

(Johnnie Weaver continued)

Johnnie’s poem speaks of “Indian Gasoline”, but in a photo taken around 1932 in front of his store , and published in the Topeka Area Historical Society’s book “Celebrating a Century 1893-1993” (page 57) there are 30 or 40 children all wearing Texaco Fire Chief hats. Jim Hinds’ history of The Texas Company (Texaco) sheds some light on the apparent contradiction (www.texacocollector.com).

Indian Gasoline actually began in 1904, as the Indiana Asphalt Company. It was started by a 23 year old Lafayette, Indiana native by the name of Richmond M. Levering who was living in Chicago at the time. Hinds speculates that, “the name “INDIAN” is an allusion to Indiana—meaning land or place of Indians. For some reason the company was incorporated in the State of Maine in spite of the fact that major operations were in northwest Indiana. In 1906, the name was changed to Indian Refining Company. By the late 1920’s, 20% of the gasoline sold in Indiana was Indian. In January of 1931, The Texas Company gained controlling interest in Indian Refining. From 1931-1943, Indian operated offices out of Indianapolis as an affiliate of Texaco selling “sub-regular” (cheaper than Texaco) gasoline. Obviously, cut rate gas and cut rate prices are nothing new.



On April 15th, 1932, Texaco introduced “Fire-Chief” gasoline. Johnnie apparently made the switch from Indian to Texaco at that time which would explain why the 1932 photo shows all the kids wearing “Fire-Chief” hats.

Galen Yoder says that Johnnie’s store was a part of what is now Yoder Oil Company. When Erman Yoder bought the business he added on and renovated the building in such a way that that Yoder could put in the Hawpatch Dairy Bar. Later it became a restaurant operated by a succession of owners such as Ed & Beulah Shelly, Al Gingerich, and Jonas & Pat Bontrager. Today that section of the building is a laundromat. Yoder Oil Company continues to serve the community and is owned by Erman’s grandson, Dennis Yoder and his wife Becky.

Exactly when Johnnie Weaver died (1960’s) and where he’s buried are not clear. But everyone who remembers him has a story and seems to have liked him.

HC

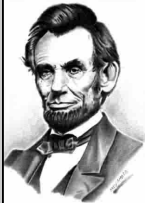
**On The Lord’s Side**

During the heart rending Civil War Abraham Lincoln, it is said, was found reading his Bible and praying more than once. What a terrible thing it is to see men die on both sides for that which they both think is right.

To a church pastor’s attempt to reassure President Lincoln that “the Lord is on our side”, Lincoln replied: “I am not at all concerned about that, for I know that the Lord is always on the side of right. But it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and this nation should be on the Lord’s side.”



*Are We On the Lord’s Side?*  
Selected by Dan A. Hochstetler

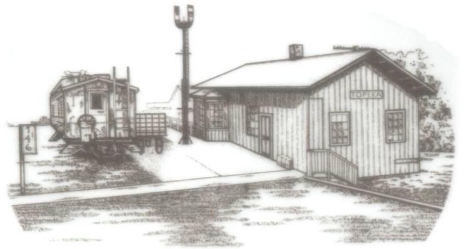


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P.O. Box 33  
Topeka, Indiana 46571



**Mile 146**

July-September 2009



Volume 2 Topeka Area Historical Society Number 3

**Johnnie “The Fiddler” Weaver and Indian Gasoline**

One of the lesser known, and somewhat colorful, figures in early Topeka history was Johnnie Weaver. Among other things he operated a Texaco Fire Chief gas station on Main Street. According to Galen Yoder, former historical society president, Johnnie really didn’t play the fiddle. Just how and why he got the name “The fiddler” remains a mystery. Several explanations have been offered; some of which are not appropriate for print.



Johnnie “The Fiddler” Weaver

Galen does recall that some of the young Topeka boys took great delight in teasing him, knowing that Johnnie did not like being called “fiddler”. It was cheap entertainment and a momentary diversion for the boys. Apparently one day they got the better of him and Johnnie chased them down the street with a butcher knife. As far as we know all escaped unharmed and lived to tease another day.

Evidently ole Johnnie didn’t always get along with his neighbor Jephtha (Jeff) Troyer who at one time had been an Amish/Mennonite preacher. The story is told that Troyer’s chickens had a way of getting in Johnnie’s yard. Johnnie’s solution was to send them back home by ringing their necks and throwing the dead birds back over the fence. Needless to say Jeff Troyer didn’t take kindly to that. Things escalated to the point that on at least one occasion the sheriff had to be called to restore peace to the neighborhood.

Harley Fry remembers the time when Jeff was burning leaves and the smoke all went to Johnnie’s house. Johnnie took his garden hose and started putting out the fire. What happened next must have been quite a sight. The two old men wrestling on the ground with Jeff on top of the much smaller Johnnie hosing down his face. Harley and Cal Hochstetler watched it all from Omar Hochstetler & Sons next door. Harley thought maybe they should stop the fight fearing that Johnnie would get hurt. But Cal said, “Not yet; it’s too much fun to watch!” Fortunately Johnnie escaped unharmed.

Dan A Hochstetler found some interesting rhymes on the cover of Johnnie’s 1927 calendar. While some of the lines are missing; one can capture a feel for his wit and wisdom.

