

# THE HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION OF THE WHITEWATER CANAL



**“EXTEND THE CANAL”**

**CANAL SOCIETY OF INDIANA**  
**April 8-10, 2016**

**CANAL SOCIETY OF INDIANA PO BOX 10808 FT WAYNE, IN 46854**

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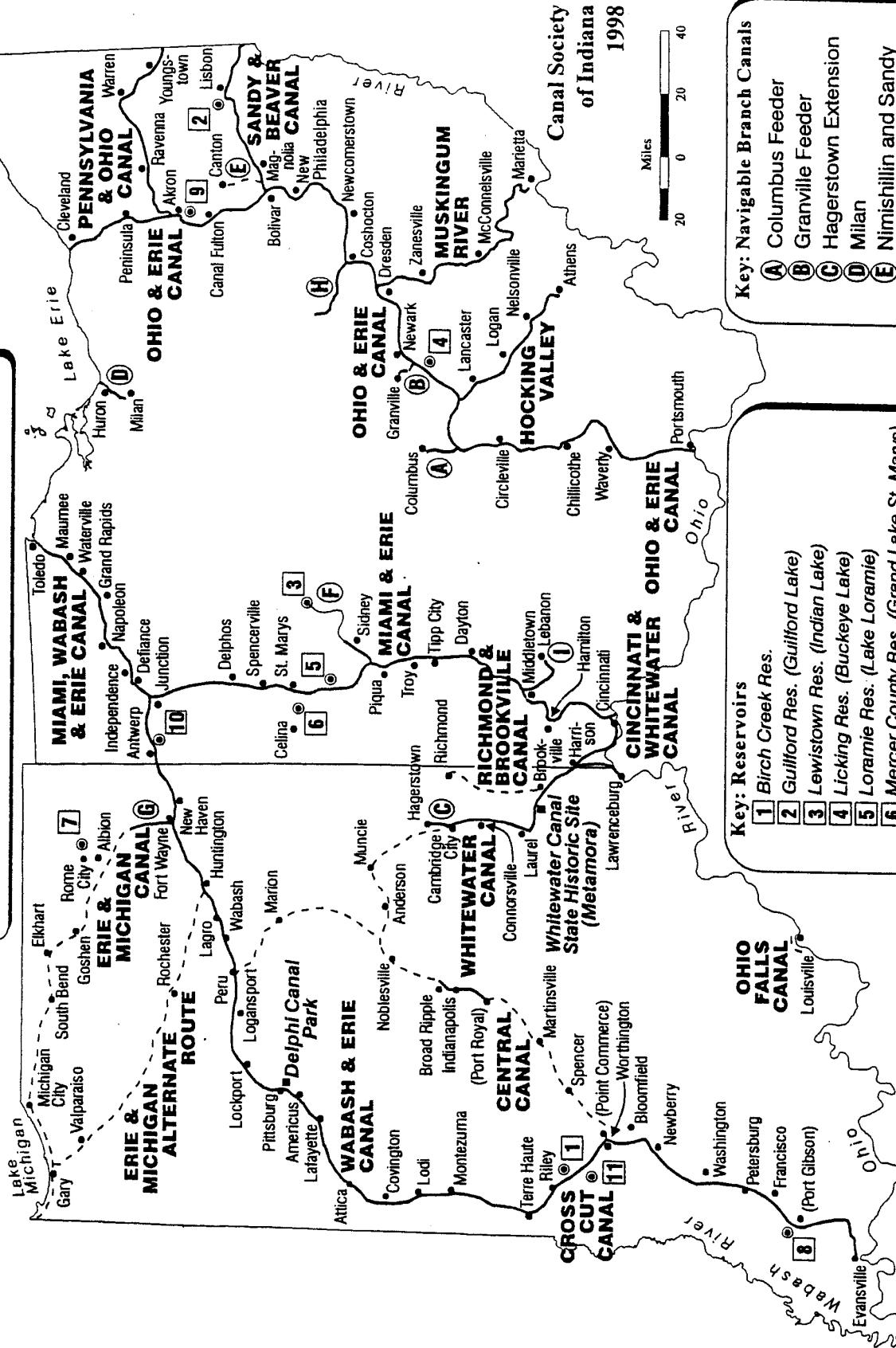
**CANAL SOCIETY OF INDIANA**  
**April 8-10, 2016**

**EDITOR:**  
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# Canal Systems of Indiana and Ohio



**Legend**

- Canal or Canalized Rivers
- - - Canal Proposed or Incomplete
- City or Town
- ⊙ Reservoir
- Park

**Key: Reservoirs**

- 1 Birch Creek Res.
- 2 Guilford Res. (Guilford Lake)
- 3 Lewistown Res. (Indian Lake)
- 4 Licking Res. (Buckeye Lake)
- 5 Loramie Res. (Lake Loramie)
- 6 Mercer County Res. (Grand Lake St. Marys)
- 7 Northport Res. (Sylvan Lake)
- 8 Pigeon Creek Res.
- 9 Portage Lakes
- 10 Six Mile Res.
- 11 Splunge Creek Res.

**Key: Navigable Branch Canals**

- A Columbus Feeder
- B Granville Feeder
- C Hagerstown Extension
- D Milan
- E Nimishillin and Sandy
- F Sidney Feeder
- G St. Joseph Feeder
- H Walhonding
- I Warren County



Canal Society of Indiana 1998

Prepared by C. McOmber, Cartographic Services, Department of Geography, Ball State University, 1998.

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## FOREWORD

### “EXTEND THE CANAL”

Each tour given by the Canal Society of Indiana attempts to relate the history of the canal and point out the location of its structures in a particular area of Indiana or in a neighboring state. On this tour we will visit sites along the Hagerstown Extension and the northern portion of the Whitewater Canal in Cambridge City and Milton, Indiana.

Tours also include other canal related buildings and some early history of the counties and towns being toured. We will visit the grave of John Minesinger, the engineer who built the Hagerstown Extension and platted the railroad town of Millville, which is near the birth place of Wilbur Wright.

Although this book only covers the canal, canal people and places, while touring we will also note the advance from canal to rail to air transportation. We will learn about Indiana's sports history by visiting the gym in which “Hoosiers” was

filmed in Knightstown and have an opportunity to see the High School Basketball Hall of Fame in New Castle. We will learn about the Soldiers and Sailors Home in Knightstown built for those injured in the Civil War and see how it is being used today by the National Guard, see the Overbeck sisters' pottery and figurines in Cambridge City and watch candy being made in Hagerstown.

Tours usually have a theme — something that ties the tour together. Since this spring's canal trip concerns the Hagerstown Extension of the Whitewater Canal, our theme is “Extend The Canal.”

Think back to the 1800s when horses and mules pulled laden boats up and down the smooth waters of the canal while nearby the Whitewater River rushed and gouged out the countryside during freshets. Note the change in elevation that had to be overcome with locks as the canal proceeds northward.

**Welcome aboard!**

## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

### HAGERSTOWN PLANS CANAL

By Robert F. Schmidt

“Hagerstown Plans Canal” could have been the headline of the *Cambridge City Reveille* in June 1846 when the citizens of Hagerstown gathered at the store of Wesley Williamson. The Whitewater Canal that was originally planned in 1836 and had surveys conducted to Nettle Creek at Hagerstown stopped abruptly at Brookville in November 1839 when the national financial panic dried up funding. The state of Indiana was in dire straits.

Work stopped on all of Indiana’s canals except the Wabash & Erie, which was able to continue as it was funded by land sales. However, even this project was turned over to the bondholders in July 1847.

In 1842 Indiana had turned over all of its interests and completed works on the Whitewater Canal to the White Water Canal Company. By the terms of its state charter, this private company was committed to complete the canal but only to the National Road by March 1, 1847. A gala barbecue was held in Cambridge City on July 28, 1842 to celebrate the resumption of digging by the private company. Attendance was said to have been around 10,000 people. This event left the citizens of Hagerstown wondering if or when the canal would be completed the eight miles to their town.

Work on the Whitewater Canal was resumed. It reached Cambridge City in October of 1845 ahead of schedule.

Meanwhile Hagerstown had some manufacturing establishments that were rivaling those of Richmond and, as it was surrounded by rich farming country, it was necessary that they should

have the advantage of the new method of trade and communication in order to compete with other towns of the county. The state legislature provided an opportunity for a Hagerstown Canal Company with enabling legislation in February 1841 and then authorized a stock company on February 11, 1843.

