

Brown County Journal

June 15, 2012

Events:

Brown County Historical
Society meeting
July 2

Brown County Genealogical
Society meeting
July 10

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Rhonda D.

Displaced Families of Brown County

It has happened many times in the history of Brown County. Some government agency has sought out Brown County to develop some sort of project, either for parks, water sources, or a military installation. For some reason it seems that poor Brown Countians have faced this more times than most American communities in history. For the most part it is due to the local terrain because it is hilly and isolated more than any other county in Indiana. The list of government projects is long: Camp Atterbury, Game Preserve, Brown Co. State Park, Hoosier National Forest, Lake Monroe, Yellowwood State Forest, and Lake Lemon.

So what about all these families that have been displaced from their homes? Entire communities have disappeared. In the southwest corner of the county Lake Monroe reservoir cut off communities such as Elkinsville, Youno, and Cooper. The State Game Preserve, which later became the Brown County State Park, swallowed up the communities of Kelp and Weed Patch Hill. Camp Atterbury Military reserve took over land in the northeast part of the county and small communities like Mt. Moriah in Brown County and Kansas and Pisgah in Johnson County have disappeared.

Of the other three government acquisitions there is not much known about the history of the communities and families that were displaced from these areas of Yellowwood State Forest, Lake Lemon, and Hoosier National Forest. You can bet though that there are stories out there that need to be written or told so these people and their communities won't be forgotten forever. All that is left are some names such as Wert, Possom Trot Ridge, Scarce 'O Fat Ridge and the Jackson Salt Works. Sometimes the only evidence left behind is from remote cemeteries that were left after their families were forced to move out.

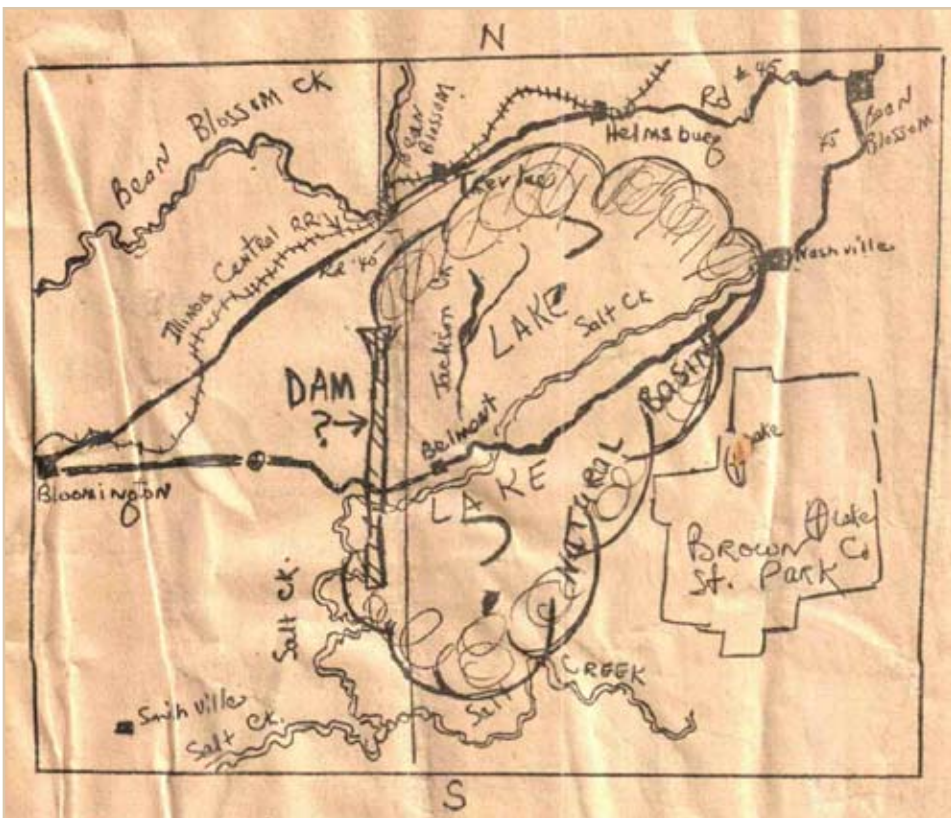
To look at all sides though is best. Not only did families have to leave their homes, but Brown County as a whole might be better off for these projects. From a recent visit to the Nature Center at the Brown County State Park we had some enlightening information. Our guide showed us a satellite image of Brown County. Right over Brown County was about the only dark green area left in Indiana. He said it was very important to humankind that we preserve these dark green areas and don't let them disappear. The coming of the lakes was important to develop a water supply for Monroe and Brown Counties for clean and sustainable water. An indirect positive result was that more wildlife area was created to protect some dwindling species of plant and animal life. But with the coming of any new project comes controversy.

