

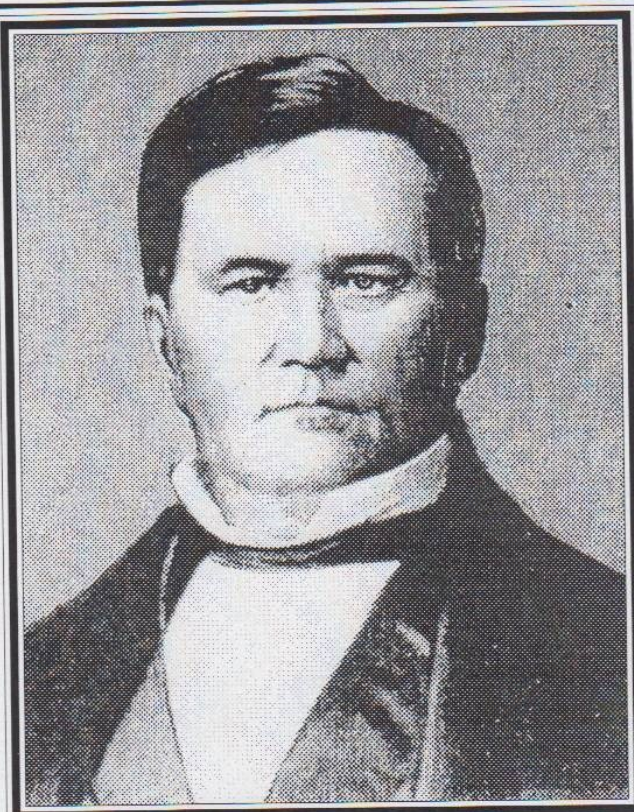
## CANAWLERS AT REST

# GOVERNOR DAVID WALLACE

b. April 24, 1799  
d. Sept. 4, 1859

By Sue Simerman

Photo courtesy Indiana 1930



David Wallace was born on April 24, 1799, near Lewistown, Mifflin County, Pa. (founded 1795) that is in the central part of the state along the Juniata River. At a young age he and his parents, Andrew and Eleanor Campbell Wallace, moved to Ohio. David was the oldest of eight children. His siblings were Catherine, Benjamin Franklin, John Thompson, Wm. Henson, Thomas Jefferson, Washington and John Milton. Two of his brothers also became involved with politics. They were Benjamin Franklin Wallace, born June 7, 1804 at Hamilton, Ohio, and William Henson Wallace, born July 19, 1811 at Troy, Ohio.

The Wallace family developed a friendship with the family of General Wm. Henry Harrison (1773-1841) and through this connection with their neighbor being a representative to Congress, young David became a cadet at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. In 1821 he graduated as a second lieutenant and became a teacher of mathematics. Within a few years he moved to Brookville, Indiana, to study law. He started his practice, was soon involved in politics and was elected to the Indiana House of Representatives in 1828.

In 1830 David moved to Covington, Indiana, and opened his law practice. He became the lieutenant governor of Indiana as a Whig in 1831 with Noah Noble being governor. They were both reelected in 1834.

David Wallace was lieutenant governor during the years 1831-1837 when Indiana was in the throes of Canal Fever and the want of internal improvements. Governor Noble (1831-1837) delivered a message during the legislative session of 1831-1832 saying; "it is our interest and duty . . . to apply the means placed at our control by the national government, to their legitimate objects . . . to improve our rivers, and by making lateral roads and canals to facilitate the conveyance of the various commodities of our state."

A simple ground breaking ceremony for the Wabash and Erie Canal was held in Fort Wayne on Feb. 22, 1832, along the St. Joseph River, which would furnish the water for the feeder canal. Construction was done at a leisurely pace but costs put a strain on available funds. The assembly of 1833-34 removed restrictions on loans and this led to heavy borrowing and a financial hole for the state. This legislative session also established a state bank and ordered a number of canal surveys.

