

YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



THE UPPER HOTEL: Copy of first photograph made in Yosemite by C. W. Weel, 1859.

Yosemite Nature Notes

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THE HISTORY OF BUSINESS CONCESSIONS IN YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

By Homer W. Robinson

In 1855 the first party of sightseers came to Yosemite Valley. These pioneers on the tourist circuit did not wait until they were out of the mountains to shout to the world that they were thrilled with their "scenic banquet." J. M. Hutchings, the leader of the party, when en route to the lowlands, stopped in the then young mining town, Mariposa, and provided the **Mariposa Gazette** with an article on the wonderful experience his party had just enjoyed. This article, the first written by one uninfluenced by Indian troubles or gold fever, was the beginning of Yosemite publicity, and the Hutchings expedition was the beginning of a mighty pilgrimage which has brought to Yosemite Valley some 10,500,000 visitors from all parts of the world.

The development of accommodations and the provision of services to visitors started almost immediately after the Hutchings party exclaimed in superlatives regarding the natural beauties to be seen. At first the hotels and camps in Yosemite Valley and the routes of travel were crude, indeed. The earliest enterprises in serving the Yosemite visitor were launched by individuals working entirely "on their own" and in a land which was still a part of the public domain and open to homestead entry. Several such claims were made in Yosemite Valley.

Then in 1864 came the action of the Federal Government in granting to the State of California, tracts of land embracing the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees.

This was the first of a long series of Acts of Congress which brought about the establishment of the World's first system of National Parks (10). In 1866, private claims upon the Yosemite lands were disallowed by the Commissioners of the Yosemite Grant, an action which was finally effected through purchase in 1874 (1, p. 162), and thereafter business concessions in Yosemite Valley were established in accordance with the regulations of the Commissioners and through contracts with the State. (Note the indicator at the top of the accompanying chart showing the duration of the State administration.) A variety of concessions pertaining to about a dozen hotels, a studio, a bakery, provision stores, toll trails, livery service, and saddle horses were authorized by the Yosemite Commissioners at the beginning of their regime. A little later they entered into agreements with the builders of toll roads and the operators of stage routes.

In 1890, the Yosemite National Park ("reserved forest lands") was created by Congress encompassing the state-owned Yosemite Grant. The State retained its plan of administration of Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove, and the U. S. Army cooperated with the Department of the Interior in protecting and managing the larger federal reservation which surrounded the state park. This dual control of the Yosemite areas continued for sixteen years. However, the Army had little to do with business concessions at this

time because most of the enterprises were located on the state lands administered by the Yosemite Valley Commissioners.

The Yosemite Grant was re-ceded to the United States in 1905, and in 1906 the recession was accepted by the Congress. Thereupon the business concessions in Yosemite Valley became the responsibility of the Department of the Interior, and the U. S. Army officers who then administered the entire national park moved their headquarters from Camp A. E. Wood (Wawona) to a new "Fort Yosemite" on the site of the present Yosemite Lodge. The Army administration continued to function for several years after the recession, and during this time they were responsible for contracts with business concessioners.

In 1914, "park rangers" replaced the military, and the Secretary of the Interior sent his civilian representative to Yosemite as superintendent, to regulate the business concessions and to exercise general administrative authority within the national park. The next year, 1915, Stephen T. Mather entered the picture in Washington as assistant to Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the Interior, and the ground-work was laid for the present-day scheme of management in Yosemite National Park.

In 1916, the National Park Service was established by Act of Congress and Mr. Mather became Director. Washington B. Lewis was appointed to the superintendency of Yosemite National Park, and negotiations were started looking toward better handling of business concessions. The policy of "preferential contracts" with concessioners was adopted almost at once. Because large investments were required in providing the facilities and services needed by the ever-growing crowd of Yosemite visitors, it was deemed necessary to provide a contract which would reduce the hazards of operation as much as possible and give to the

concessioners a measure of financial protection. One of the first acts of the National Park Service was to convert a part of the hodge-podge of individual permits into a new order of business controlled by a corporation, the D. J. Desmond Company. During the more than thirty years of National Park Service administration, the policy of protection of investment has characterized the contracts entered into with business concessioners in Yosemite National Park. Progressively, the smaller operations have been consolidated until today the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. conducts all of the business enterprises except one restaurant, and one photographic studio.

