



CANAWLERS AT REST

COLONEL JORDAN VIGUS

b. Sept 17, 1792

d. 1860

By Thomas L. Castaldi

Photo of George Winter's painting of Vigus
courtesy of Rich Voorhees

When ground was broken for the Wabash & Erie Canal, it was Jordan Vigus, who first forced a shovel blade into the frozen earth for that ceremonious dig in the ground that has been called perhaps the most outstanding event in the history of Indiana. It was planned for and took place on February 22, 1832, the day set aside to honor the birth date of George Washington.

The momentous event was covered in the March 2nd 1932 issue of the *Cass County Times* and in the writing style of the day a reporter wrote:

"...by an order of the Board, J. Vigus, Esq. was authorized to procure the necessary tools and assistance, and repair to the most convenient point of the St. Joseph Feeder-line, at 2 o'clock, on said day...

"The intention of the Commissioners having been made known, a large number of citizens of the town of Fort Wayne and its vicinity, together with a number of gentlemen from the valley of the Wabash, convened at the Masonic Hall, for the purpose of making arrangements for the celebration of this important undertaking, whereupon Henry Rudisill, Esq., was called to the chair, and David H. Colerick appointed secretary.

"The procession, having been formed agreeable to order, proceeded across the St. Mary's river, to the point selected, when a circle was formed, in which the Commissioners and Orator took their stand."

Having properly organized themselves the celebrators stepped outside into a cold winter day and marched across the Saint Mary's River. Proceeding west they formed a circle at the junction of the Saint Joseph

Feeder and the mainline of the Wabash & Erie.

"Arriving at the scene of the ceremony, the group that gathered included Jordan, Vigus, Charles W. Ewing, Samuel Hanna and Elias Murray. After listening to a patriotic speech eloquently delivered by Ewing whose remarks were representative rose to speak, In his words he,

"...explained the reason why his colleagues were absent—adverted to the difficulties and embarrassments which the friends of the canal had encountered and overcome; noticed the importance of the work and the advantages which would ultimately be realized; and then concluded by saying, 'I am now about to commence the Wabash and Erie canal in the name and by the authority of the State of Indiana.'

Having thus said, he 'struck the long suspended blow' broke ground — while the company hailed the event with three cheers."

Jordan Vigus, the central figure of the canal's ground breaking, was born on September 17, 1792, in New Glasgow, Amherst County, Virginia, near the city of Richmond. His parents were from London, England, and both were teachers and preachers. The name *Vigus* is English and family members say their surname has a meaning that relates to "cigarettes". His obituary appears in the September 29, 1860, *Logansport Journal* and states, "he removed to Lexington, Kentucky, without any worldly possessions — nothing, as we have heard him remark, but the prayers of a devoted father and mother." At about age 18, he left his father's store and home in Virginia, traveling with a brother came north settling in Lexington, Kentucky, where Jordan clerked in his brother's store.

Volunteering to fight in the War of 1812 under General William Henry Harrison, Vigus served as a

private in the First Rifle Regiment of Kentucky Volunteers. He was one of the troops that liberated Fort Wayne from the Indians, participated in additional raids upon the enemy, and helped to rebuild Fort Defiance. Some accounts indicate that he emerged from his military service having been elevated in rank, however, historians do not mention how he may have earned a promotion. The War of 1812 Pension Files indicate that his beneficiary was his wife "Wealthy H.", that he served in "Captain Kerley's Company of Kentucky Volunteers" and at the rank of Private. However, back in civilian life he was soon being referred to as "Major" Vigus.

In 1817 he moved to Corydon, the then Indiana state capital and the center of business and population of the state. By 1826, he had set up residence in Indianapolis and operated a tavern in the fledgling western frontier town of a few years and where the state government had decided to move.

By 1828, Vigus was mailing correspondence to John Tipton from Indianapolis discussing topics such as the removal of the Indian Agency from Fort Wayne to Logansport, and the likelihood that the "Wabash Canal" would pass through Logansport. The next year in January 1829, Vigus was continuing to write to Tipton from Indianapolis.

