

CONVICTS, BOOSTERS, AND FARMERS:  
PARK COUNTY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE YELLOWSTONE TRAIL

1912 - 1914

by

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## DEDICATION

To my parents, David and Suzanne, who loved nothing more than getting behind the wheel and out onto the open road. For my daughter, Angela, who has many road trips ahead of her.

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## ABSTRACT

The Yellowstone Trail was initially an improved dirt transcontinental automobile highway began in 1912. The first 1,100 miles from Minneapolis-St. Paul to Gardiner, Montana, were made without state or federal money. This story focuses on Park County, Montana, where farmers had opposed the road and were reluctant to assist in improvements. Through a campaign of boosterism which included editorials in the local newspapers, charismatic speakers, and by building on the work of prison labor, the farmer opposition was overcome. Farmers made the remaining improvements that made the road a reality. The story is narrated with evidence primarily obtained by analyzing newspaper articles from the *Livingston Enterprise* and the *Livingston Daily Post*.

## INTRODUCTION

The Lincoln Highway, the nation's first transcontinental automobile roadway, had its first travelers in 1913. Extending from New York to San Francisco, initially this route was made of a connected patchwork of existing dirt roads. A 'pathfinder' had been hired to scout out and map the route in its entirety, and these maps were made available to the public. Before the dust had settled on the Lincoln Highway project, work began on the nation's second transcontinental roadway, the Yellowstone Trail. This route eventually connected Plymouth, Massachusetts, to Puget Sound, Washington, and was completed in 1919 (see fig. 1).

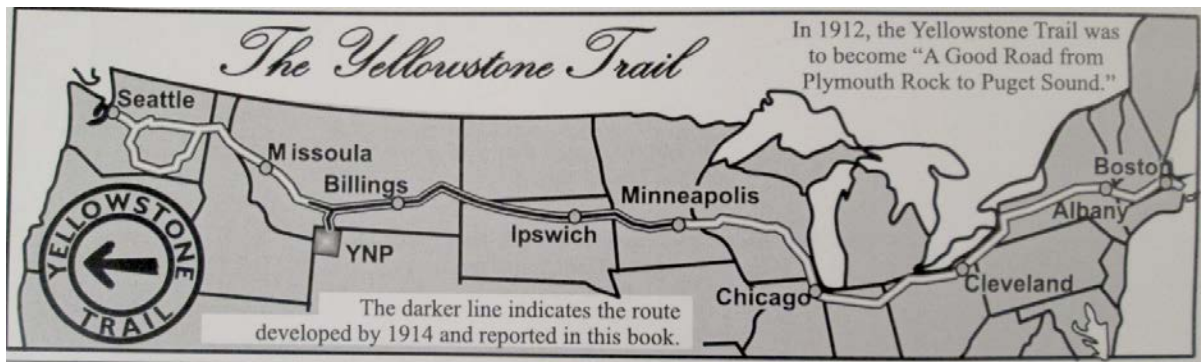


Figure 1. The Yellowstone Trail map.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alice A. Ridge and John W. Ridge, *On the Yellowstone Trail: A Reproduction of the First Year Book of the Twin Cities-Aberdeen Park Trail Association (The Yellowstone Trail Association) 1914* (Altoona, Wisconsin: Yellowstone Trail Publishers, 2003), ii.



The National Old Trails Road, another transcontinental highway, was ‘conceived’ nearly at the same time, but scholars debate as to the completion dates, due to ambiguous stretches, and therefore the chronology of which roadway was built second or third. Despite its deliberately nostalgic name, The Yellowstone Trail was not a trail, but a modern automobile route created by stringing together existing dirt roads. It was in essence an improved dirt highway.

The first significant leg of the Yellowstone Trail, completed in 1914, stretched 1,100 miles from Minneapolis-St. Paul, to Gardiner, Montana. No state or federal funds were used, because the Federal Road Act of 1916, which would provide such assistance, was two years away. Park County, Montana, which contained the gateway corridor of the Trail leading to Yellowstone National Park, needed the most formidable improvements along the entire 1,100 miles (see Appendices A, B, C). The work entailed the removal of multiple sections of solid rock hillside, the reduction of several daunting grades, and over 60 miles of dirt road improvement.

Automobiles would not be allowed in Yellowstone Park until the late summer of 1915. Instead, tourists relied on the railroad and horse-drawn conveyances to visit the Park. Nonetheless, during 1912-1914 the local Park County newspapers consistently published stories of Yellowstone Park soon being open to automobiles which added to the county’s urgency for completing this improved dirt roadway.

Park County’s motivation further increased, with what later turned out to be an overly optimistic announcement, that a Park to Park highway between Glacier National Park and

Yellowstone National Park was to be constructed (see Appendix D). With this north-south park road in mind, in 1912 Park County arranged with the state prison to use convict workers on certain labor-intensive rock removal and grade-leveling sections. Independently contracted free-market labor costs would have been prohibitive for the county's budget. While there was no state or federal money for roads at the time, the state of Montana was providing the use of prison work crews to improve roads, which in lieu of money, was a type of state support.<sup>2</sup>

During this period, convict labor was common in the United States, and the state of Montana began its prisoner roadbuilding program in 1910. State prison bureaucrats had toured prisons in the Midwest and West and brought back information and protocols for organizing and using convict work crews. The bureaucrats further believed that the convicts' outside work aided Montana, taught skills, increased prisoner self-esteem, and reduced recidivism. Secondly, the convicts, mostly "thieves, burglars, cattle rustlers, and other men convicted of non-capital crimes," had ten days taken off of their sentences for each month worked. Lastly, the Montana State Prison in Deer Lodge was overcrowded, and the outside convict work crews alleviated that condition.<sup>3</sup>

The convicts had finished their work in Park County by 1913 and departed back to Deer Lodge. Over 60 miles of dirt road remained in the county that needed less-intensive, but

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<sup>2</sup> "Commissioners Ask for 40 Convicts to Work Roads," *Livingston Enterprise*, May 4, 1912, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Jon Axline, "Building Permanent and Substantial Roads: Prison Labor on Montana's Highways, 1910-1925," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 62, no. 2 (Summer 2012):59-66, 95-96.

still critical, work to be roadworthy for motorists. Throughout 1913 further roadwork in the county came to a near stall. The local newspapers continued publishing editorials on the benefits of good roads. While public awareness of good roads was increasing through these editorials, there was no compelling organizing force to marshal citizens for road improvement efforts. This standstill created a lull in the progress of Park County's main dirt road for the Park to Park highway.

Meanwhile, a group of South Dakota good roads boosters had formed the Yellowstone Trail association, so named due to the location of their end-goal. Through boosterism and diligent organization, this group had already improved hundreds of miles of dirt roads in South Dakota, North Dakota, and Minnesota. In mid-1913, Park County joined forces with this Yellowstone Trail association. The 450-mile Park to Park project, due to funding and organizational shortfalls, would not see completion for several years to come. The Park County portions of the Park to Park road, that were convict-built improvements, were at this time subsumed under the banner of the Yellowstone Trail. However, at this point, convict labor would not be adequate: the people who needed to be motivated and enlisted to improve the remaining sections in Park County were the farmers, who thus far had been reluctant to assist.

One of the main reasons for farmer opposition to the notion of tourist highways was wariness of any manner of 'organized' development projects. In part, this attitude harkened back to the rugged individualist myth of the American West featured in the writing of Frederick Jackson Turner: "the frontier is productive of individualism . . . It produces

antipathy to control, and particularly to any direct control.”<sup>4</sup> It may well also be that in the case of Park County, farmers who had already built their own rural roads resented outside interest in, and threats to use, ‘their’ painstakingly built routes.

The historian Christopher Wells, focusing on a slightly earlier period, argues that farmer beliefs in individualism and self-governance were in opposition to the increasingly popular idea that roads needed to be under a distant and centralized control. Farmers were concerned that rural peoples’ wants and needs would be neglected by faraway bureaucrats. Up to this point, the farmers valued the independence that they had in the hands-on maintenance of their own roads and utilizing their own tools. Further, while their dirt roads had shortcomings, outsider improvement of roads was seen by farmers as expensive and therefore unwanted. Farmers felt that they knew what was best for their own roads.<sup>5</sup>

The proposed Park to Park highway, and then the better organized Yellowstone Trail that eventually took over its improved route in southern Park County, were both initially viewed by farmers as tourist roads. Wells has analyzed, again in reference to an earlier period, farmer disdain and irritation towards outsider automobiles creating havoc on the roads they had built and maintained. While not from the Montana of the early twentieth century, these stories may give some insight into how Park County farmers likely felt about non-farmer automobile wear and tear on their dirt roads. Wells described an early farmer

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<sup>4</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, ed. Harold P. Simonson (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1963), 51.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher W. Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2012), 27-28.

backlash at these automobilists: “Farmers plowed roads and sprinkled them with glass, hindering automobile traffic without affecting horses or pedestrians . . . [and] angry farmers stretched barbed wire across roads, threw stones, or threatened speeding motorists with firearms.”<sup>6</sup> However, Henry Ford’s introduction of the Model T in 1908, with its high ground clearance, ability to navigate ruts, and humane price, increasingly made it a favorite vehicle among farmers, doubtlessly generating greater rural interest in and acceptance of cars.<sup>7</sup> Despite the ever-increasing numbers of Montana farmers with automobiles, the use of draft horses were a common sight for decades to come. Yet, regardless of the farmer mode of transport, disrespectful outsider automobiles were surely frowned upon by rural inhabitants.

A good roads movement had been underway in the United States since the 1880s, and one of its chief goals was to get the farmer and his draft animals out of the mud. This mud referred to the roadways that led from the farm areas into towns and railheads, called ‘feeder’ or farm-to-market roads. The farmer saw the merit in improving these farm-to-market roads. Perhaps for Park County farmers the idea of spending money on a perceived tourist highway, such as the Yellowstone Trail, elicited the same backlash that Christopher Wells described concerning farmer responses towards the proposed Lincoln Highway funding, which “represented the worst possible priority—an approach that would leave local roads mired in mud while ushering growing numbers of sightseeing motorists into rural territory.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher W. Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2012), 73.

<sup>7</sup> William Kaszynski, *The American Highway: The History and Culture of Roads in the United States* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2000), 26.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher W. Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2012), 78-79.

Part of the booster campaign for the Yellowstone Trail that was waged in the editorial sections of Park County newspapers sought to educate the farmer to the benefits of having one main good road (a trunk) that rural feeder roads (branches) could connect to. This was the philosophy of Charles Henry Davis, a good roads movement founder who wrote numerous pamphlets extolling the benefits of trunk and branch roads. In one 1914 pamphlet he argued that the railroad became successful by creating trunks (main lines) followed by connecting feeder branches, and that this would apply to highways. In the same piece he touched on two farmer concerns: “some of our farmers think that trunk line highways will be paid for by [farmers] and used by the wealthy ‘speed bug.’”<sup>9</sup>

In this story it was the spirit and power of boosterism that changed the farmer’s minds about the Yellowstone Trail. Aldo Leopold wrote of the power of boosterism during the early decades of the twentieth century:

Boosterism is not firmly established in any other country but our own. Perhaps it will not be. But it is an undeniable fact that it touches the daily lives of a hundred million Americans, and dominates the lives of some of them. This alone establishes it as one of the great political and economic forces of our time.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Henry Davis, *Railroads and National Highways* (Washington DC: National Highways Association, 1914), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Aldo Leopold, “A Criticism of the Booster Spirit [1923],” in *The River of the Mother of God and Other Essays by Aldo Leopold*, ed. Susan L. Fladerer and J. Baird Callicott (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1991) 98.

The proponents of the Yellowstone Trail effectively used this spirit of boosterism at local and regional meetings. Boosterism was also responsible for good roads news and education articles in the daily newspapers. These two venues of boosterism combined with word-of-mouth booster evangelizing of the Yellowstone Trail overcame farmer opposition and reluctance towards participating in improving the road.

The proponents of the Yellowstone Trail had effectively used boosterism to overcome the farmer opposition. Through an exploration of Park County newspapers this paper will examine the boosterism techniques of proponents of this 1,100-mile route to reveal how the opposition of the farmers was overturned. The Yellowstone Trail which allowed thousands of automobile travelers to see the wonders of Yellowstone Park from 1914-1929, would otherwise not have been possible.

Harold Meeks, a geographer and early automobile road historian, wrote one of the few books on Yellowstone Trail history. In the introduction he lamented the dearth of information on the Yellowstone Trail organization, stating that few records have survived. Meeks added that the route created excitement in all the towns that it touched, and he was optimistic that more Trail stories are hidden in local newspapers of the period. Finally, he stated that, "Untapped newspaper sources would probably answer a host of unanswered questions." The newspaper archival research for this project conducted at the Research

Center of the Yellowstone Gateway Museum in Livingston, Montana, has brought the Park County story of the Yellowstone Trail to light.<sup>11</sup>

Section One of this essay will explore the early growing pains of automobiles amongst the milieu of railroads, the quest for tourist independence, and poor roads. Further, the road conditions and challenges of 1911 Montana are touched upon, while the use of convict labor for the tentative Park to Park highway in Park County, Montana, is explored. Throughout, the boosting for good roads in both daily newspapers is chronicled, with accompanying interpretations of its significance.

Section Two concerns the period in Park County following the completion of the convict work, where there is a lull in further road progress. Reading between the lines, and conspicuous only by the absence of stories of farmers conducting road improvements, it is suggested that farmers were staying on the sidelines and not coming forward to assist in the next step of the project, which was fixing the remaining 60 miles of dirt road in Park County. This period of 1913 was a time of many good roads editorials in both newspapers. In mid-1913, the South Dakota-based Yellowstone Trail organization joined forces with Park County, subsuming the Park to Park improvements completed from Livingston to Gardiner, and also bringing Yellowstone Trail fever to a pitch.

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<sup>11</sup> Harold Meeks, *On the Road to Yellowstone: The Yellowstone Trail and American Highways 1900-1930* (Missoula, Montana: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 2000), v.



Section Three analyzes the peak of boosterism that finally won over the farmer opposition. This was accomplished by the continuous pro-Yellowstone Trail stories and editorials in both daily papers, combined with charismatic speakers. The culminating boost was the announcement of a Trail Day to take place May 22, 1914, where tens of thousands of people turned out to work, the majority of whom were farmers who completed 1,100 miles of improvements from Minneapolis-St. Paul to Gardiner, Montana. Park County farmers turned out in force to finish the 60 miles of roadway in that county.

## SECTION ONE

## GOOD ROADS AND CONVICT LABOR

Early Automobile Roads

In the days before the railroads, Americans had traveled overland on foot, by horse, carts, wagons, stagecoach, and buggies. Then the railroads came, and in time, opened up growing areas of the West to non-Native settlement. Towns and cities were formed along the railroad lines. Trips of any length were taken by rail. Non-rail trips were made on dirt roads from the rural areas into the towns, and vice-versa. It was up to people in towns and counties to make efforts to keep these roads maintained, sometimes through the half-hearted method known as “working out the road tax,” which meant that a citizen had to volunteer a certain amount of labor per year, or else pay someone to take their place.<sup>12</sup>

The federal government was slow to help with state and rural road improvements, in part because the Constitutional status of state-federal sovereignty had not been worked out yet. For example, while the federal government often assisted with money for harbors, canals, and dredging waterways—projects that were often extensive and boundaries ambiguous—the imposition of federal control on the landscape of the individual states was a matter of some contention. Additionally, policy had been slow in coming to improve dirt

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<sup>12</sup> Harold A. Meeks, *On the Road to Yellowstone: The Yellowstone Trail and the American Highways 1900-1930* (Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 2000), 2.

roads because of the railroads' dominance on the landscape and American culture and business of long-distance overland transportation.

The dawn of the automobile age challenged the railroads' technological monopoly. A transitional period ensued, slow moving at first, towards popular automobile usage. This transition had growing pains, the first of which was that existing dirt roads were often ill-suited for automobiles. The wheels of a horse-drawn cart or wagon were easily pulled over the surface of a dirt road—the motive power being generated by the horse. Only when the roadway was wet, or during cornering, was there much disturbance of the roadbed. Whereas automobile tires “with their greater speed and the fact that they were providing the driving force, sucked gravel and dirt off of the roads, thus destroying the surface and stirring up great clouds of dust.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, tens of thousands of miles of dirt roads in the U.S. were not designed to handle to the considerably more disruptive technology that autos brought to bear.

