



OAK HERITAGE

CONSERVANCY

Protecting Southeast Indiana's Natural Heritage

Fall 2016

Forest and Family Legacy Protected

Steve and Mary Ann Simmons donated Lebline Woods Preserve to OHC this summer. The following is an excerpt of Steve's essay about the 28-acre riparian forest. Read the full essay on our website, www.oakheritageconservancy.org.

By Steve Simmons

I hold a tattered paper; it's a land deed dating to the early 1870s. The surname on the deed is spelled "Libline," which is an error. It should have been spelled Lebline, which was the name of my great-great grandfather.

I never knew my "Grandpa Lebline," as he was referenced when I was a boy; he died in 1913. Yet in my mind John stands as one of the most noteworthy persons in my family's history. This is the story of one of his most enduring legacies.

Grandpa Lebline sailed from Le Havre, France to New York City in 1848. Family lore states that his initial command of English wasn't good, so instead of going directly to his intended destination of Rockford, Indiana, he ended up 130 miles away at Rockport, IN, along the Ohio River. He worked for a few years in St. Louis, MO, before finally making his way back to Rockford in 1854.



Steve's elders remember the bluebells carpeting this forest. In April 2016, they were in full bloom.

Rockford was a thriving town when John arrived, but over the years it experienced economic decline. By the 1880s, it was a sleepy by-way with few businesses remaining.

I know nothing about how John and his wife, Katharine, fared during this turbulent time. It's probable that the town's economic decline helped make it possible for him to make land acquisitions, including Lebline Woods, for it surely must have been a buyer's market.

John and Katharine's family grew, and eventually included granddaughter Christine. As a young girl, she had a special love for nature and a strong affinity for the area of her grandfather's farm associated with the Leblin Woods. She and her girlfriends would traipse along White River after church on nature outings, still dressed in their Sunday garb. It was fitting that Christine inherited this part of the Leblin farm in 1938.

In addition to its natural features, like the wildflowers that carpeted the forest floor each spring, Leblin Woods also helped the family economically through timber sales.

Once Christine acquired the property she began planting black walnut trees into Leblin Woods to increase the timber value. She'd sometimes take walnuts she had gathered from trees in her yard, load them into a coal bucket and take them to Leblin Woods to "heel 'em in." This involved

walking through the forest dropping walnuts to the ground at intervals and then pressing them into the soil with the heel of her boot. Although I'm sure some of these walnuts—perhaps most—were subsequently claimed by squirrels, a few surely took root and contributed to a future harvest of marketable trees.

I don't recall the first time in the 1950s that I visited Leblin Woods with my Grandmother Christine. Yet I do remember the last time we were there together. I was making a short visit to her farm during early-April 1960; I was thirteen years old. I had my Brownie Hawkeye camera along with me; I planned to take photographs of some of the landmarks on her farm.

One day while I was there she indicated that she needed to go over to Leblin Woods to "heel in" some walnuts she'd gathered that previous fall. "We'd better go now, Steve, before the poison ivy grows up later this



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Our mission is to preserve, protect and conserve land and water resources that have special natural, agricultural, scenic, or cultural significance. Oak Heritage Conservancy will help landowners personally protect their land so future generations can enjoy the rural landscapes of southeast Indiana.

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(Clockwise) Christine Leblin and a friend stand beside White River across from Leblin Woods. The binoculars in Christine's hand suggest they were on a nature outing. (February 1905). Loading a log onto a truck near Leblin Woods (c. 1920s). Christine in the Woods (April 1960).



spring," she remarked. I welcomed the opportunity to experience another adventure with her.

We loaded the coal bucket filled with walnuts into the trunk of her large Buick. I settled into the front bench seat beside her and off we went, across the Rockford Bridge over White River and then down the county road. After a half mile or so, she pulled to the side of the road near where a small farm lane led back to Leblin Woods. "We'll leave the car here and walk the rest of the way," she said.

After a ten-minute hike, we came to Leblin Woods. I was carrying the coal bucket, and as we entered the forest she quickly instructed me in the proper technique for heeling in walnuts. I set the bucket down in a small clearing. We proceeded to take walnuts from the bucket and walk deliberately in a pattern radiating out from the bucket like spokes on

a wheel. Along each transect we scattered walnuts and pressed them into the soil with our heels.

We finished our planting chore and my grandmother suggested we take a walk through the woods to look for wildflowers and other signs of spring. I don't remember what we saw, but I did take a couple of photographs that are treasures for me now.

After we returned from the river and retrieved our coal bucket, she expressed some disappointment that we hadn't seen any bluebells in bloom. "They'll be thick as hair on a dog's back in this woods in a couple of weeks, Steve. Too bad you won't be here to see them."

"Oh, I'll be back to see them someday, Grandmother," I replied.

