

LOST TOWN OF ST. JOHN, ILL.

By EDWARD B. CLARK © BY WESTERN NEWSPAPER UNION

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LAST REMINDERS OF SITE OF LOST TOWN

BELOW the bluffs which skirt the shore of Fort Sheridan military reservation the waves of Lake Michigan wash over the site of a lost town. When the winds of a few more storms shall have blown to the beach two apple trees which have but a frail footing at the embankment's edge the last reminders of a once thriving and populous place will have been swept away.

Almost seventy years ago the hamlet of St. John was founded by a man named Hettinger and a few of his followers. The site chosen was a commanding one on the bluff overlooking the lake and one-half mile east of the point where the northwestern depot at the Village of Highwood now stands. The great clay bank with the stretch of sand beach which shelves away to the water's edge at its foot looks as if it were strong enough and far enough removed from the breakers to be safe against the angriest northeaster that ever blew. The men who built their houses upon the plain surmounting the embankment thought their foundations were as sure as though founded on the traditional rock. They did take the precaution, however, to limit their building operations on the east by a line drawn fifty yards from the edge of the bluff. That line has long since been buried in the sand under the waves, and with it are the houses and the shops of the early settlers.

In the year 1845 the Village of St. John was the rival of Waukegan, which was then called Little Fort. Both were prosperous and both were growing. Highwood tradition hath it that people passing through the two places from Chicago declared that St. John showed the ear marks of success and that it was destined to be a big city. Other people beside the Chicagoans thought so, too, and they flocked to the place and built substantial houses and shops. The two apple trees which alone remain of all that pertained to the Village of St. John grew in the yard of Sebastian Richards, whose house was farther removed from the lake than any other in the village. The apple trees were back of the residence. Not long ago the foundation of bricks, which was all that was left of Richard's dwelling, slid down the bluff into the lake during the height of a winter storm. The roots of one of the apple trees are even now extending into the air through the side of the embankment. One good strong push would send it hurtling to the beach 100 feet below.

Among the names of the builders of St. John in addition to those of Hettinger and Sebastian Richards, the only ones that the oldest Highwood inhabitants can remember, are Frank Mitch, Peter Baker and George Shepard. Mitch was a shoemaker and it is said that he is still following the trade in a town in the far north. As far as is known he is the only survivor of the men who founded the Village of St. John. In the year 1847 there were several stores, a blacksmith shop, a tavern and a postoffice in the Village of St. John, which then held a population of about 200 people. In that day there was a stage coach line between Chicago and Milwaukee. The tavern at St. John was a relay station for the stage. Henry Mowers, who remembers the village in its latter days, says that the tavern was noted for its table, and its liquor, and that people frequently took the stage journey from Chicago for the sole purpose of getting a good dinner and a good glass.

It was a man who intended becoming a resident of St. John that afterward founded the Village of Half Day. He had looked over the lakeside village, and then had declared that he would establish one that would last longer and had more people in it. The automobilists who every Sunday pass through Half Day on their runs to Waukegan and return may look on the half-dozen houses there assembled, and know that the man who turned his back on St. John has kept his word.

When the Chicago and Milwaukee railroad was built the surveyed line ran one-half mile west of the Village of St. John. An adequate idea of the importance of a place of which now barely a vestige remains may be had when it is known that the railroad authorities built a spur line running to the south edge of the town. Some of the practical residents of the place had discovered that an excellent quality of brick could be made from the clay which was found in a pit a short distance south of the blacksmith shop. As a matter of fact, the presence of this brickyard was one of the chief reasons that the branch line of the railroad was built. When Uncle Sam accepted from the Commercial Club of Chicago the land to the north of the city as a military reservation the soldiers drew hundreds of cartloads of both good brick and broken brick from the site of the old brickyard and used the material for temporary road-making and for the filling in of swamp spots. The forethought of the St. John people in leaving behind them specimens of their handiwork saved the United States government a great many dollars.

It is possible to trace today with no difficulty at all the embankment upon which the branch line of the railroad ran to the brickyard and to the now lost Village of St. John. In size and outline it looks like a military redoubt, and it would perfectly answer the purpose of one. The embankment was leveled at its western end when stores were erected in the Village of Highwood. It starts now from a point almost directly back of the little Methodist church, and runs eastward, broken only by roads which have been dug through it.

