



1982

## A Tell Tale Retold: The Influence of the Photographs of William Henry Jackson upon the Passage of the Yellowstone Park Act of 1872

Howard Bossen

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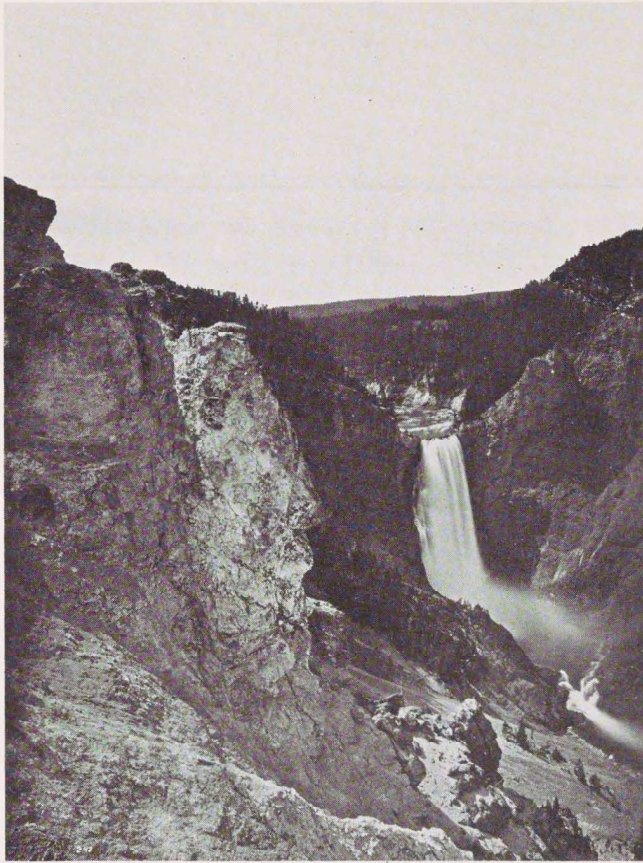
### Recommended Citation

Bossen, H. (1982). A Tell Tale Retold: The Influence of the Photographs of William Henry Jackson upon the Passage of the Yellowstone Park Act of 1872. *8* (1), 98-109. Retrieved from <https://repository.upenn.edu/svc/vol8/iss1/10>

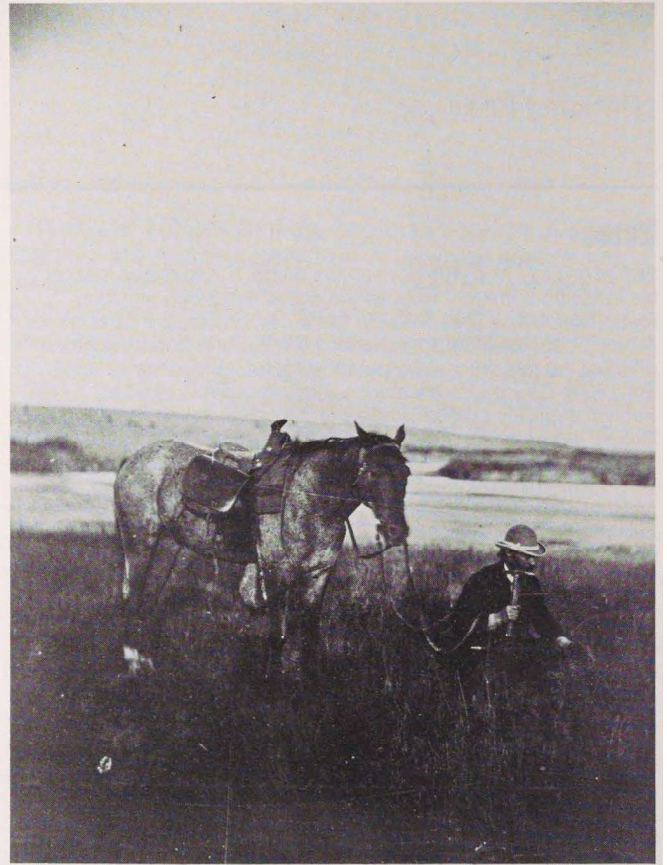
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**Figure 1** ★ No. 243. THE LOWER FALLS (1871). View from the east side of the cañon. 7 × 10 inches. (Caption from 1875 catalog, p. 27. Photo U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 82.)



**Figure 2** Camp scene (n.d.). Figure is Dr. Hayden. 3½ × 4½ inches. (U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 1119.)



**Figure 3** Camp Study (n.d.). W. H. Jackson. 5 × 7 inches. (U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 592.)



# A Tall Tale Retold: The Influence of the Photographs of William Henry Jackson on the Passage of the Yellowstone Park Act of 1872

Howard Bossen

Imagine the excitement William Henry Fox-Talbot, an English inventor and country gentleman, must have felt when in August 1835 he succeeded in permanently fixing a fleeting sun-picture. The image is of the oriel window in his home at Lacock Abbey in Wiltshire, England. It measures not quite an inch square.

As the world's oldest extant photographic negative, it represents the foundation of the negative-positive process in photography. It presents to the world one of the earliest permanently fixed photographic recordings of an object. In a note written to the left side of this paper negative, Fox-Talbot wrote: "When first made, the squares of glass about 200 in number could be counted, with help of a lens" (Lassam 1979:13).

Since that magical moment when Fox-Talbot demonstrated the ability of photographic recordings to document the 200 or so glass squares in his window, photography has been used to demonstrate that something exists, that something is lovely, or, perhaps, hideous. From almost the moment of their invention, some have attempted to use photographs as powerful persuaders.

Apparently the very first time a specific body of photographic work was used with stunning effect was in the winter of 1871-1872. The photographs were made in the summer and fall of 1871 for the U.S. Geological Survey of the Yellowstone region of Wyoming and Montana (see Figure 1). This survey, usually referred to as the Hayden survey, was named after its director, Dr. Ferdinand V. Hayden, an M.D. and a professor of geology at the University of Pennsylvania (see Figure 2). The photographs were made by William Henry Jackson, who served as expedition photographer for the Hayden surveys from 1870 through 1879 (see Figure 3).

