

# Was there a silver mine in Owen County?

What county in Indiana "worth its salt" does not have a few local legends to tantalize each succeeding generation of historians. Owen County has one of the most intriguing ones.

The story is included in *Fact & Folklore of Owen County* written by Dixie Kline. Readers are left wondering whether it just might be true after all.

A man and wife by the name of Baker settled down on land given to her by her family and noticed that there were many signs of recent Indian habitation — flints, arrowheads and some strange symbols carved into the trees. There is no evidence to the effect that at first the Bakers attached any great significance to those things.

It was in later years that a man by the name of Hughie Warren turned up at their farm with some startling information. He claimed that he came from Kansas and had been witness to the dying statement of a blond, blue-eyed man captured by Indians when he was a child and reared by them.

Included in the dying man's statement was the promise of great wealth for Warren. He was to come to Owen County and follow certain landmarks which would lead



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

him to the entrance of a cave. Within the cave was a stone wall that concealed a silver mine.

According to the story, the Indian was supposed to have told Warren that there was so much silver he would "never again have to shoe his horses with iron."

Continued Kline, "On hearing the story, Mr. Baker considered the possibility of the mine remote, but he agreed to exchange room and board for Hugh's help on the farm with the understanding that he could spend Sundays in his search for the cave. They agreed if the treasure were ever found, it would be divided equally."

Warren's Sundays were spent carefully searching through the woods for the stream and trees with Indian symbols. On a Sun-

day hunt one of the Bakers' hogs who was foraging in the woods, suddenly disappeared right before Warren's eyes.

The hog had fallen into a cave whose entrance had been concealed. There was other evidence of Indian presence. After a considerable amount of excavating, Warren did find some rock that contained ore. Unfortunately, he died of typhoid fever before he could realize his dream.

There was no more activity in the cave until the late 1800s when B. Schweitzer and his brother-in-law, Louis Levistein, took a lease on the land to re-explore in earnest.

Wrote Kline, "A hold 30 was opened. Schweitzer sent east for a mining engineer named Thomas and a vein of mineral was located with a heavier lode about 100 feet from the cave in which Hughie Warren had dug for such a long time, and they began operations in a new location."

They were supposed to have found a stone wall believed to hide a "treasure room." At 65 feet the cave/mine started yielding some ore assayed at \$2.50 to the ton, Schweitzer ran into bad luck when his Brazil business burned and his wife died.

The Bakers' daughter had married a man

by the name of Gilmore, and they continued to live at the old homeplace. They provided room and board for the mine workers, including the engineer, Thomas.

Thomas and Gilmore were forbidden by the Schweitzer heirs to work the mine, but when the lease had expired the two men began again. They put down a new shaft and found the sandstone wall described in the original death-bed story.

When Thomas and Gilmore opened a hole in the wall and put a torch inside to see what they could find, it went out. Another misfortune struck. Thomas slipped on ice, broke his hip and died.

The Gilmores doggedly continued the work, husband and wife, but they were too afraid to venture past the opening in the wall. Three men, Ralph Edwards, J.F. Crane and the Rev. R.E. Mangas took a lease on the land and were determined to find out the truth about the "mine."

What they found were indications of Indian presence and a blind shaft. A newspaper article at that time hinted of "highly interesting" features of the three men's work.

Kline's second volume of Owen County history contains another silver mine story.

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