

# **Spanker's Branch**

**One Man's Journey into the History of a Ditch  
Set Against the Background of 1800's Rockport, Indiana**



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**Researched and Prepared by Raymond Joe Dawson**

# Spanker's Branch

## Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1 - Introduction to Spanker's Branch .....	3
Chapter 2 - Lovers Swinging Bridge .....	6
Chapter 3 - John and Mollie Killian's Home .....	9
Chapter 4 - Skating on Eigenmann's Pond .....	16
Chapter 5 - Lake Drain Bottoms Monster .....	19
Chapter 6 - Spanker's Branch and Lincoln's Flatboat .....	21
Chapter 7 - Spanker's Branch in the Local News .....	27
Chapter 8 - Haines Family Lands near Spanker's Branch .....	30
Chapter 9 - Spanker's Branch Summary .....	31
Chapter 10 - Spanker's Branch Today .....	35

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Spanker's Branch



**One man's journey into the history of a ditch,  
Set against the background of 1800's Rockport, Indiana.**

Or how a note in *The Rockport Journal* on September 12, 1878, about Tom Langdon hurting his foot working on the levee over Spanker's Branch, led to the news of the July 2019 burning of a historic home on Elm Street in Rockport.

Research and Memories of Raymond Joe Dawson

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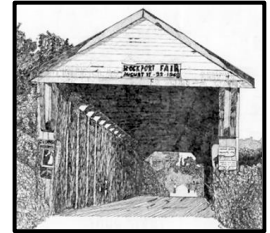
### **We Lead in Digging up Dirt!**



*The Spencer County Historian* is the leader in “digging up dirt” on historical ditches! One example is our research on **Lake Drain**, today it is called **Huffman's Ditch**, near St. Bernard's Cemetery on the north edge of Rockport, Indiana. This is part of our research as reported in newsletter Issue 120, December 1, 2018.

**Selection from *The History of Warrick, Spencer and Perry Counties, Indiana,*  
1885 by Goodspeed Publishers,  
Chapter IV, Organization of the County, Page 277**

The place selected was known far and near as “Hanging Rock,” from a large projection which overhung the river, and which has long since fallen off. The name “Rockport” was selected from the obvious reason of the presence of the rock and its location on the river. As will be seen by the report of the Locating Commissioners, the county actually received one-half of 240 acres of land and \$1,550 in money. The citizens who donated the \$250 for the construction of a bridge across Lake Drain (This is the creek on Hwy. 66 at Rockport city limits near the Catholic cemetery.--Ed.) were Willis Snyder, William Bennett, Enoch Berry, William Small, Azel W. Dorsey, Martin Stuteville, James Small, Samuel Snyder and Henry Small.



In 1865-66, a bridge was built over Lake Drain for \$36,656.84.



Another example of our “dirt digging” research is **Cotton’s Pond** which drains into the Ohio River on north Fifth Street. This article described some of the history of the area in Issue 119, September 1, 2018.

**Lafe Langdon Pays “Birthday” Visit to Rockport Landmark**

*The Rockport Journal, May 18, 1951*

Back in the days of the early Spencer County settlers, a large gully extended from the Ohio River clear across what is now North Rockport. As the city grew, levees were built to permit the traffic of that day to pass north and south, and one of these--across what finally was known as “Cotton’s Pond”--became known as North Fifth Street as the city developed and expanded.

Need for better traffic facilities was recognized by county officials in the years following the Civil War and finally, in 1876, the commissioners completed plans for rebuilding the existing levee and constructing a wide stone arch to support “modern” traffic.

First official action was taken a year earlier when local citizens filed a petition for the improvement. The commissioners--John Hiley, D. J. Axton and Zack Klahn--appointed J. D. Armstrong to draw plans and specifications for the proposed culvert and levee.

The arch and 30-foot levee, still standing and in use today, were “born” by action of the commissioners on May 22, 1876.



And so with this issue, we continue our historic exploration of ditches. As we have said before, historical research is like a spider’s web, with one item leading to another. So goes our research on Spanker’s Branch. “What is Spanker’s Branch?” you ask. That is the same question we asked ourselves when we read the following article about it while doing research on another subject.



## Local News

*The Rockport Journal*, September 12, 1878, D. Hayford, Editor and Proprietor

Tom. Langdon, Sr., got his foot badly hurt while at work on the levee across **Spanker's Branch**, one day last week.



### Other interesting items in the same Local News section of the above newspaper:

A curl found by a highly susceptible young gent at Masonic Hall; the owner can receive further information at this office.

“Stryker Tom” Brown has taken the Spencer House and will run that institution as a first class hotel.

Parents be just in the criticism of the teacher of your children and never disparage the teacher in presence of the children.



The article about Tom Langdon, Sr. being injured while working on “Spanker's Branch” started our search for more information. The Spencer County Surveyor's office provided a list of regulated (legal) drains in the county. None were named Spanker's Branch.

There are only three levees in Rockport--one is on North Fifth Street through Cotton's Pond. Another is on North Seventh Street also through Cotton's Pond. This was explored in Issue 119, September 1, 2018. The other is on South Third Street that is over a drain. That ditch drains an area from the old Rockport High School and Rockport Pioneer Cemetery on South Fifth Street. It is suspected the Third Street levee was where Langdon injured his foot.

The web of research will branch out and take one on a journey to explore:

- Lovers on a swinging bridge,
- Mollie's home burning,
- Ice skating,
- Killing of the Lake Drain monster,
- Abe Lincoln's flatboat trip and flatboat construction, and
- The landing of the Haines Family.

However, the one element that will remain consistent throughout all of these is

## **SPANKER'S BRANCH!**

Further research found the following:

## Chapter 2

### Lover's Swinging Bridge

#### Local News

*The Rockport Journal*, January 31, 1878, D. Hayford, Editor and Proprietor

The bridge over **Spanker's Branch** is being repaired. All right!



The photo above is in the Historical Society's collection at the Genealogy Room in the Rockport library. Written on the back of the photo is *Mollie Baumeister of Stendal, Indiana married John Killian. Mollie on the old footbridge, 1901, South Third Street in Rockport, Indiana.*

If this photo was taken in 1901, it means the bridge was up after the Third Street levee was constructed as articles in Chapter 7 show the contract to build the levee over the Branch was awarded in 1878. However, the photo does say South Third Street for the location of the footbridge. It is possible that the bridge was kept after the levee was constructed. According to several sources, the bridge was a favorite place for lovers to meet.

Also mysterious is the water and boats under the bridge. The Ohio River at that time must have been lower as the dams had not been constructed. Today, the drain is just a small ditch emptying into the river. It is possible that the area had been filled when the levee was constructed. These questions may be answered later.



Kate Evans Blake was featured as one of the “Women of Spencer County” in *The Historian*, Issue 97, July 12, 2013. She wrote several books, one being “Hearts Haven” and the other “The Stuff of a Man.” The latter was about Rockport but was renamed in the book as Blufftown. People from Rockport were also renamed. The following about Kate is from Issue 97:

## **Katharine Evans Blake**

How about a young girl who marries her high school principal? What a scandal in the 1800’s! Well, not quite, but it makes an interesting introduction to Kate Evans Blake. William McKendree Blake was principal at Rockport High School 1873-1876. In 1873, the Rockport Collegiate Institute was sold to the City of Rockport and became Rockport High School. Kate graduated from the Institute in 1873, sharing top class honors at the age of 15. William and Katharine were married August 28, 1876; a reasonable length of time after her graduation and after William became Superintendent of Public Schools in New Castle, Indiana. In 1907, he became Principal and Founder of the Blake School in Minneapolis, Minnesota which is still in existence today.

Katharine is listed in *Who Was Who in America*, Volume 4; *Indiana Authors and Their Books*, Page 34 and *Woman’s Who’s Who of America*, 1914-15. Her ashes are buried at Sunset Hill Cemetery.

In her book, “The Stuff of a Man”, Kate has a Chapter 5, The Foot-Bridge. The following is the first two pages from the chapter. We believe she is describing the foot-bridge in the previous photo. The book is about Rockport although the name was changed to Blufftown.

