

The Heartland – Our Foundation

Three settlements in these Western Reserve lands made up what was originally called “Mayfield Township”. They were Willson’s Mills (in 1805), Mayfield Center (in 1819), and finally Gates Mills (in 1826).

While the War of 1812 retarded early growth of the area, the most impactful development to the land was the establishment of saw mills from 1826 to 1867. Clearcutting of the virgin woods for milling can be seen in old photographs taken of the village center. This clearcutting took place over large tracts of land on either side of the Chagrin River. Today there still remains large open areas within the village, but once the mill production came to an end, expanses of forest on the hillsides flanking the Chagrin River began to re-grow the tree canopy.

Toward the end of the 1890’s, after the saw mills left the area and with the advent of manufacturing and communications, more development took place. The Maple Leaf Land Company purchased 3,000 acres of land and converted homes, inns and the general store into country residences for Cleveland businessmen.

In 1899, the Cleveland Eastern Traction Company created the first electric railcar connecting Chardon, Burton, Middlefield with Cleveland through Gates Mills. This was known as the Interurban, and it stimulated growth and development to Gates Mills...

“The reminders in Gates Mills are the road beds used as bridle paths and the foot bridge next to St. Christopher’s.” (A Pictorial History of Gates Mills 1826-1976)

It wasn’t until 1920 that Gates Mills became incorporated as a Village, and the villages of Willson Mills and Gates Mills merged in 1926.

Land conservation in this historic corridor is especially important to the character of the Village. The Gates Mills Land Conservancy completed an agreement with the Douglas Wick family in 2005, which preserved 53 acres including the wetlands, meadows and pine woods along Beverly Lane between Epping Road and Chagrin River Road. This was an extraordinary cooperative effort on the part of the Gates Mills Land Conservancy and the Western Reserve Land Conservancy resulting in the donation of a conservation easement on 28 acres by the Wick family, with the purchase of an additional 25 acres.

Also recently completed was a very complex project involving: the Village of Gates Mills, the Gates Mills Improvement Society, the Chagrin Valley Hunt Club, and Village residents. It resulted in a comprehensive conservation easement on our historic, “Polo Field”. This beautiful 25-acre open space will be preserved in perpetuity. In 2020 the field was dedicated as the “Daniel R. Collister Polo Field” in honor of our former Mayor and one of GMLC’s founding fathers.

Our continuing vision for this corridor is the preservation of its vista of green lawns stretching from the polo field south along Epping Road. The Conservancy continues to work with other property owners in this corridor, and we are hopeful that our vision for this part of the Village will be successfully fulfilled within the next few years.