

# **From Summer Homes to Public Playground: The Evolution to Point Park, Grand Lake, Colorado**



**by Michael Weeks**

## INTRODUCTION

This project originated at the request of Edwin McCrillis. Edwin's family jointly owned the current Point Park property on the shores of Grand Lake from 1921-1945 as a result of a court case won by his father, Ralph Waldo McCrillis, a case which will be treated at length in this narrative. Edwin credits experiences rowing on the lake, fly-fishing in the area, and generally exploring the landscape for helping him to recover from pneumonia in 1929. In subsequent years, he rowed on Grand Lake, prepared boats for the annual Grand Lake Regatta, fished at every opportunity, and hiked most of the nearby peaks. When Edwin offered me the opportunity to research and tell the story of his family's property, I was delighted.

Michael Weeks



Ralph Waldo McCrillis fly fishing from the outlet footbridge with his property in the background. Photo courtesy of Edwin McCrillis.

In a landscape resplendent with natural beauty, Point Park is one of the more pleasing places to visit in the Town of Grand Lake. It sits on approximately one acre of relatively flat land at the outlet of Grand Lake where Granby Reservoir's waters are pumped, against their natural flow, into the lake for much of the year, and flow from it during the remainder. Today visitors to Point Park can gaze across the lake to the east toward the imposing precipices of Rocky Mountain National Park, stroll across a recently rebuilt bridge which connects Point Park to the south side of the channel, observe boats traveling between the two lakes, or view an eclectic mix of rustic and modern summer cabins which dot the shoreline in all directions. This curious mix of natural beauty and constructed landscape, of the modern and the pioneer, provides hints to the fact that Point Park once appeared far different than it does today.

The last private owners of the land on which the park now sits were Ralph Waldo McCrillis and Jarvis Davies, who shared a half interest in the property and its modest cabin. Their arrival and attraction to the area were shaped by those who visited the shores of Grand Lake before them. It was a past marked by the centuries-old presence of several Indian groups, primarily the Utes. Its history was also marked by late nineteenth-century settlers who sought mineral riches in the mountains near Grand Lake and primarily failed. Plentiful fish and game additionally brought numerous sportsmen to the region, also known as Middle Park, and locals who guided these enthusiastic visitors generally extracted more income than their mining peers. But the lake itself, Colorado's largest natural body of water, proved to be the biggest treasure trove, its deep blue waters and stunning mountain backdrop firing the imagination of many would-be travelers. Thus, with the removal of the Utes, a mining industry gone bust, the slow decline of game in Middle Park, and increased transportation access in the early twentieth century, Grand Lake became a haven for summer visitors, tying the fortunes of residents to the

tourist trade. These factors and a noteworthy court case occasioned the unique joint ownership between Davies and McCrillis of this distinctive property, and eventually brought the McCrillis family to Grand Lake. It is to these details that we now must attend.

Joseph “Judge” Wescott was the first permanent settler on the shores of Grand Lake, arriving in 1867. Having enlisted in the Colorado Volunteers during the Civil War, Wescott was familiar with the region. Following the war, in 1865, he settled in what would eventually become the Middle Park town of Hot Sulphur Springs, hoping that its medicinal waters would heal his rheumatism. In so doing, Wescott joined throngs of migrants moving westward in the hope that its dry air and open spaces would restore the health and vitality ravaged by the Civil War and stifled by the confines of an urbanizing East. In 1867, apparently full of vigor, Wescott sold his Hot Sulphur Springs homestead to William Byers, publisher of the *Rocky Mountain News*, and migrated to the west shore of Grand Lake. There he claimed a rundown cabin built by Philip Crawshaw, the first Anglo to have a recorded presence in Grand Lake. Wescott later subdivided his homestead into Grand Lake City (not to be confused with the Town of Grand Lake), and sold off parcels, including the property which would eventually become Point Park. He kept a sizable chunk for himself however, and remained in Grand Lake for most of his life. He died in Ohio in 1914.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael M. Geary, *A Quick History of Grand Lake* (Ouray, CO: Western Reflections, 1999), 19-24; Mary Lyons Cairns, *Grand Lake: The Pioneers* (Denver: The World Press, 1946), 103-112; Robert C. Black III, *Island in the Rockies: A History of Grand County, Colorado to 1930* (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing, 1969), 55-63.

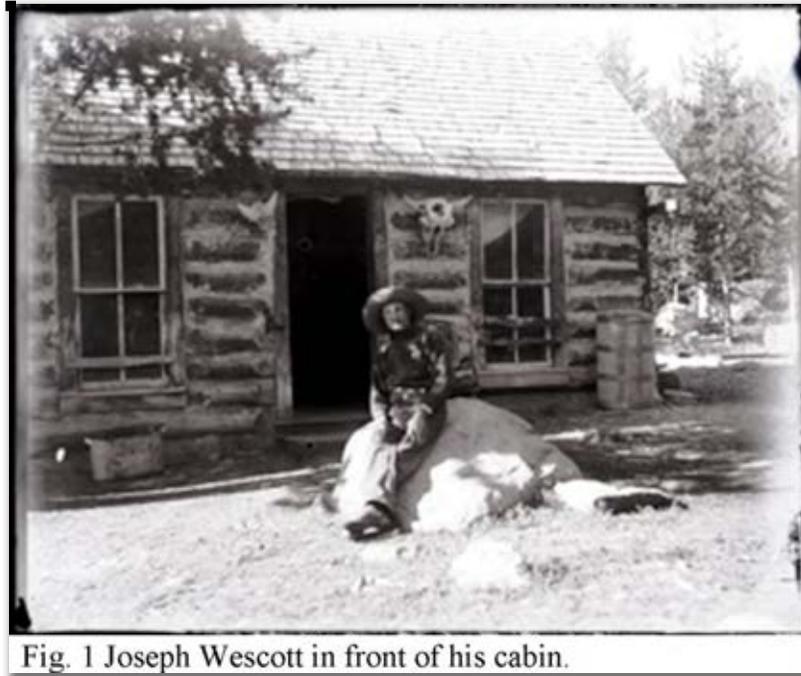


Fig. 1 Joseph Wescott in front of his cabin.

