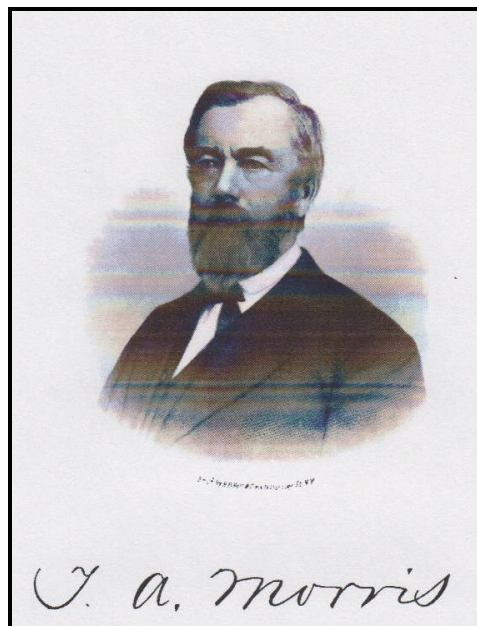


Thomas Armstrong Morris

Find-A-Grave # 8537742

By Carolyn Schmidt

Thomas Armstrong Morris was born in Nicholas county, Kentucky on December 26, 1811 to Morris and Rachel (Morris) Morris. His great-grandfather, James Morris, Sr., and his maternal great grandfather, John Morris, were brothers, who came from Wales along with another brother in the early settlement of Virginia. James Morris lived in Pennsylvania and was an ensign in Col. John Philip De Haas's regiment, 1st Pennsylvania battalion, having been appointed by Gen. Gates on November 3, 1776. This battalion participated in the operations in Canada under Benedict Arnold and also Ticonderoga in 1776.



He was the third son born to Morris Morris (1780-1864) and Rachel Morris (1786-1863). Their children were William Little Morris (?-1864), Austin W. Morris (1804-1851), **Thomas Armstrong Morris** (1811-1904), John David Morris (1815-1895), Amanda Melvina Morris Mothershead (1817-1851, Julia Ann Morris Ross (1820-1895), and Elizabeth Mitchell Morris Defrees (1824-1904).

When Thomas was ten years of age his parents moved from Kentucky to Indianapolis, Indiana by covered wagon. He later described early Indianapolis saying that life there “was like camping out in a forest on a hunting expedition, except that the camping places were cabins instead of tents or brush houses.” He was baptized in the White River by Henry Ward Beecher. In 1823, he began to learn the printer's trade. At the end of three years he was sent to a private school taught by Ebenezer Sharpe. After 4 years, at age 19, he was appointed as a cadet to West Point. When he was graduated in 1834 he was fourth in a class of thirty-six and was brevetted as second lieutenant of the 1st artillery in the regular army.

After about one year's service at Fort Monroe, Virginia., and Fort King, Florida, he was sent by the war department to assist Maj. Ogden, of the engineer corps, in constructing the National Road in Indiana and Illinois, and had charge of the division between Richmond and Indianapolis, Indiana. This was the first turnpike road in Indiana.

Central Canal Project

In 1835 Thomas resigned from the U.S. service to work as Indiana's resident engineer. In February of that year a survey to locate the line of the Central Canal had been authorized by the Indiana general assembly to be supervised by state canal engineer Jesse Lynch Williams. The canal was to begin at the Wabash and Erie Canal at the mouth of the Mississinewa River and end at the Ohio River at Evansville. This survey was followed by a second survey by Thomas to determine the width, depth and other canal definitions. He was then given the job of superintending its construction.

Thomas A. Morris reports, "I located the line of this canal, laid it off and superintended the construction. I surveyed the line from Wabash town [Wabash] to Martinsville. It went through a rather rough country. I camped out for six months, but came into town for Christmas. Many a morning we had to shake the snow off ourselves when we got up.

"There were forests and thickets and a great deal of swampy ground. There was a big swamp a mile or so south of Broad Ripple, which contained water nearly all the year and was a great feeding place for wild ducks. There was another big swamp southeast of this, near Hiram Bacon's place on the Noblesville road, west to the [White] river. Remains of the former swamp still exist. I have had some good sport shooting snipes and ducks there."

