

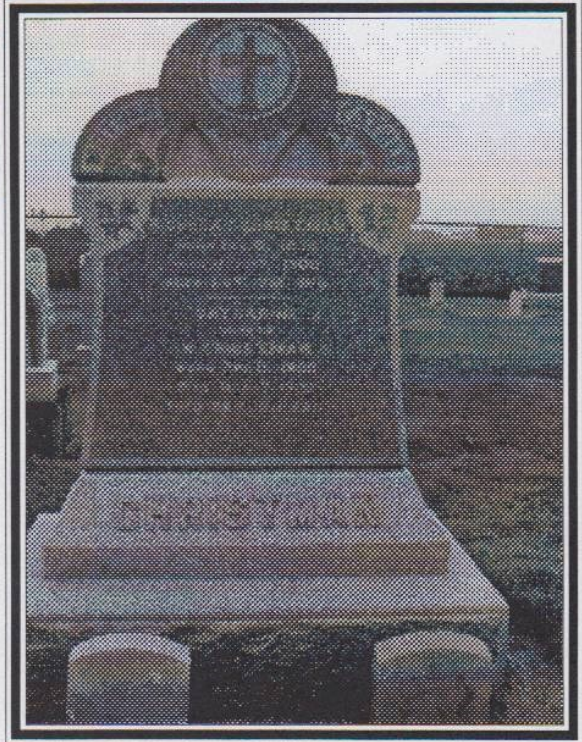
## CANAWLERS AT REST

# NICHOLAS CHRISTMAN

**b. February 5, 1834**  
**d. October 23, 1900**

By Carolyn I. Schmidt

Photographs by Bob Schmidt



Nicholas Christman was the son of Michael Christman (b. 7-23-1805) and Amea (Madeleine Franzell or Frentzel) Christman (b. 7-30-1808), who were married on 4-19-1833. Nicholas was born in Betting (Lorraine near present day St. Avold), France on February 5, 1834. His grandparents on his father's side were Michel and Marguerite Beckerich Christmann (note spelling). He was the oldest of three children. Their small village was located in the territory called Alsace-Lorraine, a small strip of land measuring 123 miles in length, running north and south that was approximately the size of the state of Connecticut. This territory had rich deposits of iron and coal. Throughout the mountain district fruits were raised, especially large vineyards of grapes. The farms were of small acreage, sometimes as small as one acre.

Alsace-Lorraine was taken from France at the close of the Franco-Prussian War, which was a bitter sorrow to the French people. Under German rule these people suffered heavy taxation and were compelled to learn the German language. German soldiers rode into their towns on horseback and made bonfires of all the French books.

