

## Review Essay

*Duel for the Dunes: Land Use Conflict on the Shores of Lake Michigan*, by Kay Franklin and Norma Schaeffer. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983. xviii, 267 pp. Notes, illustrations, maps, bibliographical essay, index. \$18.95 cloth.

*Sacred Sands: The Struggle for Community in the Indiana Dunes*, by J. Ronald Engel. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983. xxii, 289 pp. Notes, illustrations, maps, index. \$26.95 cloth.

Measured against the great national parks of the West, the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore is very small. Why, then, did two university presses publish in the same year full-length books describing the eighty-year struggle to preserve the dunelands stretching along Lake Michigan south and east of Chicago? If both books tell the same basic story, is one or the other redundant? No, indeed, both books are excellent, but in purpose and content they are quite different.

Kay Franklin and Norma Schaeffer, the authors of *Duel for the Dunes*, are freelance writers who live in the dunes area and were themselves participants in the struggle to save them. They tell the story as one phase of a much longer struggle in American history, the duel between boosters eager to create wealth by cutting down forests, harnessing rivers, digging harbors, and building factories, and conservationists determined to prevent waste of natural resources and to protect the beauty of the landscape. Their book is a study of the gritty infighting of environmental politics.

J. Ronald Engel, author of *Sacred Sands*, also resides in the dunes and participated in the preservationist movement, but his background is strikingly different from Franklin's and Schaeffer's. He holds a B.D. from the Meadville Theological School in Chicago and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. He is now a professor of social ethics at Meadville. His book is a wide-ranging inquiry into the intellectual, artistic, and literary streams that fed into the movement to save the dunes. He finds a profoundly religious meaning in the preservationist effort.

Nineteenth-century enterprisers found profit in digging away the dunes and selling the sand for landfill, especially in Chicago. The idea that the dunes should be left as nature formed them took shape slowly.

Easily reached from Chicago, the wild lakeshore provided first a few, then a growing number, of city dwellers with welcome change. One of the earliest enthusiasts was the Danish-born Jens Jensen—landscape architect, planner of Chicago parks, and civic leader. Another was Henry Chandler Cowles, who taught biology at the recently founded University of Chicago. Jensen and Cowles joined with other nature lovers in organizing the Prairie Club, which built shelters in the dunes and began to agitate to have the area set aside as either a state or a national park. This prompted the creation of a broader based National Dunes Park Association.

When first proposed, the idea of a national park in the dunes was startling. Almost all earlier national parks had been located west of the Mississippi on land already federally owned; they required no purchase or condemnation of private property. But an unusual combination of circumstances brought the proposal on the national stage. Woodrow Wilson was in the White House. His secretary of the interior, Franklin K. Lane, was firmly committed to conservation, and Stephen Mather, head of the new National Park Service, had been an active member of the Prairie Club during several years' residence in Chicago. Still more remarkable, U.S. Senator Thomas Taggart of Indiana favored the project at a time when almost all Indiana politicians were opposed. A Democrat appointed to fill a vacancy opened by the death of a Republican senator, Taggart served only eight months. He used this brief tenure to introduce a bill for the establishment of a Sand Dunes National Park.

Assigned to make an official study of the project, Stephen Mather presided over a carefully orchestrated hearing in a Chicago courtroom. An impressive parade of witnesses testified in favor of the park. Already a friend of the project, Mather recommended a reserve that would stretch along the Indiana lakefront for twenty-five miles. Secretary Lane approved the report and sent it along to Congress. Then nothing happened. The favoring winds that had floated the trial balloon reversed direction. Mather was temporarily sidelined by illness, Tom Taggart lost his Senate seat, and the nation plunged into World War I.

Franklin and Schaeffer clarify the political obstacles which confronted the preservationists. The larger the city of Chicago became, the more precious the nearby dunes seemed; but the cherished area lay beyond the Illinois boundary, and most Indiana politicians were opposed to the proposed park. The state had only about forty-five miles of shoreline along Lake Michigan, and businessmen were eager to build port facilities and manufacturing plants there. As early as 1931, Porter County businessmen began to petition Congress for federal funds to

develop a harbor in the Central Dunes. The principal sponsor of the proposal was Charles Halleck, who held a seat in the House of Representatives from 1934 to 1969. As one of the most powerful Republicans in Congress, Halleck was able to keep the harbor project alive and to hold in check the movement for a national park. Two other Republican stalwarts from Indiana, William Jenner and Homer Capehart, allied themselves with Halleck. Most Indiana Democrats also supported the port; only occasionally did they favor the park.

