

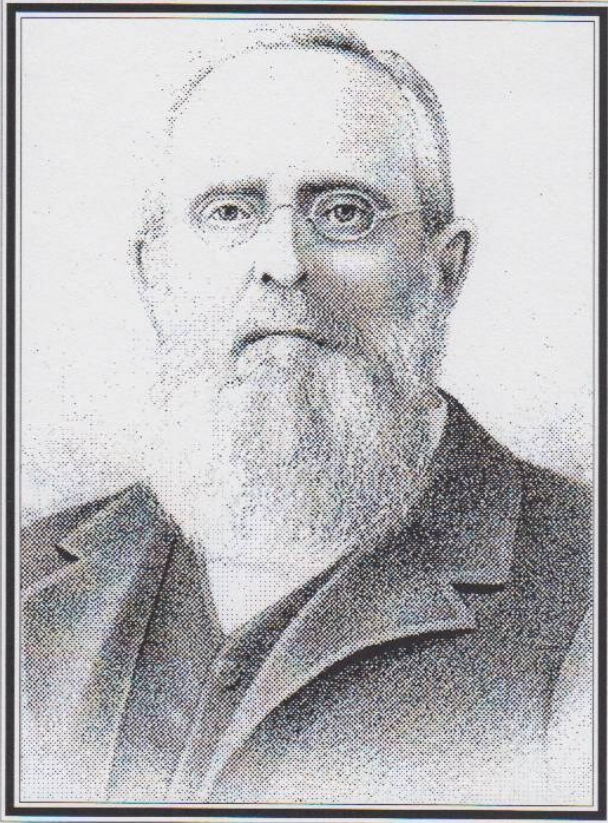
# CANAWLERS AT REST

## AUSTIN MONTANA PUETT

**b. 1803**  
**d. June 3, 1879**

By Charles Davis

Photo from 1881 Parke County History



Austin Montana Puett was a prominent man in the affairs of Parke County and Indiana. He resided there from the earliest days of the county until the Civil War, when he moved to Putnam county. Mr. Puett married a sister of Governor Joseph A. Wright, who regarded him as the faithful and efficient follower that he was. He was a leader in the practical work of every campaign, always fighting for the Democratic party, and he also filled various public offices - Sheriff, Treasurer, Canal Trustee and State Senator.

In connection with Austin M. Puett it will be of interest to know more about a family that from the very beginning of Parke County to the present day (1874) has always been prominent in the Democratic party. Among the early settlers to come to the Territory of Indiana was Coleman Puett, who moved with his family from North Carolina to Monroe County, Indiana, in 1815. At that time the country was alive with Indians and they were a source of terror to the women and children. Vincennes was their nearest town. Two or three years later his brother, Joseph M. Puett, moved to Monroe County.

About 1822 (another source says 1828), Coleman Puett moved from Monroe county to Parke county, bringing his wife, three sons and two daughters. The boys were Elisha, Johnson, and Alexander Puett.

Most of the Native Americans had moved west,

but Johnny Green was the last Indian in those parts to live the wild life in the woods. He was a frequent unwelcome visitor at the homes of the settlers. He changed his long unpronounceable name to Johnny Green. He told savage brutal stories and was ugly and ill-tempered when drunk, which caused people to fear him. He related his deeds of barbarous cruelties on defenseless women and children while the men were off fighting the war with the Indians. Once when visiting Coleman's home, he started telling a cruel story about creeping up on settler's cabins when the men were away, slipping the barrel of his gun through an open crack and shooting the women and children while standing before the fire "fleaing themselves." He told how they would fall into the fire when shot and then demonstrated how they kicked and flounced around in their dying agonies. Coleman Puett, having none of that, knocked him out and threw him on the floor. Johnny finally woke up, walked down the road to Hethco Pond and made a temporary shelter by a large tree in which he spent the night. The Puett family watched him through the night to make sure he did not attempt revenge for the blow Coleman had given him.

The next morning Johnny started for Sugar Creek followed by Coleman and his son Elisha, who were armed with their rifles. The following day they found Johnny fishing on a rock in Sugar Creek and Coleman shot and killed him.



Captain John C. Campbell, who was raised on Sugar Creek and who was familiar with the recent happenings, went to investigate. There was no doubt Coleman shot Johnny. His wife Judith, his son Alexander, and other family members had witnessed the attack by Coleman. This tragedy was later written by Coleman's grandson Shelby C. Puett as related to him by his father, grandmother and other old settlers.

