Mason, Ohio

and Alverta Green Museum

October 2020

AN UNSOLVED MURDER... A GHOSTLY PRESENCE

Sally Sherman Caudill, Contributing Editor

Is Rebecca McClung Still With Us?

Fall is upon us and Halloween will soon be here. This month, in that "spirit," we're looking at some infamous crimes, ghostly happenings, local legends, and strange occurrences that have befallen Mason over the course of its history.

Mason's most well-known murder case would have to be the sad story of Rebecca McClung and her unsolved murder. What is it about this case that has fascinated locals for over a hundred years?

Rebecca's story starts on July 19, 1840, when she was born in Mason to Martha and Ezra Dawson. Described as a buxom¹ beauty, she likely had her fair share of suitors. However, she held off on marriage until the age of 30 when she wed John McClung, who was 14 years her senior. They lived and worked on a farm north of town, until John retired and built them a large home at 101 E. Main St. in 1880.

The McClung's were described as wealthy recluses who lived the life of paupers. They were "eccentric in the extreme... They knew neither joy in themselves or interest in the world." John was a miser with a distrust of banks, who was known to have a violent temper. The friendless 74-year-old had recently been exhibiting signs of dementia. For 21 years, 60-year-old "Becca" never left the house. She watched the world go by through her closed shutters. She was a "prisoner by force or by choice." No one was quite sure which.

At 4:30 am on April 12, 1901, blood-curdling screams were heard from Rebecca's bedroom. John later testified that he was in the barn doing his daily chores, and when he returned to the house, he found her dead in her bed. She had been viciously beaten about the face and head with a piece of ash stove wood from the home. The townspeople of Mason were very nearly in a frenzy over all the excitement that the murder generated. Word spread like

wildfire around the village, and the townspeople packed the coroner's hearing, as well as the trial. Interest in the case was not limited to Mason. Newspapers across the



"John McClung.
From his last
photograph, taken
several years ago. He
now wears long chin
whiskers."

From an unsourced article found in coroner's inquest.

country, from Chicago to St. Louis to Billings, Montana, carried the story. Locally and across Ohio, the story was front page news for months. The *Enquirer* reported, "The McClung tragedy marks an epoch in Mason's civic existence... The outside world does not know what a terrific shock it was to the community of quiet, simple people which is Mason."

Authorities first suspected robbery, as John was thought to keep large amounts of cash in the home. However, there was no evidence of a break in and nothing in the home was missing.

Rebecca's funeral was held two days after her murder. Astonishingly her husband had an open casket viewing in their home before the service at the Universalist Church. John McClung, who had blood stains on his jacket, and fresh sores on his hands and

wrists, was tried for second-degree murder. Due to lack of evidence presented by the prosecution, he was acquitted. There were no other suspects. Three years after the murder, John died of natural causes and is buried next to Rebecca.

story continues on page 3

The Mason Historical Society and Alverta Green Museum are located in the heart of downtown Mason, Ohio. Established over 40 years ago, the Society's aim is to create, promote and preserve the history and heritage of Mason.

For more information, call 513.398.6750, visit our website at masonhistoricalsociety.org or friend us on Facebook.

Visit us at: 207 W. Church St. Mason, Ohio

REGULAR HOURS

1 pm - 4 pm Thursday and Friday, First Saturday of the Month 10 am - 1 pm, and by appointment

GHOSTS IN THE GRAVEYARDS?

Sally Sherman Caudill, Contributing Editor

Mason's Original Cemetery

When Mason was just a fledgling village, they buried their dead in a cemetery on North East St. by the railroad tracks. In 1868, when Rose Hill was founded, the small, original cemetery sat quietly, waiting for progress to catch up to it.

That time came in 1892 when council passed an ordinance to prohibit the interment of the dead within the limits of the village. Over the next decade, William Jackson was paid \$2.90 each to move the bodies the half-mile from the old cemetery to Rose Hill. This

move included several dozen unknown remains; their identities lost to history.