Construction of the Central Canal began in 1836. The first portion of the Indianapolis and Northern divisions of the canal were constructed by contractor John Burke and about 750 workers who cleared the canal route of trees and stumps by using shovels and picks to excavate a 6 feet deep and 60 feet wide canal route. They also built a feeder dam on the White River with an inlet to the canal. By the fall of 1838 the Central Canal was completed from Broad Ripple through Indianapolis to Pleasant Run. It was watered and was used to bring lumber and farm products from Broad Ripple to Indianapolis. Soon sawmills, and woolen, cotton, and paper mills were erected along its banks to utilize its water power.

Gen. Thomas Armstrong Morris was married, in 1840, to Elizabeth Rachel, daughter of John Irwin, of Madison, Indiana. They had five children: John I. Morris (1846-?), Thomas O'Neil Morris, (1846-?) a division engineer on the Big Four; Elnora Irwin (Morris) Chambers, (1852-?), the widow of Dr. John Chambers, and Milton A. Morris, (1854-?), the secretary of the Indianapolis Water Company.

Service With The Railroads

In 1841 Thomas took over as chief engineer of the Madison and Indianapolis railroad after it had been abandoned by the state at Vernon, Indiana. It was the first railroad in the state. Through his extreme efforts it was completed by 1847 after he conceived a stock-swapping plan to finance it. The plan gave area farmers railroad stock in exchange for land and labor. His success led him to further railroad endeavors.

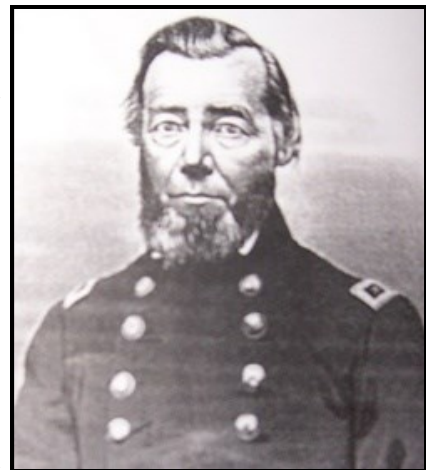
From 1847 to 1852 he was chief engineer of the Terre Haute and Richmond railroad, connecting Terre Haute and Indianapolis, and in 1880 it became part of the "Vandalia." During the same time he was chief engineer of the Indianapolis and Bellefontaine railroad, later part of the "Big Four." From 1852 to 1854 he was chief engineer of the Indianapolis and Cincinnati railroad and from 1854 to 1857 was president of the same. He drew the plans and superintended the construction of Indianapolis' Union Depot completed in 1853, the first of its kind in this country. Later, after remodeling, it was called Union Station. At his time he was also a colonel in the Indiana militia. From 1857 to 1859 he was president of the Indianapolis and Bellefontaine road, and from 1859 to 1861 chief engineer of the Indianapolis and Cincinnati railroad.

In October 1850 a Constitutional Convention was called to revise Indiana'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. The canal Thomas had built was put out of business by the railroads just like the rest of Indiana's canals.

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.

Three Month Civil War Service

When the war broke out in 1861 Thomas was appointed Quartermaster General of the state by Gov. Oliver P. Morton. He had charge of the equipment of Indiana's first regiments at Camp Morton. They promptly entered the field. As General he commanded the first brigade of troops that went from the state. That April he became a brigadier general. Later that spring he commanded the brigade that became known as the "Indiana Brigade." This brigade was ordered to Western Virginia as part of the Department of the Ohio.

