service, *Manual for Museums* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2005), preface; Ralph H. Lewis, “Retracing Curatorial Developments in the National Park Service,” *CRM Bulletin* 5 (December 1982); on-line at <http://crm.cr.nps.gov/archive/05-4/5-4-all.pdf> (unpaginated version).
10. Hermon C. Bumpus, Jr., *Hermon Carey Bumpus, Yankee Naturalist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1947), pp. 68–72, 104–120. Bumpus (1862–1943) received the Pugsley gold medal “for outstanding service in the field of national park education.” He has been credited with establishing the conceptual foundations for today’s NPS interpretive centers and thus has been called the “father of museums in national parks.” He produced “Museum Work in National Parks,” in *Museum News* 7 (January 15, 1930); “Outdoor Education, The Part Played by Our National Parks,” *Hobbies: The Magazine of the Buffalo Museum of Science* 10 (June 1930); and “Trailside Museums,” in *Museum Journal* (London) 30 (July 1930). For his work in Yellowstone, park officials named a riverside pinnacle for him “Bumpus Butte.” Lee H. Whittlesey, *Yellowstone Place Names* (Gardiner, Mont.: Wonderland Publishing Company, 2006), p. 58.
 11. Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, p. 145.
 12. Haines, *Yellowstone Story*, II, p. 310; Rydell and Culpin, *Matchless Wonders*, p. 101.
 13. H.C. Bumpus, “To Messrs. Demaray, Yeager, Jones, Kelly, McDougall” [on pink paper], January 30, 1930, pp. 7–8, in box K-18, file 833-05, “H.C. Bumpus 1930,” Yellowstone National Park Archives.
 14. Madison Museum was shown as “Trailside Shrine” on a 1931 blueprint. National Park Service (T.C. Vint), blueprint “Yellowstone National Park Parking Area Development Madison Junction,” August 18, 1931, YEL-1008, in box K-18, file “H.C. Bumpus 1930,” Yellowstone National Park Archives. See also Carl P. Russell, “Museum Prospectus: Madison Junction Visitor Center Yellowstone National Park,” June 3, 1960, in box D-66, Yellowstone National Park Archives; and Thomas C. Vint to Roger W. Toll, January 5, 1932, in NPS file 111.1 “Director (Stephen T. Mather), held in “Biography (Mather),” Yellowstone National Park Library Vertical Files. The “nature shrines” designed by Bumpus and Russell are in box K-18, Yellowstone National Park Archives, and are mentioned in Carr, *Wilderness by Design*, p. 145.
 15. David Nathanson, “The Mather Memorial Plaques,” January 7, 2002, in National Park Service History Collection, Harpers Ferry Center, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia; Joseph Joffe, “Stephen T. Mather Plaque Dedicated,” *Yellowstone Nature Notes* 9 (nos. 6–7), June–July 1932, pp. 27–28. See also Guy D. Edwards to NPS director, May 24, 1932, in box K-18, file 702.133, “Museums General Plans and Suggestions/Corrections,” Yellowstone National Park Archives; and “Report of Kenneth C. McCarter, Asst. Landscape Architect. . .,” July 1–4, 1932, in box D-67, file 329, “Landscape Division Matters FY 1933 FY 1934,” Yellowstone National Park Archives.
 16. Thomas C. Vint to Roger W. Toll, January 5, 1932; Horace Albright, telegram to Roger W. Toll, July 2, 1932, both in NPS file 111.1, “Director (Stephen T. Mather).” This file is currently located in “Biography (Mather),” Yellowstone National Park Library Vertical Files, but will eventually be moved to Yellowstone National Park Archives.

