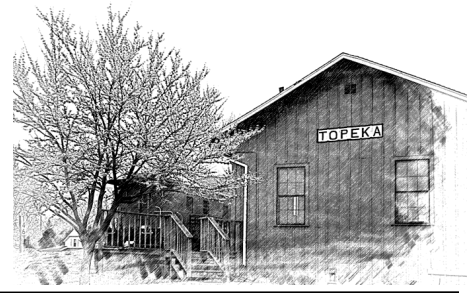




Mile 146

Summer - 2018



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Topeka Area Historical Society

Number 3

“William Spackeen’s Odyssey” *The man who came to life after 18 years*

For people living in Topeka, that Wednesday in October of 1923 when William Albert Spackeen reappeared in Topeka after 18 years, it must have seemed as if they were looking at someone who had come back from the grave. In fact, the courts were within weeks of declaring him legally dead. The mystery that still surrounds Spackeen’s whereabouts, and the fact that he knew nothing about the death of his parents, is just another illustration that sometimes truth really is stranger than fiction.

William Albert Spackeen was born on March 29, 1880, in the Hawpatch area to Henry and Theodocia (Dora) Spackeen. The 1880 Census lists him as an infant of two months named Willie. There are no records to indicate that he ever attended school in Topeka.

Henry E. Spackeen (1842-1922) and Theodocia (Dora) A. Bodien (1850-1916) were both born in Mecklenberg, a historic region in northern Germany. Why Henry chose to settle in Indiana is not known, other than he was a farmer and land was cheap. Census records indicate that Henry immigrated to America in 1864. Henry and Dora are listed in the 1880 Census as living in Perry Township of Noble County. Their marriage license dated November 5, 1868, was from Noble County. To their union were born 10 children. By the 1910 Census they were living in Clearspring Township northeast of Topeka. Both are buried in the Beulah Cemetery, northeast of Topeka, next to their daughter Louise who died in 1886 at age of 14. We can only presume that they moved to LaGrange County prior to Louise’s death.

Sometime around 1905 William left the family for Canada. The Topeka Journal’s front-page article heralding his return says that William went to “work a claim”. We presume it was a mining claim, but the article does not say where he went in Canada. It does say that after four years he became discouraged, abandoned the claim and headed for the west coast of the United States. In all those 18 years no one heard a word from him or knew where he was or if he was alive or dead.



1893 Clearspring Township map

DECLARED LEGALLY DEAD - RETURNS HOME

William Spackeen Comes to Life
at Topeka After 18 Years’
Absence—Claims Property

A story that could be woven into a movie has been enacted by William Spackeen, who left Topeka eighteen years ago for Canada and from there went to the Western coast of the U. S. In the meantime his father and mother died. In the settlement of the estate, after the usual publication of legal notice, William was declared legally dead and an administrator was appointed.

Last week William returned home. He told of taking a claim in Canada and then becoming discouraged at his prospects went further west. He had heard nothing from home during the eighteen years and had not learned of his parents’ death or the death of a brother, who it will be remembered died heroically a few months ago while attempting to save the lives of others at a railroad crossing.

County Clerk Robinson appointed A. J. Ritter administrator for the estate. Now that Spackeen has returned the administrator will turn the property over to him after the law has taken its course and a final settlement is made at the regular November term of the LaGrange Circuit Court.

The case is such as one frequently reads about in stories and in faraway places but seldom comes to light in one’s own community.

In this Issue

- William Spackeen
- Track Notes
- The Mile 146 Quiz
- The Hawpatch History Detective

William was in “parts unknown” when his mother Dora died on May 29, 1916. Her death certificate, which was signed by Dr. W.O. Hildebrand, provides a wealth of interesting information. The cause of death was

Continued on page 2

"Dilation of heart" (heart failure) with contributory factors being "Measles - La Grippe" (Influenza). The undertaker, including his embalmer's license number (1006) was A.W. Ritter, but it does not show that he embalmed the body.

