A Brief Account of the Origin of Glen Echo Park

“Apart from all city noises, set among arching woodland where breezes are cool and shady nooks inviting, a new park has opened up in North Columbus, dedicated to all city people anxious to forget dull care and to find rest after a hard day’s work.”

The Ohio State Journal
July 4, 1909

Glen Echo Park began as part of a subdivision carved out of property owned by the Shattuck heirs. The land was acquired, platted, and marketed by the Columbus Real Estate and Improvement Company, which had incorporated in 1908. The location was significant: it occupied a part of the wooded ravine that extended westward through the Olentangy Amusement Park on the Olentangy River at the end of the streetcar line. An advertisement in the real estate section of the Sunday Columbus Dispatch dated June 20, 1909, invited the public “to visit this beautiful Glen Echo Park which is to become a permanent park for the residents and owners in Indianola Park View Addition.”

This addition was the first planned subdivision outside the Columbus city limits. However, by 1910, the City of Columbus had annexed the entire subdivision, including Glen Echo Park.

A drawing by Billy Ireland in a 1911 volume titled Club Men of Columbus in Caricature pictures the president of the Columbus Real Estate and Improvement Company, E.W. Crayton, with an inscription that reads: “The man who delivered the people of Columbus from narrow lots and noisy streets, and opened up a paradise of beautiful home sites.”

On June 24, 1912, the company sold Glen Echo Park to the City of Columbus. The plat was accepted by an ordinance passed by Columbus City Council, and Glen Echo was dedicated on July 22, 1912 for public park purposes forever.

by Martha Harter Buckalew

1910 Annexation Map Book 12, page 10

 Courtesy of the City of Columbus
FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD

This issue of Ravinia marks the beginning of our year-long centennial celebration of Glen Echo Park located on the border of the University District and south Clintonville. Glen Echo was established as a Columbus City Park in the summer of 1912. While all central Ohio ravines are important to the mission of Friends of the Ravines, Glen Echo certainly holds a special place in our hearts: This once-neglected park has been rejuvenated by more than ten years of restoration work that has transformed the urban woodland—its slopes are now covered with a diversity of native trees, shrubs, and spring ephemerals. In many ways, the restoration of Glen Echo ravine mirrors the many environmental successes that have occurred in central Ohio over the last 20 years. Make sure to mark July 14 on your calendars, as on that date there will be a 100th-year birthday celebration for this very special park.

It does not seem possible, given the outstanding success of our first annual ravine art contest, that our recently concluded second annual contest may have been even better! The entries were exceptional and illustrated once again that our fragile ravine ecosystems are in good hands with the next generation of conservationists and their beautiful vision of the environment. Please visit our website (www.friendsoftheravines.org) to see several examples of the artwork created by these gifted young artists. Friends of the Ravines intends to continue this tradition and will encourage even more of these exceptional students to participate in this annual event. Stay tuned for information later in the year.

Still to come this spring, our annual plant walk on May 12 will feature a special hike in remote ravine areas in Battelle Darby Metro Park, areas not usually accessible to the public. Don’t miss this unique botanical experience! You can go to www.friendsoftheravines.org for more information.

As in past years, 2012 will be chock full of exciting events focused on the protection, preservation, and restoration of ravine areas in central Ohio. Friends of the Ravines remains committed to this mission, and we offer special thanks to our amazing membership, whose generous support helps make these efforts possible!

Brian Gara, Chair, Board of Trustees

NEWS FROM THE RAVINES

Iuka Ravine is now home to numerous native woodland plants—including Christmas ferns and spice bushes—that have been rescued from an area being logged in the Hocking Hills.

Glen Echo Ravine celebrates its 100th birthday this year. Friends of the Ravines, Friends of the Lower Olentangy Watershed, the Lower Olentangy Urban Arboretum, and ALTernatives received a grant from Chase Bank which will help fund the celebration planned on July 14, 2012. Go to friendsoftheravines.org for more details.

