

The Time Traveler

Scioto County Past and Present **By Kaitlin Setty**



George Willis, Thought to be Killed, is Alive

On November 4, 1920, the Portsmouth Times ran a story about a man named George Willis who was believed to be dead, but showed up two days after his funeral. The burial of an unknown individual, originally believed to be Willis, was in Greenlawn Cemetery, and Willis even had a headstone in place inscribed with his birth date and death date. Willis had allegedly been hit by an N & W train, and the body had been examined by Coroner Dr. J. D. Hendrickson. Willis' wife and other relatives identified the body. Though the corpse was mangled nearly beyond recognition, there was similar scars on the knees to Willis' own scars, thus leading his wife to believe it was him. In reality, George Willis had been working away from home for eight weeks in Columbus. He was located through two friends, Louis Pennington and Jesse Lucas, who used to work with him in the open hearth department at the steel plant. Willis saw Pennington on Sunday in Columbus, and the two men spent some time together and caught up. On Monday, Pennington came to Portsmouth. While walking on the street, Pennington met Jesse Lucas who told him of George Willis' untimely death. Instantly Pennington was confused. He'd just seen Willis in Columbus on Sunday.

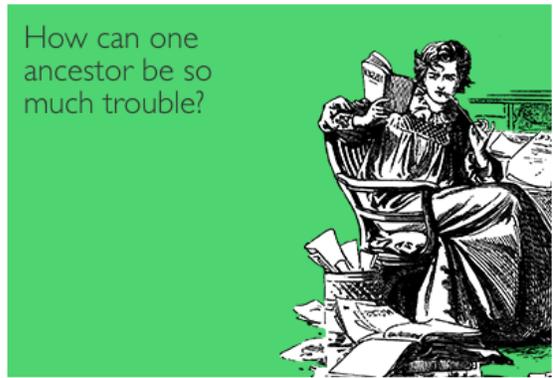
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Tween Club

Our Tween Club has been suspended due to COVID-19 Guidelines until further notice.



Timeless Treasure: Nurses Graduation of 1928

Our November/December Timeless Treasures is this sepia-tone group photo of five graduating nurses (possibly from General Hospital) in 1928. In 1978, the class was honored at a meeting of the Scioto County Medical Society. This item comes from a recent donation from the Scioto County Medical Society.

View this image and many more at <https://www.yourppl.org/history/>
Have a timeless treasure of your own you'd like to share? Contribute images of your regional historic interest to our website!



Who am I?

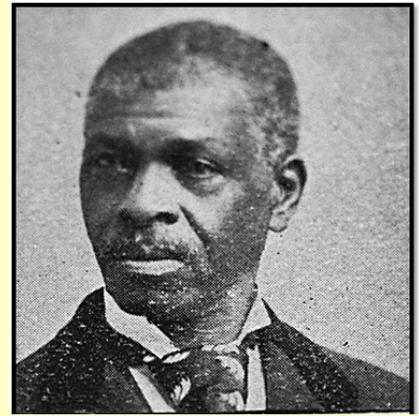
Clue 1: I was born a slave near Louisville, Kentucky in 1823.

Clue 2: I came to Portsmouth in 1867.

Clue 3: I was a member of the African American Methodist Church.

Clue 4: I was a steward on the steamboats the Bostonia and the Bonanza from 1865-1890.

Clue 5: I died in 1911.



George Willis is Alive Continued

How could he have been killed on Monday? Lucas immediately got into contact with Mrs. Willis. She sent a telegram to Columbus and told her husband to meet her. Accompanied by her sister, Mrs. Willis went to Columbus on Wednesday morning. By the afternoon, both Mrs. Willis and her husband had arrived back in Portsmouth. George Willis went to Lynn's Undertaking, the funeral home that conducted his funeral, and asked to see his death certificate, as he thought the entire ordeal was a bit of a laugh. His wife, however, was quite agitated about everything because she had personally looked over the body and claimed it was her husband's. Were they expected to pay for the funeral of a man they did not know? Mrs. Willis agreed to pay for part of the services, and a picture of the dead man was sent around in an effort to locate relatives.

Hold your copy up to a mirror to view the answer!

Ben Johnson

Do you know this place?

Clue 1: This place was named after and laid out by William Powell.

Clue 2: According to Captain N. W. Evans, this place was a hamlet, and in 1985, it was still considered one.

Clue 3: The first survey for the town plat was made July 31, 1846, consisting of 21 inlots.

Clue 4: One of the first businesses to start in the area was a blacksmith shop owned by George Shafer in 1874.

Answer in the next issue!



