

CANAWLERS AT REST

AARON H. CONOVER

b. July 10, 1852

d. April 30, 1920

Find A Grave 36070826

The basic requirement for a Canawlers At Rest articles is that it is about someone who at one time had an association with Hoosier or other canals. Sometimes the person has a close relationship to the canal and sometimes it is remote. This month we feature Aaron H. Conover who lived in Terre Haute and as a boy rode his mule up and down the banks of the Wabash & Erie canal just north of Terre Haute. Some might think this is really far fetched, but Aaron and his family had some unique things happen that make his history interesting.

Aaron's parents were Ralph and Eleanor (Snedeker) Conover who were married in New Jersey and lived there for a couple of years. About 1840 they decided to move to Terre Haute, Indiana with their two children, Aaron (not our subject) and Mary Jane. Ralph was a brick mason and perhaps he knew of the plans for the Wabash & Erie Canal or the National Road. Whatever the reason, he decided that his skills could be put to good use in the west. His first work was in the construction of many of the brick buildings in Terre Haute. In fact his first contract was for The Prairie House (Terre Haute House), a hotel in the city. He was a Republican. He and his family were members of the Baptist church. His brother William Conover and his wife Catherine also moved to Terre Haute from New Jersey.

In Indiana additional children were born to Ralph and Eleanor, William in 1841, Alfred in 1844, and Daniel in 1848. Unfortunately, as often occurred in families during this time period, their oldest son Aaron died at age 11 in 1848. We don't know the circumstances, but young deaths such as his usually were the result of disease. Perhaps it was cholera as canal workers were busy constructing the canal through Terre Haute at that time and the disease seemed to follow them. Englishman J. Richard Beste, who traveled on the canal, lost his young daughter here to cholera in 1851 and Wabash & Erie Canal trustee Thomas

Blake died of the disease in fall of 1849 in Louisville, Kentucky.

Perhaps in honor of their deceased son, they named their next son, who was born on July 10, 1852, Aaron H. Conover. He is the subject of this essay. Over the years other children were born, Isabella in 1853, Elizabeth Ann in 1857, Gertrude in 1859 and finally Ralph Jr. in 1861, for a total of ten children.

The Conover family farm was located in Section 9, Township 12N, Range 9W, just north of Terre Haute near the present day Woodlawn cemetery. The Wabash & Erie Canal ran through the farm. In his latter years when reminiscing about the canal Aaron would often tell the story of a young black boy who was unable to swim and often performed a trick to cross the canal. The lad would wade as far as he could, then holding his breath crawl on his hands and knees across the bottom of the canal to the other side where he would emerge and scurry up the bank.

During his early life Aaron learned the mason trade from his father and worked with him for about five years. Aaron married Nettie Metcalf of Paris, Illinois on November 1, 1876. She was 20 at the time and he was 24. At the death of her parents she had come to Terre Haute to live with relatives. Over the years Aaron and Nettie had four children, Carl born in 1877, Earl B. born in 1879, Warren born in 1880 and Beulah born in 1889. Warren died at age 6.

Aaron's uncle William Conover and his sons were also in the building trade. They were listed as plasterers in the 1880 Census. Uncle William died in 1886 and Aaron's father, Ralph Conover, died in March 1889. They were both buried at nearby Woodlawn cemetery.

Aaron was 37 years old when his father died and as the oldest living son went into full time management of the 120-acre family farm. At one time he was quite extensively engaged in the breeding of registered Jersey cattle and Berkshire hogs. He was also very interested in horticulture and gardening. As for public affairs he held the position as city supervisor for several terms, 1881-1889, 1903-1905 and 1905-1907.

After graduation from local Terre Haute schools Aaron's son, Earl B. Conover, went on to graduate from the Medical College of Louisville, Kentucky and then became a leading surgeon in Evansville, Indiana. He married Amalia Matthes and later Mildred Lowrance. Aaron's daughter, Beulah Conover, spent four years at the Oldenburg Catholic school in Oldenburg, Indiana. Later she married John Brown and lived in Terre Haute.

