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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

### 1. Name of Property

historic name: QUEEN'S LAUNDRY BATH HOUSE

other name/site number:

### 2. Location

street & number: Sentinel Meadows, Lower Geyser Basin

not for publication:

city/town: Yellowstone National Park

vicinity:

state: WY code: 48 county: Teton code: 39 zip code: 82190

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this    nomination    request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property    meets    does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant    nationally    statewide    locally. (    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature]  
Signature of certifying official/Title

6.12.01  
Date

State or Federal agency or bureau National Park Service

In my opinion, the property    meets    does not meet the National Register criteria.

[Signature]  
Signature of commenting or other official

7/16/01  
Date

WYOMING STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE  
State or Federal agency and bureau

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register  
   see continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register  
   see continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register  
   see continuation sheet
- removed from the National Register  
   see continuation sheet
- other (explain)

[Signature]  
Signature of the Keeper  
Edson A. Beall

Date of Action  
7-25-01

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property:** public-Federal

**Category of Property:** building

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:** NA

**Name of related multiple property listing:**

Number of Resources within Property		
Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		building(s)
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions:**  
GOVERNMENT/public bath house

**Current Function:**  
VACANT/NOT IN USE

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification:**

Other: log vernacular

**MATERIALS:**

**Foundation:** none

**Walls:** logs

**roof:** gone

**Other:**

**Narrative Description:**

The Queen's Laundry Bath House is located towards the western end of Sentinel Meadows in the Lower Geyser Basin of Yellowstone National Park. The building is on the northwestern edge of a travertine mound formed by the active Queen's Laundry Spring (also called Red Terrace Spring). Deposition from the pool's run-off is gradually encircling the Bath House. To the east of the building, in a grassy meadow, are Flat Cone, Seep Cone, and Mound Spring.

Overall, the Bath House measures 8 feet, 2 inches by 19 feet (center to center). The exterior walls and the center partition are constructed of pine logs, from six to nine inches in diameter, and carefully vee-notched. The building has a shed roof. It slopes from about six feet at the front (west) to under five feet at the rear (east). The building originally had three purlins, one each on the front and rear walls and one in the center. The purlins supported small diameter puncheons, laid with the round side on the purlins. A layer of dirt covered the puncheons. In 1961, the purlins and about one-half the puncheons existed. Today, only the front purlin remains. The top log on the south side, which was notched for the center purlin, also is in place.

(See continuation pages.)

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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**Applicable National Register Criteria:** A and B**Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):** NA**Significant Person(s):** Philetus W. Norris**Cultural Affiliation:** NA**Areas of Significance:** Politics/Government;  
Exploration/Settlement; Conservation**Period(s) of Significance:** 1881**Significant Dates:** 1881**Architect/Builder:** Philetus W. Norris

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**Narrative Statement of Significance****Statement of Significance**

The Queen's Laundry Bath House is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A. The bath house was the first building constructed by the federal government for public use in a national park. The building is a humble beginning to a policy of accommodating tourists in the national parks, which would have tremendous influence on how parks were managed. The Queen's Laundry Bath House is the oldest standing building constructed by the U.S. Department of the Interior for a national park function and the only building representing Yellowstone National Park's early civilian administration from 1872-1886.

The Queen's Laundry Bath House also is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion B. The building is associated with Philetus W. Norris, the second superintendent of Yellowstone National Park (April 18, 1877-February 2, 1882). Norris' impact on Yellowstone National Park was great. He obtained the first congressional appropriation for the park in 1878, explored and documented its natural and cultural features, and constructed the park's first roads and public buildings. Norris established the beginnings of a national park service ranger corps and a wildlife management plan.

**Historical Narrative**

After Yellowstone's designation as a national park in 1872, Congress failed to publish rules and regulations or appropriate funds to care for the new national treasure. A succession of able and not-so-able superintendents appointed by the Secretary of the Interior managed the park during this fledgling period. To few people's surprise, Nathaniel Langford became the park's first superintendent in 1872. Congress neglected to fund the superintendent position and provided little guidance or support. Langford may be best remembered for his fabled story regarding the conception of the national park, a tale not related until some 30 years after the supposed event. According to Langford, the park idea originated during the 1870 Washburn expedition, when members camped near the Firehole and Gibbon rivers, discussed the area's future, and Montanan Cornelius Hedges suggested the park set-aside, to the favorable response of the party.<sup>1</sup>

During his five years as superintendent, Langford maintained ties with the Northern Pacific Railroad and spent considerable time trying to ensure that no strong concession interests could be set up to complicate the Northern Pacific's plans to someday control visitor accommodations. Langford's successor, Philetus W. Norris, felt the

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<sup>1</sup> Aubrey L. Haines, *The Yellowstone Story*, vol. 1 (Niwot, Colo.: University Press of Colorado, 1996), 180, 129-30.

