

CANAWLERS AT REST

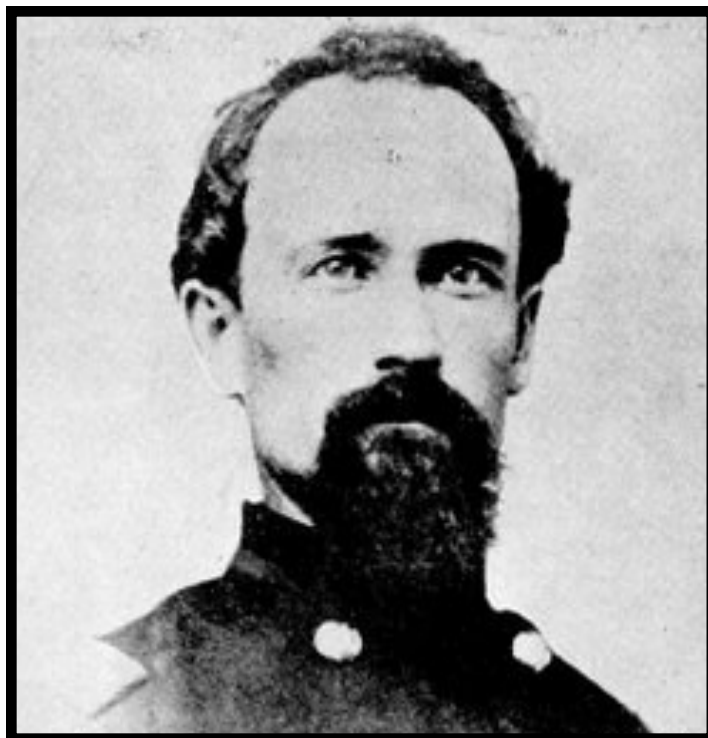
Lieutenant Colonel **WILLIAM MONROE COCKRUM**

Find A Grave Memorial # 25646857

b. December 8, 1837

d. February 24, 1924

By Robert F. & Carolyn I. Schmidt



First hand observations by those who lived at the time of an event usually provide the best sources for historical accuracy. Unfortunately most of the workers and contractors on our canals did not have time or desire to leave written records or even letters about their experiences. A secondary source is someone who lived at a later time but had contact with those who lived in canal times and can tell the story. These sources often provide a different perspective as they look back and analyze an event or decisions that were made at the time with the knowledge of the end results. We are lucky in this case that William M. Cockrum lived during the time of the canal, shipped via it and wrote about it.

In the August 2013 issue of The Hoosier Packet there was an article concerning the potential impact on the finances of the state of Indiana that might have occurred if the election of 1837 had had a different result. What if John Dumont, a lawyer from Vevay, IN. had been elected vs. David Wallace, a lawyer from Brookville? This election occurred at the height of canal fever so Dumont, who favored classifying, prioritizing and limiting the various internal improvement projects, was defeated. Col. William Monroe Cockrum in his *Pioneer History of Indiana* also points out that years earlier, Governor William Hendricks in his message to the Indiana General Assembly in 1822, had said that, although he favored canal construction, the subject should be deferred until the state was better able to afford such projects.

By 1836 canal fever had swept the state and the Mammoth Improvement Bill could pass the legislature only if all areas of the state received some promise of an enhanced transportation system in their region. Although Northern Indiana had the least population, it had the most feasible project: the Wabash & Erie Canal. The southern portion of the state, where the population was the greatest, had a topography that did not lend itself easily for canal projects, so railroads and river improvements were added. Compromises produced multiple projects but also portended potential failure from the start. The financial collapse in 1837 sealed the fate of Indiana's most magnificent plan.

William Cockrum, a resident of Gibson County, has become one of Indiana's foremost authors and historians about this period of Indiana history. As he looked back on early Indiana he tells us a lot about the impact of the canal in southern Indiana.

Gibson County, located in the southwest pocket of the state, was established on March 9, 1813 and named for John Gibson, Secretary of Indiana Territory from 1801-1816. Some of the final construction of the Wabash & Erie Canal was completed there in the 1850s. Towns were platted as the canal moved through the county. Dongola, Francisco, and Port Gibson were just some of them along the canal.



