January 1958

The Glory Trail: The Great American Migration and Its Impact on Natural Resources

Ernest Swift
The National Wildlife Federation

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THE GLORY TRAIL

THE GREAT AMERICAN MIGRATION AND ITS IMPACT ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Ernest Swift, Executive Director
THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION
FOREWORD

Surprisingly few Americans have any definitive or comprehensive knowledge of the history of their country, although many are under the delusion that their school book history taught them all they needed to know.

They were indoctrinated with a smattering of dates which included the voyage of Columbus and the landing of the pilgrims at Plymouth. They learned what Priscilla said to John Alden, gloated over the Boston Tea Party and memorized part of Patrick Henry's speech; they were briefed on Bunker Hill, Washington crossing the Delaware and the Surrender of Cornwallis. And that just about completed that era.

Daniel Boone's trek into Kentucky, Andy Jackson at New Orleans, and the struggle between the States were considered necessary landmarks in school history. These were followed by subjugation of the Indians, extinction of the buffalo and the Spanish-American war; which wrapped up American history to the year 1900 in a tight little package.

There have been books written also on the nation's wealth of natural resources, but too few of them in relation to people. People and their affinity to forests, prairies, mountains, deserts, lakes and rivers are the warp and woof of this country, and they should not and cannot be separated in reciting the unequaled drama of America.

History can be made a dull and musty recitation of dates and political events, or it can be brought to life and made a vibrant, living story. It can be the record of forces and stresses that motivate mankind; of violence that challenges dictators and traditions; of the urge to migrate, to cross trackless mountains and deserts, and to breast uncharted seas; of the impulse to be self-righteous, to make aggressive war while praying for peace.

This booklet makes no pretense of being a complete history of the United States. It is not a recital of events but a panorama of motivation and action; a picture that must be viewed from a distance to appreciate the restless ebb and flow of humanity and the fabulous wealth of empire that we claim as our heritage. Its intent is to arouse an intellectual curiosity for resource history, which will lead the reader to an interest in the bibliography and other outstanding publications.—E. S.
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INTRODUCTION

The years 1905 and 1908 provide a suitable ground swell from which to view the deadly and oftentimes acrimonious struggle for control of the nation’s tremendous storehouse of resources; not only as they were affected in the previous century by a fever-eyed conquering horde but down to the present time.

The ground swell was created by a relatively few determined and farsighted men—now all but forgotten by atomic mankind—but who in their day were determined to save the nation’s resources from complete ravishment.

John Wesley Powell, for example, whose reports to Congress on the management of the arid West laid buried under the dryrot of bureaucracy until the hysteria of the dustbowl ’thirties, made them prophetic reading.

Or John Muir who found eternal fame in his efforts to create national parks and to save some of America’s wilderness; or T. Gilbert Pearson who rescued wild fowl from the plume hunter and game butcher.

There were others concerned with the nation’s forests—such as John Warder, physician and part-time forester, who organized the American Forestry Association in 1875. There was Bernhard Fernow, called America’s first professional forester. Fernow, a native of Germany, received his forestry education in that country and then migrated to the United States to become Chief of the Division of Forestry in the Department of Agriculture in 1886. Then, of course, there was Gifford Pinchot who fought for national forests like an angry god. There was Teddy Roosevelt in the middle of all the sound and fury and loving every minute of it. There were Charles Sargent, Asa Gray, Franklin Hough, Filbert Roth, to risk naming a few. There were many others, but all with a common purpose.

The year 1905 saw the creation of the United States Forest Service as successor to the old Bureau of Forestry. This Act of Congress was symbolic in many respects for it was a declaration to all concerned that the old spoils system must end.

Nearly all Congressional acts in connection with public domain up to that time had been to dispose of the public resources in a more or less lavish laissez faire give-away program.
Shortly after the colonial revolution, lands having naval stores and ship timbers were set aside. But with the new embryo republic being ceded land from the original colonies and later acquiring the Louisiana Purchase, California and the southwest from Mexico, the young nation was much like a lumberjack with a quart of liquor under his belt and two dollars in his pocket. It owned the world and insisted on giving it away. Land was a drug on the market.

Land was given to the states, to the veterans of successive wars; sections were set aside for the development of school systems; it was purchased or fraudulently acquired by speculators; it was made available to settlers through various devices of purchase and homestead; it was given away to canal companies; and millions of acres of the most fertile land together with additional millions of acres of the finest timber that looked up to the heavens were ceded to the freshly blossoming industry—the railroads.

The creation of the Forest Service did not end the fight—no indeed. But it marked the high tide of exploitation and the meager beginning of resource management and some restraints. There had been previous attempts to write some such philosophy into federal laws. For example, as early as 1850 agents had been appointed to stop wholesale theft of timber on public lands. These agents had little or no effect and their reports of outrageous timber stealing hardly came to light; but surprisingly President Grant sent a special message to Congress in 1874 calling attention to the urgent need for forest fire protection. This same year he pocket-vetted a bill to protect the disappearing buffalo.

As early as 1872 Congress was making some attempt at preservation and in that year established Yellowstone National Park. There were successive attempts to stem the tide of exploiters and brigands. There were also many ignorant but honest people who were certain that this nation would not run out of resources and were antagonistic to any government controls.

For at least fifty years there had been an increasing need for the appraisal and orderly management of the public domain. In 1891 Congress took a forward step little realizing its lasting effect on the future of the United States:

"That the President of the United States may from time to time set aside and reserve in any state or territory having public lands bearing forests in any part of the public lands, wholly or in part covered with timber or undergrowth, whether of commercial value or not, as public reservations. And the President shall by public proclamation declare the establishment of any such reservations and the limits thereof."
Such legislation had been debated in Congress as far back as 1876 and with its enactment President Harrison set aside the Yellowstone Park Forest Reservation, thereby making it illegal to trespass. By the end of his administration 13,000,000 acres had been withdrawn as forest preserves from homesteading or purchase. There followed certain withdrawals by President Cleveland and President McKinley.

With the forest reservations being set aside, the need for management arose, with Congress giving the bureaus vested with the responsibility of custodianship certain discretionary and policy-making authority. Thus the bureaucrat was conceived and born in federal government.

It was Theodore Roosevelt, however, with his interest in conservation and his flair for a good fight, who put this authority to use. In addition to creating the U. S. Forest Service in 1905, as a bureau to manage the public forests, he established vast areas of public domain as national forests.

So energetic was he in this task that the despoilers became alarmed and pressured Congress to pass the following Act in 1907:

“Hereafter no forest reserve shall be created nor shall any additions be made to one hereafter created within the limits of the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Colorado, Wyoming, California, Arizona, or New Mexico, except by the Act of Congress.”

In 1908 Roosevelt’s flair for timing and public leadership resulted in his Governors’ Conference on Conservation. In his letter of invitation he stated the following: “Facts which I cannot gainsay force me to believe that the conservation of our natural resources is the most weighty question now before the people of the United States. If this is so, the proposed conference which is the first of its kind will be among the most important gatherings in our history in its effect upon the welfare of our people.”

It was a conference of many big names and many speeches; it was designed to rally the nation’s top elected officials, industrial leaders and other public figures to a concerted effort for the better management of all resources. In fact the word “conservation” as applying to natural resources was practically unknown prior to the 1908 conference.

Fifty years later the Halls of Congress still resound with heated debate—who will prosper from the fruits of the earth and who will pay for the prosperity—the government or private capital? Putting it simply, who will get what through the power of political force? Meanwhile the citizens continue to waste and destroy the treasures of the earth in the name of progress.
Chapter I

THE CONQUEST

The motivation to migrate, to cross mountains, to challenge undetermined forces and stresses, must be in the genes of people and transmitted even unto the second and third generation. The multitude of compelling forces that forged these United States are traceable and understandable, if not ethical in all phases.

Our forefathers came to America for religious, political, and economic reasons. The discovery of a new land area gave release to the pent-up emotions of millions of underprivileged people. Any fears they might have had of the new world with its terrifying wilderness and threat of savage Indians was outweighed by subjugation and persecution in the older countries.

The common man was subjected to unreasonable taxation and confiscation without recourse to law; his sons were kidnapped and impressed by the military; his wife and daughters taken for the pleasure of royalty. Why should hardships, hard labor, and the threat of being scalped deter him from striking out into the unknown to escape human bondage? It is not difficult to understand the fierce soul-gripping emotions that impelled these people to grasp for the greatest of all human prizes—freedom: Freedom of religion; freedom of government; freedom to earn a living, to own property, to prosper.

This upsurge of forces commenced a chain reaction of events that still convulses the globe. Many historians have rather ponderously stressed the efforts of the early colonizers who laboriously grubbed a meager living along the Atlantic seaboard, when not engaged in debating ecclesiastical tenets, branding adulteresses, and burning witches.

Exploitation of North America commenced when the first white man set foot on the continent. That is what he came for.

The stage, however, was first set in the forthcoming struggle for empire along the Gulf of Mexico and in the southwest by a long list of bold, cold-blooded conquistadors. The objective of all these early invaders was the same—gold. In the temper of the times all were cruel, all skilled in the techniques of murder, rapine, assassination, torture and pillage. When finally there was no more gold to plunder the natives were put to slavery and forced to work the mines. For this
purpose they marched their columns from Florida to the Arkansas and from Sonora to the staked plains, the Grand Canyon and California.

In the beginning it was not the tantrums of petulant, vacillating monarchs nor the stubbornness of hard-fisted colonials that produced convulsions in continental Europe; first it was the fabulous gold discoveries in Mexico, Peru and the southwest; later it was the sweet, greasy scent of beaver hides. Ultimately beaver proved more potent than gold. The motivations were at work. The first chapter of exploitation and plundering in America was being outlined. Red-blooded young men were spurred on with tales of wild adventure, and kings and courtiers to insidious intrigue and wars of conquest. Eventually the tentacles of their avarice reached out to lonely frontier cabins in the New World where fair women and children were left scalped and mutilated.

There was no grand strategy or master plan in the conquest of the North American continent. It was a series of probing actions that commenced with Eric the Red and ended when Lewis and Clark tied in the last transect at the mouth of the Columbia.

Some were bold expeditions of a military nature, expansive in manpower and equipment, and extending over protracted periods of time. Such was a bloody trek of DeSoto which commenced with much confidence, fanfare, and with a reported 720 men with 237 horses. Starting from Tampa Bay in 1539, he followed a golden fantasy through Georgia, North and South Carolina, over the Appalachian mountains, through Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi to within a few miles of the present Oklahoma line. After more wandering to the south, he turned east finally to give up the illusion and the ghost and to have his body dropped into the Mississippi in the dead of night.

Spanish supremacy slowly crept up the Rio Grande, past the El Paso del Norte; first by the way of armed camps; then with sheep and cattle to feed the conquerors; followed by haciendas, irrigation and the ever-increasing herds. These humble agrarian uses held the territory and eventually established a way of life long after the gold fever had subsided. This land-use pattern is still the basic formula of the arid country, modified only by time, by government, by the impact of modern civilization.

Like the tracery of a green thread, irrigation developed along the rivers and cattle ranches beyond that; with cattle and sheep empires eventually stretching from horizon to horizon. After nearly four hundred years of dreamy existence, with monastery bells punctuating the pastoral peace, this land was embroiled by the Anglo-American in deadly cattle and sheep wars and brutal battles with nesters. It
also brought an enemy which guns could not conquer—erosion from too many livestock grazing in an arid country. It brought dust storms and rural slums. It brought all the ills attendant upon and seemingly inseparable from the greed of our accepted form of civilization. These were the same ills repeated that beset the hinterlands of the Tigris and the Euphrates and helped to destroy ancient Babylon.

Over the decades the land had its cultural, romantic and tragic epochs. It created the Mexican gentleman of grace, charm and easy virtue; the vaquero, the western badman and the Anglo-American knight of the saddle—the cowboy. It made such words as sombrero, chaps, latigo, honda, spade bit, buckaroo, nester, dry farmer, dogie, Okies, and many others a part of the American language.

But the rudimentary efforts in sustaining life and developing a land pattern were of small moment to the first conquistadors. In the beginning the Spaniard could not be diverted from the main objective—the search for gold.

For seventy-five years after the epochal voyage of Columbus, the tenacity and vigor of Spanish conquest and exploration was nothing short of amazing. It was certainly in sharp contrast to the rather timid expeditions of the French and English, who confined their first efforts to coastal observations, or at best, to inland journeys of a day or a week.