A 1923 Topeka Journal article says that William's father Henry died in March of 1922. However, the April 13, 1922, Journal reported his date of death as being (Sunday) April 9th at the age of 79 years, 10 months, and 22 days. The death certificate, which does show that his body was embalmed, lists the place of death as being in Eden Township and was signed by his son Paul. Funeral services were held the following Tuesday at the Beulah Church and were conducted by Rev. A.L. Lamport. Following the death of their father, the Spackeen children published a "Card of Thanks" to the many "neighbors and friends for their kind sympathy and aid" which appeared immediately following his obituary in the Topeka Journal.

The LaGrange County Clerk, Clarence L.

Robinson, appointed A.W. Ritter as the administrator of the estate. It is interesting that Ritter's name appears on both Dora's and Henry's death certificates as the undertaker. Following a diligent search by Ritter to find Wil-

liam, it was decided that he was most likely dead. Had he not returned when he did, the LaGrange Circuit Court would have legally declared him dead and gone

Death Of Henry E. Spackeen

Henry E. Spackeen was born May 18, 1842, departed this life April 9, 1922, aged 79 years, 10 months and 22 days. The end came peacefully after several years of declining health.

November 5, 1868, he was married to Dora Bodien and to this union was born 10 children. He was preceded in death by his wife, three daughters and one son.

He leaves to mourn his death 2 daughters, 4 sons, and 1 sister, besides numerous relatives and friends.

Funeral services were conducted at 2 o'clock on Tuesday afternoon by Rev. A. L. Lamport, at Beulah church. Interment in Beulah cemetery.

One more tie in Heaven.

'Our father has gone home

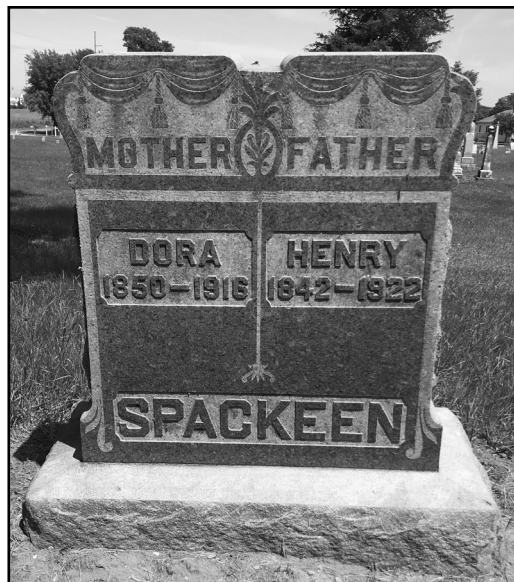
One less our number here below,

Will add to our Heavenly throne.

CARD OF THANKS

We wish to thank the many neighbors and friends for their kind sympathy and aid shown us in this hour of our bereavement.

THE CHILDREN.



Answers:
(1) Henry Spackeen
(2) October 24, 1923
(3) A.W. Ritter
(4) January 13, 1916
(5) M.E. Wisman

JOURNAL.

AY, OCT 25, 1923

\$1.50 PER ANNUM.

School Notes

riters have been rent-ass in typography ig. Most typewriters each pupil in the ave one to use.

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hool teams have very the beginning of the next three games will ion and LaGrange. pounta have strong s' teams.

'oder '27 and Doro- are out of school this

Chas. Hartzler and wife In Automobile Smash-up

Mr. and Mrs. Chas. Hartzler met with what might have been a very serious auto and street car accident in Goshen, Tuesday evening when at a street crossing they were hit by another auto which shoved them cross-wise onto the street car track directly in front of an oncoming street car which was unable to stop until it also smashed into them, and a car on the opposite side struck them. The car was badly wrecked but fortunately the occupants escaped with nothing worse than severe bruises.

Mr. Hartzler was driving the Topeka Roller Mill truck and was returning from making a delivery at Mishawaka when the accident occurred. Harvey S. Frye and E. E. Hartzler drove to Goshen and brought them home, and yesterday they brought the wrecked truck home.

Returns After Long Absence

William A. Spackeen who left Topeka eighteen years ago and went to Canada, where he took up a claim, after four years became discouraged, turned his back to h's shack, and started for the western coast of the United States.

He had never been heard of in all these years. In March 1922, his father died and A. W. Ritter was appointed administrator of the estate. After diligent search to find him it was decided he was dead.