Bill Moose Ravine has lost one of its guardian angels. Dave Snyder, Wesley Glen resident and one of the first certified arborists in Ohio, passed away in the Fall of 2011. His legacy lives on. Dave identified and tagged numerous trees along the Wesley Glen Memorial Trail on the northern bank of Bill Moose Ravine. An article titled “Dave Snyder, Retired, but Not Tired” appear in the Fall/Winter 2011 issue of Ravinia.

Walhalla Ravine residents caught Columbia Gas dumping drilling waste into the storm sewer. Officials from the Ohio EPA and Columbus’ Sediment and Erosion Protection Program stepped in and ordered Columbia Gas to install filters and dams to contain the sediment.

Remember!

You can call the city’s 311 line to report illegal dumping in area ravines.

Columbus 200/Glen Echo Park 100 Celebration

When? Saturday July 14, 2012
Where? Glen Echo Park

Go to friendsoftheravines.org for details.

This event was made possible, in part, by a grant from Chase Bank.
In my story “Westmont and the Ravine,” young “Westy” Westmont spends idyllic summers during the late 1940s and early 50s playing in the Glen Echo Ravine with his visiting cousins from Washington, D.C. They improvise stories of knights or pirates and deck themselves in costumes and paraphernalia from Westmont’s hoard of hats, capes, plumes, boots, jackets, and a collection of family heirlooms including his grandfather’s Spanish American War swords and his uncle’s uniforms from World War I. It was a sad summer for Westy the year the cousins signed up for an organized camp near their home and ceased their annual summer visits to Columbus. As the text reads, “He could see for himself what was coming. Although he held out for a year, he finally agreed that he would follow Robert and Richard into what was represented to him as a way to meet new friends and learn new skills at an organized camp of his own. But he knew it was mainly an unwanted initiation into proper adolescence. He had loved being a child.”

There we can leave Timothy Westmont. As for John Matthias, he is, or at least was, pretty much like young Westy in those days. In the early to mid 1950s I grew up right at the edge of the ravine. Although our house had a Glen Echo Drive address, we approached it from Arcadia Avenue. 2642 was the first house east of the Arcadia bridge over Glen Echo Drive. (Wisely enough, it has been renumbered 414 Arcadia; I can find a photograph of it on Google maps.) The hill directly down into the ravine was fairly steep, and we were inclined to lose our footing and tumbled rather than stepped down the slippery shale to get to the road. We did indeed go down the ravine in costumes, trying desperately to avoid meeting anyone else as we continued living in our imaginary world.

My school from kindergarten to 12th grade was the University School on the Ohio State campus, so my school friends lived all over town. My neighborhood friends were mainly those few who didn’t think it was disloyal to the community of North Side kids to attend the wrong school. Some thought the University School was for misfit geniuses, some thought it was for the mentally challenged, and others thought it was for juvenile delinquents. But it had been founded by some idealistic followers of John Dewey’s philosophy of education, and it was open to anyone who wanted to pay the modest entry fees. The place stressed cultivating one’s imagination, and that I did with a vengeance (ending up, in fact, as a 70-year-old poet with thirty books behind him).
The house was a simple frame dwelling (now evidently covered in aluminum siding) with a kitchen, dining room, and living room on the first floor and three bedrooms on the second. The door that we used was on the Arcadia side, except in the spring when birds would inevitably nest in the lilac bushes that spilled over one part of the small porch. Then we used the door on the Glen Echo side until the fledglings had flown. The old rotary telephone (Jefferson 3332), from which I hatched childhood plots and nervously called my first girlfriends, stood on a table beside the Glen Echo door. In the back, opening out from the living room, was a large screened porch that stretched the entire width of the house. We spent as much time on the porch as possible, especially in the hot summers before air conditioning. Sometimes we even slept on the porch, trying to keep cool. The backyard was fairly large and ended just behind two wonderful oak trees that grew to a great height only a few feet from each other. (Alas: I understand that these were cut down in 1970 to make room for a house built at the back of the lot.) One branch of the oak nearest the house had an almost perfectly horizontal limb at exactly the right height for a swing. I’ll quote just one run of lines from a poem in my book Northern Summer, which remembers my father:

Or again: near the house of my childhood
On a street called Glen Echo Drive
There was a tree, an oak,
Where my father swung me in a swing –
His long thin fingers
And his firm damp palms on the small of my back
I feel still –
And my bare and grimy feet going up through the leaves!

