

CANAWLERS AT REST

SAMUEL DODSON

b. October 18, 1818

d. May 23, 1890

By Carolyn I. Schmidt

Samuel Dodson was born on October 18, 1818 to Jeremiah and Arletta (Brown) Dodson in western Tennessee. He was the fourth of their ten children of which nine grew to maturity. His parents, from Scotland, moved to Tennessee in colonial times. His father was a minister, who preached the gospel and who also practiced medicine.

Samuel and his siblings were sent to the common schools. At an early age he became a contractor. Little more is known about his early life.

Meanwhile in 1824 Col. Thomas H. Blake of Vigo county, Indiana was a member of the county legislature. While serving in this position he made many trips to Corydon, which was the capital of Indiana until 1825. There he introduced the first measure to investigate building a canal from Lake Erie to the Wabash River. He gave a long and able report that said since Terre Haute was the head of navigation on the Wabash River, it should have a canal to transport things from the river to Lake Erie. After much discussion about what route this canal might take, the canal act was passed by the legislature in January 1830. Ground was broken for the Wabash & Erie Canal in Fort Wayne, Indiana on the 100th anniversary of George Washington's birthday, February 22, 1832. By 1840 the canal was completed from the Indiana/Ohio state line to Lafayette.

The citizens of Terre Haute saw that farm produce was sold in Lafayette for double of what they were receiving locally. They wanted the canal completed from Lafayette to their town. Although it looked like it would be built along the line previously suggested, Col R. W. Thompson, who was in the 1840-41 legislature, advocated building a railroad instead of the canal, even though much

work had already been done on it. Citizens of the county didn't have faith in the technology of railroads and voted to finish the canal.

In 1844 Samuel Dodson moved to Terre Haute, contracted to build several of the railroads running into the town. In 1847 an agreement was made with the canal bondholders to extend the Wabash & Erie Canal to Evansville. Around this time Samuel took on an extensive contract to build the canal at the summit level near Lockport. Lockport was located about ten miles southeast of Terre Haute. The canal contracts were for sections 1/2 mile in length. The list of W & E contractors found in the Indiana State Archives shows that Samuel Dodson, David B. Dodson, and Hiram S. Hanchette held the contract for section 221 and that Samuel Dodson also held the contracts for sections 219 and 220 by himself. All of these contracts were for south of Terre Haute.

Lockport, which is now called Riley, did not exist before the canal was built. Since there were several locks being built in that vicinity, the town was laid out on land owned by Nathaniel Donham during canal construction. The first stores in the new town were opened by a grocer and whiskey seller named Manning and J. W. Penn. Samuel Dodson opened two general merchandise establishments. This town did a booming business from 1847-1850 and was considered one of the best trading points up to the time the canal was closed. Then there was about a two-year period when business was quiet until the Terre Haute & Worthington railroad opened a station in the town.

On January 25, 1845 Samuel married Martha E. Witty in Putnam county, Indiana. She was of Scotch descent, the daughter of John Witty, and was born in North Carolina on April 16, 1825.

In 1848, when Peter McKenna came from New York to Terre Haute to work for Samuel, he found that no work had been done on the canal through the town limits. When completed it came into town from the north along the city cemetery, now Woodlawn Cemetery, and ran close to the river bank to the foot of Mulberry Street, then turned east on Eagle Street, then rounded a bend to the north to Canal Street, then east on Canal Street to Tenth Street, then down Tenth Street to Oak Street and finally headed south-easterly, passing out of town. Water was finally turned into the canal in Terre Haute and the line boats E. A. Hannegan and the G. R. Walker arrived on October 25, 1849.

On May 1, 1850 water was let into the first portion of the Cross-Cut from the Eel River Dam to Terre Haute. This is the portion that Samuel had worked on. In June 1850 the Iolus (Oleus), a line boat, left town via "the raging

THE HOOSIER PACKET - OCTOBER 2013

canal” with Captain Spear, canal officers, prominent bank and ended the canal forever. citizens and a cannon on board headed for Eel River Dam. The first regular Terre Haute packet or passenger boat on the canal was Captain David Dodson’s “Eliza.” Next was Samuel Dodson’s “Eliza Jane,” but the boat was so small that there was only room to paint the word “Eliza” on it. So two “Elizas” floated through Terre Haute.

