



Mile 146

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Topeka Area Historical Society

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County Music Jamborees

Topeka's Nashville Connection

For many years Topeka enjoyed an amazing Nashville connection with country music legends such as Red Foley, Loretta Lynn, Tex Ritter, Little Jimmy Dickens and a host of others. During the late 1950s and 1960s it seems that many Nashville stars performed at Topeka's historic Sycamore Hall along with a number of local groups. Buck Lake Ranch in Angola was already a regular stop for established Nashville stars, so Topeka's close proximity made it a great addition to their tour. It was also easier for the new rising stars to get booked in Topeka.

It all started about 1956 with the Shrock brothers, Mose and Lester, a couple of Amish boys with vision and a musical talent. They called themselves "*Mose Shrock and the Blue Valley Boys*". Featured was Mose singing lead and playing his vintage 1795 fiddle, Lester on dobro (a resonator guitar), Elmer Schrock on base fiddle, and Emmanuel (Yum Yum) Miller on rhythm guitar. Three or four times a year they rented Sycamore Hall to put on a two hour country music show that included a Gospel music segment with local groups such as the Crusaders Quartet. Every performance was sold out. Lester loves to tell about the time when John Frey sold 520 tickets for one of the shows.



**Mose & Lester
at Buck Lake Ranch**

"People kept coming and wanting tickets, and ole Johnny kept saying 'Come on in there is plenty of room!'" Well, it turned out to be standing room only because Sycamore Hall only seated 410 people. With a chuckle and a grin Lester says "We didn't know what he had done until later but nobody complained." They obviously got their money's worth and enjoyed the show.



Red Foley

The Nashville connection got started when Mose and Lester wrote to Red Foley at Jubilee, USA and invited him to Topeka. To their surprise Foley accepted the invitation and agreed to come for \$350.00, which would have been a sizable amount for the late 1950s. According to Lester, as the performance was about to begin Foley quipped, "What have I gotten myself into?" Clearly, the future County Music Hall of Fame legend felt right at home on Topeka's grand old stage because he came back to Topeka four or five more times. It was the beginning of a friendship that would

last for the rest of Foley's life. One day Foley showed up unannounced at Mose's home in Morley, Michigan. When Mose asked Red how he had found him, all Foley would say was, "I have my ways". It was a visit that Shrock and his family would treasure for a lifetime.

Pete Stauffer's three girls, "*The Hoosierettes*" were among the wealth of local talent. Harry Smyth from Buck Lake Ranch was so impressed with the trio that he offered to put them on the road. Because of family and religious reasons the girls passed on the offer.

The Country Cut-ups from across the line in Michigan were a local favorite. Their brand of Blue Grass was just what the Amish young folks in the Topeka area lined up to hear.

Loretta Eicher of Sturgis appeared in Topeka numerous times beginning at age 11. In her late teens stage fright began bothering her so much that she resorted to a shot or two of whiskey to go on stage. In her final performance in Topeka she and a friend turned to prayer instead a shot. As she sang "Moody River" Loretta says, "The Holy Spirit came over me and the audience just went wild. Afterwards people came backstage for autographs and everything....I just laughed. And, I told the Lord that if He can do this for me with a country song like that, I'll only sing Gospel music from now on."

Continued on page 2

In This Issue

- **Topeka's Nashville Connection**
- **1910 THS Football**
- **Grant Update**
- **Track Notes**
- **Quiz**



***Mose Shrock and the Blue Valley Boys with
The Hoosierettes at Sycamore Hall in 1958***

There seems to be no end to the stories about Topeka's Country Music Jamborees. George Philley tells about the evening when he and his wife Phyllis walked downtown to hear the music. It may have been the night Crystal Gayle and her sister Loretta Lynn came to town. As he leaned back against the door of Farmers State Bank to enjoy the music, George fell in! Obviously someone had forgotten to lock the bank. After a phone call or two, someone came down to lock the doors, nothing was missing and the oversight remained a secret for many years.

Ann Stoltz tells of when Little Jimmy Dickens came to town. Ernie Miller, an Amish boy from Shipshewana, was his bass player. Ann worked for M & W Music at the time and they handled ticket sales. Smoking wasn't allowed backstage, but that didn't stop Little Jimmy. After the show Dickens decided to head for the bar down the street. They refused to serve him because he looked like a kid in a cowboy hat. It didn't take long to straighten things out



and, according to all accounts, it didn't take long for Dickens to get good and drunk. That may have been his only trip to Topeka, but it was memorable.