Although there was probably some activity to sell stock in this company as early as June 1844 based on a documented receipt to George Gillespie, the real organizational meeting was held in Wesley Williamson’s store in Hagerstown two years later in June 1846. This delayed action was probably wise to be sure that the Whitewater Canal actually was completed to Cambridge City. At Williamson’s store they elected officers and agreed to support a plan for more stock subscription.

The men at this meeting were business men and property owners. George Gillespie and Jacob Ulrich were some of the original proprietors of Hagerstown. They created the town based on the assumption that a canal would be built as surveyed earlier to nearby Nettle Creek. Now, to protect their investment in the young community, they were elected to the key leadership positions of the Hagerstown Canal Company. Jacob Ulrich, who was instrumental in platting the town in 1839, was elected president. George Gillespie was named general manager, Archibald B. Knode financial secretary and Wesley Williamson recording secretary.

Stock subscriptions were offered to the community at \$5 and \$50 increments. Investors signed notes promising to pay for their share commitments in incremental payments of cash. The *Cambridge City Reveille* in its weekly paper regularly carried notices for up to 15 installment payments due the company financial official, A. B. Knode. Some others offered their labor in exchange for shares of the company.

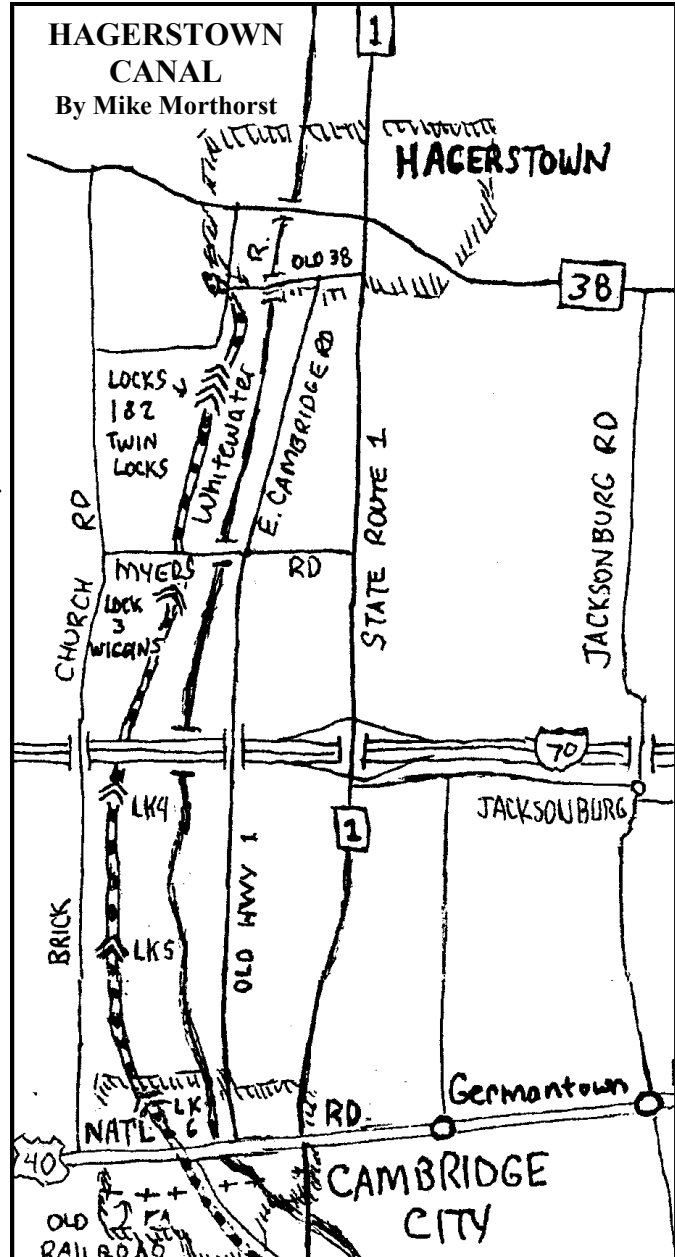
## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

John Minesinger, an experienced canal engineer from Pennsylvania, was hired to be the engineer for the Hagerstown Canal. He had worked with Jesse Williams and William Gooding back in 1834 on surveying the Whitewater valley for the canal route. Minesinger apparently liked this area of Indiana. By 1850 he had moved his family to New Castle and established a farm there.

Minesinger was critical of the engineering of the Whitewater Canal. He used his earlier experience in constructing the last segment to Hagerstown. Following the West River branch of the Whitewater River, he chose to build the prism on higher ground, often several feet above the river. The wisdom of his plans became evident over the years as the Hagerstown Canal received little damage from the floods that plagued the lower canal.

The next step was to hire contractors to build the eight miles of prism and the six locks and other structures that were required. The first section was let to Hiram Mendenhall of Randolph county. The next section south went to James Putney and extended to Heiney Road. A much longer segment from Heiney Road to Symond's Creek was let to Barney Linderman. These local contractors illustrate why canal proponents always argued that more locals were hired to build canals than to build railroads.

They dispensed with a formal groundbreaking celebration and immediately began digging in the summer of 1846. Minesinger planned to use the standard Erie dimensions of 40-foot-wide and 4-foot-deep for the prism and build 6 locks to deal with elevation change. The Whitewater Canal including the Hagerstown extension has Nettle Creek as its summit and drops 491 feet down a narrow valley to the Ohio River in only 76 miles.



Like any canal, there was a lot of manual labor required to cut down trees, grub out their roots, remove the timber and other brush, move tons of earth, form banks for the prism, build a tow path and puddle the canal to reduce absorption. All this work was done with the tools of the period – shovels, scoops, wheelbarrows, ropes, pulleys and wagons. The only horsepower used was farm mules and horses. Most of the manual

## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

labor was done by Irish workers who received \$18 per month. Dunkards, a local religious sect, worked along with the Irish workers either as contributed labor or with little pay. An Irish work camp was located just south of the Jerry Myers road and a small graveyard nearby has some Irish burials.

Contractors Putney and Linderman soon ran into financial difficulties and their contracts were re-let to Andrus Wiggins, a local industrialist, and Joseph Madden, who completed sections just south of Hagerstown.



Remains of double locks #1 and #2  
located south of Scout Lake.  
Photo from Jane Lacy's article published in the  
*Hagerstown Exponent* in 1981.

The first two of the six 15' by 90' locks were to be twin timber locks to handle an 18-foot-drop at the location just south of today's Girl Scout camp. They were let to Matthew Luce. They were described by A.C. Ginther in 1902 as: "The locks that were planned by Mr. Minesinger were said to be models of perfection. They were almost 100 feet long, each made of walnut and oak timbers and hewed and fitted with gates of the latest pattern... These two locks were the most picturesque, as well as the most massive, on the entire canal."

Lock 3 was located in the contract area

taken over by Andrus Wiggins. Based on a conversation with Wiggins later in life, he said the location of this lock was poorly selected as they ran into quicksand making its construction very difficult. Water had to be pumped out into a 4 mile ditch to carry it from their diggings to the river. This lock was located just north of the Jerry Myers road. After the canal was finished Wiggins became the toll collector in Hagerstown.

The contractor for Lock 4 is unknown but it appears to have been located on a farm purchased by industrialist Benjamin Conklin. One source says Matthew Luce built locks 1-4. The contract for this area was originally assigned to Joseph Madden.

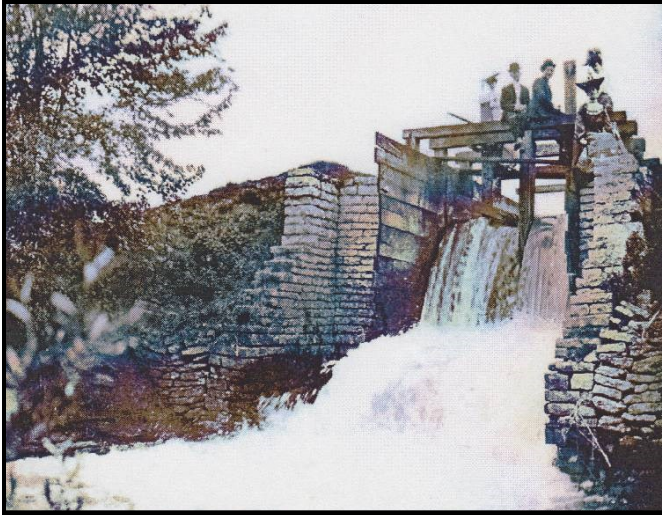
At Symond's Creek an aqueduct was built to carry the canal water over the waterway. This was probably an open trunk aqueduct vs. a covered aqueduct to save costs. Details of this structure or the contractor are unknown. It appears to have been built sometime in 1846 as mention of it is made in the records of the flood that occurred on January 1, 1847 saying it sustained considerable damage .

