



clearing it, cutting the timber, hewing the logs and building a log cabin alongside the Wabash River for his new bride. They settled down to married life in the cabin in 1840.

John Shanahan also decided to live in Lagro and was a close neighbor to Michael. John married Louanna whose last name we do not know. Louanna had been born in Ireland in 1814.

Michael and John not only competed in their farming, but they seemed to compete in the number of children they had. When one's first child was born in 1838 the other had his first child. This competition went on through 1849 when each had fathered eight children. At that time Louanna must have said "enough!" for she and John had no more. Michael and Lydia went on to have five more.

By 1858 when Michael and Lydia's oldest child was 20 and their youngest was 1 year old, their little cabin was bursting at its seams. They purchased 80 acres of land in the E½ of the NW¼ of Section 14, Sims township, Grant county, Indiana about two miles northeast of what is now Swayzee, Indiana. They packed up the family belongings and farm equipment and moved there.

Michael kept several account books over the years. Compare these prices he recorded to those of today. 3 lb. Coffee 37¢, ½ lb. Tobacco 6¢, Lumber & Nails 4¢-10¢ He also must have enjoyed whiskey for every now and then it was listed in his accounts.

Little by little the children became of age and moved away from the farm. Some married and lived nearby. Michael's sons, John and Nicholas, both volunteered during the Civil War. While serving with the 12th Indiana Infantry John was killed in action at Winchester, Pennsylvania. While serving in the 101st Indiana Infantry, Nicholas was taken a prisoner at Chickamauga and imprisoned first at Libby and later at other southern prisons. After he was released he boarded a ship to return north. It's boiler exploded, he was thrown into the Mississippi River and drowned. Sometime during this war David and Andrew died. William, their retarded child died at age 78 in the state hospital.

Once all the children had moved out, Michael and Lydia's son, James, and his wife moved back to the farm to look after it and them in their old age. The farm remained in the Shanahan family for almost 120 years. James was also a stockholder in the Swayzee Telephone Company.

Michael and Lydia spent their last days on their Sims township farm. He died on January 2, 1885 and was buried in the northwest corner of the old section of Thrailkill Cemetery, in Grant county, Indiana. Lydia passed away on May 25, 1890 and was laid to rest beside Michael. Their grave stones are difficult to read. Later a brass plate was added to Michael's stone.

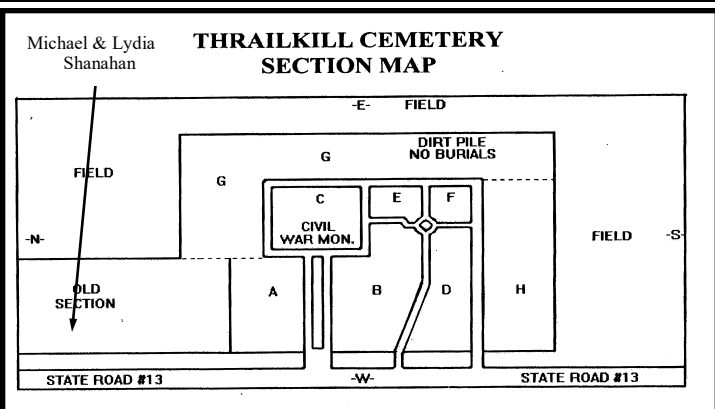


Photos by Bob Schmidt

Trailkill Cemetery, Grant County, Indiana

Michael Shanahan D. Jan. 2, 1885 Age 86 y. 3 m. 28 d. Bronze plaque added to stone: 1799-1885 [should be 1798]	Lydia A. Shanahan D. May 25, 1890 Aged 69 years
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Michael and Lydia are buried in the old section, original plat of the cemetery located in Section #2, Sims Twp, State Rd. #13.



Sources:

- <http://www.ingenweb.org/ingrant/SDW/thraindx.htm> Thrailkill Cemetery
- Ancestry.com *Indiana Marriage Collection 1800-1941*
- Federal Census: 1850, 1880
- Malott, Eva, Ada McPhilliamy, Dick Pence. *Digging Our Roots*. Baltimore, MD; Gateway Press, 1977.
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- Whitson, Rolland Lewis. *Centennial History of Grant County, Indiana 1812-1912*. Chicago, IL: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1914.