While digging Indiana's canals workers sometimes found coal, Indian artifacts and sometimes even Mastodon remains. This was the case just north of Covington on the Wabash & Erie Canal where a Mastodon skeleton was un-

THE HOOSIER PACKET - DECEMBER 2012

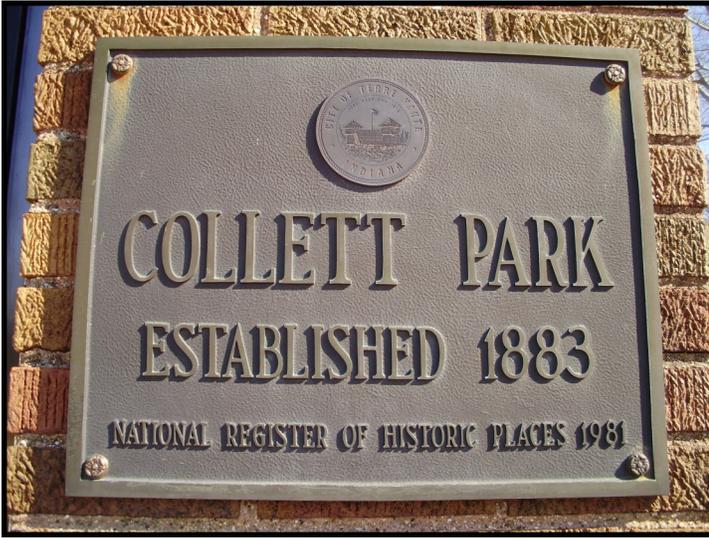
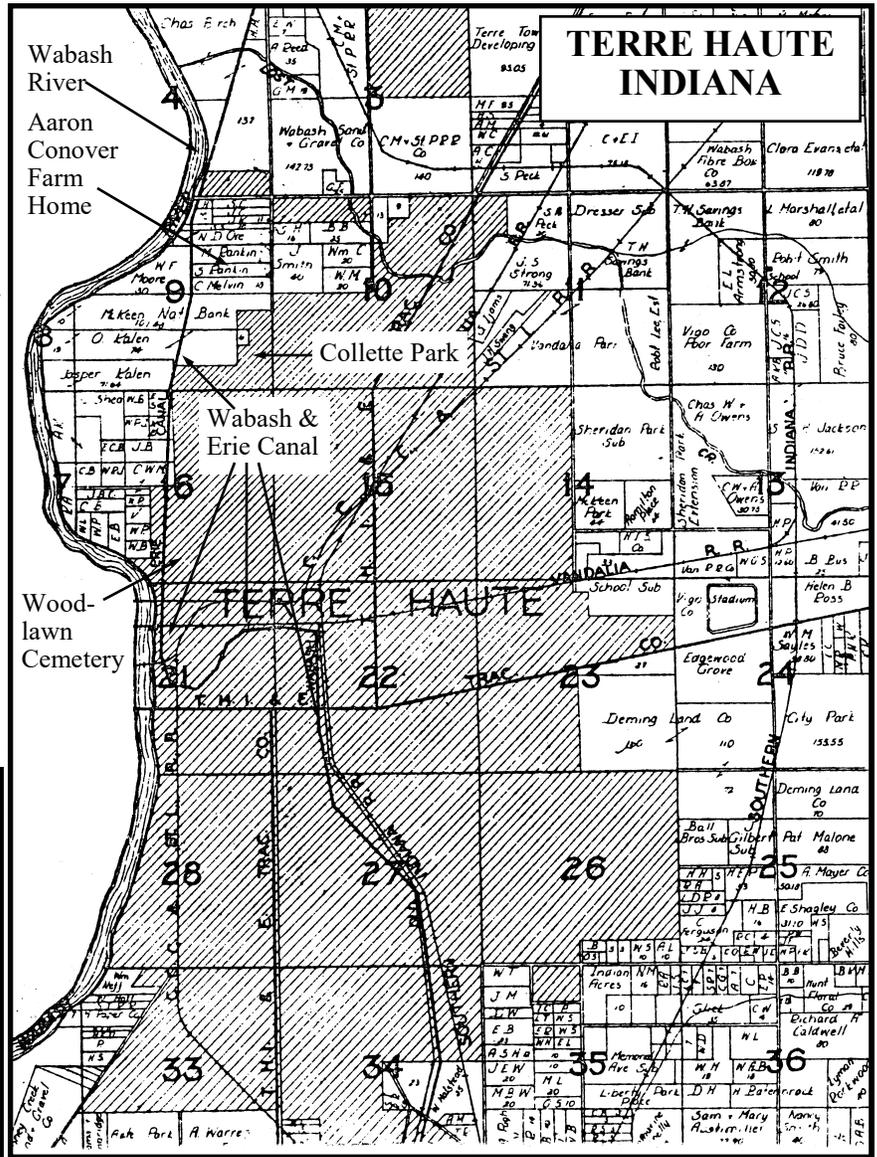
Conover Family - Terre Haute / New Jersey

