

The National Park System and the Historic American Past: A Brief Overview and Reflection

Richard West Sellars

Editor's note: What follows is the opening chapter in Richard West Sellars' history of cultural resource management in the national park system, in progress. It is intended as an introduction for readers who are not fully familiar with the breadth and depth of National Park Service involvement with historic preservation.

Then he told me—really ordered me—to ‘get busy.... Suppose you do something tomorrow about this.’

— *Former National Park Service Director Horace M. Albright, recalling a discussion with President Franklin D. Roosevelt*

The trip to Shenandoah

ON AN EARLY APRIL MORNING IN 1933, a heavily guarded motorcade carrying President Franklin D. Roosevelt made its way through the pastoral beauty of the Virginia Piedmont to the rugged mountains of Shenandoah National Park, about 90 miles west of Washington, D.C. Its destination was a rustic camp in the woods along the upper Rapidan River that Roosevelt wanted to inspect for use as a retreat from the constant pressure and stifling summer heat he would have to contend with in the nation's capital. His predecessor, Herbert Hoover, an avid trout fisherman, had built the rustic fishing camp beginning in the late 1920s. However, upon visiting the camp the newly inaugurated president, crippled by polio and dependent on leg braces and a wheelchair, found the terrain around the buildings too rough and decided against using the place. Nevertheless, Roosevelt, who loved automobile touring, thoroughly enjoyed the drive through the Virginia landscape on a beautiful spring day and the chance to relax and visit with friends, including several officials of his new administration. Eleanor Roosevelt had ridden up with her husband, and the new First Lady hosted a picnic at the Hoover camp. In the afternoon the motorcade headed back to Washington—a trip that would mark a decisive turning point in the historic preservation activities of the federal government, especially the National Park Service.

Interested also in inspecting Shenandoah National Park's high-mountain roadway, then under construction, Roosevelt invited the director of the National Park Service, Horace M. Albright, to join him in the presidential limousine for the return trip. Roosevelt was fascinat-



The President's Cabin at Rapidan Camp, ca. early 1930s. National Park Service photo, courtesy of Shenandoah National Park collections.

ed with the roadway (soon officially designated Skyline Drive)—a winding drive edged in places with low, picturesque guard walls made of rough-cut native stone. Scenic pull-outs provided spectacular views of wooded slopes and rolling farm country in the distance below. During the return to Washington, the president, pleased with the day and in a characteristically ebullient mood, talked at length with Albright about American history and about historic sites, especially those in Virginia and the District of Columbia, topics of great interest to both men.

The visit with Roosevelt was a rare opportunity for the Park Service director, but one he had prepared for. Even before the National Park Service was established as a bureau of the Department of the Interior in 1916, Albright and key members of Congress had envisioned the Park Service taking control of all federal lands set aside for their historical associations. They planned that the Park Service would be in charge of not only ancient southwestern Indian sites managed by the U.S. Forest Service, but also historic areas under the War Department, which oversaw Civil War battlefield parks and other historic sites, including those in the nation's capital. Sites that Albright had *especially* wanted included battlefield parks such as Shiloh, Gettysburg, and Vicksburg; plus the Forest Service's archeological areas in the Southwest. But the 1916 act did not turn these places over to the Park Service. And by 1933, Albright was increasingly certain that such places were not being managed satisfactorily enough to fulfill the American public's desire to see them and gain a better understanding of their history and significance. The Park Service itself was convinced that, given the experience it had gained in historic site management by 1933, it could oversee these

Stone guardrail under construction on Skyline Drive, early 1930s. National Park Service photo, courtesy of Shenandoah National Park collections.



places better than the existing caretakers. As Albright later put it, the National Park Service “coveted” these sites—it wanted them in the national park system.