By 1540, Cardenas had looked down into an awesome gulch caused by eons of erosion, and most rightfully named The Grand Canyon. And while DeSoto was floundering his weary way west from Florida, Coronado in 1541, with a far more imposing retinue, was starting out somewhere in the neighborhood of Albuquerque to find the elusive Quivira and the Seven Cities of Gold, reported on but not seen by Vaca. Coronado is reported to have had some 1500 men and 1000 horses, plus 500 beef cattle and 5000 sheep. This early mention of livestock again denotes the beginning of the true land pattern in the great southwest.

His journey in search of gold took him up the Rio Grande, through a part of Texas, across the Brazos, the Red River, the Canadian and the Arkansas into Kansas. At one time he was probably within three hundred miles of his countryman in arms and partner in crime, DeSoto. He found some drab Quivira Indian villages, but no gold. In fact, the natives apparently had no interest in the white man’s obsession for this treasure.

Siphoning off the spoils of theft for royalty and the Spanish Dons, eventually sapped the energy for further exploration. Settling on the land gradually became a way of life as the gold became scarce.
In 1602 Vizcaino had mapped a goodly part of the California coastline; the same year Champlain began his tentative thrusts in the St. Lawrence country. With an anchorage on the Pacific, interest in a trail from Sonora to Monterey increased. In 1774 it was accomplished by Anza. Then followed the amazing and arduous journey of Garces and Escalante through New Mexico, Colorado, the Grand Canyon country, the latter not visited by white man since the time of Cardenas two hundred and thirty-six years prior.

These two defenders of Christianity wandered through the Gunnison country, the Uncompahgre, Utah and the present Dinosaur Monument, the Green River, Wasatch Mountains, Great Basin, missed the Great Salt Lake, found Utah Lake and circled their way back to Santa Fe, all in one year. In their own right they circumnavigated a kingdom on foot, a kingdom where 200 years later a governmental bureaucracy called the Reclamation Bureau staked out its sovereignty and demanded fealty of the people; one of the fattest pork barrels so far developed by experts in making pork barrels.

One tale of wilderness travel and survival transcends all sagas of adventure and exploration. It is the story of Alvar Nunez Cabeza De Vaca. Forced ashore through shipwreck on the Louisiana or Texas Gulf coast, Nunez and companions were made captives by Indians. They were slaves for six years, and finally he and three other Spaniards escaped, along with a Negro. During the years 1534 to 1536 they walked across Texas, New Mexico, and northern Arizona. Here they turned south and entered Old Mexico through Sonora, finally contacting a party of fellow Spaniards and ending their momentous journey. Alvar Nunez brought stories of golden cities as told to him by the Indians, which again inflamed the greed of Spanish gentlemen and sent them packing off in search of more rainbows. It might be added that, undoubtedly, Nunez saw the Mississippi some 13 years before DeSoto.

While the Spanish were launching their imposing expeditions from Florida west, and financing their bankrupt kingdom with stolen bullion, men of other nations had begun to try the new continent for an easy passage to the Orient. For hundreds of years this quest proved an obsession. As such, it increased man's geographical knowledge, snuffed out the lives of many daring men, and influenced the destiny of empires.

John Cabot was among the first, and sailed through the drifting fogs, to discover the Grand Banks of Canada six years after the first voyage of Columbus. Magellan inscribed his name on the pages of history when he completed his trip around the world in 1522. Verazzano explored the east coast of North America in 1524, and Cartier
sailed into the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1543. He found fishermen already ahead of him, and the natives conditioned to the benefits of trade.

It was not until 1603, however, that a man with rare capacity for exploration, leadership and government appeared on the scene to promote the interests of Imperial France. This man was the intrepid Champlain and his decisions set the course of conquest up to the time Wolf scaled the heights to fight on the Plains of Abraham. In many respects his tracks were bigger than all the rest.

In 1608 he founded the colony of Quebec. This was twelve years before the Pilgrim Fathers dropped the Mayflower’s hook at Plymouth Rock.

At a somewhat later date, eager men such as Perriot, LaSalle, Hennepin, DuLhut (Duluth), Menard, Radisson, Kelsey and Verdrye, invaded the austere and utterly savage wilderness of the Great Lakes country and Canada. They had an eye for romance and adventure, and they also caught the scent of untold wealth in their nostrils. “We are Caesars, there being nobody to contradict us,” wrote Radisson. They all traveled weary miles, as did the Spaniards, suffered countless hardships, and what they saw was so fabulous their tales were thrown back in their teeth as lies; yet the scoffers hastened on their back-track to capture wealth, fame, and more than likely an unmarked grave.

Radisson was truly one of the most fabulous, with his brother-in-law Monsieur Groseiller, Mr. Gooseberry. Still a beardless youth when he invaded the Mississippi and Superior country, Radisson was an old hand at handling Indians and in wilderness travel. Part of his conditioning had come about as a captive of the Mohawks for some years when a lad of fifteen or less. It is now fairly well established that he wintered at Chequamegun Bay about 1658, and prior to that had taken a long look at the Mississippi where it now bounds Minnesota and Wisconsin, had possibly penetrated west to the edge of the plains country; following that, from the Superior, through to Hudson’s Bay and North through Ungava.

On his return to Three Rivers he brought back a fortune in furs only to have them seized for his failure to comply with licensing regulations. He sold his ideas and experience to the English.

His talent for description and his active imagination were responsible for one of the most famous trading charters ever to be issued. It was issued to The Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading in Hudson’s Bay. The H.B.C. has been aptly referred to by inhabitants as “Here Before Christ.” Few enterprises, if any, have ever built up such traditions.
The irresistible pull of wilderness adventure, with its fanciful dreams of wealth, power, fame and freedom affected men from all nations and all walks of life. Freedom was a tantalizing allure that challenged all other inducements. It not only had an appeal in throwing off dull responsibilities inherent in civilization, but was a means to escape a morass of imperial bureaucracy and the cold, ambitious hand of the church. A man’s life and goods were under jeopardy to both, and their displeasures could easily brand him an outlaw. So they hied themselves to the life of a vaquero, a coureur de bois, an itinerant fur trader, or just an ordinary whiskey peddler. Their individual capacities determined their successes, and they played the percentages as to how long they could keep their scalps.

By far the majority had the raw courage for conquest. But as is common in human endeavor, only a few stand out in the capacity for daring leadership as against the many unknown and unnamed. The New World developed a rare breed of men: The explorer with an insatiable desire to see what was beyond the next hill, the next mountain, the next horizon; the canoe man, the Kentucky frontiersman, the mountain man, the river pig, the cowboy, the pioneer farmer. Although they varied greatly in intelligence, purpose and honor, they all had the basic attributes of individual daring, a serenity during prolonged periods of danger, and the highest tribute of all—the guts to “go it alone.”

In the end, however, it was not the adventurers that conquered and held fast to the Empire. It was the mass movement of stolid, plodding men of the soil with their axes, milk cows, and families pre-empting the land. In composite, they were an irresistible force. They moved and held on, then increased and moved again. They became ever more restless as they advanced to seek the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow; and finally an empire came into being as the result of their labors. Lighthearted at times, they could be truculent, hardheaded, stubborn people. Their ambitions became a mandate, a sign of manifest destiny. They still do. They claimed guidance from the Holy Ghost for whatever enterprise they embarked on, from making corn whiskey to killing “varmint” Indians. With religious fervor, unquestioned moral right, and a very practical application, they used deceit, intrigue, broken treaties, rotgut whiskey, trade guns, venereal disease, smallpox, and slavery to beat down the American Indian. The Red Man’s uncultured honesty and his childish delight for the white man’s gadgets played him into the hands of the invaders. It was hard to comprehend such cold-blooded hypocrisy and greed.

These invaders were more than willing to fight for and make their own opportunities, and to plan and build their own security. Surely
there is no lasting value in a security that one has not earned or helped produce. They scorned asking their government for economic security. Subsidies were a thing unheard of. They made their own police protection a great part of the time. They felt themselves capable of handling all situations which confronted them. They did not always succeed as individuals, but they had the courage to try. The Welfare State was still many years away.

The American scene, with the exception of the plains and deserts, is identified with the forests, certainly the crowning gem of nature’s handiwork; stretching their endless miles from the headlands of Maine to the Olympic Peninsula and from the land of Little Sticks in the Arctic to the fetid swamps of the Mississippi Delta country.

With little prejudice, it can be said that they were the aristocracy of the world’s sylva; by turn austere, beautiful beyond description, and warmly comforting. The forests felt the first impact of invasion, and with mixed feelings the invaders felt the impact of the forests. Forests readily supplied many of the basic elements of livelihood, but were also considered an obstruction to agriculture, place of ambush for Indians, and later a barrier to western migration.

Their lofty canopies, nodding in the eternal breezes, had looked down on generations of savage red men, supreme in their nomadic idyll; then on no less savage whites, intent on garnering nature’s bounties; on awkward, ill-equipped armies, marching and countermarching in an aura of fancied glory and conquest; on adventure and romance; and in the end, on unbridled and violent death.

Timber and furs, the easiest available resources on the Atlantic Coast, were the first to be exploited and as a result soon became subject to regulations. Masts were shipped to England from Virginia in 1609; and the first forest regulation was passed by the Plymouth Colony in 1626 which forbade the sale or transport of timber from the colony without approval of the governor or council. Fear of local timber shortages was the basis for this ordinance.

In 1631 the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed an ordinance forbidding the burning of any land after March 1, under pain of payment of full damage and such penalties as the court might inflict. By 1631 all Colonies as far south as Pennsylvania had taken similar action; and by Revolutionary times fire control laws had been enacted in all Colonies except Maryland, Virginia, South Carolina and Georgia. Some of these ordinances not only recognized damage to timber and young second growth, but to soil, real property and live stock.
As early as 1691 the Crown reserved trees of certain dimensions principally for mast timbers for the Royal Navy in issuing a charter to the Province of Massachusetts which became known as the Broad Arrow Policy. It eventually led to wholesale trespass and defiance of law and order, which in later years, during the western migration expanded to colossal timber thefts on public domain. Generally paralleling forest laws were regulations of various nature regarding the bountying of predatory animals and the taking of game and fish. Rhode Island had the first closed season on deer as early as 1646, and in 1694 Massachusetts began protecting deer. In 1708 New York was giving a measure of protection to ruffed grouse, quail, wild turkey and the heath hen.

It is surprising to note that anyone sought to safeguard the public welfare at that early time in terms of conserving and managing resources when they so conclusively seemed inexhaustible. And it must be further remembered that no other people had ever tackled such a job of subjugation, expansion of free enterprise, and struggled with the ideologies of free government, all at the same time.
Chapter 2
THE WEAK DIED AND THE COWARDS NEVER STARTED

When the man of the stone age met the man with the arquebus and later the Kentucky rifle, the advantage was apparent. The latter had more than the rifle, he had the intellect that went with developing the rifle. Giving the rifle to the stone age man did not make him an intellectual equal. The stone age man sustained himself in this uneven contest remarkably well, for he was intelligent in his own right and fighting on home grounds. He did well in a delayed action war until the invaders resorted to what might be termed the scorched earth policy. The white man wiped out the basic resource that made the plains economy possible, the buffalo. From then on the stone age man had one of two alternatives: death or the concentration camp. Many chose death.

Indian culture in its primitive setting rested on the old and ancient natural law that the strong lived and the weak died. Life was for the strong. It was true both of the Indian and the wild beasts he shared living space with. The natural adjustment of both were preserved by war, starvation, drownings, disease, storms and floods, and predation.

It was wasteful in the sense that it kept the populations in check; it was sound in that it did not allow the populations to expand beyond the ability of the land to sustain them. Under such checks and balances the land ecology was preserved. The prairie bluejoint and buffalo grass tied down some of the most fertile soil on the universe.

Neither history nor tradition gives overwhelming evidence of malnutrition or rickets among the Indians in their primitive environment, even though periodically plagued with starvation. It took the refinements of civilization to produce conditions described in the “Grapes of Wrath.” Mismanagement of land has fostered many rural slums in the United States and created social problems symbolized in the word “Okies.”

Even the Indian’s approach to government, as socialistic as any on earth, did not contemplate a welfare ideology which allowed mediocrity to thrive. Whether our philosophy of progress can overcome the old natural law of the survival of the fittest is yet to be seen.
One thing should be learned from this stupid mass destruction; and that is how quickly a resource can be destroyed. The massive bison herds of the great plains country were beginning to show wear and tear by the 1850's at which time the hide hunters really got to work with their nefarious slaughter.

