



Gifford Pinchot

“Father of American Forestry”



Gifford Pinchot, 1865-1947

Born in 1865 in Simsbury, Connecticut, Gifford Pinchot was born into a wealthy family and traveled abroad regularly with his parents. Despite their wealth, his father, James Pinchot, had an abhorrence of wastefulness. He had made his fortune in first importing then manufacturing wallpaper. James also had interests in the forest products industry which, paired with his practical and frugal nature, made him a pillar of the American Forestry Association. This organization sought, as early as 1875, to halt the reckless destruction of natural resources by employing conservative management.

Gifford was a lifelong learner, preparing for college at Phillips Exeter Academy then attending Yale University, where he earned a BA degree in 1889 (followed by an MA in 1901 and LLD in 1925). He also held several other degrees from various colleges and universities including Princeton University (1904), Michigan Agricultural College (1907), McGill University (1909), Pennsylvania Military College (1923) and Temple University (1931).

Though urged by his grandfather to enter the family business, which consisted of various business interests in the U.S. and abroad, Gifford followed his father’s advice and chose to follow his passion: forestry. No schools in the U.S. offered forestry courses at that time, so he enrolled at L’Ecole Nationale Forestiere (National School of Waters and Forests) at Nancy, France, at the urging of then renowned German forester Dietrich Brandis. Gifford was the first American to receive formal education in the field, learning the practice of selective harvesting of forest resources. However, impatient with the courses and desiring practical experience, Gifford left France after just one year.

Gifford’s parents later endowed the Yale School of Forestry and established at Milford, PA, the first forest experiment station in the nation to encourage the reforestation of denuded lands. His father, who was influenced by the Utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill which defined social good as “the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.”, was a major influence in Gifford’s life. This was later reflected in Gifford’s opinion that our national forests should be managed for “...the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run.”

After leaving school in France in late 1890, Gifford returned to the U.S. and opened a forestry consulting office in New York. “*When I got home...the nation was obsessed by a fury of development. The American Colossus was fiercely intent on appropriating and exploiting the riches of the richest of all continents.*” Gifford said. This impression, his upbringing and training in France would guide him throughout his professional and political career.

Gifford began the first systematic forest management in the U.S. at Vanderbilt’s Biltmore Estate in 1892, hired on the recommendation of Frederick Law Olmsted, the famous landscape architect and an old friend of his father. He set out to prove that forestry could both produce timber for harvest and maintain the forest for future generations.

Pinchot was appointed to the National Academy of Sciences' "Forest Commission" in 1896, which recommended creation of forest reserves and was responsible for the Forest Reserve Act of 1897, providing for the administration and protection of the reserves.

Having become a close friend and collaborator of Teddy Roosevelt, Gifford was appointed forester and chief of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Division of Forestry in 1898, which became the Bureau of Forestry in 1901 and the Forest Service in 1905. He flooded the press with the country's need for forestry and began to influence public opinion. In 1905 he succeeded in getting the forest reserves transferred from the Department of the Interior to the Forest Service and renamed the reserves "national forests" in 1907. During Pinchot's leadership (1898 – 1910), the number of national forests increased from 32 to 149 and totaling 193 million acres. Pinchot also extended Federal regulation to all resources in the national forests, including grazing, water-power dam sites and mineral rights.

Gifford was organizer of (and personally helped finance) The White House Governors' Conference on Natural Resources in May 1908. It was attended by governors, members of Congress and the Cabinet, Supreme Court judges and prominent private citizens and was the first meeting of its kind to address the protection and management of natural resources. Soon after, he was appointed chairman of the National Conservation Commission, which compiled the first inventory of the country's natural resources. In 1909, the North American Conservation Conference convened at his suggestion, and plans followed for an international conference to be held at The Hague but was cancelled by the change in administrations.

