

## CANAWLERS AT REST

**JAMES  
ELWARD**  
b. 1805  
d. March 12, 1890

By Carolyn I. Schmidt

James Elward was born in Kilkenny, Ireland to Richard and Mary Elward. As a young man he got the idea of immigrating to America and shortly thereafter booked passage on a sailing ship. It landed in New York harbor after a six week voyage.

In the state of New York he found work as a gardener's assistant. At the end of a year he quit the job and his employer paid him a lump sum of one hundred dollars. With money in his pocket he decided to return home to Ireland. After arriving in Ireland, he again became restless. He came back to America a second time accompanied by his brother, William, who later died in Vincennes, Indiana.

After his return to America, James lived in Pennsylvania. While there he became acquainted with Robert English, a canal contractor, who was later engaged in the construction of the Wabash and Erie Canal in Indiana. It was English who's design was used for the flood gate on Silver Creek southwest of Huntington, Indiana, and the upper gate at Lock #31 at Carrollton, Indiana.

Having heard Robert English talk about the great canal being built in Indiana, how he was a part of it and how there were plenty of jobs available, James moved to Indiana around 1833. That year he, and others, drove oxen that pulled wagons loaded with tools and equipment to be used to construct the canal to Lagro. At that time Lagro was the largest and had the best prospects of any town in Wabash county. This was because the canal would require four locks to overcome the drop in the elevation of the land. It had been proven in the east on other canals that where there were many locks, which took time to pass through, a bustling town grew up.

Once construction began on the canal around Lagro, James' job was to haul the stone for the building of the four locks. Stone locks were unusual on the Wabash & Erie Canal. They were usually built of timber. However, near Lagro was a limestone quarry on the Salamonie River where good stone could be acquired.

James had been in Lagro for a while when the canal work had to be stopped due to the winter months. He decided that rather than sitting around and wasting his time when there was no work on the canal, he could better occupy his time by improving a farm and settling in Lagro. He purchased eighty acres of heavily timbered land about two miles north of Lagro for \$1.25 an acre. The \$100 was well spent. Over the next few winter seasons he worked at cutting down the standing timber and clearing the land. When he had cleared an area large enough for a home, he erected a round-log cabin in which he lived during the long winter months.

James' property was about a mile from his nearest neighbor, who was also in the process of clearing land. They both spent almost all of their time clearing with their only social contact being on Sunday when they met to grind their axes in preparation of the next week's work. Other than on these Sundays James seldom saw a human being other than an occasional Indian roaming through the woods.

Today James' property, which was covered with a magnificent stand of black walnut trees, which was generously interspersed with beech, hickory, oak, and sugar maple, would have brought in great sums of money. However, in the 1830s there was little market for fine timber partly because of a lack of a good way to transport it. Although a completed canal would help with this problem, James had little choice but to ruthlessly cut down the trees, roll the logs into huge heaps and burn them. At that time cleared land on which crops could be grown was more valuable than what is today almost priceless timber.

Daniel, John and James Driscoll and their attractive sister, Ellen Driscoll, came from County Cork, Ireland, to Indiana in 1833-34 and settled in the woods near James' farm. Ellen met James and they married in Wabash county in 1835 procuring their license from Col. William Steele.

Around this time there was an influx of Irishmen. They came to work on the canal. They were well fitted for work done often in cold and wet conditions, because it was similar to the conditions in which they lived in Ireland. James and his brother William influenced their brothers Thomas and Richard to come to America from Ireland.

Thomas Elward carried on in business in Memphis, Tennessee. He died there years later.

Richard Elward went to Natchez, Mississippi. He was a book binder. He became prominent in business and other activities of the city. Richard married and made his home in Natchez. He later founded the *Natchez Free Trader*. Being a neighbor of Jefferson Davis, he became Jeff's friend and assisted him in getting into Congress. After Jeff's election and "through some instrumentality" Richard was appointed to the position of postmaster for Natchez during the administrations of U. S. presidents, James K. Polk, Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan.

