

Dr. Ambler Memorialized
In Curtis Creek Ceremony

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CURTIS CREEK—They dedicated a historic piece of the nation's heritage to a man and a philosophy here in the McDowell County hills Wednesday.

And with it a fitting climax was written to a two-day national celebration in Asheville commemorating 50 years of forest conservation and development.

In a quiet, simple ceremony on the banks of this mountain stream, the first tract of national forest land purchased under provisions of the Weeks Law was dedicated to the memory of Dr. Chase P. Ambler of Asheville.

Thus, the U.S. Forest Service gave official recognition to one of the country's comparatively little-known and unsung early-day champions of national forests and a pioneer in forest conservation.

A crowd of some 300, gathered under a canopy of hemlock and hickory and oak, heard Dr. Ambler described as a man to whom America owes a great and lasting debt.

James K. Vessey, Southern Regional forester, spoke the words and then with a flick of his hand unveiled a marker memorializing Dr. Ambler for his untiring efforts in forest conservation.

"Let all who come this way," he said, "read these words and be thankful for the Dr. Ambler

of our country who have made possible the many benefits our people enjoy because of our forests."

The eyes of the crowd fastened on the words:

"You are now entering the first tract of national forest land purchased under the authority of the Weeks Law, March 1, 1911. This 8,100-acre tract is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Chase P. Ambler of Asheville, N. C., and his associates in appreciation of their timely efforts to establish additional forests and their pioneering in forest conservation."

Set on a foundation of stone from Grandfather Mountain, the marker was built this summer by Don and David McFalls, employes of the Catawba District forest office at Marion.

The ceremony began shortly after 10 a.m. with an invocation by the Rev. William T. Potts of St. John's Episcopal Church of Asheville.

Then Joseph F. Pechanec, director of the Southeastern Forest Experiment Station, who served as master of ceremonies, introduced Dr. Richard E. McArdle, chief of the U.S. Forest Service.

He paid tribute to Dr. Ambler and then presented brass-framed plaques, picturing the memorial marker, to three of the pioneer conservationist's children.

Moving out of the crowd to receive them were Mrs. T. S. Maunsell of Vancouver, Wash., Mrs. W. H. Thorne of Asheville and Dr. John Ambler of Denver, Colo.

A fourth plaque was sent to Dr. Arthur Chase Ambler of Asheville who was prevented by illness from attending the ceremonies.

In his opening dedication remarks, Vessey said "we are standing on a very historic tract of land to do honor to the noted Dr. Chase P. Ambler."

"We are also honoring his associates," he added. "And we are honoring all who had a part in the final passage of the Weeks Law 50 years ago."

Vessey described Dr. Ambler as a man who walked tall upon the earth at a time when the future of America's forests seemed destined for complete destruction.

"He was a friend of presidents," Vessey said, "a man who had great confidence in his country, and who became identified as a man who greatly helped push the Weeks Law to enactment.

The regional forester said that what was probably just as important as establishing the national forests was the state-federal cooperative protection program outlined in the Weeks Law.

"This was a new philosophy, a new concept, a new revolution that established federal-state cooperation and has been and is the backbone of the conservation and development of our national forests.

"I am sure that the national forests of Western North Carolina will continue to play an important part in the welfare of our people, but this is no time for complacency.

"We must move rapidly into the next phase—the multiple use not only of our public lands but of all lands."

At this point, Vessey said he wanted to salute the men of the Forest Service who came into this region when the first national forests were established because they were faced with a task that seemed impossible.

"Yet," he added, "they set the foundation and did a job that has resulted in a great program of protection and development."

In the crowd, just a dozen feet away, was Verne Rhoades of Asheville, the first supervisor of the Pisgah National Forest.

Vessey paused. "This has been a great day — a day to be remembered," he said.

And then the Rev. Mr. Potts moved to the speaker's stand, raised his hand, and intoned a benediction.

The crowd began to disperse.

Dr. McArdle hurried off to catch a plane for Washington.

The long string of cars moved out down the forest road, heading back to Asheville and then to their homes across the country.

The Weeks Law celebration in Asheville was over.

(in 1976 art)