

Cover Two diaries belonging to John B. DeCrow from 1887 and 1890. Albert Photographic, 2022.

Right Myron Benedict's son Bill holds a vertebra of the partial mastodon skeleton found on their farm in 1949.

"Myron Benedict's discovery is a remarkable story spanning thousands of years."

The fifth issue explores extraordinary stories that emerged from the routines of daily life. *Myron Benedict unearthed prehistoric mastodon fossils* while plowing his fields (page 16). John B. DeCrow's *daily diaries depict a life hard to imagine* for a twenty-first-century reader (page 10). A community of Kouts women demonstrate how *needlework can be both quotidian and aspirational* (page 4).

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Dear Readers,

The PoCo Muse has seen a number of different homes since its beginning in 1916, but all of them have been physically located in Valparaiso. While this influences the composition of our collection and the base of our support, it shouldn't affect our commitment to represent all areas of this remarkable county. The settings of this issue's three stories are in Porter, Morgan, and Pleasant Townships, all located in the southern part of the county. Amazingly, two of the stories take place on farms only a stone's throw away from one another. Explore how extraordinary history is found throughout our county's borders.

Sincerely,



Kevin Matthew Pazour

Executive Director, PoCo Muse



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Chair, Board of Trustees, PoCo Muse Foundation



Lest Old Friends Are Forgotten: A Community Embroidery Quilt

By Emily Graves



The first thing one notices about this object is the red heart. An inscription inside the heart reads, “Lest Old Friends Are Forgotten.” Radiating from this central message are the hand-embroidered signatures of thirty-nine women.

It is clear that countless hours of laborious needlework went into its making, yet the shapes appear messy and inconsistent, and the ragged fringe of the ground fabric shows. The complex cursive of the signatures clashes with the strange, uneven text of the central inscription. Every part of the piece is asymmetrical and slightly off-center. Yet, it has been remarkably well preserved.

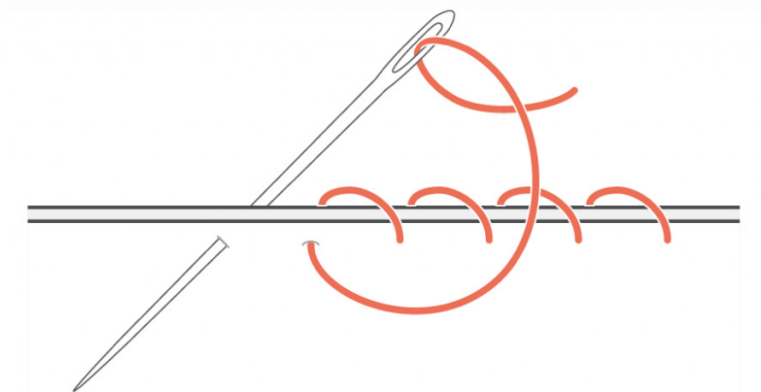
To a casual observer, these peculiarities may give it the unfinished look of an amateur embroidery project. Yet in some ways, these contradictions define the piece and set it apart. Its incongruity offers a viewer an invitation to look closely at the embroidery itself and reflect on the lives of the women of the Morrison Community Club in Kouts who created it sometime between 1911 and 1915.

Unraveling these threads begins with a close examination of the object. A square cotton fabric with a plain weave is embroidered with a uniform red thread, likely from a single skein. One side of the square is perfectly straight and even, the selvedge from the original fabric. The other three are frayed and irregular where the fabric was cut off. It appears that no effort was made to conceal this fringe, and the fabric remains in remarkably good shape. Likewise, the embroidery, which is surely the most fragile aspect of the object, is still wholly intact. Other than slight fraying of

What did this work mean to them?

thread, three creased folds, and a few errant stains, the fabric shows almost no signs of heavy use or handling. Never finished into a complete quilt, the piece was folded and put into storage.

The appearance of the inscription, “Lest Old Friends Are Forgotten,” within the heart is simple and imprecise. The letters’ size and spacing are irregular and use only single straight and curved lines with serifs on some, but not all, characters. The embroidery employs a whipstitch technique, a connected line of slanting stitches, which is very common and easy to use. The words of the motto



Whipstitch A diagram of a whipstitch technique. Courtesy of Hillary Lang and her blog, weewonderfuls.com, 2016.

Autographed Embroidery Quilt The thirty-nine signatures radiating from the heart-encircled motto, “Lest Old Friends Are Forgotten,” belong to women of the Morrison Community Club in Kouts who created it. Albert Photographic, 2022.

were perhaps embroidered without prior layout and by a single person. The signatures, however, are unique and complex and demonstrate a collaborative effort. After cutting a piece of fabric scrap for the background, each individual took turns writing her name on the fabric in pencil. After the initial signing, the fabric was likely handed over to a single embroiderer who carefully traced over the pencil signatures with red thread, preserving their unique traits. Signs of pencil lead can still be seen in places.

After just a short examination, the personal bonds of a tightly knit community are revealed. It is reminiscent of a high school yearbook signed by graduating classmates or a t-shirt autographed by a championship sports team. Yet it still isn't entirely clear how this embroidery originally functioned for the Morrison Community Club. What did this work mean to them?

In May 1911, the first meeting of the Morrison Community Club was called to order in the home of Mrs. Minnie Tillotson. Meetings were divided into business proceedings and a social hour.

[The] bonds between members ran deep, and they took joy in each other's company.

During the social portion, food would be served to the members and their guests, and they would play a variety of games and contests. Celebrations and events were frequent, and descriptions of the club's meetings were published in *The Vidette-Messenger* newspaper for the community to read.

The Morrison Community Club is most often remembered for its volunteer work and community service. Newspaper entries during the club's existence portray a group focused on building community. An article from 1933 describes the social hour in detail, yet the only piece of information regarding the business agenda is that minutes for the previous meeting were approved. An article from the next year reports songs performed, a guessing contest, and "visiting socially." These accounts place the most emphasis on friendship and socialization. The quote chosen for the center of the embroidery, "Lest Old Friends Be Forgotten," suggests that bonds between members ran deep, and they took joy in each other's company.

