

CAMP CURRY
(Curry Village)
Yosemite National Park
Curry Village
Mariposa County
California

HALS CA-65
HALS CA-65

PHOTOGRAPHS

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FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
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HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

CAMP CURRY, YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK (Curry Village)

HALS No. CA-65

Location: Curry Village, Yosemite National Park, Mariposa County, California

The iconic “Camp Curry” sign near the center of Curry Village is located at this coordinate: latitude, 37.737738; longitude, -119.571919. It was obtained using Google Earth imagery, dated April 24, 2010. The Camp Curry (Curry Village) location has no restriction on its release to the public.

Present Owner: The National Park Service owns the historic buildings at Curry Village, which are assigned for use by the concessioner under their contract to operate within the park. The concessioner, Delaware North Companies Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc., owns the canvas-covered tent cabins and a scattering of non-historic buildings concentrated mostly in the Boystown area of Curry Village.

Present Use: Guest lodging in Yosemite National Park

Historian: James A. Jacobs, HABS

Significance: Curry Village, known as Camp Curry from the time of its establishment in 1899 through the 1960s, was historically and remains a highly significant development of guest accommodation within Yosemite Valley. It holds significance within the history of the National Park Service as both one of the earliest tourist camps of its type in a national park as well as a place where the service’s nascent design office implemented some of its first approaches to managing the automobile.

Educators David and Jennie Curry founded Camp Curry as a less expensive choice to the handful of hotels then existing in the valley and a more convenient one than traditional camping as it eliminated the need to travel with food, supplies, and tent equipment. They situated the camp among a stand of trees on the relatively flat ground between one of the main roads traversing the valley and the talus pile at the base of Glacier Point. It grew steadily in the 1900s and more explosively in the 1910s and 1920s as the initial scattering of tents gave way to more permanent structures and buildings arranged in precincts that pushed east, west, and south from the camp’s core.

This rapid transformation of Camp Curry largely occurred in an unplanned manner; substantial buildings for guest services formed a core at the center and tent, and later bungalow and bungalowette, accommodation extending in the flat area to the east and west of the core and pushing up the talus slope to the south. The Currys and their family-run

concession steadily modernized Camp Curry during these first decades, balancing visitor expectations for comfort, entertainment, and leisure against the government's goals and policies. The latter were shaped by a changing cast of characters as oversight of the valley shifted from the State of California to the United States Army and ultimately, in 1916, to the National Park Service.

Camp Curry was reinvented as a modern and easily accessible vacation resort set within the grandeur of Yosemite Valley. It manifested as a complex composed of hundreds of structures and buildings having a rustic, even humble architectural presence and an informal arrangement under tall conifers. These character-defining features furnished a unique tourist experience within the valley, an experience that remains very much today as it was at the end of Camp Curry's period of vigorous expansion during the first three decades of the twentieth century. The constructed tourist landscape—partly through the low-key design of its buildings and structures and partly because of its history of piecemeal development—remains subservient to the astonishing beauty of the natural landscape.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

- 1. Date(s) of establishment.** David and Jennie Curry established Camp Curry in the summer of 1899 under Glacier Point at the eastern end of Yosemite Valley. It was the first tent accommodation in the valley and made available a more affordable option to tourists than the two hotels existing there at the time. Camp Curry developed rapidly and it was in a near-constant state of change and expansion during its early history. In just three decades, it went from a repurposed family campground consisting of seven tents tucked under lofty pines and cedars to “a fully equipped modern hotel camp with a capacity of 1000 guests” spreading out along and up the talus slope at the base of looming Glacier Point.¹ By the 1930s, the decades of frenetic development slowed and its extent and overall organization reached stasis and, until recently, remained essentially intact.

The Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) completed for Curry Village in 2010 concluded that the “landscape has not changed significantly since 1936. Some features have been replaced, relocated, or modified but, for the most part, the general layout of the camp has remained the same.”² That assessment was, for the most part, correct up until that year,

¹ “Curry's Yosemite Automobile Road Guide,” 1921, Box 1, Folder 2630, Series 8.8.2, Yosemite Park and Curry Company Collection (YP&CC Collection), Yosemite National Park Archives, El Portal, California (hereafter Yosemite Archives).

² Daniel Schaible, Patrick Chapin, and Brian Chilcott, “Cultural Landscape Report: Camp Curry Historic District,” U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Yosemite National Park, 2010, 20.

In response to a 1968 request by the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, “Camp Curry” was renamed “Curry Village” to reduce confusion about reservations and capacity in the camp and in adjacent government-run campgrounds. Stuart G. Cross, the president of the concession wrote to Yosemite Superintendent Lawrence C. Hadley explaining that the change would “clearly distinguish between those services which are furnished by the government in the public campgrounds and those lodging units and

but dramatic changes were already in-process at the time the park was preparing the CLR. The danger of falling rock in the southernmost portions of the camp closest to Glacier Point has been long recognized by the park and plans to eliminate the areas most at risk have existed for decades, but were never implemented. A major rockfall in 2008 resulted in the formal establishment of a “rockfall zone” fenced off from the rest of the camp from which all buildings and structures will be eliminated. The removal of those portions of Camp Curry within the rockfall zone will be the only significant contraction in its size since 1899 and the most radical alteration to the landscape of the camp since the 1920s.

2. Major periods of development and the shapers of the landscape:

The Establishment and Growth of an Informal Camp Landscape

Camp Curry is a vernacular landscape that grew up organically over time within one of the most spectacular natural landscapes in the United States. Although the camp is composed of hundreds of permanent, semi-permanent, and seasonal buildings and structures, their informal organization was both dictated as well as unified by the natural environment. A group of buildings at the center of Camp Curry contain the administrative offices and guest services and amenities. This was the approximate location of the original facility, established on relatively flat land at the base of the talus slope, easing the construction of major buildings. The location was also far enough away and slightly elevated above the flood-prone flats along the Merced River to the north.

As the camp expanded, its guest accommodations and a scattering of permanent residential buildings spread to the east and west of the core between the edge of the talus slope and the main road on the south side of the Merced River. Development also moved to the south up the talus slope towards the base of Glacier Point. The intensive development and full extent of Camp Curry is obscured by a forest of tall trees, composed mainly of ponderosa pine, mixed conifers, and California black oaks in the flat areas and canyon live oaks on the talus slope.³ Even when considered as a group, the manmade elements of Camp Curry are subservient to a landscape primarily characterized, in its immediate vicinity, by forest and, more pointedly, by Glacier Point’s massive granite face.

The Curry family oversaw most aspects of its expansion during the early decades. The additions and improvements followed no overarching plan and occurred in a piecemeal fashion based on needs and available resources. The disjointed pattern was also shaped by two significant, related conditions: the rise of leisure tourism and the relationship of Camp Curry to government officials controlling operations in the valley. The Currys focused their efforts on meeting the changing expectations of the burgeoning tourist industry. The camp was comparatively rustic and not especially easy to access during its first decade or so of existence and it mainly provided a place to eat and sleep as tourists explored the natural beauty of the valley. The “bare bones” character of Camp Curry changed

services which are functions of the concessioner, while, at the same time, indicating their interrelationship.” Stuart G. Cross to Lawrence C. Hadley, 23 Jul. 1968, Box 3, Folder 270, Series 4.3, YP&CC Collection, Yosemite Archives.

³ Schaible et al, 95.

dramatically in the 1910s and 1920s. In 1907, the railroad arrived in El Portal, only fourteen miles from Yosemite Valley. This considerable improvement in transportation access was met and surpassed in the following decades by continual road improvements, which culminated in the much heralded completion of the “All-Year Highway” in 1926. This roadway connected the city of Merced with Yosemite Valley, following the twisting route of the Merced River.

The relationship between the Currys and their growing enterprise and the federal government during its first two decades put into place a structure for development that did not encourage long-range planning and design.⁴ The federal government established Yosemite National Park in 1890, but it did not include Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove. These areas had been preserved since 1864 as part of the federally mandated Yosemite Grant, which was managed by the state of California. It was not until 1906 that the lands of the Yosemite Grant were folded into Yosemite National Park.⁵ David and Jennie Curry established Camp Curry during the period when the valley was still being administered by California and the extent of regulatory practice by the state over the concession is uncertain.⁶ The camp steadily expanded between 1899 and 1906, suggesting that oversight was relatively lax. Since California would have benefited from an increase in tourism it is unlikely that the state would have stymied the development of facilities in Yosemite, which was only sparsely served at the time.

The laissez faire character of California’s administration was indicated by Camp Curry’s condition at the time that the United States Army began its oversight after the transfer of the Yosemite Grant to Yosemite National Park in 1906. In July 1907, Major H.C. Benson, The Acting Superintendent of Yosemite National Park, cautioned Secretary of the Interior James Garfield about David Curry’s desire to expand the camp, noting: “The sanitary arrangements at Camp Curry are exceedingly bad.”⁷ The following month, Marshall O. Leighton, the Director and Chief Hydrographer of the U.S. Geological Survey further reported to Secretary Garfield on conditions at the camp:

⁴ While the variability in government oversight had a negative effect on long-range planning, Alfred Runte has observed that David Curry learned to operate within and benefitted greatly from the administrative conditions during the camp’s early decades—he “symbolized the growing influence that concessionaires wielded over the development of the park.” See: Alfred Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), Chapter Seven, “Changing of the Guard,” accessed online, 4 Feb. 2013, http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/rusticarch/

⁵ Fletcher, Farr, Ayotte, Inc., for Delaware North Companies Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc., and the National Park Service, “Yosemite National Park, Curry Village Cabins: Historic Structure Report,” Nov. 2011, 12.

⁶ Although time and resources for this project did not allow the investigation of the records of the California agencies involved with the oversight of the Yosemite Grant between 1864 and 1906, this area of research might turn up useful information about Camp Curry’s earliest years of operation.

⁷ H.C. Benson to the Secretary of the Interior (James R. Garfield), 11 Jul 1907, Box 286, Entry 9 (Central Files, 1907-39), RG 79 (Records of the National Park Service), National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (hereafter NARA).

The present site has now been in use nine years. The soil upon which the camp is sitting is not readily drained and the site is at the present time too crowded... There are on the borders of the camp troublesome accumulations of garbage and organic matter, the presence of which could not be otherwise than a menace to the health of the persons patronizing the camp... All of the above features taken together, namely, the difficulty of good drainage, the accumulation of putrescible [sic] matter, and the intention of the proprietor to make extensive additions, lead me to recommend that the present site of the camp be abandoned and that his concession be located in some other part of the Valley.⁸

Curry appealed to the Secretary Garfield and, with promises of improving the sanitation at the camp, was granted a lease to operate for one year. David Curry continued to annually negotiate the lease and its “privileges” as a concession until 1917 when the Curry Camping Company (incorporated in 1911) received its first multiyear lease (five years) one month before David Curry died.⁹ Up until that time, without certainty that the company would be permitted to operate in the coming year, the feasibility and desirability of creating and implementing a comprehensive plan for expansion would have been limited, if not impossible.

At the time that the Curry Camping Company received its first multiyear lease in 1917, Camp Curry’s informal landscape character was already well established. A growing core of permanent, rustic-styled buildings containing guest and visitor services filled the area of the original camp located to the south of the main road that connected (Old) Yosemite Village to the west and Happy Isles to the east at its intersection with the road connecting to the north side of the valley via the Stoneman Bridge over the Merced River.¹⁰ The entrance to Camp Curry was positioned at this intersection. Tent accommodation spread increasingly outwards to the east, west, and south of this core in an unplanned manner, and some staff accommodations began appearing on the north side of the Happy Isles Road. While the more substantial buildings constructed at the core were more likely to have actual designers, the landscape remained largely ad hoc and principally defined as the space between buildings rather than a deliberate landscape intervention.

Accommodating the Automobile: Formal Landscape Design Arrives at Camp Curry

There were two significant departures from the casual development of Camp Curry in the 1920s: a bypass road around Camp Curry (now part of Southside Drive and the Happy Isle Loop Road) and the creation of the adjacent “Orchard” and “Central” parking areas. Steadily increasing automobile traffic into the eastern end of the valley and the start of

⁸ Director and Chief Hydrographer, U.S. Geological Survey (Marshall O. Leighton) to the Secretary of the Interior (Garfield), 22 Aug. 1907, Box 286, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

⁹ Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the Interior, to David A. Curry, 7 Mar. 1917, Box 287, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

¹⁰ For more information about the Stoneman Bridge, see: Richard H. Quin, “Stoneman Bridge, Yosemite National Park,” HAER No. CA-95, Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991.

comprehensive planning in Yosemite Valley by the National Park Service (NPS) led to a proposal to eliminate through traffic on the portion of the road connecting Old Yosemite Village with Happy Isles on the south side of the Merced River in the vicinity of Camp Curry. In January 1924, NPS Director Stephen T. Mather wrote to Yosemite Superintendent Washington B. Lewis about the possible expansion of the camp:

Mr. [Daniel] Hull feels as you do, that a new road should be built in front of Camp Curry and that if it is at all possible, Camp Curry's expansions should be limited to the south side of the proposed new road...I have told Mr. Hull, however, that I think he ought to go over the ground with Mr. Tressider [director of the Curry Camping Company] and if the proposed new road can be brought closer to the Merced River and particularly in the area back of the Curry garage, I will have no objection to permitting further expansion in that area than the attached map contemplates.¹¹

The drawing attached to the letter depicted a new road splitting off from the existing main road on the west side of Camp Curry.¹² The bypass road looped to the north around the new parking garage, which was located south of the Stoneman Bridge on the road connecting to the northern side of the valley, before cutting across the Stoneman Meadow and through an existing fruit orchard. Beyond the orchard, the road turned to the south, intersecting with the road that providing access to mirror lake before merging back onto the road to Happy Isles on the east side of Camp Curry.

Daniel R. Hull, the preparer of the drawing, was the landscape engineer (architect) directing the NPS's nascent landscape design office. In 1918, Mather hired Charles P. Punchard Jr., a Harvard-educated landscape architect, to evaluate the state of infrastructure and visitor services in the parks and to provide recommendations and guidance to the government and concessions about improvements to existing facilities and plans for future development.¹³ Punchard was based in Yellowstone National Park, but visited parks throughout the west, focusing especially on Yosemite because of Mather's "personal interest in the Valley."¹⁴

Punchard identified so many pressing design issues throughout the system that Mather hired Hull as an assistant for him in August 1920. Hull was also a trained landscape architect, receiving his education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and

¹¹ The Director (Stephen T. Mather) to Washington B. Lewis, 21 Jan. 1924, Box 545, Entry 10 (Central Classified Files, 1907-1949), RG 79, NARA.

¹² [Daniel R. Hull], "Map of Proposed Camp Curry Limits to Accompany Letter from Director Dated Jan. 21, 1924," ca. Jan. 21, 1924, Box 545, Entry 10, RG 79, NARA.

¹³ Linda Flint McClelland, *Building the National Parks: Historic Landscape Design and Construction* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 136.

¹⁴ William C. Tweed, Laura E. Soullière, and Henry G. Law, "National Park Service Rustic Architecture: 1916-1942," National Park Service, Western Regional Office, San Francisco, 1977, "III. The Formative Decade: 1918-1927," accessed online, 13 Sep. 2012: www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/rusticarch/part3.htm.

Harvard. The workload facing Punchard was certainly enough justification to hire Hull, but Punchard was also ill with tuberculosis and died three months after Hull was hired. Hull became the head of the design office, which had been moved to Yosemite and would remain there until 1923.¹⁵ According to historian Linda Flint McClelland, Punchard “provided a philosophical framework for future park development and management,” a framework that guided Hull between 1920 and 1927 as he pioneered techniques in design and construction—for example, the use of unobtrusive masonry walls in the creation of road and trail networks—and advocated for long-range, comprehensive park planning.¹⁶

The simple blueprint Hull prepared in January 1924 not only depicted Mather’s preferred location for the bypass road, but also hatched-in the proposed extent of Camp Curry’s future expansion. Mather’s letter suggests that the road had been a recent topic of discussion within the park and a more detailed drawing of the existing circulation and proposed changes dated January 5, 1924 was most likely also the work of Hull (fig. 1).¹⁷ The base of this drawing was a detailed topographic map that showed footprints of the permanent buildings in Camp Curry as well as existing and proposed roadways. The orchard was more precisely represented, which made it clear that the northern third of the orchard would either be cut off from the rest by the new road or eliminated for its right-of-way.

