

HISTORY OF THE HUCKLEBERRY QUEEN AND MARSHES

1857

October 13, 1949

Walkerton, Indiana

CLUB WOMEN RECALL HUCKLEBERRY QUEEN

Editor's Note: The following paper on the Huckleberry Queen was prepared and read by Mrs. Herman G. Goppert before the Woman's Community Clubs in Walkerton as a topic assigned her by the Program Committee.

There is so much that is shady in the story of the Huckleberry Queen and can only be whispered or told in secret, that it was difficult to prepare a story that could be told before our club.

Anyway, it begins with the story of the Big Huckleberry Marsh, which lay to the North and East of Koontz Lake and embraced some 500 acres, extending into the three counties of Starke, Marshall, and St. Joseph. One person estimated that it was 1000 acres of huckleberry swampland.

The yield of berries from this territory was so abundant that the fame of it was carried far and wide and it became known as the Big Huck Marsh.

Each summer when the season came and the berries ripened, people came to gather them for market. It was in the early 1870's, the period of depression which came after the Civil War, when jobs were scarce and they welcomed this opportunity. They came from far and near, on foot, on horseback, and every kind of conveyance known to that day. One man with an ox cart had forgotten to water his oxen and when they saw the water in the mill at Koontz Lake, they rushed down the steep bank to drink, dragging everything with them. There were children and supplies in the cart, but luckily no serious damage was done. Another man was said to have driven milk cows for oxen and later used them for his supplies of milk and butter. At once of course, the buyers came to put the berries on market as rapidly as possible. They came from every nearby town and must have shelters for their crating etc.

Many people came from long distances, prepared to camp on the ground for the season. Temporary shelters of every description were put up, almost over night everywhere. Soon dancing floors in the open air dotted the woods around about and soon the echo of dancing gave the place the name of the "Stomping Grounds".

As the place grew and moved farther south (to perhaps within a half mile of the lake) and as the notoriety of the place grew, it became known as South Chicago. Because of the increased number of saloons, and gambling places, and the ensuing noisy confusion, it was supposed to be like its namesake, the real South Chicago, from whence many of its patrons came.

Weekends were the busiest, most hilarious time, but always on Sunday afternoon there was a time for religious services. Ministers came from surrounding towns and there were sermons and special song services in which everyone joined and the woods echoed with sacred songs.

There were added throngs who came for these devotions and perfect quiet and respect reigned thruout them, and there is no doubt many a heart was reached that might otherwise never heard a sacred song or sermon.

One person estimated he had seen as many as 5000 people on the ground to hear the woods echo with the sermons and songs of the old-fashioned revival hour which was repeated each Sabbath afternoon as long as the place existed, (about 20 years).

The services were conducted on one or the other dance floor and afterward when the announcements were made, always there was one saying, "There will be a dance on this floor in 15 minutes" and hilarity were on again.

Early in the season there came a merry-go-round from Michigan City and with it a group of young people. Among them was an especially attractive young girl, buxom, blond, and beautiful, who very soon became a favorite and a leader in all forms of amusements and was very soon given the title of Huckleberry Queen. She was never crowned and proved to be anything but queenly in her conduct. She very soon became noted for her gayety and boisterous manner and was as often found in the saloons and gambling places as on the dance floor or merry-go-round.

I never saw her and was unable to learn her name, but it seems she married several times and one of her married names was said to be Falconberry. In later years she was said to have tried to have a restaurant of her own but it was unpopular and poorly patronized.

As the years passed the fame and notoriety of the place grew. The Stomping Grounds, or South Chicago became a huge, continuous carnival throughout the season and with saloons and gambling dens there were bound to be some disagreements, brawls, and drunken fights. One man was known to have lost an eye and two men were killed. Constables were always on the grounds and the sheriff was much in demand. One man said he had traveled all over the West but he had never seen anything like this. As a little girl, playing on the front porch of our home, (now the home of Mr. And Mrs. Gus Verkler), I vividly recall hearing sounds of shouting and shooting and the sounds of music coming to us thru the air. We never had any desire to go there, for though we loved the music, we were too frightened by the other ominous sounds.

The business transacted here during the huckleberry season was immense. The berries were brought in by the bushel. One man went out with two bushel baskets and returned soon with both of them full. There were hundreds of pickers on the grounds as

busy as he, and the buyers were ever ready to crate them and send them out. The crates of that day were a long flat box, 3 ft. by 18 in. and six to nine inches deep. They were divided in the middle and the berries were poured in, (no quart boxes), just solid berries. They were nailed shut and stacked high on the wagons, hayracks or huge carry-alls and rushed to every available market, then away on trains until the whole country was supplied.

