

CANAWLERS AT REST

CHARLES COMSTOCK

b. October 12, 1807
d. July 21, 1850

By Carolyn I. Schmidt

Charles Comstock, of Irish descent, was a native of Buttermilk Falls, Pennsylvania. His ancestors were among the early settlers in the colony established by Roger Williams in 1632, at what was then known as the Plantation of New Providence, now Rhode Island. They arrived there in 1683. Family records show that for two generations they lived and prospered in Pennsylvania.

While in Pennsylvania, Charles met and fell in love with Polly Hall. Polly was born on February 6, 1813. They were married in Luzerne county, Pennsylvania.

Charles and Polly Comstock had five children:

Waty, b. *circa* 1834 in Pennsylvania
became the wife of Samuel T. Morgan, of
Huntington, 1901 history lists her as deceased

Rosalia, b. probably in Pennsylvania
died in childhood

Andrew F., b. probably in Indiana
was deceased by 1850 census

Charles E., b. *circa* 1845 in Indiana
Charles served in the Union Army from 1861 to
1864.
married Mary E. Rose 1-7-1866 in Huntington,
Indiana, moved to Ellis, Kansas
had three children

Aurora B., b. 2-19-1850
d. 1-28-1923 in Highland, San Bernardino
county, California, buried in Wesley Chapel
Cemetery in Indiana

married Abram Cuppy Huffman 10-21-1868 in
Wesley Chapel Methodist Church in Huntington
County, Indiana, following his graduation. Abram
was 22 and Aurora was 18. He was the son of
William and Elizabeth Smith Huffman, originally
of Clear Creek, Ohio, who came to Fort Wayne
via canal boat and then proceeded to their new
home in Jackson township by wagon and ox
team. Wesley Chapel was the small Methodist
church that William Huffman helped construct.

Aurora and Abram Huffman had five children:

Lillian E., b. 7-9-1869, d. 1-17-1940
college teacher, married Monroe Dinius,
of Jackson township, 3-1-1891

Archer William, b. 10-3-1872, d. 10-23-1942
married Antis E. McCarty, moved to
California

Mabel E., b. 1875, d.
married John Ellsworth 2-21-1895, a
horticulturist, bee keeper, and lived in
Allen county, Indiana

Walter Charles., b. 2-19-1877, d.
a graduate of the Huntington Business
College, who held a clerical position in
Detroit, Michigan

Verne Abram., b. 1-1-1882, d.
married Elfa Carter about 1905, who
continued to live at the old home

Charles Comstock, our subject, was a master
carpenter and a contractor. He probably saw an adver-
tisement for the Wabash & Erie Canal much like the fol-
lowing, which appeared in the Indianapolis *Indiana Jour-
nal* on August 4, 1832, as follows:

Cash for Canal Hands

We wish to employ laborers on the Wabash
and Erie Canal, 12 miles west of Fort Wayne.

The situation is healthy and dry. We will pay
\$10 per month for sober and industrious men.

MURRAY & VERMILYA (sic)

Charles moved to Indiana in 1832 without his
family. He is on the list of early settlers of Huntington
county. He found jobs on various public works. He took
out large contracts for the construction of canal locks,
culverts, stone piers, etc. on the Wabash & Erie Canal.
He also engaged in building canal boats for the first few
years after his arrival. Although no canal boats survive,
there is still evidence today of his work on the canal be-

tween Ft. Wayne and Lafayette.

It wasn't until three years later that his family joined him in Indiana. During that time of separation he erected a dwelling and prepared a new home for his wife and children. They arrived via a large wagon laboriously drawn by a team of oxen.

The Wabash & Erie Canal was constructed along the side of an old Indian village known as White Raccoon's Village. Just to its southwest, a small town grew up alongside one of the canal's locks. It was first called Dickey's Lock. It was in Jackson township, Huntington county, Indiana. Lemuel G. Jones, from Virginia, erected a sawmill at the lock and called it Roanoke Mills.

"The Town of Roanoke...was an outgrowth of the Wabash and Erie Canal and early became not only a prominent shipping point, but also the chief source of supplies for a large area of territory in Huntington, Allen and Whitley Counties, being at that time the principal trading place between Fort Wayne and the town of Wabash. The construction of the Dickey Lock was the immediate cause that led to the birth of the village...The mill and the store early formed the nucleus of quite a flourishing settlement, and within a couple of years the influx of population was such that where his daughter Aurora B. Comstock Huffman, her husband Abram Huffman and their five children later lived.

the owner of the land, George A Chapman, determined to lay out a town, which was accordingly done in September, 1850...The first four [lots bordered] on the canal." Its name was later changed to Roanoke from Roanoke Mills that was located there.