The growing presence of Anglo settlers, such as Wescott, provided one piece of the puzzle which resulted in the forced removal of the Northern Ute tribe from the area. Though it is probable that many explorers, miners, fur trappers and others had visited Grand Lake prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, the Ute Indians were the only peoples who regularly resided in Middle Park. The Utes prized the area as an excellent hunting ground for elk, deer, mountain bison, antelope, and bear. Though their access to plentiful game was occasionally limited by the encroaching Arapaho and Cheyenne nations, the increased presence of white commercial hunters and land prospectors presented a more significant challenge. Minor conflicts in the early 1860s between Anglos and Utes brought the U.S. military to Middle Park in 1863, and resulted in treaties which, in effect, confined the Utes to a reservation encompassing the western third of Colorado. Following this, the discovery of gold on the southwestern portion of Ute land, and increased pressure from settlers, brought about ongoing Anglo violations of that treaty and multiple reductions in the size of the reservation. The Utes occasionally visited Middle Park

following an 1868 treaty, since it allowed them limited hunting rights there. However, deteriorating conditions on the White River Reservation, increased settlement in Middle Park, and a reduction in game virtually eliminated them as a factor in the area's development by 1880.<sup>2</sup>

As settlers trickled into Grand Lake prior to 1900, two industries quickly came to dominate the town: mining and tourism. Discoveries of silver ore resulted in the emergence of a number of mining towns; the most prominent being Lulu City, located ten miles north of Grand Lake. At its height in 1882, it boasted several hundred residents and had been platted for one-hundred blocks. Enthusiasm for the fortunes to be made soon diminished, and Lulu City became a virtual ghost town one year later. The low grade silver ore mined there required processing and access to efficient transportation, neither of which was available anywhere within Middle Park. Moreover, silver prices crashed during the same period. Other mining endeavors in the area suffered similar fates, and by 1890 the mining industry had collapsed.<sup>3</sup>

Prospecting for tourists fared far better than mining precious metals. Word of Middle Park's abundant game and fantastic scenery conspired with a growing number of hunters in the nation to draw sportsmen to Grand Lake. Locals were more than happy to guide these well-heeled urban escapees to the area's abundant herds of elk and deer, as well as to streams and lakes filled with trout. To meet the needs of visitors, numerous guest lodges were built by the early 1900s, such as The Kauffman House, the Rustic Hotel, Camp Wheeler (locally known as Squeaky Bob's Place), Grandview, Grand Central Hotel and Nickerson House.<sup>4</sup> Some visitors desired a more consistent presence in Grand Lake and built lakeside homes beginning in the late

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<sup>2</sup> Black, 43-60 and Geary, 25-38; For a more comprehensive treatment of the removal of the Utes see Peter R. Decker, *"The Utes Must Go!": American Expansion and the Removal of a People* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2004), 17-120.

<sup>3</sup> Cairns, 163-190 and Geary 39-55.

<sup>4</sup> Cairns, 125-161; for more on guided hunting in the American West and its effects, see Louis S. Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1-20.

1880s. Access to Colorado's largest body of water naturally resulted in enthusiasm for boating on the lake. Development of yacht races beginning in 1901 brought Denver socialites over Berthoud Pass annually to brave Grand Lake's unpredictable winds. The development of a rail line connecting the Front Range to nearby Granby in 1905 further enhanced tourism's fortunes by simplifying access to Grand Lake. By the early twentieth century, Grand Lake's future was clearly tied to tourism.<sup>5</sup>

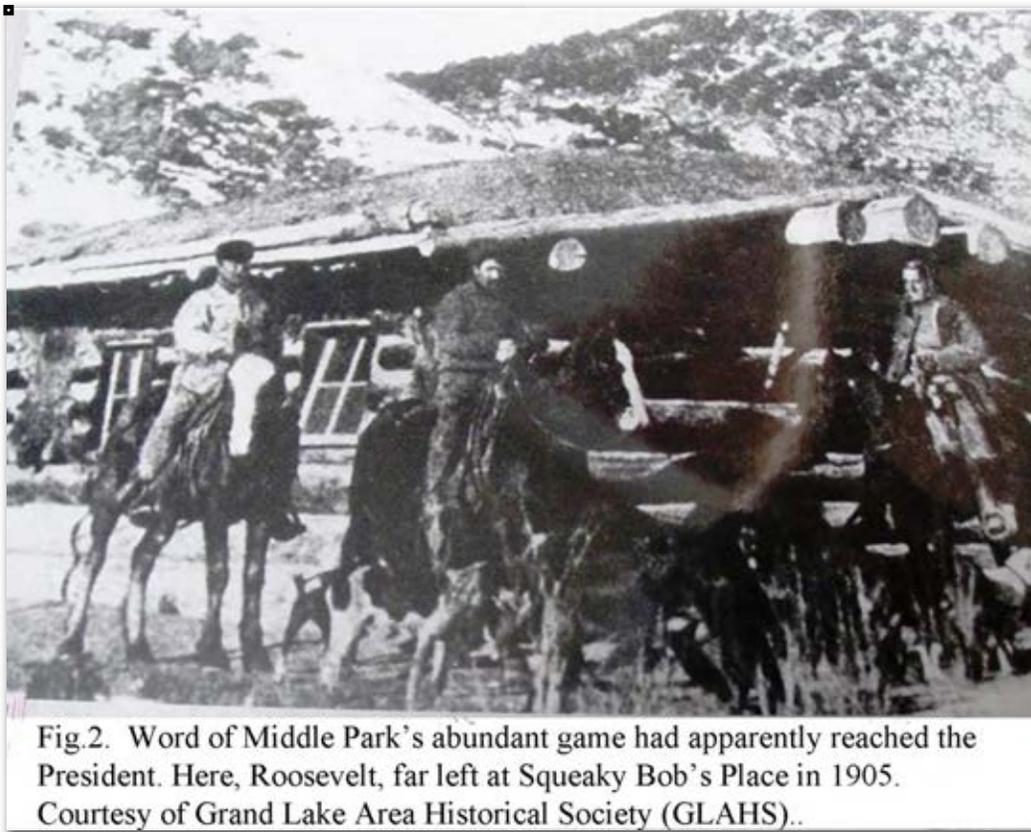


Fig.2. Word of Middle Park's abundant game had apparently reached the President. Here, Roosevelt, far left at Squeaky Bob's Place in 1905. Courtesy of Grand Lake Area Historical Society (GLAHS)..

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<sup>5</sup> For more on Grand Lake's historic hotels see Cairns, 125-161; for more on the early transportation to Grand Lake see Geary, 68-90.



Fig. 3. Fishing in Grand Lake attracted numerous tourists. Here well dressed anglers ply the waters at Grand Lake's outlet in 1895. Courtesy of GLAHS.