As the canal work proceeded into 1847, the Hagerstown Canal Company ran into financial difficulties. To get the canal completed they turned to Cambridge City businessman, Benjamin Conklin. They reached an agreement with him that they would give him perpetual water rights for the operation of the Conklin Mill, which he had built there in 1846, if he would complete the sections of canal down to the National Road. Madden may have built the aqueduct at Symond's creek before Conklin finished the works, but Locks 5 & 6 were definitely built by Conklin.

Some of the other structures required for this canal have not been too well documented. At the head of the canal there was a dam and a control gate on the West branch of the Whitewater

## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

River just east of Hagerstown. These structures allowed a regulated amount of water to be fed into the canal. We have no description or contractor for either of these structures, but Mendenhall or Luce may have done the work. There were also waste weirs to let excess water out of the canal.



This waste weir released water from the canal to maintain the appropriate level of water in the canal. Post card image

Every stream crossing the canal— Nettle Creek, Bear Creek, Pronghorn Run and Symond's Creek etc.— required either a culvert or aqueduct. An aqueduct appears to have been used at Symond's Creek and a very nice stone arch culvert remains on Nettle Creek today. At Bear Creek there are some remaining stones of some sort of structure.

The use of culverts or aqueducts on canals requires some explanation as the terms are sometimes confused. Both structures were used to carry the canal over an intersecting waterway. The purpose was to prevent the waters of this intersecting creek or river from entering the canal. A culvert was used if the waterway was narrow like a ditch or small creek. A culvert could be box shaped or an arch and could be made of either timber or stone. In either case the prism width of the earthen canal was maintained and built continuously over the culvert. In contrast, an aqueduct was used

where the waterway required a wider span. In this case the aqueduct trough built on piers carried the canal water. The aqueduct was usually only wide enough for one boat to cross whereas a culvert maintained the width of the canal prism. A comparison can be seen today with our highways. The roadway and its berm are usually much wider over a culvert than the lanes at a bridge crossing.

The Hagerstown Canal passed over this culvert and Nettle Creek passed through the arch. Photo by Bob Schmidt



By the fall of 1847 the Hagerstown Canal was completed. Without much fanfare, Benjamin Conklin made the connection with the Whitewater Canal. The 1874 Birdseye Map of Cambridge City shows a covered bridge over the National Road at that intersection.

No matter how fine the locks or how far the canal was raised above the river, the Hagerstown Canal was always 100% at the mercy of the Whitewater Canal. If the lower canal flooded and washed out there was nowhere else to go with the produce or manufactured products except the National Road. Flooding, not the railroad, was the ultimate cause for failure and the demise of the Whitewater Canal.

By 1863 the Whitewater Canal Company was unable to fund the required repairs. The canal was sold to Henry C. Lord of Cincinnati.



## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

In 1902 C.M. Ginther wrote a summary of these events that is quite quotable:

“The great washouts practically ruined the lower canal. Hagerstown languished. There was little business between there and Cambridge City.... The decline was sudden and the loss severe. The thriving town at the northern terminus of the canal succumbed to circumstances. Her opportunity had come and she had made the most of it, but she could scarcely be expected to survive the blow dealt when the canal as a public carrier ceased to exist.”

“The self-reliance manifested by the people of Hagerstown in this enterprise called for the unqualified praise of the press of the day. In contrast with the action of other promoters of public works, no subsidy was asked from anybody and the State was not called on to assist with so much as a single dollar... There was never a more remarkable public work undertaken than this, and it is a pity the example set could not have been followed in other places...”

The last boat to arrive in Hagerstown was in 1861. It was owned by Mr. Stevenson of Milton. Although the canal era lasted here only 14 years, during that time in brought economic development to the little village of Hagerstown. There were woolen and flour mills, a shingle factory, a barrel factory, carriage shops, a foundry, slaughter houses and many more businesses.

From Hagerstown to Cambridge City the canal continued to function as a hydraulic canal providing water power to Conklin’s (Eagle or Imperial) mill and later, in 1889, to W.A. Crietz’s mill. The mill was finally destroyed by fire in 1944.

The Whitewater Valley Railroad was built on the towpath, reaching Connersville in 1867 and Hagerstown in 1868. The railroad helped to boost

the continuing industrial development of Hagerstown just as the canal was abandoned. In this instance the railroad was not the competitor but rather the saving grace for Hagerstown.

With the passage of time and changing economics, rail service was abandoned to Hagerstown in March 1931 and then, in 1972, was abandoned between Brookville and Connersville. That same year the Whitewater Valley Railroad was established as a not-for-profit organization to preserve rail heritage.

In 1946, one hundred years after the canal’s construction began, the Hagerstown Business Men’s Club erected a stone monument at the southwest corner of the Main Street bridge in Hagerstown, which recognizes this historic canal. Note that the marker includes this 8 mile Hager-



HAGERSTOWN, INDIANA  
THIS MONUMENT MARKS  
THE NORTHERN TERMINUS  
OF THE WHITEWATER CANAL  
PIONEER TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM  
BETWEEN CINCINNATI AND HAGERSTOWN  
Construction 1836-1847  
Operated Until 1861  
Length 101 miles

## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

### HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION CANAL CONTRACTORS

Hiram Mendenhall, the man who earlier had presented the anti-slavery petition to Henry Clay when he visited Richmond, Indiana in 1842, was probably the person who was most instrumental in extending the Whitewater Canal to Hagerstown. His home was one-mile south of the town near the ice pond. He and others contracted with the canal company as follows:

Hiram Mendenhall - Hagerstown to the Tilton farm

James Puntney - ½ mile from Tilton farm to the Heiney farm

Barney Linderman - from the Heiney farm to Symonds Creek

Benjamin Conklin - from Symonds Creek to Cambridge City at the National Road including Locks #5 and #6.

Puntney and Linderman did not complete the portions for which they had contracted. These sections were re-let to Andress Wiggins and Joseph Madden. Wiggins was to install Lock #3, the locks having been numbered 1-6 from Hagerstown to Cambridge City. He encountered an immense bed of quicksand, which had to be removed. He first had to build a 4½mile long drainage canal and use a pump that threw a stream 18 inches in diameter. He hired 80 men to assist with the pumping in order to remove all the sand. Eventually the foundation became so solid that teams of horses could pass over it without danger.

Lock #3 was a treacherous lock, for it lay eight feet below the bed of the West River.\* The contractor was paid \$1 per cubic yard to remove the soil and sand.

\*The west branch of the Whitewater River was noted on maps as the West River.

### SCOUT CREEK CULVERT

Below Hagerstown this culvert passed Scout Creek below the Hagerstown Extension Canal. The canal is to the west of the Whitewater River.

Photos by Lowell Goar 2010



This structure is located 1/2 mile south of Hagerstown at Camp Wapikamigi/Scout Lake. It can be crawled through, but it is a very tight fit on its upper end.

## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

### ACTS TO INCORPORATE THE HAGERSTOWN CANAL

**1841**

An act to incorporate the Hagerstown Canal Company was approved on February 15, 1841.

**1843**

In 1843 an act to amend the earlier act to incorporate the Hagerstown Canal Company was approved on February 11, 1843 as follows:

Sec. 1. Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Indiana, That, in addition to the time allowed by said act [Feb. 15, 1841] for organizing said company and completing said canal, the Hagerstown Canal Company shall be allowed two additional years within which to become organized and commence operations, and two additional years within which to complete said canal.

Sec. 2. That all subscriptions of stock to said canal company, and all rights acquired by said company shall continue as perfect as though this act had never been passed, and said company had organized with the time prescribed by the act to which this is an amendment.

Sec. 3. The commissioners named in the act to which this is an amendment, or a majority of them, shall have the right, if deemed expedient, at any time within five years after the passage of said act to open new books or the present books of said company to receive subscriptions of new

or additional stock in said company, in the same manner as is prescribed in the act above named.

