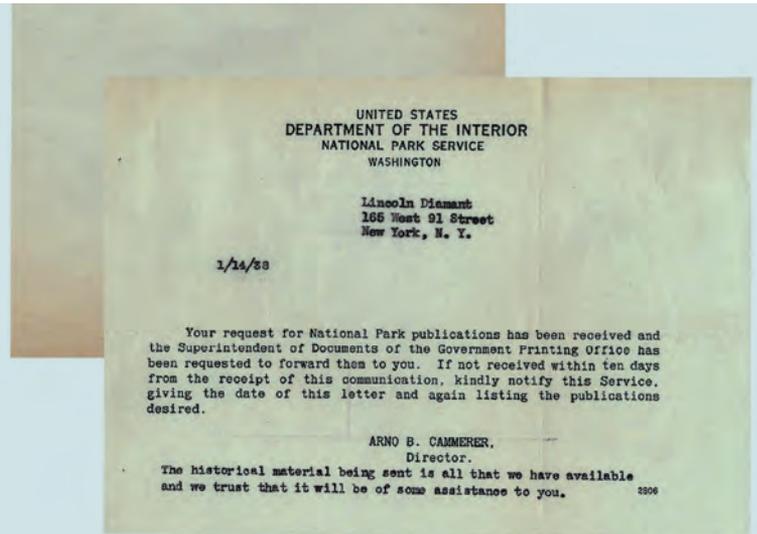




LETTER FROM WOODSTOCK



INHERITANCES

Rolf Diamant

You might say I inherited this column from Bill Brown of Gustavus, Alaska. Bill, the author of *Islands of Hope: Parks and Recreation in Environmental Crisis*, was one of the most brilliant and idiosyncratic figures in National Park Service (NPS) history. A long-time member of the George Wright Society (GWS), from 1992 to 1996 he wrote a column titled “Letter from Gustavus” for *The George Wright Forum*, the Society’s journal. The “Letter” was his independent, incisive commentary on the role of national parks framed in a larger, global context.

I knew Bill through Rick Caulfield, a close friend of mine at the University of California, Berkeley. Rick, Bill, and former Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve superintendent Bob Howe had spent an Alaskan winter sharing a cabin near the newly designated Yukon–Charley Rivers National Preserve. During those dark months, before the park first opened for business, they got the lay of the land, and slowly befriended distrustful local residents. Bill was known as an all-around problem solver selected to lead the team because of his emotional intelligence and his intuitive appreciation for local knowledge and traditional cultures. Above all he was also a good listener with an above-average sense of irony.

When I retired from NPS in 2012, I was invited to debut a column in *The George Wright Forum*; this is the 21st installment. At the time, Bill was gratified to see his “Letter” picked up again as the column’s locus now shifted from Gustavus to Woodstock, Vermont, where I live. Hopefully Bill’s spirit and intent survived the transition. I expect that I have been on occasion as provocative as Bill, and I hope that in the 20 letters I have written to date, I have been as consistently honest and thoughtful.

Now that *The George Wright Forum* has been reincarnated as *Parks Stewardship Forum*, as a collaborative project of the Institute for Parks, People, and Biodiversity and the George Wright Society, I am reminded of another inheritance: my affection for UC Berkeley, which I have carried with me since my days as a College of Natural Resources undergraduate and later as a graduate student in Landscape Architecture. While at Berkeley, I began my NPS career working on the start-up of Golden Gate National Recreation Area on the other side of the Bay. Closing the circle, I now have the pleasure to once more be associated with my friend and former colleague, Institute Director Jon Jarvis, former NPS director and past GWS board president.

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Pages from Lincoln Diamant's scrapbook, 1938.

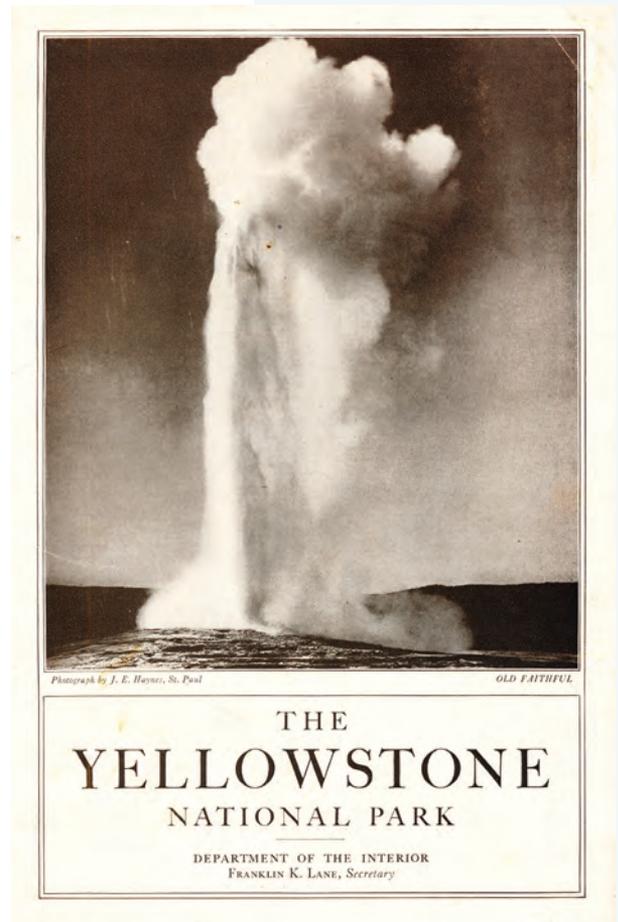


In a larger historical context, both GWS and NPS share deep historical connections to UC Berkeley. George Melendez Wright, early champion of scientific wildlife management in national parks, was a Berkeley graduate—as were both Stephen Mather and Horace Albright, first-generation NPS leaders.

