

CANAWLERS AT REST

JOHN MINESINGER

Find-A-Grave #37038230

b. March 17, 1803
d. September 1, 1870

By Robert F. Schmidt



John Minesinger Courtesy of Ada Miles

When the businessmen of Hagerstown decided to build a canal to connect with the Whitewater Canal at Cambridge City, they quickly concluded that they would need an engineer to head up the project; a person who had previous canal experience. John Minesinger of Beaver county, Pennsylvania was chosen to layout the 8-mile-long waterway from Hagerstown to Cambridge City. What was his background and experience to lead this task?

John's father, Joseph Minesinger, was born in Wittenberg, Germany circa 1765 to Jacob & Catherine Minesinger, who originally emigrated from Italy. Joseph learned the stone-mason trade in his native Germany, and in late 1790s came to the United States. He bought 400 acres of timber land in Greene Township, Beaver County, Pennsylvania and circa 1791 married a woman named Christina. During the next decade 4 sons were born to them: David, Jacob, **John** and Godfrey. As the boys grew up they were able to help him clear the land and build a large stone house on his property. The Minesingers had 3 more children, two daughters, Catherine born in 1810 and Elsie born in 1814. Finally in 1817 another son, James, was born.

Joseph continued his stone masonry work and farming. In those days sons often followed the occupation of their father. His son Godfrey took up stone masonry and built one of the stone abutments for the railroad bridge at Wheeling, West Virginia. Godfrey purchased a farm near the Ohio River at Smith's Ferry. At his death in 1868 this farm was divided between his two sons John and Thomas.

Joseph's fourth oldest son **John**, our subject, at 21 in 1824 was married to a local Pennsylvania girl, Mary "Polly" Swearingen. She was 16.

We don't know how John Minesinger gained canal engineering knowledge, but it was probably on the job like many men did who worked on canals. It appears likely that he became involved with the Beaver Division of the Erie Extension Canal in Pennsylvania.

The Erie Extension Canal was to extend 136 miles northward from the confluence of the Ohio and Beaver rivers up the western edge of Pennsylvania to Lake Erie. When completed in October 1844 by a private company, it consisted of 137 locks to overcome a total rise and fall of 977 feet and included 32 miles of slackwater. The first phase of the project began in July 1831 along the Beaver River to Harbor Bridge, a distance of 31 miles—25 miles of slackwater and 6 miles of constructed canal banks. This phase was completed in May of 1834. This Beaver Division is the same area where the David Sanger family built lock #8 and dam #3. (See *The Hoosier Packet* December 2010)

John Minesinger probably gained some work on the Beaver canal project and then learned about a planned survey in Indiana on the Whitewater River. In the summer of 1834 William Goodin and Jesse L. Williams were employed to conduct a survey of the Whitewater valley from the mouth of Nettle Creek (Hagerstown) to Lawrenceburg, Indiana. One of their assistants was **John Minesinger**. They determined that a canal was feasible along this route and

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subsequently the Whitewater Canal was included in the Mammoth Internal Improvement Bill of 1836. Ground-breaking for the canal was held in Brookville on September 13, 1836. The first portion was completed from Lawrenceburg to Brookville in 1839. By this time the state of Indiana had gotten into financial difficulty and all work stopped in November 1839. In 1842 the Whitewater Canal was sold to Henry S. Vallette of Cincinnati and subsequently became the White Water Canal Company.

After the summer of 1834, Minesinger apparently returned to Pennsylvania to the Erie Extension Canal for on July 13, 1837 he is specifically mentioned and linked as an assistant to the Principal Engineer Dr. Charles Tillotson Whippo. Whippo was now responsible for the 2nd phase of the Shenango Division that was begun in 1837-38. How long John Minesinger was with this work is unknown. He perhaps spent time farming as well.

Somehow John was contacted by Hagerstown businessmen to become the Engineer for the Hagerstown Canal, the portion of the Whitewater Canal that was never completed. Why was he hired? We can only guess. Other engineers were likely working on larger canal or railroad projects. Perhaps he had a friend or business contact. Maybe he was recommended to them by Jesse Williams or another engineer.

John's canal engineering work at Hagerstown was well planned and designed. Here he elevated the canal so it was not subject to the flooding that plagued the lower Whitewater Canal. Around the time he accepted the Hagerstown position, he moved his remaining family to the New Castle area where he purchased a farm. In the 1850 census his family was located in Prairie township, Henry county, Indiana. Martha his youngest daughter was born September 19, 1845 in Indiana so he may have moved to Indiana before he was hired as the engineer on the Hagerstown canal. Other records say the family arrived in 1847.

In the following years John was involved with other engineering projects. The Panhandle railroad, the first railroad in Henry county, was one such project. He was also involved in platting the town of Millville in January 1854 that lies on that railroad and, at that time, was Deputy County Surveyor. Later he served in the mid 1860s as one of the county commissioners when the current Henry county court house was being built from 1865-69.