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Born</u>	<u>PL</u>	<u>Died</u>	<u>PL</u>	<u>Marriage</u>	<u>Burial</u>	<u>FG #</u>
A	Ralph Conover	1811/12	NJ	6 Mar 1889	Vigo	New Jersey	Woodlawn	35907511
m	Ellen Snedeker	1819	NJ	12 Apr 1908	Vigo	mid 1830's	Woodlawn	36070834
<u>Children/Spouse</u>								
1	Aaron H. (Initial use)	1837	NJ	7 Oct 1848	Vigo		Woodlawn	35907497
2	Mary Jane	9 Feb 1838	NJ	16 Nov 1908	Vigo	Terre Haute	Woodlawn	6844658
m	William H Merry	1831	IN			4 Jul 1854		
<u>Moved to Terre Haute about 1840</u>								
3	William / Harmon (possible twins?)	19 Jul 1841	Vigo	3 Jun 1864	Vigo		Woodlawn	35907507
4	Alfred A	1844	Vigo		Vigo	Edgar Co IL		
m	Ellen O'Neil	1845	Vigo			9 Oct 1865		
5	Daniel K	1848	Vigo	21 Aug 1886	Vigo	Terre Haute	Woodlawn	35907503
m	Annie O'Neil	31 Jan 1849	Vigo	16 Nov 1912	Vigo	22 Aug 1886	Woodlawn	36070828
<p align="center">----- Aaron & Nettie Conover & family -----</p>								
6	Aaron Harmon	10 Jul 1852	Vigo	30 Apr 1920	Vigo	Terre Haute	Woodlawn	36070826
m	Nettie Metcalfe	12 Feb 1856	IL	14 Oct 1927	Vigo	1 Nov 1876	Woodlawn	36070835
6-a	Carl	21 Aug 1877	Vigo	25 Mar 1908	Vigo			
6-b	Dr Earl B.	1 Feb 1879	Vigo	25 Mar 1951	Vand	Evansville	Newburgh	26729092
m	Amalia Matthes	10 Nov 1879	MO	4 Jun 1932	Vand	28 Dec 1911	Rose Hill	49599179
m	Mildred E Lowrance	20 Feb 1908	Wark	19 May 1985	Warr	3 Sep 1934	Oak Hill	26729106
						Vincennes	Newburgh	
6-c	Warren	21 Dec 1880	Vigo	8 Jun 1886	Vigo		Woodlawn	35907514
6-d	Beulah E.	13 Mar 1889	Vigo	20 Nov 1969	Vigo	Terre Haute		
m	John C Brown	1889				15 Jun 1910		
<p align="center">-----</p>								
7	Isabella "Belle"	1855	Vigo			Terre Haute		
m	Samuel McClure		Vigo			26 Dec 1872		
8	Elizabeth Ann	1857	Vigo	10 May 1933	Vigo	Terre Haute		
m	Warren Scott Harvey	1846	Parke	24 Nov 1903	Vigo	28 Aug 1882		
9	Gertrude	23 Jun 1859	Vigo	11 Apr 1930	Vigo	Terre Haute	Woodlawn	34387494
m	William M Mason	11 May 1846	Sulv	29 Nov 1914	Vigo	29 Apr 1874	Woodlawn	76496058
10	Ralph Lot Jr	Dec 1861	Vigo	7 Oct 1909	Vigo	Clark Co IL	Highland	65832760
m	Mary Belle Snedeker	Jul 1862	Vigo	1917-1919	Vigo	11Apr 1883		
	"2nd cousins"							
<u>Ralph's Brothers</u>								
B	William Conover	6 Nov 1817	NJ	6 Jun 1886	Vigo	New Jersey	Woodlawn	35907515
m	Catherine Warth	10 Jan 1821	SWZ	12 May 1905	Vigo	" "	Woodlawn	36070829
C	Samuel Conover				NJ	New Jersey	Rahway, NJ	?
m	Sarah Frances Weeks				NJ	1835	" "	?

covered. On the Whitewater Canal a six foot tusk was found during canal excavation. Although not in the canal but on the farm of Aaron Conover a large lower left mammoth molar was uncovered at a depth of about 18 ft. in 1896. Earl, the Evansville surgeon, later presented it to Indiana for preservation and recording.

