PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-34

“A Wild Child” of Michigan City, Indiana, December 1839: the earliest printing yet found

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SUMMARY

The hairy “wild child” of Michigan City, Indiana, a staple of Midwestern wild-man lists, has been cited from a Gettysburg reprint of 30 December 1839 (Indiana History Blog, 2017). The report went out under a dateline “Michigan City, (Indiana,) Dec. 4,” and was credited to the Michigan City *Gazette*. The earliest printing yet found is in the *Farmers’ Gazette, and Cheraw Advertiser* of Cheraw, South Carolina, on 27 December 1839: a “wild child, or lad,” “about four feet high, and covered with a light coat of chestnut-colored hair,” running “among the sand hills round and in the vicinity of Fish Lake,” plunging into the lake to swim, “all the time whining most piteously.” The plea to capture it, “an act of humanity on the part of our young men,” stands inside the text credited to the *Gazette*.

THE RECORD

1. ***Farmers' Gazette, and Cheraw Advertiser*** **(Cheraw, S.C.), 27 December 1839, p. [7]**

   > *"Michigan City, (Indiana,) Dec. 4. A Wild Child.—Strange as it may appear, it is currently reported and very generally believed that a wild child, or lad, is now running at large among the sand hills round and in the vicinity of Fish Lake. It is reported to be about four feet high, and covered with a light coat of chestnut-colored hair. ... it will plunge into Fish Lake and swim with great velocity, all the time whining most piteously. ... It would be nothing but an act of humanity on the part of our young men to turn out and help to capture it. —Gazette."*

   Library of Congress, Chronicling America (University of South Carolina) · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn85042795/1839-12-27/ed-1/?sp=7)

WHAT IT CHANGES

The report's dateline (4 December 1839) and its source (the Michigan City *Gazette*) are recovered, and the earliest printing yet found moves three days earlier, to 27 December 1839. The New-Hampshire Statesman printed it the next day.

LIMITS

The text is a reprint credited to the Michigan City *Gazette*, and may abridge it. It reports a rumour ("currently reported and very generally believed"), not a sighting by the writer. Its only time for the sightings is "during the summer months."

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

The Indiana History Blog (Beckley, 29 May 2017); “A Chronology of Michigan Creatures” in the Marcello Truzzi papers; Chronicling America and loc.gov for “wild child” with Michigan City, 1839–1840; Internet Archive full text; web searches (October 2026).

Our standard for calling a finding new is set out in How we research (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/), and how we weigh each kind of record in Scrollsigns (projectscroll.com/scrollsigns/).

“New” means new to print as far as we can tell. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will credit it here and raise the note’s version.

WORKS CITED

Earlier work, catalogues and databases named in this note, besides the records quoted above.

1. Michael Urbanski, “The True Story of the Dewey Lake Monster: The Week the Valley Went Wild,” *Project Scroll* (2026). https://projectscroll.com/news/the-week-dewey-lake-went-wild/
2. Indiana History Blog, “Mermaids, Giant Turtles, and Wild Men, Oh My!” (29 May 2017). https://blog.history.in.gov/mermaids-giant-turtles-and-wild-men-oh-my/

THE FULL STORY

The finding is set out in context, with the rest of its sources, in The True Story of the Dewey Lake Monster: The Week the Valley Went Wild (projectscroll.com/news/the-week-dewey-lake-went-wild/). In the discoveries register:

- `dewey-wild-child-1839` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#dewey-wild-child-1839)

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

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