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Book Review

John Clayton, *Natural Rivals: John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, and the Creation of America's Public Lands* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2019), xxii + 276 pp., $27.95 (cloth), ISBN: 978-1643130804.

Having read every biography of John Muir and Gifford Pinchot that I know of, I would not have thought anyone could have anything new to say about the relationship of Muir, nature writer and advocate for national parks, with Pinchot, forester and first chief of the National Forest Service. Ever since Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967), which presented them as players in a morality play, a steady stream of books and articles has portrayed them as opponents who clashed over preservation versus conservation of public lands. Their antagonism reached its climax in Muir's bitter, determined, but doomed fight to stop the damming of Hetch Hetchy valley in Yosemite National Park, which Pinchot supported. In this, Nash did little more than reproduce the heroic Muir of Linnie Marsh Wolfe's 1945 biography. Recently, Char Miller and others have reframed the Muir-Pinchot relationship. Nevertheless, environmental histories often continue to repeat this simplistic dichotomy of Muir the preservationist vs. Pinchot the conservationist.

What a delightful surprise, then, to find that John Clayton's *Natural Rivals* did not retell the stale Nash myth but quite effectively upends it. A journalist and the author of *Wonderlandscape: Yellowstone National Park and the Evolution of an American Cultural Icon,* Clayton finds a refreshingly new way to frame the friendship of Muir and Pinchot. His dual portrait includes perspectives and details that will surprise even readers well acquainted with their stories.

Clayton begins the book with a standard summary of the two men's lives up until 1896. A Scottish immigrant, Muir grew up the son of an abusive religious zealot on a frontier farm in Wisconsin. After a couple of years at the University of Wisconsin and an industrial accident that ended a promising engineering career, he made his way to Yosemite Valley in California in 1868. He soon gained a reputation as a charismatic prophet of nature's beauty as the cure for civilization's ills. His writings won a national audience and led him to political activism to stop rapacious destruction of the nation's forests. His signal achievement, in a campaign orchestrated by editor Robert Underwood Johnson, was the creation of Yosemite National Park in 1890. In 1892, he co-organized the Sierra Club to defend Yosemite from commercial pressures.

Pinchot, on the other hand, grew up in a wealthy and cultured home in New York and graduated from Yale. Encouraged into forestry by his father to atone for the clearcut Pennsylvania forests that created the family's wealth, he attended forestry school in France. On his return to the U.S., landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted hired him as forester of a wealthy estate. In 1895, he set himself up in New York City as a forestry consultant.

The books' biggest insights and contributions come in the last chapters. In 1896, Muir and Pinchot worked together on the tour of the American west by the National Forest Commission, Muir as unofficial member and Pinchot as the commission's secretary. While most of the commission stayed in hotels along the way, Pinchot joined Muir in camping out, and the two bonded. The question of the hour was what to do with America's forests. Traditionally, the nation's attitude towards the public lands it held was to put them into private hands (whether of farmers, ranchers, miners, or railroads) as quickly as possible. The withdrawal in 1891 of public lands from sale in forest preserves did not answer the question whether the forests could be used, and, if so, how. Dissatisfied with the commission's report, Pinchot and Muir formed a partnership in which Pinchot supplied concepts from the profession of forestry, which Muir publicized in articles. In this way, these 'natural rivals' shaped the American notion of the purpose of public lands: to be used for economic purposes, but not in such a way as to deprive future generations of their use and benefit, be it economic, ecological, or recreational. Later, the relationship of the two men grew strained. However, Clayton points out, for a moment, they had the nation's ear and led the creation of the unique and unprecedented American idea of public land. In other words, before the two could fight about the future of public lands, they had to create the idea of public lands to argue about.

Natural Rivals is quite readable and well researched. Readers of this journal will appreciate the attention he devotes to religious motivation of the two men. The structure of the book is a little awkward, as it follows the life of one man and then the other before reaching the heart of the story Clayton wants to tell—their work together in the 1890s. Clayton also for some reason feels compelled several times to comment negatively on Muir's grooming, which he surely exaggerates in Muir's later years. I would also have liked to have seen more about how Muir worked with Secretary of Interior John W. Noble to expand Sierra forest reserves before he met Pinchot. The book ends a bit weakly, pleading for a new alliance between the lovers of America's parks and the users of its resources for the public good. As good as that sounds, the twentieth century is not 1896. The nation—and the world—needs fresh, creative ways to think about the global interrelationship between the natural world, the economy, the climate, and natural resources.

The book makes an old story new and makes a case for the historical importance of the early Muir-Pinchot partnership. *Natural Rivals* would make an excellent book for undergraduate or graduate students and serve as an excellent introduction to the purpose and controversies surrounding American lands. It is an excellent work that will interest both environmental historians and students.

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