

National Park Service Automobile Permit Pasters 1920-1939

The purpose of this exhibit is to outline the National Park Service automobile permit program of the 1920-39 period and show examples of the window stickers applied by Park Service personnel as proof that a user had permission to bring an automobile into the park. The program also provided data of visitation for Federal budget appropriations.

Treatment

This exhibit showcases the colorful windshield decals used by the National Park Service (NPS) in the early to mid-20th century for proof of having paid automobile entry fee – functioning both as a receipt and a souvenir.

We begin with the first year of general issue, 1920, when the parks issued 5” decals – called “pasters” by park employees – as automobiles and their owners paid to enter the park. Over the program years, the pasters changed size, becoming smaller; three parks changed their designs once. All parks changed the color of their pasters annually to allow quick scanning of entry for the year. After the general discussion we show the various designs used park by park.

Importance

Park visitation grew as car ownership increased. The decals became popular among visitors as collectible mementos, but the real values were upfront revenue to the Park and solid visitor data for use with the annual federal budgeting process struggle with Congress.

Knowledge, Study, and Research

I reviewed several sites, including the National Park Service and Henry Ford site/blog archives. In addition, I contacted a few main collectors of these items for added insight.

Condition

These decals were applied to windshields, so the exhibit contains versions that were not actively used. Small scuffs are present on some of the rarer items due to age and to the habit of being kept in scrapbooks.

Rarity

Surviving pasters are mostly found in private collections. They are rarely seen for sale, and when they are, they are in demand, depending on condition. The 5” and 4.5” early pasters are rare- three or four copies from a given park to none for many parks.

References:

Morse, R. (2016). National parks automobile registration stickers: Fee paid. *The American Revenuer*, 69(4), 104–110.

National Park Service. (n.d.). *50 nifty finds #47: Bumper views*. U.S. Department of the Interior. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/50niftyfinds-bumperviews.htm>

The Henry Ford. (n.d.). *Automobiles enter the national parks* [Blog post]. The Henry Ford Blog. <https://www.thehenryford.org/explore/blog/automobiles-enter-the-national-parks>

National Park Service Automobile Permit Pasters 1920 - 1939

The purpose of this exhibit is to outline the National Park Service automobile permit program and show examples of the window stickers (which the employees called “pasters”) applied by park service personnel as proof that a user had permission to bring an automobile into the park, helping to account for number of visitations in congressional budget appropriation.

Beginning in 1908 with Mount Ranier, national parks began to charge cars to enter, fees based on the amount of improved roads in a park. In 1918 the money earned was placed in Treasury’s general fund. Money to run the parks would need to come from budget appropriations. A system was necessary to track automobile use in the parks.

Yosemite began to issue windshield stickers for automobiles in 1917, and Yellowstone followed in 1918, perhaps also two other parks. In 1920 the National Park Service standardized the design format, and the eight parks that charged entrance fees for cars began to use them. That is where this exhibit begins.



Yosemite was one of the original eight parks in the National Park Service program for 1920. This is a first year paster.

The exhibit will proceed by National Park after general information on the decals. Rarities will be indicated by red frame.

National Park Service Automobile Permit Pasters 1920 - 1939

The purpose of this exhibit is to outline the National Park Service automobile permit program and show examples of the window stickers (which the employees called “pasters”) applied by park service personnel as proof that a user had permission to bring an automobile into the park, helping to account for number of visitations in congressional budget appropriation.

Beginning in 1908 with Mount Ranier, national parks began to charge cars to enter, fees based on the amount of improved roads in a park. In 1918 the money earned was placed in Treasury’s general fund. Money to run the parks would need to come from budget appropriations. A system was necessary to track automobile use in the parks.

Yosemite began to issue windshield stickers for automobiles in 1917, and Yellowstone followed in 1916, perhaps also two other parks. In 1920 the National Park Service standardized the design format, and the eight parks that



Yosemite was one of the original eight parks in the National Park Service program for 1920. This is a first year paster.

The exhibit will proceed by National Park after general information on the decals. Rarities will be indicated by red frame.