

# CANAWLERS AT REST

## ANDREW DOWNING

b. 1809  
d. 1872

By Carolyn I. Schmidt

Andrew Downing, was of Scotch-Irish descent. His father Michael Downing was born in Ireland in the 1750s and emigrated from Cork to America during the time of the Revolutionary War. Hoping to escape the oppression of the British government he enlisted in a Virginia regiment and fought for seven years under General "Mad Anthony" Wayne, who he loved and trusted. He endured much adversity. Michael was with Wayne at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in Ohio in 1794. They used bayonets and bullets to kill the Indians hiding amid trees blown down by a tornado. He also had been in Harmar's Defeat on the Maumee River in 1790.

Later Michael served for five years in the regular army during the War of 1812. He also was a soldier along the frontier on the Ohio River. He was at Fort Massac below the mouth of the Tennessee River on the Ohio River in what is now Illinois. He carried the mail from the Fort to the Falls of the Ohio (Louisville, Kentucky) by foot passing through dangerous wilderness.

We do not know when Michael Downing married Mary Anne Wells. However in 1818 he put his family on a flatboat on the Kanawha River in (West) Virginia and went to Louisville, Kentucky. From there they moved by land to Washington County, Indiana and settled on Walnut ridge. In 1832 he moved to Bloomfield in Greene County where Andrew, his third son, was living and lived there for many years. He then moved to Jackson County, where he died in 1852. He has monuments in two cemeteries. One is in Downing Cemetery, Grassy Fork Township, Jackson County, Indiana, and the other in Grandview Cemetery, Bloomfield, Greene County, Indiana.

Michael and Mary Anne Downing's children were Alexander; John; Andrew (our subject born in 1809);

Paul, who was a great flatboat pilot; Albert and Gallatin, who were twins; and Peggy.

Andrew Downing came to Bloomfield about 1829. He was a shoemaker for awhile and then began handling liquors, groceries, sugar, coffee, molasses, etc. in a merchandising establishment. Business prospered. He purchased a lot prior to 1835. He built the first brick house in town. In 1831 he built and ran the first flatboat out of Bloomfield on the nearby White River.

While on the river in 1832 Andrew came down with cholera and brought the disease back to Bloomfield. Thomas Warnick the Greene County clerk caught it from him. The doctor treating Warnick gave him nothing but calomel used for the treatment of worms and not the proper treatment at all. When Andrew heard of this he rode as fast as his horse could go to reach the cold collapsed form of Warnick. Andrew quickly put on a big kettle of water filled with roasting ears. When the water boiled and the corn was very hot, he wrapped cloths around the ears, put bundles of hot corn all around Warnick's body, and held the covers in place throughout the agonizing reaction. It is said that when the blood goes back into the limbs it feels like hot needles being inserted into the body. Andrew's quick work saved Warnick's life.

Andrew operated the flatboat and continued to operate his merchandising establishment until 1837 at which time a contract was let for a brick court house. The builder absconded with the first one thousand dollars. Andrew, being one of the sureties on the contract, had to build the court house. He hired William Eveligh (Eveleigh) of Louisville, Kentucky, to be the boss carpenter for the building. It was finished it in 1839. It was forty or fifty feet square and overlooked a gully to its south. Almost the entire town was built around the public square located on its other three sides.

When William Eveligh came to Bloomfield, he brought his family of three brothers and two sisters with him. They had just arrived from Ireland and the girls were very beautiful. Andrew and M. H. Shryer, both widowers, were struck by them. When the court house was finished, the first event held in the new court room was a huge ball. When everything was magnificently arranged and the musicians in their places, Andrew and Shryer stood up with the Eveligh sisters and were married in front of all present. Andrew married Eliza Eveligh.

Although a website by Cathy Wayman lists Andrew and Eliza (Everleigh) having five children (William A., born in 1840; John W., born in 1851; Louis, born in 1859, Lillie, born in 1864; and Josie, born in 1872) the dates of his children's birth seem very far apart with the last child being born the year Andrew died. The names

of these children and times of their birth are in question. It also says he was married to Mary F. She could have been his first wife.

In *Biographical Memoirs of Greene County, Indiana With Reminiscences of Pioneer Days* it says Andrew set up his oldest son, John, in merchandising in the old brick block. This was the largest of the merchandizing buildings built by Andrew as his business grew. It was located a block north of the square in Bloomfield.