Shirley Gingerich, my mother, often worked the ticket window because Dad (Joe Gingerich, who worked for the town) had to unlock and lock up. That generally translated into free admission for yours truly. Mom said that the night Tex Ritter preformed

the Amish young people were more excited about the local talent than the country music icon. They didn't know who Tex Ritter was. ***The old ticket window is on permanent display at Topeka's Depot Museum .***

Mose, Lester and the Boys often stole the show with their wild costumes and slap-stick humor. They were having fun and so was the audience. It went without saying that musically they could perform with the best of them.

In 1959, Mose joined the US Army serving as a medic and ambulance driver in Germany. The Chamber of Commerce began sponsoring the shows bringing in acts like Nancy Lee and the Hilltoppers who were main stays on WOWO radio's Hoosier Hop and The Little Red Barn. July 4th entertainment was normally held at Sycamore Hall as well. Topeka native Fred Miller & the Ramblers from Grabill, IN, highlighted the bill for several years.

Country music shows continued until the late 1960s. After the last class graduated from Topeka High School in 1967, ownership of Sycamore Hall reverted to the Town. It was later sold to a private individual who lived next door. In April of 1980 the grand old hall fell victim to a wrecking ball to make room for the family swimming pool. Today the pool and the house are also gone and in their place stands a Forks County Line Store.

For the hundreds of people who came and loved the shows, the music still lingers in their hearts as does the memory of a host of Nashville stars, *Mose Shrock and the Blue Valley Boys, The Country Cut-ups, The Hoosierettes* and countless others playing to a packed house. **HG**



Mose E. Shrock

July 19, 1936 - November 27, 2008

An accomplished musician and songwriter, Mose was a member of the Original Michigan Fiddlers Association. He wrote over 100 songs, handcrafted fiddle bows and also loved piecing and sewing quilt tops.

DON'T MISS THE COUNTRY MUSIC JAMBOREE Saturday, Jan. 4, 1958

8:00 TO 10:00 P.M. ADMISSION 75c

At SYCAMORE HALL, TOPEKA, IND.

TWO HOURS OF FINE ENTERTAINMENT, FEATURING

MOSE SCHROCK AND The Blue Valley Boys

The Lambright Brothers

AND DIRECT FROM WGL AND THE HOOSIER HAYRIDE

MISS CAROL MILLS

STARRING OUR SPECIAL GUESTS FROM KALAMAZOO, MICH.,

THE COUNTRY CUT-UPS

AND THEIR FINE STYLE OF BLUE GRASS MUSIC

Eddy Sechrist and His Western Starlighters

WITH THE CRUSADERS QUARTET - THE CHUPP SISTERS TRIO - FREEMAN & JOE -

BEN BARNES, AND AS AN ADDED ATTRACTION

MISS LINDA SHAW

A LITTLE GIRL WITH A BIG, BIG VOICE

Track Notes:



Schedule of Events:

- March 16, 2010
Country Music Jamborees at Sycamore Hall
Special Guest: Lester Shrock of "Mose Shrock and the Blue Valley Boys"
6:30 PM Topeka Library
- April, 2010: *TAHS Board Meeting*
- May 18, 2010
Horse Progress Show
To be held in Topeka in July 2010

TAHS Quiz

1. How much was Red Foley paid to perform in Topeka?
2. What was the Stauffer girls' stage name?
3. In what year was Mose Shrock's fiddle made?
4. How many points did LeRoy Lambright score in one game?
5. In what year did T.H.S. go undefeated and claim the state championship in football?



Standing (L-R) Principal Ray Lantz, Albert Stroman, Paul Stutzman, Melvin Mullett, Woodrow Risser, Earl Stout, and Coach Ananias Robbins; Seated: Kenneth Yoder, Francis DeWitt, Arnold Ecker, Carlyle Meroney, and Burdette "Cap" Roy

The Path to Glory

Topeka 22	Lima 18
Topeka 19	Brighton 15
Topeka 41	Shipshewana 27

* In 1930 there was a center jump after every score.

