



Calvin  
Fletcher  
Attends  
Opening of  
the Wabash &  
Erie Canal  
on July 4,  
1835

Calvin Fletcher as he appeared to Jacob Cox, a portrait painter in 1833, two years before this event.

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society

from Fletcher's Diary,  
edited for explanations  
by  
Carl Leiter

Calvin Fletcher [1798-1866] was born in Ludlow, Vermont, February 4, 1798, and headed west in 1817 to establish his career. He studied law in Urbana, Ohio, and after his admission to the bar in 1821, removed to Indianapolis then in its first year, before the first land sales. He and his new bride lived in a log cabin off Washington Street two blocks west of the State House when they arrived in Indianapolis, and Indianapolis became their permanent residence.

While Calvin Fletcher was not a great public figure, he did participate in public affairs from the start, serving as prosecuting attorney of the Fifth Judicial Circuit in 1822-23 and 1825-26; and as a state senator from 1826 to 1833 representing Marion, Hendricks, Hamilton and Madison counties with as many as ten central Indiana cities at the time.

The Fletchers arrived in Indianapolis "virtually penniless" in 1821, according to one biographer, and in 1865, the year before his death, he was the highest income taxpayer in the city. Not only was he a member of one of the leading law firms in the state with his partners Simon Yandes and Ovid Butler (founder of Butler University), but he bought land to farm and for speculation to the point that his farming and banking interests led his law practice later in his life. His diary, published by the Indiana Historical Society in 1972 in nine volumes, recounts his keen interests in nature, travel, education, religion and the public welfare.

Fletcher traveled extensively in connection with his land speculations throughout Indiana and his private banking business and family visits to New England

carried him outside the state as well. He is said to have traveled "...on foot, on horseback, by canoe and skiff, by stagecoach and canal boat, and finally by rail." His diary provides us with information on the conveyances he used, the conditions and hazards he encountered, and the accommodations travelers could expect in Indiana's pioneer period through the Civil War. The following account reviews his trip from Indianapolis to Fort Wayne in July, 1835, to participate in the opening of the Wabash and Erie Canal. It is copied verbatim from *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher, Volume I, 1817-1838*, pp. 260-263, and my explanatory comments were obtained from documentation in Volume I and other sources. These are enclosed in brackets, i.e. [ ].

(June) 29 Monday. Pleasant. Preparing to go with Messrs. Hand & Stansbury to Ft. Wayne to celebrate 4th of July. [Charles J. Hand with Fletcher and Nicholas McCarty had purchased about a thousand acres of W & E Canal lands in Allen, Huntington & Wabash counties that summer; and Col. Howard Stansbury was an engineer of the U.S. Topographical Bureau who headed the survey for the W & E Canal and other internal improvement projects].

30 June. Mrs. F[letcher] taken very unwell. Doubt the propriety of my leaving home. She has a fever. Send for Dr. Coe who says he thinks I best go. Mr. Hand calls & says he cant leave with us — must attend to other buseness. Write to Messrs. Joe(?) & Drake & prepare to leave with (...). At 9 o clock called on Col. Stansbery who boards at Mr. Hendersons. He is the chief of the Engineer corpse in this State detailed by the W(ar) dep(artment) to run several routes for Railroads, a gent. about 30 formerly imploid as a surveyor with Messrs. Moore & Shriver [both Asa Moore and James Shriver were assigned by Congress to survey the W & E canal route and both came down with Malaria] in the survey of the Wabash & E. canal. We left at 10. Mrs. F. desires me to go but I apprehended she is liable to a severe attack. Very cool. Waters getting down. Corn about waist high in my lot. Garden corn tassling & tasseled. We proceede after an agreeable ride to Pendleton. Very cold — I fear frost. Had a fire made up for us. Called on by Messrs. Silver (who had a hay making at his farm where we passed) Shanklin Mershon & Noble [all four of these men — Thomas Silver, Andrew Shanklin, William H. Mershon and D.S. Noble, were early settlers of Madison County].

