

Springhouse Ink

The third day of February we walked the dogs half a mile to the Saline River.

Sasha and Maggie wagged their tongues and chased their shadows. There was no cowering from the wind in the garage this day. The Jack London days of January were a distant memory.

A disorganized skein of snow geese circled above us, trying to reach consensus on a landing spot. Snow still clung in the meager shade by the river. The leaf bare trees provided enough shade to impede melting.

Vicky spotted a green snake on the ground. The little guy must have been roused from hibernation by the sun, but if he was hoping for a bug to eat he must have been disappointed. A few wasps and ladybugs may have been coaxed out of the attic, but nothing except the snake was moving on the ground. I kicked the snake hoping it would scale up the tree and be safe from the dogs' curiosity. The snake only squirmed a bit. The sun had compelled it from winter's bed, but not warmed it enough to slither away from enemies. The dogs could have cared less. They were headed for the flooded river.

Maggie jumped in the water as is a Golden Retriever's nature. Sasha, a predatory mutt, snuffled the woods for varmints.

The third day of February featured snow geese, snow-pack, flooding, a snake, daffodils sprouting, playful dogs. It seemed winter and spring had called a sort of truce from their tug-of-war and peace ruled the atmosphere.

The truce was short-lived. More rain and snowmelt caused the Ohio River to rise to nearly 49 feet at Old Shawneetown, which places it on the list of top 20 crests. Roads got covered up. The sheriff's department had to rescue at least two different motorists who drove their cars into the flooded Ingram Hill Road in Saline County. The *Springhouse* editorial office became such a lakeside resort that had it been warmer we might have opened up the Springhouse Bait, Tackle and Video Gambling side hustle. (Sorry, that's a resurrected joke from last year's flood, which became the ninth highest Old Shawnee-

town river crest in recorded history. Bait, tackle, one canoe rental, keychains, firecrackers.)

The river rose through February and began receding until two days of torrential rain beginning March 9 beat down the daffodils and set the river to rising again. The air became cold and stayed that way for more than a week. Then the so-called Bomb Cyclone formed in Colorado and began sucking up all the warm southern air. All that warmth blew past us, taking a few roofing shingles, tree branches and power poles with it. For two days the house shuddered and shook while the dogs cowered in the hallway. One couldn't watch a TV show without weather update interruptions. Mobile phones chimed with tornado watches, tornado warnings, severe thunderstorm warnings. One power line blew down on our lane, but the crews worked in the darkness to correct it and we never lost power. The yard is still a wreck of limbs and shingles. Nebraska is a lake with the mass of water flowing through the Missouri into the Mississippi River.

But around here, the frogs began calling again.

Here it is March 22 and I just heard a mockingbird peenting like a woodcock, that silly ground bird who "beeps" and creates a series of robotic chirps as it displays at dusk for a mate.

Right as the season seems to be settled, now there are news reports that this spring could bring flooding of historic proportions to the Midwest, including southern Illinois. So it appears the calm may be short-lived and by the time this issue reaches readers' hands there may have been a new natural disruption.

We begin this issue with "Plumbing the Depths of Somerset's Lost Silver Mine." In a sense, this is a story I've been working on for 35 years. Boys have a fascination with the Gold Rush, probably instilled by Yosemite Sam's strident declaration, "There's gold in dem dar hills!" Well, at least somebody believed there was silver in dem dar Eagle Mountains. I'm convinced this story that comprises 12 magazine pages is the most thorough account of the local silver mining operation out there.

This story could not have been written without the assistance of Gary DeNeal, Mark Motsinger, Matt Gholson, F. Brett Denny, Terry Geese, Sherry Hinant, Ron Nelson and The Newberry library in Chicago.

We also quest for gold in this issue with “The Gold Rush Diary of Aaron Riley Lambert.” Lambert, of Hardin County, Illinois, spent several years — various accounts state three years, five years and seven-and-a-half years — as a gold miner in Forrest Hills, California. His great-great-granddaughter Frances L. Hope Sanders Dyhrkopp, bought his diary and typed it out. Gary DeNeal bought the transcribed diary at Dyhrkopp’s estate sale upon her death in 2014. The diary is a record of Lambert’s time in the mines from 1857 through 1859. When read only a few passages at a time, the diary is not exciting, but once one becomes used to the odd spellings and cadences it paints a vivid picture of the miner’s routine.

Lambert yearns for letters from home and each Sunday visits the local post office and mercantile, Yankee Jim’s, but most often returns home disappointed. He appears to be a generous man and writes regularly of loaning money to other men at Yankee Jim’s. He returns hoping to collect his money back, but seldom seems to get it. He’s sick most of the time. He is often asked to work while his bosses and co-workers enjoy holidays in town. He misses home.

Sadly, neither Lambert nor his family got the opportunity to enjoy the profits of his labor. John M. Belt’s 1980 book *Who Killed Logan Belt* includes a chapter written by Dyhrkopp. She writes that Lambert left California and returned to his wife Susan J. Lambert, in Hardin County with a considerable amount of money. He then enlisted in the Union Army in the Civil War. Before leaving home for the war, he loaded up his money and rode away to bury it. He was afraid night riders would come looking for his money and torture Susan if she knew the hidden money’s location, so he never told her. He was gone for about an hour burying this money. He left for the war convinced the money would be safe and provide for him, Susan and son, Aaron Lambert, Jr., once he returned safely from the war. He was killed June 4, 1864, in Memphis, Tennessee, while returning to his camp which Dyhrkopp believes was at Germantown, Tennessee. His impoverished wife lived off his \$8 a month war pension and later raised her two grandchildren while the riches from her husband’s gold mining days lay buried in an unknown location around her home.

Though Lambert’s diary indicates he enjoyed reading, he didn’t learn much about spelling from the books he read. He repeatedly uses the phrase “as yausal” which must be “as usual.” He uses other odd phrases that may have made sense only to him. We intend to print the diary’s year 1858 in the next issue, 1859 in the issue following and that will end the diary.

Elsewhere in this issue Rudement native Billy Paul

Ewell recounts growing up in the small community in “Memories of Rudement.” Attending Rudement School, he acquired role models in educators Guy DeNeal — my great-grandfather — and Kestner Wallace — my principal while attending Independence Grade School and faithful *Springhouse* contributor.

Roger K. Lyons writes the tribute “Remembering Mr. Buck Reynolds, Tool & Die Man of Epworth.” Reynolds was a machinist and continued to practice his trade even while living in an assisted living home. Certainly a man with a wealth of historical knowledge, Reynolds imparted a revelation to Lyons during a knife sharpening visit.

John J. Dunphy writes about escaped slave turned soldier Lewis Martin in “His Own Freedom Wasn’t Enough.” Having tasted freedom, Martin would not be satisfied until the institution of slavery was ended and put his life in peril for that cause.

As we fantasize about our spring gardens, Dixie Terry offers some advice on preparing our bounty. Think light and crunchy and healthy in this installment of “From My Kitchen Window.”

It is our hope the weather does not interrupt your spring gardening, farming or lawn care routines, but if the first three months of 2019 are any indication, better expect the unexpected. Either way...

The adventure continues.

