

CANAWLERS
AT REST

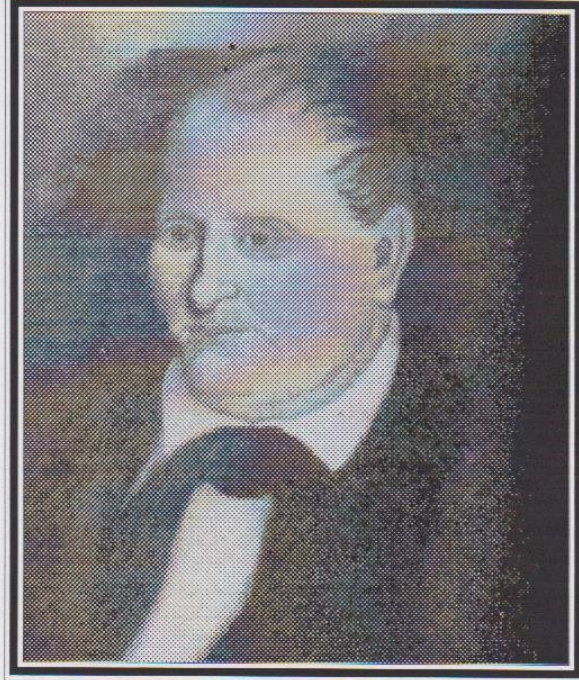
**FRANCIS
COMPARET**

b. Oct. 12, 1796

d. Feb. 20, 1845

By Cynthia Powers

Painting courtesy of Allen County-Fort Wayne
Historical Society



Francis Comparet, a French Canadian who arrived in Fort Wayne in 1820, had his fingers in almost every "pie" in the growing community. His first enterprise was establishing, with A. Coquillard and Benjamin Kercheval, a fur trading post for John Jacob Astor's American Fur Co.

As "county agent" in 1830 he was directed to purchase, at \$1.25 per acre, 20 acres of the old Fort property, using money borrowed by Henry Rudisill. The lots were then sold for home building. The next year he was directed by the board of commissioners to contract for "the cutting off of the brush and stumps from the public square" preparing for the building of the first Court House. That building was so poorly built that it was only used for 10 years and torn down.

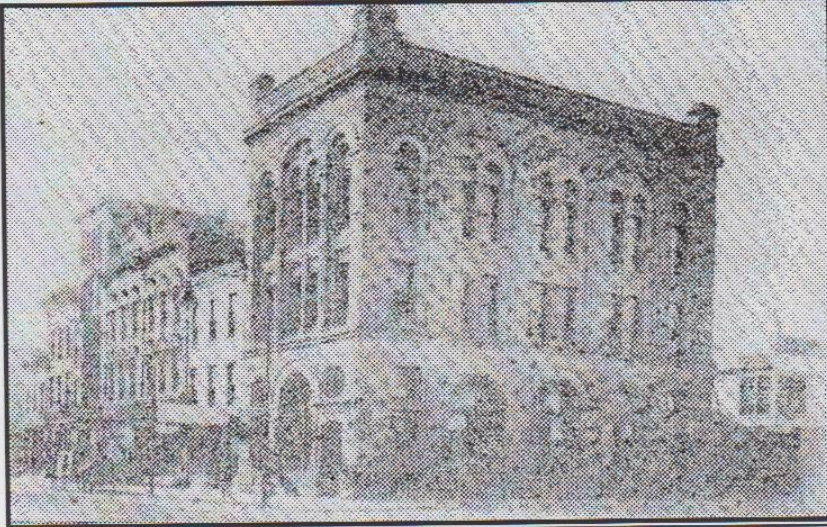
In 1834, one of the ads in the *Fort Wayne Sentinel* was for "good strong beer" brewed by Comparet and Coquillard.

In July 1835 Mr. Comparet was on the committee which went to Huntington (then known as Flint Springs) to greet the first three boats which came from Fort Wayne, on the brand new Wabash and Erie Canal. He then built a canal boat, the "Chief Richardville," which was owned by the four Mahon brothers. (They also owned the "Indiana," the "Clyde," and the "Wabash," and operated a canal port just west of Roanoke, where Mahon Road now joins US 24 near the Econoasis gas station.) Also in 1835 a new steam sawmill was opened on the Archer farm; after three

years it was sold to David Archer (who owned the land) and Mr. Comparet.

1835 was a busy year for Mr. Comparet, for in November his home, a small brick building on the south side of Columbia Street west of Clinton, was the site of the first bank organized in Fort Wayne. It was a branch of the State Bank of Indiana, and was unusual for that time in that its charter required it to redeem its notes in "specie," that is, in coins. In fact if at any time it refused to do this, its charter was to be forfeited. This put it in a class with the best banks in history, and distinguished it from so-called "wildcat" banks that were becoming common in the surrounding states. In Mr. Comparet's house were stored "kegs of specie" worth \$20,000. The coins were stored in a large oak chest with padlocks, but the overflow was kept lying on a table. For security reasons, Oliver Jefferds was employed to sleep there during the winter of 1835.

