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# NATURAL HISTORY

## SOILS

Soil is essentially the upper layer of earth in which plants grow, a black or brown material typically consisting of a mixture of organic remains, clay, and rock particles. The factors that determine the kind of soil that forms in a particular area are (1) composition of the underlying parent material, (2) climate under which the soil is accumulated through weathering, (3) the relief of the terrain [the amount of variation in elevation and slope in a particular area], (4) plant/animal-activity on and in the soil, and (5) the length of time the forces of soil formation have acted on the soil material. The soils of Sheffield and Avon were formed from parent material consisting of glacial till clay, ancient lake bottom deposits, glacial lakes beaches, and river deposited alluvium. The U.S. Department of Agriculture and Ohio Department of Natural Resources has classified the soil of Sheffield and Avon into 21 series based on parent material, physical properties, and topography (Ernst et al. 1976).

The dominant soil series of North Ridge is Oshtemo sandy loam. Soils of this series are nearly level to sloping, well drained, and derived from beach ridges of ancient glacial lakes. These soils formed in coarse-to medium-textured beach deposits [glacial Lakes Warren and Wayne] on the crest and flanks of North Ridge in the southern portion of Sheffield and throughout central Avon. The surface layer of Oshtemo soil is brown sandy loam with yellowish-brown gravelly sandy loam subsoil. Permeability is rapid and the available water capacity is low. This soil is the most ideal in the area for domestic septic-tank sewage systems. Limitations are high gravel content, droughtiness, and erosion on slopes. White, red and black oaks, box elder, black

cherry, sugar and silver maple, and black walnut trees are common on Oshtemo soils. American chestnut once thrived on the beach ridges, but now it is essentially gone. Many of the early homes on North Ridge were framed with lumber from this tree. In 1904 American chestnut trees were first attacked in New York by an introduced fungus. Within 40 years the blight spread west, virtually wiping out this once abundant species.

On the flanks of North Ridge, the dominant soil series is Mermill loam. Soils of this series are a very poorly drained, hydric [wetland-like], dark-colored, nearly level soil on the Lake Plain in low areas to the north and south of North Ridge. This soil formed in stratified loamy lacustrine sediment [lake bed deposits] and underlying finer textured glacial till. The surface layer is very dark gray loam with mottled, dark-gray sandy clay loam. Wetland vegetation has been mapped on this soil and wetness is the main limitation. Red oak, white oak, tulip-tree, and black walnut thrive on Mermill soil.

## NATIVE FOREST VEGETATION

Before settlement by pioneers of European stock, a mixed hardwood forest covered the original Sheffield and Avon Townships, as well as most of Lorain County. Part of the great Deciduous Forest of Eastern North America—the continent’s second most extensive, after the species-depauperate boreal forests to the north—it was stunningly diverse with over 200 native trees, some 30 were dominant species in various parts of the forest. In Sheffield and Avon alone, 75 species of native trees have been identified, as well as over 350 species of native herbaceous plants. Most of the forest has been cleared and by 1967 only 13% of the county’s land

area remained wooded (Ernst et al. 1976). Fortunately, several sizable woodlots occur along the *North Ridge Scenic Byway* corridor, notably the valleys of the Black River and French Creek and along an abandoned railroad right-of-way in Sheffield.

A pre-settlement forest map, prepared by the Ohio Biological Survey (Gordon 1966) from early surveyor's accounts, reveals that the corridor was located within the Mixed Mesophytic forest that extended along the Black River valley and the ancient beach ridge in Sheffield. Canopy trees such as beech, tulip-tree, buckeye, sugar maple, basswood, red oak, white oak, white ash, red elm, and wild cherry characterize this forest type (Braun 1961). In Avon, the original vegetation along the corridor was mixed oak forests. These forests included black oak, red oak, white oak, shagbark hickory, and chestnut. In the valleys to the north of the corridor, elm-ash forests were present which also contained

swamp white oak and pin oak, while bur oak, shellbark hickory, and black walnut grew on better-drained areas. On the glacial till plain to the south of the corridor, beech-maple forests predominated.

The portion of Sheffield and Avon east of the Black River bluffs, known as the Lake Plain, is very low, flat land which, except for North Ridge [on which Detroit Road is built], was poorly drained and covered with an ash-elm-maple swamp forest. Slightly elevated places on this Lake Plain were better drained and were covered with beech and maple trees. The ancient beach ridge [North Ridge] left by glacial Lake Warren is sandy or gravelly soil with rapid drainage, which favored an oak-hickory-chestnut forest. Some deep ponds were left at the northern end of the Townships by the receding glacier some 12,000 years ago. Several of these were still wet bogs when the pioneers arrived, but soon they were drained for agricultural fields.



