

# THE VILLAGE PIONEER

Newsletter of the Sheffield Village Historical Society  
& Cultural Center



## Sheffield Celebrates the 135th Anniversary of the Day-Austin-Root August Reunions

On Saturday, August 1, 2009, some 125 folks gathered at the Jabez Burrell Homestead in Sheffield to participate in an old-fashioned reunion picnic that dates back to 1874. The gathering was sponsored by the Sheffield Village Historical Society, Lorain County Metro Parks, Village of Sheffield, and The Community Foundation of Lorain County through The Historic Burrell Homestead Fund.

The first reunion was held at the lakeshore home of James and Eleanor Austin to celebrate the August birthdays of 10 members of Sheffield's founding families. The idea of an August family reunion and picnic caught on and eventually it became an annual event, variously held at the Day, Austin, Root, and Burrell Homesteads. A historian was selected for each reunion to record family happenings and eventually a book was published, *History of the Day-Austin-Root August Reunions 1874-1930*. In 1885, Lorain County Auditor William Root served as historian for the reunion and referred to the event as the Sheffield August Picnic.

William Root wrote on that occasion,

“An August picnic seems to nicely accommodate a farming community. The hardest and most pressing work of the season is done. What is to be the outcome of the year's work can be pretty much seen. Men and teams are tired, not to say anything of the women and children. Let the fathers and sons be thoughtfully courteous on picnic day and make it as great a pleasure and rest to the faithful and tired mothers and daughters as possible.”

This year's August Picnic was not merely a family reunion, but all Society members, guests, and anyone who wanted to see some old traditions revived were welcome to attend. A special event this year was particularly appropriate because it marked the 40th anniversary of the donation of the Burrell Homestead to the Lorain County Metro Parks by the Burrell sisters and the start of the second decade of The Historic Burrell Homestead Fund initiated by Eleanor Burrell just a few years before her death in 2001.



Picnickers gathered at the Burrell Homestead for 135th Anniversary of the Sheffield Family Reunion on August 1, 2009.

The reunion picnic featured tours of the 1820s Burrell House, guided by Historical Society Board of Trustees members, as well as a visit to the adjacent 1870s cheesehouse factory and a chance to hike to an Archaic Period (4,000 to 5,000 years ago) archaeological excavation at the nearby Burrell Orchard Site, which included a new trail along the promontory that yielded views of the steep bluffs that afforded natural protection for the ancient Indian encampment. There were pioneer and Indian games for the children, which several adults also enjoyed—particularly throwing an Atlatl spear at buffalo and bear targets, under the supervision of James Barnes. Those who were lucky enough to hit the target received a certificate, including Sheffield Mayor John Hunter and his son Dave. Like the picnics of many years ago, there were formal presentations—this year author James Day spoke on his research for a book about his father, Richard Day, *In Search of Father: The Thirteenth Man* and Dr. Brian Redmond, Curator of Archaeology at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, related his findings from *Archaeological Excavations at the Burrell Orchard Site*. Both

presentations were stimulating and evoked much thought about the recent and distant past.

Arguably the most popular revival was the serving of Sheffield Chicken Pie, based on an 1800s family recipe, to over 100 picnickers. In addition to the Pie, donated beverages, ice cream, and a lavishly decorated cake were also served. Members of the Society's Board of Trustees, under the watchful eye of Society member and cuisine consultant Linda Urig, served the Pie and other treats. Anne Stokes, a member of the Day family, not only donated the cake, she traveled the longest distance to attend the reunion from her home in Claremont, California. The entire event was captured in over 350 digital images by the Society's official photographer Denny Davis, including an old-time-type panoramic view of all those in attendance. The editor wishes to thank all of the Society members that worked tirelessly to make the day a success. Yes, Meredith, their hard work has exonerated you! If you missed the picnic, the accompanying images will give you a flavor of the fun we had.



*Ricki Herdendorf and Andy Minda greet visitors at the Welcome Desk.*



*Tom Hoerrle displays historic flag at tour of the Jabez Burrell House.*



*Eddie Herdendorf, Historical Society president, welcomes members and guests to the Reunion.*



*James Day discusses his research on the book he wrote on the life of his father, Richard Day.*



James Barnes (left) instructs Theo Day on techniques for throwing a spear with an Indian Atlatl.



Bear target with several Atlatl spear hits.



Davis Day beams after receiving a certificate for bagging a buffalo with an Atlatl spear.



Den Davis proudly exhibits his success in hitting the buffalo target with an Atlatl spear.



Mayor John Hunter (right) and his son Dave display their Atlatl certificates.



Tom Horrele attempts walking on pioneer stilts.



Linda Urig prepares servings of Sheffield Chicken Pie for over 100 guests.



Marilyn Day and her sons Davis & Theo are ready to enjoy Sheffield Chicken Pie. If you would like the recipe, contact the Sheffield Village Historical Society at (440) 934-1514.



Corinne Seink enjoys fresh watermelon with her parents, Dan and JoAnne.



Reunion Anniversary Cake donated by Society member Dr. Anne Stokes of Claremont, California.



Meredith Williams (left), Carol Day Minda, and Dr. Anne Stokes serve Anniversary Cake to Tom Hoerrle.



Dr. Brian Redmond, Curator of Archaeology at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, with his wife Jeanne.



