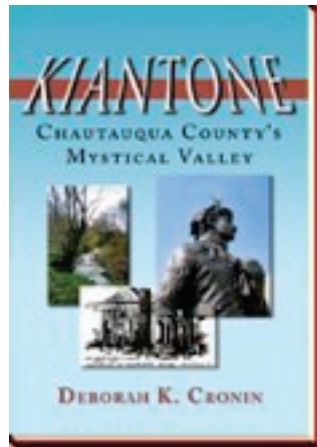


The Sentinel

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Kiantone: Chatauqua County's Mystical Valley



On Tuesday, June 12, Deborah K. Cronin presented, “Kiantone: The Harmonia River Voyage,” to the Roundtable. The program was an excerpt from her book, *Kiantone: Chatauqua’s County’s Mystical Valley*, published by Author House in 2006.

Deborah, who now makes her home in Bloomington, is from Chatauqua County in Western New York. During the 1850’s, a short-lived utopia community, known as Harmonia, began along the Kiantone Creek, a small spring-fed creek along the New York and Pennsylvania border. The leader of this community was John Murray Spear. Spear, a social activist, was also a Spiritualist prophet and healer. The interests of the Harmonia community were broad, including prison reform, educational reform, abolition and women’s suffrage. Its members regularly sought the advice of leaders in those areas who were no longer living.

In autumn 1859, Spear and some of his followers believed that the spirits were urging them to undertake a river voyage from Western Pennsylvania to New Orleans, Louisiana. The purpose of the voyage was to bring peace to nation fractured by the issue of slavery. It was no coincidence that the group set sail in a small steamer, the *Cleopatra*, on December 2, 1859, the same day John Brown was executed. During their ensuing six month journey, Spear and his followers traveled the great rivers, wintered at Cincinnati, and eventually, according to their records, reached New Orleans. They also founded a new community at Patriot, in Switzerland County, Indiana. The reason for their choosing the geographical location of this new endeavor, known as the Mount Alpheus Colony, was obvious as it is surrounded on three sides by the Ohio River and saw a great deal of runaway slave activity.

Cronin’s book also contains the on-going story of John Murray Spear’s activities both during and after the Civil War. Altogether, it is a thought-provoking look at the role of one utopian-type community’s activities during a challenging era of American history.

For a copy of her book (pictured above), or to simply discuss the Kiantone experiment, contact Deborah at the number at the end of the newsletter.

What You Could Do With Your Civil War Library

In our last newsletter, the possibility was raised of donating personal Civil War collections of books, tapes, magazines, etc. to the Monroe County History Center's genealogy library for use by others as research materials, etc. While donating such items is a real possibility, library director Liz Knapp and MCCWR member and former library director Julian Livingston both stressed some important points. First, materials with a local or family history connection would be most likely to be accessioned into the library's permanent collection. Materials not accepted for the permanent collection would be sold at the museum store, given back, donated to others, etc. Also, the MCHS genealogy library is not a lending library, so materials taken and made part of the collection would be available for reading and study only during the open hours of the library within the library's reading room. Another possibility, suggested by member Livingston, was to come up with a location inside the history center but outside the library to place such items and simply have them available to members and perhaps others on an honor system. All possibilities are still being explored. If you are interested in pursuing any option, you can contact Liz Knapp at the library at 355-5588 or at genealogy@monroehistory.org.

Don't Miss the Summer Civil War Exhibit

The major Civil War artifact exhibit is now open and in full swing. Kicked off in a big way by the first annual summer lawn encampment (see next article) on June 9-10, the exhibit showcases many rare and interesting artifacts, many graciously loaned by MCCWR member Bob Willey and several of our other members. There are also a number of items from the History Center's own permanent collection, some of which are being shown for the first time publicly. A highlight is the story of our own David van Buskirk, the largest soldier in the Union army who was from Gosport, Indiana, and is buried in the Buskirk cemetery near there today, along with several other CW vets. There is even an appearance by a full sized model of "Big Dave", a 6' 10 1/2" historical mannequin loaned by Ashton University (Clinton, Iowa) history professor Gene Wright, who makes and shows almost 85 of these models as a way of producing a "living" history. The exhibit will be open to all for a small charge during the museum's regular hours through October 26. Bring a friend and see it soon.

Encampment a Huge Success



MCCWR member Joel Foust's 42nd IN regulars perform a musket demo in front of the center while member Carol Wise (r) and her daughter, Sherry, show camp life on the lawn.

What is hoped is the first annual encampment on the lawn of the History Center occurred on the June 9 & 10 with the 42nd IN Volunteer Infantry setting up bivouac in front of the History Center. Saturday had firing demonstrations outside, an 1860's women's clothing demonstration inside, cooking on the lawn, a Civil War surgeon to treat your every malady and even a speech by Indiana Civil War Governor Oliver Morton. From the reaction of those who sought the event out and even those who just happened by, the effort was well worth it and all involved hope to return next summer to do it again.



Call any of the below for questions, suggestions or comments regarding the Roundtable.

Steve Rolfe, President, 336-0757 • David Wiley, Secretary, 337-0649 •
Carol Wise, Treasurer, 824-8708 • Deborah Cronin, Hospitality, 323-9615