

CANAWLERS AT REST

JAMES CONWELL

b. November 22, 1786

d. May 10, 1849

GEORGE GROVE SHOUP

b. November 11, 1810

d. July 7, 1853

Indiana's Whitewater Valley is filled with the history of our state and nation. From 1825-43 Brookville (pop. 3,000) was the home of four governors of Indiana in succession — James Ray, Noah Noble, David Wallace and Samuel Bigger. Connersville (pop. 15,000) was the home of Caleb B. Smith, U. S. Secretary of the Interior in the Lincoln administration. Laurel (pop. 580) also has a place on the national scene. Located about 11 miles south of Connersville along State Road 121, this sleepy little town is atop a hill overlooking the Whitewater Valley. All of these towns were on the Whitewater Canal.

The Treaty of Greenville in 1795 created a boundary between settlers and Indian territory. This line extended from Fort Recovery, Ohio, to just west of Richmond, Indiana, and on to where the Kentucky River pours its water into the Ohio River. Brookville, established in 1808 by Amos Butler and Jesse Thomas, was in the settler territory. Just west of the town is Boundary Hill, which was named for its location on the treaty line. The treaty delayed settlement to the valley west of this point for several years.

On September 30, 1809, at the Treaty of Fort Wayne, William Henry Harrison negotiated the so called "Twelve Mile Purchase," which extended settler territory further west to just outside of Cambridge City, Indiana, and followed in a diagonal line to the west of most of the Whitewater River. In November 1810 following this treaty, Wayne and Franklin counties were created from the northern portion of Dearborn County.

With the valley opened to settlers, in 1815 Edward Toner established the small village of Somerset on the west side of the Whitewater River and built a tavern. At this point in 1816-18, Jacob Whetzel and his four sons blazed a 60-mile-long trail due west through the primeval forest to Waverly, located just south of Indianapolis on the White River without using any surveying instruments. Later when Whetzel's trace was actually surveyed, it was found to be off only 4 degrees from due west. Settlers used this route to western Indiana and regions beyond from 1818-1826. After that time other state roadways came into existence and the old trace was soon taken over by private landowners along the way.

In 1818, Abram B. Conwell, originally from Lewestown, Delaware, came to Connersville. That fall three of his brothers followed him into the region. James Conwell, a Methodist minister, located in Somerset; William Conwell settled at Cambridge City; and Isaac Conwell went to Liberty, Indiana. Each of the brothers became successful merchants in their respective communities.

James Conwell, also from Leweston, was born on November 22, 1786. He had married Mary Hughes in 1809, but Mary died in Delaware in 1817. He then married his first cousin, Winifred Harris King, on August 10, 1818. Both James and Winifred moved to Somerset in 1820 and James opened up a store in his home while acting as a part-time minister of the gospel. He became convinced that a canal would be of great economic benefit to the valley and to himself as well.

In 1822-23 groups of citizens from six counties met at West Harrison, Indiana, to discuss the feasibility of constructing a canal along the Whitewater River. This was followed in 1824 by some local surveying. On January 21, 1826, the state of Indiana authorized The Whitewater Canal Company. That same year Congress authorized a federal survey and, in July, James Shriver led a team of surveyors up the Whitewater Valley. Shriver died while the survey was in process and his successor, Asa Moore, died shortly thereafter. This was not a good start and the chartered canal company was unsuccessful in launching the new company. In 1829 after doing a second survey, the federal surveyor, Colonel Howard Stansbury, reported that he felt the Whitewater canal was impractical.

In June of 1834 William Goodwin and Jesse L. Williams conducted still another survey with a favorable report. James Conwell calculated that their proposal for a Whitewater Canal would be very profitable. James became the postmaster of Somerset in 1831 and in May 1832 had the town renamed Conwell Mills. He ran for State Representative in 1834 and soundly defeated canal opposition candidate C.W. Hutchen.

On January 16, 1836 the Indiana State legislature approved the Mammoth Internal Improvement Bill. Noah Nobel, the Governor who was from Brookville, signed the bill into law

on January 27, 1836. James Conwell served in the Senate in 1836 and was a representative from Franklin County in 1840.

