



EPILOGUE

Increasingly discussed among environmental historians are the various events associated with this nation that have served to inspire America's exceptional reverence for nature. With the proper interpretation of these events, one is able to recognize the shaping of the American lore that related an individual, a society, and a nation, to its natural environment. The initial jeremiad which appears to have seeded this lore is an address by Puritan leader and governor of Massachusetts John Winthrop in 1630, titled "*A Model of Christian Charity*."¹ In his oration, Winthrop projects the idea that the New England colonies are to be viewed as "A City on the Hill" or a "New Jerusalem" whose Christian ethics will guide the values of the New World.² For John Winthrop and the New England Puritans, the colonies represented a Christian society standing as a beacon for the world, a model as how to organize and live under the religious ideals that they believed had been abandoned by a corrupted and crowded Europe.³

A second Puritan jeremiad that projected the American lore into the woodlands soon followed with Samuel Danforth's election address of 1670, "*A Brief Recognition of New England's Errand into the Wilderness*."⁴ Within this sermon, Danforth put forward the Puritan ideal that the wooded forests of America were a not an evil, dark and cursed land but a divine wilderness that provided one with a unique opportunity to commune with God. The following paragraph quotes a portion of Danforth's famous sermon: *Such as have sometime left their pleasant cities and habitations to enjoy the pure worship of God in a wilderness are apt in time to abate and cool in their affec-*

*tion thereunto; but then the Lord calls upon them seriously and thoroughly to examine themselves, what it was that drew them into the wilderness, and to consider that it was not the expectation of ludicrous levity nor of courtly pomp and delicacy, but the free and clear dispensation of the Gospel and Kingdom of God.*⁵

As a loosely organized system of beliefs, this developing lore co-mingled with the philosophies of the European Romantics and inspired a mythos that placed a strong emphasis on individuality, feelings, emotional expressions and nature. It would be these fabled beliefs that next served to inspire and energize the American intellectual movement known as Transcendentalism. At the core of this movement were America's first poets and philosophers who penned sentiments that defined the nation's spiritual connection to nature. Among the first of these writings was William Cullen Bryant's, 1825 poem "A Forest Hymn" suggesting God's handiwork was to be found within every forest grove of trees.⁶ Soon to follow, in 1836, was Ralph Waldo Emerson's published essay "Nature," in which he writes that every natural object held the potential to awaken spiritual reverence -*when the mind is open to their influence.*⁷

Scientific validation for the writings of Emerson and other transcendentalists of the time came from the respected words of Harvard Professor of Comparative Zoology, Louis Agassiz. In the article, titled "Methods of Study in the Natural History" that appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* in January 1862, Agassiz suggests the ability to approach the thoughts of God through the study and classification of objects of nature:

*If these classifications are not mere inventions, if they are not an attempt to classify for our own convenience the objects we study, then they are thoughts which, whether we detect them or not, are expressed in Nature, - then Nature is the work of thought, the production of intelligence, carried out according to plan, therefore premeditated, - and in our study of natural objects we are approaching the thoughts of the Creator, reading his conceptions, interpreting a system that is his and not ours.*⁸

A further mythologizing of the nation's spiritual connection to nature was projected from the psyche of America's landscape painters who rendered on canvas the natural beauty of wilderness and interpreted this imagery as an expression of the glory of God.

This recognition of the natural world as the presentation of God's handiwork would extend beyond the transcendental poets, landscape painters and academic professors of natural history, to be accepted by the instructors of nature study, who also embraced the study of objects of nature to be a pathway that led one closer to the thoughts of God.

Running parallel with this evolving mythos that sanctified nature, was the emotional influence of America's Great Awakening, originally shaped by religious preaching of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield and John Wesley. From their enthusiastic sermons was inspired the organizing of religious camp revivals set in the wilderness. Born from this nation's extreme religious zeal, these distinctly American religious camp meetings, positioned in scenic rural locations and closely associated with the natural environment, serviced hundreds of thousands of parishioners who ventured into the wilds to be "born-again." This grand organizing of the wilderness camp meetings served as precursors for the establishing of an untold number of religious camp retreats, which continued to service the needs of parishioners by providing access to the curative, inspirational and spiritual assets of nature.

