

## **Local Opinion on the Origins of Acadia National Park**

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### **Introduction**

The goal of this project was to shed light on opinions of the Mount Desert Island locals regarding the setting aside of land that eventually became Acadia National Park. We saw this as an important area of study for a couple of reasons. First of all, a rumor is floating around that locals were opposed to the park from the beginning—something that has no real evidence to support or refute it. Perhaps this is simply because this area of history has been greatly overlooked. It certainly does not feature as often as the Native American history or the stories of the wealthy summer residents. By doing this research we hoped to better understand the local islanders and their connection to the land before it became famous as Acadia National Park.

### **Methods**

We began by contacting Deb Wade, Acadia National Park chief interpreter, to ask where we should begin. She said to read the Bar Harbor Times archives at the Jesup Library and look for article and editorials around 1916. She also said that in 1913, a group of people went to the Maine Legislature to try to annul the Hancock County Trustees of Public Reservation's tax exempt status, and recommended that I call the Black House-Woodlawn Museum in Ellsworth where the Trustees' documents are archived.

We also looked at the Thorndike Library at College of the Atlantic for relevant books; unfortunately none of the books had anything significant regarding the local people. We did read George B. Dorr's memoir *The Story of Acadia National Park* to get background information about the Park's history to make a general timeline of our area of research. I noted a few specific dates that seemed to be significant and/or controversial. After searching in the Jesup Memorial Library in Bar Harbor and not finding very many other helpful books, we then looked at the archived Bar Harbor Record on the dates I had pulled. These dates were: January through March of 1909 at the height of the automobile controversy that Dorr had mentioned in his book; November of 1912 to March of 1913 because the bill to annul the Trustees of Reservations failed

in January of 1913; June and July of 1916 because the creation of the Sieur De Monts National Monument was July 8, 1916; and January to mid-March of 1919 because the Monument was turned into Lafayette National Park February 16<sup>th</sup> 1919.

We found lots of conflict about the automobile legislation, nothing about the failed 1913 bill, and many approving articles about the park and Dorr's work. The only indication of any controversy regarding the park directly was in a few articles praising Dorr mentioned that he had to overcome "obstacles" in order to create the park. We also found one letter to the editor on January 27, 1913 that expressed frustration at what could have been George B. Dorr and the Trustees.

The Jesup Library did have one relevant book, entitled *Tragedies and Triumphs: Charles W. Eliot, Gorge B. Dorr and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and the Founding of Acadia National Park*. This book mentioned the legislation trying to take away the Hancock Country Trustees of Public Reservations tax exemption but not in detail.

We also emailed Karen Anderson who works for the Park doing GIS and she sent us historic maps showing the land acquired by the Trustees. Relevant maps include 1911, 1916, 1917, 1921, 1922, 1926, 1928, 1930, 1934, 1941.

We talked to John McDade, who is in charge of the Acadia National Park Archives, about whether he had access to any early park history, especially anything that might indicate what the local/permanent residents felt about the creation of the park or whether there was any controversy over the creation of the park. McDade explained that unfortunately all the early park documents had been shipped to Boston and would not be returned to the park for a year. He indicated that the only thing left would be books which were accessible through other places like the library and brief summaries of the history of Acadia as a preface before the start of a document that was generally unrelated to our topic of interest.

At the same time we contacted Elsie Flemings, the Maine State Representative for Bar Harbor and she found the legislative records for the 1913 bill that did not pass—House Bill No. 142 that Representative Sherman of Eden introduced.

We also contacted Mark Honey, Hancock County's preeminent historian. We interviewed him to gain a contextual understanding of MDI in the early 1900s in terms of the island's economy, local culture, and the general history leading up to the origins of the Park. Honey also suggested some other leads: the Tracy Diaries (which are too early for our purposes), the Ellsworth Library which is larger and has more archives than the Jesup, and to talk to Debbie Dyer from the Bar Harbor Historical Society to find out if there are any historians specifically focused on Mount Desert Island.