Anticipating the growth along the canal, James Conwell platted the area up the hill from Somerset in 1836. At first he was going to name it New Baltimore but later decided upon naming it Laurel after a town from his former state of Delaware. On July 26, 1837, Laurel officially became a town. Later on Somerset was absorbed into Laurel. This same year the two-story Laurel Academy was built and still stands today. Francis Asbury Conwell, James' eldest 25-year-old son, became the new town's first postmaster. On October 12, 1838, George Shoup became its second postmaster.

George Grove Shoup had come to Laurel in 1832 and married James Conwell's daughter, Jane, on May 16, 1833. On March 22, 1834, their first of nine children was born. The boy was named Francis Asbury Shoup after his uncle, Francis A. Conwell, Jane's brother. This was also a good Methodist name and greatly pleased his grandfather James.

Construction of the Whitewater Canal began at Brookville on September 12, 1836 with great celebration and by June 9, 1839 the first boat, "the Ben Franklin," traveled from Lawrenceburg to Brookville. It appeared that the hopes for a canal were about to be realized. Indiana's internal improvements suffered from a nationwide financial collapse. The state issued this stop order in November 1839: "That with the exception of the Wabash canal, from Lafayette to the State line, and the dams on other works yet to be preserved, the work at Lawrenceburg and bridges at Harrison, the public works be immediately suspended." Only 30 miles of the canal were completed by the state. Work came to a halt and the future looked dim.

Two years went by with nothing happening on the Whitewater Canal in Indiana, but by the summer of 1840 work had resumed in Ohio on the Cincinnati & Whitewater Canal. The people of the upper Whitewater Valley thought it was time to renew the efforts to extend their canal. Both James Conwell and his son-in-law, George Shoup, were instrumental in calling a meeting at Laurel on April 15, 1841. A resolution was passed to develop a plan to establish a company to complete the canal. George Shoup was one of the seven members of this committee. James Conwell was selected as part of a five man committee to draft the articles of association.

In 1842 the legislature granted a charter for a new private company, the Whitewater Valley Canal Company. James Conwell, acting President, announced that the books would be opened on April 4, 1842, for stock subscriptions. George Shoup was part of the committee to create a barbeque celebration at Cambridge City on July 28, 1842. Crowds of between 7-15,000? people were there to hear speeches by James Raridan and Samuel Parker. The festive atmosphere was interrupted by a great storm that dispensed the crowd.

Work proceeded quickly from the partial diggings of 1839 and the canal reached Laurel on November 17, 1842. The "Native," a boat built in Cedar Grove, was brought to town by its builder and captain Stephen Coffin. The boat glided over smooth waters and the ladies and gentlemen were entertained by the Brookville band. When they left the next day at 11:00 a.m. they were entertained with speeches by George Shoup and John Farquhar. Another celebration was held at Connersville on June 21, 1845, when the "Patriot" commanded by Capt. Gayle Ford arrived.

By October 1845 the canal had finally reached Cambridge City. The final connection to Hagerstown was completed in 1847 by the Hagerstown Canal Company, another private company.

As stated before James Conwell was first married in 1809 to Mary Hughes in Delaware. They had four children, Elizabeth Ann, Francis Asbury, Jane and Mary Hughes Conwell. James' wife Mary died in 1817 and he then married Winifred Harris King, the daughter of his uncle, William King, on August 10, 1818. The family with children from age 1-8 traveled west arriving in Franklin county in 1820. He and Winifred later had 11 children. The youngest child was Frances (Fannie) Olivia, who was born on March 23, 1837.

James was a Methodist Episcopal minister, a merchant and canal promoter. His name will always be associated with Laurel. He died on May 10, 1849, and was buried in the Conwell Cemetery on his farm.

Winifred managed with her teenage family but by 1860 had moved in with her daughter, Fannie, who had married William H. Smith, a physician, on June 9, 1858. They moved to Rushville, Indiana a few years later where Winifred died on June 29, 1883.

George Grove Shoup

George Grove Shoup was born November 10, 1810, at Fairfield (Fairborn) OH, Bath Township near Dayton. He was the youngest of nine children of Samuel and Dorothy (Grove) Shoup. Seeking to make his fortune in the new west, he moved into the Laurel area in 1832 at age 22. He apparently began by working in the local mills and became very closely associated with the James Conwell family. In May of 1833 he married Jane Conwell, the daughter of James and Mary Conwell, and then in 1838 he followed Jane's brother, Francis, as the Postmaster of Laurel. He served in this capacity until 1849.

