Through his earlier books such as *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism* (2001), Char Miller has distinguished himself as the preeminent biographer of the nation’s first Chief Forester and leader of the twentieth-century Conservation Movement. Now, through his expert selections from several libraries’ collections of Pinchot’s letters, articles, and speeches, Miller brings us—in Pinchot’s own words—a personality who is so much more than the two-dimensional character known to most of us in the forestry community. Although Pinchot himself wrote in his autobiography, *Breaking New Ground* (1947), “I have ... been a governor, every now and then, but I am a forester all the time—have been, and shall be, all my working life,” Miller brings to life a multilingual polymath who fought tirelessly not just for conservation, but for racial equality, women’s rights, and universal health care for senior citizens.

Through this collection, Pinchot himself details not only his famous successes, but his less remembered defeats as well. He was an ardent supporter of Theodore Roosevelt’s Progressive (or “Bull Moose”) Party bid for the presidency in 1912, which was widely credited with sinking Republican Howard Taft’s chances for reelection and handing the presidency to Democrat Woodrow Wilson (Fausold 1961). We learn that Pinchot expected to have served as secretary of state had Roosevelt won. In retribution, Pinchot is cast into the political wilderness by his Republican Party’s “machine politicians,” whom he blames for his subsequent losses in two Senate races. But in 1922, Pinchot confronts the “machine” head-on in a bid to become governor of Pennsylvania, running on a populist platform to reform the state government and regulate the utility monopolies. After a landslide victory, he delivers a tough-minded inaugural address (included in its entirety), and immediately proceeds to deliver on his promises.

After a four-year hiatus required by Pennsylvania law, Pinchot again confronts the machine politicians of his own party, and with a wave of popular support wins a second term as governor. Echoing his earlier populist conservation theme of “the greatest good, for the greatest number, in the long run,” Pinchot redoubles his efforts to make the state government more transparent, efficient, and responsive to farmers, rural communities, and others “without access to the levers of power.” Miller dedicates the longest section of the book to Pinchot’s writings about state government reform. In “Lifting the Farmers Out of the Mud,” Pinchot details his rationale for revolutionizing the rural economy by constructing farm-to-market roads to facilitate timely transportation of agricultural produce. Known to this day in Pennsylvania as “Pinchot roads,” this system became a model for states as far away as Texas, which still uses the “FM” designation for its rural county roads.

This was not the only public works innovation pioneered by Pinchot in Pennsylvania and subsequently widely adopted elsewhere. In the depths of the Great Depression, Governor Pinchot put thousands of Pennsylvanians to work restoring the state’s battered forests, improving access to state parks, and constructing roads and other public infrastructure. As Miller writes, “Pinchot created jobs and generated hope in communities that had little of either.” So successful was this public works program that it subsequently became the model for FDR’s national Civilian Conservation Corps, and in many ways the precursor to today’s Job Corps programs in the national forests and on other public lands.

But it was the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources that continued to dominate Pinchot’s intellect and energies for the remainder of his long and productive life. Having helped draft the “Declaration of Principles” from the North American Conservation Conference in 1909, which Miller has included, Pinchot continued to advocate for a global conference on conservation and development. His reasoning is articulated in an article entitled “Conservation as a Foundation for Permanent Peace,” also included in this volume, which was published in 1940 unfortunately—and so ironically—on the eve of the Second World War. At the urging of his widow, Cornelia Bryce Pinchot, a modest conference was finally convened three years after his death, but Pinchot’s broad purposes and goals arguably were not fully addressed until the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

Miller states that “Even as Pinchot was resolutely a man of his time, he speaks to our own.” Pinchot intended his autobiography *Breaking New Ground* to serve as an “eyewitness account” of the events in which he was personally involved. As Miller notes, Pinchot rejected the “common statement that actions or events cannot be properly appraised until after generations have passed” and the implication that “actions and events cannot be understood until there is nobody left alive who knows the inside causes which produced them, or the true conditions which gave them meaning.” The mark of useful historical scholarship is the extent to which it places past events within their full context, so they can be understood as a product of their own unique time and place.

There are acclaimed biographies of Gifford Pinchot such as those by McGeary (1960) and Pinkett (1970), and
articles by Watts (1950), Pinkett (1961) and Dana (1965) and others, which were written closer to Pinchot’s time and had the benefit of personal accounts from individuals who actually lived and worked with him. Other studies, notably Steen (2001), have drawn extensively from Pinchot’s personal diaries to provide a direct and immediate perspective on his thinking during his involvement in the Conservation Movement and the early years of the US Forest Service. But there are none that have better captured the full depth and complexity of Gifford Pinchot, which Miller has skillfully and respectfully afforded Pinchot an opportunity to convey in his own words.

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