James and Ellen Elward's family grew in number to fourteen and the value of their estate increased according to the following Federal Census.

|                 | Age in |       |          | Born  |             |
|-----------------|--------|-------|----------|-------|-------------|
|                 | 1850   | 1860  | 1870     | Circa | Died        |
| James           | 44     | 56    | 65       | 1805  | 3-12-1890   |
| Ellen           | 34     | 46    | 55       | 1816  | 2-23-1893   |
| Richard         | 13     | 24    |          | 1836  |             |
| William A.      | 11     |       | 9-8-1838 |       |             |
| Mary A.         | 10     | 18    |          | 1842  |             |
| JoAnna          | 8      | 17    |          | 1843  | before 1884 |
| Margaret        | 6      | 15    |          | 1845  |             |
| Ellen           | 4      | 14    |          | 1846  |             |
| Catharine(Kate) | 18 mo. | 12    | 20       | 1848  |             |
| Sarah Ann       | 2 mo.  | 11    | 19       | 1849  |             |
| Bridget         |        | 9     | 18       | 1851  |             |
| Nancy Louisa    |        | 7     | 16       | 1853  |             |
| Clara Elizabeth |        | 3 mo. | 9        | 1857  |             |
| L.              |        |       | 8        | 1860  | before 1884 |
| Laura           |        |       | 5        | 1865  |             |
| James           |        |       | 17m.     | 1868  |             |

The 1850 Census lists James as a farmer. His real estate is valued at \$1,000.

The 1860 Census listed both James and his son Richard as farmers and Ellen as keeping house. James had real estate valued at \$2,400 and a personal estate valued at \$800.

In the 1870 Census James had real estate valued at \$4,200 and a personal estate valued at \$940. He was listed as a farmer and Ellen was keeping house. Their older children Richard, Mary A., JoAnna, Margaret and Ellen no longer lived with them. Catharine age 20 was a school teacher. Sarah A. was 19, Bridget was 18, Nancy was 16, and Clara was 9. They all lived at home. There were two additional initials of children: L. was 8 and J. was 17 months.

James and his family were Catholics like most

Irishmen. They attended St. Patrick's Catholic Church in LaGro. This was the second Catholic church built in Indiana, the first one was in Vincennes. The *History of Wabash County, Indiana*, lists the men whose families composed the society that formed the church as follows:

|                       |                   |                  |
|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Jeremiah Casey        | Barnabas Finan    | John Nolan       |
| John Clifford         | Bryan Finan       | Michael Nolan    |
| Patrick Costello      | John Fitzgibbon   | Dennis O'Brien   |
| Michael Coughlan      | Thomas Fitzgibbon | James O'Brien    |
| John Coughlan         | Thomas Grace      | James O'Harran   |
| John Dalton           | John Hogan        | Morris Reagan    |
| Terence Devine        | Michael Hogan     | John Reardon     |
| Daniel Driscoll       | John Holland      | Edward Saney     |
| <u>James Driscoll</u> | Patrick Kinneark  | John Shanahan    |
| <u>John Driscoll</u>  | Timothy Kinneark  | Michael Shanahan |
| John Eagan            | Dennis Kohan      | Thomas Torkey    |
| <u>James Elward</u>   | Jeremiah Murnan   | John Welch       |
| Michael English       | Patrick Murnan    | Martin Wright    |
| <u>Robert English</u> | Timothy Murphy    |                  |

Although James had no political aspirations of his own, he was always interested and discussed politics of the day. He was a Democrat.

Several years after establishing his home on the farm James purchased an additional sixty-five acres of land that was covered with primeval forest. Eventually he cleared a total of one hundred forty-five acres on which he resided until his death in 1890.

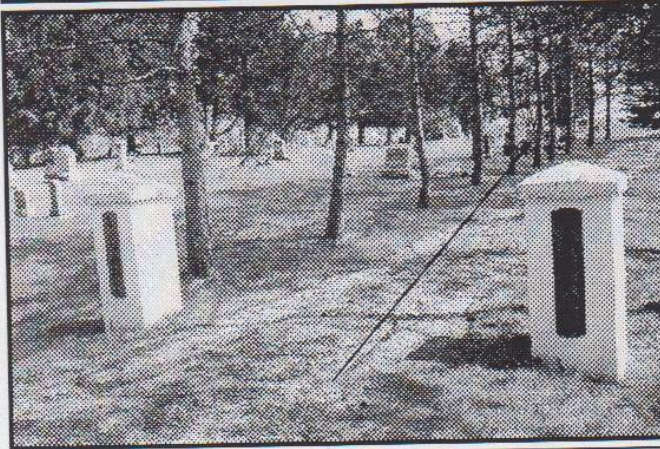
In the *History of Wabash County, Indiana* James is described as "a man inclined to reticence in his manner, a quality peculiarly noticeable in an Irishman, but withal was inclined to be genial and companionable. He was a lover of horses, and was a hard-working man all his days. He was saving and prudent, and he educated his children to the best of his ability."

