The Plague of New Elizabeth

Don Alan Hall and Ruth A. Hall* 

... for weeks no traveler passed along the road ... . Trains would not stop ... but passed through at an extra rate of speed. Many of the residents packed their household goods and moved ... . 

... the town has never recovered from the depression caused by the terrible epidemic.1

In the summer of 1873 the town of New Elizabeth, Indiana, had grown from the original twenty-nine lots platted by Jesse Vieley in 18512 to more than 100 lots, most of which contained dwellings or other improvements.3 The first lots of the town were laid out along the state road, with one tier

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2 An atlas of Hendricks County published in 1878, as well as several county histories, indicates that New Elizabeth was laid out in 1877. This date is apparently incorrect. While the Vieley land grant for the 320 acres which included the townsit was dated 1831, real estate transactions recorded in Hendricks County suggest that it was twenty years before the town was actually founded. Atlas of Hendricks Co., Indiana, To Which Is Added Various General Maps, History, Statistics, Illustrations ... (Chicago, 1878), 10. See also History of Hendricks County, Indiana: Her People, Industries and Institutions (Indianapolis, 1914), 97-99; History of Hendricks County, Indiana ... (Chicago, 1885), 717-18; Deed Record Book, XIV, 144 (Recorder's Office, Hendricks County Courthouse, Danville, Indiana). “Vieley” has been so spelled in this article because the authors felt that it was the most logical and acceptable variation of the name. Other sources list it as “Veley,” “Veeley,” or “Velely.” See, for example, U. S. Ninth Census, 1870, population schedules for Hendricks County, Indiana (National Archives Microfilm Publication No. 593, roll 322); Debra, “Cholera.”

3 Hendricks County tax records for the year 1873 were used to determine the size and approximate layout of New Elizabeth and the locations of the specific houses which are mentioned in this article. Tax
on the southwest side and two tiers along the northeast side of that Indianapolis-Crawfordsville route. The town's location seemed ideal, for besides being on the main road, it was about halfway between Danville, the Hendricks County seat, and Lebanon, the seat of Boone County.

The Indianapolis, Bloomington & Western Railroad had come in 1869 to parallel the state road and to give impetus to industrial growth and economic prosperity. New Elizabeth spread northward a quarter of a mile to the railroad and farther beyond along both the east and west sides of the road to Lebanon. Rails meant that for the first time there was a market for the timber that remained on the land, although much of the original virgin hardwood cover had already been wasted.

The town itself had begun to develop along the railroad. The post office, which had opened on the state road in 1851, was moved north to the railroad, and nearby was the town's railroad station and new hotel. On the north side of the tracks was a factory which produced barrel staves and barrel heads. This industry, and a bumper factory, were operated by the four Sourwine brothers. These men were in human resources what the railroad was to the industrial and commercial potential of New Elizabeth. The Sourwines brought to the community the serious air of growth and economic success. John Sourwine was the superintendent of mill operations; Samuel Sourwine bought timber and followed its progress from standing, living plant material to finished product shipped out on the railroad; Isaac Sourwine also worked in the mill and bought timber as well; Jake Sourwine was a blacksmith; and John Sourwine's oldest son, Isaac, was the mill's engineer. As the town grew in importance, its name was shortened; New Elizabeth was too long for railroad telegraphers. The newly industrialized town became, at least for railroad purposes, simply "Lizton."

Through the early weeks of the summer of 1873 residents of New Elizabeth could see little reason to worry about distant problems; however, threatening reports were to be found

Duplicates, 1873, pp. 63-87 (Auditor's Office, Hendricks County Courthouse, Danville, Indiana). The tax records for Hendricks County in 1873 are kept in two bound volumes, separately paginated.

4 History of Montgomery County, Indiana, with Personal Sketches of Representative Citizens (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1913), I, 301; History of Hendricks County, 1914, p. 98.

5 Roscoe R. Leak, A History of the Christian Church, Lizton, Indiana (n.p., 1911), [22-23].
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LIZTON

State 34 Rods to 1 Inch

in the newspapers that were brought by train from Indianapolis. Not the least of the bad news were the frequent accounts of the Asian cholera that was then spreading through the central United States as the final wave of a pandemic which had begun some years earlier in Asia. Reports of the disease might not have seemed particularly ominous, however, because "cholera" was not an unusual summer disease. The term often was used to describe sicknesses such as dysentery that were less serious than the dreaded Asiatic plague.

While medical experts of that time regarded Asiatic cholera as difficult or impossible to cure, many considered it preventable; it was known to be related to sewage and sewage polluted water. A weekly newspaper reported: "It is fortunately the case that, so far as preventative measures are concerned, the doctors of all schools of medicine substantially agree. Allopaths, homeopaths, and eclectics all concede the virtues of chloride of lime, carbolic acid, copperos and the various disinfectants, antiseptics and deodorizers now in general use." Perhaps in part because of newspaper advertisements, a number of people also believed quinine to have preventive powers against cholera: "Persons living in or visiting sections where Malaria, Fever and Ague, Bilious Fever, &c., are the characteristic diseases, should be provided with . . . Quinine, one of the best Remedial Agents which the science of Chemistry has placed at the disposal of the physician . . . ." In 1873 many still referred to cholera as "malarious congestion," and a sizable portion of the medical profession were still miasmatists to a certain degree; that is, they believed diseases such as cholera and malaria could be generated by poisonous vapors from swamps and rubbish heaps. It was not until 1883 that German bacteriologist Robert Koch isolated the cholera vibrios from cases of the disease in Egypt.

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6 Erwin H. Ackerknecht, History and Geography of the Most Important Diseases (New York, 1965), 28; Indianapolis Daily Journal, July 21, 22, 23, 24, August 2, 8, 1873; Indianapolis Evening News, July 28, August 1, 1873.

