

THE HANCOCK COUNTY TRUSTEES OF PUBLIC RESERVATIONS

A Brief Record of their Origins and Activities

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For thirty-five years the residents of Mount Desert Island, the summer visitors there and the tourists who traverse the roads and trails have profited by the disinterested and unassuming activities of a company of citizens associated in an endeavor to preserve for public enjoyment the scenic and historic sites of Mount Desert. The origins and achievements of this organization need to be recorded, its activities extended, its endowments enlarged, its methods elsewhere adopted.

In the summer of 1901 Charles W. Eliot, who had been for twenty years a summer resident of Northeast Harbor, suggested to some of his neighbors and friends that they might form an organization to conserve and maintain the unique natural beauties of Mount Desert. During the preceding winter Dr. Eliot had been engaged in putting together the papers of his son, Charles Eliot. Here he came across an article printed in 1889 in "Garden and Forest" describing the wild charm of the coast of Maine and pointing out how the increase of private ownership might soon deprive the public of access to many of the beautiful hills, points and beaches. It further suggested how the peril might be averted by action of the State or by the organization of incorporated bodies to secure and maintain reservations for public use. "It is time decisive action was taken; and if the State of Maine should by suitable legislation encourage the formation of associations for the purpose of preserving chosen parts of her coast scenery, she would not only do herself honor, but would secure for the future an important element in her material prosperity."

It was in the following year (1890) that Charles Eliot had put this idea to practical test. He devised a plan for the organization of a body of substantial citizens of Massachusetts to be known as the Trustees of Public Reservations who would be empowered to acquire parcels of real estate possessing natural beauty or historical interest and to hold them for public use and enjoyment. This Board was incorporated by act of the Massachusetts Legislature May 21, 1891, and has rendered a conspicuous public service for more than forty-five years. This was the precedent that President Eliot had in mind when he inaugurated a similar movement at his summer home.

The first step was to enlist the interest of the Village Improvement Societies of Bar Harbor, Northeast Harbor and Seal Harbor which included leaders among both the permanent and the summer residents. Each of these Societies appointed a Committee and on August 13, 1901, these Committees met at Seal Harbor and enthusiastically endorsed the plan. An organization committee was chosen and this committee on August 29, applied to Bertrand E. Clark, J. P., to call a meeting of those desiring to be incorporated as provided by Chapter 55 of the Revised Statutes of the State of Maine for the purpose of "acquiring, owning and holding lands and other property in Hancock County for free public use." This meeting was held at the office of Mr. Edward B. Mears in Bar Harbor on September 13, 1901. The Hancock County Trustees of Public Reservations were there duly organized and Bylaws adopted. The Incorporators were Luere B. Deasy, George B. Dorr, Charles W. Eliot, John S. Kennedy, Loren F. Kimball, Le. McI. Luquer, Edward B. Mears and George R. Stebbins. Charles W. Eliot was elected President, George B. Dorr and Edward S. Dana, Vice-

Presidents, Lea McI. Luquer, Secretary, and George L. Stebbins, Treasurer. Luere B. Deasy and Edward B. Mears were appointed additional members of the Executive Committee. The incorporation of the Trustees was confirmed by special act of the Legislature in 1903, giving the Corporation power "to acquire, hold and maintain and improve for free public use lands in Hancock County which by reason of scenic beauty, historical interest, sanitary advantage or for other reasons may be available for the purpose." This Act also provided for the exemption of such lands from state, county or town taxation.

Gradually interest in the purposes of the corporation was aroused and confidence established. A pamphlet written by President Eliot and issued in 1904 with the title "The Right Development of Mount Desert" had a wide circulation and was for many years a sort of guide for both the town officers and private citizens in efforts to prevent forest fires, improve the roads and the roadsides, open trails, avert undesirable developments and incite public spirit. In the summer of 1905 gifts to the Trustees began to be made. Eliza L. Homans (Mrs. Charles D. Homans) gave to the Trustees a considerable tract above the Ocean Drive and including the Beehive and the pond called "The Bowl." The Trustees of the Estate of Linda Dows Cooksey conveyed a piece of land on the Sea Cliff Drive near Seal Harbor on which the Champlain Monument stands. Mr. George B. Cooksey gave title to some five acres at the top of Barr Hill and a gift of money from Mr. John S. Kennedy enabled the Trustees to buy two tracts on the ridge and top of Green (Cadillac) Mountain thus preserving the summit from exploitation and conserving for the enjoyment of the public the highest point on the Atlantic

coast of the United States. In former years two small but unsightly hotels had successively occupied that summit and at one time a cog railroad had been operated to carry people up the western slope from Eagle Lake.

