

# CANAWLERS AT REST

## ROBERT CISSNA

**b. February 2, 1800**  
**d. November 6, 1877**

**By Carolyn I. Schmidt**

Robert Cissna was born on February 2, 1800 in Pennsylvania. As a small boy he and his parents moved to Fairfield in Licking County, Ohio. His father and mother both died early in life and Robert had to support himself by manual labor.

Around 1823 Robert married Susan McCollum, who was about 22 years of age. As far as we know they had five children all of whom were born in Ohio:

Alexander Cissna

- b. April 25, 1826
- d. January 21, 1876
- m. 1846 to Jerusha Farrow
  - b. 1848
  - d. July 6(?), 1893

Member of 84th Indiana Regiment  
Died of softening of the brain

Louisa Cissna

- b. around 1830
- d. ?
- m. D. Patterson

Susan Cissna

- b. around 1833
- d. ?
- m. James McCrea June 1857

George Cissna

- b. around 1836
- d. December 8, 1858 age 22 years 11 days

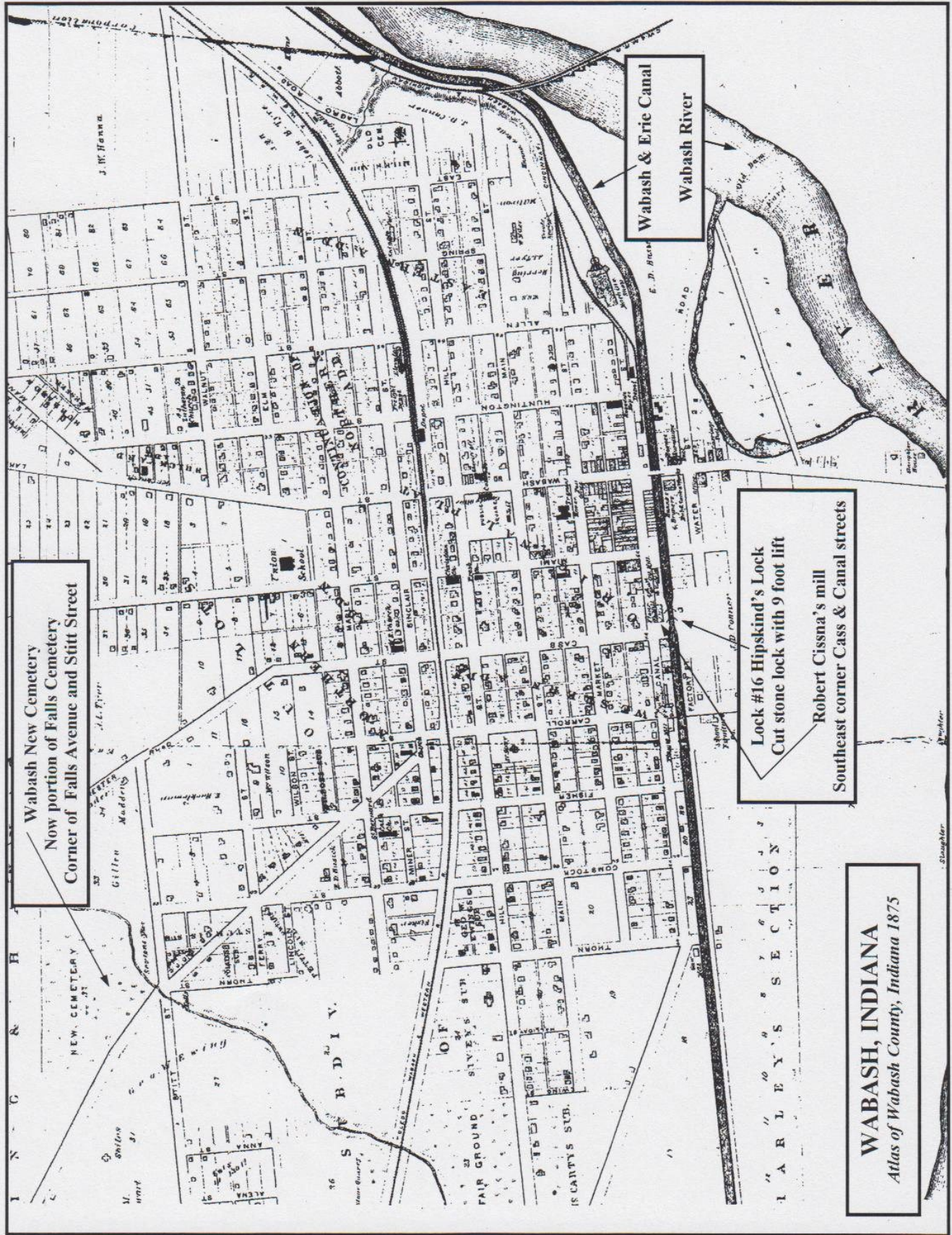
Mary Cissna

- b. around 1840
- d. October 1, 1847 age 7 years, 5 months, 5 days

In 1842 Robert left Ohio and moved to Iowa City, Iowa. He did not remain there long before moving to Logansport in Cass County, Indiana. The Wabash & Erie Canal prism had been completed to the town in the fall of 1838 and the canal opened on April 20, 1839. He saw how it helped develop businesses. He learned that water from the canal was being used to power mills all along its route from Toledo to Lafayette. He took a scouting trip to Wabash, Indiana, and found the perfect place to construct a grist mill alongside Wabash & Erie Canal Lock #16, which, in the spring of 1834, had been contracted to Lemuel G. Jones and Peter Myers to build. He knew that the site would meet the terms prescribed by the managers of the canal, and that he only needed to purchase it and get the consent of the State Legislature.

In the fall of 1843 Robert and his family moved to Wabash. On January 15, 1844 the state board of internal improvements was instructed by the State Legislature to lease Robert the waterpower at Lock #16 of the Wabash & Erie Canal "for the purpose of erecting thereon a mill house, and further to carry out and enjoy the object of the purchase or