

THE NORTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD YEARS

The Northern Pacific Railroad first petitioned for a right-of-way across the Flathead Reservation in 1882. For the next 10 years, the station at Ravalli was a beehive of activity, as it was at this point that freight and passengers bound for the Upper Flathead region were transported first to Polson by wagon and stage, then by steamboat to the north end of Flathead Lake.

In 1891 the Great Northern Railroad was completed through the upper Flathead Valley, diminishing the role of the Northern Pacific in the region.

When the Flathead Reservation was opened for homestead settlement in 1910, the services provided by the Northern Pacific were once again in high demand. In the first month 81,363 persons registered for the available 3,000 homestead sites. One of the successful settlers in the homestead drawing was Herman Schnitzmeyer, who chose Wildhorse Island as his home.

After proving up on his 160 acres and moving to Polson, Schnitzmeyer operated the Polson studio until selling the business to Julius Meiers, his apprentice, in 1922.

With the restraints and demands of maintaining a studio business gone, Schnitzmeyer was at liberty to pursue freelance assignments offered by the Northern Pacific. From 1922 to 1930 the photographer traveled throughout the Pacific Northwest, documenting NP infrastructure and scenic routes.

In October 1923, he returned to Polson from a ten-week trip for the Northern Pacific in the Yellowstone and Teton country. His views of Jackson Lake and the Tetons were spectacular, as were his Yellowstone pictures. More than 30 of them appeared in a NP brochure advertising the vacation amenities of that region.

Schnitzmeyer said of the trip that he'd traveled "1,000 miles by auto and 200 miles on horseback. The experience was delightful and interesting, but at the same time exasperating and nerve wracking!" Quoted from *Schnitzmeyer, Homestead Era Photographic Artist*, by Paul Fugelberg, pp. 25-27.

The July 10, 1924, *Flathead Courier*, notes: "H. Schnitzmeyer returned Tuesday from Paradise where he was called by the Northern Pacific to take some pictures of the tie packing plant there."

In spring of 1929 Schnitzmeyer traveled to the Cascades, photographing scenes for the NP, and returned to Polson for an assignment which covered the southern Mission Range and Mission Canyon.