

CANAWLERS
AT REST

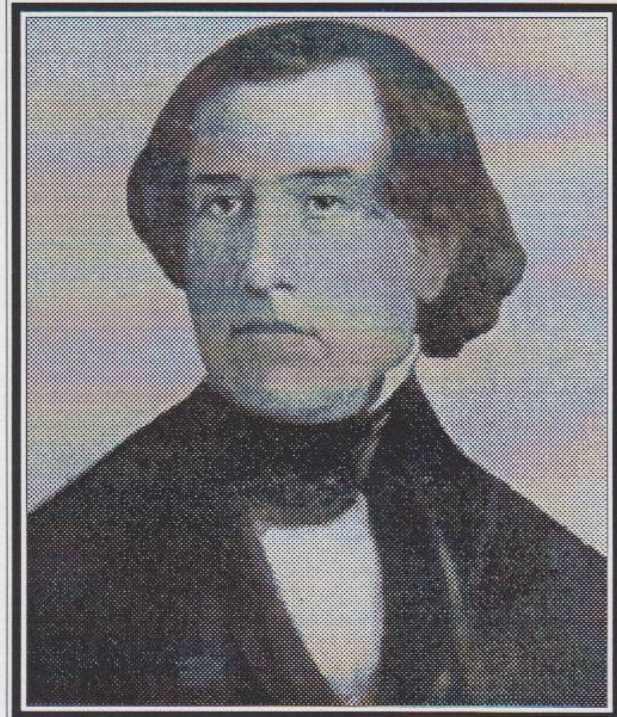
**GOVERNOR
JAMES
WHITCOMB**

b. December 1, 1795

d. October 4, 1852

By Sue Simerman

Portrait from Indiana 1930. Indianapolis, IN/The Board of Public Printing. 1930.



James Whitcomb was born December 1, 1795 near Windsor, Vermont, which is located on the Connecticut River. His father moved the family and settled on a farm near Cincinnati, Ohio, when James was quite young.

As a young boy James had a thirst for knowledge. He would borrow books and read as much as possible while helping on the farm and attending school on an irregular basis. He managed to educate himself to the point he could go to Transylvania University at Lexington, Kentucky. By teaching during vacation breaks he was able to pay for tuition.

James continued his education by studying law. He was admitted to the bar at Fayette county, Kentucky in 1822.

In 1824 James settled in Bloomington, Indiana, where he commenced a law practice and became well respected. He was the prosecuting attorney for Monroe county, Indiana, from 1826 to 1829, having been appointed by Indiana Governor James B. Ray (Indiana's 4th governor 1825-1831). This allowed him to travel many miles around Indiana and to meet people of note.

James Whitcomb was elected to the Indiana state senate in 1830-1831 and re-elected in 1833. He served on the judiciary committee and was very influential.

President Andrew Jackson appointed James

Commissioner of the General Land Office and he served in this position from 1836 to 1841. He learned Spanish and French so he would be able to read the old land grants.

James' next move was to Terre Haute, Indiana. There he resumed his law practice and wrote a pamphlet, "Facts for the People," in 1843. It was a highly recognized argument against a protective tariff.

Also in 1843 James was nominated for governor of Indiana at the Democratic State Convention. He defeated incumbent Governor Samuel Bigger (Indiana's seventh governor 1840-1843) by a majority vote of 2,013. He was re-elected for a second term by defeating his Whig opponent Joseph G. Marshall.

Indiana was deep in debt during Governor Whitcomb's term of office. He pointed out in a message December 2, 1845 that more than two thirds of the state tax paid by the people was given to the payment of public debt. This debt was incurred by the extensive public works under the Internal Improvements Act of 1836. The commissioners were empowered to borrow 10 million dollars for 25 years.

On the first Monday in December 1845 Governor Whitcomb asked for a survey for the southern division of the Wabash and Erie Canal. This division extended from Terre Haute to Evansville, Indiana. The act was approved on January 19, 1846.

Burdened with financial difficulties, the governor also had to cope with war. On May 13, 1846, the U. S. declared war on Mexico. Five regiments of infantry were organized in Indiana. The son of Governor David Wallace (Indiana's sixth governor 1837-1845) was studying law and turned away from his books to form a group of Marion county volunteers. First Lieutenant Lew Wallace and his company heard an address from Governor Whitcomb before getting into farm wagons and going to Edinburgh to continue their journey by rail.

