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Letter from the Editor

More than Carr, a scholar of the history of America's national parks, is guest editor for this issue of *Site/Lines*. Our contributors include landscape historians and longtime National Park Service employees. In their essays, they honor the visionaries who sought to preserve portions of America's scenic heritage for the benefit of its citizens. In addition, they explore the challenging issues facing park managers in the twenty-first century.

Frederick Law Olmsted can be considered a precursor of such visionaries. As leading Olmsted historian Charles Beveridge points out in his essay, the father of America's municipal parks movement wrote a report in 1865 on the need to ensure public access to Yosemite Valley's spectacular scenery.

Soon thereafter, in the wake of the 1868 completion of the transcontinental railroad, government-sponsored survey expeditions made an array of scenic discoveries. These natural wonders served as the stimulus for an adventurous new brand of tourism, and they were quickly promoted by the

railroad companies as recreational travel opportunities.

Commerce and mapping went hand in hand, while art and photography became a means of revealing western grandeur to the rest of the country. The Northern Pacific Railroad funded the participation of artist Thomas Moran and photographer William Henry Jackson in the Ferdinand Vandever Hayden Survey of 1871. Their depictions of the waterfalls, deep canyons, geysers, and steaming fumaroles of the Yellowstone region helped make the case for its designation by Congress as the first national park the following year. Thus the impetus for creating national parks was to preserve remarkable natural curiosities as tourist destinations rather than to set aside wilderness for its own sake. Lee Whittlesey, park historian for the National Park Service at Yellowstone, in chronicling Yellowstone's history in this issue of *Site/Lines*, gives voice to the continuing dichotomy: How can we adhere to Thoreau's dictum "In wildness is preservation of the world," while accommodating those who need access and visitor facilities in order to enjoy the parks that were created for their benefit?

Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. drew on his father's Yosemite report when writing key portions of the enabling legislation for the creation of the National Park Service in 1916. Before that date, there was no governmental unit to administer the parks as an integrated system. With the establishment of a federal agency within the Department of the Interior, Congress, which had been previously intent on creating parks in the western United States, expanded its purview to include areas east of the Mississippi. Acadia on Mount Desert Island in Maine was the first such park.

As Paula Deitz explains here, Maine's coastal scenery had long attracted such landscape painters as Thomas Cole, Frederic E. Church, Sanford Robinson Gifford, and other Romantic landscape artists. Now protected as a national park, Acadia became the beneficiary of a singular act of private philanthropy. In addition to donating 11,000 acres to the National Park Service, John D. Rockefeller Jr. worked with landscape architect Beatrix Farrand on laying out the fifty-seven miles of carriage roads through Acadia's unfolding scenery of forest and shoreline. Their work made movement a fundamental part of the park experience, similar in con-

cept to the one achieved by Frederic Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux in their design of the paths and drives in Central Park. Here Ethan Carr discusses the principles of this aesthetic tradition, which he calls the "natural style," as exemplified both in Central Park and the national parks.

In making improvements to the national parks during the Great Depression, federally funded Civilian Conservation Corps teams used rustic timbers and rough-hewn rock, perpetuating the style pioneered by the railroad companies who built many of the first park lodges and visitor facilities. The New Deal era also saw the National Park Service embrace automobile parkways. A prime example, as Anne Whisnant relates, was the building of the Blue Ridge Parkway connecting Shenandoah National Park and Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The parkway gave a new dimension to scenic recreation, but like the earlier national parks, it was vulnerable to exploitation by commercial tourism. Whisnant warns against the politically allied economic forces that can result in excessive tourist-industry development.

As soldiers went off to serve in World War II, the federally funded economic relief programs that had benefited the national parks came to an end. The parks themselves languished, and

by the 1950s their visitor facilities had become run-down and obsolete. In 1956, the same year that the Federal-Aid Highway Act authorized the construction of the interstate highway system, it became evident that a significantly augmented national park system would be invaluable to a society with more mobility and leisure than ever before. Deemed a ten-year effort, the billion-dollar program – Mission 66 – was designed to provide an array of services for an estimated eighty million annual visitors. Prominent among these services were administrative buildings, housing for park rangers, comfort stations, and more than a hundred new visitor centers offering interpretive programs. In addition, the size of the national park system increased by forty percent with the acquisition of seventy-eight new sites. As new visitor centers and other amenities were built, the natural style of park design gave way to such practical considerations as automobile parking. At the same time, modern architecture replaced the rustic character of the older park facilities.

In recent years, the National Park Service has created parks in large urban areas, notably Gateway

National Recreation Area in New York City and Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco. Rolf Diamant, superintendent of the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, provides an insider's speculation about the agency's future stewardship of America's most remarkable living legacy after the Constitution.

We at the Foundation for Landscape Studies would argue that the national parks did not fare well during the Bush years, when there was a lack of a clear leadership and adequate funding. Our hope is that the ideals of the visionary Americans who created the national parks and former directors such as Stephen Mather, Conrad Wirth, and Roger Kennedy will be revived and perpetuated during the administration of Jon Jarvis, President Obama's new head of the National Park Service. The signs are good. Jarvis is a highly qualified career employee who has filled various important posts over the past thirty years. His appointment has been hailed by environmental groups and historic preservationists alike. We send him – along with all our readers – good green wishes,



Elizabeth Barlow Rogers
President

On the Cover:

Yellowstone Falls by Thomas Moran,
Courtesy Gilcrease Museum.

America the Beautiful: The National Parks

The Natural Style and Park Design

The Irish gardener William Robinson and the American landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted met in New York in 1870, the same year Robinson published what would become one of the most influential gardening books of all time, *The Wild Garden*. We know little of the meeting except that Olmsted gave Robinson tours of Central Park and Prospect Park, and that the two men apparently liked what each had to say to the other about landscape design. There is no record of a personal meeting again until 1892, but their correspondence indicates a sustained and mutual respect.

The basis of this alliance was not shared background, temperament, or training because the two men differed in all these regards. Robinson was a true plantsman, who rejected gaudy displays of bedded annuals in favor of more informal compositions of perennials. His influence shapes residential gardening to this day. Olmsted was not really a gardener at all, but held a wider ambition for what he called the public art of landscape architecture. The year he met Robinson, Olmsted spoke in Boston on “Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns,” making his most definitive statement on the social and environmental goals of urban park systems. He was also in the thick of municipal politics in New York, struggling to achieve his vision of a more healthful and beautiful American city. But if they differed in their preparations and aspirations as artists, the two men immediately sensed a common value: a deep belief in the utility and beauty of what they would both describe, in different terms, as a natural style of landscape design.

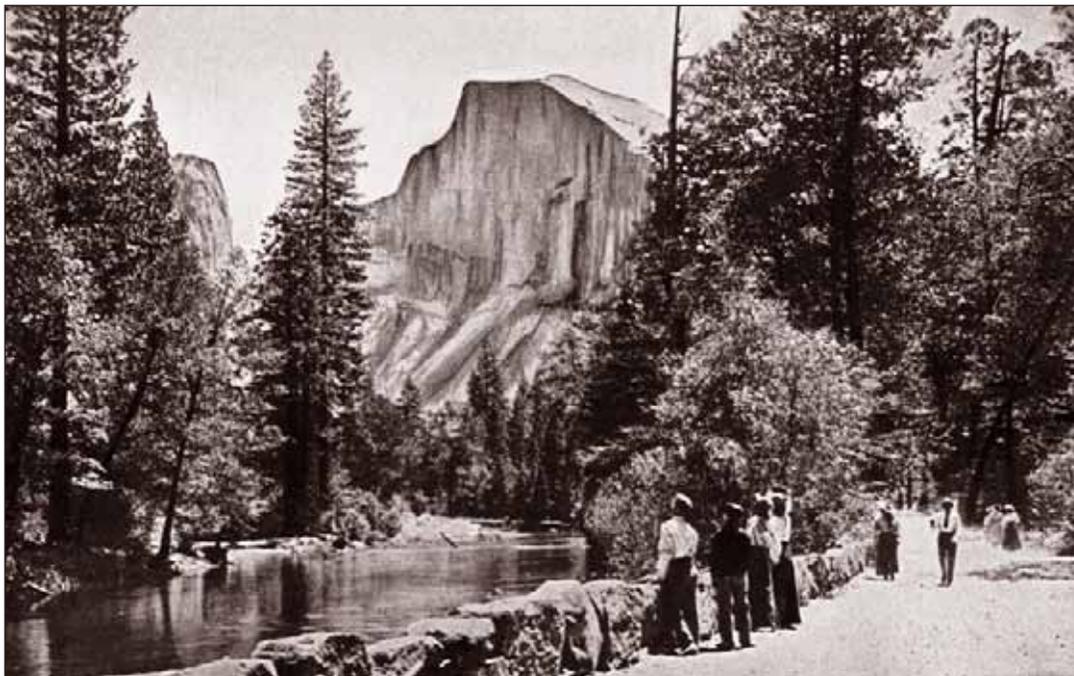
For Robinson, natural style meant wild gardens of loosely composed perennial borders, meadows strewn with “naturalized” masses of bulbs and other flowers, or woodlands with understories of flowering shrubs and ferns. In Olmsted’s case, the natural style encompassed the varied landscapes of his large municipal parks: the pastoral beauty of meadows, the picturesque scenes created by more densely planted or wooded areas, the expansive sheets of water meandering through and around other features of the landscape. But the term also indicated Olmsted’s approach to preserving existing scenic landscapes through minimally intrusive “improvements” – the drives, paths, and other public facilities that could make a large natural area like Niagara Falls into a (nearly) ready-made park.

During a recent walk in the Central Park Ramble on a spring afternoon, I became convinced that this was where Olmsted and Robinson found common ground in 1870. An embodiment of a semi-divine, nineteenth-century ideal of nature, the Ramble was conceived as the center of both the spatial experience and the iconographic program of the park. Originally, the landscape was merely a rocky hill rising out of a poorly drained area in the center of the site. But it was crowned by an outcrop promptly named Vista Rock, and the area already had an essentially picturesque character that Olmsted heightened by adding a profusion of flowering shrubs, ground cover, and vines, as well as winding paths and rustic shelters and bridges. The Lake, excavated around it,

enhanced its solitary and dramatic aspect. To the south, the straight, quarter-mile-long avenue of the Mall was angled between Vista Rock and the main park entrance, so that the axis of this one great formal space in Central Park terminated not on a monument or building but rather on a wild garden. Although there is no record of Robinson’s response to the Ramble, he was extremely taken with the park itself, referring to it as “equal and in many respects superior, to anything of the kind in existence.” For his part, Olmsted later recognized that there could be “no better place than the Ramble for the realization of the Wild Garden,” instructing the park’s gardeners to use Robinson’s ideas in the future management of the landscape.

On that April afternoon more than a century later, I was struck by how pertinent the principle of the natural style still is to the way we enjoy and protect our public spaces, whether we are talking about a landscape in the middle of New York City or the vast wilderness of Yosemite National Park. Today the issues surrounding the management of municipal and national parks systems may seem far apart or even antithetical. But historically both city parks and remote scenic reservations were manifestations of the perceived importance of experiences of nature and landscape beauty. Olmsted, for example, strongly believed that people in cities required access to open, pastoral scenery in order to maintain their physical and emotional well-being. Urban parks therefore did not merely provide an amenity, but were necessary to public health. In the case of Yosemite Valley, he argued that government had a “political duty” to assure that such scenes should remain inviolate and available for the enjoyment of the “body of the people,” not just the wealthy few. In both cases, as different in scale and context as they were, the design of park “improvements” – paths, roads, shelters, and other features – would allow the public to enjoy natural and scenic beauty in large numbers without trampling and destroying the landscapes they had come to appreciate.

In 2008 a partnership of academic, government, and nonprofit groups organized a two-part conference called “Designing the Parks.” At the first half of the conference – which was hosted by the University of Virginia, where I teach landscape history and preservation – scholars as well as park managers from all over the world were invited to present papers on the history



Trail with rough-hewn rock wall giving visitors access to a view of Half Dome and the Merced River in Yosemite Valley, postcard, ca. 1910. Courtesy of Tim Davis.

of park design. The second half was hosted by the National Park Service at the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco and brought together landscape architects, planners, park officials, and others to draft a series of statements on future priorities for public parks of all types. (The results so far can be seen at www.designingtheparks.com, but the process is continuing and intended to be open-ended, drawing in new voices and partners.)

As a participant in this effort, I have been revisiting the role of the natural style in U.S. park history. Defining the natural style is admittedly difficult, as it is neither natural, since it involves human manipulation, nor is it a style, since it is not restricted to a particular combination of expressive features. Rather, it is an approach to planned landscape intervention based on scientific and poetic consultations of the “nature” of a particular site: its natural systems, geology, visual qualities, and cultural meanings. Or, as Alexander Pope put it rather more succinctly, the “genius of the place.”

The natural style was born in eighteenth-century Britain, but its greatest expressions arguably were made in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly in the United States. This is because the natural style had enormous influence over how Americans conceived and developed the systems of large parks and scenic reservations that we like to think of as “our best idea.” In other words, in the setting of a large scenic reservation natural-style design is synonymous with unimpaired preservation for the purpose of public enjoyment, a goal that is still part of the core mandate of many park agencies today. A reconsideration of this aspect of the natural style seems critical as part of a larger effort to consider future park design principles.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a term like “natural style” or even the word “design” can be viewed with suspicion in the setting of a national park, where public use and enjoyment are seen by some as principal threats to park preservation. Since World War II it has become a commonplace that national parks are being loved to death by an enthusiastic but overly large public. Commercial interests – the snowmobile industry, to cite a notorious example – are always ready to capitalize on new attractions and uses that may not have even existed in Olmsted’s day. And yet most would agree that without access for people, parks would be eviscerated of their social purpose, political justification, and diverse cultural significance. Both sides have a point, and this is why design

remains a critical practice and subject for inquiry. Landscape design has always been the essential activity that allows the entire project of park making – public enjoyment without impairment – to succeed, or not. To assure that public parks remain central in American culture and imagination, this definition of the purpose of design in these settings must be reclaimed. A reconsideration of what the natural style was – and what it might be – is a good way to begin.

Consider what was, for Olmsted, the primary purpose of a large natural or scenic reservation: the experience of the landscape itself, not of museums or cultural institutions, organized recreation, or didactic monuments that might be sited there. The emotional response to nature and scenery provided healthful benefits that served a broad public interest and therefore justified the government creation and management of public parks. The task of the designer was to make those landscape experiences – whether more contrived and created, as at Central Park, or previously existing, as at Yosemite – accessible in a way that assured the preservation of the landscape being enjoyed.

