

# CANAWLERS AT REST

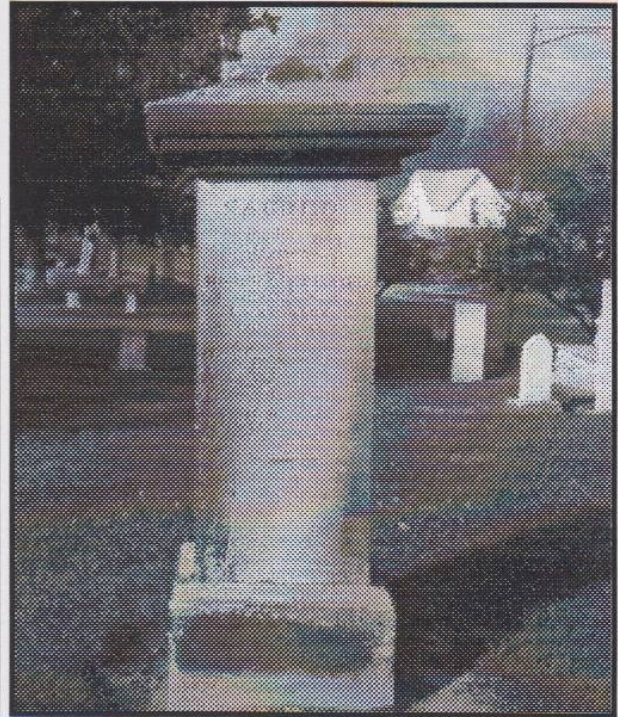
## ROBERT STUART

**b. February 19, 1802**

**d. October 23, 1842**

By Carolyn I. Schmidt

Photo by Betty Clawson



Robert Stuart, a Scottish immigrant, was born on February 19, 1802. Little is known of his early life. He became one of four contractors on the Wabash & Erie Canal in Fountain County, Indiana. The other three were named Winn, H. Winn and H. Stuart (sometimes spelled Stewart).

The work on the canal progressed slowly. The work on it was unsteady and the men of the vicinity volunteered to help complete the culvert\* at Attica, which took about six months to construct.

Workers often perished from cholera, accidents, snake bites, and rough and tumble fights between the imported Irishmen. There were many Irish stonemasons employed to build the keystone arches and the massive stone locks. Life was made tolerable by the jigger boss, who distributed three jiggers of whiskey or brandy per day and, in wet weather, six jiggers a day to each worker. Their pay was little and often they died in debt.

The workers, who were under contractor Robert Stuart, thought highly of him. When he died on October 23, 1842, his body was carried on a bier to the old Oak Grove Cemetery in Covington, Fountain County, IN. located on Liberty Street. An immense crowd attended his funeral according to an old article.

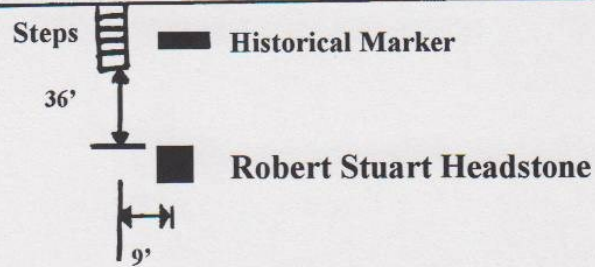
A stone carver named Hayes, who worked on the project, asked the canal boss James McMannomy for a large stone to carve a monument for Stuart's grave. McMannomy agreed to the request and dragged a thick

shaft of tawny sandstone to the cemetery. Hayes began carving it. He'd work on the canal about two weeks and alternated this with carving the stone until he ran out of money, but he never completed his project. What remains today is a six foot tall stone among anonymous heaps of broken headstones that date back to the 1830s. It looks like a gatepost. Most of the inscription is weathered and unreadable. It stands as a lasting memento of the affection of two friends and keeps alive Stuart's name when the names of most of the men who worked on the canal have been lost to today's generation.

The Wabash & Erie Canal reached Covington, IN, in 1846 and was open to Toledo, OH. It brought trade and money to towns such as Lafayette, Attica and Covington for a period short time and the towns grew. But floods, droughts, ice, costly repairs and the coming of the railroads soon killed it. Boats, locks, warehouses, mills, woolen factories, packing houses, breweries, or anything that depended upon the canal trade fell into disuse. The last packet boat to visit Covington was the "Goodman." In November 1875 it traveled the canal from Lodi to Lafayette.

*\*The culvert mentioned in the **Covington Friend** at Attica was probably the aqueduct south of Attica on Shawnee Creek. Two culverts No. 128 & 129 were located at stone quarry branch and in Attica. Both were of wood and were comparatively small. It is doubtful that they took six months to construct. However, Aqueduct No. 9, over Shawnee creek was one span of 80 feet clear. The*

LIBERTY STREET



OAK GROVE CEMETERY  
COVINGTON, INDIANA  
Map by Betty Clawson, CSI member Attica, In

trunk and superstructure were of the same plan as Aqueduct No. 1 over the St. Marys River in Ft. Wayne. Abutments were of cut stone masonry, the whole work appeared to have been well constructed and was considered permanent, except for the trunk that needed renewal once in 10 years according to the *Chief Engineer's Report of 1847*. It also stated that the chords on which the whole structure depended were insufficient in strength and they should add a strong iron chain or bar extending the length of the chord, and attaching to each foot of the arch. The expense was estimated to be \$300 and would be paid as an 1848 expenditure.

Sources.

Cullen, Kevin. "Headstone Lasting Marker Of Life Along Wabash & Erie Canal Route." *Lafayette Journal and Courier*.

Covington Friend. Jan. 8, 1904

1847 Indiana House Documentary Journal. 1847 Chief Engineers Report to the Indiana General Assembly concerning the condition of the Wabash & Erie Canal mechanical structures as of July 1, 1847.

HISTORIC INDIANA LANDMARKS

Indiana Preservationist, a publication of Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, reported on several structures of interest to canawlers in its Nov.-Dec. 2004 issue. The home of Captain Marcus Sherwood, who was featured in last month's Canawlers At Rest column in the Hoosier Packet, was built in 1867 in Evansville, Indiana, and is up for sale for \$469,000 dollars.

Cottrell Village in Attica, Indiana, seen on a canal tour was featured in an article entitled "Attica Residents Take Nothing For Granted." It said, "Platted in 1825, Attica prospered with the arrival of the Wabash and Erie Canal in 1847 and later the railroad." It credits John

Cottrell for restoring a complex of mid-nineteenth century buildings and adds that there are many more buildings of importance in Attica.

Another article, "Swinney Homestead Remains Neighborhood Anchor," relates the importance of the Thomas Swinney home built in 1875 to Fort Wayne's West Central neighborhood. The grand celebration for the opening of the W&E Canal from Lafayette to Toledo took place on the property on July 4, 1843.

Cambridge City's Huddleston Farmhouse, seen on a canal tour, hosted End of Winter suppers like those served in the 1840-60s and Evansville's Reitz home and Willard Library will be part of a members tour on March 11. Both were seen on CSI's "Great Expectations" tour.