

Harold L. Ickes and the National Park Service

by Barry Mackintosh

In 1933, President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt sought to balance his cabinet by nominating a Republican supporter to be secretary of the interior. Senators Hiram Johnson of California and Bronson Cutting of New Mexico both turned him down, preferring to remain in the Senate.¹ Roosevelt then turned to Harold LeClair Ickes, an “independent Republican” lawyer from Chicago. Ickes would serve as secretary of the interior from 1933 to 1945, longer than any man before or since. His responsibilities included the National Park Service, which—except for certain of its personnel—prospered under the leadership of this complex and colorful figure.

Born in 1874, Ickes spent his first years in Pennsylvania but moved to the midwestern metropolis during his youth. As a reporter for the *Chicago Record*, he covered Republicans in the 1900 election and became a particular admirer of vice-presidential candidate Theodore Roosevelt. He worked actively in Roosevelt’s 1912 Bull Moose campaign, reverted to Republican regularity on behalf of Charles Evans Hughes in 1916, but then supported every Democratic presidential candidate during the 1920s. At home in Chicago he battled Samuel Insull and the colorful Mayor William H. “Big Bill” Thompson. His tireless and uncompromising advocacy of reformist principles and his facility for verbal attack made him “almost the incarnation of lonely, righteous, and inextinguishable pugnacity.” When Ickes finally found himself on the winning side of a presidential campaign in 1932, he thought first of becoming commissioner of Indian affairs; then he resolved to shoot for the top position in the Interior Department. He was not from the western states that traditionally supplied secretaries of the interior, and he had no personal familiarity with his successful candidate. He made his interest known to FDR through mutual acquaintances, however, and eagerly accepted the post upon his call to Roosevelt’s Hyde Park home.²

The new secretary of the interior was “a remarkably complex and profoundly suspicious man who thrived on

rancorous debate and unending controversy.” Ickes consciously projected an irascible image in his speeches and writings, exemplified by his *Autobiography of a Curmudgeon*. “If, in these pages, I have hurled an insult at anyone,” he declared in its introduction, “be it known that such was my deliberate intent.” Arthur Krock called him a “professional man of wrath.” He was reputed to breakfast on “half a dozen ten-penny nails and a few buttered brick bats.”³ Much of this, especially as it was self-promoted, conveyed an impression of harmless bluster and essential good humor. “It was true that [Ickes] was the greatest living master of the art of quarreling,” Walter Lippman wrote after Ickes’ death. “But it was not true, as he liked to pretend, that he was quarrelsome because he was bad-tempered. He was a kind and generous and warmhearted man. The Old Curmudgeon business was a false front to protect him against it being generally realized how violently virtuous, how furiously righteous, how angrily unbogoted he was almost all the time.”⁴

Internal Park Service Politics

For many of his subordinates in the National Park Service and elsewhere in the Interior Department, however, Ickes’ front was anything but false. As a result of the Teapot Dome and earlier scandals, the department had the worst reputation for corruption of any federal agency; the new secretary arrived with a wholesale suspicion against its career personnel and prior appointees. Normally a champion of civil liberties, he made Louis R. Glavis, who had been a central figure in the explosive Ballinger-Pinchot controversy of two decades earlier, his chief investigator. Ickes had Glavis monitor the telephone conversations of suspected employees. Before Ickes married her, Jane Dahlman worked in the historical division of the Park Service under Chief Historian Verne E. Chatelain and reported to the secretary on activities there. Ickes personally patrolled the corridors of the Interior

1. Harold L. Ickes, *The Autobiography of a Curmudgeon* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1943), p. 267.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 266–71. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), p. 282.

3. Donald C. Swain, *Wilderness Defender: Horace M. Albright and Conservation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 218; Ickes, *Autobiography*, pp. x–xi.

4. “Today and Tomorrow,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 7 February 1952, cited in Swain, *Wilderness Defender*, p. 219.