Living in Laurel George Shoup and the Conwells were huge supporters of canals for the Whitewater valley. Due to their investments and interest in the town it is obvious that they would do everything they could to promote the completion of the canal.

In 1841 Shoup was elected to complete the term of John A. Matson in the Indiana House of Representatives. He continued to be elected for two more terms serving until 1843. After the Whitewater Valley Canal Company had reached Laurel in November 1842, he became involved in boat ownership, mills and pork packing.

During the decade of the 1840s George Shoup was always involved with the canal and earned the respect of the citizens of the valley. The *Brookville American* on November 28, 1847 following a disastrous flood complained that the board of the canal was not taking decisive action. It said: "If the board were composed of such men as Samuel W Parker, Meredith Helm, **George G. Shoup**, Griffin Taylor, John D. Jones, Benjamin Conklin, James Rariden, James Wood, and R. Tyner, in four months from this date the richly laden boats would float down our valley - the laborer on the canal would receive the pay for his hire, and the public would feel assured that all was right."

It is interesting to note that in January of 1848 there were two factions in the election for the board —, the John Newman ticket and the Samuel Parker ticket. George Shoup was on both tickets and won election to the board.

In the spring of 1849 George's father-in-law, James Conwell died. In October 1850 George went to Indianapolis as one of three delegates from Franklin County to attend the called Constitutional Convention to revise the state's governing document. There were a total of 150 delegates at this convention. Debate continued until February 10, 1851. One of the results was the provision to prevent the state from borrowing for capital improvement projects since the earlier projects had driven the state to the verge of bankruptcy. During the debates in Indianapolis an important event occurred at the door of the State Capital — the selling of the Central Canal.

In January 1850 the legislature had authorized the sale of the Central Canal. The auction occurred on November 16, 1850. George Shoup, James Rariden, and John Newman, who were all members of the constitutional convention either left the meeting or it was recessed for a while, for they bid and bought the canal for \$2,425. On February 7, 1851 they transferred it to Francis Asbury Conwell, Shoup's brother-in-law, and some other investors. What the relationships and deals were we don't know. The title of the group was the Central Canal Manufacturing, Hydraulic and Water Works Company. They in turn passed it on and it eventually became the Indianapolis Water Company.

George Shoup returned to Laurel where he died on July 7, 1853, at age 42. His wife Jane lived seven more years, dying just prior to the census of 1860.

We have been unable to find the grave of James Conwell on his farm. We assume George Shoup was buried in Laurel where he died, but we don't know where his grave is located.

The influence that America's first Methodist Episcopal Bishop Francis Asbury (1745-1816) who worked in the Maryland/Delaware area, had on the Conwell family can be seen. James and Mary named their first son Francis Asbury Conwell and as we will see this name carries into the next generation. Two of their grandchildren went on to have lives of national interest and national significance.

Famous Grandchildren of James and Mary Hughes Conwell

Their daughter, Jane Conwell, married George Groves Shoup, as noted above. Jane's sister, Mary Hughes Conwell, married Henry Dayton Smith. Each of these had offspring who excelled.

Francis Asbury Shoup
The Brigadier General CSA

George Shoup and Jane Conwell's first son, Francis Asbury Shoup, was born on March 22, 1834, about a year after their marriage in May 1833. They named him after Jane's brother Francis Asbury Conwell. Francis Shoup grew up in Laurel at the time of the canal. His grandfather, James Conwell died in 1849 and his father George Shoup died in 1853. His mother Jane was only 39 when she became a widow and Francis was just 19.

Francis was the first cousin of Elisabeth Conwell Smith (Willson). The two grew up together in Laurel but she was eight years younger having been born in April 1842.

In the early 1850's Francis attended Indiana Asbury for a time but soon received appointment to the United States Military at West Point. After graduation in 1855 he was assigned to the 1st Artillery and served in Key West Florida 1855-56. He later participated in hostilities with the Seminoles. He was transferred to Charleston and Fort Moultrie in 1858. Francis' mother died in the late 1850s leaving his siblings alone. He resigned his commission in January 1860 after returning to Indianapolis in 1858 to take care of them. He practiced law there and also became the leader for a troop of Indianapolis Zouave militia.

