

CANAWLERS AT REST

PHILO RUMSEY

b. March 11, 1811

d. ?

By Jim Ellis

Sources:

Griswold, Bert J. *The Pictorial History of Fort Wayne, Indiana.* Chicago, IL/Robert O. Law Company. 1917.

Poinsatte, Charles R. *Fort Wayne During the Canal Era 1828-1855.* Indianapolis, IN/Indiana Historical Bureau. 1969.



The Rockhill House in Fort Wayne was managed by Philo Rumsey from 1854-1867. From a woodcut printed in 1858.

Philo Rumsey was born in Rutland, Vermont on March 11, 1811. He came to Fort Wayne, Indiana in the early part of 1832 and became a merchant and a tailor. There he met Rebecca Rockhill, daughter of William Rockhill, and on March 7, 1838 he married Rebecca. They were blessed with two children, a son James and a daughter Edith.

After the Fort Wayne Light Infantry had to be rapidly created in 1834 to dispel the outbreak of canal workers at Lagro, Indiana, the citizens of Fort Wayne saw the need for a military organization. The first formal organization was established in 1841 and was known as the Fort Wayne Guards. Philo signed up and became an ensign.

In 1840 when the city of Fort Wayne was chartered, George W. Wood was elected mayor. He and the other newly elected city officials faced many problems. Mayor Wood was reelected in 1841, but he had a new city council. Philo Rumsey was elected to this second city council. He was again elected to the council in 1845.

A grand celebration for the opening of the Wabash & Erie Canal from Lake Erie at Toledo, OH to Lafayette, IN was planned at the American House in Fort Wayne, Indiana on May 17, 1843. Philo served on the correspondence and invitation committee. Other notables who made arrangements for this celebration and had canal connections were Sam Hanna, W. S. Edsall, Henry Lotz, Samuel Edsall, Asa Fairfield, W. G. Ewing,

and David Comparet.

In 1849, after the death of Maria Vermilyea, wife of Jesse Vermilyea a canal contractor and owner of the Vermilyea House inn, Philo managed the inn. It was located fourteen miles southwest of Fort Wayne on the Wabash & Erie Canal. It had a dock, a basin for canal boats and was near Aboite Creek aqueduct. He catered to many passengers traveling on the canal.

The experience gained operating the Vermilyea House probably was one reason Philo was given the responsibility of managing the Rockhill House. However, being the son-in-law of William Rockhill, owner of the hotel, wasn't a hindrance. The Rockhill House was a first-class hotel, which opened in 1854 after talking 13 long years to complete. Its rural setting at the west side of Fort Wayne on the corner of Broadway and Main and its being four stories tall with 65 rooms made it the largest and best constructed inn in Indiana at the time. The hotel closed in 1867, sat idle until May 20, 1878 when it was purchased by the St. Joseph Benevolent association. Today the present St. Joseph Medical Center has the original hotel and its one story addition as its core.

After the hotel had closed, Philo moved to Omaha, Nebraska in October 1868 where he became the manager of the Cozzen House and operated several eating houses along the Union Pacific Railroad. He was also proprietor and manager of the Palace Hotel in Santa Fe, NM. We don't know when he died or was buried.