1929-30 Topeka Bears LaGrange County Champions



If anyone knows the names of these girls, please share them with us.

Cruising to the Championship

Topeka 66	Mongo 8
Topeka 83	Brighton 17

\$25,000 Matching Grant

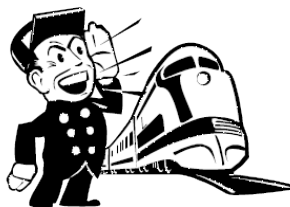
There is still time to help us meet the full amount of our matching grant.

An anonymous benefactor has pledged to match dollar for dollar every dollar we can raise up to \$25,000. The purpose is to establish a sustainability endowment fund. To date we have only raised **\$1,845.00**.



We do receive an annual donation from the Town of Topeka. And, our income from membership dues is growing. That income is barely enough to maintain the Depot Museum and cover our annual operating expenses.

The Topeka Area Historical Society is a not-for-profit corporation with 501-c-3 status. Your donations are tax deductible. Please consider sending a generous gift to help reach our goal. We really do need your help!



"Get on Board"

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

Answers: 1) \$350.00;
2) The Hoosierettes; 3) 1795;
4) 44; 5) 1910

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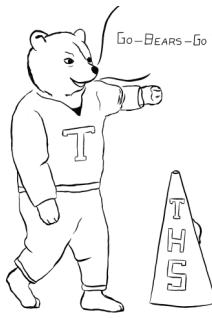
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Hoosier Hysteria Wasn't Always King

This is Indiana and "Basketball is King". Aside from the fact that our beloved Topeka Bears struggled on the hardwoods and seldom won a championship, the movie "Hoosiers" could have been filmed in the old Honeyville gym. Friday nights the place was packed out to see career scoring leader (1,289) LeRoy Lambright ('58) set the single game high of 44 points. But, in the early 1900s, THS dominated on the gridiron. That's right! Topeka was a football powerhouse.

In the early days football players didn't use helmets and wore very little padding. The ball was an odd pumpkin-shape that made the "drop kick" a powerful weapon. It was a real man's game and hard working farm boys had what it took to win. According to Maggie Glick's research, during one stretch the Topeka boys dispatched 13 opponents by a combined score of 260 to 0. Their most lopsided victory came against Kendallville who found themselves mauled by the Bears 101 to 0.

Topeka's claim to a state title in 1910 came as a result of their scoreless game against South Bend. The Bears crossed the South Bend goal line on several occasions only to have the plays called back because of penalties. South Bend, however, never did cross the Bears' goal line. Topeka's line of Leming, Leming and Leming was like a stone wall. Topeka finished the year undefeated and claimed the state title because they had done things that South Bend couldn't match. While the Topeka boys offered to play a rematch, the young men from South Bend refused. Apparently they wanted nothing more to do with our farm boys, and were content to go home with a tie.

Ben Leming and Russell Holden, members of the 1910 team, remembered how the town "closed up" on Saturday afternoons so people could watch their hometown heroes.

Holden is quoted in "*Celebrating a Century 1893-1993*" edited by Maggie Glick, as saying that "our players came from farm families and were tough". He went on to say that, "In those days we did a lot of walking following horses in the fields which helped prepare us to play football".

When Topeka High School dropped football is not clear. In



1910 State Champs

recent years, there have been concerted efforts by parents and fans to persuade the Westview School Board (Shipshewana-Topeka consolidation) to field a team. However the Board has denied those requests. Junior High and Middle School boys have been able to enjoy the sport in the West Side Football Club.

Hoop Dreams & Glory

While the Purple & Gold never claimed a state crown in basketball, our Bears did win several championships. The 1929-30 boys were the only boys team to win the County Tourney. In the finals they defeated Shipshewana 41-27 to bring home "The Horse Shoe". But, many don't realize is that the girls also took the county crown that year, defeating Brighton by the impressive score of 83-17. The boys and girls tourneys were played concurrently.

The 1948-49 Bears had the best season record at 15 and 7, but lost in the county tourney. The only other title belongs to the 1964-65 squad led by Keith Bobeck, Richard Lambright, Daryl Yoder and Larry Schlabach. They held off Millersburg 63-59 to cut down the nets in a four-way Holiday Tourney held at Concord Jr. High in Dunlap. HG

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