Delivery men of all kinds came to the Arcadia door: milkman, bread man, grocery boy from the small grocery store on Summit, paper boy, strawberry man with a wonderful street cry that took one back to the middle ages, even an iceman (we had an ice box at first, and not a proper refrigerator) and various odd-job men looking for work. My father in those days was a Columbus Municipal Court judge, and he would sometimes hire people he had sentenced to jail to work in the yard once they’d been released. I found these “criminals” all very romantic and spent a lot of time talking to them. They were predictably enough embarrassed when I’d ask them enthusiastically to describe their crimes with my father standing near by. I got to know one of them pretty well, and one day he said to me, “Johnny, I want to tell you something. Your dad’s a tough judge, but he’s fair. We all know that. You should know it, too.” No one had ever spoken to me like that about my father, and I was very much impressed.

Pete Robinson remembers my father for some of his Rube Goldberg inventions. There was a hole he cut in the basement landing, for example, through which he installed a “tin can chute.” All you had to do was open the basement door and toss the can in the chute, from which it dropped into a large barrel under the stairs. Then there was the “dog wire.” This was tightly strung from just above the back porch screen door to a tree about sixty yards away at a diagonal from the house. From this he ran a lengthy rope with a roller at the top and a dog’s collar latch at the bottom. Our dog could then enjoy a good long run of its own without having to be taken for walks. Later, he constructed an “air plane” for me to ride on the wire myself. It was a kind of swing seat with wings attached. He’d pull me along the wire in my “plane” and I’d bomb everything in sight from high above the German cities. Pete’s brother Bill describes in this issue how the lawn was mowed over at his Cliffside house. At ours, my father had a method of his own. He would attach my two cousins and me to the lawnmower with ropes so that we pulled it along like a team of horses. My mother was not working during those years and in the summers when we went down the ravine to play or off into the neighborhood on our bikes, she’d say, “Come home when the street lights come on.” No one said anything about lunch: somebody’s mother would always give you lunch if you hung around looking hungry.

It amazes me in retrospect how free we all were to roam where we would from dawn until dusk. Bill Robinson’s memories are so sharp and exact that I don’t think I need to dwell on all the possibilities. What he doesn’t say, however, is how unlikely it would be to have this freedom today. Down the ravine we’d go, and who knew what we were going to do or when we’d come back. My grandchildren all have very closely managed and monitored activities. We had nothing but freedom—which was everything—freedom of a kind I haven’t experienced since. No one thought we’d be abducted or murdered. If we got hurt—and we often did—we’d get patched up or sent to the doctor. If there were tough kids down the ravine, we’d steer clear of them. In the winter we’d come back sopping wet and freezing cold from sledding in what often became watery slush. We’d take a bath (not a shower) and warm up with a cup of hot chocolate. Even during “polio season” no one seemed to worry. When we went to the Hudson Theater...
on a Saturday morning, we’d stay all day, eating nothing but popcorn and candy bars. Having seen the double feature once, we’d get some more popcorn and another candy bar and see the double feature again. One time, during the winter of the famous “Blizzard Bowl” at Ohio State, I went to the movies in bright sunshine and walked out into five feet of snow—or at least what seemed to be five feet at the time. Of course we all spent the next several days sledging in the ravine and building snow forts—some of them of enormous sophistication with labyrinthine tunnels and very high walls.

When I gave up playing the fantasy games, activities down the ravine became a different order of things. By that time I knew Pete Robinson, and between us we got into a good deal of trouble. One thing we liked to do was to drop water balloons and paper bags full of dust and debris on cars passing under the Arcadia bridge. We delighted particularly in delivering our missiles directly into the front seat of convertibles—remember 1950s convertibles? We’d go down the ravine and look around for what might be going on. We used peashooters a lot.

