

NATHANIEL FITCH

There is an old story about the marriage of a Wabash & Erie Canal worker named Nathaniel Fitch. In 1834 Fitch walked into a tavern in Auburn, IN seeking a wife. He asked those present if they knew of someone to marry him. One of the tavern's employees went to the kitchen and returned with a girl named Sarah DeLong, who was from Germany and couldn't speak any English. Fitch said, "She'll do." They were the first couple to be married in the township. They eventually had 15 children.

When Sue Simerman, CSI board member from Ossian, IN, read the above blurb in the October 2002 *The Hoosier Packet*, she recognized the name Fitch and knew she had read about the family. After finding three articles concerning the Fitch family in the *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette* entitled "Fitch Reunion Convenes For Final Hurrah," "160-acre Tract Sheds Light On Local Heritage," and "Huntertown Festival," she looked at a history of Allen County, Indiana. Under Perry Township, Sue found the following with the added bonus of information on George B. Gloyd, another person connected to the W & E canal.

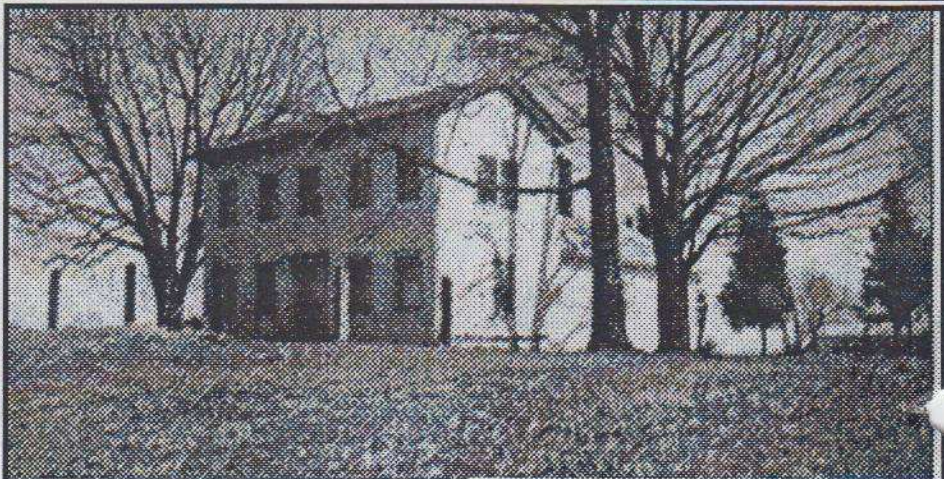
"Nathaniel Fitch was another who came empty-handed to the wilderness. Shrewd and intelligent, he had learned for himself numerous trades, being blacksmith, gunsmith, locksmith, with which he speedily made himself indispensable. Starting from Pennsylvania with but fifteen cents in his pocket he was obliged to walk, and earn his board en route. His life had already been full of adventure. Before he came to Indiana he had been shot in the leg during a wolf hunt; and again, while crossing Lake Erie on a side-wheel steamer, their ship was caught in a gale, and one shaft disable. In this predicament, in which ruin seemed inevitable, they were saved by the stratagem of breaking the other shaft. Not only the wild beast inhabited the forests at the time when Nathaniel set up his forge, but Indians were still very numerous, and thought subdued were by no means fully

civilized. On one occasion he was obliged to ask an Indian, who had a gun to mend, to wait, whereat the Indian became enraged and sprang at him with knife drawn. Mr. Fitch was sharpening a shovel at the moment, and an old story quaintly states that the Indian would probably have been hurt with the shovel had not the chief, Chopine, intervened. Among other notable things recorded to Mr. Fitch's credit is his work for the canal, for which he made all the iron used in the locks from Fort Wayne to the Wabash river. He was married, 1840, to Sarah, the daughter of George and Elizabeth DeLong. Fifteen children came to them, thirteen of whom outlived their parents, who reared them in comfort while amassing a large property. Twenty-three hundred acres, all told, belong to the Fitches by the time they reached the evening of life. Perry Fitch, the eldest son, married Sarah E., daughter of George and Magdalena Gloyd, and reared to maturity eight of their twelve children. Mr. Fitch was twelve years justice of the peace. Matthias Fitch, Nathaniel's second son, married Frances, daughter of James and Rebecca Vandolah. They also have been very prominent, and their six children who survived to adult age have proved worthy sons and daughters. Another son of Nathaniel Fitch, Amos, married the daughter of William T. and Jane Hunter, Miss Nancy E., their family consisting of one son and one daughter, while David, the youngest of the sons, married Miss Emma B. Stirlen and lived on the homestead farm with his aged mother."

