

## CHAPTER 2

### *A Magnificent Beggar:* **Samuel Boardman and the Formation of Oregon State Parks (1929 - 1950)**

The important thing was to make it a park. When Sam Boardman fought, wheedled, and speechified for the acquisition of the 12 miles of craggy Curry County coastline that would one day bear his name, what mattered to him was that the land and its beauties be preserved. For a while, he thought that the land might be the heart of a broad new National Park, showing the glory of the Oregon Coast. But its eventual fate as a state park also served. As the land donations that made the park a reality were beginning to be finalized in 1949, Boardman could console himself that he had saved another stretch of precious trees and scenic views. When he retired in 1950, the still-growing Samuel H. Boardman State Park (later Scenic Corridor) was named after him—surely a salve, though Boardman died just a few years later in 1953.

In 1970, Alfred “Cap” Collier, a longtime member of the State Parks Advisory Committee and founder of Collier Memorial State Park, spoke at a dedication event for the still-growing Boardman park. He summed up his longtime friend as a “magnificent beggar,” who asked nothing for himself but who went begging for the people of Oregon.” During Sam Boardman’s 21-year tenure as the first State Parks Superintendent, the Oregon State Park system swelled from 6,444 acres of park lands to over 57,000 acres. More than 18,000 acres of that land were donated. Even more than they had been in the 1920s, donations were a critical part of building the state park system under Sam Boardman. One of his greatest assets was his ability to convince others that the preservation of land for future generations could be a powerful means of building a legacy. Boardman’s time as head of State Parks would coincide with a population boom in Oregon and in the whole United States, a rise in leisure travel aided by rapidly expanding highway systems, and two of the most famous tragedies of the twentieth century: The Great Depression and World War II. Boardman weathered a turbulent era of growth and change with his signature brand of amiable stubbornness and an unwavering love of scenic spaces.<sup>43</sup>

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43 “Park Dedication: Moment to Remember,” *Medford Tribune*, August 16, 1976, Folder: Retirement, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection, Oregon State Parks and Recreation, Salem, OR.

As the “magnificent beggar” secured scenic vistas and park lands, he also fought to create an ethos and legacy that he hoped would guide the state park system and its caretakers for the next 100 years. The Boardman ethos would emphasize reverent protection and preservation of the land over engagement and recreation. When Boardman was appointed, most of the Highway Department, which remained in charge of state parks, viewed scenic waysides and timber as an afterthought. Careful work from Robert Sawyer, Henry B. Van Duzer, Jessie M. Honeyman, and others had laid the groundwork for state parks, and had quietly crafted the patchwork system that Boardman inherited in 1929. When Boardman left office in 1950, the number of parks in Oregon had expanded from 46 to 151, and the state parks system had developed its own profile—with the lyrical, larger-than-life Boardman at the center of the frame. For better or worse, Boardman ran the parks as an extension of himself, rarely ceding control to anyone, and resisting the attempts of his superiors in government to dictate park procedures. As Marshall Newport Dana, a famed editor and longtime friend, would write on the eve of Boardman’s retirement: “other states have state parks superintendents. Oregon has Sam Boardman.”<sup>44</sup>

*If I Had a Third Arm, I Would Use It Only  
to Doff My Hat to Each Tree I Met:*

### **Sam Boardman’s Long Love of Trees**

Samuel Boardman was born in Lowell, Massachusetts in 1874 and lived in Wisconsin and Colorado before coming to Oregon in 1904. Previously a civil engineer on various construction projects, his early years in Oregon were spent as a homesteader in an arid portion of Eastern Oregon that now bears his name. Irrigation came too late to the area to make Boardman’s land profitable, and he felt he had to abandon homesteading for an engineering job with Oregon Highways. Although his early professional life was dedicated to the exacting work of a civil engineer, Boardman was also “born with a New Englander’s affection for trees.” Before he worked for the Highway Department, he planted and cultivated trees in Eastern Oregon. In the 1920s, he was one of only a handful of highway engineers who made beautification projects along roadways a priority. This yen for trees was emotional as well as aesthetic; as Boardman once wrote, “If I had a third arm, I would use it only to doff my hat to each tree I met. The stateliness, the serenity of a tree is the vitamin for troubled minds.” Boardman’s love of scenic landscapes was echoed in larger scenic conservation movements, particularly the environmentally-focused members of the Good Roads movement, but with Boardman it manifested first as a confluence of engineer pragmatism and settler romanticism. He saw the natural environment of arid Eastern Oregon as an incomplete landscape, and he toiled to replicate the shaded environment of his

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44 “Biography – Subject: Samuel H. Boardman,” June 15, 1950, Folder: Retirement, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; *Statesman Journal* Jan 27, 1953, 1 – 2; “The Oregon-Boardman State Park System,” *Oregon Journal*, June 5, 1950, Folder: Retirement, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers.



*These Russian olive and locust trees along Highway 30 between The Dalles and Ontario may have been planted by Boardman himself. That the non-native species grew at all in arid eastern Oregon speaks to Boardman's dogged nature: among other care and feeding, he surrounded some saplings with cacti to deter jackrabbits.*

childhood home in New England on the high desert he had moved to. But he was also passionate about preserving existing trees and forests. Boardman and his wife Anna Belle both donated their time and money to the Save-the-Redwoods League, with the Boardman family sponsoring several redwood groves over the years.<sup>45</sup>

Working under the Highway Commission in the 1920s, Boardman set to work planting trees along Highway 30, the “Old Oregon Trail.” The initial plan for the highway had focused on its history (discussed in Chapter 1). Boardman hoped to make it beautiful as well as historical. He dreamed of replacing the arid desert highlands with verdant tree-lined drive. The *Oregon Journal* described his somewhat madcap planting technique. “With what he called a highway hoopie, two barrels of water, a bucket, and an assortment of trees, Boardman started planting the most likely places along the highway from The Dalles to Ontario.” Around particularly vulnerable trees, he would plant a ring of cacti, saying “I am strictly averse to having the rabbit girdle my trees in any manner, but I’ll be damned if I am going to let them sit down to do it.” His hope was to create

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45 “Biography – Subject: Samuel H. Boardman,” June 15, 1950; John Clark Hunt, “Boardman Pushed Oregon Parks,” *Oregon Journal*, Aug. 21, 1962, pp. 1- 2, Folder: Retirement, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; Thomas R. Cox, *The Park Builders: A History of State Parks in the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 79, 82; Samuel H. Boardman Grove, Angeline Boardman Kirk Grove, Walter W. Boardman Memorial Grove, <https://www.savetheredwoods.org/donate/dedicate-a-redwood-grove-or-tree/dedicated-groves/>.

shaded resting spots for travelers and also increase the bird life in the quiet arid landscape. This was alteration, not preservation; Boardman's love of nature was for most of his life reserved for green spaces, not brown ones. But his attitude matched that of the other park builders of the 1910s and 1920s. It was this dogged determination to enhance the landscape that would attract the attention of Robert Sawyer and other park advocates later in the decade.<sup>46</sup>

In 1936, seven years after Boardman became Park Superintendent, the tree planting program in Eastern Oregon was officially halted, as the “[r]esults obtained [did] not appear to justify further expenditures in additional tree plantings.” Mourning the loss of his dream, Boardman wrote to his fellow engineer and conservationist R.H. (Sam) Baldock, comparing his tree-planting campaign to the early issues and criticism Baldock had faced while experimenting with a design for oiled roads (which was eventually widely adopted). Seeming to speak half of the highway department and half of himself, Boardman mourned “[h]ow difficult we find it to consider the pace of the snail; to believe and trust in things that are skeptical, to a certain extent, to our analytical minds.” But even in his disappointment he tried to evoke the necessity of conservation for posterity. In the same letter to Baldock, Boardman reflected on the importance of highways and (especially) parks as a means of “building an edifice that will honor you long after you are gone.” The shape of that imagined edifice changed over time for many people. By the 1930s, reflecting broader changes in conservation movement, Robert Sawyer had changed his views on the cultivation of non-native timber. As he wrote to Boardman:

*Years ago I shared the somewhat common belief that tree planting was a desirable thing to undertake on any highway. In recent years my opinion has entirely changed and I think now that tree planting almost anywhere along the highway is a mistake... As I remember, you were largely responsible for this planting and at the time I thought well of it. Now, however, it is my feeling that since the trees are not native and since their presence produces an incongruous effect in the desert setting they are quite out of place.*

Boardman, however, remained unconvinced.<sup>47</sup>

The shifting sands of conservation work was never more apparent than in Boardman's relationship with landscape alterations. As an engineer, Boardman believed firmly that land could be enhanced through trees and non-native wildlife. When he assumed his role as Park Superintendent, he urged all workers to protect the land as it was, rather than alter it for the comfort of the visitor—

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<sup>46</sup> Hunt, “Boardman Pushed Oregon Parks.”

<sup>47</sup> Samuel H. Boardman to R. H. Baldock, Aug 4, 1936, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; *Highway Research News* 34 (1969), pp. 10 – 11; Robert W. Sawyer to Sam Boardman, May 18, 1939, Folder 10, Box 3, Robert W. Sawyer Papers, Ax 100, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, OR.

but remained willing to alter environments whose “nature” he did not recognize. In his retirement, Boardman looked fondly on the work of planting trees as a means of communing with the landscape and focusing an eye on the future environmental health of Oregon.<sup>48</sup>

Boardman’s early dedication to trees never wavered, and was mirrored in his later dedication to the state park system as a whole. In the 1950s as he had in the 1920s, Boardman wrote: “Plant a tree and be a part of your continuity of tomorrow. Leave something of yourself in the planting of a tree that may speak for you when your lips have been stilled.” He used this notion of scenic beauty living on for generations as a way to raise money, acquire land, and inspire those who worked in parks. Boardman wrote, “one of the greatest friends of mankind is the tree. Talk about the dog being man’s best friend – there is no comparison. I know what trees will do – fight for you, never give up – for I lived with them in the desert.”<sup>49</sup>

### *The Job Was Waiting for Him:* **The Legend of Sam Boardman**

By the time Boardman retired, his name was synonymous with Oregon state parks. In a retrospective published in 1962, the *Oregon Journal* wrote of Boardman’s 1929 appointment to the role of what became Parks Superintendent that it was as though “the job was waiting for him.” Boardman’s own reflections, as was his wont, leaned towards the lyrical. In 1947, at arguably the height of his fame, he wrote (in third person):

*Through a pass of the Cascades some eighteen years ago,  
a native of Eastern Oregon sagebrush land entered... an  
enchanted land so picturesque that the visitor stood bewildered  
by its beauty. The visitor had been appointed State Park  
Superintendent. His billet—a park system for the state. To  
develop one in the valley of Shangri-La...*

Reality, as usual, failed to live up to Boardman’s prose. His appointment was less cosmically inspired than it seemed in reminiscences. When Boardman got the call to a meeting in Salem on August 6, 1929, he was working on a road-oiling crew with the Highway Department in Southwestern Oregon. There can be little doubt that he was awestruck by the beauty of the valley as he drove to the capital (this was a man who tipped his hat to trees). But Boardman was also worried that that he might be reassigned to some other onerous task—or even a desk job. He was pleasantly surprised by his appointment to head the

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48 Samuel H. Boardman to R. H. Baldock, Aug 4, 1936, Folder: Correspondence, Samuel H. Boardman Papers; *Highway Research News* 34 (1969), pp. 10 – 11; Robert W. Sawyer to Sam Boardman, May 18, 1939, Folder 10, Box 3, Robert W. Sawyer Papers, Ax 100, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, OR.

