



Bradley State Wayside, 1920s

# CHAPTER 1

## *Abundantly Blessed with a Thousand and One Wonders:* **The Road to Oregon's State Park System (1913 - 1929)**

It all started with a beach, or so the story goes. Fresh off his successful campaign for governor the year before, Oswald West acquired a stretch of land just south of Cannon Beach near Haystack Rock in 1911, braced by the forest on one side and the ocean on the other. Newly sensitized to the beauty of the coast and fearing the encroachment of unsightly development, West purportedly resolved to do something to protect the beach as a public good—in keeping with his ethos of public ownership and government conservation. As workers were preparing to finish his beachfront home in early 1913, the governor gave his biennial message to the legislature, as usual laying out an ambitious agenda he hoped they might pursue. Among the 40-plus proposals for the “greater development of the State and the increased prosperity of her people” was an item labeled “Good Roads”—a standard part of governors’ messages throughout the decade, addressing the desirability of building roads for these new “automobiles” that seemed to be increasingly popular. After noting that the recent election had shown that the voters did not want any costly expansion of the roadways, West proposed that “[t]he ocean beach from the Columbia River to the north to the California State line on the south should be declared a public highway.” In a legislative session otherwise marked by contention between the governor and the state legislature, this part of the governor’s raft of proposals passed easily, with no recorded dissension or debate. On February 13, 1913, it became Oregon law that the tideline of (nearly) all Oregon beaches was “a public highway and shall forever remain open as such to the public.”<sup>1</sup>

Most histories of the public parks and public recreation in Oregon begin with this law, and for good reason. Oregon beaches are a foundational part of

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1 Kay Weeks, “Oswald West Coastal Retreat,” *Working on the Past in Local Historic Districts*, U.S. National Park Service ([www.nps.gov/tps/education/workingonthepast/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/tps/education/workingonthepast/index.htm)); “Oswald West, Governor of Oregon, to the Twenty-Seventh Legislative Assembly,” (Salem: Willis S. Duniway, State Printer, 1913), pp. 3, 12; *State of Oregon... General Laws* (Salem: State Printing Department, 1913), Chapters 47, 80. A small portion of tideland had already been sold to private interests, and was thus exempted from this law.

Oregonian identity, and the public character of those beaches is one of the distinguishing traits of the state. But while it has become legendary, there is little evidence that many people saw the first beach bill as significant at the time. Unlike the public debates, furor, and celebration over beach legislation in the 1960s, this first law was passed with minimal attention. It is possible that Oswald West, as he claimed much later in the 1940s, knew precisely what he was doing when he maneuvered this secretly massive public land bill through the legislature. But it was a milestone whose full weight would not be felt for decades.<sup>2</sup>

Milestones are built on minutiae. Oswald West's proclamation mattered because it became law. It became law because the Oregon legislature was already primed to support it. Two days before Governor West enshrined Oregon beaches as public highways, the Oregon Legislature met jointly in special night session to hear from experts in the Good Roads movement. As they had for years, these activists extolled the value of preserving nature along roadsides of all sorts—and the economic prosperity that would bring. Two years before the proclamation, West's acquisition of picturesque property south of Cannon Beach helped set his devotion to coastal preservation in motion. Four decades before that, in 1871, Oregon's first public parks were created in Portland and Sodaville. In rural and urban Oregon, then, there was interest in developing public lands for recreation long before there were state laws to that effect. From the centuries and millennia before Euro-American arrival to the present day, Indigenous people and communities in what became Oregon have commemorated places of especial beauty and significance in the land they shape through reciprocal relationships. Every history has a tail that stretches beyond the horizon.<sup>3</sup>

The significance of the first milestones that built the Oregon state park system, such as West's public beach bill, are clearer in retrospect than they were at the time. State parks were auxiliary to highways in the 1921 and 1925 laws that laid the groundwork for the system. Subsumed in larger debates about public lands and public roads, surrounded by other conservationist causes and alternative opportunities for outdoor recreation, Oregon State Parks only slowly developed its own identity. But the activists and administrators who laid the foundations for Oregon state parks shaped the blueprint of the system for decades to come, in ways they may not have foreseen. Amidst a broad sympathy for nature and recreation in Oregon (a sympathy that did not always extend to the budget), amongst a broad array of park organizations, Oregon State Parks only slowly found a place.

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2 Oswald West, "Seashore Conservation," *Oregon Daily Journal* Aug 8, 1949; Kathryn A. Straton, *Oregon's Beaches: A Birthright Preserved* (Oregon State Parks and Recreation, 1977).

3 For the meeting with Good Roads advocates, see *Journal of the Legislative Assembly... of the State of Oregon... 1913* (Eugene: The Guard Printing Company, 1913), pp. 555 – 556.

## *The Whole Country ... a Park:* **Indigenous Peoples and the Land They Made**

Native people have savored and celebrated their cultures' connection to the land since time immemorial. Long before Euro-American invaders imposed their own geography on what they called Oregon, Indigenous people and nations have identified spaces of especial beauty, cultural relevance, and/or spiritual power, including celebrated locales like Wy-am (Celilo Falls) and Gii-was (Crater Lake). Native identity shaped and was shaped by ties to the land, as it continues to be for many Indigenous people in Oregon today. Use did not preclude reverence. Indeed, agricultural, gathering, fishing, and hunting practices were seen as a way of fulfilling a reciprocal relationship with the land. Some spaces, like Wy-am (Celilo Falls), were meeting grounds—local fishers had special rights over the waters, but a multitude of Native peoples and nations met there to trade, socialize, and negotiate. Other spaces, like Gii-was (Crater Lake), were reserved largely for sacred activity, considered places of heightened spiritual hazard, power, and opportunity. But all spaces in the region were, and are, Native land, inextricably woven into Indigenous life and identity. Colonialism, invasion, and the incalculable Indigenous deaths inflicted by both have strained but not severed these connections. The relationship between Native people and communities and their homeland continues.<sup>4</sup>

Euro-American settlers in early Oregon, too, got much of their recreation outdoors. Hunting and berry-picking served pleasurable as well as practical purposes. While the word “hike” remained a term of contempt in the nineteenth century, early Oregonians nonetheless went on long walks, stargazed, and sometimes even climbed mountains for pleasure. Cookouts and clambakes could mark special occasions, or become them. In later years, some early Euro-American emigrants to Oregon recalled a love of wilderness as one of the things that drew them to the nascent state. John Minto, one of these early emigrants, attributed his move west to Oregon in part to his “love of nature... the fields and the woods—the streams and the seashore.”<sup>5</sup>

Love of nature was a shared idea; “Oregon wilderness” was (and is) an unnatural concept. The natural landscapes extolled by Euro-American

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4 Douglas Deur, “A Most Sacred Place: The Significance of Crater Lake among the Indians of Southern Oregon,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 103 (2002): pp. 18 – 49; David Lewis, “Four Deaths: The Near Destruction of Western Oregon Tribes and Native Lifeways, Removal to Reservation, and Erasure from History,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 115 (2014): pp. 414 – 437; Katrine Barber, *In Defense of Wy-Am: Native White Alliances and the Struggle for Celilo Village* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018); Special Issue: Remembering Celilo Falls, *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 108 (2007).

