

## Wilderness by Design

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Within government, those in favor of rigorous scenic preservation and exclusively recreational for national park did not make much progress until after Theodore Roosevelt left office in 1909. Although the national park at least remained under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior, the parks still had little central administrative support or funding. No bureau – even a full time staff person – looked after park affairs in Washington.<sup>37</sup> Many in the federal government doubted the feasibility of scenic preservation that excluded commercial uses, with Pinchot himself expressing the greatest skepticism over such “sentimental nonsense.”

Scenic preservationists outside of government however, had not abandoned their goals. After the American Park and Outdoor Art Association was founded in 1897, the group had attracted new members and broadened its agenda. The association became even less of a professional society, with park superintendents and landscape architects outnumbered by representatives of village improvement societies, women’s federations, and members of the public at large who expressed interest in “civic improvement,” generally, as well as in scenic preservation and landscape design.<sup>38</sup> In 1904, the association merged with another group, the League of Civic Improvement Associations, which had been founded in 1900 and was headed by an energetic printer from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania named J. Horace McFarland. McFarland then presided over the combined group, renamed the American Civic Association.<sup>39</sup> In pamphlets, speeches, and conventions, McFarland and the American Civic Association advocated a full range of urban environmental reforms, including smoke abatement, sewage treatment restrictions on outdoor advertising, planting of street trees, and the creation of “playgrounds for the children and parks for grown-ups.”<sup>40</sup> During this period McFarland participated on Harrisburg’s municipal park commission, which (with landscape architect Warren Manning as a consultant), implemented environmental reforms and completed an impressive park system. His interest in municipal parks and civic improvement extended naturally to state and national parks.<sup>41</sup>

As the membership and influence of the American Civic Association grew, McFarland became a national spokesman for scenic preservation causes. Niagara Falls was under assault in the early 20th century by hydroelectric proposals that threatened to diminish the flow of the cataract. For over twenty years, McFarland worked to preserve the falls and acquire more parkland around the state reservation.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps because he was less threatening than figures such as John Muir and Robert Underwood Johnson, in 1908 Clifford Pinchot allowed McFarland to attend his White House governors’ conference on conservation.<sup>43</sup> If he anticipated that McFarland would represent the national park cause ineffectually, however, Pinchot erred. Speaking in terms of economic value that his audience could appreciate, McFarland urged him “to consider the essential value of one of America’s greatest resources – her unmatched natural scenery.” He

gave the governors a memorable and impassioned summary of why national parks should be managed as parks, not national forests: “The love of country lights and keep glowing the holy fire of patriotism...is excited primarily by the beauty of the country.... The national parks, all too few in number and extant, ought to remain absolutely inviolate.... The scenic value of all the national domain yet remaining should be jealously guarded.” He also proclaimed, in defiance of the opinion of his host, that the “Hetch Hetchy Valley of the Yosemite region belongs to all of America and not to San Francisco alone.”<sup>44</sup>

The controversy surrounding the Hetch-Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park had become the most divisive scenic preservation issue of the day and was the reason why Pinchot did not invite Muir, Johnson, and other former allies to his governors’ conference. In 1905, the City of San Francisco had requested permission [based again on the provisions of the 1901 Right-of-Way Act to dam the Tuolumne River in Yosemite in order to make a municipal reservoir out of the Hetch-Hetchy Valley. Pinchot, near the height of his influence, approved of the plan and advised Roosevelt accordingly. Park advocates, led by Muir, considered the Hetch-Hetchy a scenic rival to Yosemite itself and immediately tried to persuade Roosevelt and Secretary Hitchcock not to follow Pinchot’s advice in the matter. Sentiment in favor of improving municipal water supplies for San Francisco was strong, however, especially after much of the city burned in 1906. The same month Pinchot convened his triumphant conservation conference in 1908, Secretary of the Interior Garfield granted permission to dam Hetch-Hetchy.<sup>45</sup>