*The decision as to the Van Weller legacy did not press, and Clay Hardesty found much to interest him while it was pending. Young Shafter was a frank, friendly, buoyant-souled companion, Judge Ochiltree had an original flavor and his daughter-in-law a charm that grew upon him. She seemed compounded of all those sweetly alluring traits that had pleased him in real women, and all the poetic enchantment of the women of whom a young man dreams.*

*As he strolled down a quiet street of Blufftown in the freshness of early morning, a delicious sense of expectancy that is the very essence of youth thrilled him. He went on from cross street to cross street, greeting the new vistas as if they were the shifting scenery of a play, feeling the advance of the drama in his heart toward some climax of delight, and, at the same time, feeling that it was all fancy, all a pretty illusion, likely to fade at a touch.*

*He came to a ravine spanned by a foot-bridge perhaps a hundred feet long, looking like a causeway of gossamer stretched by fairies from hill to bluff with the river sweeping by on one side, while a beech wood covered slopes and hollow on the other. Half-way across this bridge he leaned upon the guarding rails and let his fancy rove, following down the river or across its sun-smitten*

*stream to the corn-valleys and environing hills of Kentucky. He willed to think of his own future, to call up the clear-cut visions of a career definitely mapped, and fell into dreams.*

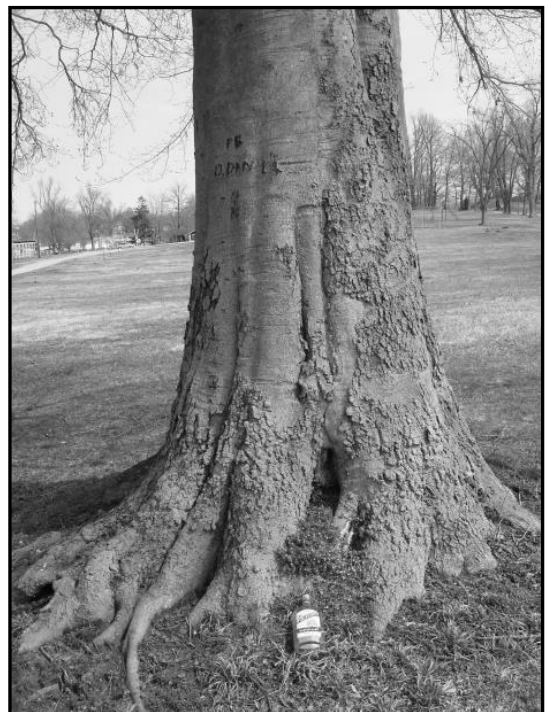
*A stranger, he did not know that this spot had long been the haunt of lovers quivering under mated steps and echoing vows and kisses. Even the rough guard-rails upon which he leaned had had their sympathetic thrills under the contact of young arms and throbbing breasts leaning together upon them for so many years that the foot-bridge had become the shrine of old memory as of young love; and it was not strange that its soft obsession should dominate the young man idling within its influence. And, yielding to it, his dreams drew closer about the idea of Mrs. Ochiltree, clinging there like winged seeds that have found congenial soil.*



In the book above, Blake mentions the beech trees covering the slopes of the hollow. The beech forest extended from the Ohio River up the ravine to the Olde Rockport Pioneer Cemetery, covering the campus of the Rockport Collegiate Institute and on out west to the City Park. The number of beech trees, which are slow growing, in the area are few in number today as noted in the following from *The Historian*, Issue 98, October 2, 2013.

## Beech Trees

Beech trees were a major part of the hardwood forest that made up much of the western side of Rockport in the early 1800's. They spread out from the hills and hollows near the river and the Olde Rockport Cemetery to the land that now comprises Rockport City Park. During a recent count, three beech trees were still living on what was the campus of the Rockport Collegiate Institute/Rockport High School and is now the location of Rockport Elementary. Eight beeches are holding on at the Rockport City Park. In the past, they provided shelter for the Spencer County Fair goers as well as a medium for lovers to proclaim themselves by carving their initials in the trunks as in the picture at the left. They also provided a resting place for some to have a "cold drink" as is shown in a photo at the right.



## Chapter 3

### John and Mollie Killian's Home

The photo above, at the beginning of Chapter 2, is of Mollie Baumeister of Stendal, Indiana who married John Killian. Mollie is on the old footbridge in 1901 on South Third Street in Rockport, Indiana. It is believed the bridge is over Spanker's Branch. John (Uncle Jack) Killian was a photographer in Rockport. He probably took the photo of Mollie on the swinging bridge. Nothing was said in his obituary about his photographs but many of them are in the hands of the Indiana Historical Society.

This is where the web of research takes a different turn to explore the Killian's home while an investigation was being conducted on Spanker's Branch.

The Spencer County Recorder's Office had the following concerning John and Mollie's home on Elm Street.

September 16, 1902

This Indenture Witnesseth, that Mary M. Howland, and Lewis Howland, her husband, Annie M. Arnold, and W. P. Arnold, her husband of Spencer County, in the State of Indiana Convey and Warrant to John M. Killian of Spencer County, in the State of Indiana for the sum of Three Hundred (300) Dollars, the following Real Estate, in Spencer County, in the State of Indiana, to wit: The legal description of the property is not listed here but refers to the home below.



The preceding photo from our Genealogy Room shows the Killian house at 310 Elm Street in Rockport being painted. The picture is from the early 1900's. Notice the outhouse at the left in the photo near the side door. Outhouses were still in use on Main Street in Rockport in the late 1950's. The brick home on the right is currently owned by Carolyn Kell who uses the lower portion for her accounting business. Notice the sign on the house and on the light pole. The sign on the house says J. M. Killian, Photographer. The sign on the light pole says Do Not Hitch Here. Apparently, you should not hitch your horse to the light pole. The pole also has wooden angles nailed to it so workers can climb it.



This photo from our Genealogy Room collection shows the same Killian house but from the alley south of the house. It shows several bird houses along with Uncle Jack's bee hives. The photo was taken January 11, 1912, after a big snow, with the mercury going 12 below zero. This temperature was likely to freeze ponds making them safe for ice skating as will be discussed later.



The same backyard of the Killian home in the summertime. Note the two ladies dressed in their finest whites. The sign above the shed on the left side says: J. M. Killian's Bee - Yard. There are at least 18 bee hives in the photo along with grape vines growing on a fence and a fruit tree that is fenced in to protect it from critters.





Recent photo of John and Mary Killian's home on 310 Elm Street before the 2019 fire.



The Killian's home after a July 2, 2019, fire.

On July 2, 2019, a fire destroyed the former home of John Killian, Rockport photographer and beekeeper. The fire was so intense that it destroyed the house on the left and seriously damaged the home on the right which is Carolyn Winkler Kell's accounting business. She is a 1966 graduate of South Spencer High School. Two vehicles in front of the home were also burned. A home across the street to the north suffered siding damage from the heat.



This recent photo taken from the alley after the fire shows the burned home. The brick building on the left was the Feigel Dodge dealership and the brick building on the right is the back of the old Conner Ford dealership. The bee hives are long gone.



## **Retired Business Man Dies Here**

From Genealogy Room, Date and Newspaper Unknown

(Society Cemetery Book lists John M. Killian, 1861 - 1934; Mary E. 1864 - 1959)

Heart Disease Causes Death of J. M. Killian, Highly Respected Citizen--Funeral Held This Thursday

J. M. (Uncle Jack) Killian, died about 2:30 o'clock Tuesday afternoon at his home on Elm Street, after an illness of heart disease. Funeral services were held at 2:30 this Thursday afternoon at the Trinity Lutheran Church, conducted by Rev. Charles H. Armstrong of Shelbyville, Tenn., assisted by Rev. Karl W. Kramer. Interment was in Sunset Hill Cemetery.

### **Obituary**

John M. Killian, well known as Jack, the son of James Killian and Nancy Burkhart Killian, was born on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of May, 1861, on a farm in Spencer County, Indiana, near Little Pigeon Church, and homed there with his parents, one brother and four sisters, all of whom have long departed, except a brother, Robert Killian of Idaho, and two sisters, Mrs. Myrtle Horsman and Mrs. Laura Ehmer, both of Spencer County.

When seventeen years of age, he apprenticed himself to August Tonisi, at Grandview, for three years in the tinner's trade. Later at Stendal, Pike County, Indiana, he merchandised in hardware for a brief period, and returning from Stendal in 1891, he farmed near Bradley Station until 1899, when he moved to the home in Rockport, where he died on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1931, at the age of 69 years, 10 months and 17 days. (The date of his death was read on his stone as 1934 according to the Historical Society's cemetery book. It was probably misread.--Ed.)

On December 26, 1899, at Stendal, he was married to Mary E. Bauemeister, who survives him. They were childless.

He fraternized with the Modern Woodmen of America and united in full communion with the Trinity Lutheran Church of Rockport on July 20, 1924.

Of genial and affable manners and disposition, yet his physical and moral courage and his lofty conception of duty and right nerved him to meet squarely every emergency, and always to measure up to the standard of a worthy citizen, and unfailing friend and an upright man.

Quick to forgive and forget the faults of others, he spread the mantle of charity over the foibles of his fellows. Naturally robust, buoyant, high spirited and reacting to the humorous side of things. In youth and early manhood he was active, vivacious and good company; however, after middle life his spirit was toned down, perhaps by the gradual approach of the illness which finally carried him away, and also, by the realization that the hand of death was constantly outstretched before him. Later, his activities in every way being restricted, he devoted himself to cultural studies, becoming a refined and agreeable companion. He delighted in the affairs of every day finding quiet pleasure in his garden with his flowers, trees, bees and birds, which he well knew.

In his lonely hours of pain, he safely relied on the selfless devotion of his good wife, Mary, and how many sweet and tender memories and traditions cluster around that name, the first and the last!

His was the true philosophy of life and to this effect: Do not withhold from a friend words and acts of kindly sympathy until after the final tragedy of death, and then vainly place upon his pulseless heart wreaths of precious flowers and immortelles, wet with your tears shed out of futile regret for your indifferent silence toward him while he was here; but rather give unto him, while living, old fashioned roses, and forget-me-nots, in acts of encouragement and cheer, whose beauty and perfume never cease, because they are nourished in the human breast.



It is interesting that the above obituary does not mention anything about John Killian being a photographer. There was a sign on his house proclaiming such and many historic photos of the area have his stamp on them.

The Indiana Historical Society has his collection that survived. This is some of their information:

Manuscript Materials: 2 document cases, 5 reels of microfilm; Visual Materials: 1 box of photographs, 8 boxes of glass plate negatives, 4 OVA photograph folders, 4 copy negatives. It dates from 1900 to 1906.



