

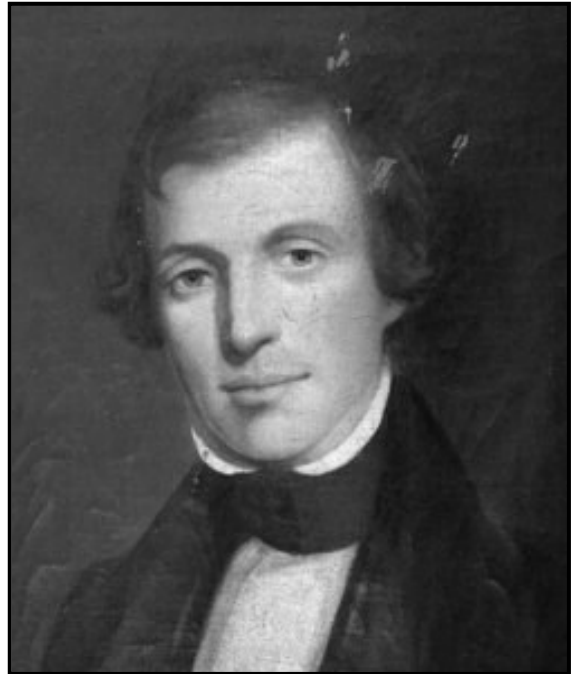
CANAWLERS AT REST

BENJAMIN CONKLIN

Find-A-Grave #96313132

b. May 29, 1811
d. August 16, 1883

By Robert F. Schmidt



Benjamin Conklin, the youngest son of Joseph and Rebecca (Ross) Conkling, was born on May 29, 1811 in Cincinnati, Ohio. His parents moved to Ohio from Westfield, New Jersey, with 9 children ages 2-19 in April 1806. Their infant daughter and 10th child, Mary, had just died in New Jersey in January. Perhaps this move was their way of starting anew.

Benjamin's father was a farmer. He and his family settled on land in Mill Creek township, Hamilton county, Ohio. Three more boys were born in Hamilton county, with Benjamin being the last in 1811. Rebecca, his mother, died in 1813 at age 43 when Benjamin was just under 2 years of age. His father remarried a woman named Gertrude. Then in 1814, less than a year later, Joseph, age 49, died as well. Gertrude was pregnant at the time Joseph died and she had a baby girl, Elizabeth, born six months later. How she and the Conkling family managed we don't know. Benjamin now had 9 brothers and 3 living sisters. The oldest son, Pierson and oldest daughter, Keziah had married and moved out before the death of their parents.

In September 1822, Rebecca Conkling, who was then 19 years old, married Isaac Conwell age 28. They, along with the three youngest Conkling boys, Aaron, Felix and Benjamin, moved to Liberty in Union county near Richmond, Indiana. In 1823 the Conwell's had a daughter of their own.

Isaac Conwell had moved from Delaware with his three brothers: James, who founded Laurel Indiana; William

who settled in Vandalia, Indiana; and Abraham, who settled in Connersville, Indiana. Isaac initially had lived in Cincinnati where he met Rebecca Conkling. (see *The Hoosier Packet* Feb. 2011)

Benjamin Conkling, at age 15, wanted to set out on his own so he went to Vandalia, Wayne county, Indiana around 1826 to work in William Conwell's store. He clerked in the store for the next 10 years.

The National Road reached just south of Vandalia in 1827. It brought more and more trade to the store. Somewhere along the way both Benjamin and brother Felix dropped the "g" in their surname to just Conklin.

Benjamin's future wife, Alice Elizabeth Harris, was born April 14, 1815 to George and Elizabeth Harris of Dayton, Ohio. The circumstances of their meeting are unknown but apparently she was then living in Fayette county, Indiana. Benjamin and Alice were married by James Conwell of Laurel in Fayette county on Benjamin's birthday May 29, 1833. She was 18 and he was 22. They had one son James Harris Conklin born April 21, 1836, who lived to adulthood. Unfortunately Alice died a few days after his birth on May 9, 1836, probably as a result of labor complications. She was buried at Riverside Cemetery in Cambridge City. Again we don't know who helped Benjamin take care of young James, but somehow he managed to do that and also take over ownership of Conwell's general store about the same time.

