A year ago I helped the Park Service dedicate a visitor center at Chancellorsville, Virginia. What I remember of that occasion, with continuing embarrassment, was that it was there that I found, to my consternation when I turned over page four of my text, not the final page I expected, but page one again. Page five was back at my seat.

I've been travelling these last two days with your Congressman, Wayne Aspinall. To tell you the truth, I've been travelling with him for a lot longer than two days. He is the Chairman of the best-run committee of the United States Congress, and it is the best-run because he is the Chairman. His House Interior Committee is the most important committee of the Congress for the Western United States, exercising jurisdiction over the public lands, parks, water resource development, minerals, Indians, and all the other subjects which are, in the Executive Branch, the assigned responsibilities of the Interior Department, where I serve.

We could talk for a long time about the public lands, and the reclamation projects, and the Indians, and the minerals of this great area, but our purpose today leads us to the national system of parks, monuments, and recreation areas of which the Colorado National Monument is one.

On my last trip through the Monument, I asked Superintendent Bussey what he thought was the most significant thing about the history of the Monument. Without hesitation he mentioned the spirit of cooperation and mutual helpfulness of the people of the area about the park. He singled out the friendly and helpful interest which Congressman Aspinall had always shown to the activities here.

I've had a theory for a long time about park areas -- what makes for their establishment, and what makes for their successful operation.

For establishment, one key is vision and insight -- the capacity to see a natural feature, which may seem commonplace, a damned nuisance, economically worthless, or all three, at the time and place, against a larger backdrop -- the backdrop of geology, archeology, history or esthetics, for example.
But vision and insight aren't enough. Added to that must be the wracking, endless work of achieving something like a political consensus locally. Not necessarily evidenced by a political act, such as an election, but by general acceptance in the community, support which may be evidenced in myriad ways -- by Chamber of Commerce resolutions, by newspaper support, by elected officials' espousal, by urgings on the floor of Congress.

If there is such a community consensus at the outset, it tends to be self-generating. With any kind of nurturing, the good feeling about parks tends to grow. Even parks which seemed just to squeak by come to be regarded as great boons, after awhile.

This unit of the park system was blessed from the beginning, both in the vision and inspiration of early leaders, and in the maintenance of that spirit of cooperation. This is clearly evidenced by its early history, which I personally checked in the files of the Department about it for the period from 1907 to 1912.

There is no question but that the idea for the Colorado National Monument was single-handedly conceived, and single-mindedly pursued, by the colorful John Otto.

When the vision or inspiration for making this a national area came to him I didn't find out. Our earliest records only show that the first efforts must have been concentrated on the citizens of Grand Junction. In 1907, Judge Walter Sullivan was the draftsman and scrivener of a formal letter to the Register of the U. S. Land Office at Montrose, asking "that the Interior Department set aside certain lands for a public park and that they be eventually granted to Mesa County". Other signers included every elected official of the County, the Mayor, City Clerk and City Treasurer of Grand Junction, the State Senator, and the officers of the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce. To this evidence of local unanimity they were able to add the formal indorsement of the Governor and the Auditor of State.

In due course, the Interior Department heeded the request for a temporary withdrawal, being swayed, perhaps, by the argument in the petition that to fail to do so would permit "any interested person who was so disposed to make filing thereof as agricultural land or entry thereof as timber and stone land" all for the "mercenary purpose of charging fees to visitors" and "to make a profit out of the same to the detriment of the thousands of persons now living or who may hereafter become citizens of this County and vicinity".

Within two months, the temporary withdrawal for about five thousand acres was processed, notwithstanding a land office clerk's note that it was NOT authorized by the Antiquities Act. Another clerk indirectly referred to President Theodore Roosevelt's midnight creation of the forest reserves by calling "special attention to the fact that the withdrawal is not for forestry purposes and I do not therefore believe it would be antagonistic even to the spirit of the act of
March 4, 1907, prohibiting the creation of the national forests in Colorado and certain other states except by act of Congress.

With the withdrawal made, John Otto took up his pen to get a more permanent status for the area. On August 8, 1909, in a "My Dear President" letter to William H. Taft, he begins "Again I take the liberty to call your attention to our National Monument Park proposition", and invited the President to visit the area.

Whether in response to the invitation, I doubt, but Taft did visit and another "My Dear President" letter opens, "Almost a year has passed since you visited our valley. Perhaps you remember the Peach Queen". I'll wager Mr. Taft did indeed remember the Peach Queen! Then a sly political reference, perhaps looking forward to the 1912 Bull Moose campaign which unseated Taft in favor of Wilson, although 1910 was an off year: "We are stand-patters, that is, we always stand pat for the continuance of prosperity". He asked Mr. Taft to permanently establish the area as a National Park, and signed himself "John Otto, Trailbuilder and guide".

Mr. Otto recognized that even then Presidents had to be preoccupied with Congress: "We hope that now in between sessions you can give this matter the attention that it as we believe duly deserves".