We contacted Dyer and asked her that question and a few others. She told us that census records were in Ellsworth, but she had the Mount Desert Register from 1909 to 1910 which has records of everyone who lived on the island—but we decided that was too specific for our purposes. She also mentioned a few prominent Edenites from around 1900 but did not have writings from them that were from the 1908 to 1919 that we were looking at (from when Dorr started reserving land to when the park was established). I also asked Dyer about possible stories and oral histories from local residents who have had family on the island since before 1900. She did not seem receptive to this idea and did not think that people would have told their children and grandchildren what their opinions were regarding Dorr, the Trustees, or the Monument or Park itself.

Next, we went to the Ellsworth Library and looked at the *Ellsworth American* for the same dates that we looked at in the *Bar Harbor Record*. We did not find any mention of the 1913 bill, the Trustees of Reservations, the Monument, or the Park.

We contacted Debbie Dyer again and found out that the Representative Sherman of the failed 1913 bill was the same Sherman of Sherman's General Store and also the man who ran the Bar Harbor Record.

We contacted Joshua Torrance, the director of the Blackhouse-Woodlawn Museum to find out more about the attempt to annul the Trustees tax exempt status. Torrance said that we should look more at the Bar Harbor Record in the months previous to January to 1913 and the Ellsworth

American as well. He also recommended that we email Ron Epp who is writing a biography of George Dorr. Torrance did not seem to think that the archives at the Woodlawn Museum would have what we were looking for, but he sent me a finding guide to the collection.

Ron Epp replied to my email with several suggestions and bits of information. He said that the surviving Trustee minutes were incomplete and that they “offer little guidance on most matters relating to the evolution of the organization.” He did not say anything about a record of the Trustees’ response to attempts to annul their tax exempt status. In his email, Epp did say that the Trustees appear to have been pressured by “...realtors who feared that real estate donated to the Trustees was costing them sales...” He suggested another lead, specifically that Josh Torrance recently uncovered the papers of Judge John A. Peter who was instrumental in helping Dorr stop the bill that would have annulled the Trustees tax exempt status. Finally, Epp said that the Northeast Harbor Library has a copy of the Charles W. Eliot II paper including a letter from Dorr to S. A. Eliot.

### ***FOLLOW UP***

- [currently I’m following up on that and finding this book in Sherman’s that has a mention of William Sherman-- and seeing if anyone at the Bar Harbor Times knows anything about Sherman. I do not know if he has any living descendants on the island. because right now we are just trying to answer the question: Why did Sherman introduce that bill?
- going to Woodlawn to look at minutes for Trustees
- going to ask Josh Torrance for Peter’s papers
- contacting Judith

### **Annotated Bibliography**

“Automobiles: Crowded Committee Hearing at Augusta.” *The Bar Harbor Record*. 10 Feb 1909:1-3

This is one of many articles between January and March 1909 about automobiles on Mount Desert Island. This article showed the bitter controversy on the island during the time that Dorr was beginning to set aside land. The author of this article gave a significant amount of history on the topic and tried to show both sides of the issue, but since they were both so full of rhetoric it was hard to discern what the islanders really felt about it. This article showed that while the controversy was not simply locals versus summer residents, a large majority of the summer residents were all on the same side and did not want automobiles. Clearly the dispute would not have been so amplified if the summer residents were not on the island. We included this because

it presents conflict between summer residents and at least some of the local residents—tension that may have been building and may continue to ferment through the reserving of land and the establishment of the Monument and Park.

“Be a Booster.” *The Bar Harbor Times*. 15 March 1919: 3.

This article suggests that people buy land because property values will go up soon once WWI is over and nearby Lafayette National Park is developed more.

“Communication.” *Bar Harbor Times*. 29 January 1913.