5 Cox, *The Park Builders*, 5 – 6; Rev. Robert Forby, *The Vocabulary of East Anglia...*, v. 2 (London: J.B. Nicholas and Son, 1830): p. 158; Inez Eugenia Adams Parker, “Early Recollections of Oregon Pioneer Life,” Folder: Inez M. Parker, Box M – Rei, Diaries and Reminiscences, Mss 1509, Oregon Historical Society Special Collections, Portland, OR; Earl Pomeroy, *In Search of the Golden West: The Tourist in Western America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), pp. 40 – 41 and 114 – 118; John Minto to George Himes, n.d. [likely 1900s], Folder 4, Box 1, John Minto Papers, Mss 752, Oregon Historical Society Special Collections.



conservationists were not untouched by human hands. Native communities had formed relationships with the land, and altered it, for generations. This was clearest in areas where Indigenous communities practiced the cultivation and alteration of the environment through the use of fire. Controlled burns were a tool used to promote the growth of useful plant species and animals suitable for hunting. As a result of these burns, Euro-American colonizers had found much of the Willamette Valley as a “whole country for miles together [brought to] the conditions of a park” when they first arrived. Many who lamented changes in the forests and fields likely didn’t realize that they had played a part in destroying the existing “conditions of a park” in the Willamette Valley and elsewhere. Mass deaths of Indigenous peoples from invasion, disease, and wars brought the controlled burns they used nearly to a stop in the 1850s. American administration virtually halted the remaining Indigenous practices of controlled burns in Oregon until the twenty-first century. Later attempts to preserve or recreate “wilderness” in parklands and forestlands have sometimes stumbled in part because Indigenous knowledge and action had been a critical part of the purported “wilderness”; only recently has the scientific consensus begun to recognize that the controlled burns used by Indigenous communities can still play a vital role in land management. There is a hope in many Indigenous communities that other persisting reciprocal relationships of the land will also receive broader recognition.<sup>6</sup>

### *Nature’s Special Gifts:*

## **State Parks Before the Creation of a Park System**

While the language and concept of nature changes over time, reverence of some sort has deep and recurrent roots. What was new in the parks movements was less a sense of nature’s worth than a sense that nature needed to be preserved for the public good. One forerunner of this sentiment in Oregon was Thomas S. Summers, a settler who created what is sometimes purported to be the first public park in Oregon, Sodaville Springs, in 1871. “[N]ature’s special gifts,” he piously proclaimed, “are not intended for private exploitation.” The park proper centered on a natural mineral spring, whose pungent water was believed to have curative effects. Summers’s park, like many that followed, was designed with the hope of mixing public good and private interest. The famed

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6 Robert Boyd, “Strategies of Indian Burning in the Willamette Valley,” in *Indians, Fire, and the Land in the Pacific Northwest*, ed. Robert Boyd (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1999): pp. 94 – 138; Leland Gilson, “Willamette Valley Pyroculture,” *Current Archaeological Happenings in Oregon* 17 (1992): pp. 9 – 11; H.S. Lyman, “Reminiscences of F. X. Matthieu,” *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 1 (1900): pp. 73 – 104, esp. 88; Megan K. Walsh, Cathy Whitlock, and Patrick J. Bartlein, “1200 years of fire and vegetation history in the Willamette Valley, Oregon and Washington, reconstructed using high-resolution macroscopic charcoal and pollen analysis,” *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology* 297 (2010): pp. 273 – 289; William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, William Cronon, ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995): pp. 69 – 90.

Sodaville Springs its immediate environs he *did* reserve for public good—while reserving the area surrounding the new park for himself. The draw of these medicinal springs drove the development of Sodaville, which had some success as a resort town, particularly in the 1890s. The bet had paid off. Summers, who had fought a lengthy legal battle for title to Sodaville Springs before making them a public park, proclaimed that he did so “for the benefits to arise therefrom to the public *and* to myself.” Parks were a public good, but from the get-go many also hoped they would draw both locals and tourists to the beauties of Oregon. And in Sodaville as in grander and more famous projects, the energies of boosters turned first to the unique and the extraordinary.<sup>7</sup>

Few sites are more extraordinary than Crater Lake, made a national park in 1902 but known as a natural wonder for millennia before that. As photographs made the deep, clear, and strikingly blue lake nationally famous, tourists flocked as best they could to the remote regions of southern Oregon. The fight to turn the site into a “National Park for the pleasure and instruction of the people” was long but relatively frictionless. Early highway enthusiasts often invoked the breathtaking, famous, and remote lake when they called for more and better roads. For audiences that did not see highways as (just) an economic necessity for shipping, the call for means to convey visitors to Crater Lake could be a useful way to begin a call for good roads. As time wore on, they began to argue for beautiful roadways generally, not just for connection to a few extraordinary sites. This involved a push for parks, attacks on garish gas stations, a call for billboard regulation or elimination, and similar measures to make driving on highways an aesthetically pleasing experience.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1900s and 1910s, a number of Oregon cities embraced the “city beautiful” movement, which envisioned aesthetic spaces and natural places within urban landscapes as a key to social uplift and mental health. There needed to be parks and reserves for the citizenry, not just for the preservation of a few extraordinary spaces. The most visible and extensive of the Oregon “city beautiful” efforts was in Portland, which by 1911 had created an integrated system of city parks, as part of a grand plan that at its peak included an urban population of millions commuting by train, trolley, and some day (one planner dreamed) flying cars. The backbone of Portland’s city beautiful movement remains as the

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7 At the request of Thomas Summers, Sodaville Mineral Springs Park was put under the jurisdiction of the state of Oregon in 1891, but was not made a part of the state parks system until 1947. The site was deeded back to the community in 1975; the famed springwater is no longer potable. Cox, *The Park Builders*, 6 – 7, 180; Jennifer Moody, “Memories Spring Eternal in Sodaville,” *Corvallis Gazette-Times* July 12, 2014; *Journal of the Senate... of the State of Oregon, 1891* (Salem: Frank C. Baker, 1891), 204 [emphasis mine]; Thomas A. Chambers, *Drinking the Waters: Creating an American Leisure Class at Nineteenth-Century Mineral Springs* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institutions, 2002).

