A Taste of Sowbelly and Saleratus Biscuit: Gifford Pinchot's Arkansas Adventure

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GIFFORD PINCHOT HAS LONG BEEN CONSIDERED the "father" of American forestry. In 1898, Pinchot became chief of the Division of Forestry (a predecessor to the modern-day Forest Service) and helped build the fledgling agency into the leading federal mechanism for forest conservation. In one capacity or another, Pinchot's support and guidance helped Presidents Grover Cleveland, William McKinley, and Theodore Roosevelt (a close friend) establish and expand what would become the National Forest system, including the Arkansas (now Ouachita) and Ozark National Forests, created in 1907 and 1908, respectively. Pinchot's many protégés staffed a growing number of forestry programs, and he sent friends and contemporaries like Samuel J. Record and Frederick E. "Fritz" Olmsted to help implement scientific forestry on public and private lands. Bankrolled by the Pinchot family, the Yale Forestry School emerged as the premier forestry institute in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century.[1] Early Yale faculty members like Herman Haupt Chapman and R. C. Bryant helped to prod portions of the timber industry towards sustainability and, hence, permanence. But in 1891, Pinchot was just a wide-eyed novice exploring many of the forests of his native land for the first time, and his journeys would bring him to Arkansas.

[1]Fervent conservationists, the Pinchot family provided a large endowment to establish the school in 1900; James G. Lewis, "The Pinchot Family and the Battle to Establish American Forestry," *Pennsylvania History* 66 (Spring 1999): 143-165.

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Gifford Pinchot in the 1890s. Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston. *Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-83207.*

Pinchot had been born into an influential Connecticut family just after the Civil War.[2] Because of his family's affluence, Pinchot could attend Yale University and then pursue, with his father's encouragement and blessing, a career in a profession so obscure in the United States that he had to travel to Europe for his technical education.[3] When he returned from L'Ecole Nationale Forestière in Nancy, France, as the first American formally trained in forestry, Pinchot faced a predicament. Since most citizens

[2]M. Nelson McGeary, *Gifford Pinchot—Forester, Politician* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 7.

[3]Outside of a few lectures or abbreviated courses, "true" forestry (as opposed to botany or horticulture) was not offered collegiately in the United States until the late 1890s, when the first formal programs appeared at Biltmore, Cornell, and Yale; Herbert A. Smith, "Forest Education before 1898," *Journal of Forestry* 32 (October 1934): 684-689.

in 1890 viewed the virgin forests of North America either as a limitless resource or an obstacle that needed to be cleared for "higher" uses such as agriculture, they had little desire to manage their timber for the future and even less to hire some European-trained upstart to tell them how to do it.

Fortunately for Pinchot, his family's wealth allowed him to further his career by traveling with Dr. Bernhard Eduard Fernow, a Prussian-born and trained forester who was the chief of the Division of Forestry in the U.S. Department of Agriculture.[4] In January 1891, the brusque Dr. Fernow invited the young forester on an excursion to the bottomlands of eastern Arkansas to observe the timberlands and lumbering operations of the South. Having just completed a report on the Pennsylvania white pine lands of the Phelps, Dodge Company, Pinchot accepted the non-paying trip: "Dr. Fernow had been asked to examine a body of hardwood timber in the overflow lands of the Mississippi in eastern Arkansas. Very kindly he invited me to go along. Here was an open door to learning a little more about the United States."[5] Although brief, this trip is interesting for what it reveals about Pinchot at the beginning of his career in terms of both his personal and professional development.

Before their widespread commercial and agricultural exploitation, the hardwood-dominated forests of the lower Mississippi River Valley had impressed many observers, including the writer Thomas Bangs Thorpe who, in 1840, romantically penned:

