

MYSTERY DEATHS OF GIRLS PUZZLES OFFICIALS; FAIL TO FIND POISON

On Friday, May 31, 1933, several youths found Muriel Howard, 18, and Doris White McCormick, 19, dead in bed at their rooming house at 530 Fourth Street. The police were notified immediately. After examining the crime scene, interviewing the boys who found the girls, and conducting various other tests, the police had discovered very little. They called it the “most baffling double poisoning case ever to occur in this city.” Virgil E. Fowler, a well known criminologist with more than fifteen years of study and work experience with crime scenes at the time, claimed the case was “the most mysterious case ever brought to his attention” in a *Portsmouth Times* article on April 1, 1933.

This could probably have a lot to do with the fact that after further examination of the crime scene, it was discovered that the door leading to the women’s room was closed completely at 3 A. M., but found partially opened at 1 P.M. Small blisters were found in the mouths of both girls, leading police to believe that they were not the victims of food poisoning. Both bodies were found in normal sleeping positions; nothing indicating a painful death. The type of poison used was hard to discern from any autopsy reports. The liquid was odorless and clear. The only thing officers were able to conclude was that the poison was the kind that was exceedingly strong and destructive.

About a week or so after the girls were found, an unmarked bottle was found in a nearby yard by one of the boys who discovered the bodies. The bottle had a label marked as choral hydrated Merch, Poison, loose crystals. Virgil E. Fowler claimed that there had also been traces of choral found in the girls’ stomachs leading police to believe that the bottle contained the poison that had killed them. The choral can be broken down to form chloroform.

Was the mystery ever solved?

Come see for yourself in the Local History Department. We have the *Portsmouth Times* on microfilm from 1858 to 2010. After 2010, we have them scanned on our computers. You can also search on our in-house database <https://access.newspaperarchive.com/>

INTERESTED
IN LOCAL
MYSTERIES?



UNDETERMINED

Suicide Theory Virtually Abandoned By Investigators;
Hint That Girls May Have Known Too Much
About Narcotic Peddling

POLICE TO QUESTION MANY PERSONS
Second Thorough Search Of Death Room Fails To
Produce Slightest Clue; Chemist Says Some Toxic
Poisoning Used.

Above: front page headline
for the *Portsmouth Times*
on April 11, 1933

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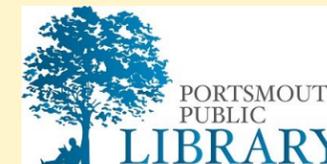
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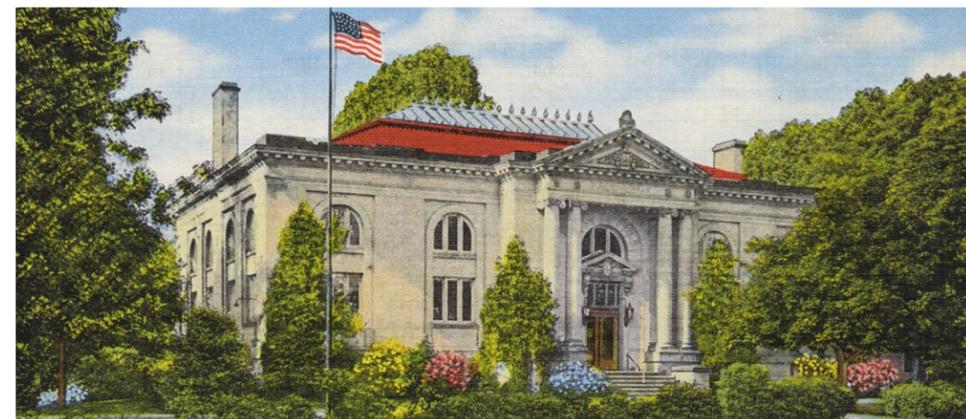
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Summer/ Fall 2018
Volume 1, Issue 3