This remains the ideal for what design today can hope to achieve in the setting of protected natural and historic landscapes. The natural style is not a question of designing buildings or landscape structures with rusticated finishes or neotraditional themes; it has a more important objective than promoting one stylistic preference over another. If the experience of the landscape is the principal purpose of a park, then development for any other purpose – no matter how praiseworthy that purpose may be – works against the purpose of the park. As Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. wrote in 1916, the role of any development in the setting of a large natural or historic



The invention of the automobile introduced a new challenge for designers of park circulation systems in the natural style, postcard, ca. 1935. Courtesy of Tim Davis.

park is to create roads, trails, and interpretive experiences in a manner that allows the public to fully appreciate the beauty and significance of scenery, history, and wildlife without impairing those resources in ways that would prevent future generations from having the same enjoyment. The beauty and significance of a landscape should never be narrowly construed; there are multiple historical narratives and layers of commemoration in any historic landscape, for example. But park development should be about facilitating the appreciation of the landscape, not some alternate attraction, program, or activity.

As new buildings and other park redevelopments are proposed, we should ask whether the new development serves or detracts from the primary purpose of the park. New visitor centers at the Old Faithful area of Yellowstone and at Gettysburg, for example, exemplify rustic and neotraditional design intended to harmonize with landscape settings. But are large, centralized facilities with administrative and retail space still what the National Park Service should be building, at least within park boundaries? The new Heritage Research Center at Yellowstone, for example, is outside the park in an area once dominated by railroad infrastructure, and serves its purposes

beautifully without encroaching on park landscapes. The following can therefore be suggested as a first tenet of natural-style design: *If preserving a natural or cultural landscape for public appreciation is the primary purpose of a park, then development in the park should be minimized to that purpose.*

If the experience of the landscape is to be paramount, a second tenet of the natural style is this: *Any development deemed truly necessary should visually complement, not dominate or distract from, the landscape.* The natural style is a design process and a general approach to the site. If a building is planned with an appropriate program, site, massing, and spatial sequence relative to its surroundings, architectural design need only support these landscape design decisions in an unobtrusive way. The new visitor center in the Paradise area of Mount Rainier National Park, for example, reinterprets a regional rustic architectural idiom for contemporary purposes, but its impressive success is due more to its intelligent placement, which strengthens the spatial experience and pattern of public use within a historically developed area of the park. References to park architecture of the past or to vernacular architecture of the region might or might not be good ideas, but on their own they do not constitute a natural style of landscape design based on sound and responsive site planning.

The subject of design may seem somewhat suspect for park managers, who at times have condemned aesthetic considerations as superficial, under the assumption that a concern for visual composition may be accompanied by a disregard for less visible ecological disturbances. In the early twentieth century, for example, the extirpation of wolves and other predators was considered desirable, in part because large herds of ruminants were valued as scenery. This policy had terrible consequences for wildlife and forests. But today an appropriate consideration for aesthetics can be combined with science-based decision making, and this would be consistent with the idea of the natural style.

Both Olmsted and Robinson advocated and employed the natural sciences of their era, and were protoecological in their design approaches. Olmsted in particular had a deep interest in geology and forestry. If he were alive now, he would probably be labeled an ecologist. Advancement in the natural sciences, particularly ecological science, has resulted in a new, but entirely sympathetic, context for the natural style today. A third tenet of the natural style would therefore embody this requirement: *Landscape design must incorporate scientific knowledge as well as aesthetic judgment.*

Finally, natural-style design has always been predicated on a specifically modern mode of perception: that of the viewer in motion. Whether on foot or on horseback, in carriages or in

automobiles, the modern tourist has experienced the beauty of the landscape while moving through it. In natural-style landscapes, transportation has never been merely a matter of access, but a way of seeing and being in a place: a mode of perception and experience. But over the last thirty years alternative transportation schemes for parks such as Grand Canyon and Yosemite have often been frustrated or had only limited implementation. A fourth tenet should state the following: *Any revised, contemporary version of the natural style should have new and perhaps dramatic ideas for circulation – that is, the pattern, pace, and content of park visits – at its heart.* As park transportation planners know, alternative circulation patterns and new forms of transportation lead to revised modes of experience and interpretation. An indication of this potential can be experienced at Zion Canyon, where a fleet of buses shuttles visitors in and out of the canyon, transforming the noise and distraction of car traffic into a more appropriately hushed and reverential atmosphere.

New technologies – not only for transportation but for the dissemination of interpretive information – seem always to be on the cusp of offering major shifts in how the public moves through and appreciates parks. Will interpretive displays still be necessary once handheld devices are receiving educational programming at specific locations in a landscape? Will the advent of low-emission vehicles change attitudes about the impact of personal vehicles? Ironically, one of the most popular and successful forms of alternative transportation has been the historic “gear jammers” – open-top touring buses built in the 1930s – which have been restored and again take visitors over Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier National Park. The social and technological context for design, of course, never stops changing. And yet principles of the natural style may still have significant application as we continue to revise ideas about how people arrive, move through, and experience park landscapes.

The connection between natural-style design and the preservation of natural and historic landscapes may be more obscure today than it was when Olmsted and Robinson strolled through the Ramble together. But if we accept that the natural style was significant in park history, there are good reasons to consider how it has evolved over time while retaining fundamental meanings and functions. These thoughts came to mind last spring as I observed Central Park Conservancy gardeners

who have been engaged in a thoughtful, incremental restoration of the Ramble since 2007. One of the last major landscape components of the park to be restored, the revitalization of this wild garden will be a high point of the Conservancy’s thirty years of remarkable stewardship. In the areas of the Ramble already reopened to the public, Conservancy staff have planted ground cover and understory vegetation, unclogged stream channels, and stabilized and amended the soil, which for decades eroded into the Lake. Surrounding the Ramble on three sides, its edges are being restored by using portable coffer dams to temporarily drain sections of shoreline. This has made it possible for silted-in coves and inlets to be excavated and replanted. The project has been planned in stages to avoid extensive, simultaneous environmental disturbance to the thirty-eight-acre landscape that is, among its other qualities, one of the most significant migratory bird habitats in the entire region.

As the Ramble is renewed, it struck me that the multiple meanings and historical significance of the landscape are also being resuscitated and given new immediacy. It is no longer a Robinsonian wild garden of carefully maintained shrubs and ground covers. Since the 1920s, a secondary forest of black cherries, ash, and other volunteer species has matured and replaced many of the original ornamental plants. But the forest has itself come to be valued as another vision of wildness – not a naturalistic garden but a product of a natural succession that has reclaimed a rocky piece of Manhattan’s topography. The minimal-impact management of this landscape has allowed this evolution to take place, and has emphasized the integrity of wildlife habitat rather than visual effects. Dead trees are left standing and native plant species are encouraged.

Today no one would advocate clear-cutting the Ramble in order to re-create the historic, naturalistic garden it once was; instead it continues to embody an ideal of nature, but in a contemporary form. It has become a new kind of wild garden, one in which succession and other natural processes have been allowed full expression. Here habitat and ecosystem are showcased – just as picturesque outcrops, shrubs, and other effects once were. As an updated vision of wildness, the Ramble fulfills its place in the larger park composition and in the sequence of landscape experiences in ways that a nineteenth-century shrub garden could not.

The revitalization underway in the Ramble today is a powerful metaphor for the resurgence of the social and environmental aspirations for public parks once espoused by figures such as Olmsted and Robinson and described by them as a natural style of landscape design. The definition and appear-

ance of nature may change, but the conviction that the experience of such landscapes is a necessary condition for human happiness has not: on the contrary, the reasons for preserving landscapes in ways that allow the public to experience them meaningfully and healthfully have only grown stronger as the world has grown more crowded and urbanized. A reexamination of the natural style, therefore, can be a logical and inspiring starting point in the process of renewing our vision of park design today. – Ethan Carr

Olmsted and Yosemite

When Frederick Law Olmsted embarked from New York City in the fall of 1863 to assume his new position as general manager of the great Mariposa gold-mining estate in the foothills of California's Sierra Nevada, he thought he was leaving behind both his career as a park designer and his Civil War role in preserving the Union as head of the U.S. Sanitary Commission. And yet the principal results of his two-year sojourn in California would be his formulation of a distinctive style of regional landscape design for the semi-arid West and the first comprehensive formulation of a rationale for creating parks from the national domain.¹

Olmsted's first impressions of the California landscape surrounding the settlement of Bear Valley were hardly promising for success in either endeavor. The only time during his first few weeks on the Mariposa Estate that he took any delight in the scenery was at twilight, when shadows gave the appearance of turf to the parched ground and the "vegetable productions" briefly resembled fully formed trees. Still, after several months he could write a friend in the East that "there are certain views here which are sterner and more awful than any I ever saw before. I don't love them, but I surrender to them; I feel that they have got me. I should feel humiliated to live anywhere else, after having made myself at home with them." The spot that he found particularly "sublime in no contemptible degree" was a mine on the edge of the deep ravine of the

¹ The information in this article was drawn primarily from documents and editorial commentary in Victoria Post Ranney et al., eds., *The California Frontier, 1863-1865, The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Volume 5* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), and Charles E. Beveridge and Carolyn Hoffman, eds., *Writings on Public Parks, Parkways, and Park Systems, The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Supplementary Series Volume 1* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

Merced River where the view westward up the valley gave a distant glimpse of the bold granite face of El Capitan and the entrance to Yosemite Valley.

Within a month of his arrival at Mariposa, he began to explore the scenic wonders beyond the mines, and the following summer, after the arrival of his family, he spent two weeks visiting the Mariposa and Fresno groves of giant sequoias. He was awed by these ancient specimens, declaring that "you feel that they are distinguished strangers who have come down to us from another world." His experience of their majesty was most intense in the *chiaroscuro* effects provided by night-time campfires. In such a setting, he recalled, "the scene of the woods was one of the most impressive I have ever fallen upon, the stately trunks of two enormous sequoias a few hundred feet off lighted up and standing out in a clouded gold color . . . , perfect columns 170 feet, then lost in general obscurity of foliage." This experience anticipated his reaction to the sublime elements of Yosemite Valley itself; there, too, he responded to the grandeur of the place most intensely when it was revealed through light and shadow, moonlight and bold shafts of sunlight, creating a sense of drama and mystery.

By the summer of 1864 – independent of any involvement by Olmsted himself – Californians had secured from Congress a grant to their state of Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Tree Grove as inalienable public parkland. Governor Frederick Low moved quickly to protect the region. That September, he

forbade settling or lumbering in the area and appointed a commission of eight men to oversee creation of a public preserve. He appointed Olmsted as superintendent and chairman of the commission and ordered that all suggestions concerning policy and all requests for use-leases be directed to him. Reporting his appointment to his father, Olmsted called Yosemite "far the noblest public park, or pleasure ground in the world."

In his new role, Olmsted immediately hired the geologists Clarence King and James T. Gardner to draw up an accurate survey of the grant. He also prepared a report, which he presented to the commission in Yosemite Valley in September 1865, in which he discussed the theoretical basis for scenic preservation and proposed specific measures for safeguarding the landscape of the protected area while providing for public access.

The gist of his analysis was that the uniqueness of the valley was not due solely to its towering cliff sides and great cascades. As he observed:

There are falls of water elsewhere finer, there are more stupendous rocks, more beetling cliffs, there are deeper and more awful chasms, there may be as beautiful streams, as lovely meadows, there are larger trees. It is in no scene or scenes the charm consists, but in the miles of scenery where cliffs of awful height and rocks of vast magnitude and of varied and exquisite coloring, are banked and

fringed and draped and shadowed by the tender foliage of noble and lovely trees and bushes, reflected from the most placid pools, and associated with the most tranquil meadows, the most playful streams, and every variety of soft and peaceful pastoral beauty.

The union of the deepest sublimity with the deepest beauty of nature, not in one feature or another, not in one part or one scene or another, not in any land-



Merced River with Half Dome, Yosemite National Park. Photograph courtesy of the National Park Service Digital Image Archives.

scape that can be framed by itself, but all around and wherever the visitor goes, constitutes the Yo Semite the greatest glory of nature.

In this heartfelt (if calculated) paean to the beauty of the place, Olmsted was applying the aesthetic he used in his own park designs. There was to be no display of specimen objects, however impressive, in this landscape. The experience of the place was to be a continuous, flowing, and changing one: a succession of scenes in which the wall of the valley would seldom be viewed alone, but would instead be part of a well-composed scene in which the Merced River and its adjoining meadows, fern-brakes, and woods played a crucial part. Elaborating on this issue in later years, Olmsted recalled that “I felt the charm of the Yosemite much more at the end of a week than at the end of a day, much more after six weeks when the cascades were nearly dry, than after one week, and when after having been in it, off and on, several months, I was going out, I said, ‘I have not yet half taken it in.’”

Olmsted’s report carried significant implications for the management of the area. No lumbering, grazing, or homesteading should be permitted. The eminent botanist John Torrey informed Olmsted that within sight of a trail used by visitors in the valley floor, there were some six hundred species of flora, “most of them being small and delicate flowering plants.” Moreover, within a few acres of meadow, Torrey had found and named three hundred species native to California. The fragility of much of this valley vegetation dictated a management policy that would serve the requirements of tourists while protecting the plants as fully as possible. Olmsted predicted that millions of people would visit the valley in the next hundred years, and he warned that “an injury to the scenery so slight that it may be unheeded by any visitor now, will be one of deplorable magnitude when its effect upon each visitor’s enjoyment is multiplied by these millions.” Professional guidance was needed for protecting both the scenic and botanical elements of the valley, and for this purpose he urged that four of the eight members appointed to the commission be landscape artists and natural scientists.

The danger that individuals would mar the beauty of the valley in their pursuit of private gain was already evident when Olmsted drew up his report. James Hutchings had laid claim to much of the valley and was about to build a sawmill there. Governor Low’s proclamation ended that threat, but the cutting of trees continued. Commercial activity also accompanied the increased flow of tourists in the summer of 1865; along the

road to the reservation, patent-medicine purveyors had already defaced picturesque outcroppings with their advertisements.

Olmsted realized how easily a few self-interested men could destroy the beauty of a place that should be preserved for the benefit of the public at large. Accordingly, he was willing to use the power of government to protect against such profit-making intrusions. “It is the main duty of government,” he stated in his report, “to provide means of protection for all its citizens in the pursuit of happiness against the obstacles, otherwise unsurmountable, which the selfishness of individuals or combinations of individuals is liable to interpose in that pursuit.” He had long since rejected what he called “the besotted *laissez aller* [faire] principle,” which, he believed, sanctioned materialism in its least responsible form and gave a decided advantage to men possessing capital. Such a policy could too easily result in perpetuation of power and privilege in the hands of the same families from generation to generation, whereas he firmly believed that “government should have in view the encouragement of a democratic condition of society.”