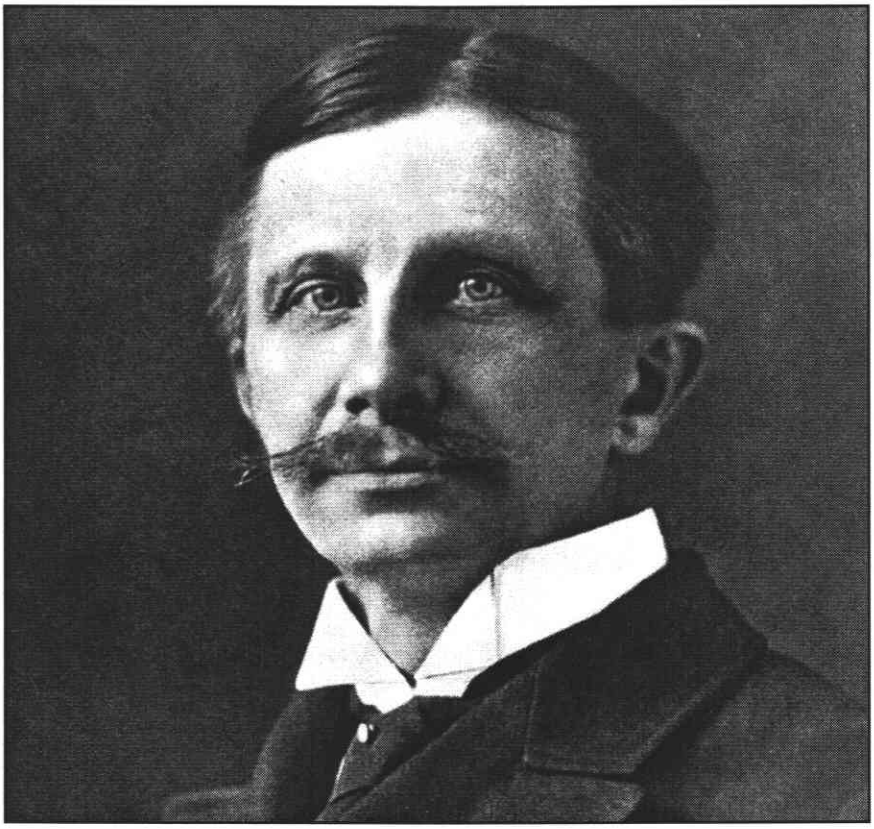
> Gigantic trees obstructed my path, and as I cast my eye upward, my head grew dizzy with the height; here, too, might be seen dead trunks shorn of their mighty limbs, and whitening in the blasts of years, that appeared, dead as they were, as mighty as the pillars of Hercules; and I could not help comparing them to those lone columns of fallen temples, that occasionally protrude themselves above the ruins of Chœps and Thebes.[6]

With the exception of areas along the railways and a few of the major rivers, most of these hardwood forests had not experienced any significant

[4]McGeary, *Gifford Pinchot*, 24-25. Fernow is also sometimes dubbed the father of forestry in America. He encouraged Pinchot to study other professions such as horticulture to ensure that he would have marketable skills to fall back on.

[5]Gifford Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1947), 37. Rather than alluding just to the "Sunk Lands" along the St. Francis River, Pinchot referred to the entire region of northeastern Arkansas prone to flooding by the Mississippi River and its tributaries as the "overflow" lands.

[6]Thomas Bangs Thorpe, "Primitive Forests of the Mississippi," in *A New Collection of Thomas Bangs Thorpe's Sketches of the Old Southwest*, ed. David C. Estes (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 94.



Dr. Bernhard Fernow sponsored Gifford Pinchot's 1891 trip to Arkansas. *Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-49489.*

clearing by 1890. The big yellow poplars and black walnuts of Crowley's Ridge had largely been cut by the time of Pinchot's visit, but eastern Arkansas still contained extensive tracts of virgin timber dominated by oak, hickory, gum, baldcypress, elm, ash, and numerous other species.[7] Many

[7]*Goodspeed's History of Craighead County, Arkansas* (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1889), 310; R. Ellsworth Call, *Annual Report of the Geological Survey for 1889* (Little Rock: Woodruff Printing, 1891), 2: 186-194; William Trelease, "The Swamps of South-Eastern Missouri," *Garden and Forest* 10 (September 22, 1897): 370-371; John C. Nelson, "Presettlement Vegetation Patterns along the 5th Principal Meridian, Missouri Territory, 1815," *American Midland Naturalist* 137 (January 1997): 86-90; Harold K. Grimmett, "Early Plant and Animal Communities of the Arkansas Delta," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 48 (Summer 1989): 105-106.

of these trees reached truly imposing size, if Frederick Gerstaecker's description can be believed: "the trees grow to a colossal grandeur—I have seen some measuring seven, eight, and even nine feet in diameter."[8]

But Fernow and Pinchot did not travel this distance just to enjoy the spectacle of Arkansas timber. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, there was growing interest in the developing lumber industry of the largely untapped forests of the South. Vast stands of virgin oak were still to be found there, and oaks were particularly vital to the American economy during this period. Domestic and European demand for barrels, carriages, and ships, for instance, had decimated white oaks in the eastern United States.[9] But in Arkansas and other parts of the South, most oaks had only been harvested for local use, primarily for staves, production of tannin for leather manufacture, fuelwood, and railroad ties.[10] Given his work on the mechanical properties of wood during this period, Fernow might have come to Arkansas to investigate the suitability of white oak grown in the South for use in carriages. As early as the 1860s, the chairman of the Arkansas Agricultural Bureau touted the value of white oak for "mechanical purposes," such as wagons and plows. Apparently, though, some uncertainty remained about the ability of white oak from southern timberlands to serve in this demanding application.[11]

[8]Frederick Gerstaecker, *Wild Sports in the Far West* (London: George Routledge & Co., 1856), 177.

