

A Green Shrouded Miracle  
The Administrative History of Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area,  
Ohio

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Special History Study

Chapter 1: A Brief History of the Cuyahoga Valley

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*The Cuyahoga River Valley is biologically unique--a "botanical crossroads" situated in the transition zone between the Central Lowlands to the west and the Appalachian Plateau to the east. The valley serves as a natural dividing line between these eastern mountain and western prairie physiographic provinces.*

Statement for Management, 1977

The Cuyahoga River of northeast Ohio originates from two sources. The river's east branch emanates from a spring near Montville while the west branch begins near Chardon, both in Geauga County, Ohio. The branches combine near Burton. The river proceeds south through the Allegheny Plateau to present-day Akron where it unites with the Little Cuyahoga River. It is at Akron that the aforementioned watershed plateau divides the land north and south: for while the Cuyahoga River turns to the north and empties into Lake Erie, the Tuscarawas River, five miles distant from Akron, flows south to the Ohio River, thence to the mighty Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico.

The valley between Akron and Cleveland through which the Cuyahoga River flows consists of Devonian and Mississippian shales and Mississippian and Pennsylvanian sandstones. When the glacier receded (13,000 B.C.), coarse debris, including sand, gravel and clay, remained in a half-mile-wide valley marked with unstable slopes from 200 to 400 feet high. Within this valley, the meandering Cuyahoga River, fed by Furnace Run, Yellow Creek, Dickerson Run, Chippewa Creek, Salt Run, Brandywine Creek, and Tinkers Creek tributaries, cut into the bedrock and varied from 35 to 85 feet wide and a depth of from a few inches to five feet. The natural floodplain ranged from a few hundred yards to a mile wide. Soil conditions, sandy and clayey, and the frequency of flooding, result in a poor ability to bear loads, but good potential for agricultural pursuits.

The valley walls were heavily forested as were much of the land beyond the floodplain. It is the flora which makes the valley unique as a transition between the mountain and prairie physiographic zones. While the flora principally bears Canadian characteristics, more than forty percent of the vascular flora of Ohio is also present. Northern hemlocks thrive in many of the tributary ravines which sprout from the valley floor to the uplands.

Tinkers Creek Gorge National Natural Landmark in the north end of the Cuyahoga Valley (within the Bedford Reservation) is noted for its hemlock habitat. The gorge encompasses a virgin forest where a beech/maple/hemlock association may be seen on the damp valley floor while an oak/hickory association exists on higher, drier soil on the slopes to the uplands. The 22-acre Stumpy Basin, a wetland used by Kent State University as a study area, preserves rare and diverse plant species.

In prehistoric times, Cuyahoga Valley fauna contained mammoth, mastodon, and caribou, as well as representatives of most modern species.<sup>1</sup>

### **Prehistory, Indian Settlement, and Euro-American Contact**

Following the departure of the glaciers, the first humans to enter the Cuyahoga Valley came as early as 12,000 to 10,000 B.C., and are known as “Paleo-Indians,” small hunting and foraging groups which roamed through the area following herds of mastodon and mammoth. During the Archaic Period (7000 to 800 B.C.), small nomadic groups grew in number and density and tool-making of cold-hammered copper became common. The “Archaic Indians” settled only seasonally in campsites in interfluvial rock shelters along bluff edges and the floodplain. (Natural processes have obliterated most of these sites.) Toward the end of this era, group territoriality and long distance trading systems began.

In the Early and Middle Woodland period (800 B.C. to A.D. 500), maize and squash agriculture helped the growing human population become more sedentary. Villages along the edge of the floodplain continued to expand and were occupied from the spring through the fall harvest. This Mound Builder/Hopewellian culture also developed mortuary ceremonialism.

