

Springhouse Ink

On a mid-December day gossamer strands littered the vegetation of Gallatin County. Baby spiders use these single strands as a sort of hang glider and let the wind carry them to their new home. Ladybugs buzzed in the air and even a light jacket brought sweat to the skin.

A bright red fox ran up the driveway to Leavell Hill Cemetery, but fingers were too slow to get the camera to focus. That camera remains around the neck ever since spotting the bald eagle perched at the cemetery and no camera to capture it. The fox's image was a blurry, red splotch in the background of tree limbs.

"See the fox there? It's right here," he said, trying to prove to his family what he'd seen.

Several graves were decorated with poinsettias — organic or plastic — and a couple of Christmas stockings were hanging.

An excavator was clanging away across the river on South Junction Road. A donkey's bray drifted across the barren fields, long since cleared of beans and corn. Cows grazed contentedly.

Migrating geese and bare trees were the only signs October had come and gone.

We have a new camera. The old one had been acting up, but finally ceased to power on at Caseyville, Ky., while we were searching for the Button Ram boulder. It lasted long enough to meet Rodger and Karen Howell at Eldorado Dollar General earlier in the day. The camera recording their horses pulling their wagon away west on state Route 13 on their journey across the Mississippi River. It's been good weather for cross country wagon travel this fall.

Our recent travels have taken us across and up the Ohio River by boat, searching for that Button Ram with no luck. River lover Joe Edmondson told us it has been below the river's surface. Neighbor Gene McCluskey found his father, Clyde, drowned there in 1977. Edmondson's father also drowned in the same area.

We received an order for the previous issue and a subsequent phone call from Helen Robertson in Oceanside, California. Robertson

grew up on the Martin farm where Springhouse bases its current operations. Robertson — as a 12-year-old named Helen Martin — would ride her horse from her family's house up the road to the pear tree where the horse snacked on pears. We were sad to inform her the pear tree succumbed first to an ice storm years ago, and it's remaining pear-producing bough broke in a thunderstorm in July of 2014. The stump remains, but it is unlikely we will enjoy any more of its fruit.

That pear tree was a local landmark. Former residents have told me the school bus used to stop and let kids out to get a pear as an after school snack.

Robertson also recalled a trip across Island Riffle Bridge enroute to Evansville, Ind. At that time the bridge was in such a state of disrepair her father laid planks on its surface in order to drive a car across. The crossing put her mother in an understandably anxious state. The bridge was dismantled and its steel repurposed for the war effort in the 1940s.

Island Riffle's previous reputation as a swimming destination was lost after the dams were built on the Ohio River.

The riffle had been shallow enough not only for swimming, but also for washing cars. Drivers would park in the river and splash the mud away. The bridge abutments remain, but the riffle can be reached only by boat, on foot or by an all-terrain vehicle. There is still a small island, but the shallow riffle has deepened.

Now there is no bridge, no swimming hole and only a semblance of a pear tree. A few good neighbors remain at Leavell Hill.

Muddy, Illinois, may be soon to lose the St. Iosaph Russian Orthodox Church as the Tennessee owners are no longer able to afford the costly repairs. As that church appears doomed to a footnote in the history books, there is good news in that St. Kateri Church in Ridgway has been rebuilt following the devastation of the Feb. 29, 2012, tornado. That storm killed eight in Harrisburg, one of whom — Donald Smith — is buried up at Leavell Hill Cemetery. The red fox ran



Brian DeNeal photo
The old pear tree refuses to let go at Springhouse headquarters on Level Hill Road.

past the red poinsettias at his grave on that mid-December afternoon we started out talking about. Among other stories in this issue are a John Dunphy essay on Elijah Lovejoy's slave's autobiography; Paul Stroble's poems and review of Jonathan D. Sarna and Benjamin Shapell's *Lincoln and the Jews: A History*; Jack Wiggins' essay on growing up in Muddy in the 1940s; Dixie Terry's holiday recipes, another installment of Keith Ewell's new feature *Backyard Bugs*; and more odds and ends.

We have a few stories of loss in this issue. I was reminded of another loss by a subscriber at the Southeastern Illinois College Heritage Festival. She lamented being unable to read Kestner Wallace's contributions. Kestner died April 17, 2014, at age 93. I first knew him as principal at Independence Grade School at Mitchellsville and later knew him as a neighbor, family friend and tireless *Springhouse* contributor and supporter. Recently tasked to sort through a drawer of things worth keeping, I came across a poem Kestner had written about my marriage. Kestner's son, Ray, conducted Victoria Bosley's marriage to me on April 17, 2010,

atop Ray's property at Fairy Cliff, Herod. Exactly three years prior to his death, Kestner penned the following poem that Ray read during the ceremony. Unless Ray or LeAnn comes across another of Wallace's unpublished offerings, this will be Kestner's final contribution to *Springhouse*:

Brian and Vicky

As Brian and Vicky travel
the winding road of life
May happiness bless their choosing
to travel as husband and wife

Honest effort and devotion
keeps the goal of success in sight
Heart strings strumming joyfully
assures happiness and delight.

Thanks, Kestner. We have done and will do our best.



Photo provided by Gene McCluskey

This was the Island Riffle Bridge on the Saline River photographed in summer of 1920. The bridge was dismantled and the steel used for the war effort in World War II. The individuals are impossible to make out, but our information is they are Gertrude Fields, left, Alma (Storey) Cremeens and, bottom, H.H. Barlow.