

# “There will never come an end to the good that he has done.”

## The Stephen Mather Memorial Plaques

by Don Lago

It had always seemed obvious to me that Grand Canyon’s Mather Point should have a sign explaining who it was named for. People who are camping in the Mather Campground and attending ranger programs in the Mather Amphitheater and enjoying the view from Mather Point would begin to wonder who this Mather person was. To make it clear that Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service, was appreciated at Grand Canyon, the NPS had installed not just a normal wayside sign, but a large, artistic, bronze plaque paying tribute to him.

Since I had always associated the Mather plaque with Mather Point, I was puzzled when I first noticed the exact same plaque in another national park. It seemed incongruous, almost as if another park bore a sign explaining the view from Hopi Point. Had this other park made a copy of Grand Canyon’s sign? I asked a ranger about their plaque, but he didn’t know anything about it. Over the years I noticed the Mather plaque in other parks, but no one seemed to know how it had gotten there. The rock strata beneath Mather Point remember 1.7 billion years of events, but park rangers come and go more quickly, and even the National Park Service, which is officially dedicated to remembering history, holds many memories only on papers buried in archives, if at all.

Eventually I contacted the national headquarters of the National Park Service and asked about the history of the Mather plaques. In response to my inquiry, NPS historians queried one another, but no one knew much about it. Fortunately the folks at the NPS Mather Training Center in Harpers Ferry had remained more curious about their namesake, and they supplied me with a 1997 research paper by David Nathanson that provided a

good start.

The last line on the Mather plaque, “There will never come an end to the good that he has done,” was spoken by Michigan Congressman Louis Cramton on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives in January, 1929. Cramton served on the House Public Lands Committee, and was one of Congress’s strongest supporters of Stephen Mather and the National Park Service. Cramton spoke on the occasion of Mather’s resignation as director of the NPS, but since Mather had suffered a stroke and the prognosis was poor, Cramton’s remarks had the ring of a eulogy. A year later, on January 22, 1930, Mather suffered another stroke and died.

Soon after Mather’s first stroke and resignation, his friends and supporters started a private organization, the Stephen T. Mather Appreciation, to plan some sort of memorial to him. The executive committee was full of prominent names, including Gilbert Grosvenor of the National Geographic Society, General John J. Pershing, and Congressman Cramton. They came up with forty-two ideas for memorials, and had a lively debate about them. There was strong opposition to the idea of a plaque, including opposition from Mather’s friends inside the National Park Service, including Horace Albright, who had succeeded Mather as director. Mather had always disliked the idea of plaques, statues, and other human monuments inside the national parks. National parks were supposed to be about the grandeur of nature, not about the transient heroism of politicians, generals, or explorers. When admirers of John Muir had come to Mather and proposed that a small plaque honoring Muir be placed in Yosemite, Mather had refused, even though John Muir was Mather’s hero.

Stephen Mather shared John Muir’s vision of nature as not just

beautiful and ancient, but sacred, a refuge for the human spirit. A California native, Mather made trips to the Sierras, climbed mountains, and joined the Sierra Club when it was only a dozen years old. Mather met and had a long talk with John Muir, who filled Mather with indignation at the despoiling of the Sierras. Yet the national parks and America’s conservation movement now required something more than just vision and indignation. They required someone with the political and managerial skills to build an agency, inside the U. S. government, that could defend and expand the national parks against powerful economic and political forces. It required someone with the rare combination of Stephen Mather’s personality and experience. In 1893 the young Mather, working as a newspaper writer, was hired by the Pacific Coast Borax Company to come up with an advertising slogan for its borax soap and detergent. Mather came up with the slogan and image of the “20-Mule Team” brand. The president of the borax company disliked Mather’s idea, but Mather prevailed, and the borax company made a fortune. The 20-Mule Team, invoking the romance of the Wild West, became one of the enduring advertising symbols of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Later Mather started his own borax mining company and made his own fortune, but Mather also observed the greed and machinations of mining companies and other private interests.

