



Footprints

A publication of the Howard County Historical Society

Searching for the Real Kokomo:

**Separating
the man
from the
legend**



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From the executive director

Be an advocate for our history

How much do we as a community care about our Howard County history? We've all expressed pride in our community's past, especially our automotive heritage. As a historical society member, you've already shown that you value our heritage and want to preserve it. You've made a commitment through your membership, donations and participation.

I thank you for that, the board of trustees thanks you and everyone who truly cares about our history thanks you.

Outside of the county's historical organizations, though, there seems to be a lot of lip service and little commitment.

I'm asking you to now go a step further. Advocate for the importance of our history. Make preservation a part of our collective ethos. Engage new members and new advocates. Help our community leaders understand that our future depends on our understanding of the

past, and that preserving pieces of the past will provide a constant reminder of our successes, failures and the lessons learned. Help our educators remember that history helps teach critical thinking, holds up examples set by great innovators and leaders, reminds us that we're all human and helps break down the barriers that divide us.

Now, if ever, we need to make a better effort to preserve our history. The stories we record and save; the buildings, artifacts and documents we keep; the lessons we've learned all serve to move us forward not backward.

Now, if ever, we need to focus on what we have in common. History illustrates those things. And, if we have the courage, we need to overcome the things that divide us. History illustrates those, as well.

Dave Broman
HCHS Executive Director

Thanks to those who donated to the 2016 annual campaign

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Former home to the Apperson Brothers south plant. The site is being redeveloped into luxury apartments and the plant was demolished in 2016, shortly after this photo was taken.

Auto pioneers' last building is demolished

By Dave Broman
HCHS Executive Director

The Apperson Brothers played a pivotal role in the early history of automobiles – locally and nationally. Elwood Haynes took his plans to their machine shop and hired them to build his first car. They hired a man named Maxwell to help with the project.

The two brothers teamed up with Haynes to manufacture cars, then split off to start their own car company. Maxwell left, too, and started his own car company, which eventually became Chrysler. The Appersons haven't shared in the credit and fame that followed Haynes, but their work paved the way for the cars of today and played a key role in establishing Kokomo's industrial and automotive economy.

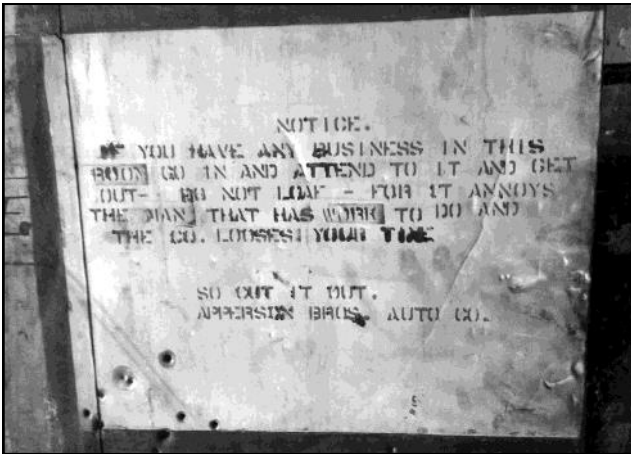
During the height of their success, there were two Apperson plants in Kokomo. The north plant was located in the vee where Davis Road splits off from North Washington. The south plant was built just south of Wildcat Creek between Main and Union street.

The north plant was in use until the 1980s, for a time as the Reliance Dress factory, then as General Motor's Delco Plant 5. After sitting empty for a few years, it was demolished and the site remains empty with little but concrete foundation remnants to mark its passing.

After the Apperson company failed, the south plant was used as a warehouse for years, most recently by Northern Indiana Supply Company and DeLong Auto Parts. When NISCO closed, much of the building was left empty and began to deteriorate.

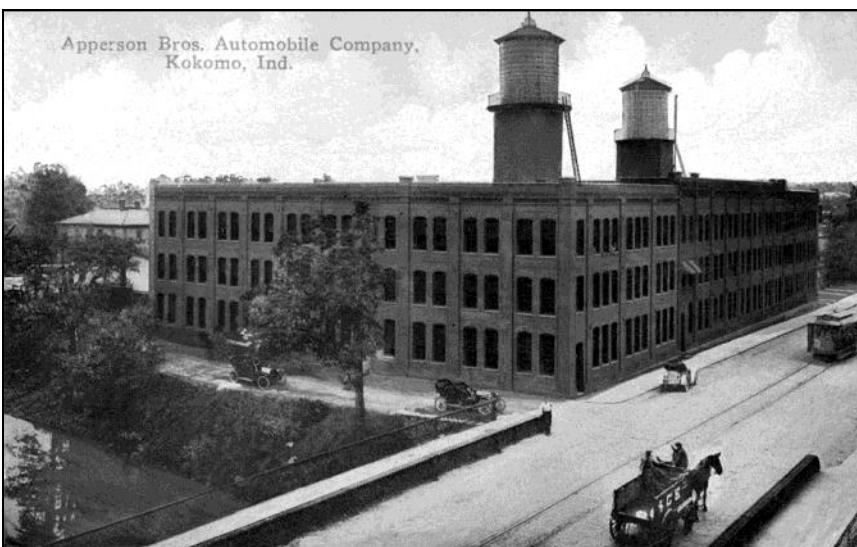


The Apperson sports coupe



In late 2014, an Indianapolis company announced plans to redevelop the south plant buildings as a luxury apartment community. Initial reports indicated that they would retain much of the original structure, but later decisions led to its complete demolition. Bricks from the original structure were salvaged and will become part of the new development.

