

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Rock Spring Camp Ground Additional Documentation

Denver, Lincoln County, LN0008ad, Listed 4/17/2017

Nomination by Laura A. W. Phillips

Photographs by Laura A. W. Phillips, October 2016



Row of Tents



Row of Tents

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National Park Service

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[Note: Only amended items and the required NPS certification are included below.]

1. Name of Property: Rock Spring Camp Ground, Additional Documentation

3. State/Federal Agency Certification: As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant locally.

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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7. Integrity Update

The following is an update of the current appearance, condition, and integrity of the Rock Spring Camp Ground property. It is necessitated by the occurrence of three fires at the camp ground since its listing in the National Register in 1972.

The fires – on October 30, 1973, January 26, 1981, and April 17, 1981 – damaged or destroyed numerous tents in several sections of the camp ground. None of the fires affected the central arbor. The attached plan of the camp ground, Fig. 1: Fires at Rock Spring Camp Ground, identifies the locations of the three fires.¹ The location of the 1973 fire, indicated by the number 1 and a dashed line encompassing the burned tents, shows that that was the most destructive blaze, damaging or destroying ninety-five of the 258 tents (approximately thirty-seven percent), mostly on the north side, but somewhat on the east and west sides, too. The number 2 and a solid line identify the location of the January 1981 fire, which damaged or destroyed sixteen tents on the east side of the camp ground. The fire of April 1981 damaged or destroyed twenty-six tents, two of which were replacements of tents burned in the 1973 fire. The location of that fire, at the southwest corner of the camp ground, is shown on the map by the number 3 and a solid line.

Although just over half of the tents were lost in the fires of 1973 and 1981, the overall integrity of the camp ground – in terms of its location, setting, design, workmanship, feeling, and association – has been retained to a relatively good degree. This level of integrity is due to the physical character of the tents and to the organic process of building and rebuilding the tents over 187 years or, as the 1972 National Register nomination calls it, the “accretive growth” of the tents. That nomination documents well (p. 2) the physical character of the tents and their evolution as simple structures that replaced the cloth tents or brush shelters first used by camp meeting attendees. Several comments in this additional documentation nomination serve to reinforce and add to the points made in the original nomination.

Following the typical pattern of house building in frontier areas, the first-built tents were of log construction, but they were soon replaced by frame tents, which came to predominate. When built, tents were meant to be permanent structures. However, because they were inhabited only during the annual one-week camp meeting, they were not constructed with the same care and finished character of year-round houses. Thus, they looked, and still look, more like shacks than houses.

¹ Terry Brotherton, *Rock Spring Campground Vol. II 1970-2002: A Continuing History of the Campground Including Amusing Facts and Anecdotes*. N.p.: Terry Brotherton, 2003: 726. Brotherton took a previously drawn plan of the camp ground (source and date unknown) and added to it dashed and solid lines indicating the locations of the fires, along with a map key.

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Although some tents were built as free-standing structures, most are attached buildings that share common interior walls, thus providing more available space at the camp ground for the construction of additional tents. The tents form long rows, three deep on all but the west side of the central square, where there are only two rows. Because of the contiguous arrangement of frame tents in rows, any fires tended to burn multiple tents, and if there was a wind, the damage could be considerable. However, once the rubble was cleared, owners rebuilt their easily constructed tents in time for the next camp meeting. Currently the camp ground has 260 tents.

Throughout the camp ground's history, tents have been built and rebuilt, whether due to general expansion of the housing facilities or to replace earlier tents that had deteriorated or burned. As the original nomination notes, when new tents are built, they conform closely to the standard tent form, though usually with minor variations, so that the camp ground has retained its historic appearance, even after the fires of 1973 and 1981. The fact that the tents at Rock Spring Camp Ground are unpainted contributes to the homogenous appearance of newer tents alongside older tents, because within several years of being built, new tents take on the same weathered appearance of their predecessors. Most tents now have concrete, rather straw-over-dirt, floors and, as was true in 1972, some have an upper-level gallery, many of which are likely additions.

A 2016 comparison of tents built after the 1973 and 1981 fires (photos 3 and 4) with tents of older dates of construction (photos 1, 2, and 4) shows that the tents have some variety – as would be expected of structures built by different owners – while maintaining an overall continuity of appearance. All the tents – older and newer – shown in the photographs are unpainted, have side-gable roofs with some variations in height between tents, walls with slatted ventilation, and long runs of front porches. Photo 4 shows that upper-level galleries were present before and after the 1973 fire.

