

"Hoofed Locusts"



"Hoofed Locusts" 1917

The spring and summer of 1917 brought severe pressures. Finding qualified personnel to operate the parks was a continuing problem. Thanks to our congressional foes, the army had returned to Yellowstone. At Yosemite, Lewis had decided not to enlist in the army, and in a few parks good men were too old for the military. Elsewhere, however, we were painfully short of competent supervisors. When our supervisor in Glacier, Samuel Ralston, resigned, I quickly moved a new engineer, George Goodwin, over there. Once more, that incurred the wrath of Senator Thomas Walsh.

Mather continued his slow recovery and moved to a halfway house in Lakewood, New Jersey. Now my prime consideration was the war effort.

It was just as well that I could put my deep concern about Mather to the back of my mind, for I had to concentrate on Secretary Lane's desire to win the war through the Interior Department. Lane was a peculiar fellow. He could spend unlimited time on minor matters, study microscopic details, and still end up not making a decision, leaving it to a bureau chief or some other subordinate. He pretty much trusted his assistants and let them have their heads, which Mather and I deeply appreciated. On the other hand, in appearance, he rather resembled a bulldog, and that's what he became when he took hold of some idea or project dear to his heart.

The minute war was declared, he assumed his bulldog psyche and searched for ways he and Interior could contribute to winning the conflict. Most of us believed he was still feeling the effects of his

pummeling by conservation groups and the western press over his championing of Hetch Hetchy and wanted to show he was a patriotic American. His first act was to have a complete survey made of his department to ascertain how and where each division could fit into the war plans. Acker and I immediately insisted that, under the law, the resources of the national parks could not be utilized.

The western cattlemen and sheepmen thought otherwise. They found the declaration of war a perfect opportunity to break into the national parks. Lane's inclination was to agree. But there was such an immediate outcry from conservation groups, interested congressmen, and powerful representatives of the press that he hesitated, then began to backtrack, and finally indicated that he would wait a bit and see how things went.

Then the newly appointed chairman of the National Defense Committee of California took a strong hand in the situation. He was none other than Dr. Benjamin Ide Wheeler, president of the University of California, an extremely vigorous and strong-willed man. Prior to our entry into the war, due to an old friendship with Kaiser Wilhelm, Wheeler had spoken favorably of the German cause. Now he felt he had to prove he was 100-percent American. As Lane, Mather, and I were all University of California men, it was an awkward situation.

At heart, Lane never was much of a conservationist or preservationist. Mather and I had gotten so much done not because of any strong convictions Lane held but because he had just left us alone to do as we wished.

Another sore point was that Wheeler's prime advisor was Court Dubois of the U.S. Forest Service. "Use" was the core of his bureau's tenets. For example, he happily offered statistics indicating that the carrying capacity of the Yosemite was ample for extensive grazing.

The upshot was that Lane drew up an order stating that sheep and cattle could be pastured in Yosemite and Sequoia. I was aghast and immediately sought an answer from the secretary as to his precipitous action without even consulting me. He hemmed and hawed and finally admitted it was a combination of Wheeler and Court Dubois. Why on earth was Interior paying any attention to the Forest Service, practically an enemy? Well, it seemed the Forest Service policies were far more patriotic than ours by allowing pasturing and other noble deeds in their forests. We had to prove ourselves too.

Lane casually added that Wheeler wanted fifty thousand sheep pastured on the floor of Yosemite valley and elsewhere in the park. That

did it. For the first time I exploded. "Mr. Secretary, how could you possibly allow fifty thousand 'hoofed locusts' [a John Muir expression] in that beautiful park? It wouldn't recover from an onslaught like that until the next century."

He leaped from his chair, leaned across the desk, and bellowed right back at me: "Albright, you do as you are ordered. Wire Lewis and tell him to open the park to the sheep." I rarely lost my temper, but when I did, I knew how to rein it in. I did so now and reverted to being a lawyer trained to argue and persuade. No use. After a futile half-hour of presenting my case, Lane wouldn't budge.

I took a deep breath and said: "Then, Mr. Secretary, with deep regret, I tender my resignation. I simply couldn't oversee the ruination of park lands that belong to all the American people just for the simple greed of a few."