7 Ackerknecht, History and Geography of the Most Important Diseases, 28; Greencastle Banner, July 24, 1873.

8 Danville Hendricks County Union, September 11, 1873.

As August, 1873, wore on, concern about cholera became widespread in Indiana. There were probably very few Hoosiers who had not heard of that dreaded intestinal disorder with its uncontrollable diarrhea which dehydrated the body and its unbearable cramps which frequently heralded death. There is no reason to believe that fear of cholera was less in the growing town of New Elizabeth than in any other Indiana community. There had been several cholera deaths as near as Indianapolis, and reports of panic in cities such as Mount Vernon, where there had been a serious outbreak, were in all the newspapers.\textsuperscript{10} Most Indiana towns during the 1870s, however, never experienced direct contact with the cholera vibrios; New Elizabeth was not so fortunate. Possibly nowhere else in the central part of the state did the disease have such an impact.

Conflicting stories of the introduction of cholera to New Elizabeth have been told. It can probably be traced, however, to the arrival in the town of William Davis, his young wife, Fannie, and their baby. The Davises came from the tiny community of Needmore which existed for a time a few miles southwest of New Elizabeth on the road running between Danville and New Maysville. The couple seems to have been known to New Elizabeth residents although no indication has been found as to why they moved there on Wednesday, August 20, 1873.\textsuperscript{11}

The Davises moved into a small house in New Elizabeth. Thursday, August 21, passed uneventfully as Fannie Davis probably went about settling into what may have been the first home that she could call her own. The future possibly seemed bright for the young family that day, but the outlook changed suddenly midway through the family’s second night in the new home. It was after midnight—Friday morning—when Fannie awoke to find herself violently ill. So frightening was her sickness that before dawn her husband went out to summon medical help.\textsuperscript{12}

Dr. John A. Dicks, who probably conducted his practice from his home on the south side of the state road, was

\textsuperscript{10} Indianapolis \textit{Daily Journal}, July 21, 22, 23, 24, August 2, 8, 1873; Indianapolis \textit{Evening News}, July 28, August 1, 22, 1873.

\textsuperscript{11} Danville \textit{Hendricks County Union}, September 11, 1873; Leak, \textit{History of the Christian Church}, [23].

\textsuperscript{12} Danville \textit{Hendricks County Union}, September 11, 1873.
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described as an energetic young man with a personality and outlook that fitted well in New Elizabeth. He had moved to the town in 1867 and had started his practice there in 1870 after receiving a diploma from Indiana Medical College in Indianapolis. He in all likelihood went at once to Fannie Davis' side and watched her for a time. Surely he suspected Asiatic cholera when he learned the sick woman's symptoms, but there is no evidence by which to determine his diagnosis. Neither is there any record of how he treated the woman or what precautions, if any, he took to safeguard the health of baby and husband. It is known, however, that he did not sound a general alarm throughout New Elizabeth, and it is unlikely that the word "cholera" was used to describe her illness. Perhaps Dr. Dicks, not knowing of any way the young mother could have contracted the Asiatic disease, believed that she was merely suffering from an unusually severe case of diarrhea. Apparently, no effort was made to discourage visitors, and she had several. A protracted meeting was in progress at the Christian church, and several of those attending called on the suffering young woman. But despite the Christian charity demonstrated by the churchgoers, neighbors, Dr. Dicks, and her sister or sister-in-law, who came to nurse her, Fannie's condition worsened throughout the day.

Among the people who visited Fannie were members of the family of Thomas B. Hall, a fifty-five year old Kentuckian who farmed about eighty acres two miles west of New Elizabeth. He and his wife, Maria, had lived in the community for approximately eighteen years. In August, 1873, their three youngest children still lived with them in their brick farmhouse near the road to North Salem. They were Mary, nineteen years old; Cleopatra, fifteen; and Douglas, thirteen. Two older daughters were married. Maria Rachael had become the wife of Caleb F. Adams, a New Elizabeth farmer, in October, 1870; and they had a two year old son, Hickman B. Adams. Lavina Hall had recently married Stephen Fountain Hardwick, a farmer who owned and farmed

13 Greencastle Banner, September 4, 1873. Mrs. Ethel Barker of Fillmore, Indiana, has Dr. Dicks' diploma. A relative of the Dicks family, Mrs. Barker lived with Dr. Dicks' widow in Kokomo for two years.
14 Leak, History of the Christian Church, [23].
LEFT, Thomas B. Hall

RIGHT, Douglas Hall

LEFT, Mary and Lavina Hall
land west and north of Danville not far from Needmore. Mary Hall, who was to be married soon, was working away from home that summer. Squire Hall, so called because he was serving his fourth nonconsecutive term as justice of the peace, served as an elder of the Christian church, and his wife and daughters were active in church activities. So it was that they were among those attending the meetings the week that Fannie Davis was stricken. At least some of them visited the sick woman.\textsuperscript{15}

Prayer and medicine had little effect. In the afternoon Fannie went into a coma and by 5:00 p.m. she was dead.\textsuperscript{16} Within a few hours of the onset of her affliction a grave was being dug for her body in the graveyard on Jesse Vieley's place on the southeast side of the east fork of Eel River. After her funeral on Saturday, pallbearers went to the drugstore for some medicinal whiskey.\textsuperscript{17}

On Sunday morning Dr. Dicks was summoned to the care of one of the Hall girls, Mrs. Caleb Adams, who was stricken at church. The terrible truth was becoming evident: Fannie Davis was dead and buried, and Rachael Hall Adams was being taken from church with what was apparently the same illness. Further, it was learned that the Davis baby and Fannie's sister (or sister-in-law) were sick.\textsuperscript{18} In a community of no more than seventy-five families, it seemed an epidemic was at hand. Since the epidemic was Asiatic cholera, it could be termed a plague.

Rachael Adams was not taken to her parents' house but to the nearby cabin of William Richardson on the north end of Squire Hall's farm.\textsuperscript{19} She may have been removed to the Richardson cabin to protect other members of the Hall household, including Cleo and Douglas as well as Squire Hall himself, from the scourge; but it could have been that there was


\textsuperscript{16}Danville \textit{Hendricks County Union}, September 11, 1873. Most, if not all, reports in the \textit{Union} were written by David C. Lane, a New Elizabeth teacher-merchant.

\textsuperscript{17}Eldora Keeney to Ruth A. Hall, [January, 1970]. Mrs. Keeney, a niece of George L. Leak, one of the pallbearers, related details of the funeral as she had heard them.

