

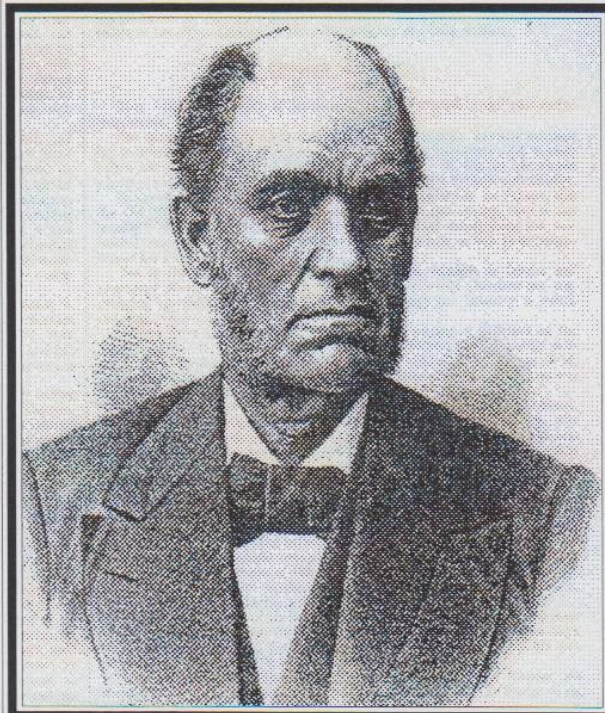
CANAWLERS AT REST

THOMAS COLEMAN

b. August 2, 1818
d. September 18, 1887

By Carolyn I. Schmidt

Picture from: Combined Atlas Map
of Tippecanoe County, Indiana



Thomas Coleman was born on August 2, 1818 in Jefferson County, Ohio, to Cephas and Rossana Ellis Coleman. This pioneer family had nine children, was poor and Thomas' education was attained by attending a county school three months each year. He learned to read and write by the age of sixteen and decided to leave home to start his life's voyage. Even though he had no money or influential friend to help him, he was determined to rise from poverty, obscurity and the ignorance that surrounded him.

His first employment was that of driver on the Ohio & Erie Canal between Cleveland and Portsmouth. The pay was poor, but his industrious and thrifty ways paid off. By 1841, after seven years of hard work, he had saved enough money to become part owner of the canal boat and was its captain. Canaling was good business. By 1845, he, along with Mr. Standort of Cleveland, bought five canal boats and put them on the Miami & Erie Canal. The following year they bought six more boats and sold them at a good profit. During this time Coleman sought other employment during the winters when the canal froze and navigation halted. For six winters he purchased and shipped horses from the neighborhood of New Philadelphia, Ohio, to the Baltimore market, over the mountains.

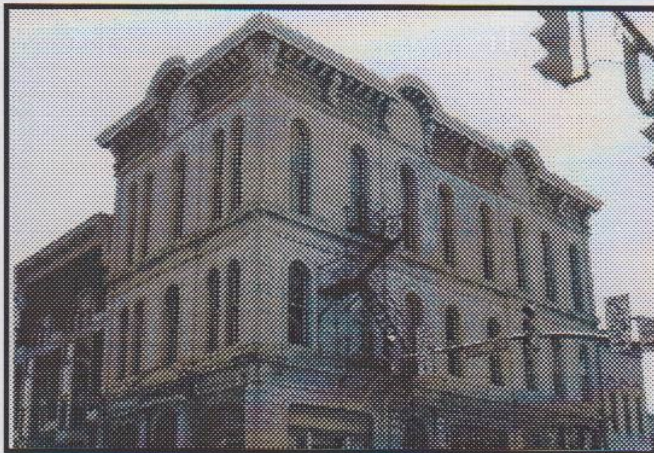
In 1847, Coleman sold his boating business and bought a farm and a warehouse in Lagro, Wabash County, Indiana. For five years he shipped grain on his own boats to Toledo on the Wabash & Erie Canal.

While in Lagro, Coleman met Julia Wheeler and married her. They eventually had nine children. Three of these children - Julia, Walker and Dickie - died under the age of 2. In the 1860 census, the children listed for Thomas and Julia Coleman were: Ellen-8, Sarah-7, George-6, Adeline-2; also living in the household was Dewit Wheeler-21. In the 1870 census their children were: Alice (Ellen)-18, Sallie (Sarah)-17, George-16, Adie (Adeline)-12, Kathe-8 and Harry-5. In the 1880 census their children listed were Adeline-22, Kate-18 and Harry-15.