8 Douglas Deur, “A Most Sacred Place”; Erik Weisberg, “He All But Made the Mountains: William Gladstone Steel, Mountain Climbing, and the Establishment of Crater Lake National Park,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 103 (2002): pp. 50 – 75; Sharon M. Howe, “Photography and the Making of Crater Lake National Park,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 103 (2002): pp. 76 – 97; Hugh Myron Hoyt, Jr., “The Good Roads Movement in Oregon, 1900 – 1920,” PhD diss., (University of Oregon, 1966).

nucleus of the Portland Parks System. Indeed, many city centers in Oregon beyond Portland are still shaped by parks conceived in this era.<sup>9</sup>

Even in these early years, the preservation movement encompassed history as well as nature, often rolled together under the mantle of heritage. Joseph N. Teal, a business-minded mainstay among the preservationists in Portland, also funded several statues across Oregon meant to forever immortalize a celebration of Euro-American conquest onto the landscape. Washington Park, acquired by the city of Portland in 1871, seemed a natural place to house the permanent monuments to history created for the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition. Among state parks, Champoege, particularly, was an early example of the move to preserve history and nature as intertwined.<sup>10</sup>

Located just south of present-day Newberg, Champoege was an Anchuyuk Kalapuya village that became a blended community with retired Hudson's Bay fur traders in the late 1820s. The site gained fame as the location of an 1843 settler meeting that organized a provisional local structure of American governance in what became Oregon—and later became the site of one of the first parks funded by the state. In the decades after statehood, when the movement to create and commemorate a heroic pioneer history for Oregon was gathering steam, Champoege was one of the earliest to be memorialized. In 1901, the Oregon Legislature funded the erection of a monumental granite obelisk near the supposed site of the 1843 meeting (choosing from among the possibilities the location better viewed by passing boats on the Willamette River). In 1905, the Legislature purchased the lands surrounding the memorial, and in 1913 made it a state-funded park—though Champoege did not become a part of the official Oregon State Parks system until 1943, one hundred years after the events it celebrated.<sup>11</sup>

“Provisional Government Park,” as Champoege was drably titled from 1913 to 1943, was primarily a venue for event planning and historical interpretation. Interested parties disagreed on many things—state officials, the Daughters of the American Revolution, Indian War veterans, and citizens' boards clashed on

9 The sources on visions of Portland as a future hub for flying cars are tragically scanty—see Carl Abbott, “Greater Portland: Experiments with Professional Planning, 1905 – 1925,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 76 (1985): pp. 12 – 21, esp. 12; John Fahey, “A.L. White, Champion of Urban Beauty,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 72 (1981): pp. 170 – 179; William Wyckoff with William Cronon, *How to Read the American West: A Field Guide* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 296 – 297; Robert D. Russell, Jr., “Unrealized Visions: Medford and the City Beautiful Movement,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 102 (2001): pp. 196 – 209; Cox, *The Park Builders*, 9 – 10.

10 Jeffrey Uecker, “Picturing the Corps of Discovery: The Lewis and Clark Expedition in American Art,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 103 (2002): pp. 452 – 479; Marc James Carpenter, “Reconsidering *The Pioneer*, One Hundred Years Later,” report submitted to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, June 27, 2019, <https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/OH/Documents/Fellow2019MarcCarpenterReconsideringThe%20Pioneer.pdf>.

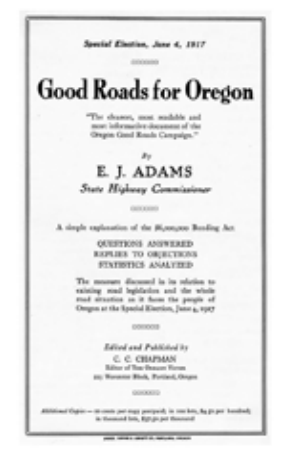
11 David G. Lewis, “The Kalapuya Village of Champoege,” *Quartux* June 25, 2016; Melinda Marie Jetté, *At the Hearth of the Crossed Races: A French-Indian Community in Nineteenth-Century Oregon, 1812 – 1859* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2015); J. Neilson Barry, “Champoege Park,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 40:4 (1939), pp. 336 – 342; Katrine Barber, “We Were at Our Journey's End”: Settler Sovereignty Formation in Oregon,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 120:4 (2019): 382 – 411.

many aspects of Champoeg as they strove to collaborate towards its success. But all promoted the cultivation of native plants as a constituent part of the park, from caretaker Albert Tozier's efforts at artful landscaping to the Daughters of the American Revolution's fundraising campaign for a native plant arboretum on the site. Nature, all sides seemed to agree, should be a part of history—and history should be a part of preservation.<sup>12</sup>

## *Scenic Roads and Automobile Pleasure Drives:* **The Drive for Good Roads**

The government decree preserving Oregon beaches as public highways in 1913 also works as a marker because it points to the long connection between highways and parks in Oregon. Also formed in 1913, Oregon State Highway Commission (and its successors) managed Oregon state parks from their slow inception in 1921 through the end of the 1980s. Even after the inauguration of an independent Oregon Parks and Recreation Department in 1990, roads and parks in Oregon have remained closely linked.<sup>13</sup>

From the beginning, the connection between highways and parks was pragmatic but purposeful. In the 1910s, automobiles were transforming from playthings of the rich to the mainstay of the middle class. At the same time, trucks were increasingly seen as the best way to transport goods to and from rural areas. The push for public roads thus had a wide range of supporters. Those who linked roads to parks hoped to draw on that support. When the Oregon state parks system began in earnest in 1921, highways were already seen as a constituent part of state government in Oregon. Growing the parks system under



*"The whole road situation  
as it faces the people of  
Oregon . . ."*

12 John Hussey, *Champoeg: Place of Transition; A Disputed History* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1967), esp. 270 and 274.

13 Merriam, Jr., *Oregon's Highway Park System 1921 – 1989*, pp. 17 – 19.



the mantle of the highways department seemed safer at the time than subjecting parks to the whims of changing legislatures. But there was also a feeling of natural connection between highways and parks among many of the boosters of the park system and the citizens of Oregon. Highways in Oregon were viewed by many as a means to experience the beauty of nature. Tourism and Good Roads movements were mutually reinforcing. Those hoping to promote tourism at places of remote scenic beauty needed good roads to take visitors there; those hoping to promote the building of roads needed a wholesome cause and a set of destinations for those roads to lead to. Crater Lake, they hoped, was only the beginning.