These bonds extended outside of the club. Most members came from only a handful of families, and many had been close friends prior to joining the club. This is exemplified by the vice president, Mrs. Rebecca Mockler. Her daughter, Mabel, appears on the quilt, as do her sister-in-law and niece. Mrs. Lulu Starkey was Mrs. Mockler's good friend outside of the club. This web of connections extends to nearly all the members. Many relatives to the Morehouse Family appear, and Minnie Tillotson's daughter, Flora, wrote her name directly under her mother's signature. The inscription at the topmost point of the heart reads "Faithful Workers," and the two names on either side of it are labeled as "President" and "vice Pres."

In many ways, the embroidery reflects the town where it was created. Kouts was and still is a small rural community. Pleasant Township had a population of 1,424 in 1910, and the town of Kouts grew from a population of 214 in 1880 to 583 in 1930. Even today, town residents number barely over 2,000.

Kouts promotes itself as a small, tight-knit, and welcoming community. A graphic from the town's 125th anniversary celebration in 1990 displays a large heart with "Kouts Indiana: A Small Town With A Big Heart" printed within, a remarkably similar design to the Morrison quilt. This spirit of hospitality dates back to the memorable, almost mythological, story of the town's founding, as recounted in a book celebrating the Kouts centennial. In 1865, surveyors for a railroad company sought lodging

for the night. They first approached the Trinkle family home, but the lady of the house was entirely occupied making apple butter and turned them away. The surveyors walked further, reaching the home of Mr. and Mrs. Barnhart Kouts, where they were welcomed. The workers were so touched that they built a railroad station nearby and named it after the family, eventually serving as the basis for the town's name. Other accounts of the town's naming are not so charming. An 1882 history of Porter and Lake Counties claims the town is named after Barnhardt Kouts for his role in planning and constructing the first buildings.

Not surprisingly, a town cherishing community bonds and kindness fostered many clubs. In addition to the Morrison Community Club, there was a Farm Bureau chapter, the Kouts Woman's Club, an American Legion Post, several sports teams, and many other community organizations in the early 1900s. Membership lists often overlapped, and particularly active individuals emerged. Rebecca Mockler, Morrison Community Club's vice president, served as the first secretary of the Kouts Farm Bureau chapter upon its establishment in 1919. These two commitments were not enough to keep her occupied, as her descendant Stephen E. Mockler attests. She was also involved in the Morrison Ladies Aid Society, served as president for the Kouts Christian Church Ladies Aid Society and The Auxiliary of the Sons of Union Veterans. "They always said that's why Stephen August [Rebecca's husband] always went hunting and fishing," says her descendant, because Rebecca "was involved with so many clubs, and they met lots of times at her house." For women like Rebecca, involvement in clubs provided purpose and community and broke up the monotony of everyday life.

The embroidery of the Morrison Community Club embraces a larger tradition of friendship quilts. Also known as autograph quilts, they record the names of either the women who worked on the quilt or people important to its recipient. Such quilts first began to emerge in the 1840s. Women made them for organizations and churches and to commemorate special occasions, such as weddings. Names, drawings, short sayings, poems, and, occasionally, specific dates and places adorned the quilts. Often, a single woman wrote all the signatures. The ideal writer had beautiful, legible handwriting as well as experience in the craft.

Fabric and thread would have been relatively cheap and accessible to women of the time, making

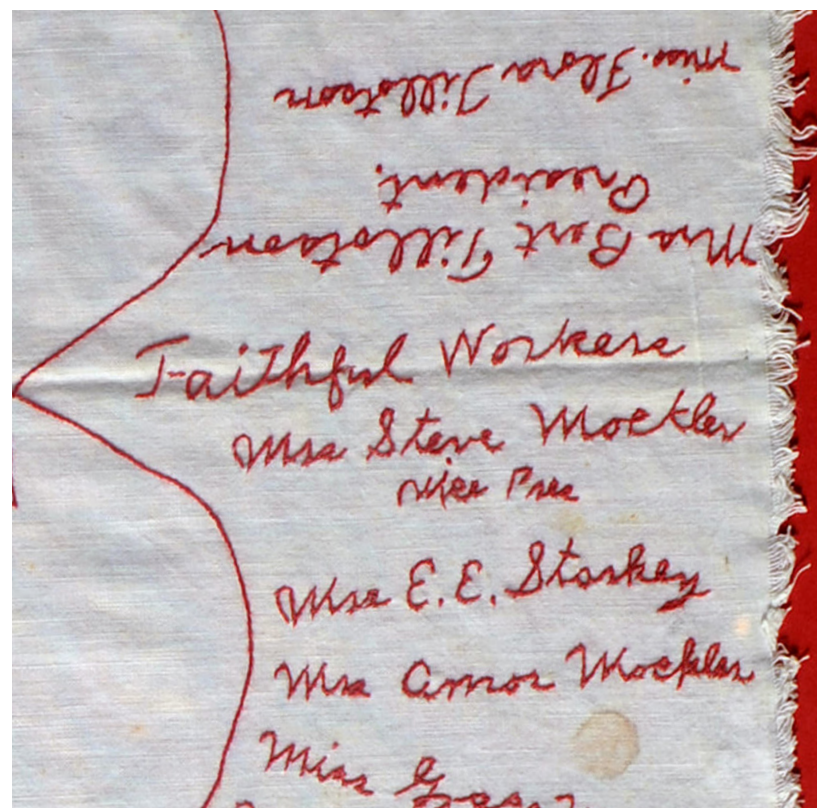


Kouts Anniversary Graphic A graphic from Kouts anniversary publication features a heart-encircled motto, "Kouts, Indiana: A Small Town With A Big Heart." A Quarter Past One: 125th Anniversary Kouts, Indiana. Star Printing, 1990.

[Needlework] was viewed as both deeply quotidian and aspirational.

quilts an ideal medium for these keepsakes. Needlework was exceedingly common, perhaps even a required skill for girls, and quilts could be made from readily accessible scraps of fabric. The style, design, and complexity of the quilts could be easily adjusted to meet the tastes, values, and skill levels of the quilt makers. This adaptability was a major draw for women. Friendship quilts met women where they were.