National Geographic Featured Photographer to Speak at OHC's October 15th Annual Dinner

The photos are sepia toned and so detailed that they almost appear to be line drawings. Joshua White's photos focus on often overlooked objects like seedpods and insects. The photos encourage us to pause and consider these "background objects."

His collection, "Photographic Survey of the American Yard," was recently featured in *National Geographic*.

White grew up in southeast Indiana, near Aurora. He now teaches at Appalachian State University in North Carolina, but he's travelling to Indiana to present at our Annual Dinner on October 15th. White says he is honored to help promote conservation in Indiana.

White is sure to impress, but he is not the only highlight of the evening.

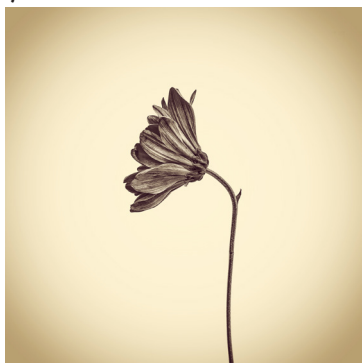
Our setting is a recently restored nineteenth-century church in historic Lower Madison. Admission includes White's presentation, a fine dining experience, a silent auction with quality items, and an update on our

progress, including newly protected land, programs for the public, and partnerships.

Only 60 seats are available, so reservations are required. Invite friends, and share a lovely evening together.

To RSVP, send a check for \$30 per guest to OHC, P.O. Box 335, Hanover, Indiana 47243.

(Clockwise) Lightning Bug, *Photuris* sp.
Luna Moth, *Actias luna*. Daisy, Family
Asteraceae.



*You are cordially invited to
OHC's Annual Dinner on
October 15, 2016, 6:30pm
at Poplar Place, a restored 1800's church,
409 Poplar Street, in historic Madison*

Your \$30 admission includes:

- ▶ Presentation by *National Geographic*
Featured Photographer Joshua White
- ▶ Catered, fine dining experience with cash bar
offering local beers and wines
- ▶ Silent auction, including one of White's prints
and other fine items
- ▶ An update on OHC's work

Capturing the Beauty of Farmland

When you picture a farm, do you imagine sandhill cranes and zebra tiger swallowtails? How about a summer sunset through sycamore trees or fog over a wetland?

Farms in southern Indiana often include a diversity of ecosystems. We are hosting a photography contest to highlight the beauty of working farms, and to encourage community members to consider how farmland helps contribute to the character of our rural communities.

Why a photo contest? Photography is participatory and fun. We hope to engage new people of all ages, from around southeast Indiana.

Why now? A new bridge is opening on Interstate-65, increasing access between Louisville, KY, and Indiana. We anticipate that the easier commute will lead to increased development of farmland and natural areas in southern Indiana.

We want to give communities an opportunity to consider the value of intact, undeveloped open space, natural areas, and working farms. We also want to share that we stand ready to help protect their land.

The photo contest – and the photo exhibits and land preservation workshops that will follow – are a collaboration with George Rogers



Capturing, Continued

Clark Land Trust. Their group focuses on farmland preservation in southern Indiana. OHC focuses on natural area conservation in southeast Indiana. Our efforts are complementary, so we have agreed to refer landowners to each other and partner on projects when we can.

This project is our first opportunity to work together. Help us start this collaboration by entering the photo contest and encouraging your friends to enter, as well.



We invite you to submit your photos of farmland and join the conversation about farmland and natural area preservation. Photos by Brian Lowry.

This project is generously funded by the Indiana Arts Commission.

Enter the Contest

Submit your farmland photo by October 31, 2016. Email your name, address, phone number, and category - plus your photo - to enter. Full directions are available on our website, www.oakheritageconservancy.org. Categories include:

Wildlife & Wildflowers
Cropland, Pasture, & Livestock

Wetlands, Creeks, Prairie, & Forests
Farmstead, Barns, & People

Up to 15 winning photos will be printed and mounted, then displayed as part of a travelling exhibit and landowner workshops that will raise awareness about land conservation in southern Indiana. Winners will receive their mounted photo as a prize next spring.

Join OHC and Engage Your Passion

If you share a vision of protecting Indiana's resources and special places, please contact us and join with the Oak Heritage Conservancy.

*Work with us to protect
southeast Indiana's natural heritage
for the generations to come.*

Join OHC Today

You can now join online, or complete this page and mail it, along with your payment, to Oak Heritage Conservancy, P.O. Box 335, Hanover, Indiana 47243.

____ Student - \$10

____ Cornerstone - \$100-\$499

____ Individual - \$25

____ Sponsor - \$500 - \$999

____ Organization - \$25

____ Benefactor - \$1000+

____ Family - \$40

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

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Thank you for your support!

Donate Online

Online donations have never been easier. Simply visit our website, www.oakheritageconservancy.org, and click "Donate."

Your donation will be processed through PayPal, which is secure and trusted. Like all donations to Oak Heritage Conservancy, your donation will be tax deductible.



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