

Present day liars bench

Stories of yesteryear fuel lives of today's residents in Nashville, Indiana

Compiled by Kate Anderson, Nikki Shepherd, Christina Howerton and Peter Owens

Tucked in the recesses of the backwoods of Indiana, the small town of Nashville holds the secrets of liars, the first house in Brown County, and an ambassador to another time.

Native Americans first settled the area around Nashville after the Illinois Glacier passed over North America. Later, it was settled by Europeans and used as hunting grounds. In the 1800's, it became an escape from large cities like Chicago and New York.

At the turn of the 20th century, Nashville had a healthy population, but it began to decline after the heavily wooded areas were removed. This created many difficulties with septic systems and flooding. Population declined. Within 30 years, Nashville was substantially smaller than it had been.

"The trees that were cut down are now just starting to grow back," said Andy Rogers, owner of *Nashville House* and several other establishments in Nashville.

Back in the 1930's and 40's, a spot near the Courthouse called the Liar's Bench dominated the conversation of many a summer and fall afternoon. This was a bench where older men would sit and



In memorandum of the original "Liar's Bench" photo by Frank Hohenberger, four citizens of Nashville, Indiana sit at the new Liar's bench donated by the Brown County Lion's Club.

share their tall tales with each other.

In 1954, a group of angry women, the wives of the men who would waste their time at the bench, chopped the Liar's Bench up.

Even though the bench is gone, the stories and tall tales still remain in the hearts and minds of the citizens of Nashville. *Nashville House* waiter Wilma Atlinder recalls the tale of a couple that lived in Nashville.

The two got into an argument with each other that was so heated that the wife drew a line down the middle of the old couple's cabin and refused to let her husband on her side. When the man died, his body had to be carried out a window because the wife refused to let the deceased body of her

(right) Pete Siebert, portraying Jacob Brown, points to the large wooden beams high on an old log cabin. Nikki Shepherd photo

husband on her side of the cabin.

Rogers also told the tale of a few meddling teens that succeeded in placing a cow in the belfry of the courthouse.

"Kids have a tendency to do things that are normally impossible," Rogers said.

Some of these tall tales are more real than others, such as Pete Seibert. He is a man who lives in Nashville, and portrays Jacob Brown.

Jacob Brown is a man from Nashville, but not from this time. At the age of twenty-two, in the year 1858, he was out on a hunting trip before his wedding to his sweetheart Rachel.

While searching for game, he discovered a moonshine still. While looking into it, he was startled by his dog and stumbled into the still.

"When I woke up and came out, I asked a passerby if it was still June. He said that it was June, but in the

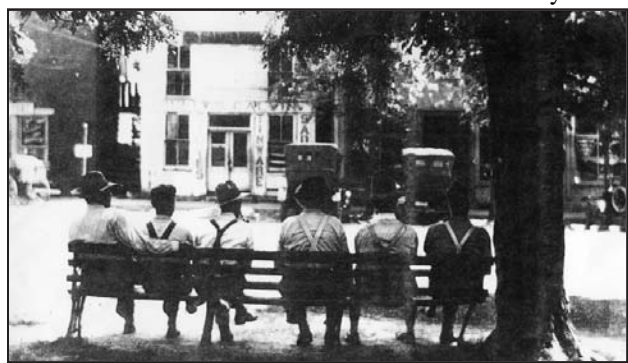


year nineteen and ninety-eight!"

Nowadays, Brown spends his time giving tours of the town and of the historically preserved site northeast of the courthouse. Someone looking for his brown wool hat, long dark grey beard, and walking stick can easily recognize him.

The people of Nashville have replaced the lost Liar's Bench with a new one. It is located west of the courthouse

The new bench is a popular place for residents and visitors alike to sit and maybe tell a few tall tales of their own, and even though the original object of lore is no longer, the stories continue today.



Oldmen share tall tales in Frank Hohenberger's now famous photograph, "Liar's Bench". Nikki Shepherd photo

Artist's negatives leave positive impact on history

Lived 1876-1963

Works spanned from 1917-1960 consisting of 8300 prints and 9400 negatives

Was a column writer for the Indianapolis Star called "Down in the Hills o' Brown County"

Originated the phrase "Liar's Bench"

Work was donated, and can now be seen at Indiana University

Tall Tales Tell Off

Saturday afternoon June 20

Brown County Public Library

Sponsored by the library and Chamber of Commerce

Five out of 43 tales will be told

\$1000 in prize money will be spread amongst the five contestants

Legends of Nashville

An old married couple had an argument. The wife was upset with her husband, so much so, she drew a line down the middle of the house and did not let him cross it. When he died the wife would not even let the coroners take his body out the front door, he left through a window.

-Phillis Davis, waitress

I heard a group of kids supposedly put a cow in the belfry of the court house. Kids have a tendency to do things that are normally impossible.

-Andy Rogers, prominent business owner

The town of knowbone came from a local legend. Two friends were talking in the morning, one was knowwing on a hambone. When the friend came back later in the afternoon he was knowwing on a pork chop bone. when the friend left the house he told everyone about know bone.

- Jacob Brown, Ambassador to another time

There was only hand rail on the liar's bench. When a new person came to sit on the bench, they would sit near the handrail. Then, when the bench was full the sixth man on the end would have to leave. The wives of the men on the bench grew tired of their husbands sitting around, so one night they used their axes and chopped it up. That was the end of the liar's bench.

Bob Kerling, store owner

It seems it fits in the county, the feeling that we aren't quite caught up yet. It gives a sense of nostalgia. We are simple people and that is what people long for.

Hank Swain, retired