

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Riverside Park, Laurel

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 1425 U.S. Highway 212 South, 59044

City or town: Laurel State: Montana County: Yellowstone

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B X C ___ D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title:

State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>5</u>	<u>2</u>	buildings
<u>3</u>	_____	sites
<u>1</u>	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>9</u>	<u>2</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- LANDSCAPE: park
- RECREATION AND CULTURE: outdoor recreation
- SOCIAL: meeting hall, clubhouse
- GOVERNMENT:
- DEFENSE: military facility
- _____

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- LANDSCAPE: park
- RECREATION AND CULTURE: outdoor recreation
- SOCIAL: clubhouse, meeting hall
- _____
- _____
- _____

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: Rustic

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Bungalow/Craftsman (simplified)

OTHER: Recreation Facility Park

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: EARTH, WOOD: Weatherboard

Walls: STONE (river rock cobble veneer), STUCCO, WOOD, METAL, CONCRETE

Roof: ASPHALT, METAL

Narrative Description

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

Riverside Park (also referred to as “the Park” throughout this document) of Laurel, Montana, represents a locally significant public landscape with historic resources associated with community development, New Deal programs, military history, and community recreation activities. The second-oldest park in Laurel, the property nestles along the south bank of the Yellowstone River approximately one mile south of the Laurel Downtown Historic District (NR Reference #10000768).¹ Riverside Park’s beginnings date to 1923, when a private owner constructed a dance hall. Within a year after the City of Laurel’s purchase of the property in August 1934, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration’s (FERA) Transient Relief Service and later the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and National Youth Administration initiated a period of building construction and occupation that lasted through 1939. The US military used the property as a World War II prisoner of war camp that occupied the district from 1944 to 1945. Subsequently, local civic organizations, including the Boy Scouts of America, Laurel Rod and Gun Club, Laurel Rifle Club, American Legion Post 123, Girl Scouts, Laurel Jaycees, and the Laurel Lion’s Club leased the buildings and park property for social and sporting activities. The Riverside Park District consists of five contributing historic buildings, three contributing sites, two contributing structures, and two noncontributing buildings. Riverside Park currently operates as a recreational and camping area, a meeting spot for local social service clubs, as well as a wedding and party venue.

Setting and Location

Laurel, Montana rises just north of the Yellowstone River, one mile west of and upriver from its confluence with the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone, and approximately 16 miles west-southwest

¹ Elsie P. Johnston, *Laurel's Story, A Montana Heritage* (Laurel: Laurel Historical Research Committee 1979), p. 76.

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of the state's largest city, Billings. The Riverside Park Historic District occupies 19.7 acres in the NW¼ of Section 22 and S½ of Section 15, all in T2S R24E on the Yellowstone's south bank, about one mile south of Laurel's city center. Mature cottonwoods stand throughout the Park, providing shade and beauty to the landscape. Additional deciduous trees and shrubs, including mountain laurel and serviceberry, appear along the district edges and beside the buildings, while grassy lawns offer graceful spaces throughout the Park. Narrow paved vehicle paths provide access, branching off from Hwy 212 near the Park's entrance and southwest corner of the district. The circulation system's roads branch north to the campsites and river and loop through the building cluster.

An elevated berm rebuilt after a 2011 flood parallels the Park's north edge and mitigates flooding from the Yellowstone River; the berm's south edge constitutes the district's north boundary. Highway 212's east edge serves as the west boundary, connects Laurel to the city of Red Lodge, and eventually becomes the Red Lodge-Cooke City Approach Road Historic District (NR Reference # 14000219) that leads through the Beartooth Mountains and on to the northeast entrance to Yellowstone National Park. The Laurel Oil Refinery rises across the Yellowstone River to the northwest and the Laurel water treatment facility stands directly across from Riverside Park on the north bank of the Yellowstone River. The Clark Fork of the Yellowstone River, one mile south and southeast of Riverside Park, joins the Yellowstone River two miles downstream. The eastern wooded site of the Park, tucked behind the elevated shooting range backstop, originally served as a Laurel city landfill but now finds use as a historic nature hiking area within the historic district.

Riverside Park Resources

Riverside Park's standing resources reflect a WPA Rustic aesthetic, following the early twentieth century architectural movement made popular by federal construction programs in the National Parks and New Deal projects. The historic district contains five contributing buildings: Riverside Hall/Jaycee Hall, a Small River Cobbled Building, the Bath House/American Legion Hall, the Transient Camp Barracks Building/Laurel Rifle Club, and the Laurel Rod and Gun Club Building. Additional contributing resources include three sites (a campground/picnic area, rifle range, woodland area), and two structures (rifle range backstop/berm, circulation). The Park has two noncontributing buildings including one modern vault public restroom and a concrete block public restroom. The City of Laurel recently removed several resources - the 1935 caretakers building, a log cabin, rifle range shelter, and clay pigeon sheds.

Resource Number #01. Transient Camp Mess Hall and Kitchen (aka Riverside Hall/Jaycee Hall), August 1935 (one contributing building)

Constructed in August 1935 for the New Deal-era transient camp, the mess hall and kitchen building transitioned to a social meeting space and dance hall within a decade.² Located in the

² The original building on the lot, the mess hall and kitchen, measuring 72 by 36 feet and square wing, 30 by 30 feet, burned down just three weeks after construction. According to the *Billings Gazette*, fire gutted the "mess hall and kitchen of the federal transient relief camp" in late June of 1935. The new combination mess hall and kitchen building was rebuilt over the existing foundation later that summer. Elsie P. Johnston, *Laurel's Story, A Montana Heritage* (Laurel: Laurel Historical Research Committee 1979), p. 76; "Transient

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center of the park, south of the American Legion/Bath House building, the mess hall's modified-cross footprint stands upon a concrete wall foundation. Its cross-hipped asphalt-shingle roof features deep, unboxed eaves and exposed rafter tails, and covers the main north-south ridgeline and slopes as well as the east rear wing. Metal vent pipes punctuate the ridgelines at the north, south, and east slope intersections, and a tall river rock exterior chimney rises from edge of the rear (east) wing's north slope. Additional vents appear on the south and east slopes. A full-height, front-gabled entry porch extends from the center third of the west elevation. Coursed river rock harvested from the Yellowstone River clads the exterior walls, and cement lintels and sills define the window openings. Original six-over-six light double-hung windows remain in place throughout the building, though plywood covers many openings. Called Riverside Hall throughout the 1940s and 1950s, its name changed to Jaycee Hall when the Laurel Jaycees began leasing the building in the 1960s.³ The Laurel Lion's Club took over the lease in 2023.

West (front) elevation: As noted above, an enclosed gable-front porch dominates the center third of building's west (front) elevation and features dark-stained shingles in its gable end. The gable's deep eaves reveal dimensional-lumber purlins beneath each slope and notched into the narrow fascia. A continuous lintel and sill wrap around the porch above the window and door level and beneath the window level, respectively. Plywood fills the porch openings, including a single large opening centered on its north and south elevations, a window opening set in the center of its west wall, and the door opening on the south side of the west wall. A small wood-frame enclosed entry extends from the porch's west elevation's north side. Clad in smooth stucco and topped with a shallow gable roof, the extension contains only one opening: a plywood entry door centered on its south wall and accessed by a concrete ramp. The extensions' roof exhibits deep unboxed eaves, exposed rafter tails, and vertical wood siding in its gable end.

On either side of the centered porch, the mess hall's west elevation contains two window openings. During the historic period, each opening contained a pair of six-over six wood-frame windows. Plywood covers the southernmost pair on the south side, and the innermost window and outermost window on the north side.

South (side) elevation: The mess hall's south elevation, excluding the porch described above, features six window openings, three evenly spaced across the west and middle bays. At the time of the building's construction, each opening contained a pair of six-over-six double hung windows. The west bay's west and east openings now display plywood infill, and an air conditioning unit supported by a metal bracket protrudes from the west side of the westernmost opening. The lone infill within the middle bay occurs at the west side of the easternmost opening. The south elevation's third and easternmost bay has no openings.

Mess Hall is Burned," *Billings Gazette*, June 29, 1935, p. 6. "Interesting Article Reveals Workings of Transient Camp," *Roundup Record Tribune*, November 21, 1935, p. 4.

³ "Callers Chant Circle Square: Dance Festival to Draw 25 Groups to Riverside Hall," *Laurel Outlook*, December 4, 1957; "Alderman Hear Discussion on swimming pool, Riverside Hall," *Laurel Outlook*, August 3, 1966, p.3.

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East (rear) elevation: The hall's east elevation displays three bays. The southernmost bay contains a centered pair of six-over six windows, and a single-entry door punctuates the middle bay at its north side. Clad in river cobbles, a large, one-story shed roofed extension comprises the north bay of the building's east (rear) elevation. A large wood-frame, stucco-clad opening dominates the south two-thirds of the extension's east wall. A single-entry door to the south and a ribbon of three windows, covered with wood panels, appear within the wood frame opening. To the north, the extension's east wall also contains a single pedestrian door opening covered with plywood and supported by a concrete lintel.

North (side) elevation: The building's north elevation exhibits three bays, not including the front porch described above. Three evenly spaced window openings punctuate the westernmost bay, all which display concrete sills and lintels; the openings originally contained a pair of six-over-six double-hung units. Plywood fills the westernmost window opening, the center pair, and the easternmost window opening. An air conditioning unit, supported by a metal bracket, fills the west window space of the easternmost opening. This west bay extends to the north beyond the middle bay's plane, and therefore has an east elevation. That east elevation displays an opening that originally held a pair of six-over-six windows. Plywood covers all but the north window's upper sash.

The north elevation's center bay contains two openings for paired windows across the elevation's western two-thirds. Six-over six double-hung fill these openings, except at the west end, where plywood surrounds an air conditioning unit. To the east of these windows stands a cobblestone exterior chimney. Its wide base tapers near the roofline to the narrower shaft above, and a cricket diverts water at the chimney-roofline intersection. A single six-over-six window opening punctuates the east side of the center bay. The north elevation's unfenestrated easternmost bay comprises the north exterior wall of the east elevation's shed extension.

Resource #02: Laurel Rod and Gun Club, 1939 (one contributing building)

The Laurel Rod and Gun Club, a one-story post and beam log building most likely built by workers of the National Youth Administration in 1939.⁴ It stands on a concrete foundation on the east side of the Park's building cluster, east of the historic outdoor rifle range.⁵

The long rectangular building features a side gable roof with three intersecting dropped gables centered on the north façade and two intersecting dropped gables on the south elevation: asphalt

⁴ Some confusion regarding the date of construction exists. The 2017 City of Laurel Riverside Park Master Plan suggests a date of construction of 1929. However, newspaper accounts from the 1930s indicate construction occurred in 1939 by the National Youth Administration (NYA) as a maintenance shop and later leased by the Laurel Rod and Gun Club in August of 1940 under a ten-year agreement; "Rod and Gun Club Leases Building Tract from City: Directors Take 10 Year Lease on Former Shop and Strip of Land at Riverside," *Laurel Outlook*, August 28, 1940, p. 1.

⁵ The Laurel Rod and Gun Club made improvements to the building in 1964. Elsie P. Johnston, *Laurel's Story, A Montana Heritage* (Laurel: Laurel Historical Research Committee 1979), pp. 269-270; The building has been in poor condition since a 2001 flood. "City of Laurel: Riverside Park Master Plan," Prepared by Great West Engineering, December 2017.

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shingles top the entire roof. Exposed purlin ends support the deep, open eaves at the gable ends and log brackets support the eaves beneath the front and rear elevation's east bays. All gables feature cladding of wood shingles painted brown. The north roof slope displays an extended metal furnace vent projecting from the east end of the building. A beautiful cobble slope chimney punctures the south roof, positioned between the two gable projections, and two small metal vents project from near the roof ridge. Horizontal logs clad the entire building. Original wood windows throughout the building display one-over-one single-hung designs of various heights and widths, and plywood fills several openings.⁶

North elevation: The Laurel Rod and Gun Club Building faces north, and the façade features five bays defined by log and dimensional lumber posts. Three intersecting dropped gables protect the center bays. The east bay steps back several feet from the façade's plane. The westernmost bay topped by a shed roof is likely a small addition. The larger center gable features exposed rafter tails under a deep soffit and the two neighboring gables display sawn logs under deep soffits. Fenestration includes an overwide metal person door in the center bay above which is affixed a decorative wood sign broadcasting "Laurel Rod & Gun Club;" a concrete walk approaches this door. Windows include paired single hungs in the west shed roof bay, small paired rectangular units in the adjoining gable bay, a single one-over-one single hung flanked by *faux* shutters in the east gable bay and paired one-over-one single hung units separated by three vertical boards in the east shed bay; the easternmost window of the east bay is boarded over.

West elevation: the west wall displays a two-light metal person door approached by a concrete walk. Window openings include two dimensionally equal openings, one that holds two one-over-one single hung units separated by three vertical boards and another that displays a one-over-one single hung with three vertical boards and plywood infill. The gable holds two boarded over openings. Electrical boxes and lines affix to the wall between the sets of ribbon windows.

South elevation: small paired dropped gables project from near the center of the south elevation connected by a short shed roof with vertical plank wall that closes the distance between the two. A short shed roof covers what likely is a small addition on the wall's west end (matching the shed roof addition on the directly opposite north wall). The wall lacks any entry but holds paired one-over-one single hungs in the far east end and a single one-over-one single hung flanked by *faux* shutters in both gable projections; the window opening in the west gable projection is boarded over. A metal vent projects from the upper wall of the west shed addition.

East elevation: the east wall holds a centered solid metal door flanked by one-over-one single hung units separated by three vertical boards. The gable holds two boarded over openings. A single concrete step approaches the door and a light projects horizontally from the gable above the doorway.

⁶ This building represents the lone building that lacks cobble veneer. A reference in the *Laurel Outlook* in May of 1936 noted this, "the miniature village...with the exception of the dining hall (measuring 72 feet x 42 feet), the permanent buildings will be veneered in stone from the Yellowstone river bottom...." "Riverside Will be one of the Most Unique and Complete Playgrounds in the State," *Laurel Outlook*, May 27, 1936, p. 10.

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Resource #03: Small Stone Building, ca. 1935 (one contributing building)

The one-story 21-foot by 18-foot stone building that rests on a concrete foundation was built circa 1935. It stands west of the Laurel Rod and Gun Club Building, northeast of the Transient Camp Mess Hall and Kitchen, and south of the historic Bath House and Transient Camp Barracks/Laurel Rifle Club.

An asphalt shingle-covered hipped roof with open eaves with exposed rafters protects the handsome building. This square building was constructed at the same time as many of the other early buildings in this cluster, circa 1935; a year later cobbles from the nearby river were affixed to the exterior. Original wood entries and window frames remain with multi-light units in two of the four window openings; two window openings are boarded over with plywood. Concrete sills and angled lintels below the rafter ends complete the windows and the same style lintel tops the entries.

South elevation: This building holds two entries, one in the south elevation along with a single window. The offset south wall entry contains a three-panel wood door; the upper portion of the door displays vertical boards suggesting an underlying covered window opening. A single concrete step approaches the door. A small electrical box affixes to the door's bottom with wires leading to a narrow PVC pipe projecting from the nearby ground.

East elevation: This elevation boasts a slightly offset five-panel wood door painted green fronted by a one-light metal storm door. A two-step concrete stoop leads to the door with a small concrete entry pad approach to the south. This elevation lacks window openings.

West elevation: Two window openings appear in this elevation. One is clad with plywood and the other sports a six-over-six double hung unit.

North elevation: This wall holds a single window opening infilled with plywood.

Resource #04: Bath House/American Legion Hall, ca. 1935 (one contributing building)

The single-story Bath House/American Legion Building stands west of the Transient Camp Barracks/Laurel Rifle Club. The building measures approximately 60 feet north-south by 40 feet east-west and likely rests on a concrete foundation. Similar to its neighboring buildings, the original portion of the building dates to circa 1935 with the cobble wall application dating a year later. North and south additions and later cobble application dates to 1948.

The original construction includes the central hipped roof mass with a north wing that was likely topped with a gable roof. A later 1940s-era full-width gable roof addition occurred to the south and a smaller addition enclosed the east wall of the north wing resulting in a full-width reconfiguration of the gable roof at this end. Asphalt shingles clad both the hipped and gable roofs. Open eaves with exposed rafters occur on both the central hipped block and the south gable addition proffering some Craftsman detail; the north gable roof displays boxed eaves. The hipped mass features an eave wall stone chimney off the west elevation and a round metal vent projecting from its west roof slope. A cinder block chimney punctures the west roof slope of the

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north addition and a PVC vent pipe extends from the east roof slope. River cobbles clad much of the building with the original construction displaying a redder appearance and the subsequent cobble cladding exhibiting a gray color. The later cobbling effort included reinforcing the corners of the exposed 1936 cobble cladding. Locations excluded from cobble cladding include the ground floor of the south elevation and the east and north walls of the north addition covered with vertical boards; vertical board siding painted white covers the north and south gables. Except for a boarded-over window opening in the east wall of the north addition, concrete lintels and sills grace window openings and the entry in the north elevation; original paired six-by-six light sliding windows occupy the window openings except for the north wall that holds two single six-light units.

North elevation: A slightly recessed central entry that holds a modern wood door flanked by a single six-light window defines this elevation. The vertical board addition that dates to 1948 encompasses the east third of this side of the building; it is stepped back about 18 inches from the original construction. The west one-third of the wall features an open patio area with concrete pad covered by the gable roof; paired windows appear in both the west and north walls protected by the gable roof. The gable roof protects an air conditioning unit, electrical box and connections, and a gas meter. Motion detector lights appear immediately below the gable ridge.

West elevation: This striking elevation displays the original 1936 cobble cladding, the later 1940s-era cobble cladding, and the robust 1948 eave chimney that extends several feet above the roof. Paired six-by-six sliding windows appear on each side of the chimney. The combination hipped roof flanked by the gables emphasizes the building's length. The north end of the elevation displays the open patio area with concrete pad described above.

South elevation: the wall of the 1948 south addition displays a very simplistic presentation consisting of vertical board cladding on both the lower elevation and gable. A modern steel door centers below the gable, accessed by a single step. The American Legion seal and motion detector lights appear immediately below the gable ridge.

East elevation: The east elevation consists of the wall of the original hipped roof block and later 1948 additions to the north and south. The north one-third of the elevation presents the vertical board siding while the middle and south sections feature cobble cladding dating to 1936 and 1948, respectively. Windows include a boarded over opening in the north addition and three six-by-six sliding units in the original block.