Highway boosters were a fractious group, within and beyond the local, state, and national Good Roads movements. Muddy roads that had worked well enough for horses were dangerous or impossible for automobiles. In a time before shock absorbers, even technically passable roads were deeply unpleasant to drive along—particularly at the high speeds enabled by these new vehicles. Farmers who wanted to build up rural roads sometimes clashed with the automaker consortiums that funded Good Roads activism, who argued against spending on roads that “began nowhere and ended nowhere” rather than on more options for urban drivers. Paving companies, the other major corporate force behind Good Roads, simply wanted to maximize road production everywhere. And although the leadership of Oregon Good Roads movements in the 1900s and 1910s tended to be corporate-backed, many of those who pounded the proverbial pavement for the movement were motivated by regional pride, aesthetic concerns, and even conservation. Good Roads activists were a critical component of the early parks movement, for local and national as well as state parks. After the passage of federal funding for state highways in 1916 and especially after the road-building boom that followed World War I, such activists were increasingly at the forefront of the Oregon Good Roads movement. The paving and automobile industries had achieved their objectives. It was the local activists who cared where roads were built, what their aesthetic qualities were, and whether nature was preserved as a part of the journey—or amidst a set of possible destinations.<sup>14</sup>

The creation of the Columbia River Highway from 1912 to 1916 was both a template and a threat for Good Roads activists and park-builders. For preservationists, the Columbia River Highway was a triumph. Designed with nature conservation and aesthetics in mind, the winding road provided (and provides) breathtaking vistas and views of natural wonder along the Columbia. Portland magnate Simon Benson, who had thrown his support and land behind the Columbia River Highway just as he had behind Portland Parks, got almost precisely what he wanted: the highway connected Portland to points east but

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14 Hal S. Barron, “And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight: Public Road Administration and the Decline of Localism in the Rural North, 1870 – 1930,” *Journal of Social History* 26 (1992): pp. 81 – 103, esp. 94; C. H. Claudy, “Federal Aid in Fighting Mud,” *Scientific American* 116 (1917): pp. 14 – 15; Preston Lerner, “Innovations in Driving: Shock Absorbers,” *Popular Science* Sept 19, 2012.



*This 1915 road was typical of the era: technically passable, “deeply unpleasant to drive along.”*

more importantly connected well-heeled automobilists near and far to the beauties of nature. Benson’s case for the restorative leisure such a highway would offer won the day, and taxes and bonds paved the Columbia River Highway.<sup>15</sup>

But this made the Columbia River Highway—and perhaps highways and parks more generally—a class issue. Labor unions and farmers’ groups objected to the use of state monies to pay for what they saw as a “speedway for the idle rich.” Why should they pay for the restorative leisure of the aristocratic automobilists, for “scenic roads and automobile pleasure drives,” when farmers still needed to get goods to market and laborers still needed land of their own? Many questioned the use of any land for non-productive purposes, or the building of roads for anything but utilitarian concerns. Good Roads enthusiasts and park boosters took note. Later efforts for parks and beautification in Oregon were especially sensitive to the issue of taxes, and to the need to build broad public support.<sup>16</sup>

15 Ronald J. Fahl, “S. C. Lancaster and the Columbia River Highway: Engineer as Conservationist,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 74 (1973): pp. 101 – 144; William G. Robbins, “Town and Country in Oregon: A Conflict-ed Legacy,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 110 (2009): pp. 52 – 73, esp. 65.

16 Lawrence M. Lipin, “‘Cast Aside the Automobile Enthusiast’: Class Conflict, Tax Policy, and the Preservation of Nature in Progressive-Era Oregon,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 107 (2006): pp. 166 – 195.



*Engineered to showcase the magnificent natural features of the Gorge, the winding beauty of the Columbia River Highway is breathtaking to this day.*

Highways largely faded as a class issue in the 1920s. In part, this was because of a change in how highways were paid for. Wanting to avoid a class-based backlash like the one that sparked during the construction of the Columbia River Gorge Highway, the state legislature hiked up automobile license fees in 1917. When it became clear in 1918 that a highway system extensive enough to serve urban and rural Oregonians needed more funding than such fees could bear, Good Roads activists and the legislators they had elected pushed for something more extensive. Progressive Oregonians had famously attempted all sorts of novel taxation schemes in the 1900s and 1910s. In 1919, the Oregon legislature passed the first gasoline tax in the country. Much more money was still needed for highways—bonds would still be used, federal monies still sought. But with the day-to-day expenses of the Oregon state highway system now paid through automobile fees and gasoline taxes—in other words, by those who used the roads—there were fewer calls of conspiracy.<sup>17</sup>

But support for the rapidly expanding highway system boomed largely because automobiles were moving from a luxury good to a middle-class desire, and trucks from a useful transport option to a rural necessity. Automobile leisure, seen as a diversion of the well-to-do in the 1910s, became a middle-class aspiration in the 1920s. Office workers increasingly saw the car as a necessity; unions in the 1920s and beyond included outdoor recreation as part of the good life they hoped to enable. Between 1910 and 1920, Oregonians acquired more automobiles per capita than most of the rest of the country—there was 1 registered automobile for every 7 residents in 1920, one of the highest rates at the time (though still not as high as California). Most Oregonians now saw a pleasurable

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17 R. Rudy Higgens-Evenson, "Financing a Second Era of Internal Improvements: Transportation and Tax Reform, 1890 – 1929," *Social Science History* 26 (2002): pp. 623 – 651, esp. 636 – 640; John Chynoweth Burnham, "The Gasoline Tax and the Automobile Revolution," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 48 (1961): pp. 435 – 459, esp. 438 – 440.

drive along the Columbia Gorge Highway as a wholesome recreational activity that both middle- and upper-class families could enjoy. Parks were a part of this leisure. When Oregon state parks were first established as an entity in 1921, the core of their mandate was to create and conserve the restorative leisure of nature for those driving and stopping along the good roads of Oregon.<sup>18</sup>



*This 1939 ad campaign presages the postwar boom years, when leisure time and automobiles turned into tourism dollars.*

## *Attractions and Scenic Beauties:* **Oregon State Parks Start Small**

What marks 1921 as a beginning of the Oregon state parks system is a law passed on February 28 to “to empower the highway commission to acquire rights of way along state highways for the maintenance and preservation of scenic beauties along such highways.” Like the beach bill of 1913, the act enabling Oregon state parks was passed by the legislature with majority support and little debate. It gave the highway department significant power to acquire lands within three hundred feet of state highways, “for the maintenance and preservation of the roadbed” or to “aid in the maintenance and preservation of the attractions and the scenic beauties thereof.” Although it was correctly presumed that such lands would typically be acquired through purchase or donation, the act bestowed the state highway commission with the power of eminent domain where necessary. “[I]n the name of the people of the state of Oregon,” the highway commission would now manage a system of “attractions and scenic beauties” in the state—at least if they were next to the road.<sup>19</sup>

18 Peter J. Huggill, “Good Roads and the Automobile in the United States 1880 – 1929,” *Geographical Review* 72 (1982): pp. 327 – 349, statistics on 340; Higgens-Evenson, “Financing a Second Era of Internal Improvements,” esp. 636 – 640; Lawrence M. Lipin, *Workers and the Wild: Conservation, Consumerism, and Labor in Oregon, 1910 – 1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), chap. 3.

19 Sam A. Kozar, compiler, *State of Oregon Constitutional Amendments... Together with the General Laws...* (Salem: State Printing Department, 1921), Chapter 343 [S.B. 365], quotations from 654; “To Beautify Roads,” *Oregon Voter* 24 (1921), 586.