Sometimes the prevailing conditions in the business concessions of Yosemite National Park are referred to as a "monopoly"; however, there is no exclusive private control of the industries in the park. The concessioners' business is under the regulation and control of the Secretary of the Interior; he limits the commercial activities in which they may engage, specifies the location of their facilities, defines the standards of their service, and approves the rates they charge the public. The use of the term "monopoly" is not valid. The concessioner has exclusive right of operation only so long as he fulfills the terms of his contract and renders service satisfactory to the Government. His contract is properly described as "preferential" rather than "exclusive." (23, pp. 49-54).

The account of administrative history, and some detail regarding many of the individual business concessions, past and present, of Yosemite National Park may be read in the book—**One Hundred Years in Yosemite**, by Carl P. Russell. On the chart accompanying this present paper, and in the brief digest which follows below, there is provided a convenient reference to the history of all business concessions in the park.

The original sources from which this information was obtained are cited for the benefit of those readers who wish to learn more from the manuscript diaries and journals of the participants in pioneer business ventures, and from the written statements of contemporaries of the business men who have served or are now serving the Yosemite visitors. The references cited are preserved in the library of the Yosemite Museum.

HOTELS

Two hotels were under construction in Yosemite Valley as early as 1857. The Lower Hotel near the foot of the present Four-Mile Trail, opened in 1858 with Mr. and Mrs. John H. Neal as managers, (1, p. 100). The Cedar Cottage or Upper Hotel was started by Buck Beardsley and G. Hite in 1857, and was ready for occupancy in May, 1859 with a Mr. Peck its first operator, (4, p. 20; 5, 0-3E Cedar Cottage; 12, p. 35). J. M. Hutchings, a writer and publisher, purchased the Cedar Cottage and established residence in the Valley early in 1864, (1, p.131).

Galen Clark settled on the South Fork of the Merced River in April 1857. By the early 60's his establishment was known as Clark's Station (Wawona), and served to accommodate visitors en route to and from Yosemite. (3, p.40).

In 1869, the Lower Hotel was torn down and Black's Hotel was erected in its place, (6, p.96; 12, p.35). Leidig's Hotel was built adjacent to Black's. (7, p.208; 12, p.35). In the same year, Charles E. Peregoy started construction on his Mountain View House at Peregoy Meadows, then on a saddle trail route to Yosemite Valley, (8,

July, 1929, p.71) and Edwin Moore entered into partnership with Galen Clark at Clark's Station, (3, p.40).

In 1870, Hutchings built River Cottage and Rock Cottage to provide additional accommodations for visitors, (9, p.125); Albert Snow built a hotel, La Casa Nevada, below Nevada Fall, (8, 1930, p.4). In 1875, James McCauley erected a two-story hotel at Glacier Point, now known as the Mountain House, (5, 0-4A McCauley), and Washburn, Chapman and Coffman purchased Clark's Station in May of the same year, (3, p.40).

