

CANAWLERS  
AT REST

JOSEPH MARSH  
DARBY

b. February 27, 1819

d. March 21, 1907

By Carolyn I. Schmidt

Photos of Joseph and Catherine from:  
**Biographical and Genealogical History of Cass,  
Miami, Howard & Tipton Counties, Indiana**



Joseph Marsh Darby was born in Butler county, Ohio, to Owen Darby of New Jersey, who was of English descent, and Mary Fritts Darby of Virginia, who was of German descent, on February 27, 1819. Owen and Mary were married in Virginia in 1799 and had 11 children — Joseph being the youngest. At the time he was born they lived in a log cabin and Joseph's cradle was a sugar trough. Unfortunately, Mary died when Joseph was 4 years old leaving him in the care of his father and older siblings.

Joseph's father married Hanna Bills in 1824 and the family moved to Fayette county, Indiana. They settled about eleven miles south of Connersville. A few years later they moved to a small farm seven miles northwest of Connersville on "homy ridge." There Joseph shot squirrels and woodpeckers, trapped quail, fished and swam in large and small Garrison Creeks, and assisted his father on the farm

In 1831, when Joseph was about 12 years old

**Children of Owen Darby** (b. July 13, 1782; d. 1844 ) and

**Margaret Fritts Darby** (b. March 3, 1783, to John Michael and Nancy Fritts; married in 1799 in Monogalia county, Virginia to Owen Darby; died January 2, 1822 in Ohio)

**Sarah**, born March 10, 1801 in Monogalia county, Virginia, died July 13, 1876 in Ohio

**Hannah**, born February 15, 1803 in Virginia, died April 12, 1877 in Indiana

**John**, born December 2, 1804 in Ohio, died January 11, 1860 in Indiana

**Daniel**, born June 10, 1806 in Ohio, died September 26, 1875 in Indiana

**Samuel**, born July 25, 1808 in Ohio, died September 8, 1870 in Indiana

**Ezra**, born June 10, 1810, in Ohio, died March 11, 1871 in Kansas

**Squire**, born December 1, 1811 in Ohio, died in 1854 in Indiana

**Rowlen**, born October 5, 1813 in Ohio, died in infancy

**Thomas**, born July 30, 1814 in Ohio, died January 14, 1888 in Converse, Indiana

**Hester A.**, born May 4, 1817 in Ohio, died June 3, 1892 in Brazil, Indiana

**Joseph Marsh**, born February 27, 1819 in Butler County, Ohio, died March 21, 1907 in Jonesboro, Indiana

**Hannah Bills Darby** (married Owen Darby in 1823, Butler County, Ohio)

Margaret

Jane

Owen

Perry

Jedediah (died in infancy)



his family moved to a small farm on Wild Cat Creek in Tippecanoe county about 10 miles from Lafayette. The land was timbered. Joseph helped grub, picked and burned brush and built fences. He spent some time on the creek. His father soon sold the land and never again owned land. They farmed a year on Wea prairie and another on Wild Cat prairie. They sold their corn at ten cents per bushel, delivering it to the hog pen. Hogs at the time were worth \$1.00 per hundred.

Living in pioneer areas, Joseph had meager chances for an early education. He attended subscription schools held in log school-houses. He was educated in farming by his father. He did "gouging" for his father and others during harvest through which he became a good reaper. By the age of 15 he was considered a "full hand."

When Joseph became 16 his father told him it was time he was on his own — "root, pig or die." He worked for one year at the "sugar grove" and "high-gap" located six miles from Lafayette for his cousin, James P. Ellis, Esq., a wealthy farmer. His wages were \$100, the highest wages paid the best farm hands. But when his father decided to move to Johnson county in the fall of 1835, Joseph accompanied him, even though his cousin begged him to stay.

