PROJECT SCROLL · A SERIES IN THREE PARTS

Potato Creek

The farms and sawmills under Worster Lake, the dream that made the park, and its return to the wild.

1. Before the lake: the farms of Potato Creek
2. Darcey Worster’s dream
3. The park goes back to the wild

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POTATO CREEK · PART 1

Before the lake: the farms of Potato Creek

DISCOVERY · 11 NEW FINDINGS › 24 MIN READ

A creek with an odd name, German farms and maple sugar camps, and a free Black settlement whose families were buried beside their white neighbors. The land that became Potato Creek State Park, before there was a lake.

By Michael Urbanski · Project Scroll · 27 October 2026 · 24 min read

PUBLISHED RESEARCH

Research Note 2026-08 Three sawmills on Potato Creek, 1863: the mills on the ground of Potato Creek State Park, Indiana (projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-08/)
PDF (projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-08/project-scroll-research-note-2026-08.pdf)

This story's key findings, each set out as a short, dated, citable note. All research notes › (projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/)



Liberty Township, St. Joseph County, Indiana, in Higgins, Belden & Co., An Illustrated Historical Atlas of St. Joseph Co., Indiana (1875). Allen County Public Library, via the Internet Archive. Public domain.

The short version

Potato Creek was described in print in 1849 as "a mill stream in the southern part of St. Joseph," and in 1863 three sawmills with their ponds stood on it, on ground that is now the park. Its "wild potato" name story appears in no source before 2005 that we could

find. Settlers of German ancestry farmed Liberty Township from 1833; the Shuppert, Schrader and Naragon farms are remembered on the park's markers.

Just east lay the Huggart Settlement of free Black farmers, from 1834 into the 1890s, and inside the park is Porter Rea Cemetery, deeded in 1854, where Black and white neighbors were buried side by side.

Read the whole story ›

✦ NEW FINDING 11 new findings in this story. **See what's new ›**

In 1849 the *Indiana Gazetteer* gave the stream one line: "Potato Creek, a mill stream in the southern part of St. Joseph, runs west into the Kankakee." For more than a century after that it was a farm creek, a place to dip a line for trout, a stream that farm boys crossed on Pierce Road and Violet Road and the Osborn road.

> *"Potato Creek, a mill stream in the southern part of St. Joseph, runs west into the Kankakee."*

Today the creek runs into a lake of more than three hundred acres, through six square miles of woods, wetland and prairie that half a million people visit every year. Before there was a lake, there were farms, a free Black settlement, a country cemetery and a creek with an odd name. This is the first of three parts: the land before the park.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE DOCUMENTED READING ✦ NEW FINDING

27 documented · 7 readings · 11 new

What the marks mean

This is a living research document. Every statement carries one of our Scrollsigns™, so you always know what is on the record and what is our reading of it. Every source is listed at the foot of the page, and the story is updated as new records turn up.

DOCUMENTED	A source says so, and you can read it yourself.
READING	Our interpretation of the sources, kept separate from the facts.
✦ NEW FINDING	Something we found in the record that we have not found in any earlier telling.

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▼ Who's who (16)

Alexis Coquillard
South Bend man appointed in 1840 to carry out a Potawatomi removal; Chapman alone puts his rendezvous at Potato Creek.

Gen. Hugh Brady
Ran the 1840 emigration from his headquarters at South Bend.

Michael McCafferty
Linguist whose reconstruction gives the creek a Miami-Illinois name, "red-potato creek."

Daniel Antrim
Laid out North Liberty on 12 January 1836.

Anson Worster
Wagon maker from New York who came to North Liberty in 1852 to help build the second grist mill.

Joseph Shuppert
Bought land in 1835 at $1.25 an acre; United Brethren meetings were held in his cabin.

Clinton Shuppert

Charles and Mary Schrader

Joseph's grandson, a storekeeper at Olive Branch, who sold the family farm to the state.

Charles Naragon
Builder of the red Naragon barn in 1908, by the Friends' letter and news reports.

Samuel Gard
Deeded the ground for Porter Rea Cemetery in 1854; a sawmill stood on his land in 1863.

John Green Jr.
Built the "first saw-mill on Potato Creek," by the 1875 county atlas.

Frederick Karst
Historian who estimated the Huggart Settlement at about thirty people around 1880.

German immigrants who bought 160 acres on the creek in 1851 and called it Springdale Farm.

Franklin N. Shenneman
Local historian who lists the six families' maple sugar camps.

Peter Waldsmith
Settled in 1838; his sawmill and pond stood on today's park ground.

Samuel Huggart
Free Black farmer from Ohio whose eighty-acre patent is dated 20 March 1837.

Andrew Huggart
Sunday school superintendent, "the first colored man to run for office in this county."

PART I

Ground the ice left

DOCUMENTED The ground under the park was made by ice. The county's soil survey says the glaciers covered St. Joseph County about 15,000 years ago and finally retreated about 12,000 years ago, leaving till and outwash behind them. About two-thirds of the county drains not to Lake Michigan but south and west, into the Kankakee River and on to the Mississippi; Potato Creek is part of that western drainage.

DOCUMENTED The park's own markers point out the evidence. Springs rise where the porous glacial outwash of "rock, sand, and gravel" meets a layer water cannot pass, and the farmers who cleared the fields left "fence rows and rock piles" of glacial boulders that can still be seen in the woods. The Naragon barn by the nature centre stood on footings of the same boulders until it was taken down in November 2025.

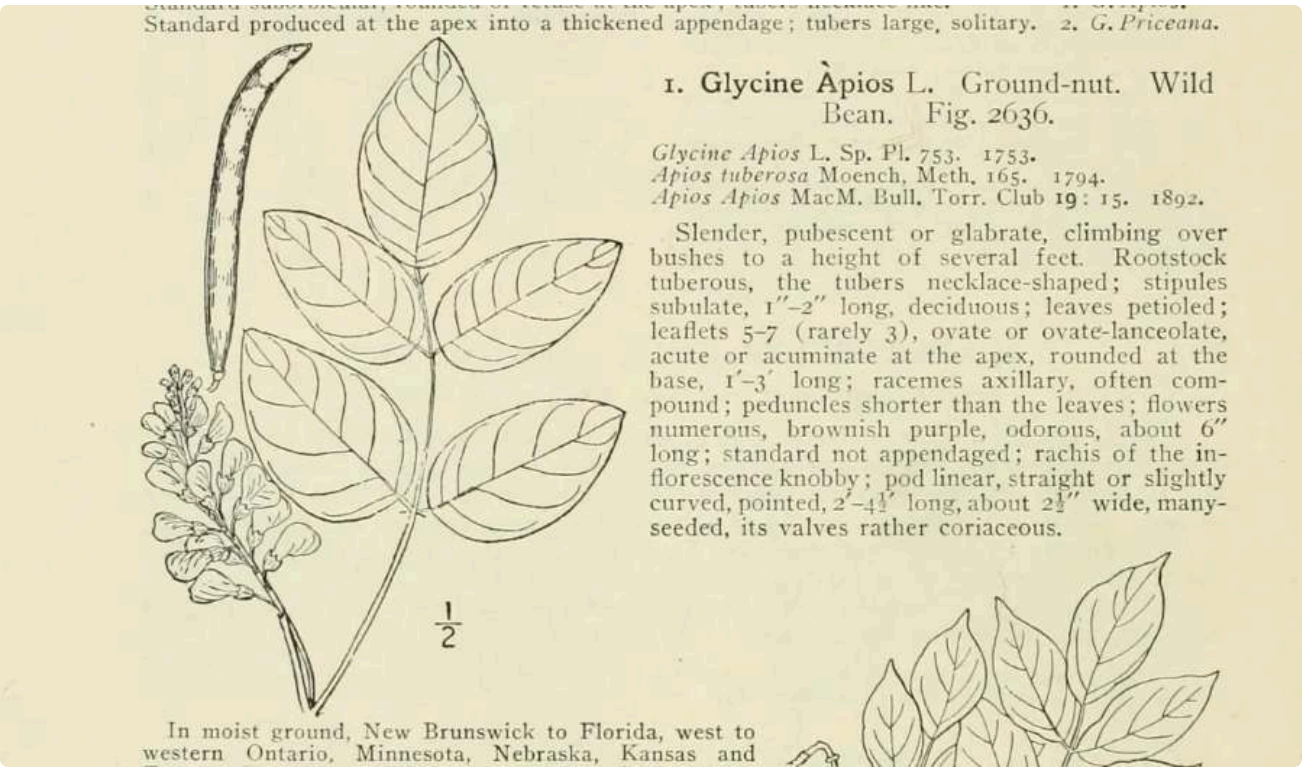
PART II

A creek with an odd name

DOCUMENTED ✦ NEW FINDING The earliest printed description of the creek we have found is the line in Chamberlain's *Indiana Gazetteer* of 1849. The earlier gazetteer of 1833 has no entry for it. The same 1849 page lists a second Potato Creek, a mill stream in Montgomery County near Crawfordsville, which has nothing to do with this one.

DOCUMENTED The name may have been in use earlier than that. Chapman's county history of 1880 says that Alexis Coquillard of South Bend, appointed in 1840 to carry out a removal of Potawatomi people from the region, "established a rendezvous at Potato creek."

DOCUMENTED ✦ NEW FINDING The papers of 1840 itself tell it differently. Gen. Hugh Brady ran that year's emigration from his headquarters at South Bend, and on 10 August he wrote from there that "Mr. Coquillard ... leaves here in a few days in charge of an emigrating party." The South Bend *Free Press* reported that the party was to leave "that place" on the 17th; of 536 people who set out, 526 were delivered west on 6 October. None of the 1840 records we found names Potato Creek, and the historian R. David Edmunds speaks of "the removal camp near South Bend." Chapman's rendezvous on the creek rests on Chapman alone.


Standard produced at the apex into a thickened appendage; tubers large, solitary. 2. *G. Priceana.*

1. **Glycine Àpios** L. Ground-nut. Wild Bean. Fig. 2636.

Glycine Apios L. Sp. Pl. 753. 1753.
Apios tuberosa Moench, Meth. 165. 1794.
Apios Apios MacM. Bull. Torr. Club 19: 15. 1892.

Slender, pubescent or glabrate, climbing over bushes to a height of several feet. Rootstock tuberous, the tubers necklace-shaped; stipules subulate, 1″–2″ long, deciduous; leaves petioled; leaflets 5–7 (rarely 3), ovate or ovate-lanceolate, acute or acuminate at the apex, rounded at the base, 1′–3′ long; racemes axillary, often compound; peduncles shorter than the leaves; flowers numerous, brownish purple, odorous, about 6″ long; standard not appendaged; rachis of the inflorescence knobby; pod linear, straight or slightly curved, pointed, 2′–4½′ long, about 2½″ wide, many-seeded, its valves rather coriaceous.

½

In moist ground, New Brunswick to Florida, west to western Ontario, Minnesota, Nebraska, Kansas and

The ground-nut, or “wild bean,” whose tubers are “necklace-like” and edible: the likeliest candidate for the creek’s “wild potato.” Britton and Brown, *An Illustrated Flora of the Northern United States*, vol. 2 (1913), p. 418. Internet Archive. Public domain.

DOCUMENTED ✦ NEW FINDING Where did the name come from? The state park’s brochures say that the Potawatomi gathered a plant with potato-like roots along the creek, and that settlers’ English name for it, “wild potato,” became the creek’s name. We searched the nineteenth-century gazetteers, county histories and place-name books for that explanation, and the guidebooks of the 1980s and 1990s, and did not find it. The earliest form of it we have found is a 2005 student newspaper, which says the park “is named after potato-like roots,” followed by the Department of Natural Resources brochure of 2007.

DOCUMENTED There is an older story of this kind in Indiana, but it belongs to the other creek. The 1881 history of Montgomery County says its Potato Creek and prairie “took their name from the wild potatoes that then grew so luxuriantly in this slough.” The explanation may have travelled from one Potato Creek to the other.

READING It is still a reasonable explanation, and there are two candidates. Chapman’s county history of 1880 records both growing here: the “ground nut,” a native climbing bean with strings of edible tubers, and the “wild potato-vine,” which “is occasionally found on woody hillsides.” The ground-nut grows in wet ground like the creek’s and was widely called “Indian potato.”

