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HOW THE WEST WAS FUN: CONSTRUCTING THE WESTERN
TOURISM EXPERIENCE IN THE YELLOWSTONE WYLIE CAMPS,
1880-1916

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One evening in the summer of 1900, a large camping party of young women was settling down to sleep when “the air was pierced with a shriek from Sue Welch.” Minutes after her tentmate thought she heard a bear grunt, twenty-two-year-old Sue “could have sworn that the bear’s cold nose had been pressed to her cheek.” The entire group of women gathered their “valises, telescopes [and] umbrellas,” intending to go bear hunting in the mild Yellowstone night. Their pursuit was cut short, however, when the chaperone and operator of the site, William Wallace (W.W.) Wylie, told them to go back to sleep before they woke up the entire camp.¹ Like many western travelers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these women eagerly anticipated the thrill of danger that accompanied the wilderness. And, despite their brave grasping of accoutrements, they clearly had no fear that they would be harmed. In the end, they gained excitement without danger – the nose without the claws.

Though camping in the wilds of the continent’s biggest national park, these would-be bear hunters were not seasoned outdoorsmen or explorers.² They were travelers, visitors who paid Wylie to convey them through Yellowstone’s untamed terrain; an early version of what might now be referred to as “adventure tourism.” Even for those traveling from adjacent states, getting to the park could be a lengthy and difficult journey, and once within the park, danger from treacherous landscapes or curious wildlife might cause further discomfort. Why then, would such an industry exist? What kinds of people would find a wilderness experience attractive, and what other social and cultural factors might have influenced their desires? Finally, what tactics did tourism companies use to provide an experience that would harness the

¹ Maggie Sullivan, “Came Back Alive,” in “Impressions of the Wonderful Trip,” *The Daily Inter Mountain*, September 15, 1900, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85053057/1900-09-15/ed-1/seq-9/>

² Until Death Valley’s park designation in 1994, Yellowstone contained more square miles of protected land than any other park in the continental U.S. Alaska has several parks that are significantly larger than Yellowstone.

interests of these travelers? To answer these questions, this project explores the operation and guests of the Wylie Camping Company of Yellowstone, a park concessionaire (licensed vendor) that operated from the late 1880s to 1916.

Understanding the turn-of-the-century attraction to western tourism begins with consideration of “The West” as an ideal as well as a geographic region. The mystique and wilderness of the vast untamed area inspired stories of drama and action, popularized by songs, novels, and other popular media of the time. The celebratory portrayals curated a region synonymous with themes like bravery, hard-work, and self-sufficiency.³ Popular opinion at the turn of the century echoed historian Frederick Jackson Turner’s classic “frontier thesis,” yoking American exceptionalism and national pride to the west.⁴ The exciting imagery had long attracted western migration, however by the end of the nineteenth century companies emerged to offer temporary visitors a taste of the frontier experience.⁵

Early travel entrepreneurs capitalized on the existing fascination with the west, crafting and promoting western experiences that would fulfill tourists’ expectations. The difficulty for these businessmen was in presenting a comfortable and enjoyable experience in an area that was, by definition, untamed. As the business of western tourism evolved, the most successful proved adept at using product and promotion to reconcile the contradictory; finding ways to promise wilderness and comfort, excitement and stability. Wylie proved himself willing to change any aspect of the trip to accommodate his guests, including manipulation of the park’s environment.

³ Samuel Bazzi, Martin Fiszbein, and Mesay Gebresilasse, "Frontier Culture: The Roots and Persistence of 'Rugged Individualism' in the United States," IDEAS Working Paper Series from RePEc, *The National Bureau of Economic Research*, 2018, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w23997>. This paper compiles statistical data demonstrating population movement, while analyzing trends of individualism and opposition to redistribution.

⁴ Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); Eric Hobsbawm, *Fractured Times: Culture and Society in the Twentieth Century* (The New Press: New York, 2012).

⁵ U.S. Census Office, “Progress of the Nation,” *Compendium of the Eleventh Census: 1890 Part I.- Population* (1892): xlvii

Wylie tourists also played a role in cultivating their own experiences. Influenced by societal norms, campers brought their own goals and perceptions of the west into their trips that impacted the both the physical experiences and the meaning of the trip for the individual. Americans of various classes and genders were looking for ways to engage with the pervasive myth of the west; camping the Wylie Way offered the opportunity for inclusion in that narrative. Beyond a simple vacation, this paper argues that gender, class, and national identity influenced both tourism producers and consumers in their cultivation of the turn-of-the-century western experience.

To demonstrate the ways the participants of the western tourism business influenced the Wylie Yellowstone experience, this project will engage with both the tourism producers and the consumers. First, I will review primary sources from the Wylie company and its successors followed by a look at the material produced by tourists and other visitors to the Wylie camps. This will establish the scope of the project's research and writing methodology. This will be followed by a historiography section, in which I will place my work in the context of existing academic research pertinent to the Wylie Camping Company and western tourism.

The organization of the body of the paper follows a similar path. First, I will discuss Wylie's history and the founding of the camping company. This section will show how the company's operation changed over time to meet the demands of the tourists and detail what a camping trip with Wylie would entail. Next, I explore the Yellowstone camping experience from the visitor perspective. The visitors are broken into the following categories: the wealthy, men, women, employees, and working-class Montanans. By looking at each in turn, we can see the impact of each group's unique goals and societal influences on western tourism, and how those factors impacted their own perceptions as well as the camps' actual operations.

To demonstrate the dual sides of the Wylie story, this project engages with published and unpublished sources from two groups: Yellowstone tourism promoters and Yellowstone tourists. Published promotional materials as well as other writings and records kept by the company and its staff illustrate the goals, techniques and language used by the Wylie Company. Conversely, both public and private writings display tourist perspectives on their Yellowstone experiences.

Personal writings by the original owner of the camping company, William Wallace Wylie, demonstrate the perspectives of the owner as well as his experiences within the nascent tourism industry of Yellowstone Park. Wylie's 1926 unpublished autobiography relays the entrepreneur's reminiscences of the Company's founding and some of the activities included in his camping trips. The autobiography also signals the general class, education, expectations, and outdoor experiences of visitors via Wylie's description of tourist questions and attitudes, as well as short and demonstrative vignettes.⁶

To present the perspective of Wylie staff, this project utilizes the diary of Beatrice Boedefeld, a young woman who worked as a tent maid in the summer of 1916, the last summer of the company's operation.⁷ Boedefeld was typical of a Wylie employee; she was unmarried and working class, but college educated and eager to improve her station in life.⁸ As this is the only source I was able to uncover from a Wylie employee, no comparisons to other worker experiences can be made. Though it cannot be seen as representative, it does give insights into the daily lives of the workers and their role in the development of western tourism.

⁶ W.W. Wylie, *W.W. Wylie Autobiography*, 1926, Collection 343, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, Bozeman, MT

⁷ Beatrice Boedefeld, *Diary of a Wylie Savage*, 1916, Private Collection, Salt Lake City, UT, partially transcribed at <http://beyoublithe-n-bonny.blogspot.com/p/bee-boedefeld-and-her-beatrice.html>.

⁸ Wylie insisted that all of his workers be either a college graduate, college student, or a journalist. Boedefeld was a college graduate, as well as a writer for a newspaper in her *Wylie Autobiography*, 81; Jane Galloway Demaray, *Yellowstone Summers: Touring with the Wylie Camping Company* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 2015), 107.

The final unpublished company document referenced in this project is the Wylie Company's tourist register for 1904-1909. This register includes dates of visits, customer names, and cities of origin. In reviewing this material, the flow and patterns of the company's operation can be noted, as well as other trends in group demographics. Though this resource is not referenced on its own, it is very useful for gaining an understanding about operations and corroborating advertising claims.

