

**Remarks by Peter Pinchot  
on the 30th Anniversary of the  
dedication of Grey Towers  
to the U.S. Forest Service.**

September 25, 1993

I am honored to be here representing the Pinchot family in this reaffirmation of Grey Towers after 30 years of federal ownership. Seven generations of Pinchots have lived in Milford full or part time. Several years ago we counted 35 living family members that have direct ties to Grey Towers. Since then we have lost several family members, but many more have been born.

Our family has a deep and rich relationship with Grey Towers: to begin with we are committed landowners and own 1400 acres of land, much of which is contiguous with the Grey Towers property. We have both personal and historical interests in what happens to the buildings and the landscape at Grey Towers. And we are very concerned with the kinds of policy issues being discussed here. In fact, several of us have been involved with helping to develop programs at the Pinchot Institute. I am pleased to think that we will be neighbors for many generations to come. It is a wonderful partner-

ship between family and Institute.

I remember the original dedication of Grey Towers. I was quite young and I had considerably mixed feelings. I had spent my childhood playing around this land and these buildings. It was the end of a wonderful era in my life. I am not so sure I really understood much about conservation at that time or the real significance of what Grey Towers was going to become.

The one clear memory I do have was of standing with my family in the field across the driveway as the helicopter carrying President Kennedy landed. This shows you the limits of a child's grasp of the world. The thing that impressed me most was watching the President come walking down the steps of the helicopter under the spinning rotors which were blowing up quite a breeze. And not one hair moved. I thought, "What does this man do to his hair?" I don't remember too much more from that day.

Many years later, when I hope I was somewhat more aware of the

world, I had the good fortune to go to the Yale School of Forestry for a masters degree. While I was there I attended lectures by a history professor named William Cronin, who was a pioneer in the new field of environmental history. He exposed us to the idea that history was not just the story of the acts of great men and women, but that it was also the story of how the interaction of people with the land shapes the course of events.

In this vein I would like to consider how the land around Milford helped shape the early days of Conservation and what this land has to tell us now about the future of the



Pinchot Institute for Conservation.

I live in Connecticut and I sometimes feel strange about taking such an active role in conservation issues in the Milford area. I was pleased to find out recently that this region was originally part of Connecticut. The first settlers came from Connecticut in 1750 and built a sawmill on the Sawkill Creek that runs through the Grey Towers property. It wasn't until the late 1870s that Pennsylvania won a battle against Connecticut and annexed the Pocono region.

From the late 1700s until the turn of this century this county was being actively lumbered. Timber was taken down the Delaware and helped build the downriver towns of Easton, Camden, Trenton and Philadelphia. Large white pines were floated away to become ships masts. In fact, there is a town just upriver from Milford called Masthope. This was the farthest point up the Delaware that large pine timber could be floated down the river in the spring floods. During the 1800s lumbering and quarrying made up the primary industries of this region. The whole face of the landscape was being dramatically changed.

In 1814 Constantien and Cyril Pinchot arrived in Milford. They soon became involved in lumbering, cashing in on a standing crop. The land was being clear cut to make way for agriculture. They also established a dry goods business, and began building the family wealth.

By the time Cyril's son James came of age, the opportunity to make money locally was already diminishing because resource extraction had already passed its peak. So James went off to New York City and established himself in business importing French wall paper and managing real estate. He did well and retired early.

James was deeply influenced by what he saw here in Pike County, where deforestation left an ugly landscape with poor soil, not well suited for agriculture. In fact there was a population exodus after the forest had

been cut over. When comparing this with the well managed forests of Europe with which he was familiar, and the prospect that the pattern of Pike County was being spread rapidly westward across the whole country, it is not surprising that he encouraged his son Gifford to pursue a career in forestry.

During the period when James was in New York there were several pioneering thinkers who were attempting to formulate a new view of the human relationship to natural resources. Men such as George Perkins Marsh, George Bird Grinnell, and John Wesley Powell were formulating many of the basic precepts of the revolutionary new idea of conservation.

What remained was to develop a way to implement this new concept into policy that could effectively address the major environmental issue of the time: the rapid consumption of the primary forest. We are all familiar with that story: it involves Gifford and the Forest Service, and Amos, Gifford, Leila and Ruth and the Progressive Party. This fight to conserve our natural resources deeply influenced the next generation, my father, Gifford Bryce Pinchot.

In 1959 my grandmother, Leila Pinchot died, and with her death went a grand way of living. My father spent two years agonizing about what to do with Grey Towers. It clearly didn't fit the scale of living of any of the remaining Pinchots. Finally after many family discussions, a plan evolved to transfer Grey Towers to the Forest Service with the idea of establishing a conservation institute. My father, a research biologist and active conservationist, hoped that this



institute would play an important role in adapting the principles and practices of conservation to the new environmental challenges that scientists were becoming aware of in the 1960s.

