

# The History of the Black Swamp Nature Center



**Paulding Soil & Water  
Conservation District**

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## Ownership of the Black Swamp Nature Center

<b>Before 1820</b>	<b>United States of America</b>
<b>1820</b>	<b>William Bolt Hedges</b>
<b>1837</b>	<b>George Marsh</b>
<b>1847-1881</b>	<b>Various Owners who eventually all sold back to George Marsh</b>
<b>1881</b>	<b>Alexander Latty</b>
<b>1889</b>	<b>Paul Weidman</b>
<b>1892</b>	<b>Susana Weldman</b>
<b>1905</b>	<b>Simon J. Straus, Abe Goldsmith, Abe Ackerman</b>
<b>1909</b>	<b>Augustus M. Sponseller, German-American Sugar Company</b>
<b>1918</b>	<b>Columbia Sugar Company</b>
<b>1932</b>	<b>Detroit Trust Company</b>
<b>1933</b>	<b>Paulding Sugar Company</b>
<b>1948</b>	<b>Great Lakes Sugar Company</b>
<b>1953</b>	<b>Luntz Iron &amp; Steel Company – Canton, OH</b>
<b>1957</b>	<b>Luntz Realty Incorporated – Canton, OH</b>
<b>1958</b>	<b>State of Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR)</b>
<b>1994</b>	<b>Paulding County Commissioners</b>

## **In the Beginning....**

The Black Swamp Center was not always a Nature Center. It used to be a part of the old Sugar Beet Factory. Built in 1910, the German-American Beet Factory came to be because of the efforts of Charley Allen, the president of the Paulding National Bank. He was a great believer in the future of the sugar beet as a new diversified crop for the farmers.

## **The Sugar Beet Factory....**

The Governor of Ohio, Judson Harmon, came to Paulding one



summer and was on hand for the dedication ceremonies. Work was steady from October to Christmas, working 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. The factory, when in operation, was a source of pride to the people of the town. It was always hot and steamy inside from the boiling of the sugar water. The steamy water was released into a pond outside of the factory. It was said that local kids would swim in this pond in the winter time because of the water being so warm! It has also been said that people touring the factory had to remove their overcoats because of the amount of heat that accumulated within the factory!

## **The Ponds....**

Four ponds were constructed for the factory just south of the buildings along the Flat Rock Creek. The ponds water was not used for drinking, but to be pumped to the factory to moving the beets to production. A series of chutes and pipes were set up to float the beet to the factory. This also helped in cleaning the dirt and debris from the beets. Three ponds still exist today and are part of the Black Swamp Nature Center. There was also a dam constructed on the Flat Rock Creek to be used as a water retention idea. In the summer months, the creek would dry up so there was never enough water to pump and fill the ponds during production, hence the dam, which is still there today. What remains of a concrete pump house is on County Road 132, this was part of the system of beet transportation for the factory.

## The Company Changes....

The north side of County Road 132 was owned by the German-American Sugar Company. During the year 1918, it was rumored that the German-American Company changed its name because of World War I, but this is not true. The German-American Sugar Company's owner, Augustus M. Sponseller, decided to sell out to the



Columbia Sugar Company in 1918. Different companies bought and sold the Sugar Beet Factory over the years. Sugar was cheap, and they could not pay much for beets. Minimum wage laws came into effect, and wages prior were \$.17 - \$.30 per hour, but new laws made the owners pay workers \$.40 per hour. This combined with the high cost of harvesting the beets; profits were not there to keep this type of operation running. In 1947, the last harvest was produced in the Sugar Beet Factory. The final name of the company was Paulding Sugar Company. They quickly sold the plant to the Great Lakes Sugar Company for \$1.00 and closed it completely down in 1948.

## From Sugar to Nature....

The wildlife area was established in 1958. The state purchased the land with Federal Excise monies from Luntz Reality Incorporated for \$15,500. From



1958 – 1990, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) spent monies to turn the vast lands of wetlands, wooded areas, and ponds into a fish stocked, wildlife refuge park with a driveway and parking lot. The ponds were abandoned by ODNR as deep-water fishing ponds because the ponds were not originally constructed for deep permanent water basins, but as temporary reservoir watering basins for sugar beet processing. Attempts were made to fix dikes by excavating trenches along centerline of dikes, and packing with clay. The attempts failed to stop the leaks. Management of these sites became abandoned around 1986.

