

Making Pictures Out of Clouds:  
Lessons from the Life and Times of George D. Butler\*

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Sometimes, when I am lost in the immediacy of things, I forget that other people, other ideas, and other worlds preceded me. I behave as if everything worth knowing began with me, and I lose sight of the fact that almost everything I take for granted is the result of someone else's hard work. Periodically, then, it is healthy for someone like me to be drawn up and out of my self-absorption to reflect on what I've learned that is my doing, what it is I owe to the learning of others, and give credit where credit is due. Today is one of those days.

My assignment seemed straightforward. I was asked to explore the life and times of George D. Butler, the National Recreation Association's Director of Research for forty-three years from 1919 until 1962, and the individual in whose honor this lecture is now named. I was instructed to read the body of Mr. Butler's work, get inside his head, and speculate on what he might have to say about the contemporary state of leisure research.

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\* I would like to thank Lee Furr, Joe Bannon, Randy Virden, Dan Williams, John Butler, Bob Butler, and George Butler, Jr. for their assistance.

Why I was selected for this task remains somewhat of a mystery to me. At first I thought it might be because I am the only one in our midst who does not have a research agenda of my own. Then I thought it might be because I am one of the few among us who, like George Butler, has made a habit out of publishing in *Parks & Recreation*.<sup>1</sup> I even went so far as to think it might be because I'm now considered to be in the twilight of my own career, and, therefore, that I might possess a facility for talking in past tense. Perhaps my mere presence here today would lend itself to this – how shall I put – historic occasion.

Having beaten myself up sufficiently, I finally decided to just do the job. I contacted Lee Furr, the Joseph Lee Memorial Library archivist. I not only wanted to read everything George Butler had written, I wanted to see photographs of him. What did he look like? How did he carry himself? What was he like to be around? Thanks to Mr. Furr, I can tell you that George Butler stood five feet seven and one half inches tall and weighed one hundred forty pounds. He was a bespectacled unassuming man, modest in dress and demeanor. He wore business suits, was business like, and went about his business. He shied away from publicity. He focused the spotlight on others. He was, in his own way, a mere toiler in the field. But where's the story in that?

I then decided to contact some people who actually knew George Butler. This was no mean feat given that he passed away in 1985 in Sarasota, Florida at the age of 91. Having read Joe Bannon's chapter on Butler in Hilmi Ibrahim's *Pioneers in Leisure and Recreation*,<sup>2</sup> I knew Joe worked for Butler in Leonia, New Jersey when Joe was fresh out of college. What I didn't know was that Joe had done so at the urging of Charles Brightbill. Joe provided a good point of departure for probing into Mr. Butler's personal life, especially when he sent me George's notes recounting his experiences as an ambulance driver in World War I. But I wanted more. Unfortunately, Joe had lost contact with Mr. Butler's two sons, George Jr. and Bob, who themselves would have to be in their late seventies or early eighties by now, and my momentum slowed appreciably.

Then I got lucky. At the International Symposium for Society and Resource Management in Keystone, Colorado in June, Randy Virden mentioned in passing that George Butler's grandson, John, had been an acquaintance of Dan Williams at Utah State. Perhaps Dan could be of help? I corralled Dan between meetings. Though he had maintained little contact with John since their graduate school days, Dan thought he might have John's mailing address since they still exchanged Christmas cards. Sure enough, a few days later, Dan sent me an address and phone number, two pieces of information that provided the key for unlocking the story I am about to tell.

### Lessons from the Front <sup>3</sup>

It is June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918. Twenty-four-year-old George Butler, freshly minted Yale economics graduate, with Phi Beta Kappa key in hand, finds himself a Section Clerk and part-time translator for the United States Ambulance Service supporting the 128<sup>th</sup> Division of the French Army near the village of Faverolles, France. Butler stumbles upon a cave with a Red Cross flag attached to it. Inside, he finds 7-year old Fernande Noel suffering with a thigh wound. He carries the little girl to safety, and then maintains a correspondence with her that lasts for more than twenty years. For this and similar acts of "courage and endurance," Butler is awarded one of France's highest honors - the *Croix de Guerre* medallion.

