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Interview with Harold Bower

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Harold Bower

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PW: This is Peter Wickline with life along the Kokosing, Rural Life center, Kenyon college, interviewing Harold Bower on February 16, 2000 at his offices at 1025 Harcourt Rd.

PW: Alright, just to leap right into it, could you give me a general history of the area? What first springs to mind when you think of that area around the reservoir?

HB: Well, this area, of course, was Indian land. When Mad Anthony Wayne took his army up through Western Ohio and defeated the Indians at the battle of fallen timbers up along the Balmy [sp?] river. They eventually went and sat with him and signed a treaty which they gave away all their lands south of what is called the Greenville treaty line, which happens to run through Knox county. In fact, Yankee street follows that treaty line. The Kokosing is a pretty important river from that time because it linked the Sandusky, the Sayoto, the Muskingum and the Cuyohoga drainages, more or less. It was the crossover. They could come down the Conalla river in what was Virginia at that time and cross the Ohio, go upstream to the mouth of the Muskingum, and then go up the Muskingum to the Wohanding or the Tuskororref, and if they came up the Wohanding they could then reach the Mohican or the Kokosing rivers. Kokosing would take them west across what's now Knox and Morrow counties and over across Crawford to upper Sandusky there they would catch the Sandusky river and go downriver to Lake Erie and from there they could go on to the upper Great Lakes, go to fort Detroit, whatever they were [breath] whatever they were headed for.

PW: Could you tell me about the treaty?

HB: The treaty was signed in August of...the final signings were in August of 1795. The actual treaty line started at the mouth of the Cuyohoga river. Went upstream to where the Cuyohoga turns and goes back north again, crosses over the portage, or the portage lakes area, to where the Tuskororas river, comes down the Tuskororas to an old trading post, and went from that point west-southwest to about Grand Lake St. Mary's then turned a bit north to where the Wabash river and the -what's now the Indiana state line and then went south from there to the mouth of the Licking river from Kentucky, into the Ohio river. All the lands south of that line and east, became United States property then, and the Indians had to live north of and west of it. They were allowed to hunt that lands, at least that was the agreement in the treaty but because the Iriquois had signed away their lands in 1794 on November 11th, and because this land was then opened up the floodgates from the east just poured in white settlers. And by 1803 Ohio had enough population to apply for statehood. When all those white people came then the lands were cleared rapidly and the game was driven out, or, simply shot by the white hunters who the Indians really couldn't make a living here. Turned and went farther west again. The land in that area was settled early, all of Knox county was settled early on. 'Seems to me that Mount Vernon was platted by 1805 and had a big population of people here and the town of Clinton was also in place. So all that area up around what's now the reservoir was settled early on and cleared early on. There were a lot of sheep farmers and a lot of dairy farmers and a lot of just general farmers: small eight-acre, fifty-acre farms.

PW: What was the date of settlement before 1800?

HB: Well, most of the people that were here in the 1600's would have been Wyandot or Huron, Huron is the French name, Wyandot is what the people called themselves, they were and Iriquoisan speaking people, who had been driven out of Canada by the Iriquois confederacy or the six-nations people. They had moved down around the Great Lakes and come back this direction and settled in Ohio from lake Erie down to this area. Farther south were the Shawnee people they came in later, after the Wyandots. East of here and in this area would have been the people who were called Mingoes that's not a nation or a tribe it's a confederacy, and the were some Delaware peoples, there were some Cayuga peoples from over in the six nations, probably some Senecas, maybe even some Shawnee although I would doubt that but there could have been. Many Delaware people came here after they were driven from the eastern coast -the eastern colonial areas. They came to Pennsylvania first and asked to settle there and the Iriquois gave them- well Pennsylvania wasn't really a state yet but they gave them permission to settle there. And the Delawares made the mistake of selling some of the Iriquois lands to William Penn, which sort of made the Iriquois people hostile. And then the other problem was that being farther east they were within reach of the traders. Most of the traders were whiskey traders and it caused a lot of problems among the people and the United States government would not honor the request of the Chiefs to keep the whiskey traders away so they up and moved west across the Allegany or what's now the Ohio, and settled in -in Ohio. There were a lot of people in this area and farther east that were Delaware people, or Leni-Lanapis as they called themselves. And they were a pretty congenial people and so the missionaries came to them early on and the town of Jenayden-Hutton and the town of Showenbrun were Christian towns. The Delaware Christian Indians lived there in those places, but then the hostilities got bad, and the militia were coming over from Pennsylvania -out from Virginia. A lot of them were just rabble, they had no morals about them. They would kill any Indian. They could collect bounties on scalps, it didn't make any difference what the age of the Indian or the sex or whatever just as long as it was an Indian they would kill them and take their scalp. And...one of the situations was a militia leader his name was Williamson came into the Jenayden-Hutton and Showenbrun area. Those Indians were about one-hundred fifty of them that had lived there and they had left and gone up to live with the Wyandots but their corn was ripe and they needed to harvest it. Unfortunately they came back when the militia were there and they captured a hundred of the hundred-fifty people and murdered them. That's what led to Crawford's capture later by the Wyandots, and the non-Christian Delawares. That's why they killed him, why they burned him at the stake. They never did catch Williamson that I know of, he was the one who did the actual acts of murdering the Christian Indians. There were a lot of people living up Mohican river and up the Tuskororas river and out west on the Kokosing. And- Ko-kosin is a Delaware word which means 'the Creek of the Owls,' we pronounce it Kokosing. They also had called it 'the Creek of many Delaware towns' but I've forgotten that name. There is a plaque from the Ohio Historical Society over on the bike path that talks about the little Indian fields over by the sewage treatment plant and the High School, and that ground was farmed. Most of the woodlands peoples raised corn and beans and squash...as a bare minimum. There were many other things that they grew, also. That they picked up from the European peoples. They really liked peaches so they had- they had very large peach orchards, and they would have apple orchards, because the only sugars that they got were natural sugars. So they raised a lot of fruit. They would dry strawberries, wild strawberries, which are very small so you know how hard they worked getting dried strawberries. They also would make maple syrup. This area of Ohio has quite a few sugar maple woods, so there was quite a bit of sugaring going on here. They wanted sugar more than the syrup because the sugar could be

