



Brown County Journal

December 15, 2011

Events:

Brown County Historical
Society meeting
January 2

Brown County Genealogical
Society meeting
January 10

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

The material contained herein
is copyrighted.

Rhonda D.

The Fox Hunts of Brown County

It was Sunday night, Oct. 5, 1925, and some had come early to get a good spot to set up their tent. They were sitting around the bonfire that had been prepared for this big event that had been planned for about a year previous. Oh, that glorious sound of the hounds baying in the distant hills. "That one's my Old Red," says one fox hunter. "That one's my Little Jane; I would know her voice anywhere." Thus was the conversation those nights sitting around the fire whenever a fox was stirred up. Those were the golden days of our county when the fox hunts were the regular pastime. Fox Hunts in Indiana weren't like those you might be more familiar with as seen on TV or in England. There the fox hunters were dressed in elegant riding attire and rode fine steeds racing after the hounds on the trail of a fox racing through the forest and bounding over dead trees. Many a Brown County boy didn't even own a horse and wore overalls seven days a week. Their greatest entertainment was to sit around a campfire or woodstove with their fellow fox hunters and speak proudly of their hound. They would swap stories of past fox hunts while listening for their hounds to kick up a fox. As soon as the first bay was heard then all went silent, listening. Each and every fox hunter knew the distinct sound of their hound. Where was he in the pack? Was he in front or in the middle? How far ahead do you think the fox was? One story was told of a wise, old fox named Elijah, who always gave the hounds a good run across half of Brown County and always seemed to elude them in the end. Suffice it to say that Elijah died of old age and nary a hound ever caught up with him. Fox Hunt clubs abounded in every county back then and this was a very popular sport in the early 1900s.

The year before in October Morgantown had sponsored the 14th Annual Meet of the Southern Indiana Fox Hunters Association. It was such a good event that Brown County wanted to do it this year. In April the Directors were invited to view the camp

grounds and Brown Countians went all out to woo them for this year's big event. It worked, when the Association looked over the grounds just south of Nashville, which was then called Tourist Park, and with the excellent hunting terrain of the Brown County hills they couldn't say no. This was to be one of the biggest sporting events ever to be held in this county, the 15th Annual Fox Hunter's Meet. They went all out building a log cabin for the officials to use, digging water wells for the many that would attend, running electric lights throughout the campground, tents were provided for the officials to stay in, a good restaurant was put up in the center of the camp, fireworks were shot off several nights, and entertainment of some sort was provided every night.

The program included Derby races, dog auctions, bench shows, all age race for the hounds, best pair of pups show, oldest fox hunter, oldest lady fox hunter, oldest fox hound, ugliest fox hound, and the show went on and on. There were more than 100 tents with over 300 people, and the fox hunters were from all over the states of Indiana, Kentucky, Illinois, and Iowa. From a local newspaper, the Democrat, article, "Hundreds of hounds were on the grounds some good, some not so good, some more valuable than a horse or Ford." Every morning they rose to the smell of sizzling bacon and boiling coffee. Then they were up and dressed and off to another part of the county for a hunt. A bystander watching the hunt asks one of the fox hunters, "who gets the brush, you know, who kills the fox?" The hunter says, "Kill the fox? Say mister, you are bloodthirsty, nobody gets killed. It's a chase, not a lynchin'. Foxes are hard enough to find without killin' em." It all sounds very hazy to the outsider, what is the point, and he finally realizes the fox is merely incidental to the sport. The sport is the chase! Sylvanus Shrock, called Abe Martin by his neighbors, was at the meet. "Hey Abe," called a spectator in the race, "got a dog in the race?" Abe said, chewing a blade of grass, "Naw, I sold my hound last week, er I would a showed these fellas what a real hound is."



15th Annual Meet of the Southern Indiana Fox Hunter's Association 1925 - Poor Farm is in the distance

Friday was the day for awarding prizes. H. H. Evans was voted Ugliest Fox Hunter and someone remarked that they must not have seen" Louis Snyder right on the stand there with him." Valentine Penrose got first prize for being the Oldest Fox Hunter at 98 years old. Emma Jane Shrock was the Oldest Lady Fox Hunter at 70 years old. The Tallest Fox Hunter was Charles Swift. Lon Weddle got second prize for the Laziest Fox hunter for dancing all night and not attending the hunts. Fremont

Weddle got a prize for Best Pair of Hounds under 6 months. Miss Virginia Leonard got second prize for Best All Age Fox Hound. Deaver Wilson got third place in the All Age Bench Show for his dog. Charles L. Snyder got third place for the All Age Winners Show. Election of officers for the year were H. H. Evans of New Castle as president, Bunn Mitchell of Bloomfield as Secretary, Lon Weddle as a Director with Scott Moser as Alternate.



L to R: Frank P. Taggart, Dan Turner, William Kennedy, George Turner, Dan Gordon, and Anderson Percifield

The following year the Monroe County bunch got it in their heads to sponsor the next meet there. They were so jealous of Brown County's success that a big push went to woo the Association over and it was successful. The newspapers related that "many members of the association in Brown County will attend the meeting and some of the best fox dogs in the state of Indiana will go from this county." Lon Weddle's dog, Polly, won the

first prize, another one of his dogs, Judge, won second in the derby bench show. All dogs from Brown County scored in the races. Another one of Lon Weddle's dogs, Pat, well known by all Brown County fox hunters almost won the daily tally on racing except someone objected because he was a Director in the organization and he withdrew from the races.