In 1914 Mather wrote a long letter to the Secretary of the Interior complaining about how private companies were threatening the national parks, and about how poorly the national parks were being managed. The Secretary of the Interior replied that if Mather didn’t like the way the parks were being run, he could come to Washington and run them himself, as director of a new National

Park Service. Mather put his skills as a salesman and manager to work building a loyal constituency for the national parks, building the National Park Service, and expanding and improving the park system. Mather built a coalition that spanned bird watchers, artists, politicians, and railroad corporations. He set high standards for the national parks, enduring standards that have made America's national parks the model for the world. Even when railroad corporations had become crucial allies for bringing the public to the national parks and for fighting off powerful mining corporations, Mather ordered the Union Pacific Railroad to decentralize its plans for its lodges at Zion, Bryce, and the North Rim of the Grand Canyon so that human architecture wouldn't compete too much against the scenery. And yes, even when lovers of John Muir wanted to place a tribute to Muir in Yosemite, Mather disliked the idea of national parks looking like every courthouse square in America. In the end, Mather was persuaded to allow John Muir into Yosemite.

In the end, the Stephen T. Mather Appreciation decided on a bronze plaque. Horace Albright reluctantly went along: "I did not want to stand in the way of the activity of the Mather Appreciation group."<sup>1</sup>

Hoping for something special, the Mather Appreciation selected sculptor Bryant Baker to create the plaque. On April 22, 1930, three months after Mather's death, Baker had received enormous national publicity with the dedication of his Pioneer Woman statue in Ponca City, Oklahoma. Forty thousand people attended the Pioneer Woman statue dedication ceremony and heard Will Rogers praise the statue and the American pioneer spirit it represented. Baker's design for the Pioneer Woman statue was selected in a national contest in which 750,000 people had voted among twelve contending models for the statue. Over six months the models had toured from museum to museum, from coast to coast, and stirred up great public interest and newspaper publicity. The statue and the contest were the idea of

E. W. Marland, an Oklahoma oil tycoon who would also serve as Oklahoma's governor and congressman. Marland was a great admirer of the American pioneers and felt that pioneer women hadn't been sufficiently honored for their role in building America. In 1926 Marland invited twelve

prominent sculptors to a dinner party, promised them \$10,000 just for creating a model for a Pioneer Woman statue, and \$100,000 if they won the public contest. Many of the sculptors were more famous than Baker, such as Alexander Stirling Calder, who had done the statue of George Washington at Washington Square Arch in New York City, and whose son Alexander would become famous for his mobiles. Baker's model was the big winner, beating the #2 choice by two to one.

Bryant Baker had an unlikely beginning for a sculptor of American heroes. Baker was born in London in 1881, the son and grandson of professional sculptors. Baker learned his skills helping his father build the Victoria and Albert Museum. While still an art student Baker won several medals and won royal favor, leading to his sculpting royal subjects. When the Great War broke out, Baker tried to enlist in the British army, only to be rejected as unfit. Baker immigrated to the United States and enlisted in the American army, but he served in the Medical Corps, sculpting artificial limbs and faces for severely wounded soldiers.

Baker soon became enthralled by American history, and over the next 50 years he would sculpt many American presidents, generals, explorers, and other heroes like Thomas Edison. Of 100 statues in the Capitol build-



One of the many Stephen Mather plaques.

ing's Statuary Hall, three were done by Baker. For the Pioneer Woman statue Baker created a strong woman striding heroically forward, her gaze on the western horizon, holding a Bible in one hand and her son's hand in her other hand. Baker thought of her as an American Joan of Arc. The statue is 27 feet high and weighs 12,000 pounds. It was cast by the Gorham Company of Providence, Rhode Island; Gorham was famous for its fine silver, used in the White House from Lincoln to Bush, but it also operated a bronze foundry. The Pioneer Woman statue remains Baker's most famous work. When Baker died in 1970, the Marland Estate purchased the sculptures and plaster casts in Baker's New York studio and moved them to a studio on the grounds of the Marland mansion in Ponca City, and it also acquired Baker's papers.

Baker had communicated with Stephen Mather in 1925, though the purpose isn't clear. All we have is a two-sentence letter in which Mather replied to Baker, saying "I am glad you thought of me but I am going back West for another two months and will have to wait until October when I will see how matters stand."<sup>2</sup> Was Baker working on a sculpture with a national park inspiration?