Zouave was the title given to certain infantry regiments in the French Army, normally serving in French North Africa between 1831 and 1962. The name was also adopted during the 19th century by units in other armies, especially volunteer regiments raised for service in the American Civil War. The characteristic zouave uniform included short open-fronted jackets, baggy trousers and often sashes and oriental headgear.

In the fall of 1860 Francis became convinced that the election of Abraham Lincoln would lead to war. He greatly feared abolitionism. He knew that he would be forced to serve in the military on one side or the other. Even though he had high prospects for his military career in the north, he moved south before South Carolina seceded. He attended the Secession Convention in Charleston in December 1860.

When Francis declared that he had "aristocratic inclinations and admiration for the South" those in the Indianapolis militia, who loved him as a friend, were shocked. They had given him a special set of revolvers with holsters and trappings believing that he would be an officer in the Union and always ride horses thus needing such a set. However, soon thereafter Francis moved to St. Augustine, Florida, where the Governor commissioned him a Lieutenant in the Confederate Army.

Francis A. Shoup participated in the Battle of Shiloh as chief of artillery under William Hardee. On September 12, 1862, the First Confederate Congress made him a brigadier general. He was captured at the Battle of Vicksburg, later paroled and fought again in the Battle of Atlanta serving in the Confederate Army. He was the designer of the "shoupade" design for fortifications along the Chattahoochee River. He advocated having blacks serve in the army. During the war he wrote texts on infantry and artillery drill. He also served as Chief of Staff for the commander of the Army of Tennessee, John Bell Hood.

After the war, Francis was ordained by the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1868 and wrote books about mathematics and metaphysics. He became a chaplain at the University of the South, in Sewanee, Tennessee, serving from 1869-71. On June 29, 1871, he was married to Esther Habersham Elliot of Beaufort, South Carolina. He continued to serve as a rector in Waterford, NY; Nashville, TN; Jackson, TN; and New Orleans, LA. In 1878 he received his Doctor of Divinity degree from the University of the South and taught there from 1883-96. Upon his death on September 4, 1896, in Columbia, Tennessee, he was buried in the cemetery of the University of the South in Sewanee located about 75 miles west of Chattanooga.

An Indiana State Format Marker was erected in the Conwell Cemetery at Laurel, Indiana, on October 21, 2006, honoring Francis Asbury Shoup, the only Confederate General from Indiana. Fifty people attended its dedication. One wonders how a young man born and raised in Indiana became a general in the southern army. His family was firmly planted in the north in the Quaker region of Indiana that opposed slavery. His family was clearly pro Union. He held a military position in Indianapolis and lived there with his family. They had to be sent to other relatives when he went south. Prior to the war he had spent only about five years in the south

Elisabeth Conwell Smith Willson
The Poetess

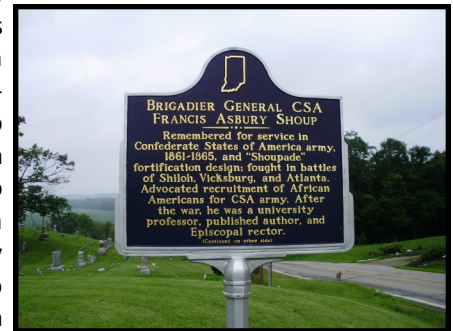
Mary Hughes Conwell was born March 6, 1817, in Seaford, Delaware, and moved with her father, James, and stepmother, Winifred, to Franklin county where she grew up. On March 15, 1836, at 19 she married Henry Dayton Smith, who was 21. They had 3 children, Mary Caroline born in 1837, James Albert born in 1840 and Elizabeth Conwell born April 26, 1842. Henry was listed as a notary in Franklin County in 1840, but little else is known about his occupation.

Unfortunately a year after Elisabeth Conwell Smith was born, her father died suddenly in Laurel on June 28, 1843. Her mother struggled to keep the family together and four years later married Richard Howland Cullum on August 18, 1847. This was the only father 5-year-old Elizabeth ever knew.