This building stands as the "Bath House with de-lousing station" built in 1935 during the Transient Camp occupation.⁷ In 1947, American Legion Post 123 began permanently renting the

⁷ G.R Studebaker, "Interesting Article Reveals Workings of Transient Camp," *Roundup Record Tribune*, November 21, 1935, p. 4

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building after years of previously meeting in downtown Laurel at the L.L. Club.⁸ The Club made significant additions to the building in 1948 that included the new stone fireplace, with work executed by Legion Post 123, “carried on by veterans who have donated their time and skill.”⁹

Resource #05: Transient Camp Barracks (Laurel Rifle Club), ca. 1934 and ca. 1955 (one contributing building)

The Transient Camp Barracks lies immediately east of the Bath House/Legion Hall. It displays a narrow rectilinear stepped footprint that measures roughly 50 north-south by 210 feet east-west at its greatest extent; a small shed addition projects from the north wall near the center of the building. The building rests on a concrete foundation and is an amalgam of three buildings; the two end sections that anchor the building, originally built circa 1935 and clad with river cobbles in 1936, joined by a later intermediary section constructed and clad with river cobbles in the mid-1950s, that links the east and west buildings and forms a single unit. The two original buildings were built as camp barracks and possibly for use as an infirmary.

Because of its patchwork construction, the roof consists of intersecting hips on the east and west ends connected by a gable roof. Asphalt shingles top the entire roof and eaves are boxed, except for the eave of the north elevation’s shed roof addition that features open eaves and exposed rafters. The roof displays two slope metal vent pipes near the center of both the north and south roof slopes and a ridge turbine ventilator. All of the exposed walls of the two 1935-anchor buildings display river cobble cladding while the north wall and the north wall’s shed addition exhibit vertical board cladding painted tan. Entries consist of single or double width openings filled with either five-panel wood doors, solid wood doors, or paired solid wood doors; one opening is infilled with horizontal boards. Window openings appear only in walls clad with river cobbles and feature concrete sills. Approximately half of the window openings are infilled with plywood; those not infilled hold either paired six-over-six double hung units, single six-over-six double hungs, or a ribbon of three 6-light units.

South elevation: This elevation faces the Park, drawing the eye of visitors due to its large scale and cobble finish. The red hue of the river cobbles of the 1935 east and west end blocks differentiates those two original portions of the building from gray cobbles that clad the center connecting portion. This elevation holds five doorways and 10 window openings. A single paired door provides ingress to the building’s central section; the remaining doors and windows all occur in the east and west 1935 constructions. A concrete approach leads to the westernmost and central door opening and a single concrete step accesses the remaining entries.

East elevation: This elevation consists of the 1935 construction and 1936 cobble cladding and presents an L-shape. The north wall section of the L holds a doorway with wood door and two

⁸ “Veterans Complete Arrangements for Memorial Day Observances at Park City and Laurel Cemeteries,” *Laurel Outlook*, May 17, 1944, p.1; “Council Acts on Building Rentals, Parking of Busses,” *Laurel Outlook*, June 4, 1947.

⁹ Legionnaires Work to Improve Their Building in Park, *Laurel Outlook*, January 7, 1948.

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window openings filled with plywood; three window openings, one partially infilled, appear in the south wall portion of the L.

West elevation: Similar to the east elevation, this elevation consists of the 1935 construction and 1936 cobble cladding and presents an L-shape. The north wall section of the L contained a window opening but is infilled with gray river cobbles, indicating its closure in the mid-1950s. The south wall portion of the L appeared to hold two windows and two doors, the openings of which are now filled with gray river cobbles, indicating their closure in the mid-1950s.

North elevation: This elevation presents siding harkening back to the 1936 cobble cladding of the 1935 anchor buildings and the later wood siding used to cover the walls of the intermediary section of the building. The far west end of the north elevation's L (the 1935 construction) features a single doorway filled with a wood door and two plywood covered window openings and the eastern portion of the L holds two window openings, one infilled; the infilled opening holds an exterior fan.

The central length of the building lacks fenestration displaying only the vertical board cladding. An exterior fan with plywood surround projects from the wall just west of the shed addition. The far east end of the elevation includes the 1935 anchor building with 1936 cobble cladding. The west section of the elevation's cobbled L (the 1935 construction) features two window openings, both infilled with plywood, and the far east cobbled north wall holds two paired window openings with one of the two units covered with plywood.

Resource #06: Concrete Block Restroom, ca. 1984 (one noncontributing building)
Constructed around 1984, the concrete block restroom represents a newer but important addition to Riverside Park in terms of visitor comfort. Formerly used by campers and park guests, the building does not contribute to the historic nature of the park due to lack of age.

It stands on a concrete pad toward the west edge of the property near the main Park's entrance. The building features a rectangular footprint and displays a gable roof topped with asphalt shingles. Boxed eaves complete the roof. A PVC vent pipe, slant metal vent, and light puncture the east roof slope. The gables feature vertical panel siding painted green and the building lacks windows.

The south end of the west wall contains a recessed entry filled with a metal door; two metal vents project from the north end and central portion of the upper elevation. The placement of the entry and vents mirror the west elevation. Both the east and west entries are approached by a slightly angled concrete pad. The north gable elevation holds two slightly recessed entries filled with metal doors. The south gable elevation holds a single slightly recessed entry that contains a metal door and an electrical box attaches to the wall west of the door.

Resource #07. Public Restroom Building, north ca. 2020 (one noncontributing building).
A modern single vault toilet on a poured concrete pad stands near the northwest corner of the property boundary near the Yellowstone River. The side gable restroom is topped with asphalt

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shingles and displays open eaves finished with soffits. Vertical wood paneling painted brown clads the walls. Entry is via a metal door with lower vent in the east wall. The north and south walls hold a single fixed triangular light. A large metal vent pipe projects out of the concrete pad and up the outside of the west wall. A vertical wood panel privacy wall stands about three feet east of the entry and supports the roof's east end.

Campground and Picnic Area, ca. 1920s (one contributing site)

The historic campground and picnic area lies in the northwest portion of the district with access provided by a circular drive that begins at the highway and travels northeast, then southwest, before angling back to the southeast to reconnect near the beginning of the loop. The campground consists of 35 recreational vehicle sites, camper pull through spaces, and tent sites. Each site is level, and several holds a modern picnic table and hearth. A blacktop drive accesses each vehicular recreational site. Mature cottonwood trees provide shade from the heat of summer and a buffer from winds. Large multi-gallon garbage cans are scattered around the campground area and the large concrete bock restroom stands within easy walking distance.

Camping occurred soon after the calendar flipped into the 1920s during the early period and rise of tourist campgrounds.¹⁰ The campground proved popular for decades prior to a 2011 flood with a number of different organizations and visitors finding accommodations here. In 1938, this area hosted individual tent sites and small single occupancy log cabins that stood parallel to the river built by the National Youth Administration.¹¹ The cabins, sold and moved in 1959, could be rented by travelers if tent camping seemed untenable or undesirable.¹² The campground provided water hookups for travelers prior to the 2011 flood, an event that closed the campground for maintenance. During the summer of 2020, the City of Laurel approved campground improvements that included repaving camping spots, placement of fire pits, and adding vault toilets.¹³ In 2023, the campsites were once again available to the public.

Historic Rifle Range, ca. mid 1940s (one contributing site) and Backstop (one contributing structure)

The historic rifle range lies toward the eastern end of the Park, just east/southeast of the Laurel Rod and Gun Club building. The rifle range measures approximately 100 yards, generally west-east, and presently consists of a flat area covered with grass; a large north-south trending dirt berm, or backstop, marks the east end of the range. The contributing backstop/berm stands about six to seven feet above the surrounding ground surface, measures about 15-20 feet wide, and about 270 feet long. By the early 1960s, the backstop provided the useful benefit of separating the Park from the nascent landfill to the east—now a part of the Park. Three large fan-shaped shooting pads remain at the west end of the rifle range. They consist(ed) of a concrete boundary

¹⁰ "Cody Woman Buys Park Near Laurel," *Billings Gazette*, May 14, 1926.

¹¹ "N.Y.A. Erecting Machine Shop at Riverside Park," *Laurel Outlook*, December 14, 1938.

¹² "Laurel Council Leases Riverside Park Cabins," *Billings Gazette*, July 4, 1946, p. 5.

¹³ City of Laurel, *Riverside Park Campground Construction 2020*, <https://cityoflaurelmontana.com/publicworks/project/riverside-park-campground-construction-2020>, accessed October 2021.

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and radiating sunburst alignments with gravel laid between the areas of concrete; two are quite well-defined and retain much of their gravel pad while the one to the north is mostly infilled with grass.

Although metal trap houses/clay pigeon boxes and an outdoor open shooting shelter were removed by the City of Laurel in 2022 or 2023, the footprint of the shelter remains providing a visual connection to the range field and backstop in the distance. Several National Rifle Association sanctioned events occurred at the rifle range throughout its history and it served an important role and attraction to the denizens of Laurel.

Woodland Area, 1966 (one contributing site)

The triangular in shape Woodland Area consists of vegetated trail space and encompasses the land east of the rifle range backstop. The area measures approximately 500 feet north-south at its greatest width by 750 feet east-west. This Woodland Area occupies the location of one of the City of Laurel's landfills reclaimed by the City and annexed to the Park around 1966. The heavily treed area, dominated by cottonwoods, allows those seeking quieter confines an opportunity to distance themselves from the general mass of Park visitors that use the main open areas. Trails meander through the area, many leading to river access and views.

Small Scale Resources (not included in resource count)

A number of small scale features occur in the Riverside Park area and include, but are not limited to, the Park entry sign near the highway, an informational sign regarding camping, and a number of short concrete posts that parallel a few of the drives.

Circulation/Spatial Organization (one contributing structure)

The circulation system generally reflects that of the historic layout, especially since the construction of the buildings in the 1930s. Drives that access recent camping areas south of the Transient Camp Mess Hall and Kitchen are recent but are excluded from the National Register boundary. The roads that meander around and near the buildings date to the construction of the buildings and the road that accesses the entire property from Highway 212 also provides a similar ingress as it has for around 100 years. The roads remain unpaved as they have for decades. The spatial organization of the property tightly ties to the circulation pattern as the buildings' placement occurred with forethought toward the Park's eventual return to the City of Laurel for full recreational use. One road leads to a reconstructed boat ramp installed in 2013; the boat ramp itself falls outside the north edge of the National Register boundary slightly beyond the south edge of the flood berm constructed in 2011 that parallels the river. The rifle range and its associated backstop/berm occupy the same location they have since the 1940s as does the woodland area that dates to the 1960s.

Integrity:

Riverside Park retains fair integrity. In terms of integrity of location, setting, feeling and association, it presents very strong integrity. The Park obviously lies in its original historic location and retains many of the historic touchstones including the landscape and vegetation that enable integrity of setting, feeling, and association to shine. The footprint of historic activities

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associated with the Park, such as camping or picnicking, remains albeit with some modification as the Park evolved through the decades. Many, though not all, of the historic buildings that date to the Government use and later public use of the Park remain in their original locations, a product of the City's foresight of building placement for future Park use; changes to these buildings, such as the application of cobble cladding of several of them and the construction of a conjoining segment that linked the two barracks buildings occurred within the period of significance. Most of the buildings retain fair to good integrity of workmanship, design, and materials—again reflecting their period of construction and the style popular at the time employed by the WPA.

Changing recreational pursuits left their print upon the park. When local sportsmen discovered the potential the Park held, they opened a rifle range complete with backstop/berm to thwart forward progress of wayward bullets. By the mid-1960s, an area that once hosted a landfill found a second life as part of the Park landscape and now serves visitors as a wooded area with trees and trails.

The recent loss of some resources is unfortunate and does diminish the property's integrity, however, not to such a degree as to preclude the appreciation of the Park, its history, and its remaining resources. The Park's functionality and service of use to both the Government and the public, continues to yield a vibrant and important space to those who live locally and others travelling the Interstate 90 corridor or travelling south to the Town of Red Lodge.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ENTERTAINMENT / RECREATION

ARCHITECTURE

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

MILITARY

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Periods of Significance

1923-1974

Significant Dates

1923 (Initial use of Riverside Park for recreation)
1934 (Beginning of use by federal agencies)
1945 (Beginning of use exclusively for recreation)

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Federal New Deal Programs: FERA and Works Progress Administration, 1934-1942.
City of Laurel, Parks Committee

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)]

Riverside Park is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A and Criterion C. Under Criterion A, Riverside Park gains significance in the areas of entertainment/recreation and politics/government reflecting its long-standing use for enjoyment by the local community starting in the 1920s, its use and development during the Great Depression of the 1930s through the involvement of Federal agency, and its use during World War II as a prisoner of war camp in 1944-1945. Under Criterion C, the property's contributing buildings all date to Works Progress Administration construction and embody the style that emphasizes a WPA Rustic aesthetic with Craftsman touches, a style proffered by New Deal programs at the time; the building stock includes both log buildings and buildings clad with river cobbles from the nearby Yellowstone River.

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Significant dates include 1923 when the first (nonextant) dance hall and camping area (extant) were constructed on private land. The City of Laurel purchased the land and opened the Park to federal New Deal programs and building construction in 1934. Noting the Park's role in World War II, 1944 identifies the establishment of a prisoner of war internment camp. The end of the period of significance is 1974, acknowledging the continued use of the Park and the end of the historic period.

LAUREL HISTORY and RIVERSIDE PARK

The history of the Laurel area includes the Crow (Apsáalooke) Reservation Years (1851-1891) and early years of private land ownership (1892-1922). In 1923, Riverside Park was established as a privately owned recreational facility complete with a large dance hall and auto campground. The City of Laurel purchased Riverside Park in August of 1934 and leased the land to the federal government for relief service programs from 1934-1939 and the intermittent occupation of the park site as a World War II Prisoner of War Camp from 1944-1945. Post-1945, Riverside Park continued to lease buildings to community service organizations and operate as a general city park and campground.

History of Laurel

The Riverside Park lands fell within the federally recognized treaty lands of the Crow (Apsáalooke) Nation from 1851-1891. The 1851 Horse Creek Treaty at Fort Laramie formalized traditional territorial claims of the Northern Plains tribes. At the time, Crow territory was an expansive region stretching from the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming (south) to the Musselshell River Valley (north), Powder River (east) and Yellowstone River/Bridger Mountains (west) in Montana. The Treaty of Fort Laramie with the Crow Tribe, signed May 7, 1868, continued to place the future Riverside Park lands within the defined boundaries of the Crow Reservation. The 1868 Crow Indian Reservation boundaries followed the south bank of the Yellowstone River from the Montana/Wyoming border near Yellowstone National Park (established in 1872) all the way to Fort Sarpy, 25 miles east of the mouth of the Big Horn River. The ceded Crow lands of the 1882 Agreement removed a sizable area of Crow land from the west and southwest of the 1868 reservation boundaries, providing access to the new mining areas at Red Lodge, Cooke City, and the Beartooth Mountains.

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1889 map from the Library of Congress, published by E.R. Cookingham, call number G1413.G4 C6. The map shows the former western edge of the Crow Reservation, including Emigrant Peak, ceded in 1882 to access the mines at Emigrant, Red Lodge and Cooke City (Beartooth Mountains). The southern boundary of the Reservation is the Montana Wyoming border. Further treaties maintained the Yellowstone River as a northern boundary. After 1891, the future Riverside Park lands (red arrow) would become part of Yellowstone County.

The Northern Pacific Railway transcontinental line constructed through the Yellowstone River Valley from 1881-1883, established Carlton Station in 1882; renamed Laurel in 1883, the town lay just north of the tracks and the Yellowstone River, and near the Crow Indian Reservation, and future parklands.¹⁴ In March 1887, the U.S. Congress granted permission for the Rocky Fork and Cooke City (RF&CC) Railroad to cross the Crow Indian Reservation connecting the fledgling town of Laurel to the mines and mineral deposits at Red Lodge, Cooke City, and the Beartooth Mountains.¹⁵ The location of Riverside Park on the south bank of the Yellowstone River lay adjacent to the Rocky Fork Railroad bridge.¹⁶ The 44.3-mile rail line was operated by the RF&CC until the Northern Pacific Railway acquired it in 1890.¹⁷ The siting of Laurel proved adept near the junction of the Northern Pacific and RF&CC tracks. In October 1891, the Crow

¹⁴ Ann Kooistra-Manning, *Images of Americas: Laurel* (Arcadia Publishing, 2015), p. 7.

¹⁵ "The Rocky Fork Road!," *Bozeman Weekly Chronicle*, March 9, 1887, p. 3.

¹⁶ "Montana News Gleanings," *Butte Weekly Miner*, March 20, 1889.

¹⁷ "Report of State Board of Equalization of Montana for Park County," *The Livingston Enterprise*, September 6, 1890, p.1.

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Reservation was reduced again in size and the lands south of the Yellowstone River in the vicinity of Laurel and Park City became public domain for homesteaders with “Hundreds of settlers crossing the Yellowstone to the land of promise.”¹⁸ The removal of the future Park lands from the Crow Indian Reservation in 1891 resulted in the area becoming part of an expanded Yellowstone County.¹⁹

Agriculture reigned supreme in the area, and in fact, in Montana, fueled by the homesteaders. Early agricultural success due to ample rainfall and the construction of several local irrigation projects resulted in homesteaders moving to the region.²⁰ As the area grew, improvements occurred including the construction of a levee on the south bank of the Yellowstone River that appears on the 1906 General Land Office map to provide protection to where Riverside Park now lies.²¹ As agriculture prospered, so did the town illustrated by the range of positions and jobs highlighted in the 1907 City Directory.²² The town’s incorporation in 1908 established it as a railroad and agricultural hub.²³ Success breeds success and by 1909, businessman Walter Westbrook built a 5000 bushel grain elevator in town, the first of many to serve Laurel.²⁴

In 1917, Laurel became a division point of the Great Northern and Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy lines with rail capacity rising by 1200 rail cars.²⁵ The discovery of oil the same year further raised optimism for the area.²⁶ However, 1919 ushered in the first of several years of below average precipitation driving thousands of homesteaders from the area. With the loss of homesteaders and the emerging depression came a concomitant failure of banks.