It soon got them. During the return trip to Washington, Director Albright seized the chance to explain to the president the benefits of turning the supervision of these sites over to the Park Service. Roosevelt gave a surprisingly quick response. Deeply interested in American history and approving of the Park Service’s work at Shenandoah, he suddenly instructed Albright to draft a presidential executive order transferring the coveted areas to National Park Service control. In early June—almost two months to the day after the trip to the Hoover camp in Shenandoah—the president signed the executive order. In July, following further negotiations, he signed a second executive order providing a final list of those sites that were to be transferred, including more than forty historic and archeological sites in addition to a dozen predominantly natural areas. Roosevelt’s orders, which became effective August 10, 1933, decisively placed primary responsibility for federal historic preservation activities in the hands of the National Park Service.¹

By August 1933, the National Park Service had built its public status not on historic preservation, but primarily on its management of a number of large, spectacular national parks mostly in the West. Yellowstone, established in 1872, was the first, followed much later by such majestic parks as Sequoia, Yosemite, and Mount Rainier. These parks gained great renown, becoming geographical symbols of national identity and destination sites for thousands of tourists. The Park Service—much more than its management predecessors in the Department of the Interior—had worked diligently to attract people to the parks and to educate visitors about the areas’ natural history and special scenic features. To enable the public to see and enjoy the parks, the Park Service’s first director, Stephen T. Mather (Albright’s immediate predecessor) aggressively sought to develop roads, trails, camping areas, tour-bus systems, and many other facilities. Under Mather’s guidance, the parks continued to enjoy enthusiastic support from railroad companies, and then from automobile associations, all interested in promoting tourism to these extraordinarily scenic places.²



President Franklin D. Roosevelt visiting a CCC camp at Shenandoah, August 1933—about four months after his visit to the park with Horace Albright, described in the text. National Park Service photo, courtesy of Shenandoah National Park collections.

Still, the National Park Service's historic preservation responsibilities had become rather extensive even before President Roosevelt signed his executive orders in 1933. By that time, the Park Service was already managing about 20 archeological and historic areas, including Aztec Ruins and Bandelier in New Mexico, Scotts Bluff on the Oregon Trail in western Nebraska, and sites in the town of Sitka in Alaska Territory. Most of these parks had been established as "national monuments," not by Congress, but by presidential proclamation under authority of the 1906 Antiquities Act. Many of them were relatively small, encompassing far less acreage than any of the big scenic parks. With the chief exception of Mesa Verde National Park, the Park Service had paid little attention to these historic and archeological sites, given that many were not overwhelmingly scenic and had remained little-known to the American public. Yet archeological and historical investigations had begun, along with stabilization and restoration work on structures. But these parks had to compete for limited operating and development funds coming from Congress, and the bulk of the funding went to the increasingly popular large national parks that the Park Service had been striving to develop for the public. Building a park system required strong public support, so that parks with greater potential to attract and please visitors tended to receive higher funding. Still, Director Albright believed in the ultimate potential of the smaller national monuments to attract and inform the public. The Park Service would develop those areas when funding became more available.

Among the archeological and historic sites already managed by the Park Service in the West, only one was well on its way to becoming a national attraction. With its awe-inspiring cliff dwellings, Mesa Verde National Park, created by act of Congress in 1906 and located in southwestern Colorado, had gained wide recognition; and the Park Service increased the funding and attention that the park had received since shortly after its establishment. With the development of roads, a campground, museum, and other facilities, plus stabilization of some of the major cliff dwellings, this remote park proved it could draw substantial numbers of visitors.³

Also, the Park Service had become especially interested in acquiring historical parks in the more populous eastern United States. Between 1930 and early 1933, it gained three new parks representing the Colonial era and Revolutionary War: the George Washington Birth-

George Washington Birthplace National Monument, Virginia. National Park Service photo.



place in Virginia, near the Potomac River downstream from Mount Vernon; Colonial National Monument, also in Virginia, which included portions of the 1607 English settlement of Jamestown, as well as Yorktown Battlefield, site of the last major engagement of the Revolutionary War and surrender of the British forces; and Morristown in New Jersey, the Continental Army's wintering quarters in early 1777 and 1779–1780. Already, organizations such as the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities and the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (established in 1889 and 1910, respectively), had helped nurture a strong interest in places related to the Colonial era and the war against the British. With much of the American public long steeped in Colonial and Revolutionary War lore, the new historical parks provided the Park Service an opportunity to reinforce its preservation efforts by connecting to public patriotism through building greater pride in the nation's past and the founding fathers. The parks would soon become significant tourist destinations. Realizing these possibilities—and wanting to increase political support in the East for the national park system—the Park Service pushed for congressional funding to develop these parks to accommodate the public.⁴

