

# Neighbor happened upon 'shocking scene' of murder

In the history of crimes committed in Monroe County, one of the most horrible ones happened in 1861. It is referred to in the *Histories of Lawrence and Monroe Counties, Indiana*, and "Pop" Hall's *Historic Treasures*.

During a September morning neighbors who went to the John B. Cox home at "old" Unionville were met with a horrible sight. The whole family, according to Hall, had been "horribly butchered."

Continued Hall, "Within the house a shocking scene met the startled eyes of the first neighbor who made the discovery of the awful murder. Mrs. Cox (who would have been about 24 years old) lay upon a bed with her throat slashed from ear to ear, while the husband and father of the family, John B. Cox, was found laying unconscious in his own blood on the porch of the house, weakened from the loss of blood from several deep cuts and severe bruises about his neck and head."

The neighbor did not have far to look for



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

other members of the family. The little girl lying next to her mother had a throat that was "horribly mangled." She was unconscious.

Near the bed was another girl, and the neighbor must have been nauseated by the sight. She was dead, and her head was half-severed from her body.

No one would have blamed the neighbor if he had run from the house to get others to continue the search. Perhaps he did, but there were others yet to be found.

There was a trundle bed with two smaller children. It contained a girl with deep cuts on her neck and a boy who was unconscious from loss of blood.

Hall commented on the latter. "This little boy, it seems, was not a member of the Cox family. He was considerably scratched and bruised, and evidence showed plainly that the little fellow had put up a terrible fight for his life, as the bedding was torn and scattered over the room."

Needless to say, when the word about the tragedy spread around the Unionville community, a huge crowd gathered. Rumor had it that Mr. Cox was feuding with his neighbors, and there may have been some whispering about that as the crowd gagged at the house and the carnage.

So persistent was the rumor that several of the neighbors were arrested "upon suspicion of having had a hand in the terrible crime." It was necessary to take the prisoners to Bloomington for "safe-keeping." Hall reported that at their trial the neighbors were acquitted of the charges.

Meanwhile, "the dead and wounded were removed to the residence of William Cox, near

the scene of the tragedy." When the authorities could talk to John Cox, he told them that several men and been involved in the attack. They had knocked him senseless, and he knew nothing until he heard the shouts of his neighbors at the scene.

The crime was never solved, but there were plenty of rumors.

One was that John Cox, who had had some "mental problems," had committed the murders. He disappeared from the county shortly after the trial of the neighbors.

The other story about Cox came from a Monroe County man on furlough from the army during the Civil War. He "...stated that John B. Cox had reported for roll call in his company one morning with other recruits, but when recognized the man disappeared and it was believed that he went into the Confederate lines. That was the last time he was ever heard of by Monroe County people."

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