Overview

The Grand Canyon has evolved from one of the great wonders of the world into one of the profitable National Parks for the United States. Ever since the canyon’s majestic prescience was discovered, there has been a need to observe, explore and some cases, exploit the resources that is possessed. On a time when the country was still reeling from a second major confrontation in the last decade, the Mexican-American War, many peoples, who either couldn’t make a living in the Eastern or Midwestern parts of the United States began migrating towards the West for newer opportunities discovered this new territory. This territory, which hadn’t become an official state of the union provided opportunities for those who were able to exploit the situation. However, with a new sense of purpose, the government decided to work with big business to create a national park out of an area that had long been profitable. Under the government’s jurisdiction, the Grand Canyon became a place where individuals could be given the opportunity to witness the majesty of nature as well as be given the opportunity to experience it up close and personal. The beginnings of this process were very interesting indeed and this particular case delves into the historical background of this park and how it came to be. From 1882 until becoming an official park in 1919, the park experienced every type of corruption and abuse of its natural resources as well as exploitation from those who would utilize its vast resources for their own personal gains. Understanding the
dichotomy between industry, individual entrepreneurs, and the American government, will bring clarity to this particular situation, as it was then, it is today.

Becoming a National Park 1882-1919

In the time period after the Mexican-American War, federal explorers began inroads into the vast territories that the United States government had recently acquired. With the aid of the United States Military, these explorers were able to identify potential trade routes through the Arizona territory, identification of vast natural resources, such as gold, copper and timber, and also sweeping the Native Indian peoples off this territory. The Atlantic and Pacific Railroad’s arrival in the region created an opportunity for transportation of these vast resources as well as a transportation system for new settlers. These settlers, mainly European immigrants who weren’t getting the most out of the opportunities in the Eastern and Midwestern United States, began migrating to this region via the east-west wagon trail routes. Between the railroads and the wagon trails, many people settled this region quickly, hoping to take advantage of the entrepreneurial opportunities. Many of these men were trying to take advantage of this area with the hopes of striking riches, but were having difficulties in taking advantage of this opportunity. Many tried traditional ventures, but realized that the best and most profitable way to make a living was to exploit everyone else who wanted to visit the Grand Canyon for now other reason except that it was the Grand Canyon. A whole new economic venture became the way for these men to reach their goals of prosperity: tourism.
Several issues became apparent during the initial exploration of this region. The ability to transport both resources and human capital around the area were very difficult. There also was the absence of an organized labor pool which also made it difficult to convince the more profitable capitalist from penetration of this area. This, however, didn’t stop all from entering this area; especially those who felt that they didn’t have anything to loose. There was a sense that people had to get all that they could while the getting was good; once the territory became a state, all the freedoms that they could achieve would probably be eliminated once government came in. Government, however, in the beginning was not as interested in the land itself as it was the potential trade routes gained by the Atlantic and Pacific rail-routes; it was giving out land grants very quickly and therefore those who were interested in taking advantage of the West’s vast lands and undeveloped territory could have opportunities if they were willing to take advantage of it.

**Infinite Needs vs. Finite Resources**

In the beginning, several groups were taking advantage of the new opportunities created. Mormon Lumberjacks were entered the Mt. Trumbull and Kaibab Plateau areas to extract timber. Cattlemen ranged southward from the town of Pipe Springs to the Grand Canyon’s North Rim and Esplanade. Mormons were also colonizing the Eastern part of Arizona, settling places like Lee’s Ferry, Moenkopi, and other communities along the Colorado River. Hispanic shepherds were taking their herds form Northern Mexico into this region as well. Settlers from Boston had also relocated to the area that would come to be known as Flagstaff. Ranchers were also taking advantage of the land grants and moved form Prescott to the area around the Southern Rim of the Grand Canyon.
Prospectors for precious minerals had begun to take advantage of the Southern Rim also. Men like William Hardy and Daniel Moody had found deposits of precious ores such as lead and zinc, as well as precious mettles such as silver, while Seth Tanner had discovered copper deposits in abundance along the Eastern end of the Grand Canyon. All of these various groups for a multitude of purposes, decided to ply their trade around this particular area.

With so many different types of people with so many different types of needs and issues, conflicts were bound to occur; this lead to action by Congress besides the land grant claims being given out in droves. In 1862, Congress passed the first Homestead Act, which would also contain several updated amendments to it until the last being in the 1930s. To encourage the used of desired lands, it also passed the Timber Culture Act of 1873; it also passed the Desert Lands Act of 1877. Laws such the ones previously mentioned helped foster the culture of entitlement that the settlers had. As they were plying their futures in this region, they had come to expect a certain amount of government assistance but at the same time, expected the government to stay out of their affairs because of the limited involvement of that same government. Political mandates such as the ones mentioned also gave the citizenry a belief that the land was there’s to do as they pleased and they had little to no regard for the ramifications of the usage of the land. There was no incentive to preserve the territory nor was there any sense of conservation of these vast resources of land, timber, and or minerals/mettles.

