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Cornelia's Speech

The Foundations for Practical Conservation

Gifford Pinchot, Simsbury native, is well known as a two-term Governor of Pennsylvania and the first Chief of the U.S. Forest Service. Less known is his generosity and selflessness when it came to public service. His parents, James and Mary Pinchot, founded the Yale School of Forestry in New Haven with a gift of $100,000 in 1900, a gift that would provide the practical and philosophical foundations for professional forestry in America. The pursuit of conservation, defined as serving the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run, would consume every hour of every day of Gifford Pinchot's life. Under the leadership of Pinchot, a corps of professionally trained young men and women were dispatched to the fields and streams, to the heavily cut over woodlands and deserts, to count and measure, to re-plant and restore what was left. By 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt had already recognized the fact that an intact, healthy environment would determine the fate and future of the country.

Gifford Pinchot's "Old Timer" narratives, a collection of 5,000 pages of correspondence housed in the two-million document Gifford Pinchot Collection at the Library of Congress, contain a mind-boggling record of Pinchot's efforts. The narratives reveal Pinchot's record of generosity in service to the men and women who came not just from privilege, but from backgrounds where few other alternatives were available other than life in the factory. They demonstrate a benevolent government, a creative government, government founded on morality, decency, and giving the individual a helping hand, a leg up, and a job that meant something. The narratives reveal a central tenet of Roosevelt and Pinchot's public service: an end to political corruption that allowed for profiting, or trading, off public service for private gain.

Al Jackson, one of Pinchot's early forest ranger-recruits, was able to attend the University of Washington's acclaimed School of Forestry in Seattle, now the School of Environmental Sciences, thanks in part to Pinchot. We learn how Pinchot's leadership fostered practicality and innovation. For example, forester Homer Ross wrote of modifying his personal "rig" to make it the first fire engine for use in the field. We discover a corps of dedicated stenographer-typists whose job it was to document expenditures in order to provide a record of the Agency's accountability and accuracy. We find the first attempts at forest and range restoration that give us a detailed picture of how projects went from idea to implementation.

About the author

Bibi Gaston is a landscape architect and the great-grandniece of Gifford Pinchot. She has provided landscape architecture, site planning and design services for public and private clients throughout the United States since 1986.

Bibi Gaston is also an author. Her first book, *The Loveliest Woman in America: A Tragic Actress, Her Lost Diaries and Her Granddaughter's Search for Home*, was published by William Morrow / Harper Collins in hardback in 2008 and by Harper Perennial in a paperback edition in 2009. *The Loveliest Woman in America* was selected as a finalist for the prestigious Literary Arts Society's 2010 Oregon Book Award and featured as book of the month in March 2009 by the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress.

Her second book, *Gifford Pinchot and the Old Timers,* volume 1, published by Baked Apple Club Productions in 2018, provides her readers with a series of extraordinary firsthand accounts of the early days of conservation as told by the first men and women to serve under Gifford Pinchot and Theodore Roosevelt in the U.S. Forest Service.

Author Gaston has presented programs on both of her books at the Simsbury Free Library. She can be reached at www.bibigaston.com or www.firstforesters.com

Cornelia Pinchot at the dedication of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest Washington State, 1949

Photo Courtesy of the Gerald W. Williams Collection, Oregon State University

Through the narratives, we also learn that a flourishing domestic environment meant that a country was less likely to engage in foreign entanglements or exploitation. It was less likely to go to war. Pinchot imagined a future of water depletion, but he could not have imagined the extent to which water contamination might undermine domestic tranquility or determine a nation's foreign policy. His focus was on the short- and long-term health and well-being of the American people who, he felt, deserved the best life possible for as long as possible given a limited land base. Without a benevolent vision, men of little faith and many fears could unleash a narrative of famine upon the world.

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On July 3, 2014, I found myself in Washington State's Gifford Pinchot National Forest in the shadow of Mt. Rainier. My destination: La Wis Wis Campground, where I'd learned of a remarkable CCC-era amphitheater set in an old growth hemlock grove beside a crystal river. July 3 was my birthday. What I wanted was scenery and a day spent in nature.

The history of La Wis Wis is extraordinary. On October 15, 1949, five years after her husband's death, Cornelia Pinchot, Gifford Pinchot's widow, delivered a remarkable speech on the re-naming of the Columbia National Forest to the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. The audience included Washington State's Governor Langlie, soil conservationists, foresters, engineers, and others. Cornelia's speech was as majestic as the conifer grove in which she spoke.

