

Statement of Significance

The Glacier National Park Headquarters Historic District is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with national park administration and development. The headquarters area is a complex of office buildings, trade shops, and employee residences, which exists to serve the national park. Planned, built, and owned by the federal government, occupied and inhabited by federal employees, the community is both emblematic of the enlarged federal presence in the West and reflective of Glacier's status as a large, old national park. Ensclosed in a forest environment, Glacier's headquarters is characterized by its neighborhood setting. Besides the historic buildings, the streets, lawns, patches of native vegetation, forest paths, and forest edge make up a cultural landscape that constitutes a contributing resource to the historic district.

The district is also eligible under Criterion C for its embodiment of National Park Service landscape design concepts, its continuity with the park's first Master Plan of 1933, and its array of historic buildings that are characteristic of Park Service building types. The architecture of the buildings reflects the Park Service's distinctive use and modification of architectural styles, from a simple Craftsman style in 1917, to the development of Park Service Rustic in the 1920s and 1930s, to Park Service Modern during and after Mission 66.

The period of significance for the Glacier National Park Headquarters Historic District extends from 1910, when the park was established, until 1966, when the last of the Mission 66-era construction occurred. Although the area was not selected as a headquarters site until 1916, the year of establishment of the park was decisive since it withdrew the area from settlement and had a formative effect on land use of the area, including the location of the first park road. The area was selected for a headquarters site six years later largely because it was on this road.

Because of its association with Glacier National Park, one of the oldest units in the national park system, the Glacier National Park Headquarters Historic District has national significance.

The National Register areas of significance for the Glacier National Park Headquarters Historic District are (1) Conservation, (2) Architecture, (3) Landscape Architecture, and (4) Community Planning and Development.

Significance under Criterion A

The establishment of Glacier's permanent headquarters site coincided with the birth of the National Park Service in 1916. The fundamental purpose of Glacier National Park was to preserve the area in a state of nature while developing the area for public enjoyment. This was the same "dual mandate" that lay at the heart of the national park idea. From the beginning, National Park Service leaders decided that the best way to reconcile the seemingly contradictory objectives in the dual mandate was to apply concepts of landscape architecture so that whatever minimal development was necessary to accommodate public use would be harmonious with the natural environment. According to the theory of landscape architecture, construction of roads and buildings did not harm natural conditions as long as it did not impair scenic values. In Glacier, and in

other national parks, ideas of landscape architecture were put into practice on a heretofore unprecedented geographic scale. As the National Park Service proceeded to develop Glacier's headquarters area, it did so using the same concepts and tools with which it approached all national park design and management.

The search for a suitable location for headquarters began as soon as Glacier National Park was established. A functional headquarters site was vital to the park administration, since the superintendent needed a fixed place to assemble a ranger staff, establish a communications hub, and store and maintain equipment. Early park superintendents made their temporary headquarters at the foot of Lake McDonald. Stephen T. Mather visited Glacier in 1915, one year before becoming the first director of the new National Park Service, and decided that Glacier's headquarters should be located across the Middle Fork of the Flathead River from Belton, where it would not only provide for efficient communications (via the railroad station at Belton) but would also be conspicuous to visitors entering the park. Mather was also eager to eliminate a parcel of private property in that location. So he bought the private land with his own money and donated it to the government. The location of the headquarters is significant because it reflects Mather's political calculation and design aesthetic that the visiting public should be made aware upon entering the area that this was a *national* park under federal administration.

From the time the headquarters site was selected until 1937, the main park road went through the headquarters site and all buildings were situated in relation to the road. The buildings were arranged so as to have a strong visual effect for the motorist entering the park. The main park road crossed the Middle Fork upstream from the present-day bridge and ran along the edge of the river for about one quarter of a mile before making an abrupt climb and right turn onto the river terrace, where the road then headed north up the McDonald Creek valley. The superintendent's house was strategically located at the outside of that abrupt turn, while the first four ranger residences were built in a line on the opposite side of the road just north of the abrupt turn. From the viewpoint of the motorist entering the park in the 1920s or early to mid 1930s, the line of original ranger residences was on the right, the superintendent's house and administration building were on the left, the utility yard was also to the left beyond a screen of natural vegetation, and the park entrance station was reached at the far end of this headquarters complex. After 1937, a new bridge was built over the Middle Fork and the Going-to-the-Sun Road was realigned so that it bypassed the headquarters. Henceforward, visitors entering the park stopped at a new entrance station and generally passed by without turning down the short spur road into the headquarters area. From the Going-to-the-Sun Road buildings were practically hidden from view in the forest. However, the original design intent of the headquarters site in relation to the original park road is still discernable to anyone who walks over the old roadbed, which is now a foot trail.