In 1912, Mason Central, the town's new school, was built just east of the old cemetery. In 1950, when a classroom annex was being added onto the south side of the school, legend has it that the construction workers found several unknown bodies in the midst of their excavation. Apparently not every body made the move and some had been left behind. The legend continues in saying that not every body still buried there was found and some still lie beneath the school's former playground and baseball field. Fact or fiction? I could find no record at Rose Hill of a group of bodies being moved and buried at the same time around 1950. But I can't help but think that the town would certainly not want this kind of negative publicity and would want to keep it under wraps... So, fact or fiction? You decide. I just hope that if there are any poor unknown souls left behind, they're at peace.



Dog Street Cemetery gravestone for five-year-old Missouri Jane Galeenor.

No. of Interment	NAME OF DECEASED	Section	Lot	UNDERTAKER	REMOVED FROM
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	luknown	7	*79	1	mason o brangard
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	luknown	7	*83	1	Mason O Granyard
	link nown	7.	#84	1	mason Olmanyand
1273	unknown	7	*85	1	masono loranguid
1274	ank grown	7	#860		mason O lorangerd
1275	unk moron	7	*87 0		Maron Olmanyand
1276	Auk nown	7	#88 0		Mason Olmanyard
1277	unknown	. 7	#89 6		Mason Obraoujand

1902 Rose Hill ledger entries showing some of the unknown remains that were removed from the original Mason Graveyard.

Dog Street Cemetery

The roller coaster screams. and the fireworks booms each night have been the constant companion of a small cemetery nestled amongst the trees at the north end of the Kings Island parking lot. Dog Street Cemetery was founded in 1803 by the Union Methodist Church. One story says it got its name from the "dog leg" street that used to lead up to it. In use until about 1890, it then became part of the John D. Hoff farm. It was later the Dill farm, and then was purchased by the King Family

to expand their powder company. When Kings Island acquired the land in 1969 for its future amusement park, they weren't quite sure what to do with the little cemetery, but a decision was made to build around it, so as not to disturb the burial grounds.

Although it's visible from Kings Island Drive and the north parking entrance, it's very easy to overlook this incongruous sight. The split rail fence contains the earthly remains of many familiar names: Baysore, Bowyer, Clark, Dill, Hageman, Monfort, Scofield and Witham to name a few. There are at least 70 graves, but only about 50 still have a marker.

Legend has it that some of the Dog Street graves were inadvertently paved over when the parking lot was laid in, giving rise to a restless spirit. Kings Island is known to have several different ghosts. They include Racer Boy, Tower Johnny, and White-Water Canyon Woody. But the most intriguing by far is a young girl with blonde hair and blue eyes, who's four-feet-tall, and is dressed in a period, 19th-century blue dress.

Some say her name is Sarah, but many others believe her to be Missouri Jane Galeenor. This little girl with the unique name died at the age of five in 1846, and is buried at Dog Street Cemetery. She was the oldest of three children born to Nancy (nee Malsbury) and Stephen Bowyer Galeenor. After their daughter died, they moved away to Illinois and ended up having nine more children. Of their 12 children, only six would live to adulthood.

The little girl's spirit is playful and friendly, and has been sighted all over the park. Her favorite "hobby" though is to startle the parking lot tram drivers at the end of the evening. Not much is known about her "living" time on earth. Since spirits will typically haunt places that they were associated with in life, perhaps she lived and/or died on the very land that over three million people visit every year. She may be a lost soul because her family left the area and she's looking for them. Or she may just want to join in on the fun that she's been witness to for so many years.

¹Around Mason, Ohio: A Story, Rosemarie Springman Rose Hill Cemetery ledger

Dog Street Cemetery & the Ghost of Missouri Jane; youtube.com Ancestry.com-William E. Galeener obituary The Big Book of Ohio Ghost Stories by James Willis

AN UNSOLVED MURDER..., cont.

In the almost 120 years since Rebecca was killed, legend has it that her ghost has never left her home. Numerous sightings over the years have been documented. She has been seen floating at the top of the steps dressed in black, and reportedly spoke to one person, inquiring as to the location of "the Rebecca McClung" grave. Her presence is not always seen, but she's sure to make her presence known. She'll open and close windows, topple chairs, and slam doors among other pranks. She's especially active in the Fall, and at Christmas time.

