

Name: Gifford Pinchot

Years: August 11, 1865 to October 4, 1946

Residence: Grey Towers in Milford, Pennsylvania; and Milford, Connecticut

Brief Biography: Gifford Pinchot, forester, utilitarian-conservationist, and governor of Pennsylvania, was born in Simsbury, Connecticut, to James Wallace Pinchot and Mary Jane Eno in 1865. Pinchot's father James was a wealthy merchant who, after making a fortune clear-cutting timber, had helped form the American Forestry Association in 1875 and then endowed the Yale School of Forestry, the first of its kind. Pinchot graduated from Yale in 1889 and spent a year at the French National Forestry School. In 1896 he was appointed to the National Forest Commission by President Cleveland and in 1898 he was made Head of the Division of Forestry in the Department of Agriculture by President McKinley. Gifford Pinchot was a utilitarian-conservationist who believed that forest reserves should be developed to maximize their economic potential in a careful and controlled manner. He was the chief proponent of America's federal conservation movement, which reached its peak under the Theodore Roosevelt administration. Naturalist John Muir's failed attempt, as a preservationist-conservationist, to save the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite from being flooded and used as a reservoir, symbolized the purists' resistance to Pinchot's commercial utilitarian-conservation policies. Resistance to Pinchot's approach also came from special interest industry forces who wished to completely exploit natural resources. It was a highly charged issue. Shortly after Taft assumed office in 1909, a national scandal involving Pinchot and former rival, the new secretary of the interior, Richard Ballinger, broke out over an alleged malfeasance by Ballinger regarding coal land resources in Alaska. In the fallout, Pinchot was fired by President Taft but in 1910 the court of public opinion soundly declared Pinchot the victor. Gifford Pinchot then channeled his efforts to help Teddy Roosevelt try to defeat Taft in 1912 with the newly formed third party, the Progressive "Bull Moose" Party; Democrat Woodrow Wilson won and Taft came in third. Pinchot then went on to pursue his own successful career in politics, serving as the governor of Pennsylvania for three terms. In 1914, Gifford Pinchot married political progressive cause activist and woman suffragist, Cornelia Elizabeth Bryce, whom he had met while campaigning for Roosevelt in 1912. Together they had one child, a son, Gifford Bryce, and a colorful political life together, both running for offices and supporting each other's campaigns. Gifford Pinchot died in New York City in 1946.

Major Achievements: Gifford Pinchot was a primary force behind Theodore Roosevelt's progressive federal conservation policies and served on the 1907 Inland Waterways Commission (This was an early version of the Federal Power Commission, a party in Hudson Valley's famous legal battle over the Storm King power plant in the 1960's and 1970's.) In 1909, as forces mounted against Theodore Roosevelt's administration in its last days, Pinchot spearheaded a burst of measures including: the White House Governor's Conference, showcasing conservation; and the National Conservation Commission, chaired by Pinchot. After Pinchot left the federal bureaucracy payroll he continued to push for conservation through a lobby he founded, the National Conservation Association. The Association's victories included: the Weeks Act of 1911, which permitted the enlargement of forest reserves by purchase; and the Water Power Act of 1920, which began federal regulation of the power industry.

More Information: The Pennsylvania State Parks Web site at:
<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks/history/historypinchot.aspx>

Sources: The Library of Congress: *The Evolution of the Conservation Movement from 1850 to 1920*:
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/amrvhtml/conshome.html> ;

American National Biography. 1999. Volume 17. New York: Oxford University Press. 531-533.

By Steve Grim