We’d climb up the hills of houses fronting on the ravine and attack their rear windows after it got dark. We’d jump out of bushes and frighten little kids on Halloween. At some point we graduated from peashooters to BB guns. Mostly we only went “hunting” and did some target practice. But once we met some other kids with BB guns and decided to have a war. The rules were strict: “Don’t shoot at anyone above the shoulders.” That may have been the time, in fact, when the Robinsons’ window was shot out, another thing Bill writes about in his memoir. Weapons of all kinds were cool. Along with the BB gun, I also had a pretty good bow and a quiver of arrows. These too we shot at anything that moved, and we used cherry bombs to create an “atmosphere.” Somehow no one was ever seriously injured.

One of our last pranks continues to frighten me in retrospect. The ravine in those days was clearly a lovers’ lane at night, but we were never sure what was going on in all the parked cars. One night we crept up on a car and pounded furiously with our fists on both sides. Out of the back door jumped a half-dressed man cursing and screaming. He chased us almost all the way home, just short of the Arcadia bridge. I think that was the last time we ventured down into the ravine after dark. Maybe the half-dressed man was a specter from the future, when freedom such as we enjoyed would have to be curtailed out of a prudent sense of parental responsibility.

I was glad to discover that my old house is still standing. It was a “childhood home” in every sense of the word, and all my good early memories are associated with it. I still can’t smell lilacs in the spring without immediately recalling the great billowing bush at the Arcadia entrance to the house. And the scent of lilacs brings back a recollection of times I spent in the ravine and what it meant to be a child there in the 1950s. As for Timothy “Westy” Westmont, his story isn’t yet finished, so I can’t tell you what became of him. But I am sure that he will feel, as I do, that it was a great privilege to have been allowed a brief Tom Sawyer-Huckleberry Finn-like existence “going down the ravine.”

John Matthias was born in Columbus in 1941 and spent the first seventeen years of his life at 2642 Glen Echo Drive. Both his father and grandfather were justices of the Ohio Supreme Court. Matthias has published some thirty books of poetry, fiction, memoir, criticism, and collaborative translation. He taught English for many years at the University of Notre Dame, and continues to edit Notre Dame Review.
The glen was my domain: I think I knew all of it, from the railroad tracks behind 4th Street all the way down to the Calumet bridge—and especially every inch between the railroad tracks and the Indianola Avenue bridge, including Glen Echo Drive. Depending on my objective, I had four main entrances to the glen. If I was riding my bike or sledding, I went down Parkview Drive—the road that started at Cliffside Drive and 4th Street. If I wanted to get down in a hurry, I went straight down from in front of our house at 509 Cliffside Drive. If I wanted to be sure that I stayed clean, I went down the steps from Cliffside Drive—the scenic route. But if I wanted the fastest path to the playground, I went over the stone wall at Cliffside and Summit. I venture to say that by the time I was 12, I owned the glen, and no one could catch me if I did not want them to.

The glen had at least three concrete tables with their concrete benches. The first one was east of the first bridge, in the flat, grassy area just below “the cliffs” (the steep, denuded side) to the south of the creek. The second and the third tables were west of the second bridge at the Indianola Avenue end of the glen. The playground consisted of one set of “monkey bars,” one three-board teeter-totter, one three- or four-seat swing (each seat was the standard flat board of that period), one not-too-large slide, and a “basketball court” (dirt, except when hard rains turned it into mud) with a “woven wire” backboard and (occasionally) a net. Right next to the basketball court was the house containing men’s and women’s toilets (with sinks and running water). We also had a drinking fountain over by the slides and swings, along with a couple of equipment storage boxes with large locks—to be opened only by the official Columbus Recreation and Parks employee. (I remember that our recreation employee one year was a student at the OSU dental school.)