*John’s got the nicest store  
Right on the street of Main  
With a welcome on his door  
I thank you, come again.  
Each year he has a bigger trade  
Because He’s up to date.  
Everything the best that’s made  
With nothing desolate.  
Each year you see some tourist stop  
For candy and ice cream;  
Then they try a case of pop,  
To put in their machine  
..... (Missing lines)*

*The school kids and the teachers  
They buy from him each day,  
The layman and the preacher  
Get in the game and stay.  
..... (Missing lines)*  
  
*John’s got the Indian Gasoline,  
Puts pep in any machine.  
In front of his shop, where all the cars stop,  
Stands the Indian pump, nice and clean.*

(Continued on page 4)

*Yes Johnnie Weaver,  
Was no deceiver  
He does business on the square,  
It is his delight,  
To treat you right,  
Because Johnnie’s always there.  
J.W.*

**In This Issue**

- Johnnie “the Fiddler” Weaver and Indian Gas
- The Pink Elephant and Buggy Caper
- Track Notes
- Quiz



Topeka PD - Cold Case Files:  
“The Pink Elephant and Buggy Caper”

Call it vandalism, call it innocent prank or just a bunch of boys with too much time on their hands. Whatever you call it, the mystery goes unsolved. Whose idea was it to put “Newt Katie’s”(Miller) buggy hitched to a pink elephant on top of the Topeka Town Hall?

Topeka Town Marshal Carl Stoltz found the pictorial evidence in the police files when he was preparing a presentation for the historical society on the history of law enforcement in Topeka. No one admits to knowing when it was done or who was responsible for the engineering feat.

There is one clue in the photograph. Clearly it was done before the current fire station was built in 1990 because several of the original buildings on the west side of Main Street are still present.

Carl says that he was a boy when this happened, but he assured this writer that he was much too young to have participated in the fun.

Once the photo surfaced a number of suspects did come to mind, but at this time no one has taken responsibility for the daring caper.

Apparently “Newt Katie” thought it was pretty funny too until she learned that it was her buggy on top of the Town Hall. Where the pink elephant came from or where it ended up is still a mystery. Marshal Stoltz has assured this writer that the statute of limitations has long since expired on the “Pink Elephant and Buggy Caper”, but the Topeka PD

would like to be able to close the case by properly recognizing those responsible for the effort.

Halloween pranks are nothing new for Topeka. For many years people woke up to a buggy or two perched on the roof of the Sale Barn. Some might say that it was a relatively harmless right of passage for young Topeka lads. The year that a buggy came crashing to the ground as it was being hoisted onto the Sale Barn roof seems to have marked the end of annual event. Needless to say, if there are any surviving photos of buggies on the Sale Barn the historical society would be delighted to make copies.

There were other annual Fall activities like “corn shock football” and late night visitation to watermelon patches.

The story is told of when Andy Gingerich talked Slim Miller into raiding a Honeyville melon patch. What Slim didn’t know is that Andy had arranged things with Carl Christner to provide a little welcome for the would be thieves. At the appropriate time Carl started firing his shotgun into the air. Andy dropped to the ground pretending to be shot. Poor Slim was so scared that he took off across the field for town leaving Andy to fend for himself. One version of the story says that when Slim came to the fence there was no need to climb over, he was so scared that he cleared it in full stride. We will never know if that part of the story is true or not because all the participants are now gone. But it certainly makes for a great story. What we do know is that the whole thing was a joke and there never was a watermelon patch.

Merv Miller, Andy Gingerich’s nephew, says that for the next month or two every time Andy came to town he would pretend to have a limp just to add insult to Slim’s misery.

Another more recent prank was when Harley Fry, who lives just east of town) returned home to find Bambi (field dressed of course) hitched to one of his buggies. Photos do exist to verify the story. Rumor has it that a local physician along with a certain pharmacist may have vital information on just how it was accomplished.

One thing is evident, there was never any intent for malicious mischief. It was all done in good fun. And as best we can tell, all the “borrowed” items were returned to their rightful owners in tact. The one notable exception being the smashed buggy.

All this adds up to just one more good reason why Topeka is a great place to live and raise a family.

HG



Track Notes:

Schedule of Events:

- October 20th: TAHS Board Meeting
- November 17th: Annual Dinner Meeting Election of Officers



Coming Soon:

Topeka Area Historical Society “Online”



- Be looking online for our new website.
- Plans are to have it up and running in the next few weeks with links to the Town of Topeka website.

TAHS Quiz

1. What was the original name of the company that sold Indian gasoline?
2. When did Texaco introduce “Sky-Chief”?
3. Whose buggy ended up on top of the Topeka Town Hall?
4. What was the name of Topeka’s newspaper?
5. What did the woman in the 1914 Seagly Bros advertisement want her husband to buy?



“Topeka” Indian Word for Spot to Plant Potatoes

Topeka must have *anciently* been a good place to plant potatoes, or at least, when the Indians had the area.

“Topeka” is the Indian word for a good place to plant potatoes.

Now corn, soybeans, and tomatoes seem to be the ranking crops. So says the Chicago American newspaper.

Topeka Journal  
September 25, 1957

(Note the wording in line one of the copy.)

1950s Topeka Postcard



Teddy says,  
“We Need You to Join—so Sign Up!”

2010

T.A.H.S. membership  
only  
\$10.00 a year



YOUR MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

A Woman Hung in Topeka

around her husband's neck begging him to buy some of Seagly's Coal. Her neighbors had used it and told her about it. Don't be the cause of your wife being hung, but get some at once.

Seagly Bros

Scales, Office and Shed west of depot north side of tracks

Topeka Journal - December 31, 1914

The original ad is on microfilm at the Topeka Depot museum. We have tried to duplicate the original font as closely as possible.

Topeka Area Historical Society  
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Answers: 1) Indian Asphalt Company; 2) April 15, 1932; 3) Katie Miller; 4) Topeka Journal; 5) Seagly's Coal;