Surveying His Life

Gifford would have seemed an unlikely forester because of his family’s past relationship with Penn’s Woods. His French immigrant grandfather, Cyrille Pinchot, used his French fortunes to purchase tenant farmland in Milford, PA. Gifford’s father, James, worked the Delaware River.

Born the 11th of August in 1865, Gifford spent a significant portion of his childhood in Europe, where his father noticed the land management. Gifford seemed to have a keen interest in nature growing up, so, his father suggested his son become a forester at Yale.

In 1885, Gifford began his collegiate experience at Yale. Yale did not have a program for forestry. Pinchot delved into any class and all literature at Yale relative to the concept.

After a resolute rejection of his ideas from Congress, Gifford left for Europe in 1889. He traveled to Coopers Hill of England, l'ecole Nationale Foresterie de France, and the Sihwald of Switzerland. The importance of silviculture was impressed upon him; he returned home in 1890.

By 1892, Pinchot worked to prove his learnings at Biltmore Forest. His work led to his invitation to work on a government project concerning national diminishing forestland under President Cleveland from 1896-97. This later led to President McKinley appointing him as a special forest agent in 1897.

President Roosevelt and Pinchot ushered in reform of federal conservation in 1905 because the former system was ineffective. Gifford became head of the new Forest Service. He and his family also would initiate a forest school with Yale the same year. Grey Towers, their home in Milford, would host the first classes.

1909 marked a shift leading to the end of Pinchot’s federal fight for conservatism. People had grown skeptical of the power being used by the Forest Service and government claiming of land. President Taft and Richard Ballinger, the Secretary of Interior, worked to undo Roosevelts added national lands of 1907. Pinchot took the fight to the media forcing Taft to readmit the lands he just removed. Taft fired Pinchot for his scandalous behavior. Pinchot was glad to have sacrificed his job for the sake of conservation.

Runaway Consumption

General Patterns

As people gained land in Pennsylvania, it was common for land to be cleared for habitation and agriculture. Most settlers stripped the bark from trees and waited until they died. At this point, the section of dead forest would be set on fire.

Another common practice used throughout much of the state is winter timber harvesting by farmers. In areas forming iron industry, land value would be determined by lumber available to be made into charcoal.

The East

Pennsylvania forest land along the Delaware River succumbed to exploitation as forest resources. The timber would be cut down and floated down the river to the major cities demanding the resource, i.e. Trenton and Philadelphia. Technology allowing for more efficient and larger sawmills led to production rates resulting in the clear-cutting of forests along the Delaware.

Central

Central Pennsylvania also succumbed to the timber harvesting industry. Like in the east, it started out as small operations worked by farmers during the winter seasons. Like along the Delaware, advancing technologies caused a change in harvest patterns.

Sawmill numbers would increase to over 400 along the West Branch. Waterways that were once deemed impassible by the rafting process employed by the winter harvesters were replaced by those bold enough to float single logs. Nearly every waterway leading to the West Branch supplied lumber from Williamsport to Lock Haven saw mills. Moshannon Creek alone is estimated to have provided over 2 million feet of logs.

The Northwest

All of Pennsylvania timber production faced an increase once the railroads finally stretched across the state, as can be viewed in the center graphic. It replaced much of the floating methods. The northwest needed the rail road system because its hemlock timber was much heavier than the pine and could not be floated.

Until the railroad allowed the north western hardwoods to be transported, trees mostly went to waste as the bark was harvested for the tanning industry. Allegheny forest land fell at 3,000 acres a year by 1904 with 200,000 board feet a day leaving on train.

Conclusion

Admittedly, Gifford Pinchot did not directly affect Pennsylvania conservation until he became governor in 1923, the same year the Alleghany National Forest became protected by the Forest Service. It was his mentor, Dr. Joseph Rothrock, that had helped acquire Pennsylvania’s first state protected lands, 17,010 acres, in 1898. However, if Gifford Pinchot had not purpose of conservation: greatest number of people people of Pennsylvania over consume the limited them. It is rightfully so that the honor of a National named after him and a PA

Mr. Ryan M. Stuart – Spring 2018