Nashville as Lakefront Property?

Back in 1949 the question was on the minds of all Brown Countians. The Army Corps of Engineers was studying the possibility of taking Schooner Valley, damming it up, and making a new reservoir, Lake Monroe. It would alleviate yearly flooding and provide a much needed water source for Brown and Monroe Counties. The first preliminary area picked out for the lake would encompass all of Schooner Valley right up to Nashville over to Trevlac and leaving Belmont all under water. A newspaper article on the project follows.

“Getting an accurate view of what the proposed Brown-Monroe county lake project would mean to the community appears to be somewhat the same kind of a task as interviewing three blind men

about what their elephant looks like. It, too, is different things to different people. The inner circle of backers of the Utopian vacation-land flood-control creation admittedly have shunned publicity for fear that limelight on the lake might incite residents of the affected area into vigorous opposition. On the other hand these Noahs who must reckon with the man-loosed flood which would destroy their homes and farm lands, are diligently seeking accurate information which would give them the potent ammunition which they will need to back up their resistance. Belmontians point an accusing





Elkinsville Church Congregation 1937

finger at the 'big fellers' in the county seats whom they charge with nurturing the vacation-land part of the lake deal. 'What they really ought to do is just give the whole county to the state and get it over with!' The general store at Belmont, owned by Treva Fleetwood and his wife, the members of the 43 families who live in the basin which would likely be affected if the project goes through meet to talk over plans."

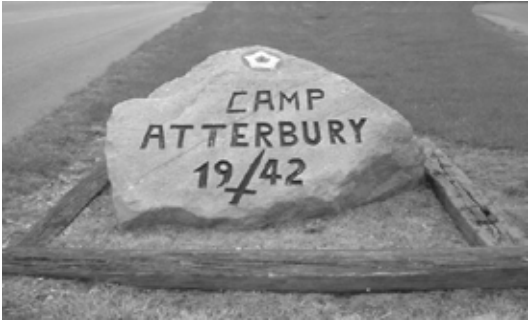
The statement of a very frustrated Brown County resident, 'give it to the state and get it over with,' is a well-

shared sentiment by all long-time Brown Countians. Brown County families have been forced to moved from their ancestral homes for the good of progress and this has been run over and over again like a broken record. Reflecting on the history of Lake Monroe brought to mind the many instances that this has occurred in our county. Brown County is full of beautiful and useful natural resources. Unfortunately this has left its citizens on the back burner when it has been time for progress to move forward once again in Brown County.

So what about all these families that have been displaced from their homes? Entire communities have disappeared. Some have made a good effort to keep their history alive by the former residents. But, there are some communities that have been lost forever. Elkinsville comes to mind when talking of a lost community, not to mention other smaller communities such as Youno, Gent, and Cooper. Have you ever heard of these communities? Maybe a couple such as Youno just because it had an unusual name. Some have made a good effort to keep their history alive. Elkinsville is a little better known because these former residents hold an annual community reunion every year and have written several books on the history of the community and the families. Elkinsville has a long historical past in Brown County dating back to some of the very first settlers whose name was given to their town by their first settler, William Elkins. It was once a thriving community now lost to progress.

