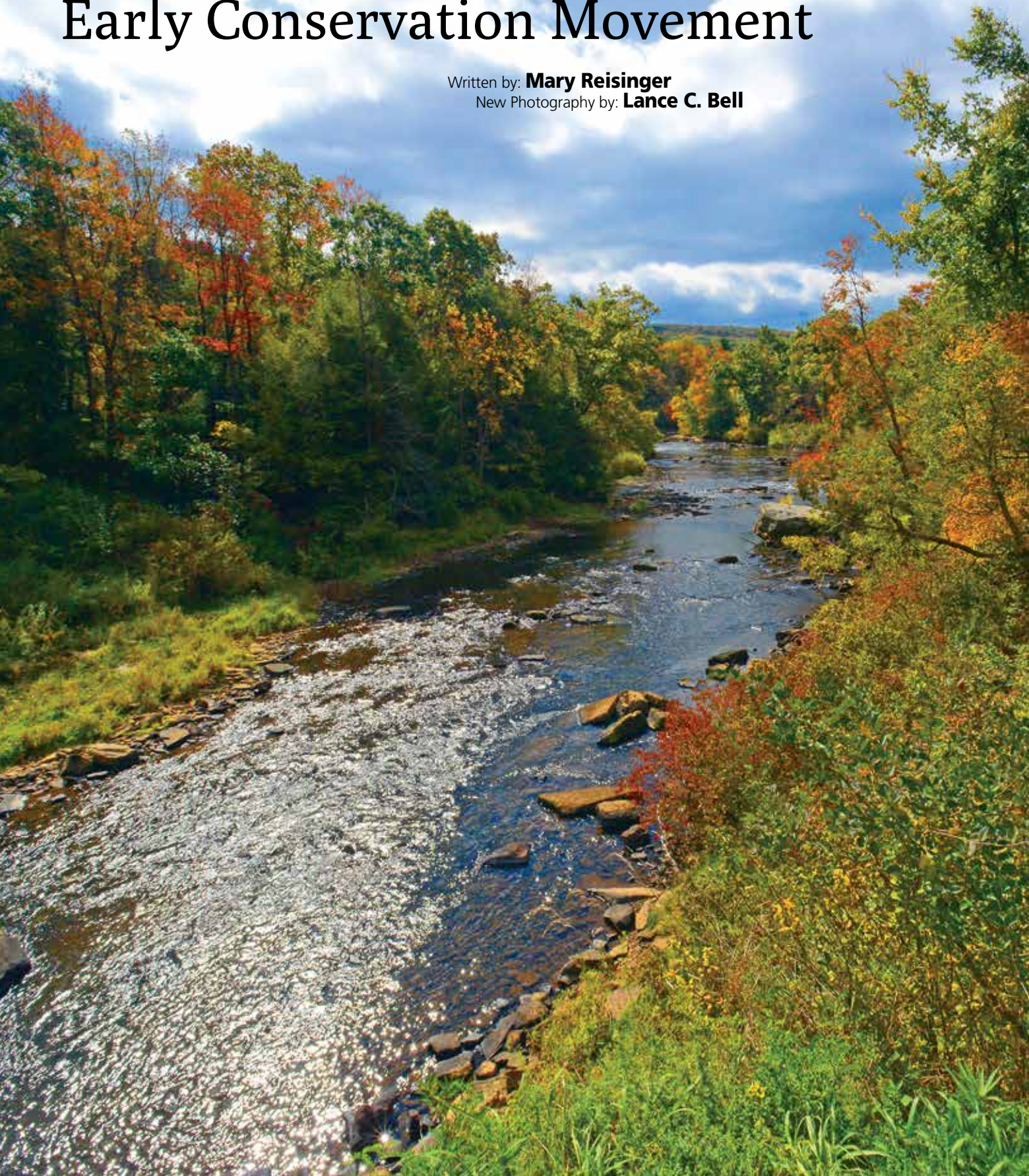


# *Gus Delawder, Lake Cleveland, the Maryland Fish Commission, and the Early Conservation Movement*

Written by: **Mary Reisinger**

New Photography by: **Lance C. Bell**





In 1886, President Cleveland married Frances Folsom and the couple honeymooned near Oakland, Maryland, at a cottage in fashionable Deer Park. One of the President's activities was fishing at Gus Delawder's fishing resort, which was later named Lake Cleveland in his honor. In 1902, President Teddy Roosevelt sent his wife, his 15-year-old son, and Gifford Pinchot, future Chief of the United States Forest Service, to Garrett County on a fact-finding mission.

