PROFILE: GEORGE BIRD GRINNELL (1849-1938)

By Leonard H. Wurman B&C Regular Member

In 1880, at age 31, George Bird Grinnell purchased and became editor-in-chief of *Forest and Stream*, the most popular of that period's sporting weekly newspapers. He had spent nearly 12 consecutive summers hunting and exploring the western plains and had just completed his Ph.D. in paleontology.

Using *Forest and Stream* as a pulpit, Grinnell urged the establishment of hunting seasons, bag limits, hunting fees (licenses), and the elimination of spring hunting. Even more important than new laws, Grinnell believed, was the need to enforce existing laws by establishing a system of county game constables (present-day wardens). In those days, the public viewed the outlaw poacher with tolerance, somewhat akin to Robin Hood.

The Audubon Society

Post-Civil War fashion dictated that ladies, even those who considered themselves lovers of wildlife, should wear hats decorated with feathers or plumed skins of birds. American hunters demanded protection for these non-game birds, which often were killed during the breeding and nesting seasons. In 1886, Grinnell published an editorial that established The Audubon Society, and Forest and Stream became the society's headquarters. There were no dues and the costs were covered either by the paper or by Grinnell personally. By 1888, there were over 50,000 members and the paper's staff was so overwhelmed that it was forced to disband the organization. However, Grinnell's national movement led to the establishment of a number of state Audubon Societies that in 1905 joined together to become the National Association of Audubon Societies. In 1949, the name was changed to the National Audubon Society, although several state societies remain independently active today. Many of the early members were women who, ironically, would attend society meetings wearing plumed hats.

Glacier National Park

In 1885, Grinnell took his first trip to the Rocky Mountain region of northern Montana, which was then part of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. The rugged terrain had discouraged all but a few white men and Indians from exploring the region. Grinnell visited the area almost annually for many years, became fluent in the Blackfeet language, and in 1890 was made an honorary Blackfeet chief. At one point, he used his influence to have a dishonest Indian agent removed from the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. He named many of the area's landmarks, such as Gunsight Mountain and Pass, Swiftcurrent Lake, Mountain, and Pass, Little Chief Mountain (after Frank North), Iceberg Lake, and Mount Cleveland (after the president). Grinnell Glacier, Lake, and Mountain were later named in his honor. He fought to have the area declared a national park and headed a committee that in 1896 amicably purchased the land from the Blackfeet. Joining efforts with U.S. Senator Thomas Carter of Montana, another member of Boone and Crockett, Grinnell was finally victorious when President Taft signed the Glacier National Park Act in 1910.

Boone and Crockett Club

In 1885, 26-year-old Theodore Roosevelt entered the *Forest and Stream* office to protest Grinnell's review of Roosevelt's first hunting book. In Roosevelt, Grinnell found an aggressive, courageous, and politically tuned ally for his conservation efforts. The two men became fast friends and cooperated in this endeavor for the next 35 years.

In 1887, realizing the need for an influential national organization, Grinnell and Roosevelt invited nine fellow hunters to a dinner meeting in Roosevelt's Manhattan home. The result was the founding of the Boone and Crockett Club. Membership would be limited to 100 Regular Members and as many Associate (present-day Professional) Members as was warranted. The Members would include many of the country's wildlife and conservation leaders, all of whom would be influenced by Mr. Grinnell's leadership for the next half-century.

Yellowstone

Yellowstone National Park, established in 1872, had been for its first decade simply a curiosity. The railroad arrived in 1883, bringing not only more tourists, but also exploiters of the park's minerals, timber and, most significantly, big game. *Forest and Stream* had editorialized for years against this development, and one of the first actions of the Boone and Crockett Club was a commitment to protect our nation's first national park.

Forest and Stream effectively argued against allowing the railroads to build a line through the park. In addition, to document the extent of poaching, Grinnell several times sent reporters to live in Yellowstone for months at a time. In the winter of 1893-1894, reporter Emerson Hough witnessed the capture of Ed Howell, Yellowstone's most notorious poacher. When Grinnell published the story and photographs in *Forest and Stream*, the nation was aroused.

