

STONE HEAD

The Making and Unmaking of a Local Landmark

In the winter of 1851, local farmer and stone carver Henry Cross made three road markers as payment for his county-road “tax.” At that time, land owners were expected to either work on the newly plotted roads or pay someone to do the work for them. An experienced engraver and carver, creating signposts would have been a fairly simple task for Cross. The entrepreneurial artisan, however, recognized that the markers could also advertise his craft to the community. At the top of each stone sign, Cross carved the likeness of township trustee George Summa, which no doubt would have been the talk of the township. As locals chatted about the unusual (and humorous) statue, they also spread the word about their new neighbor who had a quarry and could skillfully carve stone.

Little is known about Cross before he received a land grant of forty-one acres in Brown County in 1848, but census records reveal that he was born in Indiana in 1821. He married Mary Clark in Brown County in 1848; she was the Ohio-born daughter of Absalom Clark, a farmer and tailor. Van Buren township was the last corner of the county to be settled, and the 1850 Census indicates that several artisans chose to make southern Brown County their home. Cross’s neighbors included basket weavers, gunsmiths, shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and masons. While many of the immigrants had special skills, most were primarily farmers who cleared the land, grew crops, and raised livestock.

Local history remembers Cross as a stone carver; however, both the 1850 and 1860 Census record his occupation as a farmer. Likely, his stonework supplemented his agricultural aspirations. By 1850, he was growing corn and oats, and owned four horses, five head of cattle, thirty sheep, and eighteen hogs (1850 Agricultural Census). Cross worked to grow his farm, and by 1864 he owned 120 acres. Southern Brown County in the 1850s would have been an exciting but difficult place for the newlyweds to make their home and raise their family. The couple would bury two infant sons on a hillside, on the eastern edge of their farm, as well as Mary’s parents and her sister.

The couple had seven more children, but tragedy seemed to define their life.

While clearing his land in 1864, a burning tree fell on Cross, pinning him beneath the fiery mass. Cross’s untimely death left Mary in debt and with seven children to raise. His seventeen-year-old son Chester tried to continue his father’s gravestone carving business; but he was not as skilled as his father. This combined with the importing of marble gravestones, signaled the end of the local carving tradition. Mary and her children would eventually move back to Ohio, and Chester would go west to Missouri. J.W. Critchfield, an engraver who had worked with Cross, placed a marble marker on the carver’s grave in the Mellott



The original Stone Head carved in 1851 directed travelers to other towns, some which no longer exist

Cemetery. The mass-produced stone seems insufficient to memorialize Cross's life in Brown County; perhaps a more meaningful testament to the artisan's life and work are the dozens of his finely-carved gravestones, and the stone head who for so long quietly watched as travelers passed.

The Decapitation of Stone Head

On November 6, 2016, vandals broke off and stole the head of Stone Head, leaving the chest of the monument still mortared to its base. 165 years after first being carved, the last of the three stone road markers was destroyed. Why would someone do this? Perhaps the questions shouldn't be why was it destroyed, but rather, how did it survive so long? There are many reasons why Stone Head may not have survived to the present. Consider the fate of the other two markers. The third is completely lost to history, or perhaps its existence is a local legend. "Stone Head Number 2" was lost until local historian and artist Kenneth Reeve was talking to his neighbor Taylor Wilson, who told him about finding a fragment of "Number 2" when he was a boy. A road grader had dredged up a piece of the marker, which previously stood at the intersection of Christiansburg and Orchard roads. Mr. Reeve began an amateur archaeological project to find "Number 2" and soon discovered another chunk of the old roadmarker, which he donated to the Brown County Historical Society. If the other stone heads became so easily lost, how did our Stone Head survive? The truth is it almost didn't. Photojournalist Frank Hohenberger recorded in his diary a story that "the stone had fallen into the creek at one time and laid there for ten years" before local road contractor Wes Polley retrieved it. "Hill Coffey of Nashville retraced the lettering" on the damaged Stone Head and mounted it on a cement base (Hohenberger nd., 338). Stone Head could have suffered the same fate of the others had it not been for local interest in preserving the old landmark.

Our Stone Head suffered not just from neglect, but also abuse. In 1920, a writer for the *Franklin Democrat* relayed a story about the shooting of Stone Head. He writes that one evening "many years ago" Tom Brown,



This headstone carved by Henry Cross is an example of his fine craftsmanship and served as the inspiration for the new monument to come

who was intoxicated "drew his pistol and shot the stone head in the upper edge of the right eye where the bullet made a deep dent" (*Franklin Democrat*, Friday August 20, 1920). In addition to this drunken duel, the tip of the nose was also chipped off sometime in the early nineteenth hundreds, which is apparent when you compare early photographs with later images of Stone Head.

