

CANAWLERS AT REST

MAJOR SAMUEL LEWIS

Find-A-Grave #55425418

b. June 13, 1796

d. January 2, 1843

By Robert F. Schmidt

Samuel Lewis was born in Mason county, Virginia on June 13, 1796, the son of Thomas Lewis and Sally Thorton. Both of his parents died in 1800 when he was 4 years old. His oldest brother, Thomas, was only 12 at the time, so all of the five siblings must have lived with relatives in their early childhood. The family members all remained in Virginia except for Samuel.

He first moved to Cincinnati in 1811 at age 15 and then in 1817, six years later, moved to Brookville, Indiana in the Whitewater valley. The circumstances of his original move to Cincinnati or what he accomplished there, and the reason he moved to Brookville are unknown.

Another mystery is why he was later identified as Major Samuel Lewis. He was too young for the War of 1812. Probably he was associated with a local militia unit at Brookville.

The Andrew Wallace family also arrived in Brookville in 1817. Andrew was a close friend of William Henry Harrison and served with him during the War of 1812. Through Harrison, Andrew was able to secure an appointment to West Point for his son David, who was to become the future Governor of Indiana.

David Wallace graduated from West Point in 1821 and served in the army as a lieutenant of artillery for about a year before resigning his commission and returning to Brookville. There he decided to take up the legal profession and studied law under Judge Miles C. Eggleston. Passing the bar, David joined the practice of the newly elected congressman John Test. On November 10, 1824 he married the congressman's 17 year old daughter Esther French Test.

Samuel Lewis, who was 3 years older than David Wallace, courted David's sister Catherine. Samuel and Catherine were married in Brookville on December 10, 1818. Catherine had been born in Troy, Ohio in 1802 and was 20 at the time of her marriage to Samuel, who was then 22. They had two sons born in Brookville, Thomas Lewis in 1821 and David Wallace Lewis in 1825. The Lewis family lived in Franklin County for several years. Samuel apparently became involved in business and was elected to the Indiana General Assembly in 1826 at age 30.

In 1827 David Wallace and Esther had a son they in turn named Lewis (Lew) Wallace, who became a Civil War General and later author of the famous novel, *Ben Hur*. David was first elected to the Indiana General Assembly in 1828 and served there until 1831 when he became Lt. Governor under Noah Noble. Then he was elected as a one term Governor of Indiana from 1837-1840 and was followed by Samuel Bigger.

In 1827 President John Quincy Adams appointed Samuel Lewis the Indian sub-agent in Fort Wayne, an agency which operated under John Tipton's agency headquartered in Logansport. At this time the Lewis family moved to Fort Wayne and built a handsome double-hewn log home on Montgomery (Douglas) Street. The walls were covered in the summer with beautiful climbing roses and honeysuckles as described by Hugh McCulloch in his biography. During the next few years they had two more children, Virginia Lewis in 1827 and Charles W. Lewis in 1829. Samuel and Christine became involved with the Presbyterian Church and pledged \$250 toward the salary of its first pastor, James Chute. Their fifth child Frances Lewis was born later in 1841.

Indiana had received a land grant in 1827 from the Federal government for building a canal in northern Indiana. The state accepted that grant in 1828. A board of Commissioners was then established to pursue the planning for a Wabash & Erie Canal. Samuel Hanna, who was instrumental in the initial canal survey and planning, resigned from his board position in 1830 and Samuel Lewis was chosen by the legislature to replace him. The Board of the Wabash & Erie Canal then consisted of David Burr, Jordan Vigus and Samuel Lewis. This board decided to hire Joseph Ridgeway, a canal engineer from Ohio, to prepare the specific engineering for the 32 mile middle division from the Fort Wayne Feeder to the Little River at Huntington, Indiana. Ridgeway was reluctant to leave his Ohio work at the Licking summit but agreed to serve in Indiana for a brief period. In the meantime Jesse L. Williams filled in for him in Ohio. Ridgeway began his survey from the Fort Wayne summit in August 1830 and filed his final report with the Indiana Legislature in December of that year. (*The Hoosier Packet* May 2013)

The Board and the Legislature accepted Ridgeway's recommendations on January 9, 1832 and the groundbreaking occurred in Fort Wayne on February 22, 1832 with only Jordon Vigus, Mayor of Logansport, in attendance. In June 1832 Jesse Lynch Williams, age 25, accepted the position of Chief Engineer for the Wabash & Erie Canal. He moved to Fort Wayne with his wife at that time.

The Board accepted contracts for ½ mile sections along the feeder and main canal for a total of 15 miles that June and some serious work soon began. One of the first contracts signed by Samuel Lewis was with William Rockhill of Fort Wayne for Section 1 on the main canal dated March 1, 1832. Section 2 is dated June 4, 1832 and is also with William Rockhill. These contracts were for the main canal. Contractors were required to pledge that they would not serve spirits to their workers. The contract for the St. Joseph Feeder Dam was let with Valerius Armitage & John Cresswell both of Pennsylvania on November 6, 1832. Four more miles were contracted in the fall of 1832 and the balance of 13 miles was let in May 1833. The total miles for the middle division was then 32 miles.

A canal land office was opened in Fort Wayne in October 1832 for the sale of the lands granted by the government along the route of the waterway. It attracted purchasers in large numbers. The government appointed Major Samuel Lewis as receiver of monies at the canal land office for a period of ten years while he continued to carry out his duties as canal commissioner. Work on the Middle Division proceeded well and on July 4, 1834 a Fort Wayne native, F.P. Tinkham, built a simple craft that carried local residents to the Feeder Dam for a picnic and celebration.

