

## CANAWLERS AT REST

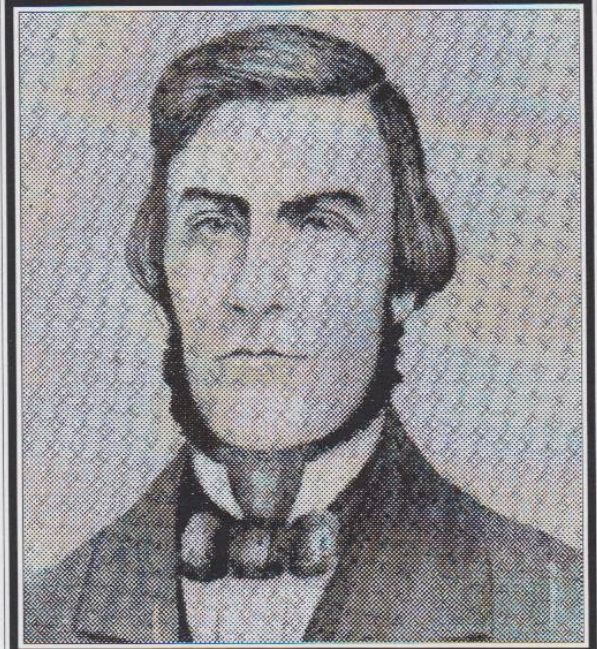
# FRANCIS S. AVELINE

**b. 1814**

**d. 1865**

**By Sue Simerman**

**Photo courtesy of Pioneers Resting  
in Historic Lindenwood**



Young Francis S. Aveline was born in 1814 and came to Fort Wayne, IN from Vincennes with his family in 1820. His father's name was James, but, since the family originally came from St. Jule, France, he was nicknamed St. Jule.

This was a fast growing period for the small town. Indian treaties had been signed in 1818 followed by the abandonment of the Fort in 1819. The town had many rough edges that lasted well into the canal era. In 1820, the population of Indiana was 147,178.

There is little information on Francis' early years at Fort Wayne. It is assumed that he had some schooling even though there were less than a few hundred people who were of permanent settlement.

Francis Comparet, who also came to Fort Wayne in 1820, established a fur trading business with the Indians. He bought one of the first lots offered in the new town when the land office opened in 1822 and lots were sold in 1824 by McCorkle and Barr. Francis Comparet also operated a trading post near the town of Northport on the Elkhart River in northeastern Indiana. He exchanged trinkets and whiskey for furs.

In a booklet published by the staff of the Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County entitled **Daily**

**Life in Early Fort Wayne** there is a reference to Francis Aveline and the moccasins or shoepacks that he made for the whole village (Fort Wayne). He had worked for a dry goods store for six years and may have made the moccasins to sell in this business.

Francis Aveline joined with Francis Comparet in undertaking the project of creating the Northport Reservoir and the feeder for the Erie-Michigan Canal. The reservoir exists today and is called Sylvan Lake. It is located at Rome City on Hwy. 9. Sylvan Lake was and still is an attraction for people who love fishing and boating. It was the "Western Chautauqua" for many years following the tradition of New York's summer school by the lake started in 1874 in Chautauqua, NY, which consisted of educational and recreational programs, lectures and concerts. This special attraction was on Kerr Island at Sylvan Lake.

Three surveys were made for this canal, two in 1829 and 1830 and the last in 1837. The latter was done by W. B. Mitchell and became the official route. The reservoir was created at the summit on a branch of the Elkhart River. Sometimes it is referred to as the North Fork and other times the Middle Fork.