This, then, was the general state of affairs by the spring of 1933, when Director Albright made the return trip from Shenandoah with the president. With an assortment of historical and archeological parks already in the national park system, Roosevelt's 1933 executive orders nearly tripled the number of these kinds of parks under the Park Service's care, bringing the total to more than sixty. Out of the broad sweep of American history, the greatest concentration of new sites in the system was related to the Civil War, including the battlefields that Albright wanted most of all. This gave Civil War history and sites a prominent role in Park Service preservation and interpretation of the American past. In 1933, seventeen years after Congress established the National Park Service primarily to manage large scenic parks, it achieved a goal that Albright in particular had sought since even before the bureau's creation: to gain dominance in federal historic preservation.

Getting very busy

Moreover, the potential for continued growth in the field of historic preservation became evident during the return trip from Shenandoah. Immediately following his instructions to Albright to prepare an executive order, the president switched the conversation to Saratoga Battlefield. Located in his home state of New York and scene of one of the pivotal conflicts of the Revolutionary War, the battlefield had long been of special concern to Roosevelt. Albright, who already had an interest in Saratoga and recognized its potential to become a federally preserved park (some of the lands were already owned by the state of New York), responded by commenting on the battle's importance and previous efforts to establish the area as a historical park. Likely influenced by what he had seen that day and by Albright's encouraging comments, Roosevelt determined that the battlefield should be under National Park Service supervision. The president flashed his famous smile and told Albright to "get busy" on the Saratoga idea, adding, as Albright later recalled, "Suppose you do something tomorrow about this."⁵

Through the decades, many more opportunities would arise for the Park Service to "get busy" and add other historic and archeological areas to the national park system. But prob-

Saratoga National Historical Park, New York. National Park Service photo.



ably few, if any, such opportunities came about as a result of the kind of enthusiastic spontaneity displayed by Roosevelt on the return from Shenandoah. The Park Service would resist many proposals for new historical parks, declaring them unsuitable; still, it steadily and selectively sought expansion of its historic preservation responsibilities, which would grow significantly over the years.

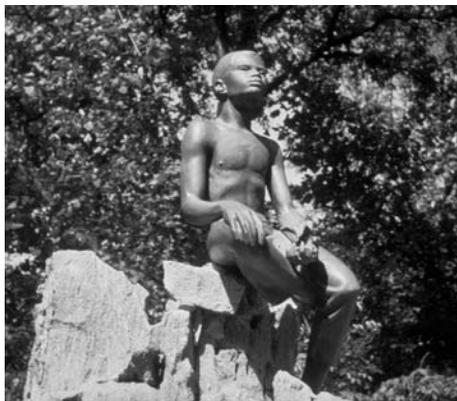
Prominent among the kinds of sites added to the national park system in the decades *after* 1933 were presidential homes, such as Theodore Roosevelt's Sagamore Hill estate on Long Island; the Abraham Lincoln home in Springfield, Illinois; and the Dwight D. Eisenhower farm, adjacent to Gettysburg Battlefield. Also, Franklin Roosevelt himself donated his home near Hyde Park, New York, to the American public, to be cared for by the National Park Service. More parks associated with the Revolutionary War and early nation-building came into the system, including Independence Hall in Philadelphia, where, among other events, the Declaration of Independence and, later, the Constitution were debated and drawn up; and Valley Forge near Philadelphia, the revered site of the 1777–1778 winter encampment of Washington's Continental Army. Civil War sites that came into the system after 1933 included Fort Sumter in the Charleston Harbor, where the war began in 1861; Manassas Battlefield in Virginia, scene of major Confederate victories in 1861 and 1862; and Andersonville, the infamous military prison in Georgia. And as more memorials were built on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.—for instance, the Thomas Jefferson, Vietnam Veterans, and World War II memorials—they also came under National Park Service management.