The final design of the roadway did not occur until a few years later. On October 27, 1927, Mather wrote to Thomas C. Vint: “I understand you have now made definite settlement as to the location of the road to run around Camp Curry, and the general plan as you outlined it to me has my approval.”¹⁸ Vint succeeded Hull as the chief landscape architect of the NPS Landscape Division in 1927 at which time the office was moved to San Francisco, becoming part of the newly created Western Field Office. Vint remained in San Francisco until 1933 when he became the head of the what became the Branch of Plans and Design at the NPS headquarters in Washington, DC.

Around the same time that Vint was finalizing the design of the bypass road, the NPS and the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, the name of the concessionaire running Camp Curry after at 1925 merger, were consulting with the recently formed “Board of Expert Advisors” about additional parking for Camp Curry. The Board of Expert Advisors was

¹⁵ Hull was successful in having the design office moved to Los Angeles in 1923 where he began closely collaborating with Gilbert Stanley Underwood on public projects in the parks as well as on private commissions. Hull left the NPS in 1927 to enter private practice, but returned to government work during the Great Depression, ultimately guiding the development of the system of California state parks. Carol Roland, “Hull, Daniel Ray,” in *Pioneers of American Landscape Design*, ed. Charles A. Birnbaum and Robin Karson (New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 2000), 180-184.

¹⁶ McClelland, 138, for Punchard, 159, for Hull.

¹⁷ “Map Showing Suggested Extensions to Camp Curry and Proposed Relocation of Main Road,” 5 Jan. 1924, Box 545, Entry 10, RG 79, NARA.

¹⁸ Mather to Thomas C. Vint, 27 Oct. 1927, Box 545, Entry 10, RG 79, NARA.

created to aid the park in the development of strategies for expansion and improvement. The board was composed of famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., university geologist John P. Buwalda, and Duncan McDuffe, “a prominent California Brokerage firm president.”¹⁹ In the 1920s, the Olmsted landscape design firm remained the most prominent and influential in the nation, building on the prestigious career of Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. (1822-1903) and his work professionalizing the field of landscape architecture. After his retirement, Olmsted Sr.’s son, Frederick (“Rick”) Law Olmsted Jr. (1870-1957), and stepson, John Charles Olmsted (1852-1920) ran what became known as “Olmsted Brothers.” The firm prospered under a new system of decentralized project management devised by John Charles Olmsted to cope with ever-increasing numbers of commissions and, after John’s death in 1920, Olmsted Jr. more-and-more turned his attention to the areas of planning and landscape conservation.²⁰ It was within this context that Olmsted became involved with the development of Yosemite National Park.

Olmsted’s firm initially proposed repurposing the portion of the orchard located to the south of the planned bypass in 1927, but he later opposed the action, explaining: “The more we studied it the more keenly we felt that it would be a calamitous loss to obliterate the arm of the meadow in front of Camp Curry by gravelling it and converting it into an automobile parking space.”²¹ Once the orchard had been identified, however, there would have been few alternatives as obvious or appealing. The ease of shipping produce by truck meant that the orchard was no longer essential to the operations of Camp Curry and its location on flat ground immediately adjacent to the camp made it attractive to accommodate the steadily increasing number of cars arriving there.²² These factors likely contributed to Olmsted’s ultimate support for the conversion and by the end of 1928 he was collaborating with Thomas Vint and Eldridge Spencer, the in-house architect for the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, “on the Curry parking area layout.”²³

The overall design—which included vehicular circulation and the extent and position of parking to the south of the orchard immediately adjacent to the main buildings and tents on the east side of Camp Curry—dragged on into the spring of 1929. Even while some details remained unresolved, the NPS design staff in the Western Field Office thought that

¹⁹ Sky Skach, Brian Chilcott, and Daniel Schaible, “Orchard Management Guidelines,” U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Yosemite National Park, Division of Resources Management and Science, 2011, 58.

²⁰ National Association for Olmsted Parks, “Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.,” and “John Charles Olmsted,” both accessed online, 12 Aug. 2010: www.olmsted.org, and The Cultural Landscape Foundation, “Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.,” and “John Charles Olmsted,” both accessed online, 12 Aug. 2010: www.tclf.org

²¹ Schaible et al, 100, for the Olmsted Brothers as originators of the idea to adapt the orchard for parking; Alfred Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 155, for quote, as transcribed in: Skach et al, 58.

²² Skach et al, 22, for feasibility of shipping produce.

²³ Vint to the Director (Mather), 28 Nov. 1928, Box 545, Entry 10, RG 79, NARA.

the plans for the bypass road and the parking area had proceeded enough to begin preparations for construction. Frank A. Kittredge, the Chief Engineer in the field office, wrote to Yosemite Superintendent Colonel Charles G. Thomson in March 1929: “It occurs to me however that inasmuch as the company recognizes Mr. Olmsted’s plan in the east parking, the park engineers could definitely stake out the east parking in the orchard, together with the roadways around the area.”²⁴ Work on the road and parking area started soon after this letter as the final report on the construction of the “section of the Curry Road, thru Stoneman Meadows [*sic*] extending from the extreme West end of Camp Curry to the extreme East end” was dated on September 26, 1929.²⁵

The final report for the “Camp Curry Parking Area” was completed on December 2, 1929.²⁶ It chronicled the removal of vegetation; reconstruction and construction of roads and driveways—both the main approach to Camp Curry and access to the new parking areas; and the grading, paving, and curbing of roads and footpaths. The transformation of the orchard into a parking area required the removal of every third row of trees and the area directly to the south was paved for parking in the summer and could be flooded for use as an ice-skating rink in the winter. In total, the bypass road and the reengineered drives and new parking areas established a modern system of circulation and parking for the accommodation of motor vehicles, including loop entrances for cars and buses and long-term and short-term parking for Camp Curry’s guests. The new motor landscape was visually unified through an extensive program of paving and the use of regularly spaced boulders as curbing. This work represents the only deliberate and comprehensive landscape design at Camp Curry during its early, consequential period of development during the first three decades of the twentieth century.

3. **Builder, contractor, laborers, suppliers:** Given the extent of Camp Curry, its already long history, and multiplicity of physical components, compiling an accurate list of individuals involved in its construction over time not only stands beyond the scope of this study, but is also likely impossible given the piecemeal and casual nature of many of the projects and improvements over the years. Most broadly, the present landscape of Camp Curry was a truly collaborative effort variously involving the concession(s), park officials, and a host of contracted individuals and businesses.
4. **Original and subsequent owners:** Yosemite Valley has been government-owned for most of its Euro-American history. No person of European descent is confirmed to have entered Yosemite Valley before the mid-nineteenth century. In 1864, Congress passed the Yosemite Grant Act, which gave Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees to

²⁴ F.A. Kittredge to Col. C.G. Thomson, 23 Mar. 1929, Box 548, Entry 10, RG 79, NARA. See also in Box 548: Horace M. Albright to Kittredge, 29 Mar. 1929 and Kittredge to Thomson, 4 Apr. 1929.

²⁵ “Final Report of Job #501.11, Camp Curry Section,” 25 Sep. 1929, accessed online at the Technical Information Center, NPS Denver Service Center, <http://etic.nps.gov/> (hereafter ETIC).

²⁶ “Final Report on Camp Curry Parking Area, Job #501.24,” 2 Dec. 1929, ETIC.

California provided the state preserve the lands forever for public use and enjoyment.²⁷ The lands of the Yosemite Grant were controlled by California until 1906 at which time they were folded into Yosemite National Park (established 1890) and have remained in ownership of the federal government since that time.

Members of the Curry family were involved with the operation of Camp Curry/Curry Village, either directly or as part of the later concessions, for seven decades. The business was incorporated in 1911, was reorganized once in 1923, and merged with the Yosemite Park Company in 1925, forming the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, which remained active until 1993, at which time Delaware North Companies acquired the concession.

1899-1911	David and Jennie Curry
1911-1923	Curry Camping Company
1923-1925	CURRY CAMPING COMPANY ²⁸
1925-1993	Yosemite Park and Curry Company
1993-present	Delaware North Companies Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc.

5. **Original and subsequent occupants:** The occupants of Camp Curry/Curry Village have remained the same for its entire history: the management and staff of the concession running the facility and guests, other visitors, and National Park Service staff.

B. Historical Context

Introduction

The development and growth that shaped the general character and overall landscape of Camp Curry occurred mainly during the first three decades after its establishment in 1899. Although individual buildings and features have appeared or disappeared, been renovated, razed, or replaced, the sense of the camp as a distinct place in Yosemite Valley has been remarkably stable and one typified by a sense of continuity. Its seemingly placid state over the past eight decades stands in contrast to its frenetic development in the early decades of the twentieth century, a time during which a modest tent camp providing cost-effective convenience for middle-class tourists was transformed into a massive complex with hundreds of units of accommodation and a full spectrum of guest services and amenities.

In May 1929, the *Oakland Tribune* offered a brief summary of the changes that had occurred since 1899: The Currys' "initial operation consisted of a wagon, two horses, and

²⁷ Although spanning only about a decade, the period between the arrival of the first Euro-American homesteaders in the valley and the establishment of government ownership was long enough for two settlers, James Lamon and James Mason Hutchings, to make considerable improvements to the land. They entered into a decade-long court and legislative battle with the state and the federal government and were ultimately compensated for their losses in 1874. Schaible et al, 38-39; Runte, Chapter Three, "Prophecy and Change."

²⁸ Schaible et al, 186, for the 1923 reorganization during which Foster Curry's family members purchased his shares of the business.

seven tents. From this humble beginning three decades ago, Camp Curry has grown to one of the largest hotel resorts of the west, with accommodations for 1300 guests....Camp Curry is a self-contained community in every sense of the word.”²⁹ With the distance of time, the pace of steady expansion appears to be a seamless whole, but Camp Curry’s earliest decades of history can be divided into two overlapping, yet distinct phases providing structure to a narrative where the “pioneer camp” that was, literally, rustic gave way to “a community center with complete service in its central buildings for all tourist needs.”³⁰

A “Hotel in Tents,” 1899-1912³¹

Camp Curry was a vanguard institution not only in Yosemite Valley, but also in the national parks. Permanent tent camps offering lodging, meals, and toilet facilities furnished relative comfort to visitors in the national parks at a reasonable cost, making a trip to the parks both more appealing as well as within reach of a larger swathe of the public. In 1896, William Wylie was the first to gain permission to establish this type of accommodation in Yellowstone National Park to meet the growing popularity of his educational touring company.³² David and Jennie Curry would have been familiar with Wylie’s business as they also organized tours to Yellowstone in the early 1890s while teaching at a school in Utah.³³ They moved their family to California in 1895, yet David continued to lead tours to Yellowstone over the next couple of summers. Wylie’s new permanent camps undoubtedly informed the Currys decision to set up a similar type of camp in Yosemite. The 1909 travel brochure noted the affinity directly: “[Camp Curry] is similar to the Wylie camps of Yellowstone Park.”³⁴

The Currys opened “Camp Sequoia” in 1899 at the base of Glacier Point in the eastern end of Yosemite Valley; by the end of the first season it had been renamed “Camp Curry.” The location was on the south side of the Merced River near the recently destroyed Stoneman House hotel on the site of a San Francisco family’s private camp.³⁵ The

²⁹ “Camp Curry To Continue Its Tour Service,” *Oakland Tribune* 19 May 1929, np, Box 549, Entry 10, RG 79, NARA.

³⁰ C.G. Thomson (Yosemite Superintendent) to the Director (Albright), 12 Dec. 1930, Box 552, Entry 10, RG 79, NARA.

³¹ As early as 1907, the Camp Curry letterhead featured the following text: “Camp Curry, Yosemite. A Hotel In Tents on the American Plan.” For an example, see: David A. Curry to Major H.C. Benson, 10 Jul. 1907, Box 286, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

³² For a history of Wylie’s pioneering efforts, see: Elizabeth Ann Watry, “More Than Mere Camps and Coaches: The Wylie Camping Company and the Development of a Middle-Class Leisure Ethic in Yellowstone National Park, 1883-1916,” thesis, Montana State University, 2010, accessed online, 21 Nov. 2012: <http://etd.lib.montana.edu/etd/view/item/1104>

³³ Schaible et al, 44.

³⁴ “Camp Curry Yosemite,” 1909, Box 1, Folder 2631, Series 8.8.2, YP&CC Collection, Yosemite Archives.

³⁵ Schaible et al, 45.

location had many desirable attributes, which David Curry listed in a 1907 letter to Secretary of the Interior James Garfield in response to a suggestion that the camp be relocated:

I have looked over Mr. Leighton's proposed site and would say that I would not be willing to move Camp Curry from its present site to that site or any other, for reasons hereinafter stated.

1st: Camp Curry had the first choice of location and made no mistake in its location as has been proved by nine years of successful business, and furthermore it was the first camping business in Yosemite.

2^d: With reference to nearness to points of interest.

3^d: With reference to freedom from mosquitoes. There is absolutely no point in Yosemite so free, of which I know.

4th: No other such camp site can be found with other conditions equal, amid lofty pines, firs, and cedars which leave a fresh carpet every spring upon the sandiest soil.

5th: I have told thousands of tourists that it is the finest camp ground God ever made, and I have not had any to dissent from that opinion. Its present location affords the best show ground for avalanches of fire from Glacier Point, and Curry's stentorian voice, both of which have become advertising features of its present location. Camp Curry, in its present location is the idol of my heart.³⁶

The Currys located the new camp at a point where the flat land along the Merced River began to rise in elevation in the direction of Glacier Point. The upward slope of the land at the base of the cliff is the talus pile formed by thousands of years of rockfalls from the upper portions of Glacier Point. The original camp was situated among trees on a relatively level site between the base of the talus pile and the intersection of two important roads in the valley. A photograph of the original camp as initially occupied in 1899 depicts a scattering of tents punctuated by tall conifers.³⁷

The larger backdrop of the scenery and ease of access to major points of interest, and the pleasant characteristics of the camp site itself, were the principal draws to Camp Curry in its earliest years. The 1899 image of Camp Curry in its first season shows tent accommodation that was hardly permanent (fig. 2). In the view are smaller tents with two roof planes and vertical side and end walls with light pole framing and ropes staked in the ground. There was one larger, marquee-style tent with decorative scalloped edging, which may have been used for dining or possibly dormitory-type lodging.³⁸ Guests at the camp

³⁶ D.A. Curry to Garfield, 24 Aug. 1907, Box 286, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

³⁷ See photograph in Schaible et al, 44.

³⁸ The Acting Superintendent of Yosemite National Park expressed displeasure about this type of accommodation at Camp Curry in a 1907 letter: the "tents are similar to those which were in use by the

were assembled casually, standing and seated on chairs, outside in an area cleared of major brush and debris. Any sense of permanence during its first decade primarily referred to its fixed location and elimination of the need for a tent and camping supplies for preparing meals. The 1909 brochure for Camp Curry explained that it was “a hotel camp which relieves its guests of the inconveniences connected with ordinary camp life” and the “convenience of such a camp, managed as a hotel[,] reduces to a minimum every objection even the most fastidious may offer.”³⁹

In just a decade, Camp Curry had begun a move toward greater permanence, yet it remained a relatively unassuming environment almost wholly dedicated to providing just meals and lodging for travelers exploring Yosemite. The Currys did make a number of significant investments at the camp, including: piped spring water and a rustic dining hall (1901); restrooms and a bathhouse with running water and connected to a septic system, and croquet grounds and a tennis court (1902); and a registration office with a veranda and stage coach loading platform (1904).⁴⁰

Each season also saw an ever-increasing number of tents for guest accommodations arranged somewhat more formally. After only a couple of seasons, the Currys began pitching tents over individual wood platforms with the aid of simple, stout wood frames along the sides.⁴¹ The platforms created a raised wood floor for otherwise conventional tents, offering a degree of added comfort, but, more importantly, also contributed to the camp’s more settled character.

