

CREATING A VISION OF GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK - PRESERVING THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF HARRISON R. CRANDALL



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♦ INTRODUCTION

Harrison and Hildegard Crandall arrived in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, in 1922—the beginning of a pivotal and turbulent period in local history. Some of the valley’s homestead and ranch traditions were about to be transformed into what is now the Grand Teton National Park. Harrison (or “Hank” as he preferred) and Hildegard (or “Hilda” as Hank preferred) lived through it all—swept up in the local saga of dry homesteading. However, the Crandall family homestead, located in the shadow of the Grand Tetons, was just the beginning. Hank carved out a more permanent place for his family in the landscape they loved by inventing a way to make a living as the Grand Teton National Park’s official photographer and resident artist. The Crandall family operated their art studios in the Park for a total of 34 years. A summary of the life, times, and art of the Crandall family is provided in an earlier edition of the UW—NPS Annual Reports (Barrick 2008). Today, Hank’s photographic legacy provides a way for Jackson Hole residents and Grand Teton visitors to enjoy early scenes of the Park.

We will never know how many thousands of Hank’s photographs were sold at the Crandall Studios, or at the drug stores and gift shops that sold the Crandall line of photos throughout Wyoming. Most of the surviving Crandall photos are now distributed around the nation, and are enjoyed as part of private collections. Therefore, until recently, it was difficult for the public to view more than a few Crandall photos at a time. However, as a result of the “Harrison R. Crandall—Creating a Vision of Grand Teton National Park” research initiative, many vintage Crandall photographs were discovered in the

files of the Grand Teton National Park archive. About 400 of the Park’s Crandall photos were electronically scanned and assembled into a digital photo archive. The Park’s digital archive will make the Crandall photographs more widely available for research and public enjoyment, and will minimize the future handling of the actual photographs in order to prevent potential damage to the aging photographic paper and emulsions.

The purpose here is to introduce 15 selected examples of the vintage Crandall photographs that are now part of the Grand Teton National Park digital archive. The examples were selected in order to show the range of subjects contained in the Park’s collection. Hank created many of these photographs on special order from the Park’s early management team during the late 1920’s, 1930’s, and 1940’s. In addition, the archive contains many vintage photos that were donated to the Park over the years from the Crandall Studio’s standard photo inventory.

Many of the Crandall photographs that are preserved in the Park’s archive are among the masterpieces of Grand Teton art. Moreover, some of these photographs rank among the nation’s finest examples of national park photography. Modern photographers often marvel at the accomplishments of early national park photographers—they worked with cumbersome cameras and field equipment, and fickle photographic papers and chemicals. Nonetheless, the inherent challenges of early photography did not diminish Hank’s attention to photographic detail, his thoughtful and artistic compositions, or the consistently excellent exposures of his photographic prints.

◆ SELECTED CRANDALL PHOTOGRAPHS

In 1929, the U.S. Congress established the original Grand Teton National Park. One of Hank's duties as the official park photographer was to record aspects of park life. In a classic (and now historically important) image, he captured the Grand Teton National Park's first staff, including the first Superintendent—Samuel T. Woodring (Figure 1). Sam Woodring was the Park's Superintendent from May 15, 1929 until July 6, 1934 (NPS 2006). The photo also depicts other historically important staff members. Mrs. Sam Woodring served as the Superintendent's secretary (Bonney and Bonney 1992). Dr. Fritiof M. Fryxell (Doc) and Phil Smith began climbing the Teton Range peaks as early as 1926. Doc Fryxell, a geologist, became the Park's first ranger-naturalist, and Smith was a homesteader that joined the ranger staff (Pritchard 2009). Eddy Bruce was the Park's first permanent ranger (Bonney and Bonney 1992).



Figure 1. The Grand Teton National Park staff during the summer of 1929: (left to right) Dr. Fritiof M. Fryxell, Superintendent Samuel T. Woodring, Mrs. Samuel T. Woodring, Edward Bruce, and Phil D. Smith (photo by Harrison R. Crandall, photo courtesy of Grand Teton National Park Archives).

The Park's digital photo archive includes a number of Crandall images that captured Superintendent Woodring surveying the Park landscape, and supervising construction projects. Hank and Sam Woodring formed a close working relationship. Hank's technique of portraying his subject in silhouette as they survey the scenery at a trail overlook is illustrated in Figure 2, in this case, with Superintendent Woodring actively engaged in the Western American lifestyle on horseback.



