

CANAWLERS AT REST

WILLIAM L. COTTON

b. June 14, 1816

d. 1902

By Carolyn I. Schmidt

William L. Cotton was born on June 14, 1816 in a block-house three miles west of Brookville, Indiana on the west fork of the White River. His grandfathers, William Cotton and Absalom Cramer, were both soldiers in the Revolutionary War. His parents, Joseph Cotton (5-9-1787, 5-8-1873) and Mary Cramer (4-12-1787, 9-11-1868), were both born and reared in Greenville District, South Carolina and were married there when they were 19 years old. They had 11 children and enjoyed sixty-two years of married life.

Joseph, Mary and four of their children moved to Indiana in 1816 and settled in Franklin County. After living there for fourteen years they moved to Fayette County. Joseph farmed in Fayette for forty-three years.

The Whitewater Canal was part of the Internal Improvement Bill passed by the General Assembly of Indiana in January 1836. On January 18 a huge celebration took place in Connersville, Fayette County, in anticipation of the prosperity the canal would bring. During the excitement, a young man died and three others were maimed when a piece of artillery exploded.

The first contracts for building sections of the canal were let on September 13, 1836 at Brookville. By December 15, 1837, the superintendent of construction reported that the Lawrenceburg-Brookville section was half completed through the labors of 975 men at the cost of \$18 per month per man. Although they thought this section of canal would be completed much sooner, the first boat to pass through it was the "Ben Franklin" on June 8, 1839.

The excitement over the canal might have prompted William Cotton, our subject who had lived with his parents until he was about twenty-two years old to purchase land in Fayette County. Around 1838 he purchased 105 acres. He threw himself into work clearing and improving this land while also working on

the Whitewater Canal. Due to his excessive labor within two years he had lost his good health.

William abandoned his farm sometime around 1840. Since he had obtained a pretty good education in the common schools, he became a teacher.

On April 6, 1843 Christiann Goodwise became William's first wife. They had one daughter named Amanda. Christiann died about two and a half years after their marriage. She passed away on September 9, 1845 at the age of 20 years and 1 month. She is buried in Columbia Cemetery, Columbia Township, Fayette County, Indiana.

In 1845 the Whitewater Canal was completed to Connersville. By 1846 it had reached Cambridge City.

While still teaching William read medicine with Dr. Kitchen during 1847-48. However, he never went into practice.

William was married for a second time on March 4, 1848 to Druscilla C. Utter. She bore him two daughters and one son before passing away October 15, 1854 at the age of 25 years 8 months. She also is buried in Columbia Cemetery, Columbia Township, Fayette County, Indiana.

Being left with three little girls and a little boy to rear by himself, William had to break up his housekeeping and board elsewhere. In 1856 he took his family to South Carolina where his parents had lived. They visited the old plantations and residences where they had been born, reared and married. He taught and boarded there for one year before returning. He was called "Brother" Cotton.

The Civil War interrupted his teaching career. In 1861 after twenty-one years he retired from teaching to participate in the war effort.

On July 25, 1861, at the age of 55, he enlisted in the Third Indiana Cavalry, Company F. and entered the Civil War as a private. He served for three years: First under Colonel Conrad Baker, who later became Governor of Indiana; then under Colonel Scott Carter of Vevay, who resigned in the early part of 1863; then under Colonel George H. Chapman, who was the last colonel to command the regiment; and lastly under Major William Patton of Vevay. He was honorably discharged from the regiment as a Second Lieutenant on August 31, 1864. He had participated in some of the most important engagements of the entire war and had been in command of a company at the time of his discharge.

On November 6, 1868 after returning to Fayette County from the war, William was elected County Sheriff. He served in that capacity for two terms (1864-1868). Then on September 3, 1869 he was elected County Treasurer and served as such for two terms (1869-1873). In 1873 William was overtaken by finan-

cial problems and spent thousands of his hard earned dollars paying off others' debts. He never once equivocated.