A photograph on the cover of the 1909 brochure shows a broad clearing containing a handful of trees and bordered by two neat rows of tents facing each other (fig. 3). Toward the back of the clearing, the rows arced slightly inward. This type of enclosure was described in a caption for a photograph in the previous year’s brochure, an image that depicted a segment of marquee-style tents: “Camp Curry has an Entrance Street, which in the Rear Spreads into a Circular Amphitheater. This is a Section of Individual Tents in the Circle.”⁴² The photographs in the 1908 and 1909 brochures graphically record the existence of more than one size of tent at Camp Curry, conditions also documented in text

Yosemite Valley Railroad in housing their day laborers...and these tents were used by Mr. Curry by separating men and wives, putting all men in one tent and the women in another, where they are packed in like sardines.” David Curry clearly understood the shortcomings of this type of accommodation as he had explained to the Acting Superintendent in a letter the day before “These two large tents are used only in case of emergency, and have not been used over two or three nights this season, nor have they been used for one-half of their capacity.” Benson to Garfield, 11 Jul 1907, and D.A. Curry to Benson, 10 Jul. 1907.

³⁹ “Camp Curry Yosemite,” 1909.

⁴⁰ Schaible et al, 177-178.

⁴¹ While the remnants of the private family camp previously on the site of Camp Curry may have included tent platforms, the Currys did not begin building them until the 1902 season. See Schaible et al, 102, 177.

⁴² Camp Curry brochure, ca. 1908, Box 286, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

sources (fig. 4). In a July 1907 letter to Yosemite's acting superintendent, David Curry enumerated the tents and their capacities: sixteen four-person tents having the floor dimensions of 12' x 14'; fourteen 12' x 12' and eighty 9'-6" x 12' tents for two persons; twelve 9' x 9' tents for one person; and a handful of larger tents "used only in case of emergency."⁴³

Although the construction of wood service buildings and the use of fixed tent platforms began to give Camp Curry a more durable character, a stay there during its first decade or so of existence was a no-frills experience that relied on the beauty of the valley in overcoming any drawbacks with the accommodation and meals. By 1907, the restrooms and septic system introduced in 1902 were insufficient for the growth of the camp, as noted by the acting superintendent: "The sanitary arrangements at Camp Curry are exceedingly bad. There are but 10 bowls for 318 people which Mr. Curry says he can accommodate, which is a very inadequate supply. His cesspool is very small, not properly constructed and very unsanitary."⁴⁴ The Currys installed a new septic system in time for the 1908 season, but the health of the camp remained in question.⁴⁵ A lodging facility hosting hundreds of people not only required proper sanitation, but also the removal of kitchen waste and other garbage. Yosemite's acting superintendent echoed earlier opinions by his predecessor about the waste situation in a 1908 letter to the Secretary of the Interior:

I have inspected Camp Curry last summer and found [David Curry] had a horse stabled in his provision store-room, or his provisions stored in his stable, whichever you prefer...I have also found his garbage pit open with millions of flies swarming about it, and he had never heard, or at least he said he had never heard, of putrifying it by burning it out daily.⁴⁶

Guests not only had to contend with unpleasant and unhealthful sanitary conditions in Camp Curry's early years, but also with tents having the most minimum of furniture, some of which was crafted in an improvised manner. The 1908 brochure and a contemporary description of the accommodations by the acting superintendent are models for how

⁴³ D.A. Curry to Benson, 10 Jul. 1907.

⁴⁴ Benson to Garfield, 11 Jul 1907.

⁴⁵ For new septic system, see: D.A. Curry to Garfield, 23 Dec. 1907, Benson to Garfield, 8 Feb. 1908 and accompanying "Sketch of Plan for Sewage Disposal System at Camp Curry, Yosemite Park, Cal.," [ca. Jan-Feb. 1908], all in Box 286, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

⁴⁶ As quoted in a 1910 letter from Major Wm. W. Forsyth, then Yosemite's Acting Superintendent to James C. Needham, a United States Representative making an inquiry claims of "discrimination" against Camp Curry and its proprietors. Marshall O. Leighton, the Director and Chief Hydrographer of the U.S. Geological Survey, had expressed a similar and more detailed opinion on the issue to Secretary Garfield in 1907. See: Leighton to the Secretary of the Interior (Garfield), 22 Aug. 1907 and William W. Forsyth to J.C. Needham, 23 Apr. 1910, both in Box 286, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

written language in promotional materials could obscure reality.⁴⁷ The description was penned at the time that the Secretary of the Interior was considering what rates would be used at Camp Curry and other valley facilities in the coming season. The brochure noted that the “Tents have board floors and burlap carpets” in contrast to the description’s text, “The floor is made of rough lumber covered with gunny sack.” The two sources also diverged in details about the furnishings with the brochure stating that the tents “are supplied with washstands, chairs, mirrors, etc. The beds consist of spring mattresses mounted on couch legs, wool-top mattresses, sheets, pillows, blankets and comforts.” The letter about rates provided a different description: “These tents are equipped with the cheapest form of woven mattress placed on four legs made of 2 x 4 lumber, undressed; a wash stand, consisting of old boxes, (usually those used for canned tomatoes or canned fruit) the top having been split into four parts and nailed to the boxes to serve as legs; a camp stool, a small hand glass and a tin basin.” The makeshift quality of at least the beds and the storage seems to have been resolved within a year as the 1909 brochure indicated that iron beds and dressers had been placed in the tents.⁴⁸

The convenience of not having to travel with one’s own equipment and provisions undoubtedly increased the number of tourists contemplating and making trips to Yosemite. Still, a stay at Camp Curry during the first decade of the twentieth century was promoted as “camping” and intended not only for a cost-conscious, but also an intrepid traveler. Camp Curry’s 1908 brochure explained: “The camp is designed for those who, whether from necessity or inclination, wish to make their money go as far as it will. People who enjoy outdoor life, who know how to camp or wish to learn, should come to Camp Curry.”⁴⁹ The facility offered “plenty of clean plain, wholesome food adapted to outdoor mountain life,” but little else; “The camp is the place for the enjoyment of nature, and the necessary incidentals of eating and sleeping.” Aside from a tennis court and croquet grounds—a relatively low-cost investment laid out to the south of the dining hall by 1902—there were few provisions for activities beyond actively or passively enjoying the natural grandeur of Yosemite Valley.⁵⁰

The promotional materials emphasized: “no attempt is made at systematic entertainment of guests, though the evening camp-fire has furnished many an impromptu entertainment of merit.”⁵¹ The campfire gatherings in what was fast becoming a core of permanent buildings for guest services occurred in the open area abutting the south side of the office.⁵² The open area was the place where the Firefall could be periodically observed.

⁴⁷ Camp Curry brochure, ca. 1908, and Benson to the Secretary of the Interior (Garfield), 30 May 1908, both in Box 286, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

⁴⁸ “Camp Curry Yosemite,” 1909.

⁴⁹ Camp Curry brochure, ca. 1908.

⁵⁰ Schaible et al, 102.

⁵¹ “Camp Curry Yosemite,” 1909.

⁵² Schaible et al, 128.

This legendary spectacle, described in a 1921 Camp Curry brochure as “wonderful cataract of fire, falling from Glacier Point, directly above Camp Curry,” was revived by David Curry in the first years of the twentieth century.⁵³ Although the Firefall did not immediately become a daily event at Camp Curry—no doubt in part because of the labor involved with gathering fuel and managing the smoldering embers—it eventually became part of the “systematic entertainment” that would increasingly characterize the visitor experience during the 1910s and 1920s.

David and Jennie Curry understood that their inexpensive alternative to more expensive hotels in or near the valley and the convenience when compared with conventional camping meant that many prospective visitors needed to be informed of the casual lifestyle awaiting them at Camp Curry. While this business and others like it in Yosemite and other national parks were more economical than earlier lodging options, the people staying at Camp Curry would have been part of at least the leisured middle class, individuals and families with the means and position to take a vacation. These relatively affluent people would have had normal lives defined by middle-class respectability. Proper clothing was normally a key signifier of class, but unnecessary at a place focused on exploring the outdoors. The 1908 brochure counseled visitors: “A Texas girl says: ‘Tell them to bring their old clothes.’ Your clothing will get dusty. Be prepared for cool nights and mornings and warm days.”⁵⁴ The promotional material a year later stated more simply: “Conventional customs of dress are laid aside in Camp Curry.”⁵⁵ In the later 1910s and 1920s, as Camp Curry continued to expand, its amenities increased in number, and its character evolved, the Currys began providing a more explicit outline of useful and non-useful clothing while staying in Yosemite Valley.

The no-frills campground atmosphere during Camp Curry’s early years was not the only criterion that would have filtered out the less adventurous tourists as merely getting to Yosemite Valley was a relatively involved endeavor. Travel into Yosemite Valley remained exceptionally slow prior to 1907 with the opening of the Yosemite Valley Railroad, linking the city of Merced with El Portal on the western side of the park. When Camp Curry was established, most tourists traveled to Yosemite Valley on an arduous seventy-one mile, sixteen-hour journey by Yosemite Stage & Turnpike Company coaches run over the Wawona Road from a railroad terminus in Raymond, California.⁵⁶ In 1875, the Wawona Road joined the Coulterville and the Big Oak Flat roads (both completed in 1874) as one of the three primary routes into the valley.⁵⁷ The Wawona Road became the

⁵³ “Curry’s Yosemite Automobile Road Guide,” 1921.

⁵⁴ Camp Curry brochure, ca. 1908.

⁵⁵ “Camp Curry Yosemite,” 1909.

⁵⁶ Richard H. Quin, “Wawona Road, Yosemite National Park,” HAER No. CA-148, Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991, 7-8.

⁵⁷ Richard H. Quin, “All-Year Highway (El Portal Road),” HAER No. CA-150, HAER, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991, 3.

preferred route because of a number of stunning views on the approach and the ability to visit the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees.⁵⁸ Historian Richard Quin has observed that “the obvious route into Yosemite Valley, that is the Merced Canyon, was long rejected as a possibility on account of the rocky gorge and the river’s proclivity to flood.”⁵⁹

Still, the Merced River route held enough potential for investors that the Yosemite Valley Railroad was constructed as far as the park boundary at El Portal. A wagon road was built along the river within the park between the gateway community and the Coulterville Road and the route by train and stage quickly became the preferred one into the valley and, theoretically, an all-weather one. It would not be until the ban on automobiles within the park, started in 1907, was lifted in 1913 that there would be a strong impetus to significantly improve the El Portal road, culminating in the completion of the “All-Year Highway” in 1926. Automobile tourism would relieve many of the unpleasant aspects of travel into the valley and contribute to a significant makeover of Camp Curry between the 1910s and 1930s.

The “amusement center of Yosemite,” 1913-1936⁶⁰

On July 19, 1912—the middle of the high tourist season in Yosemite Valley—the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that Camp Curry “was partially destroyed by a fire this afternoon which originated in the laundry adjoining the dining room, where several hundred guests were at luncheon.”⁶¹ Before it was contained, the fire destroyed the laundry and seventy-five guest tents and heavily damaged the icehouse, bakery, and the original 1901 dining room.⁶² While the *Chronicle* stated that “the loss is estimated at \$4000, well covered by insurance,” the actual value of the buildings destroyed was considerably higher and they were not insured.⁶³ Still, David and Jennie Curry saw opportunity in this undeniable misfortune and, within a month, had submitted proposals to the government for an array of improvements to Camp Curry. Jennie Curry reflected in a 1923 letter to Director Mather that, because of the fire, “we did more building [in 1913] than we had ever done before.”⁶⁴ Based on a report that David Curry had prepared a year after the fire, the Curry Camping Company spent “between \$35,000 and \$40,000” on new

⁵⁸ Quin, “Wawona Road,” 8.

⁵⁹ Quin, “All-Year Highway,” 2.

⁶⁰ “Camp Curry, Yosemite National Park, California,” ca. 1936, Box 1, Folder 2630, Series 8.8.2, YP&CC Collection, Yosemite Archives.

⁶¹ “Camp Curry Nearly Destroyed by Fire: Seventy Tents and Baggage of the Guests Lost at Yosemite Summer Resort,” *San Francisco Chronicle* 19 Jul. 1912: np, Box 286, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

⁶² Schaible et al, 179.

⁶³ Schaible et al, 49, for lack of insurance. This source placed the losses at \$12,000.

⁶⁴ Jennie F. Curry to the Director (Stephen T. Mather), 23 Aug. 1923, Box 289, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

construction during the previous year.⁶⁵ This significant expenditure launched a two-decade-long transformation of Camp Curry. The efforts turned an enterprise focused solely on the enjoyment of Yosemite's natural beauty, whose primary amenities were tent accommodations, prepared meals, and toilets and bathing facilities, into "the amusement center of Yosemite."

In mid-August 1912, only a month after the fire, the Curry Camping Company, which the Currys had formally incorporated a year earlier, submitted "sketches and specifications" to the government's "Resident Engineer" for not only facilities lost or damaged in the fire, but also entirely new ones that marked a significant new direction in the guest experience. The projects outlined in the resident engineer's report included improvements to Camp Curry's service infrastructure, for example a partial reconstruction and expansion of the bakery to include cold storage and an ice plant.⁶⁶ The source of the fire and a vital component of any business dealing with guest accommodation—the laundry—was destroyed in the fire and would need to be replaced. Given its clear potential as a fire hazard, the laundry was pragmatically moved to a location to the east apart from the dining room and kitchen. The new building, "to be almost entirely of iron and concrete, making it almost fireproof," was planned to also include space for a machine shop and tool room. More notably, it also offered a barber shop and dressing rooms associated with a new swimming pool, the latter of which was the first facility aside from croquet grounds and a tennis court at Camp Curry providing a daytime recreation alternative to exploring the park. Likewise, the construction of a dance hall and auditorium created a sheltered location for the ultimate development of a program of evening entertainment distinct from the informal campfires in the open area to the south of the registration office.

With just the swimming pool and dance pavilion, the Curry Camping Company both began to redirect its business model and also give the camp a feeling of greater permanence. The dance hall/auditorium's design "indicate[s] a much better class and style of construction than has heretofore been used in any camps in the Valley."⁶⁷ Although the laundry and bath house building, in contrast, was described as not having "much architectural beauty," its low-slung profile and unremarkable cross gable form was intended as only a functional backdrop to the centerpiece of this area of expansion: a rectangular pool lined and bordered with river stones featuring a diving platform.⁶⁸ In 1913, the Curry Camping Company also modernized the sewer system, rebuilt the dining room, and added a second dining option in the form of a cafeteria; presumably the kitchen was also reconstructed at this time or at least expanded for the increased dining capacity.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ David Asherfey, Resident Engineer's report, 15 Aug. 1912, Box 286, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ See photograph of the "Laundry and Swimming Tank" in "Camp Curry Yosemite," 1915, Box 1, Folder 2630, Series 8.8.2, YP&CC Collection, Yosemite Archives.

⁶⁹ Schaible et al, 130, for dining room and kitchen.