While clearly a useful skill in homemaking, needlework products were marketed and sold to women and pushed as an integral part of womanhood. A needlework guide from 1877, the same year Mrs. Tillotson was born, proclaimed that "there is no occupation so essentially feminine, at the same time so truly ladylike, as needlework." Needlework takes on a multifaceted identity encompassing all that was expected of women during this period. It was a practical skill, an art allowing for the creation of beautiful things, a way to spend time, a communal activity, and a conduit for ideals and values. Needlework was an art held in high regard. It was viewed as both deeply quotidian and aspirational.



"Faithful Workers" This detail of the quilt viewed on its side highlights the central "Faithful Workers" and the two names on either side of this inscription being labeled as "President" and "vice Pres." Albert Photographic, 2022.



Neighborhood Sisters Quilt This machine-stitched, brick-pattern quilt from the PoCo Muse Collection was made in 1939 by a group of Valparaiso women whose names can be seen embroidered by hand in the quilt blocks.

By the late nineteenth century, the practice had evolved from a celebration of community among friends and relatives to a means of raising money. Fundraising quilts began to form their own traditions. Red thread on a white fabric became a prevalent combination and a key signifier of fundraising quilts. The popular wheel-shaped design allowed names of donors to be embroidered in the built-in spokes. This wheel design mirrors the radial composition of the Morrison Community Club embroidery, and both use red thread on white fabric. These similarities draw focus to the Morrison Club's charity and volunteer work. The club would be later remembered for serving lunch at auction sales, sewing for the needy, and helping members in times of sickness and sorrow. Volunteering and assisting others were important to members.

Kouts was not the only town seeing a rise in clubs and community service. This trend was connected to the greater advent of Progressivism in the early twentieth century, a movement often associated with the middle and upper classes in small towns. Progressivists sought to enact social

[Clubs] represented an opportunity to advance women's potential to use their talents to influence the world around them.

change and reform through both their own actions and community efforts; they wished to preserve "family, friendship, and small-town solidarity" in the face of an increasingly industrialized, impersonal world. Clubs were an easy way to organize members for these goals. Women found clubs particularly attractive, allowing them to leave their homes to further education and participate in community activism. They represented an opportunity to advance women's potential to use their talents to influence the world around them. Organizations provided a sense of power and agency, a way to exercise values and build a robust community.

The friendship between the women of the Morrison Community Club was deeply personal and meaningful, but the center quote of the embroidery seems bland and generic. Even the name of the group is left off in favor of the generic epithet, "Faithful Workers." This dissonance is at least in part due to a tradition of taking quotes from a larger collection of mottos.

Mottos were everywhere in nineteenth-century Victorian America: room decor, furniture embellishments, book titles, grave markers. Short sayings were approachable and almost universally relatable, yet they were able to fit many grand connotations into just a few words. Their use gave women some creativity and expression in the decoration of the home while also nodding to shared values and conformity. The practice of including mottos into embroidery offered a level of novelty which provided a sense of sophistication and trendiness.

Mottos tended to be common and oft repeated, but the exact phrase, "Lest Old Friends Be Forgotten," was rare. Even still, it is clearly similar to and derived from other mass-produced sayings, such as, "Absent But Not Forgotten," "Forget Me Not," and "Remember Me." The conformity in these quotes did not stop them from being reiterated in embroidery, autograph albums, and friendship quilts. Their generic quality and conformity were part of their appeal.

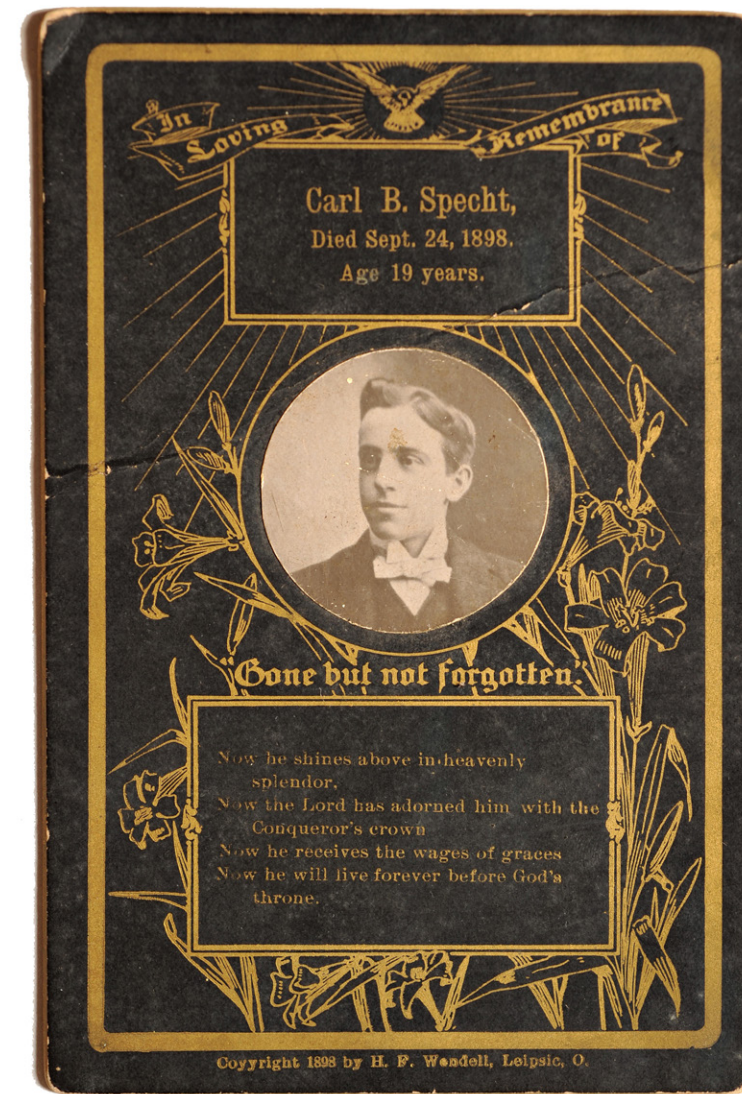
What is most striking about this group of mottos is their strong association with loss, graves, and memorial pieces. The embroidery becomes a *memento mori*, an artistic trope that reflects on the inevitability of death. There is an implicit understanding that friends will become old and lost, and that memory is fickle and needs reminders. Mrs. Tillotson died in 1915, shortly after the quilt's production and only four years after the club's

founding. How did this embroidery add meaning for a group soon to experience its own grief? Was there an anticipation of her loss in its making? The club continued to face loss. Flora Tillotson moved away after her mother's passing, occasionally traveling back to Kouts to attend club meetings. Only two original members of the club remained by its forty-fifth anniversary in 1956. The embroidery captures a moment when the charter members were all together. What may have once been simple communal activity holds special meaning and memorializes the bonds between these women after death.