July 1st. Some frost. Very cold but no injury to vegetation. Left P[endleton] at sunrise. Rode with a (...) to Andersontown. Breakfasted at A. with Andrew Jackson [a local sheriff who was later a state senator and a farmer and miller of Madison County]. Great complaint of the people of A. that the feeder to W(hite)

R(iver) passed north of the town on the other side of the River. Left A. at 9 o proceeded up Kill buck 10 miles on the road direct to Marion. Over took Surveyors of Canal route. Passed on to Palmers on the summit level & arrived at Marion about Sundown. There found a Dr. Trask from Vt. & staid with him over night [Dr. Ezra Stiles Trask who came to Marion two years earlier and was Grant County's third physician]. Could not procure grain for horses. Dr. had a pleasant family. Breakfasted.

2d July. & proceeded to Lagro on the Wabash. Cool but pleasant. No flies. Arrived at Lagro about 2 P. M. Found Mr. Findly of Richmond candidate for Congress [John Finley was running in the Fifth Congressional District, then made up of Allen, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Huntington, La Grange, Randolph, Union, Wabash and Wayne counties. Finley was defeated by Jonathan McCarty in the election]. Messrs. Burr & Hugh Hanner also arrived here. [Hugh Hanna came to Fort Wayne in 1824 and in 1834, with David Burr, platted the town of Wabash and lived there until his death in 1869. His brother Samuel Hanna, 1797-1866, was an Indiana



**Samuel Hanna**

By Morris R. Perry courtesy of Pioneers Resting in Historic Lindenwood

state legislator in the Ft. Wayne. [Jesse House (1826-27, 1831-32; and 1840-41) and Indiana Senate 1832-35. He was a delegate to the Republican National Convention from Indiana in 1856, was a Presbyterian and a Freemason who is buried in Lindenwood Cemetery in Fort Wayne, Indiana]. Here we dined & fed & at 3 oclock left for Huntingdon where we staid overnight. Mrs. Burr & Hanner with their childrin came up. Slep with Col. Stansbery.

July 3d. We left & proceeded with Genl. Tipton along the canal line to Huntington at the locks East of that place. [John Tipton, 1786-1839, was born in Tennessee in 1786 and served under William Henry Harrison at the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811. He was a public figure in Indiana, serving as a Democrat in the Indiana H. of Reps. and was Indian Agent of the Miami Indians at the agency in Fort Wayne which he led in moving to the town he helped found, Logansport, in 1828. Tipton was elected U.S. Senator of Indiana and served 1832-39. He died in 1839 and is buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery, Logansport, Indiana. Tipton County is among those sites named for him.] The canal is finished to Ft. W(ayne) 25 Ms. Here we Breakfasted. Met with a millitary company commanded by Capt. Fate a Dr.

residing at H. I Breakfasted at Helveys [Joel and Champion Helvey were brothers who were the first settlers at the site of Huntington, Indiana. Their double log cabin named the Flint Springs Hotel was a favorite tavern of 1835.] At 10 we left the lock accompanied by 2 boats beside the one we were in one loaded to the very top with Deer & fur skins. About 50 ladies & 100 gentlemen. Saml. Hanner Esq. on the part of a committee of arrangements at Ft. W. was present & accompanied us. At first the boat grounded inasmuch as the water had not been let in from above --- but we soon glided along. It was with inexpressible delight to all the company (among whom were all the engineers Col. Burr &c) to glide along upon the Waters that by nature were & had been by the Great Architect from the beginning designed & used to run into the St. Lawrence now by art & science made subservient to the purposes of commerce in the great valley of the Wabash making their way to the Mississippi.

We dined at Vermillias 10 ms. from Ft. Wayne. [Jesse Vermilyea came to Allen County in the early 1820s and was a farmer and Indian trader. He was a director of the Fort Wayne branch of the State Bank and ran the Vermilyea House which was a hotel on the Wabash & Erie Canal about fourteen miles southwest of Fort Wayne.] Left V.'s & soon met J. Williams principal Engineer who had been up for 2 nights to watch the embankments of the canal. [This was Jesse L. Williams, 1807- 1886,



**Jesse Vermilyea**

Drawings by Morris R. Perry courtesy of Pioneers Resting in Lindenwood Cemetery.

