

CANAWLERS AT REST

NATHAN ROWLEY

b. September 28, 1788

d. January 12, 1872

By Carolyn I. Schmidt

Nathan Rowley was born in Shoram, Vermont, on September 28, 1788. He worked on his father's farm and also learned the shoe business. In 1819 he decided to seek his fortune elsewhere. When the flatboat on which he was traveling stopped at Evansville, Indiana, to "wood up" on December 10, 1819, he decided to stay.

Nathan used what little capital he had to establish a shoe and boot shop on Water Street in 1820. He saw that Evansville was becoming a place to notice. Prices were inflated. He began to purchase real estate in 1820-21. Half of the northwest quarter of section 20 was entered in 1820 or 1821 and the southeast quarter of section 20 in 1821. The land was worth \$5.00 per acre

In October 1822 the shoe and boot making stand of Rowley and Robinson was taken over by Harry D. Smith. On March 5 the following year Nathan announced he had again commenced the shoe and boot business on Front Street. He ran the shop for eight years, saved his profits, and accumulated several hundred dollars.

In 1823 Nathan began his service to the community. He was a trustee on Evansville's Board of Trustees along with Robert M. Evans, president; John W. Shaw, Wm W. Vernon, Amos Clark and Joshua V. Robinson. Daniel Chute was the secretary, Daniel Avery the treasurer and Nathan Rowley the collector. Taxes assessed were on property valued at \$24,681.

In 1825 Nathan was on a committee of the Vanderburgh Missionary Society. He was interested in helping others.

In September 1828 Nathan was elected president to take the place of John Connor, whose term of office

had expired, on the County Board of Justices. A law was in effect from 1824-1831 that justices-of-the-peace performed the duties of county commissioners. At the end of a year's service as justice-of-the-peace, Esquire Rowley was succeeded by James Rose, Esq., who in return was succeeded in 1830 by Esquire Rowley, who served as the president that year as well. During that time he was known as Squire Rowley and was often consulted by those prone to quarrel.

Trustees were changed every year. Nathan Rowley served again in 1831 as board secretary with Alanson Warner, president; Alexandria Johnson, treasurer; Edward Hopkins, collector; Silas Stephens; and one vacancy. Taxes assessed that year were on a property valuation of \$11,627.

From 1828 to 1831 Nathan operated a drug and grocery business with different partners at various times: John Shanklin, Dr. Trafton, and Gen. Evans. In 1831 he built a store-house and the following year opened a dry goods store in the building in company with Marcus Sherwood. Later the Merchants' National Bank was located at that site.

Nathan bought three ten acre lots for \$250 in 1834. In 1835 he bought another ten acres for \$500 from Trafton. These 40 acres he later platted as Rowleytown on the Northeastern Enlargement of Evansville. It also was known as Rowley's farm. Rowley's Lane, which extended from Main Street to the farm later became Williams Street. In the 1840s or earlier, Bull's Head Tavern, a large two-story frame building with a two-story porch in front, a bar, a large dining room, a dance hall, lodging rooms, stables for horses, wagons and buggies and a ten pin alley sat upon this tract. Many important Evansville residents frequented the establishment.

On March 16, 1833 Nathan Rowley was elected president of the Evansville Board of Trustees. Francis Amory was the secretary; John M. Lockwood, treasurer; and Edward Hopkins, collector. Also serving were Silas Stephens and Francis Amory. Taxes of real estate and personal property were assessed on \$17,932.

Those serving on the Board of Trustees as of May 23, 1835, were Amos Clark, president; James Carson, clerk; Nathan Rowley, treasurer; Thomas Ham, collector, James Lockhart, surveyor, Alanson Warner, and Marcus Sherwood. Property on which taxes were assessed was valued at \$47,167.

In August of 1835, Nathan succeeded G. W. Lindsay as a judge of the Vanderburgh County Probate Court. He and the others serving in this capacity at various times were said to be "men of good business

talent, prominent in their day, devoted to the best interests of the city and community, and while they were not lawyers, yet they were trusted for their sound judgment and unimpeachable integrity."

Nathan continued in the capacity of Board of Trustee's treasurer on June 10, 1836. Amos Clark continued as president. James Lockhart was the clerk and Isaac Hutchison the collector. Representing the first ward was Wm. McKnitt; second ward, James Lockhart; third ward, John M. Lockwood; fourth ward, Edward Hopkins; and fifth ward, Amos Clark. Property that year valued at \$120,880 was assessed for taxes.