One lady, who as a little girl lived across the lake, was ever curious to know just where the music came from and to see the Huckleberry Queen. She finally persuaded her father to let her go with her older brother, but they first promised to drive straight thru, never stop, and come straight home. They were delighted and hadn't gone far when they saw a band in green uniforms, gold braid etc. It was the Nappanee band on their way to "South Chicago". They had come to Walkerton on the B. and O. and were marching to their own music. The children were enchanted and drove at a snail pace to be sure to drink in all the sights and sounds. They saw their first pitcher pump in front of Charlie Stevens' store. Mr. Stevens was one of Walkerton's earliest merchants and was famous throughout the country for his exceptional business ability and his many sterling qualities. They also had a glimpse of the Huckleberry Queen, who was beautifully dressed in flaming red which she was said always to have worn. The children were very happy.

City bands came from various places - Ft. Wayne, Chicago, Michigan City, etc., - each Sunday a different band - a carnival the summer through. Many newspapers published articles about the Huckleberry Marsh - The Kansas City Star, St. Louis Globe Democrat. Brick Pomeroy's Democrat, Denver, Colo. came to our home with a lengthy article which though I'd blush to tell you the title, gave a very complete description of conditions as they really were.

And then one hot, dry, day after the season was over and there was no danger of anyone being in the marsh, a mother, whose young son had been led astray by the saloons and gambling dens became desperate and with a can of kerosene went to the Big Marsh and set fire to it and in a short time it went up in flames and smoke.

This proved an unmeasureable blessing, for though the huge huckleberry industry was ended, so also were the Stomping Ground, "South Chicago", and the reign of the Huckleberry Queen and happily there was no scar left on the community. Now after 50 years the Big Huckleberry Marsh is dotted with thirty farms and homes and the Stomping Ground is the woods road leading north from the lake with dogwood blooming in the springtime.

Koontz Lake lies calm and peaceful, surrounded with lovely homes; and with the great influence for good coming from the Community Church and the Conservation Club we have fair proof that our world is growing better.

"That God's in his heaven and all's right with our world." - E. L. R. G.

THE MARSHALL COUNTY DEMOCRAT 20 AUG 1857 THURSDAY

“The whortleberry crop this year will be about 500 bushels with an average price of \$1.50 per bushel.”

THE MARSHALL COUNTY DEMOCRAT 12 JULY 1860 THURSDAY

“The whortleberry crop of this season has proved to be a bountiful one. A large number of bushels have been shipped from this place. They are selling readily for 4 and 5¢ a quart.”

MARSHALL COUNTY REPUBLICAN 28 NOV 1867 THURSDAY

“About \$10,000 worth of huckleberries were shipped from this place last summer. This sum was chiefly earned by the women and children of this vicinity.”

THE PLYMOUTH DEMOCRAT 4 AUG 1870

“The huckleberry trade is enormous.”

“Shipment of huckleberries from Marshall County often exceeded 200 bushels per day in August. Prices range from \$1.50 to \$3 per bushels.”

THE PLYMOUTH DEMOCRAT 13 JULY 1876

LaPaz item – “Whortleberries are coming into market and our merchants are paying \$2 a bushel.”

Also – “Mr. Morgan Johnson has, for the past few days, been busy making boxes for shipping berries.”

Also – “To whom it may concern – Mr. Shidler has rented his whortleberry marsh to Hugh Gillen and he gives warning to all not to trespass on it without first consulting Mr. Gillen, under penalty of the law. His marsh joins this place on the east and southeast.”

THE PLYMOUTH DEMOCRAT 3 AUGUST 1876

Bentley's Marsh and the Huckleberry Crop

Eds. Democrat:

Aug. 2, 1876

Having a few hours of leisure on Sunday last, and to wear away the cares of a lonely day, we were invited to take a stroll along the banks of the Bentley marsh. At a quarter to 9 o'clock we jumped into a 2x4 rig and in less time than I can tell you we were in front of Jim Lampson's encampment. We made but a short stay here. However, Jim gave us some idea of the extent of the berry trade. There are perhaps some 200 lodgers at this place.

Jogging along, after a drive of thirty minutes, we pulled up to Warner's encampment. Here there are perhaps some 300 to 400 lodgers. The berry trade at this point is immense. After exchanging a few words, however, we were off.