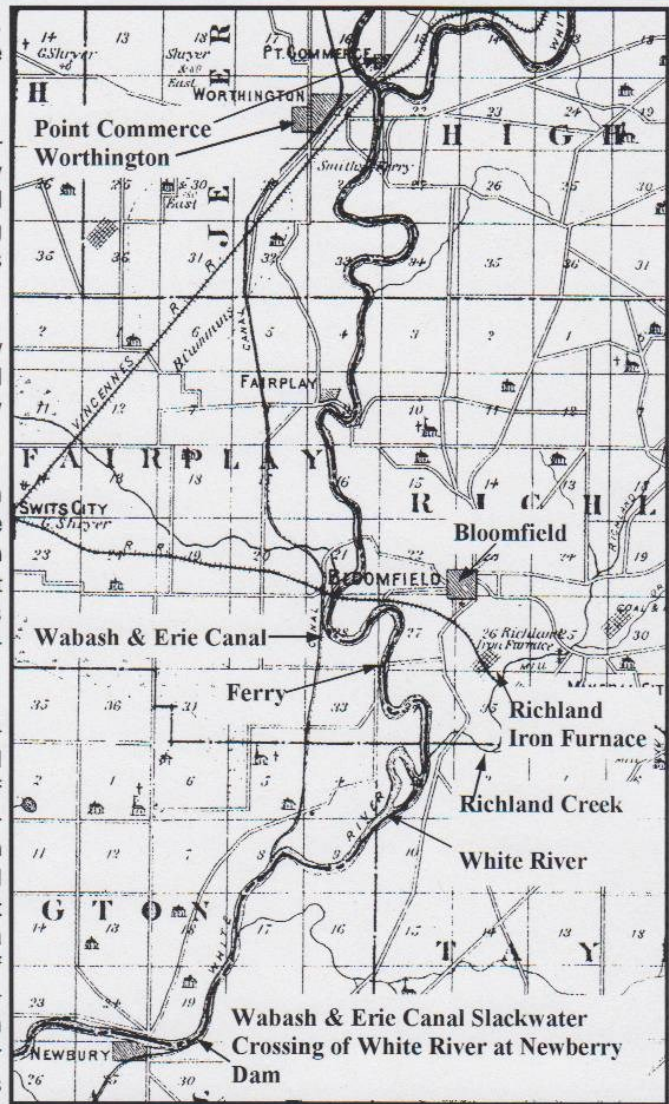
By 1840 Bloomfield merchants including Andrew had a sales base of over 400 people, who not only lived in town but came from distances around town. Andrew was becoming wealthy.

When iron was discovered a short distance from Bloomfield, Andrew's attention was piqued. The iron ore from Ore-branch of Plummer's Creek formed a bench on each side of a ravine that was about nine feet deep. It was block ore. Other ore was discovered in pockets along Indian Creek and Richland Creek. This would supply all the ore necessary to operate an iron furnace.

Andrew knew there was a demand for iron products for farm and household needs. Items settlers had brought with them were deteriorating. He had plenty of money from his other businesses and saw the opportunity to make even more. He decided to set up an iron furnace to make pig iron on a bluff overlooking Richland Creek about a mile southeast of Bloomfield. It was built in 1840-41 and named Richland Iron Furnace. He built a loading dock for the pig iron. It stood on the bank of Richland Creek at the foot of a steep hill below the furnace. It was built by setting huge stones into a wooden crib made of twenty-inch squared timbers held together with long, thick iron spikes made at the furnace. Teams hauled ore up the hill to the furnace and returned with cooled iron pigs to be stacked on the loading dock for shipment.

At first only pig iron was made at the furnace. Then Andrew added a shop to cast stoves, plows, kettles, farm castings, mill machinery and all kinds of domestic hollow ware. It produced the best quality of mill-iron.

As business increased Andrew hired more men. Around 1844-45 the furnace was enlarged with the addition of better machinery and a blast furnace. It had an engine, boilers, and a stack about forty-five feet high and nine feet across the boshes. The blowing-cylinders were forty-two inches in diameter and had a six foot stroke. Charcoal was used for fuel producing a hot-blast for smelting. It could turn out about nine tons of pig-iron in a twenty-four hour day operation.



