

Marshall County Memorial Forest

A traveling troupe of beavers was responsible for the Marshall County Memorial Forest – the first established under the 1943 law permitting Indiana counties to acquire and maintain wooded tracts.

First Sam Jones, an observant farmer living north of Burr Oak on Yellow River, reported he had seen signs of quaking aspen cut down in a small swamp across his line fence. Then Luke Duddleson, the county highway maintenance man, related in casual conversation around a tavern stove that “somethin’” was plugging up a culvert that led to the river “faster than I can clean it out.”

Russ Fisher, local authority on wildlife in general, and this writer out of curiosity visited the area several weeks later. We found a worthless 80-acre tract, mostly blow-sand,

and a sprinkling of long-neglected apple trees to one side of a swail surrounded by second-growth black oaks, through which a small stream trickled from a spring at the back of the property. Sure enough, there were evidences of beaver workings, and a small dam just back of the culvert was a second line of defense against Luke’s determination to keep the culvert open.

By this time it was generally noised around that beavers had migrated down river three miles from where they were originally planted. Due to the dam’s accessibility by road, it attracted hundreds of people, most accompanied by children, to vainly “see the beavers.”

Before winter a second and larger dam was started, and the water in the swail backed up into a sizable pond which eventually flooded about 10 acres and raised the water level nearly eight feet. It was an engineering feat of the first magnitude, about 160 feet long, and one wondered how animals so small could do such a huge job – and so slyly that no one ever got a glimpse of them. Their colony, way back in the pond, stuck out in a huge mound seven feet above the water and was about 12 feet in diameter, and was estimated to house about 60 beavers.

During the hunting season Russ and I cruised the surrounding territory, flushed a number of wood ducks that had nested in small dead trees in the pond, and came to the conclusion that to preserve the beaver workings as an educational project we would have to acquire the area and reforest it.

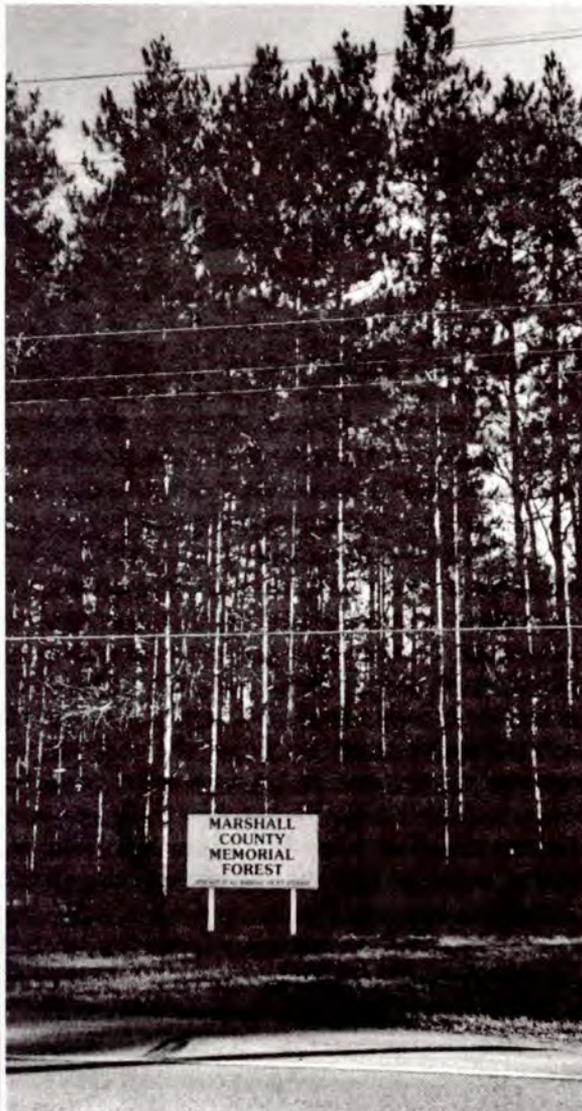
We talked the situation over with Harry Medbourn, county commissioner from our district, who came forth with the idea that the county buy it, taking advantage of the 1943 law, and make it into a recreational area.