John and Mary Killian's tombstone at Sunset Hill Cemetery in Rockport.  
The stone reads: Mary E. 1864 - 1959; John M. 1861 - 1931.

### **Biographical Sketch from Indiana Historical Society**

John M. Killian, was born on May 20 1861 in Spencer County, Indiana. He was one of six children of James Killian (31 December 1834 - 15 September 1899) and spent his childhood near Little Pigeon Church in Spencer County. At the age of seventeen, he apprenticed himself to the tinner's trade in Grandview, Indiana. Sometime later, he merchandised hardware in Stendal until 1891, when he moved to Bradley Station and became a farmer. In 1899, he moved to Rockport, bought a farm, and married Mary E. Bauermeister on 26 December of that year. The couple did not have children.

Through his diaries ranging from the years 1900 - 1904, we know that Killian was an industrious and intelligent man. Killian bought his first Kodak camera in September, 1901 and fell in love with photography. By October, 1901, Killian had built his own darkroom and was spending increasing amounts of time with his new interest. In August 1902, he became a professional photographer after he bought a Pony Premo No. 5 for \$45 and began making and printing photographs for money; on 10 September 1902, he sold a photograph to the *Indianapolis News*. Little else is known about Killian. Mrs. Killian survived her husband by several years after his death on 7 April 1931. In the years following his death, she sold most of his negatives and photographs to collectors.

The collection was acquired through three different donations from two donors. Donor Bert R. Fenn obtained the original prints, copy prints and negatives, and original glass negatives with the G numbering system from a Rockport antique dealer who had acquired them from Killian's widow. Nine of the copy prints were made by a Tell City photographer and are among those donated by Fenn. Bert Fenn sent along notes describing four of Killian's photographs and a newspaper clipping from the *Indianapolis News* depicting Killian's photograph of the Harry Brown stranded on a sandbar in the Ohio River at Rockport.

Donor John Haines also contributed to the collection. Haines acquired his part of the collection through his grandfather, who bought the Killian's house after the death of Mrs. Killian. The negatives had been left in the house at the time of its sale. This set of negatives is numbered 1 - 80. It is not known whether this numbering system is Killian's or was assigned by IHS at the time of acquisition. Mr. Haines also donated Killian's personal diaries from 1900 through 1904.

## Chapter 4

### Skating on Eigenmann's Pond

The photo of the pond at the beginning of Chapter 2 must be what is referred to in the newspaper article below. Ice skating on ponds was a popular activity years ago. Perhaps you remember a parent, grandparent or other relative talking about skating on a pond or lake. One person said he remembered an old-timer saying, when he was young, that you could skate down frozen creeks.

The writer remembers playing ice hockey (without skates) on Lake Alda at the Rockport City Park in the 1950's. A 2" x 2" board was used for a stick and an empty beer can for a puck. Also remembered was exploring the basement of an abandoned warehouse that stood near the entrance to the park. It was full of water and would freeze in the winter making an indoor skating rink. If the ice would have broken, the person's body wouldn't have been found for a long time.

The author's father, Ralph Joe Dawson and father-in-law William Raymond Miller were both poor when growing up. However, both owned a pair of ice skates which is surprising to people. Today, it is rare to see a pond with ice thick enough to stand on in our winters.



#### The Dangers of Historical Information

An uncle, Carl Lehr, related many tales of walking across the Ohio River when it froze. According to him, one could walk across the river to the Kentucky side and back safely. Of course this was a time when the river level was much lower due to the absence of dams and the climate was much colder.

As a young child, that always stuck in my mind. One winter in the 1950's, the Ohio River partially froze over. It was frozen out from the bank a good distance but did not completely freeze. A friend of mine, we'll call him Dickie, and the writer decided we would walk on the river just like our relatives did. Our plan was to start at the lower landing and walk on the ice to the upper landing at the sand and gravel plant.

The two of us made it about one third of the way when I looked down at the ice near our feet. There was a hole in it with the muddy river water gushing downstream. We quickly decided to get off the ice and back safely to land all the while wondering how dumb teenagers can be. Moral: Don't try to imitate your elders unless it is safe to do so.



## Skating

*The Rockport Journal*, December 16, 1878, D. Hayford, Editor and Proprietor



Eigenmann's Pond on **Spanker's Branch**, has been the scene of the liveliest skating season that Rockport has ever seen before. The ice has been in the best possible condition and as high as fifty persons, of both sexes have been spinning, carving, sculling, cutting High Dutch, etc., at one time there.

H. C. Pentecost furnished two stoves, and Sid Stocking, and others contributed coal, and the result has been a joyful season for lovers of the fine art of skating. The great improvements in skates, as well as their cheapness, also, have contributed to make this rare amusement more than usually popular this winter.



## Local News

*The Rockport Journal*, January 2, 1879

A Happy New Year to you all. Don't quarrel with anybody this week, nor next, for that matter.

The attics and closets have received a terrible overhauling the past week, and all the old skates, skate straps and such, have been brought into requisition, and the average small boy is away on the pond cutting dog stars and the like.

Five hundred boys a day, more or less, were skating on Eigenmann's Pond at the foot of Third Street last week.

Ph. Eigenmann has just finished a very large and convenient ice house below the new levee across Spanker's Branch. A pond nearby will enable him to store a large amount of pure ice at small expense.

(This new levee is today South Third Street over Spanker's Branch. Eigenmann's Pond was to the east and a swinging bridge was used by lovers and others to span the area before the levee was constructed. Today Spanker's Branch is a small ditch flowing into the Ohio River. In the past, a pork processing plant and lumber company as well as other businesses were in this area.)



## Rockport City Council

*The Rockport Democrat*, May 22, 1908

A petition of citizens alleging that the Eigenmann Mill Pond near Washington Street is a nuisance and asking its abatement was referred to the board of health with instructions to investigate and have the same abated if found to be as alleged.



In the Atlas of Spencer County, Indiana, 1879, there is an advertisement for John Eigenman [sic], proprietor of Pearl Mill. The map shows the location of Pearl Mill at the corner of Washington Street and Old Plank Road. That would be the southeast corner of Washington and Lincoln Avenue today. In 1879, the Old Plank Road ran diagonally, through a block of property, from St. Bernard's school to Washington Avenue at the corner of Lincoln. It is possible that Eigenmann owned more than one mill and this pond is not the one on Spanker's Branch.



The arrow in the above map is pointing at the discharge of Spanker's Branch into the Ohio River. Below Center Street and to the right of Third Street is an area the City of Rockport hopes to turn into a new park and boat ramp.

In the next chapter, a monster makes it to Spanker's Branch.

## Chapter 5

### Lake Drain Bottoms Monster

The following articles came from the Baker's Creek Baptist Church web site concerning a monster that roamed around Lake Drain up the river from Rockport in the 1880's. This is currently called Huffman Ditch and is near St. Bernard's Catholic Cemetery. Though the story starts north of Rockport at Lake Drain, it ends at Spanker's Branch. Our web of research branches out on a journey to find the monster at Spanker's Branch.

*The Rockport Journal*

Rockport, Indiana, Thursday, August 4, 1881

Great excitement prevails over the animal that is said to be roaming in Lake Drain bottoms, seeking whom he may devour. A German living near the covered bridge on the river road, (Issue 120 featured the two covered bridges of Rockport.--Ed.) says he and his family have had glimpses of it, and that it is very ferocious in its aspect. There are some unimaginative people who would rob the tale of its glamour by asserting that it is a shepherd dog sheared to resemble a lion.

*The Rockport Journal*

Rockport, Indiana, Thursday, August 11, 1881

The Lion Hunt

We mentioned last week the rumor that a lion was roving at large in the Lake Drain bottoms, just above town and that many men and big boys were hunting it down. Fifty persons armed mostly with shotguns, heavily charged with buckshot, were in eager search after the "varmint." Each tired with a landible [sic] ambition to distinguish himself as the slayer of the native of the tropical jungles of Africa. All manner of reports as to the size of the animal, were rife. Some said it was as big as a two year old mule, others declared it was still larger.

*The Rockport Journal*

Rockport, Indiana, Thursday, August 25, 1881

That Horrid Animal.

The wild and ferocious animal that has been haunting the wilds of Lake Drain bottoms for a month past has made its appearance in the southern part of town, just across **Spanker's Branch**. It has been seen by any number of the residents of that neighborhood within the past twenty-four hours, and their imaginative brains, together with the terrible deprivations [sic] it has committed, has caused a greater excitement in this vicinity than the arrival of Barnum's circus could possibly have done. Many superstitious people are of the opinion that it is Satan in disguise, "seeking whom he may devour," and that it is but one of the many tokens given to us proving the existence of a "hereafter." If such is the true state of affairs, a good old fashioned camp meeting should be at once inaugurated, giving the boys an ample opportunity of preparing themselves "for the coming of the end of the world." Many have come to us in dire distress, imploring us to organize a company for the purpose of "routing the enemy," but thus far we have been unable to comply with their demands. Lovers who are in the habit of taking a "moonlight meander" over the foot bridge (See photo at beginning of Chapter 2.--Ed), should steer clear of the haunted "deestrics [sic]" for a period of time.

*The Rockport Journal*

Rockport, Indiana, Thursday, September 1, 1881

KILLED AT LAST!