To the list of charges of neglect and abuse, we can also add theft. Stone Head was stolen several times. Many locals remembered occasions when youths hid or relocated the marker. On September 29, 1974, however, two Indianapolis teens stole the monument and the marker was missing for several months. When it was recovered on January 23, 1975, the old marker had suffered minor damage to the back of the neck, where they used a chain to pull the bust from its pedestal. The two men had also written their names on the monument. The reason the two young men gave for their unplanned theft of Stone Head, was that they thought it would "look good" in their living room where they were using it as a hat rack (*Brown County Democrat*, January 29, 1975). While the monument was missing, the Brown County Historical Society commissioned a limestone copy that could replace the old marker. Once the police recovered the original, locals rejected the idea of replacing the relic, so the original marker was returned to its cement base. For the next forty years, Stone Head received little fanfare until the fall of 2016.

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A Monument for Stone Head

Word quickly spread through social media about the damaged marker, and it was suggested that someone should make a replica of Stone Head or perhaps create a new piece that would honor the long-standing landmark. The Brown County Art Gallery picked up the challenge and spearheaded the undertaking, helping secure financial and creative support for the project. Believing it was perhaps premature to replace Stone Head, they instead opted to create a piece of art to honor the old sentinel. The Lechleiter Family, who now own the land where Henry Cross quarried his stone, offered the sandstone for the memorial. For the project, The Gallery commissioned Casey Winningham, a carver who specializes in nineteenth-century style gravestones. On a hot afternoon in June, Casey and I met with Dan Lechleiter to select the stone from Cross's old quarry. As we walked down the steep hillside toward the quarry, we could hear a trickle of water as it spilled from the sandstone ledge of the quarry and struck the creek bed below. It was exciting to stand in the same spot where the famed artisan had cut his stone. We could see the straight,

perpendicular channels that the carver cut into the fine blue siltstone, each resembling the rough dimensions of Cross's gravestones.

As we stood at the bottom of the ravine, we gazed up the steep incline, which was crowded with underbrush and trees; we began to realize how difficult it must have been for Cross to transport the heavy stone slabs up the hill — how were we going to get the stone out of the ravine? Then Dan remembered that there were several stone blocks that had been foundation stones from the old Cross homestead; perhaps we could use one of them.

Dan led us to the blocks, which were stacked in an easily accessible location; they were covered with moss, but looked good. Casey then pulled out his chisel and mallet to check the quality of the stone. "It carves like butter," he commented, and pointed out that the stones still had the chisel marks from where Cross had shaped them in the 1840s. This ended our debate. We had to use that stone. The next week, with the help of Jerry and Dan Fleetwood as well as Jim Ogle, we were able to secure the stone for the monument.

To prepare for the project, Casey searched several southern Brown County cemeteries for examples of the



Stonecarver Casey Winningham uses traditional hand tools made in the 19th century to create his stone artwork



The Intersection of History and Art

Casey Winningham, Stone Carver

Casey Winningham of Bloomington, is one of a small number of gravestone carvers in the country who work by hand with chisel and mallet. He became interested in the Stonehead marker project because of a growing respect for the man who created it...Henry Cross.

"For many years my work in recreating 19th century headstones has involved seeking out and photo documenting over 5,000 headstones in the Southern Indiana area. I have come to recognize the styles of many Indiana carvers. Among the best is Henry Cross. My studies now have focused on Henry's work. His lettering style is bold and unique. It has a flowing, well balanced

Henry Cross's work. He documented the fonts, motifs, and embellishments that were part of the old master's repertoire. Eventually, Casey settled on a distinctive motif used by Cross: a parted curtain and urn, but rather than the urn, the carver substituted a miniature version of Stone Head. At the top of the relief carving, Casey also incorporated a beautiful serpentine ribbon, another design element lifted from Cross. Below the stone's pediment the monument reads:

STONE
HEAD
1851 - 2016
CARVED BY
HENRY
CROSS

The text was simple but poignant. The curtain and urn were traditionally symbols of mourning for a loved one who has moved beyond the veil. Applying it to the lost marker seemed appropriate.

Throughout this project, when I reflected on the meaning of the stone, the carving, and the inscription, I was reminded of something Helen Reeve said to me many years ago when we were talking about when Stone Head was missing in the seventies: "He just stands there. He watches over the whole community and when he was missing...we missed him." The new marker is not intended to be a replacement, but rather a remembrance of an old friend whom we will miss.

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look. The curves are graceful and beautiful. In my letter carving I use tools that were made in the 19th century. While not completely necessary, they give me a feeling, an inward connection to those carvers who have gone before me."

Winningham didn't start out as a gravestone carver. He spent much of his life as an artist-blacksmith. He became fascinated by old cemeteries and began documenting stones that were in danger of being lost. Soon he learned how to restore them using the old techniques. People appreciated his work and began asking him to create stones for new graves. According to Casey, modern machine carving typically creates a rounded groove bottom that doesn't have the same light play as the hand carved work. It is the "V-groove" that creates the shadows. He now teaches the old techniques to others.

Carving stone puts him at an intersection of history and craft. A visit to the family cemetery as a 10-year-old with his grandfather made an impression.

Many of the ancestral graves were marked with just fieldstone. He knew those names would be lost including that of his grandfather's. He has now carved headstones for those graves, giving back a name to those who are buried there.

"I'm leaving something for many generations to come."

*A rendering of the
new memorial marker
Winningham is carving*