Many parks relating to ancient American history were added. These included Cape Krusenstern, an area of about 650,000 acres on the northwest Alaskan coast, containing thousands of archeological sites, mainly Inuit and representing 4,000 years of occupation; the Ocmulgee mounds in Georgia; and Pipestone in southwestern Minnesota, the site of early (and still active) Indian quarries for stone used for pipe-making. Congress has also established sites relating to controversial aspects of American history, such as Washita Battlefield in western Oklahoma, where in 1868 the Seventh U.S. Cavalry led by Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer attacked and overwhelmed a Cheyenne village under Chief Black Kettle. European American expansion and settlement—and encroachment onto

Indian lands—has been represented in the national park system by less controversial places such as Cumberland Gap in the Southern Appalachians, long-distance emigration and trade routes like the Oregon Trail and Santa Fe Trail, and sites reflecting early Spanish activities, including several early missions in San Antonio, Texas, and a site on Florida’s west coast commemorating the explorer Hernando De Soto.⁶

Only in 1943 did the first site specifically representing African American history come into the system: George Washington Carver National Monument in southwestern Missouri, honoring the distinguished scientist and teacher and including his birthplace, childhood home, and family cemetery. In the mid-1950s, the Virginia farm on which the great educator and orator Booker T. Washington was born into slavery and spent his boyhood was added to the system. By the late 20th century, Congress was open to establishing deeply controversial African American historic sites involving recent and, at times, violent conflicts over Civil Rights issues, such as Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, where, in 1957, nine black children aided by the United States Army finally integrated the school; and a historic trail to commemorate the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, which helped bring about the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The national park system includes other places involving Civil Rights history, such as Manzanar in southeastern California and Minidoka in southern

Idaho, where during World War II American citizens of Japanese descent were incarcerated.



George Washington Carver National Monument, Missouri. National Park Service photo.

The expansion of the park system in Alaska in 1978 and 1980 brought in a number of huge national parks and preserves such as Wrangell–St. Elias and Yukon–Charley Rivers, most of which are frequently thought of as scenic natural areas in the traditional sense. Yet Bering Land Bridge National Preserve helps commemorate where humans first immigrated from Asia, and Cape Krusenstern was included in this expansion because of its vast array of archeological sites. Most important, however, with these Alaskan additions the National Park

Service has practiced not only the more typical kinds of historic preservation, but also the protection of living cultures on a scale unmatched in any other areas within the national park system. This especially includes subsistence practices, such as the regular harvesting of native animals and plants of value to Alaskan cultures. These practices, which are in accord with the views of Native Alaskans and in line with congressional legislation, greatly contributed to the expansion of the concept and meaning of cultural resource preservation. As well, they contributed to a growing awareness of the interrelationships of nature and culture in park management.⁷

Especially in the latter decades of the 20th century, the American history profession moved away from concentrating on great men and great events toward social and cultural his-

tory that no longer ignored the lives of salt-of-the-earth Americans—a trend that in turn influenced the types of sites that came into the national park system, such as Selma to Montgomery and Minidoka. In seeking to broaden the context for interpreting the American past, the Park Service also became involved with diverse kinds of historical themes, such as the industrial mills in Lowell, Massachusetts, with their labor forces of women; the World War II home front as represented by Rosie the Riveter national historical park in the San Francisco Bay area; and the history and culture of the Nez Perce Indians in the northern Rocky Mountains and nearby lands to the east and west.

Similarly, the Park Service has served as a catalyst for the cooperative establishment of national heritage areas—extensive and generally privately owned landscapes where the natural and built environments together reflect traditional American lifeways, and where present-day communities set direction for their own conservation and tourism efforts. For instance,

the Cane River National Heritage Area features Creole and other southern cultures in a rural Louisiana setting, while the Lackawanna Valley area in northeastern Pennsylvania reveals the history and culture of a coal mining and industrial region. Such new kinds of areas involving cultural and social history have helped advance another Park Service trend that has affected most areas of the nation-



Lowell National Historical Park, Massachusetts. National Park Service photo.

al park system: the complex array of creative “partnerships” that connect the bureau with supportive organizations and interested individuals to further park preservation, protection, and interpretation.

In the approximately seven decades between 1933 and today, the number of predominantly historic areas in the national park system increased to about 230—a total, and a diversity, of places surely far beyond what Roosevelt or Albright envisioned. Furthermore, Congress, especially through laws passed in 1935 and 1966, greatly strengthened America’s historic preservation endeavors inside and outside the national park system. Through the National Register of Historic Places and its allied programs, these laws precipitated a multitude of working relationships on behalf of preservation within the private sector and among local, state, tribal, national, and territorial governments. This extensive nationwide effort to enhance historic preservation came to involve millions of private citizens.