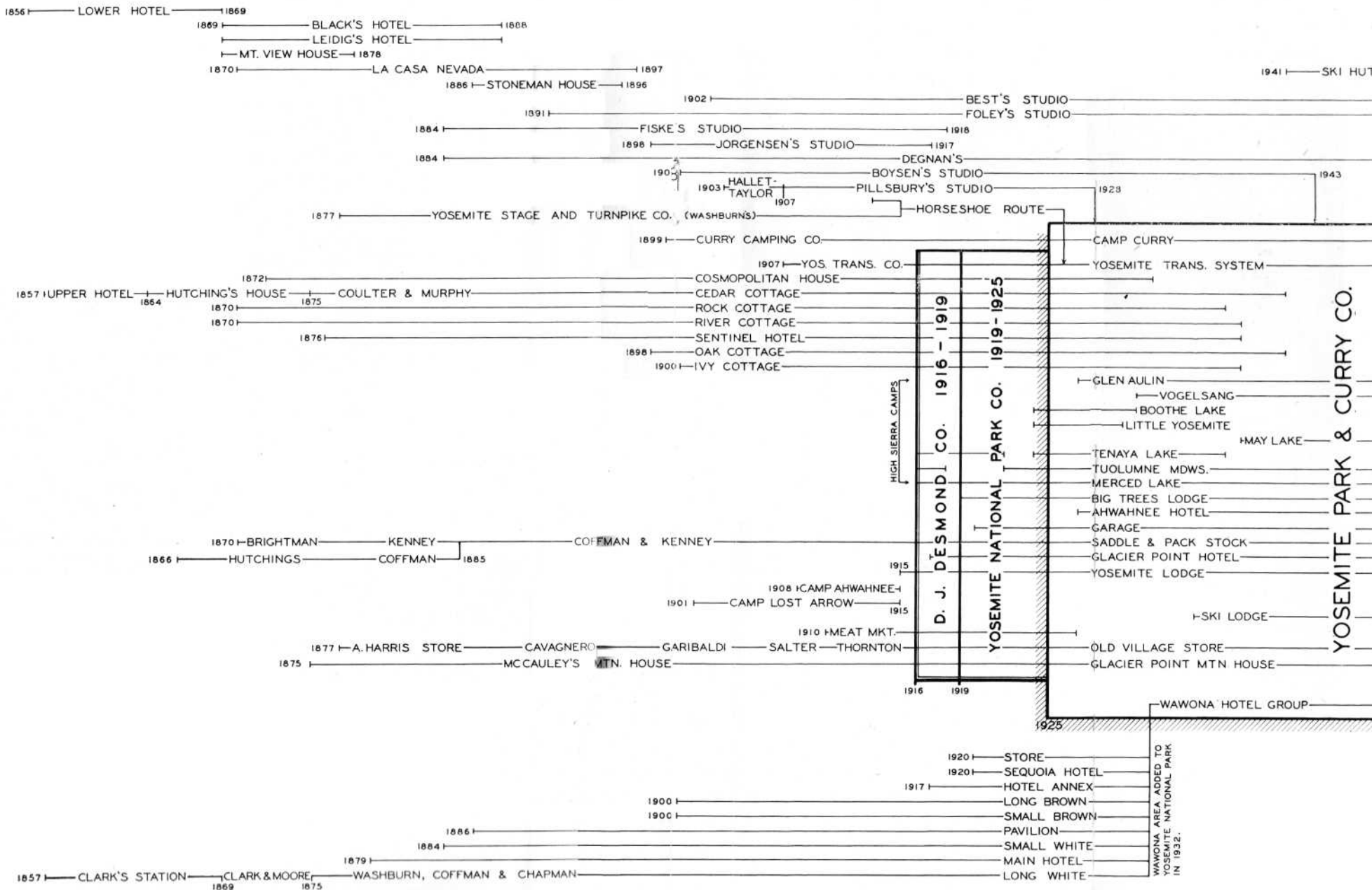
The Yosemite Falls Hotel, later known as the Sentinel Hotel, was started by Coulter and Murphy in 1875, and finished by J. K. Barnard the following year, (12, p.35).

Peregoy's Mountain View House was put out of business when construction of the road from Clark's Station was completed to Yosemite Valley, since the road passed several miles west of the hotel. A few visitors continued to stop there; the last names on the register were entered in June, 1878 (8, July, 1929, p.7).

Due to increased travel to Yosemite and inability of existing hotels to accommodate visitors, the State of California appropriated funds for the Stoneman House, and construction was started in 1886, (12, p.35). After it was operated one season, it was apparent that some of the older hotels were no longer needed and, as they were considered unsightly, Black's and Leidig's hotels were torn down in the fall of 1888, (7, 1887-88). The Stoneman House was completely destroyed by fire on August 24, 1896, (7, 1895-96, p.9), and the following year the La Casa Nevada burned, (16, p.49).

1860 1870 1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1930 1940

1864 THE YOSEMITE GRANT (CALIF. STATE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS) 1890 YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK (U.S. ARMY ADMINISTRATION) 1906 RECESSION OF YOSEMITE GRANT 1914 1916 U.S. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE ADMINISTRATION (1916 TO DATE)



After the Stoneman House burned, the need for additional accommodations for visitors was acute. Extensive repairs were made to the Sentinel Hotel group, and the new Oak and Ivy cottages were built in 1898 and 1900 respectively. The camp type of accommodation was pioneered by David A. Curry, who founded Camp Curry in 1899. Camp Lost Arrow was established in 1901, near the foot of Yosemite Falls, (12, p.35); Camp Ahwahnee was opened by William Sell near the foot of the present Four-Mile Trail, in 1908, (12, p.36; 5, 0-3F Camp Ahwahnee).