Her unrest in the afterlife is likely due to the fact that her murder remains unsolved and her killer could very well be right by her side at Rose Hill. If I were her, I wouldn't want to spend eternity next to him either, and would look for any opportunity to get away. She certainly deserves to be able to cause a little mischief once in awhile...

¹Cincinnati Enquirer, April 18, 1901

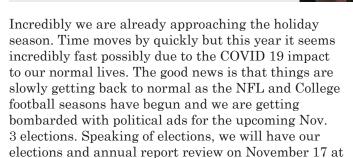
²Dayton Herald, April 13, 1901

Testimony in McClung Murder Case before Coroner Carey, April 12,1901 Testimony in McClung Murder Case before Mayor Lowe, April 15, 1901 Cincinnati Ghosts by Karen Laven

The Board Report



7 p.m. at the museum.



Thank you for making the Rescue Raffle a great success so far. We have received many very generous

donations along with ticket purchases from about 50% of our membership. These funds will go a long way toward helping us meet our 2020 expenses and gather matching funds from the City of Mason.

More good news is that we have also seen a nice increase in new memberships over the past couple of months which is key for our long-term success as an organization. The great work of Gina Burton Arens and Sally Sherman Caudill on the Newsletter has been identified as the reason on most of the new membership requests.

We love to receive stories about growing up in Mason so we can include them in the Newsletter. Each of us have unique and interesting stories to tell so send them to us so our entire membership can enjoy them.

Stay safe, stay well & thank you for your support of MHS.

THIS MONTH IN MASON HISTORY

Excerpt from Around Mason, Ohio: A Story, Rose Marie Springman, ©1986.

1818: Sarah Mason was born to William and Sarah Murphy Mason on October 4. In later years Sarah's daughter, Flora Tetrick, was to write that she recalled many of the stories told by her mother about life in the early part of the nineteenth century.

1880: Extra police were to be hired for the evening of October 9 when thousands of people from southeastern Ohio were expected in Mason for the torchlight political procession.

1884: During the months of September and October there was a typhoid fever epidemic in the area.

1928: WLW Radio officially opened its 50,000-watt transmitter at Mason, 25 miles from the Cincinnati studios. Powel Crosley, owner of the radio station, had bought out WSAI, which already had transmitting facilities at Mason and the two were operated as sister stations for a while.

1937: The Mason High School junior class scheduled their class play for October 20. Despite problems during

the rehearsals because of an epidemic of scarlet fever among Mason students, "Father Goes Domestic" was presented on the date planned.

1962: The first football game played by the Mason High School team was with the Loveland High School team on their field. On October 13 the first home game ever played in Mason was with the team from Lebanon.

1973: Jack Nicklaus wins the inaugural Ohio Kings Island Open tournament at the Jack Nicklaus Golf Center in Mason, at 13 under par, donating his first-place prize purse of \$25,000 to charity.

1975: On October 25th Evel Knievel leapt over 14 buses at Kings Island with more than half of all TV viewers tuning in to the event.

Around Mason, Ohio: A Story (Bicentennial Edition) is available for purchase at the Alverta Green Museum. This book is an invaluable reference for anyone interested in the history of Mason.

A MURDER THAT TIME FORGOT

Sally Sherman Caudill, Contributing Editor

Locals Called Him the Insane Farmer

As most of you are aware, the 1901 McClung murder has entered the annals of infamy in the history of Mason. You may be surprised to know that just one year later, there was a very similar murder that has been all but forgetten. This horrific crime left one family member dead and another seriously wounded.

James N. Conover was a wealthy, highly-connected farmer who was born in Mason in 1845. His grandmother was Margaret Mount Cox who moved to Mason in 1810, five years before the village was incorporated. She was a widow who came with her eight children from New Jersey and settled on a large farm in Deerfield Twp.³ Some of James' first cousins were Peter Wikoff, son-in-law of William Mason, and W.N. Cox, a successful hardware store owner in town.

A Civil War veteran, James married Loretta Krauskopf in 1871 and they settled on a large farm just north of Mason. The year after they were married, Loretta gave birth to a daughter, Alice, and five years later, a son Charles followed.

In 1891, 19-year-old Alice died of diphtheria, and this appears to be when James's mental health spiraled downward. For the next 11 years, he was in and out of state mental hospitals, staying for a few months at a time. Several times he asked to be committed when he could feel his "deranged episodes" coming on. In March of 1902, just four months prior to the murder, James was once again considered "cured" and sent home to his wife.

