

## The Story of Teena (or Making No Bones About It)

by Charles David Head

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I must admit that I was quite surprised, but not skeptical, when I opened up my weekly hometown newspaper and saw the following headline: "Little Girl Spotted Again in Churchyard."

The story said that for several weeks in succession, a little girl had been spotted playing in the Methodist churchyard in the Battlecreek Community of Marion County, Tennessee. This in itself was not unusual, as kids often play in yards of local churches near their homes. However, this Methodist church was way out in the country at least a half-mile from the nearest house. The little girl, according to those who saw her, was about eight or nine years old and dressed in Victorian era clothing and wore bright yellow ribbons in her two long braids of auburn hair.

As I read further, I could not help but smile. On the first two occasions when the little girl as spotted by local passers-by, upon being approached the child would quit playing or picking flowers near the church steps and run off into the woods.

After a very diligent and thorough search by several hundred volunteers, the police and rescue squad, no trace of the child was ever found. When the incident occurred a second time and the little girl wasn't found, the locals came to the conclusion that she was a ghost, perhaps that of a child trampled to death by horses at a Sunday service 100

years ago. Yet the child was never seen while services were taking place every Sunday.

I leaned back in my chair and placed the paper on the small table I kept on the front porch for such a purpose. What a story! While there was some truth to it, I knew why the little girl was being seen in the churchyard. I even knew her name – Christina Lee Furgurson – but I just call her Teena. Now, let me tell you her story:

Since the 1970s, I had noticed the roof of an old two-story house in the fall of the year as I drove up and down the old Battlecreek Road. Every time I saw it, I'd just imagine the loads of old bottles that must be laying around an old place like that. I always promised myself that one day I would take time to go over there and look over the old home place.

Finally, on a cool autumn day in October of 2000, I loaded up Cousin Billy and headed out to check out the old house. Built shortly after the Civil War by Thomas P. Furgurson, the two-story house was a huge and solid structure set at the foot of the Cumberland Plateau. According to local folklore, Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee had once visited the Furgursons there in 1869. However, local historian Robert Hookey discounted that as an old wives' tale.

There was only one place for me to park the truck and that was at the Methodist church located a half-mile or so from the



house. Numerous outbuildings on the property helped steer our way to the house. Having waited 25 years to look over the place, I started my search inside, access made easy because the doors were wide open and most of the window panes were cracked or broken out. I found very little inside, except a 1920s era cloth bag marked "The Dixie Portland Cement Company Richard City, Tennessee" inside a Civil War-era writing desk, which was in deplorable condition.

With Cousin Billy's help, the attic as searched, but only some common food jars and peanut butter tins were found. I did find a bundle of old letters tied up with twine behind a beam in the attic's loft. My next search was in the crawl space so, with Cousin Billy close by to help if I found any treasures, I began my search. Success at last! Some very nice 1870s-80s medicine bottles were my reward, many with contents intact. One was a paper-labeled Cherry Cordial from Chattanooga, a large city some 25 miles from the old house. Time flies when you're having fun so it was nearly dusk when Cousin Billy and I headed back to my truck, vowing to come again real soon.

During the next few days, I cleaned up the old bottles and tins and scanned the bundle of letters I'd found. Most were love





letters and quite interesting, to say the least, with discussions of the ice cream socials and other events attended by the star-struck lovers. They were Thomas P. Furgurson's eldest son, John, and a young lady named Sarah from across the valley.

Some of the correspondence included very nice letterheads from the coal company where John had worked during the late fall and winter months when the farm lay idle. There also were a couple of letters dated 1910 from the local Methodist minister to John, apparently after he and Sarah had wed and she had borne him a couple of children. The letters were interesting and intriguing, but not as much as the old medicine bottles we had found, so I stored them inside a dresser drawer and forgot about them.

Two weeks later, Cousin Billy and I found time to return to the old Furgurson place, spending the day searching the outbuildings for bottles and relics. We found a few pieces of old dishes and milk glass vases inside an old barn, as well as some one-gallon oil cans from the late 1930s, early 1940s, in near mint condition.