Jackson was born in 1843 and lived to the age of 99. Before joining the U.S. Geological Survey team he operated a portrait studio in Omaha, Nebraska. In addition to his photographs of the Yellowstone region for the government, he made numerous other photographs of the American West. In 1875 he produced

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for the U.S. Department of the Interior the *Descriptive Catalogue of the Photographs of the United States Geological Survey of the Territories for the Years 1869 to 1875, Inclusive*. And in 1877 he wrote the *Descriptive Catalogue of Photographs of North American Indians*. This major ethnographic document describes over 1000 photographs in the possession of the government. The intent of the publication, according to Jackson, was

to systematize the collection of Photographic Portraits of Indians now in the possession of the United States Geological Survey of the Territories, and to place on record all the information we have been able to obtain on the various individuals and scenes represented. [Jackson 1877]

After leaving the government in 1879, Jackson resumed his career as a commercial photographer. Moving first to Denver to set up a studio, he eventually photographed people and places all over the world. Many of his images he sold through commercial firms with which he was involved, first in Denver and later in Detroit. The Detroit View Company owned by Jackson sold his scenic pictures as well as those made by other photographers. His reputation had been made as a landscape photographer, yet one of his large commercial projects was the production of *The White City*, a folio of views of the 1893-1894 Columbia Exposition in Chicago.

Jackson's magnificent views of Yellowstone's natural wonders are considered by several historians to be the first time that photographic evidence was used to shape national policy in the United States.

Beaumont Newhall, the United States's most prominent historian of photography, wrote in his classic study, *The History of Photography*:

The United States Congress was persuaded to set apart the Yellowstone region as a national park by the convincing evidence of William H. Jackson's photographs which had been presented to its members by Ferdinand V. Hayden as documents; they made credible the reports of natural wonders which until then had been dismissed as the tall tales of travellers. [Newhall 1964:137-138]

Gail Buckland, in *Reality Recorded: Early Documentary Photography*, wrote:

Jackson's photographs of the West served to validate the tales that were told of the natural wonders that existed in North America; they greatly impressed the members of the United States Congress—to the extent that they set apart Yellowstone region as a national park. [Buckland 1974:40]



Her bibliography lists Newhall as a major source.

Barbara London Upton and John Upton (1981) wrote in *Photography*: "William Henry Jackson's photographs of Yellowstone helped convince Congress to set the area aside as a National Park . . ." (p. 332). In their preface, they acknowledge relying upon Newhall.

George Craven (1975) wrote in *Object and Image*:

But the best known of all the frontier cameramen was William Henry Jackson, who worked his way west from Omaha and was the official photographer to the Hayden Surveys from 1870 to 1879. The 1871 trek explored the natural wonders of the Yellowstone region, and Jackson's photographs, displayed to the Congress in Washington, were instrumental the next year in creating Yellowstone National Park. [p. 44]

And Peter Pollack, former curator of photography at the Art Institute of Chicago, in his *The Picture History of Photography*, is quite specific in his claim for Jackson's influence. "Nine of his photographs saved Yellowstone for the people of America, making an area 3,578 square miles into the country's first national park" (Pollack 1977:63).

Perhaps because the statements seem so intuitively correct, none of these historians bothered to footnote their sources. Perhaps because the statements seem correct, they have become accepted as historical truth. For whatever reasons, the perception that Jackson's photographs played an important, and perhaps decisive, role in gaining the passage of the Yellowstone Park legislation, which formed the basis for the national park system, has become the accepted truth. Precisely because none of these writers cites sources for their claims, the role Jackson's photographs played in the passage of the Yellowstone legislation needs to be reexamined. What evidence did Newhall and the others marshal?

Apparently Newhall relied on the pioneering work of the chemist and historian Robert Taft. Taft, a native of Kansas and a professor of chemistry at the University of Kansas, published one of the earliest well-documented histories of photography. His work, *Photography and the American Scene*, subtitled *A Social History 1839-1889*, covers photography's first 50 years. Taft compiled a remarkable amount of data. The book is, however, more an encyclopedia of facts than an analytical social treatise. Nevertheless, considering the vacuum in the field in the 1930s, it represents, even today, a monument to diligence and scholarship.

The similarity to the assertions found in Taft's and Newhall's books is strong. Taft wrote:

The real value of Jackson's photographs became apparent the following winter [1872], when through the efforts of Hayden and of N. P. Langford and William H. Clagett, a bill was prepared and introduced into both houses of Congress setting aside the Yellowstone as a National Park.

Jackson's photographs were prepared and placed on exhibition and had an immense influence in securing the desired legislation. Senator Pomeroy, of Kansas, who introduced the Senate bill, had some difficulty in getting its consideration. The second time he attempted to bring up the matter in the Senate he remarked, "There are photographs of the valley and the curiosities, which Senators can see." The Senators must have seen them, for the next time the bill came up for consideration it was passed without dissent, and on March 1, 1872, President Grant signed the bill creating the Yellowstone National Park. [Taft 1964:300, 302]

After citing Senator Pomeroy's comment, duly excised from *The Congressional Globe* (now known as *The Congressional Record*), Taft continued to build his case by relying upon the work of an early Superintendent and historian of Yellowstone Park, H. M. Chittenden. Taft continued:

The value of these photographs in aiding in the passage of this bill is also attested by Chittenden, the historian of the Park, who says, "The photographs were of immense value. Description might exaggerate, but the camera told the truth; and in this case the truth was more remarkable than exaggeration. . . . They did a work no other agency could do and doubtless convinced everyone who saw them that the region where such wonders existed should be carefully preserved to the public forever." [ibid.:302]

Taft's footnotes provide specific sources upon which he based his conclusions. He also includes quotations from two of those sources. As well researched as Taft's book is, his conclusions in regard to Jackson's photographs, however, are not supportable.

A careful examination of his text, notes, and sources reveals: (1) he strung together sentences from different chapters in Chittenden's book, thereby creating a false connection; (2) he quoted Senator Pomeroy out of context; (3) he ascribed the difficulty in getting the Yellowstone Park legislation onto the floor to the fact that the senators had not been adequately exposed to Jackson's photographs; and (4) he incorrectly implied that because of Jackson's photographs this legislation "passed without dissent." Taft manipulated the record. His reason, conscious or unconscious, was to substantiate his belief in the power of photographic evidence to persuade, and resulted in the creation of a myth. Newhall, as well as other respected writers, has perpetuated it.



When examining the effort to persuade the Congress to pass the Yellowstone Park legislation, one finds that many people were involved. Jackson's photographs represent but one kind of data collected. The lobbying effort included many pieces of data and many kinds of activities.