By 1922, Laurel investigated the possibility of a location to refine oil, aided by the presence of the rail yard—these economic drivers undoubtedly played in role in Riverside Park’s path forward. Dreams of refineries gained traction after a few years of fits and starts and several failed attempts, but in 1933, Laurel welcomed the Independent Refining Company who received product from the Oregon Basin in Wyoming, Dry Creek in Montana, and the Elk Basin in

¹⁸ “Now For a Home!,” *Billings Gazette*, October 20, 1892, p.1.

¹⁹ “The Document, As Issued by President Harrison Declaring the Reservation Open for Settlement,” *Billings Gazette*, October 27, 1892, p.1.

²⁰ “Laurel Given Space in the Report of Bureau of Agriculture,” *Laurel Outlook*, April 19, 1911, p.1.

²¹ Great West Engineering, “City of Laurel: Riverside Park Master Plan,” December 2017, p.4. This levee has undergone several improvements and reconstructions through the years resulting in its exclusion from the Riverside Park National Register boundary.

²² 1907 Billings and Red Lodge City Directory and Yellowstone and Carbon County Directory, p. 356.

²³ Don Spritzer, *Roadside History of Montana* (Missoula, Montana: Mountain Publishing Press, 1999), p. 8.

²⁴ Jon Axline, Montana Historical and Architectural Inventory for the Wold Building, 24YL1576, August 29, 2003; “An Elevator for Laurel,” *Laurel Outlook*, September 13, 1911, p. 1; “Elevator Has Changed Hands,” *Laurel Outlook*, September 20, 1911, p. 1; Sara Adamson, “Laurel Downtown Historic District” National Register nomination, NR #10000768, listed September 16, 2010, p. 25.

²⁵ “Laurel Starts New Period as Terminal,” *Laurel Outlook*, May 2, 1917, p.1.

²⁶ Sara Adamson, “Laurel Downtown Historic District” National Register nomination, NR #10000768, listed September 16, 2010, p. 31.

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Wyoming. In 1943, the Farmers Union Central Exchange purchased bought the refinery and subsequently changed their name to CENEX.²⁷

Laurel's ties to the railroads permitted them to navigate the Depression better than many other Montana towns with many finding work in the shops. The rail yards' presence also proved a boon during the World War II years as preparation for war ramped up rail car construction and maintenance. The presence of the refinery also dampened the local effects of the Depression by its investment in a 1936 rebuilding effort and its launch of producing emulsified asphalt in 1937.²⁸ Assistance from federal agencies also helped alleviate Depression effects, not only in Laurel, but front and center in Riverside Park, as discussed below.

The increasing popularity of the automobile led to a rise in tourism, especially in states like Montana with its abundance of scenic landscapes. Routes highlighting tourism became popular, such as the Yellowstone Trail that passed directly through Laurel. Yellowstone County, home to both Billings and Laurel, rated third in Montana for spending tourism dollar to attract visitors, a likely reason for Laurel's selection in 1928 as a tourism bureau location, one of nine, between Spokane, Washington and Chicago, Illinois.²⁹ Such tourism helped spawn Riverside Park as an autocamp early in its history.

In 1936, a new bridge that replaced a collapsed bridge was constructed across the Yellowstone River. This bridge, and its earlier iteration, provided access to Riverside Park and destinations south of Laurel.³⁰

²⁷ "Black Butte Is Scene of Newest Search for Oil in Laurel District," *Laurel Outlook*, May 4, 1921, p. 1; "Build Refinery Here," *Laurel Outlook*, October 23, 1929, p. 1; "Deep Test Drilling at Duck Creek Resumes," *Laurel Outlook*, 13 June 1921; Elsie P. Johnston, *Laurel's Story, A Montana Heritage* (Laurel: Laurel Historical Research Committee 1979), pp. 99-103; "Laurel Considered as Site of Oil Refinery," *Laurel Outlook*, February 15, 1928, p. 1; "Northwest Company Buys Site for 2,000-Barrel Refinery at Laurel," *Laurel Outlook*, June 28, 1922, p. 1; "Refinery Launches New Production," *Laurel Outlook*, June 7, 1933, p. 1; "Us Geological Survey Recommends Field Here Be Tested for Oil and Gas Development," *Laurel Outlook*, October 19, 1923, p. 1.; Don Spritzer, *Roadside History of Montana* (Missoula: Mountain Publishing Pres 1999), p. 356.

²⁸ "250 Stock Cars Ordered Built at Laurel Shops," *Laurel Outlook*, February 19, 1936, p. 1; "Additions to Local Refinery," *Laurel Outlook*, August 4, 1937, p. 1; Elsie P. Johnston, *Laurel's Story, A Montana Heritage* (Laurel: Laurel Historical Research Committee 1979), pp. 72-75, 380-381; "Laurel Shops to Rebuild 250 Cars," *Laurel Outlook*, May 30, 1934, p. 1; "Laurel Taking Holiday Thursday to See Railroad Plants in Operation," *Laurel Outlook*, August 28, 1929, p. 1; "Local Shops Share in Car Building-One of Three," *Laurel Outlook*, December 10, 1930; "Np Announces Huge Car Building Program in Own Shops, Coming Year," *Laurel Outlook*, November 26, 1930; "Refinery Launches Rebuilding Plan," *Laurel Outlook*, February 26, 1936, pp. 1, 8; "Refinery's Improvements Well Along," *Laurel Outlook*, July 25, 1934, p. 1; "Shop Forces Ordered to Go on 6-Day Week," *Laurel Outlook*, February 3, 1937, p. 1.

²⁹ "Tourist Business Is Fifth Industry Here," *Laurel Outlook*, January 25, 1928, p. 1; "Tourists by Thousands Came to State Last Year," *Laurel Outlook*, June 4, 1924, p. 1; "Yellowstone Trail", <http://www.yellowstonetrail.org/>, accessed April 18, 2024; "Yellowstone Trail Puts Bureau Here," *Laurel Outlook*, June 6, 1928, p. 1.

³⁰ "New Bridge Here Is Opened to Traffic," *Laurel Outlook*, 10 June 1936, pp. 1, 6.

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World War II brought Laurel and Riverside Park back into the local consciousness when a prisoner of war camp was established using the previous infrastructure dating to the Federal Transient Program, WPA, and the National Youth Administration, all discussed below.

Following the War, Laurel welcomed a period of prosperity as the refinery and rail yards grew to accommodate increased use. This prosperity found the Laurel-ites beneficiaries as the town's inhabitants ranked first for average per family income.³¹ By 1957, however, railroads began the shift from steam to diesel, a transition that exposed employees in the rail yards to staff reductions with others assuming new roles. The transition to diesel engines relegated turntables obsolete severing additional employees from their paychecks. Despite the reduced workforce, the rail yards continued and continues to be a major employer for the Laurel area.³²

Since the early 1920s, and through Laurel's economic difficulties, Riverside Park has welcomed Laurel residents and others for relaxation from the everyday grind of life. The Park has been home to numerous clubs and organizations and has welcomed both locals and visitors. Its use has extended beyond recreation and relaxation to federal service for the greater good and to provide a base for prisoners of war.

History of Riverside Park

John Kinnick arrived in Park City, Montana in 1886 and on April 20, 1911, received a land patent for 162.9 acres from the General Land Office.³³ The patent encompassed all the Riverside Park lands in Section 15 and Section 22 of Township 2S Range 24E. Kinnick's background included work in arming, road construction, and carpentry; he also served as the Laurel City waterworks plant engineer until 1910.³⁴ Although receiving the patent in 1911, Kinnick may have possessed the 160 acres as "unsurveyed government land" as early as 1905 based on a lawsuit filed by Orville E. Wisdom over access to the (Sam) Davis Ditch, which runs through the southwest corner of Section 22.³⁵ The future Park land changed private ownership several times over the next decade. Travel through the area witnessed the construction of a wagon bridge near the parklands by the summer of 1913 and a bridge over the nearby Clark Fork of the Yellowstone.³⁶ Use of the vicinity for recreational purposes occurred by at least 1913 when an

³¹ "Expect Completion of Tank Car Shops First of Year," *Laurel Outlook*, October 4, 1950, p. 1; "Ground-Breaking Ceremony Ushers Start of Major Addition to Plant," *Laurel Outlook*, July 11, 1951, p. 1; "Refinery Completes \$4 Million Addition," *Laurel Outlook*, October 15, 1952; "Sande Views Growth Wealth Gain of Area," *Laurel Outlook*, May 3, 1950, pp. 1, 10; "Start \$3 Million Refinery Addition," *Laurel Outlook*, October 9, 1957, p. 1; "State's Family Incomes above U. S. Average," *Laurel Outlook*, July 23, 1952, p. 1.

³² Elsie P. Johnston, *Laurel's Story, A Montana Heritage* (Laurel: Laurel Historical Research Committee 1979), p. 93; "Shift to Diesel Lays Off 15 Men at Roundhouse," *Laurel Outlook*, March 20, 1957, p. 1.

³³ "Serial Patent," U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office Records, Accession Number 191781, BLM serial number MTBIL 0000293.

³⁴ "City Council Meeting, JF Jackson is Employed as Engineer at the Water Works Plant," *Laurel Outlook*, January 12, 1910, p. 8.

³⁵ "Orville E. Wisdom Brings a suit against John Kinnick," *Billings Weekly Gazette*, August 18, 1905, p. 8.

³⁶ "Laurel News Notes," *Billings Evening Journal*, August 2, 1913, p. 5.

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Iowan re-union picnic was held “in the grove near the wagon bridge south of Laurel;” it remains unknown if this gathering took place within the future boundary of Riverside Park or nearby.³⁷

Dance Hall / Auto Camping Years (1923-1933)

Montana cities’ quest for tourists and rural entertainment became more prevalent with the widespread use of the automobile. In 1917, automobiles replaced horse drawn stagecoaches in Yellowstone National Park. Attracting the increasing amount of auto tourists to Yellowstone became a significant strategy for gateway communities. A 1920 promotional campaign for the Billings-Cody way road noted Laurel as a “key-seat” for diverting tourist traffic from the east-west Yellowstone Trail auto road.³⁸ Laurel’s first auto tourist park, located closer to the city, witnessed over 150 automobile campers in the summer of 1922.³⁹ Riverside Park, the subject of this nomination, would soon serve as a travel campground while adding a dance pavilion to host and entice both travelers and locals. T.C. Judkins owned the property at the time of the early development of the Park. Judkins made improvements to his 10 acres near the Yellowstone River that included building a dance pavilion, referred to as Riverside Hall, that measured 60 feet by 80 feet, a picnic area, and refreshment stand that he opened to the public by May 26, 1923.⁴⁰ A year later, ownership transferred to S.O. Harris in September of 1924.⁴¹ Although no longer under Judkins’ ownership, he filed for bankruptcy in 1924 and a lien was placed on the property with the “dance hall building with metal roof;” the filing named Judkins, Harris, and Isaac Platz.⁴²

In late May of 1926, Bertha Serrine of Cody purchased the dance hall from Harris.⁴³ Serrine, an experienced hotelier stated her intention to install electric lights, gas cooking equipment, and 10 to 20 tent houses for campers.⁴⁴ For the eight years, the Riverside Hall hosted local entertainment and dances with promotion appearing throughout the late 1920s and into the early 1930s. Management changed over the years, but the operating premise based on recreation that included dances and bands remained true to the Park and the hall.⁴⁵ This cycle continued until the purchase of the land by the City of Laurel in 1934. The City’s acquisition of the property changed little in terms of Park use for camping as it served this purpose for decades. By the 1960s, camping in the Park proved a mainstay of its use, as it continues to do so to the present.

The Depression and Federal Aid Program Period (1934-1945)

The Federal Transient Program

The City acquired the Park in the early 1930s as banks failed and unemployment increased. In response to the unemployment woes of the Great Depression, the United States government,

³⁷ “Iowans Will Hold Annual Big Picnic,” *Billings Gazette*, August 21, 1913, p. 5.

³⁸ “Laurel Joins Hands with Sister Towns in Rousing Cody-Way Meet,” *Laurel Outlook*, April 14, 1920, p. 1.

³⁹ “Local News,” *Laurel Outlook*, July 12, 1922, p. 3.

⁴⁰ “To Open Park and Dancing Pavilion Next Week,” *Laurel Outlook*, May 16, 1923, p. 3.

⁴¹ “Local News,” *Laurel Outlook*, September 3, 1924, p. 4.

⁴² “Summons,” *The Billings News*, October 16, 1924, p. 8.

⁴³ “Around Our Town,” *Laurel Outlook*, May 26, 1926, p. 4.

⁴⁴ “Cody Woman Buts Park Near Laurel.” *Billings Gazette*, May 14, 1926, p.4.

⁴⁵ “Promoter Leases Hall at Riverside,” *Billings Gazette*, April 8, 1930, p. 5.

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under the auspices of President Roosevelt's New Deal, established transient relief camps and services.⁴⁶ The Federal Transient Program (FTP) served as one of the first New Deal Programs of 1933 providing funding to states to establish transient bureaus.⁴⁷ The Transient Relief office, which fell under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), opened in Laurel in 1934 following its transfer from nearby Billings. The office began providing meals and training for (mostly) men without work. The need for aid proved obvious as the office reported handling 600 to 700 cases a day.⁴⁸ Job training opportunities often correlated with one's skills with the result that many witnessed an increase in their skill set while others learned a new skill adaptable to later employment.⁴⁹ Despite government attempts to ease the crisis, tensions ran high, illustrated by a clash between the Laurel police and transients receiving government aid being dispersed with tear gas at the site of the first transient kitchen hall on Laurel's downtown Main Street.⁵⁰

Hoping to move to a location out of town, the agency eyed a spot south of town and across the Yellowstone River, known as the "Platz tract south of the Yellowstone," the future home of Riverside Park.⁵¹ In late August of 1934, the City of Laurel purchased the property from widowers Frank Platz and Isaac Platz (Deed #305776; August 24, 1934). With the acquisition of the property, the city voted to "furnish the 40-acre plot of ground for the transient camp."⁵²

The Riverside Park camp soon took its position beside at least 400 other established camps across the nation that provided shelter to 200,000 to 250,000 men by 1934.⁵³ The camps provided shelter, food, and a job for 90 cents a week. Clothing was also provided to those in need. The Bureau identified three classes of men who occupied the camps: younger men generally looking for a meal who once fed tended to move on; "frowsies," who are akin to hobos; and those men who would work if work was available and who tend to "police their own camps."⁵⁴

⁴⁶ Elsie P. Johnston, *Laurel's Story, A Montana Heritage* (Laurel: Laurel Historical Research Committee 1979), p. 76.

⁴⁷ Illinois Library, "The Great Depression and the new Deal: Transient Division Newsletter from Macon, Georgia," <https://iopen.library.illinois.edu/scalar/the-great-depression-and-the-new-deal-transient-division-newsletter-from-macon-georgia/introduction>, updated August 16, 2023, accessed February 27, 2024.

⁴⁸ "Transient Relief Office Opens: Site for Camp Still Undecided," *Laurel Outlook*, August 8, 1934, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Illinois Library, "The Great Depression and the new Deal: Transient Division Newsletter from Macon, Georgia," <https://iopen.library.illinois.edu/scalar/the-great-depression-and-the-new-deal-transient-division-newsletter-from-macon-georgia/introduction>, updated August 16, 2023, accessed February 27, 2024.

⁵⁰ "Police and Transients Clash: Tear Gas Brought into Use Near Mess Hall," *Laurel Outlook*, September 24, 1934, p. 3.

⁵¹ "Transient Relief Office Opens: Site for Camp Still Undecided," *Laurel Outlook*, August 8, 1934, p. 1.

⁵² "Assign Crew To Transient Camp," *The Billings Gazette*, August 11, 1934, p. 5.

⁵³ Herbert Corey, "Food, Shelter—and 90 Cents," *Billings Gazette*, August 5, 1934, p. 28.

⁵⁴ Herbert Corey, "Food, Shelter—and 90 Cents," *Billings Gazette*, August 5, 1934, p. 31.

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The selection of the Riverside Park facility resulted in it quickly taking shape with transient services in town transferred to the new location. At the time of establishment, the Transient Relief office issued approximately 475 food slips, an early variation of food stamps, and camp officials anticipated over 300 occupants staying through the winter.⁵⁵ The obvious need for assistance was broadcast loud and clear in the *Laurel Outlook* on September 12, 1934 with the caption, “7,712 Transients Receive 14,006 Days Service Here During Month Of August.”⁵⁶

Although little development of the transient camp occurred by September of 1934, long term goals for the property were being proposed and discussed. Envisioning brighter days ahead, plans for the area of the camp included its eventual return to the city for use as a park; this idea held enough merit that placement of the camp buildings revolved around their future use by the City for recreation.⁵⁷

With the decision to relocate the camp, the need to construct the infrastructure to accommodate those for which it was intended to move forward. These efforts began in August of 1934 and included, “preparing the foundation for buildings, constructing sanitation facilities and developing a water supply.”⁵⁸ Plans also included the construction of sleeping quarters, a commissary, laundry, a building to house medicine, and laundry room. Resources for the camp arrived via the Northern Pacific Railroad that provided 30 box cars for use as sleeping quarters and the Custer National Forest who contributed 40,000 feet of lumber from the construction of the buildings at the Rock Creek Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp. Development of the camp, “... the largest in the state ...,” was still unfinished by mid-September.⁵⁹ By early October, 70 men employed at the camp focused their attention on the construction of a temporary dining room, sleeping quarters, and administrative offices.⁶⁰

A mild December proved quite favorable toward the camp’s developmental progress with foundations poured for many buildings and materials ordered.⁶¹ The completed foundations included those for two large barracks, a bakery, an administration building, the main dining hall, and a commissary. Most of the foundations provided a base for the installed floor joists. Laying a sewage disposal line to a large septic tank, construction of a shower and bathroom, the erection of a 2-foot by 24-foot barn, and two hog houses and pens also occurred. The construction of the camp south of Laurel definitely benefited the town economically as the materials ordered at the

⁵⁵ “Assign Crew To Transient Camp,” *The Billings Gazette*, August 11, 1934, p. 5.

⁵⁶ “7,712 Transients Receive 14,006 Days Service Here During Month Of August,” *Laurel Outlook*, September 12, 1934, p. 1.

⁵⁷ *Laurel Outlook*, September 26, 1934, p. 8 (no title).

⁵⁸ “Assign Crew To Transient Camp,” *Billings Gazette*, August 11, 1934, p. 5.