For the Stephen Mather plaque, Baker drew upon arts-and-crafts style of imagery and lettering. He shows Mather in profile, gazing off

toward the left horizon, which on a map would be west, a bit reminiscent of the Pioneer Woman. In the background are sharp, Sierra-like peaks, and a forest. At the bottom is a pine branch, and above that is the inscription: "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." John Hays Hammond, the chairman of the Mather Appreciation, appreciated Baker's design, telling Baker it was "very excellent."<sup>3</sup> The Mather Appreciation paid Baker \$1,000 for his work. The plaque was forged by the Gorham Company. The plaque is 30 inches by 35 inches, and since it is solid bronze, it must be heavy, though the exact weight isn't recorded. The plaque is signed "Bryant Baker, 1930."

The Mather Appreciation was hoping to place plaques in all 56 of the national parks and monuments of the time, but at first they cast only 25 plaques for the National Park Service, and three more for state parks. For unknown reasons, Mount Rainier National Park received two copies of the plaque. Two later generations of plaques would be cast in the 1950s and 1980s, adding about 30 more plaques, though this wasn't enough to keep up with the proliferation of new parks and monuments. Today 59 sites are known to have Mather plaques, but this count may not be complete.

Stephen Mather's 65th birthday would have been July 4, 1932, so on and around that date a dozen national parks and monuments held dedication ceremonies for their plaque. Some of these ceremonies were major events, with VIPs, music, live radio broadcasts, and lots of speeches. The next day the *New York Times* took note of the occasion with an editorial titled "The Mather Memorials." After two paragraphs praising Mather's devotion, vision, and results, the *Times* noted that he "would have been 65 on the Fourth of July if he had not worn himself out in devotion to the cause of developing the national park system

for the American people."

Gilbert Grosvenor traveled to Sequoia National Park to head up their dedication ceremony. Sequoia, like most parks, followed the suggestion of the Mather Appreciation and installed its plaque on a large, elegant boulder. Most parks placed their plaque-boulder in a prominent location.

At Yellowstone the featured speaker was nationally prominent novelist Struthers Burt, who had helped lead the fight to get Grand Teton established as a national park. The Yellowstone dedication ceremony was held outside the new Madison Museum. For decades the Madison Museum would serve as the NPS's foremost shrine to the idea of national parks. According to Yellowstone legend (now deflated) it was at Madison Junction in 1870 that early explorers sat around a campfire and resolved that Yellowstone should be protected by the creation of a national park. According to Yellowstone historian Lee H. Whittlesey, the placement of the Mather plaque at the Madison Museum was a large symbolic step in turning the museum into a shrine:

...having built the Madison Museum as a shrine in 1929, and with the museum not yet open to the public, the NPS decided at the time of the death of its founder Stephen Mather in 1930 to elevate the "shrine" idea one step further. One can almost picture their thinking. Madison was already a shrine to both the establishment of the first national park and the national park idea, so why should it not also be a shrine to the agency that managed them? ...the idea that the Madison Museum could also be a monument to the NPS as well as to Mather fit right into the shrine concept...The NPS's ceremony to dedicate this "Mather memorial tablet" involved speakers and around seven hundred members of the public, and it is clear from the many words expended at the ceremony and from the guests who attended it that the Service considered the new tablet a very important monument.<sup>4</sup>

At Crater Lake National Park the ceremony included remarks by the park naturalist, a song accompanied by a violin, an invocation from a pastor, more songs, a speech by a judge, then a speech by Superintendent Elbert Solinsky, who said of the plaque:

May its presence remind all who come and read its message of the prophetic judgment and works of a good man and of a life well spent. May his life and the record he left be an incentive to our citizenship to carry on the great work which he inaugurated. We of Crater Lake National Park will keep and treasure this plaque not only as a monument to a great American citizen, but also as a challenge and inspiration to us for all times to come.

At Yosemite the ceremony included music from the Curry Company orchestra and a string quintet, and then Superintendent C. G. Thomson spoke, saying that it was Yosemite that had inspired Stephen Mather's love of nature and his Park Service career, and that Yosemite had served as the model Mather had applied to parks across the nation, the example of how to build facilities and staff, how to protect resources and welcome visitors, how to solve problems.

