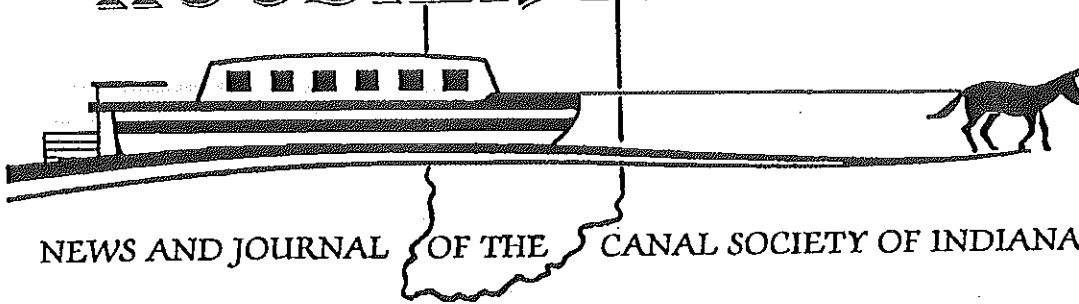


THE
HOOSIER-PACKET



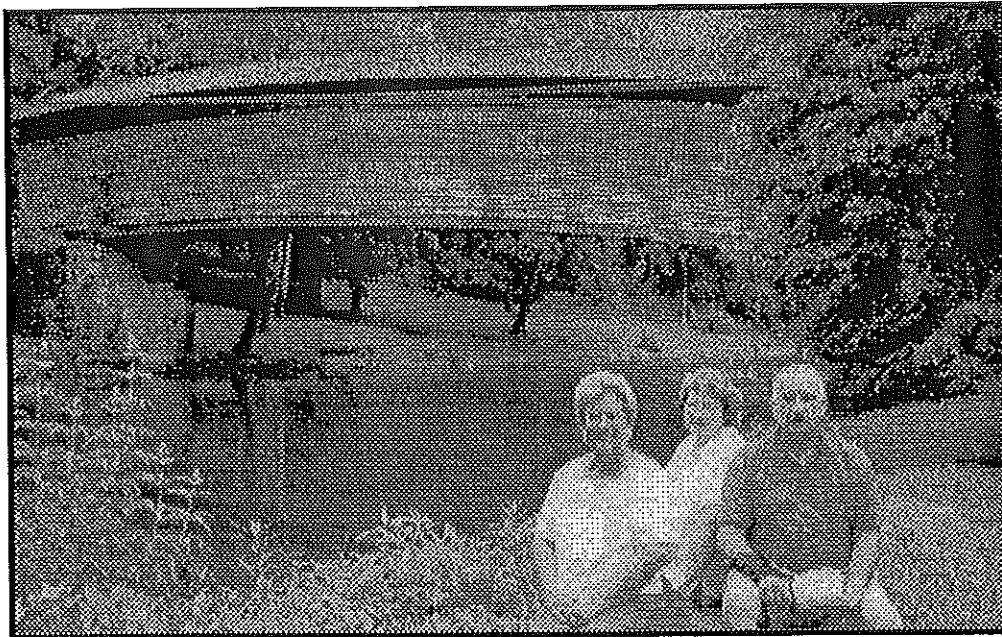
NEWS AND JOURNAL OF THE CANAL SOCIETY OF INDIANA

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DIABOLICAL DEEDS



Carolyn Schmidt (l) poses with Betty and Don Haack in front of the Humpback Bridge (1835-1929) that was built of hand hewn timbers for the James River Kanawah Turnpike Corporation near Covington, Virginia. Betty is the great granddaughter of Nicholas Christman, who is featured in the "Canawlers at Rest" article and mentioned in the "Diabolical Deeds" articles. Photo by Bob Schmidt

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RESEARCH LEADS TO MURDER

By Carolyn Schmidt

Canal Society of Indiana (CSI) headquarters often receives calls for assistance in genealogical research. Recently, while working on information about Nicholas Christman for Betty and Don Haack, I found an old article in our archives about his connection with a murder. I went to the library in Huntington, Indiana, and with the aid of Joan Keefer, head of the Indiana Room who is extremely knowledgeable in the genealogy of Huntington county, a news article, marriage date, and census records were found in a matter of minutes that concerned a murder/suicide in Roanoke, IN. She said that sometimes genealogy searches can lead to uncovering family secrets and bizarre events.

CANAWLERS AT REST

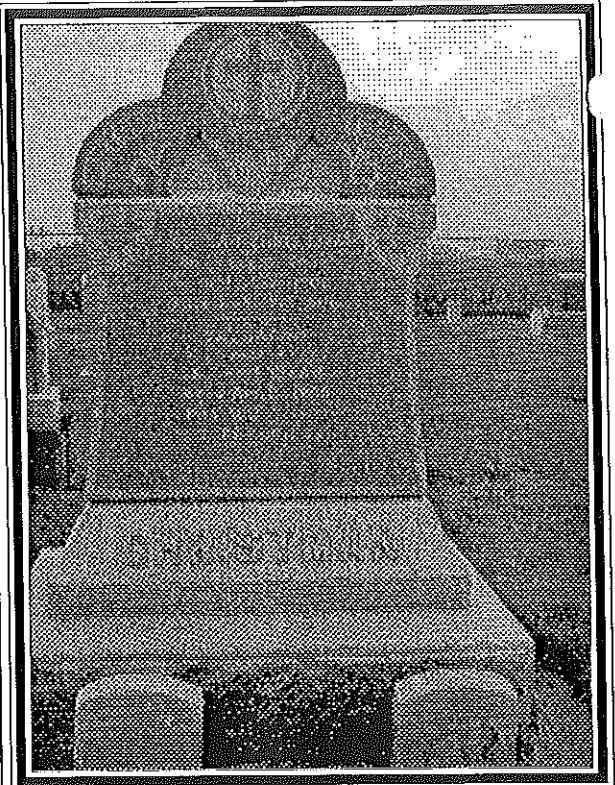
NICHOLAS CHRISTMAN

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.