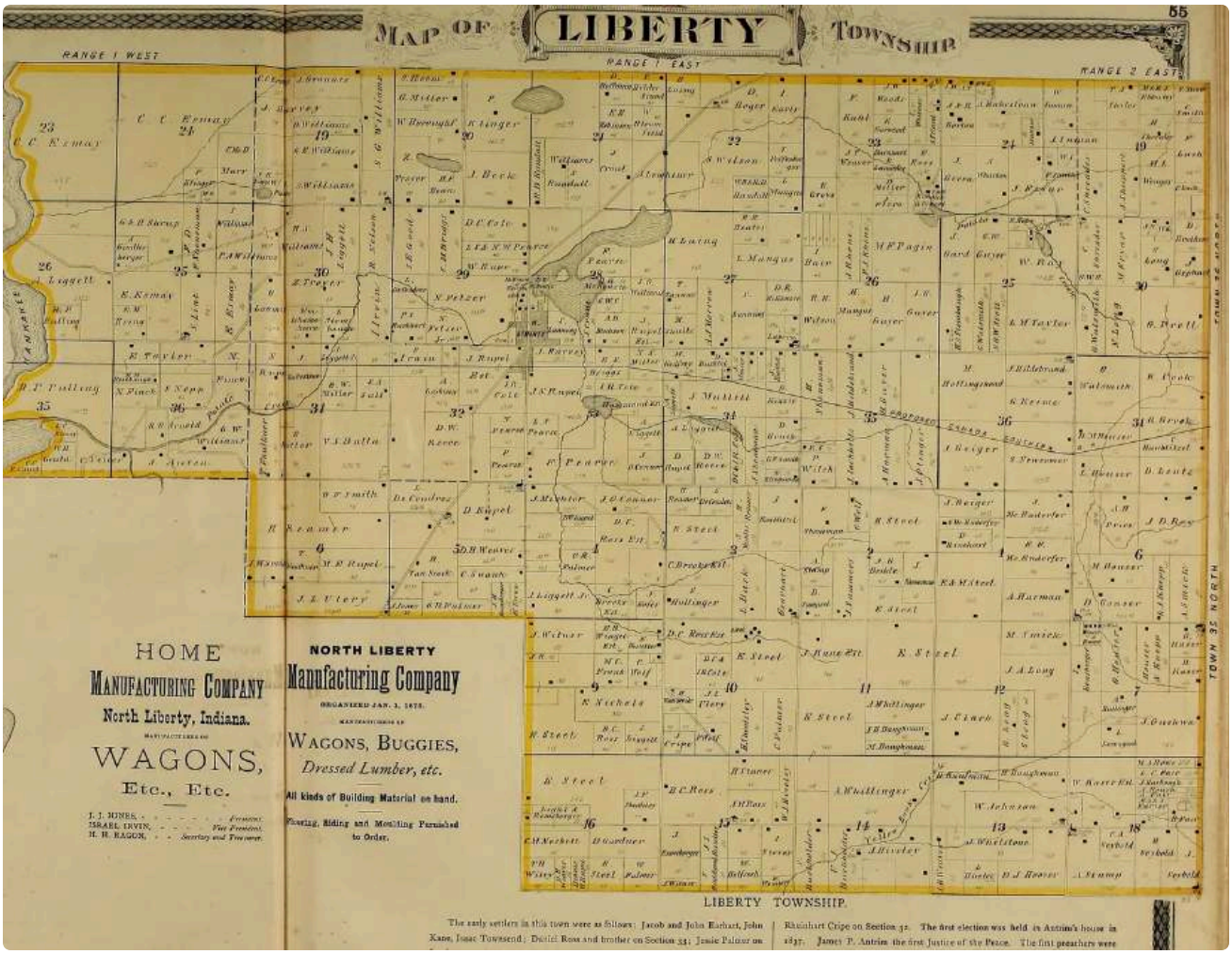
DOCUMENTED A linguist has offered the other. William Bright's *Native American Placenames of the United States* (2004), citing Michael McCafferty, gives this Potato Creek a reconstructed Miami-Illinois name, ***mihk-ohpina siipiiwi***, "red-potato creek," where the red potato is the wild sweet-potato vine. It is a scholar's reconstruction, not a name anyone wrote down, and it is not Potawatomi. No recorded Native name for the stream has come down to us.

PART III

Settlers and sawmills

DOCUMENTED The park lies in Liberty Township. The first settlers came in 1833, near what became North Liberty, and the township was organized in 1837. Chapman says the settlers were "mostly of German ancestry, or what are called Pennsylvania Dutch," and that they at first had to go all the way to Elkhart to get their grain ground. A grist mill went up in North Liberty in 1837 and a sawmill in 1839.

DOCUMENTED This was heavy timber country. Chapman wrote that "it was not till about 1850 that the work of grubbing and clearing began to be faithfully prosecuted," and by 1880 five sawmills were running in the township. North Liberty was laid out by Daniel Antrim on 12 January 1836: Howard's county history of 1907 prints the plat itself, "witness my hand, this 12th day of January, 1836," surveyed by the county surveyor Tyra W. Bray, who held that office only until 1836. (Chapman's 1837 is the year of the first store.) The village had nearly four hundred people by 1880; its only complaint, Chapman said, was "the lack of railroad facilities."



Liberty Township in the atlas of 1875, with North Liberty near the middle and Potato Creek winding through the farms east of it. Higgins, Belden & Co., *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of St. Joseph Co., Indiana* (Chicago, 1875), pp. 54–55. Allen County Public Library, via the Internet Archive. Public domain.

DOCUMENTED Among the craftsmen of the village was Anson Worster, a wagon maker from Chautauqua County, New York, who came to North Liberty in 1852 to help build the township's second grist mill. He and his wife helped organize the village's Adventist church. Remember the name.

PART IV

The farms on the ground

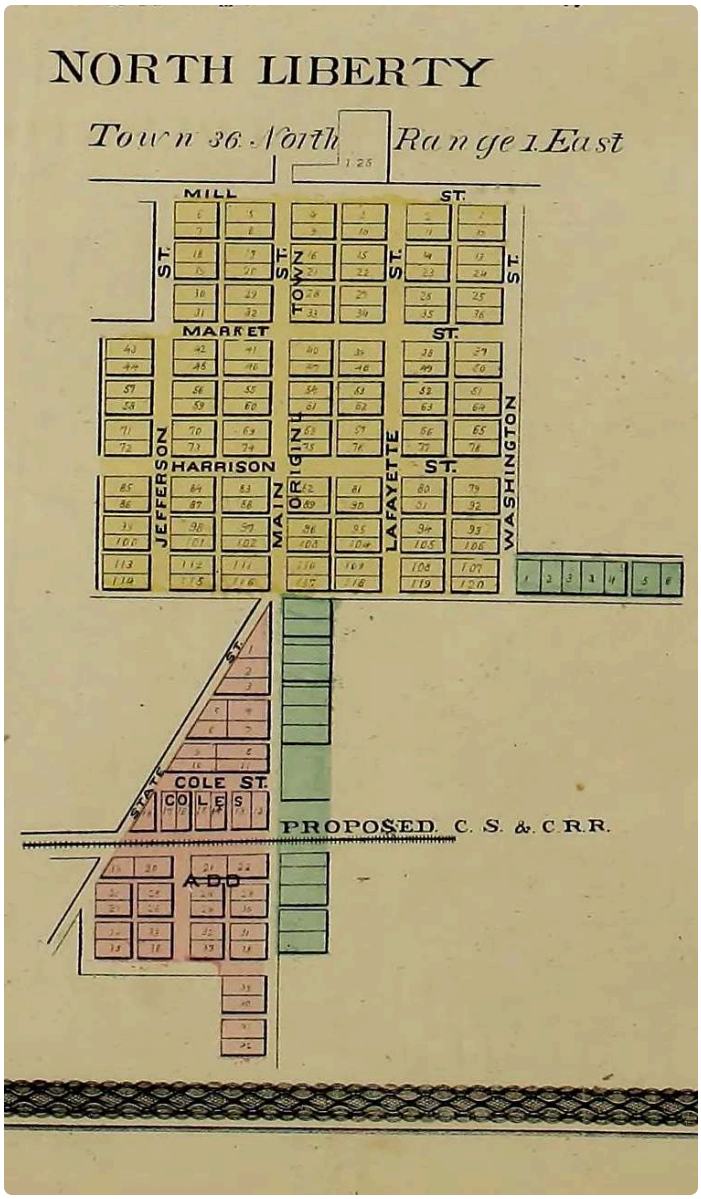
DOCUMENTED The families who farmed the land that is now the park are remembered on the park's markers. Joseph Shuppert and his wife bought their land in 1835 at $1.25 an acre, and United Brethren meetings were held in their cabin. Their son Jacob bought the farm in 1885, and Jacob's son Clinton, who kept a store at Olive Branch in the 1920s, sold it to the

state. One marker says the family were “the last landowners to leave in 1978”; another says the farm was sold in 1968. Both may be true, a sale in 1968 and a family that stayed on, but we have not found the deed.

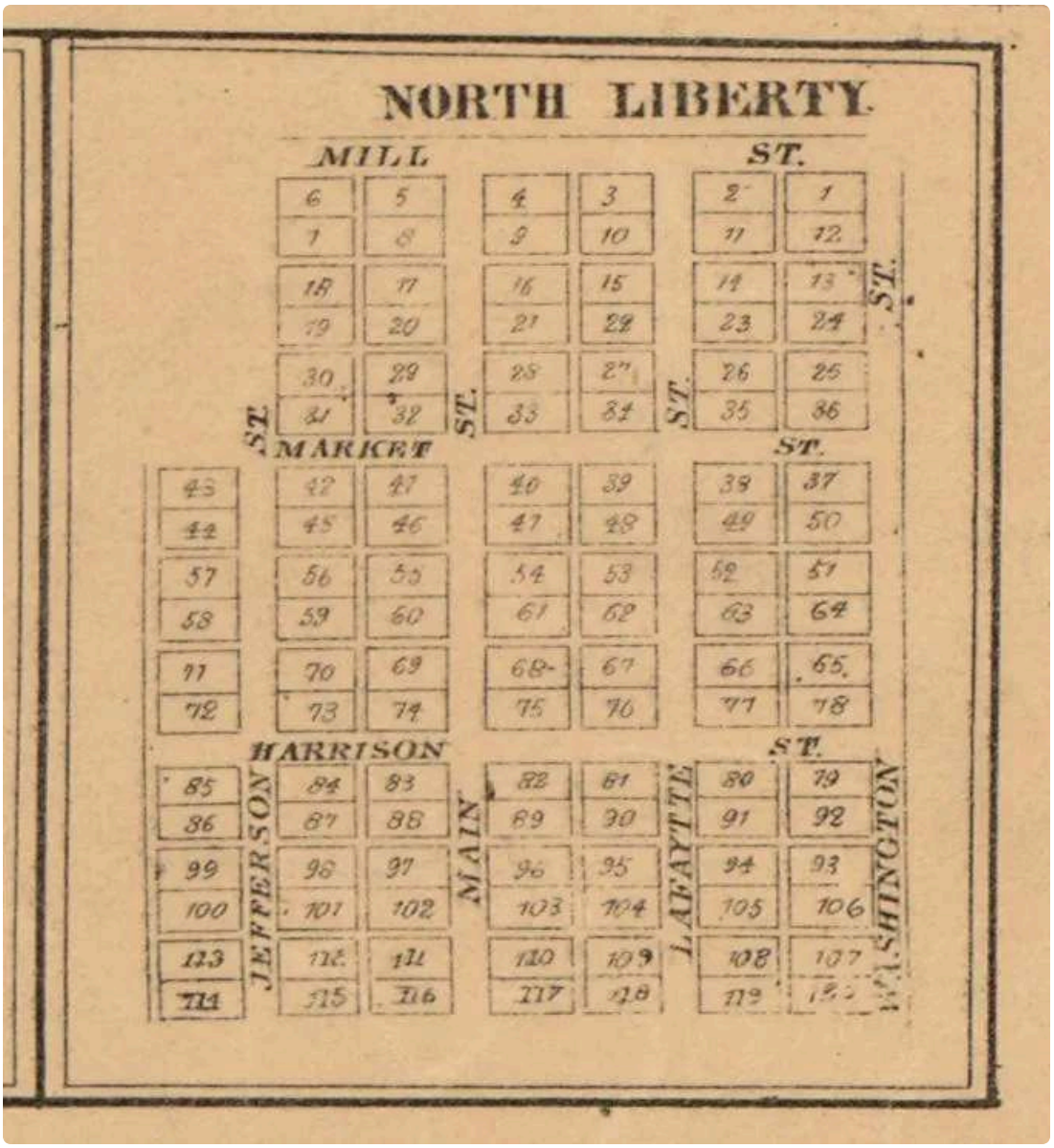
DOCUMENTED Charles and Mary Schrader came from Germany in 1851 and bought 160 acres on Potato Creek. The farm had twelve springs and the family called it Springdale Farm. Its springhouse has been rebuilt on the old foundation by the Friends of Potato Creek, and visitors can find it on Trail 4. The Naragon family cleared eighty acres and built up a farm of five hundred. Their red bank barn, with beech and tulip-poplar beams joined by mortise and tenon, stood beside the nature centre for more than a century; the state judged it unsafe, and despite a campaign by the Friends of Potato Creek it was taken down in late November 2025. Its date is told two ways: 1889 on the park’s new marker, 1908, built by Charles Naragon, in the Friends’ letter and the news reports, which take it from Shenneman. Documents found in 2025 showed that the state’s historic-sites survey of 2000 had rated the barn a “contributing” building.

READING ✦ NEW FINDING That survey lists a barn in the park, “W. Boat Launch, Potato Creek State Park”: an English bank barn “built on side hill, with basement level facing lake and boat launch area,” with weatherboard and vertical board siding, a stone and concrete foundation, sliding doors on the hay level and sawtooth boards above them, once used for agriculture and rated “Contributing.” The record does not name it, but it fits what the 2025 reports describe, a barn in the park rated Contributing in 2000, so it is probably the Naragon barn. The surveyor dated it only “c. 1900,” which sits between the two dates and settles neither.

DOCUMENTED In spring the woods smelled of maple smoke. Six families ran maple sugar camps in the Potato Creek area, Shenneman writes: the Cullar, Kane, Naragon, Robertson, Schrader and Sheneman camps.



North Liberty as platted, from the atlas of 1875. Higgins, Belden & Co., *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of St. Joseph Co., Indiana* (Chicago, 1875), p. 40. Internet Archive. Public domain.