A BRAVE DRUMMER LEADS THE SUCCESSFUL PARTY.

The dilapidated Carcass Exhibited to the Eager Crowd.

For the past two weeks our people have been laboring under a terrible strain of excitement brought on by the appearance of a wild animal of some kind lurking near the town, and many a brave heart has been made to quake with the fear of encountering the monster “just in an unexpected moment.” Several parties have been made up to hunt the animal down, but all met with failure until last Monday night when a party of four brave men, led by an intrepid commercial man, shouldered their guns and took up their line of march for the place said to be the favorite resort of the w. a.

After clambering around over rocks and chasms, liable at any time to run right into the jaws of death by encountering unawares the object of their search, they were at last rewarded by a sight of the animal standing between two projecting stones on the hillside near the old grave yard southwest of town. Instantly the four men brought their guns to bear on the doomed object and shortly after, the report of the four pieces was heard upon the air, hurling sixty-four buckshot into its side, but notwithstanding the heavy load of lead deposited in its hide, the animal stood erect until one of the party advanced with uplifted gun and dealt it a stunning blow on the head, when without a parting grasp, it rolled over on the ground – dead.

With feelings of pride, no doubt, our brave hunters gathered around the fallen foe ready to feast their eyes and gloat their passions for honor and renown with a sight of the remains of he who had for two weeks held the lives of over three thousand people in his keeping, as it were. What must have been their feelings of mortification when they discovered that they had simply killed a dummy which had been prepared and placed there for them. Thus ends the life of the wild animal, and thus ends our hopes of securing a first-class sensational article, and thus was the story of the daring exploits of our commercial friend destroyed.

This ends the saga of the Lake Drain Bottoms Monster.

## Chapter 6

### Spanker's Branch and Lincoln's Flatboat

One of the items that continued to peak our interest in Spanker's Branch was its relation to the construction of Lincoln's historic flatboat at Rockport. In the book, *Lincoln's Boyhood - A Chronicle of His Indiana Years*, 1963 by Francis Marion Van Natter, Spanker's Branch was mentioned on Page 55. While this book may be historical fiction, it is well documented with 40 to 50 footnotes for each chapter. This is what he wrote about Spanker's Branch:

*While Katy (Anna Caroline Roby Gentry.--Ed.) waited, Allen and Abe worked at building the two-man flatboat on the south side of **Spanker's Branch** just below Rockport, right at the flatboat-steamboat landing and woodyard.*

This sentence was documented with this footnote: Gentry affidavit. E. Grant Gentry, Rockport, had the Gentry-Lincoln flatboat story from his grandmother, Katy Roby Gentry, wife of Allen Gentry and schoolmate of Abraham Lincoln. Mr. Gentry's sisters--Misses Anna, Hannah, and Rose, of Rockport--told the same story to author; Herndon-Weik Mss, Vol. 14, N. Grigsby, Sept. 12, 1865 statement.

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### Location of Flatboat Landing

The curiosity of the flatboat construction in relation to Spanker's Branch brought the following from Society member Jim Hevron. Jim and his wife, Barbara, were co-historians of the year in 2012 and have produced several histories of the Lincoln City area.

#### **Email from Jim Hevron dated August 19, 2019.**

Good morning, the location the flatboat left Rockport for the trip to New Orleans has intrigued me for many years. If you look at where the signage (The Historical Society's stone flatboat marker.--Ed.) is located, consider how far above the water of the Ohio River the location is today and also consider the pool stage has been raised twice since the flatboat left Rockport with Allen Gentry and Abraham Lincoln. The first dams and locks were built in the 1920's to raise and keep the pool deep enough for the larger boats to have enough water depth to use the river. I do not know off hand how much these dams raised the pool stage.

The present dams and locks, which the last one is still being completed, were started in the early 1960's in our area and I am not sure when they started up stream, these last dams raised the pool stage 8'. So add 8' of bank above the water at pool and it was a long way down to the water.

The attached Herndon interview #78 on page 116 of *Herndon's Informants* (This book is now available in our Genealogy Room.--Ed.) is an interview with Nathaniel Grigsby, Silas Richardson, Nancy Richardson and John Romine. Romine gives us a location a short distance below Rockport by saying from Gentry landing. This is on page 118.

(This is a quote from the book: *Boat started out of the Ohio in the Spring - Abe about 20 years of age - Started from Rockport - a Short distance below rather - at the Gentry landing - Ed.*)

Then we look at interview document #88 of Anna Caroline Gentry, she tells Herndon she saw the boat start the trip to New Orleans, she says flatboat started from Gentry's landing yonder say 1/2 a mile from this house due South & 3/4 mile below Rockport.

I don't know from what point in Rockport Romine's measurement started and also I do not know where the Allen and Anna Gentry house was located or where her 3/4 mile from Rockport started.

I have never expressed my thoughts on the location. My best guess would be Gentry's landing was probably located where a creek ran into the Ohio River and I do not have knowledge where such a creek was located. Being on a creek would make building the boat easier and easier to launch, as well as protecting the boat from damage from drift, not having to fight the water levels fluctuating up and down in the current. In a creek it was more protected.

The location of the Society's historical marker telling the story of the flatboat trip is practical so the public can see it versus down river. The lay of the land would not allow many to see the marker.



The Gentry family still owns a few acres of property from the old homestead. It is located on the southern edge of Rockport, south of Center Street. While the aerial maps of the area do not show a deep creek, it can be assumed that the flatboat was probably launched from their property in this area. This would confirm it being located south or down river from Spanker's Branch as mentioned in the Van Natter book. The following contains more information about the Gentry Landing.



# LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor  
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 1276

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

September 21, 1953

## Most Important Venture of Lincoln's Youth

Without much fear of contradiction it may be said that the most important venture of Abraham Lincoln's youth, embracing the years until he became of age, was his first trip to New Orleans. It seems regrettable that so important an episode during Lincoln's impressionable years has been so greatly overshadowed by a second trip to New Orleans made three years later during the Illinois residence. It is true that some of the incidental details about the initial visit to the great metropolis are lacking, but we have **in Lincoln's own handwriting in the third person** this account of the boat enterprise starting at Rockport, Indiana.

*“When he was nineteen, still residing in Indiana, he made his first trip upon a flatboat to New Orleans. He was a hired hand merely, and he and a son of the owner, without other assistance, made the trip. The nature of part of the ‘cargo-load,’ as it was called, made it necessary for them to linger and trade along the sugar-coast; and one night they were attacked by seven negroes with intent to kill and rob them. They were hurt some in the melee, but succeeded in driving the negroes from the boat, and then ‘cut cable,’ ‘weighed anchor,’ and left.”*

In this same autobiography Lincoln makes but a very brief reference to the second trip to the great metropolis at the mouth of the Mississippi. After mentioning the building of a flatboat at Old Sangamon Town he states “which boat they took to New Orleans.” That is all Lincoln had to say about the trip with the exception that “Hanks (John) had not gone to New Orleans, but having a family and likely to be detained from home longer than expected had turned back at St. Louis.” Yet this is the same John Hanks whom William Herndon claimed, went to New Orleans with Lincoln and supposedly gave Herndon an eye witness account of Lincoln’s reaction to the slave markets of the city.

Just how much of this interview recorded by Herndon originated in Herndon’s own imagination we cannot ascertain. The following statement credited to Hanks has all the internal evidence of a Herndon composition: “We saw negroes chained, maltreated, whipped, and scourged. Lincoln saw it, his heart bled, said nothing much, was silent from feeling, was sad, looked bad, felt bad, was thoughtful and abstracted. I can say knowingly that it was on this trip that he formed his opinions of slavery. It ran its iron into him then and there.” This alleged Hanks testimonial is most certainly the diction of Herndon. So is another statement Herndon credited to John Hanks who was never in New Orleans with Lincoln. John, it is claimed, told Herndon about an auction of slaves they witnessed and reported Lincoln to have said; “My God, boys let’s get away from this. If ever I get a chance to hit that thing (meaning slavery), I’ll hit it hard.”

At the conclusion of the interview with John Hanks, Herndon wrote: “I can say that this testimony can be implicitly relied upon.” It will be observed that this entire story is nothing more than a composite fabrication by Hanks and Herndon. Yet it is this worthless tradition that has been accentuated to the extent that little attention is paid to Lincoln’s very first visit. At this time we may logically conclude Lincoln experienced the thrills and excitement one naturally would on the initial visit to the picturesque city, the novelty of which would be lacking on a second experience.

The confusion as to the exact time Lincoln and Gentry went from Indiana to New Orleans is also changeable to Herndon’s notes. He claimed that John Romine told him that “Lincoln went to New Orleans about ’28 or ’29 . . . Boat started out of the Ohio in the spring--Abe about 20 years of age--started from Rockport, a short distance below, rather at the Gentry landing. Gone about two months.” The Lamon book published in 1872 and using this source and other Herndon traditions sets the date of embarkment of the Gentry-Lincoln flatboat as early in April 1828. Practically all Lincoln biographers have accepted this orientation of the story in the spring of the year.

