



BICENTENNIAL BULLETIN No. 29 **—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 or sheffieldvillage.com**

PETER BUNGART (1876–1949) — Sheffield’s renowned paleontologist

Peter A. Bungart was born and raised at the family farm on the banks of the Black River near the southern end of Root Road. The farm included a sizable island in the river where his father, Nicholas, grazed livestock and raised crops. Nicholas had a flat-bottomed scow with a cable arrangement that he used to ferry cows, pigs, horses, and farm implements from the river flats to the island. Although, somewhat inconvenient to farm, the island had good pastureland and rich soil for crops. Sweet corn grew particularly well there. The stone foundation of a barn that once stood on the island can still be seen. Raymond Vietzen, a noted avocational archaeologist from Lorain County, tells of Peter’s observation of a pig on the island. The pig constantly fished for fat mussels along the shore, typically with only its back showing out of the water. One could hear the pig crushing the shells and gulping down the soft parts. The pig eventually went blind and Peter attributed this to its long hours under water.

Peter Bungart was born in an eventful year—1876. The nation celebrated its Centennial in Philadelphia and Archibald Willard of Wellington, Ohio painted his famous *Spirit of 76*. It was also the year that Civil War General George Armstrong Custer and his U.S. Cavalry were annihilated by the Sioux Indians at the Battle of the Little Big Horn in Montana.

As a boy of eight years old, Peter tagged along with his father who was helping a paleontologist excavate some fossils along the riverbank. That man was Jay Terrell, legendary Ohio fossil collector searching for the remains of “giant placoderms” in the Devonian shale banks of the Black River on the Bungart farm. This experience so impressed Peter that he knew geology was his calling. For the next 25 years he made a hobby of collecting fossils and familiarizing himself with the rocks and structure of the Earth, as well as hunting Indian relics, which prepared

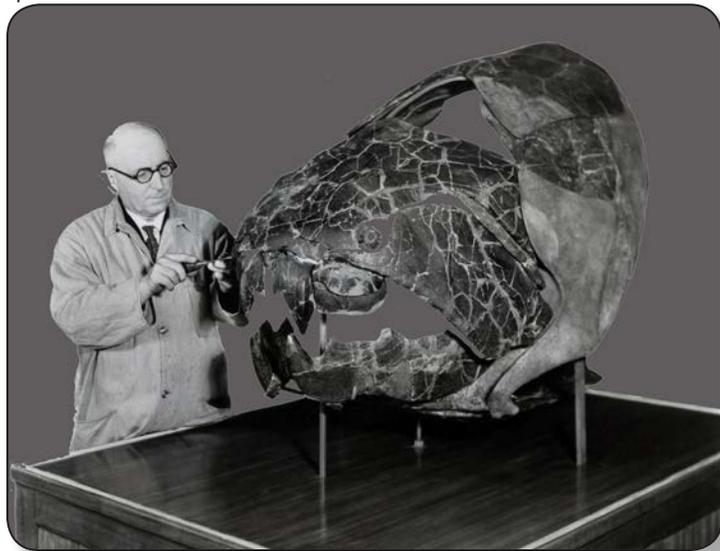
Peter Bungart collecting Devonian fish fossils from the Ohio Shale, 365 million years old



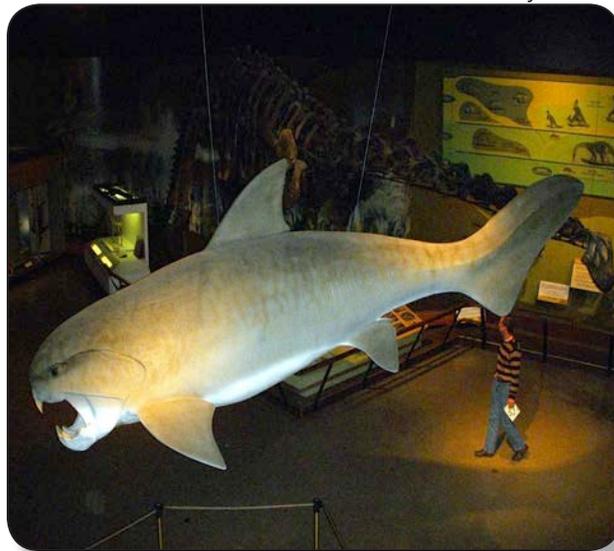
him for becoming a professional paleontologist. He was destined to become one of America's foremost paleontologists and win the respect and admiration of scientists throughout the world.

In his early years, in addition to his farm duties, Peter went to work at the Lorain shipyards where he excelled as a ship's carpenter. It was then that he courted and wooed a young schoolteacher, Margie Brown, who taught in the Sheffield Township District No. 1 School near the Burrell Homestead. They wed and settled in Lorain. The devastating tornado of 1924 destroyed their home, but they were unharmed. Every hour Peter could find away from farm work and the carpentry trade, was spent in prospecting and collecting. The earlier collections were sometimes sold which made him known to the scientific community. In 1915, he was commissioned by the Canadian government to investigate the fossil assemblage of Alberta. Peter's big break came in 1923 when the newly organized Cleveland Museum of Natural History offered him full-time employment in paleontology.

*Peter Bungart reconstructing a fossil of *Dunkelosteus terrelli*, a rare placoderm fish first discovered in the shale cliffs at Sheffield Lake*



*A life-sized, 20-foot-long model of *Dunkelosteus terrelli* at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History*



He entered this profession with a breath of experience and perfection of technique in reassembling fossil animals never before attained by any collector of Devonian fossils in Ohio. During the succeeding 25 years, until his retirement in 1947, Peter Bungart amassed a collection of Devonian fossil fish, which is nowhere exceeded in number or quality of preparation. Giant armored fish and primitive sharks that swam in the waters of the great Devonian inland, sea, which covered northern Ohio 365 million years ago, were familiar creatures to him. Because of Peter's enthusiasm and skill in finding obscure fossils in the rock in which they were embedded, the Cleveland Museum of Natural History owns the finest collection of these forms in the world. His most outstanding discoveries were made on the banks of the Black River in Lorain and Sheffield, and on the Rocky River in the Cleveland Metropolitan Park.

In his honor, and in recognition of his contributions toward the advancement of knowledge of the fossil fish fauna of Ohio, one of the rarest of these ancient armored fish, which he discovered, was named in his honor—*Bungartius perissus*. It represents not only a new species, but a new genus as well. The only two known specimens in the world are in the collections of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. Peter Bungart died on July 29, 1949 in Lorain's St. Joseph Hospital and was buried at Ridgehill Cemetery in Amherst.