Carol and Andy Minda with their daughter Michele, members of the Day family.



*Patsy and Jack Hoag with their grandson Peter at main entrance to Jabez Burrell House.*



*Dennis Bryden with his daughter Denise Rego and granddaughters Maria & Julianna.*



*Dennis Bryden's 1930 Model A Ford on display at the Reunion Picnic.*



*Eddie Herdendorf with cousins Melinda, Connor and Patrick Wood, members of the Day-Garfield-Root Family.*



*Matt Nahorn (standing) and Brian Redmond examine collection of Indian artifacts from Lorain County.*



*Eddie Herdendorf and Brian Redmond lead a tour of the Burrell Orchard Archaeological Site, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.*

## Early Accounts of Sheffield's Native Flora

### Eastern Deciduous Forest

Before settlement by pioneers of European stock, a mixed hardwood forest covered the original Sheffield Township, 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 of which formed dominant stands in various parts of the forest.

In Sheffield alone, 75 species of native trees have been identified, as well as 353 species of native herbaceous plants, 126 alien species, and 63 introduced/cultivated plant species. The Sheffield Village Historical Society has compiled a list of all the reported plant species in our area and will publish it in book form later this year, titled, *Natural Vegetation of Sheffield, Ohio and the Factors Contributing to its Development*.

Within the Village the deciduous forest was divided into several components. The portion of Sheffield east of the Black River bluffs, known as the Lake Plain, was very low flat land which, except for North Ridge (on which Detroit Road was 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 Village 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.

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, the 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.



*Deciduous forest along Lorain County Metro Parks' Bridgeway Trail as the trail crosses the Black River south of Garfield Bridge (October 2008).*

### Earliest Record of 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 Revolutionary War, and at the age of 61 published his fascinating memoirs. Writing about his recollections of the Black River watershed while a captive, he wrote, "My adopted brother, called Tontileago, took me to the head waters of the Muskingum; thence to the waters of the *Canesadooharie* [Indian name for the Black River], 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."



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

"I had no gun, but Tontileago, who was a first rate hunter, carried a rifle gun, and every day killed deer, raccoons or bears. We left the meat, excepting a little for present use, and carried the skins with us until we encamped, and then stretched them with elm bark, in a frame made with poles stuck in the ground and tied together with lynn [basswood] or elm bark; and when the skins were dried by the 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 became so heavy that 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. I was surprised to hear the roaring of the water and see the high waves that dashed against the shore.

The next morning the lake was only in a moderate motion, and we marched on the sand along the side of the water [toward the mouth]. I saw on the strand [beach] a number of large fish, that had been left in flat or hollow places; as the wind fell and the waves abated, they were left without water and numbers of bald and gray eagles were along the shore devouring them. We came to a large camp of Wiandots [Wyandotte], at the mouth of the Canesadooharie, where Tontileaugo's wife was. Here we were kindly received: they gave us a kind of rough, brown potatoes, which grew spontaneously and is called *ohnenata*. These potatoes peeled and dipped in raccoons' fat, taste nearly like our sweet-potatoes. They also gave us what they call *caneheanta*, which is a kind of homony, made of green corn, dried, and beans mixed together."

Smith continued, "From the head waters of Canesadooharie to this place [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, 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 also 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 a plenty of meadow ground, intermixed with upland, but no large prairies or glades, that I saw or heard of. In this route, deer, bear, turkeys, and raccoons, appeared plenty, but no 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 and proceeded up the Canesadooharie. "A few miles upstream we went on shore to hunt; but to my great surprise they carried the vessel that we all came in up the bank, and inverted or turned the bottom up, and converted it to a dwelling house, and kindled a fire before us to warm ourselves by and cook. With our baggage and ourselves in

this 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 some weeks, and killed a great number of deer, several bears, and a great many raccoons. On our passage up I was not much out from the river, but what I saw was good land, and not hilly. About the falls is thin 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*. The name Scoouwa was given to James Smith by the Indians 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 Tappen and Anson Sessions to survey the land, which would become later 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 such 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 prepared one of the most accurate descriptions available of the original vegetation in our area. 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 actually 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



Ohio Buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*) in bloom on East River Road (spring 2009).

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 varied in length 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 Austin Day in 1816. In 1931 May Day and her sisters were instrumental in transferring 43 acres of the James Day Farm in scenic French Creek valley to the Village for a park to be named in honor of their father [see related article *History of James Day Park*, page 10).

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



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

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 attained 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 on the flowering and fern plants of Lorain County.

On her own, May E. Day published a chapter titled *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 1 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 3 to 4 inches thick and sold for ship planking. One white oak tree measured 2,500 feet of plank. May Day found that some of the finest oaks grew where the U.S. Steel plant is now situated, on soil



*First Growth Forest Tree—Specimen tree preserved from the original forest. Until the Nickel Plate R. R. was built this tree stood upon the farm of Norman Day in Sheffield. Originally the whole country was thickly covered with trees of this size (May E. Day 1916).*

that in some places 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.”

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.



*Sycamore (Platanus occidentalis), stately signature tree of Black River valley (summer 2009).*

### Interviews with Sheffield 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 scientific name of tree species have been added by the editor after the common name for the 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.

