

CANAWLERS AT REST

WILLIAM CRAWFORD LINTON

b. 1794

d. January 31, 1835

By Robert F. Schmidt
Photos from CSI photo collection



Today it is hard for us to imagine the excitement the early plans for the Wabash & Erie Canal generated during the late 1820's in the Hoosier state. Immediately after being made a Canal Commissioner in 1828, Sam. Hanna rode off to Detroit and then on to New York to acquire the necessary surveying instruments, which were unavailable in Indiana. As various milestones were reached in the plans or construction of the canal, hundreds, even thousands, gathered around bonfires, firing cannons and guns into the air. Indiana at last had joined the eastern states in building its own canal. William Crawford Linton, an enthusiastic Terre Haute merchant supported canals long before the Wabash & Erie came near this city on the Wabash.

William Crawford Linton was born in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania in 1795 and moved to Terre Haute in 1818. By 1820 he was operating a general store there in a white-frame building on the east side of the Courthouse Square. This business was later moved to 25 North 5th Street. As a store keeper, he was known for his strict commercial honesty. A story regarding Linton was told that reflected upon his clerks and some of the villagers. "At a time Mr. Linton was absent in the east purchasing goods. In due time with other merchandise, a large cask was received, and being opened was found to contain salted codfish. The clerks and the villagers in the store at the time, from the rank smell, pronounced the fish spoiled, and a drayman was summoned to haul the cast out on the prairie and empty it. The wise Paddy, knowing the rich delicacy of the codfish did not lie specially in its odor, notified some of

his friends of the dump on the prairie, and they eagerly shared the prize among themselves."

Public records show that at the August meeting of the Circuit court in 1821, he was one of the board of commissioners, having been recently elected. Soon he built a brick residence on the southeast corner of Third & Ohio streets. It had a larder, bathroom, milk room, and smokehouse. He ran the local post office for a few years.

Around 1828 he purchased land several miles south of town in Honey Creek Township for what became known as "Spring Hill Farm." This land eventually became a community landmark after having been improved further by its successive owners, William J. Ball, Resident Engineer of the Wabash & Erie Canal, and, then, Colonel Richard W. Thompson, Secretary of the Navy under President Rutherford Hayes.

Local magistrate John Britton once remarked that William Linton "was a small, spare man, and, when not busy would walk back and forth behind his counter very rapidly, with his arms swinging as if in fierce debate with some unseen person. He was a very nervous man, and not without courage." Other descriptions say that he was fidgety, frail, yellow-complexioned and lacked the genteel personality of his brother-in-law Thomas H. Blake. But through his accomplishments it is seen that he was also an energetic, achievement oriented man, who became affluent. His assets were his impeccable integrity, his tenacity, his intestinal fortitude and his leadership.

In December 1820 Linton married Ann Aspinwall. They had four children. Their son, Freeman Hubbard Linton, died in 1841 at the age of 11 after falling from a horse. In 1821 he served as a co-personal representative for Eliza, the widow of Dr. Eleazer Aspinwall, his father-in-law, and meticulously settled the estate. Linton's fastidious bookkeeping over three years is enlightening. After the death of his first wife Ann, he married Elizabeth Perkins in 1827.

In 1822 he was one of three Vigo county commissioners named to supervise construction of the first Vigo County Court House. He was a founder of the Terre Haute library and in 1824 became its president serving in this office for more than a decade.

Linton's first business partner was his brother, David, who built Terre Haute's first two-story brick mansion in the downtown area. David Linton originally erected his home on the southwest corner of Second and Wabash, but it was moved several times before it was demolished to make way for the Terre Haute Savings Bank parking lot in the 1950's.

In 1827, William Linton brought a carriage to Terre Haute that is believed to be the second carriage to be used there. He decided to run for the Indiana Senate and was promptly elected representing Vigo, Clay, and Sullivan counties. There he crusaded for the National Road, the navigability of the Wabash River, the State Bank of Indiana, libraries for every county, and the Wabash and Erie Canal. He served three consecutive terms 1828-1829, 1829-1830 and 1830-1831 in the state Senate.

Linton was a Whig and a Presbyterian. On May 17, 1828 the Presbyterian Church was organized in Terre Haute and had ten members: Samuel & Margaret Young, Samuel & Mary Ewing, John and Margaret McCulloch, James & Jane Beard, Phoebe Monfort, Mr. O. Dibble. Samuel Young and James Beard were chosen and ordained as elders. William Linton, John Britton and Captain James Wasson were elected trustees.