The Wabash & Erie Canal entered Gibson County on its northeast side at Dongola where William M. Cockran had a warehouse and shipped tobacco. It proceeded south west to Francisco and onto Port Gibson. The only major structure along this route was Aqueduct 17 at Dongola over the Patoka River. The minor structures were Culverts 198-208 and Road Bridges 149-154.

From Port Gibson the canal continued south and then turned south-east and proceeded into Warrick County. The 1027 acre Pigeon Reservoir was constructed to the northwest of Port Gibson and retained water from Pigeon Creek to supply water to the canal. From Port Gibson to Warrick County there were Locks 67-71, Culverts 209-214, and Road Bridges 155-156. All of these locks were made of timber.

The Cockrums lived in Oakland City south of Dongola and east of Francisco. Before the canal they flat boated south down the Patoka, Wabash, Ohio, and Mississippi Rivers.

THE HOOSIER PACKET - DECEMBER 2013

We need to explore William's background to understand his credentials. James Washington Cockrum, William's father, was born in Buncombe county, North Carolina in 1799. He then traveled west into Tennessee and there married Sarah "Sallie" Barrett in October 1818. They moved to Gibson County, Indiana and settled on a farm near the current town of Francisco. A few years later they moved just east of current Oakland City. The property they purchased in 1827 was originally settled by Jesse Houchins.

Transportation at that time was very primitive. Rivers were the only practical means to take excess farm produce to market. In 1834 James Cockrum, a farmer, decided to load several flat boats on the Potoka river near Dongola, which was 2½ miles north of Oakland. Taking his wife, Sarah Barrett Cockrum, and their 5 children with him, they headed south by flatboat via the Wabash, Ohio and Mississippi rivers for New Orleans. Perhaps he and his family were moving south to be near his widowed mother since his father had died in Granada, Mississippi in 1830. She was living near Yazoo City, Mississippi. Unfortunately on this trip James' wife died at Yazoo City on May 4, 1834. Then in 1835 his mother also died there.

Years earlier James' wife's family, the Barretts, had moved from Tennessee into Pike and Gibson counties in Indiana. After his wife and mother had died he returned with his family to Gibson county in 1835. James, now age 36 with a family of five small children, did the practical thing and married Sarah's younger sister, Judah P. Barrett, who was only 22. James and Judah's first child born was William Monroe Cockrum, our subject, who was born December 8, 1837. Eventually the only child to survive from his earlier marriage was James Monroe Cockrum, who was born March 26, 1828. Both boys were raised in Oakland City, Gibson county. Later William worked in his brother James' general store where they dealt in pork products and leaf tobacco.

Also in 1835 James W. Cockrum purchased the land occupied by Oakland from his brother-in-law, Richard Barrett. From time to time James continued to operate flat boats and he owned two steamboats, *Otsego* and *Nile*, that were used on the southern cotton trade.

James Cockrum was the father of the town of Oakland, which was officially plotted in January 1856. Named for a grove of oak trees nearby, the name was changed to Oakland City because there was already a town in Marion county called Oakland. James became interested in politics and in 1848 and 1851 was elected as representative from

Gibson county as a Whig to the Indiana legislature.

The Cockrum family became heavily involved in the underground railroad during the 1850s. In his book entitled *The History of the Underground Railroad* Col. William Cockrum writes: "We had a barn built of peeled hickory logs, 40 feet square, and it was floored with thick planks so we could use horses in tramping wheat on it. Under the floor we had a cellar that we used for storing potatoes, turnips and apples. It was in this cellar of the barn where the escaping slaves were kept before being passed on to the next station farther north." Many slaves traveling north made a stop in the Cockrum barn.