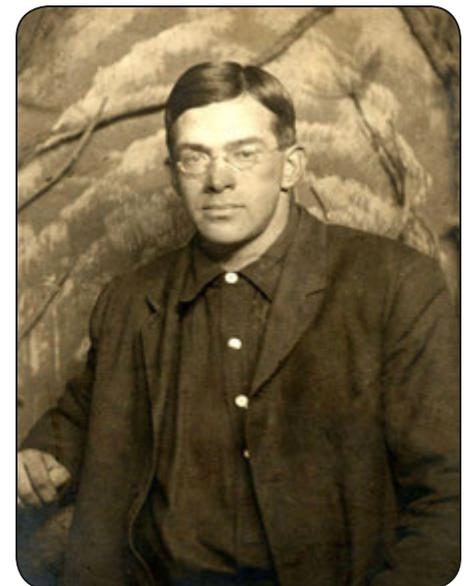
**Peter Eiden.** The Eiden Farm was located at the crest of the north bluff of the Black River overlooking the mouth of French Creek. The predominant timber trees located on the Eiden Farm were elm (*Ulmus americana*), silver maple (*Acer saccharum*), tulip-tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), pin oak (*Quercus palustris*), and hickory (*Carya* spp.). On the higher knolls were beech (*Fagus 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*) 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 Black River 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 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 two miles south of the bridge. Along the upland banks was a very large stand of white oak and tulip-tree and some sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*). On the bottoms, walnut, sycamore and willows (*Salix* spp.) dominated.



*Henry Garfield Root (1885-1971), Sheffield farmer and avocational naturalist (1910).*

Wild grape (*Vitis vulpine*) with fruit nearly as large as Concord grapes grew over the trees. At times, the pioneers felled these trees and then picked four to five bushels of grapes from the vines on each tree. Other timber trees in the area included basswood, butternut (*Juglans cinerea*), wild black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), wild crabapple (*Malus coronaria*), red haw (*Cataegus coccinea*), hop hornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*), ironwood (*Carpinus caroliniana*), black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), and honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*). 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 huckleberrys (*Gaylussacia baccata*) in bogs located in the northern portion of Sheffield near Oster Road.

Root recalled being told 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 not drained and marshy north of the ridge where the log was hauled out. Over the years, water draining away in the path made by the dragged log cut a channel six feet deep.

### Commentary

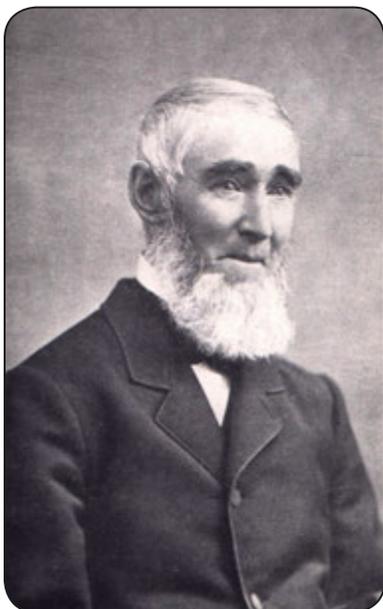
Our forefathers dealt with the swampy conditions of the Lake Plain by installing field tile and cutting drainage ditches to create agricultural fields. Unfortunately, more recent residential developments have cut the old tiles and relocated the drainage channels causing today's flooding conditions at numerous home sites throughout the Lake Plain. It appears the early settlers had a better grasp of dealing with the natural environment than some modern-day administrators, developers, and engineers.

## History of James Day Park

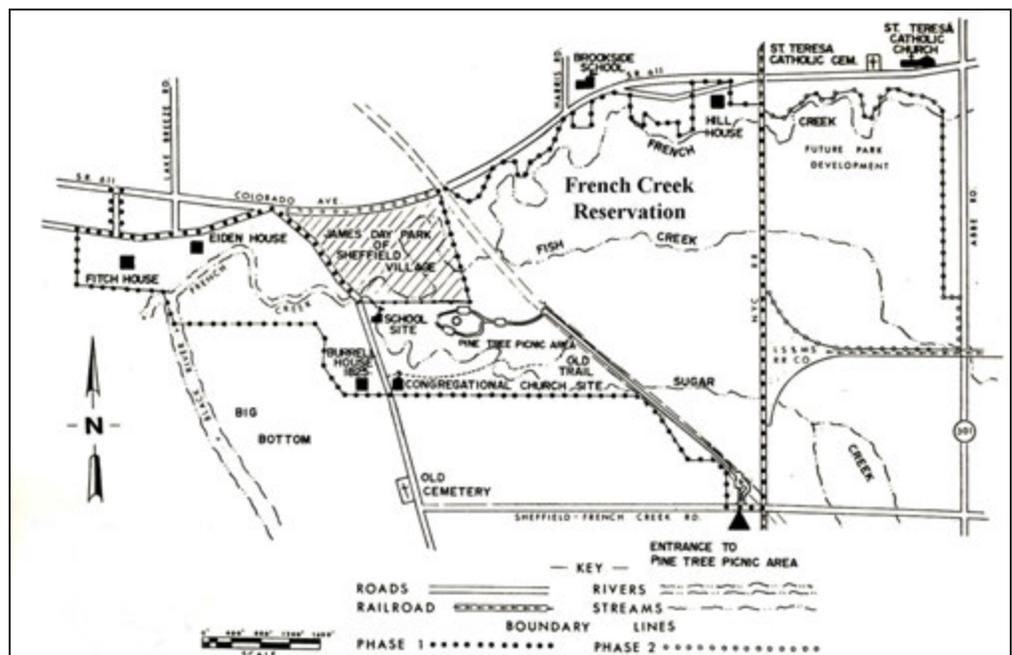
In 1931, the City of Sheffield Lake and the Village of Sheffield were all one community, the Village of Sheffield Lake with Fred B. Hosford as mayor. That was the year that 43 acres of the James Day Farm were sold to the Village for \$4,800 by James Day's surviving daughters, Celia Day Durand (1845-1939), May Eliza Day (1850-1938), and Caroline Elizabeth Day (1854-1932) with the understanding that the land would forever be used as a Village park and named in honor of their father. For many years earlier, this portion of the

