

OPINION

Record-Courier
TUESDAY
JANUARY 25, 2011
PAGE A4

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Towner's Woods Park helped preserve nature, ancient history

1974 was a year of gas shortages from the Middle East oil embargo and recession that spawned the U. S. federal government's Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, or CETA. It provided money to local governments to create employment for out-of-work citizens.

In 1975, the Portage County commissioners used these funds to create 16 positions for a crew to develop a county park on the land located in the eastern side of Franklin Township. That park was named Towner's Woods as it was already known by area residents.

Towner's Woods, now administered by the Portage Park Commission, is situated off Ravenna Road with about one quarter of its irregular northern boundary following the shore of Lake Pippin. Of the 175-acre park about 40 acres are the former George Towner property and the remaining acreage is part of what was the Brigham family farm. The Portage Hike and Bike Trail, which is one leg of the former Erie Railroad, runs along the southern border.

This property consisted of the two parcels of land that the Portage County commissioners had acquired in 1972 with the help of federal revenue sharing funds and were purchased ostensibly to provide land for a county well system. It seems, however, the commissioners also had in mind the preservation of the same wooded and rolling acres as a future county park.

The land that was originally sculpted 14,000 years back by receding glaciers was altered in the 830s by canal builders and later the construction of railroads that sliced and diced the landscape and mined gravel for roadbeds from adjacent spots.

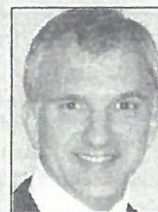
Possibly the most notable feature of the park may be the Hopewell Indian burial mound that was rector on a peninsula at the southern shore of Lake Pippin. The culture of Native Americans known as the Hopewell Indians existed in parts of the northeastern United States as much as 2,300 years and were known for their burial mounds.

The discovery and unearthing of the Hopewell Indian mound in 1933 was somewhat of a local sensation, "a circus" as described by one writer. It was probably the first time the area that is now a park was visited by scores of area residents.

The CETA crew worked for four years to re-cre-

GREEN PORTAGE

Allan Orshan
Portage Park District



ate trails over old logging roads, carve new trails for hiking and eventually cross country skiing, and construct rustic shelters within the park.

While funds were available for salaries, very little was available to supply building materials, so he crews had to become extremely resourceful.

Some material came from the woods itself for arts of structures; old railroad ties were salvaged to create walls, steps, floors and posts; and local lumber companies donated some non-sellable lumber such as water-stained boards. Old utility poles and white oak logs were cut up and hand split into wood shakes for roofs. When the Kent Historical Society took over the Erie Railroad Station (now Pufferbelly Restaurant) a deal was made to disassemble and remove an adjacent loading dock. Those sizeable, creosoted components were used for the construction of the first gazebo and its approaching decks.

Thirty-five years since Towner's Woods officially opened most of its original structures are undergoing much-needed repairs by volunteers and part-time Portage Park District employees.

Funds are still extremely limited as the park district operates on a shoestring budget that has been even further reduced recently.

Today, Towner's Woods is utilized by hundreds of county citizens each week to walk dogs, hike, and picnic. In fact, the half dozen miles of trails are known as one of the best places to crosscountry ski in northeastern Ohio.

Towner's Woods and other Park District-owned sites remain some of the best bargains for Portage County.

Allan Orshan was the Portage County Park director from 1975 through 1979. He is now one of five Portage County Park District commissioners and is a Portage County Realtor.