

# Providence Metropark Highlights

*Please use this as a supplement to information provided on the Providence Metropark map.*

## Messages for Interpretation

Providence Metropark inspires visitors to connect the natural history of the Maumee River with the stories of the people who lived there—their hopes, dreams and accomplishments through changing technologies.

- Throughout time, the river has nurtured both wildlife and people.
- From hand grinding to lighting up towns, the mill has harnessed the energy of the river through changing technologies.
- From the early to mid-1800s, the Maumee River defined the Miami-Erie Canal.

## What's In A Name?

The park's location makes up the far eastern stretch of the former canal town, Providence, platted by fur trader Peter Manor in 1835. Only three original buildings of this ghost town remain: The Isaac Ludwig Mill, St. Patrick's Church and Peter Manor's house.

## Natural and Human History

Meadows, wetlands, upland and floodplain woods all contribute to the biodiversity at Providence. Meadows support many small mammals, soaring hawks and native summer wildflowers attracting butterflies and other insects. A restored wetland in the eastern section of the park provides breeding and foraging grounds for dragonflies, waterfowl and amphibians. The upland and floodplain woods along the Green Trail offer excellent spring wildflower displays.

The Maumee River floodplain woods provides wildlife habitat as a corridor for migratory birds. Tree cavities initiated by ice scarring and then hollowed by natural decay from fungi provide homes for mammals and cavity nesting birds. The floodplain allows essential space for flooding which in turn reduces erosion, filters water returning to the mainstream, and creates a buffer for floods and ice jams.

Flooding is a natural process at Providence. 1904 brought the greatest flood on record, when the river crested 8 feet above flood level. The spring flood of 1913 caused nearly \$500,000 of damage for the tow-path, ultimately closing the Miami/Erie Canal. In 2015, the river crested to roughly 2 feet above flood stage, leaving much of Providence underwater.

Providence's first sawmill was built in 1822 by Peter Manor and located further west of today's Isaac Ludwig Mill. In 1842, Ohio granted Peter Manor perpetual water rights as the original mill was razed for the



*The Volunteer canal boat and Isaac Ludwig Mill*

construction of the canal. The mill passed through several owners over the next 130 years, one added a gristmill to the original sawmill. It remained in commercial operation till 1974 when it was donated to the Metroparks by Cleo Ludwig, grandson of former mill owner, Isaac Ludwig. The donation conditions required free, public demonstrations, and that the mill be named after his grandfather.

After 20 years of construction, 1845 marked the official opening of the Miami-Erie Canal from Toledo to Cincinnati via a 248 mile route that included the town of Providence. Around that time, the rowdy town of Providence had 160 citizens, four stores, five hotels, and numerous saloons and warehouses. At the canal's height in 1850, over 500 registered boats (2 per mile) could be seen passing by. Unfortunately, the town's population declined over time due to a fire that destroyed most businesses in 1846, three cholera epidemics, the advent of trains in 1876, and the flood of 1913 which permanently closed the canal. Providence was unincorporated in 1982, which made it an official 'ghost town.'

Restored in the 1990's, Lock 44 is the only original working lock in Ohio that a canal boat still passes through. Built directly on bedrock rather than wood, Lock 44's structural integrity allowed for its preservation, eventual excavation and restoration. The Canal Experience living history ride offers visitors a glimpse of the past. Additionally, the Isaac Ludwig Mill still harnesses water power for saw and grain milling demonstrations, while the Heritage Center's interpretive displays detail human interactions in shaping Providence – from Native Americans through present day.

The dam on the west edge of Providence was initially built in 1830s to bring water into the canal. It was reinforced with concrete in 1908. Further restoration was completed during the WPA, when the shelter house was constructed.

**Plant Life**

Wildflowers in the floodplain woods include:

- |                 |                              |
|-----------------|------------------------------|
| Bloodroot       | Mayapple                     |
| Wild ginger     | Wild geranium                |
| Spring beauty   | Wild onion                   |
| White snakeroot | Virginia knotweed (Jumpseed) |

Grasses and wildflowers of the meadows/prairies include:

- |                            |                         |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Big bluestem               | Prairie cord grass      |
| Indian grass               | Switchgrass             |
| Bergamot                   | Common milkweed         |
| Wingstem                   | Green-headed coneflower |
| New England aster          | Wild Potato-vine        |
| Spotted and pale jewelweed |                         |

Trees and shrubs include:

- |                    |                  |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Northern hackberry | Shagbark hickory |
| Cottonwood         | Box elder        |
| American sycamore  | Silver maple     |

Common prickly ash is a notable shrub growing at Providence. It is the host plant for the Giant swallowtail butterfly larva, and was historically used by Native Americans and settlers for alleviating tooth-ache pain.

**Wildlife**

Some reptiles and amphibians include:

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|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| Bullfrog        | Common water snake              |
| Snapping turtle | Eastern spiny soft shell turtle |

Eastern cricket frogs, an Ohio species of concern, can be heard calling late May through July in the restored wetland. Their calls resemble rapid tapping together of marbles.

Reptiles and amphibians bask in the sun along the retaining wall of the canal as well as on bedrock near the river.

No venomous snakes occur at Providence.

Insects include:

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|------------------------|----------------|
| Giant swallowtail      | Monarch        |
| Silver spotted skipper | Praying mantis |

Birds include:

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|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Baltimore oriole                    | Belted kingfisher |
| Great blue heron                    | Green heron       |
| Bald eagle                          | Osprey            |
| Wood duck                           | Common merganser  |
| Canada goose                        | Tree swallows     |
| Cliff swallows (nest at 295 bridge) |                   |

Fish include:

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|------------------|-----------------|
| Walleye          | White bass      |
| Large-mouth bass | Long nose gar   |
| Channel catfish  | Emerald shiners |
| Carp             |                 |

Mammals include:

- |                    |               |
|--------------------|---------------|
| Raccoon            | Red squirrel  |
| Eastern cottontail | Striped skunk |
| White-tailed deer  | Muskrat       |
| Big brown bat      | Groundhog     |

Although evidence of river otter and American beaver has been observed, no established populations are known at this time.

Pests include invasive zebra mussels that must be cleaned from mill turbines, and also poison ivy, mosquitoes and American dog ticks. Stay on the trails and cover up or use insecticide for protection.

(Note: There is no poison oak in Northwest Ohio.)



*Spring beauty*



*Spotted jewelweed*



*Bullfrog*



*Snapping turtle*



*Belted kingfisher*



*Osprey*



*Long nose gar*



*Groundhog*