

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA – PRESENT AT THE CREATION

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In March, 1915, the University of California hosted the Third National Park Conference, a meeting of prominent conservationists, politicians and businessmen. That this conference was held on the campus in Berkeley symbolized the unusually close ties developing between the university and the national parks. By the early 20th century, the University of California was well established as the leading center of higher education in the West – the region that then contained almost all of the national park units. In the next few decades, many top National Park Service personnel would be graduates of the University of California. And, in association with the school, the Park Service would initiate some of its most important and lasting professional programs, including landscape architecture, forestry, interpretation and wildlife management.

Franklin K. Lane, the secretary of

the interior who helped secure the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916, had studied at Berkeley. And three of the first four Park Service directors – Stephen Mather, Horace Albright and Newton Drury – graduated from the University of California (as did the most recent former director, William Penn Mott, Jr.). It was Mather, however, who fostered close ties with the university and was most responsible for the school's extensive involvement with the national parks.

Under Mather, landscape architecture became a dominant profession in the National Park Service, due in part to the efforts of Thomas Vint, a University of California graduate. Vint assumed leadership of landscape architecture about 1927; and throughout his long and influential career, he employed a number of the university's graduates, who contributed to the strength of this program.

In the mid-1920s, Mather established a forestry division under Berkeley graduate Ansel Hall, who simultaneously served as chief naturalist, in charge of education (i.e. natural history and interpretation). For a time, the Park Service's field office for forestry and education was located in Hilgard Hall on the University of California campus.

In 1930, Dr. Harold Bryant, a University of California graduate, assumed overall supervision of the education and forestry programs. Partly in association with the university, Bryant had had long experience with the nature study program at Yosemite. Also under Bryant (and located in Hilgard Hall) was the Division of Wildlife, a newly established office headed by George Wright. Wright and several of his research staff had graduated from the University of California. They were deeply influenced by the ecological thinking of Joseph Grinnell, head of the University's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology.

By the mid-1930s, most functions of the Berkeley field offices had been transferred to Washington, DC, thus weakening ties to the university. Yet later, another California graduate and student of Grinnell's from the 1930s, Berkeley biology professor A. Starker Leopold, would achieve prominence with the Park Service as co-author of the 1963 *Wildlife Management in the National Parks*

(the *Leopold Report*), and then as the Service's chief scientist. Some of Leopold's students are among the Park Service's current-day scientists.

Since their early association, the university and the Park Service have individually grown, diversified and expanded their influence worldwide. Yet both institutions seem to have largely forgotten their once close ties. Typifying this lack of institutional memory, the university's library holdings do not include *The George Wright Forum*, a journal named in honor of one of the school's own graduates who greatly influenced the Park Service's early science programs. And at Hilgard Hall there is little awareness that this building once housed important field offices of incipient National Park Service professional programs.

The institutional ties ultimately proved more meaningful to the Park Service than to the university. While other schools (e.g. Colorado State University and Northern Arizona University) have since graduated many Park Service leaders, no other institution has had an impact comparable to that of the University of California. It was the University of California that was present at the creation and whose graduates contributed much of the visionary and intellectual leadership that led to the National Park Service's early and long-range success.