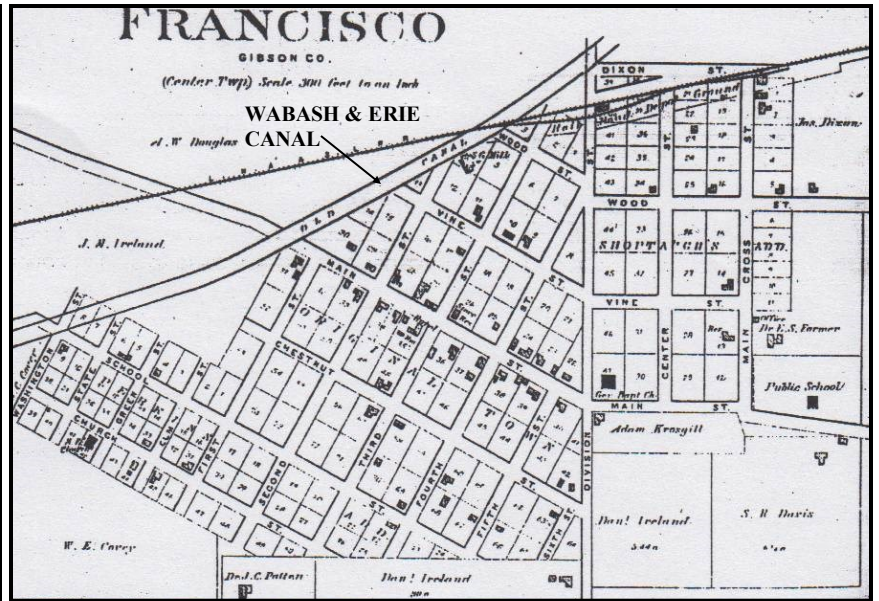
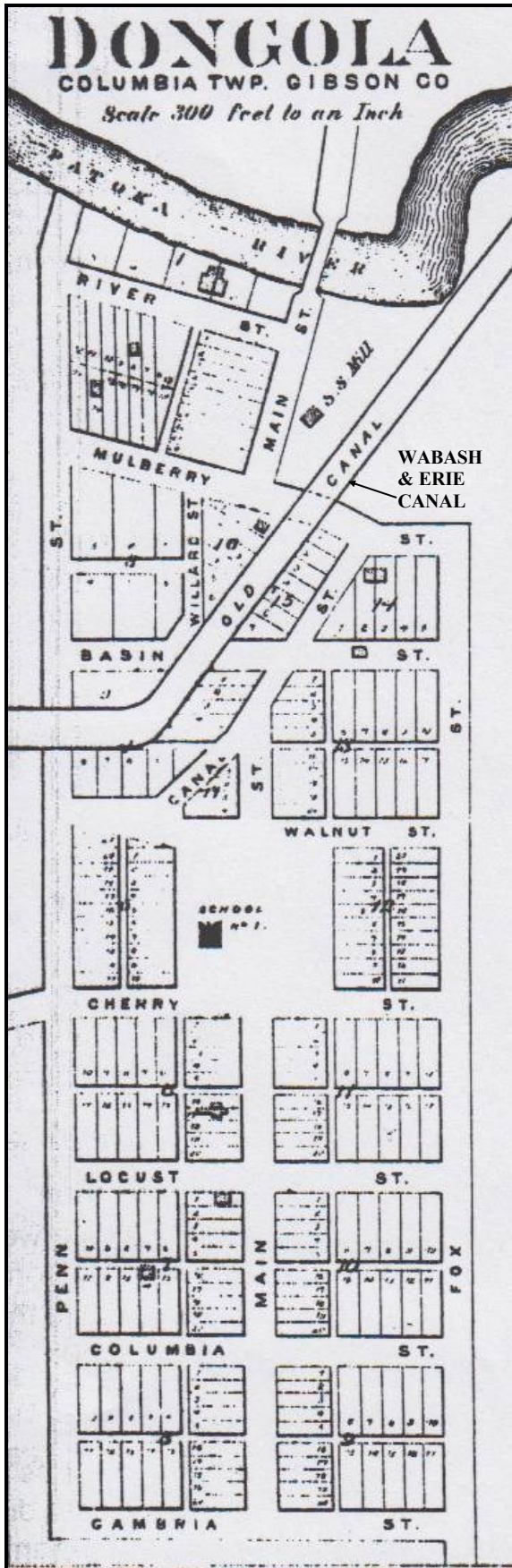
In his book *Pioneer History of Indiana* William tells of how negroes making their way north were hiding in a thicket and were taken from their hiding place under a small load of straw to the barn of Isaac Street before a raiding party could capture them. Then under darkness Street with the help of Thomas Hart took them north of White river and delivered them to a friend [Quaker].