The period A.D. 700 to 1200 is not well defined nor are there many extant sites other than winter hunting camps. From A.D. 1000 to 1350, summer agrarian villages along the edge of the forest revealed an increased density of semi-permanent habitation. The following 200 years saw organized fields ringing stockaded villages. The latest radiocarbon-dated prehistoric sites in the Cuyahoga Valley are from A.D. 1620, 40 years before the initial Euro-American contact period (A.D. 1660 to 1750). This corresponds with the earliest historic accounts from fur traders, who did not find any Native American habitation there from 1640 to 1720.<sup>2</sup>

The traditional explanation for this occurrence has spawned a pseudo-historical legacy which persists to this day. Jesuits, relying on second-hand information, were responsible for assigning the homeland of the Erie nation along Ohio’s south shore of Lake Erie. Subsequent tradition holds that, before white traders arrived, Hurons, pushed out of the Lake Ontario region by other Iroquoian tribes, clashed with native Eries in northeast Ohio. War between the two peoples resulted in the Erie’s defeat and departure from the area.

A contemporary scholastic view, however, rejects this traditional story and places the Eries to the southeast of Lake Erie in western New York, well outside of the Ohio area. Knowledge of the Eries is scant because they ceased to exist as a cohesive group in the seventeenth century. During the same period, a series of Iroquoian raids in northeast Ohio displaced the precontact native inhabitants. This latter group is largely undocumented and remains a mystery. Confusing the situation even further, Senecas were simultaneously pushing westward, resettling the Erie’s former homeland.<sup>3</sup>

Ottawäs from the western Great Lakes soon moved into northeast Ohio, settling in small villages along Lake Erie and south into the Cuyahoga Valley. The most enduring Native American legacy in the Cuyahoga Valley is its name of which the most popular

translation is “the crooked river,” but the “place of the jawbone” and “place of the wing” are also acceptable.<sup>4</sup>

The continent’s interior in the 17th and 18th centuries experienced an intense European rivalry over the lucrative fur trade. As British and French (and to a much lesser extent, Spanish) traders vied for control, Native Americans became pawns of the imperial powers. In 1744, the Iroquois confederacy recognized British hegemony over the territory north of the Ohio River. Tensions soon came to a head in 1753 as the French-Indian War began at Fort Necessity when a French-Canadian force, intent upon capturing the Ohio River valley for France, clashed with Virginian troops led by George Washington. Upon resolution of the conflict in 1763, French activity ended and the region belonged to Great Britain.

With the advent of the American Revolutionary War and the peace treaty of 1783, Britain relinquished all of Ohio to the United States, but British activity did not cease until the conclusion of the War of 1812. By this time, all of the Native American groups had left, except the Wyandot who finally departed in 1842. As United States settlers pushed farther west from the Atlantic seaboard, a number of treaties were negotiated to establish territoriality and effectively separate the two cultures. The treaties of Fort Stanwix (1784) and Fort McIntosh (1785), which were both reaffirmed by the Treaty of Greenville (1794), fixed the western boundary of the United States in this area at the Cuyahoga and Tuscarawas rivers and the eight-mile Portage Path connecting the two. This arrangement remained in effect until 1805 when Native Americans ceded the remainder of their lands in the region to the U.S.

The first Euro-American settlement in the Cuyahoga Valley came in 1786 when Moravian missionary John Heckewelder built a mission he called “Pilgerruh” along the river, but then abandoned it the following year. Two French traders also established posts, one at Portage Path, the other at French House in the general vicinity of the junction of Tinkers Creek and the Cuyahoga River. The valley remained a “quiet backwater” for several decades, but a popular legend holds that three gunboats (Trippe, Tigress, and Portage/renamed Porcupine), manufactured by craftsmen at a Portage military post, were part of Oliver Hazard Perry’s Lake Erie fleet and played key roles in the September 10, 1813, American victory.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Western Reserve**

In the late 1700s, four states claimed the land west of Pennsylvania largely because of confusion caused by overlapping land grants from the British crown. New York, Virginia, Massachusetts, and Connecticut all claimed lands in the “Northwest Territory” (established in 1787) and the resulting disputes became heated and sometimes violent. To end the turmoil, the states, beginning with New York in 1780, relinquished their claims to the national government. The last to cede its claim was Connecticut in 1786; however, Connecticut officials reserved a strip of territory along the south shore of Lake Erie stretching 120 miles west from Pennsylvania with a southern boundary at the 41st parallel. Congress officially recognized the area as “The Western Reserve of Connecticut.” The Cuyahoga River lay entirely within the Western Reserve.

