



Independence Oaks

9501 Sashabaw Road, Clarkston
248-625-0877



Park Information

Independence Oaks County Park is the largest in the parks system, at 1,286 acres. The Wint Nature Center offers interactive exhibits, interpretive programs and Scout Badge Days. Camp Wilderness, a youth group overnight camping area, features platform tents and a modern bathhouse.

The 12+ miles of natural and paved trails feature stands of oak, hickory and maple trees. It's not unusual to see walkers, jogger, skaters, bikers and parent with strollers on the trails year-round. Nearly 10 miles of groomed and marked trails are open during winter to cross-country skiers of all abilities and two miles of paved trails are open exclusively to hikers in winter.

Independence Oaks also offers a new archery range, volleyball courts; boat launch (non-motorized boats); and swimming beach. Twin Chimneys Shelter provides a sweeping view of 68-acre Crooked Lake and is popular for outdoor wedding ceremonies and receptions.

Independence Oaks-North, which opened in 2011, offers hiking, fishing, picnicking and also open for archery deer hunting in the fall. Anglers can portage and launch canoes, kayaks or other non-motorized boats. No vehicular boat launch is provided.



Natural Resources

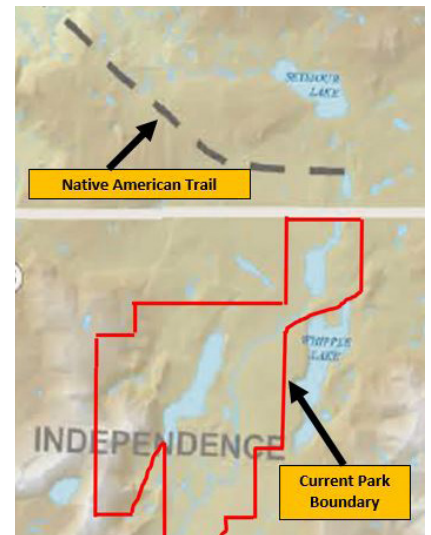
- Independence Oaks is part of the headwaters of the Clinton River; the Clinton River itself runs through park from Upper Bushman Lake to the south.
- Crooked Lake is likely a kettle lake that was formed by receding glaciers and is now spring-fed. Crooked lake is 68 acres and flows into the Clinton River at the south end of the lake.
- Part of the Clinton River, 38-acre Upper Bushman Lake is a designated catch-and-release-only lake, which allows for interesting and diverse fish populations.
- An old-growth mesic southern forest can be found on the south end of the property where trees are estimated to be between 200-300 years old, one of the few areas in Michigan (and Oakland County) that wasn't timbered in the 19th and 20th centuries.
- Hardwood conifer swamp surrounds sections of the Clinton River and is one of the most southerly occurrences of this natural community in Michigan. These areas support species like tamarack, white pine and cedar along with rare plants such as bog bluegrass, bishop's cap and small yellow lady's slipper.
- A bog on the east side of the property along Sashabaw road is an uncommon sight in southeast Michigan. The ground layer of this bog is made up of sphagnum moss, a thick mat that supports other species such as bog rosemary and large cranberry.
- The oak forest on the west side of Crooked Lake is a remnant Oak Barren, providing a window into what Oakland County primarily looked like prior to European settlement. Large oak trees are interspersed with open prairie plants.
- Other interesting natural community types that can currently be identified, and are being restored on the property, include prairie fen, dry mesic southern forest, and southern wet meadow.

History

There is evidence that the history of people on the land that became Independence Oaks most likely began with Native Americans long ago. The park includes the headwater streams of the Clinton River which was a major river used by Native Americans for hundreds of years. The park also includes wetlands, lakes, elevated areas and other environments favored by Native Americans for seasonal camps. A significant Native American trail ran just to the north of what is now Upper Bushman Lake. Stories passed down by local residents tell of the discovery of arrowheads and other projectile points on what is now park property. For example, Maria Arnold who grew up in the Manor House in the north part of the park talked of the many projectile points and a small stone bowl her father had found on their property.

CLARK Jeremiah 1837	CLARK Jeremiah 1837	COBB Myron 1837	WATERS Asa 1837	MAXWELL George 1837	CLARK Jeremiah 1837	WALTER Jacob 1837	BAILEY Wilson 1837
						SHERWOOD Erasmus 1856	
CROSS John 1837	PARKER Robert 1837	PARKER William 1837	WATERS Asa 1837	CLARK Jeremiah 1837	CLARK Jeremiah 1837	WALTER Jacob 1837	BAILEY Robert 1837
CROSS John 1837	WEBBER George 1840	NORMAN Edward 1838	CLARK Jeremiah 1837	WALSH John 1838	BURRELL John 1837	BALDWIN Joseph 1844	BURROWS Daniel 1837
ROPER John 1837	BENJAMIN Robert 1857	CHAPPEL John 1848		MULLEN Henry 1838	MONROE Joel 1837	MONROE Joel 1837	
ROPER John 1837	TUBBS James 1837	FARRIN James 1837		LEWIS David 1835	WHIPPLE Joseph 1837	BURROWS Hiram 1837	RUNNELS Daniel 1837

The first person to purchase land in what became the park was David Lewis, a blacksmith from Ontario, New York. In 1835 he purchased the southwest quarter of Section 10. Records indicate he came to Michigan with his mother, brother and sister. The 1840 census suggests that the family members may have been living in a small house on the land. After his marriage in 1846 to Mary Benjamin he built a house in Clarkston and the 1850 census shows the family living there. That house is still in existence, located at 121/123 Main Street. David Lewis died in 1853 and was buried in Clarkston's Lakeview Cemetery.



The William Bailey homestead was located in what is now Independence Oaks-North. William Bailey came with his parents Robert and Malinda Bailey to Independence Township from New York in 1835. He married Clarissa Shotwell, the daughter of Clarkson and Keziah Sutton Shotwell who had settled on land in Independence Township in the 1830s. William and Clarissa raised ten sons, several of whom remained residents of the township.



Henry Belitz was born in Prussia in 1823 and immigrated to the U.S. around 1856 with his wife Mary and three children. In approximately 1864 they settled on land that is now in the western part of Independence Oaks. By 1872 they had built two houses across from each other on the property; stone foundations are still visible. Henry and his wife had at least 8 more children after coming to the U.S., but it appears they lost four of them at a young age. Henry's wife Mary had died by 1870 and he had a new wife, Rachel. Henry and Rachel had 5 more children.

The original structure of the building now known as Twin Chimneys Shelter appears to have been built by George Bee as a summer home. From 1944 to 1960 Mr. Bee's company, the Palmer-Bee Company, owned much of the property that became Independence Oaks. Mr. Irwin I. Cohn purchased 390 acres of the property in 1960 and the structure (known as the Bee Lodge) became the gathering place for members of the Glen Acres Hunt Club that was operated on the property. After the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission purchased the property, the Lodge was vandalized and destroyed by fire, leaving only the two fireplaces and part of the slate floor. Twin Chimneys Shelter was reconstructed by OCPRC in 1977 from the remains of the Lodge.

"Bee Lodge" c. 1960
Now Twin Chimneys Shelter