17. Stewart, "Yellowstone's Madison Museum," *Montana the Magazine of Western History* 25 (summer 1975), pp. 65–66. This also appears in Stewart, *My Yellowstone Years* (Fowlerville, Mich.: Wilderness Adventure Books, 1989), pp. 167–168.
18. Lee H. Whittlesey, "History of the Madison Museum—Today's Madison Information Center—at Madison Junction, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming," unpublished draft manuscript, National Park Service, July 23, 2008, p. 14, Yellowstone National Park Library, citing William E. Kearns, "A Suggested Plan for Madison Junction Historical Museum," 1940, in box D-66, Yellowstone National Park Archives.
19. Carl P. Russell, "Museum Prospectus," June 3, 1960, in box D-66, Yellowstone National Park Archives.
20. Russell, "Museum Prospectus," June 3, 1960, in box D-66, Yellowstone National Park Archives.
21. Ronald F. Lee is deserving of a major footnote. About his role in the National Park Service, former Chief Historian Robert Utley has written: "After the war Ronnie emerged as one of the major powers that made historic preservation a national concern. He was a founder and longtime honcho of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and he cemented [NPS's] solid ties to the American Institute of Architects and the American Association for State and Local History. No one in NPS, above or below him, challenged his rule in matters historical. He did not look authoritarian: [he was] short, bald-headed, moon-faced, [with] horn-rim glasses, and a wide mouth that articulated slowly and with painfully long pauses between clauses. Although Verne Chatelain was the first NPS Chief Historian, I think few would dispute that Ronnie Lee laid the foundation for the NPS history program and built the walls to a respectable height." Utley to Paul Schullery, January 5, 1998, copy in possession of Lee Whittlesey. This makes it clear that Lee was a very important figure in public history in America. His role as a pioneer in historic preservation and as a senior NPS official whom other agency officers had no reason to doubt must have made a lot of less-than-knowledgeable observers skeptical of Haines's viewpoint.
22. Although much of this dispute occurred during the period 1966–1972, Carl Russell included his "extra blaze of glory" statement in the text of his 1960 report on Madison Museum, indicating that his suspicion of the campfire story existed that year, so probably he and Aubrey Haines had already been communicating about the issue. For the "extra blaze" quotation by Russell and analysis of it, see Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*, pp. 45–46. For Lee's role, see pp. 57–60. For Albright's role, see pp. 51–55.
23. Nathaniel P. Langford, *Discovery of Yellowstone Park 1870: Diary of the Washburn Expedition to the Yellowstone and Firehole Rivers in the Year 1870* (St. Paul: J.E. Haynes, 1905), pp. 117–118. J.E. Haynes published a second edition in 1923, and Haynes too had a stake in the campfire story because he had promoted it so vociferously in his Haynes guidebooks. A third edition of the book was entitled *Discovery of Yellowstone Park 1870: Journal of the Washburn Expedition to the Yellowstone and Firehole Rivers in the Year 1870* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972) and is, according to

Aubrey Haines, “defective” in some senses, even though Haines himself wrote the foreword to that edition.