Plans for the apartments fit a dynamic new vision for the heart of the city, but, bricks or no bricks, the essence of the place and the last vestige of a pioneering automaker are irretrievably gone.



Top left: Some things never change, including those who want to loaf when others have work to do.

Above, a view of the inside of the historic factory before it was torn down.

At left, a postcard of the facility when it was new.

HCHS moves toward goal in replacing failing roof

By Dave Broman
HCHS Executive Director

The Seiberling Mansion's 126-year-old slate roof has been a problem since the museum moved there in 1972. A recent assessment by the preservation experts at RATIO Architects called it a "crisis" and said, "The poor condition of the roof poses a major threat to the building's interior."

Brianne Poor, an IUK intern, learned first-hand about the mansion's leaky roof: "It was raining one afternoon when Randy and I were working on my exhibit on the third floor of the mansion. As we prepared to hang some revised labels, Randy noticed a spot on the floor that was wet. He said that the section of the roof that was leaking had caused problems in the past, so he went down to the shop to grab a bucket and let Bill know that the spot had begun leaking again... This was when I realized just how dire the roofing situation had become."

The campaign to save the mansion went public in spring 2016 and Tom and Judy Sheehan were among the first to accept our offer of a behind-the-scenes tour of the mansion.

"When we toured the Seiberling Mansion and saw the condition of the roof and the interior water damage, there was no doubt that help was needed," Tom Sheehan said. "The Seiberling is an architectural treasure for Howard County and one of the symbols of the early automotive industry.

"To let this unique historical building continue

to deteriorate was not acceptable to us," he continued. "The Seiberling Mansion has been and should continue to be a source of pride for all residents and visitors. We hope most see the need as we have!"

Their commitment of \$25,000 to the "Save Our Seiberling" campaign is a huge step toward our goal of a new slate roof for the mansion.

Kokomo's Hingst family has supported the historical society and Seiberling Mansion for many years. Bill and Ginny Hingst gave us a great start to 2017 with their gift of \$25,000 to the roof campaign. Their family has been part

of the community since the gas boom era, as has the mansion, and Bill commented, "If we get together and do it right, the mansion will stand for another 125 years and our grandkids will enjoy its beauty and history without having to worry about the roof."

Our first grant for the roof campaign came from the Community Foundation of Howard County. It committed to a \$50,000 matching grant, effectively doubling all individual contributions up the \$50,000 cap. We

met the matching requirement and received the full grant amount in December.

Our second grant notification came in May 2016 from the Indiana Historical Society. Its Heritage Support grant of \$50,000 was made possible by the Lilly Endowment as part of a program to support the state's local history or-



Dave Broman with Hilda Burns and Greg Aaron, president and executive vice president of the Community Foundation

See 'Roof' on page 8



Monroe Seiberling entertains guests at country club gala

Dateline: KOKOMO, Indiana Nov. 13, 1904

Mr. and Mrs. Monroe Seiberling, late of this city, entertained Saturday evening at a gala five-course dinner in honor of their son and daughter-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Alton Seiberling.

The festive evening occurred at the beautiful new Kokomo Country Club, recently opened by a group of Kokomo luminaries devoted to improving the reputation and social status of our fair city. A number of leaders of commerce and industry, as well as esteemed local elected officials, were among the guests, including noted inventor and business owner Elwood Haynes.

The elder Seiberlings are visiting Kokomo from their current residence in Illinois, where the elder Mr. Seiberling continues his long entrepreneurial career. We note with pride that his career included several years in the last decade developing outstanding manufacturing concerns here in Howard County. The younger Mr. Seiberling also has worked with his father's Illinois businesses but is returning with his wife, the former Anna Tate, to take an executive position with Mr. Haynes' automotive establishment.

Mr. Seiberling gave a warm and humorous welcome to the guests gathered in the club's impressive ballroom for the lovely

meal. In a witty aside to his political fellows, Mr. Seiberling noted with relief the end of the prickly 1904 presidential contest with the election Nov. 8 of a Republican president with a vice president who hails from the great state of Indiana.

"I know we all extend our congratulations to President Theodore Roosevelt and our own Senator Charles Warren Fairbanks. Our great hopes for the future are entrusted to them," Mr. Seiberling said.



**"Mr. and Mrs. Seiberling" greet the Moore family
– Margie, Dick and Tyler**

The story above never appeared in any newspaper in 1904, but, in a bit of imagined time travel one November night, about a hundred guests at the Kokomo Country Club of 2016 enjoyed a step back to this earlier time.

With the ladies sporting vintage hats and festive attire, the Seiberlings and Elwood Haynes (represented by local reenactors) entertained their guests in an evening designed to support the Howard County Historical Society's Save Our Seiberling campaign. The campaign is in the midst of raising funds to replace the origi-

nal 126-year-old slate roof on the Seiberling Mansion, home to the Howard County Museum.