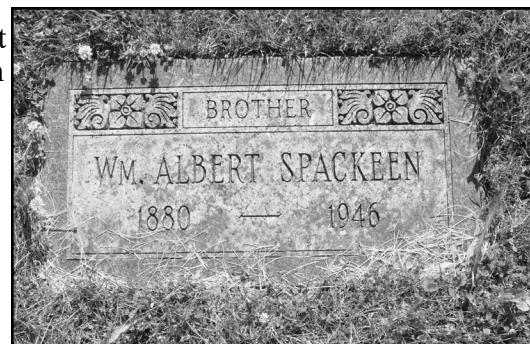
The clerk of the court appointed A. W. Ritter as administrator of his estate, and in a few months the court would have declared him legally dead but he returned yesterday, and will lay claim to his share of his father's estate which is in the hand of his administrator. We are glad he has returned. He knew nothing of the death of his parents until he arrived here.

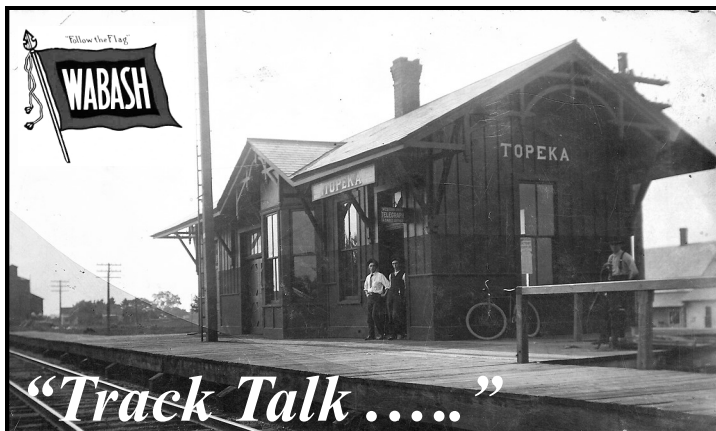
on to settle the estate in its November term.

Articles were published in both the LaGrange News and Topeka Journal in October of 1923 stating that William did reappear in Topeka on October 24th, however the papers differed when it came to the spelling of his last name. He had no knowledge of the death of his parents nor of his brother, who died in a heroic effort to save the lives of others at a railroad crossing. Unfortunately, the LaGrange News failed to mention the brother's name or give any further details. The Topeka Journal made no mention of the brother.

We know very little about William Spackeen in the years following his return to Topeka. How long he stayed in the area and what he did to earn a living is a mystery. He somehow found his way to Indianapolis where he married Eva Belle Cavett (1878-1942) whose husband James Cavett had died in 1927. William and Eva Belle had no children of their own. However, Eva Belle did have four children from her previous marriage. Eva Belle died on November 17, 1942, at the age of 64.

William Albert Spackeen died on June 22, 1946, at the age of 66. William was buried next to Eva Belle and her first husband, James Cavett, in the Floral Park Cemetery on the west side of Indianapolis.





Explore with Jason

Jason Yoder, great grandson of Erman & Gladys Yoder (the founders of Yoder Oil Company), recently spent some time in Topeka visiting family. He also spent some time exploring the historical society's Depot Museum.

Jason is a 1991 graduate of Westview High School and a Chief Petty Officer in the US Navy with almost 20 years of service, and a Microsoft Certified Trainer. His father is Dennis Yoder of the THS Class of '65. His grandparents were Robert (Bob) and Mary Yoder. His mother is Beth Yoder, a retired school teacher.

During his time at the Depot, Jason took numerous pictures and some video for his YouTube channel "Explore with Jason". If you are online, check out his YouTube channel. Be looking for his Topeka video which should be available online in the next couple of weeks.

Depot Set to Close for the Season

The Depot Museum will be closing for the season on October 1st. We will reopen in the Spring in time for Topeka Elementary School 3rd graders, who study local history, to make their annual field-trip to the Depot.

Kit Castetter Joins the Board



We are happy to announce that Kit Castetter has agreed to join the Topeka Area Historical Society as a member of the Board of Directors.

Kit is the son of Harry & Stanna Castetter and a 1981 graduate of Westview High School.