One source claims that 400 copies of *Scribner's Monthly* containing an article on Yellowstone by an early explorer, N. P. Langford, were distributed to all members of Congress just preceding the day of the vote.<sup>1</sup> In the February 1872 issue of *Scribner's Monthly* an article by Professor Hayden, head of the 1871 survey, appeared. It concluded with a specific plea for the establishment of Yellowstone as a national park:

The intelligent American will one day point on the map to this remarkable district with the conscious pride that it has not its parallel on the face of the globe. Why will not Congress at once pass a law setting it apart as a great public park for all time to come . . . ? [Hayden 1872:396]

Both the western press, most notably the Helena *Herald* of Helena, Montana, and eastern papers, such as the *Washington Star* and the *New York Times*, reported on the expeditions and the passage of the legislation.<sup>2</sup>

The natural wonders of the American West had been reported by explorers for many years. However, it was not until after the Civil War that most of the systematic exploration occurred. Although the Yellowstone region was visited by explorers at least as early as 1829,<sup>3</sup> it was not until 1869 that the first "definitely intended exploration" occurred.<sup>4</sup>

The Folsom-Cook expedition of 1869 was unofficial. It had no artists and no photographers. The only accounts were written and oral. Appearing in the July 1870 issue of *Western Monthly* was an article, probably by Folsom, which described the beauty of the region, expressed fear that the public would soon overrun the area, and commented upon the problem of being believed.<sup>5</sup>

The country around the headwaters of the Yellowstone River, although frequently visited by prospectors and mountain men, is still to the world of letters a veritable terra incognita. . . . Owing to the fact that this class of men had gained a reputation for indulging in flights of fancy when recounting their adventures, these reports of waterfalls, hot springs and volcanoes were received with considerable incredulity, until it was noticed that, however much the accounts of different parties differed in detail, there was a marked coincidence in the descriptions of some of the most prominent features of the country.<sup>6</sup> [emphasis added]

This comment, part of one of the earliest published descriptive articles on the Yellowstone region, placed into the public record the fact that the sheer repetitive nature of the "tall tales" had resulted in many people beginning to believe the descriptions. Failure to take this point into account, when claiming that the photographs of Jackson made the "tall tales" believable, is an important omission.

The following year the Washburn expedition took place. This, too, was a private and unofficial expedition, but it included "some of the most influential citizens and officials of the [Montana] Territory."<sup>7</sup>

General Henry D. Washburn was the surveyor general of Montana. He had been given the rank of major general for services rendered during the Civil War and had served two terms as a United States congressman. Cornelius Hedges was a judge and member of the Montana bar. Samuel Hauser was a civil engineer and prominent banker in Helena. Walter Trumbull, an assistant assessor of internal revenue, was the son of Lyman Trumbull, a United States senator from Illinois. Truman C. Everts was the assessor of internal revenue for Montana. Nathaniel P. Langford had been the collector of internal revenue for Montana. And Warren C. Gillette and Benjamin Stuckney were merchants from Montana.<sup>8</sup>

Because of the presence of so many influential persons, a military escort was granted. The head of the military contingent was Lieutenant G. C. Doane. His account of the expedition represents the first major official government report on the Yellowstone region. Professor Hayden refers to it in his preliminary report on the official 1871 expedition. He commented "that for graphic descriptions and thrilling interest it has not been surpassed by any official report made to our government since the time of Lewis and Clark."<sup>9</sup>

Several of the people on the Washburn expedition played a role in lobbying for the passage of the Yellowstone legislation. The most prominent was N. P. Langford who, in addition to writing "The Wonders of Yellowstone" for *Scribner's Monthly*, toured the country lecturing on the wonders of Yellowstone.<sup>10</sup> After the passage of the legislation he was appointed the first superintendent of the park.

Truman C. Everts became lost, and after several days other expedition members stopped searching for him, fearing he had perished. He was found by a search party that was sent out after the expedition had returned. He wrote "Thirty-seven Days of Peril," which described his terrifying ordeal, for the November 1871 edition of *Scribner's Monthly* (Everts 1871:1-17).

Cornelius Hedges wrote a series of articles for the *Helena Herald*. Evidently his accounts of the expedition "attracted wide interest in the country and were immediately copied generally by the press . . ."<sup>11</sup>



Just as "the information secured from Folsom led to the Washburn exploring expedition in August 1870,"<sup>12</sup> the results of the Washburn expedition most likely led to the sanctioning of the official government survey of 1871.

An article appearing in the November 14, 1870, Helena *Herald* claims that:

The wonderful discoveries reported by General Washburn . . . are likely and almost certain to lead to an early and thorough exploration of those mysterious regions under the patronage of the general Government and of the Smithsonian Institute and other prominent institutions of this country. I think this will be sure to take place next season.<sup>13</sup>

The earliest reference to the Yellowstone region listed in the *New York Times Index* is a report dated January 22, 1871, on N. P. Langford's lecture. Langford discussed his experiences as a member of the Washburn expedition. The article reports the lecture at Cooper Institute the preceding evening in a matter-of-fact manner:

In Montana County, Nature, he said, displays her wonderful beauties in a magnificent manner, and it is inhabited only by wild beasts, Indians and a few trappers.<sup>14</sup>

There is not any indication to lead a reader to believe the *New York Times* doubted the general veracity of Langford's report. However, when the *New York Times* coverage of Yellowstone picks up again in September 1871, referring to the Hayden survey, it does become apparent that the truth of many of the Yellowstone accounts had been in question. The *Times* wanted more evidence, yet there is no indication that the evidence it desired was photographs. Rather the newspaper awaited the reports of trained scientists.

Hitherto the reports that have reached us, have been mainly those of popular as distinguished from scientific observers. Those now to be furnished, on the other hand, we have a right to anticipate will be trustworthy, exact, and comprehensive, and will thus supply much needed information of one of the most wonderful tracts of the American continent.<sup>15</sup>

On October 23, 1871, the *New York Times* again wrote about "The New Wonder Land." Here one finds reiterated the *Times's* reluctance to believe fully earlier reports, including the report of Lieutenant Doane. The *Times* wanted "confirmatory testimony" and argued that:

. . . the official narrative of the Hayden expedition must be deemed needful before we can altogether accept stories of wonder hardly short of fairy tales in the astounding phenomena they describe.<sup>16</sup>

The article concludes with a statement attesting that the *New York Times* had been convinced by the evidence that the descriptions of the explorers were accurate, at least in general:

We have heard enough now to be satisfied that the region in question must be among the most wonderful of this wonderful central continent of ours, and to suspect that it deserves, in this wise, absolute preeminence, Prof. Hayden's official report, which, we hope, will not be long delayed, will enable us to arrive at conclusions more positive.<sup>17</sup>

They did await specific details not available until the publication of Hayden's final report. They had been convinced on the basis of the written descriptions of a Hayden survey artist, Henry W. Elliott. The article relied upon a letter Elliott sent to Professor Henry, the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.