Farmers and the bicyclists who had been wrestling with wet and muddy roads for some time joined forces in earnest in the 1880s, and this became known as the Good Roads Movement, from which the automobilists would eventually benefit greatly. The unlikely alliance between mostly city-dwelling bicyclists and rural farmers is one of those great American stories where people minimized their differences and united for the same cause—in this case, improved roads. Both of these groups produced booklets, pamphlets and magazines extolling the virtues of fixing up roads, lobbied congress, and made arguments

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<sup>13</sup> Alice A. Ridge and John Wm. Ridge, *Introducing the Yellowstone Trail: A Good Road from Plymouth Rock to Puget Sound 1912-1930* (Altoona, Wisconsin: Yellowstone Trail Publishers, 2000), 2.

before the railroad owners that improved roads would mean more commerce and shipping of goods to the railheads.<sup>14</sup>

Recognizing that good roads could help move freight out from railheads more quickly, the railroad owners began promoting Good Roads with special trains that visited towns along rail stops. At this time, farmers had seen the utilitarian benefit of good roads, while bicyclists saw the joy in using smooth and dry roadways. However, it was the arrival of the automobile, with its in yearly increasing numbers, that created a constellation of stakeholders capable of even greater changes. In the beginning, there was little, if any help, from bureaucrats in Washington, so citizens accomplished road improvement efforts through grassroots organizing, local fundraising, and volunteerism.

### Transitions in the West

In the American West, where one small ‘slice’ of this greater road improvement story takes place, the transition from railroad to automobile was also occurring by the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Following the first wave of automobile buyers came the more affordable Ford Model-T, making it clear that automobiles were not a passing fad. With the automobile, there was an alternative to train travel, and “Through the 1910s and 1920s

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<sup>14</sup> Christopher W. Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2012), 25-26.

railroading slowly declined as an economic enterprise, a decline that noticeably accelerated once the Great Depression hit in the 1930s.”<sup>15</sup>

It is important to first take a look at why any Americans would want to forsake the railroad. Why drive an automobile 1,100 miles over the course of a week from a city such as Minneapolis westward through the Great Plains to reach Yellowstone Park? Surely the train was easier and more comfortable. There were many reasons why travelers chose the automobile.

The Wonderland known as Yellowstone Park had already loomed large in the American imagination for some decades before this Trail story begins. In 1883, the Northern Pacific Railroad’s Park Branch line ended in the town of Cinnabar, which became the final stop where tourists boarded horse-drawn conveyances to Yellowstone Park. Even by 1883, before all of these early railroad tourists’ stories were about to flood across America, “more than thirteen hundred US newspaper articles had been written about Yellowstone National Park,” and combined with the European-written stories, the Yellowstone Park fascination inhabited many early twentieth-century minds.<sup>16</sup> This same idea of seeing new landscapes that had motivated many railroad tourists, now excited early automobile travelers.

In pre-railroad America people traveled between towns either by using waterways, on horseback, with horse-drawn conveyances, or by walking. The use of covered wagons as a

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<sup>15</sup> John Jakle and Keith Sculle, *Supplanting America’s Railroads: The Early Auto Age, 1900-1940* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2017), xv-xvi.

<sup>16</sup> Lee H. Whittlesey, *Gateway to Yellowstone: The Raucous Town of Cinnabar on the Montana Frontier* (Missoula, Montana: TwoDot, 2015), xiii.

mode of transportation often typifies stereotypes of the American spirit: the rugged individualist; captain of their own ship; conquering new lands; and overcoming hardship. In a very real sense, the railroads had taken away many of these aspects from the typical person's travel experiences. The train engineer and conductor became the 'captains of the ship,' choosing the routes, the speed, and when to stop. Much of the earlier independence experienced by the covered wagon travelers was gone. There was a sharp control imposed on the train travelers: where and when they would stop, where and what to eat, and hotel choices. Many of these constraints were put in place by the railroad schedules and the locations of their depots and stations. Rail travelers were also bound by the railroad's itinerary, which usually looked quite linear, with "stops" as towns on the map, and passengers who were largely insulated from the physical landscape between towns. Lastly, rail travelers often had to occupy space on the train with strangers.

By sharp contrast, as one prominent historian of the automobile described it, early automobile travelers and roadside campers forsook the,

Monopolistic rail-hotel complex. Behind their delight in traveling off the beaten track was a profound desire to discover new perspectives, to experience unconventional intimacies with fellow Americans, and to break away from the hectic work routines and bureaucratic institutions of an urban-industrial civilization. Slow, arduous, and close to nature, autocamping revived what tourists imagined to be a more

leisurely pace, personal independence, simplicity, and family solidarity of pre-industrial times.<sup>17</sup>

These early auto tourists, as well as local automobile users, were the first point on the triangle of the burgeoning auto-related economy. The second were the people who had the commercial and economic incentive to improve the roads, which included not only farmers, but also automobile manufacturers, parts suppliers, hoteliers, garages and repair facilities, diners, and just about anyone else that was supplying travelers with goods and services. Included, was the medium between all of these groups: the newspapers, which will be covered in greater depth below. Lastly, the third point was the map and guidebook publishers, whose maps provided the interface between the tourists, the roadway, the sights, and the services.

Similar to the railroad maps before them, early automobile maps were much more than navigation aids that portrayed ‘stops’ and destinations. The newly-formed American Automobile association, a publisher of maps and guidebooks based in New York, as well as several similar organizations, sent out explorers as “pathfinders” to piece together and connect America’s system of dirt roads and map them into cohesive guidebooks to sell to the touring public. Some of the early transcontinental route maps were known to stretch

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<sup>17</sup> Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel: 1910-1945* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1971), 3.

the truth in relation to the connectedness of two roads.<sup>18</sup> Early maps made by these pathfinders did simply connect existing dirt roads, albeit the mappers did seek the most direct routes.

Many of the early major auto roads closely followed railroad tracks whose surveyors had already chosen the best routes and most manageable grades. Because of the regularity with which towns and cities were interspersed along these railroad tracks, it also made automobile travel more secure because gasoline, oil, food, and lodging were consistently available and parts could be rail-shipped into the town in the event of more significant repair.

The historian JoAnne Conrad writes that while the type of tourism so rigidly structured by the railroads began having its dominance usurped by the independence and growing popularity of automobile travel, some things remained the same. While auto travel did provide more personal connectivity to the land, people and towns, it “still existed within the same nationalistic symbolic rhetoric” where a powerful America was symbolized by the awe-inspiring national parks of the West, while the eastern parks held the Revolutionary roots, and scripted Indian cultural displays and handicraft shops reaffirmed the tourists’ position and identity in the pecking order of society. Conrad sees

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<sup>18</sup> JoAnn Conrad, “Mapping America: Re-creating in the Cartographic Imagination,” *Cultural Analysis* 9 (2010):5-38, 5.



this type of travel as the visiting of narratives of conquest, safely navigated, and reinforcing the identity of the dominant class.<sup>19</sup>

The Yellowstone Trail, and its early maps, with its iconographic namesake park destination, were a good example of a way in which Americans and others could reenact the supposed conquering of the West. Automobile travelers on the Yellowstone Trail had a certain independence much like that of covered wagon pioneers—though in truth many of those earlier pioneers would have much preferred more support and safety and less independence. Indeed, unlike the real challenges faced by the pioneers they sought to emulate, the auto tourist journey could largely be done in safe and structured manner, with conveniences along the way, and above all, with the assistance of a map to show them what they should be interested in, where to shop in towns along the way, and where their final goal and destination might be.

The geographer John Jakle, writing of this transition from covered wagon, to train, to automobile, echoes JoAnn Conrad's thoughts by stating that "the motor car has not imposed new values so much as reinforced the old."<sup>20</sup> Likewise, the historian Christopher Wells described American's ongoing love affair with automobiles as stemming from "a technology that is ultimately liberating, enabling, empowering, and democratic, all qualities that accord well with American values," while at the same time acknowledging the negative impacts on

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<sup>19</sup> JoAnn Conrad, "Mapping America: Re-Creating in the Cartographic Imagination," *Cultural Analysis* 9 (2010) 5:38, 10.

<sup>20</sup> John Jakle, "Landscapes redesigned for the automobile," in *The Making of the American Landscape*, ed. Michael P. Conzen (New York: Routledge, 1994), 293.

the environment, the imposed infrastructure, and traffic jams that are the “tradeoffs that Americans must make to ensure universal access to an otherwise useful and beneficial technology.”<sup>21</sup> Within the often-vast distances of the American West, automobiles, and autotrucks, the precursor to the pickup truck, would become especially loved.

### Montana’s Roads in 1911

By 1911, the national Good Roads Movement had already taken root in Montana, and meetings were being held throughout the state. The second annual Montana Good Roads Congress, held that year in late July in Missoula, was attended by more than 250 delegates. Montana Governor E. L. Morris was the keynote speaker, and he orated on the importance of the state and federal governments assisting in the construction of roadways, while still acknowledging that it was the counties that should be the main engines of such projects. Most importantly, L. H. O’Dea of Hamilton, Montana, put forth his idea of a “Park to Park Road.” The plan was to connect Glacier National Park to Yellowstone National Park, a distance of 450 miles, with an improved roadway (see Appendix D). This announcement, and its generally favorable reception, was a factor in motivating Park County to begin its own road improvements, as the route was scheduled to go through the county seat of Livingston

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<sup>21</sup> Christopher W. Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2012), xxii.

and continue more than 55 miles in their jurisdiction to the North Entrance of Yellowstone Park, near Gardiner.<sup>22</sup>

At the Missoula Good Roads Congress, Governor Norris spoke about the need for state and federal money assistance, but as rational and practical as that idea sounded, no such monies would be available for several more years. The delegates from Park County returned home and discussed the news about the proposed Park to Park Road. The stakes were high. If Park County could improve its roads to be included on the Park to Park Road to Yellowstone Park, the economic benefits could be enormous. There were two problems standing in the way. An existing wagon road connected Livingston to Gardiner, but for automobile usage it would need to be widened, and parts of rocky hillsides removed—an expensive project. The second problem was getting county monies approved for any such construction plans.

Park County had a number of stakeholders who were highly interested in seeing this improved roadway built and welcoming the money of automobile tourists. Businesses and proprietors who stood to benefit included: automobile garages offering repairs; lodging; restaurants; camping and fishing supplies; fuel and oil sales; and tourist items. There was also a bigger picture at work, one that profited from an overall proliferation of good roads, and all associated services: automobile sales and the newspapers.

Automobile sales were increasing year by year, and all of these vehicles needed good roads to drive on. Henry Ford had introduced the reliable, tough, and relatively inexpensive

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<sup>22</sup> “Montana Good Roads Congress at Missoula,” *Good Roads* Vol. 8, no. 6, (1911), 92.

Model T in 1908, and soon moderate-income folks would be buying them by the millions. The automobile would no longer be a toy for the upper-middle class and wealthy. With automobiles within reach of more and more people, auto dealerships were about to become a serious money-making venture. It was paramount for their continued success that the dealership owners support good roads—and they did. Before the advent of radio and television, newspapers and magazines were the major venue for advertising new automobiles. A tight relationship formed between auto dealerships who purchased large display ads on a weekly basis and the newspapers who sold the advertising space to them.

Park County had two main newspapers at the time, *The Livingston Enterprise* and the *Livingston Daily Post*. A close reading suggests the older *Livingston Enterprise* was a more conservative paper, and it received the lion's share of ad purchases, including for automobiles. The *Livingston Daily Post* was more working-class, progressive, and carried more details on crime, violence, and accidents.

The newspapers and automobile interests worked in tandem because their causes reinforced each other. Beginning in 1912, Park County newspapers began a continuous public relations campaign for good roads and automobiles. Some of these tactics were overt, and others subtler. Keeping their readers abreast of any good roads developments within the state can be seen as part of the journalistic duty of informing the public. However, the publisher of the newspaper obviously decided what quantity of certain types of stories to print, and how much emphasis they would receive—front page or back, above the fold or below? Also beginning in 1912, coverage of good roads stories began appearing more frequently in both the Livingston papers. In the staple feature generally known as “local

news,” there appeared on a regular basis small stories about how an individual or family drove a certain brand of automobile to go visit with relatives in another town. While it was probably exciting in the early days of the automobile to read of such things, it also served to create an atmosphere of townsfolk rivalry and peer pressure. One suspects the question, “When can we buy a motorcar, dear?” became increasingly common. Lastly, both newspapers engaged in ongoing editorials about the needs and benefits of good roads, with the *Livingston Daily Post* having the longest and most argumentatively persuasive writings.

The newspapers offered a bridge between local business and the community of readers, while at the same time they were also a business. The newspapers engaged in actively promoting good roads, a type of automobile and local boosterism. Today, there is sports team boosterism where fans root for their team, wave pennants, and apply stickers to their cars. Boosterism in 1912 meant that a person promoted, ‘talked-up’, and generally evangelized a cause, usually one having to do with the welfare of a city or region. Boosterism is the most important element of this whole story. It is what got people motivated and things done. Newspapers were the biggest boosters for good roads and the automobile, because in addition to their editorials, they were making money from the car dealerships that placed ads.

### Park County’s Solutions

Although it was never officially recognized, boosterism was the key force in getting the route to the Park paid for and completed. It began with just a few stories about the Park to Park highway, so that the reading public could be educated on its potential benefits to Park County citizenry. Behind the scenes, County Commissioner Gibson had been in talks with

Warden Frank Conley, of the Montana State Prison in Deer Lodge, about Park County hiring a convict work crew for their road project. This was how the problem of expensive construction costs would be reduced down to a palatable level. Convicts would do the work at a cut rate after the local taxpayers had been softened up to the idea about the need and benefit of the impending Park to Park Road. The people of Gardiner were so excited about improving their section of road, that a week before a general announcement of the deal with Warden Conley, they had raised \$1,000 “through subscriptions . . . for the purpose of procuring convict labor to work on the roads between Gardiner and Livingston.” Although it is not clear if this money was used, ‘subscriptions’ was a word used during this period that meant individuals put up money during a fundraiser. Boosting played a part, and peer pressure and one-upmanship surely influenced such proceedings.<sup>23</sup>

The County Commissioners made an announcement that funds had been appropriated for “forty state convicts for work on the roads in this county for a period of three months.” This was an exciting step forward. As the convicts were to be an important part of the good roads effort in Park County, coverage of their activities by the newspapers veered towards public relations. The citizens had security and safety concerns that needed to be soothed.<sup>24</sup>

Fortunately, the first camp was made at Point of Rocks, just north of Yankee Jim Canyon, away from the relatively larger population centers of Livingston and Gardiner (see Appendices B and C). Despite this remoteness, when the opportunity came to write a

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<sup>23</sup> “Fourth July in Gardiner: \$1,000 for Gardiner Roads,” *Livingston Daily Post*, April 26, 1912, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> “Commissioners Ask for 40 Convicts to Work Roads,” *Livingston Enterprise*, May 4, 1912, p. 1.

newspaper story it evoked a tone that the convict operation was being handled in a professional manner with quality hands-on oversight. Such reassurances were conveyed when it was reported that Warden Conley and Commissioner Gibson drove out together to lay out the work camp and were expecting fifty convicts on July 24, 1912.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, another one of the variables that helped to fuel the urgency for improving Park County roads came to visit. This person was A. L. Westgard, a Norwegian-American whose forte was being a “pathfinder” or mapper of roads. While his countrymen were making headlines exploring the polar regions, Westgard was traversing and crisscrossing the country in a vehicle under the employ of the American Automobile association, finding the best routes, navigating hazards, and making maps. After arriving at the Hunters Hot Springs resort and hotel near Livingston, Westgard, accompanied by his wife, and driver-mechanic, were met by delegation headed by prominent car dealer and president of the Park County Automobile association, H. B. Blair. Westgard explained that he was mapping a “coast to coast road,” (see Appendices E, F, G). This road would be passing Livingston in an east-west direction and continue on to the Pacific coast. For Park County stakeholders it was imperative that their Park to Park section of road to Yellowstone Park be completed to be able to receive these tourists coming from this east-west route.<sup>26</sup>

Holly Hefferlin, son of prominent local businessman Charles S. Hefferlin, drove the Westgard party in his personal auto from Livingston to Corwin Springs and Gardiner, along

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<sup>25</sup> *Livingston Enterprise*, July 20, 1912, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Livingston Enterprise*, July 20, 1912, p. 4.

the way boosting the attributes and showing off the scenic corridor of the Yellowstone valley, famous today as Paradise Valley. Due to the unimproved condition of what had until recently been little more than a basic wagon road, the journey appears to have been rougher than expected. For the return trip to Livingston, the Westgards rode the train. Certainly, Westgard saw the potential in the scenic Livingston to Gardiner route, and heard the plans for the improvement of this nascent Park to Park Road that would bring travelers right to the North Entrance of the Park. Westgard and company departed the next day over the Bozeman Pass, and soon exciting news from him affecting Park County would appear in print.<sup>27</sup>

The convicts arrived in late July of 1912 and began their work. For several weeks there was no word on their progress. The first news that did come out of the camp was bad, as one of the convicts had escaped—though he was caught within five hours. The convict, James English, had escaped on a Saturday night. The shock was that a prisoner from Deer Lodge had escaped from a barely week-old convict work camp and had been wandering around Park County in the middle of the night. If this story was not handled right, it might have led to fear and outrage, with the populace up in arms wielding guns and pitchforks demanding better security. As it was, the prisoner was caught at the school house in Emigrant, albeit at one o'clock in the morning.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Livingston Enterprise*, July 20, 1912, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> "Convict Caught by Blood Hounds," *Livingston Enterprise*, August 10, 1912, p. 1.