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In the early 1830s traffic really began picking up along the National Road. Indiana's Mammoth Improvement Bill was passed in 1836. That year the town of Cambridge City was platted where the National Road and the Whitewater Canal would meet.

1838 was an important year for Benjamin Conklin since he decided to move his store from Vandalia to a location just ¼ mile south of the quickly developing town of Cambridge City. Vandalia soon disappeared as a town being absorbed by Cambridge City.

Not uncommon in those days a man would marry a woman in the same family when his first wife died. The Harris family was from Dayton and it appears that Alice's parents had also died. She had a younger sister named Harriet, who was born September 25, 1825 and was only 11 years old when Alice died. Harriet had a guardian, a Mr. Bruien. How Benjamin and Harriet became a couple or how the marriage was arranged we don't know, but on May 15, 1839, they were married in Dayton. Consent was given for Harriet by her guardian. The bride was almost 14 and the groom 28. This might raise some eyebrows today, but it turned out to be a happy marriage. They had 5 children, the first was Henry Franklin born in 1845 when Harriet was 20.



Home on east side. Business Entrance on west side near river.
The Conklin-Montgomery House in Cambridge City, Indiana

For his new bride and his business, Benjamin built a Greek Revival two story combination home and business on the East bank of the Whitewater River in Cambridge City. Why did he choose this location? Perhaps it was based on the fact that travelers heading west would come to his store in East Cambridge before reaching the main part of the town. He operated his mercantile business on the first floor next to the river and the family lived on the east side. Later on his single adult children continued to live in the home until 1936.

In the fall of 1839 some bad news was received that impacted the economy of Cambridge City and the whole Whitewater Valley. The canal that had promised such opportunity was halted in November as the State ran out of funds to continue the project. The situation looked pretty dire for the next few years, but in 1842 a new corporation was created to complete the works. William Conwell and Benjamin Conklin both became members of the Board of Directors of the White Water Valley Canal Company. James Conwell of Laurel became its president and Abraham Conwell of Connersville was also on the board.

It was decided to have the great groundbreaking at Cambridge City on July 28, 1842 for restarting work on the canal. A barbeque was held just east of town on Capitol Hill for an estimated 10,000 people. There were 3 brass bands playing and many speeches made by the local politicians. Finally ground was broken and dirt moved in a wheelbarrow provided for the occasion. The only thing that went wrong that day was a great storm developed that forced the crowd to disperse.