By the early 1870s John began his most ambitious engineering feat, that of building a railroad trestle across the

Mississippi River at St Louis, Missouri. Another Hoosier self-taught engineer from Lawrenceburg, Indiana, James B Eads, was also working at the same time on another bridge across the river at St Louis. They probably knew each other. The famous Eads' bridge was completed in 1874. Unfortunately James Minesinger was fatally injured by a fall off his bridge trestle and died on September 1, 1870. The *St Louis Democrat* reported:

"Late Saturday evening, Mr. John Minesinger, civil engineer, in charge of the construction of the trestle work between the island and main shore for the Belleville and Southern Illinois, in walking over the work, stepped on the end of a loose plank; the plank tipped up and he fell a distance of twenty-seven feet. The unfortunate man was picked up by other employees of the road and carried to his boarding house. The best medical aid possible to obtain here as well as over the river, was called in and every effort was made by Mr. Broughton, Superintendent of the road, to relieve the sufferer, but to no purpose. He lingered till Sunday, when he expired. The deceased leaves a widow and family, all the children grown up, residing near New Castle, Indiana, as well as a host of friends to mourn over his sudden death. The deceased was a member of the Masonic fraternity, and the body will be escorted to the cars today by a delegation of that order to send it home for burial."

His body was returned to New Castle, Indiana and was buried in South Mound Cemetery in the city. His wife Mary died six years later on June 27, 1876 and was also buried there.

Mary Swearingen Minesinger



John Minesinger had played a key role in developing canals and railroads in the Midwest. His children also had interesting careers that bear short reviews here. For more details on all of these family members and their interesting lives go to: *fam-*

ilysearch.org and look for: *My Genealogy Book 8* by Walter K Miles, a Minesinger descendant.

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**JOHN
MINESINGER
DIED
SEPT 1, 1870
AGED
67Y 5M 15D**

B. March 17,
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Hanover Twp.
Beaver Co.
Pennsylvania

D. September 1,
1870
New Castle
Henry Co.
Indiana
South Mound
Cemetery
Sec. 2 #132

Minesinger Family Members

John's oldest son, James Madison Minesinger, was born in 1826, left Indiana about 1856 and went West to make his fortune. In the fall of 1856 he became a cattle drover in Beaver county, Montana. Other times he did odd jobs like hauling timber. He also was a trader with the Indians. As a trader he met his wife. In 1857 he married Nellie Monteray, whose mother was a mix of Shoshoni (Snake) & Flathead (Salish) Indians. Her father was of Spanish origin. James, taking Nellie and his family with him, tried gold mining for a while. Eventually he settled in Hell Gate, Montana near Missoula. He participated in local civic affairs and help organize the first county government there. He did survey work like his father. He laid out the town of Missoula and did survey work for the Northern Pacific Railroad.

James' daughter Mary, wed Joseph Miles. He and his son-in-law purchased a cattle ranch in High River, Alberta, Canada. It was there that James and Joseph Miles made a trip in May 1894. James contracted pneumonia, died and was buried in the local Catholic cemetery. An interesting fact is that James never returned to Indiana to visit his family members after leaving in 1856.

Nellie remarried in 1897, but her husband, Nazaire Finley, died in 1911. She went on to live until 1932, dying at age 105. She was buried at Pleasant View Cemetery in St. Ignatius, Montana.

The second son of John & Mary Swearingen Mine-

singer was Joseph R., born in 1828, who was named for his grandfather. Unfortunately this boy died suddenly at age 12 in 1841 either of an accident or disease. He was buried back in Georgetown Cemetery in Beaver, Pennsylvania.

Their next son, Henry M. Minesinger, was born in 1832. He attended college in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania and went on to medical school at Rush Medical School in Chicago, Illinois. He also was a musician. On April 21, 1861 he enlisted for a 90 days as a musician in Company B. 8th Indiana Infantry.

The 8th Indiana Volunteer Infantry was organized at Indianapolis, Indiana on April 21, 1861, for a three-month enlistment. On June 19, 1861, the regiment was moved to Clarksburg, West Virginia, and attached to William Rosecrans's Brigade, in George B. McClellan's Provisional Army of West Virginia. On June 29, it was marched to Buckhannon, West Virginia and occupied Buckhannon on June 30. The regiment engaged in the West Virginia Campaign, July 6-17, fighting in the Battle of Rich Mountain on July 11. The regiment was mustered out of service on August 6, 1861.

After being mustered out with his regiment in August 1861, at age 30, Henry returned to Henry County and practiced medicine at Sulphur Springs. On December 10, 1861 he was married to Mary H. Engle. They had two daughters and one boy. Henry died at age 47 and his wife, Mary, lived until 1920. They both are buried in South Mound Cemetery at New Castle.

John and Mary's fourth son was John Quincy Minesinger. He was born in 1838 in Beaver County, Pennsylvania, moved to Indiana in 1847 with the family, and became a farmer. He married Mary Jane Ridgeway in April 1858. He remained in Indiana his entire life. They had one child, Omar Eugene Minesinger, born in November 1859. Omar remained single until age 55 and then married a Kate Pence. They had no children.