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The Time Traveler

Portsmouth Past and Present

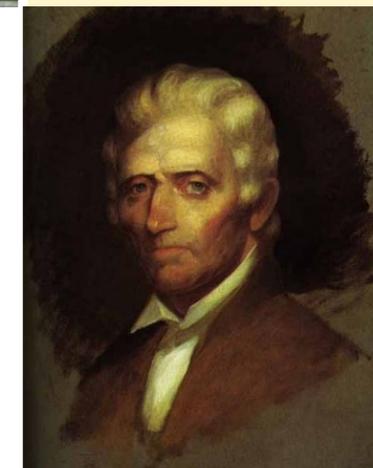
BY KAITLIN SETTY

Welcome to the third edition of *The Time Traveler: Portsmouth Past and Present!* Our goal is to bring Scioto County, Ohio’s past to life through engaging articles, archives and images that residents can be proud to share today. Be on the lookout for our next issue in October!

FORGOTTEN HISTORY: THE HEROICS AT RAVEN ROCK AIRPORT IN OCTOBER OF 1938

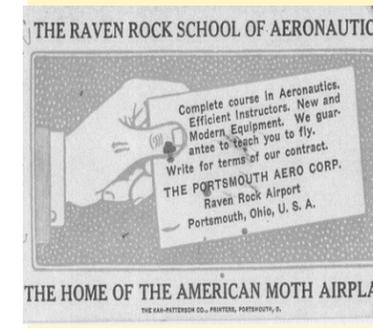
About two miles west of Portsmouth, the peculiar Raven Rock peeks out of rocky crags to peer down at the Scioto River. The famous rock structure is just as poignant and mysterious today as it was years ago. It is said that Raven Rock acquired its name from an Indian chief that was killed in the area. Legend and folklore suggest that the rock was an important lookout spot for the Shawnee Indians. One tale even refers to the formation as “Daniel Boone’s lookout” and tells the story of Boone jumping from the rock to land in a tree in order to escape a band of Shawnee Indians.

Yet, for all its mystery and natural prowess, what many people may not know about Raven Rock is that it once overlooked its very own airport.



ABOVE: Daniel Boone, famous American frontiersman
Source: MyHeritage website

BELOW: The Raven Rock School of Aeronautics advertisement card. Source: Local History digital collection



Story continued on page 3

Our July/August/September Timeless Treasure is this hand painted Parthenon plate. The item was donated with notation: "On behalf of all the Greek people in Portsmouth, we give this plate with a painting of the Parthenon from Athens, Greece to be put in the library. December 30, 1955, The Tsakires Family." The family lived at 850 Third Street. Christo operated a hat cleaning and shoe shine shop at 826 Gallia Street.

Access this and thousands of other timeless treasures via our Local History Online Digital Collection, available for the public to view 24/7 at <https://www.yourppl.org/history/>.

Have a Timeless Treasure of your own you would like to share? Contribute images of your regional historical interest items at <https://www.yourppl.org/history/contribution>.

FROM THE VAULT: THIS ISSUE'S TIMELESS TREASURE

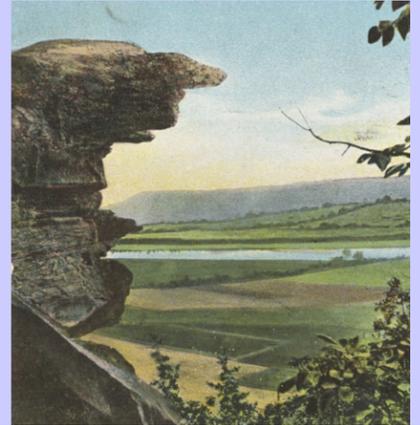


The official day designated for the opening of the Raven Rock Airport was slated to be on Saturday, November 12, 1927 according to an article in the *Portsmouth Daily Times*. "The airport commission of the Chamber of Commerce has done all they can to make Saturday one of the greatest days Portsmouth has ever seen," the *Times* said.