Queen's Laundry Bath House  
Name of Property

Teton County, Wyoming  
County and State

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### 9. Major Bibliographic References

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See continuation pages.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.  
 previously listed in the National Register  
 previously determined eligible by the National Register  
 designated a National Historic Landmark  
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Location of Additional Data:**

State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other – Yellowstone National Park Archives

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### 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	12	510341	4934283

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### Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary for the Queen's Laundry Bath House is a rectangle (approximately 49 feet by 59 feet, 10 inches) measured twenty feet from each wall of the building.

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### Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses the historic property. There are no other known resources associated with the building.

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### 11. Form Prepared By

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**name/title:** Lon Johnson, Historical Architect  
**organization:** Yellowstone National Park  
**street & number:** P.O. Box 168  
**city or town:** Yellowstone National Park

**date:** February 1, 2001  
**telephone:** 307-344-2157  
**state:** Wyoming      **zip code:** 82190

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### Additional Documentation

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Please see continuation pages, photographs, map

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### Property Owner

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**name/title:** Yellowstone National Park, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior  
**street & number:** P.O. Box 168  
**city or town:** Yellowstone National Park

**telephone:** 307-344-2002  
**state:** Wyoming      **zip code:** 82190

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The Bath House is divided into two rooms, one measuring 7 feet, 6 inches by 9 feet and the other 7 feet, 6 inches by 8 feet, 8 inches. The larger room has a door, 4 feet, 6 inches high by 2 feet, 6 inches wide, set one foot to the right (south) of the center partition. The room also has a small window, 5 inches by 12 inches, made by cutting half through a log in the middle of the south wall. The only other opening in this room is an 8-inch gap in a wall log, which was at ground level in 1961, but is not visible today. The smaller room lacks a doorway, but does have a small window in the west side, created by a gap in a wall log. This gap was probably intended as a door, but just never completed. The height of the opening matches the flanking doorway to the larger room, and if it had been sawn to the ground, would have created a doorway the same width.

The interior logs were hewn flat with an adz. There is no evidence of a floor, although it may be buried beneath the hot springs deposits.

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wrath of the Northern Pacific when he looked approvingly upon competing railroads for service to the park. The reaction by the Northern Pacific in part led to Norris' removal.<sup>2</sup>

Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz appointed Philetus W. Norris the second superintendent of Yellowstone National Park on April 19, 1877. Just like his predecessor, Norris received little direction from Congress or his superiors at the Department of Interior.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Norris instituted plans for a road system, the initial stages of a wildlife management plan, construction of the first government buildings, and ultimately increased awareness of the importance of science in the park's overall value.

Norris obtained the park's first appropriation of \$10,000 for fiscal year 1879, and immediately began construction of a road connecting the park's headquarters at Mammoth Hot Springs to the Norris Geyser Basin and Old Faithful. Over the next few years, Norris continued an ambitious road building program. During his tenure, Yellowstone's road system expanded from 32 miles to 153 miles.<sup>4</sup>

The beginnings of a wildlife management plan and genesis of the future ranger corps were sparked by Norris's discussions of how to stop the wholesale slaughter of bison, bighorn sheep, moose, and other wild game. He proposed turning the northeastern portion of the park into a wildlife preserve, and hired Harry Yount as the first gamekeeper. Yount was stationed in the Lamar Valley and charged with protecting the game from poachers.<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning of his third season as superintendent (1879), Norris directed the construction of the first federally-funded building in a national park, a "fine shingle-roof block-house of hewn timber, with a balcony and three wings, and surmounted by a gun-turret" at Mammoth Hot Springs on top of a hill that became known as Capitol Hill. The building served as the administrative headquarters of the park. Norris also constructed an earth-roofed cabin at Old Faithful and another in the Lamar Valley for the gamekeeper. In 1881, he built the first federally-funded facility for the use of the public in a national park, an earth-roofed, two-room log bath house at the Queen's Laundry Spring.