The situation changed dramatically for Yosemite, however and for all the national parks, in 1909 when William H. Taft succeeded Roosevelt in the White House and appointed Richard A. Ballinger as secretary of the interior. Ballinger, a westerner and former commissioner of the General Land Office, did not continue the close cooperation with the Forest Service that his predecessors had found expedient. The new secretary immediately infuriated Pinchot by allowing valuable hydroelectric sites (that Garfield and Pinchot had retained in public ownership to again become available to private hydroelectric power interests. Ballinger soon found himself on the defensive, however, when charges of improprieties involving Alaskan coal lands were levied against him by a clerk who had worked under him in the General Land Office. The charges were almost certainly false; but Pinchot encouraged them and spread the story in the press in order to destroy his rival. Taft, who had no intention of allowing Pinchot the same level of influence he enjoyed under Roosevelt, backed Ballinger and forced the Chief Forester’s resignation for insubordination in 1910.<sup>46</sup> In the meantime, Ballinger, perhaps as part of a calculated attempt to gain support in his public relations battle with Pinchot, revoked permission to dam the Hetch-Hetchy, a move hailed by scenic preservationists, who bitterly resented Pinchot’s failure to side with them on the issue. The battle resumed, however, and only ended in 1913 when Congress passed legislation directly authorizing the construction of the dam. Without the permanent organized influence that a national park bureau could have exerted within the government, private groups such as the American Civic Association and individuals such as Muir and Johnson would find it difficult to frustrate lobbying efforts that could be sustained for years on the part of established commercial and industrial interests.

But the battle of the Hetch Hetchy proved a Pyrrhic victory for Pinchot. While Ballinger failed to prevent the waterworks construction, he did redirect the institutional attitude of the Department of the Interior towards its national parks. Ballinger adopted the rhetoric of

McFarland and the scenic preservationists who claimed that the commercial value of landscape scenery could be economically exploited, without destroying it for posterity, by developing better facilities for tourists.<sup>47</sup> “It has been broadly estimated that one hundred million dollars has been spent in some years abroad by American tourists,” Ballinger reported in 1910, noting that “only a fraction” of that amount was spent by domestic tourists visiting national parks.<sup>48</sup> To remedy this, he suggested that all parks be brought under civilian administration, and that Congress created a “bureau of national parks and resorts...with a suitable force of superintendents, supervising engineers, and landscape architects, inspecting park grounds, and other employees.” Noting that the Army Corps of Engineers had done important work in Yellowstone and Mount Rainier, Ballinger nevertheless felt that “the Interior Department should have supervision over the construction and maintenance of park roads...according to [a] general plan of development” for each park.. This process was hindered, he confessed, by a lack of “well-defined policies and plans for their general improvement.” He went on to claim that if national parks were to be fulfilled as national institutions, a definite policy for their maintenance, supervision, and improvement should be established, which would enable them to be opened up for the convenience and comfort of tourists and campers and for the careful preservation of natural features. Complete and comprehensive plans for roads, trails, telegraph and telephone lines, sewer and water systems, hotel accommodations, transportation, and other conveniences should be made for each of the national park before any large amount of money is expended.”<sup>49</sup>

Ballinger’s motivations for these policies were encouraged by the prospect of embarrassing Pinchot and scoring a public relations victory; perhaps they also reflected general policy in the Taft administration to reduce the Forest Service’s influence in public land management. In any case, Ballinger, hardly known as scenic preservation himself, summoned J. Horace McFarland to Washington in 1910 to begin drafting legislation for a national park bureau.

McFarland recognized that such legislation would create what would become the country’s largest and most important park commission, charged with developing some of the most scenic places in the world as a system of public parks. He therefore turned for assistance to Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., who at age forty was emerging as the leader of the profession of landscape architecture.<sup>50</sup> The younger Olmsted, growing up around the landscape architects at Fairsted, had entered the profession at an early age. Since 1898, he had been a full partner, with his older half-brother J.C. Olmsted, in the firm Olmsted Brothers, which replaced Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot after Charles Eliot’s death. That year the younger Olmsted had accompanied Eliot as landscape architect for Boston’s Metropolitan Park Commission. In 1900, at the age of twenty-nine, he headed the new academic program in landscape architecture at Harvard, the first degree program offered in the field. In 1901 he became a member of the Senate Park Commission, and was a co-author of the 1902 McMillan Plan for the Capital, the first comprehensive city plan of its type in the United States. One of the founders of the profession of city planning, in 1917 Olmsted was named the first President of the American City Planning Institute. He contributed to dozens of park and subdivision designs throughout his career, including some of the most important projects of the day, such as Biltmore (1895) in North Carolina and Forest Hills Gardens (1901) in New York.<sup>51</sup>

