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For: December 16, 2017

Parks. Henry David Thoreau turned 200 this July 12 and he had something to say in his short corporeal life - about parks. He noted that every township should have *“a park, or rather a primitive forest, of 500 or a thousand acres, where a stick should never be cut for fuel, a common possession forever, for instruction and recreation.”* We have not come that far, but our parks are common possessions of the highest order.

This year has highlighted this for me. Let us look at a first few examples, starting with something familiar to Almanacs: the Calendar.

The Signal Tree. I was perusing the 2018 Calendar themed with “Trees That Inspire Us” from Davey Tree, kindly provided by Dave Goerig of Davey Resource Group and Greg Ina, Executive Vice-President of the Davey Tree Expert Company. There it was, right there with spruces from Alberta, coastal live oaks from Texas, golden larches from Virginia and coastal redwoods from California, the pick for September (my birth month) is...

The Signal Tree bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) from Cascade Valley Metro Park here in Akron. The Davey calendar notes: *“Hundreds of years ago, when American Indians roamed the land of Northeast Ohio, it's said that they created special landmarks to mark certain locations and paths. It's still a mystery how this 3-pronged bur oak got its shape, but its grandness is clear.. Today, this 300-year-old bur oak, known as the Indian Signal Tree stands tall...”*

I confess that I had misplaced the Signal Tree in my memory. Decades ago, members of the Akron Tree Committee met there to discuss tree tours in the Akron area. Bill Snyder, grounds manager at Stan Hywet and wonderful garden columnist for the Akron Beacon Journal and Carroll Miller, longtime city arborist for Akron, Jim Gray from Stow, Tom Riccardi from Goodyear and Rick Riccardi from the University of Akron, what a group.

So, visit the Signal Tree this winter and spring. And read it here: as sure as winter comes, spring shall blossom forth with a new iteration of the Akron Tree Committee to plan a tree program for autumn 2018, commencing from the Signal Tree at the Cascade Valley Metro Park, Chuckery Area of Summit County Metro Parks. It is an Almanac guarantee.

Secret Arboretum. Next from OSU's Secret Arboretum in Wooster, a park in all but name. Dave Goerig of Davey Resource Group came down recently to take a look at the area in the arboretum that was left to recover naturally from the 2010 130-mph tornado that knocked down over 1500 large trees. Most of the damaged area was replanted with more trees than were lost, but the area past the rhododendron valley is regenerating without our help.

This was deliberate and has yielded a great deal of useful scientific information. Dr. Charles Goebel and his students made observations on stream and other biological systems in this area prior to the tornado. The before and after observations provide great insights on stream health and species composition of animals following such a natural, albeit violent, event.

Of course, opening up the canopy, with resultant light penetration to the forest floor changes much and, for example, allows for insinuation of invasive species such as English ivy, European euonymus and common privet.

This too is instructive for a research institution such as OSU and Dave was exploring ideas of perhaps developing a modest nature trail through the area.

As we slogged through the still rough area of downed trees, we came upon a red pine with an old wooden sign that said...red pine. Eureka! Not so surprising, but at least for Dave and I, we had not realized that Edmund Secrest, for whom the Arboretum was named, the first state forester of the State of Ohio, the once director of the Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station, on this site had put one of his forestry plots.

Here some of those red pines still stand. They are amidst numerous red pine brethren and fellow travelers that fell in the 2010 tornado and a few red pines that fell on the 100-mph November 2017 tornado that swept through mostly the same area of the Arboretum. These still standing stalwarts and the views they provide looking back westward across the valley should provide a great focal point for the proposed trail. And stalwart retiring Secrest Arboretum curator Joe Cochran and myself have pledged to lead the charge in helping blaze the trail. In honor of Secrest – and Thoreau.

Coal Ovens, For our next park, let's look at the Cherry Valley Beehive Coke Ovens city park in Leetonia, Ohio, 62 miles from Akron and 26 miles from Youngstown. This is a wonderful story not of ashes to ashes (the emerald ash tree ecological disaster), but of carbon to carbon. Start with the Carboniferous (literally “coal-bearing”) Age from 360-300 million years ago. Plants of this period, including cycads, giant seed-ferns, primitive relatives of our current gymnosperms (modern-day pines and spruces), early versions of club-mosses and others, became eventually coal, powering much of the modern Industrial Revolution.

In Leetonia and nearby areas, coal was purified into coke in small hobbit-hole-like ovens, the coke then used as fuel for iron and steel producing furnaces. These Cherry Valley Coke Ovens were constructed starting in 1866, eventually producing over 70,000 tons of coke at their peak. In time they were abandoned, but 205 of these coke ovens are still there in the park in various states, some intact, some crumbling and collapsed, some overgrown with trees (carbon again!). It is quite a sight. Trees and other plants now adorn the site of the ovens,

Carbon to coal to coke to carbon. Whatever we think about our modern energy economy this site is something to C and to ponder as we think about long-term and short-term history (see Bruce Springsteen). You can pick up a chunk of slag from the ovens, which were within view of smokestacks once rising in the near distance. Today in the park Bill Merdich and others continue to work on nature trails, tree plantings, and educational programs, including on May 10. with “Things Go Better With Coke (Ovens)”.

Oh, yes, Springsteen, and his song “Youngstown”.

Here in Northeast Ohio

Back in eighteen-o-three

James and Danny Heaton

found the ore that was linin' Yellow Creek...

Then smokestacks risin' like the arms of God

Into a beautiful sky of soot and clay...

Here in Youngstown...

Speaking of steel...and this is just an introduction for next time to a rich story of a postage-stamp sized gossamer-winged blue butterfly, *Lyceaides melissa samuelis*, the Karner blue. It involves my nephew Chris Chatfield, chairman of the park board in Michigan City, Indiana. Vladimir Nabokov, one of the most storied

writers of the 20th century. Monty Python ('Your life or your lupines!). A Midwest Steel Plant and the sand dunes of Indiana. Cathy Herms of OSU and her interests and countless others in the Karner blue. The intersection of endangered species, ecology and economics. And my brother David, manager of the Midwest Steel plant near those Indiana dunes. How can all of this be connected? We shall see.

And one final note: Following the Thanksgiving version of my Almanac entry, several gracious readers have asked for the broccoli casserole recipe mentioned there. Originally from the New York Times, I think, but specifics are forever lost to me. Here is the key, though. Flash steam bite-sized broccoli florets so they are bright green (watch closely). Chill in cold water. Add something bright red such as halved cherry tomatoes or roasted or fresh red peppers. Add long, thin strips of Gruyere or similar cheese. Toss in caraway seeds, other seeds as desired, a range of possible spices including something with heat, and vinaigrette. Or in my case, Paul Newman, olive oil and vinegar dressing. Beautiful, healthy, and very tasty. I promise to have a picture for my post-Christmas Almanac.