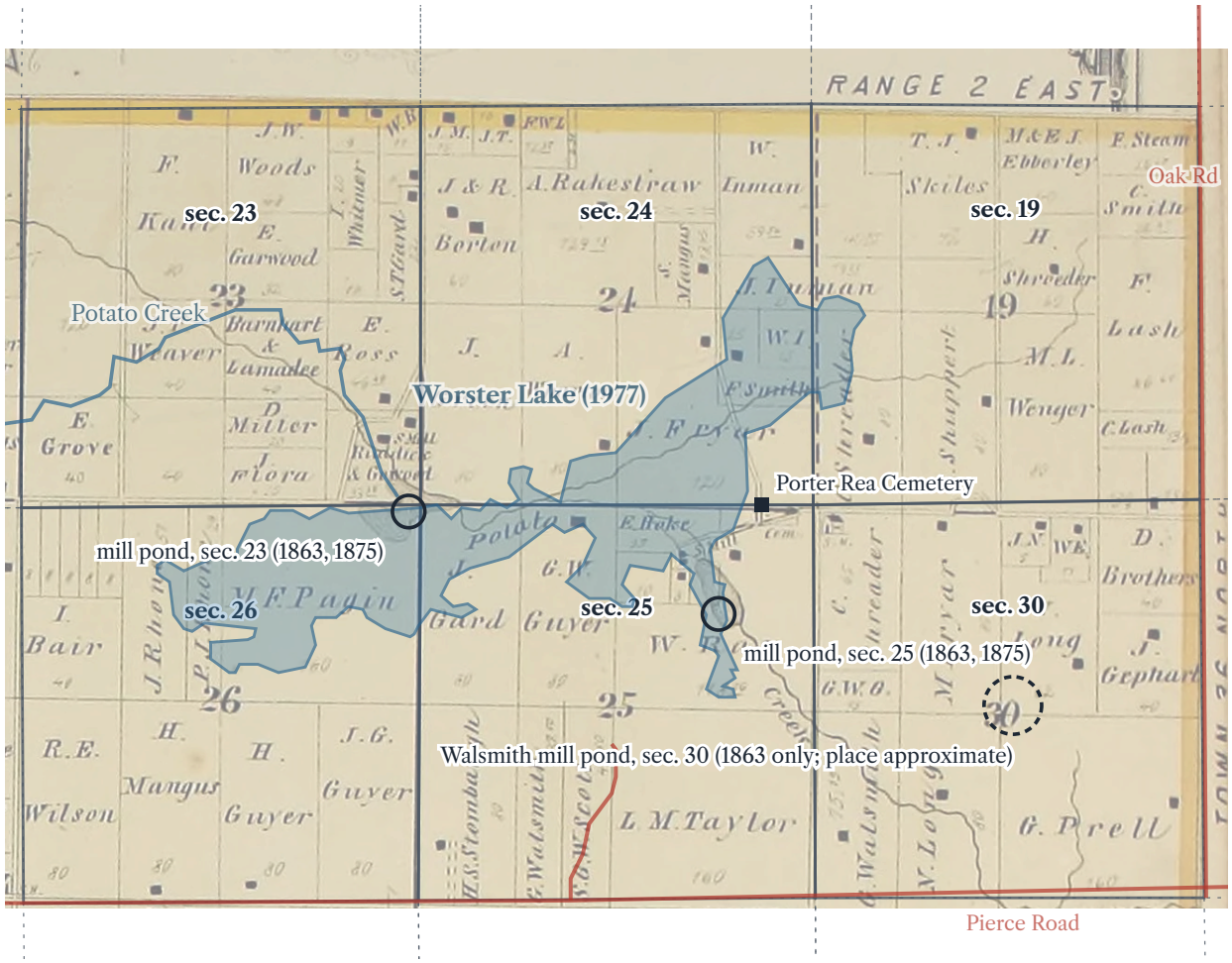
North Liberty twelve years earlier, in the inset on the county map of 1863. M. W. Stokes, *Map of St. Joseph Co., Indiana* (Philadelphia, 1863). Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division. No known restrictions.

PART V

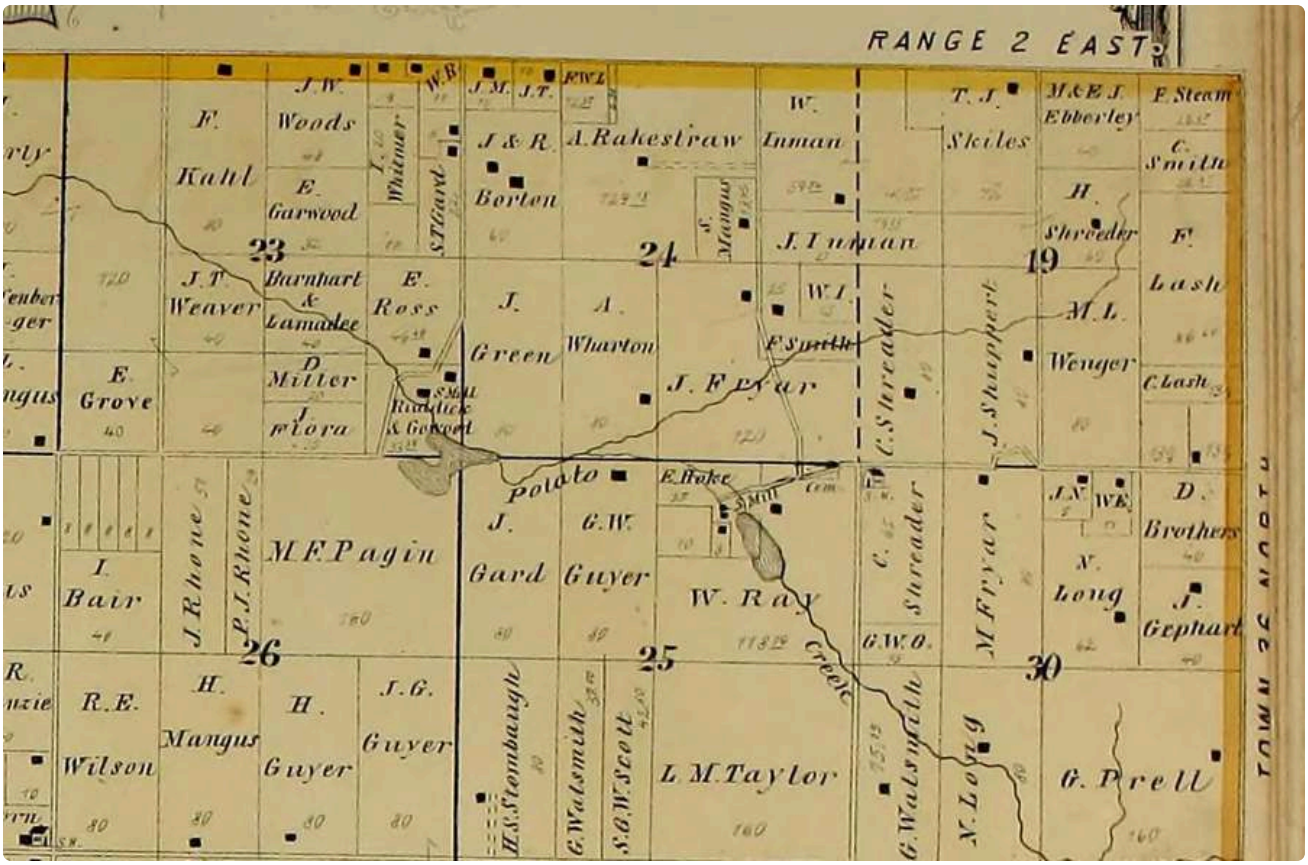
The park ground on the old maps

DOCUMENTED ✦ NEW FINDING The park's boundary is a plain rectangle, three miles by two: exactly six square-mile sections of the federal land survey, sections 23, 24, 25 and 26 of Township 36 North, Range 1 East, and sections 19 and 30 of Range 2 East. All six lie in Liberty Township. Laid over the atlas of 1875, they hold some forty farms: J. Shuppert and C. Shreader, the Schraders of the springhouse; J. and G. W. Guyer; H. and S. Mangus; M. F. Pagin's 160 acres; L. M. Taylor's; A. Rakestraw, J. Fryar, the Inmans, the Whartons, G. Prell and

more. A schoolhouse stood at the northwest corner of section 30, just across the road from the cemetery.



The park ground in 1875 under today's lake. The atlas page is laid on the six survey sections by their lines, so farms, the creek and the two mill ponds of 1875 sit where they were; the blue is Worster Lake and today's creek, the red lines today's roads. Slide toward 1875 to read the farm names. The third mill, Peter Walsmith's, appears only on the county map of 1863, and its place is approximate. The section lines are the federal survey's (Bureau of Land Management, PLSS CadNSDI); the lake, creek and roads © OpenStreetMap contributors (ODbL); the atlas is Higgins, Belden & Co., *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of St. Joseph Co., Indiana* (Chicago, 1875), pp. 54–55, and the 1863 mill is from M. W. Stokes's county map. The fit is good to about sixty metres: the atlas's "Cem." falls that close to Porter Rea Cemetery.



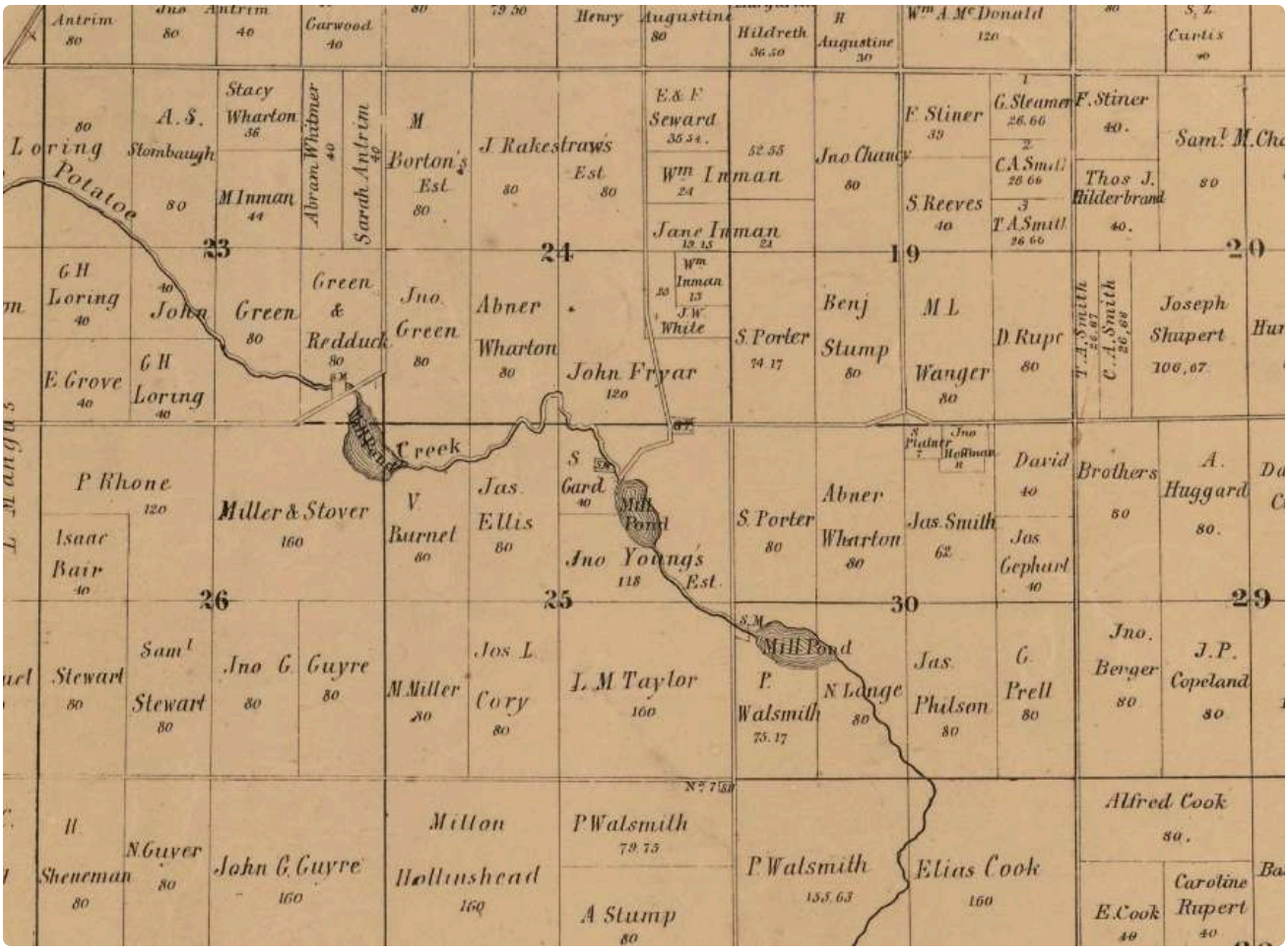
The six sections that are now the park, in 1875: sections 23, 24, 25 and 26, and 19 and 30 across the range line. Potato Creek winds east to west; the "S.Mill" labels mark sawmills at their ponds, and "Cem." is today's Porter Rea Cemetery. Higgins, Belden & Co., *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of St. Joseph Co., Indiana* (Chicago, 1875), pp. 54–55. Internet Archive. Public domain.

READING The sugar-camp names on the atlas, the Kane estate, the Shenemans, the Fulmers and the Summers, lie southeast of North Liberty, outside the later park. The camps Shenneman lists were in the Potato Creek area, not all on the park ground.

PART VI

Three sawmills on the creek

DOCUMENTED ✦ NEW FINDING The park brochure says only that "springhouses and mills dotted the area." The county map of 1863 names them. On the park ground it shows three sawmills, each with its mill pond dammed across Potato Creek: one in section 23 on the land of Green and Redduck; one in section 25 on the forty acres of S. Gard, the Samuel Gard who in 1854 gave the ground for the cemetery that stands beside it; and one in section 30 on the farm of P. Walsmith. Twelve years later the atlas still marks two of them, in sections 23 and 25, with their ponds.



The park ground in 1863, with three mill ponds on Potato Creek: below "Green & Redduck" at left, beside "S. Gard" in the centre, and by "P. Walsmith" at right. "S.M." is the map's sign for a sawmill. M. W. Stokes, *Map of St. Joseph Co., Indiana* (Philadelphia, 1863). Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division. No known restrictions.

