

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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THE ECONOMIC DESTINY OF THE  
NATIONAL PARKS

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AN ADDRESS

BY

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## ECONOMIC DESTINY OF THE NATIONAL PARKS.

By J. HORACE MCFARLAND, President of the American Civic Association.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, the American Civic Association early in its existence saw the importance of considering that national parks were actually national parks, and not merely incidental parcels of lands set aside by quite incidental legislation, and with a most fragmentary relation to the General Government. At the time we began to agitate the matter there was not a desk in Washington which belonged wholly to the national-park work; indeed, there was not more than a third of a desk in any department relative to the nation's park possessions.

Even before we began with the national parks as such, dealing with those already established, we thought it our duty to prevent aggression. It was rather early in Mr. Roosevelt's administration that I received a letter one day from a good woman who wanted to know if something could not be done to prevent the building of a trolley line around the rim of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. I thought something could. So did Mr. Pinchot. So did Mr. Roosevelt. And the Grand Canyon immediately thereafter was, by Executive order, declared a national monument. The trolley line is not yet there.

Mr. Roosevelt was not addressed on the subject of national parks because the broad conception was not yet in our minds, but when Mr. Taft came into office as President we began, very early in the administration, an effort which brought us into close connection with the Secretary of the Interior. We went to Mr. Ballinger with the thought that the time had come to give the national parks a definite status. He quickly saw the idea, and the first draft of the national parks bill ever offered in Congress was prepared in the office of Mr. Ballinger, and submitted for review to a meeting of the American Civic Association. Every suggestion we made was immediately and fully adopted. That bill was offered by Senator Smoot in the Senate, and by Mr. Davidson in the House, both then firm friends of the parks, and still friends of the national parks.

The essential thing in this legislation was that there should be a declaration as to what a national park was; what it was for. Frederick Law Olmsted it was who phrased that definition, and with all the mutations of the national park legislation, his phrasing has

remained. It has been the only thing we were unwilling to give up. Our idea of an advisory council we had to let go, but we have never been willing to see the declaration as to the purposes of the national parks eliminated from the bill, which is the reason we feel that the bill which was passed in August last is worth while.

The American Civic Association kept on following the national park effort after Mr. Ballinger resigned. When Mr. Fisher came in, our relations became closer, and we followed throughout the administration vigorously and insistently. I had the honor to write the words relating to national parks which appeared in one President's message, and it was a pleasure to find that the President of the United States could see that the national parks were worth bothering about.

When Mr. Lane came into office, Mr. Watrous and myself did not allow much time to elapse until we saw him, and I well remember that on the 15th of March, 1913, when we called on him, he said that he had not had time to look into the matter seriously, but the idea of a national park service struck him favorably, and that if the railroads were conducted in the same manner as the national parks, no man would be brave enough to ride from Washington to Baltimore.

There was another relation the American Civic Association has had to the national parks which may properly be mentioned at this time. When Mr. Roosevelt called that memorable conference on national resources in the White House in May, 1908, I had the honor to be present and to deliver an address on "The value of natural scenery as promoting patriotism," and I do not think that in connection with whatever I have done in a public way there has ever come to me more satisfaction than I felt, after finishing that short address, when the venerable old Secretary of Agriculture, Mr. Wilson, said, "Those are good words, my boy. The world will forget what the rest of us say here, but the women and the children will read and remember those words."

Mr. Yard has asked me, however, to address myself to "The economic destiny of the national parks." It is rather a large order for a 15-minute address. I will merely endeavor to give you the headings, so that you may think it out for yourselves.

The American Civic Association has long since ceased to be interested in that unfortunate slogan "The city beautiful." We believe in efficiency, in accomplishing something. The beauty will come, and the thing that is not really useful is never beautiful.

We have long known that recreation spells efficiency in communities. I would like to ask that you give consideration to a few thoughts in that direction. We want to consider the use of the national parks as playgrounds.

I want to pour that single word "play" into your minds, if I may. Perhaps it does not seem dignified to you. It means something just the same. I have ventured to formulate a definition which I should like to have you consider. The lexicographers do not give it, but it is this: "To engage in exercise or occupation of any kind for diversion, amusement, or recreation."

That's the kind of play we believe in, and the kind we expect to continue to promote.

There is good reason for considering this angle of the subject. It has been worked out by a most able park superintendent, George A. Parker, of Hartford, Conn., that there is a definite amount of time spent by each human being in play. He assumes that the time not occupied in eating, sleeping, or working is playtime, and he insists that it amounts to at least five hours every day for every individual. If you will challenge the statement in your minds, you will be rather inclined, I think, to say that Mr. Parker's estimate is low. However, I ask you to accept for the moment the statement that five hours per day per person is being used for something else than eating, sleeping, or working. When that time is added up for the Nation of 110,000,000 people it becomes an incomprehensible sum of time—about 63,000 years—to-day, and to-morrow, and every other day the recreational expenditure of the United States of America. We do not control it at all; it happens, whether or not. We have little to do with it, save that we can influence it; but we can not make it longer or shorter. We are tending all the time to make it longer as we reduce the hours of labor, and that movement is hardly likely to be stopped.