Sec. 4. That there shall hereafter be paid at the time of subscription therefore, by each subscriber, the sum of two dollars upon each share of stock, which payment shall authorize the subscriber therefore to exercise all the rights of a stockholder.

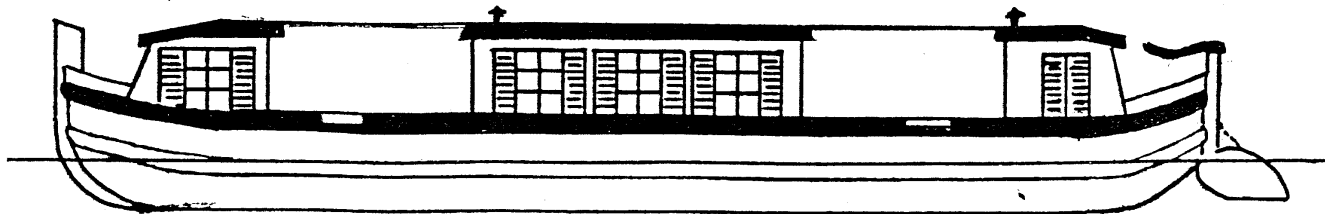
Sec. 5. So much of the act entitled "An act to incorporate the Hagerstown Canal Company" as is by this act amended or supplied, be, and the same is hereby repealed.

Sec. 6. This act to take effect and be in force from and after its passage.

Bill No. 312 incorporating the Hagerstown Canal Company on a motion of Mr. Test was taken up and referred to a select committee of Messrs. Test and Carnan. It was read three times. The Indiana Senate amended the House Bill.

### 1847 & RESULTS

"Hagerstown's expansion was delayed until workmen completed the section of the Whitewater Canal from Cambridge City to Hagerstown in 1847. For the next six years Hagerstown experience a boom. Its population exceeded 600 by 1850. Financial and climatic misfortunes forced closing the canal in 1853." according to *The Taming of the Wilderness*.

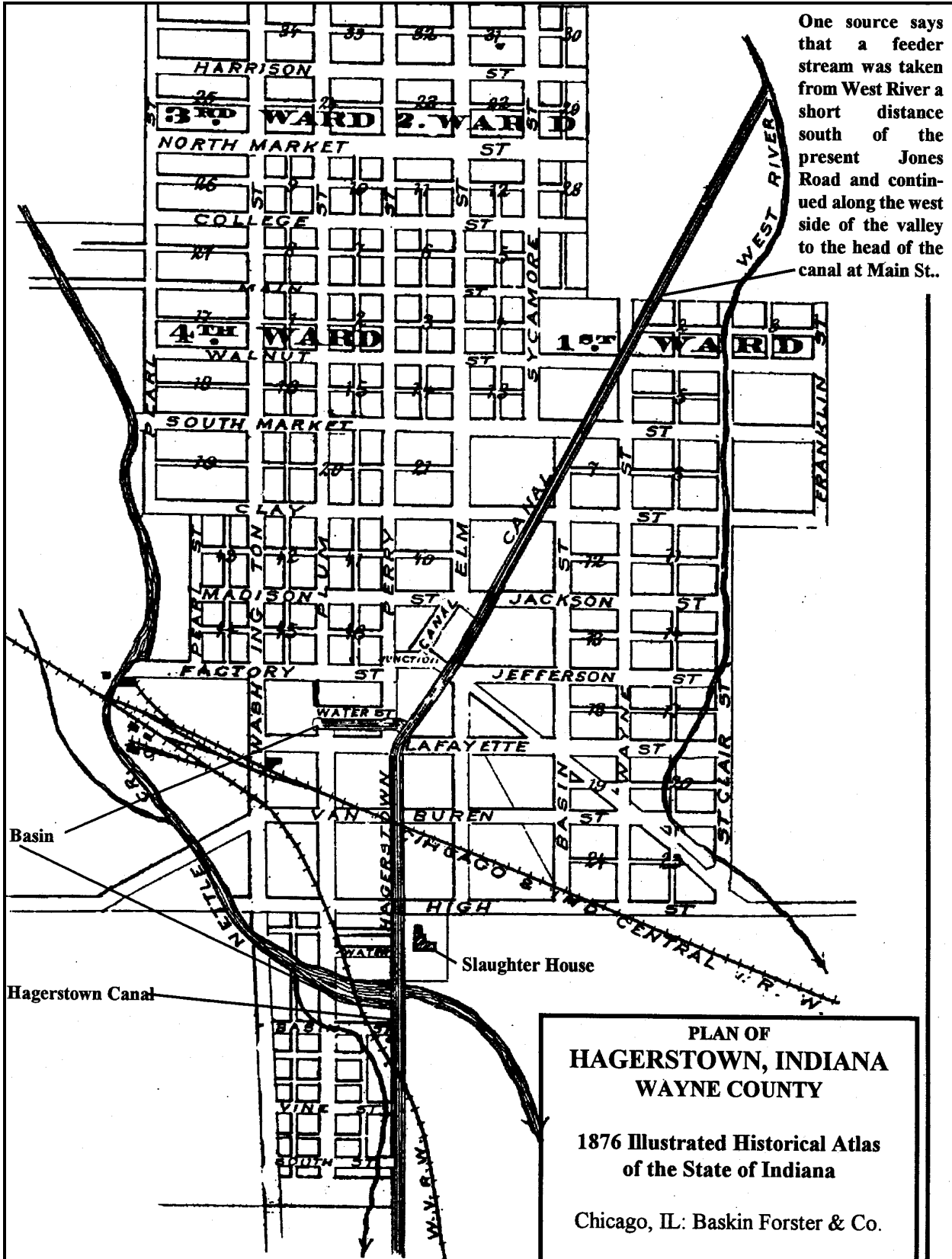


BELLE OF THE WEST ~ Line boats transported both passengers & freight.