A dead silence reigned as Lane stared at me. I guess he was trying to decide whether I meant what I said. He apparently came to the conclusion that I wasn't bluffing, for he spoke in a very soft but deadly serious voice: "You are not to resign, but something must be done along this line. You send a telegram to Lewis to say that pasturing will be allowed in Yosemite. But you may work out a compromise for me. In the meantime, you are ordered not to discuss this matter with anyone. And I mean anyone."

With that menacing admonition, I went back to my office and closed the door. I remember sitting there staring at Mather's picture hanging over my bookcase and asking myself, "What would Stephen Mather do under these circumstances?" There are times in everyone's life when principle and necessity meet head on. The more I reviewed where Mather and I had been and what we wanted to do in the future, the more my decision was clarified. As in the case of so many other challenges in the past, I found I simply couldn't let my chief down. I couldn't resign and leave the Park Service. A lot worse things could happen to it without a guardian for Mather and the plans we had made. That was it. Our plans and dreams. I knew that our commitment to the service was deeper than some passing issue.

Well, I had one word of Lane's to cling to: compromise. This scheme had to be worked out carefully. First I wrote the telegram to Lewis as ordered and had Lane approve it. As I found out later, he never sent it. I next began to formulate a compromise, but never completed it, always procrastinating, telling Lane I had to get more facts.

I was sworn to silence, but I was sure, given some time, that Lane's decision about Yosemite would leak out and alert conservationists. I was correct. The Sierra Club learned of it from two or three sources, one of whom was an associate of Wheeler's. Colby immediately wired me for confirmation, but I didn't answer him. So the Sierra Club went ahead and got the California press to publish very anti-grazing stories. Then they pushed the California delegation in Congress on Lane, especially the newly elected Senator Hiram Johnson.

When I figured Lane had been pressured enough, I went to him with my compromise. Of course, he blamed me for the leak, swore I had gone against my word, and acted cool and distant. It was several years before Colby exonerated me. For now, Lane accepted the plan I presented to him. No sheep at all. Allow a few head of cattle in strategic, fairly worthless areas. Without consulting him further, I issued permits for grazing. Actually, Colby and his allies picked the cattlemen to place their animals in "just the right places," basically men they knew who would go along with conservation.

With all the publicity in the newspapers, I feared that Mather would somehow hear about the problem. I decided to write him a carefully discreet version: "I am in a dilemma as to how to handle the Yosemite grazing situation. The grazing demands are enormous on account of the short food supply and everybody except the Sierra Club, from the Governor down, including President Wheeler, is urging the opening of the park. I am afraid to go ahead, however, because I am not satisfied that it is absolutely necessary that the park be opened, and, furthermore, I think that a few of the old cattlemen like John Curtin are back of this move and are taking advantage of the existing conditions to open the old issues about grazing in the Yosemite." Mather absorbed the situation calmly and made no additional suggestions to me.

Spring brought a really exciting event for all of us in the Interior Department. A beautiful new building was completed for our department between Eighteenth and Nineteenth and E and F Streets, two blocks west of the White House. Interior had been quartered for more than sixty-five years in various structures in Washington, the latest being the eastern section of the old Patent Office Building overlooking Seventh Street. Even before its completion, there had been discussions about space, but no assignments had been made. Usually assignments were made by seniority of the bureau. The General Land Office, the Bureau of Indian

Affairs, and the Pension Office would take precedence over newer bureaus such as Reclamation and the Park Service.

On behalf of the National Park Service, I argued that we were entitled to an attractive view since we were concerned with scenery and natural sites. I requested that we have the fourth floor, just under the secretary on the sixth floor and the assistant secretary on the fifth floor. With this suite of rooms, our vista would be Potomac Park, the river, the Washington Monument, and the famous Octagon House. Because of seniority, the Bureau of Indian Affairs claimed the same space. Lane decided in our favor.