The following was written by Ben Meeks and published in **Indiana Waterways** (a publication of the



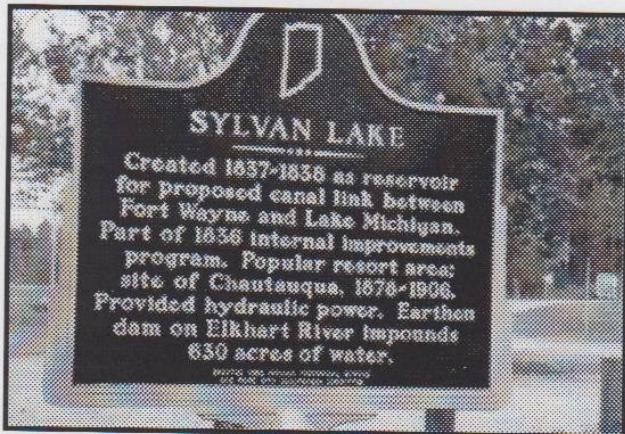
Canal Society of Indiana).

The story is told that there were many Frenchmen employed in the construction of the dam, as well as Irish. The two groups did not get along too well. The foreman Francis Aveline, who later built the famous Aveline Hotel in Fort Wayne, divided the crews up according to nationality and put the Irish who were Roman Catholics on the south end of the dam. The French stayed on the Northport end. Mr. Aveline said that anyone working on the south end would have to do "as the Romans do", so that is how Rome City received its name.



This old postcard shows "The Tumbles" or spillway of Sylvan Lake in Rome City, IN. and is post marked July 1911. Postcard from the collection of Sue Simerman.

The reservoir was created by building a dam on the fork of the Elkhart River near Northport. The town of Rome City was created from the canal workers' shanty town just to the south of the dam. Today's visitor should go to Sycamore Park that is located on Hwy. 9 just north of the town. The Canal Society of Indiana was instrumental in having a marker placed near the foot of the dam.



SYLVAN LAKE Created 1837-1838 as reservoir for proposed canal link between Fort Wayne and Lake Michigan. Part of 1836 Internal Improvements program. Popular resort area; site of Chautauqua, 1878-1906. Provided hydraulic power. Earthen dam on Elkhart River impounds 630 acres of water. P- Bob Schmidt



This postcard post marked August 6, 1910 shows a lady sitting in a gazebo at the edge of Sylvan Lake, Rome City, IN. Postcard from the collection of Sue Simerman.

at the junction of the Wabash and Erie Feeder (also known as the St. Joseph Feeder Canal) and Spy Run Creek, near Clinton and State Street and go to Michigan City.

Mr. Aveline is found again in Fort Wayne history. In 1841 he was a 4th Sergeant in the military organization called the Wayne Guards.

Another partner of Mr Aveline may have been Mr. John Rhinehart. In 1848 Whitley County placed advertisements asking for bids for the construction of a new courthouse. On June 7 the contract was given to Mr. Rhinehart, a master carpenter and house joiner, and his partner F. Aveline; however, they did not come forward at the proper time or with the required paper-



