



Brown County Journal

August 15, 2015

Events:

Brown County Historical
Society Dinner
September 7

Brown County
Genealogical Society
September 10

If you no longer wish to receive this
e-newsletter send an e-mail with the
word "unsubscribe" in the subject
heading to: rhonda@
browncountyhistorycenter.org

The material contained herein is
copyrighted.

Rhonda A. Dunn

What an Odd Name ~ Gnaw Bone?

"Two families lived down by the creek at Gnaw Bone. The Petro family had 17 children and 25 dogs (they did a lot of hunting). The other family was the Dan Hawkins family. The Petro children all went to school with their lunch in one bucket. One day one of the smallest boys got too much fat meat to eat on his sandwich and it made him sick. One of the Hawkins children started saying, "Petro town and Hawkins street, Nothing to eat but old fat meat, Gnaw Bone!" The town has had that name ever since."

Unfortunately, we really don't know for sure how Gnaw Bone got its name originally. To date we've counted at least nine different stories about how Gnaw Bone got its name. Several of these stories have at least three to four different versions. The little rhyme above can also give us a glimpse of Brown County humor in the 1800s. The first documented mention of this name was recently found in a Cincinnati newspaper telling of the death of Preston Hawkins by George Rutter of **Gnaw Bone**, Indiana in 1879.

Early History of the Gnaw Bone Area

We don't know for sure when Gnaw Bone first became an established community. As with all communities they came into being as a result of the inter-relationships of neighbors and then the resulting intermingling of their families. We're going to concentrate though on the area directly around present day Gnaw Bone.

It all began with the first settlers to the area. At the beginning of the county the first land owners were families with names such as Henderson, Clark, Fox, Crouch, Bright, Brown, Smith, Pittman,



Old Gnaw Bone Store

Hawkins, Petro, Ayers, Rutters, Burkharts, Kirts, West, Sietz, and Schrougham.

Gnaw Bone Becomes a Community

We first get a sense of Gnaw Bone becoming a community in the late 1800s. The stories that have survived of the families and the tales of how it got its name reflect on the idea that Gnaw Bone was becoming a community. These stories being told and retold have kept the early history alive. We all know what happens when a story is retold - it gets changed a little bit with every retelling. You can read all the stories in the red boxes.

Gnaw Bone now just seems like a populated spot on State Road 46 in between Nashville and Columbus. There are a cluster of houses, a couple of stores, a campground, and flea markets. When State Road 46 was straightened out it cut off the old part of the Gnaw Bone community. This now lies on old State Road 46. Old 46 at the intersection of Brown Hill road turns south and runs along Henderson Creek for about a mile and eventually comes back to our current State Road 46. On the south side of the creek Gnaw Bone backs up to Moore Hill which is an abrupt incline and looks like a wall of a mountain. This hill belonged to John Moore and then

Taggart, King, Weddle, and Floyd. Of course, many of these first settlers stayed on the land, built homes, farmed, and raised their families. As the needs of the family grew they had to seek out their neighbors to provide things that they could not do and obtain for themselves. Then as human nature goes the neighbor boys grew up and married the neighbor girls. Thus, family relationships were also formed. The first wave of settlers were from the southern states. With the onset of the Civil War a second wave of migration of families from Ohio and others that wanted no part in the war. Then there were those that moved on and then others moved in to take their place. Other families names were

Origin Theories No. 1

1. Early French traders set up an Indian trading outpost here and it was named after a French city, Narbonne - later Naw Bone.
2. Two Kentucky traders opened up a trading post here using their last names Naw (half Indian) and Boone (Daniel Boone's brother) - thus Naw Boone.



Old Gnaw Bone Store - The West Family

can also get a glimpse of the community and their troubles. In 1875 Nicholas Petro was charged with cutting down a tree on someone else's property. The list of witnesses which would also be residents and neighbors of Gnaw Bone were David Crouch, George Bowden, Frank Petro, William Crouch, James Scrogham, Joshua Knight, James Henderson, and John Ayers.

In the Indianapolis News of September 1898 there is an article entitled Oddly Named Places. "There are some oddly named places in Brown County such as . . . Gnaw Bones. It consists of three or four houses, two churches, a blacksmith shop and a quart shop, operating under a government license. The man

to his descendents at that time.