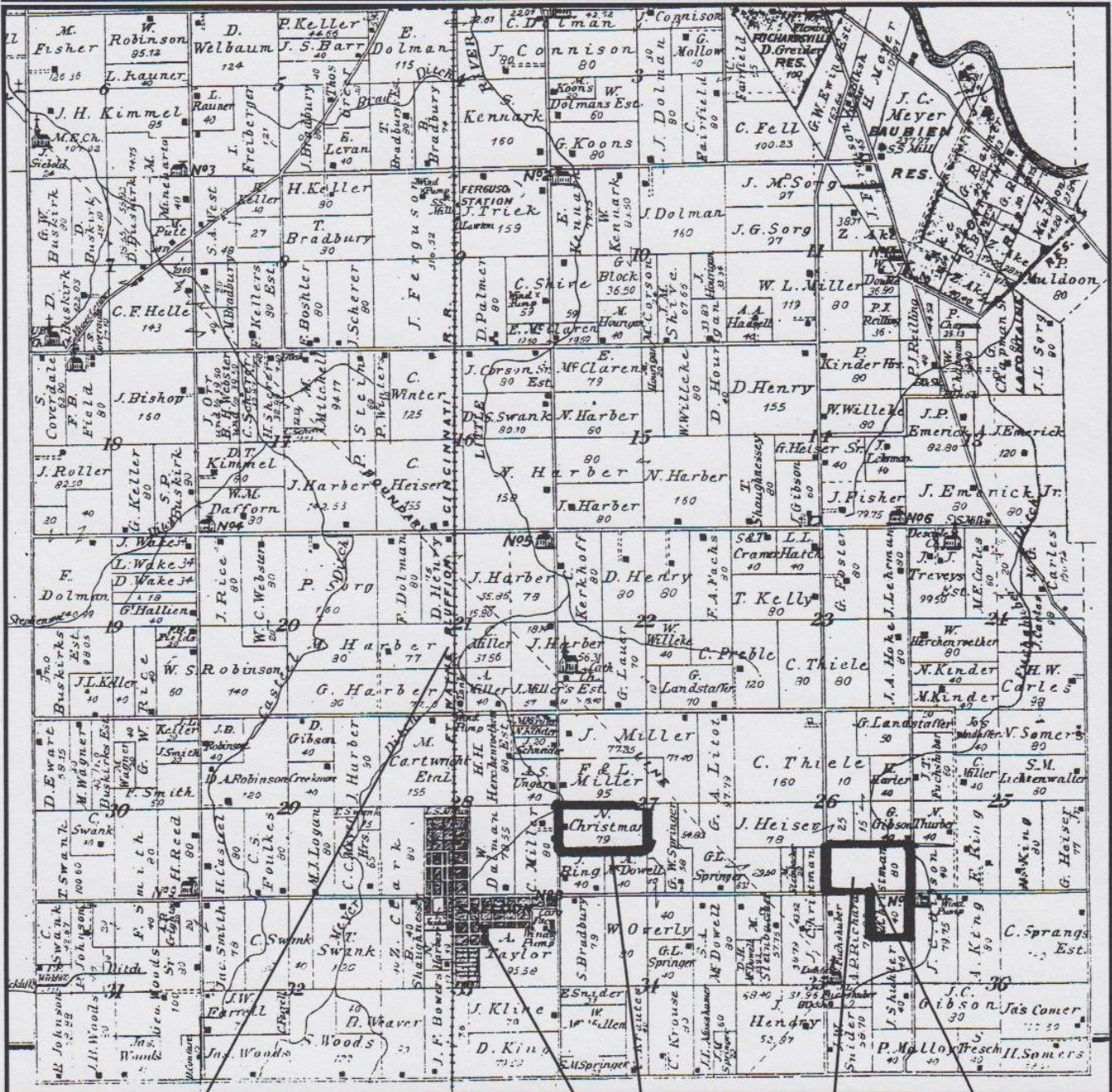
Due to this constant warfare Michael and Amea Christman left their home, relatives and friends and sailed for America in 1846 with their children: Nicholas, 14; Amea, 5; and John, 3. On the 5<sup>th</sup> day little Amea took ill, died and was buried at sea. They landed at Buffalo, New York, and settled on a farm in a French settlement near Montreal, Canada. There two more children, Rose and Jacob, were born to the Christmans.

In 1851, at the age of 18, Nicholas Christman left home and moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana. There he obtained work as a towpath driver (hoggee) on the Wabash and Erie Canal. He ate his meals at the Ruffner Inn located on the canal near Roanoke, Indiana.

The Ruffner Inn was originally owned by Jesse Vermilyea. By that time Jesse Vermilyea had died in 1846 and his wife Maria had passed away in 1848. The Vermilyea House, also known as the Vermilyea Tavern or Inn, remained in the Vermilyea estate and was operated by Philo and Rebecca Rumsey in 1849. Canal boat traffic began slowing down so Rumsey moved to Fort Wayne to manage the Rockhill House. The Vermilyea House was then purchased from the Vermilyea estate by Benjamin and Mary Ruffner on January 8, 1853. Southwest of the house was a widewater that was used as a turning basin for canal boats. On this basin Ruffner erected a warehouse. The property became known as Ruffner's Basin and Ruffner's Inn.

Nicholas met Catharine Heckbour (Last name as spelled on census, other spellings include Heckbar, Heckber, Heckbore) near Ruffner's Inn. Catharine was born on April 11, 1833. After a year's courtship they were married on April 30, 1854, at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Fort Wayne, Indiana. They started farming in Pleasant Township near what later became Sheldon, Indiana, a small community located ten miles south of Fort Wayne on Highway No. 1, Bluffton Road. There they built a home and started their family.