The story was placed innocuously on the front page surrounded by three tame stories with the same headline size: “Death Summons John M. Lannon”; “Ranchers Need More Help; and “City Fathers in Regular Session.” Further, there were two automobile stories nearby. One, “Autoists Will Pick Up Spikes,” told of how the Livingston Auto club had its members pick up rail road spikes in the Bozeman Pass that were damaging automobiles. This was a good example of citizens working together to improve roads. The second, “Livingston on Northwest Trail,” announced that New York had received reports that Westgard put Livingston on the map of his Coast to Coast route, renamed the Northwest Trail. Tucked humbly away in the lower right corner of this entire front page was the escape article, “Convict Caught by Blood Hounds.” Perhaps the first part of the public relations plan was to treat the escape story like it was nothing to get excited about, any more than some other road news or rancher-seeking-help story. By the newspaper giving the appearance that the escape was not a big deal, the publishers may have been hoping to get the readers to believe that there was no cause for alarm.<sup>29</sup>

The second tactic used by the writer/s of the “Convict Caught by Blood Hounds” story was to educate the reader with select information about the convict work camp, the security, and the daily life there. It was reinforced that this was the first escape attempt by any of the convicts, and that the prisoner, James English must have been odd because he only had six months left on his sentence. There is no accounting for the criminal mind, the article

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<sup>29</sup> *Livingston Enterprise*, August 10, 1912, p. 1.

seemed to suggest. English would be sent back to Deer Lodge to a probable poor reception with extra time tacked on his sentence. The story continues that English had somehow gotten some bad information that blood hounds were ineffective, and that he found out the truth the hard way. Next, the camp life and security were discussed, mentioning that there was a roll call every hour, and that is how they discovered that English was missing. Further, it stated that the fifty convicts wore regular work clothes, “can take walks, fish, and enjoy themselves” while watched by three guards. This was conveying known truths about these convict work positions, emphasizing that there was a lot of freedom, as well as the incentives for prisoners not to escape.<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, on the same day as the *Livingston Enterprise* printed its convict escape story, the *Livingston Post* offered its version of the James English escape story. The *Post* went even farther in downplaying the story, reducing coverage to only three sentences. Significantly, this was a paper known for offering juicy details on crime stories, but the publisher chose not to do that with this one. However, on the same page that offered this unusually small James English story, another curious story appeared: “State Convict Can’t Work on Road,” telling of a road work crew convict who was sent back to Deer Lodge for allegedly being “an agitator,” as well having a bout of altitude sickness. An agitator often refers to someone who organizes workers to strike. It had been asserted by the *Enterprise* that the workers on similar convict crews were quite happy to be doing such outdoor labor, so the

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<sup>30</sup> “Convict Caught by Blood Hounds,” *Livingston Enterprise*, August 10, 1912, p. 1.

idea of an agitator is unusual. However, after the revelation in the *Livingston Enterprise* that there were only three guards for 50 prisoners, perhaps a fear developed amongst the citizens that with such a small number of guards, that had they wanted to, the convicts could organize, subdue the guards, and take to the countryside. Such a rebellion was not likely because being on a roadwork crew was probably perceived by convicts to be an excellent job compared to confinement to a squalid cell in Deer Lodge. Still, any public imaginings of such a prisoner rebellion needed to be quashed. Therefore, in this story, where the guards identified a man with the slightest agitation potential, and sent him immediately back to Deer Lodge, this helped to cement the idea for newspaper readers that the guards were on high alert for such subversives and took immediate and harsh action if they discovered such activity. Perhaps the agitator prisoner, C. Ormsby, really only had altitude sickness and had to leave, and maybe the boosterism-minded publisher decided to additionally brand him with this “agitator” label to further a public relations agenda. We may never know. But there can be little doubt that many stakeholders did not want any bad publicity to impede the inexpensive road improvement being done by the convicts.<sup>31</sup>

While all of this was going on, besides the need to appear in AAA guidebooks and maps, there was another simmering matter of urgency. In 1912, automobiles were still not allowed in Yellowstone National Park. Rumors would fly back and forth that “soon” autos would be allowed. Since 1883 most tourists going through the North Entrance of the Park

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<sup>31</sup> “State Convict Can’t Work on Road,” *Livingston Daily Post*, August 10, 1912, p. 1.

would arrive by train at the nearby town of Cinnabar, where they boarded horse-drawn conveyances to the park, continuing nearly twenty years until the railroad finally extended to Gardiner, a final stretch long-stalled due to a mining claim impediment.<sup>32</sup> By 1912, increasing numbers of automobile tourists were beginning to speak to their representatives, demanding that the park be open to auto travel, and this movement was getting stronger year by year. There was no telling when the park would be opened to autos, but gauging by recurring newspaper articles, it was felt to be coming soon. The attraction and convenience of automobiles being allowed to tour the park would only add to the amount of tourist traffic, and therefore the stakeholders were most likely hoping for a positive outcome on this campaign for automobiles in the Park.

### Horse to Automobile Tension

While the automobile was experiencing growing pains, there were die-hard horse users who were coming to grips with the reality that times were changing. Many of the newspapers' long-time readers had not yet embraced the automobile, seeing it as a toy for rich folks. These people and their ancestors had used horses for centuries, and it was not yet quite thinkable that horses might be replaced one day by autos or trucks. There is some indication that these horse people told the newspaper publishers to quit showing such favoritism to automobiles, because periodically pro-horse stories were printed, especially ones that made the automobiles look silly. For example, an article described how during his

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<sup>32</sup> Lee H. Whittlesey, *Gateway to Yellowstone: The Raucous Town of Cinnabar on the Montana Frontier* (Helena, Montana: TwoDot, 2015), 10-11.

day off, Frank Larson loaded a dozen of his friends into a motorized multi-passenger tourist car. On the way to Hunters Hot Springs the motor conked out. Help arrived from Livingston in the form of a vehicle “drawn by two horses and the two-horse power outfit came flying into the Gateway City [Livingston], while the fifty horse power auto rested . . . unable to accomplish its mission.” The same page of the paper told another story of how Dan Allen had jumped out of a car filled with five men after it had stalled going up a hill. While giving the crank a whirl a to start the machine, a force from the handle broke his arm.<sup>33</sup>

Another newspaper article titled “The Horse Still Lives” reminded readers that when the bicycle first became popular many people thought that the usefulness of the horse for personal transportation would decline. This dire prediction never came to pass, nor did a similar one when electric streetcars were introduced. With the increased use of the automobile, once again the need for horses was predicted to wane. The article cited government facts that “in 1910 the horse population was 19,833,000, while on January 1, 1914, it was 20,962,000, or an increase of 5.7 per cent.” Further, the article admitted that ‘light’ horses were being displaced by the automobile, while draft horses held steady and competed head-to-head with autotrucks and tractors and would for some time. Despite the constant road and automobile stories in the paper, at this time motorized vehicles were relatively few in number in Park County compared to the horse.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Livingston Enterprise*, September 28, 1912, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> “The Horse Still Lives, *Livingston Enterprise*, February 21, 1914, p. 4.

A major point of concern and debate among some farmers was whether spending money on an 'autotruck' was cost effective against horse teams in the long run. The *Enterprise* ran an excerpt from the *Chicago Live Stock World* in regards to this controversy. First, it alluded that while the autotrucks had all manner of fancy showrooms and ads, horse people needed to rise to their animals' defense. The main argument in favor of keeping horses was the unreliability and high cost of fixing broken autotrucks. Overcharging for parts and repairs was another grievance, for example: One man "was charged \$90 to put in place a repair that cost \$7.50. Some bill for labor." Testimonials for the horse were given by a coal company, two baking companies, Gimble Brothers department store, an ice cream company, and three delivery companies. Freihofer Baking company reported that they used "Two hundred and eight-four horses, 20 autos [trucks]. Every horse working except three, most of the autos out for repair." Indeed, various manufacturers' autotrucks did vary in reliability, mechanical repairs could be expensive, and business was hampered while the vehicle was being fixed. Horses and their problems were more straightforward, and people knew more what to expect. There was a certain reliability that could be counted on.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, the convicts had put in a little over three months of work, and with the winter approaching it was decided to move them to work at a lower elevation in the Shields Valley, six miles north of Wilsall (see Appendix H). Again, Warden Conley arrived from Deer Lodge to personally oversee the site selection for the new camp. The plan was, when

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<sup>35</sup> "Draft Horses vs. Auto Truck," *Livingston Enterprise*, March 21, 1914, p. 11.

better weather returned, to return the road crew to the last work site at Sphinx. The work that the convicts had performed during the late summer and early fall was so pleasing that the county commissioners appeared to have extended their contract with the warden.<sup>36</sup>

The Park County Automobile Club put together a caravan of automobiles to go inspect the work that the convicts had completed in the first three months and their immediate reaction was one of astonishment and joy at the roadway. Club members marveled at the “tons and tons of rock” that had been removed to complete nearly seven miles of improvement at “Point of Rocks, Sphinx Hill, and Yankee Jim’s canyon,” while the dirt roadway was described as “smooth as city pavement.” This seemed to affirm the county commissioners’ decision to continue using the convicts, and perhaps gave hope to newspaper readers that their taxpayer money was being used effectively.<sup>37</sup>

Periodically, some of the convicts would get sent back to Deer Lodge if they were up for parole, or other reasons, and new convicts would replace them. One such new arrival at the Shields Valley camp was “Joe” or Charles Miller. On his second day there, which was Thanksgiving Day, Miller fled the camp. Unlike James English, who back in August was caught by bloodhounds in five hours, Miller managed to brave the elements and hide from Thursday until Sunday, when he finally gave himself up. Miller’s feet had begun to freeze, and he approached a ranch house, admitted that he was an escaped convict, and asked to be turned in. This story appeared, not sensationalized, with a moderate headline in the

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<sup>36</sup> “Convicts Moved to the Shields Valley,” *Livingston Enterprise* November 23, 1912, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> “View Roads Made by the Convicts,” *Livingston Enterprise*, November 23, 1912, p. 1.

*Livingston Daily Post* on the fourth day after Miller's escape. This delayed story perhaps acted to placate the curious until the major stakeholders and the *Livingston Enterprise* could muster a damage control and reassurance strategy.<sup>38</sup>

The *Livingston Enterprise* finally printed their front-page story of the event on December 7, 1912, nine days after Miller's Thanksgiving departure. The article contained the same information the *Post* had run, except that it added the reported detail of Miller's reason for running off: "he was there and without a second thought commenced his journey."<sup>39</sup> This implies that it was a spur of the moment decision, acting on impulse, and not a planned conspiracy. Once again, it is difficult to predict the criminal mind. Perhaps the guards were distracted on that Thanksgiving, and the temptation as an unshackled prisoner to run were just too overpowering.

The delayed printing of the above story perhaps bought the writers time to cobble together a second article, that appeared in the same day's edition, likely aimed at reassuring readers about the convict road crew program. The strategy the *Enterprise* employed was one of informing the readers using a two columns-wide, page-four article, seeming to create an air of transparency about the whole convict operation from top to bottom. This story attempted to cultivate awareness of the benefits to the prisoners of this outdoor labor, as well as to explain how critical it was to have Park County's roads fixed. It even went into the

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<sup>38</sup> "Convict Makes Escape Then Gives Up," *Livingston Daily Post*, November 30[sic], 1912 [December 2, 1912] p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> "Starving and Freezing, Convict Escaping from Road Camp Begs Food and Shelter from Ranchers," *Livingston Enterprise*, December 7, 1912, p. 1.



financial arrangements. It must have been a tough nine days trying to figure how much to reveal to the public and attempt to win their trust in the continued convict work program. Nowhere does it say in this story, or any of the day's stories, that one solution to the escape problem would be to pay for more guards, or to arm them. Indeed, the reason for the guards being unarmed is not clear. Perhaps it was reasoned that, with fifty convicts watched by only three unarmed guards, any possible rebellion and subsequent overpowering of said guards would not enable any prisoner procurement of weapons. Surrounding this period of 1912, it was becoming more common in some states to have prison road work crews not shackled by the ball and chain. In Arizona, for example, the statement that "Governor George Hunt's honor system of setting convicts to work without guards is proving quite successful," was one of many such stories of the growing popularity of this experiment in penal road work crews with unarmed or minimal supervision.<sup>40</sup>

The above *Livingston Enterprise* public relations and education article began with its main headline, "Road Building by Prisoners," followed by three more sub-headlines: "Montana System of Handling Men is Commended," "Park Co. Roads Improved," and "Prisoners Work as Diligently for Nothing as They Would for \$5 Per Day—Few Make Any Attempt at Escape." The first paragraph of the article deftly bypassed any talk of concern among Shields Valley ranchers about safety for their kin in regards to the nearly 50

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<sup>40</sup> "Meet and Talk Roads at Cincinatti: Arizona Ready to Work," *Motor Age* 22, no. 24 (1912): 16.

unshackled convicts near their homes and families, and instead regaled readers with reports of the excellent work being done by said prisoners on the roads north of Wilsall.<sup>41</sup>

The article continues with details of the operations and daily lives of the convict work crews. It is not clear if the *Enterprise* ‘borrowed’ much of the following details from another source, because earlier reports of convicts transferred to the Shields Valley seemed to indicate that about 50 prisoners were working there that December. Nevertheless, the article stated that, “Seventy-five prisoners require but three (unarmed) guards”, the convicts lodged in a tent camp, and there were “no cages, shackles, or ball-and-chain. No one wears stripes,” since the “honor” system was in effect, and that instead of having armed guards and an atmosphere of prisoner “degradation and humiliation,” this system produced superior results. There is no mention that having so few, and unarmed guards, was cheaper for the stakeholders. Surprisingly, the article did reveal money details, but beforehand, the readers were given a dose of good roads public relations verbiage, leading with the single-sentence claim that prison road crew work, “does not interfere with free labor.” This was not backed up by any other sentences, but rather was just laid out as a statement of fact for readers to digest or simply believe. It was a preposterous statement, as Montana unions had voiced their opposition to such practices elsewhere in the state.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> “Road Building by Prisoners,” *Livingston Enterprise*, December 7, 1912, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> “Road Building by Prisoners,” *Livingston Enterprise*, December 7, 1912, p. 4.

As early as 1910 there was already friction between the pilot prison road crew program and free labor. Jon Axline, historian at the Montana Department of Transportation writes that Governor Norris attempted to mediate early protestations from the “Trades and Labor Assemblies of Butte and Helena,” who adamantly voiced their position that, “convict’s labor unfairly competed with free labor.” Union advocates in Helena succeeded in shutting down a convict work crew near the Helena fairgrounds with a threatened boycott of businesses owned by members of the Helena Commercial Club. One solution was to move convict work crews to locations and counties where organized labor was not so strong.<sup>43</sup>

The good road public relations newspaper article continued with how the county was obtaining cheap labor from the convicts, and after the roads were improved, all that was left was for the county to maintain them. Next, the article stated that good roads,

upbuild the community, attract immigration and settlement more than any other improvement, and without them it is impossible for any community to advance and prosper. They are of benefit to all classes, and more particularly the working man and his family. Good roads add greatly to the industrial activity of the community; they attract investment of capital, and as a result the laboring classes are benefitted in larger number than others.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Jon Axline, “Building Permanent and Substantial Roads: Prison Labor on Montana’s Highways, 1910-1925,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 62, no. 2 (Summer 2012):59-66, 95-96.

<sup>44</sup> “Road Building by Prisoners,” *Livingston Enterprise*, December 7, 1912, p. 4.

In Livingston, a railroad town and mostly working class, it was important to make sure that the majority looked favorably upon good roads improvements within their county, especially since the county commissioners had appropriated taxpayer money to pay for some of the work. Additionally, always looming in the background, was the possibility of asking voters to support a bond measure.