Although most of Coleman's family remained in the Rockville area, Elisha Puett later went to Texas,

where he lived and died. He was in the Mexican war and in all the principal battles of General Scott's campaign. He and one son were killed in Texas by the Indians while carrying dispatches from one army post to another.

Johnson Puett married Patsy Noel. Their youngest son, Elisha A., lived at Long Beach, California. Johnson lived and died in Parke County.

Alexander Puett was one of the party of surveyors who laid out the State road from the Wabash River to Indianapolis. Shelby C. Puett and Mrs. Lucy Bates, his son and daughter, were residents of Rockville. Alexander lived and died in Parke County.

**GENEALOGY**

**Joseph Puett, brother of Coleman Puett, married Elizabeth Moore and they had 11 children:**

**Armstead W. Puett b. 1800**

**Louisa Puett b. 1801**

**\*Austrian (Austin) M. Puett b. 1803 in North Carolina d. June 3, 1879 in Greencastle, IN**

**Esq. William Wesley Puett b. 1805**

**Jesse Puett b. 1806**

**Elisha Puett b. 1809**

**Francis Puett b. 1812**

**Joseph Puett b. 1815**

**Amelia (Milly) Puett b. 1817**

**Coleman Puett b. 1819 named for his uncle**

**Nancy Puett b. 1821**

**\*Austrian (Austin) M. Puett married Lucinda (Lucy) Puett, the daughter of Coleman Puett, his cousin on March 19, 1823 and they had eight children:**

**William Puett**

**Austin Puett**

**James Puett**

**Louisa Puett Wilkerson**

**Thomas Puett**

**Coleman Puett**

**Caroline Puett Darrach**

**Albert Puett**

**Lucy Puett died in 1844 and was buried in Rockville Cemetery, Rockville, IN. Two years later Austin married Amy D., the sister of Joseph A. Wright, who served as the Governor of the State of Indiana from 1849-Jan. 12, 1857. Austin died June 3, 1879.**

Beadle, J. H. History of Parke County, IN. Chicago: Hill & Iddings, 1880. A Biographical Directory of The Indiana General Assembly Vol. 1816-1899. Putnam Co. Will Record, Allen Co. Pub. Library Bk. 2 p. 301.

**AUSTIN M. PUETT**

Austin M. Puett, son of Coleman Puett's brother Joseph, was born in 1803 in North Carolina. He moved to Monroe county, Indiana with his parents and siblings. In 1820 he moved to Putnam county, Russell township near Portland mills. Later he moved to Parke county. He married Lucy, Coleman's oldest daughter, his cousin. There were 8 children named in his will: Coleman, William H., Caroline Darrach, Albert, Austin M., Louisa E. Wickerson, James W., and Thomas. He was a farmer, merchant, Democrat, and Baptist.

Austin was 2nd lieutenant in the 50th Regiment of the Indiana militia in 1830. He was the Parke county sheriff in 1833 (another source says he was appointed to fulfill the term of Sheriff of Parke county by the Commissioners in 1837 when Sheriff William Kilgore was drowned at the Armiesburg Mill Dam). He was the county treasurer 1834-1838. He served the following terms for Parke county in the Indiana Senate 1835-36, 1836-37, 1837-38 and for the Indiana House 1838-1839. Austin ran for the State Legislature in 1843 but was defeated by James Kerr. In 1844 Austin's wife died and was buried in Rockville Cemetery, Parke county. A year or two later he married Amy Wright, sister of Governor Wright.

A Biographical Directory of The Indiana General Assembly Vol. 1816-1899, p. 320

Austin was one of the founders of the Old School Baptist Church in Rockville that stood on the "Commons" located on the north corner of Erie and Ohio streets. This was the church that participated in "The Big Sleigh Ride and Its Wabash & Erie Canal Connections" article that I wrote for Indiana Canals winter 2002. Austin also built a saw mill on Williams (Billy) Creek in the early 1840s. This mill was on the east side of the creek and about 1/2 miles above the Judson road.