William also relates the time when Andrew Adkins was stopped on his way to James W. Cockrum's home and shown a handbill. It gave the description of seven runaway slaves and offered one thousand dollars for their capture. Andrew feared the slaves would be captured by men guarding the bridge. Later that day he learned of a plan to trick the guards by Jerry Sullivan, a full-fledged abolitionist who worked for James Cockrum. Jerry convinced William Cockrum and two young boys who worked on the farm to go fishing and stay late into the night. Andrew Adkins was to send his brother and a neighbor boy to go with them.

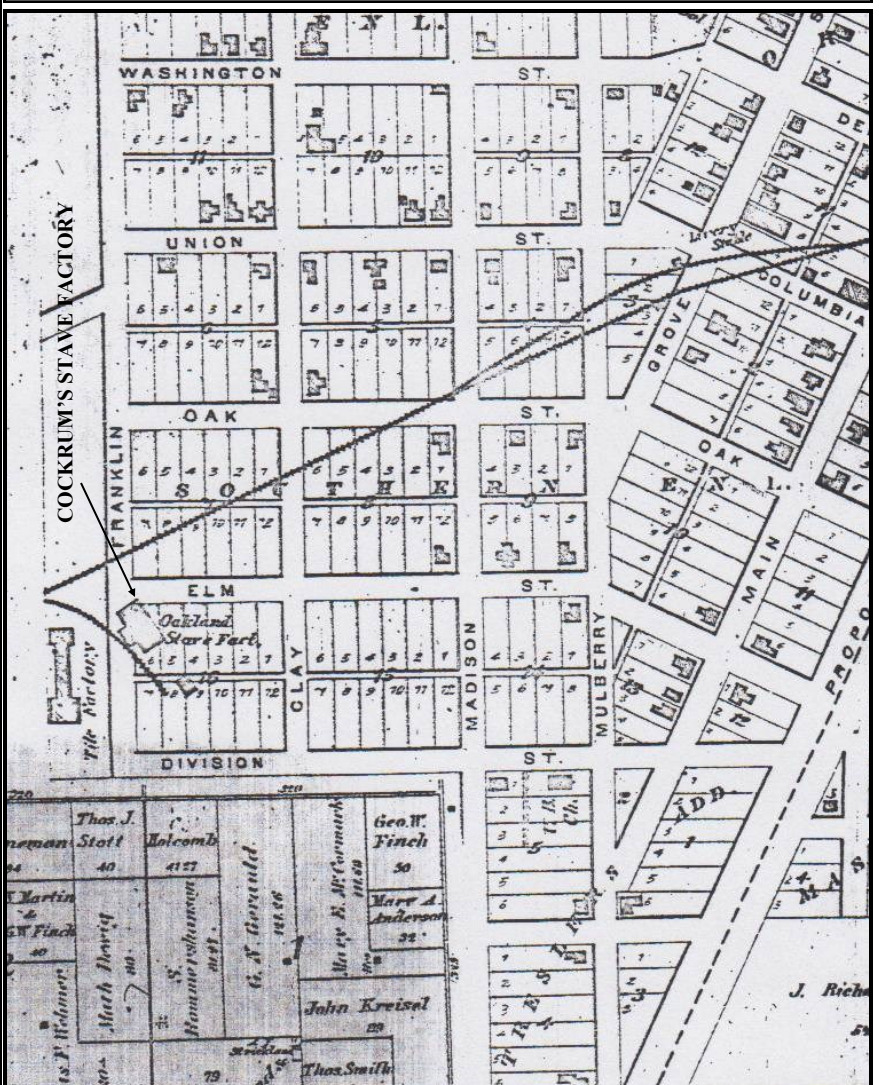
Andrew thought the boys would only turn the guards' horses loose and drive them away, but Jerry Sullivan had other ideas. He took old newspapers and rubbed wet powder all over them leaving lumps that would flash when it burned. He dried the paper in the sun, took a long fuse he had been using to blast stumps, took lots of flax strings and made six large broaches out of the newspapers.