In 1943, president of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society Alexander Hamilton presented medals to Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, National Park Service assistant director Arthur E. Demaray, and Harlean James, of the Interior Department's Historic American Buildings Survey. Park Service Photo



Department building in search of slackers. Horace M. Albright, director of the Park Service during Ickes' first months on duty and frequently in later contact with the secretary, called him "the meanest man who ever sat in a Cabinet office in Washington."⁵

Albright and Ickes nevertheless had a high regard for each other from the start. Ickes asked Albright, a key figure in the Park Service from its inception and director since 1929, to remain and gave him additional responsibilities as an advisor on departmental policy, administration, and reorganization. Albright guided the new secretary on weekend automobile trips to Civil War battlefields and other historic sites around Washington and made the most of such opportunities to heighten Ickes' awareness of Park Service concerns. The director had long sought to bring under his bureau the battlefield parks and the national monuments then administered by the departments of war and agriculture; he won over Ickes and personally obtained President Roosevelt's support for his plan, implemented during the summer of 1933.⁶ Ickes was further impressed by the 1935 Historic Sites Act, enacted after Albright had left the agency but with his active guidance and promotion. The secretary declared that this measure, which expressed a national policy for historic site preservation under Park Service leadership, gave him more pleasure than any previous development during his administration. Patriotism, he said, could best be taught through acquaintance with the great places of American

history: "The best way to teach youth is to show them how our ancestors lived."⁷

Despite his good experience with Albright, Ickes' suspicion of his inherited staff prejudiced him in favor of outside appointments to most positions. When Albright announced his intention to leave for private business in the summer of 1933, he recommended as his replacement Arno B. Cammerer, his associate director. Ickes resisted, but when his outside choice—Newton B. Drury—proved unavailable, he went along with Cammerer.⁸

The new director's standing was later recalled by one who worked under him: "A far better than average administrator, a man of deep devotion to the parks and to the employees of the Service, and an exceptionally conscientious public servant, Cammerer had the misfortune, soon after he became director, to incur Ickes' disfavor."⁹ Ickes' disfavor lasted until Cammerer left the directorship, his health broken, seven years later.

Underlying their relationship was a fundamental personality conflict: Ickes detested Cammerer's ingratiating "'pat on the back' approach" and his "bland, unassertive administrative style." Ickes regularly insulted Cammerer before the director's subordinates in episodes to which written records do scant justice. "I was particularly rough on Cammerer," the secretary confided to his diary after one such incident

5. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. 359; author's interview with Chatelain, 9 March 1973; Swain, *Wilderness Defender*, pp. 218, 250.

6. Swain, *Wilderness Defender*, pp. 219–21, 224–25; Horace M. Albright, *Origins of National Park Service Administration of Historic Sites* (Philadelphia: Eastern National Park and Monument Association, 1971), p. 23.

7. Minutes, Secretary of the Interior's Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments, 13–14 February 1936, National Park Service, Cooperative Activities Division, Washington, D.C.

8. Swain, *Wilderness Defender*, p. 231. Drury preferred to retain his job as executive secretary of the Save-the-Redwoods League at this time, but became director in 1940; see footnote 15.

9. S. Herbert Evison, "The National Park Service: Conservator of America's Scenic and Historic Heritage" (typescript in National Park Service, History Division, Washington, D.C., 1964), p. 30.



Arno B. Cammerer became director of the National Park Service in 1933 at the recommendation of his predecessor, Horace M. Albright, but over the opposition of Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes. National Park Service photo

involving a land appraisal report that appeared to involve wrongdoing. "As usual, he sat by my desk vigorously chewing gum in an openmouthed manner. I asked him who was responsible for his bureau and when he acknowledged that he was, I told him the facts seemed to prove what I had charged him with some time ago, namely, that he is in total ignorance of what goes on in the Park Service." On another occasion, Ickes recorded, "I had Cammerer in the other day to give him hell. . . . Before I got through with him I told him that he is a misfit in his job and that I had no confidence in his ability."¹⁰

He tried no harder to veil his contempt in the curt formal memoranda he fired off to the director. One such, in toto:

Mr. Marx has just brought in copies of your "Historic National Parks and Monuments" poster. I do not like it.¹¹

This unhappy association could have spelled disaster to the Park Service organization. Fortunately for the agency, Ickes respected assistant directors Arthur E. Demaray and Conrad L. Wirth, and Horace Albright maintained diplomatic liaison with the secretary and his old bureau. However, even these relationships were not without rough moments.irate memoranda came to Demaray as well, such as that commenting on a speech drafted for Roosevelt's use at a cornerstone-laying ceremony:

10. Donald C. Swain, "The National Park Service and the New Deal, 1933-1940," *Pacific Historical Review* 41 (August 1972): 315; *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, 3 vols. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 2:584; Ickes' typescript diary (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division), 3 December 1938, p. 3067; 5 March 1939, p. 3265; and 16 September 1939, p. 3725.

