

LEGEND OF HAIRY JOHN VONNEDA

from file in PA State Library

R. Lynn Emerick, Forests and Waters, found in the files of photographic films negatives preserved in the department the negative of a German article by John Vonneda, undated, but marked as "Printed by Lewis Kurtz," Aaronsburg, Center County, Pennsylvania. A rough transcription was made, and a carbon is attached. From Colonel Henry V. Shoemaker, State Archivist, the following information concerning John Vonneda was obtained. The events of his life point to a curious and interesting interpretation of his words.

He seems to have belonged to an Amish or Mennonite Community in Sugar Valley, Clinton County. His wife was quite a bit younger and beautiful. A younger man, nearer of course to her own age, was in love with her, and neighbors carried tales, but he finally went off to the Mexican war, and the incident, such as it may have been, was closed. On his return, however, rumors again began to float about. Then, on a day, the body of the young wife was found in the cellar of the home, the throat cut. Neighbors seem to have jumped to the conclusion that her husband had killed her in what might be called a ritualistic murder, in atonement for what they surmised was her adultery. However, nothing was done to him, and he continued to live quietly in his home, only later on moving to a point near the line between Union and Center County. It is related that on the rare days when he came into the nearest town for supplies, children ran from him in the street. He was called Hairy John. This is doubtless because, like others of his faith, he shaved only about the mouth, or not at all. A fine spring on his place led to his laying out a little parklike space where travellers might halt. It is said that the young man disappeared from the region entirely, and there were those who surmised that it was he who killed the young woman, because she would not leave her home for him. Nobody knows now what really happened.

Note: Handwritten on the bottom of the paper "He was still alive and running this little picnic ground in 1890. 'Democratic Watchman of Bellefonte, Pa.'"