



## ***BICENTENNIAL BULLETIN No. 16*** ***—Sheffield Celebrates 200th Birthday***

The Sheffield Bicentennial Commission will issue a *Bicentennial Bulletin* each Monday throughout 2015 that illustrates the rich heritage of our communities. **View them at — [www.sheffieldbicentennial.org](http://www.sheffieldbicentennial.org) or [sheffieldvillage.com](http://sheffieldvillage.com)**

### ***FRENCH CREEK NATURE & ARTS CENTER***

*(built in 1987—Lorain County Metro Parks' jewel in Sheffield Village)*  
5030 Colorado Avenue, Sheffield Village, Ohio

*J*ames Day, one of Capt. John Day's sons, made the journey to Sheffield in 1816 when he was only nine years old. In the 1850s he built a Greek Revival-style farmhouse on Colorado Avenue where he was known for hosting congenial social gatherings. After his death in 1896, his heirs arranged for the Andrew Conrad family to manage the homestead for several decades. In 1986 the house mysteriously burned. Now the property is home to the French Creek Nature and Arts Center, within Lorain County Metro Parks' French Creek Reservation.

*James Day House in 1975*



In 1987, Lorain County Metro Parks embarked on a \$6,000,000 development plan for the French Creek Reservation, the capstone feature being the French Creek Nature Center. The Nature Center, staffed by park personnel and volunteers, was designed with an entrance off Colorado Avenue (State Route 611) and scheduled to be open daily. Originally the building emphasized the natural environment of the French Creek valley with exhibits and program rooms, bird and wildlife observation areas, reservable classrooms, and a non-lending nature library. The center also boasted a large gallery for hosting temporary exhibits.

*Entrance to French Creek Nature & Arts Center in 2014*



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*Nature Van at French Creek Nature & Arts Center*



French Creek at the Nature Center



Over the years numerous fascinating exhibitions have been held at the center. To highlight a few, in September 1994, local herpetologist, Paul Ackerman, presented *Exotic Critters—Live*, a reptile extravaganza displaying alligators, lizards, caiman, turtles, and more. In 2003, the year of Ohio’s Bicentennial Celebration, from April to June the gallery presented *Ohio 200: A Celebration of Lorain County’s History*. The exhibition, which was the collaborative work of Lorain County Metro Parks and 14 historical societies in Lorain County, featured historical

artifacts, photographs, and video presentations from throughout the county. A different society was spotlighted each week during the exhibit and members of the societies served as docents. Each society brought their best pieces and put together a timeline.

Stairs to French Creek nature trail at the Nature Center



French Creek nature trail



Pie contest at Sheffield Village Family ArtsFest



Other shows highlighted Australian wildlife, native fish and aquatic invertebrates, and ocean life, all with hands-on exhibits.

In 2007, a major change occurred at the center when TrueNorth Cultural Arts established its headquarters there and began presenting a wide variety of performances in the gallery and in a smaller adjacent theater known as the Distance Learning Center. In addition to traditional theater and concert performances, several plays were commissioned that dealt with local historical events. *Blooms of Steel* portrayed the coming of the steel industry to the Black River valley, *Freedom’s Light* depicted the Underground Railroad in Sheffield, and *Forever Sisters* chronicled the Burrell sisters of Sheffield’s founding family in the mid-20th century. For the past seven years the *Sheffield Village Family ArtsFest* has been held at the center. In response to the changing emphasis, the facility has recently been renamed the French Creek Nature & Arts Center.