Meanwhile, Harry carried the idea to the other commissioners, Justin Myers and Ben Smith, who

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A recent view of the Marshall County Memorial Forest

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looked favorably upon using county funds to buy the acreage. By that time, public opinion was sounded out and sentiment, both favorable and otherwise, was fomented, and finally the opposition ran out of arguments, and funds of \$1,600 were set aside, with the blessing of the Indiana Board of Tax Commissioners, and the property was acquired.

Next Ted Shaw, Purdue extension forester and at that time acting state forester while Ralph Wilcox was in service, was contacted. He brought expert technical knowledge along with remarkable vision to the undertaking. His plan was for a model or "pilot" county forest from which other communities could get encouragement to reforest their waste land.

Russ enlisted the services of 18 active county conservation clubs and was appointed chairman of a planning committee consisting of Harry Lower of Plymouth, present conservation officer; Herb Sloan of Bremen, former

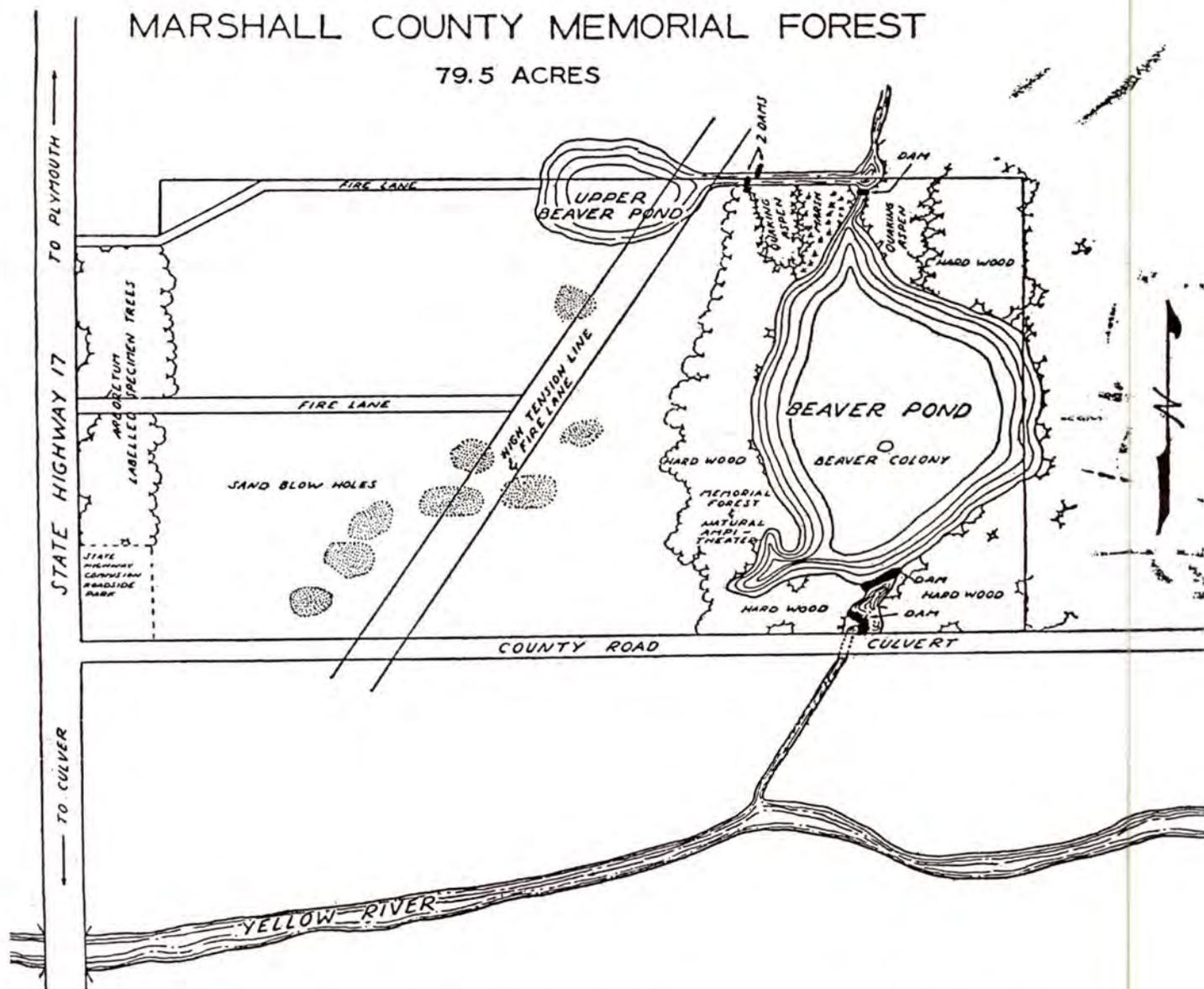
conservation officer; Otto H. Grossman of Argos, ardent Waltonian; Mrs. F.W. Bates of Culver, president of the Marshall County Federation of Women's Clubs, and Omer Bixel of Plymouth, president of the County Council of Conservation Clubs.