49 Samuel Boardman to Charles Sprague, May 1, 1950, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; “Guest Editorial: Sam Boardman,” *Oregon Journal*, July 20, 1950, *ibid*.

newly conceived State Parks program, effective immediately. But his initial title was Park Engineer, not Superintendent, and many on the Highway Commission assumed his job would be temporary. Destiny would require a lot of help.<sup>50</sup>

In the 1950s, as both men were facing retirement, Samuel Boardman and Robert Sawyer discussed this pivotal moment in 1929. Looking to solidify their legacies, each commented on the early need for a parks program. Sawyer wrote:

*... while Mr. Van Duzer [chairman of the Oregon Highway Commission in 1929] in the end was, as you say, very enthusiastic about parks, he was not at all enthusiastic when I first brought up in the Commission the proposal that we create the office to which you were later appointed... It was only after you were appointed to the position and with your personality and superb performance that Van became enthusiastic.*

Indeed, Robert Sawyer had been adamant that the park system needed a Superintendent in charge of parks, arguing strongly against management by commission or committee, which many on the Highway Commission had favored. Boardman agreed that his own role in the park system was made possible only after the hard work of Judge Sawyer to secure a position. He wrote, “I know only too well that you were the yeast that raised the Park Department into being.... Yours was the only move at the time to acquire a park system.” In fact, of course, both men had relied on the labor and support of many others, for popular support and practical application of their park plans. Like Sawyer had in the 1920s, Boardman would face an uphill battle for funding and recognition throughout his career. Unlike Sawyer, he would be able to do so from a stable position within the government—a position that he would steadily expand through his own tenacity and temerity.<sup>51</sup>

When Boardman was made head of the Park system, it consisted of 46 parks totaling 6,444 acres. Many of these areas had been obtained under the 1921 law that authorized the Highway Commission to acquire rights of way within 300 feet of the center line of the roadway. This law enabled the construction of roadside rest areas and waysides, which still made up the majority of the 46 parks that Boardman inherited in 1929. The law had been expanded in 1925, allowing for the preservation of scenic spaces and recreation grounds in addition to road waysides. The Oregon state park system had been increasing its holdings since Sawyer had joined the Highway Commission in 1927. Indeed, over half of what Boardman inherited came from the few years Sawyer and Van

50 Hunt, “Boardman Pushed Oregon Parks”; Samuel H. Boardman, “The Birth of a Park System: Our Scenic Beauty,” in “Oregon State Park System: A Brief History,” Samuel H. Boardman et al, *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 55 (1954): pp.– 179 – 233, esp. 181; Cox, *The Park Builders*, –54 – 55, 80.

51 Sawyer to Boardman, February 13, 1952, Folder 10, Box 3, Robert W. Sawyer Papers; A “State Parks Commission” was created in 1929, but met only once. See Lawrence C. Merriam, *Oregon’s Highway Park System 1921 – 1989: An Administrative History* (Salem: Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, 1992), p. 21; Boardman to Sawyer, February 19, 1952, Folder 10, Box 3, Robert W. Sawyer Papers; Cox, *The Park Builders*, 82.

Duzer had worked together at the end of the 1920s (see Chapter 1). From this growing foundation Boardman spurred an explosion of growth, increasing more than eightfold the land under the management of Oregon state parks. Boardman shifted from a strategy of conservation by subterfuge to a larger-than-life call for preservation, using the role of Parks Superintendent as a sort of bully pulpit to preach the value of nature.<sup>52</sup>

Boardman leapt into action as soon as he was appointed. After his official assignment was granted, he got to work, reading up on old correspondence and visiting acreage already under Highway control. By Thursday of that week, Boardman was driving through Bend in a borrowed car to confer with Robert Sawyer on the most immediate preservation needs in the state of Oregon. He never stopped moving, logging thousands of miles on his state-issued cars over the years. His only mandate was passed down from the short-lived State Park Commission of 1929, which had declared that their goal was to “create and develop for the people of the State of Oregon a state parks system, to acquire and protect timbered strips on the borders of the state highways... and to preserve the natural beauty of the state”—language clearly influenced by the wording of the 1925 law. Boardman latched onto this last notion, “to preserve the natural beauty of the state,” and that mandate would serve as a guidepost for him over the next 21 years.<sup>53</sup>

### *Keep That Which Is Placed in Your Care in Its Natural State:* **Developing a Park Ethos**

Sam Boardman’s legacy had two key facets. First, his was an era of acquisition. The state park system grew at an unprecedented rate during his tenure. Second, Sam Boardman worked to create an ethos that would guide how Oregon state parks would be acquired and managed. He saw his role as that of a protector of Oregon lands. Just as he had seen growing trees in the desert as a sacred duty, Boardman believed that it was his generation’s responsibility to protect Oregon from development so that future generations could enjoy natural spaces. This vision did not preclude visitors, but Boardman wanted those who visited state parks to treat nature with the same reverence that he did. Insufficiently solemn recreation he would try to curtail where possible; conservation would be the first priority. Boardman’s greatest strength in this goal was his prolific letter writing, his humorous memos, and his clear and unwavering belief that the natural landscape would act as a curative for modern life—that the “answers to a distressed world” could “be found in the God-given sermonettes of a park system.”<sup>54</sup>

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52 “Biography – Subject: Samuel H. Boardman,” June 15, 1950.

53 Cox, *The Park Builders*, 85 and 83.

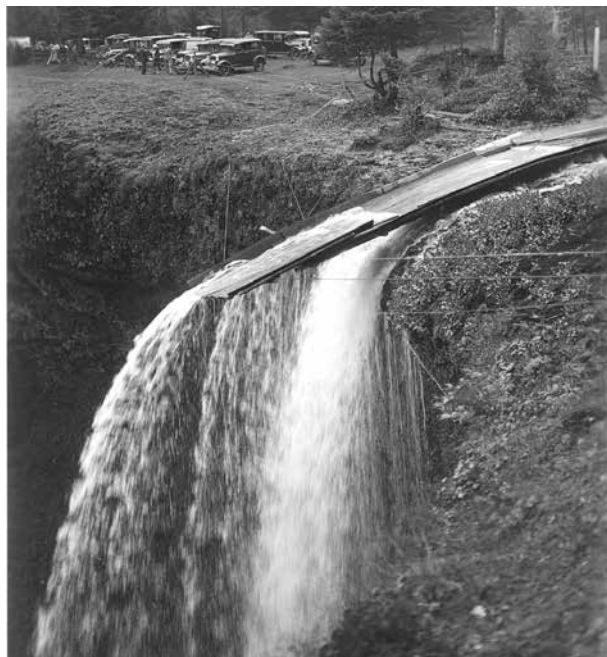
54 Boardman, “The Birth of a Park System: Our Scenic Beauty,” 182.

Key to Boardman's park philosophy was the desire to maintain the "wild" characteristics of the verdant landscape. This desire only grew as he became more enmeshed in his role, and he regretted actions that had marred the landscapes under his control. Early in his parks career, Boardman instructed his caretakers to cut a trail at Latourell Falls (in Guy W. Talbot State Park). He thought this would give park visitors a nice walk between the falls. But once the trail had been created he lamented that he had ruined Latourell Falls. In his attempt at display:

*The very foundation upon which depended the beauty of the entire picture has a great gash across it. The aesthetic sense of the individual curdled before reaching the beauty spot.... From then on, I became the protector of the blade of grass, the flower on the sward, the fern, the shrub, the tree, the forest.<sup>55</sup>*

He remembered this lesson for the rest of his years in state parks and regularly taught those coming after him to have the same respect for a park's natural state.

