One of the Committee’s Goals

- More than a history lesson, but an assessment of the present, and provide a vision for the future”
- “The recollection of the past is only useful by way of provision for the future.” Samuel Johnson
Helen Besley and sister camping at Patapsco State Reserve (c. 1921)
Cascade Branch
Patapsco Valley Campsite (c. 1920)
Patapsco Valley Campsite (c. 1920)
Helen Besley Overington at Elk Neck (1941)
Helen Besley at New Germany (c. 1941)
Helen Besley at New Germany

175 MILES AWAY FROM HOME TO RUN A TOBOGGAN INTO A PICKET FENCE - HARRETT, MORGAN, HELEN, AND GRACE. SWALDBY SEEMS MASSIVELY AMUSED.
“Easy with the cream Helen – Alec’s coffee is still black.” (c.1941)
MERLE'S CLAYLICK MOUNTAIN TRIP  NOV. 23D

HELEN BESLEY, RUTH LENDERLING, DOROTHY COCHEL, GEORGE RUSSELL, FRANK CALAFIORE, MERLE HENRY, MORGAN BARR, JEAN RUSSELL
“They could have all the gingerbread and baked apples they wanted. One night, Pinchot told them they were going to have a special guest….That special guest was President Theodore Roosevelt!”

Fred W. Besley
(1870-1960)
“Father was born in Vienna, Virginia”
“Pinchot told my father he ought to go into forestry”
“He was a terrific worker”
“Being one of the first State Foresters, Father had to pioneer everything.”
Besley the Pioneer

- Pioneered Environmental Education
  - Started Career as a teacher

As the population grows larger.
The forested area grows smaller.

HELP
PROTECT THE WOODS FROM FIRE
A tree will make a million matches—a match may destroy a million trees.
Take no chances with lighted matches, tobacco, brush or camp fires.
Forest destruction is quick—forest growth slow.
Burned timber pays no wages.
When fire is discovered, put it out if you can. Get help if you need it.
ARE YOU PRACTICING FIRE PREVENTION AND FOREST PROTECTION?
Besley the Pioneer

- Environmental education
  - An accomplished photographer
  - Lantern slides

Patapsco Valley State Park
At the former Paw Paw CCC Camp
Green Ridge State Forest
1941

Rare photograph of Fred Besley standing behind a camera
“I remember being with my father at his lantern slide programs.”
“Father would jack up the back end of the car, and to power up the lantern slide projector, attach a belt from the axle to the projector.”
“He would hang a sheet and show slides about forestry instead of movies...people were crazy (enthusiastic) to see them.”
“Governor Ritchie was great on helping father. He was very proud of Maryland’s roads and he thought they ought to be beautified.”
Besley the Pioneer

- **Pioneered Conservation Laws**
  - The Roadside Tree Law (1914)
  - concerned with forest and roadside aesthetics (model adopted across the country)
Besley the Pioneer

- Pioneered Forest Inventory Techniques
  - *Forests of Maryland* published in 1916 - the first complete State forest inventory in the nation
Besley the Pioneer

- Pioneered Big Tree Champion Program
  - Program and method of measurements for “noted trees” – later adopted across nation
  - “Father of the Big Tree Contest”
Besley the Pioneer

Concerned with preserving remnants of old-growth that Besley called "original growth"
Besley the Pioneer

- Pioneered the forest nursery to regenerate “devastated” forests
Besley the Pioneer

- Pioneered outdoor recreation on public lands to gain public support for conservation.
  - Camping
  - Brought Skiing into Maryland (c.1938)
Rare Photograph of FWB Giving a Campfire Program at GRSF
“The Mountain Club of Maryland was very interested in bringing skiing to Maryland...It was built at Savage River State Forest in New Germany State Park.”
New Germany State Park

Circa 1938
Besley the Pioneer

- Oversaw development of co-operative forest management programs on private property
Besley the Pioneer

- Oversaw development of facilities and infrastructure on public lands, especially during the CCC period
Besley the Pioneer

- Pioneered “parketecture”
Besley the Pioneer

- Established forest warden system
Volunteers – priceless legacy

- Preserved and conserved the significant places of majestic beauty for posterity.
- Preserved and conserved places of historic interest and natural beauty cultivating a historic sense of place not found in books.
- Variety of activities, from fighting wildfires to providing political clout to support conservation efforts of Forest and Park Service.
Besley the Pioneer

- Pioneered methods to detect forest fires
Besley the Pioneer

- Pioneered methods to fight forest fires
“Father was a great Story Teller…especially Paul Bunyan stories.”

“His Stories are as Tall as the Trees he Protects.”

from a heading in a newspaper article
“Governor Ritchie was very much for State rights, as was my father... He thought the closer to the people you got, the better it was, and so did my father.”
“One of the things my father felt, that he brought to the State, and to the Country, was that forest lands should not only benefit the land owners and the State (with taxes and so on), but that they should be used for recreation for the public.”
“Father believed the forest should not only be conserved, but that they should be used. Father was very interested in getting the public to use the land. Father thought that this would bring more public support for conservation.”
“The reason Father bought these lands was to utilize areas not good for anything else and practice forestry. He thought it was important to practice what he preached.”
Besley the Pioneer

- Pioneered acquisition of public lands
  - 2,000 acres in 1906
  - 500,000 acres in 2004
  - No outdoor recreation in 1906
  - 11 million forest and park visitors (2002)

Father of Public Lands
Rare Photograph of FWB with Buckingham at GRSF
Herb Robertson, the first forester hired by the State of MD to work at GRSF, receiving advice from FWB (1941)
50th Anniversary - 1956

Fred W. Besley and Governor McKelden
Conclusion

Fred W. Besley is one of Maryland’s, and the Nation’s, great conservation leaders of the 20th century.

Maryland Forest Service and State Forest and Park Service pioneered conservation standards adopted across the country and world.

The legacy and influence of Maryland’s great conservation leaders of the past are felt today.
“The greatest advances in human civilization have come when we recovered what we have lost: When we learn the lessons of history.”

Winston Churchill
Contributors to this program

- Helen Besley Overington
- Peggy and Don Weller
- Mary Rotz
- Kirk Rodgers
- Maryland State Archives
- Department of Natural Resources
- Dr. Geoff Buckley
- Maryland Mountain Club
- Offutt Johnson