The establishing of the Methodist camp retreats in part, laid the foundation for John Heyl Vincent and Lewis Miller to establish, not only the mother Chautauqua in upstate New York, but numerous daughter Chautauquas throughout the nation. The Chautauqua Institute furthered the efforts associated with Methodist reform movement in America by providing to the masses, access to an intellectual and moral education. A portion of this intellectual and moral education offered through the Chautauqua Program, was derived from America's popularized interpretation of natural history (i.e. Nature Study). As presented in the Oshkosh Wis-

consin's State Normal School Bulletin of May 1906, one finds six purported positive elements provided to students engaged in the instruction of nature:

First, to provide discipline especially to the perceptive faculties leading to the cultivation of close and accurate observation.

Second, to develop the right moral spirit leading to sympathy, kind treatment, and right feeling toward life, especially animal life.

Third, the work should aim to develop the spiritual nature, leading to reverence, trust and belief.

Fourth, to cultivate the aesthetic sense, leading to an appreciation of nature's beauty, including recognition of the beautiful, training in the securing of beautiful effects, and appreciation of the beauty of adaptation to use.

Fifth, to arouse love of nature and desire for her acquaintance and companionship.

Sixth, the work should help to maintain interest in all school work and aid in the work of other studies, especially language, reading, and drawing.⁹

For much of last quarter of the 19th century and first quarter of the 20th century, such ideals lent to the scholarly and principled education of students engaged in the study of natural history, including those enrolled in the Chautauqua Institute.

With the establishing of Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Program came the organizing of Chautauqua reading circles throughout the nation, whose members became well versed in the literature of nature study and the transcendental writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and John Muir. This organizing of Chautauqua reading circles throughout America quickly seeded the formation of an untold number of women's clubs, which in turn furthered the development of America's women's club movement.

In the first year of the 20th century, women's clubs initiated the work of organizing political campaigns, and the writing of legislation on both the state and national level, directed toward the legal protection of nature. The years to come

would see the California Federation of Women's Clubs campaign for the establishment of a system of state parks and the General Federation of Women's Clubs advocate for the establishment of a system of national parks.

Finally, in reference to the establishing of a system of national parks in this country, which is today proposed to have been "*America's Best Idea*,"¹⁰ we circle back to consider the influence of the Chautauqua Institution. The following paragraphs being passages from a talk titled "*Organized Popular Education*" by Arthur E. Bestor, President of the Chautauqua Institution (1907-1944), presented in Yellowstone National Park during The National Park Conference of 1911; this being the first conference of departmental officials and invited guests interested in the development and administration of the national parks.

Organized Popular Education

The National Parks Conference has no more important task than the organization of such machinery as will bring to the people of America the knowledge of their unsurpassed heritage in the national parks and an earnest desire to enjoy them as individuals. Speaking on behalf of Chautauqua Institution, for two generations one of the great centers for popular education and one of the first places where the parks as national playgrounds were brought to the attention of the American people on a large scale, I can assure you of our readiness to put at your disposal all of our facilities for publicity and all of our agencies for the influencing of public opinion.

Our problem, strange to say, has not been unlike the one in which we are interested in this conference. Chautauqua has had to induce people to leave their comfortable homes in all parts of the country; has had to provide for all their physical, as well as mental, spiritual and recreational needs; had had to maintain them in safety, health and comfort; had had to see that their environment was such that they could work out their social and intellectual salvation in comfort and happiness. We have succeeded in building up the unique center for popular education of the world, partly because we have successfully met the same needs that face you in connection with the national parks. We are still under the necessity of taking into account railroad rates and transporta-

tion problems, sustenance, and sanitary arrangements and of carrying on publicity on a national scale.

There are great interests involved in this conference which do not concern themselves with my particular topic - how the parks shall be administered, how influence shall be brought to bear on Congress for their maintenance and development, what advantage shall be taken of them by scientific and educational organizations, what shall be the relationship of the National Park Service and the National Parks Association to other organizations. But all those who are interested in any of these questions will do well to remember that all are equally concerned in the problem of the education of the mass of the people with reference to the parks... ¹¹

We close this story with one final reflection upon the source of inspiration for this nation's extended reverence for nature; a wonder that is expressed by the remarkable number of national and state parks established throughout the United States. Today, these parks are increasingly recognized as representing a form of landscape democracy, and a symbol of the Puritan values born of the colonies of New England, held up to the world as an inspiring result of John Winthrop's Model of Christian Charity.