

# CANAWLERS AT REST

## THOMAS D. SMYTHE

**b. 1824**

**d. May 14, 1880**

**By Carolyn I. Schmidt**

Thomas Smythe (also spelled Smyth, Smith) was born in Ireland in 1824 and came to America at the age of fourteen in 1838 with his family. They settled near Fort Branch, in Gibson county, Indiana, where he remained on a farm for a period of several years, then going West, where he stayed a short time, returning to Kentucky, and then going to Evansville, Indiana.

Thomas was a canal boat captain on the Wabash & Erie Canal from 1848-1855/56. He was appointed Superintendent of the First Division (District #1) of the canal in 1856 and served in that capacity until it was abandoned..

In 1848 Thomas married Mary Rowley, who was born in Evansville in 1824. She was the daughter of Nathan Rowley, a politician and probate court judge who was influential in canal matters and had come from Shoran, Vermont. .

In 1849 the fifth Warrick county courthouse was to erected in Boonville in the center of the Public Square after the plan of Gibson county's court house, 60 x 44 feet. John H. Spilman had the contract for the masonry work and John W. Millspaugh and Thomas B. Byram had the contract for the entire completion of the court house. Thomas D. Smith and Lewis Denison were appointed in September 1851 to inspect the wood work and reported the contract "fully completed."

Henry B. Smythe was born to Thomas and Mary on March 21, 1849, in Evansville, Indiana. At age 15 he attended Behme's Commercial College in Evansville.

Thomas engaged in the livery business with John S. Gavitt in Evansville until the Civil War broke out and he closed the business. With the money he had made he

purchased land in Knight township, Vanderburgh county, which at the time was mostly covered with timber.

Thomas Smythe served as a soldier in the Civil War. On his return to Indiana he took an active interest in the public welfare and participated in politics by voting for the Republican party.

In 1864 when the canal supposedly closed, Thomas moved his family to a farm east of Evansville on the bank of the canal. He purchased two hundred acres on June 22, 1862, from William Walker for \$5,200. He built a house on what is now Green River Road, which today is Evansville's major shopping and restaurant strip. Unfortunately the land was wet and not good for farming. He knew that if he tilled the land and drained it, it would be good farm land.

In 1871 Thomas and son Henry started the Thomas Smythe Tile Factory located near the corner of Green River Road and Morgan Avenue, just down the road from their house. This factory was very successful since much of the land in that area needed draining. It provided jobs both at the factory and on the farms. At that time the Wabash and Erie Canal was no longer in operation and the tracks of the Louisville, Evansville & St. Louis railroad were atop the old towpath. (An 1876 atlas shows this road as the Lake Erie, Evansville & Southwestern R. R. and an 1880 atlas calls this road the Evansville & Eastern R. R.) A stop along this track was known as Smythe's Station. It offered a way of transporting the tile made at Smythe's factory as far as Kentucky and Tennessee. Their business rated among the best in the state.

The tile was made by forcing clay through a mold to shape them. They made several sizes ranging from two and a half inches to six inches in diameter. They produced three "kilns" of tile per month.

Henry Smythe married Emma Stroud on March 13, 1872. She was born in Union township on March 16, 1854 to Benjamin Franklin and Sarah Stroud. Sarah's maiden name was Cloud. Emma was a member of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

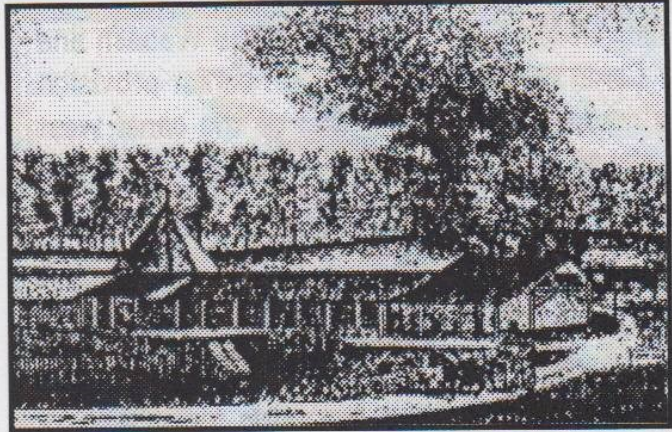
Henry's land covered 176 acres. He had put in six to seven miles of tile on this land. It probably had more under-drainage than any other piece of land in Evansville.

Henry and Emma's daughter Maybel married a Mr. Bell in 1908. They had two daughters, Henrietta and Betty.

When Thomas grew old he moved to Kansas because he thought it would be better for his health. He

died on May 14, 1880 at 4:15 a.m. at the age of 56. Henry was left to run the tile factory. We do not know how long the tile factory operated. We do know that the business was not on city maps in 1899.

Henry deeded his land back to his mother, Mary, on March 18, 1897. He died in 1922 at the age of seventy-three. A resource said that all of the Smythes were buried in Oak Hill Cemetery. Although we were able to find a Thomas Smythe there, his middle name was Edward not the "D" for which we were looking. The birth and death dates also did not correspond. Was he buried in Kansas?



The Smythe Tile Factory from Griffing's Atlas 1880

Sources:

An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Warrick Co., IN.  
Philadelphia, PA/D.J. Lake & Co., 1880.

History of Warrick, Spencer & Perry Counties, Indiana.  
Chicago, IL/Goodspeed Bros. & Co. Pub., 1885.

Peckinpugh, Jane. Superintendent of Cemeteries, City of  
Evansville, Oak Hill Cemetery, 1400 East Virginia,  
Evansville, IN 47711.

This 1880 map below shows the location of land owned by Thomas Smythe (Smith) in Greer township, Warrick county, Indiana. The largest holding is along a proposed railroad, which is shown by long dashes. A smaller holding is crossed by the Wabash & Erie Canal, which is shown by short dashes. Note the location of the residence. His home was on Green River Road in Knight township, Vanderburgh county. Did an overseer live in this residence or Thomas or Henry at one time or another? An Illustrated Historical Atlas