A member of Roosevelt's inner circle, Gifford also served on several of TR's commissions: Commission on the Organization of Government Scientific Work; Commission on Public Lands; Commission on Departmental Methods; Inland Waterways Commission; and Country Life Commission.

In 1910, following a widely publicized controversy with Interior Department secretary Richard Ballinger, Gifford, through a senator, attacked both Ballinger, who wanted to turn Alaskan coal lands over to private ownership, and President Taft on the floors of Congress. He was dismissed as chief of the Forest Service by Taft, who believed that public lands should be controlled by states or private individuals. The public outcry at Pinchot's firing and his continued popularity aided his mission to keep national forest management within the Federal government and fueled his political aspirations. He organized and served as president (1910 – 1925) of the National Conservation Association, formed to continue the fight for his conservation ideas and oppose the transfer of public lands to the states.

Gifford spent the next several years supporting Theodore Roosevelt's 1912 presidential campaign and helping to create the new Progressive Party with his brother Amos. He represented the more radical wing of the party's politics, campaigning for antitrust laws and innovative social reforms such as unemployment compensation and equal pay for women workers.

At age 49, Pinchot married Cornelia Bryce, daughter of Lloyd Bryce, distinguished publisher of North American Review, U.S. minister to the Netherlands, congressman and novelist. A wealthy woman in her early thirties, Cornelia had an independent political life as a champion of the working woman and an advocate of women's suffrage. Teddy Roosevelt considered her to have one of the best political minds he had ever known.

In 1914 Gifford was an unsuccessful Progressive candidate for Pennsylvania governor. From 1920 – 1922, he was commissioner of Pennsylvania's Department of Forestry and later secretary of its Department of Forests and Waters. He served as Pennsylvania's governor from 1923 – 1927, largely through the support of rural counties and the new women's vote. During his term, he reorganized state government, did away with many long-standing political practices, eliminated the state's \$23 million

deficit, settled the anthracite coal strike of 1923 and was known for his accessibility to the public. He won widespread support for regulating public utilities but offended many by enforcing prohibition.

Prohibited by state law from serving a successive term, Gifford attempted a Senate election but lost. Re-elected as governor from 1931 – 1935, he faced the challenges of the Great Depression. He pushed for federal economic intervention, created state jobs programs and donated a quarter of his own gross salary for one year. He successfully pressed for large reductions in utility rates and built 20,000 miles of paved rural roads to “get the farmer out of the mud.” He was also known for including women, blacks and Jews in his administration. Gifford’s subsequent campaigns for the Senate and again the governorship were unsuccessful.

Gifford founded the School of Forestry at Yale University and the Society of American Foresters, of which he was the first president. He wrote several papers and reports on conservation, including a dozen monographs on forestry subjects, approximately 150 published articles, reports, bulletins, lectures and addresses. He also authored several books, including a popular book on his journey to the South Seas, *A primer of Forestry* (1899), *The Fight for Conservation* (1909), *The Training of a Forester* (1914), and his autobiography, *Breaking New Ground* (published posthumously in 1947).

Gifford Pinchot is acknowledged as the “Father of American Forestry”. He was largely responsible for the growth and support of conservation by the American public and the establishment of conservation policy in both state and federal government. He is credited with popularizing the term “conservation” in its natural resource context (as opposed to “preservation”) and establishing its definition as “the greatest good for the greatest number” – one of the guiding principals of U.S. national forest management. Teddy Roosevelt was quoted regarding Gifford’s contribution to the establishment of the conservation movement, “...among the many, many public officials who under my administration rendered literally invaluable service to the people of the United States, Gifford Pinchot on the whole, stood first.”

Pinchot died in New York in 1946 of leukemia at the age of 81.

The estate Gifford’s parents built in Milford, PA, was gifted by his son to the U.S. Forest Service in 1963. Now known as Grey Towers National Historic Site, the property is used for conservation education programs and a conference center.

The Mount Rainier Forest Reserve, later changed to the Columbia National Forest, was re-named in 1949 as the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

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