It was 1794 and Axe was eleven. She said, “yes that is why the bobcats ran into the cave.” “What is in there I wonder.”

Pommissin the other 11-year-old and youngest of the sons, says,

“You don’t want to go inside until those cats are gone.”

The boys’ ages ranged from Pommissin, age 11, Topi, age 12, Elikus, age 13, Ichauweleman, 15, Achpineen, age 16 and Nachgundin. Age 17

Axe, “I am not stupid, I know that.”

The group then departed to return home.

That night, Axe saw that her Uncle Witatschimolsin fellow Lenape were pow wowing near the campfire next to the field.

She decided to walk over to the men gathering.

Uncle said, Axe you need not be out here we are going to discuss things and I do not think your Aunties will like that.”

Axe, “yes I won’t stay long, I just had a question.”

Every man there, anticipated that question.

Axe, says, “me and my brothers went hunting and we were walking along the creek, then we took a path down the holler and up the hill and seen wild bobcats go into a hole in the side of the hill hidden by trees.”

Uncle says, oh my, those boys know better than to stray away from the creek path. Those places are off limits.”

Axe, “but what is that hole in the hill?” The men began to talk and mumble, and one said, “That’s wildcat den. We, Lenape had discovered that a spell back away, and had used it for storage of some corn because it is cold in there.”

Uncle Witatschimolsin “now don’t you go in there.”

Axe began to walk away but lingered enough to hear the conversation amongst the Lenape men. She managed to slip behind the shed without being spotted just to eavesdrop on what was being spoken.

One Lenape man says, “You know that cave is dangerous just not because of wild bobcats or bears.” Axe’s ears were tuned in.

“Legend has that there is a large hole once inside about 10 paces to the rear of cave that drops off” I know of several English pioneers who wondered into that cave seeking shelter and were never heard of again, I recon they fell into that hole, or something pulled them down.”

Other Lenape man says, “When I was young, I was with my father and he lit a torch, to show me a ledge about two men length down on the far side of the hole, where there was an old deer hide saddlebag which was hanging on a root. He managed to direct the light from the torch on the saddle which had a rip on one side. When the light flickered upon the saddlebag, a gold shine from within the bag was revealed. My father said, “son this is the white man’s curse, to seek gold” He explained to me that several years ago, a white French fur trader had in his possession three bars of gold which he had carried with him from Virginia. He had stumbled upon this cave hideout and had attempted to cross over the hole in this cave by a log which was placed over the hole by our forebearer tribe members when seeking shelter from the winter. At one time, it served to make safe the passage into the other area of the underground cave where the tribal Indians could safely remain during harsh winter days. Unfortunately for the French fur tradesman, the log gave way after dry rotting for many moons. The leather strap of saddlebag caught the extending root, and the French fur trader managed to cling on to the saddlebag, but the strap gave way and he fell into the bottomless pit. He then said, “watch as I toss this fire torch into the pit, and it will not make a sound.” To my amazement the torch fell downward and disappeared with no sound of hitting bottom. Axe had heard each word and was now aware of the hole in the ground near Salt Fork run. She would recall this story and share it with others as time would tell. Wild Cat den would become a place of curiosity and a place Axe will remember.

**Axe meets the Leatherwood God**.

Whatever may be the facts concerning the folks living in Guernsey county, the memories of those who knew Axe bear witness to the truth of these descriptions. Aunt Betty Couts and others testified that Axe was not only brilliant, accomplished, exquisite in manner, but good to everyone, kind to the poor and devoted to her tribe. She was a fearless equestrian, and she was strong in body as she was active in mind. Axe could leap a five-rail fence, walk ten miles at a stretch and ride with the boldest of dragoon. Robed in scarlet broadcloth, with a white beaver hat, on a spirited horse, she might be seen dashing through the dark woods reminding one of the flights of a wild hawk. Axe was very fond of a picturesque figure of Ohio’s earlier times, was one who never meant and never imagined harm to any living creature, man, or beast, but gave his simple humble life to doing good, with no thought of his own advantage. Few knew his real name was John Chapman, but it did not matter; Johnny Appleseed became his right name.