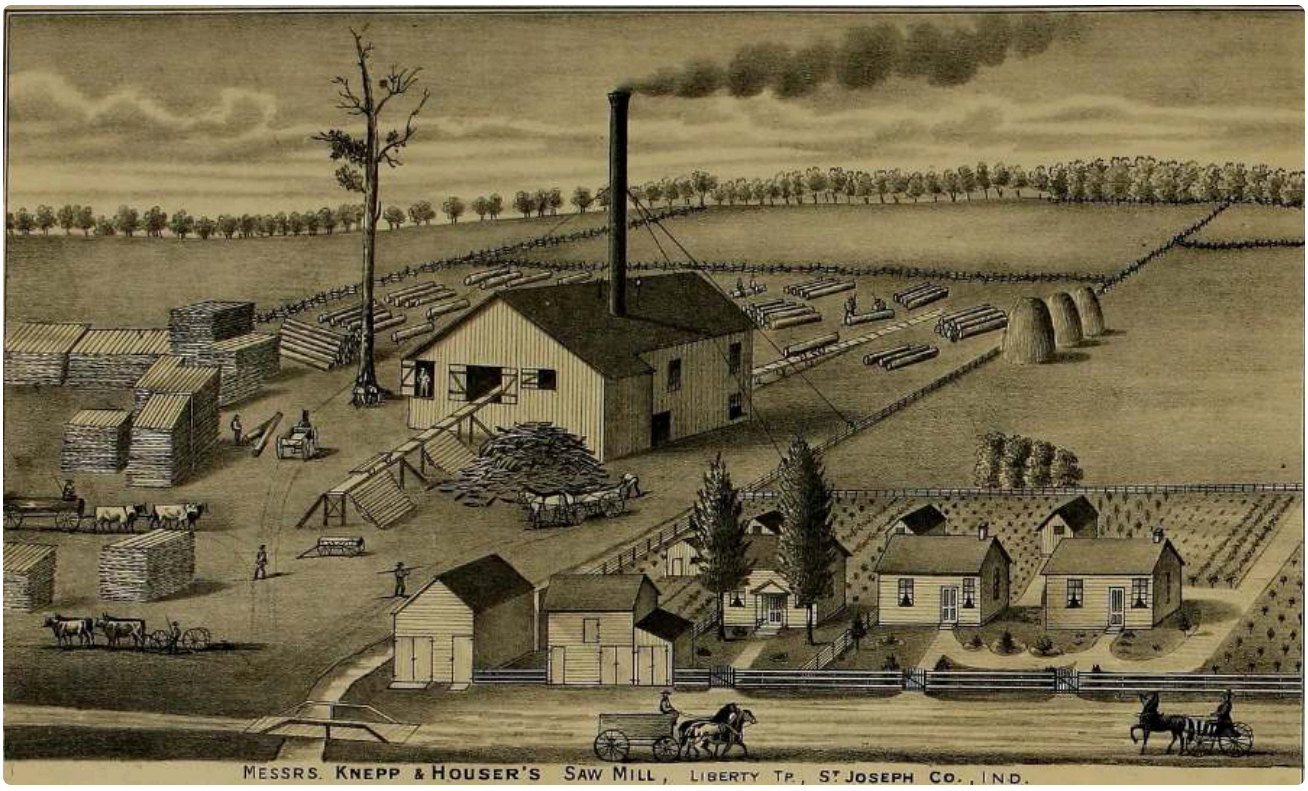
DOCUMENTED ✦ NEW FINDING The last of those mills has a story attached. In 1927 the *South Bend News-Times* reported the sale of "the Waldsmith farm," settled in 1838 by Peter Waldsmith: "The first saw-mill in St. Joseph county was built on Waldsmith's farm on the banks of Potato creek," and his son George ran it. Chapman says Waldsmith "settled on section 30." The atlas shows no Waldsmith in the section 30 west of North Liberty, but the 1863 map puts P. Walsmith's sawmill and pond in section 30 of the next range, inside today's park; his larger tract lay just south, in section 31, and the "160 acre tract" sold in 1927 may have been that land. Peter Waldsmith, who died in 1873, is buried in Porter Rea Cemetery, a short walk from his mill pond.

DOCUMENTED ✦ NEW FINDING The first of the three mills may be the oldest on the creek. The county atlas of 1875, in its short history of Greene Township, lists among the firsts: "First saw-mill on Potato Creek by John Green, Jr." The same paragraph records that "the first death

was that of Isaac Rudduck, Jan. 13, 1833," and that the first couple married were "John Rudduck and Elizabeth Rupe."

READING The names fit the map. In 1863 the mill in section 23 stood on the land of "Green & Redduck," a Jno. Green held land in the next section, and twelve years later the atlas seems to letter it "Rudduck" again. The atlas does not say where John Green Jr. built his mill or when, so it may not be the same one; Chapman, repeating the line in 1880, calls it "the first saw-mill in the township," meaning Greene Township, and the section 23 mill lies in Liberty, so Green's may have stood farther north, in Greene, and not on the park ground. But a Green and a Rudduck working a sawmill on Potato Creek, in the families of the first settlers, makes a connection likely.

READING The partners of 1875 may be traced the same way. John Rudduck's daughter Martha was the wife of George W. Garwood, Chapman says, and a G. W. Garwood farmed in the next section, so the mill's firm was probably Rudduck and his son-in-law. The "E. Hoke" on Samuel Gard's mill tract in section 25 was very probably Emanuel Hoke, whose son William, "lumbering for a number of years while young," married Gard's daughter Margaret in 1856. Neither is stated in any record; both are our reading of the names.



A Liberty Township sawmill of the 1870s: "Messrs. Knepp & Houser's Saw Mill, Liberty Tp." It was a steam mill, unlike the water-powered mills on the Potato Creek ponds. Higgins, Belden & Co., *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of St. Joseph Co., Indiana* (Chicago, 1875), p. 48. Internet Archive. Public domain.

READING Whether his was the county's first sawmill is another matter; other mills are older claimants, and the 1927 story was told eighty-nine years after the fact. But the mill pond and the grave are both on the park ground, and the farm lay at its edge.

DOCUMENTED The creek was worked hard. In 1917, during the great project to drain the Kankakee marshes, the *South Bend News-Times* reported plans for "a general cleaning out of ditches that empty into the Kankakee; as, the Kline ditch and Grape Vine, and Potato creek in St. Joseph county." The park brochure says settlers "drained wetlands and straightened the creek bends."

DOCUMENTED ✦ NEW FINDING Eight years earlier two federal biologists had seen the creek as it was. Surveying the mussels of the Kankakee in the summer of 1909, Charles B. Wilson and H. Walton Clark found Potato Creek near Walkerton "8 or 10 feet wide, with the water nowhere more than a foot or a foot and a half in depth," its bed "hard sand or gravel." Being "undredged," they wrote, "it still preserves those alternations of swift and sluggish current, deep and shallow water, coarse and fine bottom, which are conducive to mussel life," and they counted nine species of mussels in it.

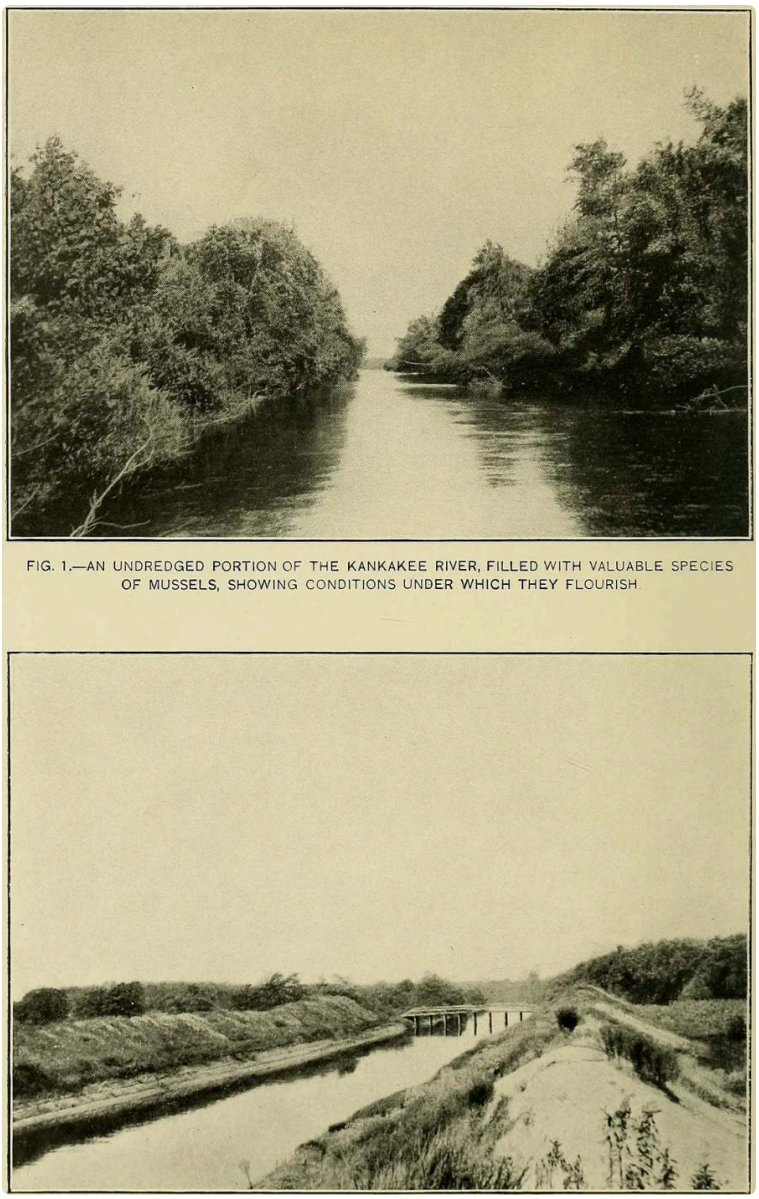


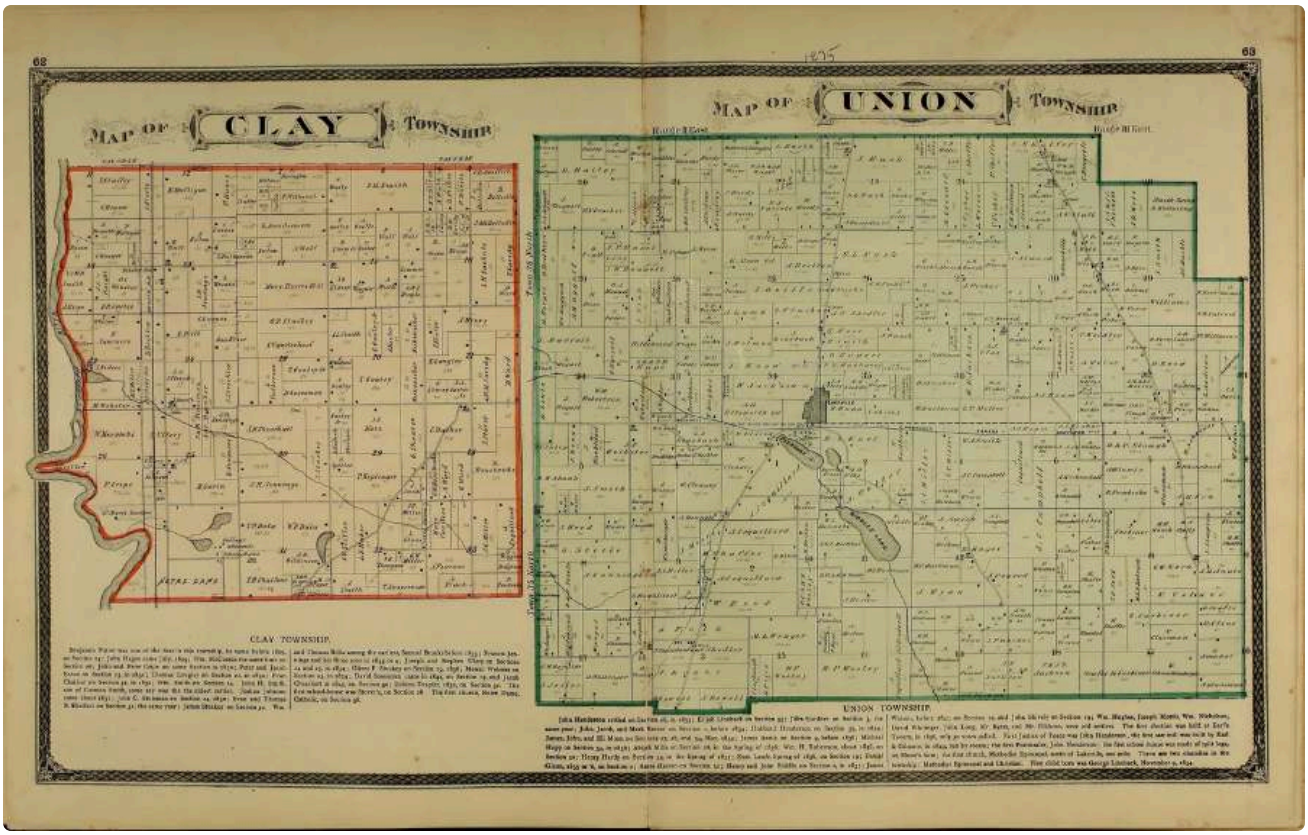
FIG. 1.—AN UNDREDGED PORTION OF THE KANKAKEE RIVER, FILLED WITH VALUABLE SPECIES OF MUSSELS, SHOWING CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THEY FLOURISH

What dredging did, photographed in the same survey: an undredged stretch of the Kankakee, “filled with valuable species of mussels,” and a dredged one where “all the mussels here were killed.” Potato Creek was still the first kind in 1909. Charles B. Wilson and H. Walton Clark, *The Mussel Fauna of the Kankakee Basin* (Washington, 1912), plate I. Library of Congress copy, Internet Archive. Public domain.

DOCUMENTED ✦ NEW FINDING It was also a fishing stream. In June 1927 the *News-Times* reported that “through the efforts of the North Liberty Izaak Walton league 10,000 rainbow trout minnows were put in Potato creek.” Half a century later a federal report on the Kankakee basin still called Potato Creek in St. Joseph County “an extensively fished trout stream.”

PART VII

The Huggart Settlement



Union Township in 1875, east of the park, where the Huggart Settlement lay. Higgins, Belden & Co., *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of St. Joseph Co., Indiana* (Chicago, 1875), pp. 62–63. Internet Archive. Public domain.

DOCUMENTED Just east of the park, in Union Township, lay one of the most remarkable communities in the county. The Huggart brothers, free Black men from Miami County, Ohio, entered land there in 1834; Samuel Huggart's patent for eighty acres at $1.25 an acre is dated 20 March 1837. Other Black families, the Basses, Boones and Manuels, bought land nearby, and the settlement was farmed by its families from the 1830s into the 1890s. The historian Frederick Karst estimated its peak at about thirty people around 1880.