[9]Andrew Denny Rodgers, III, *Bernhard Eduard Fernow: A Story of North American Forestry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 186-195; Karl [Charles] Mohr, "The Hardwood Forests of the South," *Garden and Forest* 1 (March 14, 1888): 34-35; Charles Mohr, "Hard-wood Timber in the South," *Garden and Forest* 6 (January 11, 1893): 21-22; R. Ellsworth Call, "Notes on the Native Forest Trees of Eastern Arkansas," *Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science* 1 (1887-1889): 82-83. Oaks from the white oak subgroup are preferred for barrel making because the vascular structure of the wood makes it impervious to leakage; A. J. Panshin and Carl de Zeeuw, *Textbook of Wood Technology,* 3rd edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 1: 569-572.

[10]Call, *Annual Report of the Geological Survey for 1889*, 184, 195-196; Mohr, "Hardwood Timber," 21; *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas* (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1889); *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Eastern Arkansas* (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1890).

[11]Caleb Langtree, "Arkansas—Its Advantages to Immigrants," *De Bow's Review* 3 (January 1867): 68 [quotation]; William G. Robbins, "Federal Forestry Cooperation: The Fernow-Pinchot Years," *Journal of Forest History* 28 (October 1984): 164-173; Rodgers, *Fernow*, 189. "White oak" can refer to the true white oak (*Quercus alba*) or any of a number of related species, including post oak (*Quercus stellata*), bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*), overcup oak (*Quercus lyrata*), chinkapin oak (*Quercus muehlenbergii*), and swamp chestnut (cow) oak (*Quercus michauxii*). The structural and mechanical properties of species within the white oak subgroup are virtually impossible to distinguish, so it has been common practice to lump them together when wood products are discussed; J. Frank Keeley, *Arkansas and Her Resources: Facts and Figures from Every County in Arkansas* (Little Rock: Little Rock Publishing, 1915), 13; Panshin and de Zeeuw, *Textbook of Wood Technology,* 1: 569-572.

A virgin oak-dominated stand in Arkansas similar to the forests investigated by Pinchot and Fernow. *Courtesy Library of USDA Forest Service.*

The only two detailed sources for Pinchot's Arkansas trip are his diary and an autobiography, both published many years later.[12] Neither is an ideal source—his autobiography is a retrospective account written over fifty years later, and, unlike many of his contemporaries, Pinchot was neither a diligent nor copious diary keeper. His published diaries contain gaps covering days, months, and even years, and rarely did any of his daily musings for the two-week period encompassing his Arkansas adventure exceed more than a couple of lines.

Pinchot left New York City by train and, on January 18, 1891, arrived in Memphis, Tennessee, where he was to rendezvous with Fernow. In the early 1890s, Memphis was not a particularly impressive urban center. Periodically wracked by disease, it could hardly have seemed destined to become a key hub in the burgeoning hardwood tim-

[12]Harold K. Steen, ed., *The Conservation Diaries of Gifford Pinchot*, (Durham, NC: Forest History Society, 2001), 11, 64-65; Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*. Presumably, the differences between his diaries and autobiography are explained by the fact that the latter was written over fifty years after his Arkansas trip and was intended to tell the public of the growing pains of the new profession of forestry, including those of its early participants, rather than report the details of any given junket. Regrettably, I could find no contemporary references to Fernow or Pinchot in local newspapers published during their visit.

ber trade of the lower Mississippi River Valley.[13] Pinchot's diary entry for the day was less than enthusiastic: "Reached Memphis 2:40 p.m. Hole in the ground at first sight. Pavements awful . . . red mud, shanties & niggers the foremost features."[14] The use of a racial epithet by Pinchot might seem out of character, but he also referred to some white inhabitants in condescending terms. Later on this trip, Pinchot wrote in his diary that the people of the Jonesboro area were "very kind & entirely friendly to strangers, [though] very coarse & rough. On the 'chaw terbacker' order." He was "[m]uch struck by the awful shiftlessness & poverty of the Piney Woods natives, the Poor White Trash" in reference to some of the inhabitants of southern Alabama.[15] Notably, these disparaging comments about people Pinchot encountered are not included in his autobiography. The elitism expressed in his diary might have simply reflected the naiveté of a strongly opinionated youth raised in privilege. Yet it was also characteristic of his age. Pinchot would later champion the rights of average citizens as a devoted Roosevelt progressive, but it was not unusual for this stripe of reformer to wish to uplift but be simultaneously contemptuous of or appalled by members of the lower orders.[16]