Many of the mothers of the younger children would go to the playground, not only to look after their children but also to socialize and play cards as well. Columbus Recreation and Parks had several programs, one being a bike race. Kids of each age group would race against each other at their park, and the fastest in each group would advance to the regionals. (Our regional was held at Goodale Park.) Then, I think, the first two or three in each group advanced to the finals at Franklin Park, or the races at Goodale and Franklin parks (both were finals, but in different years). There also were many craft programs in the park, as well as organized games. I can’t believe that I spent so much of my summers from ages 10 to 15 in this playground, with regular excursions up and down the glen.

When evening came, the glen was essentially off limits for the kids. So home base seemed to be the intersection of Glenmawr Avenue and Cliffside Drive overlooking the glen, where we frequently played hide-and-seek or kick-the-can in the dusk. Those were the games that the boys and girls played together. Except for football, basketball, or baseball, the boys and girls were usually together in their activities. That included just hanging around the yard or on the front porch, talking and listening.
There was one incident reported about our house in the local paper (the *Northside Booster*) when living right across from the glen was not an advantage. We had plenty of trees in “our glen” right across the street. In fact, there was one large tree directly across the street where some of the more ambitious neighborhood boys built a rudimentary tree house that could easily accommodate three, four, or five boys at one time. Access was by climbing a ladder of 2’ x 1” x 4” boards nailed up the tree. However, I was not a member of the club that built and used this wonderful facility.

The story begins with my family’s return from one of our vacations. Mom and Dad noticed that we had some new “ventilation” in the four front windows of their bedroom. Dad called the police, and the news people got ahold of it. Nothing was ever resolved; the members of the “club” were known, but there was no indication that they were the BB gun sharpshooters. I know that Dad assumed they were the culprits and laid the blame on them.

I did not limit my play solely to the glen. I also played in a number of other places: I had a season pass to the Olympic swimming pool, which was only about two miles north of the glen on Indianola. Medary Avenue School also had a summer playground similar to the glen’s; it had a (gravel) baseball diamond, had a lot more action, and was next to our shopping mecca (the three blocks of Summit between Hudson and Tompkins, Hudson between Summit and Indianola, and Indianola between Hudson and Duncan). Bike trips were for real exploration. The Olentangy and Scioto rivers were popular destinations. These were just some of the other ways to spend time around the neighborhood.

I don’t expect that the creek in our glen is as much of a creek today as it was then. It wasn’t deep enough or sufficiently oxygenated to support fish, but that didn’t keep a boy away from “fishing” for crawdads. They were plentiful, as long as you knew the spots (immediately upstream from the eastern-most bridge over the creek and just under the cliff). I would watch the “water striders” (insects that are able to walk on water) as a distraction. There was a large weeping willow—just east of that first flat area before the first bridge—where somebody built a tree house. The storm-water sewer runoff near Cliffside and Summit originally was surrounded by bricks, creating a picturesque waterfall: so picturesque that people often came to paint it. Then it was replaced with a corrugated, galvanized pipe about 12”–16” in diameter that stuck out about a foot or two. Before long, “rusty water” left its stain on the dark blue-gray slate, making it less picturesque.

Bill Robinson caught crawdads in Glen Echo creek just under the cliffs.

The glen was a very popular place after a good snow. The road that ran down from Cliffside and 4th was clearly the most popular section, since it was the steepest. The ride usually ended after you had crossed the first bridge and was stopped by an uphill grade. The next most popular sledding spot ended near the first one; however, this one started at the top of the northern hillside; it was almost a perfect southern route that cut a straight path through the trees. One could go much faster on this slope—often referred to as “The Nutcracker”—for obvious reasons. Twenty or thirty yards east of The Nutcracker was a more daring sled ride—more daring because it ended in a drop-off like a small ski jump. Most of the sledding was done in these areas. But some thrill-seekers would consider going down the hillside just immediately south of the Indianola bridge; it was an awesomely steep ride, with a fairly small, flat recovery area at the bottom. Occasionally, a person would do damage to his or her knee by running into a large rock at the bottom of the hill.
Another sports venue was the boulevard on 4th between Hudson and Arcadia; it was our football field when we were between 9 and 13. Bill Miller, Jimmy Ring, Tom Huff, Buddy Wareham, and Pete Cline generally were the first ones there (along with me) for our football activities. If we had only three or four people, no problem: we would play “throw up and tackle,” which wasn’t as gross as it sounds. One person of a knot of three would throw the football up, which one of the others would catch; then the people without the football would try to tackle the receiver as he tried to make forward progress. We could do this over and over for at least a half-hour before becoming sufficiently bored or tired, or if enough people (six, with three on each side) arrived so we could play a semblance of a game.

