

# CANAWLERS AT REST

## CHRISTOPHER STOPHER

b. Approx. 1793  
d. April 30, 1841

## JOHN STOPHER

b. August 2, 1833  
d. February 8, 1908

By Carolyn I. Schmidt

John Stopher was the son of one of Fort Wayne, Indiana's early pioneer families. He had the forethought to keep a notebook, which details his life's activities and his relationship to people in northern Indiana along the route of the Wabash & Erie Canal. He and his wife Adelia wrote their autobiographies around 1900 as follows below with some spelling corrected for this article:

**Autobiography of John Stopher**  
Obtained by H. W. Stopher

I was born in Ft. Wayne Aug. 2, 1833. At that time Ft. Wayne had a population of three hundred. *The Sentinel*, which is now the oldest paper running in Ft. Wayne, was established Jan. 1, 1833, the same year, I was born.

I cannot remember very much about my father. I do, however, remember that he had been a soldier in the War of 1812. Altogether, he served thirteen years in the army, or rather in the service of the United States Army.

Enlistments were taken at that time for terms of six years. He served one term, enlisted again, and served his time, and after that, he served one year for another man for which he received a horse, saddle, bridle and a small amount of money, though I do not remember just the exact amount.

During the greater part of the time of his enlistment he acted as a mail carrier and scout. He carried messages between Ft. Wayne and Ft. Dearborn

(Chicago) and then he sometimes went on up to Green Bay, Wis. In all his journeys, he traveled afoot. There were no roads at all, then, and he followed the trails of blazed trees through the woods.

He had an Indian guide, whom he always took with him. I used to know his name, but cannot recall it now. All this was told me, by a man named Simon Edsell, who came here about the same time that my father did. [Simon Edsall was the brother of Samuel, John, and William S. Edsall. Besides being a prominent farmer, he and his brothers actively helped develop Fort Wayne and Allen County.]

My father [Christopher Stopher] was born in Pennsylvania I do not know just where, nor when, but think he must have been about forty when I was born, which would make the date of his birth about 1793. He had a Bible, which I now have, but record of his birth was never entered there.

He never had a home. He was raised by an Aunt, but, disliking domesticity, he entered the Army, when quite young, possibly, when he was about fifteen years of age. As I remember him I think he was a little above the average height, about five feet, ten inches high. He was straight, a natural soldier in his carriage, and black hair hung down over his hazel eyes. He must have been an officer for I remember that all the men about the Fort [Ft. Wayne] called him, "Captain." He had one thumb off. He lost that in front of a cannon at a military drill, which was a common enough form of amusement in those days on Washington's birthday.

He was married in Ft Wayne in 1830 to Jane Conner at the home of her parents. I do not know where my mother was born, but it was probably at St. Mary's, Ohio. She was one of fifteen children. Her name was Jane Conner, daughter of George Conner, who lived in the site of Bloomingdale. [Bloomingdale is a neighborhood west of Wells Street in Fort Wayne.] The name shows Irish descent, but the family talked Dutch. I do not remember much about mother's mother, except that she died, when I was five years old from the effects of bee stings. She died on the farm owned by her husband just west of, and adjoining John Bass's big farm east of Ft. Wayne. My mother's father lived until I was at least fifteen years old, but of him, I remember very little.

This is the record kept on the flyleaf of my father's Bible.

Christopher Stoupar - Died April 30, 1841.

As nearly as I can find out his name was spelled Stoupar and must have been changed to Stopher before my father's death for the other entries are all "Stopher."



Children born to Christopher & Eliza Jane Stoupar (Stopher):

John Aug 2, 1833

Joseph Jan. 22, 1836

David Dec. 12, 1837

Eliza Jane June 15, 1840 & died Sept. 27, 1840

The family moved to Roanoke when I was about one year old. At that time the old Wabash-Erie Canal was being dug, and the locks were then in the process of construction. The one at Roanoke was called Dickey's Lock. From that place to Ft. Wayne, a distance of sixteen miles, was called the Sixteen Mile Level, and was the longest level on the entire canal. Dickey's Lock to East Lock [Moots Lock] was called, "The Summit Level." Ft. Wayne afterward came to be called "The Summit City." The lock at Ft. Wayne was called "East Lock" and was near the end of what is now Walton Ave. A feeder emptied near this place. Another feeder situated where Robison Park used to stand, emptied into the canal west of the site of Bloomingdale. [Robison Park was built at the site of the dam for the St. Joe Feeder Canal, which fed the W & E Canal. Trolleys carried visitors to the park on rails laid atop the old tow-path.] From the outlet of this feeder the water ran both ways thus it was called "Summit Level."