Figure 2. Superintendent Sam Woodring on horseback (photo by Harrison R. Crandall, photo courtesy of Grand Teton National Park Archives).

In the 1930's, the frontcountry of Grand Teton National Park was enhanced with new roads and trails. These facilities insured that millions of Americans could visit the Park, and access the backcountry. Hank no doubt enjoyed his many excursions into his beloved Tetons in order to document the construction or improvement of Grand Teton trails (Figure 3). Hank was also busy photographing work crews as they cut-and-filled, graded, and oiled the Park's roads (Figure 4). Note the combination of motorized (foreground) and horse-drawn (background) equipment in action. Of course, the roads needed to be maintained. The vintage rotary snow blower had its work cut out for it clearing a path through the deep snow (Figure 5).



Figure 3. Trail construction workers in Grand Teton National Park (photo by Harrison R. Crandall, photo courtesy of Grand Teton National Park Archives).



Figure 4. Road grading in Grand Teton National Park near Mt. Moran (photo by Harrison R. Crandall, photo courtesy of Grand Teton National Park Archives).



Figure 5. Rotary snow blower at work (photo by Harrison R. Crandall, photo courtesy of Grand Teton National Park Archives).

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was a public work program created for the unemployed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Great Depression. The CCC operated from 1933 until 1942. The CCC made important conservation and natural resource improvements to the federal lands, including the national parks. As early as 1933, Horace M. Albright, the Director of the National Park Service, envisioned the CCC working in the Grand Teton National Park in order to remove thousands of dead trees that lined the banks of Jackson Lake (NPS 2000). The trees were drowned by an engineered increase in the Lake level. When the CCC came to the Grand Tetons in 1935, Hank was there to document the dedication ceremony at the Jenny Lake CCC Camp (Figure 6). The Park's digital photo archive includes other photos of CCC work projects. For example, the CCC men of the Jackson Lake crew were housed in large tents (Figure 7).



Figure 6. Dedication ceremony of the Jenny Lake Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Camp on July 28, 1935 (photo by Harrison R. Crandall, photo courtesy of Grand Teton National Park Archives).



Figure 7. Jackson Lake Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Camp (photo by Harrison R. Crandall, photo courtesy of Grand Teton National Park Archives).

Menor's Ferry at the Snake River crossing is a classic Crandall photograph—Hank framed the famous ferry with the Tetons (Figure 8). Menor's Ferry once belonged to William D. Menor who came to Jackson Hole in 1894, taking up a homestead beside the Snake River, and constructing a ferryboat that became a vital crossing for the early settlers of Jackson Hole (NPS 2007).



Figure 8. Menor's Ferry at the Snake River crossing (photo by Harrison R. Crandall, photo courtesy of Grand Teton National Park Archives).

The Crandall Studio building was constructed on the family homestead in 1925-26, and opened for business in 1927 (Barrick 2008). Hank designed his studio to withstand a heavy snow load, and, as Figure 9 suggests, the building was adequately tested. The studio building was moved to the Jenny Lake area, where it now serves as a National Park visitor center.



Figure 9. Harrison R. Crandall Studio (at the Crandall homestead location) with Hank Crandall standing next to the porch (photo by Harrison R. Crandall, photo courtesy of Grand Teton National Park Archives).

Hank was not a technical mountain climber, but his interest in high mountain places attracted him to the base of summit routes in order to photograph early Teton climbers in their element. In a compelling composition, Hank captured two mountaineers considering their climbing prospects with the Grand Teton peak in the background (Figure 10). Hank's vintage photographs remind us of the basic equipment and clothing that aided and protected early Teton Range climbers.

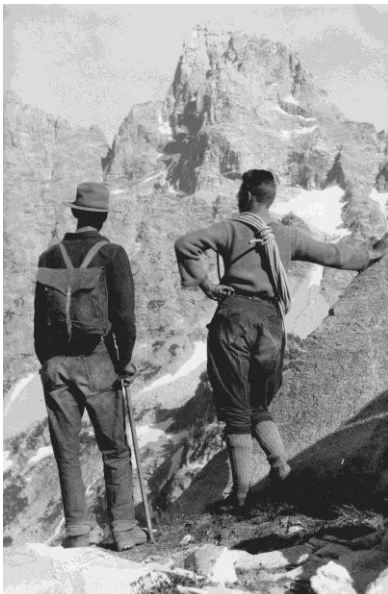


Figure 10. Mountaineers overlooking the Grand Teton peak (photo by Harrison R. Crandall, photo courtesy of Grand Teton National Park Archives).