A portion of an 1876 map of Greene County, Indiana, from *The Historical Atlas of the State of Indiana* by Baskin, Forster & Co.

To supply the furnace, iron ore in stone like chunks was taken from the hills and hauled by horse and mule team over what is now called the Iron Mountain Road. Trees were felled in the nearby wilderness and turned into charcoal at various pits nearby to fuel the furnace. This process is described in the *History of Greene County* as follows:

"About forty cords of wood were cut into lengths of about four feet, and on a level piece of land were stood up on end around a central cavity which was filled with kindling materials until a space thirty or forty feet in diameter was covered, and on the top of this another layer of the wood was stood and still another on top of this until the pit had the shape of a large flat bowl. Leaves were then spread entirely over this,

and then on the leaves was placed a layer of earth five or six inches deep, with a few air holes on the sides, and an opening at the top where the kindling below was lighted. It required an experienced collier to manage the pit —to know how to regulate the air supply, to know when the wood had all been suitably charred and to know how to smother the fire in this pit. Some twenty or thirty men were constantly at work in this branch of the business cutting and hauling the wood, forming and burning the pits, and hauling the charcoal to the furnace.

"All this was under the superintendence of a boss, as was also the mining of the iron ore. The bosses usually took contracts of supplying the coal or the ore, and hired and controlled the hands under them, and were paid for the coal or the ore —4 cents a bushel for the coal at the pit or 7 cents delivered at the furnace. There were sub-bosses throughout the system.

"The ore was furnished in the same manner by the ton usually, and came out in chunks like stone. This was reduced, by heat before being used in the furnace, to small pieces like nuts."

There were three main divisions at Richland Furnace. One cut the wood, made the charcoal and took it to the furnace to keep it burning. Another mined the ore and transported it to the furnace. The third worked in the mill to produce the pig iron and iron products.

The process of producing pig iron is described by Tom Thomas in an 1976 article in Bloomfield's *Evening World* as follows:

"Pig iron is the first form of useful iron and is derived by melting iron ore in a furnace. Also melted in the furnace is an agent for producing heat, limestone for use as a purifying agent or flux for separating the iron from the impurities when in a molten condition.

"The furnaces used to smelt the ore for the purpose of separating the iron from the impurities are called blast furnaces because air under pressure is forced through the mass of ore, fuel and flux within the furnace to cause the separation. The molten iron then settles to the lower portion of the furnace while the impurities or slag being lighter, rise above the iron.

"When it is determined that the separation of the iron and impurities is completed and that the mass inside the furnace is satisfactorily liquefied, a hole, called the cinder notch or slag notch, just above the top of the molten iron is opened up and the molten slag is drained off for discard. The hole through which the molten iron is extracted is then opened and the iron is run into prepared molds which were made in sand, in the early

days, in what was known as the pig bed. The solidified iron has always been called pig iron and the waste product called slag."

It is hard to imagine transporting such a great weight as that of pig iron or the iron products through a wilderness with almost impassable roads. Much of the iron first produced was hauled on wagons pulled by horse teams to Louisville, Kentucky. This route became one of the roads into Bloomfield. In the beginning the teamsters were paid five dollars per ton for the 100 mile journey.

Since Richland Iron Furnace employed a number of workmen, the little town of Furnace rapidly sprang up around it. Farmers in the area sold their produce in the village. Eventually the town had a post office, bank, a company store, houses and Furnace Mill. The mill probably was the largest in Greene County.

After the furnace had been operating several years, M. H. Shryer, who Andrew had previously aided when Shryer's business failed; William Eveleigh; and William Mason went into business with Andrew. Shortly thereafter they purchased a steamboat and called it "The Richland." Shryer managed the boat and was called Captain. They used it to transport iron and produce down the White River to the Wabash River, then to the Ohio River. They also made additional money by shipping agricultural products for local farmers. For awhile other steamboats came up the river to pick up loads of pig iron and the furnace did fairly well.

In the early 1850s the Wabash & Erie Canal was dug through Greene County. Lock #57, a timber crib lock with a 7 foot lift, was built between the Bradford Ferry roads 126 and 127 in Section 33 of Fairplay Township about a mile and a half south of the road to Bloomfield (SR 54, US 231). An epidemic of cholera struck the camp of the Irish laborers and took many of their lives. Their bodies were buried on a bluff near an Indian mound at Bloomfield.

