

David Tomlinson Yeakel
Find-A-Grave #30164733
Canal Infirmary at Lafayette

By Carolyn Schmidt

Boatmen on the Wabash & Erie Canal fell ill or were injured and needed a place to be treated. The General Assembly of the State of Indiana approved an act for the relief of boatmen on the Wabash and Erie Canal on January 15, 1844. It authorized David T. Yeakel and Elizur Deming and their associates to erect at a convenient point in Lafayette, Tippecanoe county, Indiana, an Infirmary "for the proper medical and dietetic treatment of such boatmen and others connected with the navigation of the Wabash and Erie canal as may from time to time sicken and stand in need of medical assistance." The institution's name would be the Boatmans' Infirmary. It was to be completed by July 1, 1844. Yeakel and Deming were either both or singularly to be the proprietor and superintendent and to erect it at their/his own expense.

The act then appointed Samuel R. Johnson, T. T. Benbridge and Rudolph S. Ford, all who resided in Lafayette, as a board of examiners. They were to make a semi-annual examination into how the infirmary was conducted, inspect its books, and report annually to the State governor the cases submitted to medical treatment or surgical operations, the number of deaths, the number of patients cured, and any other thing of importance. They also were given the power to fill any vacancies that might occur due to death or resignation of its members.

The duty of the superintendent/s of the Infirmary were to receive all applicants bearing the proper certificate and to place them under medical treatment, providing free of charge such medicine and nursing as needed. They were to keep a case book that was available at all times to the board of examiners including the name, age, and disease of each patient, what practice was adopted, the duration of the treatment, and, in case of death, to provide a proper and decent burial with no cost to the county.

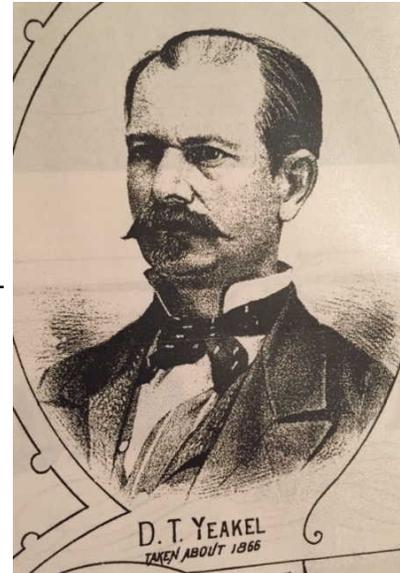
The captains running canal boats on the Wabash & Erie Canal within the state's boundaries to and from Lafayette, were to deduct fifty cents each month from April 1 to December 1 (8 times a year) from the wages of each male person age eighteen and over, stewards, steersmen, cooks, boat hands, drivers, or others connected with the boat's navigation to defray the expenses of the Infirmary. On the first day of the prescribed months, the boat captain paid the amount deducted to the collector of the port at Lafayette and submitted a written statement of the number of individuals employed by him, the statement to be verified by an oath. If he failed to comply he was subject to a penalty of five dollars for each failure, to be collected by an action of debt before a justice of the peace.

After the collector received the payment from the boat captain, he was to pay himself for the necessary books he used and six per cent of all moneys he collected for his services. The remaining balance was to be paid to the superintendent/s of the Infirmary.

It was the duty of each captain, boatman, or other person whether male or female, who applied for admission to the Infirmary for medical treatment, to report his or her name, the boat on

which he/she was engaged, and to receive from the collector a permit of admission.

David Tomlinson Yeakel, who was 26 years old at the time, had been born on July 4, 1818 to Jacob and Elizabeth (Wilson) Yeakel in Hagerstown, Maryland, where he spent his early years. He later studied medicine under the celebrated Dr. Charles McGill, who was incarcerated in prison for opposition to McClellan's idea in regard to suppressing the Maryland Legislature. He then attended and graduated from Jefferson Medical College in 1839. He began practicing medicine in Indianapolis, then, two years later, went to New Orleans. While there the terrible cholera epidemic broke out. He returned to Indianapolis and, in the winter of 1841-42, relocated in Lafayette, Indiana. He took the Indiana General Assembly at its word and took on the job of building, financing, and superintending the Boatmans' Infirmary. We do not know what happened to Elizur Deming, who also had been authorized by the General Assembly to build and superintend it.



David Tomlinson Yeakel
Taken about 1866

David had most of the Boatmans' Infirmary built and ready for occupancy on July 1, 1844, as required by the act. The board of examiners visited the site that day and reported, "We visited the infirmary and made an examination of all its arrangements, and of all that had been accomplished. We were highly satisfied with every thing we saw. The site chosen is very judicious, being elevated with a clear extended prospect; and so situated as to command a fine circulation of air and in every way to promote health and cheerfulness. The edifice, though the front part was not yet built, was well planned and constructed, and so far finished as to be ready for the immediate reception of patients. The rooms were very commodious, neat, and pleasant, and the beds, bedsteads, stands, &c., gave us an impression that every thing had been done which was requisite for the comfort of the inmates. The whole appearance of the infirmary was quite inviting."