Rock Spring Camp Ground is a rare historic property in North Carolina, being the oldest of only several surviving religious camp grounds that continue to hold annual camp meetings. Two of the others – Ball's Creek and Tucker's Grove – are both listed in the National Register and both have lost and rebuilt tents due to fires. Rock Spring Camp Ground lost a considerable number of tents in the fires of 1973 and 1981, but those tents were rebuilt in time for the next camp meeting. The combined tents – older and newer – stand in their original location in rows surrounding the central camp ground square with its 1832 timber-frame arbor. The setting remains rural and largely wooded. The design of the tents reflects the slow evolution of a traditional building form over more than a century. The workmanship remains that produced by relatively unskilled labor working quickly on habitations meant to be lived in during one week out of the year. Physically, the arbor and surrounding tents maintain the feeling of the historic religious camp meeting ground, and as an active camp ground, Rock Spring retains its camp meeting ground function until the present.

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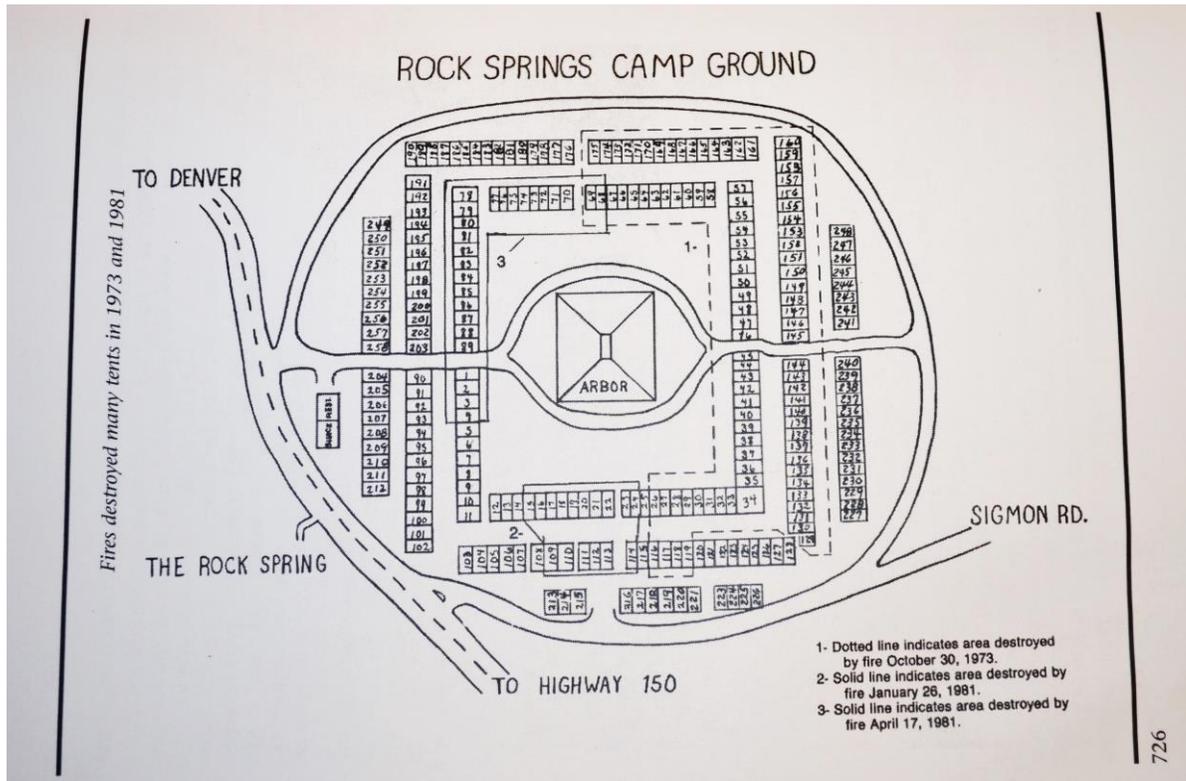


Fig. 1. Fires at Rock Spring Camp Ground. (Terry Brotherton, *Rock Spring Campground*, Vol. II: 726.)

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8. New Name Documentation

In 1972, the camp ground property was listed in the National Register under the name “Rock Springs Camp Meeting Ground.” During the process of preparing a boundary increase nomination for the property in 2016, it became apparent that the camp ground has been called by a variety of similar names throughout its history, for example: Rock Springs Camp Meeting Ground, Rock Springs Campground, Rock Springs Camp Ground, Rock Spring Campmeeting, Rock Spring Campground, and Rock Spring Camp Ground. In common usage, the camp ground is currently, and probably always has been, called by slightly different names, and therefore clarifying the camp ground’s historic name, for the record, became important. To this end, research to discover historic references to the camp ground name was undertaken.

