PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-55

The Shipshewana Saw-mill in 1839, and the county history's word in 1882 that the chief "died some time prior to the settlement"

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SUMMARY

The lake at Shipshewana, Indiana, is only "Lake" on the government survey of 1830. By 1839 the La Grange County commissioners were laying out roads to a mill on its outlet by the chief's name: a petition at their March session of 1839 asked for a road running "to the Shipshewana Saw Mill," and the viewers' report at the May session ran a road "to the Shipshewana Saw-mill in Sec. 3." It is the earliest dated use of the name for a place in the county that we have found. The plaque on the monument of 1931 says that the chief was removed in 1838, came home in 1839 and died by the lake in 1841. The earliest county history we have found that speaks of his death, that of 1882, says instead: "The old chief died some time prior to the settlement." An account of the monument printed in 1932 from the *Shipshewana Handbook* and the Elkhart *Truth* admits that "Little if anything is of record concerning Chief Shipshewana," and that what older residents remembered came from "the lips of Johnny Thorp, who died about 36 years ago."

THE RECORD

1. **La Grange County Board of Commissioners, docket, November 1837 to August 1841, March Session 1839**

   > *a road petition running "thence bearing a north westerly course to the Shipshewana Saw Mill"*

   Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/lagrangecountyin00unse_2)

2. **The same, May Session 1839, the viewers' report**

> *"thence Due West on the North line of Section 17 & 18 - 490 Perches to the Shipshewana Saw-mill in Sec. 3"*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/lagrangecountyin00unse_2)

3. ***Counties of La Grange and Noble, Indiana: Historical and Biographical*** **(Chicago: F. A. Battey, 1882), p. 234, Newbury Township**

> *"Shipshewana, the Pottawatomie chieftain, ... is said to be buried somewhere on the banks of the lake. A lady, now deceased, claimed to know the place of his grave, but the secret has been lost with her death. The old chief died some time prior to the settlement."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/countiesoflagran00infaba)

4. **"Tribute to 'Vision-of-a-Lion' by the Shores of Shipshewana," adapted from the** ***Shipshewana Handbook*** **and the Elkhart** ***Truth***, ***The Brethren Evangelist***, **2 July 1932, pp. 10–11**

> *"Little if anything is of record concerning Chief Shipshewana so far as local delvers in history are aware. But older residents of the Shipshewana district ... remember some of the things concerning his life as they heard them from the lips of Johnny Thorp, who died about 36 years ago when more than 80 years old."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/brethrenevangeli54bret)

WHAT IT CHANGES

The name Shipshewana is dated as a place name in La Grange County to 1839, thirty-five years before it appears on a printed map. The plaque's account of the chief's return and death in 1841 is shown to have no written source before 1931 among those searched, while the county history of 1882 has him dead before the settlers came, and the 1932 account traces what was known to the remembered stories of one man.

LIMITS

The docket is read in a later transcript held by the Internet Archive, not in the original volume. The 1882 history and the 1932 account both report tradition; neither gives a date for the chief's death.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

The 1830 plat of T37N R8E; the gazetteers of 1833, 1849 and 1858; the 1874 atlas; the La Grange County histories of 1874, 1882, 1893, 1920 and 1936; Dunn (1908); the commissioners' dockets, 1832–49; the Tipton papers; the 1838 removal rolls; McPherson (1993, 2007); the town's and county's tourism pages; the Historical Marker Database; Wikipedia; web searches.

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.

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WORKS CITED

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

quoted above.

1. Daniel McDonald, *Removal of the Pottawattomie Indians from Northern Indiana* (Plymouth, 1899). https://archive.org/details/removalofpottawa02mcdo

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THE FULL STORY

The finding is set out in context, with the rest of its sources, in The Shipshewana Puzzle: One Name, at Least Five People (projectscroll.com/news/who-was-shipshewana/). In the discoveries register:

- `shp-sawmill-1839` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#shp-sawmill-1839)
- `shp-1841-first-1931` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#shp-1841-first-1931)

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