A short ride brought us to Larkesville. This is a beautiful encampment containing perhaps 1,000 souls, the foaming waves of Koontz's lake bringing the water almost to the edge of the tents. Here we had the pleasure of conversing with a heavy berry buyer and perhaps the largest buyer at the marsh—Mr. Stevens, a Walkerton man. He says his average daily pickers amount to 100 men, women and children and estimates the crop this year at \$60,000, at least 20 percent better than last year. It being mealtime, we alighted and after satisfying the inner man at Brown's Grovertown restaurant, we mounted behind our steed and dashed off in the direction of the old stamping ground. But a few moments elapsed until we were in the second Chicago of the West. Were we to give a full description of the daily transactions at this point, words would be inadequate. Suffice it to say that a mere outline should prevent all parents, all parents with common sense, from allowing their youthful children to visit such vile places on Sunday. Here we find crime in all its glory, from the fallen woman down to three card monte. There seems to be every branch of trade carried on here. There are dry goods stores, groceries, picture galleries, saloons, target guns, box swings, dance halls, a physician, a minister and a horse doctor. Here we found some dancing, others gambling, two or three fighting, and the rum seller dishing out his poison, and yet we could stand and notice prominent arrivals every few minutes from Plymouth, LaPorte, Bourbon, Knox and other places. Why such doings on a Sabbath day are tolerated by the community around is beyond our comprehension.

At four o'clock we left for Walkerton. You will hear from us again at South Bend."

Also – "A shooting scrape occurred at the Bently/Sammy huckleberry marsh last Sunday by which a man was shot through the mouth, inflicting an ugly wound."

"Several knock-downs, shooting slungshot, etc., varied the amusement at the huckleberry marsh last Sunday. It is to be hoped these disgraceful performances are at an end."

THE PLYMOUTH DEMOCRAT

20 JULY 1876

"The huckleberry crop is simply prodigious but the price is so low there will not likely be an unusual quantity marketed. The present rate is five or six cents a quart."

Also – "Having been informed that the Bently huckleberry marsh was a sight for to see, we concluded to pay it a visit and on Monday afternoon took the train on the Indianapolis, Peru and Chicago railroad to Tyner City, seven miles northwest of Plymouth. We had often heard "I'm your huckleberry"; "Pull down your vest"; "Wipe your chin" and other slang phrases and supposed the Bently marsh was the place where these expressions could be heard in their original purity. A half hour's ride brought us to the city of Tyner. The city part of Tyner is hardly perceptible to the naked eye. It derives its name from its founder, Hon. Thomas Tyner, who owned a considerable quantity of land in that region and was one of those energetic men whose influence secured the building of the I. P. and C. R. R. When the road was completed he laid out the town of Tyner, naming it in honor of himself, and, in order to give it a high sounding title, called it Tyner City, by which name it has ever since been designated. Mr. Tyner is one of the oldest and most prominent citizens of Marshall County and has also a state reputation. He has always been a Republican in politics but has, nevertheless, been an earnest, conscientious and consistent man in all his political relations. At Tyner City we had no difficulty in obtaining transportation to the scenes of our explorations, and, in company with W. F. Johnson, behind his dashing grey, Bucephalus, an hour and a half brought us within the limits of one of the greatest improvised cities this side of the Black Hills. Leaving the main traveled road, we dodged about here and there, for a mile and a half, until, taking a sudden turn to the right, we were brought face

to face with the inhabitants of what appeared to us to be a first class city. The architecture of the buildings, however, is of a style seldom met with and can hardly be classed with the fine original orders. On the ragged edge of the marsh there are four towns, or cities, or encampments. The first is located on the southwest side of the marsh and contains a population of one or two hundred men, women and children. The main village, farther up and a short distance from Koontz Lake, is a place where those wishing to see the sights usually stop. There is a barber shop here, four or five saloons, a dry goods store, several restaurants and everything usually found in a first class city. A string band makes music for the dancers and the platform erected for that purpose is full day and night. Last Sunday a minister from Walkerton preached from the platform and, when he had concluded, dancing was resumed. Card playing, croquet, everything in the way of outdoor sport was freely indulged in. When we were there, there were, as near as we could estimate, about two thousand people. They were coming and going, in and out of the marsh, with their tin pails, baskets, etc., of berries, disposing of the fruits of their labors to several gentlemen who were paying five cents a quart, buying and shipping them by wagons to Walkerton and thence by rail to Chicago and other markets. Fully a carload each day is picked and shipped from this marsh alone. Judging from the number of people who were there last Sunday, it is presumed there will be at least 5,000 on the grounds and in the marsh next Sunday. If the reader wants to see humanity in all its purity, by all means he should pay this rural place a visit before the season is over.”

(The beginning of the paragraph below is missing..)

“.....has leased 200 acres of marsh belonging to I. F. Duffy of Chicago and also the marsh belonging to Samuel Koontz, a well known, fat, jolly, Dutchman of Starke County which, together with about 350 of his own, gives him control of about 600 acres and he also ships from Teegarden and Lapaz, his shipments daily amounting to 6,000 to 8,000 quarts. The crop this year is regarded as only an average. There are many families in parts of Starke, St. Joe, Marshall and LaPorte *(counties) who almost depend on the huckleberry crop for this subsistence and there is probably about \$1,000 paid out here daily for berries by the different shippers, Schroeder, Stevens and others.”