Pinchot was not disappointed when he received a letter from Fernow the next day instructing him to leave Memphis and proceed directly to Jonesboro, Arkansas, to begin the inspections. On January 20, Pinchot spent $2.40 on a "pleasant" train ride to Jonesboro. Always studious and adventurous, he reveled in this short trip. "Saw cypress & its knees for first time in a satisfactory way," he noted in his diary, while in his memoir he recalled:

> At Memphis I had my first glimpse of the Father of Waters, and in the Arkansas bottoms, which were then a refuge for criminals,

[13]Jim Cortese, "Memphis: The Hardwood Capital," *Southern Lumberman* 193 (December 15, 1956): 137.

[14]Steen, *Conservation Diaries*, 11.

[15]Ibid., 65. Northerners and foreign adventurers (even urbane, "enlightened" ones) frequently denigrated people and life in the rural South, although this was not universally so. Charles B. Spahr's 1899 trip to the Jonesboro area suggests that some recognized the industriousness of Arkansas farmers and the hardships faced by African Americans. Michael B. Dougan, "Uncle Bill Ishmael and Butch Dickson Receive a Northern Visitor," *Craighead County Historical Quarterly* 19 (January 1981): 3; Charles B. Spahr, "America's Working People," *Craighead County Historical Quarterly* 19 (January 1981): 5-13; Robert Cochran, "Hanged By His Friends—The Image of Arkansas in Early Travelers' Reports," in *The Early Republic: The Making of a Nation—The Making of a Culture*, ed. Steve Ickringill, Zoltán Abádi Nagy, and Aladár Sarbu (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1988), 191-196.

[16]Steen, *Conservation Diaries*, 62.

> my first contact with an outlaw community, my first look at the hardwoods of the Mississippi Valley, and my first taste of sowbelly and saleratus biscuit. The emblem of this civilization was the frying pan.[17]

Pinchot did not elaborate on his "contact with an outlaw community," although traveling the wilds of eastern Arkansas during the late nineteenth century could prove hazardous. The remote and impenetrable swamps and woods presented a foreboding natural environment and, when coupled with a sparse population and lax law enforcement, made the area welcoming to criminals.[18] Undoubtedly, this seediness disturbed the well-to-do easterner, whose life to date had been considerably more sheltered than those of his Arkansas contemporaries. Yet Pinchot did not flinch from what was set before him. He particularly relished the gastronomic opportunities, claiming to have eaten, with some gusto, opossum ("very fat & good") and sweet potato pie, as well as the aforementioned sowbelly and saleratus biscuit.[19] Although these were considered conventional fare (or even treated as delicacies) by natives, Pinchot's willingness to partake in local cuisines exemplified his flair for living "off the land," as it were.

Pinchot settled into his lodgings in Jonesboro and promptly met with at least two local citizens who had apparently awaited his arrival—men he referred to as "Mr. Krewson" and "Colonel Markle." Krewson appears to have been Amos L. Krewson, a well-known Jonesboro resident, realtor, and investor in the Jonesboro, Lake City and Eastern Railroad. Krewson had helped other local sawmill operators find properties for their businesses, and seemed keenly interested in promoting the growth of the Jonesboro area by developing timber resources. For example, Krewson had negotiated the sale of some city lots to Charles A. Stuck, a prominent lumberman who opened a planing mill in Jonesboro in early 1889.[20] Col. Samuel Markle, another realtor

[17]Ibid., 64; Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*, 37. Sowbelly consists of salted pork taken from the belly of a hog, while saleratus biscuit is a flour, sour milk, salt, sugar, baking soda, and lard-laden concoction.

[18]Other accounts of trouble in the Arkansas delta during the early 1890s can be found in Michael B. Dougan and Ken Hubbell, "A Late Frontier," in *The Arkansas Delta: A Landscape of Change,* ed. Tom Baskett, Jr. (Helena: Delta Cultural Center, 1990), 38-39.

[19]Steen, *Conservation Diaries*, 64.

