

LOUISA'S HISTORY

A 20th Century History of Louisa County, Iowa

Pancho Villa in Columbus City?

by FRANK BEST

In 1966 a gentleman named Woodrow Brenneman, an antiques dealer from Nichols, was in Columbus City looking for bargains in an old barn. He had a lead on some old paintings that had been done by a local artist. The artist was a man named Ivanhoe Whitted. Ivan was a bit of an eccentric gentleman, a loner around town. He had lived in Des Moines most of his life, that is where he met and married Elsie Colton of Columbus City. Among other things, Ivan was also a pretty good artist. He became known for his paintings of America's Southwest. Ivan had passed away in 1950 and left several items that went along with the sale of his home.

As Woodrow was looking through paintings, the owner of the shed offered him an old box that was covered in a fancy material. A unique item, it sparked his interest, until he opened the lid. Sitting inside the box was a human skull. Now that alone would freak most people out. However, upon further inspection of the skull, it was discovered it was riddled with holes. Most likely the person in the box did not die of natural causes. I am sure Woodrow probably wondered where the rest of this poor soul was. The owner of the object explained they had been told that this was the Skull of Pancho Villa. This sounded like an interesting story, but it was not something that Woodrow wanted to take home. So, he passed on the box and what it contained.

Well as the year passed Woodrow decided to do some research on who Pancho Villa was, and more importantly what happened to him. Pancho was born most likely around 1878 in Mexico. He grew up in the state of Durango. He would grow to be a well-known revolutionary. A hero to many and a villain to some. Part of Villa's rise to hero in Mexico was his willingness to stand up to the United States. This included a raid he led across the border into Columbus, New Mexico where many were killed. President

Woodrow Wilson responded to the raid by sending General John J. (Black Jack) Pershing to lead a group of men into Mexico to find and kill Villa and his men. Villa managed to stay one step ahead of the Americans, and eventually Pershing gave up and took his men back across the border. This entire action by the American government not only almost broke a very strained relationship with Mexico, but it also helped Villa to become a folk hero.

By the 1920s Villa had retired and turned to ranching to pass his time. Then on June 20th of 1923 Villa's life ended when assassins shot him more than 40 times while he was riding in an open touring car through the streets of Hidalgo del Parral. As one would expect, Villa was given a hero's funeral, but he would not rest in peace. In 1926 vandals would desecrate his grave. His skull was removed from the rest of his body and disappeared into the night. Authorities in Hidalgo del soon arrested a person of interest. Emil Holmdahl, a soldier of fortune from Fort Dodge, Iowa was taken into custody. However, lack of evidence forced the local authorities to let him go. Holmdahl would deny that he had anything to do with the stolen skull until his death in 1963.

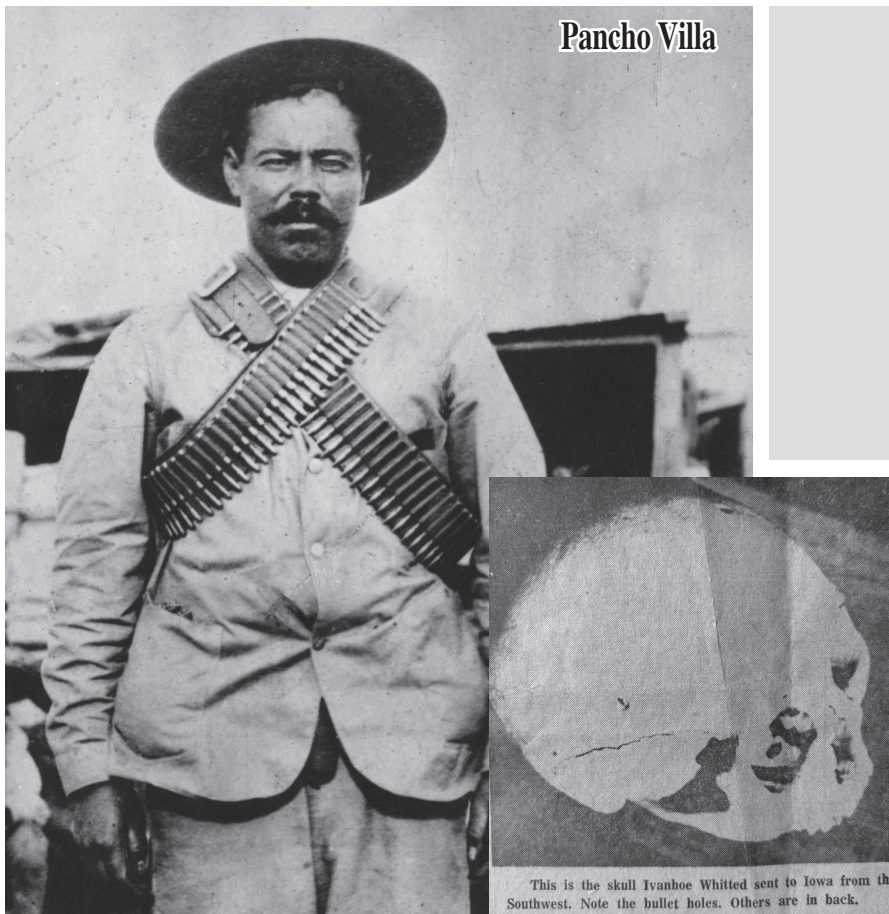
By 1967, Woodrow Brenneman discovered that all these years later the Mexican Government was still looking for Villa's stolen skull. It was then that Woodrow decided to contact the owner of the skull and see if it was still there and if it was still for sale. To his delight the skull was still there, and for the hefty price of one dollar, he became the new owner. Brenneman set off to find some provenance on his new artifact. After some research he discovered that Ivanhoe Whitted was in fact in the area close to where Villa was killed in 1923. Also, the holes in the skull seemed to match what was known of Villa's assassination. The holes in the skull were strangely located in the top and rear. Villa's killers shot him perched from the