"Conservation was never a vague, fuzzy aspiration," Cornelia told the crowd. "It was concrete, exact, dynamic. The application of science and technology to our material economy for the purpose of enhancing the life of the individual. The very stuff of which democracy is made. To Pinchot, you see, man himself is a natural resource," she said.

Gifford Pinchot was inspired by the likes of George Perkins Marsh, John Muir and others, men who knew what it takes to survive: fresh air, clean water, and forest groves where one could pitch a tent, look up at the stars, and put things in perspective. Pinchot dedicated his last book, his memoir, *Breaking New Ground*, published posthumously in 1947, to "The men and women of the Forest Service, whose courage, devotion, and intelligence have made it and keep it the best organization in the Government of the United States."

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Gifford Pinchot and the Conservation Ideal

A speech given by Cornelia Bryce Pinchot

You will understand how hard it is for me to speak on this occasion, even to thank you for the thoughts you have so beautifully expressed and the tributes you have so generously paid. I know that every word has been heart-felt. Surely you realize how profoundly grateful I am.

Each of you, the foresters, Governor Langlie, the soil conservationists, the engineers, have expressed, in your own separate fashions, something of the essence of what was Gifford Pinchot in the various fields in which you knew him. I can add nothing to what you have said.

But there is one point I am concerned to bring you which has not been stressed here. That is the ideal of conservation that was so truly born of Gifford Pinchot's mind and spirit. The conservation philosophy from which he derives his temporal and earthy immortality.

Beyond preservation of the forests, beyond reclamation of the soil, beyond various techniques of land use and flood control, over and above and back of all these stands, the philosophy itself, the philosophy of conservation.

Conservation to Gifford Pinchot was never a vague, fuzzy aspiration. It was concrete, exact, dynamic. The application of science and technology to our material economy for the purpose of enhancing and elevating the life of the individual. The very stuff of which democracy is made.

The conservation he preached dealt not only with trees—it dealt with the sheep herders and the homesteaders whose means of livelihood in the forest depended upon the kind of protection that was given them. It dealt not only with erosion and flood control, but with the wise use of the land, with the development of the great river valleys in terms of irrigation and power, such as you are so magnificently working out with your Grand Coulee and Bonneville dams.

It dealt with research, with programs of improvement of country life, with electrification of farms, with rural education. It dealt with equality of opportunity, with control of monopoly. The list is a long one.

Most important, it dealt with conservation of natural resources as an international problem affecting issues of permanent peace.

To Pinchot, you see, man himself is a natural resource. The basic resource for whose material, moral and spiritual welfare the Conservation doctrine is invoked. Man, without whose energy, the energy of coal and oil of electricity, yes of atomic science itself, is inert and meaningless.

Believing, as Pinchot did, that the planned and orderly development of the earth and all it contains is indispensable to the permanent prosperity of the human race, conservation in its widest sense became to him one of the guiding principles through which such prosperity might be achieved. A bold creative affirmation in spiritual and ethical terms, of our faith, in the dignity of man as a child of God.

Pinchot was trained as a forester, he thought as a forester, he felt like a forester. But before he had practiced forestry long, he realized that there were questions with which he as chief forester was called upon to deal—questions that on the face of them might seem to have little to do with trees.

In his autobiography he writes about going out some 42 years ago "in the gathering gloom of an expiring day to ride in Rock Creek Park," and of taking with him on that ride the difficult problems upon which he was constantly at work.

Particularly he was thinking of the relation of the forests not only to streams and erosion, but to inland navigation, to water power developments, to fish and game, to recreation. He was thinking of the danger of monopoly of control of natural resources, about abuses in the exploitation of mineral deposits on public lands, about river valley developments, about soil conservation, about better agriculture.

What had these to do with forestry, he asked himself and what had forestry to do with them? What was the basic link, if any, between them all?

Suddenly the idea flashed through his mind, "Here are no longer a lot of different, independent, often antagonistic questions, each on its own separate little island" as he, a forester, had been in the habit of thinking. Instead there is one central question, many-sided yes, but still a unit. All so closely connected as to make it imperative they be coordinated and treated as part of a single coherent plan.

Seen in this new light, these separate issues fitted each into the other to make up one central problem—the use of the good for the good of man.