"George B. Gloyd became a conspicuous figure very soon after his arrival in 1832, being a man of much executive ability and consequently in demand in the construction of the public works of his time. His first engagement was as superintendent of part of the construction work on the Wabash and Erie canal. He was married in 1835 to Miss Madeline Mittler, of Ohio. Subsequently he undertook various contracts in railroad building, and at the time of his death was engaged in this work on the Saginaw railroad (now the L.W. & M.S.). Mr Gloyd was successful from every viewpoint, and his family of eight are now worthy representative of the name in their native township. Jerome D. Gloyd, married in 1875 to Fidelia, daughter of Nathaniel and Sarah Fitch, has four children."

From the newspaper articles Sue also learned that the descendants of Nathaniel and Sarah DeLong Fitch have been having family reunions since 1884. The first reunion was held at the Fitch homestead on Coldwater Road in Ft. Wayne, IN. These reunions were annual events from 1902-1986. This was the 88th reunion and perhaps the last since little more than 100 family members were able to attend. Contact has been lost when some family members moved and didn't leave their addresses. Other members

NATHANIEL FITCH HOMESTEAD
Courtesy of ACRES



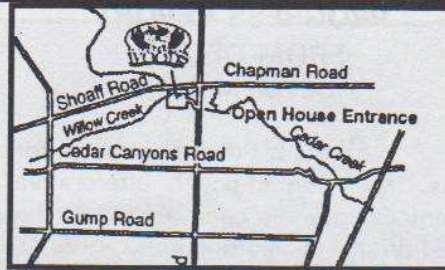
are interested in keeping up with the family genealogy. At least they are assured that a portion of the family land is in safe hands and they can return at will. ACRES, a preservation group in Ft. Wayne, purchased 80 acres from Mary Ellen Arnold, a great niece of Nathaniel Fitch, as the Bicentennial Woods. The Arnolds wanted this last piece of virgin timber in Allen County to remain in its natural state. A portion of the Fitch home, built in 1854-55 sits on ACRES' property.

Nathaniel Fitch originally paid \$200 for 160 acres described as the west half of the northeast quarter of section nine in township 32 north of Range 12 East. He purchased the land from Wesley and Sophia Park on Jan. 15, 1838. He eventually amassed over 2,300 acres, which were in Allen and a portion of DeKalb counties. Nathaniel gave the original homestead to his son David, a veterinarian, who in turn sold half the property to his brother, Harvey, in 1893. David's 80 acres were later purchased by his niece and her husband, Frederick & Bessie Kell, who's daughter Mary Ellen Arnold later owned it before selling to ACRES.

Bicentennial Woods held an open-house where visitors could see northern Allen County much like it was when Nathaniel arrived. They learned that Nathaniel Fitch Jr. and Sarah Elizabeth DeLong were married on June 3, 1840, theirs being the first wedding in this part of the county. They reared 13 of their 15 children to adulthood and have more than 950 living descendants.

Nathaniel moved his blacksmith shop as the Wabash and Erie Canal moved. He made all the ironwork for the canal locks between Wabash river and Ft. Wayne. He lived in a log hut near Christina Fair, the sister of Sarah DeLong. Sarah was to become his wife.

Sarah, after having a fight



**BICENTENNIAL WOODS
NATHANIEL FITCH HOMESTEAD**

with her family in Dayton, OH ran off to Pennsylvania. There she learned her neighbors were moving west and hitched a ride on their wagon to DeKalb County to live with her sister Christina. Sarah first saw Nathaniel when he was out chasing his oxen, which had strayed. According to the family history, which differs slightly from the tavern story, he was soon at the Fairs' door wondering if any single woman lived there who would marry him. Christiana introduced him to Sarah, who said, "Well, I'll take him."

Sarah and Nathaniel first lived in a log house near Hometown, IN. They moved to the larger frame house (1854-55) that sat in the middle of the 160 acres.

A festival and auction was held in Hometown, IN in recent years that showed off the standing homesteads of local pioneers via a trolley ride. Among them was the home of Nathaniel Fitch on Coldwater Road. The first hewn log house in the area was built in 1834. There was a play given entitled "The Nathaniel Fitch Family" written by Jenny McComb.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

CSI welcomes aboard the following members who have joined at the membership level unless otherwise noted.

Karl & Catherine Dietsch- Ft. Wayne
Scott Evenbeck - Indianapolis