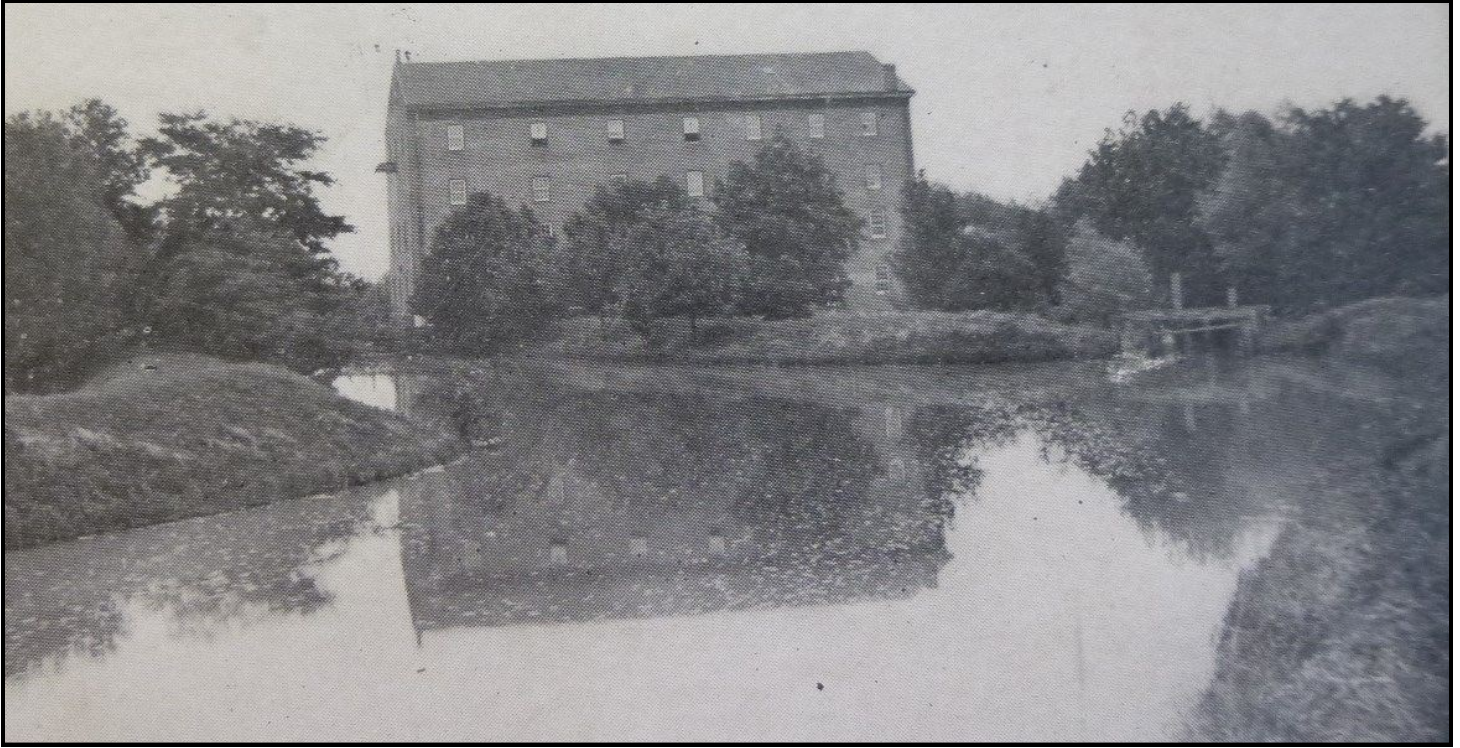
During 1845 as the Whitewater Canal was nearing completion from the south at Connersville to Cambridge City, the Hagerstown merchants were considering their own canal to join the Whitewater Canal at Cambridge City. Benjamin now saw a great business opportunity. He speculated in land north of town where he knew that the Hagerstown merchants were planning to build their canal. He planned on building a large grist mill in the center of town where the canal could provide the water power needed for operating his mill. It would be located on the North side of the National Road near where the canals would meet. He may have even purchased stock in this private canal company.

On October 8, 1845, the "Belle of Indiana" pulled by its mules came into Cambridge City from Cincinnati, Ohio. The privately funded Cincinnati & Whitewater Canal had just been opened from Cincinnati to Harrison, Ohio and joined the Whitewater Canal at West Harrison, Indiana.

By June 1846 digging on the Hagerstown Canal was underway. At that time Conklin had nearly completed his work on his new mill, but he needed the waterpower of the canal. When the Hagerstown Canal Company ran into a financial problem in late 1846 he had little choice but to agree to complete the last two locks and several miles of prism to attain rights to use canal water to power his mill.

Conklin, having invested heavily in Cambridge City, was eager to enhance the value of his property so he

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This mill built for Conklin was known by different names at different times: Conklin's Mill, Eagle Mill and Imperial Mills. It was later sold to W. A. Creitz in 1889 and became known as Creitz Mill. The Cambridge City, *Indiana Traveler* of August 3, 1945:

"An Early Landmark Now Gone! Originally Conklin Mill Later Imperial Mills"

"The canal was responsible for the erection of Cambridge City's historic Flour Mill. Built by Jacob Waltz for Benjamin Conklin in 1846, it was considered a colossal structure in its day. The stone used was quarried on the Henby farm southwest of town. Its big beams and joists could not be duplicated today. The walls of brick tapered from the foundation at the rate of 4 inches for each story until they reached the roof. Large quantities of wheat had been floured here, at one time 90,000 bushels of wheat being stored within its walls for milling. Modern machinery had replaced the old water wheels and burrs. W. A. Creitz, who bought in the mill in 1889, continued its operation for almost 40 years when he retired from active business and sold to Mr. Clark, and the mill burned to the ground a year ago. (1944)"

This picture was taken in 1908.

advertised for workers on June 12, 1847 in the *Cambridge City Reveille*. By year end 1847 the canal work had been accomplished. Due to the fine engineering by John Minesinger, this canal was less flood prone and provided Conklin with reliable power while other mills down the Whitewater Canal were often waiting for repairs to dams and the canal due to flooding.