It was in these terms that Olmsted viewed the question of scenic preservation. He considered reservations like Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Tree Grove to be public institutions of popular education of the sort that he had been working to foster in the North for over a decade. In justifying the Yosemite grant, in fact, he invoked A. J. Downing’s seminal

editorial “The New-York Park,” published in the *Horticulturist* in 1851, with its vision of “a whole people whose system of voluntary education embraces...not only schools of rudimentary knowledge, but common enjoyments for all classes in the higher realms of art, letters, science, social recreations and enjoyments.”

As part of his demonstration of the importance of the Yosemite grant as an educational opportunity and civilizing force, Olmsted returned to a concept he had developed after his trip to England in 1850: the United States had the ability, and the responsibility, to disprove the preconceptions on which the stratified society of the Old World had been built. There the governing classes had always believed “that the large mass of all human communities should spend their lives in almost constant labor and that the power of enjoying beauty either of nature or of art in any high degree, requires a cultivation of certain faculties, which is impossible to these humble toilers.”

As Olmsted had realized during his European travels, and as A. J. Downing had taught, the American republic must prove itself capable of providing its citizens with facilities for the full development of their capabilities. The engrossment by the rich of so many of England’s beautiful landscapes must not be permitted to occur in the United States. Preservation and proper management of the Yosemite grant would be a

crucial test of this ideal. It was this lesson concerning republican institutions and the promotion of civilization that Olmsted taught in his Yosemite report – a lesson he combined with a cogent analysis of the beneficial psychological effect of scenery. The report was his first formal statement of themes that he would articulate many times during his next thirty-five years as a practitioner of landscape architecture.

Having instructed his audience how to appreciate the scenery of Yosemite and spelled out a rationale for its preservation by the government, Olmsted went on to propose measures for its development and management. He called for immediate establishment of regulations that would protect the valley from destruction, since careless habits once established



Descent into Yosemite Valley by Mariposa Trail, *Harper's Weekly* 1873. Courtesy of Tim Davis.

would be hard to break. In order to provide access while at the same time acting “to reduce the necessity for artificial construction within the narrowest practicable limits,” he proposed a narrow carriage path circling the valley by a course that would intrude as little as possible on the landscape. He also proposed construction of five cabins at the points most frequented by visitors. The cabins would be let to tenants who were responsible for offering free resting space and facilities for visitors and providing rental of tents, camping gear, and cooking utensils. The cost of these minimally invasive alterations was very little: a projected \$6,600. But Olmsted was not merely committed to protecting the land; he was equally committed to bringing people there to experience it. Steamboat service easily carried visitors the seventy-five miles from San Francisco to Stockton, but there remained an overland journey of nearly one hundred miles. He therefore called for an appropriation by the state legislature of an additional \$25,000 to facilitate construction of a good carriage road from Stockton to Yosemite Valley. This costly scheme would prove the undoing of his vision.

When Olmsted read his report to the Yosemite Commission in the valley on August 9, 1865, his conclusions impressed visiting newspaper editors from the East. The response of the state government was far less positive. Three members of the Yosemite commission were also commissioners of the California Geological Survey, which was itself seeking new appropriations. They convinced Governor Low to suppress Olmsted’s report and budgetary request. The only verbatim portion of his report that reached the general public during Olmsted’s lifetime was the description of the special landscape qualities of Yosemite Valley that he published in the *New York Evening Post* of June 18, 1868; the report itself was virtually lost to the world for the following half century. Not until 1916, when Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. turned to the only existing copy of his father’s document for inspiration and phraseology as he composed the enabling legislation for the National Park Service, did Olmsted’s carefully developed rationale finally serve its intended role. Published several times since then in its entirety, the report has become an important part of the body of design doctrine that has informed the Olmsted revival of recent years.

Olmsted returned to the East in October 1865, resigned from the Yosemite Commission in October 1866, and was not officially involved with setting policy for the grant thereafter.

Although he visited the area in 1886, while planning the Stanford University campus, he seems to have intentionally avoided returning to Yosemite Valley. Soon after, however, a rising chorus of dismay at the spoliation of the valley’s landscape led to a campaign by concerned observers against the permissive and lax policies of the commission. Ralph Underwood Johnson, publisher of the *Century Magazine*, appealed to Olmsted for assistance, but he felt too far removed from the situation to comment effectively. He did, however, draw up and publish a brief paper in 1890, entitled *Governmental Preservation of Natural Scenery*, in which he discussed development of policies related to the cutting of trees and programs for replanting them.²

By this time, he had been involved for a decade in the campaign to create a scenic reservation at Niagara Falls – first as a leader of the effort and then in 1887 as co-designer with his old partner Calvert Vaux of the land ultimately set aside for protection by the State of New York. At Niagara he found the same combination of widely varying landscape elements – in this instance, torrential rapids, tremendous falls, and rich profusion of native vegetation – that constituted the special charm of Yosemite. The problem was similar – how to provide access and necessary facilities with least disruption of the landscape. In his response to Johnson’s appeal – Olmsted’s last statement on Yosemite – he quoted telling advice from his Niagara report of 1887 that crystallized his final recommendation for both sites and for scenic reservations in general:

Having regard to the enjoyment by visitors of natural scenery, and considering that the means of making this enjoyment available to large numbers of them will unavoidably lessen the extent and value of the primary elements of natural scenery, nothing of an artificial character should be allowed a place on the property, no matter how valuable it might be under other circumstances and no matter at how little cost it may be had, the presence of which can be avoided consistently with the provision of necessary conditions for making the enjoyment of the natural scenery available.

– Charles E. Beveridge

Yellowstone: From Last Place Discovered to International Fame

Since its founding in 1872, Yellowstone National Park has been renowned for the quality and quantity of its natural and cultural features. It has been designated a World Biosphere Preserve and a National Heritage Site. It is routinely proclaimed one of the world’s most extraordinary places, and it appears on nearly everyone’s lifetime-pilgrimage checklist. It is also a place that was decreed by Congress to be kept “unimpaired for future generations.” As a National Park Ranger at Yellowstone, I saw the consequences of this promise every time I watched my little daughter Tess play in the park with her friends. Because it was the first national park ever established, its history is generally instructive, and this spring’s National Park Week (April 18-26, 2009) led me to reflect on Yellowstone’s dramatic beginnings. It was already internationally famous by the mid-1870s – before it could be reached by railroad, and when few Americans had even seen it.

One of the great riddles of Indian history is why local tribes did not inform white people about the place. While ancient humans and, later, at least twenty-six Indian tribes visited Yellowstone over the centuries, they did not pass along information about it to Euro-Americans the way they did about other locations in the American West. Nor did they pass along to westward-bound whites what must have been well-established myths and legends about this strange land. Although we are not quite sure why, it seems likely that Yellowstone was considered a sacred place and therefore not something to be shared. Historian Hiram Chittenden wrote in 1895: “It is a singular fact in the history of the Yellowstone National Park that no knowledge of that country seems to have been derived from the Indians . . . Their deep silence concerning it is therefore no less remarkable than mysterious.”¹

Eventually Euro-Americans found Yellowstone – fur trappers in the 1820s and ‘30s and gold prospectors in the 1860s – but these travelers also did little to pass on their knowledge. Difficult mountain geography, the presence of deep snow for much of the year, the Civil War, and the lack of information from Indians all contributed to the area’s obscurity. When Yellowstone was finally “rediscovered” by Euro-Americans in 1870, it was effectively the last place in the American West to be explored and opened – and that was arguably fortunate. Otherwise settlers would have claimed the land and we probably would not have had today’s protected national park.

² *Governmental Preservation of Natural Scenery* will be published in Ethan Carr and Amanda Gagel, eds., *The Early Boston Years, 1882-1890*, Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Volume 8 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming).

The wonders and curiosities of Yellowstone were so amazing that even the 1869 Folsom party and the 1870 Washburn party – the parties that received credit for its white discovery – were not initially believed. David Folsom stated on his return that he “was unwilling to risk his reputation for veracity by a full recital...of the wonders he had seen.” N. P. Langford of the Washburn party stated to traveler Charles Whitmell that 1870 newspapers portrayed him as “the biggest liar in the West.”² Indeed the *New York Times* sneered that Langford’s submitted magazine article “reads like the realization of a child’s fairy tale.”³ Walter Trumbull of Langford’s party wrote an account for *Overland Monthly* magazine that the editor of the *Boise Tri-Weekly Statesman* blasted as fiction:

A great fault of our western literature is its gross exaggeration and its vulgar straining for effect. Simple people are astonished (which generally seems to be the purpose of the writer), but sensible ones are disgusted with this style of “old trapper” lying. We are of the opinion that when Mr. Walter Trumbull saw that column of water from the Beehive [Geyser] spouting up two feet in diameter to an altitude of 230 feet he must have been under the influence of an element more inspiring than Rocky Mountain water. And that other five foot column from the Giantess [Geyser] spouting up two hundred feet, and falling in drops and spray and shrouded with golden mist is equally tough. Now we like good healthy exaggeration; it indicates the poetical temperament, and lends a change often to a dull, practical subject, but this is a little too clumsily done. We suggest to Walter that he knock off a hundred feet or so and call the balance steam.⁴



known to the world, newspapers and magazines quickly made it famous, despite its remoteness. Initially all travel was on horseback, over what the *New York Times* referred to in 1873 as “wild and difficult bridle-paths.” A search today of one online archive shows that at least 1,336 newspaper articles about

Northern Pacific Railroad brochure, 1884. Courtesy of the National Park Service.

If this editor in Boise, Idaho, could not believe in Yellowstone geysers, then who could blame those in eastern cities for doubting that the strange wonderland existed?

It required a third expedition – the 1871 Hayden Survey – to fully document the glories of Yellowstone with photographs and scientific reports so that people could believe they were real. But even expedition artist Thomas Moran worried that the colors with which he painted were so bright that people might think him a liar.⁵ Fortunately W. H. Jackson’s photos and those of Joshua Crissman could not lie, so Congress declared Yellowstone the world’s first national park on March 1, 1872. Originally singled out because of its unique 200-foot-high geysers, the new park soon revealed other astounding features, including huge lakes, colorful canyons, petrified trees, tall waterfalls, large mammals, and thousands of hot springs.

Once Yellowstone was

Yellowstone appeared between 1872–1883. In addition, the largest Yellowstone bibliography reveals at least 209 published magazine articles published during the same period. These statistics do not include government documents, book chapters, individual letters, or items that were published in Europe, fed by the great number of wealthy European travelers who visited the park. Those miscellaneous productions number in the hundreds.

Along with the sheer volume of articles came glowing praise that hardly any place could live up to. Only one year after Congress’s act to establish the protected area, the *New York Times* proclaimed that “it is only necessary to render the Park easily accessible to make it the most popular summer resort in the country.”⁶ Over and over we read sentences like “Every person in our estimation should visit the Yellowstone.”⁷ Poetic language in the style of an intricately worked quilt was in vogue and produced lines like these describing Yellowstone’s Grand Canyon:

The whole gorge flames. It is as though rainbows had fallen out of the sky and hung themselves like glorious banners. The underlying color is the clearest yellow. This flushes onward into orange. Down at the base the deepest mosses unroll their draperies of the most vivid green; browns, sweet and soft, do their blending; white rocks stand spectral; turrets of rock shoot up as crimson as though they were drenched with blood. It is a wilderness of color. It is impossible that even the pencil of an artist can tell it.⁸

¹ Hiram M. Chittenden, *The Yellowstone National Park: Historical and Descriptive* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke Company, 1895), 8, 99. For those interested in more on this subject, I’ve written about it in the second chapter of my book *Storytelling in Yellowstone: Horse and Buggy Tour Guides* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007) and in “Native Americans, the Earliest Interpreters: What is Known About Their Legends and Stories of Yellowstone National Park and the Complexities of Interpreting Them,” *George Wright Forum* 19, no. 3 (2002): 40-51.

² Aubrey L. Haines, *Yellowstone National Park: Its Exploration and Establishment* (Washington: GPO, 1974), 54; Charles T. Whitmell, “The American Wonderland, the Yellowstone National Park,” *Report and Transactions of the Cardiff Naturalists Society* 17 (1885): 102.

³ *New York Times*, October 14, 1870.

⁴ *TriWeekly Statesman* (Boise, ID), June 6, 1871.

⁵ *Brooklyn (NY) Eagle*, August 14, 1883.

⁶ *New York Times*, March 12, 1873.

⁷ *Daily Gazette and Bulletin* (Williamsport, PA), September 29, 1884.

⁸ Rev. Wayland Hoyt, 1878, quoted in Whittlesey, *Storytelling in Yellowstone*, 191.

Many writers made much of their inability to do justice to Yellowstone's wonders in words. They stated that seeing the place was the only thing adequate for understanding:

The exuberance and...profligacy with which nature has dumped out into this National Park the grand, gorgeous, and awful creations of her infinite power fill the tourist with unspeakable awe and amazement, and furnish such illimitable material that the pen is puzzled both for a beginning point and a language to convey even a feeble description. The boldest and most successful effort of the ablest exaggeration would fall far short of the...realities that meet the eye at every step in this "goblin land."⁹

With so many glowing reports emanating from the press, it is not surprising that Yellowstone was already famous by the time its railroad arrived in 1883. The Northern Pacific Railroad (NPRR), extending its line across the Dakotas and Montana in what was effectively the nation's second transcontinental railroad, reached Livingston, Montana, in 1882. That was only about fifty miles north of Yellowstone Park, so the NPRR made immediate plans to build a branch line south. Working for eight months, the company laid the last iron on August 30 and ran its first regularly-scheduled train to Yellowstone on September 1, 1883. This marked the first time in American history that a railroad company built tracks specifically to a tourist destination. It was appropriate that the place so honored was the world's first national park. Eventually four other railroads would offer service to the park, but for eighteen years the NPRR was the only one. Nearly ninety thousand visitors rode its trains to the park in the first fourteen years, many of them wondering, as did 1907 visitor Elizabeth Rowell, "Would Yellowstone equal its reputation?" Her party soon

Old Faithful erupting, Yellowstone National Park. Photograph by Craig Mellish.



"no longer questioned" the park's "right to fame."¹⁰

By 1897, Yellowstone was a grand tourist success. It had six hotels and numerous smaller lodging facilities. It received 10,000 visitors per year who were transported around its 140-mile loop in four-horse stagecoaches. At least two dozen books had been published about it and the park's existence was taught in geography classes the world over. Geologists and other scientists came from around the globe to study it.