## **Another Change in Ownership....**

In 1990, the 50.98-acre Paulding Ponds Wildlife Area was offered and approved for sale to the Paulding County Commissioners by the ODNR. The county agreed to purchase the property and lease it to the Paulding County Area Foundation. However, the final date of sale did not occur until January 14, 1994, when then Governor, George V. Voinovich, acting under the acts of authority under the Ohio Revised Code, signed the release of lands for \$20,000 to the Paulding County Commissioners.

## **A New Beginning....**

The county had agreed to lease the property to the Paulding Area Foundation. The Flickinger Foundation, which was dissolved in 1990, provided funds for the lease and to maintain and develop a wildlife education area. The Paulding Foundation had to raise some matching funds. With the hard efforts of Steve Sprow, Joel Althausser, and



Tim Franklin, goals were set to raise at least \$10,000. Area businesses were asked for support and public information meets were set up. Representatives from organizations discussed future plans for the facility. Although the Paulding Foundation held the lease, it was not in charge of development. During this time, several groups joined together including: Paulding County Fish and Game Club, Pheasants Forever, Paulding County Three School Districts, Audubon Society, the Paulding Fair Board, County Commissioners, and the Paulding County Soil and Water Conservation District. This combined group of local organizations was known as the Paulding County Wildlife Association.

The Paulding County Wildlife Association formed a board and their focus was habitat retention and restoration. The board foresaw use of the land for science and scouting groups. They envisioned students seeing water fowl nesting sites, pond life, and tree and plant identification. The area would be closed to all hunting. They

wanted to enhance the land make it readily accessible to the public. The acreage is a highly recognized wetlands area for water fowl. It is one of the few designated wildlife areas in Paulding County. Protection of wildlife areas is one of the few renewable resources we have in Paulding County. The association also had offered to help build nature trails and habitat areas. Students from Antwerp, Paulding, and Wayne Trace schools provided in-kind working hours. The students worked very hard doing such things as planting trees, clean up, identification signs, marking trails, and making picnic tables. Immediate goals were set to formulate an operating structure and continue to raise maintenance monies.

## **It Was Time for an Addition....**

In 2000, planning of an Education Building was being heavily talked about amongst the board. A lot of planning, organization, and contacts were made through the state to secure funding for this



building. A lot of local support through donations and labor became available and the building project was then underway. Through months of construction, communication,

meetings, organizing, and paperwork, the building was completed in the early fall of 2002. The availability of a structure for education use has been what finishes of a picturesque view of nature. Today, the Nature Center Building is available for workshops, trainings, meetings, youth groups, and personal rentals. It is encouraged of teachers, scout leaders, 4-H leaders, schools, youth groups and all other organizations to utilize the area as an indoor/outdoor classroom or meeting room.



## Just the Facts....

The Black Swamp Nature Center contains 51 acres consisting of 24 acres of woodland, 14 acres of wetlands, and 6 acres of old meadow. A boat launch allows easy access to Flat Rock Creek, while trails wonder around the top banks of three ponds along Flat Rock Creek and past the old Sugar Beet dam. The Paulding County Fairgrounds border the Nature Center on the northeast side, with two access trails allowing easy entrance. The old meadow and wetland areas provide



an excellent habitat for many species of birds and plant life. The Black Swamp Nature Center provides a wonderful area to observe birdlife, especially during the spring and fall migrations. The diversity of “mini-habitats” gives the visitor an opportunity to observe woodland, marshland, and meadow species within a very small area. Numerous species of birds have been seen and documented on this site, 175 to be exact! During the summer months, the Nature Center provides nesting cover for many songbirds as well. The Black Swamp



Nature Center rewards the watchful eye and attentive ear with many delights.

## Planning for the Future....

With the restoration of the Nature Center being carefully overseen, you can expect to see additions continuously throughout the future of the Nature Center! Additions are to encourage native species, and to enhance and encourage wildlife growth. Trees, wildflower, wildlife...who knows what you might see next!



## Want to Know More?

Educational events, workshops, and trainings are continuously being held. Please visit our website for the most up-to-date event schedule or contact the Paulding Soil and Water Conservation District office. The Black Swamp Nature Center Park is open from dusk until dawn. Individuals are encouraged to visit the park at their own leisure or contact the Paulding Soil and Water Conservation District to schedule an event.



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