

It is hard to believe that there once lay a terrible swamp beginning in the vicinity of South Boundary Street and running as far south as Findlay, Ohio, and east and west from the city of Sandusky nearly to Fort Wayne, Indiana...40 miles wide and 120 miles long. It was the Great Black Swamp, an oozing mass of water, mud, snakes, wolves, wildcats, biting flies, and clouds of gnats and mosquitoes. It was nearly big enough to cover the entire state of Connecticut.

Water, often up to the belly of a horse, stood on the surface until it evaporated in the hot summer months. When it rained, or thawed in the winter, it was water and muck. Much of the swamp was covered with an almost impenetrable forest of giant oak, sycamore, hickory, walnut, ash, elm, maple and cottonwood trees, except in a few prairie areas where limestone just under the surface would not support timber growth.

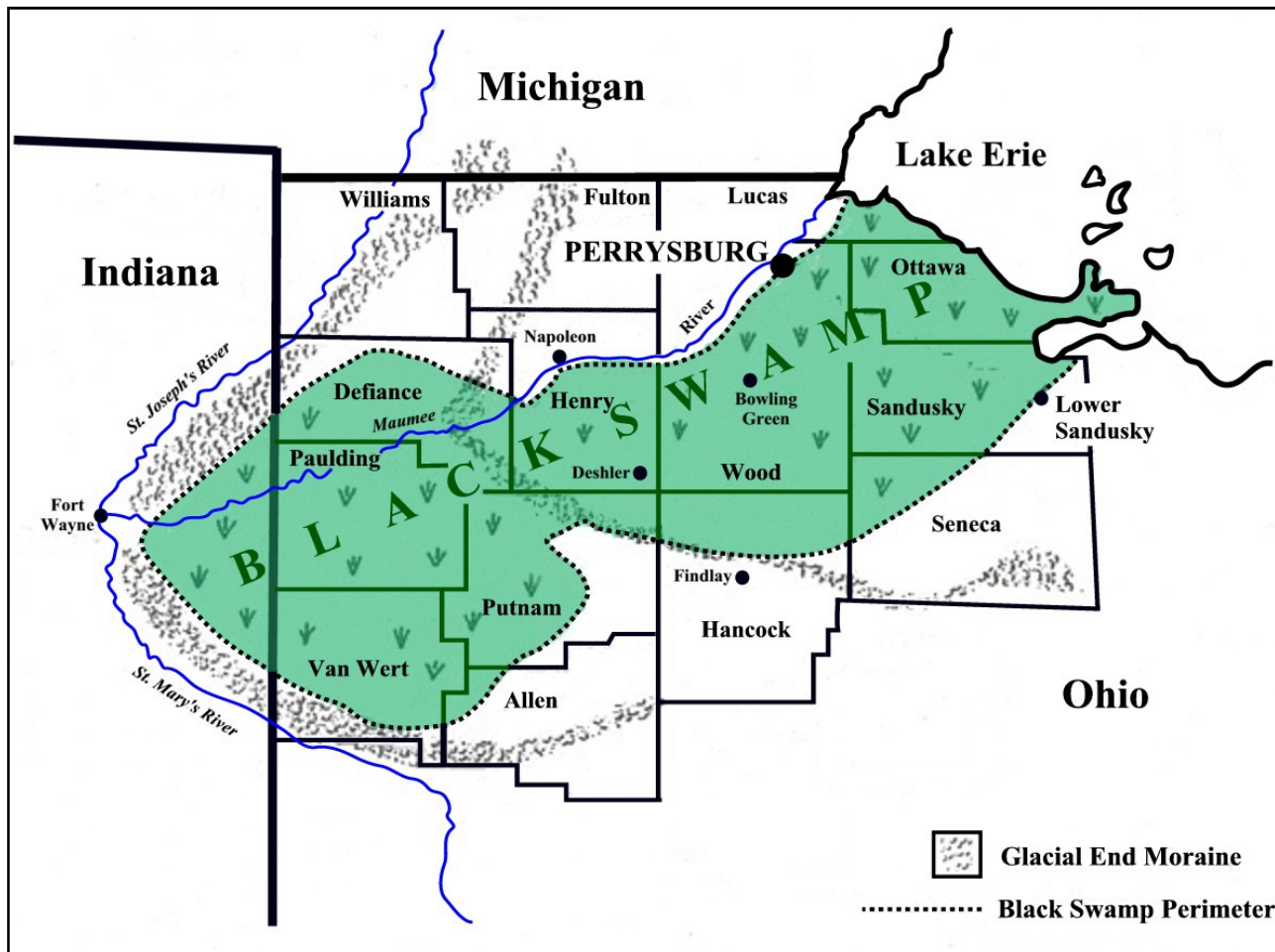
Not even native Indians went into the swamp except to hunt, and unless you could follow a blazed trail, it was easy to become hopelessly lost since you could only see but a few yards ahead.