This law was the scaled-down version of a more ambitious plan pursued by Oregon Governor Benjamin Olcott, who had assumed office after the death of Governor Withycombe in 1919. Like his good friend and political mentor Oswald West before him, Olcott's breakthrough moment for preservation came from the Oregon coast. Dismayed by land logged bare right up to the Cannon Beach-Seaside road, Olcott issued a public call in 1920 for maintenance and preservation of roadside beauty. Riding on years of local activism and a national movement for nature cultivation and preservation, Olcott was able to garner widespread support for his proclamation of "the patriotic and civic duty" of every Oregonian "to preserve our wonderful natural surroundings."<sup>20</sup>

Olcott's original proposal to the legislature was a grab-bag of preservationist goals, including not only scenic beautification but also a broader mandate for state parks and the billboard ban sought by the Good Roads movement. The slimmed-down law that passed was correctly seen as an "opening wedge"; state parks and other preservation efforts could be built from core legislation protecting highways. The highway commission began slowly acquiring and creating roadside parks and attractions almost as soon as the law was passed—though parks were not a priority for most highway engineers. The first such acquisition to be framed as a distinct space, Sarah Helmick State Park, was donated in 1922.<sup>21</sup>

The State Highway Commission was given official authorization to acquire and supervise "parks, parking places, camp sites, public squares and recreation grounds" in 1925, almost precisely the powers originally sought in 1921. Importantly, this new mandate also came with at least some funds from the new gasoline tax. Olcott had been roundly defeated in the election of 1922, in significant part because he had openly opposed the briefly ascendant Oregon Ku Klux Klan, and left the state shortly afterwards. But the "wedge" of legislation he had gotten through in 1921 continued to expand in 1925 and beyond, helped along by a decentralized movement of preservationists within and beyond the government.<sup>22</sup>

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20 Cox, *The Park Builders*, 36 – 41, quotation from 36.

21 Merriam, Jr., *Oregon's Highway Park System 1921 – 1989*; Virginia Nesbit, "Sarah Helmick and Helmick Park," *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 26:4 (1925): 444 – 447.

22 Merriam, Jr., *Oregon's Highway Park System 1921 – 1989*, 20; Cox, *The Park Builders*, 41 – 46; Eckard V. Toy, "The Ku Klux Klan in Oregon," *Experiences in the Promised Land: Essays in Pacific Northwest History*, G. Thomas Edwards and Carlos A. Schwantes, eds. (Seattle: University of Washington, 1986): pp. 269 – 286; Arthur H. Bone and Walter M. Pierce, *Oregon Cattleman/Governor/Congressman: Memoirs and Times of Walter M. Pierce* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1981), esp. 186 – 221; Robert R. McCoy, "The Paradox of Oregon's Progressive Politics: The Political Career of Walter Marcus Pierce," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 110 (2009): pp. 390 – 419.



## *Speak of the Beauties of Oregon:* **Robert W. Sawyer and the Spark of Conservation**

A key figure among those pushing for state parks was Robert W. Sawyer, a newspaperman and jurist with a longstanding interest in nature preservation and a finger on Oregon's political pulse. A blue-blooded Harvard-trained lawyer who had worked for Louis Brandeis in private practice, Sawyer abandoned his old life (and his first marriage) in 1910 to elope with his neighbor's wife for points west. Remarried and reinvented, Sawyer wandered through a number of temporary jobs. Moving to Bend for the health of his new family in 1912—he wanted to try his hand at outdoor labor and his new wife Mary hoped the dry climate would help her tuberculosis—Sawyer was briefly a lumber sorter in a sawmill. Finding it “rather hard work” for not much pay, within months he wrote his way into the newspaper business, becoming the owner and editor of the *Bend Bulletin* by 1917 and remaining at the helm until 1953. He eventually returned to law, appointed and then elected as Deschutes County judge from 1920 to 1927, when he left to join the Highway Commission. Though in many respects a small-government conservative, Sawyer pushed for government conservation *and* development of Oregon land and resources, and the enablement of both through good roads connecting the east, the valley, and the coast of the state to rest of the country.<sup>23</sup>

Like most activists, Sawyer had a conversion story. In 1919, he had a chance visit with two titans of the burgeoning conservation movement, Director of the National Park Service Stephen T. Mather and renowned naturalist (and eugenicist) Madison Grant. The two men were touring the West Coast, admiring spaces of natural beauty and warning of their fragility. With Sawyer as with many other audiences, they focused on economic potential. Natural beauty was a precious resource, they argued, that could bring tourists, profit, and prestige to remote stretches of Oregon. Sawyer, his interest in preservation already kindled by Good Roads rhetoric, “caught the spark and set to work.”<sup>24</sup>

Sawyer saw conservation and park creation as part of a broader system of land use and regional development. Beautiful highways leading to majestic parks would encourage travel and bring tourists across the state. Known as a booster of lumber interests, Sawyer was less liable than many to raise the hackles of industry when he pushed for trees along highways and selected spaces for parks.

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23 The work in the sawmill was built up as a quasi-mystical origin story in later years; Sawyer edited out his reflections on the hardness of the work and the paucity of the pay before sending his own miniature biography to *Oregon Voter* editor C. C. Chapman. John Francis Sprague, *Sprague's Journal of Maine History* 1 (Dover, ME: John Francis Sprague, 1913): p. 286; “Lawyer Elopes with Partner's Wife,” *Boston Post* Oct 28, 1910, found in “Mary Crane, 1886,” People of Brookline, [BrooklineHistoricalSociety.org](http://BrooklineHistoricalSociety.org); Robert Sawyer to C. C. Chapman, July 8, 1930, Folder: “C. C. Chapman,” Box 5, Robert W. Sawyer Papers, Ax 100, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, OR; Cox, *The Park Builders*, 32 – 33.

24 Cox, *The Park Builders*, 33; Thomas R. Cox, “The Crusade to Save Oregon's Scenery,” *Pacific Historical Review* 37 (1968): pp. 179 – 199.