Boardman's notions of land preservation ran contrary to the views of many Oregonians who saw land as a means of profit, rather than a sacred space. In rural Oregon, landowners and communities sometimes resented the governmental encroachment that came with most early conservation initiatives. Rural and urban business interests often supported conservation as a means of promoting tourism, and thus prioritized development with conservation



*Crazy stunts, like pushing old cars over the falls, slowly disappeared, as the core parcels of today's Silver Falls State Park came to the state, piece by piece.*

55 Boardman, "Guy W. Talbot and George Joseph State Parks," in "Oregon State Park System: A Brief History," 196 – 198, esp. 198.



areas that would maximize profit. How the land was meant to be used, and by whom, was a contentious debate in Oregon, and Boardman's role placed him in the center of this controversy. Sawyer was first and foremost a booster of rural economic growth, and from that vantage point was still able to coax some support for conservation from those constituencies. Boardman more often alienated them. He had a visceral negative reaction against development, which he would maintain all his life, and that made him less willing to compromise than Sawyer. Boardman saw the damage that the development and commercialization of scenic locations caused, and he vowed to halt their spread.<sup>56</sup>

Boardman's fight against uncouth commercialization of nature came to a head several times at Silver Falls (eventually Silver Falls State Park). Perhaps the most egregious misuse of the natural world for recreation (in Boardman's view) occurred in Silver Falls before the state purchased any land. The property owner, D.E Geiser, would stage stunts as a means of cashing in on the waterfall attraction. As Boardman later recalled:

*[Geiser] built a low dam just above the lip of the South Falls, got a chap with an enclosed canoe ["Daredevil Al" Fausset]. Ran a wire through a ring on the bow of the canoe, anchored the wire to the bottom of the pool, a 184-foot drop. The voyager got into the padded canoe, the dam was pulled. The canoe failed to follow the wire, but turned sideways. The voyager was fished out with a set of broken ribs. The canoe demolished. Mr. Geiser couldn't get any more human guinea-pigs, so he built a track in the bottom of the creek, sent ancient cars over the brink for the plunge. These were Fourth of July stunts and drew very well. I believe the entrance fee was twenty-five cents.*

Acquiring the land from Geiser drew such extravagant stunts to a close, but Boardman still had to deal with what he called "pestiferous" property owners if he wanted to expand the park and make it the place of reverence he imagined. An unregistered concessionaire who advertised his trailside ice cream by means of a "bell with a resonance likened unto a bullmoose calling to its mate" was bad enough. A man named Fred Volz ran a honky-tonk next to the state picnic area, only 100 feet from the South Falls, was even worse. Bullmoose bells and honky-tonk music, Boardman believed, ruined the quiet introspection visitors—at least the *right* kind of visitors—expected. And Boardman was willing to play hardball, and to threaten with the power of eminent domain granted in 1921 but unused for parks until his tenure. The man with the ice cream bell was tractable, but Fred Volz initially rejected all offers. When Volz refused to sell at market price, Boardman later claimed, the streets around Volz's business were vacated. When he still didn't budge, his property was condemned. On the verge of a trial, Volz relented,

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<sup>56</sup> Lawrence M. Lipin, *Workers and the Wild: Conservation, Consumerism, and Labor in Oregon, 1910–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2007).

the honky-tonk closed, and the sonic landscape of Silver Falls would no longer be mixed with the sound of hawking wares or raucous music.<sup>57</sup>

Boardman entertained correspondents with stories of many such encounters, from noise of vendors to the sudden sighting, on his first visit to what is now the Devil's Punchbowl State Natural Area, of "a roly-poly brown bear" loosely chained to one of the park trees. Later in his career, when camping in parks was being debated, Boardman recalled these early encounters with crass commercialism. He could see no clear dividing line between a trod-upon campsite and a bear chained to a tree.<sup>58</sup>

To combat the human tendency to commodify the landscape, Boardman tried to fashion parks staff in his own image. He regularly sent out grand letters to caretakers expounding on the proper deference that should be shown to natural lands. The caretakers, those men who lived on park grounds and were in charge of all aspects of park upkeep, Boardman viewed as the most important among the staff to be imbued with his philosophy. In 1938, caretakers made \$80 dollars each month—at the time enough to support a modest living, but an insufficient wage with which to feed a family. For this rate they were the sole interpreters, rangers, maintenance men, and engineers for their parks. A caretaker at Cape Lookout in 1938 wrote of the type of work he was responsible for:

*The cleaning and grading and the bucking of the numerous windfalls was all done with hand tools. We used rope block and tackle (hand pulled rigging) to remove the sections of the windfalls blocking the route. We worked six days a week 8 hours a day for \$.50 (fifty cents) an hour and we were all glad to have a job. The only deduction from our monthly pay check was one cent per day for accident insurance. There was no overtime pay.*

When advocating a pay raise for caretakers three years later, Boardman detailed what was expected of them:

*A man should be qualified enough to pass on to the visitor information about the flora and forest cover of the park under his supervision. He should have personal qualifications wherein he can meet the visitor with courtesy and a park friendship. He should wear a uniform where he would be distinguishable to patrons of the park looking for information. A uniform on an*

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57 Boardman, "Silver Creek State Park," in "Oregon State Park System: A Brief History," 210 - 218, esp. 213; See also Jeff Brekas, "The Daredevil Al Story," *Trail's End: News from Silver Falls* (Summer 1995); J. M. Devers to R. H. Baldock, Nov. 21, 1932, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; Zeb Larson, "Silver Falls State Park and the Early Environmental Movement," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 112 (2011): pp. 34 - 57. As was typical for men of his generation and position, Boardman's classism could stray into racism—as in his reflexive assumption that "native hunters" were especially likely to set fires, and thus should be presumptively surveilled. See "Boardman to J. C. Ainsworth," Nov. 24, 1936, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers.

58 Samuel Boardman to Hon. J.M Dever, May 21, 1932, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers.

*officer has a tendency to keep the peace. I just haven't had the nerve to ask these caretakers to buy a suit out of the salary they are getting. On peak days I have no method of policing the parks. If I could get a higher type of man, a trustworthy man, I could have him made a deputy sheriff and secure at least a semblance of the law for emergency cases.*

First and foremost, Boardman taught his caretakers not to alter the landscape unless it was absolutely necessary to do so. He wrote to all caretakers:

*It is better to let the fern in a pathway brush against the hem of a skirt than to "citize" it with breadth and clearance. Within the fern is a touch of friendliness and understanding that is so often missing in a handclap. Keep that which is placed in your care in its natural state.*

Boardman preached reverence of nature above all else, and so expected his caretakers to act as the front line against those that would despoil his parks. This did not indicate an opposition to visitors, but rather a belief that those visitors would be best served by making friends with trees and enjoying the touch of ferns. He wrote, "The saving grace of a synthetical people lies in the naturalness of a hinterland, which in your case is the park under your supervision." Prioritizing nature over convenience, he thought, would be the best way to serve visitors.<sup>59</sup>

A large portion of Boardman's correspondence with his caretakers centered on the swift removal of graffiti, usually in the form of hearts and initials etched into trees. He wrote, "you will find the wayfarer who would design his initials upon the bark of a tree. To such, kindly refer them to the inner partition of a privy where their posterity inspirations will have the setting that their mental abilities rate." Boardman would always favor the destruction of the man-made, the park bathrooms, over damage to trees. He offered similar advice to The Pacific Telephone Company battling its own version of vandalism, noting sarcastically that some of the best American literature can be found carved into bathroom stalls,

*You cannot deter the actions of a knife point in the hands of youth, but you can direct it.... The Country privy is a national institution. More poet laureates have secured the fundamentals of their profession from country privies than obtained in later years from the curriculum of English universities... You may evolve levity from the foregoing. I was never more serious in my life. If I desired to create levity, I wouldn't be writing this in my office. I would have breezed it from a privy.*

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59 Records of Employment Sent to Personnel Director, Nov. 5, 1938, Folder: Retirement, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; Cape Lookout Photographs, Envelope 51, Folder: Cape Lookout, Box: Cape Lookout, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; Boardman to R.H. Baldock, March 11, 1941, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; Samuel Boardman to Park Caretakers, May 22, 1936, *ibid*; Samuel Boardman to All Caretakers of Oregon Parks, May 22, 1936, *ibid*.

Boardman's care for parks did not prevent him from a few well-intentioned jokes at the expense of the public he was preserving the lands for. Especially if they dared to desecrate his trees.<sup>60</sup>

Boardman's desire to focus on the conservation of greenery in the parks did not necessarily overwhelm his practical side. When he forbade cars from driving right up to Silver Falls (an act for which he never stopped getting complaints), he rerouted them to a donated parking lot, rather than banning them from the area outright. Boardman's pursuit of primordial perfection was leavened, when it had to be, by his perception of the possible—though he often dreamed impossible dreams.<sup>61</sup>

## *A Way for You to Keep Your Name Green Forever:* **Park Creation at a Time of Desperation**

When Sam Boardman was made head of parks in August of 1929, the world economy was already edging towards freefall—though few would notice until the stock market crash that October. Like nearly everyone else, Boardman had difficulty grasping the present or planning the future as the Great Depression set in. Writing to the recently ousted Sawyer in 1931, Boardman worried that “all Highway work is of an uncertain nature these days. My particular work seems to set upon a quick sand foundation. No one seems to really know where they are at.” Boardman nonetheless pushed for an ambitious program of acquisition. With little land and less money, with parks still seen as an extravagance by many, Boardman spent the 1930s crisscrossing the state, justifying the need for parks not only to the Highway Commission but also to Oregonians themselves.<sup>62</sup>

Funding from the gas tax was not enough to support Boardman's plans for expansion. The tax had been enacted in 1919 to support highways, and the park system had to compete with other highway priorities. Stretched thin before the Great Depression, highway budgets now had to deal with even more expenses—including new state highways projects that employed hundreds of jobless men with families. Highway Commissioner Henry Van Duzer was sympathetic to parks, but was reluctant to give them priority.<sup>63</sup>

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60 Samuel Boardman to All Caretakers of Oregon Parks, May 22, 1936, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; Samuel Boardman to General Manager, The Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Co., Feb 1, 1952, “Samuel ‘Sam’ H. Boardman, Oregon State Superintendent of Parks 1929 - 1951: Essays, Humorous Letters, Editorials and Published Articles 1922 to Present Times,” Samuel Boardman Papers Digital Collection, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection, Salem, OR [hereafter “Boardman Articles 1922 to Present Times”].

61 “Boardman, “Silver Creek State Park,” 211.

62 Samuel H. Boardman to Robert W. Sawyer, May 25, 1931, Folder 10, Box 3, Robert W. Sawyer Papers.

63 ODOT History Committee, “Oregon on the Move,” (Salem: Oregon Department of Transportation, 2013), Oregon State Parks and Recreation Digital Collection; Hugh Currin, “Albin Walter Norblad's Administration,” June 12, 1931, Folder: Official Papers of the Governor's Office, Albin Walter Norblad Papers, Ax 680, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, OR.

Public support was fragile. Once the hard times hit, state parks seemed like a luxury. Some still saw the forests and beaches as boundless, and were thus skeptical of the need for special protections parks could provide. Others put development ahead of tourism. While funds from the Highway Commission for acquisition remained sparse, Boardman saw in the tragedy of the Great Depression an opportunity to purchase land for a song from landowners suddenly in need of cash. There might not be much money for parks, but as land prices plummeted, more people were willing to sell on the cheap.<sup>64</sup>

Boardman's preferred method, however, was to wheedle, cajole, or sweet-talk donations of land or dollars from the movers and shakers of the time. Donations had been the mainstay of park acquisition since before the Oregon park system had existed, as far back as Sodaville in the 1890s, but Boardman was unusually successful—and audacious. E.R. Jackman, retired from Oregon State's Extension Service, recalled Boardman's approach to land donations.