This complex also featured a small store selling such things as groceries, soft drinks, tobacco, and reading material and maps as well as a photographic studio for developing and printing.⁷⁰

Although the Curry Camping Company needed, and received, federal approval for all of these projects, the extent of the changes was not uniformly supported. In October 1913, Major William T. Littebrant, Yosemite's Acting Superintendent, expressed his opinion to Secretary of the Interior Franklin T. Lane about the Curry Camping Company's desire to expand their concession:

The purpose of the Curry Camping Co., in this Valley is to conduct a hotel camp for the accommodation and convenience of tourists. For this purpose D.A. Curry has selected what he considers to be the best and most central portion in the Valley. It is about 1-1/8 miles from the village where all industries should be located except that pertaining exclusively to the management of a hotel camp...[The Yosemite Village concessions] are entitled to get their share of patronage from the patrons of Camp Curry. Curry is not justified in selecting an isolated portion of the Valley for his hotel camp, and then requesting authority to handle every article and supply every want of the tourists unless he pays a commensurate fee that will justify a corresponding reduction in the other concessions' fees in the park...It seems to me that the Curry Camping Co. should be informed that their business here should be exclusively confined to the hotel camp.⁷¹

Littebrant's position about fairness in the business scope of park concessions was justifiable, but it did not necessarily reflect the expectations and desire for convenience by guests staying at Camp Curry, whose daily lives included a growing number of commercialized leisure pursuits, including dance halls, movie theaters, and amusement parks. His opinion about reigning in the Curry Camping Company might have also likely resulted from near-constant discord between the government officials in Yosemite Valley and David Curry. In a November 1916 letter, Superintendent Washington B. Lewis characterized the nature of the Curry Camping Company as one imbued with an "attitude of selfishness," a "spirit of vindictiveness against imaginary wrongs," and an "apparent failure on their part to the play the game in the open."⁷² Lewis grudgingly admitted that Camp Curry was popular among park visitors, but qualified the statement with this

⁷⁰ The Curry Village CLR noted that the studio and store were included in the initial post-fire rebuild (Schaible et al, 130). In his August 1914 request for a lease in 1915, David Curry wanted permission to operate a "booth" selling various items, a news stand, and a picture studio as well as the rights to "sell some groceries and provide catering." It is not known what form these services took at this time, although they might have been accommodated in the new cafeteria building. Site plans with enough detail to show accurate building footprints do not exist for Camp Curry prior to the construction of a new store building around 1923. See the Secretary of the Interior (Walter L. Fisher) to Forsyth, 24 Feb. 1913 and D.A. Curry to Major W.T. Littebrant, 20 Aug. 1914, both in Box 286, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA, and Arno Cammerer (Acting NPS Director) to Lewis, 8 Jun. 1923, Box 288, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

⁷¹ Littebrant to the Secretary of the Interior, 30 Oct. 1913, Box 286, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

⁷² Lewis to the "Superintendent [Director] of the National Parks," 1 Nov. 1916, Box 287, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

observation: “In fact so popular does Camp Curry seem to be that Camp Curry guests appear to leave thoroughly inoculated with the same spirit of antagonism against all things not a part of Camp Curry as the Curry Camping Company itself.”

Problems with David Curry’s personality and style of leadership were longstanding in Yosemite, but lessened in 1917, initially, by granting the concession its first multiyear lease to operate and, then, with David Curry’s unexpected death. The former expressed a degree of support for the enterprise by the government and provided greater business stability and the latter forever silenced a key source of enmity in the valley. Foster Curry took over direction of the family-owned company, although his mother remained Camp Curry’s esteemed figurehead and managed its day-to-day operations. In the four years between his father’s death and his own forced and permanent departure from the business and Yosemite in 1921, Foster Curry not only sustained the trend of modernization and expansion started after the fire, but intensified it in ways that his father would have found unacceptable and with such vigor that it continued after his departure from Yosemite Valley.⁷³

Foster Curry made two important contributions to Camp Curry prior to 1917. The iconic entrance sign appeared in 1914 and is attributed to Foster; with some alterations, it remains a key feature of the visitor services area at the center of the camp. Although not as visually prominent, the rustic bungalow that Foster Curry built for his family in 1916 was a model for the future of guest lodging at Camp Curry.⁷⁴ The cabin was the first hard-sided accommodation at the camp, but in compromise to his father’s opposition to the project, the design originally had window openings without sash, rather fitted with roll-up canvas shades. Notably, it contained a full private bathroom, which, along with the hard-side construction and, initially, the windowless wall openings, would become features of the first two phases of bungalow construction in 1918 and 1919.

Foster began planning for the eventual construction of the bungalows in 1917, which was the first major reconsideration of the Camp Curry landscape since its founding. In that year, he built a hard-sided bungalow for his mother at what was then the eastern edge of the property in the vicinity of the Le Conte Memorial (1903-04). The memorial had been constructed in 1901 by the Sierra Club in honor of Joseph Le Conte, one of its co-founders, who died while staying at Camp Curry. Foster Curry also reconstructed and expanded his own recently constructed bungalow far up the talus slope that had been seriously damaged by a falling tree. At the far eastern edge of the camp, Foster oversaw the construction of a sawmill to provide cost-effective materials for his planned expansion and had hot water piped throughout the camp. The infrastructural improvements, the

⁷³ See Schaible et al, 56, for Foster’s departure.

⁷⁴ For a thorough discussion of the Foster Curry Bungalow, see information in: Fletcher, Farr, Ayotte, Inc., “Yosemite National Park, Curry Village Cabins: Historic Structure Report,” 14, 23-24. See also: “Foster Curry Cabin,” HABS No. CA-2181, Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1979 (photographs), 1984 (data sheet and sketch plan).

creation of an on-site source of building materials, the design experimentation with two hard-sided bungalows for members of the Curry family, and a spike in borrowed money all pointed to big changes at Camp Curry.⁷⁵

The Curry family bungalows were considerably removed from the areas of tent accommodation in location and architecture. The tent had been the principal structure type at Camp Curry since its first decade and a later variation—the tent cabin—is a character-defining feature of the landscape. The Currys steadily increased the number of tents in the first decades of the twentieth century with some notable episodic increases, such as in 1915 in anticipation of an increase in visitation related to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition held in San Francisco. About the time that Foster Curry built his bungalow in 1916, the camp featured approximately 540 tents that fully encircled the core of guest service buildings at the center and extended far to the east on relatively flat land as well as up onto the more dramatic landscape of the talus slope to the south.⁷⁶

Photographs for the brochure from the 1915 season suggest that while the pyramidal marquee-style tents common during the camp's earliest years still existed in the older parts of the camp, the new areas appear to have been largely made up of a second type of tent. This tent had gable ends at the front and back and half walls on the sides. It was covered by a "double roof" with a large piece of canvas stretched over the top of the tent proper and held in place by ropes. A wood platform and a simple wood frame along the sides gave the tent a degree of rigidity and permanence. Its back wall was fully enclosed and pierced by small window while standard front flaps could be fully rolled back (fig. 5). The inability to fully secure the tent flaps made petty theft a "quite common" problem during at least the 1916 season.⁷⁷ The phasing out of tent accommodation at Camp Curry was proposed at various times, but, in an altered and slightly more robust form known as a "tent cabin," the type remains in essential use to this day and is a character-defining feature of the site (fig. 6). The tent cabin employs a rigid interior frame constructed of two-by-fours and a standard hinged door at the front secured by a padlock, changes that made the long-term viability of the form at Camp Curry more certain even as more durable alternatives appeared.⁷⁸

As early as 1917, Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane proposed the full elimination of tents at Camp Curry. In the letter to David Curry granting the Curry Camping Company its first multiyear lease in 1917, Lane stipulated: "You will also be required to

⁷⁵ Schaible et al, 183.

⁷⁶ "Curry of Yosemite" (brochure), 1916, Box 1, Folder 2630, Series 8.8.2, YP&CC Collection, Yosemite Archives, for number of tents.

⁷⁷ Lewis to the "Superintendent of the National Parks," 1 Nov. 1916.

⁷⁸ In a November 1928 letter to Director Mather, Paul Farnsworth, a recent guest at Camp Curry, lodged a complaint about his tent being cleared out earlier than he had planned. The letter suggests that, by that time, the tents had been fitted with doors, but did not come equipped with a lock. See: Paul R. Farnsworth to Mather, 12 Nov. 1928, Box 549, Entry 10, RG 79, NARA.

reconstruct camp within two years and install tents of bungalow or tent-house type with heating facilities, screen doors, and locks, and put the units at least twenty feet apart in clear.”⁷⁹ In addition to the issue of theft, the closely spaced tents were thought to be a fire hazard and did not allow enough privacy among guests. David Curry objected to the “bungalow tents” or “tent-houses” required as part of his lease mainly on account of the cost, but also reflecting on the quality of the tent experience:

We could easily prove by the majority of people who come to Camp Curry that they prefer the ordinary white tent of Camp Curry to the dark bungalow tent houses or cottages which are proposed as a pattern for the change in Camp Curry. Most people, when summer camping, prefer ordinary tents to house like tents that are inclined to be both stuffy and dark.⁸⁰

In this response, Curry also referred to the form of accommodation recommended as “bungalow tents of the Desmond type,” suggesting that the hard-sided units with window openings not fitted with sash may have been first pioneered in the valley by his competitor D.J. Desmond.

For about a decade beginning in 1915, the Desmond Park Service Company (reorganized as the Yosemite Park Company in 1919), not only vied with the Curry Camping Company for business, but initially enjoyed the favor of Director Stephen T. Mather after the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916. Desmond had initially been granted permission to establish an “automobile camp” in the valley beneath Yosemite Falls having purchased the old U.S. Army buildings located there.⁸¹ It is now known whether this stock of buildings included “bungalow tents” or that Desmond devised a new form of accommodation as he established what became Yosemite Lodge. David Curry was resolutely opposed to them at Camp Curry and his letter explaining that stance to the Secretary of the Interior was, indeed, his final say on the matter since he died not long after it was penned. With the principal source of opposition to the new type accommodation silenced, Foster Curry advocated for the construction of hard-sided “bungalow tents” at Camp Curry. While these never replaced the densely packed groups of tents, the “bungalow tents,” later known simply as “bungalows,” provided a desirable alternative for lodging and a discernibly distinct approach to land use at Camp Curry.

On December 19, 1917, the Curry Camping Company requested permission to construct “twenty-five bungalow tent cottages, with baths and clothes closets.”⁸² Director Mather agreed to the proposed expansion the following month; however, he stressed: “this unit [of accommodation]...must not under any circumstances be regarded as other than a camp

⁷⁹ Lane to D.A. Curry, 7 Mar. 1917.

⁸⁰ D.A. Curry to the Secretary of Interior, ca. Mar-Apr. 1917, Box 287, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

⁸¹ Schaible et al, 180.

⁸² [“Mrs. D.A. Curry, on behalf of the Curry Camping Company”], “Memorandum for the Director,” 19 Dec. 1917, Box 287, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

establishment, and canvas must therefore be used in the walls of the structures therein” (fig. 7).⁸³ Mather and the recently deceased David Curry could at least agree on that topic.

In his January 1918 letter to Jennie Curry, Director Mather commented on the location of the intended expansion: “I see no other place for the construction of this unit of Camp Curry than the site now occupied by the LeConte Memorial Lodge or the forested area just west of this site.”⁸⁴ His approval of the project was contingent on the Curry Camping Company working out a solution with the Sierra Club about the “disposition of the LeConte Memorial Lodge,” which, once located outside the bounds of Camp Curry, now stood at its western edge and would soon be engulfed by the new expansion. The Sierra Club and Curry Camping Company entered months of negotiations about moving the lodge. These were concluded at the end of April 1918 when Jennie Curry herself paid \$3,500 to rebuild the lodge some distance to the east along the road to Yosemite Village.⁸⁵

During the same months in 1918, the design of the bungalow tents moved forward. Superintendent Lewis forwarded drawings of plans and elevations for the two types of duplex bungalows (one-bath and two-bath) to Director Mather in early April 1918.⁸⁶ Mather in turn submitted them to Edwin J. Symmes, a San Francisco Bay Area architect who had been working with Desmond’s Yosemite National Park Company for new buildings at Yosemite Lodge and the Glacier Point Hotel, which was completed in 1917.⁸⁷ Mather may have relied on Symmes’s expertise because of his familiarity with both the valley location and style of accommodation, but he may have been signaling his preference for the Desmond company by giving its contracted architect a degree of control with design review for additions to Curry Village.

At a time when organized park design, like the NPS itself, was in its infancy, there was a lack of internal expertise available on the matter and Mather logically looked outside the agency for assistance. Foster Curry, the driving force behind the development of this type of accommodation at Camp Curry, had gained relevant building experience overseeing the construction of his and his mother’s bungalows during the two previous seasons. Still, he was not a practicing architect and despite the overall straightforwardness of the bungalow tent’s design, Mather would not have been faulted in seeking an expert opinion on the

⁸³ Mather to Jennie Curry, 26 Jan. 1918, Box 287, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Schaible et al, 183; Lewis to Mather (telegram), 26 Apr. 1918, Box 287, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA. Designated a National Historic Landmark in 1987, the ca. 1918 relocation of the LeConte Memorial Lodge was particularly fortunate as its new site was located outside of the rockfall zone that would be established nine decades later. The existence of the building within the rockfall zone would have greatly complicated the decision making process about the fate of historic resources within the rockfall zone.

⁸⁶ Lewis to Mather, 8 Apr. 1918, Box 287, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

⁸⁷ Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (1956; reprint, Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1996), 588.

proposal. Symmes's employment by the Desmond company did not seem to impact his strong approval of the bungalow tent design at Camp Curry. In two communications to Mather on April 25, 1918, Symmes declared: "The rustic cottages are artistically designed, and placed among the trees as planned, will improve greatly the aspect of the camp" and the "design [is] exceedingly well adapted to harmonize with existing Curry buildings and with surroundings."⁸⁸ Mather informed Lewis that the "Bungalow plans for Camp Curry are approved as submitted" on May 1 and Lewis responded a week later with the news that "work has begun."⁸⁹ Twenty-two duplex bungalows and two fourplex bungalows were constructed in 1918, followed by four duplex bungalows in 1919, and, finally, eighteen duplex bungalows and one fourplex in 1922 or 1923.⁹⁰

The bungalow units were arranged in loose rows running, generally, along an east-west axis, parallel to the face of Glacier Point, and rising in elevation at first gradually and then more dramatically up the talus slope. Except for the row closest and oriented to what at the time of their construction was a major roadway connecting to Old Yosemite Village, opposing rows of bungalows faced each other across circulation pathways. These pathways, like the ones in the areas of tents, were mainly defined as the cleared space between the buildings rather than having a specific design rationale, although rocks were sometimes used to define the boundary between open space and areas of vegetation.

The design of the bungalows did much to bridge the boundary between the natural and built environments through the use of rustic local materials, the initial lack of glazed window openings, and pergolas that extended out over "wide porches where you can dream away the hours and watch the changes that sun and shadow make among the trees and along the cliffs" (fig. 8).⁹¹ The comparatively open landscape and low-key presence of the bungalows on the western side of Camp Curry would have contrasted significantly with the more densely packed sections of tent accommodations to the south and east, contrast similar to the character of districts of urban row house districts versus new, lower-density suburban subdivisions in metropolitan areas.