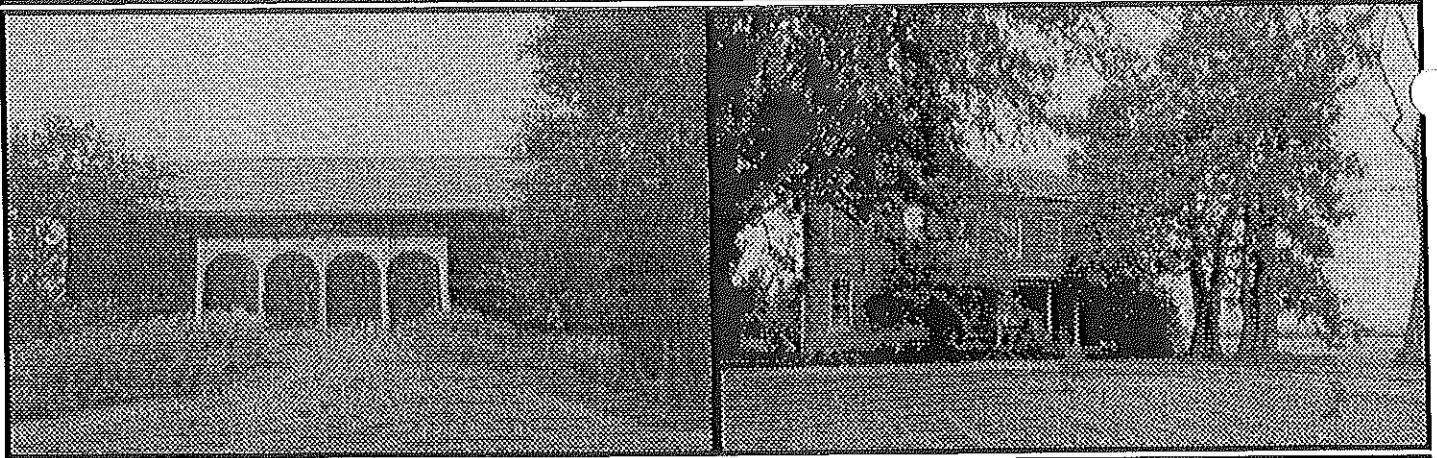
Alsace-Lorraine was taken from France at the close of the Franco-Prussian War, which was a bitter sorrow to the French people. Under German rule these people suffered heavy taxation and were compelled to learn the German language. German soldiers rode into their towns on horseback and made bonfires of 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 5th 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.



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. ? 1861	d. ? 1931
Rose	b. 1865	d. 1949
Susan	b. 1868	d. 1940
John W.	b. 1869	d. 1902
Catharine	b. ? 7-16-70	d. ? 6-22-58
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.

They Bought in 1866,

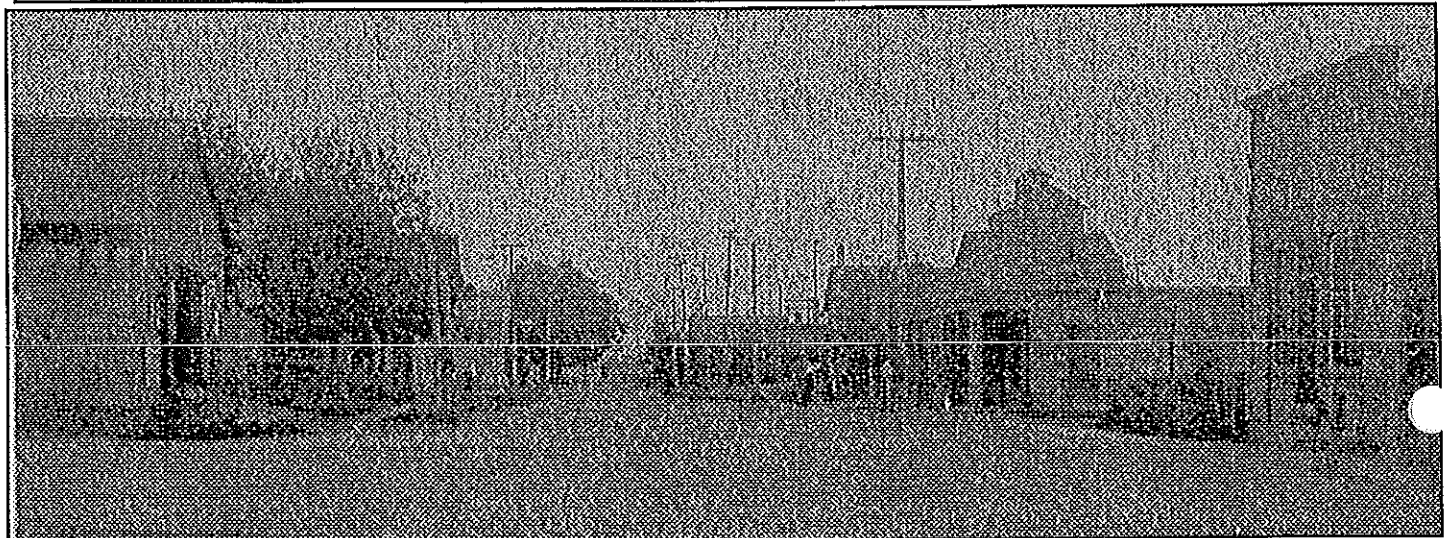
In 1862 Nicholas Christman built a large bank barn 66 ft. by 40 ft. on his property. The 12 by 12" roof

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.

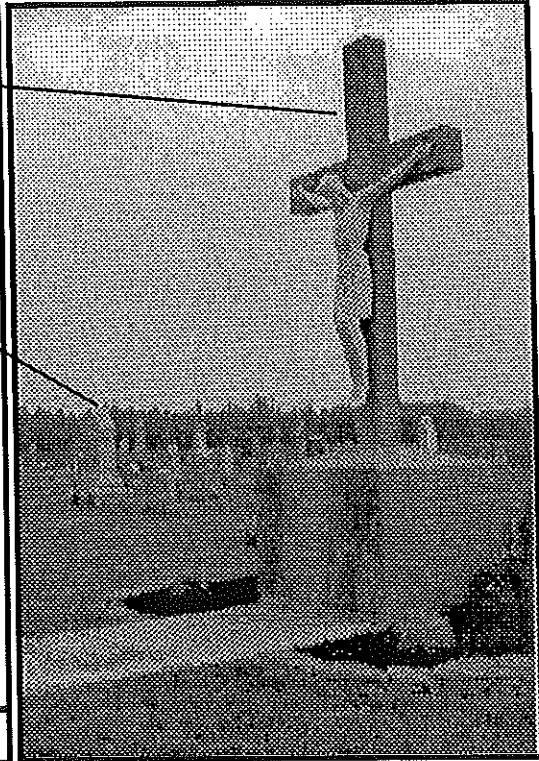
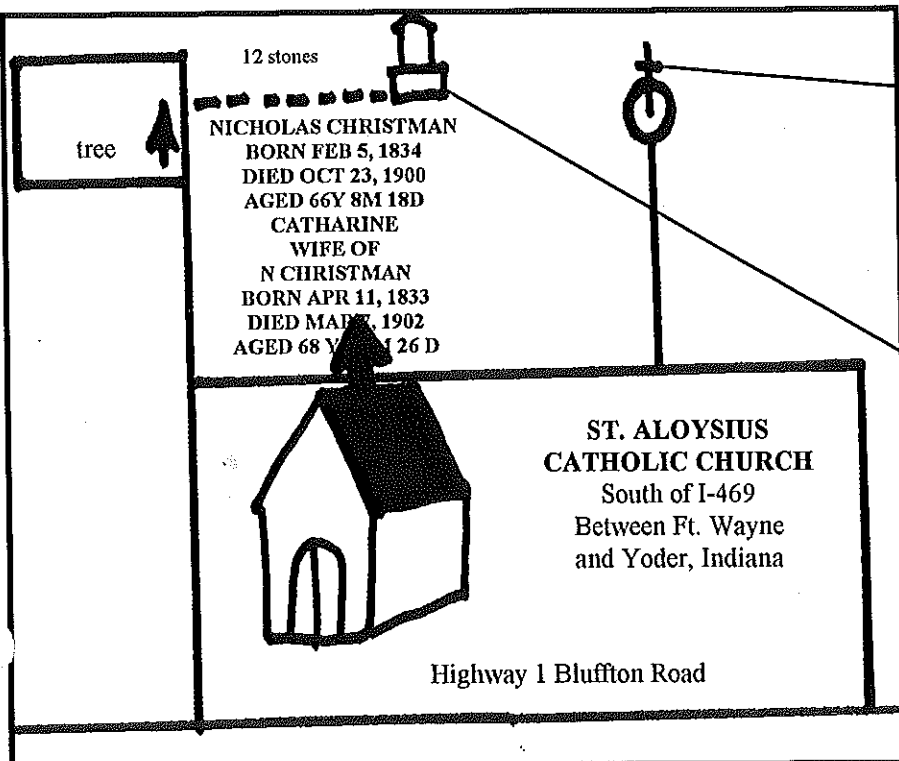
Family life at the Christman farm was fairly routine. The 1870 Indiana Census Index lists Nicholas Christman age 36, male, white, from France living in Allen County, Pleasant Twp. Roll 298 Farm value \$2,000 Personal estate \$919 on page 64. His wife Catharine is age 36, female, white, keeping house,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