rooftops of buildings that he rode past. It was also discovered that Ivanhoe was in New Mexico at the time of the theft of the skull. Also, the box containing the skull was shipped back to Iowa by train in containers from New Mexico. As reported by Ivanhoe's niece Pauline Foss, her uncle had strangely scraped all the railroad markings off the trunks. Now that he owned it Woodrow set out to prove that he had Pancho Villa's skull. His hope was to return it to the Mexican Government. As related in the newspapers at the time Mrs. Brenneman wanted to prove it even more than he did. After finding out about Villa's story she wouldn't allow the skull in the house. Multiple newspaper articles were written that went out around the country. Woodrow was hoping that someone would be able to solve his mystery.

So, what happened to the artifact

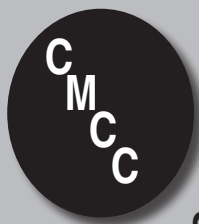
that lived so many years in a barn in Columbus City? Well, here is where it becomes even stranger. No one seems to know what happened to it. The story I was told was about a group from the University of Iowa who went to visit Woodrow and volunteered to help prove the skulls' authenticity. However, the story ended there and supposedly the skull lived its life at the University. Some years later this story came up again. The University was asked about allowing photos to be taken of the skull. Unfortunately, the University seemed to have no record of receiving or ever housing the skull.

So where did it go? Did one of Mexico's most famous revolutionaries at least partially exist in Columbus City, Iowa? Some questions may never have answers, but it is fun to ponder the possibilities.



Pancho Villa

This is the skull Ivanhoe Whitted sent to Iowa from the Southwest. Note the bullet holes. Others are in back.



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The Columbus Gazette and our friends at Colonial Manor are pleased to present stories featuring the rich history of Louisa County.

Our Residents' Trivia Question of the Month -

What did a new Chevrolet cost in 1930?
Take a guess?

PUBLIC NOTICE PUBLIC NOTICE PUBLIC NOTICE PUBLIC NOTICE PUBLIC NOTICE PUBLIC NOTICE

2024 WATER QUALITY REPORT FOR COLUMBUS JUNCTION WATER SUPPLY

This report contains important information regarding the water quality in our water system. The source of our water is groundwater. Our water quality testing shows the following results:

CONTAMINANT	MCL - (MCLG)	Compliance		Date	Violation	Source
		Type	Value & (Range)			
Total Trihalomethanes (ppb) [TTHM]	80 (N/A)	LRAA	7.00 (7 - 7)	09/30/2024	No	By-products of drinking water chlorination
Copper (ppm)	AL=1.3 (1.3)	90th	0.05 (0.04 - 0.05)	2024	No	Corrosion of household plumbing systems; Erosion of natural deposits; Leaching from wood preservatives
Lead (ppb)	AL=15 (0)	90th	ND	2024	No	Corrosion of household plumbing systems; erosion of natural deposits
950 - DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM						
Chlorine (ppm)	MRDL=4.0 (MRDLG=4.0)	RAA	1.8 (1.65 - 1.94)	12/31/2024	No	Water additive used to control microbes
02 - S/E/F FRM WELLS #4, #5 & #6						
Fluoride (ppm)	4 (4)	SGL	0.26	06/08/2021	No	Water additive which promotes strong teeth; Erosion of natural deposits; Discharge from fertilizer and aluminum factories
Barium (ppm)	2 (2)	SGL	0.28	06/08/2021	No	Discharge of drilling wastes; Discharge from metal refineries; Erosion of natural deposits
Sodium (ppm)	N/A (N/A)	SGL	44	07/09/2024	No	Erosion of natural deposits; Added to water during treatment process
Nitrate [as N] (ppm)	10 (10)	SGL	0.683	2024	No	Runoff from fertilizer use; Leaching from septic tanks; sewage; Erosion of natural deposits
cis-1,2-Dichloroethylene (ppb)	70 (70)	SGL	0.60	02/13/2024	No	Discharge from industrial chemical factories

Note: Contaminants with dates indicate results from the most recent testing done in accordance with regulations.