Glacier National Park delayed its dedication ceremony for a year, until the completion of the Going-to-the-Sun Highway, which was one of Mather's initiatives and one of the greatest engineering feats in any national park. Both the highway and the Mather plaque were dedicated in a July 15, 1933 ceremony that had an audience of over 4,000 people, including 1,500 members of the Civilian Conservation Corps. The next year President Franklin Roosevelt visited Glacier National Park and publicly acknowledged Mather's importance.

Also in 1933 First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt attended a plaque dedication ceremony, along with Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes and Mrs. Mather, at Palisades Interstate Park on the Hudson River. The longtime superintendent of Palisades Interstate Park, William Welch, had been a key

Mather ally. When Mather wanted to create national parks in the Appalachian Mountains, he had placed Welch in charge of studying the possibilities, and Welch had recommended the areas that became Great Smoky Mountain and Shenandoah national parks. In May of 1933 Palisades Interstate Park hosted the National Conference on State Parks, and the highlight was the dedication of the Stephen Mather plaque. A motorcade wound its way up the still-under-construction George W. Perkins Memorial Highway to Bear Mountain, where Mrs. Roosevelt spoke and unveiled the plaque.

The ceremony at Palisades Interstate Park was also attended by NPS director Horace Albright. For the July 4, 1932 mass dedication of Mather plaques, Albright needed to choose among a dozen national parks, and he chose to go to the Grand Canyon.

The Grand Canyon held special significance for Stephen Mather. When Mather became director of the National Park Service in 1916, Yellowstone had been a national park for 44 years, and Yosemite for 26 years. The Grand Canyon was still not a national park, and to Mather this was a scandal. For decades the American people had recognized the Grand Canyon's grandeur. In 1901 the Santa Fe Railway had turned the canyon into a major tourist destination. Yet Arizona politicians had opposed making the Grand Canyon a national park, had opposed the very idea of public lands. The Wild West was meant for resource exploitation, for mining, logging, and ranching. President Teddy Roosevelt had to settle for making the Grand Canyon a national monument in 1908. It was one of Mather's proudest accomplishments that he succeeded in getting Grand Canyon designated a national park. Yet even then, the Grand Canyon became a major battleground between the NPS and private interests. It didn't help that Ralph Cameron, who had fought for years to maintain control of the Bright Angel Trail and his other holdings inside the park, had become Arizona's U.S. senator. When Ken Burns made

his PBS series on the national parks, he liked to feature battles between heroes and villains, and Burns presented Mather as the NPS's greatest hero and Ralph Cameron as Mather's greatest enemy. Horace Albright was deeply involved in Mather's struggles to create and consolidate Grand Canyon National Park.

On July 5, 1932, the *Arizona Republic* reported on Horace Albright's day at the Grand Canyon, in an article captioned "Park Director is Paid Honor":

Governor George W. P. Hunt represented the state of Arizona and Horace A. Albright, present park service director, the federal government. Director Albright read a telegram from John Hays Hammond, Washington DC engineer and head of the Mather Memorial Association, in which the courage and vision of Mather in bringing about the creation of the park service was praised.

The only thing wrong with this article was that, in reality, Horace Albright wasn't really there. Neither, it seems, was any reporter from the *Arizona Republic*. It seems that the newspaper just wrote an article based on a press release about what was supposed to happen.

Albright was not far away. Albright had arrived at Petrified Forest National Monument on July 2, along with Miner Tillotson, the superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park. They had just come from Canyon de Chelly. On July 3, Albright and Tillotson took part in the dedication of the new Rio Puerco Bridge, a 480-foot steel span that eliminated the problem of high waters cutting off Rt. 66 traffic from being able to reach the southern end of Petrified Forest National Monument. The Holbrook Chamber of Commerce roasted a steer for the occasion and fed over 700 people. From a reviewing stand at the bridge, Governor Hunt declared: "I have done considerable scrapping in the past with various government agencies, but I want to state, here and now, that it doesn't go as far as the National Park Service is concerned. Our relations are, and will continue to be, the

most cordial."<sup>5</sup> Horace Albright then declared that the bridge was "for the everlasting benefit and enjoyment of the people."<sup>6</sup> A motorcade of 147 cars, led by Governor Hunt and Director Albright, then crossed the bridge.