This committee, by donations, accumulated the \$250 necessary to order the trees from the Division of Forestry and supplied the volunteer labor to clean the land and assist in planting. Boy Scouts, 4-H Clubs, neighboring farmers, conservationists and other interested groups helped Ted Shaw and his staff of technical experts put in the trees. The eight sand blow-holes were hand planted and mulched with corncobs, the rest planted with Purdue's experimental planter, which put in about 6,000 trees a day.

Now let Ted Shaw tell about it in his own way; it's much the best:

"The area which was reforested with 22,000 trees – most-

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A map shows the forest at the time the time the article was written by Robert Kyle.

ly red and jack pines, with a scattering of Scotch and white in favorable soil – hadn't grown a cash crop in nearly forty years and yet had not reforested itself through natural succession," he pointed out. "This made artificial reforestation necessary."

"Farmer members of local conservation clubs used their tractors to pull the tree-planting machine. Others followed the machine, straightening trees which were not planted erect, and kicking earth over a few exposed roots. Nearly one-fifth of the area was hand planted due to the roughness of the terrain. Fire lanes, which surround and transect the area, were plowed and will be kept cultivated throughout the summer as protective measures.

"The work resembled an old-fashioned barn-raising job," Ted added. "Everybody pitched in and got the job done. The old and the young were there, the women and the men. And they did a good planting job. Survival is very high to date."

Future plans call for the planting of low-growing game food species such as the dwarf chinquapin oak, which had recently been found growing wild nearby. The development of the memorial shrine and natural amphitheatre is the next step on the program. Plans are now being drawn. This memorial, possibly to be undertaken by county veteran organizations, will consist of planting hardwoods, with suitable markers as memorials to the 90-odd service men from the county who gave their lives in World War II.

What Marshall County has done can be duplicated in every county in the state with a moderate expenditure of money and organized effort. It is admitted that the county forest is not the solution to our reforestation problems, but it is the initial step in that direction.

There are hundreds of acres in every county which can be planted by their owners, and already individuals are inquiring about a planting machine. Marshall County, in its more fertile areas, has two of the most valuable privately owned hardwood timber tracts in the United States. The addition of coniferous trees will restore enough humus to sub-marginal land that volunteer hardwoods will take hold, and in generations to come it is hoped that there will return a semblance of pioneer logging days, provide a natural habitat for wildlife and hold our falling water levels.

– Robert Kyle

Epilogue

Robert Kyle was a prominent Indiana journalist and a resident of Culver, where his work frequently was published in the Culver Citizen.

Kyle had lived in Indianapolis prior to his marriage to Mildred Busart, a teacher at the Culver Elementary

School. The couple then built a home on School Street, where they lived across from the school.