French Creek valley had been informally used as a picnic ground by Village residents and was popularly known as French Creek Hollow. In fact, in 1915 the Hollow was the site of the centennial celebration of founding of Sheffield by Jabez Burrell and Captain John Day (James Day's father) in 1815. The centennial festivities included a program of speakers and reading of letters, dancing in the grove of walnut trees, and a general assembly at the nearby old Congregational Church that had been restored for the occasion.

When the separation of the two communities came in 1933, the park became the property of the Village of Sheffield. In its early years, in the midst of the Great Depression, the Village had little money to spend on the park. Fortunately the Work Projects Administration (WPA)—an early version of a "federal stimulus program"—employing local workers—did some clearing work in the mid 1930s. Later, the Sheffield Village Civic League made efforts to check the growth of bushes, weeds, and vines that were creating a tangled



James Day (1807-1896), namesake of Sheffield's James Day Park (courtesy of the Day Family.)



Map of James Day Park, Sheffield Village, Ohio (courtesy of Lorain County Metro Parks).

wilderness in the creek's valley and in 1950 the League's Park Committee constructed the first shelter in the park. In 1957, the Village constructed a municipal building to house the Fire and Police Departments within the park boundaries on the top of the hill at the intersections of Colorado Avenue and East River Roads. Then in 1999, this building was enlarged to hold the Mayor's Office, Mayor's Court, and Village Council Chambers. Unfortunately, in the early years an area at the east end of the park on Colorado Avenue was used as trash dump. The Village closed the area to dumping in 1963 and the following year in its place a metal building was constructed to house the various service departments (Roads, Water, and Parks).

In 1958, during the administration of Mayor Walter McAllister, an agreement was signed with the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company (CEI) to fill the often-flooded lowland areas of the park with fly ash (black, fine-grained waste particles produced from burning coal in electric power plants) and to level this fill. The fly ash periodically became soggy causing a dangerous condition that was brought to a head when two young boys became trapped in the deposit. They had to be extracted by police officer Joe Temkiewicz when he saw their plight. This incident resulted in public clamor against the fly ash and calls for the Village to rectify the situation. Aided by an anonymous grant of \$9,400 in December of 1961 for park restoration, and after a few false starts, the Village and CEI planned and carried out a joint effort to complete the leveling of the deposits, covering them with top soil, planting grass, and laying out a baseball diamond. The landscape work was completed under the direction of 17-year veteran forester Alvin J. Shemitz in the employ of CEI. In clearing the brush and dead trees, Shemitz noted that many of the trees were reported by May Eliza Day in her chapter on the *Botany of the [Lorain] County* in Professor G. Frederick Wright's *Standard History of Lorain County* (1916).

It was in the French Creek valley that May Day began the observation of grasses, wildflowers, and trees that eventually won her national recognition as a botanist [see related article *Early Accounts of Sheffield's Native Flora*, page 6).



Local family enjoyed the playground at James Day Park (July 2009).



James Day Park, Sheffield Village, Ohio (July 2009).



Monument on the James Day Family Plot in Sheffield's Garfield Cemetery.

In recent years more sports fields, a tennis court, and an ice skating rink have been added to James Day Park, along with a modern restroom facility with running water and flush toilets. Oddly, it was not until 1964 that the Sheffield Village Council fulfilled their pledge to the Day sisters by passing a resolution naming the remaining and restored parkland the James Day Park.

But just who was James Day? James Day was born in Sheffield, Massachusetts on August 27, 1807, and was only a boy of nine when his family of nine children were brought here by his parents, Captain John Day and his wife Lydia Austin Day, in July 1816. Capt. Day was a veteran of the War of 1812, engaged in campaigns against the British in the Lake Ontario region. Captain Day and Jabez Burrell had purchased the entire Sheffield Township the year before and had journeyed here that summer to select lots for their farms and to divide the rest of the township into lots for future sale.

