



Brown County Journal

August 15, 2012

Events:

Brown County Historical
Society meeting
September 3

Brown County Genealogical
Society meeting
September 11

Old Settlers Reunion
August 31 - September 1

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Henry Cross – Brown County's First Artist

Most of you who live in Brown County or have ever lived in Brown County have seen it or have heard of it. Down in Van Buren Township sitting at the crossroads of State Road 135 S and Bellesville Pike is a stone statue called Stonehead. Even the community that once thrived in this location came to be called Stonehead. There used to be a store, gristmill, sawmill, and several houses here in the small community of Stonehead. Just think what a bustling area it must have been. Imagine now that the present day road ran a little differently than it does now. Most of the time the roads ran along, in, or even through the creeks. The area was heavily forested, and making a road was very laborious. Nevertheless, this was a major crossroad so the county needed a road marker directing travelers to places such as Indianapolis, Sparksferry, Columbus, and Fairfax. Unfortunately some of these places no longer exist. That gives us a glimpse into what Van Buren Township must have been like –it too was an area that was primitive, but it was growing leaps and bounds.

Now getting back to that statue, the county contracted with a local stone carver, Henry Cross, to make three road markers. One we know of to this day still stands. The other two which were placed at two other locations in southern Brown County have long since disappeared. Back in that era all able-bodied men were required to work at least six days out of the year to help maintain and clear the roadways. In lieu of this requirement Henry Cross was allowed to create these road markers for the county. It is told that the heads were carved in the likeness of the Road Superintendent at that time, George Summa.

All that is left of the community of Stonehead now is the Thomas A. Hendricks house which is called, guess what, the Stonehead House – and the statue of the Stonehead. Back in its day the house



and the Stonehead roadmarker were still a sight to be seen. The Hendricks house and the Stonehead statue are now registered as Indiana Historic Landmarks. They are also now considered to be a fine example of American Folk Art.

Henry Cross residing in Brown County in the early beginnings of our county exhibited the very first signs of artistic enterprise seen in this county. The sculptor, Henry Cross, would have never seen himself as an artist. He would have preferred to have been just known as an ordinary man. He was a farmer first and a tombstone carver second. In fact, he has only been known to have actually signed two his carvings – the Stonehead statue and the tombstone of his mother-in-law. He wished for no glory.

Henry Cross was born on August 1, 1821 in Indiana and it is presumed that he was a son of Chester Cross of Jackson County. It is not known if he obtained

any sort of training in the art of stone carving. Most professions of this type go through some sort of apprenticeship. He must have obtained some sort of training for his art and it was probably from his father. Sons usually followed the professions of their fathers. There are many more carved tombstones from Columbus to Brown County than one man could have done so it is assumed that his father, Chester Cross most likely did some of these. Henry Cross also was associated with some stone-carvers in Columbus because his father-in-laws stone was signed by a J. W. Critchfield of Columbus. He could have apprenticed with them.

So for whatever reason Henry Cross moved to Brown County. Here he met and married on October 12, 1845 a young woman by the name of Mary Clark. She was the daughter of Absalom Clark and Hannah Bishop who were originally from Ohio. They all settled together on a piece of land just south of present day Pike's Peak. The land itself had to be cleared of timber to be farmed. So they went about setting





up their farmstead and building a home. With the help of neighbors and family they built a home on a hilltop that was one of the finest homes in Brown County for those times. It had two fireplaces, four sets of built-in cupboards, and two rows of three windows with real glass in the front with a door set in the middle. There was plenty of room for his bride's parents also lived with them. It is said his house was located just south of Melott Cemetery where so many of his tombstone carvings can be found. Otto Ping, a famous Brown County photographer, also lived in this house.