The bungalows were comfortable and modern, each originally having either a private bathroom or sharing one with the adjacent room. The brochure for the 1924 season offered this description: "They are well-constructed little cottages, with plenty of room in

⁸⁸ Edwin K. Symmes to Mather, 25 Apr. 1918, for "rustic cottages," and Symmes to Mather (telegram), 25 Apr. 1918, both in Box 287, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

⁸⁹ Mather to Lewis (telegram), 1 May 1918, and Lewis to Mather, 8 May 1918, both in Box 287, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

⁹⁰ Fletcher, Farr, Ayotte, Inc., "Yosemite National Park, Curry Village Cabins: Historic Structure Report," 15. For conflicting dates of construction for the third phase of bungalows between archival sources and published material, see: Elizabeth Ann Durbin, "Inspired by Nature, Threatened by Disaster: The 1918-23 Cabins in Curry Village, Yosemite National Park," thesis, University of Delaware, 2010, Chapter 4, accessed online, 21 Nov. 2012: <http://putnam.lib.udel.edu:8080/dspace/handle/19716/5713>

⁹¹ "Yosemite, Camp Curry: Where the Fire Falls," 1924, Box 1, Folder 2630, YP&CC Collection, Yosemite Archives. The brochure is an abridged version of a similar one from the same year having "1924" as part of its title.

which to settle down for a summer's enjoyment. You will find them comfortably and adequately furnished, ample in closet space...Hot and cold water, bath or shower, and modern sanitary appointments are included."⁹² The full transition from a "bungalow tent" to a "bungalow" occurred in 1921. Superintendent Lewis described the original wall construction in 1917: "frame work to be rustic with a rustic wall covered with bark up to a height of about three feet above the floor. For the walls it is the intention to use canvas curtains on rollers which can be moved up or down at will."⁹³ In 1921, the units constructed in 1918 and 1919 were fitted with casement sash; the last group of bungalows were fully enclosed from the time of their construction.⁹⁴

The third principal type of guest accommodation found at Camp Curry appeared in 1924. Superintendent Lewis wrote to Director Mather in early August 1924: "you will recall that for some years past we have urged the Curry Camping Company to consider, when the time came for replacement, to substitute a more attractive and practical accommodation for the ordinary tent now used in their cheaper accommodation. They have now developed a semi-bungalow plan which I think is a great improvement over their present type of tent."⁹⁵ The letter indicated that "Mr. Underwood" (Gilbert Stanley Underwood) designed a much-simplified version of the original, windowless bungalow tent. What became quickly known as the "bungette" was described at the time of its initial construction in 1924 as a "permanent structure consisting of a substantial frame work [*sic*]" having "side walls boarded roughly to a height of four feet above the floor, and with canvas curtains from there to the eaves."⁹⁶

Underwood was a private-sector architect who developed a close relationship with the NPS in the 1920s, sharing an office in Los Angeles with the design staff under Daniel P. Hull from 1923 to 1927. Underwood ultimately constructed a series of important

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Lewis to the Director, 23 Oct. 1917, Box 289, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

⁹⁴ Land and Community Associates, "Yosemite Valley Cultural Landscape Report," U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1994, 2-83.

⁹⁵ Lewis to Mather, 5 Aug. 1924, Box 545, Entry 10, RG 79, NARA.

⁹⁶ Ibid, for description. The cultural landscape report developed in 1994 for the Yosemite Valley notes that in 1924 "one-room wood frame cabins (without bath)" had been constructed. This is consistent with the timing of the letter from Superintendent Lewis to Director Mather. A 1925 map of Camp Curry noted the presence of seven "bungettes" in a grouping called "Azalia [*sic*] Circle" facing the main road running along the north side of the camp. All seven of these Underwood-designed bungettes remain extant at Camp Curry, although only three are in their original location. Land and Community Associates, *Yosemite Valley Cultural Landscape Report*, 2-83; "Plat, Camp Curry, Yosemite[,] Calif.," 1925, Yosemite Archives. This map was produced as part of the asset inventory conducted after the merger of the Yosemite Park Company and Curry Camping Company. See Schaible et al, 58, and Linda Wedel Greene, *Yosemite: The Park and its Resources, a History of the Discovery, Management, and Physical Development of Yosemite National Park, California* (Denver: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1987), Chapter V, accessed online, 21 Nov. 2012: www.nps.gov/yose/historyculture/lindagreene.htm

buildings both for the government and private park concessionaries including Yosemite's U.S. Post Office in Yosemite Village (1925) and the Ahwahnee Hotel (1925-27), constructed across the Merced River from Camp Curry. Only seven of the Underwood-designed bungalettes were ever constructed at Camp Curry (fig. 9). It is not known for certain why no others were constructed, although the merger of the Curry Camping Company and the Yosemite Park Company, completed in early 1925, probably affected the plan to replace the tents with bungalettes. The directors of the resulting Yosemite Park and Curry Company were immediately preoccupied with the merger and conducting an inventory of assets and then became fully consumed with the design and the construction of the Ahwahnee.

In 1927, the Yosemite Park and Curry Company began planning for additional bungalettes. Although authorized that year to construct one-hundred of them, they were likely not built until 1929-30.⁹⁷ A NPS plat map completed in 1930 indicates that over eighty bungalette units had been constructed on and around the site of the former tennis court and croquet grounds located at the foot of the talus slope to the south of the main concentration of guest service buildings (figs. 10 and 11).⁹⁸ The new bungalettes were of an entirely different design, completely hard-sided from the beginning and mostly paired in single buildings, although some individual units were also constructed. Underwood's design may have been abandoned because it was not easily translated into a fully hard-sided version and the concession sought an entirely new one.

The designer of the fully hard-side bungalette was Henry M. Carroll.⁹⁹ Carroll's 1948 obituary stated that he was "the construction superintendent for the Yosemite Park and Curry Company from 1914 to 1927."¹⁰⁰ It is not known whether Carroll was originally hired by the Curry Camping Company or the Desmond Park Service Company (Yosemite Park Company). If the start date in the obituary was correct, then it was likely the former as the Desmond Park Service Company did not become active in the park until 1915. Carroll may have superintended construction at Camp Curry during its significant expansion in the late 1910s and 1920s. This expansion not only included the reconceived tent and the devising of new types of accommodation, but also drastically modernized guest services at the establishment.

⁹⁷ Schaible et al, 188, 191, 193.

⁹⁸ The Yosemite Valley LR states that there were "87 rooms in separate cabins without heat or running water" at Camp Curry by 1930 (2-84). A plat of Camp Curry completed around the end of the 1930 tourist season represents approximately eighty-four units—mostly in pairs, but some also individual, in the "bungaliet [*sic*] group." If the graphic representation of this new area is correct, then the total number of rooms without baths at Camp Curry would have been ninety-one when including the seven original bungalettes. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Yosemite National Park, "Plat No. 1, Camp Curry Area," 1930, ETIC.

⁹⁹ Schaible et al, 188, note 377.

¹⁰⁰ "Henry M. Carroll Claimed by Death," *Merced Sun Star* 9 Oct. 1948, 1, transcription accessed online, 9 Nov. 2012, <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/CAMERCED/2004-05/1084127942>.

The increase in the capacity and quality of accommodation at Camp Curry was paralleled by its growth as a leisure center. While an August 1916 inspection of the camp harshly recorded unclean conditions in the kitchen and toilets and a fire hazard posed by “the crowded condition of the tents,” it also documented the extent of guest amenities at the time: “For the entertainment of his guests, he has a pavilion for dancing (this place has a splendid floor), three pool tables, three bowling alleys, [a] large swimming pool, one tennis court and one croquet ground...[and] also a soda fountain.”¹⁰¹ With the exception of the tennis court and croquet ground, all of these features had been constructed since the 1912 fire and represented the lead edge of a period of addition and alterations that would, along with improved accommodation, revolutionize the guest experience at Camp Curry.

Most guests at Camp Curry unsurprisingly spent the day exploring the natural wonders of Yosemite Valley, but options steadily increased for both daytime and evening entertainment. For people remaining in the camp during the day, they could play a game of croquet or tennis, go for a swim in the pool, or read on the veranda of the lounge. Upon David Curry’s death, the Curry Camping Company, under the direction of Foster Curry, began taking out loans for expansion of the facility.¹⁰² A great portion of this financing would have underpinned the construction of the first phase of bungalow tents in 1918, but a number of other improvements also followed.

In December 1917, the Curry Camping Company asked the National Park Service “for authority to construct an addition to [the] existing auditorium...in order that [the] bowling alleys and pool tables may be housed under permanent roof.”¹⁰³ It is not known when facilities for bowling and billiards appeared at Camp Curry, but the wording of this request suggests they were relatively impermanent in character. The project was approved and what became known as the “men’s lounge” was completed in 1918.¹⁰⁴ The men’s lounge was technically not an addition to the dance pavilion and auditorium. Rather, the somewhat idiosyncratic new building had a roughly L-shaped footprint that wrapped around south and west walls of the dance pavilion, but was not connected to it. An extension to the south of the south wing of the “L” featured a large river stone fireplace and provided a defined lounge area that was open to the bowling lanes and pool tables. The building expanded the evening activities available to guests and complemented the growing popularity of dancing in the adjacent pavilion and auditorium, which grew to a such a level that an “open air dance floor” extension was approved for construction in 1923.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ “Report of Inspector John A. Hill – dated 8-8-16,” handwritten on the back of a typescript titled “YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK,” beginning on page four, Box 287, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

¹⁰² Schaible et al, 183.

¹⁰³ “Memorandum for the Director,” 19 Dec. 1917.

¹⁰⁴ For a detailed discussion of the history of the men’s lounge, see: Fletcher, Farr, Ayotte, Inc., “Yosemite National Park, Curry Village Cabins: Historic Structure Report,” Nov. 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Cammerer to Hull, 21 Jun. 1923, Box 288, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

The dance pavilion and auditorium and men's lounge anchored one node of guest entertainment distinct from the campfire gatherings held each night at Camp Curry since its earliest days in the open area to the south of the registration building. The space was enhanced in 1915 when a platform for performers was constructed under the verandah at the southeast corner of the building; a more substantial stage was constructed by 1930.¹⁰⁶ By the 1920s, the campfire had long ceased being a simple event with no "systematic entertainment." It was still described as "informal" in a 1924 brochure, but the text suggests a more codified, if still somewhat variable, program:

A campfire...makes of those who seek its warmth and light a friendly gathering instead of a mere crowd. There orchestra or quartet holds forth melodiously; Mrs. Jillson delights the hearts of her audience with her stories; Glenn Hood sings popular ballads. Perhaps an impromptu vaudeville sketch is gotten up by people about camp, or some visiting musician or lecturer contributes an interesting bit.¹⁰⁷

No longer an episodic occurrence, the campfire concluded with the spectacle of the Firefall, which the National Park Service had reauthorized in 1917 after a four-year hiatus. The sanitized skits and songs around the campfire and Firefall display were tailor-made for families. A playground called the "Kiddie Kamp" also catered to families. It was established in 1921 on a site to the southwest of the men's club. The Kiddie Kamp featured playground equipment, eventually including a train on a loop of track around its perimeter, providing alternate daytime activities as well as staffed childcare.

The central core of buildings was largely reconstructed during the 1920s. On approval by the NPS, the Curry Camping Company constructed a studio selling photographic supplies and providing processing and developing facilities in 1918.¹⁰⁸ In 1921, a soda fountain, "candy kitchen," and "full equipped electric grill" were also operating in the studio.¹⁰⁹ By 1923, this building was felt to be inadequate for these varied uses and a new design was approved for a larger building containing a space for a studio, grocery store that included a soda fountain, and a grill.¹¹⁰ The irregularly shaped building featured two polygonal extensions—one facing north towards the road to New Yosemite Village that

¹⁰⁶ A 1930 site plan for Camp Curry indicates that a more imposing stage had been built out at an angle from the southwest corner of the building, having a footprint not unlike the current one. This stage was remodeled into its current form in the mid-1950s at which time fixed seating was added to the audience area to the south. Schaible et al, 51, 69, 70, 128; "Plat No. 1, Camp Curry Area," 1930.

¹⁰⁷ "Yosemite, Camp Curry: Where the Fire Falls," 1924.

¹⁰⁸ Mather to Jennie Curry, 26 Jan. 1918, for approval of studio addition to the concession; Symmes to Mather (telegram), 25 Apr. 1918, for approval of studio plans, both in Box 287, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

¹⁰⁹ Schaible et al, 184-185.

¹¹⁰ Cammerer to Lewis, 8 Jun. 1923, Box 288, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA, for new building; Schaible et al 185, for location of soda fountain in store.

accommodated the store and one oriented to the west and the main entrance into Camp Curry housing the studio. The studio portion was an “Eastman Kodak agency” that provided “film developing service” as well as sales of “pictures, cards and curios” and the store portion offered “a grocery, delicatessen, butcher and bakery departments, toilet articles and renting of hiking equipment.”¹¹¹

The inclusion of a variety of services had previously been a point of contention with the Curry Camping Company and the NPS. In 1923, Horace Albright, then the field assistant to the Director, and Superintendent Lewis conducted a study of the concessions in Yosemite National Park. Overall, their opinion of Camp Curry as a business and its proprietors was a positive one, observing that between 1906 and 1915 the company made “substantial profits each year, most of which, however, were being put back into the business in improvements in the way of additional equipment and permanent construction.”¹¹² They explained that, while the company’s first multiyear lease in 1917 “granted them practically every privilege they had been contending” for over a decade, the Curry Camping Company continued to push the limits of their concession:

However, even with the securement of this far more liberal franchise they continued to add to their demands with the aim of making Camp Curry a community center rather than a housing and feeding institution for its own guests. In addition to being in a position to provide service of all kinds for the accommodation of their own guests, they wished to be in a position to serve the general public, particularly those occupying the extensively populated public camping grounds.¹¹³

The study was part of an order by Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work to put an end to the constant jockeying and bickering between the Yosemite Park Company and the Curry Camping Company about the extent of their privileges as concessionaires.¹¹⁴ While Mather had previously favored the Yosemite Park Company, it had a rocky business history during its ten years of operation while the Curry Camping Company had proven itself to be well-managed and profitable. The relative stability of the Curry Camping Company and the quality of its leadership was confirmed when the two companies completed a merger in 1925 with Don Tressider, son-in-law of Jennie Curry, as the combined venture’s president.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ “Yosemite, Camp Curry 1924: Where the Fire Falls,” 1924, Box 1, Folder 2630, Series 8.8.2, YP&CC Collection, Yosemite Archives, for services and bird’s eye view showing the arrangement of studio and store in the new building.

¹¹² Horace Albright and Washington B. Lewis, “Report on the Franchise Situation, Yosemite National Park,” 27 Mar. 1923, 4, Box 288, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹⁴ Schaible et al, 58.

¹¹⁵ For more about the merger, see also: Runte, Chapter Ten, “Sanctuary on Trial.”

The extent of this new concession included nearly all the guest accommodations and services in Yosemite Valley and at last quieted the discontent about what Camp Curry should and should not be doing as a business. In a ca. 1926 article, the *Mariposa Gazette* provided a succinct summary and justification of the merger:

At the present writing the Yosemite Park and Curry Company operates all the concessions in the Park with the exception of three photographs [*sic*] studios, Degnan's store and the Standard Oil Stations. This is due to the policy of the Park Service, which, in effect, is to have one strongly financed public utility operator in each park so that the government can more easily control and supervise their activities and so that tourists would not constantly be subjected to competitive selling efforts by rival concessionaires. Another advantage of the one operator policy is that private capital is more willing to invest, thus insuring sufficient money for development of tourist facilities.¹¹⁶

Among the major projects pursued at Camp Curry following the merger was the reconstruction of the dining complex. The dining complex had been updated and modernized in a piecemeal way since its rebuilding after the 1912 fire and by the mid-1920s no longer met the needs of increased tourism. The Yosemite Park and Curry Company announced in 1926 that it would be rebuilding the dining complex as part of a campaign of improvements felt to be necessary "to accommodate the ever increasing demands made upon the popular resort."¹¹⁷ At the end of the 1928 tourist season, the complex was razed and a new dining room, cafeteria, and a concrete "fireproof" kitchen completed over the winter.¹¹⁸ The *Oakland Tribune* glowingly reported on the new dining hall seating 750 in May 1929: "The Camp Curry dining room suggests recreation in the great out-of-doors of Yosemite rather than a mere dining hall."¹¹⁹

The ease of travel to Camp Curry and level of comfort while staying there was changing the type of tourist attracted to the valley, many of whom were from urbane metropolitan areas. The Yosemite Park and Curry Company furnished prospective visitors a more detailed outline of typical dress than the concession felt compelled to provide earlier in the century when accessing the valley was less convenient and the camp was considerably more rustic. The 1927 brochure for Camp Curry explained that "you are perfectly free to wear whatever you find comfortable," but that in the evening men still commonly wore an "ordinary business suit or flannels" and women were attired in "sport clothes or simple dresses."¹²⁰ Men were straightforwardly instructed that "dress clothes are never worn,"

¹¹⁶ "Outline History of Yosemite," *Mariposa Gazette* LXXXI:1 (undated, ca. 1926): 6, Historic Newspaper Collection, 1926-1927, Yosemite Archives.

¹¹⁷ "Camp Curry to Spend \$150,000 for Repairs," *Oakland Tribune* 9 Sep. 1926, np, Box 545, Entry 10, RG 79, NARA.