Competition among the great steel companies further complicated the dunes controversy. Soon after the U.S. Steel Corporation was organized in 1901, it began to develop the city of Gary, Indiana. The Lake County dunes were leveled, a great harbor was built, and large steel mills were constructed. Earlier development of the iron and steel industry in the Chicago area had demonstrated the great advantages of access to the Great Lakes, and Gary's success prompted other steel companies to begin quietly acquiring land in the Indiana Dunes. The steel managers and the pro-port politicians were natural allies, but their eventual victory required skillful maneuvering. To convince the Army Corps of Engineers that the economic benefits of the port would justify its costs, the politicians needed prior commitments from the steel companies, but the companies were reluctant to start construction until the public port was a certainty. The deadlock broke when Bethlehem began to level the lovely Central Dunes. This aggressive step assured approval of the harbor project and limited the dreamed-for park to what could be salvaged elsewhere along the lakefront.

"In terms of the use of the Dunes land," Franklin and Schaeffer say, "proindustry forces emerged the clear victors." But they add: "Considering the inequality of the contending forces, any park at all in the Dunes stands out as a remarkable achievement" (246). Three determined women deserve most of the credit for this achievement. Already prominent in the Indiana Federation of Women's Clubs, Bess Sheehan became the driving force within the National Dunes Park Association. Her greatest victory came in 1923 with the establishment of the Indiana Dunes State Park, which protected some 2,000 acres of lakefront. The demand for a much larger national park did not recur until 1952, when the growing threat of the harbor project led to the formation of a Save the Dunes Council. This time Dorothy Buell assumed the leadership. A witty and forceful speaker, Buell won the backing of national conservation groups and obtained 500,000 signatures to a petition requesting a national park. She suffered her greatest disappointment in 1965 when Congress approved the harbor project, and her greatest victory the following year with the authorization of the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. Buell's successor was Sylvia Troy, who battled

successfully to expand the Lakeshore and protect it from a succession of environmental threats.

Despite the extraordinary zeal of these women, the movement desperately needed some nationally known person to champion its cause in Congress. The enlistment of Illinois Senator Paul Douglas was therefore a major coup for Dorothy Buell. In 1958 Douglas introduced a bill to set aside 4,000 acres of dune land, including the tracts on which Indiana boosters were hoping to locate the controversial harbor. Douglas's first bill was buried in committee, but in subsequent sessions he introduced new bills, each a little different to accommodate conditions. He worked tirelessly to line up supporters ranging from liberal intellectuals to labor leaders. The election of Vance Hartke and Birch Bayh, both Indiana Democrats, to the Senate in 1958 and 1960 opened possibilities, although both men supported the port project. Most important of all was the election of John F. Kennedy to the presidency. A lover of the Cape Cod dunes, Kennedy was sympathetic to the park proposal. He was also impressed by Douglas's alliance with Mayor Richard Daley and the Chicago labor unions. On the other hand, the president did not want to kill the harbor project favored by Hartke and Bayh. He fathered a compromise whereby the port would be built, the state of Indiana would be compensated for initial expenses, and a bifurcated 11,700-acre tract would be set aside as the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.

An assassin took Kennedy's life before Congress could act, but President Lyndon Johnson supported a truncated version of the compromise passed by Congress in October 1966. Disappointed because the authorized park contained only 6,500 acres, the preservationists continued their battle. They won significant victories: the size of the national lakeshore was doubled; plans for oversized parking lots and garish bathhouses were modified; construction of a nuclear power plant close to the park was abandoned; and the unfriendly maneuvers of James Watt, President Ronald Reagan's secretary of the interior, were overcome.

J. Ronald Engel's *Sacred Sands* emphasizes the fervent commitment involved in the long struggle to protect the dunes. Engel gives a thoughtful account of the preservationist movement's genesis early in the twentieth century. It was, he explains, "part of an insurgent movement in the Midwest to reform the democratic faith of the nation." Seeking to sever the identification of democracy with competitive individualism, the dune lovers insisted that democracy meant equal freedom in community, or "the cooperative commonwealth" (xviii).

Landscape architect Jens Jensen, biology professor Henry Chandler Cowles, and other lovers of the dunes were representative of

the remarkable flowering of Chicago's civic and intellectual life. Populists, progressives, and socialists—such as John Peter Altgeld, Eugene Debs, and Clarence Darrow—demanded sweeping political and economic reform. Harriet Monroe, Theodore Dreiser, Vachel Lindsay, Edgar Lee Masters, and Carl Sandburg opened literature to new forms and themes. The University of Chicago, founded in 1890 and richly endowed by John D. Rockefeller, recruited for its faculty such stars as John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and Robert Park. Jane Addams's Hull House and similar institutions provided an opportunity for idealistic young people to work among the poor.

The early park movement reached its climax on Memorial Day, 1917, when some 40,000 people made their way into the Central Dunes to watch six hundred actors and dancers portray episodes from the long history of the dunes. A terrific thunderstorm interrupted the first performance, but most of the people returned the following Sunday to see the complete drama. "The Dunes Pageant of 1917," Engel says, "must occupy a central place in any effort to understand the larger meaning of the eighty-year movement to preserve the Indiana Dunes" (17). He interprets the pageant as a religious rite. Its purpose was to convert people to a new vision of the world, one in which natural beauty was venerated and preserved against human encroachment. The pageant avoided chauvinism. It emphasized the Indians' tragic loss of their lands; it paid tribute to Spanish, French, English, and American pioneers; and it envisioned a future universal kingdom "brought in by those who act to include the rest of nature in the great council of life" (40). The key value was "community," the union of people who would cooperate and use the wealth of the world for the good of all beings.