Federal and territorial land grants for both transportation as well as land usage were equally generous to those who were willing to assume the financial risk as well as to there own personal well being. As of 1866, there were more than 500 mining districts
alone. At the territorial level, anyone who was willing to personally undertake the building of railroads realized that they had 15 years to charge tolls on the public land. Because the infrastructure hadn’t grown enough to give the major railroad corporations to build multiple routes, those who were willing to do so could potentially make a considerable profit. The American government had taken advantage to the settler’s entrepreneurial spirit as a benefit to both itself and major industry. The railroad industry had taken advantage of this opportunity in secret by quietly acquiring over 100 million acres of public land at a hugely reduced rate. All of these ventures were destroying the topsoil of the Grand Canyon territory and there was little to no incentive to change the habits created under these new opportunities.

Derived from the government’s perceived benevolence to the eagle entrepreneurs, came the concept of “rugged individualism.” This ideology allowed the inhabitants of this territory to believe that they were plying their trades all on their own. However, the reality is that the settlers, the families, the adventurers, the businessmen, risk-takers all, would not have been able to survive without the ample support of the American government that they allegedly were trying to escape form to make their opportunities in the first place. The government, noting the risk-taking nature of these individuals were able to take advantage of this enthusiasm to its own benefit, also used those same enthusiasm to use the railroad industry to further its own agenda. By utilizing the railroad’s desire to expand its own financial opportunities and potential, the government was able to connect the Atlantic and Pacific coasts without having to utilize its own funds to do so. To the American government, there was no difference between the rugged individualist and the bloodless corporate conglomerate. Both of these groups sought the
assistance from the government, both groups saw the untapped potential of the Western territories, a willingness to take risks to achieve their goals, and also both hopped to get into the market before everyone else did. The biggest difference between the two was the ends, not the means; the individuals wanted to make a good living, while the corporations wanted to control the lion’s share of the vast markets that the territories such as the Grand Canyon region possessed.

As the railroad industry began to penetrate the area, the individual farmer and rancher began getting pushed aside for other larger industries, each being more ruthless in its operation that the business that it replaced. Most of the newcomers had begun to change as well. Before, the types of settlers were happy with just carving out a plausible future for themselves and their families. Now, the newer settler was interested in how they could carve out their niche of the potential financial pie. The less ruthless of the settlers, the Mormons, the Hispanics, the individual farmers, were being pushed by subtle and sometimes overt economic, political, and social pressures.

The railroad industry was also able to allow other industries within the region. In the past, the local merchants were able to supply to Grand Canyon region with many of its own food and grain needs. At this point, the small merchant was pushed out for the use of larger corporation who could use their considerable resources to move the homesteader out of business. The timber industry also took a dramatic difference in how it was being utilized because of the railroad industry. Several businesses, such as Saginaw Lumber Company and Arizona Lumber Company, took advantage of the new trade routes and began to set up mills in several railroad towns. This type of unbridled capitalism was utilizing the resources of the area at a rate that was unexpected and the
methods of the various industries, along with the relative laizez-faire government approach left many jaded in the process.

First Canyon Entrepreneurs

Although the various industries around the Grand Canyon region were beginning to thrive, the Grand Canyon itself was relatively unspoiled. There were a few individuals who had come to the conclusion that there was great economic opportunity by using the canyon itself as the primary resource for their economic desires to be realized. Two individuals, in particular stood out: William Bass and Ralph Cameron. Some of their exploits include the following individuals:

- William Wallace Bass was a prominent figure in the Grand Canyon tourism industry from 1885 until 1923. He identified and claimed a seventy mile wagon route from Williams, Arizona to his base camp beside the rim near Havasupai Point. He begun to entertain many tourists through this area and began to realize its potential as his primary way to make money. In 1891, he extended his route Mystic Spring Trail to the Colorado River, gained toll rights. In 1894, he built the first all weather road in the Grand Canyon from Ash Fork. By 1900, he built the first rim to rim wagon route for the canyon. He later built a cable system to cross the Colorado River and also built two hotels. By 1915, he had built more Grand Canyon routes than any other person and had filed 25 or more claims within the future park boundaries.
• Sanford Rowe was the first European to ply his trade in the tourism industry in the Grand Canyon area. The area the he inhabited would soon be known as the Grand Canyon Village. During the period for 1890 until 1892, he filed several bogus mining claims so that he could acquire prime tourist real estate near the Southern Rim of the canyon. He also built a spur road to Bill Bass’s road to Hopi Point.

