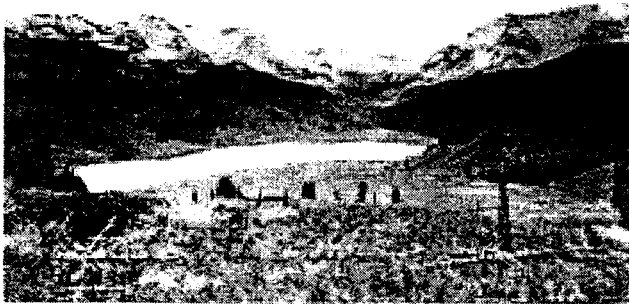


Documentary Chronology of Selected Events in the
Development of the American Conservation Movement,
1847-1920

1847-1871 | 1872-1889 | 1890-1900 | 1901-1907 | 1908-1911 | 1912-1920



The harvest moon, Currier & Ives. [between 1860 and 1870.] LC-USZC2-3259

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1847

George Perkins Marsh, then a U.S. Congressman from Vermont, delivers a seminal speech to the Agricultural Society of Rutland County, Vermont, calling attention to the destructive impact of human activity on the land, especially through deforestation, and

advocating a conservationist approach to the management of forested lands; some of these insights were elaborated in a work by Marsh's fellow New Englander, George Emerson, in a book published the previous year, *A Report on the Trees and Shrubs Growing Naturally in the Forests of Massachusetts*. In 1848, Marsh's speech is published as "Address Delivered Before the Agricultural Society of Rutland County, Sept. 30, 1847".

1849

Establishment of the U.S. Department of Interior.

1850s

Beginning around the middle of the eighteenth century, European and American literary figures had drawn increasing attention to the importance of nature; by now, in the mid-nineteenth century, travel literature in periodicals and books joins with this Romantic literary legacy to stimulate a broad popular movement of "nature appreciation."

Throughout the remaining decades of the century, the "nature essay" burgeons as an American literary genre.

Throughout the last half of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, popular interest in ornithology proliferates through books, articles, and local clubs, providing a grass-roots base for support of many aspects of conservation.

Prints, lithographs and engravings of American scenery, especially in the West, receive wide popular distribution between this decade and the turn of the century, stimulating broad interest in and appreciation for the special qualities of the American landscape, including its wilderness.

Francis Parkman begins publishing his landmark histories of America, in which American identity is celebrated in terms of the presence of the wilderness.

1850

The third edition of the Table Rock Album and Sketches of the Falls and Scenery Adjacent offers future generations a unique glimpse of mid-nineteenth-century Americans' response to spectacular natural beauty in the form of notations made by tourists in an album at Niagara Falls.

Citing the observations of Alexander von Humboldt and others on the effects of deforestation, Thomas Ewbank, the United States Commissioner of Patents, warns in his two-volume Report of the Commissioner of Patents, for the Year 1849 (House of

Representatives Executive Document No. 20) that "the waste of valuable timber in the United States, to say nothing of firewood, will hardly begin to be appreciated until our population reaches fifty millions. Then the folly and shortsightedness of this age will meet with a degree of censure and reproach not pleasant to contemplate." In the same document, Ewbank also warns that "the vast multitudes of bisons slain yearly, the ceaseless war carried on against them, if continued, threatens their extermination, and must hereafter cause deep regret;" especially in view of "their great strength and docility, when tamed, and their capacity for being drilled to the yoke,... it should never be said that the noblest of American indigenous ruminants have become extinct." Articles on the long-term harm produced by forest destruction appear in the reports of the commissioners of patents and of agriculture in this decade and during the 1860s.

1851

Henry David Thoreau delivers an address to the Concord (Massachusetts) Lyceum declaring that "in Wildness is the preservation of the World." In 1863, this address is published posthumously as the essay "Walking" in Thoreau's Excursions.

1852

In an introductory essay in *The Home Book of the Picturesque*, an important early work celebrating the American landscape through the work of eminent writers and artists, Elias Lyman Magoon argues for the importance of wild nature as a source of moral, spiritual and patriotic inspiration; this reflects the growing concern with nature as a spiritual resource, which becomes one of the definitive themes of the conservation movement.

1854

Henry David Thoreau publishes *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*.

1855

In a letter to *The Crayon*, the artist Asher Durand calls for the creation of a wilderness art.

A popular anthology of American and European poetry on nature themes, *The Rhyme and Reason of Country Life*, reflects the preoccupation with idealized rural life of an increasingly urban and industrial nation, and epitomizes the taste for nature-related literature which was a major aspect of American letters by this time, and which strongly influenced the attitudes undergirding the conservation movement.

1855-1860s

In an early example of the era's great government-sponsored scientific and ethnographic survey reports on the West, the U.S. War Department publishes the multi-volume *Reports of Explorations and Surveys, to Ascertain the Most Practicable and Economical Route for a Railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean*; these include accounts of surveying expeditions which greatly increase knowledge and interest concerning the Western landscape, documented by illustrations by artists accompanying the expeditions.

1857

Samuel H. Hammond publishes *Wild Northern Scenes; or, Sporting Adventures with the Rifle and Rod*, an important book in the nascent tradition of the hunter-conservationist, which celebrates the beauty and beneficence of the Adirondack wilds and advocates preservation of limited wilderness areas as resources for recreation and rejuvenation.

James Russell Lowell publishes an article in *The Crayon* calling for the establishment of a society to protect American trees such as the recently "discovered" California redwoods.

In an early example of the growing public concern with fish conservation through fish culture, especially at the state level, George Perkins Marsh publishes a *Report, Made under Authority of the Legislature of Vermont, on the Artificial Propagation of Fish*, in which he