As the first families formed relationships the community began to grow. Two of the first important players that show up in these tales are Daniel Hawkins and Nicholas Petro in the 1850s and 1860s. Theirs seemed to be the two largest families living there and had settled there many years earlier. From one of the Hendersons' oral histories they tell the story of these two families who lived down by the creek. The Petro family had 17 children and 25 dogs. It also mentions that their father was an avid hunter - the reasoning for all the dogs. The Hawkins family built a store and ran a sawmill there.

The next generation of noteworthy residents were James Schrougham and John Ayers in the 1870s to the 1890s. These tales say that there were three families living there at the time, the man that operated a blacksmith shop, John Ayers who operated a sawmill, and James Schrougham who had a general store. John Ayers had the sawmill where the Wesleyan church now sits. It was also the location of a rubber factory at one time.

From court records we

Origin Theories No. 2

1. Early settlers were snowed in one winter and when help came they were found gnawing on old bones.
2. Traveler stopped by one day and found a dog gnawing on a bone.



Clark Church and School

the old Mt. Liberty location. During the time Bill had the store the population consisted of the Sietz family, Tom Clark and his wife, and a couple of West families. After Bill Seitz quit the business it was passed over to Harry Letts and then Charles Lucas.

Coming down to the early 1900s it gets a little easier to trace the list of store owners because by this time the community of Gnaw Bone was more established. The list of store owners reads like a book on the history of Brown County. Thomas Bright had the store early on for about 10 years. He sold it and went into the huckster business. When he moved away the population of Gnaw Bone dwindled down quite a bit - he had a very large family.

Conner Ogle ran it after him and also ran the blacksmith shop. Conner sold his land in Johnson township and decided to try his smithy business at Gnaw Bone. In an interview for the Chicago Tribune

who gave it the name of Gnaw Bone lives close by, and the name is entered on the official records of Shelby County where a lawsuit was venued. When the place reached the dignity of three or four houses the name was given to it, and all efforts of the government at Washington to change it have proved unavailing.”

In the 1890s Bill Sietz ran the store for many years. Bill was also postmaster from 1893 to 1897. During this time he moved the Mt. Liberty post office to his store. The post office never changed names, although. At the end of his commission the next postmaster, Charles Patterson moved the post office back to

Origin Theories No. 3

1. Jim Schrougham said that one day some boys came through going to enlist for the Civil War and stopped to eat lunch, one wasn't done yet so the others went on. When they came back he was still there gnawing on his bone.
2. Civil War soldiers stopped by on the way to their camp to get a bite to eat, they called it 'gnawing the bone.'
3. One version says it was Mexican War Soldiers on the way to the front.



Looking south down old 46 and old downtown Gnaw Bone with the Wesleyan Church

hung out a sign bearing the name, Westpoint. He said since he owned the whole town that he had a right to rename it. There was quite raucous over the renaming of the town. Everyone seemed to agree that there were dozens of towns named Westpoint, but only one Gnaw Bone. Those in favor of keeping the name won the argument and when the state came by to put up new signs Gnaw Bone was once again.

When John West gave up the business it passed on to Bill Gates. Other owners of the business were those such as Can Clark, Perry Hanna, Lige Lucas, Glen Bright, S. D. Bright, and Tom Clark ran the blacksmith shop at one time. The dates and times of their ownership with many others are too numerous to mention.

From one of Frank M. Hohenberger's stories in 1941 he writes a little about the life in Gnaw Bone. "In years gone by it really was an interesting place. It was the hub around which gossip and business revolved. Men didn't seem to have so much time to loaf except in the evenings, but Saturday afternoons horses and wagons and some buggies, too, parked under the

in 1966 he talked about his life there. "These days you'd never take Gnaw Bone for what it used to be. He knows Gnaw Bone because he ran a blacksmith shop and general store there and he and his wife, Herma, and boys were Gnaw Bone's only residents way back in 1912. Conner said that blacksmithing was not particularly hard work and it always was a lot of fun. There were always a lot of people and conversation at the Smithy. In 1917 he was elected a County Commissioner."

After Conner went into politics and moved to Nashville, John B. West took over and bought the whole place. John

Origin Theories No. 4

1. Jim Schrougham stopped by John Ayers place on the way to Columbus to get a part for his machine. John was gnawing on a bone. When he got back with the part it was supper time and John was still gnawing on a bone. Jim thought that was hilarious and named the place Gnaw Bone. (There are 3 different versions of this story)



Gnaw Bone Church Camp

elm tree east of the blacksmith shop is the Section line. This Section line is Gnaw Bone's second claim to fame, the first being its name. If you follow it south it runs down a little to the east of Stone Head. If you trace it all the way to Indianapolis it runs right up Meridian Street.