A letter to the editor by “A Native Taxpayer” dated Jan. 27, 1913 expressed frustration at what could have been George B. Dorr and the Trustees. Part of the letter reads, “Seems funny ter me after a mans been here long enough ter eat up all the fish we had, he’d turn round an try to gobble the rest of the island, roads an all, then I guess he’d put em in the reservation an exempt em from taxes...” The author goes on to talk more about automobile, apparently mixing this issue with the tax free preservation of land. He also says, “Course I know tis rong for a native shop keeper to se up an argue with a rusticator and he han’nt ought ter do it but sometimes he’s bound ter set up and think after he’s brought up his family and made a pretty good living that his idears ought to be pretty near as good as the feller thats set round for 27 years and tryed ter spend what his poor old father’s made.” This is perhaps a good indication of the class differences that existed on the island at that time.

Dorr, George B. *The Story of Acadia National Park*. Bar Harbor (check on that): Acadia Publishing, 1991.

This is a two-part memoir of George B. Dorr. Part I is “Acadia National Park: Its Origin and Background” and Part II is “Its Growth and Development.” Dorr directs his story to a general audience. In the introduction Frank J. Matter writes that “while some may argue about the historical accuracy of some of the dates and events which George Dorr relates in his books, the depths of his personal involvement and the crucial role he played in the creation of Acadia National Park are unquestionable.” This is the book of a wealthy and influential man who had wealthy and influential friends—clearly it is biased. But Dorr writes about what he sees as the most important factors going into the creation of the park: the book abounds with details of his conversations, meetings, and correspondence with important people in Washington including Secretary of Interior Lane, Maine Senator Johnson, and Governor of the Federal Reserve Hamlin. Other things he mentions only briefly, like local opinion on his actions.

Dyer, Deborah. Personal communication. 27 May 2009.

Debbie Dyer is the curator of the Bar Harbor Historical Society and the Secretary and Treasurer on the Board. She seems to be knowledgeable about the prominent locals but does not know very

much about the working classes. Her family has been on the island since the 18th century. She has a bias in that she is grateful for Dorr's work in founding Acadia and she is grateful for the summer residents because the economy depended and still depends on them. She said that there is just not records on local opinion and we unfortunately have to rely on hearsay at this point. Regarding oral histories and stories, Debbie thought that local culture does not tend to facilitate discussions about the past between generations.

Goidstein, Judith S. *Tragedies and Triumphs: Charles W. Eliot, Gorge B. Dorr and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and the Founding of Acadia National Park*. Somesville: Port in A Storm Bookstore, 1992.

This was originally given as a talk so it has a casual style for a general audience but it is also part of a larger research project and is well-researched with a bibliography of mainly secondary sources. It discusses the history of the three of the major people responsible for creating Acadia National Park. Charles W. Eliot, Gorge B. Dorr, and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. are all discussed including not only their efforts in creating the park but also the more personal motivations and personalities which shaped their interactions. This history starts with Eliot's idea to create the Hancock Country Trustees of Public Reservations and ends with the creation of Acadia National Park. It also includes some insight into these men's prejudices and explores the idea of the park being a force opposing the exclusivity of the summer colony on Mount Desert Island.

Honey, Mark. Personal interview. 23 May 2009.

Mark Honey is regarded as the best historian of Hancock County and the Union River watershed, especially in looking at the histories of common people. Through his ancestors who were local to the area, Mark looks at these kind of histories that are often overlooked and deemed insignificant. He made it clear from the start of the interview that he did not have specific documents but a synthesis from all that he has researched and read for 30 years. He has a bias and he clearly voices his frustration with the current lack of respect for local history, local culture, and local land use, but he is definitely a valuable resource in this area of history. The interview covered topics including the shift from a resource-based economy to a tourist-based one, MDI as a summer destination, local culture and lifestyle, the changing relationship between locals and non-locals, land-use and ownership on MDI, and the origins of Acadia National Park—some of which were more directly relevant and some of which were just important background information. Notes from interview are attached.