Local Folklore

Portsmouth Times, December 14, 1896

Frank Crowe, his son James, and Clara McCorkle, "an estimable young belle of Scioto County fame" (Portsmouth Times) set out for the home of Frank's brother, Henry Crowe, in Lucasville. The distance between the two houses was about one and a half miles apart, so the group planned on walking back at night time. Upon arriving at the house of Henry Crowe, the group played games and listened to music. Clara and James Crowe were both accomplished musicians, so the evening was passed pleasantly as they both took up the violin and the piano while singing. The group left, all in good moods, and began the journey back to Frank's place. While climbing a hill about a half mile from the house, they saw a "strange and weird apparition of immense size" (Portsmouth Times) standing before them. The large man, as they later claimed the shape resembled, fled, and the group pursued. They were unable to find him again after searching the area and nearly getting stuck in the mud. They made it home just before morning, afraid and excited all at once. Their story was not the first sighting of some strange apparition near the place known as the "Old McDaniel Hermit Place." It had been unoccupied for seven or eight years, the inhabitants either gone or dead. No one knows for sure, but there were numerous tales of the dead chasing people from the premises after having been "awakened from their slumbers by groans and death like agonies and by seeing headless men roam about their yard during the hour of midnight. For such reasons, it has received the name of being haunted" (Portsmouth Times.) It was this reason that the following day, Frank Crowe began organizing a "company of brave men" (Portsmouth Times) to go searching for the figure again. They have some questions for the man. Frank Crowe said that he wanted to find out "what it is and its wants" (Portsmouth Times).

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Louisiana Moore Ricker's Diary Entry

Wednesday, December 25, 1889

Beautiful spring-like day with indications of rain which were fulfilled before night. Before noon the family from over home, including Father + Mother, Enos + Helen, Mary and Mrs. Behrens, Barton + Jennie, their five children + Charlie Greene, Rich + Lizzie + their five Uncle Jimmie and Aunt Maria McCall had assembled for dinner. A fuller description of the day will be found on a page further on in the book. The weather today was as mild as spring and a light rain fell soon after dinner. The weather was very unlike Christmas and aside from the Tree there was little to indicate a family reunion. The latter event was remarkable in some ways and deserves more than ordinary notice. We had planned to have all the different branches of our family meet at our home for the day and so when Lizzie came to town she sent for her trunk full of Christmas presents to our house as Santa Claus' headquarters. It was a wonder when she opened it yesterday to take out the things disguised for the friends outside of our family. Her deft fingers and skillful planning evolve many beautiful and useful things. Last evening she and Richard, Enos + Helen and ourselves prepared the Tree in the parlor and this morning it was hard for the children to await the coming of the others.

**Last Issues:
"Do you know this place?"
West Portsmouth**



Local Mystery: "Terrible Murder in Franklin Furnace"

On the morning of Friday, May 7, 1858, the Portsmouth Daily Tribune ran a story under the headline "Terrible Murder." It was referring to a case that occurred on Wednesday evening, about 7 o'clock involving Samuel Morgan and his wife. The couple lived in the Franklin Furnace area on a small farm and had eight or nine children, some being young and others already married. The Morgans had also taken in a young lady named Sarah Chamberlin to help with the children. Apparently, Miss Chamberlin had been the source of many arguments, possibly even the one that started in the evening. After quarreling for a while, Mrs. Morgan darted across the yard to try and escape her husband's rage. Samuel jumped over the fence, picked up a wooden fence pole, and hit her on the head with it. She fell to the ground, and Samuel beat her in the head until she was dead. Then, he ordered one of his younger children to retrieve a log chain which he tied around the corpse's neck and drug the body to a pit where he tried to burn it. After having no success with that, Morgan drug his wife's body to an outhouse. It was left there, and Samuel went back into the house. He did not come back out. Some of the children ran to a married sister's house to tell her what had happened. The sister called the police, who showed up to Samuel's door the following morning. Mr. O. B. Gould arrested Samuel Morgan and took him to the County Jail. While being arrested, Morgan did not struggle or try to escape. However, tensions were high within the city. Many people felt that Morgan should be drug out and strung up in the street for his crime. To prevent a mob from forming and doing just that, the Portsmouth Artillery Company was put in place to guard the jail and protect Morgan. The court then began searching for people to serve on the jury for Morgan's trial. Finding unbiased jurors proved to be a difficult task as it was well known throughout the county that Morgan was a violent drunk and it was not a far stretch to believe he could have murdered his wife in such a manner. A jury was finally composed, but many speculated that the trial and judgement of Morgan would not take long. Samuel Morgan's trial did not begin until July 7th. The jury came back, after only a short time, and everyone was called in at about 9 o'clock. They found Samuel guilty of murder. He was sentenced to hang on September 24, 1858. However, things didn't go as planned. On the morning of July 31, 1858, Morgan was found in his cell hanging by a sheet from the ceiling. He was pronounced dead at the scene. According to prisoner in a nearby cell, at about 1 o'clock the previous night, Morgan asked him what time it was. Then, nothing was heard. At about 4 o'clock, the jailer, J. Smith, came into the cell to check on Morgan. They found him hanging by a strip of his bed sheet from an iron rod that ran through the ceiling of the cell. Sometime between one and four am, Morgan had slipped his wrists out of the handcuffs, and used more of the bed sheet to tie his wrists and ankles to ensure that the attempt worked. The sheet was placed around his neck, and he stepped off his bed. When his body was discovered, his feet barely touched the floor.

