



## ***“How was your birthday?” “It was a blast!” A look at the Many Glacier Sawmill “episode”***

Horace M. Albright was Assistant Director of the National Park Service under Stephen Mather and became Director himself in 1929. He kept up a lifelong correspondence with Stephen’s daughter, Bertha (Betty) Mather McPherson.

Many of these letters have remained in the Homestead attic. In 1986, he wrote...

*“My dear Betty: Thank you for your letter, and your comment on the Glacier Park sawmill episode...I fully understand your feeling about...the book, for I was surprised that it stayed in despite my request that it be omitted – not the basic story of the mill’s destruction, but the trimmings about your birthday and invitation to tourists to witness the explosion.”*

So what is the story? In Glacier National Park on the shores of Swiftcurrent Lake, The Great Northern Railroad built The Many Glacier Hotel. To construct the hotel, they erected a sawmill which was used in 1914 and 1915 but remained even after the hotel was completed. To Stephen it was an “eyesore” that had to go, but the Great Northern continued to stall.

Then, as *Big Sky Journal* noted: “...After years of letters, telegraph messages, and meetings, Mather traveled to Glacier in August 1925 and dealt with the sawmill personally. He blew it up.”

In *Stephen Mather of The National Parks*, Robert Shankland writes...“Mather had given his orders to the trail crews, invited the hotel guests to step out for a demonstration, and then...had personally lighted the fuse to the first of thirteen charges of TNT. The sawmill was out of business...”

“...With each detonation Mather’s mood lightened. By the fifth, as people inquired into his motives, he said: ‘Celebrating my daughter’s nineteenth birthday.’”

Albright goes on to write, “...in his (STM’s) telling of the story, he liked to mention your birthday. When he reached Yellowstone with it, and told me, he mentioned both the birthday and the visitors...I am not keeping a copy of this...”



Many Glacier Hotel with groups of tourists waiting to board the old White touring buses, circa 1920. Courtesy Glacier National Park.