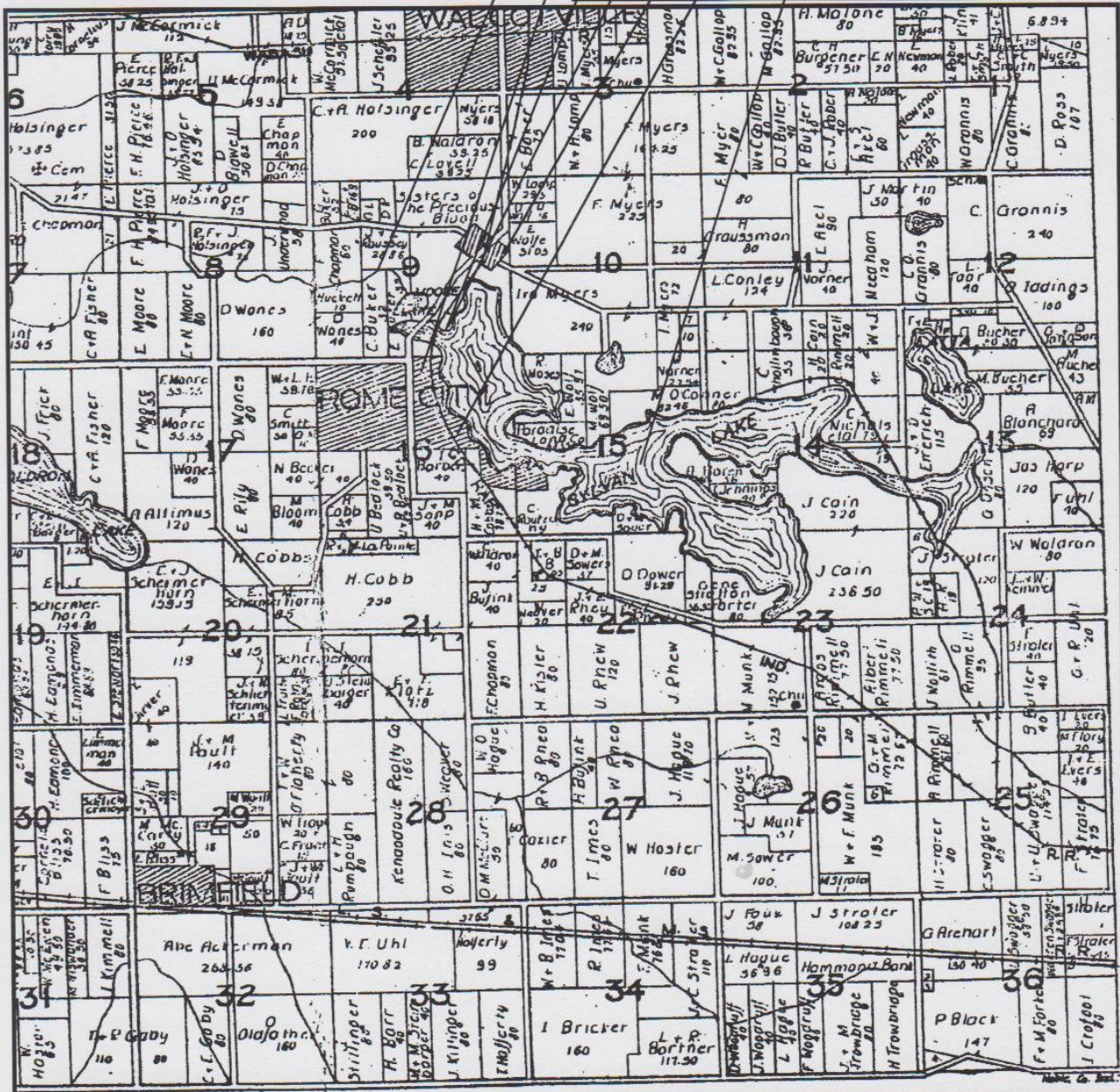
# THE HOOSIER PACKET - August 2003

work. The contract was let to Henry Swihart and Co. of Whitley Co. John Rhinehart was a significant builder during the 1840s. All of his known buildings in Fort Wayne have been destroyed.

this section of track no longer exists. It carried the nickname "the Fishing Line."

In 1854, Mr. Aveline was one of many principal speakers at a meeting held in regard to the building of a railroad from Fort Wayne to Grand Rapids, Michigan. The Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad was built, went through Rome City and ran on the earthen dike at the West end of Sylvan Lake, (Northport Reservoir). Sadly

This map of Orange Township, Noble County, IN shows:  
 Elkhart River  
 Rome City  
 Location of the dam and spillway  
 Sycamore Park  
 Northport  
 Route of the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad through the township  
 Sylvan Lake (Northport Reservoir)





### Aveline House

Francis Aveline is best known in Fort Wayne history for his building and ownership of a four story hotel known as the Aveline House. The contractor was D. J. Silver. Mr. Aveline started the hotel in 1860 and, because of the Civil War and financial problems, he had to take extra time for the construction period. It was finally completed in 1863, but Mr. Aveline had to rely on friends and public spirited citizens to help him furnish it for its opening.

The Aveline House was located at the SE corner of Berry and Calhoun Streets, south of the courthouse square. One of the tallest buildings at the time, it had a cupola on top. It should have had a view of the Wabash and Erie Canal to the North. A balcony on the second level was used for speech making by political candidates.

During this joyous time for the Avelines', tragedy struck in the form of the death of a son. The following is from Dawson's **Fort Wayne Daily Times** dated December 14, 1863.