In 1851 the first canal boat floated by Bloomfield, but the Wabash & Erie Canal was not opened all the way from Toledo, Ohio, on Lake Erie to Evansville, Indiana, on the Ohio River until 1853. Although the canal was only a few miles from Richland Furnace, it was on the west side of the White River west of Bloomfield. To reach the canal the heavy iron was put on boats at Richland Creek, floated to the White River and down to the canal slackwater at Newberry. From there canal boats carried it to Evansville for use there or it was trans-shipped to river boats at the Ohio River. This was the best means of transportation for the iron thus far and the canal boats continuously conveyed iron products to the South.

Andrew owned two canal boats. His boat captains were Paul and Alexander Thompson. One of the boats was wrecked at the Richland cut-off where its remains were imbedded in the canal bank. Other canal boats were owned by Start & Co., Worthington flour merchants, and by Peter C. VanSlyke, Bloomfield's shipper of grain and other products.

In 1855 Andrew founded Downing's Bank of Indiana at Furnace. It was located in a little stone building built by Mr. Davis, a refugee from Kentucky and cousin of Jeff Davis. It issued currency up to \$5,000.00 in \$1.00 and \$20.00 bills.

Around 1855-56 all the partners decided to leave the furnace except for Andrew, but business went on as usual with John Eveleigh and M. H. Shryer as bookkeepers. Andrew soon found three wealthy partners —E. J. Peck and A. L. Voorhees, both from Indianapolis, and Chauncey Rose, who founded Rose Polytechnic Institute, Rose Orphanage, and Rose Dispensary in Terre Haute. They began doing business on a larger scale having brought more capital into the business.

Henry Irons, an expert manager from an iron furnace in Kentucky, took charge of the furnace in 1856 and it grew until 120 men were working there. Their wages were \$1.00 per day, a wonderful salary for the 1850s. Pig iron had gone up in price and was selling for forty dollars per ton in Louisville. Plans were laid to start other furnaces. Everything began to prosper with Irons in charge.

With the increased capital additional real estate was acquired and the mill enlarged. A new 100-horsepower engine was added. The town of Furnace flourished with its bank, charcoal burning kilns, distillery, grist mill, hollow-ware factory, iron smelting plant, ore mining equipment, and store.

By 1858 the company was reclaiming forty-five percent iron from the ore. A handsome profit of \$2,000 was made. Some said the company held \$200,000.00 in property by this time.

From 1851 to 1859 business on the canal was fairly good, but often it had problems with the depth of water. Although Andrew's businesses always seemed to get bigger and better, doom loomed ahead.

The Wabash & Erie Canal near Bloomfield operated from Worthington south to Evansville for about 6 years and from Worthington to the north toward Terre Haute about 10 years. Upon the suspension of the improvement on the south end of the Wabash & Erie Canal by the Canal Company, all means of transportation were cut off except by wagon team. Where before the canal

was completed boats could use the White River, but once the slackwater dam at Newberry had been constructed for the canal, the river was no longer accessible to steamboats. When iron commanded a good price, it was feasible to haul it thirty miles to a railroad, but this was not always the case. Andrew had to stop the iron business in which he had put all his energy for about eighteen years.

Richland Furnace soon blew out and was never rekindled. Downing's bank closed its doors, families moved away, and all the associated industries were shut down.