We can see the mix of traditional and forward-looking values in a changing world.

Contradictions are everywhere in this embroidery. It records the bonds between the women whose names appear on it, yet the piece feels somewhat impersonal. It takes from the traditions of friendship quilts and embroidery as home decor, yet doesn't fully embrace either. It leans on conservative, Victorian values and techniques but points towards an emerging Progressive movement. It appears to have been made for reflection and display, yet it feels rushed and unfinished. These qualities may suggest the piece was ordinary or trivial, but it was cherished enough to be preserved for over one hundred years. While it is impossible to know exactly how the creators felt about this embroidery, it still synthesizes many important aspects of the lives of women in the early twentieth century. We can see their joys and struggles. We can see the mix of traditional and forward-looking values in a changing world. The piece implores the viewer to remember old friends. The embroidery's history won't be forgotten. •

Emily Graves is a junior at Valparaiso University studying art and history. She served as a PoCo Muse intern during the fall of 2022. Her work on this article stemmed from her research for a thesis during a first-year seminar in Christ College.



Funeral Card Carl Specht died at nineteen of typhoid in 1898, shortly after enlisting to serve in the Spanish-American War. His family purchased this funeral card from a mail-order catalog which offered a selection of mottos. Like the quilt, this card from the PoCo Muse Collection invokes remembrance.

The Diaries of John B. DeCrow

by Pamela Murrow

Each day, John would note the day's chores, track his business expenses, and document notable local events and social gatherings. Nearly every entry begins with a weather report.

The PoCo Muse Collection houses twenty-four annual diaries of John Brooks DeCrow (1833-1923), spanning thirty-one years from 1859 to 1890. In 2017, PoCo Muse supporter and volunteer Pamela Murrow began organizing, reading, and transcribing them. Murrow has rich experience with transcription, having published a book of letters written between General Henry Knox and his wife Lucy called, Unending Passions: The Knox Letters. What started out as a small volunteer project grew into a five-year immersion into the daily life of a nineteenth-century Morgan Township farmer. On February 11, 2023, Murrow presented her work in a lecture in the Eunice Slagle Gallery, where DeCrow's 1888 diary was on display in the Connections exhibit. The following has been adapted from Murrow's presentation.

During the summer of 1866, John and his father Joseph traveled from their hometown in Licking County, Ohio, to Porter County to purchase a farm for John's family. The journey from Mansfield, Ohio, to Valparaiso lasted ten hours and cost them \$8.70. On their arrival, their friend William Henry Harrison Rosecrans, who had moved to Porter County from Licking County a decade earlier, showed them around. John records the trip in his diary:

June 27, 1866: Father & I in Valparaiso, Porter County, Ind. & looking around for a farm. We bargained for a farm this P.M. of Mr. Ezra White for \$10,000, 200 acres at \$50.00 per acre. We pay \$1,000 now, \$1,000 1st Dec, next \$3,000 next year & \$1,250 a year for four years.

The deal was struck the following day. A few months later, on November 13, 1866, the DeCrow family would spend their first night on their new 200-acre farm in the northwest corner of Morgan Township, establishing themselves firmly in Porter

County. They marked the occasion with a trip into town to stock the pantry and purchase, among other supplies, a new stove for \$36.40, two new beds, a set of chairs for \$10.00, and an 1867 diary for 85 cents. John's first chore the following day was to bury the blackberry plants for winter.

John Brooks DeCrow was born in Bennington, Ohio, on October 21, 1833. He was the eldest of three sons born to Joseph Park DeCrow and Delilah Brooks, both of Waldo County, Maine, who settled on a farm in Licking County. None of Joseph and Delilah's four daughters survived past the age of four years old.

John attended common school in Ohio before becoming a schoolteacher for seven terms in Appleton, Ohio. He then went on to receive a degree from the Iron City Commercial School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1859. A few months later, he married Mary Ann Ramey, whom he called Mollie. John and Mollie had four children: Delma Jane, Arthur Burton, Eva Belle, and Vona Delilah. The eldest three were born in Ohio.

In November 1866, the DeCrow family moved from Ohio to their newly-purchased Morgan Township farm. It was here in Porter County where John and Mollie would spend the rest of their lives. Mollie died on August 28, 1879, at the age of forty-four, only four years after the birth of their youngest, Vona. John would live for another forty-four years before passing away at the age of eighty-nine on February 4, 1923.

Near the beginning of every new year, John would purchase a standard annual pocket diary for himself. Occasionally, his daughter Delma, who also kept a diary, would present him with one at Christmas. Each pocket diary, or "Remembrancer" as one is called, is a little different; some came preprinted with that specific year's dates, while others were "self-dating" and could be used for any year. Some

John Brooks DeCrow Written in ink on the back of this photograph is the inscription: "Presented to Miss Vonie Decrow by her father on her seventh birthday. Jan. 23rd 1882." According to his diaries, this photograph was taken on January 4, 1882, while visiting Valparaiso with his oldest daughter, Delma. John DeCrow was 48 years old. That same day, he also bought a new pair of boots for \$4.50.

The DeCrow Family Farm This image depicts the DeCrow family on their Morgan Township farm. The man in the dark coat is John DeCrow. Standing next to him, from left to right are his daughter Vona, his wife Mollie, daughters Eva and Delma, and son Arthur. The unidentified man with the dog on the left of the image is assumed to be a laborer. The image dates between 1877 and 1879.



had useful almanac tables for farmers. One even came with a complimentary pencil! Only six years of diaries between 1859 and 1890 are missing from the PoCo Muse Collection. One diary contains the activities from three years, and another is too fragile to open and transcribe. The earliest years contain scant and sporadic entries. It is likely John kept a diary his entire life, but those after 1890 are considered lost.