DOCUMENTED The Huggarts were part of the life of the township. Andrew Huggart was superintendent of the Olive Branch Sunday school, and the Huggart children went to the Olive Branch school with white children. When Andrew died in 1881, the *South Bend Tribune* called him "one of the most industrious and conscientious men we ever met" and "the first colored man to run for office in this county." A state historical marker stands at State Road 4 and Mulberry Road.



The gravestone of Andrew Huggart, who died in 1881, in Porter Rea Cemetery, 2021. Photograph by Chris Light, via Wikimedia Commons. CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

“

“one of the most industrious and conscientious men we ever met”

PART VIII

Porter Rea Cemetery

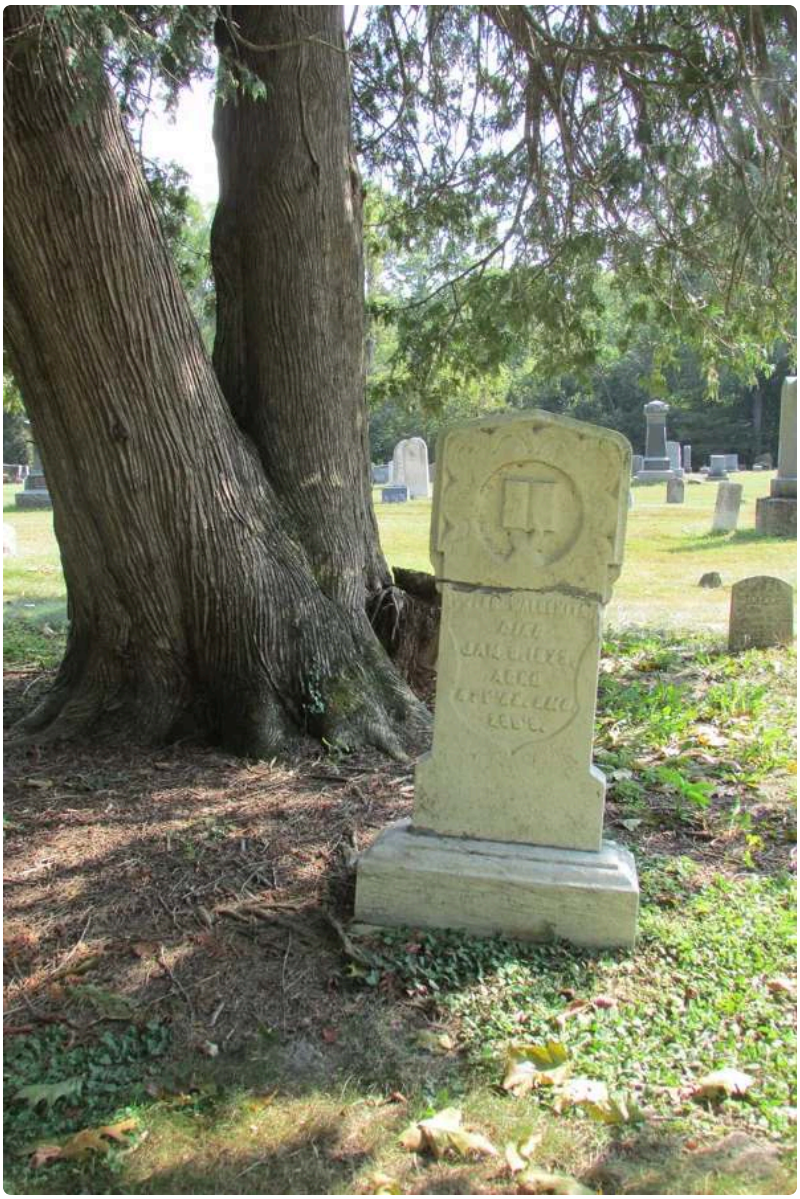
DOCUMENTED Inside the park, enclosed by it but not part of it, is a small country cemetery. It was “officially created September 6, 1854 when Samuel Gard deeded land to trustees for a burial ground.” Free Black settlers from the Huggart Settlement, says the state marker of 2003, “were buried here alongside their white neighbors, not segregated,” and the cemetery association formed on 9 May 1884 had both white and Black charter members. (Other dates in print, 1888 and 1895, have no source we can find; the marker’s date comes from the association’s own articles.)

DOCUMENTED ✦ NEW FINDING The articles themselves settle a small puzzle. The state’s dedication page labels its photograph of them “Articles of Association of Porter Cemetery – 1855,” which would put an association a year after Samuel Gard’s deed. But 1855 is the date of the law, not of the association: the members “associate together under the provision of an act of the Legislature of the State of Indiana approved Feb 12th 1855 and the amendments thereto,” cited by its chapter in the revised statutes, “for the purpose of providing a Cemetery for the burial of the dead” in section 25 of Township 36 North, Range 1 East, on the land “heretofore known as the Porter Grave Yard.” A law of 1855 cited through its later revision fits the marker’s 9 May 1884, and the articles name the association: “Porter Cemetery Association.”



Porter Rea Cemetery, inside the park, in 2021, with the state historical marker at right. Photograph by Chris Light, via Wikimedia Commons. CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

DOCUMENTED It has been called Porter Rea for decades, the marker says, “perhaps because both Porter and Rea families owned adjacent land.” The maps bear that out: S. Porter held two tracts just east of the burying ground in 1863, and in 1875 the farm beside it belonged to W. Ray. The neighborhood also had a one-room schoolhouse, the Rea School; the schoolhouse on the 1875 map, across the road from the cemetery, may be it. The cemetery “remains an active independent cemetery,” managed by its own association. Despite what one visitors’ guide says, it is not on the National Register of Historic Places.



The gravestone of Peter Waldsmith, who died in 1873, in Porter Rea Cemetery, 2021. His sawmill stood on Potato Creek nearby. Photograph by Chris Light, via Wikimedia Commons.

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READING A cemetery where Black and white neighbors were buried side by side in the 1850s says a good deal about the community around it. When the state bought the farms in the 1970s, the cemetery stayed, and it is now the oldest piece of the landscape that people still use for its first purpose. The second part of this series tells how the farms became a park.

PART IX

Story or record? Play along

Now that you have read the record, try these six. For each claim, make your call: true, false, or no record either way. Then see what the record says.

"Potato Creek is named for wild potatoes the Potawatomi gathered there."

NO RECORD

The park's brochures say so, but the earliest form of the story found is a student newspaper of 2005. A similar story belongs to another Potato Creek, in Montgomery County.

"There were sawmills on the land that is now the park."

TRUE

The county map of 1863 shows three sawmills with their mill ponds on the creek, on today's park ground.

"The old Naragon barn still stands by the nature centre."

FALSE

The state judged it unsafe, and despite a campaign by the Friends of Potato Creek it was taken down in late November 2025.

"Black and white neighbors were buried side by side at Porter Rea Cemetery."

TRUE

The state marker of 2003 says settlers from the Huggart Settlement "were buried here alongside their white neighbors, not segregated."

"Porter Rea Cemetery is on the National Register of Historic Places."

FALSE

Despite what one visitors' guide says, it is not on the National Register.

"The 1840 Potawatomi emigrating party gathered at Potato Creek."

NO RECORD

Chapman said so in 1880, but none of the 1840 records names Potato Creek; they put the departure at South Bend.

PART X

Questions we answered

5 answered

ANSWERED

An association of 1855? Was there an earlier Porter Cemetery association, a year after the 1854 deed?

No: the articles pictured on the state's page form the association "under the provision of an act of the Legislature of the State of Indiana approved Feb 12th 1855 and the amendments thereto." The 1855 is the law's date; the marker dates the association to 9 May 1884. Answered 27 October 2026

ANSWERED

The park on the old maps What land lies under the park, and who farmed it?

The park is six survey sections, all in Liberty Township; the 1875 atlas shows some forty farms, a schoolhouse and the cemetery. Answered 27 October 2026

ANSWERED

The Waldsmith mill Where was the Waldsmith mill of the 1927 "first saw-mill" story?

The 1863 map puts P. Walsmith's sawmill and pond in section 30, inside today's park, with his larger tract just south. Answered 27 October 2026

ANSWERED

The sugar camps Were the maple sugar camps on the park ground?

The sugar-camp names on the 1875 atlas lie southeast of North Liberty, outside the later park. Answered 27 October 2026

ANSWERED

North Liberty's founding When was North Liberty laid out?

The plat printed by Howard is dated 12 January 1836; Chapman's 1837 is the year of the first store. Answered 27 October 2026

The whole series as one PDF › (projectscroll.com/data/potato-creek-series.pdf)

PART XI

A timeline

1833	First settlers near North Liberty
1834	The Huggart brothers enter land in Union Township
1835	The Shupperts buy their farm
1836	North Liberty laid out, 12 January
1837	Liberty Township organized; North Liberty's grist mill
1838	Peter Waldsmith settles on the creek
1840	A Potawatomi emigrating party is to leave South Bend, 17 August
1849	The creek in the *Indiana Gazetteer*
1851	The Schraders buy 160 acres on the creek
1854	Samuel Gard deeds the cemetery ground, 6 September
1863	Three sawmills on the creek on the county map
21 YEARS LATER	
1884	Porter Cemetery Association formed
1889 or 1908	The Naragon barn built
28 YEARS LATER	
1917	Potato Creek cleaned out in the Kankakee ditch project
1927	10,000 rainbow trout put in the creek; the Waldsmith farm sold
98 YEARS LATER	
2025	The Naragon barn taken down, November

PART XII

If you go

DOCUMENTED Potato Creek State Park is at 25601 State Road 4, about three miles east of North Liberty. The springhouse is on Trail 4, the new farm markers, including one for the Naragon barn, are beside the nature centre, and the Huggart Settlement marker stands at State Road 4 and Mulberry Road. Porter Rea Cemetery is an active cemetery; please visit it with respect.

✦ NEW FINDING **WHAT'S NEW HERE**

The earliest printed description of Potato Creek we have found is Chamberlain's *Indiana Gazetteer* (1849), p. 366: "a mill stream in the southern part of St. Joseph, runs west into the Kankakee"; Scott's gazetteer of 1833 has no entry, and the same 1849 page lists a different Potato Creek in Montgomery County.

Found by Michael Urbanski [redacted], Project Scroll, 27 October 2026.

▼ What we searched

The Indiana gazetteers of 1833, 1849 and 1858; Chapman (1880); Howard (1907); the 1875 atlas; Baker and Carmony, *Indiana Place Names*; DNR brochures; Wikipedia.

The "wild potato" explanation of the creek's name is not found in any nineteenth-century gazetteer, county history or place-name book, or in the guidebooks of 1984–2000, that we searched; its earliest form found is a student newspaper of 2005 (The Chronicle, Purdue University Calumet), then the Indiana DNR brochure of 2007. The earliest Indiana story of a creek named for wild potatoes (1881) belongs to the other Potato Creek, in Montgomery County.

Found by Michael Urbanski [redacted], Project Scroll, 27 October 2026.

▼ What we searched

Archive.org full text (about thirty queries); the 1833, 1849 and 1858 gazetteers; Chapman (1880); Howard (1907); Baker and Carmony (1975); Dunn on Indiana geographical names; Bright (2004); McCaig (1988) and five later guidebooks; Chronicling America.

In June 1927 the North Liberty Izaak Walton League put 10,000 rainbow trout minnows into Potato Creek (*South Bend News-Times*, 11 June 1927), the earliest record we have found of the creek as a trout stream.

Found by Michael Urbanski [redacted], Project Scroll, 27 October 2026.

▼ What we searched

Modern park histories and brochures, Wikipedia, Shenneman (2015), the USDA Kankakee Basin report (1976).

Potato Creek State Park is exactly six sections of the federal land survey, 23–26 of T36N R1E and 19 and 30 of T36N R2E, all in Liberty Township; laid over the 1875 atlas they hold some forty named farms, a schoolhouse and the cemetery.

Found by Michael Urbanski [redacted], Project Scroll, 27 October 2026.

▼ What we searched

DNR brochures and markers; Shenneman (2015); Wikipedia; the OpenStreetMap park boundary checked against the BLM survey grid.

In 1863 three sawmills, each with a mill pond, stood on Potato Creek on what is now the park: Green and Redduck's in section 23, Samuel Gard's beside the cemetery in section 25, and P. Walsmith's in section 30 (Stokes, Map of St. Joseph Co., 1863); two are still marked in 1875.

Found by Michael Urbanski [redacted], Project Scroll, 27 October 2026.

Set out in Research Note 2026-08 (projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-08/)

▼ What we searched

DNR brochures ("mills dotted the area," unnamed); Chapman (1880); Howard (1907); Shenneman (2015); Wikipedia; the IHB and HMdb markers.

Potato Creek as it was before dredging: the federal mussel survey of summer 1909 (Wilson and Clark, Bureau of Fisheries Document 758, 1912, pp. 18–19) found it near Walkerton "8 or 10 feet wide," no more than a foot and a half deep, with a bed of "hard sand or gravel," still "undredged," and holding nine species of mussels.

Found by Michael Urbanski [redacted], Project Scroll, 27 October 2026.

▼ What we searched

The DNR park histories and brochures; Shenneman (2015); the 1917 ditch-cleaning reports; archive.org full text for Potato Creek with dredging, mussels and Walkerton.

The "1855" on the state's photograph of the Porter Cemetery Articles of Association is the date of the enabling law ("an act of the Legislature of the State of Indiana approved Feb 12th 1855 and the amendments thereto"), not of the association, which the marker dates to 9 May 1884; the articles place the cemetery in section 25, T36N R1E, on land "heretofore known as the Porter Grave Yard."

New documentation · Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 27 October 2026.

▼ What we searched

The Indiana Historical Bureau marker text and dedication page; HMdb; the 2003 marker file; archive.org full text for Porter Cemetery and 1855.

The Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory of 2000 records a barn in Potato Creek State Park, probably the Naragon barn: an English bank barn built into a hillside facing the lake, rated Contributing and dated “c. 1900” (survey no. 141-339-90001).

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 27 October 2026.

▼ What we searched

The DNR marker of 2026; Shenneman (2015); the Friends of Potato Creek letter; WSBT and InkFreeNews reports of 2025; archive.org full text.