Drawing by Paul Baudendistel



# HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION



# HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

## HAGERSTOWN CANAL STRUCTURES 8 MILES

HAGERSTOWN TO CAMBRIDGE CITY  
WAYNE COUNTY, INDIANA

**HEADGATES** NW¼ Sec. 23 Hagerstown  
Above Feeder Pond for Doestler's Mill

**HAGERSTOWN BASIN** Hagerstown

**STONE CULVERT** Sec. 26 Jackson Twp.  
½ mile south of Hagerstown at Camp  
Wapikamigi - can crawl through

**1 TWIN LOCK** NW¼ Sec. 35 Jackson Twp.  
1 mile south of Hagerstown

**2 TWIN LOCK** NW¼ Sec. 35 Jackson Twp.  
1 mile south of Hagerstown

**3 WIGGINS' LOCK** SE CN Sec. 34 Jackson  
Twp. S. Heiney Rd. quicksand

**4 LOCK** NE¼ Sec. 10 Jackson Twp.  
S. Frank Meyers Rd.

**5 LOCK** S½ Sec. 15 Jackson Twp.  
N. Williams Rd.

**AQUEDUCT** Jackson Twp.  
Over Symonds Creek

**6 CONKLIN'S LOCK** NE¼ Sec. 27  
Cambridge City, N Feeder Channel

## WHITEWATER CANAL STRUCTURES SHOWN CAMBRIDGE CITY, WAYNE COUNTY

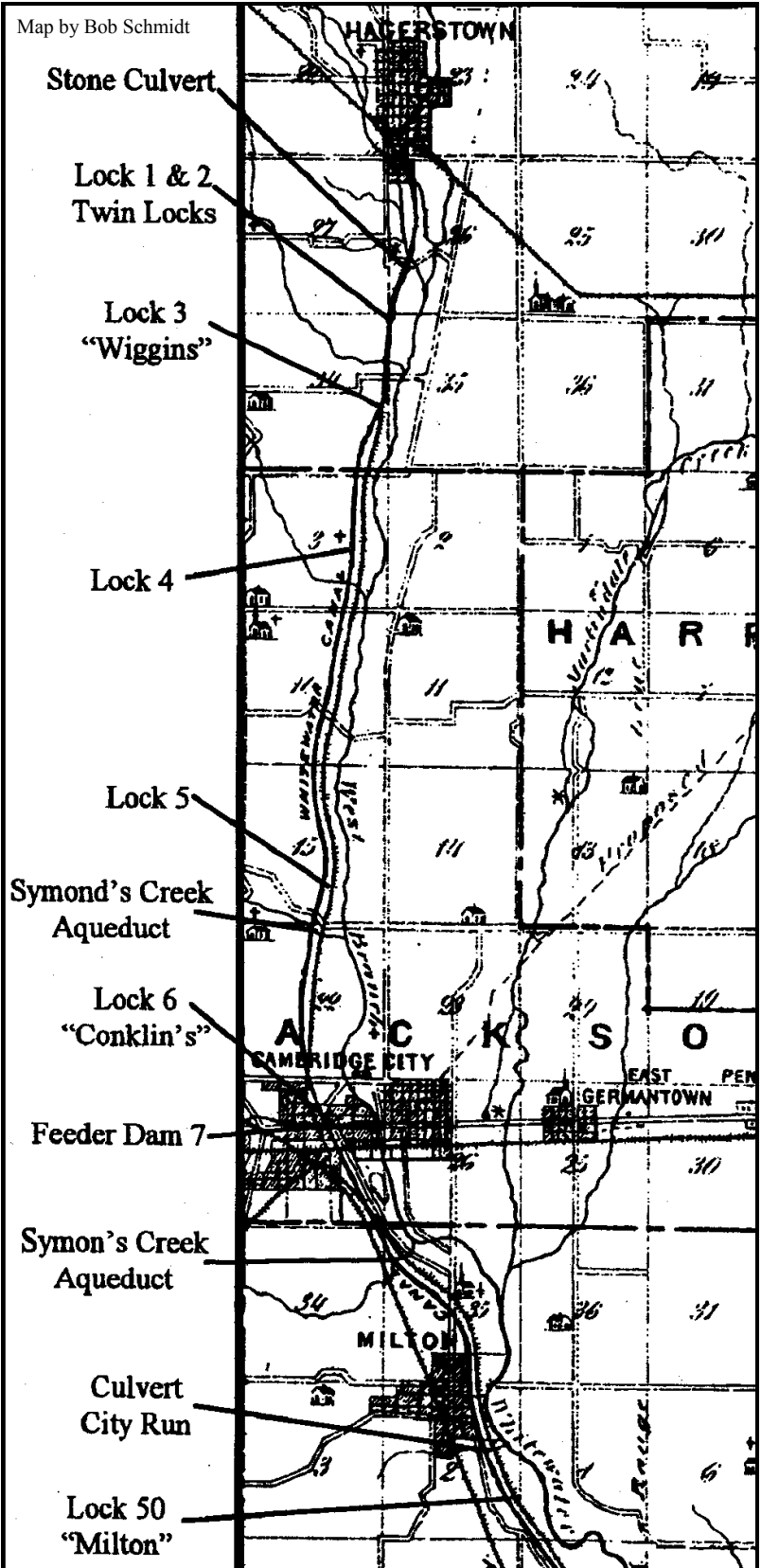
**#7 FEEDER DAM/HEAD GATES** NE¼  
Sec. 27 Cambridge City

**AQUEDUCT** Washington Twp.  
Over Symons Creek

**CITY RUN CULVERT** NE Sec. 2  
Washington Twp., Over City Run

**50 MILTON LOCK** SE¼ Sec. 2,  
Washington Twp., S. Milton off  
Old Milton/Connersville Rd.

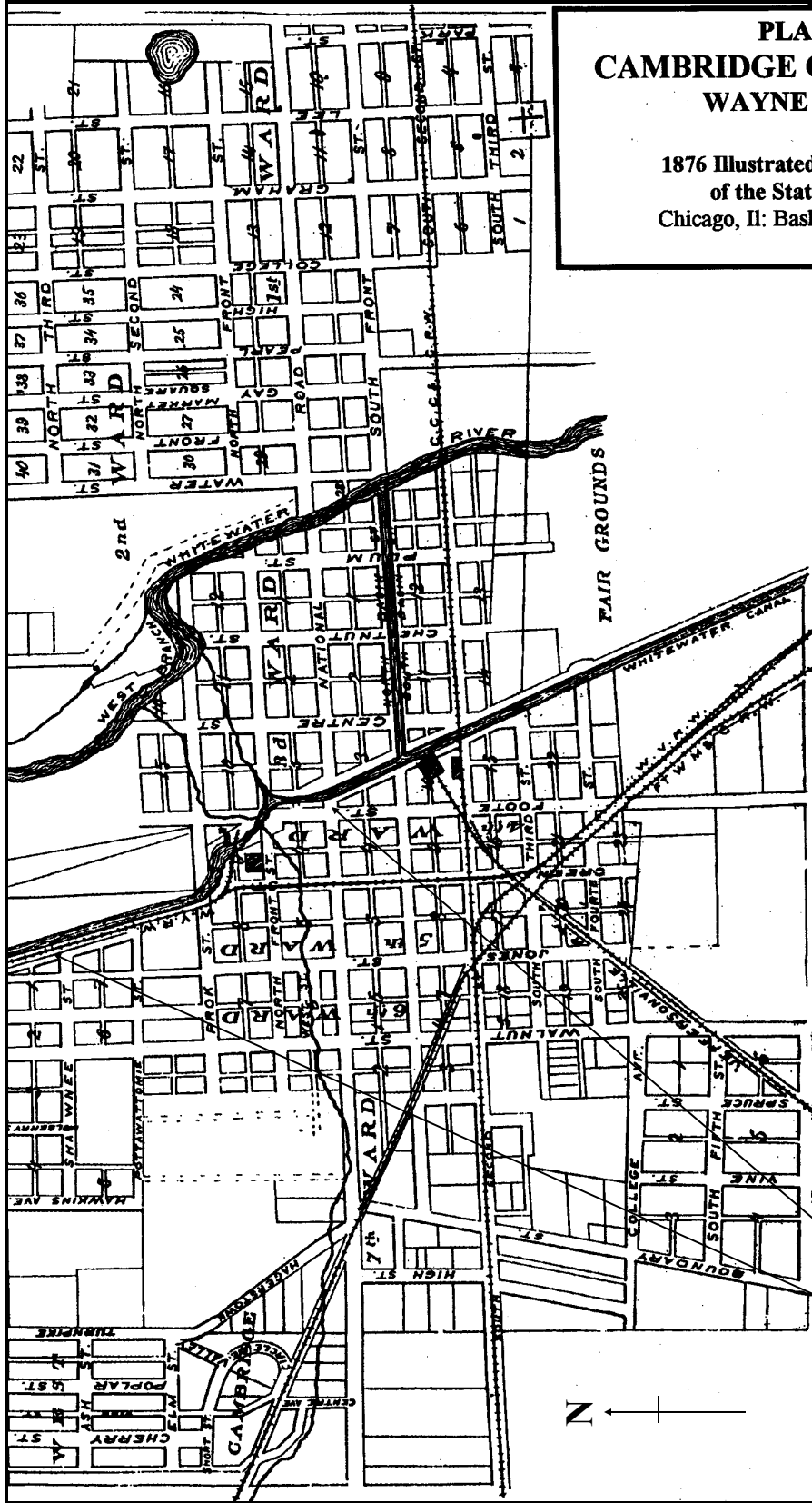
Map by Bob Schmidt



# HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

## PLAN OF CAMBRIDGE CITY, INDIANA WAYNE COUNTY

1876 Illustrated Historical Atlas  
of the State of Indiana  
Chicago, Il: Baskin, Forster & Co.



The Hagerstown Extension came into Cambridge City from the north and ended at the National Road. There a covered bridge spanned its connection to the Whitewater Canal.

## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

### CAMBRIDGE CITY

Settlers of English and German descent from Virginia, the Carolinas and Pennsylvania began moving into western Wayne County after the Twelve-Mile Purchase from the American Indians in 1809. A large stone with a brass plaque marks the line at West Main and Boundary Streets near the railroad in Cambridge City.

When Wayne County was being organized in 1810, the early settlers were dependent on spring rain to float their surplus products on flatboats to markets at Brookville, Lawrenceburg and Cincinnati. Livestock could be driven on foot and produce hauled in wagons, but this was a long and tedious round trip of up to 14 days given the condition of early roads through dense forests.

The plat for Cambridge City was recorded in October of that same year (1836) that the Internal Improvement Bill was signed by Governor Noah Noble. Cambridge City is uniquely situated at the crossroads of early transportation for no other town in eastern Indiana was built on both a canal and the National Road.

