Where it all started
The story of Portsmouth’s famous rock

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Most people know the story of how Steve Schaffer, along with a group of courageous divers, went into the Ohio River in search of the legendary Indian Head Rock, but what inspired Schaffer so much that he would embark upon this adventure?

Schaffer’s journey actually began more than a century ago with a local family known as the Bannons. “We're talking about a time in 1894 when there wasn't any television or computers or video games,” Towne Bannon, descendent of the 1800’s Bannons explained. During that time, the rock played a major part in Portsmouth area recreation. On warm, summer days young men would take their girlfriends on a skiff out to the rock, which was

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Towne Bannon visits Portsmouth for the Indian Head Rock trials. After finding out the trial was canceled, he enjoyed his visit by visiting the rock which has so many ties to the Bannon family it is like a family heirloom.
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exposed at the time. They would carve their initials on the rock and then enjoy a picnic lunch on the river. One day, an article in the Portland Daily Times reported an outra-
gious act. Three individuals had carved their initials on the rock over other initials. The article explained that this was not nec-
tarily a new occurrence and that the boys had carved their initials in a blank spot. Such an act was the equi-
valent of vandalismand upset many members of the Portland community. The initials were HB, AB and JB. Upon reading the ar-
ticle, prominent Portland Judge of the Common Pleas Court, James Bannon knew that it was time to do something. He called his three sons, Henry, Arthur and Jim — The Bannon Boys!

James went home that night and demand-
based on the experience of his sons. Quite frustrated with the boys, James explained the value of the rock as a signif-
pant part of Portland history and as a
made him decide to stop furthering the boys that they should never tell anyone that those are their initials. "Just keep your head down and shut up."

That night James had often heard this story growing up from his grandfather, the one and only HB, Henry Bannon. "I think those teenage boys, HB, AB and JB, when they called them, they realized the value of the rock," Towne stated. Following that experience, they would all have great respect for the story because of his grandfather.

The boys got a job working as a law with the firm Bannon Holland and Dever and would write a book entitled Stories Old and Often Told, which included his account of the boys and the story before the glories to the industrial revolu-
tion. The rock was so significant that Henry included it in his retelling of the story important to Henry. Art would maintain an emotional attachment to the icon as well. Just a few years after the boys had carved, the river had to be dredged to deepen the channel of the Ohio River. Part of the project included the build-
ing of a series of dams to bring the water level up from the April flood. Everyone assumed it was covered. "Everyone assumed it was gone forever," Towne stated.

In 1920, the community would again get a chance to see the rock. The river was at the advantage of a chance to capture the rock for a few years and then slowly started to be recapture. That year brought a very dry sum-
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Decades later, a young boy named Steven was in the library of the Hillsboro Historical Society of Scio County from a amateur historian named Henry Bannon. The book would tell how the area was once invaded by American Indians, how two rivers originally appeared, why Indians chose these lands and their homes and hunting grounds and how traders both British and French met and lived in the area. It told of trick battles and great triumphs. The book explained how a little town on the river grew and prospered and how a rock sat in the river. It was called the Rock. It was the
great industrialization of Portland through

That book was eventually published, just as the Bannon Boys had been, by a Illinois, sandstone boulder sitting in the Ohio. Steve decided he would find out all he could about the rock. He made a trip to Portland and the ed the firm where Henry had worked and asked for information about his descend

By that time Henry and his son had died, but he had a grandson named Towne living in San Diego, California. Steve was able to locate Towne and called him. "I'd like to talk to you," Towne commended. "I hadn't thought about the rock in decades."

Towne remembered some family dinners at his grandfather's house, where he heard stories of the rock, always surrounded by laughter. At that time, he was quite young, but he didn't think much about it. As he got older, he started to lose interest in him. "I regret very much that I can't remember those stories and laugh-

It was not until he became a father that he read about his grandfa-
ther's book. Towne shared all his information with Steve. "I'm happy to be a part of the Rock," Steve told him. "I've been down to the river and divers finally found the rock and managed to pull it out of the river as the boy over the city of Portland. The river was once a community. I'm going to try and pull it up and keep it there for the next generation."

Towne was asked to come back to Portland to testify at the criminal trial which was scheduled to take place last Friday. It was to be decided whether or not that the charges had been dropped. He heard that the reasoning had something to do with Kentuckians claiming the rock as their own. However, the trip was not a loss. He was able to meet Steve and the divers and see the infamous rock. As he stood there, he thought about the nostalgia of knowing he was touching a stone once touched by his grandfather and others who built the city. Towne refers to the rock as the "DNA" of Portland.

After visiting the rock, Towne has decided he does not believe the rock is the right rock.