Published material from the company is entirely promotional in nature. In its early years of operation, company marketing largely relied on advertisements, trip contests, and travel testimonials published in Yellowstone area newspapers, promising "splendid outdoor life, travel and sightseeing." As the business grew and changed, marketing material expanded to detailed, full-color brochures and pamphlets; the quantity and style of advertisements changed, but there was little change in the comfort/wilderness rhetoric of the ads.⁹

Like settlement boosters of the same era, entrepreneurs like Wylie used familiar frontier themes to attract people westward, though with altered goals and methodologies. Only specific aspects of frontier mythology would entice potential visitors, therefore by cultivating and promoting experiences that offered the fun of outdoor adventure without its inconveniences, Wylie and his successors created a new kind of tourism designed to appeal to the social trends and interests of their expanding client base. Understanding tourism as both a beneficiary and producer of wild-west ideology adds dimension to our understanding of the American West, both real and imagined.

⁹ Wylie Permanent Camping Company, Advertisement, *Yellowstone Monitor*, July 16, 1908, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86075153/1908-07-16/ed-1/seq-1/>. Newspaper ads located on [ChroniclingAmerica.loc.gov](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/). Full-color scans of several brochures available in the Brigham Young Collection, online at [Archive.org](https://archive.org/). In the years following the Company's sale, Wylie sued the new owners several times about the terms of the contract and his salary, but it does not seem to affect advertising or operations.

Materials produced by tourists also demonstrate the effectiveness of Wylie Company's claims and services. First-hand narratives from visitors illustrate the consumer perspective of camping the "Wylie Way." These primary accounts include published travel journals and newspaper articles written by visitors. The public nature of these sources indicates travelers' desire to participate in a dialogue about western travel. The writings also demonstrate the joint nature of the production of Yellowstone expectations. To establish context and repeating themes of the Yellowstone visitor mindset, this project also engages with materials from tourists who did not stay at the Wylie camps, but had comparable social classes and expectations of western travel.

As a type of media that bridged both the producer and consumer sides of tourism, testimonials were a form of advertising highly utilized by the Wylie Company. As evidence of the truth in their advertisements, most of the Wylie brochures include several pages of camper feedback. For almost every state, there are one or two short appreciative testimonials, along with the names and addresses of other (often influential or rich) visitors. The pamphlets go even further, promising that the company can refer the reader directly to "former tourists...from practically every city and town in the United States."¹⁰ Despite the artificiality – or at the very least cherry-picking – that this style of advertising suggests, the language and style of the testimonials bear striking similarities to the writings of other customers. While not every testimonial contained dual references to comforts of the camps and the exhilaration of the outdoors, it is certainly a recurring theme.

In reviewing the secondary literature surrounding the Wylie experience, it is important to note that the field of historic American tourism is relatively underexplored. Some argue that the

¹⁰ Wylie Permanent Camping Company, *Yellowstone National Park: Park Season June 15 to Sept. 15, 1909*, 23-28. <https://archive.org/details/yellowstonenatio145wyli>

lack of interest stems from the perception of tourism as non-controversial (and therefore non-interesting), while others contend that older institutional biases within the historical academic community are to blame.¹¹ These latter scholars argue that “lowering the disciplinary drawbridge” between business and the humanities is the best way to open up the field for historical study. This project seeks to step across the “disciplinary drawbridge” and bring the evaluative techniques of business and tourism scholarship to explore the development of western commerce within a historical context. Looking closely at the development, operation and guests of the Wylie Company adds nuance to our understanding of the tourism industry at the turn of the century. By attempting to understand who western tourists were and why they chose the Wylie experience over other destinations, societal influences of gender and class on tourism become more apparent. Though primarily focused on the roles of producers and consumers in creating a western experience, this project also introduces additional avenues for future research into the nature and value of authenticity in historic western tourism.¹²

The seminal work on tourism in the American West is Earl Pomeroy’s 1957 work, *In Search of the Golden West: The Tourist in Western America*, in which he analyzes the changing role of the tourist in the American West, tracking visitor evolution from the incredibly wealthy sightseer of the mid-nineteenth century, to the family camping trips and dude ranches of the mid-

¹¹ Thomas Weiss, "Tourism in America before World War II," *The Journal of Economic History* 64, no. 2 (2004): 291, <http://www.jstor.org.weblib.lib.umd.edu:8080/stable/3874776>; Karen L. Harris, "Taking History on Tour: Lowering the Disciplinary Drawbridge," *Journal of Tourism History* 9, nos. 2-3 (2017): 223-245, Harris is speaking within the context of South African education but uses evidence from international academia. Some interdisciplinary work has been done to address the sociological history of tourism, see e.g. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), especially his examination of tourist authenticity; Yipping Li, "Geographical Consciousness and Tourism Experience," *Annals of Tourism Research* 27, no. 4 (October 2000): 863-883.

¹² For discussions of the nature of authenticity in modern western tourism, see Hal Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998); David M. Wrobel and Patrick T. Long, eds., *Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism in the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

twentieth.¹³ An analysis of Wylie reinforces Pomeroy's argument that the expectations of the West melded with the sensibilities of the east to generate an experience that matched preconceived tourist notions of what the geography could and should be. Pomeroy addresses the change in western tourism over time as a broad synthesis. While useful for an understanding of trends in the industry over time, this approach necessarily eliminates a more precise look at the tourists and their destinations. Though Pomeroy's work does engage with the increasing democratization of tourism, it does not engage at all with the role of identity. Though his omission is likely due to the age of the text rather than poor scholarship, this project takes a deeper look at the influences of gender and class on the tourist experience.

Despite the considerable impact of Wylie on the development of Yellowstone tourism, very little academic work addresses his company beyond a simple mention. As a recipient of one of the Park's original concessionaire licenses, the camping business participated in early negotiations of power between park workers and park vendors. Jane Galloway Demaray, great-grand-niece of the company founders, explores this tenuous relationship in her 2015 text, *Yellowstone Summers: Touring with the Wylie Camping Company*. Though a fascinating look at Wylie himself, the text is missing a deeper analysis of historical context.

The most recent and expansive look at the Wylie Camping company was undertaken by Yellowstone historian Elizabeth A. Watry in her unpublished Master's thesis, entitled: "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."¹⁴ Like Demaray,

¹³ Earl S. Pomeroy, *In Search of the Golden West: The Tourist in Western America* (New York: Knopf, 1957).

¹⁴ Elizabeth A. 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," Master Thesis, (Montana State University, 2010). Watry went on to publish multiple works on Yellowstone history, several of which are utilized in this project.

Watry's thesis provides a detailed history of Wylie's operation. Like this project, "More Than Mere Camps and Coaches" explores cultural developments that led to the success of the Wylie model. Watry focuses on emerging trends like romanticism of the wilderness and the growing desire to establish a shared American heritage through cultivation of "sacred spaces." In deep detail, Watry addresses intellectual developments that contributed to the rise of the western myth. While this approach is highly effective in establishing an understanding of tourism's place in society, but - like Pomeroy - tends to present tourists as a homogenous group. This project seeks to deepen and enrich our understanding of the ways class and gender impacted individual experiences of "the Wylie Way."

Due to its significance and noted absence in the aforementioned literature, this project places a great deal of emphasis on the role of gender in the tourist experience. Though little differentiation is made in advertisements to and testimonials from both genders, scholarly literature indicates that men and women tourists experienced the west quite differently.¹⁵ Scholars like T.J. Jackson Lears and Gail Bederman point to the turn of the century as a crisis of identity for men, particularly those in positions of power.¹⁶ The increased productivity and commercial advancements of the turn of the century were accompanied by the spread of neurasthenia, a general malaise among men. Thought to be caused from both the stress of maintaining economic gains and the coddling of modernity, an analysis by historian David

¹⁵ By "both genders," this project is only addressing the motivations of those who identify as male or female. This usage is not intended to erase non-binary peoples, only reflect the historical subjects' understanding of gender.

¹⁶ Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); David G. Shuster, *Neurasthenic Nation: America's Search for Health, Happiness, and Comfort, 1869-1920* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011). Bederman notes that women could also be diagnosed as neurasthenic, but the causes and cures were vastly different, 87.

