

Twenty Years in Chains.

There are yet living in the county a number of people who remember Simeon Vest, the pauper maniac, who was a county charge for more than twenty years. Vest was a native of Kentucky, coming to Clay county in his boyhood days, the family locating on the old Bowling Green-Brazil road, west side, on what was later and for many years known as the Morgan Bryant place. In his youth and early manhood he was, to all appearances, normally poised, giving out no indications of any mental derangement. At the time of the building of the Terre Haute & Indianapolis Railroad, in 1850-SI, the two brothers, Simeon and George Vest, were contractors on construction of a half-mile of grade on the Modesitt place, where the town of Newburg was afterward platted and built. Soon there-after both went back to Kentucky where they were said to have engaged jointly as contractors on both public and private works. Several years later Simeon returned unaccompanied by his brother, so unbalanced mentally as not to be able to give an intelligent and satisfactory account of him. A county asylum having meanwhile been established, he was committed to this institution about the year 1857 and soon thereafter, under the administration of Adam B. Moon as keeper, became violent and dangerous, assaulting Moon with a heavy garden hoe, when he was being restrained by being shackled.

When Moon retired from the keeping of the infirmary to remove Vest from contact with other inmates of the institution, a special contract was made between the county board and the retiring superintendent of the asylum for his keeping, when he was taken to Moon's residence, on the hill between the Thomas and the Crafton farms, on the Bowling Green-Brazil road, a mile and a half out from the former place, where he was lodged in a small house of one room on the south side of the road. To confine him to his new

quarters the chain clamped around his wrist was securely attached to a staple in the floor. The chain was of sufficient length to allow him to walk about the room and have access to his bed. Physically Vest was a powerful man, Mr. Moon keeping close watch over him on going into the room to serve his meals or otherwise attend his wants. As the road passing by his prison home was much traveled, many passersby would stop at the door and talk to Vest. Unless agitated and in ve!

ry sullen mood, he was easily engaged in conversation and would talk rationally for a moment or two. Frequently he would call footmen to the door who were going in the direction of Bowling, Green and request them to bring him a plug of tobacco or a flask of whiskey. While he seemed to recall former visits and recognize faces, he never attempted to call names. In his hours of aberration and spasms of frenzy he noted throw to the floor his man of straw, whom he called Adam Moon, and belabor him to his heart's content, emphasizing his demonstrations With curses of deep revenge. For more than twenty-years he was in chains. He died January 7, 1879, at the new county asylum, three miles southwest of Bowling Green, to Which he had been taken two years before, age unknown. As his brother George did not return from Kentucky and was not again heard from hereabouts, it was rumored that he might have been foully dealt with his brother in a freak of emotional insanity.

From: Clay Count EntB, Thursday, April 3, 1873 - "Sim Vest in Chains For sixteen years". "There are but a few of our readers, perhaps, who have not heard of the man whose name appears in the Caption, and especially of those who at any time in the past sixteen years have traveled the road leading from Bowling Green to Center Point. For a long time he was confined in an old log hut standing on the roadside near the residence of Adam Moon, his keeper, about two miles from Bowling Green, and persons passing by, who, from levity and curiosity, would cry out, "How are you Simom ?", would be responded to by the inmate of the hut with loud curses and execrations sometimes, and at other times civilly enough, but always with an accompaniment of the clank ins of Chains . But a few months ago, his place of Confinement was changed to a more comfortable quarters, out of the way of annoyances from passers by .

The story of SIm Vest's unhappy life cannot be well told, because very little of it except his imprlsonment is known. He was found crazy in the woods near Staunton, this county, some twenty years ago, and was placed in the Insane Asylum, where he was kept for about four years, when he was pronounced incurable; and was then sent back afterwards to become a county charge. Excepting for a period of about a year, during which he was taken care of by a relative, he has been in the care of Mr. Moon, former overseer of the Poor Farm. At the time he was taken charge of by Mr. Moon the unfortunate maniac was very violent, and it was necessary to put him in chains. With the assistance of RICHARD BALLARD and JAMES LAUGHLIN, the keeper attempted to bind him, but Sim managed to disable Moon by splitting his skull with a hoe. Other assistance however, opportunely arrived and SIm was placed in a position not to do further harm. The question of his insanity is still the same, attempting viol!

ence to anybody or anything within reach, he is about 54 years old, a fine physic, about 5 feet 10 inches tall and strange to say, instead of being emaciated from his lonely confinement he has grown obese. The story prevalent at the time of the discovery of his insanity, and which is believed to be true is, that he had

killed a brother and his brother's wife in Kentucky, whence he came to these parts, and from remorse or fear of punishment became a helpless raving maniac.

Thursday April 23, 1874 Editor, Enterprise - I see a statement in regard to the life of Simon Vest, and which I wish to correct. Simon Vest is the-son of Caleb Vest, the father of fifteen children, twelve boys and three girls. He was next to the youngest child of the family, and was born February 7, 1822. His father came from Kentucky to this state in the year 1827 and lived near Bowling Green, Clay County, Indiana, one year; then went to Fort Harrison Prairie near Terre Haute, and lived one year. Then he bought a farm near Staunton, Clay County, where the old man lived until his death in the year 1864. Simon Vest was a contractor on the Wabash Erie Canal in the years 1849 and 1850, and had a contract on the railroad between Staunton and Newburg, in this county, which his brother, Joel Vest, finished after Simon had drawn his money on the canal and left. He went to Kentucky and lived there until 1852; then he came back to Staunton, and was Insane when he returned. In a short time he was sent to the Asylum at Indianapolis. When he came back to Staunton from the Asylum, his brother, Joel took care of him for a short time, but found he could do nothing with him. Then he was taken to the Poor house to be cared for. He was not found in the woods near Staunton as reported; for he lived there from early boyhood; and the statement that he killed his brother and wife in Kentucky is not true. He had a sister in Brazil who went to see her brother in Kentucky. He lay a long time with ; consumption and died after Simon had come here and was insane. One of his brother's wives fell dead of heart disease while Simon was in Kentucky. This is where this rumor came from I suppose. He has one brother in Iowa, and his sister in Brazil is all the family that is now living."

: Caleb Vest who died in 1863 in Clay Co Indiana was a son of Thomas Vest and Elisabeth Cannafax Thomas and Elizabeth were from Kentucky, and resided in both Nelson and Hardin counties. Thomas Vest died between Jan, and June 1801. Caleb married four times. The second marriage was to Phoebe Spears June 9, 1803 in Shelby Co. Kentucky.

bwvest

Orange County Indiana Archives
Cemetery records:

Stampers Creek Baptist Church Cemetery
As transcribed by the Lost River Chapter DAR

Paoli Township Sec. 34 T2N R1E Still Used.

This cemetery is 4 miles east of Paoli, on State Road 56.
Stamperscreek Primitive Baptist was organized on the 30th day of
August 1818, at the home of George Duncan, and he was chosen
moderator. The cemetery is well kept and serves a wide area.
The identity of the first person buried there is now unknown,
the crudely cut stone bearing only the date of 1820.

- VEST, Lavina L., wife of Nathaniel, d. 8 Jun 1838, aged 38y/11m/16d.
- VEST, Nathaniel, d. 6 Jun 1860, aged 69y/2d.
- VEST, Robert, 12 Jul 1768-11 Aug 1836.
- VEST, Elizabeth, 18 Sep 1762-20 Nov 1839.
- VEST, Elias, 1834-1865.
- VEST, Prudence, 1836-1918.
- VEST, Charles M., 13 Oct 1858-11 Apr 1933.
- VEST, Evaline, 27 Dec 1860-24 Feb 1941.