⁵⁹ “Transient Relief Prepares To Open Mess hall On West Main For Men Here 24-Hours,” *Laurel Outlook*, September 19, 1934, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Lace Orders For Five Cars Lumber For Transient Site,” *Laurel Outlook*, October 3, 1934, p. 1.

⁶¹ “Transients Find Open Weather Favorable To Speeding Work At Camp,” *Laurel Outlook*, December 12, 1934, p. 1.

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time “consisted of three car loads...” all of which was purchased from Laurel dealers.⁶² To accommodate the growing population of the camp, a house was rented in town to serve as a private hospital with accommodations for up to 16 people.

The construction also included the two buildings that served as the Transient Camp Barracks.⁶³ Similar to other buildings on the property, both were remodeled in the summer of 1936 for recreational purposes and veneered with river cobbles by August of that year with one assuming the sobriquet of “Calamity Jane’s Dance Hall” and the other later earning the name of the “Boy Scout building.”⁶⁴ These two buildings later served to anchor the Laurel Rifle Club when a central portion was added to join the two into a single unit.

By the time all was said and done, the *Laurel Outlook* reported the camp as “virtually a village in itself.”⁶⁵ Reviews of the camp proved mixed with colorful language often describing the venue’s conditions noted by the entire camp “enclosed by a close high wire fence, which serves a two-fold purpose in keeping the inmates in and curious citizens out...”⁶⁶

Additions to the campground extended beyond building construction. In April of 1935, landscape modifications occurred with the arrival of 200 or more trees brought from either the Big Horn Mountains or the Beartooths.⁶⁷

Community members stayed abreast of the camp’s activities through public presentations sponsored by groups, such as the Rotana Club who presented the engaging program, “Rehabilitation of Transients.”⁶⁸ Following the presentation, community members began gathering old magazines to deliver to the camp. Similarly, the camp’s involvement with local residents played out in many ways. In April of 1935, members of the “Young People’s class” of the Methodist Church of Laurel presented a play on the life of Simon Peter with the stage setting constructed by men from the Riverside camp.⁶⁹ In September, Laurel businessmen attended dinner at Riverside at the invitation of camp officials.⁷⁰

⁶² “Transients Find Open Weather Favorable To Speeding Work At Camp,” *Laurel Outlook*, December 12, 1934, p. 1.

⁶³ One of these two buildings reputedly served as an infirmary at one point.

⁶⁴ “Laurel’s New Park to Open This Week. Riverside Grounds Along Yellowstone Are Expected to Develop into Prominent Recreation Area of this Region: Barracks Become Recreation Room,” *Billings Gazette*, October 11, 1936, p. 3; “Convert Park Into Camp For War Prisoners,” *Laurel Outlook*, October 11 1944, p. 1.

⁶⁵ “Transient Services Transferring Its Offices to Camp,” *Billings Gazette*, June 29, 1935, p. 6.

⁶⁶ G.R Studebaker, “Interesting Article Reveals Workings of Transient Camp,” *Roundup Record Tribune*, November 21, 1935, p 4.

⁶⁷ “Plan Is To Plat 500 Evergreens In Coming Weeks,” *Laurel Outlook*, April 10, 1935, p. 1.

⁶⁸ “Hood Tells Rotana Of Rehabilitation Work For Transients,” *Laurel Outlook*, October 10, 1934, p. 1.

⁶⁹ “Young People Give Unusual Portrayal Of Easter Thought,” *Laurel Outlook*, April 17, 1935, p. 8.

⁷⁰ “Business Men Asked To Dinner Wednesday At Transient Camp,” *Laurel Outlook*, September 18, 1935, p. 1.

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While at the Riverside camp, men contrived a variety of ways to stay occupied.⁷¹ Dice and cards proved popular. Many found relaxation strumming through the pages of magazines and newspapers. For those inclined to more physical pursuits, baseball, softball, basketball, boxing, horseshoes, and tennis equipment was available.

By the middle of 1935, several transient camps faced closure in anticipation of the Federal policy to end the program by November of that year.⁷² While Laurel's camp survived a few months longer, those based in Livingston and Miles City soon closed. The closures piggybacked on the notion that the Federal works programs plan to end direct relief and " ... beneficiaries will be forced to either take advantage of employment opportunities, private or under the WPA, or look for relief somewhere else."⁷³ "There will be 3,500,000 men working under the new program by Nov 1. There will be no more doles after that. We will close the door to direct relief and refuse to open it even for an inch."⁷⁴

Although the fates dictated the Riverside camp eventually met the same end as other transient camps in Montana, it garnered a second life, undoubtedly due to existing infrastructure from its days as a transient camp. By September of 1935, the camp began to shrink, both in terms of its population and with amenities provided. It served 247 clients at the time it ceased further registrations. H.L. True, the division manager, said it had been the largest transient camp in Montana the previous year.⁷⁵ Camp property manager G.R. Studebaker noted a few of the buildings constructed at the camp, such as the mess hall (that burned three weeks after it opened for use), a hospital, an unfinished bakery, a commissary with a barber shop, and a bathhouse with de-lousing station, were all erected by the transients, and their required an array of building skills. Original transient dormitories consisted of 24 large tents.⁷⁶

Enter The Works Progress Administration (WPA)

The continuing effects of the Great Depression resulted in further Federal involvement to stimulate the nation's economy. Although the camp's use as a transient base began its final winding down around this time, new arrangements concentrated on the property reinventing itself by using the existing improvements made by the Federal Transient Program. The WPA acquired many former transient camps with the aim of converting them into "work camp(s)." Early news of the site's reuse was announced in mid-September of 1935 at a meeting of Laurel

⁷¹ G.R Studebaker, "Interesting Article Reveals Workings of Transient Camp," *Roundup Record Tribune*, November 21, 1935, p. 4.

⁷² "Direct Relief Nears End; F.T.S. Camp Here Survives," *Laurel Outlook*, August 14, 1935, p. 1; "Camp Closes At Miles City," *Laurel Outlook*, August 28, 1935, p. 8.

⁷³ "Direct Relief Nears End; F.T.S. Camp Here Survives," *Laurel Outlook*, August 14, 1935, p. 1.

⁷⁴ "Direct Relief Nears End; F.T.S. Camp Here Survives," *Laurel Outlook*, August 14, 1935, p. 1.

⁷⁵ "247 Transients Remain at Camp: Laurel Site Closed but Men Awaiting WPA Jobs Here," *Billings Gazette*, September 24, 1935, p. 5.

⁷⁶ G.R Studebaker, "Interesting Article Reveals Workings of Transient Camp," *Roundup Record Tribune*, November 21, 1935, p. 4.

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businessmen who approved the proposition.⁷⁷ The meeting also confirmed the earlier plans of the property's reversion to the city once the economy returned to pre-depression levels.

With the termination of the Federal Transient Program, the WPA moved in to fill the niche. The WPA represented the largest of the New Deal public works programs created to alleviate mass unemployment. Beginning at the local level, city and county governments assessed needs and unemployment numbers with proposals sent to the WPA state office for vetting before forwarding to the Washington D.C. headquarters for presidential approval.⁷⁸ Projects that fell under the umbrella of the WPA included bridges, schools, airports, and importantly for Laurel, parks. The Riverside Park location wasn't alone in the attention it received from the WPA as 8000 parks were either constructed or received improvements by the organization nationwide, including 105 in Montana.⁷⁹

Early movement in Montana regarding possible projects funded by the nascent WPA occurred with "the announcement from D.A. McKinnon, state PWA engineer, that a total of 1,901 projects had been submitted at an estimated cost of \$253,925,409." Ideas from nearly every corner of the state were offered as "City and county planning boards, public officials and interested citizens...were asked to submit every possible project which they felt was feasible and was needed or would be of lasting benefit to their communities."⁸⁰

Although the Federal Transient Program was ending, not all the men registered under that program left the area; a September 20 closure deadline for the program's intake offices provided the requirement the WPA would furnish work for registered men in the camps who indicated a willingness to establish permanent residency, a stipulation that covered around 200-300 men at the Laurel camp.⁸¹ Additional men found placement at camps in Helena, Whitefish, and Havre. The WPA program intended to compensate the men by bi-monthly checks of \$20.00 to \$25.00, meals, laundry, and board.

Five days later, nearly 100 Laurel residents visited the Riverside property to eat dinner and attend a meeting that announced plans of spending \$11,000 for materials and \$90,000 or more for labor to make improvements at the site by the WPA.⁸² The plan found wide-spread acclaim,

⁷⁷ "Transient Camp To Become Work Camp," *Laurel Outlook*, September 18, 1935, p. 1.

⁷⁸ "Works Progress Administration (WPA) (1935) [Essay]," *The Living New Deal*, <https://livingnewdeal.org/glossary/works-progress-administration-wpa-1935/>, accessed on August 5, 2020.

⁷⁹ United States, Federal Works Agency, *Final Report on the WPA Program, 1935-43* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947), p. 135, <https://www.google.com/books/edition//P3TaAAAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PP9>, accessed on October 30, 2022.

⁸⁰ "Suggested Projects Under Work Program Sent to Washington," *Livingston Enterprise*, March 2, 1935, p. 8.

⁸¹ "Transient Camp to Become Work Camp," *Laurel Outlook*, September 18, 1935, p. 1.

⁸² "Visitors To River Park Learn Plan to Spend More Than \$100,000 There," *Laurel Outlook*, September 25, 1935, p. 1.

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especially with the reiteration of the property returning to city ownership in the future. Present at the meeting was Camp Superintendent True who relayed a supervisory force of seven individuals would be stationed at the camp and that “all work so far done there been according to plans from the city engineer’s office” and that of the WPA money slated for use in Montana was “earmarked for the Laurel park.”⁸³ The visit also included a tour of the resources at the former transient camp where the guests “were surprised at the vast amount of work that had been done and the type of buildings that had been erected. They were shown sites for two other structures that have been ordered.” The Laurel camp was the largest operating the Montana at the time.⁸⁴

Official transfer of the Riverside camp from the Federal Transient Program to the WPA occurred December 16, 1935.⁸⁵ The establishment of the WPA in Laurel realized a submittal of 19 projects to the city under the program and 175 men began life at Laurel’s WPA site. Compensation scales adjusted slightly from the earlier predictions with unskilled laborers set to earn \$15.00 a month, “intermediate” workers compensated \$20.00 a month, and skilled laborers pulling down \$25.00 a month; this in addition to lodging, food, sanitation, and medical and dental access. The labor force was assigned to camp maintenance with the remaining 85 percent of workers allocated to other projects.⁸⁶

As winter approached spring and workers dreamt of warmer weather, an ice jam diverted the flow of the Yellowstone River with the result that Riverside Park flooded in March of 1936.⁸⁷ The flooding proved so onerous it destroyed the nearby temporary bridge when the “earth dike on the south side of the river,” constructed to protect the Park, breached.

Coverage of the WPA’s presence at Riverside Park through Spring proved meagre, and possibly for a reason. Citing an overused dictum, “nothing lasts forever,” and in the case of the WPA presence at Riverside Park, it barely lasted at all. On April 1, 1936, Dr. Roscoe Broughton, the mayor of Laurel received a telegram by the WPA of the imminent closure of the Riverside camp by the middle of the month.⁸⁸ Consternation followed with “a prompt and vigorous protest from local interests on the grounds that work performed and investments made at the park are seriously jeopardized by suspension of operations now while the building program is far from complete.” Attempting to quell the upswell, communications by the WPA indicated “every effort will be made to assign from Laurel and vicinity enough local labor for efficient continuation of park project,” though the Park’s closure proved necessary to “supply unattached labor to Fort Peck.”

⁸³ “Visitors To River Park Learn Plan to Spend More Than \$100,000 There,” *Laurel Outlook*, September 25, 1935, p. 1.

⁸⁴ “Visitors To River Park Learn Plan to Spend More Than \$100,000 There,” *Laurel Outlook*, September 25, 1935, p. 1.

⁸⁵ “Transient Camp Goes into WPA Column, Is Virtually Assured Of \$50,800 Fund,” *Laurel Outlook*, December 18, 1935, p. 1.

⁸⁶ “Transient Camp Goes into WPA Column, Is Virtually Assured Of \$50,800 Fund,” *Laurel Outlook*, December 18, 1935, p. 1.

⁸⁷ “New Temporary Bridge Now in Use,” *Laurel Outlook*, April 15, 1936, p. 1.

⁸⁸ “Protest Closing Riverside Park Until Job Is Finished,” *Laurel Outlook*, April 1, 1936, p. 1.

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Combined local and Federal objections to the closure of the Park, as both Montana senators Burton K. Wheeler and James E. Murray weighed in, proved effective as Senator Wheeler allayed fears in April by reporting, “Administrator Hopkins has informed me that further action on abandonment ... will be withheld until a conference can be arranged with the field representative of the WPA.”⁸⁹ Despite the support, Riverside WPA's camps' future was evident. By the middle of summer, the WPA pulled up stakes with the property returning to management by the City of Laurel.⁹⁰

Prior to Riverside's return to the City, significant buildings and ground improvements had been made. The construction of five acres of wooded land for a picnic area was conducted concurrently with building construction; five acres of wooded land for use as a picnic area were cleared, along with the installation of benches, tables, and fireplaces.⁹¹

The property's transition to the City received positive press: “it seems there should be no question about accepting such a beautiful gift—one that will bring pleasure to present residents and that will be enjoyed in years to come by future generations.”⁹² The article noted the lack of City amenities for people to picnic and recreate locally, “though such budding facilities as we now possess are helping to satisfy the public's demand ... without having to drive for hours.” Riverside began to receive wider attention: “our neighbors in Billings, learning of the beautiful park we have south of the river, have come here to spend their Sundays...they have found our park very pleasant.” “Riverside is ready-made by nature. To it has been added the contributions of cash by local sponsors, matched many times over by the federal government.”

Upon the City's acquisition of Riverside in the summer of 1936, the original 1923 dancehall was torn down with the goal to replace it with a “recreational center.”⁹³ Plans for the recreational center included two large community halls. Reuse of other buildings necessitated conversions, such as the transient program's dining hall and kitchen to a large hall with kitchen facilities (reports also suggested this building would become the new recreation center), the remodeling of the small hospital for use as a room for large gatherings, and another building modified (referenced as a “barracks” in an earlier article) to hold two rooms and a vestibule (with each room equipped with a stone fireplace).⁹⁴ No work appeared focused on the bath house. Assistance came in the guise of the local WPA who performed the work, directed by the City of

⁸⁹ “Abandonment Park Project Is Checked,” *Laurel Outlook*, April 15, 1936, p. 1.

⁹⁰ “Riverside Will Be One of Most Unique and Complete Playground in State,” *Laurel Outlook*, May 27, 1936, p. 10; “City Takes Over Riverside; Begins Decorative Work,” *Laurel Outlook*, August 12, 1936, p. 1.

⁹¹ “Riverside Will Be One of Most Unique and Complete Playground in State,” *Laurel Outlook*, May 27, 1936, p. 10.

⁹² “Riverside Park,” *Laurel Outlook*, August 5, 1936, p. 2.

⁹³ “City Takes Over Riverside; Begins Decorative Work,” *Laurel Outlook*, August 12, 1936, p. 1; “Raze Dance Hall,” *Billings Gazette*, August 13, 1936, p. 8.

⁹⁴ “Riverside Will Be One Of Most Unique And Complete Playground In State,” *Laurel Outlook*, May 27, 1936, p. 10; “City Takes Over Riverside; Begins Decorative Work,” *Laurel Outlook*, August 12, 1936, p. 1.

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Laurel. Further work encompassed “veneering the buildings with native rock taken from the Yellowstone River” and reroofing buildings with red cedar shingles.⁹⁵ The dining hall proved the exception to the stone veneer.⁹⁶ Future plans included construction of a mile-long rip-rap dike on the south bank of the Yellowstone River to protect the Park.⁹⁷

The National Youth Administration

The period that followed the WPA witnessed the Park hosting a variety of groups and individuals. Locals found Riverside quite accommodating for gatherings including dances. The City renamed one of the original transient camp barracks “Calamity Jane’s dance hall” in October of 1936, followed by a BBQ fundraiser to pay off the remaining \$600 balance from the original tract purchase of August 1934 and to add five more acres to the park.⁹⁸

In 1938 and 1939, the National Youth Administration (NYA), operating initially under the WPA, coordinated a training school that enrolled dozens of young men ages 18 to 25, at Riverside Park.⁹⁹ In 1939, following passage of the Reorganization Act, the NYA program transferred to the Federal Security Agency.¹⁰⁰ Similar to the Civilian Conservation Camps, the NYA was an important out-of-school and youth work program that operated in the late 1930s and early 1940s. At Laurel, eastern Montana youth, “men of labor,” learned cabinetry, baking, welding, farm and auto mechanics, mechanical drawing, and animal husbandry.¹⁰¹ Putting their skills to work, the NYA youth built a 30-foot by 60-foot log building for a welding and maintenance shop, which the Laurel Rod and Gun Club signed a 10-year lease to use in 1940.¹⁰² The NYA youth also constructed 9 (or 10) log cabins at Riverside Park for sleeping quarters.¹⁰³ The log cabins were used a few years later by administrators and prisoners during the 1944-1945 prisoner of war encampment period and then subsequently to accommodate tourists; unfortunately, these buildings were sold and removed about 1959 according to interviews with residents Louis

⁹⁵ “City Takes Over Riverside; Begins Decorative Work,” *Laurel Outlook*, August 12, 1936, p. 1.

⁹⁶ “Riverside Will Be One Of Most Unique And Complete Playground In State,” *Laurel Outlook*, May 27, 1936, p. 10.

⁹⁷ “Riverside Will Be One Of Most Unique And Complete Playground In State,” *Laurel Outlook*, May 27, 1936, p. 10.

⁹⁸ “Laurel Plans Whoopee Party: Proceeds to be Used to Pay for Recreational Park,” *Billings Gazette*, October 18, 1936, p. 13; “Barbeque Nets about \$1,000 For Benefit of River Park,” *Laurel Outlook*, October 21, 1936, p. 1.

⁹⁹ “Will be Opened on September 1: Expect Nearly 100 Boys to Enroll for Courses,” *Billings Gazette*, August 18, 1938.

¹⁰⁰ Social Welfare History Project, “National Youth Organization,” Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries, <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/eras/great-depression/national-youth-organization/>, accessed December 26, 2023.

