



Blair Ridge Park / Walden II, Another Hidden County Gem

One of Lake Metroparks's newer acquisitions (2012), Blair Ridge is located at 5360 Blair Road in Leroy Township. It overlooks the Grand River and landing below. The property was once owned by renowned local conservationist James Storer but this month's story begins in 1818.

W.A. Blair once owned property on both sides of the Grand River. One of eight children of Robert Blair, their father came east after the War of 1812. Arriving in the Kirtland area around 1818 after a brief sojourn two years earlier, he

purchased 100 acres. Life proved difficult as a local farmer until an observation made in 1824 made all the difference. Blair noticed an ore-like substance being unloaded by brothers Charles and Elezar Paine. Conversations ensued and in time the Geauga Iron Company began in 1825. In 1828, it was known as the Rail Road Furnace and sold to Seeley & Morley. 1829 saw it rebranded as Blair Road Furnace. The company existed until 1850 when the land was sold to the Lake Shore Railroad. Blair Hollow Bridge, a covered bridge, was built there in the 1860s. It was the last covered bridge in Lake County and was torn down in 1952. Six of Blair's children lived in homes in Painesville near Erie Street. As late as 1893, W.A. Blair still had property interests on his father's Leroy acreage and became sole owner just five years later.

In 1967, James Perley Storer bought the land, now totaling 180 acres. A house was constructed in 1970. Storer, blinded at age 6 by a tear gas gun accident, was best known as head of Storer Communications in Cleveland (WJW-AM) and as prime supporter of the Cleveland Sight Center. One of two homes he owned, the other in Gates Mills, Storer named this site Walden II after the work by noted American naturalist Henry David Thoreau. A leading conservationist in his day, Storer's property had a clock tower, cabins for campers, a pond, and trails for hiking the Grand River. A swimming pool, hot tub, pump house, Sika Deer pen and cemetery for his seeing-eye dogs were on the property until his death in 2012. Storer's legacy included leading roles in the American Foundation for the Blind, Cleveland Sight Museum, Cleveland Museum of Natural History, Holden Arboretum, Cleveland Orchestra, Kenyon College and Western Reserve Land Conservancy.

Lake Metroparks's interest in the property began in 1993 and culminated in 2012 when 63 acres were acquired. Since 2017, the park has had limited access for fishing and programming. In 2020 it is anticipated that the bell tower, cemetery, bells, trails and newly built shelter and campsite will welcome county visitors on a daily basis. A walk through local history awaits you!

Sources- Lake Metroparks archives, 1996 article written by James Storer entitled 'Brief History...'

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