It seems that men must have been hard to get at that time. My father was a good foreman and in demand on the canal work. Simon Edsell related to me this incident of my early life.

Edsell had a large interest in the Canal and was very anxious to get Dickey's Lock in. He came to my father for help, stating that this was a case of emergency, and he must go. Father had neither horses nor wagon, but Edsell wanted him so much that he agreed to take him to Roanoke from Ft. Wayne, if he would go. Father consented, and they loaded up the tool chest and wife and baby and started. Edsell had a covered wagon but in order to make the load, as light as possible, they took the top off. While on the way a fearful storm came up and Edsell said it nearly drowned me. They stopped in the woods, made a sort of a shelter of the bedclothes to keep the mother and boy dry, and made shift as best they might. Though it is only sixteen miles from Ft. Wayne to Roanoke it took us two days to reach our destination; the rain had detained us somewhat, however, I think we must have staid [sic] in Roanoke, about one year. Joseph was born during our stay in that place. We came back to Ft. Wayne and father took a piece of land for his pay for the government was then holding stock in the canal. This land, eighty acres, lay about three miles west of town. I remember a few little incidents of our life while there in the woods.

Once while we were eating dinner, mother was

holding Joe and I was sitting on the edge of a tub of water. Presently I fell backwards into it, and well, of course, I remember that very well.

The Indians bothered a good deal, too. I remember that mother once took Joe and me up into the little loft, and set us down in a corner, while a large party in paint and feathers went by. But, they did not offer to molest us. While there my father cut a great deal of timber for axles.

After a short time, the claim was sold to Steven Young, and we went back to Ft. Wayne. It still had a population of only about three hundred, for it grew slowly in those days.

My father was sort of a carpenter. His chief occupation was that of making cradles. John Schaefer remembers having seen fifty in his shop at one time. Mr. Rogers of New Haven says that my father had his Shop at Fairfield Mills, and that he used to go there, to mill, when a boy before 1831. Father and another man, Moses Yearin, owned a shop in partnership, father making cradles, and Yearin making cowbells.

About this time father bought two lots and built a house and shop of his own, on the corner of Berry and Fulton Sts. A large stone church stands there to day. My father was hurt, while building this one story frame house by falling from a scaffold upon a palling fence. Two ribs were broken and he was also injured quite badly, internally. The house was never finished, and my father died April 30, 1841.

On April 26, 1842, my mother married Eli Lake and I went to live with John Klinger, who lived on the St. Joseph River just north of the site of the Feeble-Minded Institution. Klinger was a farmer and my guardian. I did not stay at his home more than six months. I tended the baby, rocked the cradle, and churned. I remember how I hated these tasks. I thought I surely must staid [sic] there several years, but later, found to my astonishment that I had spent only six months there.

At the end of that time I went to Nathaniel Brownell's, a farmer, too. I was probably put there by Klinger, and must have staid [sic] there two years at least. I could not have been more than ten years old.

Once just after I went there, in harvest, I don't remember whether it was wheat or oats, I was set to carrying the bundles. I carried a pile together and then lay down to sleep. Brownell's told me that snakes would bite me, if I slept that way, but I had no fears on that score. This was in 184(?). While here I did not go to school a day, though. I had gone some in town before my father died.



My mother came for me in the spring of 1843, and took me to her home near Huntington, near the Forks of the Wabash, where the Wabash and Little River unite. In the fall of 1843, I came with Curtis Lake to the place where Chancey Lake, now lives.

I went to School the winter of 43 and 44 to Edward Knight. Knight afterwards became a lawyer at Leo and we two became great friends. Later, he went to Edgerton Williams County, Ohio and there died. In him, I lost a true and staunch friend.