Benjamin Conklin continued to be identified with many of the early improvements of Cambridge City, having built several residences, business houses, and manufacturing establishments. His Conklin Mill was at times called Eagle Mill or Imperial Mill.

Benjamin was strictly a businessman and never really got into the political arena. One obituary of this enterprising citizen stated:

"BENJAMIN CONKLIN, one of the early pioneers

of our town, died on Thursday, August 16th, 1883, at 12 o'clock noon. He had been confined to his home for several months past, and was failing from the beginning of his illness. He was 72 years old."

The *Cambridge City Tribune* of August 23, 1883 said:

"Mr. Conklin was born in Butler county, Ohio, May 29th, 1811, and was therefore 72 years, 2 months and 18 days old at the time of his death. He was the first merchant in the village of Vandalia, having located there in 1826 - ten years before Cambridge City was laid out. He was identified with many of the early improvements of this place, having built several residences, business houses, and manufacturing establishments that are still in existence prominent among which is the Eagle Mill, built in 1847-8. When engaged in active life he conducted a large business,

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and was an enterprising citizen, but during his later years he became embarrassed, and his financial troubles had much to do with his late illness and death. He was a kind and indulgent husband and father, and will be sadly missed by his sorrowing family and friends.

“The funeral services were held at the family residence on Saturday afternoon, and were conducted by Rev. J. W. Bailey in that gentleman’s usual impressive manner.

His remains were interred in Riverside Cemetery.”

Benjamin’s second wife, Harriet Harris Conklin, died 16 years later on December 5, 1899 at age 74. Both she, Benjamin, and her sister, Benjamin’s first wife Alice, are buried at Riverside Cemetery in Cambridge City.

The Conklin family lived in their home on the corner of E. Main Street and Lincoln Drive in Cambridge City

