



LEFT A. R. HROMATKA, RIGHT GEORGE GRANT, BOTH NPS HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION



monumental *endeavor*

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE ANTIQUITIES ACT BY JOE BAKER

Every April, the spring wind from the southwest howls across the Colorado Plateau. This particular evening, at an overlook in Mesa Verde National Park, it carries dust that softens the famous view of the great Anasazi pueblo at Cliff Palace. It also shakes my tripod, forcing me to keep my thumb poised on the camera's cable release, waiting for the short lulls between gusts. The lulls are rare, and there is ample time for reflection. There is the inevitable speculation about the day-to-day lives of the people who built the enormous sandstone pueblo beneath the soaring cliff, but my thoughts also turn to five brothers from Pennsylvania who came here in the late 19th century to homestead in the vicinity of modern Mancos, Colorado. The family name was Wetherhill.

Left: Montezuma's Castle, in Arizona, was designated a national monument in 1906, under authority of the just-passed Antiquities Act. **Above:** Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, at the foot of a large kiva. Chaco was one of the first archeological sites set aside for posterity under the act, in 1907. Today it is a world heritage site as well as a national park.

Their Ute neighbors led them to some of the ruins, explaining that no one knew who'd built them, or when. The Wetherhills began exploring and casually collecting a few mementos. Then on the afternoon of December 8, 1888, from somewhere very close to where I'm standing, Richard Wetherhill and his brother-in-law saw the set of ruins they eventually named Cliff Palace.

The Wetherhills and some of their neighbors spent most of that winter camped there, digging. They packed their treasures on long mule trains: intact painted pots and jars, baskets, sandals, leather goods, stone tools, wooden objects; the entire material culture of the pueblo's residents. They also packed up the desiccated remains of an unknown number of inhabitants. The Wetherhills eventually sold the hoard to the Colorado Historical Society for a very tidy sum.

At the abandoned pueblo, the silence of the plateau returned in the wake of the last departing mule train. Spring came, and the wind blew over the tumbled walls, empty graves, and trash piles left by the Wetherhills, gradually covering everything with tumbleweeds and dust.

A Shared Heritage

At the turn of the century, the way America viewed itself was changing. The mysterious, terrifying wilderness was nearly explored, railroads connected the coasts, and the aboriginal people were no longer a feared enemy. The America of the early 20th century was a confident young giant. Its vast expanses, its natural and historic wonders, set it apart from the stodgy Old World across the Atlantic. The Antiquities Act was born in this changing America, a child of the growing interest in the past and the natural world, and a response to the growing alarm over its destruction.

What the Wetherhills were up to was by no means an isolated incident. The excavation and sale of antiquities was rampant in the late 19th century. What was new was how Americans were viewing it. The Progressive Movement influenced opinion about the exploitation of both workers and natural resources. Concern over looting had its roots in the notion that the nation's past and natural riches belonged to all of us, and were vital to our future. There was a growing sense of shared heritage; anything that threatened it was to be taken seriously.

The era figures prominently in the birth of American anthropology and archeology. In 1879, John Wesley Powell founded the Bureau of American Ethnology, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science elected an anthropologist as president. What became the American Anthropological Association was formed, along with the Archaeological Institute of America. New perspectives began to influence what people thought of Native Americans, promoting the idea that the value of places like Mesa Verde transcended what its baskets would fetch on the antiquities market.