During the twentieth century, promotion of Yellowstone grew more intense and more sophisticated. The first motion picture of the park was filmed in 1897, but between the 1970s and the end of the twentieth century so many commercial films were produced about the park that they are difficult to count. A search of our online newspaper archive at Yellowstone shows that at least 125,917 newspaper articles about the park or mentioning it were published from 1884 to 2008. Beginning in the 1950s, television producers also promoted the park worldwide. I saw Yellowstone on television during my childhood in faraway Oklahoma, not knowing that my daughter – little Tess – would grow up there in the 1990s.

Various crises and controversies in the twentieth century kept the park in the news. After scientists proposed keeping Yellowstone natural in the Leopold report in 1963, their findings were widely debated in the press. In the mid-1960s, many Americans became angry over artificial reduction of Yellow-

stone's elk numbers through planned hunting by rangers; then a seeming lack of grizzly bears in the 1970s stimulated national discussion. The huge fires of 1988 provoked massive publicity and continuing media scrutiny. A proposed gold mine in the park in the 1990s made environmentalists so angry that President Clinton intervened and declared that "Yellowstone is more valuable than gold."

In 1995, the reintroduction of wolves and the revelation of hundreds of new waterfalls in 2000 garnered still more publicity for the park. The spectacular combination of grizzly bears, wolves, and other large mammals in the Yellowstone's Lamar Valley has caused that area to become known as the "American Serengeti." It attracts continuing attention from the national media and park visitors. Arguments about "harvesting" small amounts of bacteria from hot springs and about drilling outside the park for thermal energy continue to annoy park purists today. It is impossible to guess what aspect of Yellowstone will be next to claim our attention.

Those early Indians, explorers, newspaper editors, surveyors, railroad passengers, and stagecoach tourists would probably have been amazed to know the extent of their park's eventual fame and the numbers of people who would ultimately visit it. Today, as America and the world become more and more urbanized, Yellowstone National Park looms as something truly unusual and desirable for visitors seeking natural wonders, elusive wilderness, hoped-for inspiration, necessary solace, intellectual stimulation, and emotional rejuvenation. Although its railroads are long gone, it still witnesses three million visitors per year thronging its five entrances. Tourists from other countries routinely include it in their plans, and, as one 1885 visitor wrote, "every American must see it once before he dies."

The fact that Indians may have kept it a secret, that many nineteenth-century white men could not find it or penetrate it, and that numerous others did not believe in it at all were lucky breaks for Yellowstone during its journey to protection. Those breaks were also fortunate for the rest of us. May my daughter, your children, and all other children play in it, love it, and help us protect it "unimpaired for future generations." – Lee H. Whittlesey

⁹ "Acres Upon Acres of Hot Springs," *New York Times*, August 31, 1883.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Rowell, "Ten Days in the Yellowstone," *Alaska-Yukon Magazine* (August 1907): 475. The Northern Pacific Railroad's history for Yellowstone is in Lee H. Whittlesey, *A History of the Mammoth Village in Yellowstone National Park: Culture and Nature at Mammoth Hot Springs* (Yellowstone National Park, WY: National Park Service, forthcoming), 55.

Conundrums of Commemoration:

Blue Ridge Parkway's Seventy-fifth Anniversary

In 2010, the Blue Ridge Parkway will celebrate its seventy-fifth anniversary. As the author of *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History* (2006), I was invited to take part in the planning for this event, but mobilizing history for celebratory purposes, I have learned, can present unforeseen challenges. Anniversaries are purportedly about remembering and reflecting upon the past, but celebrations take place in the present, and are planned and shaped by contemporary issues and stakeholders. My role in this particular event is especially delicate because powerful interests similar to those that influenced the parkway's founding and development still threaten its future.

A product of the Great Depression and New Deal, the Blue Ridge Parkway connects Shenandoah National Park with Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Carved from national forest and private lands, with 469 miles of glorious mountain views, campgrounds, and hiking trails, the parkway has been the most visited site in the national park system since just after World War II. This triumph of automobile-related engineering and landscape design was part of a coordinated system of southern Appalachian parks that brought the national park idea traditionally associated with the western public domain to the more heavily populated eastern United States. To protect views from the parkway, the National Park Service stringently limited access to it; the road's completion also required liberal use of state powers of eminent domain, which sparked numerous conflicts with local political and business interests in the southern Appalachians. At the same time, the parkway represented the success of some of those same interests in securing federal funding for the development of a key travel attraction.

More than a year ago, Blue Ridge Parkway partner organizations formed a new nonprofit – Blue Ridge Parkway 75, Inc. – to coordinate plans to celebrate the parkway's seventy-fifth anniversary. Blue Ridge Parkway 75 includes representatives from the National Park Service, the states of Virginia and North Carolina, several private nonprofit parkway volunteer and fundraising organizations, and several land trusts and conservation groups. Also represented are universities, communities, and especially the travel and business sector in the mountains: Biltmore Estate, Luray Caverns, Grandfather Mountain, the Blue Ridge Parkway Association, Blue Ridge Host, Roanoke Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Asheville Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Everyone involved shares the goal of protecting and preserving the parkway for the next seventy-five years and beyond. But hidden within that broadly shared outlook are divergent

perspectives. In particular, there is an unacknowledged divide between those whose focus is scenery and conservation and those whose interest lies in promoting regional tourism. These divergent agendas have coexisted uneasily throughout the parkway's history, and were a major focus of my book. But I didn't fully appreciate that the board would so accurately reflect the power relations among the park's original stakeholders. How does a historian who is aware of how these agendas have shaped the parkway in the past negotiate them in the present?

The tensions inherent in the parkway first emerged in 1933, when boosters from three states gathered in Virginia senator Harry F. Byrd's Washington office

to hammer out their vision for a federally funded scenic "park-to-park highway" to link Shenandoah and the Great Smokies. While Virginia's Skyline Drive, being built in Shenandoah, provided a model of a stunning ridgetop road, it became clear early on that business interests would also drive the parkway's development. "The greatest industry in the world," North Carolina senator Robert Reynolds told those convened, "is not the building of automobiles, the steel, the mill or the tobacco industry, but . . . the tourist industry."

By 1934, however, that great southern Appalachian tourist industry was spiraling down fast. Asheville, North Carolina, known since the late-nineteenth century as the "Land of the Sky," had recently invested lavishly in city infrastructure to welcome tourists to grand new hotels. When the regional real-estate market collapsed, western North Carolina's largest bank failed, taking millions of dollars in city funds down with it. Asheville's resulting crisis lingered for decades.

In this context, the parkway's most fervent supporters in 1934 were not conservationists but persons associated with Asheville's media, hotel, and business community, who were banking on the fact that a new parkway would drive streams of tourists through Asheville on their way to the Smokies. Not long after the parkway was approved for federal funding in late 1933, however, North Carolina and Tennessee plunged into a yearlong conflict over its route. North Carolina's preferred

route looped south around Asheville while Tennessee's turned northwest at Linville and hugged the state line on the Tennessee side, heading towards the Smokies at Gatlinburg.

The Tennessee route completely bypassed Asheville and the city's boosters were determined to avoid such an outcome. Fortunately for them, scenery was on their side. The North Carolina route, laid out by the state's skilled highway locating engineer R. Getty Browning, clung near the ridgetops and soared above 5000 feet. The Tennessee route, on the other hand, lurched up and down the mountains and crossed several streams. In the face of an early decision by

a federal committee in favor of the Tennessee route, North Carolina's boosters pressed interior secretary Harold Ickes and President Franklin Roosevelt to adopt their mapping instead. When the dust settled, Roosevelt and Ickes agreed.

For a time tourism and scenery coexisted peacefully. But even in the 1930s some voices cautioned that their interests were intrinsically opposed. Writing to Ickes in 1933, Knoxville conservationist Harvey Broome (two years later a founder of the Wilderness Society) warned that "a skyline link would split the whole mountain region wide open, and with the cleavage would vanish much of the spell of the primeval." Businesses, he argued, would soon follow as "service stations of all kinds would necessarily have to be dragged up from the valleys to meet the needs of the motorists." The combination of the road, cars, and service stations, "all extraneous to the wilder-



Traffic jam at Mabry Mill, Blue Ridge Parkway, 1963. Courtesy Blue Ridge Parkway.

ness,” would turn the road’s surroundings into “but a mockery of the fresh, green, inviolate nature such a road is supposed to reveal.”

Broome rightly foresaw how hard it would be to promote business development while also preserving natural scenery. In the late 1930s Little Switzerland resort developer and state supreme court justice Heriot Clarkson lobbied North Carolina highway officials, launched a public relations campaign, and ultimately filed a lawsuit to force changes in the parkway’s protective 800- to 1,000-foot right-of-way through his property. Well-connected throughout North Carolina political circles and originally a parkway supporter, Clarkson commanded a level of attention from the highway commission that many other landowners could not attract; commission officials made several concessions to reduce the damage the parkway would inflict on his development.

Eventually, the case wound its way through the court system, right up to the North Carolina Supreme Court, and Clarkson recused himself. Upholding a county superior court decision, the supreme court in 1939 agreed to a settlement that reduced the right-of way through Little Switzerland to 200 feet (the narrowest in North Carolina), opened an unprecedented four access points from the resort to the road, and awarded Clarkson \$25,000 for eighty-eight acres of land. At about \$281 per acre, this payment far exceeded the average of \$37 per acre that North Carolina had paid for all parkway lands it had purchased up to that time. The narrow right-of-way also had an additional benefit for Clarkson. With a parkway entrance fronting on his Switzerland Inn, he could advertise Little Switzerland as the “Only Resort Directly on the Blue Ridge Parkway.” The traveling public’s experience suffered, as numerous buildings associated with the resort crowded the parkway view.

The fragile early alliance between parkway planners and regional tourism interests further deteriorated in the late 1940s when Grandfather Mountain owner Hugh Morton accused the park service of failing to build up the regional tourism industry that had, as he correctly noted, been central to the parkway’s founding. This form of boosterism, although a force behind the parkway and many national parks, was not written into the park service’s mission in 1916. But Morton, who had recently opened his own nearby travel attraction – the Mile-High Swinging Bridge – resented policies prohibiting commercial signage along the parkway that would direct visitors there.



Pastoral scene in Doughton Park, Blue Ridge Parkway, 2008. Photograph by David E. Whisnant.

66-era plans to build what he called “socialized” lodging and food-service facilities on the parkway. Enraged, he and his fellow mountain-tourism boosters in the Blowing Rock and Boone area proclaimed in a flyer, “We are Not Going to Sit Still while the Tourist Business Is Sold Down the River.” In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the parkway superintendent tried to devise ways to inform travelers about nearby accommodations, but he nevertheless remained wary of making the parkway “a publicity agent for private interests.”

In the mid-1950s, with the route of the parkway complete except for the “missing link” on Grandfather Mountain, Morton lambasted park service plans for building the parkway high along Grandfather’s slopes. Launching a statewide media blitz and mobilizing his connections with several governors and other top state officials, Morton by 1968 had shoved the parkway down the mountain to a location less likely to interfere with his travel attraction. Although the final route, which was completed in 1987, included the stunning Linn Cove

Morton also chafed at park service attempts to impose fees on the scenic road, as well as its Mission

throughout the region such as Grandfather Mountain, the Biltmore Estate, and the casino at Cherokee. More recently, a Florida-based private developer has acquired a lease on lands just off the parkway near Roanoke, where there had formerly been a “living history” park. Because the park’s historic aims had been seen as consonant with the spirit of the parkway, a connector road had been built in cooperation with the National Park Service in the 1980s. But the Florida developer has recently debuted plans for building a fantastical commercial resort named “Blue Ridge America” on the site. Complete with luxury spa, sprawling village complex, cable car, swanky hotel, riverside light-show pageant, super-big zip line, and golf course, Blue Ridge America – unlike other local accommodations – would be easily accessible from the parkway. The developer has predicted that the proposed resort, which is obviously very much out of character with the rest of the parkway, would be “like a national park on steroids.” Unfortunately, as it is controlled by an array of public entities, both state and local, the park service has only modest influence over deci-

Viaduct that carried the parkway around Grandfather’s rocky shoulders, the cost was high: a parkway conceived in the public interest and paid for with public funds was reshaped according to the demands of a single well-connected private developer.

The episode raised the disturbing prospect that the public interest may not prevail over the private and commercial goals of those who own land near the parkway or have political power over it. Just a few years ago, Republican congressman Charles Taylor sponsored the parkway’s new Asheville visitor center. Although the building is now run by the National Park Service, much of it is clearly designed to induce parkway travelers to visit commercial attractions

sions about the site. Even if the developer's plans fail to materialize, the park's future remains uncertain.

But in commemorative moments we tend to elide both historical conflicts and persistent differences, instead emphasizing harmony, shared goals, and a sense of forward progress. How can the historian meaningfully participate in this process? Reminding everyone of past disagreements among constituencies now working together and of complicated power relationships that persist in the present raises one's risk of being seen as a spoiler or, worse, being marginalized to the point of having no effect on the celebratory programs, events, or projects relating to the upcoming anniversary. But by playing along, I fear I may unwittingly reinforce an essentially commercial vision for the parkway's existence. I see no reason for participating in the creation of bland and uncritical rhetoric, consensus history, and system-serving processes that fail to address the serious problems of encroaching development and the ongoing fights for access and commercial benefit. Thus, I am forced to ask myself how can I retain my integrity as a scholar while being a good team player?

As a first step towards resolving this dilemma, I have had to accept that, rather than engaging in paradigm-shifting analysis, I often need to function simply as a compendium of parkway facts – facts that are used in developing lists of potential sponsors, guests, or honorees, writing commemorative legislation, creating a timeline of key dates for the Web site, or devising a reenactment of a key event. But even that has proved complicated.

From the commemorative standpoint, the most important issue has been: "When did the parkway begin?" "Begin" in this case has many possible meanings: November 16, 1933, when federal funding was approved, September 11, 1935, when the first contract was let, September 19, 1935, when the first shovelful of dirt was turned, or June 30, 1936, when the project was approved by Congress and named Blue Ridge Parkway. It seemed that the group wanted the "first shovelful" date, which a contemporaneous letter that I uncovered unambiguously places on September 19. Unfortunately, my answer differs from what is emblazoned on at least two metal plaques installed along the parkway, as well as from the widely publicized date used for the fiftieth anniversary celebration: September 11, 1935. And so conventional wisdom and inground historical markers carried the day, and the new Blue Ridge Parkway 75 website asserts that "on September 11, 1935, construction of the first 12.5-mile section began near Cumberland Knob in North Carolina."