\textsuperscript{18}Leak, \textit{History of the Christian Church}, [23].

\textsuperscript{19}Debra, "Cholera"; \textit{Atlas of Hendricks County}, 31.
more room at the neighboring house to care for the sick young woman. At any rate there were several members of the family on hand to help care for her—her sister, Lavina Hardwick, among them. Still, it is possible that the care Rachael received was somewhat half hearted, for there is reason to believe the prospect of cholera terrified the Halls.\textsuperscript{20}

As Sunday became Monday and new victims fell ill, it was significant that apparently no abuse was directed toward the Davises, at least as far as is now known. Communities could be hateful toward those who were thought to have initiated outbreaks of cholera.\textsuperscript{21} There is probably little doubt that citizens of New Elizabeth knew Fannie Davis to be the first victim of cholera and the one who introduced the loathsome affliction to their town. Nevertheless, while there may have been fears and misgivings at the time of her death, Fannie was given Christian rites and was not remembered as the vector of cholera in the folklore that grew out of the 1873 plague of New Elizabeth.

Stories told of the epidemic scores of years later by survivors did have a culprit, however. Children and grandchildren of those who lived through the epidemic heard that a foreigner brought cholera directly from abroad to New Elizabeth. Such an account was published in a weekly newspaper in Danville many years later: “A refugee escaped from a cholera infested ship in New York Harbor. Traveling west, he became so ill that he had to leave the train at Lizton, where he died.”\textsuperscript{22} It is likely that variations of the same story were told elsewhere after there was a siege of cholera, and in some other town it is possible that the story may have been true. The railroad, which changed New Elizabeth and many other such places from minor supply villages to growing regional manufacturing towns, did help spread cholera through the midlands of the United States.\textsuperscript{23} But the refugee story did not fit New Elizabeth except as a vehicle for help-

\textsuperscript{20} See footnote 35 below.

\textsuperscript{21} See Norman Longmate, \textit{King Cholera: The Biography of a Disease} (London, 1966); and Ackerknecht, \textit{History and Geography of the Most Important Diseases}. Both of these volumes document several cases of violence directed toward persons suspected of bringing cholera to a community.

\textsuperscript{22} Debra, “Cholera.”

\textsuperscript{23} Ackerknecht, \textit{History and Geography of the Most Important Diseases}, 28.
ing people to forget that the disease came to town first with a well liked, young married couple.

On Monday morning, August 25, Rachael Adams was still alive although she had slumped to a very low state. The Davis baby had died, and while Fannie Davis' sister (or sister-in-law) was not getting worse, there was no cause for optimism. Shortly after 10:00 a.m. Dr. Dicks was called to the home of Martin Griggs who had been seized with a sickness that was apparently cholera. Little is known about Griggs—even what he did for a living in New Elizabeth. The record indicates only a few facts; he was fairly prosperous by local standards, and he had a son who was a deafmute. Probably Griggs had not lived in town for more than a year or two. His permanent resting place was dug at the cemetery, however, by Jesse Vieley and David Leak; Griggs lived only about seven hours after contracting the disease.

Griggs' body had been in the ground but a few hours when Dr. Dicks was summoned again to the Hall farm. He drove his two wheeled cart out along the state road and the North Salem Road to the brick house. This time he found Lavina Hardwick in the convulsions of cholera. One can only imagine the terror that filled the family, with daughters apparently dying in each of the Squire's two houses. Their mother and sister, Cleo, probably helped take care of the two young women. Mary Hall was caring for Maria Rachael's baby boy elsewhere, and the Squire himself was no help—he was feeling infirm. Some thought he, too, had cholera. Although Rachael Adams lingered on barely alive, Lavina Hardwick died only seven hours after she was stricken. It must have been clear to Dr. Dicks that he should call for professional assistance from more experienced physicians, although a respite in the epidemic may have given him cause for delay.

At 2:00 a.m. Friday, August 29, however, the need for outside help was obvious. Dr. Dicks awoke feeling the early symptoms of cholera, and as the minutes of the night ticked...
GRAVESTONE OF LAVINA HALL HARDWICK
on, he became expert in the suffering and pain the disease could inflict on a patient with a severe case—the vomiting, the purging, and pain. His wife, Minnie, offered comfort and followed his instructions when he gave them. Neighbors came, too—those who were not afraid. Mrs. Benjamin Hedges was one who helped. She was the wife of a veteran of the War of 1812—a man much older than she. David C. Lane, storekeeper and teacher, visited Dr. Dicks, too.

Dicks probably believed he was going to die. He had little faith in his own medicines, nor apparently did he expect any results from the other physicians who had been summoned. Between seizures of intense cramping he conversed with his friends and probably told them what it was like to have cholera. And he asked to see his mother again. His parents lived on a farm near Fillmore, about thirty-five miles away. Other physicians who arrived accepted Dr. Dicks' diagnosis, but they could offer no remedies. One who came in midafternoon was Dr. J. A. Comingore of Indianapolis, one of Dicks' instructors at the Indiana Medical College. After an interval of quiet talk with colleagues, friends, and wife, Dicks slipped into a coma and was dead at 5:00 p.m.—before his parents arrived.

The death of the cheerful young doctor doubtless frightened residents of New Elizabeth more than anything before had done. Doctors were supposed to be immune from maladies which killed common men. Dicks' death also made the cholera outbreak in New Elizabeth newsworthy. The Indianapolis Evening News, for example, published a story headlined "Death of a Physician," which read: "Dr. A. J. Dicks of Elizabethtown [sic] Hendricks county . . . died of pernicious congestion [a popular euphemism—especially in the press] yesterday, after an illness of fourteen hours." The story went on to give some details of the illness and a bit of biographical information before concluding: "The deceased was a young man, energetic, honorable, self-sacrificing and an ornament to the profession, and a victim to overwork, loss of sleep and exposure, for he rode day and night to relieve the suffering. His place will be hard to fill."