Pleas to Congress, to cabinet members, to Presidents, fell on stony ears. The butchery was cold and calculated. The Red Man and his buffalo economy were holding back the manifest destiny of a God-fearing, righteous people. As the Spaniards raised the Sign of the Cross to justify enslaving the Aztecs, so the American hordes read from their Bibles the divine words that spelled extermination of the plains Indian and his culture.

The Indian had these resources but could not protect them from conquest; can we protect them from abuse? His was a good life for the strong; are we making a good life for the weak? Where he used too little, are we using too much?

In general terms the conquest of North America was prosecuted through two different philosophies—imperialism and colonialism. The Spanish followed the traditional approach of imperial conquest of taking booty, primarily gold and silver, by force; this entailed enslavement and subjugation of the natives.

Of all the European invaders the Spanish came best prepared through tradition and background to explore and conquer the southwest. The arid interior of Spain with its semi-desert and mountains was comparable—but for size—to the Sonora, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona regions. The North American southwest was an ideal horse country and the Spanish brought the ideal horse; one of Arabian and Barb ancestry. Irrigation was necessary for any agricultural venture as the Indians had proved, and the Spaniards well understood these techniques. In their own country they had learned to build with adobe and stone because they lacked timber. The southwest had little timber but much adobe and stone.

The Spaniards were able to create their kind of civilization to their satisfaction where they could subject the agrarian and sedentary natives to peonage. But when it came to extending north into the great plains they failed for two reasons. By the time they were ready to expand, the plains Indians had horses and the proud, nomadic Apaches and Comanches contested expansion and refused to submit to servitude of any kind.

The French modified this imperial approach. They developed the great fur trade routes of the St. Lawrence, the Great Lakes and
beyond, and approached the great American adventure by becoming apprentices of the Indian in learning the art of travel and survival, by becoming members of the tribes and leaving numerous half-breed offspring as mementos along their line of travel.

With the view of promoting the fur trade they created an incentive in the Indians for guns, gee-gaws and whiskey in exchange for furs and soon made the Indian partially dependent. But they did not attempt to change the Indian’s mode of living; in fact as a nomad the Indian was a more successful trapper and hunter. It was an economic venture that satisfied both parties. All this had a tremendous economic impact on Europe in developing factories, building ships and establishing systems of trade to supply the new world. Glass beads and vermillion for an Ottawa squaw meant bread on the table for some European artisan.

The English, with the exception of the Hudson’s Bay Company, depended on direct land occupancy and self-sufficiency from the resources of the land they occupied, or immediately controlled. They established themselves as landowners by pushing the Indians back from a fringe of Atlantic seaboard and attempting to make the new country fit old world customs. The English did not enslave the Indians as did the Spanish, nor did they accept them as equals as did the French. They held them in distrust and contempt, challenged the Indians to deny them land occupancy, and as a result fought three hundred and fifty years of bloody, uncompromising border wars.

It was the English Colonies that first established policies relating to the management and protection of resources. Following the American Revolution the cession of Western lands to the Federal government established the first public domain—the people’s property. Later additions came by way of the Louisiana Purchase, punitive action against the Mexicans and Indians, and settlement of boundary disputes with Great Britain. An examination of legislation enacted by Congress since Revolutionary times with relation to public domain shows definite trends in public policy and gradual changes in public thinking with the passage of time. Public domain was always—and still is—a source of temptation to many people, which results in herculean battles as to its destiny. The battle still rages, with more finesse perhaps, but just as deadly.

The philosophy once expressed by Daniel Webster persisted for a long time:

“What do we want with this vast worthless area, this region of savages and wild beasts, of shifting sands and whirlwinds of dust, of cactus and prairie dogs? To what use could we ever
put these great deserts or endless mountain ranges, impenetrable and covered to their base with eternal snows?"

From Revolutionary times and for a hundred years thereafter, congressional action dealt with giving land warrants to soldiers, for the protection of naval stores, land surveys, land grants for schools, canals and navigation, and various claim and homestead laws. Following the Mexican war, bounty warrants issued to veterans with a face value of a dollar and a quarter an acre were often sold for as little as fifty cents. The Pre-emption Act of 1841 did not achieve any anticipated remedy, and over a period of years vast acreages, by hook or crook, came under the control of speculators with fraud and forgery rampant.

In 1850 came the first enactment of a railroad grant to aid in the construction of the Illinois Central Railroad. From then on railroad building from the Midwest to the Pacific became the nation’s biggest business, and obtaining government grants a highly specialized, and at times nefarious, business. Early railroad promotion and the attendant stock speculation was probably one of the most weird and fantastic eras of our national history. The panic of 1857, primarily the result of too rapid growth and unconscionable business practices by some of these early pirates, crippled many of the roads and brought consolidation, wrung water out of the stock and hastened government controls. Lastly, the various amended Homestead Acts, allowing small farms indiscriminately west of the hundredth meridian, brought on added land abuse.

By the year 1854, the United States of America was a brash, free-wheeling youngsters with a lust for conquest. The tools of conquest were the Bible, the rifle, varying degrees of larceny, and whiskey which was drunk with both hands. The Bible and the whiskey supplied a spiritual uplift according to individual taste, and strange as it may seem, both could be used for trading stock. The rifle put meat in the belly and guaranteed reasonable equality among men. Larceny was the practical approach in dealing with natives. All of these tools were employed in varying degrees by land sharks who in many respects were more of a hazard to the migrant farmer than was the Red Man.

By 1854, the Lewis and Clark Expedition had been history for fifty years. The savage wilderness of the Louisiana Purchase had been scouted by the mountain men and scalped of most of its beaver. Already the hide-hunters were beginning on the last animal species—the buffalo. The Army was "patriotically" helping in the slaughter
as an aid in subduing the Indians. Covered wagons were rolling into California and Oregon.

In 1854 San Francisco was a sinful, brawling seaport and point of departure for thousands of miners; the Jamestown Colony had been established, vanished and restored, some 235 years; Quebec a city of growing importance, had been founded the same year as the Colony of Jamestown; and romantic Santa Fe on the Rio Grande had existed by turns a sleepy and hectic 244 years.

In 1854 the United States Government, in the role of protector for budding American enterprise, which was energetically reaching out to exploit anything and everything not tied down, established a cavalry post some seven hundred miles north of St. Louis, on the west bank of the Missouri. Once a fur trading post, it had been port of call for river boats as well as a jumping off place for pack trains to the Black Hills and on west. In honor of its resident trader the Army called the new post Fort Pierre. It stood just below the bluff where Chevalier Pierre Verendrye had buried a leaden plaque in the year 1743, and declared all the Missouri country in its length and breadth the property of Imperial France. This deed of possession was found on February 16, 1913, by fourteen-year-old Hattie May Foster. One corner of it was sticking out of the ground as she played on the edge of the bluff and she kicked it free. This disputed deed of French possession now rests in the South Dakota State Museum at Pierre.

On March 9, 1854, Jim Bridger filed a claim with the General Land Office of Washington, D. C. for 3800 acres of land surrounding Fort Bridger on a tributary of the Green River; following contentions of claims by members of the Church of Latter Day Saints.

By 1854, a new species of pioneer came striding over the horizon to cast his eye on the vast untouched land of the Mississippi and the midwest. He was not the man of the buckskin shirt and Kentucky rifle, and he disliked the crudities of the frontier. He was the forerunner of big business, the railroad builder, the wholesale merchant, the rising lumber baron. What he saw suited him right down to the ground—rich, deep, black soil; water power, and timber for the taking. He visualized a wealth of goods to be sold and transported for the serious-faced, land-hungry immigrants intent on staking out free government claims; for the freebooter and the gold seekers pushing west; for the army, the sick, lame, and lazy; for the dreamers, the builders, the God-fearing, the knaves and thieves, all combining into one vast ground swell as they moved across the face of the land.

Yes, the budding tycoon liked what he saw, and he hugged him-
self with glee, and dreamed great dreams and planned great plans, greater than any generation before him; such men as Ogden, Hughitt, Weyerhaeuser, Carnegie, Sawyer, Hill.

To the north, the Great Lakes country had pine to build homes for every mother's son that came west, to replace every sod shanty—enough to patch hell a mile. The forest was endless; it could never be all cut out, never entirely explored. Already another frontier species had evolved and was moving in. He swaggered into Michigan and Wisconsin, from Maine and Pennsylvania, with an axe in each hand, a bold look in his eye and a laconic tongue. This pioneer—the American lumberjack—grew to Paul Bunyan stature in the pineries of the Great Lakes States, and his activities were the prelude to his moving on west to take a whirl at the "Big Stuff."

In 1854 a nineteen-year-old immigrant lad from Germany by the name of Frederick Weyerhaeuser had been in the United States two years. The name Weyerhaeuser was to become synonymous with big lumbering enterprise both in the Great Lakes states and on the Pacific Coast, and famous throughout the world.

One September day in 1854 a man sat on his horse at a point called Council Bluffs and looked across the Big Muddy at the tiny, squalid village of Omaha. He had ridden from Chicago through a land that was to become the greatest corn and hog producing country in the world. All the way he had visualized farms, schools and churches, but uppermost in his mind was a railroad that would bring products from these farms back to Chicago. He crossed the Missouri and rode on and on into Nebraska territory, his mind's eye conjuring up great herds of grazing cattle and more farms—ever more farms. This man was William Butler Ogden, who became first president of the Chicago and Northwestern Railway Company. His ambitions and imagination helped build the first transcontinental railroad, thus transforming the great plains; helped bring the longhorn up the Chisholm Trail from Texas, silence the thunder of stampeding buffalo, and break the back of Indian resistance in the West.

In 1854, political freedom was an elixir of vigorous and oftentimes violent debate; gold in California, fifty-four forty or fight, land in Minnesota territory and Iowa, timber in Michigan and Wisconsin, the Gadsden Purchase, Indians, slavery—all were a yeasty conglomerate of explosive issues. Political ideologies swayed the restless and aggressive people; in this year a new political party was born at Ripon, Wisconsin—they called themselves Republicans.

By 1854, a young lad had migrated with his parents from Scotland to Wisconsin, and was helping his father grub out a frontier farm. But during chance moments, even with a grub hoe in his hand, he
was turning his inquisitive mind to the involved processes and mysteries of nature. He eventually followed the great migration west and to Alaska. He wrote books and many articles on the resources of the continent, recommended the preservation of such areas as Yosemite, and ultimately became recognized as one of the greatest naturalists of all time. His name was John Muir.

In 1854, the Wisconsin State Historical Society, through its distinguished secretary, Dr. Lyman C. Draper, published its first annual report. This same year, some fifteen thousand Swedes and Norwegians swelled the migration of freeholders into Wisconsin; while at Racine, Wisconsin, a runaway negro by the name of Joshua Glover, was arrested under the Fugitive Slave Law.

In 1854, the first rotary, or circular saw was introduced into Wisconsin, with a cutting capacity exceeding ten times the old muley. Thus, the tempo of sawmill production was accelerated. This innovation was soon followed by the steam-fed carriage, and then followed the steam “Swede” for rolling logs on the carriage, then live rollers for taking lumber away from the saw, then the hot pond and the sawdust burner. Bunyan and his blue ox were on the march.

September 30th of 1854 was another day of infamy, little noted, and eighty-seven years before Pearl Harbor. The last of several treaties with the Chippewa Indians was signed in solemn council at LaPointe, one of the Apostle Islands at the head of Lake Superior.

Twenty-two years had gone by since Black Hawk, a Sac war chief, had risen up to demand justice for his people. He had gotten his answer at the massacre of Bad Axe. In passing, it might well be noted that among the motley volunteers that pursued Black Hawk was a long, gangling frontiersman later known as the Great Emancipator of the black man and hater of slavery. Nevertheless, he helped beat Black Hawk to the ground for crying out against the perfidy to his people.

Now it was the end of the trail for those friendly Algonquins at the head of the Lake, the Chippewas. After years of negotiations conceived in white man deceit, they gave up the last vestige of their autonomy, their priceless land, their birthright—their dignity. It took little more than a decade of WPA, social security and unions to change the American philosophy of living; it took three hundred and fifty years to alter appreciably the living pattern of the American Indian.