Basil Simpson, who lived on the bluff a little west of the bridge, watched and told Jerry the guards had put their seven horses in a patch of small saplings less than one hundred yards southwest of the Dongola coal mine shaft. The boys found the horses, stripped the saddles off them and piled the saddles at the base of a large tree. They led the horses to the road where Jerry tied a broach inside the hair of six of the horses' tails with about six inches of fuse sticking out. He made a larger broach for the seventh horse out of a loosely tied saddle blanket filled with powder and a

THE HOOSIER PACKET - DECEMBER 2013



A PORTION OF OAKLAND CITY SHOWING STAVE FACTORY



long fuse. He lighted the fuses, turned the horses loose and the boys followed on their horses yelling like Indians. "The broaches commenced to pop and fizz at a great rate and the horses were going like the wind. In a little while the big bomb went off and I doubt if anyone ever saw such another runaway scrape where there was an equal number of horses." The boys loaded their guns and fired for some time but there was no one there. The guards had been scared off.

The boys found two pair of boots, which some of the guards had used as pillows, under a bed they had made. They cut the boots into strips and threw them, plus a lot of rock rolled up in their bed, into the river. The boys went back after the guards' saddles, cut them up and threw them into the river as well.

The slaves at the time were safely hidden in thick brush and tall grass by a big pond about ten miles east of Oakland City. That night they were taken over the Patoka river at Martin's ford and piloted along Sugar creek until then came to a wagon waiting for them that took them to Dr. Posey's coal bank where they were hidden once again. After remaining there the next day they were ferried across White river in skiffs and turned over to another friend. They were rushed to Canada and freedom.

Being an active Baptist James was a temperate man and he and his sons were able to keep saloons out of Oakland City until 1881. Because of his support of temperance his original home was burned down by angry saloon keepers. The home was later rebuilt on the site by William Cockrum in 1876.

The 468-mile-long Wabash & Erie Canal was completed and opened to Evansville in 1853. It touched a point two and a half miles north of Oakland City at the town of Dongola on the Patoka River. On the southern portion of the canal more shipments were made to the south than to the north.

Col. William M. Cockrum wrote an article about the Wabash & Erie Canal that was published in Gil Storment's *History of Gibson County, Indiana* saying:

"The Canal crossed the Patoka river into Gibson county on an aqueduct at the old town of Dongola, and followed the lowlands of the Patoka river to Francisco, thence southwest through the highlands of the Pigeon Summit that divides the watershed between the Patoka river and the Pigeon creek country.

"At Port Gibson, a town located on the canal in Gibson county, a reservoir was located, which flooded as much as two thousand acres from five to twenty feet deep. This was the greatest fishing resort that was ever in Gibson county, as it was well stocked with fine lake fish. After the canal was abandoned the water was let out of the reservoir, and today some of the best farms in Gibson county are situated on these famous fishing grounds. The canal followed the lowlands of Pigeon creek until it passed into Warrick county, and thence to Evansville.

"From Fort Wayne the canal followed the water levels of the Wabash and tributaries. The fall was so great in many places that locks had to be put in, so that a new water level could be secured. The locks were made of a length sufficient for the largest boats and about eighteen [fifteen] feet wide, made of heavy hewn timber. Very heavy double gates were made on each level.

"Shippers along the canal had the lowest shipping rates that have ever been in this section. In the late fifties my brother, James M. Cockrum, and I were in the pork packing and tobacco business and had our packing and shipping house at Dongola on the canal. Looking over one of our old shipping books, I find that we shipped from Dongola to Evansville tierces of lard, two hundred and fifty pounds, for ten cents each, barrels of pork for eight and a third cents each, and hogsheads of tobacco, sixteen to eighteen hundred pounds, for fifty cents each.

"The canal boats were nearly all heavy freighters, but there were two fine passenger boats which ran between Evansville and Terre Haute, named the "Prairie Queen," and the "Pride of the Wabash." These boats were finely finished and would carry about thirty-five passengers in their sleeping apartments, and that many more who furnished their own sleeping outfit. These passenger boats aimed to make one hundred miles each twenty-four hours, with four shifts of horses.