THE PLYMOUTH DEMOCRAT

17 AUGUST 1876

*“The following story is going the rounds of our exchanges *(other newspapers.)”*

“The crop this year of huckleberries in Northern Indiana is the largest, by far, that has ever been known, the average weekly shipments from Plymouth being between 700 and 800 boxes, the most of which come from what is known as Bently’s marsh which is twelve miles long by four miles wide. During the picking season little towns spring up around the marsh, containing each ten or twelve shanties, including the saloons and eating stands. Sundays are devoted to dancing; frequently a minister of the gospel visits it for the purpose of instilling some observance of the Sabbath into the hearts of the heathens who have congregated but no soon has he finished his eloquent discourse than he is encouraged by a yell of “Partners for the quadrille!” and on goes the dance, while the good man retires in disgust, thinking perhaps of “cold huckleberry pudding.”

THE BOURBON MIRROR

11 JULY 1878

“M. Alleman of Plymouth tarried in Bourbon a few hours Monday working up a trade in whortleberries.

From Donaldson

Donaldson, Indiana

12 July 1878

“Mr. Editor – Having heard so much about the Bently huckleberry marsh, we concluded to go and see the noted place. In company with a number of ladies and gentlemen, we went picnicing on the bank of Koontz’s lake which extends along the south end of the marsh. After disposing of the contents of our well filled baskets, we drove around the marsh to see the sights. We have often heard it said that “it takes all kinds of people to make a world” but never did we fully appreciate this sentence until now. People of all ages and all classes are there, from old men who are unable to walk without support to the little babe two months old. On our right hand we see a group of intelligent looking people, on our left a crowd which would make you think of a camp of gypsies. There are, at present, several hundred families living there, some in tents, some in rude houses. There are more than three thousand persons, it is believed, picking berries there daily. This may seem an exaggeration but take into consideration the number of acres in the marsh (over 2,000) and it will not appear so unreasonable. To make the scene more interesting, in the afternoon, without more than five minutes warning, the rain commenced falling in torrents and soon the pickers came rushing out of the marsh looking very much like drowned rats. A large number of stands are on the grounds. Prominent among the rest is H. Sparrow of Bourbon *(sold hot peanuts). Pickers get 5 cents per quart for their berries. Satisfying ourselves that the Bently marsh is a place which would be a curiosity for most people to see, we wended our way homeward. If any of your readers would like to visit this wonderful place we would say there are hacks running from Walkerton and Donaldson daily. The distance from either place is about four miles.

M. D. J.”

THE MARSHALL COUNTY REPUBLICAN 31 JULY 1879

“Collector Moon of Warsaw visited the Bently huckleberry marsh of “Stomping Grounds” Tuesday in the interest of Uncle Sam.”

Also, Walkerton item – “Huckleberries are on the wane and South Chicago is fading away.”

“The ‘Huckleberry Queen’ is in durance vile for contempt of court. Can the judge of a circuit court attach parties outside the territorial boundaries of his circuit?”

“The movement of the citizens of St. Joe, Starke and Marshall to secure law and order on the marshes near here meets the hearty approval of the citizens of Walkerton and surrounding country, as gambling, selling and drinking lightning whiskey and fighting and raising the associations of hell generally are always carried on to a frightful extent at the ephemeral city that springs up every year.”

“Then let us, early next year, organize ‘Law and Order Associations’ all over the territory with one central committee for the three counties, who shall make combined arrangements with the sheriffs, prosecuting attorneys and other officers of these counties and of LaPorte county, if desirable; shall employ detectives and shall be empowered to call out the members of the Associations as a posse comitati, when needed, to assist the civil authorities and also to advise a call on the Governor of the state for help if that should prove necessary, and thus, by the vigorous and determined use of all the lawful means within our power we shall assuredly rescue

our fair name and our borders from deep dishonor and sickening contamination of this foul cesspool whose offense is rank and smells to heaven!"

South Bend, Ind. 22 July 1879

*(23 signatures – none determined to be Marshall County men)

THE PLYMOUTH REPUBLICAN

24 JULY 1879

Walkerton item – "It is estimated that on Sunday, 20th inst., more than 2,500 visited South Chicago, the city of the fens and huckleberry marshes of LaPorte, St. Joe, Starke and Marshall counties and situated 2 ½ miles from this place. The band of Walkerton was there in all its pristine glory. The instruments, being new, glistened like burnished gold in the sunlight and the boys seemed to feel proud as a regiment of 2nd Lieutenants on dress parade with no enemy near. On the grounds were many who picked berries there when children and who mourned that they were now too old, sic transit and c. People were there from Chicago, LaPorte, South Bend and Plymouth. Mr. N. Schroeder of Iowa during the huckleberry season where a majority of the pickers congregate but the writer for the South Bend Register, who stated that there were 500 prostitutes at the huckleberry city should go to Louisiana, where his talents would be appreciated, for at no time would it have been possible to have found two dozen such characters on the marshes."