*[He would say] you've got a lot of money, but you're going to die in a couple days, and no one will remember you. I have a way for you to keep your name green forever, and I'll even pay for it. All you have to do is give us a little land.*

There were reportedly 99 gifts of land for parks during Boardman's tenure, and many more sales below market value. Boardman's offer of immortality was appealing.<sup>65</sup>

Sometimes Boardman's sharp wit could turn cruel. In 1936, Sam Boardman wrote to R.H. Baldock bemoaning his latest struggles to acquire a land donation from an Oregonian. In this instance, it was former Highway Commissioner Carl Washburne, who had been Baldock's boss from 1932 to 1935. Boardman characterized a three-hour meeting in which he had attempted to coax Washburne into a donation as a "diatribe of dithering diarrhea," one that, once over, propelled Boardman straight to the liquor store. "He [Washburne] reiterated again and again. I can't think of half of the prattle. The phone would ring. People wanted to see him. It was the day before Christmas. I took it for three hours. He never wriggled up to the point, if any, until I turned the knob of the door." Given Boardman's own famed loquaciousness—he talked so much during Highway Commission meetings that even allies like Sawyer suggested that he instead send his reports in writing—complaints about Washburne's "prattle" are especially striking. The land Boardman was asking for did eventually become Carl G. Washburne Memorial Park—in 1962, after both men were dead.<sup>66</sup>

64 Joel Havemann, "He Gave Us Our Parks," *The Sunday Oregonian*, Jan 2, 1966, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers.

65 Joel Havemann, "He Gave Us Our Parks.," Samuel H. Boardman Monument Dedication Program, Aug 7, 1970, Folder: Monument Dedication, 1970, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; Lawrence C. Merriam, "Oregon Parks and the Evolution of Forest Policy," March 2, 1987, p. 1, unfiled, Oregon Parks and Recreation Collections.

66 Samuel Boardman to R.H. Baldock, Dec. 28, 1936, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; Cox, *The Park Builders*, 83.

Many of Boardman's early acquisitions centered on the Oregon Coast along Highway 101, already widely seen in Oregon as a wonder of aesthetics and a magnet for tourists (see Chapter 1). But where businessmen, boosters, and even some of his fellow conservationists praised the draw of the Oregon Coast Highway's "1001 wonders," Boardman feared what might follow the tourists. He looked to the East Coast and southwards to see the type of damage that he wanted to avoid, disparaging the New Jersey and California coasts alike as ravaged by commercialization:

*Today the Atlantic coast is shacked from end to end. There is no place where the air is washed clean, no place that is free from the ugly design of the hand of man, where one can stand in silence in the midst of the soul building of our Maker. The shore line of California is "hot-dogged" and "beer-parloured."*

Boardman saw Oregon beaches as the single most important area for acquisition, not only for coastal communities, but for the state as a whole. And time was of the essence, as he wrote in 1936:

*Already shacks and signs are beginning to show their ugliness. It seems to me one of the outstanding acquisitions to be made in the State today. There is no scenic road in the world today to compare with it. Its preservation consists mainly of land alone. The opportunity in its preservation is before us. How to put it over is still to be worked out. Its preservation means as much to Ontario, Bend, Boardman as it does to any coastal area.*

The coast had long spurred conservationist thinking, since at least Governor Oswald West in 1913. But Boardman's plans included more than the beaches—particularly since the stated reason for the preservation of the tideland, to serve as a public highway, had been superseded by U.S. 101. Pointing to the high costs paid for public shores in other states, Boardman spent much of his time and energy trying to preserve as much of the coast as possible parkland under his control—the beaches, the birds, the views, and (of course) the trees. This devotion also revealed his priorities. In ignoring Eastern Oregon for the first decade of his superintendency, Boardman furthered the alienation some rural communities felt towards the emergent state parks system and revealed his disaffection for deserts and similar spaces (though he slowly came around in the 1940s).<sup>67</sup>

Boardman didn't battle alone, although his outsized personality sometimes made it look that way. Private citizens continued to play a vital role in advocating for the park system. One newspaper noted:

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67 Samuel Boardman to Mr. J.C. Ainsworth, June 30, 1936, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; Boardman to Sawyer, September 16, 1936, Folder 10, Box 3, Robert W. Sawyer Papers; Samuel Boardman to Mr. J.C. Ainsworth, June 30, 1936, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers.

*Sam has had some valiant helpers in the long struggle to make the people of Oregon appreciate their scenic values. We remember particularly the three ladies whom we have sometimes called the three musketeers: the late Jessie Honeyman, Mrs. Rockey and Mrs. C.S Jackson. Many is the time we have seen them move into battle with Mr. Boardman to persuade reluctant legislative committees to enact necessary and protective laws and to supply indispensable appropriations.*

More than a “valiant helper,” Jessie Honeyman had been fighting her own state-wide battles for preservation before Boardman had even been appointed. Her work with the Good Roads movement and Garden Clubs had helped to spur public support and parks legislation in the 1920s, reflected in the laws giving garden clubs an advisory role in beautification with native plants in parks and along roadsides. Already well-versed in Good Roads activism, Honeyman established the Oregon Roadside Council in 1931, which was affiliated with the National Roadside Council. This organization shared Boardman’s vision of preservation, but focused more minutely on protecting roadside timber and prohibiting billboards, especially along coastal areas. When Boardman needed a hand, Honeyman was happy to stump for more state parks. She also masterminded public relations campaigns of her own, particularly her long fight for billboard regulation. Like Boardman, she loved trees and hated garishness. Late in his career Boardman would write of Honeyman, “She took great interest in the protection of our waysides. She labored on their behalf.” In addition to advocacy, civic organizations often provided for small park developments, like picnic tables and water fountains—elements of parks that the conservation-minded Boardman was less likely spend time or resources on, particularly during the Great Depression.<sup>68</sup>



*Jessie Honeyman established the Oregon Roadside Council, and worked tirelessly to keep Oregon’s waysides scenic.*

68 “Sam Boardman, Park Evangelist,” *Capital Journal*, June 18, 1950, “Boardman Articles 1922 to Present Times.” Cox, *The Park Builders*, 91; Jessie M. Honeyman, Oregon Council for the Protection of Roadside Beauty flyer, March 28, 1933, Folder 26, Box 2, Robert W. Sawyer Papers; Samuel H. Boardman to Robert W. Sawyer, September 11, 1936, Folder 10, Box 3, Robert W. Sawyer Papers; Cox, *The Park Builders*, 87.

Private citizens' help was vital in part because Oregon State Parks in the 1930s had to punch above its weight. Boardman's projects had an outsized presence in the public eye, but he estimated that in the late 1930s he had perhaps ten people working full time on parks, including himself. His narrow focus on acquisition and preservation was in part a product of the small size of his dedicated workforce. In the early years of his career, Boardman could know all of his parks and employees personally.<sup>69</sup>

Boardman's latter-day reputation is partly due to his mastery of the press. In addition to surrounding himself with (and sometimes creating) civic-minded conservationists, Boardman never met a newspaperman he wouldn't chat with, regularly giving interviews with the *Oregon Journal*, the *Oregonian*, *National Geographic* and others that wished to learn about Oregon's natural resources. The plight of Oregon's scenic spaces and Boardman's single-minded resolve to fix it was a regular newspaper feature. Sawyer was not the only Oregon newspaper editor taking a leading role in conservationist causes. When Boardman was reflecting on his career in 1950, he wrote to Marshall Newport Dana, editor of the *Oregon Journal*, that "[t]he individual from a potent standpoint is a nonentity. With the help of his brother, he builds, and you surely have been my brother." Boardman recognized that he was strong, in other words, only because of the help he received.<sup>70</sup>

Boardman needed every ally he could get. Particularly during the Great Depression, some members of the Highway Commission were loath to expand the park system, no matter the bargain prices or even flat-out donations. They feared the maintenance costs, and the optics of taking on such projects in such desperate times. After his retirement, Boardman described one particularly testy exchange during the acquisition of Ecola State Park in 1932, when he went before the Highway Commission in front of a crowd of 300 people:

*Before I could explain why Ecola Park should be accepted, one of the Commission [Henry F. Spalding] jumped to his feet and proceeded to give me one of the most complete verbal tongue lashings my august person has ever been decorated with. Times were tough at this time and the Commissioner thought it sacrilege to be spending money for parks when people were tottering on the verge of starvation. His face was as red as mine was white. In some manner, I feathered my wings until the gust passed by. The Commission then voted to accept the park.*

Spalding was right that Boardman could be callous when it came to the poor—particularly those whom he deemed undeserving. Early in 1931, a day

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69 Lawrence C. Merriam, "Oregon Parks and the Evolution of Forest Policy," March 2, 1987, pp. 1 - 3, unfiled, Oregon Parks and Recreation Collections.

70 Samuel Boardman to Marshall Dana, June 6, 1950, "Boardman Articles 1922 to Present Times."



laborer wrote to the highway department hoping to procure one of the hundreds of new highway jobs first created under Governor Norblad to combat the Great Depression. These jobs were reserved for men with families, and this laborer had none. Boardman, a hardworking, well-educated member of the middle class, expressed no sympathy. He wrote back berating the man: “The fact that you are bereft of succor is the fault of your past action. Why have you not taken a wife?” Boardman suggested instead that the unemployed man live by fishing and hunting—or just gain sustenance from the air, “peppered with the paprika of life its very self.” There would be neither job nor help on offer. Boardman kept a copy of this correspondence, as was his custom when he was particularly proud of the witticisms he’d constructed. The desperate day laborer likely found Boardman’s jokes about eating air less amusing.<sup>71</sup>

Although he had plenty of clashes with state officials over spending priorities, the losses that Boardman regretted most came at the hands of the federal government. He wrote to Robert Sawyer regarding one such failure at Quartz Mountain, where Boardman had been unable to broker a deal to protect hundreds of acres of privately-held timber along the highway.

*I am enclosing two pictures taken on the summit of Quartz Mountain on the Klamath Falls-Lakeview Highway. I took one picture, the virgin forest of 300 years to the East. I turn in my tracks and the other picture to the West, chaos, devastation. The work of a day of the woodman’s axe. Once a scenic area to charm the passing traveler. What assininity [sic] to construct a road system second to none and then stand by while the very panes of the windows of our souls are shattered in a million pieces.*

The Quartz Mountain issue haunted Boardman, and he placed the blame squarely on the Forest Service’s inability to protect roadside timber. He viewed the involvement of the federal government on forest management as a necessary evil but scoffed at the notion that any Washington bureaucracy would know what was best for Oregon lands.