I lived with Nathan Lake, my step-father's father, or my step-grandfather, the Summer of 1844 and the next winter, I again went to school to Edward Knight. I had come to Nathan Lake's, because there was little or nothing for me to do at Huntington. Eli was in a sawmill and Curtis and I did very little, but fish in the Fork of the Wabash. In the summer of 1845 I went back to Huntington and then moved with Mother and Eli Lake to Roanoke. I attended school, the winter of '45 and 46, going on the ice on the canal, a distance of about two miles.

I always liked school and never had any trouble with the teacher. I had about the usual number of boy's scraps. I guess the same as all boys, or course, but remember, the cause of none of them. While here in Roanoke, then a cluster of only a few log cabins, Joe and David and I cleared off the ground, where Roanoke now stands. That was in the summer of 1846.

Eli Lake had a very roving disposition, and it is hard for me to keep straightened out just how long we stayed at each place, we went.

I know we lived in Peru and that I went to school there a part of the year. We did not stay over winter, however. We might have been in Peru before going to Roanoke. I am not sure about that. We came to Ft. Wayne and lived in the same house, my father had started to build. We did not own it then, and I don't know how we came to get into the house.

It must have been at this time, while I was twelve years old or there about, that I helped put on the first slate roof in Ft. Wayne. The slate was brought on boats on the canal to Ewing's warehouse and all thrown helter-skelter into the window. The slates were twelve, fourteen, sixteen, and eighteen inches long. I spend [sic] nearly all summer sorting all these different lengths, piling them, carrying them to the machine, my partner used to punch a hole in the middle for the nail, and then carrying them back, and piling them again This warehouse was on the northwest corner of Ewing and Berry Streets and was built by Ewing. This house is still in good repair.

Later, we moved out to Wine's Mills in the East End. [Marshall S. Wines established a flouring mill on the Maumee near the present Hanover street in Ft. Wayne where a dam was built across the river.] From here we moved to Lafayette in March of 1847. We stayed in Lafayette until Mother died Nov. 13<sup>th</sup>, 1847. We all pulled up almost immediately, and came to the Chancey Lake place. I was sick nearly all the Fall that Mother died, that is 1847, and the winter following. I was not able to go to my Mother's funeral and never knew where she was buried. We were four or five weeks on the way back to Allen Co. I was then, fourteen years old.

In the winter of '48 I lived with a family named Metsker. That was while I had the typhoid fever, we called it "winter fever" then. This sickness affected me so much, that I was not able to work any, the following summer.

The Herricks lived about two miles west of Ft. Wayne, at this time. One of them "Aruna" had come to a place near Maysville, then consisting of three log cabins. They stood where Thomas Hood, Henry Boulton, and John Zimmerman, the hardware man, now live.

Adelia Herrick came to visit her brother "Aruna" and I met her there. I was just getting over the typhoid fever and my hair was just coming in, when she saw me. She afterwards said she tho't then, I was about the ugliest mortal she had ever seen. I guess she must have changed he mind afterwards, for we were married in her father's home above Cuba [Indiana] in 1852, by Reverend Truman Pattie, a pioneer minister, who lived where Robert Harding, now lives.

I never hunted much but I did shoot a deer once, and I guess it was the only one I ever shot, and that was on Sunday, too.  
Married Aug. 15, 1852.

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#### Autobiography of Adelia Herrick Stopher

My mother's name was Susan Robins. She was born in Canada. Grandfather Robins was an Englishman. During the Revolutionary War, he remained neutral, but he went to Canada for a long time, which makes me think he must have sympathized with the English.

I remember very little of my mother and never knew very much about her people, because she always seemed unwilling to talk of her home folks. She had some older sisters who worked out while she was kept at home as housekeeper. Her father was very angry, when she married.



They lived only a short distance from the St. father." Lawrence River. She sometimes told stories of their crossing the river on the ice, and of once in particular, when they came nearly drowning. They sometimes raced horses on the ice, too

Our home was in the state of New York two miles from Lake Ontario, one mile from Three Mile Bay, and six miles from the St. Lawrence River, at Cape Vincent. My old home was three or four miles from the present town of Three Mile Bay. Most of the country was very stony. The people made a living by dairying.