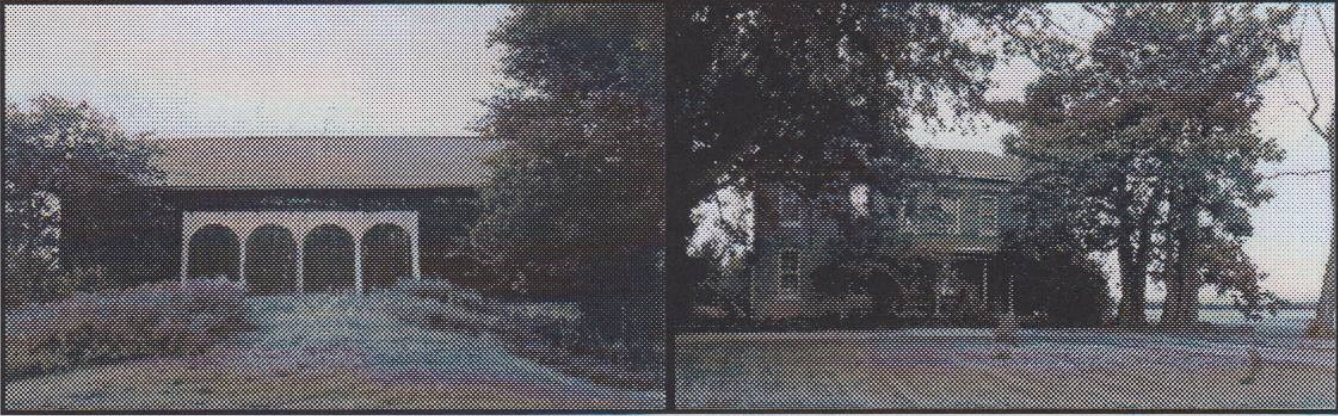


FT WAYNE, BLUFFTON,  
CINCINNATI RAILROAD  
(Earlier - Lake Erie & Western RR)

79 ACRES/120 ACRES & HOME  
OF NICHOLAS CHRISTMAN  
SHELDON (Later Yoder)

PLEASANT TOWNSHIP (partial map)  
ALLEN COUNTY, INDIANA  
1880





The 1862 bank barn and home of Nicholas Christman still stand on Yoder Road in Allen County, Indiana. Photos by Bob Schmidt

Nicholas and Catharine had ten children:

Peter	b. 1-11-1856	d. 5-31-1949
Jacob	b. 1857	d. 1938
Lewis	b. 1860	d. 1932
Mary	b. ?	d. ?
Rose	b. 1865	d. 1949
Susan	b. 1868	d. 1940
John W.	b. 1869	d. 1902
Catharine	b. ?	d. ?
Teresa	b. 1874	d. 1943

and another baby named John died in infancy.

The Christmans lived at 307 E. Yoder Road in a two-story, 11 room, brick home, which was the centerpiece of his farm. The house, 45 ft. by 60 ft. rests upon 12 by 12's with 12-inch centers and the walls, three bricks thick, extend down to rock, allowing room for a fruit cellar. Stoves were originally used to heat the home.

In 1862 Nicholas Christman built a large bank barn 66 ft. by 40 ft. on his property. The 12 by 12" roof

timbers are 66 feet long and are hand hewn. The supports are 40-footers. It is located near his home. Both are still standing today, but they, along with outbuildings of a grain shed, a brick smokehouse, and an adjoining frame milk and pump house and 2 acres on which they are located, were sold to a family who did extensive renovation. They have since been sold to another family.

A. J. Taylor owned land near the Christman farm and manufactured buggies on it. When Taylor learned that the Lake Erie and Western Railroad was to be built nearby he laid out lots in 1868 and a town was formed on November 25, 1870. He named it Sheldon in honor of the superintendent of the railroad, which ran between Fort Wayne and Muncie, Indiana. His workers located in the village. He sold his buggies at auctions. When an auction was held as many as a thousand buyers were said to have come.

A rougher element began congregating in Sheldon. Ten drinking saloons sprang up. The

Post card sent from Sheldon to Fort Wayne on April 5, 1911 shows East Main Street of Sheldon looking west.





Christmans and their neighbors were concerned about the drunken brawls and murders occurring in Sheldon. The place was not safe at night or even during the day. A correspondent to the Fort Wayne newspaper wrote of such roughness that the paper's editor thought he was exaggerating and decided to investigate for himself. He later regretted this decision. He was assaulted 11 times on his way to the train station—thrown to the ground and beaten.