Charles W. T. Minesinger, was the fifth and youngest son of John and Mary. He was born in Pennsylvania in 1841. In April 1861 the Civil War began with the firing on Fort Sumter. Charles enlisted on October 20, 1861, at age 20. At Middletown, Indiana he joined Captain Bradford's Company F of the 57th Regiment Indiana Infantry for the remaining period of the war. The unit was first sent to Indianapolis in December 1861 where he received the rank of corporal. On May 17, 1862, following the battle of Shiloh and during the siege of Corinth, he was promoted to Ser-

John Minesinger Family Genealogy

<u>Name</u>	<u>Birth</u>	<u>Death</u>	<u>Marriage</u>	<u>Cemetery</u>	<u>Location</u>
Minesinger, Jacob	1740	Baden W Ger	?	?	Beaver City, Beaver PA
m. -----, Katherine	1741	Baden W Ger	?		Beaver City, Beaver PA
Minesinger, Joseph	1765	Baden W Ger	3/15/1837	1790/91	Beaver City, Beaver PA
m. -----, Christina	1772	Pennsylvania	11/1852	" "	Beaver City, Beaver PA
Minesinger, Joseph	1792	Pennsylvania	3/15/1847		Beaver City, Beaver PA
Minesinger, David	1795	Pennsylvania	?		
Minesinger, Jacob	1797	Pennsylvania	10/18/1847	1834/35	Beaver City, Beaver PA
m. Bartholomew, Lydia Ann	1818	Pennsylvania	11/16/1847	" "	Beaver City, Beaver PA
Minesinger, John	3/17/1803	Pennsylvania	9/01/1870	1824	South Mound
m. Swearingen, Mary	4/15/1808	Virginia	6/27/1876	" "	South Mound
Minesinger, James M	11/5/1826	Pennsylvania	5/16/1894	1857	Lake Co MT
m. Monteray, Nellie	12/25/1826	Idaho	6/21/1932	" "	Pleasant View
Minesinger, Joseph R	7/07/1828	Pennsylvania	1/03/1841	Single	Georgetown
Minesinger, Henry M	1836	Pennsylvania	3/30/1879	12/10/1861	South Mound
m. Engle, Mary H	3/31/1836	New Jersey	2/??/1920	" "	South Mound
Minesinger, John Q A	7/31/1838	Pennsylvania	7/31/1916	4/04/1858	South Mound
m. Ridgeway, Mary Jane	2/23/1838	(W) Virginia	9/20/1914	" "	South Mound
Minesinger, Charles W T	1841	Pennsylvania	9/14/1864	Single	South Mound
			57th Ind Inf - wounded	Jonesboro GA	
Minesinger, Martha U	9/19/1845	Pennsylvania	8/14/1910	2/20/1867	South Mound
m1. Needham, Benjamin	12/07/1836	Henry Co IN	9/20/1884	" "	South Mound
m.2. Showalter, Harrison	11/??/1857	Henry Co IN	10/21/1920	8/04/1886	Mt Summit
Minesinger, Godfrey	12/25/1803	Pennsylvania	8/15/1868		Georgetown
m. Laughlin, Sarah	9/12/1800	Pennsylvania	1886		Georgetown
Minesinger, Catherine	1810	Pennsylvania	1850+	?	Beaver, Beaver PA
Minesinger, Elsie	2/20/1814	Pennsylvania	5/03/1890		Henry Co IN
m. Nash, Alexander	1808	Pennsylvania	4/14/1883		Henry Co IN
Minesinger, James	1817 ?	Pennsylvania	?	Western	Calhoun IL
m. Booth, Elizabeth	1820?	Pennsylvania	?	?	?

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geant. Then in December 1862 he was elevated to First Sergeant. On April 12, 1863 he was discharged and then assumed the rank of 2nd Lieutenant in the same Regiment and company.

In pursuit of Hood's Confederate forces south of Atlanta, and during the battle of Jonesboro, Georgia on August 31, 1864, Charles was shot in the abdomen. He was taken to the Military Hospital at Chattanooga, Tennessee, where he died from his wounds on September 14, 1864. His remains were returned to New Castle. He was buried in the South Mound Cemetery with other family members.

John and Mary's sixth child was Martha, who was born in Beaver County, Pennsylvania on September 19, 1845. She married Benjamin Franklin Needham in New Castle in February 1867. Her husband was a farmer and member of an early Henry county family. Benjamin followed the painter's trade, which he learned from a young age. They had four children. Unfortunately Benjamin died at the age of 47. Both Benjamin and Martha are buried in South Mound Cemetery. After Benjamin's death in 1884, Martha married Harrison Showalter in August 1886. They had one child, Harry Showalter, born in January 1889. Martha and Harrison were later divorced. In November 1899 Harrison then married Alice Sheets and they were soon di-

vorced. Next he married a Gertrude Bates in July 1902 and they too divorced around 1905. Harrison died alone in 1920. Both he and Martha's son Harry are buried in Mt. Summit Cemetery in New Castle.

Sources:

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