To him it was "like coming out of a dark tunnel." He "had been seeing one spot of light ahead, and of a sudden the whole landscape rushed into visibility."

It was a new policy that was needed. A policy not exclusively national, but one worldwide in its scope. A policy that involved not only the welfare of man but his very existence on earth. An international policy in which all nations must eventually cooperate for their fullest development.

In these terms conservation becomes a matter not primarily of techniques (as some moderns seem to think), but of democratic policy. Of government policy on the highest level.

Possibly there are some of you old timers here—the old timers he loved so well—who still remember the great meeting of 1908 called at the instigation of Pinchot by then President Theodore Roosevelt.

I want to digress here a minute to take the opportunity of bearing witness of how deeply Gifford Pinchot felt always about the debt he owed to the men of the Forest Service. Over and over again he said that to them, to the old timers, belonged the real credit for what had been accomplished. Never before or since, he said, had such high morale, such devotion to the public good, such creative ability been demonstrated in any government body. It was a three-way cooperation enterprise—the foresters at one end, the American people at the other, Gifford Pinchot in the middle.

After forty years this spirit still persists, still animates the Forest Service. Today this service is still outstanding in its high morale, its devotion to duty, its creative and imaginative leadership. It still sets a pace that many government departments might be well advised to follow.

Only a few weeks ago two men spoke to me in glowing terms of the Forest Service as the best body of public servants in Washington. They both referred (in entirely different conversations) to its energy, its courage, to the selfless devotion and drive of its personnel. They felt that the Forest Service stands today perhaps highest of all government organizations.

But to go back to the conservation meeting in 1908; there for the first time in history the idea of conservation was spelled out to the American people in terms so simple as to be understood by all.

First they were made to realize that our national resources are not inexhaustible. That, on the contrary, these are being destroyed and wasted at a rate that is disastrous and may soon become fatal.

The point was then driven home to the people that the natural resources of the country are a national heritage, to be made use of in establishing and promoting the welfare, the prosperity, and the happiness of the American people.

Hitherto, said the President, our national policy had been one of almost unrestricted destruction of these resources. It was a policy that had led and was leading to exhaustion of many of them. Moreover, it was a policy that gave unequalled opportunity for private monopoly. And "monopoly can no longer be tolerated," he proclaimed over and over again.

"In the past" Roosevelt continued, "we have admitted the right of the individual to injure the future of the Republic for his own present profit. The time has come to put an end to such exploitations…" Always the protection of the rights of the people marched side by side with the technology of forest management, with the development of waterpower, extraction of minerals, etc.

Always the emphasis was laid upon the social purpose of conservation, the greatest good to the greatest number for the longest time. Always the conception stressed that conservation is not a series of independent issues, but one central problem to be faced and solved as such. Two years later Gifford Pinchot projected his

insight into the conservation philosophy still further. This time to the international field. To the relationship between conservation and the question of peace. Why, in the long role of history, had man so persistently gone out to do battle with his fellow man? Could certain central issues be traced that underlay and explained these endless wars?

Obviously from time immemorial men had fought either to grab from their neighbors or to defend their own possession, of the best hunting grounds, the most fertile plains, of protected harbors, of lands richest in mineral deposits. In early days the thinking was in terms of iron, copper, gold; later coal and oil were included. Today nations are turning covetous eyes on rubber, on deposits of tin, manganese, chrome, molybdenum, bauxite and uranium (except for rubber, natural resources, all of these—nonrenewable resources at that.)

No single nation is self-sufficient in all the essential raw materials it needs, Pinchot pointed out. The welfare of each is dependent upon access to those it lacks—access without recourse to war. Moreover, the world is beginning to understand that, instead of its being in the interest of any one nation to see another depressed, it is to the interest of each and all to see the rest secure.

Could such access to raw materials be brought about by mutual consent on an international basis?

Well, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, President Truman, each one in his time believed that conservation on the international level could and would help to remove one of the most dangerous of all obstacles to a just and permanent world peace. They believed that international cooperation in conservation objectives most certainly would be of basic advantage of the entire world.

In 1909 a formal invitation was sent out by Theodore Roosevelt to 48 nations to join together in an international conference on the subject of natural resources and their inventory, conservation, and wise utilization.