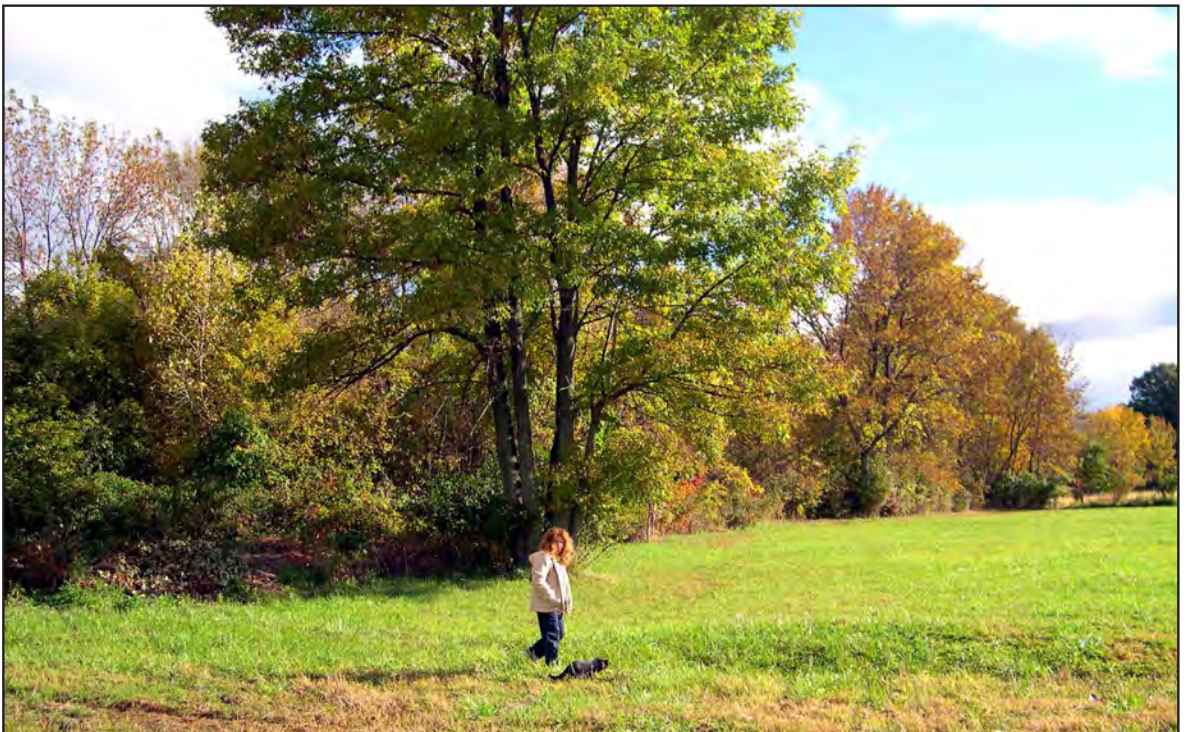
*Deciduous forest along Metro Parks' Bridgeway Trail at Black River south of Garfield Bridge.*

Some authorities believe that the dense forest cover may have accentuated the poor surface drainage of the youthful Erie Lake Plain by retarding stream formation so that much of the area surrounding the Black River valley

was swampy. Other than the ancient beach ridges, best-drained surfaces were close to the streams and immediately adjacent to the lakeshore, where short ravines have had time to develop since the glacial retreat.



*Wildflowers in bloom along First Energy transmission line right-of-way on North Ridge in Sheffield.*



*Woodlot surrounding abandoned Lorain & West Virginia Railroad tracks on North Ridge in Sheffield.*

## EARLY RECORDS OF NATIVE VEGETATION

In the 1750s, a time when Indians sparsely occupied the Black River valley, the entire surface of the Lake Plain was covered with a magnificent forest of mixed hardwoods. James Smith, a 17-year-old lad when taken captive by the Delaware Indians from his home in Pennsylvania, was later adopted by the Indians and forced to journey to Lake Erie. Smith later escaped, went on to serve as a Colonel in the Revolutionary War, and at the age of 61 published his fascinating memoirs. Of the Black River watershed in 1755, he wrote,

*“My adopted brother, called Tontileaugo, took me to the head waters of the Muskingum; thence to the waters of the Canesadooharie [Indian name for Black River] where there is a large body of rich, well lying land—the timber is ash, walnut, sugar-tree, buckeye, honey-locust, and cherry intermixed with some oak and hickory. At the time the blackhaws [hawthorn berries] were ripe and we were seldom out of sight of them.”*

