

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Good morning!

Erma (Mrs. Howard) McVicker, 4501 N. Wheeling Ave., recently sent to me a well-written bit of research on the Rees family and the Rees Cemetery on Burlington Pike. Since it would be difficult to improve on her presentation, the information will appear almost exactly as she sent it (minus some reduction for space purposes):

"Located in a part of the county that attracted the earliest settlers, Rees Cemetery dates to 1831 (perhaps earlier) and is one of the oldest [cemeteries] in the county. *Helm's History of Delaware County* states that in 1831, the first death in Monroe Township occurred, the victim being a child of Garrett Gibson. The body was taken to the Rees Cemetery in Perry Township for interment, there being no cemetery in Monroe Township until around 1833. The site of the county's first school (1827) is nearby, and the Indian settlement known as Old Town was also on the Indian trail known as Burlington Road, near the cemetery.

"Over 160 years ago, pioneer Lewis Rees chose a hill overlooking White River as a site for a family cemetery and donated the land for it. Lewis Rees and his wife Mary came to Perry Township in 1822 from Ohio and purchased land from the U.S. government. The Treaty of St. Mary's (1818) had ceded all Indian lands in Indiana to the U.S. and it became legally possible for families to acquire land.

"Lewis Rees became a substantial landowner, as

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did several of his children. When Delaware County was organized in 1827, Lewis Rees was appointed the first associate judge of the circuit court.

"The cemetery is the last resting place of Lewis and Mary Rees and six of their adult children; sons: David, Morris, John and Borter, and daughters, Corasy Keesling and Mary Ann Cunningham. Among others, the names Felton, Gibson, Ross, Shroyer and Fullhart appear on many of the tombstones. Also interred there is William Polen (1762-1837), one of 19 Revolutionary War veterans known to be buried in Delaware County.

"According to Ralph Gibson, cemetery board member, Rees has always been a 'free cemetery': that is, lots were never sold. A plat book has never been found, and all of the graves are not in straight lines. Although the gravestone information has been read and recorded, no burial records have been found.

"Lee Gerhart wrote in the Muncie Evening Press: 'Such cemeteries are considered by many as sacred places where rest the pioneers, who are the ancestors of the present generation.'

Concerning the historical figure, Indian Jim Musco, Erma McVicker wrote: "It was 120 years ago that Indian Jim was buried in Rees Cemetery. Fact and legend have blended to surround his story ever since. When the Delawares moved westward in 1820, Indian Jake and Indian Sally Musco and their son Jim did not accompany the tribe. The place where Jake and Sally are buried is unknown.

"Indian Jim, the last of the Delawares known to have lived in this county, never married. He lived with the Lewis Rees family until his death at age 69. History reports that he was a hard worker, a good

carpenter, and was respected by his white neighbors. He helped to cut the logs and make the clapboards for the first Delaware County school in 1827.

"In the 1830s, Indiana law prevented the sale of liquor to Indians. Evidently the Muscos were fond of 'firewater.' Tales were told of white men purchasing liquor and leaving it where Jake and Jim would 'find' it."

Erma McVicker reports legends that have evolved through the years concerning the Muscos. Among them are: "That Jim hid in a fodder shock for days so that the Delawares would not take him along when they left. That Jim shadowed Mrs. Lewis Rees all the way to Ohio to make sure that no harm came to her — she on horseback and Jim on foot. That he foraged peaches from John Fullhart, taking out the seeds so they couldn't be returned. That Borter Rees went to Fullhart and paid for the peaches. That he participated in debates in school."

"No story of Delaware County has been more popular than that of Indian Jim, written by Perry Township author Dorothy Hamilton, who died Sept. 15, 1983. The title of the book was *Jim Musco*."

The last segment of Erma McVicker's research concerns recent cemetery history, which follows:

"According to Jack Jordan, 6949 S. Burlington Drive, he and his brother Charles used hand reel-type mowers to mow grass in the Rees Cemetery during the 1940s. As no funds were available to pay for the mowing, the Jordan boys stood by the gate on Memorial Day and collected donations. Mrs. Aretus Rees sometimes joined the boys and admonished visitors if they failed to contribute. Mr. Jordan recalls

that he and his brother usually collected around a hundred dollars for the summer's mowing.

"During the 1960s, Boy Scouts maintained Jim Musco's grave and the words 'Indian Jim' were added to the tombstone, thanks to Paul Wearly.

"Through the generosity of Clarence (Jack) Reese, who died in 1972, a trust fund was provided for perpetual care, and the Rees Cemetery Association was formed in 1978 to take over the care of the cemetery. The original five board members, Robert Carmichael, Ralph Gibson, Jack Jordan, Carrie Leffler and Zach Roselle, are still serving.

"Art Roberts, a local chain-saw artist, was commissioned by the board to carve the 11-foot wooden statue of Indian Jim, which stands between the cemetery fence and the road. The memorial was fashioned from an old oak tree trunk and was dedicated in December, 1986."

In case readers might wonder, yes, there's still a Lewis Reese very much alive who lives on Inlow Springs Road. He is a great-grandson of the early settler. I called him for additional information, and he was friendly and cooperative.

"The name got changed somehow in the spelling," said Reese. The Rees mentioned above was also the great-great-great grandfather of Erma McVicker, who wrote the account of the cemetery's history.

If you haven't seen Rees Cemetery, take Burlington Drive and stay on it until you see the statue of Indian Jim inviting you in for a visit. You'll be glad you did.

■ Ruth Hillman is a contributing writer to *Our Neighborhood*.