Long-time camp ground historian Terry Brotherton, who has published two expansive volumes of camp ground history, has asserted to camp ground trustees and other camp meeting attendees that the proper name is “Rock Spring” not “Rock Springs.”² According to Brotherton, although the camp ground has more than one spring, there is only one rock spring, where the water comes forth from the rocky hillside. The rock spring was the reason this site was chosen for the camp ground.

Research uncovered several historic documents assigning the name of the camp ground. Interestingly, when Joseph M. Monday sold approximately forty-five acres on August 7, 1830, to Freeman Shelton, Richard Proctor, and James Bivings in trust for the Methodist Society of the Lincoln Circuit, neither a camp ground nor a name for a camp ground was mentioned.³ However, in 1830, 1831, and 1832, at least, the quarterly meeting conference of the Lincoln Circuit was held on a date during the first week in August at “Rock Spring Camp Ground.”⁴ Twenty years later, when the camp ground incorporated on January 28, 1851, the North Carolina General Assembly ratified an act establishing “Rock Spring Camp Ground” and incorporating trustees for it.⁵ Again, in 1871, when the North Carolina General Assembly ratified another act incorporating a board of trustees for the camp ground (apparently an amendment and expansion of the original 1851 act) “Rock Spring Camp Ground” was the name recorded in the official document. A century and a quarter later, in 1996, the same name was being used officially. At that time, the

² Terry Brotherton’s two volumes are *Rock Spring Campground Vol. 1 1794-1969* (2002) and *Rock Spring Campground Vol. II 1970-2002: A Continuing History of the Campground Including Amusing Facts and Anecdotes* (2003). In his writing, Brotherton combines “Rock Spring” with the one-word “Campground.” Butch Ross, *Conversations with Laura Phillips*, September 2016.

³ Lincoln County Deed Book 34: 303.

⁴ Brotherton, *Rock Spring Campground Vol. 1*: 97, 102, 104. In his book, Brotherton includes photocopies of the handwritten pages from the conference minutes.

⁵ Chapter CCLIX, *Laws of the State of North Carolina, passed by the General Assembly at the Session of 1850- '51* (Raleigh: Star Office – T. J. Lemay, State Printer, 1851), 629.

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trustees of “Rock Spring Camp Ground” were the grantor in a deed conveying a small portion of the property to the East Lincoln Water and Sewer District.⁶ These historic documents demonstrate the retention of the name “Rock Spring Camp Ground” for more than one-and-a-half centuries and therein justify changing the historic name of the property in the National Register to “Rock Spring Camp Ground.”

9. Bibliography

Brotherton, Terry. *Rock Spring Campground Vol. I 1794-1969*. N.p.: Terry Brotherton, 2002.

_____. *Rock Spring Campground Vol. II 1970-2002: A Continuing History of the Campground Including Amusing Facts and Anecdotes*. N.p.: Terry Brotherton, 2003.

Laws of the State of North Carolina, Passed by the General Assembly at the Session of 1850- '51, Chapter CCLIX. Raleigh: Star Office – T. J. Lemay, State Printer, 1851.

Lincoln County Records, Deeds.

Private Laws of the State of North Carolina, Passed by the General Assembly at Its Session 1870- '71, Chapter LXXXVII. Raleigh: James H. Moore, State Printer and Binder, 1871.

11. Form Prepared By:

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⁶ Chapter LXXXVII, *Private Laws of the State of North Carolina, passed by the General Assembly at Its Session 1870- '71* (Raleigh; James H. Moore, State Printer and Binder, 1871), 152; and Lincoln County Deed Book 929: 844.

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Photographs

The following information applies to all nomination photographs.

- 1) Rock Spring Camp Ground (Additional Documentation)
- 2) Denton, Lincoln County, North Carolina
- 3) Laura A. W. Phillips
- 4) October 20, 2016
- 5) CD:NCHPO, Raleigh, NC
- 6-7)
 - 1: Tents pre-dating fires of 1973 and 1981. Rear of second row of tents on south side of arbor, ascending from #90, view to east.
 - 2: Tents pre-dating fires of 1973 and 1981. Front of second row of tents on south side of arbor, ascending from #92, view to southeast.
 - 3: Front of first row of tents on east side of arbor, ascending from #23, view to northeast. Tents #23 and #24 built after fire of 1/1981; remainder of row built after fire of 10/1973.
 - 4: Front of second row of tents on east side of arbor, ascending from #116, view to northeast. Tents #116-#119 built after fire of 10/1973; tents #120 to end of row predate fire of 10/1973.