

OVERCOMING OBSCURITY

The Yellowstone Architecture of Robert C. Reamer

Ruth Quinn



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

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



COURTESY RUTH QUINN



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

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

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



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



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 89301-10

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

—Robert Reamer

A Quiet, Reserved Man

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

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

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

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



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 89281-43

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Master of All Styles”

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

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

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



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

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

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

A Reamer-Based Tour of Yellowstone

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

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

Yellowstone Lake

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



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

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

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

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



COURTESY ROGER ANDERSON

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



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES

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

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

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

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

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

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



COURTESY RUTH QUINN

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



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 29931

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

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

Until the construction of the Bridge Bay Marina complex, about 1962, the Yellowstone Park Boat Company operated rental facilities at West Thumb, at a dock immediately in front of the Lake Hotel, and at Fishing Bridge.²⁶ A small, outhouse-sized cabin, which floated on a barge, was attached to the east side of the Fishing Bridge and used between 1926 and 1937.²⁷ Because of his many contemporaneous projects for the hotel company in the mid-1930s, the company asked Reamer to design a small building to serve as a rental facility for fishing tackle and small water craft and as a residence for the employee who ran the facility. This building was nestled below the hillside on the west side of the bridge and just downstream. Its construction coincided with construction of the current Fishing Bridge (1936–1937).²⁸



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

Canyon

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We can be thankful that Reamer would never know the fate of this grand structure. For decades, the building settled and shifted down the hillside; foundation problems had been noted in the original old building as early as 1896.³⁸ By 1958, supporting beams had shifted as much as five feet from original plumb, and structural cracks were too obvious to ignore. An independent engineer hired by the hotel company firmly recommended closure: “...in any large city or municipality covered by zoning codes there is little doubt that the owner of such a structure would have been ordered a number of years ago to either correct the structural condition of this building or close it down...”³⁹ The Canyon Hotel never opened after the 1958 season, and was sold to wreckers in 1959. A fire in 1960 hurried the impending demolition.⁴⁰

Gardiner, Montana

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

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

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



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A Reamer sketch of the Gardiner depot.



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES

The depot, circa 1903.

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

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

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



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES

The Gardiner coach shed, now gone.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES COURTESY RUTH QUINN

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

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

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

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

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

Mammoth Hot Springs

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Reamer's drawing of the Chinese Gardens cottage.



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

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

MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM, F.J. HAYNES COLLECTION



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

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

Demolition of the old National Hotel began in the summer of 1936. Workers poured the foundations for the new cafeteria and restaurant building in the fall of that year.⁵³ Early in 1937, they completed the foundations for the "Lounge" building, which contains the lobby, Map Room, gift shop, and general offices of the hotel concessioner.⁵⁴ The final portions of the complex, the Recreation Hall and cabins, did not appear until after Reamer's death in January 1938.⁵⁵ The Mammoth-area cabins, known as cottages, were a step above the automobile cabins in lodge facilities around the park. Inspired by the bungalow style that grew out of the Arts and Crafts Movement, the cottages featured wood trellis-ringed porches with cutouts of park animals.⁵⁶

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

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

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



COURTESY RUTH QUINN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL. 30466

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

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

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

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

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



NATIONAL ARCHIVES, COURTESY RUTH QUINN

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

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

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

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



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



A 1908 Reamer watercolor of the proposed Child family home.

