

CANAWLERS AT REST

WILLIAM JAMES BALL

b. Jan. 1, 1814

d. Apr. 21, 1874

By Carolyn I. Schmidt

Photos of the Ball plot stone and head stones by B. Michael McCormick.



William J. Ball was born in Waterfront, Virginia. He became an engineer. After the Indiana state legislature ordered the completion of the Wabash & Erie Canal to Terre Haute in February of 1842, it was W. J. Ball who estimated that it would cost \$83,160.84 to complete the work. He reported his findings to a committee of Terre Haute businessmen, who were promoting the completion of the canal eastward. His estimate was for building the locks with timber, not stone as was used on Eastern canals.

In 1847 Indiana Governor James Whitcomb formally turned over the Wabash & Erie Canal to Charles Butler, Thomas H. Blake and Nathan B. Palmer. These trustees appointed W. J. Ball the resident engineer of the southern division. Their other appointments included Jesse Lynch Williams, who was Ball's brother-in-law, chief engineer; Chauncey Carter superintendent of the western division; Stearns Fisher superintendent of the eastern division; and toll collectors for Fort Wayne, Lagro, Logansport, Lafayette, and Covington.

The year of his appointment W.J. Ball and his wife Julia Sterritt Creighton Ball moved to Terre Haute, Indiana. He purchased a frame house on the corner of South 6th and Poplar streets. There they reared their children William Creighton Ball, Susan W. Ball, Spencer F. Ball and Julia Ball.

Around 1849 citizens of Jeffersonville, Indiana, stirred up new interest in the earlier proposed projects of building a canal around the "Falls of the Ohio" on the

Indiana side of the Ohio River. Three attempts were made in 1805, 1817-19, and 1824-25, but all failed. In 1849 it was W. J. Ball who reported that a survey showed a ship channel as large as two hundred feet wide and about two miles long could be built for \$688,000. The Indiana Canal Company went so far as to dig the first shovel of dirt, but again that is as far as the project went.

The following incident, which includes Ball, shows how difficult it was to travel by roads in the mid-1800s. William J. Ball was summoned before the federal Grand Jury in March 1851 along with Col. Edmunds and Tom Bourne. They had to go from Terre Haute to Indianapolis by stagecoach. They left Terre Haute at seven o'clock in the evening. When the sun came up the following morning they found themselves at the foot of Blake's Hill, which was located only about three miles out of town. The stage continued on and they ate breakfast at Col. Hoskin's at Cloverland. When they reached Manhattan, near Greencastle, they received their second relay of fresh horses. They didn't arrive at Indianapolis until the next night. When they went before the Grand Jury judge, they were fined for being late. They said that the 72 mile journey had taken 73 hours. They proved to the judge that their late arrival was not their fault by sending for the stagecoach driver, who produced the waybill. The judge subsequently remitted their fines. Their trip back to Terre Haute took 63 hours. Traveling by canal boat was a smoother and sometimes faster way to travel. Had the Cross Cut Canal and the Central Canal been completed, W. J. might have arrived on time.

When the Balls became wealthier, W. J. Ball purchased Spring Hill Farm, once the home of William C. Linton. There he built a mansion. After living in it for some time, he traded it to Richard W. Thompson. This palatial mansion was moved to South 7th and Park Street. Later it was used as a fraternity house.

W. J. Ball also served as the chief engineer of the Terre Haute Drawbridge Company and the Terre Haute & Indianapolis (Richmond) Railroad. It was not uncommon for men, who had built the canals, to later build railroads. An example is Jesse Lynch Williams, who was the chief engineer of all of Indiana's canals and then built railroads.

W. J. Ball's children became outstanding citizens of Terre Haute:

William Creighton Ball and John S. Dickerson purchased the **Terre Haute Gazette** in 1872. W. C. Ball became the publisher. His residence was at 1138 S. 5th Street in Terre Haute.

Susan Williams Ball (November 27, 1851-1921) was born in Terre Haute and baptized at St. Stephens Episcopal Church. She was the secretary for the Terre Haute Decorative Arts Society, which was founded in 1882 for the self-education and cultural enrichment of women. There she showed her flair for writing. She went to work in the 1890s as the society editor for the **Terre Haute Gazette**. Beginning on October 1, 1904, she wrote "Women's World," a column for the **Saturday Spectator**, a weekly publication. The column ran for fourteen years. In it she advocated women's suffrage and equality for women. Some of her columns critiqued Terre Haute culture while others described her trips in the United States. Susan did not marry. She lived in the home of her brother W. C. Ball. In March 2000 she was feted as Terre Haute's "Woman in History."