Since Brown County's countryside was the preferred terrain for fox hunting many regional meets were held here. There were numerous fox hunt clubs throughout Brown County. One was known to have used the Duncan Church for a while as clubhouse. There was a group that formed up around Bean Blossom. There was a group that headquartered in Nashville also. I'm sure there were many more that are known to us at this time. The last big fox hunter's meet was in October of 1942. Local fox hunter, John Wright, said it was one of the best ever held. Two local boys won prizes, Ralph Chitwood of Nashville got second place in the Derby Age contest. Ross McClung of Unionville got second and fourth places in the All Age contest for two of his dogs.

As time went on the fox population abounded, then farmers started complaining about losing livestock. Finally the harmless fun of the original fox hunts were gone. Brown Countians started organizing fox drives to get rid of the overabundance of the fox population. Fox hunters started actually hunting the foxes. Brown County's golden days were over. Fox hunting seemed to die out by the 1950s and no more of it is heard of these days. One interesting note is that when Bill Monroe, a big time fox

hunter himself, visited Brown County's Jamboree to do a show in 1952 was at the same time that a fox hunt was being held on the grounds. Some say that was the impetus for his buying the Jamboree which became Bill Monroe's Park. Bill Monroe hosted the fox hunts for many years after that. These few lines are from his song, First Whippoorwill.

Back in the days of my childhood,
In the evening, when everything was still,
I used to sit and listen to the foxhounds,
With my dad in them old Kentucky hills.



The McDonalds and some Bean Blossom men in a Fox Drive

Chief Eaglefeather's Indian Show

(This article is reprinted by popular demand from a Brown County Democrat dated March 3, 1995 written by Fred King.)

"The most colorful medicine showman ever to come to Brown County and Nashville was Chief Eaglefeather with his "squaw," Princess Silverheels. His real name was said to be Shelton Cheif [Jelf], and at one time he worked at the Pearson Piano Company in Indianapolis. She was a graduate of a university in Sioux City, Iowa. They had been coming to Nashville in the early 1920s and became well-acquainted with the area and its people.

He was always able to recruit a stringed instrument band and anyone extra to put on his show which consisted of bluegrass music, Indian dances and vaudeville skits at the expense of some of the people with whom he was well acquainted. Between acts his extras sold bottles of tonic and vials of snake oil throughout the crowd, which was always a large one. The show was always held at the street corner near the courthouse, and the crowd overflowed onto the streets. Since the auto traffic was light at that time, the overflow caused little or no problems."

In September of 1925 the Chief bought 100 acres of land from Oliver Thompson and established an Indian Reservation there. It was located between Nashville and Gnawbone just east of the S.R. 135S and S.R. 46. In the valley the Chief constructed a residence, a dance pavilion, and other small buildings. He had a few wild animals such as a bear, a giraffe, and some deer. He recruited a few locals to work for him which among them one who could make some whiskey. In promoting the place

he claimed it to be a family entertainment and the events going on at the Reservation attracted 100s of people at a time. But the law got wind of his making whiskey and the drunkenness that had been witnessed. In June of 1927 the law made a surprise raid on the Chief and he was charged with making and selling whiskey. Needless to say the Chief did some time in the Indiana Reformatory. After his release he returned to Brown County and filed suit against the county. As a resident of an Indiana prison his hair had to be shaved and he no longer looked like an Indian. He stated that it was a detriment to his business as a medicine man in the lawsuit. By 1930 Chief Eaglefeather and his wife, Princess Silverheels had separated and she left with some of his possessions. In 1949 the last word that was heard about them was that they had moved to Waverly, Tennessee. It was reported that he had reached the ripe old age of 97 and had tried to scalp his wife.

As a side note in 1926 a local church group was protesting against Chief Eaglefeather's Indian Reservation. The eastern Brown County Sunday School Convention was held at a New Bellesville church. According to a Democrat article of Oct. 9, 1926, they formed a resolution:

"One thing which we wish to voice our sentiments against is the so-called Indian Reservation located on the State Road about four miles east of Nashville. We feel constrained to speak against this place because here the Lord's Day is desecrated. Sunday dancing is practiced in open violation of the teaching of the churches and we are sure it is not a proper place for parents and children to attend."

Those that signed the resolution were: Warren Chafin, missionary of the American Sunday School Union, L. J. Moore of Bellesville, Oscar Lackey of Bellesville, W. H. Howard of North Salem, and D. S. Wilkerson of Sprunica.



Brown County Historical Society ~ January program

Next month's meeting will be on Monday, January 2 at 6:30 p.m. After the pitch-in dinner Dan Shaver of the Nature Conservancy will be speaking. We will meet at the S.R. 135N building.

Brown County Genealogical Society ~ January meeting

Next month's meeting will be on Tuesday, January 10 at 6:00 p.m. at the Brown County Library. We will be hearing Annual Reports from our Officers for the past year. We will continue with a Sharing Session on Our Ohio Ancestors from last month.