During his Indianapolis years, the 1827-28 Indiana legislature elected Samuel Hanna, Robert John and David Burr canal commissioners by a joint ballot of the Senate and House. Later on April 28th, Austin W. Morris informed John Tipton that Robert John had resigned the office of Canal Commissioner when he wrote:

"...and Major Vigus is an applicant, he has a large and highly respectable recommendation (sic) of the citizens, but if any of the Govrs (sic) friends apply for it, it is somewhat questionable (sic), wehter (sic) the Major will succede (sic) or not."

History records that Governor James B. Ray accepted the recommendation when the governor made the selection and officially announced that he had,

"...appointed Jordan Vigus a commissioner of the Wabash and Miami canal, to supply the vacancy in the board of commissioners, occasioned by the resignation of Robert John Esquire...at Indianapolis the twenty second day of May A. D. 1829 & thirteenth year of the State."

During his five years as a Canal Commissioner, Col. Vigus was directed to offer lands for sale at Logansport beginning October 26, 1830. Terms of sale and liberal credit did little to assist in raising funds for canal construction. (C. B. Lasselle said at the time, "owing to the length of credit given on the purchase, availed but little in affording means for the prosecution of the construction of the canal. It was, therefore, found necessary to appeal to the

means of the State. Accordingly a bill was introduced in the Legislature during the sessions of 1831-32, for effecting a loan upon the faith of the State, predicated upon the moneys arising from the sales, with interest thereon, together with the tolls and water rents of the canal. The bill met with fierce opposition upon the part of many prominent men in the Legislature; but it finally passed. Its success was duly celebrated by the citizens of Logansport.")

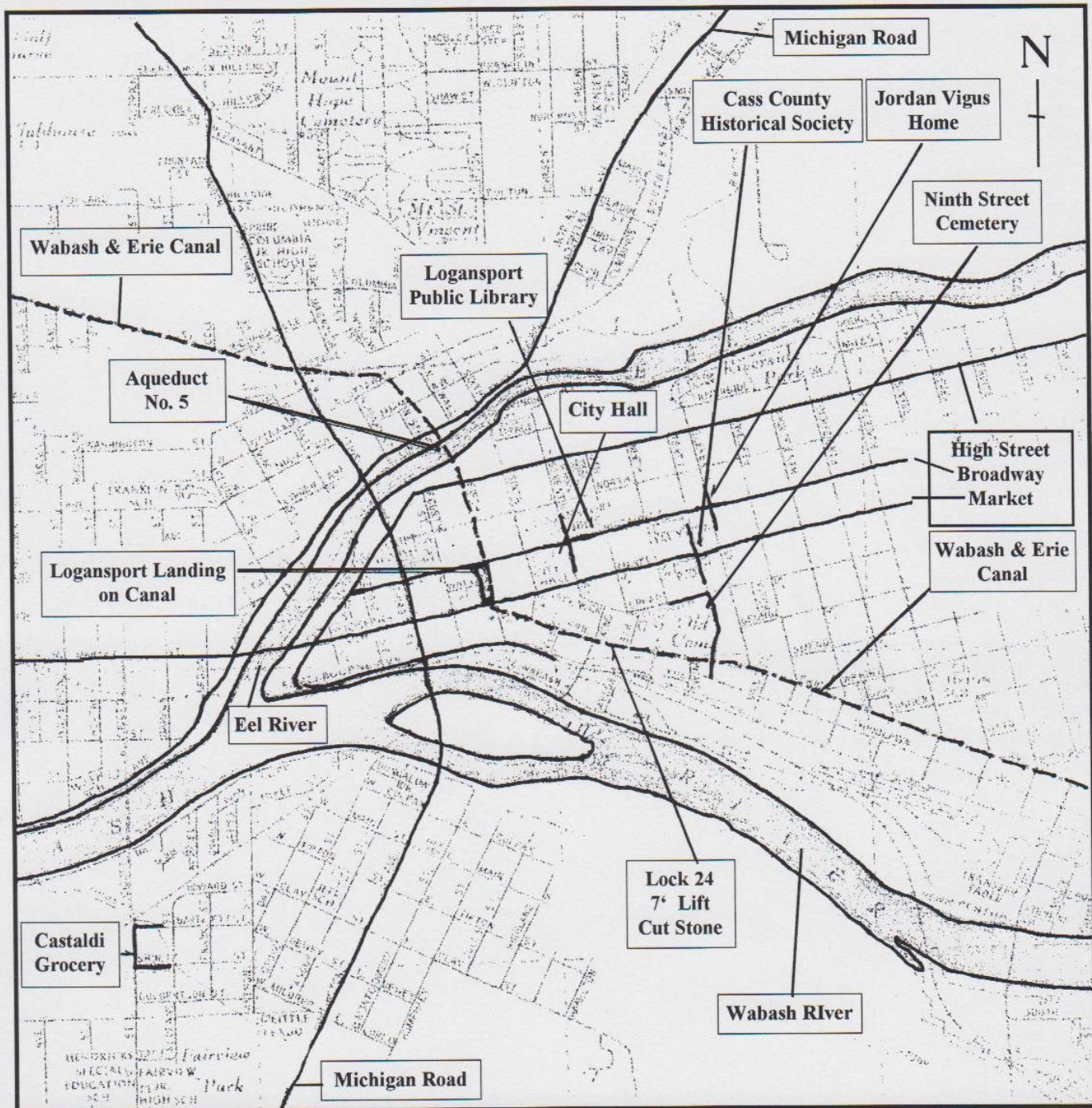
It is not clear when Vigus earned the title Colonel. He was called upon on July 12, 1828, to give testimony in a public meeting between Noah Noble and James Ray and at that time was referred to as "MAJ. Vigus". In letters written both by John Tipton to George C. Spencer on February 19, 1832, and received from Thomas Fitzgerald on July 26, 1833, references are made to "Major Vigus." However, in a December 16, 1833, letter from Joseph Barron to John Tipton, the old interpreter Barron refers to him as "Colonel J. Vigus". He was addressed as the Colonel thereafter. Some may speculate that an honorary military title was conferred even though such was not the custom in the northern states.