*“I had no gun, but Tontileaugo, who was a first-rate hunter, carried a rifle gun, and every day killed deer, raccoons, and bear. We left the meat, except for a little for present use, and carried the skins until we encamped and stretched them with elm bark, in a frame made of poles stuck in the ground and tied together with lynn [basswood] or elm bark; and when the skins were dried by fire, we packed them up and carried them with us the next day. As we proceeded down the Canesadooharie waters our packs, increased by the skins that were daily killed and we could not march more than 8 to 10 miles per day. We came to Lake Erie about 6 miles west of the mouth. The wind was very high in the evening and I was surprised to hear the roaring of the water and high waves that dashed against the shore. The next morning the lake was only in moderate motion and as we marched along the sand toward the mouth, I saw on the strand [beach] a large number of fish left in hollow places as the wind fell and the waves abated; and numbers of bald and gray eagles were along the shore devouring them. At the mouth of the Canesadooharie we came to a large camp of Wyandotte, where Tontileaugo’s wife was and we were kindly received. They gave us a kind of rough, brown*



James Smith in 1755 at his adoption ritual by Delaware Indians (courtesy of Ohio Historical Society).

potatoes, which grew spontaneously and called it *ohnenata*. These potatoes peeled and dipped in raccoon's fat, tasted nearly like our sweet-potatoes. They also gave us what they called *caneheanta*, which is a kind of green corn, dried, and beans mixed together."



Marker along the Bridgeway Trail describing the adventures of James Smith (Scoouwa) with the Indians in the Black River valley of the 1750s.

Smith continued,

"From the headwaters of the Canesadooharie to the mouth, the land is generally good; chiefly first or second rate, and comparatively, little or no third rate. The only refuse [worthless land] is some swamps, that appear to be too wet for use and I found some difficulty getting round swamps and ponds, yet I apprehend a number of them, if drained, would make excellent meadows. The timber is black-oak, walnut, hickory, cherry, black-ash, white-ash, water-ash,

buckeye, black-locust, honey-locust, sugar-tree, and elm; there is also some land, though comparatively small, where the timber is chiefly white-oak or beech—this may be called third rate. In the bottoms, and at many places in the upland, there is a large quantity of wild apple, plum, and red and black haw trees. It appeared well watered, and plenty of meadow ground, intermixed with upland, but no large prairies or glades, that I saw or hear of. In the route, deer, bear, turkeys, and raccoons, appeared plenty, but no sign of buffalo, and very little sign of elks." In Smith's time trees were considered good soil indicators—nut-bearing trees for example indicated superior [first rate] soil.

After a lengthy stay at the river mouth, Smith and his party embarked in a large birch bark canoe, 35 feet long, 4 feet wide, and 3 feet deep, with a heavy burden, up the Canesadooharie. "A few miles upstream we went ashore to hunt; but to my surprise they carried the vessel that we all came in up the bank, and inverted with bottom up to converted it to a dwelling house, and kindled a fire before us to warm ourselves by and cook. With our baggage and ourselves in the house we were very much crowded, yet our little house turned off the rain very well. We kept moving and hunting up this river until we came to the falls [Cascade Falls]; here we remained several weeks, and killed a great number of deer, several bears, and a great number of raccoons. On our passage up I was not much out of the river, but what I saw was good land, and not hilly. About the fall is chestnut land, which is almost the only chestnut timber I ever saw in this country."

Smith's fascinating journal, *An Account of the Remarkable Occurrences in the Life and Travels of Col. James Smith during His Captivity with the Indians in the years 1755–1759*, was published in 1799 and reprinted in 1978 by the Ohio Historical Society as *Scoouwa: James Smith's Indian Captivity Narrative*. "Scoouwa" was the name given by the Indians to James Smith when they adopted him. A reprinted and annotated version of Smith's book is available for circulation at the Lorain Public Library.

## Original Land Surveys and Roads

One of the most important sources of information on the natural vegetation of our area is the record of the earliest land surveys. The first survey was in 1796 when General Moses Cleaveland of the Connecticut Land Company sent Augustus Porter along the Lake Erie shore to make a traverse in order to have accurate geographical knowledge of the contour of the lake east of the Cuyahoga River, although this land was still Indian territory. When the Indian claims were extinguished by the Fort Industry Treaty in 1805, the Connecticut Land Company contracted with Abraham Tappan and Anson Sessions to survey the land west of the Cuyahoga River that would become Lorain County. These surveyors and the men they hired, such as Josuha Henshaw, followed the practice of utilizing conspicuous trees at township section corners as *witness trees*. Compass bearings and distances from the corner to several witness trees were recorded, as well as the kind and size of the trees in the surveyor's field notes. In Elyria Township, the next township south of Sheffield, Josuha Henshaw presented one of the most accurate descriptions available of the original vegetation. He noted that most of the area was covered by a beech-maple forest with some large swamps dominated by ash-elm-maple-oak woodlands and some open marshes covered with cranberry, edged by elderberry and willow.

Often the surveyors described the vegetation along traverse lines with entries such as "cranberries by the bushel can be gathered on this marsh" or "chestnut, oak, and hickory found on this ridge" or "land scalded, unfit for cultivation except grazing." The term "scalded" was typically used in connection with wet or swampy areas, referring to land that appeared to be scorched by the sun, which can occur when land is saturated with water during the early part of the growing season. A century ago a farmer recorded that water stood unusually deep in his woodlot almost all

summer, killing all of the trees and understory [layer of vegetation beneath the main canopy of the forest]. Today this circumstance might be described as evidence of a woodland vernal pool, which is still common in Sheffield woodlots on the Lake Plain.

