



# Brown County Journal

March 15, 2012

## Events:

Brown County Historical  
Society meeting  
April 2

Brown County Genealogical  
Society meeting  
April 10

Quilt Show  
June 1, 2, & 3

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Rhonda D.

## The Death of Young John Cullen

Going through our collection of oldest newspapers in the Historical Society Archives an interesting article in an 1873 edition of the Jacksonian was found. It was an account of a day's testimony in a court case on the death of a young man, John Cullen. The case was the State of Indiana vs. George Fleener, Joseph McClung, and Nathan Fritch.

In the account several witnesses testified about a fight that had occurred between these four young men. The testimonies all seemed to agree for the most part on the happenings in the fight. John Cullen and George Fleener had been having a disagreement for some time. On this day all these young men had been traveling down the road on horses around Needmore when they came upon Mr. Cullen and his riding companion, Oscar Warford. Cullen and Fleener started exchanging words again and all jumped from their horses and started pushing the two to come to a fight. Cullen and Fleener started coming to blows when Fleener pulled a knife and young Mr. Cullen was cut several times. He fell back against Joseph McClung and according to the varying testimonies it was unsure if McClung had pushed Cullen off of him or if he had pushed him back into the fight with Fleener. By the time it was all over Cullen was bleeding badly when Warford and Fritch told him to get to a doctor right away. One of the doctors gave testimony of Cullen's condition and how he advised him to give an affidavit of what had happened to him on the day of the fight, April 12, 1873. Several other witnesses testified to various happenings that had been going on before and after the death of Cullen. There were some witness accounts that contradicted what the boys had testified to. It was a most interesting article.

There are no other newspapers left from this time period so no



more of the case could be read in consequent papers. Our Archives houses the court document packets from all the Civil and Criminal Court cases. So the next step was to look for this case: State vs. Fleener, McClung, & Fritch. Going through the file there were a lot of slips of papers such as subpoenas for witnesses to appear, a dissertation on the differences of the various degrees of Murder by Judge Hester.

Most of the remaining documents pertained to Joseph McClung as an accessory in Cullen's death. McClung was eventually charged with Manslaughter and sentenced to 25 years. There was also another slip of paper saying he had taken his case to the Supreme Court and his sentence was thrown out after 10 years. But that's all that was in the packet. There was nothing more on Fritch even though he seemed to play a small part in the fight. And what was even more surprising there was nothing on George Fleener, one

of the principals in the fight. So what happened? Surely Fleener must have been charged in the death of Cullen if McClung was charged with Manslaughter for just being involved?

The area that this event, the death of John Cullen, took place in was hilly country. Farms spotted the hills and valleys. Travel might have taken a day to get to the gathering places such as the country store, the church gathering, or the country school, but all in all it was a community. Looking in the 1870 and 1880 census during this time of Cullen's death tells a lot. Cullens, Robertsons, Fleeners, Fritchs, and McClungs were all relatively close neighbors.

The accused, George Fleener, was about 19 and his parents were Abraham Fleener and Sarah Jane Alexander. Any information on George, his siblings and his parents were researched. None of the obituaries on the brothers or married sisters mentioned George as a brother or his whereabouts. We hit a dead end here. Next we needed to look at family histories so a trip to the library was the next destination. In the book, "History and Families - Brown County, Indiana" under a family history of the Fleener family one line at the bottom read, "George married Gabriella Robertson and moved west early in life." So this gave us another clue, at least he lived to marry and moved away. Looking for a marriage record for George and Gabriella proved fruitless in both Brown and Monroe Counties. It was decided then to do some more checking on Gabriella Robertson's family. Digging further in another family history on the Claiborn Robertson family Gabriella was listed as a daughter. At the bottom of their family group sheet was a few lines on Gabriella that read. "There is a mystery about what happened to Gabriella. Her name was never mentioned in the family. It was as if she had never lived. Her sister, Amanda, also wrote: Gabriella did not go west with that man, Fleener, involved in the stabbing of John Cullen. It seems that Gabriella was considered his girlfriend. The last time anyone seen her was when

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she was leaving for Taintor, Iowa. It is believed she went west in the year 1873.”

The previous quote suggests they did go west together. Looks like some of the family lived in denial and others just preferred not to talk about it. Possibly Gabriella followed Fleener out west and maybe they suspected her involvement with Fleener, but didn't want it to reflect badly on the family. The event involving Fleener in John Cullen's death was in 1873, so why would Gabriella go west in 1873 except to go with Fleener – the timing was too close. But we can't determine this for certain. One possible explanation is that unwed expectant mothers were sometimes sent away to have their baby to return home afterwards. As best could be done the obituaries of her siblings were checked for a mention of their sister, Gabriella. None gave any clues. The Criminal Court books still needed to be checked to see if a verdict was given in the case. In searching these books very little was found. Had Fleener skipped town and went out west to avoid prosecution? A warrant was filed for his arrest but did not have any return information on it. It was brought up two more times in court but no follow-up was found. The fact that no more information could be found on the case against Fleener draws us to the conclusion that no more could be done until he was present to face his charges. The court not knowing where he had gone nothing else could be done. No evidence of Fleener ever surfaced again in Brown County.