More significant and distressing have been the ongoing interactions with tourism industry representatives, who make up a large percentage of board members. My book criticizes

how powerful tourist interests – most prominently Grandfather Mountain's Morton – manipulated the parkway for their own benefit. Morton died in 2006, but well-placed friends of his throughout North Carolina have tried to influence the discourse and tone of the parkway commemoration.

In the fall of 2008, at my suggestion, Blue Ridge Parkway 75 organized a public discussion of the parkway's past and future; it was held in Roanoke, Virginia, where the threat of encroachment on the parkway is particularly severe. I presented the political and social history of the road, University of Georgia landscape architect Ian Firth explained the evolution of parkway design, and parkway planner Gary Johnson talked about current management issues. We have emphasized that many parkway challenges have roots in parkway history and that being fully aware of history provides us with valuable tools in the present. I highlighted the ongoing risk of commercialization by noting that Hugh Morton had exercised disproportionate power over parkway development in the 1950s and 1960s. What I didn't say was that, with two representatives on the Blue Ridge Parkway 75 board, Grandfather Mountain continues to have disproportionate influence on our discussion of the parkway.

During the question period, one of the board members from Grandfather accused me of unfairly maligning Morton, with whom he had worked since the early 1970s. My analysis, I responded, accurately represented the historical record, and did not purport to address his later experiences. The moment passed, but the edge of conflict apparently made some in the audience uncomfortable.

Shortly afterwards, someone else involved with planning the celebration told me that in a time of budget woes, a critical staffing shortage, and development pressure, my talks on parkway history should seek to inspire stewardship by instilling a message of "hope and joy." But history, as we know, is not full of hope and joy, and the history of the parkway is still being written: policies implemented now will shape our experience in the park for the next seventy-five years. A message of blind optimism would leave those who love the parkway ill-equipped to make the difficult decisions necessary to protect it from those who would elevate private interests over the public good. A key task for those who participate in the commemoration is to face the parkway's future prospects honestly. To meet that challenge, forthright work by historians is essential.

– Anne Mitchell Whisnant

Diary for a Second Century: A Journey across Our National Park System in Search of Its Future

Solstice Canyon

It is late August 2008 in Solstice Canyon in Santa Monica Mountain National Recreation Area in southern California, and the streamside oaks provide some welcome shade. This is the first meeting of the National Parks Second Century Commission, and the commissioners are spending this warm afternoon in the field seeing things they never expected to encounter in a national park. Following a brief amphitheater orientation by Henry Ortiz, who is the Science Coordinator for the Los Angeles Unified School District, we make our way to the water's edge where three dozen or so young "EcoHelpers," recruited from inner-city East Los Angeles, are carefully planting trees and shrubs. Most of these kids are from single-parent homes, and today is family day for the EcoHelpers. Alongside their parent and a sibling or two, shovels in hand, they are hard at work. National Park Service (NPS) biologists share encouragement, advice, and a strong arm when needed. This is clearly not the stereotypical family visit to a national park. The pride and stewardship associated with this program suggest not only positive outcomes for participants but also a deeper level of public engagement in the park itself.

The National Parks Second Century Commission, funded through a grant to the National Parks Conservation Association, has two main responsibilities: producing a report outlining a vision for the NPS and national park system, and shaping an action agenda for the administration and Congress. There are five commission meetings scheduled – in Santa Monica, Lowell, Yellowstone, Gettysburg, and Great Smoky Mountains – and each will highlight challenges and opportunities specific to these parks and common to parks across the system. The report is expected to be completed by fall of 2009, coinciding with the broadcast of the Ken Burns documentary *The National Parks, America's Best Idea*.

The Commission is co-chaired by former US senators Bennett Johnston and Howard Baker and staffed by retired NPS chief of policy Loran Fraser. Jon Jarvis, Pacific West regional director, is the NPS point of contact. I've been asked to work with Jon to capture lessons learned from the commission's national park visits and conversations with park and program staff, subject-area experts, and park constituencies. Somewhere along our route through Santa Monica we stop on a ridgetop, part of a slender corridor of open land recently

traversed by a radio-collared cougar. The cougar has threaded its way past some nearby subdivisions to reach another of the rugged ridges that envelop this vast landscape. Denny Galvin, a commissioner and former NPS deputy director, reminds me that it was in 1979 that he and I drove these mountain roads together when, as a very young landscape architect, I was assigned to organize a planning team for Santa Monica. The ink on the enabling legislation was barely dry, and it took an entire day's drive for us to traverse this archipelago of future parkland, all the while thinking that Santa Monica was going to present the NPS with one of its most complex and difficult challenges to date.

But now it is thirty years later, and Denny and I are listening to Superintendent Woody Smeck explain how one of the most densely populated places in the United States can support a viable population of mountain lions. He also describes the critical role played by his partnerships – a seamless network of private, local, state, and national parks programmatically and physically linked to communities throughout metropolitan Los Angeles. Many members of these communities, particularly those who have been traditionally underserved by park agencies, are not only using these parks but gradually becoming their most committed stewards and advocates.

When people ask why the Second Century Commission chose Santa Monica as the venue for its first meeting, the answer now seems obvious. If a national park can be so transformative and meaningful in this environment, with its complex mosaic of land uses and agency jurisdictions, intense urban and suburban pressures, and so many diverse communities, perhaps there is reason to believe that all national parks can make similar positive contributions no matter what their setting, how they are constituted, or what communities they serve.

Wannalancit Mill

A brisk October breeze blows through the open sides of the trolley as we complete our urban journey across the city of Lowell to the oversized wooden doors of Wannalancit Mill. The red brick mill – now partly University of Massachusetts conference center, partly NPS museum – functions like much of Lowell National Historical Park, as a great civic collaboration. For its second meeting, the Second Century Commission has come to the historical park and nearby Essex National Heritage Area to look more closely at the broad universe of

partnerships. We gather in the Wannalancit Mill to hear Lowell superintendent Michael Creasey and partners from University of Massachusetts Lowell and Middlesex Community College discuss their deep long-term relationship, a relationship that is not only changing Lowell but also changing the way national parks are perceived. The establishment of the park in the 1970s, they explain, was a crucial step not only in the environmental, social, and economic renaissance of Lowell but also in the transformation of the municipality into what they call an “educative city,” built on an ambitious program of park/college civic learning and community service projects.

Each partner in the collaboration brings something different to the table, and these relationships are often based on years of mutual effort and personal trust. Creasey describes the park as the hub of a much larger network of community and regional partners. He defines his success by how effective the NPS is in enabling the success of key partners. But we were also reminded that afternoon in the Wannalancit Mill that partnerships, even those that appear most successful, only remain strong and durable if the partners can work through the inevitable leadership and organizational transitions that occur. This is not easy, particularly for the government partner.

Back in the early 1990s, I spent a year at Lowell National Historical Park as acting superintendent, and I still have friends among the staff there. But I quickly sense that the park is in some way fundamentally different, and the shift becomes a little clearer that evening after dinner when the commission is entertained by the Angkor Dance Troupe. Lowell has the second largest Southeast Asian population in America, and the Angkor Dance Troupe, an intergenerational organization based at the park's Patrick Mogan Cultural Center, is performing in traditional Cambodian dress. The troupe's director is Duey Kol, a capable and effervescent young Cambodian-American woman who also happens to be, in her day job, a national park ranger. The NPS in Lowell has taken its relationship with the Cambodian community and

other underserved populations to a deeper level. The national park is accomplishing this by engaging young people, first with programs and then with jobs. Former NPS director Roger Kennedy once said, “Resource protection has to walk out of the park in the heart of the visitor.” The values of the park are enhanced when they are also perceived as being part of a larger set of cultural and community values. Park constituencies are created and strengthened not only from visits and recreational experiences but also through community cooperation, service, and reciprocity.

Mammoth Hot Springs

It is January and deep winter in Yellowstone National Park. The function room in the Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel is packed for the third meeting of the Second Century Commission. It is warm inside, but outside the temperature is ten below and it is snowing. For those of us who work in smaller national parks, Yellowstone seems like a country unto itself. Stealing a glance out the historic hotel's windows is a quick reminder of the scale of this landscape.

Our venue is particularly fitting, because this commission meeting will be largely focused on landscape-scale conservation. The relative isolation of national parks in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a characteristic of their original rural settings, is over. An invited panel of scientists, academics, and resource managers reminds the commission that even large national parks such as Yellowstone cannot adequately protect and manage wildlife that crosses boundaries with regularity. National parks, small and large, are only a part of much larger ecosystems.

The panel members describe how landscape fragmentation and habitat encroachment are accelerating throughout the

American West. In the greater Yellowstone ecosystem, the statistics are particularly alarming. From 1990 to 2007, there was a 62% population increase and a corresponding 350% increase in developed land. Many large tracts of private open land, farmed and ranched for generations, are being broken up into rural subdivisions and “ranchettes.” The impact of these trends on biodiversity is all too clear.



Minerva terrace and springs, Mammoth Hot Springs. Photograph courtesy of the National Park Service.

In recent years, parks have lost up to 40% of their wildlife.

While consensus is relatively easy to reach on defining the challenges, agreeing on the right approach to landscape-scale conservation is more elusive. The panelists stress the importance of using sound science and research in planning and policy development. Several urge the commission to recommend stronger federal interagency coordination and more consistency – particularly in a region like the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem where the national park is part of a mosaic of federal lands. Others make the case that, given the vastness of these larger landscapes surrounding parks and preserves, conservation has to become a shared objective for stakeholders throughout the region. They encourage the commission to strengthen the capacity of the NPS and partners to work cooperatively with land trusts, private landowners, and local governments. Stephanie Meeks, a former executive of The Nature Conservancy, summed it up this way: “We have learned that we cannot do conservation around these communities or for them; conservation will be successful only when considered and undertaken with them.”

We have a guided field trip out to Norris Geyser Basin and the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone in a couple of snow coaches that the park owns and operates. When we enter the Norris overlook, one of our coaches throws a track. We file out of our disabled vehicle, trying to ignore the freezing temperatures, and a park interpreter gamely tries to redirect our attention to the magnificent geyser field before us. It’s a long way back to Mammoth, and we keep glancing over our shoulders at our NPS drivers, who are examining the damage. As it turns out, our drivers not only operate these complex machines but also know how to repair them, even in the field. So with some ingenuity, they do just that – while we are treated to an extended talk on Yellowstone geology. As we gratefully climb back on board the repaired coach, I am reminded how much we depend on experienced, professional NPS staff who know a lot – about a lot of things. On the return trip, I sit next to our driver and learn that he is not only a snow coach driver and mechanic but also a plow and a backhoe operator, backcountry carpenter, and forest firefighter. Not a job I would outsource.

Little Round Top

The fourth meeting of the Second Century Commission takes us to the rolling Pennsylvania countryside of Gettysburg National Military Park. We follow commissioner James

McPherson, Princeton professor and preeminent Civil War scholar, to the summit of Little Round Top. On this early spring day in March, we look over hallowed ground as far as the eye can see. Jim has given this tour countless times, but his great passion for this place and its many stories has each one of us transfixed.

The day before, the commissioners reflected on their experiences with the national parks. Like McPherson on Little Round Top, each had an emotional connection to the national parks they knew. One commissioner said that the national park system represents “an uncommon commitment to a greater public good,” and the “immersion in something fundamentally important to being a human being.” They all seemed to agree that as the nation’s portfolio of parks has expanded in size, diversity, and complexity, the imprint of parks on the public life of the nation has been expanded as well. The national park system has become a much larger civic endeavor, assuming a higher public purpose than envisioned by its founders in 1916.

This change is evident in the new visitor center, a partnership project of the national park and the private Gettysburg Foundation. For the first time, the stories of postwar reconciliation and battlefield reunions are told in the larger context of reconstruction, segregation, and African-American disenfranchisement. The visitor center exhibits, together with NPS educational programming, represent a seismic shift in the way the NPS interprets the Civil War. What we see at Gettysburg is the culmination of a concerted system-wide initiative begun in 1997, when superintendents of Civil War sites decided to embrace the very best current scholarship and introduce the causes and consequences of the war into their interpretative programs. In a larger sense, what we are seeing at work at Gettysburg is the national park system’s potential in its next century to help people find broader context and meaning in the world around them.

From my vantage point on Little Round Top I have started to reflect on a few of the lessons I have gleaned so far in my National Parks journey from California to Pennsylvania:

- National parks serve all Americans. We have seen in parks, such as Santa Monica and Lowell, a vigorous commitment to broadening engagement with diverse communities and demographic groups who have not been traditional park users. Ultimately these efforts can make our parks increasingly accessible, welcoming, and relevant. In this regard, I remember filmmaker Ken Burns describing the national parks to the commissioners as a “regenerative force” in the twenty-first century. In a similar vein, the author Barry Lopez has written

of national parks in the context of helping people live “decent and dignified lives.”

- People’s connections with their national parks are changing in fundamental ways. Traditional patterns of use, from episodic school field trips to annual family vacations, are being augmented by a higher level of sustained engagement. There are more youth service learning programs, like Santa Monica’s EcoHelpers initiative; more park and school collaborations, such as the All-Taxa Biodiversity Inventories at Great Smoky Mountains and the Civic Collaborative at Lowell; more public-private alliances, like the Greater Yellowstone Coalition; more friends groups serving individual parks; and a growing universe of community and philanthropic partnerships – the Gettysburg Foundation, for example.
- This journey has reinvigorated my appreciation for being part of a system. People suggest that the NPS often behaves like a loose confederation. We have seen, however, what can be achieved when the NPS and its partners act cohesively. The coordinated efforts of Civil War park superintendents is a notable example. There is great power in sharing ideas, innovations, and experiences. There is a particularly urgent need to reinvigorate international park exchange programs at a time of great global environmental stress on protected areas.
- Horace Albright, the legendary NPS director, when he was nearing retirement, cautioned his staff: “Do not let the Service become just another government bureau.” Today, the effects of growing centralized control, standardization, and privatization are threatening to bring about precisely what Albright warned against. It would be ironic if, in the name of efficiency, competition, and risk avoidance, we undermine the very relationships with long-term private-sector partners so vital to the success of each park the commission visited.