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

West and East Entrances

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

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

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

Upper Geyser Basin

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



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

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

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



COURTESY ROGER ANDERSON

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

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

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

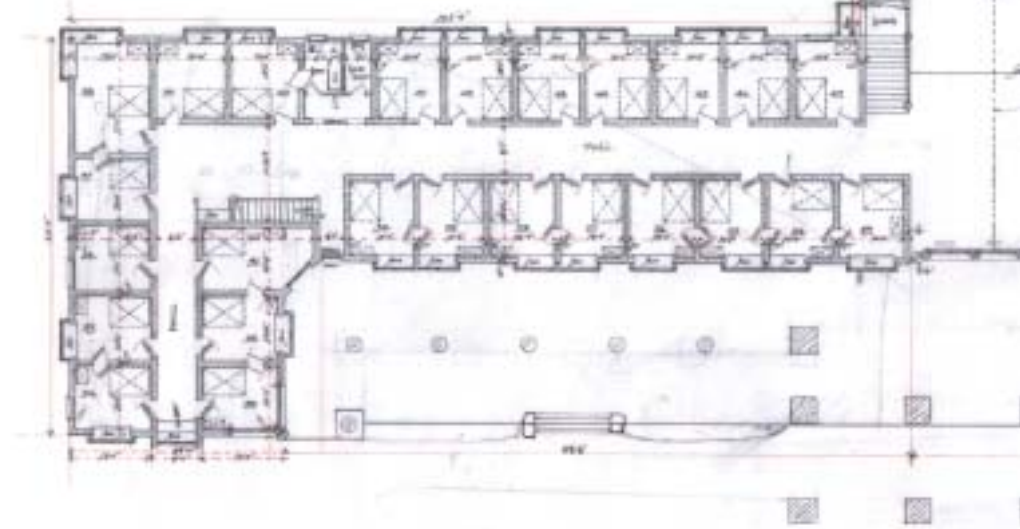
The idea of building a rustic hostelry at Old Faithful did not originate with Robert Reamer. Correspondence between Babcock and Reamer reveals that the YPHC was already planning to build in the Rustic Style. Babcock wrote, “(Y)our taste in that line would redound to your credit.”⁷² Wood cutting for the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

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

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

Reamer's work on the inn eventually

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



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



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



The fireplace is still a welcoming area.



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

—1905 visitor



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

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

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



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 3167-1

The Klammer store prior to Reamer’s remodeling.



YELLOWSTONE ARCHIVES, YELL 688

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Long Yellowstone Career

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



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

MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, J.E. HAYNES FOUNDATION COLLECTION

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

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

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

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

Reamer returned to Yellowstone between 1906 and 1911

to work on other projects in the park. During this period, he met Louise Chase, niece of U.S. Magistrate John Meldrum. They married in the fall of 1911, in her adopted home of Chicago. The Reamers made their home in Boston between 1912 and 1914. The Reamer's only daughter, Jane, was born in Boston in 1913.⁸⁶

The 1915–1920 period was a turbulent one for the Reamer family. Robert joined his brother Daniel in practice in Cleveland around 1916 or 1917.⁸⁷ He was in Yellowstone in 1917, joining an attempt to climb Mt. Moran in the Tetons with journalist Emerson Hough, park concessioner Jack E. Haynes, and others.⁸⁸ The west and east entrance station proposals were completed that year. Louise and Jane traveled alone to Biloxi, Mississippi, where Louise found work in a bank while her husband struggled to find career stability.⁸⁹ He eventually found himself in Washington State, where he obtained a civilian post in the Bremerton naval shipyards, worked as a clerk for a shipbuilding company, and finally established himself in an architectural position with the Metropolitan Building Company in Seattle.⁹⁰

For the next 17 years, from 1920 until his death in 1938, Reamer continued to design projects for Yellowstone from his offices in Seattle. Jane said that she did not think a year went by that her father did not travel to Yellowstone for some project. By 1936, Reamer's health began to fail, and he was hospitalized with circulation problems in his foot, which led to the amputation of a leg. Despite continuing health problems, he kept working until two months before his death, at home in Seattle on January 7, 1938, at the age of 64.⁹¹

Enduring Influence

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

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

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

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

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COURTESY RUTH QUINN

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

Endnotes

1. David Leavengood, "A Sense of Shelter: Robert C. Reamer in Yellowstone National Park," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 54, November 1985, p. 495–513.
2. Lawrence Kreisman, Reamer Biography, unpublished seminar paper, University of Washington, Fall 1977, copy in vertical files "Biography/Reamer," Yellowstone Park Library and Archives, p. 13–14.

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



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