The Coming of Camp Atterbury

The headline read, "Bartholomew May Get U. S. Army Camp," dated May 8 1941. At one time according to a newspaper article dated Feb. 5, 1942 "**Brown County Practically Out of Army Camp Area,**" it was believed only three tracts of land in Brown County would be lost. The landowners named in the article were Maude Hardin, Calvin Bassett and Henry Parks. Bartholomew County lost

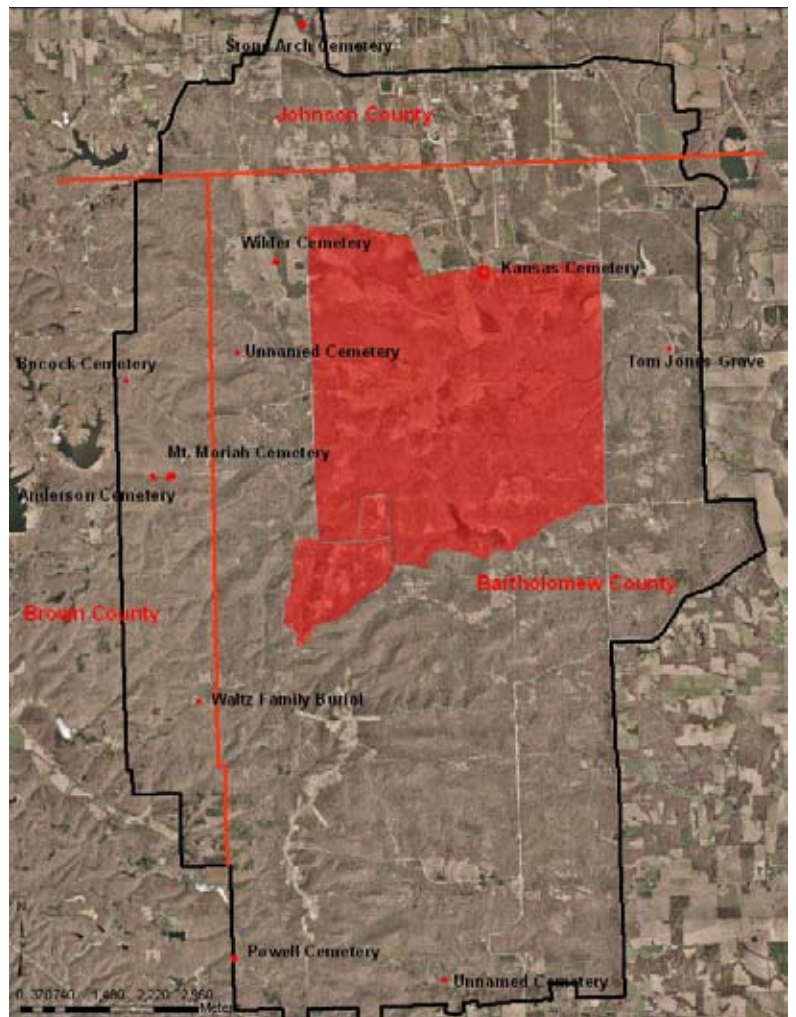


30,476 acres and Johnson County lost 12,394 acres. As the months went on and stories abounded the rumored lines moved several times. At one time Brown County thought it would lose area from S.R. 135 east to S.R. 46 north which would swallow up almost all of Hamblen township and a good chunk of Washington township.

After two years of newspaper articles and rumors it had all been settled. The section of land that Camp Atterbury acquired was in the extreme northeastern part of Hamblen township with a small section falling in Washington township. It included a strip of land containing 9,431 acres. The U.S. government took land "By Right of Public Domain" in Township 9N - Range 4E - Section 4 and Township 10N - Range 4E - Sections 4, 9, 16, 21, 28, 33.