Nearly two centuries ago, as the first pioneers arrived in Lorain County, the only dry land in many parts of the area was the tops of the ridges. Thus, the early roads were built on them, in most cases following old Indian trails that also followed the ridge crests. Where the land was too wet, planks or split logs were used to form the roadbed. Because of their rough nature they were referred to as *corduroy roads*. Depending on the wetness and extent of the swamp, log roads, some of them toll roads, varied from a few feet to many miles. The longest was built from the mouth of the Black River to Lodi, a distance of some 33 miles, traversing the southwestern corner of Sheffield Township. From the location of this and at least 16 other log roads that were built in the County, one can infer the extent of the original swamp forests before settlement.

## May Eliza Day—Pioneer Botanist

May Eliza Day (1850-1938), granddaughter of Capt. John Day—founder of Sheffield, Ohio, distinguished herself as an accomplished botanist through her studies and writings on the local flora of Sheffield and Lorain County. Her father, James Day (1807-1896) traveled to Ohio as a nine-year-old boy with his parents, Capt. John and Lydia [née Austin] Day in 1816. In 1931 May Day and her sisters were instrumental in transferring 43 acres of the Day family farm in scenic French Creek valley to the Village for a park to be named in honor of their father.

Professor George Frederick Wright of Oberlin College prepared a treatise titled, *Day Family of Sheffield Township* for inclusion in the 1913 Edition of *Genealogical Register of the Descendants in Male Line of Robert Day*. Professor Wright noted that "At one time or

another nearly all those who were born in Sheffield [Ohio] have pursued their higher education in Oberlin College ...” Regarding May Eliza Day, he stated, “Not satisfied with knowledge attended in school, May, daughter of James Day, became a recognized authority in the botany of Lorain County so that she was constantly consulted by professors of Oberlin. The herbarium which she presented to the College contains some specimens that had not before been discovered in the County.” Specifically, she contributed extensively to publications of Professor Albert A. Wright (1889,1893) on the flowering and fern plants of Lorain County.