An infant science program began with Norris's keeping of weather records, his observations and record keeping of fishes in park waters, and his collaboration with Professor Spencer Baird of the Smithsonian Institution and National Museum and the United States Commissioner of Fish and Fisheries regarding fish specimens. During Norris's time in the park, records were kept of eruptions of various geysers and hot springs, and other natural wonders were monitored. An awareness of archaeology and history of the park was established, with important scientific and anthropological collections being sent to the Smithsonian Institution. His advocacy for science in the park became well known and his efforts attracted interest by the scientific community. Norris toured the Rocky Mountain Indian reservations in 1880, seeking promises that the tribes would stay away from the park. His intent was to promote

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 216-17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 242, 244.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 252.

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visitation by lessening negative publicity, and showing the park was safe for visitors. Norris took the first steps toward education and interpretation for visitors when he had painted signboards for directional purposes and to identify important park features affixed to trees, posts, and rocks.

Norris remained as superintendent until 1882 when he was replaced by P.H. Conger of Iowa. Conger immediately initiated improvements to the headquarters building and roads throughout the park. During the summer, Conger's crew began the park's "summer headquarters" in the Firehole Basin, a centrally located site. There the superintendent supervised the construction of a storehouse, blacksmith shop, and coalhouse.<sup>6</sup>

In Conger's first report to the Secretary of the Interior, he commented on the extensive vandalism to the park's wonders. Before the end of 1882, General Philip Sheridan toured the park, and called for an enlargement of the park to provide a "secure retreat" for game, and asked for one or two companies of cavalry or mounted police to protect the park. His fellow officer, General D.B. Sackett, called for five or six men to patrol the geyser basins to protect the formations.<sup>7</sup>

The Sundry Civil Appropriation Act of 1883 provided several items benefiting Yellowstone National Park, including one that set the stage for the end of civilian supervision of the park. The act provided money for the employment of 10 assistants to the superintendent and an U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officer and troops to supervise the construction and improvement of roads and bridges. More importantly, the act authorized the Secretary of the Interior to request assistance from the Secretary of War to protect the park.<sup>8</sup>

During Conger's administration, a group of businessmen, supported by eastern financiers, gained an exclusive 10-year lease from the Department of Interior to provide visitor accommodations. This lease resulted in the formation of the Yellowstone Park Improvement Company and an attempt by the Northern Pacific Railroad to gain exclusive control over park business through that company. By 1885, the Yellowstone Improvement Company had lost many of its outrageous privileges in the park and declared bankruptcy. The Northern Pacific Railroad obtained the Yellowstone Park Improvement Company shares and renamed the company the Yellowstone Park Association in 1886.<sup>9</sup>

Despite his opposition to the Yellowstone Park Improvement Company's monopoly, or more likely because of it, Superintendent Conger came under attack for failing to protect the park, and was replaced by Robert Carpenter, who arrived at Yellowstone in September 1884. His 10-month tenure ended in scandal. Carpenter actively lobbied Congress for a bill to return a portion of the park to the public domain. The bill was supported by the Northern Pacific Railroad, which wanted to build a line to mines near the park's northeast corner.

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<sup>6</sup> P.H. Conger, *Annual Report of the Superintendent of the Yellowstone National Park to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1882* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1882).

<sup>7</sup> Mary Culpin, "History of Administration of Yellowstone National Park," Draft Historic Resources Study. On file in Branch of Cultural Resources, Yellowstone Center for Resources, YNP. Citing: P.H. Conger, *Annual Report of the Superintendent of the Yellowstone National Park to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1882* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1882); Haines, *The Yellowstone Story*, vol. 1, 267-68; "Congress Proposes to Check the Yellowstone National Park Grab," *The American Field*, January 20, 1883.

<sup>8</sup> Haines, *The Yellowstone Story*, vol. 1, 292, 325.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 263-65, 310-11.