The operation of Yosemite tourist accommodations was recognized as big business about 1915 when the D. J. Desmond Co. was granted a permit to operate a hotel and camp under the name of Camp Yosemite. The following year this company was granted a 20-year concession and it purchased Camp Lost Arrow, Camp Ahwahnee, Yosemite Transportation Company, the saddle horse business of Mr. Coffman, the store, meat market, and the assets of the Sentinel and Glacier Point hotels. Camps Lost Arrow and Ahwahnee were discontinued, and a new center of activity, now known as Yosemite Lodge, was established. "Lodges" were also established at Merced Lake, Tuolumne Meadows, and Tenaya Lake, (21, 12, p.37). The following year, 1917, the Desmond Co. built a new hotel at Glacier Point, (21; 12, p.61).

The Desmond Co. started the Big Trees Lodge in the Mariposa Grove in 1919, (21; 12, p.72), but failed in their entire business, went into the hands of the receiver, reorganized, and finally emerged in 1920 as the Yosemite National Park Co., (21; 12, p.37).

In 1923, Park Superintendent W. B. Lewis requested the Yosemite National Park Co. to establish a series of hikers' camps in the back country, (camps already existed at Tuolumne Meadows, Merced Lake, and Tenaya

Lake). New camps constructed at Little Yosemite Valley, Boothe Lake, and Glen Aulin enabled hikers to make loop trips free from the burden of carrying blankets or food. Saddle parties as well as hikers took advantage of these facilities, and the name was changed to High Sierra Camps, (6, pp.113-115).

The Yosemite National Park Co. combined with the Curry Camping Co. to form the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. in 1925, (12, p.37).

On July 14, 1927, the Ahwahnee Hotel was opened for business. This de luxe hotel was built by the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. at a cost of about a million and a half dollars, (5, 0-3E Ahwahnee Hotel).

The Washburns sold their interests at Wawona to the National Park Service in 1932, and the buildings were leased to the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. by the Government. In 1935, the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. built the Badger Pass Ski Lodge, (22).

The old buildings of the Sentinel Hotel group were demolished by CCC crews as follows: Rock Cottage, 1937; River and Ivy Cottages, and the Sentinel Hotel, 1938; Oak and Cedar Cottages, 1941, (20).

The Ostrander Lake Ski Hut was built by National Park Service CCC crews in 1941, the only unit for the accommodation of the public built by the Government in Yosemite National Park, (20).

STORES AND STUDIOS

In 1876, the Royal Arch Farm (J. C. Lamon's homestead) was leased to A. Harris for public campground purposes, and shortly thereafter Mr. Harris sold groceries to campers, thus becoming the first storekeeper in Yosemite, (7, p.310; 5, 0-4A, A. Harris).

Degnan's Bakery was started in 1884, (5, 0-4A John Degnan) and the same year George Fiske was operating a photographic business in Yosemite as evidenced by Fiske photo-

graphs in the Yosemite Museum dated 1884.

In 1910, Fred McCauley was given a permit to sell fresh meat in Yosemite Valley; he delivered meat from a wagon during 1910 but erected a building and opened a meat market in 1911. (17, Permits and Leases, 1907-1924).

D. J. Foley established a print shop and studio and published a souvenir paper called **The Yosemite Tourist**, the earliest known copy of which is dated 1891. Mrs. Foley continued the studio business following Mr. Foley's death, and although she has not done business for several years, she still (1948) holds her concession.

About 1898, Chris Jorgensen, landscape painter, built a studio near the old Sentinel Bridge in Yosemite Valley, (13, 1901, p.70).

In the early 1900's, various studios were established. J. T. Boysen started in 1900, (17, Boysen, J. T., 1912-22); Harry C. Best, landscape painter started a studio in 1902, (5, 0-4A, H. C. Best); and Hallett-Taylor Co. followed in 1903, (13, 1903). Arthur C. Pillsbury bought out the interests of Hallett-Taylor Co. in 1907, and changed the name from "Sign of the Three Arrows" to "Pillsbury's," (17, Pillsbury, A. C.). Of these only Best's remains. It is operated by Ansel and Virginia Best Adams.

