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LYDIA GUNDY.

THE FACTS ABOUT THE LAST INDIAN RESIDENT OF WAYNE
COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

Communicated by R. B. Evans, of Jeffersonville, Ill.

The writer having been familiar for years with the most important facts in the following narrative, has, of late, interested himself in the story and obtained details of interest of J. B. Brown, of Orchardville and Wm. Brown, of Zenith, Ill., sons of John Brown mentioned in this narrative.

In the winter of 1835 some hunters in the vicinity of Mill Shoals, White county, found in a cave or cavern an Indian squaw in a starved and frozen condition. She had hidden herself away for protection against the frost and snow, but in vain. She was badly frozen. Her feet in particular, and in her starved condition she presented a pitiful sight to the hunters, who in their uncultured manner were kind hearted and soon brought relief to the distressed woman.

The good people of the community came as the good Samaritan. They fed and clothed her until spring, when her feet having healed sufficiently for walking, she disappeared from the Mill Shoals neighborhood. Wandering up Skillet Fork river she was next seen in Wayne county in the region of the juncture of Nicholas creek and Paddy creek with Skillet Fork.

This Indian woman was wild and avoided meeting any of the settlers, but was occasionally seen running away to hide when any one approached too near her camp. Often the camp fire was found, but the Indian would not be seen.

This Indian woman lived in the forest as best she could, with only her hands to obtain her food. She made frequent invasions of the settlers' truck gardens and helped herself to any kind of food that suited her fancy.

This locality seemed to appeal to her more than any other and not knowing the way to her tribe she lingered here until winter was approaching. No one had ever succeeded in getting speech with her, and fearing she would starve and freeze during the winter, Philip Henson, being of a romantic disposition, organized a searching party to find her and prevail on her to adopt one of their homes and be cared for in a civilized way.

The men searched the forest in vain for days and all but Philip Henson gave up the search. He continued to ride through the forest day after day with his gun and finally came upon the woman secreted in a clump of bushes. She started to run away, but was soon overtaken by Mr. Henson on horseback who leveled his gun at her and called "halt!" The woman ceased running and faced her pursuer with both arms extended upward expecting to be shot. Mr. Henson explained his motive to her and insisted that she mount the horse behind him and go to his home. This she did and always seemed grateful for a home.

This forlorn woman told her benefactor in broken English that she was a Cherokee Indian; that her name was Lydia Gundy and that she, in company with a younger squaw had been enticed away from her people in the south by a white man who had promised "to wife her." but instead he had deserted her in the neighborhood of Mill Shoals, disappearing with the younger squaw.

Lydia Gundy lived in the Henson family as one of the household. She was kind hearted and industrious, always ready to perform any duty assigned her.

After the Henson children had all married and had homes of their own Philip Henson deserted his invalid wife and emigrated to Missouri, leaving her and Lydia

Gundy alone in possession of the farm. Mrs Henson was confined to her room all the time so all the labor fell upon Lydia, which she did without a murmur. There were but few men who could wield an ax or a hoe better than she could.

John Brown who married Sis (Narcissa) Henson, was a generous hearted man and responded to the call of duty when there was wood to haul or other work which Lydia could not do. This labor finally became burdensome to John Brown, as he lived several miles from Mrs. Henson. He then requested Mrs. Henson to move to his home where he could better care for her; but she declined the generous offer unless he take Lydia Gundy also. This he readily consented to do and the two women were moved to John Brown's home and Sis (Narcissa) Brown cared for her mother and Lydia being relieved of that duty assisted in the fields with her hoe. She thought a crop could not be planted without her aid. She did her work well and the Brown boys knew they would have no easy task when they were pitted against Lydia in any kind of outdoor labor. Labor saving machinery was unheard of in those days and it was a custom that the women assist in the fields. The soil was productive and yielded an abundance. The pioneers of Wayne county were like the Acadian peasants whom Longfellow describes as

“The richest were poor and the poorest lived in abundance.”

In personal appearance Lydia Gundy was a typical Cherokee Indian. She had the upper part of the lobe of each ear cut off, but whether for ornament or as a punishment could not be ascertained.

The habits and customs of a people can not be changed in a generation. Lydia Gundy's love for the forest clung to her all her life. On days when there was no necessary work and of Sundays she would appear restless and would soon disappear and be gone most of the day and upon her return would tell of her trip which often extended over

several miles. Lydia called all of the Henson relatives "our folks" and would visit them and was talkative, but there was only one stranger who ever succeeded in gaining her friendship, that was Uncle Billy Harrison, a Baptist minister, who often preached at Mr. Brown's.

Lydia Gundy had seen the trees drop their leaves many times before she came to Wayne county, yet during the thirty-two years of her life here she always enjoyed good health. But one day in the winter of 1867 she complained of being sick and was given some of the home remedies kept in the house. That night she left her own room and came into the sitting room where Mr. Brown and other members of the family were sleeping. She sat down by the fire and seemed in great agony when Mr. Brown asked, "What is the trouble, Lydia?" She exclaimed, "O John I die!" Before any one could reach her, her spirit had flown to the Happy Hunting Ground of her forefathers.

The Henson cemetery in the north western part of Wayne county, contains an unmarked mound and only a few of the older people know that Lydia Gundy sleeps beneath its sod.