In 1795, Connecticut established a commission to administer the sale of the three

million- acre Western Reserve. On September 1, 1795, the commission sold the land at 40 cents an acre for \$1.2 million, an amount placed in a special fund to benefit schools. Officials set aside land along Lake Erie for Connecticut citizens who lost property from British bombardments of the coast during the Revolutionary War, an area henceforth called “the Firelands” (known today as Erie and Huron counties). The state issued quit-claim deeds to the purchasers, a syndicate of 35 men who formed the Connecticut Land Company. Beginning in April 1796, the company surveyed land east of the Cuyahoga River into townships. At the mouth of the Cuyahoga River, the city of “Cleveland” was platted, named after the Connecticut Land Company’s general agent, General Moses Cleaveland. On July 4, 1805, Native Americans ceded lands west of the Cuyahoga River and the remaining Western Reserve survey work soon began.

Settlement of the Western Reserve came only incrementally as Connecticut Land Company proprietors sold off their individual holdings. Settlers came principally from New England through Buffalo, New York, and thence via Lake Erie. Some hauled their boats up the Cuyahoga River into the valley and beyond. Others herded their cattle over the cleared-off, surveyed range lines while additional settlers used the Indians’ “Mahoning Trail.” Settlement increased following the War of 1812 when many of Commodore Perry’s men purchased land in the area. Killing New England frosts in the summer of 1816 brought an influx of Connecticut farmers to the Western Reserve.

The Cuyahoga Valley was also slow to be settled largely because of its geographical isolation. Farmers found the valley heavily forested. Valley walls, in addition to being steep and rugged, tended to also be unstable. Subsistent farmers there led hard lives as opposed to other places which had fewer topographical obstacles, better communication systems, and more commercial development opportunities.

Figure 4

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Figure 4: Historic trail routes through the Cuyahoga Valley. (Source: CVNRA Trail Plan, 1985)

The establishment of Washington County in 1788 brought civil law to the region, but the county seat of Marietta in southeast Ohio was too far removed to benefit the Cuyahoga Valley which formed part of its western boundary. In 1795, Wayne County was formed in the Northwest Territory with its seat in Detroit. It bordered Washington County along the Cuyahoga River. Two years later, Jefferson County formed from the northern section of Washington County. With the subsequent organization of the Ohio Territory, which incorporated the entire Western Reserve, the legislature rearranged county boundaries and made Warren the seat of Trumbull County. Ohio entered the Union on March 1, 1803, the seventeenth state to do so. As the population around Cleveland began to expand, Cuyahoga County formed in 1807 and encompassed the northern half of the Cuyahoga Valley. The southern half of the valley was incorporated into Summit County when it formed in 1840.<sup>6</sup>

### Ohio and Erie Canal and the Railroad

American leaders knew that the key to developing the continent's vast interior was in establishing a good transportation system. That meant a series of canals would be needed to link the Great Lakes with the nation's river systems. As early as 1784, George Washington espoused a plan to boost the fur trade and interior communications by utilizing the Great Lakes. His plan included the Cuyahoga River. In 1788, Washington

formally proposed canals linking the Cuyahoga, Big Beaver, and Muskingum rivers to allow easy intercourse from the Great Lakes to the Ohio River.

Canal-building in the United States reached a feverish pace following the opening of New York's 363-mile Erie Canal in 1825 at a cost of \$10 million. Ohio was especially intrigued by New York's example because its struggling farmers were saddled with high freight charges in getting their crops to eastern markets. In 1822, the governor appointed a commission to identify potential canal routes. The Ohio Legislature authorized construction of the "Ohio and Erie Canal" (Cleveland to Portsmouth) and the "Miami Canal" (Cincinnati to Dayton) in 1825. From Cleveland, the Ohio and Erie Canal route proceeded south along the Cuyahoga River, over the Portage Summit (at the future site of Akron) to the Tuscarawas, west to the Licking, then to the Scioto at Columbus, and finally south to the Ohio River town of Portsmouth. The canal route was a total of 308 miles, crossing thirteen counties stretching from northeast, central, and south central Ohio.