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.; Leak, History of the Christian Church, [23]; Indianapolis Evening News, August 30, 1873, quoted in Greencastle Banner, September 4, 1873.
30 Indianapolis Evening News, August 30, 1873, quoted in Greencastle Banner, September 4, 1873.
Dicks' body was placed in a coffin and hauled to the railroad station for the trip to Fillmore. A group of friends and relatives went along on the journey which proceeded by way of Indianapolis. Word of his death—and the cause of it—reached Fillmore well before the funeral party. Fillmore residents heard only that cholera was coming to their town—on the train. They expected it to spread as a plague of horrible death and suffering. Several Fillmore residents talked themselves into an active frenzy about the coming of the cholera victim's body, and when mourners from New Elizabeth got off the train in Fillmore, they found armed men surrounding the depot. No one, the Fillmore men said, would be allowed to proceed with the coffin through the town to the graveyard. The guns were loaded and the gunbearers were frightened. Surely, New Elizabeth residents argued, Fillmore would allow Dr. Dicks a decent burial in his home town. Due to the persuasion of a few sympathetic Fillmore residents, including Dr. James Robinson, it was agreed that the body could be buried in the graveyard if the procession would not go through town. So coffin and mourners traveled through a woods to reach the cemetery. There, New Elizabeth residents had to dig the grave because no one from Fillmore would do it. Before the brief religious service began, Dr. Robinson opened the coffin to straighten the body of his colleague. It is recorded that because of his contact with the dead man he suffered a mild case of cholera about thirty-six hours later. Reporting later on the burial of Dr. Dicks, the Jamestown Commercial chastized Fillmore and its people. "Shame to such a community," the newspaper commented. "They need missionaries worse than the South Sea Islanders."

Back in New Elizabeth there were more cholera cases, including that of W. G. Haggard. Little is known about Haggard—where he lived or his occupation. He was reported to have been in ill health for about a year when he was stricken. At the same time, west of town, Cleopatra Hall was convulsing with cholera. With Dr. Dicks gone what medical

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31 Details of the reception of Fillmore residents were taken from the Jamestown Commercial as reprinted in the Danville Hendricks County Union, September 11, 1873, and from interviews with Mrs. Ethel Barker and Mrs. Edna Smith.

32 Greencastle Banner, September 4, 1873.

33 Jamestown Commercial, quoted in the Danville Hendricks County Union, September 11, 1873.
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attention there was came from physicians practicing in surrounding communities. On the Hall farm the condition of Rachael, still confined to the Richardson cabin, appeared unchanged, and there seemed no hope for Cleo. On Sunday, August 31, she was dying, and Mrs. Hall had cholera. Young Doug took a comfort and went back into a woods to escape the scene of suffering. He came out to the farmstead only for food which his aunt, who lived across the road, prepared and placed at the Hall's front gate for whoever would eat it. She and other relatives were afraid to come any closer. More personal help came from neighbors such as George Dale, who had constructed Lavina's coffin, and George (Tack) Lyons.

By Monday night Dale had two more coffins to make. Both Cleo and her mother were dead, and their boxed bodies were taken to Vieley's graveyard while Rachael clung to life. Neither Doug nor his father went to the burying. The boy stayed in the barn, and the Squire remained bedridden with what many assumed to be cholera. It may well not have been that disease, however. If he was ill, he recovered, and so far as is known no one else who had contact with the family developed a fatal case of cholera.

Tack Lyons, however, did experience symptoms of the sickness and assumed he was dying. A practical country man, the twenty-two year old Lyons rode into town to the drugstore, bought some quinine, and gave himself an almost intolerably large dose. So that no one would have to clean up after him, he made himself a bed in a strawstack behind a neighbor's barn. He told the neighbors to check on him in the morning, but he expected they would find him dead. About

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34 Indianapolis Daily Journal, September 6, 1873; Danville Hendricks County Union, September 11, 1873. Leak indicates that Jacob Kendall and a Mr. Haggard donated most of the work on the church benches in the new Christian church which was built in 1872. Leak, History of the Christian Church, [27]. Whether or not this was W. G. Haggard has not been ascertained.

35 Thomas Hall's half brother, William, and his family lived across the road. Atlas of Hendricks County, 31. Descendants were told this account of caring for the stricken family. However, Douglas Hall, in later years, often spoke—somewhat exaggeratedly perhaps—of surviving mainly on green apples, then thought by many to be a contributing factor to cholera.

36 Debra, "Cholera."

37 Douglas Hall said that his father had been laid up with back trouble at the time of the epidemic, but Debra's article, based on a 1953 interview with the ninety-three year old Hall, does not mention the nature of the Squire's illness.
midnight a curious neighbor went out to see how badly Lyons’ case had progressed. In the lantern’s glow he found Tack alive but with seriously impaired hearing because of the overdose of quinine.28

After the third member of the Hall family was buried, it seemed the epidemic might be lifting its hold on New Elizabeth. But on Tuesday, September 2, another resident, William R. Logston, developed the disease. “Cholera in Hendricks County,” proclaimed the headline in the Greencastle Banner. “The cholera is still raging at New Elizabeth in this county with somewhat abated fury. It is reported that two of Thomas B. Hall’s children have been taken from him by that dread scourge and that several others in that region have succumbed.” The article, signed “Danville Indianian,” concluded: “Owing to the absence from home during the greater portion of the week, we have been unable to learn the names of all the victims.”29

While there were many outside physicians visiting New Elizabeth to minister to the ill, it was not very many days before the town again had its own doctor. Dr. J. W. Culley, a former school principal at Danville, broke up a medical partnership there and came to New Elizabeth “to labor in behalf of afflicted humanity,” as one newspaper reported. “He has determined to cast his lot with citizens of that town and vicinity. . . . and we wish him abundant success.”30 Dr. Culley summoned from Louisville a physician known to be an expert on cholera, Dr. Santa Monta Heslea.31 It is reported that another doctor came to New Elizabeth planning to set up practice, but according to contemporary accounts he did not stay long. After “a day or so,” David C. Lane reported to the Danville Hendricks County Union, he “complained of feeling curious abdominally and went home, tho’ W. J. Lowry offered him $10 a day from his own pocket besides his fees,28 Both Leak’s 1911 account and Debra’s widely divergent 1953 report mention this story although it does not appear in any newspaper article written at the time of the epidemic. Leak, History of the Christian Church, [24]; Debra, “Cholera”; Cline and McHaffie, The People’s Guide: A Business, Political and Religious Directory of Hendricks Co., Ind. . . . (Indianapolis, 1874), 378.
29 Greencastle Banner, September 11, 1873.
30 Danville Hendricks County Union, September 4, 1873.
31 Both Leak and Debra tell of the Louisville expert’s being called; Leak spelled the name “Santa Monta Helsea,” and Debra spelled it “Santoe Haslea.” David C. Lane, reporting for the Danville Hendricks County Union’s September 11, 1873, edition, spelled the name “Heslea.” Leak, History of the Christian Church, [24]; Debra, “Cholera.”
One report said that the cowardly doctor was a native of Fillmore. This gives the story a flavor of folklore since Fillmore was an infamous place to New Elizabeth residents after the incident of Dr. Dicks’ burial.