On November 22, 1844 James Whitcomb, Governor of Indiana, received a letter from the board of examiners, Samuel R. Johnson, Thomas T. Benbridge and Rudolph S. Ford, saying nothing more had been done on the Infirmary due to a state of circumstances. "The means provided by the Legislature, for the support of the Infirmary, have proved unavailable. The collection of the sums due, could not be enforced, and the circuit court, to which the cases were referred, pronounced the act of the Legislature unconstitutional. By this event, the attending physician, Doct. D. T. Yeakel, has been brought into a very embarrassing position. Having attended most sedulously to all his allotted duties—having given his time and care most faithfully to the work—having advanced the means, or incurred the responsibility for all expenditures, under his entire conviction that he was to be sustained and compensated by the State of Indiana, whose law he considered effectual, and whose faith pledged. He now finds the expected resources have failed, and is entirely at a loss what to do, unless the Legislature deem it right and proper to interfere for his relief."

Dr. Yeakel had written the examiners earlier stating that “In the purchase of the lots occupied by the building (Infirmery), the erection of the buildings, and the furnishing of the same, I have expended and am responsible for 2,763 dollars 41½ cents; \$1,351 41½ of which total amount has been paid, and \$1,412 of which remains unpaid. The lots were purchased for \$525 dollars, which is a portion of the debt unpaid. Since the first of July, 1844, at which time the law should have been enforced, and from which time I should have been receiving the proceeds arising from the tax, three liens have been filed against the property, for materials furnished and work done. Which liens are at this time being prosecuted in Tippecanoe circuit court. The amount due the persons prosecuting their liens, is 887 dollars, which added to the 525 dollars due on the lots, makes the amount of 1,412 dollars which remains unpaid, and by which I am at present embarrassed. I am the sole sufferer in the matter; and I think it cruel and unjust that I should be, as I have acted entirely under the auspices of a solemn Legislative act, believed by myself, and considered by the power which created it not only perfectly valid, but amply sufficient to be carried into efective operation.”

The examiners inquired of Governor Whitcomb, “What course is just and best under the circumstances of the case, we presume not to dictate to your Excellency. Doct. Yeakel is very desirous of seeing the asylum for the sick and needy, in operation, either as a public or private establishment. And his case *he thinks* would be met, either by the ratification of the present law, with the passage of a few additional sections, continuing it, as a public institution, or by an appropriation to him of an amount equal to the present demand against the property; thus enabling him to open it as a private establishment. Should your Excellency take a favorable view of his case, and present the matter to the consideration of the Legislature, in your annual message, or by special message, or in any such way as may approve itself to your judgment, we doubt not it would be very auspicious to his interests.”

Governor Whitcomb wrote to the President of the Indiana Senate on December 26, 1844, “Herewith is transmitted the report of the Board of Examiners of the boatmen’s infirmery, established at Lafayette, made pursuant to the requirements of the second section of the act of last session for the establishment of that institution.

“By the document it will be seen, that after the present proprietor had incurred considerable expense and embarrassment in the construction of the infirmery, the means sought to be secured to him by the act referred to, with which to enable him to render the institution useful to the community, and afford a proper remuneration for expenses necessarily incurred, and services to be rendered, have proved unavailing, by reason of a decision of the Tippecanoe circuit court, pronouncing the said act unconstitutional.

“The case strongly appeals to the justice of the Legislature, either to provide for the remuneration of the proprietor, or by further legislation to secure the objects of the original act of the Legislature, as the wisdom of that body may deem the most advisable.”

Governor Whitcomb just passed it on. Mr. Orth made a motion to refer the request to the committee on claims that Thursday morning, December 26, 1844. Mr. Edmonson motioned the Senate adjourn.

Finally in the late afternoon of January 4, 1845 Mr. Orth submitted the following amendment to the joint resolution for the relief of David T. Yeakel and Elizur Deming (Deming was included since he was also originally authorized) :

“Provided however, That it shall be lawful for the commissioners aforesaid to loan the said sum of money upon the boatmen’s infirmary, and the lots on which it is erected at Lafayette, or any other real estate in said town of Lafayette; and provided further, that said commissioners shall be satisfied that the property aforesaid, or such other real estate that may be offered, is amply sufficient to secure the repayment of said loan.”

The resolution was agreed to and on motion of Mr. Chapman of Laporte, ordered, That the bill lie upon the table.

We have been unable to find any more information about whether Dr. Yeakel got reimbursed and ran the infirmary for the State, if he ran it as a private institution, or if it ever was used.

Apparently it did not preclude Dr. Yeakel from continuing his medical practice, for he served the Lafayette area for more than 25 years afterwards as a surgeon. On October 1, 1844 he married Eliza Anne Webb (1824-1905) in Lafayette. They were the parents of six children, two of whom died in early childhood werer Allan Yeakel and Sarah Webb Yeakel. The surviving children were George Mears Yeakel, Nathaniel Webb Yeakel, Alice Tomlinson Yeakel and David Paul Yeakel.

Dr. David Tomlinson Yeakel was a physician, surgeon and an inventor. He invented a cannon used in the Civil War. He died at age 80 on September 27, 1898 in Lafayette and was laid to rest in Section 1 Lot 82 of Greenbush Cemetery in Lafayette, Tippecanoe County, Indiana.

Sources:

Ancestry.com: Public Member Trees, David Tomlinson Yeakel

Find-A-Grave #30164733 David T. Yeakel, M.D.

General Laws of the State of Indiana, Passed at the Twenty-eighth Session of the General Assembly, Indianapolis, IN/ Dowling and Cole, State Printers, 1844.

Journal of the Senate of the State of Indiana, during the Twenty-ninth Session of the General Assembly, Indianapolis, IN/ J. F. Chapman, State Printer, 1844.