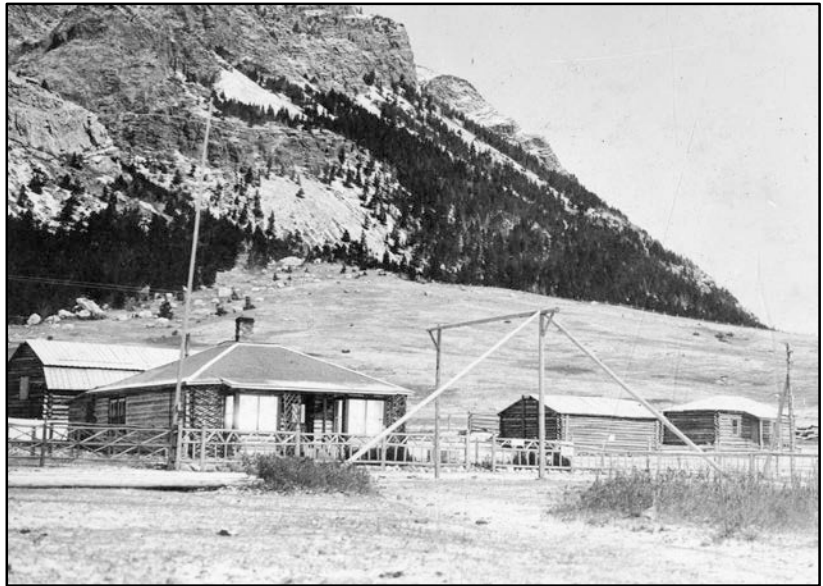




## Evolution of the Park Entry Buildings

Visitor numbers have always been an important statistic for park managers. In the early days of the park, that annual number was a rough guess. By the early 1920s steps were taken to gather not only numbers but also place of normal residence of visitors to bring some context to tourism. The information was always summarized in the annual reports of the Commissioner of National Parks as an indication of tourism.

At the beginning of the 1922 season, Arthur H. Harwood, park postmaster, was selected as the man to accept visitor registrations. With his residence doubling as the post office and being located on the entrance road northeast of Linnet Lake, the location was deemed appropriate. A rustic log arch was erected over the road at this site to alert visitors of the official entry point.<sup>1</sup> A large sign, a rarity in those days, requested that motorists to “Please Register.” Harwood was expected to be present from May through September and was paid \$25 a month. The registration location was manned nine hours a day from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.<sup>2</sup>



*A dedicated registration building was built across the entrance road from the Harwood location, an awkward location for visitors driving into the park because it was on the left side of the road. (Photo: WLNP Archives)*

A large ledger-type book was maintained for visitors to sign and list their home residence so park officials could collect the information. At the same time, visitors could ask the attendant questions about the park. It was estimated only about 40 to 50 per cent of those who came into the park registered because of the limited hours of this post.<sup>3</sup>

Written comments were invited for the registration book following a visit to Waterton. The comments reflected the good, the bad and sometimes the humorous. Visitors during the 1924 season wrote such flattering comments about Waterton as “beyond description,” “beauty spot of Canada,” “better than Banff,” “predict great future for this wonderful park.” Some made suggestions for improvements such as the need for night time lighting and the oiling of streets and many, because Prohibition in Alberta had ended in the spring of 1924, expressed the desire for a licensed premise in the townsite.<sup>4</sup>

One lady noted that after spending a few days at Waterton she had very tired feet; another person wrote the “water too fishy and cold.” The entries ran the gamut of remarks.<sup>5</sup>

The end to a few years of uncertainty, the result of a proposal to build an irrigation dam at the Narrows between Upper and Middle Waterton Lakes, allowed park officials to move forward with improvements in Waterton.<sup>6</sup> By June, 1925, a new and attractive park registration office was being built with much thought in mind. In addition to employing a Tudor style architecture, the office was built off the main road so it wouldn't conflict with outgoing

traffic. The completion of the new facility later in the summer enabled “much more accurate check being kept on the tourist traffic.”<sup>7</sup> Walter Allen of Pincher Creek was the first summer registrar.



