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Selby Walker and the Canadian National Parks Association: **Protectors of the Banff Environment**

The initiatives of Selby Walker and of the Canadian National Parks Association are inextricably linked. For most of the life of the Association, Walker was its spokesman and when he died, the Association ceased to operate. This presentation reviews the work of Walker and the Association in attempting first to protect Banff National Park, and later to expand and protect Canada's national parks system.

William James Selby Walker was born in 1879 to Col. James Walker and his wife Euphenia. The Colonel, who had distinguished careers in both military and civilian life, was declared in 1975 to be Calgary, Alberta's "Citizen of the Century". It was a daunting act for Selby to follow, but in his own calm, quiet ways he made major contributions to local and national advocacy for the protection of Canada's natural environment. Walker was present at the 1923 annual meeting of the Alpine Club of Canada at which the Canadian National Parks Association (CNPA) was founded. Reacting to the proposed damming of a river in Banff National Park, a group of the Alpine Club's executive members orchestrated the creation of this Association which was similar in spirit to the National Parks Association in the United States. Thus began Selby Walker's 39 year involvement with the CNPA. He was on the first Association executive, acting as its Western Vice-President from 1923 to 1925. He then became its President from 1926 to 1927. In mid 1927 he became the Association's executive-secretary, a position he would hold for the next 23 years.

While Walker was the stable force in the Association for 23 years, its executive and its mandate changed periodically. The executive positions were often held by officials of allied organizations - for example, the Alpine Club of Canada, the National Council of Women, and the Canadian Automobile Association. In the early years, representation from the Alpine Club focussed the Association on the protection of national parks - their domain in Western Canada. While the first mandate of the Association was to oppose a proposed dam in Banff National Park in Alberta, that changed several times over its 29 year life. When the federal government changed the park boundaries in 1930, the proposed dam was no longer in the park and the primary issue that led to the formation of the Association was now a nonissue.

An organization faced with the reality of its mandate no longer being a high profile issue can either fade away or change its mandate to reflect the interests and issues of the time - the CNPA took the latter course of action. The National Council of Women's representation on the executive brought attention to the wise use of both human and natural resources, and thus a focus on leisure and the unemployed, in addition to parks. The long

tenure of representatives from the Automobile Association coincided with increasing interest in travel and tourism, and the attendant concern about scenery that characterized much of the later years of the Association. Concerns about wise forestry practices corresponded with those interests in tourism and the need to have pleasant looking scenery. While these interests could be broadly described as being in the “public interest”, they often represented the “self interest” of the individuals and groups who were on the executive. The presentation addresses the notions of “public interest” and “self interest” and their ability to explain the actions of the CNPA; as well as the classic interest group roles that it played in attempting to both “preserve” and “change” aspects of the status quo.