Shuster indicates the illness was seen as both a mark of pride and embarrassment.¹⁷ Spending time in the outdoors, hunting wildlife, and participating in sports were the primary cures for neurasthenia, and a Wylie camping trip often offered a variation on all three.¹⁸ Though none of the tourists specifically mention the disorder, its prevalence in the emerging leisure class along with popular notions about the west likely contributed to the participation of many men.

The presence and indeed prevalence of women in Wylie's excursions is perhaps more surprising. Like their male counterparts, the participation of women in this type of adventure tourism was facilitated and encouraged by shifting cultural norms. In her examination of Progressive Era resorts, Cindy Aron notes the increased presence and acceptability of women in previously male recreational spaces.¹⁹ Many of these middle-class vacationers fit the model of the era's "New Woman." Almost entirely white and upper or middle-class, New Women were athletic, active, and educated. They married later than their predecessors, and were characterized by their increased mobility, opportunity, and independence, while still maintaining the "ladylike" qualities of virginity and propriety. Aron places the start of mixed-gendered vacation activities as early as 1859, noting that the practice swiftly became more widespread and acceptable amongst the middle-class in eastern resorts.²⁰ Interestingly, the Wylie attendees demonstrate an exception to this rule: though the company's excursions were certainly mixed-gendered, company records and testimonials indicate that much of Wylie's business came from homosocial groups. These groups ranged from small parties of sisters and female friends, to large single-

¹⁷ Shuster, 4.

¹⁸ While Shuster and Bederman focus on physicality and the outdoors, in *Rebirth of a Nation*, Lears argues that American imperialism and military expansion of the era have roots in this crisis of masculinity

¹⁹ Cindy S. Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 73. The accepted periodization for the Progressive Era ranges from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries, coinciding exactly with the dates of the Wylie Company's operation.

²⁰ Aron, 73-85.

gendered clubs and professional organizations. The reason for this adherence to a more traditional recreational pattern is unknown, but it is an important aberration to note.²¹

One mark of the New Woman was her desire to use her newfound ease of movement to further her experiences and knowledge. Offering an instructional and nominally “wild” experience, as well as matrons designated to protect their dignity, the Wylie Company offered an opportunity for the Progressive woman to have a new experience in a socially acceptable way.²²

Scholars Glenda Riley and Peggy Welts Kaufman associate the outdoors with the increased mobility of women, relating the “unprecedented” numbers of women visiting the west to the swift expansion of female conservationists and naturalists.²³

W.W. Wylie’s long-term relationship with the promotion of Yellowstone National Park began with his own consumption of “wild-west” media. Early in the 1870s, Wylie read an account of the harrowing adventures of Truman Everts, a member of the Washburn expedition who was lost for many days in Yellowstone. Fascinated by the descriptions of the park’s natural wonders and dangers, Wylie was “possessed of a great desire to sometime visit this region,” and left his secure position in Iowa in 1879 to accept a job offer in Bozeman.²⁴ Over the next few years, Wylie spent his summer vacations exploring the park and writing about its offerings. He

²¹ I suspect that this aberration is related to geography, given that Easterners traveling to Yellowstone would be spending much more time with the opposite sex than those traveling to a resort in a nearby locale. Making this claim, however, would require a comparison of other Western sites and the gender composition of their clientele in this period.

²² Jean V. Matthews, *The Rise of the New Woman* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003); Virginia Scharff, *Twenty Thousand Roads: Women, Movement, and the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 84. Scharff argues that this increased mobility, particularly in the West, led to the spread of communication and eventual passage of women’s suffrage; Wylie Permanent Camping Company, *Yellowstone National Park: Park Season June 14 to Sept. 15, 1910*, 13. <https://archive.org/details/yellowstonenat1451910wylie>. Aron notes that matrons were a common feature of the expanding world of commercial leisure: Aron, 84.

²³ Glenda Riley, *Women and Nature: Saving the “Wild” West* (Polly Welts Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman’s Voice: A History*, rev. ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, revised 2006), 3.

²⁴ Wylie Autobiography, 1-2. According to his notes, Wylie read the Evert account in *Scribner’s Monthly*. The Washburn expedition (1870) was comprised of surveyors, merchants, others with a vested interest in the area, and a U.S. Army escort. The expedition produced many highly published journals, maps, and writings about the area that were later used to promote the region as a national park.

and the photographer Henry Bird Calfee worked together to create an educational stereograph slideshow about the region and toured the eastern states to promote the park. Calfee and Wylie also participated in the era's tradition of guidebook authorship with the rather ambitiously titled: *Yellowstone National Park or The Great American Wonderland: A Complete Description of All the Wonders of the Park, Together with Distances, Altitudes, and Such Other Information as the Tourist or General Readers Desires: A Complete Hand or Guide Book for Tourists*. The guidebook, published in 1882, reprinted an 1871 statement from the House of Representatives Committee on Public Lands. The guidebook and the Committee statement both declare that the Park should be available to all, and that it would be a dire mistake "to fence in these rare wonders, so as to charge visitors a fee...for the sight of that which ought to be as free as the air and water."²⁵

Though the sight of the park might be free, Wylie's tours were not. One of the first to monetize park excursions, Wylie's foray into tourism began in the early with guided tours of the park with friends and fellow teachers during summer school vacations in the early 1880s. As the publicity surrounding the newly established park increased and the Northern Pacific Railroad completed their "Park Branch" in 1883, the numbers of visitors on his instructional camping tours of the park increased swiftly throughout the 1880s. Each day before the tour, Wylie and his employees would pack up the camps and move them to the next site. Though he declared his entry into business as "entirely unintentional," the increasing flow of paying customers made Wylie realize that he had carved out a niche in the park tourist industry.

²⁵ W.W. Wylie, *The Great American Wonderland: A complete description of all the wonders of the park, together with distances, altitudes, and such other information as the tourist or general readers desires: a complete hand or guide book for tourists* (Kansas City: Publishing House of Ramsey, Millett & Hudson, 1882), 81, https://archive.org/details/yellowstonenatio00wyli_0. I owe the connection of the guidebook text with the statement of the House of Representatives to Wylie's great-grand niece, Demaray, *Yellowstone Summers*, 40.

By the 1890s, the demands of patrons and their growing demand for greater comfort encouraged Wylie to try offering new services. First, he purchased two luxurious Pullman camping cars: enormous and finely appointed carriages pulled by four Clydesdales, with room to sleep four. Unfortunately for Wylie, these cars were extremely expensive and provided insufficient relief for the mounting visitor volume. When their size generated friction with Park administration and his competitors, Wylie abandoned use of the cars and sought a more stable solution. In 1893 – the same year that Turner declared the “closing” of the western frontier – W.W. Wylie petitioned the government for permission to install permanent camps in Yellowstone Park. With the grant of a government lease, Wylie, and his successors were able to expand the amenities offered by the company and create a bastion of civilization in the nation’s first national park.²⁶

Wylie’s modest overnight tent excursions developed into highly-structured and well-advertised tours. By constructing permanent camps across the park, Wylie set himself apart from both the refined luxury of hotels and the indignity of sleeping on the ground. He offered an experience that was wild enough to satiate the urge for adventure, while maintaining a level of comfort desired by his constituents. Because his company – like the park itself – was established well before the creation of the National Park Service, oversight was limited.²⁷ Wylie became an innovator of methods to attract and entertain tourists. In order to construct and maintain the experience his clients desired, Wylie made physical changes to the park’s environment. Among

²⁶ W.W. Wylie Autobiography, 18-19, 25-26. On Wylie’s second tour with the Pullman cars, he was arrested by the Army for scaring the coach horses of other concessionaires. While W.W. experimented with this new form of conveyance, his wife Mary continued to operate the moveable tent business. Wylie’s monopoly on permanent camps lasted until about 1910. For details about the history of Yellowstone Park concessions, see text by the park’s administrative historian: Mary Shivers Culpin, *“For the Benefit and Enjoyment of the People”: A History of the Concession Development in Yellowstone National Park, 1872–1966*, (Yellowstone National Park, Wyo.: National Park Service, 2003), <https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/historyculture/upload/ConcessionDevelopment.pdf>.