During the 1830s Nathan donated \$20 for the Presbyterian Meeting House. He also served on a building committee for St. Pauls Protestant Episcopal Church on January 7, 1839.

In 1838 Nathan sold out his interest in the dry goods store to take a contract on the Central/Wabash & Erie Canal. Its terminus was to be at Evansville. His contract stipulated that he had to dig seven half-mile sections and finish the part which ran through Fifth street to Division in 1839. He faithfully completed this contract.

Before the large canal basin was excavated in Evansville, a graveyard had to be removed from the tract of land. The canal had been surveyed and was to pass through this square on which a magnificent court house was erected after the canal era. Canal boats were built in this basin by a stock company of enterprising business men of Evansville. They were John Hewson, who was later to become the third mayor of Evansville, Nathan Rowley, Robert Barnes, Stephen Hopkins, John Mitchell, John Douglas, A. B. Carpenter, Thomas Scantlin, John M. Lockwood, Marcus Sherwood, and Joseph P. Elliott.

The company limited its capital stock to \$1,500. Thirty shares of stock were sold at \$50 per share. Experienced workmen were brought from the east to build the boats. The company's first boat was named the "Rowley" in honor of the efficient superintendent of construction. The second boat built was called the "Evansville."

The newly constructed canal boats awaited the arrival of water in the basin. As the water swelled in the channel, the boats were gradually lifted and the vast crowd, which had gathered, was filled with emotion. They sent up cheer after cheer as Mace Newman mounted a mule and started off towing the first boat. Mace, who was always on hand and up front whenever there was any excitement or public demonstration, had usurped the honor of towing the first boat from the other contenders. It was the proudest moment of his life.

Although the canal boats made their first run only as far as White river, the trip was an eventful one. Only passengers were taken by boat that day. It was a day of rejoicing and celebration. People took their picnic baskets, fishing tackle and guns. They brought back deer, turkey, and other game, which was plentiful in the area in those days. The men who pushed this enterprise forward to completion were very proud of their work. However, some say they were even prouder on the day they began filling the canal bed with dirt in 1864.

Nathan was the toll collector on the canal for several years. In that capacity a story recalls that when "the canal boat 'Pennsylvania' arrived at the terminal basin in Evansville in 1853, the local toll collector, Nathan Rowley, did not bother to collect the toll on the Pennsylvania until two days later. Perhaps the people were a little gun shy. They had celebrated so many times before only to see nothing happen."

Thomas Smythe (See article in The Hoosier Packet August 2005) married Nathan Rowley's daughter. Smythe was one of the captains who ran a canal boat the entire distance from Evansville to Lake Erie. His son, Henry B. Smythe, recalls "that when school vacations came in June for several years his father used to close his house in Evansville and take his mother with him, the only child, by canal boat the round trip between Evansville and Lake Erie." The entire length of the canal was only operated for a short time.

When Indiana became indebted after the internal improvement fiasco, Nathan tried to help. He will be remembered for his effort to relieve the State of Indiana from the "odium of repudiation in connection with its debts."

The Evansville Board of Trustees in June 1840 consisted of John Mitchell, president; first ward, Marcus Sherwood; third ward, John Mitchell; fourth ward, Fred E. Goodsell; and fifth ward, Nathan Rowley. Benjamin F. Dupey was the clerk, collector and assessor; James Carson the treasurer; Wm. T. T. Jones the attorney; and Thomas Gidney the marshal. Real estate was valued at \$599,496 and personal property at \$245,310 or a total of \$844,806. There was 2,121 inhabitants in the city at that time.

In 1840 Rowley and Sherwood are listed as one of Evansville's mercantile interests. The county had a population of 6, 250.

Governor Noah Noble appointed Nathan a Probate Judge in 1840. He was re-elected to the office by a large majority the following year, but he resigned the latter part of 1841. He was not as learned as some

of his brother officials, but he was highly commended by all who dealt with him in a probate capacity. was settled, but Carpenter was later listed as the owner.

Back on the Evansville Board of Trustees on June 11, 1841, Nathan served as president, treasurer and represented the fifth ward. F. E. Goodsell was the clerk and represented the fourth ward; Thomas Gidney was the marshal; Ben E. Dupey was the assessor; and Wm. M. Walker was the surveyor and represented the first ward. The second ward was represented by Willard Carpenter and third ward by C. M. Griffith. Real estate was valued at \$501,675 and personal property at \$164,900 for a total of \$726,108.