Two days after the bill passed the House, an article appeared in the *New York Times* applauding the action. Although it is possible that the reporter(s) who worked on this article and the previous ones may have seen Jackson's photographs, it is clear that no reference was made to them.<sup>18</sup> The *Times's* belief in the beauty of the Yellowstone region seems to have had nothing to do with his photographs.

The accounts of the various expeditions and the descriptions of Yellowstone which appeared in magazines and newspapers demonstrate that there was public interest in the exploration of the Yellowstone region before the Hayden survey and before Jackson made his photographs. However, the Hayden survey did provide the final bits of scientific evidence needed to convince skeptics that the descriptions of the breathtaking nature of the Yellowstone region were fact, not fiction.

Upon the conclusion of the survey, Hayden and some members of his group joined the lobbying effort already under way to reserve the Yellowstone region for the people. William Henry Jackson's photographs became a part of that lobbying effort.

A search of *The Congressional Globe* reveals that in the Senate reference to or action on the Yellowstone legislation was made on December 18, 1871; January 22, 23, and 30, February 27 and 29, and March 5, 1872; and in the House on January 30 and February 27 and 28, 1872.

Senator Pomeroy, on December 18, 1871, introduced "a bill to set apart a certain tract of land lying near the headwaters of the Yellowstone as a public park."<sup>19</sup> He made no specific mention of Jackson's photographs, but did say, "Professor Hayden has made a very elaborate report on the subject."<sup>20</sup> "By unanimous consent, leave was granted to introduce a bill (S.No. 392)" and it was "referred to the Committee on Public Lands."<sup>21</sup>



The record is clear that after the committee on Public Lands had decided to report back to the Senate, Senator Pomeroy twice tried and failed to gain its consideration. It was on the third attempt on January 30, 1872, that the measure was voted on. The record is also clear that insofar as the comments of the senators are reported in *The Congressional Globe*, the photographs of William Henry Jackson are not of major concern.

Photographs in the Senate comments are mentioned only once; in the House comments, not at all. The quotation Taft excised from Senator Pomeroy's comments comes from the end of a fairly lengthy statement by Pomeroy, in which he explains the reasons the bill should be passed.

MR. POMEROY. Yes, sir. There are no arable lands, no agricultural lands there. It is the highest elevation from which our springs descend, and as it cannot interfere with any settlement for legitimate agricultural purposes, it was thought that it ought to be set apart early for this purpose [a park]. We found when we set apart the Yosemite valley that there were one or two persons who had made claims there, and there has been a contest, and it has finally gone to the Supreme Court to decide whether persons who settle on unsurveyed lands have no rights as against the Government. The Court has held that settlers on unsurveyed lands have no rights as against the Government. The Government can make an appropriation of any unsurveyed lands, notwithstanding settlers may be upon them. As this region would be attractive only on account of preempting a hot spring or some valuable mineral, it was thought such claims had better be excluded from the bill. There are several Senators whose attention has been called to this matter, and *there are photographs of the valley and the curiosities, which Senators can see.* [emphasis added] The only object of the bill is to take early possession of it by the United States and set it apart, so that it cannot be included in any claim or occupied by any settlers.<sup>22</sup>

When examined in the more complete context, it is difficult to believe that Pomeroy was presenting a strong case for the influential character of Jackson's photographs. In a somewhat casual manner the remark suggests that verification of the claims regarding the lack of arable lands, the presence of hot springs, and other matters could be obtained in photographs "which Senators can see." In no place do the comments on the floor of the House or Senate suggest that senators or congressmen were either persuaded by Jackson's photographs or had actually seen them.

While the record shows one reference to photographs, it reveals four references to the work of the geological survey team. In the Senate on December 18, 1871, when Senator Pomeroy first introduced the bill, he cited Professor Hayden's elaborate report on the subject.<sup>23</sup> On January 22, 1872, Senator Pomeroy commented: "Professor Hayden and party have

been there, and this bill is drawn on the recommendation of that gentleman to consecrate for public uses this country for a public park."<sup>24</sup> On January 23, 1872, he again referred to the "exploration" by Professor Hayden.<sup>25</sup>

And in the House on February 27, 1872, Congressman Dawes remarked: "... we but interfere with what is represented as the exposure of that country to those who are attracted by the wonderful descriptions of it by the reports of the geologists. . . ."<sup>26</sup>

To put the importance of Jackson's photographs into perspective one must realize, as Jackson did himself, that the photographs represented but a part of the evidence Hayden was gathering. In fact Hayden's published report for the 1871 expedition includes no photographs. It includes many drawings of scenery, rock specimens, and similar matter, but no photographs.<sup>27</sup>

Jackson wrote in *Time Exposure*, his autobiography, that:

Pictures were essential to the fulfillment of the doctor's plan for publicizing this Survey; but the basic purpose was always exploration. I cannot be too careful in emphasizing the fact that in this [the 1871 expedition] and all the following expeditions I was seldom more than a side-show in a great circus. [W. H. Jackson 1970:201]

Clearly, Jackson viewed his own role as supportive rather than primary.

Taft implies from his reading of *The Congressional Globe* that somehow the lack of familiarity with the Yellowstone photographs was responsible for the two thwarted attempts at introducing the legislation. Nothing so sinister seems to have been the case. When the bill was reported out of committee on January 22, 1872, Senator Pomeroy asked for its immediate consideration. It appears that objections to this had to do mostly with the time element. The Vice President said:

The Senator from Massachusetts and the Senator from Kentucky both gave way *only for current morning business* [emphasis added], but the Senator from Kansas now asks unanimous consent for the consideration of the bill which he has just reported.<sup>28</sup>

The following day Senator Pomeroy again tried to have the bill considered. This time he made extensive comments, including ones about photographs. Before Pomeroy could get the bill acted upon, Senator Thurman was able to end the debate with the following comment: "I object to the consideration of this bill in the morning hour. I am willing to take it up when we can attend to it, but not now."<sup>29</sup>

These remarks can be interpreted in two ways. First, enough members of the Senate felt there was inadequate time to debate the bill before their noon recess. Second, there was substantial opposition to the bill on political grounds, and these objections



were polite, but effective, parliamentary delaying tactics.