At the time the canal reached Terre Haute, its superintendent was K. B. Osborn and its resident engineer was William J. Ball, who was the first civil engineer to come to Terre Haute. He came in 1840 because of the canal and went on to work as chief engineer on several early railroads. One of its canal trustees was Thomas Dowling. A short time later the canal was completed to the reservoir junction. Although the canal was opened all the way to Evansville, Indiana in 1853, the canal era in Terre Haute was basically from 1850-1860 — a mere ten years. Its last two years of operation were only for local trade between Terre Haute and Worthington. The Rothchilds had abandoned the project in 1858 and, had it not been for Chauncey Rose and the company he organized with W. D. Griswold as vice-president and Gen. Charles Cruft as treasurer, it would not have had its life extended those two years. After that the Wabash River washed out its west

Construction of the Wabash & Erie Canal and building railroads were not the only interests of Samuel Dodson. Soon after the canal was completed he “saw money in the show business.” He leased the Corinthian hall located at the northeast corner of Third Street and Wabash Avenue and produced the town’s first play, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” He mainly relied on local talent. The daughter of railroad engineer, Billy Baugh, played “little Eva” and Samuel’s son was cast as the baby, who had no speaking part. He conducted the play for several years and was a very successful manager. It can be seen that it was a powerful drama, for fifty-five years later it was still running in Terre Haute.

In May 1853 Terre Haute had its second election and Samuel was elected marshal. He was re-elected to that position in May of 1854-55-56. He served 4 one year terms. He was replaced by C. M. Crooks in 1857.

While serving as marshal three of Samuel and Martha’s children were born. George C. in 1852, Florence E. in 1854, and Emma O. in 1855

Samuel Dodson's Family

Name	Birth	Place	Death	Place	Marriage	Place
Jeremiah Dodson		Scotland				
m. Arletta Brown Dodson		Scotland				
A.						
B.						
C.						
D. Samuel Dodson	10-18-1818	Western Tennessee	5-23-1890		1-25-1845	Putnam, IN
m. Martha E.(Jane)Witty Dodson	4-16-1825	North Carolina	D. 11-28-1907	Bur.	12-30-1907	1-25-1845 Putnam, IN.
1. Mary Dodson King	1849				before 1870	census
m. Thomas King	1847					
a. Catherine King	1868					
2. George C. Dodson	1852	Terre Haute, IN			10-21-1879	
m. Elvira Armstrong					10-21-1879	
a. Bertha Dodson						
b. Emma Dodson						
3. Florence E. Dodson Crapo	1854		7-?-1936	Terre Haute, IN		1873
m. George W. Crapo M.D.	8-31-1852	Sullivan co., IN				
a. Edna Crapo Hyneman						
b.						
4. Emma O. Dodson Davis	9-23-1855	Terre Haute, IN	9-23-1881			
m. Daniel N. Davis						
m.2 Maggie D. Strout Davis	9-6-1856	Fairmount, W.Virginia				3-4-1883
a. Anna C. Davis Johnson						
b. Paul Hyde Johnson						
c. Charles S. Johnson						
E.						
F.						
G.						
H.						
I.						
J.						

Samuel also served three terms as tax collector and was a street commissioner. He belonged to the Whig Party and became a Republican when the Whig Party ended. He and Martha were members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Terre Haute.

In 1855 Samuel and Martha were living at the corner of Fifth and Eagle streets in Terre Haute. Their daughter Emma was born in this house.

The 1859 *Indiana State Gazette* shows Samuel as a constable. He was living on 8th Street between Poplar and Swan Streets in Terre Haute.

The U.S. Federal Census of 1860 lists Samuel's occupation as Express. His personal estate was valued at \$300. Living with Samuel were his wife and children Mary Dodson age 11, George C. Dodson age 8, Flora (Florence) Dodson age 7 and Emma E. Dodson age 4.

The 1870 census lists his occupation as Huckster (peddler) with a personal estate of \$300. Living with Him was Martha and their son George, who was a clerk in a grocery, Flora and Emma who were in school, and Thomas & Mary Dodson King and their daughter Catherine King. Thomas was a railroad fireman.

