



PENNSYLVANIA CONSERVATION
HERITAGE
PROJECT

Fact Sheet to accompany “Gifford Pinchot’s Conservation Legacy”

"I have been governor every now and then, but I am a forester all the time."

— Gifford Pinchot

Young Gifford Pinchot

Born in 1865 to James and Mary Pinchot, Gifford spent most of his childhood growing up in New York City and Connecticut. Family trips to the Adirondack Mountains immersed young Gifford in wilder forests and nature, which had a deep and lasting impact on him. His parents encouraged and fostered his natural love of the outdoors, and actually guided him to become trained in forestry.

His grandfather made money in the early 1800s by logging property he purchased and selling some of the cleared land for farming. Gifford grew up seeing the loss of forests and urbanization occurring around him, and had a father with an interest in healing the cut-over land he had inherited from his father in Milford, Pennsylvania. Gifford’s parents instilled in him a conservation ethic of healing the land, but also a responsibility of giving back to society through public service.

Early Training

Following his graduation from Yale University, Gifford spent a year in Europe learning about sustainable forestry, then returned home eager to put his training into practice. With no forestry jobs yet in America, he created a consulting business and was hired by George Vanderbilt to manage the cut-over lands surrounding his estate, Biltmore, in North Carolina. He soon became involved in the newly-formed National Forest Commission, helping to identify lands for the federal government to acquire for a national forest reserve.

Creation of the U.S. Forest Service

In 1898 at the age of 33, President William McKinley appointed Gifford to head up the (then) Division of Forestry in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In 1901 the division was bumped up

to become a bureau, then in 1905 President Theodore Roosevelt created the U.S. Forest Service as a new agency, with Pinchot still at the helm.

Pinchot's family endowed the Yale School of Forestry in 1900 to create a two-year program for training foresters, and Gifford formed the Society of American Foresters to provide a professional association for the foresters he would hire into his new agency.

Gifford promoted the "conservation of natural resources" with an emphasis on sustainability. His policy was summarized as "the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run." While President Roosevelt was in office, 150 million more acres were added to the national forest reserves, and Pinchot infused his vision of "wise use" into national forest management policy to balance conservation with economic benefit of the forests.

Cornelia Bryce Pinchot

In 1912, Gifford met Cornelia Bryce, a well-to-do social activist who was campaigning for Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Party. With similar political interests, influence and energy, they were married two years later. Cornelia became a powerful partner with Gifford, campaigning tirelessly for improving the welfare of humankind by championing women's rights, pushing for child labor reform, and supporting her husband's political races.

Return to Pennsylvania

In 1920, Gifford became Pennsylvania's Commissioner of Forestry and increased the number of foresters and firefighters in the forests. He ran for governor in 1922 with an aim to expand the state forest reserves and hire men to replant and reforest the landscape of northern Pennsylvania.

His interest was to also help improve the lives of women and others being neglected by political leaders, and to help solve social problems of the day.

One major accomplishment in which he demonstrated his problem-solving abilities was bringing together coal mine labor leaders and mine operators to diffuse tremendous anger on both sides and find a resolution to coal mine strikes.

Putting People to Work During the Great Depression

After a break from politics, Gifford Pinchot was elected for a second time as Governor of Pennsylvania in 1930 as the state and nation were faced with the tremendous unemployment resulting from the Great Depression.

Gifford's landmark roadbuilding and road paving program not only put thousands of people to work, it helped connect rural farm communities to markets for their goods and services.

He also instituted a massive tree-planting program, hiring men to restore the cut-over timber areas of the state. This experimental program became President Roosevelt's model for the federal Civilian Conservation Corps.

Grey Towers

When Gifford was 21, his parents completed the construction of a fieldstone mansion in the style of a French chateau on the family property along the Delaware River in Milford, Pennsylvania. Known as Grey Towers, it later became the summer home of Gifford and Cornelia.

Cornelia worked to improve and modernize the mansion to be better suited for entertaining guests, and added a number of interesting features and gardens around it.

Grey Towers became a place of inspiration for Gifford and others who were influential players in the conservation and progressive movements of the early 1900s, and the surrounding property was also used as a training ground for students in Yale University's early forestry program.

The building and grounds were donated to the US Forest Service in the 1960s by the son of Gifford and Cornelia, Dr. Gifford Bryce Pinchot. Designated as a National Historic Site, this public facility stands as a reminder of Pinchot's ethics of public service and doing the greatest good for the greatest number for the long run.

Additional Resources

Patricia E. Bixler, "Gifford Pinchot" *Historic Pennsylvania Leaflet No. 39*, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1976.

www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/people/4277/pinchot_gifford/443568

Char Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism*, Island Press, 2013.

Timothy Egan, *The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire That Saved America*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009.

Harold Steen, *The Conservation Diaries of Gifford Pinchot*, 2001.

U.S. Forest Service History; Chiefs; Gifford Pinchot 1898 - 1910.

www.foresthistory.org/ASPNET/People/Pinchot/Pinchot.aspx

George Perkins Marsh, *Man and Nature: Or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action*; C. Scribner, 1864. [Mentioned at the beginning of the film, this was an important book of influence to young Gifford Pinchot.]

Grey Towers Heritage Association- <http://www.greytowers.org/>

Grey Towers National Historic Site- <http://www.fs.usda.gov/greytowers>

Other Videos

Gifford Pinchot, Conservation Hero—Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWwUur6uHzA>

Gifford Pinchot, America's First Forester--USDA Forest Service

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkcL5y9svpc>

Local Speaker Ideas for Film Screening Event

Forester from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Bureau of Forestry or District Forest Office www.dcnr.state.pa.us

Private Forester

County Conservation District Staff

County Extension Staff

Forestry Professor (Mont Alto School of Forestry, Penn State School of Forest Resources, Pennsylvania College of Technology)

Watershed specialist or local watershed group

Local municipal tree-planting or tree-care person

Local naturalist or environmental educator

Pennsylvania historian

Civilian Conservation Corps member (1933 – 1942)

Local Elected Official

Staff from Grey Towers National Historic Site (see website listed previously)

Staff from Gifford Pinchot State Park or Pinchot Forest District