John Olson – Dugout – Mill Creek Township

This is a very mysterious structure and associated compound of buildings. It doesn’t appear on any of the early plat maps and the only record of property ownership seems to start in the late 1880’s. Even then it never shows any residence on the property, just a landowner’s name. It seems probable that this site would have dated to sometime before 1880. There is a story of a civil war veteran that came to the area by the name of Olson (possibly Alfred or John) with his wife and daughters. He ended up committing suicide and his family left the area soon after. It’s a story that seems impossible to verify.

The site is quite impressive with several structures and foundations still standing in one form or another. There are possibly three different standing stone structures that might have actually been a house. The structure that is the furthest south of all is an arched cave that is entered via a single doorway on a wall that also features a window. It’s at least 30 yards further south than the apparent home that stands north of it. It truly seems to be a dugout home. It is built into a slightly raise mound or an embankment and walks out to the south. The cave is decent sized, measuring 16’(L)x9’(W)x 6.5’(H).

It seems logical that this was a first home and then the settlers decided to build homes further up the draw. There are stories of homesteaders trying to start communities in remote areas like this and ending up being driven away due to not being able to stand the wind and weather felt so often in the area. Could that have been the case with this homestead/settlement?