The year 1847 held much in store for Governor Whitcomb. Indianapolis became an official city in February and later, on October first, the Madison Railroad had its last spike driven and a great celebration ensued. A circus was in Indianapolis at the time and its band and bugler led the governor through the streets. He gave an empowering speech from the train roof. There was boisterous activity and fireworks. This probably seemed an extreme expenditure to him since he once reproved the state auditor for wasting a match on a cigar instead of lighting it at the grate fire. But these things did not compare to the importance of his setting in motion things to help solve the state's financial problems.

Indiana had hope and an outlook that things would improve financially. The bondholders of the Wabash and Erie Canal hired attorney Charles Butler of New York to represent them. After hearing Butler's suggestion to surrender the canal with unsold land and tolls to the bondholders as part payment of the debt Governor Whitcomb recommended to the state legislature that it be passed. This would pay for one-half the existing debt and the rest would be paid by the issuance of bonds at a lower rate of interest. The "Butler Bills" were passed and on July 31, 1847, the Wabash and Erie Canal was handed over to the Board of Trustees—Charles Butler of New York City, Thomas H. Blake of Terre Haute, Indiana, and Nathan B. Palmer, who was appointed later during the recess of the Legislature. (See document in the next column). This was something to be excited about after the years of concern and worry over the heavy debt of the state. Although Governor Whitcomb and the legislature were a little slow at deciding how to decrease the debt, he later was likened to Moses because he helped to lead Indiana out of financial ruin.

The canal "trustees promptly made several appointments. (Jesse Lynch) Williams was named the Chief Engineer of the canal and his brother-in-law, William J. Ball of Terre Haute, was selected as Resident Engineer. At Blake's urging, the canal headquarters was moved to Terre Haute; Blake became the Resident Trustee. Butler returned to New York where he was a liaison man for the creditors. Blake's total dedication to

THE STATE OF INDIANA

To all to whom these presents shall concern send Greeting.

WHEREAS the General Assembly of the said State at their session commenced on the first Monday of December in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and forty-five did pass a certain act, entitled "An Act to provide for the funded debt of the State of Indiana, and for the completion of the Wabash & Erie Canal to Evansville: which said Act was approved by James Whitcomb, Governor of the said State, on the nineteenth day of January eighteen hundred and forty-six reference being thereunto had will more fully appear.

AND WHEREAS the General Assembly of the said State, at their session commenced on the first Monday of December in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and forty-six, did pass a certain other Act, entitled "An Act supplementary to an "Act to provide for the funded debt of the State of Indiana, and for the completion of the Wabash & Erie Canal to Evansville, approved January the nineteenth eighteen hundred and forty-six" which said last mentioned act was approved by James Whitcomb, Governor of the said State, on the 27th day of January one thousand eight hundred and forty-seven, reference being thereto had will more fully appear.

AND WHEREAS the Bonds of the said State of Indiana referred to and contemplated in and by the aforesaid acts of the said General Assembly of more than five millions five hundred and forty-five thousand dollars of principal exclusive of interest, have been surrendered for exchange and cancellation as contemplated by the said acts and the holders of not less than four millions of dollars of said Bonds exclusive of interest, have subscribed twenty per cent on said amount, prior to the date of these presents, and notice thereof has been given to the Governor of the said State.

AND WHEREAS the subscribers aforesaid towards the completion of the said canal in the said acts mentioned, have in pursuance of the said acts, and in accordance with the provisions of the same elected Charles Butler of the City of New York and Thomas H. Blake two discreet persons and Trustees both of whom are citizens of the United States one of them towit Thomas H. Blake is a citizen and resident of the State of Indiana.

AND WHEREAS notice of the said election together with a copy of the said subscription to the said canal was given to James Whitcomb Governor of the said State on or about the twenty-second day of May last: and the said Governor in pursuance and by virtue of the said acts, did thereupon on the ninth day of June A. D. eighteen hundred and forty-seven, during the recess of the Legislature of said State appoint Nathan B. Palmer a citizen of the State of Indiana as a third discreet person to act as Trustee with the said Charles Butler and Thomas H. Blake and to constitute with them a Board to be known by the style and description of "The Board of

his work is well documented. In addition to managing daily affairs and traveling to construction sites around the state (the closest of which was about 40 miles), he wrote detailed letters to Butler in New York several times a week" according to a CSI canal tour publication by Michael B. McCormick.