Charles W. Long, a Columbus attorney represented the government sending out letters to landowners notifying them of the government's interest in their land. In all over 500 families, four churches, five schools, and three communities - Mt. Moriah, Kansas, and Pisgah - would be involved. Some got \$5 an acre and some got up to \$200. Some had to go to court to prove their land was worth more than the government wanted to give them. In an article dated Jan. 28, 1943 titled "**Land In County for Camp Being Acquired**" the first checks were sent out. Mary I. Stillabower got \$400 for 19 acres and Clarence Wenger got \$1600 for 78 acres of land. Most lost family homes that had been in their families for generations.

The Mt. Moriah community in Brown County had a church, a school, a store, a post office, a blacksmith, and possibly much more. All these small communities were a gathering place for residents near and far. All people's lives were centered around their community and their church. The Mt. Moriah post office was established in 1850 and the first postmaster was William Milnes. The Mt. Moriah community would be directly affected as well as the



local New Bethel Christian Church, the church building was moved in 1942. Almost all the cemeteries had to be moved, but four known Brown County cemeteries that lay inside this boundary were left, the reason they stated being 'they would not be in their shooting range.' The cemeteries were the Bocock Family Cemetery, Waltz Cemetery, Anderson Cemetery, & Mt. Moriah Cemetery. Almost all the other cemeteries were moved to a plot of land just north of Edinburgh along State Road 31N. Not much more is known about the community of Mt. Moriah, very little is written about it. The book 'The Atterbury File' is a good account of this time, telling of the heartbreak of the people having to leave their family homes and a way of life to how Atterbury was built. It was written and can be purchased from the Custer Baker Middle School in Franklin, Indiana.

The State Game Preserve aka The Brown County State Park

In the 1920s the state of Indiana began to acquire land for a game preserve in Brown County. There were 72 landowners affected by this latest government project. Later in the 1930s the idea was expanded and more land was acquired. This developed into what is now known as the Brown County State Park. As in any new government project there was a lot of debate over how this would benefit the county. For months residents wrote letters to the newspaper voicing their concerns, "how will this benefit Brown County?" Letters to the Editor on the State Park became a weekly column just to allow residents to express their concerns.

In a Democrat article of March 22, 1928 titled, 'Commissioners to Buy 1059 Acres for State Park Near Game Reserve - State Will Then Buy From County,' relates the atmosphere during these events. "The Courthouse was crowded with people last Saturday to hear and be heard on the subject as to whether or not Brown County will have a state park. Some were against it and some were for it

and some very warm discussions were heard. In fact so warm that Deputy Clarence Moore was compelled to ask for order . . . 340 acres of the 1059 acres lies just north of the game reserve on Weed Patch Hill. One quarter of a mile of Salt Creek runs through this 340 acres. Quite a number of everflowing springs are also located on this tract. The remainder of the 1059 acres lies just back of the game reserve and will be exchanged with the Division of Fish and Wildlife for that on the north."