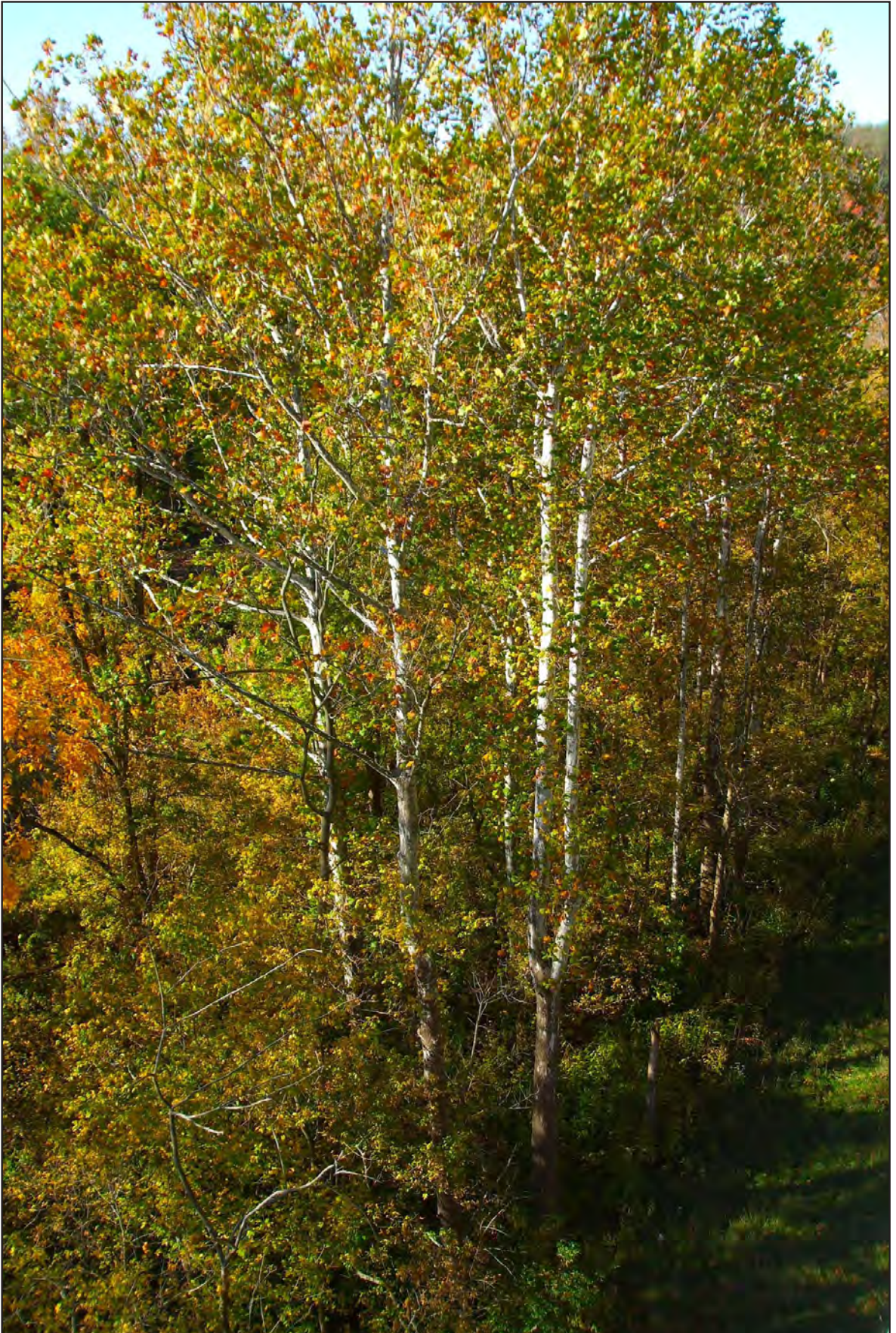


*First growth tree preserved from the original forest on the farm of Norman Day in Sheffield (photograph by May E. Day 1916).*

On her own, May E. Day published a chapter on the *Botany of the [Lorain] County* in Professor George Frederick Wright’s *A Standard History of Lorain County* (1916). In the chapter, May Day documents that

in 1885 Judge William Day sold a stand of black walnut trees in Sheffield Township for \$4,500. The largest tree measuring 10,000 board feet [a unit of volume for timber equal to 144 cubic inches, notionally 12 inches x 12 inches x one inch] of lumber, sold for \$60 per thousand, bringing \$600. The tree was nearly 5 feet in diameter and 35 feet to the first limb. Also in Sheffield, her father James Day, dug out a large black walnut log from a flood pile along the Black River where it had lain for many years and sold the 18-foot plank made from the log for \$100. In the chapter, May Day included a photograph of a magnificent black walnut tree taken on the farm of her Uncle Norman Day, reproduced here with her original caption.

Discussing various other tree species, May Day noted, “The tulip-tree, commonly known as whitewood, is one of the most beautiful of our native trees. It grew abundantly near the lake ridges. The Indians used this tree for their dugout canoes. The lumber was much prized by early settlers in building houses, especially for siding. The chestnut tree was also found on the ridges. The fruit is valuable and in early times the chestnut made the best wood for rail fences, because it is readily split and durable.” She also reported, “The tall straight white oak—many feet up to the lowest limbs from having grown surrounded by other trees—was perhaps of the greatest value.” In the 1840s, they were sawed into planks 12-foot wide by 3 to 4 inches thick and sold for ship planking. One white oak tree was large enough to produce 2,500 feet of plank. Day found many of the finest oaks grew where the steel mill is now situated, on soil that was less than a foot deep over shale bedrock. She enumerated five other oaks found in our area—red oak, pin oak, scarlet oak, chestnut oak, and black oak, stating, “The inner bark of the last named oak was used by pioneers for coloring cloth.” She also observed that sycamore trees grew to immense size near the Black River, “Some of these trees, too large to be sawed whole, were split in two with dynamite.”



*Autumn foliage on stately sycamore trees in the Black River valley near Garfield Bridge.*



May Day found several species of maples in Sheffield, in particular the red maple “grows most luxuriantly in the swamps.” Describing the sugar maple, she reported, “The early settlers obtained a bountiful supply of sugar from these trees, and it is evident that some of the old large maples along the river had been tapped before the settlers came.”

James Smith confirms this observation in his description of Indians gathering the sap from maple trees in the valley during his captivity in the 1750s. May Day points out that the making of maple syrup and sugar was an important industry in Lorain County in the early 1900s. For example, in 1915 there were 75,744 maple trees from which syrup or sugar was made, the product being 13,652 gallons of syrup and 2,159 pounds of sugar.

### Interviews with Early Farmers

In February 1947, Lewis James Ives, a graduate student in the Department of Botany at Oberlin College, interviewed four farmers from Sheffield Village who were descendents of early pioneers to the township. He asked each of them to describe the native vegetation they had observed in their lifetime and to give their recollections of what their forebears had told of the plants encountered by the pioneers. The following is a summary of those interviews. The title of Ives’ Master of Arts thesis is *The Natural Vegetation of Lorain County, Ohio*. This thesis is on file at the Oberlin College Library.

**Peter Eiden.** The Eiden Farm was located at the crest of the north bluff of the Black River overlooking the mouth of French Creek.