The 1875 county atlas’s history of Greene Township records the “first saw-mill on Potato Creek by John Green, Jr.” and the Rudduck family among the township’s first settlers (Isaac Rudduck, died 1833; John Rudduck, first marriage), names that match the “Green & Redduck” sawmill in section 23 of today’s park on the 1863 map.

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 27 October 2026.

Set out in Research Note 2026-08 (projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-08/)

▼ What we searched

Chapman (1880); Howard (1907); the DNR park histories; Shenneman (2015); the 1863 and 1875 maps; archive.org full text for Green, Rudduck and Potato Creek.

The Waldsmith mill of the 1927 story of “the first saw-mill in St. Joseph county” stood on today’s park ground: the 1863 map shows P. Walsmith’s sawmill and mill pond in section 30 of Range 2 East, the section where Chapman says Waldsmith settled, with his larger tract just south of the park in section 31; Peter Waldsmith (died 1873) is buried in Porter Rea Cemetery nearby.

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 27 October 2026.

Set out in Research Note 2026-08 (projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-08/)

▼ What we searched

South Bend News-Times, 3 April 1927; Chapman (1880); the 1863 and 1875 maps; Find a Grave and Commons photographs of the cemetery; DNR and park histories.

The records of 1840 place the gathering and departure of Alexis Coquillard's Potawatomi emigrating party at South Bend (Gen. Hugh Brady's letters of June and August 1840; the South Bend Free Press via the Daily National Intelligencer, 8 September 1840); none names Potato Creek, so the "rendezvous at Potato creek" rests on Chapman (1880) alone.

Found by Michael Urbanski [redacted], Project Scroll, 27 October 2026.

▼ What we searched

The Commissioner of Indian Affairs reports for 1840 and 1841; Chronicling America 1838–42; Howard (1907); Edmunds (1978); Clifton (1977); archive.org full text.

A **new finding** is a fact found in a primary source that we could not find in any published history, article or website we searched. Credit: Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will say so here. All our discoveries › (projectscroll.com/discoveries/)

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Numbers in the text point to this list; entries without a number are further sources we consulted. How we research › (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/) · The libraries behind all our stories › (projectscroll.com/sources/libraries/)

▾ CORRECTIONS (1)

First published 27 October 2026. Like all our pages, it is expanded from time to time with new records, pictures and features. Factual corrections are listed here, with their dates.

27 October 2026 The Naragon barn no longer stands; it was taken down in November 2025. The 1840 removal records put the departure at South Bend, not Potato Creek.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

Research and reporting

Michael Urbanski (projectscroll.com/about/michael-urbanski/)

· Project Scroll

SOURCES	Every fact on this page is drawn from the sources listed above, and each can be checked where it is held.
CORRECTIONS	Errors are corrected on the page, and each correction is noted there.
CONTACT	To report an error or share a record that adds to the story, write to research@projectscroll.com.
METHOD	How we research › (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/)

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POTATO CREEK · PART 2

Darcey Worster's dream

DISCOVERY · 3 NEW FINDINGS › 12 MIN READ

A self-taught naturalist mailed insects made of acorns to politicians for forty years to get a lake built on Potato Creek. The state finally did it, over the protests of the farmers whose land it took, and named the lake for him.

By Michael Urbanski · Project Scroll · 27 October 2026 · 12 min read



The Worster Lake dedication plaque, "In memory of Darcey Worster 1893–1974." Photograph by Chris Light, 2021, via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The short version

Darcey Worster of North Liberty, a Navy engineer in the First World War, first proposed damming Potato Creek in the 1930s and kept the idea alive by sending politicians insects made of acorns and hickory nuts. By spring 1939 the state had agreed, but the war stopped it. The state took it up again in 1964–69; many farmers opposed it, and some took the state to court.

The earthen dam was finished in 1977. Worster died in 1974, and on 6 June 1977 Governor Otis Bowen dedicated the 3,840-acre recreation area and named Worster Lake for him; it opened to the public in 1978 and became a state park in 1983.

Read the whole story ›

✦ NEW FINDING 3 new findings in this story. **See what's new ›**

Darcey Worster had a way of getting attention. A self-taught naturalist from North Liberty, he made little insects out of acorns and hickory nuts and mailed them to politicians. He "bugged" them, as one local history puts it, about a lake.

He had grown up walking the woods along Potato Creek, and in the 1930s he began saying the creek should be dammed. People told him the wet ground would never hold a dam. He kept at it for forty years. He died in 1974, three years before the lake was filled, and it carries his name. This is the second of three parts: how the farms became a park.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE DOCUMENTED READING ✦ NEW FINDING

14 documented · 3 readings · 3 new

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DOCUMENTED	A source says so, and you can read it yourself.
READING	Our interpretation of the sources, kept separate from the facts.
✦ NEW FINDING	Something we found in the record that we have not found in any earlier telling.

All about Scrollsigns (projectscroll.com/scrollsigns/) · How we research (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/)

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1. A dream in the 1930s
2. The state chooses North Liberty
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4. The dam and the lake
5. Dedication day
6. Story or record? Play along
7. Questions we answered
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▼ Who's who (9)

Darcey Worster
Self-taught naturalist from North Liberty who pushed for a lake on Potato Creek for forty years; the lake bears his name.

Margie McCaig
Author of the 1988 *Indiana Parks Guide*, which dates the idea to the early 1930s.

Franklin N. Shenneman

Anson Worster

Local historian who tells of the 1939 approval and the farmers' fight.

Parcellus Worster
Anson's son, the village builder; newspaper items point to him as Darcey's father.

Otis R. Bowen
Governor who dedicated the park on 6 June 1977 and named Worster Lake.

Richard "Dick" Mangus
Lakeville state representative credited locally with overseeing the change to a state park.

North Liberty's wagon maker from 1852, probably Darcey's grandfather.

Matthew Welsh
Former governor who counted Potato Creek among the parks that came out of his administration's planning.

Joseph D. Cloud
DNR director whose name is on the 1977 Worster Lake plaque.

PART I

A dream in the 1930s

DOCUMENTED The park's brochure says that "Darcy Worster and fellow conservation club members first proposed a man-made reservoir on Potato Creek in the late 1930's. World War II halted the project." Margie McCaig's *Indiana Parks Guide* of 1988 puts the start in "the depression years of the early 1930's," and adds that "many people at that time protested the idea, claiming that the underlying soil of Potato Creek was unsuitable for dam construction."

READING The two dates fit together. Shenneman gives the one firm event: "in the spring of 1939, county and US Army engineers toured the site, and the Indiana Department of Conservation decided that Worster's dream would become a reality," with Works Progress Administration labor lined up to build it, before the war stopped everything. Worster seems to have started talking in the early 1930s; the project became real in 1939.

DOCUMENTED Worster answered with research of his own. Franklin Shenneman, in his history of southern St. Joseph County, writes that "no one believed that the often-saturated soil could sustain a lake," but that Worster, "a self-taught naturalist," did his own studies to show it could. And he kept the idea alive, the park says, "by sending his hand-crafted insects to state officials."

DOCUMENTED ✦ NEW FINDING His name is spelled two ways: Darcy in the park's older brochures and many guides, Darcey in Shenneman and the current brochure. The state's own plaque at the lake, put up for the dedication of 1977, reads "In memory of Darcey Worster

1893–1974," and so did his neighbors: the North Liberty column of the *South Bend News-Times* spells it Darcey in item after item from 1916 to 1925, though one item of 1920 has "Darcy R." Those items fill in a little of the man. He was married by the end of 1916; in the summer of 1917 he passed the examination for the Navy's engineering department and was sent to Norfolk, Virginia, and in March 1918 he came home on furlough as an engineer on the *Vermont*. In January 1920 "Darcy R. Worster" went to Detroit, the paper said, "where he is employed as detective for the Wabash railroad."

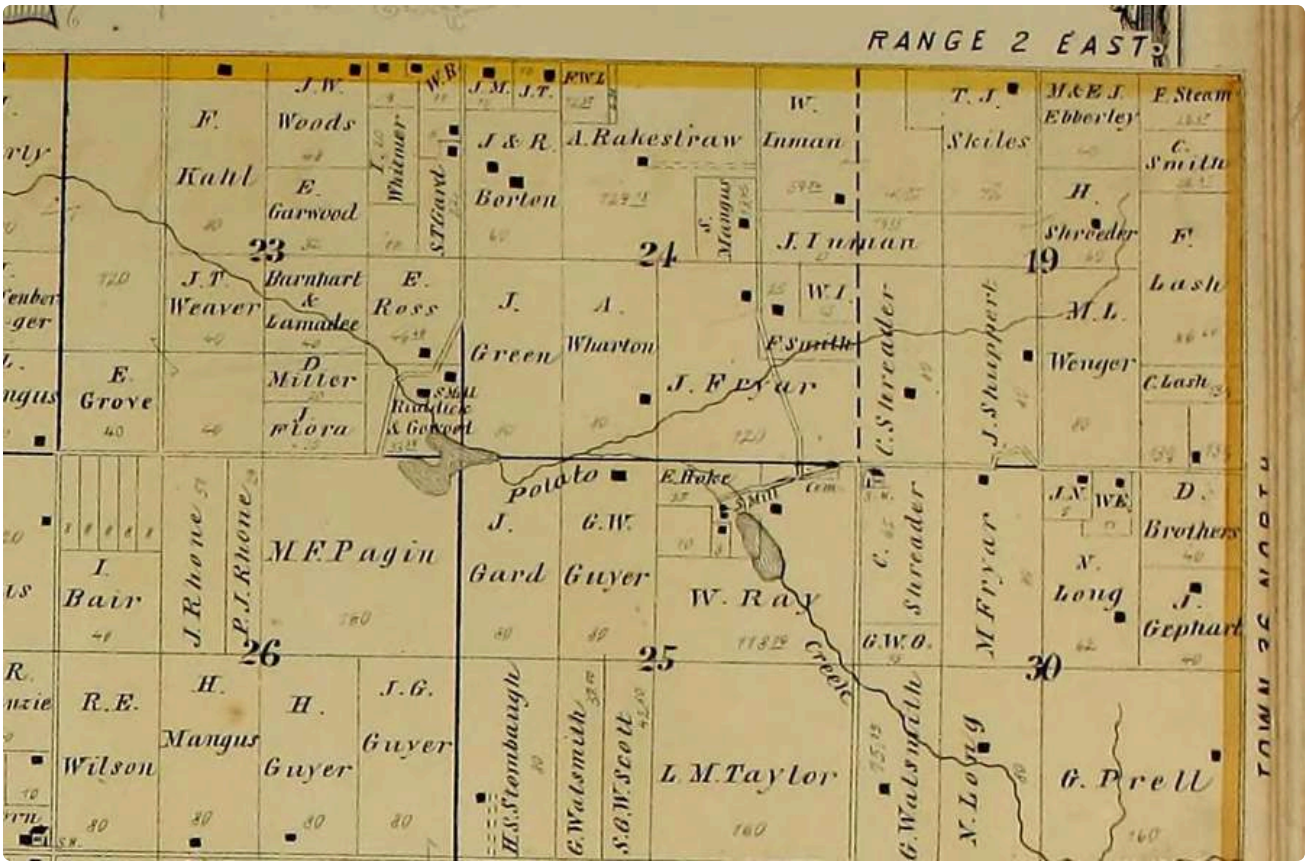
READING Was he of the old Worster family? A Worster had been in North Liberty since 1852, when Anson Worster the wagon maker came to help build the mill. The newspaper items point to Darcey as a son of Anson's son Parcellus, the village builder: in 1918 his wife was visiting "at the Worster home" while Parcellus's daughter Mary was home visiting her parents, and in 1925 "Darcey and Mary Worster visited with George Hewish at Indiana Harbor," the husband of Parcellus's daughter Jessie. That would make him the wagon maker's grandson. No record we have found says so in so many words.

PART II

The state chooses North Liberty

DOCUMENTED The idea came back after the war as a flood-control and recreation project. In December 1964 the Indiana Flood Control and Water Resources Commission published a preliminary report on a "Potato Creek Reservoir," and a natural-areas survey of 1969 says a "new Potato Creek State Recreation Area was proposed in 1964." Former Governor Matthew Welsh counted Potato Creek among the parks that came out of his administration's planning under the Natural Resources Act of 1965. Shenneman writes that in 1966 the state announced it had selected North Liberty for the new park, and the same survey records a department announcement in the newspapers on 23 March 1968. The park's brochure says that in 1969 "the area was designated to become a park."

DOCUMENTED The 1969 survey describes the plan. The lake, for "recreation, flood control and water supply," would lie "on both sides of present Osborn Road," and its eastern end would come within half a mile of Orange Road. The authors asked the state to set aside an old-growth woods and a bog in the northeast corner of the park as a natural area, and noted that a dedication was being planned there. Part 3 tells what became of them.



The six sections the state bought, as they were farmed in 1875: some forty farms, two sawmills and a cemetery. Higgins, Belden & Co., *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of St. Joseph Co., Indiana* (Chicago, 1875), pp. 54–55. Internet Archive. Public domain.

> *"without his untiring efforts the preservation of this recreation area would not have been possible."*

PART III

The farmers who said no

DOCUMENTED Not everyone wanted a lake. "Farmers who had acquiesced to the idea of donating a portion of their farmland in the 1930s," Shenneman writes, "now vehemently opposed the idea," arguing that other sites would take less farmland from people who depended on it for a living. There were fears, too, that the area would be commercialized.

DOCUMENTED Within a few months of the 1966 announcement the first owners began selling to the state. "Many early sellers were in support of the state's buyout; others fought to

the very end. Some landowners took the State of Indiana to court and eventually won judgments and received more money." By the early 1970s some holdouts were still in court. Shenneman says the state had all 3,840 acres by 1972, at a cost of $5.7 million for land and development, though a park marker says the last family did not leave until 1978. The department began tearing down houses in the early 1970s; one photograph Shenneman reproduces shows the Fullmer family home meeting "its end by way of a bulldozer."

DOCUMENTED The Department of Natural Resources is frank about this chapter of its history. "Creating a new park required landowners to donate or sell their land," it writes of the parks built after the Second World War. "In some instances, land was taken from unwilling owners," who "were paid for their land, but had to leave their homes."