An element that added spice to the games was the elm tree stumps. The Dutch elm disease had swept through Columbus earlier, killing all of our elms. The city discharged its responsibility by cutting them down and hauling the wood away. Unfortunately, the city thought that leaving a three-foot high stump was O.K. All the trees, bushes, and stumps in the boulevard were in bounds; the out-of-bounds line simply was the curb that separated the boulevard from the street. When somebody ran into a tree or a stump, it added excitement to the game. The stumps were also dangerous in that, when running into a tree, players could use their arms to absorb the hit, whereas the stumps tended to be too low for that. We would wear shoulder pads and helmets, if we owned them.

In the spring of 1945, Dad brought a guest home to meet me, a very special guest—Les Horvath, winner of the 1944 Heisman Trophy (the first one for Ohio State). Les Horvath was a student in the dental school, where Dad was head of the pathology department. Not only did Les shake my hand and talk to me, but he had a large, shiny, autographed picture of himself in an action pose, with the “22” right there for all to see. It didn’t stop there: he also brought a genuine Ohio State helmet. The chin strap was broken, but—what the hey—it was a real Ohio State football helmet, and it was all mine. It was all leather and black, as were all football helmets (except for Michigan’s, which had the rays of gold stripes on the top even then). You can bet that I wore that helmet at the 4th St.
games—which turned out to be a handicap. The helmet was far too big for a 10-year-old boy with a medium-to-small head. Upon first contact, my helmet would normally turn so that the ear flap was in front of my face (remember: no chin strap), and I would have to run looking through an “ear hole.” Now remember those elm stumps: they would stop me in my tracks. I have no idea what happened to either the photograph or the helmet; I am assuming they were left behind when the Robinsons (Mom, Dad, Pete) moved out to Prairie Village, Kansas, in 1958.

To be continued in the next issue of Ravinia.

Cliffside Drive

Robert Osbourne Chedeayne (1897–1981) came to Columbus in 1927 to study at the Columbus College of Art and Design. His artistry quickly earned him national recognition, and he was inducted into the Columbus Hall of Fame. The painting depicts the corner of Glenmawr Avenue and Cliffside Drive on a snowy day.

(Courtesy of Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio: Gift of Orlando A. Miller 1937)
Friends of the Ravines’ 2012
More Art Contest Winners

2D-Visual Art Winner of the 2012 Art Contest
Grades 3–5
Saipriga Rajapogal—Grade 3, Winterset Elementary

Haiku Winner of the 2012 Art Contest
Grades K–2
Alex Phillips—Grade 2, Indianola Informal K–8

The Leaf
Green, spicy painting,
Red, floating, soaring, falling
pretty, happy leaf.

All Art Contest winners are listed on friendsoftheravines.org.
YES! I WANT TO BE A SUPPORTING MEMBER OF FRIENDS OF THE RAVINES.

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   ___ Planning Community Forums   ___ Removing Invasive Plants in Ravines   ___ Becoming an On-Call Volunteer

My special area of expertise is _________________________________.

My favorite ravine is _________________________________.

Friends of the Ravines, PO Box 82021, Columbus, Ohio 43202
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CONTRIBUTORS

Martha Harter Buckalew Columbus Museum of Art
Brian Gara Sherrill Massey
John Matthias Bill Robinson

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Submissions and suggestions are welcome.

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Website: www.friendsoftheravines.org
e-mail: mhbuckalew@sbcglobal.net

Ravinia
P.O. Box 82021
Columbus, Ohio 43202

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