Spencer F. Ball bought out Dickerson's interests in the **Terre Haute Gazette** in 1874 and joined with W.

C. Ball in the firm of W. C. Ball & Co. The Ball brothers changed the paper's allegiance to the Democratic Party.

Julia Ball married Allen Harry Donham on June 2, 1892. They resided at 1201 S. Sixth Street. Around 1902 they built a summer home on Honey Creek in Allentown and worked at improving it. Her husband died at the age of 53 from appendicitis and peritonitis.

William J. Ball died in Terre Haute, IN on April 20, 1874. He is buried in Terre Haute's Woodlawn Cemetery in Division 48, Lot 22, recorded in Bk 8.

Julia Sterritt Creighton Ball, who was born in Chillicothe, OH on November 10, 1821, died in Terre Haute, IN, on June 24, 1877. She is buried in the family plot next to her husband William J. Ball.

Sources:

Fatout, Paul. **Indiana Canals**. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1972.

"Indiana Odyssey: Writer Of A Woman's World - Susan W. Ball." Terre Haute, IN: Vigo County Public Library. March 2000 from the internet.

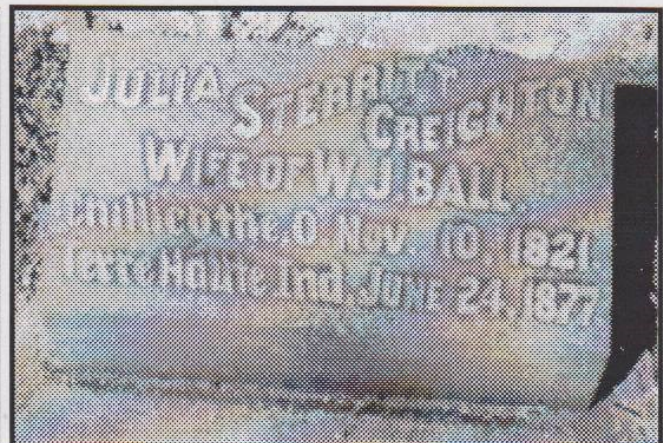
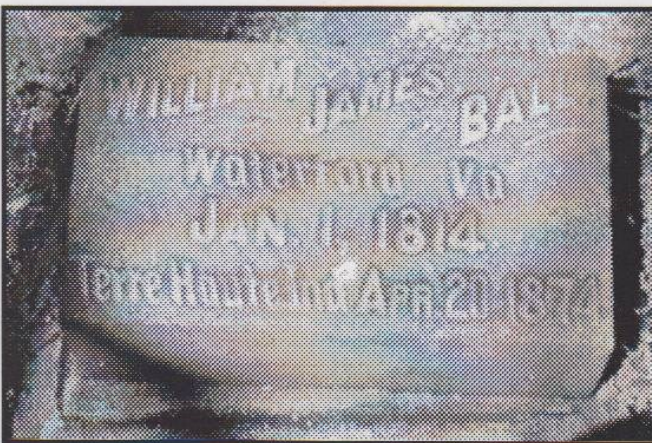
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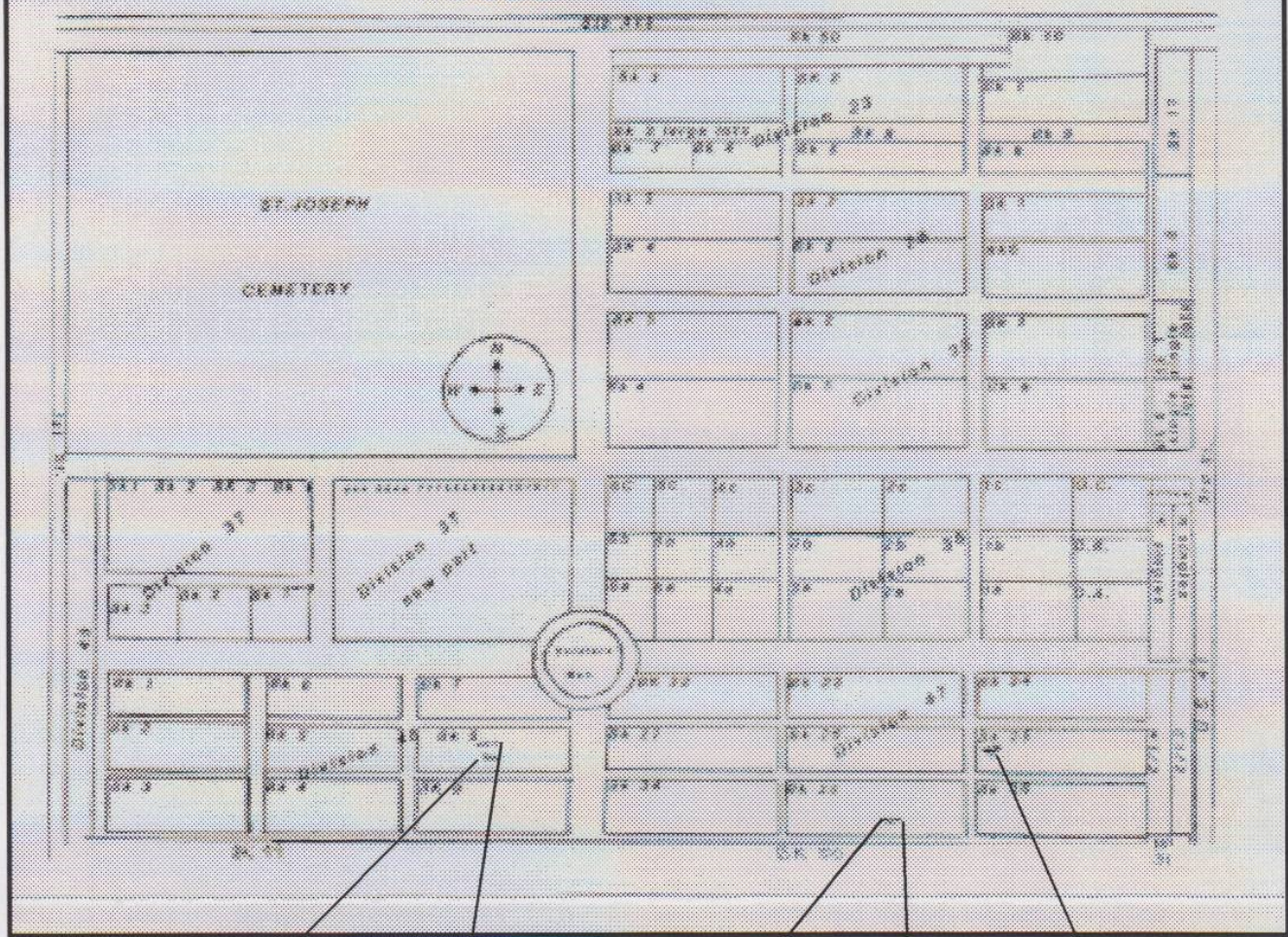
McCormick, Michael. "Wabash Valley Profiles: Allen Harry Donham." **Terre Haute Tribune-Star**. internet - no date given.