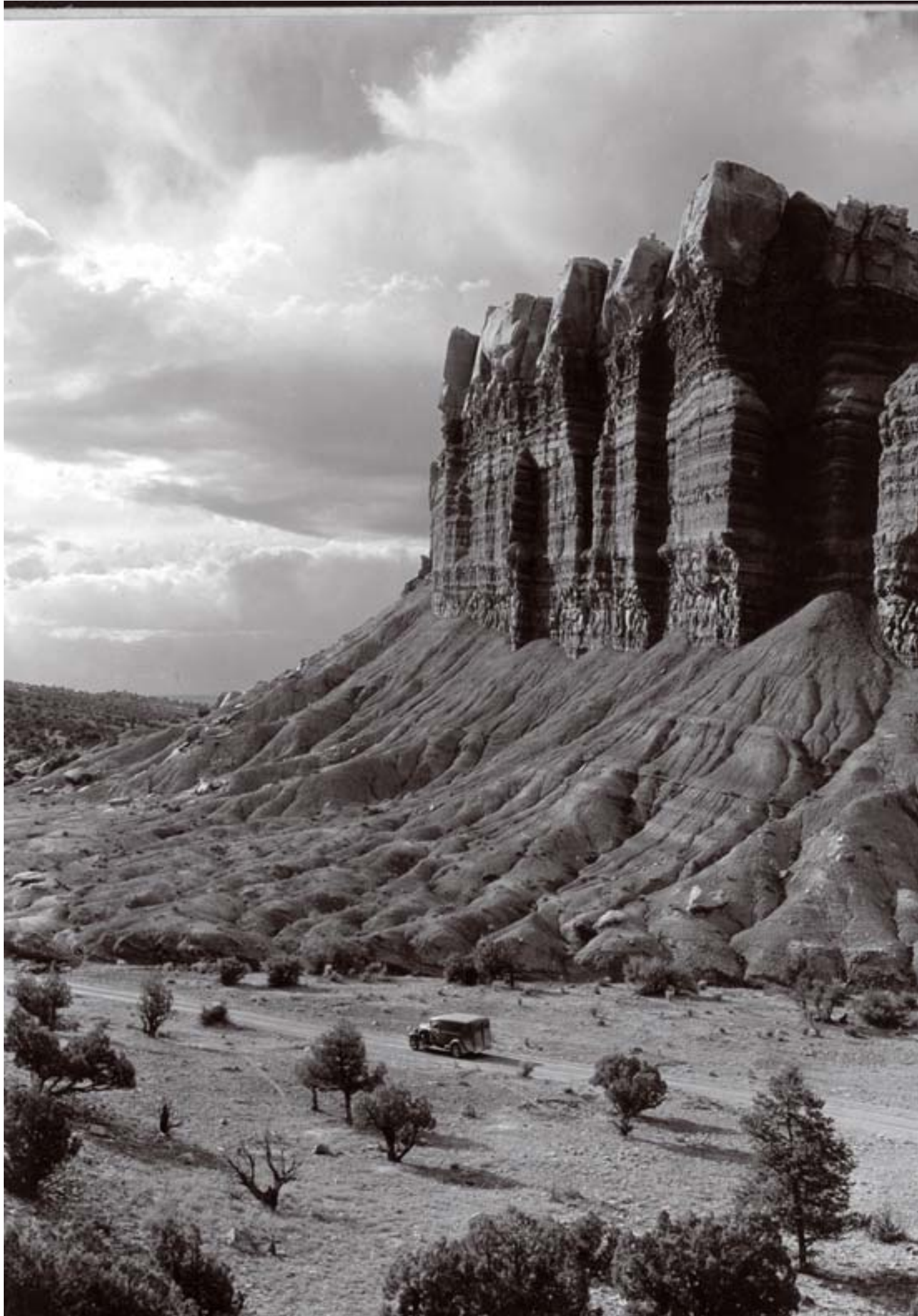
The best time to photograph Cliff Palace is at sunset, when the sun slants in below the overhang, producing the chiaroscuro that has

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Below: Charcoal kilns from the mining days at Death Valley, declared a monument in 1933. The Antiquities Act arose with the sea change in attitudes toward nature and the past at the end of the 19th century. People listened when John Muir spoke for the wilderness, when Gifford Pinchot spoke for the forests, when John Wesley Powell spoke for the legacy of the first Americans. **Right:** The act's sweep encompassed geologic wonders too, like the formations at Utah's Capitol Reef National Park, designated a monument in 1937.



captivated generations of photographers. Shortly before the last light, as I squeeze off a couple of shots, a few cars pull up and I am surrounded by families. Kids squeal and point, their parents and grandparents gasp at the architecture and landscape. They are from Iowa and Washington State, from Cape Hatteras and Zuni Pueblo. There is excited chatter, quiet amazement, the full range of human wonder. The early advocates for these places, flush with awe and reverence, had it exactly right. They knew the past belonged to everyone and acted to preserve this record of who we are. All of us at this overlook are in their debt.



