

A visit to an Indian reservation near his mother's hometown in Kansas helped spark Luke Scheer's interest in native American history, but it could also have been the end of him.

During the 1908 visit to St. Mary's Kansas-where the Potawatomi had a reservation - six year old Luke was given a toy arrow which he promptly got stuck in his throat. All ended well, and the boy grew up to become the man largely responsible for the development of the Forks of the Wabash Historic Park.

Scheer's historic interests were nurtured by his mother Elizabeth Braddock Scheer. Having lived near the Potawatomi, she herself was interested in the culture; two years after the Kansas trip, she took her son to Roanoke for the 100th birthday celebration of Kilsquah, granddaughter of Miami Chief Little Turtle.

His mother died when Scheer was still young, and the boy lived with several foster families. He earned a high school degree and worked at a series of jobs before enrolling at Marquette University, to study journalism.

He got a job as a reporter with the Milwaukee Sentinel, then went to work at the Toledo News-Bee. At age 23, he left the News-Bee to become co-owner and publisher of a weekly newspaper, the Maumee Valley News, and became embroiled in a historic controversy.

Scheer's newspaper attempted to rally public support against a 1928 plan by the city to vacate a street, which would allow an individual to build a house there, the site of an old fort and fierce battles. Eventually the fort site was acquired by the state of Ohio as a state memorial; Scheer had been successful.

Luke worked in public relations for the Detroit Panhandle Pipeline Company for 45 years. In 1936, he married Erma Webster of Wyoming, Illinois and they became parents of Luke Jr. and James.

Luke's interests led him to do research in Canada where he found and copied original permits granted to fur traders to enter this region when it was a vast wilderness. He travelled to Maryland and found original documents of the Quaker pilgrimage to this area in 1805 to establish the first Indian Agricultural School west of the Allegheny Mountains. The uniqueness of Luke's research was that so much of his information came from actual early papers, diaries, and other records. All of his collection was carefully organized and meticulously documented.

In 1943, Luke purchased the Chief Richardville House and adjoining land at the Forks of the Wabash and Little Rivers, west of Huntington. In 1977, The Junior Historical Society began a cooperative venture with the Scheers to restore the house and keep it open to the public. This property is now owned by Historic Forks of the Wabash, Inc., a group which is dedicated to realizing Luke's dream to develop a park and memorial to the cultures that met at this historic site. The efforts of Luke and Erma Scheer have left a lasting legacy which will be remembered for years to come.