Vigus moved to Logansport in 1829 to join his close friend John Tipton. Over the succeeding years he operated a tavern in his adopted town. Such establishments were meeting places and might also be referred to as an inn. Here he became active in civic affairs and was one of four men who participated in a shooting contest to decide what name to give the new village at the mouth of the Eel on the Wabash. The name Logan's Port was chosen by John B. Duret in honor of a native (albeit Logan's given name was Spemica Lawba) who supported the American cause in the War of 1812. The word "port" was added presumably to promote the place as a commercial landing site on the Wabash River trade route.

Together, the same group of men platted the town that was incorporated on February 17, 1828. Jordan Vigus was elected Logansport's first mayor when the first election of city officials took place the following May. According to the custom at that time he served a term of one year.

When construction of the Wabash & Erie was delayed due to a debate as to which of three sites the canal should pass to the south and to cross the Wabash River, Vigus, as a commissioner, influenced the decision. Along with Spears Tipton, an agreement was reached to cross the river in a pool of a dam complete with a lock large enough for steamboats and a chute for passing flatboats and rafts.

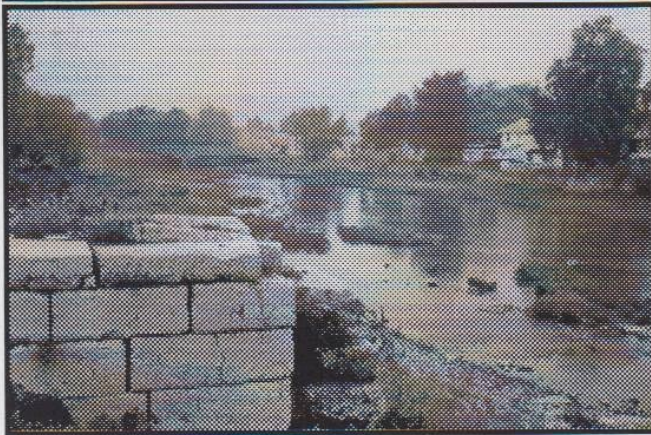
During 1838, a citizen's meeting was held to protest the state moving forward with plans for the



The Wabash & Erie Canal through Logansport, Indiana

At Logansport, the Wabash & Erie Canal crossed the Eel River a few short blocks above the Wabash River. Stone piers of the old aqueduct remain at the end of 5th Street. Lock # 24 on Erie Avenue has long since been covered over. Note the location of the Jordan Vigus home. The Castaldi family, who came much later, operated a grocery in the southwest section of town.

