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# The Quest for a National Park

Wilford D. Logan

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## The Quest for a National Park

The idea of an Upper Mississippi National Park is an old one in the northeast Iowa-southwest Wisconsin region. It appears that no one person is responsible for the beginning of the movement, or for the inception of the idea. The early Twentieth Century newspapers and private correspondence indicate that the idea was already in the minds of local people in years prior to 1909. On April 6, 1909, however, Representative George H. Schulte of Clayton County made an address in the General Assembly in Des Moines in favor of establishing a National Park near McGregor. After noting the scenic, historic, and prehistoric features of the region, Representative Schulte concluded:

Parks should be so located that they may be visited by many and this proposed park is but a short distance by rail from Chicago, Milwaukee, Madison, St. Paul, Minneapolis and other cities. Two great railroad systems run through it and it can be reached by boat from the north and the south.

If established as a national park it will become the favorite retreat during vacation and rest for the people along the river from New Orleans to Minneapolis. We hope to see the time when the tourist will be attracted by beautiful parks and cities along the "Father of Waters"

and that he will take a trip up the Mississippi instead of touring on the Hudson or crossing the Atlantic for a trip up the Rhine.

There is no grander river than ours. There are none of greater possibilities and ere many years have passed its beauty will be celebrated in poetry and song, and we hope to see a national park at the confluence of the Wisconsin and Mississippi that will be unrivaled in its natural beauty.

Here twenty thousand acres or more are awaiting to be called to serve the purpose for which I believe it was intended, to become the pleasure ground for the American people and remain such until time shall be no more.

The passing of this resolution may not cause Congress to act, but I do hope that it may have the effect of calling the attention of the people to the fact that there is a necessity and demand for public pleasure grounds for future generations, and I hope that this resolution may receive the unanimous support of the House.

Ellison Orr was one of the first persons in northeastern Iowa to advocate a park. It was during this early period, also, that Ellison Orr was President of the Iowa Forestry and Conservation Association, an organization composed of conservation-minded Iowans devoted to the protection and preservation of the natural assets of the state. In addition to lay-conservationists such as Orr, the organization also contained such professors of the Natural Sciences as Bohumil Shimek, L. H. Pammel, and Thomas H. Macbride of Iowa State College and the State University of Iowa.

In spite of early interest in a national park for

the region, the movement gained no momentum until 1915, when, in late October, Senator William S. Kenyon of Iowa visited Waukon to speak at a Jubilee Day celebration. On returning to his home in Fort Dodge, Senator Kenyon issued a statement expressing the opinion that a tract along the Mississippi River near McGregor should be made a national park. McGregor citizens gave the movement immediate support. Senator Kenyon visited McGregor later in 1915, where, at a mass meeting, he promised to introduce a bill in Congress which would establish the proposed park. Although he introduced the bill, and, along with Representative Gilbert Haugen, gave it active support, his proposal was defeated. An outcome of the effort was an inspection of the Upper Mississippi Valley by M. L. Dorr of the Department of Interior, made in 1917. No immediate action resulted from the inspection tour, however.

Although Senator Kenyon's bill was defeated, local park proponents did not lose enthusiasm. The idea was kept uppermost in the minds of local and state conservation enthusiasts through success in other ventures of similar nature. Two organizations also aided in maintaining interest in the movement. These were the Northeastern Iowa National Park Association, formed in 1929, and the "American School of Wild Life Protection" at McGregor, subsequently called the "American Institute of Nature Studies."

An unofficial survey of the area proposed as a national park was made in 1929 by Arno B. Cammerer, then Associate Director of the National Park Service. About this time, too, a bill was introduced in Congress by Representative Haugen which directed the National Park Service to make an official inspection of the region for the purpose of deciding whether or not the locality should be made a national park. This bill was passed, and was signed by President Herbert C. Hoover on June 16, 1930. The bill suggested an area about 200 miles long on the Mississippi, including parts of four Iowa counties, eight Wisconsin counties, four in Minnesota, and one in Illinois. The National Park Service sent Roger W. Toll, Superintendent of Yellowstone Park, to make the survey.

On a five-day tour by automobile and boat, Toll covered the area along the Mississippi from Bellevue to Winona, Minnesota. He was accompanied by consultants representing several phases of the natural and social sciences, including Dr. Bohumil Shimek on Ornithology, Dr. Charles R. Keyes on Archeology, Dr. I. E. Melhus on Botany, Dr. Bruce E. Mahan on History, and Dr. James H. Lees on Geology.