*We ask not for land or timber, though a foreign government impoverishes us, but we do ask that Government bring forth that timber which is in the background until it fronts our highways for that of private holdings. It is so little to ask for. It means so much to the future wealth of the State of Oregon. Quartz Mountain failures must not be the composite of our biographies.*

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71 Samuel H. Boardman, “Ecola (The Whale) State Park,” in “Oregon State Park System: A Brief History,” 206–210, quotation on 209; Samuel H. Boardman to Grattan L. Hoffman, Feb 2, 1931, “Boardman Articles 1922 to Present Times.”

Particularly, Boardman was frustrated by what he saw as federal inflexibility. Trading federal land away from the highway for private land abutting it, he believed, would have kept the aesthetic beauty of the roadside without diminishing the timber harvest.<sup>72</sup>

The federal government's perceived mismanagement of land would frustrate Boardman throughout his career. Although he is remembered for the land he was able to save, Boardman was constantly attempting more ambitious acquisitions to protect himself from a Quartz Mountain legacy. Boardman's moxie garnered praise from his mentor, even when progress was slow. Judge Sawyer would comment to Boardman in 1939, "The mills grind slowly, but certainly the product as a result of your effort is very satisfactory." Boardman, however, was never satisfied.<sup>73</sup>

### *More or Less of a Hand-to-Mouth Operation:* **The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in Oregon Parks**

The Great Depression brought cascade of calamities. Poverty, hunger, and fear stalked the lives of most Americans. For the Oregon state parks system, there were bright spots amidst this bleakness. The economic downturn of the Great Depression allowed for the cheap acquisition of lands, and some of the economic assistance that followed as part of the New Deal could flow to the state parks system. But Great Depression also threw Oregon into a period of uncertainty, increased federal oversight, and contradictory goals among politicians, conservationists, and staff over the future of the parks system. These conflicting goals would come to a head in responses to the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC would favor development and access to parks, rather than preservation of "untouched" landscapes. Federal involvement came with a new increase in funds to develop parks, but, as Boardman was quick to note, these funds came with new strings attached.<sup>74</sup>

As the Great Depression worsened in the early 1930s, the Roosevelt administration cooked up an alphabet soup of "New Deal" welfare programs meant to pull the United States out of global economic tailspin. Sam Boardman viewed the new programs with skeptical optimism. He hoped that Roosevelt could cut through the kind of smothering bureaucracy at the Forestry Department that Boardman blamed for the Quartz Mountain episode. "The red tape that they spin," he wrote to Sawyer, "may be likened unto the softest of plush. Its strands are as its forest. Numberless as to units." These hopes were swiftly

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72 Boardman to Sawyer, June 1, 1932, Folder 10, Box 3, Robert W. Sawyer Papers; Boardman to Sawyer, June 1, 1932, Folder 10, Box 3, Robert W. Sawyer Papers; cf. Reub Long and Ron Shay, "Interview: Reub Long on the Management of Central Oregon's Rangelands," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 88 (1987): pp. 183 – 195.

73 Sawyer to Boardman, Dec. 4, 1939, Folder 10, Box 3, Robert W. Sawyer Papers.

74 Neil M. Maher, *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).



*Building a footbridge in Silver Falls State Park.*



*Foundational stonework for today's South Falls Lodge at Silver Falls.*

*The CCC in Oregon's parks reflected Boardman's disdain for development, focusing on access roads, trails, and bridges, instead of buildings. Yet, the CCC and WPA influence remains evident in the majestic architecture and stonework at a number of Oregon State Parks.*



*The finished Lodge, 1940.*

dashed. Roosevelt's conservation initiatives instead produced even more federal oversight of individual state programs. For parks, the most significant of these Depression-era initiatives was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).<sup>75</sup>

The CCC was a voluntary work relief program aimed specifically at young men. These men were paid \$30 a month, a portion of which they were required to send back to their families. For this wage, they performed manual labor throughout the country. In Oregon, where the first CCC camps were founded in 1933, work included roadside cleanup, road construction, and park landscaping. The Oregon program would have 17 camps in total, each with 200 enrollees. In addition to providing employment for young men and income for their families, Roosevelt believed that fresh air, manual labor, and camaraderie would provide moral fortitude to the generation coming of age in one of the darkest periods of American history. Like Boardman, Roosevelt firmly believed in the strength of the natural world to heal the wounds of humanity.<sup>76</sup> Writing about this program, Boardman said:

*The governmental CCC movement has expanded its youth uplift throughout the terrain of the state. The birth of its inception was inspired with the lofty conception of lifting the flagstone wanderer to his place in the sun. Through the thought and its birth have come the most bewildering display of red tape administration that any government could 'best mind' into actualities.*

Boardman's frustration with federal oversight was at war with his firm belief that nature was good for the soul. He was sure that the young men of the CCC (particularly those corrupted by too much time in urban spaces) would be better for their experience, though he focused on moral uplift rather than economic survival. He was less convinced, however, that Oregon parks would survive the onslaught.<sup>77</sup>

Boardman wanted the labor of CCC workers, but only on his own terms. He hoped the program would focus on the construction of roads and bridges that were beyond the capacity of the cash-strapped Oregon highway system. The CCC camp administrators wanted an opportunity to develop the

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75 Boardman to Sawyer, Jan. 30 1933, Folder 10, Box 3, Robert W. Sawyer Papers.

76 Roosevelt believed the CCC could solve three issues facing the United States during the Great Depression: rampant unemployment, environmental degradation, and the moral decay of the largely urban youth population. See Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 19–29. For more information on Roosevelt's views on conservation during the Great Depression, see Sarah Phillips, *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For a brief summary of the CCC and WPA in Oregon see William G. Robbins, *Oregon: This Storied Land* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 2005), 117–120.

77 Sarah Baker Munro, "The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the New Deal: Oregon's Legacy," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 109 (2008): pp., 304–311; William G. Robbins, "Surviving the Great Depression in Oregon," *ibid.*, 311–317; William A. Lansing, *Camps and Calluses: The Civilian Conservation Corps in Southwestern Oregon* (North Bend: Self-published, 2014); Samuel Boardman to R.H. Baldock, date unknown, "Boardman Articles 1922 to Present Times."

park themselves through buildings, trails, and concession areas. Boardman was reluctant to subject his parks to a central plan, even one in which he had authorship. The CCC administrators were unwilling to have their priorities dictated by a single obstinate state official. Mark Astrup, who worked on the CCC program in Oregon and would later become Park Superintendent from 1960 - 1962, remembered that “Mr. Boardman, of course, was interested in getting access to the parks, such as at Ecola and Saddle Mountain and such, but the CCC program was not supposed to be a road program.” CCC workers would be involved in improvement projects in 45 state parks between 1933 and 1942, but the tension between CCC administrators and Boardman never fully eased.<sup>78</sup>

Boardman was used to having control over his parks, overseeing all construction and working with engineers he trusted and caretakers he had trained himself. The CCC camp officials were likewise accustomed to acting as foremen on their own projects. Astrup remembered,

*Boardman was always very reluctant to let anyone else do any planning of development in the Oregon State Parks. That presented a great problem because its rather difficult to bring 200 young boys into a camp without a program or any plans with which to work, so it was more or less of a hand-to-mouth operation.*

Boardman’s status as the father of state parks stood in the way of successful partnerships. Astrup’s vision for parks (“accommodate visitors without despoiling the natural character of the park”) was not so different from where Boardman usually ended up landing—at worst a matter of degree rather than an intractable difference. But Astrup’s attempts to find a middle ground were fruitless. Years later, he recalled a specific incident in what became Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park (around 1935, when it was still called Waohink Park):

*I went down, without any responsibility for having to do so, and spent a whole day cruising that park through that underbrush and salal, huckleberry and everything else. I met [Boardman] the following day and began to talk with him as to my recommendations, and he turned and walked away.*

It was difficult for Boardman to make compromises when he was unwilling to even make conversation.<sup>79</sup>

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78 Chester H. Armstrong, *History of Oregon State Parks, 1917 - 1963* (Salem: Oregon State Highway Department, 1965), 42; Mark Astrup, “Interview with Mark Henry Astrup, Third Superintendent of Oregon State Parks,” Interview with Elisabeth Walton Potter, May 9, 1981, p. 7, Folder: Administrative History—Oral History—Mark H. Astrup, Superintendent 1961 - 1962, Box: Staff Biographies and Oral Histories, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection. Boardman did have some success getting roads to parks built with New Deal funds, particularly through the National Recovery Administration—see Samuel H. Boardman to Aubrey R. Watzek, Dec 5, 1933, Folder 29, Box 1, Robert W. Sawyer Papers.