In 1854, the Menominees also gave up the ghost and relinquished possession of ancient and priceless territory. They were forced to settle for some 234,000 acres of concentration camp, and bow their heads to the shame of white domination.
In 1854, a half-million acres of the best farm land in America was sold for a dollar twenty-five cents per acre to homesteaders pouring into Minnesota territory. The previous year, a treaty, which in reality settled nothing, had been signed with the Sioux to settle their land claims for all times.

Minnesota was rapidly filling up with settlers. Many easterners who had originally planned to trail through to California or Oregon had turned off to help fill this great void of country, which was to become one of the richest farming territories in the world. But the world had yet to learn of its hidden wealth.

For nearly two centuries this land had been known as fur country. It was a crossroads where buffalo hides, beaver, marten, and corn, pemmican, and wild rice were traded for goods coming through by the way of the Great Lakes, not the least of which was the white man's firewater. The barter in this far-off land by some trader dangling beads before a squaw, or trading awls, guns, tin dishes and rotgut to some inebriated Indian changed the entire economic standards of many a gunsmith, tinsmith, artisan, clerk and ambitious tradesman in Europe.

Giants such as Radisson, Perriot, Marquette, Verendrye and Le Sueur had traversed its myriad waterways and gazed upon the beauties of its rolling prairies. Long before Lewis and Clark, Frenchmen had reached the head of the Des Moines river at Lake Shetek and were trading with the Sioux as far west as the James River. The Northwest Company had followed Verendrye up the Red to establish a post at Pembina and other points. As early as 1830 the screeching Red River carts had made a rutted trail to Mendota, a trading post at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers. Colonel Snelling had built his military fort before 1820.

George Catlin, the artist who left a priceless record of the American Indian through his paintings, traversed the prairie regions of western Minnesota in 1837 and was eloquent regarding its verdant beauty.

But the stolid man with the covered wagon, milk cow and brood of children was literally sweeping away this loose and easy life of the old days. He rooted himself to the ground and refused to budge.

Settlers had squatted along the river courses, an ancient practice of pioneer people. The black land produced bumper crops of wheat, but after the needs of the immediate family were satisfied there was no place to sell it. Water routes leading to the Mississippi were navigable to freight boats and barges for only part of the year. Minnesota had gone through the throes of frontier speculation and various financial schemes to promote railroads, even to bonding the
state. The Federal Government had released six million acres of land to private companies as a subsidy for railroad development; so far nothing had happened.

The story of land speculation was again being repeated as it had happened shortly before, in Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois and further east. The highways, byways, and grog shops were filled with land sharks lying in wait for every new crop of immigrants. Some believed they had a holy mandate to help the newcomers realize their dream of home and hearth; others were just slightly less than highjackers.

Indian negotiations were running true to form, and would so continue until the battle of Wounded Knee. Treaties with the Sioux were immediately disregarded, almost before the ink was dry. Finally, Little Crow, taking advantage of the Civil War started one of his own. The settlers were temporarily swept back east as far as New Ulm, but in the end the white man’s organizational ability came out ahead. When it was over they hanged thirty-nine leaders at Mankato, and the Sioux again retreated. This time to the Dakotas.

From then on the land rush was little short of a stampede. Three years later Minnesota had railroads and her southern wilderness was breached. Fifty years later the pothole drainage in western Minnesota was started, and thirty years after that the Federal government was paying subsidies for a planned program of drainage in Minnesota, and North and South Dakota, the greatest waterfowl breeding area in the United States. Up to 1900 the waterfowl populations seemed limitless. Forty years later the duck populations were alarmingly down and may now become a competitor with the Commodity Stabilization Service.

During the next seventy-five years much of the rich soil from the once wooded hill country on both sides of the Mississippi was gullying down to the lowlands. Farmland of the Monongahela and the Ohio valleys had been washing away for one hundred twenty-five years. The Missouri had not reached its peak capacity as a bearer of top soil; the buffalo grass had not as yet been torn away. The “Old Mississippi” by its own devices was making use of this black gold, by building a delta away down south below New Orleans.

The timber resources of Minnesota were unknown. Small sawmills were diligently attempting to keep up with demands of the settlers, but the vast empires created from timber by such men as Weyerhaeuser were for the future. About all that could be factually stated was that there was a God-awful lot of timber between St. Paul and the Canadian border, wherever that was.

Across the Mississippi, up the Wolf River, the Wisconsin, the
Chippewa, the Menominee, the Black and the St. Croix, the lumberjack was cutting himself a wide swath through the timber and letting daylight into the swamp; and the river-pig was building the traditions that made him a rival of all frontiersmen. Down river the new rotary saw was creating a sawdust trail that finally ended on the Pacific Coast.

Even back east the lumberjack and millsaw had a compatriot that set a black pattern for years to come; from Maine to Washington, from Canada to the Alabama turpentine woods: FOREST FIRE. It was a partner in New England, in the Great Lakes, in the Rockies and the Coast ranges. It set a pattern of taxation for millions unborn, a pattern of tax delinquent land, of ghost towns; it made whole areas governmentally insolvent. It probably killed more people than were scalped by Indians. Had they not finally been brought under control, forest fires could have wrecked the American dream.

But back to THE LAND OF THE SKY BLUE WATERS. To the north the lode of red dust more precious than a gold strike, which eventually helped the United States win two global wars, still lay hidden in the timbered wilderness of ten thousand lakes. At a later date, discovered by the Merritt brothers, it became known as the Mesabi Range, or just the Mesabi.

By 1854, wildlife in the midwest was feeling the encroachment of settlements. The last buffalo east of the Mississippi had been shot some twenty years before. Elk had vanished from the Illinois country; and although sustaining themselves to a degree between the Chippewa River and the Mississippi in west central Wisconsin, it was nothing more than a rear guard action. Twelve years more and the Elk in that locality were wiped out; another ten years saw the last of them in Minnesota. The Indian, the buffalo, the elk and the antelope retreated together toward the setting sun.

Deer were still common in their old haunts of northern Illinois, southern Wisconsin and southern Minnesota, but were beginning to be looked upon as a public enemy east of the Mississippi because they damaged young wheat in summer and raided haystacks during the severe winter months. In the meantime, they were common bill of fare on the settler’s table and were hauled to market as an economic adjunct.

The wild turkey was rapidly being thinned out. However, the prairie chicken and sharptail grouse found the breaking of new ground to their liking and so increased in numbers. They were also poured into Chicago and Milwaukee by the barrelfull, by the carload. The epicure’s delight, the passenger pigeons, were still
clouding the skies on their migrations, and were shot and trapped and poisoned to reduce crop damage.

The transition of land ecology was slowly getting under way. Noxious weeds began to replace the delicate prairie flower; forest fires swept through the slashings and burned the humus which had been eons in building. Raindrops made little rivulets and then small gullies, carrying particles of earth to the brook, to the creek, to the river. One hundred years later, the mighty Father of Waters was carrying toward the sea, every twenty-four hours, a forty-acre farm.

But life was too young, and virile, to notice or care. Conquest was the breath of life. There was work to be done, and not enough hands for all the tasks. And so the migration rolled along—the farmer, merchant, gandy dancer, miller, river-pig, card-shark, logger, prostitute, preacher, land-shark—all hell-bent with the job of making their own individual stake; and to create, by main strength and awkwardness, a free and democratic government. The whole impelling force of migration dictated that the individual should have the right to grab all the land, the timber, the water rights that he could control and defend against all comers. That was what he went west for; for what other reason? With such a philosophy it was easy for every man to cast himself as a benefactor of the country and an asset to civilization.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the western wilderness had been breached but not conquered. That goal was only a matter of time and relatively short time at that. Another fifty years brought an end to the old frontier, with its crusty, hardbitten ranchers grousing over the advent of the nesters.

Treating land as an inexhaustible mine was already the established use pattern. When timber was cut or burned, when soil had been exhausted, when game was killed off, the people packed up and headed farther west. It was a case of following the rainbow, where everyone would get rich by scalping the land; some did. As the people destroyed the land and moved on, they left a backwash of the defeated and discouraged who became in later generations, the problem of rural resettlement.

The flight from retribution at the hands of nature was becoming an American tradition and advancing the desert. By the time the buffalo were killed off and the Indians subdued, part of America was already old and worn out.
Chapter 3

GROWING PAINS

The European, whatever his background, was faced, in the new land, with a conflict of old customs versus necessity and was gradually forced to change his concepts to fit a new environment. The second generation began to break away from the old and to create the new and to accentuate these changes in its westerly march.

As the tight-fisted, laconic Yankees pushed over the Appalachians or floated down the Ohio toward the setting sun, they found a vast timbered country better suited for farming than the bleak, rock-ribbed hills of New England; and many a Virginian calculated Kentucky more productive than the Old Dominion. All were used to the magnificent stands of timber and game abundance of the coastal regions. In fact, their indentured servants included in their articles of limitations the number of times per week that wild game could be served them. But the land as they explored west—though still to be cleared—was mellow, deep, fertile and generally free of rock. Through all the long trek west rain was noticeably plentiful and there was a maze of lakes, rivers and creeks. No need to give a second thought to water other than a spring within handy toting distance of a cabin.

And when the Illinois was reached the prairie openings sweeping toward the horizon in the lush green of the virgin land became the summation of the weary immigrant’s dream. But this gradual change in environment was sufficient to bring on new problems.

The family that outspanned in an oak opening in Illinois, Wisconsin or Iowa to begin a farm had little or no clearing to do, and therefore could manage a larger acreage. There was more grass and hay than cattle and a need for more farmhands or machines to handle the harvest. There was also urgent need for the creation of new governmental units, with schools and roads to build; the establishment of law and order and an occasional pause to hunt down unruly Indians.

All these problems made the migrant more individualistic and less conservative than his forebears back east. Many became restless and footloose; more intolerant of restraints, as they followed the frontier. This is why the old colony residents complained that the
farther west people moved, the more radical and irresponsible they became.

Traders from St. Louis were ascending the Missouri before the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804 and when they reached the Mandan villages in what is now north central North Dakota, they found men from the Hudson’s Bay and the Northwest Companies already probing this forbidding new fur country. The British had established posts on the Assiniboine and the Souris.

The first route of travel into the plains and mountains by Americans was up the Missouri and its tributaries. Soon overland trails for pack strings were blazed by the fur trade, which in turn became wagon trails. One went to Santa Fe (there is strong evidence that a trader started for Santa Fe the same spring that Lewis and Clark commenced their noteworthy expedition); other trails angled off up the Platte past Laramie, Fort Bridger, to California and Oregon. St. Louis became a point of departure, a center of unprecedented turmoil and confusion and, for a time, the largest fur market in the world. It was from here that Zebulon Pike started his trip of exploration up the Arkansas in 1806, partly as a scientist and partly as a spy to determine what the Spanish were plotting farther west and south. By 1820 the Sante Fe Trail was considered old by western standards.

To some migrants, Missouri was just a place to reorganize for the long trip beyond; others had had enough travel so decided to squat and chop out a clearing. Unwittingly they started some of the first man-made erosion problems west of the Mississippi. Still others wandered southwest, lost themselves in the Ozarks, and created a forest fire hazard for the next hundred and fifty years. With all these civilizing advancements the once magnificent game herds of Missouri disappeared like a March snowbank; and Missouri was ready to become a state in 1821.

By 1840 immigrants were following the trails of the mountain men up the Platte on their way to Oregon. The Mormons followed in 1846 and, with the discovery of gold in California, thousands journeyed west through the South Pass to the Great Salt Lake Basin. Prospectors fanned out over the mountain country like locusts in search of more gold strikes and Nevada became a state in 1864, Colorado following in 1876. Cattle herds appeared out of the great empty spaces of Texas in the late 'sixties; railheads were feverishly pushed out on the Kansas prairies to meet them. Thousands of critters were trailed north and scattered over a grassland empire, in
the Indian country of Oklahoma, in Nebraska (a state in 1867), Wyoming and the Dakotas. The Gold Spike was driven home tying the Union Pacific and Central Pacific together across the basin from Salt Lake City in 1869; the nation was united and the extermination of the buffalo was only a matter of some twelve years.

In 1844 Joseph Smith, prophet and leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, was killed at Nauvoo. Nauvoo on the Mississippi in Illinois had been established in 1839 as a rallying point for all Saints and figured in the Mormon prophecy to become a city of everlasting glory and renown.

Religious incompatibility had led to the terrorism of nightriders, mob lawlessness, barn burning, and bloodshed—including the murder of Smith. The frontier would not tolerate such a large group of people acting in concerted effort; it violated the individualistic philosophies of the times.