#### Central Canal

Joseph heard they were building the Central Canal and hired on in the spring of 1837. His first work on the canal was for John Kuntz, an old German "Ditchman." Joseph found it a pleasure to work with Kuntz. They slept in a "pole-shanty" on slab-bunks, one above the other. Joseph worked on the section south of Indianapolis grubbing out trees, wheeling dirt, etc. at \$16 per month. Even though he was a short man, he was quick and ambitious. Being a good chopper he felled and scored the huge burr oak trees for the locks and culverts. When he counter-scored the trees his wages increased. He learned to hew and became one among the boss hewers on the line. It seemed his ambition and genius were clearing the pathway for him. He soon learned to do frame-work for those locks.

Joseph's next employers were Free and Burks. In 1836 he worked at the lock by Col. John Wishard's. There his wages were determined by the boss workman at the close of the fall work. He received \$1.75 per day. He had many memories of laughable incidents there, but they were not recorded. The following season he worked for them at the two locks just south of Indianapolis. He received the same wages as the boss workman—\$2.00 per day. The work was hard and the fare was poor, but Joseph's grit pulled him through.

Free and Burks then held the contract for the

"Feeder Dam" at Waverly in Morgan county in 1838. There 19-year-old Joseph was made superintendent of the timber and wood works. At times he had to order and direct 50 to 100 "wild" Irishmen in putting in the timber of the Dam. That fall he, along with many others, caught the malarial "fever," which ended his work on the canal.

When Joseph got well enough to ride, he lost control of a horse that ran away with him and threw him against a tree. His broke his left arm and his left leg was mashed crippling him for life. He wept bitterly when he learned he could no longer do manual labor wondering how he would be able to make a living. However, when his energy returned he remembered that once when he was caught in the White river that was full from bank to bank, he decided he had to swim or be drowned and he did it.

Joseph determined that since his education was quite limited, he would attend a county school taught by Moses P. Bradley in 1839. There, along with several other young men, he gained a sufficient knowledge of the common branches to teach school. He was examined by Judge Stevens, of Indianapolis, and received a certificate for teaching in public schools. For the following nine years he taught and attended school—first in Marion county, west of Indianapolis where he purchased an acre of land with a cabin and other buildings for \$100 at the age of 20. He gave the land to his father for his lifetime. (His father died in 1844 and his step-mother moved from the cabin in 1848. Joseph then sold the property for \$75.)

In the fall of 1840 Joseph went back to Butler county, Ohio, near where he was born. He taught school in the "Cottonrun" school house. Unfortunately while there he caught the measles, which affected his eyes and later led to several operations upon them. He then taught among the Pennsylvania Dutch at the "Seven Mile" house. This he found to be a novelty and pleasurable. This school closed in the spring of 1842.

Joseph then attended the Miami University of Oxford where he roomed with John Fegely, a German scholar. They entered as irregular scientifics. At the close of the term with George Junkin, D. D., president, they recited in Greek and Latin to Henry R. Josselyn. Darby had learned to read these languages to a limited extent.

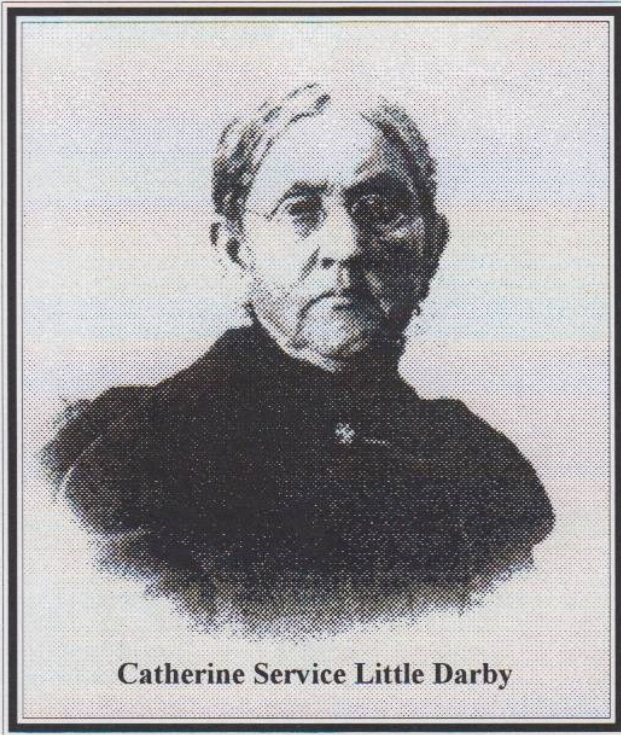
Then in the spring of 1843, Joseph attended a German school in "Hickory Flat" taught by his old roommate Fegely. There he learned to read and write the German language. He boarded with a rich old German farmer named Sowers and enjoyed the novelty of some well-prepared dishes. In the center of the table were sauerkraut, boiled or fried ham, sausage, eggs, noodles,