Fig. 4. Boating brought many visitors to Grand Lake, ca. 1900. GLAHS

Joseph Wescott, Grand Lake's original homesteader, not only witnessed these changes, but played an active role in them. In 1881, he divided his homestead on the west end of Grand Lake to create Grand Lake City. Though Wescott was eventually successful in selling his lots, Grand Lake City did not become the business and population center of the new community. That honor fell to the Town of Grand Lake, situated on the flatter and sunnier expanse of land on the north side of the lake.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the most conspicuous property sold by Wescott was the 2.5 acre parcel on the north bank of Grand Lake's outlet, known today as Point Park. According to a July, 1893, deed, the lot was contained within a twenty-acre parcel sold by Wescott to William Bayard Craig in that year.<sup>7</sup> Craig, a minister from Denver, frequented Grand Lake for leisure and occasionally to preach sermons for a community which did not have a church building during the 1880s.<sup>8</sup> Though Craig's motives for purchasing land in Grand Lake are not readily apparent, as a man of financial means and leisure time, it is likely he viewed Grand Lake as both a beautiful place to visit and a desirable investment. However, he was not the only one to covet the same property. In October, 1893, Wescott sold the current Point Park property to Jarvis Davies for \$900, though Davies failed to register it with Grand County until 1903.<sup>9</sup> This ten-year lapse was not uncommon at the time, owing to the sparse operating hours of the Grand County offices in Hot Sulphur Springs, limited transportation, and the seasonality of many Grand Lake property

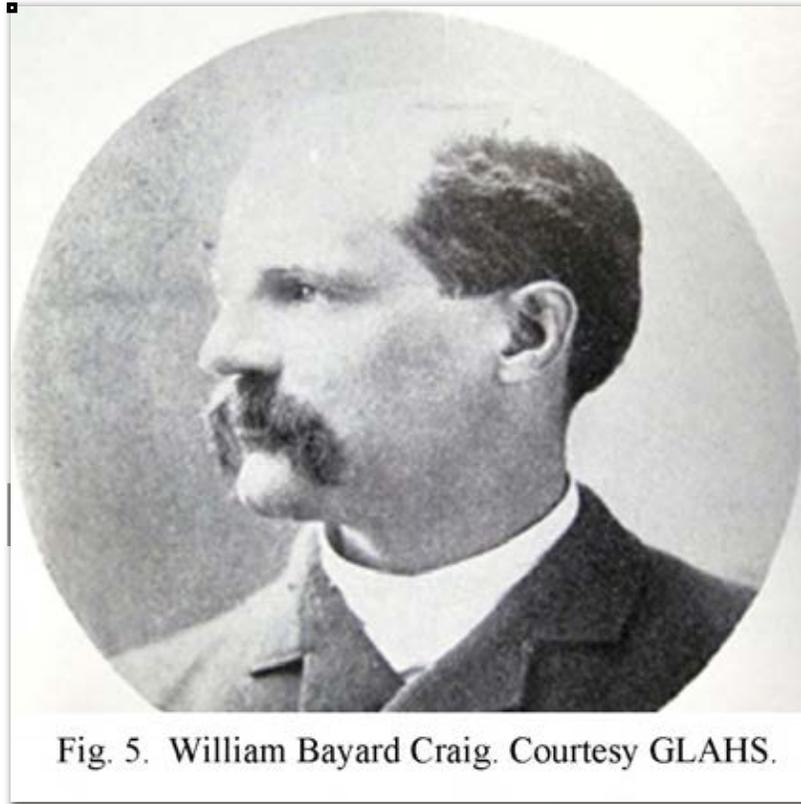
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<sup>6</sup> Cairns, 103-112.

<sup>7</sup> "Abstract of Mary J. Young Property," (Hot Sulphur Springs, CO: Department of the Assessor), copy obtained from Edwin McCrillis.

<sup>8</sup> Cairns, 257-265.

<sup>9</sup> "Warranty Deed: J.L. Wescott to Jarvis W. Davies," (Hot Sulphur Springs, CO: Grand County District Court), 1910, copy obtained from Edwin McCrillis.



owners. Whether this prime land rightfully belonged to Davies or Craig became the subject of litigation that would not be resolved until 1921.

On or around 1908 Craig brought suit in Grand County Court claiming that the Point Park property was rightfully his and that Davies should therefore quit his claim. Craig's case was based on the fact that his title to the land preceded that of Davies and on disputed survey data. According to Craig, when he purchased Lot Nine, Section Six of Grand County (see Fig. 6), it included the future Point Park Property. Davies's contention was that the 2.5 acre property was instead situated within Lot Sixteen, Section Six, which he had purchased from Wescott. Thus the court case came down to whether this valuable property on the north bank of Grand Lake's outlet was situated within Lot Nine or Lot Sixteen.

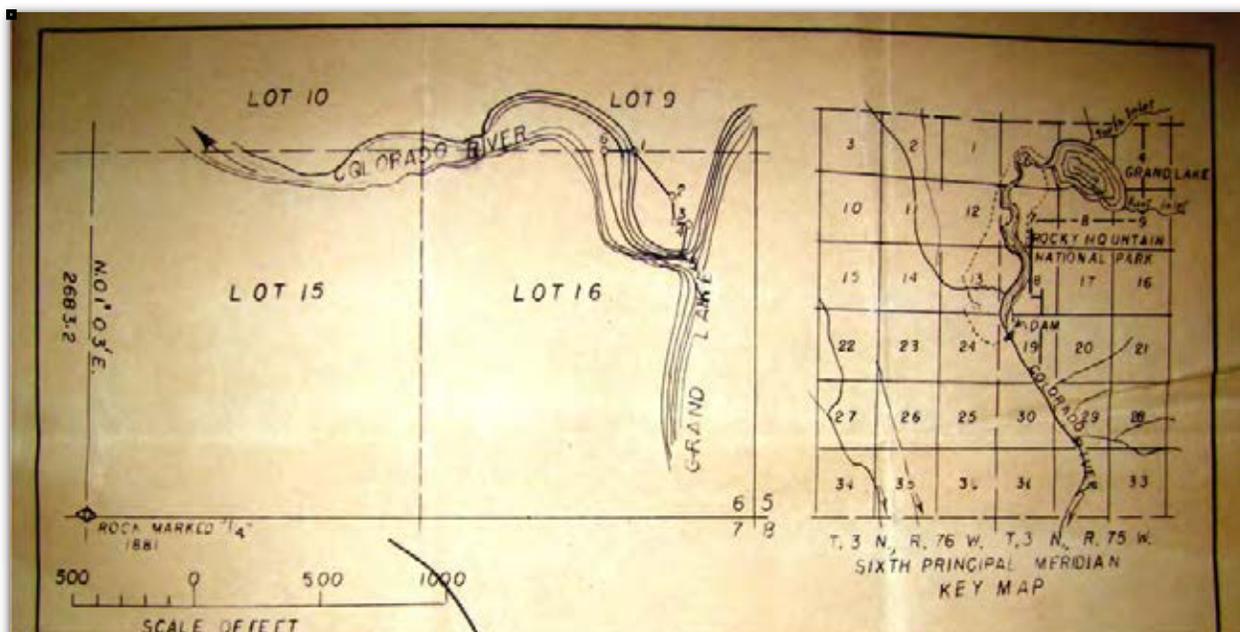


Fig. 6. These maps show lot and sectional lines relevant to the case. The disputed property was situated in the “u-shaped” tract of land located in Lot 16. Craig claimed that the property was instead situated on his 20-acre plot of land in Lot 9. The case came down to accurately reconstructing the corner where Lots 5, 6, 7, and 8 came together. The map was taken from a 1943 Bureau of Reclamation survey long after the dispute had been decided. Reprinted by permission from Edwin McCrillis.