This group also visited Lake Cleveland and enjoyed some fishing. The visits of the Cleveland and Roosevelt parties, covered extensively in newspapers and magazines of the day, illuminate an important era in American understanding of fisheries and forests.

The 1800s, a time of significant change in Western Maryland, led to the beginning of a conservation movement that continues today. Garrett County resident Gus Delawder (1826-1906) played an important role in an increasing awareness of the need for sensible management of natural resources.

Prior to the nineteenth century, Western Maryland, as well as the surrounding territory, was a heavily forested, mountainous wilderness, used primarily as hunting grounds by Native Americans and a travel route for traders. In the mid-1700s, a few settlers moved into the area and began to clear forested land for agriculture. The settlers also hunted, trapped, and fished, using and selling the products of their labor.

Advances in transportation accelerated the pace of industry in this region. The National Road (Route 40), completed in 1817, connected the eastern and western parts of Maryland, and paved the way for future development of land west of the mountains.

The Chesapeake & Ohio Canal (with President John Quincy Adams turning the first shovelful of dirt on July

4, 1828, in Georgetown) ran from Washington, D.C., to Cumberland, Maryland. The C&O Canal operated from 1831 to 1924, primarily moving coal from the Allegheny Mountains east to port cities for shipping.

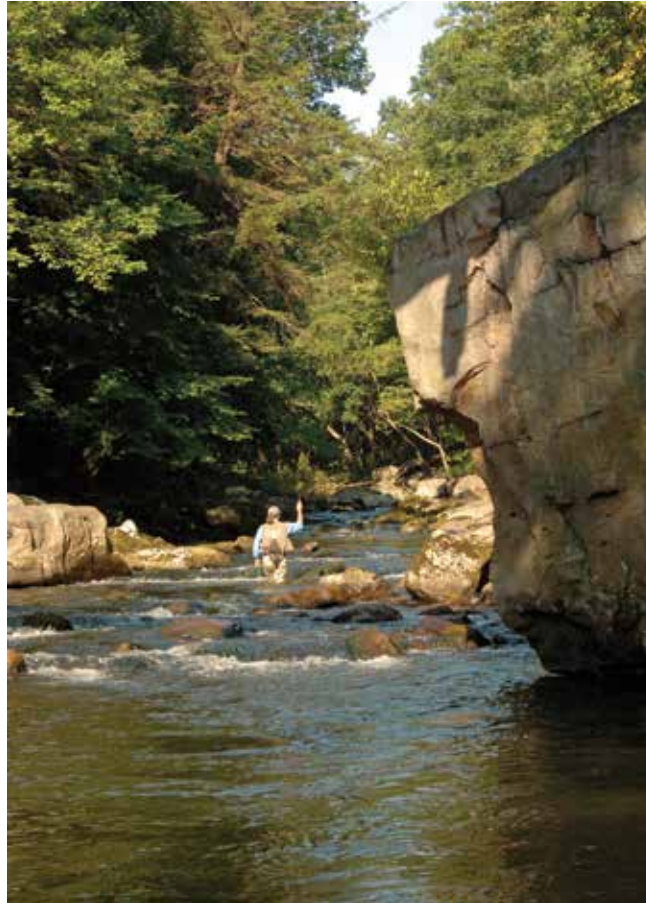
Also on July 4, 1828, ground was broken for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, with 91-year-old Charles Carroll, the last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence,

presiding over the ceremonies. The line gradually expanded westward through Maryland, reaching Cumberland, and, after a pause to resolve disputes about the route, onward through Westernport and Oakland, Maryland, to Wheeling, West Virginia, and ultimately to Chicago, Illinois.

