

## CANAWLERS AT REST

### CAPTAIN GAYLE (GALE) FORD

Find-A-Grave #96594588

**b. 1815**

**d. 1894**

**By Carolyn I. Schmidt**



Captain Gayle Ford was born in Virginia to Mr. & Mrs. Silas Ford around 1815. Silas, who was a native of Virginia, moved his family west to John Conner's Trading Post (today's Connersville, Indiana) in 1817 when Gayle was about 2 years old. Silas was a friend of John Conner. Silas had a store in Connersville prior to 1821, the year in which he began keeping a hotel there on the west side of Eastern Avenue at the south corner of the alley. He also manufactured spinning wheels in Connersville into the 1830s.

As a teenager, Gayle Ford, our subject, handed rails for 33 cents a day. However, when he could not collect the wages owed to him he became discouraged and left home at the age of 16 in 1831 to try for another job in Cincinnati, Ohio. Exactly how long he stayed there or what kind of employment he had, we do not know. However, he returned to Connersville, Indiana, where he later met and married Elizabeth, also known as "Eliza" or "Betsey," Woodcock on March 19, 1837.

Gayle became interested in the activities of the Whitewater Canal and the Cincinnati & Whitewater Canal while in Connersville. He built and owned two of the finest packet boats in service on that canal. Each boat cost \$1,500 and provided food and a place to sleep for its passengers as they traveled to and from

Cincinnati. Their fare for the round trip from Connersville to Cincinnati which took about a week was \$3.00 and included all their meals. Part of this time was a stop over in Cincinnati allowing time to conduct business there.

Connersville in the 1840s had a local fleet of canal boats numbering about 25. These boats were often named after their owners or captains such as "The Abraham Conwell," "The George Frybarger," "The James Heron" and "The Gayle Ford." We aren't sure what his other boat was named.

Gayle's claim to fame was that after the Whitewater Canal was completed to Connersville in June 1845 "The Patriot," under his command, was the first boat to reach Connersville. It was owned by A. Rockafeller. The Patriot was the first canal boat to navigate above the Feeder Dam #5 and enter Connersville. Gayle was best known as Captain Ford.

By 1842 canal boat passengers going to Cincinnati from Brookville, Indiana, could take the Whitewater Canal all the way to Lawrenceburg, Indiana and there board a steamer on the Ohio and travel the rest of the way to Cincinnati, Ohio. The following advertisement was in the Indiana American of Brookville in

## THE HOOSIER PACKET - NOVEMBER 2016

April 1842:

According to the 1860 U.S. Federal Census,

have left home. Gayle is age 64 and Elizabeth age 61. Gayle is a drayman.

### NEW LINE Cincinnati & Brookville CANAL AND STEAM BOAT LINE

The owners of the Canal Boats PATRIOT and CHESAPEAKE inform their friends and the public in general that they have formed a REGULAR LINE with the STEAM BOAT WM. PENN, and are prepared to take freight and passengers on the most reasonable terms. One of the above Canal Boats will leave Brookville on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays at 9 o'clock AM and arrive at Lawrenceburg on the evening of the same day, where the freight and passengers for Cincinnati can take the Steam Boat next morning at 7½ o'clock, and arrive at Cincinnati 10½. The Steamer Wm. Penn. Will leave Cincinnati regularly on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at 3 o'clock PM and Chesapeake, will be in readiness to receive on board all passengers and freight, and arrive at Brookville at 7 next morning.

The undersigned are determined to do all in their power to please all who favor them with their custom, and their prices shall be in accordance with the hard times.

#### WAREHOUSE

We have a New Large Warehouse immediately at the head of the Canal at Brookville, where all freight designed for the above line will be stored free of charge.

THOS. H. BARWISE,  
Owner of Chesapeake.  
A. ROCKAFELLER.  
Owner of Patriot.

Gayle and "Elizabeth" had two children, Austen Ford age 20 and Alva Ford age 17. Gayle was Connersville's City Marshal at this time.

The 1870 census shows Gayle was a day laborer and Elizabeth was keeping house. Their child Alvey Ford age 25, was living with them as well as Alvey's wife, Mary Ford age 22. and their children Lowella Ford age 4 and Rossa Ford age 1. Alvey was a teamster.

The 1880 census shows that all the children

Elizabeth Ford, Gayle's wife, passed away on March 25, 1887. She was laid to rest in Connersville City Cemetery. She was born in 1819 and was 68 years old.

Gayle died at age 79 in 1894 and was laid to rest in the Connersville City Cemetery. Note that his stone reads:

GALE FORD  
1815-1894



Sources:

Ancestry.com

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Indiana, Marriage Index, 1800-1941

U.S. Federal Census: 1840, 1860, 1870, 1880

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