The varied National Register programs brought about greater Park Service awareness of sites situated *within* parks and monuments but not previously designated officially as being

historically significant and worthy of preservation. The historic Shiloh National Military Park, for instance, includes many ancient Indian mounds, some very large. Also, large numbers of historic and archeological sites have been identified for preservation in such big natural parks as Grand Canyon, Everglades, Shenandoah, and Gates of the Arctic. And 20th-century historic structures have been preserved, including the Old Faithful Inn in Yellowstone, a number of architecturally significant buildings along Grand Canyon's South Rim (such as El Tovar Hotel), plus dozens of Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) structures from the New Deal era that grace parks and monuments across the country.⁸

Reflections

One way to think about historic preservation at a national level is to compare it with preservation at a personal level. For example, the rationale used in selecting historic sites to be included in the national park system may be thought of as somewhat like overseeing the disposition of a very large family estate; that is, sorting through a massive array of belongings and deciding what meanings they have and what to do with them. A family may consider the house, the furnishings, the personal items, the outbuildings, and the surrounding landscape—the gardens, farmlands, and woodlots—and determine what has special ties to family history and ancestors and what does not, what has artistic or architectural value and what does not, what evokes familial sentiment and pride and what does not, and so forth.

Ultimately this results in decisions on what to part with and what to keep and care for—what will be preserved for the family, and what will be sold or given away. But this becomes quite complex. The grandmother's writing desk will be kept, as well as the great-great-grandfather's military sword. But, if the lands are sold, what would happen to the ancient burial mounds on the ridge above the creek, or to the familiar landscapes—the gardens, farmlands, and woodlots—or to the dwellings, tools, and personal items used by house servants and those who (whether free or slave) worked the family fields? For the National Park Service, the great diversity of the American "family" and its material culture has resulted in the heritage of many different social and ethnic groups becoming increasingly important to a federal entity that only gradually awakened to the concept of preserving places reflecting stories of all the people.

Under such changing perceptions, the large number of historic and archeological sites brought into the national park system reflect decisions made through the decades by Congress and/or the president that these places have exceptional value for the nation as a whole. They have thus been given special protection: shielded from the vagaries and fluctuations of the open market by being officially set aside to be preserved and to enhance public appreciation and understanding of their significance.

Generally speaking, historic preservation begins when the perception of historical significance starts to influence the treatment of a place. The past may even become the central point of reference, as an earlier time and an earlier use or activity assume importance in determining present-day treatment of a site deemed to be historic. Those in charge may merely think twice before bulldozing the site; or, past events may be perceived as being so deeply meaningful that the places where they occurred cannot be ignored. In effect, they *compel* some form of commemorative affirmation. People may invoke elaborate commemorative rit-

uals, including preservation and interpretation, to affirm the importance of an era or a moment of the past.

A historic event or activity is itself of primary importance. Yet the place where it happened assumes significance through association, by having been the stage upon which important events, activities, or trends took place. People involved in a historic activity may move on, but the site remains, its importance sooner or later elevated above the ordinary. The site may have been there for years or many centuries in a stable or changing condition, yet what may also change is how it is perceived and regarded. Whether suddenly or gradually, a historic site emerges from the commonplace, assuming values beyond ordinary landscapes or real estate. A transition occurs—historical qualities are now perceived.

Once a site is formally set aside to be preserved, it may be assumed that alterations to the site are made in an informed and cautious way, with particular concern for the special historical values present and recognized. Perhaps a large majority of site, structural, and object alterations are intended to enhance the public's ability to get to, enjoy, and understand a park. Such changes to historic places almost always bring into greater focus the ever-present tension between preservation and use. Here, questions of historical authenticity and integrity become critical issues. Further complicating matters, perceptions of a site's historical values can change over time. But in the best of worlds, historic and archeological sites are treated not only as compelling landmarks of the past, but also as reservoirs of evidence regarding questions that the present generation may not be asking.