In June, when we moved, I was shocked to find the Bureau of Indian Affairs already dug in on the fourth floor. Judge Cato Sells, commissioner of Indian affairs, had usurped Mather's office space and also areas across the hall. He had ordered these remodeled according to his design. Temporarily foiled, I moved our bureau into all the space remaining on that floor. This forced some of Sells's group to descend to the third floor, separating them from their chief. It was soon a standard joke how Sells had outsmarted me—a painful joke, as the fat, walrus-mustached fellow was well disliked by all.

One day at lunch in the new office building restaurant, I decided I'd had enough of this joking and teasing. I jumped up on a table and loudly inquired: "Hey, where's the chief clerk? I'd like a crew at two o'clock this afternoon, for I want to proceed with a high-powered move."

Everyone, including the assistant secretaries, thought this looked like fun and wanted to watch it. However, when I fearlessly (or foolishly) stated I was going to move Sells out and Mather in, they ducked out with the advice to call it all off. I don't know if I'd have been so brazen except that I was outraged at Sells and knew he was away for a few days. Precisely at 2:00 P.M., when the crew arrived, I had Sells's furniture and all his other belongings evacuated into the hall and his Indian rugs thrown over them. The National Park Service moved in.

When Judge Sells returned, we all held our breath. Sells calmly went to his Indian Bureau on the third floor, ordered his belongings brought to the new locale, and never uttered a peep. I had gotten control of my floor as I had been promised, and my stock really rose with my fellow workers in the Interior Department.

Another incident made this insignificant official shine. Shortly after the Interior Department moved into its new building, we found few

places to eat west of the White House. Consequently, employees organized an informal luncheon club in the basement. On stormy days I would simply take the elevator down there, but when the weather was pleasant, I liked to go outdoors and walk all the way around.

One day, as I was taking my time getting to the lunch room, an elderly gentleman hailed me to ask where there was a place to eat in the vicinity. He stated that he was a member of the president's War Industries Board, had been at a meeting in the Pan American Building, but now could find no restaurant in the area. I replied that there really wasn't any, but suggested that he come with me to lunch. He agreed if he could pay his own way. I offered my hand, saying, "My name is Albright. I'm with the National Park Service."

He shook my hand, replying, "My name is Edison."

I gasped. "Mr. Thomas Alva Edison?" He nodded, and we proceeded to lunch in our basement, where I proudly introduced him all around.

Several weeks later I once more saw Mr. Edison walking up Eighteenth Street and again asked him to join me for lunch. At first he refused, saying I hadn't let him pay the first time. However, I convinced him that the cost was a trivial amount, so he came along with me. When we reached the lunch room, it was unusually crowded. Even Secretary Lane was present. He usually ate in his own suite. We quickly found seats off in the corner. Secretary Lane got everyone's attention to tell us that we were to be the guests of Judge Sells, commissioner of Indian affairs. Three fine courses were then served: a delicious soup, a tasty steak, potatoes, and some vegetables, and finally a dessert.

When the last bite was swallowed, Judge Sells rose to give us a lengthy talk on the problem of wild horses on the Fort Peck Sioux Reservation in Montana. They were reproducing too rapidly and eating up all the forage for the Indians' horses and sheep. Consequently he had made a deal with a packing house to reduce the herds, process the meat, and distribute it to the Indians and any extra to war-stricken Europeans. Our delicious steaks had been part of the surplus horse meat.

When the luncheon was over, I sort of sheepishly glanced at Edison and apologetically said: "I didn't know anything about this horse meat. Really I didn't, Mr. Edison."

He laughed, clapped me on the back, and said: "Albright, I've wanted to taste horse meat all my life. And furthermore I really liked it."

With the Congress and President Wilson heading for their summer vacations, I felt that our office was operating well enough that I could get away from

Washington to attend to our problems out west in the field. Before I could leave, I had my own difficulties at home with Secretary Lane. When I suggested a fact-finding tour, he didn't like the idea and asked, "With no assistants, who will oversee the bureau while you are wandering out in the mountains three thousand miles away?" I assured him that the Washington office was doing nicely, that the summer doldrums wouldn't produce any problems, and that W. B. Acker could always be called on in an emergency.

Without making a decision, Lane cut off that conversation and swung into grazing in the parks. Not just Yosemite, but Mount Rainier, Glacier, and others. He told me he was going to go further in Yosemite. He'd decided to let everything but the valley be opened to grazing.