Congressman John F. Lacey of Iowa, also a Boone and Crockett Club Member, successfully advocated for passage of the Yellowstone Park Protection Act (commonly called the "Lacey Act of 1894"). It outlawed the removal of any game, fish, minerals, or timber from the park, and assigned U. S. Marshals to enforce the rules. This "first Lacey Act" established a model for the administration of subsequent National Parks.

VATIONISTS

Lacey Act of 1900

George Bird Grinnell and John Lacey also teamed up to pass perhaps the most significant conservation law of all, the better known of the two "Lacey Acts." In the late 19th century, the term "sportsmen" separated those who hunted for recreation from those who hunted for profit, a pursuit dating back to colonial times. Market hunters cared nothing about conservation. Grinnell in *Forest and Stream* railed against this business. After several years of effort, passage of the Lacey Act in 1900 outlawed the interstate transportation of game taken out-of-season or illegally by any other existing state law. Market hunting was on the wane.

Late 19th century fears that big game animals would become extinct resulted in two distinct remedies. Grinnell and the Boone and Crockett Club were involved in both. The first predicted that free-ranging wild animals were doomed and envisioned zoos as the only way to save specimens for future generations. Grinnell and the Boone and Crockett Club proposed that future zoos not just keep animals in cages, but rather in conditions similar to their natural habitat. These efforts led to the 1889 establishment, by Congress, of a National Zoological Park in Washington, D.C. Six years later, the Club's Members, most of whom were New Yorkers, influenced that state's assembly to create the New York Zoological Society (Bronx Zoo). Nine of the Society's first board members belonged to the Boone and Crockett Club.

The second approach to preserve big game animals was the creation of wild habitat where threatened animals could find refuge. Yellowstone, as a national park, was just such an example. From its earliest meetings, the Club discussed creating national wildlife reserves similar to the forest reserves (the forerunner of our national forests). In 1891, Grinnell published a series of *Forest and Steam* editorials that urged construction of a salmon fishery and a sea mammal and waterfowl "refuge" on Alaska's Afognak Island. The following year, President Harrison established the "Afognak Forest and Fish-Culture

REGULAR BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB MEMBER FROM 1887-1938

LEFT: GRINNELL SHOULD BE CREDITED AS ONE OF OUR COUNTRY'S MOST EFFECTIVE CONSERVATIONISTS.
RIGHT: GRINNELL AND HIS WIFE ELIZABETH VISITED GLACIER PARK IN SEPTEMBER 1923 TO HIKE ON GRINNELL GLACIER.

Photograph courtesy of Glacier National Park Archives

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Three books, two by John F. Reiger, present a broad history of the period in which Grinnell played such a pivotal role. "The Passing of the Great West," first published in 1972, has been reprinted several times. "American Sportsman and the Origins of Conservation," originally published in 1975, was released in a revised and expanded edition in 2001. The third book is "American Crusade for Wildlife" by James Trefethen, published in 1975.

Reserve." Although the effort failed for administrative reasons, this was to Boone and Crockett Club Members our nation's first "refuge." It wasn't until 11 years later that President Theodore Roosevelt created Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge, officially our nation's first. When the Boone and Crockett Club formed a committee in 1901 to plan for other game reserves around the country, Grinnell was included.

In October of 1901, President McKinley was assassinated and Vice-President Theodore Roosevelt assumed the presidency. Roosevelt became the nation's greatest conservationist president. His close friend and advisor, George Bird Grinnell, influenced many of Roosevelt's actions, but preferred to do so quietly and behind the scenes, and subsequently received little public credit.