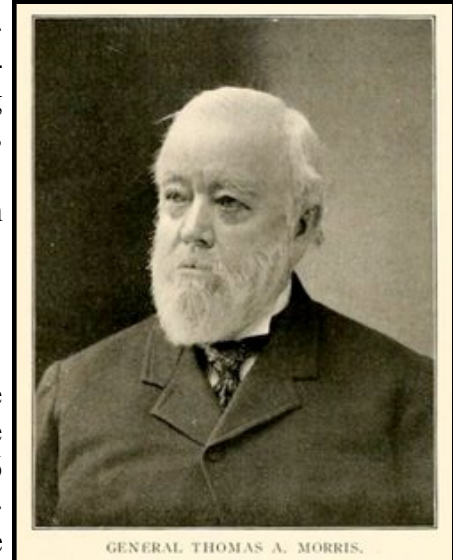


He was in the West Virginia campaign, and commanded at the battle of Philippi, June 2, 1861, which was the first engagement of the Civil War. They took part in the battle of Rich Mountain June 11. On July 6, Union Major General George McClellan ordered Thomas to move 4,000 men from Philippi to within a mile of the Confederates. Camp at Laurel Hill. He skirmished with 3,500 of Brigadier Gen. Robert S. Garnett's Confederates while McClellan led 2 brigades of about 7,000 men against 13,000 men who were holding Rich Mountain pass. On July 7 the Laurel Hill skirmish began. On July 9 the Union forces captured Girard Hill, where they set up artillery. The artillery began firing about noon on July 10 and continued the next day. When Garnett learned on July 11 that Rich Mountain had been taken, he retreated around mid-night. Union forces seized the abandoned Laurel Hill on July 12. On July 13 Thomas' brigade attacked the retreating Confederate forces led by Garnett along the Cheat River at Carrick's ford. Here Garnett was killed and, with reinforcements from the 7th Indiana regiment, the Confederates were defeated. This guaranteed the Virginia Unionist's control of West Virginia and allowed it to secede from Virginia. His campaign was with the three months' troops and he was mustered out of service on July 27, 1861. He had won all his battles, but General George McClellan was credited with Thomas' achievements.

In September 1862 Thomas was offered the position of Brigadier General of the volunteer army. But due to an over supply of Governor appointed generals and McClellan blocking his appointment, it was held up for fourteen months. He was offered the position of Major General of the volunteer army. He did not accept either offer. He returned home to civilian pursuits.

Back To The Railroads

From 1862 to 1866 Thomas was the chief engineer of the Indianapolis and Cincinnati railroad, and during that time built the road from Lawrenceburg to Cincinnati. From 1866 to 1869 he was president and chief engineer of the Indianapolis and St. Louis railroad, building the road from Terre Haute to Indianapolis. From 1869 to 1872 he was the receiver of the Indianapolis, Cincinnati and Lafayette railroad.



Meanwhile the Central Canal passed through several hands and at one time was owned by a company from Rochester, New York. Various proposals were offered to supply the city of Indianapolis with the canal waters without success. On October 7, 1869 the Water Works Company of Indianapolis was formed to provide canal water for transportation, mills and a water turbine to pump well water for city use. Title for the Central Canal was transferred from the Rochester, New York firm to the new Water Works Company of Indianapolis (WWCI).

The new company used the canal water to operate pumps for well water at the Washington Street station and to supply the city with canal water for fire protection. However, local residents were not required to switch from their individual wells to the city system.

In 1877 Thomas was appointed one of the commissioners to select plans and superintend the construction of a new state house to replace the one that his father had helped build nearly fifty years earlier. It was completed in 1888.

By 1880 the WWCI had spent \$1.5 million in equipment and piping but still only served about 1,400 of the 15,000 potential households. Indianapolis population had grown from 45,000 in 1870 to about 75,000 in 1880. The company was in receivership and was sold to a newly formed Indianapolis Water Company (IWW) at a Sheriff's auction on April 21, 1881.

In 1881, upon the resignation of T. Edward Hambleton, Thomas became the second president of the Indianapolis Water Company and inherited all the mistakes that had been made. The company used the Central Canal to carry water from the White River to the pumping station and then send it to Indianapolis homes and businesses. Thomas soon had a new board of directors and things began to get better. The customer base was soon greatly expanded. By 1881 it served 2,800 homes, by 1898 8,000, and by 1904 14,296. Pumping facilities were being expanded.

Thomas Armstrong Morris remained as President until his death in 1904. Despite his death the

Indianapolis Water Company continued to grow and by 1905 a water treatment facility was added to utilize canal water for drinking. IWC also encouraged the recreational use of the Central Canal. Fairview, Armstrong and Riverside Parks were established along the banks of the old canal. IWC had its own steamboats, the Diane and the Cleopatra, which offered rides on the canal.

In 1912 IWC and the Central Canal was sold to a private investor, Clarence H. Geist, whose family retained ownership for the next 40 years. The Geist Reservoir was constructed on Fall Creek in 1943 to supply the city with another consistent water source.

In 1952 the Indianapolis Water Company was purchased by the sons of Clint Murchison, a millionaire from East Texas. They sold their interest in the company in 1965. The Central Canal still operates today carrying water from the White River to the filtration plant and provides some of Indianapolis' residents with water.