After the death of Smith, Brigham Young assumed leadership. This was also an act of Providence for the besieged and distressed Mormons. Young, a man of rare vision and capacity for leadership, decided to move West. The place was to be one of isolation where the Saints could worship according to their own convictions and, just as important, build a strong temporal empire.

The first move was to cross the river into Iowa during the winter and spring of 1846. This was accomplished with much anguish, untold hardships, drownings, and death from disease and malnutrition. A camp was set up in the snow at Sugar Creek some nine miles inland.

Volumes have been written on the movement from Nauvoo to the great Salt Lake Basin. Some twelve to fifteen thousand people participated. The stories have dwelt largely on the hardships and social implications; too little has been said about the resources that made this mass migration, or others, possible.

Over the decades the thousands who tramped west would not have reached their destinations but for the raw fruits of the land as they passed along. Profiting from and using the various resources of the land demanded skill. Some possessed this skill and lived; others lacked it and died. But according to their skills they killed their meat from the roving game herds and cooked it over buffalo chips or wood when available. They clothed themselves from the hides; they gathered wild fruit and dug roots; they collected herbs for medicinal purposes.
The Mormons organized themselves to live off the land. It was truly a cooperative effort. It paid off; most of them got through. After crossing the Mississippi and establishing a base camp, an advance group struck out to prepare land for crops. A second group soon followed to do the planting and the first party advanced again to break new ground. Other groups followed to tend and cultivate the growing crops and finally to reap and bring the harvest to the wintering grounds at Council Bluffs, Iowa, and across the river. During this time oak and hickory were felled to build wagons and carts. In this manner a heterogeneous people with a common religious faith advanced across Iowa. It might be added that in this year Iowa was flexing its muscles in the maturity of new statehood. When the Mormons arrived at the Great Basin in 1847, they commenced a large scale irrigation and reclamation project—the first since the Spanish had diverted the Rio Grande.

When the mysterious and windswept land west of the Mississippi became a part of the public domain the invading Anglo-American coming from the forest and high grass country to the east had no background and experience upon which to rely. People from Vermont, Ohio and Illinois did not understand they were invading an entirely new ecological world.

The mountainmen were the first to condition themselves to this new mode of life, but they were a highly individualistic lot with strong separatist impulses and extreme self-sufficiency. The frontier traditions they brought with them from the east did not entirely suffice. The endless prairies, the empty plains, the searing deserts were a new challenge. It was a horse country with mountains to cross that made the Appalachians seem like child’s play. There were trees older than Christianity. There were boiling springs and frigid mountain streams, and the most savage Red Men on the entire continent. Of one thing they were very sure—the country west of the Mississippi was big.

Their place in the sun was short-lived, these men of the mountains. Their identification became fixed with the Lewis and Clark Expedition and the best days of the mountain fur trade were nearly gone by 1845. During this time probably three out of five lost their hair. Collectively they thrived on challenge and the insecurity and the freedom of the wilderness. But they went to the happy hunting ground knowing they were the master craftsmen of all America’s frontiersmen. These were the men such as Bridger, Fitzpatrick, the Ashley’s, Jed Smith, Williams and Carson, that led the Path-
finders and the Army to a glorious place in the pages of western history.

To many of those who followed, the vastness and monotony of the great plains was an appalling, frightening vacuum; but he who dared to traverse it and survived had to modify his former concepts and rigidly conform to the natural laws of the region or perish. Some perished in body and some in spirit, which is almost the same thing. Those who met the challenge grew tough and strong, and their way of life was often their only reward.

One of the first men properly to evaluate the true worth and destiny of this great arid empire was John Wesley Powell. Explorer and scientist, he was the first white man to risk the peril of a boat trip down the Colorado river and through the Grand Canyon in 1869. Many have since lost their lives attempting to duplicate this feat.

One of Powell’s statements reveals his perception of the West: “Industrial civilization in America began with the building of log cabins . . . and steadily . . . the log cabin zone moved westward until it reached the border of the Great Plains, which it never crossed.”

Over the years Powell carried on investigations in much of the inter-mountain desert country and arrived at a broad and profound understanding as to the future of western land use. Most of these investigations were financed by Congressional grants. He concluded that farming in the dry country and tearing up the sod was not the answer. He saw great possibilities in irrigation for certain areas as had the Spaniards and the Mormons before him.

But Powell’s ideas were not accepted in spite of his reports and appearances before Congressional committees. By the time he had arrived at some definitive conclusions he had many competitors in the field of western land-use; not only ambitious geologists but such men as Jim Hill, the empire builder, and many little builders were energetically advancing opposing theories and had the money and political power to try them out. Powell could see that land had to be used within the limitations prescribed by nature; for Hill and his numerous associates nature was to be subservient to their wishes and desires. The money-making prophets won out against the scientific prophet, and as a result despoiled many of nature’s gifts and broke many a human heart.

John Wesley Powell had been a Major in the Union Army and had come out of the conflict minus an arm. His life was part and parcel of a young nation’s dream; his was an era of autonomous freedom and unregimented opportunity, when the unknown voids of the west
were being explored and slowly documented. The explorers—for the most part—were descendants of the first Spaniard, the first Frenchman, the first Anglo-Saxon. As they explored, they plundered, and they killed Indians with the same dedication as did their forebears. They killed each other, and they all worshipped the same god—Gold. Gold that was dug from the ground or gold in terms of furs, land, cattle, timber, or water.

Powell was a sober, methodical, determined man; determination was probably his greatest asset and attribute. He was self-educated in geology, ethnology, biology and other sciences. As he pushed his explorations he was maligned, ridiculed and hamstrung; but by sheer determination he made his enemies admit he was a power to reckon with, and at long last a professional in his field.

He explored areas of an almost dead world that the mountain men and Army avoided if at all possible. He classified land and pondered its geological origin. Having no formal education in such matters, he was not hampered by the astringent philosophies of more learned men. Many of his speculations proved reasonable and correct. He wrote many reports, especially for the benefit of Congress, such as *Report of the United States’ Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Regions*, and the *Tertiary History of the Grand Canyon Districts*. Seventy-five years later, with the coming of dustbowls and water shortages, his recommendations and prophecies were dusted off by the experts on land abuse to see what could be done to stem the wrath of the gods.

In pursuing the geology of the Colorado Basin he became a student of Indian lore and diverted some of his energies to ethnology. He went among the savage tribes, unguarded and unarmed, and came back with his scalp. He also wrote reports on his studies of the stone age man in the high plateau country.

At an early date he recognized and studied the changing land ecology from east to west. He recognized that east of the Mississippi land would become costly and water relatively cheap. Whereas west of the Mississippi and especially the Missouri, land would be cheap and water costly. He envisioned and advocated reclamation developments for many of the arid regions but thought it should be carried out by private enterprise and not by government.

By and large he saw the west as the people’s property, which would have to be guarded by the government through bureaus. During much of the time of his explorations he went nonchalantly about his business, seemingly unmindful of the remorseless struggle for land ownership being fought between the Red Man and the White.
Chapter 4

BLAZING THE LAST TRANSECT

The first railroad west out of Chicago was built in 1848 and ’49. It was strap iron laid on wooden rails and ran forty-three miles to Elgin. By 1855 the Iron Horse was taking water from the Mississippi at Fulton, Illinois. By the next year the line was extended to Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Even with the first continental railroad completed in 1869 and the frenzied laying of steel west of Old Man River for the next fifty years, there were great voids of little-known and uninhabited country beckoning the adventurous and daring. In 1873 a railroad was completed to the Missouri, Dakota Territory, and the town of Bismarck was spawned from the prairie mud. It became the railhead for punitive attacks on the Indians who were vainly attempting to defend the land they held under Treaty; and it was the point of departure for Custer and his finis on the Little Big Horn.

In 1873 the railhead was forty miles from the Dakota Line at Tracy, Minnesota. Settlers were rapidly filling up southern Minnesota and the boldest were pushing further west. The frontier was an ever-changing and sometimes confusing point of geography. It had only one certainty: it was never static. Prior to the ’seventies the western movement had been by foot, water, horseback or wagon. The railroads had followed in the wake and meanderings of the settlers.

There seemed to be a lapse and catching of breath with the settling of Minnesota and before the mass invasion of the Dakotas. In this instance the railroads gambled and laid their steel into the vast emptiness of grassland and buffalo bones ahead of the major migration. People were not pausing enroute from the east but were hell-bent on staking a prairie claim. Foreigners of many tongues, hard realists accustomed to harsh, grueling existence, jammed the ports of immigration; loading their bundles in day coaches or freight cars and heading toward the land once dominated by the mighty Sioux. They knew nothing about Indian Treaties and cared less; just a mass of human protoplasm, irresistible in the knowledge that they wanted land; and that might made right.

By 1880 the new railhead was Pierre, on the Missouri in Dakota Territory, and both stage and bull trains took over from there to
Rapid City and Deadwood. The Black Hills were crawling with come-lately prospectors. Some longhorns were still being trail-herded on the west side of the river and bleak-eyed bronc riders with six-guns bitterly contested the use of public domain with the nesters. The river was now the dividing line between wheat and cattle. The Indians just yesterday had been in bloody contest with the horsemen and were now in rebellious and doubtful confinement on reservations.

Bone hunters, those last scavengers to capitalize on the buffalo, were making the final cleanup. The wolfers had learned to use poison and were making the most of it.

The sodbusters were spreading out east of the Missouri, although those of faint heart were backtracking to some kindlier country because of blizzards, grasshoppers and drought. It was a grim wilderness of swaying grass and wind—too wide and too broad to comprehend and the railroaders had bet that people would fill it up if there was any easy way to get there. So thousands had joined the stampede. Dakota already claimed the title of wheat center of the world, which ten years before Minnesota had claimed; and the migration was still westward.

The pattern of western advance as the migrant land-hungry farmer approached the hundredth meridian was much the same, whether it was Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska or Dakota Territory. There was the advance with a year or two of good crops, and then grasshoppers, drought and dust. Then followed the retreat back east.

In the meantime gandy dancers would build a branch line and from the branch line a siding. Corrals and loading chutes appeared almost overnight; then a dingy depot, shacks for a section crew, a warehouse, a store, a saloon, a grain elevator, more houses and a street ankle-deep in dust or knee-deep in mud dependent upon the weather.

The raw, unpainted buildings were hastily constructed of green pine lumber, still oozing pitch, which had been shipped from the Great Lakes region. The land boom in western Minnesota, the Dakota Territory and south, in turn created a lumber boom the impact of which was felt from Saginaw to St. Paul. The lumber boom immediately developed a forest fire hazard that destroyed more timber than was cut, and ultimately threw that area into a long struggle with land-tax delinquency. The land boom broke up the prairie sod eventually to start a chain reaction of dustbowl conditions, sporadic bankruptcy and chronic heartbreak. The railroaders, nor anyone else, knew at the time that breaking ground along the hundredth meridian or a hundred miles east was strictly a gamble.
The technical jargon now heard in that part of the country, such as land capability, contour farming, terracing, and submarginal lands, were unheard-of terms; and certainly no one had heard of subsidies, except the railroads. Anyway, with Sitting Bull imploring the Great Spirit to strike down the white man who had him in confinement at Standing Rock Reservation, and the Battle of Wounded Knee still to be fought, who the hell would have had time to listen to such nonsense?

The Indian and the man on horseback understood each other better than either understood the man with the plow and the sack of seed grain. The ecology of the Indian was least damaging to the land, that of the horseman, next; although in his greed he badly overgrazed the range. But the man with the plow and the seed grain committed greater crimes to the land than any who had come before him—and also paid more dearly for those crimes against the land. No one can outrage nature and prosper; nature has means of cruel and bitter retaliation.

Several thousand years ago a man named Solomon, reputed to have profound wisdom, built a temple to satisfy his ego. To accomplish this he cut down the cedar forests of Lebanon and in so doing set in motion the processes of land erosion that have cursed that land to this day. Much of the land has been washed away down to bedrock. Multitudes suffer long after the demise of the second and third generations.

During all this effervescent but deadly advance across the continent, the frontier was magic and an elixir to every red-blooded boy, and many a lad slipped away between dusk and dawn to answer that call. They went to California, to Oregon, to the mountains or plains, or simply disappeared into the great emptiness and were never heard of. Some survived and took root; others came back penniless and crushed; others were full of fantasy and with a far-away look in their eyes. Wave followed wave, and when gold was discovered in the Black Hills they made such words as Rapid City, Deadwood Gulch, and Homestake, household names. Others answered the call of the Chisholm Trail and ended up in Abilene, Dodge City, or Virginia City. The pull was there whether they were trapper, merchant, miner, school teacher or cowboy.