Below: Arizona's Casa Grande National Monument—shown here in 1934—protected the ruins left by the ancient Hohokam, "those who are gone," who survived the arid landscape using innovative agricultural practices like irrigation. The site's establishment was seminal, set aside through executive order by President Harrison in 1892. Though the protection was intended as temporary—a way around the cumbersome process of legislating a national park—the practice bought time for other sites, too. Here, the wife of custodian Hilding Palmer accompanies the daughter of Frank "Boss" Pinkley. Pinkley, an early advocate of preservation, was a dynamic force in the early days of the Antiquities Act. Beginning his career living in a tent beside this ruin, he eventually found himself in charge of a slew of monuments.





Above: Spanish mission at Arizona's Tumacacori National Historical Park, declared a monument in 1908. The park has 360 acres of protected land, preserving three missions, the oldest in the state. As a young nation awakened to the legacy of its past, spectacular southwestern sites such as this one fueled the passion for preservation. The movement eventually embraced places from coast to coast.

The Dawn of Ancient Things

In 1880, a geologist named Adolph Bandelier appeared before the ruins at Pecos Pueblo near Santa Fe. He was both impressed and shocked by what he found.

The pueblo, visited by Coronado in 1540, was large, intricate, and beautiful, a tribute to the skills and aesthetic sense of the builders. It was also being shamelessly abused. Bandelier had been sent by the Archaeological Institute of America to record the ruins. In his report, he noted: "Mrs. Kozlowski [who lived two miles south on the arroyo] informed me that in 1858 . . . the roof of the church was still in existence. Her husband tore it down, and used it for building out-houses. In general the vandalism committed in this venerable relic of antiquity defies all description . . . All the beams of the old structure are quaintly [carved with] much scroll work . . . Most of this was taken away, chipped into uncouth boxes, and sold, to be scattered everywhere. Not content with this, treasure hunters [have] ruthlessly disturbed the abodes of the dead."

Bandelier's report caused great concern. Some members of the Archaeological Institute, influential New Englanders, voiced that concern to their elected representatives.

The Pecos project, and the Wetherhill discoveries, led to further archeological investigations in the Southwest. Swedish archeologist Gustav Nordenskjold conducted state-of-the-art excavations at Mesa Verde in 1891, shipping a substantial collection back to Stockholm, where it remains to this day. A few years later, the American Museum of Natural History, with financing from wealthy New York collectors, excavated the spectacular Anasazi ruins at Chaco Canyon in northern New Mexico. A large quantity of artifacts wound up in New York. The foreman at these excavations, Richard Wetherhill, had by this time filed a homestead claim at Chaco Canyon, an attempt to corner the market on antiquities coming out of there. Homestead claims were being filed specifically for archeological sites. A lucrative antiquities market sprang up almost overnight.

The cumulative effect of the excavating and pillaging was heightened public concern. The two reports—by Bandelier and Nordenskjold—opened eyes to the wonders of American archeology. Packing artifacts from the Four Corners region off to the homes of

the wealthy or to museums in New York and Sweden was seen as a violation of the public heritage.

In 1892, to protect Arizona's Casa Grande ruin from looting, President Harrison issued an executive order declaring it off limits to homesteading. The order set two standards. One, it was the earliest example of the government intervening to save archeological sites, and two, it was the President acting, not Congress, significant in the chain of events leading to the Antiquities Act.

