

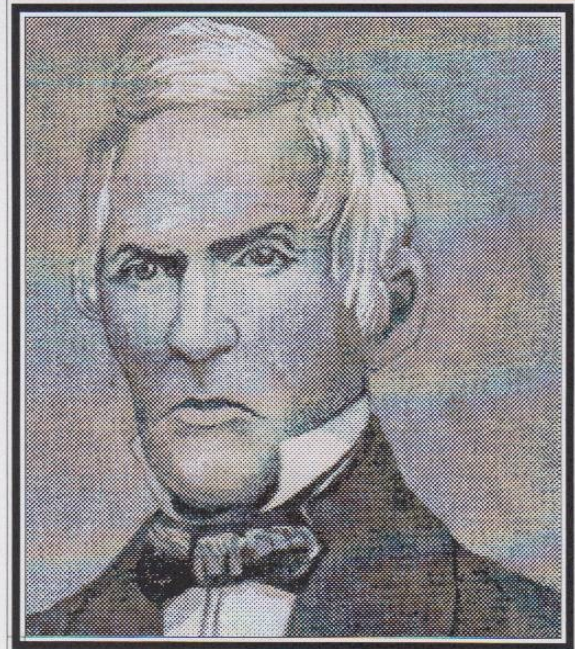
CANAWLERS
AT REST

**WILLIAM
ROCKHILL**

**b. 1793
d. 1865**

By **JAMES ELLIS**

Drawing by Morris R. Perry from *Pioneers Resting in Historic Lindenwood*.



William Rockhill was born in Burlington, New Jersey in 1793. On July 28, 1820 he married Elizabeth Hill of Baltimore, Maryland. They moved to Fort Wayne in 1823 where, for the next forty-two years, he was a leader in politics and the development of commerce. Their original home was located at 1025 W. Berry St. (In the 1980s this home was torn down by St. Joseph Hospital for a parking lot that was never completed.)

Rockhill served as an Allen county commissioner for a three year period beginning in 1824. When Fort Wayne incorporated in 1829, Rockhill was on the board of trustees with Benjamin Archer - president and John P. Hedges - secretary. He held this post for eleven years.

In 1829 the Reverend Charles E. Fuhrman, a Presbyterian minister came to Fort Wayne by invitation of Allen Hamilton. He was followed by Pastor James Chute's arrival in 1831 to organize a church. Forty-four citizens along with Rockhill signed a paper guaranteeing a salary of \$258.00.

In 1832 Rockhill contracted with the canal commissioners to construct the middle division of the Wabash & Erie Canal. He and another canal contractor, Jesse Vermilyea, served on the board of directors of the State Bank of Indiana upon its organization in 1835, the year the canal was opened from Fort Wayne to Huntington, IN. He was on the canal's dedication committee. The committee traveled to Huntington on July 2 on board the "Indiana," the first canal boat to pass through the completed "summit section" of the canal. There they met the guests and brought them to Ft.

Wayne the following day. On July 4th the guests gathered at Washington Hall. From there they went to the canal and boarded boats to take a seven mile trip to the feeder dam on the St. Joseph river. When they arrived at the dam, salutes were fired by the militia and toasts were given. They then returned to Fort Wayne where the Declaration of Independence was read and an oration was delivered by Hugh McCulloch. That night they attended a dance at Zenas tavern owned by Zenas Henderson. There was a great deal of pomp and ceremony both en route and all throughout the evening.

Not long after arriving in Fort Wayne Rockhill acquired large tracts of land in what is now referred to as the Broadway area. It was recorded as "Rockhill additions" on maps. In 1838 Rockhill began construction of a hotel in this area called the Rockhill House. It was located at the southwest corner of Broadway and Main, which was considered as being in the country at the time. Building was delayed and by 1840 only the walls and roof were done. It was dubbed "Rockhill's Folly." The building sat incomplete for thirteen years. During this time it was used for public assembly, various entertainments, fairs, and exhibitions.