This improved access had two major effects on Western Maryland. First, massive amounts of timber, coal, and other freight were shipped and sold. Second, wealthy, influential residents of Baltimore, Washington, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Richmond, and other nearby cities traveled to Oakland to enjoy the mountain climate, especially as a summer escape from hot, humid weather. Some of the best mountain resorts in the world flourished

during these years in the communities around Oakland, Maryland.

The increasing industrialization of the natural resources of Western Maryland resulted in serious environmental issues. In what is now Garrett County, it is estimated that forests originally covered 96 percent of the land. Within a few decades, extensive logging and clearing of land for habitation and agriculture left less than one third of this forest, leading to extensive soil erosion. Coal mines resulted in acidified water that drained into streams of the Youghiogheny watershed. Tanneries, pulp mills, and other industries contributed to water pollution also, as did raw sewage from growing towns.



**Fly fishing on the Savage River in Garrett County, Maryland.**

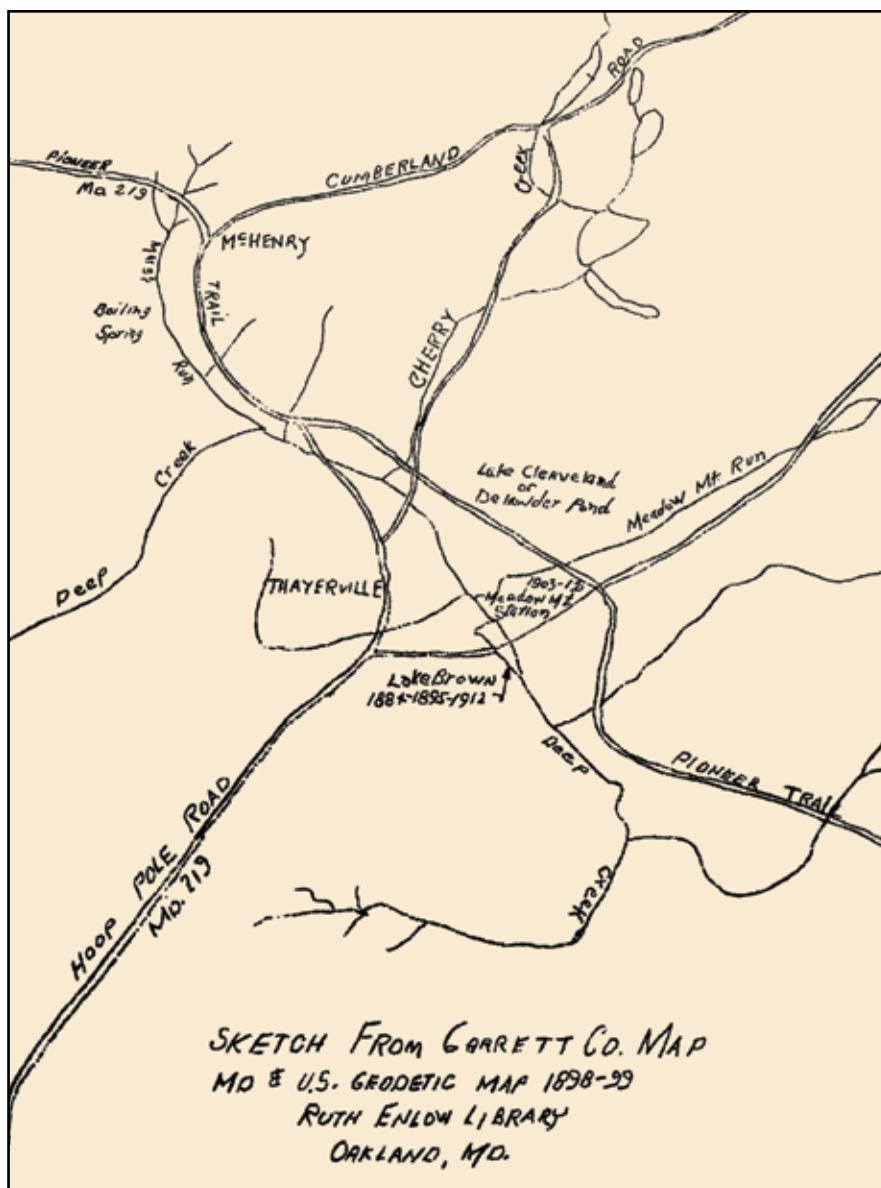
In Western Maryland, just as in the rest of the eastern states, thriving fisheries had long been an economic boon. The famous frontiersman of Garrett County, Meshach Browning, wrote about years earlier finding “hundreds of trout” jumping out of a stream he was wading through. “Just as fast as I could bait my hook, and let it into the water, I pulled out the largest kind of trout.” On that occasion he counted 47 trout, caught in a short time. By 1859, when Browning published his memoir, fish populations were declining noticeably. By 1870, most eastern fisheries were nearly depleted, and this became a matter of concern to leaders of the day.