At 9 a.m. the next morning, the officials assembled to dedicate the Mather plaque. "This plaque," according to the park's monthly report, "had been set in a massive boulder about 200 yards from the Museum. A winding trail had been located past it with a short branch leading to the plaque. This trail is called the STEPHEN T. MATHER MEMORIAL TRAIL. Superintendent Tillotson and Superintendent Pinkley [of Petrified Forest] made very fine talks. Director Albright made an exceptionally fine address in which he sketched the life of Mr. Mather and told his listeners many things not commonly known of the former Director and the establishment of the National Park Service. We in the Petrified Forest feel highly honored in having this plaque dedicated by the Director."<sup>7</sup>

Yet instead of heading for the Grand Canyon, which seems to have been the original plan, Albright and Tillotson then headed for Oraibi at Hopi, where they spent the night with Lorenzo Hubbell, who ran a trading post there. "After dinner a trip was made up on the Mesa, at sunset, an experience not soon to be forgotten. Later on at the foot of the mesa, a group of Hopi children put on several Indian dances with great earnestness."<sup>8</sup> The next morning, Albright and Tillotson set off for Rainbow Bridge.

There is no explanation as to why Albright did not proceed to the Grand Canyon, why Tillotson failed to attend his own park's ceremony. The press release issued by Grand Canyon National Park after the dedication ceremony referred to "the enforced absence" of Albright and Tillotson. Tillotson sent a telegram to Acting Superintendent James V. Lloyd saying: "Regret exceedingly my inability to be present at dedication of plaque." Albright sent Lloyd a telegram saying: "Regret cannot be present at ceremonies tomorrow but will par-

ticipate in similar dedicatory exercises here.”<sup>9</sup> The fact that these telegrams were sent on July 3 suggests that the absence of Albright and Tillotson wasn't due to any last-minute illness, car breakdown, or monsoon flood. Perhaps Albright had been planning to skip the Petrified Forest plaque ceremony for Grand Canyon's ceremony, only to realize that with all the political VIPs who had come for the bridge dedication, it might seem like a snub for him to disappear. Perhaps Albright had received a last-minute, politically valuable invitation to meet with Hopi leaders or with the influential Lorenzo Hubbell. Perhaps, as often happens with tourists, a schedule planned on a map at home turned out to be unrealistically ambitious once travelers were facing the long distances and summer heat of the Southwest. Or perhaps Albright simply wanted to visit the Hopis.

At least Governor Hunt made it to the dedication ceremony on the South Rim. The Mather plaque was installed on a stone pedestal in front of the rock wall just to the east of the Yavapai Observation Station. Acting Superintendent Lloyd presided over the ceremony, which was attended by about 100 people. Chaplain D. E. Fuller offered a prayer. Lloyd expressed regret for the absence of Albright and Tillotson, and at some point he read from their telegrams. Albright's telegram told of how Stephen Mather had helped establish Grand Canyon as a park, and helped build the Kaibab Trail, the North Rim facilities, and the highways to both rims: "He was Grand Canyon's stalwart, courageous friend." Tillotson said: "I am particularly appreciative of Mr. Mather's interest in Grand Canyon National Park." Then Lloyd read the telegram from Mather Appreciation chairman John Hays Hammond, which seems to have been read at all of the plaque dedication ceremonies. Hammond noted that General John J. Pershing, who usually refused to serve on committees, had gladly served on the Mather Appreciation national committee out of his high regard for Mather's vision and achievements. Hammond concluded:

"This plaque will reveal the noble profile of one who had the vision and whose courage and perseverance brought the achievement." Then the plaque was unveiled by ranger-naturalist Eddie McKee and Chief Ranger James Brooks. Three-year-old Sonny Lehnert, the grandson of Emery Kolb, placed a wreath of ponderosa pine and fir at the base of the plaque. Governor Hunt spoke about the conservation vision of Teddy Roosevelt and Stephen Mather. The ceremonies concluded with the wives of several rangers singing verses from "America."