potatoes, onions, etc.

Joseph then taught at Darrown, OH, which is located four miles east of Oxford, for many years. This was followed by one term at Sommerville and then at Jacksonburg, his last place in Ohio.

Having saved money through his industry and economy, he bought an 80-acre farm located in Johnson county, IN, on the Bluff state road about twelve miles south of Indianapolis in 1847. He only paid \$7.50 per acre for a total of \$600 since little improvements had been made and only 16 acres had been cleared.



Catherine Service Little Darby

On July 22, 1847, Catherine Service Little, of Ohio county near Rising Sun, Indiana, married Joseph. Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on January 22, 1827, to David Little, who was from Georgia and of Irish descent, and Mary Morgan Little, who was from New Jersey and of Scotch descent, Catherine was the next to the youngest of their three daughters Ann, Catherine, and Mary, and three sons, Ebenezer, David, and (?). The Littles had been married in New Jersey in 1816. David, a school teacher at a select school, had died in Xenia, Ohio in 1836. Mary, born in 1798, later died at the Darby's residence on February 14, 1870 at the age of 72 years. They were Scotch Presbyterians.

In the spring of 1848 Joseph left teaching and, with scarcely enough money to move them, Joseph and Catherine moved from Butler county, Ohio, to the Johnson county farm in Indiana. There they labored hard for twelve years experiencing burning fevers and cold

chills common to the White river valley during the first few years. They were very economical. Soon the farm was well stocked with horses, cattle and hogs. During this time five of their children were born:

- Virginia Florence - June 25, 1848
- Chalmers Irving - Feb. 16, 1851- died in infancy
- Alice Cordelia - Feb. 13, 1852
- Frances Loretto - Jan. 30, 1855
- Harriet Agnes - Jan. 29, 1858 - mar. Arminus Acker of Connersville

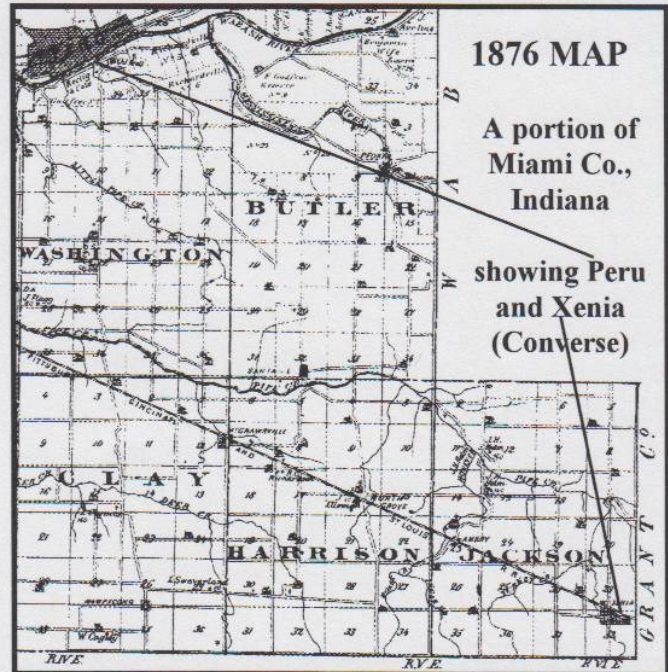
Later they had two more daughters:

- Clara Belle - June 20, 1865
- Estelle Mae - Oct. 22, 1868 - died Sept. 5, 1885

While on the Johnson county farm, Joseph subscribed \$250 stock to the Evansville, Indianapolis and Cleveland straight-line railroad. The railroad fell through and Joseph was not refunded anything. This opened his eyes to railroad building.