At the time of his death, the following obituary appeared in the *Wabash Plain Dealer* on Friday March 14, 1890:

**JAMES ELWARD**

James Elward, father of W. A. Elward, agent of the Wabash Railroad at this point, died suddenly at his home north of LaGro, Wednesday morning. Mr. Elward went out to the barn immediately after breakfast to care for his stock, and while returning was attacked with heart disease. He staggered, and extended his arms to grasp the yard fence, and just as his daughter, who saw him falter, reached him, he sank back in her arms and expired. Mr. Elward was a man universally esteemed. Quiet, industrious, strictly honest, and courteous in his bearing, he won friends everywhere, and no death which has occurred in LaGro township for years occasions more widespread sorrow. His funeral took place this morning from the [St. Patricks] Catholic cemetery at this place.

James, Elward, son of Richard and Mary Elward, was



James Elward's grave marker is 2/3 of the way up the hill in St. Patrick's Cemetery in Lagro, Indiana. Photos by Bob Schmidt

born in Kilkenny, Ireland, in 1805. At the age of nineteen he came to this country, residing for several years in New York and Pennsylvania. He then came to Indiana, and located on the farm on which he died. Mr. Elward and Miss Ellen Driscoll were married in LaGro in 1835, fourteen children being born of the union. Of the fourteen, with the widow eleven survive. Mr. and Mrs. Elward long enjoyed the distinction of being the oldest married couple in Wabash county.

Ellen Driscoll Elward passed away in 1893. The Elwards are buried in St. Patrick's Catholic Cemetery established in 1846 in Lagro, Indiana. The cemetery is located off of old U.S. 24 now the Blue Star Highway on Walnut Street (400 E). Entering between the pillars of the cemetery their grave stone is about 2/3 of the way up the hill on the left hand side. The base of the marker is old. It appears that a new stone with their birth and death dates has been placed upon the older base. The information given is James Elward 1806-1890 and Ellen Elward 1816-1893 with the words May Their Souls Rest In Peace. Amen. Perhaps the 1805 date of James' birth was hard to read on the first stone when the new one was made.

Sources:

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Schmidt, Carolyn. "Daniel Driscoll Builds and Settles Near Wabash & Erie Canal," *Canal Society of Indiana Newsletter*. Ft. Wayne, IN: Canal Society of Indiana. October 2001.