Here, however, we are able to introduce some documents that bear on the Gentry-Lincoln flatboat episode and also submit some family traditions that have come down through the Gentry family and should have the preference over Herndon’s hearsay testimonies. The Lamon book states that while the boat was loading supposedly in the month of April, “Abe saw a great deal of the pretty Miss Roby.” However, the Spencer County marriage register reveals that Miss Ann Roby and Allen Gentry were married on March 20, 1828 so there was no Miss Roby as late as April as she was already Mrs. Gentry, the wife of Lincoln’s partner. While the taking of a wife might not prevent

Allen Gentry from leaving shortly for New Orleans, it is not likely that he would plan his honeymoon alone. All family reminiscences contradict the spring departure.

Mrs. Calder (Bess--Ed.) Ehrmann is our best authority on Lincoln's first trip to New Orleans, having been well acquainted with and having interviewed many of the descendants of Allen Gentry. She also lives in Rockport where the Gentry flatboat was launched. It is Mrs. Ehrmann's firm conviction that the Gentry-Lincoln boat did not leave the Gentry landing at Rockport until the late fall or early winter of 1828. The descendants of Allen Gentry for two generations were flatboat men and both a son and grandson of Allen claim that the boats were always taken out late in the year, but never in the spring.

About this special Gentry-Lincoln trip, the Gentry family is absolutely certain as to the time of departure because it was shortly after the birth of Allen and Ann Gentry's first child who was born on December 18, 1828. Allen refused to take the flatboat out until after the child was born and all seemed well at home. The descendants of Allen Gentry are in agreement that Allen and Abe started for New Orleans during the last week in December.

Based on these documentary supports and statement of the descendants of Allen Gentry, Lincoln's law partner in the enterprise, Mrs. Ehrmann prepared a pageant depicting Gentry and Lincoln leaving for New Orleans in the fall of 1828. The pageant was entitled "When Lincoln Went Flatboating From Rockport." It was first produced at Rockport on July 4, 1926, and has also been presented on later occasions. The citizens of Rockport, Indiana feel that, inasmuch as the most important venture of Abraham Lincoln's youth was associated with their city, the episode should be properly memorialized. They do not feel that the purely fictitious stories of William Herndon--Lincoln mythmaker-- should nullify the historical importance of Lincoln's first trip to New Orleans.



The Pageant mentioned above is available for sale through the Spencer County Historical Society. The cost is \$3.00 plus \$2.00 shipping and handling if it can't be picked up at the Rockport Library. The paperback booklet is 16 pages long and is titled *When Lincoln Went Flatboating from Rockport, A Biennial Historical Pageant of the Lincoln Family in Spencer County, 1816 - 1830*, by Mrs. Bess V. Ehrmann, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1930, Two Performances - 4 PM and 8 PM.

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## Flatboat Construction

Jim Hevron's above e-mail speculates that a flatboat would need to be constructed on or near a wide creek so that the heavy contraption could be easily launched into the Ohio River. While reading a book for Spanker's Branch information, an eye-opening article about how flatboats were constructed was located.

The book is *Pioneer History of Indiana Including Stories, Incidents and Customs of the Early Settlers* by Col. William M. Cockrum, Press of Oakland City Journal, 1907. Col. Cockrum collected data for the book for 50 years. It came from personal acquaintances with the pioneers, from a history of incidents transmitted from parents to children and from tradition that is accepted as reliable. The author intended to write a *Pioneer History of Southern Indiana*, however, his good friend, General Lew Wallace, recommended he write it for all of Indiana. You remember Lew Wallace as a general in the Civil War and the author of *Ben Hur*. General Wallace was born in 1827 in Brookville, Indiana and died in 1905 at Crawfordsville, Indiana where he is buried.

Most of the photos/drawings of flatboats that are in existence show something that is much smaller than what is described below. They are merely skiffs compared to the real boats. Here is how Col. Cockrum describes the construction of a flatboat in Chapter XX - Flat-boating, Page 508.

*After produce of any amount was raised in this country it was sold to produce merchants, who took it to New Orleans on flat-boats.*

*To make one of these boats was quite an undertaking. The first thing to do was to procure two gunwales. (Gunwale is the upper edge of the side of a ship or boat that supports a ship's guns.-- Ed.) They were usually made out of large poplar trees and were from sixty to eighty feet in length. A fine large, straight tree was selected, and after it was cut down, two faces of it were hewn, leaving it about twenty-four inches thick. Then it was turned down on large logs and split in halves, hewn down to from twelve to fifteen inches in thickness, thus making both the gunwales out of one tree. The two ends were sloped from six to eight feet, so that when the bottom was on, it had a boat shape, that would run much faster in the water. The gunwales were then hauled to the boatyard and placed on rollers. The distance apart which was wanted for the width of the boat was usually from fourteen to sixteen feet. Strong sills or girders were framed into the gunwales every eight or ten feet and securely fastened there by strong pins. Small girders or sleepers, to receive the bottom of the boat, were pinned into the cross sills or girders every eighteen inches and even with the bottom of the gunwales.*

*The bottom was made of one and half inch lumber, the length to reach from outside to outside of the gunwales, where it was securely nailed and then calked. The old Indiana flat-boat builders used hemp for calking, driving it into the cracks between the edges of the planks with a calking chisel made for the purpose. When this was done, another bottom of inch lumber was made over this that held the calking in place and made the bottom stronger. When the bottom was finished, it was ready for launching. This was done by having large auger holes in the round logs the bottom rested on and turning them with handspikes. The ground was always sloping toward the river and it did not require much turning until the logs would roll down the slope and carry the boat into the water.*

*The boat, having been made bottom-upward, had to be turned. A large amount of mud and dirt was piled on the edge of the bottom, which was intended to sink it. Then a check line was fastened to the farthest edge and near the middle the line was carried over a large limb or the fork of a tree and two or three yoke of oxen hitched to it. When everything was ready, the boat was turned right side up. It was then full of water, which had to be bailed out.*

*The upper framework for the body of the boat was made very securely and well braced and the siding was nailed on. Strong joists were put on top of the framework from side to side to hold the decking. A center girder ran lengthwise of the boat and this rested on a post every six or eight feet. This girder was a little higher than the outer walls, so that the water would run off the deck. A strong*

*post was fastened in a framework made on the false bottom which came up through the decking about three feet near each end of the boat. Holes were bored in these check posts, so that it could be turned around with long wooden spikes. The check rope was securely fastened to these posts and one end of it was carried to the bank and fastened. By using the spikes the check post would take up the slack and the boat could be securely landed as near the bank as wanted.*

*There were three long oars, the steering oar had a wide blade on the end and was fastened to a post near the back of the boat. This oar was used as a rudder in guiding the direction of the boat. The other two oars were used as sweeps to propel the boat and to pull her out of eddies.*

*This crudely fashioned boat would carry a large amount of produce. The pork was usually packed in the boat in bulk; flour, wheat and corn were stored on raised floors so as to keep them dry. On small rivers when the water was at floodtide, two hundred thousand pounds of pork, one thousand bushels of corn and many other articles of produce would be carried.*

*The pioneers made their location where there was plenty of good spring water, but at a later date they had two objects in selecting their homes: First, to be near a mill or a place where there was a good mill-site; second, to be not far from a river where a flat-boat could be loaded with produce. The money paid for the produce to load the boats brought great prosperity to the country. On the lower Mississippi, where the great sugar plantations were, there was a great demand for this provision. A boat would tie to the bank near one of these immense plantations and would sell the owner a half boat-load of meat, corn and flour.*

*It took one of these boats a month to run out of the Wabash down to New Orleans. They would sell their load of produce and then sell the boat. These old boatmen were a jolly, generous, light-hearted set of men, and would often lash their boats together and float for several days and nights in that way on the lower Mississippi.*

*This description does not apply to the Pittsburg flat-boat men or those from the upper Ohio, running coal barges down the river. These were, in many instances, a lot of desperadoes.*

## Chapter 7

### Spanker's Branch in the Local News

#### Local News

*The Rockport Journal*, February 28, 1878, D. Hayford, Editor and Proprietor

Theodore Cotton, Jr., our young and popular grocery man, is having a neat little cottage built beyond the ravine, south of **Spanker's Branch**.



#### Local News

*The Rockport Journal*, July 11, 1878, D. Hayford, Editor and Proprietor

The contract for the building of the Third Street levee over **Spanker's Branch** has been awarded to Phillip Eigenman [sic], who will commence work on it in a short time. (Readers from 2018, Issue 119 will remember the arch and drain over Cotton's Pond on Fifth Street by the sewage plant was constructed by Superintendent John G. Eigenman [sic].--Ed.)



#### Local News

*The Rockport Journal*, July 29, 1878, D. Hayford, Editor and Proprietor

The work on the levy across **Spanker's Branch** progresses well considering the hot weather.