In 1910 Mr. George L. Stebbins, the alert and diligent Treasurer of the Corporation, discovered that a good title could be obtained to some large tracts in the centre of the eastern half of the island. There was need of prompt action because there was imminent danger that lumber companies would get control and cut off the woods. Two new factors made this peril an instant one. There had been a sudden increase in the market for lumber and the introduction of the portable sawmill had made profitable the cutting of timber in places hitherto inaccessible. Mr. Stebbins promptly organized a group of summer residents at Seal Harbor (George B. Cooksey, Richard M. Hoe, Dr. Christian A. Herter, Dr. Edward K. Dunham, Edward C. Bodman, Tracy Dows and George L. Stebbins) and, each taking equal shares, they bought a tract of some 3600 acres including the western slope of Green (Cadillac) Mountain and all of Pemetic Mountain and the Southern Bubble. This tract had been the property of a promoting company known as the Mount Desert and Eastern Shore Land Company which had long been bankrupt and the land had been bought in by one of the creditors at sheriff's sale with twenty-two years back taxes unpaid. The new owners took title in the name of Mr. Stebbins and then sold for \$3000 to Mr. George B. Lorr the 1600 acres which were within the limits of the town of Eden (Bar Harbor) with the understanding that he would give the land to the Trustees, and they themselves deeded to the Trustees some 1000 acres including Pemetic and the Triad. They retained the lowlands for it was the desire of the

Trustees not to withdraw from taxation land that could be used for houses or farms.

In 1912 the executors of the estate of Mr. Charles T. How of Boston and Bar Harbor offered for sale a tract of some 2000 acres including Jordan and Sargent Mountains. To save this important area Mr. Stebbins, with the aid of Mr. Cooksey, took title to it and then suggested to President Eliot that as residents of Seal Harbor had given Pemetic Mountain to the Trustees the people at Northeast Harbor might like to contribute Sargent Mountain. This idea was adopted and the \$7000 needed was promptly raised. Of this sum, and in view of the protection of the water sheds, the Water Companies of Northeast Harbor and Seal Harbor contributed each \$1000. Mr. Stebbins transferred the western half of the tract to Mr. John S. Melcher in order that the easements in favor of the Water Company might be established and Mr. Melcher then deeded the property to the Trustees.

The movement thus started steadily gathered headway. It is not possible to mention all the gifts for no less than 129 separate transactions are recorded. They varied in size and importance from an acre or two to preserve a glen or brookside or some favorite point of view to large tracts of wild land. There were a score or more of deals with the Water Companies with a view to protecting the purity of Eagle Lake and Jordan's and Hadlock's Ponds. In 1909 Mr. John S. Kennedy gave 138 acres on Bickett (Huguenot Head) and 50 acres on the north ridge of Newport (Champlain), while Mr. and Mrs. John I. Kane and Mr. and Mrs. I. . . Bridgham transferred to the Trustees the title to 467 acres including the south slope of Kebo and part of the Gorge. Then 1000 acres were acquired on the north ridge of Green

(Cadillac) and Mr. and Mrs. William H. Bliss gave 210 acres on the south ridge of Newport (Champlain). Title was taken to 30 acres at the Sieur de Monts Spring and that locality, with the Abbe Museum later established there, has become a place of resort on the Island second only to the summit of Cadillac. In 1917 Mrs. George C. Hayward conveyed to the Trustees 190 acres on the western side of Sargent Mountain with a "corridor" running down to the Sound and the holdings of the Trustees on the western half of the Island were begun by the gift by Dean William Draper Lewis and Mr. Charlton Yarnall of 100 acres at Valley Cove. Title was taken soon after to tracts on the east side of Long Pond, at Seal Cove Pond and on the western slope of Robinson (Acadia) Mountain.

In 1919 Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. began his benefactions by the gift to the Trustees of Beech Hill and the cliff on the western shore of Echo Lake. He has since purchased a number of tracts of wild land some of which he has deeded to the Trustees, or later to the Park, and some he holds and administers with a generous regard to the public interests. Over these lands he has constructed many carriage roads and bridle paths. It is owing not only to the good sense of the townspeople but also to the large holdings of the Trustees and of Mr. Rockefeller that the island has thus far been so well protected from unsightly advertising, unnecessary and ugly filling stations, undesirable resorts and from the constant danger of the forest fires which might in a few hours do a damage which it would take a quarter century to repair.

In spite of the care of the Trustees in declining to take title to any areas available for houses the withdrawal from

taxation of so much of the wild land in the interior of the island provoked a certain amount of criticism and at the 1913 session of the Maine Legislature an effort was made to revoke the clause in the Charter of the Trustees which provided for the exemption of their property from taxation. This was defeated but it was evident that some other method of holding the lands for public enjoyment should be discovered. In the spring of that year Mr. George B. Dorr went to Washington and suggested that the holdings of the Trustees might be consolidated in a national monument or park. This idea he continued to press with great patience and public spirit through prolonged negotiations. In 1914 Mr. Dorr, Mr. Ernest H. Forbush, Professor M. L. Fernald and President Eliot contributed to the National Geographic Magazine certain illustrated articles describing Mount Desert and advocating the establishment there of a National Park. These articles were issued by the Trustees in a special pamphlet under the title of "The Unique Island of Mount Desert" which had a noticeable influence in forming public opinion.