THE PLYMOUTH DEMOCRAT

31 JULY 1879 THURSDAY

"The South Bend Tribune of Saturday has the following reference to the "Huckleberry Queen"

"The Queen, in times past, performed before a South Bend audience which contained among it some of our best citizens. She was known as the 'Woman with the Iron Jaw' and traveled with Montgomery Queen's circus. She is about 35 to 40 years old, good looking, graceful in her carriage, and ladylike in her demeanor when she chooses to be. She left the show shortly after its first appearance here and settled in Tyner, a little village in Marshall County about three miles from the marsh. She joined the church there, was married, and for a long time led a decorous life. Three years ago she got pretty wild and when she went to the marsh her strength, dash and utter abandon won her, by common consent, the title of 'Huckleberry Queen' and not one dare dispute it. She reigns supreme over the marsh. Schroeder himself, who leases what he does not own of the marsh, dares not dispute her sway. Schroeder lives in Chicago and buys most of the berries gathered at the stomping ground."

THE PLYMOUTH DEMOCRAT

31 JULY 1879 THURSDAY

Bourbon item - A Bourbonite was skilleted over the head by the Blueberry Queen Saturday."

THE PLYMOUTH REPUBLICAN

24 JULY 1879

***AN URGENT APPEAL TO THE PEOPLES OF
MARSHALL, STARKE, AND ST. JOSEPH COUNTIES***

"We are widely scattered and cannot be gathered readily in one place. So we avail ourselves of the kindly aid of our county newspapers, which are ever ready to help in a just

cause, to arouse all our respectable citizens of all religious creeds and political preferences to some concerted action that will remove and destroy the enormous wickedness that has grown up in the “Huckleberry marsh” near Walkerton on the borders of our three counties.

One of our newspapers asserts on good authority, “that pickpockets, thieves and strumpets mingle among the pickers and that on nights and Sundays gambling, drinking, violence and prostitution are carried on to a fearful extent.” Another newspaper holds its statement that “there are 500 fallen women there on Sundays” to be no exaggeration. And all this, with its accompanying abominations, is to be found, not in some heathen or border country of in some city, “Five Points” or “Biler Avenue” but in our civilized counties – Marshall, Starke and St. Joseph!

Let us call on our county and town authorities to enforce the laws and try to clean out this illegal and unbearable nuisance this year and without delay. The following sensible and efficient statute passed by the last Legislature, approved March 29, 1879 and found in Acts and c., page 76, Chapt. VII to which the attention of every officer should be called, makes it possible.
*(Concerns officials crossing county lines when executing warrants and returning defendants from adjoining counties.)”

THE PLYMOUTH REPUBLICAN

14 AUGUST 1879

THURSDAY

Walkerton item – “One firm from this place that had no license to sell at the marsh took in \$170 for liquors sold there on a single Sabbath. Perhaps Uncle Sam might obtain some revenue if his agents would look into the matter.”

“Sharps from Chicago came down last week and by the use of “Ah Sins” ‘tricks’” which in their case was not in “vain”, cleaned out nearly all of the local gamblers who flourished at the marsh during whortleberry season.”

“It seems from the appeal recently published in all the papers in this part of the state that steps will be taken to prevent lawlessness at the marsh next year. Better late than never. The attention of the officers of the law was called to the subject by the correspondent of The Republican this year but it was not heeded.”

Bourbon item – “Henry Sparrow, having returned from the huckleberry marsh, sits and whistles his peanut tune with all its variations.”

Tyner City items – “Whortleberries getting scarce.”

“It is asserted that one of our blue ribbon orators imbibed too much of the ardent at the marsh a couple of Sundays ago. Having the cheek of a mule, we expect he will be making a speech at the next temperance meeting. Shame on such inconsistency.”

“Esquire Shafer was awakened from his slumbers at twelve o’clock last Friday night by someone knocking at his office door and, upon opening it, he was confronted by the smiling countenance of the ‘Huckleberry Queen’ and an eighteen year old boy named Falkenberry. The Esquire, being in a condition not fit to be seen by ladies, proposed to retire and don his clothing but the “Queen” insisted on his remaining, stating that they had come to get “splice”. The Squire invited them into his office, examined their papers and in less than a minute had tied the knot and the happy couple went away singing “We held the fort.”