Those attending were reminded of the importance of the SOS campaign by Steve Daily, former Kokomo mayor and chancellor emeritus of Ivy Tech Community College, who is serving as a campaign co-chair.

"The Seiberling Mansion is a community treasure," Daily said. "An amazing architectural gem, it serves as a point of pride, a tourist attraction, and a tangible reminder of Kokomo's long and successful history of innovation and

perseverance.

"The years of Hoosier winds and winters have taken a toll. Regular repair can't keep up with the decay of the aging roof and the leaks that are damaging ceilings and walls and threaten the very structure of the building," he said. "It's up to us, the people of Kokomo and Howard County in 2016, to be good stewards. It's an expensive proposition but replacing the roof with slate in the original and historic manner is the right thing to do and the goal of the campaign."

The campaign has set a goal of \$1 million, to be raised through individual donations and grants from public and private organizations. Plans are to complete the project next year to halt additional damage to the interior of the building and its contents.

More information on the Save Our Seiberling



campaign can be found at hchistory.networkforgood.com.

At the gala, Jerry and Marcia Nelson reprised the roles as Monroe and Sarah Seiberling they have played in wedding reenactments at the Seiberling Mansion. Seth and Jill Aaron were gracious as Alton and Anna Seiberling, Bob Webb served as Elwood Haynes, and Ed Brown and Allison Priest were at-

tired as doorman and maid to welcome the guests. Musicians Bret and Susan Hall provided background musical accompaniment to the event.

The event was put together by a committee including community supporters Joe and Lynda Klein and Howard County Historical Society volunteers Mary Ellen Harnish, Sonnie Neal, and current HCHS President Judy Brown, who served as the evening's emcee.



Joining in the gala were reenactors Ed and Judy Brown, Bob Webb, Jill and Seth Aaron, Jerry and Marcia Nelson, roof campaign chair Steve Daily and Michelle Martin, and gala co-chairs Lynda and Joe Klein.

Roof, continued from page 5

ganizations.

Thanks to the support of Indiana Landmarks, we also received a \$10,000 grant from the Efroymson Family Fund in the Central Indiana Community Foundation. We had previously received \$2,500 from Indiana Landmarks to help pay for the architectural assessment of the mansion.

The campaign committee, led by Steve Daily and Diana Tenbrook, set a goal of \$1 million. At present, we have gifts and pledges of just

under \$300,000. With a goal of starting work in July, the campaign is shifting into high gear and your donation will make a difference.

You can schedule a smaller weekly or monthly gift that will add up over the course of time by visiting <http://hchistory.networkforgood.com>.

You can make a one-time gift there as well, or by contacting the historical society directly at 765-452-4314, at info@howardcountymuseum.org, or at 1218 W. Sycamore in Kokomo.

‘Save Our Seiberling’ update

The community is stepping up to help “Save Our Seiberling.” The following donors have contributed to the campaign. We’re grateful for their support.

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Bill and Ginny Hingst
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of Howard County
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Gable Level

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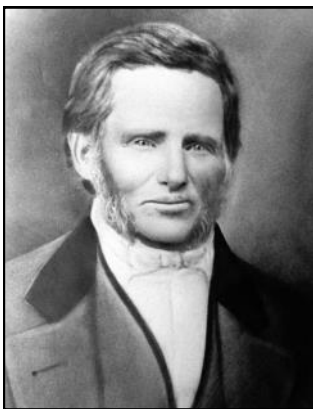
The Search for the Real Kokomo: Separating Man from Legend

By Gil Porter
HCHS Publications Committee Member

David Foster had a problem. In the early spring of 1842, the settler with a reputation as “a considerable trader among the Indians” got his trading wagon stuck in the mud somewhere on the north side of the Wildcat Creek. A story passed down in the Foster family relates that the leader of the Native American hunting and camping village on the south side of the creek was one of those on hand to help him get “un-stuck.”

The village was named for the leader – Kokomo – who, according to genealogy research at Miami (Ohio) University, was a “head-man,” or leader of a family group, and related by marriage to notable families of the Miami Nation – Richardville and Meshingomesia.

It's possible that Foster knew of the Native American either through local stories in circulation in the area at the time (some reports claim Kokomo died circa 1838), or perhaps Foster



David Foster

had encountered the village leader personally during his trading travels. Foster was born in in Virginia in 1808 and arrived in Indiana around 1830. In 1832, he married Elizabeth Grant, a native of New York state whose family had settled in Mooresville, and in February 1836 they

and their young family moved to Burlington, about 15 miles west of present-day Kokomo. There Foster established a dry goods and groceries business popular with the local Miami Indians.

By all accounts, Foster sought good relations with his neighbors, even learning their language. Seeing an opportunity to grow the business and further his reputation with his customers, Foster relocated the family permanently to the area north of the Wildcat Creek, around 1840. It was a mobile society, and the early settlers in the region took advantage of the well-known “traces” or Indian paths that provided access to the many native and new settler-based villages scattered around the southern portion of the Miami Nation reserve.