DEFINITIONS

- Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) -- The highest level of a contaminant that is allowed in drinking water. MCLs are set as close to the MCLGs as feasible using the best available treatment technology.
- Maximum Contaminant Level Goal (MCLG) -- The level of a contaminant in drinking water below which there is no known or expected risk to health. MCLGs allow for a margin of safety.
- ppb -- parts per billion.
- ppm -- parts per million.
- pCi/L -- picocuries per liter
- N/A -- Not applicable
- ND -- Not detected
- RAA -- Running Annual Average
- Treatment Technique (TT) -- A required process intended to reduce the level of a contaminant in drinking water.
- Action Level (AL) -- The concentration of a contaminant which, if exceeded, triggers treatment or other requirements which a water system must follow.

- Maximum Residual Disinfectant Level Goal (MRDLG) - The level of a drinking water disinfectant below which there is no known or expected risk to health. MRDLGs do not reflect the benefits of the use of disinfectants to control microbial contaminants.
- Maximum Residual Disinfectant Level (MRDL) - The highest level of a disinfectant allowed in drinking water. There is convincing evidence that addition of a disinfectant is necessary for control of microbial contaminants.
- SGL - Single Sample Result
- RTCR - Revised Total Coliform Rule
- NTU - Nephelometric Turbidity Units

GENERAL INFORMATION

Drinking water, including bottled water, may reasonably be expected to contain at least small amounts of some contaminants. The presence of contaminants does not necessarily indicate that water posed a health risk. More information about contaminants or potential health effects can be obtained by calling the Environmental Protection Agency's Safe Drinking Water Hotline (800-426-4791).

Some people may be more vulnerable to contaminants in drinking water than the general population. Immuno-compromised persons such as persons with cancer undergoing chemotherapy, persons who have undergone organ transplants, people with HIV/AIDS or other immune system disorders, some elderly, and infants can be particularly at risk from infections. These people should seek advice about drinking water from their health care providers. EPA/CDC guidelines on appropriate means to lessen the risk of infection by *Cryptosporidium* and other microbial contaminants are available from the Safe Drinking Water Hotline (800-426-4791).

If present, elevated levels of lead can cause serious health problems, especially for pregnant women and young children. Lead in drinking water is primarily from materials and components associated with service lines and home plumbing. COLUMBUS JUNCTION WATER SUPPLY is responsible for providing high quality drinking water, but cannot control the variety of materials used in plumbing components. When your water has been sitting for several hours, you can minimize the potential for lead exposure by flushing your tap for 30 seconds to 2 minutes before using water for drinking or cooking. If you are concerned about lead in your water, you may wish to have your water tested. Information on lead in drinking water, testing methods and steps you can take to minimize exposure is available from the Safe Drinking Water Hotline or at <http://www.epa.gov/safewater/lead>.

Our water supply has completed a service line inventory. Please contact us for information regarding the inventory and how you can access the results.

SOURCE WATER ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

This water supply obtains its water from the sand and gravel of the Alluvial aquifer. The Alluvial aquifer was determined to be highly susceptible to contamination because the characteristics of the aquifer and overlying materials provide little protection from contamination at the land surface. The Alluvial well will be highly susceptible to surface contaminants such as leaking underground storage tanks, contaminant spills, and excess fertilizer application. A detailed evaluation of your source water was completed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and is available from the Water Operator at 319-212-1160.

This water supply obtains its water from the buried sand and gravel of the Buried Sand and Gravel aquifer. The Buried Sand and Gravel aquifer was determined to be susceptible to contamination because the characteristics of the aquifer and overlying materials provide some protection from contaminants from the land surface. The Buried Sand and Gravel wells will be susceptible to surface contaminants such as leaking underground storage tanks, contaminant spills, and excess fertilizer application. A detailed evaluation of your source water was completed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and is available from the Water Operator at 319-212-1160.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions regarding this information or how you can get involved in decisions regarding the water system, please contact COLUMBUS JUNCTION WATER SUPPLY at 319-212-1160.