²⁷ Yellowstone was designated as a National Park in 1872, Wylie began giving tours in 1881, and the National Park Service was established in 1916.

other techniques, the businessman planted sweet grasses, planted traps, and interfered with habitats to ensure his campers would interact with the expected flora and fauna of the park. With his exclusive rights and the latitude granted by limited government intervention, Wylie experienced great success: almost twenty percent of Yellowstone visitors traveled with the camping company before it closed in 1916.²⁸

At the end of 1905, W.W. Wylie sold the Wylie Permanent Camping Company to a small consortium of men who also did business in Yellowstone Park. The involved parties completed the sale with the understanding and contract language asserting that the camps would continue to operate in the fashion established by Wylie, and for a short time he remained with the camps as a salaried advisor. Though Wylie credits the physical hardship of the job as the cause for the sale, the transaction came shortly after a significant legal victory that same year. In a case against the Northern Pacific Railway, the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) ruled that the railroad company used discriminatory rates to disadvantage the Wylie Company, and ruled that Northern Pacific must offer tickets for Wylie's camps and tours alongside their own. Per his biography, increasing competition and government intervention made camp management more difficult for Wylie, and likely played a role in his decision to sell. His instincts proved wise; a decade later the newly established National Park Service forced all concessionaires to sell their businesses, combining the services under a single, more easily managed company.²⁹

²⁸ Percentage calculated using 1908 visitor numbers reported by the National Park Service (19,542) and Wylie brochures (3,500+); National Park Service, "Annual Park Recreation Visitation Graph (1904 – Last Calendar Year)," *National Park Service Visitor Use Statistics*, [https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20Graph%20\(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year\)?Park=YELL](https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20Graph%20(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year)?Park=YELL); Wylie Permanent Camping Company, *Yellowstone National Park: Park Season June 15 to Sept. 15, 1909*, 29. <https://archive.org/details/yellowstonenatio145wyli>

²⁹ Demaray, 175-177, 171-172; W.W. Wylie Autobiography, 42, 22-24; Culpin, 60-61. A silent partner in the purchase was Harry Child, who co-owned the Yellowstone Park Association and the Yellowstone National Park Transportation Company with the Northwest Improvement Company, a subsidiary of the Northern Pacific Railway.

Despite the seeming difficulty of such a pairing, the principal emphasis of the Wylie Company's promotional materials was on the combination of civilization and wilderness. Advertisements asserted that "prospective Yellowstone travelers are interested not so much in **what** they are about to see, as in **how** they shall see it," and attempted to respond to that desire by offering comfort without pretention.³⁰ They presented these juxtapositions without irony, promising both "a real outing among the pines" and tents "as cozy as a summer cottage" in the same breath.³¹

In keeping with the flamboyantly colored advertisements of the period, many of the company's promotional pamphlets and post cards took the form of "pictorial handbooks." These featured panoramas of the camps, the groups of bright green and white striped tents casting a striking contrast against the rocky and geyser-filled landscape. The handbooks also included images of tent interiors that resembled small hotel rooms. Accommodations came in a variety of sizes, featuring rooms with one, two, or four real beds "(no cots)" with floral quilts, a camp stove, wash basin, and even a Persian patterned rug for the raised wooden floors.³² Brochures also displayed pictures of the numerous other camp comforts, like the large recreation pavilion with polished dance floor, and the dining tent with a full complement of china dishes. By presenting pictures of their amenities, the Wylie Company created a visual testimonial; in an era of emerging awareness about misleading advertising techniques, images of the camps reinforced the comfort and wildlife proximity promised by the advertising copy.

³⁰ Wylie Permanent Camping Company, "*Wylie Way*" in *Yellowstone Park*, c. 1912, <https://archive.org/details/wyliewayyellowst27wyli/mode/2up>, 4. Emphasis original to source.

³¹ Wylie Permanent Camping Company, "*Wylie Way*" in *Yellowstone Park*, c. 1912, <https://archive.org/details/wyliewayinyellow694wyli>.

³² The digitized Larson Yellowstone Collection contains Wylie advertising material spanning several years of the company's operation. Many of the brochures feature images of tent interiors and amenities. Wylie Permanent Camping Company Brochures and Ephemera, Larsen Yellowstone Collection, Brigham Young University, <https://archive.org/details/yellowstonebrighamyounguniv>.

Understanding the tension between the consumers' wish to be outdoors and their desire for indoor comforts meant that Wylie advertisements walked a fine line in describing their offerings. Anticipating traveler concerns about the supposed ruggedness of the park, most Wylie brochures included several pages answering "questions you will ask."³³ Here, the company let the campers know about the variety of amenities they could expect. These included daily laundry service of sheets, blankets, towels and napkins as well as fresh milk and cream from the camp cow herd. Entertainment was provided by way of nightly campfire gatherings complete with hot popcorn and songs, and always followed with dancing and other amusements in the recreation pavilion. And for all other business, the Office Tent included mail facilities and a general store that stocked "candies, cigars, postcards, drug supplies, straw hats, rubbers, etc."³⁴ Seeing Yellowstone the "Wylie Way" promised "all the comforts and conveniences of life, maintaining at the same time spice and informality of camp life."³⁵

With comforts accounted for, all that remained was ensuring campers would receive the exciting western experience that often inspired their visits. The first step: cultivating expectations. In addition to the comforts of the camp, brochures also contained very specific information about what visitors could expect to see in the park. Before even arriving, tourists could reference Wylie brochures for detailed day-by-day itineraries to reinforce the notion that the trip would allow visitors to see everything they needed to see for the full park experience. By curating and communicating a "typical" Yellowstone experience, the camping company all

³³ Wylie Permanent Camping Company, *Yellowstone National Park: Park Season June 15 to Sept. 15*, 1909, 11-13, <https://archive.org/details/yellowstonenatio145wyli>; Wylie Permanent Camping Company, *Yellowstone National Park: Park Season June 14 to Sept. 15*, 1910, 12-13, <https://archive.org/details/yellowstonenat1451910wyli>. Some version of "pertinent points," "supplementary information," or "questions you will ask" appears in most brochures.

³⁴ Wylie Permanent Camping Company, *Yellowstone National Park: Daily Service June 15 to Sept. 10*, 1913, 4. <https://archive.org/details/yellowstoneparkw27bwyl>.

³⁵ Wylie Permanent Camping Company, "Montana Excursion," advertisement in *The Daily Missoulian*, August 16, 1914, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025316/1914-08-16/ed-1/seq-10/>.

but guaranteed they could provide it. Each day would begin with breakfast in a camp dining hall and a morning of horse-drawn stagecoach touring. The parties would see notable attractions scheduled for the day, like Old Faithful or the Yellowstone Falls, occasionally with special visits to swimming areas or lunch counters. They would arrive at their next camp in the early evening, to clean sheets and camp-stoves burning. After dinner, each night ended with communal gatherings around the large campfire.

The Wylie Camping Company also capitalized on visitors' desire to seek credibility via outdoor adventure. The company produced and sold a series of postcards that followed the camp itinerary as a way for tourists to illustrate their experience with nature to their family and friends. Each day had a unique postcard depicting "The Scenes on Wylie Way," and showing images from that day's planned excursions.³⁶ While these postcards served as proof of adventure for the status conscious traveler, the Wylie Company benefitted double: profiting both from the sale of the cards and the advertising they provided.

While travel times and routes are easy to predict, natural phenomena are not. While Wylie could not promise that his customers would see geologic wonders or have encounters with wildlife, he did make serious attempts to bend the environment to customer expectations. In his autobiography, Wylie recounts the anger and disappointment of tourists on days when the geysers were less active. In response to demands for explanation of the dormancy, Wylie writes: "I was obliged to explain that the park was made before I had anything to do with it." Despite his jokes about tourist expectations regarding geysers, Wylie was not above speculating that human intervention in the park could improve tourist experiences. He suggests that The Castle, a steam geyser in Yellowstone, could someday be supplied water artificially to better satisfy

³⁶ Lee H. Whittlesey and Elizabeth A. Watry, eds., *Images of America: Yellowstone National Park* (Chicago: Arcadia Press, 2008), 72.

visitors' anticipations.³⁷ Wylie tourists wanted to experience nature, but only on their terms and in a fashion that met their expectations.