Willard Carpenter brought a law suit in 1842 against Jackson McClain, Nathan Rowley and others about a tract of land on which the Exchange Hotel stood. The circumstances connected with the various persons dealing with the property were very complicated and required pages of court pleadings to clearly state them. The largest amount of the purchase money for the property then owned by George W. L. White was in the form of notes and a mortgage held by Wilson, who pledged these notes and mortgage to Nathan Rowley as collateral for endorsement of a note to McClain. Then Wilson asked Nathan if he could look at the notes and mortgage and return them. Nathan, not suspecting anything, gave them to Wilson, who took them to Carpenter. Wilson and Carpenter made a contract between them agreeing to the forfeiture of the title to Carpenter. The agreement showed an erasure, which was said to destroy the paper. The suit remained on the docket for many years due to the many complications and numerous lawyers. There is no record of when it

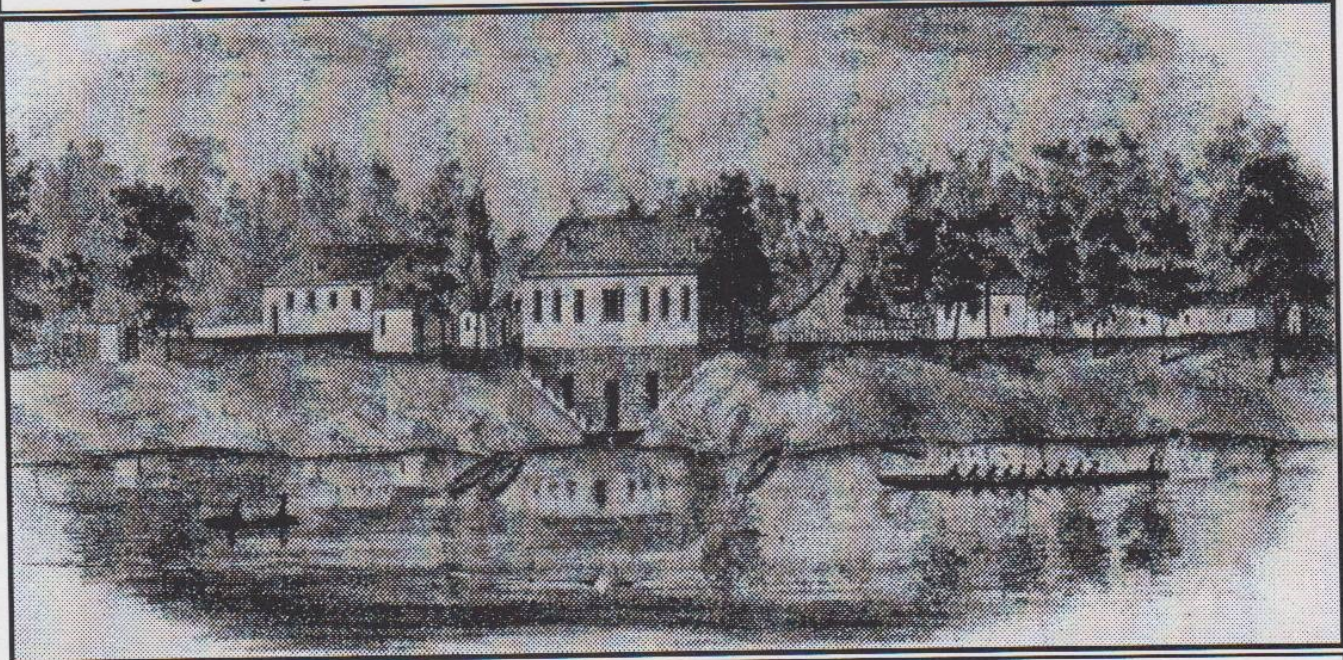
In 1842 Nathan rented the Indian Flour Mill. There he conducted a large and profitable business until fire destroyed it in 1844. The over ten thousand dollar loss did not stop him. He rebuilt the mill, ran it for a year and then sold it to open the Salt Well Park in company with Thomas Gifford. This venture became a very popular resort.