I was almost certain that the family used a part of their huge farm to dump their household garbage, but Cousin Billy and I never even found a hint of where it might have been.

Darkness was fast approaching and, thinking that we may never be able to return again, I suggested that we make one more sweep of the place. Cousin Billy chose the outside and I the inside. I made my way to the attic and probed the gathering gloom with my Q-beam flashlight. Nothing, not even a stray zinc lid from an old Mason jar, had been overlooked.

However, as I left, I inadvertently shined my light into the space between the walls. Lo and behold, bottles — lots of bottles — appeared in its rays. To reach those treasures, however, would mean dismantling parts of the wall, and tools that I wouldn't normally carry on bottle-hunting trips would be needed. Like crowbars and pry bars.

Cousin Billy wanted to come back the next day, but it was two and a half months before we were able to return. I was hoping no one else had found my treasure trove.

Because we figured to be there all day, I had my "bestest friend" Janet drive us out to the Methodist church and leave us since I didn't want to leave my truck parked in such an out of the way place for a long period of time. Carrying an assortment of pry bars, our lunch, water jugs and lights,

we made our way to the house. On the lower floor, I pried off the eight-inch baseboard for several feet in the area I thought the bottles were resting inside the wall.

I reached inside and up the wall and my hand encountered more than 100 years of accumulated trash, some put there by rats and mice and the rest by humans. I tugged on a piece of cloth and trash rained down, including bottles that hadn't seen the light of day for many decades.

Wow! I'd hit the Mother Lode!

Much to my delight, most of the bottles were embossed and others carried paper labels from early druggists in my hometown of South Pittsburg, Tennessee. There were bottles from the Sartain Drug Company / Jno. J. Ingle & Company, and even a labeled medicine bottle from Doc Astrap, the first black doctor in South Pittsburg.

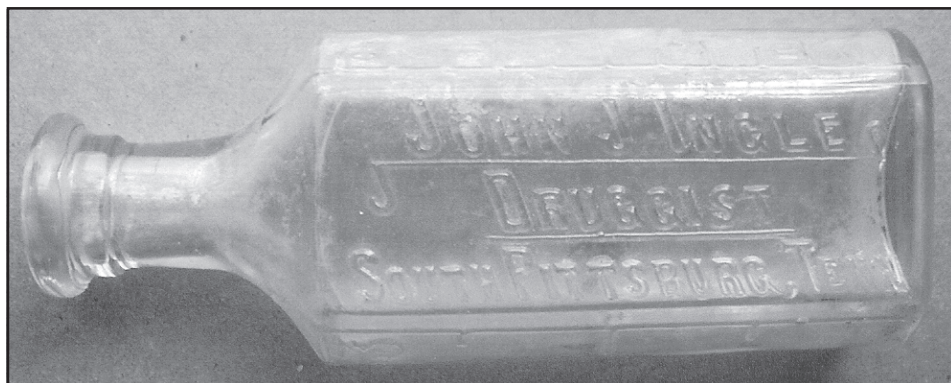
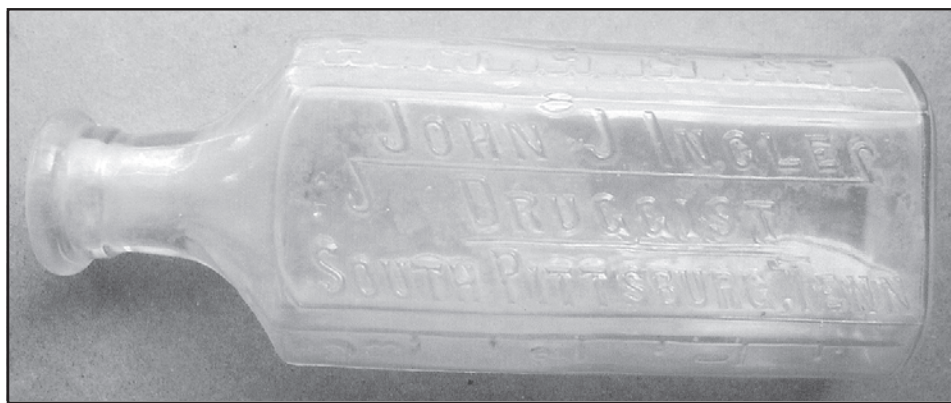
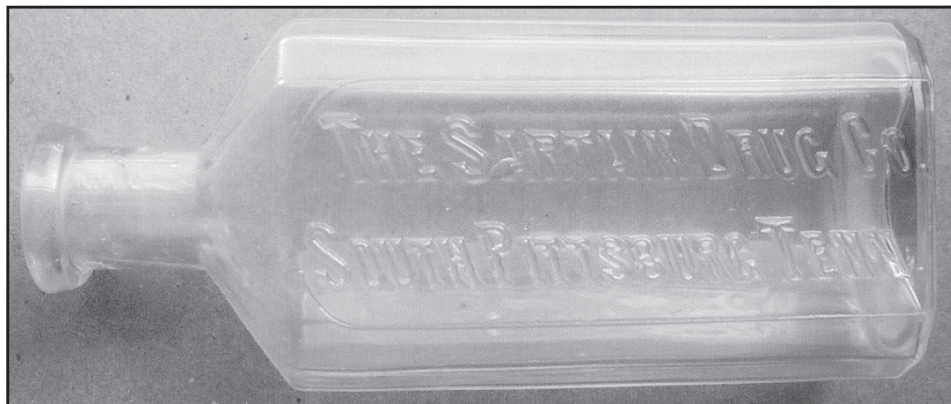
After retrieving all the bottles from that portion of the wall, Cousin Billy and I

