

# IMAGES

## ...THEN AND NOW

*From the Indian Hill Historical Society*



**Buckingham Lodge  
1861**

## Remembering Svante Humbla

Svante Humbla lived on Surreyhill Lane for over twenty years. Though he was not a lifelong resident, his efforts enhanced the parks and green areas of Indian Hill.

Born in Sweden he spent his youth on a remote archipelago (Eckdalen) in the Baltic Sea. There was no electricity, no indoor water or plumbing. There was no road. Svante walked through the woods on a trail to attend school. Eckdalen had no library or telephone service. For amusement he built small cars and toy canoes from the driftwood on the seashore.

Much of his time was spent outdoors in Nature. After high school and 2 years of military service, Svante worked for Ericsson and studied engineering at the Institute of Technology in Stockholm, from which he received a B.S. in 1945. He moved to Cincinnati in 1957 to become Director of Project Design for Vulcan Inc. Part of those years he lived in Indian Hill. Humbla then joined the Lummus Company, where he worked in New Jersey and Germany, designing industrial plants throughout the world. He retired in 1985 after a successful career in engineering and metrication.

Humbla and his second wife, Astri, decided to move back to Cincinnati. He had always been handy and considered himself a “jack of all trades”. Self-taught, he did upholstery, lighting, wall papering, furniture making, household renovations and other similar activities at his various residences. When they moved back to Indian Hill, the couple installed a vegetable garden and a conifer collection.

Before his retirement, while perusing *National Geographic*, Svante was fascinated by a 1977 article “Song of Hope for the Bluebirds”, which described how home built nesting boxes could lessen the threat of extinction for this particular avian. Once common in the US, the bluebird population had been in serious decline since the mid-1900s. This was due to many factors. Open fields and pastures had become residential subdivisions, reducing habitat; wooden fences (former nesting sites) were replaced by barbed wire and metal ones; pesticide use diminished insects (food source), and other birds (starlings and house sparrows) competed for the remaining cavity nesting spaces. So, in his senior years, Humbla became an active proponent of saving bluebirds.

Eastern bluebirds are 6 - 8 inches long, and weigh about 1 ounce. The males have reflective cobalt blue plumage, and that of the female is not quite as bright. They have a distinctive song. Their diet consists mostly of insects, wild fruit, and berries. The monogamous couples can produce 2 -4 broods annually.

Svante joined the North American Bluebird Society, Ohio Bluebird Society, Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, and later a group associated with the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail. He contacted bluebird aficionados from other states, subscribed to journals about these birds, and educated himself about construction methods for their nesting boxes. His volunteerism fostered these delightful thrushes.



**Svante Humbla's Workshop**

Svante protected countless numbers of these endangered birds throughout his latter years. His innovative shutters for nest boxes offered shelter from weather and predators. As he aged, he developed sciatica, and died at age 86 in 2006. Svante Humbla was Indian Hill's first bluebird “landlord”. The resurgence of these birds in this community is largely due to his dedicated efforts. When viewing one of these little gems in flight, recall his preservationism and croon, “I wish you bluebirds in the spring to give your heart a song to sing...”.



**Bluebird Box**

In his basement workshop Humbla built bluebird boxes – he estimated that he made at least 100. He gave some away and put others on trails. With the consent of the Green Areas Advisory Committee, he placed 10 boxes at Rheinstrom Park and later installed a bunch of them at Radio Range Park. Svante and other residents expanded the network of bluebird trails throughout the Village, placing boxes at Green Acres, the Little Red Schoolhouse, McCane Lane, Cincinnati Country Day School, Rowe Arboretum and Camargo Club. A group of 6 people monitored the boxes weekly, inspecting and cleaning them and noting how many babies were hatched at each location. In 2000, 329 bluebirds were successfully fledged locally according to these avid bluebirders.