The plains country was hard on women, especially the dreary prairie winds that moaned and howled by turn and sent their gritty dust into every nook and cranny of a house. The wind was never still. There were also the blizzards of ’eighty—’eighty-one—’eighty-eight—when hundreds of homesteaders froze to death. Some were
lost in the great white void; others burned out because of overheated, hay-burning airtights. Then they froze.

In the meantime the hell-for-leather transformation from Indian country to wheat farming east of the Big River and the beginning of an ordered civilization was a wonder to behold. A great part of it was due to the increasing efficiency of railroad building and an open country through which to build. Coal replaced buffalo chips and twisted hay withes for fuel; anemic cottonwoods began to grace the dusty streets of the older towns; grain elevators cast their silhouettes across the sombre horizon; God’s chosen had found the promised land, but drought, grasshoppers, land-sharks, and prairie fires intermittently interfered with the promise.

In 1889 the Territory was divided and became North and South Dakota, and the country west became the state of Montana. In 1890 Sitting Bull was dispatched by the white man’s bullets for making a nuisance of himself and insisting on perpetuating the ghost dance. A week later came the battle of Wounded Knee where in proud tradition the United States Army slaughtered a couple of hundred Indians, including women and children who had already surrendered. It passes understanding how Congress in its magnanimity of cancelling war debts, granting foreign aid, and farm subsidies, found time to erect a marble shaft to this “glorious” finale of the Conquest of Empire. If in doubt as to just what last act to cherish, they could have placed a memorial to the release of the Chiricahua Apache from Fort Sill in 1914—Geronimo’s band—after twenty-eight years in prison. Geronimo had been dead for four years.

Another manifestation of original Americana reached its highest development during this period and until the first World War: The itinerant worker, part lumberjack, gandy dancer, miner, saddle tramp, bindle stiff, harvest hand, drifter and hobo. Every fall they rode the rods by the thousands to Dakota’s golden harvest there to cut, shock and thresh the future bread for the world. From there they disappeared according to their inclinations to other jobs, or to drift or hibernate in some hobo jungle; but never failing to head Dakota-way come midsummer.

In such a manner did civilization’s glory trail continue west.

In 1889 the Great White Fathers in Washington decided that a certain land area lying west of the Dakotas and south of the Canadian border should be given the distinction of statehood and be called Montana. Although its latitude and longitude were known there were many gaps and voids as to any real knowledge concerning it.
The mountain men, miners and cowpokes had clothed it with a legacy of myth, humor and rare flights of fantasy common to the traditions of the west. Through the years those traditions were to be made famous by the paintings of Charlie Russell.

People living in the region knew for certain that there was a lot of it. It was six hundred miles long. It extended from the Badlands, which cowmen said looked like hell with the fires out, to the goat-rocks of the Bitterroots and the waters of Pend Oreille. It was a land of many geographical variances as well as climatical changes and moods. It had pockets of mild weather and others where the thermometer went to sixty below.

The eastern two-thirds, a part of the Great Plains, was to become farming and grazing land. The western third was rugged mountains of rare beauty and with uncounted wealth in minerals and timber.

For ages that no one could count it had been an Indian paradise. It was ideal horse-Indian country. It had furnished the Red Man a bounteous living, developed him into a splendid physical specimen and a proud, aggressive warrior. For generations the Indians had fought for its possession among themselves—the Cheyennes, Crows, Blackfeet, Nez Perce, and Dakotas.

The mountain men had also found it much to their liking and soon after they had first scalped it of its fur riches, other adventurers discovered untold wealth in gold, silver and copper. Montana had the biggest mountain of copper in the world.

Cattlemen came to marvel at its wide spread of grasslands and returned with great herds of longhorn. Eventually they over-grazed much of it. The Bozeman Trail came into being because of a cattle drive. All this was done with utter disregard for Indian Treaties. When the Indians protested or killed the cattle, because the buffalo were disappearing, the stockmen with righteous vengeance went on the warpath themselves or called in the Army.

The broad, empty homeland of the Plains Indian was rapidly shrinking and he knew it. The Long Knives were everywhere. To the south in a region to become known as Wyoming and equally as picturesque, more forts were being built each year. There were more horse soldiers, more prairie schooners. With stoic bitterness the nomadic horseman saw his domain invaded; his vast game herds butchered and wasted; his pride and dignity destroyed.

By the 1870's it was apparent that there could be no compromise between the machine age and the stone age; a fight to the death was inevitable; with arrow, rifle and knife.

In June of 1876 a Lieutenant Colonel of Cavalry was in the vicin-
ity of the Big Horn Mountains, with orders to disperse any bands of Indians who had left the reservations and to use force if necessary. He was an ambitious glory seeker and something of a smart aleck. The Indians called him "Yellow Hair." He was praying that he would find Indians and that they would resist. He found them and they did resist.

The Indians were a confederation of ancient enemies, but they were too late making peace among themselves to fight the common enemy. Custer was determined to humble and humiliate them and to destroy their power. On June 25, 1876, Custer cut their trail on the Little Bighorn and they turned on him like a great wounded grizzly in the last agonies of death. Yes, they settled with Yellow Hair for slaughtering women and children in the winter camp of the Cheyennes on the Washeta. They left his bones and those of his men to bleach on the lonely plains of faraway Dakota Territory. Not one Long Knife got away. Historians insist on calling this a massacre; an impartial judgment might call it justice.
Chapter 5

THE FOREST INFLUENCE

The extent of the forest influence on America’s history, on the character of her people, on her culture and economy, is almost beyond calculation and estimate. The impact of the people on a forest as expansive and vast and the drama resulting therefrom, has no comparison in recorded history.

Some estimate of this empire in timber was gained by the Spanish in the South, but principally by the French extending the fur trade into the Great Lakes region, the Upper Mississippi Valley and Canada; and the English by probing west over the Alleghenys, south to the Piedmont and the Great Smokies and on to the Gulf through an uncharted dominion of sylvan beauty. Whatever the original motives that sent men into the wilderness, it was not to estimate timber, and for all the many journeys of exploration there was little or no comprehension of the incalculable values. At the time it had little or no worth in a broad sense—simply a product of the land that helped sustain life and an element of nature to be reckoned with.

To the Atlantic Coast Colonials, forests were an obstruction to agriculture and a place of ambush by Indians; later a barrier to western migration. This philosophy prevailed in great part despite the fact that the forest supplied many of the most basic elements of livelihood and ultimately shaped their prosperity.

However, libraries are bulging with history and fiction detailing the dreams and ambitions of nations and men who schemed and fought for the riches of North America.

The American logger as a frontier species was first recognized in the New England states and New Brunswick, although Maine definitely put her stamp on him. At that time he was more than likely Canadian-French, Scotch-Irish, or just blue-bellied Yank’. It was here by trial and error that the first techniques of lumbering operations were worked out. In the words of the logger, “this is where he got the feel of her.”

Here logging began to emerge as a business of specialties, such as cruising, felling, hauling and river driving; nor should the very
important specialty of feeding some seventy-five to a hundred and fifty men be overlooked. The Doctor, as the cook was referred to, was an autocrat in his own right and a key figure in the success of any logging operation. Many of these traditions carried through to the Redwoods and Sitka Spruce.

All in all the American logger was little given to sentiment or to philosophical seminars on the result of his violent attack against the forests. About the only breath he wasted was to roar out against some mild protest regarding his methods and to maintain staunchly that he was the personification of manifest destiny.

Taken as a class, these bully boys had a high quotient of native intelligence, were mettlesome and impetuous, were given to gross exaggeration when someone was gullible enough to believe them, had a violent dislike for any type of restraint. With their bare hand and caulked boots they were as ferocious as any breed of animal that ever walked on its hind legs.

The first of a succession of migrations by loggers was west to Michigan in the 'thirties and 'forties; and this at a time when some old die-hards still maintained that the great State of Maine had enough timber to last until the hinges of hell rusted off. Although there had been some rafting on the Mississippi, it was not until about 1850 that the professional lumberjack swaggered on the scene in Wisconsin to hold his own against all comers for the next sixty years. And then no one licked him—he licked himself, cut his throat with his own caulks.

By 1900 he had cut a sizable swath through northern Minnesota, and with the bull pine practically gone and the slash fires merrily burning, the old pine man leaned on his axe and took a squint around him. To his horror he saw a thin line of stump farmers slowly creeping into the choppings behind him. He took a fresh chew of snooze—lifted his nose to the wind and headed for the Pacific.

Logging in New England conditioned the migrant logger for more expansive operations in the Lake states; and the white pine cut on the Saginaw and AuSable in Michigan; the Wolf, Wisconsin and Chippewa in Wisconsin; and the Pigeon and Rainy in Minnesota, were in preparation for the big stuff of the coastal ranges of Washington, Oregon and California. Big trees produced still bigger operations and finally machinery of gargantuan proportions. Here the American lumberjack came into his own; his greatest hour.

The billions upon billions of feet of lumber he produced for an expanding young nation is almost beyond comprehension; and the three thousand mile trail of slash, sawdust towns, saloons, dance
halls, ghost towns, tax delinquency and forest fires he left behind him over a period of a hundred and twenty-five years was the price.

But what a hell-roaring time he had while he was doing it! With the possible exception of the mountain man, never did the frontier produce a rougher, tougher customer. Inured to endless backbreaking toil in the most primitive of surroundings, daily staring death in the face, he broke this monotony when he hit town with an explosive energy beyond the comprehension of the ordinary mortal. He wanted whiskey, he wanted women, and he wanted to howl. Lumber towns supplied the first two and gave him space to caterwaul to his heart's content. When he had rimracked the town, as he phrased it, he returned to his forest solitudes at peace with the world.

In his own vernacular, he did up the job high, wide and handsome and let daylight into a lot of swamps.

However, it took social adjustment to satisfy the demands of the prairie states for lumber and it took tremendous social adjustment in the cutover country after the forests were gone.

The rock-ribbed theory that the plow would follow the axe had been a tradition from Georgia to Vermont since the days of Miles Standish. Generations of early Americans tried their hand at proving it. But as farm land eroded and became sterile from overcropping, it was deserted and left to grow back to brush and ravaged by seasonal fires, while a relentless migration spread out over Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and southern Wisconsin. Here the theory seemed to work. But misguided agricultural prophets were determined that the plow must follow the axe into the sandy pine country of the northern Lake States, just as they were determined that farming must succeed beyond the hundredth meridian. A common practice was being applied to all lands regardless of soil types, rainfall or climate.

Following the man with the caulked boots and double-bit into the white pine, these prophets hailed the free-running fires from the smoke-filled clearings of thousands of settlers as a divine signal of manifest destiny for the cut-over country. The advent of almost every settler meant a new road and often a new schoolhouse. All these improvements added to the local tax burden, which the land was not capable of supporting. Social and economic standards that had been developed to fit a mature economy were thrust upon a raw, undeveloped region too rapidly for it to absorb.

This was a common pattern after the nineteen hundreds, with
ghost towns increasing, mills shutting down and many a horny-handed settler going broke and cursing this land of disenchantment. The eternal question still seemed unanswered and unanswerable—just what was this stumpy, stony, burned-over “God-forsaken” country good for?

There were many regions in the United States where the plow followed the axe to disaster, until such time as many millions of acres of land were returned to their true destiny—growing timber.

The early leaders of forest conservation, realizing that most of the forest land east of the Mississippi from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico had passed into private hands by one means or another—many times larcenous, or at best quasi-legitimate—and having followed the trend of the times had been butchered, wasted and burned, were gravely concerned as to what would happen to the yet unsurveyed timbered regions of the Rockies and the Pacific.

The first and most bitterly contested step was to set these forests aside in perpetuity as Reserves, later to be called National Forests. This fight went on for years, and the expansion and contraction of the public forest boundaries is still a highly controversial subject.