24. For details, see Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*, chapters three and four.
25. Haines served as Yellowstone National Park’s first historian for ten years, 1960–1969, and then was summarily “lateralled” to Big Hole National Battlefield, Montana, as a direct result of his having “dared” to question NPS’s sacred Madison campfire story. Langford, *Discovery of Yellowstone Park 1870*, 1972 edition, back cover, has a snippet on Haines as Yellowstone historian. The story of his difficulties with NPS after 1969 is detailed in Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*, chapters seven and eight.
26. Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*, pp. xiii–xiv.
27. Author’s conversation with former Yellowstone Chief Naturalist John Good, Jackson, Wyoming, August 13, 2008.
28. Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*, pp. 61–65. This author saw the sign there on June 12, 2008.
29. Russell, “Museum Prospectus,” June 3, 1960, p. 5.
30. William S. Rosenberg, “Design Analysis, Madison Junction,” February 1962, p. 2, contained in “Master Plan for the Preservation and Use of Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming,” chapter 5, in box D-66, file “Madison Junction Museum Prospectus 1960.” For the scripted play and other developments at Madison, see Lemuel Garrison, “Madison Junction Address,” August 20, 1961, in box A-398, file “A8215 Book #2, 1961–Jan 1962.”
31. Photo of sign in Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*, p. 82. That Madison Junction was seen as a “national shrine” in 1962 is also attested to by naturalist Don Stewart in his *My Yellowstone Years*, p. 162.
32. Photo of sign in Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*, p. 86.
33. Photo of sign in Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*, p. 93.
34. “Decision of the Director on Madison Junction Visitor Center,” September 4, 1962, in box D-66, file “Madison Junction Museum Prospectus 1960.”
35. Barry Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service: A Historical Perspective*, no date, chapter two, “Historical Challenges,” at note 19. On-line at www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/mackintosh2/branching_challenges.htm. (Accessed July 2008.) Mackintosh’s original statement is in his “The National Park Service Moves into Historical Interpretation,” *The Public Historian* 9, no. 2 (spring 1987), p. 60.
36. Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*, p. 71; author’s memories of living and working in Yellowstone, 1969–1972.
37. “Chief Historians for the National Park Service,” on-line at www.nps.gov/history/history/hisnps/NPSHistory/chiefhistorians.htm. (Accessed July 2008.)
38. Author’s telephone conversation with Robert Barbee, Belgrade, Montana, September 11, 2008. A study of Albright’s lifelong influence on the NPS, especially after his 1933 departure from the bureau, seems sorely needed, because he had so much behind-the-scenes influence. Our conjectures about his likely influence on the Madison campfire story appear in Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*, pp. 51–55. Two examples

of how highly NPS held him in esteem occurred in 1963 when the Park Service's training center at Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona, was named the "Albright Training Center" and in 1979 when the Mammoth Visitor Center at Yellowstone was rededicated as the "Albright Visitor Center." See John A. Tyers, "Albright Visitor Center Dedicated at Yellowstone," 1979 in box 1, file 1.17, Isabel Haynes papers, collection 1505, Montana State University, Bozeman.

39. [NPS Chief Historian] Bob Utley to [Park Superintendent] Jack Anderson and "signed off on" by Chief Park Naturalist Bill Dunmire, June 30, 1971, in box A-92, file "Centennial 1972," Yellowstone National Park Archives. Cramton's study is Louis C. Cramton, *Early History of Yellowstone National Park and its Relationship to National Park Policies* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932).
40. Utley to Anderson, June 30, 1971.
41. [Yellowstone Chief Naturalist] John Good to Bill Everhart [director, Harpers Ferry Center], November 28, 1966, in box A-92, file "Centennial 1972," Yellowstone National Park Archives.
42. John Good, chief park naturalist, to superintendent through assistant superintendent, November 8, 1966, in box A-92, file "Centennial 1972," Yellowstone National Park Archives. Devereux Butcher's book is *Exploring Our National Parks and Monuments* (Boston: Gambit, 1969; 2nd ed. 1976); the 1976 edition (pp. 175-176) safely attributed the suggestion for Yellowstone to Cornelius Hedges. Compare this with his 1995 edition, pp. 213-214, wherein he continued to quote Langford's 1905 book even more extensively.
43. John McLaughlin to Bill Dunmire, July 2, 1971, in box A-92, file "Centennial 1972," Yellowstone National Park Archives.
44. William C. Everhart to superintendent, Yellowstone National Park, August 3, 1971, in box K-89, file "K1817 Interpretive Activities Interpretive Planning 1971," Yellowstone National Park Archives.
45. John Good implied that Roy E. Appleman, Charles W. Porter, III, Richard A. Bartlett, and Ray Mattison were all supporters of Haines's new conclusions. Documents cited here show that Carl Russell and Edwin C. Alberts were also partly if not fully "on board." Bob Utley would "sign on" by 1971 (*Myth and History*, p. 64). Appleman, Mattison, Porter, Utley, and Russell (after a fashion) were all historians who worked for NPS. Bartlett was an academic historian. Alberts was NPS regional chief of interpretation at the time; he wrote histories of Scotts Bluff National Monument and Rocky Mountain National Park.
46. National Park Service, "Formal Opening Explorers' Museum," Madison Junction, July 28, 1972, pamphlet in box A-51, Yellowstone National Park Archives. Haines's poor treatment by NPS is discussed in Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*, chapters seven and eight.
47. Freeman Tilden, "Yellowstone, the Flowering of an Idea," [1972] pamphlet filed in "Yellowstone Centennial and Second World Conference Materials," September 17-27, 1972, Yellowstone National Park Library Vertical Files, "Special Events." Many key documents in this tale of NPS's slow consideration of the Madison campfire story may