It appeared early on that Craig’s claim was solid, since the oldest survey available to the Court placed the parcel within Lot Nine, thus awarding the land to Craig. Yet Davies’ attorney, David Howard, was successfully able to appeal the case in 1914. At about this time, Howard sought help in the proceedings and approached Denver attorney Ralph Waldo McCrillis. During his ten years of practice since graduating from the University of Michigan in 1906, McCrillis had established an excellent reputation in Denver’s legal community. Although it is unclear exactly when McCrillis joined Howard in these investigations, the Court records his involvement in the Davies/Craig action by 1916.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ralph Waldo McCrillis was named after Ralph Waldo Emerson, the transcendentalist author and poet. His mother was inspired after reading Emerson’s 1836 volume of poetry, *Nature*. It is fitting that, just as Emerson took great pleasure in meditating on nature, so the property in question here has been the source of similar inspiration.



. Fig. 7 Ralph Waldo McCrillis. Photo in possession of Edwin McCrillis. Used by permission.

Successful appeals in the Davies case eventually resulted in its landing in the Colorado Supreme Court where, in 1918, the Court issued an injunction awarding the property to Craig. At that point, Howard and McCrillis appealed again, arguing that the survey used to award the property to Craig was inaccurate. McCrillis' attempts to expose the faulty survey had led him to the Pacific Northwest where he located field notes to the original 1881 Grand Lake Meander Survey in the attic trunk of a surveyor's widow. McCrillis successfully argued that a new survey should be ordered and the results used to determine the rightful owner. The Court then agreed to treat the case under the statute which judged lost and disputed boundaries and subsequently appointed two commissioners who retraced the original meander survey. They concluded that Davies should rightfully possess the property. Craig then appealed and the Court appointed another commissioner who found in his favor on January 11, 1921. Finally, in July of that year,

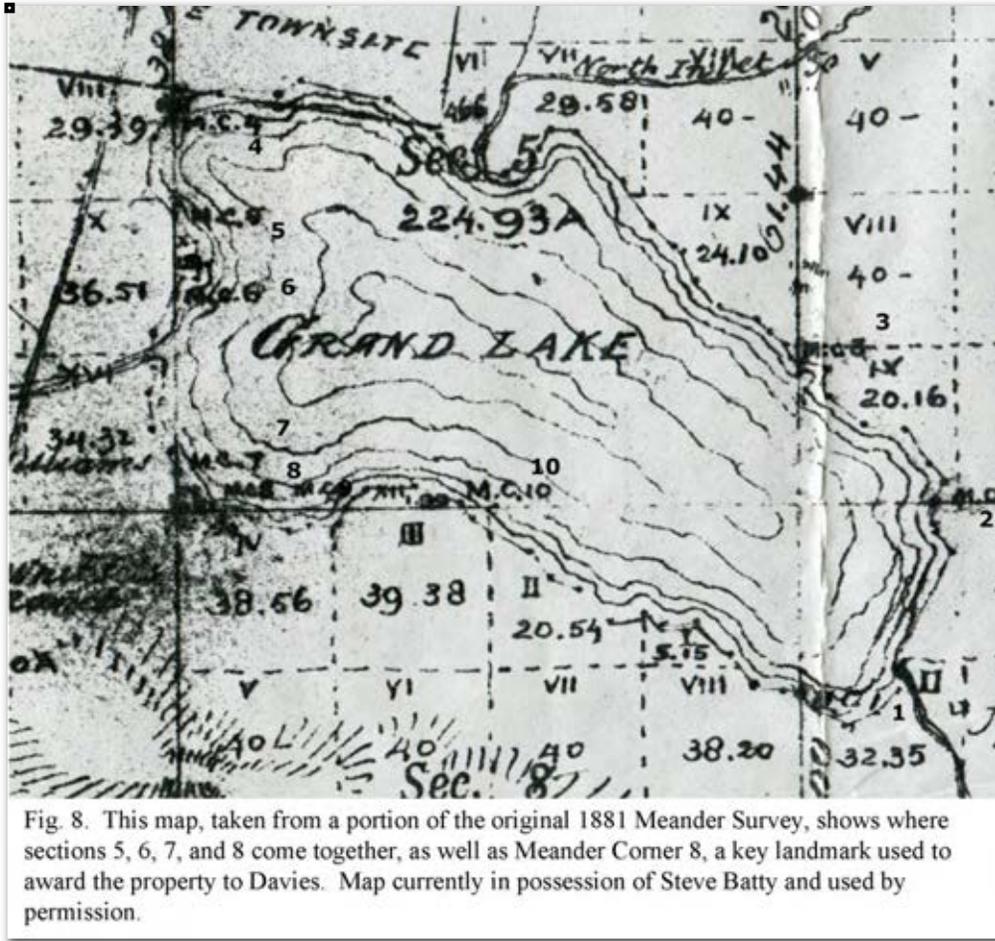
the case returned to the Grand County Court where, after considerable testimony, the Court agreed that an accurate survey of the land favored Davies, and he was awarded the property.<sup>11</sup>

In his final verdict, Judge Harry S. Class showed that the survey notes found by McCrillis were the key to awarding Davies the property. The two surveyors who followed up on these notes found plentiful evidence of their accuracy. They described several tree blazes used to show the southern demarcation of Section Six, a line shared by Lot Sixteen. Those blazes were found by the surveyors. Foresters then cut into several of the trees to determine the age of the blazes. Their tree ring analysis confirmed that the blazes were made in 1881, when the original meander survey was performed. In addition, the original survey notes referred to multiple stone markers, placed on that same line in 1881. These included one in Grand Lake which marked the corner where Sections Five, Six, Seven, and Eight came together (see figures six and eight). Prior to 1919, two witnesses had testified to the existence of those stones. Neither was contradicted. One of them was Joseph Wescott. Unfortunately, he could not return to the witness stand, as he died in 1914. Surveys which favored Craig were based on later field notes and plat maps which had no physical evidence on the ground to support their findings. However, had Ralph McCrillis not located the original field notes, the property would have been awarded to Craig and his heirs (William Bayard Craig died during the course of litigation, leaving his heirs as plaintiffs).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Edwin McCrillis, "The Early Life and Adventures of Edwin McCrillis," unpublished typescript, copy obtained from Edwin McCrillis, 1-2; "Certified Copy of Decree: William Bayard Craig and William B. Craig to J. W. Davies," (Hot Sulphur Springs, CO: Department of the Assessor), January, 1922, copy obtained from Edwin McCrillis.