New Elizabeth’s cholera plagued residents also had their share of medicine men. “Innumerable are the remedies that have been tried, some prescribed by our best physicians, others by traveling quacks, vending chloroform, liniments &c., warranting a cure in 3 minutes when no doubt they would come nearer killing in the same time,” Lane wrote. But Lane did his share of practicing medicine, and, according to his own accounts, he had better luck than the physicians. He said that he had been in Danville when the epidemic broke out, so before he returned home, he took down a prescription for cholera medicine from Hendricks County Recorder William Patterson. Lane tried the concoction on the deafmute son of Martin Griggs. Although the boy could not describe his illness, Lane said that it was obvious young Griggs was wracked by chills and cramps. He gave him a dose of the recorder’s remedy, put hot bricks against his feet, and propped his head high. He also bathed the boy’s body in a strong camphor solution. The boy survived, although his father died. Lane used the same treatment on his own daughter when she seemed to be taking cholera, and it is possible he used it on several others—perhaps on some who died—but there is no evidence one way or the other.

William Logston died Thursday, September 4, despite medications and the efforts of the doctors. On Saturday morning his wife was seized with severe cholera symptoms. Probably the next case was that of Benjamin Hedges, a hatter and veteran of the War of 1812 whose wife had helped care for some of the earlier victims. The Hedges’ home was a small, squalid abode south of the state road opposite the

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42 Danville Hendricks County Union, September 11, 1873.
43 The Danville Hendricks County Union of September 11, 1873, lists J. W. Culley as one of several physicians who served New Elizabeth residents after the death of Dr. Dicks. The article also mentions “some Dr. from Fillmore” who fled.
44 Dr. Dicks’ headstone in the Fillmore cemetery bears the date of August 29, 1872. Possibly the error in the year was made purposely.
45 Danville Hendricks County Union, September 18, 1873. Lane, at least in his newspaper article, did not share his remedy with his readers.
46 Leak, History of the Christian Church [24]; Danville Hendricks County Union, September 11, 1873. No mention of what happened to the Logston’s three children has been found. U.S. Ninth Census, 1870, Hendricks County, Indiana, 15.
junction of Middle Street. The house was assessed in 1872 at only $38, whereas most of the more prosperous homes—such as those built by the Sourwines—were appraised at from $300 to $400.47 Although a hardy man for his seventy-eight years, Hedges had not been in good health that summer. Still, he was considered the community’s Methuselah because only three years before he had fathered a son. His daughters—Alice, five; Elizabeth, seven; and Laura, ten—were also rather young.48 The old man had obvious cholera symptoms, but after he died, Lane attributed the death to “mostly . . . old age.” Oscar, Hedges’ three year old son, contracted the disease and died within seven hours of the first noticeable symptoms.49 At least two reports say the child lasted only two hours. Although townspeople who saw him were horrified by the intense suffering which caused the little boy to curl in pain, two hours is probably an exaggeration.50 After Oscar died, one of the girls took the disease and was dead in a few hours.51

With the deaths of the old man and the two young children there was a growing sense of alarm in New Elizabeth. A dozen people had died in two weeks, and there seemed to be no stopping the disease. A few who could do so fled the town and sought refuge with relatives. A week earlier the Danville Hendricks County Union had reported that people in New Elizabeth did not seem to be much alarmed but were “following their usual avocations daily.”52 However, the mood was changing. Farm people avoided the town entirely, and some businesses did not open.53

47 County tax records show that the Sourwine houses were the finest in New Elizabeth at the time of the cholera epidemic. Most still are standing.
48 U. S. Ninth Census, 1870, Hendricks County, Indiana, 11.
49 Danville Hendricks County Union, September 11, 1873. The manuscript census schedules for 1870 record the Hedges boy’s name as Milton. U. S. Ninth Census, 1870, Hendricks County, Indiana, 11.
50 Both Leak and Debra mention a boy’s dying after only two hours’ illness. Leak reports that the Hedges boy “cramped and drew almost double and cried, ‘Mamma, I hurts!’” Leak, History of the Christian Church, [24]; Debra, “Cholera.”
51 Lane does not report the death of the Hedges girl, but Leak says that one of the daughters died. Leak, History of the Christian Church, [24].
52 Danville Hendricks County Union, September 4, 1873.
53 In the Danville Hendricks County Union of September 11, 1873, Lane reports that many citizens had left New Elizabeth and that on Monday, September 8, only one business house in town was open. The authors have heard from several sources that residents fled and businesses closed. Debra emphasizes this slowdown in business in his 1953 account. Debra, “Cholera.”
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As the bodies of the old soldier and his two children were boxed and taken to the cemetery, the Hedges house seemed to exude the malady that caused the deaths. Probably on the insistence of neighbors Mrs. Hedges and her two surviving daughters moved into the then vacant house where Fannie Davis and her child had died. The sorry little Hedges house then was torched.54

Newspapers began to report on what was being called the plague of New Elizabeth or “Elizabethtown,” as some called the community. (The railroad name “Lizton” had not caught on well yet.) “New Elizabeth in Hendricks County . . . has been visited by cholera in violent and fatal form,” the Indianapolis Daily Journal reported. “Mrs. S. J. Helley, just from the fated town brings the intelligence that twelve deaths have resulted from the plague during the past ten days.” The Journal concluded: “After the death of Dr. Dix [sic] messages were sent to Louisville, and also to Dr. Wands of this city asking for medical assistance. The request was responded to promptly by the physicians of Louisville, and Dr. Wands has made arrangements to supply additional medical attendance from the physicians of this city if increase and spread of the disease render it necessary.”55

