



Ohio's Giant Couple

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

Introduction

The small community of Seville, Ohio, was once home to a very large couple. Martin Van Buren Bates, a Kentucky-born man who had served as a Captain in Kentucky's army during the Civil War, and Anna Swan Bates, a native Canadian, built a house designed just for them to hold their large frames. Mr. Bates was reportedly measured around 8' tall and weighed 470 lbs. Mrs. Bates was no slouch either, measuring around 7'11" in height, with photos of the couple showing them to be about the same size. After serving in the war, Martin returned to a Kentucky that was still fighting amongst itself and decided to move to Cincinnati where he eventually joined the circus. While on tour he met Anna Swan, who happened to be visiting. The circus promoter offered Anna a job, as a "giant couple" would surely bring a crowd. The couple was often referred to as the largest pair in the world at that time. The couple eventually conceived two children of large proportions, but neither would survive infancy. The Bates family is buried in Mound Hill Cemetery in Seville, Ohio.

Important Dates

- 1861: Bates joins the Confederate Army at the age of 16. He was admitted due to his large stature.
- 1866-1880: Bates travels with W.W. Cole's Circus as an attraction.
- 1871: The giant couple is married in St. Martin's church in London. Queen Victoria attends the reception and gives them each a watch of solid gold adorned with diamonds as wedding presents.
- 1872: The couple buys a farm in Seville, Ohio. The house and all the furniture are custom made.
- May 1874: Anna gives birth to an 18 pound girl, but she is stillborn.
- January 1879: Anna gives birth to a 22 pound, 28 inch long boy, but he died 11 hours later.
- August 5, 1888: Anna Swan dies of consumption. She was 42 years old.
- 1890: Capt. Bates remarries a woman of "normal stature", reported at a little over 5 feet in height.
- 1919: Martin dies from nephritis (inflammation of the kidneys) at the age of 74.

Suggested Search Strategies

- Try the following terms in combination (as an "all" word search), proximity or as phrases: Martin Van Buren Bates, M.V. Bates, Capt. Bates, Anna Swan, Anna Swan Bates, giant, giantess, large, Kentucky Giant, Nova Scotia Giantess.
- Limit your search to specific date ranges to narrow your results.
- Search newspapers in all states, not just Ohio. The couple was known nationwide.

Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- ["The largest infant at birth..."](#) *Spirit of Democracy* (Woodsfield, OH), April 22, 1879, Image 1, col. 7.
- ["The Tallest Man and Woman on Earth"](#) *Eaton Democrat* (Eaton, OH), October 2, 1879, Image 2, col. 5.
- ["Capt. M.V. Bates and Wife the Tallest People in the World"](#) *Semi-Weekly South Kentuckian* (Hopkinsville, KY), September 19, 1884, Image 1, col. 5.
- ["The Kentucky Giant"](#) *Norfolk Virginian* (Norfolk, VA), March 2, 1896, Image 3, col. 3.