READING It is worth remembering what was lost. The families on these farms had been there since the 1830s and 1850s. The Shupperts had held their land for well over a century. A park that hundreds of thousands of people now enjoy was built on the end of their farming lives, and the markers the park has put up along its trails are, in part, a way of paying that debt.

PART IV

The dam and the lake

DOCUMENTED The dam that made the lake is an earthen bank 42 feet high and 1,500 feet long, finished in 1977. The National Inventory of Dams lists its drainage area as 11.8 square miles and its normal storage as 3,220 acre-feet. The lake behind it, Worster Lake, covers 327 acres. Potato Creek flows in at one end and out at the other, and goes on west through North Liberty to the Kankakee.

DOCUMENTED Darcey Worster did not see it filled. He died on 11 November 1974, at eighty-one. His obituary, Shenneman writes, called him the "Father of Potato Creek." That year the legislature set aside $2.5 million for the park, later cut to $2 million.

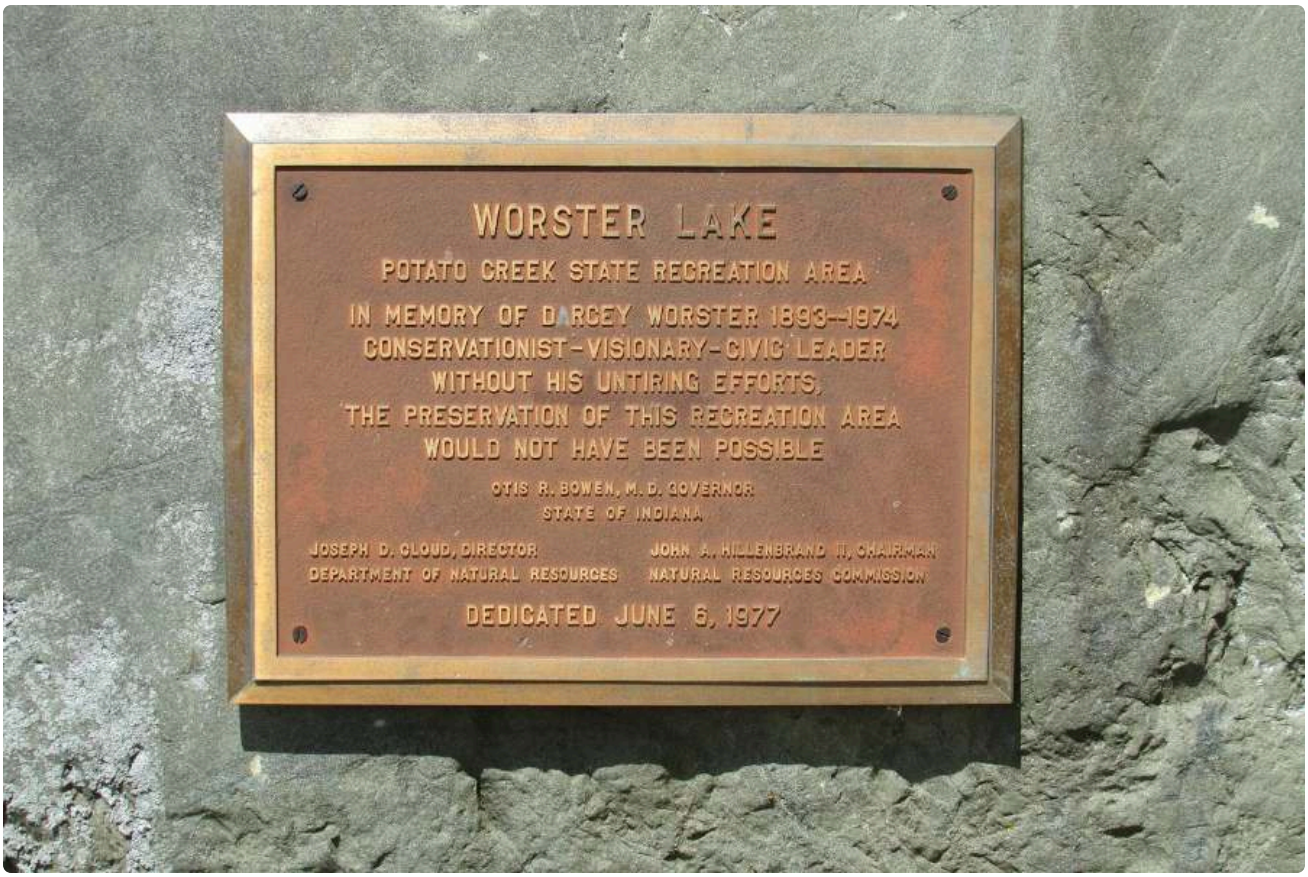


The dam today: the path along its crest, 2021. Photograph by Chris Light, via Wikimedia Commons. CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

PART V

Dedication day

DOCUMENTED On 6 June 1977, “an unseasonably cool day,” Governor Otis R. Bowen dedicated the park in front of the new beach house. The six square miles, 3,840 acres, became Potato Creek State Recreation Area, and Bowen announced that the reservoir would be named Worster Lake.



The plaque at the lake: “In memory of Darcey Worster 1893–1974 / conservationist – visionary – civic leader / without his untiring efforts the preservation of this recreation area would not have been possible.” Dedicated 6 June 1977, and signed for Governor Otis R. Bowen, DNR director Joseph D. Cloud and the Natural Resources Commission. Photograph by Chris Light, via Wikimedia Commons. CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

DOCUMENTED ✦ NEW FINDING For a few years it was officially a recreation area rather than a park. The department’s own publications called it Potato Creek State Recreation Area in 1979, 1981 and 1982. In 1983, McCaig’s guide explains, “the State Recreation Area classification was dropped,” statewide; the department’s brochure for Ouabache, another recreation area, says “In 1983, it became Ouabache State Park.” Potato Creek became a state park the same way. Local accounts credit State Representative Richard “Dick” Mangus of Lakeville with overseeing the change.

DOCUMENTED ✦ NEW FINDING Dedicated is not the same as open. Shenneman’s chapter introduction says the park opened to the public in August 1978, though it gives the dedication as 1978 too, against his own photograph caption, both plaques and every other source. A school newscast written in early 1978, after the great blizzard, bears him out on the opening: two junior-high reporters interviewed the assistant manager of “the Potato Creek State Recreation Area” and asked, “When will the park be officially opened to the public?” and

when the gate fee would start. Eight months after the dedication, it was not yet open. The likeliest reading: dedicated 6 June 1977, opened to the public in 1978.

> *"When will the park be officially opened to the public?"*

PART VI

Story or record? Play along

Now that you have read the record, try these six. For each claim, make your call: true, false, or no record either way. Then see what the record says.

"Darcey Worster mailed insects made of acorns to politicians."

TRUE

He made little insects out of acorns and hickory nuts and kept the idea alive "by sending his hand-crafted insects to state officials."

"Worster lived to see his lake filled."

FALSE

He died on 11 November 1974, three years before the lake was filled.

"Some farmers took the state to court over their land and won."

TRUE

Shenneman writes that some landowners took the State of Indiana to court "and eventually won judgments and received more money."

"The park opened the day it was dedicated."

FALSE

It was dedicated on 6 June 1977. A school newscast of early 1978 was still asking when it would open to the public.

"Darcey Worster was the grandson of North Liberty's wagon maker."

"Potato Creek has always been a state park."

FALSE

NO RECORD

Newspaper items point to him as a son of Parcellus Worster, Anson's son. No record found says so in so many words.

It was dedicated as Potato Creek State Recreation Area and became a state park in 1983, when that class was dropped.

PART VII

Questions we answered

2 answered

ANSWERED

Darcy or Darcey? How was Worster's first name spelled?

Darcey, on the state's 1977 plaque and in the *News-Times* from 1916 to 1926. Answered 27 October 2026

ANSWERED

When it became a state park When and why did the recreation area become a state park?

In 1983, when Indiana dropped the State Recreation Area classification statewide. Answered 27 October 2026

The whole series as one PDF › (projectscroll.com/data/potato-creek-series.pdf)

PART VIII

A timeline

1893 Darcey Worster born

24 YEARS LATER

1917–18 Worster an engineer in the Navy

1930s Darcey Worster and a conservation club propose a lake on Potato Creek

1939 Spring: engineers tour the site; the state says yes; the war stops it

25 YEARS LATER

1964	State flood-control commission report on a Potato Creek reservoir
1966	The state selects North Liberty; land sales begin
1968	Department announcement, 23 March
1969	The area designated to become a park
1974	Swamp Rose Nature Preserve dedicated; Worster dies, 11 November
1977	The dam completed; park dedicated, 6 June, and the lake named Worster Lake
1978	Opened to the public
1983	State park, when the recreation-area class is dropped

PART IX

If you go

DOCUMENTED The beach house where Governor Bowen spoke stands on the lake's shore, with Worster's plaque on its boulder nearby, and the paved bicycle trail, 3.3 miles long, is an easy way to see the lake. Another 1977 dedication plaque hangs at the park office.

✦ NEW FINDING **WHAT'S NEW HERE**

The park's namesake was Darcey Worster (1893–1974), the spelling on the state's 1977 dedication plaque and in the South Bend News-Times of 1916–1925, which also records him as a Navy engineer on the Vermont in 1917–18; family items point to him as a grandson of the North Liberty wagon maker Anson Worster.

Found by Michael Urbanski [redacted], Project Scroll, 27 October 2026.

▼ What we searched

DNR brochures and events; McCaig (1988); Shenneman (2015); Howard (1907); Find a Grave and web searches; archive.org full text.

A school newscast script of early 1978 (IUSB, Cable TV: Guide to Public Access, 1979) asked the park's assistant manager when the park would be "officially opened to the public" and when gate fees would start, showing that the recreation area dedicated on 6 June 1977 had not yet opened.

Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 27 October 2026.

▼ What we searched

DNR brochures; Shenneman (2015); McCaig (1988); guidebooks of 1984–2005; archive.org full text.

Potato Creek became a state park in 1983 when Indiana dropped its "State Recreation Area" classification statewide (McCaig, 1988; the DNR's Ouabache brochure); DNR publications still used "Potato Creek State Recreation Area" in 1979, 1981 and 1982. Wikipedia gives 1983 from a 2006 newspaper, without the reason.

New documentation · Found by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll, 27 October 2026.

▼ What we searched

Wikipedia; DNR history pages; archive.org full text; Library of Congress subject headings.

A **new finding** is a fact found in a primary source that we could not find in any published history, article or website we searched. Credit: Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will say so here. All our discoveries › (projectscroll.com/discoveries/)

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Numbers in the text point to this list; entries without a number are further sources we consulted. How we research › (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/) · The libraries behind all our stories › (projectscroll.com/sources/libraries/)

▾ CORRECTIONS (1)

First published 27 October 2026. Like all our pages, it is expanded from time to time with new records, pictures and features. Factual corrections are listed here, with their dates.

27 October 2026 His name is spelled Darcey, as on the 1977 plaque and in the newspapers of 1916–1926.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

Research and reporting

Michael Urbanski (projectscroll.com/about/michael-urbanski/) [redacted]

· Project Scroll

SOURCES	Every fact on this page is drawn from the sources listed above, and each can be checked where it is held.
CORRECTIONS	Errors are corrected on the page, and each correction is noted there.
CONTACT	To report an error or share a record that adds to the story, write to research@projectscroll.com.
METHOD	How we research › (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/)

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POTATO CREEK · PART 3

The park goes back to the wild

DISCOVERY · 2 NEW FINDINGS › 12 MIN READ

Swamp Rose, the wetlands that came back, the ospreys on their poles, and a lodge on Worster Lake fifty years after the dam: what Potato Creek State Park has become.

By Michael Urbanski · Project Scroll · 27 October 2026 · 12 min read



Worster Lake from the Trail 3 overlook, May 2021. Photograph by Chris Light, via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The short version

The Swamp Rose Nature Preserve was dedicated in 1974, before the lake filled; a 1975–76 survey counted 256 plants and 62 birds there. Since the early 1990s the park has restored wetlands and prairie, and in 2006 it became an Important Bird Area. Ospreys nest on poles by the lake.

Rep. Dick Mangus championed the cabins, trails and nature centre. A 120-room lodge, the first new Indiana state park lodge since 1939, broke ground on 19 October 2023.

Read the whole story ›

✦ NEW FINDING 2 new findings in this story. **See what's new ›**

Two big nests of sticks sit on poles near Worster Lake. In spring their owners come back from the south, ospreys, the fish hawks that plunge feet-first into the water, and from the

shore you can watch them hunt the lake that was farmland fifty years ago.

The farmers had spent a century draining this ground. The park has spent half a century letting it go wet again. This is the last of three parts: how Potato Creek went back to the wild, and what it holds now.

HOW TO READ THIS PAGE DOCUMENTED READING ✦ NEW FINDING

12 documented · 1 readings · 2 new

What the marks mean

This is a living research document. Every statement carries one of our Scrollsigns™, so you always know what is on the record and what is our reading of it. Every source is listed at the foot of the page, and the story is updated as new records turn up.

DOCUMENTED	A source says so, and you can read it yourself.
READING	Our interpretation of the sources, kept separate from the facts.
✦ NEW FINDING	Something we found in the record that we have not found in any earlier telling.

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▼ Who's who (6)

Victor Riemenschneider
IU South Bend botanist who surveyed Swamp Rose in 1975 and 1976: 256 plants and 62 birds.

John James Audubon
His engravings of the osprey and bald eagle, birds that now hunt Worster Lake, illustrate the story.

Richard B. Whittaker
Author of *The Deer of Potato Creek* (1986).

Richard "Dick" Mangus
Lakeville legislator, 1972–2004, credited with the cabins, trails and nature centre, who wanted an inn on the lake.

Eric Holcomb
Governor who broke ground for the Lodge at Potato Creek on 19 October 2023.

Darcey Worster
The man who mailed acorn insects to the statehouse to get the lake built.