stored in dry leather pouches where the maple syrup would have to be stored in containers that could contain liquid and...they were not sterile so they could get- the syrup could get moldy.

PW: What was the actual settlement... Did people tend to settle close to the river? Or...

HB: They probably used the river for traveling, and initially they would have probably settled close to the river because that's where the Indian peoples would have lived, and that's where the ground would have been cleared for farming, initially. And as that land was taken up, then the later settlers would move back away from the sites. That was because they were already occupied. A lot of the paths, or the Indian trails, were used for the roadways, they simply expanded on them and many of our roadways we have today, in Ohio, are simply old Indian paths, that simply were just used and expanded and continue to be used 'til this day.

PW: What do you know of the area where the dam is now before the settlers, before the building of the dam?

HB: Well it was...traditionally the smaller farms and a lot of livestock farms. Sheep was the number one livestock animal in the county. At the time of the Civil War, the American Civil War, Knox county and Licking county probably provided the majority of the wool for the Union army, for their uniforms. I've been told it was up to ninety percent of the wool for the Union army came from these two counties. I know that most of the woodlands here have been grazed, and probably the grazing was by sheep. Woods generally don't provide very much food or forage for grazing animals simply because they're so shaded and a lot of the plants in the woods are toxic. But they did allow the animals to run in the woods to glean acorns and probably before 1930 a lot of the woods had chestnut trees and they would fatten hogs on the chestnuts. And traditionally European peoples weren't...didn't have any affinity for the forest. The people who came here were the poorer farmers that worked for the landlords in Europe. Only the aristocracy and the landlords and nobility were allowed to go into the woods and hunt, and do those things. Everybody's familiar with Robin Hood and how he defied the sheriff and the king and went and lived in the forest and hunted...most of the European people weren't allowed in the woods. Then there was a great tradition that the woods harbored a lot of evil spirits- ogres and trolls and gnomes and all kinds of -dwarfs- and bad things. So they really didn't care much for the forest here either. The forest tended to be land that we can't use for anything because there's trees growing on it. So we'll let the livestock in there and they'll get what they can out of it and they'll clean it up and we can see out through the woods then. And that was the attitude. The farms weren't large back before the dam was built like they are today. Of course there's still not really large here in Knox county because our land is so rolling and hilly. You go farther west where the land is flat and they can just plow all day long and stay in the same field. That's kind of what they look for to have huge farms -thousands, they farms thousands of acres.