11. Memorandum dated 8 May 1935, Department of the Interior, Office of the Secretary, Parks, Reservations, and Antiquities Administrative File, Box 6, Record Group 48, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Administrative File).

. . . in no circumstance would I present to the President such a draft as this. It is inaccurate in certain of its facts, the English is poor, the construction involved, and it is totally lacking in interest. The best that can be said for it is that it is trite.¹²

In 1936, Ickes tried to appoint an outsider as assistant director responsible for the Park Service's historical programs in national parks and monuments. Without regard to civil service procedures, he wanted to replace Verne Chatelain, who had passed the required examination and was acting in the position. Albright incurred Ickes' wrath by informing the Civil Service Commission of the violation. Ickes' man did not get the job, but in what Albright later called "one of his meanest acts," the secretary prevented Chatelain from getting it either.¹³

Such words and acts might have broken the unity and morale of other organizations, but Ickes found the personal loyalties and esprit de corps of the Park Service staff difficult to overcome. The agency was especially resistant to his intelligence-gathering methods. "Ever since I came here I have been trying to pound it into the heads of members of the staff that they should come to me direct with any information that reflected on the administration of the Department," he wrote in 1939. "I have had particular difficulty with the Park Service because the bureaucracy there is so well established that no one down the line dares to go over the heads of his immediate superiors and bring to me important information."¹⁴ Upset over the land appraisal report, he planned "considerable shaking up in the Park Service." Later that year, "thoroughly persuaded that I cannot go along much longer with Cammerer," he successively considered Robert Moses and Gerard Swope for the director's job. He finally settled on Newton B. Drury of California, executive secretary of the Save-the-Redwoods League, who met his requirements of "new blood and a strong man."¹⁵

Like his browbeaten predecessor, Newton Drury found his chief exceedingly difficult to please. During World War II he successfully fought most pressures to put park resources at the disposal of the national defense effort. Yet Ickes later damned him for insufficient zeal in combating proposals—never implemented—to log Sitka spruce in Olympic National Park for airplane manufacture.¹⁶ At war's end the secretary, in apparent contradiction to stands taken earlier,

12. Undated memorandum, Administrative File, Box 7.

13. Swain, *Wilderness Defender*, pp. 249-50; Albright letter to the author, 14 March 1973.

14. Ickes, *Secret Diary*, 2:583.

15. *Ibid.*, 2:585; 3:9, 72. Roosevelt warned Ickes of Moses' disregard for law: "You would get awake in the middle of every night and wonder what Bob Moses was doing and how he was doing it" (quoted in Ickes, *Secret Diary*, 3:9). Swope, ex-president of General Electric, accepted a new position before Ickes could approach him. Drury had declined Ickes' offer of the same position in 1933.

16. Numerous letters in the Newton B. Drury file, container 55, Ickes Papers, provide evidence of Ickes' hostility to Drury.

faulted Drury for an overly restrictive approach to public use. Horace Albright “thought that Drury was being an impossibilist with respect to our National Park and Monument policies,” Ickes recorded after a meeting with the former director in July 1945. “I told him that I agreed with him and that I had already widened out the policy. I don’t believe that our National Parks and Monuments can be made too exclusive although from the first I have opposed putting too many highways through the Parks. After all, we need a large measure of public support for our Parks and we can’t get this and at the same time build up a Chinese wall around them.”¹⁷

In 1951, five years after Ickes’ return to private life, Drury left his post after unsuccessfully opposing Secretary Oscar L. Chapman’s decision to allow construction of a dam (never built) in Dinosaur National Monument. The *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and other papers editorially praised his stand and regretted his departure. Not so Harold Ickes, who vindictively attacked Drury’s character and conservationist credentials in letters to the *Times* and *Post*, to fellow conservationists, and to Governor Earl Warren of California, who was set to hire Drury as chief of the state’s Division of Beaches and Parks. Warren was unpersuaded by Ickes’ vendetta and gave Drury the job.¹⁸

17. Ickes, typescript diary, 28 July 1945, p. 9910.

18. Drury file, Ickes Papers.



Park Service director Newton B. Drury (center) on a boat trip at Shasta Lake in May 1945, with (left to right) Sierra Club president Duncan McDuffie, Park Service official Major O. A. Tomlinson, and author Aubrey Drury.

Park Service Photo



Ickes blocked the appointment of Park Service historian Verne Chatelain (center) to another important post within the Park Service in 1936. Seated are Waldo Gifford Leland (left), eminent historian, and Herman Bumpus of the Interior Department.

