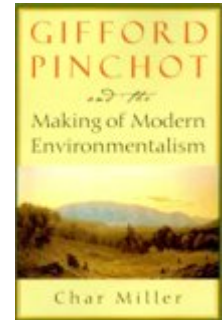


Char Miller. *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism.*

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Reviewed by Brooks Flippen

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This is an outstanding biography of the famed forester Gifford Pinchot by noted Trinity University historian Char Miller. No historian has attempted a study of Pinchot in almost four decades and, during this time, the conclusions of the earlier biographies have become embedded in most general environmental history texts. Every new student in a broad survey of American environmental history learns of Pinchot as the exemplar of Progressive-era utilitarian conservation. In leading the U.S. Forest Service for over a decade, at the turn of the twentieth-century, Pinchot is depicted as the champion of using the nation's forests wisely for sustainability. Unlike many of the timber companies of his day, he recognized the need for better management lest the nation run out of wood. While in historical context this is a positive image of Pinchot, his legacy has recently suffered with the growth of modern, ecology minded environmentalism. This new environmentalism, reflected in the scholarship since Pinchot's last biography, paints Progressive-era preservationists, not conservationists, as the real heroes. Those who saw nature in a broader light, who valued it for its spiritual and natural amenities and sought to pre-

serve it in its wild state, enjoy the best legacy. As such, it is the preservationist John Muir whose star shines the brightest today, not Pinchot. Indeed, because Muir and Pinchot clashed over the construction of the Hetch Hetchy Dam in Yosemite Valley, Pinchot is too often depicted as antagonist, a man who saw no value in untouched wilderness and opposed the environmentalism that would come to dominate. At best, as Miller notes in his introduction, Pinchot emerges in most texts as a "transitional figure" (p. 8), a man who correctly recognized the futility of mindless exploitation of the past but did not appreciate the emergent environmentalism of the future.

In this fine text, Miller sets the record straight. There are layers to Pinchot's personality and character that do not fit into the accepted historical template. His career and accomplishments are more varied than usually acknowledged. Pinchot did see God in nature, his views influenced strongly by his mother, his acquaintances, and his awe at the Grand Canyon. Indeed, Miller opens with Pinchot's first visit to Yosemite. True, the majesty of the mountains did not impress him to

the extent that they did others such as Muir. Pinchot, however, spent the subsequent days hiking and left duly impressed by the area's grandeur, writing that he wished he could stay a month.

In exploring Pinchot, Miller obviously has little patience for those who fail to realize that mankind is part of world ecology. The use of nature is essential to mankind's survival and assuming that preservation should guide all environmental policy is simplistic and incorrect. Pinchot was not against environmental quality; indeed, his career fought huge financial interests who stood as the greatest threat to the American landscape. He recognized the environmental impact of clear-cutting, which he fought strenuously. Pinchot just realized reality and placed preservation in its proper balance. Even his long-documented personal competition with Muir was more complicated; many earlier works overlook all that the two shared and their strong early friendship.

As a forester he understood forests within the broader ecology and studied for the first time the impact of forest fires and grazing. Pinchot's leadership of the Forest Service recognized and incorporated the many demands on the nation's forests, including the importance of its natural amenities. His management thus reflected the wise, multi-use doctrine largely codified by the Forest Service in the early 1960s.

Miller does not paint a static view of Pinchot and illustrates how his environmentalism evolved over time. Pinchot himself knew that conservation policy should not be stagnant, that it should change with every generation. Miller's view of Pinchot is, therefore, hardly the strict and harsh brick wall of utilitarian conservation depicted by others. Accordingly, Miller spends more time with Pinchot's later, post-Forest Service days than many previous biographers. He explores in depth Pinchot's two-term Pennsylvania governorship and his leadership of the National Conservation Association. Students may know of Pinchot's role in pushing Teddy Roosevelt to hold a national con-

servation convention, but they may not know, as Miller points out, that Pinchot hoped for an international meeting to follow, a meeting that eventually took place after his death. "That there are important intellectual links between Pinchot and the character and content of post-war environmentalism is not to say that Pinchot was a 'green,'" Miller concludes. "Rather his record lies in his greening, in his deliberate effort to reach an ever more complete understanding of the tangled interactions between the civilized and the wild. In this, he represents nothing less than the ever-widening range of strategies available to Americans, from the nineteenth-century to the present, who were or are concerned with the maintenance of a healthy and peaceful world, and who have sought and continue to seek ways to bring that more benign state to life" (p. 376).

Key to understanding Pinchot, Miller argues, was his insistence upon social justice, a concern that made him a forerunner of the modern environmental justice movement. His determination to ensure that clean water was not just for the wealthy led him to create Pennsylvania's first agency to fight pollution. Married to Cornelia Bryce, a noted feminist, Pinchot remained a champion of the poor. He fought for farmers and factory workers and opposed child labor. Growing from a privileged background, imbued with a sense of discipline, hard work, and *noblesse oblige* from his father, Pinchot maintained a faith in both expertise and federal government. In this, as earlier biographers have also pointed out, Pinchot was a classic Progressive.

While a reader might think Miller too uncritical of Pinchot, it is difficult to acknowledge the outstanding scholarship upon which Miller bases his conclusions. Relying on a number of manuscript and library collections, the author has clearly done his homework. Perhaps more important for the reader is Miller's gifted writing style. In many instances a lesser biographer might put readers to sleep with a tale of forestry and poli-

tics. Miller, however, presents his argument in such an excellent narrative that it invites the reader to continue. Simply put, this work represents Miller's talent as much as his hard work. This book has been out for several years and thus this review somewhat repeats the praise of earlier readers. Indeed, this book has won for Miller several national awards. It is simply left to this reviewer, therefore, to acknowledge that all the accolades are deserved. Hopefully, future environmental survey texts will reflect the totality of Pinchot's legacy as painted by Miller's revisions than simply the narrow view of Pinchot so long accepted.

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