During the assembly of 1834-35 persistent groups pressured for their own canals, Vigo County petitioned for the Wabash and Erie Canal to be extended to Evansville, a central canal was recommended, also the canal supporters along the Whitewater River pushed for their own canal. Fifteen railroad companies asked for charters, and others wanted turnpikes. More surveys



were authorized. The Fourth of July saw a celebration at Fort Wayne of the completion of thirty-two miles of canal between Huntington and Fort Wayne. Political candidates had learned if they wanted an elective office they needed to be agreeable to all internal improvements, so great was the enthusiasm of the populace. Meanwhile the public debt was growing.

Governor Noah Noble signed a bill into law on January 27, 1836 that provided for eight projects; the Whitewater Canal, the Central Canal, an extension of the Wabash and Erie Canal, a railroad from Madison to Indianapolis, a macadamized road from New Albany to Vincennes, another survey of a route from Jeffersonville to Crawfordsville, clearing of obstructions in the Wabash River, and a survey from the W & E Canal in Fort Wayne to Michigan City for a canal or a railroad. \$10 million was borrowed and the people were assured they would not be paying any additional taxes. Many celebrations followed.

Hard reality quickly ensued, a 5% interest rate was more than the state could bring in through taxation. All projects were underway at the same time and it quickly became evident there would be many years of high expense during construction. There were some legislators who said they had not expected to be doing all projects at once. The idea for the simultaneous method had been proposed by Lieutenant Governor David Wallace.

Brookville celebrated in the summer of 1836 that the longed for Whitewater Canal was finally going to become a reality. Governor Noble and Lieutenant Governor Wallace both gave orations at the dinner to recognize the special occasion.

Some concerned citizens across the state had become worried about so many improvements being done at the same time. They felt a few projects should have priority so some money would be coming into the treasury. This proposal was defeated.

The year 1837 showed 217 miles of canal under construction. The Indianapolis 'Sentinel' said critically of Lieut. Governor Wallace, "He proposed . . . instead of selecting one or two works, to dig a *hole*, here and there, in *every one* of them, and to concentrate all the energies of the state upon the several *holes*, until they were all dug!"

By the end of 1837, 62 miles of the Wabash & Erie Canal between Fort Wayne and LaFountain's Creek were having regular boat trips. Navigation to Logansport was soon expected.

The Panic of 1837 caused the Board of Internal

Improvements to cut back, but they would not classify projects by priority. There was a clamor for classification and the proponents put up John Dumont for governor in 1837.

David Wallace defeated John Dumont by 9000 votes to become Indiana's 6th governor. He won the election by his support of internal improvements. The Indianapolis 'Sentinel' critically said he was "one of the craziest, most ultra, and 'whole hog' advocates of the system."

Governor Wallace was looking forward to prosperity for the people of Indiana when he offered a compromise:

"...to concentrate the means of the state on portions of each work at the same time, commencing at the most profitable and commercial points to be designated by the legislature, or Board of Internal Improvement; to complete these portions . . . before others are touched; and as soon as completed put into use, in order that the state may be realizing something from them whilst she . . . is finishing the remainder. In this way conflicting interests may be reconciled, harmony preserved, and the great mass of the people enlisted on the side of our Improvements."

The legislature did not raise taxes or make any decisions on solving the problems of heavy debt brought on by the internal improvements. The board responded by spending more and letting more contracts. Chief Engineer Jesse L. Williams wanted the board of improvements to follow a policy of coordination, but this is not what happened.

Gov. Wallace's administration had a difficult time on their hands, which included a quarreling legislature, extravagant spending coming to a halt, promissory notes that could not be paid and business almost coming to a halt with the Depression of 1837. He gave a message to the legislature in 1838 saying,

"Never before - I speak advisedly - never before have you witnessed a period in our local history which more urgently calls for the exercising of all the soundest and best attributes of grave and patriotic legislation than the present."

During his tenure as governor in 1838, David Wallace asked Major General John Tipton to lead the Potawatomi Indians from their village near Twin Lakes in Marshall County to Kansas. There had been some skirmishes between the Indians and the settlers and Wallace called out the state militia. The group was hastily assembled and cabins burned. There were not enough horses, wagons, fresh food or medical attention and the



"Trail of Death" led to the death of many, especially infants. John Tipton did not like the haste that was taken, but he did help distribute blankets and clothing before they left.