IRISH 1850 CENSUS WABASH CO. LAGRO TWP. INDIANA

| LAST NAME  | FIRST NAME | AGE | OCCUPATION    | WIFE      | AGE | CHILDREN |
|------------|------------|-----|---------------|-----------|-----|----------|
| Kinark     | Timothy    | 45  | Farmer        | Ann       | 38  | 2        |
| Kinark     | Patric     | 31  | "             | Katherine | 28  |          |
| Holland    | John       | 43  | "             | Ellen     | 35  | 9        |
| Welch      | John       | 50  | "             | Ellen     | 50  | 2        |
| Carrey     | Jeremiah   | 51  | "             |           |     | 2        |
| Swaney     | James      | 80  | "             |           |     | 1        |
| Channan    | James      | 50  | "             | Ellen     | 36  | 7        |
| Collins    | Cornelius  | 50  | "             |           |     |          |
| Hogan      | John       | 50  | "             |           |     |          |
| Oristel    | Daniel     | 52  | "             | Ellen     | 35  | 6        |
| Buckley    | Patrick    | 21  | "             |           |     |          |
| Buckley    | Mary       | 55  | "             |           |     |          |
| Drakel     | James      | 42  | "             | Catherine | 42  | 3        |
| Eleood     | James      | 44  | "             | Ellen     | 38  | 7        |
| McNow      | Hugh       | 32  | Cabinet Maker | Grace     | 29  | 3        |
| English    | Michael    | 35  | Farmer        | Martha    | 30  | 8        |
| Wright     | Martin     | 45  | "             | Alice     | 41  | 5        |
| Swiney     | John       | 35  | Laborer       |           |     |          |
| Pursele    | Bridget    | 41  | "             |           |     | 3        |
| Pursele    | John       | 28  | Boatman       |           |     |          |
| Henssey    | Edward     | 35  | Laborer       | Elizabeth | 35  | 4        |
| Ryan       | Lewis      | 35  | Blacksmith    | Mary G    | 26  | 2        |
| Ryan       | John       | 30  | R C Priest    |           |     |          |
| Ryan       | Ivanna     | 21  | "             |           |     |          |
| Obrian     | Francis    | 30  | Laborer       | Heleen    | 23  | 1        |
| Murphy     | Edward     | 40  | Merchant      | Anna      | 35  | 4        |
| Hamilton   | Thomas     | 59  | Physician     | Margery   | 80  | 1        |
| Fowler     | Henry      | 36  | Boatman       |           |     |          |
| Conway     | Onias      | 29  | Laborer       | Abigail   | 28  | 2        |
| Regan      | Timothy    | 25  | Laborer       | Katherine | 18  |          |
| Taylor     | Alexander  | 41  | Taylor        | Hannah    | 43  | 4        |
| Egan       | Andrew     | 37  | Carpenter     | Ellen     | 30  | 1        |
| Collins    | Michael    | 41  | Wheelwright   | Julia     | 40  | 2        |
| Malona     | Michael    | 33  | Shoemaker     | Mary G    | 38  | 1        |
| English    | Robert     | 40  | Merchant      |           |     |          |
| McGuire    | Alexander  | 30  | Boatman       | Amelia    | 23  | 3        |
| Dalton     | John       | 58  | Farmer        | Catherine | 52  | 8        |
| Shanahan   | Michael    | 32  | "             | Lydia     | 23  | 7        |
| Shanahan   | John       | 52  | Farmer        | Joanna    | 34  | 9        |
| Tewary     | James      | 35  | "             | Catherine | 24  | 3        |
| Kathian    | Michael    | 50  | "             | Bridget   | 30  | 3        |
| Obrian     | James      | 27  | "             | Mary      | 21  | 1        |
| Egan       | John       | 52  | "             | Catherine | 42  | 7        |
| Finan      | Mary       | 31  | "             |           |     |          |
| McDonald   | James      | 35  | "             |           |     | 31 2     |
| Devins     | Seamus     | 38  | "             | Bridget   | 38  | 5        |
| Swaney     | Michael    | 30  | "             | Mary      | 21  | 3        |
| Kelly      | Edward     | 40  | "             | Joanna    | 35  | 4        |
| Fansglin   | Patric     | 33  | "             | Mallida   | 19  |          |
| Siney      | Edmund     | 60  | "             | Mary      | 45  | 4        |
| Moraninn   | Jeremiah   | 80  | "             |           |     |          |
| Grace      | Thomas     | 40  | "             | Mary      | 40  | 8        |
| Murphy     | Timothy    | 45  | "             | Mary G    | 48  | 1        |
| Nolan      | Michael    | 50  | "             | Elizabeth | 40  | 6        |
| Rokit      | Patric     | 60  | "             |           |     | 1        |
| Lughue     | Ann        | 40  | "             |           |     |          |
| Carter     | Lewrence   | 35  | Farmer        | Elizabeth | 27  |          |
| Barret     | Win        | 40  | "             |           |     | 3        |
| Graham     | Samuel     | 35  | Sawyer        | Mary G    | 25  | 3        |
| O'Lughlin  | Thomas     | 36  | Farmer        | Jane      | 43  | 5        |
| McCarty    | Devins     | 30  | Laborer       | Ellen     | 32  | 3        |
| Dalley     | James      | 23  | Teamster      |           |     |          |
| Swaney     | John       | 80  | "             |           |     |          |
| McCarty    | Jeremiah   | 32  | Laborer       | Anna      | 30  | 3        |
| Slattery   | Thomas     | 56  | "             | Mary      | 41  | 5        |
| Ragen      | Michael    | 21  | Cabinet Maker |           |     |          |
| Cohen      | Donis      | 45  | Farmer        | Bridget   | 38  | 5        |
| Holland    | Jeremiah   | 34  | Laborer       | Catherine | 35  | 3        |
| Quinn      | Margaret   | 60  | "             |           |     |          |
| Hayes      | Cornelius  | 30  | Farmer        |           |     |          |
| Hayes      | Jeremiah   | 32  | "             |           |     |          |
| Hayes      | Joanna     | 56  | Farmer        | Catherine | 50  | 2        |
| Fitzgibbon | Thomas     | 28  | "             | Bridget   | 19  | 2        |
| Welch      | Martin     | 62  | "             | Ellen     | 58  | 3        |
| Regan      | Morris     | 55  | "             | Joanna    | 44  | 3        |
| Clifford   | John       | 50  | "             | Fanny     | 41  | 5        |
| Reynolds   | William    | 50  | "             |           |     |          |

2508 persons in township  
Only those with head-of-household born in Ireland are listed above.  
Others of Irish descent or from other nationalities also lived in the township.  
Names may be incorrectly spelled.