In 1852, Coleman sold his Lagro property, made a huge profit over the purchase price and moved to Tippecanoe County where he bought the Ben Eastborn farm of 420 acres for \$5,000. For two years he farmed and was in the stock business. He then sold the farm for \$10,500.

Coleman moved to Lafayette. He went into the broker's business handling stock, buying notes and mortgages, and lending money. His success in handling money attracted the attention of John L. Reynolds, a banker and capitalist. In 1857 they formed a partnership called Coleman and Co. that lasted until 1861. For six years Coleman continued the business alone. He also bought and sold real estate.

In 1858, Coleman bought the Reuben Steely farm, which consisted of 240 acres and was in the suburbs of Lafayette. He kept buying land until he had over 500 acres. He built a mansion in appearance and



Left: The Thomas Coleman residence on a hill at the head of Main Street and Perrin Avenue in Lafayette was one the largest homes at the time. A marker in front of the home reads;

PERRIN HISTORIC DISTRICT

Platted in 1873, this district was Lafayette's first planned residential area which conformed to geographic contours. It was developed by James J. Perrin, Margaret Cason Perrin, Edward Asher, and Consider Tinkler. Listed in National Register of Historic Places, 1979.

Right: Thomas Coleman built the Coleman Block for the Farmers' Bank on the southeast corner of Third & Columbia Streets on Lafayette's courthouse square. Today the building bears a plaque that reads: Wabash Valley Trust, 1872, Coleman - Stallard & Schuh

Photos by Bob Schmidt



surroundings for a country home. His city residence located at the head of Main Street and Perrin Avenue was one of the largest and most beautiful in the city at that time. In 1906 William G. and Anna Wagner Gude purchased the city home. William was the cashier for the Merchants' National Bank.

In 1867 Coleman formed a partnership with T. G. Rainey* and organized the Farmers' Bank of Lafayette. He was the capitalist and Rainey received a part of the profits as pay for his services.

Five years later Coleman erected the handsome Coleman Block on the southeast corner of Third and Columbia streets in Lafayette to accommodate the Farmers' Bank. Coleman and Rainey's partnership lasted for ten years until Coleman's constantly changing procedures got on Rainey's nerves. In 1877 Coleman began doing business alone once again. That same year Edgar H. Andress and Thomas Wood, under the firm name of Andress & Wood, conducted a private bank in the east room of the Coleman Bank building. It never grew to be a large institution and closed after a short

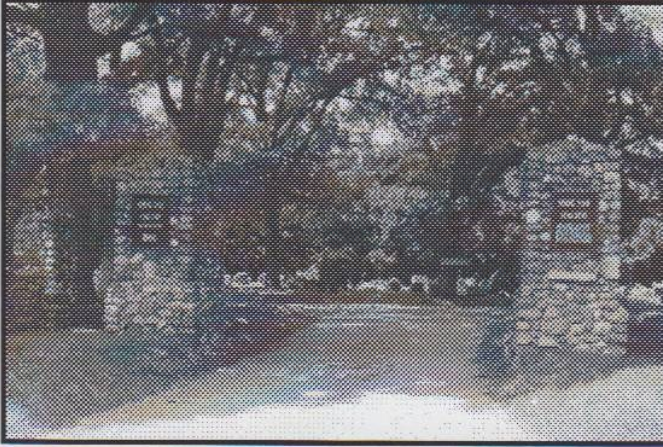
time. The Farmers' Bank finally closed about 1880. On May 1, 1901, the Farmers and Traders' Bank was incorporated under state charter and occupied the building Coleman built for his Farmers' Bank.

By the age of 60, Coleman was a millionaire. He had substantial property in Indiana and valuable investments in Kansas, Colorado, and other western states.

Thomas Coleman, a familiar figure in Lafayette banking circles in the sixties and seventies, is described in *Past & Present of Tippecanoe County, Indiana* as "a rough diamond. Under a brusque and to some forbidding exterior, he carried a kind heart; never very generous to delinquent debtors, perhaps, but very generous to his family, and in spots to his near friends and any public enterprise or charity that happened to strike his fancy. He was a keen, shrewd, level-headed man of business, and a pronounced success both as a farmer and a banker."

Coleman's success is credited to making the best

* Thomas G. Rainey had a long career in connection with Lafayette banks. In 1850 he moved to Lafayette from Pennsylvania. He was in his early twenties. He was employed by the Lafayette Insurance Company, which also did a banking business. From 1852-1858 he was cashier of the Commercial Bank, the progenitor of the First National Bank, and then was employed by Mr. Fowler at the Bank of the State, which became the National State Bank and then the National Fowler Bank. There he was a paying teller until he resigned to go into partnership with Coleman. Their partnership was dissolved because Coleman was too erratic and unique and Rainey was steady-going. Rainey continued on as an employee for a short time thereafter before going into the Lafayette Savings Bank as a teller. He served the latter for over thirty years.