In 1835, James Day married Ann Eliza Austin who was also born in Sheffield, Massachusetts and come with her parents to Ohio in February 1817. Ann Eliza's sister, Mary Ann Austin, was the first pioneer child to be born in Sheffield, Ohio (August 20, 1817). The James Day family

lived on the homestead near the present location of Lorain County Metro Park's French Creek Nature Center. James built a classical Greek-Revival House about 1850 that survived over 13 decades until it was destroyed by fire in 1986. The most congenial social gatherings in Sheffield are said to have taken place in this house. James and Ann Eliza raised their children to have civic pride in Sheffield, which doubtlessly influenced their daughters to sell the parkland to the Village at such a reasonable price. James Day died on March 19, 1896 and his wife preceded him in death on January 13, 1873. They are buried side by side in the James Day plot of Garfield Cemetery, as are their daughters Celia, May, and Caroline.

# Freedom's Light Thrills Audiences

*Freedom's Light: A Stop Along the Underground Railroad*, presented by Lorain County Metro Parks and TrueNorth Cultural Arts from May 1-17, 2009, at the French Creek Nature Center, gave theater-goers a glimpse into the lives of brave runaway slaves as they made their way north to Ohio and into the courageous deeds of Sheffield farmers and Lake Erie ship captains as they made certain that the runaways realized their dream of freedom in British Canada. Local author and playwright Kelly Boyer Sagert, wrote the compelling play and adapted musical selections from the pre-Civil War period to enhance the story line. TrueNorth's Rick Fortney directed the play in collaboration with Metro Park's Dan Martin and his staff. The editor of this newsletter, as well as several other members of the Historical Society, were honored to be in the audience on Opening Night and to spend some time with the talented cast at a reception following the performance. Society member Dennis Davis took the photographs accompanying this article, for which the editor is most grateful.

The two-act play had 29 scenes (12 in the first and 17 in the second) that spanned over two hours with one intermission. Sprinkled throughout the play, Faith David (Nellie) and other cast members sang a number of period songs. The play traces Nellie's tortuous journey from a Tennessee plantation to Sheffield, Ohio via stations on the Underground Railroad in the days before the Civil War. Dogged by marshals and bounty hunters the entire way, at her final stop—the Burrell Homestead, her destiny is in still great doubt, as she places her life in the trusting hands of Robbins Burrell and Captain Aaron Root. All seems well until the marshals descend on the Homestead, knowing Nellie is nearby.

While waiting for Nellie to somehow find her way to his ship, Capt. Root delivers a particularly poignant commentary on the evils of slavery, the injustice of government policy all the way to the Presidency, and the hope given to enslaved people in the South by the Underground Railroad. In a surprise ending that thrilled the audience, Nellie is

rescued in a most unexpected way. The details of the play are of course fictional, but the personalities depicted were of real people. Several were courageous heroes who lived in our community and who defied slavery laws at great personal risk for a single reason—their belief that all men and women had the right to be free.



*Capt. Aaron Root (left, portrayed by David Arredondo) and a seaman (portrayed by Terry Smith) on board Root's ship [Bunker Hill] at the mouth of the Black River, await the arrival of Nellie.*



*Nellie (portrayed by Faith David) hides in the French Creek valley woods.*



*Robbins Burrell (portrayed by Ray Ewers) at his Sheffield farm contemplates the arrival of Nellie on the Underground Railroad.*

## Key Cast Members (in order of appearance)

Nellie . . . . . Faith David  
 Big John . . . . . Greg White  
 Slave Master . . . . . Terry Smith  
 Runaways . . . . Debra Rose, Elliott Hooper,  
 & John Glover  
 Margaret . . . . . Brianna Burke  
 Jean Lowry Rankin . . . . . Kim Ceja  
 Rankin Granddaughter . . . Natalie Fischer  
 George . . . . . Gary Fischer  
 Robbins Burrell . . . . . Ray Ewers  
 Eliza Brigham Burrell . . . Lanie Richardson  
 Pepper Jack . . . . . Bob Kenderes  
 Marshals . . . Brett Hall & Jacob Wachholz  
 Bounty Hunters . . . Michael McConnell  
 & Ryan Sagert  
 Captain Aaron Root . . . David Arredondo



*Historical Society members attend Opening Night of Freedom's Light.*



*Rick Fortney (left), Director of TrueNorth, and Dan Martin (right), Director of Lorain County Metro Parks, welcome Opening Night audience to Freedom's Light.*



*Playwright Kelly Boyer Sagert, author of Freedom's Light.*

# The Bears of the Black River Valley and Cascade Park

Elyria's Cascade Park was most likely home to black bears (*Ursus americanus*) for many centuries before the pioneers arrived some 200 years ago. The remains of these animals have been recovered from Indian mounds and other excavations throughout Ohio. Colonel James Smith, as a boy, was a captive of the Delaware Indians as they traversed the entire length of the Black River in 1755. He recorded the killing of several bears near Cascade Falls [see related article *Early Accounts of Sheffield's Native Flora*, page 6].

Milton Garfield, an early settler on North Ridge, mentioned a black bear being taken by Indians in the Black River valley in 1815 (on a place known for many years after as "Bear's Knoll" on the old Taylor Farm in Sheffield), while Norman Day reported bears harassing Sheffield and Avon pioneers in the early settlement years, including the popular "Peter Miller Story."

## Peter Miller's Adventure

Circa 1830, Peter Miller built a graceful Greek Revival Style farmhouse that is still stands near the lakeshore at Miller Road Park at the western edge of the City of Avon Lake. The house and grounds are now operated as a museum with enchanting herb and flower gardens. When Peter was a teenager he encountered a bear in the Sheffield woods—a tale that made its way into a *McGuffey's Reader*.