In Maryland, Governor Oden Bowie realized that the scarcity of fish and seafood in the state’s waterways was causing serious financial losses. He turned to Fish Commissioner of New York State Robert B. Roosevelt, uncle of Teddy Roosevelt and the country’s foremost expert in what was then called pisciculture. Roosevelt was brought to Maryland to address the legislators, and they were convinced restoring fisheries was a worthwhile project. They set aside money to train candidates with practical experience, though it took a few years to find qualified candidates for the positions.

The Maryland Fish Commission began operations in 1874 with two commissioners to cover the entire state. By 1884, Gus Delawder, a prominent citizen of Oakland, Maryland, was appointed fish commissioner for the western part of the state. His territory stretched from Baltimore to the western edge of the state in Garrett County, which had just separated from Allegany County in 1872.

Delawder was a civic leader, serving a term as “burgess” of Oakland, and being one of three members of the first school board named in Garrett County. He was employed as an agent of the B&O Railroad for thirty years, was married, and had four surviving children when he died. Though surprisingly little is known about most of his pursuits, Delawder gained a measure of fame for his work as a fish commissioner and as a guide for hunters and anglers in Garrett County.

The influx of tourists created an opportunity for businesses centered on recreation in the area. Delawder and T. Harrison “Harry” Garrett (son of John Work Garrett, president of the B&O Railroad) bought a thousand acres of land and by 1883 constructed a dam where Deep Creek and Cherry Creek met, creating a large, scenic lake. On its shores, they built a comfortable lodge. Sadly, T. H. Garrett died in 1888 at age 39 in a boating accident; in his memory, his room was kept furnished as he left it. Delawder welcomed guests interested in hunting and fishing with a knowledgeable guide. Accounts by newspaper reporters and guests of the lodge provide some idea of what it was like and some interesting stories about Delawder.



An 1898-99 Maryland and U.S. Geodetic Map sketch. In 1883 Gus Delawder and Harry Garrett bought a thousand acres of land and constructed a dam where Deep Creek and Cherry Creek met, creating Cleveland Lake or Delawder Pond. On its shores they built a hunting and fishing lodge and camp for guests.

An article from 1886 rates Delawder's spring-fed mountain lake, nestled between two mountains, as the finest place in the country for feeding and maintaining native mountain speckled trout, plus the fish that Delawder had stocked in it in 1883: rainbow trout from California, and land-locked salmon from Maine. Delawder planted wild grasses along the edges of the lake for the health of the water and also to attract birds. The spacious cabin the men built was constructed without any nails; only nuts and bolts were used. Other features of the camp included an ice house, a buggy shed, a large garden, and several types of boats, including a miniature steamboat for pleasure excursions. The camp formed a lush natural habitat for creatures of land, water, and air, and a paradise for hunters and anglers.