As an activist, Sawyer preferred soft power over hard votes. In the 1920s, the Oregon public voiced loud support for parks—but also pushed to cut government expenses and services. Sawyer thus pursued what historian Thomas Cox has called “conservation through subterfuge,” doing much of his work behind the scenes, seeking to limit public debate over particular park acquisitions or park budgets.<sup>25</sup>

This cautious approach to funding distinguished Oregon among the national state parks movement(s). While the passage of the 1921 legislation enabling Oregon state parks became law only a month after the first meeting of the National Conference on State Parks in Iowa, this timing reflected general growth of interest in parks rather than a specific cause and effect. Over the course of the 1920s, the national state parks movement came to push for independent state parks agencies or departments of conservation, to better pursue park priorities independent of other concerns. Charles G. Sauers, a famed Indiana park builder, was sent to Oregon by the National Conference of State Parks in the fall of 1927 to build support for just such an independent agency. He pointed not only to his own state, but to the successes of leaders in the state parks movement like California and New York. Yet within a few months, Sauers changed his tune. Sawyer, who had just resigned his judgeship to take a position on the Highway Commission that summer, had rallied his allies and defeated the idea behind the scenes. They brought Sauers around to their way of thinking—Oregon, he came to agree, needed to go a different way.<sup>26</sup>

Sawyer wanted to keep parks funding away from legislative battles. The highway department got its basic operating funds without going through appropriations, instead getting paid directly by gas taxes and vehicle fees. Although there was broad support for state parks, their focus on recreation made them seem like a luxury. If state parks remained under the mantle of highways, Sawyer argued, they would be less prone to attack from legislators hunting for cost-saving measures. Moreover, Sawyer and many others saw highways and parks as naturally aligned: both could enable recreation, evoke beauty, and promote travel to places of natural beauty and/or historical import.<sup>27</sup>

Preserving and commemorating history had been imagined as part of the highway-and-park system since before the creation of a formal department. The park at Champoeg had been sited and built with the traffic of the day—steamboats—in mind. In the 1910s and 1920s, the caretakers and boosters of Champoeg hoped to loop Willamette Valley highways close enough to Provisional Government Park to draw in visitors using newer forms of transportation. The

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25 Cox, *The Park Builders*, chap 4.

26 Rebecca Conard, “National Conference on State Parks: Reflections on Organizational Genealogy,” *The George Wright Forum* 14:4 (1997): pp. 28 – 43; Cox, *The Park Builders*, 47 – 49.

27 *Ibid*, 52 – 53; Jno. D. Guthrie to Robert W. Sawyer, Sept. 5, 1932, Folder 2, Box 1, Robert W. Sawyer Papers. Oregon might have pursued state parks by different means than the national movement, but shared the national underlying philosophy of an emphasis on recreation wedded to the creation of a “virile and universal... effort of wild conservation.” “The First National Park Conference,” *Iowa Conservation* 5:1 (Jan/March 1921), p. 9.

Roosevelt Highway in southern Oregon was built to loop near Table Rock, the engineers having hoped to lure motorists to see famous sites from the official portion of the Rogue River War(s) of the 1850s in addition to the glories of nature. One highwater mark of the era was the new Old Oregon Trail Highway, planned as a historical equivalent to the Columbia River Gorge Highway. The dedication of the highway in 1923 took place at what is now Emigrant Springs State Heritage Area. The event drew between twenty and thirty thousand people, including President Warren Harding. The dedication celebrated the recreated “Road that Won an Empire,” and memorialized the hardships Euro-American emigrants to Oregon had suffered when they traveled across the continent to seize Native land in the Pacific Northwest. Although the gloss of the past articulated at the time was profoundly problematic, the notion of history as part of what parks should preserve and present has deep roots. Many early park figures, including Sawyer, saw historical sites as part of the scope of the organization.<sup>28</sup>

Sawyer paired the subtlety of his political approach with a broad public appeal for parks, framing them as matters of civic virtue. He strove for a core of experts kept afloat by a raft of volunteers. Voluntarism extended to land acquisitions. Many of the state parks of the 1920s were built thanks to donations, carefully solicited and widely praised by Sawyer and like-minded conservationists. Through the contacts and prowess he had built up as a respected newsman, Sawyer was able to keep the state parks and other conservation measures in the public eye, not only through his own newspaper but through a broad network of everyday activists. “Speak of the beauties of Oregon,” he advised one such activist nervously about to go on the radio for the first time, then “refer to the state highway system.” Sawyer’s quiet work in the halls of political power only worked because of a groundswell of popular support—one that he had helped foster.<sup>29</sup>

Sawyer saw volunteering as essential for citizenship, and vital to the park system. Recruiting volunteers was both a way to conserve the scant resources allowed to parks and to build public investment in them. When pursuing new land for parks, Sawyer pushed for professionals, but also for the involvement of the citizenry. Sawyer was unable to fund a formal site survey as the state parks department in California had done, but he did throw his weight behind fellow journalist Eric Allen’s scheme to use the Boy Scouts, proposing that each troop in the state survey the public land nearest them use their training and mark “all those spots in their territory where they like to camp or picnic and which they think ought to be open to them as long as they live and ought to be open to future generations of boys for camping and picnicking [*sic*].” Although there

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28 Aileen Wilson, “The Amazing Journey: The Roosevelt Highway,” *Oregon Motorist* June 1928, pp. 13 – 14, 30; Florence Leach, “The Old Oregon Trail: The Road That Won an Empire,” *Oregon Motorist* Jan. 1925, pp. 12 – 13; Chelsea K. Vaughn, “‘The Road That Won an Empire’: Commemoration, Commercialization, and Auto Tourism at the ‘Top o’ Blue Mountains,’” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 115 (2014): pp. 6 – 37; Robert W. Sawyer to Burt Brown Barker, June 25, 1935, Folder 33, Box 1, Robert W. Sawyer Papers.

29 Robert W. Sawyer to Mrs. Jack Murphy, Feb 2, 1931, Folder 2, Box 3, Robert W. Sawyer Papers.

is little evidence that enough troops participated to have an effect, and in fact Sawyer was no longer in the Highway Commission when it was implemented, Allen's call to the Boy Scouts got to the heart of Sawyer's approach to conservation: volunteers who with their special skills were preserving for the public that which was precious to them, and educating themselves at the same time.<sup>30</sup>

Women's organizations were an especially critical part of the loose coalition of interest groups that pushed for state parks. Public campaigns drew much of their leadership and their rank-and-file from majority-women garden clubs and nature clubs. Jessie Honeyman, a well-connected Good Roads activist and park promoter, was the most famous of the women who led volunteer public relations campaigns for parks and good roads in the 1920s and 1930s. Later the namesake of Jessie M. Honeyman State Park, she rallied club women to write their legislators, fundraised, and coordinated public programs to talks, newspaper articles, and radio. The subtle legislative achievements of Sawyer and ilk were only possible because the issues they pushed for had been made relevant to legislators by activists like Honeyman.<sup>31</sup>

## *12 Acres of Wilderness for Every Oregonian:* **The Progress of Parks at the Beginning of a New Era**

Keeping parks tied to highways might have helped preserve the nascent system when legislative fights over taxes grew bitter, but this relationship also meant that parks were dependent on highway policymakers who might have other priorities. Despite the technically broad powers granted to the Highway Department in 1921 and the more robust and explicit language passed in 1925, the state park system grew slowly and haphazardly for most of the 1920s. Highway engineers might care about aesthetics, but many viewed parks as a comparatively low priority. In his first year with the Highway Commission, in 1927, Sawyer and his compatriot Henry B. Van Duzer doubled the meager landholdings the state park system had managed to acquire. But Sawyer worried that such progress was temporary, likely to last only as long as he and his allies sat on the commission. What would keep the parks a priority if some new commission saw highways solely as a means of transportation? In places where adequate provision for parks had not been made, Sawyer warned, "The good road built to bring the tourist to the scenery has [already] taken the scenery away." How could the future of parks be secured?<sup>32</sup>