[20]Lee A. Dew, "The J.L.C. and E.R.R. and the Opening of the 'Sunk Lands' of Northeast Arkansas," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 27 (Spring 1968): 24; Charles A. Stuck, "The Stuck Family," *Craighead County Historical Quarterly* 6 (Winter 1968): 7; Harry Lee Williams, *History of Craighead County* (Little Rock: Parke-Harper, 1930), 600-601.

and native of St. Joseph, Missouri, spent a considerable amount of time in northeastern Arkansas from the mid 1880s until his death in 1895. In addition to real estate, Markle had financial interests in some Arkansas sawmills.[21]

It is significant that Pinchot and Fernow met with those associated with land speculation and the lumbering business. Most counties in northeast Arkansas, including Craighead and Woodruff Counties where Pinchot spent most of his time on this trip, had stave mills in operation by that time. R. Elsworth Call decried their wasteful use of white oak: "It is felled with a wanton hand, a comparatively small portion of the tree is utilized—the bark not [at] all—the balance allowed to decay."[22] But Pinchot and Fernow's associating with lumbermen was not entirely out of character. Both understood conservationism in the late nineteenth century as promoting the rational and sustainable use of forests, and Pinchot always considered his view of natural resources as a pragmatic, politically savvy, and utilitarian response to the needs of the day. Throughout his life, and especially during his formative years, Pinchot did not look upon an old-growth forest and see the same type of sanctity as his preservationist counterparts did. Rather he saw an opportunity to develop present and future value from the timber at hand.[23] With this perspective, and given his confident and headstrong manner, it is not surprising that Pinchot frequently clashed with other pioneers in the American conservation movement. For instance, he occasionally feuded with Charles S. Sargent, a professor of arboriculture at Harvard University, director of the Arnold Arboretum, and publisher of the short-lived but influential horticultural magazine *Garden and Forest*. Professor Sargent, recognized by Pinchot as a key force behind early conservation efforts, preferred preservation of public timberlands to active management. Pinchot referred to Sargent and other like-minded individuals as "denudatics," viewing them as obstacles to the practical utilization of government lands.[24] Pinchot, while befriending prominent environmentalists like John Muir, almost inevitably split with them in debates over

[21]Marian Parker, "The A. M. Davis Family," *Craighead County Historical Quarterly* 9 (Summer 1971): 25-26.

[22]Call, "Notes on the Native Forest Trees," 83.

[23]Gifford Pinchot, *The Adirondack Spruce* (New York: The Critic Co., 1898), 102, 105; Gifford Pinchot, *Biltmore Forest* (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1893), 14-17.

[24]McGeary, *Gifford Pinchot*, 37-44; Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*, 27-28. Pinchot and Sargent also disagreed on the use of the military to guard federal forest reserves. Pinchot called for professional civilian foresters, while Sargent preferred trained military officers; Char Miller, "A High-Grade Paper: *Garden & Forest* and Nineteenth-Century American Forestry," *Arnoldia* 60 (Spring 2000): 19-22.

the use of the public domain, though he shared their love of the land and raised concerns about the future of America's forests.[25]

An incident on Pinchot's Arkansas trip further suggested these differences. On January 21, Pinchot and company rounded up horses and a guide for a ride. Heavy rain and thick mud hobbled the party, forcing them to walk their horses (fortunately Pinchot had purchased hip boots in Jonesboro). On this side trip, Pinchot shook an opossum off of a vine and killed it with a stick, apparently to see if it would resist the effort (it did, showing fight rather than "playing 'possum").[26] Pinchot's termination of the opossum stands in stark contrast to the abhorrence many others in the early conservation movement felt toward the wanton killing of animals. Muir even once talked Pinchot out of dispatching a tarantula while on a camping trip to the Grand Canyon.[27]

Fernow arrived in Jonesboro early in the morning of January 22, prompting an after-breakfast visit with Colonel Markle at an unidentified hotel, followed by a fifteen to twenty mile ride through the forest. Pinchot reported with obvious pleasure that he was not stiff following this ride. Clearly, he did not wish to be regarded as some eastern dandy out on a holiday. On one of their sojourns into the Arkansas countryside, a local outfitter apparently decided to have some fun at the expense of Pinchot and his party by making dire warnings about the dangers of the "wild" horses they were riding. Pinchot, a skilled horseman, brushed off the notion and reported with evident satisfaction that in the end it was the guide who fell off his horse into the swamp.[28]

On January 23, Pinchot, Fernow, Krewson, and Markle traveled to Markle's property near Meredith, a rail stop and post office along the St. Louis Southwestern (Cotton Belt) Railway in eastern Woodruff County. Given the localities Pinchot mentioned, the Cotton Belt seems to have been he and his associates' major avenue of travel in Arkansas.[29] After visiting Markle's land, they inspected a sawmill, and Fernow and Pinchot

[25]Char Miller, "The Greening of Gifford Pinchot," *Environmental Ethics* 14 (Fall 1992): 1-20; Char Miller, "What Happened in the Rainier Grand's Lobby? A Question of Sources," *Journal of American History* 86 (March 2000): 1709-1714; Char Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2001), 119-144.