PW: You mentioned that, when settlers first came here not livestock [?] cleaned out a good deal of certain plants. I'm sure that also helped drive out certain types of animals because they were consuming their food-

HB: Oh eh- yeah, whenever you graze a woods, it takes on a park-like appearance, so it's not as good for the woodland species' for example, before the white people came to settle, most of the squirrels in the woods were grey squirrels. Then after the European peoples came the American

settlers came and started using the lands, using the woods- we got a lot of prairie animals and western, what would be called western was a- animals like from Indiana and Illinois and Iowa. We got more fox squirrels, we ended up with red fox...just had more prairie type birds meadowlarks, bobolinks, simply because the land was being changed -the forest, now Ohio probably was between 85 and 95% forest when...Even when the Indians were here and farming their lands, it was mostly forest land, and when the European peoples came...the white settlers came to Ohio, they continued to clear the land up until about oh...the beginning of World War II, and we were down to about 10 percent forest land in Ohio, and Knox county was very similar to what the state average was. The state average now is about a third forest again, and Knox county is, depending on what you call forest, is somewhere between 20 and 30% forested.

PW: Okay, continuing in that vein, what improvements have we seen in the environment along the river? One of the stated goals of Kokosing lake is...Wildlife preservation...

HB: Well, we're very fortunate because the river has not been in a deteriorated state. I'm sure it's not as good as it was in 300 years ago, but it's still relatively good quality and that's...that's amazing considering the number of people that are around but we had the opportunity for a lot of livestock in that area, and so, there was a lot of grassland and because of the grassland and more forests grew back. A lot of the surface runoff got filtered before it got into the river, and there was a lot of opportunity for the water to percolate in that area, because there was a lot of gravel, a lot of glacial tills, a lot of glacial soils that were laid down and they percolate a little better than some of the heavy soils of Puamo and Blount soils farther west, where you get a lot more surface runoff a lot more fi- real fine particulate matter in suspension in the rain water. So our river has, has just been blessed by the creator with all the situations around it being- more to the optimum for the quality of the river.

PW: [indistinguishable]

HB: We don't, we didn't have people who did a lot of fall plowing and leave the ground laying open over the winter, that makes a big difference.

PW: Is there any particular species of plant or bird or other creature that is exclusive to, first of all, the area around Kokosing reservoir but secondly along the Kokosing in general? Anything that has perhaps made a comeback?

HB: MMMMM. Well you know, when I was a kid- I'm 58 years old- and when I was just a boy, there were almost no deer in Ohio, so you could say they've definitely made a comeback. I never saw a white-tailed deer until I was about 18 years old and I was in Pennsylvania. Of...the...Giant Canada goose, there are 14 sub-species of the Canada goose, all of them are arctic nesters except for the Giant Canada, which we now have. Now when I went to college at the University of West Virginia they had just discovered that the Giant Canada goose, *Sprana Canadensis Maxima*, was not extinct. Up to that point they thought that the were des...they had died out, were extinct. But they found a population of them I think in Minnesota, and so they were protected, and they're a resident bird they don't go into the arctic to nest and they don't go south to spend the winter, they stay right here. The Golf courses and many of the people who have ponds are aware of the fact that they don't leave. So that bird has come back.

PW: So they've settled around Kokosing reservoir?

HB: Well, they will, they use Kokosing reservoir, ponds and farms, everything, they're resident birds and they're very adaptable. The beaver, the beaver were all trapped out of here...oh- probably soon- if not by the time the white settlers came then soon after, they were gone. We had Elk in the state at one time, they're all gone, they haven't come back, and most people hope they don't because it's tough enough to hit a hundred-and-fifty pound deer with your car you wouldn't want to hit a six-hundred pound elk. We have wild turkeys back, I never saw a wild turkey, even when I was in West Virginia going to school -I'd hear 'em out in the forest- but never saw a wild turkey 'til I got back to Ohio. So, let's see, there's deer and turkey and beaver...we have resident populations now of river otters: they had all been destroyed, trapped out of Ohio, a long long time ago, and they're back.

PW: Do they dwell in the Kokosing?

HB: They generally aren't in the Kokosing, the water quality's good enough, but they generally aren't there, simply because there's too many people, they're more wilderness animals. Now, they'll adapt, they'll probably eventually get here because they claim to have them over in the Killbuck wildlife area, the Killbuck swamp. So it won't...it wouldn't be inconceivable that they could migrate this far. Black bears have come back to Ohio.

PW: In this area?

HB: There's black bears been seen in this area. I'm not sure there's been any sows observed with cubs, this far west in Ohio, but they have been seen. Bobcats, there are bobcats in uh...this area at least people have claimed to have seen them, and heard them. I've never seen any, and I'm not out at night so I wouldn't know if they were here or not, but... These animals have come back, there's an animal in the Kokosing called a hellbender, it's a very large salamander an aquatic form, it never- never becomes terrestrial. That is an indicator species, it indicates very high quality water. Doctor Finney, who is professor Emeritus at Otterbein, used to come up here and do collections and sampling to see how good quality we have in the Kokosing because he has a great interest in aquatic Biology. My son had him when he was in college and he used to like to talk about the river and its high quality. It's a very good river, extremely good quality river.

