

Ever green

Gifford Pinchot, conservationist and governor, looms large over the bluffs and waterfalls of leafy, charming Milford, Pa.

By Beth D'Addono

For The Inquirer

MILFORD, Pa. - Driving north on leafy Route 209 along a section of the Delaware River that dips into the 70,000-acre Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, it's easy to see why Gifford Pinchot was passionate about conservation.

The two-time Pennsylvania governor, who is credited with starting the U.S. Forest Service in 1905, spent most of his life surrounded by these woods, fly-fishing on the river and trekking along the steep bluffs of Pennsylvania bluestone that surround this Pike County seat.

Although he died here in 1946 at age 81, Pinchot still looms large over this town, as much a presence as the Knob, a 400-foot bluff that rises above Broad Street, the main thoroughfare.

And his reputation is getting a boost these days, by Ken Burns' new series, *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*, and Timothy Egan's book, *The Big Burn*, due out tomorrow, detailing the country's largest forest fire.

Pinchot's vision of preserved green space and sustainable forestry began at his family home here - just about at the intersection of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York. Thanks in large part to Pinchot's stewardship, half of Pike County is state park or federal land, with an additional 30 percent set aside for hunting and camping.

These great swaths of green, punctuated by a network of dramatic waterfalls, make up some of the prettiest country in the state. And Pinchot made it his business to keep it that way.

"I think Gifford Pinchot is one of the most underappreciated figures in American history," says Sean Strub, an Iowa native-turned-New Yorker who adopted Milford as a weekend retreat in 1996 and co-owns the tony Hotel Fauchere.

"Gifford really introduced the concept of sustainable harvesting of woodlands as a way to protect our country's resources," Strub says. "That was a very new and controversial idea back then."

At the same time that John Muir was inspiring Teddy Roosevelt to create the National Park system, Pinchot was awarded oversight of 190 million acres of America's woodland resources, holding to his creed of accomplishing "the greatest good for the greatest number over the longest time."

To get a feel for just how revolutionary Pinchot was in his day, it's necessary to visit Grey Towers, the Pinchot family residence designed by Richard Morris Hunt and a family haven from 1886 to 1963.

Approached through towering black locust trees, the estate stands out against a wooded hillside. But it wasn't always so. The family, which moved to Milford from France in 1818, made a good part of its fortune felling the trees on these hills and floating the timber downriver to Trenton and Philadelphia - exactly the kind of destructive lumbering that Pinchot would devote his career to stopping. Early pictures of the 20,000-square-foot mansion show a setting bereft of trees.

Pinchot's father, James, encouraged him to study forestry, which he did in Nancy, France, after graduating from Yale University. James Pinchot later endowed a two-year graduate program of forestry at Yale and designated a portion of Grey Towers' 1,600 acres as a summer-school site and for fieldwork, an arrangement that continued for nearly 26 years.

Photos of students surveying the land, with the house in the background, are just a few of the artifacts at Grey Towers, which was donated to the U.S. Forest Service in 1963 in a ceremony led by President John F. Kennedy months before his assassination.

More than 25,000 visitors tour Grey Towers annually, many of them led by tour guide and local son Paul Cuccolo. He points out the Renaissance artwork and furnishings in the grand entrance hall, a rifle carried by Teddy Roosevelt up San Juan Hill, and books in the expansive library that reveal Pinchot's love for nature, fishing, and wildlife.

Outside, a Roman-style water table under a wisteria-covered pergola was the site of many a lively discussion. Guests floated bowls of food to each other - usually a successful novelty, except for the time Pinchot tried to carve a Thanksgiving turkey and it wound up in the drink.

"After that, the food was always served carved and ready to eat," says Cuccolo, who is writing a book about the Pinchot family.

"If anybody's had a bad thing to say about Giff, I've never heard it," Cuccolo says. "He brought Pennsylvania out of the Depression faster than any other state, built 20,000 miles of roads, and made this the greenest county in Pennsylvania."

The Pinchot Greenway, a two-mile walking path, connects Grey Towers to the McDade Trail and Milford Beach along the Delaware - just two of the area's popular green spots.

In warm weather, many visitors rent kayaks or inner tubes for a float along the Delaware, where they might spot great blue herons and waterfowl. Come winter, the Upper Delaware River watershed provides the largest wintering habitat for bald eagles in the Northeast.

Year round, Raymondskill Falls, just south of town, has been attracting tourists since the Civil War, when Milford became a popular destination for rich folk eager to leave the polluted city behind. It is the tallest waterfall in the state - only four feet shorter than Niagara Falls - and you can reach it by a short gravel path from the parking area.

Besides its natural beauty, Milford is special for being a small town where about 1,200 people live year round. Despite the influx of well-heeled New Yorkers who bought real estate at a breakneck pace in the wake of 9/11, there's a quirky charm that resists gentrification.