It was also a reflection of the limited preservation tools available to government at the time. Congress could create a national park, but that took a major legislative effort, and only worked for large, well-known places like Yellowstone. Declaring a reserve for places like Casa Grande, while expedient, was only temporary. Between 1891 and 1906 the General Land Office—part of the Department of the Interior that managed federal lands in the West—pushed through reserves at Mesa Verde, Chaco Canyon, and other sites in the Southwest. It was the best the government could do.

In 1891, Congress gave the President authority to declare permanent timber reserves. The land office used this as a model for ancient sites, drafting legislation that would allow the President to set aside scenic and scientifically important places, too. This was more than many

western congressmen were willing to give, particularly after Theodore Roosevelt established enormous forest reserves.

In 1904, in order to bolster the argument, the land office directed Edgar Lee Hewitt, a young archeologist who was gaining a reputation in the Southwest, to prepare a report on sites in the region. He drew on his contacts and the reports at the time to compile a

list including what would be many of the first national monuments. Representative John Lacey of Iowa, with input from the anthropological community, shepherded a bill through Congress, which Roosevelt signed on June 8, 1906.

Spirits in the Canyon

Lynne Sebastian exits the low doorway of a tiny masonry room at Pueblo Bonito, the monumental multistory 12th century Anasazi ruin at Chaco Canyon, then turns to watch with some amusement as I squeeze my considerable bulk through the same small opening. I find we are standing at the edge of the great plaza, the heart of an immense desert community that dates back to before the arrival of Europeans. As I look back at the maze of rooms, walls, subterranean kivas, and windows, Lynne employs her flair for the dramatic to give me a little perspective. "Until sometime in the early 20th century," she says, "this was the largest building in North America."

There are few people who know more about this place than Lynne. She wrote her doctoral dissertation on Chaco and served as New Mexico's preservation officer for a dozen years. Long familiarity has, if anything, sharpened her enthusiasm.

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For me, this is my first visit, something of a dream come true. Chaco Culture National Historical Park is a world heritage site, set aside as a national monument in 1907. It is one of the first archeological complexes so designated under the Antiquities Act. Splendidly isolated, it requires a long drive, some of it on primitive roads, to reach. The isolation helps protect it from being loved to death. In the course of a leisurely, six-hour ramble, Lynne leads me through some of the ruins, and we explore the silent remains of what must have been bustling and lively communities between 800 and 1200 AD. The magical names flood back to me from an undergraduate class almost 30 years ago: Chetro Kettle, Pueblo Del Arroyo.

Despite decades of excavations and thousands of scholarly reports, Chaco is still a place full of unanswered questions. What led bands of families to build in one of the world's most austere and unforgiving environments? How did they organize? In whom did authority rest? What led to the sudden abandonment of these communities in the 13th century? We discuss this at length, and before we know it, it's



Left: Remnants of earthen architecture at Iowa's Effigy Mounds National Monument, designated in 1949. The mysterious mounds, reminders of a long-past culture, were the focus of some of the earliest ruminations on ancient America. Particularly numerous and visible around the Mississippi Delta, the enigmatic earthworks begged questions about the continent's original population. In 1849, the American Ethnological Society commissioned a study—published by the newly formed Smithsonian—presaging the interest in the past that later led to the Antiquities Act. Right: A view down the corridors of Fort Jefferson National Monument, a 19th century redoubt off the Florida Keys, designated in 1935.

LEFT NPS HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, RIGHT JACK E. BOUCHER/NPS/HABS







ABOVE M. WOODBRIDGE/NPS HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, RIGHT JACK E. BOUCHER/NPS/HABS

time for me to settle in to a tent at Chaco's tiny campground. Before Lynne leaves, I ask a final question: It's obvious why this place matters to archeologists, and it's clearly of great importance to Native Americans, but what about the rest of the world?