With the creation of the Forest Service in 1905, the administrative philosophy to be followed in handling the National Forests was clearly set forth and defined by the then Secretary of Agriculture, James Wilson:

“In the administration of the forest reserves it must be clearly borne in mind that all land is to be devoted to its most productive use for the permanent good of the whole people and not for the temporary benefit of individuals or companies. All the resources of forest reserves are for use, and this use must be brought about in a thoroughly prompt and businesslike manner, under such restrictions only as will insure the permanence of these resources. . . . The continued prosperity of the agricultural, lumbering, mining, and livestock interests is directly dependent upon a permanent and accessible supply of water, wood, and forage, as well as upon the present and future use of these resources under businesslike regulations, enforced with promptness, effectiveness, and common sense. In the management of each reserve, local questions will be decided upon local grounds; the dominant industry will be considered first, but with as little restriction of minor industries as may be possible; sudden changes in industrial conditions will be
avoided by gradual adjustment after due notice; and where conflicting interests must be reconciled, the question will always be decided from the standpoint of the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run.”

Although admirable standards were set, there were long, tedious years ahead for the new bureau. Up to this time public land and the resources it produced belonged to the individuals who were strong enough to dominate them. Stockmen, loggers and mountaineers, many of them still under fifty, who had been raised in the craftsmanship of wilderness survival, Indian skirmishes and cattle rustling wars, took a dim view of young squirts from the East in green uniforms and stiff-brimmed hats dictating the use and management of this western heritage. This was a natural human reaction and analogous to that of Kentucky frontiersmen or the Lake States lumberjack. For years this attitude begat uneasy peace with a few instances of physical violence and loud demands to western congressmen to get rid of the upstarts. In the ranger force it separated the men from the boys and developed a fine type of pioneer leadership in public service so necessary to manage the vast wealth of federal ownership. It set a pattern for the future management of all public domain by other bureaus.

In the beginning the job consisted of exploration and survey to determine the extent and breadth of the forests; to build trails, ranger camps and to fight fires. The concept of management considered necessary in future years was still a long way off, custodianship and protection were then the order of the day. A ranger had to be a cruiser, horse wrangler, logger, stockman, mountainman and camp cook. These are still basic requisites. For this job the men of the West were ideally suited and many entered the Service at an early date. This fact softened the local hostilities and helped advance the cause of the National Forests.

It was in the mountain wilderness, that last melting pot of men and resources, that the job of fighting forest fires was taken on in deadly earnest as a public responsibility. Everyone agreed that the boys in green had assumed quite a contract, and to begin with about all the equipment they had was a pack string and guts.

There was wide speculation as to whether they could “turn the trick;” a deep-seated conviction that they could not, had traveled west with the covered wagons. During the time that the itinerant logger was developing into a distinct sub-species of the genus woodsman along the rivers of the Atlantic Coast, and perfecting the art of trespass on the Broad Arrow timber, there had been the constant challenge of forest fires. With the land rapidly passing into private ownership
the proposition of controlling them looked hopeless. It was especially hopeless for one landowner to attempt fire protection when surrounding operators had no interest; and at that time there was little interest in common effort or state responsibility. Most eastern states had fire laws, but the seasonal conflagrations were no respecters of law. It became a race as to who could cut out and get out the quickest, and move on to new territory.

Because of the impact of mankind on American forests, and the result of forest fires on the destiny of man, it is fitting to give some evaluation of the destructive force that has ravaged our woodlands.

There was a time in the receding past when people referred to events as occurring before or after the “Great Chicago Fire.” That sinful, unsanitary town was nearly wiped out by fire on the night of October 8, 1871. It was a catastrophe of great economic loss and therefore received much national sympathy and attention—several hundred people lost their lives.

On the same day and at approximately the same time, fire struck a small sawmill town in northeastern Wisconsin. The name of the village was Peshtigo. It was situated not far from Green Bay, an arm of Lake Michigan. The nation did not discover the extent of that fire until some time later, and those who escaped could not adequately describe its stark horrors.

Not all escaped. It was never accurately determined how many perished, but it was between twelve and fifteen hundred souls. The economic loss, in addition to the village, the mill and many border farms, extended over 1,280,000 acres of timber land. The Peshtigo fire was of such proportion that it seemed as if all the fires of hell had been lifted in a giant bucket and dumped on the hapless area. The Peshtigo fire was a landmark of horror and destruction to the North Woods frontier.

Forest fires became the bane of life and property in the three Lake States, as the man with the double-bit and crosscut advanced up the rivers, felling the cork pine and leaving vast, raw scars of barrenness and slash. For the next seventy-five years, as the choppings stretched away from the rivers, and with the coming of the railroad logger, an empire of timber was cut. More was destroyed than reached the mill. This was while people were prophesying that the timber resources were inexhaustible.

But in the backwoods, the words “forest fire” had a definite connotation of destruction, panic and disaster.
In the late summer, especially, the folks in the back country watched for spells of prolonged drouth, and with it the inevitable acrid smell of wood smoke. There would be a white, puffy spear of smoke rise above the distant tree line to float on the lazy breeze of the hot fall air. If the weather continued, more smoke would appear at various points of the compass. The smell of burning wood, the smoke and drifting ashes would increase as the days went by. At night the horizon would glow as if the Northern Lights had come down to earth as an inverted aurora.

Then would come the day that the rising sun appeared blood-red and remote through the smoke pall. The morning had a deathly silence as if time hung on a thread of eternity. The birds were without song, the red squirrels mute.

A cruiser stepping out of the big timber crushed the bone-dry grass at the edge of a bluejoint meadow. He flipped a leather counter on his tally-whacker, and took a long hard look at the ruby sun; and the sun stared back through streamers of smoke and ashes like an evil eye of perdition.

He said to his compass man: “We better pull the pin and find water, and be quick about it. We’re in for a big blowup.”

In a far away lumber camp two men guarding the camp and its equipment during the summer months peered through the haze at the first crescent of an early morning sun as it climbed above the forest canopy.

One said to his partner: “She’s a dirty lookin’ sky. We better pack our turkeys and high-tail it for the river. If we stay here they won’t find enough of us to even bury.”

In a stump farm clearing a woman stood in a cabin door and watched her man filling barrels at the well. She bit her lips to stifle the fear and apprehension that seemed to be choking her. A doe and a fawn slipped through the edge of the stump patch. A scrawny cow stood by the barn, nervously sniffing at the vacuum of silence. The eerie quiet finally ended with a wisp of warm air. It increased to a vagrant breeze, and then a steady blow. A shred of lighted bark dropped into the clearing and went out. Another dropped on a punky log and began to smoke. The woman cried out in alarm to her husband and pointed.

In the distance, smoke belched into the sky; it expanded into a black, menacing cloud across the horizon. It was intermingled with shafts of rainbow colored flames. There was a far-off moaning in the woodlands which increased to a dull, ominous roar as the fires of purgatory, creating their own wind, engulfed the land in
catastrophic and frightful destruction. Another forest fire was on the loose.

With some variations this story has been repeated since white men first girdled trees for a corn patch. In fact, forest fires were periodically devastating some portion of America’s woodlands before Leif Erickson began to vacation at Martha’s Vineyard.

Man’s interest in his origin and archeology have led to some interesting discoveries regarding forest fires on the North American Continent. The giant redwoods have kept records that go back nearly to the time of Christ, and bear witness to major conflagrations during the Spanish conquests, the Colonial Indian wars, and the American Revolution.

Bearing a guilt complex, the white man likes to attribute many of these fires to the Indians who, no doubt, at times were responsible. But, despite the many delinquencies of the native Red Man, the fact remains indisputable that at the inception of conquest the sylva of the North American Continent was beyond comparison to anything else in the world.

Some point with acrimony and censure at the havoc, wreckage and the inevitable fires that followed logging from the Penobscot to the Olympic peninsula. Some of the most spectacular calamities of forest fire history had their origin in the debris and slash of extensive logging operations. However, the persistent and insidious damage over several hundred years came from that sturdy yeoman of civilization, the frontier settler. Probably the settler, in his attempt to get elbow room for a farm as he followed in the wake of the logger, caused more fires than all other sources.

Fire was God’s blessing to the settler. Fire that would kill every living plant, tree and shrub on the land; fire that could burn log piles and gnaw at the roots of stumps. Children fired the woods when looking for the cows; settlers out after summer venison set off dry slashings; and at night during the spring and fall, the horizon glowed a devilish red from flames that ate away the forest; while during the day the pall of raw smoke dimmed the sun. And the settlers laughed vindictively as the fire leaped at the trees and young saplings—and destroyed the very life of the soil.

For generations fires over-ran eastern Canada, the New England states and the Piedmont, with little or no attempt at control or estimation of damages. In 1825 the State of Maine, the Provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were swept by terrible fires that destroyed villages as well as millions of acres of timber lands.
With some exceptions, most of the forest fires that have remained as landmarks in forest history and as gruesome memories in the minds of men, were disasters that took many human lives. The Peshtigo was such a fire. At the time when the nation was being apprised of the Peshtigo horrors, forest fires were ravishing much of the State of Michigan. Many lives were snuffed out but the damage extended over such a wide area and the loss of lives took such a long time to tally, it received little attention. The pall of smoke was so great that traffic on the Great Lakes was seriously hampered.

As loggers advanced west and stump farmers moved into the choppings behind them, fires became part and parcel of frontier life, on a par with death and taxes, ever present. Every year some forest region of the United States had its "blowup" of forest fires, which meant economic destruction and possible loss of life. In the South little or nothing was done in the way of fire prevention where it was traditional to burn for new grass, to kill ticks and snakes and because grandpappy did it that way. Fire in the woods was a deep-seated southern tradition.

In 1894 the Midwest had another big blowup. In September of that year fire swept Pine County, Minnesota, some sixty miles south of Duluth, and destroyed the towns of Pokegama, Mission Creek and Hinckley. When the dead were finally gathered up, there were 418. There is a monument at Hinckley for these dead and an inscription saying: "Dedicated to the Pioneers of Civilization in the Forests of Minnesota." One wonders if civilization must be tortured with such birth pains.

At the time of the Hinckley holocaust, fires were running wild over a great part of northwestern Wisconsin, which reduced at least ten sawmill towns to ashes.

The far west began to have a noticeable increase of fires as soon as the man with the staggered pants and caulked shoes moved in. The mountain country was always a high risk with the prevalence of lightning fires, but adding large chunks of slash increased the big burns. California was always a hot spot, and the intermountain country stocked with Engelmann spruce and lodgepole were regions of chronic nightmare to the new ranger force who had become their guardians.

The first white men to examine the coastal ranges found scars of early fires. When logging got underway, big timber, big fires and big losses went hand in hand. Shortly after the century mark it was estimated that more timber was being burned than got to the mill. This was a repetition of conditions as they had existed in the Lake
States, the East and South before the last migration of the canthook men.

The year 1910 was one that old-timers in Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington will never forget. The whole intermountain country seemingly was on fire that memorable year. When the show was all over, three million acres were black and eight billion feet of standing timber killed in Montana and Idaho—and eighty-five people were dead. Some of the men in the newly created Forest Service, apple-cheeked and starry-eyed, took a “whirl” at that fire, but they made little impression. The gods of destiny finally decided that enough wrath and vengeance had been turned loose and so let it rain and snow. Some of those same young men, tested in a crucible of overwhelming odds, became great crusaders and public leaders of conservation in years to come.

But a growing awareness did not or has not stopped the forest fires, and the all-time fire of the century should be mentioned in passing. The Tillamook of Oregon. On August 14, 1933, a blaze started in the Tillamook that lasted eleven days and spread over 311,000 acres. It killed some twelve and a half billion feet of the finest timber that ever looked up into the heavens. It was enough to supply the entire nation with wood products for an entire year. Combine prolonged drouth with human indifference and we can again have a Peshtigo, Hinckley, Cloquet, Milestone, or a Tillamook.
Chapter 6

GROUND SWELL OF CONSERVATION

Some early invaders braved the uncertainties of the new Continent to conquer and plunder for their King; and with the secret hope that fame, power and booty would be their personal reward. Many came for individual economic, political and religious freedom. The word “freedom”—that elixir of the human soul—embodied all their prayers, hopes and desires.

In attempting to escape the injustices imposed on them by the aristocracy, the Divine Rights of Kings and the Church, these migrants were not loathe to impose gross injustices on the natives who first met them in peace.

The United States is a nation born of conflict, first with the struggles of European powers to possess the territory from which it came into being, then with the conflict of its people to survive the elements of nature and to conquer them—the conflict of revolution with England, the conflict among the thirteen colonies to establish a free government; the conflict to extend the nation's boundaries; the bloody conflict between the states; and finally the continuing conflict to preserve the freedoms set forth in the Constitution.

Conflict, adversity and the discipline of survival have their virtues in producing a breed of people that are of a tough fiber; although under stress they can become emotional as well as ruthless and vengeful.