¹¹⁸ Schaible et al, 60.

¹¹⁹ "Camp Curry To Continue Its Tour Service," *Oakland Tribune* 19 May 1929.

¹²⁰ "Camp Curry" brochure, 1927, Box 1, Folder 2630, Series 8.8.2, YP&CC Collection, Yosemite Archives.

while women were more lightly counseled that “party gowns are rarely seen.” Everyday life in the 1920s was formal enough, even for the middle class, that guests needed guidance about packing for a stay at Camp Curry beyond the basics of climate and weather.

The communications and utility networks and systems were also significantly modernized during this period. A “seasonal branch” post office had been established at Camp Curry in 1909; however, by the end of 1919, the National Park Service sought to reclassify the Yosemite Village post office as a second-class post office in an effort to increase mail efficiency and raise the status of the one at Camp Curry to a “branch post office.”¹²¹ This action seems to have also necessitated the construction of a new standalone post office, completed in 1920.¹²² The year was also a benchmark for the introduction or upgrades to utilities: long distance telephone, telegraph service, the construction of a refrigeration plant to produce ice, and the “complete” electrification of the camp, which included the construction of a ponderous, castellated transformer “bunker” located within the new section of bungalows.

The modernization of Camp Curry in 1920 also addressed what was fast becoming the major mode of transportation for accessing Yosemite Valley with the construction of a massive storage garage for automobiles.¹²³ In 1913, the U.S. Army lifted a ban on automobiles in the park that it had enacted in 1907, but stipulated they had to be parked in a garage when not in use.¹²⁴ Almost immediately, David Curry requested permission to construct a garage, but the company was denied until 1920 at which time it built a structure large enough to accommodate 240 automobiles. The rustic-style building had a U-shaped footprint with parking in the two wings and service area in the middle fronted by a canopy sheltering people while filling their cars with gasoline. The parking structure was located across the main road to the north of Camp Curry facing the road to New Yosemite Village. A road guide issued by the Curry Camping Company in 1921 advertised the garage: “Camp Curry’s new permanent storage garage with an attendant always in charge will be available at a fee of fifty cents per day.”¹²⁵

The need for this type of facility was short-lived. A newspaper article from the early 1920s proclaimed: “At last the motor car is coming into its own in Yosemite Park. And as

¹²¹ Cammerer to Jennie Curry, 29 Dec. 1919, Box 287, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

¹²² Charles P. Punchard to Mather, 24 May 1920, Box 287, Entry 9, RG 79, NARA.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Schaible et al, 49, 180-181.

¹²⁵ “Curry’s Yosemite Automobile Road Guide,” 1921.

a result the privately owned machines this year, for the first time, have carried more persons into the great National reserve than the railroad and auto stages combined.”¹²⁶ By the end of the 1920s, the number of automobiles arriving in Yosemite Valley overwhelmed the capacity of the garages at Camp Curry and elsewhere in the park and open surface lots became the only feasible solution. Two spacious, adjacent parking areas (Orchard and Central) were completed at Camp Curry in 1929 and the garage, less than a decade old, was significantly altered.¹²⁷ A 1930 plat map for Camp Curry shows that the south wing of the building had been removed and a small tire shop constructed in its place and the number of pumps in the filling area increased (see fig. 11).¹²⁸ The north wing of the structure was still labeled “garage,” although it is not known whether it was still used for storage or was for service only.

The rapid increase of automobiles in Yosemite Valley in the 1920s reflected both the general expansion of car ownership in the United States during that decade as well as the construction of a modern highway between Merced and the valley. The highway required the significant improvement of the wagon road from El Portal within the park and the difficult construction of a road along the Merced River between Mariposa and El Portal. As early as 1909, Yosemite’s Acting Superintendent believed that “the need of a good highway from El Portal...still overshadows all the other needs of the park.”¹²⁹ Some improvements were made to the road after automobiles were allowed back into the park in 1913, but it was subsequent lobbying by automobile associations and driving clubs, and the dedication of the NPS to auto tourism after its founding in 1916, that ultimately led to the creation of the highway.

The NPS realized early-on the potential of the automobile for park visitation. During the decade following its creation, the agency engaged in a number of campaigns to widen, straighten, and shore-up the bed of the El Portal Road and provide smoother and more durable paving.¹³⁰ A 1921 booklet about Yosemite National Park noted the improved road between the valley and El Portal: “A beautiful macadam highway, which follows the tumultuous course of the [Merced] river, has been built by the government, running between Arched Rocks, past Elephant Rock, looming 1,500 feet above, and leading finally to ‘Gates of Yosemite’, that marvelous landscape where Yosemite Valley is first seen.”¹³¹ An automobile guide issued by the Curry Camping Company around the same time

¹²⁶ Untitled and undated (ca. 1920-23) newspaper article, Historic Newspaper Collection, Aug. 1920-Sep. 1923, Yosemite Archives.

¹²⁷ See Part I:A:2, “Major periods of development and the shapers of the landscape,” for more information on this parking area.

¹²⁸ “Plat No. 1, Camp Curry Area,” 1930.

¹²⁹ As transcribed in Quin, “All-Year Highway,” 4.

¹³⁰ Quin, “All-Year Highway,” 5-10.

¹³¹ Robert Sterling Yard, “An Appreciation of Yosemite National Park,” in *Yosemite National Park Booklet* (National Parks Association, 1921), 5, Folder 456, Series 4.3, YP&CC Collection, Yosemite Archives.

extolled the virtues of experiencing Yosemite National Park—a “motorist’s paradise”—by car:

Within easy access of every motorist in California is one of the beauty spots of the world. There is no excuse for any man or woman possessing an automobile not making the trip to the Yosemite Valley. For a summer vacation nothing could be more ideal. The roads are good from almost any point in the State...A motor vacation to the Yosemite combines the pleasures of all other vacations...The well-graded mountain roads and liberal Government regulations make for safety, and no motorist need hesitate making the trip. Under the present regulations motorists have practically the freedom of the Valley.¹³²

As wonderful as the road seemed by 1921, the NPS continued to improve it over the next five years as California forced the new highway up the narrow and twisting Merced River valley from Mariposa. In 1926, the “All-Year Highway” was completed, providing year-round access to Yosemite Valley and significantly increasing visitation to the park.¹³³ The *Los Angeles Times* excitedly reported on the road’s opening: “It is difficult indeed to find words with which to describe the scenic wonders along this wide and easy grade...No less is it difficult for those who have followed the steep and twisting one-way roads of other days into the valley, to conceive of the broad turns and imperceptible gradients of this newest of roads.”¹³⁴

Conclusion

By the early 1930s, Camp Curry’s period of phenomenal growth and modernization was coming to a close. Its range of guest services and accommodation afforded an ever-increasing number of visitors a cost-effective and convenient option for enjoying Yosemite Valley. The ease of traveling to and staying in the valley was viewed as an improvement to most, but some people longed for a less connected era in the park. In September 1920, E.A. Richon wrote to the editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle* from Yosemite Valley expressing dismay about the proliferation since 1901 of such emblems of modern life as electric poles, wires, and lights, and “elegant stone bridges” that “do not harmonize with rugged nature.”¹³⁵ Mentioning the landscape of Camp Curry specifically when viewed from Glacier Point, Richon observed: “the most conspicuous objects in sight are the swimming tank and [a] group of buildings of Camp Curry (including a laundry, planing mill and garage), and apple orchards symmetrically planted in the form of squares and rectangles.” The perennial tension within the national parks between the conservation of the landscape and its enjoyment was already securely in place at Yosemite.

¹³² “Curry’s Yosemite Automobile Road Guide,” 1921.

¹³³ Quin, “All-Year Highway,” 10.

¹³⁴ Charles H. Owens, “Yosemite Will Be All-Year Mecca for Motorists Traveling New Road,” *The Times* (Los Angeles), undated (1926), Historic Newspaper Collection, 1926-1927, Yosemite Archives.

¹³⁵ E. A. Richon, “Making Yosemite Prosaic and Unpicturesque” (letter to the editor), *San Francisco Chronicle* Sep. 1920, np, Historic Newspaper Collection, Aug. 1920-Sep. 1923, Yosemite Archives.

Camp Curry retains the qualities its owners and proponents had achieved by the late 1920s (fig. 12).¹³⁶ The landscape has been far from static as buildings and structures have appeared, disappeared, been replaced, or been moved, but the sense of the place—an informal collection of tents and rustic structures and buildings scattered among the conifers under the looming edge of Glacier Point—can still be experienced more-or-less in the same way as in 1936. Certainly, its comparative level of comfort or modernity has shifted overtime as new facilities have been constructed elsewhere in the valley—for example with the completion of the nearby and luxurious Ahwahnee Hotel (1927) or mid-century replacement of the main buildings at Yosemite Lodge (1956)—yet, Camp Curry has remained popular as a camp and a center from which to explore the park.

Unlike many historic tourist centers nationwide—both inside and outside the parks—Camp Curry’s primary threat is not its popularity and the demands of the contemporary tourist-visitor. Rather, as concluded in the recent Curry Village CLR, “the most difficult and unpredictable constraint [in managing the facility] has always been the very thing that has made Camp Curry profitable: its physical location.”¹³⁷ As Camp Curry moves forward in its second century of existence, serious decisions will be made about the extent of the threat from unstable rock above and the unpredictable river below and the value of the pioneering camp to the cultural history of Yosemite National Park.

PART II: PHYSICAL INFORMATION

A. Landscape character and description summary:

Camp Curry, which will be referred to by its current name of Curry Village in PART II, is a large tourist camp at the base of Glacier Point in the east end of Yosemite Valley in Yosemite National Park. It is composed of hundreds of buildings and structures, a majority of which are very small-scaled, canvas-covered tent cabins. More substantial hard-sided buildings are found throughout the camp, with a large concentration at the center. These are deliberately unassuming and range in architectural style from blandly rustic to almost whimsically so. The bulk of Curry Village was constructed and reconstructed on an as needed basis and the overall character of the camp is informal and unplanned. The portions of the facility related to automobile circulation, located mainly to the north of the guest services and accommodation, show the most cohesive engineering. Still, against the backdrop of one of the most spectacular natural landscapes in the United States, Curry Village seems comparatively inconsequential.

The core of the camp is located in an area of flat land only elevated slightly above the floodplain of the Merced River. Even with a significant portion of the facility extending up onto the talus slope, most of the camp is effectively screened by a mixed deciduous and coniferous forest and overshadowed, literally, by the presence of Glacier Point rising

¹³⁶ Schaible et al, 11.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

3,200 feet above the valley floor. In general, views out from inside the camp are also limited, although there are some notable exceptions. The 2010 Cultural Landscape Report for Curry Village explained: “although the majority of views from within Curry Village are characterized by close foreground views with a discrete range of vision, there are some expansive and panoramic viewing opportunities.”¹³⁸ In the coming years, the landscape of Curry Village will change in consequential ways that will be barely perceptible when comprehended against the natural landscape, yet will represent an immense loss of tangible cultural history within Yosemite Valley and the history of tourism within the national parks.

B. Landscape Characteristics and Features

1. Natural systems and features (climate, geomorphology/geology, and vegetation):

The 2010 Cultural Landscape Report for Curry Village found that three elements or conditions present in the natural systems had great effect on the location and appearance of the camp: climate, geology and geomorphology, and vegetation.¹³⁹ The climate of Curry Village is generally cooler than other areas of Yosemite Valley, in no small part because of its position on the south side of the valley under Glacier Point. This was desirable in both summer months as it was a comfortable respite from the sun and heat as well as winter months when it was assured of colder temperatures and longer lasting ice and snow for winter sports.

The geomorphology of the granite cliff face of Glacier Point contributed to the creation of the talus pile at its base and the recent designation of a rockfall zone within Curry Village. Glacier Point offers an awesome scenery for the camp during the day and, for many years, was a key component of a major nighttime activity: the Firefall. The former Ledge Trail—a more direct, but always a dangerous route to the top of Glacier Point and closed and not maintained by the park since the mid-twentieth century—cuts steeply across the cliff above Curry Village. The geology of the granite boulders—as a collection in the form of the talus pile and scattered individually across the surface of the ground—presented variety within the camp as it required casual, even random siting of cabins in contrast to the more regular rows in the flat area off the talus slope.

Finally, vegetation, in the form of a mixed coniferous and deciduous forest shades the camp and obscures much of its extent when viewed from the north, closer to Merced River. In the flat area below the talus pile, the forest is primarily made up of ponderosa pine and incense-cedar, which has been steadily overtaking the California black oak—the formerly dominant native species. On the talus pile, Canyon live oak is the most common tree species. In addition to these type of

¹³⁸ Schaible et al, 158. Much of the basic descriptive data in PART II was underpinned by information contained in the 2010 Cultural Landscape report, particularly 91-108 and the individual resource descriptions.

¹³⁹ Schaible et al, 91-96 for discussion of natural systems and features, 96 for summary.

trees, California laurel and Douglas-fir are found in the tree canopy and Mountain dogwood, a native species found naturally in the understory, often appears in the landscaped beds around buildings in the camp. The rocky woodland setting of Curry Village had a greater influence on the development of a rustic architectural tradition there than, for example, the meadows to the north along the Merced River.¹⁴⁰ Additionally, the trees themselves were milled into lumber used to construct buildings, such as the bungalows (1918-23), and “native vegetation became not only an architectural inspiration, but it physically *became* architecture.”¹⁴¹

- 2. Spatial organization and cluster arrangement:** Curry Village is organized in a way that is both linear and nodal in organization, although a sense of the former has been lessened through far-reaching changes to the vehicle approaches and circulation since its founding and a sense of the latter is obscured by the sprawling quality of the facility and its components and the natural screening provided by the trees.

When established, the tourist camp was positioned south of the main road running west to east along the south side of Yosemite Valley between (Old) Yosemite Village and Happy Isles near its intersection with the road connecting to the north side of the valley via the Stoneman Bridge over the Merced River. In time, the original camp became the core of permanent guest service buildings and its lodging areas pushed out to the east, south, and west. Hemmed in by a major road to the north and a natural barrier—the increasingly steep topography of the talus slope and base of Glacier Point—to the south, its boundaries pushed far to the east and west of the central core. Until the 1910s, the camp’s expansion was limited to the area south of the main road and its footprint became increasingly broad along the principal east-west axis while remaining comparatively shallow north to south. This linear process of development began changing in the 1920s as it expanded to the north principally to meet the demands of the driving public and, to a lesser extent, for new areas of employee lodging.

Within this general, linear pattern of development, a number of distinct landscape clusters emerged because of topography or features of the built environment. A complex of major guest service buildings and amenities exists at the center of Curry Village. The complex contains a mixture of historic buildings adapted for modern use and more recent ones that replaced earlier ones with similar functions; most of them can be described, in architectural terms, as “rustic,” to varying degrees. A dense area of accommodation—made-up mostly of tent cabins sheathed in white canvas interspersed with wood-sheathed bathroom and shower buildings—spreads out in the flat land to the east. To the west of the core is the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 95-96

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 96.

precinct of duplex and fourplex bungalows built between 1918 and 1923, which are linked by a similar architectural vocabulary and less crowded arrangement of units.

In contrast to these areas of Curry Village on relatively flat land, which are principally defined by the types of buildings or their function, the architectural distinctions between the areas of Curry Village built on the talus slope is secondary to the topography. The limits on density and the visual variety provided by the gradient, and rocks and boulders, of the talus slope obscure boundaries between areas made up of three main types of accommodation available at Curry Village. The tent cabins on the east side are scattered among the large boulders on an area known as the "Terrace," an area that was largely used over time for employee housing. The center, just to the south of the guest service core, features a large collection of hard-sided bungalows, and the upper ranges of bungalows are present in the west. The topographic link between these areas of diverse accommodation has become an official one with the establishment of the rockfall zone, most of which is the part of Curry Village on or immediately adjacent to the talus slope.

