



## SHELBY RIVER BENDS PARK

### The Park with a Historical Past

**SPRING HILL FARM:** The farm was owned by Shelby pioneer settlers Sarah and Peter Lerich (1835 - 1889). They were prominent in the community and well known for their strong views in temperance, equality and anti-slavery. The farm complex stood on the west side of the river at the end of Hamlin Road until it was destroyed by fire in 1973.

**THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD AT SPRING HILL:** During the period of 1850 to 1864 the farm served as a "station" on the Underground Railroad. Sarah and Peter Lerich served as "station conductors" helping unknown numbers of southern slaves in their journey to freedom in Canada. Peter dug a spring for the farm (thus the name for the farm) and then enlarged the spring house so as to form a cave capable of giving concealment to several people. Atop the spring house was the "Beacon Tree", a large cedar known as a landmark on the route.

**JOE LOUIS'S TRAINING CAMP:** Spring Hill was a well known riding establishment when fighter Joe Louis's manager purchased it for Joe Louis's training camp (1939-1945). Joe introduced many changes at the farm including a night club for his friends. Joe's favorite past time was horse riding. He was active in the Utica Riding Academy, located on the north side of 24 Mile Road between Jewell and Schoenherr Roads.

**US ARMY NIKE MISSILE BASE:** The Nike guided missile system was placed in the field of defense of the major areas of the U.S. in 1953. The Utica site (one of four in the Detroit area), located on the western boundary of the park parallel to Hamlin Road was dedicated in October 1957 and was manned until 1964 by members of Battery B-516th AAA Missile Battalion.

**CLINTON AND KALAMAZOO CANAL:** The first large public works project in Michigan, construction of the Clinton and Kalamazoo Canal, began on July 20, 1838 amid much fanfare. The proposed canal would have made it possible to cross Michigan by boat from Lake St. Clair to Lake Michigan. However, due to financial difficulties, the State withdrew its support, and construction of the canal ended in 1843 after only 12 miles were completed.



*The material for this display has been provided by*  
**The Charter Township of Shelby Historical Committee**  
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