In 1830-1831 Linton was a founder of the Indiana Historical Society. In 1831 his ethical tenets led to his defeat in the Indiana Senate race. Although the Senate Education Committee, on which Linton served, decided to make an issue of Governor James B. Ray's failing to return the Louisiana Code to the State Library, only Linton was fearless and foolhardy enough to publicly confront the governor. This has been punned as "The Case of the Overdue Book." It set back Linton's budding political career. In 1833 he ran for the U.S. Congress but was defeated. Linton did not let this terminate his public service. In January 23, 1832, when

asked by Governor Noah Noble to be one of three Canal Fund Commissioners to handle financial affairs, he accepted. The other commissioners were: Nicholas McCarty of Marion County and Jeremiah Sullivan of Jefferson County. He served until his death in 1835.

On February 22, 1832 ground was broken in Fort Wayne for the Wabash & Erie Canal. The original plan was to terminate the canal at the Tippecanoe River near Lafayette. But soon after the work began, a movement was initiated to extend the canal to Lafayette and then on to Terre Haute.

Linton did anything necessary to help promote the canal. He traveled to New York at least six times if not more to negotiate loans to deliver funds or notes. He walked whenever a horse, stage, steamboat, or canal boat was unavailable. He often made these trips alone. He feared he would be robbed and did not sleep. Sometimes he hired an armed guard to accompany him. He used his own funds to pay the guard.

The Indiana General Assembly in its 1831-32 session authorized placing 32 miles of the Wabash & Erie Canal under contract. By August 1832 the Canal Fund Commissioners had borrowed the first money for canal use from J.D. Beers & Company of New York. The commissioners agreed to pay usurious interest rates of 13.25% for \$100,000. When the fund commissioners reported in 1833 both the house and senate journals show total expenditures of \$75,529.25½ and a balance of \$102,288.57¾. Total receipts were \$176,817.82½, which were derived from the sale of canal lands, the \$100,000 loan, and interest. The work during the season was said to have progressed with "spirit and activity, and was executed in a manner that does credit to the commissioners, engineers and contractors." Also as a Canal Fund Commissioner, Linton replied to a letter addressed the Commissioners while he was in New York, on the subject of a loan for the bridge at the Falls of the Ohio river. He referred it to the committee of canals and internal improvements. They considered it inexpedient to legislate on the subject and asked to be discharged.

Linton appreciated his appointment by Governor Noah Noble and, on September 21, 1833, wrote to him in behalf of Mr. Samuel Barnes Gookins recommending that he be appointed a Notary Public. Gookins received the appointment on September 27, 1833. Gookins, who was an apprentice to the editor of the **Western Register**, later studied law and practiced in the firm of Kinney, Wright and Gookins. He later was a member of the Indiana State House of Representatives (1851-52) and was a judge of the Indiana Supreme Court for three years (1854-57). This shows Linton's ability to choose men of good character. In 1834 Linton was also named a Fund Commissioner for the State Bank of Indiana. He served

until 1835.

En route to New York on January 31, 1835, at the age of 41, he died of a massive heart attack in Philadelphia. Within his 14 years in Indiana, he had accomplished more than most men accomplish in a lifetime. Governor Noah Noble quickly submitted the name of Samuel Hanna for consent of the Senate to replace Linton as canal fund commissioner. Samuel Hanna, of Fort Wayne, Allen County, Indiana, was another canal enthusiast as mentioned earlier.

Although the Linton's were successful, they died young. William's sister Sarah Linton Blake, wife of Thomas Holdsworth Blake, died in 1831 and his brother, David Linton, also died in 1835.

On June 18, 1837, Linton's widow, the former Eliza Perkins, wed Lucius H. Scott. Linton previously had been in partnership with Scott for a short time in a store at Third and Ohio streets in Terre Haute known as "Scott's Corner." That same year, Scott, along with the two Law brothers of Vincennes and James B. McCall of Terre Haute, platted the town of Lamasco on Evansville's west side deriving its name from the first letters in their last names: Law McCall Scott

Perhaps the greatest honor to be bestowed on Linton was that of having the town of New Jerusalem, Indiana changed to Linton, Indiana, on November 19, 1835, the year of his death. Although this town in Greene county was not located on the W & E canal route, the route for the purposed Central Canal, was surveyed to go from Worthington through Newberry, all of which is in this county. This name change occurred prior to the approval of the Mammoth Internal Improvements bill in January 27, 1836. The renaming of New Jerusalem to Linton only reinforces the display of canal exuberance at the time.