On another occasion, in the French village of Villers-Cotterets, Butler is about to leave the compound with fellow soldier, Al Bates, to take an ambulance to the front when he is called back inside by his commanding officer to write a brief letter. While at the typewriter, a shell explodes in the courtyard killing three Frenchmen and seriously wounding Bates, who had been waiting for Butler in the ambulance. Butler attends to Bates day and night until he is evacuated to a hospital in Paris for several weeks of convalescence before being sent home.

A few months later, Butler's Section is called to Belgium to help defend a narrow strip of land extending from the English Channel to the French border. Butler participates in the unfolding assault as the German Army is beaten back by the Allies across the entire Western front, culminating in the Armistice of November 11, 1918. Soon thereafter, Butler makes a farewell tour of Germany, stops in Bonn at the birth home of Ludwig von Beethoven, and plays a few notes on Beethoven's piano.

What are we to make of these experiences? Two things. First, Butler witnessed up close and personal the brutality of war. How it affected him we cannot know for sure, though years later, at his wife's request, he chose not to discuss the war with his children. Second, despite the dreadful circumstances, Butler found joy where he could. He polished his French with a medical doctor's family, appreciated music and song when they presented themselves, enjoyed the company of several new acquaintances, and traveled on leave to England and Wales. In sum, though he had ample reason to despair, George Butler managed to see a silver lining in the clouds of war.

### A Social Service Ethic

In the summer of 1919, having returned to New York City, young Butler had to choose between two job offers: one from the National Recreation Association (NRA) and the other from the Guarantee Trust Company. In a memorandum profiling his qualifications, Mrs. R. Jay Schwartz described Butler as "small physically," but "wiry" and capable of standing "a good deal of pressure."<sup>4</sup> He accepted the NRA's offer, but then equivocated when the banking firm upped the ante. He was, after all, a Yale-educated economist. Finally, Butler wrote Mrs. Schwartz and apologized for having forgotten temporarily that his interests lay in the National Recreation Association's direction. Social service was his calling after all, and Butler signed on as a probationary employee for an annual salary of \$1,700. Within two months, Howard Braucher, the NRA's Executive Secretary, offered Butler a raise and a permanent position, one he would occupy for the next 43 years.

Soon after assuming his duties, Butler met another new hire, Smith-educated music major Rebecca Jones. Two years later Miss Jones became Mrs. Butler – a position she would also occupy permanently. George and Becky’s marriage would be blessed with two sons, George Jr. and Bob, and years later with four grandsons and three granddaughters. For now, however, the stage was set for this son of a working class family from Seymour, Connecticut – equipped with a hard-earned degree from an Ivy League college, seasoned by war, and imbued with a social service ethic – to try to make a difference with his life.

### Laying a Professional Foundation

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was no park and recreation infrastructure to speak of, no established guidelines for doing things, no system within which to work. It would be up to people like George Butler to lay the foundation for service delivery that we now take for granted. And this, in fact, is what Mr. Butler set about doing. First, he articulated the importance of playgrounds for the healthy upbringing of children. Second, he became one of the first instructors in the National Recreation School. Third, he underscored the importance of research to the growth and development of the park and recreation profession. Fourth, through a series of books ranging from *Playgrounds: Their Administration and Operation* published in 1936,<sup>5</sup> to *Introduction to Community Recreation* published in 1940,<sup>6</sup> to *Recreation Areas: Their Design and Equipment* published in 1947,<sup>7</sup> to *Pioneers in Public Recreation* published in 1965,<sup>8</sup> George Butler catalogued the principles, practices, and pioneers that make up the foundation of our contemporary leisure service delivery system.

If that weren’t enough, Butler conducted national studies of municipal parks in 1930, 1935, and 1940, and oversaw a series of National Recreation Association surveys of community recreation. He helped establish playground design and open space standards. He helped inventory the nation’s recreation resources. He helped define local government’s responsibility for providing leisure services, and he spearheaded the idea that recreation is a major contributor to human development.

What Mr. Butler helped establish, then, is the ground floor upon which almost all of our subsequent research, planning and policy have been based. All those familiar aspects of service people like me take for granted exist because George Butler and his colleagues consciously brought them into existence. I stand on the shoulders of a giant; we all stand on the shoulders of a giant. He was a pathfinder, a groundbreaker, and a pioneer in our field. But George Butler was more than that.