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Carpenter, who was in Washington, D.C. during the bill's hearing, schemed with local allies to lay claim to the detached land. The bill failed to pass, but the plot became public, and Carpenter was removed from office.<sup>10</sup>

Carpenter's replacement, David Wear, asked for more park protection by increasing the number of assistants from 10 to 15. He also urged the enactment of a law to aid in the prevention of fires in the park. Public pressure to improve the protection of the park also came from visitors. The most intense pressure came from the U.S. Geological Survey, particularly from Arnold Hague and the director, John Wesley Powell. Powell pointed out to the Secretary of the Interior the importance of the park to the fields of science and archaeology. Powell suggested that the park be "utilized as a scientific station" by hiring a superintendent who not only had good business qualifications, but was interested in scientific research and could direct natural history surveys. He also recommended that the superintendent be authorized to select assistants who were competent to make natural history collections, observations in meteorology, and observations regarding the physical phenomena of the geysers. Powell called for a year-round force that could contribute toward science as well as guard the park.<sup>11</sup>

Superintendent Wear's tenure, generally described as efficient, ended in 1886, when Congress failed to provide funding for the park. Under the provisions of the Sundry Civil Appropriation Act of 1883, the Secretary of the Interior called upon the Secretary of War to detail troops to the park. The Secretary of the Interior ordered Wear to turn over all property and records to the army.<sup>12</sup> The U.S. Army administered the park until 1918, when it turned administrative duties over to the newly created National Park Service.

### **Conclusion**

From 1872 until 1886, civilian superintendents appointed by the Secretary of the Interior administered Yellowstone National Park. Five different men filled the position, some with honor and integrity, others incompetently and with self interest. Of the five superintendents, Philetus W. Norris stands out for the breadth of his accomplishments and their impact on the evolution of national park management policies. The Queen's Laundry Bath House is the only building in the park representing the civilian superintendent era. Although Norris constructed other buildings during his administration, none are extant. This building is the only representative of his contributions to national park history.

Less than 20 years after Norris' departure from the park, Captain Hiram M. Chittenden of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, described him as "one of the most unique and picturesque, as well as one of the most important, characters in the history of the Park."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 315-18.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Culpin, "History of Administration of Yellowstone National Park," Draft Historic Resources Study. On file in Branch of Cultural Resources, Yellowstone Center for Resources, YNP.

<sup>12</sup> Haines, *The Yellowstone Story*, vol. 1, 324-25.

<sup>13</sup> Hiram M. Chittenden, *The Yellowstone National Park* (1895; new ed., Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 111.



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Yellowstone Park historian Aubrey Haines wrote of Norris:

[He] was a fortunate blend of the pioneer and scientist—just the right man to open a wilderness. He was practical enough to see the immediate need for trails, roads, and buildings, and scholarly enough to record the area's human and natural history; in everything he was enthusiastic and sincere, and his achievements were monumental.<sup>14</sup>

**The Queen's Laundry Bath House**

The organic act setting aside Yellowstone National Park preserved the park's natural features "from injury or spoilation," while creating a "pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." These two precepts provided a foundation for conservation policy *and* tourism development. The Queen's Laundry Bath House represents the earliest recognition that providing for visitor accommodations was a legitimate use of federal funds within a national park. This policy would ultimately have a tremendous influence on the national parks, as the infrastructure for public access expanded. The results of that policy are seen today in the visitor centers, roads, hotels, stores, campgrounds and all their supporting facilities. As Richard West Sellars states in *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*: "Principally in an effort to ensure public enjoyment, nature itself would be manipulated in the national parks; to a large extent, natural resource management would serve tourism purposes."<sup>15</sup>

Norris provided a concise description of the Queen's Laundry Bath House and its purpose in his 1881 Annual Report. He explained that only two buildings were built that year because he was waiting for construction of a lumbermill, which would provide less expensive materials. He described one of the buildings constructed as:

A double-roomed earth-roofed bath house at the matchless Queen's Laundry, near the forks of the Fire Hole Rivers', together with wooden troughs for conveying water thereto, for the free use of the public.<sup>16</sup>

Norris had probably planned construction of the bath house the year before. In July 1880, while clearing a bridle path from near today's West Yellowstone into the Lower Geyser Basin, the Queen's Laundry spring gained his attention and was named.

It was while thus engaged that, during a Sabbath's rest and bathing recreation, some of the boys crossed from our camp to the attractive bordered pools below this great boiling fountain, and in one cool enough for bathing discovered its matchless cleansing properties, and from the long lines of bright-colored clothing soon seen drying upon adjacent stumps and branches, while there owners were gambolling like dolphins in the pools, the envious cooks and other camp attaches

<sup>14</sup> Haines, *The Yellowstone Story*, vol. 2 (Niwot, Colo.: University Press of Colorado, 1996), 449.