Conkling (Conklin) Genealogy

	<u>Birth</u>	<u>Death</u>	<u>Burial Location</u>	<u>Married</u>
Conkling, Joseph	03-06-1764	02-19-1814	Pleasant Ridge Hamilton Co OH	07- 15-1787 NJ
m. Ross, Rebecca	11-04-1769	03-19-1813	" " " " " "	" " "
Conkling, Pierson	11-21-1787	03-09-1870	Reilly Cemetery Butler Co OH	03-06-1811
m. Marsh, Hannah	04-19-1793	06-25-1860	" " " " " "	" " "
Conkling, Keziah	10-20-1789	06-03-1850	Baptist Cemetery Harrison OH	1807
m. Wooley, Isaac	05-24-1784	02-15-1840	" " " " " "	" " "
Conkling, Isaac	09-12-1791	06-29-1849	Pleasant Ridge Hamilton Co OH	06-11-1814
m. Marsh, Rebecca	08-18-1794	12-17-1879	" " " " " "	" " "
Conkling, David	06-08-1793	03-15-1841	Spring Grove Cemetery Hamilton OH	06-08-1815
m. Martin, Freelove	12-13-1798	05-04-1841	" " " " " "	" " "
Conkling, Joseph C	12-21-1794	09-06-1872	Rochester Cemetery Topeka, KS	04-24-1817
m. Marsh, Mary	03-02-1801	01-29-1851	Bethel Cemetery Reilly OH	" " "
Conkling, Daniel	07-21-1797	07-09-1866	Spring Grove Cemetery Hamilton OH	01-06-1820
m. ---- Priscilla C.	1801	05-14-1883	" " " " " "	" " "
Conkling, Elijah	03-08-1799	06-07-1842	Pleasant Ridge Hamilton Co OH	NA - single
Conkling, Phoebe	11-29-1800	01-13-1859	Pleasant Ridge Hamilton Co OH	11-29-1824
m. Talbot, John L	10-20-1800	10-16-1881	" " " " " "	" " "
Conkling, Rebecca	09-16-1803	09-03-1864	Maplewood Cemetery Anderson IN	09-19-1822
m. Conwell, Isaac	04-21-1794	03-08-1867	" " " " " "	" " "
Conkling, Mary	12 1805	01-06-1806	Essex New Jersey	NA – infant
Conkling, Aaron	12-19-1806	05-04-1857	Riverside Cemetery Cambridge City IN	01-01-1829
m. Johnson, Mary	08-23-1813	05-23-1905	Odd Fellows Cemetery Seaford DE	" " "
Conklin, Felix	12-14-1808	02-01-1894	Riverside Cemetery Cambridge City IN	08-09-1831
m. Frazee, Mary	1813	05 1878	" " " " " "	" " "
Conklin, Benjamin	05-29-1811	08-16-1883	" " " " " "	05-29-1833
m1. Harris, Alice E	04-14-1815	05-09-1836	" " " " " "	" " "
<u>Conklin, James Harris</u>	04-21-1836	02-11-1880	Spring Hill Cemetery Whiting KS	02-20-1856
m. Ritchey, Aurelia C	10-29-1836	04-07-1907	" " " " " "	" " "
m2. Harris, Harriet E	09-25-1825	12-05-1899	Riverside Cemetery Cambridge City IN	05-15-1839
<u>Conklin, Henry F</u>	08 1845	11-14-1926	" " " " " "	NA - single
<u>Conklin, Alice S</u>	1850	04 1934	" " " " " "	09-14-1870
m. Medsger, William F	1847	02-03-1921	" " " " " "	" " "
<u>Conklin, Elizabeth E</u>	07 1854	11-06-1936	" " " " " "	NA - single
<u>Conklin, Harriet G</u>	10 1856	07-28-1936	" " " " " "	NA - single

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for almost 100 years. The Conklin door knocker still remained on the door of the home in the mid-1990s. The family members lived there until 1936 when Harriet and Elizabeth "Lillie" died. The home was later purchased by two school teachers and local historians, Robert and Pauline Mont-

Benjamin Conklin's gravestone
in Riverside Cemetery,



gomery. Pauline was instrumental in having the structure placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Pauline Woodward **Robert Montgomery**
1903 – 1982 1907 - 1978

Pauline Montgomery, a native of Wayne county, Indiana, was the daughter of William Woodward and Anne (Huddleston) Woodward. The original owners of the Huddleston House on the National Road just west of Cambridge City in Mt. Auburn were John & Susanna Huddleston. John Huddleston was distantly related to Anne. The earlier Huddleston family were Quakers and participated in the underground railway in Indiana. The Huddleston ancestral home still stands and information about it can be found on the internet.

Pauline Woodward was a graduate of Indiana University and was deeply dedicated to education. She spent

most of her professional life as a Latin and English teacher. She married Robert Montgomery in 1948. She wrote *Indiana Weavers and Their Coverlets*.

Robert Montgomery was a native of Posey county, a history teacher and, at one time, a director of the Indiana Junior Historical Society. His first wife, Catherine Gushwa, died in Posey county in 1932.

Robert probably met Pauline through teaching and their love of history. They both subscribed to the theory that "history is fun" during their teaching years and even after they retired from the classroom. Pauline and Robert also founded the Upper Whitewater Historical Association in 1962, which was committed to the history of the eastern counties in Indiana.

Their home was the Conklin-Montgomery House in Cambridge City, a 22-room home built in 1839-40 and listed on the National Registry of Historic Places. In 1976 for all their efforts on behalf of their local community, they were named as "Citizens of the Year" in Cambridge City.

Robert Montgomery died June 17, 1978 and Pauline four years later on July 25, 1982. Both are buried at Riverside Cemetery in Cambridge City. At the time of her death, Pauline had been a 50-year member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. She took photographs of

Huddleston House on U.S. 40

Photo by Bob Schmidt