Weed Patch Parade

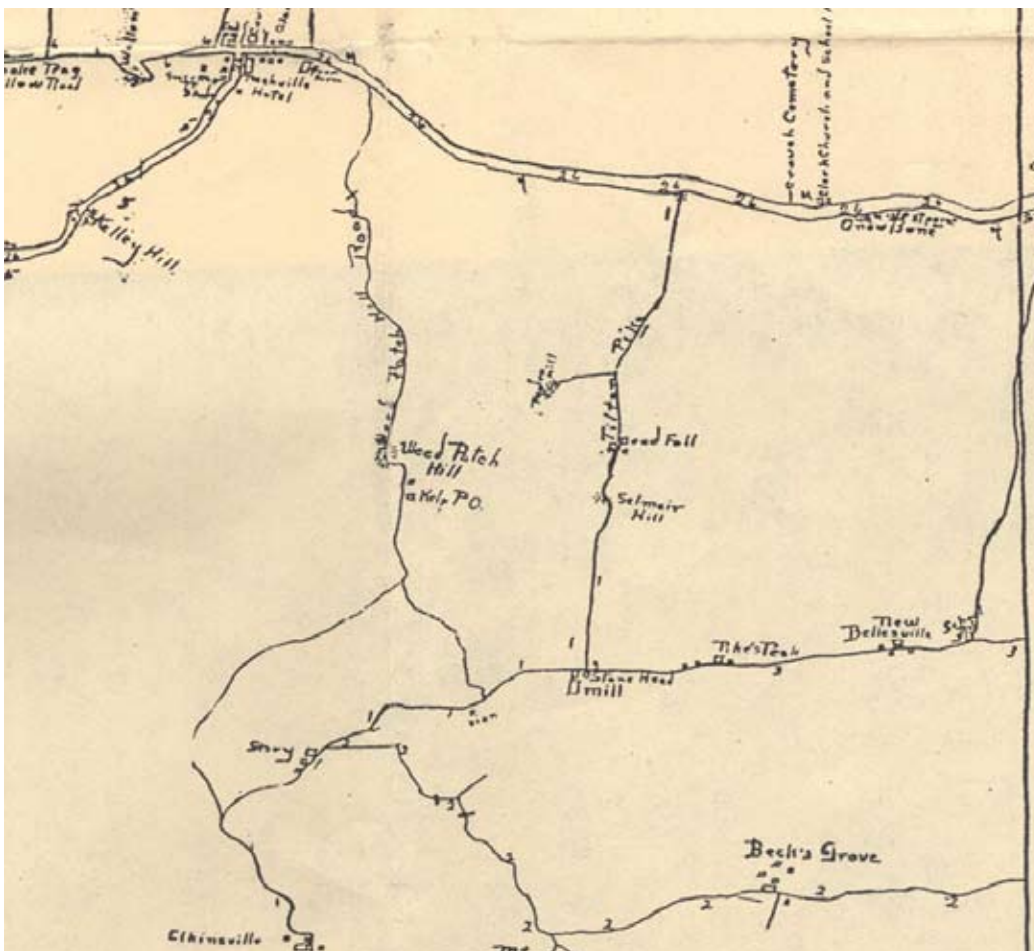
The State Game Preserve and then the State Park later on were

responsible for the demise of the communities of Kelp and Weed Patch Hill. The center of the community of Kelp was located between where the Horsemen's camp is now and below Strahl Lake at the junction of Skinner and Strahl Creeks in Brown County State Park. The settlement was first called Bird's Run Creek and then Hobbs Creek after an early settler, George Hobbs. At one time the community bustled with activity with a church, school, store, sorghum mill, sawmill, icehouse, and a post office.

In 1892 Alonzo "Lon" Allison, the Nashville postmaster, got a letter from Washington D.C. asking him to establish a post office in this area and to give it a name. After going over several names and being rejected he finally wrote back to Washington to suggest the name Kelp. Lon Allison came up with the name because of a boy, Harry Kelp, whom he was fond of and had done a lot of chores for him. So it came to pass that the new post office and village would be named Kelp. Afterward young Harry Kelp later become Nashville's most prominent barber.

The new post office was first run by William Hobbs in a log cabin in 1896. It was later operated in a general store run by Robert Leander Bruce in 1899 and then his widow, Charlotte, until 1921. Famed photographer, Frank Hohenberger, recalled from one of his trips to Brown county in the 1920s that Kelp

was the meeting place for about 40 farming families with about 60 children attending the local school. In the early days of Kelp these children graduated after the sixth grade and then went to work on the family farm. No marker shows where the village once stood but history buffs take tours there sometimes to seek out the remnants of the old cellars and wells that were left behind.



Brown County 1874

R. 1 E.

R. 2 E.

R. 3 E.

R. 4 E

T. 10 N.

T. 9 N.

T. 8 N.

T. 7 N.