PW: Any species of plant that you know of that has come back?

HB: Oh, there's no plant that I know that has come back as a result of the reservoir...

PW: Let me qualify the question a little more, somebody else is doing the Brown Family Environmental Center wanted to ask you about a few things, and he's interviewed Inese Sharp...

HB: And that's okay-

PW: Who brings [indistinguishable]

HB: Yes

PW: And, they plant them along the river there and he wanted to know your feelings on that project.

HB: Well I've been doing the same thing. In the riparian zone that Kenyon is refurbishing I've been planting Oaks, I've been planting some American Chestnuts. They'll probably get blighted and die, but we're trying to keep the genetic material present anyway because within the next ten years we'll probably have American trees that are hybridized with Asian trees, although you won't be able to tell...Because of the backbreeding you won't be able to tell that they have Asian characteristics, but we want trees present so they'll be a pollen source.

PW: Has there been any previous standard, or previous instance of hybridized trees taking over-hybridized plants in general taking over-?

HB: No, no, there's no evidence of that. We have a lot of exotic plants taking over. One of them, probably the commonest one, is the garlic mustard plant that was brought here from Europe. The people used it as a medicinal plant and they used it as a green, like spinach or dandelions. It just, almost by magic, it just shows up in the woods and just fills the woods up with its presence, and it's very aggressive, and it's causing other plants to be squeezed out: and I don't know how we're going to control it, I can't see that we will.

PW: How are the results of your- the planting campaign? So far, your own and the-

HB: Well, the trees are growing. Of course, trees you know take a long time to get any size to them. Usually a tree is forty years old before it's ten inches in diameter, which is not a terribly large tree. And trees, don't seem to count time, they don't worry about it, anyway. But, we have a lot of trees coming in, actually the eastern hardwood forest will reestablish itself and over time, as I said, it will change; it will succeed itself. Right now, the main tree that's blowing in down there, or seeding in, is the sycamore, and that's simply because there's such a seed source and the wind will disperse the seed. So it's filling in- you don't really want a woods that's just sycamore because there's some disease problems you can run into that will kill the trees, or damage them: but we're trying to mix as many oaks in, simply because it has a very high value for wildlife and they're strong trees. If the ospreys or the eagles happen to move this far south, we want to have as good a nesting platform as we can get. We want to have the acorns present for the wildlife, because it's a massed species, it allows them to be fat when winter gets. They're in good breeding condition then in the spring.

PW: How long has the planting project been going on?

HB: Ohh, probably for the last three or four years, it just started.

PW: Okay...What importance does the wooded areas- how important are the wooded areas to the river and to the landscape in general?

HB: Well, riparian zones are extremely important to their adjacent streams because they

contribute to very high quality entering the stream, by absorbing most of the nutrients. If a riparian zone is a hundred feet wide, on the average it can absorb nearly all the nitrates that are coming- moving across the land surface: most of the phosphorus, most of the materials would enter the stream- [end of side 1]

HB: The forested zones provide habitat for the ground nesting mammals, like chipmunks and voles and moles and they make large pores in the soil. And then there's earthworms, and the amphibians and...All these things contribute to the porosity of the soil, which allows all this percolation to take place, before it goes into the stream. So you get a high quality water, the streams themselves are benefitted directly by the shade because cools -or keeps the water cooler- and doesn't allow the sun to heat up the water, and if the water's cooler it will carry more oxygen. So it's a higher quality environment for the crustaceans like the insects, the...mayflies and dragonflies and damselflies and stoneflies, those are all organisms that are in good quality water. They leaves fall in the stream, and contribute a lot of...detritus or organic matter for these organisms to feed on. Some -there are some organisms that graze or browse on these leaf materials, pass the materials through their gut and then there's another level of crustaceans that feed on their feces, and digest the material down farther. So, streams are definitely benefitted by the forest.

PW: What effect does the forest have on a standing body of water, such as the reservoir?

HB: Well, it's not as great because you have such a large area -you know- they can't shade the area but they can impact the lake or the impoundment simply by reducing the amount of sediments that go into the streams: that enter the impoundment and therefore the lifetime of the impoundment is longer because you're not filling it up with mud.

PW: What are the ecological ramifications of such a large standing body of water such as the Kokosing reservoir?