#### Local News

*The Rockport Journal*, August 29, 1878, D. Hayford, Editor and Proprietor

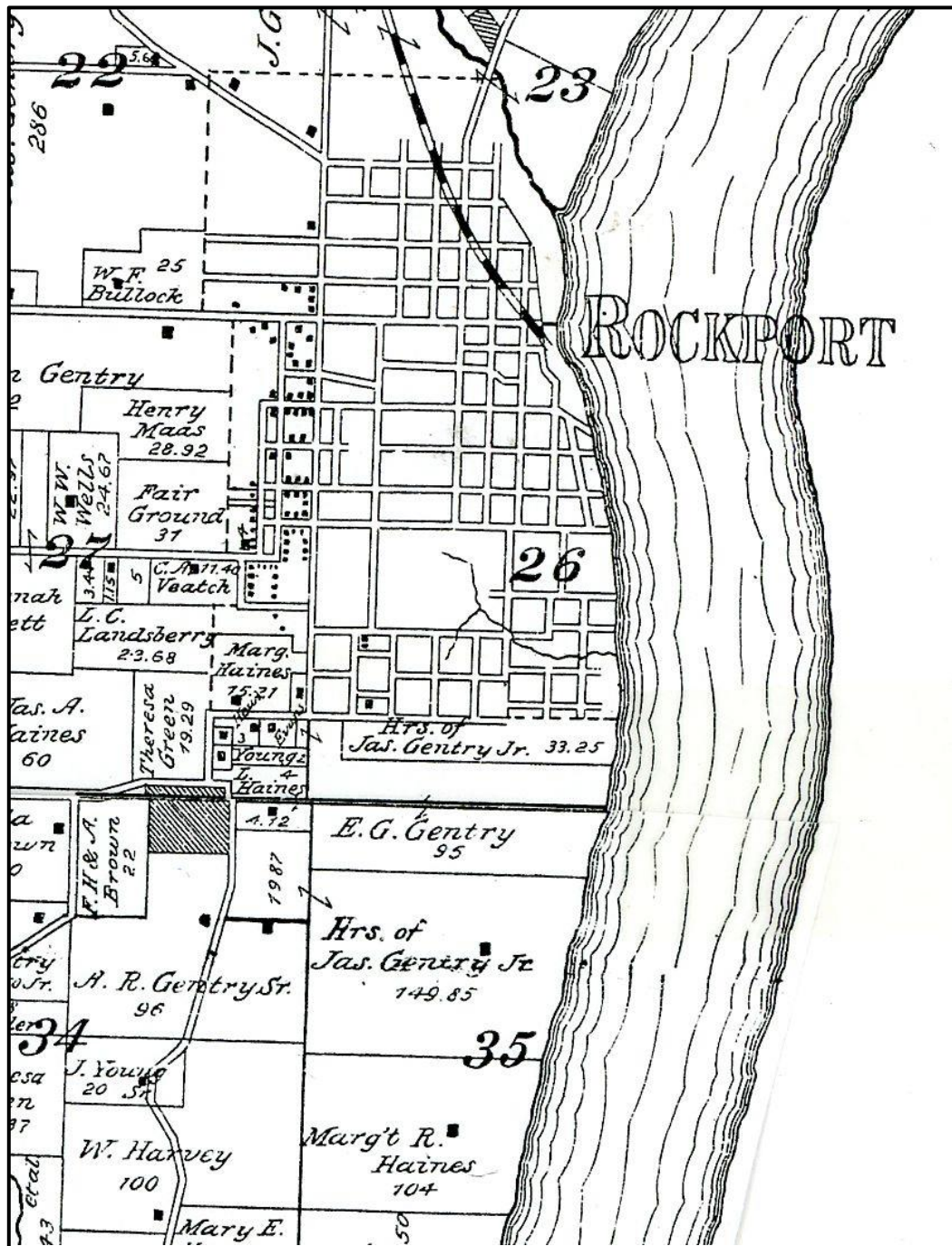
The bridge across **Spanker's Branch**, at the lower landing, has been condemned, as unsafe.

Comment: The note below also appeared in the Local News. There is a levee being built on Third Street at the time but it isn't known what cut could be referred to in this article. Possibly dirt was being moved from high ground on Third Street to be used as fill.

Work on the Third Street cut is going on lively. Teams pass with empty wagons now and there is a prospect of something better ahead.



(Since the term "Spanker's Branch" was used frequently in the newspaper and other documents, it can be assumed that most of the people in Rockport knew of its location.--Ed.)



The portion of the map above comes from An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Spencer County, Indiana 1896. We believe it shows the location of Spanker's Branch just below the Number 26 on the map. It also shows the Gentry's property south of the branch which confirms the information in Van Natter's book.



This is part of an article that appeared in Issue 90, 2012. David Morgan wrote about all the businesses in Rockport from north of town to the south. David Morgan is the grandson of John Morgan who was Spencer County's first Clerk and Recorder. John Morgan is buried in the Olde Rockport Pioneer Cemetery. The stream he mentions below, we believe, is Spanker's Branch.

## Excerpt from View of Rockport from River in 1856

By David Morgan, 117 W. Madison St., Pittsburg, Kansas

Just below here is the mouth of a little stream that heads up back of the old cemetery and on its banks stands Snyder and Cavin's pork house. From this point, many flat boats of meat were shipped south. Just below this stream is Locust Street and that is as far down as we intend to go.

Turning west, and following the meandering of this stream, we come again to the bluff. From under it, there flows a clear stream of pure water. We take the gourd that hangs nearby and drink our fill. This is the famous Coal Spring. How I long for a drink of its pure dear water tonight. I have drunk water and other stuff in many states but have never tasted anything that equals the water that flows from the bluff on the south side of this beautiful glen just south of Rockport. (Spanker's Branch?--Ed.)

We cross the **branch** and climb the hill to the south of Third Street and follow it down to the old Spencer House (Now known as the Rockport Inn. Repairs are being made after a fire damaged the building.--Ed.) Here let us have a good square meal and after dinner, I will take you to one more place. We must go east on Walnut Street to its end. Right at the end of this street is a neat cottage facing west. Down the street everything looks neat, cozy and clean. We enter the gate, go round the house and follow a path down the hill. Presently, we come to the north end of the cave, which we enter, and go to its south end where a natural stone walk, about eighteen inches wide, leads down to the river below. Here one of Spencer County's first families lives.

(The path Morgan refers to must have led south to the end of Seminary Street, for at one time, a path was down the bluff there.--Ed.)



Morgan describes drinking from the Coal Spring above and how he never tasted anything that equals the water that flows from the bluff. Perhaps he was tired and thirsty from walking up the sides of the ravine in exploring the area of the creek.

It reminds the writer of a similar experience in the 1950's. While visiting relatives on the northeast end of Jasper, Indiana, one could roam the pasture and woods in the area. A cousin found a spring coming from the side of a hill and used a broken glass bottle neck to make an easy place to get a drink. The water tasted cool and refreshing after walking in the woods. Forty years later, the woods and pasture are long gone with a large Kimball building taking up most of the area. It is interesting to note that my son worked there years after his father walked through the woods and drank from the spring.

On January 7, 2020, Kentucky Educational Television broadcast a show about the history of environmental protection. At the beginning, they showed Beargrass Creek that runs through Louisville, Kentucky. It was said that in the 1800's the creek ran red. That was because of the slaughterhouse on the banks of the creek that discharged blood into the stream. Today, Beargrass Creek is a state urban nature preserve with a 41 acre forest.

At the beginning of the article above, Morgan says Snyder and Cavin's pork house stood on the banks of the creek. Like Beargrass Creek, it must have run red from the blood and offal being discharged from the plant. However, it stood close to the river. The possible location of the pork house can be seen on the 1879 Historical Atlas Map of Spencer County that appears in Chapter 9.

## Chapter 8

### Haines Family Lands near Spanker's Branch in 1847

After mentioning the research on Spanker's Branch at a Historical Society meeting, Janet Haines Berry remembered seeing the name before. Janet was a classmate in the Rockport High School Class of 1961. She sent the following article about her great-great grandparents landing in Rockport.

**Mr. and Mrs. Willis Haines Recently Celebrated Their Golden Wedding Anniversary**  
*The Rockport Journal, 1903*

Mr. and Mrs. Willis Haines, two of our oldest and best respected citizens, two weeks ago celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. With their children and grandchildren gathered about them they spent the Memorial Day in joyful thanksgiving. Following, we give a brief sketch of their lives:

Willis Haines, for over half a century one of the foremost citizens of Spencer County, was born March 7, 1828, in Carroll County, Ky. He is the second of nine children born to his parents, who were Garrett and Nancy (Chadwell) Haines, natives respectively of Kentucky and Virginia. The father was born in the same county as the son. In 1847, with his father and family, he came to Rockport. They loaded all their possessions on a flatboat on the Kentucky River and floated down, landing at the landing near the mouth of **Spanker's Branch**. Here they lived for three weeks. At the end of this time they moved down in the bottoms and spent one summer, finally settling on the bluff about two miles below town. The country was in a wild state then. The bottoms were covered with a dense growth of trees, furnishing ample cover for deer, wild turkeys and an abundance of smaller game. An occasional bear was seen in the canebrakes.

