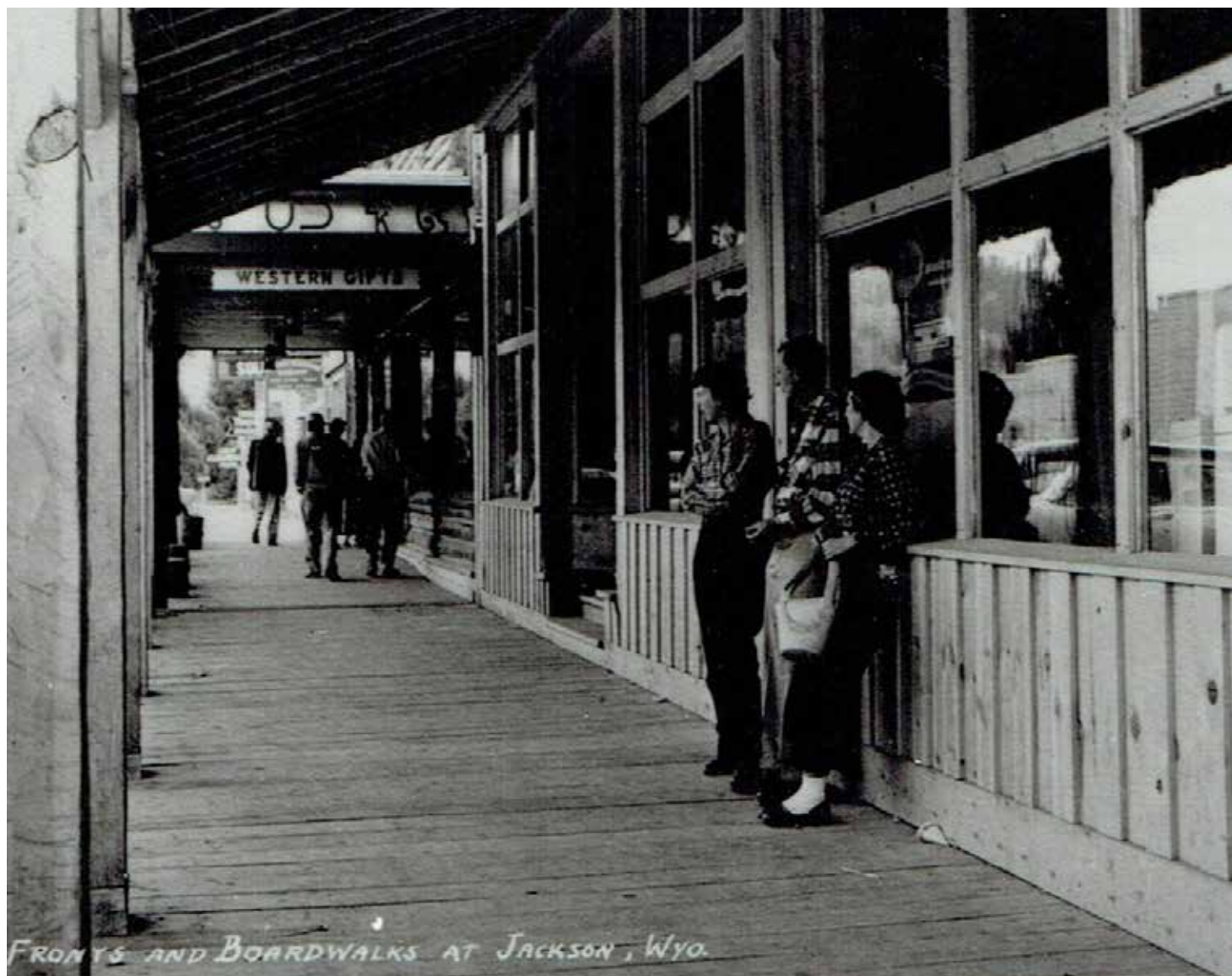


JACKSON HOLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM CHRONICLE

VOLUME 43, ISSUE N° 3 | NOVEMBER 2022



*Pedestrians rest in front of Jackson Hardware on the Town Square boardwalk from a postcard by commercial photographer Harold Sandborn. The writing on the card reads, "Western fronts and boardwalks at Jackson, Wyo."
JHSM 1958.0241.001P.*



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The Clubhouse with horses on the early Square in Jackson, 1907. JHHSM 1958.0244.001P.