Peter was the son of Adam Miller, the first permanent settler along Lake Erie in Avon Township in 1819. The Miller family cleared the forested land near the house and raised wheat, corn, flax, and beans. At this time the area's center for trade was the gristmill, shop, and tavern at French Creek in Avon. No early settlements were made between North Ridge (Detroit Road) and the lakeshore because this land was one vast swamp. In 1821, Peter Miller, a lad of 17, encountered a black bear and two cubs in the swampy wilderness while returning home to the lakeshore after laboring at Sheffield Center where French Creek flows into the Black River. He attempted to escape by climbing a smooth elm tree, but the mother bear followed. By kicking, he repulsed the bear twice. On the bear's third attempt, Peter lost not only his boots, but his balance and both boy and bear tumbled to the ground. Startled the bear gave ground and Peter ran barefooted to safety in Sheffield. Norman Day and several other settlers rallied with guns and dogs to seek revenge on the aggressor, but the bear and her cubs had escaped by the time they found the elm tree. When night came and Peter had not returned to his parent's home, an anxious father and friends, fearing some evil must have befallen him, set out through the wilderness with lighted torches. They found the boy in Sheffield, well cared for and snugly in bed, having narrowly escaped a horrible fate.



*Rare quintuplets of black bear cubs and their mother photographed by Tom Sears in northern New Hampshire in May 2007 (top) and after the family emerged from hibernation in April 2008 (bottom).*

## A Woman's Weapon

At about the same period, Mary Day Root, wife of Henry Root, also had a close encounter with a black bear on their Sheffield farm near where present-day St. Teresa Church stands. One summer day, Mary, while busily engaged in household duties, heard a great outcry from the pig yard. A pig was squealing most pitifully. She dropped everything, and seizing the broom, a woman's weapon, she rushed out to find a bear carrying off a pig. He had got it to the fence and was trying to get it over, when Mary appeared on the scene furiously brandishing her broom and shouting at the top of her voice. Such surprising attentions from a woman was so disconcerting that the pig was dropped as the bear scrambled over the fence and made off into the woods.

## Cascade Park Bears

Discounting recent incursions from Pennsylvania and West Virginia, black bears have been extirpated from Ohio since 1881 when the last native bear was killed in Paulding County. However, some 40 years later black bears were returned to Cascade Park, albeit in a large iron cage set into a natural grotto formed in the face of a 40-foot high sandstone cliff.

With the urging of nature lover Frederick S. Reefy, founder and editor of the *Elyria Democrat*, Cascade Park was established in 1900. His lyrical and poetic writings of the Black River valley and the falls earned him recognition as the "Father of Cascade Park." When the park was still in its infancy, around the time of the First World War, there was a pair of bears held in a small cage at the old fair grounds in Elyria. To the park administration it seemed that a more fitting place would be a natural setting within Cascade Park. The cage, including a concrete block shelter house, was constructed at a sandstone enclave still known as the *Bear Den*, not far upstream from the playground. The bears were moved to the park, and so began a six-decade tradition of visitors to the park making a pilgrimage to the Bear Den to see old favorites and new cubs.

A progression of bears occupied the Bear Den over the years, with names like Boston Blackie, Gracie, Mona, and Sophie—some of them living to be over 25 years old. In 1938 the Kiwanis Club of

Elyria donated two bears to the park and four years later an orphan cub was captured in Canada. A man from New London, Ohio later donated another cub to the park. The original diet fed to the bears was a mixture of skim milk, sardines, and stale bread and rolls from a local bakery. Later, park officials obtained a diet recommended for bears by the Cleveland Zoo—Dad’s Dog Food, which the bears ate by the tons. A State inspector came every year to check the bears’ condition, always giving his approval. The cages were cleaned daily during the winter, and twice a day during the summer. Even so, some people complained that the cage smelled, but park officials noted, “10 minutes after you clean an animal’s cage it may defecate again and you can’t be cleaning it every minute.” Cage conditions were ideally situated, sheltered by the sandstone cliff and shade trees from wind and hot sun the den was cool for the bears in the summer. In the outer area a pool was carved in the rocks in which they could frolic and a cave in the rocks at the rear provided seclusion and winter shelter. During hot weather the bears naturally shed a lot of fur giving them a patchy, somewhat “moth-eaten” appearance. Some visitors suspected this was due to illness or bad diet, but it is nature’s way of cooling. New fur thickened at the onset of colder weather, once again giving them coats in prime condition. As Connie Davis of the *Elyria Chronicle-Telegram* once pointed out, “Since the Cascade bears lived many years and gave birth to cubs, their situation and care were certainly good.”