See "Canawlers At Rest: John Tipton" in the May 2006 Hoosier Packet for a map and more about the Indian removal.

Although the improvement works were moving along at the end of 1838, a cloud of doom was hanging over the state. The governor had decisions to make.

Governor Wallace spoke to the legislature of 1838-39 saying,

"the truth is, and it would be folly to conceal it - we have our hands full . . . to preserve the credit and character of the state unimpaired . "

He went on to review land sales, money borrowing and thought Indiana's finances were doing well. In truth, bankruptcy was looming on the horizon.

Work was done to shore up the failing improvements projects. The six man board and three canal commissioners were replaced with a three person elected board. The board members; Noah Noble, Samuel Lewis and John Graham allocated their funds to five canals; the Wabash and Erie, the Whitewater Canal, the Central Canal, the Erie-Michigan and the Cross-Cut Canal. The legislature changed the fund commissioners to a two man board appointed by the governor. These two men, Lucius H. Scott and Milton Stapp, were given their jobs by Governor David Wallace. Neither man lived up to expectation.

The first Whitewater Canal boat, "Ben Franklin," arrived at Brookville from Lawrenceburg, June 1839. The Wabash & Erie Canal was now navigable for ninety miles. The Central Canal was almost completed from Noblesville to Martinsville.

All work was stopped in the late summer of 1839, except for the Wabash & Erie Canal and some work on the Whitewater Canal. Gov. Wallace's message to the legislature in December, 1839 was forthright:

"The failure to procure funds, as we had a right to expect from the extensive sale of bonds effected in the early part of the season, has led to great and unusual embarrassments, not only among the contractors and laborers, but also among the people. The state has, in consequence, fallen largely in debt to the former, and is without means of discharging it ... What shall be done with the public works? Shall they be abandoned altogether? I hope not. In my opinion, the policy of the state, in the present emergency, should be, first, to provide against the dilapidation of those portions of the works left in an unfinished state, and, secondly, as

means can be procured, to finish some entirely, and complete others, at least, to points where they may be rendered available or useful to the country."

News spread slowly, gradually details of losses and loans were revealed. Democratic editors took shots against the Whigs who dominated state politics. The *Goshen Democrat* said, "let Governor Wallace make a million by selling 100,000 acres of the land he valued at ten dollars an acre."

Noah Noble who had been governor during the session of 1835-36 took the brunt of the criticism for what had gone wrong. The Internal Improvements Act of 1836 had caught everyone's fancy and moved along without a careful look. Failure came and it took everyone a long time to fully understand what had happened. The legislature of 1839-40 asked for studies, reports and investigations looking for others to blame.

Governor David Wallace lost his bid for a second term. His opponent Samuel Bigger was elected governor in 1840.

David Wallace stayed in politics and was elected a U. S. Representative in 1841 to serve from March 4, 1841, to March 3, 1843, for Indiana's 6th district. He was the man to cast the deciding vote on March 3, 1843, whether \$30,000 would be given for a telegraph line between Washington D. C. and Baltimore to test Samuel Morse's telegraph. Because the people of Indiana thought he was extravagant in spending, they did not reelect him. They voted for William J. Brown.

Wallace was the chairman of the Whig State Central Committee in 1846. The year 1850 saw him as a member of the Indiana state constitutional convention from Marion county. He was elected Judge of Common Pleas of Marion county in 1856-1859 and was known to be just and fair.

Wallace was the father of four sons by his first wife Esther Test (1806-1834). Lew Wallace (1827-1905) is the one that is the most well known. When Lew was seven years old his mother passed away from illness and Zerelda Sanders Wallace (1817-1901) became his stepmother. Zerelda Wallace was the first president of the Indiana Women's Christian Temperance Union and Vice-president of the National Women's Suffrage Association. Her father was Dr. John Sanders of Indianapolis (1791-1850). The state bought his home after his death and used it as the governor's mansion.