Mary F. (nee Webb) Smith became Williams third wife on May 20, 1874. She was about 21 years younger than William. They had one daughter and one son. Mary F. was born in 1837.

William was elected the City Marshal of Connersville in 1878. He fulfilled two terms. He tendered his resignation after a third election thus ending his official career.

He spent the summer and fall in Arkansas. There he purchased land and retired.

By 1885 William, the father of six children, had only one daughter and one son living. Amanda, his daughter by his first wife, died on March 9, 1874 at the age of 25. She was buried in Connersville's City Cemetery. One of his daughters and his son by his second wife had died as well as his daughter by his third wife.

William was a member of the G. A. R. and voted Republican on all general issues. He was an active worker in local politics. He was associated with the Christian congregation from the age of twenty-three. His personal and public character were exemplified by his long official service.

William L. Cotton died in 1902. He was laid to rest in Connersville's City Cemetery.

Mary F. Cotton, William's third wife, died in 1906. She is buried in Connersville's City Cemetery.

Sources:

Barrows, Frederic Irving. *History of Fayette County Indiana Her People, Industries and Institutions*. Indianapolis, IN: B.F. Bowen & Company, Inc., 1917.

Hill, Lillard Henry. *Genealogy of the Hill Family of Garrard & Madison Counties, Kentucky*. 1978.

History of Fayette County, Indiana. Chicago, IL: Warner Beers & Co. 1885.

Old Cemeteries of Fayette County, Indiana. Connersville, IN: Indian Hill Chapter Daughters of the American Colonist. 1964.

Slevin, Ruth M. *Fayette County Marriages*. Book E p. 29, Book F p. 55 and Book 2 p 193.

Land was purchased in Franklin County, Indiana by William Cotton on October 11, 1824. This was probably William L. Cotton's grandfather, who died in 1834.

WILLIAM COTTON INVENTORY
Franklin County, Brookville Township, August Term AD 1836

Be it known that on the 1st day of August 1836 before me Nathaniel Hammond the undersigned a Justice of the Peace in and for the County aforesaid personally appeared Josiah Milsher and Hugh West appraisers duly appointed by Jesse Woodyard administrator of the estate of William Cotton, late of said county deceased who made oath in due form that the foregoing appraisement by them subscribed was made by them at the late residence of said deceased on the 8th day of October 1834 and that it comprises all and singular the goods and chattles belonging to said estate that was by said administrator exhibited to them and that the amount of the said appraisement as by us added is \$130.33½ and that said sum is in their unbiased judgment the true value of the same. And further dependents say not.

9 chairs	2.50	1 tin horn & cullender	.25
1 big wheel	1.00	1 tray & churn & bucket	1.00
1 little wheel	3.00	2 shuttles	.50
1 hetchel [hatchel]	1.50	2 bedspreads	1.00
1 cupboard	2.50	Lot of barrels	1.62
1 bureau	4.50	1 pr hames & collar	2.00
1 loom	5.00	1 table	.30
1 table	2.50	1 do [table]	.50
1 pr hand irons	.50	5 fat hogs	27.50
1 trammel	1.25	1 sow & pigs	2.50
1 wire sive [sieve]	.62	1 cow	9.00
1 fire shovel	.25	1 do [cow]	9.00
1 bed & bedding	10.00	1 do [cow]	9.00
Sundry articles of puter	4.50	1 heifer	6.00
[pewter]		10 sheep	9.00
2 axes	.75	1 lot of oald iron	.75
4 reeds	1.75	1 pitch fork	.37½
1 knife box	.12½	Total	\$136.33½
1 set knives & forks	1.00		
Pot mettle [metal]	3.00	8th October 1834	
1 coffee mill	.50	Hugh West	
1 shovel plough	.50	Josiah Milsher	
1 bull plough	3.00		
1 horse	20.00		
23 geese	2.37½		
1 auger &c	.42		