Tom Castaldi spent his early years around the canal and heard about men such as Vigus. He was the perfect choice for the person to write this "Canawlers At Rest" article. CSI Headquarters is looking for volunteers to write additional biographies of canal personalities to be carried monthly under the "Canawlers At Rest" column.



The abutment of Wabash & Erie Canal Aqueduct No. 5 over Eel River still stands at the end of 5th Street in Logansport, Indiana. The painting of the aqueduct with a canal boat in its trough can be seen at the Cass County Historical Museum. Photos by Bob Schmidt

slackwater dam to cross the canal over the Wabash River near Delphi at Pittsburg, Indiana. A five-man committee was chosen to obtain an injunction through an attorney granted in U. S. Circuit Court and Jordan Vigus' name appears as a member of the correspondence committee for the endeavor. A dam downriver would have cut off steamboat traffic that upper Wabash valley communities such as Logansport and Peru believed they should enjoy during seasons of heavy rains. Ultimately the Wabash Dam No. 4 was built, and, to satisfy the upper Wabash River contingent in 1841, a steamboat lock was completed in the dam to ensure scheduled, albeit rarely used, steamboat traffic above the dam.

While living in Lexington, Kentucky, Jordan had joined the Masons. He and John Tipton were among the founding fathers of the Logansport Masonic Lodge No. 33 and he was a member of Logansport's IOOF Lodge. Local historian, Richard Copeland records that Jordan Vigus was active in several business ventures. He and Dr. Hiram Todd opened a tavern and grocery store in Logansport at 209 East Market Street and with his brother Cyrus Vigus and his father-in-law John Tipton, initiated a mail coach route between Logansport and Indianapolis. The partners, with Jordan as treasurer, formed the Bridge Street and Michigan Road Free Bridge Company to construct a bridge over the Eel River at Logansport's Third Street.

Teaming up with his brother Cyrus, the two began U. S. Mail Pilot Lines from Niles, Michigan, South Bend, Plymouth, Logansport and Indianapolis, as well as service between Logansport and Michigan City. It is not surprising to learn that Col. Vigus after leaving the mayor's office served two terms as postmaster in 1840 and again in 1848.

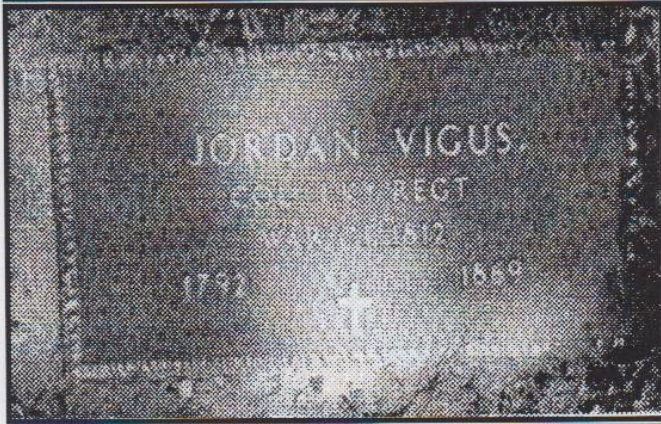
On May 10, 1845, a circular was distributed

announcing a meeting to appoint delegates to a convention at Terre Haute on May 22 for deciding on the extension of the Canal to the Ohio River. Col. Vigus was one of five delegates representing Cass County at that convention.

He was married in 1826 to Elizabeth Ross back while residing in Louisville, Kentucky, and together they had three children — Elizabeth Ann, Harriet and Jordan. Historian Copeland notes that Elizabeth died on February 18, 1841 after an illness of several years. Four years later Vigus remarried. His second wife was Wealthy Ann and they became the parents of Virginia, Horace A., (who died in infancy), and Horace B.