Given the fact that the bill was first introduced in mid-December 1871 and finally passed the Senate on January 30, 1872, it would seem that the resistance to the legislation was not very strong, that perhaps lunch, and not politics, held the bill up. This analysis concurs with Cramton's conclusions. He noted:

The speed with which the Yellowstone Park bill proceeded from introduction to enactment into law is surprising. It is true that it was not accompanied by any appropriation and was merely the reservation of lands already belonging to the Government. There were, however, projects pending at the same time involving the reservation or transfer of lands totaling about 100,000,000 acres, most of which projects failed. It was just after the Civil War, a period when economy in the National Government was urgent. Nevertheless the bill which was first introduced in Congress December 18, 1871, became law March 1, 1872, only about 10 weeks later.<sup>30</sup>

Jackson, in his autobiography, mentions that his photographs were needed for the lobbying effort, but does not describe how they were used. He, too, says that "The photographs . . . had helped do a fine piece of work: without a dissenting vote, Congress established the Yellowstone as a national park . . ." (W. H. Jackson 1970:205). If memories fade as time passes, one should not fault Jackson for his imperfect memory. After all his own glory was tied to the perpetuation of the myth.

His son Clarence Jackson, writing about the importance of his father's work, described the lobbying process in the following manner:

Each member of the House was visited personally by Langford, Hayden or Clagett; the Senators received the same flattering attention; the Secretary of the Interior was induced to give the bill his public approval. Specimens of the mineral wealth and the animal life of the region were displayed and explained. The trump card was held for last.

At just the right moment, prints of the Jackson photographs were placed on the desks of all Senators and members of the House. Handsomely bound folio volumes of the photographs, neatly captioned, and bearing the name of the recipient in gold, were distributed among those perennial, shadowy gentlemen who were believed to have an "influence" beyond their immediate official position. It was these actual pictures of the wonders of the upper Yellowstone that clinched the vote in favor of the first National Park. [C. Jackson 1971:145]

One would suppose that if the Jackson photographs were used as a trump card during the period of January 23 to January 30, 1872, some mention of them as a persuasive device would have found its way into some official record or some news account

of the time. So far this researcher has been unable to locate such documentation.

Clarence Jackson's description of the lobbying process, although a bit overly dramatic, seems plausible. What does not is his conclusion. Even he acknowledges the vast amount of other information presented to the congressmen, yet he is insistent upon the overriding importance of his father's work.

Chittenden acknowledges the documentary value of the photographs but limits his praise to the context of their being but one type of evidence. The last sentence of Chittenden's paragraph from which sentence one in Taft's quote is taken reads:

The report and collection of photographs and specimens by Dr. Hayden were therefore the principal results of this season's work, and they played a decisive part in the events of 1871-72.<sup>31</sup>

From Chittenden's perspective, then, the photographs were but one of three important elements in the official reports. They were not the decisive element as Taft claims. All three were interrelated.

This interrelationship is emphasized again in the second paragraph from which Taft excerpted material. A more contextual look at that paragraph reveals that the "they" to which Chittenden was referring were the "photographs and specimens," not just the photographs. He wrote:

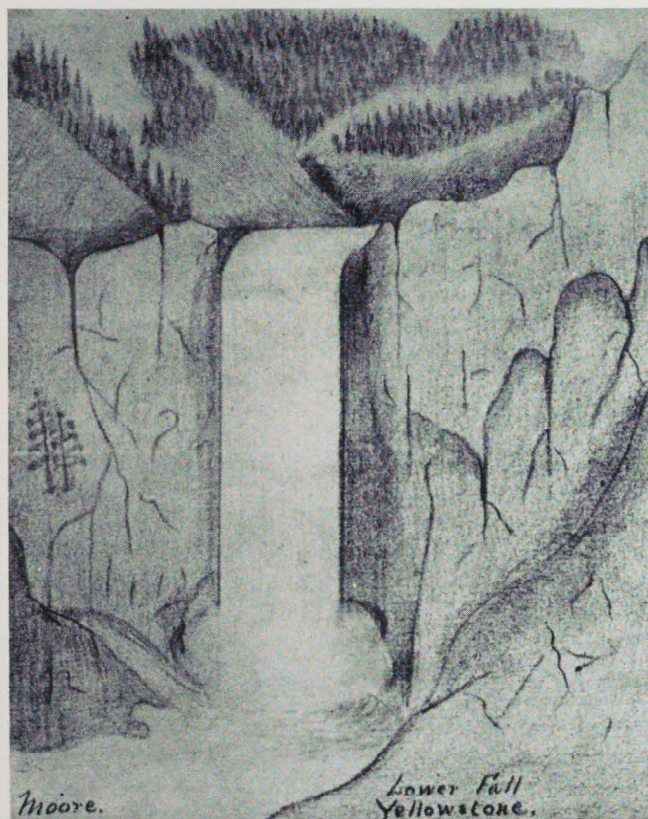
[Hayden] was thoroughly familiar with the subject, and was equipped with an exhaustive collection of photographs and specimens collected the previous summer. These were placed on exhibition and were probably seen by all members of Congress. They did a work which no other agency could do, and doubtless convinced everyone who saw them that the region where such wonders existed should be carefully preserved to the people forever.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps, but Chittenden, like Taft, Newhall, and the younger Jackson, ascribes cause without demonstrable proof of cause. Neither he, nor Taft, nor Newhall demonstrates which piece of evidence, if any, to which members of Congress were exposed convinced them to support the legislation.

A letter by William H. Clagett, the congressman who introduced the Yellowstone legislation, shed some light on the exhibition question and its possible influence on the legislators.