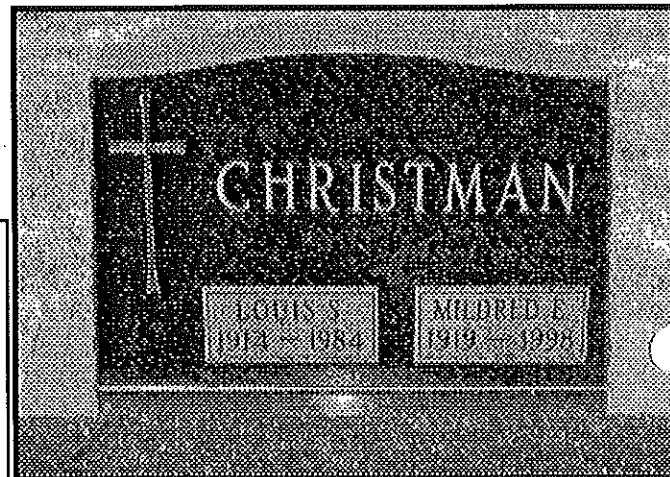
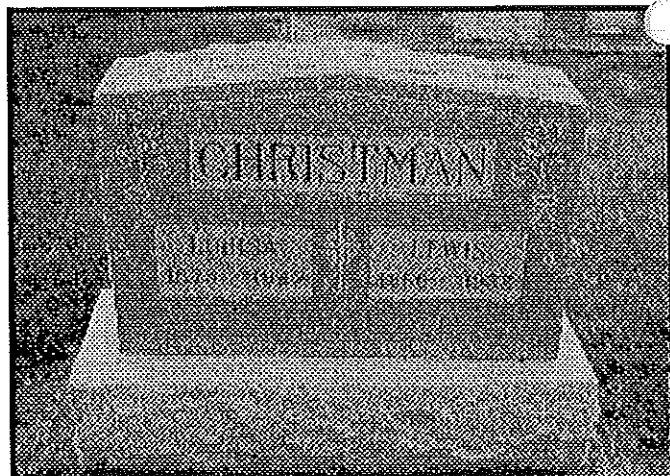
Keller, Kenneth. "Their Dream Come True." Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette.

"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.

FOLLOWING PARTICULARS:

The first discovery of the fire in the Hobogaz residence was made by E. M. Wasmuth and Miss Ina Serivens who were going home from choir meeting. They raised the alarm and neighbors were not long in hastening to the scene. Finding every thing locked, doors were forced open by Col. Zent. The fire was raging and when the bedroom was reached a revolting sight met the gaze of the intended rescuers. The body of the old lady who had lived in the humble cottage on Posey Hill for a period covering nearly forty years, lay on the bed and was covered with blood. Her throat had been slashed with a knife that left a gaping wound from which the last drops of life's blood were oozing. The bed was burning but the spreading flames had not reached the body by reason of the saturated condition of the bed clothing upon which blood had flowed. The corpse was removed from the house but not without peril to the living, for the top of the structure was ready to cave in at any moment.

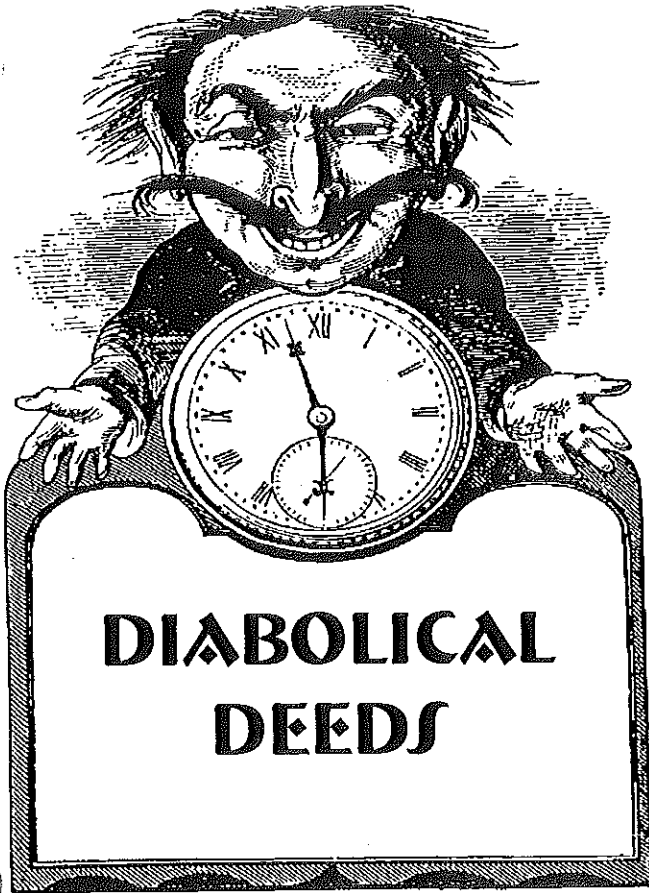
THE OLD MAN MISSING.

As Christian Hobogaz was known to be a desperate man when in anger, people in the crowd trembled with fears that he had killed his wife, fired the building and then secreted himself among the bushes from which he might rush forth with revolvers, and add greatly to the horrors of the scene.

The house was one story and the garret was used by the old man as a secret receptacle in which to keep his money, guns, ammunition, curios, etc. Access to this compartment was only to be gained through a trap door, which could not be forced open by the combined strength of all the men who were underneath. It was weighted down with iron, which was subsequently found to be an iron kettle in which were chains and pieces of iron. It was not until some one climbed a tree and looked through an opening into the garret that there was any assurance that the old man was in the building. In the black smoke and amid the lurid flames his body could be seen at times quite distinctly, but not plainly enough to indicate what method had been used to end his life. It is supposed, however, that he cut his throat.