Cholera was indiscriminate about its victims. Old, young, sickly, or healthy—everyone seemed to have the same chance to contract the disease. Eva Burgess, for example, to all appearances was as healthy a person as there was in town. Yet on Friday morning she suddenly became violently ill. Those who came to her home on Middle Street saw her change in a few hours from a hale, stout woman of fifty-five, to a bluish, shrunken corpse.56 The next day, September 6, Mrs. Logston, still grieving the death of her husband, yielded to the disease and died within about eight hours. W. G. Haggard took the

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54 While contemporary accounts do not mention the burning of the house, Leak does; and Alice Hedges recounted the incident to relatives later in her life. Leak, History of the Christian Church, [24]; conversations with Mrs. Eldora Keeney.

55 Indianapolis Daily Journal, September 6, 1873. S. J. Holley was a jeweller who resided in New Elizabeth. Cline and McHaffie, People’s Guide, 375.

56 Lane reports the death of Mrs. Burgess but makes no mention of her two daughters and two sons listed in the 1870 census as schoolteachers and farmers respectively. Danville Hendricks County Union, September 11, 1873; U. S. Ninth Census, 1870, Hendricks County, Indiana, 27. The census schedules list Mrs. Burgess’ name as Elizabeth.
disease on Saturday also. While the death of Eva Burgess and other robust residents seemed surprising, Haggard's death did not, since he had been sick for nearly a year.\textsuperscript{57}

Lane wrote that common sense dictated the treatment of cholera cases,\textsuperscript{58} but, to most, common sense dictated that when someone had cholera he was going to die and that anyone coming into contact with the sick was doomed. Many healthy residents, no doubt, merely hid out if they could or went to visit relatives who may have been less than eager to welcome them from New Elizabeth.

Church meetings likely were held on Sunday mornings, but no records of the messages or prayers spoken or records of the attendance have been found. The Christian church had about sixty members at the time,\textsuperscript{59} and the Methodist Episcopal congregation surely was at least as large. Yet it is possible that a few Sundays went by with no meetings at all—with no preacher and no congregation.

\textbf{LIZTON CHRISTIAN CHURCH}
\textit{Built 1872}

\textsuperscript{57} Danville Hendricks County Union, September 11, 1873.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., September 18, 1873.
\textsuperscript{59} Leak, History of the Christian Church, [27].
Plague of New Elizabeth

It is unlikely, however, that the streets of New Elizabeth were deserted as cholera went on killing. Several residents worked as faithfully as the physicians to assist patients. Doctors, of course, could offer little help. Lane wrote at the time: “Our physicians are at a loss to know what to do for it, yet each does his utmost to assist in staying the ravages.” What could neighbors do if there was nothing the doctors could do? Lane mentioned two things that his fellow townsmen should not do. First, he said in a dispatch for the Danville Hendricks County Union: “When a patient is violently attacked, do not suffer a crowd to gather from morbid curiosity.” In spite of their fears once New Elizabeth people accepted cholera as a fact in their town, they would gather around a patient to see what it was like to be fatally afflicted with vomiting, diarrhea, and cramps. So they stood about and watched. It might not have seemed polite to ask them to leave since they were doing their Christian duty to come to the aid of the sick. But they also talked. “Let those about be very careful of their conversation,” Lane continued. “By no means speak discouragingly, saying as we have heard some, ‘That one cannot live, he is already turning black.’” Cholera sufferers, said Lane, were “very sensitive to every motion and expression of those about them, especially in the first three hours of the attack when they seem fully to realize their condition . . .”

In spite of the pain and extreme discomforts patients did try to prepare for death. For some, it was an act as simple as Tack Lyons going to the strawstack where he thought he could die in peace. For others, there were spiritual matters to take care of, last minute confessions to make, and forgiveness to ask of God and loved ones. And there was mundane, earthly business to finalize—special gifts of personal property, requests for the care of children and favorite pets. “Some of these scenes are beyond the power of description,” Lane wrote. He had been present at several, although none with members of his own family. “They must be witnessed

60 Leak lists several persons who made special efforts to help care for the sticken. Ibid., [24].
61 Danville Hendricks County Union, September 18, 1873.
to form a proper conception of the terrible distress and agony . . .”

But Lane managed to find a bit of levity in the midst of the plague. That came from New Elizabeth’s only minority group—the Irish railroad maintenance crew that was working on the “Lizton” section of the road. There were rumors that the Irish were about to strike or at least to leave their work near the plague ridden town because of fears of the disease. Lane investigated and found that they had chosen to remain. The Irish had held a meeting on the subject at which various cholera preventives were suggested. Many favored coffee, Lane reported. Others thought a good pipe of tobacco at regular intervals was the answer. One Irishman said a glass of apple brandy three times a day would keep cholera away. “A drink of whiskey every five minutes should keep the cholera away for ever,” said still another. As far as is known, none of the Irish living in the New Elizabeth area were victims of cholera. Because they lived, worked, and probably ate together, it is likely that if there had been one case of cholera among them, there would have been many more. Since they did not mix with the New Elizabeth residents, it is not surprising that they remained free of the disease. Townspeople, however, continued to get cholera, and they continued to die.