Some 30 of these countries, including among them Great Britain, France, Germany, Canada, and Mexico, accepted. Most unfortunately, however, for the cause of peace, Roosevelt's successor, President Taft, whose failure to support domestic conservation, precipitated a major political revolt, decided to recall the invitation and to kill the conference.

Wilson, Harding, and Hoover were in turn approached but all failed to act.

In 1944 we went to see Franklin Roosevelt. The story of that meeting is both exciting and dramatic. For F.D.R. with his broad and imaginative understanding of history, grasped and immediately welcomed the full significance of the idea. Pledged himself to the calling of such an international conference and asked how soon it might be put through. He authorized Pinchot to draw up an agenda, and to draft whatever government officials he might want for the doing of it.

In a letter to Cordell Hull, dated October 24, 1944, FDR wrote: "In our meetings with other nations I have a feeling that too little attention is being paid to the subject of the conservation and use of natural resources. I am surprised that the world knows so little about itself…It occurs to me, therefore, that even before the United Nations meet…it might do much good to hold a meeting in the United States of all the united and associated nations….I repeat again that I am more and more convinced that Conservation is the basis of permanent peace. I think the time is ripe."

After FDR's death, President Truman, who had given the matter much close personal attention, went ahead on it. In August 1946, he sent to the United Nations as the American plan a formal proposal for such a conference.

This conference so conceived and so born took place last August at Lake Success. It was known as the Conservation and Scientific Conference. The story of this conference is a tragic one too long to go into here. Suffice it to say the moral and social, the economic and political objectives of conservation, its democratic significance were rigidly ignored by the men of little faith and many fears who organized the conference. Even more unbelievable, all mention of peace and war in relation to conservation was deliberately and definitely excluded from the agenda.

"Topping a Telephone Tree" from Joe Halm's narrative, Library of Congress

The sterile mouse that emerged, while excellent on the technical side and adequate enough on most of the scientific, had obviously no right to lay claim to the name of conservation in which it was conceived.

So deplorable a retreat from an opportunity was bitterly resented by many of the delegates who had been looking forward to a great upsurge of sentiment from the peoples they represented. Delegates who understood what such developments as TVA (and those you are so imaginatively building here on the Columbia River) might mean, do mean, in terms of inspiration to literally hundreds of millions of impoverished and hopeless people of Europe, Asia and Africa.

However, to dwell too narrowly and too long on the details of the past, while it may be good history, it is not necessarily sound conservation. By which I mean that the problems of today differ at least in many superficial ways from those of the past.

For one thing many concrete victories have been achieved since conservation was first promulgated as an American doctrine—victories that will stand for all time. In the intervening years new and breathtaking techniques have been worked out, scientific truths laid bare, that were not even foreshadowed in those early days. Even more important, new problems that are constantly arising—new needs of the American people that are coming into being. Problems and needs that demand new applications of the Conservation philosophy.

The CCC camps, the shelterbelts, some of the recent techniques in the development of the TVA and the Columbia River are cases in point. As is the bold new doctrine of President Truman and his statesmanlike vision in building up the peoples of backward nations. All of which hold inspiration and great hope for the future.

Gifford Pinchot was always the first to proclaim the principle of growth, of development, and of renewal as central to the conservation idea.

He insisted that conservation must be reinvigorated, revived, remanned, revitalized by each successive generation. Its implications, its urgencies, its logistics, translated in terms of the present by each of them. Always he pointed out that the victories and achievements of Conservation must never be regarded as an excuse for complacency, but only as an incentive to further goals.

He, therefore, welcomed the rediscovery of conservation by successive presidents and political leaders. Conservationists, you know, believe in the renewal of natural resources. And such political renewals constitute of themselves a prolific resource in our national political life. Conservation is today more than ever a philosophy of dynamic democracy. Still to be conceived not only in terms of science and techniques, but primarily in relation to men and to women to their needs, their aspirations, their social demands. That fact is what gives conservation its basic unity. As such it is central to the domestic and international objectives of the American people.

With his deep insight into the well-springs of democratic action, with his abiding concern in the ethical and spiritual bases of American life, Gifford Pinchot provided the leadership in applied conservation.

Fearless, zealous, practical, and creative, a man "who never turned his back, but marched breast forward" he blazed the trail.

Upon those of us who are left, upon the young men and women of the future rests the responsibility and the glory of the long march ahead to greater opportunity—to more perfect freedom.

Continued from page two.