[26]Steen, *Conservation Diaries*, 64.

[27]Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*, 103.

[28]Steen, *Conservation Diaries*, 64.

[29]The St. Louis Southwestern traversed Arkansas from Piggott in Clay County through Paragould and Jonesboro toward Brinkley, then Stuttgart and Camden before exiting at the southwest corner of the state; *Cram's Township and Rail Road Map of Arkansas* (Chicago: George Franklin Cram, 1895), http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g4001p.rr001840, (accessed May 25, 2004).

took another ride. They admired the timber but also clearly recognized the rich agricultural potential of this area:

> For miles on end Fernow and I rode our horses through the great flatwoods of superb Oak timber—miles of the richest alluvial soil, where there wasn't a stone to throw at a dog, and the cotton in the little clearings grew higher than I could reach from the saddle. Everything was new and strange. Every fence in the scanty settlements was plastered with signs of Ague Buster, and the people looked as if they needed it.[30]

"Ague Buster" was, no doubt, a professed remedy for malaria.[31] In an era before vaccines, pesticides, and a clear understanding of microbes, the unhealthy nature of this area was typical of rural America, especially the southern bottomlands. Mosquito-borne malaria haunted the lowlands of Arkansas throughout the 1800s.[32] Decades earlier, for instance, Frederick Gerstaecker and many of his companions had suffered repeated bouts of the disease, including one episode that nearly killed Gerstaecker.[33]

But for all their potential hazards, the forested bottomlands of eastern Arkansas proved instructive to Pinchot: "The Arkansas lumberjacks were tough, but very willing to talk. I got new light on logging and sawing, learned some of the mysteries of whisky staves and quartered Oak, [and] collected a fine specimen of Hackberry (I have it yet)."[34] It is important to remember that, in the 1890s, so little systematic study of forests, forestry, or even lumbering had been conducted that Pinchot and his American contemporaries had no text from which to learn. Hence, even simple observations of logging practices or sawmilling were very informative to the young forester. Pinchot doubtlessly used these experiences in Arkansas, as well as his observations of the consequences of nineteenth-century lumbering, in developing the first recommendations for practical forestry in places like the Bilt-

[30]Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*, 37-38.

[31]Local newspapers were replete with advertisements for similarly dubious products, such as "Mansfield's Magic Arnica Liniment" for curing "Rheumatism, Sore Throat, Pain in the Back, [and] Frosted Feet" and "Dr. C.P. Duncan's Liniment For Man, Horse and Cow," *Craighead County Sun* (Jonesboro), January 30, 1891.

[32]John Solomon Otto, *The Final Frontiers, 1880-1930: Settling the Southern Bottomlands* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 30-31; Conevery Bolton Valencius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 78-84.

[33]Gerstaecker, *Wild Sports*, 154-171.

[34]Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*, 38.

more Estate in North Carolina and the Adirondack Mountains of New York.

But Pinchot mixed some pleasure with business in his Arkansas inspections. He mentioned in his memoir playing a "low trick" on his family while in Arkansas:

> Chained in the yard of the house where we stayed in Jonesboro was a young bear by the name of Betsy. Betsy and I struck up a vivid affection, stimulated, if not created, by sundry bottles of molasses and water. It was love at first sight.
>
> So I wrote home about the nice people I had met, and in particular and in detail about how much I liked Betsy. Then, when I judged the family were sufficiently keyed up over the prospect of an Arkansas flatwoods daughter-in-law, I sent them a photograph of Betsy and me very close together, with the molasses bottle in full flood. It achieved an instant and unconditional success.[35]

A point apparently lost on Pinchot was that Arkansas, once known as the "Bear State," had relatively few bears by 1891. A cub tied to a post as a curiosity was the barest remnant of the wildlife that had so impressed Gerstaecker, Thorpe, and other writers only a few decades before, a clumsy tribute to a species that helped shape the image of the territory during its formative stages.[36]