Although the Irish laborers were a class unto themselves, New Elizabeth had no other marked class divisions except those of economic attainment. In 1873 it was not unusual for a man to go in a short time from subsistence on a small farm to relative wealth as a craftsman or a purveyor of some needed service or commodity. By twentieth century standards all were dirt poor, even though some were considered prosperous. As a storekeeper and former trustee of Union Township, George Shirley naturally was one of the town’s more prosperous citizens; and if New Elizabeth had had a

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62 Ibid.
63 The census for 1870 lists at least eighteen Irish railroad workers, one of whom had a family, as living in New Elizabeth. There may have been that many in 1873. U. S. Ninth Census, 1870, Hendricks County, Indiana, 19, 20, 21.
64 Danville Hendricks County Union, September 18, 1873.
65 History of Hendricks County, 1885, p. 720; Cline and McHaffie, People’s Guide, 381.
social register, his eighteen year old wife, the former Mollie Wilkinson who was reared between Danville and New Elizabeth, surely would have been listed near the top. Being Baptists she and her husband had a good excuse to leave New Elizabeth to attend the Baptist Association’s Sunday meeting at Abner’s Creek a short distance north of Danville. They went to Danville on Saturday, September 6, and stayed at the fine home of George’s brother, John. The ride out to Abner’s Creek and back on Sunday was a happy one. New Elizabeth had become a dreary place to live. The Shirleys stayed Sunday night in Danville where the young woman became ill. Danville’s best physicians, including Dr. W. J. Hoadley, who was George and John Shirley’s brother-in-law, and Dr. Lockhart, watched her until she died early Monday afternoon. According to the doctors Mrs. Shirley had a “pretty fair case of cholera,” one she had brought from New Elizabeth. While the physicians could do nothing for her, they undoubtedly did all they could to make certain that cholera did not spread to other members of the family or to Danville residents.

Mollie Shirley was buried in the graveyard at Abner’s Creek—probably at night. She and Dr. Dicks were the only victims of New Elizabeth’s epidemic not laid to rest in Vieley’s cemetery. On the day Mrs. Shirley died, Rachael Adams, Squire Hall’s daughter, succumbed after more than two week’s illness. Thus far two young women who had been married only a few months and two women with two year old sons had died of cholera. Although no contemporary accounts of the plague seem to mention it, it is probable that all four were in some stages of pregnancy.

Mrs. Hedges, who had moved herself and her daughters to permit the burning of her house, suffered yet another loss. Probably less than a week after moving into the Davis

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66 The death of Molly Wilkinson Shirley rated a separate story in the Danville Hendricks County Union for September 11, 1873. Other details about the young woman were supplied the authors by Eldora Kenney, who recalled hearing them as a child. See also Atlas of Hendricks County, 12.

67 Danville Hendricks County Union, September 11, 1873.

68 Personal communication from Eldora Keeney.
LEFT AND ABOVE, GRAVESTONE OF MOLLIE WILKINSON SHIRLEY

RIGHT AND BELOW, HEAD- AND FOOTSTONES ON GRAVE OF DR. JOHN A. DICKS
house, a second daughter developed the disease and died. Alice, the remaining daughter, was stricken but survived.69

"Lizton Deserted," said the headline in the Crawfordsville Journal over a story which exaggerated in fact if not in spirit. "From a gentleman who left Lizton... Monday [September 15] we learn that the village was nearly depopulated, the people having been frightened away by the scourge which has swept over the town. Out of one hundred and eight families [probably there were no more than seventy-five] but five remain. Thirty-three deaths have occurred within the last two weeks. The persons attacked by the disease, called by some pernicious fever, and by others cholera, lived but from four to seven hours. A general gloom pervades the whole surrounding country."70

GEORGE AND ALICE HEDGES LEAK

69 Leak is the only source which mentions the death of the third child in the Hedges family. Leak, History of the Christian Church, [24]. Eldora Keeney, in personal communication with the authors, said that Alice Hedges contracted cholera but recovered. Alice Hedges married Mrs. Keeney's uncle and was partially responsible for rearing her.

70 Crawfordsville Journal, quoted in the Greencastle Banner, September 18, 1873.
Plague of New Elizabeth

Probably many families did leave New Elizabeth, but not all “but five.” One family that remained was that of Phillip Helmick. The Helmicks numbered eight—including a married daughter, son-in-law, and baby—and they lived on the east side of the Lebanon Road not far north of the railroad, probably next door to one of the fine new houses of one of the Sourwines. It is not known what Helmick did for a living; perhaps both he and his oldest daughter’s husband worked for the Sourwines. However, it is known that when cholera hit their household, it had the effect of a deadly explosion.

There were no lingering illnesses among the Helmicks. One by one they felt the awful ravages of the intestinal toxins, and they watched helplessly as other members of the family suffered the same tortures as they themselves were experiencing. One by one they were carried out in castoff drygoods boxes for hasty burial—at night—at the graveyard. Neighbors were afraid to enter the Helmick home, a pesthouse of stinking, deadly horror. No one, not even Lane, was there to record the order in which they died; but in about two days husband, wife, two sons, son-in-law, daughter, and her baby were dead. Only one son, eight year old Newton Helmick, survived after having suffered, no doubt, as much of the horrors of the disease as other members of his family. Indeed, so certain was the community that the entire family was doomed that a drygoods box was prepared to receive Newton’s body. Some thought he did have cholera, but when the seven others were being ravaged with the disease, it might have been difficult for an outsider to ascertain.

71 Leak, History of the Christian Church, [24].

72 Debra’s article says that only the Helmick boy and Tack Lyons survived after having contracted cholera. Leak is unclear as to whether the boy was stricken, merely referring to him as the “boy who did not die.” Leak, History of the Christian Church, [24]; Debra, “Cholera.”

73 The most complete account of the deaths in the Helmick family comes not from any contemporary report but from Leak. Both Leak and Debra list seven deaths in the family of eight. The names or ages of the dead are not known because the Helmicks were not in New Elizabeth in 1870 when the census was taken. Further, they were buried in unmarked graves, and no public records were kept of the interments. It is not surprising that Lane did not report more fully to the Danville Hendricks County Union on the deaths of the Helmicks. First, they were stricken on Friday and Saturday, September 12-13; and news of the deaths, when it reached Union readers, would have been almost a week old, giving the impression that the plague was still raging in the community. Further, New Elizabeth residents undoubtedly had become aware
One of Newton's brothers was probably the last of the Helmicks to die. His body was found, drawn and blue, on a cot behind the kitchen cookstove where he must have gone in a last effort to ward off the chills and cramps that he felt as he slipped into the peace of coma and death. The kitchen was so awash with the products of cholera, real or imagined, that outsiders were afraid to go in to get the body. Someone got a rope and made a loop in it. The loop was thrown until it hooked the boy's body, and he was dragged out through the kitchen door.\(^4\)