Around 1907 Sheldon's citizens eventually drove out the saloon keepers and declared the town "dry." Some small industries along with two grain elevators, a drain tile company and a bank were located there. Apparently the railroad company decided the cleaned up town needed a new name and changed it to Yoder. Sheldon's citizens were unhappy with this change. In 1917 one wrote, "'Yoder' is a name which has been thrust upon the town of Sheldon by the railroads, though without other authority than themselves, but it applies only to the stations. Sheldon is the legal name, and Sheldon it will remain." However, postal records show that they started using Yoder as the official address in August of 1920, the Yoder post office was established in 1947, and it remains Yoder today.

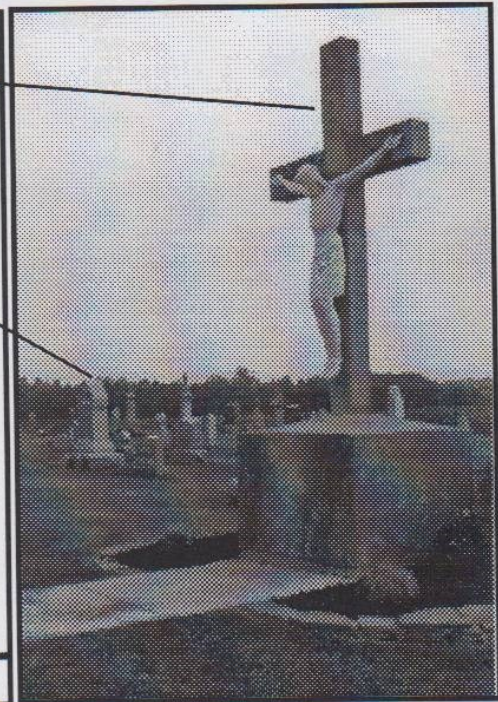
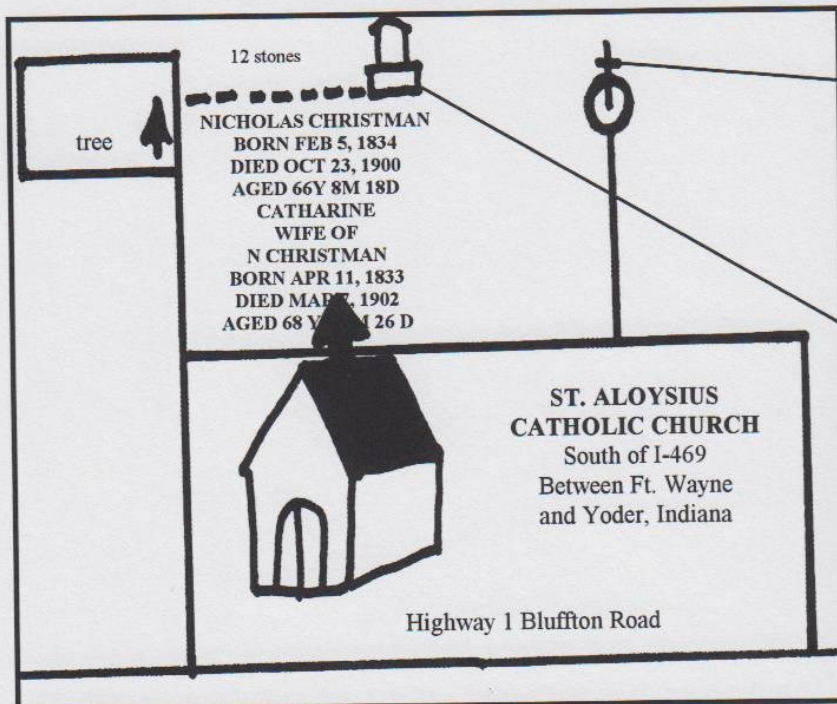
Family life at the Christman farm was fairly routine. The 1870 Indiana Census Index lists Nich Christman age 36, male, white, from France living in Allen County, Pleasant Twp. Roll 298 Farm value \$2,000 Personal estate \$919 on page 64. His wife Catharine is age 36, female, white, keeping house, from France, etc. All the children were born in Indiana and included Peter

13, Jacob 12, Louis 10, Mary 8, Rose 6, Susan 4, and John 1. Catharine and Teresa had not been born at the time.