Lew Wallace was a soldier, lawyer and a general during the Civil War, but he is best known as the author of *Ben-Hur*. The following is a memory of his father,



David Wallace. "Almost the earliest of my recollections is the gray uniform of Cadet (David) Wallace. The small tail and shining bullet-buttons of the coat captured my childish fancy. None of the good man's after honors exalted him in my eyes like that scant garment."

Wallace was a Methodist by faith. He also was a Freemason.

David Wallace died suddenly in Indianapolis, September 4, 1859 and is interred at Crown Hill Cemetery, Indianapolis. His grave is located in Sec. 3 number 78 on the walking tour map. Zerelda Sanders Wallace is buried there also.

**SOURCES:**

Bodurtha, Arthur L. *History of Miami County, IN.* Vol. 1. Chicago, IL: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1914.

Fatout, Paul. *Indiana Canals.* West Lafayette, IN.: Purdue Univ. Press, 1972

*Indiana 1930.* Indianapolis, IN.: The Board of Publishing Printing, 1930.

Montgomery, D. H. *The Beginners American History.* Boston, MA.: Ginn and Co., Publishers, 1903.

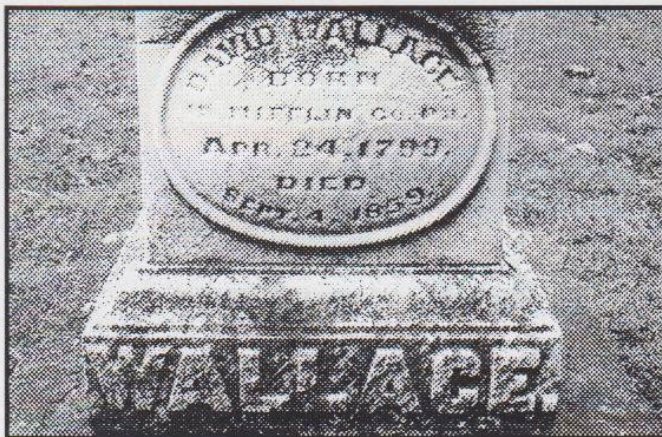
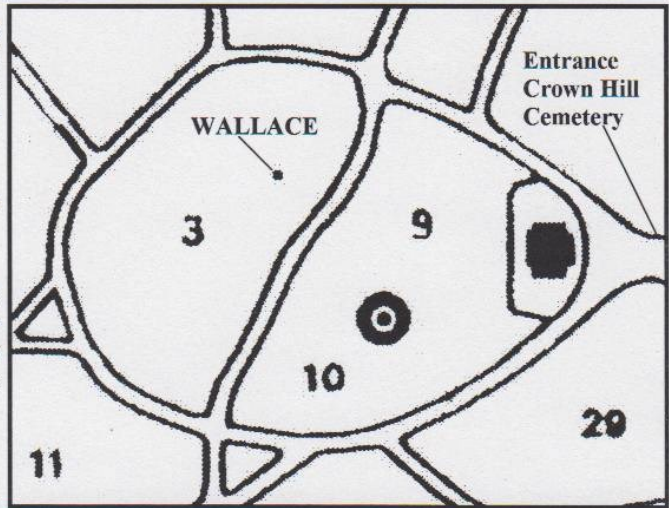
Sanford, Wayne L. *Memories of the Past: A Tour of Historic Crown Hill Cemetery.* Indianapolis, IN.: Crown Hill Cemetery, 1996.

Stormont, Gil R. *History of Gibson Co., In.: Her People, Industries and Institutions.* Indianapolis, IN.: B. F. Bowen and Co. Inc., 1914.

**INTERNET SOURCES:**

Ben-Hur.com - General Lew Wallace Study and Museum (Lew Wallace quote and genealogy)

Indiana Historical Bureau - INDIANA GOVERNORS



This medium-sized obelisk marks the grave of Governor David Wallace (1799-1859) in Section 3 of Crown Hill Cemetery in Indianapolis, Indiana. Nearby is the grave of Zerelda G. Wallace (1817-1901), his second wife. Photos by Bob Schmidt