It was not, however, until the summer of 1916 that the negotiations at Washington bore fruit. On July 8th President Wilson signed an executive order establishing the Sieur de Monts National Monument. As no money appropriation was required this could be done without act of Congress. It meant just the acceptance by the Government of the offer of the Trustees to turn over certain of their lands to the perpetual care of the Federal authorities. This proved to be the first step in the larger plan advocated with resolute persistence by Mr. Dorr and finally an Act establishing the Lafayette National Park was passed by Congress on February 26, 1919. The national monument, together with further lands

transferred by the Trustees, was merged into the Park and Mr. Dorr was appointed Superintendent. Ten years later on January 20, 1929, an additional bill was approved by President Coolidge which changed the name to Acadia National Park and authorized the inclusion in the Park holdings of lands beyond the boundaries of the island.

Since the establishment of the Park generous friends have continued to make gifts both of real estate and of money to the Trustees. Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln Cromwell gave 185 acres on Robinson (Acadia) Mountain as a memorial for Mrs. Cromwell's parents, Reverend and Mrs. Cornelius Smith who had been among the earliest of the summer cottagers at Northeast Harbor. Dr. Abbe, Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Henderson and other friends presented the Valley of Duck Brook and Mrs. John Markoe added to her earlier gift a piece of property on the north side of Bear Brook. Mr. T. W. Lawson gave the Valley of Man-of-War Brook in 1922 and the next year Archibald Murray and Charlton Yarnall contributed another 300 acre lot on the western shore of Somes Sound. In 1925 the heirs of Mrs. Homans added 62 acres to her original gift bringing the holdings of the Trustees to the ocean front south of Schooner Head. A unique donation was that of beautiful Bar Island at the head of Somes Sound -- the gift of Edith Pryor and Caroline Pryor Pine in memory of James W. Pryor and John B. Pine. In 1925 also the activities of the Trustees were extended to the mainland by the conveyance of a large tract at the end of Schoodic Point -- the eastern bound of Frenchman's Bay. This gift, which included the Moose Islands and Welch Island, came from Faith Moore and Ruth Moore Lee in honor of their father, John G. Moore, who had been the founder of the summer colony at Grindstone Neck. In 1929

the Trustees received under the will of George Nixon Black of Boston the noble old Black Mansion (Woodlawn) at Ellsworth. The bequest includes the house with its unique collection of old time furnishings and pictures, the carriage house and its ancient vehicles, the well-kept gardens and grounds, the remarkable woodlands accessible by the roads built by Colonel Black more than a century ago, and a modest fund for insurance, repairs and upkeep. The Estate is administered by a special committee of the Trustees of which Mr. Richard W. Hale has been the efficient chairman ever since the trust was accepted. Mr. and Mrs. Millison and their daughters are the courteous and capable custodians on the premises. The Black Estate is now the largest and most important unit now under the care of the Trustees.

Dr. Eliot continued to serve as President of the Corporation until his death in 1926 and he was succeeded by Mr. Justice Deasy of the Maine Supreme Court, who had been associated with the enterprise from its inception. Mr. Luquer, Mr. Albert H. Lynam, Mr. Serenus B. Rodick and Mr. Richard C. McKown have successively served as Secretaries, and Mr. Stebbins, Mr. Edward B. Mears and Honorable Guy E. Torrey as Treasurers. The often complicated task of searching titles and passing deeds was long under the diligent care of Mr. Albert H. Lynam and similar work on the western side of the Island has been done by Mr. Schuyler R. Clark.

The Trustees of Public Reservations continue to administer their trust with undiminished fidelity and disinterestedness. They serve the public good reliably and without ostentation or reward. Since 1930 they have been steadily transferring their larger holdings to the Acadia National Park but they are ready

to accept and administer additional gifts of either land or money. All who are interested in one of the most beautiful regions in North America will recognize that it is exceedingly desirable that certain areas still held in private ownership should be included either in the Park or in the lands held by the Trustees. As illustrations of properties that are needed to round out the Park or to protect the views from the hilltops there may be mentioned the ridge and top of Brown (Morumbega) Mountain, a strip of land on the northern ridge of Newport (Champlain) which cuts through and severs Park holdings, and the Porcupine Islands in Frenchman's Bay. Funds are needed to provide for the better protection of the Black House from fire and for the care and maintenance of the Estate. While all the towns have now established public landings there is still need of more access to the shores and for the preservation for public enjoyment of some of the fine headlands, islands and beaches. For historical reasons as well as for beauty of outlook Fernalds Point, the site of the Jesuit Settlement of 1613, should be included in the public lands and appropriately marked by a commemorative tablet. The Trustees offer their services as experienced and disinterested custodians of gifts of land or money which will help to carry out the purpose of the trust to acquire, and hold for public use and enjoyment lands in Hancock County which have scenic beauty or historical interest."