While the geysers may have been out of the Wylie's control, the camping company strove to guarantee visitors' encounters with wildlife. With permission from the park supervisor, W.W. Wylie planted alfalfa on a flat-topped hill by an entrance gate. With a nearby fence that kept out domestic stock and kept in park game, his sweet grass attracted "elk, deer antelope, and even mountain sheep" all year round. When visitors wanted to see wildlife, Wylie could always count on the area to provide. Colonel Waters, another Park concessionaire, contracted with Wylie to provide steamship tours of Yellowstone Lake. In order to make the ride more attractive, the Colonel stocked an island with hay-fed animals, ensuring that the more "difficult to spot" fauna were on view for the tourists.³⁸

Wylie and his Company also took more direct actions to enable tourists to encounter wildlife. One season, the Company stagecoaches encountered a large dam being built by beavers. Noting the industriousness of the animal and the swiftness with which it repaired any leaks, Wylie decided "it was too good a show to abandon" and began bringing tour groups to the dam for viewing. At each visit, the tour guide used a hook to break parts of the dam so that visitors could see the beaver fix the damage.³⁹ As the most commonly written about animal of the park, bears received similar treatment. Brochures promised the most enjoyable experience of viewing bears of all sizes and colors eating at refuse heaps "within easy walking distance from the Wylie Camps."⁴⁰ In his autobiography, Wylie recounted the regular practice when a bear

³⁷ W.W. Wylie *Autobiography*, 79, 36.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 52, 66.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 61.

⁴⁰ Every personal journal and many testimonials referenced in this paper make some mention of bears. Wylie also cites the bear as "the wild animal of chief interest to the tourist" in his autobiography, 57; Wylie Permanent Camping Company, *Yellowstone National Park: Daily Service June 15 to Sept. 10, 1914*, 8. <https://archive.org/details/yellowstonen1451914wylie>.

came near the camp: the stagecoach drivers encircled the bear to hold it in place until the campers were available, then the campers and drivers all shouted together so that they might see a bear climb a tree.⁴¹ These overt interferences with Yellowstone fauna demonstrate the attempt of the Wylie Company to grant their customers a thrilling and controlled “close-encounter” with nature.

Glaringly absent from Wylie’s “typical” western experience, are customer interactions with Native peoples. Despite the dozens of tribes that used the area for hunting and ceremonial purposes, ripple effects from earlier Indian removal policies left the area sparsely populated by Native peoples. After the Flight of the Nez Perce and Chief Joseph in 1877 and some skirmishes with Bannock tribes, park superintendent Philetus Norris declared in 1880 that all native peoples must leave Yellowstone.⁴² Decades later concessionaires at Montana’s Glacier Park would utilize the native Blackfeet population as both employees and props to promote an unspoiled western locale.⁴³ However, Norris’s declaration meant this particular aspect of the expected frontier experience was largely absent from Yellowstone.

Though unable or unwilling to manufacture Native American encounters for his guests, Wylie did offer tourist “Dudes” interactions with “Savages,” the company’s term for its employees. Use of the term became widespread amongst the seasonal and industry workers, and eventually became popular slang to reference employees of park concessionaires.⁴⁴ Wylie

⁴¹ W.W. Wylie Autobiography, 82. Wylie’s memoir also notes similar methods of trapping animals for tourist amusement employed by his competitors, though he considers many of their methods to be harmful to nature and dangerous to the tourists.

⁴² Robert H. Keller and Michael F. Turek, *Native Americans & National Parks* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 23-25; the National Park Service currently recognizes 26 tribes with “ties to the area and resources now found within Yellowstone Park,” <https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/historyculture/historic-tribes.htm>.

⁴³ Keller and Turek, 61-64; Brad Hall, “Blackfeet Interpretations of Glacier National Park,” The Avarna Group, September/October 2015, <https://theavarnagroup.com/resources/blackfeet-interpretations-of-glacier-national-park/>.

⁴⁴ Wylie Autobiography, 79-81; Anne Foster, “Yellowstone Lingo,” *National Park Service*, (2013) <https://www.nps.gov/yell/blogs/yellowstone-lingo.htm>. The origin of “Savage” in this context is unknown, but NPS

expected the Savages to be lively and young, embodying the fresh energy of the natural landscape. Despite their names, the Company largely employed lower-middle class college students and teachers and touted the “uniformly courteous and intelligent” service provided by their “educated and refined” workforce.⁴⁵ Savages occupied a strange social space of providing both service and instruction. Employees provided the amenities listed in the brochures, but were also responsible for camp entertainment: singing, performing skits, and providing dance partners for the Dudes. They were prohibited from eating or bathing in the same facilities as the Dudes, while being treated as peers and leaders in the realms of outdoor guidance and amusement. Once daily work was complete, workers were free to tour the park and enjoy the amenities of the camp – in effect becoming long-term tourists themselves. In their dual roles as producers and consumers of Park tourism, the Wylie Savages personify the twin appeal of Wylie’s approach to Yellowstone camping.

Understanding why and how the Wylie Camping Company chose to market their product requires examining the tourists themselves. A western adventure may be exciting to hear about, but what would entice people to leave their homes - often taking long cross-country train rides - only to sleep in a tent, however well-appointed? Though Wylie spent a great deal of energy on making his customers comfortable, the idealized West remained a central and crucial piece of his product. The traveling dairy, hotel-quality bedding, fancy meals, and other amenities would be meaningless without their setting. Naturally, motivations differed by class, gender, and socio-economic status, however the American cultural fascination with the frontier remained a constant factor influencing all visitors, from wealthy family patriarchs to Wylie “Savages.”

archives indicate “it was already a well-accepted and known vocabulary” by 1916. Since Wylie left the business in 1906, this indicates he was certainly an early adopter, and possibly the originator of the term.

⁴⁵ Wylie Permanent Camping Company, *Yellowstone Park “Wylie Way” Park Season June 15th to Sept. 15th*, 1915, <https://archive.org/details/yellowstoneparkw27wyli>, 3; Demaray, 107.

Across social strata, the most universal promotion of western tourism came from the surging nationalism of the era. The Wylie Camping company joined a growing number of tourism boosters who worked to cultivate the West as a destination, capitalizing on the rising levels of American patriotism. In 1906, the Salt Lake City Commercial Club initiated the “See America First” campaign to promote western tourism. According to scholar Marguerite Shaffer, the purpose of the campaign was to unite “western businessmen, civic leaders, representatives from railroad publicity departments, and city and state politicians...in an effort to advertise the tourist attractions and develop the tourist infrastructure throughout the West.”⁴⁶ Phrasing the need for tourism development as a patriotic endeavor, the conference leaders bemoaned the large sums that Americans were spending in Europe rather than at home. The keynote speaker of the conference even concluded his speech with a recitation of the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence, reworded to declare American independence from touring “the Continent.”⁴⁷ A variety of businesses, particularly those doing business in the National Parks, adopted the “See America First” slogan. The sentiment was powerful enough to make it into popular culture.⁴⁸ In a short story published by *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in 1887, a tour group decides to visit Yellowstone over Europe precisely because of this changing perception of the west. One member of the party, a younger sister, reads from a guidebook that claims the wonders of the world “combined would not begin to compare with the glories of the National Park on the

⁴⁶ Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2013), 27.

⁴⁷ Herber M. Wells, *See Europe if you Will, But See America First* (Denver: Carson Harper, 1906), 12. <https://archive.org/details/seeuropeifyouwi00well>

⁴⁸ The phrase “See America First” was ubiquitous enough that it was the title of a 1916 Cole Porter Broadway musical. The satirical production was intended to mock the nationalism of growing frontier romanticism, and included songs like *Beautiful, Primitive Indian Girls*. Audiences, however, did not care for the show’s tone and the production was a critical and financial flop.