¹⁰¹ “Learning by Doing Is Theme of NYA Camp south of Laurel Where 50 boys are enrolled,” *Billings Gazette*, January 15, 1939, p. 13.

¹⁰² “Rod and Gun Club Leases Building Tract from City: Directors Take 10 Year Lease on Former Shop and Strip of Land at Riverside, Laurel Outlook, August 28, 1940, p. 1.

¹⁰³ “Learning by Doing Is Theme of NYA Camp south of Laurel Where 50 boys are enrolled,” *Billings Gazette*, January 15, 1939, p. 13.

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Ynetich (sic) and Mrs. O'Rourke.¹⁰⁴ Ynetich (or Yovetich) moved eight of the cabins to the east end of Laurel where they still stand in 2024.

As discussed below, Riverside Park continued to serve both the local community and those passing through the area. It represented the area's primary park despite the attention it received from the United States government for Federal Aid projects. Use of the Park by the NYA, however, did not end federal use of the property.

The Prisoner of War (POW) Camp Years (1944-1945)

With the entry of the United States into World War II, the need for camps to house prisoners of war arose. Accommodations to house and feed these prisoners of war fell to the Provost Marshal General's Office of the Army; additional tasks fell under its authority as the War progressed.¹⁰⁵

Both sides took millions of men as prisoners of war. The United States captured an estimated four million and approximately over 400,000 found their way here.¹⁰⁶ Bringing POWs to US soil, however, necessitated securing locations for their placement; the Provost Marshal General's Office sought out remote areas away from the defense industries located on east and west coasts.¹⁰⁷ In a classic case of "recycling" or adaptive reuse, many prisoners of war found placement in earlier Federal camps, such as those of the CCC, or in the case of Riverside Park, the WPA.¹⁰⁸

Locally, the first wave of prisoners of war to Yellowstone County were non-military Italians originally imprisoned at Camp Rupert, Idaho; upon their transfer to Montana, they found accommodations at the Billings Polytechnic Institute campus, east of Laurel and Riverside Park.¹⁰⁹ German prisoner field workers constituted the next wave, often preceded by army personnel and Italian prisoners of war from Camp Rupert, who helped prepare the sites.¹¹⁰

Surveillance initially assumed priority. However, a shortage of manpower in the agriculture and forestry sectors soon found authorities calculating the possible benefits of the POWs and how to

¹⁰⁴ Montana Cultural Resource Inventory Locational Information for Laurel Bridge Project (24YL169). No Author listed, but reference to interviews with residents Louis Ynetich (sic), likely Councilman and Mayor Louis Yovetich, and a Mrs. O'Rourke indicate nine of the 10 cabins were moved in 1960. Louis Ynetich (sic), likely Councilman and Mayor Louis Yovetich, moved the nine cabins to the east end of Laurel, north of the railroad tracks, where they stand in 2023 for low-income housing.

¹⁰⁵ Eric Muller, "Provost Marshal General's Office, Army," *Densho Encyclopedia*, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Provost_Marshal_General%27s_Office_Army/, accessed March 13, 2024.

¹⁰⁶ J. Barrie Williams, "Re-Education of German Prisoners of War in the United States during World War II," Masters Thesis, College of William and Mary, 1993, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ J. Barrie Williams, "Re-Education of German Prisoners of War in the United States during World War II," Masters Thesis, College of William and Mary, 1993, p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ J. Barrie Williams, "Re-Education of German Prisoners of War in the United States during World War II," Masters Thesis, College of William and Mary, 1993, p. 10.

¹⁰⁹ "War Prisoners Ready for Work," *Billings Gazette*, June 9, 1944, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ "War Prisoner Camp is Planned, 750 Germans to Aid in Harvest," *Billings Gazette*, September 8, 1944, p. 5.

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harness their potential productivity.¹¹¹ The loss of able-bodied US men serving the War effort resulted in a continual dearth of field workers. In areas around Laurel and Billings, the use of Mexican nationals to assist with the sugar beet harvest proved successful but the required labor force fell short of demand.¹¹²

In October of 1944, Sugar beet district growers from Laurel and the Billings Sugar Beet Factory requested supplemental labor of German war prisoners to assist with the harvest near Laurel. At the time of the request, approximately 540 acres of land near Laurel lacked sufficient help to harvest the crops.¹¹³ Three camps of German war prisoners at Ballantine, Billings, and Forsyth were already assisting with the local beet harvest. The request for additional labor for Laurel-area crops required accommodation to house them.¹¹⁴ By this time, the Provost Marshal General's Office recognized the advantage of placing prisoners in locations with existing infrastructure; locating POWs in agricultural areas with a high demand for labor, such as sugar beet farming regions of Yellowstone County, proved suitable.¹¹⁵ To this end, Riverside Park and its existing infrastructure associated with the Federal Transient Program, WPA, and NYA proved attractive to house the German prisoner of war resulting in the Park's transformation into a temporary camp in October of 1944.¹¹⁶

Converting the Park to accommodate the men gained urgency by the middle of October as news came that the "first consignment of prisoners, said to number 150, is en route now from Utah" with "another consignment of about 75 is expected later, bringing the total to 225."¹¹⁷ Most of the internees hailed from Germany, but a handful of Russians and Polish soldiers arrived that had been forced to fight the Allies.¹¹⁸ The placement of the prisoners of war near Laurel through the request of both farmers and the Great Western Sugar Company resulted in the two assisting with the conversion of Riverside Park into an internment camp; farmers supplied the bulk of physical labor for construction and the company provided materials.

¹¹¹ J. Barrie Williams, "Re-Education of German Prisoners of War in the United States during World War II," Masters Thesis, College of William and Mary, 1993, p. 10.

¹¹² "Mexicans Here For Beet Work," *Billings Gazette*, September 21, 1944, p. 5.

¹¹³ "Council Grants Temporary Use of Riverside Park for War Prisoners Needed To Harvest Sugar Beet Crop," *Laurel Outlook*, October 4, 1944, p. 1.

¹¹⁴ "Council Grants Temporary Use of Riverside Park for War Prisoners Needed To Harvest Sugar Beet Crop," *Laurel Outlook*, October 4, 1944, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ Emily Katherine Dean. *Nazi Prisoners of War: The Civilian and Prisoner Experience in Agricultural America*. Carroll College (Helena, Montana) Honors Thesis, 2014, p. 12.

¹¹⁶ "Laurel Turns Park into Camp for Prisoners, Germans Sent There to Assist in Beet Harvest," *Independent Record*, October 18, 1944, p. 7.

¹¹⁷ "Convert Park Into Camp For War Prisoners," *Laurel Outlook*, October 11, 1944, p. 1.

¹¹⁸ "Council Grants Temporary Use of Riverside Park for War Prisoners Needed to Harvest Sugar Beet Crop," *Laurel Outlook*, October 4, 1944, p. 1.

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The *Independent Record* of Helena reported, "Several buildings in the Park, including its dance hall, were found useful as the nucleus of the camp."¹¹⁹ Plans entailed use of the dance hall as a kitchen and dining room with the "Rod and Gun club building, Rifle and Pistol club and Boy Scout buildings" also finding use at the camp.¹²⁰ The Laurel Rod and Gun Club and Laurel Rifle and Pistol Club (Laurel Rifle Club) temporarily relinquished any building leases and followed this up the following year for use of the club house and grounds, if needed, to house more prisoners during the summer of 1945.¹²¹ The NYA youth log cabins became living quarters for guards. Full conversion of the property for internment necessitated construction of raised wooden platforms to serve as watchtowers, installation of floodlights and telephones, and the erection of barbed wire fence around the camp.¹²²

Though not called out as such, an acknowledgement of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) of the men in the camp appeared in the October 25, 1944, *Laurel Outlook* with the military's request that with the opening of pheasant season, hunters confine their activities to at least one-half mile distant from the camp. For the prisoners ... "any gun, no matter what kind or size, is a weapon for killing people." The article noted, "Most of the prisoners have been on the receiving end of the heavy shelling and bombing and many were wounded in addition to being 'shocked' by the terrific explosions. They are nervous and 'high strung' as a result of their experiences ... Strange or sudden noises are very disquieting and even terrifying to many of the men."¹²³

The prisoners productivity of harvesting beets garnered successful reviews with "Many farmers who employed prisoners of war labor ... heard to say that they have 'produced' far more than many other kinds of labor had in previous years ..." and with the employment work of "the Mexican nationals" are "far surpassing early expectations, have 'saved the day' for the local sugar industry."¹²⁴ Men based at Riverside Park worked the fields of local farmers Coombs and Richardson, west of Laurel, who observed "the prisoners were delivering a 50 percent increase in output."¹²⁵ Although the prospects of using prisoners of war in agriculture caused some concern, "in actual practice the handling and working of the prisoners proved to be relatively simple and effective."¹²⁶

¹¹⁹ "Laurel Turns Park into Camp for Prisoners, Germans Sent There to Assist in Beet Harvest," *Independent Record*, October 18, 1944, p. 7.

¹²⁰ "Convert Park Into Camp For War Prisoners," *Laurel Outlook*, October 11, 1944, p. 1.

¹²¹ "Council Grants Temporary Use of Riverside Park for War Prisoners Needed to Harvest Sugar Beet Crop," *Laurel Outlook*, October 4, 1944, p. 1; "Rod and Gun Club Board Has Meeting: Grants Use of Club House in Park for War Prisoners," *Laurel Outlook*, March 28, 1945, p. 1.

¹²² "Convert Park Into Camp For War Prisoners," *Laurel Outlook*, October 11, 1944, p. 1.

¹²³ "Ask Hunters To Keep Away From Prisoners' Camp," *Laurel Outlook*, October 25, 1944, p. 1.

¹²⁴ "Prisoners of War Prove Good help In Billings Area Sugar Beet Fields," *Billings Gazette*, November 5, 1944, Section 2, pp. 1, 6.

¹²⁵ "New Use of Farm Equipment Boosts Labor Output 50%," *Laurel Outlook*, June 13, 1945, p.4.

¹²⁶ "Story of Harvest Labor Told By Ralph E. Bodley," *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, November 25, 1944.

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The flow of prisoners to Montana continued in 1945 with an additional 1500 men arriving in September, again to assist with the beet harvest.¹²⁷ Of these, about 250 arrived in Laurel, disembarked at the railroad depot, and walked to Riverside Park. The new arrivals replaced the group from the previous year who left for other states upon the completion of the harvest.¹²⁸ The movement of men from one area to another was a regular occurrence as projects faced completion; seventy-five of the 250 German POW's who arrived in Laurel in September shipped out in mid-October to Sidney, Montana for the sugar beet harvest there.¹²⁹

The end of World War II on November 11, 1945, witnessed the beginning of a general release of prisoners of war laborers from the regional POW camps over the next six months. However, despite the end of the War, not all prisoners returned to Europe; the beet harvest of Montana played heavily in negotiations to keep "5656 German prisoners of war for spring work in sugar beet fields" suggesting the men's presence shifted from POW status to that of forced laborers.¹³⁰ Although some prisoners of war apparently remained in Montana to assist with agricultural productions in 1946, it remains unclear whether Riverside Park continued to host them. The national deadline for releasing and transporting prisoners back to Europe was set at June 15, 1946, a date President Truman was reticent to extend.¹³¹

Riverside Park—A Park For All—Life after 1945

Riverside Park began its new life benefiting the local populace with the cessation of its use by Federal agencies. A plethora of activities by a myriad of clubs, groups, and organizations occurred at the Park post-Federal agency service; the following highlights only a smattering of its community engagement illustrating its importance to community.

One of the longest tenured groups at Riverside Park was the Laurel Rod and Gun Club. Although the Club signed a 10-year lease to use the Rod and Gun Club building and adjacent grounds in 1940, the Park's subsequent mobilization to house prisoners of war interrupted their ability to truly avail themselves of the lease. Upon occasion, however, lulls in Federal agency use did occur including one in May of 1945, which allowed the Rod and Gun Club to host about 500 sportsmen from surrounding clubs.¹³² The success of the 1945 gathering spurred the organization to again host the Southeastern Montana Sportsmen's Association in May of the following year with the meeting venue the "Laurel Rod and Gun club building in Riverside park."¹³³ A retriever exhibition followed the meeting showcasing that the "dogs ... work on both land and water." The

¹²⁷ "Prisoners Arrive to Work in Fields," *Laurel Outlook*, September 26, 1945, p.1.

¹²⁸ The public occasionally used the property for club activities, dances, and wedding receptions during the few months when the prisoners were not stationed at Riverside Park.

¹²⁹ "More German POW Arrive Tomorrow for Beet Harvest," *The Sidney Herald*, October 11, 1945, p. 1.

¹³⁰ "State Will Get War Prisoners," *Billing Gazette*, March 15, 1946, p. 1; "War Prisoners' Use Extension Is Refused," *Great Falls Tribune*, April 28, 1946. p. 5.

¹³¹ "War Prisoners' Use Extension Is Refused," *Great Falls Tribune*, April 28, 1946. p. 5.

¹³² "Rodgers Heads Rod and Gun Club: Five Hundred or More Attend Annual Laurel Event at Riverside," *Laurel Outlook*, May 2, 1945, p 1.

¹³³ "Large Attendance Is Forecast For S-E Meeting Here," *Laurel Outlook*, May 1, 1946, p. 1.

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Rod and Gun Club held regular meetings at their leased building at Riverside Park for years and expanded their outdoor use to trap shooting, a popular activity.¹³⁴ The organization continued to operate their building at Riverside Park into the 1970s.¹³⁵

The potential of Riverside Park to host both indoor and outdoor activities witnessed an increase in wedding receptions such as those of Mary Strecker and Reuben Besel who rewarded the attentions of 250 of their closest friends with a reception and dance at the Park.¹³⁶ Similarly, the Park hosted a reception and dance celebrating the union of Elsie Ostwald and Herman Frank, Frank a veteran of four years in the Army Air Corps.¹³⁷ Receptions at the Park continued unabated for years including during inclement weather thanks to the Parks existing infrastructure.¹³⁸ By 1974, the popularity of Riverside Park yielded wedding receptions and dances for groups larger than 400 people.¹³⁹

Wedding events marked only one type of celebratory activity held at the Park as other events, including birthday parties, commemorative events, and New Year's Eve celebrations, all found Riverside Park open to such occasions.¹⁴⁰

Riverside's reversion to its calmer pre-Federal service days found mention in May of 1946: "Solitude, unbroken save for the twitter of birds and an occasional early spring picnic group, has descended again on Riverside Park, ..." ¹⁴¹ The newly rediscovered tranquility, however, proved no match for 12 car loads of "vagabonds of the road." ¹⁴² Described as "dark-skinned ear-ringed women in long bright dresses and swarthy mustached men, ..." who recently emigrated to the Park, they "... danced about roaring campfires whose flames shot high, making ghostly silhouettes of the figures weaving in and out among the tall cottonwoods." They, and their "colorful, shabby tents," were evicted by Laurel police.

Riverside Park remained busy in 1946 and 1947, hosting a variety of groups and organizations eager to regain their lost time during the War years. The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) held

¹³⁴ "Miss Martha Strecker, Reuben Besel Married," *Laurel Outlook*, May 1, 1946, p.4; "Attention Sportsmen!," *Laurel Outlook*, May 1, 1946, p.4; "Laurel Rod & Gun Club's Annual Turkey Shoot," *Laurel Outlook*, November 2, 1955, p. 4.

¹³⁵ Barbed wire show given," *Laurel Outlook*, July 17, 1974, p. 16.

¹³⁶ "Miss Martha Strecker, Reuben Besel Married," *Laurel Outlook*, May 1, 1946, p.4.

¹³⁷ "Miss Ostwal, Herman Frank Are Married Thursday At Church," *Laurel Outlook*, October 9, 1946, p. 5.

¹³⁸ "Alexander Frank and Eleanor Ostermiller Wed Here At Church," *Laurel Outlook*, December 18, 1946, p. 2; Anna Kukes and Perer Bakker Are Married At Ceremony On Saturday, *Laurel Outlook*, March 5, 1947, p. 12; "Romance Beginning In Europe Culminates In Wedding Dec. 16 At Congregational Church," *Laurel Outlook*, December 31, 1947, p. 1; "Gloria Wells Bride Of George Kappel At Ceremony June 6 In Laurel, *Laurel Outlook*, June 10, 1953, p. 2.

¹³⁹ "Lehman, Robertus united in double-ring ceremony," *Laurel Outlook*, September 25, 1974, p. 13.

¹⁴⁰ "Laurel Happenings, *Laurel Outlook*, June 18, 1947, p. 2; "Tales of the Town," *Laurel Outlook*, July 30, 1947, p. 12; "Annual New Year's Eve Dance," *Laurel Outlook*, December 31, 1947, p. 14.

¹⁴¹ "Largest Gypsy Caravan Since Prewar Days Are Evicted at Laurel," *Billings Gazette*, May 4, 1946, p. 8.

¹⁴² "Largest Gypsy Caravan Since Prewar Days Are Evicted at Laurel," *Billings Gazette*, May 4, 1946, p. 8.

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its convention in October, the first held at Riverside Park in several years.¹⁴³ Other organizations gathering at the Park included the Laurel Aerie No. 2564 Fraternal Order of Eagles and the Rotana club, who often hosted dances there.¹⁴⁴ The Laurel Saddle Club ponied up for their “Big Cowboy Party” too, and did so for years.¹⁴⁵ The Moose and the Laurel Chapter of Women of the Moose herded at the Park for their dances, as did the Eagles who flew in for events. Church groups congregated for picnics that comprised “games for old and young, contests and races with prizes, and free ice cream...”¹⁴⁶ The Farmers Union visited for an event, as did the Laurel Busy Beavers 4-H club.¹⁴⁷ In 1968, the 4-H-ers held an event where 90 members attended to hear a delegate to Ecuador of the International Farm Youth Exchange program.¹⁴⁸

By March of 1947, the City undertook work to enlarge the dance hall, remove partitions, and equip a rest room.¹⁴⁹ Work progressed rapidly and included the additions of three toilets connected to a sewer line to a cesspool.¹⁵⁰

In June of 1947 after a vote by the city council, the Park’s popularity and high use-rate resulted in increases for certain amenities, specifically “in renting the hall at Riverside ...”¹⁵¹ The council approved renting a building in the Park known as the “bath house” to the American Legion and its auxiliary. Other hikes focused on updating leases with clauses added that directed the disposal of garbage.¹⁵²

The appeal and beauty of Riverside Park lays the foundation for groups to use the venue for fundraising opportunities — a welcoming and well-kept location tends to accelerate fund raising potential. The March of Dimes and the American Legion baseball clubs hosted their events at the Park in 1947.¹⁵³ Just over 10 years later, the Laurel Kiwanis Club hosted a community dance for a March of Dimes fundraiser to raise money “... still needed for those unfortunate who were stricken before the anti-polio vaccine was perfected.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁴³ “VFW Delegates Hold successful Convention Here,” *Laurel Outlook*, October 16, 1946, p. 1.