Olmsted was particularly interested in scenic preservation, a field in which he made some of his greatest professional contributions. He had met McFarland during his efforts to prevent

hydroelectric development at Niagara and Yosemite, preservation campaigns in which they had both played important parts. The Hetch-Hetchy controversy, in particular, helped define Olmsted's thinking on national park policies. During the Hetch-Hetchy debate, Gifford Pinchot had flatly rejected the role of national park planning and design on the national level.<sup>52</sup> Olmsted, however, better understood the continuity between municipal, state, and national park planning. In 1906, he and fellow landscape architect John Nolen published their description of a formal typology of "public open spaces," encompassing a range of types from the smallest neighborhood playground to "great outlying reservations."<sup>53</sup> He brought this comprehensive understanding of the American park movement to his analysis of the Hetch-Hetchy dispute.

Proponents of the Hetch Hetchy dam insisted that, far from being a scenic liability, the reservoir would be a pleasant addition to the park and would even enhance the scenery of the valley. This was no idle sophistry; since the mid-19th century, American landscape parks had often included reservoirs for municipal water supplies, and the lakes had indeed contributed to the composed scenes of municipal park landscapes. Clean water, even more than verdant meadows, embodied the ideal of public health. In dozens of cities the greenswards and groves of municipal parks, combined with law lakes that served as reservoirs resulted in compelling visualizations of healthful beauty and utility.<sup>54</sup> One of the younger Olmsted's, first professional writings, published by the American Park and Outdoor Art Association in 1899, detailed "The Relation of Reservoirs to Parks." In this paper he encouraged close cooperation between park designers and municipal engineers, since almost "all reservoirs...have an element of landscape effect; namely, that of an expanse of clear, sparkling water." He went on to observe that "this same element forms the chief feature of many landscapes in public parks, where it is created at large and is clearly a thing of great value...Where a reservoir occurs in a public park, as frequently happens, it might be made to add largely to the value of the park instead of striking a discordant note." He then provided diagrams and examples, including Middlesex Fells and Fresh Pond parks (both near Boston), in which Olmsted Brothers had artfully integrated major reservoirs into park landscapes.<sup>55</sup>

It was the Hetch-Hetchy proposal to add a reservoir to Yosemite that forced Olmsted to distinguish what might be appropriate in a regional park, such as Middlesex Fells, from what was appropriate in a national park. And the imagery and rhetoric of public health in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century park would, again, be replaced by 20<sup>th</sup>-century aesthetic and economic arguments in favor of scenic preservation. Olmsted opposed the Hetch-Hetchy reservoir forcefully, and he felt compelled to explain his resistance to what he might otherwise have considered a "a thing of great value." In 1913, as the controversy neared its end, the *Boston Evening Transcript* published Olmsted's summary of the entire affair.<sup>56</sup> The principal point to be considered, in his opinion, was "the effect of the proposal upon the value of the Yosemite National Park." At issue the legitimacy of the assertions of the San Francisco municipal engineers that reservoir construction would not inhibit the appreciation of landscape scenery. Olmsted quoted the engineers' position: "Granting the desirability of keeping certain areas free...of population for the purpose of drawing public water-supplies from them, and the purpose of keeping certain areas free of population for the purpose of using them as parks...there seems to be no reason why these two classes of areas should be kept separate....There is every reason why the two uses should be combined." Olmsted recognized this logic. "I have urged this principal again and again," he admitted, "and have not done a little into helping to put it into practice...Not infrequently, land

acquired and policed primarily for park purposes may serve incidentally...[as] sites for reservoirs, with no impairment of their park value or even with an actual increase in park value.” But at Yosemite there was another principle involved, one that demanded that “aesthetic value” should not be compromised by “utilitarian value.” “Some things...are of a value wholly or primarily for their beauty, and if they have any direct utilitarian value it is utterly secondary and incidental,” Olmsted explained. “If we can afford it, we direct our efforts toward conserving and making available its primary value, its beauty.”