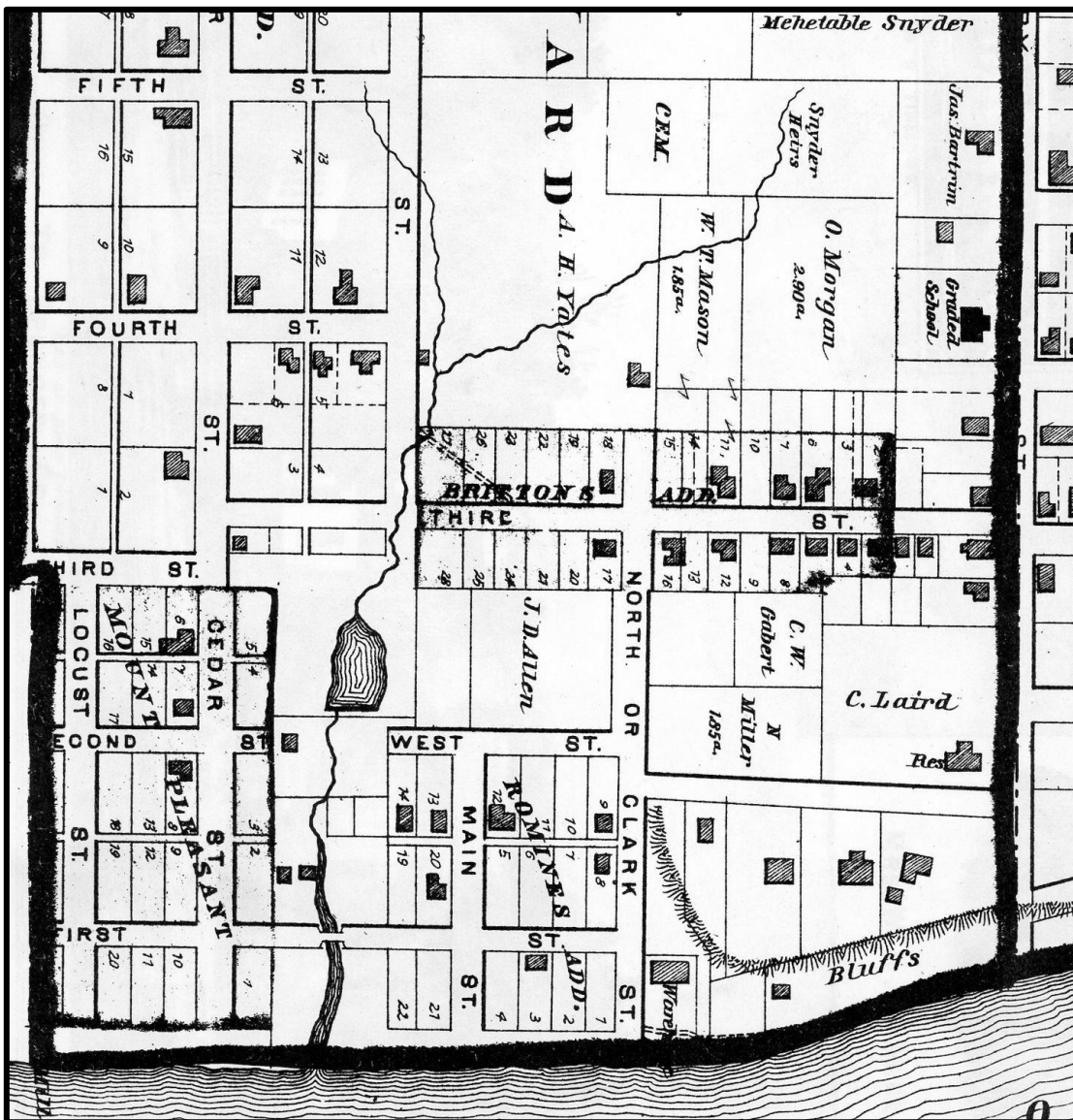
The subject of this sketch received but a limited education, although he has supplemented this by extensive reading. In his early days, he followed flatboating, but in 1852 took up farming, at which he has been very successful.

In 1853, he was married to Mary E. Gentry, a daughter of Allen Gentry, and a native of the township. The wedding took place at 6 p.m. on January 27, at the home of the bride just below town, the ceremony being performed by John Smith, a local preacher in the Methodist church. There are now living but six persons who attended the wedding. They are: Mr. and Mrs. A. R. Gentry, Polk Gentry, Mr. and Mrs. More Snyder and Mrs. Wm. Ingram. To this union were born eight children, of whom six are yet living, James A., Mrs. Fred Brown, Josiah, Mrs. Mort Brown, John and Livingston. All are living in this county except Livingston, who has recently become engaged in the insurance business at Peoria, Ill.

Mr. Haines has been a life-long Republican, and early in life he and his wife joined the Methodist church, in which they have been faithful members, exerting at all times a great influence for good in the community. They are now enjoying their old days and reaping the benefits of righteous lives. Uncle Willis and Aunt Mary are both in good health and have good prospect of several years more on this earth together. The wish of *The Journal* is that they may see their jubilee wedding anniversary.

# Chapter 9

## Spanker's Branch Summary

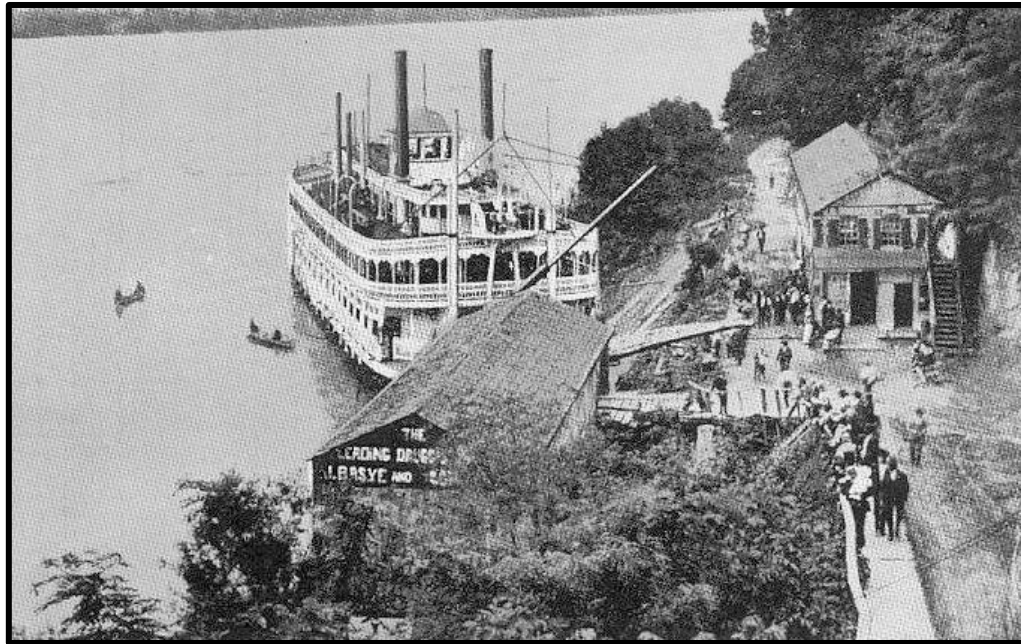


This portion of a map of Rockport came from the Historical Atlas of Spencer County, Indiana, 1879 and gives a good image of what is believed Spanker's Branch draining into the Ohio River. Notice the pond in the middle of the drainage. This is in all likelihood where the bridge photo from Chapter 2 was taken that showed boats in the water. Also note the width of the branch where it drains into the Ohio. Today, it has been filled in to a narrow stream.

This was very likely the location of Eigenmann's Pond on Spanker's Branch that was the scene of the liveliest skating season that Rockport has ever seen before as mentioned in the article in *The Rockport Journal*, December 16, 1878, in Chapter 4.

The author believes the pond was kept full by drainage of the watershed from south of Seminary Street, north of Center Street and east of South Fifth Street. Also helping to keep the pond full was the Coal Spring that David Morgan said flowed from the side of the bluff.

The Snyder property in the upper right of the image was the location of the 1957 Rockport High School building. This land is now being developed for homes.

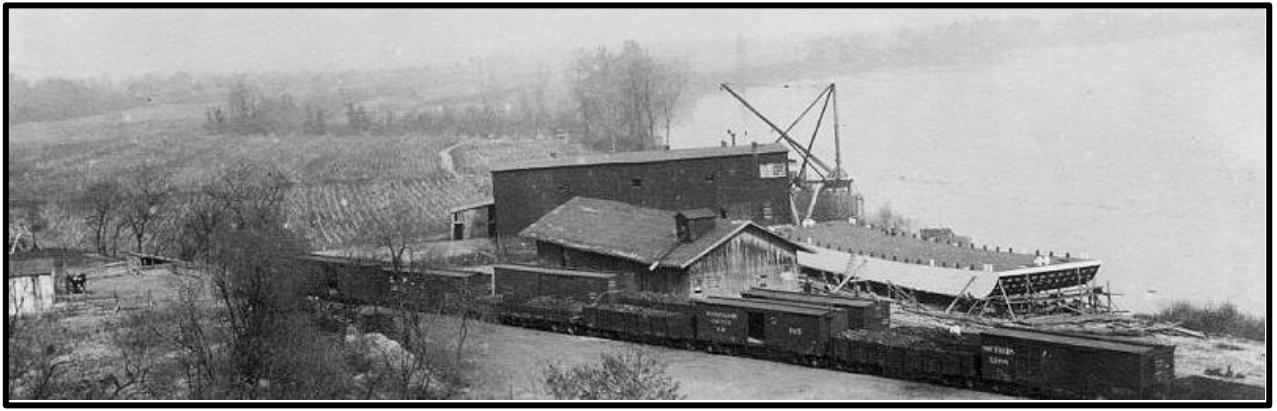


The postcard above of the lower landing is courtesy of Jane Boultinghouse.

The goods transported from the boat to the warehouses had to eventually be moved up the hill to the businesses on Main Street. One old person remembered using horses to pull the wagons. He said they had to use a whip to get them to pull the heavy loads and the sparks would fly from their horseshoes.