*Sugar making from maple sap on the former James Day farm (photograph by May E. Day 1916).*



*Ohio buckeye tree in bloom on East River Road near North Ridge.*

The predominant timber trees located on the Eiden Farm were elm (*Ulmus americana*), silver maple (*Acer saccharum*), tulip-tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), pin oak (*Quercus palustris*), and hickory (*Carya* spp.). On the higher knolls were beech (*Fragus grandifolia*), maple (*Acer* spp.), hickory, red oak (*Quercus rubra*), and white ash (*Fraxinus americana*). There was a large grove of Ohio buckeyes (*Aesculus glabra*) in his woodlot. Eiden noted that no chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) trees grew on the Lake Plain north of North Ridge.

**Alvin Bungart.** The Bungart Farm was located on the north bluff of the Black River near the south end of Root Road and included Cromwell Island (aka Bungart Island). There were oak and hickory trees along the upper bluff of the river and walnut (*Juglans nigra*), sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*), and cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) on the floodplain. Elm was the most common on the low moist land. On the Day farm, situated on the north side of French Creek, cucumber-tree (*Magnolia acuminata*) and spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) were found. Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) was common, particularly near Lake Erie.

**Dwight Burrell.** The Burrell Farm was located on the Black River, immediately upstream of the mouth of French Creek. Burrell's ancestors told him that the land on the rim of the Black River valley once had a large quantity of white oak (*Quercus alba*), red oak, and tulip-tree. The bottom land was mainly sycamore and walnut. Elm, maple, hickory, and basswood (*Tilia americana*) were also common along the river bank.

**Henry Garfield Root.** The Garfield-Root Farm, originally settled by Milton Garfield in 1815, was located on North Ridge about a quarter-mile east of the Black River valley. Black ash (*Fraxinus nigra*), elm, and silver maple were the predominant timber trees north of North Ridge. There were also large numbers of pin oak, bur oak (*Quercus*

*macrocarpa*), and cottonwood. No chestnuts grew north of North Ridge, although they were plentiful on the ridge, to the south, and along the Black River. Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) was found along the banks of the Black River as far north as Garfield Bridge (SR 254), whereas white pine (*Pinus strobus*) only came north to a place about 2 miles south of the bridge. Along the upland bank of the river was a very large stand of white oak and tulip-tree. Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) was found there too. On the bottoms, walnut, sycamore and willows (*Salix* spp.) dominated. Wild grape (*Vitis vulpina*) with fruit nearly as large as Concord grapes grew over the trees. At times, the pioneers felled these trees and then picked 4 to 5 bushels of grapes from the vines on each tree. Other timber trees in the area included basswood (*Tilia americana*), butternut (*Juglans cinerea*), wild black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), wild crabapple (*Malus coronaria*), redhaw (*Cataegus coccinea*), hop-hornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*), ironwood (*Carpinus caroliniana*), black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), and honey-locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*).



Henry Garfield Root (1885-1971), Sheffield farmer and avocational naturalist in 1910 (courtesy of the Root family).

Root told of a black walnut tree that grew on the Black River floodplain that was thought to be the biggest in Ohio. Sumner B. Day was hired by an English firm to cut and saw the tree. Day had to order a special saw blade for his nearby sawmill to handle the felled log. Once the bark and sapwood were removed, the log measured 40 feet long and 6 feet in diameter. It was floated down the river to Lorain where it was shipped by train to the East Coast.

Knolls of clay north of North Ridge had beech and maple trees on them. Most of the land north of the Ridge was low and marshy. In some places, there was a layer of muck 18 inches deep. Root's grandfather, Capt. Aaron Root, picked cranberries (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*), swamp blueberries (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), and huckleberries (*Gaylussacia baccata*) in bogs located in the northern portion of Sheffield near Oster Road.

Root recalled that a creek was formed on his farm in the pioneer days when a log was hauled out by a team of horses. The land at that time was marshy and undrained north of the ridge where the log hauled out. Water draining away over the years in the path made by the log had cut a channel six feet deep.

### TODAYS VEGETATION

Today, the bottomlands forests of the Black River contain magnificent sycamore trees (some exceeding 100 feet in height), black walnut, red elm, and willows. Stately beech trees grow along the upper slopes of the valley and hemlocks are present in the on the cool, lower slopes leading down to the river. Detroit Road, which runs along the crest of the ancient beach ridge, is noted for many tree-lined segments in Sheffield and Avon. Arching black walnut, red elm, maples and oaks present an inviting passage to travelers along the corridor.

East of the Black River bluffs, most of Sheffield and northern Avon lies on the low, flat land of the Lake Erie Plain and except for

North Ridge was poorly drained and covered with an ash-elm-maple swamp forest when the first pioneers arrived. Slightly elevated places on this Lake Plain were better drained and were covered with beech and maple trees. The ancient beach ridge (North Ridge) left by glacial Lake Warren is sandy or gravelly soil with rapid drainage, which favored an oak-hickory-chestnut forest.

