

CANAWLERS AT REST

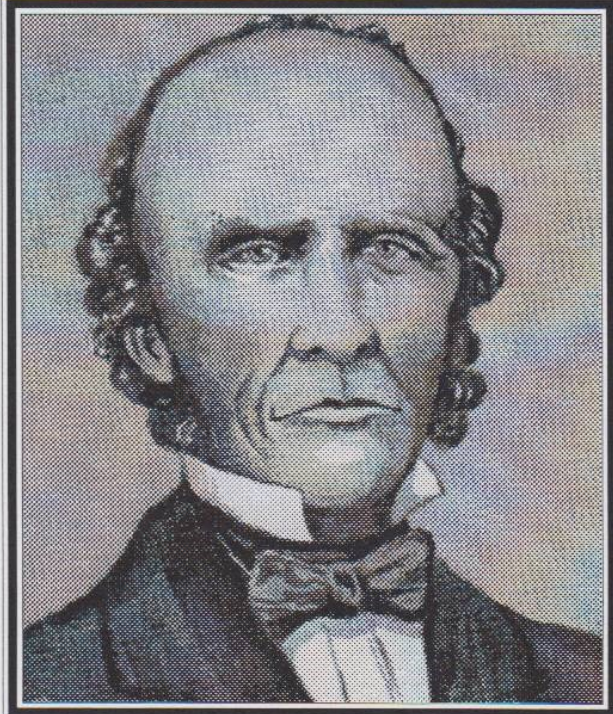
ASA FAIRFIELD

b. January 28, 1797

d. October 4, 1868

By Sue Simerman

Some information from Jim Ellis
Portrait by Morris R. Perry from
Pioneers Resting in Historic Lindenwood



Asa Fairfield was born in Kennebunkport, Maine, January 28, 1797, the third of 14 children born to William and Polly King Fairfield. William was a private in the Revolutionary War and was at Valley Forge with General George Washington the winter of 1777-1778 and in the Battle of Monmouth.

Asa and several of his brothers followed their father by working on sailing ships. They became captains of their own ships.

Legend states that as a teenager Captain Asa served during the War of 1812 and was taken prisoner by the British. He was imprisoned for six months in Dartmoor prison in England.

In 1819 Asa married Olive Stone. She was a first cousin to Hugh McCulloch. McCulloch came to Fort Wayne in June 1833. He practiced law and later became Secretary of the Treasury under presidents Lincoln, Johnson and Arthur. He is also known for being the founder of the Secret Service under the Treasury Department. McCulloch may be responsible for Asa and his brother Oliver's decision to come to Fort Wayne in 1834. They came intending to invest in land.

Asa and Olive had five children. They were all born in York County, Maine. They were as follows: William Henry, born in May 1822; James Monroe, born in April 1826; Olive, born July 1829; William Augustus, born September 1831; and Cyrus King, born December 1834.

The story of Captain Fairfield's life states that he came to Fort Wayne with \$30,000.00 in a knapsack. As there weren't any banks, he was convinced to hide his money. Mrs. Ann Thompson, wife of Dr. L.G. Thompson, sewed it into a mattress for safe keeping until Asa decided how it could be best invested.

In 1835 some of Asa's money was placed in the Fort Wayne branch of the newly formed Indiana State Bank that was set up by Fairfield, Hugh McCulloch and others. Asa became one of 10 directors of this new bank. The other directors were Samuel Lewis, William G. Ewing, Francis Comporet, Joseph Morgan, Joseph Sinclear, Isaac Spencer, Jesse Vermilyea, David Burr and Samuel Edsall. Allen Hamilton became president of the Fort Wayne branch and Hugh McCulloch was made cashier and manager.

In 1835 Asa and his brother Oliver returned to Maine to bring their families to Indiana. Their brother Charles returned with them. Oliver went into the bakery business while the other two brothers busied themselves clearing land and beginning their farming operations.

Asa invested heavily in land to the south of the town of Fort Wayne and in Wells County. He bought 240 acres in Allen County in 1835 for \$12.00 an acre. This land today is defined by the following streets: Hoagland Avenue on the east, Broadway on the west, Taylor on the north and a point a bit south of Packard on the south. He built a double log house on this acreage and began raising hogs, sheep and garden products. In 1838 he

bought an additional 240 acres. In 1838 and 1839 he bought 408.04 acres in Wells County.

1835 was a busy year for Asa. Besides bringing his family, building a cabin and starting his farm, he also served on the "Arrangements Committee" for the July 4th Canal Celebration. Three men from each township were chosen to raise funds for entertainment of guests. Although Asa was one of them, his real claim to fame came that year when he captained the first canal boat, the "Indiana," on the Wabash & Erie Canal, opening the "Summit Section" to travel from Fort Wayne to Huntington, Indiana, on July 4th. The three mile an hour journey took eight hours and it is said "There was dancing on board and drinking good whiskey, even getting funny."