When [Professor Hayden] returned to Washington in 1871, he brought with him a large number of specimens from different parts of the Park, which were on exhibition in one of the rooms of the Capitol or in the Smithsonian Institute (one or the other), while Congress was in session, and he rendered valuable services in exhibiting those specimens and explaining the geological and other features of the proposed Park . . .<sup>33</sup>





**Figure 4** Sketch by Private Moore, 1870 Washburn Expedition.

This sketch was reproduced in *Diary of the Washburn Expedition to the Yellowstone and Firehole Rivers in the Year 1870* by Nathaniel Pitt Langford. Langford wrote:

It is much to be regretted that our expedition was not accompanied by an expert photographer; but at the time of our departure from Helena, no one skilled in the art could be found with whom the hazards of the journey did not outweigh any seeming advantage or compensation which the undertaking promised.

The accompanying sketches of the two falls of the Yellowstone, and of the cones of the Giant and Castle geysers, were made by Walter Trumbull and Private Moore. They are the very first ever made of these objects. [p. 122]

Editors' comment: Space limitations prohibited the reproduction of all four sketches.

From what Clagett stated, it does not seem reasonable to conclude that because there was an exhibition all the members of Congress saw it. The evidence seems to be lacking to support this notion. The fact that all members may have had an opportunity to see the exhibition, or may even have been presented with personal copies of the photographs, does not mean that they all, or even a majority, did in fact see them and, more importantly, were in fact persuaded by them to vote for the legislation.

With the exception of passing reference to their existence in official government documents, mention is not made of Jackson's photographs in printed accounts written at the time. Rather, drawings and paintings are mentioned and reproduced in more than one source.

As far as the persuasive device argument is concerned, the only mention of visual material found by the researcher is to drawings and paintings made by Private Charles Moore and Walter Trumbull of the Washburn expedition of 1870<sup>34</sup> (see Figure 4) and by Thomas Moran and Henry W. Elliott of the Hayden expedition of 1871.<sup>35</sup>

Walter Trumbull was the son of Senator Trumbull,<sup>36</sup> one of the senators who figured prominently in the passage of the Yellowstone legislation. Just before the bill was voted on in the Senate, Senator Trumbull remarked:

Here is a region of country away up in the Rocky Mountains, where there are the most wonderful geysers on the face of the earth . . .

Now, before there is any dispute as to this wonderful country; I hope we shall excerpt it from the general disposition of the public lands, and reserve it to the government.<sup>37</sup>

In the House, one of the bill's principal proponents was Congressman Dawes, whose son, Chester M. Dawes, was an assistant on the Hayden expedition of 1871<sup>38</sup> (see Figure 5).

Perhaps the passage of the legislation was due more to the influence Trumbull and Dawes exerted on their colleagues than to any of the geological evidence. At least one historian thinks this is partially so. Louis Cramton wrote:

. . . Dawes was one of the greatest powers in the House of Representatives. The speed with which the bill became law after it was introduced is in part to be explained by this.<sup>39</sup>

It does not seem likely that the bill passed only because of their interest. Yet one must not minimize the important role they played, a role that was perhaps more persuasive because of family considerations than because of the photographic or geological evidence at hand.

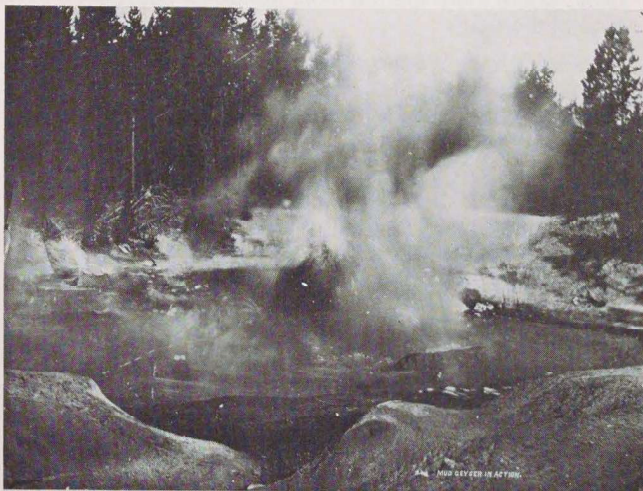




**Figure 5** No. 273. THE ANNA (1871), the first boat ever launched upon the lake. Its frame-work was brought up from Fort Ellis and then put together, and covered with tar-soaked canvas. A tent fly made the sail. In it two adventurous members of the survey visited every arm and nook of the lake, and made all the soundings. It is so named in compliment to Miss Anna Dawes, a daughter of the distinguished statesman whose generous sympathy and aid have done so much toward securing these results.  $5\frac{1}{2} \times 9$  inches. (Caption from 1875 catalog, p. 29. Photo U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 1268.)

**Author's comments:**

The last sentence of this caption would seem to draw the Dawes connection even closer. Not only did the Congressman have a son with the Hayden group, but he also was honored with the first boat being named for his daughter.



**Figure 6** No. 298. THE GROTTO IN ERUPTION (1871), throwing an immense body of water, but not more than forty feet in height. The great amount of steam given off almost entirely conceals the jets of water.  $8 \times 10$  inches. (Caption from 1875 catalog, p. 31. Photo U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 111.) ▼

◀ **Figure 7** No. 264. MUD GEYSER IN ACTION (1871). The only true mud geyser discovered, eight miles below Yellowstone Lake. It has a funnel-shaped orifice in the center of a basin 150 feet in diameter, and in which there are two other hot mud springs.