We moved to Indiana in September 1835 after I was eleven. In the following spring 1836 Susan died at the age of nineteen. She had had the Scarlet Fever (then called the canker rash), which left her quite deaf.

I remember Aunt Rebecca who was quite old, and was quite a smoker.

Christopher died in April 1841. His obituary and stone have not been found.

John Stopher died at the age of 74 on February 8, 1908. A Fort Wayne newspaper carried the following obituary:

**JOHN STOPHER**

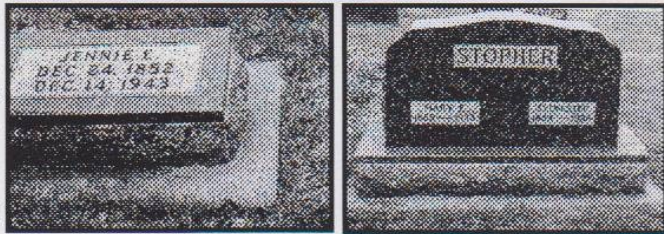
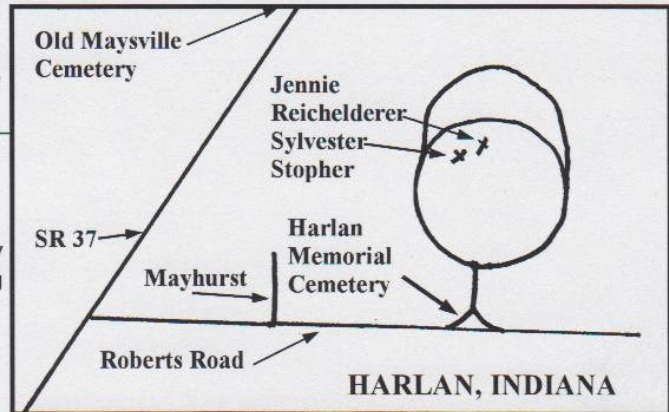
"John Stopher was born in Ft. Wayne, Ind., Aug. 2, 1833 and died at Harlan, Ind. Feb. 8, 1908, aged 74 years, 6 months, and 6 days. He lived in Ft. Wayne until his father died in 1841. After that he moved to Lafayette where he stayed for seven years, when his mother died.

"His educational advantages were limited to a few months in the winter during several years, but he was a man of good information. He kept a diary for thirty-five years and many important events have been settled by reference to Uncle John's diary, among them, several pensions.

"He was married August 15, 1852 to Adelia Ann Herrick. To this union were born four children, two sons and two daughters. Those living are Sylvester and Mrs. Wm. A Reichelderfer, Joseph dying in infancy and Mrs. Angelia Grice died Mar. 22, 1873, she leaving one son John. There are nine grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

"Mr. Stopher lived in the vicinity of Harlan all his married life. He was a man who was held in the highest esteem by all who knew him. He was a member of the Masonic Fraternity having been Worshipful Master for over twenty years. He was a good husband and a kind

Noting from John Stopher's obituary that he lived in the vicinity of Harlan and not finding anything about where he was buried in the library, a walk through both the Harlan Memorial Cemetery and the Old Maysville Cemetery located nearby did not result in finding his grave site. The grave stones of his daughter Jennie E. Reichelderer and his son Sylvester Stopher were located in Harlan Memorial Cemetery and the stone of his son Joseph Stopher was found in Old Maysville Cemetery. Perhaps John's stone was one of those that only the base remained in one of these cemeteries or perhaps he was buried in a family plot somewhere.



Markers for Jennie Stopher Reichelderer and Sylvester Stopher, the children of John Stopher. Photos by Bob Schmidt

The stone for Jennie showed that she was born Dec. 24, 1852 and died Dec. 14, 1943. Sylvester's stone said he was born in 1854 and died in 1936. His wife Mary's stone (1855-1933).

**SOURCE:**

Stopher, John. *Some Allen County, Indiana Pioneers: A Notebook Kept by John Stopher*. 1900.

*Indiana Waterways. "John Stopher: Canal Builder." Fort Wayne, IN: Canal Society of Indiana. October 1983.*