Whenever he went he carried a store of apple seeds with him, and when he came to a good clear spot on the bank of a stream, he planted his seeds, fenced in the area, and left them to sprout and grow into trees for the orchards of nurseries throughout Ohio which he would return year enough he would sell them to the farmers for a trifle an old coat or an old shirt, and when he needed nothing he gave them for nothing. He went barefoot in the warm weather, and in winter he wore castoff shoes. The Ohio Lenape Indians knew him and loved him for the goodness of his life, and they honored him for the courage with which he bore the pain he never would inflict. If his belief was true and we are in this world surrounded by spirits, evil, and good, which our evil or good behavior invites to be of our company, then this harmless, loving, uncouth, half-crazy man walked daily with the angels of God. In those early days when the folks were poor and ignorant and had little hope of bettering themselves in this world, their thoughts turned much to the other world. The country was often swept by storms of religious excitement; at the camp meetings the devout fell in fits and trances or were convulsed with strange throes called the jerks, and all sorts of superstitions grew up easily among them. The wildness of these was that of the Leatherwood God which A person in a tall hat

Description automatically generatedflourished in Guernsey county about the year 1828.

The name of this fanatic or impostor, who was indeed both one and the other, was Joseph C. Dylks, and his title was given to him because of his claim to be the Supreme Being, and because he first appeared to his worshipers on Leather-wood Creek at the town of Salesville. The leatherwood tree which gave this creek its name had a soft and pliable bark, which could be easily tied into knots and was used to cordage by the pioneers and dwellers on Leatherwood Creek had a faith of much the same easy texture. Yet they were of more than the average intelligence and they were so far from bigoted or intolerant that all sects among them worshiped in one sanctuary, a large cabin which they had built in common and which they called the Temple. Here on a certain night, in 1828, while the worshiping folks sat listening to one of their preachers, they were thrilled by a loud cry of “Salvation”!, followed by a fierce snort, like that of a startled horse and they discovered in their midst a stranger of a grave and impressive aspect, who had come no one knew whence of how. When he arose he stood nearly six feet high, and showed himself of a perfect figure, with flashing black eyes, a low broad forehead and a fine arched nose; his hair , black and thick, fell in a mass behind his ears over his shoulders; he wore a suit of black broadcloth, a white neckcloth and a yellow beaver hat. His weird snort and his striking presence seem to have been his sole equipment for swaying the faith of the people; though some of the earliest believers saw a heavenly radiance streaming from his countenance at times, and when he rode, they beheld above his head a ring of light which hung in the air over the saddle if he dismounted. He soon was making converts, and at first claimed to be Jesus Christ, but he then announced he was God Almighty the maker of heaven and earth. His followers readily believed him, and some disapproved of his claims. Dylks made a fateful decision to prove his heavenly powers by claiming he would perform a simple miracle of making a seamless garment out of a bolt of linsey-woolsey cloth and kept none of his promises to them. The unbelievers had him arrested and brought before two justices of peace. Both investigated the existing laws of Ohio and decided there was not a law forbidding a man from declaring himself to be God. He was acquitted but was fearful others wanted to kill him or punish him further. When he came back to the believers, he had bated nothing of his claim to divinity, but he was no longer bold. He told the believers that New Jerusalem was not in Guernsey but in Philadelphia and he departed towards the pathless woods.

This is how he met Axe. One day he was attempting to sway a woman to worship him. Woman said, “you are a wicked man, Joseph Dylks. You could not do good if you tried” She pulled her sunbonnet across her face as if to hide it for shame and went back towards her cabin. “Salvation!” Dylks shouted after her and gave his equine snort. He began to sing as he took his way through the woods, “Plunged in a gulf of dark despair, we wretched sinners lay.” At first, he sang boldly, filling the woods with a mocking of his hymn. But at the sound of footsteps cracking over the dry falling twigs toward him intermittently as if they paused in question and then resumed their course towards him, his voice fell brokenly silencing itself till at the encounter of a woman, glimpsed through the trees and pausing in a common stop. “Who are you?” Dylks demanded of the figure before him. “I am Axe, a Lenape “

“Well Axe, make way for the Lord thy God.”