The Ohio and Erie Canal's first link opened on July 3, 1827, when a group led by Ohio Governor Allen Trimble left Portage Summit aboard State of Ohio. The 38-mile trip to Cleveland and Lake Erie saw a 395-foot drop in elevation as the boat wound her way through the Cuyahoga Valley's 44 locks and three aqueducts. The canal trench itself was 40 feet wide at the top and 26 feet at the bottom. The entire canal was completed in 1832 at a cost of \$5 million. The engineering miracle proved to be an economic wonder as well. Barges could now cross the state in eighty to ninety hours. Not only did the Ohio and Erie Canal tie Ohio to the rest of the nation, but it helped open the interior to other markets to the south and east. Living standards improved with the new prosperity and settlers poured into central Ohio as towns cropped up along the canal.

Rivers and canals remained the primary means of transportation in the United States until the proliferation of railroads, a quicker, more efficient mode, began to eat away at canal revenues in the 1850s. By 1856, canals operated in the red. Railroads became preeminent during the Civil War and many canals were transferred from public control to private lessees. No longer economically competitive, canals were being abandoned in the 1880s.

In the Cuyahoga Valley, the Ohio and Erie Canal dominated as the primary mode of north-south transportation for a half-century. Topographical difficulties temporarily prevented the construction of a railroad route through the valley to connect Cleveland and Akron. A desire to haul iron ore more cheaply from Canton for the ravenous blast furnaces of Cleveland prompted construction in 1873 of a rail route which was finally completed in 1880. Called the "Valley Railroad," the route paralleled the west bank of the Cuyahoga River and the Ohio and Erie Canal. Railroad stations were built at Independence, Boston, and Peninsula (where the railroad crossed over to the east bank of the river), Everett, Ira, and Botzum. With this vibrant transportation system in place, the subsistence lifestyle disappeared. Farmers stripped most of the valley of its heavy forest cover to till the rich soil, and benefitted from the fruits of a market economy.

The Valley Railroad, which was incorporated into the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (B & O) system in 1890, competed with the canal for commerce, but nagging financial problems resulted in the railroad's bankruptcy in 1894. In 1895, it resumed operations under the name "Cleveland Terminal and Valley Railroad." A devastating flood in 1913

ended the operation of the canal in the valley. The B & O maintained passenger service on the Valley Railroad until mid-century; thereafter it served the needs of the Hydraulic Press Brick Company in Independence and the Tecumseh Corrugated Box Company at kite.

By the turn of the century, a complex road system criss-crossed the valley. Both of the nineteenth century transportation systems of the Cuyahoga Valley were about to be surpassed by something new--the private automobile.<sup>7</sup>

### **Development of Northeast Ohio and the Cuyahoga Valley**

Cleveland's population grew quickly thanks to the Ohio and Erie Canal. The town's status as a trade center surged again when rail service arrived in 1852. A ready food supply was available from the fertile valley to the south from where the Cuyahoga River flowed to Lake Erie. With advances made during the Industrial Revolution, new industries sprouted along these water routes and urban industrial expansion skyrocketed. When high-grade iron ore from the Great Lakes region was mixed with soft Ohio coal to make steel, Cleveland's future as one of America's industrial centers was assured.

Akron traces its birth to the canal. Platted along the canal right-of-way in 1825, it had been settled by 250 people two years later. The construction of the Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal linking Akron with Pittsburgh in 1840 encouraged new expansion. Industries ranging from iron ore smelters, pottery kilns, and grain mills (such as Ferdinand Schumacher's which evolved into the Quaker Oats Company) came here. Akron's Benjamin F. Goodrich opened a rubber factory in 1880 to manufacture carriage and bicycle tires. Similar companies such as Miller, Seiberling, and Firestone also located in Akron, and with the advent of the automobile, the rubber tire industry boomed.

