



Brief History of the Area, the Furnace, and Lake Vesuvius

The Storms Creek valley was once a narrow valley of farmland flanked by steep cliffs and hills. As iron production began in the Hanging Rock Iron Region the Vesuvius Iron Furnace along Storms Creek was one of 69 iron furnaces in the area. Built in 1833 it produced pig iron using the cold blast method until 1863, when it was the first to experiment and adopt the revolutionary hot blast method. Vesuvius Furnace produced 10 tons of iron each day until its final blast in 1906.

Today only this stack remains, but in its prime Vesuvius Furnace supported hundreds of workers and their families and played a key role in the early iron industry. The men who owned the furnaces were called ironmasters, and many played another significant role in history. Many of them were strong abolitionists and supported the Underground Railroad. The furnace complexes provided safe houses and money for the movement of slaves seeking freedom. The secret routes that the runaway slaves followed lie along the same roads as southern Ohio's iron furnaces. With the help of the ironmasters, other families and supporters of the Underground Railroad, hundreds of escaped slaves reached freedom.

After the depression in the 1930's, the U.S. Forest Service began buying land, planting trees, and building recreational facilities. The most ambitious of these was the construction of a dam near the ruins of the Vesuvius Furnace. In 1937 construction got underway.

The lake's construction was done by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). CCC Company 0526-C was stationed in nearby Pedro, Ohio, and known at various times as Camp Dean, Camp Lawrence, and Camp Vesuvius. The company had about 200 enrollees and 12 supervisors. They completed work on the dam, campgrounds, bathhouse and beach, warehouse, recreational office and garage, and museum and classroom in 1941 but worked in the area until 1942 when the CCC was phased out as the country entered World War II. A CCC newsletter reports the cost of construction of the dam was approximately \$100,000.

The dam itself and 7 of the buildings at the Lake Vesuvius site are historically significant and were determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 1999. To preserve the historic significance of the dam, the cut face rocks were carefully numbered and removed, then later replaced.

The area changed very little in the 60 years between 1941 and 2001. But when National Dam Safety Standards and Regulations were tightened after several spectacular dam failures in the west, the Wayne NF was notified that the Lake Vesuvius dam no longer was in compliance. Though in no danger of failing, the lake needed a different type of dam if it were to meet the probable maximum flood requirements assigned for the area.