Under Blake's supervision, the Wabash and Erie Canal was pushed forward as rapidly as possible. It reached Terre Haute from Coal Creek in October, 1849. This was cause for celebration. A cannon boomed, a excursion trip was made down the canal, a band played, and a banquet was held at the Prairie House. Then floods and cholera caused such delays that the canal was not completed to Evansville until the spring of 1853. It was the longest canal every built in the United States.

However, "from the viewpoint of the bondholders to whom it was deeded, the canal proved to be a 'white elephant.' ...they lost heavily. In the twenty-seven years of their control, the expenditures for construction, repairs, and other incidents amounted to more than \$8,000,000. The receipts amounted to less than \$5,500,000.

It was in James' house that the Raper Commandery of the Freemasons was organized and it held its meetings there for a while. James reached the highest rank of York Rite Masons on May 20, 1848. He was the first man to be knighted in Indiana.

As a man that greatly understood the need for education, Governor Whitcomb pushed for the need of having schools for everyone. He signed the Common School Bill on January 17, 1849. He was also instrumental in creating benevolent institutions; one for the mentally ill and another for the education of the deaf and blind.

In 1849 James Whitcomb resigned as Indiana's governor when he was elected as a Democrat to the United States Senate. He began serving in this capacity on March 4, 1849 and continued until his death in 1852. In the Senate he was chairman for the Commission on Claims and also on the Commission on Public Buildings.

Having married late in life, James' only daughter, Martha, was only 5 years old upon his death. She later married Claude Matthews on January 1, 1868. Matthews also was a politician. He served in the Indiana legislature, was secretary of state, and was elected Indiana's twenty-second governor in 1892.

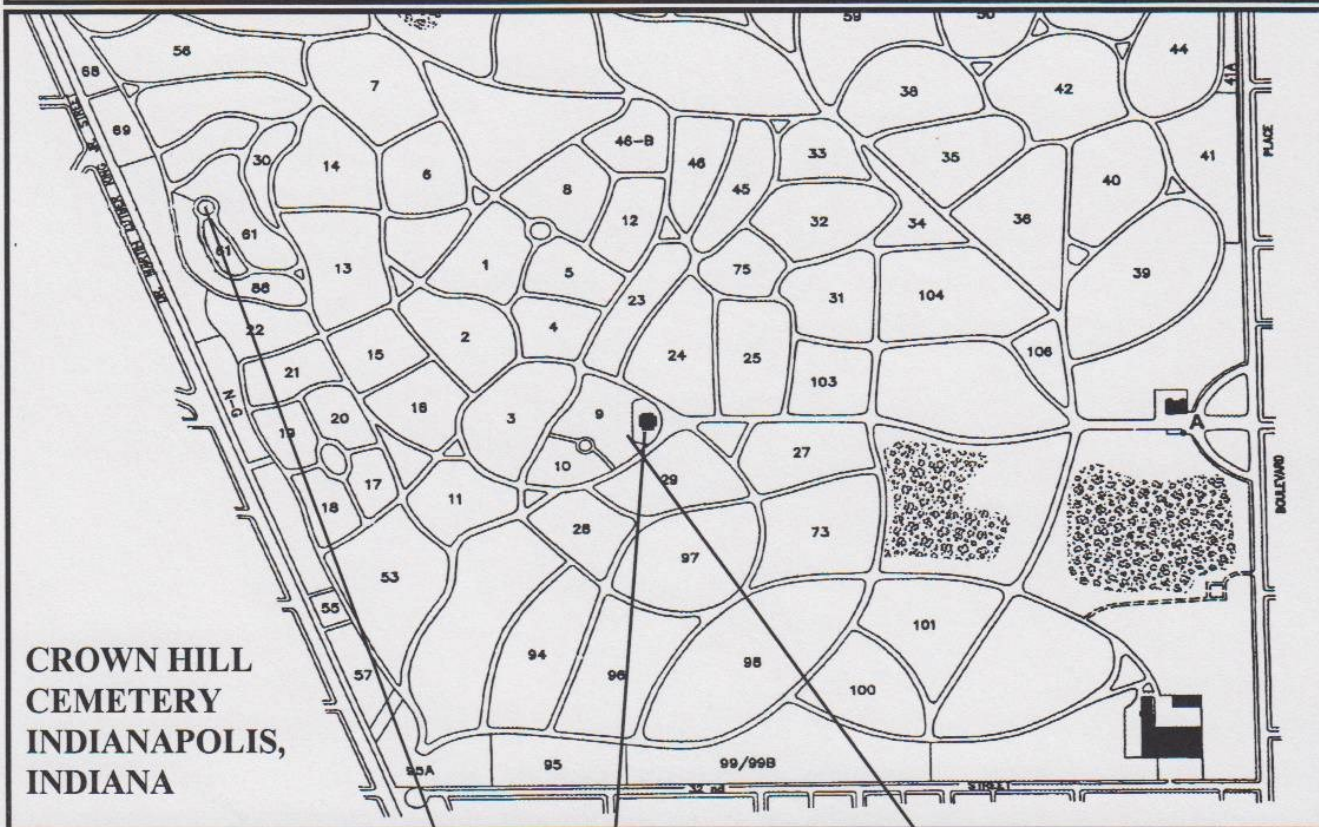
James Whitcomb died in New York City on October 4, 1852, having been in poor health for a long time. His body was returned to Indiana for burial at Greenlawn Cemetery in Indianapolis. Forty years later his