Today an Indiana State Format Marker stands at the site of the Dickey Lock. It reads:

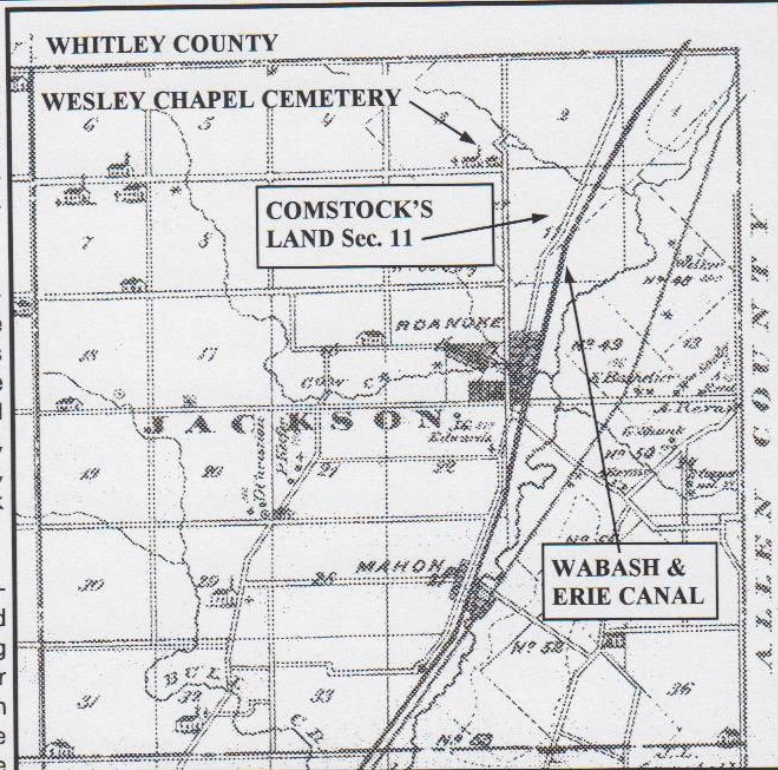
Wabash Erie Canal Lock 4

First lock west of summit level of Wabash and Erie Canal (connected Lake Erie with Ohio River in 1853) Known as Dickey Lock Built as Lock 1 1834-1835 of wood construction renumbered Lock 4 as result of canal completion to Ohio line (1840) Remnant of arch culvert nearby Canal important to founding of Roanoke

Erected 1997 Indiana Historical Bureau and Roanoke Area Heritage Center

Around 1835 the canal construction had progressed beyond Roanoke to Huntington, Indiana. Histories say that Charles Comstock built the locks there.

In 1844 Charles purchased several hundred acres of government land in Jackson township northeast of Roanoke, a part of which was included in the farm



Map of Jackson township, Huntington county, Indiana from *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Indiana*. Chicago, IL: Baskin, Forster & Co. 1876.

His land purchases were recorded as follows:

- Oct. 31, 1844
 - NE Fr NW¼ 40.00 neJA-11
 - E Fr NE¼ 38.80 neJA-11
 - W½ NW¼ 80.00 neJA-11
 - N Fr SW¼ 67.60 neJA-11
 - S Fr SW¼ 43.00 neJA-11
- Oct. 12, 1847
 - Fr NE¼ 110.88 neJA-11
 - \$380.28

Tom Castaldi, Allen County Historian and CSI Advisory Council, found the following contracts that Charles Comstock held with the state of Indiana, while doing research for the canal books he has written:

Contract No. 192

6/1/47 Charles Comstock is named in the contract for St. Joseph Feeder and Dam north of Fort Wayne in Allen County. Tom suggests that this contract is sort of ambiguous. The "feeder" could encompass a lot of differ-

ent projects. Jesse Lynch Williams says in his 1847 Engineer's Report that it is suffering from much decay, and "must be rebuilt during the low water of the present summer." It appears that he arranged for Comstock to do the work.

Contract No. 193

10/20/47 Comstock received the contract for "Huntington locks - wooden" in Huntington County. No specific lock was named. In his 1847 report Williams recorded Lock No. 7 as being built on the "combined or composite plan." He then says that, "the other five locks [in Huntington] may all be described under one statement. They were built upon the wooden crib plan ... constructed in 1835, and the timber is of course, considerably decayed. The upper course in places, and in some places the two upper courses, have been renewed. By renewing the remainder of the two upper courses, and in some parts, the third course, during the ensuing winter it is supposed these locks may last for two seasons more, but after that must be rebuilt." Tom believes that Williams contracted Charles Comstock to make these repairs. This is likely what the early histories meant when they said that Comstock built the locks in Huntington that was mentioned before in this article.

