

National Park Service 75th Anniversary

Vocation plus Avocation equals Preservation

A COMPLAINT LETTER

"Scenery is a hollow enjoyment to a tourist who sets out in the morning after an indigestible breakfast and a fitful sleep on an impossible bed."



Horace M. Albright

Stephen Mather

In 1914, the author of that quote, Stephen Mather, had been invited to Washington, D.C., for a meeting which changed his life and ours. The Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane invited Mather to come and "... run them yourself" if he did not like the way national parks were being managed.

Stephen Mather's complaint letter was a first step in providing consistent management of our national parks. The parks were administered by a variety of government agencies, and run by officials with little long term commitment to conservation.

A PARTNERSHIP



When Mather arrived in Washington, he met a young lawyer, Horace Albright, who was serving as a clerk to the Secretary of the Interior, to gain experience in land and mining law. When Mather and Albright met, they stood together at an important crossroads for the infant national parks and monuments. It was Mather and Albright's task to make order out of chaos: to bring consistent policies, and adequate funding and attention to the administration of the national parks.

In 1914, Albright and Mather met in the Secretary's office for a series of discussions which resulted in Mather accepting the job of running the parks on the condition that Albright stayed on to keep Mather "... out of jail". Both Mather and Albright agreed to spend a year, together, to get the parks organized. Mather left public service shortly before his death in 1930, and Albright spent the next nineteen years with the National Park Service.

NATIONAL PRIDE



The arrival of Mather, a 47 year old mountain climbing millionaire, and Albright, a 24 year old journeyman attorney, was preceded by years of change and distillation of ideas about the national parks. The first 100 years of the United States had seen the nation rapidly expand from the original 13 colonies to the full width of the continent – from sea to shining sea. The country had fought two major wars for independence and a terrible civil war. Settlers had surged westward during the period of expansion, with little time or interest in the development of culture and civilization. The young

nation found itself on the threshold of the twentieth century with little to show, culturally, for its hard won freedoms.

Despite the invigoration of rapid growth, America could not ignore, could only envy the stability of old world traditions: sites of world famous events, architecture of great antiquity, works of art, and literature from the dawn of history. America suffered in comparison. However, as the west became better known, it was obvious that scenery was one area in which America took a back seat to no one.

AMERICAN SCENERY



Appreciation of American scenery became a foundation for national pride. During the 1890s the American Civic Association started a campaign to encourage Americans to "See America First", rather than constantly traveling to Europe to view sweeping alpine scenery. This nourished the developing American tourism industry and promoted development of automobile and railroad access. By 1917 there were approximately 3,000,000 automobiles on America's roads and the American Automobile Association had become a

powerful lobby. As a result the tourists stayed home (the United States), and so did their dollars.

When Mather and Albright arrived in Washington, D.C., the Wilson administration was nervously viewing the European war and attempting to keep America neutral. Wilson's policy made "Seeing America First" the only option for travelers who found themselves facing strict restrictions on overseas vacations.

PARTNERS AT WORK



Bad facilities, poor services in parks, and treacherous roads elicited Mather's letter to Lane criticizing the condition of the National Parks. Park promotional efforts succeeded but visitors found travel difficult and unappealing. Upon arriving at one of the thirty one parks and monuments then in the Department of the Interior's care, they also found indifferent and inconsistent management, most of which was incapable of carrying out important programs such as the development of facilities, or the protection of the scenery and the wildlife. Mather and Albright, at Secretary Lane's urging, set out to correct this situation.

Mather brought marketing and sales techniques, as well as his compelling personality and dedication to the preservation of monumental scenery to the team. Albright brought managerial, legal and diplomatic skills. Mather, outwardly boyish, optimistic, full of ideas, was also intense and driven to achieve personal goals. While labeled the "eternal freshman" by his peers, he would be called a "workaholic" today. Albright was also playful, dedicated, and driven in his own way. He was content to work very hard behind the scenes, to help Mather achieve their mutual goals. They were the ideal Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer.

A NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

It is entirely fitting that on the day the act which created the National Park Service was signed by President Wilson, Albright was in Washington shepherding the bill through to the President, while Mather was out in the Sierra Nevada mountains, shepherding a party of influential guests through potential park lands.

With the passage of the National Park Service Organic Act on August 25, 1916, the ideal team of Stephen Tyng Mather and Horace Marden Albright, met their mutual commitment to inaugurate the National Park Service.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



The National Park Service is celebrating its 75th anniversary, and we invite you to read more about it. The following books provide information on the colorful history of the service:

Albright, Horace M., *The Birth of the National Park Service*, Howe Brothers, Chicago, 1985.

Robert Shankland, *Stephen Mather of the National Parks*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1951.

Swain, Donald, *Wilderness Defender*, Horace M. Albright and Conservation, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1970.