Trustees of the Wabash & Erie Canal" which said Board is in and by the said acts made and created a body politic and corporate by the name and style aforesaid.

AND WHEREAS the said three Trustees have before entering on their duties, each taken the oath required by the said acts, and have also each of them, given bond with surety, which has been approved by the Governor in the penal sum of one hundred thousand dollars conditioned as is required by the said acts.

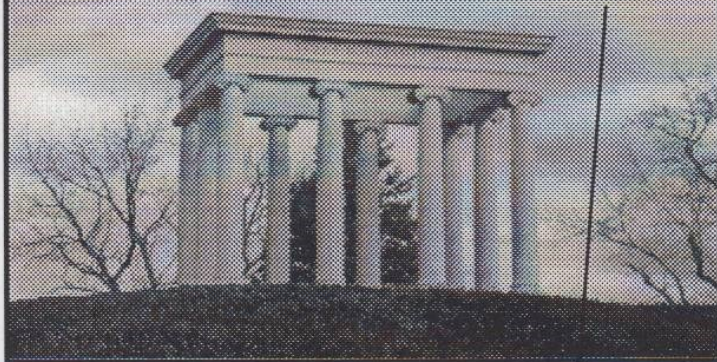
AND WHEREAS the said Governor is satisfied from proper evidence submitted to him that Bonds to the amount of more than five millions, five hundred and forty-five thousand dollars exclusive of interest have been surrendered for exchange and cancellation, and are in the hands of the agent of the State for that purpose and that five percent on certain of the said Bonds, amounting exclusive of interest to more than four millions of dollars has been paid over by the said subscribers to the said Charles Butler and Thomas H. Blake the two Trustees elected by them as herein before mentioned, as provided and required in and by the said acts.

NOW THEREFORE KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS, that the State of Indiana, in consideration of the premises and in pursuance of the provisions of the said acts, and in fulfillment of the pledge therein given by the said State, and in consideration also of one dollar to the said State in hand paid by the said "The Board of Trustees of the Wabash & Erie Canal" hath given, granted, bargained, sold, conveyed, confirmed, as signed and transferred and doth by these presents give, grant bargain, sell, convey, confirm, assign and transfer unto the said "The Board of Trustees of the Wabash & Erie Canal" their successors and assigns forever, upon the terms and conditions in said acts named, the bed of the Wabash and Erie Canal and its extension by whatever other name the same may now be designated, finished and to be finished from the Ohio State Line to Evansville including its banks, margins, tow paths, side cuts, feeders, basins, right-of-way, lots dams, water power, and structures and all materials provided or collected for its construction, and all the property, right, title and interest of the State in and to the same, and all its appurtenances AND ALSO ALL THE LAND AND LOTS (NOT SOLD OR DISPOSED OF) HERETOFORE GIVEN, GRANTED, OR DONATED, BY THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT TO THE STATE TO AID IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SAID CANAL OR ANY PART OF IT OR WHICH MAY HEREAFTER BY ACQUIRED UNDER OR BY REASON OF ANY EXISTING GRANT, and all moneys due and to grow due and remaining unpaid on account of any sale or sales heretofore made of any canal lands so donated, and all monied due or to grow due on account of any existing leases or any waterpower or other privilege on said canal its sidecuts, feeders, basins or other appurtenances. TO HAVE AND TO HOLD unto the said "The Board of Trustees of the Wabash & Erie Canal" and to their successors and assigns forever, as