An interesting court case was tried over who had the right to the mast on 200 acres owned by Andrew Downing & Company in 1855. At the time mast, the nuts from trees, was an important and easy way of feeding hogs. Major Livingston drafted a complaint stating "that the plaintiff was the owner of a certain tract of land in Center Township containing two hundred acres, and was agent for a large body of land belonging to Andrew Downing & Company, and in possession of it, and entitled to the annual mast growing thereon, all of which was covered with a heavy and large growth of timber, consisting of white oak, black oak, pin oak, burr oak, post oak, chestnut oak, chinquapin oak, beech, black walnut, white walnut, hackberry, hazelwood and grape vines. The said oak timber, beech timber, black walnut, white walnut, hackberry and hazelwood were heavily loaded with oak mast, beech mast, walnut mast and hazel mast, and said grape vines with grapes. And also that the ground underneath said timber, hazelwood and grape vines growing on said lands were deeply covered with said oak mast and beech mast and walnut mast, hazelnuts and grapes, furnishing to the stock, hogs, cattle and sheep of said plaintiff a good and sufficient supply of food to last his said stock from the 1st of September, 1854, up to the 1st day of April, 1855, of great value, to wit, of the value of two hundred dollars, and the said plaintiff says that the defendant afterward, to wit, on the 20th day of September, 1854, at the county and township aforesaid, did drive in and upon said lands of the said plaintiff one hundred head of large hogs, being the hogs of the defendant, and from thence, hitherto and up to the time of filing this complaint, and feed upon and eat up the mast of said plaintiff and hereby deprived the stock of the said plaintiff of the use and benefit of said mast, to the damage of plaintiff, etc."

A motion was made by the defendant's attorney and the part of the complaint regarding the land owned by Downing & Company was stricken out. A trial by jury found for the plaintiff and assessed damages at six dollars.

In 1857 Andrew left behind all the land, bank, canal-boats, flatboats, forge, iron furnace, mill, and store he owned at Richland Furnace and all his interests in the first brick house, the first flatboat, the brick block on the north side of the square, the old brick court house, the brick jail that was located on the east side of the square, and a house on the hill in Bloomfield. He set off for Texas where he became involved with the cattle business and politics.

Andrew was elected to the Texas legislature from Bosque County. When the Civil War began Andrew was loyal to the Union. After he told the legislature that "The 'Secesh' papers were killing their enemies until they had more men dead than were in the whole nation on both sides," he was asked to leave the state. He spent over fifty hours on horseback to reach safety at Fort Smith Arkansas with the United States army. At another time he was forced to ride to safety covering the 50 miles.

Andrew spent the ensuing winter with Colonel E. H. C. Cavins back in Bloomfield, Indiana. Cavins' wife was Andrew's niece. But when Nathaniel Bank's army entered Texas Andrew went with it, and returned to his home there.

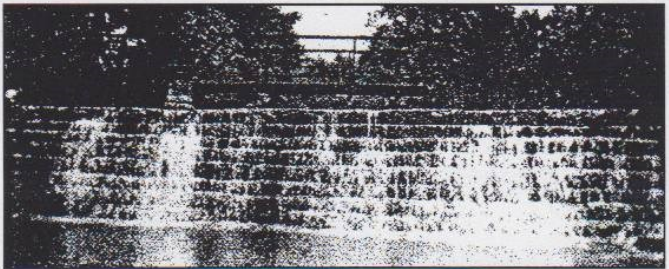
On February 1, 1859, delegates from counties along the line of the Wabash & Erie Canal assembled in Indianapolis, Indiana, to determine the best means of keeping what remained of the canal in operation. Called to the Chair was Judge Foster of Evansville. Jos. Ristine of Covington was appointed secretary. Speeches about the canal's value and necessity for repair were made by Fort Wayne's Judge Hanna, Logansport's Chauncey Carter, Wabash's Stearns Fisher, Senators Slack and Steele, and others. A committee to prepare a memorial to the Legislature on the subject was appointed consisting of Hanna, Griswold from Vigo County, Ingle from Vanderburgh, Andrew Downing from Greene, and McDonald from Fountain. Andrew still had much influence even though he lived in Texas

Andrew was appointed a United States marshal of Texas, and office that he held for some years. He died in 1872. He is not buried in Bloomfield nor have we found the location of his burial.

At some time Downing's old bank building was moved to Judge and Main streets in Bloomfield. It served as a veterinarian's office.

In 1884 citizens of Bloomfield decided it was time to build a new courthouse. The volume of records had increased and there were many laborers without work. A contract was let at the end of April 1885. By mid May the old brick courthouse that Andrew had had

built was cleared away and work begun on a new one. By 1940 the old mill at Furnace was gone. In the 1950s the old mill dam on Richland Creek was destroyed.