He has been a registered nurse for 22 years and a paramedic for 29 years. Kit has been with Medflight for 10 years. He is a certified Flight Nurse and a certified Flight Paramedic (FP-C, CFRN). He is also a Goshen Fire Fighter with 28 years of service. Kit has his ASN from IUSB and is a Nationally Registered Paramedic.

Kit and his wife, Kim, have five children and eight grandchildren. He enjoys riding his motorcycle and spending time with his family during his off time.

Coming Down the Tracks:



Sept. 18, 2018 The Trail of Death

The forced relocation of the Potawatomi

Nov. 13, 2018 Dinner Meeting

Election of Officers

Program and location to be announced

Topeka Area Historical Society Meetings are held at the Topeka Branch Library - 6:30 PM

Visit us online at: www.topekahistoricalsociety.com

The Mile 146 Quiz:

1. Who was William Spackeen's father?
2. What day did William Spackeen reappear in Topeka?
3. Who was the administrator of the Spackeen estate?
4. When did the Topeka Milling Company burn?
5. Who owned the Topeka Milling Company?

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Topeka Area Historical Society

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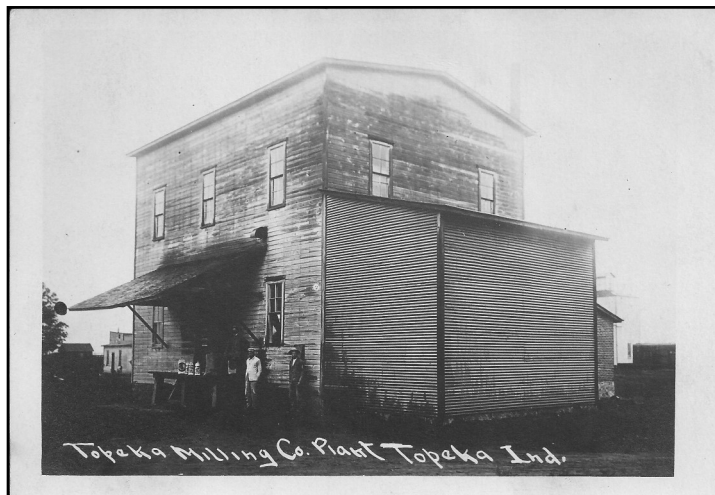


The Hawpatch History Detective

The Topeka Milling Co.

In the process of scanning the historical society's old postcards I discovered these two gems. When the photo of the "Topeka Milling Co Plant Topeka Ind." was taken is not known. Clearly the postcard photo below of the burning mill was taken on the day of the mill fire, which was Thursday, January 13, 1916. But inquiring minds want to know more! Who took the picture? Where was the mill located .. along the railroad tracks? Who owned it? Was it ever rebuilt ... and if so, did it later become the Topeka Roller Mill?

All we know is that on the back of the postcard of the mill (upper right) someone wrote, "Dad and Volneys mill it burned." That only leaves us with more questions. Is that



them in the picture standing outside of the mill? When was it built? Who is "Dad"? And, who was "Volney"? Was that his first or last name?

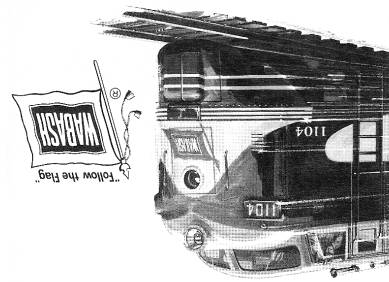
Fortunately, we have issues of the Topeka Journal from 1916 on microfilm. And what we found is amazing. The story of the fire, that had taken place the morning of January 13th at 9:30, was front page news on the same day. "M.E. WISMAN GRIST MILL TOTALLY DESTROYED THIS MORNING." But, we still don't know anything more about M.E. Wisman.

The news story made a point of saying that the building could have been saved if only the firemen would have had "anything to fight fire with". That was followed with a call for the people of Topeka to demand fire protection as soon as possible. The article also noted that the new water plant was nearly complete.

The January 27th issue reported that on January 24th, some 40 people met in the office of A.W. Ritter where they officially organized Topeka's first volunteer fire department with two companies, one on the North Side and the other on the South Side. *HG*



www.topekahistoricalociety.com



"Serving The Heart Of America"

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