lease of said waterpower, to enter upon, take possession of, use and occupy so much of Canal Street in said Town of Wabash, as also so much of a space of public ground in said town lying west of fractional Lot No. 1 between the Wabash and Erie Canal and Canal Street as may lie and be situated within a line commencing at and running north from the north side of the tumble at said lock, fifty-eight feet, thence west forty-one feet, thence south to the canal, and thence east along the canal to the tumble or place of beginning;" also, "that said purchaser, or lessee, may for the purpose specified in the first section of this act, use and occupy any portion of the south part of Canal Street in said town not exceeding eighteen feet from north to south, not forty-one feet from east to west, commencing within and not varying more than ten feet in any direction from the northeast and northwest corners of the premises in the first section of this act particularly described; as also so much of the space of public ground in said town west of fractional Lot No. 1 as may be east of a line running from the northwest corner of the premises so used and occupied, to the Wabash & Erie Canal."

Robert hired Sanford Honeywell, a Wabash millwright and cider mill owner, to build the mill for him in 1844. [After 1880, Honeywell grew oranges in DeLand, Florida. He was the father of Mark C. Honeywell, the founder and president of the Honeywell Corporation (1927) after whom the Honeywell Center in Wabash is



named.) The mill was located at the southeast corner of Canal and Cass streets adjacent to Lock #16 of the Wabash & Erie Canal. [A mill stone from Cissna's mill with a plaque on it sits by the *Wabash Plain Dealer*, the local newspaper, which is currently located at the mill site.]

On September 2, 1845 Robert secured a lease of the premises for thirty years that was back dated starting on November 1, 1844. This gave him the right to use the surplus canal water that was not required to operate the lock for navigation "as would be sufficient, applied to an overshot wheel of eight feet diameter with proper gearing, to propel two four and one-half feet mills."