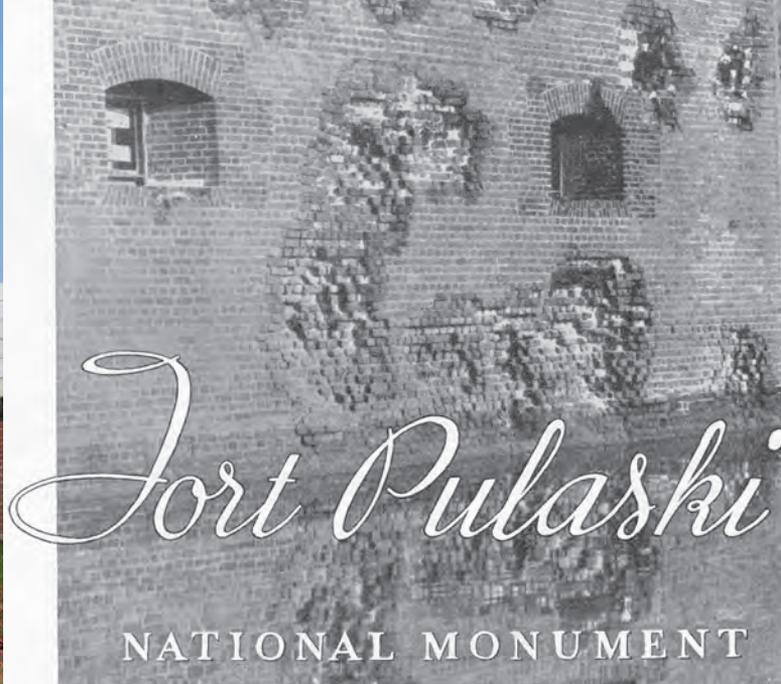
My most recent inheritance is also related to national parks: a grey archival box filled with first-edition NPS brochures left to me by my late father, Lincoln Diamant. I recently went through the box with Ryan Polk, a helpful curator at Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, a place I got to know well as superintendent. The materials were collected by my dad—who first became aware of NPS at the age of 11 as an avid stamp collector—when he obtained the complete 1934 national park stamp series. He began assembling his NPS publications collection as a teenager living in New York City. After carefully typing a letter requesting anything NPS could send his way, he received what must have been a surprisingly large package from Washington, along with NPS Director Arno Cammerer's cover letter and envelope, both of which are today still glued into a school report my dad prepared at that time and saved. The *Official Business* line on the envelope is underlined and annotated in red pencil, "WOO! WOO!" As a young person, Linc, as he was known, didn't have the opportunity to travel much outside of New York, but his interest in national parks never flagged.



NPS brochure for Fort Pulaski National Monument, 1941.



NPS brochure for Yellowstone National Park, 1917.



The idea to re-open the box came to me after a recent spring visit to Fort Pulaski National Monument, on the Georgia coast. I recall seeing a Pulaski brochure when I first browsed through the collection, as a teenager myself, many years ago. When I opened the box again, I found that the earliest materials include 1917 brochures for Yellowstone, Sequoia, and Rocky Mountain national parks and also include George Melendez Wright's *Fauna Series* numbers One and Two, which Wright co-authored with Joseph S. Dixon and Ben H. Thompson. Altogether there are mint-condition booklets for about 40 parks, minus what I sent to Pulaski, at the request of Laura Waller, the cultural resource manager there.

These original park publications got me thinking about how many of these storied places will become inaccessible as our destabilized climate, with its oversized storms and rising seas, reshape the national park system as we know it. As I write this column Hurricane Dorian is bearing down on the coast of Georgia and Fort Pulaski has been indefinitely closed, its fate uncertain. It was evident from my Pulaski visit that the park staff is clearly worried that Cockspur Island with its massive masonry fortification will sooner rather than later be flooded one too many times, cut off from the mainland, and lost to posterity. As I conclude this letter, I realize that one part of resilience is the stewardship of public memory. How are we going to curate essential cultural and natural histories when park landscapes are inaccessible or unrecognizable, and the physical resources tied to those stories can no longer be experienced?

Which brings me back to my inherited box of brochures. There was a disturbing anachronism in the collection, a Vicksburg National Military Park publication, part of the *NPS Popular Study Series* from the 1930s, that the NPS Richmond Regional Office chose to illustrate with a blackface cartoon. In contrast, during my recent Pulaski visit I was impressed by NPS's thoughtful interpretation of a freedman's village on the periphery of the fort—a reminder that Pulaski too has a history, like Fort Monroe National Monument, as another “freedom's fortress” that held the promise of sanctuary and a new birth of freedom on the far edge of the North American continent. As the waters rise around Pulaski and other national treasures, let us hope that this story, and many others, are not submerged or erased in what we choose to remember and how we keep those memories alive. This, after all, is our greatest inheritance.