

Explore The RiverBend: The Wood River Massacre still haunts region

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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Sunday, July 10, 1814, was a typical day in the Wood River area but by evening quickly turned into a tragedy that still haunts the region.

On this particular Sunday, Reason Reagan attended a worship ceremony about three miles away, leaving his wife and two children at the house of Abel Moore. At about 4

that afternoon, Rachel Reagan, Reason's wife, retreated to her own dwelling joined by six children, two of her own, Elizabeth and Timothy, two of Abel Moore's children and two of William Moore.

The Wood River Massacre was a tragic Indian ambush on a woman and six innocent children.

SEE BELOW FOR VIDEO ABOUT THE WOOD RIVER MASSACRE:



Dion Roe, director of the Wood River History Museum and Visitor's Center, said at the time of the catastrophe, there were only 18 states in the U.S., including Illinois and Indiana. The U.S. was only 30 years old at this time and the war of 1812 had just ended. Indians had a long established heritage near the Mississippi River but the 1800's was the beginning of the end of the Indian occupation of the region. The British troops had provided some of the Indians with weapons in return of their support during the war.

Roe said he rarely hears about what is now called the Wood River Massacre at his museum.

"People very seldom talk about it," he said. "It was a great tragedy. There are a lot of versions of the story, but all very similar."

Roe said from what he has read the children ranged from 3 to 10 years old and the woman with the youngsters who was killed was very young.

Brenda Fick of the Wood River Heritage Council said one of her ancestors helped take the bodies to what is now Vaughn Hill Cemetery for burial, so she holds the story dear to her heart.

At the time of the massacre, Wood River didn't exist. In the fork near Wood River, there were eight families of East and West Fork. Around dusk the massacre occurred of the seven people. Scalps were found afterward and there was extreme grief.

A message was sent to Fort Russell after the bodies were found on what had happened. Those who were left feared for their own safety and wanted protection.

Capt. Solomon Pruett lined up a wooden cart and oxen to carry the seven victims and provide burial on Vaughn Hill. Trees were cut down to make coffins and the graves were dug by hand. There was no cut wood readily available in the area at the time.

The children killed were Rachel Reagan's children, Elizabeth, 7, Timothy, 3, Capt. Abel Moore's children, William, 10, and Joel, 8, William Moore's children, John, 10, and George, 3. Rachel Reagan and the children were all tomahawked and scalped and remained on the ground where they laid all night, with the Indians stripping them of their clothing.

William Moore, returning from Fort Butler, near where St. Jacob is located today, and his wife, who was going a different route, didn't meet until they had returned home and they both found the bodies in the darkness. Rachel Reagan was found with her two children close together and the others were a distance away. One of the children, Timothy, 3, was alive when found. The wounds were dressed of the one living, but he did not survive the trauma.

At the time, death was something people faced every day, but this situation was devastating to those who resided in that area and as time went on, the story has continued to be retold. It is one that today Fick said is a crime so horrific in nature that is difficult to understand.