Robert utilized this canal water by diverting it to his mill and using its valuable power to turn the mill stones. His lease for water was reported by E. F. Lucas, General Superintendent of the Wabash & Erie Canal, in the *Indiana Documentary Journal* of December 1, 1845 as follows:

Robert Cissna, of the town of Wabash, is the lessee of two run of 4½ feet stones, at \$226 per annum each, one commencing December 16, 1844, and one run November 1, 1845, and payable semi-annually thereafter, on the 1st of May and November in each year. His wheel is 8-feet overshot, and the regulating weir that conducts the water to it is well and elegantly constructed, which admits of no surplus water to escape, and further, is well worthy of imitation by others. The rents are all paid up to November 1, 1845.

In a table of water power as leased on the Wabash and Erie Canal reported to the legislators on December 1846 in the *Indiana Documentary Journal*, we learn that this run of 2 stones on the 8 ft. wheel was allowed usage of 1237 cubic feet of canal water per minute, the annual rent formerly computed at \$452.00 and presently computed at \$678.00 for a number of standard powers of 3.00 with the computed rate per power as per lease of 226.00.

Although Colonel Hanna had improved the waterpower of the Wabash River and built a gristmill as early as 1835, it was the enterprise founded on Robert Cissna's grist and flour mill built in 1844 that eventually became Wabash's largest mill with a daily capacity of about one hundred barrels. D. Thompson & Son purchased the mill and operated it for several years. It then was operated by George W. Summerton and later with his sons, Clayton C. and George P. It was the original building of the Wabash Milling Company.

On a deed dated July 7, 1845, Solomon Hoover granted Robert Cissna Lot 41 of the original plat of Wabash, Indiana. The price of the lot was \$100.

The 1850 Census for Wabash County, Indiana, shows Robert at age 50 a miller with an estate valued at \$13,400. Those living with him are his wife, Susan age 48, and children Louisa age 20, Susan age 17 and George age 12.

In 1859 Robert built a woolen mill/factory that employed a force of about twenty men. Philip Smith worked as a laborer in the mill receiving fifty cents per day. The mill outgrew its building and had to be enlarged so that new looms could be added. Philip ran a carding machine and learned spinning, weaving and cloth finishing. Philip became the boss carder and had his wages increased several times. James McCrea, Robert Cissna's son-in-law also worked for him in this mill for six years.

Robert sold the mill to Mr. Stearns in 1862. Although Stearns had originally planned to erect a larger factory on the opposite side of the canal, he decided to build at Peru, Indiana, instead. Stearns took the woolen mill's foreman with him and Philip Smith took over as the foreman of the Wabash mill that by then employed sixty hands. Philip's wages were increased to \$2.75 per day. He remained the foreman for two and a half years.

The 1860 Census shows Robert at age 60 working in a woolen factory with an estate valued at \$11,000 and personal property valued at \$5,000. Living with him are his wife Susan age 58 keeping house and Mary Musser, age 28 housework.

Although the town of Wabash had been incorporated in 1849, it was in the class of laws designed as "Local" and the State abandoned these "Special Laws." To re-organize the town had to be re-incorporated. Meetings ensued that led to an election held on Tuesday, May 16, 1854, at the courthouse creating 5 wards and on July 24, 1854 an election was held to select a trustee for each ward. Elections were held again in 1855 and 1856. In 1857 Robert Cissna was elected as a trustee of the Fourth Ward, which comprised all territory from north to south between Miami and Cass streets.

After the state school law was passed in 1852 several attempts were made to build the Union Schoolhouse in Wabash. They failed and the town board of trustees couldn't reach agreement. Finally five new trustees were appointed for school purposes as follows: Robert Cissna, M. R. Crabill, Albert Pawling, Warden McLees and Daniel Sayre. These men worked together and in the fall of 1857 a school fund was made available, plans for the building adopted and contracts let. The cornerstone of the school was laid on May 18, 1858 and in September of 1859 the first term of the Wabash graded schools began.

On July 6, 1863 John Hunt Morgan's Raiders crossed the Ohio River at Brandenburg, Kentucky, and entered Indiana. On July 9 Indiana's Governor Oliver P. Morton called for citizens to organize into military companies and be subject to orders. This Civil War group was known as the Indiana Legion.

In Wabash a war meeting was held on July 11 at the court house to organize into the military those over 45 years of age. A roll of paper was presented for signatures under the following terms:

ROLL OF WABASH PIONEERS.