In 1873 Flora (Florence) E. Dodson, Samuel's daughter was married to Dr. George Crapo in Terre Haute. George was the son of Silas Crapo. George was born in Sullivan county, Indiana on August 31, 1852 and moved to Terre Haute with his parents at age 14 in 1866. After finishing public school he was a clerk in a drug store for two years. There he became interested in medicine. He studied with Dr. J. E. Link for three years and entered the Ohio Medical College at Cincinnati in the fall of 1873. He was graduated on February 28, 1875. He set up practice in Terre Haute. He and Florence had a daughter, Edna Crapo Hyneman. They belonged to the Congregational church. He was a Democrat and served on the city council. George was also a Mason.

Sometime in the middle to late 1870s Emma Dodson, another of Samuel's daughters, was married to Daniel N. Davis. Dan, as he was best known, was born in Wales, came with his parents as a young child to Youngstown, Ohio, and after being there briefly settled in Terre Haute. After a public school education he attended Garvin's Commercial College and then became employed for a year at the old nail works. He then worked in a retail grocery on the corner of Seventh and Main streets until accepting a position as bookkeeper with the old Wabash Iron Company. He remained there for twenty-six years before starting a coal business in 1900. He was so

successful that he incorporated his business in 1905 as the Dan Davis Coal Company.

Emma's marriage to Dan was cut short by her death on September 23, 1881. She was only 26 years of age. The 1880 census shows that they had no children. Her early death may have been in child birth. He then married Maggie D. Strout on March 4, 1883.

George C. Dodson, Samuel's son, married Elvira Armstrong on October 21, 1879. George had attended the Terre Haute public schools and at first was employed as a salesman in a general store. After working there for six years, he became a partner in the firm. Two years later he went into the produce trade after which he became a wholesale dealer in junk, wood and coal. Elvira was of Irish/German descent and was the daughter of John Armstrong. George and Elvira had two children, Bertha and Emma, and were members of the Methodist Episcopal Church. George was a Republican, a member of the K. of P. and K. of H., being the treasurer or the latter for eight years. He also served for several years as director of different building and loan associations.

The 1880 census shows Samuel as a Junk and Produce Dealer. He and his son George were probably working together in this business at that time. Samuel was with Martha and all the children were on their own.

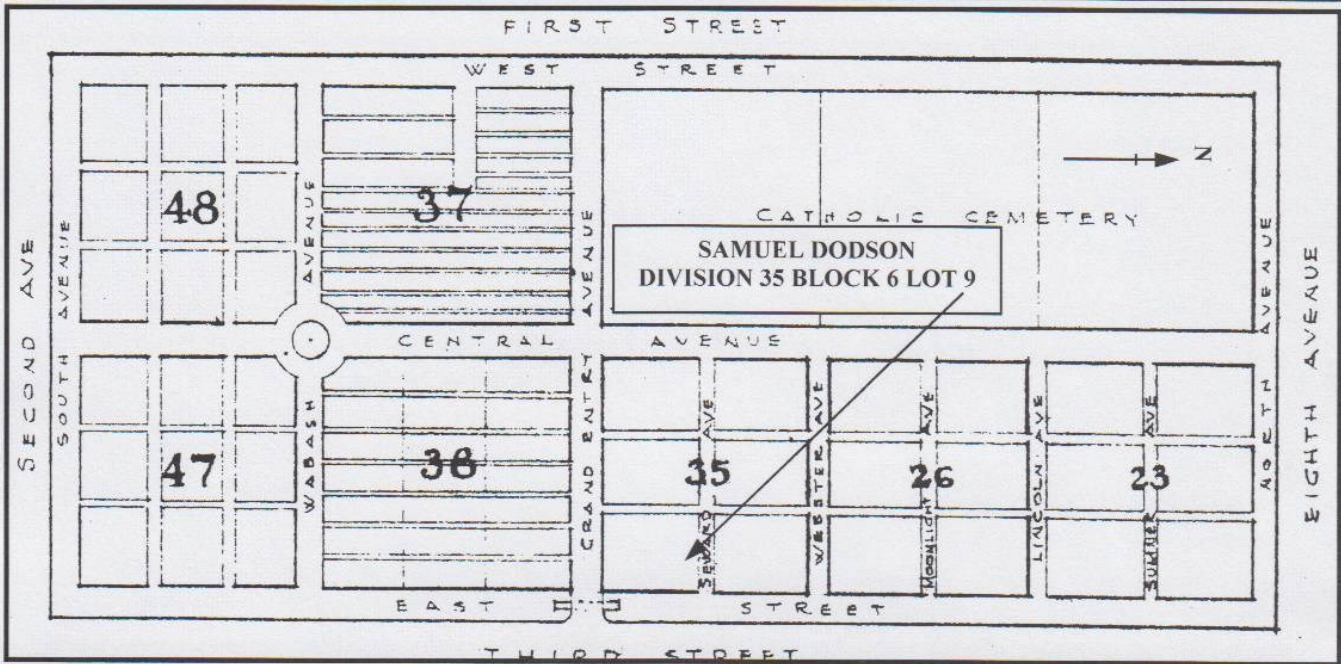
Samuel Dodson passed away in his home in Terre Haute on May 23, 1890. He was laid to rest in lot 9, section 6, division 35 of Woodlawn Cemetery, which was located on Third Street in Terre Haute, on May 25, 1890.