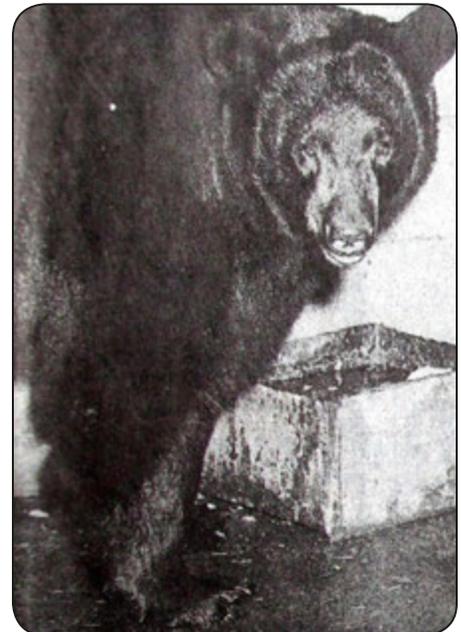


*Professor Frederick S. Reefy (1833-1911)—The Father of Cascade Park (courtesy of Lorain County Historical Society).*



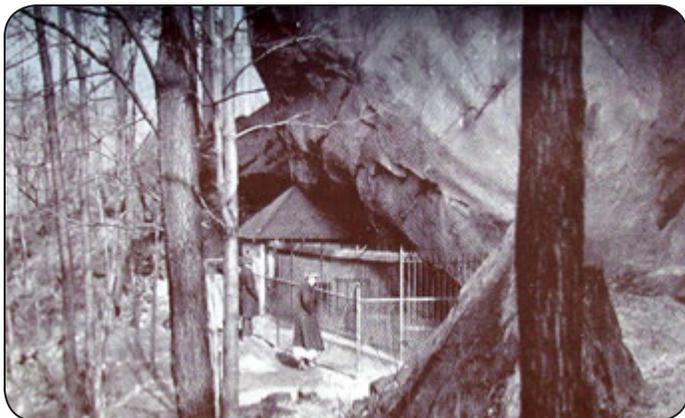
*Mother and bear cubs in cage at Bear Den in 1948 (courtesy of Elyria Chronicle-Telegram).*

Weather conditions led to some interesting adventures for the bears. The winter of 1947-1948 was very cold, with weeks of daily temperatures of 15°F accompanied by brisk winds that drove wind chills to dangerous levels. Amidst this came the birth of twin bear cubs on January 26. Park Warden Johnny Machock wondered if there might be a third cub in the rocky darkness of the den, but a Cleveland Zoo veterinarian advised against any disturbance to the mother, who if alarmed, might kill the cubs. The mother had been captured in 1942 as a cub herself in Canada by a party of Elyrians, including then Mayor Henry Ault. After overcoming some difficulties in bringing the cub across the border, the cub was given to John Machock to rear in his home for several months. A frisky animal, fond of running away any chance she had, Johnny named her Boston Blackie. The size of pups, her cubs were the first to be born in Cascade Park in a number of years. A third pup never materialized to the relief of the park warden.



*Black bear in the cage at Bear Den during the winter of 1951; note the healthy condition of the bear’s fur (courtesy of Elyria Chronicle-Telegram).*

Probably the most harrowing experience for the bears occurred during the Fourth of July Flood of 1969, when over 12 inches of rain fell overnight, swelling the Black River to record-high levels. The average flow of the Black River at Cascade Park as measured by the U.S. Geological Survey is 336 cubic feet per second (cfs). On July 6, the crest of the flood reached the park, yielding an instantaneous peak flow of 51,700 cfs—over 150 times higher than the average flow. The river water rose up and flooded the bears’ den, which



*Bear Den at Cascade Park in the 1930s (courtesy of Elyria Park Commission).*



*Children still wonder about the Bear Den at Cascade Park (July 2009).*

had a mesh grate over the top to prevent vandalism. There was great concern that the bears would not be able to escape and would drown. At the time the cage held a mother and two young bears (Gracie and Sophie). It is said that police officers stood by with rifles to shoot the bears rather than let them struggle hopelessly against the overhead grate. After hours of swimming for their lives in the rising waters, the bears were getting fatigued and the mother bear could no longer be seen. It was then that courageous Park Ranger Ron Nagy rowed a small boat, loaded with stout planks, to the cage and forced the boards through the bars to give the bears something to cling to as the water continued to rise. Thankfully the river crested before the air space below the grate was flooded and the young bears were saved. When the water subsided, park rangers entered the cage expecting to find the drowned mother. To their surprise, she had survived within the shelter house by climbing onto a wooden pallet, somehow left there. Just enough air space had remained between the water and the pyramidal ceiling of the shelter for mama bear to last out the flood. Ten years later only Gracie and Sophie were left in the cage.

The end of an era came in 1980, when park department officials wanted to terminate the keeping of bears in Cascade Park. They were concerned over vandalism—"hooligans" were throwing stones and sticks into the cage and smashing bottles against the rear rock walls. Wire mesh had been stretched over the cage bars to offer some protection, but the remote location made patrolling difficult. The Park Board was divided on the issue—the bears were always a big draw and several generations of children loved them,

but they required year-round maintenance for visitors who came mainly during the warm months. Twenty five-year-old Gracie had to be put to sleep the year before and now only Sophie, about the same age, was left in the cage. The Cleveland Zoo offered a three-year-old brown bear as a replacement for Gracie, but the park officials hesitated. Cost was also a factor—Gracie and Sophie ate 30 tons of food annually. "We're not a zoo and it's time to get out of the bear business," was the general feeling among park officials. On June 23, 1980 the *Elyria Chronicle-Telegram* ran a questionnaire on the front page asking readers to respond to this issue. Of the 230 respondents, 180 supported ending the program, while only 50 wanted it to continue. It was decided to remove the cage and send Sophie to Columbus. Perhaps for the best, while Sophie was being loaded into a trailer for the trip, she passed away. If you visit the Bear Den today you can still see evidence of the iron cage embedded in the rock floor. As I stop to take a photograph in July, I could still imagine the bear cubs I had seen so many times as a boy.

