

MICHAEL HEDEKIN AND THE HEDEKIN HOUSE

Just as the Vinton House built in 1847-48 served Whitewater Canal and National Road travelers in Cambridge City, Indiana, the Hedekin House built in 1843-33 in Fort Wayne accommodated canal travelers. It was located on the east side of Barr Street between Columbia and Main Streets just a block from the hustle and bustle of the Wabash & Erie Canal. It was the foremost tavern and inn in Fort Wayne during the canal era.

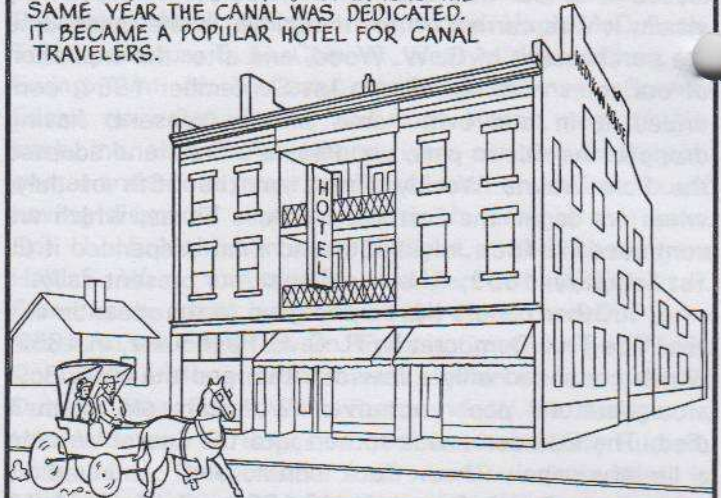
In the *Columbia Street Story* by Roy M. Bates and Kenneth B. Keller it is noted that Michael Hedekin came to Fort Wayne from County Westmeath, Ireland early in 1834 and "by June of that year had opened a general store on the southeast corner of Barr and Columbia streets." When this business prospered he built the Hedekin House beside it nine years later.

The Hedekin House was a three-story brick structure with balconies. The second floor balcony hosted many early prominent leaders. The hotel had thirty-four guest rooms each of which had a knotted rope to escape fire. The first floor was used for business and had a wide staircase that took visitors up to the second floor lobby. To the front of the second floor were two large rooms. The basement kitchen had a spit large enough to roast a side of beef.

Michael Hedekin died in 1872 at the age of seventy-nine. In 1876 Avery Freeman Jr. took over the management of the hotel. The Hedekin House remained in his estate until 1921 when it was purchased by Lloyd Hursh. Before then it had had other leasors including J. Johnson, J. J. Knox, J. C. Gaylord, Ely Kerns, H. J. Mills, Mr. Wolf, Avery Freeman, Mr. Denison, Edward Purcell and Jacob Swaidner. It eventually became better known as the Home Hotel, a fitting name as it housed many permanent residents and pensioners. It had deteriorated into a flop house by the time Hursh purchased it, but the building itself had remarkably stood up over time.

Roscoe Hursh, Lloyd's son, became interested in the historic structure in 1953 and, using his skill and imagination, began its restoration. As deteriorating buildings on Columbia Street were demolished, he collected the vintage trims and stockpiled them in case he might need them to maintain the hotel. He refurbished the iron railings on both the second and third floor balconies. He was restoring fireplaces that had been walled over through the years when he unexpectedly died. The hotel looked better than it had for years and his wife, Pauline, continued to manage it until 1962. After 124 years of service the old Hedekin House fell via a

THE HEDEKIN HOUSE WAS BUILT IN 1843 THE SAME YEAR THE CANAL WAS DEDICATED. IT BECAME A POPULAR HOTEL FOR CANAL TRAVELERS.

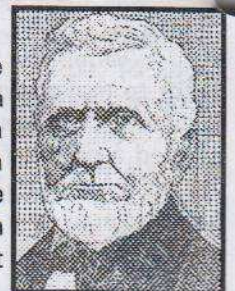


Nate Tagmeyer drew this picture of the Hedekin House for a coloring book that he made about the canal.

wrecker's ball in April 1969 to make way for the Civic Theatre.

In the booklet *As I Remember* that was prepared by the staff of the Allen County Fort Wayne Public Library in 1960, old residents reminisced about the town's early taverns. Winifred Randall told about the Hedekin House as follows:

"It was the year 1843 — the year of the completion of the Wabash & Erie Canal that Michael Hedekin built the Hedekin House. He chose a site within a stone's throw of the docks of the Wabash & Erie Canal on ground which had formerly been a part of the Old Fort Site.



Michael Hedekin
1793-1872

"Mr. Hedekin was quick to see the possibilities of trade from the canal nine years after he had arrived in Fort Wayne from Ireland [1834].

"On the occasion of the opening of the hotel, a grand military ball was held — one of the memorable social events of the period. The "Silver Grays," a crack Detroit military organization, were in attendance. Calvin Anderson was the first landlord. The hotel proved to be the place of entertainment for many of the great antebellum days. Beginning with Mr. Anderson's management in 1846, the place was notable for the absence of a bar or the sale of liquor.

"April 15, 1861, three days after the fearful news of the firing on Fort Sumter, Franklin P. Randall, Mayor of Fort Wayne, called a mass meeting at the He-

dekin Hall, adjoining the Hedekin House on the north. A committee composed of Hugh McCulloch, A[lford] P. Jgerton, Samuel Hanna, Hugh B. Reed, Joseph Brackenridge, Pliny Hoagland and Lott S. Bayless, was appointed to prepare the following resolutions: 'In the present crisis of our national affairs, there should be but one party in the State of Indiana, and that party should stand pledged before the country to uphold and sustain, by all the means in its power, the national administration — enforcing obedience to the laws preserving personal property and vindicating the honor of the flag.'

"In 1856, Samuel E. Curtis established a private banking business here with a capital of \$25,000 in silver. He safeguarded the sum by dividing it into equal portions to be placed in separate wooden boxes, stored in a room at the Hedekin House and guarded day and night while the banking rooms on the east side of Calhoun Street north of Columbia, were being prepared for occupancy. [There were 25 wooden boxes each containing 1,000 silver dollars.]

"A very good picture of the Hedekin House will be found in Robert Grafton's Mural entitled 'The Wabash & Erie Canal,' which is [was] displayed in the north end of the lobby of the Fort Wayne National Bank, and depicts a lively, colorful scene of the 'forties' in Fort Wayne at the beginning of the transportation period. In the foreground are men and women in their quaint dress on the dock of the canal where a packet had just tied up."

In Charles M. Comparet's reminiscence of November 1928 he talks about the hotels during and after the canals era saying:

"The Hedekin House at the time was a fine hotel, all of the eastern trade stopping there. The other hotels in the city were the Kime House on the corner of Wayne and Clay Streets, the Old Fort Hotel on Lafayette and Main Street — a farmer hotel [frequented by farmers when they had business in town]. There was the Exchange Hotel on Main Street between Calhoun and Harrison Street; then the Rockhill House on Broadway. Others were the Ross House on West Main Street, the Union House on Main Street, the Mayer House on Wayne Street and Calhoun, the McKinnie Hotel at the Pennsylvania Depot, the Phillips House on the corner of Lafayette and Columbia Street."

Julia Stapleford wrote notes to Mrs. Perry A Randall in which she told about Michael Hedekin, the builder of the inn. They follow:

"A remarkable old gentleman was Michael Hedekin. He had by his first wife three children, two daughters and a son. One daughter [Julia] married Mr. McDou-

gall who kept a carpet store on Columbia Street between Barr and Clinton, and had two children Charles and Katherine. His second wife had no children and they adopted Patrick Daugherty, my uncle.

"Mrs. Hedekin died and Mr. Hedekin gave Uncle Patrick to the Orpahns' Home at Vincennes. From the palatial home of the Hedekins where he was given every care, he was taken from the Orphans' Home and bound out to a Frenchman, a farmer with a big family.

"After mother and father were married — Henry Baker and Mary Daugherty — she kept worrying for her little brother and it went on for a number of years and mother could not locate the boy. Mr. Hedekin did not know and finally Mr. Hedekin passed away.

"Then father, feeling to comfort mother, said he recalled Omig [Ochmig] Bird telling him that Mr. Hedekin had told him that the boy had been bound out to a farmer, so he instructed Mr. Bird to watch for the boy when he was making his trips through the country to purchase timber. Mr. Bird was a timber buyer and my father had a sawmill with his brothers.

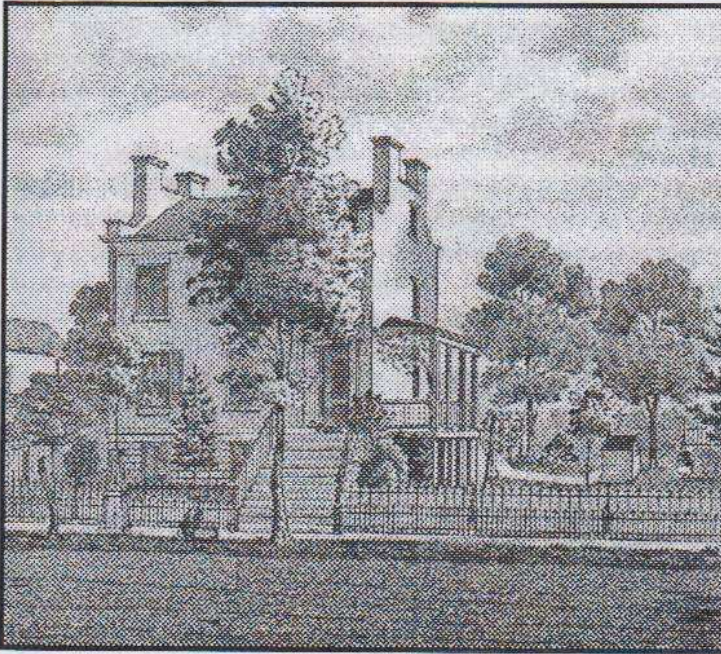
"One day Mr. Bird came to my father and said 'Henry, I have found your boy. Your wife had reason to worry. The little fellow plows ten acres of corn and is half fed and he has never felt a bed but has slept on the straw and under old rags, washes the diapers for the small children, has no clothes.'

"He instructed father how to get him. Father left the house without telling my mother where he was going. He said, 'I am going away now and may not be home tonight.' He went to the Frenchman, hiring a carriage to take him to this farm. As my father went toward the house the boy was coming in from the field with an old pair of pants torn almost to the waist, barefooted, peaked-looking as though half-starved. Father said to him, 'What is your name?' He stopped and looked at my father. 'My name is Patrick.' 'What is your other name?' He said 'I do not know my mother's name.'

"About this time the old farmer made his appearance, reached out his hand and wanted to shake hands with my father. Father would not accept his hand but turned and looking at the boy, asked, 'Is this boy bound to you to live with you until he is twenty-one?' He said, 'Yes Sir. What is it your business?' My father then said, 'He is my brother-in-law. I have a good home and am ready to keep him and I am taking him home with me.'

"The other man said, 'You cannot do it.'

My father took the little boy by the shoulder and said, 'Patrick, get your clothes on. I am taking you to



Michael Hedekin lived at 95 East Main Street in Fort Wayne on the grounds of the old council house.
1876 Atlas of the State of Indiana by Baskin & Forster

pany's agents. In reality the canal workers appear to have fared the worst from being paid in scrip, but some of the more clever laborers used the opportunity to their own advantage. Michael Hedekin, one of the Irish workers at Fort Wayne, bought the scrip at attractive discounts and, although he came to Fort Wayne in 1834 a poor man, by 1843-44 he was able to construct the Hedekin House, one of Fort Wayne's best hotels."

In the *History of Fort Wayne & Allen County, Indiana 1790-2005* edited John D. Beatty it says:

"Several Catholics who arrived in Fort Wayne during the early canal era became successful businessmen. One of these was Michael Hedekin. Born in 1793 in County Westmeath, he married Rebecca Pau, a native of Ohio, and arrived in Fort Wayne penniless in 1834. Through hard work and successful investing, he built a three-story brick hotel on the east side of Barr Street, south of Columbia Street between 1843 and 1844. Known as the Hedekin House, it became a local landmark, especially after Hedekin opened the first floor as a tavern in 1846 and hired Calvin Anderson as its proprietor. Hedekin also opened a general store in Antwerp, Ohio. When he died in 1872, he was buried from the Cathedral and was considered a wealthy man. His hotel remained standing well into the twentieth century."

your sister.'

"The boy answered, 'I have no other clothes.'

At that my father said to the man. 'It is time you are taking care of your own children. I will take care of this little boy.'

"There were words between them. Father said, 'I will take law that you are not taking care of him.'

"Then father said to Patrick, 'Come along and get into the buggy.'

"The Frenchman tried to get the boy out of the buggy but father resisted saying now the boy would have a home."

In Charles R. Poinsett's *Fort Wayne During the Canal Era 1828-1855* he talks about canal workers being paid in scrip, which we usually think of as cheating them. However, Poinsett says, "It has been stated that many merchants along the canal line were ruined because they had accepted the scrip at par value. There is no evidence to indicate that this was the case among the more experienced merchants at Fort Wayne. According to an account by A. D. Compere, the establishment owned by his father and Peter Kiser was very careful in accepting scrip. Other firms such as that of Allen Hamilton also knew its real value and when possible used it to pay off their debts for canal lands. The Ewings bought 'White Dog' from the canal workers through the com-

In *Valley of the Upper Maumee River* published in 1889 says:

"The Hedekin House is a notable monument of early days, and was, when built, excelled in its size and appointments by none in the northwest. Thomas B. Hedekin, son of Michael, who was not a year old when his father came, established a grocery in 1848, which he managed for twenty years. Maurice Cody...was born in County Cork, Ireland...Mr. Cory engaged in cutting stove wood and other odd jobs [after arriving in Ft. Wayne in 1834] until 1839, when he became a clerk in the pioneer store of Michael Hedekin, with whom he was associated for four years. In 1841 he was interested with Mr. Hedekin in a store one mile east of Antwerp, Ohio, where he lived eleven months...."

As seen through these reminiscences and short articles, Michael Hedekin and the Hedekin House played an important role in the early development of Fort Wayne. The Canal Society of Indiana now has a piece of history from this old hotel in the form of a packet boat carved by Nate Tagmeyer.



Aleda & Nate Tagmeyer in 1999