What Did the West Mean for America?

In 1890, Congress declared the frontier closed—there was no more available land in the West. Americans were deeply affected - If the West was "conquered," what did it mean to be an American? What should the country do with the remaining wilderness? Americans began to feel nostalgic about the past. At the same time the Conservationist Movement, dedicated to saving wilderness, grew in popularity and the government began setting aside parcels of land as designated national parks. Paradoxically the government's policy towards Indigenous populations still living in these areas was one of removal and cultural assimilation beginning in the early 19th Century and continuing during this period with the 1867 Indian Peace Commission. All formal treaty activities were suspended by 1871, and by 1900, 56 of 162 federal reservations had been established by executive order alone.

Creating a "National Parks Bureau"

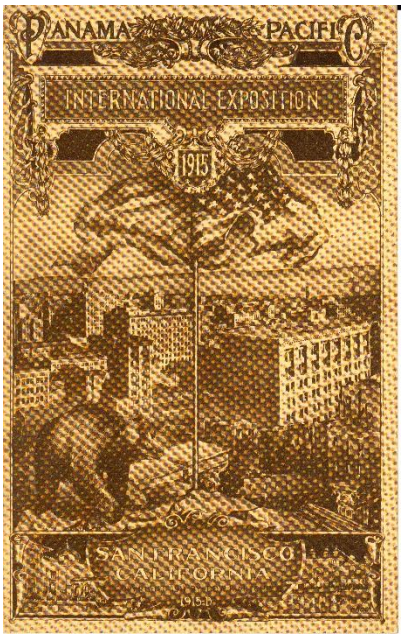
Union Pacific was not the only railroad to value natural landscapes. In 1872, Northern Pacific Railway and others successfully lobbied Congress for the creation of Yellowstone National Park. Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe began development of Grand Canyon's South Rim in 1901, and Great Northern Railway served Glacier National Park beginning in 1910.

All Set for the West: Railroads and the National Parks

At the turn of the century, all railroads agreed to abolish billboards along their passenger lines to provide unobstructed views of the landscape.

The Canyon of the Yellowstone, painting by Thomas Moran, c1911, *Library of Congress image #96507173.*

However, the government structure in place to govern these new parks was a bureaucratic nightmare for the railroads. Any railroad seeking to extend a line to a national park had to run a gauntlet of negotiation with several different organizations such as the Department of the Interior, the Indian Office, the General Land Office, the Bureau of Mines, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the U.S. Forest Service. The railroads began pressing legislators to unite the leadership of the parks under one "bureau." In 1911, at the first National Park Conference held in Yellowstone, representatives from every principal railroad endorsed the idea of consolidation.



At the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915, the railroads made their biggest contribution to the creation of the National Park Service. Held in San Francisco, the exposition was supposed to celebrate the completion of the Panama Canal, but the railroads used it instead to promote the National Parks. Each railroad built massive exhibits showcasing the parks they served with acres of recreational landscapes. Both the Union Pacific and Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe (AT&SF) built elaborate exhibits promoting current national parks' interests to the tune of $500,000 each. The AT&SF's Grand Canyon exhibit led directly to its adoption as a national park in 1919. Union Pacific built a massive four-and-a-half-acre replica of Yellowstone National Park, complete with working geysers that spewed boiling water. This model also included a replica of the Old Faithful Inn with its dining hall and auditorium. The $500,000 contributed by UP and AT&SF was well over twice what Northern Pacific spent to build the original lodge in 1904.

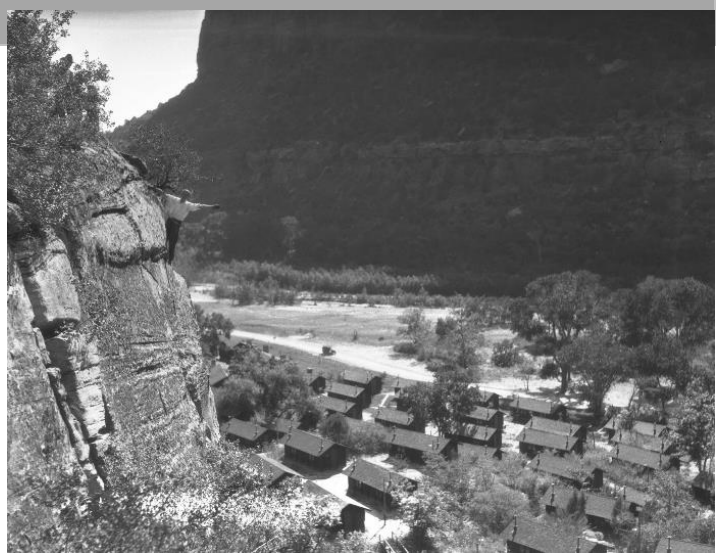
Postcard showing the new buildings constructed for the Panama Pacific Exposition with a bear and damaged buildings from the 1906 earthquake in the foreground, published by Edward H. Mitchell, San Francisco, California, 1911, *Library of Congress image # 2008681154.*

All Set for the West: Railroads and the National Parks

Railroads were one part of a multi-pronged effort to create the National Park Service. Conservationists banded together, creating groups like American Civic Association, Camp Fire Club, Save the Redwoods League, Wilderness Society and Sierra Club, founded by famous conservationist John Muir. Between the Panama-Pacific International Exposition displays and future NPS Directors Stephen Mather and Horace Albright's cross-country speaking tour, “What Makes a National Park?” the creation of the National Park Service was assured.

