

Lebline Woods Nature Preserve



This narrative is an excerpt from an essay by Steve Simmons, who, together with his wife Mary Ann, donated Lebline Woods Nature Preserve.

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 nature preserve 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 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 returning to Rockford in 1854.

Rockford was a thriving town when he arrived, but over the years it experienced

decline. By the 1880s, it was a sleepy by-way with few businesses remaining. 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 the farm associated with Lebline Woods. She and her girlfriends would traipse along White River after church on nature outings. It was fitting that Christine inherited this part of the Lebline farm in 1938.

Once Christine acquired the property, she began planting black walnut trees into Lebline 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 Lebline 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 Lebline 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 Lebline 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 spring," she remarked. I welcomed another adventure with her.



OAK HERITAGE

CONSERVANCY

Marvel at the Bluebells.

"There grew the loveliest spring flowers, and especially bluebells," wrote Matilda Lebline years ago, and was she ever right! The spring wildflowers at Lebline Woods are a sight to behold. Visit in April to see them for yourself.

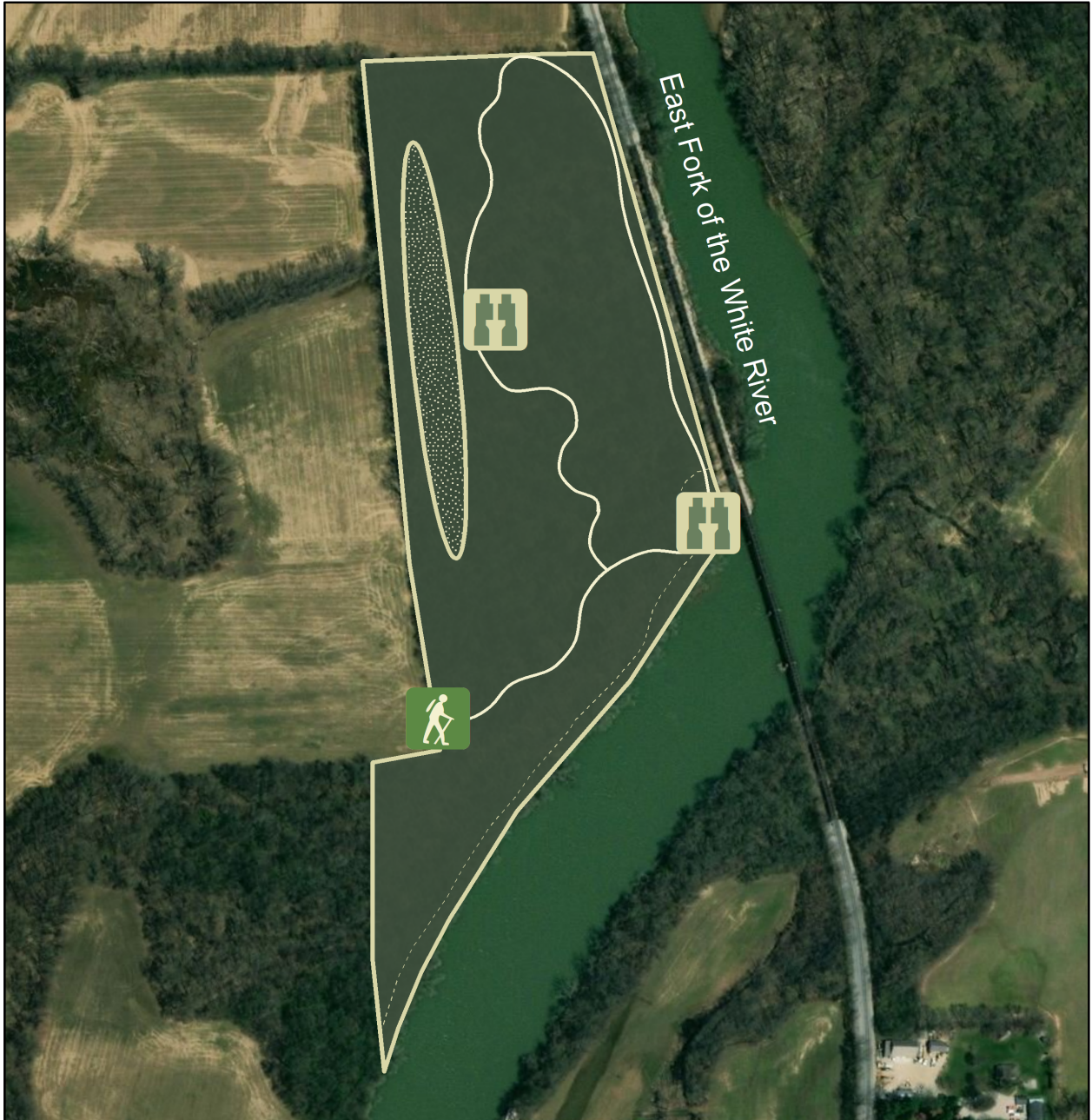
Look for evidence of the river at work.

This forest provides an important "ecosystem service" (that's a specific, tangible service that nature provides to people): flood control. The trees' deep roots help keep the river's banks in place and when the forest floods, it's absorbing energy from the river, thereby protecting downstream farm fields and communities.



Listen for the train – and history.

The Lebline family called this the "Railroad Woods." The Leblines owned this forest before there was a railroad, and stewarded their farm for generations. The first Lebline, John, came to southern Indiana in 1870's. Over the years, the Railroad Woods became the family favorite – a perfect



Points of Interest



Educational Sign



Observation



Parking



Trailhead

Streams

Trails

Minor Contours

Major Contours

Property Lines Light

Habitat Type

Access

Hay Field

Immature Forest

Mature Forest

No Access

Old Growth Forest

Open/Meadow Area

Open Water

Pollinator Habitat

Restoration Area-Forest

Restoration Area-Pollinator

Native Wildflowers

0 0.04 0.08 0.16 Miles

