

## The Iron Stone

### The Plight of Eddie Irons

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Over two hundred years ago, the shores of the winding Obey River were a rough and tumble place. Most of the inhabitants of this area were still Native American Indians. But there were a few pioneering families that chose to call these hollows home. This story is about one of them.

The year was 1799. Edward and Sara Irons lived near what eventually became the old town of Willow Grove. The creek flowing through this old settlement still bears the Irons name...Irons Creek. Edward (or Ned) and his wife, Sara, settled the many acres all up and down Irons Creek that they had purchased from the Cherokee. They had two children (twins) that eventually became quite famous in these parts. Their daughter, Rachel, grew up and married yet another famous person...one Mr. William Dale, *the William Dale* for which this lake is named. He and Rachel settled the many acres where our dam is built. But this story isn't about those two famous folks. This is about her brother, Eddie.

Eddie was a fiery young lad, and he delighted in racing horses. There were few pastimes in this part of the country in the late 1700s to occupy a young man's life other than farming and racing horses with the neighbors and Indians. But Eddie excelled in racing. It wasn't until his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday that things went awry. Edward and Sara purchased Eddie a new horse as a birthday gift. It was a particularly spirited and fierce race horse that was only partially broken to ride. But this didn't stop young Eddie. His confidence and strong Iron will never wavered. He had set his mind to ride his present *on his birthday*.

As you might imagine, Eddie and his horse had conflicting personalities. Neither was willing to bend to the other's will. And when Eddie's seat hit the saddle, he and the horse bolted into top speed. Nothing slowed their pace. Thickets and briar patches tore at their skin and hide, yet both raced on. The horse would not stop, and Eddie would not jump from the ride. Both intended to ride to the end. On the outskirts of what would become Willow Grove, a stand of large walnut trees lined an old fence row. Eddie and his horse raced straight for it, not slowing their pace in the slightest. Despite the impending danger ahead, they still raced onward. Limbs began to brush horse and rider, making it impossible for either to see.

And then it happened. Amid the chaos of brushing limbs, Eddie's head hit a low-lying limb of a large walnut tree. The blow ejected him immediately from the horse. Eddie was killed instantly. Mother, father, and sister watched, as the family's heart-felt gift took young Eddie's life.

It was then that Edward Irons took on the hardest challenge of his life. There were three things he set out to do, and it would take every ounce of energy he could muster.

The first item on his list proved easiest. The hollow-echoing explosion of a 50 caliber musket rang in the air. The subtle thump of a falling horse was heard thereafter. On to number two.

Edward stood solemnly at the base of the lone walnut that so innocently took his son's life. In his hands was his largest and sharpest ax. He swung it with every ounce of strength he had, and it fell with utter satisfaction. Its razor sharp edge cut deeply into the trunk of the old walnut. After an hour of chopping, Edward heard the creaking break of the trunk as the old tree fell to the ground. For two days Edward cut. He sawed and planed beautiful walnut boards. He pegged those boards together into a casket for his son. And with what little energy he still had left, he completed his third and final task. He buried his son on a shallow hill of shale near his home. And soon, Edward and Sara moved away from the hollows they once loved. And time passed.

About one hundred years passed. The now bustling city of Willow Grove had grown around the old Irons place. The town had decided it was time to build a school. There was a lovely little hill on the edge of town that seemed perfect for the building of the school. During the groundwork for the building, an old wooden casket was unearthed. It was the casket of Eddie Irons. The townspeople were perplexed. *Now what are we going to do?* What they did was simple. They placed him back in the ground from where he came and built right over top of him. After all, he might as well stay where he was first buried.



Another thirty years pass. It was time to build a much bigger school. And the people of old Willow Grove were watching closely as they built. Sure enough, that old walnut casket again saw the light of day. *Now what are we going to do?* It wasn't quite so simple this time. This new structure was much bigger. Large volumes of concrete were being poured, and bricks were being hauled in from miles around. This was to be the biggest school within miles. *Do we really want a body beneath our building?* The answer was a resounding yes. This fellow had been there longer than anyone alive. *Let's pour him a tomb while we build.* And that's what they did. Our friend Eddie would now have himself a tomb. He would be there forever. *Or would he?*

In 1942, it was time to build Dale Hollow, and all the structures on the newly purchased government land were being demolished...including the Willow Grove School. *What about the Irons Tomb?*



The Irons Tomb was blasted with many claps of dynamite. And with much of old Willow Grove watching, pieces of the old Irons Tomb crumbled and fell. But the tomb stayed in tact. Many have asked why the Corps had documented a grave as moved, when it actually had not. And who is to say the Corps didn't come back another day and remove him?

This much is certain. The steps of the old Willow Grove High School are still just how the Corps left them in 1942. Scuba divers have proven that the south side of the steps looks sharp and natural. The northern side where the tomb lies is crumbled on the outer edges, but still very much in tact. Eddie is still there, folks. And I think that is

exactly how it should be. Eddie's tomb stands as a reminder...a monument to the settlers of old that endured the many hardships of these rough and tumble lands. And I think Edward and Sara would be proud.~