Yellowstone.” Her ever status-conscious older sister decides then that the west would replace Europe in her quest to be “looked upon as a privileged creature by one’s envying friends.”⁴⁹

Wylie’s publicity materials echoed the “See America First” campaign’s emphasis on tourism as patriotism. The Company’s promotional brochures include extensive details about the history of the park, and anecdotal information about the sights and prominent previous visitors. These notes also explained the science behind the wonders of Yellowstone, attempting to convey the significance of the sights. Pictures, maps and detailed itineraries reassured potential visitors that they would see the notable places mentioned by the Lewis and Clark journals and the Washburn expedition. Though this edifying material could perhaps be less cynically explained by the instructional background of its founder, the brochure for the 1913 season featured the “See America First” slogan on the front page.⁵⁰ This advertising technique indicates that The Wylie Company was aware of their privileged position in the nation’s first national park and knew that use of such rhetoric would appeal to their intended audiences.

Joining existing characterizations of the West as a land of opportunity and the source of the uniquely American character, framing tourism of the West as patriotism would have only broadened its appeal. Though the frontier ideal pervaded society, participants of western tourism were often limited to those who could afford the price of trip. Prior to the Civil War, tourism was only for those with disposable time and money who could afford to engage in leisure travel; in the 1920s, the proliferation of the automobile changed the nature of travel, democratizing tourism. Wylie’s years of operation, 1893 – 1916, fall squarely within this transitional period. Though a Wylie Yellowstone excursion was certainly out of reach for poor families, the

⁴⁹ Alice Wellington Rollins, “The Three Tetons,” *Harpers New Monthly Magazine* 74 (1887): 870. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924077722506?urlappend=%3Bseq=879>

⁵⁰ Wylie Permanent Camping Company, *Yellowstone National Park: Daily Service June 15 to Sept. 10*, 1913, cover, 4. <https://archive.org/details/yellowstoneparkw27bwyl>.

expansion of the railroads and the gradual reduction in ticket fares suggests that traveling became more widespread amongst the growing middle class.

Though more accessible, a Wylie Camping Company excursion was still a relatively expensive proposition. In an era when the average yearly income ranged between \$200 and \$400, only those of considerable means could afford the per-capita price of \$47 round-trip railroad fare, the six-day Wylie rate of \$40, and other incidental costs.⁵¹ Not surprisingly, then, typical Wylie patrons were urban, middle-to-upper class professionals or their family members. Although the head of household was not always present, many visitors came from families of bank managers, business owners, or corporation executives.⁵² By offering a more authentic park experience than hotels while retaining the comforts of traditional lodgings, Wylie appealed to the adventurous upper-middle class.

By some combination of clever advertising, Wylie's monopoly on camping concessionaire privileges, and the company's skill in catering to customer desires, the camp became a favorite retreat for well-heeled groups. In 1904, the Wylie Camps hosted the entire Knights Templar Commandery of Pittsburgh on one of the company's six-day tours. The number and status of those participating merited several mentions of the camp in Pittsburgh

⁵¹ Alexander Klein, "Personal Income of U.S. States: Estimates for the Period 1880-1910," *IDEAS Working Paper Series from RePEc*, 2009, https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/research/workingpapers/2009/twerp_916.pdf; Railroad rates for 1901 taken from Northern Pacific Railway, "Rates and Arrangements for the Tourist Season of 1901," *Wonderland*, (St. Paul, MN: Northern Pacific Railway, 1901), 105; Wylie rates taken from multiple brochures cited throughout text.

⁵² Wylie Permanent Camping Company Yellowstone Lake Tourist Register, 1904-1909, Collection 2572, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, Bozeman, MT. Occupations and identities verified by census data through city of origin and travel companions. Though the company register contained a few visitors from South America and Asia, there are no mentions of African-Americans or other subaltern groups in primary accounts. Given the cultural and systemic oppression of non-whites during this era, it is likely they were not typical Wylie visitors.

society papers. Playing host to affluent parties was not unusual; numerous minor celebrities and political officials also chose the camping company for their Yellowstone experience.⁵³

Wylie credited part of the company's success to his distinguished camp alumni, asserting that customer satisfaction was the reason for his initial concession grant: according to the name-dropping entrepreneur, the Secretary of the Interior, the chairman of the committee on Public Lands, and numerous other congressmen and senators were previous campers.⁵⁴ When it was time to renew Wylie's concession privileges, the Company again used the sway of influential society. In 1897, Wylie's lawyers presented the Department of the Interior with multiple glowing testimonials from members of the swiftly growing evangelical religious youth group, the Society of Christian Endeavor, who had visited Wylie the previous year.⁵⁵ With over 56,000 members and multiple publications with at least as many subscribers, the Society of Christian Endeavor were powerful advocates.⁵⁶ Their testimony, along with other evidence from "satisfied customers" demonstrated Wylie's contributions to society, and certainly played a role in the renewal of his concessionaire license. Though financial consideration limited *who* could participate as a Wylie "Dude," other factors, such as gender, affected *how* they approached the experience.

With vastly different social expectations and perceptions, it is unsurprising that tourist expectations varied based on their gender. As presented in literature and other media of the era,

⁵³ Wylie Tourist Register, August 26, 1904; "In the Social World," Tensard De Wolfe, ed. *The Index Magazine* 11, no. 5 (1904): 12, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=s2hJAQAAMAAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.RA3-PR17>; In addition to the politicians discussed in the following paragraph, Wylie was particularly proud of the tour he gave to the Cowan family, former captives of the Nez Perce during their flight through Yellowstone in 1877, Wylie Autobiography, 69-72.

⁵⁴ W.W. Wylie Autobiography, 20.

⁵⁵ Demaray, 119-120.

⁵⁶ Rev. Frank Otis Erb, "The Development of the Young People's Movement," *The Biblical World* 48, no. 3 (1916): 133-134. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3142079>

the West was a masculine place.⁵⁷ While women were certainly present in stories of homesteading and ranching, their roles were generally portrayed within the domestic sphere. Men were the cowboys, hunters, and adventurers. Though the pampered approach of a Wylie trip was scarcely a hardship, for male visitors participation in Wylie camps was an exercise in asserting masculinity. Camping outdoors enabled men to engage with an aspect of the frontier mythology that seemed to be missing from the developing nation-state: self-sufficiency. For many, technology and industrialization had made life far too easy; diagnoses of neurasthenia - the general malaise believed to be caused by too much mental stress with too little physicality - began to spread.

Among others, national icon Theodore Roosevelt advocated for the “strenuous life” and interactions in the outdoors as a cure for this lack of masculinity in Progressive era men. As an Eastern politician turned rugged cowboy, Roosevelt personified the transformative power of the west. As bankers, politicians, and businessmen, many of the men who traveled with Wylie certainly experienced what Roosevelt called “a life of ignoble ease.” A trip to the wilds of Yellowstone, either with family or business acquaintances would seem to satisfy this call for manly adventure.⁵⁸

The services and marketing of the Wylie Way demonstrate the belief that customers wanted to experience the thrills of a wild Yellowstone, while still remaining essentially safe. Male tourist accounts support this conclusion, and often express the twin desires side-by-side. Fred Ellsworth, a Michigan financial executive, visited Yellowstone Park in 1912. Like most male Wylie campers, Ellsworth was part of a large commercial group. *Moody Magazine*

⁵⁷ For a study of the masculinization of literature of the American West, see Victoria Lamont, *Westerns: A Women's History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016).