AFTER THE FIRE

The body of the old lady was removed to the calaboose where the undertaker prepared it for burial. When the fire had spent its force and every thing had been reduced to ashes, very little could be found of the old man's remains. Some of the bones were found, but, at the slightest touch, fell to ashes and no effort was made to secure even a part of the remains, so they were left to mingle with the ashes of the weird old house.



May 23, 1893 - Huntington Herald

MURDER AND SUICIDE

Diabolical Deed Committed at Roanoke.

BLOOD, DEATH, FIRE,

All Combine to Produce an Unparalleled Scene in the History of this County.

Christian Hobogaz Cuts His Wife's Throat, Sets Fire to the House,

Kills Himself and Only Leaves His Ashes.

Last Saturday night, at about 11 o'clock, one of the most remarkable tragedies ever enacted in this part of the country, took place at Roanoke.

Christian Hobogaz, living on the street leading west from the central part of town and known as Posey Hill, cut his wife's throat, set fire to his residence, killed himself and burned to ashes in the fire, which entirely consumed the building. The deed was startling in the extreme and news of the sensation flashed over the wires to all parts of the United States, metropolitan papers demanding particulars in an incredibly short time after the notable affair took place. Investigations made by the HERALD result in the

LOOKING FOR MONEY.

Before there was any chance for intruders to commit depredations, a committee consisting of Isaac Roberts and Ira W. Webster, was appointed to guard the ruins. It was generally believed that a large sum of money was in the house at the time of the fire. The people lived like hermits, always made considerable from the sale of vegetables and produce, scarcely ever expended a cent for anything, received a pension, and surely there must be money somewhere. A lady living near said when she was a little girl she often visited the house and what money they had was in a certain corner of the upstairs. The locality in the ruins corresponding with the spot indicated was visited and gold and silver dug from the ashes. The money was so damaged from heat that the only estimate of its value could be made from the size of the pieces. Col. Zent, James Highland and Marshal Twining counted the money and estimated the amount then found to be worth \$153.91. Afterwards another bunch of about \$50 was found making a total of a little over \$200. Of course if there was any currency, it was destroyed. There is an opinion expressed that some of their money was buried in the yard although there are others who do not think they had much more than was found.

NOT LIKELY A ROBBER

A great many expressed a belief that a thief, who chanced to learn the old folks had rich treasure in the house, did the killing and burning of the house but there is little or no circumstantial evidence upon which to base such a theory. The old man had often been heard to make threats and the sequel was only in accordance to his eccentricities and terrible traits of character. His wife had been poorly for some time and the husband said in his broken accents:

"Vin effer my Mary's two eyes close foreffer, four eyes close!"

He had also said that he was born in May, was married in May and would die in May. These things lead people to believe that there can be no doubt as to who committed the deed.

THE CORONER'S VISIT.

In response to a telephone message Sunday morning, Dr. H. M. Beaver, the coroner, and Alonzo Crandal, the city marshal, went to Roanoke to make an official investigation. Witnesses were examined and testimony was taken as flows:

D. C. Twining: I am the marshal of Roanoke. I was called to the Christian Hobogaz residence about 12 o'clock last night. The house was on fire. I saw the body

of Mary Hobogaz. Her throat was cut. Christian Hobogaz body was entirely burned. I believe Christian Hobogaz did the deed himself. I helped count the money found in the ruins and estimated the amount at \$123.91 (\$153.91). The money is badly damaged by fire. I have appointed Ira W. Webster and Isaac Roberts to guard the ruins and search for further valuables.

Noah Rupert: I have known Christian Hobogaz for seven years. Mary Hobogaz had been in poor health. He told me that he would kill himself when Mary died. I was at the house when it was burning and I saw the body carried out of the house by the neighbors. Mary's throat was cut. The supposition is that he cut his wife's throat and fired the house, then killed himself. The doors were all locked when parties first came to the scene.

Wm. Yahne: I helped carry the body of Mrs. Hobogaz across the street from the burning house. The house was on fire above. He had a trap door to upper story and this was fastened. I considered him a desperate man when angry. My opinion is he did the deed himself. D. C. Twining, James Highland and myself counted the money and estimate the amount at this time to be \$153.91. They money is hard to count on account of damage from fire.

S. M. Zent: I was among the first to come to the burning house. I found the doors locked. I have been acquainted with the family thirty-five years. He was a desperate man when angry. His wife was in poor health. Her bedroom door was locked and the bed was on fire when we entered. The supposition is that he committed the deed, first killing his wife, then firing the house and finally killing himself.

The coroner finds in accordance with the foregoing testimony, which is the effect that Mrs. Hobogaz came to her death at the hands of her husband and that he committed suicide. The official says it will necessitate two separate reports, that of murder and suicide, the double tragedy being the only one of the kind ever reported by a coroner in the history of Huntington county.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The eccentric character who brought about such a dreadful occurrence has always been known by the name of "Hovercuss." Very few who knew him for many years ever called him any other name except "Hovercuss," but his true name seems to be Hobogaz. He was born in Germany and came to New York when quite young. While in that city he made cigars for livelihood. He left New York to seek his fortune west, and settled at Fort Wayne where he engaged in the manufacture of vinegar, his place of business having

been near where the Cathedral now stands. When the Mexican war broke out he enlisted and, after serving to the close, returned to Fort Wayne. For a number of years he had been drawing a pension on account of services rendered in the Mexican war. He married at Fort Wayne after which he bought a farm north of Roanoke which he soon traded to T. V. Horton for the house and lot which constituted his home up to the time of his death. When not in anger, he was polite and courteous especially to those who bought fruit and vegetables of him and of which he always had the finest produce to be found in the neighborhood. He kept secluded nearly all of the time and only when compelled to buy something did he appear on the streets. He was always neat and tidy, walked with a quick elastic step, never looking to the right or left, nor stopping until his errand was accomplished. As he passed along people would stare at him from windows and children would seek a shelter from which they would whisper in bated breath, "There goes Hovercuss!" He was regarded as a sort of veterinary surgeon and was often called to treat cattle and horses. With the exception of such times, he was never seen unless while at work in his garden behind the hill from the street. It is said they never burned a light in the evening but for what reason was never known. It is also stated that he once studied for the priesthood and while thus engaged, suffered a mental disorder from which he never fully recovered. His passion knew no bounds and on more than one occasion when mischievous lads sneaked around his premises and yelled "Boomblesock," would he chase them with revolvers, firing load after load at every step. In one or two instances there were serious results from such fracas. He always kept a liberal supply of ammunition and firearms and when the building was burning there was a popping and bang, bang, bang of guns and cartridges in the room upstairs where his body lay that sounded at times like a Gattling gun and made timid people shriek with fright for they thought the dreadful old man's ghost was up there in the flames engaged in a merry war with demons and dragons right from the infernal regions, who, while there, might take the whole town.