This area of land, known as the “Big Miami Reserve,” was a result of the 1818 Treaty of St. Mary's in which a 35-square-mile area in north central Indiana was granted to the Miami community, whose band in the area was led by Metocinyah. The leader and his band had relocated along the Mississinewa River after their first village was destroyed in an early battle in the War of 1812. The resource-rich area traditionally was of great importance to the Miami nation.

In fact, archeological research in the area supports the importance of the area both historically and even pre-historically. The western Great Lakes-based Miami, an Algonquin-speaking people, were traditionally among the westernmost Algonquin peoples during the prehistoric and early contact periods. They claimed a vast “inland empire.” The great leader Little Turtle at the Treaty of Greenville in

1795, which essentially created the area for the state of Ohio, enumerated how their boundary stretched from what is now western Ohio to eastern Illinois, including all of Indiana. For two centuries, the Miami people and their band leaders developed unparalleled military and diplomatic skills even as they endured warfare and displacement with other Native American people and ultimately the encroachment by European settlers.

By 1840, treaty agreements between the United States government and the Miami ceded much of the Big Reserve to the state of Indiana. Most of the Miami nation was relocated to west of the Mississippi; a small band remained under the leadership of Metocinyah's eldest son, Meshingomesia. The 1834 Treaty at the Forks of the Wabash, which outlined land cession and allocation between the tribe and the U.S. government, includes a signatory whose name is rendered Co-come-wah. It is this native who may have been the village leader, or "head-man," Kokomo, who died in the vicinity of the Wildcat Creek about the time Foster was trading in the area.

With his trading reputation well-established, Foster made contact with a land speculator from the Fort Wayne area named Allen Hamilton. Hamilton had obtained a 640-acre section of land known as the Lafontaine Reserve, granted by treaty to the akima, or chief, Francis Lafontaine, with whom Foster had been well-acquainted. Hamilton then sold the property to Foster for a handsome profit. With the land in his possession Foster ultimately secured his place in history by convincing the newly appointed county commissioners to make his trading-post site the county seat as the town of Kokomo.

In 1844, the county was organized, originally named Richardville for the Miami akima Jean Baptiste de Richardville. (His name was Pe-che-wa, "Wildcat" -- hence Wildcat Creek.) The county's first property deed -- from David and Elizabeth Foster to Peter

Man or myth?

By Gil Porter

HCHS Publications Committee Member

The curious controversy about the source for the name "Kokomo" has been around almost since the settlers officially organized the town in 1844.

What is known is that in 1842 near the Wildcat Creek the settler David Foster built a double-log cabin on what is now South Main Street, one side being his residence and the other a trading post, in essence making him a "full-fledged Indian trader and Kokomo's first merchant," according to an 1899 article in the *Kokomo Morning Tribune*.

The county was organized in 1844 and originally called "Richardville" in honor of the Miami Nation akima, or chief, Jean Baptiste de Richardville. It was renamed "Howard" at the time of the Miami Indians' western relocations in 1846 by an act of the Indiana State Legislature (in honor of a respected recently deceased legislator named T.A. Howard). Foster by now had acquired some 600 acres previously owned by Francis Lafontaine, chief of the unified Miami nation during the forced removals, and when an incorporation plan was approved, Foster donated 40 acres on the north side of the creek for a county seat -- the town of "Kokomo."

The Name

But whence the town's name? Historical research requires documented provenance, and only two known sources point to a Miami Indian with a name similar to "Kokomo." A person listed as "Co-come-wah" is a signatory to the "Treaty at the Forks of the Wabash" document in 1834, signing as a family leader, and this person is known by and generally accepted by the Miami people as the person Kokomo.

Besides the 1834 treaty signature, the only other documented evidence of an actual per-



Gay, agent for Richardville County – was filed on Dec. 2, 1844. The original plat outlined the county-seat town as follows: “Commencing at the corner of Washington and High (Superior) streets, then north to the first alley north of Taylor street, then east to Market street, then south on Market to High street, then west from the west line of Market street to the place of beginning.”

That the settlement was succeeding was surprising. The original location for the modest log courthouse at first seemed uncompromisingly unpromising – the 40 acres Foster donated was under water most of the time, and elsewhere covered by heavy timber and thick underbrush.

Fortunately, the original pioneers proved quite tenacious and resourceful. Those hardy settlers who staked their claim on the swamp-land that, when cleared and cultivated, ultimately became the fertile soil of the City of Firsts were well-rewarded and satisfied. By October 1844, the first public sale of 100 lots (about \$30 per 66-by-132-foot lot) of the original town plat was made available.

In 1846, the Indiana State Legislature voted to rename the county “Howard” in honor of an Indiana state legislator (the copy of “An act to change the name of Richardville county to Howard county” in the clerk’s office is dated Feb. 13, 1847). The county population grew from some 600 souls in 1844 to more than 6,500 by the Census of 1850. And in 1854, when the first railroad from Indianapolis began service, Kokomo was no longer a country trading spot, but indeed a town.

For a city with such an enterprising history, it’s interesting that more is known about the *stories* of how it started than about the event itself. History is inconclusive on who actually proposed the name “Kokomo.” It was thought it was named for a legendary chief of the local Native peoples. In this version, from the earliest days at his trading post, Foster himself had reportedly heard tales of a “veritable giant” of a chieftain, whose physical strength and superior

cunning secured ample hunting grounds for the tribe around what is now north-central Indiana.

