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Indiana Ghost Trackers Indy Chapter

THE GUYER OPERA HOUSE

BY: ANGIE MILES

In 1893, a gas explosion caused a massive fire in the business district of Lewisville, Indiana. A block and a half of the north side of the National Road was reduced to rubble.

Local physician Oscar K. Guyer, also known as O.K. Guyer, was in Chicago at the time of the fire. Dr. Guyer returned along with eight other families to discover his home and office in smoldering ash.

Dr. Guyer had encouraged the town to build a public hall for entertaining. By the fall of 1900, O.K. Guyer had persuaded a large group of local citizens to build the opera house on lot 7. On October 19, 1900, Dr. Guyer purchased 2/3 of lot 7, while the First National Bank of Lewisville purchased 1/3 of the lot.

O.K. Guyer died in March of 1901 at the age of 49. They honored Dr. Guyer with a funeral in the opera house and the Lewisville Band preformed the "O.K. Guyer March".

Later there was a tragic accident at the opera house during a Wild West Show. During the show, a bullet ricocheted into the audience, killing a little boy. It is said

that the little boy and Mr. Guyer still haunt the opera house today.

The Indy Chapter of The Indiana Ghost Trackers visited the Guyer after the June meeting. We were guided through the opera house with a tour by Lee Satcey. The tour was through the whole opera house and basement and a building attached to the Guyer that is used as storage.

Once we had finished the tour we split up into two groups, one in the opera house and the other in the connecting building. We switched places through out the night and compared stories before going back in.

While investigating the Guyer we did hear voices and footsteps, but most of the evidence was debunked. However, one of the teams had taken a glass from the stage props and put it into a certain spot, they then asked for it to be moved and walked away. Once they had returned they noticed that the glass had been moved.

As we began to wrap everything up, we talked about our happenings with Mr. Stacey and his wife then thanked them for their time. Although, we did not have much happen that night, I still believe that there is something there and would love to go back again someday.

Paul Ruster Park

As many of you know, our August Indy Chapter meeting will take place at Paul Ruster Park. Here is a little history of that location. We hope to see you all there for an evening of socializing, fun, food and games.

Location: 11300 E. Prospect Street
 Paul Ruster Park, acquired by the city in 1970, is 102 acres

of land sloping eastward along Buck Creek, wooded along its east and north edges. Just beyond the west tree line lies a developed soccer field for Warren Township. The park was designed as a rural natural setting, with both passive and active areas for recreation. park is comprised of trails, a playground, two shelters, a small fishing pond and a sledding hill. (Cont. page 4)

Inside this issue:

Goodbye Sylvia Likens	2
Likens, Cont . . .	3
Waverly Photo	3
Paul Ruster Park, Cont . . .	4

GOODBYE, SYLVIA LIKENS

BY: RICK HINTON

A house does not necessarily define a person's life, but can it define their death? A sense of closure comes with the recent demolition of the large double that sat at 3850 East New York Street - for a neighborhood and a city. It shuts the door on a city's painful reminder of the abuse and destruction of 16 year old Sylvia Likens. The small church located just across the street will use the vacated lot for parking, and time will march on as the neighborhood slowly forgets its former infamous resident.

Little has physically changed on this stretch of New York Street since that time in the summer and fall of 1965 when the lyrics of the Supremes, "Stop (In the Name of Love)" filtered out of the open windows of passing cars and the Mr. Softee melody echoed across the narrow confines of Denny Street as the lumbering blue and white ice cream truck made it's rounds. The neighborhood is still a compact assortment of older homes and businesses with a community of people who come and go. There are many who have never heard of Sylvia Likens or Gertrude Baniszewski. There are those who have chosen to forget. After all, it's been decades since Baniszewski and neighborhood kids laid siege to a young girl unprepared to deal with the depths of human indecency.

Was the house at 3850 East New York Street haunted? Over the years it certainly became the neighborhood "spook house" with talk of figures in the windows, the sounds of crying and screaming, and strange lights emitting from inside when the house was empty. Through the years

the house had a consistent history of vacancy; it seemed nobody stayed for long. Was that just the transitory nature of the neighborhood or something more? I felt if any house **should** have been haunted, it would have been this one. All that tragedy embedded into the very core of that house! As far as I am aware there were no serious or documented paranormal investigations of the property – at least none reported.

My friend Jim, who claims to be "sensitive", always felt suffocated when he approached the back section of the house and the basement windows. (Strangely enough, Jim's wife attended School 78 with Sylvia's sister Jenny. "She was nice enough," she said. "She was very quiet and seemed withdrawn.")

One of my work vendor's employees, a Hispanic worker and his family, had just recently rented the house. I suspect they very well may have been the last renters before the demolition. I pumped the vendor for an introduction. I wanted in this house! He sadly informed me a week later that the family had moved. They kept seeing "this girl" wandering about the house.

On the occasion that I would be passing I frequently stopped and found myself on the sidewalk leading to the back of the house and those basement windows. I don't claim to be sensitive, but I always felt a sense of heaviness and sadness.

I found the house listed for sale in March. 3 beds, 1 bath, 1072 sq ft - \$9990, with a soothing monthly payment of \$107. I told a friend who invests in cheap

GOODBYE, SYLVIA LIKENS, CONT...

properties. I had it all planned out – I will go in with him posing as his contractor and snap pictures like crazy. He calls to make arrangements to view the house. They tell him they are in the process of making some repairs and will put him on a list to see the property in roughly 2 weeks. One stipulation – **no pictures!** They never called. Within 3 weeks after the initial conversation the house was bulldozed to the ground.

