

# CANAWLERS AT REST

## DR. JAMES GORDON

b. Mar. 20, 1809

d. Oct. 11, 1889

By Carolyn I. Schmidt

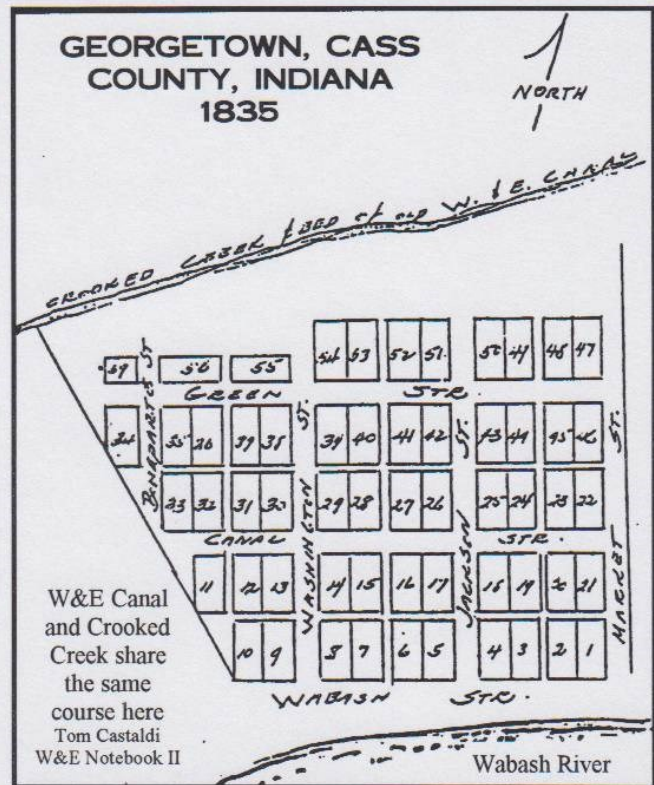
William Gordon (1752-1811), our subject's father, was born in Pennsylvania. He married Mary Catrell (1774-1812) and they had three children: Elizabeth, Eleanor, and Nancy. In 1800 William and Mary moved their family to Butler county, Ohio, and William worked in the milling business. There they had seven more children: Thomas, Margaret, Mary, Moses, James, William and Nellie, all of whom were reared in the county.

James Gordon was born on March 20, 1809. During his early childhood in Butler county, he acquired a fairly good literary education and began reading medicine. He attended medical college in Cincinnati. After attaining a high degree of proficiency he began practicing medicine with "excellent success in his undertakings."

In 1833 Dr. James Gordon moved to Vermillion County, Illinois. On September 1<sup>st</sup> of that year he was united in marriage to Cyndisa McMillen. In 1834 he and Cyndisa moved to the Coble farm near what was to become Georgetown in Jefferson township, Cass county, Indiana. He was the first physician in the township.

Seeing that the canal would pass through George Cicott's reserve on the north bank of the Wabash river, Daniel Bell laid out the village of Georgetown there in July 1835. The town was probably named after Cicott. It had fifty-seven lots and six streets: Canal and Wabash running east and west, Market, Jackson, Washington and Bonaparte running north and south. Shortly after Georgetown was platted Lock #27 and Aqueduct #6 were built there for the canal.

The plat above shows the canal and the creek sharing the same course. However, the canal ran from



northeast to southwest on the south bank of the creek, crossed the aqueduct and continued southwest on the north bank of the creek.

James saw a need for a general store in Georgetown and knew when the canal opened he would have a way to get merchandise more easily from the east. He opened his store in 1836 to supplement his medical practice for the following few years.

On February 18, 1839 William Warden and John Barr of White county, David Martin of Carroll county and James Gordon and James H. Kentner of Cass county were appointed commissioners by the General Assembly of the State of Indiana to organize Pulaski county and locate its seat of justice. They were to be notified of their appointment by the sheriff of White county on or before the first Monday of April, and meet in the house of John Pearson, in Winamac along with the circuit court on the first Monday of May to hold their first session. After that they could meet at any proper place until the county's public buildings were erected. They could hold up to three sessions, appoint an assessor and make all other necessary appointments as well as take steps to collect state and county revenue. Until Pulaski county had a place to hold court, it remained attached to White county for judicial purposes for the first twelve months.

In April 1839 the Wabash & Erie Canal was



completed to Logansport in Cass county. *The Logansport Herald* of May 28, 1839 reported, "The Canal. Boats are arriving almost daily. Business is becoming better every day. In a few days the water will, we understand, be let in to Georgetown [sic] six or eight mile below." Georgetown is west of Logansport and at a lower canal level.

With the opening of the canal, most of the merchandise for James' store arrived by canal boat. He also began buying and shipping grain on the canal to Toledo. According to the Logansport papers there were two canal companies in the area in 1839 transporting cargo on the canal. These were the Wabash and Erie Packet Boat Company, which carried passengers, and Spencer, Rice, & Hopkins Storage, Forwarding, and Commission. James' probably shipped his grain through Spencer, Rice and Hopkins.

some trouble with either having too much water or not enough. When there was too much water there were not enough waste weirs between Logansport and Georgetown to carry off the excess water. Although excess water was vented off the aqueduct over Clear Creek, at times this method was insufficient.

About 1840 James Gordon erected a sawmill at Georgetown, which he operated for some years. It was the town's second sawmill. One was built earlier in 1833 by John Myers. Patronage of Gordon's mill fell off and was closed.

In 1842 James' wife Cyndisa passed away. He was left with four children to rear.

In 1844 the whole length of the Wabash & Erie Canal was placed under a single superintendent, Ebenezer F. Lucas (1807-1871). His title was General Superintendent. That year he noted the lack of waste weirs or

The canal through this portion of Indiana had

## JAMES GORDON'S FAMILY PARENTS AND SIBLINGS OF JAMES GORDON

Name	Birth	Place	Death	Place	Marriage	Place
William Gordon	1752		1811			
Mary Gattrell (Gattrell,	1774		1812			
CHILDREN						
Elizabeth Gordon	1793					
Eleanor Gordon	1795					
Nancy Gordon	1797					
Thomas Gordon	1800					
Margaret Gordon	1805					
Mary Gordon	1807					
Moses Gordon	1808					
<u>James Gordon</u>	2-20-1809	Butler Co., OH	10-11-1889	Cass Co., IN		
William Gordon	1811		1865			
Nellie Gordon	1812					

## JAMES GORDON'S MARRIAGES AND CHILDREN

<u>James Gordon</u>	3-2-1809	Butler Co., OH	10-11-1889	Cass County, IN		Vermillion Co., IL
1. Cyndisa McMillen			1842		9-1-1833	Vermillion Co., IL
CHILDREN						
Elizabeth			infancy			
James Gordon	circa 1837	Jefferson, Cass, IN				(m. Dr. A. B. Jones)
Margaret R. Gordon	circa 1838	Jefferson, Cass, IN	2-?-1866	Francesville, IN	6-30-1864	Cass Co., IN
William McMillen Gordon	1-2-1839	Jefferson, Cass, IN	7-24-1913		5-26-1862	(m. Elizabeth Hoffman)
Cyndisa Gordon	circa 1842	Jefferson, Cass, IN				(3-24-1840, 5-10-1914)
						Logansport
2. Anna Neff	1820		1863		11-18-1845	Cass Co., IN
CHILDREN						
Daniel N. Gordon	circa 1847	Jefferson, Cass, IN				
Mary Ellen Gordon	circa 1849	Jefferson, Cass, IN				
John P. Gordon	10-16-1851	Jefferson, Cass, IN	12-1-1872			(m. S. Amanda)
Edward Everett Gordon	circa 1856	Jefferson, Cass, IN	1943			(1853, 12-14-1923)
Estelle Bell Gordon	circa 1859	Jefferson, Cass, IN				



waste gates contributing to the 1844 tragedy of "The pairs. Kentucky," a canal packet boat. The pressure of the excess water created a breach in the canal's berm (north bank) at Fitch's Glen, water rushed out carrying "The Kentucky" along with it toward the Wabash River. The boat was wrecked and Thomas Emerson drowned. Luckily the chambermaid and three other men were rescued. Enion ("Indian") Kendall wrote the following poem about the event: [more verses on page 11]

"The chambermaid and three men more,  
Sat all night on a sycamore,  
From early night till rise of sun,  
And watched the mighty Wabash run."

Logan Esarey in his *History of Indiana From Its Exploration to 1850* said in 1845 after the flood that "Business was reviving rapidly and there was every indication of prosperity in the transportation business. But the rotten condition of the wooden aqueducts and inadequate supply of water from the feeders did not promise so well for the canal.

In 1845 James married again. Ann Neff became his wife and over the years they had five children.

During the dry season the canal in this area often needed more water to float the boats. Canal officials noted the need for a feeder and in 1845 they temporarily redirected Crooked Creek to flow into the canal. Then in 1847 a feeder canal was built. James Gordon would later build a warehouse beside it at Georgetown. In the late 1800s there was a break in the towpath opposite the feeder gate and water rushed into the creek washing out the timbered passage beneath the canal bed.

As stated before, the two major structures built at Georgetown were Lock #27 and Aqueduct #6. Originally planned to be a composite lock of rough stone lined with timber, Jesse Lynch Williams, Chief Engineer of the Wabash & Erie Canal, noted in his 1837 and 1847 reports that the plan was changed and Lock #27 was built as a cut stone lock. This was the most expensive type of lock to build. The stone came from the Georgetown quarry. Its approaches and chamber were built of stone blocks that were durable, but Williams records that the workmanship was "imperfect." The lock raised/lowered canal boats 8 feet.

Aqueduct #6 was a 28 foot open wooden trunk aqueduct. Its one span was supported by stone abutments. It carried the canal across Crooked Creek. The aqueduct frequently needed repairs due to floods and later in 1867 due to the bottom timbers rotting away. James Gordon, our subject, received a contract on January 18, 1848 to make one of the aqueduct's early re-

Although James' general store was quite successful he had left merchandising from 1843-48. In 1848 James once again opened a store. Then in 1852 he erected the large warehouse on the Wabash and Erie Canal. From it he operated the county's largest business buying and shipping grain to Toledo and also bought lumber, produce and all types of building materials as well as merchandise for his store. His stock of merchandise averaged from \$20,00-\$30,000 and from 1857-1864 his sales exceeded \$80,000. He was so successful that his operation was the most extensive in northern Indiana. The 1870 US Census lists him as a farmer and dealer in dry goods and groceries with real estate valued at \$3,660 (probably value of store merchandise) and \$32,400 (real estate) and a personal estate of \$16,000. However, after the canal began to decline his business also declined. He had made several investments through which he incurred severe losses and from which he never fully recovered. However, he did manage to continue operating his store, which was the only store, for a time. The coming of the railroad killed both his store and the town.

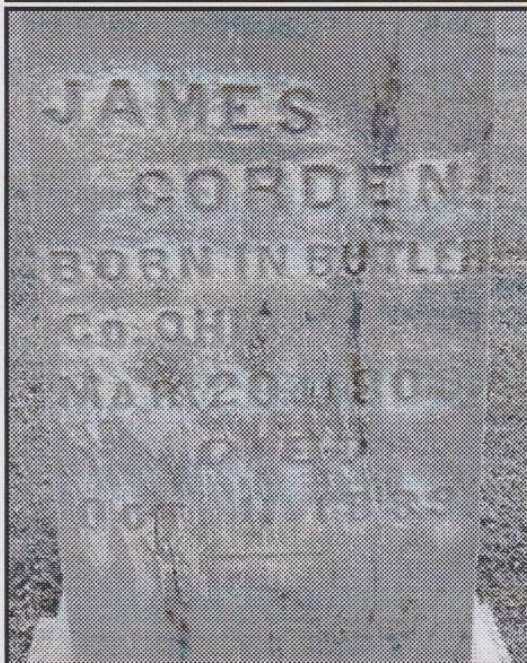
In 1855 James Gordon took over as pastor of Pisgah Presbyterian Church from its founder the Rev. M. M. Post. Post had organized it on September 24, 1836 in a log schoolhouse, which had been replaced by a frame structure in 1853. James led this congregation until 1859 when he was replaced by Rev. Randall.

In the 1830s a post office had been organized as "Amsterdam" for the Georgetown area. In 1856 James became postmaster there in Amsterdam, Cass county. His compensation was \$25.83 and revenue of the office to the department was \$13.98. This post office was closed in the 1870s and later re-established under the name of "Gordon" in James' honor. It was later discontinued and became a rural route from Logansport.

In 1883 a covered bridge, the longest one in Indiana at the time being 1000 feet long and a Howe truss type, was built across the Wabash River at Georgetown. James Gordon, the son of our subject, was the superintendent of its construction. After a great ice gorge of March 20, 1912 severely damaged this bridge, it was repaired. However, the flooding of March 1913 carried away most of it and a new cement arch bridge was built. William (Max) McMillen Gordon, another son of our subject, was the superintendent of construction of this bridge that was designed by Daniel Luten, an alum of Purdue University. This bridge crossed at the site where the Wabash and Erie Canal ran through Georgetown. It was a single lane bridge. It was replaced in the 1970s. Max became a well regarded citizen of Georgetown.



Mr. James Gordon an old pioneer of this county died yesterday afternoon at 3 o'clock at his home in Georgetown having resided in that vicinity for more than 50 years. The deceased was born March 20, 1809 Butler county, Ohio therefore being more than 80 years of age. He moved to Georgetown this county in 1833 and commenced the practice of medicine, but soon abandoned that profession to engage in merchandising. At the opening of the canal he was one of the contractors who helped to push the work through. He was engaged in that business for more than fifty years when he retired from a more active pursuit of life. The funeral will be held at the Pisgah church in Jefferson township at 2:30 o'clock Saturday afternoon Rev. E. S. Scott of this city officiating. From Logansport paper



James Gordon Born in Butler Co., Ohio  
Mar. 20, 1809 Died Oct 11, 1889

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