The body of Captain Frank Aveline, of the 12th Indiana, was interred with military honors at Lindenwood Cemetery near this city (Fort Wayne) today. The Captain was killed, while leading his men in a charge at the Battle of Lookout Mountain. After having been buried a very short time upon the battlefield, his body was exhumed, and taken to

Louisville by his Father, and there embalmed - Thence brought to his home in this city for final interment. The funeral services were held at the Aveline House, by Rev. R. D. Robinson of this place. There was a large attendance of citizens and soldiers.

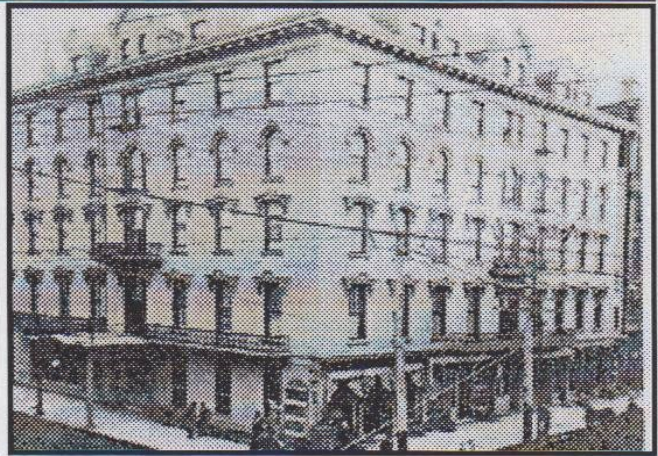
Francis S. Aveline died August 14, 1865 and is buried in Lindenwood Cemetery, section B lot 65. His death was directly attributed to his grief over the loss of his son, Captain Aveline. Francis Aveline has a small stone marker with F. S. Aveline across its curved top. It stands beside the tall marker for his son.

Francis and Junia Aveline had five children, Frank, George, Joseph, Mrs. John (Lavina) Shurick, and Mrs. Horace Clark. Mrs. Aveline died July 23, 1880 at the home of her son-in-law, John Shurick in Fort Wayne. Mrs. Aveline and her son George are buried here also but without markers. Their daughter Lavina Shurick is buried nearby. According to cemetery records, a Martha Aveline, who died September 8, 1902 at the age of 44, is buried in the same lot as Mr. and Mrs. Aveline. Her connection is unknown.

A few interesting things happened at the Aveline House. First, a meeting was held August 24, 1865 to organize the first post of the Grand Army of the Republic. Later, in 1895 at the Aveline, The Bell Telephone Company gave the people of Fort Wayne their first opportunity to hear voices and music sent over the wires from points 900 miles distant.

Left: The original Aveline House was built in 1863 at the corner of Berry and Calhoun streets in Ft. Wayne, IN.

Right: The new Aveline Hotel was the same building with a fifth floor added in the 1880s. Photos courtesy of Ft. Wayne Historical Society







This old postcard shows pictures of the "New Aveline" hotel, its proximity to the Allen County courthouse, and its remains after the fire on May 3, 1908. It is dated June 1, 1908. Postcard from the collection of Sue Simerman

An accidental meeting between three men at the Aveline led to the beginnings of the Jenney Light Co. John Kiess was employed by Evans-McDonald Co., a wholesale dry goods company, as a shipping clerk. He used the Aveline House as his residence. This was especially helpful since it was only one block from his place of employment. He became table mates of two gentlemen from Ann Arbor, Michigan - James A. Jenney, the electrician, and Walter S. Hicks, the businessman. They came to Fort Wayne to interest businessmen in a demonstration and possible sale of patent rights to their lighting system - an arc lamp and dynamo. John Kiess convinced them that his employer Ronald T. McDonald was the man that they should see. A demonstration was arranged for July 11, 1881 (another source gives Sept. 11, 1881) in the Evans-McDonald warehouse on Berry St. near Clinton St. The Fort Wayne Jenney Electric Light Company, which eventually became part of the General Electric Company, was founded. The first building was built in the 100 block of Superior Street. It backed up to the Wabash and Erie Canal's Orbison Basin. In 1881 this