The Presidential trip to the Valley had been for the purpose of dedicating the Gunnison Tunnel. Mr. Otto appreciated the Tunnel: "A great achievement it is as the world knows; as such it is simply the work of man".

In December, 1909, an additional withdrawal, up to about 15,000 acres, was requested by the Chamber of Commerce. Probably more because Senator Guggenheim had announced his intention to introduce a bill to make the area a national park, than the Chamber petition, this withdrawal got prompt and favorable Department action. Senator Guggenheim's stationery was from the now defunct "Committee on the University of the United States".

Congress not having acted by 1911, either on Senator Guggenheim's bill, or on Congressman Edward Taylor's companion measure, the move started for a Presidential proclamation of a national monument. The petition from the Grand Junction area to the President bears literally hundreds of names, probably the grandparents or parents of many in this audience. Maybe some of you here today signed.

President Taft, after getting a favorable report from the Department, signed the proclamation on May 24, 1911. And it was here that I found the only ripple of disharmony -- over the name. On May 9, 1911, Mr. Taylor received a telegram from Grand Junction: "Chamber of Commerce recommends Hooper National Monument in honor Major S. K. Hooper who has done more to advertise Colorado's scenic attraction than any six men in state". A pencilled note on the telegram says "Held up by violent protests from Colorado, Taylor".

3
The Chamber explained to the Congressman what was up in two letters, both dated May 15, 1911. In one this informative sentence appears: "The Fruita people could have very easily arranged the matter without any friction if they had called up anyone here in the city and made a suggestion".

And: "I think Otto should be consulted about the matter, but he was off in the woods somewhere".

And finally: "As I said before, we will not make any further suggestions... and will leave the matter of selecting a name entirely with you and the Secretary of the Interior".

But under the same date, the same Chamber Secretary listed 18 typed names, and one written as an afterthought in pen. Here are the eighteen typed:

Dinosaur
Mammoth
Mesa Rojo
Grand National
Grand River National
Otto
Ute
Robideau (He was a trapper who lived in this territory in 1832)
Escalante
Domínguez
Independence
Crawford
Liberty
Sphinx
Mile-High
Columbus
Columbine
Centennial

The one penned in? You guessed it. "Colorado National Monument". Congressman Taylor was responsible for its selection.

Well, other interesting things happened. Mr. Otto got married. Collier's weekly, although they had written the Department to verify their facts, announced erroneously that it was to be named "Monolithic National Monument". And they started a legend about where the marriage took place:

"The segregation of this section of land crowns the personal work of the last five years of one of the West's most peculiar characters, John Otto. Otto, without any hope of personal gain, unpaid, and for a long time actually discouraged by the open jeers with which his work was greeted, opened up the natural wonders of this district to the world. With the aid of two burros he has built over twelve miles of splendid trail, leading into and through the various canyons of the park... In places he has drilled through solid rock for long distances. During the last few years he has been supported by the Grand Junction and Fruita Chambers of Commerce."
"On July 4 (1912) he will be married on the top of Independence Monument to Miss Beatrice Farnham of Weymouth, Mass., an artist ... Otto has just completed an iron ladder to the top of this shaft which is 575 feet high".

An equally fascinating story is the episode of the flag to fly atop Independence. I must abbreviate it. Mr. Otto, after the Proclamation was signed, was hired as custodian and sole employee at $1 a month. He took to writing through channels, never again to the President, but instead to his boss, the Commissioner of the General Land Office.

At first he wrote that he would use his salary to buy a $12 flag once a year to fly on Independence, but he soon decided he ought to get one free from the government -- and he did. Then he located a couple of Bureau of Reclamation mules not being used, which the Reclamation man was willing to let him have "but for the trouble of it".

It is always fun, and instructive too, to poke around in the old files of the Department. Invariably one finds that however much things have changed, they remain always the same.

The people don't react differently now than they did in 1911. We have today our John Ottos -- some unrecognized. The benefits of cooperation in the identification of values on the public lands, and the protection and development of these values in the public interest remain the same, too.

This is an auspicious occasion, dedicating as we do this fine structure to serve the needs of numbers of people which even the farseeing Grand Junction people couldn't have imagined in 1907. I hope that we rededicate ourselves, too, to the spirit of cooperation and helpfulness which has marked the entire history of Colorado National Monument.

With men like Wayne Aspinall in Congress, this relationship will be built on solid footing. For he understands the duties and responsibilities of each branch of the government with respect to the public lands, including the parks and monuments.

The source of our national strength is not in the structures we build, whether physical or governmental, but in the people and their elected officials.

President Johnson has infused all of government and the American people too with a new awareness of this elemental fact. Where opportunity is blighted, where the people cannot break out of the chains of poverty forced upon them, where people cannot vote or are denied the rights of Americans, to that extent the whole nation suffers. A spirit of national cooperation in meeting these problems is evident everywhere.
As the oldtimers here express satisfaction that they helped make this park a reality, so all of us will someday express satisfaction that we helped in the great struggles for equality and justice in the Nineteen Sixties.