Contract No. 196

7/1/48 Charles Comstock received a contract for Fort Wayne's Lima Rd Bridge and Barr St. Bridge in Allen County.

Contract No. 188

8/10/49 Charles Comstock received a contract for Lock No. 1. Williams states in his 1847 report that Lock No. 1 "will last some three years, which brings its renewal, say in 1850." It appears that Comstock was selected to make the repairs having received his orders in August of 1849.

Charles also had an interest in a general store. Unfortunately the histories do not give any dates as to this enterprise. Entries in his business books would probably cause a present day accountant to smile. For instance one reads:

John Smythe

July 29, to one gallon whisky, two pounds lard, one pound tobacco, half pound salt

July 30, one white dog, one gallon whisky, five pounds flour

While Charles was keeping store, the currency at the time was unstable. Store keepers seldom accepted what was known as "wildcat" money for more than half of its face value. In those days it was often the case that those who did receive paper money would note in

the next day's news that a very large proportion of it would be, if not entirely, worthless. According to the 1850 Federal Census, Charles had an estate valued at \$1,700, the equivalent of \$41,886.00 today.

It seems that Charles was more of a family man than a social person. Apparently he had no political aspirations or belonged to any fraternal organizations. A research through the county histories found no references to him in any of those type of things. It is assumed that he was a Methodist by his place of burial and the fact this his daughter and son-in-law were Methodists.

According to the histories and his tombstone Charles Comstock died on July 21, 1850. They also say he was about 43 years of age at that time and that his death occurred only 5 months after Aurora's birth leaving Polly with a family to raise on her own. However, the August 6, 1850 Federal Census taken by Samuel Mahon, another canal boat builder, shows him alive that August. It also shows Aurora as being the age of 5/12. Perhaps his tombstone should read August 21, 1850. That would put him alive on August 6th for the census and would be a little over 5 months after Aurora's birth. There is also the possibility that the census was taken earlier and recorded on August 6.

Polly Hall Comstock outlived Charles Comstock by nearly 22 years. Polly later married John Houseman (b. 1810 in Virginia), and Aurora and her older brother, Charles E. Comstock, were thereafter John Houseman's stepchildren. The 1860 Federal Census shows Polly (age 47), Charles E. (age 15) and Aurora B. (age 10) living with John Houseman (age 50) and his children, Caroline E. Houseman (age 16) and George Houseman (age 13).

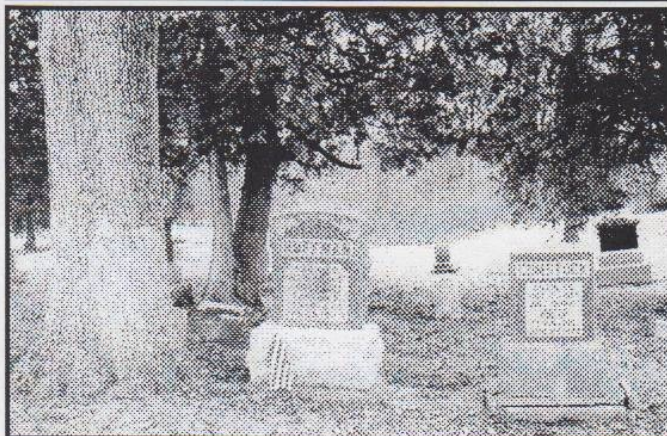
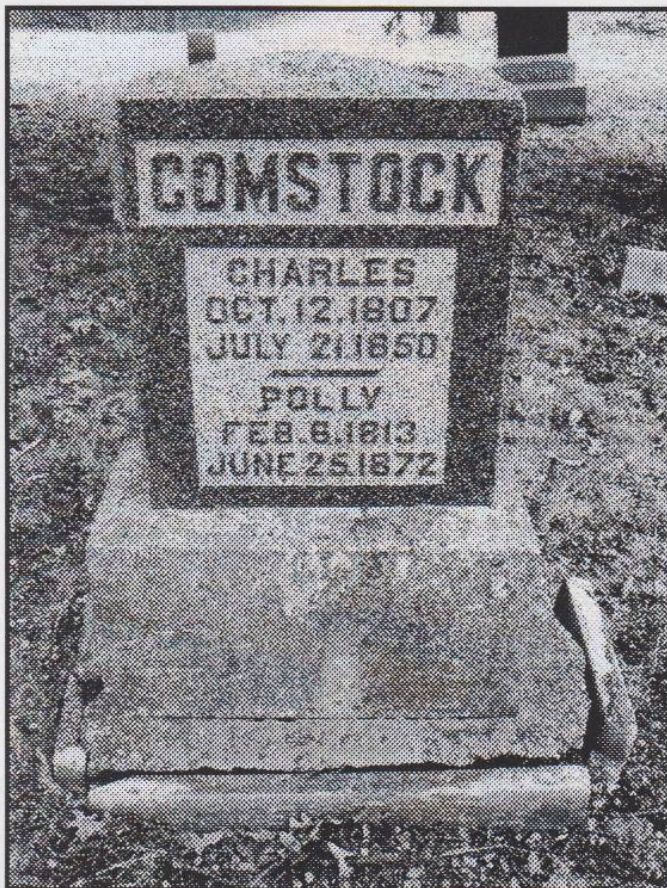
In later years, after John Houseman died, Polly lived with Abram and Aurora on the Huffman farm in Huntington County. Polly died on June 25, 1872 at the age of 59. Many Huffman and Comstock families are shown in the Huntington County registries at this time.