HIS COFFIN AND GRAVE.

The weird and peculiar conception which all people had of "Hovercuss" will be more readily understood when it is stated that years ago he had his coffin made which he kept in the house up to the time of his tragic deed. He also had his grave made in the rear end of the lot but whether it had been allowed to fill up and get out of proper condition for the reception of a body is not learned.

RELATIVES ARRIVE.

Mr. and Mrs. (Nicholas) Christman and Mrs.

Christman's sister arrived in Roanoke Sunday evening. The ladies were nieces of Mrs. Hobogaz. They reside in Sheldon (Yoder) near Fort Wayne. They frequently visited the old people years ago but were so cruelly treated by Mr. Hobogaz that they could not stay at the house and finally ceased their visits altogether. A nephew from Fort Wayne, whose name was something like Domyer, was also present. The remains of the old lady were buried in the Catholic cemetery at Roanoke yesterday at 9:30 o'clock. Her age was eighty years and her husband was several years younger.

The money found in the ruins, which amounts to about \$200, with the real estate, will be divided by legal process between the legal heirs.

It is claimed that every article about the premises was taken into the house so that not a vestige of anything might be left after the fire. The knife used by the murderer and suicide was found in the ruins. It was very large and neighbors saw the old man grinding it on Saturday afternoon. It will be a long time before people in the vicinity of Roanoke forget "Hovercuss" and the terrible method he adopted for the ending of his strange career.

Years later F. S. Bash told of the event from his memory.

ECCENTRICITIES OF A FORMER ROANOKE MAN AND TRAGIC END OF HIMSELF AND WIFE ARE TOLD

By Frank Sumner Bash
Huntington Herald Press October 14, 1922

In your youth did you ever experience a mortal dread of some one, real or imaginary, who dwelt in your community? When a youngster did you have a positive knowledge that right up there on the hill lived a foreigner for many years, who was just as fierce and strong and dangerous as a cave man and that he kept big knives and strange looking guns with which to kill people? As a child did you ever know of a demon-like resident of your town who would swear black vengeance on boys, chase them through the darkness to murder them in cold blood? In passing a particular little old house at night, with your associates, did you speak in hushed whispers and in accents of shivers about this peculiar man having his own grave dug in his lot and that he made himself a coffin which he kept in readiness in his work shop? Well, if you did, you must have lived at Roanoke many years ago, for it is absolutely true that exactly such an

individual lived there and his name was Chris Hovercuss. I am spelling his name the same as it was pronounced by everybody in the vicinity, but where his name appeared on his old deeds and papers it was spelled Christian Hobakus (Hobogaz), or something like that.

Among young people the very name gave one a creepy, chilly sensation. To pass this man's house at night made the imagination of boys and girls see specters moving about the humble premises of Chris and Mary Hovercuss, on Posey Hill. Youngsters just could not help thinking of those knives, guns, the coffin and grave and all about how he would at times lie down in the grave and tell Mary he was going to die there. Then, too, the house was always in darkness. No lamp or candle of any kind was ever used at night. This added to the hushed mysteries that seemed to permeate the atmosphere surrounding the quaint little cottage on the hill. That Chris sometime would commit a real tragedy, everyone, old and young believed in all sincerity. Sure enough, when the curtain finally did rise for the last act in his life's drama, it proved to be ghastly diabolical, blood-curdling. It will be referred to in detail at the close of this article.

Chris Hovercuss and his wife, Mary, were born somewhere in the German empire, presumably in Prussia and were married there (married in Ft. Wayne, IN). Just how the fate ever decreed their crossing of the Atlantic and landing from a canal boat at Roanoke before the Wabash railroad was built, no one could explain. Other people would tell how they came to locate there but Chris and Mary would never offer any explanation. They immediately bought a small tract of land north of town, lived in a cabin and tilled the ground until a time when T. V. Horton, proprietor of the old woolen mills at Roanoke, traded them an acre lot on the street known as Posey Hill. Hovercuss at once engaged Samuel H. Grim, at that time a contractor and still a resident of Roanoke and now approaching an age not far from ninety years, to construct a one-story house on the lot. The ground sloped to the south, which made it ideal for vegetables and fruit. Chris and Mary had learned in the old country how to get the most from a small amount of land, and they always had choice products of such fine quality as to meet with ready sale right at their own door. Honesty, fair dealing and generous measure always characterized their every transaction. Chris knew the art of making good wine and always kept some that was well aged. If Dr. Koontz or other local physicians prescribed unadulterated wine for a patient, as was sometimes done in the early practice, it could be secured from Chris, who would go to his cellar alone, fill the bottle and refuse to accept a cent because it was for a sick person.

Chris had a chubby, wholesome face that was clean and free from a growth of beard, although I

remember hearing him tell my father a razor had never touched his face. This he explained one day at our house when my father brought him to our farm to perform a surgical operation on a sick cow, in which he was accounted well skilled and rendered for us excellent service. He was asked by my father how often he shaved. Then was when he said he never was shaved, but always used a small scissors with which to clip his beard close to the skin every day. He showed us how rapidly he could do the trick.

One of his peculiarities was that he, himself, must answer a rap at the door. Sooner or later the door would swing open but the caller would find no one in sight. Then Chris would step out from behind the door and extend a friendly greeting. His wife was kept in a state of fear and intimidation. He had an ungovernable temper and Mary humbly bowed to his stern edicts. He was possessed of a dual personality, a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in real life. His face could be all sunshine one hour and the next be an impersonation of the devil. In a fit of fury he was seen at times to jerk off his hat, slam it on the ground, jump upon it with both feet and stamp it into shreds, at the same time clinching his fists and swearing such oaths as no one could describe. Boys nearly grown, would sometimes venture within hearing distance of his place, then yell, "Nick-commer-ouse to the Dutchman's house," and away he would bound as fast as his short legs could carry him which was never fast enough to overtake the fleet-footed tormentors. Sometimes he would call at a house to see if he could locate the lads and his fury and frenzy would nearly frighten the women folks into hysterics. Once he came dashing into the old seminary building in search of young fellows he had been chasing, thinking they might be students, but Prof. Reefy would have to satisfy him that the mischievous lads did not belong there. One can imagine the panic such a scene produced among the students. Occasionally of nights, Bill and Jim Yahne, who lived about half a mile out on the same street, would scrape fishpoles on the weather boarding of the Hovercuss house and a brain storm would invariably ensue. Springing out of bed, not waiting to dress, Chris would grab a knife and gun and hot-foot it in pursuit, but the Yahne boys could hop fences and hide in thickets under cover of the darkness and make good their escape. Returning home Chris would talk to himself saying: "If only I could cotch dem tyfels once, day voult find somedings oud quick van I kill 'm already!"