HB: Well, you've gone from a riverine situation to a lacustrine situation, although I think the lake's only about a hundred-and-fifty acres, it's fairly small. It's shallow, it's definitely been invaded by the german brown carp. That's probably the commonest fish in there. You can go up in the mud flats and just stand still in those shallow waters, and there's actually more of those carp-fish out of the water than there is in the water. They're like pigs or hogs rooting around your feet, if you stand real still, they just come all around and they're just going through there. You could spear all of them you wanted if you wanted to smoke 'em. The shorebirds tend to use that area more, if we have a dry summer so that a lot of the mudflats are exposed: they can run on those mudflats and look for food.

PW: what types of shorebirds?

HB: Oh, there are jacksnipe, and sandpipers, and oh, you might get an occasional yellow lakes or something of that order.

PW: What other fishes are there, other than the german brown carp?

HB: The german brown carp is probably the most common one, but there's a lot of bass and

members of the centarkikay [phonetic spelling]: there's probably croppies and largemouth bass, and probably smallmouth up in the streams, they probably don't enter the lake. I suppose there could be some spotted bass if they've been- Kentucky spotted bass if they've been stocked in there. There's probably bluegills, green sunfish, long-eared sunfish, punkinseeds, black and white croppies because you have both a stream and a lake environment. There are probably a number of minnow families up the streams, I'm sure there are some in the lake too. I'm guessing maybe they've stocked some pike or muskies up there, maybe not, I don't know that for sure, but they could.

PW: How do you generally feel about the way that area's been tended?

HB: Well there's- you know- there's not a whole lot of overuse, a lot of people like the campgrounds. I think they're free, and I noticed will use the campground that come in and out of...It's a nice small lake to canoe on if you want to go up and paddle around. I'm sure that the eagles from over at Knox lake fly over there and fish some. Once the ospreys get reestablished in Ohio we'll probably see more ospreys. I've seen ospreys over there, actually dive into the Kokosing north branch there and catch a fish, come up out of the water and fly off with it, so I know they could be there: it would support them. I don't think the area's hunted a lot, that's one of the uses of wildlife, and hunting. I occasionally see people there- I used to hunt it a lot for ducks, when I was younger, and my boys were home. We'd go up there and hunt ducks, spent a lot of time just watching things going on, watch the killdeer running on the mudflats, and the dippers, and just enjoy ourselves...Wood ducks use the area, greenwing teal, bluewing teal used it a lot early on, I don't know if they still do, I assume they would because it's shallow water, that's the kind of habitat that they like.

PW: What about, just in a similar vein, what about the Brown Family Environmental Center, what do you think of the setup down there? How beneficial to the river...[indistinguishable]

HB: Well I don't see anything wrong with that. They're certainly trying to educate people with the center, and that in itself is good. Exposing the people to these things, in a manner that the people can comprehend them, understand them, that's good. They have their field trips, and little hikes. Dr. Heithaus takes them out and tells them about the things that they see, that's excellent, people enjoy that.

PW: Anything else you'd like to talk about, as far as, concerning the river?...Well, considering that this is going to be a tour is there anything that you think people should check out about the area around the river? Anything they should pay attention to? The idea is to educate them, what are things that you don't think people pay attention to? Not just people coming here but people who live here?

HB: Well, that's hard to say. One of the things, one of the concepts that people need to learn is to listen, and that's more than just hearing: learning to comprehend what you're hearing, paying attention to it, storing it in your mind so that you have a reference point, so if you come back in a year or six months or six weeks you can remember that you heard that. Learn to identify the things that you hear: I work with a lot of land owners and we'll here a pilliated woodpecker for example, and a lot of people never get to see a pilliated woodpecker because they're so...so shy, but they- they're really amazed when I point out to them this bird which is the size of a crow: a

woodpecker the size of a crow. They like to look for them then, after they realize what they are, and that -that's all, that's all you're doing when you go out is learning to pay attention to what's going on around you, being aware of the things you hear. And when you hear them, if you can't identify them, try to learn what they are so that in your mind's eye you can see them the next time you hear them.

PW: Is there anything else you'd like to say about the river?

HB: It's a beautiful resource, the people in Knox county are blessed because they have it. It's something that they creator has made for us, we should continue to take care of it, and think of the people who will come after us, out to the seventh generation so that they too can enjoy these things. With more and more people coming, they'll be more pressure on the land and on the habitat and sometimes because these things don't make us money, we tend to value them less. This is something that's very very fine, I've been to some of the other scenic rivers in Ohio, and it's my own personal opinion that this river is much cleaner and much nicer than some of the other scenic rivers, and for that I'm thankful.

PW: Thank you for your time.

HB: You're welcome.