Further, we spend money in this playtime, and Mr. Parker has figured that play averages us 2 cents an hour. That does not seem much, but when you pile it up for the United States of America, with the time used also, looking at 63,000 years a day and at \$11,000,000 a day spent in money, doing something else than eating, sleeping, or working, the splendor of the problem which is before this present organization fully appears.

This expenditure of time and money is always going on. We have only such influence as we may choose to exert, but we can not stop it. As I have said, I believe that the use of this play time ought to be beneficial, and that if it is we should be making a better nation rather than a worse nation all the time. The play time and expenditure includes the time and money used in churches, saloons, theaters, libraries, and everything not related to eating, sleeping, and working. There is not time here to go into the details, but they are awe-inspiring as to the divisions of the recreational expenditures of the people of this country, and I can not recommend to you a more wholesome survey than that of the play problem in your own home community.

See how it is spending its play time and play money, and see how infinitesimal is the amount of time diverted and the amount of money used for good.

We believe, then, in the American Civic Association, that we should do our utmost to divert some of the play time and some of the play money toward the upbuilding of the people, and away from the down-pulling of the people. Now, public recreation may, in a general way, be separated, as it may relate to parks—the city parks, playgrounds, parkways, and sometimes I might say the county parks, which are intimately related to where we live. These provide “first aid to the injured.” They give the first chance to see the sky, and to feel the influence of a clean, pure breeze. They do not always do that, for I have seen playgrounds in cities as dirty as they could be, but the general influence of the smaller parks and playgrounds is that of first aid to the injured. The broader areas, the State parks and the national parks, serve a different purpose. They reach after the spiritual side of the matter, and that side is the most important to the nation, because in it lies the whole impulse of patriotism, on which the safety of the nation depends.

I have sometimes asked audiences whether they have ever heard of a desire to take up arms in defense of a machine shop. Of course, you can hire guards to defend a machine shop; but do you ever hear of people springing to the defense of a town as unlovely, for instance, as Hoboken; or could the State of Pennsylvania be aroused to defend the smoke, filth, and dirt of Pittsburgh? No, not a bit of it! Often the man who made his money creating the ugly conditions goes traveling, and when he begins to boast he says very little about his smoking factory or his dirty towns. He exclaims about the beauty of his neighborhood, his State, his country. The whole basis of patriotism is love of country. Without it there is no safety.

We can not expect people to go sightseeing in these lavish days and undergo discomforts. If the national parks are not made comfortable as well as comfortably accessible they will not be used, and an important means of promoting patriotism will lie dormant. If the parks are made easy for the people, they will be used extensively. I have had much to do, in my own park experience, with the intensive use of city parks, and have helped to work out certain formulæ as to how to get the most people to make the most park visits. In Harrisburg, where I live, there are about 74,000 people, who make annually around seventeen hundred and fifty thousand visits to the parks. All we have done, Mr. Chairman, is to make the parks in Harrisburg accessible and comfortable. God made them beautiful.

Another of the things that could be done in the direction I am trying to indicate is to increase the number and proximity of these

parks. If there was on the wall here a map of the United States the national parks would show as only little spots, mere trifles; and they are so far off. I have just come in 38 or 40 hours from the shadow of one of the newest and the most accessible national park—the Rocky Mountain National Park. I had my eyes on Longs Peak on Sunday morning about 9 o'clock, and it has taken all the time since to get to Washington. It is too far off.

The national parks are not close enough; there are not enough of them. Why should the park center be so far beyond the center of population? Why should we in the East have to spend about \$150 to get the first whiff from the pines of the Rocky Mountain National Park, the first glimpse of its snows? Are we thus penalized because we happen to live where the most people live? No, Mr. Chairman, the parks must be brought close to the people. We who work out the problems of putting the park in competition with the hospital and graveyard and jail know that it is never safe in a community to reckon on the women and children and deficient men going more than a quarter of a mile to a park. We know that we must put the parks in reach of the people.

If national parks are worth while they must be where more people can reach them without large expenditure. It would be a good investment for the United States to make a park survey of the entire country and to indicate certain areas as intended to be national parks to serve the Eastern States, others to serve the Middle States, and the Northern States and the Southern States.

I insist the time must soon come when instead of having national parks created by accident or through the devotion of some interested man we must have a system of national parks all over the land in order to accomplish the upbuilding of patriotism.

We want also unification in national park management. It is now the fact that there are three departments handling national parks—an obvious absurdity. If the departments do not soon fix it up between themselves, some independent agency like the American Civic Association, not caring whose toes it treads on, will need to try to eliminate some of the duplication. It would be a good job to put all the Federal departments into better relation. It would be doing a great thing for them and for the people.

Congress now has spent a gigantic sum on the national parks—nearly a quarter of a cent per person a year. If it would spend a half cent per year per person for parks, I think Mr. Mather would think the millennium had arrived. And if 1 cent per person per year was provided, he would be unable to comprehend all that could be done for our national parks.