One of Hank's iconic Western American theme images is entitled, "Packing over the Death Canyon Trail" at Lookout Point (Figure 11). The photograph is a powerful combination of the "cowboy" silhouette, and the sweeping Jackson Hole overlook. The density of the black color that was achieved in these silhouettes would impress any darkroom expert. Like many other early photographers, Hank's main role in the photographic process was to compose and execute the photographic negative, while darkroom experts were entrusted to render the photographic print. Herb Pownall (Hank's son-in-law) served in the Crandall darkroom for many years, and the final result testified to the teamwork and craftsmanship involved in operating the Crandall Studios (Barrick 2008).

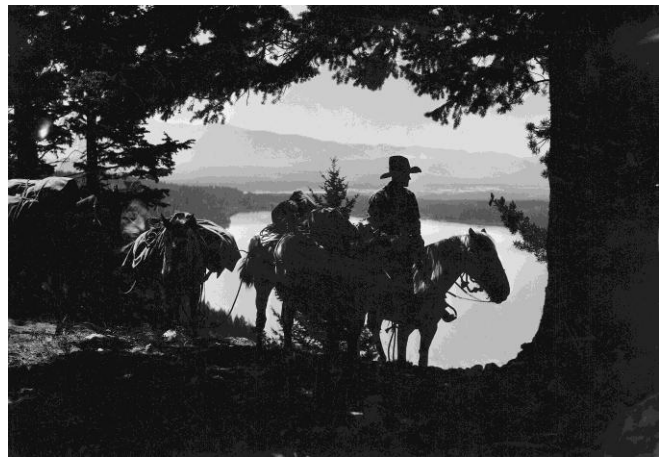


Figure 11. Packing over the Death Canyon Trail (Lookout Point) (photo by Harrison R. Crandall, photo courtesy of Grand Teton National Park Archives).

Early national park photographers had many daunting tasks. In order to keep his studio business going, Hank had to induce demand for his photographic products well before the advent of mass tourism and the souvenir art tradition. Hank's success was reinforced by his keen sense of what photographic subjects that the guests of the local dude ranches, and early Park tourists, would want to take home with them. One of his innovative ideas was to extend the Western theme by posing "cowgirls" with their horses. Hank often used family members and neighbors as models in order to accomplish his vision. A classic example of Hank's cowgirl image is simply entitled "Beauties" (Figure 12). The Grand Teton mountain backdrop is an ever present reminder of Hank's sacred mountains.



Figure 12. Beauties (photo by Harrison R. Crandall, photo courtesy of Grand Teton National Park Archives).

Hank packed his photographic equipment up steep trails in order to capture the beauty of the Grand Teton high country. The image entitled “Camping on Lake Solitude” captured the tranquility to be found in the Teton wilderness (Figure 13). Hank added drama to his compositions by using the full range of black and white contrast. The mountain landscape is framed by the towering “black” silhouetted tree and the “whites” of the sunlit tents. The overall effect, with both natural and human elements, seems to suggest that the temporary presence of campers is a welcomed activity in the Teton wilderness. Hank also composed wilderness images without evidence of humans. For example, “Alligator Lake at Alaska Basin” is one of his high country masterpieces (Figure 14).



Figure 13. Camping on Lake Solitude (photo by Harrison R. Crandall, photo courtesy of Grand Teton National Park Archives).



Figure 14. Alligator Lake at Alaska Basin (photo by Harrison R. Crandall, photo courtesy of Grand Teton National Park Archives).

Hank’s photographs captured the many activities that attracted people into the Grand Teton National Park, in part, to promote public recreation. His image “A nice one from the Snake River” illustrates one type of fun—fishing. The image is almost a moral statement about the outdoor benefits that Americans can share in by visiting their national parks (Figure 15).



Figure 15. A Nice One from the Snake River (ca. 1944) (photo by Harrison R. Crandall, photo courtesy of Grand Teton National Park Archives).

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