Olmsted reinforced his position in the terms that had justified public parks since the 1850s, updated with a Progressive emphasis on value and efficiency. “Certain kinds of valuably refreshing scenery are so incompatible with the ordinary economic uses of Land ...[that they] must be given over specifically to that purpose.... Until it is deliberately concluded that the value of the landscape beauty is no longer the prime justification for the maintenance of the park, the only safe rule is to permit no other avoidable use ...which in any degree impairs the value of the park for that purpose.” The advocates of the dam, in other words, “must bear the burden of proving that the new use [would] not impair the scenery.” Olmsted quoted his father’s 1865 analysis and description of the beauty of Yosemite, and then specifically refutes the municipal engineers claims that the reservoir would not damage “the landscape qualities which, in all the world, we peculiar to Yosemite scenery...and which in the next few centuries will, I believe, become of incalculably larger value to humanity.”<sup>57</sup>

Again and again, Olmsted defended “this commodity called Yosemite scenery” as a sound investment that would accrue “value” in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century as beautiful scenery became increasingly scarce. He also summarized a basic preservationist philosophy for the new century. “The lesson of history in this respect is unmistakable,” he concluded, “a thing which many people have held to be of great and peculiar beauty and which cannot be replaced, even if the predominant men of the day fail to appreciate its beauty. . . ought not to be destroyed or radically altered.” Other figures in scenic preservation, such as John Muir, may have been superior polemicists; but probably no one in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century was better qualified than Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., to prepare legislation and policies that would establish a national park system and a national park commission to manage it.

In the meantime, Taft replaced the embattled Secretary Ballinger in 1911. The new Secretary of the Interior, Walter L. Fisher, continued Ballinger’s national park initiative, however, and that September he convened a national park conference at Yellowstone. The conference assembled park concessioners, superintendents, railroad executives, and Interior officials for the first time to specifically discuss national park management. Many of those present took up the “See America First” slogan and urged that American tourists be encouraged to consider visiting California or the Rockies before making the typical tour to European destinations. Even Canada seemed to be besting the United States in the competition for tourist dollars. Louis W. Hill, for example, who was just beginning his development of Glacier, spoke immediately after Secretary Fisher’s opening address at the conference. Thousands of Americans go to Canada every year for things they might just as well get in the United States,” Hill complained, “we all want to go ahead and do a great deal more in the way of advertising...[which] will change the current of travel from Europe and Canada to this country....We are going ahead with this in our ‘See America First’ campaign.”<sup>58</sup>

Secretary Fisher noted that American national parks had “grown up like Topsy...with no one particularly concerned with them.” Most of the participants in the conference agreed that publicity was a good first step in correcting the situation. In the words of one Northern Pacific executive, “the principal purpose of this meeting is to consider in what manner the number of visitors to the various park can be increased.” The railroad companies had advertised the parks for years, but Fisher reported that the Department of the Interior now supplied press releases and other information to newspapers as well.<sup>59</sup> A national park bureau could institutionalize this kind of effort, and could also effectively request increased appropriations from Congress for park improvements – roads, trails, and sewers, for example – that concessioners wanted to improve their resorts.

A new park bureau was therefore advocated by most of those who spoke at the conference, but J. Horace McFarland in particular was called upon to address that specific concern. Introduced by Fisher as “one of the persons in the United States who is most deeply concerned with the development and use of our national parks,” McFarland announced that “it seems to me that that it is now the time that the national parks shall cease to be incidentally handled and come to such handling as will make them as definite on the map of the United States as are the parks in any large city.” His goal to create a national park bureau modeled on the precedents of municipal and county park commissions was clear: “Parks are successful when they are the primary object of attention on the part of some one person....A park commissioner is the usual means.”