¹⁴⁴ “Monday, Nov. 25,” *Laurel Outlook*, November 20, 1946, p. 6.

¹⁴⁵ “Laurel Saddle Club,” *Laurel Outlook*, March 19, 1947, p. 10; “Dance,” *Laurel Outlook*, March 17, 1948.

¹⁴⁶ “Moose Dance,” *Laurel Outlook*, April 16, 1947, p. 8; “Moose and Women’s Group Plan Annual Picnic Next Sunday,” *Laurel Outlook*, August 13, 1947, p. 1; “There’s Fun and Entertainment for all at the Dance,” *Laurel Outlook*, July 23, 1947, p. 3; “The First Congregational Church,” *Laurel Outlook*, June 11, 1947, p. 8; “New Year’s Dance,” *Laurel Outlook*, December 27, 1950, p. 1.

¹⁴⁷ “Assessed Value Of Property In City Has \$486,554 Gain,” *Laurel Outlook*, June 16, 1947, p. 1; “News of 4-H Clubs,” *Laurel Outlook*, October 29, 1947, p. 12.

¹⁴⁸ “4H news,” *Laurel Outlook*, February 14, 1968, p. 9.

¹⁴⁹ “Council Adjusts Pay Of Election Officials,” *Laurel Outlook*, March 19, 1947, p. 1.

¹⁵⁰ “Improvements At Park Dance hall Progress,” *Laurel Outlook*, March 26, 1947, p. 5.

¹⁵¹ “Council Acts On Building Rental, Parking Of Buses,” *Laurel Outlook*, June 4, 1947, p. 1.

¹⁵² “City Accepts Land for Ball Park And Local Playground,” *Laurel Outlook*, June 18, 1947, p. 1.

¹⁵³ “Benefit Dance,” *Laurel Outlook*, February 26, 1947, p. 9; “Announce Benefit To Provide Junior Ball Players With Suits,” *Laurel Outlook*, September 3, 1947, p. 1; “Benefit Dance,” *Laurel Outlook*, October 8, 1947, p. 7.

¹⁵⁴ “Survival Is Not Enough,” *Laurel Outlook* January 22, 1958, p. 9.

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By January of 1948, the American Legion drew closer to finalizing the improvements on their leased building, “With walls of knotty pine and a ceiling of white tile, the finishing of the main room of the American Legion building ... is nearing completion.”¹⁵⁵ The project, begun the previous autumn, “carried on by veterans who have donated their time and skill to complete the 26 by 40-foot main room.”¹⁵⁶ A large fireplace was planned for construction in the west end. Additional plans for the remodel boasted equipping the 16-foot by 20-foot kitchen with built in cabinets with a “An entrance room to the building, probably 12 by 12 feet to serve as reception and cloak room.” Apparently, the American Legion was given leeway to make changes to the property. In November of 1949, Legion members “cut down some 10 large trees that were two near the buildings” in addition to finishing the cupboards in the kitchen and beginning the front entrance and fireplace.¹⁵⁷ The American Legion efforts provided them and other groups an attractive venue for meetings for years to come.

The rifle range began operation in 1947, when the Club constructed the outdoor facilities.¹⁵⁸ George Peterson, a member of the Club stated construction of the backstop followed.¹⁵⁹ July of 1950 witnessed Ken Beegle’s arrival in town who proclaimed, “Folks who like to shoot also like to watch the other fellow shoot.”¹⁶⁰ In 1951, the rifle range hosted a “civilian defense rifle class” in the contingency that “should there be an invasion...it will be necessary for civilians to know how to protect themselves and their country.”¹⁶¹ An added bonus included that guns and ammunition was furnished. Class instruction extended to the art of “firing at paratroopers.”

In the 1950s, the Laurel Rifle Club removed the west wall of the original easternmost Transient Barracks building and east wall of the westernmost Transient Barracks and added a center section to form a single building with one footprint.¹⁶² Although now a single unit, the different periods of construction remain obvious through exterior differences, especially in cobble veneer color. This joining and expansion enabled the creation of a 50-yard indoor shooting range, “the only one of its kind on the Northwest,” and indoor pistol galleries.¹⁶³ In 1957, the rifle range hosted three “National Rifle Association registered smallbore rifle tournaments.”¹⁶⁴ The tournaments included 10 shots “each in the prone, standing, sitting and kneeling position with

¹⁵⁵ “Legionnaires Work to Improve Their Building in Park,” *Laurel Outlook*, January 7, 1948, p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ “Legionnaires Work to Improve Their Building in Park,” *Laurel Outlook*, January 7, 1948, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ *Laurel Outlook*, November 30, 1949, p. 1 (no title).

¹⁵⁸ Elsie P. Johnston, *Laurel’s Story, A Montana Heritage* (Laurel: Laurel Historical Research Committee 1979), p. 268.

¹⁵⁹ George M. Peterson, *History of Laurel Riverside Park*, unpublished, no date, acquired by Michelle Caron.

¹⁶⁰ “Ace Marksman Here Sunday, July 30,” *Laurel Outlook*, July 19, 1950, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ “Rifle Club to Teach Shooting,” *Laurel Outlook*, January 24, 1951, p. 1.

¹⁶² “Laurel Club Boasts Top Range Set-up,” *Billings Gazette*, January 19, 1958, p. 1.

¹⁶³ “Laurel Club Boasts Top Range Set-up,” *Billings Gazette*, January 19, 1958, p. 1; Great West Engineering, “City of Laurel: Riverside Park Master Plan,” December 2017. The building sporadically continues to house meetings, indoor shooting events, hunter safety classes, and other archery activities.

¹⁶⁴ “Top Marksmen to Fire in 3 Tournaments Here,” *Laurel Outlook*, May 22, 1957, p. 1.

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metallic sights at 50 yards.” In 1958, the *Laurel Outlook* noted the range’s uniqueness and its ability to host several National Rifle Association sanctioned events: the Club “has the finest range, galleries and building of any like organization in the Northwest.”¹⁶⁵ Practice sessions at the Riverside facility occurred with regularity as did junior rifle club matches.¹⁶⁶ The rifle range backstop berm proved fortuitous as it blocked the view of the newly constructed landfill.¹⁶⁷

In December of 1961, the council’s eyes turned toward “a site in Riverside park that needs to be filled,” solving the apparent need to procure a location to dispose of the City’s refuse.¹⁶⁸ The area requiring fill suggested a depression capable of receiving the town’s discard for up to two years. By April of 1963, the dump was in full swing located behind the rifle range. In somewhat curious juxtaposition of words, care was requested by “people hauling trash to the dump in Riverside park.”¹⁶⁹ The article noted, “litter about the park will give the entire town a bad name,” which gives one pause about why a landfill was established within a park in the first place?

While the facilities may have been the toast of visitors’ experience, the property’s proximity to the landfill began to cause consternation, especially among the locals—at least among the locals who recreated at the Park. A year later, while reporting on the new landfill, the *Laurel Outlook* pulled no punches:¹⁷⁰

For the city to sell space to hell, as it does to those who camp in Riverside park, would seem ludicrous if it did not have so many tragic possibilities. ... Of course, the buildings and leases were there first.

In an age when cleanliness is considered not only a virtue, but a necessity to good health, why put crowds at people next to a dump. The green flies that lite on the camper's food, or the dinner guest’s plate, have not come far from a pile of filth that can stir up almost unimaginable odors.

Riverside Park is, in reality, something which Laurel can be proud. It is an attraction Laurel has to offer to the traveler, but the dump next to it can destroy its usefulness to visitor and native alike.

Closing the landfill moved forward and by March of 1966, plans were afoot to not only close the dumping area but to enlarge Riverside Park by incorporating the area within the Park’s

¹⁶⁵ “Laurel Club Boasts Top Range Set Up,” *Billings Gazette*, January 19, 1958, p. 23.

¹⁶⁶ “Junior Rifle Club to Open Season, Invites Members,” *Laurel Outlook*, September 9, 1959, p. 1; “Mary Ann Peterson wins trophy in Junior championship shoot,” *Laurel Outlook*, April 27, 1960, p. 8; “Laurel affairs,” *Laurel Outlook*, February 1, 1961, p. 9.

¹⁶⁷ “Tourist Attraction,” *Laurel Outlook*, May 12, 1965, p. 2.

¹⁶⁸ “Aldermen talk of radar, garbage in quiet session,” *Laurel Outlook*, December 6, 1961, p. 7.

¹⁶⁹ “Spring is sprung, patches are here,” *Laurel Outlook*, April 10, 1963, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ “The other side of Riverside Park,” *Laurel Outlook*, August 26, 1964, p. 6.

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boundary.¹⁷¹ Progress toward this goal accelerated with the opening of a new landfill north of Laurel, the closure of the dump near the airport, and the closure of the landfill at Riverside Park.¹⁷² Despite the closure of the Riverside landfill, intransigent garbage depositors continued to visit the site to illegally deliver their refuse forcing the city to barricade the area prior to it becoming “a part of the camping-park area.”¹⁷³

With the demise of the too-close-for-comfort dump now a part of the Park itself, local efforts ensued to enhance the landscape, no doubt with the intent to put the sordid refuse fiasco behind them. In 1966, the City received a \$6695 grant from the Land and Water Conservation Fund.¹⁷⁴ Senators Mansfield and Metcalf announced the funding for “5 ½ acres of a 42-acre park on the Yellowstone River, south of the city, adding additional picnicking, camping, water, sewer, and sanitary facilities.” The grant timing strongly suggests its use toward reclamation of the landfill area.

Other clubs utilizing Riverside Park’s amenities included the Yellowstone Valley Chapter of the Experimental Aircraft Association.¹⁷⁵ By at least 1959, the group found a venue for its monthly meetings within the inviting confines of the Rod and Gun Club building. One at least one occasion, the group enticed those who straddled the fence regarding attending with a planned show of “Aircraft movies.”

Riverside Park found itself in the political spotlight on a number of occasions with visits by candidates vying for National office. In November of 1960, Lee Metcalf spoke at a Riverside Park rally.¹⁷⁶ Eight years later, Governor Tim Babcock, “mixing with the voters,” assembled with other Republicans for a barbecue in the Park.¹⁷⁷

Like any venue, bills, often in the form of taxes, need to be paid to sustain a level of maintenance necessary for the enjoyment of those who use it. Most of the clubs and organizations who leased buildings met their financial obligations, but a few apparently failed. This proved contentious as the City paid the required insurance and fuel costs, “... but in some instances the groups leasing the buildings have not, ...”¹⁷⁸ Agreements stipulated that groups leasing buildings should bear the cost of both their portion of the insurance and fuel bills. The council highlighted the leasers

¹⁷¹ “Two groups work to boost Laurel recreation facilities,” *Laurel Outlook*, March 2, 1966, p.1.

¹⁷² “New Landfill Dump,” *Laurel Outlook*, June 8, 1966, p. 1.

¹⁷³ “Money, floods, mail boxes city problems,” *Laurel Outlook*, June 22, 1966, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ “Riverside Park fund gets \$6,695 in grant,” *Laurel Outlook*, July 13, 1966, p. 3.

¹⁷⁵ “ ‘Build your own’ flying fans to assemble in Laurel,” *Laurel Outlook*, February 4, 1959, p. 1; the “Hat in the Ring” insignia represented the 94th Aero Squadron of the Army Air Service in World War I; “Insignia, 94th Aero Squadron, United States Army Air Service,” Smithsonian, National Air And Space Museum, https://airandspace.si.edu/collection-objects/insignia-94th-aero-squadron-united-states-army-air-service/nasm_A20160065000, accessed April 2, 2024.

¹⁷⁶ *Laurel Outlook*, November 2, 1960, p. 1 (No title, photograph).

¹⁷⁷ “Babcock Talks on Issues at Laurel Rally,” *Laurel Outlook*, October 16, 1968, p.2.

¹⁷⁸ “Council toils over its unfinished business,” *Laurel Outlook*, November 4, 1959, p. 1.

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side-stepping their financial responsibilities, noting five years earlier that the City paid a \$638 insurance bill but only received \$62 from the various groups. The greatest offender appeared to be the Rod and Gun Club who received an immediate flat \$10 charge per month and approval from the council “to purchase a gas meter to measure the quantity of fuel being used in that building and to bill the club for the fuel consumed ...” Future arrangements saw the City assume a more proactive approach to organizations’ use of the Park infrastructure; in 1970, the committee responded to a request from the Laurel Jaycees to use a portion of “the large public hall in Riverside Park” with the condition the Jaycees pay the utilities for the entire building.¹⁷⁹

Envisioning what could be, in September of 1960, the council deliberated further developing Riverside Park for camping, an activity the Park accommodated for years.¹⁸⁰ Some grumbling occurred by the local motel owners worried about the potential loss of income. The council argued those travelling through the area that planned to camp would do so regardless of prohibitions against the activity. To this end, the council advocated “providing facilities that make Laurel an attractive place ...” However, the council acknowledged that improvements were necessary to the Park’s restrooms prior to a full camping endorsement. A small fee to camp overnight was also approved. The council’s efforts proved fruitful evidenced by a postcard the City received singing its praises regarding the “quality of the facilities available to the camping public.”¹⁸¹ Further accolades arrived the following year as “vacation travel appears to be at its peak this month judging by the number of travelers who are making use of the camping facilities in Riverside Park. The park and its facilities receive much favorable comment from the visitors.”¹⁸² Signs posted over 100 miles away that announced the availability to camp at Riverside Park yielded positive results; on one August night of 1964, “visitors ranged widely... into all four directions of the continent ... including families from Manitoba, Canada and the Canal Zone, as well as states from the east-to-west and north-to-south borders.” Per the “Canal Zone” visitor, “we appreciate a place like this,” with another chiming in, “a very nice park.” Compliments continued year after year.¹⁸³ In 1970, visitors to Riverside Park hailed from New Zealand, England, Canada, Venezuela, Germany, and Finland, as well “as tourists from every state in the union.”¹⁸⁴ The Park remained open year-round with the \$2.00 charge only applied when the shower facilities operated.

Amenities that catered to a full range of users were added as the park continued to flourish such as the installation of new playground equipment in April 1961.¹⁸⁵ The attempt to draw additional visitors found fruition through the placement of a new highway sign, a collaboration with the groups that operated clubhouses on the property.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁹ “Council has garbage, pollution, water meters,” *Laurel Outlook*, January 7, 1970, p. 1.

¹⁸⁰ Hamber favors park for travelers,” *Laurel Outlook*, September 14, 1960, p. 1.

¹⁸¹ “Riverside camp brings praises,” *Laurel Outlook*, September 18, 1963, p. 14.

¹⁸² “Number of visitors stop at Riverside Park,” *Laurel Outlook*, August 12, 1964, p. 8.

¹⁸³ “What’s with the north access?” *Laurel Outlook*, October 4, 1967, p. 16.

¹⁸⁴ “Riverside Park popular place,” *Laurel Outlook*, July 29, 1970, p. 6.

¹⁸⁵ “Parker term closing in rush of work without engineer,” *Laurel Outlook*, April 12, 1961, p. 1.

¹⁸⁶ “Chamber moves to build good public relations,” *Laurel Outlook*, August 9, 1961, p. 1.

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As one might expect, the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and local schools convened at Riverside.¹⁸⁷ Some gatherings brought forth large crowds exemplified by a Girl Scout gathering in July of 1963 when about 84 girls attend activities.¹⁸⁸ Local school use transcended student field trips illustrated by the P.T.A. meetings held under the shade of the trees' canopy.¹⁸⁹ School class reunions were also a draw for summer gatherings at Riverside Park as were events that honored the Senior classes.¹⁹⁰

Retirement celebrations, including that of Gene Wilder, occurred. Gene Wilder's retirement party in May of 1963 marked a celebration of her 30-year career in the service of the people of the United States through her employment at the post office.¹⁹¹ Dinner commemorating Ms. Wilder's service was held at the American Legion Building in the Park.

The continuing popularity and reputation to host large gatherings resulted in Riverside Park serving as the location for the fourth annual Montana State Firemen's conference in June of 1966.¹⁹² Two hundred fifty delegates participated. Festivities included a banquet, dance, and barbeque, and a luncheon and program for wives of the delegates. Eight years later, the Firemen's convention exceeded the 1966 participation with an estimated 300 congregants.¹⁹³

With its proximity to the Yellowstone River, Riverfront Park began serving as a docking point for the Yellowstone River Boat Float in 1967, an event that commenced in Livingston.¹⁹⁴ Categories for trophy awards included largest boat, most original craft, oldest person, and largest family participating in the competition. The float continued for years with 1970 marking the first year the event officially ended in Laurel.¹⁹⁵

Further landscaping transpired in the early summer of 1968 with the planting of about 50 trees, laying new sprinkler lines, and planting grass in several locations.¹⁹⁶ Local organizations continued work to enhance the Park's appearance remained unwavering illustrated by the Unity Garden Club's purchase of bulbs for planting in May 1973 as part of a "beautification project;"

¹⁸⁷ "Boy Scouts," *Laurel Outlook*, April 12, 1950; *Laurel Outlook*, November 5, 1958, p. 4 (No title).

¹⁸⁸ Neighborhood Girl Scouts have most successful day camp," *Laurel Outlook*, July 3, 1963, p. 5.

¹⁸⁹ "Kenneth Hageman Is Speaker, South PTA," *Laurel Outlook*, May 1, 1957, p. 3.

¹⁹⁰ "Laurel Chamber honors Seniors," *Laurel Outlook*, May 11, 1966, p. 6.

¹⁹¹ Unrelated to the Gene Wilder of *Young Frankenstein* fame; "Mrs. Wilder completes career in post office," *Laurel Outlook*, May 6, 1964, p. 1.

¹⁹² "Montana firemen to assemble here," *Laurel Outlook*, June 1, 1966, p. 3.

¹⁹³ 300 expected at convention," *Laurel Outlook*, February 27, 1974, p. 5.

¹⁹⁴ "If it floats it will be on the Yellowstone," *Laurel Outlook*, July 5, 1967, p. 1.

