

The History of the Black Swamp Nature Center



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Ownership of the Black Swamp Nature Center

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

In the Beginning....

The Black Swamp Nature Center was not always a nature preserve. At one time it was part of local 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 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. A series of chutes and pipes were set up to float the beet to the factory- moving the beets to production. 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.

In the summer months, the creek would dry up so there was never enough water to pump and fill the ponds during production. The dam was constructed on the Flat Rock Creek to be used for water retention. The dam is still present 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 Realty 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 they 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 Althaus, 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 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 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 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.