79 Astrup, “Interview with Mark Henry Astrup,” 4 - 6, 10.

Boardman tried to instill his park philosophy in the CCC Superintendents just as he did with his caretakers, demanding both a respect for his authority and a respect for the lands themselves. To one such administrator, Sam Bellah, he wrote, “Before work may start on road, trail, building, bridge, forestry, or any item contained within the application of your camp, I desire to go over said work with you in person.” Although Boardman was unimpressed with the administration of CCC initiatives, he was also adamant that the workers of the CCC be treated in a way that maximized their well-being and moral instruction:

*Your first thought should be for the welfare of the boys, physically, morally, and most of all, mentally. Most of these boys have been taken from a walk of life where the flagstones are worn smooth, the accompanying border of a picket fence. Little in life has been their lot, still they are the grout and mortar that will adheal (sic) the stones of the foundation of tomorrow... The intent of the CCC movement is the uplift of the American youth. You have a cross-section of American youth containing two hundred lines. How you weave these lines through the loom of your stewardship is your greatest duty.*

He insisted that these principles be respected by all that entered his parks. Just as he warned his caretakers not to remove an errant fern, he informed federal officers that they could not improve upon nature, nor should they try:

*Don't think for a minute you can cut down and replace with your hands something better... whether it be a bush or tree in your way-side clearing, your wooded lot, your picnic area, LEAVE IT. Only the dead debris should be removed and buried. If you can't go into a forest without blazing the trees to find your way out, don't go in.*

Boardman warned Bellah that “[w]astage through carelessness is your written order for dismissal.” The purpose of this seeming threat to a man over whom Boardman had no tangible authority is unclear. Perhaps Boardman simply assumed that his own horror at excessive tree clearing would be shared by any reasonable person.<sup>80</sup>

Boardman saw red tape and frustration everywhere. Casting aside Sawyer’s caution, he campaigned for an independent Parks Department under his sole control in the 1930s, only to be rebuffed. Power over the fate of Parks became more important to Sam Boardman than securing regular funding sources. Instead he faced a proliferation of oversight—the Oregon State Planning Board (established in 1935) and the various government organs it created produced a

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80 Sam Boardman to Sam Bellah, November 5, 1934, “Boardman Articles 1922 to Present Times” [emphasis in the original].

number of studies and reports, solicited new experts for new kinds of advice, and (Boardman feared) added still more of the “red tape [which] fritters so much time in Governmental work.” The new state-level central planning organs mirrored the proliferation of federal programs. The Civilian Conservation Corps was later widely embraced by the country, and has been lauded by historians as the birthplace of the environmental movements that would follow in the 1970s. The Works Progress Administration, another New Deal program, produced formative reports on state historic and recreational assets. But Sam Boardman was suspicious of the oversight that came with these ambitious programs, and of central planning generally. He believed that it was the individual on the ground—namely, one Samuel H. Boardman—who knew what Oregonians needed.<sup>81</sup>

Indeed, Boardman viewed most federal supervisors who dared to enter his parks as virtually an invasive species. When these “walking boughs of ivy enter our wilderness,” he wrote, “I immediately get the itch.” Those responsible for hiring CCC workers were a “mélange of governmental porch climbers [who] interwind their lean fingers into a potpourri of pork seeking job hunters.” Oregon, he complained at another point, was besieged by “a passing horde of Washington tentacles.” But his arsenal of metaphors could not stop the tide.<sup>82</sup>

Boardman, a self-taught environmentalist, was suspicious of any expertise that was not his own, and was reluctant to change his views even as understandings about ecosystems and wilderness evolved. “I am of the outdoors, the woods,” he proclaimed. “[I] desire to keep them as they are.” But just as he resisted the shift away from the planting of non-native trees along roadways, Boardman railed against conservationist measures not of his own making. “I have fought for weeks for the removal of shoreline logs that jeopardize the safety of boating,” Boardman wrote in one of several letters to R. H. Baldock complaining about the CCC, “only to be overpowered by a wildlife technician who favored the retention of the logs for the hideout of the pollywog and fingerling.” This was an inversion of sorts; Boardman was trying to alter the natural environment to allow for greater access for boaters, while the federal technician insisted on protecting natural habitat. For all his talk of honoring the natural landscape as it was, Boardman restricted that honor to particular kinds of nature. Boardman’s near-infinite love for the trees, the ferns, and the birds did not extend to the humble pollywog.<sup>83</sup>

Probably the most conspicuous example of the Civilian Conservation Corps in Oregon State Parks was at Silver Falls. The CCC camp was established in 1935 and was first occupied by young men; in the next decade, returning

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81 Samuel Boardman to Mark Astrup, Nov. 16, 1936, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; Cox, *The Park Builders*, 98–99; Armstrong, *History of Oregon State Parks, 1917–1963*, p. 27; Maher, *Nature’s New Deal*, esp. 225–226.

82 Samuel Boardman to R.H. Baldock, Dec. 2, 1936, “Boardman Articles 1922 to Present Times.”; Samuel Boardman to R.H. Baldock, date unknown, *ibid.* Boardman was more forgiving when it came to long-term National Park employees, whose expertise he trusted more.

83 Samuel Boardman to R.H. Baldock, Dec 2, 1936, *ibid.*

veterans would be put to work there. In Silver Falls alone, the CCC completed 88 park projects that ranged from sewer and road work to the construction of buildings that still exemplify rustic architecture in the state. The federal government would fund 97% of the projects in Silver Falls, investing \$410,000 in the betterment of this park alone—nearly as much as the entire yearly budget for Oregon State Parks in the era, and far more than Boardman could ever have hoped for from the state government in a time of economic catastrophe.<sup>84</sup>

The years softened but did not melt Boardman’s distaste for the CCC. In his posthumously published memoir he seemed to concede that “without the aid of the CCC boys, our parks would have been years in arrears in their development.” But to him the most important thing was the effect of the outdoors on the young workers:

*To me the greatest thing is not the amount of work that has been done, but the salvaging and building of the future cornerstones of the Nation.... The CCC movement has been worth every cent it has cost, even if not one lick of work had ever been struck, and may I say here that wonderful work has been done.*

Despite this new enlightened outlook on the hard work of “the CCC boys,” Boardman still couldn’t help but make one last jab, in 1949. In a narrative report to the National Park Service, he wrote that in one park “[new] painted fog posts replaced old and decadent CCC pole constructed guard rails.” Guard rails might be necessary in Sam Boardman’s parks, but they certainly would not be “decadent.”<sup>85</sup>

Compared to many other institutions during the Great Depression, the Oregon state parks system prospered in the 1930s. Boardman’s aggressive (and successful) pursuit of lands—first along the valley and the coast, eventually in eastern reaches of the state—gave the Oregon parks system a large, unwieldy, and eclectic array of parks compared to years previous. Despite the hard times, the masses of tourists that Sawyer had dreamt of and Boardman dreaded finally showed up, as the new Travel Information Board claimed an increase from 300,000 to 800,000 out-of-state visitors a year between 1935 and 1941. Federal monies had paid to build conveniences that Boardman was unlikely to push for and the Highway Commission was unlikely to pay for. And then the war came.<sup>86</sup>

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84 Samuel Boardman to C.H. Armstrong, Nov. 1951, 5, Folder: W.A Langille Articles, Folder 3 of 4, Box: Publications - W.A Langille Articles The Oregon Motorist, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection.

85 Boardman, “Ecola (The Whale) State Park,” 209; Samuel H. Boardman, “Narrative Report Oregon State Parks 1948 For National Park Service,” 4, Folder: Annual Report to NPS – Statistics, Acreage and Expenditures, Box: Chester H. Armstrong Papers.

86 Cox, *The Park Builders*, 96 – 97, 100; Ernest P. Leavitt to Henry F. Cabell, Nov. 8, 1941, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers.



## “*The Handicap of Our Times*”: World War II and the Oregon State Parks

As Sam Boardman dealt with budget constraints, expanding federal agencies, and unending work in acquiring Oregon’s treasured scenic spots, the United States was entering World War II. This conflict shaped the 1940s, and propelled a period of unprecedented economic prosperity in the years that followed the war’s end. But in 1944, Boardman described the war period as “the handicap of our times.” The far-reaching impact on the state park system can be easily seen in attendance and acquisition reports. After a mix of steady and rapid growth, even during the hardest years of the Great Depression, the park system slowly ground to a halt, a victim of gas rationing, closed oceanside parks, and a focus on wartime austerity.

Even before the United States formally entered the war, world events had sent attendance tumbling. In 1940, there were 2,070,238 visitors to Oregon State Parks; in 1941, that number dropped by a staggering 72% to 583,473. Beyond the business of running the state park system through challenging circumstances, the magnitude of the war was never far from Boardman’s mind. Writing to his old friend and ally Jessie Honeyman, Boardman first filled her in regarding the latest in park construction and acquisitions, then turned to the war raging across much of the rest of the world. “Do you know of someone who will give me a million dollars? I could use it to such a good effect to secure living things, instead of destructive things like bombs and shells.” Boardman wrote in frustration over the United States’ slow response to Hitler’s march through Europe. “As a Nation, we have hidden behind the horizon of a dipping ocean. The water to our eyes is as the sand to the ostrich. Wishful thinking will not stop Hitler from cleaning up Europe.”<sup>87</sup>

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Oregon’s resident population (as Boardman explained to the National Conference on State Parks) “immediately turned its attention to the business of the war.” Visitor counts slipped further, dropping another 31% to 402,506 by the end of 1942. Military enlistments and defense jobs disrupted family life while gasoline and tire rationing, plus speed restrictions, severely curtailed recreational travel. Oregon’s parks, built as adjuncts to the highway system, were hit hard. Many towns had not yet recovered from the economic downturns of the previous decade, leaving restaurants and hotels closed even before the start of the war.<sup>88</sup>

On top of a general decrease in travel and leisure, parks along the coast were closed to the public and turned over to the military for defense purposes. During the war, Boardman wrote to California State Parks asking, “What is the

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87 Samuel Boardman to Jessie M. Honeyman, April 14, 1941, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers.

88 Samuel H. Boardman, “A 1942 – 1943 Report on Oregon’s State Parks to the National Conference on State Parks,” Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; Eckard V. Toy Jr., “Oregon At War,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 102 (2001): pp. 413 – 433, esp. 425 – 428.