This newspaper article finished with details about the convict labor contract between Warden Conley and Park County. Again, it is not clear if these details are borrowed from another newspaper, or a prison or state report, or if it is specific to the contract at hand. In any regard, it is a good starting point to understand some of the finances involved. The article stated that the county was required to provide the workers with, “all necessary powder, drills, picks, shovels, scrapers, wagons, horses and harness . . . cost of transportation to and from the place of employment, over and above the sum of 50 cents per day. The state pays for the maintenance of said prison crew at the rate of 50 cents each day.” In other words, the state paid the county 50 cents, per day, per prisoner, towards their upkeep, and Park County was responsible for any supplies and expenses over that.<sup>45</sup>

Warden Conley had come from Deer Lodge to personally locate and set up the convict camps each time, usually with Park County Commissioner Gibson along for the ride. Keith Edgerton in, *Montana Justice: Power, Punishment & The Penitentiary*, describes how Conley had worked his way up from guard to warden, then with partner Thomas McTague,

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<sup>45</sup> “Road Building by Prisoners,” *Livingston Enterprise*, December 7, 1912, p. 4.

leased the prison from the state for 18 years, being paid by the state per daily inmate. This lease arrangement ended in 1908, but he continued on as warden until 1921, and through corruption nearly without equal in Montana state history, “amassed a tidy personal fortune,” according to Edgerton. Finally, the corruption caught up with Conley and he lost the job. Edgerton further described how Conley had become known for using “the prison, its various ranches, and its free labor to further his own personal gain.” However, even detractors could not deny that Frank Conley’s hired-out convict work crews had accomplished great things in the state.<sup>46</sup>

That December, another story appeared that also gave some details on cost of the convict road work. Mayor W. A. “Billy” Hall of Gardiner, described as “an enthusiastic booster for the use of convict labor in improving roads,” said he was thoroughly impressed with the prisoner work performed in Yankee Jim Canyon. Further, an engineer had estimated the work would have cost “\$5,600” with civilian workers, and the convict work only ended up costing the county “\$1,300.” The latter figure was said to be that high because local farmers who supplied the horses for the heavy work wanted an extra “supervisor” to make sure that the animals were not mistreated.<sup>47</sup>

The convict labor and its associated camps described thus far had been placed a considerable distance from relatively higher population areas such as towns. Now, the

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<sup>46</sup> Keith Edgerton. *Montana Justice: Power, Punishment, & The Penitentiary* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 69-70, 90.

<sup>47</sup> “Convict Labor Pays, Belief of Billy Hall,” *Livingston Enterprise*, December 21, 1912, p. 1.

convicts had been moved from their camp in the rural ranching and farm area of the Shields Valley, to “Holliday’s hill,” just a couple miles outside of Livingston (see Appendix I). This was a headline-less article that appeared on page five of the *Enterprise*. Perhaps the newspapers and stakeholders felt it prudent to minimize any fanfare about the convicts now working so close to Livingston so as to not needlessly arouse citizenry safety concerns. Recall, the earlier December 7, 1912, convict work crew public relations article, on the heels of the Thanksgiving Day escape, that appeared to have been intended to calm some of the citizenry regarding these convict security apprehensions for such a move closer to town.<sup>48</sup>

Two weeks later, the *Enterprise* did give a report on the 45 convicts working near the Holliday property immediately south of Livingston. The crew had filled in two notorious low spots and were making everything level with a milder grade. The men were said to be very happy, and “there is not the least trouble experienced by the guards.” Further, the article reported that a hillside that used to unleash falling rocks onto carriages, creating accidents, was in the process of being tamed by the convicts with the construction of a retaining wall.<sup>49</sup>

Compared to Livingston, smaller Gardiner did not generate as many good roads stories, but apparently there was also quite a booster spirit alive there for the road improvement cause. The *Livingston Daily Post* reported that the citizens of Gardiner formed a Commercial Club (a chamber of commerce) that proceeded to raise one thousand dollars towards the Park to Park road cause, and they vowed to raise another thousand. This money

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<sup>48</sup> *Livingston Enterprise*, January 4, 1913, p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> “Dangerous and Hilly Road Made Wide, Safe and Level by Convicts,” *Livingston Enterprise*, January 18, 1913, p. 1.

was specifically for hiring a convict labor crew to begin improving the road leading from Gardiner to Livingston, with the prisoners to work in that direction until the funds ran out. It is not clear if the convicts ever accomplished this, as the convict deal-making was between Commissioner Gibson and Warden Conley. This fundraising action did demonstrate that Gardiner was serious and excited about having the road near them finished.<sup>50</sup>

Another citizen interested in obtaining the services of a convict road crew was Mr. L. Shaw, who began a petition, likely signed by neighbors, to improve the road conditions at Harvat hill, just outside of Livingston. The county commissioners had been presented with the plea but had not issued a reply. This came from a newspaper article that also suggested that, “certain parts of the country are willing to pay all expenses if the county commissioners” would only authorize the prisoners to come and do the improvements. This was a good sign that citizens had noticed how well the convict work had been performed and were willing to raise their own money to use the prisoners. However, the convicts would soon be assigned to their final work in Park County, that of the road between Livingston and Springdale (see Appendix F).<sup>51</sup>

Meanwhile, in February of 1913 came a big turning point in the greater story. A good roads group originating from South Dakota, calling themselves the Twin City-Aberdeen-Yellowstone Park Trail association, held a conference in Miles City, Montana. Park County did not have representation at this conference, but they more than made up for it at the next

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<sup>50</sup> “Gardiner Commercial Club Organized Speedy Results,” *Livingston Daily Post*, February 6, 1912, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> *Livingston Daily Post*, March 6, 1913, p. 5.

one, where they ended up joining forces with the Yellowstone Park Trail association and their good road movement from South Dakota.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> "Twin City Aberdeen-Yellowstone Park Trail Association Hold a Successful Meeting," *Livingston Daily Post*, February 20, 1913, p. 1.



## SECTION TWO

## THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF THE YELLOWSTONE TRAIL

The Yellowstone Trail story begins in the town of Ipswich, South Dakota, in 1912. Joe Parmley, for years with a horse and wagon, and now with his automobile, had battled the quagmire that the Ipswich country road turned into when it became wet. People who live in the states that have this particular soil are well acquainted with it. Yellowstone Trail historians Alice and John Ridge, and all who live with it, call it “Gumbo, a slimy, gluey, viscous mud, [that] lay in places very thick, and in summer if it didn’t rain, dust lay in some places inches deep.”<sup>53</sup>

During the last ice age, when the massive ice sheet crept down from Canada over thousands of years, it scoured the earth and picked up fine rock particles. As it melted and receded back north, this powder, called loess, was left behind in what would become many northern and midwestern sections of the United States.

While all gumbos share the characteristic of being sticky, a special variety is common in eastern Montana, called bentonite. Unlike glacial gumbo, this kind is made from 100 million-year old volcanic ash which settled in a massive inland sea. The particles, when wet

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<sup>53</sup> Alice A. Ridge and John Wm. Ridge, *Introducing the Yellowstone Trail: A Good Road from Plymouth Rock to Puget Sound 1912-1930* (Altoona, Wisconsin: Yellowstone Trail Publishers, 2000), 6.

can absorb water and expand over ten times their size. With the addition of water, this soil becomes extremely sticky such as when adding liquid to flour to make dough. This stickiness is what confounded thousands of dirt road travelers.<sup>54</sup>

Joe Parmley travelled in his automobile on a dirt road that ran 26 miles eastward from his hometown of Ipswich, to the next town, Aberdeen. Apparently, on one of these journeys, Joe became so frustrated about bad road conditions that he decided to do something about it. On May 23, 1912, Joe attended a District Development Meeting in Ipswich. The topic was creating good roads and interested parties from two other neighboring counties attended. The discussion was said to have come to the conclusion that the 100 miles of road, stretching from Aberdeen in the east, to the Missouri River at Mobridge in the west had to be improved. It was time. Joe was ideally suited to spearhead this road improvement cause, considering he had a prior history of road grading improvement aspirations and inventions. A committee was formed containing people from the three counties on the route, and Joe Parmley, who had earlier orated most effectively, was made the chairman. After the meeting, Joe went home and wrote letters to all the committee members, envisioning how progress could be organized. First, was to divide the 100 miles into manageable sections, and appoint sub-committees for each of these parts. Then, folks, townships, and property owners living along these sections could through “subscriptions” put up money to improve the road, with work being performed first near the homes of these donors. Writing prophetically in this letter, he

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<sup>54</sup> Donna Healy, “There is Science Behind Sticky Gumbo Soil,” *Billings Gazette*, March 14, 2008, [http://billingsgazette.com/lifestyles/there-s-science-behind-sticky-gumbo-soil/article\\_8c6c31ef-2b94-5122-b52c-7113644c656c.html](http://billingsgazette.com/lifestyles/there-s-science-behind-sticky-gumbo-soil/article_8c6c31ef-2b94-5122-b52c-7113644c656c.html).

envisioned “a great transcontinental highway from ocean to ocean.” This was the beginning of the Yellowstone Trail, and within eight years, Joe’s prophecy would come to pass.<sup>55</sup>

Work began on July 11, 1912, and the 26-mile stretch from Aberdeen to Ipswich was one of the first improved. By September, 60 miles had been completed, and their initial 100-mile goal of reaching the Missouri River at Mobridge would occur in the spring of 1913. During this early period the road was called the Parmley Highway, against humble Joe’s protests. Increasing boosterism had entered into the roadbuilding equation. Towns extending east and west from Aberdeen began to catch the enthusiasm for road improvement. On the other side of the Missouri River, the Commercial Club in city of Lemmon, South Dakota, offered to host a Good Roads convention in October of 1912. It was a raging success. At the Lemmon meeting, after deliberation and a vote, the road was renamed the Twin Cities – Aberdeen – Yellowstone Park Trail, and bylaws were enacted. Later, the name would be shortened to the Yellowstone Trail. The scope of the ambition for the road length ran from Minneapolis-St. Paul to Yellowstone National Park.<sup>56</sup>

The Yellowstone Trail association utilized a system of dues collection from the towns and commercial clubs along its path to sustain its organizing and outreach operations. There was no state or federal funding in the early years, and good roads bills had been annually

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<sup>55</sup> Harold A. Meeks, *On the Road to Yellowstone: The Yellowstone Trail and the American Highways 1900-1930* (Missoula: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 2000), 41-42.

<sup>56</sup> Harold A. Meeks, *On the Road to Yellowstone: The Yellowstone Trail and the American Highways 1900-1930* (Missoula: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 2000), 42-43.

stalled in Washington. Yellowstone Trail historians Alice and John Ridge summarize the character of the organization:

Thoroughly disgusted with big government inaction, the group believed that a coalition of small towns influencing county boards would succeed in getting one long road. All members were expected to push hard on their local governments, newspapers, and neighbors to support this road . . . . No elected officer was paid a salary, but travel expenses were reimbursed . . . . The Yellowstone Trail Association didn't make anyone rich. In fact, at the end of 12 years the General Manager claimed that he personally paid for a typewriter, and Joe Parmley could claim that he had spent many dollars for chrome yellow paint used to mark rocks and telegraph poles along the way.<sup>57</sup>

This lean-budget attitude combined with contagious boosterism was part of the organization's appeal in winning Yellowstone Trail converts.

The effects of boosterism were most pronounced when there was an enthusiastic Good Roads speaker addressing a large crowd. The listeners not only donated money, but also took the zeal home and evangelized neighbors, got involved directly with the roadway, and talked the proposition up to the local papers. After the successful meeting in Lemmon, there was another meeting organized further west, in the direction of the extension

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<sup>57</sup> Alice A. Ridge and John Wm. Ridge, *Introducing the Yellowstone Trail: A Good Road from Plymouth Rock to Puget Sound 1912-1930* (Altoona, Wisconsin: Yellowstone Trail Publishing, 2000), 8-9.

envisioned. In late February of 1913, a meeting of the Twin Cities – Aberdeen – Yellowstone Park Trail association, as it was still formally called, was held in Miles City, Montana.

Nearly 100 delegates and guests attended the Miles City conference, and the enthusiasm was reported to have been through the roof. The main issue, all agreed upon, was the need for an improved and clear route to Yellowstone Park. The *Livingston Daily Post* either sent a reporter to cover this story or else the newspaper ‘borrowed’ the story from another newspaper, as was common at the time. It appears to be the latter, because there is no mention of any Park County attendees. The second item mentioned in the article is that Cody, Wyoming, had sent a delegation that was lobbying to get the Trail diverted at Laurel, Montana, to their Wyoming Eastern Entrance of Yellowstone Park. Stakeholders back in Park County read this with some trepidation and responded to the Cody threat by sending a over a dozen super-boosters to the next conference set to be held in late May, 1913, in Forsythe, Montana.<sup>58</sup>

Park County, because of their no-show in Miles City, had been temporarily outmaneuvered by Cody. The Park County stakeholders wasted no energy in making up for lost time. Boosting in the county was ratcheted up to high levels in anticipation of making a strong showing at the upcoming Forsythe conference. Nowhere was this new wave of boosting more evident than in the editorials run by the *Livingston Weekly Post*. During this time the *Livingston Enterprise* also ran two major stories emphasizing the importance of the

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<sup>58</sup> “Twin City-Aberdeen-Yellowstone Park Trail Association Hold a Successful Meeting,” *Livingston Daily Post*, February 20, 1913, p. 1.

upcoming Forsythe meeting for Park County. To further bolster the increasing importance of automobiles and roads, another story ran about the venerable Shaw and Powell Company, one of the exclusive concessionaires that provided horse-drawn tourist conveyances in Yellowstone National Park. The company announced that they foresaw automobiles being allowed in the park by 1915, and that they were looking forward to saving a lot of money by not having to feed the horses and keep them idle for nine months of the year in the off-season. This was a major declaration, breaking with over twenty years of tradition of using horses. It was also confirmation that park insiders knew that automobiles were to be in Yellowstone Park in the next few years.<sup>59</sup>

Next, in the same issue, ran a story about the convict work crew that was working on the east-west road between Livingston and Hunters Hot Springs (see Appendix F). The article described the prisoners using dynamite to remove massive rock protuberances that had formerly blocked passage of any type of vehicle. Whereas many citizens had not seen the before and after rock removal effort in Yankee Jim's canyon, the rock sections along this stretch of the Yellowstone River just outside of Livingston were well known known by the citizenry. Improvements in this highly visible section would demonstrate Park County's commitment to improving its section of an east-west or Coast to Coast highway."<sup>60</sup>

This east-west section, today known as Convict Grade, is the closest to the town of Livingston that the prisoners had yet worked on any site, except for the near-equidistant

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<sup>59</sup> "Autos in the Park by 1915," *Livingston Enterprise*, May 3, 1913, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> "Convicts Building Perfect Roads Over Formerly Impassible Places," *Livingston Enterprise*, May 10, 1913, p. 4.

Holliday hill. In order to reassure the citizenry's sense of security, a test was conducted using bloodhounds. A convict was given a head start outside of Livingston, and then the pack of dogs was let loose on his scent. The man made it as far as the stockyards outside of town. The bloodhounds' effectiveness was demonstrated, and the article stated, "Although they have little trouble with the convicts, the dogs are kept constantly in training as a preventative of trouble." There was no mention of the August and Thanksgiving Day escapes and bloodhound inadequacy. This article had a reassuring tone, as if to suggest that the dogs were now on high alert, under a superior training regimen, and were proving themselves.<sup>61</sup>

A week before the Forsyth convention, the *Livingston Daily Post* ran a front-page booster and public relations article aimed at the Park to Park highway, but also overlapping to Yellowstone Trail possibilities. It reminded readers of the importance of Livingston being on the long-talked-about Coast to Coast route. This term—Coast to Coast route—seemed to be a catch-all phrase for the east-west highway that had been in piecemeal development for some time. A report was in that the convict road crew working on the east-west road from Livingston to Hunters Hot Springs was putting it in excellent shape (see Appendix F). Readers were assured that once the entire east-west road was completed, automobiles would flood in from the east, and that "will mean construction of more local garages, hotel accommodations will be at a premium and Livingston merchants will be assured a much heavier business in supplying these tourists." The article ended with reminding readers that

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<sup>61</sup> "Try Bloodhounds on Convict," *Livingston Enterprise*, May 24, 1913, p. 1.

while other cities were “anxious” about being left off these routes, that Park County residents need not worry about being bypassed, because Livingston had long been recognized as a critical hub.<sup>62</sup>

A salvo of newspaper booster editorials began. The stretch of road that the convicts were working on would be their last project in Park County. They had taken care of the most difficult sections, at a bargain price. Now there was 60 miles of less-intensive road improvement needed to be performed on the remainder. Farmers were still opposed to assisting, so it was not clear if money would need to be raised for paid labor to finish this remaining work. There was always the possibility of a bond measure. The stakeholders knew that they needed to have the support of the majority of citizens, including farmers, for such an offering. Until this was decided, the *Livingston Daily Post* continued to go to great lengths with its good roads editorial crusade. The first one of the series refreshingly mentioned the farmer. Farmers were one of the main working-class groups that stood to substantially benefit from good roads which would help them to get their crops to the railroad easier. The editorial included, “such roads as the farmer would like to see and is entitled to, the care and supervision of our highways must be placed in the hands of competent men . . .for the money thus expended.” The latter part seemed to want to reinforce the idea that money would not be wasted because professional people would be sought and retained, and that should a vote for bonds arise, to feel confident in an affirmative vote.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> “Park to Park Highway is of Greatest Importance,” *Livingston Daily Post*, May 19, 1913, p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> “The Value of Good Roads,” *Livingston Post*, May 15, 1913, p. 2.