Family members have described Jordan Vigus as being five feet eight inches tall, weighing about 170 pounds, hair and eyes were dark and his complexion was slightly olive with a tinge of red in the cheeks. These no doubt were the days of his powerful contribution to community when he built a large two-story Greek Revival/Italianate style home in about the year 1842. The Vigus family occupied the brick structure until some time after 1860, and it still stands on the northeast corner of 11th Street and Broadway at 1100 East Broadway. In 1864, James Cheney, banker and industrialist, purchased the home. It was here that in 1865, the Cheney's eldest daughter Helen was wed to John Alfred Kimberly. Another memory—this one on April 4, 1865,—of the place was recorded by local historian Mary Schultz. She writes that there once was a picket fence surrounding the house featuring large gate posts. Young children found the posts a great place to sit and rest. "Alice was sitting on one when Mr. Peter Dunkle, a neighbor, came by and said, 'Little girl, run in the house and tell your mother that President Lincoln was shot last night in Washington.'"

In August 1954, the structure became the home



Jordan Vigus lies at rest in the Ninth Street Cemetery overlooking Erie Avenue in Logansport. His marker is by the tall red granite obelisk marked "VIGUS" at the top of the seventeen stone steps. Photos by Tom Castaldi

(Shultz) of the Cass County Historical Society. It has been occupied by the Rich Voorhees Studio photography business since 1967. The historical marker mounted near the front door recognizes the significance of the Vigus home. Inside the studio hangs a large framed likeness of Jordan Vigus. Painted by George Winter, the original is in the possession of the Cass County Historical Society.

Jordan Vigus died on September 27, 1860, a Thursday afternoon at 4:00 p.m. The funeral took place from his 11th Street residence on September 29, 1860 at 3:00 p.m. with services by the Masonic order. In the last eight years of his life, he suffered a paralysis that is said to have contributed to his death.

In his gentle obituary he is remembered as a man who "During his residence at Corydon, Indianapolis and Logansport, Col. Vigus filled many places of trust, in all of which he discharged his duty honorably to himself and with satisfaction to the public. In his habits the deceased was regular and simple. He indulged in none of the fashionable vices of his day."

There is a military drum in the Cass County Historical Society collection presented to Jordan Vigus by Major Samuel McFadden. On its sides, artist Wils Berry painted Civil War era flags and a classic federal eagle. Actually, it is a drum used in the Mexican War [1846-48] that was given to Jordan Vigus. It is worthy of note that Col. Vigus is buried next to his sixteen-year-old son Horace B. Vigus, a Civil War drummer boy who fell at Lost Mountain in 1864. The youngster's marker reveals that he was a veteran of Company B. 128th Indiana Infantry born July 18, 1847 and died June 3, 1864. The Colonel, his wife and son rest along side one

another in Logansport's Ninth Street Cemetery.

The Ninth Street Cemetery overlooks today's Erie Avenue, a street constructed on the channel following the Wabash & Erie Canal line. To find the gravesite travel east on Market Street to Logansport's Fifth street. Here from the southeast enters Erie Avenue. (This is the place where the Wabash & Erie entering from the east made a sharp turn to the north approaching the Logansport landing.) Travel easterly on Erie Avenue to Ninth Street and turn north one block to Spencer Street. Parking is readily available and the cemetery is on the east side. Ascend the seventeen stone steps and notice the tall red granite obelisk marked "VIGUS". The marker reads: "JORDAN VIGUS/Col 1 Ky Regt/War of 1812/1792-1869. (His marker gives 1869 as the date of death however, other historical records and accounts state that the year was 1860.)

Sources:

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- Logansport Pharos Tribune**
- Looker, Brian. Executive director Cass County Historical Society
- Report of the Adjunct General 1864-65, War of 1812 Pension Files**
- Shultz, Mary. **Old Homes of Logansport**
- Voorhees, Rick. Voorhees Studio

"Canawlers At Rest" will be a monthly feature. Several CSI members have written articles to get it off to a good start, but we are seeking other volunteers. Articles about canal personalities should include if possible their birth and death dates, a picture of the person and the tombstone, a map of the cemetery or directions how to find the grave site, the obituary with name of newspaper, city, date of paper. Articles will vary in length by material available. Please check with headquarters to avoid duplication (260) 432-0279.