In Vigo county a township, a square and a street were named in his honor. Today Linton Square no longer exists and Linton Street has been renamed Sycamore.

The only other Indiana town named for a Hoosier canal personality that comes to mind is Hoagland, platted 1872, named for Pliny Hoagland 1810 -1884. Clinton, Indiana, and Clinton county, Indiana are named for Governor DeWitt Clinton, a national canal figure.

In 1994 Michael McCormick, an attorney and historian from Terre Haute, Indiana, contacted the Canal Society of Indiana asking for its help in placing grave markers for William Crawford Linton and Thomas Holdsworth Blake. On Saturday, July 29, 1995, a grave marker dedication ceremony was held at Woodlawn Cemetery in Terre Haute. Several CSI members came in



CSI members attended the grave marker unveiling for William Crawford Linton at Terre Haute's Woodlawn Cemetery in 1995.

turn-of-the-century clothing. I, Robert Schmidt, as president of CSI, recognized the achievements of two of the Wabash Valley's most significant founders: William Linton and Thomas Blake. Both men were area and state trailblazers during their life-times. Sally Russell played "Taps" on the trumpet as the crowd paused to honor the deceased. Mike McCormick received a certificate of honorarium for his efforts in setting up the events from Terre Haute Mayor Pete Chalos. Officials representing the city of Linton, Indiana, were Mayor Jimmie K. Wright and Clerk-Treasurer Ron Sparks.

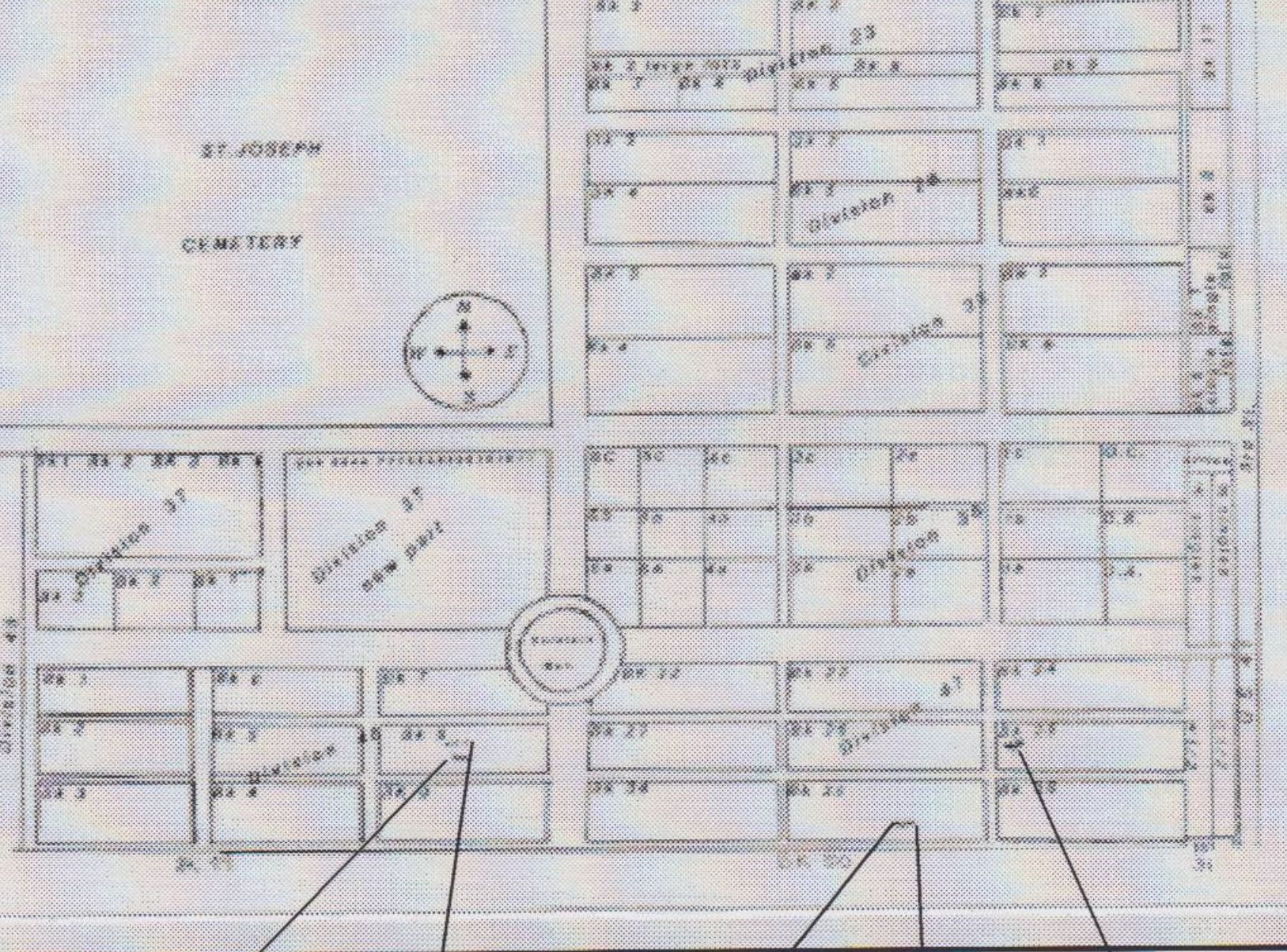
Michael McCormick in his book *Terre Haute Through The Canal Era* says:

