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Telling The Tri-County's Story Since 1869 WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2007

This and That

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Have you ever heard of the Bloody Bridge? It crosses the Miami-Erie Canal just a short distance south of Kossuth, East of Route 66 and not too far from Deep Cut.



The new Bloody Bridge

Let's just reminisce a little about how the canal and Deep Cut came to be.

Ohio Governor Ethan Allen Brown is often referred to as the "Father of Ohio's Canals". His terms as Governor ran from 1818 to 1822. Brown lobbied for the canal system because he realized the importance of transportation between Lake Erie and the Ohio River.

In 1825 the state legislature authorized construction of the Ohio and Erie Canal, on the Eastern side of Ohio. On 4 July 1825 the first shovelful of earth was turned for the first Ohio canal. Two weeks later came the groundbreaking ceremony for the Miami Canal at Middletown. Work was begun on the southern section between Cincinnati and Middletown. Labor on the canals was provided by local farmers and their sons and by the thousands of immigrants, primarily Irish but including some Germans. Many died of malaria, typhoid and smallpox and some from cholera epidemics. Murderous fights took many lives. In 1833 the entire 308 mile route of the Ohio and Erie Canal was opened to traffic.

The Miami & Erie Canal was not initially conceived in a single, bold master plan to provide transportation from Lake Erie to the Ohio River. First it was the Miami Canal. Then the Miami & Erie Extension Canal was authorized in 1831 and the Wabash & Erie Canal was authorized in Feb. 1833. Work began on the Miami Extension in 1833. Work proceeded to Troy for 17 miles. Later additional segments to the north were parceled out. The last 33 miles of the canal was let to contractors in 1843.

By 1845 the entire 115 mile Miami Extension was opened to traffic. Three miles above Piqua the canal crossed the Loramie Creek. It ascended in 5 locks at Lockington and arrived at the Loramie Summit. From the Loramie Summit the canal descended to Junction. It passed through New Bremen, Woodbourne, Newport, Berlin and Minster. Then it passed through the towns of St. Marys, Kossuth, Spencerville, Acadia, Delphos, Ottoville, Hamler, Mandale, St. Andrews and Charloe. Grand Lake St. Marys was a major hydraulic feeder of the canal. At that time it was the largest artificial body of water in the country. The canal linked up with the Wabash & Erie at Junction and provided the needed access to Toledo and Lake Erie. The Wabash & Erie had been completed between Toledo and Ft. Wayne two years earlier.

In 1845 the Ohio Board of Public Works suggested the entire route from the Ohio River to Lake Erie be given the name Miami & Erie Canal. This extra 87 miles of canal gave Ohio a second major canal of some 250 miles in 1849. The first boat to make the entire run from Cincinnati to Toledo was the Banner in 1845. Samuel Forrer was the resident engineer of the canal. He lived in Delphos for a time and owned a great deal of property. The first canal boat to pass through Delphos or Section 10 was the Marshall in 1845.

One of the most interesting spots on the canal is Deep Cut, just south of Spencerville. This section of the "Big Ditch" is a huge ditch 6,600 feet long and 5 to 52 feet deep. It was dug and blasted through the tough blue clay ridge, which separated the St. Mary Watershed from that of the Auglaize River.

Farm boys, along with Irish and German immigrants dug and blasted through the tough blue clay ridge. They toiled with picks, shovels and barrows from sun up to sun down for 30 cents per day and a jigger of whiskey. Digging the cut took a long time and one legend said they started from both ends with the Orangemen on one end and the Irish Greens on the other end. The cut was said to have been completed on 17 Dec. 1844. Nobody knows who flung the first blow or swung the first club but a big fight erupted between the two gangs. It is said the militia had to come from St. Marys to settle them down.

Just south of Kossuth and down the road from Deep Cut is the famous Bloody Bridge. Some say it got its name from all the fightin' and killin' that went on at that time near the bridge. Another story claims the saloon keeper by the name of Clyde and a tough evil man named "Girty" got into a fight on the bridge and Clyde was killed. Old Girty just walked away.

The most popular legend of the Bloody Bridge involves a lover's triangle. A memorial stone near the bridge tells the tale. "During the canal years of the 1850s a rivalry grew between Bill Jones and Jack Billings for the love of Minnie Warren. This became hatred by Bill because Minnie chose Jack. One a fall night in 1854 returning from a party Minnie and Jack were surprised on the bridge by Bill. Armed with an ax, with one swing Bill severed Jack's head. Seeing this, Minnie screamed and fell from the bridge into a watery grave. Bill disappeared and when a skeleton was found years later in a nearby well, people asked ... what it suicide or justice?" The old time Bloody Bridge was dismantled and the 1990's it was replaced by the present bridge. The Auglaize County Historical Society erected the memorial in 1976.

Some friends of mine, let's call them Laurie and Jerry, were driving home from St. Marys one night about midnight. As they were driving along Rt. 66, approaching the road where the Bloody Bridge crosses the canal, they noticed a young woman in a long flowing white gown, walking along the road toward them. Her gown or robe was blowing in the wind. They debated as to offer help but thought she appeared to know what she was doing. They often wondered "was this the ghost of Minnie Warren?" Who knows?