decided to remove baseboards from the rest of the house, just in case there were other bottles I hadn't been able to spot from the attic. We worked several hours, but never found another bottle. We also gained access to a good-sized closet next to one of the house's three huge chimneys, enabling me to shine my flashlight into the dead space behind the chimney. Nothing was there.

I got onto my hands and knees and began reaching my hand into the far crevices, finding five inches of dust, but no bottles, until I got close to the base of the chimney. I felt what seemed like a coconut, but when I pulled it into the light of the room, I was stunned by what I saw — a human skull! I couldn't believe it and handed it to Cousin Billy for confirmation. I found a few more human bones.

Having found numerous Indian bones during my searches of plowed fields and

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4, 1902; Ibid, December 11, 1902; Ibid, December 18, 1902; Ibid, January 1, 1903, pg. 8; Ibid, January 8, 1903, pg. 16; Ibid, January 15, 1903, pg. 18; Ibid, January 22, 1903, pg. 36; Ibid, April 2, 1903, pg. 11; Ibid, May 28, 1903, pg. 29; Ibid, June 4, 1903, pg. 29; Ibid, June 11, 1903 through August 13, 1903; Ibid, August 20, 1903, pg. 40; Ibid, August 27, 1903; Ibid, September 3, 1903, pg. 40; Ibid, September 10, 1903, pg. 40; *Saturday Evening Post*, August 15 1903; Ibid, August 29, 1903; Ibid, September 19, 1903; *McClure's Magazine*, September 1903; *The Munsey*, October 1903 and Ibid, November 1903.

<sup>13</sup> Figure 8 was extracted from the sellers' ad on the electronic marketplace eBay when I was bidding on the item.

<sup>14</sup> *Crockery and Glass Journal*, June 4, 1903, pg. 29; Ibid, June 11, 1903 through August 13, 1903; Ibid, August 20, 1903, pg. 40; Ibid, August 27, 1903, pg. 40; Ibid, September 3, 1903, pg. 40; Ibid, September 10, 1903, pg. 40; *Saturday Evening Post*, August 15, 1903; Ibid, August 29, 1903; Ibid, September 19, 1903; *McClure's Magazine*, September 1903, pg. 60; *The Munsey*, October 1903 and Ibid, November 1903.