MARRIAGE RECORDS, MARSHALL COUNTY, IN. BOOK E, PAGE 90

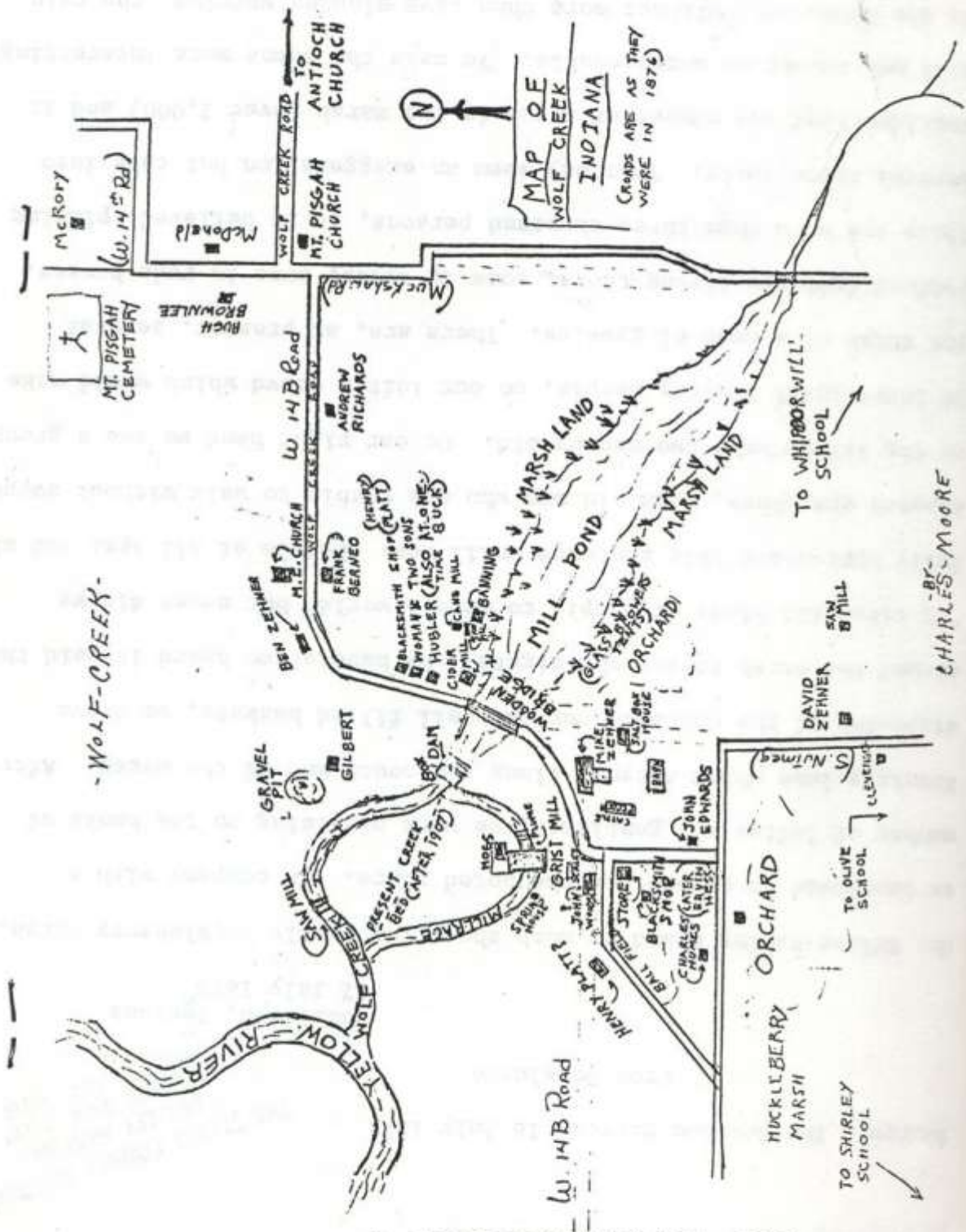
Mary L. Johnson – Jacob B. Falconberry, 7 Aug. 1879

THE PLYMOUTH DEMOCRAT

12 JAN 1882

“The Central House, the only hotel here *(Tyner City) is occupied and managed by the notorious Huckleberry Queen and under her management the place has become a stench in the nostrils of every decent citizen. Why our citizens stand quietly by and allow this devilish and infamous nuisance to exist and flourish in our midst is a query not easily solved.”

There is a MAP on following page and more story after the map.



-WOLF-CREEK-

-BY- CHARLES-MOORE

THE HISTORY OF WOLF CREEK

PART IV

By
Dr. Charles L. Moore

(Editor's note: We continue the story of Wolf Creek, and its inhabitants located in the northwest corner of Green Township, few traces of the once flourishing village remain today.)