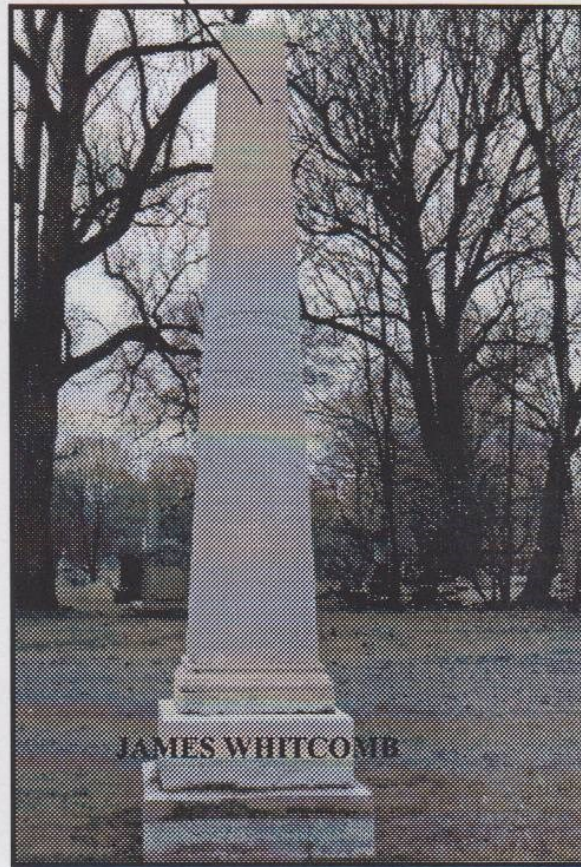
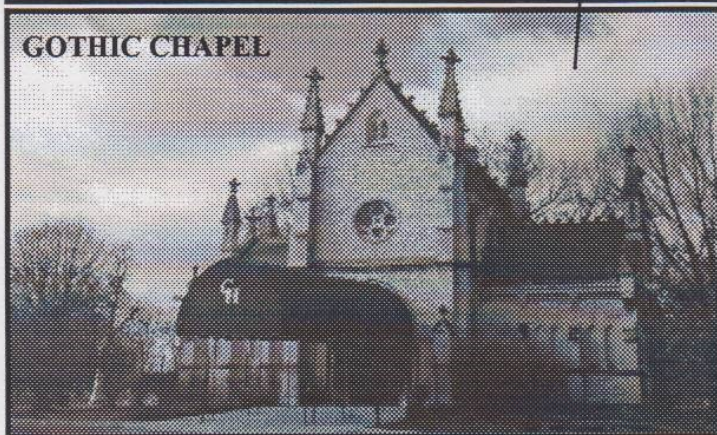


CROWN HILL
CEMETERY
INDIANAPOLIS,
INDIANA

JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY Photos by Sue Simerman



GOthic CHAPEL



JAMES WHITCOMB

body was re-interred at Crown Hill Cemetery at 700 W. 38th Street in Indianapolis, IN. He is buried in Section 9 Lot 38. His grave is behind the Gothic chapel near the marker for Gov. Oliver Morton (Indiana's fourteenth governor 1864-1867.) His obelisk marker is difficult to read, but two things stand out; James Whitcomb and self taught. I could read b 1795 - self taught - at ___ Ind - general land office - Gov of In - died Oct 1852 - at the city of N York - while ___ state

At the time of his death in 1852, James was vice-president of the American Bible Society to which he donated his wealth. He gave his extensive library to De Pauw University at Greencastle, IN.

James Whitcomb influenced many lives and held the respect of many individuals as seen by the following:

In 1902 a celebration took place marking the completion of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Indianapolis. It is a stone shaft of Indiana limestone rising 284 feet with a statue of Victory at the top. On the outer area of the plaza are four subordinate bronze statues of men who represent four periods of Indiana history. They are George Rogers Clark, Wm. Henry Harrison, Oliver P. Morton and James Whitcomb. Gov. Whitcomb's statue is for the time that Indiana was involved with the Mexican War. It is at the south west edge of Monument Circle. The bronze statue was done by John H. Mahoney, an Indiana resident. The monument was dedicated on May 15 of that year with Governor Winfield T. Durbin (Indiana's twenty-fourth governor 1900-1904) presiding. Banners were flown, speeches given and music played. On the platform with Governor Durbin was the nationally known and acclaimed Indiana poet, James Whitcomb Riley (1849-1916).