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30 Merriam, Jr., *Oregon's Highway Park System 1921 – 1989*, 22 – 23; Eric Allen to J.C. Ainsworth, c/o Robert Sawyer, Nov. 3 1932, Folder 12, Box 1, Robert W. Sawyer Papers; Eric Allen, "Boy Scout Survey" [undated], *ibid.*

31 "Garden Clubs and Roadside Beauty in Oregon," *The American Magazine of Art* 24 (1932): p. 228; Gail E. Evans, "Promoting Tourism and Development at Crater Lake: The Art of Grace Russell Fountain and Mabel Russell Lowther," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 116 (2015): pp. 310 – 343.

32 Robert W. Sawyer, "Why Oregon Needs State Parks," *Oregon Motorist* May 1930, pp. 5 – 7.

Increasing government funding seemed unlikely. Governor Isaac L. Patterson, who appointed Sawyer shortly after he came to office in 1927, was a vocal supporter of roads and parks. But like many other legislators, his support did not necessarily extend to the budget. Rebuffing Sawyer's request for highway funding specially reserved for parks, Patterson preached expansion in the same breath as fiscal restraint. He framed the leaders of the state parks movement, New York and California, as spendthrift, noting that Oregon was constructing its system at a fraction of the cost. Nature and history needed to be preserved for the citizens of Oregon, Patterson argued, but "with the least expenditure possible."<sup>33</sup>

Patterson, Sawyer, and others discussing parks at the time often evoked the vast stretches of federal forest land when they discussed the benefits and beauties of Oregon. Patterson thought state parks could be run with the least expenditure possible because "the huge area of national forests [in Oregon] afford a wilderness area that is unsurpassed in scenic or recreational facilities.... every man, woman and child could have 12 acres allotted to him [*sic*] as a private park for his individual use if that should prove desirable." Sawyer used the same notion, revised up to 13 acres a head, to call for popular support for a national bill to swap railroad grant lands next to highways for timberlands further from the public eye. The state parks system was not created in a vacuum; it existed alongside local parks, National Parks, National Forests, and for a time state-owned parks managed separately (like Champoeg). Tied to highways by purpose as well as name, the system was only slowly developing an ethos or identity.<sup>34</sup>

Sawyer's most consequential act on the Highway Commission seemed trifling at the time. From the beginning he had argued that the highway department needed a dedicated parks superintendent. In the summer of 1929, his colleagues relented—though they insisted on hiring from within, and assumed that the job (first labeled "Parks Engineer") would be a temporary expedient to deal with new land acquisitions. Sam Boardman, selected to be Oregon's first State Parks Superintendent, instead served for 21 years. By some mix of luck and guile, Sawyer had, by getting this position created, established the continuity of support from within the government he desired. And just in time. In December of 1929, Governor Patterson died suddenly, and within six months the new governor had dismissed Sawyer from his post.<sup>35</sup>

When Albin W. Norblad ascended to the governor's office in 1929, he seemed like a natural ally for Sawyer and the rest of the Highway Commission. Like Sawyer, a conservation-minded conservative, Norblad had made his political bones in Astoria, campaigning on good roads, tourism, lumbering, and

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33 Governor Isaac L. Patterson, "Oregon's State Parks," *Oregon Motorist* Aug. 1928, pp. 5–6, 19.

34 Patterson, "Oregon's State Parks," 6; Sawyer, "Why Oregon Needs State Parks," 7; Jno. D. Guthrie, "Thirteen Million Acres of Recreation," *Oregon Motorist* Aug 1931, pp. 9–11, 19.

35 Cox, *The Park Builders*, 54–56; Stephen R. Mark, *Preserving the Living Past: John C. Merriam's Legacy in the State and National Parks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): pp. 87–88;



fishing. An early supporter of the Roosevelt Highway who led the charge to rename it the Oregon Coast Highway (U.S. 101), he spoke often about the natural beauty of Oregon generally and the coast specifically. “Nowhere else in the world,” he proclaimed on multiple occasions, “can you find... such a general lavish display of old mother nature as that presented and reached by the Oregon Coast Highway. It takes you along a panorama which unfolds to you nature’s choicest gems.” As he pronounced in his 1930 Fourth of July address:

*Oregon, the promised land... [has] 1001 wonders. There are the marble halls — Crater Lake — Wallowa Lake in the Alps of America, our unsurpassed beaches—the splendid fishing streams, the snow clad mountain peaks, the great forests—wonderful highways—all this and more constitutes our Oregon.*

Highways, to Norblad as to Sawyer, were (if well-constructed) central to the nature and draw of the state.<sup>36</sup>

But Norblad was unable to win even his own party’s nomination for governor in 1930—and many believed his dismissal of Sawyer was a big part of the reason. Ascending to office in an election year, Norblad was campaigning as soon as he was governing—and Fred J. Brady, a major figure in his campaign, was also a lobbyist for the “black top gang,” a construction company consortium with an interest in highway contracts. Norblad, when he removed Sawyer from the Highway Commission, accused him of creating a “lack of harmony” in the department. Norblad’s political foes, and Sawyer’s fellow newspapermen, suspected instead that the new governor was in pocket of the “black top gang,” and planned to replace the whole Highway Commission with compromised cronies. Many at the time believed this scandal was the most critical of the factors that cost Norblad his party’s nomination—though they were divided over whether his intent had, in fact, been corrupt. Both Norblad and Sawyer would continue their advocacy for good roads, business-minded nature conservation, and Oregon State whether or not they were in public office.<sup>37</sup>

In 1931, just after Norblad departed, the state parks department (led by Sam Boardman) named a new acquisition near Bend “Robert W. Sawyer Park.” In 1933, Sawyer came back, appointed to the newly created State

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36 Irl S. McSherry for Albin W. Norblad, “Fourth of July Address,” July 4, 1930, Folder: Official Papers of the Governor’s Office, Box 1, Albin Walter Norblad Papers, Ax 680, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries;; Albin W. Norblad, “Oregon Coast Highway,” (n.d. but likely 1931), Folder: “Speeches,” *ibid*; Albin Walter Norblad, “Roadside Survey,” July 31, 1930, *ibid*.