Some deep ponds were left at the northern end of the Village by the receding glacier some 12,000 years ago. Several of these were still wet bogs when the pioneers settled, but soon they were drained for agricultural fields. Unfortunately, more recent residential developments have cut the old field tiles and relocated drainage channels that cause flooding conditions at numerous home sites throughout the Lake Plain. It appears the early settlers may have had a better grasp of sustainability and how to deal with the natural environment than some modern-day administrators, developers, and engineers.

A total of 1,276 plant species have been identified in Lorain County (Andreas 1989; Ives 1947; Walters 1994). In the vicinity of the *Scenic Byway* some 75 species of native trees have been recorded, as well as over 350 species of native herbaceous plants. In the past two centuries at least an additional 130 alien species and 60 introduced/cultivated plant species have been incorporated into the flora through human activities. Of particular interest is a remnant section of prairie located in Black River valley along the Lorain County Metro Parks' Bridgeway Trail to the north of the corridor.

Appendix A at the back of this guide contains a checklist of the plants that have been recorded as growing in the vicinity of the *Scenic Byway*. The checklist also indicates the origin of each plant: native (N), invading alien (A), or purposefully introduced or escaped from cultivation (C). Both the scientific and corresponding common names are given for all plant families and species.

## SKUNK-CABBAGE EMERGES

One of the first plants to emerge from the winter snow in the vicinity of North Ridge is a peculiar forb known as skunk-cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*). Patches of skunk-cabbage are found along the Black River floodplain near Garfield Bridge on the Bridgeway Trail.

Skunk-cabbage is a distinctive plant of marshy woodlots that sprouts so early in the spring that the heat of cellular respiration resulting from rapid growth often melts the snow surrounding it (Photo 1).

It first emerges as large brownish-purple and green, mottled, shell-like hood or spathe—modified leaves or sheathing bract at the base of the plant about 6 inches tall (Photo 2). In March the spathe opens to reveal a yellow knob-like spadix covered with tiny flowers (Photo 3). By April and May a tight roll of fresh green leaves unfold forming huge, cabbage-like leaves that carpet large areas of the old river bed near East River Road and in vernal pools (Photos 4 & 5).

The plant's strong unpleasant odor, especially when crushed, resembles decaying flesh and acts to lure insects that aid in pollination. Once the flowers are pollinated, the spathe disintegrates and the spadix arches down, pushing the developing fruit into the soil. At about the same time the lush green leaves begin to form, with large ribbing for added strength. The leaves produce calcium oxalate crystals ( $\text{CaC}_2\text{O}_4$ ), which create a burning sensation when eaten, protecting the leaves from predators. The roots of skunk-cabbage are light in color, radiate out from a central stem, and have the appearance of earthworms. The roots contract slightly each year, keeping the leaves and fall buds low to the ground.

Skunk-cabbage is not a true cabbage, rather it is a member of the Arum or Philodendron Family, along with Jack-in-the-pulpit and arrow-arum. Other members of this family (Araceae) also exhibit a large showy spathe, which sheaths a fleshy spadix clustered with flowers.



1. Skunk-cabbage spathes emerge through the late winter snow.



2. Skunk-cabbage spathes continue to grow as spring draws near.



3. Skunk-cabbage spathes open in early spring to reveal a golden spadix.



5. Skunk-cabbage leaves fully unfolded in mid-spring.



4. Skunk-cabbage leaves begin to unfold as spring progresses.



*Horse chestnut tree in bloom on North Ridge, an introduced species related to native buckeye trees.*

## WILDLIFE

Scientific investigations of the wildlife resources of Lorain County demonstrate that some 70 fish, 25 amphibian, 15 reptile, 200 bird, and 35 mammal species frequent the general vicinity of the *Scenic Byway*. Checklists for these animal groups are found in the Appendix.

Faunal inventories from archaeological sites and early historical accounts within

the region indicate that northeastern Ohio provided habitats for a diverse array of terrestrial, aquatic, and avian animal species. Among the more important of these for early human exploitation were white-tailed deer (which remain abundant today), elk, black bear, eastern cottontail rabbit, beaver, raccoon, gray fox, wild turkey, passenger pigeon, ducks, geese, and many species of fish and mollusks.

Within the waters and along the valley of French Creek a wide variety of plants and animals can be discovered by visitors to the parks on this waterway. Mallard and teal ducks, Canada geese, great blue herons, and several species of hawks are abundant, and the fortunate observer can see wild turkeys, ring-necked pheasants, and owls. Steelhead trout in French Creek has become a recent



*Snapping turtles, the largest reptile in the area, are common in the ponds and moist woodlot near North Ridge (courtesy of Ohio Division of Wildlife).*

attraction for anglers. Beavers have dammed a small tributary to French Creek creating a sizable pond on the Black River valley north of the corridor. The Ohio Division of Wildlife has reintroduced the river otter into nearby watersheds. These playful animals were once common in Ohio streams until habitat loss drove them from the state in the late 1800s. A recent sighting of a river otter in French Creek south of the corridor indicates that the population may be spreading back into the Black River watershed.