• James Thurder in 1896 extended his stage road form Flaggstaff into the canyon area. He then opened up the Bright Angel Hotel. He then developed a trail down to the Tonto Platform.

Developments of these early entrepreneurs of the Grand Canyon were microcosm of the situation; large turnover in properties illustrate that these family-owned ventures had a lot innovation and enthusiasm but lacked long-term staying power. Many of these ventures were shepherded by single family or duo family units but many did not have the capital to achieve long term results of note. To further this point, many of these incestuous circumstances were essentially the exchange of property for another, but neither investment left the capitalist in a better position than their original investment. These men of industry, however, did create many of the trails and development of much of the infrastructure that allowed the tourist to have a potentially positive experience within the canyon. These capitalist did connect the canyon in all the directions, created ways to cross the Colorado River and had also created the framework for the tourism industry that thrives in the Grand Canyon Region today.
Ralph Cameron: The Man of the Times

Ralph Cameron was the man of the times during this undeveloped era of the Grand Canyon’s history. He along with his brother, Niles, carved a niche that will make him very hard to forget. Of all of the tourism-oriented entrepreneurs, he was by far the most shrewd and capable. He, his brother Niles, along with a third partner, Pete Berry, began to use the Grand Canyon as his personal financial playground and was able to enter into several different ventures besides just tourism to help further his own agenda. He used the hunt and peck method to be able to acquire the amount resources he necessary to further his own desires. He was among the first to use both political power as well as the power of the media to help further his own causes, but under the guise of attempting to do what was best for the people. He was a shrewd negotiator, a sharp-witted orator, and also had tremendous foresight, an asset that he used to stay ahead of his competition, which also made him more than a passing nuisance for both big business who tried to enter his turf, and even for the United States government on more than one occasion.

Ralph Cameron was the first among the local entrepreneurs to realize that at some point the railroad industry was going to eventually come for the lands near the Grand Canyon Rim, so he put himself in a position to take advantage of the situation. He knew that he couldn’t beat big businesses, such as the Santa Fe Railroads, or even the United States Government. He knew that couldn’t beat them, but he was smart enough to force them into a stalemate, with him benefiting from the stalemate. As an individual, he knew that by forcing those entities to negotiate with, he felt he would benefit greatly. His understanding of the law gave him an opportunity to be able to negotiate with the
Santa Fe Railroad, his ability to use the media to his advantage kept all other peer
competition chasing his shadow; his position within the government meant that the
United States couldn’t ignore him either.

Trouble between the Santa Fe Railroad began immediately when the railroad tried
to backdoor one of Cameron’s land claims by dealing with one of his competitors.
However, the negotiation couldn’t be completed in a proper manner because of
Cameron’s claim on the lands adjacent to the area. Unable to bully Cameron into their
wishes, the Santa Fe Railroad began a series of lawsuits to attempt to deter him into
relinquishing his claims. Cameron is the one who initiated the litigious contentions by
making a land claim that enveloped the adjacent areas around the original negotiation by
the Santa Fe Railroad and his competitor. In 1906 the courts determined that Cameron
could keep his claims as long as they didn’t overlap the depot parcel. He didn’t beat
Santa Fe, but by forcing a stalemate, he might as well have. He further strengthened his
position by erecting a gate at the very area that Santa Fe wanted to utilize and began to
charge a toll. This prompted Santa Fe to file another lawsuit against him, only this time,
the territory was also involved because of the legality of the issue. The claim for the
land was declared illegal, but he was continued to be allowed to charge tolls. Another
stalemate with Santa Fe meant another victory for Ralph Cameron.

Cameron’s regional popularity grew in part form his ability to stare down the
Santa Fe Railroad. He was by now the territorial representative for the Grand Canyon
area and had developed considerable leverage. Once one of his friend’s franchising
rights expired, he used his political clout to allow another to receive that franchising
right. Whenever the Santa Fe Railroad tried to gain land, Cameron used his political
power over the territory to fight them. More often then not, Cameron was proved successful in his endeavors. He was aided by the people of this territory who were afraid that their interest would be over-run by big business who had desires on taking advantage of the economic opportunity that the Grand Canyon Territory represented. These were individuals who despised the Federal government only slightly less then they despised big business interfering in their affairs. His supporters, however, turned on him, once Cameron’s political aspirations were revealed to only be furthering his own agenda and not in the interest of his fellow citizens and was primarily to further his own greed.

**Becoming a National Park**

During the times of capitalism and unbridled growth in the United States, a new concept began to take shape: Progressivism. Progressivism was an aggregation of independent social, economic, and political reform movements at the turn of the century that developed in response to the unchecked capitalism that had sweep throughout much of the country. This ideology, along with industrialization, and rapid urbanization had been on over-drive since the conclusion of the Civil War. Progressivism was the answer to that issue by attempting to reign in the rampant use of essential resources without replacement and also the ability to become socially, morally, and environmentally responsible for its own destiny.