Tragedy again struck when Elisabeth was 16. Her mother, Mary Hughes Conwell died on November 12, 1858. Elizabeth probably spent the next couple of years at the Laurel Academy finishing her education but by 1862 she had gone to the female academy in New Albany, which was to change her life.

Byron Forceythe Willson was born in Little Genesee, New York, on April 10, 1837. In about 1846 his parents, who were both teachers and very religious, emigrated to Maysville, Kentucky on a flatboat on the Ohio River. His mother died in 1856 and the family again moved west to New Albany, Indiana, in 1858 where his father became a lumber merchant. A spiritual excitement swept the area and many people believed they could communicate with the dead through a medium. Forceythe became very caught up in these beliefs and, after his father's death in 1859, he professed to be in communication with his father's spirit.

Forceythe was the oldest son and was the guardian for the other three living children. He attended Antioch College in Ohio and was under the supervision of Horace Mann. He also attended Harvard for a time. In about 1861 he had to leave the school and return back to New Albany because of a very severe attack of consumption (tuberculosis). The physicians thought he was in the final stages of the disease but they were able to restore his health. He was able to obtain employment on the editorial board of the *Louisville Journal*, writing pro-Union articles.



**BRIGADIER GENERAL CSA
FRANCIS ASBURY SHOUP**
Born near present-day Laurel 1834;
Attended Indiana Asbury University,
Greencastle; Graduated 1855 from
United States Military Academy
at West Point; served in Federal
army 1855-1860; resigned to
pursue law career in Indianapolis
circa 1860; Died 1896; buried
at Sewanee University
Cemetery, Tennessee.

Remembered for service in
Confederate States of America army,
1861-1865, and "Shoupade"
Fortification design; fought in battles
of Shiloh, Vicksburg, and Atlanta.
Advocated recruitment of African
Americans for CSA army. After
the war, he was a university
professor, published author, and
Episcopal rector.

In 1862 Forceythe met Elisabeth Smith when she was attending the local DePauw Academy for Women that had been established in 1852 by Washington C. DePauw. Since age 16 Elisabeth had been writing poems. It was through their common interest in poetry that they met and became romantically involved. Some of her poems can be found at Google Book, [1861 Ladies Repository DW Clark](#). Here is a sample of one that relates to her recently deceased mother.



Elisabeth Conwell Smith Willson

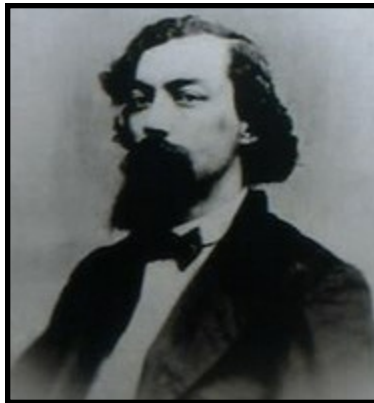
Mother

Speak tenderly to me, sweet mother-saint,
Let thy dear whispers voice the silent airs,
O! press me to thy heart, for mine is faint
With the long loss of mother-love and prayers.

Etc.

Fall noiselessly upon the twilight flower —
Ah, they are withered flowers
within my heart! —
Sweet mother, come once
more and bless the hours
In thy dream presence sorrow
must depart.

This same sort of sentimentality was very common for the period and can also be found in Willson's works as well as his belief in the communication with the dead. In the summer and fall of 1862 he produced a poem based on the final hours of a



Byron Forceythe Willson

soldier who was fatally wounded at Shiloh in April of 1862. The poem entitled "The Old Sergeant" was published in the *Louisville Journal* on January 1, 1863. It is the transcript of a real person, a federal assistant-surgeon named Austin, with whom Willson was acquainted at New Albany, and a dying Sergeant named Robert Burton, who Austin had attended in his last hours. The entire works and some other comments can be found again on Google Book, [Byron Forceythe Willson, Piatt](#).

Here are a few lines from this famous poem:

The Old Sergeant

"Come a little nearer, Doctor, --thank you, -- let me take the cup:
Draw your chair up, -- draw it closer, --just another little sup!
Maybe you think I'm better; but I'm pretty well used up, --
Doctor, you've done all you could do, but I'm just a-going up!