Park Service Photo

Confrontation with the Forest Service

The longstanding rivalry between the Park Service and the Agriculture Department’s Forest Service was tailor-made for Ickes’ combative nature. The decade-older Forest Service had opposed creation of the Park Service in 1916, believing that it could handle the national parks itself and foreseeing more new parks carved from its domain. Two notable battles before the 1930s involved the establishment or enlargement, at Forest Service expense, of national parks at the Grand Canyon and Crater Lake. During his administration Ickes joined the fight for Olympic National Park, established in 1938 from national forest land over the bitter opposition of the Forest Service and timber interests.¹⁹ He was instrumental in a similar Park Service victory two years later when Congress created Kings Canyon National Park. The epic park struggle of the Ickes years came over a move to add Wyoming’s Jackson Hole region to Grand Teton National Park. The secretary induced Roosevelt to proclaim Jackson Hole a national monument by executive order in 1943, but the Forest Service and Wyoming interests effectively prevented park administration of the area until after the war.²⁰

19. See Elmo R. Richardson, “Olympic National Park: Twenty Years of Controversy,” *Forest History* 12 (April 1968): 6–15; and Ben W. Twight, *Organizational Values and Political Power: The Forest Service Versus the Olympic National Park* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

20. See Robert W. Righter, *Crucible for Conservation: The Creation of Grand Teton National Park* (Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1982).



Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace (right) and Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes (left) clashed over which department should include the Forest Service. Harry A. Slattery (center) was Ickes' personal assistant from 1933 to 1938.

FHS photo collection

Relations between the Park Service and Forest Service were not improved by Ickes' persistent attempts to add the latter to his domain. Horace Albright had wanted such a transfer since the early 1920s, and he had little difficulty selling Ickes on the idea of a "department of conservation" encompassing the Forest Service and other natural resource management bureaus then outside the Interior Department.²¹ Sparring between Ickes and Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace began amid the general preparation for executive branch reorganization at the outset of the New Deal. Wallace called on Ickes to negotiate a transfer of the Park Service to the Agriculture Department; Ickes countered by bidding for the Forest Service. "I argued that it was time that the stigma under which this Department has been resting ever since the [Richard A.] Ballinger days and down through [Albert B.] Fall should be removed and the Department given a chance to function so as to merit a return to public confidence," Ickes wrote in his diary. "I added that National Parks were particularly interesting to me and that fifty percent of my interest in this Department would be gone if they were taken away."²²

Ickes approached Roosevelt with the idea of taking the Forest Service in March 1934. The president feared opposition from friends of the Forest Service outside the government—the "National Forest Organization," to use Ickes' term—but Ickes foresaw adequate congressional support. "[Roosevelt] went into the matter in some detail and admitted that Forestry should be in this Department," Ickes recorded. "In the end he said that if I could bring it about, it would be quite all right so far as he was concerned." As a first move Ickes petitioned Congress to change the Interior Department's name to the Department of Conservation and Works (he was already administrator of public works as well as secretary of the interior).

21. Swain, *Wilderness Defender*, p. 222.

22. Ickes, *Secret Diary*, 1:21.

While expressing sympathy, Roosevelt would not openly endorse Ickes' bill to this end, however; and notwithstanding personal assurances to Ickes, he did not prevent Wallace and the Forest Service from lobbying against it. When a House committee killed the bill in 1935, Ickes was bitter: "The cold fact is that I don't think the President has put any pressure behind this bill at all. . . . In his heart I think the President does want it, but apparently he doesn't want it enough to help me get it." Roosevelt's lack of genuine support then and during Ickes' subsequent attempts to change the name of his department and acquire the Forest Service depressed the secretary and contributed to his frequent resignations, which the president always refused.²³

Ickes' Conservation Philosophy

Insofar as Ickes had a conservation philosophy before becoming secretary of the interior, it was the utilitarian view of natural resource conservation for use promoted by his old friend (and later enemy) Gifford Pinchot, Forest Service chief from 1898 until 1910. The Park Service's aesthetic approach to conservation and its expansionist tendencies often brought it to blows with the Forest Service, although the issue was frequently whether the latter agency should be transferred from the Agriculture Department to the Interior Department. Horace Albright quickly helped Ickes to attain an appreciation of the aesthetic position; Albright's influence may have accounted for Ickes' early diary entries expressing a special interest in the parks.²⁴