Epp, Ron. Personal communication. 21 May 2009.

Ron Epp is writing a biography of George B. Dorr and is referred to by Joshua Torrance as the authority on the HCTPR. Epp said that his research had focused more on events leading up to the founding of the HCTPR in 1901 and the issues surrounding Dorr's efforts to make the reservations into a national park. He suggested several sources that we should look for, including the HCTPR minutes I the Woodlawn Museum archives, the papers of Judge John A. Peters uncovered by Josh Torrance, and the Charles W. Eliot II Papers in the Northeast Harbor Library.

Epp said surviving HCTPR minutes were incomplete and that they “offer little guidance on most matters relating to the evolution of the organization.” He did not say anything about a record of the Trustees’ response to attempts to annul their tax exempt status. In his email, Epp did say that the Trustees appear to have been pressured by “...realtors who feared that real estate donated to the Trustees was costing them sales...” Another lead he suggested was that Josh Torrance had recently uncovered the papers of Judge John A. Peter who was instrumental in helping Dorr stop the bill that would have annulled the Trustees tax exempt status. Finally, Epp said that the Northeast Harbor Library has a copy of the Charles W. Eliot II paper including a letter from Dorr to S. A. Eliot. Epp said, “[The letter] reports that several months before the 1913 January Augusta gathering, Trustee properties were sufficiently extensive as to endanger the HCTPR charter rights and freedom from taxation ‘unless development of the tract in the public interest—more than its mere holding—could be shown.’”

### ***MAPS - how to cite ?***

“Trustees To Meet.” *The Bar Harbor Times*. 3 June 1916: 12.

This brief article mentions that the Trustees of Public Reservations are meeting to accept more land and to vote to allow the President and Vice President to have the authority to give the Trustee land to the United States.

“Pres. Wilson Accepts Sieur de Monts Memorial: Superb U. S. National Park of Mt. Desert Hills.” *The Bar Harbor Times*. 15 July 1916: 1 & 4.

This article states that President Wilson has created Sieur de Monts National Monument through the perseverance of Dorr and the recommendation of the Secretary of the Interior, Franklin K. Lane. It includes the letter Lane wrote recommending the creation of the Monument in which is stated the scientific and historic value of the land.

“President Wilson May Come.” *The Bar Harbor Times*. 22 July 1916: 5.

This brief article states that some of President Wilson’s friends are trying to persuade him to visit Sieur de Monts National Monument.

“President Wilson Signed Lafayette National Park Bill On Thursday.” *The Bar Harbor Times*. 1 March 1919: 1.

This is a short article announcing the fact that President Wilson signed the bill that created Lafayette National Park. It also summarizes the history of the creation of the Park and acknowledged Dorr as the major person behind it.

“Remarks of Congressman Peters.” *The Bar Harbor Times*. 8 March 1919: 3.

This article describes the comments of Congressman Peters of Ellsworth about Lafayette National Park. He enumerates the Park’s wide range of qualities that make it a wonderful park including scenery, wildlife, the ocean, geology, history, botany, and recreation.

*The Bar Harbor Record*. Ed. William Sherman. Eden, ME. dates of existence?

***Find out and annotate!***

“The Lafayette National Park.” *The Bar Harbor Times*. 22 February 1919: 3.

This article states that the Lafayette National Park now only needs the signature of President Wilson to be created. It praises Dorr for being the reason the park was created and mentions that the park helps represent and encourage the wonderful relationship the United States has with France.

“To View National Park.” *The Bar Harbor Times*. 22 July 1916: 1.

This article states that the editor of National Geographic is coming to Bar Harbor to get more information about Sieur de Monts National Monument.

“Town Expresses Thanks to Mr. George B. Dorr.” *The Bar Harbor Times*. 8 March 1919: 1.

This article thanks Dorr for helping to create Lafayette National Park and summarizes the Bar Harbor Town Meeting’s unanimous vote to publicly thank Dorr for his work. The article also mentions that Dorr had to overcome significant obstacles to achieve the creation of the park.