Etc.
"And the same old palpitation came again in all its power,
And I heard a Bugle sounding, as from some celestial Tower;
And the same mysterious voice said: "**It is the Eleventh hour!**
Orderly Sergeant --Robert Burton --It is the Eleventh hour!"
Etc.

This poem is responsible for bringing the Willson's to national attention through a chain of events. The *Louisville Journal* was a pro-Union newspaper that was often read by President Lincoln. Having read the

poem, Lincoln was touched, and asked his friend Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. if he knew the author. Holmes contacted the editor of the *Journal*, George D. Prentice, who identified Willson as the author.

Byron Forceythe Willson married Elisabeth Conwell Smith in Connersville, IN on September 16, 1863. The marriage took place at the home of her aunt and uncle Elizabeth Ann (Conwell) and Martin Updegraff. He and Elisabeth then moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to support his brother, August Everett Willson, future Governor of Kentucky, who was attending Harvard. They purchased a pleasant old mansion on the Mount Auburn road. This residence was originally the home of Governor Elbridge T. Gerry, the father of gerrymandering, and was later the home James Russell Lowell. Here he associated with Lowell, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Oliver Wendell Holmes. It has been said the he was the only Indiana poet who came in close touch with the New England writers.

James Russell Lowell was the first editor in 1857 of the *Atlantic Monthly*, which published some of Willson's works. Dr. Holmes often read "The Old Sergeant" to his audiences and compared it favorably for human interest to Samuel Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

Elisabeth and Forceythe had a son "Little Dolfi," who died shortly after birth on June 1, 1864. Then, on October 13, 1864, Elisabeth, age 22, who was always in somewhat fragile health passed on. Forceythe grieved but felt that he was frequently in communication spiritually with her. In 1866 he published a small volume of her poetic works.

Forceythe went on to write several other war time poems such as "The Rhyme of the Master's Mate" and "In State." He published a small volume of his works in November of 1866 but none ever achieved the fame of "The Old Sergeant."

In the fall of 1866, at about the time he published his works, he was visiting New Albany, Indiana, when he suffered from a hemorrhage of the lungs. At times following this attack he was heard in communication with his dead wife. After about a month he recovered enough to travel to Alfred Center, New York, where his younger sister and brother were living with an aunt. There on February 2, 1867, he died. His body was then removed to Laurel, Indiana.

The two graves lie side by side in the Conwell Cemetery on the northwestern slope in Laurel. "Little Dolfi" is buried with his mother and commemorated on her stone. Her marker is a small obelisk of white marble. Forceythe's is a round-topped marble headstone. From the top of the sloping graveyard you can see several miles north to the cornfields of the Whitewater Valley. These graves have a lovely situation, but the casual passer-by would not suspect that in them two poets and their son were sleeping.



Little Dolfie
June 1, 1864
Elisabeth Conwell Willson
Born
April 26, 1842
Died
October 13, 1864

Byron Forceythe Willson
Born
Little Genessee N. Y.
April 10, 1837
Died N Alfred N.Y.
Feb. 2, 1867

To Each His Own

And part to meet on earth No More;
We clasp each other to the heart,
And part to meet on earth No More.
There is a time for tears to start, --

For dews to fall and larks to soar:
The Time for Tears, is when we part
To meet upon the earth No More:
The Time for Tears, is when we part
To meet upon the earth No More.

Byron Forceythe Willson (1837-1867)

The Willsons' made a lasting impression on Oliver Wendell Holmes for after their death he made a visit to Laurel to visit the grave of his old friends. He wrote at one time about Forceythe saying: "He came among us as softly and silently as a bird drops into his nest. His striking personal appearance had attracted the attention of the scholars and poets who were his neighbors, long before they heard his name or condition. It was impossible to pass without noticing the tall and dark young man with long, curled locks and large, dreamy, almond-shaped eyes, who was often seen walking along the road that leads from the village of Old Cambridge to Mount Auburn." When visiting the Conwell Cemetery today and looking out into the Whitewater Valley, it looks very much like the time that Dr Holmes visited.



Coulter House, Southwest corner Conwell/Lafayette Streets in Laurel Indiana. This is where Oliver Wendell Holmes stopped for a drink on the way to the graves of Forceythe and Elisabeth Willson.
Photo by Bob Schmidt

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Special thanks to the Harvard Library for providing pictures of the Willsons to the Laurel Library.