*Visits to parks nosedived as the nation turned to war. Coastal parks were closed entirely for security and national defense use.*

army doing to National and State Parks in California? They are raising more or less heck with my parks, especially along the coast line.” Cape Arago State Park and Yaquina Bay State Park, which were at the mouth of harbors and therefore strategically important, were requisitioned. Other points along the Oregon coast, from parks to lighthouses to giftshops, were used as lookouts and patrol stations. The majority of these were opened again early in 1945, but lookouts along the coast continued until Japan’s surrender. At times, parks used by the army to house returning soldiers. In Oregon, soldiers were placed at Shore Acres State Park for recuperation. And the war tragically encroached on Oregon State Parks when a B-17 Bomber returning to its Pendleton base crashed in Cape Lookout on August 2, 1943, killing 9 American soldiers in training.<sup>89</sup>

Amidst the horrors of World War II, Boardman did not lose his taste for wit. In the summer of 1945, with the war having come to a close, he wrote one of his famous memos to all caretakers. Rather than reminding them to care for the parks, watch out for vandals, or appreciate the scenic values of Oregon, Boardman archly urged vigilance against Hitler’s coming invasion. Conspiracy theories about the whereabouts of Hitler and other top Nazi officials were regular

<sup>89</sup> Cox, *The Park Builders*, 101; Samuel H. Boardman, “1943-1944 Biennial Report of the State Parks Department,” Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; Laura Jane Gifford, “Shared Narratives: The Story of the 1942 Attack on Fort Stevens,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 116 (2015): pp. 376 – 383; Folder: Bomber Crash, 1943, 1 [entire], Box: Cape Lookout, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Collection; see also *Fallen Fortress at Cape Lookout* (film), Dir. Tim King, Oregon Public Broadcasting, 1993. The Look-Out on Cape Foulweather, which became a part of the Oregon State Parks system in 2013, was a giftshop/coffee shop “improbably perched” at the edge of the Oregon Coast. The Coast Guard saw the strategic potential of the panoramic views, and the giftshop was requisitioned (with full support of its owners) from 1942 – 1944. See Oregon State Historic Preservation Office and Chrissy Curran, “The Look-Out on Cape Foulweather,” NRIS No. 14001159, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Nov 20, 2014 (listed Jan 14, 2015), esp pp. 1, 17.

reading following Hitler's suicide and Germany's surrender in 1945. Boardman's pet theory was that he had taken a submarine through the Bering Strait and would use Oregon as a landing site. It was up to the caretakers, Boardman drily suggested, to prevent invasion. "Being a porch climber by profession, you should be fully alerted against any park entry by Hitler in the parks under your supervision." He warned that although the fugitive Hitler would likely have shaved his characteristic mustache, his German accent would still give him away.<sup>90</sup>

As with nearly every aspect of American life, the normal day-to-day of Oregon parks was transformed during the war, but returned only gradually to an altered normalcy after it. Park acquisition had slowed but not stopped, visitation had dropped but not disappeared, and Boardman's ethos of frantic acquisition and conservation was hindered but not halted by exigencies of the war. As the United States and Oregon entered a boom in the postwar period, Oregon state parks under Boardman faced greater strains than ever before.

### *Betterments Are in the Blueprint Stage:* **An Ethos without a Plan**

Boardman and the cadre of caretakers he trained had transformed Oregon state parks from an afterthought to an institution in the span of a decade and a half, but the "Father of State Parks" was increasingly struggling to keep up with the times in the late 1940s. Boardman's growth binge had not stopped during the war, and only increased afterwards. However, the prosperity that followed the war brought an unprecedented number of visitors to state parks, and the new popularity of overnight camping exacerbated the strain on park facilities. Boardman's ethos of minimal development bent under the pressure rising attendance, and his lack of a cohesive long-term plan came into high relief. Boardman's struggle to balance the calls for rapid improvement with his fear of overdevelopment would define the last years of his career.

In 1945, there was a "immediate and marked increase [in visitation] following the abolishment of gas rationing." Oregon state parks weren't alone; tourism ramped up across the American West following the end of World War II. Wartime industry had brought hundreds of thousands of people to the coast. The growing middle class had more money and more vacation time than ever before. Roads were improving, and automobile ownership was becoming common. The two-week summer road trip quickly became, as historian Hal Rothman put it, a "badge of middle-class status." Parks that had already been crowded in the prewar era were again too small to accommodate visitors. Construction of amenities had virtually halted during the war, and partially-built projects were often in a state of disrepair. Boardman noted that "betterments are in the blueprint stage, and scheduled for the new year, provided the material necessities

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90 Samuel Boardman to All Coastal Caretakers, Aug. 3, 1945, "Boardman Articles 1922 to Present Times."

are obtainable.” By 1947, park attendance had bounced back almost entirely to the numbers in the pre-war era.

In the following years, these numbers would continue to grow, rapidly taxing the park system that Sam Boardman had cultivated. As more and more families flooded the parks, notions of recreation and scenic spaces were changing. Parkgoers increasingly wanted campgrounds, bathrooms—even running water and electricity! Boardman’s final five years as Park Superintendent required him to change his own ideas of how parks should be used. However, Boardman was still required to meet at least the letter of the law, building parks adjacent to roadways and with a focus on scenic space. In a letter requesting information on his park system, Boardman acknowledged the limitations of this park mandate:

*The State Highway Commission is the State Park Commission. A legislative act authorized the Commission to acquire ‘recreational areas adjacent to, along or in close proximity to state highways, and high are so situated as to be accessible to and conveniently reached by and from state highways.’*

Because of this guideline, the “wild” spaces of Oregon—the vast forests and out-of-the-way landscapes—were usually managed by the Forestry Department, to varying degrees of success, as had been seen with Quartz Mountain. Boardman noted that every effort was being made to keep his parks as scenic as possible, and this included a prohibition on overnight camping. Still, Boardman’s letter, written in 1948, conceded that the tide might be turning. His parks, which he called “sermonettes,” might be required to adapt. He feared, however, that any change to his parks would come, not for the benefit of future Oregonians, but as a means of capitalizing on the land. He wrote, “I have been criticized often by those who are commercially inclined.”<sup>91</sup>

For Boardman, this commercial inclination manifested in concessionaires and, worse yet, overnight camping. Writing to R.H. Baldock, Boardman noted that with camping “grass will turn to the dust of the earth, bush and foliage will wither and [only] stunted stumps will remain.” Boardman’s solution (he thought) was simple: let tourists stay in private facilities and visit his parks as a day trip. During a visit through the vast California state parks system Boardman wrote snidely to Sawyer:

*First, I want to say that the California Parks don’t hold a candle to ours. Second, I thank God that I have not destroyed the beauty of our parks thru development. They are utterly*

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91 Samuel H. Boardman, “1945-1947 Biennial Report of the State Parks Department,” Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; Boardman to Ernest Griffith, Oct. 27, 1948, *ibid*; Many preservation efforts distinguished parks completely from wilderness spaces, seeing them as fulfilling fundamentally different functions. Kevin R. Marsh, *Drawing Lines in the Forest: Creating Wilderness Areas in the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009); Boardman to Ernest Griffith, Oct. 27, 1948, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers. For information on the tourism boom of the postwar era, see Hal Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-century American West* (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1998), chap. 8, esp. 202 – 204.

*destroying theirs, National and State, thru over development in the very heart of their scenic setting. Commercialism, get the money, seems to be their motto.*

Boardman's stance on camping and his militant fight against over-developing park systems was by necessity softened during his final year as Park Superintendent in 1950. His last budget before retirement earmarked funds for the development of overnight camping in three parks: Willowa Lake, Silver Falls, and Sunset Bay. The office of the Governor had reservations as to whether the law would allow for this type of development with highway funds. Boardman, to justify his decision, pointed to the long string of acquisitions and decisions that might have stretched the original intention of the law, but that had bettered Oregon parks. He argued that "there is need of a strong park department for the preservation and development of the present system."<sup>92</sup>

Boardman was grudgingly willing to allow his park lands to adapt to the changes the postwar era brought. However, because most parks had been acquired without camping in mind, the land was sometimes not up to the task. Mark Astrup was hired as Assistant Parks Superintendent in 1946 and noted these changes in park management. Astrup recalled that there was not a forward-thinking plan for development, and parks were not always large enough or well-suited for camping or other park amenities.<sup>93</sup>

Astrup saw this lack of access as a huge issue for maintaining public support of the park system. Boardman, Astrup said:

*was preserving the natural features, and I don't think he ever appreciated the fact that he had to have public backing if it were ever to go beyond that point. And at some point, there would be antagonism aroused by people not having access to the areas.*

Boardman had focused on conservation and scenery. Astrup argued that public support could be maintained only with access. If Oregon didn't adapt, it ran the risk of falling behind. In 1949, overnight camping in state parks nationwide increased 33%, as more states moved to accommodate tent and trailer camping.<sup>94</sup> Oregon State Parks also began to adopt new kinds of sites. Parks already run by the state were put under its purview, like Champoeg (in 1943) and Sodaville (in 1947). Other history-centered parks followed, like Collier Memorial State Park, which was acquired in 1945 and prominently featured a museum of logging equipment. Predictably, Boardman began pushing for more robust preservation

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<sup>92</sup> Cox, *The Park Builders*, 100; Boardman to Sawyer, March 22, 1941, Folder 10, Box 3, Robert W. Sawyer Papers; Samuel Boardman to Governor Douglas McKay, March 3, 1950, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers.

<sup>93</sup> Astrup, "Interview with Mark Henry Astrup," 8.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*; "Analysis of State Park Statistics—1949," Folder: Annual Report to NPS – Statistics, Acreage and Expenditures, Box: Chester H. Armstrong Papers.

measures only loosely connected to recreation, like the conservation of bird habitats at Cape Lookout (starting in earnest in 1941) or the creation of the Darlingtonia State Natural Site (began in 1946). The nature of these diverse sites required more robust interpretation and education within the park system. Prior to the mid-1940s, educational signage about scenic spaces was limited to highway markers and monuments. It was in these new historic and biological spaces that signage about the area's importance and history became commonplace, particularly when the often informal network of volunteer interpreters could not keep up with demand. These interpretive efforts would continue to expand, creating a fissure in the 1960s and 1970s over whether or not a Park Ranger was, at their core, an educator or a maintenance technician.<sup>95</sup>

The growing pains of this era continued as Boardman's staff and their responsibilities seemed to continuously increase, especially following the war when delayed maintenance and construction projects were re-started. In 1945, there were 5 Salem office employees and 32 field employees, only 27 of which were year-round. By 1949, the State Park system was divided into 5 districts. There were 16 office staff, 43 caretakers, and 21 laborers that worked year-round. There were also 61 temporary laborers, and 30 - 60 workers for day jobs each year. Over this short period of time, the fulltime employees working on behalf of Oregon State Parks increased from 32 individuals to 80. In addition, Boardman noted, "there was an unusual amount of surface improvement and building activity carried on, and much new development was accomplished, as well as caring for the increasing and more exacting public that frequent[ed] the parks."<sup>96</sup>

As staff size increased, so too did the number of projects that Oregon State Parks would tackle. Boardman wrote in a report to the National Park Service, "much of the generally used state park system underwent a process of face-lifting that was pleasing to the public; but always done with due consideration for the preservation of the natural beauties of the affected areas." Astrup (whose philosophy was almost identical) remembered that Boardman had a tough time ceding control to his new staff. This included Astrup himself, at the time the Assistant Superintendent of Parks:

*I would sometimes visit a park and make recommendations for the caretaker to do this or that, and those recommendations would normally be countermanded within a day or two. It was not a very satisfactory arrangement, because Mr. Boardman would not allow anyone else to accept any responsibility. So you had chiefly a feeling of being a figurehead and of accomplishing nothing.*

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95 Cox, *the Park Builders*, 97 – 98; OPRD-Statewide Interpretive Committee, "Statewide Interpretive Services Program White Paper," July 1993, Folder: Administrative – Park Planning – Interpretation – Interpretive Planning, 1988 – 1993, Box: Planning – Interpretation and Bicentennial, Oregon Parks and Recreation Collection.