A big land with few people, developed individualism and separatist instincts. Each was looking to his own security and when resources were there for the taking, certainly each would fight for all he could hold and defend.

To a struggling, youthful nation, attempting to establish some semblance of governmental equilibrium, the responsibility of policing and managing regions of unknown extent began to prove a perplexing issue that gave rise to divergent and oftentimes violent extremes in philosophies. In the beginning there was general agreement that the public domain should be disposed of in some orderly manner or means, but this broad generality soon became involved in sectional rivalries, slavery, free soil, free homesteading rights, capitalism and so forth. Direct revenues from sale or a later and indirect return through development brought out the oratorical talents of many a
politician of that period. For more than a hundred and fifty years
the destiny of public lands has been debated; much of it with more
forensic flourish than statesmanship. The northern politician cam-
paigned for free soil and homesteading; the southern office seeker
campaigned for the extension of slavery and against homesteading.

The right of every citizen to his fair share of free land appealed to
the European in contrast to the astringent philosophy of primogeni-
ture; that is, inheritance by the oldest son. Andrew Jackson was a
belligerent advocate of the sturdy pioneers' taking up land. And
Lincoln's election to the Presidency was no doubt influenced by his
support of the homestead idea.

The land east of the Mississippi was taken up through various
grants and public land laws or sold in large blocks to speculators.
On much of it, prior to being surveyed, people just squatted and
claimed the rights by pre-emption. This did not always pan out and
many were dispossessed by later surveys. Removal of the Indians,
however, was the last barrier to settlement and exploitation.

By 1853 the United States owned one and one-half billion acres
of public domain. To possess as much as possible within one's ability
became an obsession and a disease of some men. It blinded them
to any sense of moral obligation, justice, patriotism, or humanity.

Hardship, freedom and virgin resources provided the formula for
enterprise and frenzied expansion. The long-time interest of the
nation was conceived to be the short-time interest of the individual.
The more intelligent and aggressive began to develop embryo indus-
tries, and eventually many of them grew to Herculean size. This
was especially true in the New England States and formed the pat-
tern as the hard-bitten Yankee moved west. It was not until 1891 that
any restrictive land policies were adopted.

It was possible for a man to acquire large acreages of timber or
coal lands and mill sites on rivers, which were arteries of travel and
transportation. Rivers were dammed for all types of milling indus-
tries. Canal development and later railroad building induced men
of daring to organize stock companies and corporations. Much of
this development went through a phase of wild, ruthless speculation
and fraud before such activities were controlled by law.

Exploitation in southern states followed an agrarian economy of
cotton and tobacco due to the climate and the institution of slavery.
Plantations developed a self-sustained unit, sawing their own lumber,
making their own bricks, raising their own subsistence with cotton
and tobacco as a cash crop being shipped to New England or abroad.
Industrial goods were returned for use on the plantation. For this
reason, mills and independent businesses bypassed the South until after the Civil War.

It was in this manner that the ecological balance, through destructive logging methods, ruinous farming, and devastating forest fires, was destroyed; and it was thus that America's beautiful rivers began to carry an ever-increasing load of eroded earth and human filth.

Removal of the Indians from the short-grass plains and beyond the hundredth meridian opened up the country for cattle grazing. There was a short period of time when buffalo, Indians, cattle and cowboys were all attempting to occupy the same land. Raw courage and individualistic instincts characterized the cattle business; and in some instances bred arrogance and intolerance. The land was government land, public land, the people's land—therefore, nobody's land. A man simply dominated as much of it as he could hold with his cattle, hired help and his gun. Almost over night the great unknown land, which had no dimensions and was vaguely referred to as the West, plunged into the story book era of romance; of cowboys, stage coaches, road agents, gun slingers and western marshals.

After the Civil War, cattle were pushed north to the Canadian Border by the millions with amazing rapidity, and overgrazing soon became apparent. But at that time the fetish of the greatest good for the greatest number was being preached back East and invoked by Congress. Land was open for homesteading regardless of its suitability, rainfall, irrigation possibilities, and so on.

Cattlemen fought to preserve their way of life with the same tenacity as had the Indians. Losing the battle, many of them were pushed off the new homestead lands and grazing increased on the arid and semi-arid desert and in the timber and mountain meadows. Weeds and inferior forage replaced the native grasses that sustained livestock, the earth was cut to dust by the trampling of thousands of hoofs, and was caught up by the restless winds and whipped away to desolate the land.

Although iron, copper and lead were indispensable to the early life of the nation, the first major effect of minerals on the lives of men was the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill on the American River, Spanish territory, California. The magic word "gold" started a frenzied march of people across the plains and mountains toward the Pacific. Many were ill-prepared in skills, courage and material goods; many died of disease and thirst; women died of childbirth; and men from the arrows of Indians or the bullets of marauding Whites; but thousands tramped two thousand miles beside their
wagons at the snail's pace of ten to fifteen miles a day to find their Utopia.

The search for gold soon spread beyond the hills of California, to Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico and Montana. The lonesome, plodding man with a burro and a long-handled shovel—the prospector—became part and parcel of the West's tradition; he hunted for precious metals more assiduously than did the mountain man for beaver.

Brawling, sinful boom towns, such as Virginia City, Alder Gulch, Tombstone and Deadwood, became synonymous with fabulous wealth, lurid living, fantastic games of faro bank, and sudden death. Law and order were slow to follow the mining camps; and the miners, to protect life and property, made their own laws and defended their claims with guns. A gold strike meant little unless a man had courage and ammunition.

It was not until 1866 and 1872 that Congress got around to regulating mineral claims. These laws were very liberal and remained substantially unchanged until 1920 and it was not until 1955 that most of the basic abuses were rectified. In effect the original law stated that any land with a minimum showing of mineral could be purchased at a nominal price without obligation that minerals be produced. Through the years the current land laws were used to gain mineral claims and many fraudulent claims were filed for the timber and water on them. Much of this abuse occurred within the national forests and constituted outright thievery. Needless to say, it took years of struggle in the Halls of Congress to correct these abuses. The mining interests were well entrenched and had plenty of friends in the halls of the lawmakers. The question has often been debated as to whether lands having varied mineral values should be sold at the same price.

In 1879 the Geological Survey was created by Congress through the efforts of Powell and associate rivals. The long tedious work of land classification was commenced together with that of water power sites. Men of vision and ambition were beginning to appreciate the fact that water for irrigation and power would be like liquid gold to the West.

Slowly and painfully the justification of managing and protecting the public domain became apparent. A public conscience was beginning to level off the peak of exploitation and demanding that the treasures owned by the people collectively be protected. This is reflected in the creation of the Department of Interior, in 1849, and the Department of Agriculture, in 1862. Their duties and responsibilities slowly broadened as the frontier disappeared and the country took on a degree of maturity. As a result bureaus were created.
within the departments as more intensive policing and management were demanded. By the year 1900 they were still comparatively small and lacked influence, but the seeds of bureaucracy had been sown with nurtured ambitions of empire-building and self-preservation as governmental agencies. Fifty years later the struggle between states’ rights and private industry on one side, and federal autonomy using subsidies as bait on the other, developed a grim struggle of clarifying national philosophy.

To study the enactment of conservation laws is to trace the history of the abuses which brought about their enactment. Corrective laws have never ended abuses without the support of public conscience.

Commencing with the Broad Arrow Policy, the respectability of defrauding the government by acquiring or outright stealing publicly-owned land, minerals, and water-power sites were seldom challenged. It was fondly regarded as a quaint and innocent American custom. By state and federal action there have been thousands of laws—laws by the bale—enacted supposedly to correct the abuses of the use of natural resources; laws, from the trapping of turtles to the control of uranium.

Some of the first conservation laws had to do with wildlife. Public conscience was first aroused because of the depletion, commercialization, and absolute decimation of many game species. Commercialized market hunting and the intensive fur trade were responsible for the disappearance of many species, in some instances in a relatively short period of time. It was not until much later that the effects of erosion, forest fires, pollution and general land abuse became recognized as affecting game populations.

The first great rallying cry was: “Remember the Buffalo; Remember the Passenger Pigeon!” Although there had been some crude game laws since colonial times and some understanding of their need had moved west with migration, very few took them seriously. If game was lacking in one region, all one had to do was move on to virgin territory. The massive slaughter of the bison and passenger pigeon brought realization that game was not inexhaustible.

Americans are fast forgetting the important part that game and fish played as an ingredient in their dreams of freedom, economic independence and self-government.

There would have been no conquest of America if there had been no wildlife. There would have been no Indians to meet the Spanish, or John Smith, or Champlain, if the Continent had not been well-
stocked with game. There would have been no fabulous journeys of exploration, no Radisson, no Hudson’s Bay Company, no Lewis and Clark, no United States. Game was elemental to survival, a basic part of the economy; it still has a mystic and profound grip on the lives and emotions of millions of Americans. The killing off of the wildlife and its general disappearance through other causes, has probably aroused more national attention and produced more concerted effort to the general tenets of conservation than any other one issue.

Through all this travail of giving birth to a new civilization, of valour and craven fear, of plodding honesty and base deceit, courageous men and women were becoming educated through trial and error, through hope and despair, through bloodshed and adversity, to the proposition of self-government. Its like and kind, its intensity of purpose, its nobility and baseness, its broad sweep of conquest, had never before been witnessed by mankind. A democracy had thus far survived by the consent of the governed.

A stoic fortitude had sustained the nation through its trials and tribulations; would that same fortitude sustain it along the flower-strewn paths of success?

The years 1905 and 1908 brought the nation to a pound swell of national existence where it could look back on a fabulous panorama of conquest. The rainbow it had been following with grim, unyielding tenacity had ended at the shores of the Pacific. An illusion fondly called “the frontier” was gone like the mists of the morning. Its only existence into eternity would soon be in the minds of dreamers. The resources of a great Continent had been discovered and assayed. There were no more mountains to climb, no more deserts to cross, no uncharted prairies to explore. A growing population must learn to manage and subsist within the dimensions of its conquest. But as yet a limitation of resources was beyond the ken of these restless and victorious conquerors. This fact would of necessity be borne out later as a galling and a frightful fact of life. In the first flush of success it was scorned and ridiculed, and even worse, ignored!

A new era was dawning, however, which many looked upon with suspicion and dread. The old days of unlimited space and barbaric freedom were fast drawing to a close. The country had reached its first stage of maturity when regard for the future, however reluctant, must be given due consideration if there were to be national survival. But this fruition of unparalleled achievement was a heady wine; the fruits of a Continent were still endless and were there to be torn from the earth by men who by their achievements had become
gods. They were gods, and no one dared contradict or deny it. Had they not licked the British Lion, the Mexicans and the Spaniards? Every advance, every Indian war, every struggle with the elements was proof of their divine destiny. They were the Lords annointed and could do no wrong, nor could they make any mistakes. The strong said, “Let the dead bury their dead. Let us boldly set our faces to the rising sun of a new century; there is no power in heaven or earth that can deny us our place in the sun.”

In 1789, Thomas Paine, the much maligned patriot of the Colonial Revolution and a Quaker by belief, wrote of his beloved America:

“When we contemplate the fall of empires and the extinction of nations of the ancient world, we see but little to excite our regret than the mouldering ruins of pompous palaces, magnificent monuments, lofty pyramids, and walls and towns of the most costly workmanship. But when the empire of America shall fall, the subject for contemplative sorrow will be infinitely greater than crumbling brass or marble can inspire. It will not then be said, here stood a temple of vast antiquity, here rose a Babel of invisible height, or there a palace of sumptuous extravagance; but here, ah painful thought! the noblest work of human wisdom, the grandest scene of human glory, the fair cause of freedom rose and fell. Read this and then ask if I forget America.”

Paine spoke of a time “when the empire of America shall fall,” although he did not expressly state why or when this catastrophe would befall. No doubt the embryo nation was too close to a-borning for Paine to envision all the contingencies that would affect its course of empire. He could well have dated the fall of “the fair cause of freedom” in conjunction with the garroting of the natural resources through continuous abuse and willful disregard by a consuming public. He could date it when people demand more substance from the earth than it can produce; when forests and mines can no longer supply unreasonable standards of living; when our rivers can no longer bear their intolerable burden of human filth. As America’s appetite of resource consumption continues to expand for lack of discipline and self-restraint, Paine’s prophecy regarding the fall of the “fair cause of freedom” may well become a certainty.
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