### A Family Man

Mr. Butler practiced what he preached. In a 1919 application for work with the War Camp Community Service, he listed “out-of-door life, especially hiking” as his favorite recreation.<sup>9</sup> In later years, as his youngest son Bob now recounts, “He was very caring for his two boys. He spent a lot of time with us, even though his work entailed very long days because of the long commute to New York City . . . . Dad taught us both a great love for nature and the outdoors. We enjoyed frequent hikes in the woods nearby and for many years spent the month of August together in Friendship, Maine. There we enjoyed an extremely crude cottage in the woods right on the shore. It did not have electricity or indoor plumbing and water was drawn from a well in a bucket. Several Yale and Smith friends had nice summer homes nearby and marveled at how we loved our rustic living . . . .”

This love of nature was instilled in George’s oldest son, George Jr., early on as evidenced by his extensive bug collection. When guests would visit the Butler home, including Wiley Post, the aviation pioneer and compatriot of Will Rogers, they would quickly be escorted upstairs to view the boy’s collection. George Jr. would someday become an academic – you guessed it – an entomologist, and be referred to fondly by his friends and colleagues as “bugsy.”<sup>10</sup>

“Dad came from a very musical family and loved classical music,” Bob continues. “He sang in the choir for many years.” His wife, Becky, who was a virtuoso on the piano, reinforced his penchant for music. Becky taught piano at home, partly to pay for violin, cello and trumpet lessons for the boys. George Sr. would often lay on the couch and revel in his family playing Beethoven trios.

“Church was also very important to him and he served as an Elder, Sunday school teacher and treasurer.” He was also a scoutmaster. And, from 1946 until 1962, he was a member and frequent Director of Leonia, New Jersey’s Recreation Commission, where he first met young Joe Bannon. When Butler retired, they named the recreation center’s gymnasium after him.

Most importantly, Bob concludes, “Dad was a more devoted husband to his wife than anyone I have ever known. They were a great couple, parents and team.”<sup>11</sup> George Jr. echoes this sentiment when recalling that his mom sat on his father’s lap every evening following dinner to discuss the day’s happenings. Theirs was indeed a lifelong love affair. It played itself out in the final year of Becky’s life, a year marked by her terminal illness, when George attended to her day and night, just like he had done with his comrade, Al Bates, so many years before.<sup>12</sup> There was, then, a consistency to George Butler, a congruity between what he espoused publicly and what he lived privately that was ennobling. The integrity with which he conducted himself dignified his person and validated his life.

### The George Butler In Us All

In many respects, the story I have been telling you is our story as well. There is some of George Butler in all of us. Many of my friends in this field – Leo McAvoy from Minnesota, George Arimond from Wisconsin, Ross Tocher from Washington, Bev Driver from Wyoming, Bob Wolff from Florida, Todd Paxton from Michigan, Gary Chick from Pennsylvania, Liz Griffin from New York, and John Hemingway from Illinois – to name but a few – are veterans of one war or another. Surely they have been affected, as was George Butler, by what they did and saw. But, like Butler, they also managed to see hope amidst the clouds of war, and they devoted their lives as well to researching an antidote to despair.

There are poets among us like Geoff Godbey, stand-up comedians like Ellen Weissinger, art collectors like Peter Witt, band members like Karla Henderson, connoisseurs of fine wine like Doug Sessoms, ministers like Jack Kelly, and even concert violinists like Max Kaplan once was. They could

have been bankers all, but instead they chose the path of social service and social science. There are also wonderful parents in our midst like John Dattilo, Gene Lamke, Ingrid Schneider and Bill Hendricks, who, though they too work long hours, take especially good care of their children: Steven, David, Kimberly, Hunter, Travis, Annika, Evin and Sam, respectively.

We are, all of us, toilers in the field, and like George Butler, we are, all of us, three-dimensional beings with layer upon layer of complexity woven into the fabric of our lives. Social science is an important part of what we do and who we are, but it by no means defines all we do or are. There is more to us than meets the eye, more to us than we are given credit for, and more to us to delight in.

