

CANAWLERS AT REST

OMER TOUSEY

b. December 21, 1800
d. March 28, 1868

By Charles A. Whiting, Jr.

Researching the Whitewater Canal for his master's thesis at Ball State University, Don Burden found that Tousey and Company contracted to build Sections 2 and 3 of the Whitewater Canal. After reading his paper I, Chuck Whiting, decided to find out more about Omer Tousey.

Omer Tousey was born in Green County, New York, on December 21, 1800. His father, a prosperous merchant and farmer, purchased a farm in Boone County, Kentucky, opposite Lawrenceburg, Indiana, settled there in 1802 with his family and remained there until his death in 1832. As a mere child Omer Tousey was put into his father's widely known store in "Tousey Town," once a flourishing village but now a ghost town. It had a store, warehouse and a horse-powered ferry operated by Moses Tousey. Fine Boone County products such as flour, hemp, pork, and tobacco were brought to the warehouse where they were inspected before shipment down the river. The town existed only a few years before being overshadowed by Lawrenceburg, Indiana, and Petersburg, Kentucky.

While working in his father's store, Omer Tousey acquired a thorough knowledge of the dry good business. In 1822 he moved to Lawrenceburg and began his own dry goods business. It soon became very successful. He made annual journeys to Philadelphia on horseback to procure the stock for his store. No man had better credit.

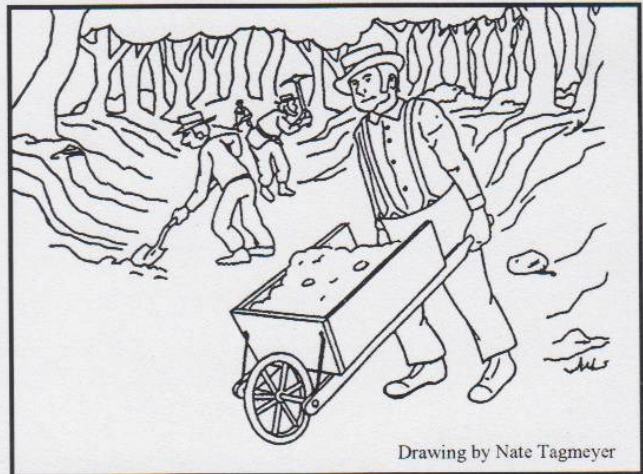
On October 23, 1823 he married Lucinda Johnson (b. May 11, 1804, d. Oct. 2, 1883), the daughter of Col. Cave and Betsey Johnson. She was from Boone County, Kentucky. They had no children.

By 1834 Tousey had acquired so much capital from his store that he decided it could be employed elsewhere and be more profitable.

Omer Tousey was twice president of the Lawrenceburg branch of the State Bank of Indiana and conducted it well. Years later he was placed in charge of the same bank in order to extricate it from embarrassments into which it had fallen by injudicious management. He was equal to the exigency and the bank again prospered under his wise direction.

Calvin Fletcher mentions Tousey in his diary. On May 17, 1836, he notes: "Messrs. Dun & Tousey called from Lawrenceburg. They wish to get the additional bank stock sold." Isaac Dunn is the other man mentioned in the note.

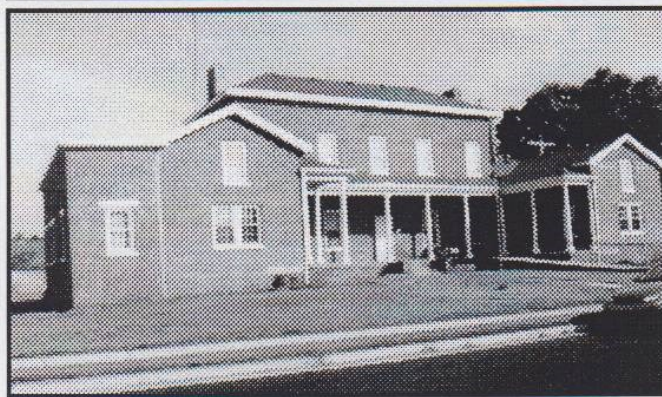
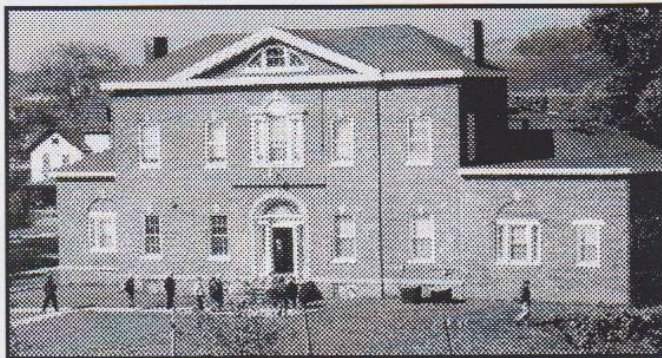
Tousley (Tousey) and Company along with Pen Thomas Linnard contracted with the State of Indiana to build two sections of the Whitewater Canal. The contracts were let on May 3, 1837 and were only for grubbing and excavating. They did not have to build any structures such as waste weirs, culverts, locks or dams. The contract for Section 2 was to be completed by September 5, 1838 and was estimated to cost \$6,550. The contract for Section 3 was to be completed by July 3, 1838 for an estimate of \$9,580.