It was less than ten years after the founding of St. John that the people awakened to a possible danger to their homes by the encroachment of the waves of the lake. It is true that they



SHOWING HOW MICHIGAN IS WEARING AWAY THE CLIFFS



WEEBIE WEAVER'S WISH SITE OF ST. JOHN, ILL.

saw year by year that the face of the bluff was being gradually worn away, but the erosion was so slow that they gave little heed. One night in the winter of 1852 a storm whipped up out of the northeast. It was forty-eight hours before it had fully spent its force. Before its assaults, the bluff gave way, tons upon tons of the hard clay breaking off in great pieces and falling to the beach. When the wind ceased blowing the barn of the dwelling nearest to the lake stood at the edge of the embankment. The villagers started to move the structure inland, but another storm, coming up suddenly, forced them to stop the work, and before it could be resumed the barn, in the shape of disjointed joists and broken planks, was being tossed about by the waves.

It was about this time that the people of St. John received a visitor who was much more unwelcome than the storm. This visitor was a lawyer armed with a lot of formidable-looking papers. He went to the tavern and asked that the elders of the village be sent for. They came. The lawyer told them that their title to the land which they occupied was extremely faulty and that they must either pay again for the ground on which their homes stood, or get out. The villagers made up their minds to fight the matter out, but preliminary court proceedings showed them that the lawyer had fully as good a case as he claimed. They became disheartened, and when another terrific storm arose, and the blacksmith's shop and George Shepard's house went into the lake they lost all courage. They told the lawyer that the lake seemed to have a better claim to the land than either they or he had, and that it apparently was bent on enforcing title rights. One by one the people of St. John moved away, leaving their dwelling and stores to the will of the wind and waves. Settlements sprang up to the south and the west of the deserted village, and the people, during the height of winter storms, used to go to a place near the bluff and watch for some deserted dwelling standing perilously near the edge of the embankment to fall with one final crash onto the water-swept sand below.

Henry Mowers, an old time hunter was a veteran of the residents near the site of the lost village. Not long after the disappearance in the lake of the last building of the Village of St. John, Mowers took a spade and walked up the lake shore until he came to the point where a large part of the site of St. John had disappeared beneath the waves. Mowers' trip was taken up at sunrise, a time when he was not likely to be interrupted in his work. He began a series of mysterious diggings just at the base of the mud cliff. He worked for two hours and then quit. He returned to his task every morning for a week, making several new excavations a foot or two in depth each time. One morning the spade struck something hard, and in a minute Mowers had unearthed an ingot of pure copper weighing eighteen pounds. This was worth having, but it was not what Mowers was after. He kept on digging for a month, and at the end of that time had secured gold and silver French and Spanish pieces in value to the amount of \$24. In addition he found some United States copper cents and half-cents of an early date and one bronze Roman coin of the period of Nero.

Mowers kept at his work for weeks, but after unearthing the Roman piece he found nothing for a long time. He was about to give up the work for good. He shouldered his spade and started homeward. On the sand, glistening in the sun at the water's edge, just as he turned to go for supposedly the last time, he found two United States silver dollars minted on one side



BLUFFS NEAR SITE OF LOST TOWN

only. Here was a puzzle which even his shrewdness could not solve. The coins were silver and of full weight, and in that day silver was of sufficient intrinsic value to make it useless for anyone to make counterfeitlets out of the pure metal. Mowers searched for another week, but found no more coins. He then showed the result of his labor to neighbors and to some people in the city of Chicago. He said nothing about where he had discovered the treasure. Shortly afterward, however, a man offered him \$100 for the secret, and though Mowers told him that the place was probably worked out the man offered the money, said he would take the chance, and the offer was accepted. The purchaser never found anything and gave up the labor in disgust.

It was not long before the story of the place where the coins had been picked up became generally known and the people flocked to the bluff and to the beach marking the site of the lost town. They dug, searched and prospected with all the ardor of Klondikers, but the sole result was a gold piece of the value of \$2.50, which a boy picked up from the wake of a retreating wave. The collection of coin which Henry Mowers found is now in the possession of a man who once ran a Chicago dime museum. No one has ever been able to account for the presence of the money in the place. The theory that it was left behind by a departing resident of St. John is said to be hardly tenable, because the people of that place were not rich enough to make them careless of valuables.

There is one metal which the prospector may find in abundance if he will go to St. John before the two old apple trees tumble down the bluff. The trunks and branches of both of them are full of lead. The trees stood just at the end of the old Sixth infantry rifle butt. For three years before the building of the present post the troops that first came to Fort Sheridan pumped lead at target practice into the butt and incidentally into the apple trees at the side. Despite the attacks of the weather and this leaden onslaught the two trees bore a burden of fruit for years as sound and as sweet as that which bent their branches at the time when the town of St. John was something more substantial than a memory.