<sup>12</sup> "Certified Copy of Decree"



Modern readers may question why the case consumed approximately thirteen years before a final verdict was reached. First, the Grand County Court generally met only twice each year, in January and July. The Court needed to prioritize actions, and consequently passed on many of them until subsequent sessions. This occurred on multiple occasions in the Davies/Craig dispute. In addition, it was not always possible for all parties involved to be present. In this situation, both McCrillis and Craig lived in Denver, and were not always able to travel to Grand County during court sessions. Often attorneys filed motions from afar which were then carried forward until a future session when they could be resolved. Though this case came before the Grand County Court on multiple occasions prior to 1918, no final verdict was reached. With the revelation of new survey data, the case took on increased importance.

Consequently, Grand County Court became less likely to pass it on to future sessions, and the parties involved were more likely to be present at proceedings. Moreover, Ralph McCrillis' discovery of the original 1881 Meander Survey not only transformed the nature of the case, but added a sense of urgency to it.

After Davies obtained clear title to the land in 1921, he was unable to pay attorney fees to McCrillis and Howard. He subsequently offered the property to them as compensation. McCrillis and Howard instead offered to split the property with Davies, thus giving the two attorneys each a one-quarter share. The agreement was confirmed in January 1922, at the Grand County Courthouse. In 1926, McCrillis bought Howard's quarter share for \$2,600. That arrangement would remain in place until 1944.<sup>13</sup>

During the period of litigation, Jarvis Davies enlisted local Red Craig to build a log cabin on the property to pay off a \$1,200 loan. Edwin McCrillis fondly remembers spending most of his summers beginning in 1929 and through the 1930s there. It was built primarily of split lodgepole pine and stone taken from the property. McCrillis describes it this way:

...a large living room, a large granite fireplace and two bedrooms at ground level. Above was a single large room entered through a door from the roof of an add-on kitchen accessed with a ladder. The walls and floors were never sealed. Security consisted of a front door with an inside latch and a skeleton key to unlock the kitchen door. Water safe to drink was obtained with buckets carried from the lake outlet (the headwaters of the Colorado River.) Candles and kerosene lamps provided night lighting. Wood burned in a fireplace and a small flat-top stove provided heat.

Ralph McCrillis affectionately named the cabin, "Wind Whistle," since the structure was not sealed from Grand Lake's notoriously strong winds.<sup>14</sup>

Edwin McCrillis' cabin description fits well with those of his contemporaries. Original settlers and summer residents of Grand Lake generally erected a canvas tent when they first

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<sup>13</sup> McCrillis, 1; Confirmation that Howard sold his share of the property to McCrillis can be found in J. Stuart McMaster to R.W. McCrillis, 19 October 1944, copy in possession of author.

<sup>14</sup> McCrillis, 1-2.

arrived and lived in it while building a log cabin. The abundance of lodgepole pines and rock provided natural building materials. Common practice was to rip the logs longways and then stack them horizontally so that they would be more airtight. Floors were also constructed of lodgepole pine, split, planed and sanded smooth. Neither indoor plumbing nor electricity was readily available until later in the 1930s. Mac Ruske, who came to Grand Lake in 1929 at the age of nine, also describes walking to the North Inlet - a tributary of the Colorado River which empties into Grand Lake - to carry pails of water until the family developed a pump system in 1935. Like McCrillis, Ruske describes the use of candles and gas lamps for lighting, as well as an outhouse on his north Grand Lake property. Residents such as Craig Adams, whose family purchased much of the southeast shore of the lake, found innovative methods to makeshift indoor plumbing. For example, his family cut a hole in the kitchen floor, and placed the bathtub below the floorboards. Water obtained by bucket from the North Inlet - another tributary of Grand Lake and the Colorado River - was then heated on the wood-burning stove and poured into the tub. The post-bathing ritual included pulling the tub's plug and letting the water drain onto the ground.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Mac Ruske, interview by author, 6 June 2012; Alan C. Pape, "The Ruske Family of Grand Lake, Colorado: A Story of Pioneering Revival in the Old West, unpublished typescript, copy in possession of author; Craig Adams, Untitled Speech delivered to an unspecified audience in Grand Lake, Colorado, 1955, copy obtained from the Grand Lake Area Historical Society.



Fig. 9. Example of an early homesteader's cabin in Grand Lake. Note the horizontal stacking of lodgepole logs and concrete used for chinking between logs. Courtesy of GLAHS.

Though some summer residents, like the McCrillis family, often left their cabins unsealed and without electricity or plumbing, most of them modernized their structures. For permanent residents, such as the Ruskes, the most important step was to seal their home from the harsh elements. The indispensable part in this process involved “chinking” or sealing between the exterior logs. A rudimentary form of this involved cutting young lodgepole pines and nailing them between cracks in the logs. Some settlers used oakum, which consisted of tightly woven horse hair generally taken from the tail (other animal hair would sometimes be used as well) and stuffed between cracks in the logs. The oakum would swell with moisture, forming a sort of insulation. Still others used cement in the cracks. Sealing the interior generally included planing the logs smooth and tacking rough-milled boards over them. Though some residents stopped there, others tacked burlap and/or newspapers over the top of the boards – an excellent way of

dating a cabin - and finished the interiors with fiber board or pine paneling. Similar processes were often used to seal the cracks below the floors.<sup>16</sup>

The development of modern conveniences, as well as improved transportation arteries to Grand Lake altered cabin construction and living. By the early 1930s, several roads connected Grand Lake with the larger world and a railway could be accessed in the nearby community of Granby. Consequently, residents had access to more building materials. In the mid-1930s, Mac Ruske was working for nearby Grand County Lumber Company where they milled large Douglas fir trees primarily from the Pacific Northwest. The Ruske family obtained indoor plumbing in 1935 and electricity shortly thereafter. In this they typified Grand Lake in the 1930s which, in Ruske's estimation, boasted about seventy-five permanent residents.<sup>17</sup>

The McCrillis family was eventually pushed into relinquishing their property due to forces beyond their control. In 1937, Congress approved a Bureau of Reclamation project called the Colorado-Big Thompson (C-BT). Completed in its entirety in 1959, it would eventually carry 310,000 acre feet of water annually to slake the thirsts of farmers in Northeastern Colorado.<sup>18</sup> To bring the water to the eastern slope of the Rockies, most of it would be diverted from the Colorado River below Grand Lake through four dikes and stored in the massive 540,000 acre foot Granby Reservoir, built for the C-BT. The water would then be pumped nearly 200 feet uphill into the much smaller Shadow Mountain Reservoir, also being constructed for the C-BT. Behind Shadow Mountain Reservoir a channel would be created, where the headwaters of the Colorado River once flowed, to move water into Grand Lake at an elevation of 8,369 feet. The water would then be gravity fed into the Alva Adams Tunnel where it would

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Ruske Interview; Pape, 4-5.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Tyler, *The Last Water Hole in the West: The Colorado-Big Thompson Project and the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District* (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1992), 158-159.