*Waterton's first registration location was opposite the home of Arthur Harwood on the entrance road below the present-day park compound. Poles created a rough arch. (Photo: Harwood Collection WLNP Archives)*



*This handsome stone-clad registration building was constructed in 1935 at the junction of the park entrance road and Highways 5 and 6. (Photo: Galt Museum and Archives)*

The registration facility was operated through the summer of 1935. That winter, with the Chief Mountain International Highway nearing completion and the anticipated increase in motorists because of it, the decision was made to build a new office at the junction of Highways 5 & 6. As well, the Public Works Construction Act of 1934 provided the \$2,000 to construct wood frame, stone clad building at this time.<sup>8</sup> Although not quite completed when it opened for the Victoria Day weekend in May, 1935, it was close enough to complete to be operational under the direction of T. Gregson of Cardston.<sup>9</sup> The handsome building

provided staff accommodation as well as office facilities to deal with the public. The old registration building near Linnet Lake was demolished in 1936.<sup>10</sup>

At least two changes to route traffic to the building were made over the years, the first being in 1939 and again in 1951.<sup>11</sup> In 1984 the 49-year-old registration building was designated a Federal Heritage Building in the ‘recognized’ building category, the second highest rating given by the Federal Heritage Building Review Office.<sup>12</sup> This building served until 1990 when a new and more modern pair of kiosks were built on the entry road to complement extensive road construction/improvement.<sup>13</sup>



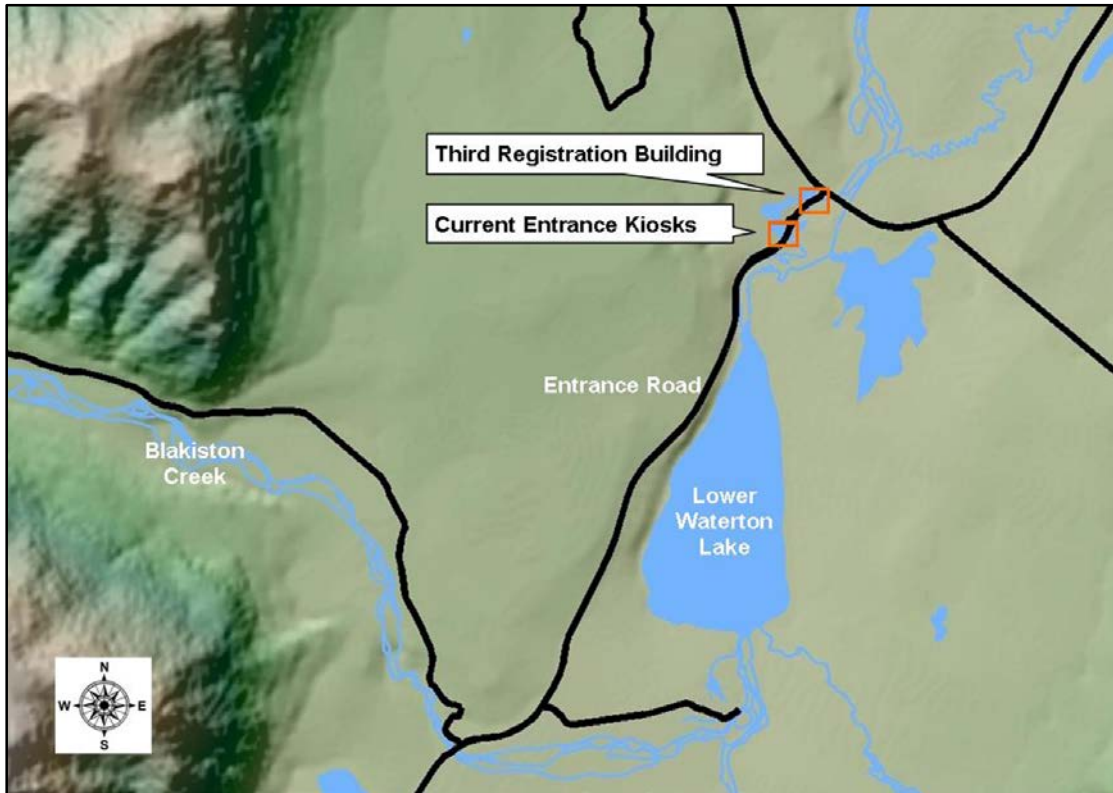
*Superintendent Charlie Zinkan, centre, cuts the ribbon to mark the opening of the new registration kiosks in 1990.*

