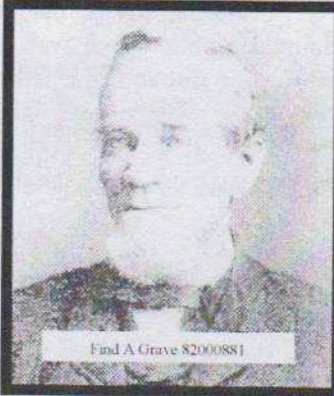


## JOSEPH BURNS

### AND HIS WABASH & ERIE CANAL CONNECTIONS

By Charles Davis

Joseph Burns, son of James and Mary Burns, was born in Pickaway county, Ohio on March 17, 1822. He came with his parents and six siblings to Parke county, Indiana on October 23, 1828. When they arrived ¼ miles north of where Armiesburg now stands they set up camp and lived partly in the big old Virginia wagon bed in which



they had moved from Piqua county, Ohio. The next day they began erecting a log cabin from the trees and poles that stood on the ground around the site and in a short time had built a cabin about 18 feet square and two stories high.

The floor of the cabin was made from slabs, the loft with planks from Cox's mill nearby. The chimney was about 5 feet long and made of logs, sticks and mud and lined with stone procured from the "Wea" Indian burying place that was on the bank of Raccoon Creek about 300 feet from where the aqueduct of the Wabash and Erie Canal afterwards crossed the creek. From this pile of stones Joseph procured many Indian Relics such as pie beads, tomahawks and a piece of metal, which he supposed had been used for a breast plate.

Their cabin was located across the road from Chief Christmas "Noel" Dagenet. Near this place the walnut trees were peeled and no doubt had been used by the Indians not a great many years before in building their dwellings. At this time a small number of Indians, perhaps 20 to 40, visited Christmas Dagenet, who was half French and half Wea (Miami) and owned one mile square of land. Davis, Charles. "Christmas 'Noel' Dagenet and His Wabash & Erie Canal Connections" Indiana Canals, Spring 2001, pg. 8.

The Indians would come about once a year and would pass by the Burns' house once a day, sometimes oftener, going from Dagenet's to the creek and the dense woods that then lined the Raccoon bottom to hunt and fish. There was whiskey to be had at Armiesburg. They would get all dressed up in their Indian garb and get gloriously full of it.

At first the Indians scared the Burns' children. However, they soon became accustomed to seeing them because their father, James Burns, served in Bereman's company during the War of 1812 and had been a prisoner

of the Indians. He had learned a little of their language. They would often stop and talk to him. I, Charles Davis, ordered and put a head stone on his grave in March 2001.

Joseph Burns, our subject, recalls, "I remember I claimed a colt, which was running in the yard around the cabin. One Indian had a fisherman gig he made. He made a rush at the colt with the gig and I fully believed my colt would be killed. My father spoke to him and he let the gig fall and gave a hoop, a laugh and went on down the road."

At this time Chief Dagenet lived in a cabin with a row of log cabins starting on the north near Dagenet's house and running south to near the south line of the section. This row of cabins was called "String Town" and it is said that in one of these cabins the first court was held in Parke county. The other cabins were occupied by Dagenet's relatives, some of them part Indian and French.

There are no recorded deeds from the time when the Burns family settled on this farm. Joseph worked there

until the age of 19 when he went into business for himself. He worked by the day or month on flatboats running down the Mississippi to New Orleans and saved \$500. From his earnings he settled in Montezuma, Indiana.

John Given Davis owned a ferry-boat on the Wabash River. His boat had previously been operated by Thomas Vanlandingham and later his sons, Septimus and "Uncle Wyck," for many years. In 1849 Joseph rented and managed the ferry-boat for Davis for several years.

On November 14, 1860 Joseph Burns bought the ferry from Davis for \$1000. Deed Record 24/301 It included the landing sites on the east and west side of the Wabash River. The deed reads: "all rights of ferrying across the Wabash river, at and adjacent to the town of Montezuma in Parke county east of said river and also that small parcel of gore land situated between the Wabash river on the west, the Wabash and Erie Canal on the east, and North street on the north, and running south not over 250 yards or to Patterson street or so much thereof as belongs to said John