In 1893 an event occurred that shook Nicholas, Catharine and their family. The Christman's were notified that Catharine's uncle had killed her aunt and himself in Roanoke, Indiana. Articles about the Hobogaz (Hovercuss) diabolical crime appeared in the *Huntington Herald* and spread to all parts of the United States. (These articles are quoted fully following this article.) Later Nicholas was appointed administrator of the estate and sold the Hobogaz acre to Addalaid M. Koontz in 1899.

Nicholas and Catharine were married 46 years. Nicholas died on October 23, 1900 at the age of 66 years, 8 months and 18 days. He was buried in the cemetery at St. Aloysius Catholic Church. At that time 9 of their children were alive. Catharine died on March 7, 1902 at the age of 68 years, 10 months and 27 days. She is buried beside Nicholas. Two small stones, Father born in Lorraine and Mother, originally marked the graves. Later a large monument was placed behind them that says Christman and gives their statistics.

St. Aloysius Cemetery is a genealogist's dream. Many Christmans are buried there including Peter Christman and Lewis Christman. The 1906 Allen County Directory shows Peter Christman, Nicholas' first child, a farmer owning sections 27 and 34 of 138 acres with an assessed value of \$3,850 in Pleasant township, Sheldon, and Lewis Christman, Nicholas' third child, a farmer owning sections 26 and 35 of 120 acres with the





assessed value of \$4,115 in Pleasant township, Sheldon.  
This property was previously owned by Nicholas.

Following the line of Lewis Christman (b. 1860, d. 1932), he married Louisa Hoffman (b. 1873, d. 1942). They were the parents of eight children:

Henry D.	b.1894	d. 7-14-1962
Mildred	b.11-14-1895	d. 4-28,1953
Ida Florence	b.1897	d. 10-20-1982
Albert John	b.11-26-1900	d. 10-20-1987
John F.	b. 9-9-1903	d. 3-19-1916
Lawrence Peter	b. 10-29-1909	d. 12-23-1973
Gertrude	b. ?	d. ?
Louis Stanford	b. 5-3-1914	d. 12-19-1984

Then following the line of Louis Stanford Christman (b. 1914, d. 1984), he married Mildred Edith Graft (b. 2-8-1919, d. 2-3-1998). Their children were:

Betty Jean	b. 1-16-1940	still living
Thomas Lee	b. 9-24-1957	still living

Betty Jean Christman is married to Don Haack (b. 11-30-1939). Both are members of CSI and Don is on the board of directors. Nicholas Christman was Betty's great-grandfather. As a child, Betty lived in the old brick house for a short time. Today Betty and Don's home is on part of Nicholas Christman's farm around the corner from the original homestead. When the Haacks joined CSI they had no knowledge of their canal connections. They only learned of them recently at a family reunion. The Haacks have a lengthy written genealogy of the descendants of Nicholas Christman, which is not included in this article.

The following articles appeared in the May 23, 1892 *Huntington Herald* and in the October 14, 1922 *Huntington Herald Press* regarding the murder/suicide.

Sources:

Bash, Frank Sumner. "Eccentricities Of A Former Roanoke Man And Tragic End Of Himself And Wife Are Told." *Huntington Herald Press*. October 14, 1922.

1870 *Indiana Census Index*

*History of Allen County*, Illustrated by Kingman Bros. 1880.

Keller, Kenneth. "Their Dream Come True." *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*.

"Michael Christman (1804-?)" written by a grandchild

"Murder And Suicide," *Huntington Herald*. May 23, 1893.

Post card. P. H. Heyman & Co., Ft. Wayne, IN.

*The Postal History of Indiana*. Vol. 2, page 1053.

"Yoder" Mary Lou Woodward, postmaster, Yoder, IN.

The St. Aloysius Catholic Church cemetery on Highway 1 Bluffton Rd. has the graves of many Christmans. Shown here are Nicholas' first child Peter and Margaret Christman, who later owned a portion of Nicholas' property, and Nicholas' third child Lewis and Louisa Christman, who owned another portion. The latter's property was then owned by their son Louis and Mildred Christman, who passed the property to their children Betty Haack and Tom Christman.