ARTICLE I. The undersigned associate themselves into a military company, the persons composing it being over forty-five years of age and exempt from military duty.

ART. II. We do hereby —each member for himself —voluntarily waive all right of exemption as set on in the foregoing article, and tender our services, and present a company that shall be held and holds itself, as a part of the Indiana Legion subject to the orders of the Governor for all military purposes.

ART. III. This company pledges itself to loyalty, and hearty supports the Union and the Government. This article is fundamental, and shall not be changed.

Robert Cissna was among the 86 signatures joining in this effort. They met every evening at 7 p.m. at the courthouse for roll call and drill awaiting further orders. They were relieved from duty on July 15, 1863 in an address by Governor Morton stating that the duties of these "minute men" were no longer needed.

After the national banking law of February 25, 1863 was passed, the First National Bank of Wabash was organized with a capital stock of \$50,000 and the privilege of an increase to \$100,000. Robert Cissna was its president and John L. Knight its cashier. The bank became extremely successful and by 1883 needed to enlarge the facilities.

In 1868-69 Robert Cissna, Joseph Crabbs, Esq. (b. October 10, 1815, d. February 14, 1890), and Judge John L. Knight (b. December 27, 1816, d. ?) organized the Citizens' Bank in Wabash with a capital of \$50,000. Robert was its president, Joseph Crabbs its vice-president and Judge Knight its cashier. James McCrea, Robert's son-in-law later became the bank's president and principal stockholder, owning five-sixths of it. The institution was prosperous.

The 1870 Census for Wabash County, Indiana, shows Robert at age 70 as a banker with an estate valued at \$13,000 and personal property valued at \$2,000. His wife Susan is 68 years old and is keeping house. They have a domestic servant, Kate Ott age 16, living with them.

Robert lived out the rest of his life in Wabash. He had been actively "engaged in enterprises calculated to develop the resources of the country, or foster and increase the business of the town and city."

On the morning of November 6, 1877, Robert Cissna passed away having suffered greatly for some time with cancer on his face. He was survived by Susan, his wife of 54 years, and his two daughters, Mrs. D. Patterson and Mrs. James McCrea. A large group of citizens followed his remains to Falls Cemetery in Wabash, Indiana, where he was buried. The following obituaries ran in Wabash County newspapers:

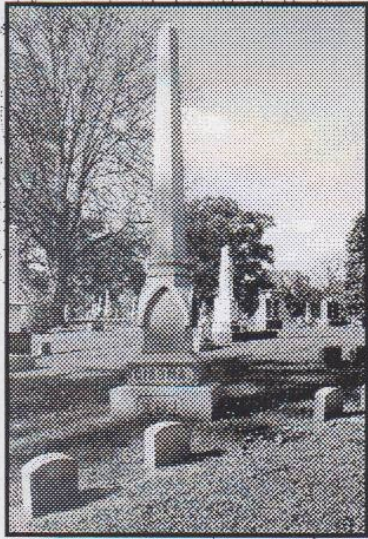
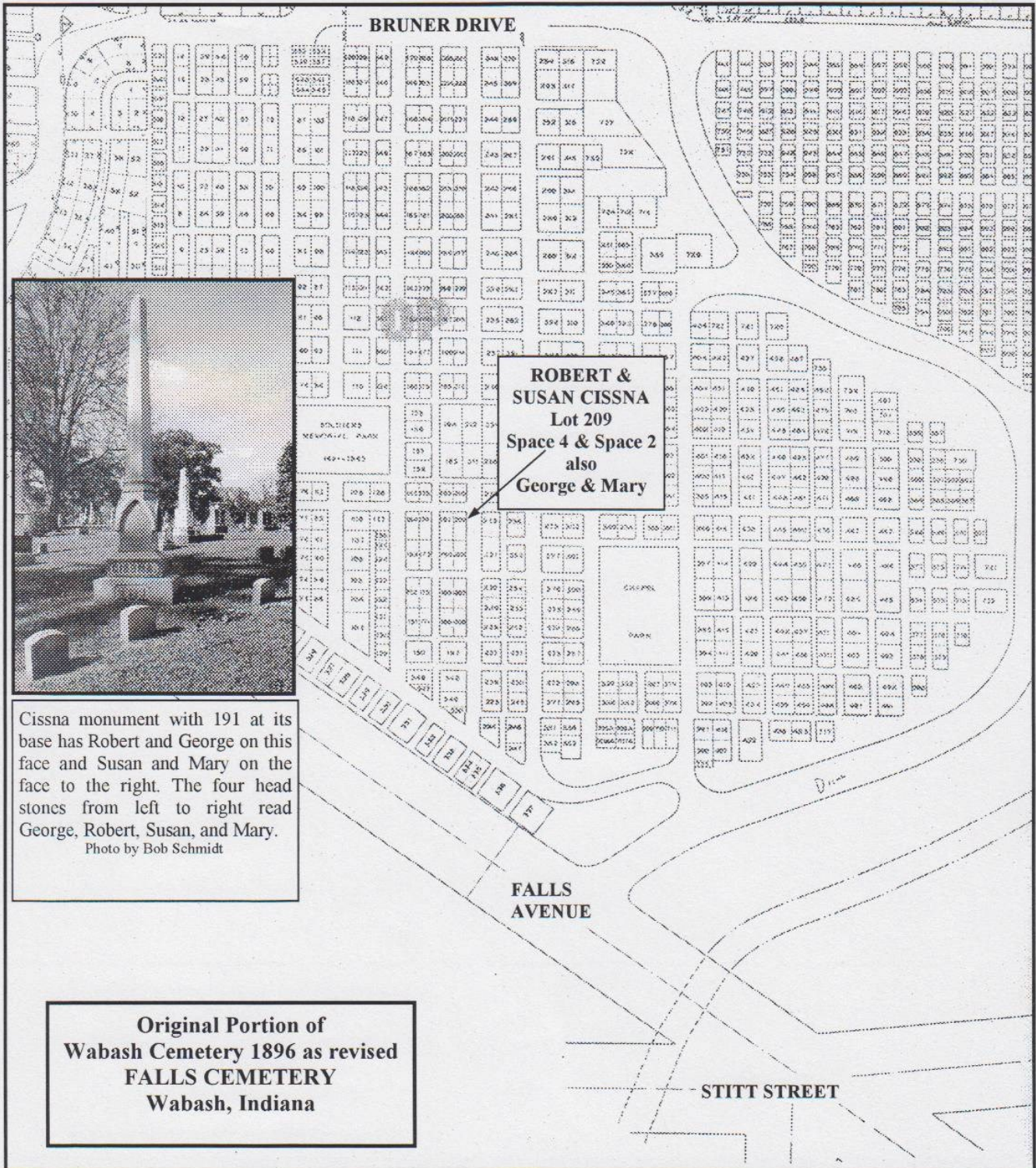
Wabash Plain Dealer November 9, 1877

—Mr. Robert Cissna was buried yesterday. Not one of the very earliest to settle in this city, he was one of its inhabitants for more than a third of a century. Though by some he was thought not easy of approach, the general verdict of those who knew him longest and best will be that his seeming indisposition to conciliate grew out of a jealous regard for the public advantage, and was scarcely ever exhibited in matters pertaining to his private interests. All agree in pronouncing him an honest man and a public-spirited citizen; one who fought harder for what he thought was the public interest than he did for his own; less yielding when the public interest was involved than when his individual rights were likely to suffer. For many of our public improvements, as well as much of our city's growth and prosperity, those who survive him are indebted to his advice, his money and his influence. Those who knew Robert Cissna only after age and infirmity began to drive him out of business, have little conception of the strength of his judgment, the simplicity of his manner, the industry and frugality of his habits, and the energy and force of his character in the days of his active life. He will be long and favorably remembered by those who knew him best. This item is not meant in any sense as an obituary —that appears in another part of this paper —but we were unwilling one should depart from among us we had favorably known so long, and who had formed so conspicuous a part in our city history, without at least a passing mention on the editorial side of our paper. He did our people much good and no harm.