She ponders the question for a moment. "I think the most haunting and compelling thing about this place is its permanence. They built for the ages, with an eye to eternity. Just like us, these people were certain of their future. They believed they needed to build places that would last a thousand years, yet after only a couple hundred years, they were gone. There is something so moving, so sobering about that . . . maybe we see ourselves here."

A Movement Gathers Steam

Things happened quickly after the passage of the Antiquities Act. Between 1906 and 1908, President Roosevelt established 16 national monuments, all in the western states. Ten, including the first at Wyoming's Devil's Tower, were designated primarily for their scenic and scientific value rather than for archeological or historic preservation.

The act had three precedent-setting provisions. The first made it illegal to damage archeological sites on federal land, criminalizing looting. The second got rid of the world "parks"—a word that gave western legislators cold feet—replacing it with "national monuments," areas limited to just enough acreage to protect a site. The act gave the President sole authority to establish the monuments by proclamation. The third provision required a permit for excavations on federal land, demanding professional rigor.

Part of the act's legacy is its role in preserving environmentally and geologically important places. While the first monuments were almost entirely in the western states, that soon changed. In 1916 Woodrow Wilson established Maine's Sieur de' Monts, which eventually became Acadia National Park. Others followed including Mound City in Ohio (1923), Fort Wood, site of the Statue of Liberty, in New York (1924), and Forts Marion and Matanzas in Florida (1924). In total over a hundred monuments have been established,



Left: A picnic at the Great Falls Tavern along Maryland's C & O Canal, once a major route to the interior and a critical connection to the markets of the East Coast. The canal, a lifeline to the rapidly expanding frontier, played a prominent role in the development of the nation's capital. The 184-mile-long waterway was designated a monument in 1961, the same year this photograph was taken. Above: A young visitor examines a lighthouse lantern at California's Cabrillo National Monument, designated in 1913.

BELOW NATT N. DODGE, RIGHT GEORGE GRANT, BOTH NPS HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION



although some have been absorbed by other sites or redesignated as parks or state properties. While most are in the West, there are now monuments in 25 states. Every President has designated or expanded at least one monument.

The net effect is the protection of an enormous swath of heritage. Hopewell burial mounds, vast cave networks, numerous southwestern pueblos, gigantic redwoods, and 19th century forts are all part of the act's legacy. And that goes well beyond the monuments themselves. Says Frank McManamon, chief archeologist of the National Park Service, "The act defined a basic public concern for sites on public land, and asserted a fundamental right to how they were to be treated." That concern formed a foundation for all the laws that followed.

The accomplishment is breathtaking. Protected lands have preserved literally millions of acres of priceless cultural and environmental treasures. The statute is part of the legal foundation for preserving wild places, too. Several of the iconic parks—jewels like the Grand Canyon—began life as monuments in the early days of the Antiquities Act. They are a reminder that historic and environmental preservation were born more or less together.

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A Timeless Idea

A few weeks after my visit to Chaco, I board the Port Authority train in Newark for the short hop across the river to New York, disembarking at the World Trade Center Station. The sight hits me like a punch in the stomach. The last time I was here, the towers still stood. I proceed up Broadway for a few blocks to the new federal building. It's not the building that brings me here, but a small plot surrounded by a cyclone fence immediately adjacent. A national monument is under construction, one of the newest, established by President Bush in March. Three years ago, 419 individuals were interred on this spot, moved from their original resting place beneath the building. I am at the site of the African Burial Ground.

Among the residents of colonial New York was a substantial population of African descent. Some were free and some were not. Some arrived with the Dutch, others on British slavers from Africa or the Indies. Very little is known about day-to-day life in the community. Certainly life was harsh and segregated. So was death.

Persons of color could not be buried with Euro-Americans. Instead, their burial was relegated to a seven-acre plot on a ravine at the edge of the settlement. In the 1790s, the plot was filled with rubble to level the area for building sites. That fill, some 15 to 30 feet deep, protected the occupants for two centuries.