As the National Parks Second Century Commission heads into its final meeting at Great Smokey Mountains National Park and prepares its recommendations to the American people, the “national-park idea” is once again being reinterpreted and reinvigorated for the times we live in, as it should be. Commissioner Milton Chen, early in this journey, made the observation that “national parks build human capital.” My own hope is that national parks will continue to appeal to our best instincts: love for the American landscape; respect for nature and the lessons of history; and the possibility that, through acts of intentional conservation and stewardship, we might raise the bar on our responsibilities to each other and the world around us. – Rolf Diamant

Acadia National Park

Like the vast deserts of the West, the mountainous coast of Maine was viewed in the nineteenth century as an untouched wilderness, even though it had been well trodden and physically altered by native Indian populations. Scattered travelers and government expeditions were overwhelmed by the ruggedness and austerity of the landscape, and their appreciation for what we might call the American Picturesque ultimately led to the creation of the national parks. Artists found these coastal views particularly uplifting when they were enhanced by the dramatic rhythms of rough surf and spectacular sunsets.

Landscapes painted by pioneer artists visiting Maine's Mount Desert Island as early as the 1830s attracted urban dwellers to these regions. The summer colonies grew to such proportions later in the century that they threatened idyllic views, and wealthy, established summer residents took measures to preserve the landscape. The eventual result, the 35,000-acre Acadia National Park, incorporates most of the landmark mountains that sweep down to the sea (the "sleeping giants" recorded by artists), as well as the tip of Schoodic Peninsula across Frenchman Bay and some offshore islands, including Isle au Haut, in the Atlantic Ocean.

The park's name also recalls the earlier French claim on this region as a colony extending from Maine into the coastal regions of Eastern Canada – the "Acadian land" with the "forest primeval" made famous by Longfellow's poem "Evangeline." The Portuguese explorer Esteban Gomez was the earliest European to enter Mount Desert's Somes Sound, sailing from Spain in 1525 in search of the Northwest Passage to the Pacific. But in 1604 the French navigator Samuel de Champlain became the first to chart the island, acting on behalf of Pierre du Gua, Sieur de Monts, who had a royal land grant from Henry IV for "La Cadie," the Indian name meaning "The Place." Champlain named the island l'Isle des Monts Desert, the island of barren mountains. Their silhouettes form an undulating landmark when seen from the sea.

A decade ago, Pamela J. Belanger, Curator of Nineteenth-Century American Art at the Farnsworth Art Museum in Rockland, Maine, mounted an engaging exhibition entitled "Inventing Acadia: Artists and Tourists at Mount Desert." In the catalogue, Belanger and other essayists documented the migration of the Hudson River school painters to coastal Maine and placed their work in the social, cultural, and aesthetic context that explained the popularity of their exhibitions in cities, where they were viewed as vicarious voyages into seemingly uncharted territories.

Artists often manipulated scenes by adding symbolic traces of human settlement – deserted houses or abandoned boats – that further enticed viewers by placing them psychologically within the frame. On the whole, though, the painters accurately portrayed the lone lighthouses, scattered islands, and rocky headlands under violet-streaked skies. Then, as now, a patient gaze was required to capture the subtle and transitory atmospheric changes that altered one's perception of the Maine landscape.

Thomas Cole and his student Frederic E. Church were prominent among the artists who made expeditions to the island. The two often painted the same scenes – images that have since become iconic views of Acadia. Both Cole's *Sandy Beach, Mount Desert Island, Me.* of 1844 and Church's *Coast at Mount Desert Island (Sand Beach)* of about 1850 capture the contrast between jutting boulders of pink granite and the only smooth sand on the island. Cole's 1845 scenes of waves crashing against rocks in Frenchman Bay and Church's sunset paintings of the 1950s are testaments to the extraordinary artistic response inspired by Mount Desert Island.

Cadillac Mountain, the highest on the island, figured frequently among the painters' subjects, and Sanford Robinson Gifford even places an artist sketching on a rocky perch at its summit, looking out toward the horizon. In 1896, Childe Hassam portrayed the mountain in an Impressionistic haze from the vantage of Frenchman Bay.

While most artists worked on land, Fitz Hugh Lane painted and sketched on ship deck, capturing statuesque masts and sails and luminous effects on water. His 1852 *Entrance of Somes Sound from Southwest Harbor* depicts the deep channel of water formed during the ice age there, the only fjord on the East Coast and the location in the 1770s of the first permanent colonial settlement on the island. Very little had changed when Richard Estes painted "A View of Somes Sound" in 1995, more than one hundred and forty years later, and that was the principal point of the show – the scenic experience of Maine has been preserved.

Once a wilderness area is engaged by man, it ceases to be in a natural state. Its future hangs between those who fight to protect it for its beauty and the encroachments of civilization. By 1900, fearing the consequences of the latter, Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard University and a summer resident of Northeast Harbor, took his case for conservation to local village improvement societies. These societies, which still exist today, were already establishing and protecting Maine's wood-

land and mountain trails. Realizing that his mission required an entity with funds to purchase land, he followed the advice of his landscape architect son, Charles Eliot Jr. and in 1901 formed the Hancock County Trustees of Public Reservations (HCTPR) with himself as president and his Boston friend George D. Dorr as director. Dorr was a fortunate selection; until his death in 1944, he devoted his entire life and financial resources to establishing and maintaining the park.

When the Maine legislature withdrew the charter of the HCTPR in 1913, Dorr, with undimmed determination, sought government protection in Washington. Although he made his approach at a difficult stage of World War I, on July 8, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed a proclamation establishing the Sieur de Monts National Monument. Only weeks later, on August 25, the National Park Service was founded, and Dorr grasped the opportunity to designate Mount Desert's conservation areas a national park. With political savvy, he supported the name Lafayette National Park for a country currently defending France, and the park was established by an act of Congress on February 26, 1919. The name was changed to Acadia National Park in 1929.

This story is well told by Ann Rockefeller Roberts in her book *Mr. Rockefeller's Roads: The Untold Story of Acadia's Carriage Roads & Their Creator*. In 1908 her grandfather John D. Rockefeller Jr., then in his twenties, first came to Mount Desert with his young family. Eventually he would donate 11,000 acres to the park, almost one-third of its territory. "Between 1913 and 1940, a period of twenty-seven years," Roberts writes, "my grandfather designed and constructed fifty-seven miles of carriage roads on Mount Desert Island, Maine, as part of his effort to offer the public a way to experience nature." He was undoubtedly inspired by his father, who had built carriage roads on his New York and Ohio properties.

A major feat of landscape architecture, engineering, and construction, the carriage roads also opened possibilities for architecture that complemented the natural settings. In the rustic stone bridges – no two alike – that pass over vehicular roads and span streams and deep ravines, Roberts sees a connection to a European countryside of the past. Even the gatehouses at the carriage road entrances were designed to resemble French hunting lodges by the New York architect Grosvenor Atterbury, who had already built a barn complex on Rockefeller's estate in Tarrytown, New York, in the style of eighteenth-century French nobility.

For advice on landscaping the carriage roads, Rockefeller turned to landscape gardener Beatrix Farrand, who lived at Reef Point in Bar Harbor and was also designing "The Eyrie," the Rockefeller's garden at their home in Seal Harbor. In the late 1920s Rockefeller and Farrand would drive through the

park in a four-wheeled buckboard carriage to inspect the plantings. Farrand responded to these outings with closely typed “Road Notes,” offering advice in her usual direct language and listing her suggestions for appropriate trees and plants – sweet fern, wild roses, sumac, goldenrod, and bush blueberry – along with directions for how and where to plant them. In a note of November 4, 1930, she wrote:

On the south and west sides of the road opposite the view young spruce should be used, and later on, as pitch pine is available. The north slope of the hill could be gradually planted with these giving a splendid Chinese effect to this superb northern prospect. These pitch pine will never intrude on the view any more than they do on the Shore Drive where they add a great picturesqueness to the position.

Throughout these notes, she urged Rockefeller “to vary the road planting in height and quality and type of material, as these varieties are usually shown in natural growth.” When her directions were not followed, she expressed displeasure, particularly when trees were planted in straight lines. Such moments, however, were infrequent. She wrote to Rockefeller in 1933, “Again I want to thank you for the way in which you are so consistently upholding my judgments and helping with the ease of carrying on the work to which I look forward as one of the great pleasures of the Island days.” Certainly he took pleasure in the results: “For the first time [I] could understand why you are so partial to wild cherries and pear trees. The blossoms certainly are lovely.”

Every six months, Mrs. Farrand forwarded a detailed accounting of the number of drives, days in the field, office consultations, and stenography hours. With a few exceptions, the amount owed was always the same: “No charge.” Rockefeller, of course, was deeply appreciative and enjoyed their teamwork “in the public interest”

for the “beautification of Acadia National Park.” “I do not know when I have spent an entire half day in so carefree and enjoyable a manner as last Sunday afternoon,” he wrote in May 1929, early on in their long road correspondence. “To feel that I could talk as frankly as I did about park matters, with the perfect assurance that nothing that was said would go further, added much to my satisfaction and sense of freedom in the talk.”

The collaboration was a close and dedicated one. In 1941, at the season’s end, the two tried unsuccessfully to make a rendezvous for a final carriage ride up Day Mountain. Rockefeller responded with the courtly congeniality that characterized their rapport. “Whatever happens to the world,” he wrote, “Day Mountain will be standing next summer and I much hope we can drive up it then.” Throughout their long association, however, neither abandoned a formality and reserve instinctive to them both. One August, Mrs. Farrand wrote: “It was only with what I thought great self-control that I passed you the other day on your way homeward from an evidently brisk walk. I wanted to stop and say how do you do to you and to tell you what a pleasure it has been to work over the lodges and their surroundings.” Horticulturists on the Island have observed what may still be traces of her handiwork in such selections as the American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) around the bridges that serve as overpasses for the carriage roads.



Otter Cliff, Acadia National Park.
Photograph courtesy of the
National Park Service Digital Image
Archives.

Today, no sooner does a visitor drive over the causeway connecting the mainland to the twelve- by fourteen-mile island than cedar signs appear with directions for entering park roads. During my summers in Maine, I always begin with the sweep of the Ocean Drive, a segment of the circular park road that begins just outside the town of Bar Harbor and offers immediate access to the landscapes made famous by nineteenth-century artists.

The sand beach of Cole and Church may be densely populated with bathers on a good day, but one can still appreciate its curved outcropping of granite and the nearby rock chasms that invite the crashing waves. The road passes by Otter Creek, where Church painted a lone figure on a rocky beach, and proceeds along coves and inlets, the view opening out to the glittering sea with bobbing lobster buoys before coming under cover of woodland. In one of Beatrix Farrand’s letters to John D. Rockefeller Jr. she wrote, “May I add that the Ocean Drive seems to me to be a real masterpiece.” (The best view of Frenchman Bay and the Porcupine Islands is, in fact, from Shore Path, the public walkway along the coast just behind Farrand’s Reef Point property back in Bar Harbor.)

At the heart of the park, the Abbe Museum, filled with local Indian artifacts, maintains its original Spanish Colonial Revival building, now complemented by larger premises in Bar Harbor. The Sieur de Monts Spring covered with a Florentine-style canopy near the museum in the park was dedicated by Dorr to the man who established “New France” in North America. Further on, the Wild Gardens of Acadia bring an assortment of native plants to the public eye in a very straightforward arrangement.

Driving across the island, one observes clusters of cars parked here and there; their owners have taken to the trails throughout the park. These paths are beautifully maintained and clearly marked, making it difficult to lose one’s way. All of the park roads lead to Mount Cadillac. From its heights, one can see expansive views of the sea, the distant hills, and the island’s unusual rock formations, which derive from its complex geological origins.

There is nothing more suggestive of future possibilities than a Maine sunrise seen from the peak of Mount Cadillac, when the first gleam of light pours over a watery horizon and turns the world into a blush of pink. In that quiet moment under a streaked sky, time appears to expand into timelessness. It was moments like this that inspired a generation of painters to make palpable the wonders of the Maine landscape and benefactors to preserve the experience for future generations. – Paula Deitz

Parts of this essay are based on earlier ones by the author that have appeared elsewhere.

Place Maker

Henriette Granville Suhr, Garden Creator

It is the last day of April, and my friend Marge Sullivan and I are trying to keep up with Henriette Granville Suhr, the energetic proprietor of Rocky Hills, who has offered to give us a personal tour of the thirteen-acre garden she and her late husband created on the steep declivities of their property in Westchester County. As she describes the brambly overgrowth that covered the site when they bought it in the 1960s, she points with her walking cane to first one area and then another. Carpeting the ground is a pale blue wash of forget-me-nots (*Myosotis sylvaticus*). “They spread everywhere, and we like that, so we don’t try to contain them in one spot,” Suhr explains. Their unchecked abundance puts me in mind of what another gardening friend of mine, Lynden Miller, calls such happy horticultural riotousness: “careless rapture.”

Our progress through the garden is punctuated by several pauses. Each one is followed by a comment: that group of tulips did well last year but doesn’t look quite right this time around; the ferns declined here after a particular tree fell down and had to be replaced by a more sun-loving species; over there are some new irises but she is still trying to decide what to plant next year just beyond them. My eye travels up the sharply rising slopes to the edges of the garden. There are great embankments of huge old rhododendrons and numerous kinds of azaleas. Above are some very tall conifers that loosely enclose the property while screening the road and neighboring houses.

Within the garden are several botanical rarities, gifts to Suhr from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden (BBG) when it closed its Westchester County research center twenty years

ago. Among them are a group of magnolias developed to thrive in this climate zone. Like other hybrid botanical specimens, the magnolias have honorific variety names as well as species names. “That one is Elizabeth, and over there is Judy,” Suhr says, referring to Elizabeth Scholtz and Judy Zuk, two widely-esteemed former presidents of the BBG. At Rocky Hills such arboretum specimens are never merely showcased; they are planted in logical groupings that meld into an overall landscape composition. After we have passed through the magnolia grove, Suhr’s cane rises a few feet off the ground as she points out how small a particular tree was when it was first planted. It now towers overhead. Life and death, growth and decay – these themes are the subtext of this garden story.

Suhr’s own story is as remarkable as the garden’s, and one that has demanded the same kind of innate resilience and ability to turn radical change into opportunity and good fortune. Born in Vienna, she moved with her parents and sister to Paris in 1938 and then in 1941 to the United States. In Paris she



attended Parsons Paris School of Design, and she credits the school’s American affiliation with her ability to land a job at Macy’s upon her arrival in this country. Because furniture styles were often sketched rather than photographed in those days, I am curious to know whether her drawing ability was an advantage in planning the garden at Rocky Hills. “No,” she says emphatically, “I never designed any part of the garden on paper because I think in three dimensions. Instead I walk around and ask myself what needs to be planted and what needs to be removed to make it interesting – both in a horticultural sense and as a whole landscape.”