The Conover farm was also the site of the early Fairgrounds for Vigo County. During the Civil War one of the fair buildings was used as a commissary and others for bunks for soldiers at what was called Camp Vigo. There once was a marker for Camp Vigo on U.S. 41. The site is near today's Collett Park. Aaron's home was on North 7th street north of the park.

On April 26, 1890, Martha E. Foster age 8 was placed on a trial basis in Aaron's home. She was the granddaughter of Preston Hazelrigg, who also lived on N. 7th street. Preston's daughter (Martha's mother) had



Collett Park, established in 1883, today is surrounded by beautiful old homes. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981. Photos by Bob Schmidt

died about 5 years prior to this time. Martha's father did nothing to support her or her sister and moved to Kentucky. Martha and her sister Rosa were cared for by their poor aunts and grandfather for as long as they could. Later Aaron returned Martha on January 9, 1890 saying she was too dull and slow.

Martha then was placed with Peter Miller on January 27, 1890. On June 28, 1893 she was returned because full grown woman who was quite neat and pretty. She married around 1888 and moved to Georgia.

Aaron lived until April 30, 1920 and his wife Nettie until October 14, 1927. They were buried in Woodlawn Cemetery not far from their farm and the canal. They lived along the banks of the old canal in its final days. Although not directly involved in canal activities their lives were impacted by the economic activity that it brought to Terre Haute.

Sources:

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Barrett, Edward, *Thirty-sixth Annual Report of Department of Geology and Natural Resources, Indiana*. Indianapolis, IN: Wm. B. Burford, Contractor for State Printing and Binding, 1912.

Early 1900 Plat Book of Vigo County, IN. Wabash Valley Genealogical Society.

Federal Census: 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920

Find A Grave, Conover

Indiana Marriage Collection 1800-1941

Oakey, C.C. *Greater Terre Haute and Vigo County Closing the First Century's History of City and County*. Chicago, IL: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1908.

Obituary Records of Vigo County

W & E A SEWER

The Sunday Morning Call, a short-lived Wabash, Indiana Sunday newspaper published the following. It was sent in by Pete Jones, CSI member from Wabash.

The Sunday Morning Call
September 18, 1892

The people of Wabash can not hope to rid themselves of the old canal bed and its horribleness unless they constantly impress upon the city legislators the fact that it is a menace to the health of the people and a positive disgrace to the appearance of the city. To say that it is a nuisance is putting it too mildly. Language can not describe its looks or picture the hatefulness of the contrivance. The best citizens of the town are woefully tired of it and avoid crossing it in showing the city to strangers. The people desire to rid themselves of any features that savor of slovenness and indifference. There is no need for the old canal other than what use can be made of it for a sewer. If all the people will go to the several councilmen separately or collectively and graphically portray the advisability of correcting this evil, it will not be many days ere the pick and shovel will hide the old canal beneath an improvement of incalculable benefit to the city.

Wall Street Journal
March 15, 2011

"In 1816, it cost as much to move goods 30 miles over land as it did to ship them across the Atlantic. Public investments in waterways and railroads created a transportation network that made the national wealth of the American interior accessible."

From Craig Leonard, Wells County Historian

September 19, 2012 - Elk River, Minnesota

Speakers Bureau

CSI director and Allen County Historian, Tom Castaldi of Fort Wayne, spoke to the combined classes of 35 Fourth Graders at St. Andrew's of Elk River, Minnesota. He discussed the role of canals in U.S. history, explained how they operated, gave descriptions of the various types of boats used on canals, and told how animals were used to pull the boats. His talk generated a lively question/answer session.



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The following have joined the Canal Society of Indiana at the single/family membership rate of \$25 unless otherwise noted:

Todd W. Ussery - Kokomo, IN

Welcome Aboard!