Fernow did not seem to enjoy this trip as much as Pinchot. Pinchot's diary entry for January 26 mentioned that a carriage driver charged Fernow $9.00 for a ride (presumably between Paragould and Harrisburg), which Pinchot termed "wicked." Soon thereafter, Pinchot accompanied a lumbago-stricken Fernow to Memphis. By January 28, Pinchot and Krewson had returned to Jonesboro without him. At this point, Pinchot examined a 140-acre tract of land on the east side of Jonesboro bordering the junction of the St. Louis Southwestern and Kansas City, Fort Scott, and Memphis railroads. Krewson was eagerly seeking investors to help purchase this property, for which he was willing to pay 6 percent interest and the principal of one-third of the $5,000 purchase price before taking any money for himself. Pinchot viewed this transaction favorably, believing the location, Jonesboro's development ("growing very fast," he remarked), and Fernow's impending

[35]Ibid.

[36]Thomas Bangs Thorpe, "The Big Bear of Arkansas," in *New Collection of Thomas Bangs Thorpe's Sketches*, 112-122; Dougan and Hubbell, "Late Frontier," 38-39.

positive report on the timber would attract an "English syndicate" apparently interested in locating a mill in the area.[37] This "English syndicate" may have been associated with the shipbuilding industry, which consumed large quantities of oak timber. A booklet published by the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad the following year promoted the value of oak from Arkansas in boat construction: "Several varieties of oak abound both on the rich alluvions and on the uplands. Some of these species attain large proportions, and are now extensively exported to England for that purpose, being pronounced the finest timber ever put on the Liverpool docks."[38] Pinchot thought enough of the financial potential of Krewson's venture to write his father (and benefactor) about the investment.[39]

There is no evidence that Pinchot, his father, or Fernow ever invested in Arkansas real estate. Some may find the prospect of Gifford Pinchot participating in land speculation and development remarkable, given his later advocacy of the withdrawal of millions of acres of public domain to prevent its exploitation by others with similar notions. However, Pinchot never pushed for the elimination of all commercial activity on public lands but rather that it be conducted in a manner that supported both local communities and national interests. Years later, he made this point abundantly clear when addressing a gathering of the Arkansas Club of Washington (D.C.), seeking to soothe some of the hard feelings many Arkansans harbored toward the Forest Service following the formation of the Arkansas and Ozark National Forests. Pinchot declared:

> For a Yankee, I am the best Southerner that ever lived . . . having fished in the South's streams, climbed its mountains, and enjoyed the hospitality of its people . . . . Everywhere we have found that the Southern people appreciate and support the fundamental principles of the forest service, which is to put every piece of land to that use in which it will best serve the interests

[37]Steen, *Conservation Diaries*, 65. Craighead County tax records from 1890 show that Krewson already owned hundreds of acres in the vicinity; Nancy L. Matthews, *1890 Tax Receipts, Real Estate Tax, Personal Property Tax, and Poll Tax, Craighead County, Arkansas* (Jonesboro: N. L. Matthews, 2002), 136-137.

[38]St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad, *Arkansas, an Accurate and Reliable Description of the State of Arkansas for the Information of the Farmer, the Home-Seeker, and the Investor* (St. Louis: Woodward & Tiernan Printing, 1892), 9.

[39]Steen, *Conservation Diaries*, 65.

of the people of that country, whether that be a forest use, an agricultural use, or any other use."[40]

Pinchot's trip to Arkansas concluded rather uneventfully. After declaring the coffee available in the Jonesboro area "awful" on January 29, Pinchot continued the timber inspections for the still-ailing Fernow in the company of a man he identified as Will Beasley, possibly "Uncle Billy" Beasley, a logger and longtime resident of Marked Tree.[41] While journeying through the countryside, Pinchot collected samples of hackberry wood and a baldcypress "knee." To help cover his travel expenses, he also gathered wood and other botanical materials to sell to interested academics.[42] By January 30, Pinchot (with Colonel Markle's help) took a train from Jonesboro to Pine Bluff on Fernow's pass. The next day, Pinchot met up with Fernow and a "Mr. Leak" in Arkansas City and then crossed the Mississippi River en route to Mobile, Alabama. This trip eventually took Pinchot to North Carolina and the Biltmore Estate of George W. Vanderbilt, the wealthy son of a highly influential eastern family who acted as a key sponsor in the early phases of Pinchot's forestry career.

