

A Park with History



The area known as **River Bends Park** today has a long, rich history.

The **Shadbush Tract** is 80 acres of natural area located in the northwest section of River Bends Park. It's named after the large Shadbush trees that grow in the area. The lower part of the tract runs parallel to many of the historic sites located around River Bends Park.

Part of the land started as **Spring Hill Farm**, owned by Shelby pioneer settlers Sarah & Peter Lerich (1835-1889). They were prominent in the community and well known for their strong views on temperance, equality, and anti-slavery. The farm complex stood on the west side of the river at the end of Hamlin Road until it was destroyed by fire in 1973.

During the period of 1850-1864, the farm served as a "station" on the **Underground Railroad**. Sarah and Peter served as "station conductors", helping an unknown numbers of southern slaves in their journey to Canada. Peter dug a spring for the farm (inspiring the farm's name) and enlarged the spring house to form a cavity capable of concealing several people. A large cedar stood atop the spring house and would become known as the "Beacon Tree" to signal the farm's stop along the underground railroad.

The Burgess-Shadbush Nature Center is a familiar rest stop in River Bends Park, where natural education and native creatures can be found.

Come visit us online or in person for more information on our upcoming events.



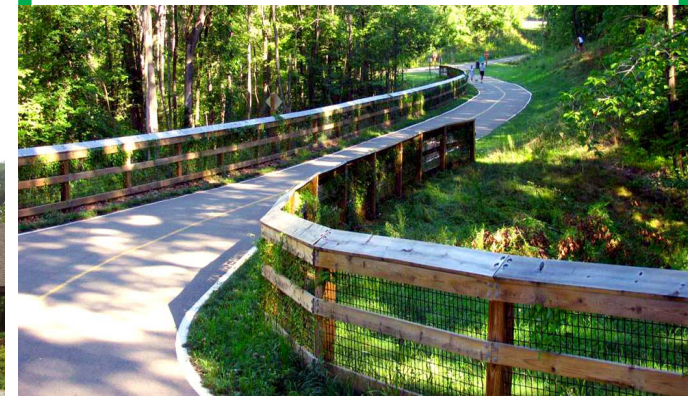
Burgess-Shadbush Nature Center

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The History of River Bends Park and Shadbush Tract



Presented by Charter Township of Shelby Parks, Recreation and Maintenance

Compiled with assistance from The Shelby Township Historical Committee



Points of Interest

The Burgess-Shadbush Nature Center

Constructed in 2001 out of 10-inch White Pine logs, this facility is dedicated to the natural preservation of the Shadbush Tract and the education of the public at large. It was renamed in 2005 in honor of longtime educator and Shelby-Utica resident JoAnn Burgess, who has dedicated her life to natural and historical training through her career at Utica Community Schools and countless hours of volunteer efforts thereafter.



Shelby Township River Bends Park

Once a part of the State of Michigan Rochester-Utica Recreation Area, the nearly 800 acres known as River Bends Park was a part of the 1991 split of the property between Shelby Township and Rochester Hills. Shelby Township now uses this space for both active and passive recreation purposes, housing ball fields, soccer fields, walking/hiking/mountain biking trails, a trap and archery range, and rental pavilions for events.

Joe Louis' Training Camp

Spring Hill was a well known riding establishment when fighter Joe Louis' manager purchased it on his behalf (1939-1945). Mr. Louis introduced many changes to the farm including a night club, and used this as a getaway to host his friends. Joe's favorite pastime was horseback riding. He was active in the Utica Riding Academy, which was located on the north side of 24 Mile Road between Jewell & Schoenherr Roads.



Pictures provided by shelbyhistory.com

U.S. Army Nike Missile Base

The Nike guided missile system was placed in the field of defense of the major areas of the U.S. in 1953. The Utica site (one of four in the Detroit area) was dedicated in October 1957 and was manned until 1964 by members of Battery B-516th AAA Missile Battalion. The Utica site was located on the western boundary of what is now River Bends Park-Ryan, parallel to Hamlin Road.

Clinton & Kalamazoo Canal

The first large public works project in Michigan, construction of the Clinton and Kalamazoo Canal, began on July 20, 1838 amid much fanfare. The proposed canal would have made it possible to cross Michigan by boat from Lake St. Clair to Lake Michigan. However, due to financial difficulties the State of Michigan withdrew its support and construction of the canal ended in 1843 after only 12 miles were completed.