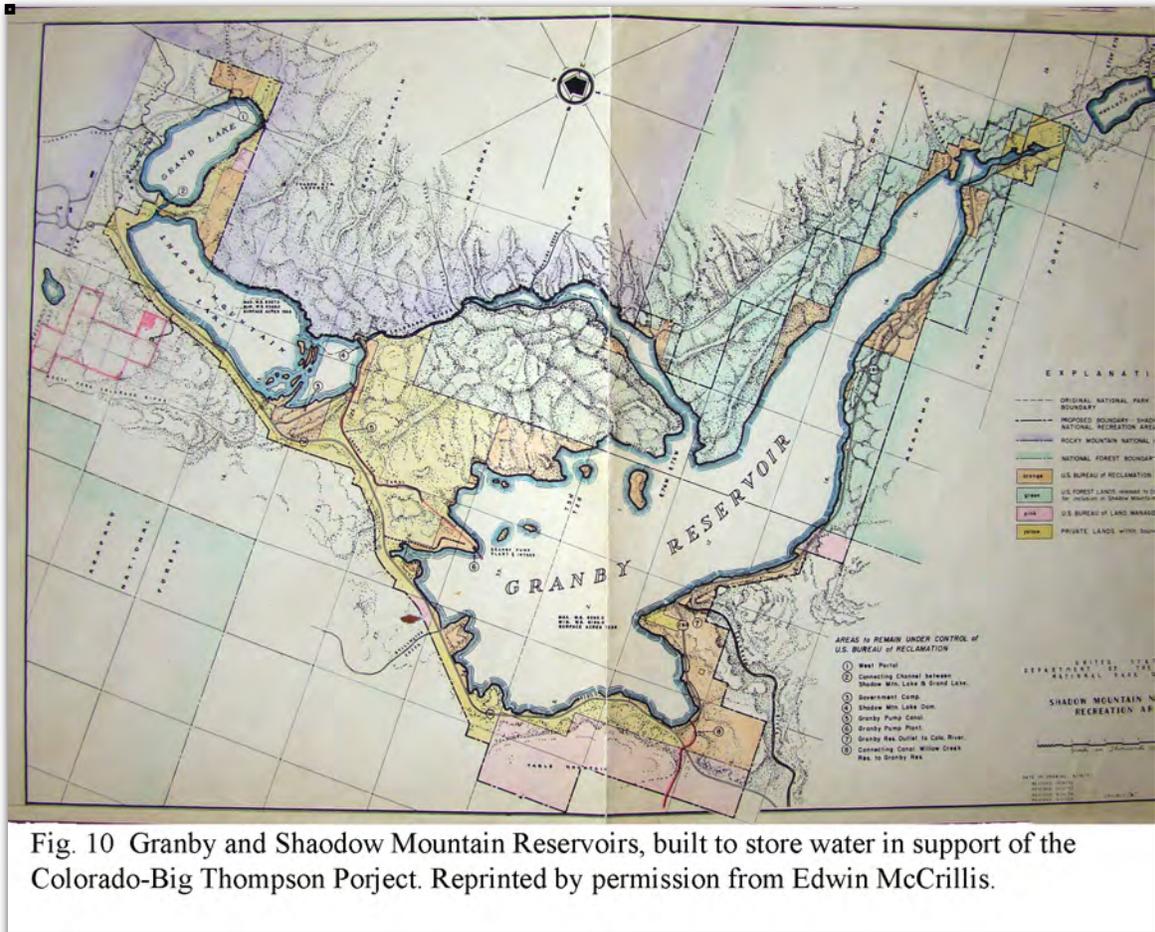


Fig. 10 Granby and Shaodw Mountain Reservoirs, built to store water in support of the Colorado-Big Thompson Porject. Reprinted by permission from Edwin McCrillis.

flow under Rocky Mountain National Park and emerge near Estes Park, 13.1 miles later. From there the water would be diverted into the Big Thompson River, as well as a series of dams, tunnels, and canals, eventually plunging 2,900 feet and through nineteen additional dams until it found its way into the irrigation canals of farmers on Colorado’s northern Front Range and the state’s northeastern plains. Though primarily intended as an irrigation project, the C-BT would also supply municipal water and power to the east slope communities of Boulder, Longmont, Loveland, Fort Collins, Greeley and other smaller communities. When completed, it would be the world’s largest trans-mountain diversion project.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Robert Autobee, *Colorado-Big Thompson Project* (Denver: Bureau of Reclamation, 1996), 17. For a list of C-BT features, including construction dates, see Christine Pfaff, *The Colorado-Big Thompson Project Historic Context and Description of Property Types* (Denver: Bureau of Reclamation, 1999), 76-87.

Engineers for the project determined that a portion of the McCrillis/Davies property would be required as a right-of-way for the new channel being constructed between Grand Lake and Shadow Mountain Reservoir. This included two important pieces. First, the McCrillis/Davies property extended to the center of the Colorado River. Since that would form part of the new channel, the Bureau purchased that. In addition, the new channel would be wider and had the potential to inundate .9 acres of the property. In all, the Bureau would requisition 1.5 acres, leaving less than one acre. They paid \$2,000 for this right-of-way, while offering an additional \$3,500 for the entire parcel.<sup>20</sup>