"No monument is big enough to recognize Linton's magnanimous feats for causes necessary to advance his state. He cared not for publicity. He was unafraid to step on toes. His brutal frankness nearly cost him his life on more than one occasion. His work ethic doomed him."



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WOODLAWN CEMETERY, U.S. 41 (3RD STREET), TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA CANAWLERS

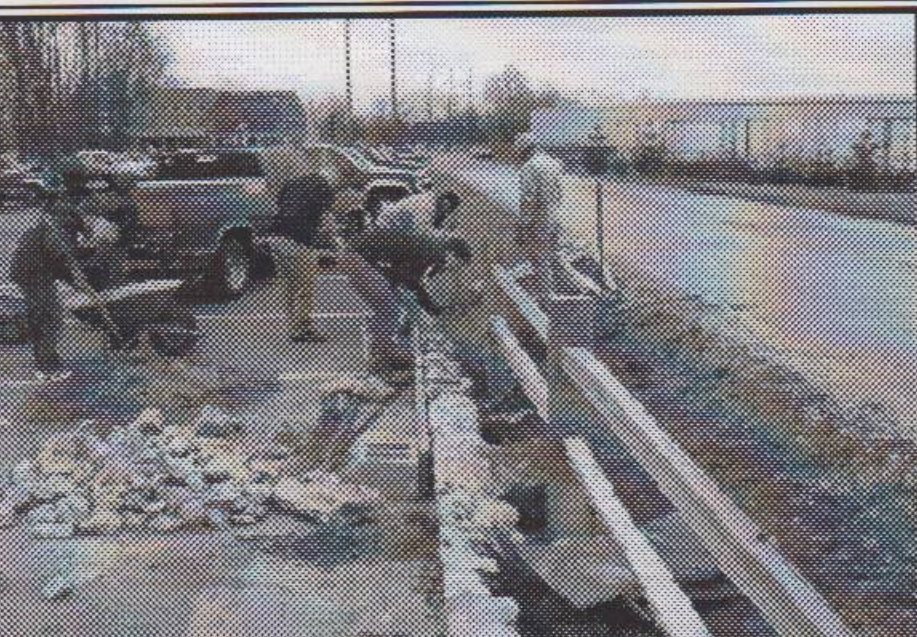
William J. Ball
Div. 48 Lot 22 Bk 8

Edward A. Hannegan
Div. 48 Lot 18 Bk 8

William C. Linton
Div. 47 Lot 23 Bk 35

Thomas H. Blake
Div. 47 Lot 23 Bk 35

Thomas Dow
Div. 47 Lot 5 Bk 35



NEW FENCE FOR PARK ENTRANCE

Delphi volunteerism is seen again in an Eagle Scout project at Canal Park. To complete the requirements to receive an Eagle badge, a scout must lead his troop in a project that benefits the community. He has to organize the project, find a way to finance the materials required to complete it, and oversee the work of the boys in his troop as they work on it. Recently, such a project, a new fence was added near the entrance to Canal Park by a local scout troop. The Canal Interpretive Center & Museum is visible at the back left of the picture.

Photo by Dan McCain