With the Forsythe convention less than two weeks away, the farmer editorial was followed by other articles with the same themes that had been trumpeted for months: the “impending” Park to Park route; autos being allowed in the Park soon; people coming from the east; the Coast to Coast route; and the issue of raising money. The money topic kept recurring because although the county commissioners were able to divert money from other county projects to pay for the bargain convict labor, the non-convict work that was needed to finish up the job was looking to be expensive. The Montana State Constitution “prevented a county from spending more than ten thousand dollars on a single project without obtaining the consent of local voters.”<sup>64</sup> Perhaps this was the reason for the many months of money-related public relations priming of the newspaper readers.

Finally, four days before the convention, the *Livingston Weekly Post* ran a nearly arm-length editorial titled “The New Spirit for Better Roads,” which after congratulating the Livingston Automobile Club and the county commissioners for their “vital interests,” proceeded to remind the readers of the many economic benefits at stake, urging them to be openminded about fundraising ideas towards immediate road improvement, and suggested that well-supervised spending was critical for success. Further, that thousands of automobiles would soon be arriving from the east, and final road improvements needed to be made before other routes, such as the one from Laurel, Montana, to the Cody, Wyoming, Yellowstone Park Eastern Entrance, siphoned off possible Livingston-bound tourists. Next, it was cited

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<sup>64</sup> Jon Axline, “Building Permanent and Substantial Roads: Prison Labor on Montana’s Highways, 1910-1925.” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, Vol. 62, no 2 (Summer 2012), pp. 59-66, 95-96. [p. 61]

that Yellowstone County, Montana, had already raised \$18,000 for its Yellowstone Trail road improvements, in a hope that Park County residents would be motivated by seeing that other counties were serious about spending money on their sections of the route. In a new argument, it was claimed that real estate values would rise because potential outside buyers with automobiles would be better able to view Park County properties, thus increasing visibility and sales. Lastly, the editorial urged readers to “help boost for it,” meaning to not only support it, but to promote the ideas.<sup>65</sup>

After having had little or no representation at the Miles City convention where the Cody threat first surfaced, Park County sent over a dozen prominent delegates to the Twin Cities-Aberdeen-Yellowstone Park Trail association’s Forsythe conference. Of the approximately 50 attendees, sixteen were from Park County. Armed with enthusiasm, strong arguments, and photographs of all the convict roadwork already completed, the Park County delegation received assurances that Livingston would be on the Yellowstone Trail route. It is not clear who needed who more, but the Trail association also vowed to have Livingston as the home for all future conventions.<sup>66</sup>

The Forsythe convention also unveiled some important news. A logo for signage had been decided upon consisting of a black arrow on a yellow circular background. Second, the delegates agreed to the use of yellow paint on boulders, overlain with the aforementioned black arrow, pointing the way to the Park. County Commissioners along the route were asked

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<sup>65</sup> “New Spirit for Better Roads,” *Livingston Post*, weekly edition, May 22, 1913, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> “Livingston Chosen Meeting Place---Park County is Well Represented,” *Livingston Enterprise*, May 31, 1912, p. 1.

to paint parts of their bridges yellow, and elsewhere fences, poles, and the like, were to be emblazoned yellow. For years to come, many of these yellow-marked objects would become the most enduring guideposts, and then remnants, of the Yellowstone Trail.<sup>67</sup>

Fresh from the news of Park County's guaranteed inclusion on the Yellowstone Trail, the *Livingston Daily Post* ran two editorials. The first was a recognition of the great pulling-together that the county's citizens had achieved. Then looking to piggy-back on some of the booster spirit in the air, the editorial suggested that the same enthusiasm be used to build a local flour mill.<sup>68</sup> The second editorial reminded readers that more road improvement money would need to be raised, and that bonds might be a solution since they had proven successful in some eastern Montana districts. If there was ever a time to be bold about floating a bond proposal for roads, it was right after this Yellowstone Trail victory in Forsythe.

Unbeknownst to Park County, the Yellowstone Trail association was formulating a plan that would not only negate the need for the county to issue bonds to finish improving the road, but one that would be the height of boosterism. Meanwhile, the month of June passed with the usual editorials and stories. Finally, it was announced that the convicts had finished up the east-west road connecting Livingston to Hunters Hot Springs and that they were returning to Deer Lodge after spending nearly one year working in Park County (see Appendix F). An

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<sup>67</sup> "Park County Delegation Lands a Big Convention for Livingston in 1914," *Livingston Post*, weekly edition, May 29, 1913, p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> "A Good Boost for Livingston," *Livingston Post*, weekly edition, May 29, 1913, p. 4.

article stated that “about twenty one miles of roads in various localities have been either built or repaired” by the convicts.<sup>69</sup>

On July 16, 1913 the *Livingston Post* ran a full front-page headline that cried out, “First Trip to Livingston Over Yellowstone Trail is Made: Large Party from Minnesota Reaches Here in Remarkable Time and Success of Trail Assured—Others Coming.” Four automobiles had departed Olivia, Minnesota, 93 miles west of Minneapolis, and had arrived at Hunters Hot Springs in eight days. This was huge news, and it seemed to affirm all of the hype that predicted large numbers of auto travelers would be coming from the east. The main spokesperson for the party, M. J. Dowling was a director of the Yellowstone Trail association, and remarkably he drove with an artificial left hand, and with all the fingers missing on his right hand. Accompanying him in his Oakland automobile were his wife and three children. A Mrs. Windhorst, her husband William, and their three daughters arrived at the same time in a Buick. Mrs. Empey and her husband James traveled in a Ford. Lastly, Mrs. Page, her husband George, and two children drove in an unspecified vehicle. They spent the first night at Hunters Hot Springs, and the following day all checked into the Park Hotel in Livingston and soon boarded the Park train for Yellowstone Park. It is not clear why they did not drive on to the Park, given all of the convict work done. Perhaps they were tired of driving, or just did not have enough reassurances and reports on the road from Livingston to

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<sup>69</sup> “Convicts Have Finished Work: Those Building County Roads Returned to Deer Lodge,” *Livingston Daily-Weekly Post*, weekly edition, July 3, 1913, p. 9.

Gardiner. There were also children to consider, who had just spent eight days on a road trip.<sup>70</sup>

A reporter interviewed Mr. Dowling, who provided a number of important observations about their trip west on the Trail. First, he was very pleased that there were good hotel accommodations all along the nearly 1,100 miles length of the road. Next he reported that the road from Olivia was good to Ipswich, South Dakota, rougher to Mobridge, needed better markings through the Cheyenne country, as well as from Marmarth to Ismay, North Dakota. Leading to and from Forsythe, Montana was found to offer the best road conditions since Minneapolis. Mr. Dowling wanted to make clear that the Trail road was for the most part good, but that more marking signs were needed in some areas on the route. He commended the work done by the convicts on the stretch between Hunters Hot Springs and Livingston and finished by saying that once the people in the east found out that the Trail was good, many of them would take three weeks of vacation with the family to see the wonders on the route. The news of these Minnesota travelers ratcheted up the Yellowstone Trail fever in Park County. The coming Fall and Winter did not bring any more major road stories, but the sleeping giant of boosterism was would wake again in the spring of 1914.

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<sup>70</sup> “First Trip to Livingston Over Yellowstone Trail is Made: Large Party from Minnesota Reaches Here in Remarkable Time and Success of Trail Assured—Others Coming.” *Livingston Daily Post*, July 16, 1913, p. 1.

## SECTION THREE

## 1914: BOOSTER FEVER AND TRAIL DAY

A clear indication that a trend or event has entered into mainstream public consciousness occurs when art begins to imitate life. This is exactly what happened during the Yellowstone Trail fever that had been building for nearly two years in Park County. On Saturday evening, February 20, Eugene Quaw's song and dance musical "The Yellowstone Trail" was performed at the opera house in Livingston. This three-hour extravaganza, written, composed, scored, and directed by "the young genius," was a tremendous success. Quaw, between directing scenes, "stood at the piano, playing the 25 song hits and music for the dances." Miss Edna Laurens was the principal singing actress whose "every appearance brought down the house and her costumes, her acting, her singing and her clever and catchy twists of the head and twinkle of the eye completely captivated the crowd." The Pony Ballet Girls, an eleven-performer local troupe, went through a dozen costume changes for their song and dance numbers, which included such motifs as sunflowers, and railroad "brakie" (brakemen) costumes for one of the hit songs of the evening, "That's Railroad Love."<sup>71</sup>

"The Yellowstone Trail" musical was comprised of several overlapping love stories and adventures set among its namesake roadway and Yellowstone Park. Other local elements and characters were included, such as a brakeman on the Shields river railroad line, and a

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<sup>71</sup> "The Yellowstone Trail' Proves a Great Success and Pretty Musical Comedy Played to Crowded House," *Livingston Enterprise*, February 21, 1914, p. 1, p. 4.

well-to-do landowner from Springdale and his temperamental poetess daughter. The story begins with an eastern young lady who drove west on the Yellowstone Trail to marry her soldier fiancé stationed at Fort Yellowstone. Soon, a tango-dancing Chicago lad aroused jealousy during the proceedings. Included in the 25 song-and-dance numbers were a Yellowstone Park campfire song scene, and an Old Faithful geyser eruption which cleverly helps to seal a marriage proposal. This musical played for two nights to sold out houses. Part of its appeal was the generous use of local talent and the timeliness of the topic matter.<sup>72</sup>

Following on the heels of the play, came what would become one of the most important booster elements in the history of the Yellowstone Trail, one that was subtly announced in an article concerning the second multi-state meeting of the Yellowstone Trail association held in Mobridge, North Dakota. First, during the meeting a number of facts about the Trail were offered. Of 1,100 miles of the road, there were “660 miles properly marked, 617 miles graded, 118 miles graveled . . . [and] 21 counties showed expenditures of \$494,000.” Second, and most importantly, was that the association had hired George N. Keniston to be its traveling Financial Agent. Keniston’s job was to travel to different venues and give pep talks on the Yellowstone Trail, as well as to lobby politicians.<sup>73</sup>

George Keniston soon proved remarkably gifted at putting on presentations, educating, and fundraising. He had graduated from Northwestern University where he spent

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<sup>72</sup> “The Yellowstone Trail’ Proves a Great Success and Pretty Musical Comedy Played to Crowded House,” *Livingston Enterprise*, February 21, 1914, p. 1, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> “Yellowstone Trail Boosters Meet at Mobridge,” *Livingston Enterprise*, February 28, 1914, p. 7.

two years in medical school before dropping out to take up ministering. After a mission working with Native Americans in Oklahoma, he organized and led a group of students to the Holy Land and Europe. This trip lasted nearly one year, and when George returned, he found a niche on the lecture circuit before resuming his pastoral work. After a howling storm blew the roof off a church, Keniston was tapped to raise funds to fix the structure, which he promptly did through his charismatic boosting for the cause. Hired by the Yellowstone Trail association, he became known for his money-raising talents, notably for a bridge over the Little Missouri River at Marmarth, North Dakota, which he accomplished by soliciting local and regional subscriptions for the much-needed structure. Keniston's skills were used by the Yellowstone Trail association to solidify allegiances of key cities and areas that were increasingly coming on board, including Park County, as well as to promote what would become the biggest boosting strategy in the history of the Yellowstone Trail.<sup>74</sup>

A meeting of the Montana section of the Yellowstone Trail association was scheduled for Friday, March 27, 1914 in Livingston. Keniston, like all good speakers, was aware of the axiom: know your audience. He came to Livingston on Friday, March 20, the week before the big meeting and addressed a crowd at the Commercial Club. The speaker gave the audience an overview of issues concerning the Trail and the hopes and plans for the future. Keniston, who spent many months of the year under contract speaking before lyceum and Chautauqua gatherings, was a charismatic speaker who immediately endeared the audience

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<sup>74</sup> "Pioneer Congregational Minister Laid to Rest," *Adams County Record*, Hettinger, North Dakota, March 25, 1943, p. 1, p. 8.



when he proclaimed that Livingston was *the* “Scenic City of the West.” This was followed with an analogy comparing the importance of the Yellowstone Trail to Ancient Rome’s Appian Way. After a few stories and anecdotes, he further solidified his welcome by declaring Livingston as “The City of Trail Boosters.”<sup>75</sup>

Keniston continued with his speech, gauging various reactions from the crowd with which to perfect his speech for the following Friday at the big all-Montana meeting to be held in the same room. Exemplifying the transparent policies of the Yellowstone Trail association, Keniston stated that he held the only paid position at the organization, and that his three-month boosting engagement was paid for by 30 well-to-do men who each contributed to his salary. This information alleviated possible concerns from local Trail subscribers, or prospective ones, that such a refined, talented, and sought-after speaker as Keniston was not being paid for out of their contributions, and that all monies collected on his boosting tours were marked for road improvement. With further analogous examples, he spoke of the government’s assistance with the Cumberland road and military roads, and how the Europeans were ahead of the Americans in quality road building by a substantial margin. He thought it unjust that the U.S. government would spend so much money improving the nations harbors and rivers but procrastinate with the same assistance for road aid. Keniston saw farmers as key to the success of the Trail, because they were a unified voice that had swayed congress before. Lastly, Keniston spoke of two immediate and tangible concerns

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<sup>75</sup> “Livingston to Give Share of \$40,000 Needed to Complete the Trail,” *Livingston Enterprise*, March 21, 1914, p. 4.

regarding the drivability of the Trail. An 87-mile section of the Trail ran through the Standing Rock Indian reservation in Corson County, South Dakota, and funds were needed to purchase the right-of-way easement from the tribe. It was seen as impossible to do the usual fundraising and volunteer work in that county, and besides the money for that easement, further monies would be needed for small bridges and getting the Trail in shape. Lastly, money to construct a bridge over the Little Missouri River in Marmarth, North Dakota, was direly needed, as the current ferry boat in use was inadequate. In all, Keniston said that \$40,000 was needed for these projects, and he asked each section to contribute towards this, which Livingston agreed to by the end of the meeting. Keniston concluded with the reminder that in addition to the meeting the coming Friday, that now the entire multi-state Yellowstone Trail association would meet at Hunters Hot Springs, a few miles outside of Livingston, in July of 1914.<sup>76</sup>

One week later, the Keniston-led Montana section meeting of the Twin Cities – Aberdeen – Yellowstone Park Trail association, as it was officially called, was held on Friday, March 27, 1914 at the Commercial Club in Livingston. In a large front-page story, the *Livingston Enterprise* began by noting the booster luminaires attending from other parts of Montana, and then reasoned that the lower than expected turnout for the meeting was because Trail boosters were too busy in their respective towns helping to raise their shares of the \$40,000 that was spoken of the week prior. George Keniston said that a number of towns

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<sup>76</sup> “Livingston to Give Share of \$40,000 Needed to Complete the Trail,” *Livingston Enterprise*, March 21, 1914, p. 4.

along the Trail had already raised their portion, and many exceeded it, using the overages locally. Keniston further stated that enthusiasm was very high and declared that “interest is at red heat all along the line,” including all states as far as Minnesota. A plan was put forth to have a caravan of automobiles leave the Twin Cities for the upcoming July meeting in Hunters Hot Springs. All along the route the growing caravan would be joined by other autos, and by the time it arrived in the Livingston area, there would be 500 to 1,000 automobiles. Noted booster “Bill” McCormick spoke up to acknowledge that farmers were getting much of the work done on the Trail in eastern Montana, putting in their time, money, and effort, without the need for recognition or fanfare. The farmers were just out there getting the work done. This was the breakthrough news that the boosters had been waiting for. The farmer opposition and reluctance to help improve the Trail was gradually being overcome in some areas<sup>77</sup>

Other good news at the Friday session was that Congressman Stout of Montana and Congressman Faris, chairman of the public lands committee in Washington, DC, had promised to assist the Trail association in purchasing the right-of-way through Standing Rock reservation in Corson County, South Dakota.<sup>78</sup> A separate story in the same edition of the paper, credited to the *Miles City Journal*, and apparently related to the above news, reported that the recent fundraising drive of the Trail association to purchase the right-of-way had

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<sup>77</sup> “Interest at Red Heat All Along the Yellowstone Trail, Says Geo. N. Keniston at State Convention,” *Livingston Enterprise*, March 28, 1914, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> “Stout Promises Aid to Yellow Trail Promoters,” *Livingston Enterprise*, March 28, 1914, p. 1.