Wabash Weekly Courier November 10, 1877

Mr. Robert Cissna, one of the oldest residents of this county, and for a number of years among the leading men of Wabash, died at his residence in this city last Tuesday and was buried in Falls Cemetery, on Thursday. Mr. Cissna was 77 years of age and had been a resident of this city thirty-four years.

Lagro Local & Express November 10, 1877 said that Robert Cissna died of facial cancer.



Cissna monument with 191 at its base has Robert and George on this face and Susan and Mary on the face to the right. The four head stones from left to right read George, Robert, Susan, and Mary.  
Photo by Bob Schmidt

**Original Portion of  
Wabash Cemetery 1896 as revised  
FALLS CEMETERY  
Wabash, Indiana**

Robert's will was written on March 21, 1877 were Francis M. Eagle and Thomas McNamee. [Note and recorded on November 21, 1877 following his that his two surviving daughters were not mentioned in death. In it is listed Susan Cissna, his wife, and the four the will. Apparently he thought that they had husbands eldest children of their son Alexander, who had died the to provide for them while Alexander's children were previous year. These were James, Geo, John and Gertie without a father. According to the Federal Census of Goodlander. There was no executor and the witnesses 1870 Alexander and Jerusha had six children James age

21, Girty age 15, Jackson (John?) age 12, George age 9, Kittie age 3, and Otey age 3½ months. Why Kittie was left out of the will we do not know. Otey had not been born when the will was written.]

In Wabash County histories Robert Cissna is described as "an architect of his own fortune" who had "great vital energy, discreet judgment and indomitable will in every emergency." "He was a man of well poised mind, positive from conviction, and stubborn only in the defense of right as he saw it; every ready to listen to reason, and yielded his own opinions when argument and facts demonstrated their faultiness."

Apparently Robert liked to clash with the editor of the *Plain Dealer*. One reminiscence reported that "Mr. Cissna was an old-time abolitionist and A. P. Ferry, the editor of the *Plain Dealer*, was also a rank republican, but they would disagree sometimes and it was worth more than the price of a trip to Nevada when they joined issues and got into a political scrap — although their quarrels never led to anything more serious than the use of adjectives.

As a business man he was described as "having a clear conception of business details and of the means whereby any desired result might be obtained....He was seldom mistaken....the people of Wabash especially, and of the county generally, owe the satisfactory introduction and prosecution of their present excellent gravel road and turnpike system."

Susan McCollum Cissna, Robert's wife, died on November 14, 1878 at the age of 77. Note that her obituaries carry the name of her husband rather than her first name as was the custom at that time.

Wabash Weekly Courier November 16, 1878  
Mrs. Robert Cissna, one of the oldest residents of Wabash county, died of apoplexy [stroke] at her late residence in this city last Thursday about ten o'clock, A.M. She had not been in good health for several months. But had not been seriously affected at any time. For some weeks past the deceased had given herself a great deal of trouble about her financial affairs, and on Thursday morning Mr. Thomas McNamee called upon her to set her mind at ease on that subject as well as he was able. Mr. Mc was about to depart when Mrs. Cissna called to him, as if wishing further conversation, and when he returned she gasped a few times, fell in his arms and died in a moment without a struggle. The deceased was the wife of the late Robert Cissna, one of the prominent pioneer citizens of Wabash county. She was a highly respected lady and her sudden and unexpected death will be deeply regretted by her many friends. Mr. James McCrea and wife, the latter a daughter of the deceased, were visiting in Pennsylvania at the time of her death.

They were immediately telegraphed for and are expected to arrive this (Friday) evening. No burial arrangements will be made until the return of Mr. and Mrs. McCrea.

Lagro Local & Express November 16, 1878 reported the death of the wife of Robert Cissna.

Sources:

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Cissna tombstone listing Robert, Susan, George and Mary

Gray, Kenneth E. *Bye-gone Memories of Wabash County.*

Falls Cemetery Plot Book, Wabash Carnegie Public Library.

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