Appendixes B and C at the back of this guide contain checklists of fish and birds, respectively, that have been observed in the vicinity of the *Scenic Byway*. The checklist of birds contain the relative abundance of each species by season. Appendix D is a composite checklist of amphibians, reptiles, and mammals that are known to occur in the vicinity of the *Scenic Byway*. As with the plants, both the scientific and corresponding common names are given for all animal families and species.



*Mallard ducks on the wing at Waterford Pond in Sheffield.*



*Cardinal, Ohio's State bird, is a common resident bird of North Ridge in all seasons (courtesy of Ohio Division of Wildlife).*



*Great Blue Heron. A colony [rookery] of these birds is located on the Black River and they can frequently be seen fishing at farm ponds on the slopes of North Ridge (courtesy of Ohio Division of Wildlife).*

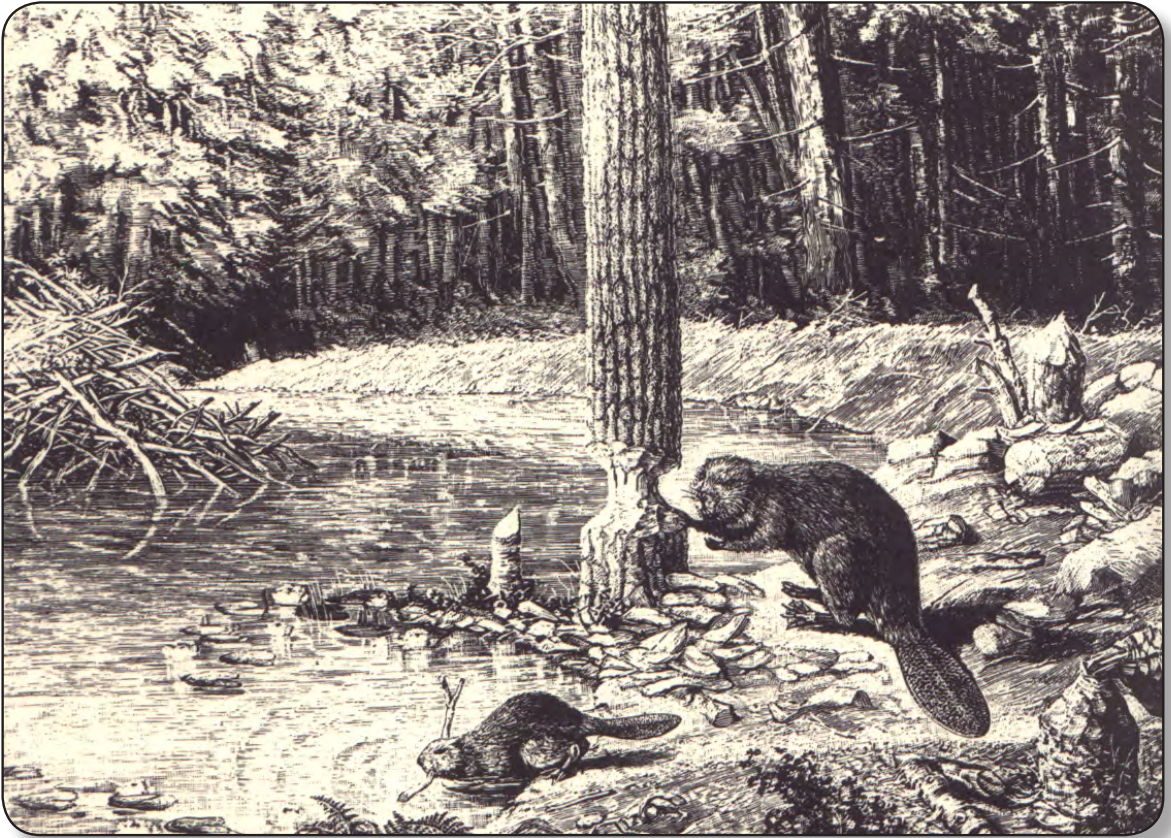




*Green frogs, common amphibians in ponds of North Ridge (courtesy of Ohio Division of Wildlife).*



*Rock bass, a game fish that has been taken in the Black River and French Creek (courtesy of Ohio Division of Wildlife).*



*Woodcut illustrating beavers recorded by the early pioneers (courtesy of Ohio Historical Society).*



*Beaver dam on a small tributary to French Creek in the Black River valley.*



*Northern water snake, an occasional reptile species seen along the Black River (courtesy of Ohio Division of Wildlife).*



*River otter, a long extirpated mammal, has recently been observed in the upper reaches of French Creek (courtesy of National Audubon Society).*



*Fawn of a white-tailed deer, a mammal frequently seen in the area surrounding North Ridge (courtesy of Ohio Division of Wildlife).*