“been computed [and] it will cost about \$3,500 to get this privilege from the noble red man.”<sup>79</sup>

Due to the low attendance at the previous week’s meeting, it was decided to invite all interested people of Park County to the Commercial Club that Friday night to hear George Keniston speak. A popular weekly edition of the *Livingston Enterprise*, generally distributed on Saturdays, was made available that Friday afternoon to alert the citizenry of this lecture open to the public by Keniston that evening. In the article, Keniston’s background was positioned as a world traveler who spoke before thousands at one dollar per person, and that it was a coup to have him in Livingston speaking for free. Finally, it was noted that not only was he a Trail booster extraordinaire, but because he had driven over the entire trail, he had information and stories from the whole route.<sup>80</sup>

At this point a pattern emerges in how the stakeholders and the *Livingston Enterprise* handled the news stories of Keniston’s March 20 visit and talk, as well as the Montana section meeting of the Yellowstone Trail association on March 27. Both Friday meetings, held until at least ten o’clock in the evening, were fully reported on in the next day’s newspaper. A reporter had apparently been assigned to attend the meetings, take notes, write the stories during the night, after which they were subsequently typeset. The resulting stories

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<sup>79</sup> *Livingston Enterprise*, March 28, 1914, p. 9.

<sup>80</sup> “Chautauqua Lecturer to Talk on Good Roads Friday Night; Public is Invited,” *Livingston Enterprise*, March 28, 1914, p. 11.

of this special nighttime reporting effort appeared alongside other Trail-related stories a few hours later in both Saturdays' weekly edition of the *Enterprise*.

Demonstrating the Yellowstone Trail fever in Park County, the Saturday of March 28, 1914, the *Livingston Enterprise* ran at least six Trail-related stories. During this time period, the *Enterprise* on Saturdays ran what would be considered a weekly edition, which recounted all of the week's top stories and added a few new ones. It is likely that many working people during the week did not have time to read the daily paper, and with perhaps more free time available on Saturdays, and after church on Sundays, the weekly edition was their prime chance for catching up on newspaper reading for the week. With this in mind, Saturday can be seen as an important day for the publishers to capture the widest audience, and also to make sure that any Yellowstone Trail boosting news was available for this weekly edition's readers.

For the week following the March 27 Montana section meeting at the Commercial Club, the stakeholders and the *Enterprise* appeared to have devised a strategy for the coming Saturday that was well-crafted for maximum boost as well as to continue to make use of the excitement of this recent meeting also held in Livingston. The Saturday, April 4, 1914 *Enterprise* contained at least eight Yellowstone Trail-related stories. Some of these stories were from previously un-released details from the March 27 meeting, held a week prior. Others spoke to the economic benefits of the Trail. Others were more boosting in nature, mentioning the enthusiasm of the Upper Yellowstone valley, while yet another mentioned Gene Quaw visiting Livingston and reminisced about the success of "The Yellowstone Trail" musical. The point was that these stories did not appear one-by-one piecemeal during the

week. Rather, it seems likely that these stories were thought-out, written, and collated during the week, and then all published in a booster blitzkrieg of a weekly edition on Saturday, April 4, 1914.<sup>81</sup>

The April 4, 1914, lead front page story in the *Livingston Enterprise* contained a story that sought to amplify the earlier Twin Cities, Minnesota, to Hunters Hot Springs auto caravan idea. Apparently, this new caravan idea was brought forth at the Keniston-led meeting just held the Friday evening of March 27. The new strategy entailed that during the big July 27 Yellowstone Trail multi-state convention to be held at Hunters Hot Springs, 1,000 to 2,000 automobiles that would gather along the way during the caravan from Minnesota, and after rallying at the conference, would drive to the North Entrance of Yellowstone National Park at Gardiner. Further, it was planned that one massive banner be draped over the vehicles with the message, “Let us in,” while another reading, “For the Benefit and Enjoyment of the People,” with a final and somewhat sarcastic banner adding: “Except Autoists” (A synonym at the time for automobilist was ‘autoist’). Super-booster “Bill” McCormick suggested that automobiles from all corners might pre-rally in Billings and then proceed to Hunters Hot Springs with him leading the way.<sup>82</sup>

A separate story sharing the front page reported more details milked from Keniston’s previous Friday night speech, this time aided by further editorial help. During his public-

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<sup>81</sup> *Livingston Enterprise*, April 4, 1914.

<sup>82</sup> “Plan to Get Thousand Autos at Park Entrance with Sign ‘We’d Rather Be on the Inside Looking Out,’” *Livingston Enterprise*, April 4, 1914, p. 1.

invited speech, which ended at 10 o'clock, Keniston urged "every citizen of Livingston to aid in the great work and to help join forces of workers and let others do the holding back." This encouragement alluded to the need of farmer involvement, which was the group needed for the success of Park County's final road improvements. Meanwhile, this article made the argument that the Trail was not just for the wealthy and acknowledged that farmers and ranchers were increasingly purchasing motorized vehicles. Further, in regards to outsiders using the route, the argument was made that automobile-bound people would see the potential of the land and resources along the Trail, with many sure to decide to settle in the environs of Montana. This alluded to an increase in land sales or values. Addressing the farmer again, Keniston stated that good roads helped to create a climate of more diversified farms and subsequent transport of production.<sup>83</sup>

Another theme that had recurred for several years in both main newspapers was that of a Coast to Coast highway, envisioned for a long time by persons such as A.L. Westgard, pathfinder and mapper of the American Automobile association and similar guidebook organizations. As stated before, guidebooks and maps showing a "path" or route did not necessarily equate with actual road improvement. Now, it was revealed that the topic of extending the Yellowstone Trail farther west to the Pacific Ocean would be put on the agenda for the meeting of the entire Trail association the coming July at Hunters Hot Springs. This would become one of the decisions that would turn the Yellowstone Trail into the

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<sup>83</sup> "Convention Closes with Interesting Address by George N. Keniston," *Livingston Enterprise*, April 4, 1914, p. 1.

nation's second transcontinental highway, following the Lincoln Highway which was opened in 1913.<sup>84</sup>

Another story, of key importance, appeared on April 4, 1914, on page six of the *Livingston Enterprise*. Following his Friday night speech, George Keniston, "Bill" McCormick, and Dr. S.F. Way, president of the Montana division of the Yellowstone Trail association, motored by automobile to Gardiner. Keniston proclaimed that the entire upper Yellowstone valley was "a hot bed of Trail enthusiasm." At Gardiner, Keniston, perhaps with overnight news from Yellowstone Trail association headquarters, announced that there would be an all-citizen "Trail Day" of road improvement along the entire 1,100-mile route from the Minneapolis-St. Paul to Gardiner. Upon hearing this, an Emigrant farmer, A.W.T. Anderson, bursting with excitement, vowed to supply "40 teams and a large number of men who will spend May 22, Trail Day, at work on the roads in that vicinity." This Trail Day announcement and farmer vow of alliance, indicated the major turning point in this Park County story.

Farmer Anderson's enthusiasm and promise to assist in a significant manner exemplifies how at this point the farmers' opposition had been overcome, and now they had been won over into joining in the Yellowstone Trail improvements in Park County. Trail Day was a plan to involve every single citizen, but most importantly farmers. The word-of-mouth excitement, newspaper boosting, and friendly rivalry amongst neighbors working road

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<sup>84</sup> "Spurling Tells of Livingston Meeting," *Livingston Enterprise*, April 4, 1914, p. 1.



sections would have an enormous impact on the efforts due to this apex of Yellowstone Trail fever. The greater multi-state Trail Day announcement was major news for the rest of the people and towns along the whole 1,100 miles, and everyone would be talking about it for weeks leading up to the special day, especially the newspapers.<sup>85</sup>

Lastly, the April 4, 1914 *Enterprise* offered a preview of new economic activity to come with the improved road from Livingston to Gardiner. The article was about how the needs of supplying Yellowstone National Park with produce were not being taken advantage of by Park County or Gallatin County producers. “The bulk of the supplies are hauled from St. Paul, a thousand miles distant,” the writer noted, arguing that for potentially enterprising persons with autotrucks delivering to consider starting a business to supply Yellowstone Park, because “fresh food of various kinds furnishes a convenient and profitable market for the surplus products of the valley.” The amount of supplies purchased by operators of Park businesses over the tourist season was stated as, “1,000 cases of eggs, 30,000 pounds of butter, 2,000 gallons of cream, 3,000 gallons of milk—more or less—and many vegetables, chickens, etc.” This article was aimed at farmers, ranchers, and those with delivery ambitions. There was big money to be made supplying the Park, money that up until this point was going to the St. Paul area producers and middlepersons for their railroad

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<sup>85</sup> “Upper Yellowstone Valley Alive with Yellow Trail Enthusiasm,” *Livingston Enterprise*, April 4, 1914, p. 6.

shipments. This was one more reason to support good roads in Park County, especially the main one, the Yellowstone Trail.<sup>86</sup>

On April 11, 1914, an article appeared that summarized the whole history of the Yellowstone Trail association and its works. It was one of the final public relations education writings before Trail Day, perhaps aimed at any remaining farmers who had lingering doubts about the Trail organization. First, it gave some updated facts about the Trail: “Seven hundred miles of the 1,100 of the route have been graded and 150 miles have been graveled, while 600 miles have been suitably marked.” This article is somewhat unique in that it gave the history, beginning with its founders’ challenges on the pre-Yellowstone Trail dirt road between Ipswich and Aberdeen, South Dakota. Further on, it provided an overview of how the association had “subordinate organizations” and “auxiliary associations” ensconced in each state, and that there was scarcely a mile that was not tended to. This was excepting, of course, of the stretch inside Standing Rock Indian reservation, South Dakota, and the much-needed bridge to span the Little Missouri River at Marmarth, North Dakota. Lastly, it recognized that farmers were coming on board in rapid numbers due to word-of-mouth and the growing realization that hauling freight over lousy roads was costly—farmers could be putting extra money in their pockets when it was all improved. One subtitle proclaimed, “Country Folk Who Criticized Project are Now Enthusiasts for Better Roads, as They Can

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<sup>86</sup> “Yellowstone Park Offers Wonderful Market for Park County Products but Advantage Not Taken,” *Livingston Enterprise*, April 4, 1914, p. 3.

See the Big Advantage.” More and more, all things pointed to the fact that farmer participation was going to be the key to the final success of improving the Trail.<sup>87</sup>

### Conway the Con Man

The readers of the *Livingston Enterprise* were treated to another fascinating story on April 11, 1914. Just as art had imitated life in Eugene Quaw’s Yellowstone Trail-themed musical, the enthusiasm and contagious boosterism of the Good Roads movement was leveraged by a clever criminal, William C. Conway. Although Conway was not associated with the Yellowstone Trail, he found a way to make money riding on the coattails of the good roads booster fever that had existed for the past couple of years in many states. Apparently, the confidence man had attended some Good Roads lectures, and being an astute observer of human psychology, realized that money could be made from catering to peoples’ overwhelming desire to have a road in their town combined with the prospect of getting the government to pay for some, or all of it. For towns that were being bypassed by an official trail route of one kind or another, just to have an official man come and speak to the town’s commercial club about including their town on the route was an irresistible proposition. Whether a town was actually scheduled to be on a route or not, a charismatic spiel combined with the promise of government money to pay for the necessary road improvements was often embraced with showers of money to show good faith. This is what Conway did in

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<sup>87</sup> “‘Yellow Trail’ Aids Good Roads,” *Livingston Enterprise*, April 11, 1914, p. 1, p. 13.

many towns on, and near, the Yellowstone Trail, as well as points further west that hoped to be on the expansion route to the Pacific. Conway was ‘working’ western towns in Montana when he was finally found out and stopped. Conway had forged credentials that purported he worked for the government-affiliated National Highways association. With confidence and nerve, “he successfully ran the gauntlet in every city he visited . . . [and was finally] pronounced a fraud and cheat.”<sup>88</sup>

Conway worked towns on the Yellowstone Trail in the beginning, but towards the end he was having great success with towns and cities to the west of Livingston that had not yet been declared on the Yellowstone Trail, or had been bypassed by both the long-planned Park to Park road or Westgard’s Northwest Trail. For example, a newspaper article reporting a story out of Bozeman had Conway posing as the “superintendent of the northwestern division of the Federal Good Roads association.” In the Bozeman meeting he claimed that his organization was in the process of obtaining from the federal government “\$50,000,000 a year for the construction of national highways.” Secondly, he put forth the plan to put into use all of the left-over government-held machinery from the Panama Canal construction job for use on highway improvement. At least Conway could not be accused of thinking small. In Bozeman, and in other such towns, he asked attendees to subscribe (join) his group. This

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<sup>88</sup> “Alleged Booster of Good Roads is Faker,” *Livingston Enterprise*, April 11, 1914, p. 8.

entailed people handing cash over to Conway, who after assurances of getting back to them with updates, would drive away with the money, headed for the next town.<sup>89</sup>

Conway was finally stopped because he had been using the U.S. mail to send his credentials and visit dates to the commercial clubs of towns and cities he wanted to bilk.<sup>90</sup> Apparently, the quality of Conway's documentation raised the suspicion of some of the recipients. A Missoula commercial club secretary said that as soon as he looked at the papers they, "Put me on my guard. His letterheads were plastered with a likeness of himself, and it was difficult to believe that a representative of an organization of the class as of the Federal Good Roads association would stoop to such a trick." Yet, it had worked on dozens of towns. Sometimes when people hear something too good to be true, they can overlook small shortcomings.<sup>91</sup>

### Trail Day

George Keniston, during his April 4 visit to the upper Yellowstone valley towns of Gardiner and Emigrant, had announced a Trail Day for May 22, 1914. Immediately following this, recall that the local Emigrant farmer, A.W.T. Anderson, had offered forty horse teams and a good quantity of men to assist in the efforts of that day. Emigrant was indeed a hot bed of road-building enthusiasm, as Keniston had noted. The April 18, 1912 *Livingston Enterprise* announced the booster news that school children in Emigrant were to take the day

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<sup>89</sup> "Use Panama Machinery on Highways, it is Urged," *Anaconda Standard* (Anaconda, Montana) February 19, 1914, p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> "Conway Arrested for Fraudulent Use of Mails," *Livingston Enterprise*, April 18, 1914, p. 1.

<sup>91</sup> "'Engineer' Conway Branded as a Faker," *Missoulian* (Missoula, Montana) April 8, 1914, p. 1.

off from studies on Trail Day, and vowed to help to, “clear the road of stones for a distance of 14 miles, from Senator Darroch’s ranch to the ranch of Sam Dalley.” This announcement instigated friendly competitive rivalries between Park County towns and neighbors to try to outdo one another in improving their local section of the Trail. No general announcement had yet been made in the Park County newspapers indicating that this Trail Day was to be an 1,100-mile long endeavor.<sup>92</sup>

On May 2, 1914 a letter from O.T. Peterson, secretary for the entire trail, was published that finally fully explained the scope and nature of Trail Day. The article announced that for the whole length of the Trail, from the Twin Cities of Minnesota to Gardiner, the plan was for:

a hundred thousand men to turn out with teams, picks, shovels, discs, harrows, and road drags. Road drags made of split logs, heavy timbers, railroad rails, old binder frames, old automobile frames, hay rack beds, in fact anything that will smoothen the road. Pull them with horses, mules, oxen, auto or traction engines.<sup>93</sup>

The article continued, stating that there would be squads of men assigned for every one of the 1,100 miles of the Trail, and in addition to pleas that women provide food, that they were expected participants, as well as children, a hundred thousand in total,

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<sup>92</sup> “Boys and Girls to Observe Trail Day by Picking Up Stones Off of Roads,” *Livingston Enterprise*, April 18, 1914, p. 6.