Yet Philadelphia spends \$1.40 per person for park purposes; Milwaukee, 93 cents; Pittsburgh, 53 cents. Why should not the United States spend a whole penny for each of us annually in our national parks?

Let me put it in another way. The United States spends the gigantic sum of \$700 a day on its vast areas of marvelous natural wonders; Philadelphia \$655 on her little bit of most inadequate park area; Milwaukee gets away with \$1,076; and even smoky Pittsburgh spends \$862 per day on her parks, which Pittsburgh knows is better than extending cemeteries and providing more policemen.

We need extension of the sort of national park promotion we have recently had. Indeed the kind of management that has been going on in the last 18 months in the National Parks Service is so near business management that I do not see how it can have happened in Washington. Here are Mr. Mather and Mr. Yard, business men, actually managing national parks as if they were a business enterprise. It is extraordinary; but I wish it might be extended, and that we might have a whole lot more of it, and that they might be given money, much real money to do the job, such as Mr. Schwab would give them if they were working for the Bethlehem Steel Corporation.

I am not throwing mud at Congress, because Congress does the best it knows how, and we who elect its Members are the responsible persons. When we get around to having a budget in the United States and working with it like any business man, then we will get plenty of money for parks; but I do not want to wait so long. This appropriation of 1 cent apiece for every inhabitant of the Nation ought to come right away, this session; and it should be an automatic, continuing, annual appropriation of 1 cent apiece. That would mean the automatic increase of the support in proportion to the population. There are American cities in which it is written in the organic law that not less than 1 mill of taxation shall be spent on the parks, and the park authorities in those cities can really plan, because they have something to plan for and something to plan with.

I do not think that what I am now about to say will be popular, but I must say it. In the management of the parks I think the Government should do the whole job. I see no room whatever for the delegation of the doing of anything in a national park. Nothing should be sold, except as sold at cost by the Government to the people. Why? The Government can buy in the cheapest manner and has indefinite credit. It pays no rent or taxes. It needs no profit. It needs to pay no interest on its investment. Naturally, therefore, it can render the same service at far less cost. If the Gov-

ernment can be trusted to send our letters the Government ought to be trusted to provide us with beds and food in the national parks. If the Government can be trusted to do the things it does through the Army and the Navy it should be trusted to run automobile stages for us in the national parks.

I do not mean to criticize what has been done. I am full of admiration of what I have seen in the parks, and of those now doing park service on concessions; but the very fact that it is good business for them makes it bad business for the people. The only proper way is the handling of the functions of the people by the people. There are States that do that and cities, also. George A. Parker, whom I cited, is responsible for a most excellent and epigrammatic definition of the relation of service and business. He says: "Business is to get all you can for what you give, and service is to give all you can for what you get."

And that's the answer. There is no possible reason why we should not have the cheapest and best service. This man Parker has been trying in Hartford to sell things at actual cost. He can not do it. He has been unable to avoid making a profit in selling milk and chocolate and other things that he is permitted to sell, because he can not get the units down low enough not to make a profit.

I hope you are familiar with the recreation centers on the South Side and West Side in Chicago. These are courageously run by the park authorities, things being sold at cost. They are magnificently handled because they are done for the people by the people. I would not want to be long in the company of one who says the people can not be trusted to do these things. Municipal government is no longer what Mr. Brice said it was 20 years ago—"The one conspicuous failure of the American system."

I go back to my starting point. "The economic destiny of national parks" is to promote patriotism; but there is another aspect to it. If we want to be a little bit calculating—and Americans are sometimes said to be a little sordid—then, the economic destiny of the national parks is to bring a tremendous amount of money into the United States from abroad. I wonder if you realize that the one great natural wonder of the United States which is most attractive, and which is not yet safe until it becomes a big national park—Niagara Falls—is estimated to produce \$30,000,000 a year of travel revenue outside of any power use that has been taken from it. Niagara Falls is easily accessible and is visited by 1,500,000 people each year.

There is one truly tremendous travel revenue possibility for the United States—a possibility beside which the doings of Switzerland in attracting visitors might sink into insignificance. Indeed, Switz-

erland could be lost in Rocky Mountain Park. If we are willing to provide the conditions and facilities, the handling of the national parks becomes a purely economic proposition: an investment, not an expense.

But the greatest of all park products, Mr. Chairman and ladies and gentlemen, is the product of civilization, the product of patriotism, the product of real preparedness, the product of manhood and womanhood, unobtainable anywhere else than in the broad, open areas which alone the Nation can provide. There, ladies and gentlemen, is a product which we must promote and which we must have, and everything we can do and everything we can spend which will increase the facilities of the United States for intensifying our all too feeble national spirit for increasing the fervor and vigor of our spirit of devotion to the country—every such thing we can do is thoroughly worth while. That is then, ladies and gentlemen, the “economic destiny of the national parks” of the United States.