“Trustees To Meet.” *The Bar Harbor Times*. 3 June 1916: 12.

This brief article mentions that the Trustees of Public Reservations are meeting to accept more land and to vote to allow the President and Vice President to have the authority to give the Trustee land to the United States.

“Woman’s Study Club Has National Park Program.” *The Bar Harbor Times*. 8 March 1919: 5.

Very short article that mentions that the Woman’s Study Club was shown a collection of pictures from Lafayette National Park.



An act to grant certain powers to the Hancock County Trustees of public reservations.

“For a legislative act, begin with the name of the act. Then provide the act's Public Law number, its date of enactment, and its Statutes at Large number.

Electronic Freedom of Information Act Amendments of 1996. Pub. L. 104-418. 2 Oct. 1996. Stat. 3048.”

Legislative Record - House, 5 Feb 1913. pg 231: House

***Ken: How do we cite laws and legislative records?***

## **Discussion**

Except for the park archives, we think that we have done reasonably thorough research within our time constraints. We can reasonably conclude that although some locals had negative feelings towards the summer residents and the Trustees of Public Reservations, we found no evidence that this antagonism carried into the establishment of Sieur de Monts National Monument or Lafayette National Park.

We found evidence from several sources that that Trustees were a source of frustration from year-round residents. Legislator William Sherman introduced a bill to the Maine House of Representatives in January of 1913 to amend the Trustees of Public Reservations' charter to make an exception the tax exemption only in the town of Eden. As Goidstein mentions in her book [title] “this could place the Trustees in financial jeopardy and completely undermine their conservation efforts” (18). She also said that “partially as a result of the automobile challenge and partly because of conflicts between land speculators and the trustees, Dorr and his organization were suddenly under intense pressure from Bar Harbor’s year-round population” (Goidstein 18). Historian Ron Epp also mentioned that from the Trustees’ minutes he found that “the pressure appear[ed] to come from Realtors who feared that real estate donated to the Trustees was costing them sales.” All of this together suggests that there was resentment towards the Trustees but we do not know who it was coming from specifically—were the “realtors” that Epp speaks about local or people coming from afar to buy and sell land?

We also do not know what pressured Sherman to introduce the bill—local pressure, other interest groups, or his own motives? We do know that he was the owner of the *Bar Harbor Record* so newspaper may include some of his own biases. [would he have included the bill to get more support for it or tried to hush it up by not including it when it didn't pass?]

The *Bar Harbor Record* (later the *Times*) did present the automobile bill as highly contentious with both sides represented but had only praise for the Monument, the Park, and Dorr himself. This suggests that locals were not highly opposed to the creation of the Monument and the Park but brings up the question of who the newspaper represents and if it is a good indicator of public opinion.

There is obviously still work to be done on this topic. Most importantly, a major source is missing from our research are the archives of Acadia National Park. These documents potentially have a large amount of information that would add to this area of study but they were recently sent to Boston to be processed and will not be back for a year.

The other areas for future work are time-consuming and may not prove to be very fruitful. It would be good to track down the local residents who have had family on the island since 1900 and see if they have any oral history or stories regarding opinions about the park or land reservations. Another thing would be to learn more about the locals at the time in general, especially us as outsiders with possibly less of a bias. Another thing would be to find out the dates that the Trustees acquired land and look in the *Bar Harbor Record* from 1908 to 1916 to see if it mentions anything about these acquisitions. For example, there is the story of the Sieur de Monts spring incident—where Dorr essentially snatched the land out of a group of locals who were planning to start a bottling company—that Mark mentioned and Dorr mentioned in his memoir. How did the people react to Dorr's actions?

Considering the available evidence, we are fairly certain that there was little to no controversy over the creation of the Monument and the Park or that the *Bar Harbor Record* very much wanted to promote positive feelings toward them.