The following was written in 1906 concerning the memories of Cyrus Fairfield, son of Asa:

"My Father had the first boat built — the first passenger and freight boat that ran on the Canal — and it was called the "Indiana." I remember they went to Huntington to celebrate the Fourth of July. Among the crowd were Hugh McCulloch, my father's brother, my father, who was captain of the boat for that occasion, Allen Hamilton, Judge Hanna, Major Lewis, and a dozen or so of the early settlers. They had a pretty big time of it — dancing on the boat, etc. — and they thought they were going some. I often think that if it were possible for them to come back and see how we go today, they would think they were not going so fast then.

"The tract of land that lies between DeWald Street and Taylor Street, from Broadway east to Oakley Street, we called 'hog pasture.' My father built a pen of round logs twelve or fifteen feet high. He had a so-called trap door, 'a figure four,' which gave entrance into the pen. It was almost impossible to get through this place, as it was a swamp. There were a great many wolves around there. We tried to raise sheep, but the wolves destroyed too many for us."

Another reminiscence that tells us about Asa was written in 1906 by Alexander C. Comparet, son of Francis Comparet. It says"

"The first boat yard on the Feeder Canal was constructed by Barthold and Sons. They built the first three canal boats. The first boat was called "Indiana" and was built for Mr. Asa Fairfield. It started from a place on the Feeder Canal north of Bloomingdale, known in those days as the Hinton farm."

The "Indiana" was later owned by the Mahon brothers. They owned a line of packets including the "Clyde," "Wabash," and "Chief Richardville."

Captain Fairfield operated several businesses that tied in with his farming business. He owned a soap and candle factory as well as a grist mill. During the Cholera scourge in 1849, the log building that contained the soap and candle factory was moved from the Fairfield farm to the County Farm for use by those with Cholera. Between 1849 and 1854 Cholera claimed 600 victims in Fort Wayne. The grist mill, which he purchased from Louis Davis, was located on the left side of the St. Mary's river where Foster Park is now located. This mill was built in 1827 by Samuel Hanna and James Barnett. It was called Beaver's Mill.

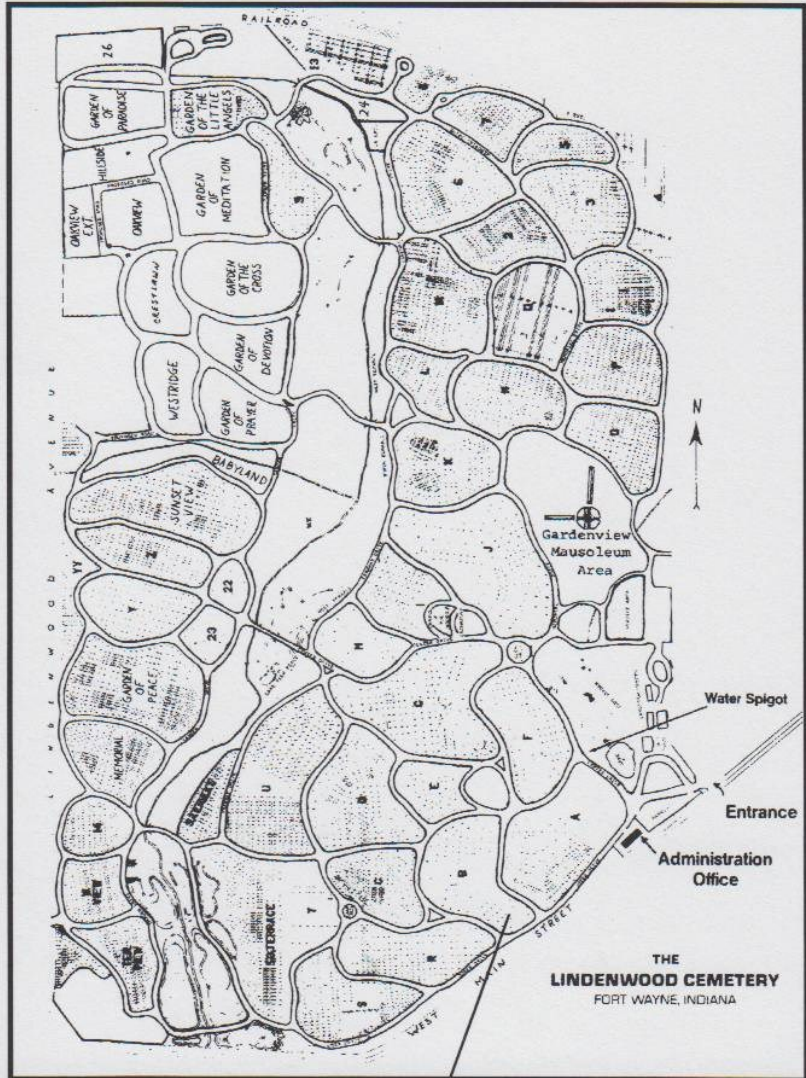
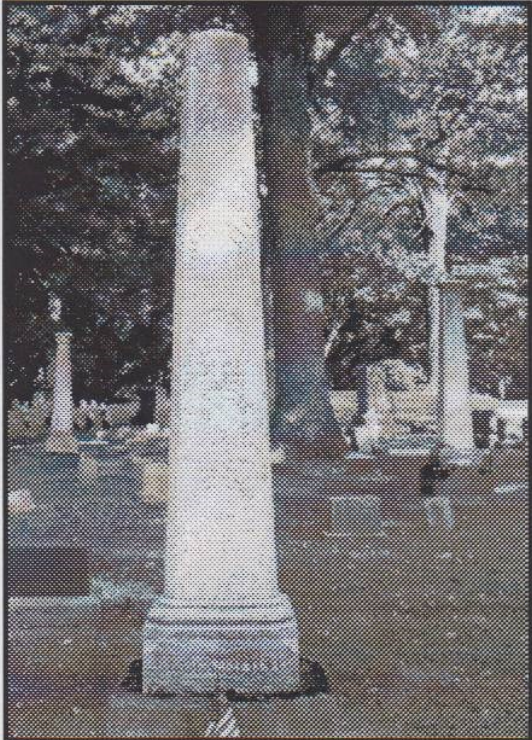
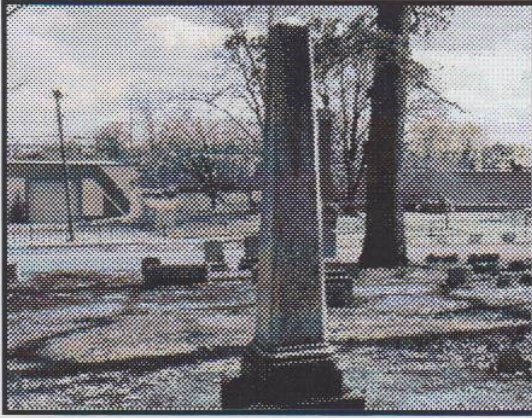
In 1860 Asa built himself an Italianate designed home on a hill on Creighton Avenue in Fort Wayne. It originally had a third-floor cupola and a separate summer kitchen. He graded the land in front of the house to make Creighton Avenue and used the dirt to fill in a swamp where Fox Avenue is now located. The house is still standing today at 813 West Creighton.