SOME WOLF CREEK PERSONALITIES

The Huckleberry Queen

One outstanding personality of the village was the “Huckleberry Queen”, Molly Edwards, who came to visit her father, John. Mr. Edwards, while intoxicated one time, tried to catch a ride on a freight train, fell and, as a result lost both his legs. The devotion and care of Molly to her father was remembered by many. “Shorty”, as Edwards was known around Wolf Creek, was a kind old man with a soft white beard but his daughter, the “Queen” had a bad temper which certainly distinguished her from her father.

One man who knew her at the huckleberry marsh, located in Polk Township near Koontz Lake, said Molly was a pleasure to be with until she was “liquored up” and, when that happened, she was as tough and vicious as any man!

FROM THE THE PLYMOUTH REPUBLICAN, JULY 1, 1880, we gain further insight into her personality:

“The Huckleberry Queen has arrived at the marsh and established her authority on Sunday by whipping her husband and another man.” The fact was that she did not restrict that kind of conduct to the marsh area. Once Gene Marshall, local jokster, played some prank on the “Queen”. Irrate at what he had done, she made a fast trip to Marmont (Culver) where she found him standing on one of the streets. She walked up behind him, said “Turn around and take off your coat, Gene”. He turned—before he made another move—she laid her whip to him.”

The story of the notorious Huckleberry Marsh and its “Queen” will appear in future issues of the quarterly. Editor
--

Frank Berneo and Family

This column is devoted to another Wolf Creek character, Frank Berneo, but is not directly connected to the Huckleberry Marsh or Queen, just Wolf Creek History.

Berneio was very poor, but an honorable hard-working man. He was afflicted with a type of palsy that affected his speech and whenever he would begin to talk he always said “Dishy, dishy, dishy”, before continuing. For that reason, he was called “Dishy Frank” by his friends and neighbors. His popularity at Wolf Creek is attested to by the following from the **THE PLYMOUTH REPUBLICAN OF JANUARY 2, 1981.**

“The citizens neighboring about Wolf Creek Mills made a very reasonable draft on their purses and made a worthy Christmas present to one of their neighbors. They collected \$15, and placing it in the hands of Orrin Hand, they purchased 200 pounds of pork, 200 weight of flour, pair of shoes, mittens, etc., which were presented to Frank Berneo, an aged, infirm, but worthy citizen. Mr. Berneo was duly grateful. Other localities might follow suit and also bring happiness and comfort to many worthy homes this winter.”

Berneio, with his wife and two daughters, always walked from Wolf Creek into Plymouth each Sunday morning to attend services at the Catholic Church. They walked back. (A distance of around 10 miles—Editor.)

In spite of his affliction, Mr. Berneo dug ditches and did other work for David Zehner, often eating his meals with the Zehner family. At the Zehner home for supper on a Friday evening, he was served meat, (forbidden to Catholics on Fridays). Eating the meat, Berneo said later, to Mrs. Zehner, “Dishy, dishy, dishy-now I’ve got to pay the priest!”⁶⁴ Often farmers in the area, having sympathy for Berneo’s poverty, would give food to him, but these special gifts were always passed on by Berneo to his priest.⁶⁵

Once, when it was raining, Berneo went over to the Shirley school, opened the door and walked into the classroom, shaking an umbrella and shouting “Dishy, dishy, dishy!” The teacher and children were somewhat startled by their unexpected visitor but it seems his only purpose in coming was to give his daughter, Elizabeth, the protection of his umbrella from the rain.⁶⁶

At one time the Berneo family was being plagued with ground hogs beneath their cabin. Frank was discovered putting sticks of dynamite under the home to kill the pests but was dissuaded from lighting them by Ben Zehner, who, luckily, happened by.⁶⁷

The Berneo cabin caught fire one day and, in spite of the efforts of Mrs. Berneo, who climbed atop on the roof to try and extinguish it, the home burned down. Frank and his wife, Delphine, moved to Peru to live with their daughter and Wolf Creek’s population was diminished by two.⁶⁸

In talking with Alta Listenberger, who remember the Berneo family, she said “....They were strange people and I was always afraid of her. (Mrs. Berneo). “They said she was a witch. She killed cats by scalding them. He worked around the neighborhood but people left them alone because they didn’t seem to want to be neighbors. There were vines growing all over the” *(The end of this paragraph is missing.)*

64. Adam Zehner interview, ca. 1965

65. Ellen Carpenter interview, ca. 1959

66. Daisy Zehner Spitler, interview, 1966

67. Clarence Zehner interview, ca. 1958

68. Spitler interview

“Huckleberries seem plenty and very fine this year.”