As Cleveland and Akron prospered, both cities expanded in the direction of the Cuyahoga Valley which, despite the developing transportation systems, remained a quiet backwater. Valley resources were extensively exploited to construct both the canal and railroad routes. Trees not felled for these projects were logged off to clear the land for farming or for home-building in the valley or nearby cities. There were few remnants of pre-settlement vegetation. (In 1946, members of the Early Settlers Association of the Western Reserve found only fourteen trees in the valley more than 150 years old.) Sandstone was quarried at several sites for the canal's infrastructure. These construction activities in the valley also brought an influx of workers. Once completed, the canal continued providing employment opportunities. One young man who worked for a short time as a "hoggie" or mule-driver on the canal was James A. Garfield, a future president of the United States.

The earliest valley settlements appeared following Ohio statehood. In Cuyahoga County, two townships, Independence and Brecksville, formed along the river in the valley's north end and towns by the same name were founded following surveying in 1808 and 1811 respectively. Valley View in Independence Township was platted in 1806. In what later became Summit County, Northfield, Boston, and Wheatfield (later renamed Bath) townships formed. In the latter, Abraham Miller squatted on land purchased by Jonathan Hale of Glastonbury, Connecticut. When Hale arrived the following year on July 4, 1810, Hale appreciated the work Miller had already accomplished and helped him settle on a

nearby parcel. Hale's generous spirit earned him a reputation which endures to this day and is commemorated by The Hale Farm and Western Reserve Village, a living history complex operated by the Western Reserve Historical Society.<sup>8</sup>

Each township developed much like the other. Each benefitted from the river, canal, and railroad. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the beginning of the twentieth, because of soil conditions and lack of potable water, the Cuyahoga Valley was in no danger of losing its status as a quiet backwater sandwiched between two of the nation's booming industrial centers.

#### 1FOOTNOTES:

1. Nick Scratish, *Historic Resource Study: Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area, Ohio* (Denver: Denver Service Center, National Park Service, September 1985), 1-3; League of Women Voters, "Cuyahoga Valley Study," January 1974, Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area Archives (hereinafter cited as CVNRA Archives); Harry Pfanz, *The Cuyahoga Valley Between Akron and Cleveland* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, n.d.), 1- 2; Statement for Management, Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area, Ohio (Denver: Denver Service Center, National Park Service, February 1, 1977); and Dr. David S. Brose, "Summary Report on the Archeological Resources of the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, March 17, 1975," chapter contained in Mosure-Fok & Syrakis, et al., *Technical Report for the Cuyahoga River Valley Park Study: Volume Two* (prepared under contract for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, March 1975).

2. Brose, "Summary Report on Archeological Resources," March 1975; Scratish, *Historic Resource Study*, 1; and Pfanz, *Cuyahoga Valley*, 3.

3. David R. Bush and Charles Callendar, "Anybody but the Erie," *Ohio Archaeologist* (Winter 1984).

4. Scratish, *Historic Resource Study*, 1.

5. Pfanz and Scratish, *passim*. CVNRA North District Ranger Rory Robinson stated that research conducted during the tenure of Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt revealed the claim was indeed untrue, but the popular piece of folklore persists. Robinson to author, 22 November 1991.

6. Scratish, *Historic Resource Study*, 85-93; Pfanz, *Cuyahoga Valley*, 8-9; and "The Cuyahoga Valley and The Ohio Canal," pamphlet compiled by Robert L. Hunker, Peninsula, Ohio, for the annual conference of the National Trust for Historic Preservation members' tour of the Cuyahoga Valley and Hudson, Ohio, October 12, 1973.

7. *Proposed Ohio & Erie Canal, Ohio: Suitability/Feasibility Study* (Denver: Denver Service Center, National Park Service, October 1975), 12, 14, 20-1, 24-6; Pfanz, *Cuyahoga Valley*, 11-3; Scratish, *Historic Resource Study*, 49-52, and 182; and Ron Thoman interview, 26 May 1989.

8. Pfanz, *Cuyahoga Valley*, 14-17, 24-30; and Scratish, *Historic Resource Study*, 3, 94-5.

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