*(Photo: Chris Morrison)*

Once the old building was mothballed, several proposals and ideas were put forward to create a future for it. All would have been expensive to implement either for the government or the private sector because of the need for structural renovation and moving expenses. Standing water in the basement over the years had sped the deterioration of the floor joists and previous changes to the structure that created a drive-up window which called for exterior restoration and stabilization of the building. The roof needed to be replaced, the basement filled in, the windows rebuilt, plus electrical upgrading, painting and stucco work at an estimated cost of \$30,000-\$34,000 in 1994. While deemed a good example of the original park architectural style, and a familiar landmark to visitors, it had lost its function in its historical setting.<sup>14</sup>

The new registration kiosks, with an updated façade reminiscent of Tudor revival architecture of bygone days in the park, were built in 1990 about 0.8 kilometres southwest of the 1935 building. The new location was selected to improve traffic safety, increase traffic flow and eliminate problems at the old site which was too close to the junction of Highways 5 and 6.<sup>15</sup> The new facility features two staffed lanes (during peak times) and one automated lane for annual pass holders. Electronic signs provide safety and general information even in the absence of staff. Inside the staffed kiosks are numerous modern improvements including a computer system connected to Parks Canada network and to the internet, phone lines for staff use, credit card machines, an alarm/security system plus safety windows. Point of sale connections to the Parks Canada’s national office allows on-demand collection of visitor statistics. As well air conditioning and heating for staff comfort and equipment efficiency is provided.

In October, 2014, after 24 years of disuse, the 79-year old registration building was demolished.<sup>16</sup>



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- <sup>1</sup> Provincial Archives of Alberta, PR 1970.190, Box 20, Item 303. Harwood's residence was officially sited on Lot 9, Block 7. Letter to J. B. Harkin, commission, Ottawa, from George Bevan, superintendent, Waterton Lakes National Park, June 14, 1922.
- <sup>2</sup> "Waterton Lakes Park Had Record Year 12,600 Actually Registered" *Lethbridge Herald*, Jan. 14, 1924, 4. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 31.
- <sup>3</sup> "Waterton Lakes Park Had Record Year 12,600 Actually Registered" *Lethbridge Herald*, Jan. 14, 1924, 4. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 31.
- <sup>4</sup> A licensed premise was otherwise known as a beer parlor, something that would not be permitted in Waterton until 1927. See *Waterton Chronicles: People and Their National Park*, (Lethbridge: Goathaunt Publishing, 2008), 104-115.
- <sup>5</sup> "Eighteen Thousand Tourists Visited Waterton Lakes Park; Beauties Generously Praised," *Lethbridge Herald*, Jan. 26, 1925, 5. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 31.
- <sup>6</sup> "The Waterton Dam," reprinted from the *Calgary Herald* in *Lethbridge Herald*, Feb. 11, 1922, 18. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 31. See also *Waterton Chronicles*, 11-14.
- <sup>7</sup> *Report of the Commission of Canadian National Parks*, for the year ending March 31, 1926, (Ottawa: A. F. Acland, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1927), 23. Digital copy in WLNP Archives.
- <sup>8</sup> "Old Park Gate Kiosk Options Analysis," Waterton Natural History Association files, ca. 1992.
- <sup>9</sup> "Wonderful Waterton," *Lethbridge Herald*, May 30, 1935, 10. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 31.
- <sup>10</sup> "Wonderful Waterton," *Lethbridge Herald*, July 29, 1936, 13. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 31.
- <sup>11</sup> "Wonderful Waterton," *Lethbridge Herald*, July 4, 1939, 13. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 31.
- <sup>12</sup> "Old Park Gate Kiosk Options Analysis," ca. 1992. WLNP Archives, Box 156, Item 7.
- <sup>13</sup> Chris Morrison, "Ribbon Cutting Opens Kiosks at Parks Day Celebrations," *Lethbridge Herald*, June 14, 1990, 5. WLNP Archives Box 130, Item 31.
- <sup>14</sup> "Old Park Gate Kiosk Options Analysis," ca. 1992.
- <sup>15</sup> "Old Park Gate Kiosk Options Analysis," ca. 1992.
- <sup>16</sup> "Removal of Registration Building," Community and Staff Bulletin, Oct. 2014. WLNP Archives Box 130, Item 1.