There would have been no way of determining whether the boy was dead or alive until the rope wielders had pulled him outside and examined him. Even then, it might have been difficult for a layman to be sure. Indeed, it is possible that some persons may have been buried alive at the New Elizabeth cemetery in the community's haste to clean up the scourge of death and to get things back to normal, healthy business. Some of the dead, including the Helmicks, were buried wrapped in the sheets which had been on their sick-beds.\(^5\)

Perhaps it was because of the advice of the out of town physicians who came to study the disease, or perhaps it was because most of the residents were scared to get near a cholera patient and left the town; but for whatever reason, apparently no new cases developed. Days passed—September 15 and September 16—ordinary days of late summer when farmers were cutting corn and gathering it into shocks and days when wheat was being drilled into the soil for the 1874 crop. September 17 saw still no new cases. "The Malarious Congestion, or Cholera, has, we think entirely abated," Lane wrote in a short dispatch to the Danville Hendricks County Union on Wednesday, September 17. His report was affixed to the end of his earlier story which reported the deaths of the Helmicks as well as other aspects of the plague. Referring that the name of their town had become infamous throughout central Indiana, and there undoubtedly was pressure on Lane to convey a more favorable and optimistic impression to the outside world—especially when it seemed that the plague had ended. Lane concluded his report for the Union issue of September 18 by saying that the disease was not as bad as had been reported elsewhere and that he would, in future stories, tell of the "growth and prosperity" of New Elizabeth.


Caleb F. Adams, His Second Wife, and Family

Hickman B. Adams, Son of Caleb and Maria Rachael Hall Adams, Is Not Pictured Above

Courtesy Almadore Smith.
to reports such as the one from the Crawfordsville Journal, Lane wrote: “The disease has not been half as bad as reported. There have only been about twenty-three deaths in the town and vicinity.” A total of twenty-four deaths probably is more accurate—twenty in town and four outside.

Only twenty deaths in a population of about 200 is not as staggering a toll as one might expect in an epidemic that came to be called a plague. But if ten per cent of the population of New Elizabeth did die in those three and one half weeks of late August and early September, 1873, the death rate was very high indeed for cholera, although higher rates have been reported. For example, the 1845 cholera outbreak in Teheran was fatal to 12,000 of a population of 60,000—that is twenty per cent. The same pandemic was reported to have caused one death in every twelve persons living in St. Louis, Missouri—about eight per cent. However, considerably lower mortality figures came from the much heralded epidemics of Great Britain—less than one per cent in both Edinburgh and Glasgow, Scotland, in the first outbreaks there. Further, it was ordinarily expected that no more than one half of those afflicted with the disease would die. In New Elizabeth, however, a maximum of only eight nonfatal cases can be accounted for and that includes Squire Hall. Even if it is accepted that there were other nonfatal cases unreported, that there were only the twenty-four documented victims rather than the thirty-one or thirty-three fatalities which some sources reported, and that the popu-

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16 Danville Hendricks County Union, September 18, 1873.
17 It would seem that Lane, being in town and working with the stricken, should have compiled a correct tally of the dead. Yet taking into account other reports and census information, it is difficult not to arrive at a figure of twenty-four dead. The stories in the weekly Danville Hendricks County Union actually name only twenty persons as having died. One conspicuous omission is that of one of the Hedges daughters who died about the same time as her father and brother whose deaths Lane reports.
18 Longmate, King Cholera, 57-58, 158, 169.
19 See, for example, Ackerknecht, History and Geography of the Most Important Diseases, 26; “Cholera Epidemic,” Science News, XCVIII (September 12, 1970), 216; Roderick E. McGrew, Russia and the Cholera, 1823-1842 (Madison, 1965), 19.
20 Debra's story said that thirty-one died. Debra, “Cholera.” The Crawfordsville Journal, in an article reprinted in the Greencastle Banner, September 18, 1873, reported thirty-three fatalities.
lation of the town was even more than 200, it must be concluded that the cholera epidemic at New Elizabeth was particularly virulent.

No common source—such as a polluted well—for the cholera vibrios can be identified for New Elizabeth. Chance personal contact seems the most likely means by which the disease organisms spread from victim to potential host. New Elizabeth's water supply came from individual wells—most dug only to ten or fifteen feet in depth—and it is possible that some of these could have been contaminated from underground seepage from nearby outhouses. Further, contaminated surface water after a heavy rain could have entered some of the wells to spread cholera.

Not being highly contagious, cholera is usually transmitted only in food or water, although it can spread from person to person if a sick person's evacuations soil the hands of another person who fails to wash well before eating. Cholera vibrios die in a few hours at room temperature and are destroyed easily by heat or chemical antiseptics. Normally they cannot compete with other organisms that live in fecal matter. The incubation period of the disease is short. It generally takes from six hours to two or three days for an infected person to develop cholera, with the length of time depending on the size of the infecting dose. These characteristics of the cholera vibrios explain why the epidemic in New Elizabeth ended suddenly and completely when it seemed to be at its worst.

The overall socioeconomic effect of the plague on the town is more difficult to assess than its toll on human lives. In the opinion of many survivors the town never recovered from the depression caused by cholera. "Some older people say the cholera killed Lizton," Roscoe R. Leak wrote in 1911. "There was good business and quite a lot of trade here but it stopped suddenly and was never regained."

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61 A separate population figure for the town was not listed in decennial census data until 1910, but another source sets the population of New Elizabeth in 1885 as about 275. History of Hendricks County, 1885, p. 718.


64 Leak, History of the Christian Church, [24].
While the community experienced little growth in the last part of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, it is difficult to accept the hypothesis that cholera alone halted its development. The epidemic of 1873 undoubt-edly was one of the most severe in the state that year; however, it struck New Elizabeth, or Lizton, at a time when frontier economic expansion was drawing to a close. Continued growth of the town through the 1870s and into the twentieth century would necessarily have meant a proportionate lack of growth in surrounding areas. One cannot rule out the possibility that the town might have come to be of much greater importance in the region had it not been for the “plague,” but considerably more research into the demography and economics of the entire region will be required before the theory that “cholera killed Lizton” can be accepted.