There were times when Chris would be in such a temper that he would threaten to kill both Mary and himself, thus causing her much distress. One day he took his gun and told Mary he was going to the woods to kill himself sure. She was in the yard in terrible anguish, weeping, and trying to dissuade him from his evil purpose, but he went right on. It so happened he met Ed



Salts, a seven-foot giant of Roanoke, who was good natured but made any one feel in his presence that it was just as well not to incur his displeasure and bring a lick from one of his sledge-hammer fists. When they met, Ed extended greetings and asked Chris what was the matter? In his broken dialect, Chris said: "Och, Gott in himmell! It vas petter I did vent to ter tyful in hell, so I go shoot myself quick already py ter voots!" (Oh, God in heaven! It was better I did went to the devil in hell, so I go shoot myself quick already by the woods!)

Instead of extending sympathy and pity, or offering protests, Ed was as cool as a pickle and proceeded to take the old man's breath away by this unexpected rejoinder: "See here Chris! If you want to die, hand me the gun, I'll fix you quicker'n you can say Jack Robinson. What's the use of you going out there to the woods, I can attend to the job right here and now you old devill! Give me the gun, I say! Hand it over and you'll never worry that good old wife of yours again about killing yourself."

Chris was astounded. Ed said Chris didn't seem to know whether he was dead or alive and had met the devil in citizen's clothes. Then big Ed commanded Chris to clear out for home and behave himself. He went, too, and obeyed the command for some time.

To Hovercuss the Month of May was peculiarly significant. He took pride in saying he was born in May; his wife, Mary was born in May; their marriage was in

May; they sailed for America in May; bought their farm in May; traded for the lot in May; happenings in the history of their ancestors in Germany were in May; and in closing the series of events he said, "Mary and I are getting old and we will die in May."

Back in 1895 (1893), early in the month of May, Mary was taken seriously sick. In earlier times if Mary became ill, her husband manifested deep concern. Now he was showing no uneasiness and was really quite indifferent. He did not summon medical aid. Neighbors, such as Mrs. Olds and Mrs. Ola Miner, called frequently to offer kindly ministrations. For years Mrs. Olds was a customer for fruits and vegetables and when Mary was sick, would bring her bread and delicacies, for which Chris was lavish in his appreciation, but now he expressed no alarm after his wife showed rapid decline into a state of coma. Right then neighbors saw him one day grinding some big knives. The month a May was fast drawing to a close. That night after the grinding of knives, young folks were returning from a choir rehearsal and when passing, saw a bright light in the Hovercuss house, above and below. Black smoke was finding its way outside. The alarm spread and neighbors forced open the doors. The bed on which Mary lay had been oiled and was on fire. Her form was snatched from the flames and carried out, but she was dead and her throat was cut from ear to ear. Her flesh was burned in places. It is thought he waited until her illness advanced to an unconscious condition before committing the deed. The husband was nowhere visible. Above was a loft or attic leading to which was a ladder and trap door. The door was found so heavily weighted down that the combined efforts of Col. Zent and Samuel Grim could not raise it. The fire was raging and nothing further could be done. Boys climbed a tree and from this could look into the small upper window and see the gruesome form of Hovercuss surrounded by flames. After the house was consumed and the ashes cooled, his bones were removed and with the remains of Mary were given respectful sepulcher. In the ruins were found several steel parts of ancient guns, pistols and knives, also blackened silver coins amounting to one hundred dollars (\$153.91). The only legal heir that could be found was a nephew (nephew by marriage), Nicholas Christman, who lived near Sheldon (which later became Yoder). He was appointed administrator and disposed of the Hovercuss acre, in 1899, to Addalaid M. Koontz.

Armiesburg Bridge

And Its Wabash and Erie Canal Connections

By Charles Davis

After writing about Armiesburg and its Wabash & Erie Canal Connections (Indiana Canals Vol. 11 No. 4 Autumn 2000), I have found a few more interesting things to add to this once prosperous town in the Canal Era. A good find is that the canal there just south west of the town was the shipping point called "Widewaters," a widened point in the canal instead of a basin.

The subject here is the Armiesburg Covered Bridge. Since the founding of Parke county, people forded the creek near the Armiesburg Mill. The crossing was made famous when Gen. William Henry Harrison crossed the creek and camped at this point when he and his army were going north to the Battle of Tippecanoe. Then again by Gen. Hopkins on his way to Tippecanoe in 1813. After destroying the rest of the village of Prophet's Town, Hopkins came back this route locating the first military road through Parke county. Today part of this route is through Armiesburg and is called the Armiesburg or Lafayette road. Col. Zachary Taylor, later the President of the United States, was with this force of volunteers.

Our covered bridge histories are sketchy at best on this particular bridge. The Rockville True Republican of Dec. 7, 1854 gives us an in-depth look about its building and its cost. It was built at the time the Big Raccoon Creek No. 12 Aqueduct for the Wabash & Erie Canal was being repaired just west of the bridge.

"Armiesburg Bridge"

As this long needed and very necessary improvement has been entirely completed, it may not be uninteresting to our readers to know something about its cost, etc. In the first instance, the State appropriated \$250 towards the construction of this bridge, which sum, as yet, has not been realized. The Board of Commissioners, in pursuance of the system commenced by them a few years since, appropriated \$6,500 towards it, when the work was let. After estimating the cost, etc; it was found that this sum was not sufficient for its completion, and as it was virtually throwing away money to let the work remain unfinished, they wisely concluded to make an additional conditional appropriation of \$2000. This, in addition to the first appropriation, made the sum of \$8,500, which was not within several hundred dollars of the estimate. The Township Trustees then levied a tax of 25 cents on the hundred dollars in Wabash township, which will come very near paying the whole cost of the bridge. Mr. Henry Wolf, the active and energetic contractor, has made a

first rate job of the bridge, and deserves great credit for it. He has performed even more than he was required to do, and has really made no money by his contract, although there are some few who appear to think that of such an immense sum as this work costs, a large portion of it would go into his pockets. That our readers may see for themselves, we give, below, the different items in the construction. The work was estimated by a competent engineer, and Mr. Wolf, we are told, comes up to the estimate within a mere trifle: FINAL ESTIMATE of the work done by H. Wolf on the Armiesburg Bridge, Parke county, Indiana, as follows:

411 cubic yards of masonry in abutment, at \$6	\$2,466.00
194 feet of superstructure, at \$18	3,492.00
2135 cubic yds rock in bluff, at 80¢	1,706.00
3266 do earth do, at 25¢	816.50
1826 do in north pit, at 25¢	456.50
134 do in south pit, at \$1	134.00
1302 feet hewed timber, for foundation, at 12¢	162.75
1632 feet oak plank and spikes and putting them in, at \$1.75	28.56
244 extra bolts 578 lbs., at 15¢	86.70
45,000 pine shingles, cost \$4.00 (dif-over poplar, at 85)	38.25
Moving J. Hunt's stable, at \$9.50	9.50
Adding 6 feet finish and taking rock, out of south end of bridge	50.00
Total	\$9,449.00*

For center lines over and under lateral braces throughout the bridge, and center lines on studding, anchor irons and stayrods and brace rods 38 in number, 7 feet 2 inches long, and cutting of the stone in abutments, in place of hammer-dressed, no charges made or allowed for the same, etc. H. WOLF This 18th Nov. 1854.

