PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-47

Chief White Pigeon's run, its earliest telling yet found in 1908, and the monument unveiled on 11 August 1909 by the Alba Columba Club

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SUMMARY

The monument to Chief White Pigeon (Wahbememe) at White Pigeon, Michigan, says that he "about 1830 gave his life to save the settlement at this place," and the story told with it has him run from Detroit to warn the settlers and die of the effort. The accounts of his grave written before 1908 that we have found do not tell that story. The village paper in 1839 described the grave "on a small eminence about one mile west of the village," which "The Indians were accustomed to regard ... with much veneration"; the county history of 1877 said the chief "died before any white man ever lived on the prairie"; a county biography of 1889 told of the trees planted on the grave; and a Kansas paper of 1890 printed a different tradition, of a Miami chief who died in 1812. The earliest telling of the run yet found is the minute of the St. Joseph County Pioneer Society's meeting of 11 June 1908, which named a committee to mark the grave of the chief "who acted as a flying messenger and saved the lives of the white settlers from massacre." The village paper, quoted in the county history of 1911, dates the unveiling to Wednesday, 11 August 1909, and puts the crowd at about seven thousand; the state marker of 1988 says 10 August and four thousand. The monument was the work of the Alba Columba Club, a White Pigeon women's club.

THE RECORD

1. **"White Pigeon's Grave," *White Pigeon Republican*, 29 May 1839, reprinted in *Historical Collections* of the Pioneer and Historical Society of Michigan, vol. 10 (Lansing, 1888), pp. 172–73**

   > *the village and prairie "take their name from an Indian chief whose grave may still be seen on a small eminence about one mile west of the village. The Indians were accustomed to regard this spot with much veneration."*

   Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/michiganhistoric10michuoft)

2. ***History of St. Joseph County, Michigan* (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts, 1877), p. 61, White Pigeon Township**

   > *"Tradition says the old chief, who died before any white man ever lived on the prairie, was buried on a knoll just outside the village boundaries"*

   Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/bad1045.0001.001.umich.edu)

3. ***Portrait and Biographical Album of St. Joseph County, Michigan* (Chicago: Chapman Bros., 1889), Thomas Redfearn**

   > *"Our subject planted a cottonwood tree to mark the spot ... This tree died of old age, and he planted a black walnut tree in 1866; it also died, when he planted the noble elm which now marks the Indian's lonely grave."*

   Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/portraitbiographsjc00chap)

4. **Delbert S. Ivins, "Plucked from the Burning: A Reminiscence of White Pigeon," *Western Kansas World* (WaKeeney), 17 May 1890, p. 1**

   > *"White Pigeon, Chief of the Miami tribe of Indians ... He was born in Ohio about the year 1775, and died in Michigan 1812."*

   Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn82015485/1890-05-17/ed-1/?sp=1)

5. **Minute of the St. Joseph County Pioneer Society, 11 June 1908, in H. G. Cutler, ed., *History of St. Joseph County, Michigan* (Chicago: Lewis, 1911), vol. 1, p. 133**

> *a committee "to secure funds and have a monument erected to mark the last resting place of the Indian Chieftain, White Pigeon, who acted as a flying messenger and saved the lives of the white settlers from massacre, sacrificing his own life to accomplish his errand of mercy."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/bad1044.0001.001.umich.edu)

6. **The White Pigeon *News*, quoted in Cutler (1911), vol. 1, pp. 137–39**

> *"More people were in White Pigeon Wednesday (August 11, 1909) than have gathered here since the time of the departure of the soldiers for the south in 1861 ... The attendance is estimated at about seven thousand." The project "had been under consideration by the Three Rivers chapter of the Daughters of the Revolution and by the County Pioneer Society, but these White Pigeon ladies insisted that the task was a local one"*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/bad1044.0001.001.umich.edu)

7. **Wire story datelined White Pigeon, 11 August 1909, in the *Durango Weekly Herald* (Colo.), 12 August 1909, p. 1**

> *"The people of this, one of the oldest towns in southwestern Michigan, are unveiling today a monument to the Pottawatomie chief White Pigeon ... Owing to the inaccuracy of early records, it is uncertain when this occurred."*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn91052314/1909-08-12/ed-1/?sp=1)

8. **Michigan state historical marker L1521, Wahbememe (1988), side two**

> *"On August 10, 1909, a day-long celebration marked the occasion of the dedication of Wahbememe's memorial. Four thousand people ... watched"*

Michigan History Center · See the record (https://www.dnr.state.mi.us/PUBLICATIONS/PDFS/ArcGISOnline/StoryMaps/mhc_historical_markers/pdfs/MHC751988022.pdf)

WHAT IT CHANGES

The run from Detroit, the heart of the White Pigeon legend, is dated to 1908, when the Pioneer Society set out to raise a monument; the four earlier accounts of the grave found, from 1839, 1877, 1889 and 1890, do not tell it, and the 1877 history has the chief dead before the settlers came. The unveiling is put back on Wednesday, 11 August 1909, with a crowd of about seven thousand by the village paper's estimate, and credited to the Alba Columba Club.

LIMITS

The minute of 1908 and the village paper of 1909 are known here as printed in the county history of 1911. The 1839 note is known from its reprint of 1888. The crowd figures are estimates. The marker text was read in a transcription, the state's PDF of it being out of reach from here.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

The *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, vols. 1–40; the county histories of 1877 and 1911; the county album of 1889; *Michigan History* (1920); Chronicling America for 1839–1910; the state marker; Wikipedia; the county historical society's and township's pages; web searches for the legend and the dedication.

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. “Wahbememe Burial Site and Monument,” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wahbememe_Burial_Site_and_Monument
2. Avoysia McLoughlin, “Marking the grave of Wahbememe,” *Michigan History Magazine* 4 (1920), pp. 523–24. https://archive.org/details/sim_michigan-history_april-july-1920_4_2-3

THE FULL STORY

The finding is set out in context, with the rest of its sources, in White Pigeon’s run (projectscroll.com/news/white-pigeon-and-the-run/). In the discoveries register:

- `wp-run-first-1908` `(projectscroll.com/discoveries/#wp-run-first-1908)`
- `wp-dedication-1909` `(projectscroll.com/discoveries/#wp-dedication-1909)`

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

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