In the United States presidential election of 1844 when James K. Polk ran for president of the U.S. and



George M. Dallas ran for vice-president, Austin was one of the twelve Democratic electors from Indiana. In 1846 a company called the Parke County Volunteers was organized and held muster in the United States army when war with Mexico was declared. Jacob Oldshue was Captain; Austin M. Puett, 1st Lieutenant; Robert M. Gilkerson, Second Lieutenant. This company was enrolled among those on the waiting list by the Adjutant General of the State, but the war ended before they could be reached in the order of priority of organization.

Governor James Whitcomb appointed Austin a Trustee of the Wabash & Erie Canal. He first served with Charles Butler and Thomas H. Blake in 1848. The trustees changed from time to time. In 1850 he served with Charles Butler and Thomas Dowling. As trustee he participated in the following canal lettings in 1848:

- Forty miles of the Wabash & Erie Canal extending from Terre Haute to Point Commerce including one reservoir, a number of lift-locks, culverts, and rebuilding a portion of Eel river dam and the guard-lock located there
  - Seventeen miles of the canal from Port Commerce to Newberry including 6 lift-locks, one guard-lock, a dam across White river 12 feet in height and over 400 feet in length, and rock excavation at the Patoka Summit
  - Fifteen and a half miles of canal from Maysville to Petersburg including heavy earth work, the aqueduct over East Fork of White river 400 feet in length
- Source: *Evansville Journal*. 1848, 1850.

**The Trusteeship**

Since Gov. Wright's appointment of Austin M. Puett, of this place, as Canal Trustee, the old line papers are exceedingly wordy and rapping His Excellency over the knuckles without mercy. For the purpose of showing how the appointment is received, we append the following from the *Evansville Enquirer*, a "real old line" paper:

"This appointment is justly regarded by the citizens of Evansville as little less than an insult to this city. We do not question the right of the Governor to appoint any person he chooses to fill the vacancy, but in view of the fact that our city feels perhaps a deeper interest in the success of the Canal than any other town in the State, we say justice required that the appointed should be a resident of this place, or a man identified with our interests and prosperity.

"There were three applicants for the office of Trustee from this city, Dr. George B. Walker, James Rouquett, and James G. Jones, Esqs. The two first the Governor could have no kind of objection to. Mr. Jones, in view of his politics might have been objectionable, though we are free to confess, we should have vastly preferred his appointment, to that of Austin M. Puett. — It cannot be denied that either

of these gentlemen would have made an active energetic and efficient Trustee. As much cannot be said of Mr. Puett. He has filled the office of Trustee before, and it is conceded that he was careless and incompetent. The only merit that he possesses consists in the fact that he is the brother-in-law of Governor Wright.

"Gov. Wright has enjoyed the confidence of the party to which he is attached in this part of Indiana, to an unlimited extent. — They have been forward to show him personal favorite at a time when he was appealing to them for their votes, but now, when he is not an applicant for any official position, he forgets those who were his friends. The Governor may aspire to a position of some kind in future, when his old friends in Evansville will certainly assist him all in their power — to mind his business."

This is tolerably forked, isn't it? But we suppose the aggrieved citizens of Evansville will have to "bore it." As to the charge of incompetency against Major Puett, we presume he is as well qualified as some Evansvillians. Whether competent or not, he has got the office, and they can't help it.

The *Evansville Journal*, (Republican) also speaks in rather bitter terms of the Governor, and seems to think that the Pocket City is the only town in Indiana. Hear it.

"Mr. Austin M. Puett, of Parke County, has been appointed by the Governor, Trustee of the Wabash and Erie Canal in place of Mr. Edmenson, deceased. What do our Old Line Democratic friends of Evansville, who have been getting up big petitions for the appointment of one of their party from this city, think of Mr. Puett's appointment for they may probably be consoled by the fact that this appointee is the brother-in-law of Gov. Wright. The Governor knew that by a right, Justice and decency, Evansville, that the donation of land was obtained which secured the building of the Canal from Terre Haute to Evansville.—He knew that our interest, in this connection, so long neglected so slighted, imperatively demanded a man on the Board, who would give some attention to the lowest section of the Canal, but to aid a begging relative, he has declined giving us this Trustee, and put a brother-in-law in office. We have said before, that Gov. Wright's professed interest for Evansville, was of that same demagogue nature of his professed interest for every place in which at any time he may happen to be—and the fact is illustrated. But his Democratic admirers have a bitter pill to swallow. As for giving the office to a "begging relative," the Governor had a right to give it to whom he pleased. But we opine from our knowledge of Puett's circumstances that the money in the mere office is not much of an object. The Major is like Auditor Dunn, he is in "about as comfortable circumstances as any old liner," that we know of.