He had many personal friends and business associates who attributed the secret to all of his successes in all the things he undertook to his "rare versatility of talent, and [that he] easily became master of the work before him" according to the *History of Vigo County, Indiana*.

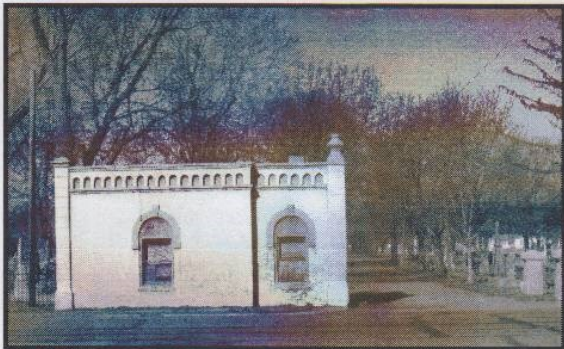
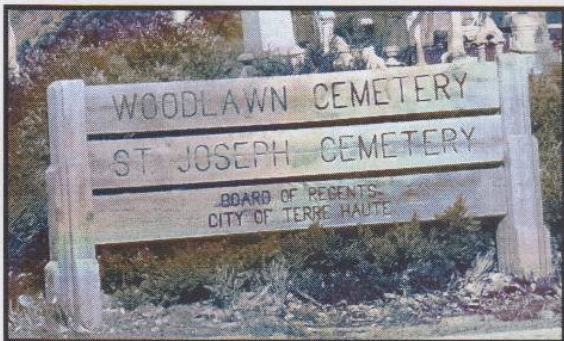
Martha E. (Jane) Witty Dodson, Samuel's wife died on November 28, 1907 according to the large Dodson marker. However the cemetery's ledger says she was buried in the Dodson plot on December 30, 1907. We believe the ledger should read November 30, 1907. Perhaps the E. in her name stood for Eliza. Did Samuel name his canal boat "Eliza Jane" after his wife?

While searching for Samuel's grave, Sandy and Leon Billing, CSI members from Terre Haute, also found another Samuel Dodson buried in Division 37 Section 6 Lot 197 of the cemetery according to cemetery records. He died at age 23 in 1869. A headstone on or near this lot is unreadable. How he is related to our subject is uncertain.

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Samuel Dodson died on May 23, 1890 and was buried on May 25, 1890 in City (now Woodlawn) Cemetery in Terre Haute, Indiana. The Dodson family plot marker shows Martha Jane on one side and Elijah Dodson on the opposite side. Samuel has no headstone, but there are newer headstones for Martha, Elijah and John Dodson.



Sources:

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 Oakey, C. C. *Greater Terre Haute and Vigo County: Closing the First Century's History of City and County*. Chicago, IL: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1908.

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 Wabash & Erie Canal Indiana Canal Contracts found in the Indiana State Archives, Indianapolis, IN.

Special thanks to:

Sandy & Leon Billing, CSI members from Terre Haute, for locating Samuel's grave and taking pictures for this article.

The staff at Highland Lawn Cemetery where records for Woodlawn Cemetery are kept

WOODLAWN CEMETERY

THIRD STREET

TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA

Top left: Sign outside Woodlawn Cemetery
 Bottom left: Entrance to Woodlawn Cemetery with old office that is no longer used
 Center: Dodson family plot marker

Photos by Sandy Billing