The camp began expanding north of the main road in a piecemeal manner and individual clusters to the north are somewhat more defined. The center of this area contains the main drive into Curry Village and its traffic loops as well as the ice rink, which was constructed on the site of the original parking structure. A wetland area bordered with trees buffers the entrance road from the main parking area, which is visually distinct as it was constructed in an existing orchard altered in the 1920s for surface parking. This feature remains a particularly discernible one from the top of Glacier Point. To the east of the orchard is an area guest accommodation known as "Boys Town" that started life as an area of employee housing for men. The closure of the main road to most automobiles and the conversion of Boys Town for guest use lessened the division between it and the historic area of guest accommodation to the east of the core and they are now more-or-less visually and functionally contiguous. The Huff Area stands at the other end of Curry Village between Southside Drive and a linear collection of small parking lots constructed over what had been the main road. The Huff Area contains a mixture of historic and modern buildings and structures used for employee housing.

- 3. Land use:** Land use at Curry Village can be roughly divided into three primary functions: guest services, automobile circulation, and guest and employee housing. The most intensely developed part of Camp Curry, not coincidentally the oldest part of the camp, is the central area of guest services and amenities. The construction and reconstruction of buildings and features, the need for a variety of modern utilities and systems, and a high level of use have resulted a considerably altered natural landscape. Similarly, the intense use and demands of the automobile have affected the network of roads, approaches, and parking areas to the north of the core. Spreading out from the center core are areas of guest and

employee housing that, although comparatively have had less of an impact on the natural landscape, are still considerably changed with the construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of accommodation, bathroom and shower facilities, and roads and pathways.

- 4. Circulation:** Circulation at Curry Village is defined by a collection of primary and secondary roads, and both defined as well as more informal pedestrian walks and pathways. With the exception of the paved service/emergency road arcing partially around the central core of buildings, hard-topped roads and pathways are limited to the major drives and vehicular areas for the public and the pedestrian pathways connecting the major buildings and principal parking areas and drives at the core. While most of the packed earth roads in the areas of guest accommodation are wide enough to admit emergency and service vehicles, Camp Curry was intended and remains a pedestrian oriented place to the south of the former main road and a car oriented place to the north.

Originally, vehicles could enter directly into the center of the camp from the main road—the platform for loading and unloading stagecoaches was attached to the guest lounge and registration building. Steadily increasing automobile traffic in Yosemite Valley and arriving at the camp during the 1910s and 1920s led significant changes in approach and circulation to ease travel and to mitigate road noise that might negatively impact the guest experience at the facility. A bypass road, completed in 1929, routed through traffic to the north of the camp; only remnants of the main road in the area of Curry Village survive on the extreme eastern and western ends. Automobiles arriving at the camp also used the new bypass road before turning onto the road that connected the camp with the Stoneman Bridge and the northern part of Yosemite Valley. In the 1920s, this road was completely reengineered with approaches for a massive parking structure and service station, and a large new surface parking area constructed in and adjacent to an existing orchard. The reengineered road essentially became the tourist camp's driveway with car and bus traffic directed into loops in front of the service core or the parking areas rather than into the camp itself. This system of segregated public vehicle circulation remains essentially in place.

- 5. Buildings and structures:** Curry Village is made up of hundreds of buildings structures. With the exception of the large, multipurpose guest service building containing such things as the dining room and swimming pool, very few of the buildings can be described as large-scale and the mass of even this building is broken up and its actual extent is obscured. The types of buildings at Curry Village fall into two primary categories: guest services and amenities, and their associated offices, and residential, both for guests and employees. A majority of the non-residential buildings are located at the center of Camp Curry and constructed and sheathed in wood. These are deliberately unassuming and range in architectural style from blandly rustic to almost whimsically so.

There are four principal types of residential accommodation at Curry Village: tent cabins, bungalettes, duplex and fourplex bungalows, and larger bungalows that were originally constructed for members of the Curry family or high-ranking individuals working for the company and are now divided into housing units for concession employees. Examples of all of these types of accommodation are found within the rockfall zone and will either be moved or destroyed. Pages 20 to 26 in Section I:B (Historical Context) of this report provides an understanding of the history and physical appearance of the three types of guest accommodation. While examples exist outside the rockfall zone and will remain extant, the eventual disappearance of most of the hard-sided bungalows and bungalettes represent a considerable loss to the cultural history of Curry Village and Yosemite National Park.

The more substantial historic buildings within the rockfall zone that will likely be lost include: the Foster Curry Bungalow (1916-17); the Women's Club (1922); the Rufus Green Bungalow (1922); and the Nob Hill Cabin (Cabin 101, ca. 1925-28).¹⁴²

The **Foster Curry Bungalow** was the first hard-sided accommodation at the camp, although, as originally constructed, it did not have windows fitted into the large wall openings and became one of the models for the relatively short-lived concept of the "bungalow tent." Built up against and partially incorporating two large boulders into its structure, the one-story building has an irregular U-shaped plan. A main room featuring a stone fireplace, beadboard paneling, and French doors that open onto a spacious front porch is linked to a nearly free-standing room to the west by a spacious bathroom with original fixtures and a small kitchenette in what had once been an open, covered porch/breezeway. A second bathroom and dressing area—with some older fixtures, but not as opulent as in the other bathroom—extends out to the east of the main room. The building has an unpeeled log frame infilled with bark and log slabs. More recent wall construction and repairs have been done with a textured plywood, the complex assemblage of roof planes sheathed in asphalt shingles, and some of the original wood casement windows have been replaced with aluminum sliders.

The **Women's Club** is located on an area of the talus slope known as the Terrace, which had historically been area of female employee accommodation. It was constructed as a lounge and club house for these employees and later used as a kitchen, dining area, and men's and women's comfort stations for concession employees. The rustic building has a wood frame infilled with tongue-and-groove siding and embellished with log detailing. The roof is sheathed in asphalt shingles, and the original sash replaced with aluminum windows.

¹⁴² See more detailed descriptions in Schaible et al, 112-113, 119-122.

Yosemite Superintendent Lewis sent a copy of the design for the **Rufus Green Bungalow** to the NPS director for approval in mid-July 1922, stating: “this bungalow is considerably larger than any of those built in the past and of a somewhat different type of construction.”¹⁴³ Instead of cedar poles with the bark still attached, the Curry Camping Company intended to use peeled pine with sheathing of shingles, perhaps because of a scarcity of cedar after the recent construction of the duplex and fourplex bungalows. The gables and window frames were embellished with peeled long sills, lintels, and jambs.

The building was constructed as a spacious duplex—one side for Rufus Green, the accounts manager for the Curry Camping Company and a cousin of Jennie Curry’s, and the other as a guest rental—with each side having an enclosed room, a sleeping porch, a full bathroom, and a closet. A third room at the center-rear behind the bathrooms was a screened porch folded into Green’s unit, which also featured a fireplace constructed of the same river stone used for the foundations and front porch footings. All of the window and wall openings were later fitted with aluminum windows and the roof is asphalt shingle. If the treatment of the front was similar to the smaller, roughly contemporary guest bungalows, then the porch was likely embellished with a pergola, later removed.

The **Nob Hill Cabin (Cabin 101)** is a two-room building with a bathroom addition and was constructed sometime between 1925 and 1928, likely as the lodging for the Nob Hill shower house caretaker. The long narrow building has a low-pitched gable roof and a smaller cross gable over the bathroom extension to the north. The modest building has numerous generations of wood siding and features both original wood casement sash as well as later wood and aluminum sash. The roof is sheathed in asphalt shingles.

Finally, vital to the function of a tourist camp are comfort stations. A number of historic, although altered, comfort stations are extant at Camp Curry, two of which are within the rockfall zone and will likely be lost: the 400s Comfort Station at the base of the Terrace and the Comfort Station at “The Rock.”¹⁴⁴ The 400s Comfort Station existed by 1925, although it is not known whether its current T-shaped plan is original. The Comfort Station at “The Rock” near the 1929-30 bungalows was constructed in 1935 and replaced an earlier facility on the same site. Both of the buildings feature low-pitched gable roofs and walls with defined bays articulated by vertical posts that framed a clerestory window with shingle infill below. The rear (south) wall of the facility at “The Rock,” facing the large adjacent boulder, is a windowless board-and-batten wall.

¹⁴³ Lewis to the Director (Mather), 12 Jul. 1922, Box 287, Entry 9, RG 97, NARA.

¹⁴⁴ Schaible et al, 121, 126.

6. **Views and vistas:** The 2010 Cultural Landscape Report noted that the spread of conifers across the meadows and wetlands along the Merced River, in particular, has greatly reduced many of the long views out from Curry Village to key features across the valley to the north.¹⁴⁵ Still, some significant views and vistas can still be enjoyed from the camp and its vicinity.

It is possible to view Yosemite Falls, North Dome, Royal Arches, and Washington Column along the portion of the pedestrian trail connecting to Happy Isles that is a broad paved walk on the southern edge of the main Curry parking area. Although the view is broken up, to a degree, by a screen of conifers. A sense of the original views to the north across the meadows and wetlands from the camp can be experienced along the Happy Isle Loop Road where it cuts through the Stoneman Meadow. Looking east along the road from a point near the drive into the Curry Village parking area, Royal Arches, North Dome, Washington Column, and Half Dome can be fully viewed across the meadow without competition by the stands of conifers, which line the banks of the Merced some distance to the north and east.

There are three important, historic views related closely to the extant cultural resources at the center of Curry Village. The view south looking through the entrance sign that captures the registration office (former post office) and the guest lounge (former registration office) in the middle ground and the craggy mass of Glacier Point is fully discernible, rising up in the background. Indeed, the view is considerably more open than it was historically as mature conifers have been removed with the construction of a spacious pedestrian plaza having smaller scaled plantings. In contrast, the reverse view of Half Dome back through the entrance sign from the porches of the registration office and guest lounge, a key part of how these buildings were originally sited, is very much obscured by deciduous trees planted in the area. The view up to Glacier Point from the amphitheater area behind the lounge also remains open. This was the site of the evening campfire during the camp's earliest years and the view needed to be maintained for the viewing of the Firefall. This area remains more open than other parts of Curry Village because of the amphitheater seating and the pedestrian mall linking the major guest service buildings.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 105; 105-108, for discussion of the type and extent of views.

PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Yosemite National Park Archives (Yosemite Archives), El Portal, California

Yosemite Park and Curry Company (YP&CC) Collection

This vast collection contains an immense amount of varied information about the company, which was a merger (finalized 1925) of the Curry Camping Company and the Yosemite Park Company. The collection also includes materials of the two predecessor concessions. The most useful items in this collection to the development of the historical report were the brochures, guidebooks, and other promotional materials. The finding aid was a useful tool for identifying the areas of the collection with the most promise for researching Camp Curry. Given the time constraints of the project, the boxes called up represented the most obvious files and documents (those specifically related to “Curry,” mainly prior the mid-twentieth century) and it is possible there are relevant materials elsewhere in less obvious parts of the collection that may provide further insight about the camp’s history.

Historic Newspaper Collection

The Historic Newspaper Collection is a collection of clippings about Yosemite National Park and related topics arranged in rough chronological order. The single research trip made as part of this project only allowed a cursory review of some of the articles and clippings.

National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, Maryland

Record Group 79, Records of the National Park Service

Within this record group, records related to Yosemite National Park and more specifically Camp Curry (Curry Village) under “Central Files, 1907-39” (Entry 9) and Central Classified Files, 1907-1949 (Entry 10) were most useful. These boxes and folders included a range of correspondence and other records related to Camp Curry the most useful of which were brochures and promotional materials and the files related to the “privileges” granted by the government to the concession that outlined the extent of the business in a given year or range of years.

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"Map Showing Suggested Extensions to Camp Curry and Proposed Relocation of Main Road." 5 Jan. 1924. NARA.

"Sketch of Plan for Sewage Disposal System at Camp Curry, Yosemite Park, Cal." [ca. Jan.-Feb. 1908]. NARA.

PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

The recording of Camp Curry (Curry Village) was co-sponsored by the Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS) and Yosemite National Park, both of the National Park Service, in part to mitigate the demolition of historic buildings within the rockfall zone along the base of Glacier Point. Support was provided by Yosemite National Park staff: Don Neubacher, Superintendent; Ron Gaunt, Project Manager; David Humphrey, Branch Chief, History, Architecture and Landscapes; Bill Kuhn, GIS Specialist; Geoffrey Lane, Project Manager; Shawn Lingo, Historical Architect; Madelyn Ruffner, Environmental Planning and Compliance; Daniel Schaible, Historical Landscape Architect; and Barbara Wyatt, Park Historic Preservation Officer (on detail). The documentation was undertaken in 2011-12 by HALS under the direction of Richard O'Connor, Chief of Heritage Documentation Programs, and Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief of HALS. The project leader was HALS landscape architect Chris Stevens. The fieldwork was completed by Chris Stevens and HABS architects Anne Kidd, Alexander Matsov, and Jeremy Mauro as well as by volunteer Samuel E. Beetler II. Measured drawings were completed by Jeremy Mauro and Chris Stevens. Jason W. McNatt prepared the title sheet. The project historian was HABS historian James A. Jacobs, and HABS photographer Renee Bieretz produced the large-format photographs.

APPENDIX A: ILLUSTRATIONS

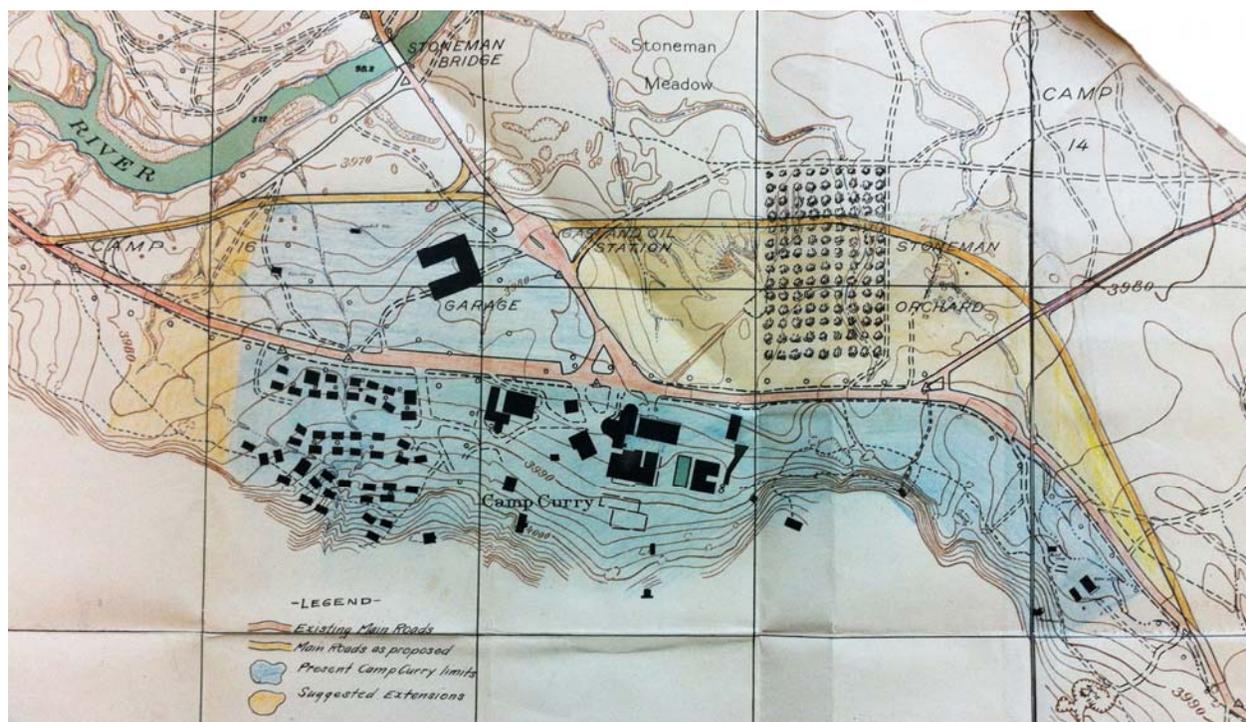
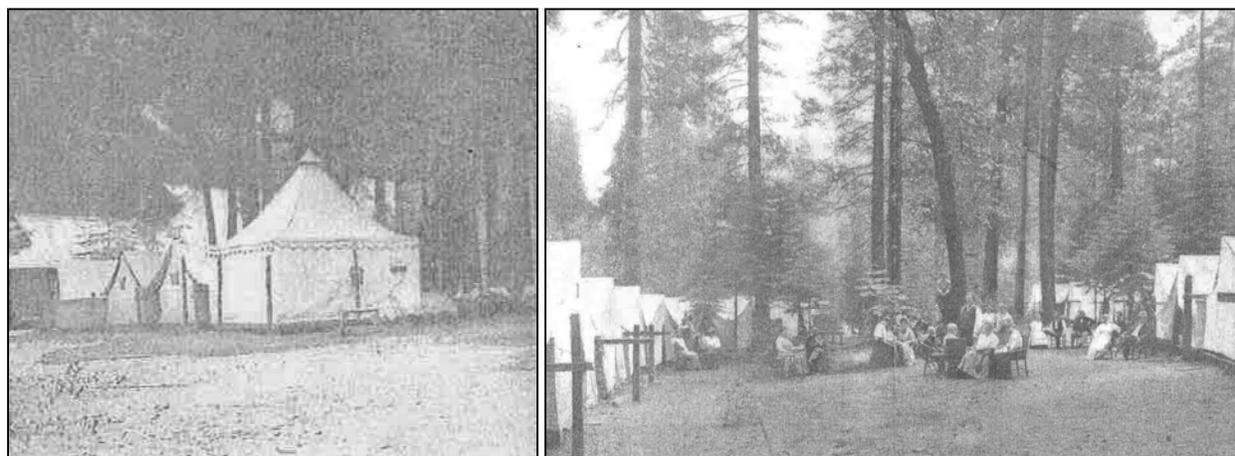


fig. 1. “Map Showing Suggested Extensions to Camp Curry and Proposed Relocation of Main Road,” 5 Jan. 1924. This map was most likely created by Daniel R. Hull, who led NPS’s nascent landscape design office from the end of 1920 through 1927. National Archives and Records Administration.