"The same condition of things did not exist as when the state was supplying the funds to carry on her many improvements. The money to build the canal from Terre Haute to Evansville came from the English bondholders. The works supplied employment for thousands of men and many hundreds of teams, and good wages were paid. The vast amount of help made a great demand for food stuffs, and good times was the result in all the country near these works. There are thousands of farms that were paid for with funds obtained for labor and supplies on these works.

THE HOOSIER PACKET - DECEMBER 2013

"In connection with the history of the Wabash and Erie Canal, I here give several incidents that happened during its construction through Gibson county.

"The contractors for the canal, as a class, were honorable men. In most cases they had one section of the work, and these sections, as a rule, were a mile long. Where the work was very heavy the sections were much shorter, in order that the work might be completed about the same time. The embankments were made by hauling the dirt in one-horse carts. The usual outfit for a crew of men, when the haul was not over two hundred yards, was four carts and four men to shovel the dirt into them. The work was so timed that the loaded cart was ready to pull out as soon as an empty one was ready to be loaded. Over forty men and carts there was a boss. The shovelers were nearly all Irishmen; there were very few Americans. Of the latter, most of them got out timbers for the culverts and bridges.

"About a half gill of raw whiskey was given the men four times a day. Whiskey at that time was as free from law restrictions as water and everyone that wanted a "doggerly," as they were called, could have it by building a little log shanty and purchasing a barrel of whiskey at twenty-five cents a gallon. These lax laws resulted in many little drinkings dens along the canal.

"Stewart and Rockefeller had the section at Dongola and on both sides of the Patoka river, also the building of the aqueduct across the river. The William H. Stewart of the firm mentioned was the father of Dr William H. Stewart, of Oakland City, Indiana. The above mentioned works were very busy ones, and many men were engaged on them. As soon as they got well under way, a man named Bev Willis built a small ten-by-fifteen shanty boat on the Patoka river. It was situated near where the present iron bridges spans the river at Dongola. Willis was from a good family, but was a wild fellow and in a short time had a den full of drunken sots. There was little attention paid to him until some of Stewart's best men began to neglect their work. Then Stewart went to see him, and gave him one week to get away with his boat and whiskey. Bev sold his whiskey to another doggerly man some miles farther west on the works, tore his boat to pieces and went to California.

"Soon after this a man named Spradley, from Warrick county, came to Dongola, hunting a place where he could build a whiskey shanty. He boastingly said that he would teach the canalers that they would have to get busy before they drove him away. He had two barrels of whiskey hauled to this place where he built his doggerly, and for a

couple of days dispensed liquor without interruption. Then Stewart took two or three of his bosses, with picks, and went to see the brave Warrick county man. When the latter saw them coming he made it convenient to get away. Stewart and his men broke open the barrels and poured the whiskey on the ground. This ended the liquor traffic at Dongola."

Elsewhere in Stormont's history, William Cockrum wrote about Francisco, another town on the Wabash & Erie Canal saying:

"This was a town whose heyday was during the time of the Wabash & Erie canal. It was platted and laid out in January, 1851, by John Perkins. Originally it was on the east side and up to the banks of the canal, on section 19, township 2 south, range 9. Several business houses and two flouring mills were built by Perkins, and the town flourished until 1858. Mr. Sweeney taught the first school here. The first church was built in 1855. Dr. J.M. Ireland was the first resident physician.

"Those who remember Mr. Perkins say he was an energetic man. He built two flouring-mills, a saw-mill and several houses. For a number of years he was a merchant and real estate dealer. Francisco was a very busy place in 1854 and 1858. Three large packing establishments, three large grain warehouses, a number of general stores and a few smaller places of business gave an impetus to the hamlet."

Although William went on to tell more about early Francisco and the canal that sounded promising, the canal later couldn't compete with the railroads, made no money for its stockholders and gradually ran down. The days when it took two days to go by canal from Francisco to Evansville soon ended and all that remained were the memories of a small boy riding on top of one of the two horses that were hitched in tandem to a big cable fastened to a canal boat, which was pulled along the canal by the horses on the towpath.

In 1855 James W. Cockrum, William M. Cockrum, N. G. C. Hargrove, Edward Crow and Charles T. Shannon formed a stock company and built the first steam grist mill in Oakland City. It stood on Mill Street in the northern part of the town and cost \$8,000. It had four run of burrs. It proved to be unsuccessful because it was much too big for the unimproved surrounding area to support. It later burned down.