A Foundational Relationship

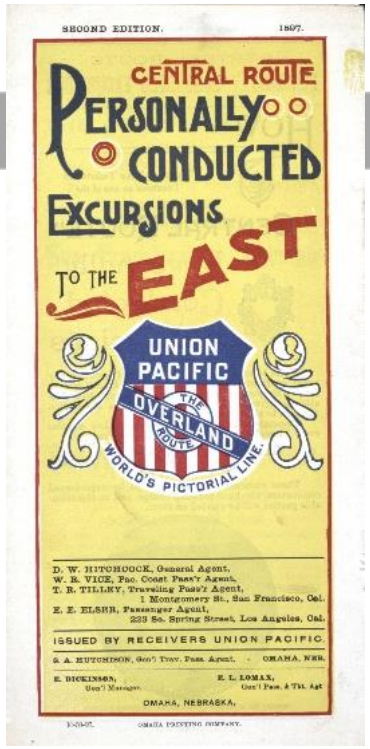
After it was founded in 1916, the fledgling National Park Service needed help. The traditional police force of the national parks, the United States Army, vacated in 1918. The park rangers now had to work full time to keep out squatters, poachers, and cattle ranchers. They had almost no resources to devote to visitors or even to park development. This was left to the railroads who built roads, cabins, hotels and provided concessions. Union Pacific provided access to national parks otherwise nearly impossible to visit easily like Zion, the North Rim of Grand Canyon and Death Valley National Monument. Union Pacific worked hand-in-hand with the National Park Service, managing concessions and visitor-related infrastructure in several National Parks in a foundational relationship that lasted more than half a century.



Vincent H. Hunter, Union Pacific photographer, points toward cabins and the lodge in Zion National Park, *Union Pacific Museum Collection.*

Pictures from the *World's Pictorial Line*

Right from the very beginning, visitors enjoyed having their pictures taken in the national parks. Throughout the 1920s, three men staffed Union Pacific’s entire Photographic Division—Eyre Powell, Jack Bristol and Vincent H. Hunter. There was no separation of labor among Union Pacific photographers in those days—all three took photos, developed film, authored articles for the monthly “Union Pacific Magazine” and even created movies on 16mm. The trio was joined at the end of the decade by photographer William A. Coons. The photos reproduced here were taken inside the national parks during the 1920s and 1930s.



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The Nation's First Peoples

Frank, a Navajo silversmith, sits at work bench at Zion National Park, PHYS 2245, *Union Pacific Collection.*

It was no coincidence that the newly created National Park Service (NPS) was placed under the Department of the Interior. This large and complex bureaucratic department was also home to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. From the beginning there existed a tenuous relationship between the NPS and Indigenous tribes that had been relocated, and in many cases forcibly evicted, from the newly established governmental areas. Despite this, there was a national momentum to preserve what was perceived then as "vanishing" attributes of the American West: the unblemished natural landscape and the American Indian way of life.

Tribes continuing to live near the newly created parks and were involved in varying degrees depending on the park as the new relationships evolved.

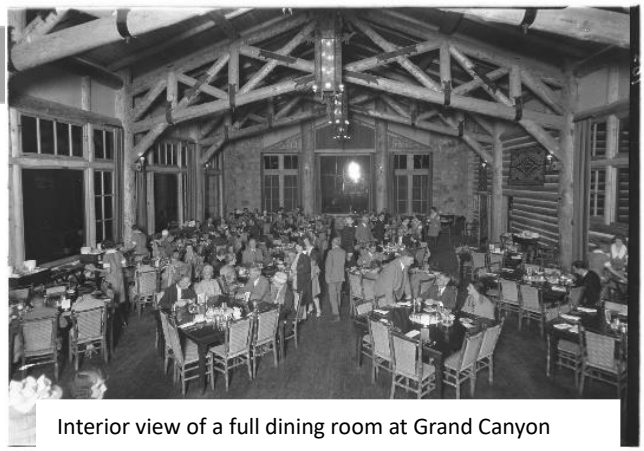
At the same time, American's thirst for exploration and the unknown filled the curio shops at several major parks with Tribal cultural merchandise for sale and demonstrations of cultural practices like weaving. This also included participation at major park events. For example, when Zion National Park opened on June 1, 1925, Union Pacific invited members of the Paiute Tribe to preside over the ceremony. Some parks employed members of nearby tribes, but true collaboration remained only cursory until the latter half of the 20th Century.

Currently the National Parks Service works to integrate Native Peoples' perspectives and voice in the interpretation of the parks. For example, this statement is proudly posted at the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trails Center in Omaha, Neb. "The Trail is committed to building true relations with all people, to learn from them and to tell their stories with sensitivity and respect while working to preserve and protect our natural and cultural heritage for future generations."

"Parkitecture"

Gilbert Stanley Underwood was a famous architect who designed buildings for Union Pacific Railroad and the national parks. Some of these buildings were huge places where people could meet, eat, and tell stories. These were called lodges.

When Underwood designed a lodge, he used the trees and stones he found in the local area so that the lodge would match the environment. This type of architecture is called the National Park Service Rustic Style.



Interior view of a full dining room at Grand Canyon Lodge, Grand Canyon National Park, at night. PHYS_4431, *Union Pacific Collection*.

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