

Way We Were  
Wednesday, July 16, 2014  
Minda Stockdale, Collections Intern  
All Nature Paths Lead To Cole

The wake of July 4<sup>th</sup> left the melodies of our nation's most beloved anthems on a loop in my mind. Their lyrics reveal a common theme that is familiar to us all: Americans' understanding and expression of patriotism is inextricably linked to the natural landscape. From Irving Berlin's mountains and prairies to Guthrie's Gulf Stream waters and red wood forest, American songwriters have turned to geography to express love of country since at least the nineteenth century. As early as 1832, Samuel F. Smith wrote the second stanza in his song, 'My Country Tis of Thee': "...I love thy rocks and rills, thy woods and templed hills, my heart with rapture thrills like that above."

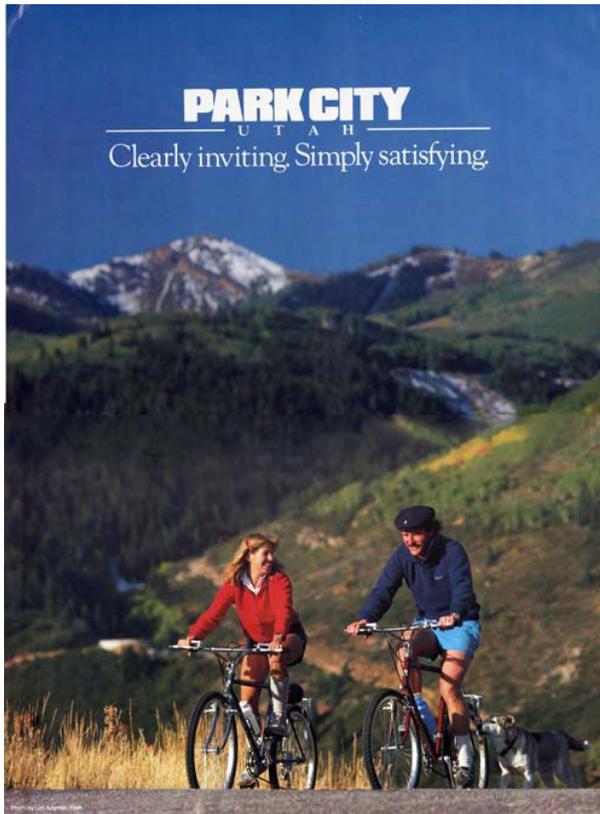
Over the past two centuries, the American landscape, in turn, has become a stage for recreation and relaxation that defines the American leisure experience: an escape from the busy realities and regimented schedules of urban productivity. By extension, marketing campaigns for resort towns have framed the natural landscape as the ultimate escape since their inception in the twentieth century. Nowhere is this reflected more clearly than in promotional material for Park City during the resort renaissance from 1963 to the present day. A wonderful example in our collection is this poster heralding summer in Park City, showing a smiling man and woman riding bikes in the afternoon sunshine below Jupiter Peak. The motto, "Clearly Inviting, Simply Satisfying", is printed below. The poster promises a return to a simpler life in the outdoors, a place where one can achieve peace of mind and the fundamental satisfaction that only nature can provide.

While the idea of nature as a calming escape that can awaken one's senses and revitalize the spirit have oft been the selling points of Park City's attractions and appeal, the foundations of this attitude are much older. Its origins can be traced to the opposite coast with the founder of the Hudson River School, landscape painter Thomas Cole. As Linda S. Ferber, Senior Art Historian at the New-York Historical Society explains, Cole was an initiator in the growing cultural idea that nature should serve as a restorative refuge; she says, "The idea of nature-as-calming was still quite new. Centuries before, a retreat into nature would have been something dangerous."

In the early nineteenth century, Cole's revolutionary landscape paintings, imbued with their author's reverence for nature in its wild state, altered the face of traditional landscape painting and sowed the seeds of a conservation movement that would fully take hold in the early twentieth century, with the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916. As we bask in all that the Park City summer has to offer, it is fascinating to step back and examine the historic origins of our modern conception of and appreciation for the natural world around us.

Come learn more about Thomas Cole and his role in this important movement at the Park City Museum's temporary exhibit, *Wild Land: Thomas Cole and the Birth of American Landscape Painting*, on exhibit in the Tozer Gallery through October 20, 2014.

The Park City Historical Society & Museum is celebrating 30 years of preserving, protecting, and promoting Park City's history and heritage.



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Credit: Park City Historical Society & Museum

Caption: Poster advertising Park City, ca. 1980-1990