

Frank “Boss” Pinkley

Importance

Frank J. “Boss” Pinkley started his career with the National Park Service as the custodian at Casa Grande National Monument, where he worked from 1901 to 1915. After a brief hiatus, he returned to Casa Grande in 1918, and in 1923 he was appointed Superintendent of all southwestern national monuments managed by the National Park Service. He also remained the official custodian at Casa Grande until 1931. Pinkley was a tireless advocate for the preservation and protection of national monuments. Despite a chronic lack of funding, he improved facilities and interpretive programs at the monuments under his administration.

Champion of the National Monuments

In 1901 Frank Pinkley took up the duties of custodian at what was then called Casa Grande Ruin Reservation in Arizona. When the passage of the Antiquities Act in 1906 allowed for the creation of national monuments to protect objects of “historic or scientific interest,” Casa Grande was reclassified as a national monument. Initially intended to preserve prehistoric archaeological sites, the Antiquities Act proved to be a versatile tool for preservationists. Compared to the national parks, however, the monuments occupied a distinctly second class position. Even after the National Park Service assumed control of many national monuments in 1916, appropriations for the monuments remained limited.

Frank Pinkley sought to change this situation. At Casa Grande, Pinkley cobbled together an exhibit, protected the ruins from vandalism, and erected a fence to keep out cattle. He wrote regularly to the highest officials in the Park Service—Director Stephen Mather and Assistant Director Horace Albright—requesting more funding. By the 1920s, Mather and Albright realized that they needed a field administrator for the national monuments, and they thought immediately of Pinkley. In 1923 Pinkley accepted the position of Superintendent, overseeing the fourteen national monuments that the Park Service managed in the Southwest. Pinkley immediately embarked on an ambitious improvement program, instilling a sense of professionalism and pride in the custodians of national monuments, who were usually unpaid volunteers. Pinkley knew that higher numbers of visitors equaled a better chance for funding, and by 1927, over 270,000 people visited the southwestern monuments each year. Pinkley also jealously guarded the category of “national monument.” Often, the

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Park Service promoted national monuments, such as Zion or the Grand Canyon, to the status of national parks. Pinkley felt this undermined his efforts to gain recognition for the national monuments. When Bandelier National Monument was transferred to the Park Service in 1932, Pinkley fought hard to keep it a monument as opposed to reclassifying it as a national park.

Eventually, as Mather and Albright broadened the mission of the National Park Service in the 1930s, moving beyond a strict focus on the premier national parks, the national monuments became more important to the agency. The agency itself was changing—a higher percentage of managers were college-educated professionals. Pinkley, accustomed to having free rein, often disagreed with other officials, particularly in the Division of Education. His last years with the Park Service were marked with discord, but Pinkley did live to see the creation of a school for future custodians of national monuments in 1940. He died of heart failure immediately after giving the opening address at the school’s dedication ceremony. Pinkley had dedicated much of his life to preserving the national monuments and helped to make them an integral part of the National Park Service.

References

Rothman, Hal. 1989. *America’s National Monuments: The Politics of Preservation*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.