As early as 1824 a settlement called Vandalia grew up along the old state road from Centerville to Indianapolis where it crossed the west fork of the Whitewater River. Present day Delaware Street is a remnant of that old state road. The settlement was located near Vandalia Avenue.

When the National Road was surveyed through Wayne County beginning in June 1827, businesses began moving one-quarter mile south to that area, and East Cambridge developed east of the river about 1830. The new town of Cambridge City in 1836 encompassed both of these earlier places, as well as being the head of the new canal.

Canal construction was halted in 1839 to 1842. A charter was granted to the Whitewater

Canal Company to finish “within five years” the project that the state had started. A groundbreaking celebration attended by several thousand people was held in Cambridge City on July 28, 1842.

After the canal was completed to the town the first boat arrived accompanied with much fanfare in the fall of 1845. Construction of the canal had brought skilled labor, immigrants and much prosperity to the western Wayne County area.

With the new transportation available, twenty boats were needed to ship the grain, pork, lard and other goods that farmers hauled from near and far. According to newspaper accounts an incredible amount of produce and manufactured items left the Cambridge City docks for Cincinnati. Transportation time was shortened to as little as three days. Water-powered manufacturing increased the general prosperity and made jobs for many in the area. Saw mills, flour mills, woolen and cotton mills produced goods for shipment. During the winter months, the canal provided ice for the ice houses and a place to skate.



The Vinton House served travelers on the National Road and the Whitewater Canal. Photo by Lynette Kross

The Vinton House Hotel built in 1847 on the National Road was an official stagecoach stop for Americans moving westward as well as hosting folks from the canal packet boats. It is written that Vinton’s daughters sat on the hotel’s back steps watching for the arrival of the canal boats three times a week from Cincinnati to deliver guests to the side door. Then the boats would

## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

make a turn in the basin west of the hotel for the return to Cincinnati. Take a walk today down the alley beside the angled west wall of the Vinton House and imagine the canal boats making their turns where the parking lot is located. The Vinton House was operated by host Elbridge Gerry Vinton. More about him can be found in the “Canawlers At Rest” section of this book.



Today this culvert under the National Road that connected the Whitewater Canal on the south to the Hagerstown Extension on the north has been filled in by a wall of concrete blocks. Photo Bob Schmidt

Today a culvert under the National Road can be seen west of the Vinton House that connected the Whitewater Canal Basin to the Hagerstown Extension. The canal crossed under the National Road between South Center and Foote Streets. The hand-drawn 1836 plat map, framed in the library, shows a through canal from the north edge of town and under the National Road. Also shown on the plat map is an one-half black long north-south Hawkins Basin at North Front Street and a two-black long east-west basin extending west from it to Jones Street. Green Street follows the path of the canal north from the fire station to Delaware where the tree line indicates the location of the Hagerstown Extension northward.

More warehouses were built to handle all the merchandise that was shipped. In the center of broad East Church Street was a three-block long

canal basin reaching to the river. It is thought that the two and one-half story brick building at One East Church Street, preserved by Dr. James Bertsch and converted into his offices, was one of these warehouses.

The remnant of a canal boat keel was discovered under Church Street during some street work. It is now preserved in the Wayne County museum in Richmond.

Along the west side of South Center Street a 150-foot section of the canal has been preserved, which shows the four foot depth, 30 foot width at the base and 40 foot width at the water level of the canal. A metal marker was placed beside this canal section in 1988 by Western Wayne Heritage, Inc.

The Whitewater Canal never had a full year of business. Floods in the 1840s and 50s caused so much damage to the canal banks, dams and locks that the Whitewater Canal Company would not recoup its losses.

In the meantime railroads were being constructed across the United States. The first steam engine train through Wayne County arrived in 1863 from Indianapolis and soon a track was built on the towpath of the abandoned canal. In all, four railroads were routed through Cambridge City creating a nation-wide network for sipping.

Just after the turn of the century the inter-urban electric railroad, chiefly for passengers, transported people to Richmond and Indianapolis for more than 25 years. Tracks were discovered under the blacktop of the Main Street bridge during some renovation.

The town's significance as a stop for travelers continued well into the 20th century as auto and truck traffic increased on U.S. 40. All the methods of transportation through the town—the river, the roads, the creek, the canal and the railroads—required bridges. In addition there is a sus-

## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

pendent foot bridge over the river at Creitz Park.

A wooden covered bridge may have been the first to span the river. It is featured in an oil painting by Margaret Overbeck on the cover of the 1936 centennial booklet. The 1836 plat map also shows the two-lane wooden bridge over the Whitewater River. The present concrete bridge was built in 1936 and carried a plaque on the northeast corner.

Even though the canal's usefulness for transportation in western Wayne County was less than twenty years, it provided an artery of commerce for mail, passenger and freight service when none other existed. For an even longer period of time the canal's water provided power for the many mills along its banks until the industrial age. For nearly a century, until 1951, canal water from the Interstate Road feeder dam in southern Washington township powered the seven hydroelectric stations in Fayette County. The hydros produced 900 amps maximum per unit in full power. When Connersville rebuilt their water lines and sewer system in the 1950s, utility lines were laid in the canal bed.

In Cambridge City industry and commerce supported a growing business district. Along Main Street are buildings from every period of the town's development, making a virtual history of Indiana's architecture dating from 1835-1940. The large brick Conklin-Montgomery House on the southeast corner of East Main and Lincoln is Greek Revival. The tallest four-story brick building on the north side of Main Street is Romanesque Revival. Next to it, the old library is Neo-classical. In the middle of the next block is the three story Italianate opera house, and near the west end of the business district is the post office, a Colonial Revival building.

On the south side of Main Street a Chicago style building sits on the southeast corner of Green Street, and just east, the charming yellow brick dwelling is Federal style. The bank building

on the southwest corner at Foote Street has Queen Anne details.

The Historic District includes homes, out-buildings, stores, industrial buildings, railroad structures and a small early filling station on West Main at North Walnut. The National Register of Historic Places is American's official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation. The Cambridge City Historic District listed in 1991, has a broad range of styles and a high degree of integrity.

Cambridge City was the home of the six Overbeck sisters. Margaret Overbeck studied at the Cincinnati Art Academy (about 75 miles distant) during the 1892-93 term and again in 1898-99 at about age thirty. An accomplished artist, she taught drawing, water color and china painting for the next eleven years at DePauw University, Greencastle. Margaret also provided early instruction for her younger sisters, Elizabeth and Mary Frances, before they attended art schools.

The eldest sister, Ida, had a photographic studio and was not active in pottery; nor was Harriet, who had studied languages and music in Europe and gave private lessons to local students. But the rest of the sisters were known for their china designs and pottery. Later Kathleen Postle wrote *The Chronicle of the Overbeck Pottery*. In it she lists the four types of articles produced from their kiln:

1. The functional or conventional pieces: jars, dinnerware, pitchers, tiles, candlesticks, tea and coffee pots.
2. Representational sculptures: small figurines drawn from real life, models, or photographs of both human and animal subjects, such as a Quaker pair, an historical personage, a family group or pet.
3. Grotesques: caricaturized sculptures created with a sense of humor and fantasy, depicting a local personality or well-known figure, or an animal.
4. Vases and bowls: the important pieces made on consignment for presentation gifts.

Today the Cambridge City Public Library has an outstanding exhibit of the Overbeck sisters' work. Their home is now owned by Jerry and Phyllis Mattheis and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 28, 1976. The home stood on property owned by the Whitewater Canal Company from 1844-49.



## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

### PLANNING THE WHITEWATER CANAL

*The Journal of The Senate of the State of Indiana, During the Twenty-first Session of the General Assembly, Commenced at Indianapolis on Monday the Fifth Day of December, 1836* that was published in Indianapolis by Douglass & Noel, Printers in 1836 contains a report by Jesse Lynch Williams, principal engineer of Indiana's canals, and a letter from Samuel Forrer concerning the location of the Whitewater Canal. It shows the obstacles the engineers had to consider while planning its route. It is quoted in its entirety.

#### WHITE-WATER CANAL

Having understood it to be the wish of the Acting commissioner on this line, that a survey and estimate should be made on the east side of the White-water, from Brookville to a point near Harrison, with a view to a comparison with the west side which had been followed by the former survey, measures were taken immediately after the adjournment of the Board, in March last, to accomplish this subject.