Delawder preferred to sit in a rocking chair while fishing because he believed it brought him good luck; he was a trustee at his church, but nearly lost his position because he sometimes couldn't resist fishing on Sunday; he kept a barrel of local rye whiskey in his bedroom and dispensed it to favored guests; and he was an excellent cook who prepared delicious meals for hunting and fishing parties. Delawder was described as a large man with a ruddy complexion, a perpetual smile, and a twinkle in his eyes. He could not be hurried by anything "short of a bear," and one sportsman wrote that Delawder's presence made one forget the fatigue of hunting.

Delawder was widely acknowledged for his hunting and fishing prowess. An 1893 national outdoor sports magazine's discussion of ruffed grouse and woodcock notes that these birds are generally only found in the "glades of the mountain counties," where "phenomenal bags" of both birds have been made by area hunters, including Gus Delawder, State Fish Commissioner. A memoir, published in 1896, recounted a local man's story about catching a huge fish, which he described as being as big as his kitchen table. Upon examination of the table, his friends concluded that it was as big as a hand saw, but not as big

as a cross-cut saw. The writer then wonders what "Dick Browning and Gus Delawder" will think of this fish tale.

Though less publicized, the accomplishments of Delawder during his tenure as Maryland fish commissioner were at



**Spencer F. Baird**  
(*first curator of the Smithsonian Institution*) headed the first U.S. Fish Commission in 1871.



**Robert B. Roosevelt,**  
uncle of Teddy Roosevelt and Fish Commissioner of New York State, was brought to Maryland to address the legislators, convincing them that restoring fisheries was a worthwhile project.

least as important. The United States had established a U.S. Fish Commission in 1871, due largely to the efforts of R. B. Roosevelt. It was headed by Spencer F. Baird (famed naturalist and first curator of the Smithsonian Institution) until his death in 1887. The Commission's mandate was to investigate the causes of the decline in aquatic populations, to recommend remedies, and to oversee restoration of the fisheries. Many states, such as Maryland, created fish commissions at the state level. Delawder served as Western Maryland Fish Commissioner from 1884 through 1891.

The fish commissioners undertook a major effort to hatch fish and stock the streams of the state. The early years of fisheries work were filled with trial and error to determine the safest way of trapping fish, harvesting eggs, fertilizing them, transporting them, introducing them to streams, and determining what breeds worked best. Fish commissioners kept extensive records, communicated with the public (especially those who fished), wrote reports, and attended conferences and workshops to learn from each other.

There were numerous challenges to overcome. Water temperatures might be too cold, or drought would lower water volume in the streams. Some types of fish didn't adapt well to the new habitats. At first, nearly all the fish being brought from a distance died in

transit. Fish that needed to return to their original body of water to spawn might be hindered by dams. In places, polluted or heavily silted water killed the new stock. Some methods of fishing injured the fish, took too many at one time, harvested the fish about to spawn before they could reproduce, or damaged the stream bed.

Fish commissioners designed equipment and developed techniques that worked for these various tasks. They learned



which breeds would thrive in Maryland's waterways, and which would be accepted by consumers. They built fish ladders over dams. Delawder worked with the hatchery at Druid Hill Park in Baltimore and then found a way to successfully hatch in Garrett County to avoid transporting the young fish two hundred miles.

Fish commissioners advocated for measures that would keep streams healthy for fish such as avoiding clear-cutting and replanting when logging was done; and reducing runoff from industries such as tanneries and pulp mills. Delawder was one of the first people to speculate about the impact of these practices on human health. In an 1890 report, Gus noted that research should be done to determine how the material draining into the Potomac damaged fish and what could be done about it, not only for the sake of the fish that served as an important food supply, but also for the benefit of the "inhabitants of the two cities drawing their principal supply of water from this stream": Cumberland and Washington, D.C.