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Arriving at La Wis Wis Campground on that summer day, I sought an interpretive sign that would explain what had happened in 1949 and why Cornelia Pinchot had crossed the country to talk about her husband's work. Searching high and low, I finally stumbled on a rock with a plaque next to a thin rivulet of water. The plaque told me there had been a ceremony but there was no mention of Cornelia Pinchot or the speech that kept her husband's memory alive.

That day, the crowd at La Wis Wis had learned of Gifford's life-long commitment to public service, to the work of conservation, and to the long-term aspirations and well-being of the American people. "He welcomed," she said, "the rediscovery of conservation by successive presidents and political leaders. Conservationists...believe in the renewal of natural resources. And such political renewals constitute of themselves a prolific resource in our national political life. Conservation is today more than ever a philosophy of dynamic democracy."

Before I left La Wis Wis, I chatted up a very nice concessionaire installed in a trailer with a portable generator hissing, moaning, and interrupting the peace and quiet of the campground. A stone's throw away was a small A-framed ranger cottage with a stone base being restored by volunteers. But I wondered, "Where are the forest rangers to explain things like when I was a kid? Where were the signs telling people about Cornelia's appearance at the amphitheater and the speech? Was I the only one who knew what had happened on that day in 1949 when Cornelia gave voice to the man who made all this land and recreation possible? And why was the amphitheater such a mess?" She shook her head. She'd never heard of Gifford Pinchot. Or Cornelia. Clearly, she wasn't the person to whom I should be asking questions. She cited budget difficulties.

The concessionaire gave me her card hoping I'd send the history so that she could share it with her guests. "Her guests," she said. I wondered. These are the nation's guests, aren't they? Why had the U.S. Forest Service history been outsourced and abandoned in places of such importance? Campers stood in line behind me twiddling their thumbs. I went on my way to Mt. Rainier National Park where the entrance fee paid for uniformed rangers at an information desk that handled questions.

Upon arrival, I sidled up to the information desk to ask the Park Service rangers if they had heard of Cornelia Pinchot or her speech at La Wis Wis Campground in 1949. No, they hadn't, they said. I'd given up, but I'd had an amazing day. For my birthday, I bought a Golden Eagle Pass, the least I could do. I then drove north to Seattle with Mt. Rainier in the rearview mirror standing like a beacon to all of Gifford and Cornelia's hopes and dreams for America.

By Bibi Gaston

Source: The text of Cornelia Bryce Pinchot's speech is taken from the *Journal of Forestry*, February 1950.

Two Plaques Honor Gifford Pinchot in Simsbury

Gifford Pinchot was born August 11, 1865, in the summer home of his maternal grandparents, Lucy Phelps and Amos Richards Eno, now the Simsbury 1820 House at 731 Hopmeadow Street. He is honored by a plaque on the front lawn and also on a plaque in front of the Pinchot Sycamore, the largest tree in Connecticut. The tree stands beside the Farmington River, just north of Route 185.

Upcoming Programs at the Simsbury Free Library

A Hip Road Trip: Roadside Architecture

Wednesday, April 24 at 6:30 p.m.

Mary Donohue, award-winning architectural historian and assistant publisher of *Connecticut Explored* magazine will take attendees on a grand tour of Connecticut's roadside architecture. Using vintage postcards, rare brochures and matchbooks, early automotive maps and contemporary photographs, Donahue explores our state's two-lane highways–including the Berlin Turnpike, Route 1, and the Albany Turnpike–in search of vintage diners, tourist cabins, neon signs, gas stations, and 1950s amusements such as miniature golf courses and drive-in movies.

Gospel Comes to Simsbury

Thursday, May 9 at 6:30 p.m.
Children and families welcome!

Join us for the musical talents of Helen Walton. She will share the history and intrinsic elements of gospel music as she sings and plays percussion instruments handed down from her grandmother.

Connecticut Architecture: Stories of 100 Places

Wednesday, May 22 at 6:30 p.m.

Christopher Wigren, architectural historian and Deputy Director of the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, is the author of the recently published book *Connecticut Architecture: Stories of 100 Places*, an illustrated guide to notable buildings, neighborhoods, and communities across the state. Author Wigren will speak about a wide variety of places from Colonial churches and Modernist houses to refurbished nineteenth-century factories, small farmsteads, quiet maritime villages and more. His book will be for sale for $40.

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