Drawing by Nate Tagmeyer

In 1839 Tousey joined the Methodist Episcopal Church and was a zealous member until his death. His judgment was sound and his advice was sought on every important occasion of the church. He gave liberally to the church.

Tousey was described as having a sober and quiet dignity. He was entirely devoid of ostentation. Even though he was known for his hospitality and even though his home, purchased from Samuel C. Vance founder of Lawrenceburg, was furnished with every material for comfort, nothing in it was for mere display.



Front and rear views of the Vance-Tousey House in Lawrenceburg, Indiana, now on the National Register. Photos by Bob Schmidt

Every New Year's Day he invited most of the people in Lawrenceburg to a large party in this home.

To show his love for his fellowmen, Tousey expressed it in deeds rather than professions. When he contributed to the poor he asked them to keep his charity secret. They later testified to his giving after his death. He repeatedly said that upon his death his remains should be placed in the private graveyard on his father's farm where his father, mother and sisters were interred.

Omer Tousey died on March 28, 1868, at the age of 67. The bulk of his large estate went to his widow and nearest relatives. The remainder were to remote relatives and faithful domestics. Notice of his death appeared in *The Press of Lawrenceburg* as follows:

Note the spelling of Lawrenceburg in the following article. The "h" was dropped from the spelling by the State of Indiana in 1890.

DEATH OF OMER TOUSEY

"Although it has been announced for near a week previous that Mr. Omer Tousey was dangerously sick and could scarcely recover, still the announcement of his death, on Saturday afternoon last, cast a gloom over the entire community. He had been so actively en-

gaged in business in Lawrenceburgh for near half a century that he seemed almost a part of the town, and his death is a great loss to the community. Mr. Tousey having started in life, poor, by industry and economy worked his way up until he became very wealthy. Of his means he was very liberal, but in giving always remarkable unostentatious. The deserving poor always found in him a ready helper, and this class mourn his death with sincere grief. The following statement of Mr. Tousey's life was prepared by an intimate friend of his, who had been associated with him in business and in church relation for many years:

"Omer Tousey, was born Dec. 21, 1800, in the State of New York, and in company with his father and family emigrated to Boone county, Ky., where they settled upon the farm opposite this city Lawrenceburgh), which was for many years the Tousey Homestead.

"At 14 years he went into a dry goods store as clerk in Tousey Town, then a village on the opposite side of the (Ohio) river, and in a few months developed such an aptitude and diligence in business, that the principal management and control of the store was entrusted to him. He commenced the dry goods business in Lawrenceburgh in 1822, and prosecuted it with energy and success until 1835 —often traveling the entire distance from this place to the seaboard cities on horseback. He was married in 1823 to Miss Lucinda Johnson, daughter of Col. Cave Johnson, of North Bend, Ky. Until 1839 he paid little attention to religious matters, though he was strictly moral and regarded as an upright and honest man. His religious views however, were far from being orthodox. But at a protracted meeting, held in this city, in the month of September, 1839, he was soundly, clearly and happily converted. His conversion occurred at his house about the dawn of day, and was an event never to be forgotten by himself or the inmates of the family, who were aroused from their beds by his shouts and loud praises to God. He ever referred to this as a great epoch in his life, and never thought of it (to use his own language) but what he felt the Divinity stir within him. He at once attached himself to the M. E. Church, and soon set about devising means for extending the cause of Christ. The building in which the congregation then worshipped was old, dilapidated, and withal, too small for the congregation. He wrote out and circulated a subscription for the building of the present church edifice, heading it with his own name for \$1000, which subsequently largely increased. He purchased the lot on which the church was built, with his own funds, was at the head of the building committee, purchased all the material, made all the contracts and superintended the entire work to its completion —keeping an accurate and exact account of every cent received and of expenses. Twenty five years ago he was elected steward in the church and twelve years he has acted as

