

Silver and gold fever struck many in this area

In her book, *Fact & Folklore of Owen County*, Dixie Kline related a story called the "Indian Silver Mine Mystery." It recalled the history of a lost mine supposedly worked by the Indians and had the added detail of a deathbed disclosure about it.

Inside a cove in the woods could be found a cave with a man made limestone wall at one end. Behind the wall was supposed to be a silver mine. According to the story that Kline recreated, the man who uncovered the mine found "enough mineral to encourage him to continue," but he died before he reached the "mother lode."

There may be several counties in Indiana with similar stories. One suspiciously like the Owen County one happened in Lawrence County.

On Oct. 15, 1881, the *Bloomington Telephone* reprinted an article that had appeared in the *Bedford Magnet*. It described the current activities of a 72-year-old farmer by the name of John Judah, who lived near Guthrie.

Apparently Judah had been digging for



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

some time on his farm. In fact, the hole was 18 feet deep. What was he looking for? You guessed it — gold or silver.

Explained the *Magnet*, "There is a well-known legend about a boy who was captured by the Indians up White River and brought down in a canoe to the mouth of a small stream, which he always declared was Spider Creek."

Continued the story, the boy was blindfolded and taken some distance into the country. After the Indians uncovered his eyes, the boy was taken to a hole in the ground. There the Indians showed him what looked like silver ore.

"That is the story the captive, who once

lived in Bedford, used to tell in his old age."

His tale had inspired many men to hunt for the mine, but they had not succeeded in finding it. Judah had found in the Guthrie area some seams of bright ore which yielded "a button of metal like silver when melted."

The *Magnet* recalled that gold and silver fever had raged in the Salt Creek area of Lawrence, Monroe and Brown counties for a long time. A Professor Cox, who was the state geologist, said he once came across a stone in the road between Bloomington and Fayetteville that had quite a bit of silver in it.

Commented the newspaper, "It is a well-known fact that there are small quantities of gold on Bean Blossom creek. Periodically, self-styled prospectors formed a partnership and worked the creeks in Brown County, but the yield was never enough to keep the enterprises going.

Judah apparently told a reporter he had found "a good quantity of kaolin (used in making ceramics) and also silver and lead." He must have found something to keep him

digging all through the heat of an Indiana summer.

The *Magnet* reporter had been farther afield than Lawrence County looking for other prospectors. He learned that "A few years ago a party of civilized Indians appeared in Morgan County and camped there awhile. It was said that they spent their time there in digging around some of the high White River bluffs. Suddenly, they disappeared and no more was heard of them.

Added the newspaper, some people in Morgan County thought the Indians were looking for precious metals.

Concluded the *Magnet*, "Nothing is dearer to the heart of the average Salt Creeker than these traditions. Some of them pretend to be regular magicians in the way of discovering minerals. One thing is certain, and that is that there are small quantities of valuable metals on Salt Creek and tributaries. It is doubtful whether they will ever be discovered in paying quantities, though."

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