JACKSON'S BOARDWALK SHUFFLE

BY JHHSM STAFF WITH RESEARCH BY SAMANTHA FORD

Built out of necessity, often questioned for their safety, and most recently embraced as a remnant of the old West - almost everyone has an opinion about Jackson Hole boardwalks. Their history is both varied and an important part of town culture.

The first boardwalks in the nation were installed in 1870 in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Typically elevated, they were often expansive platforms on or next to the Atlantic Ocean and had little in common (except for their wooden building material) with early Jackson boardwalks.

In Jackson, boardwalks referred to boarded sidewalks, and they were highly utilitarian. After a commercial business was constructed, the owner often installed a boardwalk

as a means for pedestrians to cross between businesses without getting their feet covered in dirt or mud.

JACKSON'S FIRST BOARDWALKS

The first photographic evidence of a boardwalk in Jackson from the museum's collection is visible in an early photo of The Clubhouse in 1907. Of course, this boardwalk didn't yet have anywhere to go! It simply ran along the front of the town's primary commercial building.

In a 1986 *Jackson Hole Guide* article, Director of Public Works Mike Yokel estimated that the original boardwalks

dated to 1914. He said, "There was nothing else available [in Jackson] at that time...there was no cement or blacktop."

The first documented mention of any kind of sidewalk in Jackson was in 1915 when the Spicer Garage was about to open, and a sidewalk was planned to connect the building to the Clubhouse. The materials used for the sidewalk aren't specified, but the article does mention a "platform" will be built on the sides of the building. In historic photos, this platform appears to be made of wooden planks.

In 1916, Charles Deloney advertised his plan to install a gasoline tank at his store, with the expectation that motorists will be able to "fill their tanks from the sidewalk." A wooden plank sidewalk is visible outside the Deloney store in most historic photographs of the building.

Just a few years later in 1918, the construction of a "board sidewalk" by William Blackburn is reported on from Dr. Huff's residence to the Mercill store. J.R. Jones followed suit the next year, with a "constructed sidewalk" in front of his building on the north side of Town Square in 1919.

Residents often complained about the short-lived nature of the wooden boards, which seemed to require constant upkeep. Individual shop owners were responsible for repairing, replacing, and keeping the boardwalks clear in front of their stores. This lent a varied and precarious nature to the walkways, with people reporting that they had bruised shins, twisted ankles, and various injuries from run-ins with the boardwalks over the years.

In 1922, an article titled "Cement Sidewalk!" was printed in the *Jackson's Hole Courier*: "Mayor Huff, acknowledged by everyone as one of the most progressive citizens

and best boosters in the valley, is finding time to lay a cement sidewalk in front of his residence in Jackson." The excitement about this more modern building material is palpable, lending some credibility to Mike Yokel's musings that the earliest sidewalks used wooden materials in the absence of other options.

Most of the first mentions of the term "boardwalk" in the local *Jackson's Hole Courier* actually refer to Atlantic City's famous paths. However, in 1946 references to the local boardwalks started to appear. Columnist Sherwood Hough satirized boardwalks in a newspaper section called "The Errant Typewriter" on August 29, 1946.

"We learned from experience, at an early age, never to step on the business end of a rake when it lies tongs-upward. We are now trying desperately to accustom ourselves to walking in the road instead of the town's boardwalks, for the same reason. Both weather and leather have reduced a great many of the walks to hazardous teeter-tawtlers that produce, when walked upon, the erie [sic] effect that one leg is shorter than the other.

The sad condition was brought forcibly to our attention this week when a pedesterial proceeding in the opposite direction stepped on a board in front of us, an operation which (1) raised the other end of the board two feet (2) would have raised higher if our shins had not been in the way, (3) was forced down again by our falling body. Whom can we sue?"

THE PEAK OF BOARDWALKS

Mentions of boardwalks in the local newspaper increased through the 1950s, 60s and 70s when they peaked.



The boardwalk headed south on Cache St., undated but definitely early Jackson. JHHSM 2009.0057.007.

Not surprisingly, the 1960s also saw the installation of many of Yellowstone's boardwalks that provided a raised walkway through sensitive thermal areas. There were calls to remove the cement sidewalks around the Square. In an ad from a June 1966 *Jackson Hole Guide* article, residents generally viewed the boardwalks as, "one of its biggest attractions and they should surely be preserved to retain our western atmosphere."

By the early 1970s, boardwalks ringed the Square. A "Sidewalk Laying Party" was organized to add them to the Courthouse on Cache Street. In 1977, the Town Square park's asphalt walkways leading to the newly installed Veteran's Memorial were replaced with boardwalks. Boardwalks were lauded in *The Jackson Hole Guide* as, "a definite step forward which will greatly add to the western atmosphere of our picturesque little square."