I yowled as if I was stuck with a pin and then fought back. "Mr. Secretary, if you let this thing get started, you'll never get rid of it, even with the Kaiser signing a peace treaty. If a wholesale grazing policy is instituted, we'll have it forever. Once approved, the precedent will be laid in concrete. Please, please, don't put your stamp of approval on it."

He ruminated over this outburst, scratched his nearly bald head, and then said, "What is your solution?"

I replied: "Well, of course, you know that my answer is no place, under no circumstances. But I realize, as I did before, that some adjustment has to be made." Lane and I finally hammered out an agreement. Only the extreme northwestern area of Yosemite would be opened. (Unknown to him, friends of the park would be given this franchise, so protection could be guaranteed.) Another decision Lane made was to let me settle the grazing problem in the various other parks when I arrived to visit them in the next few months.

One more thing we had a tussle over was whether Senator Walsh was to have the right to name the permanent supervisor in Glacier. I argued that we had to cease political appointments, that men had to be chosen by ability, for responsibility to the service, and to meet standards that we alone would set.

Lane basically agreed but didn't have the will or the ability to fight such a wild beast as Walsh. He stalled me along for a time, but finally caved in to Walsh and let him have his way. I really couldn't do anything, as our supervisors weren't covered by Civil Service. It was a sore point with me, and I determined to get them covered as soon as possible.

Then there was Bob Yard. He had been behaving pretty well since the last time I had laid down the law to him. Furthermore, he was keeping his nose out of national park affairs. I had been forced to make him bring me

everything he wrote or was about to mail out. I hated to be so overbearing with a friend, but Mather had to come first. Bob simply couldn't be trusted not to slip up. When he talked to people in person, he often sounded like Mather's oracle, expounding on policy with, "Steve and I have discussed this and we feel..."

I closeted with him one more time and, in a friendly but firm way, let it be known that if I had another problem with him, I had the authority from Mather to cut him off from the Park Service along with his \$650 per month.

There was also Yard's summer to be dealt with. He had grandiose plans not just to travel around our parks but to put in a lot of time and expense on Canadian parks. It was necessary to explain to him carefully that he did not work for the United States government, that the Park Service could not foot one cent of his travels. I suggested that he pick one park. How about Glacier? Spend his time doing a complete job on it, writing and taking photos for his next edition of the *Parks Portfolio*. He had already sold one book to Scribner's for a trade edition and a school edition of the same. Mather and I had discussed this aspect and felt he could probably make money writing a new book, his own book. With a good income, he could then be eased out of the Washington job.

I guess I was somewhat crafty in suggesting Glacier for the summer because I knew Yard had gotten to be a pal of many of the Great Northern Railroad people, mainly Howard Noble, the general manager of the Glacier Park Hotel Company. I thought they'd give him a break on his bills at the hotels and chalets. Although I never would permit an employee of the Park Service to do this, Yard was really outside a government position and could accept a break on room and board. Actually he ended up getting them practically free.

My affairs in Washington were in good shape. Dr. Weisenburg assured me that, although far from well, Mr. Mather had made a successful transition from Lakewood to his own home in Darien and would soon be able to spend the summer in the West. There seemed nothing to hold me any longer in Washington, so Grace and I boarded the train for Colorado, where we spent a week before she headed for California to remain with her folks while I continued my inspection trip. Our visit to Rocky Mountain National Park was a rewarding experience except for Enos Mills.

I should mention that Enos Mills was one of the meanest, most cantankerous, most fascinating men I ever knew. I'm pretty sure I never knew anyone who liked him—maybe admired him, maybe tolerated him.

But no one liked him. Even his brother Joe hadn't talked to him since childhood. Probably it was more that Enos hadn't talked to Joe. They both lived in Estes Park. Both owned hotels. Both wrote about nature. Both hated each other. Someone remarked that Enos Mills "used up friends like typewriter ribbons, a man unhappy without enemies." When Mills died on September 21, 1922, I received a telegram from Roe Emery, who had the transportation concession in Rocky Mountain: "Enos Mills died last night. Ain't nature grand?"