Twelve years later, after noting the inconvenience of the schools where they lived, Joseph and Catherine decided to sell this farm and move to a more suitable location. In January 1860 Jacob Paddack bought the farm for \$4,000. They also sold some of their personal property for \$1,000.

Before he sold to Paddack, Joseph had visited his two brothers, Daniel and Thomas, who lived near Xenia, IN. (Xenia, Indiana, changed its name to Converse in 1849. Today Converse is located in the extreme southeast corner of Miami county in Jackson township and the northwest corner of Grant county in Richland township.) In January 1860 he bargained for and bought two farms. The first one in Xenia had eighty little-

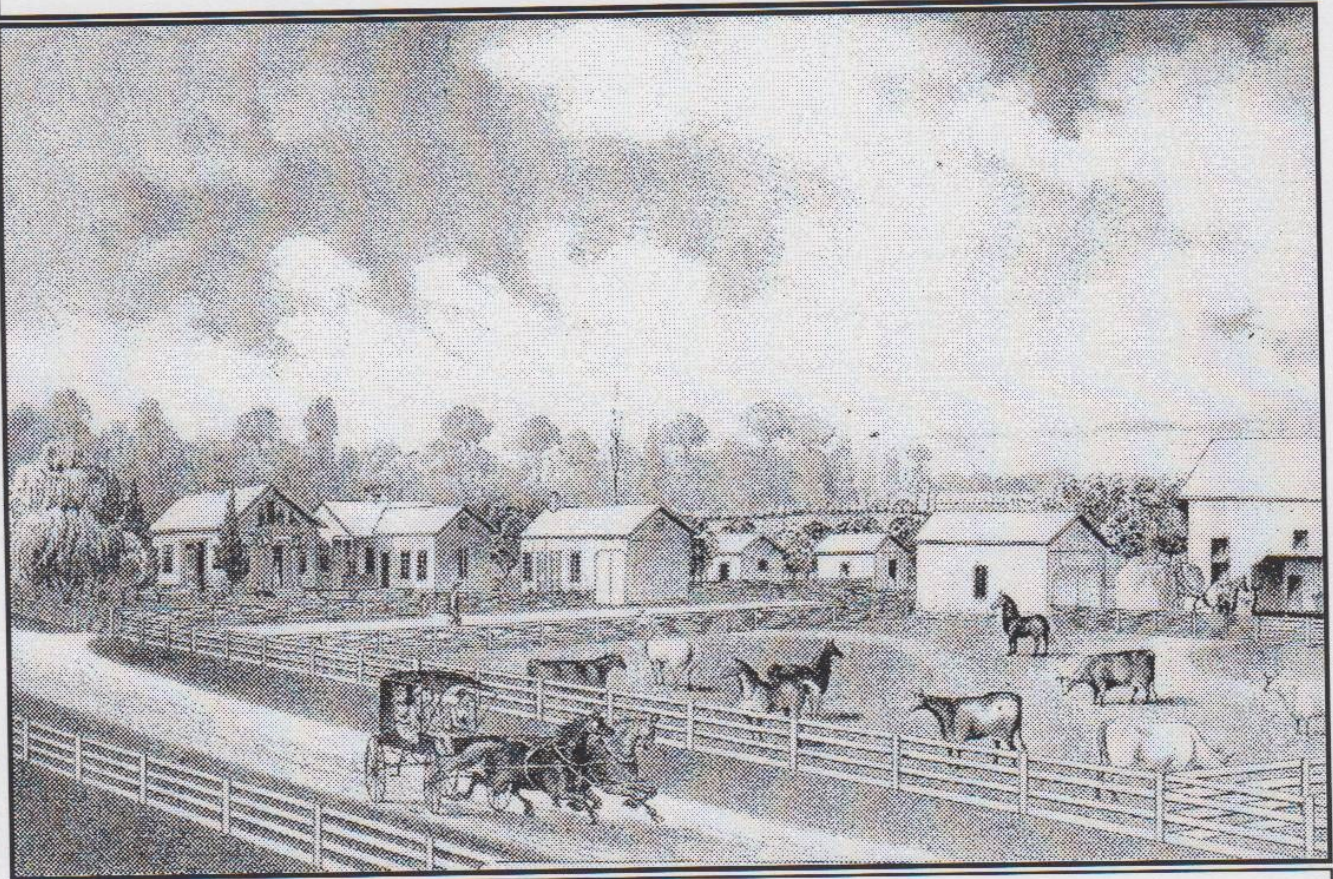


1876 MAP

A portion of Miami Co., Indiana

showing Peru and Xenia (Converse)





**Residence of Joseph M. Darby**  
**Section 32 Jackson Township, Miami County, Indiana**  
**New Historical Atlas of Miami County, Indiana. Kingman Bros., 1877.**

improved acres for which he paid \$2,300. The second farm of one hundred acres cost \$2,400 and was located two miles southeast in Grant county.

On March 1, 1860, Joseph and his family moved onto the 80-acre property. Before long they had it and the Grant county farm well stocked with horses, cattle and hogs. Although he tried raising sheep for two or three years, his notes showed him that there was no profit in sheep so he quit raising them. His delight was in the beautiful cattle that grazed on his pasture.

In 1864 Joseph added 44 acres to the homestead for \$1,400. This increased the 80 acres to 124 acres that were well supplied with water.

Things were going well for Joseph so he decided to by a store in Xenia and stock it with goods. Soon he found he had too many "fires" to keep going and sold the store to a man who was to make payments for it. The business failed for the man, he didn't keep up the payments, and Joseph lost over \$1,000.