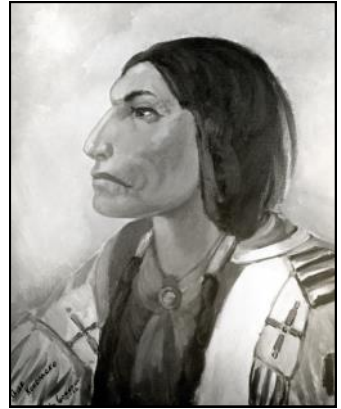
As this story goes, the chief, identified as a village- or band-chief from around Muncie, had camped and hunted in the area on the north side of Wildcat Creek.

After the area was settled, the great leader was revered as the “last of the fighting chiefs.”

Irrespective of what view one holds as to the authenticity of the Native or his name, naming the town for an impressive Native American, whenever he lived, seemed an appropriate tribute.

Still, for whatever reason, some of Foster’s contemporary pioneers chose an alternate version of the Native’s background. The town’s namesake was hardly a chief or even a tribal-leader, it was claimed, but a regular local, identified variously as a common, shifty, lazy, liquor-loving wife beater.

In a published account from an actual Kokomo resident on the matter, Foster himself had weighed in on the status of the Native he knew of as “Ma-Ko-Ko-Mo.” In the early 1920s, longtime resident Harrison Stewart, whose family was friends with the founding Foster family, shared with a Kokomo newspaper his memories of a conversation he had with the settler just before Foster died in 1877. Stewart said Foster had related how he had identified a set of bones uncovered during a construction project as being those of “Chief Kokomo” himself. This was due to the examining physician’s conclusion that the bones were those of a tall



A previous depiction of the legendary “Kokomo,” by artist Ida Gordon.

man, which to Foster fit the description of a legendary “giant chief,” and that the brass kettles and “tools of stone” and other grave goods pointed to an ancient burial.

About 170 years after those wagon wheels stuck in the mud of the Wildcat Creek, another David Foster had a problem. This Foster, a longtime veteran of the Kokomo Police Department, is the great-great-great-grandson of the town’s founder, and the family still lives in Kokomo.

Foster, the descendant, has long been a steward of the history of both his family and the town (a Foster family Bible is among the artifacts on permanent display at the Howard County Museum). Increasingly, he became dissatisfied with the artistic depictions of the legendary Native American chief so closely aligned with his ancestor.

“A few years back, a desire was kindled in me to re-create a likeness of the Chief whom this city holds as its namesake -- ‘Ma-Ko-Ko-Mo,’” Foster said. The modern Foster has a passion for the past and the importance of getting the story straight. “People have lived on this land all the way back to pre-history, and unfortunately there are many gaps in our knowledge of the history of the peoples right through to the Miami nation. There are general facts known about the people here when my ancestor began trading in the area between Burlington (Indiana) and the area that became Kokomo.”

His quest to know more, combined with the inauthentic portrait that had come to

symbolize Chief Kokomo, led Foster to commission an updated version.

“I’ve traveled to develop an understanding of the ancient tribes,” he said, “and during this time of discovery I became acquainted with the artist Marcia Moore, who has been bringing the faces of the ancient past into focus again.”

For about 100 years, at least three portraits in public circulation purportedly showed “Chief Kokomo,” and the Indian leader’s “Hollywood-style” likeness has appeared on everything from City of Kokomo official stationary to police officer and firefighter uniform patches to coffee mugs and commemorative coins.

Part of the problem was the depictions themselves. A 1910s depiction shows a Native American with a bonnet with a single feather, signifying a chief or clan-leader, while a version from the 1920s shows a Native American without a feather. And the famous 1962 version, by Indiana artist Ida Gordon also shows a featherless leader, and in fact likely was inspired by one of the earlier renderings, updated to reflect her interpretation.

Inauthentic attire was another issue. The

clothing in the 1962 image would mark him a Western Plains Indian, but an historical “Ma-Ko-Ko-Mo” in the area of modern-day Indiana would be a Woodlands Indian from the Miami tribe. So seeking a more modern representation actually led Foster to go further into the past. “The new portrait places Kokomo in an earlier time period than the traditional painting, because there was more information available from that



David Foster and artist Marcia Moore. Read more about her process in creating an updated depiction at howardcountymuseum.org.

time,” Foster said.

In the new portrait, the Native is pictured with copper ear spools, shell ornaments, bearskin and indigenous hawk feathers, a more realistic interpretation of a period Woodlands Indian. The local Miami tribe approves.

“The effort to correct the image is extremely meaningful to the tribe,” said Sarah Siders, tribal secretary for the Miami Nation of Indiana, based in Peru. “The new portrait is more accurate historically,” she said.

Siders noted the updated depiction is an important step in ensuring an accurate and positive representation of the Miami people’s heritage and culture. She praised the efforts of the modern Foster. “He is driven to be accurate and to correct many of the inconsistencies and inaccuracies that have become part of the historical record between the natives and the settlers,” Siders said.