Suhr’s job at Macy’s was followed by a brief stint at Lord & Taylor, and then in 1949 she was hired by Bloomingdale’s chairman Jed Davidson to run the department store’s decorat-

ing department, serve as a fashion coordinator, and – in what turned out to be the most important part of her job description – design model rooms to display furniture. Because Davidson was more interested in furniture retailing than fashion merchandising, Suhr’s imagination was given free rein. With his support she went on to do nothing less than revolutionize the way Americans went about decorating their homes.

Suhr suggested that Bloomingdale’s display its towels according to colors rather than brands, a change that led manufacturers to offer what she calls a rainbow array. This allowed customers a wider range of choice and thus more creativity in their bathroom decor. It perhaps sounds trivial today, but this was at the time a merchandising revolution. Yet, Suhr’s greater contribution to home style was the design of model rooms that were changed four times a year. So popular did these become with shoppers – whether they were planning to buy furniture or not – that each season’s new display was greeted with the same anticipation as the opening of a play on Broadway.

It is hard now to remember that in those days, long before craft items from countries around the world were being sold by mass-market retailers, shawls and throw pillows from India or a mirror frame from Provence would have been novelties in creating the ambience of a room. Her contract with Bloomingdale’s allowed Suhr to travel two months out of the year; during these forays – usually in the company of her husband William, a noted art conservator known to one and all as Billy – she quickly developed an eye for spotting just the right accents for her upcoming display rooms.

More important than these inspired touches, however, was Suhr’s embrace of the new when modern art, architecture, and furnishings were just coming into their own in the postwar era. Bloomingdale’s became the first place in America to sell the furniture of Finn Juhl, the distinguished Danish designer. Suhr’s “At Home with Scandinavian Design” display room in 1957 was one of the harbingers of the more relaxed style of contemporary living long championed by industrial designer Russel Wright and textile designer Jack Lenor Larsen. (Like Suhr, both Wright and Larsen allowed their genius as modern designers to spill over into the garden [see *Site/Lines*, vol. 1, no. 1].) Today Larsen, her friend for over fifty years, says, “Henriette had such a light, deft hand in creating change with imagination and authority. She was illustrating an easier new lifestyle and at the same time teaching us connoisseurship.”

This combination of a casual, unpretentious, modern lifestyle with connoisseurship was revelatory to those who

were invited to the Suhrs' dinner parties in their simple, plain (except for accents of color, craft objects, and some works of art), eminently livable country house. No one else back then served smoked salmon, European cheeses, and fine wines from Bordeaux. But the luncheons and dinners at Rocky Hills were given not to impress but to educate. The guests were often the conservators who worked with Billy Suhr at the Frick Collection or people like Larsen who were part of Henriette's world of interior design. "What we were really learning there was civilization," Larsen recalls.

If Rocky Hills is a living work of art, Henriette Suhr's passion is fired by the garden's continual change, with all the opportunities for reconfiguration that this implies. Suhr says that if there were such a thing as unalterable perfection, she would probably stop being a gardener. Always in a state of transformation, Rocky Hills is for her a reservoir of memory, an ongoing activity, and a challenging area for future horticultural creativity and experimentation.

Fortunately, Suhr has found a way to extend the garden's life beyond her own. The Garden Conservancy has made Rocky Hills one of its preservation projects, meaning that the conservancy is working closely with Suhr and the Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation (the garden's future proprietor) to ensure that it will be a place to educate garden enthusiasts in years to come. In this way it will follow the paradigm of Wave Hill, the remarkable garden in Riverdale created by Suhr's friend and mentor Marco Polo Stufano on the twenty-eight-acre estate that the Perkins-Freeman family deeded to the New York City Department of Parks in 1960. It goes without saying that those charged with taking care of Rocky Hills will have to cope with increased visitation and raise operational funds to staff and support the garden, if they are to maintain the level of horticultural excellence that Suhr and Timothy Tilghman, her talented head gardener, now provide. Something impossible to provide will be Suhr's own gardening taste and creative genius. As with LongHouse, Jack Larsen's East Hampton garden, which is now operated by its own not-for-profit corporation, the hope must lie in a future gardener having the imagination and willingness to experiment with new ideas. As Larsen says, "Gardens are not still lifes. They are never static arrangements but always changing." – Elizabeth Barlow Rogers

Television Review

***The National Parks, America's Best Idea* (PBS, 2009)**

A Film by Ken Burns

Ken Burns refers to himself as "an emotional archaeologist," and for the past six years he has wielded his cinematic spade to excavate the history of America's national parks. The result is a six-program, twelve-hour epic, *The National Parks, America's Best Idea*, scheduled to air this fall on PBS. As is the case with many of Burns's documentaries, it will be accompanied by a book, DVD, and extensive educational website.

This new series is Burns's most engaging work since his remarkable *The Civil War*, broadcast nineteen years ago on public television, which attracted 14 million viewers on the first night and 40 million total by the end of the five-part series – the largest audience ever for the PBS network at that time. *The National Parks* shows Burns at his best, reflecting his thirty years' experience producing documentaries as diverse as *Frank Lloyd Wright* (1998) and *The War* (2007). In typical fashion, he draws upon the expertise of a dis-

tinguished group of advisors, including historians William Leuchtenburg, Alfred Runte, Paul Schullery, and William Cronon, to explore the role of the national parks in shaping American identity.

American identity has been Burns's principal preoccupation throughout his career. In this new series, he presents the creation of the national parks as an expression of democratic values as radical as the Declaration of Independence, pointing out that our country's most remarkable natural landscapes and significant historic sites are owned not by royalty or the rich but by the American people. As he did in his American trilogy, *The Civil War*, *Baseball*, and *Jazz*, Burns focuses on the values and experiences that unite us rather than on those that divide us. He once remarked in an interview, "there is more *Unum* than *Pluribus* in my work."

Burns's previous documentaries do not avoid the dark shadows of American history, however, and in *The National Parks* he returns to

these realities again and again: the eviction of Native Americans from their lands, the wanton slaughter of wildlife, the destruction of natural resources for short-term profit, the indifference of Congress towards these national treasures, and the degradation of the parks' beauty by concessionaires and visitors. Yet his overall treatment of 150 years of the history of the parks is an optimistic celebration of the fundamental democratic values embodied in the national parks' vision. The series' subtitle, *America's Best Idea* is a bit of hyperbole (I would vote for the Constitution), but it expresses the tenor of the series.

Burns has not departed from the basic film style unveiled for PBS viewers in his 1982 program on the Brooklyn Bridge and refined in his later documentaries. He blends the classic Hollywood narrative style of a John Ford, whom he acknowledges as an influence, with incisive voice-overs. Numerous archival photos, which are skillfully panned, zoomed, or tilted, are intercut with newsreels and home movies and accompanied by emotionally charged music, from popular songs to hymns. Burns also includes readings from the letters, diaries, and contemporary publications of

historical figures, but he avoids docudrama's gimmicky use of actors to depict them on screen. Skillful editing creates a well-paced narrative that keeps us engaged through abrupt contrasts, foreshadowing, flashbacks, and informed expert and lay commentary.

Filmmaking is teamwork, and for *The National Parks* Burns has assembled a group of individuals who have worked with him to great advantage on earlier projects. The excellent script of historian and filmmaker Dayton Duncan, Burns's coproducer, skillfully complements the artistry of chief editor Paul Barnes and the exquisite 16-mm cinematography of Buddy Squires. This ensemble of talent has produced a masterful, carefully researched popular history of the parks, employing the power of film to stir emotions and to enliven history through narrative suspense and resolution. The film's use of broad themes and personal narratives enables it to reach a wider audience than the more analytical and comprehensive scholarship of professional academics, who often emphasize abstract economic or social trends. Burns has correctly

characterized himself as a kind of Homeric bard telling stories around an electronic campfire of millions of individual television sets.

The sweep of Burns's chronological narrative encompasses the early park movement of the mid- to later-nineteenth century under the leadership of Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. and, later, John Muir; the setting aside of state and federal land for scenic parks in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries; the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916 to manage the emerging system; and the rapid expansion of the system under Franklin Roosevelt's administration to include additional historic sites and monuments. The documentary continues with the post-World War II increase and upgrading of the parks system under the Mission 66 initiative; the postwar emphasis on including more notable historic sites; the application of rigorous scientific knowledge to park management policies in the latter part of the twentieth century; and the extension of the system into urban areas. It concludes with the last major expansion of the system, the incorporation of federal lands in Alaska during the Carter administra-

tion. This last initiative, ending in 1980, more than doubled the park system's acreage to a grand total of about 83 million acres, comprising 54 national parks and 291 additional "units," including national historic sites, national monuments, and national seashores.

The spine of this far-ranging narrative consists of the stories of the creation of the individual places of the park system – its large scenic wonders like Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Crater Lake, and smaller historic sites like Mesa Verde and the Lincoln Memorial. These stories often highlight relatively little known individuals who played a major part in establishing or protecting the parks, such as George Masa, a Japanese immigrant whose photographs were an important aid in the struggle to protect Great Smoky Mountains National Park from the timber industry; Marjory Stoneman Douglas, a journalist and author who crusaded for the establishment of the Florida Everglades as a national park; and George Melendez Wright, a park ranger who advocated for the protection and scientific management of wildlife throughout the

park system, including the reintroduction of wolves.

Perhaps the most powerful contributor to the documentary, however, is the landscape itself, which is captured here with by far the best cinematography of any of Burns's works. In a few shots, especially those of the magnificent Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone River, the color correction is a bit exaggerated, but this is a minor flaw. Burns and his production team have gone to extraordinary lengths to film landscapes and animals at all seasons, under the most favorable lighting conditions. Often the camera remains fixed on a beautifully composed scene, allowing us the freedom to scan and absorb its details.

Individual commentators supplement this history with insightful observations, often sharing their own experience of the parks.

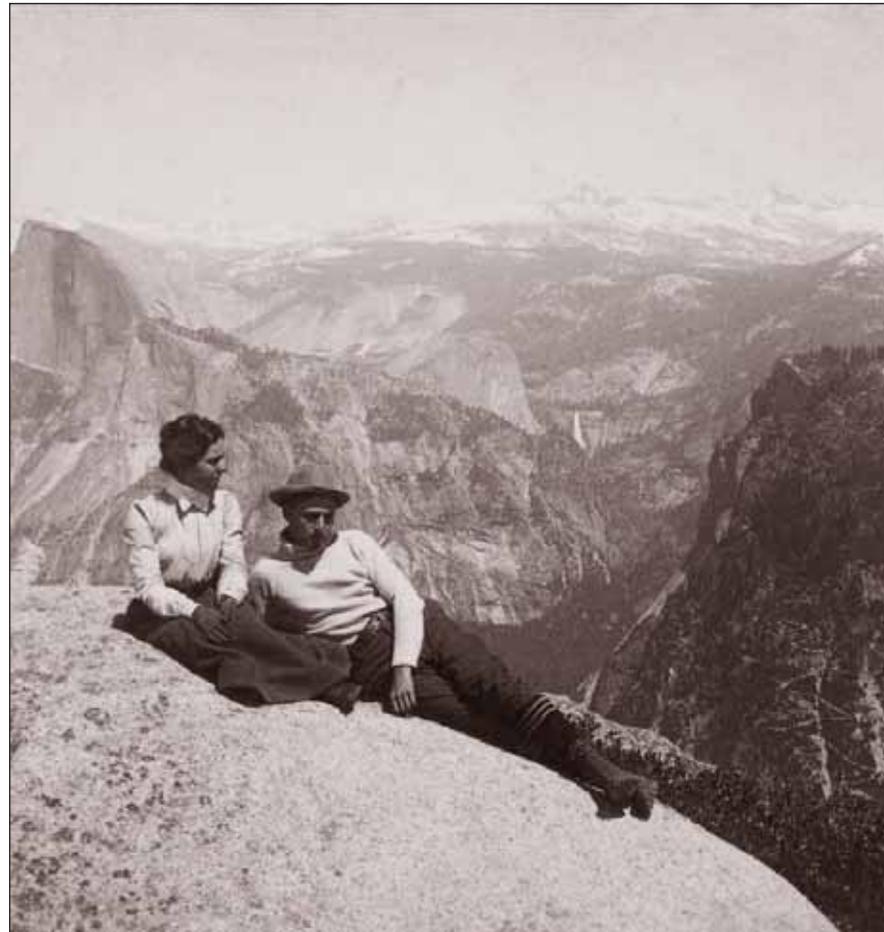
Their words give the documentary a welcome intimacy. Park ranger Shelton Johnson's descriptions of his experiences of nature in Yellowstone and Yosemite are especially powerful. Historian William Cronon provides nuanced commentary on such issues as policy disagreements between preservationists who would set aside the parks as sacred spaces (John Muir, for example) and conservationists (for instance, Gifford Pinchot), who advocate for intelligent management of their natural resources. Environmentalist

Terry Tempest Williams reminds us of the restorative power of scenic beauty, and Dayton Duncan illuminates the development of the park idea over time.

Burns studiously avoids simplistic partisanship when presenting controversial issues and invites us to make up our own minds. Was it right to dam Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley to provide San Francisco with a much-needed water supply? Did Theodore Roosevelt overstep the bounds of executive privilege when he invoked the Antiquities Act

to dramatically enlarge the park system without Congressional approval? The scroll of issues constantly unrolls.

A series of recurring themes also unifies this twelve-hour epic. These include the role of dedicated and visionary individuals in creating and protecting the parks, the constant threat to the parks of rapacious commercial interests, the effect of different modes of transportation in providing access to the parks, the reformulation of the park idea by various generations, and the challenges of dealing with an ever-expanding park system. Additional themes include the controversies over the acquisition of parkland between local or state interests and the federal government and the paradoxical mission of the National Park Service to make the parks readily accessible while also preserving them for future generations. Throughout Burns reminds us that the way we treat our parks has served as a mirror of ourselves as a people, reflecting us as both sensitive stewards of the landscape and shortsighted despoilers of our priceless heritage.



A man and woman lounge on Eagle Rock in Yosemite National Park, circa 1902. Photo courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

Burns's first four programs emphasize the history of the parks to 1933, leaving only the last two programs to deal with the complex period from Roosevelt's New Deal to the Carter administration. Without a doubt much of the most engaging personal narrative material is in the early history – John Muir's nature mysticism and his complex relationship with Theodore Roosevelt; the fascinating arc of Roosevelt's development from colorful hunter sportsman into a passionate parks advocate; the pathos of Steven T. Mather, the Park Service's dynamic first director, who cured his bouts of deep depression by immersing himself in the park landscapes he was striving so ardently to acquire and preserve. However, with only two programs to cover the period from 1933 to 1980, Burns is forced to touch a bit lightly on key issues of the Carter administration, especially the question of whether the rapid growth of the park system during the 1970s and '80s should be continued or slowed.