From his early life Thomas was never very long out of active employment. He amassed a large and valuable estate. In his later years he worked to support public interests such as being a life trustee of the Consumers' Gas Trust Company.

General Thomas Armstrong Morris died on March 22, 1904 in Indianapolis, Indiana at the age of 92. He was buried in Section 6, Lot 1, Crown Hill Cemetery, Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana, a cemetery for which he was an incorporator. His meager grave stone does not reflect the importance of this man in Indiana's history.



Thomas Armstrong Morris
Section 6, Lot 1
Crown Hill Cemetery
Indianapolis, Indiana

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Ancestry.com

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Document With Signature of Thomas A. Morris

Shortly after the above article about Thomas Armstrong Morris was written, CSI member Neil Sowards of Fort Wayne found a document on E-bay that was a deposition from Thomas A. Morris in the case of the State of Indiana and Samuel Henderson that was tried in the Marion County Circuit Court of the State of Indiana. The document is dated May 15, 1841, which is after the digging of the Central Canal had stopped leaving a partially completed ditch through Samuel Henderson's property.

Samuel Henderson (1800-1883) was one of the very first settlers to arrive in Indianapolis in the Fall of 1821. He was its very first Postmaster and served until the Summer of 1829. He was a Whig and the very first mayor of the city of Indianapolis (1847-1849). He owned the property on which the first State fairgrounds and Civil War Camp Morton were located and through which a portion of the Central Canal was to run. When Union Station was built he sold his real estate for 1/10th of its value. He then moved to California since he believed the railroad would ruin the city.

Thomas A. Morris answers for the State of Indiana since he was in charge of the Central Canal project. At that time the Central Canal was referred to as the "Big Ditch."

The four-page-long handwritten official court document was partially written and signed by John L. Ketcham. It begins with a handwritten statement from Hugh O'Neal, the U.S. attorney for the State of Indiana from 1850-1854. It then proceeds in question and answer format.

Henderson asks: "Will you please state what you know about a ditch (Central Canal) made through my land near and north of Indianapolis on or near Fall Creek and what injury if any is done me?"

Morris answers: "The ditch I think is now 1 mile in length and will probably average one half chain (66 feet) wide taking up some acre of ground. The ditch can not at present be crossed with horses at any of the points at which I have seen it without digging down slopes to get to the water where there is no canal and ditch had been made. If no more of the canal is ever finished then there is at present I have not purpose to say that the farm is less valuable as it was in that it would have been with the drain running where it did originally and the portion of the canal had never been made."

Henderson asks: "Did the State build a farm bridge across this ditch for the accommodation of this farm, if so how much did it cost?"

Morris answers: "We did, the cost was I think near \$150.00."

The document was hand signed by T. A. Morris

Others signing the document are:

John L. Ketchen (April 3, 1810-April 21, 1869) was Indianapolis' first town attorney from 1837-1839. As an abolitionist, he led a successful defense of John Freeman in a case tried under the 1853 fugitive slave act. He is buried in Crown Hill Cemetery in Indianapolis.

R. B. Duncan, an expert on Probate Law, served as Clerk of Marion County Courts from 1834-1863. He was reared in Hamilton County, Indiana until 1824 when he moved to Pike township, Marion county, Indiana to live with his brother-in-law, William C. Robinson, and also his uncle, John Duncan. While there he cleared ground and helped farm. In 1827 he went to Indianapolis, then a village, to pursue his education. He boarded with James M. Ray. He worked at the county clerk's office as deputy while at school to pay his board. He remained in that position until March 1834 when he was elected clerk of the county, a position he held for sixteen years. Meanwhile he studied law, and, on the expiration of his term in 1850, he began his professional law career. He confined his law practice to consultation and business associated with the Probate Court. He was a Whig and then became a Republican. He was a Presbyterian. He married Mary E. Sanders, daughter of Dr. John H. Sanders, of Indianapolis in December 1843. They had four children. John S. Duncan was a lawyer, Robert P. Duncan was a manufacturer, Anna D. Duncan became the wife of William T. Barbee of Lafayette, Indiana, and Nellie D. Duncan became the wife of John R. Wilson of Indianapolis. R. B. Duncan died in 1897. He was the oldest continuous resident of Marion county at that time.