The scarce documentation and oral history tradition of the Miami nation ensured any attempt to create a new pictorial record for Chief Kokomo could only be achieved through collaboration, and Siders expressed appreciation for Foster’s commitment to working with the tribe on the updated version. “He knew it was important not just for his family, but for the Native peoples as well to correct the record,” she said.

Another advocate for accuracy in the historical record, Sally Tuttle, a representative with the Native American Indian Commission in the State of Indiana, echoed the tribe’s views, and, as the Kokomo Perspective reported in its coverage of the unveiling of the depiction, Tuttle thanked the Foster family for “bringing to life the real version and the real look of native people of Indiana.”

The Kokomo challenge

Few names in the history of North American native cultures have puzzled etymologists more than “Kokomo.” Dr. David Costa, of the Language Research Office at the Myaamia Center at Miami (Ohio) University, shed some light on what the name might, or might not, have meant:

Primary Sources

Kiilhsoohkwa. 1810-1915. The granddaughter of Miami Chief Little Turtle. Spoke the Miami language exclusively. Said she knew the person “Kō-káhm-ah” but didn’t know what the name meant.

Gabriel Godfroy. Circa 1830-1910. Youngest son of Chief Francis Godfroy. Gabriel was leader of the Indiana Miamis until his death. Related the name “Kokomo” to the Miami verb for “to dive” (he evidently pronounced it “kó-keh-mah”). Linguistically, though, a word like “Kokomo” or “Kokomwa” is not a grammatical form of the Miami verb meaning “dive”.

Reputed Definitions

“*Black walnut*” — Nope. It’s not the Shawnee word for “black walnut.”

“*Grandmother*” or “*Old Woman*” — A man would not have this name.

“*Male*” or “*Female Bear*” — The name “Kokomo” does not look like any of the several words for “bear” in the Miami language.

Ma-Ko-Ko-Mo

A long-standing tradition holds that the town’s namesake was “Ma-Ko-Ko-Mo” and David Foster, the settler himself, understood the name to mean “he-bear.” However, no independent corroboration supports a Miami Indian being called a “bear” chief. Plus, words like mahkookima are not found in the language sources.

Conclusion

Some 100 years of etymological investigation have proved nothing conclusive about the origins or meaning of the name “Kokomo.” What is known is many native names were translated incorrectly and transcribed inaccurately as the translators were hearing them during oral testimonies.

“Kokomo could equally likely be of either Miami or Potawatomi origin, but there is nothing that I would consider a linguistically sound etymology for it,” Costa said.

See ‘Challenge’ on page 17



son with a name like “Kokomo” is from a ledger at Miami Chief Francis Godfroy’s Mississinewa River trading post showing that on June 27, 1838, “Koh Koh maw” and his wife paid \$12 for a barrel of flour.

Further, over the years the name has been translated variously to mean “she-bear,” “Black Walnut,” “the Diver,” or even “Old Woman.” (See “Kokomo challenge”, pg. 14) Finally, Foster, probably apocryphally, is long-quoted as having chosen the name because “It was the orneriest town on earth, so I named it after the orneriest Indian on earth – called it Kokomo.”

But did Kokomo even exist, and did Foster know such a man?

George Ironstrack, a citizen of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma and the assistant director and program director of the Education and Outreach Office of the Myaamia Center at Miami University in Ohio, says documenting the actual person is preferable to decoding the name. “The origin of the name ‘Kokomo’ is fuzzier and supported only by bad history,” he said.

Kokomo the man is in fact documented and is not mythological, Ironstrack said, and it’s possible to view him in a “fully human context.” He noted genealogical research definitively identifies a Miami native named Kokomo. “There is good evidence he was a member of an identifiable family group (in the Miami nation),” Ironstrack said. “We do know his family through their intermarriage with the Meshingomesia band and the Richardville family.”

Research from the Myaamia Center shows Kokomo was the uncle of Thomas Richardville, who was the chief of the Miami Nation from 1888 until 1910. Kokomo and Thomas’s mother, Kah-tah-kee-quah, were siblings. Thomas’s father, Pimicinwa, was the grandson of Jean Baptiste Richardville. Thomas

was thus the great-grandson of the aforementioned akima Richardville.

Kokomo’s family connection to the Meshingomesia family runs through his wife, Lo-pu-ge-quah. Her sister, Cakapia, was married to Metocinyah. Cakapia and Metocinya were the parents of the band’s most well-known leader Meshingomesia. While Kokomo and his family were not a part of the Meshingomesia band, they had a very strong connection through marriage.

Further supporting documentation includes the substantial 1873 Meshingomesia testimonials, a year-long U.S. government investigation to determine the proper partition of the Big Miami Reserve, the 35-square-mile area in north central Indiana whose band was led by Metocinyah’s eldest son, the akima Meshingomesia. The U.S.-appointed commissioners conducted extensive interviews to establish who had a claim to the reserve land as part of a changeover to private property ownership, based on their relationship to Meshingomesia.