fig. 2. A photograph of Camp Curry during its inaugural 1899 season. A character of informality remains a dominant part of the camp landscape and is clearly evident despite its considerable size and extent of development over the past century. Image at Yosemite National Park Archives, Museum, and Library as reproduced in Schaible et al, Figure 7.



figs. 3 and 4. Two photographs in the 1909 brochure that depict the tent accommodation at Camp Curry. The image on the left is a detail of a view of tents in the vicinity of the registration office and clearly show the use of wood platforms, more substantial framing posts visible on the outside of the tents, and the variation on tent size and type at the time. The image on the right depicts two facing rows of tents that arc inward toward the rear, defining open space at the center meant to be used by guests. “Camp Curry Yosemite,” 1909. Courtesy Yosemite National Park Archives: Yosemite Park & Curry Company Collection YOSE 070796.

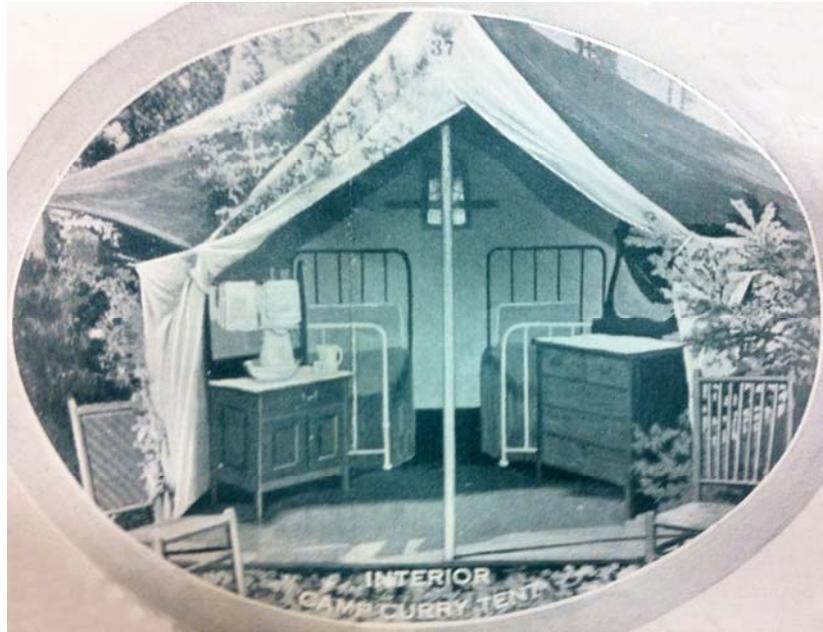


fig. 5. View of a tent interior in the 1924 brochure. Despite the floors, double canvas roofs, and actual furniture, the tent was still a relatively insubstantial structure. Proposals were made to abandon the tent at various times in Camp Curry’s history, but they never gained traction. Sometime in late 1920s, the Yosemite Park & Curry Company began constructing a more durable variation of the tent—the “tent cabin”—which has a rigid interior frame and a lockable door. Yosemite, Camp Curry 1924: Where the Fire Falls,” 1924. Courtesy Yosemite National Park Archives: Yosemite Park & Curry Company Collection YOSE 070796.



fig. 6. Tent cabin under construction and completed at Curry Village.
Chris Stevens, photographer, 2011.



fig. 7. When first constructed in 1918 and 1919, the “bungalow tents,” or merely “bungalows,” featured pergolas and openings in the wall without windows fitted with canvas shades, both of which blurred the distinction between indoors and outdoors. Image at Yosemite National Park Archives, Museum, and Library as reproduced in Fletcher, Farr, Ayotte, Inc., 107.

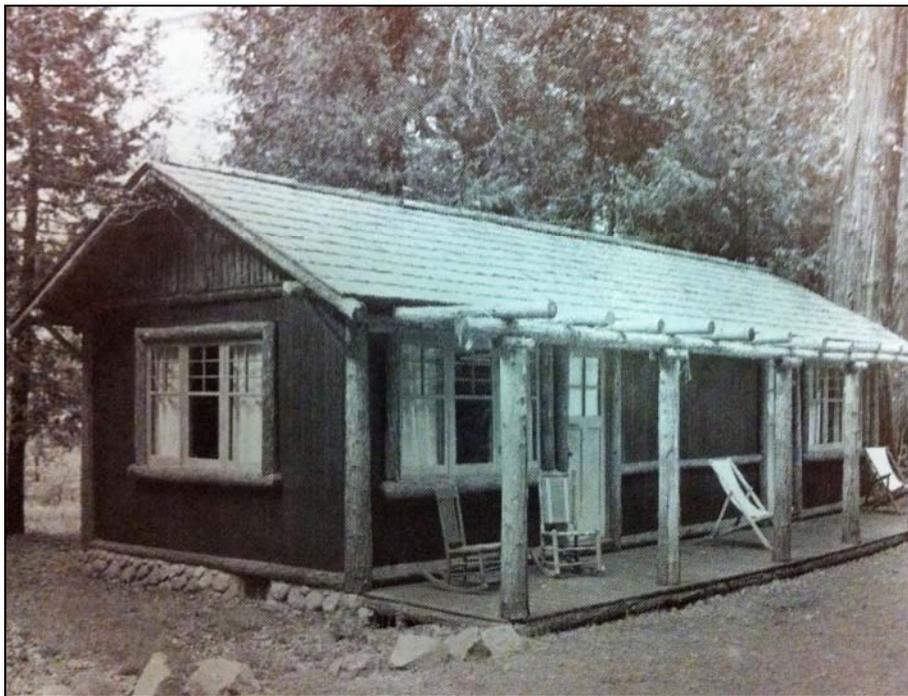


fig. 8. In 1921, the canvas covered openings in the bungalows constructed in 1918 and 1919 were fitted with sash and the third phase of bungalow construction completed by 1923 featured windows at the time of completion. Camp Curry brochure, 1941. Courtesy Yosemite National Park Archives: Yosemite Park & Curry Company Collection YOSE 070796.



fig. 9. Two of the seven original bungalows (cabins without bath) at Camp Curry, which were designed in 1924. All seven of the small buildings are extant, although only these two and one other are in the original grouping facing the main parking area. The upper portions of the wall were originally open with operable canvas shades and latter fitted with windows. Chris Stevens, photographer, 2011.



fig. 10. In 1929-30, approximately eighty-five bungalows were constructed at Camp Curry in the area to the south of the main core of guest service buildings. The single and paired units were built using a different design than the first seven and had full walls and window sash from the beginning. Chris Stevens, photographer, 2011.

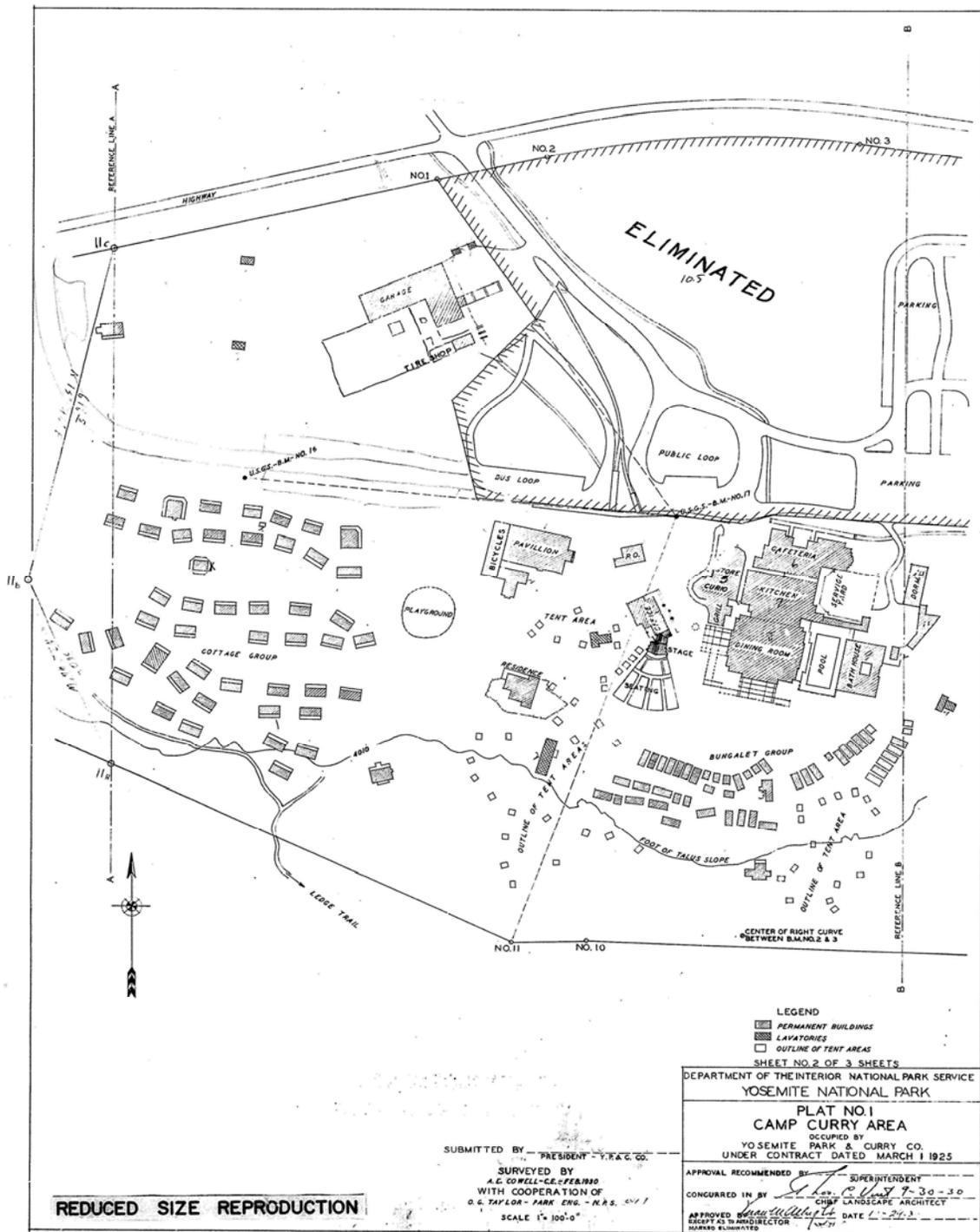


fig. 11. Detail of Camp Curry plat, 1930, showing the guest service buildings and amenities at the center of facility with the bungalows grouped to the west (left) and the recently constructed “bungaloret group” just to the south of the dining room. “Plat No. 1, Camp Curry Area,” 1930, ETIC.

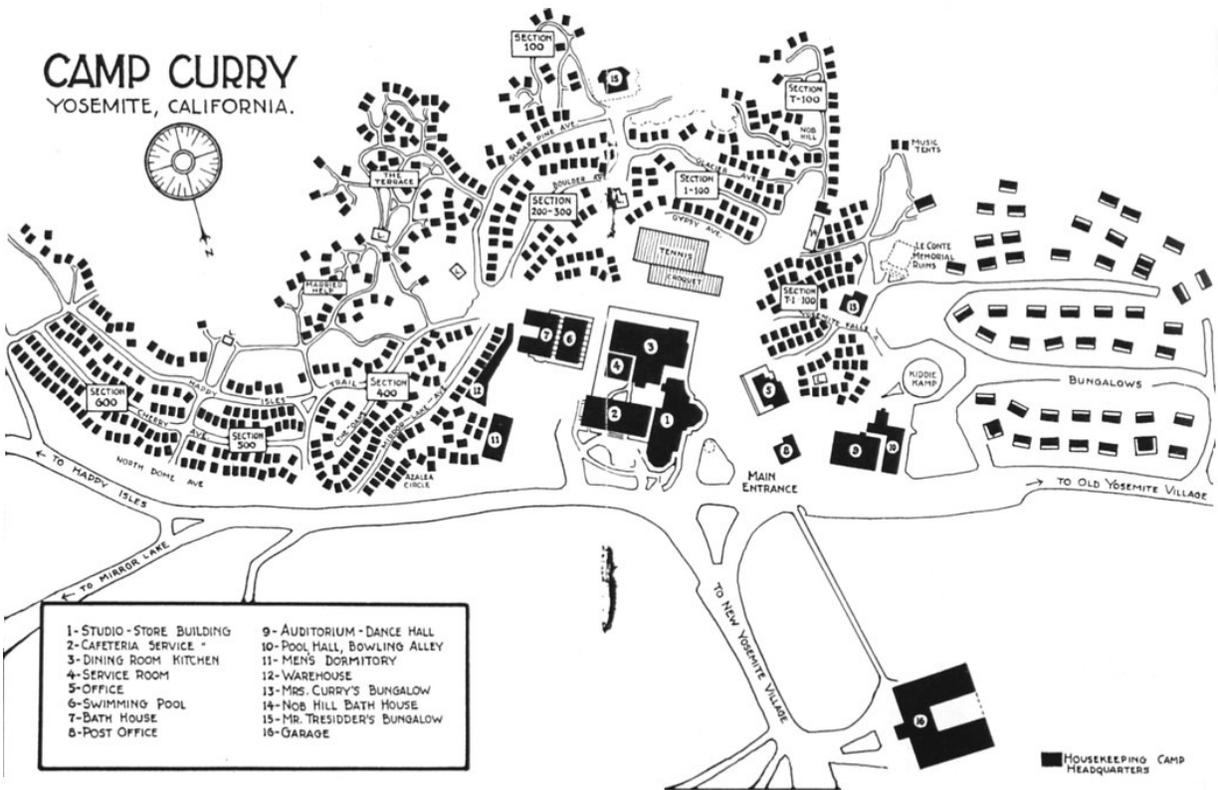


fig. 12. “Camp Curry” brochure, 1927. Courtesy Yosemite National Park Archives: Yosemite Park & Curry Company Collection YOSE 070796. Note the U-shaped footprint of the garage at bottom right and the area around the tennis court and croquet grounds where the large group of bungalettes would be constructed in 1929-30.