Fort Wayne's first fire company was organized in 1839 on Lot 70 of the William Ewing addition at Clinton & Main street. It was later reorganized as the "Anthony Waynes" in 1841. Rockhill was a member of the hook and ladder company. It was the first fire company equipped with apparatus — the Jeffries "Galley" engines with side brakes — a two wheeled cart fitted with 500 ft. of riveted leather hose.

Rockhill along with Samuel Edsall established a two-band sawmill on the north side of Clinton street in 1842. It operated using water from the St. Joseph Feeder Canal. That same year he was instrumental in establishing the local public school system and donated land for the Fort Wayne Female college, a Methodist school, to be located at the end of West Wayne street facing College street. Rockhill, along with Samuel Edsall and P.H. Taylor, was chosen to prepare the building plans.

In 1844 Rockhill was elected a State Senator. He was elected to the House of Representative in 1846.

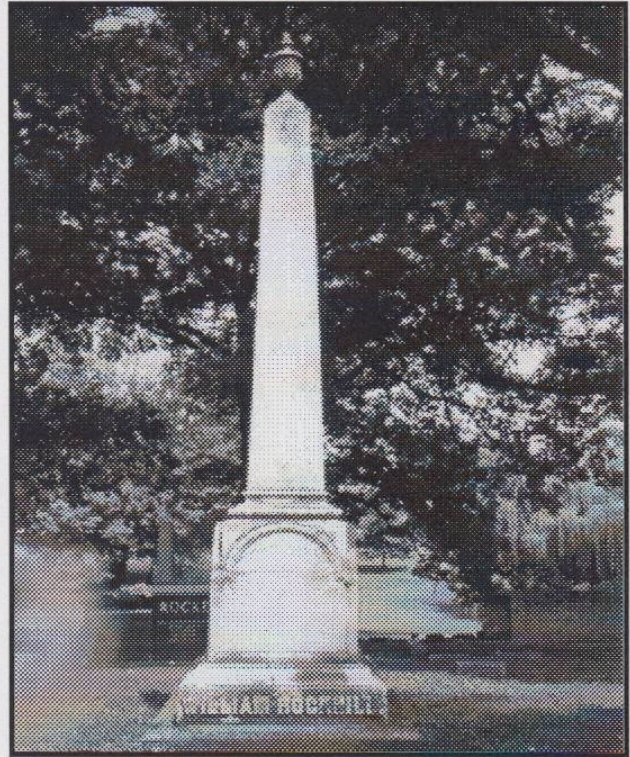
Rockhill served as a director of Fort Wayne's first gas company. B. W. Oakley was its president.

The Rockhill house, which was about a block away from the Wabash & Erie Canal, finally opened its doors as a grand hotel in 1854. A banquet and ball introduced Ft. Wayne society to its comforts such as the omnibus line that connected it with the railway depot. It had 65 of the finest rooms in the region. Philo Rumsey was the manager. He had previously managed the Vermilyea Inn after the death of Maria Vermilyea in 1849.

In 1858 Rockhill began his service on the school board of trustees. He was always interested in education.

The Rockhill House hosted the Old Settlers Reunion in 1860, Those attending were given souvenir canes made from timbers of the old fort. The canes were presented by G. W. Ewing.

William Rockhill departed this earth on January 15, 1865. He rests in Section F Lot 5 in Lindenwood Cemetery in Fort Wayne, Indiana. His grave is close to those of Samuel and William Edsall.



William Rockhill's deteriorated marker in Lindenwood Cemetery is difficult to read. Photo - Jim Ellis

The Rockhill House was closed in 1867. Its location and the building of newer hotels hindered its income. It sat unused until May 20, 1878, when the St. Joseph Benevolent Association purchased the property. At one point an additional story was added to the original building all of which remains as a portion of the present day St. Joseph Hospital.

This woodcut of the Rockhill House was printed in 1858.