A more extended treatment of recent thinking on the role of parks in the twenty-first century would also have been a valuable addition. Near the end of the last program, Terry Tempest Williams introduces the sub-

ject by suggesting that at present we should attend to restoring our existing parks to their former excellence. True to his approach, Burns leaves it to us to reflect on this issue. However, a few more opinions from some of today's creative thinkers on the subject, such as Park Service veteran Jon Jarvis, recently nominated by President Obama to be the new director, and Dwight T. Pitcaithley, retired chief historian of the Park Service, would serve as a useful catalyst.

Coincidentally, on the day I completed this review, two stories in the *New York Times* were devoted to our national parks. One report highlighted a recent controversy over elk hunting in Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota; the other focused on the stealing of rocks by tourists in Acadia National Park as a serious problem marring the landscape. It is to be hoped that some of the individuals involved as well as members of Congress will gather around the electronic campfire this fall to partake of Burns's outstanding epic history of our remarkable national parks.

– Reuben Rainey

Memorial

Hal Rothman and National Park History

Hal Rothman, who died in 2007 at the age of forty-eight, was one of the best known environmental historians in the field. He was a trenchant analyst of the cultural effects of tourism (*Devil's Bargains*, 1998), and he became a national expert on the history of Las Vegas, a city he had made his own after moving there in the 1990s (see *Neon Metropolis*, 2002). Reporters and commentators frequently sought him out when perplexed by the quirky complexities of that city. But Rothman began his career writing national park histories – some paid for by the National Park Service – and invigorated the field in the process, raising the academic and critical standards of such work even as he became better known for his other books.

Opinionated and brilliant, Rothman shook up the staid world of military and administrative historians he encountered at the National Park Service in the 1980s. He had little patience for the shibboleths and platitudes that characterized much writing on the parks before then, and his first book, *Preserving Different Pasts: The American National Monuments* (1989), set a standard and something of a pattern for his approach. The national monuments were a particularly apt subject for Rothman in this regard. While Congress legislated parks into existence, presidents established national monuments by executive action, as authorized through the 1906 Antiquities Act. The early national monuments were created to protect archeological ruins, unique geological features, and other sites of “scientific value” in the western public domain. Devil's Tower in Wyoming, declared a national monument in 1906, is prototypical.

But Rothman also argued that the untold story of the national monuments revealed “the story of federal preservation from inside the government.” He maintained that, since they were the products of executive rather than legislative action, government intentions for this “inside” form of preservation were more plainly discernable than in national parks. Accordingly, he argued that the monuments “became a dreamland for those with preservation-oriented agendas.” Rothman's compelling thesis would become typical of much of his writing: iconoclastic, original, and scrupulously researched.



Some future national parks were initiated as national monuments by executive order so as to protect sites while the lengthy advocacy campaigns for park legislation were organized. Theodore Roosevelt declared the Grand Canyon a monument in 1908, for example, and Franklin Roosevelt declared the Grand Tetons a monument in 1943. Both became parks later after the more lengthy legislative process. The ease with which these national monuments were designated, however, did not guarantee later appropriations for their management. Rothman observed that after the creation of the National Park Service in 1916, the agency concentrated on its scenic parks to the detriment of the less-visited monuments, establishing what he characterized as “second-class sites” within the national park system. Perhaps Congress was less inclined to provide money for the operation of those sites that it had not created through the legislative process. In any case, only with the emergency spending programs of the New Deal, when the government was actively

looking for public works projects, were some of these imbalances addressed with extensive restorations and remarkable facilities, such as the complex of Pueblo Revival buildings at Bandelier National Monument in New Mexico. And it was not until the National Park Service's “Mission 66” development program of the 1950s and 1960s that *all* the “units” of the national park system were brought up to a minimal level of service, with utilities, housing, and the requisite visitor center.

Rothman revealed not only in the personalities and conflicts that swirled around the parks' creation but also in the human stories that determined their management and meanings. One central character of *Preserving Different Pasts* was Frank “Boss” Pinkly, who became the first superintendent of the Casa Grande National Monument in Arizona in 1918. By 1923 he headed the Southwest National Monuments Office of the National Park Service, overseeing a dozen others. Pinkly earned his nickname; he was a pugnacious and successful advocate for the underfunded but numerous archeological sites under his care. He advocated for better protection, more research, and adequate visitor services for the dispersed system of monuments. He organized a capable staff on shoestring budgets and fought for attention for his sites, which were becoming increasingly popular among the first generation of

automotive tourists. In Pinkly, “an intense, assertive man, who prided himself on his candor” – Rothman discovered a kindred spirit, and he brought his accomplishments back to life for all of us.

In later books as well Rothman found a neglected topic and exploited its potential with energetic and critical purpose. *The New Urban Park: Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Civic Environmentalism* (2004) examined this particular park’s history while also extracting original conclusions about the evolution of the national-park idea as a whole.

The Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco and Marin County was established in 1972 together with its counterpart, the Gateway National Recreation Area in New York and New Jersey. Other urban national parks, such as Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia or the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis, had been founded decades earlier, and were historic sites dedicated to the interpretation of the founding and westward growth of the nation. But the urban recreation areas of the 1970s had come about through very different political motivations and for other purposes. With the slogan “parks for the people, where the people are,” the urban national parks of the 1970s originated in the idealism of the Great Society. Their founding suggested that a profound change was taking place in the institutional culture of the National Park Service, which had been associated chiefly with the preservation of outstanding scenic areas and the nation’s historical shrines.

Rothman analyzed in detail the convoluted local and congressional politics of the 1960s and early 1970s that brought federal parks to urban centers. The growth of neighborhood activism – in this instance mainly the People for a Golden Gate National Recreation Area – and the political strength of Bay Area environmental groups led to a new level of influence in Congress for park supporters. During the Progressive Era, the Bay Area had produced many of the most passionate advocates of the national park movement. Rothman argued that in the 1970s a new generation of regional advocates achieved national leadership and reinvented the national park idea. Originally about 34,000 acres, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area now encompasses spectacular parkland on the city’s waterfront, many significant historic sites, and regional reservations in Marin County, as well as the Presidio, a former military base. It became a prescient model of a twenty-first century national park, one characterized by complex partnerships of governments, organizations, and the private sector.

In this case, the extraordinary personality central to the story was Democratic representative Phil Burton from California, the author and political force behind the 1972 legis-

lation establishing the park. Burton was neither an outdoorsman nor was he previously known as a park advocate; instead, he rose to power as a champion of organized labor and identified himself with the needs of his urban, blue-collar constituents. But once Burton was convinced of the overall purpose of expanding the national park system, his legislative acumen and deal-making ability forever changed the politics of federal park-making.

Following the political success of the 1972 act, Burton was responsible for other national park legislation, culminating in the Omnibus Bill of 1978, which included over 100 individual park projects. In a classic case of logrolling (later derided as “park-barrel” politics), Burton secured the votes of a diverse array of legislators by locating parks in their districts. Much good came out of the act: three new national parks, nine historic areas, many park expansions, national trails, wild and scenic river designations. Together this accounts for nearly a tripling of the acreage under federal wilderness protection. Burton then pushed through the 1980 National Parks and Recreation Act, which added Channel Islands National Park and the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site to the system, to name just two of the many vital projects funded. An unlikely and relatively little known champion of national parks, Burton left a personal legislative record that has no parallel. He died in 1983 at the age of fifty-six, just as the era that allowed for such sweeping environmental reform ended.

Grounded in the analysis of specific places, events, and personalities, Rothman’s books about our national parks and monuments demanded that the reader reconsider comfortable certainties. They also raised expectations substantially for government-sponsored histories of this type. As a professor of history at the University of Nevada Las Vegas, Rothman was responsible for mentoring a generation of scholars who continue to contribute to this field. Many of their reports are published by academic presses, generating further interest, new dissertation topics, and in-depth studies that, like Rothman’s, expand our understanding of the multilayered significance of the national park system.

In a January 2007 interview with the editors of *Environmental History*, Rothman stated: “National parks have never been preservationist vehicles; they have always been political creations, products of the politics of Washington, D.C., and its interactions with the local level. Casting national park histories in this light has been my greatest contribution to the field.” Although this was but one aspect of his intellectual achievement, in this special issue of *Site/Lines* it is appropriate to acknowledge that Hal Rothman’s challenging reinterpretations gave the study of national park history a contentious relevance it very much needed. – Ethan Carr

Awards

The Foundation for Landscape Studies is proud to announce the recipients of the 2009 David R. Coffin Publication Grant, given for research and publication of a book that advances scholarship in the fields of garden history and landscape studies, and the 2009 John Brinkerhoff Jackson Book Prize, awarded to recently published books that have made significant contributions to the study and understanding of garden history and landscape studies.

2009 David R. Coffin Publication Grant

Lawrence Halprin *A Life Spent Changing Places*

Publisher: University of Pennsylvania Press

An autobiography by one of the world’s leading landscape architects, environmental planners, and urban design innovators.

John Dixon Hunt *The Venetian City Garden: Place, Typology, and Perception*

Publisher: Birkhäuser

A history of the Venetian garden as a representation of the city’s unique cultural and environmental conditions.

Judith K. Major *The Evolution of a Landscape Critic: Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer*

Publisher: University of Virginia Press

The first full-length study of the artist, architect, critic, historian, and journalist Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer and her writings on landscape gardening.

Janet Mendelsohn and Christopher Wilson, Editors *My Kind of American Landscape: J. B. Jackson Speaks*

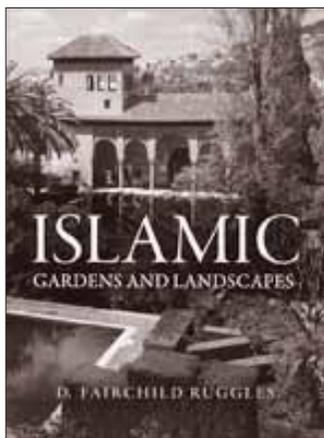
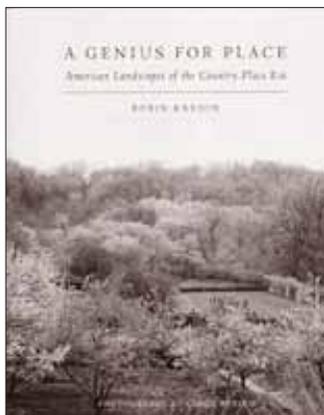
Publisher: Center for American Places

A multimedia compilation of the teachings, writings, drawings, and photographs of the cultural geographer John Brinkerhoff Jackson.

2009 John Brinckerhoff
Jackson Book Prize

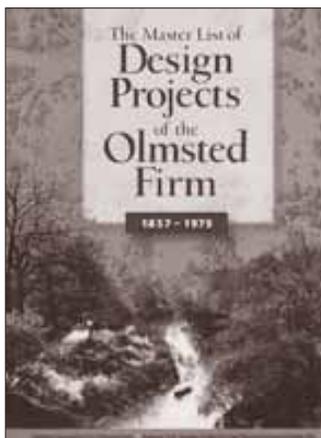
*A Genius for Place:
American Landscapes of
the Country Place Era*
By Robin Karson
University of Massachusetts
Press, 2007

*Islamic Gardens and
Landscapes*
By D. Fairchild Ruggles
Penn Studies in Landscape
Architecture, 2007



*Daring to Look: Dorothea
Lange's Photographs
and Reports from the Field*
By Anne Whiston Spirn
University of Chicago Press,
2008

*The Master List of Design
Projects of the Olmsted
Firm, 1857-1979*
By Lucy Lawliss, Caroline
Loughlin, and Lauren Meier
National Association for
Olmsted Parks, 2008



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Ethan Carr, Ph.D., FASLA, is the Reuben M. Rainey Professor of the History of Landscape Architecture at the University of Virginia. He has written two books on the history of American park planning and design: *Wilderness by Design* (University of Nebraska Press, 1998) and *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma* (Library of American Landscape History, 2007). He is currently editing the eighth volume of *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, which covers the period from 1882 to 1890, during which time Olmsted's office, called Fairsted, was established in Brookline, Massachusetts.

Rolf Diamant is superintendent of Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park. He writes about conservation history, parks, and protected areas, and is a contributing author of *The Conservation of Cultural Landscapes* (CAB International, 2006), *Reconstructing Conservation: Finding Common Ground* (Island Press, 2003), *Wilderness Comes Home: Re-wilding the Northeast* (University Press of New England, 2001), and *Twentieth-Century New England Land Conservation: A Heritage of Civic Engagement* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

Paula Deitz is editor of *The Hudson Review*, a magazine of literature and the arts published in New York City. As a cultural critic, she writes about art, architecture, and landscape design for newspapers and magazines here and abroad. *Of Gardens*, a collection of her essays, will be published in the near future by the University of Pennsylvania Press.

Reuben Rainey, Ph.D., is William Stone Weedon Professor Emeritus in the School of Architecture

at the University of Virginia. He is a former chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture and the author of a wide range of studies on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American landscape architecture. His most recent book, coauthored with J. C. Miller, is *Modern Public Gardens: Robert Royston and the Suburban Park* (2006). He is also coexecutive producer of *GardenStory*, a ten-episode documentary for public television.

Lee Whittlesey is park historian for the National Park Service at Yellowstone. He is the author, co-author, or editor of ten books and more than twenty-five journal articles, including: *Storytelling in Yellowstone: Horse and Buggy Tour Guides* (2007); *A Yellowstone Album: Photographic Celebration of the First National Park* (1997); *Death in Yellowstone: Accidents and Foolhardiness in the First National Park* (1995); *Lost in the Yellowstone: Truman Everts's Thirty Seven Days of Peril* (1995); *Yellowstone Place*

Names (1988); *Wonderland Nomenclature: Myth and History in the Creation of Yellowstone National Park* (with Paul Schullery, 2003); and *Ho! for Wonderland: Travelers' Accounts of Yellowstone, 1872-1914* (2009). *A History of Large Mammals of the Yellowstone Region, 1806-1885* (with Paul Schullery) will be published in 2010.

Anne Mitchell Whisnant is a historian and author of *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History* (UNC Press, 2006). She is currently director of research, communications, and programs for the Office of Faculty Governance at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she holds adjunct faculty appointments in history and American studies. With her husband, David Whisnant, she also conducts contract historical research and writing for the National Park Service through their small consulting firm, Primary Source History Services. Their most recent project (in process) is a historic resource study for Cape Lookout National Seashore.

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