## THE REASON FOR THE IRISH CANAL WAR

AT LAGRO, INDIANA

July 1835

By Robert F. Schmidt

On July 4, 1835, as celebrations were being held for the arrival of the first boat, "The Indiana," on the Wabash & Erie Canal at Huntington, Indiana, trouble was "a brewin'" between the camps of Irish canal workers from Lagro to Peru.

Young, mostly single, Irish lads had left their native Ireland and come to America to seek their fortunes. They came as jobs became scarce in Ireland due to a change in land use. The land was being converted from individually owned small farms with crops that required many farm hands to large farms that grazed sheep for landlords. The English industrial revolution had increased the demand for cotton and wool by the textile industry. The cotton was supplied by Egypt, India and the southern United States. Sheep could be easily raised in nearby Ireland so cropland became grazing lands. The Irish tenant farmers were forced into poverty and had to find jobs in the cities or emigrate. Although this was before the potato famine that hit in the late 1840s, this change in land use was also a contributing factor to the food shortage..

Those persons that had enough resources headed for the United States where they found a country in industrial growth and expanding westward. There were many internal improvement projects underway throughout the United States that were suited for physical labor and didn't require any special skills. Cutting trees, digging and hauling dirt, was a job not desired by local American farmers, who had plenty of work for themselves and their families on their own farms..

Contractors found it necessary to advertise on the East coast for labor. As soon as an Irishman stepped off the boat he saw flyers with the flowery descriptions of great opportunities in the west. These Irish young men came in groups with their friends and usually they were organized groups. Just as some young boys in the United States today have names for their gangs, special handshakes and greetings, so did the young men from Ireland. Popular gangs in Ireland were the Whiteboys and the Ribbon Men. They reacted to the land loss in Ireland with acts of violence.

Jay Martin Perry in his December 2009 thesis, "Shillelaghs, Shovels, and Secrets: Irish Immigrant Secret Societies and the Building of Indiana Internal Improvements, 1835-1837," for the Department of History at Indiana University delves into the history of these secret societies. His thesis may be found on-line under Lagro Canal War.

The young Irish men who arrived in northern Indiana seemed to have come from two different regions of Ireland. Those called "Corkonians" came from County Cork and the Province of Munster, while the "Fardowners" were from Leinster and Connacht counties. This was not a Protestant Catholic clash as is often thought since this work force was almost entirely of the Catholic faith. The source of Lagro's labor problems was in reality a problem of groups or gangs trying to protect their jobs. If too many persons moved into the area it would have a depressing impact on wages and working conditions. It was similar to a labor union controlling access to labor today and required membership in a gang.

The Corkonians arrived first. They began work to the East of Huntington and through Lagro. As the Fardowners arrived contractors knowing of other confrontations in the East on the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal and elsewhere, moved their workers further down the canal line closer to Peru, Indiana. There was plenty of work for all, but the Corkonians perceived these Fardowners as an invasion force on their work. Soon violence erupted along the entire stretch of canal construction.

The events that transpired are described in the New York *Spectator* of September 3, 1835, which quoted an earlier Fort Wayne *Sentinel* story of the events:

"Disturbances on the Canal - There have been some disturbances among the Irish laborers on the Wabash & Erie Canal, which but for the prompt and energetic measures resorted to for their suppression, would have resulted in a sanguinary conflict between the two factions into which the Irish are divided. For some time past the Corkonians have been the strongest party on the canal line, and have embraced every opportunity of maltreating such of the Fardowns as might fall into their hands; nor have our own citizens at all times been safe from the attacks of these ruffians. The Fardowns having lately received great accessions to their numbers, resolved upon driving their opponents from the canal and preparations for the contest were made by both parties. The Irish were observed by the citizens to be in the habit of nightly assembling in secluded places in the woods, and all who could in any way procure arms, were providing themselves with them. Three kegs of powder were forcibly taken from a wagon on the highway; the houses of some of the citizens were entered and the owners compelled to give up their guns; and the lives of others were threatened who refused to surrender their guns. Several outrages were committed by these deluded ruffians upon each other, and Mr. Brady, a canal contractor, was fired at, but fortunately without effect, by a wretch named Sullivan, who, we are informed, took a prominent part in the disturbances in Maryland last year, and is also deeply implicated in the murders committed at Williamsburg, Pa. four years ago.