Also – “The huckleberry marsh near Walkerton is said to be attracting more roughs this year than usual. There are twenty gambling establishments, four saloons, thirteen boarding houses and the Queen in all her glory.”

“The Michigan City Dispatch says:”

“St. Joseph County, the hitherto undisputed realm of that patron saint of morality, the Huckleberry Queen, is to lose a distinction it has possessed for years and years. The big huckleberry marsh, which occupied a great share of the county and was known throughout this and adjoining states and which has in time past produced such immense crops of berries and criminals, is to be converted into a peaceful celery garden by the owner. What will become of her huckleberry majesty to whose despotic sway her subjects bowed humbly, or the subjects themselves, is largely a matter of conjecture; but they will doubtless succeed in finding green fields and pastures new, where the regular summer orgies and bouts can be continued uninterrupted by the interfering hand of the law. We’ll all miss them but to old St. Joe county, the loss will be doubly heavy.”

Also, same source, 23 June 1892

“Now comes the announcement that the “Huckleberry Queen” has reformed and joined church. Will wonders never cease?”

“The death of the Huckleberry Queen, who has been residing in a little hovel near Valparaiso for the past twelve or fifteen years, recalls many interesting recollections in this part of the country. For years she was a famous outlaw and lived in a huckleberry marsh near Walkerton. She often came to Plymouth, generally on foot, following the Lake Erie track.

Back in the seventies or eighties, her disturbances on the streets here was a regular week occurrence. She would come to town early in the morning and begin imbibing bad “boose” until she felt like fighting a regiment. Then she would either be taken to jail or sent out of town. One day the town marshal found her dancing a jig on the scales at the old Wabash depot, now the Lake Erie. He tried to induce her to accompany him to jail and used every persuasive argument he could think of. The scales were elevated several feet and she said, “If you catch me in your arms when I jump, I’ll go with you.” “Certainly”, said the marshal and he held out his arms. Before he knew it, she had leaped to the ground to one side and landed him a blow below the ear that put him in bed for a day. Whenever she went to jail, it was always through the efforts of more than one officer.

When the Queen’s father died, she was out on the road with a side show, swinging sledge hammers with her teeth and lifting big weights. She hastened home as soon as possible to attend the funeral but arrived too late. Going immediately to the graveyard, she found the sexton and a laborer at work on the grave. They were just rounding off the mound when she made her

appearance. Flashing two guns, she made them dig down to the coffin again, and expose the corpse. After looking at it a minute, she walked away, leaving the men to readjust the coffin and grave as best they could.”

THE PLYMOUTH TRIBUNE

25 SEPT 1902

WEEKLY EDITION THURSDAY

HUCKLEBERRY QUEEN DYING

“The “Huckleberry Queen”, a woman once famous throughout this section of the country, whose reckless will reigned supreme over a motley horde of ruffians and criminals, is dying in a hut near Valparaiso. The Indianapolis Sentinel Sunday had an illustrated article concerning the woman who is recollected by every citizen who resided here twenty years ago when the “Queen” reigned during huckleberry season at the big marsh near Walkerton. In closing its article, the Sentinel says: County Clerk Charles R. Hughes, of Peru, well remembers an encounter he had with the “Huckleberry Queen”. He said, “I was running on the north end of the Lake Erie *(RR) many years ago and was just pulling a freight train out of Plymouth when I observed a woman climbing up between two cars. I stopped the train and walked back to where she was and found her standing on the dead woods, one foot on one car and the other foot on the next car. She had her hands pressed against the cars to steady herself. She was drunk and cursed a blue streak when I told her to get down. Conductor Frank Ream then appeared on the scene and both of us managed to unload her. While I held her Conductor Ream gave my fireman the go-ahead signal and the train pulled out. When the caboose passed me I let go of the “Queen” and jumped on the train. She fired stones at me but I escaped uninjured. She was the cause of many similar incidents on the Lake Erie.”

HAMLET CENTENNIAL BOOK

HAMLET, INDIANA

1863 - 1963

Excerpt from Page 51

“Many interesting and conflicting stories are told about the Huckleberry Marsh near Koontz Lake. During the 4-6 week season, itinerant pickers lived in tent camps, providing their own eating and sleeping accommodations, groceries, saloons, and dance halls. Gamblers and thieves were numerous in this wide-open atmosphere. The only law was the law of the “Huckleberry Queen”, a former circus bareback rider who dressed like a man, carried a gun, and split the gambling and other profits with those who came to fleece the hundreds of berry pickers. A fire destroyed much of this marsh in 1892, and pretty well ended the great huckleberry harvests.”

Property of:
The Starke County Historical Society Museum
501 South Main Street
Knox, Indiana 46534
Manuscript donated to the museum by Charles Moore, June, 1963