¹⁹⁵ "Float set; The Good Lord will'en and river down," *Laurel Outlook*, June 30, 1971, p. 14.

¹⁹⁶ No Title, *Laurel Outlook*, June 19, 1968, p. 9.

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the Club repeated their efforts in October.¹⁹⁷ The planting of flowers, bulbs, or trees occurred almost yearly sponsored by different people or groups.¹⁹⁸

Other steps to enhance the beauty of Riverside Park ensued in 1972 when commissioners outlined plans for the installation of underground wiring.¹⁹⁹ Burial of the lines improved safety and also did away with a very noticeable eye sore. Other improvements occurred as funds were allotted at the end of 1975 to add more camper pads with electrical hook-ups and to purchase more playground equipment.²⁰⁰ The addition of more camper pads reflects the high use of the Park by overnights and also illustrates how parks in general evolve over time to cater to the shifting preferences of those who use them.

The popularity and increased use of the local parks around Laurel resulted in the creation of a new park and recreation commission around 1974.²⁰¹ Riverside Park fell under the commission's oversight with one of its first tasks the approval of the construction of 12 horseshoe pits, with the pits "installed in the area directly south of the Riverside Hall." These pits occupy their original location and receive frequent use by picnickers and visitors, though they lie outside the National Register boundary.

Spotlighting the Park's ready and easy access, in September 1975, "... a 15 unit wagon train that is making a cross-country journey across the United States ..." found accommodation in the Park.²⁰² The Riverside Park stop was only one of many stops as the Bicentennial Wagon Train hoped to arrive in Philadelphia by July 4, 1976.

The intervening years from the end of the period of significance to the present reflect Riverside Park's ongoing importance to the area. It continued and continues to serve the local populace as well as those travelling the Interstate 90 corridor and those driving south to the town of Red Lodge. The Park endures accommodating both day users and overnights.

In late May and June of 2011, heavy rains and above average snowpack caused the Yellowstone River to flood the parklands. The flooding damaged the rock riprap protecting the Park, destroyed the boat ramp, and damaged many of the historic buildings from standing water.²⁰³ The Park remained closed the rest of the year and concerns arose that the banks needed stabilization to save the Park.²⁰⁴ The same month, the flood waters ruptured an underwater

¹⁹⁷ "Unity Garden Club," *Laurel Outlook*, May 16, 1973, p. 6; "Unity Garden Club buys tulip bulbs," *Laurel Outlook*, October 17, 1973, p. 3.

¹⁹⁸ "Garden Club has herbs program," *Laurel Outlook*, May 8, 1974, p. 10; "Club program tour of garden," *Laurel Outlook*, May 22, 1974, p. 3; "Easter theme at Garden Club," *Laurel Outlook*, April 2, 1975, p. 16.

¹⁹⁹ "Laurel to look at consolidation plan," *Laurel Outlook*, December 6, 1972, p. 10.

²⁰⁰ "City to match pending funds," *Laurel Outlook*, December 3, 1975, p. 2.

²⁰¹ Work begins on horseshoe pit," *Laurel Outlook*, July 24, 1974, p. 13.

²⁰² *Laurel Outlook*, September 3, 1975, p. 1 (No title).

²⁰³ "Laurel Water Plant Spared Flooding," *Billings Gazette*, May 26, 2011, p. 1.

²⁰⁴ "Facebook Campaign Launched to "Save Riverside Park," *Laurel Outlook*, February 1, 2012, p. 1.

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ExxonMobil Silvertip oil pipeline, just downstream from the Park, spilling an estimated 1,500 barrels (63,000 gallons) of crude oil into the Yellowstone River.²⁰⁵ The ExxonMobil Foundation donated \$300,000 to help repair the Park's levy.²⁰⁶ By 2014, the north and south banks of the River were stabilized through a 1.4 million dollar Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant and donations from CHS (Laurel Refinery) and ExxonMobil.²⁰⁷

Following the flooding and reclamation, the City of Laurel sponsored a 2017 Riverside Park Master Plan that recorded nine buildings located within the Park boundary; three of these were called-out as operational buildings, including Riverside Hall/Jaycee Hall, a storage building, and the Horseshoe Club building. The summer of 2020 found the City of Laurel approving campground improvements that consisted of repaving camping sites, fire pit placement, and adding vault toilets.²⁰⁸ In 2023, the three dozen campsites, accommodating recreational vehicles, pull through campers, and tents, were once again available to the public.

Many parks dot Laurel's streets. Most are small and considered neighborhood parks. The larger parks, such as Thomson Park, Nutting Park, and Murray Heights Park, feature athletic fields either for soccer, baseball, track and field, or swimming. Riverside Park is the only park that fronts the Yellowstone River. Riverside is not only a park in the recreational sense, but it also has a history second to none. Despite the property's intensive use, it is likely few know of its long and interesting history, a history that incorporates episodes associated with some of the country's most important periods including time as a transient relief camp and a prisoner of war camp. To most, Riverside Park's importance derives from its common perception as a local spot to relax and enjoy time outdoors. With the passage of time, this perception clearly holds merit and symbolizes what in many ways the National Register represents, the acknowledgment of a property's value to a local community through its continued use over time.

Architectural Significance

The Rustic approach to architecture grew out of the development of National Parks in the early part of the 20th century as a response to the romanticism and glorification of the American West. The National Park Service (NPS) architects envisioned the Rustic style and designed buildings and structures with an eye toward more nature-accordant construction — complementing the landscape instead of competing with it.²⁰⁹ The NPS advocated that scenery, not buildings, assume top billing. Influence for the style derived from the park designs of landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and the “organic architecture” movement that proffered many of the

²⁰⁵ Great West Engineering, “City of Laurel: Riverside Park Master Plan,” December 2017, p. 5.

²⁰⁶ “Exxon Donation,” *Laurel Outlook*, August 17, 2011, p. 1.

²⁰⁷ “Riverside Park: The Heart of Laurel's History,” *Billings Gazette*, July 19, 2014, p. 7.

²⁰⁸ City of Laurel, *Riverside Park Campground Construction 2020*, <https://cityoflaurelmontana.com/publicworks/project/riverside-park-campground-construction-2020>, October 2021.

²⁰⁹ William C. Tweed, Laura E. Soulliere, and Henry G. Law, *National Park Service Rustic Architecture: 1916-1942* (National Park Service Western Regional Office, Division of Cultural Resource Management, 1977), p. 16.

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same ideals followed by the NPS, buildings harmonizing with their surroundings and the use of local natural building materials.

In the 1910s and 1920s, the NPS honed the Rustic style, refining and promoting it through the construction of lodges, museums, and other structures at National Parks that included Glacier, Yosemite, Yellowstone, Zion, and Grand Canyon. The style trickled up to the Parks' grandiose buildings, such as Yellowstone's Old Faithful Inn and Yosemite's Ahwahnee Hotel. The 1933 election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as President resulted in the reorganization of the National Park Service with historical preservation assuming a primary role with New Deal federal relief programs of the Great Depression. The New Deal agencies, including the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA), Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), National Youth Administration (NYA), the Civil Works Administration (CWA), and the Works Progress Administration (WPA), aimed to put Americans back to work through training programs, supporting skilled craftsmen and artisans, and creating jobs to help rehabilitate the general economy of the nation.²¹⁰ Local manifestations of Rustic style generally presented a less-grand, more vernacular scale at the New Deal relief camps to more effectively blend with the environment through use of local materials.²¹¹

Resources within Riverside Park, Laurel

The five contributing buildings at Riverside Park that include Riverside Hall/Jaycee Hall, the Small River Rock Building, the Bath House/American Legion Hall, the Transient Camp Barracks Building(s)/Laurel Rifle Club, and the Laurel Rod and Gun Club Building were built loosely following the Rustic aesthetic of the National Park Service with simplified Craftsman detailing.

The buildings at Riverside Park stand as an extension of the National Park vision of architecture tailored to a local audience. Rustic architecture at its most elementary level embraces walls or siding that consist of rough-cut lumber, peeled logs, or log siding, and steep roofs topped with shingles (at least historically) that display overhanging eaves and exposed rafters, the latter roof traits an embodiment of the Craftsman style simplified in its realization at Riverside. Another important facet of Rustic style is the use of materials that display colors that harmonize with the surroundings.²¹² In many cases, especially in rural areas, construction materials lean to vernacular, utilizing readily and locally available native products. Other touchstones may include

²¹⁰ William C. Tweed, Laura E. Soulliere, and Henry G. Law, *National Park Service Rustic Architecture: 1916-1942* (National Park Service Western Regional Office, Division of Cultural Resource Management, 1977), p. 77.

²¹¹ William C. Tweed, Laura E. Soulliere, and Henry G. Law, *National Park Service Rustic Architecture: 1916-1942* (National Park Service Western Regional Office, Division of Cultural Resource Management, 1977), p. 106.

²¹² Ernest Burden, *Illustrated Dictionary of Architecture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), p. 284.

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the lack of excessive finish, avoidance of overly straight lines, and embracing low silhouettes.²¹³ The style evokes construction via early craftsmen using few hand tools, and when “successfully handled... achieves sympathy with natural surroundings, and with the past.”²¹⁴

The inclusion of fieldstone chimneys is common; in the case of most of the buildings at Riverside Park, the use of cobbles is ratcheted up to clad most of the buildings with the locally sourced material.²¹⁵ Although not constructed by the WPA, it was that agency that left their indelible mark on the exterior of three of the five buildings dating to the Transient Service Work camp years with the application of a veneer of “native rock taken from the Yellowstone River”....²¹⁶ The WPA applied the cobble cladding in the summer of 1936, and while the cobble veneer obscures the buildings’ original Rustic materials, it shifts the buildings’ appearance toward a more vernacular presentation. The idea of “rustic” buildings filtered to the local newspaper with the 1936 dance hall summer renovation described as “rustic architectural design.”²¹⁷ The Rod and Gun Club log building built in 1939 by the NYA youth during H.E. Wildman’s charge, remains the only building that lacks cobblestone veneer, thus, retaining more fully its historic Rustic style.

²¹³ “NPS Rustic Style Architecture,” National Park Service Resource Brief, <https://www.nps.gov/sagu/learn/historyculture/upload/NPS-Rustic-Style-Brief.pdf>, accessed April 25, 2024.

²¹⁴ Merrill Ann Wilson, “Rustic Architecture: The National Park Style,” *Trends*. (July August September 1976): pp. 4-5.

²¹⁵ Ernest Burden, *Illustrated Dictionary of Architecture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), p. 284.

²¹⁶ “City Takes Over Riverside, Begins Decorative Veneer Work,” *Laurel Outlook*, August 12, 1936, p. 1.

²¹⁷ “Riverside Will be one of the Most Unique and Complete Playgrounds in the State,” *Laurel Outlook*, May 27, 1936, p. 10.

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Riverside Park
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“Veterans Complete Arrangements for Memorial Day Observances at Park City and Laurel Cemeteries,” *Laurel Outlook*, May 17, 1944.

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“Young People Give Unusual Portrayal Of Easter Thought,” *Laurel Outlook*, April 17, 1935.

9. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 19.7 acres

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 45.653660 | Longitude: -108.759050 |
| 2. Latitude: 45.654560 | Longitude: -108.755660 |
| 3. Latitude: 45.655090 | Longitude: -108.752680 |
| 4. Latitude: 45.654780 | Longitude: -108.749830 |
| 5. Latitude: 45.652950 | Longitude: -108.754630 |
| 6. Latitude: 45.653640 | Longitude: -108.755160 |
| 7. Latitude: 45.652580 | Longitude: -108.757890 |

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Point 1 of the Riverfront Park National Register boundary marks the northwest corner, near the east edge of Highway 310 crossing the Yellowstone River. From this location through Point 4, the boundary lies immediately south of the non-historic levee/berm that parallels the river and provides the park protection from flooding; the levee/berm lies outside the boundary. The boundary travels northeast for about 950 feet to Point 2 where it bends very slightly to follow an east-northeast direction for about 75 feet to Point 3. The boundary then runs east to Point 4, the property's furthest eastern point. From Point 4 the boundary shifts away from the river to travel about 1350 feet southwest, paralleling the park's southern boundary tree row; a rough two-track road parallels the tree row and lies outside the National Register boundary. From Point 5, the boundary runs northwest 300 feet to the east edge of the historic access road that leads from the highway (Point 6). The boundary then runs 800 feet southwest along the south edge of the historic access road to Point 7, the east edge of Highway 310 and the southwest corner of the boundary. The boundary then turns northwest and parallels the east side of Highway 310 for approximately 500 feet to where it returns to Point 1. Please see the aerial and topographic maps on the following pages (pages 64 and 65) to reference area to confirm this boundary.

Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses all contributing resources that remain within Riverside Park and excludes, where possible, modern intrusions and development that fail to contribute to the Park's history, landscape, and historic setting.

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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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: Western Heritage Center, Billings

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Form Prepared By

Name/title: John Boughton (SHPO), Kate Hampton (SHPO), Kevin Kooistra, Western Heritage Center, Billings

Organization: Western Heritage Center / Yellowstone Historic Preservation Board
Street & number: 2822 Montana Avenue
City or town: Billings State: MT Zip code 59101
E-mail kevin@ywhc.org
Telephone: Cell 406-647-5337
Date: December 25, 2023

organization: Montana State Historic Preservation Office
street & number: 225 North Roberts Street
city or town: Helena state: MT zip code: 59620
e-mail jboughton@mt.gov , khampton@mt.gov
telephone: (406) 444-3647 (406) 444-7742
date: April 2024

Additional context and research by:

Name: Emily Meick, Cecelia Gavinsky, Michelle Caron, and Ann Kooistra-Manning
Organization: Western Heritage Center / Yellowstone Historic Preservation Board
Street & number: 2822 Montana Avenue
City or town: Billings State: MT Zip code 59101

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Additional Documentation (Maps)



Montana State Library - Digital Library
(406) 444-5354 | geoinfo@mt.gov | <http://msl.mt.gov>

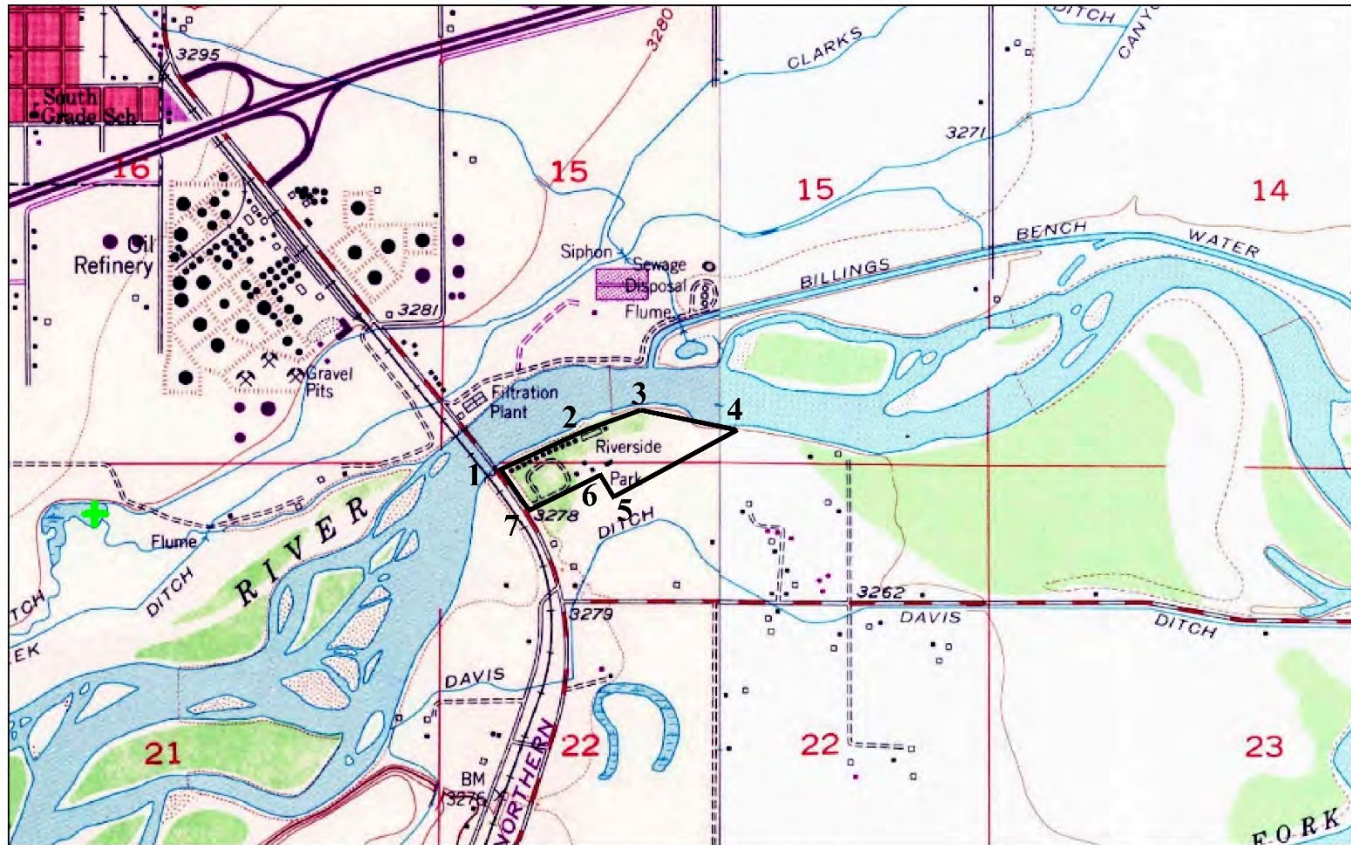
Map created using the Digital Atlas February 22, 2024
<http://msl.mt.gov/GIS/Atlas>

Aireal image showing National Register Boundary of Riverfront Park, Laurel.

- 1. Latitude: 45.653660 Longitude: -108.759050
- 2) Latitude: 45.654560 Longitude: -108.755660
- 3) Latitude: 45.655090 Longitude: -108.752680
- 4) Latitude: 45.654780 Longitude: -108.749830
- 5) Latitude: 45.652950 Longitude: -108.754630
- 6) Latitude: 45.653640 Longitude: -108.755160
- 7) Latitude: 45.652580 Longitude: -108.757890

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Montana State Library - Digital Library
(406) 444-5354 | geoinfo@mt.gov | <http://msl.mt.gov> Map created using the Digital Atlas February 22, 2024
<http://msl.mt.gov/GIS/Atlas>

Location of Riverfront Park, Laurel. Found on the Laurel 7.5' quadrangle map.