Another important measure was to manage fishing to protect the fish population. Delawder and the other fish commissioners advised that no fishing should be allowed during spawning season, and that certain equipment and methods (such as chemicals that caused explosions to kill fish) should be banned. In some cases, there should be a limit on the catch.

To enforce these laws, they suggested licensing fees, game wardens, and fines sufficient to be a true deterrent. Though these measures were resisted by citizens initially, Delawder commented that attitudes shifted as results became known; people began to see the benefits to having regulations that would increase the fish population. Through the efforts of these early fish experts, fisheries were indeed restored, returning to production of significant profits and a plentiful food supply.

The meticulous records of the early fish commissioners still exist in archives. Their work has been carried on by generations of fisheries experts. Richard T. Browning, grandson of outdoorsman Meshach Browning, succeeded Delawder as fish commissioner of Maryland's "Western Shore." Browning, with the help of government funding, created another lake in Garrett County, very near Lake Cleveland, and named it Lake Brown in honor of the then Maryland governor.



**Top two photos: A brown trout (top) and a brook trout — DNR fish managers work with Army Corps of Engineers and the Upper Potomac River Commission, which manages the Savage River Dam, to implement guidelines for cold water releases to maintain optimum trout habitat.**

**Bottom two photos: Today, the Department of Natural Resources continues to assess and improve fisheries in the United States. In Western Maryland, the Bear Creek Hatchery continues this important work, raising rainbow trout and golden trout (bottom) among others.**

In 1967, a history of the fish commission in Maryland was compiled and published by Albert Powell, Superintendent of Hatcheries in Maryland for over 40 years. The young Albert had lived next door to a hatchery developed in 1916 in Lewistown, near Frederick, Maryland. He became so interested in fish that he spent his entire career working with them. A later fish hatchery he developed in Hagerstown is named for him.

The government agency overseeing fisheries has changed several times. Today, the Department of Natural Resources continues to assess and improve fisheries in the U.S. In Western Maryland, the Bear Creek Hatchery, built in the 1920s, continues this important work.

Delawder eventually retired to his beloved Lake Cleveland lodge, and died there in 1906. The lodge burned in 1918, and the lake was absorbed into the much larger Deep Creek Lake when it was constructed in the 1920s. Though the man and the resort are gone, both served as vital components of the rise of conservation in the United States.

Cleveland's visits brought Western Maryland to the attention of the whole United States. Teddy Roosevelt, enthusiastic proponent of wild places, had learned to care about conservation at least partly due to his Uncle R. B. Roosevelt's influence. During his campaign swing through Garrett County in 1899, he observed the devastation of formerly forested land, and his deputizing Gifford Pinchot to visit Delawder's lodge was influential in his administration's efforts to restore the nation's forests.

Other notable people contributed to the growing conservation movement. In the early 1900s prominent figures such as Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, John Burroughs, and President Warren G. Harding made deluxe camping trips in scenic Garrett County. Within a

few years, Swallow Falls State Park and some of the other places these men visited became government preserves, accessible to all. Ordinary people began to take advantage of opportunities to experience nature and to value their country's wildlife and natural places.

The seeds for the American conservation movement were sown primarily in the 1800s. Among the many individuals



Left to right: Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, President Warren G. Harding, and Harvey Firestone camping in Western Maryland in 1921.

who contributed to this effort, Western Maryland can proudly claim fish commissioner Gus Delawder, who helped ensure that anglers today can still catch and eat fish from our waterways, and that fisheries continue to be an important part of our economy.

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For those interested in seeing how fish are hatched, the **Albert M. Powell Hatchery** (20901 Fish Hatchery Rd., Hagerstown, MD 21740; phone: 301-791-4736, ext. 106, or 301-393-5940, ext. 105) welcomes visitors Monday through Friday, 9:00-3:30.

For those interested in the history of the conservation movement, the **Maryland Conservation Agency Museum** (20990 Keadle Road, Boonsboro, MD 21713) can be visited by appointment. Call Lt. Gregory L. Bartles, Ret., at 240-500-0077.