The swamp was created some 15,000 years ago when the last glacier retreated.

The enormous weight of the mile-thick ice pack pressed down and scooped out the earth beneath it to create a depression about 10 feet lower south of where Perrysburg sits on the river bluff. Thereafter, until it was drained, water stood in the silted wetland and clay in the ground prevented it from soaking in. When water was standing and flooding conditions occurred, large fish from the Maumee River and other streams could swim all over areas now covered by corn and soybean fields. One man in Perrysburg told of ice skating all the way to what is now Weston, Ohio, nearly 17 miles southwest of Perrysburg.

There was no end to the variety of sicknesses and maladies spawned from the mosquito-infested swamp. There was cholera, typhoid and milk sickness, but chief among them were malarial fevers generally known as "ague" for which people kept quinine powder on the table, along with salt and pepper, to sprinkle on their food.

The fevers caused people to have chills, or the "shakes", and according to a doctor of the time it took them from three to five years to get over it. The



“shakes” occurred from about the first of July until the first frost. They took hold of people and literally shook them up. The doctor wrote that so violent were the chills and shaking that when they came on a person, the very bed and floor would rattle.

The Black Swamp was Ohio's last frontier, and beginning in the 1840s, it took several generations of determined farmers to drain it and make it the rich, flat farmland of today. What started it all was pretty much the idea of the medical profession, which believed that it was bad swamp air that caused the fevers and “shakes”.

They were ignorant of the fact that it was blood-sucking mosquitoes that transmitted the disease, but at least they were on the right track. Along with this, when canals and railroads came through here they created markets for the vast timber resources, most of it in the swamp. And still another good reason for beginning the tremendous job of draining the swamp was the realization that it could be done. People learned from building roads that they could dig ditches alongside them and the water would flow toward the nearest stream or river.

Until then, early farmers tilled just the highest ground, with some effort to build shallow, open ditches around a plot or field, or one leading to the nearest creek if available.

Finally, in 1850, the Ohio legislature passed the first law regarding government support for drainage systems resulting in people throughout Northwest

Ohio cooperating in wide-area drainage, with ditches deep enough to drain the swamp water into Lake Erie via the Maumee, Portage and other rivers.

Individual farmers continued to dry out their fields by plowing trenches across them, using wooden troughs laid underground, and eventually with clay tiles and pipe introduced by European farmers.

It took back-breaking labor and construction of one of the greatest underground drainage systems in the history of the world to create the productive farmland we now drive by and take for granted just outside of Perrysburg.



**Buckeye Trenchers dug many miles of Black Swamp ditches**

## **Things You Should Know About Perrysburg, Ohio**

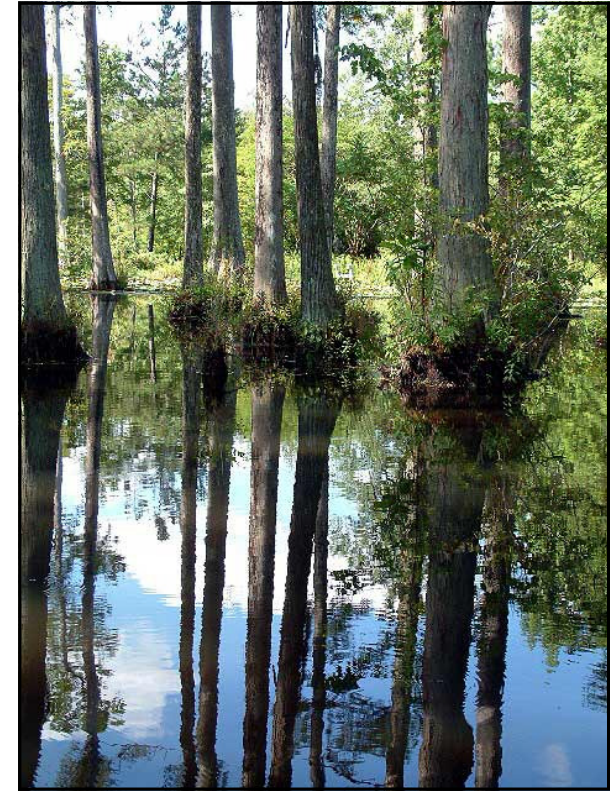
Copyright 2006 / 2008

By

**HISTORIC PERRYSBURG, INC.**

[www.historicperrysburg.org](http://www.historicperrysburg.org)

## **THE BLACK SWAMP An Impenetrable Bog**



## **Things You Should Know About Perrysburg, Ohio**

One of a Series Presented By  
**HISTORIC PERRYSBURG, INC.**



ERROR: stackunderflow  
OFFENDING COMMAND: ~

STACK: