

## CANAWLERS AT REST

### GEORGE W. FRYBARGER

**b. December 28, 1796**  
**d. March 26, 1853**

**By Carolyn I. Schmidt**

George Frybarger was born in Frederick County, Maryland on December 28, 1796 to German parents. In the spring of 1805, when George was 8 years old, the family moved to Montgomery County, Ohio, to settle in the vicinity of Dayton. There in his neighborhood, he taught a term at a subscription school at the early age of 15. At age 16 he worked as a clerk in a Dayton mercantile establishment. After a few weeks of displaying admirable fitness in that position he was given the job of chief clerk. In 1819 he was taken as a partner by his employer William Worton.

After his success George decided to seek a new outlet for his talents and energy. In May 1821 he left Dayton and moved to Connersville, Indiana, a promising village in a relatively new state. Thence began his wonderful business career touching almost every enterprise of importance in the growing town.

George opened a dry goods store. In 1824 a license to vend merchandise in Connersville was given to him and also to W. & S. Watson. Earlier licenses were given to others for operating taverns, but George and Watson had the first store licenses.

In 1828 Connersville was still in its early days. George told about witnessing a savage encounter between a wolf and several men with dogs. The wolf was killed on the street across the street from Frank Dale's property.

George was a member of the board of trustees of Connersville. In that position he greatly contributed to the advancement of the commercial and industrial development of the village. By 1830 George was listed

among the men who pioneered the development of Connersville. Pioneers like A. B. Conwell, Newton Claypool, Arthur Dixon, George Frybarger, Joshua Harlan, Jonathan McCarty, James M. Ray, John Sample, Oliver H. Smith, and later Marks Crume, Daniel Hankins, Samuel W. Parker, Martin M. Ray, and Caleb B. Smith went on to become legislators, judges, members of Congress, a United States senator, a cabinet officer, and wealthy businessmen.

In 1834 the Legislature passed an act dividing the state of Indiana into ten districts for establishing a state bank in one town in each district. Fayette county, along with Delaware, Henry, Randolph, Rush, Union, and Wayne counties, were in the third district. The town of Richmond was chosen for the bank site. George later became a member of the board of directors for the Richmond branch of the Indiana State Bank.

When the Whitewater Canal was being built George took a prominent part in its construction. It was completed to Connersville in June, 1845, and the first canal boat to reach the village in the fall of that year was the "Patriot" commanded by Captain Gayle Ford. According to the *Brookville American* of January 7, 1848, George was elected director of the White Water Valley Canal Company.

The Whitewater Canal gave impetus to Connersville's growth. However, floods and a railroad caused through traffic to cease in 1849. It operated between local points up to 1862. The "Union" owned by David McCarty was the last boat to pass over it. It was purchased by what is today the Big Four Railroad. Tracks were laid on the towpath.

George had interest in various mercantile enterprises and erected quite a few business blocks in Connersville. He also established a pork-packing plant on the banks of the Whitewater River. For about 25 years after the Whitewater Canal was opened to traffic hog slaughtering and pork-packing became leading industries. George's competitors were A. B. Conwell & Sons, Daniel Hankins, Caldwell, McCollem & Company, etc. The number of hogs killed in the town in 1846 amounted to 6,000.

The office of postmaster was a trusted position. George served in this capacity from April 5, 1847 to December 30, 1847. It appears that he had to attend to his other businesses.

Prior to the Constitution of 1851, which provided for a state bank, and the Legislature's act of May 18, 1852, formally establishing a state bank to go into effect on July 1, 1852, banking in the town of Connersville was basically done by merchants such as George.

They issued paper currency to customers and bought or sold notes. These were called "shin-plasters." These "shin-plasters" and bank paper of various kinds were the basic currency used during the flourishing days of the Whitewater Canal. Very little specie was in circulation anywhere in Indiana.

In 1852 the first fifteen banks were organized. The Bank of Connersville was one of them and started out with twice as much capital (\$400,000) as any of the others. It was located in the rear of George's store, which stood at the southwest corner of Central avenue and Fifth street. George Frybarger was its first president. A. B. Conwell followed him. It soon outgrew that location and built a three-story brick building on Central avenue between Fourth and Fifth streets. Most of the time from the opening date of the Bank of Connersville until his death, George was its president.

The 1850 Federal Census shows George Frybarger at age 52, a merchant with a real estate value of \$46,000, living in Connersville and born in Maryland. Living with him are his young wife and children:

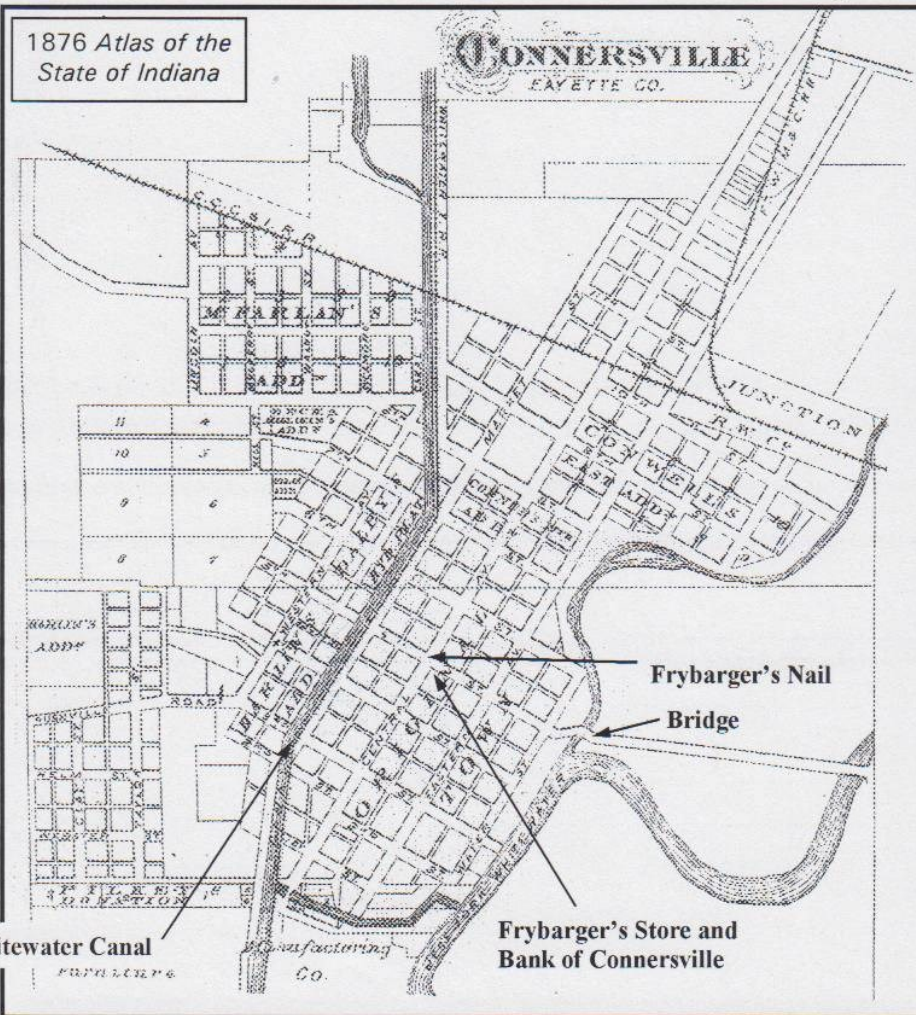
- Eliza [Eichelberger] Frybarger age 34
  - b. October 30, 1817 York County, Pennsylvania
  - d. May 15 or 18, 1886
- Mary Frybarger age 8
  - b. 1842
  - d. December 31, 1915
- m. Dr. William J. Pepper on August 4, 1858.
  - b. September 26, 1830
  - d. August 31, 1892
- First president of the Fayette County Medical Society organized in 1879.

Sophia Frybarger age 6

- George W. Frybarger age 4
  - b. October 14, 1845
  - d. March 9, 1906

- Charles H. Frybarger age 2
  - b. July 24, 1847
  - d. April 10, 1906

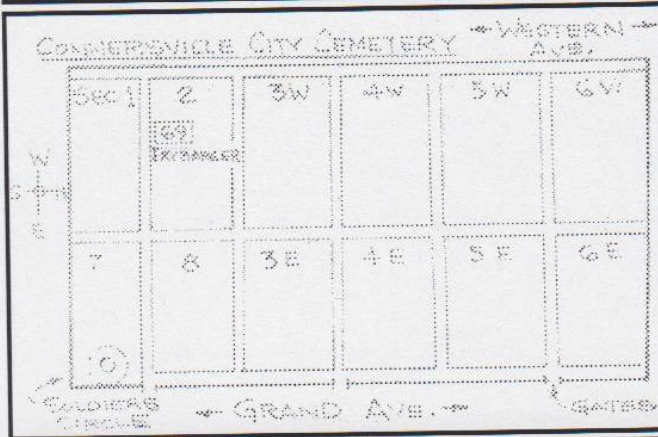
George W. Frybarger died on March 26, 1853.



### STRIFE OVER FIFTH STREET BRIDGE

*History of Fayette County, Indiana*

Locating the site for a bridge across the river at Connersville gave rise to a bitter strife. Colonel Hankins and others whose business interests were in the south part of the town wanted the bridge at the end of Third street. Abraham Conwell and those whose property and businesses were two squares up the street wanted it leading from Fifth street. On the day that the question was to be decided **George Frybarger**, with a hammer in his hand, stepped to the center of the street, at the intersection of Central avenue and Fifth street and drove a large nail into the earth, at the same time saying "Gentlemen, for years to come these four corners will be the center of the town," a prediction that has come true, and a decision, which meant the ultimate selection of a site for the bridge.



born on December 12, 1797 and died on March 26 185\_\_, the last digit being hard to read. This differs from his date of birth in the history book of December 28, 1796. A large monument on the lot reads: "Erected AD 1855 to mark hallowed ground where sleep our Father, Mother, George, Mary & Eliza Frybarger." This and the earlier reported census lead us to believe that George had two wives. A headstone gives Mary's birth being October 1804 and death on August 23, 1826. Eliza's headstone shows she was born October 30, 1817 and died May 15, 1880 or 1886.

In *The History of Fayette County, Indiana*, a writer describes George Frybarger as follows:

"Like most of the early settlers he was fearless and self-reliant, and entered upon the duties of his calling with decided purposes of usefulness and accumulation. His industry and energy gave him success, and for many years he ranked among the foremost merchants and traders of the White Water valley. It has been said that, perhaps, there never was a man in Connersville who knew the business as well as Frybarger, none at least who did so much business as he. There can be no doubt but the ruling trait and the carefully guarded ambition of George Frybarger was honesty. Even to the minutest details of ever raging trade throughout a long life of successful mercantile pursuits, he adhered in theory and practice to his passion — honesty. The charity of Frybarger was to the unfortunate honest; he gave, too, and encouraged with his advice and credit and means, stimulating them to all the demands of success. He had an unbounded credit at home and abroad. He always kept safely stored in his vaults coin to put against his credit. He is said to have been the first man in the West in a crisis, well remembered in the commercial world, to promptly pay his Eastern debts with coin stored for the purpose of adversity."

Sources:

Barrows, Frederic Irving. *History of Fayette County, Indiana*. Indianapolis, IN: B. F. Bowen & Company, Inc., 1917.

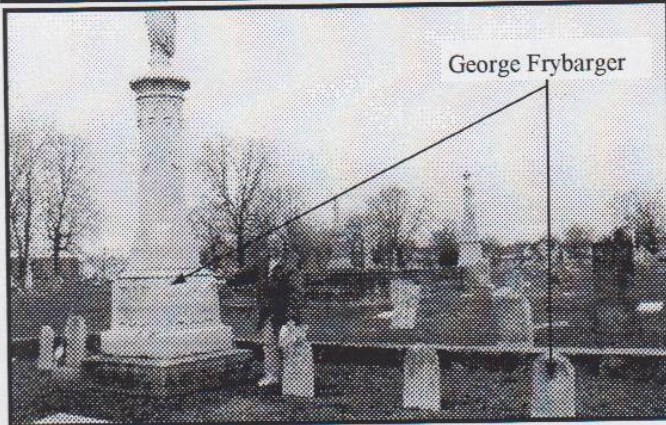
*Brookville American*. January 7, 1848

1850 Federal Census of Connersville, Fayette County, Indiana on September 7.

*Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Indiana*. Chicago, IL: Baskin & Forster & Co., 1876.

*Old Cemeteries Fayette County, Indiana*. Connersville, IN: Indian Hill Chapter DAR, 1964.

Special thanks to Jerry & Phyllis Mattheis for their help.



Above: Map of Connersville Cemetery

Center: Phyllis Mattheis stands by the 1855 Frybarger monument with a draped finial on top. The west side of the monument reads:

Our Father & Mother  
The south side reads:  
George o Mary  
Eliza  
Frybarger

George's headstone is at the far right of the three and closest to the drive.

Bottom: 1855 Monument West & South sides

Map/Photos by Jerry Mattheis



He was 57 years old. He is buried in Section 2 Lot 69 of City Cemetery in Connersville. The whole Frybarger lot is surrounded by a low wall and has at least 8 burials. CSI director Jerry Mattheis and his wife Phyllis found that the inscription on his tombstone says that he was