History does not record Mrs. Comparet's reaction to sharing her home, which by that time included three small children, with a bank! At least the bank paid the Comparets \$200 a year in rent. (The back rooms and garden were rented for \$5 per month to Smallwood Noel, a justice of the peace.) Luckily by 1837 a new building was built for the bank, which had living quarters for its manager, Hugh McCullough. (This new career for Mr. McCullough was a life-changing event for him, as he later became Secretary of the Treasury under Presidents Lincoln and Johnson.) The bank survived several reorganizations but finally went out of business



The bank started in Comparet's home in 1835 as a branch of the State Bank of Indiana moved to this new bank building in 1837. Several reorganizations took place and finally collapsed during the Great Depression as The Old National Bank.

Photo courtesy the Fort Wayne News-Sentinel

Masonic Hall, before any Catholic Church was built. But later, when Fr. Badin ordered some religious books to help with his teaching, Mr. Comparet was "outraged at the cost and threatened to send them back." Eventually Fr. Badin paid for them himself. Later, after Fr. Badin had left, Mr. Comparet wrote to the bishop in Vincennes that there had been no mass in Fort Wayne for seven months, and pleaded for a priest who spoke German as well as English. This resulted in the arrival of Fr. Simon Lalumiere in 1835—just in time to help deal with the "Irish War" in Lagro, IN.

In 1838 Mr. Comparet laid out the village of Northport, near Rome City. For a short time it had a tannery, a tavern and two stores. Now its site is marked by the old Northport Cemetery, to be found just east of Indiana Highway 9, on County Road

in the Great Depression under the name of the Old National Bank.

Later Mr. Comparet operated a hotel, the "American House," on Columbia Street, which had been built in 1836. And he was one of a series of owners of a flour mill on the Maumee, near the present Hanover St., which was destroyed by fire in 1879.

The first fire company in Fort Wayne was organized in 1839. It included Francis Comparet as one of its members along with many other prominent citizens.

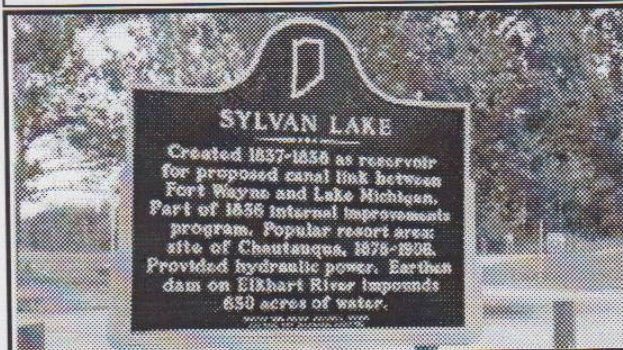
Mr. Comparet was Catholic, and hosted Fr. Stephen Badin on the occasion of his first visit to Fort Wayne in 1830. Since Mr. Comparet was a member of the Masonic Order (despite official Catholic disapproval), he was able to arrange for Fr. Badin to preach in the

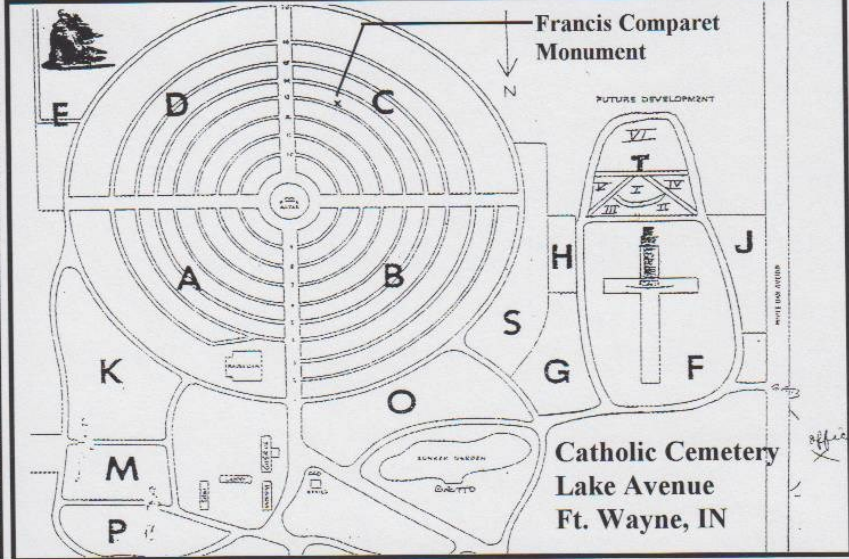
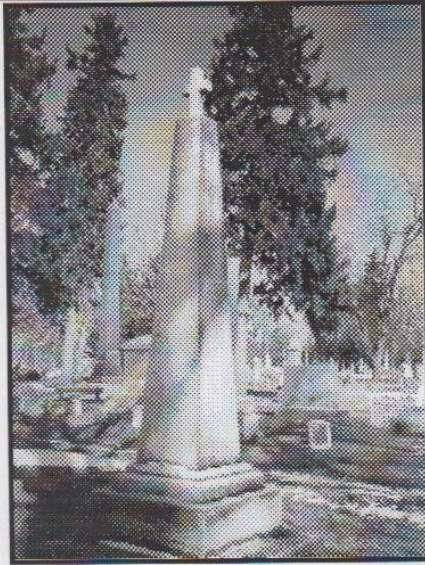
300 East, 0.2 miles north of Northport Road. Several accounts credit Mr. Comparet with building the dam at Rome City which created Sylvan Lake. This was to be a reservoir for a canal planned to connect the Wabash and Erie with Lake Michigan; however this canal was never built.