By 1835 the canal had reached Huntington. A delegation of 3 boats sailed to Huntington on July 2 and returned with passengers for the 4th of July celebrations. On the morning of the 4th the boats were loaded with local officials and proceeded to the feeder dam for a brief speech by John Tipton. They returned to Fort Wayne where Lazarus Wilson read the Declaration of Independence and Hugh McCulloch gave a lengthy oration followed by a huge public dinner. Later that evening a dance was held at the tavern of Zenas Henderson.

On January 28, 1834 Indiana created the State Bank of Indiana, which was required to redeem notes in specie (gold or silver), and authorized 10 branch banks in towns throughout the state. The Fort Wayne branch was headed by President Allen Hamilton and cashier (manager) Hugh McCulloch. On August 25, 1835 stockholders were to begin making their subscriptions to the bank with payments to Samuel Lewis, who became 1 of the 13 directors of the bank in November 1835. Other directors included William Ewing, Francis Compaet, Joseph Morgan, Jesse Vermilyea, Asa Fairfield, David Burr and Samuel Edsall. McCulloch, who had no prior banking experience, went on to become the Secretary of the U.S. Treasury in 1864 during the 2nd Lincoln administration.

One of the problems contractors faced, especially in the first years was the shortage of laborers. Fort Wayne, the largest town in the area, only had a population of about 400. Samuel Lewis traveled to Buffalo, New York to recruit German and Irish young men to come to northern Indiana to be hired by the contractors working on the canal. He made generous

promises overlooking, or at least omitting, some of the hazards of this work-- fever, ague, dysentery, and cholera.

The progress of the Wabash & Erie Canal in northern Indiana and the wave of canal building nationwide created an increased demand in the state for more internal improvements. In 1835 the Erie Canal was so successful that the original state investment had been repaid in tolls and plans were underway for expanding the size of this successful waterway west. Ohio was also completing its Miami & Erie Canal in western Ohio. Pennsylvania was building a network of canals throughout the state. In January 1836 Indiana finally responded with the Mammoth Internal Improvement Bill. This bill was more comprehensive than just canals and included rail roads, new roads and river navigation improvements. To handle contracts and administration a new Board of Commissioners was established that met in February 1836 in Indianapolis. It was composed of 3 members from the old Wabash & Erie Board (Samuel Lewis, David Burr & James B. Johnson) plus 6 new members (Samuel Hall, John Clendenin, Thomas Blake, John Woodward, Elisha Long, David Maxwell). In February 1839 this Board of Commissioners was again reorganized to a 3 man board composed of Samuel Lewis, John A. Graham of Warrick county and ex-Governor Noah Noble. Finally in February 1840 the old board was reduced to one person, Noah Noble.

In 1832 a Board of Fund Commissioners had been created and was initially composed of William Linton, Nicholas McCarty, and Jeremiah Sullivan. Because of the death of Linton and resignations of the other two, they were replaced by Samuel Hanna, Dr. Isaac Coe and Caleb Smith. Later James Farrington of Vigo county replaced Hanna. In February 1839 the legislature reduced the Fund Commissioners to two persons, Lucius Scott and Milton Stapp.

The legislature had created probably one of the most comprehensive internal improvement plans in the nation. The problem was that the timing and funding practices were horrendous. Andrew Jackson's specie circular of 1836, requiring cash payments for land purchases, created a nationwide financial collapse in 1837

-39 that effected internal improvement projects everywhere. Indiana had initiated a plan to borrow up to \$10 million from eastern investors. Without careful financial control some of the funds were lost through kickbacks and failed financial institutions as the Panic of 1837 took its toll throughout the nation.

An investigation in 1842 by a legislative committee found Dr. Isaac Coe guilty of taking kickbacks and requested repayment. Others such as Milton Stapp were found wanting in good judgment, but Samuel Lewis was cleared of any of the charges as was Samuel Hanna, Jesse Williams and several others. Even Coe was eventually found innocent by a jury trial in 1847. Likewise a suit against the Morris Canal & Banking Company for damages of over \$1 million was eventually dropped by the state.

Samuel Lewis, as a dedicated Whig and supporter of the candidacy of William Henry Harrison for President, received the appointment as Receiver of Public Monies by the newly elected President in 1841 and retained that position until his untimely death on January 2, 1843 at age 46. He did not live long enough to see the opening

SAMUEL LEWIS
Born June 13, 1796
Died Jan. 2, 1843

CATHERINE W. LEWIS
Born Feb. 13, 1802
Died Dec. 14, 1859

Samuel Lewis was moved from Ft. Wayne's Broadway Cemetery to Lindenwood Cemetery in 1887 and interred in Section G Lot 3. This stone no longer stands at his grave site.

Photo courtesy Jim Cox.



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of the Wabash & Erie Canal in May of 1843 and the grand celebration in Fort Wayne on July 4th. Samuel was buried in the Broadway Cemetery in Fort Wayne and later, in 1887, removed to Section G Lot 3 in Lindenwood Cemetery.

Catherine Lewis continued to live in Fort Wayne. Her brother, David Wallace, also lived in Fort Wayne from 1848 to 1850 following his service in the state house, but his brief residence here was rendered unpleasant by unfortunate investments. Catherine lived until December 14, 1859 when she died in Fort Wayne at age 57.

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Catherine Wallace Lewis

Samuel Lewis

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