The concessioners, railroad executives, and park superintendents assembled at Yellowstone apparently did not feel as Gifford Pinchot did, that McFarland’s experience with “Eastern municipal parks” and “civic improvements” disqualified him from appreciating the exigencies of national park administration. On the contrary, the development and administration of scores of municipal and county park systems presented successful models for accommodating tourists in settings calculated to enhance their appreciation of landscape scenery.<sup>60</sup>

From 1910 on, McFarland and the American Civic Association mobilized to create a national park bureau. Immediately after the Yellowstone conference, McFarland convened his groups’ 1911 annual meeting (held that year in Washington) and dedicated the entire program to presenting the “needs for a federal Bureau of National Parks.”<sup>61</sup> Among the speakers endorsing the creation of such a bureau was President Taft, who notes that the national parks, after being set aside, had simply been stored in “the ‘lumber room’ of Government...the Interior Department.” “If we are going to have National parks,” Taft affirmed, “we ought to make them available to the people, and we ought to build the roads...in order that those parks may become what they are intended to be when Congress created them....And we cannot do that, we cannot carry them on effectively, unless we have a bureau which is itself distinctly charged with the responsibility for their management and for their building up.”<sup>62</sup>

In McFarland’s own address at the Washington conference, he offered a brief history of “the American Park idea.” Like Olmsted and Nolen, McFarland recognized the continuity between playgrounds, municipal parks, parkways, and “the nation’s larger playgrounds”: state and national parks. All these parks promoted the general goals of public health, enhanced welfare, and improved productivity. “Everything that the limited scope of a city park can do as quick aid to the citizen,” McFarland explained, national parks “are ready to do more thoroughly, on a

greater scale.” He emphasized the difference between national parks and national forests: “The primary function of the national forest is to maintain in healthful efficiency the lives of the people who must use that lumber. The forests are the nation’s reserve wood-lots. The parks are the nation’s reserve for the maintenance of individual patriotism and federal solidarity.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> This according to J. Horace McFarland’s often quoted claims. See The American Civic Association, *National Parks*, pamphlet series 11, no. 6 (Washington, DC: The administrative situation, 1912), 28-29. For a more detailed description of the administrative situation, see Horace M. Albright and Robert Cahn, *The Birth of the National Park Service: The Founding Years, 1913-33*, (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1985), 32-33.

<sup>38</sup> This was especially true after 1899, when professional landscape designers established their own group, the American Society of Landscape Architects.

<sup>39</sup> Frederic A. Delano, “What the American Civic Association Is,” in *American Civic Annual* (Washington, DC: The American Civic Association, 1929), v-viii. According to Delano, the American Civic Association was dedicated to the “dual purpose of preservation of outdoor beauty with the attendant promotion of landscape art and the civic improvement of towns and cities.”

<sup>40</sup> The American Civic Association, *Seventh Annual Convention*, pamphlet (Washington, DC: The American Civic Association, 1912), 5-6.

<sup>41</sup> Ernest Morrison, *J. Horace McFarland: A Thorn for Beauty* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1995), 68-92.

<sup>42</sup> J. Horace McFarland, “Niagara Falls – A National Asset,” in *American Civic Annual* (Washington, DC: The American Civic Association, 1929), 26-30. McFarland pointed out that if the two million visitors to the New York side of the falls spent only twenty-five dollars apiece, the total annual revenue would be double that produced by hydroelectric development.

<sup>43</sup> George Kunz, the president of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, also attended the conference.

<sup>44</sup> Most of McFarland’s address is reprinted in Morrison, *J. Horace McFarland*, 123-137.

<sup>45</sup> Elmo R. Richardson, “The Struggle for the Valley: California’s Hetch-Hetchy Controversy, 1905-1913,” *California Historical Society Quarterly* 38, No. 3 (September 1959): 249-258.

<sup>46</sup> Ise, *National Park Policy*, 89-91; Gifford Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground* [1947] (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1974), 442-451.

<sup>47</sup> For one of many contemporary examples of this reasoning, see Allen Chamberlin, “Scenery as a National Asset,” *The Outlook* 92, no. 4 (May 28, 1910): 157-169.