The religion involved in dunes preservation is obviously not that of traditional Christianity or Judaism. It is the American civil religion, the religion of democracy proclaimed in sacred texts like the Declaration of Independence, on sacred days like the Fourth of July and Memorial Day. Engel identifies Walt Whitman as one of the prophets of this religion and William James, Josiah Royce, and John Dewey as its theologians. The trek of thousands to the great pageant of 1917 was thus a pilgrimage to a sacred place, an initiation into sacred mysteries that still stirred memories long after the event. In other chapters, Engel shows how artists caught the spirit of the dunes and literary people found inspiration there. Carl Sandburg called the dunes "a wonderland for creative art or creative pause." With splendid appropriateness Sandburg lived in a house perched on a dune hilltop while he labored over *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*.

In one of Engel's best chapters, he calls the Indiana Dunes "the birthplace of ecology." "The province of ecology," wrote Henry Chandler Cowles, "is to consider the mutual relations between plants and their environment" (143). As Lake Michigan washed sand on the shore and the wind piled the sand into mounds and hills, the dunes provided an environment of constant change. The hills were unstable, building up and wearing down, moving further inland until they finally became anchored at some distance from the lake. In this shifting environment a succession of plants evolved, each adapted to new conditions. Later biologists at the University of Chicago followed Cowles's example by closely studying the plant and animal life of the dunes. In his account of evolution, Warder Clyde Allee placed less emphasis on the struggle for survival and more on natural cooperation—a point of view highly congenial to the argument of Engel's book.

Paul Douglas is an appropriate hero for *Sacred Sands*. Although brought up in Maine, he came to the University of Chicago to teach economics as a young man. There he absorbed the values associated with midwestern progressivism. He married Emily Taft, daughter of the talented Chicago sculptor Lorado Taft. He formed strong friendships with Jane Addams and Carl Sandburg. Raised a Quaker, he later worshiped with Unitarians. But his true faith, Engel believes, was the religion of democracy, making it highly appropriate that he should fight his last great political battle on behalf of dunes preservation.

If objectivity requires strict neutrality, neither of these books is objective. Each sees the struggle over the dunes as a battle between the forces of light and darkness. Nevertheless, they are both objective in another sense. Each displays a scholarly concern to dig out essential facts, to understand the motives of the participants, and to interpret the larger meaning of events. By giving a full account of the effort to develop an industrial port in the heart of the Indiana Dunes, Franklin and Schaeffer demonstrate that the preservationists had no monopoly on determination and persistence. They do not claim that the park proponents were perfect people. Sometimes their motives were mixed: U.S. Steel Corporation executives gave quiet donations to the park movement because they wanted to hamper construction of rival steel mills, and labor-union leaders in Chicago and Gary probably had similar desires. Franklin and Schaeffer have an excellent chapter on the National Park Service, showing how bureaucratic jealousies and political influences affected its policy toward the proposed dunes park—sometimes supporting, sometimes opposing it. Engel frankly admits that he pays scant attention to the failings of the preservationists and perhaps overstates their virtues. He uses the tools of critical scholarship "for the purpose of illuminating the depth and significance of

their perceptions—not to correct or challenge them” (viii). In focusing on Chicago, Engel may pay less than justice to the Indiana leaders who struggled to educate a public long indifferent or hostile to the idea of a dunes park.

Both books make significant contributions to an understanding of the broader preservationist movement. Scholars familiar with other parts of the country will recognize familiar patterns. Take, for example, the Florida Everglades. Like the dunes, the Everglades were long considered wastelands needing the expenditure of capital to alter and develop them. In both cases nature lovers and scientists developed a deep affection for the strange landscape. In both cases the first effort to protect the region occurred during the Progressive era. In both cases women’s clubs were influential in establishing small state parks. In both cases preservationists decided that adequate protection would require larger national parks, and they were able to win backing from major conservation groups. In both cases the war was almost lost, and the final victory was a partial one. Before Everglades National Park was opened in 1947, half of the original Everglades had been lost to agriculture, industry, and real estate development. Before the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore was authorized in 1966, the most beautiful dunes had been destroyed to benefit commerce and industry.

Environmentalists will find both books useful. *Duel for the Dunes* will provide them with insights into the practicalities of preservationist politics: how to organize, publicize a cause, lobby, and make the alliances necessary for success. *Sacred Sands* will inspire them. It will give them a sense of dedication to noble ideals and a religious purpose, as Engel sees it. In his final sentence—gracefully and powerfully written like the rest of the book—Engel says: “In the concluding decades of the twentieth century, the fragmented, vulnerable, yet ever-renewing Dunes landscape was an apt metaphor of the struggle for community in the midst of a divided society and a broken land” (294).

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