The perception of history is like the view through a broken camera lens: images of the past are blurred and can never be brought into perfect focus. No matter who is in charge of a site, objectivity remains elusive. Whether a site is perceived as merely historic or as truly hallowed ground, the perception is likely to be influenced by factors such as nationalism, localism, ethnocentricity, racism, social class, and reverential ancestral pride. Hallowedness is in the eye of the beholder—and in most cases so is historical significance.

The multitude of activities and programs that have been undertaken within the national park system to commemorate the American past reflect such complex cross-currents of perceptions and values. Yet the historical qualities of those places selected to be set aside for preservation are validated with, in effect, an official stamp of approval. In preserving significant places throughout the country and explaining their meanings, the National Park Service has been an "official voice" for American history, ancient and modern. Through its management of historic and archeological areas, the Park Service calls attention to, commemorates, and perpetuates public remembrance of selected aspects of American history as represented by specific sites. Preservation of such places comes about through political processes, and sometimes within a context of sharply divergent, conflicting perceptions, many very strongly held, and, at times, angrily voiced.

Commemoration and tourism are closely linked at publicly preserved historic sites, as the public supports these places of remembrance not only through preservation, but also by *going there* to see and understand. Once historic places are set aside, serious controversies can arise over how to care for them and present, or interpret, them to the public. Such matters have been debated and hammered out many, many times by groups or individuals of one persuasion or another within the National Park Service's bureaucratic structure. And the

Park Service is very frequently pressured by external voices, both local and national, themselves often at odds. The preservation world within which the Park Service operates is rarely, if ever, monolithic. As well, neither the establishment nor the management of historic sites always results from fully rational processes. The national park system reflects, by and large, the perceptions and proclivities of those who have held influence and authority through the decades, both inside and outside the Park Service—but who typically keep a close watch on the shifting interests and perceptions of the American public, to whom many owe their influence and authority.

Generally shadowing the primary narratives of the American story, the history of historic preservation many times begins, in a sense, “after history”: an after-the-fact looking back at significant events and people that is focused on specific associated places designated to be preserved and interpreted. (Places connected to living cultures and lifeways represent, in some respects, an exception to this.) Collectively within the national park system, this looking back forms a great national retrospective; and public fascination with the scenes of exceptional events—the places where they happened—can endure remarkably well. Many National Park Service sites associated with personalities, events, or activities of surpassing interest or significance (the “iconic” sites) have themselves become celebrated—launched into the legendary and mythological realms of the great American historical narrative. There many of them remain today, alive and well.⁹

Hallowed ground and conflicting perceptions

As an example, the Little Bighorn Battlefield—where in late June 1876 the Lakota Sioux and Northern Cheyenne overwhelmingly defeated Lieutenant Colonel Custer’s Seventh U.S. Cavalry—became a celebrated shrine to the defeated commander and his troops. There, on the high and lonesome plains of southeastern Montana Territory, a wooden memorial to the fallen soldiers was erected in 1879, then replaced in 1881 by a granite obelisk, sculpted in Massachusetts and shipped across country. At first, a square mile of the battlefield was designated a national cemetery (an official military burial ground), but later a much smaller national cemetery was established not far from the obelisk, and the overall site became commonly known as Custer Battlefield. It was cared for by the War Department until transferred to the National Park Service in 1940. Under the Park Service, interpretation at the battlefield continued to enshrine Custer and his men, helping to perpetuate an almost religious reverence not only for Custer, but also for the place—the battlefield itself, the sacred ground.

Historic sites at times project messages and values that trigger deeply passionate feelings, and bring about sharp conflict among those holding different perceptions of the past. In the last decades of the 20th century, determined American Indian groups sparked a move to shift the focus at Custer Battlefield National Monument toward full inclusion of the Indian story—the story of all those who fought and died there. This effort reflected the more expansive and inclusive perspectives on American history that emerged in the late 20th century. The situation at the battlefield turned belligerent on occasion, with angry confrontations between opposing factions. Indeed, threats were made to park staff who supported plans to abandon the long-time park name that honored Custer and to erect a memorial to all Indians who participated in the battle. The proposal to change the name to Little Bighorn Battlefield



Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, Montana.

became the most contested issue of all, but ultimately proponents for both the name change and the Indian memorial prevailed. Surely these high-publicity events and their resolution helped intensify and perpetuate the controversy and celebrity of the battlefield.