Asa Fairfield's home at 813 West Creighton in Ft. Wayne, IN as it appears in 2004. Photo by Bob Schmidt

Asa Fairfield died October 4, 1868. Although no obituary could be found for Asa, we know that he was active in the old Second Presbyterian Church and the Masonic Lodge. His funeral was probably conducted by them. He is buried in Sec. B Lot 113 in Lindenwood Cemetery, close to West Main Street in Fort Wayne, IN. Fairfield Avenue is named in his honor.

Upon Asa's death the farm and house were inherited by his son, Cyrus. In 1880 Cyrus sold the house to David Nestels, whose children were midgits known as Commodore Foote and Fairy Queen. These children sold it to Bernhard and Wilhelmina Weber. The Webers platted out lots and sold them reducing the size of the property. Today the home is being restored.



Asa Fairfield is buried in Section B Lot 113 of Lindenwood Cemetery in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Map from *Pioneers Resting in Historic Lindenwood*.

Top: Front of Marker reads:

Capt Asa Fairfield

Born Kennebunkport, MA Jan. 28, 1797
Died Oct. 4, 1868 Aged 70 Yr. 9 Mo.

Olive

Wife of Capt. Asa Fairfield
Died Sept. 6, 1864 Aged 69 Yr. 19 D.

Capt. Asa Fairfield (across marker bottom)

Bottom: Back of Marker reads:

Mary Fairfield Died 1850 Aged 2 Yrs. 5 Mo.

Olive P. Fairfield Died Nov. 23, 1853 Aged 8 Mo.

Cyrus J. Fairfield Died Dec. 17, 1859 Aged 3 Yrs. 1 Mo.

Oliver A. Fairfield Died Sept 16, 1861 Ages 1 Yr. 8 Mo.

J. M. Fairfield (across marker bottom - Asa and J. M. Fairfields' families shared a marker) Photos by Bob Schmidt

Sources

"Canalabration": (Miami) Wabash & Erie Canal Allen County, IN and Paulding, Defiance, & Henry Counties, OH. Fort Wayne, IN/Canal Society of Indiana. April 2002.

Cooper, Laura Munson. "Asa Fairfield Canal Boat Captain." *Canal Society of Indiana Newsletter*. Vol. 14 No. 8. Fort Wayne, IN./ Canal Society of Indiana. Aug. 2000.

Paulison, Arthur M. *Pioneers Resting in Historic Lindenwood*. Fort Wayne, IN/Lindenwood Historical Foudation.

Poinsatte, Charles. *Fort Wayne During The Canal Era 1828-1855*. Indianapolis, IN / Indiana Historical Bureau. 1969.

Reminiscences of Old Fort Wayne. Fort Wayne, IN./Public Library Board for Allen County. April 1953.