It was around 1866, the same pivotal year when the DeCrow Family moved from Ohio to Porter County, that John began in earnest the daily habit of writing in his pocket diary. This regularity would continue through to the last remaining diary from 1890. Some entries covered an entire page, while others were only a sentence long. What is consistent, however, is the straightforward and quotidian manner of the entries. Each day, John would note the day's chores, track his business expenses, and document notable local events and social gatherings. Nearly every entry begins with a weather report.

July 23, 1885: Quite warm this morning & cloudy early, it then cleared up for a short time. Mr. Charles Cobb here last night & to day . . . cutting my wheat, cut till about half past 9 A.M. Eli Tatero here helping . . . spread hay till half past 9. Otto & Arthur plowing & I sowing rye till it rained at 9-30 A.M. Raining most of the time till night. Did not do any thing this after noon. Gen. U. S. Grant died at 8 A.M.

Despite the momentous news of General Ulysses S. Grant's death, the tone of the entry is sober and matter-of-fact. John provides no unnecessary frills, emotions, or embellishments. Since the diaries served as his primary business records, the pragmatism was crucial. John was very meticulous in keeping track of money spent and money earned, documenting expenses to the half-cent.

January 24, 1880: Froze quite hard last night. Pleasant to day. I have been at town to day, got returns for my clover seed. It weighed 37 bushels & 27 lbs, sold at \$4.85, come to \$181.63 less weight, \$2.48 cartage . . . net \$178.60 . . . I got 9 bushels of Blue grass seed. Total cost here \$2.56.

In their early days in Morgan Township, the DeCrows harvested sap for molasses and syrup and grew corn, wheat, oats, potatoes, cabbages, blackberries, raspberries, strawberries, and hundreds of pounds of "pie plants," or, as we now know it, rhubarb. John hunted rabbits and opossums. As the years went on, the farm grew successful and expanded, slowly adding livestock, including chickens, cattle, hogs, and merino sheep, for which the DeCrows were particularly well-known. Many of his diaries are stamped on the cover and inside pages with "J. B. DeCrow, Breeder of Merino Sheep and Suffolk Hogs. Valparaiso, Porter Co., Ind."



1888 Diary The diary from 1888 bears the imprint of the stamp reading, "J. B. DeCrow, Breeder of Merino Sheep and Suffolk Hogs."

In the 1880s, John began keeping bees, originally in his basement cellar.

June 9, 1881: Pleasant. Boys picking pie plants this A.M. I divided a swarm of bees & got badly stung & then went to shearing rams. This P.M. Arthur took 193 lbs of pie plant to town, \$1.93 & Delma took up 14 1/2 lbs of butter at 10 cts per lb., \$1.45. Ellice picking brush in orchard and I shearing rams & sick the eavning from bee stings.

It's clear that John worked every day, and his workday seems never-ending, no matter the weather or how ill he felt. Life in the late nineteenth century could be very demanding and arduous.

February 27, 1866: Alfred & I took our bacon to uncle's to smoke . . . took 4 hams & 2 shoulders & shod the sap sled, put in a new bar and rave. This P.M. we hauled 5 loads of wood to the camp & gathered 3 1/2 barrels of sap. We taped [tapped] 7 trees this P.M. I have 273 fine pails & 2 tin making in all 275 trees taped [tapped].

On several occasions, John described the journey of transporting and selling his sheep and cattle at the Chicago Stock Yards. For example, in 1887 on a warm June day, "about the hottest of the season," John took at least twenty sheep, freshly sheared and marked, the four miles to Valparaiso to arrange transportation on a train car to Chicago. The following day, John followed his livestock to Chicago for the sale.

June 8, 1887: Warm, some rain this P.M. I . . . left this morning at 5-7 for Chicago, got there at 6-40. At the yards till afternoon then went into the city, left there at 4 P.M. Got to Valpo at 6-10 & then

walked home. My sheep sold at \$2.75 per hund [hundredweight], weighed 3340 at Valpo. & 3130 in yards, come to \$86.07. Freight \$3.51, yardage .20 . . . total expences \$3.71, net \$76.36, my fare round trip \$1.20, dinner 50 cts & 10 cts. car fare.

As the primary function of the diaries was for record keeping, they are notably short on emotional substance and familial affection. One of the years missing from the PoCo Muse Collection is 1879, the year that Mollie passed away. This is not to say the diaries are completely devoid of DeCrow Family social activity. Entries indicate how visitors from near and far would be welcomed regularly, and trips would be made back to Ohio. One trip to town for a funeral in January 1880 allowed John to witness the first night Valparaiso installed gas lighting. The family would celebrate weddings and births of neighbors, hold taffy pulls on their property, and enjoy activities with various community societies.

October 1, 1885: A little rain to day. We were all up to the fair grounds to a soldiers reunion. Had a good time. A large number there [for] a sham battle.

Because they are so scarce, any adjectives associated with a pleasant memory seem to sparkle on the page. Excursions to local lakes seemed to bring much delight to John, Mollie and their children. Many happy Fourth of July holidays were celebrated at Flint Lake. In their first years in Porter County, the family took overnight camping trips to Lake Michigan in August.

August 8, 1867: Six teams of our neighbors with our selves started for the Mishigan lake last night about 9 1/2 P.M. got here about sunrise this A.M. We spend the day in picking huckle berries & looking at the lake.

In addition to maintaining a successful farm, John was an active community member, serving as Justice of the Peace and a Trustee of Morgan Township. He witnessed many significant events and contributed to the growth of this community. The day-to-day entries in his meticulous and straightforward diaries offer readers today a marvelous peek into the life of a nineteenth-century farmer living during an interesting era in Porter County history. •



DeCrow Diaries Various diaries belonging to John DeCrow. Clockwise from top center: 1889, 1887, 1890, 1888, and 1886. The Excelsior Diary brand often included useful tables including moon cycles, religious holidays, and the calendar year at a glance. Albert Photographic, 2022.

Myron Benedict's Mastodon Discovery

By Kaelie Eberhart

For nearly 75 years, visitors from near and far have marveled at the mastodon bones in the PoCo Muse Collection. These fossils, originally discovered in 1949 by south county farmer Myron Benedict, have been a mainstay of exhibits since the museum was located on the third floor of the Porter County Courthouse. But the complete story began 113 years ago on Benedict's Porter Township farm.