Ickes' position on park roads illustrated both his distrust of Park Service leadership and his move toward a "purist" approach to aesthetic conservation. "If I had my way about national parks, I would create one without a road in it," he declared early in his administration. "I would have it impenetrable forever to automobiles, a place where man would not try to improve upon God." In 1934, he stripped Cammerer of authority to approve new roads in the parks, directing that all road plans be submitted to him personally. "Frankly, I think the Park Service was going entirely too far in this direction and I have been doing my best to hold it down," he wrote a supporter of his antiroad posture.²⁵

Ickes resisted other developments and activities that the agency traditionally promoted to foster increased public use and thus political support of the parks. "I have told them [Park Service officials] that we do not want any Coney

23. *Ibid.*, 1:151, 328, 347, 417; 3:162–63; Richard Polenberg, "The Great Conservation Contest," *Forest History* 10 (January 1967): 22.

24. Swain, "National Park Service and the New Deal," 314; Ickes, *Secret Diary*, 1:21–23.

25. *New York Times*, 14 May 1933, cited in Swain, "National Park Service and the New Deal," 330; memorandum to Cammerer, 21 September 1934, Administrative File, Box 6; letter to Robert E. Wood, 19 March 1936, *ibid.*, Box 7.



A view of Mt. Olympus, in western Washington state, in 1935. As secretary of the interior, Harold Ickes strongly supported the creation of Olympic National Park in this area, against the opposition of timber interests and the U.S. Forest Service. The park was established in 1938. U.S. Forest Service photo

Islands and that the parks are for those who will appreciate them and not merely for hordes of tourists who dash through them at break-neck speed in order to be able to say that they have been to Glacier or Yellowstone or some other park," he wrote in 1938. He thought museums had "no place in the parks at all" and took a dim view of interpretive programs: "We have too much of a disposition not to allow people freely to enjoy the parks for what they can get out of them for the refreshment of their spirits and the good of their souls. Our guides insist on describing the beauties and the wonders of nature in trite and uninspired words. Nothing makes me want to commit murder so much as to have someone break in on a reverential contemplation of nature in which I may be indulging by giving me a lot of statistical or descriptive information relating to what I am looking at."²⁶ He disliked the commercial influence of private park concessions: "I have said more than once, before Committees of Congress and elsewhere, that we ought to buy out, take over and run ourselves all of the tourist activities in the parks."²⁷

Consistent with Ickes' attitude toward park roads and museums was his advocacy of development-free wilderness areas. "I shall welcome it if the Congress of the United States will define and set standards for wilderness national parks, as well as provide for wilderness areas to be proclaimed, and similarly protected by law in other national parks," he stated in 1939. He was particularly eager to maintain portions of the proposed Kings Canyon, Olympic, Everglades, and Isle Royale national parks in a primitive state.²⁸ Not until the Wilderness Act of 1964, however, did Congress set an explicit national policy for wilderness protection.

26. Letter to Jens Jensen, 18 March 1938, container 222, Ickes Papers, Library of Congress.

27. Ickes, typescript diary, 16 September 1939, p. 3726.

28. See *Science* for 24 February 1939: 171; Swain, "National Park Service and the New Deal," 330.

Personal Concerns and Social Issues

Ickes' interest in the parks insured his personal involvement in most significant issues and decisions affecting the National Park Service. Despite his general dislike for park roads, as public works administrator he implemented Senator Harry F. Byrd's proposal for a scenic road linking Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains national parks. The Blue Ridge Parkway was added to the National Park System in 1936.

Ickes also worked for another new type of park—the national seashore. "When we look up and down the ocean fronts of America, we find that everywhere they are passing behind the fences of private ownership," he declared in 1938. "When we have reached the point that a nation of 125,000,000 people cannot set foot upon the thousands of miles of beaches that border the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, except by permission of those who monopolize the ocean front, then I say it is the prerogative and duty of the Federal and State Governments to step in and acquire, not a swimming beach here and there, but solid blocks of ocean front hundreds of miles in length."²⁹ Congress authorized the first national seashore at Cape Hatteras in 1937 but the Park Service did not acquire the necessary lands until the 1950s.

Occasionally Ickes ended up on the "wrong" side of a Park Service battle, such as that with the Bureau of Reclamation over an aqueduct tunnel beneath Rocky Mountain National Park. The tunnel proposal appeared to park supporters as a threat to the park's natural values, and with Ickes' support the Park Service refused to allow the bureau to begin its surveys. Congress prescribed the tunnel, however, and Ickes yielded to what ultimately proved a minimal intrusion.³⁰

29. 10 October 1938, speech quoted in John Ise, *Our National Park Policy: A Critical History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), pp. 426–27.

