

The Mather Memorial Plaques

Even before Stephen Tyng Mather died in 1930, a group of friends and admirers formed an organization called the "Stephen T. Mather Appreciation" which decided to place memorial plaques in each of the 23 National Parks and 33 National Monuments, as well as some other areas. Many plaques were dedicated on what would have been Mather's 65th birthday, July 4, 1932.

The plaques are 30"x35", made of either bronze or cast aluminum and contain a profile view of Stephen Mather against a mountain background facing a group of trees. The inscription, from a tribute to Mather by Congressman Louis C. Cramton, reads:

"He laid the foundation of the National Park Service, defining and establishing the policies under which its areas shall be developed and conserved unimpaired for future generations. There will never come an end to the good that he has done."

The sculptor was Bryant Baker.

On July 10, 1932, the Bohemian Club of San Francisco through the courtesy of the National Broadcasting Company made a National Memorial Broadcast in honor of Mather. The NPS History Collection has a recording of the broadcast. There was also a 19 page booklet that accompanied the broadcast. It discusses the dedication of the original bronze plaques. (Linda Eade, YOSE, 9/30/1999)

According to the available information, the plaques have been placed as follows since 1932:

July 2, 1932:

Mount Rainier National Park - Mather Memorial Parkway, at Tipsoo Lake picnic area. It was moved there 300 yards from the original roadside location just below Cayuse Pass in the 1980s. (Loren Lane, MORA, 3/4/97)

July 4, 1932:

Acadia National Park - summit of Cadillac Mountain - bronze. (Brooke Childrey, ACAD, 3/4/97)(Deb Wade, ACAD, 3/24/97) Located facing the parking lot (Bryant Woods, ACAD, 3/5/97)

Petrified Forest National Monument - mounted on a large boulder at an overlook on the Rainbow Forest Trail (now the Giant Logs Trail) behind the Rainbow Forest Museum (the old park headquarters) (William Grether, PEFO, 9/21/99) (from the List of Classified Structures)

Mesa Verde National Park - located on the south exterior wall of the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum, near the entrance (Will Morris, MEVE, 9/22/99)

Yosemite National Park - Set in a large granite boulder in the main stream of the Merced River at Happy Isles in Yosemite Valley. Yosemite NP has photos of the plaque and dedication ceremony. (Linda Eade, YOSE, 9/30/99)

Yellowstone National Park - Madison Junction

Crater Lake National Park - located at Rim Village, along promenade between Crater Lake Lodge and the Kiser Studio overlooking Crater Lake (Kent Taylor, CRLA, 9/23/99)

Grand Canyon National Park - Originally installed at Yavapai Observation Station. Received in July, 1931. Sometime after 1938 it was placed on a limestone boulder set along a path east of Yavapai. In 1947, it was moved to Mather Point where it is today. (Colleen Hyde, GRCA, 3/7/97)

Mount Rainier National Park - Longmire Administration Building.

Zion National Park - Temple of Sinawava

Rocky Mountain National Park - outside the front door of the visitor center / administration building in Estes Park. (Michael Shaver, SAHI, 9/23/99)

Dunes State Park (Ind.) (The state park still exists as Indiana Dunes State Park, but the plaque is now located at the Lake View overlook area of **Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore**) (Dale Engquist, INDU, 3/4/97)

July 10, 1932:

Sequoia National Park - Giant Forest. The park reportedly has film footage of the dedication. (Melanie Ruesch, SEKI, 3/10/97)

Humboldt Redwoods State Park (south of Redwood NP) - Late summer, 1932:Mather Grove.

1933:

Palisades Interstate Park (NY,NJ) - Bear Mountain State Park near "Outdoor Museum" (Michael Shaver, SAHI, 9/23/99)

Casa Grande Ruins National Monument - mounted on the front of the visitor center/museum (William Grether, PEFO, 9/21/99)

Glacier National Park - Dedicated July 15, 1933 at Logan Pass as part of the dedication festivities for Going-to-the-sun Highway. In 1968 the plaque was removed and resituated at Logan Pass on July 16 of that year. The rededication in 1968 was done by retired Montana Senator (1923-1947) Burton K. Wheeler, who was the only surviving principal speaker at the original dedication. (Deirdre Shaw, GLAC, 3/4/97)

A second group of plaques were produced in aluminum in the 1950s-90s and placed in some parks. We do not have a list of these. (Some may be mentioned in this paper.)