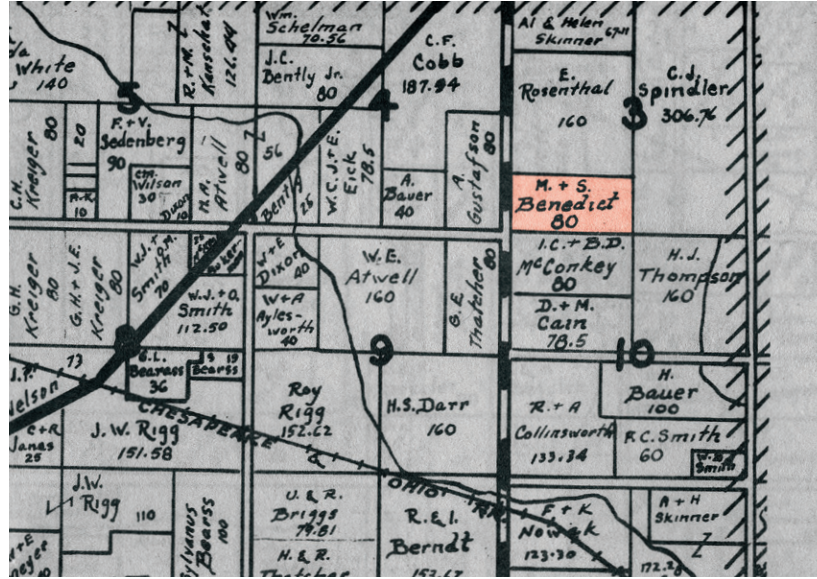
On September 5, 1910, Myron Benedict was digging a ditch on his Porter Township farm when he found two large teeth. According to *The Vidette-Messenger*, each tooth "measured seven inches across the roots and six inches long" and weighed four and a half pounds. The discovery was certainly alarming and noteworthy enough to make a story in local newspapers, but Benedict made no attempts to search for additional remains. He put the teeth aside, keeping them as curios. It was by pure accident almost thirty-nine years later, on April 21, 1949, that more bones were discovered, and Myron Benedict became a household name in Porter County.

That day, Benedict was planting and plowing in a marshy part of his farmland when he unearthed several parts of a mastodon skeleton, including a leg bone, jawbone, and various vertebrae. Since that part of Benedict's land had never been cultivated,



Newspaper Article Exhibit graphic from Prehistoric Porter County, adapted from *The Vidette-Messenger*, April 26, 1949.

Myron Benedict Myron Benedict holds a vertebra of the partial mastodon skeleton found on his farm in 1949.



1948 Plat Map The location of Myron Benedict's farm in Porter Township. Stacy-Ray Farm Plat Book of Porter County, IN. Stacy-Ray Map Publishers, 1948.

the possibility existed that more remains were hidden beneath the surface, buried deeper in the ground. Benedict's friends advised him to contact the Chicago Museum of Natural History (now known as the Field Museum). Officials there agreed to help with the excavation on Benedict's farm, hoping to uncover a full mastodon skeleton. This was just the beginning of the Chicago Museum of Natural History's deep involvement with the Benedict dig.

Colonel Clifford C. Gregg of the Chicago Museum of Natural History spearheaded the excavation efforts. Gregg played an important role in the story. Not only was he Director of the Chicago Museum of Natural History at the time, but he also resided in nearby Jackson Township. Gregg took an immediate interest in the bones because they were practically in his backyard. He met with Benedict a few weeks after the initial discovery to discuss how to undertake a full-scale dig of that area of his farm. They decided to wait until the fall before attempting to do any more digging. The water level would be lower on the marshy land at that time, making it easier to dig and less likely that the bones would be damaged.

The actual dig began five months later on October 5, 1949, under the leadership of Bryan Patterson, a Chicago Museum of Natural History paleontologist, and assistant Orville Gilpin. The team, which included Myron's two sons Walt and Bill, carefully probed the soft soil of Cobb Ditch to

Gregg played an important role in the story. Not only was he Director of the Chicago Museum of Natural History at the time, but he also resided in nearby Jackson Township.



Clifford C. Gregg Director of the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, May 18, 1937. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Accession 90-105, Science Service Records, Image No. SIA2008-2078.

avoid damaging any bones that might be present. They dug for around two days, hoping to find a full skeleton, but to no avail. Their prize find, however, was an almost perfectly preserved tusk, which, according to that day's *Vidette-Messenger*, was "as big around as one of Valparaiso's ornamental light poles in the business district." The Chicago Museum of Natural History used an innovative technique to remove the fragile tusk from the ground. An iron and wood splint was constructed to provide support while the tusk was wrapped in burlap and covered in plaster. Once the plaster hardened, the tusk could safely be extracted from the ground.

The team also found fragments of cedar wood of various sizes within the same "stratum," or layer of ground, and even embedded within some of the mastodon remains. Testing the age of the wood logs helped them to date the mastodon bones to about 12,000 years old. Amazingly, once the wood dried out, it still smelled like fresh cedar!

For a brief moment, this discovery brought Myron Benedict and Porter County national attention. An archaeological discovery this large in a farmer's backyard caught the attention of news outlets. Many newspapers within Indiana and

across the nation covered the Benedict mastodon discovery. This publicity turned Benedict, an ordinary Porter Township farmer, into a local celebrity.

Before the Benedicts donated the mastodon fossils to the PoCo Muse, they were displayed elsewhere in the county. In June 1949, a few of the fossils from Benedict's discovery appeared in a window display at the former Farmers State Bank on the northeast corner of Franklin Street and Lincolnway in downtown Valparaiso. They were a part of the bank's rotating window exhibit highlighting industry and nature in Porter County. According to W. Lloyd Rigg, bank employee and

This publicity turned Benedict, an ordinary Porter Township farmer, into a local celebrity.

exhibit arranger, it was their most popular display. After the dig in October, all of the bones found on Benedict's farm were taken to the Chicago Museum of Natural History.