- 1) Latitude: 45.653660 Longitude: -108.759050
- 2) Latitude: 45.654560 Longitude: -108.755660
- 3) Latitude: 45.655090 Longitude: -108.752680
- 4) Latitude: 45.654780 Longitude: -108.749830
- 5) Latitude: 45.652950 Longitude: -108.754630
- 6) Latitude: 45.653640 Longitude: -108.755160
- 7) Latitude: 45.652580 Longitude: -108.757890

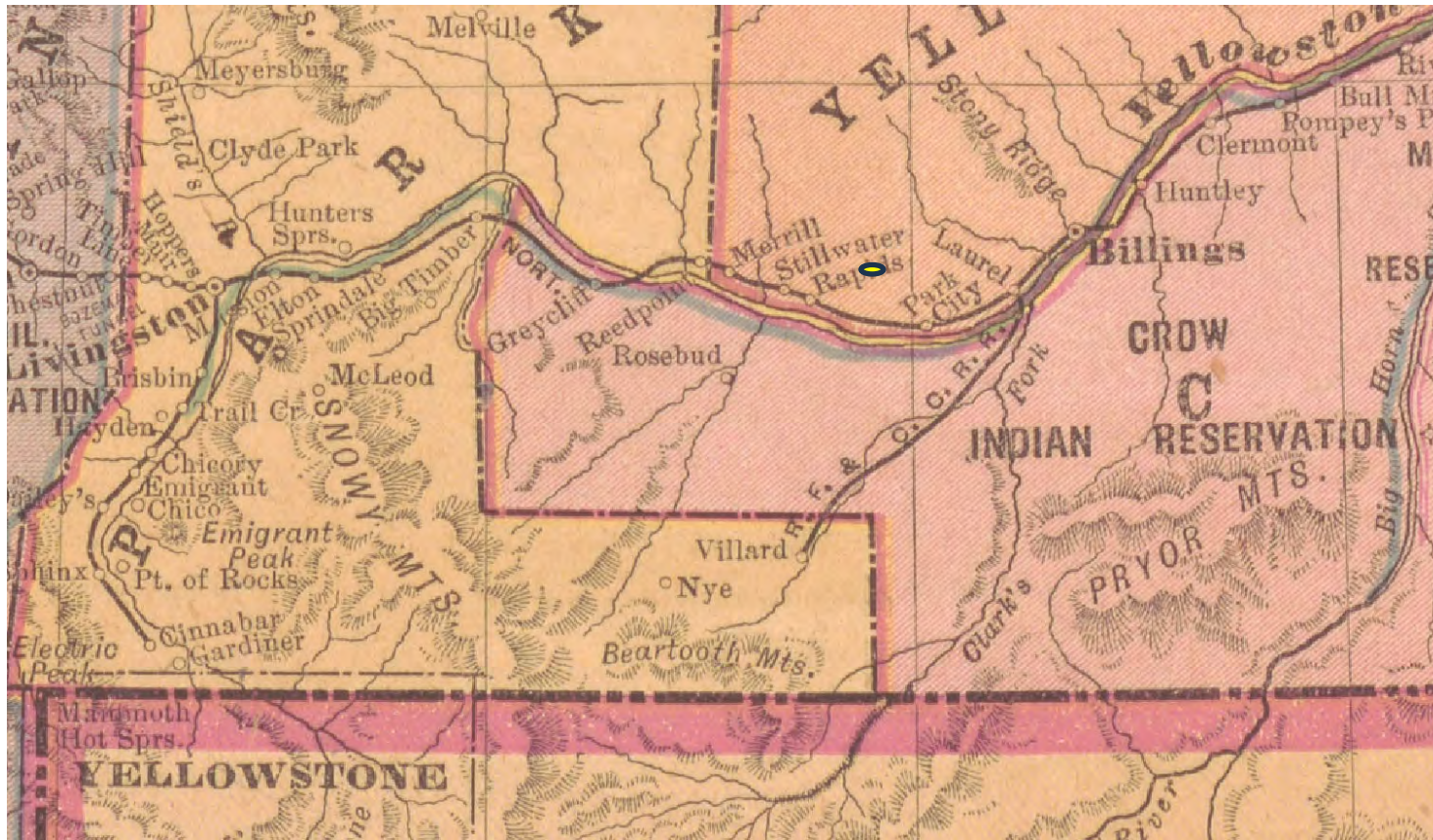
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1890 Montana by Mast, Crowell & Kirkpatrick. The Riverside parklands, south of Laurel and the Yellowstone River, were located on the Crow Indian Reservation until 1891. The Rocky Fork and Cooke City (RF&CC) Railroad crossed the Yellowstone River, adjacent to the future parklands, and the Crow Reservation in 1889 to access mines near the Beartooth Mountains. Henry Villard was a trustee of the Rocky Fork Coal Company at Red Lodge (town of Villard?). Reference: Mast, Crowell & Kirkpatrick, Cartographer, Copyright Holder, and Engraver Benedict & Company 145,310 square miles. [Springfield, Ohio: Mast, Crowell & Kirkpatrick, ©, 1890] Map retrieved from the Library of Congress, Call number G4250 1890. M3 Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C.

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Additional Documentation—Historic Images



1936 May 27 *Laurel Outlook*. Two new buildings at Riverside Park by May of 1936. Top: Riverside Hall / Jaycee Building prior to the cobblestone veneer work done in the summer of 1936. Bottom: East end of the future Rifle Club building.

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Barracks Become Recreation Room

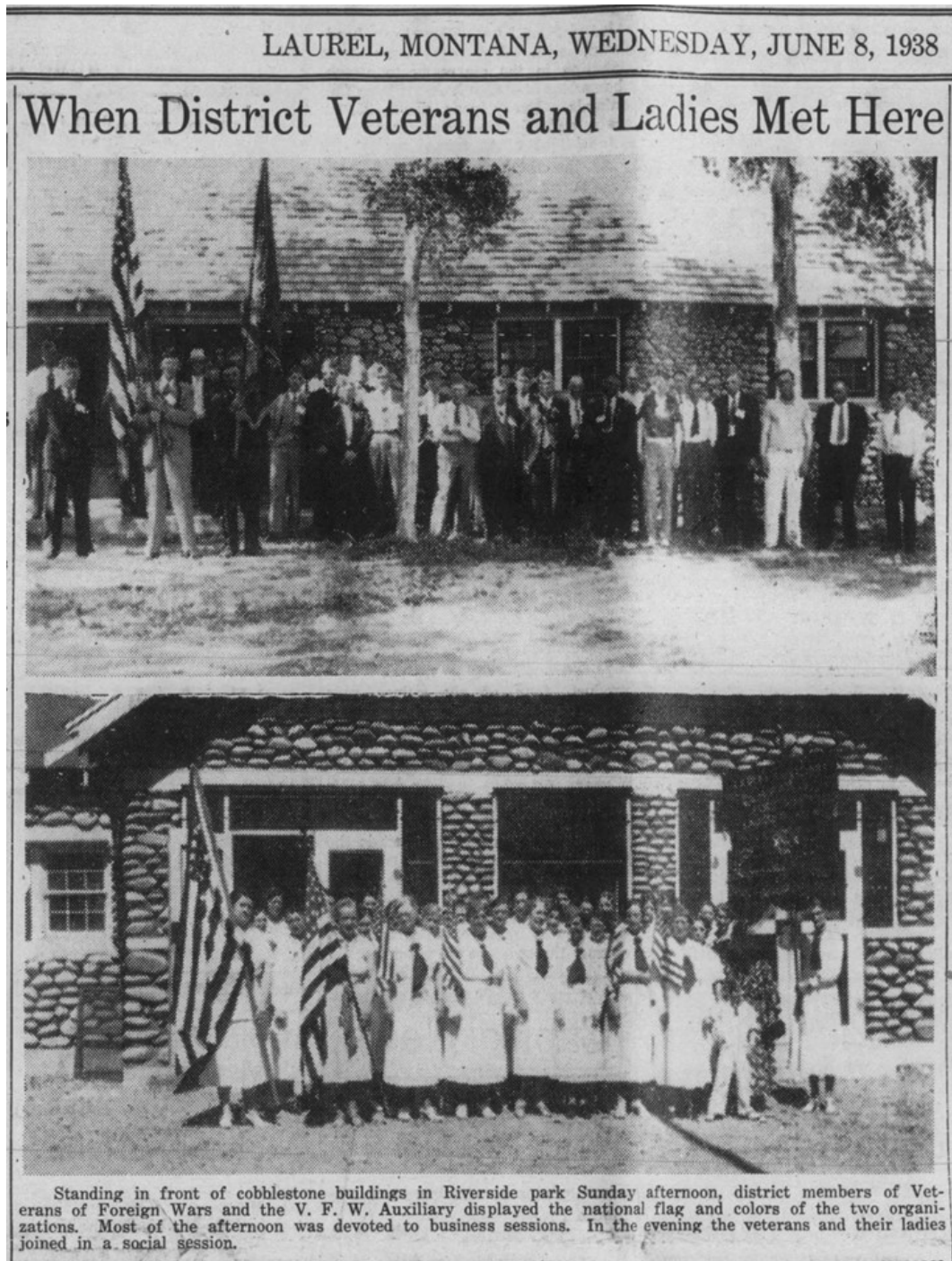


Former barrack rooms of the federal transient service have been remodeled as a recreational room and veneered with native stone. During the official opening celebration October 16 and 17 it will be designated as "Calamity Jane's" dance hall.

1936 Oct 11 *The Billings Gazette*. Article: "Laurel's New Park to Open This Week." The public barracks become "Calamity Jane's Dance Hall." The west end of the future Rifle Club Building.

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“When District Veterans and Ladies Met Here,” *Laurel Outlook*, June 8, 1938, p. 1. Laurel Riverside Park. Top: One of the two buildings that would form the Laurel Rifle Club building (east end). Bottom: VFW ladies in front of the Riverside Hall / Jaycees Building after the 1936 cobbler stone veneer work.

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Riverside Hall / Jaycee Hall, about 1955. Photo scanned from the Laurel Public Library collections. Ann Kooistra-Manning. Riverside Park Laurel, Research Notes Timeline from Newspaper Articles, Deeds & WPA Records (Unpublished), 2020.

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National Register of Historic Places Photographs

Photo Log

All photographs unless noted

Name of Property: Riverside Park, Laurel

City or Vicinity: Laurel

County: Yellowstone County

State: Montana

Photographer: Kevin Kooistra

Dates Photographed:

January 20, 2021, October 7, 2023, November 20, 2023, and December 21, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0001. View: Riverside Hall / Jaycee Hall, looking northeast. November 20, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0002. View: Riverside Hall / Jaycee Hall, looking north. November 20, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0003. View: Riverside Hall / Jaycee Hall, looking south. October 07, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0004. View: Laurel Rod and Gun Club, looking northeast. November 20, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0005. View: Laurel Rod and Gun Club, looking east. October 7, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0006. View: Laurel Rod and Gun Club, looking north. November 20, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0007. View: Laurel Rod and Gun Club, looking southeast. January 20, 2021.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0008. View: Small River Rock Building / Guards' Building, looking southeast. October 07, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0009. View: Small River Rock Building / Guards' Building, looking west. October 07, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0010. View: Small River Rock Building / Guards' Building, looking north. November 20, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0011. American Legion Hall / Bath House, front façade addition, looking northeast. October 7, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0012. View: American Legion Hall / Bath House, looking east at semi-enclosed porch. January 20, 2021.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0013. View: American Legion Hall / Bath House, looking southwest at façade marked by color change in mortar. October 07, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0014. View: American Legion Hall / Bath House, looking east at chimney and front façade marked by color change in mortar. October 07, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0015. View: American Legion Hall / Bath House, view looking south. Back façade faces Yellowstone River. October 07, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0016. View: Rifle Club building, looking north. November 20, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0017. View: Rifle Club building, looking southwest (northeast end of the long building). October 07, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0018. View: Rifle Club building, looking south to southeast. Northwest end of the building. October 07, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0019. View: Rifle Club building, view looking east at filled in window (notice mortar change). Back façade faces Yellowstone River. October 07, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0020. View: Rifle Club building, looking north. The mortar changed between 1934 and 1955 construction. October 07, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0021. View: (left to right) American Legion / Bath House, Rifle Club building, and Guard House, northeast. October 07, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0022. Park entrance with campsites, park bathroom, and Riverside Hall / Jaycee Hall, looking east / northeast. December 21, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0023. Overview of Laurel Rod and Gun, Riverside Hall / Jaycee Hall, and small square cobbled building / guard building, looking west. December 21, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0024. Horseshoe Club pits and Club indoor hut (outside NR boundary), Riverside Hall / Jaycee Hall in the backdrop. looking north. December 21, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0025. North edge of Riverside Park along the Yellowstone River, looking upstream, with Highway 212, railroad bridge, small bathroom, the Laurel oil refinery, and Laurel water treatment plant (right), looking northwest. December 21, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0026. Berm along the north edge of Riverside Park and south bank of the Yellowstone River. The south edge of the berm defines the north edge of the National Register boundary. Looking northeast. December 21, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0027. World War II Prisoner of War sign at entrance to Riverside Park, with concrete restroom and Riverside Hall/Jaycee Hall in the background, looking east / northeast. December 21, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0028. Campground sign at entrance to Riverside, looking south. December 21, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0029. Berm on east end of Park used with firing range and edge of former dump, looking south. December 21, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0030. Riverside Park entrance sign off Highway 212, looking north. December 21, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0031. Laurel Rifle Club long building, looking west / northwest. December 21, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0032. Laurel Rod and Gun Club and historic rifle range, looking south / southwest. December 21, 2023.

MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0033. American Legion and Laurel Rifle Club, looking north / northeast. December 21, 2023.



MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0001.
Riverside Hall / Jaycee Hall, looking northeast. November 20, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0002.
Riverside Hall / Jaycee Hall, looking north. November 20, 2023.

Riverside Park
Name of Property

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0003.
Riverside Hall / Jaycee Hall, looking south. October 07, 2023.

Riverside Park
Name of Property

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MT_Yellowstone County-Riverside Park, Laurel–Photo 0004.
Laurel Rod and Gun Club, looking northeast. November 20, 2023.

Riverside Park
Name of Property

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0005.
Laurel Rod and Gun Club, looking east. October 7, 2023.

Riverside Park
Name of Property

Yellowstone County, MT
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MT Yellowstone County-Riverside Park, Laurel-Photo 0006.
Laurel Rod and Gun Club, looking north. November 20, 2023.

Riverside Park
Name of Property

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0007.
Laurel Rod and Gun Club, looking southeast. January 20, 2021.

Riverside Park
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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0008.
Small River Rock Building / Guards' Building, looking southeast (Laurel Rod and Gun building is in backdrop). October 07, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0009.
Small River Rock Building / Guards' Building, looking west (The Riverside Hall / Jaycee building is in the background). October 07, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0010.
Small River Rock Building / Guards' Building, looking north (Rifle Club building is in the background). November 20, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0011.
American Legion Hall / Bath House, front façade addition, looking northeast. October 7, 2023.

Riverside Park
Name of Property

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0012.
American Legion Hall / Bath House, looking east at semi-enclosed porch. January 20, 2021.

Riverside Park
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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0013.
American Legion Hall / Bath House, looking southwest at add-on façade from the 1950s (left)
marked by color change in mortar. October 07, 2023.

Riverside Park
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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0014.
American Legion Hall / Bath House, looking east at chimney and front façade (right) marked by color change in mortar. October 07, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0015.
American Legion Hall / Bath House, looking south. The back façade in photograph faces the
Yellowstone River. October 07, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0016.
Rifle Club building, looking north. November 20, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0017.
Rifle Club building, view looking southwest. October 07, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0018.
Rifle Club building, view looking southeast. Northwest corner of the long building. October 07, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0019.
Rifle Club building, looking east at filled in window from 1950s (notice mortar change after 1955). October 07, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0020.

Transient camp barracks / Laurel Rifle Club, c.1934 and c. 1955. Photograph taken October 2023 shows the change of color in the mortar. On the left is the original concrete work and river cobble veneer from 1936. On the right is the concrete work and veneer done by the Laurel Rifle Club about 1955 to expand, connect, and match two historic buildings. October 07, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0021.
American Legion / Bath House, Rifle Club building (middle), and Guard House (left to right),
looking northeast. Photo by Kevin Kooistra, October 07, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0022.

Park entrance with campsites, park concrete bathroom, and Riverside Hall / Jaycee Hall, looking east / northeast. December 21, 2023.

Riverside Park
Name of Property

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0023.

Overview of Laurel Rod and Gun (white door), Riverside Hall / Jaycee Hall, and small square cobbled building / guard building, looking west. December 21, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0024.

Horseshoe Club hut and club horseshoe pits (outside NR boundary), Riverside Hall / Jaycee Hall in the background. looking north. December 21, 2023.

Riverside Park
Name of Property

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0025.

North edge of Riverside Park along the Yellowstone River, looking upstream, with Highway 212, railroad bridge, small bathroom, the CHS Laurel oil refinery, and Laurel water treatment plant (right), looking northwest. December 21, 2023.

Riverside Park
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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0026.

Berm along the north edge of Riverside Park and south bank of the Yellowstone River. The south edge of the berm defines the north edge of the National Register boundary. Looking east / northeast. December 21, 2023.

Riverside Park
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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0027.
World War II Prisoner of War sign at entrance to Riverside Park, with concrete restroom and Riverside Hall / Jaycee Hall in the background, looking east / northeast. December 21, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0028.
Campground sign at entrance to Riverside, looking south. December 21, 2023.

Riverside Park
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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0029.

Berm on east end of Riverside Park used as a backstop for the firing range. It also defines the edge of the former dump to the east, looking south. December 21, 2023.

Riverside Park
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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0030.
Riverside Park entrance sign from Highway 212, looking north. December 21, 2023.

Riverside Park
Name of Property

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0031.
Laurel Rifle Club long building, looking west / northwest. December 21, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0032.

Laurel Rod and Gun Club with historic rifle range and berm in the background, looking south / southwest. December 21, 2023.

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MT_YellowstoneCounty_RiversidePark_0033.
American Legion Hall and Laurel Rifle Club building, looking north / northeast. December 21,
2023.