James's surviving child, Charles, had married Pearl Bowyer and they lived in a house on an adjoining farm. On June 11th, Pearl prematurely gave birth to a son, who survived for 14 hours. It's not known exactly what led to the events a month later, but the death of James' first grandson seems more than coincidental, given the timing of his first breakdown after his daughter's death 11 years before.

What is known is that at two in the afternoon, on July 14th, 1902, James Conover came up behind his wife, Loretta, who was sitting in their summer kitchen. He bludgeoned the back of her head with a walnut bedpost, and continued hitting her face and head until she was completely unrecognizable. He neatly laid a sheet over her body and then went to the barn to lay in wait for his son.

An hour later Charles arrived and entered the barn. The "Cincinnati Enquirer" reported, "Before the young man could realize his danger, he had been dealt a murderous blow on the head. Fortunately the heavy blade glanced off, inflicting only an ugly scalp wound. Before the ax could be wielded a second time the young man was out of harm's way."



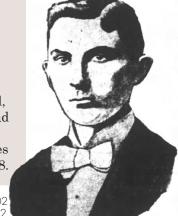
The Conover farm (white outline) was comprised of over 100 acres. The murder site is now a green space and part of the Crossroads Church parking lot.

Bleeding profusely, Charles was near collapse, but managed to escape from his father and make it to a neighbor's home. The authorities were called out at once, and soon a posse arrived at the Conover farm. They found James dispassionately telling farmhands that they "needn't stop here for harvest...for I've killed my wife and there'll be no need for you." He was taken into custody and later told a reporter, "they're to blame for it. They shouldn't have left me alone with my wife. I don't know what made me do it, but I wanted to kill both my wife and son."

James was committed to the Lima State Hospital for the remainder of his life. He died there at the age of 78 in 1924, and was buried next to his murdered wife in Rose Hill. His obituary ironically stated, "He was a highly respected citizen and had many friends here."

Charles Conover, maimed for life, was a victim of his father's madness. "Cincinnati Enquirer" illustration, July 16, 1902.

Charles and his wife, Pearl, remained in Mason and had three more sons: Charles, Merrill and James. Charles died in 1965 at the age of 88.



[&]quot;Cincinnati Enquirer," July 15-16,1902 "Akron Beacon Journal," July 15,1902 Ancestry.com

Rose Hill Cemetery ledger

³Around Mason, Ohio: A Story, Rosemarie Springman ⁴"The Hamilton Daily News," May 9, 1924

MASON'S HAUNTED HOLLOW

Gina Burton Arens, Editor

John R. Liming was born in Mason in 1938 and resided here for 35 years until 1973. He is the author of a collection of stories at the Alverta Green Museum called "Memories of a Kid from Mason". Mr. Liming relates many stories of growing up in Mason but admits that memories are conditioned by two things. One, a sense of how things actually were, and two, how you wished they were. With that in mind, we take you into the boyhood world of one John R. Liming.

John R. Liming's grandpa was Lafayette (Lafe) Liming (1870-1957), the sexton at Rose Hill Cemetery for many years. His Dad, John E., worked for his Dad at the cemetery for many years as well. Many of John's childhood memories relate to time spent as a boy in the cemetery.

In one story John tells of a place he referred to as the "Haunted Hollow". Legend says that there was once a small shanty town there. Reportedly the hollow had a working spring and an old cistern that had been capped by timbers. Nearby there was blacked wooden foundations of what could have been a cabin or a house of some kind. The hollow was believed to host a small community of indigent people living there in the late 1890s through early 1900s.

The old hollow is located up the old CL&N (Cincinnati, Lebanon & Northwestern) Railroad tracks towards Lebanon and is directly behind Heritage Oak Park. As a boy, John used to walk up the tracks to reach the hollow. As you might imagine, there were stories of ghosts inhabiting this dark hollow. John asserts it possessed a disturbing, haunting quality and that for those brave enough to find themselves in the hollow after dark, the spirits would manifest themselves in a variety of ways.