The development of the headquarters area dovetailed with major bursts of design and construction in the national park system over the next five decades. The first wave of construction in Glacier's headquarters area occurred in the 1920s and was guided by the agency's Landscape Division. This decade saw the development of the older utility yard, the administration building (now the West Lakes Ranger Station), and a substantial portion of the residential area. Another wave of construction occurred in the 1930s with the help of New Deal programs including the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). CCC

crews added to the number of buildings and also contributed many small features to the landscape, such as flagstone paths and street lamps. During World War II, the late forties, and the Korean War, practically no new construction occurred, but this was a time of planning for the postwar era. The headquarters area was reconfigured in light of two major changes: first, the completion of the Going-to-the-Sun Road bypass, which meant that the headquarters area was essentially flipped from the standpoint of how people entered the area by car; second, the demands of increasing park visitation, which required a near doubling in size of park staff housing, administrative office space, and the utility yard. The last wave of construction occurred under the system-wide development initiative known as Mission 66. For the Glacier headquarters area, the Mission 66 program featured an effort to modernize staff housing, which came to resemble the middle class housing found in American suburbs. The Mission 66 years also saw expansion of the utility area and completion of a large, new administration building. Since 1966, there has been minimal new construction in the headquarters area. The headquarters area grew organically from the 1920s through Mission 66, so that street patterns, buildings, vegetative screens and plantings, and other landscape features generally reflect those waves of construction described above. For example, when a second utility yard was built, the original one was left intact. The residential area consists of roughly concentric curvilinear streets, with the 1920s and 1930s houses dominating some streets and Mission 66 houses dominating others.

The headquarters area today still reflects the concepts and uniformity of a designed community. Besides bearing the imprint of Mather, who wanted a cluster of neat, rustic, government buildings to frame the visitor's view at the very entrance to the park, the headquarters area also reflects the design intent of early Park Service landscape architects Charles Punchard, Jr., Daniel Hull, and Thomas C. Vint. These men, who had great influence on national park design throughout the United States, prepared site plans and building plans specifically for Glacier's headquarters that were put into effect in the 1920s and 1930s. The redesign of the headquarters area during and after World War II and the last wave of construction under Mission 66 reflect the design concepts of the Park Service's Branch of Planning and Design around mid century. The decision to screen the headquarters area from public view from the Going-to-the-Sun Road was consistent with a trend throughout the national park system to make service areas less visible. The effort to make the residential area more family oriented and to build housing units that were more attractive to career service members and their spouses reflects the personal direction of Park Service Director Conrad L. Wirth. Although the resident population of the headquarters area has declined in recent decades, the existing cultural landscape still conveys those design concepts dating from the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Footpaths lead to children's play areas that are tucked into the interior of each residential block. Lawns, driveways, and garages give all of the residential area (but particularly the Mission 66 housing units) a mid twentieth century suburban appearance. Most importantly, perhaps, the forest setting has not changed appreciably. The many standing trees and clumps of natural vegetation within the development area and the wall of trees around the perimeter convey a sense of a planned residential and working community located deep within the primeval forest.

Significance under Criterion C

All buildings in the Glacier headquarters area reflect prevailing National Park Service ideas about architectural styles that would support the mission to preserve natural conditions and provide for public enjoyment. With few exceptions, the buildings were made according to designs prepared at the regional or national level by professional architects or landscape architects. Before World War II, the prevailing idea was to employ an exaggerated Craftsman style of architecture, native construction materials, and natural color schemes of brown, beige, and green to create a sense of harmony between the built environment and the natural surroundings. The architectural style became known as Park Service Rustic. In the Mission 66 years, the prevailing idea was to make the service area maximally efficient and minimally impactful on the environment. The service area was screened from view and its total footprint was kept reasonably compact. The Park Service Rustic architecture was discarded in favor of a modernist architectural style that became known as National Park Service Modern. The earlier emphasis on native construction materials gave way to an emphasis on economy and functionality.