The Little Bighorn's enduring fame and celebrity stem in large part from the fact that it has offered something for everyone—Indians and non-Indians, scholars and non-scholars, adults and children. As drama and as theater, the battle provides endless fascination; as historic incident, it provokes endless inquiry, speculation, and controversy. The battle's symbolic aspects remain powerful even today. For many, the battle rages on. Each generation has found itself part of this historic pageant, this great retrospective. And now our own generation has its participants, its actors in the play—in the enduring drama of remembrance.

The battlefield has served, in effect, as a public stage for an exceptionally rich and varied pageant of commemorative history—an extended, ongoing response to the brief, furious conflict that occurred there. Preserving the battlefield—the sacred ground—allowed the site to fulfill its role as a shrine, rather than being just another tract of high-plains grasslands. From around the world, pilgrims and the curious continue to trek to this celebrated focal point of the Little Bighorn legend—the place where it happened, the one spot on the planet where this historic encounter can be recalled most vividly.¹⁰

The Little Bighorn Battlefield, where commemoration began shortly after the 1876 battle and has been overseen by the National Park Service since 1940, is only one of many historic and archeological places across the country where the bureau has faced controversial issues. Those who, in effect, “pick up the pieces” in the aftermath of history—who preserve the places where history occurred; examine and re-examine historic events, personalities and trends; and infuse them into the public mind—themselves become a part of history. So it has been with the Park Service in its preservation and interpretation of historic and archeological sites. By perpetuating memory of the historic past, the National Park Service has nur-

tured, sustained—and become part of—an ongoing commemorative history that reaches far back in time and extends throughout the United States and its territories.

Notes on terminology

Because of its early and long-standing usage, the term “historic preservation” is most frequently used in this essay. As well, the terms “history” and “historic” are often used in a generic sense, referring to ancient and/or more recent times. Only by about the early 1970s did the term “cultural resources management” come into general use. As increasingly diverse new areas were brought into the national park system owing to their importance in American history, archeology, ethnography, and related fields, these areas (and the older historic and archeological sites as well) would come to be generally referred to as “cultural” parks—an appropriately broad designation, inclusive of the varied aspects of the American story by then being addressed by the National Park Service. Significant structures, objects, landscapes, gardens, archeological remains, etc., within each park would become known as “cultural resources.” Also, the word “park” is often used here in a generic way, whether or not the official designation of the site being discussed is “national park,” “national monument,” “national historical park,” “national historic site,” or any other of the more than two dozen such designations now used in the national park system.

Acknowledgments

The author is grateful to the many individuals who supported this work during its preparation.

Endnotes

1. The epigraph is from Horace M. Albright, *Origins of National Park Service Administration of Historic Sites* (Philadelphia: Eastern National Park and Monument Association, 1971), 21.

Land purchasing in Shenandoah National Park was still underway in 1933. In the late 1920s, President Hoover had bought the 164-acre fishing camp site, which, along with the buildings, he donated to the park after leaving office. Aware of increasing interest in a scenic mountain roadway in Shenandoah, and responding to the national financial stress of the early Depression years, Hoover had authorized the roadway along the mountainous “spine” of the newly created Shenandoah National Park and insisted that it be built using unemployed local workers. He had not, however, been able to persuade Congress to grant him full presidential authority (that is, without having to get further congressional approval) to reorganize the Executive Branch of the government for purposes of greater efficiency. Only in March 1933, at the close of his administration, did Hoover get a chance to sign legislation providing presidential authority for reorganization—which Roosevelt soon used to transfer the archeological and historic areas to the National Park Service.

Roosevelt and Albright had met several times, including at private parties in Washington when Roosevelt was Assistant Secretary of the Navy. The president eventually chose a site in the Catoctin Mountains of northern Maryland for his retreat, which he named Shangri-la, and which President Dwight D. Eisenhower would rename Camp David.