INTELLIGENT DOG.

"My wife must be doing the cooking today."
"Why?"
"On those days my dog always comes to the office. All right, Towser, you can go to lunch with me."

A PARADOX.

"There is one thing queer about an accusing charge."
"What is that?"
"A man refuses to countenance it when he faces it."

FIRST BIDDER BUYS KINGDOM

Many Islands, Large and Small, Scattered Around Shores of United Kingdom.

London.—Scattered around the shores of the United Kingdom are a number of small islands, large and small, whose proprietors, while owing allegiance to King George, are, nevertheless, monarchs of all they survey, with greater power over the comfort and well being of their "subjects" than his majesty enjoys. Indeed, in some instances the British parliament has no power to tax these island estates, without the consent of their owners, nor can anyone land or reside upon them without the permission of



Typical Cottage in Lewis.

their rulers. Some of them are but a few acres in extent, while others run into many square miles of territory, boasting of a lordly castle and quite a large population.

Perhaps the principal island property in the United Kingdom is Lewis, in the Outer Hebrides, whose present ruler is Major Matheson. Lewis is certainly no mean kingdom, seeing that it boasts of an area of 437,221 acres and a population of nearly 30,000 souls. Indeed, it is the largest island in the United Kingdom next to Ireland. For the man desirous of setting up in a moderate sort of way as a monarch, here is an admirable chance, for Major Matheson is anxious to dispose of his kingdom.

The little kingdom boasts of extensive locks, where magnificent fishing is to be had, while in some parts it is very mountainous, Meallasbhal and Ben More, the two highest peaks, towers 1,500 odd feet above sea level. Over its extensive moors and forest land the red deer still roam. Everywhere there are numerous antiquities and Druidical remains. The owner's residence is a magnificent old castle close to Stornoway, the principal town. Many members of the royal family have stayed here, including the late King Edward. The principal industry is fishing, and in the season the girls of Stornoway go all over Scotland packing herrings. Next to fishing, cloth weaving engages the attention of the islanders, who are a hardy and thrifty set of people, the majority of whom know no other tongue but Gaelic. Major Matheson is asking \$1,500,000 for this island kingdom.

MAN HAS HOT STOVE IN HEAD

Imagines People Are Always Cooking on It and Making Him Eat, Hungry or Not.

Savanna.—Of three men charged with being lunatics, who were tried at the jail, two men were ordered sent to the state sanitarium, while the third was discharged in the custody of his sister and a friend with whom he lives.

B. J. McCoy, who was released, is subject to periodical attacks of insanity, when he believes he possesses miraculous religious powers. And the women who defended him excused his claims in this respect.

A few years ago he was hurt in a railroad accident. His lawyer fled, and McCoy now sometimes imagines he and his lawyer are partners. When these spells are on him he tries his case, testifying, examining witnesses and making the argument to the jury.

Ben Perry is an old-timer. He thinks he carries a hot stove around in his head. People are all the time cooking things on this stove, and they make him eat whatever it is, whether he is hungry or not. He is always surrounded by his enemies, who never give him a moment's peace. Jim Spencer, the third subject, has lost his mind, speech and hearing.

Big Alabama Snake. Huntsville, Ala.—The body of one of the largest rattlesnakes ever seen in this section has been brought here from the Green plantation, near Farley, where it was killed by Will Wise. The reptile measured six and one-half feet and carried sixteen rattles. A son of Wise almost stepped on the snake while in the mountain and gave the alarm.

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Time it! Pape's Diapepsin ends all Stomach misery in five minutes.

Do some foods you eat hit back—taste good, but work badly; ferment into stubborn lumps and cause a sick, sour, gassy stomach? Now, Mr. or Mrs. Dyspeptic, jot this down: Pape's Diapepsin digests everything, leaving nothing to sour and upset you. There never was anything so safely quick, so certainly effective. No difference how badly your stomach is disordered you will get happy relief in five minutes, but what pleases you most is that it strengthens and regulates your stomach so you can eat your favorite foods without fear.

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Modern Agent.

Hall—What are you doing now?
Gall—Oh, I'm making a house-to-house canvass to ascertain why people don't want to buy a new patent clothes wringer.—Chicago News.

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