**Jesse Lynch Williams**



who made canal surveys in Ohio as a young man and became chief engineer for the Wabash & Erie Canal in 1835. He became chief engineer for all canals of Indiana projected in the internal improvement program, and in 1837 all roads and railroads were put under his direction as well.]

Arrived within 5 or 6 miles of the place of destination & met several companies of Gents. from Ft. W. and within a ½ m. a company of melish (militia) who marched us



John Tipton



Jean Baptiste de Richardville



Francis LaFontaine

Pictures courtesy Bert J. Griswald The Pictorial History of Fort Wayne Indiana.

Andrew Johnson. McCulloch died 24 May 1895 and was buried in Rock Creek Cemetery, Washington, D.C.]

July 5 Sunday morning. Left in canal boat with company that came up from Huntington & arrived at H. at 9 o'clock P. M. Genl. Tipton & myself staid at Capt. Murrys. [Elias Murray was

into town the canal not being completed with 1/2 m. I was invited by Mr. A. Hamilton with Genl. Tipton to spend our time with him as we were all (...) out among the neighbors. [Allen Hamilton was a Fort Wayne merchant and Indian trader who invested in Indian lands and later became a banker. He was Commissioner of the Miami Treaty of 1840 in which the Miami Nation gave up their remaining tribal lands in Indiana except Meshingomesia's Reserve on the Mississinewa River near Marion. It was in this "Treaty of the Forks" the Miami agreed to go west of the Mississippi within five years. Lafountain's Reserve #6 where Kokomo now is was set aside for Francis Lafountain, son-in-law of Chief J.B. Richardville in the Miami Treaty of 1840, and Allen Hamilton acquired it, holding title to it from 21 October 1841 to 17 January 1844 when he sold it to David Foster, doubling his investment. David Foster platted and named the town Kokomo for a local Miami chief named Mahkokima (Bear Chief) as analyzed in 2002 by Michael McCafferty, Miami linguist: e-mail: <mmccaffe@indiana.edu>.]

(July 4). The morning of the 4th was ushered in by salutes. At 9 the companies of milish & all interested formed & marched to the canal where 5 boats were prepared to carry the company up to the St. Joseph feeder 6 miles accompanied with music. Cols. Spencer & Bourie were the officers of the day. At the feeder dam all debarked. Col. Burr made a speech & Genl. Tipton gave a toast &c & the boats were turned back at 12 & we arrived at Ft. W. at 2. Went to the court house. Mr. McCulloch delivered a good oration. After which a dinner was had and after that toasts. [Hugh McCulloch was only 26 years of age at the time. He was born 7 December 1808 and as a young lawyer in 1835 became cashier of the State Bank, Fort Wayne branch. He eventually became president of the Bank of the State of Indiana, chartered in 1855, and President Lincoln appointed him as U.S. Comptroller of Currency. He served as Secretary of the Treasury under President

Tipton's real estate agent in Huntington where he settled in 1830. He served three terms in the Indiana legislature, was a member of the Constitutional Convention of Indian in 1850 and was also superintendent of Indian Affairs for Wisconsin and Minnesota.]

July 6. Left Huntington at 9 & with Genl. T. arrived at Col. [...] at Miamis town [opposite Peru, Indiana] at Sundown.

July 7th. Arrived at Genl. T. at 9 o'clock. A.M. Breakfasted & went to Logansport. Done some business & left there at 3 P.M. and came to Stipps or rather Stocktons at Wild cat. [David Stipp platted Burlington due south of Logansport on Wildcat Creek in 1828, and opened a tavern he built there in 1833.]

8 July. Left Stocktons & came to Mich(i)gan town. Breakfasted at Mrs. Johnson. Arrived at McQuedys [Hiram McQuiddy/McQuitty was an early settler of Union Township in Boone County and a merchant in the village of Northfield] at 2 P.M. where there was a show. Met 200 people. Mr. Quarles who rode home with me where we arrived at about dark.

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This concludes Calvin Fletcher's adventure from Indianapolis to Fort Wayne to attend the July 4, 1835 opening of the Wabash and Erie Canal and his return home.

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Carl Leiter, CSI member from Kokomo, prepared this story for the history series on the Kokomo Library website and made it available for use in The Hoosier Packet.