Thus it will be seen that the total cost of the bridge is \$9,449.56,* without saying anything about the gratuitous work done by Mr. Wolf. If he got pay for the whole work done, it would amount to about then thousand dollars. This seems like a very large amount to expend in one section of the county, but the bridge was needed badly, and ought to have been built long ago. There are two other streams in the county that need bridging, and we suppose our worthy Commissioners will see that it is done as soon as possible. We are in favor of bridging every stream in the county that needs it." *Note the discrepancy in the total cost. Your editor gets \$9,446.76 using these numbers.

This covered bridge took care of traffic until 1913, when it was replaced by a concrete structure.

On the same page about the bridge is some noteworthy news as follows:

"Mrs. Sarah W. Karns died in New York a few days ago, age one hundred and seventeen years, three months and sixteen days. She had been the mother of twenty-two children, two of whom survive her. She was for many years a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church."

In 1873 an article in Rockville's Indiana Patriot on May 8 mentioned the Armiesburg ford area, the only of that Gen. Harrison camped in Parke County on his way through it. It is seen on the right:



This photo owned by Robert Burns of Montezuma was taken around 1900 and shows the old covered bridge that crossed Big Raccoon Creek at Armiesburg. The bridge was replaced in 1913.

Silver in a Sugar Tree Grove

Reading the (Terre Haute) Gazette account of the coin in the possession of L. Goodman, Jr., reminded Mr. Mason, of Liberty avenue that a year ago last fall, he and a brother-in-law were squirrel hunting in Parke county, when he chanced to see a shining silver coin in the rubbish, near a spring. Stooping down he picked it up and found it to be an apparently antiquated American dollar, coined in the earlier days of the Republic, yet but little worn. Searching around in the same locality he found other coin, including several Spanish dollars. His brother-in-law also succeeded in unearthing some coin of like character. Sometime afterwards, he returned to the same locality and recovered still more money. Meantime another gentleman, one who resides in Parke county, found a purse that dropped to pieces at his touch and out rattled twenty three dollars in silver, Spanish and American coins. The theory of the "oldest inhabitants" of that section of the country, is that in the great Indian campaign that resulted in the decisive battle of Tippecanoe, General Harrison's army camped there for a season, and that the money was lost by the troops. ---T. H. Gazette

Murder Will Out

A Girl Outraged At Wabash

A Clue to the Attica Horror

There is a great excitement at Attica, Wabash, and Peru, in the Valley— one Van Dyne and two accomplices charged with outraging a girl near Wabash, some days since. The girl died from the effects and (the) arrest of the parties developed the fact that one or more of them had been implicated in the murder of the German girl at Attica.

Almost two years ago it will be remembered that the girl was living in the family of Mr. Loeh, a merchant of Attica; that she went out to milk the cow at nightfall and her remains were found in the (Wabash & Erie) Canal that next day. Several parties were arrested and circumstances had complicated others that various theories have been entertained touching the murder. Innocent parties have been strongly suspected and bitter antagonisms have grown out of it. At last however the truth is to be divulged.

A woman with whom Van Dyne boarded at Attica and who was in his confidence, positively asserts that he and his accomplices committed the outrage and the murder; that after the cow had kicked over the pail of milk, they drove the animal toward the canal and the girl coming after the cow they intercepted her and consummated the outrage and the murder.

Van Dyne and his alleged accomplices were arrested night before last at Wabash, and heavily guarded were driven in a closed carriage to Peru to avoid a writ of habeas corpus, but the Sheriff of Wabash county intercepted those at that point with a writ and they were taken back for examination. The Attica witness, however in company with the Sheriff of Fountain county, accompanied (them), and the officers express confidence in their ability to hold them for trial on the evidence. Further developments will be awaited with interest. Lafayette Courier.

This article appeared in the Rockville Republican on June 4, 1873 and was sent to CSI headquarters by Charles Davis of Rockville, IN.

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THE STURGEON BAY SHIP CANAL, WISCONSIN

By Cynthia Powers

Last summer (2004) Ed and I had a chance to add another canal to our "life list." This was the Sturgeon Bay Ship Canal, which crosses the Door Peninsula in Wisconsin. It's probably one of the world's shortest canals, but it has an interesting history.

The Door Peninsula sticks into Lake Michigan like a thumb, with Green Bay on the west. It's a very picturesque part of the Midwest, especially as you get closer to the tip. Since we'd never been there before, we chose a one-week Elderhostel program called "Door County Panorama." (In their current catalog, it's been renamed "A Door County Experience.") It turned out to be a delightful introduction.

Now we can truthfully say "We've been at Death's Door!" Treacherous currents off the very tip of the peninsula caused so many shipwrecks (or canoe wrecks) that the French named it "Porte des Morts" or "Death's Door." Indians and voyageurs avoided it by portaging their canoes across the peninsula. The easiest place to do that was at about the halfway point, where Sturgeon Bay almost completely cuts across the peninsula, leaving only a little over a mile to be portaged.

In the 1880's a group of local businessmen, headed by Joseph Harris, editor of the newspaper *The Door County Advocate*, decided to construct a canal using the route of the old portage. They determined that they could recoup their costs by charging tolls. It helped that the canal only had to be 6600 feet long, or 1 ¼ miles. They began work in July 1872. Small craft began using the canal in 1880, and by 1882 it was open for larger vessels.

Of course the increased traffic led to the need for a lighthouse. Unfortunately the architects badly underestimated the heavy winds in the area. The tower vibrated so badly that the light couldn't operate reliably. Several "fixes" were tried but failed. Finally a network of cable supports on a much wider platform was erected, which solved the problem in 1903.

The canal is easily seen from the Sturgeon Bay Maritime Museum, which the Elderhostelers visited on one of our bus tours. We also visited the Eagle Bluff lighthouse, several art galleries, a cherry orchard, and the Ridges Sanctuary, where rare orchids bloom between ancient shoreline ridges.

We learned that Door County was settled by Belgians, Icelanders, and Moravians. The Icelanders settled on Washington Island, off the tip of the peninsula. So they truly had to cross "Death's Door" to get there.

When CSI members traveled on New York's Erie Canal in October, 2003, the grand climax of our trip was the series of five locks at Lockport. Those locks were necessary for the canal to cross the hard rock ridge called the Niagara Escarpment. We were amazed to learn that this very same formation makes a big arc around the Great Lakes and forms the backbone of the Door Peninsula! We felt that in a way we'd come "full circle."

NEWS FROM DELPHI

WHERE IN THE WORLD DID THEY COME FROM? CANAL CENTER ATTRACTS VISITORS

By Dan McCain

Ever wonder how a small Midwestern town can attract attention from people all over the world? And do all this without spending a dime for advertising! Well that's the mark of the Canal Interpretive Center as it has become a tourist attraction and it is uniquely quite successful. Come to the little Hoosier town called Delphi and see for yourself. It's the "Home of the Wabash & Erie Canal" according to Mayor Lee Hoard.