That Pinchot eventually went to work at Biltmore can, in part, be attributed to his Arkansas sojourn. Prior to this adventure, Fernow and Pinchot had minor disagreements over Pinchot's career development. Fernow's abrasive manner probably chafed the young Pinchot even before their arrival in northeastern Arkansas, and Pinchot's journal indicates that it clearly did so during this journey. He wrote in Mobile: "Getting more weary of Fernow's endless detractions . . . . [He] has been at it ever since we met in Arkansas."[43] Pinchot seemed especially troubled by an outburst near the end of the trip directed at Dr. Charles T. Mohr, a German émigré chemist and botanist who after retiring from chemical manufacturing had been appointed agent of the Division of Forestry.[44] It was in this capacity that he hosted Fernow and Pinchot in Mobile in early February 1891. Pinchot admired the elderly Mohr and recalled:

[40]"Forestry Problems Told," *Washington Post*, June 8, 1909, p. 3.

[41]Billy Beasley, "Before the Levees Were Built," *Craighead County Historical Quarterly* 3 (Spring 1965): 24-26; Anna Ritter, "Marked Tree from 1883–1936," *Craighead County Historical Quarterly* 5 (Summer 1967): 28.

[42]Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*, 38.

[43]Steen, *Conservation Diaries*, 65.

[44]Rob Messick, "Charles T. Mohr," Special Collections and University Archives, University of North Carolina at Asheville, http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/photo/usfs/biographies/mohr.htm, (accessed April 7, 2004).

> When Fernow directed one of his tirades against Dr. Mohr in the very room the kindly white-haired elder had given us, I was so disgusted that our association very nearly ended then and there. That incident settled my opinion of Fernow as a man, and colored all my future contacts with him.[45]

Coupled with advice from some of his mentors, this episode helped convince the young Pinchot to back out of a tentative arrangement to work under Fernow at the Division of Forestry and take a job at Biltmore.

There is no way to measure what other impact this two-week journey may have had on Pinchot's career in forestry and conservation. A recent definitive work on Pinchot's life and philosophy devotes only a single, passing reference to the trip.[46] Pinchot's published works immediately following this trip likewise make no specific mention of the lessons he may have learned in Arkansas. But, if nothing else, Gifford Pinchot's Arkansas adventure furthered his familiarity with the forests and people of America in the late nineteenth century. He remembered his 1891 tour of the South as "an eye opener of a trip, and it did the beginner much good. I had seen new kinds of trees. I had touched new kinds of people, and I had gained a new conception of what the United States was like. My real preparation had begun."[47]

Within seven years of the trip, Pinchot was declaring:

> Under the present system the lumberman practically ignores the fact that the forest land is productive capital. He speculates in the timber with little regard to the real productive capacity of the land . . . Ordinary lumbering pays a high interest now, but it leaves the forest in a very bad condition.[48]

Of course, lumbering also brought disquieting and not necessarily welcome changes to local populations. The clearing of the virgin forests, the intrusion of the railroads, changing population dynamics and social life following the opening and closing of mills, and the prospect of reforesting farmland would affect countless Arkansas communi-

[45]Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*, 38-39.
[46]Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism*, 101.
[47]Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*, 39.
[48]Gifford Pinchot, *The Adirondack Spruce* (New York: Critic, 1898), 102, 105.

ties.[49] By the early 1930s, most Arkansas forests had been cleared, burned, farmed, eroded, and otherwise abused, and the state's timber industry was in dire straits.[50] Fortunately for Arkansas and the rest of the nation, Pinchot's hard work with the Forest Service and Yale University helped to shape forestry into a full-fledged profession, and the implementation of sustainable forest management has helped to restore tree cover to millions of acres in the state and support a multi-billion dollar industry.

[49]John Wordy Buckner, *Wilderness Lady: A History of Crossett, Arkansas* (Little Rock: Rose Publishing, 1989), 7-8; Dougan and Hubbell, "Late Frontier," 46-49; Kenneth L. Smith, *Sawmill: The Story of Cutting the Last Great Virgin Forest East of the Rockies* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1986), 7-90; Otto, *Final Frontiers*, 15-31; G. P. George, *The Pine Tree Menace* (Hamburg, AR: self-published, 1928); Dougan, "Uncle Bill Ishmael," 3.

[50]Russ R. Reynolds, "The Crossett Story: The Beginnings of Forestry in Southern Arkansas and Northern Louisiana," *U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service General Technical Report SO-32* (New Orleans: Southern Forest Experiment Station, 1980), 1-11; Stephen Strausberg and Walter A. Hough, "The Ouachita and Ozark-St. Francis National Forests: A History of the Lands and USDA Forest Service Tenure," *U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service General Technical Report SO-121* (Asheville, NC: Southern Research Station, 1997), 5-21.