The airport was used for many important community events. The Portsmouth Aero Corporation taught pilots how to fly out of Raven Rock. Military and commercial airshows were flown at the airport for various corporations. At each holiday or important historical event, a "daring stunt plane show was put on" (Portsmouth Times, 1928 article). One *Portsmouth Daily Times* story talked about a "Flying Grocery [Landing] at Raven Rock." The airport was an important community place in the early 1900's, but on a stormy October night in 1938, Raven Rock Airport would reach new heights, this time on a national scale.



ABOVE: Painting depicting Shawnee Indians on Raven Rock. Source: Image in Shawnee Lodge



RIGHT: Postcard of Raven Rock from our online digital collection

FEATURED RESEARCH TOOL

A long time ago in a library far, far away...



Not anymore! We make it easy!

MyHeritage is one of the databases the Portsmouth Public Library subscribes to so **YOU** can do genealogical research. **Easily access it at your own home through the Local History website!** All you need is your library card and you're all set!

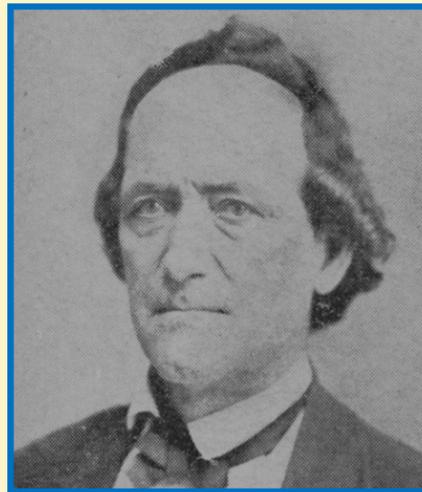
WHO AM I?

Clue #1: I was born in Alexandria, Scioto County, Ohio in 1827.

Clue #2: I built the steamboat the "Reliance" in 1841 and was a prominent captain in Portsmouth.

Clue #3: My eldest daughter, Louisiana, was born aboard the steamboat "Grace Darling" on the Mississippi River near Yazoo City, Louisiana.

Clue #4: My brother-in-law and I retrieved the porthole from the "Star of the West," the first ship sunk in the Civil War. The window was a part of my family's mausoleum in Greenlawn Cemetery.



Clue #5: I was an avid reader and even donated many of my books to the public library.

Hold your copy of The Time Traveler up to a mirror and the answer will magically appear below!

Wendell L. Willkie

Wendell L. Willkie, presidential candidate who ran against Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1940 presidential election, was flying over Portsmouth en route to Tennessee on a blustery October night with a small crew and passengers. The trip seemed like a routine one until a dark thunderstorm surrounded Willkie's plane. The crew on board the vessel decided to follow the Ohio River in the hopes of running into a large city. That, however was easier said than done. The men followed the river for hours, losing hope as the minutes ticked by. They had nearly given up when the crew spotted a lighted athletic field on the ground below. Little did they know that the field they were seeing was the Portsmouth Spartan Stadium, a football game going on. The plane flew down over the field and blew its horn in an effort to attract attention.

In the midst of this, the radio in the plane had begun working again. A dispatch came in from Columbus to inform them they were lost. When told about the lighted athletic field, the dispatcher responded that it was the Portsmouth Stadium and that there should be an airport nearby. They promised to try to get the distress signal to stadium. The passengers and crew hoped they hurried: their plane was running out of fuel.

Seconds after the dispatch came on, the crew noticed flares lining ground just outside of the city. Apparently, the Portsmouth Police and Fire Department had already seen the lost plane and rushed to provide aid. Other vehicles followed them to light up the landing strip for the plane. They parked with their headlights directed across the open field.

After circling the field several more times, the plane came in and made a safe landing at Raven Rock Airport.

RIGHT: Wendell L. Willkie, presidential candidate who ran against Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1940. Source: The George Washington University website.