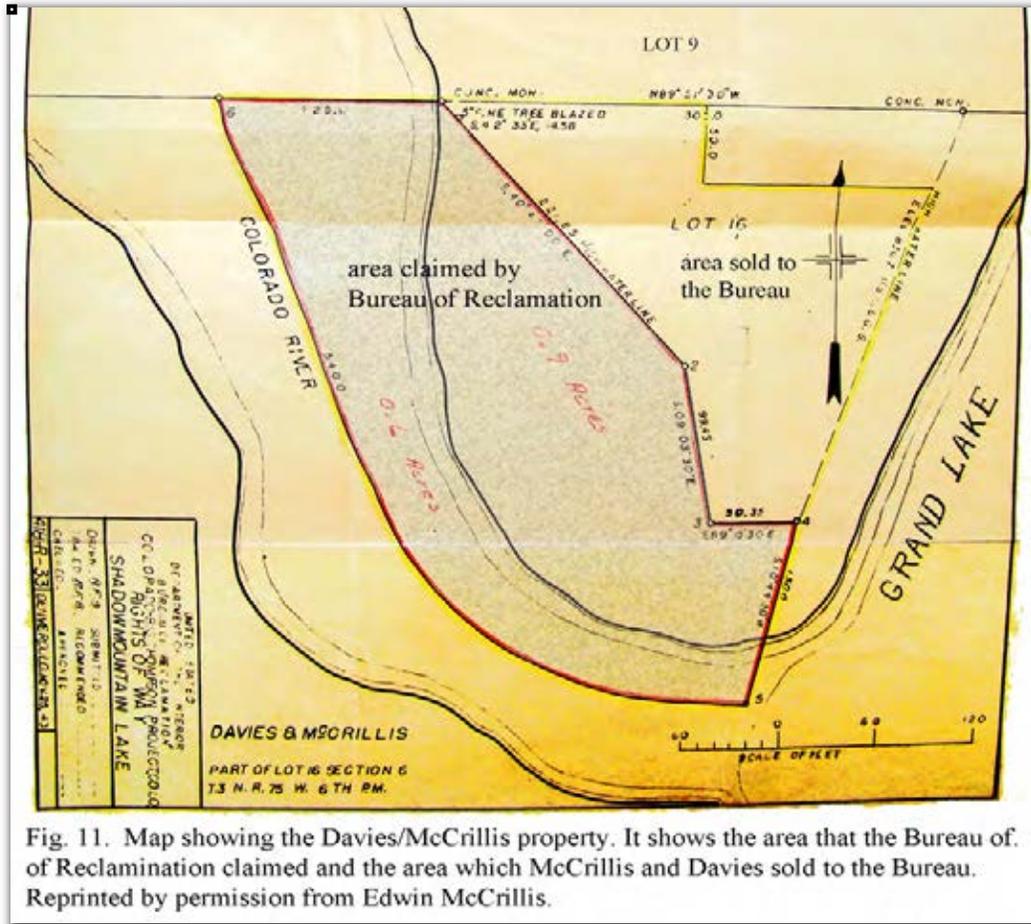


Fig. 11. Map showing the Davies/McCrillis property. It shows the area that the Bureau of Reclamation claimed and the area which McCrillis and Davies sold to the Bureau. Reprinted by permission from Edwin McCrillis.

<sup>20</sup> “Land Purchase Contract: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation and Jarvis W. Davies and Ralph W. McCrillis, 25 September 1944, copy obtained from Edwin McCrillis; Bureau of Reclamation to Jarvis W. Davies and Ralph W. McCrillis, 26 February 1945, copy obtained from Edwin McCrillis.



Fig. 12. Bureau of Reclamation survey marker from 1935 placed at the estimated high water line which would be created at the completion of the Colorado-Big Thompson Project. Photo by Steve Batty by permission

The decision to sell the property was not an easy one, but correspondence in 1944 between Jarvis Davies and Ralph McCrillis explained their reasoning. Davies argued that the new channel would result in greater public access to their remaining property, and increased boat traffic near their property. He worried that this access might result in people leaving garbage on their property. In addition, Davies guessed that the Bureau of Reclamation would need to cut many trees, leaving the cabin more exposed to the world. Moreover, since the altered waterway would bring the channel to “within a few feet of our cabin,” any erosion might cause it to “tumble into the outlet.”<sup>21</sup>

McCrillis shared these concerns, adding loss of property value to these worries. Knowing that Shadow Mountain Reservoir would create miles of new shoreline and potentially

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<sup>21</sup> Davies to McCrillis, 28 August 1944 and 14 July 1944.

hundreds of new summer homes, McCrillis feared that the increased amount of available property would drive down the value of his land.<sup>22</sup> Conversely, it is clear that McCrillis was conflicted about selling the remaining property and felt cheated by the Bureau of Reclamation. The \$5,500 price paid may have reflected market value for the property in 1944, but McCrillis argued that it did not reflect the unique beauty of his land and its scenic location at the outlet of Grand Lake. Further, Edwin McCrillis points out that his father and Davies were offered \$15,000 for the same land in 1929, suggesting that placing it on the open market would net a higher purchase price. The offer was so low that Ralph McCrillis feared that graft might be involved. In one letter to Davies, he opined that some speculator or government agent might end up with the property and he wanted guarantees that the property would not fall into private hands. Utilizing the same logic, McCrillis wrote to the Bureau, requesting that if any of the land was ever resold he would receive the first right of purchase. Whatever their motives for selling the remaining land, it is clear that McCrillis understood that the C-BT would forever alter the lake and the land they loved. In this they would prove prophetic.<sup>23</sup>

The changes envisioned by Ralph McCrillis extended far beyond his former parcel. Though the outward appearance of Grand Lake remained much the same, the C-BT Project changed much about the lake's character. In function, it would now be used to move water from Grand County to the Front Range. Much of the water that made its way into the lake would never have found its way there since the C-BT pushed water into Grand Lake where once it flowed out. The C-BT pumped water from the Colorado River at a lower elevation into Granby Reservoir. That water contained much more silt than Grand Lake had carried before since it

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<sup>22</sup> McCrillis to Davies, 14 September 1944.

<sup>23</sup> Edwin McCrillis, Interview by author, 5 June 2012; Ralph McCrillis to C.H. Powell, Colorado-Big Thompson Project Engineer, 6 October 1944; McCrillis to Davies, 14 September 1944.

flowed from mountains with a different geology than that in Grand Lake. Further, the water had to travel through the much shallower Shadow Mountain Reservoir. This lack of depth enabled the sun to penetrate to the bottom, allowing algae and weed growth in the summer. Much of this material then found its way into Grand Lake. Consequently, Grand Lake, which had been known for its water clarity, became a much murkier place. K. John Stahl, former president of the Grand Lake Area Shoreline Association, points out that viewers could once peer at least nine meters into the lake's depths. The waters pumped through Grand Lake today struggle to yield a clarity of four meters. In addition, the complete surface of Grand Lake rarely freezes any more because of the regular flow of C-BT water through it, and its altered hydrology has impaired the lake as a trout fishery. Water quality had deteriorated so much that in 2006 the Forest Service and the Bureau of Reclamation drained part of Shadow Mountain Reservoir in late autumn in hopes of killing the weeds and algae clogging both Grand Lake and the channel leading into it. Their efforts largely failed. The lake and river channel that Edwin McCrillis once knew have been forever altered by the agency which bought their property.<sup>24</sup>

The Bureau of Reclamation was not the final agency to manage the former McCrillis property. Initially, the Bureau used the cabin Ralph McCrillis had christened the "Wind Whistle" for an office while Shadow Mountain Reservoir was being constructed. Once the project was completed, the Bureau razed the cabin and later transferred management of the property to the National Park Service (NPS). During much of the 1950s, little was done with the land that was not flooded by the C-BT. In fact, long-time summer visitor Gay Shaffer recalls riding her horse through the former McCrillis property and land adjacent to it on the north – at that time owned by the Grand Lake Lodge, but undeveloped. She also recalls a beach where the

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<sup>24</sup> K. John Stahl, *Grand Lake Historical Society: Water Quality and Futures*, Speech delivered before the Grand Lake Historical Society, 13 June 2012, copy of presentation in possession of the author.

waters of Grand Lake lapped against both properties. Today, what remains of the beach is underwater, likely a victim of erosion and the fact that the lake's level no longer recedes in late summer since the demands of the C-BT require that it never recede by more than one foot. In 1978, control of the former Davies/McCrillis property, along with all of Shadow Mountain and Granby Reservoirs, was transferred once more, this time to the United States Forest Service (USFS). For the NPS, management of this land was never a good fit since its philosophy prioritized preserving scenic landscapes over commercial use, while the USFS mission embraced multiple uses of public land. The former Davies/McCrillis property remains in USFS hands today.<sup>25</sup>