### Out of the Darkness

Mark Twain once remarked that researchers already have cast much darkness on the subject, and if they continue their investigations, we'll soon be able to see nothing at all. While there may be a grain of truth in those words, George Butler, were he alive today, would be amazed by what we've accomplished as a community of scholars. Founded on his rudimentary work, we have built multifaceted intellectual scaffoldings for displaying leisure's various meanings. We have elevated our investigative efforts from basic descriptions and categorizing of park and recreation areas and facilities to the more demanding task of trying to understand the psychology of leisure experiences themselves. Mr. Butler could relate since he, too, saw recreation as a psychological response to activity rather than the activity itself.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, he would be awed by the complexity of the task we have laid out for ourselves as we struggle to better understand the nuances of meaning that both bind and differentiate us as highly individualized human beings. He would wish us well in our quest to find unity in that diversity.

As a lover of the out-of-doors, George Butler would also welcome the role ecology plays in modifying our research questions, and in humbling us about our significance in the order of things.



He, too, would advocate for recreation ethics. At the same time, when it comes to the question of recreation's significance in our own lives, Mr. Butler would no doubt implore us to "just do it." In this regard, he, too, would find a little something to chuckle at in Mark Twain's musings. Above all else, you see, George Butler was a man of conviction. He believed in recreation's healing powers. He believed in recreation's capacity to do good. And he made his leaps of faith accordingly. The question George Butler would have us to ponder is, "What do we believe in?"

### Making Pictures Out of Clouds

Jacob Bronowski described science as the discovery of unity in hidden likenesses. He saw the scientific enterprise as a highly creative endeavor. "Reality is not an exhibit for [our] inspection, labeled 'Do not touch,'" he said. "Science, like art, is not a copy of nature but a re-creation of her."<sup>14</sup> Science can and should be a joyous process. I am reminded of Roger Mannell's wonderful description of the birth of an idea at the 1977 NRPA convention, in, of all places, Las Vegas, Nevada when he grabbed the nearest piece of paper – a Keno card – to jot down something that had just popped into his head. Later on, Roger reminisced about another occasion when he and a graduate student were about to process the results of a study. "At the prompt from the mainframe computer that signaled the statistical run was complete," he said, "I typed a command on the keyboard and entered the resultant file that held the analysis. We were hunched forward, eyes glued to the screen as we cursoried through the file until we hit the analysis of variance table that with elegant simplicity told whether months of thought, debate, and hard work had paid off. We were oblivious to the stares of the co-inhabitants of the terminal room as we jumped up, arms raised, and did our 'end zone' dance of victory."<sup>15</sup> In that moment of discovery, Roger and his student's hearts surely missed a beat.

My wish for each of you is that you have such moments as well. They don't come easily in this line of work, and they don't come often. The times we live in don't help matters either. To paraphrase Norman Cousins, human despair can reach a point where even the most stirring visions

lose their regenerating and radiating power, a point when human beings are no longer capable of calling out to one another, when the words in their poetry break up before their eyes, when their faces become frozen toward their young, and when they fail to make pictures out of clouds racing across the sky.<sup>15</sup> The profession we serve is an antidote to that despair. Our challenge is to inform the profession as best we can by making our own kinds of pictures out of clouds as they race across the sky. To that end, and in the name of George Daniel Butler, I encourage you to look skyward for your inspiration, for your patterns of hope, and for signs of a life worth living.