Chris Jorgensen abandoned his studio in Yosemite Valley in 1917, (15; 5, 0-4A Jorgensen). The building has since served as a museum, quarters for rangers, as a rangers' club, and more recently as a residence.

In November, 1918, George Fiske pioneer photographer, died by his own hand at his studio on the bank of the Merced River north of the foot of the Four-Mile Trail, (18).

After a disastrous fire destroyed his theatre, Arthur C. Pillsbury sold his photo studio to the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. on February 23, 1928, (17, Pillsbury, A. C.). It is now the Lost Arrow Studio of the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. at Government Center.

Following the death of Mrs. Mabel Boysen, the Boysen Studio was sold to the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. in 1943, (11).

TRANSPORTATION

The first saddle train business in Yosemite was started by J. M. Hutchings, in 1866; Fred Brightman competed, beginning in 1870, (7, p.123). By 1875, Brightman had formed a partnership with George Kenney, (7, p.123 and p.309), but this partnership dissolved the next year. Brightman then went to work for Washburn's stage lines, and Kenney continued in the saddle business, (7, p.123). The Yosemite Stage and Turnpike Co., Washburn's stage line, was incorporated November 16, 1877, (21).

In 1878, William F. Coffman purchased the stables and stock of J. M. Hutchings in Yosemite Valley and entered into the saddle train business, (5, 0-4A Wm. F. Coffman).

George W. Kenney and Wm. F. Coffman combined their saddle horse businesses in 1885, to form Coffman and Kenney, and operated stables at Kenneyville, a village which stood near the site of the present Ahwahnee Hotel, (5, 0-4A Wm. F. Coffman).

The Yosemite Valley Railroad was completed in 1907, (19, p.236; 12, p.32), thus making it possible for many visitors to see the Valley who would not undertake the long stage trip. The increase in travel resulted in the formation of the Yosemite Transportation Co. that year, (21), and long lines of horse-drawn buses moved up and down the canyon between El Portal and Yosemite Valley.

In February, 1913, the Madera, Yosemite, Big Tree Auto Co. was organized, and the inevitable replacement of stagecoaches by motor buses began. In 1915, this company, working under an agreement with the Yosemite Stage and Turnpike Co., formed the "Horseshoe Route" stage line which ran from Raymond to the Mariposa Grove, Wawona, Glacier

Point, and Yosemite Valley.

The present garage in Yosemite Valley was built by the Yosemite National Park Co. in 1920, (21).

On March 4, 1926, the Horseshoe Route stage line sold out to the Yosemite Park and Curry Co., (22).

ROADS AND TRAILS

The first trail construction recorded in Yosemite was the trail between Clark's Station, now Wawona, and Yosemite Valley, completed as a toll trail in 1856 by Milton and Houston Mann, (1, p.98). Other approach routes from Coulterville and Big Oak Flat were built in the 50's and 60's. The Four-Mile Trail to Glacier Point was built as a toll trail by James McCauley in 1871, (7, p.221). Albert Snow, Washburn, and McCready, and J. M. Hutchings also engaged in private ventures in trail building on the walls of Yosemite Valley. In 1882, the State took over most of these trails and soon assumed responsibility for the maintenance of all saddle trails in and around the Valley.

In 1874 the Coulterville and Big Oak Flat toll roads reached the floor of Yosemite Valley, (7, 1877, p.12); the former is yet a steep narrow road, little modified by modern road builders, but still in use; the old Big Oak Flat Road between Gentry on the north rim and the floor of the Valley near the foot of El Capitan, is no longer passable.

The Wawona Road connecting Clark's Station and Yosemite Valley was completed in 1875 by Washburn, Chapman, Coffman & Co., (12, p.32), and the Yosemite Stage and Turnpike Co. was incorporated two years later by the Washburns, (21). In 1883, the Tioga Road was completed across the present park to the Tioga Mine, (14, p.26).

The right to charge toll on the first three roads above, within the boundaries of the Yosemite Grant, was extinguished by the State in 1886. In

1915, Stephen T. Mather purchased the Tioga Road and presented it to the Federal Government. Soon thereafter the National Park Service acquired title to all other roads in the National Park, and "entrance fees" then replaced the former toll charges.

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