



By any other name, it would still be Kokomo

Friday, July 22, 2005

My son Nathan had found an interesting piece of history last year in our front yard. That item was a .70 caliber lead musket ball. Now after some checking, this musket ball has to be at least 200 years old. Why was it here? Who would have been shooting a trade musket in my front yard 200 years ago when my front yard belonged to the Miami Indian Nation? This is when my research began.

Now I live between Burlington and Russiaville. Russiaville was once called Richardville, pronounced by the French as "REE-chard-vee." And as many Hoosiers can and still do, they slur the English language a bit saying, "Rishervill" using a part French and English version. Most local natives spoke, French, English and Shawnee at that time and there would have been a serious language barrier to overcome by pioneers moving in. I still recall a protestor a few years ago protesting that we had a town in Indiana by the name of Russiaville boycotting the Communist connection. I would have to say it is more of a French connection.

The name Richardville was our county's given name before it was re-named after a politician, Tillman Howard. Jean Baptist de Richardville was born in 1761 to a French trader and his Miami Indian mother Tuacumwah (sister to one of the most famous Miami chiefs, Little Turtle). Now another very known fact is that Richardville's Miami name is Pechewa. In the Miami tongue which means "Wildcat." Yes, our main river through our town is named after him too. Richardville became the civil, chief of the Miami in 1814 and has signed many treaties with the United States.

So what does this have to do with French traders and that musket ball?

Our beloved county 200 years ago was a bit of an Native American "no man's land." After 1700 when some of the other eastern Indian tribes were being pushed off their land settled in our area, tribes such as the Potawatomi, Delaware and Wea had moved into the territory. Early French surveyors had either been here or mapped information fur traders that had passed through Howard County.

One trail in particular winds to the south of the Wildcat River from Burlington and stretches all the way to Anderson. If you're familiar with the Wildcat, you will see several areas where there are flowing wells that traders and Indian alike looked for refreshment along their travels.

Another route from Thorntown through and near Russiaville extends almost all the way to Michigan. Although not thoroughly documented, this was also a Buffalo migration route that Native Americans also traveled for food. For those county residents that live in Green Acres, you also have a "French Connection." Not only was this area was a waypoint for the buffalo hundreds of years ago but this was part of the Miami Reserve given to another French trader, Pierre "Pete" Longlois. Pete emigrated to the U.S. from France and settled and was a trader with the Indians near Thorntown and married into a local tribe. He was awarded part of the "reserve" in 1834 which is today a subdivision.

Indian trading then began shortly before the last tracts of land were purchased by the U.S. which

led to our area being opened to pioneers.

Other traders began to move into the "reserve" -- referred to as the "Seven Mile Strip" -- to trade with the Indians as well as the first settlers moving in. Names like Jesse and Joshua Barnett, John Harrison (and I am sure you have heard of David Foster) were the first traders here. The Barnett and Harrison families were told of our area through family and their first visits here during the War of 1812 and their exploits during the Battle of Tippecanoe. Foster and the Barnetts traded with the Miamis at Indian Suck. This was a settlement of the last remaining clan, with a population of about 75 to 100.

Indian Suck had a small ferry service across the Pechewa River and a grist and saw mill were later built. The Richardville County white population at the beginning was approximately 30. Indian Suck was later called Cromwell's Mill, and was supposed to be our county seat until that Foster guy donated the land near another Indian settlement just east of Indian Suck, later called Kokomo. The Kokomo Wildkats sure sounds better than the Indian Suck Wildcats. Thank you, Mr. Foster.

So that musket ball in my front yard must have been fired either for someone's meal that day, or at a passing enemy tribal member. That particular trail later was known as the Burlington Pike and was for a short time a toll road between Kokomo and Burlington.

A final note: For those of you that live in Derbyshire subdivision, yes you live in that particular Indian village, Indian Suck.

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