According to the *Old Fort News*, vol. 42 no. 4 (1979), Mr. Comparet was born in Monroe, Michigan October 12, 1798, the son of Xavier Comparet, an Indian trader. Records of the Catholic Cemetery say he was born in 1796, and his tombstone seems to say that he was 49. So it would seem that 1796 is correct.

Mr. Comparet died on February 20, 1845 and is buried in Catholic Cemetery, Section C, Lot 148. His tall monument can be approached by entering in the farthest east gate off Lake Avenue, closest to Coliseum Boulevard, and driving up the hill past the mausoleums,

Francis Comparet built the dam and this spillway for Sylvan Lake at Rome City. It was replaced in the late 1990s. Photos-Bob Schmidt





The Comparet monument in Catholic Cemetery, Section C Lot 148 off of Lane 13 reads as follows:
 North side: Elenore 1800-1853
 Francis 1796-1845
 (his age is 49 but looks like 19)
 South side: Frances O. 1820-21
 East side: Harriet b. 1818 d. 1818
 West side top: Francis A. 1856-1876
 West side bottom: Anthony X. 1822-23
 Photo by Cynthia Powers

going halfway around the Breen altar, and locating Driveway 13 on the right. Francis' wife, Elenore Guin Comparet, is buried there too. Her dates are 1800-1853. They were married in

and describes Francis as follows: "Hardy pioneer, he was amongst the first settlers of Fort Wayne, and for industry, ability, perseverance, and fortitude under the severest trails and the most unexpected reverses of fortune but few will bear a comparison with him. He was truly charitable. Having the substance of this world he could not see his brother in need and shut his bowels from him. His departure hence, while we hope it is his gain, will nevertheless be severely felt by the Poor, the widow, the fatherless and the community at large.....may he rest in peace."

Monroe, Michigan in 1819, and were the parents of six children. A book called **Valley of the Upper Maumee River**, first published in 1889 and reprinted in 1974, lists their children as: Joseph, born 1825, living in Washington Territory; David, born in 1831, living in Fort Wayne; Alexander, born 1833, living in Hicksville, OH; Theodore, born 1835, living in Washington, D.C.; John M., born 1837, living in Blanco, Texas; and Louis, born 1840, living in Des Moines, Iowa. This partly agrees with those listed in David's obituary; it gives John M., Alex, and L. G. From the records in Catholic Cemetery. I think there may have been at least two children who died as babies: Anthony X., 1822-1823 and Frances O., 1820-21. If I am correct, the early married years of Francis and Elenore were full of sadness. Visiting a pioneer cemetery is always a sobering experience. However, a mystery remains: who were the other Comparets buried in the family plot? Harriet C., who died in 1818 at age 10 months 22 days; and Mary E., who died in 1879 at age 4 months?

An obituary for Francis was found in the **Fort Wayne Times and People's Press** for 2-22-1845, p. 3, col. 1. It does not list his survivors by name. It gives the cause of death as "severe inflammation of the lungs,"

Sources:

Directions in Catholic Cemetery, by the staff there.

Griswold, B.J. **Pictorial History of Fort Wayne, Indiana**. Chicago, IL: Robert O. Law Co./Chicago, 1917.

Isenhour, Dick. Undated article from the **Fort Wayne News-Sentinel**, entitled "In Early Years, City's First Bank Went Through Change (and Dollars, Too).

Mather, George. **Frontier Faith**. Fort Wayne, IN: Allen County Fort Wayne Historical Society, 1992.

Poinsatte, Charles. **Fort Wayne During the Canal Era 1828-1855**. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1969.

Old Fort News Vol. 42 No. 4 (1979) published by the Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society. See pp. 106-107.
Elenore's birth date is given as 1811, which must be an error. It also refers to her as Francis' third wife. I did not find any other source which confirms that.

Old Fort News. Vol. 53 No. 2. Ft. Wayne, IN: Allen County Fort Wayne Historical Society. 1990, p. 18.

Taylor Stevens, Ponder and Brockman. **Indiana: A New Historical Guide**. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana Historical Society, 1989. p 30.

Valley of the Upper Maumee River published in 1974 as a reprint of the 1889 edition published by Brant and Fuller of Madison, WI.
Thanks to Barbara Gorney for locating this source for me.