Through the years, the town has attracted its share of characters, from residents of Horace Greeley's Sylvania Colony - a utopian community associated with the mid-19th-century "free-love" movement - to the annual Milford Science Fiction Writers' Conference, a now-defunct event that drew genre stars such as Isaac Asimov, Philip K. Dick, and L. Ron Hubbard.

Philosopher Charles Peirce, the founder of pragmatism, was another notable resident. His papers, along with the bloodstained Lincoln Flag taken from Ford's Theater after the assassination, are housed at the Columns Museum, operated by the county Historical Society.

In 1867, Swiss-born Louis Fauchere, the chef at Delmonico's restaurant in Manhattan, opened the Hotel Fauchere, and a cadre of stage and film stars followed him on weekends. Frequent guests included Charlie Chaplin, Sarah Bernhardt, Mae West, and the Gish sisters. Over the years, the hotel would host the likes of Robert Frost, Babe Ruth, Henry Ford, and Presidents Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt and Kennedy, until it closed in the 1970s.

Strub and Dick Snyder renovated the dilapidated Italianate building, and reopened it three years ago. The Relais & Chateaux hotel has again become a drawing card, but the town's Victorian architecture, owner-operated galleries and shops, and handful of good restaurants add to its allure - that, and its proximity to New York (75 miles) and Philadelphia (125 miles).

"We have economic diversity - Pike is not a rich county," Strub says. "And we're a real town, not a toy-train set."

Strub, who is active in the community, says the town could use a shoe-repair shop and a seafood store.

"We don't want to be a Woodstock or a New Hope, with a Main Street full of T-shirt shops. Preserving our cultural and historic vitality is important to all of us."

Just as preserving the area's forests and falls was paramount to Gifford Pinchot.

Exploring Milford

Things to Do

Grey Towers

151 Grey Towers Dr.
570-296-9630
www.fs.fed.us/na/gt

Tours: On the hour daily, 11 a.m.-4 p.m., through Oct. 31; 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., Saturday-Sunday, Nov. 1, 7-8, 14-15, 21-22; 1 p.m. and 3 p.m., Dec. 12-30 (excluding Dec. 24-26); Open House, 1-4 p.m., Dec. 12-13, 19-20, 27-30.

Admission: \$6.

The Columns Museum

608 Broad St.
570-296-8126
www.pikecountyhistoricalsociety.org

Hours: 1-4 p.m., Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday.

Admission: \$5

Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area

Includes the Knob, Raymondskill Falls, and Milford Beach
570-426-2452, 908-496-4458 (weekends)
www.nps.gov/dewa

Kittatinny Canoes

378 Routes 6 & 209
1-800-356-2852 www.kittatinny.com

Places to stay**Hotel Fauchere**

401 Broad St.; 570-409-1212
www.hotelfauchere.com

Elegant, restored Italianate hotel offers 16 luxe guestrooms (\$200-\$350) that combine 21st-century technology (WiFi, iPod docking stations, flat screens) with heavenly comfort (Frette linens, Kiehls cosmetics, wine and chocolate in every room).

The Black Walnut Inn

179 Firetower Rd. 570-296-6322 www.theblackwalnutinn.com

Charming stone Tudor inn set on three acres with a lake. Twelve rooms, suite and cabin (\$100-\$250) include breakfast. Stables on site; pets - including horses - welcome.

Harrington House B&B

208 Harford St.; 570-296-2661; www.harringtonhousemilford.com

Newly remodeled, pet-friendly B&B in a historic Victorian house offers four en suite rooms (\$160) and a hot breakfast daily, with homemade baked goods a specialty.

Places to eat**Delmonico Room Bar Louis**

Hotel Fauchere
401 Broad St.
570-409-1212
www.hotelfauchere.com

The Pâtisserie

403 Broad St.
570-409-1246
www.patisseriefauchere.com

Fretta's Italian Specialties

223 Broad St.; 570-296-7863
www.frettas.com

Milford Diner

301 Broad St.; 570-296-8611

Muir House

102 Route 2001
570-296-6373
www.muirhouse.com

Waterwheel Café & Bakery

150 Water St.
570-296-2383
www.waterwheelcafe.com

Shopping**Antiques of Milford**

216 Broad St.; 570-296-4258

The Artery Fine Art and Craft Gallery

210 Broad St.; 570-409-1234
www.arteryonline.com

Books & Prints at Pear Alley

220 Broad St.; 570-296-4777
www.booksandbookbinding.com

Forest Hall Antiques

214 Broad St.; 570-296-4299
www.foresthallantiques.com

Golden Fish Art & Craft Gallery

307 Broad St.; 570-296-0413
www.goldenfishgallery.com

Jill Deal

200 Broad St.; 570-409-9276
www.jilldealyarn.net

Upriver Home and Garden

202 Broad St.; 570-296-2026
www.upriverhome.com

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