be found in box H-6, file “Madison Campfire Myth by Schullery and Whittlesey, 1971–2000,” Yellowstone National Park Archives. Some of the most important letters are: Roy Appleman to Aubrey Haines, undated (but Haines wrote on it “sent recorded tape 10/28/64”); John S. McLaughlin to director of NPS, June 27, 1967 (suggesting that NPS establish a panel of three historians to rule on the case); Ronald F. Lee to Edward A. Hummel, June 3, 1971 (saying he thinks Haines is wrong); William C. Everhart to Ronald F. Lee, February 7, 1972 (NPS Director sides with Lee); Ronald F. Lee to Edward Hummel and Robert Utley, June 7, 1971 (Lee’s arguments on why he thinks Haines is wrong); and perhaps the most important one, Aubrey L. Haines to Robert M. Utley, January 3, 1972 (Haines’s arguments on why he thinks Lee is wrong).

48. Stewart, *My Yellowstone Years*, p. 187.
49. Richard A. Bartlett, *Nature’s Yellowstone* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), pp. 150, 168, 199–200, 205.
50. Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*, pp. 64, 71; author’s memories of living and working in Yellowstone, 1969–1972. Haines’s 1974 book, *Yellowstone National Park: Its Exploration and Establishment* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1974) made the case against Langford more forcefully than his 1977 book *The Yellowstone Story*, but even the former was toned down a bit due to Utley’s requests.
51. Author’s telephone conversation with (Chief of Interpretation) Linda Young, July 23, 2008; author’s conversation with (Senior Technical Writer) Paul Schullery, July 22, 2008, and his review comments on Whittlesey’s “History of Madison Museum.”
52. Paul Shackel, ed., *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), pp. 10–11; Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), pp. 467, 500–501. For more on NPS at U.S. historical sites and a photo of historian Ronald F. Lee, see pp. 465–473.
53. Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).
54. In a similar manner, some of today’s environmentalists oppose Yellowstone’s winter planning proposal that touts plowing park roads and using buses instead of snowcoaches, probably because—like Horace Albright—they have spent years of time and energy paying tribute to one ideal (snowcoaches) and therefore do not want to hear about something that might be different or better. Even in the face of evidence that snowcoaches would use two-and-a-half times more fuel than buses, the snowcoach boosters do not want to hear it. National Park Service, “Winter Use Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement, Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway,” (Yellowstone National Park, Wyo.: NPS), 2007, pp. 79–80, discussed in Michael J. Yochim, *Yellowstone and the Snowmobile: Locking Horns Over National Park Use* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, in press), chapter five.
55. Details of this story and Haines’s involvement in it are in Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*. Fellow historian Paul Schullery and I are among those who believe that Haines’s career was vindictively cut short by some vague set of people in the Department of the Interior and their advisors. As we state in our book on the subject, “We are

- among those who are certain that this happened but we cannot prove it” absolutely. Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*, p. 94.
56. Author’s conversation with former chief naturalist John Good, Jackson, Wyoming, August 13, 2008.
 57. Gregory Y. Titelman, *Random House Dictionary of Popular Proverbs and Sayings* (New York: Random House, 1996), p. 67. Sophocles wrote in *Antigone*: “Nobody likes the man who brings bad news.”
 58. Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*, pp. 71–72.
 59. Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*, p. 72.
 60. Schullery and Whittlesey, *Myth and History*, p. 92.

Lee H. Whittlesey, P.O. Box 228, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming 82190-0228