37 Hugh Currin, “Albin W. Norblad’s Administration,” June 12, 1931, p. 11, Folder: Official Papers of the Governor’s Office, Albin Walter Norblad Papers; *Oregon Journal* April 27, 1930, p. 11; “Vigorous Protest on Removal of Sawyer Voiced,” *Eugene Guard* May 28, 1930; Sawyer to Chapman, July 8, 1930. Albin W. Norblad played a key role the creation of Fort Stevens State Park. See “Fort Stevens: In the Beginning,” *FYI* 209 (Sept 12, 1997), Oregon Parks and Recreation Digital Archive.

Parks Commission. Sawyer had secured foundational funding for state parks, and set in motion the man, Sam Boardman, who would define the system for decades. The two remained close—though they would occasionally good-naturedly tussle over who thought of what in the early days of the park system. Sawyer continued to lobby for good parks and good roads into the 1950s.<sup>38</sup>

### *Fitness, Proportion, and Harmony:* **The Meaning of “Public” in Oregon State Parks**

At the national and the state levels, parks struggle with the dual mandate to serve the public in the present and to preserve for the public of the future. There is a fundamental tension between the mandate of preservation and the dictates of recreation. Then as now, navigating the two required what Jessie Honeyman called “[f]itness, proportion and harmony”: recognizing the need for a middle ground, adapting to changing tastes of recreation, and making it harmonious and minimally destructive to the nature, heritage, and beauty the parks were charged with protecting on behalf of the public.<sup>39</sup>

But who counted as “the public” would continue to shift. By the 1920s, the target audience for state parks in Oregon had moved from rich White men (and their families) to rich *and middle-class* White men *and women* (and their families). Native people were seldom consulted on their homelands, and along with other people of color were not considered a potential partner or constituency for the parks for decades to come. Even the Indigenous place-names that remained attached to parks have often been replaced or effaced to make room for the names of donors or other honorees, as when the grounds of the Suislaw-derived Camp Woahink became Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial Park. Honeyman deserved to be honored in some way, and there is no reason to think this erasure was intentionally malicious. Rather, the racial assumptions of the early park system were so ingrained that they passed without significant notice for most of the twentieth century.<sup>40</sup>

The Oregon state parks system was created at a time when much of Oregon embraced White supremacy, and visions of the parks and intended guests reflected those beliefs. Support for White supremacy crossed party lines and class lines. In the same 1921 message in which he laid out the new plan for highways and parks, Republican Governor Olcott proudly asserted that “in Oregon the pioneer blood flows more purely and in a more undiluted stream than in any other state

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38 Cox, *The Park Builders*, 56; Samuel H. Boardman to Robert Sawyer, May 15, 1933, Folder 10, Box 3, Robert W. Sawyer Papers.

39 Honeyman quotation from “Garden Clubs and Roadside Beauty in Oregon,” 228.

40 William A. Langille, “Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park,” July 8, 1941, Folder: Inventory of Park Articles, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection, Oregon State Parks and Recreation, Salem, OR; Patty Whereat Philips, “Revisiting Woahink and Cleawox,” Shichil’s Blog July 10, 2015; Natchee Blu Barnd, “A Lot to Ask of a Name: White Spaces and Indian Symbols,” Oregon Humanities Aug 30, 2018.

in the Union,” from the “little band of men [that] voted at Champoege” onward. Olcott proclaimed that Oregonians should “preserve our land and our resources for the people of our own race and nationality.” His 1922 opponent Walter Pierce, elected with Klan support, fought even harder for White supremacist legislation. Such opinions were mainstream and uncontroversial among Euro-Americans in the state and much of the nation at the time. Unusually, Governor Norblad in 1930 preached racial harmony, welcoming Filipinos to the state (and encouraging them to visit the parks!) and at one point announcing from the governor’s office to Oregonians that despite what “many of your best friends” feel, “colored people [are] [s]ome of our finest citizens.” This was progress at the end of a Klan-infested decade, likely reflecting in part the modest successes of the Oregon NAACP in the era. But a speech proclaiming to skeptical White Oregonians that Black people were, in fact, people—that they were productive citizens rather than “passive” invaders—also marked how far Oregon had to go. The state as a whole, and the parks specifically, are still working and struggling to reckon with the legacy of White supremacy as they push for a more equitable state, and to shape parks for a more inclusive sense of the public (see Chapter 7).<sup>41</sup>

## *Forever Remain Open to the Public:* **The Many Beginnings of Oregon State Parks**

When did Oregon State Parks begin? One could make plausible arguments about the assumption of state control over Sodaville in 1891, or over Champoege in 1905. The beginning has been placed at 1921, when the first legislation for Oregon state parks went through; at 1922, when Sarah Helmick State Park became the first part of the new system; even at 1925, when the legislation laying aside more specific powers and responsibilities for parks was established. The date has at times been 1929, the year “Father of State Parks” Sam Boardman was appointed. Until the “Father,” the logic goes, how could the parks system be said to have been born?<sup>42</sup>

This chapter opens in 1913, another popular date for the origin of the Oregon State Parks system, when Oswald West proclaimed beaches as public highways, Oregon’s government first took over the finances at Champoege, and the Highway Department that would run state parks for decades was first

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41 *Message of Ben W. Olcott to the Thirty-First Legislative Assembly, Jan. 10 1921* (Salem: State Printing Department, 1921), p. 17; McCoy, “The Paradox of Oregon’s Progressive Politics”; Albin Walter Norblad, “Colored People,” April 27, 1930, Folder: Official Papers of the Governor’s Office, Albin Walter Norblad Papers; Irl S. McSherry for Albin W. Norblad, “Rizal Day Celebration,” Dec 30, 1930, *ibid*; Kimberley Mangun, *A Force for Change: Beatrice Morrow Cannady and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Oregon, 1912 – 1936* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2010); Alec Weis *et al*, “Applying a Lens of Racial Equity to Our Parks,” *Parks & Recreation* 53 (2018), 36+.

42 Elisabeth Walton Potter to Craig Tutor, cc Jim Lockwood and James Hamrick [email], Dec 1 1999, Folder: Tracing the Origins of OPRD, Box: Park History, Oregon Parks and Recreation Collection; Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, *Centennial Horizon: Shaping the Future of Oregon’s Parks, Recreation, Conservation and Preservation* (Salem: Oregon State Parks, 2008).

established. But in truth, there is no one single origin for Oregon State Parks. All of these dates are potentially valid, because each marks an important step toward what the system would come to be. The goal, the mission, and the imagined future of what became Oregon Parks and Recreation has changed many times over the years. New changes may even suggest new dates of origin, in the years to come.

None of those involved in the proclamation of public beaches as highways seems to have appreciated the full importance of the largely ceremonial action. It was only decades later in the McCall era, when the ethos of public beaches was ingrained enough in Oregon to charge a movement, that this act was retroactively recognized as momentous. The same was true of state parks—the pragmatic choices and fleeting decisions that defined their earliest iteration shaped what they would be for the rest of the century, quite beyond what the early activists and administrators might have envisioned. The choices made today are no different.