In 1854, Austin served on the Rockville town board. I found this important article in the *Rockville True Republican*, Thursday, September 27, 1855, about his being appointed once again a canal trustee:

Evansville normally voted Democratic. Wright, a Democratic lawyer from Rockville, was elected Governor in 1849 and re-elected in 1852. His first term was for three years under the old Indiana constitution. However, in 1851 a new constitution went into affect. It provided for four year terms and limited service to two consecutive terms. Since he appointed Puett near the end of his second term and could not be re-elected Governor, Wright probably felt no compulsion to appoint a trustee from Evansville.

At some time Austin moved back to Putnam county, Indiana. On October 29, 1860 he was elected a royal arch captain in the Greencastle Chapter (Putnam county) of Royal Arch Masons. In 1861 he was elected a councilman for the 3rd Ward in Greencastle, IN. Austin served as a 1st sergeant in the 102nd Regiment for 8 days during the Civil War in 1863. He moved to Ohio and then back to Indiana. He served again in the Indiana House of Representatives in 1863 for Putnam County. In 1865 he unsuccessfully defended his seat in the House against Higgins Lane and was unseated on February 13, 1865.

Austin Montana Puett died in Greencastle on June 3, 1879. His will left all his property to Amy D. Puett in her lifetime. His children's names were listed in the will.

According to the *Olive Branch*, an early Rockville newspaper, "Wily Austin" was Austin M. Puett and he was referred to as "the braggart Austin"... "the hard-faced, oily-tongued, wily Austin," and tried to "fool the coons," but the "able reasoner." J. H. Beadle in his book tells of Austin as: "Among the earliest (Adams twp.) settlers who attained to prominence was Austin M. Puett, who died a year or two since. He was a man of very decided character, and his life was checkered with stirring scenes. He filled various stations of public responsibility - sheriff, treasurer, canal trustee and state senator."

Sources:  
 Beadle, J. H. 1881 *Parke County History*. Chicago: H.H. Hill.  
 Combined 1874 Atlas - 1908 Atlas.  
 Isaac Straus Centennial Memorial and Name Index of Parke County, Indiana.  
 Putnam County Will Record B. 2 p. 301.  
 Weik, Jesse W. *History of Putnam County Indiana*. Indianapolis, IN: B. F. Bowen & Co. 1910.

## PARENTS CAME BY CANAL BOAT

The parents of Charles Stockbridge came to Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1842 by way of the newly-opened Wabash & Erie Canal and operated one of the first bookstores here. Charles was born in 1856. He helped his father sell books for a while and then became a letter carrier until his retirement at the age of 65. He lived at 2323 Webster Street in a white two-story frame house.



Charles Stockbridge was recognized so widely as an authority on birds that the northeastern chapter of the Audubon Society was named for him. He was friends with Amos Butler of Indianapolis and T. Gilbert Pearson of Washington D.C., both birders. He served as the president of the Fort Wayne Audubon Society for several years "during the period of the society's greatest activity" according to his obituary. He talked to many clubs, schools, and Boy Scouts about birds and sent migration reports to the state and national governments for many years. After his retirement, he, along with his daughters, operated the Fort Wayne Baby Chick Hatchery until he died.

Over the years Charles amassed one of the finest bird collections in the state of Indiana. It was displayed at the public library in Fort Wayne, then moved to the Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society Museum, and then to Swinney Homestead, which sits on land where the grand celebration was held for the opening of the Wabash & Erie Canal from Lafayette, Indiana, to Toledo, Ohio. What is left of the collection is now at the Joseph Moore Museum at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. When it was last received, the Wood Stork and a Northern Raven were still in good shape, but others were in a poor condition and without labels. Even though only a few of Stockbridge's specimens are on public display, Professor William Buskirk invites everyone to come visit the college's museum to see them.

In 1934 Charles Stockbridge died at the age of 78. Surviving him were Ada, his wife of 55 years; Alatheia and Mary, his two daughters; and Willard, his son. He was buried at Lindenwood Cemetery in Fort Wayne, in Section H, near where Pine Siskins and White-winged Crossbills are often seen.

