

# IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

*From the Indian Hill Historical Society*



**Buckingham Lodge  
1861**

## The Story of Kroger Hills Park

In June 1914, B. H. Kroger generously gifted the Cincinnati Park Board an 82 acre parcel of land with the provision that the property be used for a park "for the benefit of the citizens of Cincinnati". Located in Columbia Township, the land extended from Indian Hill Road to Wooster Pike and was roughly between Willow Hills Lane and Indian Ridge Road/Councilrock Lane.

That summer the Anti-Tuberculosis League started Kroger Hill Camp, using the property during June, July, August, and September to house and care for anemic children. Two years later the League made improvements to the camp, enabling it to accommodate more children and perform its mission more effectively. Eventually five buildings were constructed, as well as two or three swimming pools, with an entry road from Wooster Pike. Here youths from poor neighborhoods were sent to camp, where they played in the country, ate wholesome foods, were exposed to fresh air, and had respite from crowded unhealthy inner city conditions common in the meat packing and industrial areas. The belief was that by building up children's resistance in the summer, fewer would be afflicted with tuberculosis in the winter. The Anti-Tuberculosis League was engaged in preventative health care and charity. Christmas Seals were sold to help sponsor some campers. Kroger Hill Camp was



active for 27 years, with about 80 children attending each session, until it closed in 1942.

Then Camp Joy, which initially began as a church sponsored summer camp in 1938, moved to Kroger Hills Park from 1946-1956. They did not pay any rent. Though Camp Joy sought funds from the Park Board to improve the depreciated

buildings and facilities, the Board declined. Still Camp Joy appreciated using Kroger Hills Park for a decade.

From the late 1960s to the 1980s, the status of Kroger Hills Park was deliberated. First the Village of Indian Hill sought to swap land in Madisonville for the park; then it considered buying it from the Park Board. After years of discussion, a plan emerged. The City of Cincinnati conveyed the park to the B. H. Kroger heirs, who then turned it over to the Nature Conservancy, which held it in trust until matching funds were given for the development of a Little Miami River park, at which time the Nature Conservancy transferred the property to the state. This complicated transaction was completed in 1973, and Kroger Hills became the first state park in Hamilton County.

By 1990 the park has expanded to 214 acres, as additional land was acquired between Wooster Pike and the Little Miami River. Currently the Hamilton County Park District has a long term lease on Kroger Hills Park from the ODNR, and it manages the property. The original portion is a nature preserve, while the newer eastern portion across Wooster Pike is seasonally mowed. There are no trails at Kroger Hills Park, however it is managed and has been protected from development. A current seasonal project is the removal of Amur Honeysuckle. The entire park has been mapped, and data compiled about the plants, reptiles and amphibians within its boundaries.

Since 2004, a controlled bow hunting program has occurred in the original portion of the park. Hunters must qualify before they are permitted access for a two week period between late September and February 1. The long term goal is to promote native habitat, to entice grassland birds to the flat bottom eastern portion, and maintain a high diversity of flora and fauna on the wooded western hillside.

The most unique feature of the park is the quality of its trees. It is mature woodland comparable to a near climax forest, containing beech, maple, oak and hickory, some of which are over 200 years old. Kroger Hills Park is a beautiful but little known local nature preserve with a fascinating history.