Notes

1. Butler published many articles in *Recreation*, the predecessor to *Parks and Recreation*. He also served as Associate Editor of *Recreation*.
2. See Hilmi Ibrahim's *Pioneers in Leisure and Recreation* for Joe Bannon's tribute to Butler.
3. This section is based on a collection of notes provided by Joe Bannon. George Butler shared the notes with Joe several years ago. They were extracted from a diary detailing Butler's World War I experiences.
4. This quote is taken from a memorandum written by Mrs. R. Jay Schwartz, a Playground and Recreation Association of America staff member on June 23, 1919. Her comments provide an assessment of Butler's employment qualifications.
5. *Playgrounds: Their Administration and Operation* was published in 1936 by A. S. Barnes and Company in New York City.
6. *Introduction to Community Recreation* was first published in 1940. It was widely adopted and evolved through five editions. According to Butler's sons, their father was not happy with the McGraw-Hill editor assigned to the fifth edition when he suggested some minor revisions. Butler prided himself in his writing ability.
7. *Recreation Areas: Their Design and Equipment* was published in 1947 by A. S. Barnes and Company in New York City.
8. The Burgess Publishing Company printed Butler's *Pioneers in Public Recreation* in 1965. By all reports, this was Butler's favorite project. Joe Bannon suggests that Butler himself should have been the subject of one of the essays, but modesty prevented it. Butler insisted that each individual discussed in the book must have made his or her contribution prior to the end of World War I, thus excluding himself from consideration.
9. This is taken from Butler's application for employment with the War Camp Community Service. It was provided by Lee Furr, the Joseph Lee Memorial Library archivist, and it is dated June 14, 1919.
10. From a personal conversation with Dr. George Butler, Jr. on July 14, 2004. Dr. Butler, now retired and living in Chandler, Arizona, is a former professor of entomology.
11. From a personal conversation with Bob Butler on July 8, 2004. Now retired and living in Gloucester, Virginia, Bob worked as an executive in the chemical industry.
12. From a personal conversation with Dr. George Butler, Jr. on July 14, 2004.
13. See *Introduction to Community Recreation (5<sup>th</sup> Edition)*, p. 10.
14. See Part One of Jacob Bronowski's *Science and Human Values*, "The Creative Mind."

15. See Roger Mannell's "The Joys of Doing Research" in *Beyond Promotion and Tenure: On Being a Professor* for an inspirational look at the life of a social scientist (published by San Diego State University's Institute for Leisure Behavior, 1990).
16. Norman Cousins' *Human Options*, 1981, p. 63.

Lessons from the death of his daughter. George and Barbara Bush had six children together, four boys and two girls, but only five would survive to adulthood. Three years after George W. was born, in 1946, he was joined by a younger sister, Pauline Robinson, whom the family called Robin. At age 3, Robin was diagnosed with leukemia, for which there were limited treatment options at the time. Both Bushes have talked about the darkness of those times and how much they had to rely on each other to get through it. "For one who allowed no tears before her death, I fell apart," recalled Barbara to biographer Jon Meacham. (Photo: Leonard McCombe/The Life Picture Collection/Getty Images).

Meeting James Baker. English News Lesson on George Floyd: African Union condemns killing of George Floyd - FREE worksheets, online activities, listening in 7 Levels... Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning? 4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings. 5. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall how they were used in the text: city. Time: 1 hour 15 minutes. LISTENING. Task 1 For items 1-10 listen to part of a lecture about bilingualism and decide whether the statements (1-10) are TRUE (A), or FALSE (B) according to the text you hear. You will hear the text twice. According to our current understanding, a star and its planets form out of collapsing cloud of dust and gas, i.e. nebulae are often star-forming regions. In these regions the formations of gas, dust, and other materials stick together to form denser regions, which attract further matter, and eventually will become dense enough to form stars. The estate is an iconic American landmark, an enduring reminder of the life and legacy of George Washington. Washington personally supervised each renovation, advising on design, construction and decoration. He lives and works in London. Product details. Publisher : Picador; First edition (August 3, 2002). Richard Hamblyn does an immaculate job of painting the picture of the world of almost two hundred years ago, opening with the presentation room as it must have appeared to Luke Howard, the inventor of our current system of naming clouds. He takes what has since come to be a dull and pedantic topic and reinvigorates it with the Victorian Zeitgeist, including quotes from Goethe, passages from Howard's diary, and the unfortunate results of political infighting among society-academics unrivalled since the age of Newton and Voltaire. The book is also beautifully presented in a half-height for This picture depicts the beauty of our nature. In the foreground you can see water lilies. They are of comforting colours "white and blue." They tried to capture the atmosphere of a particular time of day and the fleeting effects of different conditions. That was why they had to work very. Besides, they were the first group of artists who worked 'en plein air' ( ). It is important to say, that Impressionism was the first movement in the of modern art. 1 " Paintings of this style depict scenes of contemporary people and their daily life. 2 - In the paintings of this movement we can see dreams, hallucinations, automatic or random image generation. 3 " Painters depict objects, which are broken into fragments and reorganized into geometric shapes.