30. Swain, "National Park Service and the New Deal," 322; Ise, *Our National Park Policy*, pp. 434–35.



As Park Service director in the 1930s, Horace M. Albright had a less stormy relationship with Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes than did many of his successors. Albright, shown here in 1957, later remembered Ickes as “the best Secretary of the Interior who ever held that office.”

FHS photo collection

Ickes’ official activity on behalf of the parks was reinforced by his appreciation for their natural and historic features. In 1934, he toured several western parks and recorded his impressions in his diary: “To contemplate nature, magnificently garbed as it is in this country, is to restore peace to the mind, even if it does make one realize how small and petty and futile the human individual really is.” Of the sequoias in Yosemite he wrote, “They made a great impression on my imagination with their strength and endurance and majesty.” “I love flowers,” he wrote Cammerer the day after the director took office. “If some could be sent to my office without additional trouble or expense, I would appreciate it.” Two Florida trips aroused his enthusiasm for the birds of the Everglades and for Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas: “This fine old historic fort ought to be maintained for all time.” Unattractive sights did not escape him either. Spotting refuse in the Lincoln Memorial reflecting pool, he wrote the superintendent of the National Capital Parks: “Cannot something be done to clean up this pool and keep it clean? Offensive water is worse than no water at all.”³¹

Ickes spent several vacations at Acadia National Park in Maine, occupying a house reserved for top government officials. When Ickes, members of the president’s advisory “brain trust,” or other VIPs were in residence, the public was barred from crossing the property. A Boston attorney who summered near the park was annoyed by this arrangement and in a series of letters pressed Ickes for the names of occupants, their lengths of stay, and the costs involved.

31. Ickes, *Secret Diary*, 1:175–76; 2:116–17; memorandum to Cammerer, 11 August 1933, Administrative File, Box 6; memorandum to C. Marshall Finnan, 10 November 1937, *ibid.*, Box 7.

Known for his opposition to special privilege, Ickes reacted defensively to the inquiry with the kind of ad hominem attack for which he was famous:

My dear Mr. Hale:

It is too bad that your business has not yet picked up to the extent that you still have so much time to devote to a microscopic examination of fly specks. Every man to his own hobby. . . .

I note your sneering reference to “brain trust.” Apparently you are one of those who do not believe in the use of brains in the administration of public affairs. Your resentment can be understood, but this is the first intimation that I have had that you are yourself an aspirant for public office.³²

Ickes’ acerbity coexisted with a liberal outlook on social issues, expressed in several of his park-related actions. His admiration for Jane Addams led him to propose that Big Bend National Park in Texas, together with corresponding land across the Rio Grande, be renamed Jane Addams International Park. He found Roosevelt “enthusiastically in favor of the proposition” and Vice President James N. Garner also agreeable, but Texas Senator Tom Connally and other essential parties were opposed and the suggestion came to naught.³³ His progressive attitude on race relations was exemplified by his provision for Marian Anderson to use the Lincoln Memorial for a concert after the Daughters of the American Revolution refused her the use of Constitution Hall in 1939. Ickes personally introduced her to the throngs assembled before the memorial and around its reflecting pool. Less heralded were his actions two years later when he met with blacks who had been harassed upon attempting to use a Park Service golf course in Washington. Ickes upheld their right to play there, ordering the park police to protect them and arrest any disturbers.

Harold Ickes’ relations with the National Park Service and its parks reveal in microcosm his multifaceted nature. “Stout-hearted and incorruptible, he was at his best a superb public servant,” and he was at his best with the national parks. In 1973, Horace Albright, who knew them all since Franklin K. Lane in the Wilson administration, argued that “Harold L. Ickes was the best Secretary of the Interior who ever held that office.” At the same time Albright recalled his vindictiveness. Those he punished may be forgiven less balanced appraisals; Verne Chatelain referred to Ickes as “a stinker.”³⁴ Marian Anderson and those for whom he broke racial barriers would have a different view. He was able; he was petty; he was compassionate; he was cruel. He was what all men can be—just more so. ▲

32. Letter to Richard W. Hale, 6 March 1936, Administrative File, Box 7.

33. Ickes, *Secret Diary*, 1:385–86; Administrative File, Box 7.

34. Schlesinger, *Coming of the New Deal*, p. 283; Albright letter to the author; Chatelain interview (1973).