By 1978, the term boardwalk also began appearing in business names like Boardwalk Realty and Boardwalk Productions later in 1983. The Historical Society held boardwalk bake sales and an annual Boardwalk Cookout. Numerous articles mentioned the western charm of the covered walkways.

BOARDWALKS IN RECENT DECADES

Just decades later during the 1990s, the use of the term boardwalk decreased in the news. In 1991, a woman fell and broke her leg on the boardwalk outside of the library, resulting in a lawsuit against the Town of Jackson and Teton County. Businesses with boardwalk titles disappeared and less advertising featured boardwalks.

At the turn of the century in the early 2000s, the boardwalks were acknowledged as, "a liability waiting to happen." It was estimated that an uncovered boardwalk could last for 10 to 15 years and a covered one for up to 25 years. Despite other western towns starting to replace their old wooden sidewalks, Jackson was trying to keep them in place. Research was underway to find more appropriate wood species for longevity and safety.

Today none of the original boardwalks exist, although most have been replaced in their original locations. Even though they trend toward dangerous and annoy some with their functionality, the boardwalks' curb appeal and character-defining nature will preserve them for the foreseeable future.



Cowboys on the town boardwalk and on horseback by the gas pump in front of Jackson Hardware with Mercill's store in the background. JHHS 1958.0569.001P.



Two men outside Spicer Garage on the boardwalk. JHHS HS.0488.

FIELD SCHOOL AT HELL GAP

BY KIMBERLY SUTHERLAND, JHHS STORE MANAGER

As an archaeologist, people often ask me if I study dinosaurs. Don't get me wrong—I love dinosaurs! But, I leave the studying of them to the paleontologists. I actually study the history of humankind. My personal experience focuses on Wyoming archaeology where I've studied Native American campsites, bison kill sites, and military artifacts from Fort Laramie.

The next most common question is about the "coolest" thing I've ever found. Finding things is great, but for me seeing them undisturbed in the same place where they were left, possibly thousands of years ago by someone, is a real thrill.

The "coolest" site I've worked on is the field school at the Hell Gap Archaeology Site outside of Guernsey, Wyo., where I've been a crewmember for the last three years. Hell Gap is a stratified Native American campsite with layers of archaeology going back to around 13,000 years ago to the Paleoindian time period. The stratification is complete and undisturbed, which is a rarity in archaeology and delights me.

We excavate in 1m by 1m sections, and it's a lot of bending over and sitting in uncomfortable "yoga-like" positions. Biting flies are a given, as is getting thoroughly coated with a layer of dust. We dig in layers of 5cm, and we give ourselves a 3mm margin-of-error to work in. Basically, we need to dig exactly 5cm down. If we dig even one-third of a cm too deep in that layer, we are messing up the science. Any artifact 1cm in size and over is mapped in place, or *in situ*. Imagine digging in your garden, but you can't knock anything out of place that is the size of a marble or larger. Good science means being precise and detailed, even if it is hotter than Hades and the flies are continually biting.

The layers I've helped excavate were about 8,000 to 10,000 years old. Last year, the excavation revealed the remains of a (now extinct) bison, a *Bison antiquus*. Surrounding the bones were stone tools and sharp, stone flakes used in butchering. Scattered across the site were pieces of ochre, a highly pigmented clay-like material



that Native Americans used ceremonially and in personal adornment. We also found fragments of bone needles and charcoal.

Seeing the details of an ancient campsite emerge from the dust is incredible. There's nothing like it. When I suddenly find a stone tool with a razor-like edge that looks as fresh as though it was made only hours ago...then realize it is thousands of years older than the Pyramid of Giza, I'm struck with a sense of awe. When my eyes are the first ones to behold the remains of a butchered bison - someone's meal - since it was left 6,000 years ago, a thrill runs down my spine. Excavation leaves me feeling connected, across time and space, to someone I've never met. I feel a kinship with a stranger.

That is probably the "coolest" thing I've ever found. Through science and excavation, I've discovered an ancient world with people not so different from you and me. People who liked shiny, red ochre - not that different from make-up today. People who made tools, and seemed to enjoy the way they felt in the hand. People who once sat around a fire, somewhat similar to modern campfires. As an archaeologist, I, in a small way, also experience the butchering of a bison thousands of years ago - my hands hold their same tools.

Even with the dust, heat, snakes, and uncompromising weather, it is very "cool."