⁵⁸ Shuster, 126; Bederman, 85-86; Theodore Roosevelt, *The Wilderness Hunter* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1893), 278.

published the story of his trip with the men of the American Institute of Banking later that year.⁵⁹ Though his narrative and phrasing are witty and fresh, his sentiments around the trip vary little from those expressed by other campers. Like most other accounts, Ellsworth mentions a close bear encounter for a number of their group, joking “it is said that the bears were far more scared than the men, but did not run as fast – indeed, the men in question claim that they did a hundred yards in considerably less than seven seconds, which is two or three seconds under the record.” Despite the thrill of the bear encounter, Ellsworth also mentions that the Yellowstone bears are not particularly intimidating, and “not a bit like the ferocious bears that inhabit the story books.” The banker describes the natural curiosities as explained by the guide, including the famous boiling cone beside Yellowstone Lake where fish can be cooked immediately after catching, and the Emerald Pool – so named for the Irishman who fell in and drowned there. The excitement of the group exploits is somewhat blunted, however, by Ellsworth’s constant references to the food provided by the Wylie Company. The regularity of Old Faithful seems equally as remarkable as the speed and skill with which “those dignified bankers did shine as knife and fork artists.”⁶⁰ Though the purpose of the retreat was possibly an attempt by the businessmen to encounter the rugged “strenuous life” promoted by Theodore Roosevelt, their concerns were largely related to comfort and comestibles.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, men were not alone in seeking the excitement and fulfillment of the western “strenuous life.” In fact, the Wylie Company’s clientele was overwhelmingly female, with company ledgers and camper photographs indicating that women

⁵⁹ Whittlesey and Watry, 292.

⁶⁰ Fred W. Ellsworth, “Through Yellowstone Park with the American Institute of Banking,” *Moody’s Magazine* 14 (November 1912): 367-75, in *Ho! For Wonderland: Travelers’ Accounts of Yellowstone, 1872-1914*, 298, 300, 297, 296, 293. Several primary sources mention joking answers given by exasperated Wylie guides to their inquisitive middle-class guests. Since Ellsworth is also a quipster, it is unclear if he is genuinely relating a “fact” from the guide or making his own gag.

outnumbered men by almost two to one.⁶¹ While many men may have sought a rediscovery of their masculine strength through camping in the parks, women were able to take advantage of changing social mores and the national significance of western land to acquire and exhibit newfound freedoms.

The expanded freedoms women gained from the western camping experience extended beyond the physical and into the intellectual, with women authoring the vast majority of travel journals and excursion stories published in this era. While the overwhelming demographics of female visitors certainly played a role in the prevalence of their writing, Kaufman argues the widespread publishing of women's western experiences was an avenue for them to celebrate the expanding freedom of and self-determination of their trips, challenging other women to produce similar expressions.⁶² Publishing their stories may also have been for the purposes of representation. Literature scholar Victoria Lamont argues that late-nineteenth century Americans agreed with Frederick Jackson Turner in viewing the nation's shared frontier experience as a defining characteristic.⁶³ Meanwhile, women were still largely portrayed as supporting characters in the Western story. By publishing stories of their own Western adventures, women established a legitimate stake in this vital aspect of American culture.⁶⁴

Most common to the Wylie experience were groups of consisting of only women, both married and single, travelling together.⁶⁵ Occasionally the group had an older matron or a

⁶¹ Wylie Permanent Camping Company Yellowstone Lake Tourist Register, 1904-1909, Collection 2572, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, Bozeman, MT. E.g. Sample from June 21, 1909 lists 22 visitors, 14 of whom are female. The visitors come from a number of eastern and midwestern states, including Tenn., Miss., Ind., Mo., Ia., Mass., Ill., and N.Y.

⁶² Kaufman, 3.

⁶³ Lamont, 56.

⁶⁴ Lamont, 54.

⁶⁵ The prevalence of female tourists was not unique to the Wylie Company, but was ubiquitous enough to already be a trope before the end of the century. This is demonstrated in the 1887 *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* story referencing the patriotic and social pressures for visiting Yellowstone (see note 49). The party consists of two

husband accompany them; but just as often women travelled alone, speaking to the perceived safety of the excursion. The Wylie Company estimated that forty percent of their campers were “ladies traveling in small parties or individually, without male escort.” The sheer number of unaccompanied female travelers encouraged the company to hire camp matrons to “give special attention to the comfort and pleasure of women” and “preclude the characteristic annoyances to female travelers.”⁶⁶ These specific conveniences and chaperoning duties are emblematic of the desires of the Progressive Era “New Woman.”

The social acceptability and relative informality of park visits allowed female tourists to experience the outdoors on a near-equal footing with men. On tours given by Wylie and others, the only restrictions placed on excursions were physical ability. Women tourists engaged in hiking, climbing, and naturalist geological observation without many of the limitations of the society. Where gender norms could not be discarded, as in matters of dress, female hikers and climbers adopted a variety of devices to clip and pin skirts into pants-like forms.⁶⁷ Whether attracted by the rising naturalist movement or the social currency of the experience, women utilized the expanded freedoms of national parks and camps like Wylie’s to express self-determination.

While male tourists sought to regain a measure of masculinity through adventure, female tourists also used their newfound freedom to claim new experiences. Traveling sisters Fannie and Mattie MacLaury, emphasize the danger of the park in their 1910 account, pointing out craters as “pitfalls for unwary pedestrians,” like the woman in their party whose foot was badly

sisters – one married and one single – traveling to Yellowstone with another married female friend. The two husbands participate reluctantly, but the focus of the tale is on the expectations and experiences of the women.

⁶⁶ Wylie Permanent Camping Company, *Yellowstone National Park: Park Season June 14 to Sept. 15*, 1910, 13. <https://archive.org/details/yellowstonenat1451910wyli>.

⁶⁷ Kaufman, 3; Wylie Autobiography, 45-46. Wylie’s friend Tom (of the famously treacherous “Uncle Tom’s Trail) charged one dollar per person to provide guidance down the trail, lunch with coffee, and a pin for ladies to make “imitation divided skirts.”

scalded by a misstep. The sisters also visited the site of a famous series of stagecoach hold-ups that took place in two years prior, in 1908. In their joint memoir, the sisters marvel at the twelve robberies in one day, in which “a desperado...thrusting a loaded revolver in the faces of his victims, quickly separated them from their cash.”⁶⁸ Though these women were excited by the risks of the park, they also appreciated efforts by the government and tourism companies to provide protection and safety.⁶⁹ In the nine-page chapter dedicated to their Yellowstone trip, the sisters dedicate most space to the flora and fauna of the park; however a full third of that chapter addresses the comforts of the camps, the “quite tame” bears, and the increased soldier patrols and tourist protections that followed the famous robberies.⁷⁰ Similarly, in her 1907 *Reminiscences*, Amelia J. Lyle declares that her party would “bow most profoundly” to the “undeviating faithfulness” of Old Faithful’s high, hot blast. While enjoying the natural phenomena, Lyle also appreciates that “the danger line of approach is guarded by a railing to keep the unwary from too dangerous proximity.”⁷¹ At least for the female visitors to the park, it is clear that a certain amount of danger was acceptable – or even desirable – as long as it was accompanied by sufficient safeguards.

Though national fascination with the West pervaded all social classes, the ability to take such a vacation did not. For those who could not afford a trip for pleasure, the camping concessionaire offered another avenue to the experience: the position of a Wylie “Savage.” The diary of tent maid Beatrice Boedefeld demonstrates the Wylie experience from the perspective of a female worker. Boedefeld saw her time in Yellowstone as an exercise in freedom, though from

⁶⁸ Fannie and Mattie MacLaury, *The Vacationers’ Story of their Trip: From East to West and Home Again* (Delhi, NY: Express Printery, 1910), 10.

⁶⁹ Riley, 139-142. Riley notes that the tendency to portray the west as amenable to women was common amongst most female writers.

⁷⁰ Fannie and Mattie MacLaury, 8, 12.