The editor wishes to thank, Bill Bird, Karis Lyon, and Jim Smith of the Lorain County Historical Society for help in researching this article and for their personal accounts of the Cascade Park bears. The Friends of Cascade Park have recently published an excellent trail map and guide to the park that is available through the Lorain County Historical Society. The articles written by Connie Davis for the *Elyria Chronicle-Telegram* were particularly helpful in tracing the history of this fond memory.

## *Sheffield's Population Growth*

Sheffield, Ohio's first permanent settlers arrived on November 13, 1815—Capt. Joshua Smith and his 17-year-old son, Douglas. In the next few years more pioneers arrived from New England giving the original Sheffield Township a population of 89 by 1818. The newly formed Lorain County formally established Sheffield as a township in 1824 and three years later the population was recorded as 44 adult white males. Nearly a century later, in 1920, that portion of the township east of the Black River was incorporated as Sheffield Lake Village, which in turn was further subdivided in 1933 when the southern three-quarters was incorporated as Sheffield Village. The accompanying table shows the population growth of these two communities.

Sheffield Village has had a steady but gradual population growth in the past seven decades, with a marked spurt of 50% between 1990 and 2000, and an estimated growth of 40% in the current decade. Sheffield Lake on the other had has its ups and downs. The number of inhabitants along the Lake dramatically jumped by 150% between 1950 and 1960, surpassing the 5,000-population mark at that time resulting in its designation as a city. The population of Sheffield Lake crested about 1980 and has experienced a slow decline since. It is interesting to note, however, that the combined population of the two communities has remained relatively stable since 1980, with a modest increase.



*Sheffield's Municipal Complex, 4340 Colorado Avenue, originally built in 1957 as a fire and police station, enlarged in 1999 to house the mayor's office and Village council chambers.*

<b>SHEFFIELD'S POPULATION TRENDS</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>Sheffield Village</b>	<b>Sheffield Lake</b>	<b>Total</b>
1930 (combined)			1,256
1940	733	1,099	1,832
1950	1,147	2,381	3,528
1960	1,664	6,884	8,548
1970	1,730	8,734	10,464
1980	1,886	10,484	12,370
1990	1,943	9,825	11,768
2000	2,949	9,371	12,320
2009 (est.)	4,106	8,967	13,073



*Map showing the proximity of Sheffield Lake and the Village of Sheffield (courtesy of Ken Carney, Lorain County Engineer).*

## Society Organization

The Sheffield Village Historical Society is a charitable nonprofit 501(c)(3) and educational organization dedicated to discovering, collecting, preserving, interpreting, and presenting Sheffield's rich heritage.

Membership is open to anyone who wishes to support the Society's mission. Contact Eddie Herdendorf, President (440-934-1514 [herdendorf@aol.com](mailto:herdendorf@aol.com)), Ron Forster, Vice President (440-949-7638 [rforstersv@yahoo.com](mailto:rforstersv@yahoo.com)), or Patsy Hoag, Secretary (440-934-4624 [patsyhoag@roadrunner.com](mailto:patsyhoag@roadrunner.com)) for more information.

Society newsletters can be found on the Village of Sheffield, Ohio official website: [www.sheffieldvillage.com](http://www.sheffieldvillage.com) (click on Sheffield Village Historical Society, then *The Village Pioneer* Newsletters, then download).

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The collections of the Sheffield Village Historical Society are housed in the Sheffield History Center at 4944 Detroit Road. The Center is open to members and guests by appointment—please call (440-934-1514). The next meeting of the Board of Trustees is October 15, 2009, 7:00 pm at the History Center. All members are welcome to attend this meeting.

Society members are encouraged to submit items for future issues. Please send your stories or ideas to the Editor.

Charles E. Herdendorf, Ph.D.  
Newsletter Editor  
Sheffield Village Historical Society  
Garfield Farms, 4921 Detroit Road  
Sheffield Village, Ohio 44054

## Ask Your Friends to Join the Historical Society



## Decals Available

The Sheffield Village Historical Society is pleased to announce the creation of a new bumper sticker-type decal for the Society. The logo on the decal is based on a preliminary design approved by the Board of Trustees in July. Facilitated by Dennis Bryden, the original design was enhanced and printed by Tom Ott of Visual Expressions Sign Company, Lorain, Ohio. Decals are available from the Society Treasurer Ricki Herdendorf (934-1514) for a \$3.00 donation. We hope to see the Society's logo on many of the member's automobiles.

## Save Your Campbell's® Labels

The Historical Society is still collecting labels from Campbell's® products for our educational programing. All you need to do is clip and save the UPCs or beverage caps from *Campbell's Labels for Education Products* and either send them to the Society or call Bobbie Sheets (277-6825) and she will have Leo pick them up. Thanks to those who have already sent some in!

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## APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP SHEFFIELD VILLAGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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 Business/Corporate & Organization (\$25.00/year)

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Special Interests in Sheffield History? \_\_\_\_\_