The charge of this survey, under the direction of the acting commissioner, was confided to Mr. William J. Ball, with such general instructions as a previous knowledge of the line enabled me to furnish. From the reports and estimates of Mr. Ball, it appeared that there would be a difference in cost of about the sum of \$25,000 in favor of the east side, which difference, by subsequent improvements in the line has been increased to \$40,000. The east side was also supposed to present the safer route for a canal, inasmuch as the bank will be less frequently exposed to the current of the stream. No hesitation was felt therefore, in the recommending the adoption of the east side.

The surveys and examinations necessary to a proper final location of this line, and its prepara-

tion for contract were continued under the immediate direction of Mr. [Simpson] Torbert, resident Engineer.

An important question was presented at the commencement, as to the manner of crossing the East Fork, and of passing the town of Brookville, so as to afford to that place the proper facilities for business, without detriment to the public interest. Several plans of location were proposed at this point, and surveys and comparative estimates were made. The plan of crossing the East Fork in the pool of a dam, with the towing path bridge, was finally recommended as combining the most advantages. By this arrangement the high and hazardous embankment necessary to an aqueduct crossing is avoided, and the pool formed by the dam in the channel of the stream enables canal boats to approach the eastern side of the town, while the main line passing along the valley of the West Fork, will extend the advantages of the canal also to the west side. This plan will cost less than that of an aqueduct by about the sum of \$10,000. The dam across the East Fork will be 11 feet high from low water, and 230 feet long. The great length of the dam being twice the width of the channel will tend to prevent very great rise, or a strong current in the stream during freshets.

In the first survey, the line was crossed from the east to the west side on an aqueduct at Mrs. Carr's, four miles below Harrison [Ohio]. In the subsequent survey made by Mr. Torbert, a line was run upon the plan of crossing by means of a dam and towing path bridge, near Harrison. By instituting a comparison between these lines, it was found that the latter plan would be the cheaper one by the sum of \$28,400, and would reduce the length of the line one mile. These advantages were deemed sufficient to give the preference to the upper crossing, notwithstanding the objections which might be urged to the plan of crossing by a dam, and its adoption was therefore recommended. The dam is located about half a mile below

## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

Harrison, at the place where the state line crosses the White-water, and will be built 11 feet high from low water, and 375 feet long. The pool of the dam will be occupied as the canal, with a towing path on the west bank for the distance of 20 chains.

The conditions annexed to the assent of Ohio to the construction of this canal through her territory, required such a location in the vicinity of the state line as would furnish a supply of water for a branch canal to the city of Cincinnati, and afford reasonable facilities for the construction. This requirement has been regarded in the location. The dam by which the canal crosses the White-water is so situated that it will furnish an abundant supply of water for both canals. The proposed arrangement will not diminish the amount of water power at Lawrenceburg, inasmuch as the stream is supposed to afford more water than can be passed through the canal after supply the Cincinnati branch to be located through the territory of this State for the distance of 20 or 30 chains.

The greatest obstructions presented to the construction of a canal along the White-water valley are the bluffs or washed banks formed by the contact of the river with the hills which skirt its valley. The most difficult of these is McCarty's Bluff, about 3 miles below Brookville, where the river washes the base of the high land for nearly the distance of a mile, leaving no other mode of constructing a canal than by forming an embankment in the river and protecting it with stone from the abrasion of a rapid current. The great expense of constructing an independent canal through this narrow pass, induced me to recommend the adoption of slack water, which will be formed by building a dam at the lower end of the bluff and cutting a towing path on the face of the hill. The pool formed by this dam will be occupied as the canal for a distance of one mile and ten chains and will vary in its depth from 12 to 16 feet. The great depth of the pool will tend to removed the diffi-

culty arising from a deposit of sand which under different circumstances might be apprehended, while the greatly enlarged cross section of the stream will diminish the rapidity of the current in time of freshets. To guard against the difficulties which might arise from too near an approach to the dam, the canal has been so located that boats will pass from the pool into the guard lock about ten chains above the dam. From these favorable circumstances it is believed that the evils some times attendant upon this species of navigation, will be greatly mitigated in respect to this. The slack-water is estimated to cost \$16,500 less than the separate canal. The dam will be 235 feet long and 14 feet high from low water.

It will be perceived that the location and plans of this canal are such as to secure to it an ample supply of water, not only for navigation but also for hydraulic purposes to any extent that the country may require.

From the basin in the East Fork at Brookville to the basin at Lawrenceburgh, there is a descent of 144 feet, which in the final location is overcome by 17 locks, distributed to suit the inclination of the valley.

Before determining the plan of these locks, further examinations were made in the adjoining country, with the hope of finding stone suitable for building cut stone locks, but without success. The composite or combined lock was therefore recommended for this line as being the best substitute for a perfect cut stone lock. The culverts, aqueducts, and dam abutments on this line, may be built of hammer-dressed masonry of a durable character.

In extending the examinations above Brookville, preparatory to future lettings, various plans have been examined and compared by the resident Engineer, and questions of importance have arisen as to the proper location, some of



## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

which have been submitted to me. The first of these is at the Franklin Factory ridge, two miles above Brookville.

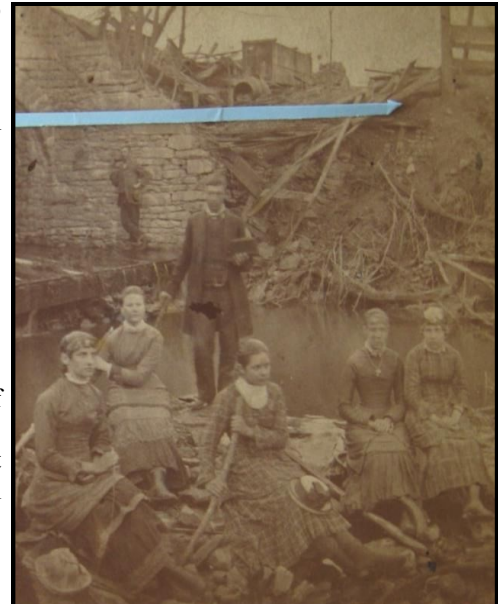
This ridge is a part of the high land jutting in from the east side and extending nearly across the valley, diminishing both in width and altitude as it approaches the river. In any location which can be adopted at this point the canal must be thrown considerably out of its proper direction. In the survey of 1834, the level was depressed just above the ridge for the purpose of receiving a feeder; which made it necessary to pass entirely around this obstruction; but in the survey of the past season it was found that by dispensing with the feeder at this point and approaching it with a high level the ridge might be crossed further from the river, and a material saving effected both in distance and cost. Two routes have been surveyed and estimated by the resident Engineer, one crossing the ridge by an open cut at a point where it is 40 feet above the bottom of canal and three and a half chains wide; and the other passing through it at a point still farther from the river, by a tunnel three hundred and thirty feet in length. The latter plan is thirty chains shorter, and is estimated to cost \$6,500 more than the other. The ridge where the tunnel would be formed is composed of clay and loose stone, and is 80 feet above bottom of canal.

From the facts here presented, I should recommend the open cut, notwithstanding its greater length. The formation of tunnels, unless the material be solid rock, is an operation liable to many contingencies, which cannot be fully estimated at the commencement, and I am of opinion, that they should not be adopted, except in cases of strong necessity.

By adopting the open cut, a saving will have been effected over the former survey of 35 chains in distance, and about \$8,000 in cost.

At the village of Milton, two lines have been examined, one upon the plan of passing the bluff at the point by means of slack-water in the channel of the river for the distance of 32 chains, formed by a dam at the lower end of the bluffs 8½ feet high; and the other upon the plan of sustaining the level and passing through the eastern edge of the town, near the bank of the stream, cutting about 8 feet for the distance of 40 chains through the plain on which the town stands. By the plan first described, a feeder would be received into the canal without any extra cost, while upon the other plan the feeder, if one be required, at this point would be thirty five chains long and would require a dam perhaps 2 feet in height. The upper or village route is three chains shorter, and including the expense of a feeder is estimated to cost \$4,500 more than the slack-water plan. Should a feeder at this point be dispensed with, which is highly probable, the cost of the two routes would be about equal. In this case, as here presented, I should recommend the adoption of the upper or village route, as the advantages of a the slack-water do not appear sufficient to justify us in exposing the canal to the hazards of a dam and to the current of a stream. Although the slack-water may frequently be resorted to with advantage as a means of passing difficult points, yet it should not generally be preferred to an independent canal when these difficulties do not occur.