⁷¹ Amelia J. Lyle, *Reminiscences of Travel at Home and Abroad* (Burlington, IA: The German Literary Board, 1907), 68. <https://archive.org/details/reminiscencesoft00lyle>.

perhaps a different perspective than the women campers she served. The location and the labor of the camps offered more enjoyable work than she could get in the city, and despite her duties she described the job as “a time of absolute carefree bliss.”⁷² While acknowledging the beauty and dangers of the park, her prose reflects the matter-of-fact attitude of daily exposure. Hot springs and similar features that thrilled guests were used by Savages for bathing or washing rags; accidents like falls or scalding geysers were not reasons to implement safeguards, but were funny incidents proving something innocuous, such as male workers being “useless” at laundry.⁷³

Boedefeld’s diary also celebrates the camps for a freedom not necessarily granted to paying visitors: control of her own sexuality. Strict rules of contact prevented romantic interactions with guests, and the Wylie camps provided a matron to protect the virtue of unaccompanied women tourists. Women workers, however, were largely left to self-police their bodies. Boedefeld openly acknowledges she is excited by the concept, stating, “I have left my brain in cold storage at Yellowstone station, likewise my conscience.”⁷⁴ Though she enjoyed the freedom at first, she quickly suggested that the girls take turns chaperoning each other after being teased for spending time alone with a male co-worker.⁷⁵ Despite her status as a woman in the service industry, the Wylie camps afforded Boedefeld a level of self-determination that she referenced longingly throughout her life.⁷⁶

⁷² Boedefeld, Part 2, <http://beyoublithe-n-bonny.blogspot.com/2015/05/diary-of-wylie-savage-part-2.html>

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Like Beatrice, many of the women employees at the camp exercised their newfound freedom to explore their sexuality, the popular term for these liaisons was “Rotten Logging.” Like “Savages,” the provenance of the phrase is unknown but in wide use by 1916 and is present in other primary material from non-Wylie Yellowstone workers.

⁷⁶ For years following 1916, Boedefeld and her friends exchanged letters about their time at the camps. Knowledge of her enduring affection for the Wylie experience is courtesy of her granddaughter Marci Andrews Wahlquist. To see letters between her and other workers, journal entries, and accounts of later trips to Yellowstone,

While the looming role of western mythology in the narratives of Wylie visitors and workers from out-of-state is perhaps unsurprising, a fascination with wilderness also enters into the accounts of local Wylie guests. Despite the popularity of the camps with influential and far-flung visitors, the Wylie Company also made concerted efforts to attract Montana residents to the park. During the peak of the season, the Company ran promotions in state newspapers, advertising special pricing for residents who bought tickets on “Montana Day.” “Montana Day” visitors could purchase a six-day tour and round-trip railroad ticket for the reduced price of \$41.75.⁷⁷ The price, while still substantial to many, represented a steep discount when compared to the regular Missoula round trip rate of \$57.60. Wylie publicity in local newspapers varied from small, twenty-word exhortations, to full-page historical and geological summaries of Yellowstone. To encourage Montanans to know their own state better, the longer advertisements employed a light scolding mixed with an appeal to the fear of missing out: “Did any one [sic] ever ask you if you had seen the Park? Really oughtn’t you to know a little about it? You always meant to go – always wanted to go. You never will by putting it off..It would be a lot more fun to go. Ask anybody who has been.”⁷⁸

The Wylie Company also employed a unique tactic to generate Montana interest in their camps. In partnership with several local newspapers in different Montana cities, the Company held contests for young women to win “all expenses paid” trips to experience Yellowstone the “Wylie Way.” Newspapers used ballot voting to determine the contest outcome. Voting coupons were available in each edition of the paper, and contestants were encouraged to have all

visit Wahlquist’s digitized family archive <http://beyoublithe-n-bonny.blogspot.com/p/bee-boedefeld-and-her-beatrice.html>

⁷⁷ Wylie Permanent Camping Company, *Yellowstone National Park: Daily Service June 15 to Sept. 10*, 1913, 4. <https://archive.org/details/yellowstoneparkw27bwyl>.

⁷⁸ Wylie Permanent Camping Company, “Wonderland of America,” *Yellowstone Monitor*, July 16, 1908, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86075153/1908-07-16/ed-1/seq-8/>

of their friends and family buy papers to collect votes. If a new subscriber mentioned a specific contestant, that young lady would be eligible for coupons worth an exponentially increasing number of votes, depending on the length of subscription and pre-payment status. In effect, the newspapers recruited several new saleswomen, while Wylie received numerous ads reminding all readers of the comforts and sights of the “decidedly pleasant” camping prize.⁷⁹

Census records of contest winners reflect a decidedly different style of tourist than the typical Wylie “Dude.” The women, all in their late teens or early twenties, were largely working class, holding jobs titles like milliner or seamstress. A number of them came from single-parent homes or were themselves the sole income-earner in a house with four or five younger siblings. Despite their comparatively less privileged upbringing, their reviews of the Wylie experience varied little from those of their upper-crust counterparts. Their recollections too focus on elements of the natural world juxtaposed with leisure and comfort. Sue Welch and Maggie Sullivan, respectively the subject and storyteller of the introductory bear story, were two such contest winners. Other trip recipients – whose stories were published by the awarding newspaper – waxed equally poetic about the fascinating and dangerous paint pots and the “heavens of rest” that were the Wylie camps, reflecting the pervasiveness of the dual emphasis on danger and leisure. Lucy Grannis, the twenty-three-year-old daughter of a laborer from Dillion, wrote several pages about the variety of terraces, geysers, and the “Indian legends” of the park’s mysterious Obsidian Cliff.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ William S. Bell, ed., “Big Contest Inaugurated,” *Yellowstone Monitor*, July 16, 1908, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86075153/1908-07-16/ed-1/seq-1/>; The Billings Gazette, ed., “Two Free Park Trips,” *The Billings Gazette*, July 14, 1908; The Daily Inter Mountain, ed., “Impressions of the Wonderful Trip,” *The Daily Inter Mountain*, September 15, 1900, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85053057/1900-09-15/ed-1/seq-9/>

⁸⁰ The Daily Inter Mountain, ed., “Impressions of the Wonderful Trip,” *The Daily Inter Mountain*, September 15, 1900, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85053057/1900-09-15/ed-1/seq-9/>

Though clearly astounded by the oddities of her natural surroundings, Grannis devotes several paragraphs to the tents “equipped with all the conveniences one could wish” and expressing her gratefulness for the tent heater fires started by employees a half hour before the group had to wake up. For twenty-one-year-old stenographer Lizzy Gibney, the startling sights and “wonders to be unrolled before their eyes” paired well with “royal manner” in which she was treated from the moment of leaving her home.⁸¹ The statements of the contest winners are particularly revealing about the nature of western tourist expectations. These young women were not wealthy or accustomed to luxury, yet they expected and praised the conveniences of the camps; they were Montanans, but Yellowstone was somehow *more* “Wild” and “Western” than the nearby towns from which they came. Of all traveler accounts, these would seem most likely to stray from the typical. Their adherence to the script of danger and comfort, suggests that the concept of the Western Tour as a product was well established across geographical and socio-economic lines.

In the growing field of western tourism at the turn of the twentieth century, promoters and tourists added a new chapter to the story of the American West. With increased accessibility, more people than ever before visited a land that occupied a central space in the nation’s consciousness. Though nominally a trip of leisure, the experiences and expectations of the camps’ visitors and creators had larger implications based on their perspectives. Despite the uniform set-up of the camps and the structured itineraries, each group that visited Yellowstone brought their own interpretations and goals to the mythic frontier. Some sought to reaffirm their

⁸¹ Contest winner observations taken from: The Daily Inter Mountain, ed., “Impressions of the Wonderful Trip,” *The Daily Inter Mountain*, September 15, 1900, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85053057/1900-09-15/ed-1/seq-9/>. Though their observations were similar to their wealthier counterparts, most of the women recounted a repeated group shout: “We are the people, Who are you? We’re from Montana, How do you do?... Razzle Dazzle, Hobble, Gobble, Sis! Boom Bah! Inter Mountain! Inter Mountain! Rah! Rah!! Rah!!” There is no evidence that the regular Wylie campers engaged in loud group chants.

role as strong heads of household, while others sought to claim new freedoms and experiences. While engaging in their own western adventures, these customers, particularly the wealthy, lacked the desire or ability to encounter the dirt and discomfort of their pioneer precursors. Businesses like the Wylie Permanent Camping Company answered those desires for a safer, cleaner western adventure. Beyond providing a simple service, the camping and tour group worked to create an experience that would satisfy visitors' frontier expectations, while still meeting customer requirements of comfort and quality. The demand for both security and danger generated new tourist offerings and advertisements, and reestablished perceptions and expectations. This interplay between the allure of adventure and the wish for comfort manufactured an entirely new western experience.

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