THE HOOSIER PACKET - DECEMBER 2013

In 1855 James W. Cockrum laid out the Oakland Cemetery. Also that year, he, along with Jacob W. Hargrove, built the first store room that stood north of the public well on Main Street. The stock for their general country store cost \$8,500 and was the first stock transported there on the Wabash & Erie Canal. They did an extensive business as merchants and general traders. They also shipped many flat boat loads of pork, corn and flour on the Patoka and Wabash rivers.

On October 5, 1856 William married Lucretia Harper the daughter of John and Mary (O'Neal) Harper who also lived in Oakland City. This family was also of Scotch-Irish descent. A son, John B. Cockrum, was born to William & Lucretia in 1857 and a daughter, Ella C. Cockrum, in 1859.

William soon became involved with various other business enterprises. In 1857 he partnered with Jacob Hargrove and established a harness shop and a shoe shop. That same year William established a tobacco compress on his home property, as more and more tobacco was being grown in the area. He then shipped two hundred hogshead of tobacco on the Wabash & Erie Canal from Dongola. A hogshead is very large wooden barrel. A standardized hogshead measured 48 inches long and 30 inches in diameter at the head. Fully packed with tobacco, it weighed about 1,000 pounds. He made a large profit on this tobacco.

With the call to arms for the Civil War, both William and his older brother James Monroe Cockrum, enlisted into Co F 42nd Indiana Infantry in September 1861. James, who was already 33 and who had become a prominent Oakland City merchant, fell prey to illness in October

Lieutenant Colonel William Monroe Cockrum's Family							
Name	Birth	Place	Death	Place	Marriage	Place	
James Washington Cockrum	6-19-1799	Buncombe, NC	11-19-1875	Oakland City IN			
m1. Sarah "Sally" Barrett	1800		1834	Yazoo City, MS	10-??-1818	Tennessee	
Columbus W. Cockrum	1820		1843				
Caroline Cockrum	1821		1866				
America Jane Cockrum	1823		1879				
Riley Cockrum	1825		1827				
Dennis W. Cockrum	1826						
James Marion Cockrum	1828		1903				
Lafayette Cockrum	1830		1832				
Alexander Hamilton Cockrum	1832		1863				
m2. Judah P. Barrett	12-01-1813	South Carolina	11-24-1875		7-15-1835	Gibson Co. IN	
Sally Ann Cockrum	1836		1837				
Cindarella "Linda" K. Cockrum	1837		1879				
William Monroe Cockrum	12-08-1837	Oakland City IN	2-24-1924	Oakland City IN	10-05-1856	Oakland City	
m. Lucretia Lou Harper	1-04-1839		2-22-1917				
John Barrett Cockrum	1857		4-15-1937	Indianapolis, IN			
m. Fannie C. Bittroff			3-31-1943	Indianapolis, IN			
Ella C. Cockrum	6-03-1859		11-07-1943			1880	
m. Winfield Scott Wheatley	4-01-1869		9-08-1888				
Clara Cockrum	1861		6-1-1929				
m. Montgomery Campbell	1861		1935				
William "Willie"	1863		1864				
Oliver Morton "Mort" Cockrum	1864		1907				
Zoe Cockrum	12-19- 1866		7-01-1962				
m. Benjamin Windsor Aldrich	3-26-1866	Kenosha, WI					
Mary C. Cockrum	4-25-1869		6-08-1943				
m. Dr. William Prentice Dearing	9-30-1874		12-14-1958				
James Washington Cockrum	1871		1937				
Marion Onis "Onie" Cockrum	4-08-1873		7-08-1950				
m. Grace Ratcliff Drake			2-17-1963				
John B. Cockrum	1840		1846				
Henry Clay Cockrum	1845		1862				
Thomas Barrett Cockrum	1850		1855				
Samuel C. Cockrum	1855		1855				
Helen Beatrice Cockrum			1858				

THE HOOSIER PACKET - DECEMBER 2013

and had to return home.