"The contest was to have taken place on the 12<sup>th</sup> inst., the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne. On the 10<sup>th</sup>

instant the Corkonians assembled at Lagro, to the number of three hundred, most of whom were armed. At the same time almost two hundred and fifty armed Fardowns' advanced to Wabash, seven miles from Lagro, on their way to attack their adversaries. D. [David] Burr Esq., canal commissioner, and some other citizens of the neighborhood, succeeded in inducing the two parties to suspend the intended fight for two days, in order to give them an opportunity of making some amicable arrangement. In the meantime expresses were sent to Fort Wayne and Logansport requesting assistance to suppress the disturbances, and protect the citizens from the dangers to which they would be exposed, if the parties should come in contact. The express arrived here on the 11<sup>th</sup>, and the appeal was promptly responded to by our citizens. The drum beat to arms, and in two hours a company of sixty-three men, well armed, and furnished with ammunition and provisions, were on their march for the scene of action. Colonel J. Spencer was elected to command the expedition; Adam Hull was elected first lieutenant; Samuel Edsall second lieut., and H. [Henry] Rudisill ensign. The company embarked in a canal boat, and arrived at Huntington about midnight.

"Next morning they marched forward on their route, under the command of Captain E. [Elias] Murray. On hearing of the arrival of the volunteers, the Irish disbursed into the woods, and next day most of them returned to their work, fully satisfied that they could not trample on the laws of the State with impunity, and that, if they attempted to proceed any further in their mad career, they would inevitably meet with the punishment due to such lawless proceedings. The volunteers marched through Lagro and Wabash (at each of which places they received reinforcements) to Peru; sending out on the way several small detachments, who scoured the woods in every direction, and examined all shanties on the line, where arms or suspected individuals were supposed to be concealed, seizing several guns, and taking many prisoners. They arrived at Peru on the 14<sup>th</sup>, where they were joined by Capt. Tipton's volunteer company from Logansport. The number of volunteers now under arms was not less than 250, the whole of whom next day marched back to Lagro, where all the prisoners were assembled for examination.

"The display of this force having awed the rioters into submission, and there being nothing more to be done, the Fort Wayne and Logansport volunteers returned to their homes, leaving the prisoners at Lagro under the charge of the Huntington and Lagro volunteers. Upwards of one hundred prisoners were arrested; of these several were discharged for want of evidence; 14 of the ring leaders, including Sullivan, were taken to Indianapolis for safe custody; some were admitted to bail and the remainder were still kept under guard at the date of our latest accounts.

"The Fort Wayne company arrived here on Friday morning at 3 o'clock, after a harassing march of one hundred twenty miles through a new country, performed in the short space of 5-1/4 days.

"Great credit is due to the citizens of Fort Wayne, Huntington, Logansport, and the canal line generally, for the spirit manifested on this occasion, which was the means of suppressing the present disturbances without bloodshed and will also have a tendency to prevent any future tumults, as it has convinced the Irish that, although they are in a sparsely settled country, yet an armed force can at any moment be brought among them, sufficiently powerful to enforce their submission to the laws of the State. Peace appears to be perfectly re-established, but as a measure of precaution, arrangements are making for the organization of volunteer companies in all the villages along the canal line. A supply of the public arms at this time would be a great assistance."

With the Irish dispute at Lagro finally quelled, the workers returned to their construction job of buildings Indiana's longest canal. Still the Irish loved fighting and brawling. Often on the weekends fights were staged as part of the Sunday's entertainment. With lots of young men, few women, and abundant whiskey -- what else were they to do? No wonder local people kept their families and especially young women away from the canal work camps:

For additional information about early working conditions and the construction of American canals I suggest reading *Common Labor* by Peter Way, Cambridge University Press, 1993. He also speaks about the Irish secret societies and talks about the disturbances on other canal lines.

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In the 1830s, it took 250-300 man-hours of labor and 5 acres of land to harvest 100 bushels of wheat, and much of Indiana's wheat crop was transported on canal boats. By 1965 it only took 5 hours of labor and 3 acres of ground to produce that same 100 bushels of wheat. Can you imagine how many canal boats it would take to transport the wheat produced today?