Though managed for public access, the Town of Grand Lake hoped that the property might provide more recreation opportunities than were being offered by the Forest Service. Consequently, in 1985, it entered into a contract with that agency to manage jointly what had recently become known as Point Park. Bill Ray, Grand Lake City Manager from 1984-1992, played an important role in the project. In part due to his efforts, public bathrooms were installed, four covered picnic areas were scattered through the area, and a paved parking lot was built. In addition, the town cooperated with the Bureau of Reclamation, the Forest Service, Grand County, and a local power company to rebuild the footbridge leading to the south side of the channel, allowing easier public access as well as increased opportunities for fishing. The bridge was refurbished in 2009. Though the Bureau of Reclamation still owns the bridge, since it spans C-BT waters, its modern appearance and easy access can largely be credited to the efforts of locals.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Gay Shaffer and Judy Capra, Interview by author, 15 June 2012; Dan Matthews, Manager of Arapaho National Recreation Area, Interview by author, 12 June 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Bill Ray, Interview by Author, 19 June 2012.



Fig. 13. Current footbridge over the Grand Lake channel, facing southeast. Photo by author.

The most recent chapter in the history of Point Park has been written by nature. Starting in the early 2000s, a pine beetle infestation killed most of the lodgepole pines, the majority tree species around Grand Lake. Lodgepoles were also the predominant species in Point Park and they were devastated by the pine beetle. As a result, the Forest Service removed the trees in 2008, most of which had already died. Point Park has thus found its way into one of the more lively dialogues in forestry today since pine beetle kill has ravaged forests throughout the American West. Debates have raged over whether such damage is a consequence of over-managing forest fires and human-caused climate change which have created unhealthy trees and a longer breeding season for beetles, or whether increased pine beetle activity is largely a result of natural succession in forests. Whatever the case, during the following year, eighty healthy lodgepole pines were donated by the Forest Service and planted in Point Park. In addition, locals

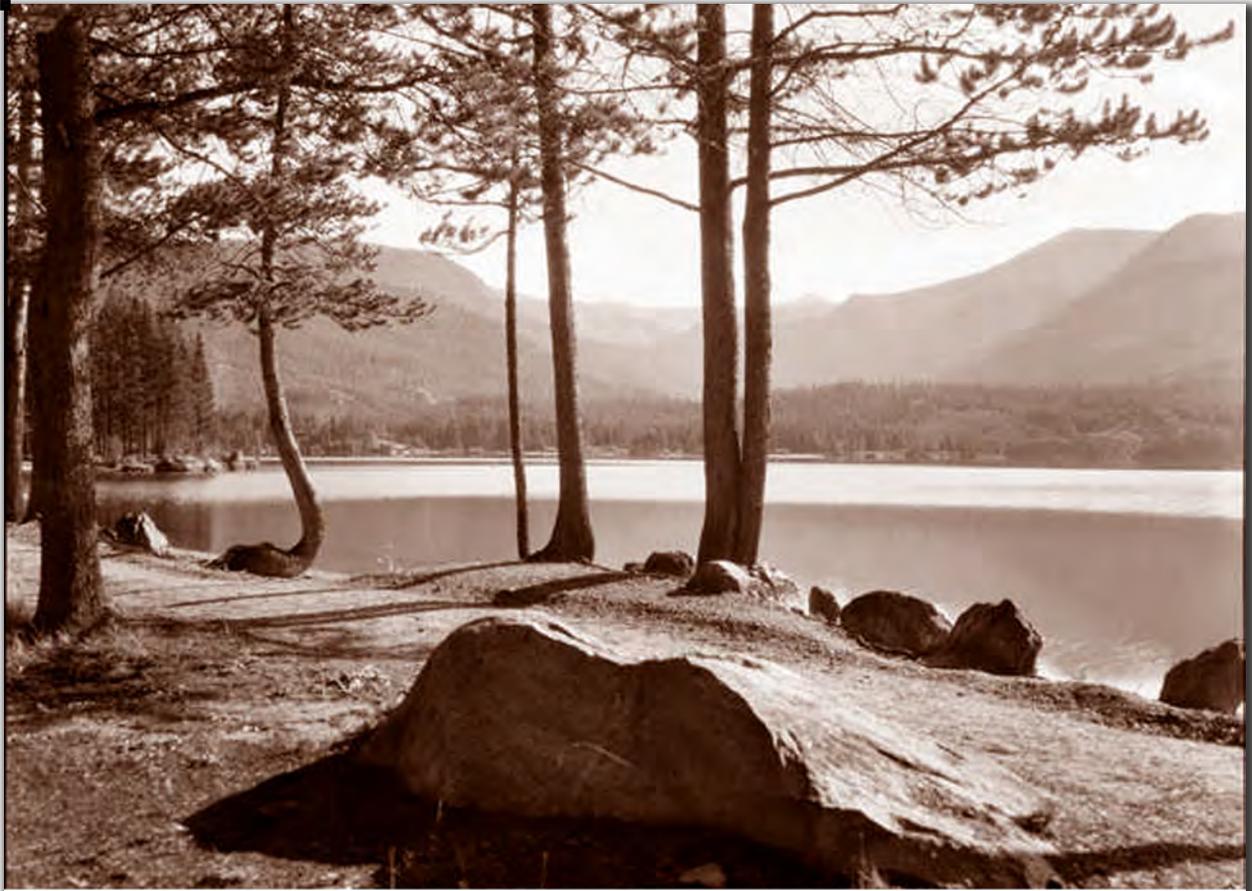


Fig. 14. Foot path crossing Jarvis Davies' property, looking up the North Inlet, ca. 1890s. Compare with fig. 15. Source of photo unknown.

raised funds for twenty-four additional trees, including several spruce. Today, their slow growth provides a reminder of the forested property that the McCrillis family once knew well.<sup>27</sup>

Though changed, Point Park retains many of the same functions Ralph and Edwin McCrillis would recognize immediately. The land is still a point of arrival and departure for rowboats and canoes, and people of all ages come to the park, fishing rod in hand, hoping to land multiple large trout. The backdrop is largely unchanged as well, providing stunning views of the granite peaks of Rocky Mountain National Park across the lake to the north, east and south.

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<sup>27</sup> Matthews Interview.



Fig. 15. Point Park today looking up the North Inlet. Note the rock in the foreground. It contains the survey marker referenced in fig. 12. The rock in the background is the same as in fig. 14. Photo by author.

Inspired by this spectacle, Point Park surely has provided the motivation for aspiring hikers and climbers to venture deeper into the mountains. Consequently, though the McCrillis family no longer retains possession of 2.5 acres at the outlet of Grand Lake, their legacy has extended far beyond any title to the land.

Michael Weeks

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Michael Weeks

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