**GENEALOGY OF JOSEPH BURNS**

By Charles Davis 2011

	BORN	DIED	BURIED	MARRIED	FIND A GRAVE
James Burns Mifflin, PA	1-23-1790	12-26-1853	Montezuma		
1. Mary A. Wolfe	1-24-1793	3-??-1831/34	Old Montezuma Cem.		
<u>Children</u>					
A. Joseph Burns Sr.	3-17-1822	12-17-1903		11-10-1847	82000881
1. Caroline Vanlandingham	1-24-1828	3-30-1849	Old Montezuma Cem.	11-10-1847	79141292
<u>Children</u>					
A. Caroline Burns	3-14-1849	5-19-1937	Lawrence, KS	10-03-1867	
m. Enos Newton Kuhn				10-03-1867	
2. Permelia Vanlandingham	11-22-1822	6-06-1852	Parke Co.	6-12-1850	
3. Mary F. Millikin	7-15-1834	12-13-1882		1857	74723121
<u>Children</u>					
A. Mary Louise Burns	6-??-1859	2-15-1942	Montezuma, IN		
B. Edward H. Burns	9-23-1861	6-02-1921	Chicago, IL		
C. Hattie Burns	10-17-1862	1-17-2863	Parke Co., IN		
D. Belle B. Burns	1866	1921			
E. J. Francis "Frank" Burns	7-24-1868	8-04-1875	Montezuma, IN		
F. Robert Burns	1-11-1871	1-11-1875	Montezuma, IN		
G. Joseph Hugar Burns Jr.	3-14-1877	4-28-1962	Montezuma, IN		
4. Ann Elizabeth Donaldson	4-??-1836	3-??-1911	Tuscola, IL	1880/1882	
wife of Elisha Cannon, brother of Congressman Joseph Gurney Cannon					
B. Sarah Burns					
C. Margaret Burns					
D. Robert Burns					
E. Jane Burns					
F. Mary Burns					
G. John Burns	11-22-1822	6-06-1852	Old Montezuma Cem.		
2. Mary Thompson					
<u>Children</u>					
A. Samuel Burns					
B. James Burns					
C. Isabella Burns					
D. Elizabeth Burns					

Davis and wife purchased by Road and Davis of Ambrose Whitlock." The deed was recorded December 2, 1865. Joseph operated this ferry until the Wabash River bridge was built in 1892. He made his fortune on this ferry and the Wabash & Erie Canal.

While operating the ferry on the Wabash River, Joseph discovered fire clay on the west bluff of the river in Vermillion county. When the first section of the C. & E. I. R. R. was being constructed by Joseph Collett, he met Collett and they organized a fire-brick company. It opened in 1872 as the Burns and Collett Fire Brick Company just two weeks before the first C. & E.I. Train ran between Terre Haute and Danville, Illinois, passing right in front of the plant. In a few years Joseph purchased Collett's interest in the company. He later sold an interest to his son-in-law, Salem P. Hancock. The new Corporation became Burns and Hancock Fire Brick & Clay Col, and remained so until it was sold in 1947. They shipped brick to 12 states. In 1906 they installed an electric light plant, used the power coming from the Burns & Hancock brick plant in West Montezuma and furnished electricity to the town of Montezuma. It was a success and lit 40 street lights at no expense to the town.

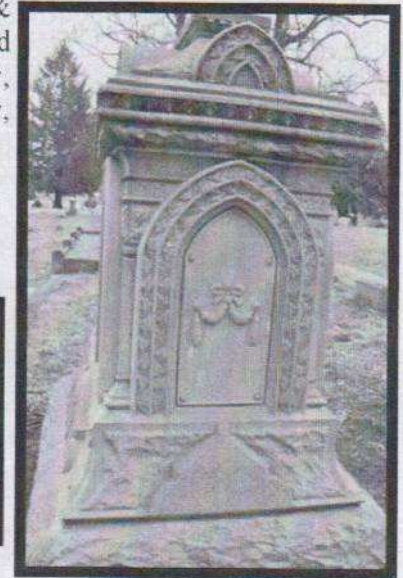


Built around 1866 by Thomas S. Hood, this home on lot 150 on Jefferson Street in Montezuma, Indiana was purchased by Joseph Burns on December 28, 1889. He lived there until his death in 1903.  
Photo by Charles Davis

Joseph owned 600 acres of fertile land in West Montezuma. I don't know where Joseph lived most of his life, but I do know that in his later years he lived in "the Burns house." On December 28, 1889 he purchased his home on lot 150, Jefferson (North) street in Montezuma from John X. Ireland for \$150 plus a mortgage of \$700. D. R. 50/437. While running through the deed records I got the impression that the house was built around 1866 by Thomas S. Hood, a banking and grain businessman, who moved to Dana, Indiana, where he died on April 24, 1894. The house is still standing, is vacant, and is one of the few old homes left in town. It is of Italianate design and has a

hand cut sandstone block foundation.

Joseph Burns is another success story. He made it good during the Wabash & Erie Canal era. He is buried in Oakland Cemetery, Montezuma, Parke County, Indiana.



Sources:

- Beekwith, *History of Vigo and Parke Counties*, 1880.
- Bowen, *Parke County-Vermillion Co. History*, 1913.
- Combined Atlas 1874-1908-1916 Isaac Straus Centennial Memorial of Parke Co., IN.*
- Davis, Charles. "Walter C. Donaldson and His Wabash & Erie Canal Connections"
- Deed records at Rockville court house
- Families of Parke County*, Reserve township, 1983.
- Federal Census Records 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, & 1900
- Foster, Robert Burns. Picture of Joseph Burns Sr.
- Indiana Marriage Records on Ancestry.com
- Joseph Burns obituary, *Rockville Tribune*, 12-20-1903, p. 1.
- Old Times in Montezuma* Reminiscences of Dr. B. F. Hudson, Wycliffe Vanlandingham 4-21-1914.
- Parke County Marriages in Rockville Library.
- Public Member Trees, Ancestry.com
- Recollections of Joseph Burns © 1892 SC 152 Indiana State Library

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

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

- Annemarie Deville - Ft. Wayne, IN
- Ronald & Helen Haywood - Indianapolis, IN
- Teresa Lowe - Connersville, IN
- John Polles - West Lafayette, IN

Welcome Aboard!