John warns that you must quietly observe your surroundings for the best experience. The hollow always seems a bit darker and a bit cooler in temperature, even in the warmest weather. You may notice leaves moving without a hint of a breeze; noises such as crackling of leaves and sticks under foot, loud

thumps and the onset of muffled voices. You may even sense you are being watched as you feel something brush against your arm, but there's nothing there.

John claims to have experienced these things and more. One night he and two friends saw a dark figure of what seemed to be an old man, with only shadows for a face standing in the hollow. They called out to him with no response. When they approached

the man he simply was not there.

They fled the Haunted Hollow that night not returning for a very long time. Are these the restless spirits of the past? Or the imagination of one young John Liming, apt at telling spooky stories to begin with? He insists that these tales are true. So, if you dare visit the old hollow, after dark, you might become a believer too!



John Liming, c. 2000.

"Memories of a Kid from Mason," John Liming, 2005-2006.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Please join us in welcoming the following new members to the Mason Historical Society.

Tim Hackman Tom & Barbara Henn Alex Henn Leah Joelson Pam Kapraly Don Middleton JoAnn Robinson Alan Werner Joshua Zerkle family

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

If you have any thoughts you would like to share regarding Mason history, please submit them to "Letters to the Editor." You can mail these to the museum or email them to mason.oh.historical@gmail.com

HALLOWEEN TRADITIONS AND MISCHIEF IN MASON

By John R. Liming; Edited by Gina Burton Arens

Each year Mason Central hosted a Halloween Jamboree. Until 1959, all grades, first through twelfth, were held at Mason Central. The fire company organized and funded the party, assisted by the local Grange and school band. There was music, costume contests, soft drinks and hot dogs. The gym was fully decorated with orange crepe paper streamers, paper pumpkins and cardboard skeletons.

Each year the big event was a costume parade through town. All would assemble in front of the school with a police car leading the parade. The band would follow, escorting a host of ghosts, goblins, hobos and their parents.

The red light from the police car cast an eerie glow over the crowd as it marched up East Street to Main, past the Municipal Building and on to the area of Deerfield Manufacturing. Some onlookers lined the streets but not many because most folks were in the parade. The group would then turn around and march back to the school.

Beyond the annual party, another major component of an old-fashioned Halloween was "homemade" treats for the "beggar's bag". There was a time when neighborhood mothers made those great sticky-sweet popcorn balls, fresh fudge and fragrant spicy cookies

in the shape of witches, pumpkins and autumn leaves. A candied apple with that spicy red coating was a real treasure. Better yet if it were dipped in caramel fudge with peanuts!

There were no pre-determined hours for "begging" and there were few of those parent-escorted groups of kids you see today. If you were six or seven you were pretty much let loose to be on your own. It didn't work out that way though because you would hook up with other kids anyway as you made your rounds. People could be trusted in those days. There were no fears of poisoned candy or razor blades in apples.

Another tradition involved the older folks in town getting a bang out of telling their ghost stories to the young. You could find this kind of entertainment on every front porch in town, especially the front porches of the big boarding houses. These "Tales of Elders" from people like Clem Bowyer, Grandma Chesney, Cecil Fields, Albert Dill and others were never to be questioned. It was understood they were true and authentic.

Meanwhile around town, in the darkness, the trees grow heavy with toilet paper as the Halloween mischief makers get to work. Soap is being applied to house and car windows, eggs are being thrown at houses and nicely carved jack-o-lanterns are seen splattered on the streets. In addition, if you lived in Mason before they installed a sewer system, outhouses would be overturned in back yards!

In the Springman book, Around Mason, it is noted that in 1917 two deputy marshals were appointed to be on duty for Halloween. "Undoubtedly it was hoped that the extra law enforcement would prevent the most prevalent trick on Halloween, the overturning of the outhouses in the back yards of homes." There were numerous notations of extra law enforcement being assigned during the days leading up to and including Halloween, apparently many felt "mischief" was an indelible part of the holiday tradition.

> One other mischief tradition was "tick-tacking". This activity involved throwing shucked corn kernels against the façade of a neighbor's house causing a frightful and sudden noise. Field corn was plentiful in and around Mason at one time, so it was easy to get what one needed to tick-tack.