Discussions of Albright's goals, his trip with President Roosevelt, and the follow-up to Roosevelt's decision are found in Albright, *Origins of National Park Service Administration of Historic Sites*, 1–24, see especially 17–22; Horace M. Albright as told to Robert Cahn, *The Birth of the National Park Service: The Founding Years, 1913–33* (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1985), 238–239, 265–268, 285–297; Darwin Lambert, “Shenandoah National Park, Administrative History, 1924–1976” (Philadelphia: National Park Service, 1979, typescript), 83–84, 99–100; John Ise, *Our National Park Policy: A Critical History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), 352–353; Horace M. Albright and Marian Albright Schenck, *Creating the National Park Service: The Missing Years* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 23. For pertinent text from Roosevelt's executive orders (nos. 6166 of June 10, 1933, and 6228 of July 28, 1933), see Lary M. Dilsaver, *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994), 116–121.

2. Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 7–90; Alfred Runte, *Trains of Discovery: Western Railroads and the National Parks* (1984; rev. ed., Niwot Colorado: Roberts Rinehart, 1990), 1–82 (a beautifully illustrated book); Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (1979; rev. ed., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 65–105; see also Runte's discussion of national parks and America's “cultural nationalism,” 11–32.

3. National Park Service, *The National Parks: Shaping the System* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, rev. ed., 2005), 12–43; Hal Rothman, *America's National Monuments: The Politics of Preservation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas: 2000; originally published as *Preserving Different Pasts: The American National Monuments*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 127–131, 197; Ricardo Torres-Reyes, *Mesa Verde National Park: An Administrative History* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1970), 125–149, 196. Even earlier than at Mesa Verde, development and stabilization work (overseen by the Department of the Interior's General Land Office) began at Casa Grande Ruin Reservation (now Casa Grande Ruins National Monument), in south-central Arizona Territory. Rothman, *America's National Monuments*, 12, 109.

4. Barry Mackintosh, “The National Park Service and Cultural Resources,” *CRM* (vol. 22, no. 4, 1999), 41–42; National Park Service, *Shaping the System* 21; Albright, *Origins of National Park Service Administration of Historic Sites*, 14–17; Albright and Cahn, *Birth of the National Park Service*, 249, 252.

5. Albright, *Origins of National Park Service Administration of Historic Sites*, 21; Albright and Cahn, *Birth of the National Park Service*, 296–297.

6. National Park Service, *Shaping the System*, 44–61; and Mackintosh, “The National Park Service and Cultural Resources,” 42–44. The Hyde Park estate came under National Park Service administration not long after Roosevelt's death in 1945. Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., *Preservation Comes of Age: From Williamsburg to the National Trust, 1926–1949* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), vol. II, 758–767.

7. G. Frank Willis, *The National Park Service and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980* (1985; rev. ed., Anchorage: National Park Service, 2005), 50–57, 130–138.

8. See: Laura Soullière Harrison, *Architecture in the Parks: National Historic Landmark Theme Study* (Washington, D.C., National Park Service, 1986), 1–19; William C. Tweed, Laura Soullière, and Henry G. Law, “National Park Service Rustic Architecture” (San Francisco: National Park Service Western Regional Office, 1977, typescript).

9. Richard West Sellars, “Why Take a Trip to Bountiful—Won’t Anaheim Do?,” *Landscape*, (vol. 30, no. 3, 1990), 14–18; Richard West Sellars, “Custer at the Little Bighorn: The Great Retrospective,” *History News* (vol. 44, no. 5, September–October 1989), 11–12.

10. Jerome A. Greene, “Stricken Field: Little Bighorn, 1876–2003” (unpublished manuscript, January 2005, copy courtesy of the author), 162–163, 267–269, 274–293; Edward Tabor Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 127–171; Robert M. Utley, *Custer and Me: A Historian’s Memoir* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 203–205, 210–213; Robert M. Utley, “Whose Shrine Is It?: The Ideological Struggle for Custer Battlefield,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* (vol. 42, no. 1, winter 1992), 70–74; Don Rickey, Jr., “Myth to Monument: The Establishment of Custer Battlefield National Monument,” *Journal of the West* (vol. 7, April 1968), 209–216; Sellars, “Custer at the Little Bighorn,” 11–12, 33; Sellars, “Why Take a Trip to Bountiful—Won’t Anaheim Do?,” 14–18.

Richard West Sellars, National Park Service, P.O. Box 728, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504-0728; richard_sellars@nps.gov