This process actually provides clues to the man whose name in the Miami nation is “Koko-mo,” according to Ironstrack. His name is referenced several times in the testimonials in 1873. The testimonials record the oral testimony of Miami people, but the transcribers often failed to accurately record the sounds of Miami names. Ironstrack noted that Miami names were recycled within clans or families and can usually be readily identified and understood today. However, during treaties and interviews, like the testimonials, names were often anglicized in a way that makes it difficult to determine what the original name was. Thus “Kokomo” is probably just a distortion of sounds from the Miami language.

Intriguingly, Ironstrack noted David Foster is the only interviewee in the testimonials to call him “Ma-Ko-Ko-Mo.” In an interview with the amateur linguist Jacob Dunn in the early 1900s, Kokomo’s nephew, Thomas Richardville, claimed that the name Kokomo meant

“the diver” (to dive under), but this meaning cannot be verified today.

The Tall Leader

In the early 1920s, another tantalizing account surfaced about a powerful and benevolent Native American chief, who in fact lived many generations before the area was settled by European descendants. The story comes from Harrison Stewart, who came to Indiana from Virginia at age 10 with his parents in 1846 and witnessed the relocation of the various Native American tribes as well as the development and rapid growth of the city of Kokomo. The long-lived Stewart, whose father, Henry C. Stewart (a distant cousin of U.S. politician Henry Clay) reputedly built the 13th cabin in the town and is listed as Kokomo’s “first plasterer,” had an interesting life on its own terms: successful Kokomo building contractor; member of the Indiana General Assembly in 1909; the first city councilman elected from South Kokomo; supposedly built the first “free” gravel road in Kokomo (Albright near Vaile Avenue); and reportedly was the first man from Howard County to enlist in the Civil War (went in a private and came out a captain).

Capt. Stewart, age 85 at the time of a published interview and whose residence was recorded as 1022 S. Webster St., said his family had been on good terms with David Foster, and that the town “founder” in fact had related a somewhat different version of “Chief Kokomo” to him before he died. According to Stewart, Foster told him that Natives trading at his trading post had spoken of a legendary leader of the Miami peoples who was headquartered just west of Muncie. “Besides being of mighty physical strength he was a leader of warriors, and as such brought riches and happiness to the Miami tribe by gaining great grounds on which they could hunt,” Foster reportedly told Stewart. Foster said the leader was large – “a

veritable ‘giant’ who became the chieftain of them all.”

But new to the story Stewart related was that Foster seemed to imply that Chief Kokomo was known to him only through the tales told by the Indians who had visited Foster’s trading post – that Foster himself did not know him, only of him. And according to Foster, the name in English meant “he-bear.”

Stewart went on to describe the events surrounding the discovery of the “Indian bones” that ultimately were moved to the present-day Pioneer Cemetery on Purdum Street just south of Superior Street. As he relates the account from Foster, Stewart says Chief Kokomo eventually led hunting and fishing expeditions to the area of present-day Kokomo north of the Wildcat Creek, and in fact he died there during one such excursion. When a collection of Indian bones and grave goods were later uncovered during construction of a sawmill, the unusual length of one set of bones led the examining physician (Kokomo’s first doctor, Dr. Corydon Richmond) to conclude they were of a “giant more than seven feet tall and of great power.”

At this point in the discovery, Foster himself had arrived on scene, and hearing the doctor’s description excitedly proclaimed “Chief Kokomo! Chief Kokomo!” His enthusiasm clearly affirmed his choice of the name for his trading-post county-seat town, as well as ensuring the bones were re-interred properly.

For Ironstrack, the account of a “tall leader” is also likely apocryphal, and consistent with the desire to establish or enhance stories about a town’s beginnings. “It’s common for communities to create ‘origin myths,’” he said. But the name is less important than adding context to a chief Kokomo, and that his name lives on points to a positive reputation. “As a family leader, he was an akima, a band or village leader,” Ironstrack said. “He definitely was a ‘head man.’”

Challenge, continued from page 14

"The fact that a fluent Miami speaker like Kiilhsoohkwa knew the person 'Kokomo' but had no idea what the name meant may well indicate that it's not even a Miami word."

It's frustrating, but not uncommon in linguistic research, Costa said. "Most likely it is ultimately

from some Potawatomi or Miami word, but the pronunciation, transcriptions and translations of the name became so badly mangled so early on that the actual original pronunciation and meaning of the name are not now recoverable, unless much better new evidence comes to light in the old written records."

Sources

The "Chief Kokomo" articles are based on personal interviews and the examination of publicly available research resources.

Interviewees were the following: Dave Broman, director, Howard County Historical Society; artist Marcia K. Moore, Ciamar Studio; Jack and David Foster, current descendants of Kokomo founder David Foster; Sarah Siders, tribal secretary, Miami Nation of Indians of Indiana; and from the Myaamia Center at Miami (Ohio) University: George Ironstrack, assistant director and program director of the Education and Outreach Office, and Dr. David Costa, Language Research Office.