The first plan for the Pinchot Institute for Conservation Studies was extremely bold: a joint project between the Conservation Foundation and the Forest Service to develop a national curriculum for conservation education. It was a wonderful and very much needed idea, but for a number of reasons it didn't work out.

My father was a member of the original board of directors of the institute, but when the conservation education program was dropped, the board was disbanded, and our family had little direct contact with the Pinchot Institute for the next two decades. From the family view, the idea that the Institute would help shape conservation policy seemed to recede into the background.

In 1983 two important events happened. Under the directorship of Ed Vandermillen the Forest Service at Grey Towers helped establish a nonprofit organization, the Pinchot Institute for Conservation, to raise money to develop conservation programs and to restore the buildings. Secondly, our family held a family reunion. Both Gifford's and Amos's families rediscovered the land and many of us fell in love with it and began spending a lot more time here. Several family members became actively involved in helping the Pinchot Institute with its programs. Most importantly from our point of view, the Institute began convening several substantial conservation policy conferences. That really sparked our interest. This is what we had hoped the Institute would be used for.

During the last decade there has been a continually evolving close working relationship between our family and both the nonprofit and forest service components of the Pinchot Institute. We are greatly pleased with the current direction being set by Ed Brannon as Director of Grey Towers and Jim Giltmier as Execu-

tive Vice President of the Pinchot Institute and with the recently strengthened board. The Institute is well established and well on its way. I wish my father and mother were alive to see this.

But I want to return to an earlier strand of this story, the land and what it has to tell us. Apart from a powerful aesthetic attachment that Gifford and Amos had for this landscape, the land was largely silent during the early part of this century. This was the long period of regrowth of the forest, when white pine and red cedar invaded pastures and eventually gave way to hardwoods. Early pictures of the Yale Forestry School summer camp show great open fields. Now the same land is covered by a maturing oak-hickory forest. As nature gradually healed its wounds, it spoke no strident message about the need to reshape conservation policy.

But in the last two decades the land has found its voice again. Despite the regrowth of the forest, a rapid increase of subdivisions with checkerboard zoning is causing extensive habitat fragmentation and lowering the water quality of many streams and lakes. Groundwater in several areas is threatened by illegal hazardous waste dumps. The oak-hickory forest has been knocked back by two heavy waves of gypsy moths and the stream corridors are now about to lose their hemlocks to the woolly adelgid, both Asian exotic pests. Sulfur and nitrogen emitted by Ohio River Valley industries bring low pH rain which may be related to the local drop in populations of red eft and other amphibians.

The common denominator of this list is that none of the impacts is caused primarily by the actions of local residents as was the clearing of the land in the 1800s. Pike County is once again a microcosm of the threats to the health of natural landscapes: but this time from the diffuse impacts of our modern industrial economy. Poor regional planning in an area

dominated by automobiles, a glut of industrial toxics with few good disposal sites, and a growing global trade in horticultural crops are at fault in this case. Our old concepts of conservation are virtually powerless to solve these complex problems.

There is good reason to believe that just as the late 1800s was the incubation period for a great revolution of values about the human role in nature, the last two decades have been brewing an equally significant revolution. Again a number of radical thinkers have been attempting to build a new understanding of the proper role of humans in the natural world. Garret Hardin, Rachel Carson, Barry Commoner, Paul Ehrlich, Lester Brown and many others are all challenging the basic methods that modern society has chosen to organize its industrial economy. They are each calling for a profound reorganization of our economy in order to bring human needs into congruence with the biological needs of the rest of nature. Some consider this heresy and some proclaim it as almost a religion. To me it sounds surprisingly similar to the birth pangs of conservation just prior to the turn of this century.

Gifford, Amos, Leila and Ruth Pinchot were all committed social revolutionaries. They sought to apply some of the most radical intellectual ideas of their day to bring about concrete changes in their society. They occasionally lost their jobs, as did Gifford, or were labelled "lunatic fringe" as Teddy Roosevelt called Amos for standing up against monopoly business interests. But they did not flinch for a minute from the pressing needs of their time.

The Pinchot family still believes in taking the radical view. We hope that the Pinchot Institute will take the risk of following in the grand Pinchot tradition. The pressing need today is to find a way to reconcile our economic means with the preservation of the natural world, in order to produce a genuinely sustainable

economy. We hope that the Pinchot Institute will actively pursue the debate about the policies that will bring about this next conservation revolution. This will certainly be one of the most exciting intellectual challenges of our time.

In closing, I want to welcome all of you to this site where our family

once lived, and to this community and landscape which has so much to tell us. Speaking for the three living generations of our family, we are looking forward to at least another thirty years of a warm, intimate, and at times provocative relationship between our family and the Pinchot Institute.