Around 1874-75, since Joseph was getting older, he sold the Grant county farm for \$5,000 on payments making a profit of \$2,600. He quit cultivating his land himself and rented it out. Although his farming years were over and he never claimed being a No. 1 farmer, he had always done most of the labor himself and had kept as "square" with the world as possible. He felt that a man should be independent in living his life.

When Joseph's biography was written in 1877, he was 58 years old. Catherine was 50. They had lived 17 years on their Jackson county farm. It had the appearance of a first-class farm, with modern improvements. It was under a high state of cultivation.

Politically, Joseph never ran for any office nor ever wanted one. He said he didn't want any part in those "wire-working" conventions. He was content living on his farm with his family and reading his books. He cast his first vote for Martin Van Buren, who was running for president in 1836, and Col. R. M. Johnson, for vice-president. He voted for the Republican party at



its organization helping to elect Abraham Lincoln. He was "stringently" opposed to slavery and to "secret orders," which he thought "were better adapted to despotic than Republican governments." He thought their obligations, penalties and foolish ceremonies lowered humanity. He also opposed whiskey, tobacco, and gambling, those habits and principles that degrade humanity. He supported those which elevated the human race. He later identified himself with the bimetalists and left the Republican party to vote for William J. Bryan.

When the Xenia (Indiana) Presbyterian Church was organized on November 12, 1870, by Rev. William Armstrong, who visited the town as missionary of the Muncie Presbytery for the purpose of establishing a society, J. M. Darby and Catharine S. Darby were the first names on a petition for organization. For several years, Joseph was a ruling elder in the Presbyterian church. However, through his reading of history and science, his own observation of the world, his own reason as an intelligent man, and his dealings with men, he questioned both the authenticity of old and new Testaments of the Bible and doubted the "Divine" of the Christian Religion. He believed he and others had the right to read, examine, think and judge for themselves.