Using the 1879 Atlas map, let us summarize what we know about this stream. According to the Willis Haines document, there was a landing near Spanker's Branch where the family landed in 1847. Today, one usually thinks of Rockport having two landings--an upper landing which would be where the sand and gravel plant is located at the east end of Washington Street and the lower landing which was below the bluff where the Miller ferry transported people to Kentucky in later years.

It is reasonable to assume there were many other landings from north of town to the south end. David Morgan documents businesses along the river starting at Lake Drain north of town and continuing to the south of town. The Glass Boat would dock near Lake Drain where the ladies of the town would purchase their glassware before it was available in stores. Then there was the upper landing where the sand and gravel plant now stands. The lower landing was below the Main Street bluff. This is where steamboats would land and later the Miller ferry would operate. Downstream from the lower landing may have been a landing at Spanker's Branch. According to the Morgan article, there was a pork house on its banks which would need a landing to ship their products. The map shows a building on the banks of Spanker's Branch that could be the pork house.



The postcard above of the upper landing is courtesy of Jane Boultinghouse.  
Notice the new barge under construction on the banks of the Ohio.

Documents mention a Gentry's Landing, which was probably south of Spanker's Branch where they owned land, and still own land today. That makes four or five main landings. There were other places where people would drive in a piling and place planks to create a small landing. These were scattered along the banks of the Ohio. They were probably used by fishermen and mussel fishermen who used the shells at the Pearl Button Factory.



The above 1909 postcard image courtesy of the Dawson archives.

This image shows the mussel fishermen camps and the pilings with planks they used to walk down to their boats in the river. This is downstream from the upper landing. Notice the remains of the Lady Washington column at the left that was dynamited into the river. At the top of the image is the town's water tower.

Tracing the stream west, the map shows a fairly large pond halfway between Third Street and First Street or River Road. This was probably the location of the Molly Baumeister photo that shows boats in the water. It was also the probable location of the footbridge that lovers enjoyed using that was referred to in the Lake Drain Monster August, 1881 article plus *The Stuff of a Man* book by Katharine Evans Blake and the various other news articles.

Following the stream on the map, one can see it crosses under Third Street where today a narrow levee spans the ravine. The end of one branch of the drain is at the Snyder farm. This was the location of the 1957 Rockport High School building. Also the Rockport Pioneer Cemetery is on this location and is referred to in the David Morgan article.

The obvious answer to the question about the location of Spanker's Branch is to look at a map or drive through the town. There is the Lake Drain or Huffman Ditch north of town and Cotton's Pond that drains into the river at the sand and gravel property. The only other ditch is the one south of the bluff.

According to the above articles, books and maps, we believe the preponderance of evidence proves Spanker's Branch is the name of the small ditch north of Center (Cedar) Street and south of Clark or North Street in Rockport, Indiana that drains into the Ohio River.

## Chapter 10

### Spanker's Branch Today



A December, 2019 photo of the bridge on First Street over Spanker's Branch looking north to the bluff.

Many people in 1800's Rockport more than likely knew the location of Spanker's Branch due to its name appearing in many issues of the local paper. But the name, Spanker's Branch, was also well-known to citizens and students farther north in Bloomington, Indiana. However, it was a different stream.

This appeared in the 1915 Indiana University Arbutus yearbook from an old alumnus:

*We had good old-fashioned ways then. **Spanker's Branch** ran across the street and we went over it on stepping stones. Stepping stones for students, we called them. They finally built the new street over it and covered the branch clean up, and they tell me that they call it the Jordan River now. Maybe so, but we called it **Spanker's Branch**.*

This web page, <https://indiana.rivals.com/news/field-of-dreams-4>, has a little more detail in the renaming of Spanker's Branch in Bloomington.

*The July 9, 1897 edition of the Bloomington Telephone reported that the university had purchased 14 lots that had been a part of the Dunn Farm, extending from 3rd Street to the creek that ran near the Dunn Cemetery.*

*Grading the new field wasn't easy. In fact, it took a lot of work. For instance, **Spanker's Branch** was an issue. The creek ran right through the area that was proposed to house the new athletic grounds, and before the fields could be used, **Spankers' Branch** had to be diverted to the south. **Spanker's Branch**, by the way, would eventually receive a different name. During a trip back to IU after taking over as president at Stanford, David Starr Jordan told a group of students at the university chapel that he didn't have ambitions to have a building on the Bloomington campus named after him. Instead, he hoped **Spanker's Branch** would someday be named after him. From that point on, Spanker's Branch was known as the Jordan River.*

*(Fun Fact: As workers began to relocate Spanker's Branch, the University started to dig a deep well to furnish drinking water to the new campus. The well, which would be more than 90 feet deep when completed, would eventually be covered by the Rose Well House, a gift in 1908 from alumnus Theodore F. Rose.)*



This December, 2019 photo of Spanker's Branch was taken from the First Street Bridge looking west. Snyder and Cavin's pork house would have been located near the clearing on the left side of the branch.



This December, 2019 image of Spanker's Branch was taken from the Third Street levee looking east.

Today, in the year 2020, Spanker's Branch in Rockport is a small little creek that still drains the kudzu covered ravine near Seminary Street over to the Center Street area. Much of the creek has been filled in near the Ohio River when comparing its current condition to the 1879 map.

Eigenmann's Pond is a low area that residents have been attempting to fill over the years. Some of the stream is polluted with old tires and other debris.

One would never know today that this small stream was a source of drinking water, recreation such as boating and ice skating, industry such as the pork house, as well as providing a place for lovers to dream of the future as they stood on the swinging bridge.

The name "Spanker" remains a mystery. It does not appear to be the name of any person in this area. While it is the name of a small stream in Rockport as well as Bloomington, that name does not appear in the Spencer County Historical Society cemetery records. It does not appear in Spencer County's history bible--*History of Warrick, Spencer and Perry Counties, Indiana*, 1885 either. Perhaps some future historian will solve this mystery.



This December, 2019 photo was taken from the Third Street levee looking west. In the 1800's, a gourd hung near a spring that had the best tasting water that came from the bluff.

## Eigenmann's Pond in the Year 2020



This January 2020 photo, looking west, is believed to show the remains of Eigenmann's Pond. The foreground is a small hill that drops into the low area. The photo was taken between Clark Street and Center Street, just west of First Street. The white structure in the center of the picture is a house on Third Street. This low area is quite expansive and is much larger than what one would suspect from the photo at the beginning of Chapter 2.

Although there was some water standing on the right side of the photo, the area has filled in over the more than 100 years since it was used for ice skating and boating.

Spanker's Branch is on the left. The swinging bridge that lovers used was more than likely up the ravine to the west. That would be in the center of the photo. Most of the creek and ravine areas are overgrown with scrub trees. Long gone are the majestic beech and hardwood forests of the pioneers who used the wood to build flatboats and their homes.

## Eigenmann's Pond in the Year 2020



This January 2020 photo was taken looking to the right side of the one on the previous page. It shows the bank of the pond with rip-rap stones on the right. It also shows some of the extensive size of the low area believed to be Eigenmann's Pond.

This area undoubtedly floods when the river rises. It would be interesting to see the pond then as it would probably be similar to what it was in the 1800's. The light object to the right of the large tree on the left side of the photo is the house on Third Street. Again, one can see the extensive scrub trees that have overgrown the area.

### **September 2025 Update**

Several pages above, it is mentioned that the source of the Spanker's Branch name is a mystery. However, the following may lead to why the creek was named.

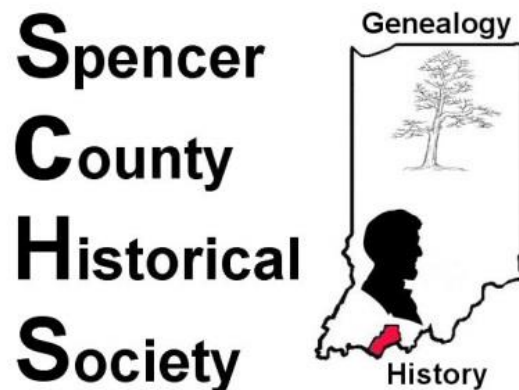
Historical Society Vice President John Spaetti wrote to say he enjoyed reading about Spanker's Branch which is now available on our web site in a PDF file. John was wondering where the name originated. This has perplexed the author for years as the only other mention was about a creek at Indiana University with the same name. John's e-mail caused another search of the Internet with no results. However, a small change in the search wording resulted in Google's AI giving the probable answer. It stated:

“A ‘spanker’ was a term for money, particularly gold coins, in 18<sup>th</sup> century English slang. The use of this term was not directly tied to pioneer life in the American West but was part of a broader British slang lexicon that colonists and later pioneers would have brought with them.”

Other historical meanings not related to money were something fine or large, something fast or the fore and aft sail on the mast of a square-rigged ship.

I think this solves the problem. The location was where flatboats loaded and unloaded goods and people. The Haines family is documented as landing there. A pork processing plant was built along its banks as well as other businesses. It is believed Abraham Lincoln made his famous flatboat trip from near the Branch as the Gentry family owned land nearby. It is felt that the pioneers thought they could make “gold” along the fine, fast moving Branch by doing business there and that is how it received its name. Of course this is pure speculation on the editor’s behalf; however, no other explanation exists at this time.

Thus ends our exploration of the history of Spanker’s Branch.



Raymond Joe Dawson 2020

