

Famed cartoonist's home offers link to Irvington literary heritage

by Barbara E. Cohen

Frank McKinney Hubbard, known to all as “Kin” Hubbard, published his first “Abe Martin” cartoon 100 years ago, on Dec. 17, 1904, inaugurating a beloved character whose folksy sayings appeared in the *Indianapolis News* and more than 200 city newspapers across the country for decades.

This month, special events in the Irvington neighborhood of Indianapolis, where Hubbard lived from 1909 to 1928, and in Brown County, the fictional home of Abe Martin, commemorate the artistry and folk wisdom embodied in the Hubbard caricatures.

Born in Bellefontaine, Ohio, in 1868, Hubbard was the son of a newspaper editor. A disinterested student, he left school before finishing the 7th grade, when he took a job in a paint shop. But in 1891, he joined the staff of the *Indianapolis News* after a friend showed his drawings to John H. Holliday, then the paper's owner and editor. Hubbard

went on to spend most of his career drawing cartoons for the *News*, according to researcher Kerry Hubartt of Ball State University.

While covering the presidential campaign of 1904, Hubbard began developing the Abe Martin character. Although Martin started as an urban figure, by 1905 Hubbard had moved him to Brown County and invented a host of additional personalities to offer opinions that weren't likely to come from Martin.

These characters appeared daily in the *News* and in a series of annual books featuring humorous stories, on the order of contemporaries Josh Billings (Henry Wheeler Shaw) and Artemus Ward (Charles Farrar Browne), also popular humorists. Around 1910, he signed a syndication deal, and by the 1920s, Abe Martin



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The Hubbard home today (above) is quite similar to its appearance in 1915 (right), though it is now surrounded by trees.



courtesy of the Indiana Historical Society

had become well known from coast to coast.

The success of the Abe Martin books, in addition to a regular weekly salary of \$35, allowed Hubbard to purchase a lot in what was suburban Irvington. There he built a house for his wife, Josephine Jackson, and their children, Thomas and Jane.

Hubbard selected local architect

Frank Hunter to build an Arts and Crafts-style cottage facing Pleasant Run Parkway, according to Paul Diebold, senior architectural historian for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and author of “Greater Irvington: Architecture, People and Places on the Indianapolis Eastside.” (continued on next page)



Photo courtesy of the Indiana Historical Society

Kin Hubbard rests on the porch of his Irvington home, circa 1915.

Abe Martin notable quips

“We’d all like t’vote fer th’best man, but he’s never a candidate.”

“Nobuddy ever fergits where he buried a hatchet.”

“When a fellow says, it hain’t the money but the principle o’ the thing, it’s th’ money.”

The home, still at the corner of New York Street and Emerson Avenue, is now occupied by Pam House, who teaches world geography at Arsenal Tech High School. She bought the residence in 1980 without knowing about its remarkable history. "I had no idea that it was the home of Kin Hubbard," she says. "I bought it because it reminded me of a house near Terre Haute where I lived as a child."

Today the structure stands opposite Kin Hubbard Park, at the intersection of Pleasant Run Parkway North Drive,

centenary events

The local celebration begins 100 years to the day of Abe Martin's first appearance in print.

The exhibit "Hoosier Wit and Wisdom: The Centennial of Kin Hubbard and Abe Martin" opens on Dec. 17, 2004, at the Bona Thompson Memorial Center, according to Steve Barnett, executive director of the Irvington Historical Society.

The exhibit will feature paper artifacts and other Abe Martin memorabilia, focusing especially on Hubbard's writing while living in Irvington, which was — and continues to be — the home of many artists and writers.

Although Hubbard rarely visited Brown County, the area warmly embraced Abe Martin and his fictional friends, proud of the rustic sayings Hubbard attributed to the county's native philosophers. Centenary activities have been underway all year in Brown County under the guise of "Celebrating 100 Won'erful Years" — from a Tall Tale Tell-Off held in June in Nashville, Ind., to skits and musical concerts held in the name of Abe Martin through this holiday season.

For up-to-date information on special events, visit the Brown County Convention and Visitors Bureau's website, www.browncounty.com, and click on "Abe's Events."

Emerson Avenue and East New York Street. Now hidden behind trees at the top of a mound, the house was originally surrounded by lawn.

While largely unchanged, especially on the outside, the home now boasts new casement windows, refinished wood floors and updated plumbing and electrical systems — all thanks to its current owner.

"The house is a modest 30 feet by 60 feet," House explains. "It is full of lots of small, comfortable spaces. One of the upstairs bedrooms was probably originally a bathroom, but the house appears to be much as it was."

In 1928, Hubbard sold the home and moved to 5437 N. Meridian St., where he suffered a heart attack and died on Dec. 26, 1930.

In his tribute to Hubbard printed in *The New York Times* the following day, Will Rogers compared Hubbard to Thomas Edison:

"To us folks that attempt to write a little humor his death is just like Edison's would be to the world of invention. No man in our generation was within a mile of him," Rogers wrote.

"Just think — only two lines a day, yet he expressed more original philosophy in 'em than all the rest of the paper combined." ❖



BBB BASICS

Phony cashier's checks are plaguing the city

by Linda Carmody



For months the BBB has warned Indianapolis consumers about overseas scams involving counterfeit cashier's checks and stolen credit card numbers. The rip-offs come from all over the world — Africa, Europe and especially Canada — and cause gullible folks to lose thousands of dollars to overseas con artists.

It all begins when a consumer runs an Internet ad to sell a car, boat, computer or almost any other item. To his surprise, a man calls or e-mails from overseas, saying he wants to buy the item. He promises to pay the asking price plus the cost of shipping it to his country.

Here's an example: you're selling a car for \$10,000. A buyer purchases it and sends you a cashier's check, but it's for \$25,000 — much more than you requested. He could give any excuse for the extra money. Maybe he's setting up an account in the United States, or his secretary sent the wrong check. He asks if you can deposit it in your account, keep your share and send him the difference.

Don't do it. The cashier's check is actually a skillful fake. Oftentimes these counterfeits look so realistic that even banks are fooled. They credit the full \$25,000 to your account, and you keep your share, sending the remainder to the overseas buyer. Weeks later, however, your bank receives word that the check was a fake, so they notify

you to repay the entire \$25,000. You've already sent most of it to Africa or Europe. Unfortunately, you're probably obligated to repay the rest.

Swindlers are pulling this trick on thousands of Americans every month. One man advertised a car

for \$17,500 and received \$92,000 from Africa. He was left owing \$74,500.

The BBB offers a few tips to help consumers avoid these traps. First, don't assume that all cashier's checks are genuine. They aren't. Furthermore, if someone overpays you for an item, don't send any money until you've thoroughly verified the check. He may tell a tale tale about how honest he is, but beware. It could be a scam. ❖

'The rip-offs come from all over the world — and cause gullible folks to lose thousands of dollars to overseas con artists.'

Carmody is president of the Better Business Bureau, which has reports on thousands of businesses. Check the BBB online at www.indianapolis.bbb.org or call 317-488-2222. Complaints can be mailed to BBB, Victoria Centre, 22 East Washington St., #200, Indianapolis, 46204. This office serves Indianapolis and central Indiana.