After the fight with George Fleener young John Cullen died five days later on April 17, 1873. His father, James Cullen was an immigrant from Ireland that had come to settle in Brown County along with his bride, Rozanah Haeffer of Pennsylvania, in the mid 1860s. Theirs was a large family of 12 children – 4 boys and 8 eight girls. Most of their children were born in Ohio on their way to Indiana. It's a shame young John Cullen's new life in Indiana was so short lived.

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## Two Stories of Marital Bliss in Ole Brown County

Here are two stories of marital goings-on in the old county of Brown. You can tell we came from hearty stock if any of our families were like these. Some of it may be hard to read, but it is in their original words.

### **JONES-SCHROCK FIGHT- 1925**

“ After it was over Bummer Mobley said they had imported 52 gallons of bullets for the defense of Blood Alley. Fred Patterson wanted to move at any price. Houses scarce, however. He had no gas to sell after

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sundown or before sunrise. Lon Kennedy went home and told his wife very promptly where to head in. Hershel Mobley said his wife was talking sassy to him and snapped her fingers in his face - such a thing never heard of before. Said the men of the town would have to whip their wives at once to keep them in their place.

Dues to Community Club, or initiation fees raised on account of the athletics derived therefrom since Mrs. Jones showed her ability. Vene said he knew Jones had been training his wife for boxing. Drive a hammer through Dick Jones' head if he trespassed again. Joe Schrock jealous of Bill Reed, of whom Joe's wife thought more of his little finger than she did of Joe's whole body. Closing stores early in order to get home before Mrs. Jones appeared on the streets. Man sprained his



**Dick Jones & Buck Stewart**



**Sylvanus Schrock as Abe Martin**

ankle in  
a ditch  
trying to  
make

a shortcut homeward. A woman beating a man never heard of here before. Mrs. Jones is to be presented with a medal. Date not set for exercises. Will probably wait until Vene's eye heals up so he won't miss anything. "If it hasn't a-happened in Brown County it ain't gonna come off anywheres," a common saying after the fight. Vene said if it was to do over things would be different - her heels would be higher than her head in a jiffy."

If I had been eating when I read this I surely would have spit up!

(From the Hohenberger Journal)

### **PHOEBE HATCHETT RULES THE ROOST**

With a shotgun and an ax Mrs. Phoebe Hatchett, 45 years old, made her husband, Bartlett Hatchett, promise to cut out some of his "tantrums" and "be good." She also, with club, put three ministers to flight and the religious services conducted nightly in the Hatchett home have been abruptly terminated. Revs. David Graham, W. U. Crabb and Preston Petro, with other persons of the neighborhood, gathered at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Bartlett Hatchett to hold prayer services.

While Rev. Graham was talking, he stated that "secret prayer would never bring any souls to God." Some person in the audience took exception and nearly everybody joined in the discussion that



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became heated. During the argument, one of the ministers “cut up,” as Hatchett expressed it, and Hatchett ordered him out. He refused to go, and Hatchett struck him over the head with his cane. Then it was that Mrs. Hatchett, siding with the preacher, struck her husband between the eyes with an apple. This was too much for the ministers and, while they were trying to prevent active hostilities, Mrs. Hatchett ordered them all out, and as they were slow in obeying, she backed up the command with a club that proved persuasive.

The last day of the circuit court here was taken up in hearing the divorce case of Barlett Hatchett against Mrs. Hatchett. A large crowd was attracted to the courtroom. The testimony of Hatchett was so quaint and laughable that Judge Dupree, of Franklin, who presided, could not control even himself, but he begged the crowd to keep as quiet as possible, although he said, “I know you cannot keep from laughing, but I want to hear this case.”

Among other things, Hatchett said in his testimony that his wife called him “an old gray-haired groundhog,” said he, “Phoebe got mad for nothing, and I went to town to get some fresh meat, and when I returned she had carried the cook stove into another room and bolted the door. I asked Phoebe if I could fry my meat on her stove, and she said, ‘No, you can’t fry any meat in here.’ I paid her 10 cents every time she made biscuits for me since the prayer meeting.” The judge took the case under advisement.

(Elkhart [IN] Daily Review, February 26, 1908, p. 1.)



**Joe Schrock, Vessie Stull, Jim Schooley, Jimmy Tomlinson, and one unknown on the Liar's Bench - 1957**

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