Some other recorded installations:

Big Bend National Park - reported as having a bronze one unmounted in the mid-1970s (Carol Kruse, FLAG, 3/4/97). Currently on the Window View Trail in the Chisos Basin (Rick LoBello, CAVE, 3/7/97)

Blue Ridge Parkway - Sometime after 1989, a plaque was transferred from the NPS History Collection and installed after 1990 behind the Linn Cove Visitor Contact Station. (Richard Quin, WASO, 3/4/97)(Phil Noblitt, SERO, 3/5/97)

Bryce Canyon National Park - visitor center (late 1950s?) Appears to be bronze.(Susan Colclazer, BRCA, 3/4/97)

Cabrillo National Monument - Bronze plaque, received in 1951 or 52 (according to former superintendent Donald M. Robinson). Installed on a large rock to the right of the walk leading from the parking area to the lighthouse. Remained there until 1968 (according to former superintendent Thomas R. Tucker) when, upon Director Hartzog's request (he felt it should not be in the historic area), it was removed and placed in storage. Installed at its present location at the base of the flagpole in 1995. (Terry DiMattio, CABR, 4/17/97)

Carlsbad Caverns National Park - at the bat flight seating area at the cave entrance (1960s) (Barbara Justice, VICK, 4/10/97) The park has a photo in the files dated spring, 1964 showing a couple of employees installing the plaque. (Bob Hoff, CAVE, 3/11/97)

Denali National Park - used to be at the Toklat Bridge prior to 1985-86. Original date not reported. Currently on the headquarters building. (Steve Carwile, DENA, 3/10/97)

Denver Service Center/Rocky Mountain Regional Office building - a plaque was installed August 26, 1991. (Aida Parkinson, REDW, 3/4/97)

Fire Island National Seashore - Seen after 1988, but received as much as 13 years earlier - bronze-colored (Neal Bullington, SLBE, 3/4/97) Never installed, currently in a supply room. (Maria Wagenbrenner, FIIS, 3/13/97)

Golden Spike National Historic Site - Mounted on the wall as you walk up the covered approach to the visitor center front entrance. Appears to be aluminum (John Case (visitor) 9/27/99)

Grand Teton National Park - in front of Moose Visitor Center. Possibly from the Mission 66 era. (Cherry Payne, SAAN, 3/5/97)

Great Falls Park, VA - along the trail overlooking "Mather Gorge." Installed and dedicated on April 17, 1969. Rededicated April 15, 1989. (Dwight Madison, GRFA, 3/4/97)

Hawaii Volcanoes National Park - in front of Kilauea Visitor Center (date unknown) (Dick Rasp, 3/7/97)

Hot Springs National Park (ca 1932 - one of the original distribution) bronze. Reportedly removed from the administration building during a renovation ca 1992-3. Currently in storage, but plans are to have it mounted and placed probably on the Arlington Lawn. (Roger Giddings, HOSP, 3/10/97)

Isle Royale National Park - either Rock Harbor or Mott Island headquarters (Helen Scully, WASO, 9/21/99)

Kings Canyon National Park - The monthly report of General Grant National Park for September 1936 stated that a plaque had been installed at Grant Grove. It was reported there in an August 6, 1946 memo from the superintendent to the landscape architect. It was removed at some point and it is suspected to be the spare plaque currently in the museum storage room in the SEKI warehouse. (Melanie Ruesch, SEKI, 3/7/97)

Lassen Volcanic National Park - on the Loomis Museum. Probably one of the earlier distributions. (Betty Knight, ARO, 9/21/99)

Mammoth Cave National Park - a bronze plaque was attached on a rock just outside the visitor center. (David McGinnis, FOBU, 10/13/99)

Mather Training Center / Harpers Ferry National Historical Park - plaque was dedicated on November 13, 1983

National Park Service, Washington Office - in the corridor at the old Interior Building (now the General Services Administration building) Moved to new Interior Building in 1937. Located outside the Director's office for many years until a renovation. It was stored in various offices until it was installed in the office of the Associate Director, Operations, where it remains. (Bob Whitman, WASO, 3/7/97)

Southwest Support Office - Old Santa Fe Trail building (old Southwest Regional Office) - The casting was made up specifically for the 50th Anniversary of the building

celebrated on July 1, 1989 and mounted on a wall in front of the building. In March 1999, it was moved inside the building to the front lobby and placed on a chest directly in front of a large portrait of Mather. (Richard Sellars, SWSO, 9/24/99; John Conoboy, SWSO, 9/21/99), Cecilia Matic, SWSO, 10/8/99)

Stephen T. Mather High School (Chicago public school system) - mounted on the wall just inside the main entrance. (Dale Engquist, INDU, 9/21/99)

Theodore Roosevelt National Park (Original installation date unknown. The plaque was placed into storage in 1980 when the visitor center underwent a major face lift. In 1988 the plaque was mounted on a low pedestal made from CCC-era stonework at the entrance to the South Unit Visitor Center (Bruce Kaye, THRO, 3/19/97)

University of California, Berkeley campus (Mather's college) (possibly 1930s) Located at the "Mather Grove" of Redwoods at the Strawberry Canyon Horticultural Gardens. (Armando M. Quintero, GOGA, 3/7/97)

Virgin Islands National Park - outside the visitor center. Reported there in the mid 1980s.