In the Western regions of the Continental United States, this meant a halt to onslaught of the consumption of natural resources. Perkins’ publication of ‘Man vs. Nature’ helped influence Congress that the country’s resources without proper protection
would be gone forever and could never return. Wildlife was now being protected as well as lands being designated for protection. Limits were being taken on the outright abuse of the lands and certain lands were being designated as protected because of both their aesthetic value but also for their resources that they possess, such as timber. In 1875, the American Forestry Association was formed and in 1881, the Department of Agriculture’s Division of Forestry was created. In 1891, Congress passed the Forest Reserve Act giving presidents the opportunity to protect certain lands as public domain. Gifford Pinchot, the first American Forester, became head of what would become know as the United States Forestry Service, consolidated all forestry under one agency.

Conservation became the concept from the USFS ideology. This, however, did not have any effect on the Grand Canyon initially. Several bills had been presented to make the Grand Canyon area a national park. Each of these attempts was killed in committee. However, the forests around the Grand Canyon were designated by the USFS as land that could be protected, so in essence the canyon itself was also being protected. Pinchot was primarily concerned with the forest itself and was not overly concerned with all the other logistical issues that the area had. He was perfectly willing to allow businesses like the Santa Fe Railroad the opportunity to develop, which in turn, drew the ire of men such as Ralph Cameron.

The agency roles of the individuals who had been charged with the protection of the forestry had now become contentious with the local citizens. With the primary concept of protection of the parks, the rangers were no longer in the business of helping the local capitalist with their various issues. The forest service took its role of protection seriously but when it came to the issues of tourism, they were not very receptive at all. In
the priority list of the rangers and the service itself, sustainable forests were far more important than the Grand Canyon itself. Simply put, a canyon isn’t a forest and since there are no forests within the canyon, there was no great sense of urgency for protecting the interests of the citizens who plied their trade in this region. Rangers spent time checking on the conditions of the forest such as checking the range conditions, working on timber sales, issuing use permits, recording homestead entries, building fences, and fighting forest fires. These men spent little to no time at all dealing with the tourist of the region.

The USFS was glad to work with a business like the Santa Fe Railroad. Once a friend to the local developers, once the ranger’s roles changed, so did the relationships. Now the rangers were responsible for the legitimacy of the claims that these developers had ad if there was no real mineral claim, the land was not legitimately in the possession of the developers. This allowed the Santa Fe Railroad to come in and make a proper claim, which lead to more development of the rail system. It became more convenient to make lease agreements because of the public land usage issue and the railroad was in a position to be able to take advantage of the lease agreements. Local developers were not able to sustain the leasing agreements so they were being forced of lands that they had claims to for years and there was nothing they could do about it legally. The land owners who couldn’t continue to fight the government and Santa Fe eventually sold their lands away. Ralph Cameron, with his influence waning, tried to force another stalemate to drive prices up on his land that he knew he would eventually have to sell. The USFS and Santa Fe, eventually forced him out, by making a settlement with him, giving him what he wanted, but not at the price he really wanted.
Even though troublesome private owners like Ralph Cameron were dealt with, it did not mean that everything was well with the situation. There was a limited amount of resources to deal with all the vast amount of issues that management of such a diverse area would possess. The conditions of the area around the Grand Canyon, once of high quality, had now become substandard. There was now enforcement by the USFS to keep the quality at a certain level because that was not the priority of the agency. The areas around the Grand Canyon had become so poor; it was thought to be an embarrassment. It was at the this particular point, that it was decided that the USFS perhaps was not the best agency to handle the issues of the Grand Canyon fully. The forestry was one thing, but the area had become in disarray. The forest had bigger concerns, such as trying to retain its own political power. It was concerned that it was going to loose its power and became embittered with trying to retain as much land as possible. Tourism was not the original aim of the agency, but they did not want to loose any land and more importantly, any funding either.

Arguments for the creation of a national agency coincided with the desire to turn the Grand Canyon into a national park. Those that were certain that the region couldn’t gain wealth were certain that the park could still provide many uses and were receptive to the idea, as long as they had an opportunity to make money for themselves. The conservationalist believed that the canyon would be exploited but the argument was that it was being exploited anyway. The USFS tried to keep the area as long as possible but they would have to relinquish its possession of the area as well. Legislation passed through Congress quickly and May 16, 1918, the Grand Canyon was officially removed from the United States Forestry Service. On August 15, 1919, the Grand Canyon area
was put under the control of the United States Forest Service and became the United States seventeenth national park.

References

Polishing the Jewel: An Administrative History of Grand Canyon National Park


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