Obtaining cheap salt was very important to frontier settlements. People living south of Henderson county, Kentucky, were walking to Terre Haute, Indiana, to get salt transporting it in sacks on horseback or by wagon in the early days. In the late summer of 1824 James W. Jones and Elisha Harrison drilled through solid rock on Pigeon Creek south of and adjoining Maryland Street in search of salt water. After passing several small veins of it they struck a large vein of very highly impregnated salt water at 463 feet. An editorial on September 9, 1824, said it hoped to be sufficient to supply two furnaces of 50 kettles each with salt. These furnaces were located just a short distance up Pigeon Creek from the Ohio River where salt could be easily shipped to other villages.

Mr. Worsham of Kentucky packed the meat of several head of fat hogs with the Evansville salt. It ate the skin entirely off the dressed pork and covered the meat with slime. Manufacturing salt on Pigeon creek ended. The property became overgrown with natural vegetation and remained so for about 20 years.

In the early 1840s Rowley and Gifford purchased

Pigeon Springs was opened one mile west of Evansville in 1842. It later was known as Salt Wells.



the salt works property. Thomas Gifford was an Englishman of means from a good family. He was prominent in the English Settlement and in the social life of Evansville.

Rowley and Gifford opened the grounds in 1842 as a private pleasure resort after clearing them and erecting buildings. The artesian spring located there was highly recommended for its medical properties. A lithograph of the Pigeon Springs (Salt Works Park) property that Nathan Rowley sent to Henry Ashley in England is said to have impressed Ashley so much that he moved to America and lived on the grounds occasionally working on the Wabash and Erie Canal.

On June 19, 1845, the *Evansville Journal* ran the following advertisement:

"Pigeon Springs"

"Pigeon Springs advertised by Rowley and Gifford, as a Health Resort. One mile from Evansville on Pigeon Creek. Southern patronage solicited. Hotel accommodations first class. Wild game of all kinds in the forest surrounding the Springs. The buildings are all new, large and well planned. Bowling saloons and a bar apart from the main building in a shady grove. The proprietors invite Southerners to call and examine this establishment, etc."

"ROWLEY & GIFFORD"

Those wishing to reach the Salt Works could take the Salt Wells Road that ran directly from the town about one mile north to the resort. Later, Gifford's sister's husband, Captain Thomas Bethel, of Newburgh, Indiana, is said to have stopped at the resort while in Evansville during the Civil War and ridden backwards and forwards from Evansville on horseback in full uniform.

The first street car line in Evansville was built to the salt wells. The cars were drawn by mules and horses. Later the electric railway took visitors to the property then known as Pleasure Park.

Evansville was finally incorporated on January 27, 1847. From then on the mayor appointed the heads of the departments and councilmen.

On February 17, 1849, Nathan was again a justice-of-the-peace in Vanderburgh County. In June of 1851 Nathan became recorder of the Evansville City Council. That year things were in a state of flux. The same clerk, treasurer, attorney, assessor, collector, surveyor and wharf-master were retained, who had served the previous years. However, on August 39, 1851 G. W. Glover succeeded J. F. Sherwood as marshal; Nathan was succeeded by G. H. Todd on

August 17, 1851; and Joseph P. Elliott resigned and was replaced by John S. Hopkins on November 22, 1851.

Nathan was a promoter of the Evansville & Crawfordsville Railroad in 1849 and liberally subscribed for its construction. He also contributed \$2,000 in 1853 to the Straight Line Railroad.

By 1853 Nathan had been instrumental in making Pigeon Springs Resort (Salt Well Park) a leading public resort. It was the oldest place of amusement in Evansville.

Nathan became a justice-of-the-peace on July 13, 1859. In 1865, at the expiration of his term of justice-of-the-peace, he retired from his active career.

Nathan Rowley died at the home of Thomas D. Smythe, his son-in-law, on January 12, 1872. Records show that Nathan Rowley was buried in Section 7 Lot 4 Grave 3 in Oak Hill Cemetery in Evansville, Indiana. There is no tombstone on his grave.