Reuben Riley, a lawyer who was elected to the state legislature in 1844, admired and respected James Whitcomb to the extent that he named his third child in his honor. James Whitcomb Riley is buried beneath a columned Grecian memorial on a high hilltop in Crown Hill Cemetery.

Thomas A. Hendricks (Indiana's sixteenth governor from 1873-1877) said the following of James Whitcomb, "Governor Whitcomb.....declared what he believed to be the truth, and trusted to its influence upon men's minds to bring them into common action. He led legislators because it was safest for them to follow. His manner was grave and serious, his voice was full and musical, and his delivery almost without gesture."

Paul Fatout in his book *Indiana Canals* describes James as follows:

"James Whitcomb, an accomplished lawyer, eloquent speaker, master of French and Spanish, and

fully as the said State can or could be, subject nevertheless to all the existing rights and equities against the State on account of the same or any part thereof, or liabilities of the State growing out of or in relation thereto. UPON TRUST however to hold and apply the said herein above granted and described premises and the tolls and revenues of the said canal and the proceeds and produce of the said lands sold and unsold after first defraying thereout all needful and proper expenditures for repairs attendance and other necessary things appertaining thereto in security and for the uses and purposes particularly declared expressed and set forth in the said several acts of the said General Assembly as by reference to the same will fully and at large appear.

AND IT IS HEREBY declared and provided and these presents are executor and delivered by the said State of Indiana and accepted by the said "The Board of Trustees of the Wabash and Erie Canal", with this express intent, and upon these express conditions, that is to say that these presents, and the grant, conveyance and assignment herein and hereby made, and everything herein contains are designed and intended to the end and for the purpose of fulfilling the directions and requirements of the said several acts of the General Assembly of the State of Indiana and upon the terms and conditions therein set forth, according to the force and effect, true intent and meaning of the said several acts, as the same are now in force; and that all and singular the provisions of the said acts, as the same are now in force, touching and concerning the nature, continuance and termination of the trusts herein before declared and set forth, the powers, duties, proceedings and liabilities of the said Trustees; the termination of the offices of the said Trustees and the appointment of new Trustees; the rights, privileges and liabilities of the subscribers in the said acts mentioned, the time to be allowed for the completion of the said canal, the application of the tolls and revenues thereof and of the proceeds of the canal lands in the said Acts mentioned, the powers and rights reserved by the said State of Indiana and all other the provisions of the said several acts as the same are now in force, are to be deemed and taken and are hereby declared to be, a part of these presents with the like force and effect as if the same were herein particularly recited and incorporated, according to the true intent and meaning of the said several provisions.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF the said James Whitcomb Governor of the State of Indiana has caused these presents executed in triplicate to be made patent and the great seal of the State to be hereunto affixed.

Given under my hand at Indianapolis, in the State this 31st day of July in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and forty-seven.

(STATE SEAL) Jas. Whitcomb. By the Governor,
Jno. H. Thompson, Secretary of State.

skillful amateur violinist. A social being, he became known for elaborate entertainments in the governor's mansion, his urbane conviviality aided by distinguished bearing, strong features and black hair in ringlets to his shoulders...A marked idiosyncrasy was a habit of taking snuff according to a meticulous ritual. A satirical observer described such precise tappings of the snuff box, such nice pouncings with thumb and forefinger, such melodious snuffles that his manner when in full costume and under the eye of magnates was equal to Lord Chamberlain's — it made you sneeze to witness it...Another eccentricity was concern for petty economies, like smoking a cigar to the ultimate stub by sticking a pin through it."

SOURCES:

Indiana 1930. Indianapolis, IN: The Board of Public Printing. 1930.

Covert Nolan, Jeannette. *Hoosier City the Story of Indianapolis*. New York, NY: Julian Messner Inc. 1943.

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

McCormick, Michael. *Terre Haute Through The Canal Era*. Terre Haute, IN: Michael McCormick. 1994.