The fossils first came under the PoCo Muse's ownership the next year, only four months before Myron Benedict's death. On July 9, 1950, Myron Benedict and his wife Helen donated the bones during a historical landmark tour of the southern part of the county organized by Marie Chester and Arthur A. Finney to celebrate the sesquicentennial anniversary of the Indiana Territory. Lucy Putnam, then-president of the



Excavation Myron Benedict (center) and his son Walt (kneeling, at left) dig away soil from a ditch where a seven-foot long mastodon tusk was found. Bryan Patterson (standing), chief paleontologist at the Chicago Museum of Natural History, and museum paleontologist Orville Gilpin (kneeling, at right) oversaw the 1949 excavation. Notice the plaster-wrapped tusk between Myron and Walt.



Excavation Bryan Patterson (left), chief paleontologist at the Chicago Museum of Natural History, and Myron Benedict pose with specimens of the mastodon skeleton found during the excavation. The Vidette-Messenger, October 11, 1949.

Porter County Historical Society, presided over the event. The Benedict farm was one of the stops on the tour. It was there that Dr. A. L. Rand of the Chicago Museum of Natural History presented the mastodon fossils on behalf of the Benedicts to Mrs. Putnam, who accepted the donation with deep appreciation. Rand also gave a lecture on the history of the excavation, some scientific statistics on the fossils, and the mastodon's past prevalence in the region.

Despite the majority of our mastodon bones coming from the 1949 Benedict mastodon, the PoCo Muse had a mastodon bone in its collection far before the Benedict bones were donated in 1950. Our collection also contains a rib bone found on the property of Zada Ann Cooper in Washington Township in the fall of 1911. It was a part of a major accidental discovery by workmen William Hubbard, Herman Shales, and Jacob E. Davis while they were excavating Kosalke Ditch. In their digging, they found a complete skull, fourteen vertebrae, two humeri, two ulnae, two patellae, twelve ribs, two tusks, and other minor bones, making it at that point in time the most complete skeleton ever found in Porter County. However, this dig did not come without controversy, as Cooper filed a lawsuit against the three workers in the Porter Superior Court on November 4, 1911.

Thousands of years ago, the heavy, elephant-like mastodons who roamed these parts often got stuck and died in the soft, marshy soil, where their remains were preserved for millennia.

She claimed that the bones, which she valued at \$500, were discovered on a tract of her property, and that she was the lawful owner of them. The case ended in a compromise where no one person particularly benefited materially, as the workers retained part of the skeleton, Cooper took another part, and a portion was left in the ground. A small fraction of the discovery, a singular rib, ended up at the PoCo Muse through a donation many decades ago, making it the collection's oldest mastodon fossil. Though equally noteworthy to the Benedict discovery, it could not triumph the national attention that the Benedict bones received.

In fact, the discovery of mastodon remains is quite common in this area. Porter County's geologic history has a lot to do with it. Massive glaciers once covered our landscape; as they froze and melted, they acted like giant plows, carving cavities out of the land which became lakes, valleys, and wide hills called moraines. This process was how Lake Michigan and the U-shaped Valparaiso Moraine were created during the most recent Ice Age which began about 50,000 years ago. The melted runoff from these glaciers deposited nutrient-rich silt in this area, which is one reason why this land is so great for farming! Thousands of years ago, the heavy, elephant-like mastodons who roamed these parts often got stuck and died in the soft, marshy soil, where their remains were preserved for millennia. Mastodon fossils are particularly abundant in Indiana, having been found in nearly every county. The mastodon was officially named the state fossil in 2022.

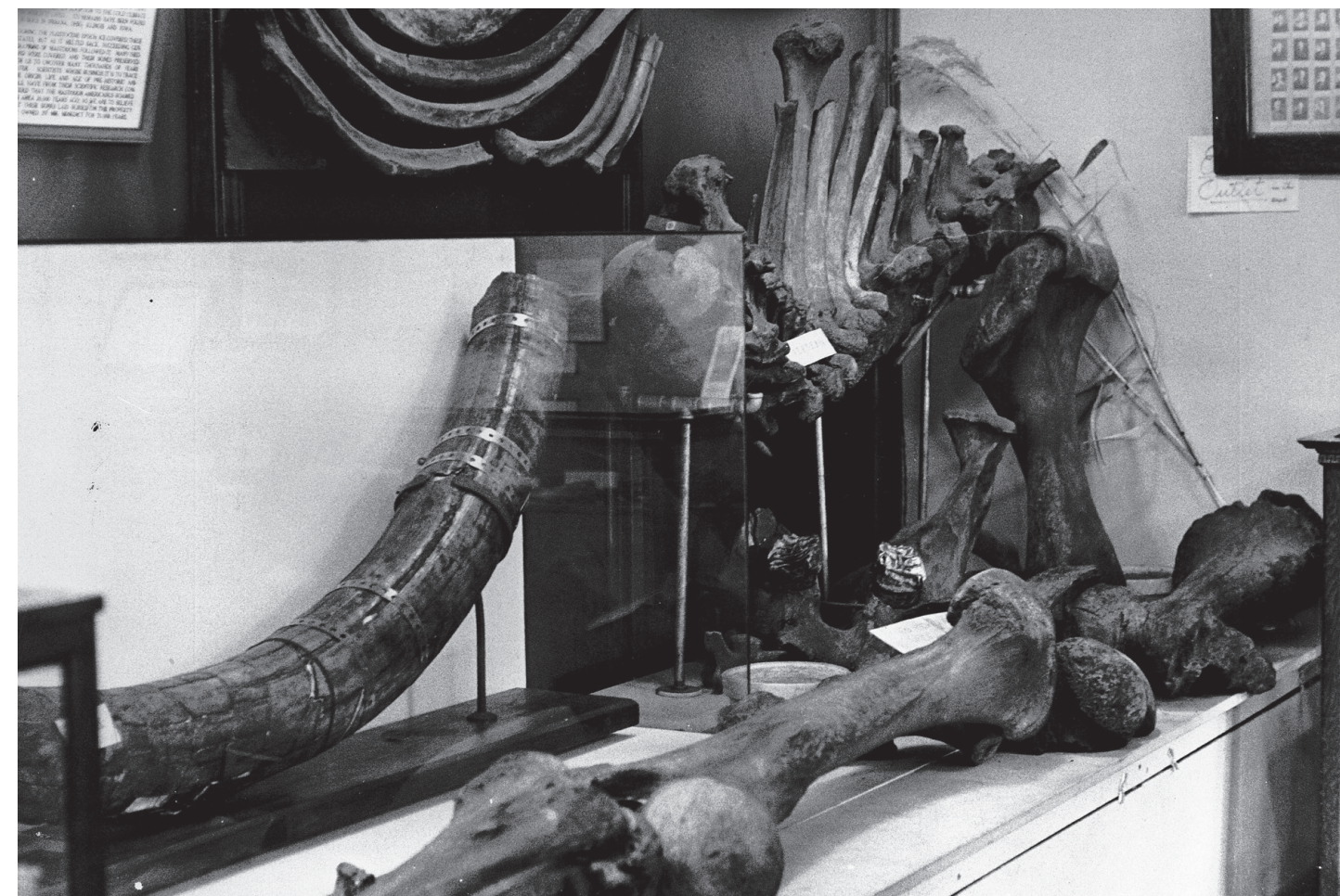
The PoCo Muse currently has nearly all of the mastodon bones found in the 1949 excavation. The fossils have been displayed at three locations of the PoCo Muse in the past seventy-three years. The most impressive of these is the seven-and-a-half-foot-long tusk. Because of its fragility, the tusk has been fitted with metal reinforcements, a support mount, and a custom glass vitrine to protect it from damage. The PoCo Muse also has two leg bones: a forty-inch-long femur, the upper bone of a hind leg, and a humerus, the upper bone of a front leg. There are also seventeen vertebrae of the total sixty-two that make up a mastodon's spine. This same situation applies to the ribs: only seven of the thirty-six to forty were found, one of them being broken. Another notable piece is the mandible, or lower jawbone, which has a partially missing ramus, or arm, which connected the jaw to the skull. Also significantly absent is a tooth, possibly one of the two Benedict found in 1910. The two original teeth are currently in the possession of orthodontist