The Club established a Game Preservation Committee in 1910, with Grinnell as chairman. The committee was authorized to raise funds and establish an endowment to be used specifically for America's wildlife. This was a significant move, signaling that in addition to functioning as individuals sharing common goals, the Club would also now operate as its own entity. The funds first raised were used to capture antelope in Yellowstone and relocate them to the Wichita Mountain National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma and the National Bison Range in Montana. In 1912, the committee also tried to establish an antelope refuge on the Fort Grant Military Reservation in Arizona, but Arizona had just achieved statehood and political considerations prevented this.

GEORGE BIRD GRINNELL WAS THE EDITOR OF "FOREST AND STREAM" FROM 1880-1911.

Waterfowl

In 1903, and again in 1906, Congressman and Boone and Crockett Club Member George Shiras III of Pennsylvania introduced legislation to control migratory waterfowl hunting, but the bills died in committee. After Shiras had retired, Congressman John W. Weeks introduced the same bill in 1908, but it again failed. In 1912, 15 prominent sportsmen representing various conservation organizations, many of whom were or would become Boone and Crockett Club Members, met for dinner to develop a strategy. Grinnell represented Boone and Crockett Club. By the end of the evening, the legislation had been rewritten to include insectivorous birds. This shrewd move resulted in the backing by agricultural interests, and the Weeks-McLean Act was passed. The new law outlawed spring hunting and was the final blow against the market hunter. However, many expected the Supreme Court to declare it unconstitutional.

At the same time, George Bird Grinnell and other Club Members had been using their personal influence in Washington to promote a treaty with Great Britain that would protect migratory waterfowl in Canada and the United States. Congress approved the treaty in 1916. Within two years, despite protests from remaining market hunters and Midwest duck hunting clubs, Congress enabled the Migratory Bird Treaty. Missouri immediately challenged its constitutionality, but the Supreme Court upheld both the treaty and the Weeks-McLean Act. The law gave the Bureau of Biological Survey, forerunner of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the task of drawing up new waterfowl hunting regulations. The new rules created a 3-1/2 month season, set daily bag limits at 25 ducks and 10 geese, and banned hunting of wood ducks and shorebirds.

Waterfowl hunters were concerned about the diminishing populations of ducks, and also about the anti-hunting propaganda of those who wanted to significantly limit waterfowl hunting. Grinnell joined 15 other influential and dedicated waterfowlers in 1927 to form the "American Wild Fowlers." To assist the Bureau of Biological Survey, the AWF raised private money for the bureau to band ducks. This resulted in the first evidence that waterfowl populations migrated in distinct flyways. Four years later, the AWF merged with the newly formed More Game Birds in America, which in 1937 became Ducks Unlimited.

Despite his advancing age, Grinnell remained active as president of the Boone and Crockett Club from 1918 until 1927. He also founded, and became the first president of, the National Parks Association, a citizens group formed to assist the government. The group's efforts led to the creation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 1930.

Author and Editor

Throughout his life, Grinnell found time to take his annual western summer trips. Frequently staying with the different Indian tribes and learning their languages, he became an accomplished Native American anthropologist. He published 10 books on Native Americans: two each on the Blackfoot and the Pawnee, three scholarly and comprehensive books on the Cheyenne, and three not specific to any tribe.

Besides the anthropology books, Grinnell wrote two books on frontier life, seven western books for youngsters, one book on waterfowl hunting, and another on upland bird hunting. He also edited or co-edited eight hunting books, all but one published by the Boone and Crockett Club.

Grinnell did not marry until he was 53 years old, after which his wife accompanied him on his summer trips to the west. He sold the Forest and Stream Publishing Company in 1911, but remained an active waterfowl and upland game hunter. Grinnell died April 11, 1938, his last years spent in a wheelchair as a cardiac invalid.

More than anyone, George Bird Grinnell influenced, directed, and solidified the conservation movement during its early years. He also orchestrated the activity of many other conservation leaders, some of whom will be topics of future biographies. His avoidance of self-promotion, and his desire to often work "behind the scenes," has left him largely unheralded today. Yet, he deserves credit as one of our country's most effective conservationists. Today's American hunters are truly indebted to this quiet and self-effacing gentleman. ■