<sup>15</sup> Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 11.

<sup>16</sup> P.W. Norris, *Fifth Annual Report of the Superintendent of the Yellowstone National Park* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1881), 69.

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dubbed it the Laundry, with a variety of prefixes, of which that which I deemed the most appropriate adheres, and hence the name Queen's Laundry.<sup>17</sup>

After leaving Yellowstone, Norris wrote a guidebook to the park in which he describe a potential visit to the Queen's Laundry from Prospect Point or Marshall's Hotel,

through lovely groves and glades, and amid unique geyser and other hot-spring cones to visit and, by a bath-house which I constructed in 1881, or hopefully a better one, test for themselves the velvety feel and cleansing properties of these waters.<sup>18</sup>

The Queen's Laundry Bath House is mentioned in one other contemporary publication. In 1882, W.W. Wylie published one of the first "tour" guide books to Yellowstone. He recommended that people staying at Marshall's Hotel travel the two miles to the Queen's Laundry, "where the superintendent has arranged conveniences for bathing."<sup>19</sup>

The Queen's Laundry spring received a small mention in an 1886 book, but the bath house was not mentioned. The author said:

Right here is the spring known as the 'Queen's Laundry.' The spring is on a little elevation and pours forth a quantity of water which in places is quite hot. . . [and] is said to be a good place to do washing. I suppose it owes its high-sounding title to the fertile imagination of Col. Norris.<sup>20</sup>

Although, neither Norris nor Wylie says so, the Queen's Laundry Bath House does not appear to have ever been finished. This belief is based on the lack of access to the second room.

Yellowstone National Park Historian Aubrey Haines summarized his thoughts about the Queen's Laundry Bath House after he visited the site in 1961:

The implication . . . is that the bathhouse was not entirely finished during the summer of 1881, and that Norris' successor who took over management of the Park before another season was fairly begun (Patrick H. Conger became superintendent on March 31, 1882), did not care to complete the project. Obviously, the proprietor of the Marshall House was not enthusiastic about sending his guests two miles to use a facility of doubtful virtue in the eye's of a frontiersman, so, the lonely little bathhouse remained an isolated monument to its peculiar but energetic and sincere originator.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> P.W. Norris, *The Calumet of the Coteau* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1884), 252.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>19</sup> W.W. Wylie, *The Yellowstone National Park, or the Great American Wonderland* (Kansas City, Mo.: Ramsey, Millett & Hudson, 1882), 26.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>21</sup> Yellowstone National Park Historian [Aubrey L. Haines], Memorandum to Chief Park Naturalist, June 14, 1961.

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Three years after Haines wrote the above, the park proposed removing the Queen's Laundry Bath House. Haines wrote a scathing letter to the chief park naturalist condemning the proposal, and questioning a park philosophy that would obliterate a building that "has historical value of a high order as a unique remnant of an important period, and as the very beginning of Federal construction aimed at serving the park visitor" only for the purpose of restoring a "mediocre" thermal area to its natural state. He concluded by saying "[t]he proposal to remove the Queen's Laundry Bathhouse is a purist approach which is both unrealistic and destructive, and I hope it will receive no further consideration."<sup>22</sup>

The Queen's Laundry Bath House continues to stand, suffering from 120 years of neglect. The partial roof that remained when Haines visited the building in 1961 is now gone. The small log building is gradually being encircled by the springs after which it was named.

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<sup>22</sup> Yellowstone National Park Historian Aubrey L. Haines, Memorandum to Chief Park Naturalist, March 17, 1964.

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9. Major Bibliographic References

Chittenden, Hiram M. *The Yellowstone Story*. 1895; reprint, Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964.

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Sellers, Richard West. *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

Wylie, W.W. *The Yellowstone National Park, or the Great American Wonderland*. Kansas City, Missouri: Ramsey, Millett & Hudson, 1882.

Yellowstone National Park Historian [Aubrey L. Haines], Memorandum to Chief Park Naturalist, June 14, 1961.

\_\_\_\_\_, Memorandum to Chief Park Naturalist, March 17, 1964.