Charles and Polly Comstock are buried in Wesley Chapel Cemetery located in Huntington county, Jackson township, Section 3, near the corner of 1100 N and 400 E, north of the town of Roanoke, Indiana. The tablet portion of their shared gravestone has been replaced by a newer red granite stone on top of the former stone's base. The old tablet has been buried in front of the stone and a portion of the words are still visible. The new stone reads:

Charles Comstock
b. 12 Oct 1807 d. 21 Jul 1850

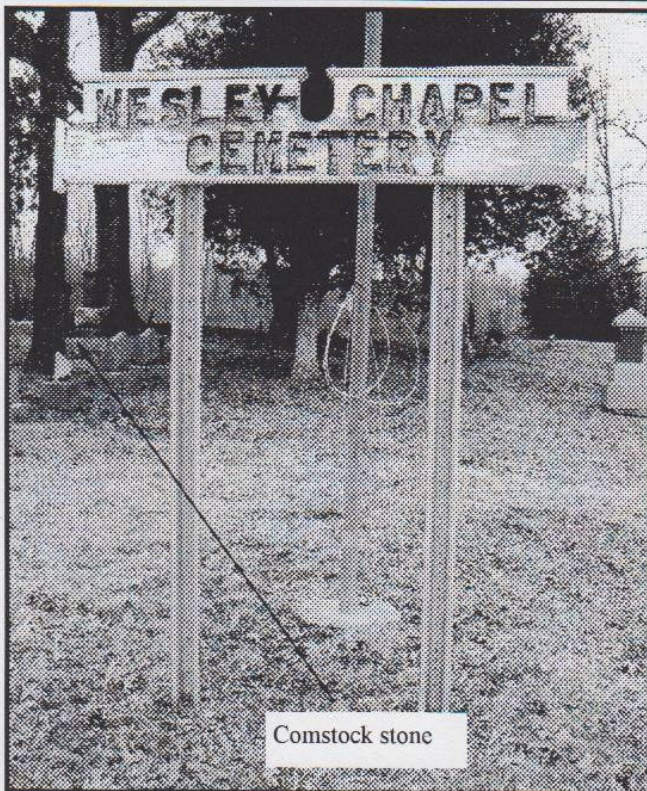
Polly Comstock
b. 6 Feb 1813 d. 25 Jun 1872

Alongside a tree to the left of the stone for Charles and Polly is the gravestone of Abram and Aurora Huffman, their daughter. It is the same color and style as their stone.



Above: Grave stone of Charles and Polly Comstock with the old tablet buried in front of and on the sides of the original base.
 Below: The Comstock's daughter and son-in-law are buried between their stone and a tree. The Huffman stone reads:
 Abram C. Mar 4, 1846 Dec 15, 1927
 Aurora B. Feb 15, 1850 Jan 26, 1929
 Co. D 137th Ind Vol Inf

Photos by Bob Schmidt



Comstock stone

Sources:

Bash, Frank Sumner. *History of Huntington County, Indiana*. Chicago, IL: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1914.

Biographical Memoirs of Huntington County, Chicago, IL: B. F. Bowen, Publishers, 1901.

Castaldi, Thomas E. *Wabash & Erie Canal Notebook: Allen County and Huntington County, Indiana*. Fort Wayne, IN: Graphik Mechanix, 1995.

1850, 1860, 1880, 1900, & 1910 Federal Census

History of Huntington County, Indiana. Chicago, IL: Brant & Fuller, 1887.

[Http://www.huffman.tk/id21.html](http://www.huffman.tk/id21.html)

Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Indiana. Chicago, IL: Baskin, Forster & Co., 1876.

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

Scherr, Luke. *Alphabetical Listing of the Settlers Who "Entered" Lands in Huntington County, 1830-1853*.

With special thanks to Tom Castaldi for his research on canal contracts at the Indiana State Archives.