Brian Benedict, Bill's son and Myron's grandson, in Fishers, Indiana.

The PoCo Muse first displayed these fossils soon after their donation at the museum's location on the third floor of the Porter County Courthouse. The Porter County Historical Museum (as the PoCo Muse was called at the time) held an open house on November 19, 1950, and Benedict's celebrated mastodon fossils were the central attraction. Colonel Clifford Gregg returned to give a talk on the 1949 dig and provide general information about the extinct American mastodons which roamed our region about 20,000 years ago. He praised the efforts of the excavation team and the museum, stating that the recovered tusk was in a "fine state of preservation." A crowd of 300 to 400 persons attended that day, including representatives from the Michigan City, La Porte, and Duneland Historical Societies.

[Clifford Gregg] praised the efforts of the excavation team and the museum, stating that the recovered tusk was in a "fine state of preservation."

When the museum moved from the Courthouse to the former Sheriff's Residence and Old Jail in 1973, the fossils became one of the permanent exhibits in 1975. They were on display for almost forty years in various exhibits. One of these displays asked visitors to step back in time tens of thousands of years to when American mastodons would have roamed the region and explore the geologic features and other species of the era. Its follow-up exhibit in 2013, *Prehistoric Porter County*, sought to contextualize the discovery through the human perspectives of Myron Benedict and the Chicago Museum of Natural History paleontologists. The immersive and hands-on exhibit was designed with children in mind, featuring molds of mastodon fossils and an interactive excavation sandbox. The exhibit asked visitors young and old to put themselves in the shoes of Benedict: "What would you do if you found mastodon remains in your backyard?"



Mastodon Fossil Display The mastodon fossils found on Benedict's farm were donated to the PoCo Muse in 1950, seen here on display in the 1960s on the third floor of the Porter County Courthouse, the home of the museum between 1938 and 1973.

The *Prehistoric Pop-Up* exhibit debuted at the Porter County Fair on July 21, 2022, bringing with it the jawbone found by Benedict. This traveling display redeveloped many of the popular elements of the 2013 version, focusing on the perspectives of a fictionalized farmer, paleontologist, and laboratory scientist who narrate the story of the Benedict dig, what exactly was found, and scientific facts about the American mastodon and its history in the region. In ten days at the fair, 6,610 visitors viewed the exhibit. Afterward, the *Pop-Up* took up residence at the fourth and current home of the PoCo Muse at 20 Indiana Avenue between October 2022 and April 2023.

The PoCo Muse and its communities prize these fossils very highly, and their long-term preservation remains a top priority. Myron Benedict's discovery is a remarkable story that spans thousands of years, brings together local history and natural science, and pulls this county into a larger state and national narrative. It is one that the PoCo Muse will continue to tell for generations to come. •

In ten days at the Porter County Fair, 6,610 visitors viewed the exhibit.

Note: This story is developing, as discrepancies remain between local newspapers and other primary sources, including those of the Benedict family, regarding the discovery of the Benedict fossils, especially the details of the finding of the first tooth.

Kaelie Eberhart began working at PoCo Muse in June 2022 and soon after assumed the position of Collection Assistant. After graduating from Valparaiso University in May 2023, Kaelie will pursue a Master's degree in History at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge, England.



Prehistoric Pop-Up Exhibit Installation view of the Prehistoric Pop-Up exhibit in the Montague/Urschel Gallery of the PoCo Muse at 20 Indiana Avenue. Albert Photographic, 2022.



Hours
Tues-Sun, 11a-4p

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Visit our newly-imagined and fully-accessible building—the fourth home of the Porter County Museum since 1916.

MISSION

We engage Porter County's rich past with its evolving present to educate, enrich, and inspire our communities.

VISION

We believe our work of interpreting this area's history and culture empowers Porter County residents to form a strong and purposeful sense of place, identity, and community.

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Hands-on Learning

We create opportunities to learn from interactive and intergenerational experiences.

Collaboration

We work together with people and organizations aligned with our mission and vision.

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We uphold the collection and history of our institution with integrity and accountability.

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Last Look! This circa 1960s photograph depicts a mastodon tooth from the lower jawbone (also known as the mandible) that was excavated from Myron Benedict's farm in 1949. Other than the partially-missing ramus, or arm, which connected the jaw with the skull, the tooth and mandible are in very good condition. Notice the shape of the tooth. The high, pointed crowns helped the plant-eating mastodon crush and chew the leaves, twigs, and branches which made up its diet.