<sup>48</sup> McFarland reported the amount to be \$350 million and later \$500 million. The American Civic Association, *National Parks*, 28.

<sup>49</sup> Department of the Interior, *1910 Annual Reports*, 55-58.

<sup>50</sup> Morrison, *J. Horace McFarland*, 175.

<sup>51</sup> Olmsted became the senior partner of Olmsted Brothers when his brother John Charles died in 1920 after a long illness. He remained professionally active until 1950.

<sup>52</sup> In a letter to Olmsted, Pinchot claimed that McFarland, in particular, was unable to distinguish between policies appropriate for Eastern, municipal parks, and those suited to the vast public lands of the West. Morrison, *J. Horace McFarland*, 184.

<sup>53</sup> Olmsted and Nolan defined six “important types of public grounds”: “Streets, boulevards, and parkways; City squares, commons, and public gardens, Playgrounds [in three categories based on age]; Small or neighborhood parks; Large parks; Great outlying reservations.” Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and John Nolen, “The Normal Requirements of American Towns and Cities I Respect to Public Open Spaces,” *Charities and the Common* 16, no. 14 (July 7, 1906): 411-426.

<sup>54</sup> Central Park, for example, was located in central Manhattan part because land for a future reservoir, which was subsequently built within the park, had already been acquired. Druid Hill Park (Baltimore), Fairmount Park (Philadelphia), and Prospect Park (Brooklyn), are just some examples of municipal parks that successfully incorporated the acquisition, protection, or impounding of drinking water.

<sup>55</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., *The Relation of Reservoirs to Parks* (Boston: The American Park and Outdoor Art Association, 1899), Paper 32.

<sup>56</sup> The article was reprinted in *Landscape Architecture* 4, no. 2 (January 1914): 37-46.

<sup>57</sup> The 1865 “Preliminary Report upon the Yosemite and Big Tree Grove” by the elder Olmsted is often supposed to have been completely lost until 1952, when his biographer Laura Wood Roper pieced together portions of his report

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and published it in something like its original form (*Landscape Architecture* 43, no. 1, 13-25). Most of the texts Roper pieced together, however, had always been accessible to F. L. Olmsted, Jr., and he quotes from them extensively in his 1913 analysis of the Hetch-Hetchy controversy.

<sup>58</sup> Department of the Interior, *Proceedings of the National Parks Conference Held at the Yellowstone National Park, 1911* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office 1912). Canada had created its own national park service in 1911. Better managed Canadian parks drew large numbers of American tourists to the Canadian Rockies, much to Hill's dismay, since these tourists rode the Canadian Pacific Railroad, not Hill's Great Northern, to get there. William C. Everhart, *The National Park Service* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 208-210.

<sup>59</sup> Department of the Interior, *Proceedings of the National Park Conference Held at Yellowstone*, 3, 6-7.

<sup>60</sup> Olmsted did not attend the conference but did draft a letter, which McFarland had read into the record, supporting the creation of a national park bureau. The letter suggested that a "permanent independent 'board of overseers'" be established to "discuss questions of general policy with the executive officer," in other words the director of the proposed bureau. "This is the theory of unpaid park commissions all over the country, and it is a sound theory," he concluded. Olmsted would later serve as chairman of the Yosemite National Park Board of Expert Advisors, organized in 1928 along these lines. Department of the Interior, *Proceedings of the National Parks Conference Held at Yellowstone*, 20-21.

<sup>61</sup> The American Civic Association, *Seventh Annual Convention*, 2.

<sup>62</sup> The American Civic Association, *National Parks*, 16-18.

<sup>63</sup> The American Civic Association, *National Parks*, 27-28. Like many of his fellow Progressives, McFarland worried that the tremendous influx of Southern and Eastern European immigrants in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries had eroded national identity and patriotism. Besides being sound investments in public "healthful efficiency," McFarland and others often portrayed parks, and the appreciation of American scenic beauty generally, as a sure means of promoting sincere patriotism and unified national spirit.