Axe said, “oh you are the Creator. I had no knowledge of you being here “Dylks says, Yes I am, and I can redeem your sins.” Axe knowing the religion of the white settlers from her Lenape tribe who embraced the religion from the Moravian missionaries. Axe had learned the teachings and made sure she knew the faith. Axe remembered a few lessons she was taught by her guardians and accessed Dylks persona and decided to bestow him some lessons to prove to settlers in the area, that he was a wolf in sheep clothing. Axe had observed Dylks speaking to his followers and watched him manipulate the people who were at the services. Axe says, “if you are God, and Creator of all things, then there are two things I want to tell you.” Dylks believing he was to benefit from this woman says, “Yes Salvation will come, let me know your confessions and I will forgive your sins” Axe said, “the first thing I want to tell you, there is gold in Wild Cat Den, a cave, beyond the Salt Fork creek, perhaps ten miles from here along the old Indian hunting path leading from Leatherwood creek.” Dylks black eyes lit up and became glazed, says, “Axe you must be wise, because I seek gold for my mission” Of course this confirmed Axe’s intuition about Mr. Dylks. Axe begins to describe the location and recalled the story of the French fur tradesman who had three gold bars stuck on root in the cave. Dylks remained intent on following up on her story. Axe then said, “the second thing I want to give you is something that you can use to recreate a holy tunic for your mission. She says, “you know Jesus wore a tunic representing unity in the faith?”

Axe reaches into her clothing and pulls out a strand of thread about six inches in length. “ here, since you are God, this belongs to you, it is a sacred thread that binds cloth into seamless tunic as worn by Jesus as he went to the Cross” Dylks said, “ yes I want that thread” Axe said, now remember, it with your power and faith can create a seamless robe for you to wear. You can perform a miracle with this thread. This would make your followers very loyal to you.”

Mr. Dylks reaches out and grabs the thread which was attached to a stick to keep it intact. Axe says, “I had attached it to a sassafras branch for safe keeping, and besides, you can chew on the sassafras if you wish.” Mr. Dylks paid her no mind and placed the thread in his coat pocket. Dylks became distracted when he heard a woman yell from the area where the Temple was and turned to yell back to the woman. He says, “Salvation” I am close by, I be up there in a few” as he turns away from Axe and covers his mouth with his hands to make his voice heard over the trees. Dylks speaks to Axe with his back turned away and says, “I want you to know I will honor you in my sermon and miracle which I will perform for my flock at the Temple tonight” He turns to face Axe, but to his bewilderment, she had vanished without a word. “Where are you? Hello” peering down the forest trail he sees no one or hears no horse or sounds from Axe. Suddenly, a crow caws from an over hanging branch, startling Dylks. It appears as if the crow was gazing at him from above.

Dylks says, “ok don’t answer me and run away” Which Axe had managed to leave without Dylks seeing which way or how she was able to leave the area without Dylks noticing. Dylks began to return towards the Temple to meet up with two women who are his followers. Dylks says I am going to do a miracle for you later tonight, ladies. Sally was one of the women who had some doubts about Dylks claims. Dylks says, “I am not fooling; all I ask now is to have you see me do a miracle at Brother Hingson’s tonight. I will do two miracles if you see, and one will be sending Jane Gillespie away from me and back to Hughey Blake. You will want to see that even if you do not want to see me turn a bolt of cloth into seamless raiment by the touch of my hand.” Jane was married to Hughey Blake but became infatuated with Dylks and was one of his devout followers now. “You are a wicked man, Joseph Dylks,” the woman solemnly answered. “And I am sorry I asked you anything. You could not do good if you tried,” said the other woman.

Later in the early evening hours, folks’ believers and non-believers began to head towards the Hingsons cabin and barn. Young people looked as if they were going to one of the social gatherings, they would have called a frolic, in the backwoods phrase. Sally heard a girl whisper as she walked past, “I wonder if Mis Hingston going to pass around the apples and cider?” Jane Gillespie was that strong believer who in her utter trust when she heard that cloth would be needed for the seamless raiment of his miracle had offered to provide it, and now, neither in pride nor in shame, but in defiance of her unbelieving husband she was bearing away from her house the bolt of linsey-woolsey newly home from the weaver, which was to have been cut into the winter’s clothing of her children. She had spun the threads herself and dyed them and they had become as if they were of her own flesh and blood. She carried the bolt wrapped about with her shawl, bearing it tenderly in her arms as if it were indeed her flesh and blood, her babe which she was going to lay upon an altar of sacrifice. -The crowds in Hingston’s mill grew with the arrival of the unbelievers as well as the believers in Dylks. The spectacle was unbelievers were jeering at the believers as these arrived sometimes hailing their name, they neighed and whinnied and shouted Salvation and in the intervals of silence they would burst out with the first lines of the Believers hymn. There were those who mocked “I am God,” “Oh do not leave us Dylks” “Make the Devil jump Joseph Dylks” “Fetch on your miracle.”