In the wake of a study of the Marshall County Forest by local forester Bruce Wakeland, the county commissioners in the last years of the 20th century authorized large-scale cutting of red pines that Wakeland reported had become infested with bark beetles.

The firm hired to undertake the work, which was based in Topeka, brought in Amish loggers and teams of work horses to remove the mature pine trees. The process involved reshaping the logs to a common diameter for use in the construction of log buildings.

Wakeland told the commissioners that the forest was in a transition to native deciduous vegetation and that the succession would be speeded by removal of the pines. Following his recommendation, a border of pines was left around the periphery of the forest, so that its appearance from Indiana 17 was not changed. Other species of pines not affected by the bark beetles were not disturbed.

Some opposition to the logging was expressed by local birdwatchers who said the forest was one of the finest places in the area to observe native birds, particularly owls that favor old stands of red pine trees. Other areas that have such stands of pines are on private land and are not open to the public, they lamented.

Beavers and muskrats continue to make their homes in the ponds of the forest, according to the current county commissioners. One indication of their continued presence is the damage done to signs placed at the forest which require frequent repairs. Recently, their burrowing made it necessary to shore up the levee in the spillway just southeast of the ponds.

Moonlight Serenade Planned July 23, 24

Remember the Moonlight Serenade the "way it used to be"? Remember when the Fowler, and then the Ledbetter, cruised closer to the shore, serenaded the cottages which were lighted up, slowed down at piers outlined with candles in paper bags, and was greeted with fireworks sent up to salute the ship, its crew and the musicians?

Many boats from the opposite shores traveled back and forth with the beautifully lit up ship and the resulting festivities made the event a community celebration, a night we looked forward to all summer.

There is still a Moonlight Serenade, this year July 23 and 24, but Ann Smitson is one of those who have noted that it doesn't seem to get the notice and participation that it did in times gone by. She is hoping we will help her to return "serenade" to its original concept as a beloved local one-of-a-kind celebration.

Mark your calendars and plan to make the 2004 Moonlight Cruise a memorable one.

WINTER, 2004
NEWSLETTER

Antiquarian and Historical Society
P.O. Box 125
Culver, Indiana 46511-0125

The President's Report

By Jim Peterson

Last year the Culver-Lake Maxinkuckee community experienced a record number of tear-downs and new construction on the site. Some of these homes are testing the limits of the zoning regulations and are threatening to change the character of our community.

This is not a local phenomenon, as many communities are having the same experience. Some react by trying to tighten regulations. Many are just bemoaning the fact that their community is losing its charm.

The Antiquarian and Historical Society of Culver has always been opposed to strict regulations to preserve the historic, cultural and environmental value of our community. A property right is a basic tenet of our democracy. Yet it is difficult to stand by and watch our beautiful lake community become like thousands of others, an area of congestion with jet skis, traffic jams, crowds and noise.

A large number of the people I talk to think it is too late to save this community. I do not agree. Many of these tear-downs have resulted in new homes that are interesting additions to the historic and cultural value of our neighborhood. The Academy has done everything in its power to maintain an environmental setting worthy of its institution. Shop owners, the Chamber and Second Century have made every effort to maintain the charm of the Town of

Culver. Some individuals have purchased property to save it from development. Others have retained large parcels of land to preserve the lake's natural setting. However, the heavy burden of taxation is making the cost of keeping land prohibitive.

The society has made great strides in preserving our historic and cultural heritage. Heritage Park is a good example of our organizational commitment. However, we must do more. We must guard and enhance our image as a place where people can find refuge from the hurried pace of the city and suburbs, and where people can take pleasure in the natural beauty, great architecture, historic sites, ice cream socials, lawn concerts, antique boat shows, art exhibits, local plays, first-class restaurants, antique stores and in meeting old friends.

Our plan for the New Year is to finally establish a historical museum. We hope it can be a site in town, to add to the good things already taking place there. We also intend to replicate our very successful Ice Cream Social and Antique Boat Show this coming summer. Our goal is to convince anyone making an investment or buying property in our community that it would be to their advantage to maintain the character of this unique and magnificent place.