Years later the Mather plaque was removed from its original pedestal and placed upon a large boulder, which was what had been done from the start in most other parks. This boulder sat along the sidewalk further east of the Yavapai Observation Station. The original pedestal was removed. In 1953 the NPS built a new highway from the park entrance station to the rim, with the goal of allowing visitors to have a first experience not of the buildings and bustle of Grand Canyon Village, but of the canyon itself. The highway offered a stop at a dramatic promontory, which was named Mather Point. The Mather plaque, boulder and all, was moved from Yavapai to Mather Point. As the Mission 66 program built new facilities, Stephen Mather was honored with the Mather Campground, the Mather Amphitheater, and even the Mather Business District—the cluster of grocery store, bank, post office, and Yavapai gift shop and cafeteria. When Mather Point was redesigned in 2010, it gained the Mather Point Amphitheater (the old Mather Amphitheater was renamed the McKee Amphitheater), which is used for ranger programs. Until now there has been little ranger presence at Mather Point, so there was little opportunity to interpret the Mather plaque to visitors. Yet former South Rim District Ranger John Benjamin told me that when he was responsible for escorting VIPs around the park, he would always begin with Mather Point and the Mather plaque, using the plaque as a lesson in the value and values of the National

Park Service.

The continuing respect for Stephen Mather within the NPS, and the continuing creation of new national parks and monuments, led to a continuing demand for new Mather plaques. In 1958 a second generation of plaques was created, though this was initiated from outside the National Park Service. Chicago was planning to dedicate a Stephen Mather High School in 1959 and wanted a Mather plaque for the school. A relative of Stephen Mather contacted NPS Director Conrad Wirth about obtaining a plaque. Wirth contacted Bryant Baker, who contacted the Gorham Company, but it turned out that they no longer possessed the model of the original Mather plaque, which had probably been destroyed during World War Two when Gorham cleaned out much old material to clear space for war-related work. Baker told Wirth they could use one of the original 1932 plaques as a model, and Wirth volunteered the one in the hallway outside his office. As Wirth thought about the opportunity and queried his NPS colleagues, he decided that the NPS should cast fourteen new plaques for newer parks. Baker contacted two other foundries to obtain estimates for making new plaques, and Wirth agreed to pay Baker to supervise the process.

A third generation of plaques was cast between 1986 and 1991. This casting was initiated by Colorado National Monument, which wanted a Mather plaque to celebrate its 75th birthday in 1986. They obtained the 1932-edition Mather plaque from Wind Cave National Park and made a mold from it. In anticipation of the 75th anniversary of the National Park Service in 1991, other parks and monuments were given the chance to obtain a plaque, and many responded. This new edition is aluminum but colored to look like bronze, and on the backside it says "Colorado National Monument Edition." Several parks and monuments held dedication ceremonies in 1991.

Two Mather plaques have experienced adventures with Mother Nature.

Zion National Park received one

of the original 1932 plaques, which was dedicated by Heber Grant, the president of the LDS Church. The plaque was placed halfway up the Riverwalk, the path that leads to the Narrows, on a boulder in a grotto known as "the Stadium". The Stadium, ringed by boulders and centered on a pool and full of wildflowers, was a popular spot for visitors and ranger programs. But the Stadium was directly beneath a hanging canyon that occasionally disgorged a waterfall, sometimes a violent waterfall. Shortly after the plaque was dedicated, according to ranger-naturalist A. M. Woodbury in Zion's *Nature Notes*, "In July 1932 another waterfall following a heavy rain poured from the hanging canyon scouring the pool completely clear again of plant and animal life, leaving a clean sandy floor under the pool..."<sup>10</sup> The Mather plaque would survive another 20+ years of floods, but sometime in the 1950s a waterfall knocked the plaque off its boulder and buried it under so much sand that rangers couldn't find it, and they had to get a war-surplus metal detector to find it. Today people at Zion are still trying to find the Mather plaque—finding it is one of the assignments for Junior Rangers. The plaque was relocated to the wall beside the door of the new Mission 66 visitor center, which today is the Zion Human History Museum.