Above left: Entrance to Springdale Cemetery, Lafayette, IN.

Above right: Head stone for Thomas Coleman

Right: **COLEMAN MARKER**

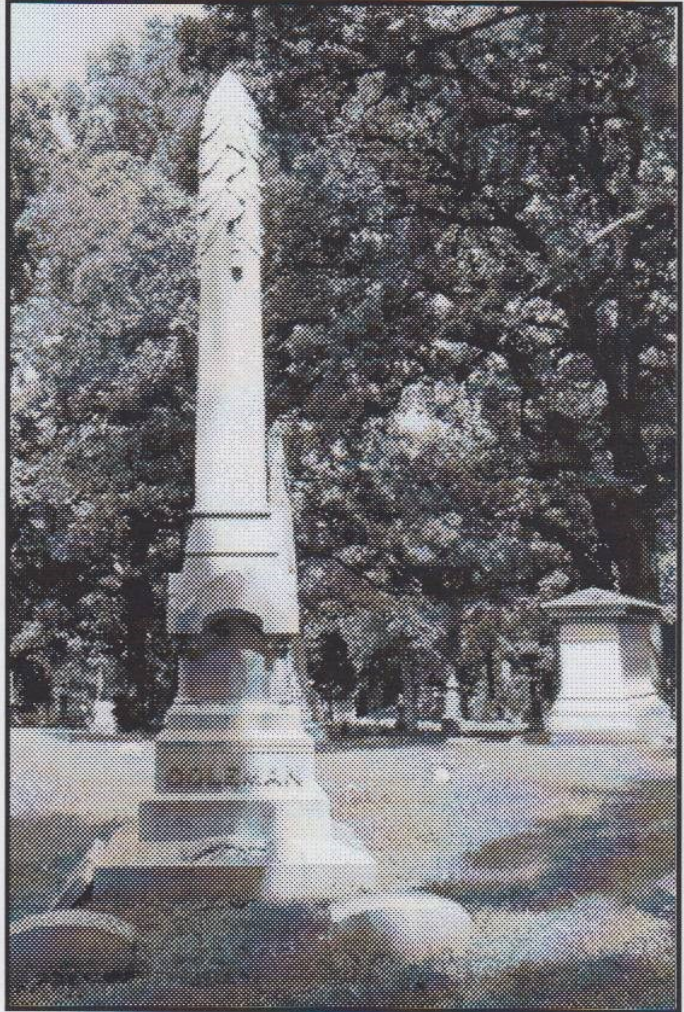
Two headstone are placed before the Coleman marker. The one of the left is for Thomas Coleman, Born Aug. 2, 1818 Died Sept. 18, 1887. The one on the right is for Julia Coleman, Born Sept. 17, 1825, Died Aug. 30, 1905. Three small head stones lean at the base on the left side of the monument. They read:

Julia, Daughter of Thomas & Julia Coleman, Died Sept. 26, 1867, Aged 1 Yr 1 Mo 13 D. How shall we miss our darling

Walker, Son of Thoas & Julia Coleman, Died Oct 5, 1864, Aged 1 Yr 19 D, How fondly we loved him

Our Little Dickie, Son of Thomas & Julia Coleman, Died Jan. 22, 1862, Aged 4 Mo 17 D, Herein lies one of our own dear precious

Photos B. Schmidt



of what he had on hand and giving it his undivided attention. He also gave to things that benefited the public. He subscribed to railroad stock, assisted in raising money to equip the soldiers in the Civil War, and gave the city a town clock at his own expense. He made sure all his children had a good education.

Thomas Coleman died at Lafayette, Indiana, on September 18, 1887. He is buried in Springdale Cemetery, in Lafayette, Tippecanoe County, Indiana. His will is in Tippecanoe County Will Book 5, page 035. The cemetery is on S.R. 25 north of its junction with U.S. 52 at 2580 S.R. 25 N. When entering Springdale Cemetery take the main road and follow the signs to the cemetery office. Turn right onto the road across from the office. His stone is to your left in Section 23, Lot 227.

Sources:

Biographical Record and Pictorial Album of Tippecanoe County, Indiana. Chicago, IL / The Lewis Publishing Company, 1888.

Combined Atlas Map of Tippecanoe County, Indiana. Kingman Bros. 1878,

DeHart, Gen. R. P. Past and Present of Tippecanoe County, Indiana. Indianapolis, IN/B. F. Bowen & Co. Publishers. 1909.