The first four buildings constructed in the headquarters area (Buildings 1-4) were completed prior to the development of the Park Service Rustic style. The building plans employed an ordinary Craftsman style and are thought to have been the first set of building plans created by the new National Park Service; thus, these four buildings have significance as markers for the nascent architectural style that would come into its own just a few years later.

The 1920 plan for the layout of the headquarters area had a residential area flanking the park road and a utility area extending away from the park road on a perpendicular axis to the road. This was a variation on the standard concept of a “national park village” in which the administrative, residential, and utility functions of park headquarters would be arrayed around three sides of a square, with the park road forming the fourth side. The “national park village” idea was derived from the Fairsted school of landscape architecture, which sought to blend the English formal garden tradition with the “natural” garden style prevalent in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century (Carr, 1998, 95-138). While new construction in the 1920s did not exactly follow the 1920 plan, the first of two utility areas – with its buildings positioned around a hollow rectangular yard – grew organically from this original design concept.

Buildings constructed in the 1920s show the flowering of Park Service Rustic architecture in the headquarters area. The distinctive architectural style is exhibited in the superintendent’s residence (Building 8), the administration building (222), the assistant superintendent’s residence (16), and the commissioner’s residence (9), among others. The log construction, cobble facing, and exaggerated knee braces on these buildings reflected a maturing of the Rustic Style from the more traditional Craftsman Style of the wood-frame residences (Buildings 1-4).

There was a trend toward less ornate, more functional design in the residences built during the 1930s. As each dwelling unit was separated from the next by a small lawn, the residential area exhibited the middle class ideal of individual home ownership, and as all of these ranger residences were either built or retrofitted with single car garages in the late 1930s, the image of middle-class living in the forest was complete.

The Park Service’s master plan for Glacier, completed in 1933, included a section titled the Belton Headquarters Area Plan. New construction went according to the master

plan, which was updated periodically over the next two decades (with major revisions being made to this plan following the realignment of the Going-to-the-Sun Road in 1937). The master plan, which was basic to the Park Service's approach to national park development in the middle decades of the twentieth century, derived from urban planning as well as landscape architecture. The master plan not only showed the layout of streets and buildings, but also prescribed many other landscape features such as vegetation screens to provide separation between residential and utility areas, tree islands to break up the large expanse of utility yards, footpaths mainly through the residential area, and children's play areas. Many of these elements of landscape design are still evident today. Other landscaping details, such as street lamps, cobblestone edging around parking areas and driveways, and flagstone paths, have long since been removed or become overgrown by vegetation but are clearly visible in historic photos.

The cultural landscape also bears the results of Tom Vint's emphasis on "landscape naturalization." This program referred to the planting of native trees and shrubs around the base of buildings as soon as they were completed. Some individual building plans carried highly detailed instructions on which plants would be planted where around the new building. In the same vein, Park Service landscape architects identified trees that were to be left standing each time a new building was added to the complex.

The Glacier National Park Headquarters Historic District contains two types of postwar residential housing with historical significance. One type may be considered transitional as they were built between 1948 and 1953, in the years between the Park Service's two main bursts of construction activity during the interwar years and the Mission 66 years. Three residences (Buildings 41, 77, and 80) are representative of this type. The first of these is a three-bedroom, two-bath Ranch Style house with an attached single-car garage. The house had distinctly modern lines and marked a definite departure from the Park Service Rustic style. The latter two houses in this trio are even more modern in style with low, almost flat roofs and detached, flat-roofed garages connected to the house by an open breezeway. Although modern, these three houses are transitional in the sense that they were not built from standardized plans and do not reflect the emphasis on economy and efficiency that were the hallmarks of Mission 66 house designs. By contrast, there are more than a dozen examples of the second type, the three-bedroom, two-bath, rectangular Ranch Style house that served as the standardized Park Service house design in Glacier and elsewhere during Mission 66.

The second utility yard, which runs on a perpendicular axis to the first and is more than double its size, and the complex of large garages and shops on either side of it, are significant components of the district as well. The sheer expanse of this portion of the district is reflective of the increased scale of park operations in the postwar era as park visitation climbed toward a million visitors per year. If this portion of the district tends to obscure the original "national park village" design, it is also reflective of the growth of Glacier National Park operations (particularly snow removal operations on the Going-to-the-Sun Road, which required a fleet of snow removal vehicles and associated shop space). Outside of Yellowstone and Yosemite, few national parks have such a large headquarters area as this.