William was only 23 when he enlisted but quickly moved up the chain of command of his Regiment and became a lieutenant colonel. At the battle of Chickamauga, Georgia in September 1863, he was severely wounded when an ounce ball passed through his legs at the hips. As he lay on the battlefield he was captured by rebel forces and sent to Libby prison in Richmond, Virginia where he remained for eight months until exchanged. Although he somehow survived his wounds and imprisonment, it left him a cripple for life. He mustered out with the regiment on July 21, 1865.

He always remembered his military service and was an active member of the Grand Army of the Republic and the Loyal Legion, two patriotic orders, which arose from the Civil War. In politics, he was a Republican. He was active in the Masonic Knights Templar and orders of the I.O.O.F. He was an active and prominent member of the General Baptist Church in Oakland City.

After the war William became engaged in agricultural pursuits. William and Lucretia's family continued to grow. After the war they had seven more children. Willie Cockrum, Oliver M. Cockrum, Zoe Cockrum, Mary Cockrum, James W. Cockrum and Onie M. Cockrum. The U. S. Federal Census of 1870 shows William having an estate of \$12,700 and a personal estate of \$4,600.

James Washington Cockrum was very much a believer in education for all. He died as a result of a fall from a horse on November 19, 1875 in his beloved Oakland City.

In 1882 William established William M. Cockrum and Sons, a barrel stave factory. The factory was built along side the Air Line Railroad in Oakland City and produced about 25,000 staves and 25,000 sets of heading per day. They were able to make 150 barrels per day. A saw-mill was also connected with the business.

William, like his father, was a supporter of education. He donated land and was on the Board of Directors of Oakland City College, [Oakland University], from its founding in 1885 by the General Baptists until his death.

In his later years William began to draw upon the accounts of history of southern Indiana, that he had begun collecting as a boy. His first publication in 1907 was *Pioneer History of Indiana*. Much of what we know about Port Gibson, Dongola and Franciso are based on these writings. He also wrote another book in 1915 entitled *The History of the Underground Railroad* as was previously mentioned. Through these works he is recognized as one of Indiana's



**Lieutenant Colonel (retired)
William Monroe Cockrum**



**Lucreita Cockrum
Wife of Lt. Col.
William M. Cockrum**



**Colonel William Monroe Cockrum
1837-1924
Montgomery Cemetery
Oakland City, Gibson County, Indiana.**

THE HOOSIER PACKET - DECEMBER 2013

foremost authors and historians.

Col. William Monroe Cockrum died on February 24, 1924, at the age of 86, in his home in Oakland City at 1 o'clock Sunday morning. Six years before his death he had suffered a paralyzing stroke that left him an invalid. His last 2½ years he was absolutely helpless in bed. His funeral was held at his residence at 10 o'clock on Wednesday morning with the Reverent F. G. Kenney officiating assisted by the Reverend John E. Cox of Evansville. He was laid to rest in the Montgomery Cemetery in Oakland City beside his wife Lucretia, who died on February 22, 1919, .

William was survived by seven of his children: John Barrett Cockrum of Indianapolis, a general solicitor for the Nickel Plate railroad; Ella C. Cockrum Wheatley, dean of the women and head of the English Department at Oakland City College; Clara C. Cockrum Campbell, wife of Mont Campbell of the Mont Campbell Auto Company in Oakland City; Zoe C. Cockrum Aldrich, wife of Professor B. W. Aldrich, deceased, former head of the Latin department at Moores Hill college, predecessor of Evansville College; Mary C. Cockrum Dearing, wife of Dr. W. P. Dearing, president of Oakland City College; James Washington Cockrum, president of the J. W. Cockrum Printing Company in Oakland City, and Dr. Onis, called "Onie," Marion Cockrum, optometrist in Evansville. Oliver Morton, called "Mort," Cockrum, a son, died several years prior to his father in Bismark, South Dakota. His son William, called "Willie," was born in 1863 and died in 1864. William was also survived by nine grandchildren.

William's home known as Cockrum Hall was restored in 2002 to house the development and alumni offices for Oakland City University. It was dedicated on July 24, 2002 at 4 p.m.



COCHRUM HALL 1876

Photos courtesy of William M. Cockrum Biography Page

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