

Martin County Mysteries, Mayhem, and More

PART I

Throughout the course of Martin County's colorful history there have been a number of events that have taken place that are quite intriguing and fascinating. The following constitute a synopsis of a few of those interesting, and somewhat bazaar, happenings – believe it or not.

One rather puzzling event, believe it or not, involves one family's pet dog from Truman named Jiggs. It seems that in 1938 his owners moved to California and left Jiggs behind with family friends. However, Jiggs was unhappy with this arrangement and decided to take matters into his own "paws." Consequently, Jiggs left Truman for California taking the 2,000 mile, three year trek to his owners' home in Santa Ana, California, on foot, or should we say, on "paws." His arrival in California found him to be flea bitten, tired, and hungry. It was reported that following his first meal after his lengthy journey, he slept for three days. Believe it or not, this account was documented in the Truman Tribune and the Santa Ana Register in 1938. Perhaps this might have been a forerunner to the movie, "*Homeward Bound*."

Another amusing mystery involved former Fairmont Mayor W. W. Ward. Elected Mayor in 1905 and reelected in 1907, he mysteriously disappeared in 1907. There were reported sightings throughout the country from Alaska to Texas. He was finally located in Santa Ana, California, running a cigar store. He had left his family in Fairmont for no apparent reason, and gave no explanation for his disappearance.

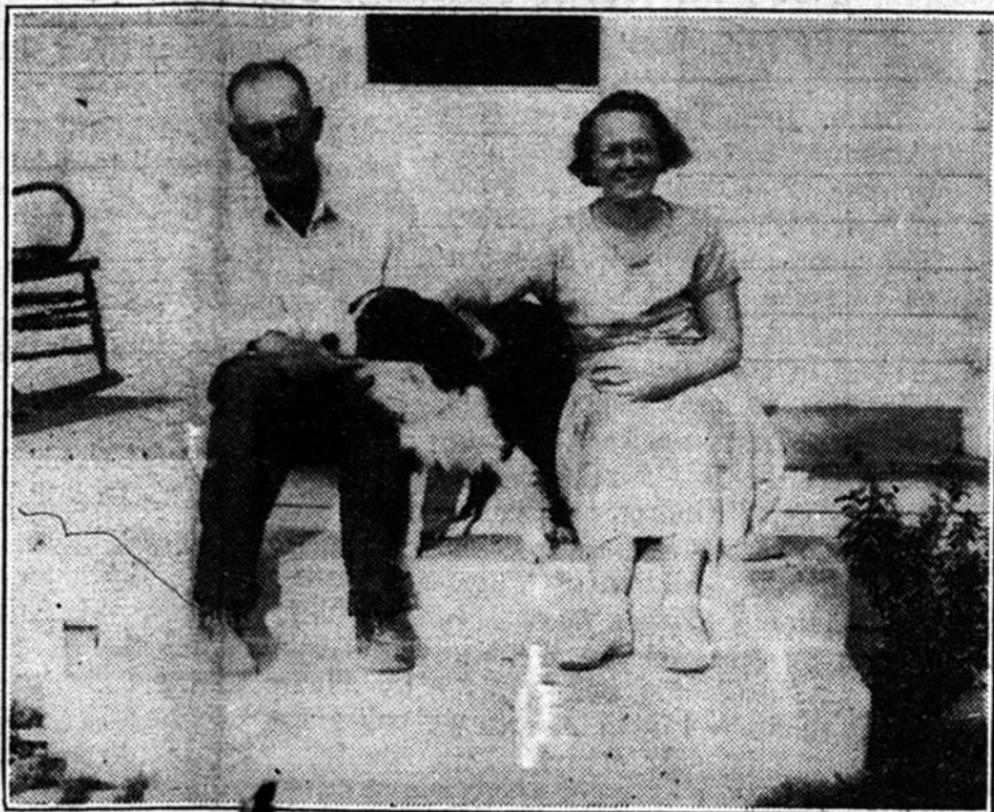
An additional mysterious disappearance involved Pastor W. R. Burton of the Christian Science Church in Fairmont. It was the talk of the town and was called a "baffling mystery." In December of 1914, he boarded a train for Milwaukee but never made it as far as Austin. Burton's disappearance was given national publicity. It was reported that he had enlisted in the Navy serving as a musician and that he had subsequently suffered from amnesia. He was eventually found collapsed on a street corner in New York City. However, he could never explain how he was able to travel from Fairmont to Key West, Florida, to Kansas City, and then to New York City with only \$8.00 in his pocket. Patient privacy was apparently not a concern in 1915 as a doctor that had treated him locally characterized his disease as being most prevalent among women and that Pastor Burton was one of the most effeminate men this doctor had ever known. Adding insult to injury, upon returning home, he found that his wife had gone to live with her sister in Idaho. Although he was reinstated as pastor, he soon resigned, most likely as a result of the ongoing scrutiny he experienced.

In 1932 a "tough" gang of hoboes, transients, and questionable characters invaded Fairmont. Police Chief Plenge headed a cleanup that included destroying huts, outdoor

cooking places and camping sites utilized by the gang. The problem was resolved by placing the transients on a train heading west. Apparently, out of sight, out of mind was the operative approach for this problem.

In 1944 and 1945 nearly 600 German POWs were housed in Fairmont. They worked for the Fairmont Canning Company and were paid \$0.70 per hour which was turned over to the U. S. Government by the canning company. They were also permitted to work on farms in the county. An interesting result of their stay in Fairmont involved what the local media referred to as "giddy females." It was reported that these "giddy" females were flirting with the German POWs. Two of the women had actually crawled through the fence enclosing the POWs. Apparently, as a result of the local men off fighting in WW II the German POWs were the most likely male candidates available for those "giddy females."

Watch the Photo Press for Part II of Martin County Mysteries, Mayhem, and More



Jiggs, the Dog of Truman

WITH MR. and MRS. OSCAR BENGTON



MAYOR W. W. WARD.