Roll, Charles. *Indiana: One Hundred Fifty Years of American Development*. Chicago, NY: The Lewis Publishing Company. 1931.

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

From the Internet:

Biographical Directory of the U. S. Congress politicalgraveyard.com

Indiana Historical Bureau "Governors' Portraits"

Portrait and Biographical Record. A. W. Bowen & Company. 1890s. countyhistory.com

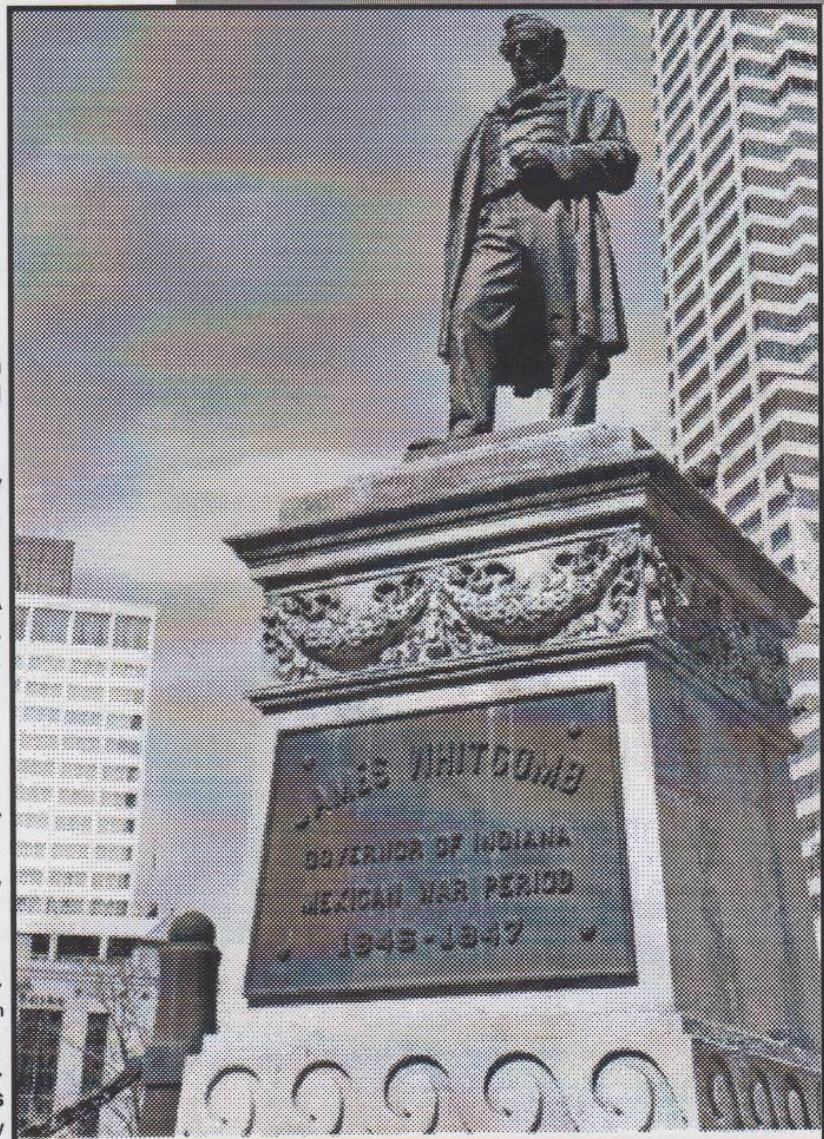
Wilson, James Grant and John Fiske. "Virtual American Biographies" *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*. New York, NY:Appleton & Company. 1887-1889. Virtualology.com

STATE OF INDIANA
OFFICE OF AUDITOR OF STATE

I, J. O. Henderson, Auditor of State of the State of Indiana, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true, and complete copy of Letters Patent executed and issued on the 31st day of July, 1847, by the State of Indiana to the Board of Trustees of the Wabash & Erie Canal as the same appears from the original said Letters Patent now on file in my office and of which I am the legal custodian.

(SEAL) Witness my hand and official seal, at the city of Indianapolis the 23rd day of July, 1892.

J. O Henderson (signature)
Auditor of State.



Statue of James Whitcomb at the Soldiers & Sailors Monument in Indianapolis, Indiana, was erected for his service as Indiana's first war governor.

Photo by Lynette Kross