When I got to know Mills at the superintendents' conference in Berkeley in 1915, and later the same year at the dedication of Rocky Mountain National Park, I was rather in awe of him. He was already well known as the "Father of Rocky Mountain," a prodigious writer and promoter of national parks, a true conservationist.

In 1909 Mills had begun his advocacy of an Estes National Park. Then he met McFarland of the American Civic Association, and they associated themselves with Bob Marshall's 1912 report on the Colorado Rockies. Their work, plus the impetus of our drive from the Interior Department, was enough to get the park created in January 1915.

But there had to be some accommodation with the Forest Service, which had held the land prior to this time. This pragmatic compromise between the two departments poisoned Mills for the rest of his life. He never knew the word "compromise" was in the English dictionary. Ever after, he regarded the Forest Service as the devil incarnate, suspicious of its every move, rebellious against every decision, and venomously opposed to its every act.

Shortly after our bureau was created, Mills began to be suspicious of us and eventually spread his hatred to the National Park Service because he felt we knuckled under to the detested Forest Service. This reached a crescendo shortly before he died.

My relations with Mills had been most cordial after the 1915 conference and park dedication. I received a constant flow of letters from that time on. He frequently asked for maps and information on various parks and rewarded my quick responses with autographed copies of his books. He was a great friend of George Horace Lorimer, editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*, and was an influential conservation writer for that magazine as well as other periodicals. He pounded out books at quite a clip and loved to hear himself called "The John Muir of the Rockies."

So when I arrived in Rocky Mountain National Park on June 24, 1917, Mills was as nice as it was possible for him to be. On my last day in

the park, I reluctantly had to face up to him. He didn't even let me get by the pleasantries when he roared, "Alright, what about this grazing situation?" Being of like mind with the rest of us conservationists, Mills had thrown a fit when he heard that grazing was going to be permitted in national parks. He had fired off a barrage of letters to me in Washington.

Now, in his office in the Long's Peak Inn, he accelerated his attack. The grazing program had been another example of Interior knuckling under to Forest Service. Forest Service was for "use," and now it seemed we were going to give in meekly to "use" ourselves. We were spineless, yellow-bellied slaves of the Forest Service.

I tried to explain that we were a new and tiny bureau with not much clout, whereas the Forest Service was older, larger, and had quite a following with the powers in Washington. The Forest Service already was leery of us stealing their lands (e.g., our push for the Grand Canyon). Although I tried to steer the conversation over to Mills's vital interest in Colorado parks, he kept interrupting me to talk more grazing.

Getting exasperated, I blurted out: "Look, Mills, this isn't the only park where I've been forced to allow grazing. Lane has instructed me to let down the barriers in back country Yosemite, a small section of Mount Rainier, and South Glacier along the railroad. Emergency war provisions. And don't forget that Congress has permitted grazing for years in places like Wind Cave, Mesa Verde, and Platt despite all our protests." That kept Mills quiet long enough for me to swing back to Colorado parks.

The city of Denver was an energetic promoter of parks—any and all kinds of parks. They had a fine system of city parks, and local mountain parks were being promoted. The Mountaineer Club as well as commercial interests were pushing for a single park, the Denver National Park, to cross the Continental Divide with a road to link it with Rocky Mountain Park.

Mills, of course, was in the forefront of the drive. And therein lay his current war with the Interior Department, represented by me. He started off by accusing us of working too closely with the Forest Service, complaining bitterly that we weren't fighting hard enough to get Long's Peak and other adjacent land out of its fiendish hands. Again I denied all his accusations, pointing out that his park plans were just too grandiose, that we were trying and would continue to push for a Mount Evans park, but that Congress simply wouldn't consider any more than a couple of major park projects per year. This year it was Grand Canyon and the

possible additions of the Teton Valley to Yellowstone and the river canyons of the Sierra to Sequoia. Furthermore, all additions that would entail larger appropriations for the Park Service were probably pipe dreams in view of the vast war effort.

He became quite vitriolic, getting personal with his attacks. When I had enough of it, I cut him off with an icy: "Mills, you have no concept of government. One department does not come out openly fighting with another. Such things are just never done. Period."