The Darbys saw to the education and mental improvement of their children, who received a liberal common school education and were supplied with an abundance of interesting literature. Joseph had the largest and most valuable library of any man in the township having acquired most of his books prior to his marriage. He also had a deep interest in geology and took pride in his large cabinet of rare rock specimens. He was most interested in the elevation and advancement in the intelligence of the human race.

Joseph Marsh Darby died on March 22, 1907. He was a highly respected man. The Marion, Indiana, newspapers carried these obituaries:

**Marion News-Tribune March 22, 1907  
Jonesboro and Gas City**

Joseph M. Darby of Converse, who has been residing with his daughter, Mrs. H. A. Acker, in Jonesboro for some time, died with hemorrhage of the brain Thursday morning at 3:30 o'clock. The funeral will be preached at his home in Converse at 2 o'clock Friday. Burial at the I.O.O.F. cemetery at that place. The deceased was 88 years of age. He had been in ill health for a few weeks and on Wednesday had a stroke of paralysis. The remains will be taken at noon Friday over the Panhandle to Converse.

**The Marion Daily Leader March 22, 1907  
Death of An Aged Man**

Joseph M. Darby, a well known resident of Converse, died Thursday morning at 3:40 o'clock at the home of his daughter Mrs. Acker of Jonesboro after a short illness with hemorrhage of the brain. He was 88 years of age and had lived near Converse for many years. The body was shipped to Converse for burial by Undertaker Ward of Gas City. The cortage left the residence Friday morning.

Sources:

Ancestry.com 1860, 1870 and 1880 United States Federal Census. Joseph M. Darby, Jackson Township, Miami County, Indiana.

**Biographical and Genealogical History of Cass, Miami, Howard and Tipton Counties, Indiana.** Chicago, IL/ The Lewis Publishing Company. 1888

Graham, John Ambrose **Pioneer History of Peru and Miami County 1877.**

**History of Miami County, Indiana.** Brant & Fuller 1887.

**Marion News-Tribune.** March 22, 1907.

**New Historical Atlas of Miami County, Indiana.** Kingman Bros., 1877.

**The Marion Daily Leader.** March 22, 1907.

Watson, Shelia D. **Pioneer Cemeteries of Grant County, Indiana.** Vol. I.

Editors note: Researching Joseph M. Darby held several points of confusion. Although several atlases and history books contained his biography, they were written before his death. A search of cemeteries in Marion county, Indiana, for his grave came up empty. Checking a map closely, it was seen that today Converse is located where Xenia once was and extends into Grant county. Checking Grant county, the cemetery where Joseph was buried was soon found. With this information it was easy to find his obituaries in the Marion County Library. On the way to the cemetery there was a sign along the road noting the town name change.

Another somewhat confusing point came about with him residing in both Johnson township and Jackson township in Marion county, Indiana, with the names being similar. Hopefully this is made clear to the reader. Also the time of death was inconsistent.





A large **J. M. Darby** marker stands behind the headstones of Catharine and Joseph Darby. The headstones read:

**Catharine S.**  
Wife of J. M. Darby  
Died Dec. 9, 1885  
Aged 68 Y 10 M 17 D

**Joseph M. Darby**  
1819-1907

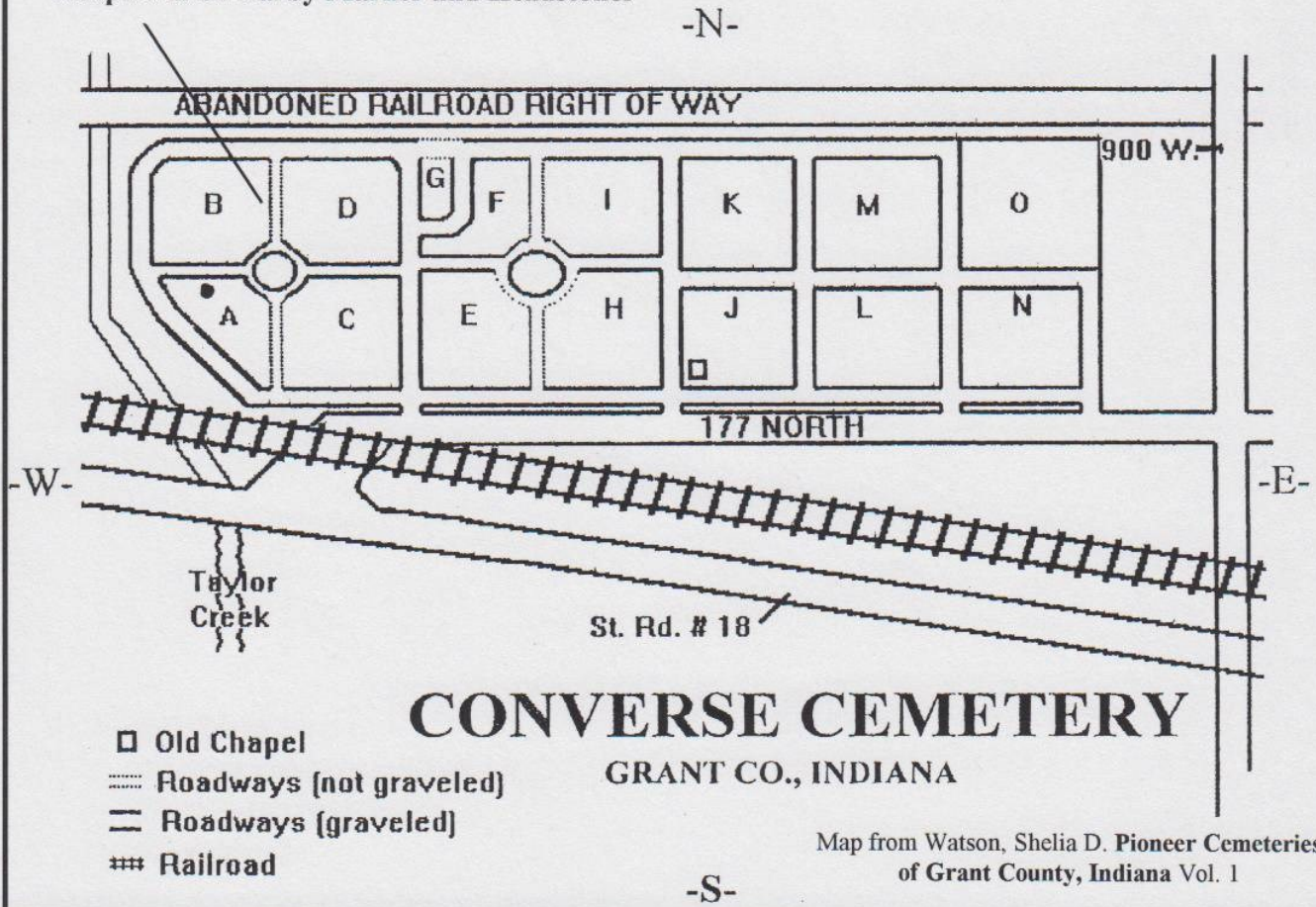
Not seen in the photo on the far left is a taller marker for **Mary Morgan Little**, the mother of Joseph's wife Catharine. And next to Catharine's stone the headstone for: **Estella May**, Setp. (misspelled) 5, 1885, 16 Y 10 M 13 D, Our beautiful May, How we miss thee at home

The first cemetery in Jackson township was laid out on the farm of Thomas Mason for the first burial of Thomas and Mary Addington's infant. Afterward it was known as the Xenia cemetery and was the principal burial place at Converse.

To reach the Converse Cemetery take S. R. 18 west from Marion, Indiana and just before reaching Converse turn right on 900 W, left on 177 north, right into cemetery and immediately left to the west end of the cemetery Section A.

Photo by Bob Schmidt.

Joseph Marsh Darby Marker and Headstones



- Old Chapel
- ⋯ Roadways (not graveled)
- ▬ Roadways (graveled)
- ≡≡≡ Railroad