Research publications and resources: "Kokomo: A Pictorial History" and "Howard County: A Pictorial History" by Ned Booher; "Howard County Court-

house Memorial Book" 1937; "Travelers Protective Association Souvenir" May 1916; National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Meshingomesia Cemetery and Indian School, April 2012; "Howard County, Past and Present" Kokomo Journal, Feb. 4, 1870; "Death of Mrs. Elizabeth M. Foster" Kokomo Tribune, Feb. 2, 1871; "Items from the Court House" Kokomo Saturday Tribune, Aug. 6, 1881; "A Peep Into the Past" Kokomo Daily Tribune, Oct. 5, 1899; "Ko-ka-mah Was Not Chieftain" Undated newspaper article, Howard County Historical Society Collection; "The Chief Kokomo Legend" Kokomo Morning Times, Feb. 27, 1965; "Kokomo's Founder, David Foster, 'Skinned' in Land Purchase" Kokomo Morning Times, May 16, 1965; "A Touch of Nostalgia" Kokomo Tribune, July 22, 1979; "Little Known About City's Namesake" Kokomo Tribune, March 29, 1998.

Membership

Thanks to all who joined the Howard County Historical Society or renewed their memberships from November through January.

Joni Andreas
Friedemann Arnold
Andrew & Mary Baker
Andrew Barker
Evan Barker
Dee Bartley
Jerry & Connie Basham
Marsha Berry
Angie Bowman
Carol Cameron
Cory Carter
Janice Chase
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First Farmers Bank &
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Paul & Shelly Wyman



Another 'incredible' year for 'Christmas at the Seiberling'

By Dave Broman
HCHS Executive Director

It's always a pleasure – and often a surprise – to hear, “Wow, this is incredible. I can't believe I've never been here before!” when a guest walks into the foyer of Seiberling Mansion for the first time. We heard that a lot during December, along with, “This is even better than last year,” and “This is the best ever!” For those who decorate, host, and sponsor, their efforts are a gift of love to the community that is more than repaid by the smiles on faces and the glint in the eyes of the thousands of visitors during Christmas at the Seiberling.

A wonderful group of community-minded businesses joined the Wyman Group in spon-

soring the festivities. Solidarity Federal Credit Union, Ivy Tech Community College, Community First Bank, Duke Energy, Haynes International, and First Farmers Bank and Trust made it possible for thousands of people to tour the mansion for free.

The decorators, under the unflagging leadership of Peggy Hobson, put in hundreds of hours altogether. They included Tri Kappa, Lynn Smith, Connie Hess, Psi Iota Xi, Daughters of the American Revolution – General James Cox Chapter, Altrusa, Haynes International – Kathy Young, Goldie Snavelly, the Master Chapter of Beta Sigma Phi, Ivy Tech Community College, Great Faith Christian Center, Jane Kincaid and Juanita Martin-Davis, Symposium, Kokomo Howard County

Public Library, Leadership Kokomo Class of 2016, Melissa Kidwell and Justina Malin, Dana Osburn, Janet Schick, Darrell and Bruce Blasius, Barbara Bothast, Patti Host, Rebecca Lepper, and Mary Groome.

The top vote-getters for the People's Choice were: (1st) Darrell and Bruce Blasius for their third floor decorations, (2nd) the Master Chapter of Beta Sigma Phi for the second floor children's room, (3rd) Melissa Kidwell and Justina Malin for the second floor "Pioneer Room", and (4th) Altrusa for the dining room. Whatever the vote total, there's no denying that every room was beautiful and every decorator shared their Christmas spirit in a special way.

Children were invited to pay close attention to candy jars placed around the mansion and guess the amount of candy in all the jars together. The grand prize for the person whose guess was closest to the actual number was a prize package full of games and toys donated by Comics Cubed, Carver Community Center, STAR Financial, Wings Etc., and the Sound of Music. It went to 10-year-old Mary Rose of Kokomo, whose guess of 233 was only two pieces of candy away from the actual count.

'Christmas' success a community effort

The Howard County Historical Society owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to all those who made it possible for the community and our many guests from around the world to celebrate another "Christmas at the Seiberling."

Visitors were treated to live musical performances by the Kokomo Men of Note, Kokomo Brass, Vivace Flute Trio, FROGS (Four Really Old Guys Singing), Lloyd, Laura and Michelle Schwartzendruber, Brass Works, Jeff and Dave, The Coventry Carolers, and the Carolers Ensemble from First Evangelical Presbyterian Church. Mary Rowe helped arrange for many of the performances.

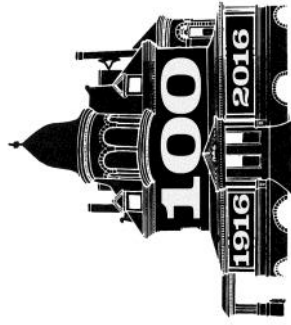
We're grateful for the support of our many volunteers, who helped host and give tours, served refreshments, cleaned up, answered questions, greeted visitors and so much more. Opening night featured carriage rides provided by Breezy Lane Carriage Company and a visit from the jolly old elf and his helpers, Jim Denny and Paula and Rob Adair. The rosy-cheeked gent in red was back for several more nights after that in the person of Rob Betts.

The local media, radio and newspaper, were instrumental in getting the word out, and we owe a debt of gratitude to them: *Kokomo Herald*, *Kokomo Perspective*, *Kokomo Tribune*, WWKI, and Z92.5FM.



The Kokomo Men of Note were among several musical groups to entertain guests at the Seiberling Mansion.

**Howard County
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