<sup>93</sup> “Trail Day Will be Day of Much Work on Roads,” *Livingston Enterprise*, May 2, 1914, p. 1, p. 7.

for this “great public-spirited cause, the likes of which has never been undertaken.” This Trail Day letter had been sent to all the newspapers along the entire Trail, and the idea created enormous excitement and motivation amongst the people along the whole route.<sup>94</sup>

A Minnesota business man, interviewed in Butte, besides sharing his belief that Trail Day would be “the greatest road building day in the history of the northwest,” also stated that, “farmers along the route will do the work.” Given the many long rural stretches and considering that farmers had the equipment and soil-working know-how, that statement was true. The article finished with the update that North Dakotans and Montanans had raised \$25,000 towards building the bridge across the Little Missouri River at Marmarth, North Dakota.<sup>95</sup> Following was an article that re-emphasized that Trail Day was not just for automobile owners. It was revealed that the president of the Montana division of the Trail did not even own an auto, nor had the past president of the entire Trail system. These men were painted as so much believing in the cause of good roads benefitting everyone, that not only did they not own autos, furthermore they did not draw any salaries for their positions. The article ended with the reminder that good roads are as much for the person “with the horse and buggy or bicycle or the fellow who has to go on foot or may get a ride in a friend’s auto as for the man who owns either a Buick, Reo, Ford, or Studebaker.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> “Trail Day Will be Day of Much Work on Roads,” *Livingston Enterprise*, May 2, 1914, p. 1, p. 7.

<sup>95</sup> “Greatest Road Day of the Northwest,” *Livingston Enterprise*, May 6, 1914, p. 8.

<sup>96</sup> “Trail Not Alone an Auto Proposition,” *Livingston Enterprise*, May 9, 1914, p. 3.

Trail Day was set for Thursday, May 22, 1914. On the Tuesday before, a large article appeared which gave out the schedule and instructions on “What to Do on Trail Day.” This included information for city folk to meet at eight o’clock in the morning at the Commercial Club in Livingston, from where they would be ferried by a continuous transport team of automobiles to the pre-selected road sites where help was most needed. Farmers and ranchers would work the roadway nearest their property, or where assigned as needed. It was reported that, “Joe Cummings of Pine creek and Fred Herzler on the Hunters road would both promise much work in their neighborhood, in addition to many other places already reported.” People were encouraged to bring picks and rakes, but especially shovels. Most merchants had agreed to close their businesses on this day, but a few proprietors who could not, vowed to volunteer one of their regular workers to assist on the road teams. Finally, Chief of Police Owens said that he was also considering rounding up “the hoboos” and putting them to work on the road. It looked as if nearly every strata of citizen was to be involved on the Trail Day endeavor.<sup>97</sup>

Trail Day, May 22, 1914 arrived, and each of the 1,100 miles of the Yellowstone Trail was worked on by the people, especially farmers. An article appeared the following day with a subheading of, “Trail Day a Great Success in Park County Despite Sore Hands and Muscles.” In this story, C.S. Hefferelin, president of

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<sup>97</sup> “Park County and the City to Unite in Working Roads,” *Livingston Enterprise*, May 19, 1914, p. 1.



the Park County Automobile association, offered an overjoyed proclamation: “I cannot estimate how many miles of road was put in really splendid shape, but there were many of them . . . [due to] the outpouring of the people, not only Livingstonians but practically every farmer.”<sup>98</sup> Another article reported that an enthusiastic blacksmith, A.H. Wilkins, from Pray, near Emigrant, gushed that he and the rest of the townsfolk in that community were chomping at the bit to put in another day of such work.<sup>99</sup>

Meanwhile, reports of the work performed on other parts of the greater Trail began to come in. Secretary O.T. Peterson described the contagious enthusiasm that prompted ladies to have “their hats trimmed with chrome yellow ribbons. The little girls wore chrome yellow ribbons in their hair. Hotels and restaurants had decorated their tables with chrome yellow center pieces,” while the some of the men were busy applying the Trail color to “telephone posts, fence posts, lamps posts, and hundreds of stones” that were on the route. In Hettinger, North Dakota, a Trail Day lunch served seven hundred participants, “30 gallons of baked beans, 30 gallons of potato salad, 1,500 sandwiches, 70 gallons of lemonade, 200 cigars and several boxes of apples.” Afterwards at the town auditorium patriotic songs were sung and speeches were made.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> “Great Work is Done on Roads,” *Livingston Enterprise*, May 23, 1914, p. 5.

<sup>99</sup> “Pray Continues Work on Roads,” *Livingston Enterprise*, May 23, 1914, p. 1.

<sup>100</sup> “Report of Work Done on Other Parts of Trail,” *Livingston Enterprise*, May 26, 1914, p. 2.

The *Livingston Daily Post* ran a front-page story garnered from an interview with S.F. Way, president of the Montana Division of the Yellowstone Trail association, as well as the Park County Automobile association's Harry S. Blair, who headed the local organizing committee. Blair said that the Trail and feeder roads improved in Park County "covered about 60 miles," and notably Emigrant and Pray "built, not merely repaired, but constructed" an important section of road leading to the Mill Creek bridge. Moreover, "On the other side of the river from Emigrant, the ranchers turned out splendidly." The article contained several columns listing the contributors to the success of the day. The first was a list of over thirty businesses and persons who contributed automobiles to ferrying effort to get citizens to the outlying road sections. At the head of the list was, "The H.B. Blair Garage, three machines," followed by "The Yellowstone Garage, two." Next came a list of over thirty names of farmers and ranchers who supplied horse teams. Finally, was a list of over fifty businesses that allowed one or more workers to volunteer on the roads that day. It was acknowledged that there were too many individual volunteers to list.<sup>101</sup>

### Conclusion

The early days of the automobile in the West brought many opportunities. Beyond the individualized mobility aspects, there were tourism and economic considerations. However, the lack of good roads was an impediment to the full enjoyment and usage of the vehicles.

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<sup>101</sup> "Report on Trail Day Shows Much Work is Completed in Park County," *Livingston Daily Post*, June 4, 1914, p. 1, p. 8.

The good roads movement had reached the West during the first two decades of the twentieth century, this story's time period. There was no federal or state funding available for roads in Montana and the other states along the Yellowstone Trail until 1916. Park County, motivated to improve its roads initially by the prospect of a Park to Park highway connecting Glacier National Park to Yellowstone National Park, went ahead with the improvements on its own, and with state assistance in the form of convict work crews.

Despite ongoing newspaper editorials touting the benefits of good roads, farmers who were critical to the success of further road improvements were initially reluctant and opposed to improving the Trail. After road improvement progress had stalled, in 1913 Park County joined forces with the Yellowstone Trail organization, who sent their speaker, George Keniston to rally Park County. After more pro-Yellowstone Trail editorials, the staging of the "Yellowstone Trail" musical, and the announcement of a Trail Day, the boosting campaign reached its tipping point and the farmers decided to assist in improving the road.

Trail Day, May 22, 1914, brought tens of thousands of people to work along the 1,100-mile route to make improvements. The majority of the length of the Trail, which was the major stretches of dirt road between towns, were improved by farmers. Farmers had the equipment, the horse teams, and the ability to improve the dirt route. Trail Day was the height of boosterism, with all strata of people volunteering to work that day. Not until the 'war effort' during World War II, with activities such as scrape metal drives, would there be such a citizen involvement for the greater good in Park County. As Aldo Leopold noted, boosterism was a powerful force, and not only the one that helped to overturn the farmer's

opposition to the Yellowstone Trail, but also the one that succeeded in enlisting their assistance in the final improvements.

In Park County, by the work of the convicts, the farmers, and the boosters in improving the Yellowstone Trail route, tens of thousands of automobile tourists were able to experience the wonders of Yellowstone Park. The Yellowstone Trail was important to tourists and all of the towns along its eventual transcontinental route, but its history is largely underrecognized. The story of Park County's contribution to the success of the route adds important new details and insights to this body of booster, tourist, and transportation history.

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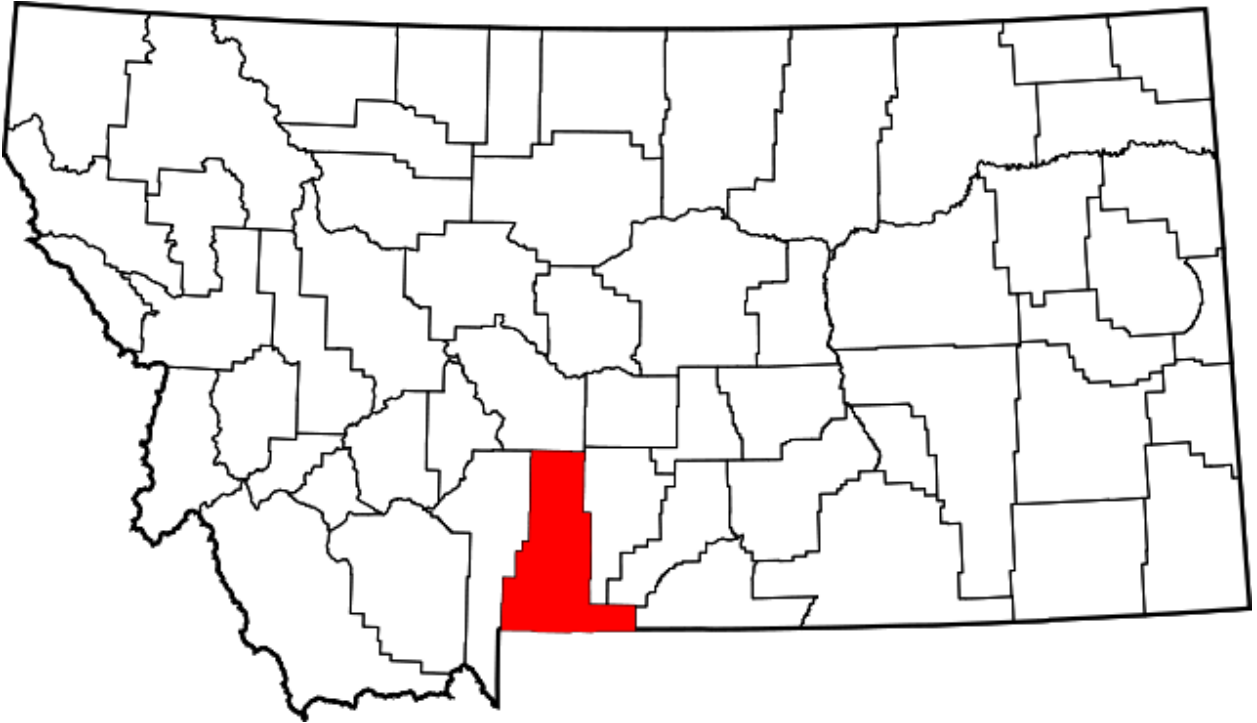
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

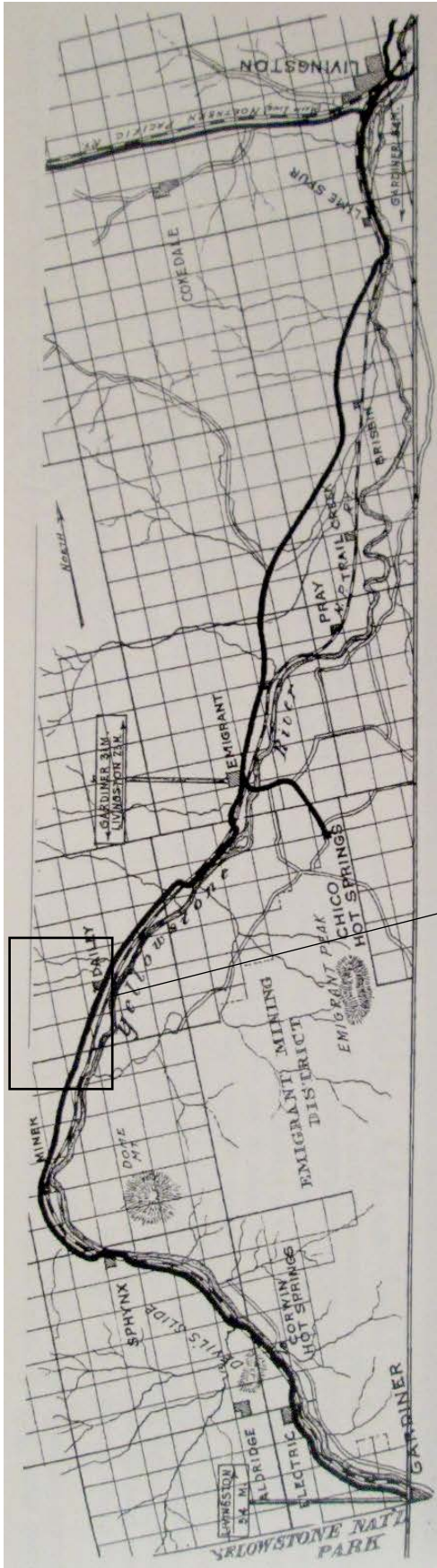
MAP OF MONTANA HIGHLIGHTING PARK COUNTY



Map of Montana highlighting Park County. “Park County Montana: Map of Montana Highlighting Park County,” *Wikipedia*. Created February 12, 2006, accessed April 20, 2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Park\\_County,\\_Montana#/media/File:Map\\_of\\_Montana\\_highlighting\\_Park\\_County.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Park_County,_Montana#/media/File:Map_of_Montana_highlighting_Park_County.svg).

APPENDIX B

LIVINGSTON TO GARDINER MAP



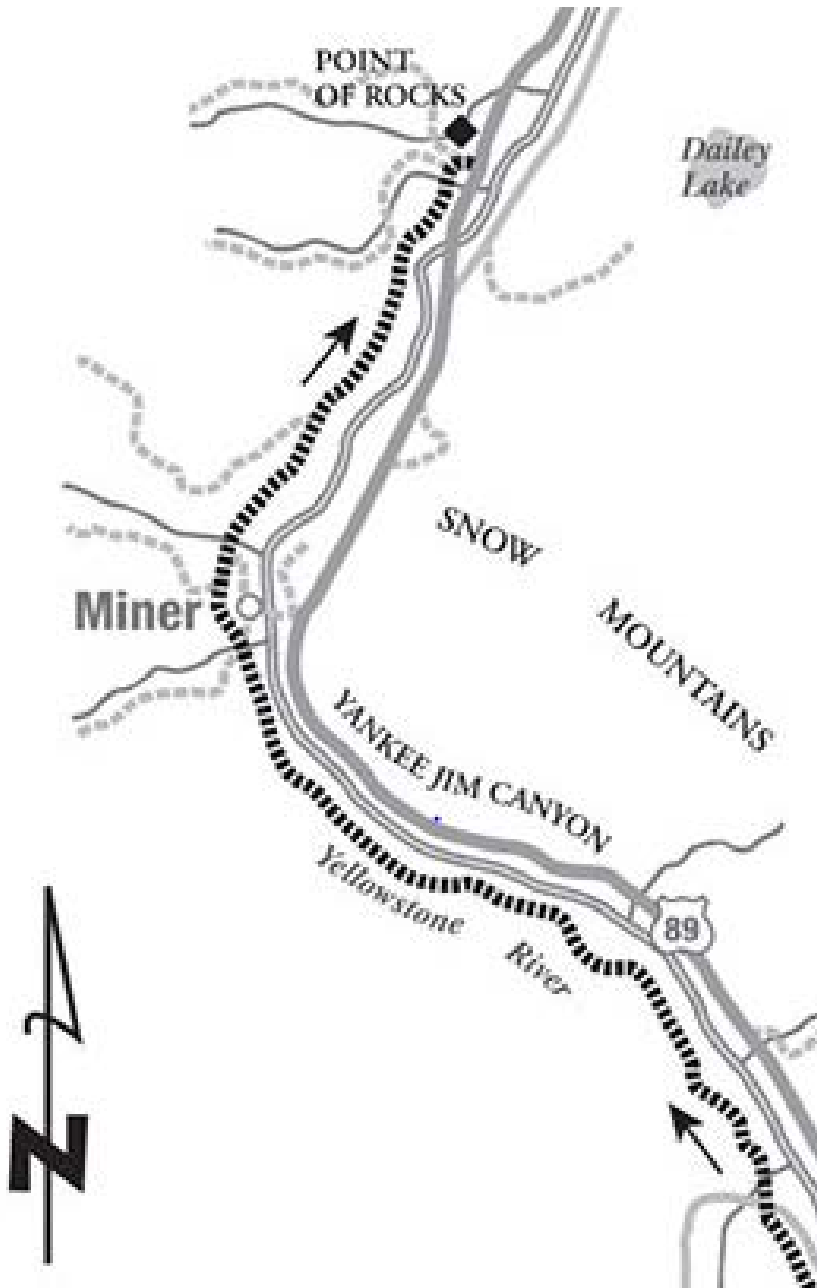
Livingston to Gardiner Map. Point of Rocks area is highlighted. Site of the first convict work camp, 1912. The Yellowstone Trail is the darkest line (see APPENDIX C for closer view).