At Acadia National Park it wasn't flood that attacked the Mather plaque, but fire. In October, 1947, a wildfire burned 17,000 acres, 10,000 of which were inside Acadia National Park—about 20% of the park. In the nearby town of Bar Harbor the fire wiped out much of Millionaires' Row, a chain of mansions, luxury cottages, and hotels. The burned areas inside the park included Cadillac Mountain, the highest peak within 25 miles of the American east coast, atop which the Mather plaque had been installed, a site apparently chosen by Superintendent George Dorr, a longtime friend of Stephen Mather. In a 1958 letter to Bryant Baker, NPS Assistant Director Hillory Tolson said simply that the plaque had been "destroyed" by the

fire, giving no details as to whether the plaque was melted, cracked, or just ruined aesthetically. Tolson said that the national NPS had given up its one spare copy of the plaque to replace Acadia's plaque.

Quite a few plaques were moved to new locations, but for reasons less dramatic than the move at Zion. With the Mission 66 construction of a new generation of visitor centers and other facilities, many plaques were relocated to new buildings. Occasional remodeling also moved plaques. At Glacier the 1933 plaque was moved about 200 feet when a parking lot was reconfigured. At Bryce Canyon a 2001 remodeling of the 1959 visitor center moved the flagpole and the Mather plaque about 25 yards. At Mount Rainier the 1932 plaque on the Mather Memorial Parkway was moved about 300 yards.

Sometimes a relocated plaque symbolized a change of values. At Denali their 1934 plaque was originally installed at the ranger's dormitory, which seemed to say that the plaque was intended only for rangers. By 1952 the plaque had been moved to a more visible location at the Naturalist's Office, the main visitor contact station of the time. But today the Denali plaque is at the front door of the park headquarters, which again means that the public seldom sees it. At least Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site had a good rationale for hiding its plaque from the public. Bent's Old Fort is a living history site, with interpreters dressed in 1840s period costume. Because of its rural isolation, Bent's Old Fort has a better chance than most historic sites of creating the illusion that you are stepping back in time. Cars are required to park a good distance away, and people walk up a trail to the fort. In 2009 this trail was redesigned to further the feeling that you are walking back to the 1840s. Rangers felt that the Mather plaque, located on the trail, tended to burst this bubble, so the plaque was moved to the new administration building. At Pipe Spring National Monument the superintendent felt that their Mather plaque wasn't good enough, since Stephen Mather had made it his personal mission to

make Pipe Spring a national monument, even donating some of his own funds for it. Pipe Spring NM created a new wayside exhibit about Mather's role, including a Mather photo and quote, and moved the Mather plaque to be near this wayside exhibit.

Some of the 1932 plaques are still in their original location. At Acadia the replacement plaque is still atop Cadillac Mountain. The Yellowstone plaque was originally on the park's main road, but today this has become a much quieter spot. The Petrified Forest plaque is right where Horace Albright left it, although the trail is now called the Giant Logs Trail.

Great Basin National Park has done its best to keep the Mather plaque in its original location, against the best efforts of vandals. In 1994 vandals removed the plaque from Mather Point Overlook along the Wheeler Peak Scenic Drive and threw it down the slope. The next year the plaque was stolen. It remained missing for years, but then it showed up at a scrap yard in Reno. Great Basin National Park left the plaque in storage for years until it could build a "bomb-proof" setting for it.

Several other parks and monuments also placed their Mather plaque into storage for many years, but they were not forced by vandals, only by their own indifference to the plaque's meaning. In researching this article I contacted all the parks and monuments that were said to have Mather plaques, and while I received enthusiastic replies from a dozen superintendents who had always valued their plaque, I also discovered that many parks had no clue about the story behind their plaque. This even included Colorado National Monument, whose personnel had made great efforts in the 1980s to get a new generation of plaques cast.

At least the Mather plaque got some recognition in the Ken Burns PBS series "The National Parks." After relating Mather's death, Burns showed a glimpse of the Mather plaque, but then the narrator stated that the plaque had been placed in "all" of the parks and monuments of

the time, when in fact it got into less than half.