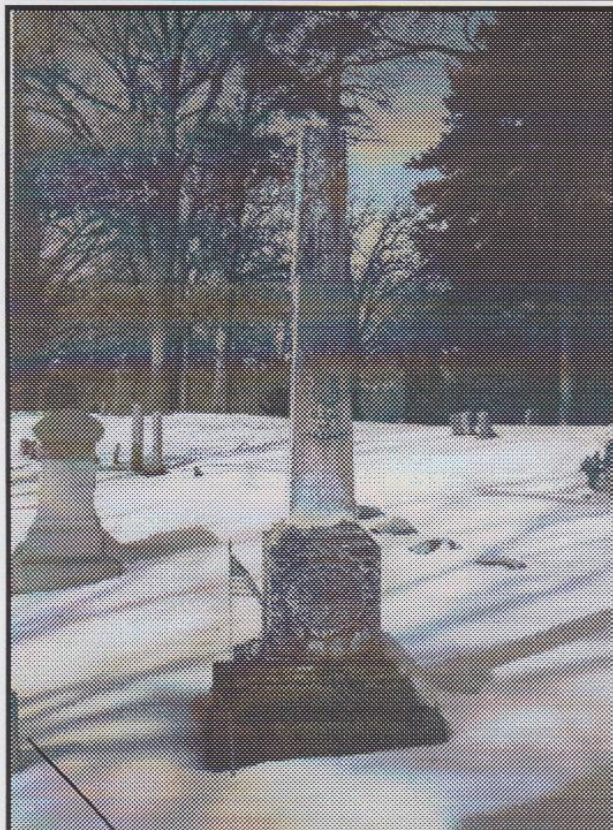
section of the canal was still being used to New Haven.

Because of a need for more hotel rooms, a fifth floor was added to the Aveline House in the late 1880s. It also was remodeled at this time. The hotel took on the nickname of "the New Aveline."

Early on the morning of May 3, 1908 the hotel was swept by fire. It was one of the city's worst fires to this date. The Aveline had 12 guests perish of the 61 registered. Some escaped by jumping from the lower windows while others used the ledges outside their windows to make their way to the roofs of neighboring buildings. The hotel housed many famous people in its 45 year history. They were politicians, vaudevillians and actors. Among the notables were Buffalo Bill and James Whitcomb Riley.

The Aveline House was not rebuilt. Today, where it once stood, there is an eight story office building that carries the logo Courtside in reference to its proximity to the courthouse.





Top: The front of the marker for F. B. (Frank) Aveline in Ft. Wayne's Lindenwood Cemetery reads:

**F. B. Aveline who died while gallantly leading the charge Missionary Ridge Nov. 25, 1863.**

The back reads: **He was born in Fort Wayne enlisted as a private the old 12 Ind. Regt. Col. 1 ink May 1864 ?**

The underlined part was almost unreadable.

Bottom: The grave stone of Francis S. Aveline, about whom this article is written, is a small stone located to the left of his son's monument.

Photos by Sue Simerman

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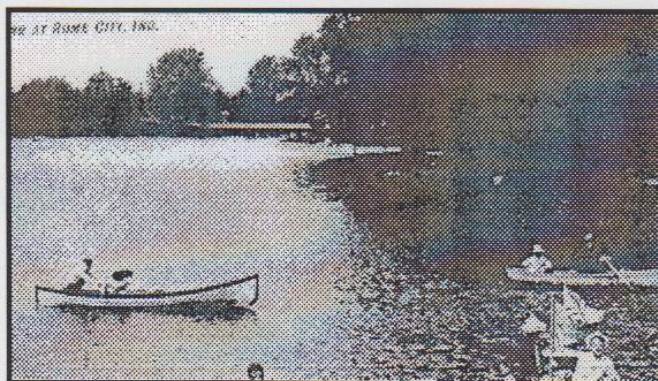
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Sylan Lake was and is used for pleasure boating but was never used to water the few diggings of the Erie & Michigan Canal.

Postcard from the collection of Sue Simerman