PART I

Swamp Rose

DOCUMENTED The wildest corner of the park was protected before the lake was even filled. Between May and October 1974 the Natural Resources Commission dedicated the Swamp Rose Nature Preserve, 100 acres (the state's map today draws it at about 155) in the northeast corner of what was then the new recreation area. When a botanist from Indiana University South Bend, Victor Riemenschneider, surveyed it in 1975 and 1976, he found about forty hectares holding 256 species and varieties of plants in three habitats, forest, upland old field and wetland, and 62 species of birds.

DOCUMENTED The park describes it as a place to see "the eutrophic process," the slow filling of open water with plants. A small stream begins in its wetland and flows into Worster Lake, and it is a favourite place of beavers. There is no trail into it today, though the state's directory of 1981 says a hiking trail then wound through it.

DOCUMENTED ✦ NEW FINDING It is half of what the naturalists asked for. The 1969 survey *Natural Areas in Indiana and Their Preservation* asked the state to save two things in the northeast corner of the planned park: a leatherleaf bog west of Oak Road, which it called New-Oak-Road Bog, and beside it the Inez Clingenspell Woods, "the only old-growth stand we located in this area." In 1987 the state's own nature-preserves staff checked what had become of every place in that book. Their table matches New-Oak-Road Bog to "Swamp Rose." Clingenspell Woods is on their other list, of areas "severely degraded or destroyed." The bog was saved; the old woods were not.

> *"the only old-growth stand we located in this area."*

PART II

Putting the wetlands back

DOCUMENTED In the early 1990s the park began what its brochure calls an active resource management program, aiming at something like the land of the early 1800s. “Today more than a square mile of the park is covered by wetlands and Worster Lake”: sedge meadows, shallow marshes, swamps and beaver ponds. Native prairie is being brought back with plantings and kept open with controlled burning, and other parts of the park are being allowed to grow back into hardwood forest.

DOCUMENTED The deer had other ideas. In 1993 and 1994 researchers studying fenced plots at Swamp Rose, Summer’s Pond and Pear Road found that browsing deer had a strong effect on spring wildflowers and young sugar maples. Richard B. Whittaker wrote a whole book about them, *The Deer of Potato Creek*, in 1986.

PART III

The birds



Audubon's "Common Osprey, Fish Hawk," carrying a trout. Ospreys now nest on poles near Worster Lake. John James Audubon, *The Birds of America*, vol. 1 (1840), plate 15. Internet Archive. Public domain.

DOCUMENTED In 2006 the park was named an Important Bird Area, and it is on the Indiana Birding Trail. Visitors see sandhill cranes, great blue herons, kingfishers, wood ducks and pileated woodpeckers, and bald eagles hunt the lake. Ospreys nest on tall poles near the water, one of them next to the dam.



An osprey nest on its pole at Worster Lake, May 2021. Photograph by Chris Light, via Wikimedia Commons. CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

DOCUMENTED Ospreys were once rare in Indiana. The state released 96 young birds from Virginia between 2003 and 2006 at four of its properties, Jasper-Pulaski, Minnehaha and Tri-County fish and wildlife areas and Patoka Lake; Potato Creek was not among them. In 2018 the state took the species off the state endangered list; that year its biologists named Potato Creek among the places ospreys nest. The park's 2026 brochure says it has had nesting ospreys "since before the species' reintroduction in the early 2000s." A wildlife guide of 1992 is more cautious: ospreys, it says, "are seen here occasionally."



A great blue heron in the shallows of Worster Lake, 2021. Photograph by Chris Light, via Wikimedia Commons. CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).



Audubon's "White-headed Sea Eagle, or Bald Eagle," with a catfish. Bald eagles now hunt Worster Lake. John James Audubon, *The Birds of America*, vol. 1 (1840), plate 14. Internet Archive. Public domain.

PART IV

A champion in the statehouse

DOCUMENTED Much of what visitors use today came through one man in Indianapolis. Richard "Dick" Mangus of Lakeville sat in the Indiana House from 1972 to 2004 and then on the Natural Resources Commission. A marker in the park credits him with the cabins, trails, picnic areas, campgrounds, the nature centre and the interpretive naturalist service, and another notes that "one of Mangus's goals for Potato Creek was an inn overlooking Worster Lake."



The Richard Mangus memorial in the park, 2019. Photograph by Chris Light, via Wikimedia Commons. CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

PART V

What the park holds

DOCUMENTED The park covers 3,840 acres. It has six numbered hiking trails, from the easy one-mile Trail 5 to the “rugged” two-mile climb of Trail 2 to the park’s highest ground, plus the Friends Wetland Trail and the Peppermint Loop. There are 3.3 miles of paved bicycle trail, 7.5 miles of mountain bike trail, three bridle trails with a horsemen’s campground, a family campground, cabins open all year, a beach, and boat launches on the lake. In winter there is cross-country skiing, sledding and ice fishing.

DOCUMENTED ✦ NEW FINDING The nature centre came with the park's first big building program. The department's guide for 1982 announced that "sometime this summer, four new picnic areas, a nature center/warming hut, and three picnic shelters will be opening," with the first cabins on the north shore; the centre would serve in winter "as a cross country ski rental building." The park then had seasonal naturalists only. Today the nature centre has a wildlife observation window and a full-time naturalist. In 2026 the department put up new markers beside it telling the story of the farms, where the Naragon barn stood until November 2025, and the Friends of Potato Creek have rebuilt the Schrader springhouse on Trail 4. About 570,000 people a year visit the park.



The nature centre, May 2021. Photograph by Chris Light, via Wikimedia Commons. CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

> *"sometime this summer, four new picnic areas, a nature center/warming hut, and three picnic shelters will be opening"*

PART VI

The lodge

DOCUMENTED Dick Mangus's inn is finally being built. On 19 October 2023 Governor Eric Holcomb broke ground for the Lodge at Potato Creek State Park on the south shore of Worster Lake: 120 guest rooms, dining for 150, conference space for 350, an indoor aquatic centre and a small nature room. It is the first new lodge built in an Indiana state park since 1939. Its cornerstone was laid in December 2024. By September 2026 it was 65 percent complete and the cost estimate had grown from $100 million to about $113 million. The state parks director has said construction should be finished by late spring 2027, after which it must be furnished and staffed, so the lodge should open in 2027; the DNR's inns page says only that "opening is targeted for 2027," and no date or reservations have been announced.

READING It is a long way from Darcey Worster mailing acorn insects to the statehouse. The lake he imagined in the 1930s will soon have a hotel on it. In 2027 the park will be fifty years old; the Shupperts held their land for well over a century, so the park has some catching up to do.

PART VII

Story or record? Play along

Now that you have read the record, try these six. For each claim, make your call: true, false, or no record either way. Then see what the record says.

"Ospreys nest at Potato Creek."

TRUE

Ospreys nest on tall poles near Worster Lake, and in 2018 state biologists named the park among the places they nest.

"The state saved everything the 1969 naturalists asked for."

FALSE

The bog was saved as Swamp Rose. The old-growth Clingenspell Woods was listed as "severely degraded or destroyed" in 1987.

"You can hike a trail into Swamp Rose today."

FALSE

"Potato Creek was one of the release sites for Indiana's returning ospreys."

There is no trail into it today, though a state directory of 1981 says one then wound through it.

FALSE

The 96 young birds of 2003–06 went to Jasper-Pulaski, Minnehaha and Tri-County fish and wildlife areas and Patoka Lake. The park says its ospreys were nesting before the reintroduction.

"The new lodge is the first built in an Indiana state park since 1939."

TRUE

Ground was broken on 19 October 2023 for 120 rooms on the south shore of Worster Lake.

"Deer have shaped the park's spring wildflowers."

TRUE

Studies of fenced plots in 1993 and 1994 found browsing deer had a strong effect on spring wildflowers and young sugar maples.

PART VIII

Questions we answered

1 answered

ANSWERED

What the naturalists asked for What became of the bog and the old-growth woods the 1969 survey asked the state to save?

The bog is Swamp Rose; the Clingenspell Woods was listed as "severely degraded or destroyed" in 1987. Answered 27 October 2026

The whole series as one PDF › (projectscroll.com/data/potato-creek-series.pdf)

PART IX

A timeline

1969 Naturalists ask the state to save a bog and an old-growth woods

1974	Swamp Rose Nature Preserve dedicated, May–October
1975–76	First survey of the preserve: 256 plants, 62 birds
1977	Park dedicated, 6 June
1982	Nature centre and first cabins due to open
1986	*The Deer of Potato Creek*
1987	Clingenspell Woods listed as “severely degraded or destroyed”
Early 1990s	Wetland and prairie restoration begins
2006	Named an Important Bird Area
2018	Ospreys taken off Indiana’s endangered list
2023	Lodge groundbreaking, 19 October
2025	Naragon barn taken down, November
2026	New farm-history markers; the lodge 65 percent built
2027	The lodge expected to open; the park turns fifty

PART X

Test yourself

Ten questions from all three parts. Tap an answer to see whether you are right, and why.

1. **In what year did the *Indiana Gazetteer* describe Potato Creek as “a mill stream”?**

   1833 · 1849 · 1880 · 1927

   Chamberlain’s gazetteer of 1849 is the earliest printed description found; the 1833 gazetteer has no entry. Part 1 › (projectscroll.com/news/before-the-lake-at-potato-creek/)

2. **How many sawmills stood on the park ground on the county map of 1863?**

   Three · One · Five · None

   Green and Redduck’s, Samuel Gard’s and P. Walsmith’s, each with its mill pond. Part 1 › (projectscroll.com/news/before-the-lake-at-potato-creek/)

3. **Who deeded the land for Porter Rea Cemetery in 1854?**

Peter Waldsmith · Joseph Shuppert · Andrew Huggart · Samuel Gard

Samuel Gard deeded land to trustees for a burial ground on 6 September 1854. Part 1 › (projectscroll.com/news/before-the-lake-at-potato-creek/)

4. **Who founded the Huggart Settlement just east of the park?**

German immigrants · Free Black brothers from Ohio · Shaker missionaries · Railroad workers

The Huggart brothers, free Black men from Miami County, Ohio, entered land there in 1834. Part 1 › (projectscroll.com/news/before-the-lake-at-potato-creek/)

5. **What did Darcey Worster mail to politicians?**

Maple syrup · Photographs of the creek · Insects made of acorns and hickory nuts · Petitions

He “bugged” them with hand-crafted insects to keep the lake idea alive. Part 2 › (projectscroll.com/news/darcy-worsters-dream/)

6. **Who dedicated the park on 6 June 1977?**

Gov. Otis R. Bowen · Gov. Matthew Welsh · Rep. Dick Mangus · Gov. Eric Holcomb

Bowen dedicated it in front of the new beach house and named the lake for Worster. Part 2 › (projectscroll.com/news/darcy-worsters-dream/)

7. **When did Potato Creek become a state park?**

1969 · 1977 · 1978 · 1983

Indiana dropped its State Recreation Area class statewide in 1983. Part 2 › (projectscroll.com/news/darcy-worsters-dream/)

8. **What did the 1969 survey call the bog that became Swamp Rose?**

Summer's Pond | Pear Road Marsh | New-Oak-Road Bog | Clingenspell Bog

In 1987 the state's nature-preserves staff matched New-Oak-Road Bog to Swamp Rose. Part 3 › (projectscroll.com/news/potato-creek-returns-to-the-wild/)

9. **Which bird nests on tall poles near Worster Lake?**

The bald eagle | The osprey | The sandhill crane | The great blue heron

Ospreys, the fish hawks, nest on poles near the water. Part 3 › (projectscroll.com/news/potato-creek-returns-to-the-wild/)

10. **How many guest rooms will the new lodge have?**

50 | 150 | 350 | 120

The lodge on the south shore of Worster Lake will have 120 guest rooms. Part 3 › (projectscroll.com/news/potato-creek-returns-to-the-wild/)

Score: **0** of 10

PART XI

If you go

DOCUMENTED Potato Creek State Park, 25601 State Road 4, North Liberty, is open all year. The nature centre is usually open Friday 11 to 5 and Saturday and Sunday 10 to 4; check with the park for current hours and programs. Bring binoculars for the osprey poles.

✦ NEW FINDING **WHAT'S NEW HERE**

Swamp Rose Nature Preserve (dedicated between May and October 1974) is the "New-Oak-Road Bog" of Lindsey, Schmelz and Nichols (1969); the old-growth Inez

Clingenspell Woods they asked the state to save with it was listed as “severely degraded or destroyed” by the DNR’s nature-preserves staff in 1987 (Bacone and Martin, Tables 1 and 5).

Found by Michael Urbanski [redacted], Project Scroll, 27 October 2026.

▼ What we searched

DNR park and nature-preserve pages; the 1981 Directory of Dedicated Nature Preserves; Preserving Our Natural Heritage (1977); Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science; guidebooks.

The Potato Creek nature centre was built as a “nature center/warming hut,” a cross-country ski rental in winter, due to open in summer 1982 with four picnic areas and the first cabins (DNR, Wander Indiana: 1982 Recreation Guide, p. 17).

Found by Michael Urbanski [redacted], Project Scroll, 27 October 2026.

▼ What we searched

DNR nature-centre and park pages; the Mangus markers; guidebooks of 1983–2000; archive.org full text.

A **new finding** is a fact found in a primary source that we could not find in any published history, article or website we searched. Credit: Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will say so here. All our discoveries › (projectscroll.com/discoveries/)

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Numbers in the text point to this list; entries without a number are further sources we consulted. How we research › (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/) · The libraries behind all our stories › (projectscroll.com/sources/libraries/)

▾ CORRECTIONS (1)

First published 27 October 2026. Like all our pages, it is expanded from time to time with new records, pictures and features. Factual corrections are listed here, with their dates.

27 October 2026 The four osprey release sites of 2003–06 have been named, and Potato Creek was not one of them.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

Research and reporting

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SOURCES	Every fact on this page is drawn from the sources listed above, and each can be checked where it is held.
CORRECTIONS	Errors are corrected on the page, and each correction is noted there.
CONTACT	To report an error or share a record that adds to the story, write to research@projectscroll.com.
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