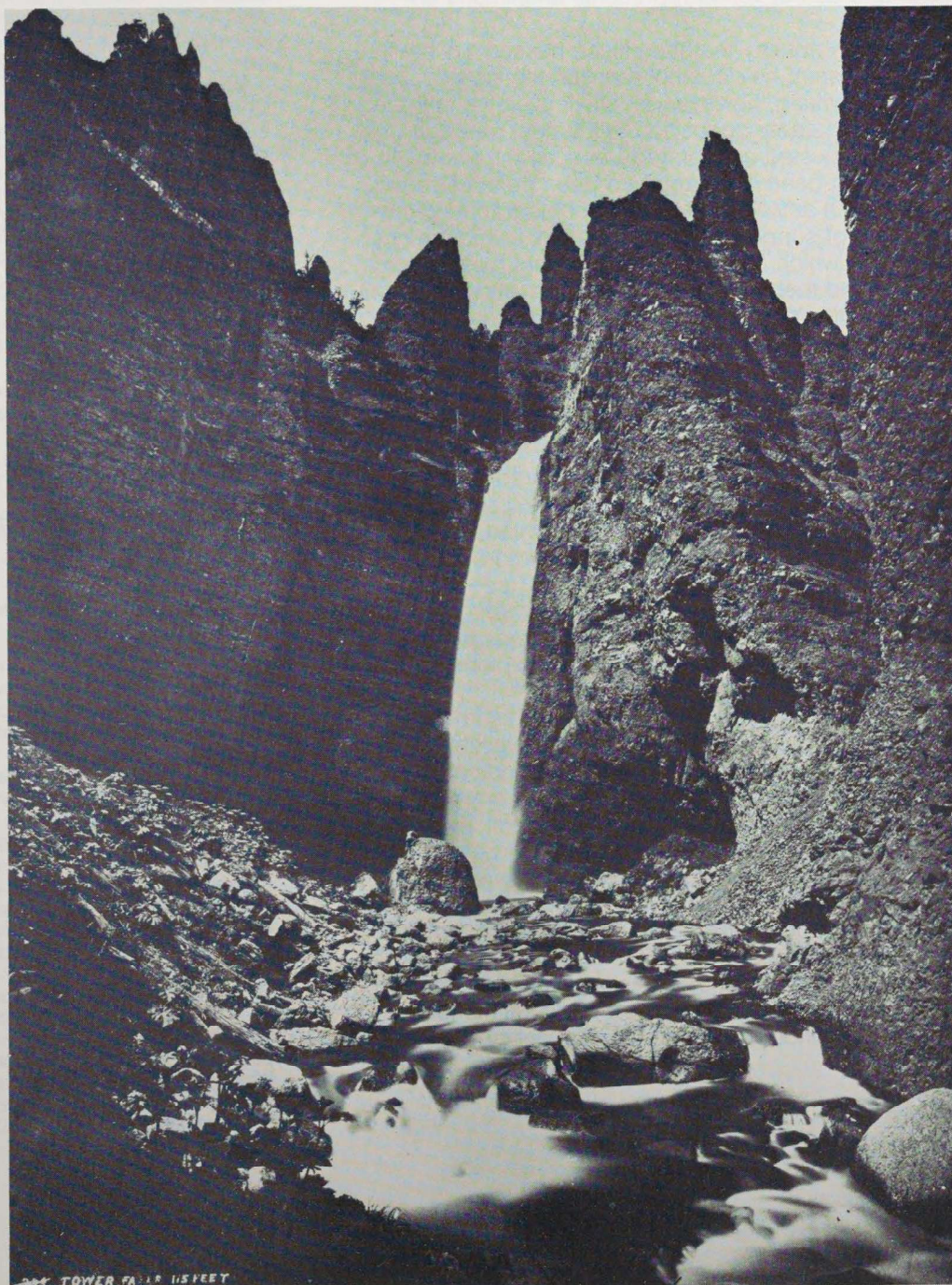
The flow of the geyser is regularly every six hours, the eruptions lasting about fifteen minutes. The thick, muddy water rises gradually in the crater, commencing to boil when about half way to the surface, and occasionally breaking forth with great violence. When the crater is filled it is expelled from it in a splashing, scattered mass, ten feet in diameter, to forty feet in height. The mud is a dark lead-color, and deposits itself thickly all about the rim of the crater.  $8 \times 10$  inches. (Caption from 1875 catalog, p. 29. Photo U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 97.)





**Figure 8** No. 260. SULPHUR SPRING (1871). At Crater Hills, ten miles above the falls, on the east side of the Yellowstone, in the center of a most interesting group of hot springs, is a magnificent sulphur spring. The deposits around it are silica and enamel like the finest porcelain. The thin edges of the nearly circular rim extend over the waters of the basin several feet, the open portion being fifteen feet in diameter. The water is in a constant state of agitation, and seems to affect the entire mass, carrying it up impulsively to a height of four or five feet. The decorations about the spring, the beautiful scalloping around the rim, and the inner and outer surface, covered with a sort of pearl-like bead-work, give it great beauty.  $7\frac{1}{2} \times 10$  inches. (Caption from 1875 catalog, p. 28. Photo U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 94.)

**Figure 9** No. 233. TOWER FALLS (1871), near view from near base.  $7 \times 9$  inches. (Caption from 1875 catalog, p. 26. Photo U.S.G.S., Denver, no. 78.)



233. TOWER FALLS 15 FEET



When Taft claims that the legislation "passed without dissent," he is inaccurate. It was passed in the Senate without a vote count being recorded. The vote was probably a voice vote, which Taft interprets as meaning a no dissent vote. Whether there in fact was little or no dissent in the Senate, the dissent in the House was duly noted in *The Congressional Globe*. Although the legislation passed by a significant margin, it is hard to argue that a vote of 115 yeas, 65 nays, and 60 not voting represents unanimous endorsement.

Taft does not say that the House passed the bill without dissent; he does not mention the House vote at all. His writing, however, clearly leaves the impression that whatever opposition to the final passage may have existed evaporated because the photographs had been seen and had been persuasive.

More than any other linkage of photographs to the unanimity of support for the legislation, it was the one by Taft on which Newhall and the others relied when they argued that William Henry Jackson's photographs of the Yellowstone region played a decisive role in shaping national policy. The record, however, shows that support was not unanimous, as Taft implied. Nor does the record support the argument that the photographs were the principal agent in the persuasion process.

All who have seen Jackson's photographs of the Yellowstone region would agree that they present a natural wonderland magnificently observed by a gifted photographer. The photographs did offer proof of the existence of "The Grotto Geyser" (see Figure 6). No one who has seen these photographs would argue that the splendor of Yellowstone was merely a delusion of grandeur shared by those explorers who fell victim to its spell (see Figures 7-9).

While it is clear that William Henry Jackson's photographs were part of the scientific data available to congressmen, there is little evidence to indicate that they influenced the legislators more than any of the other bits of information presented to them. The contention that Jackson's photographs played the primary role in the shaping of national policy is dubious. There were many factors involved in the persuasion process, no one of which can be shown to be more important than the other. This finding, by calling into question the influence of Jackson's work, suggests that it may be time to reexamine other claims for the influence of photographs on national policy.

## Notes

### ★ Author's Explanation of Art and Legends

In tracking down the illustrations for this article I discovered that the most accessible source for Jackson's photographs for the 1871 Yellowstone expedition is the United States Geological Survey Photography Library in Denver, Colorado. This library has a cataloged collection of over 1600 of Jackson's photographs made during the U.S. Geological Surveys of 1870-1879. Most of the captions in Denver's cataloged collection were taken largely if not entirely from the *Descriptive Catalogue of The Photographs of The United States Geological Survey of The Territories for The Years 1869 to 1875, Inclusive*, Second Edition, 1875. This catalog was written by W. H. Jackson and is listed as a Department of the Interior Miscellaneous Publications No. 5.