Toll's report, submitted to the Director early in 1932, was unfavorable to the establishment of a National Park, chiefly on the basis of administrative difficulties which he could foresee. His most cogent arguments against the proposal were:

The fact that the banks of the river are in private ownership, and that there are many established rights and interests due to the commercial use of the river, the prospective flooding of the river bed and the deepening of the channel, the wild life project, the railroad trackage, the towns and cities in the area, all present complications which would affect the administration of the area as a national park.

His report did leave opportunity for the establishment of National Monuments:

Along the banks of the Mississippi River there are prehistoric mounds built by Indians and used as burial places. Many hundreds of these mounds have been obliterated by farming operations. It seems desirable that some representative examples be preserved, since they are of great archeological interest to the present and future generations. . . . I would recommend that a National Monument be authorized, whenever suitable land is available for presentation to the United States, for the purpose of protecting and preserving for future generations the best examples of prehistoric Indian mounds that are to be found in this region. . . . The monument might be in several detached areas. Liberal sized tracts would be desirable, including enough of the adjacent land to prevent the encroachment of other uses.

Toll's recommendations were incorporated in the *Annual Report* of the Director, Horace Albright, to the Secretary of the Interior, February 16, 1932.

With the national park proposal having been negatively disposed of, the local citizenry, and Iowa conservationists seem to have entered a brief

period wherein their enthusiasm for their great project weakened. In April, 1932, however, Logan J. Blizzard, a McGregor businessman, spoke at a Kiwanis Club meeting on the subject of the Director's report. He pointed out that the park proposal was dead, that the door was open for the establishment of a national monument, or of national monuments, and that the time to act was the present. At his suggestion, the organization voted to send a request to Congress for action on the Director's recommendations, and to renew contacts with the scientists, historians, and conservationists who made the survey with Roger Toll the previous summer.

Ready support was found among the groups interested in the previously-proposed national park. The Northeast Iowa National Park Association, at the time about to disband, renewed its officers, and continued activities, although on a different basis than before. The State Board of Conservation now assumed the leading role. This organization entered the movement on an active basis after its meeting on May 13, 1932, wherein Charles R. Keyes of the Iowa Archaeological Survey, presented the case for preservation of the Indian burial mounds of the Upper Mississippi River Valley.

Action from this time on seems to have been a matter largely between the State Board of Conservation and the Department of Interior, with the

northeast Iowa groups handling local arrangements in connection with inspections. On July 15 and 16, 1932, Chief Historian Verne E. Chatelain, of the National Park Service, inspected three local mound groups. On the inspection he was accompanied by Charles R. Keyes and Ellison Orr of the Iowa Archaeological Survey, Mrs. Henry Frankel of the State Board of Conservation, Mrs. Grace Gilbert King of West Union, and Walter H. Beall, President of the Northeastern Iowa National Park Association.

In January of 1933 the *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* devoted eighty-eight pages to the geology, archeology, and history of northeastern Iowa by James H. Lees, Charles R. Keyes, and William J. Petersen. Chief Historian Verne Chatelain informed the State Historical Society that this was one of the finest presentations ever made in behalf of a national monument to the National Park Service.

In October, 1936, the Iowa State Conservation Commission submitted a detailed proposal for a national monument to the National Park Service, basing their plan on the Keyes files and the Ellison Orr maps and survey.

In 1937, northeast Iowa saw the first of a long series of National Park Service inspection teams whose aim was intensive investigation of one form or another. The party was composed of Neil Butterfield, Edward A. Hummel, Assistant Historian,



and Howard W. Baker, Associate Landscape Architect. Their study of the locale produced recommendations for boundaries for the proposed national monument. The boundaries they outlined, as revised and modified by Dr. Keyes, were approved by the Secretary of the Interior on March 15, 1938. The present headquarters site was added in 1946. The name for the area seems to have been settled upon by September, 1946.

Director Arthur E. Demaray formally accepted Iowa State Patent No. 203 on August 10, 1949, and the first one thousand acres to be included in the Effigy Mounds National Monument passed into Federal ownership. The remaining 204.39 acres were conveyed to the United States by an Act of the General Assembly approved by Governor William S. Beardsley on April 14, 1951.

The area was proclaimed a National Monument by President Harry S. Truman on October 25, 1949. The first Superintendent of the area, William J. Kennedy, arrived on November 11, 1949. Kennedy was replaced by Walter T. Berrett — 1953-1958. Daniel J. Tobin, Jr., has served as superintendent from 1959 to the dedication of the Visitor Center in 1961. The first Monument Archeologist, Wilfred D. Logan, came to the area in June, 1951. He was succeeded by Robert T. Bray and subsequently by John Earl Ingmanson. Attendance has soared from 1,742 in 1950 to 60,588 in 1960.