Sign-in registration sheets show 9,295 individuals registered for a no fee entrance to the museum galleries. There is no total for the patrons that didn't sign. Registrants came from an impressive 46 states and 26 foreign countries. They came from Rockfield just outside of Delphi to Riverside outside of Los Angeles—South Dakota to Spain—even from Venezuela back to the rural southern Indiana town of Jevay. On July 2, 3 and 4th, 2005 alone 1,196 people registered to see this state-of-the-art historic transportation museum.

People find the canal through others that have discovered this place. Some find it on the Internet or just happen to see articles carried by the print and TV media. They arrive in cars, on bikes, by bus and even in small aircraft — Delphi does have an airport. Surprisingly the best luck of discovering this exciting "hands-on" interpretive experience comes when people attend conferences, meetings, reunions or weddings in the Center.

Now with two full years of operation (July 1, 2003 to July 4, 2005), and a credit to the dozens of Wabash & Erie Canal volunteer docents, there is a feeling of satisfaction and reward. Hard work for 35 years since the Association was formed has netted this very successful enterprise. Black ink is flowing and anticipation is building for the next phase.

There has been a "dream" for the past decade. It is coming alive with the rides now offered on the "canal boat" pontoon operating on the reconstructed mile of water. It travels through Canal Park north to Founders Point. There a diversion of three million gallons of fresh water daily flows free to the canal from Delphi Limestone Company.

But the dream of the true "Replica Boat" will not be completely carried out until the addition of an authentic dock and warehouse for nightly storage is also built. Planning is underway but construction grants for this half million-dollar dream are still being sought.

This endeavor will also require a major donor fundraising effort, as did the Canal Center. Watch for announcements and progress, as the canal "dream" becomes a reality.

CANAL VOLUNTEERS: COME ONE, COME ALL

By Dan McCain

Volunteers come in all sizes and ages and with varied backgrounds. Some bring their family members and some come just to be with others of similar interests. They help with Canal Park activities, build and maintain trails, plant flowers, work on restorations and are the best ambassadors. The bottom line is to have fun and add to the warm feeling of volunteerism.

Anyone interested in Delphi Historic Trails activities or being a Canal Interpretive Center host were invited to a meeting on Wednesday, September 14th at the Canal Interpretive Center. Volunteers who came by 6:30 p.m. enjoyed a free pork barbeque supper provided by the Canal Association. Meeting and trading of ideas began at 7 p.m. They discussed the creation of characters that can present programs in "first person" dialog or lead tours. This is much as the characters do in Conner Prairie near Indianapolis.

A guest from Illinois, Sally Caugill, led a session on creating a "live character" out of canal era history. To become a character, they must research the character's background then present it in "first person." Sally has performed many times at an Abraham Lincoln site and traveled to conferences and workshops much like this one.

Susan Feller, a retired teacher and the volunteer coordinator of school kid's activities for the Canal Association, gathered input and solicited more volunteers for the expected onslaught of school tours. The Interpretive Center in Canal Park has become a very popular place to bring children, especially 4th graders studying Indiana history.

Needed on a regular basis are singles or couples to help greet the public during Interpretive Center public hours. This beautiful facility is open on Saturday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., Sunday 1-4 p.m. and on special days when the Case House is open too. There are three 3-hour shifts on each weekend. If you are interested, please contact the Center.

IN MEMORIAM



Speakers
Bureau

July 7, 2005 - Bluffton, Indiana

PAUL E. CORMICAN

Paul E. Cormican died in Wesleyan Health Care Center in Marion, Indiana at 12:45 p.m. Monday, July 4, 2005, following an extended illness. He was 80 years old.



Paul on the 1999 "Tracking the Central" tour in Indianapolis.
Photo by Brian Migliore

Paul was born in Deedsville, Miami County, Indiana to Milo and Lucy (Newton) Cormican on August 24, 1924. He was a resident of Upland, Indiana, most of his life. He was graduated from Jefferson Township High School in 1942 and attended the University of Kentucky. He was a veteran of the Seabees Construction Unit of the Navy. For 30 years he was a tool and die maker with Dana Corp.

Paul had many interests. He was a member of the Canal Society of Indiana, Upland United Methodist Church, Upland American Legion, Hartford City Elks Lodge, Muncie Sailing Club, Indianapolis Jazz Club, and Parents without Partners.

Survivors include: Michael (Delores) Cormican - son from Dallas; Rana (Tom) Vektor - daughter from Marion; Glenna Cormican - sister-in-law from Upland; four grandchildren; and seven great grandchildren. Paul was preceded in death by a grandchild; a brother, Clair; and two sisters, Lucy Doris, and Eloise.

Services were held in the Jones-Smith Funeral Home at 10 a.m. on July 7, 2005 with Rev. Rob Neel officiating. He was laid to rest in Jefferson Cemetery in Upland with military rites.

As a member of the Canal Society of Indiana Paul attended many tours. He would usually arrive early (as much as a day ahead of time), check out what canal sites would be seen on the tour, and then take the tour. He was always friendly and had a big smile. He has been missed on recent tours due to his illness.

Forty-eight people attended a program entitled "When Horses Pulled Boats" at the Wells County Public Library at 6:30 p.m. as part of the library's monthly educational presentations. Bob Schmidt, president of the Canal Society of Indiana, focused his talk and overhead projections on the Wabash & Erie Canal, which was the canal on which Bluffton farmers shipped their produce. They reached the canal at Huntington, Indiana, via the plank road.

Bob also talked about how the Erie Canal set the excitement for building other canals. He said Indiana's canal builders used the same measurements for structures as the Erie Canal. Many of the people who worked on other canals brought their knowledge and skills to Indiana to construct the Wabash & Erie. But not everyone had previous experience. Local land owners such as Jesse Vermilyea and Stearns Fisher became canal contractors responsible for half mile sections of the canal.

Present at the library were Don & Betty Haack, CSI members from Fort Wayne; Craig (CSI Advisory Council), Betsy, and Jane Leonard from Bluffton; Ellen Buuck whose grandfather Chartes Krudop was a member of the Old Aqueduct Club and whose great grandfather John B. Krudop used the canal to ship his lumber; and a relative of Asa Fairfiled, a canal boat captain.

Whitewater Canal Update

Jay Hamill, Cultural Administrator, reports the recent completion of two very important reconstruction projects at the Whitewater Canal State Historic Site in Metamora, specifically, the repair of the Duck Creek Aqueduct and the replacement of the gates on Gordon's Lock, Lock 24, which cost \$250,000.

Seasonal operations of the site's Ben Franklin III canal boat resumed on June 30th. Rides are offered hourly from 12-4 p.m., Wednesday-Sunday, through October 31. Fees are \$4.00 for adults (13-54), \$3.50 for seniors (over 55), and \$2.00 for Children (3-12), with those over 90 and under 3 admitted free. Special school group rate for 10 students or more is \$1.00 per student.

Lowell Beneker reports the Whitewater Canal Trail INC. set up a booth at the Franklin County Fair in mid-July to promote their trail project and organization.