Wind Cave National Park (possibly as early as 1935 or in the original distribution of plaques, but the date cannot be verified) This plaque was used as the mold for the "Colorado National Monument edition" (see below) (Ron Terry, WICA, 3/21/97)

Recent plaque installations:

Colorado National Monument (1986) Placed as part of their 75th anniversary celebration. Chief Ranger Hank Schoch (retired) worked with the foundry that produced the original plaque to reproduce theirs. (Jon Paynter, DENA, 3/4/97) The original plaque from Wind Cave was used to create the new mold (Ron Terry, WICA, 3/21/97). Bill Sontag, the 75th Anniversary coordinator, put out a call to all the regional 75th coordinators who provided their requests directly to Hank Schoch. (Bill Sontag, AMIS, 11/26/97)

Many parks also took advantage of this new edition, 1986-1991. These plaques are apparently marked on the underside "Colorado National Monument edition" and are reportedly bronze-colored aluminum.

We do not have a complete list, but we have information from the following parks:

Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site - on path leading to the park's amphitheater, probably placed when the amphitheater was completed in 1991. (Terry Roth, ALPO, 3/5/97)

Assateague Island National Seashore – unveiled as part of park's 25th anniversary and National Park Service 75th anniversary celebration on 9/21/91. According to the program, Charles Clapper, Deputy Dir. MARO did the unveiling. However, file includes the transcript of the unveiling speech given by Joe Miller, MARO Assoc. Dir. who stood in for Clapper. A press release states that the plaque “will one day rest on the observation deck of the proposed ... Barrier Island Museum and Visitor Center...”

Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site - probably mounted in 1992 (Daniel R. Brown, BEOL, 3/4/97)

Canyonlands National Park - Installed on a large rock at the front of the Needles visitor center. The date was April, about 1993. (Larry Frederick, GLAC, 3/9/97; Todd Stoerber, CANY, 3/9/97)

Chamizal National Memorial - mounted in 1992 in front of the visitor center (Bill Sontag, AMIS, 11/26/97)

Death Valley National Park unveiled during 75th program on the patio of the V.C. 10/12/91.

Fort Clatsop National Memorial - unveiled as “the 75th anniversary plaque” by Senator Robert Packwood on 8/28/91 at dedication of new V.C. file includes two 8x10 photos of the unveiling. On the outside wall of the visitor center.

Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (August 21 or 25, 1991) Bronze-colored, placed on a boulder in the picnic area. (Scott Eckberg, GRKO, 3/4/97) (Mary Hale, FOUS, 3/4/97)

Great Basin National Park - installed at an overlook along Wheeler Peak Scenic Drive sometime before 1994. In 1994 the plaque was removed and thrown down the hill. In 1995, the reinstalled plaque was stolen and had not been recovered as of 1997. (Mike Rondas, GRBA, 3/7/97)

Guadalupe Mountains National Park - outside of the Pine Springs visitor center, installed in 1991. (Note: this one is reported to be bronze-colored aluminum and to have the “Colorado National Monument Edition” on the underside. However, if that is so, it could not have been stored in the park in the early 1970s as was also reported). (John A. Mitchell, GUMO, 3/4/97)

Petersburg National Battlefield - on the walkway to the Main Unit Visitor Center, placed in August 1991. (Michael Hill, PETE, 3/10/97)

Pipe Spring National Monument - installed 1991, but probably in the park a year or two before that. (Andrea Bornemeier, PISP, 3/11/97)

Rocky Mountain National Park (at the entrance)

The 1934 Director's Annual Report (part of the Secretary of Interior's annual report) includes the following section on pages 190-191:

MATHER MEMORIAL PLAQUES

In accordance with the purpose for which the Stephen T. Mather Appreciation was formed, 25 memorial plaques have been presented to the National Park Service by the Appreciation for placement in national parks and monuments throughout the country as memorials to the first director of the Service. With the exception of 6 plaques, all of these tablets have now been installed and the majority of them dedicated. Three of the unplaced plaques have been sent to General Grant, Hot Springs, and Mount McKinley National Parks, and locations for them are now under consideration by the Branch of Plans and Designs. The three remaining plaques are destined for places of honor in the East, where Mr. Mather did so much to develop the national-park idea. Prior to the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 1931, Acadia was the only national park east of the Mississippi River, where our large centers of population are found. As soon as the Great Smoky Mountains and Shenandoah areas are sufficiently developed, fitting locations will be chosen and the plaques installed and dedicated.

By special congressional authorization, a plaque will be placed in one of the park developments of the Nation's Capital. A site has not yet been chosen, but a location along the proposed George Washington Memorial Parkway near the Great Falls terminus will probably be considered.

Thanks to all NPS employees who assisted with this project. Please send me any additions, corrections, etc.

David Nathanson, National Park Service History Collection, Harpers Ferry Center, 12/4/97, edited and updated 1/7/2002.