Top: The Richland Dam at Furnace backed up water in Richland Creek and was used by the mill and furnace. Newspaper photo  
Bottom: Today only timbers remain in the creek bed from the dam once located there. Photo by Bob Schmidt

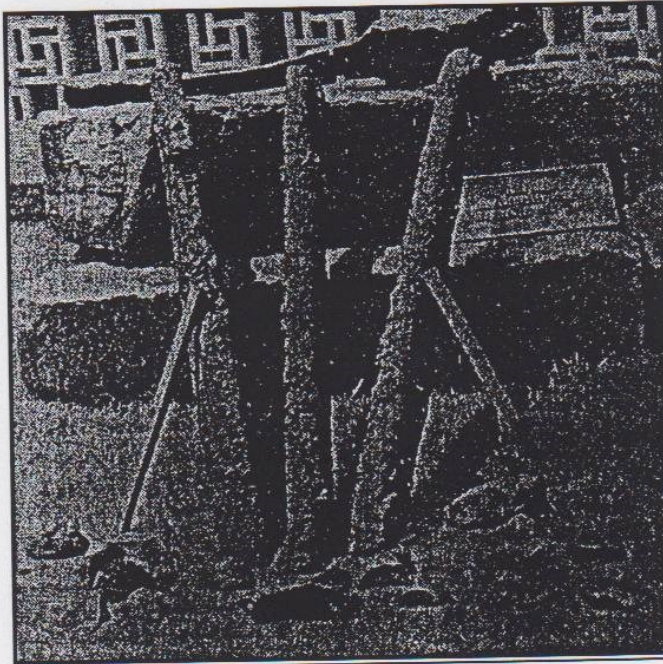
In 1962 when the rotting iron bridge across Richland Creek at Furnace was replaced by a concrete bridge, artifacts of Furnace Iron Mill were found. The Jake Wilson Construction Company unearthed the remains of the loading platforms while digging holes for new bridge footers. They brought up huge timbers that fell apart when they were exposed to the air. Stones from the platforms, some huge iron spikes and pigs of



This monument to Richland Iron Furnace was made with stones from the loading dock, pieces of slag and an iron pig. It is located beside the new bridge. Photo by Bob Schmidt

iron were salvaged and placed as a monument to the furnace mill by the side of the new bridge. The monument has a deep concrete base, eight huge stones set in mortar in which chunks of slag are visible and a rusting iron pig protruding from the stones at its eastern end. Most of the other stones were used in building the new bridge.

Located near Richland Furnace are two old graveyards that remind us of those who once lived and worked at Furnace. Furnace Mill Cemetery has four markers and the Gillam Cemetery has three. Although only a few markers remain, history and the size of the cemetery indicate many more people were buried there.



These pieces of pig iron and slag were exhibited in front of the Bloomfield State Bank in 1967.  
This photo by Ray Ames is from the *Bloomfield Evening World*.

In 1967 a display of pig iron and slag was displayed in front of the Bloomfield State Bank. These remnants of the Richland Iron Furnace seemed oddly out of place in this agricultural area of today. They played tribute to the courage, determination and initiative of Andrew Downing and the other early settlers who built and operated a furnace and businesses associated with it in a remote and isolated place over 166 years ago.

Some canceled checks from the Richland Bank were still in existence in 1976. Andrew Downing is still remembered in history books and articles written about him.

Special thanks to Sue Dove and Joan Tenhoor, librarians at the Bloomfield-Eastern Greene County Public Library, for locating information about Andrew Downing and Richland Furnace.

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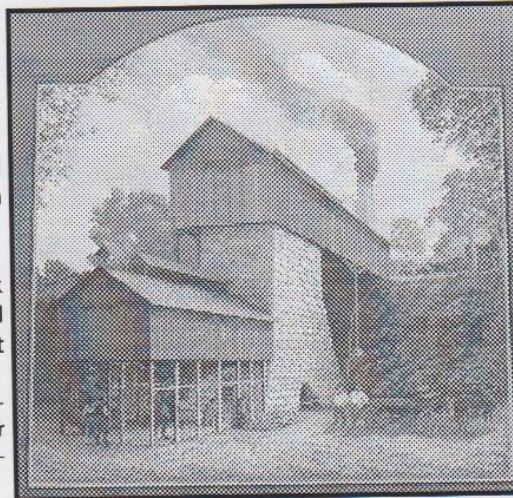
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**MURAL  
OF  
IRON  
FURNACE  
  
ON  
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P—Bob Schmidt