Halloween came and went over the years. The annual Jamboree and parade were eventually abandoned. The Law came down on the tick-tackers and curfews were imposed and enforced for

October brings fall, leaves changing colors, cooler weather, warm apple cider and donuts. There are some things that never change. These things and the joyful memories of the past will thankfully always be with us. Happy Halloween!



(John Liming's) Mom's **Halloween Pumpkin Spice Cookies**

Ingredients:

1 1/2 cups brown sugar (packed)

1/2 cup shortening

2 eggs

1 3/4 cup canned pumpkin

2 3/4 All-purpose flour

1 Tbsp. baking powder

1 tsp. cinnamon

1/2 tsp. nutmeg

1/2 tsp. salt

1/4 tsp. ginger

1 cup raisins

1 cup chopped pecans

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Mix sugar, shortening, eggs and pumpkin.

recipe continues next page 6

Your Historical Museum Collection

Featured item of the month

This blue & white transferware bowl, which dates to c. 1890 belonged to murder victm, Rebecca McClung. At an estate sale in 1904, it was



purchased by the grandmother of Martha Maddox, the donor.

The Japanese inspired pattern is Tokio and features small vignettes of Japanese themes, florals and mountain scenery. As the pattern name implies, this is a Tokyo commemorative dish and the motifs are in step with characteristic Arita blue and white themes: the peonies, prunus, lotus, the pine tree, the Shinto gate, the sun rising over the hills. Also, the rim is painted brown, again very characteristic of Arita blue and white wares. (Arita ware is a broad term for Japanese porcelain made in the area around the town of Arita.)

PUMPKIN SPICE COOKIE RECIPE, cont.

Blend together dry ingredients. Add dry ingredients to pumpkin mixture, stirring until well blended. Add raisins and pecans.

(Note: If using self-rising flour, omit baking powder and salt.)

Drop batter by teaspoons onto ungreased baking sheet. If you prefer flat cookies, chill dough, roll out and cut. Bake until lightly browned, 9-15 minutes. Cool and then ice with butter icing.

Icing for cookies

- 2 1/2 Tbsp. salted butter softened
- 1 1/2 cups confectionary sugar
- 1 1/2 Tbsp. cream
- 3/4 tsp. vanilla

Directions:

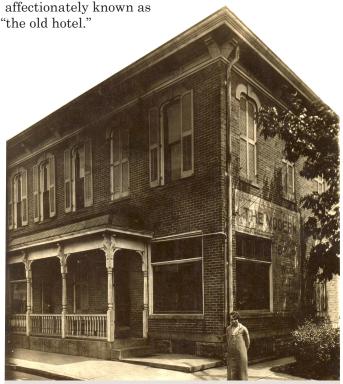
Blend butter and sugar together; Stir in cream and vanilla until smooth.

WALKING TOUR STOP #3

This is the perfect time of year to take the Mason Historical Walking Tour. It's an interesting, handson activity that offers a wonderful visual experience of the history of Mason. Brochures for the tour are accessible 24 hours a day in front of the Alverta Green Museum. There are 25 locations noted with brief descriptions of each. A map is included for easy navigation of the city streets and most locations have a numbered granite ground marker. Some sites located on the outskirts of the map may be visited by car, especially if time or energy does not allow you to walk the entire tour.

This month we're featuring the McClung home at 101 E. Main St.

Built by John McClung as a residence in 1880, the building is rumored to be haunted by John's wife, Rebecca, who was brutally murdered in her upstairs bedroom in 1901. The home was purchased in 1911 and became The Modern Hotel, where the basement was said to be a speakeasy during Prohibition. It is



"The Modern" boarding house, 1920. Built in 1880 as a residence for John and Rebecca McClung.

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RESCUE RAFFLE UPDATE

We are excited to report that our Fall Rescue Raffle is going well with almost 50% of our membership already responding. It looks like we will be on track to have our best raffle ever thanks to ticket sales and generous donations of our valued members. We cannot thank you enough!

These funds will go a long way in helping us meet our operating expenses for the year. We are hopeful more members will respond to the raffle ticket fund raiser soon! Drawing will be at our November 17th meeting.

As Always, we appreciate our members and the support you provide to the Mason Historical Society's mission to create, promote, and preserve Mason's history.