All captions used with the W. H. Jackson photographs, unless indicated by italics, are excerpted from the 1875 catalog and were written by Jackson. The catalog lists and describes each photograph. No photographs are reproduced in his catalog. In fact his catalog was published several years before the halftone process of reproduction was invented.

Italicized captions used with the Jackson photographs were taken from the catalog of the collection of Jackson photographs in the possession of the United States Geological Survey Photography Library in Denver. These captions were probably also written by Jackson.

All the photographs were made in 1871, except for those noted "n.d." (no date available), in what is now Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming.

Whenever possible the index numbers and page numbers used in the 1875 catalog are given as well as the index number used in the catalog of the collection of the United States Geological Survey Photography Library in Denver. The index number of the 1875 catalog precedes the title; the other information follows the legend parenthetically.

The 1875 catalog lists all negatives as being 8 × 10 inches. The catalog of the collection of the United States Geological Survey Photography Library in Denver lists a variety of sizes. The dimensions given are from the Denver Catalog.

All reproductions were made from modern prints pulled from copy negatives.

- 1 Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The Yellowstone National Park*, ed. Richard A. Bartlett (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), p. 82. This is a reprint of Chittenden's work (1964) which originally appeared in 1895. The edition Taft consulted was one published in 1917.
- 2 Many of the articles in the *Helena Herald*, as well as one from the *New York Times*, are reprinted in: Louis C. Cramton, *Early History of Yellowstone National Park and its Relation to National Park Policies* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Depart. of the Interior, 1932). This volume also has a bibliography which is indispensable for locating obscure references.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 6. Cramton wrote: "Joseph Meek visited this region in 1829. James Bridges, the noted hunter and scout, is clearly shown to have visited the region at various times from 1830 on. . . ."
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- 5 This article, titled "The Valley of the Upper Yellowstone," by C.W. Cook" is reprinted in Cramton's book, pp. 83-89. Cramton argues, however, that the author really was Folsom, not Cook. He states on page 11: "Every reference to the article, except the signature in the *Western Monthly*, speaks of it as having been written by Folsom, and Director Albright informs me that Mr. Cook told him that the article was written by Folsom."
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 13.



- 8 Nathaniel Pitt Langford, *Diary of the Washburn Expedition to the Yellowstone and Firehole Rivers in the Year 1870* (n.p. 1905), p. xvi. This volume was privately printed. A copy is in the Michigan State University Library at East Lansing.
- 9 Cramton, op. cit., p. 14.
- 10 This lecture tour was referred to by Cramton and was reported on in the *New York Times*, Sunday, January 22, 1871, p. 8.
- 11 Cramton, op. cit., p. 16. Evidently the articles in the *Helena Herald* were picked up and carried in many papers. On p. 17 of his *Early History*, Cramton quotes an editorial from the *Helena Herald* of October 1, 1870:

Our exchanges, East and West, are just now reaching us, containing copious extracts from the Herald's Yellowstone reports. . . . The Herald is everywhere complimented for . . . those excellent and reliable reports. . . .

- 12 Ibid., p. 10.
- 13 Ibid., p. 17.
- 14 *New York Times*, Sunday, January 22, 1871, p. 8.
- 15 Ibid., Monday, September 18, 1871, p. 4.
- 16 Ibid., Monday, October 23, 1871, p. 4.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid., February 29, 1872, p. 4.
- 19 U.S. Congress, Senate, *Congressional Globe*, 42d Cong., 2d Sess., 1871:159.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid., January 23, 1872, p. 520.
- 23 Ibid., December 18, 1871, p. 159.
- 24 Ibid., January 22, 1872, p. 484.
- 25 Ibid., January 23, 1872, p. 520.
- 26 Ibid., House, February 27, 1872, p. 1243.
- 27 F.V. Hayden, *Preliminary Report of the United States Geological Survey of Montana and Portions of Adjacent Territories; Being a Fifth Annual Report of Progress* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1872).
- 28 U.S. Congress, Senate, op. cit., January 22, 1872, p. 484.
- 29 Ibid., January 23, 1872.
- 30 Cramton, op. cit., p. 24.
- 31 Chittenden, op. cit., p. 76.
- 32 Ibid., p. 82.
- 33 This letter appears in the introduction to Nathaniel Pitt Langford, op. cit., p. xxii.
- 34 Ibid. A collection of these drawings can be found in Langford's Appendix. Cramton also refers to these drawings on p. 13, op. cit.
- 35 Langford wrote about the power and beauty of Moran's painting in his first report as Superintendent of Yellowstone Park to the Secretary of the Interior early in 1873 (See U.S. Congress, Senate, *Executive Document #35*, 42d Cong., 3d sess.)
- Hayden, in an essay which accompanied a commercially produced portfolio of Moran's Yellowstone watercolors, indicated his belief in the descriptive superiority of Moran's work to any photographs. In adopting this attitude, he was presenting the view that photographs were less adequate than paintings because they lacked color. Perhaps this is why public comments, made at the time on the drawings and paintings, are more prevalent and detailed than any which refer to Jackson's photographs. Hayden's essay appears in *The Yellowstone National Park, and the Mountain Regions of Portions of Idaho, Nevada, Colorado and Utah*, described by Professor F.V. Hayden, Geologist-in-charge of The United States Government Exploring Expeditions to The Yellowstone Valley, and of The United States Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories, illustrated by Chromolithographic Reproductions of Water-Color Sketches by Thomas Moran, Artist to the Expedition of 1871 (Boston: L. Prang and Co., 1876).
- 36 Cramton, op. cit., p. 25.
- 37 U.S. Congress, Senate, *Congressional Globe*, January 30, 1872, p. 677.
- 38 It is not one hundred percent certain that Chester M. Dawes was the son of Representative Dawes, but it seems probable. Cramton cites William Henry Jackson as the source for linking Chester and Henry Dawes: "If Mr. Jackson is correct, that the Dawes who was a member of the Hayden party was a son of Congressman Dawes, it is clear that the Dawes contact on the Yellowstone project continued to be very close." Op. cit., p. 32.
- 39 Ibid.

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