Three weeks before the demolition I paid what was to be my last visit to the house. I again walked to the back. Plywood that had covered the basement window was lying loose on the sidewalk. I bit my lower lip and contemplated this for several seconds. I then found myself on my knees with my upper body hovering in the basement as I fired off a few pictures when my camera wasn't mysteriously jamming. It would have taken nothing for me to silently drop down into the basement, but this trespassing thing kept getting my attention. Besides, I wasn't sure what I might find (of a human nature) in the upper sections of the house. I was surprised, the

basement was a lot smaller than I had imagined. There is a You-tube video of a couple touring the inside of the house. Sadly, the house had been vandalized, and at least one of the vandals was familiar with Sylvia as there is a disturbing tribute to her in an upstairs bedroom.

With the house gone does the memory of Sylvia fade like so much campfire smoke? I believe, to a degree, that it will. That tiny jolt in our soul ... the recollection of a senseless event from so many years ago that we pull up every time we pass that house just east of Sherman Drive will be no more. The house is gone and a large part of Sylvia went with it. Like it or not, the presence of that large white double on New York Street kept the memory of Sylvia alive. Hopefully, Sylvia will turn out to be larger than any structure built of wood and block; larger than a cold dingy basement; larger than a claw foot bathtub in a narrow bathroom; larger than a soiled mattress in an upstairs bedroom. The memory of 3850 East New York will fade in time, Sylvia, may you not.

Members of the IGT Indy Chapter had the opportunity to go to Waverly Hills for an overnight hunt on July 2. Join us in our next issue when we share our experiences at Waverly Hills.



Paul Ruster Park, Cont...

In August of 2007 a fenced Bark Park was added to the grounds. On its southern edge, facing Prospect Street and a relatively new housing addition, sits the Kitley-King Cemetery just a few feet into the tree line.

Activity:

The story is told that many years ago a 12 year old boy, John W. King, met his demise on nearby train tracks. He was buried in the foundation of his home and consequently never left the area. There have been instances of hearing young John playing his harmonica as he travels the paths through the woods immediately behind the graveyard. There have also been reported sightings of a ghostly boy walking along the roads around the park and occasionally strolling about the pond.

Indy Ghost Hunters conducted an investigation in November of 2005 in which you can read about on their website. Along with some mysterious noise in the woods approaching their investigators, they captured an EVP that made the hair stand up on my neck the first time I heard it. This EVP has currently (July, 2009) been removed from their report of this investigation. Hopefully it will be returning.

History:

The Kitley farm appears to have been located in this area through the 1800's, owned originally by John and Anna Kitley. A map of 1889 shows the Francis Kitley farm on the current site of Paul Ruster Park. Francis was the son of John and Anna Kitley. Francis's homestead used to sit on what is now the soccer field. Across the street was a farm owned by Andrew King. Since the population was, at best, scarce in those days and the farms adjoined each other, there were several intermarriages among the two families.

The woods that border the Kitley-King cemetery are thick with a series of trails, some little more than animal paths. There is a sense of uneasiness in these woods, not so much from creepiness as much as suffocation from the overgrowth. Since the Kitleys and Kings were farmers it was natural to bury their loved ones in the land on their property. It is reported

that the graveyard is in the foundation of a former home. The front façade of the old porch and steps leading to the foundation is visible from Prospect Street, just short of the entrance to the park. I'm not convinced that this was ever a home, but rather has always been a cemetery. The older block that has the appearance of foundation stones still encircles the border of the cemetery, entangled with the woods. I believe this was once a small wall-not the foundation of a house. There are presently only five visible grave markers, but from the rolling contour of the ground it is apparent that others are buried there. Most likely Francis's parents, John and Anna, are residents-their headstones long since deteriorated. Francis and his wife Mary had 6 children (4 daughters, 2 sons) and it is possible that some of them lie in rest here. The tallest monument in the cemetery belongs to Francis and Mary; Francis buried to the south and Mary to the north. The monument appears to have been restored in recent years. There is one marker with no name, just

the inscription - 71 years, 9 months, 1 day: a Kitley or a King? One ground marker is completely unreadable. And then, there lies our mystery-a newer modern style granite marker listing 12 year old John W. King, 1881 – 1893.

Just who was John W. King? Was this 12 year old boy a King child from the adjoining farm or could we speculate that one of Francis's daughters married a King and produced this child? And there is the manner of his death. Two railroad tracks lie in fairly close proximity to the former Kitley farm; one near German Church Road and Washington Street (now non-operational); the other south on German Church and Brookville Road. A boy with strong legs and a sense of adventure could have easily made it to either set of tracks. Yet, I could find no record of John's cause of death. Is this an example of John W. King's death slowly transforming into the realm of lore? And lastly, there is the matter of his gravestone. The Genealogical Society of Marion County's burial list for the Kitley-King Cemetery lists a John King, 1806 – 1893. The present cemetery marker clearly says 1881 – 1893, making John 12 years old at the time of death. Is this just a typo on Marion County's part? His stone has been replaced in the last few years. Someone out there knows the story.

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