96 "Analysis of State Park Statistics—1949," Folder: Annual Report to NPS – Statistics, Acreage and Expenditures, Box: Chester H. Armstrong Papers.

Boardman was determined to impose his singular ethos on the Oregon state park system for as long as he ran it. That wouldn't be much longer.<sup>97</sup>

## *Spavined Old Maverick:* **Samuel Boardman Leaves His Post**

In 1950, Sam Boardman retired from the State Parks system. Between 1923, six years before he took over parks, and 1947, three years before he retired, Boardman had driven 452,097 miles in a state car, very nearly enough miles to drive to the moon and back. He was known as the “Father of Oregon Parks,” not just because he was the first Superintendent, but because he had shaped the ethos and public persona of the park system so profoundly in his own image it would be hard to separate the two. As Park Superintendent, Sam Boardman was unable to stand still and unable to cede control of his parks to the federal government, or even his own staff. And now, as the country was finally finding its footing after years of depression and total war, he was being asked to take his state-mandated retirement, and distrusted the “young colts” who might be eager to put their own stamp on Oregon State Parks. Sending news of his reluctant retirement to the new chairman of the Highway Commission, Boardman wrote in his usual wry style:

*I am enclosing correspondence in the form of a death sentence pertaining and relating to yours truly. I think Civil Service is perfectly proper and that spavined [broken-down] old mavericks should get out of the way for up and coming colt... [but] it seems so unfair to be classed by an organization that you have been a part of for 30 years, helped build that organization, to be super-DUPED when your step has lost some of its spring.*

Before he would step down, he wanted to make sure that those who would replace him knew how the lands of Oregon ought to be treated. Informed of his impending retirement in 1949, Boardman asked for another year to wrap up the loose ends of his position—and was given half that. As he wrote to a friend, “I have just received a reprieve of six months from the Retirement Board before taking the pathway to the lethal chamber.” Still, Boardman was determined to use this time to gather his papers, publish his most influential letters and reminiscences, wrap up a lifetime of labor for conservation—and try to ensure his posterity.<sup>98</sup>

97 Astrup, “Interview with Mark Henry Astrup,” 10. Lawrence C. Merriam, who crafted an influential 1989 history of Oregon State Parks, elsewhere said of Boardman’s leadership that “as in a dictatorship, all authority and policy emanated from him, or the Highway Commission through his manipulation.” Merriam, “Oregon Parks and the Evolution of Forest Policy,” 10.

98 State Highway Commission to Boardman, July 24, 1947, Folder: Retirement, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; Boardman to Ben Chandler, May 10, 1950, *ibid*; Boardman to Marshall Newport Dana, Jan. 4, 1950, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; L.H. Warfield to Samuel Boardman, Dec. 7, 1949, *ibid*.

Chester Armstrong, a career engineer in the Highway Department, was chosen as Boardman's successor. Boardman hoped to shape the new superintendent as he had shaped a generation of parks personnel. In a letter to Armstrong meant for the public eye, Boardman wrote:

*In your hands has been placed a Master's design untarnished of subject matter that the artists of the past centuries would have given their all to have canvassed... You will be the Administrator of a scenic Kingdom beyond compare. You are a trustee of an estate comparable to none in Oregon. You rule an estate for an unborn generation. The paintings have been made. From your cabinet, may you create a frame in keeping with the treasures left in your command.*

Boardman would regularly refer to his parks as places where individuals could go to be in the presence of divinity. This form of quiet awe that Boardman so favored was being rapidly eclipsed by camping and "loafing" (See Chapter 3). Boardman still fought for reverence over recreation. In his final weeks in office, Boardman worked to make sure that everyone would remember his dictum: that state parks were not for profit, or empty pleasures, but for the betterment of future generations.<sup>99</sup>

Boardman reminded his caretakers of their own limitations when it came to improving upon the lands that they were charged with:

*It will soon be 20 years that I have been gathering parks and waysides for the state of Oregon. Time has about run thru my course, and another 20 years will not be for me to fulfill. Thru the years I have gathered unto the state, creations of the Great Architect. Guardedly, I have kept these creations as they were designed. When man enters the field of naturalness, the artificial enters. Remember you never can improve on the design... Your hand can conserve what I have builded [sic] thru the years... In so doing you will be director in keeping the recreational kingdom that has been a part of me thru the years.*

Boardman wanted his caretakers to act as extensions of himself, even after he had departed.<sup>100</sup>

This sense of ownership would shape Boardman's legacy and frustrate successive Park Superintendents. Boardman cast a very long shadow. Astrup recalled "He always regarded the areas as his, though, not particularly the public's or the Commission's—they were his, and he regarded them in that manner and

99 Samuel Boardman to Chester H Armstrong, Dec. 28, 1948, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers.

100 Samuel Boardman to All Caretakers, Feb. 15, 1949, Folder: Correspondence, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers.



was rather jealous of whatever development was accomplished.” Still, when an ally on the Oregon Roadside Council suggested a Samuel Boardman Trail to honor his legacy, Boardman was quick to demur. “We are known by our deeds,” he wrote, “not the perpetuation of a name plate.” This may have been modesty, as Boardman did not meaningfully protest the naming of Samuel H. Boardman State Park (later Scenic Corridor) after he retired in 1950. One wonders what those donors whose names Boardman had promised to “keep green forever” through just such nameplates and namesakes would have thought.<sup>101</sup>

Boardman’s retirement in 1950 was an event, reported in all the papers and noted by Governors past and present (including Oswald West, who sent a letter of support). One newspaper wrote that “Sam Boardman has spent the best years of his life coaxing the people of Oregon to do some of the things they ought to have had sense enough to do without being told.” Boardman had focused his energies on donations, creating connections with fellow Oregonians, and becoming an amiable figurehead for the Oregon State Park system. He was described in 1946 as “a great-framed, white-haired man who occasionally gives the impression of looking like a kindly polar bear in a long overcoat.” When Boardman’s writings were gathered and posthumously published in the *Oregon Historical Quarterly* in 1955, a forward was written by friends at the Portland Chamber of Commerce, who, in 1954, took Chet Armstrong to task for not living up to Boardman’s legacy (See Chapter 3). Boardman’s accomplishments were all the more impressive, they argued, given the resources he was denied. “Lacking adequate public finance, he turned to private sources with outstanding results. Lacking an adequate work force, he turned to the men assigned to emergency relief projects. He proved with highly tangible results that resourcefulness, enthusiasm, and vision are as essential to a state parks system as money and construction.”<sup>102</sup>

Boardman and Sawyer continued to make plans for parks, and spar over visions, even after Boardman retired. Living up to his title as the doting father of state parks, Boardman believed that the Oregon system had outgrown the cradle that the Highway Commission could provide, even if leaving meant unsteady funding. He wrote, “The parks system has come of age. It has risen to third place in state increment. The time has been reached when its importance should be recognized. Its development and enlargement should be of the first consideration.” Boardman was convinced that the parks system could not survive if it was required to justify itself to the Highway Commission in charge of the

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101 Astrup, “Interview with Mark Henry Astrup,” 8; Samuel Boardman to Mrs. Daniel Heffner, Aug. 5, 1946, “Boardman Articles 1922 to Present Times.”

102 Boardman Monument Dedication Pamphlet, Folder: Boardman Monument Dedication 1970, Box: Samuel H. Boardman Papers; Oregon State Parks Highway Commission State Parks Department Expenditures, June 30, 1949, Folder: Retirement, *ibid.*; “Sam Boardman, Park Evangelist,” [Newspaper unknown], “Boardman Articles 1922 to Present Times.”; Paul Hauser, “Sam Boardman: Collector of Oregon Beauty Spots,” *Oregonian* (published as *The Sunday Oregonian*) Nov. 10, 1946, p. 64; Thornton T. Munger *et al.*, “Preface: Oregon State Park System,” in “Oregon State Park System: A Brief History,” 179 – 181, esp. 181.

purse strings. He believed that “park men” should manage parks, not “highway men,” and thus that parks needed a secure and separate funding source, one that could not be seized for road improvements at the Commission’s whim. Writing privately to Robert Sawyer in 1952, after his retirement, Boardman proclaimed:

*The time has come where there should be a Park Department separate from the State Highway Commission. There is only one other state in which the Park Department is under the Highway Commission. A Park Commission should be composed of members who know park values... At the time you set up the park system, you took the only method where funds could be obtained for acquisition. The park budget has now grown into about a million a year.*

Sawyer, as usual, responded pragmatically. He departed from Boardman less in his ethos than in his estimate of the economic outcomes. The growth of the parks budget in the post-war period did not mean, for Sawyer, that such growth would continue if Oregon state parks had to stand alone. He replied to Boardman:

*I hope that someday we may have a State Park Commission, although the difficulty of financing its operations when they are set up apart from the operations of the Highway Commission may be too great. After all, the fund phase of the park activity is most important.*

Both men embraced preservation and pragmatism. Where they differed was in their perceptions of what was possible.<sup>103</sup>

Three years after retirement, in January 1953, Sam Boardman died in his home in Salem. The state government paused to honor his memory, and he was buried among his trees in Boardman, Oregon. In 1970, the Samuel Boardman State Scenic Corridor (the core of which was the old Samuel H. Boardman State Park) would be dedicated along the Oregon Coast, an area he had been especially desperate to save from the hands of construction and commercialization. In gathering his thoughts on the system he had created, Boardman would write, “My prayer to those who read this is - never sacrifice His works that the commercial hot dog and its odors may take over.” Expressed as usual through his satirical wit, Boardman here shared what he hoped would be his legacy: let some places stand separate from modernity, so that Oregonians might rest their minds.<sup>104</sup>

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103 Sawyer to Boardman, May 8, 1952, Folder 10, Box 3, Robert W. Sawyer Papers; Boardman, “Owyhee: A Recreational Area of Promise,” *ibid*; Boardman to Sawyer, Feb. 19, 1952, *ibid*.

104 Boardman, “Birth of a Park System,” 182.