Kesner, Helen at Highland Lawn Cemetery, Terre Haute. Woodlawn Cemetery Burial Record Book. 8.

Purdy, Maxine. "St. Louis By Stage." pg. 30 Terre Haute Biographies. from the internet.



WOODLAWN CEMETERY



WOODLAWN CEMETERY, U.S. 41 (3RD STREET), TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA
CANAWLERS

William J. Ball
Div. 48 Lot 22 Bk 8

Edward A. Hannegan
Div. 48 Lot 18 Bk 8

William C. Linton
Div. 47 Lot 23 Bk 35

Thomas H. Blake
Div. 47 Lot 23 Bk 35

Thomas Dowling
Div. 47 Lot 5 Bk 25

LOCAL HISTORY WEEK
FEATURES CANALS

The Maumee Valley Heritage Corridor, which runs from Ft. Wayne, IN to Toledo, OH, initiated Local History Week last year as an "annual reminder to take in some of the places that make the Maumee Valley unique or to learn more about your personal history by visiting one of the region's excellent genealogical centers," says Dick Kudner, president of MVHC and CSI member from Perrysburg, OH. This was the second year for the program held May 22-29. Randy Buchman, a former MVHC board member and historian from Defiance, OH, came up with a plan to pick one theme each year on which to focus. This year's theme was "Canals."

On Monday at 8:35 a.m. radio station WONW conducted a question and answer program about the Miami & Erie canal. Did you know that Independence Dam State Park has six miles of canal towpath?

MVHC board member and local historian, Fred Folger, presented a slide lecture entitled "Our Canal" at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at Defiance College. He talked about the Miami and Erie Canal's route between Junction and Independence Dam and how it affected area commerce. He said that Junction, OH was once a bustling town where the Wabash & Erie Canal joined the Miami and Erie Canal. He pointed out that Ohio's other canal was the Ohio and Erie Canal. Canals brought people into the interior, carried out products, and provided water power to mills. The Defiance area still has canal lock remnants.