Schools and Churches

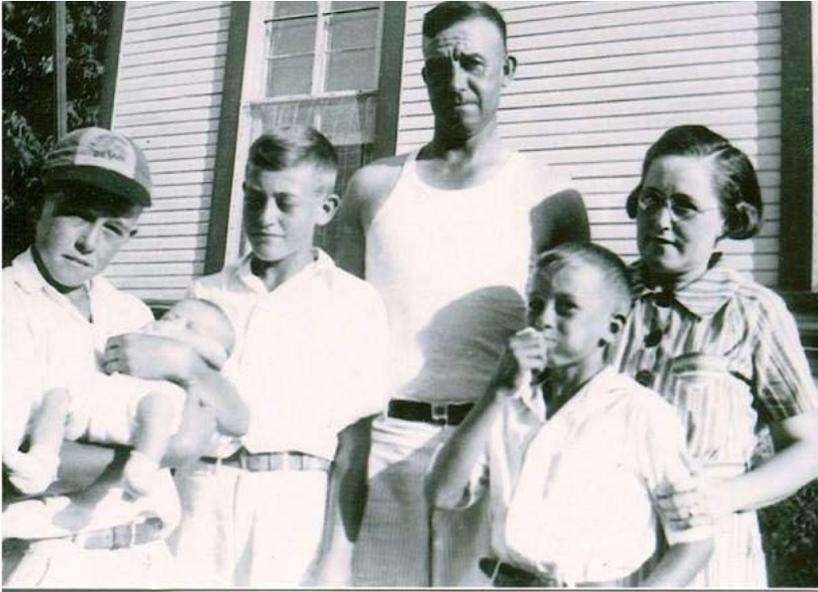
There were at least two schools that we know of that were established to serve the children of Gnaw Bone and families of the surroundings hills. About one mile to the west was the Clark School, named after one of the original landowners of the area, was built in 1890. About 35 pupils attended there. It stood where the Pleasant Valley Church now stands. To the east the other school was called the Junction School. It was located up on a hill about where the Gypsy Moon Flea Market is now located and close to Henderson Cemetery. About 20 pupils attended that school.

The churches in the area that served the Gnaw Bone residents were the Pleasant Valley church, sometimes called the Clark Church, which was located right by the Clark School. There was also a Methodist Church in Gnaw Bone which was discontinued. The Wesleyan Church now

old elm tree that stood a little to the east of the group of store buildings and an old log barn. Picturesque buildings that stood along Little Salt Creek gave way to structures used for religious camp meetings. Close by is an old ford in the stream that has been used as a shortcut for those coming from New Bellsville, Stone Head, Pike's Peak, and the Pleasant Valley neighborhood. One prong of Salt Creek flows near Gnaw Bone, another meets it at the Tabernacle, said to be the Burkhart and Salem prongs. Close to the large

Origin Theories No. 5

1. A farmer's sheep was killed by dogs, the family decided to kill the few that was left and were seen gnawing on sheep bones for weeks.
2. A poor farmer's old horses died - they didn't bury them back then. The dogs were seen gnawing on their bones for months.



The Harold Moore Family ca. 1935 - son Merrill ran the store and a huckster route.

sits there. Across the road is a church camp that has served the area for many years. Gnaw Bone was a big meeting place for revivals and camp meetings back in the day, especially in the 1930s and 1940s.

The State came through and straightened out State Road 46 in the late 1950s to early 1960s. During this time the Roberts and Reeves families occupied most of the population. The third claim to fame for Gnaw Bone came when Robert Reeves opened up a store along the new highway and introduced the Gnaw Bone Tenderloin to the world.



Merril Moore's Huckster Truck

Origin Theories No. 6

1. Whenever anyone visited old Daniel Hawkins he was often seen gnawing on a bone over at his sawmill.
2. A drunk who got lost on the way home was afterwards found by his friends, they said 'there he sits on that there log gnawing his bones.'

(Photos from the Lilly Library Hohenberger Collection, Brown County Historical Society Archives, and Rhonda Dunn)