Then this enterprising young man, Henry Cross, began a 20 year period of enormous productivity and great success. As he cleared and farmed his land he also made many fine works of carvings on tombstones. He would set out for the creek over the hill behind his house with a sled and cut out good pieces of sandstone that was finely granulated so they wouldn't flake or spall. He then would take them back up the hill to his house to his workshop that was located in the basement

of their house. His carvings were not just simple pieces of art, but finely detailed and every one was quite different from the last. No subject was ever exactly copied and all were unique. The majority of his work can be seen at the Melott Cemetery and many nearby cemeteries in Van Buren Township. In fact the Melott Cemetery had been set apart as a part of his farm for the burial of his family and his neighbors.

Henry and Mary Cross had nine children of which seven survived. His oldest was his son, Chester, and of the other six all were daughters. They were Ruey Ann, Elizabeth, Hannah, Olive, Mary Frances, and Julia Azubah. Two twin sons had died in infancy and their elaborate tombstones are located in Melott Cemetery. His last daughter was born in 1863. At the time Henry Cross was 42 years old and was a successful farmer and an accomplished stone-carver. All the while he worked his farmed and cleared more land. On February 26, 1864 he was felling some trees with the help





of three neighbors. One of the huge trees fell over pinning Henry beneath it. They managed to free him from under the tree, but he died from his injuries. His was buried next to his twin sons. His son, Chester carried on for a time taking over his father's carving business. His wife, Mary tried to make a go of it alone but could not after her parents had died. She ended up moving back to her childhood home, Jackson County, Ohio to be near her Clark relatives. Chester ended up moving to Missouri. Unfortunately Henry Cross' stone most likely came from the Critchfield stone-carvers in Columbus, it was made of marble and did not have that Cross expertise in the carving.

Living in this area I was immensely intrigued after reading these stories about Henry Cross and all his work. I just couldn't imagine that I lived just down the road from all this history. I went to the Melott Cemetery last year and photographed all the stones, it's a project I do in the summers. There I found Henry Cross and his family's tombstones. I never imagined at the time that he had a hand at carving so many of the other stones in that cemetery too.

After doing this research I also found that he had just down the road from my home. I had driven up and down the road hoping to get a glimpse of an old homesite. How hard would it be finding something after 150 years.

Reading the little book "In Search of Henry Cross" by W. Douglas Hartley it gave many clues as to where Henry Crosses land was, but not much went into detail. It mentioned the location of the cemetery from Pike's Peak and it mentioned something about a cornfield being just south of the homestead. The cornfield had grown up into forest. Then the research that Ken Reeve did on Henry Cross told so much more – in his papers was a map showing the locations of the homestead, the cemetery, and the Henry Cross farm. I had driven by it a hundred times, and I've always wondered why this drive goes back in a woods with a gate across it. No sight of a house



can be seen from the road. This was really exciting! I had just discovered History in my own neighborhood!

The quarry he used to get his stones might have been to the west or north of his house – there's a ravine each way where rainwater runs fast and swift after a heavy downpour. Or maybe it could be east



Henry Cross and his twin sons

of his house where there is a creek that is now called Hurricane Creek. It is said that when the house finally fell down that the basement was filled in - tools and all. The Henry Cross homestead was located about a mile south of Pike's Peak on Poplar Grove Road on the right hand side just around the first sharp curve to the left, and after the next curve in the road on the left is Melott Cemetery.

The Problem With All These Crosses

A friend of mine, Barb, and our Museum Curator, has this habit of giving me projects to work on – genealogy puzzles that involve history. She also added that since I liked to write it would make for a good story. Adding an historical element has what got me involved in working at our local Historical Society Archives. Her recent puzzle was about three different men with the last name of Cross and all apparently were involved somehow with stone-carving as part of their profession. One of these men, it turned out, was her great grandfather. So I had to do some checking on these three men.

The first one was from right here in Brown County, Henry Cross. Most Brown Countians know of his work because he left many beautiful tombstones in our cemeteries. What he is most famous for, though, is his work that he did for the County in carving three Stonehead road markers. The one that survives is a well known marker and even the local community has assumed the name of Stone Head for this marker. It is a carving of a man's head on a rectangular block with directions and mileage carved on the bottom helping to direct the traveler. Henry Cross was born 1821 in Indiana. He died Feb. 26, 1864 and is buried at the Melott Cemetery. So I need to go back further to see where his parents came from. He being a very early settler no records could be found to help.