<sup>15</sup> *Crockery and Glass Journal*, January 8, 1903, pg. 52; January 15, 1903, pgs. 18 and 29; Ibid, January 22, 1903, pg. 36; Ibid, April 2, 1903; Ibid, May 28, 1903, pg. 29; Ibid, June 4, 1903, pg. 29; Ibid, June 11, 1903 through August 13, 1903; Ibid, August 20, 1903, pg. 40; Ibid, August 27, 1903, pg. 40; *The Munsey*, November 1903 and *The Evolution of Table Glass*, published circa August to October 1903.

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river banks for Indian relics, I was familiar with the color of skeletal remains. The skull I'd found inside the house was ivory-colored and not nearly as dark as some of the Indian bones I'd found. I concluded these bones were newer and couldn't have been found outside and hidden behind the wall by a wild animal.

I also discarded the notion the bones might have been found by a child in a nearby old cemetery and hidden inside the wall, because there wasn't a cemetery close enough to the house. Evidently someone had put them there on purpose so no one would ever find them. That meant foul play and probably murder. The small size of the skull indicated the victim had to be a child. Four or five inches of dust and trash had covered the bones so that meant the incident had to have happened nearly 100 years ago.

My mind reeling from the discovery, I retreated to the front porch to gather my wits. Sitting in the cool shade, one of my first thoughts was to call the police and report what I had found. I discarded that idea since I didn't think they'd be interested in investigating a 100-year-old murder and I wasn't comfortable with the notion of being scrutinized by them. Besides, what if I was wrong and the remains were more recent? I could just imagine the questions they'd ask me!

With the time fast approaching for Janet to pick us up, Cousin Billy and I loaded up our equipment and old bottles and headed to the rendezvous site. Our elation at finding the bottles was dampened by the discovery of the skull and bones, which I determined to take with me.

Janet was about an hour late and Cousin Billy and I nearly froze, except I was as cold on the inside as the outside because of my grisly discovery. Janet was quite taken aback when I showed her the skull. Being close friends, she could sense that I was upset over the discovery.

During the next couple of months, I read everything that was available about the Furgurson family. Thomas P. Furgurson and his wife had the house built shortly after the end of the Civil War. They became the parents of a son named John, who wed Sarah. In 1906, Sarah gave birth to Thomas, who lived until 1998. I was familiar with Thomas, having met him several times during my two-year tenure at Paul's Food Market in South Pittsburgh from 1977-79.

I took the skull to my family doctor to get an opinion as to its age, gender and perhaps even the cause of death. The doctor, who had

known me for many years and also was familiar with my collecting habits, was quite surprised (to say the least!) to see the skull. He couldn't determine gender or cause of death, but thought the skull as nearly a century old.

In hopes that the bundle of letters I'd found hidden in the house's attic would shed some light on my research, I began reading the ones I'd not perused. One dated 1910 caught my eye. The local Methodist church minister was enquiring into the health of John and Sarah's two small children, baby Thomas and little Christina Lee. That was news to me because I was under the impression that John and Sarah had only the one child, Thomas, who had recently died at the age of 92. I began asking older folks living in the area about her. Inquiries proved fruitless and those who had known Thomas swore they'd never heard of an older sister!

This was a revelation because surely Thomas would have known of an older sister, even had she died as an adolescent or even as a young adult.

Was it Christina's remains I had found behind that wall. If so, who put them there and more importantly, who had killed her? One of her parents? God forbid!

The more I thought about it, the more that possibility had become a reality. Did the people who loved Christina the most end her life and put her into that awful, dark place? If so, how did they explain her disappearance to the minister and their neighbors? The hairs on the back of my neck stood up on their ends as a shudder passed through my body, thinking of the horrible scenario.

I kept Teena (my nickname for Christina) in my dresser drawer for another 11 months. I had no nightmares or experienced any supernatural phenomenon during that time as I searched for a suitable final resting place. I had no intentions of returning her remains to the vile home place where she'd probably met her end.

Instead, I chose the old Methodist church grounds as the only place hallowed enough, the grounds on which she may have played and picked flowers as a little girl.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** Except for the ghostly sightings, this is a true story. I have changed a few names and rearranged dates and locations. Today, Teena lies where I buried her remains in April 2002, beneath a huge, 200-year-old oak tree in the Methodist churchyard. Its broad branches serve as a canopy for her final resting place.