

'Queen of the gypsies' buried at Woodland Cemetery

HISTORY, SHE WROTE ROSALIE YOAKAM



On Sept. 15, 1878, Woodland Cemetery in Dayton

was the site of the burial of Matilda Stanley, queen of the Gypsies. The authors of the "History of Wayne Township, 1810-1976" write, "The gypsies' burial place in Woodland Cemetery ... is believed to be the only sacred burying ground of gypsies in the United States."

Matilda was born about 1821 in Reading, Berkshire, England. There she married Levi Stanley, son of Richard "Owen" Stanley, king of a prominent gypsy tribe.

In 1856, Owen Stanley decided to move his affiliated families from England to the United States. They settled in the northern part of Dayton, purchasing several farms in Harrison Twp. with others in Mad River, Butler and Wayne townships.

When Owen and his wife died, Levi and Matilda became king and queen.

The Dayton gypsies lived on their farms during the summer and roamed in the south during the winters. The wealthy families made money in horse trading and fortune telling.

If one of their tribe died while gone from Dayton, they shipped the body, in a beautiful casket, back to Woodland Cemetery.

Matilda died in Vicksburg, Miss., in January

of 1878. She had suffered with cancer for two years. Her body was embalmed and transported to Woodland Cemetery's receiving vault. All gypsy tribes were notified of the funeral arrangements. National and local newspapers advertised the event. There was a great interest in the occasion. Spectators came from all over the country.

The Rev. David Berger of the United Brethren Church of Dayton who "for many years ministered to the Gypsies in spiritual things" read a paper about them to the Dayton Historical Society. The paper was printed in the Dayton Daily Journal on May 23, 1898. He wrote, "It can but rarely occur that royalty finds sepulture in Republi-

can American soil, or that an American clergyman is called to officiate at the funeral of a queen."

The crowd was estimated to be 15,000 to 25,000. The gypsies numbered in the hundreds and were from

the United States, Canada, and England. A thousand carriages paraded from downtown to the cemetery.

Berger stood on a plank across the open grave to avoid the crush of the crowd and led the service.

A quartet from the First United Brethren Church sang and the casket was placed in the family vault.

The plot is marked by a 20-foot granite column topped by a white marble figure.