In 1991, during construction of the building, workers encountered the remains, touching off an emotional response from city residents. While the property was known to be within the old cemetery, planners assumed that generations of buildings had obliterated it.

Archeologists were called in, and uncovered hundreds of burials. The decoration of coffins and small things interred suggested connections to African customs. Chemical analysis revealed that most adults were born in Africa, although many children were born either here or in the Caribbean. Signs of stress and injury—from heavy labor and poor nutrition, even among the very young—were common. So was evidence of strong families, like women buried with infants and children. Slowly, during a decade of research, the details

Left: Observation deck at Arizona's Grand Canyon, declared a monument in 1908. **Right:** A solitary visitor at Colorado's Great Sand Dunes National Park, designated in 1932. While many of the earliest monuments were arresting reminders of a long human presence, some were set aside for their sheer beauty. The idea mirrored a deepening sense of national identity at the dawn of the 20th century, one where past and place and nature joined in a greater intangible whole.





LEFT GEORGE GRANTINIS HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, RIGHT BRIAN GROOMPSHAER

Left: California's Muir Woods National Monument, designated in 1908. As the 19th century drew to a close, the idea of protecting places broached questions both philosophical and practical. Why is the past important? Which past do we save? Does it mean taking from people who've used the land for generations? Who will care for the sites? **Right:** Remnants of a mining past at California's Joshua Tree National Park, an 800,000-acre preserve whose human history goes back at least 5,000 years. Declared a monument in 1936, Joshua Tree boasts a remarkably intact record of southern California's mining history, from the 1800s to the "second gold rush" of the Great Depression.

came into focus. These were lives of hardship and brutality, of stubborn devotion to family and tradition.

The African Burial Ground is a reminder that the Antiquities Act is hardly an anachronism. And there are new challenges ahead.

The National Park Service is not the only agency with national monuments. The Bureau of Land Management is the largest federal landowner in the West, with long experience managing wilderness areas and places with historic value. But much of its focus has been on the practical use, such as grazing leases and oil, gas, and mineral claims. With a number of monuments established in the 1990s, the agency faced some new and complex issues. Local sentiment was decidedly negative. Some feared that grazing, timbering, and other traditional activities were threatened.

BLM responded with the National Landscape Conservation System, an approach that allows for conservation in the context of the multiple-use mandate. BLM developed management plans for 15 of its monuments, with intensive involvement by local stakeholders. The result is, in a way, a new kind of monument. The plans are flexible enough to address grazing allotments and mineral extraction, while providing protection for resources ranging from cliff dwellings to old growth forests. There is still a lot of learning and adapting ahead, but the approach shows great promise.

The act faces another frontier at the shoreline. There are national monuments underwater, places rich in aquatic life, geological wonders, shipwrecks, and other historic remains. They are all exceedingly fragile. The traditional protection—a marine sanctuary—can take years. Establishing a monument can save the day with just the stroke of a pen.

Of course it's much more complicated than that. There are complex issues of ownership and control. Protecting submerged sites can be costly, and law enforcement next to impossible. There are jurisdictional issues, too.

In 2003, the 419 individuals disinterred from the site of New York's new federal building—along with all the small objects that accompanied them into the hereafter—were reburied in the plot behind the chain link fence that I now look through. Public art commemorating the burial ground adorns the lobby of the building. National Park Service exhibits will interpret the site and the history of the community. The monument will not only explain how these residents were buried, but who they were, how they lived their lives, and why they matter. One of the artworks is a mosaic of the city skyline on a foundation of human skulls, a metaphor of how modern New York, and modern America, rests on the lives and work of those who came before.



Certain places, like this one, are a palpable reminder of our predecessors, and what they left us. That's ultimately what produced the Antiquities Act and what keeps it relevant. It is based on the simple yet powerful proposition that we should remember these people, so that we know who we are and where we came from. The lesson stays with me as I walk back toward where the great towers once stood.

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