The woman who was bringing the body of the miracle came round the corner of the mill and showed herself in the open space with the bolt of cloth borne carefully in her arms. “Why it’s a baby” cried out a heckler. “Reckon the women will have something to say if he tries to turn a baby into a seamless raiment.”

The woman with the bundle passed through the open door of the house behind the mill. The public entrance was at the front whereby day the bags of grain were lifted by rope and tackle to the upper story and the farmers who brought them climbed up by the inner stairways. The believers had expected that they were to come in by way of the dwelling, but now the burly figure of the miller stood in doorway and said, “Neighbors, we want you all to go round to the front of the mill and come in there. The miracle is going to be done on the bolting-cloth floor, where there will be room for all that wants to see. We do not mean to keep anyone out, whether they believed or did not believe. The only thing we want is for you all to be quiet and not make any trouble. And now come in as quick as you can, so you can be sure we have not had time to do anything to the cloth that the seamless raiment is going to be made from.”

The wide space on the bolting-cloth floor, before the bins mounded high with new wheat, and the rows of millstones motionless under their empty hoppers, was lighted by candles in tin sconces, but these were so few that they shone only on the foremost faces and left those behind a gleam of eyes or teeth.

The miller and his family had place in the front line of the spectators and with them was the woman, who had given the cloth for the miracle and who stood staring at the stuff, which she had known so intimately in every stitch, thread, and fiber, with an air of estrangement.

After two hours of waiting, relieved with pleas and promises from the miller, there was no word from Dylks and no token of his bodily presence. Many folks became frustrated and began to leave mocking the believers.

One of the believers cried out, “Praise ye the Lord.” Then a yell of mockery broke from the unbelievers, and someone shouted, “Let us have a look “and the crowd rushed forward upon the roll of cloth which lay on the table where the woman who had brought it in her arms had placed it. She spread her arms out over it with the piteous gesture like a mother trying to keep her child from being harmed. “Oh, don’t Oh don’t” she cried. “It is my cloth I spun it, I wove it, every thread!” “It’s all I have for my children this winter!” Do not touch it!”

Her pleas were ignored. One of the spectators pushed her away and caught the cloth up. “We won’t hurt it sister, we just want to see what a seamless garment looks like, maybe it may fit some of us, here boys take a hold.”

He held the outer edge of the cloth and flung the bolt unfurling itself toward his fellows over the heads of the believing men who had crowded forward to save it from the desecration, as the woman tried to seize it from him, beseeching imploring, “Oh do not hurt it, be careful! Do not let it drop, do not.!”

“We can’t hurt it, sister, it has a miracle inside of it,” mocked one of the ruffians. During angry shouting, pushing elbowing and wailing, weeping crowd, the cloth of flung out and then in a frenzy, it was torn into pieces and shreds. “Find the seamless raiment” they cried. The woman wept and said, “Now what are my children going to wear?”

The riot in Hingston’s mill after the failure of Dylks to appear to perform the miracle, casted doubt on this man who claimed to be God Almighty.

A person in a cave holding a torch

Description automatically generatedJoseph Dylks used this stunt to deceive, however, he himself, was deceived.

He had taken the opportunity to go to the Wild Cat den and attempted to find the gold bars which Axe had described. He managed to light a torch and directed the light upon the cave interior. About twenty feet inside the cave,

A bag and gold bars in a cave

Description automatically generated

he sees the pit and low behold, a glimmer of gold was seen in a leather satchel attached to a root on the opposite side of the pit. In August 1828, Joseph Dylks had vanished from the area and was never seen or heard from again. It was Axe’s clever judgment of Dylks that he only attempted to deceive others into his schemes. Axe knew he must have attempted to obtain the satchel with the gold and like others, assumed he may have fallen into the pit. Axe had gone to the Wild Cat Den and like a needle in a haystack, while looking down on the ground, saw her sassafras stick with the thread still attached. She reached down picking it up while examining it, then Nachgundin, a spirit within Axe, placed it into her pocket and headed back to Salesville.