In a reminiscence of David Schnee he recalls a bill that amounted to \$56.15 that he owed W.M. & J.P. Elliott in Evansville on December 3, 1844 and says:

"During those three years that I lived with you (Elliott), much transpired that has been pleasantly reminiscent to me now in my old days. The campaign of 1840, when it was 'Old Tippecanoe And Tyler too.' I well remember. When having a jollification on the river bank one night in that campaign, old Joe Kerney, the negro who used to ring the auction bell across the street from our place, dressed up in woman's clothes and passed through the crowd in imitation of Harrison's waving a petticoat. For this thing old Joe was seized and taken up stairs and outrageously whipped with a blacksnake whip from your shop to make him tell who put him up to it., but they didn't get it out of him. At another time during the same campaign, when the Whigs were having a parade up Main street, our next-door neighbor stretched a Van Buren flag across Main street to the auction house. Some of the procession passed under it, when a delegation of horsemen from Posey county came along. They refused to pass under it. The crowd attempted to pull it down, but could not get hold of it—until old Squire Rowley came along with half a brick tied to the end of a long line. They threw it over the rope and soon had the flag torn down. With great excitement the procession passed on."

Nathan Rowley was described by John Iglehart as "one of the most practical and forceful men in Evansville." He "was associated in one form or another with many matters of public interest for forty years, and lived through till after the Civil War, when the writer

distinctly remembers him, a very old man much stooped, who walked with the aid of a cane."

Sources:

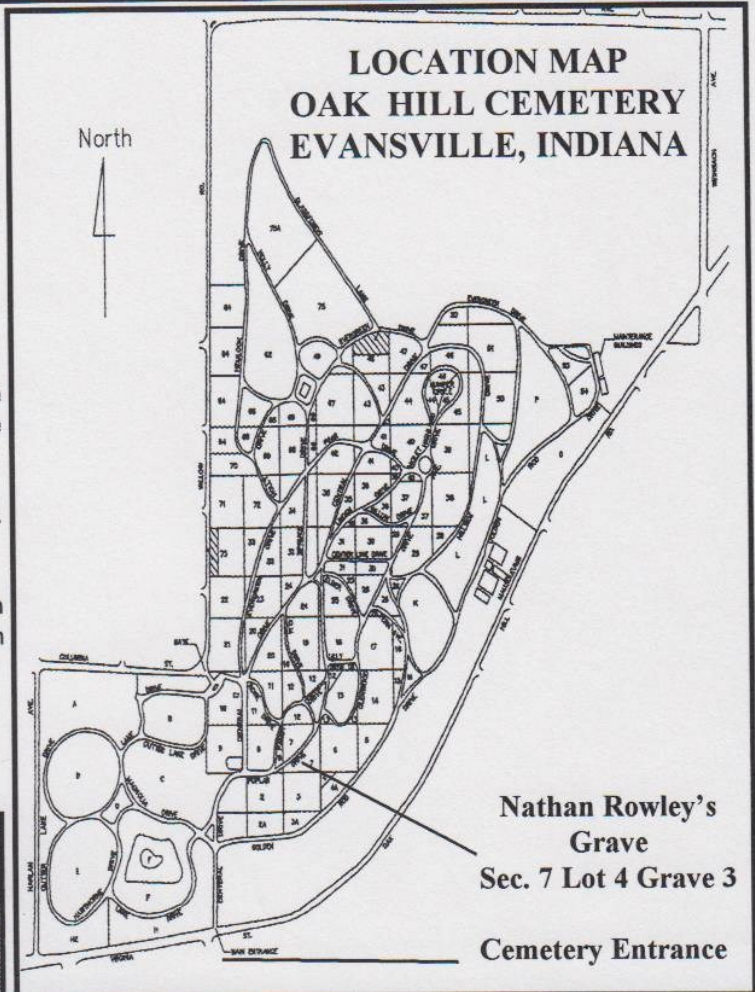
Elliott, Joseph P. *A History of Evansville and Vanderburgh County, Indiana*. Evansville, IN/Kelly Printing Co. 1897.

Evansville and Its Men of Mark. Evansville, IN/Historical Publishing, Co. 1873.

Gilbert, Frank M. *History of the City of Evansville and Vanderburgh County, IN*. Chicago, IL/The Pioneer Publishing Co. 1910.

History of Vanderburgh County, IN. Brant & Fuller. 1889.

Iglehart, John E. *An Account of Vanderburgh County From Its Organization*. Dayton, OH/ Dayton Historical Publishing, Co. 1923.



Nathan Rowley was buried up Oak Hill near the Wabash & Erie Canal.
Photos by Bob Schmidt

Nathan Rowley Grave Site
Section 7 Lot 4 Grave 3
Oak Hill Cemetery

Central/Wabash & Erie Canal
once ran where the buildings
now are located

