

**Arthur Pearson
Pullman Civic Organization**

**Testimony on HR 3894, the Pullman Historic Site National Park Service Study Act
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
June 8, 2012**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Grijalva, members of the Subcommittee, I ask that you support HR 3894, which would direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study to determine the suitability and feasibility of designating Pullman as a unit of the National Park System. The Pullman District is nationally significant and the stories it tells are uniquely American.

I've lived in Pullman for 16 years. But my family ties to the landmark community date back to 1888. It's then that my grandfather – Carl Emil Pearson – emigrated from Sweden to live and work in what the Times of London described as “the most perfect town in the world.”

The original town of Pullman, as you may know, was the brainchild of George Mortimer Pullman. The embodiment of a Horatio Alger story, Pullman's formal education ended at the age of 14. He abandoned an apprenticeship in his family's cabinet-making business and went off to Chicago where he earned his first fortune raising downtown buildings out of the muck. He earned his second fortune supplying silver miners in Colorado before returning to Chicago and revolutionizing the entire passenger train travel industry with his luxurious Pullman Palace Cars.

In stark contrast to his peer Captains of Industry, Pullman responded to the periodic and frequently violent labor unrest of the late 19th century by building a model industrial town that was unprecedented for its beauty. Nearly 1,000 artfully designed brick homes. A wealth of parks, gardens and lakes. Arcades, markets and churches. A lending library and a 1,000-seat theatre. Even a company band providing free concerts in the park.

All this beauty, Pullman argued, would have “an ennobling and refining influence” upon his “children,” as he referred to his workers and their families. Certainly it was by far the most beautiful place my grandfather ever could have hoped to live. But following a nationwide depression in 1893, my grandfather was among the one-third of Pullman workers who was laid off. The remaining two-thirds had their wages slashed by an average of 33 percent. George Pullman, however, refused to reduce the rents he charged on company housing, leaving many of his “children” destitute.

The ensuing nationwide strike marked a watershed event in the nation's labor history, launching Eugene Debs and the American Railway Union to national prominence. In 1925, the company played a central role in another watershed event in the nation's labor history with the establishment of the Brotherhood of Pullman Porters; the first African-American labor union, which paved the way for the creation of the black middle class in America.

These important stories of American history are waiting to be told to more people through the expertise of the National Park Service. At a recent meeting of the Pullman Civic Organization, which drew a record crowd, there was unanimous support for welcoming the Park Service to Pullman to explore what residents already know – that Pullman is a significant part of America's past that should be shared with all visitors to our national parks.

The last Pullman car rolled off the assembly line circa 1970. But the beauty of the architecture endures. As does the appetite and appreciation for Pullman's rich web of inter-connected stories. As does the can-do spirit of a diverse but tightly-knit community.

However, all of this was nearly lost. In the late 1960s, a local chamber of commerce recommended razing most of Pullman in favor of a light industrial park. This galvanized residents to protect their historic homes from the wrecking ball. In short order, Pullman received National Historic Landmark status from the Secretary of Interior. City and State Landmark status soon followed, staving off demolition and industrial redevelopment. Residents rolled up their sleeves and began restoring the facades of their homes to their original condition, receiving numerous awards and honors along the way.

When an unscrupulous owner of the iconic Hotel Florence threatened to sell off the original furnishings, the community rose up again and bought the hotel and operated it for many years as a restaurant and museum.

When, in 1998, an arsonist set the equally iconic Administration Building ablaze, the community rose up once more and conducted a massive and successful PR campaign to have it re-built.

Today, most of Pullman's original buildings remain and many people contribute to Pullman's vibrancy in different ways. There are garden clubs, urban gardening groups, youth groups, tour groups, artist collectives, preservation committees, civic organizations, friends groups, foundations and even a Morris Dancing Team that performs in the park.

Added to this we have the active and enthusiastic support of Congressmen, aldermen, agencies, nonprofit organizations and local businesses.

All this in one of Chicago's lowest-income neighborhoods. The median household income in Pullman is 21 percent below the city-wide average. Beyond time and sweat equity, we don't have a lot of resources. For this reason, too, considering Pullman as an addition to the National Park System is critical.

That Pullman lies at the nexus of many interconnecting stories of national – even international – significance has been documented by numerous authorities, including the National Park Service. In 1988, the Calumet Ecological Park Feasibility Study included a survey of Pullman and found that it "fit into several thematic categories in the National Park Service framework [including]...

- Developing the American Economy
- American Labor Movement
- Expanding Science and Technology
- Transforming the Environment
- Creating Social Institutions and Movements
- Shaping the Political Landscape
- Peopling Places
- Expressing Cultural Values
- Changing Role of the U.S. in the World Community"

The study also found “the cultural resources in the Calumet [including Pullman] are unique, compared with...12 National Park System-related areas nationwide associated with the U.S. industrial heritage.”

Inclusion of Pullman within the National Park Service system is a logical and critical next step to further restore and interpret this 19th century national treasure for a 21st century audience. In addition to the expertise the park service would bring to the site, the cachet of being a unit of the National Park Service would leverage the kind of public and private investment that Pullman – even as a City, State and National Historic Landmark – has a hard time marshalling on its own.

Urban national parks rising from historic places, such as Lowell, San Francisco Maritime or San Antonio Missions National Historical Parks, are shown to lead to renovation and spur business growth, especially in tourism-related enterprises. A recent study – commissioned by the National Parks Conservation Association – for the San Antonio Missions found that for every federal dollar invested in the park, \$20 was generated in local economic activity. Additionally, by enacting or completing several key initiatives, the park could more than double its economic impact by 2016, creating jobs and increasing visitor spending.

A National Park Service designation, in short, would provide Pullman with the proverbial win-win. It would help leverage the resources necessary to attract and serve a larger, national audience. And in doing so, would provide Pullman and its equally underserved surrounding communities with much needed opportunities for jobs and access to commercial services in a virtual commercial services desert.

Therefore, please support HR 3894. With your help, we can do the Times of London one better, re-christening Pullman as the once and future most perfect town in the world.