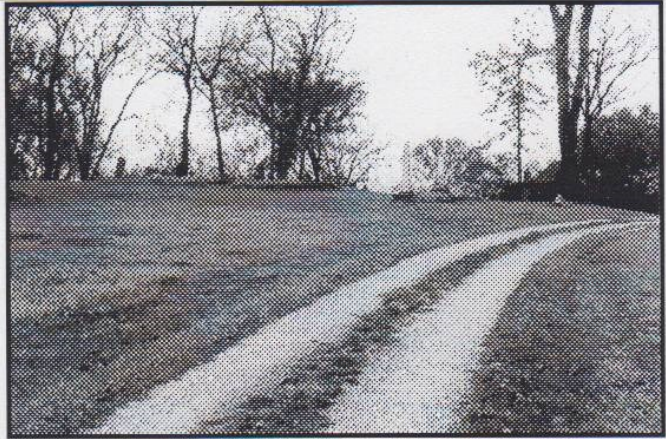
Recording Steward with faithfulness and precision. He loved the church as he loved his own life, and manifested that love not in words only, but in deeds of benevolence and self-sacrifice. The day before he left his office, never to return to it again, he said to one his brother Stewards: "I wish you would get the deed for the parsonage executed, for I want to pay one tenth of the cost of it before I die."

"The poor, too, came in for a share of his benefactions, and his unostentatious acts of benevolence and charity have, of late, been large and frequent.

"As a man of business he was prompt, accurate, reliable and scrupulously honest. As a church member he was always in his place and ready to do anything in his power for the promotion of the cause of Christ. He loved the class meeting and was seldom absent when his health permitted him to attend. As a husband, his kindness and affection, had few parallels among men. His health had been gradually failing for five years past and for months the decline had been marked and rapid. On Saturday, the 21st he left his office, for the last time, and the next day was confined to his room with slight fever and affection of throat and lungs, together with general debility, a breaking down of the whole system. During the ensuing week he suffered much but without a murmur of a single expression of impatience. He declined being helped so long and so far as it was at all possible for him to help himself. At 3 o'clock, Saturday P.M. March 28th, without a struggle the flickering lamp of his mortal life expired and his spirit went to God who gave it. 'He rests from his labors and his works do follow him.'

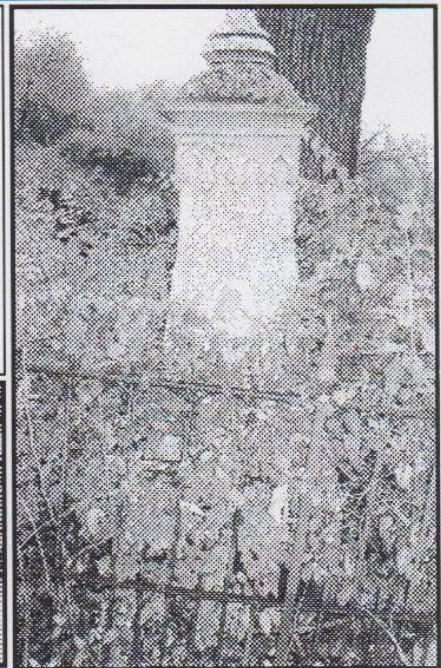
"The funeral services were held on Tuesday last, at Mr. Tousey's late residence, and were conducted by Rev. J. G. Chafee, assisted by Rev. James Lathrop and Rev. John Lewis. The concourse of people assembled embraced the largest number of old citizens that has for years been brought together in one place in this community. The services were very impressive and appropriate. The remains were taken to the Tousey burying ground in Kentucky, on the brow of the hill opposite Lawrenceburgh. —Almost the entire assembly of people followed the remains on foot from the residence of the deceased to the burying ground, crossing the river on a steam ferryboat. Here all that was mortal of Omer Tousey was deposited by the side of his father and mother and other kindred dust. While we mourn his death may we resolve to strive to emulate his virtues and live so that we may meet him in the better land where his spirit now rests in peace.

"At a meeting of the Quarterly Meeting Conference, held at Lawrenceburgh Station S. E. Indiana Conference, on March 31, 1868, the following, among



OMER TOUSEY GRAVE STONE

Top: Lane to Tousey family cemetery
Right: Omer Tousey's stone
Bottom: The cap of Tousey's stone has fallen and is at the bottom of it in the weeds.



other proceedings, were had:

"WHEREAS, In the Providence of God, brother Omer Tousey, the Recording Steward of this Station, has been removed from the church on earth to the church in Heaven; and

"WHEREAS, His many acts of kindness, benevolence and charity towards the church and the poor, together with his conversation in the past, demand at our hands more than a passing notice. —

Therefore,

"Resolved, That we deeply and sincerely deplore the loss of our much esteemed Brother in Christ, and that In duty bound, we will ever fondly cherish in our heart of hearts the fondest recollection of his memory.