For me the saddest commentary on the forgetting of the Mather plaque came at Death Valley National Park. Stephen Mather owed his entire career to his conceiving the “20-Mule Team” brand for borax soap and detergents. In the 1920s the borax company campaigned for the creation of Death Valley National Monument, with the help of Horace Albright, who’d grown up near Death Valley, and later on the borax company donated land for the creation of a Mission 66 visitor center. In its courtyard the visitor center holds a Mather plaque, dedicated in 1991. I once attended a history talk in that courtyard, given by a history-minded ranger. Afterward I asked him about their Mather plaque, and he went over and looked at the plaque as if he had never noticed it before. He didn’t

have a clue about what the plaque was doing there.

After I had finished writing this article, with its bemoaning of how the National Park Service didn’t know its own history, a Grand Canyon ranger asked me, “Of course, you know there’s a Mather plaque on the North Rim too.” Actually, I hadn’t known this. It is in front of the North Rim administration building. I searched Grand Canyon National Park archives but could find no record that this plaque even existed. It couldn’t have been an original 1932 plaque, since Mt. Rainier was the only park to receive two copies then, so it must have been from the two later generations of plaques. I asked various rangers who had been around Grand Canyon for a long time, but no one could tell me how the North Rim Mather plaque had gotten there.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Horace Albright, *The Birth of the National Park Service: The Founding Years 1913-1933* (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1985) p 249.
- 2 Letter from Stephen Mather to Bryant Baker, July 27, 1925, in Bryant Baker papers at Marland Mansion, Ponca City, Oklahoma.
- 3 Letter from John Hays Hammond to Bryant Baker, May 5, 1931, in Bryant Baker papers, Marland Mansion.
- 4 Lee H. Wittlesey, “Loss of a Sacred Shrine: How the National Park Service Anguished Over Yellowstone’s Campfire Myth, 1960-1980” *George Wright Forum*, Volume 27, Issue # 1, 2010, p 99.
- 5 Quoted in NPS monthly report, July 28, 1932, by custodian Chas. J. Smith, Petrified Forest National Monument, p 2.
- 6 *Ibid*, p 2.
- 7 *Ibid*, p 2-3.
- 8 *Ibid*, p 3.
- 9 Quotes from documents in monuments file, Study Collection, Grand Canyon National Park.
- 10 A. M. Woodbury, *Nature Notes*, September 1932. Archives, Zion National Park.

## The Demise of the Lost Orphan Mine

by Keith Green

Remember the big headframe, part of the Lost Orphan Uranium Mine, that could be seen on the South Rim between Maricopa and Powell Point? When the mine was operating, Christmas lights were strung on it for the holidays making it look like a giant Christmas tree on



The Orphan Mine headframe stood at the south rim for more than 50 years. Photo courtesy of National Park Service.

the edge of the canyon. Well, now the headframe is gone! The Park Service contracted to have it removed in January, 2009.

The Lost Orphan Mine was an inholding predating the creation of Grand Canyon National Park. Dan Hogan made it a mining claim in 1893. The claim included four acres of land on the edge of Grand Canyon, but the mine is actually 1,200 feet below the rim near the bottom of the Coconino Sandstone. That is where Dan first started digging a hole into the ground. This was later dubbed “the Glory Hole” and is the hole that can be seen down below the rim from Maricopa Point. The mine shaft follows a brachia pipe which has in it many minerals including copper, silver, and uranium. Hogan was mostly interested in the copper but access to the mine on his Hummingbird Trail was difficult. The trail skirted down thin ledges and ladders over the canyon’s rim.

Dan never made much of a profit from the mine probably because it was so inaccessible, but he began to notice the possibility of making mon-

ey through tourism. In 1936, Hogan opened a lodge at the mine site on the four rim acres which eventually included a swimming pool on the canyon rim!

The story of the mine shows that, over and over, people and institutions failed to realize the extent and danger of what the Lost Orphan Mine really is. In 1951, geologists discovered that those pesky rocks Hogan had been discarding for years were uranium ore. The concentration of uranium was fairly weak near the surface, but it became rich further down. He had been working for sixty years in an unventilated radioactive mine, but he lived to be 90 and died of pneumonia – not cancer or radiation poisoning. In this case, what he didn’t know didn’t kill him.

The mineral rights, and eventually the whole property were sold to Western Gold and Uranium Inc. in 1953. Originally, a cable brought buckets of ore from the Glory Hole, over several towers to the rim near where the headframe was being built. At shift changes, two men per bucket