After Alice A. Ridge and John W. Ridge, *On the Yellowstone Trail: A Reproduction of the First Year Book of the Twin Cities-Aberdeen Park Trail Association (The Yellowstone Trail Association) 1914* (Altoona, Wisconsin: Yellowstone Trail Publishers, 2003), 89.

APPENDIX C

POINT OF ROCKS DETAIL MAP

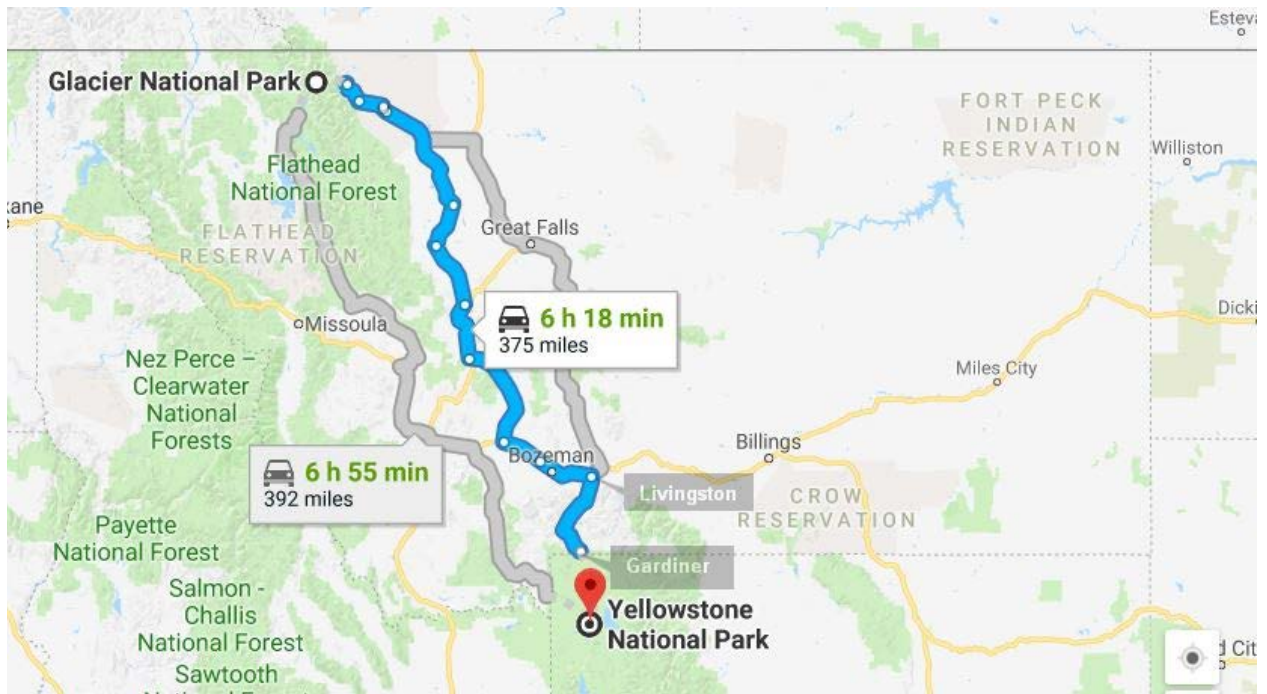




Point of Rocks detail map. Modified from “Bike Route: Gardiner to Point of Rocks: 22 Miles from Gardiner to Yankee Jim Canyon—Map of Gardiner to Point of Rocks Bike Ride,” [www.visitmt.com](http://www.visitmt.com), accessed April 21, 2018, <http://www.visitmt.com/things-to-do/outdoor-and-adventure/bicycling/bike-routes-half-day-and-day-rides/bike-route-gardiner-to-point-of-rocks.html>.

APPENDIX D

CONTEMPORARY MAP OF VARIOUS PARK TO PARK ROUTES



Various Contemporary Park to Park Routes. “Yellowstone National Park to Glacier National Park,” *www.googlemaps.com*, accessed April 21, 2018, <https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Yellowstone+National+Park/Glacier+National+Park,+Montana/@46.5718672,114.6295008,7z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x5351e55555555555:0xaca8f930348fe1bb!2m2!1d110.588455!2d44.427963!1m5!1m1!1s0x5368901555555555:0xaf16bc2215c55dec!2m2!1d-113.7870225!2d48.7596128!3e0>

APPENDIX E

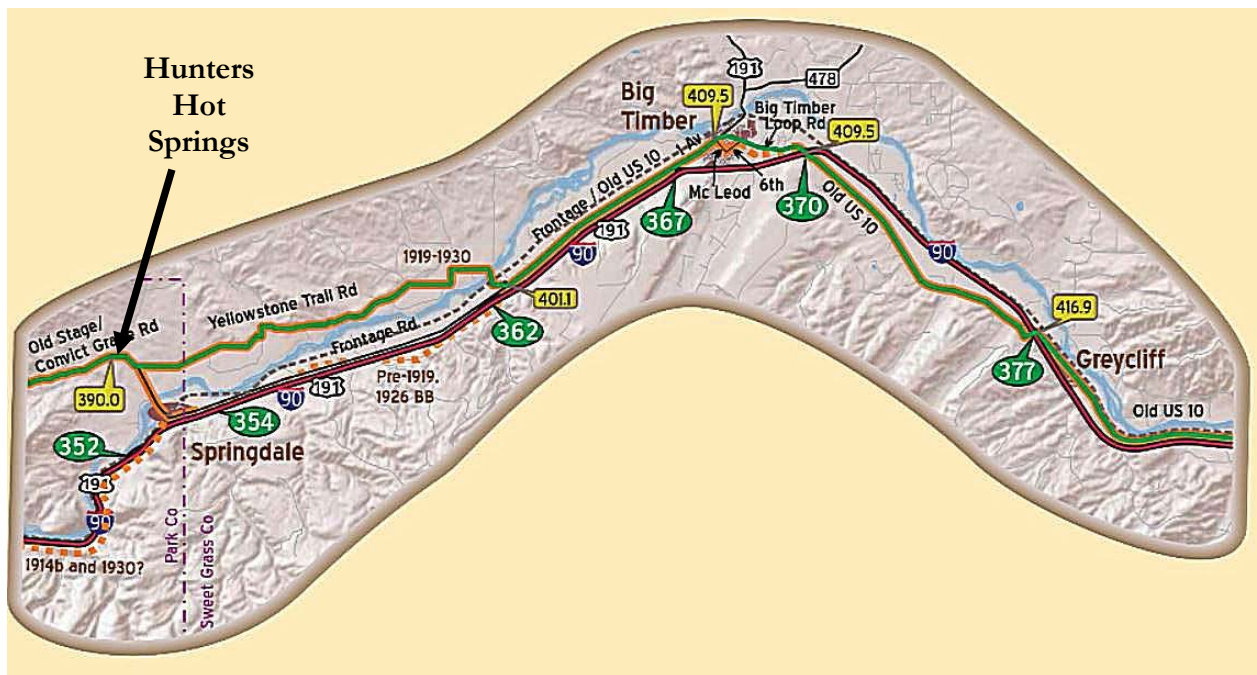
EARLY EAST-WEST ROUTE NEAR LIVINGSTON



Early east-west route near Livingston. This road was subsumed by the Yellowstone Trail in 1914 (heavy gray line is the Yellowstone Trail). John W. Ridge, "Montana: Livingston," [www.yellowstonetrail.org](http://www.yellowstonetrail.org), accessed April 21, 2018, <http://www.yellowstonetrail.org/livingston.html>.

APPENDIX F

EARLY EAST-WEST ROUTE EAST OF LIVINGSTON

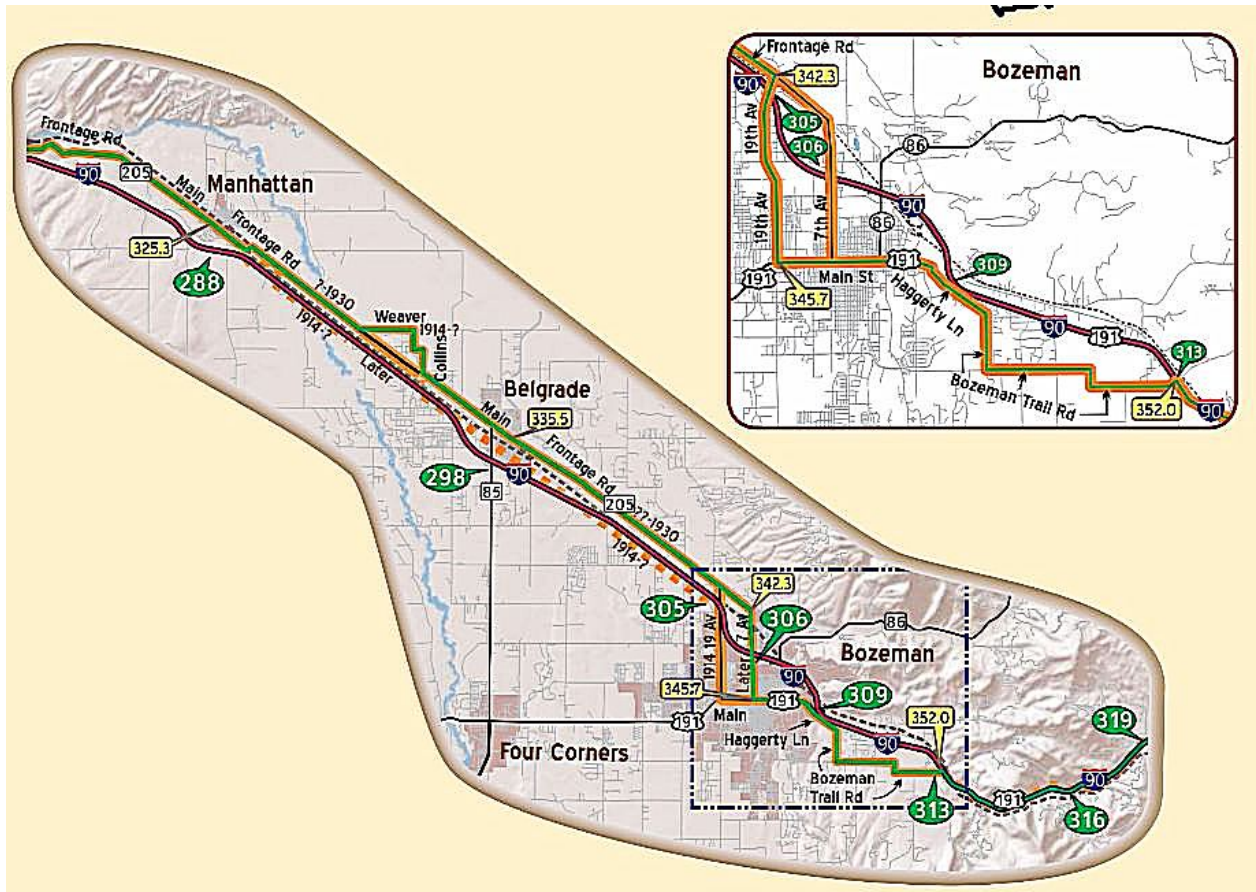


Early east-west route east of Livingston. This road was subsumed by the Yellowstone Trail in 1914 (heavy gray line is the Yellowstone Trail). Modified from John W. Ridge, "Montana: Big Timber," [www.yellowstonetrail.org](http://www.yellowstonetrail.org), accessed April 21, 2018, <http://www.yellowstonetrail.org/big%20timber.html>.

APPENDIX G

EAST-WEST YELLOWSTONE TRAIL NEAR BOZEMAN





‘East-west’ section of the Yellowstone Trail west of Livingston. This section was completed after 1914 (heavy gray line is the Yellowstone Trail). John W. Ridge, “Montana: Bozeman,” [www.yellowstonetrail.org](http://www.yellowstonetrail.org), accessed April 21, 2018, <http://www.yellowstonetrail.org/bozeman.html>.

APPENDIX H

LOCATION OF WILSALL CONVICT LABOR CAMP

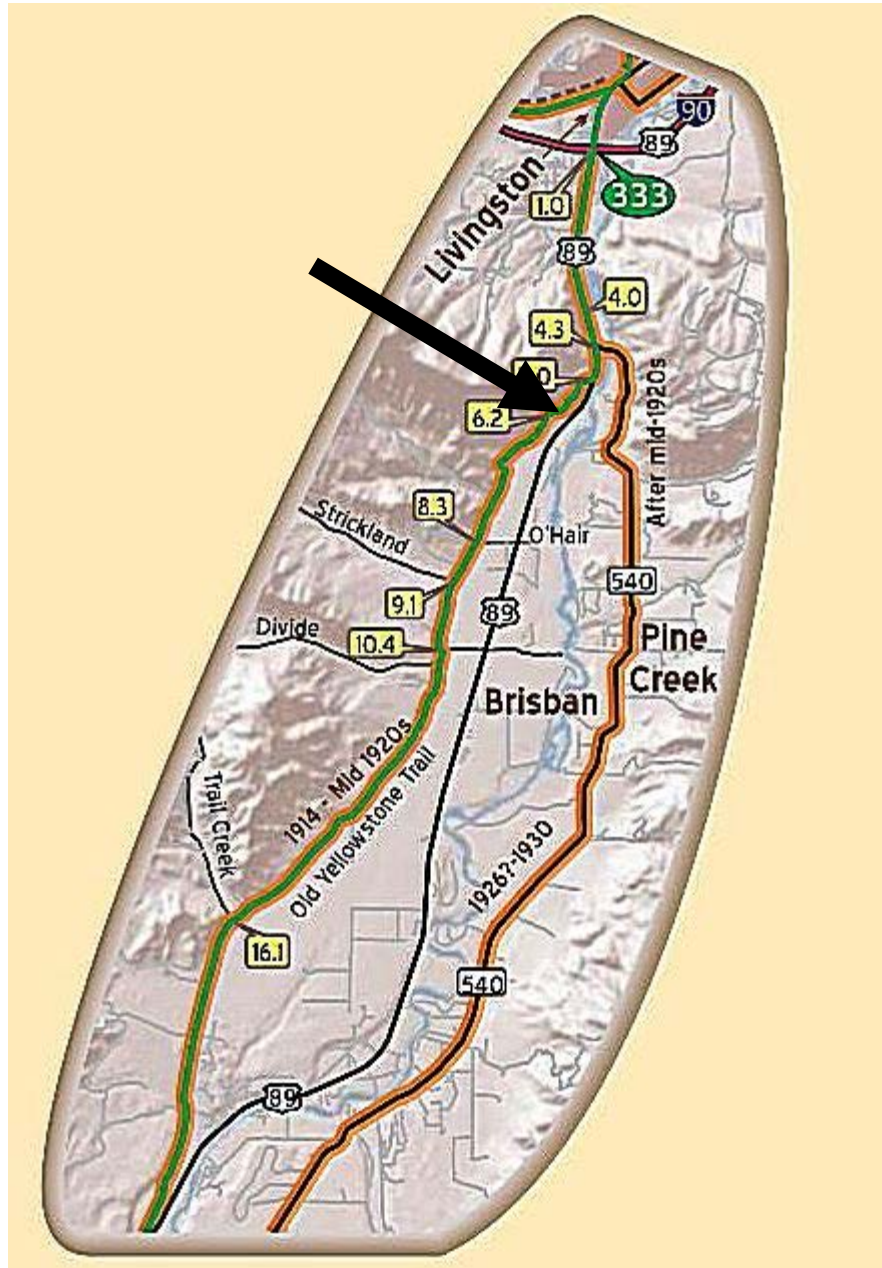


Approximate location six miles north of Wilsall, Montana, where the convicts worked and had a camp during the winter of 1912-1913 (black triangle pointing). Modified from "Livingston, Montana," [www.yahoomaps.com](http://www.yahoomaps.com), accessed April 21, 2018, <https://maps.yahoo.com/place/?lat=45.66216686433575&lon=-110.56177139282227&q=Livingston%2C%20Montana&bb=45.69682804%2C-110.64511299%2C45.62760426%2C-110.47842979&addr=Livingston%2C%20Montana>

APPENDIX I

LOCATION OF HOLLIDAY HILL WORK SITE





The arrow points to the Holliday hill winter of 1913 convict work site (heavy gray line is the Yellowstone Trail). John W. Ridge, "Montana: North of Yellowstone," [www.yellowstonetrail.org](http://www.yellowstonetrail.org), accessed April 21, 2018, <http://www.yellowstonetrail.org/north%20yellowstone%20spur.html>.