"Resolved, That although God, in His wise Provi-

dence, has sorely afflicted our church, our community, our Quarterly Conference, and especially the family of Brother Tousey, by removing him from among us, yet we will humbly bow to the will of Him who is too wise to err, and too good to willingly afflict.

"Resolved, That we tender to the church in Lawrenceburgh and to the family and friends of Brother Tousey our hearty condolence, that our tears shall be mingled with their tears, and that by the grace of God we will imitate his many virtues, follow him as he followed the Saviour, and meet ultimately in that land where death never visits, and where sorrow is unknown.

"Resolved, That these resolutions be published in the Lawrenceburgh Press, and a copy hereof be presented to the family of our deceased friend and brother.

J. B. LATHROP,
Presiding Elder.

L. B. LEWIS, Sec'y."
Lawrenceburg *The Press*. April 12 1868.

Omer Tousey was buried in the Tousey Family Cemetery that is located in Boone County Kentucky on the property of Bill and Patty Berkshire, 2450 Lawrenceburg Ferry Road. The cemetery is approximately 1/2 mile up their driveway from the main road and overlooks Lawrenceburg, Indiana, across the river and the site of long vanished Tousey Town.

Also buried in the cemetery are the ancestors of Albert Gallatin Porter, who became the governor of Indiana. He worked on the ferry between Tousey Town and Lawrenceburg when his father was the proprietor.

Tousey's home in Lawrenceburg, known as the Vance-Tousey House, is now owned by the Dearborn Historical Society. It has been placed on the National Historic Register.

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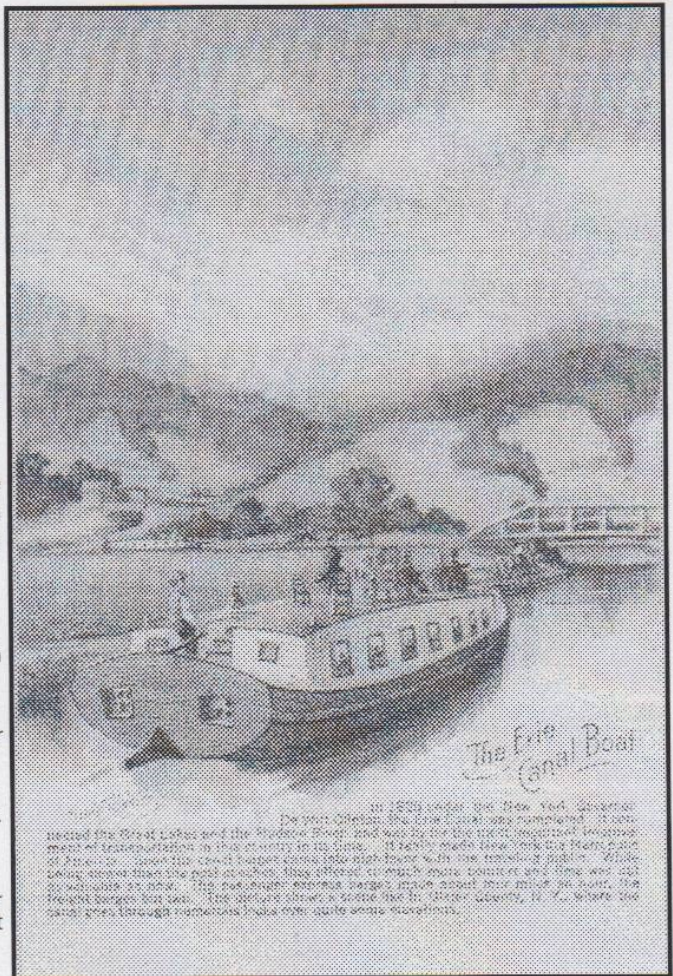
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A SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY TO SUPPORT CSI THIS YEAR

Many people consider making charitable contributions for income tax purposes. Remember, the Canal Society of Indiana is a tax-exempt 501 (3) (c) entity and contributions to it are tax deductible. Contributions can be in cash or "in kind." Appreciated stock can be given to a charity and the donor gets a charitable deduction for the fair market value of the stock on the date of the gift. This method of contributing is available every year.

In 2007 a rare opportunity exists. If you are at least age 70½ you may distribute funds up to \$100,000 from your IRA directly to a charity and it will be excluded from income tax. This exemption will probably not be given in the future. Your tax exempt gift of any amount would greatly support CSI and our projects.



This image and text concerning New York's Erie Canal are from an old ink blotter.