The second Cross to study was Barb's, great-grandfather, William Tyler Cross. She has a family bible and a lot of memorabilia on him. Her family had collected a lot of information on him as he was a well-to-do man of Peoria and Kewanee, Illinois. He owned his own marble-cutting business and he left a lot of beautiful marble carvings and headstones in this city. There is also a scrapbook that her mother put together with many pictures of William Cross, newspaper clippings, and a magazine photo as well. From the family bible William T. Cross was born July 12, 1836 in Conesus, New York. He died Sept. 22, 1910 and is buried at the Springdale Cemetery in Peoria, Illinois.



William Tyler Cross

The third Cross was actually two brothers that were very artistic, one a stone-carver and the other a painter. The younger brother, another Henry Cross, was a Chicago artist for many years and lived in Indiana for a short time with his brother, Ferdinand, who was the stone carver. Ferdinand came to Indiana settling near French Lick, Indiana to prospect the hills for good stone. Ferdinand was quite a good carver using the hillsides with rock outcroppings to make his carvings which were fanciful and intriguing to the tourists of the then famous French Lick Resort. Henry was quite good too, being known to have painted portraits of Wild West characters such as Geronimo, Sitting Bull, and General Ulysses S. Grant. Both were born in Binghamton, New York with Ferdinand being born on Dec. 26, 1838. Ferdinand died in French Lick on May 29, 1912 and is buried at Sulphur Creek Cemetery. His brother died in Chicago, but wished to be buried next to his brother, Ferdinand.

So what was the problem with all these Crosses or was it a clue? First of all, they all had the same surname. You've all heard of a particular talent running in a family line. So what if all these Crosses were related somehow? After all, they all had the same artistic talent – stone-carving.

The next thing to attempt to find out - were they all from the same area, New York? That would be easy for the later ones and it has been proven that William T. Cross and Ferdinand Cross were all from New York state. It might be a hard case to prove for one that came so early to this area, such as Henry Cross. Next, could it be a coincidence that they all ended up in the same area thereabouts – Indiana and Illinois? Actually the era that William Cross and Ferdinand Cross came to the Midwest, Chicago was an artists' mecca. So naturally they ended up in the Midwest.

Could all these men have shared the same creative gene, thus showing a relationship? The only way to tell this for sure is to track down their descendents and get a DNA test to see if they were related. The next thing to think about - I'm sure you've all heard of the old-saying about the occupation matching the name. Is this just a coincidence? Has this ever been studied? How often does this happen where a person's name seems to match their occupation.

From what little information that can be found on these men is that the two later Crosses, William T. Cross and Ferdinand Cross were from New York. Since census records only go back so far it has been impossible to tell where Henry Cross's parents came from. This research must rest on a Cross family historian.



Ferdinand Cross Tombstone

September Events

The **Old Settler's Reunion** will be held this year at **Bill Monroe's Music Park**. It will be a two day event held on August 31 to September 1. Admission and parking are free. There will be entertainment, a flea market, tractor displays, games for the kids, some good food, and much more to see. It starts on Friday at 5:00 p.m. and again on Saturday at 11:00 a.m.

The September meeting of the Historical Society will feature a program by **Hank Swain** about the **WRAP Society**. This group is all about writing and reading stories and poetry. Several of their members have published books. Come to the Historical Society building on S.R. 135N for the pitch-in dinner meeting to start at 6:30 p.m. on September 3.

The Genealogical Society meeting will be on September 11 and will feature guest speaker **Helen Ayers**. Many of you have read or heard of her books talking about how her family migrated from Kentucky and settled in **Van Buren Township**. She then met her husband, a Brown County native and she tells of their family's lives here in Brown County. Our meeting this month will be held on location at the Trail's End Restaurant in Van Buren Township. It is just two miles after you turn right at Stonehead on S.R. 135S. We will meet at 6:30 p.m. You can come early to eat dinner here.