Old photo of Whitewater canal culvert over City Run in Milton, Indiana.



## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

### MILTON

Today one must use some imagination to visualize that Milton in Washington township was the most important Wayne County settlement west of Centerville before the survey for the National Road. Travelers quickly passing through the little town on Indiana 1 are scarcely aware of the quaint charm the village possessed even into the 1960s. Now vacant lots belie the early frame and brick structures that once lined east-west Main Street and north-south Central Avenue in the town's heyday.

The area opened for settlement following the 1809 Twelve Mile Purchase, but during the War of 1812, early pioneers fled to two log blockhouses near the rivers when Indians threatened. One blockhouse was about a mile north of Milton on Martindale Creek and the other was south near Lockport, south of where Green Fork empties into West Branch. Lockport is just one of the Wayne County settlements that disappeared over time. It probably was located near today's Valley Grove Cemetery along Indiana 1 about four miles south of Milton. It is written that there were two locks at Lockport.

Settlers were living along the banks of the West Branch of the Whitewater River in 1821. The village of Milton, platted in 1824 on four blocks, was soon prospering and promising. By 1826 it had 200 residents.

As in most self-dependent communities, early businesses included a grist mill near the river, a blacksmith and a harness shop. Soon there were tanning yards, pork packing, dry goods, grocery and drug stores, a bank, bakery, tin shop, saloon and more importantly, a post office by 1829. (When a later post office building on East Main was demolished about 1972, the wooden postmaster's window and mail boxes were donated to the Wayne County Museum in Richmond where they can be seen today in the basement a part of the "village.") A hotel, restaurant, doctor

and veterinarian provided services for travelers and area residents.

The routing of the Whitewater Canal through the village in the 1840s raised hopes and business flourished. Four warehouses were built to accommodate goods brought for shipment. Just southeast of town were two canal structures, a stone arch culvert often called an aqueduct over City Run Creek and Lock #50 about 100 feet long and 15 feet in height.

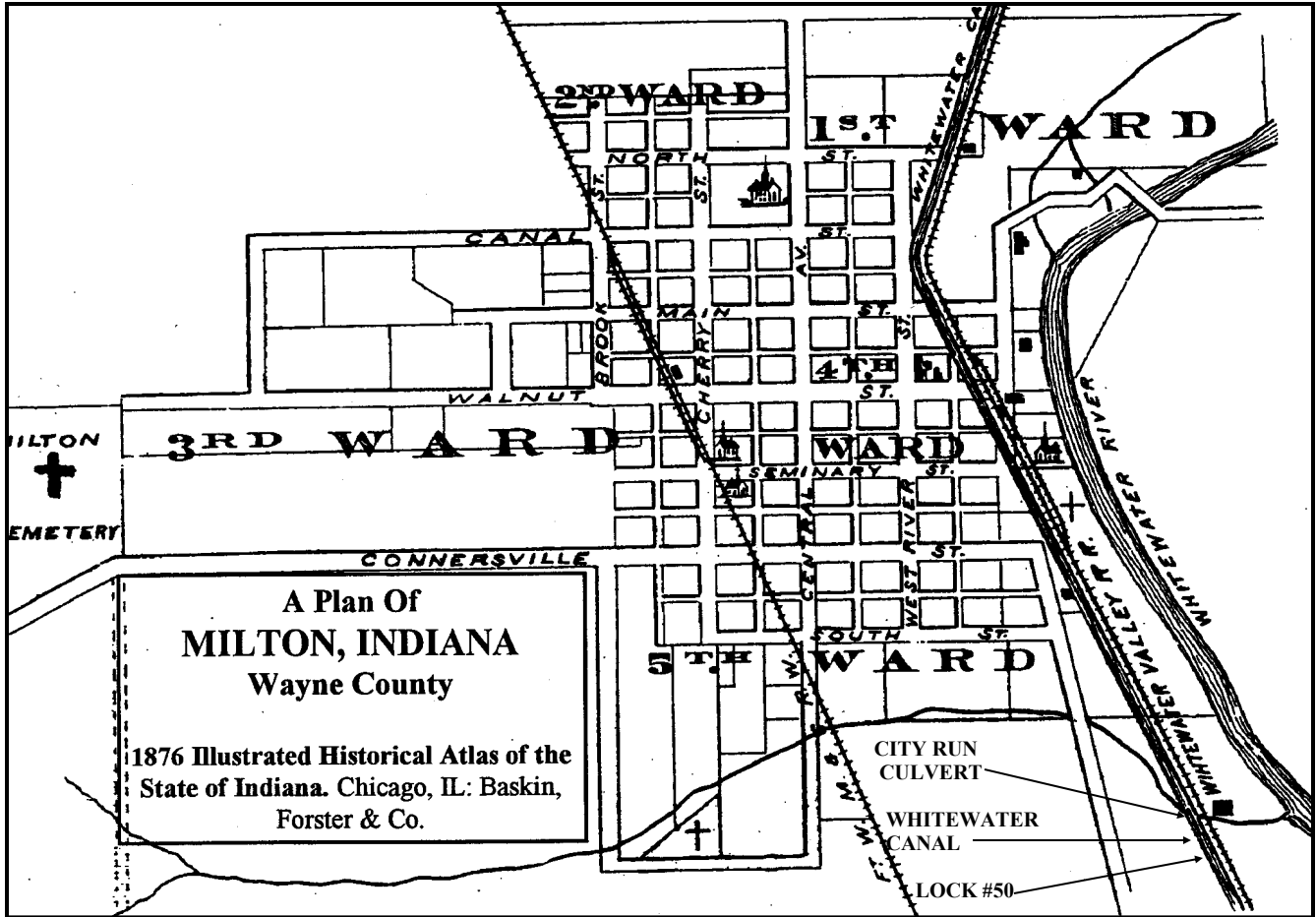
In 1976 the Indiana Junior Historical Society excavated down in the wooden floor at the south end of Lock #50 and found it in a remarkable state of preservation. Today the west side of the south gate wall and both sides of the north gate walls still stand, but the stones of the lock itself have tumbled in between. Part of the stone arch aqueduct/culvert is still visible deep below the old towpath. The west bank of the canal has been plowed, but one can easily see the line of the canal by observing the utility poles that march down its path from the 1920 railroad bridge on South Center Street in Cambridge City, through a field, across Indiana 1 just north of Milton, down through the east side of Milton, across the culvert, through the lock and on southward.

In Milton the canal prism can be seen both north and south from the East Seminary Street bridge. A small French cemetery is just southeast of the bridge.

Following the demise of the canal two railroads passed through the town. In 1876 there were 1200 residents and as many as 140 men were employed in the manufacture of several kinds of agricultural implements.

A seed drill was patented by Joseph Ingels. His business became the Hoosier Drill Company, which prospered as Milton from 1859-1877 before it moved to Richmond. A major stockholder in the company, Isaac Kinsey, was a leading figure in town. Kinsey's Hall was located on the

## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION



### LOCK #50

About 100 feet-long/15 feet deep this lock is in poor condition.  
It is located to the south of City Run Culvert.

Photos by Jim Ellis





## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

### WHITEWATER CANAL & CITY RUN CULVERT AT MILTON, INDIANA



Above: City Run Creek passed beneath the Whitewater Canal via this culvert.

Left: The culvert has a hole in its top. The Whitewater Canal once flowed where the grass now stands with creek water below.

Right: City Run Culvert is supported by huge timbers in the creek's bottom. It was built by placing stones atop wooden false work. After its keystones were dropped into the place the false work was





## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

northwest corner of Main and Central in a two-story brick building.

Kinsey amassed a fortune from the California gold rush and the highly profitable sale of his Hoosier Drill stock. He spent \$80,000 and six years during the 1860s building his magnificent 21-room Italianate mansion “Beechwood” on the



Beechwood, home of Isaac Kinsey Photo by Bob Schmidt

prominent knoll south of town on Sarver Road.

Surprisingly, Milton was at the end of a spur line of the state’s east-west interurban line, which began operating just after the turn of the century. George Callaway, a Milton resident, was on the board at Indianapolis that granted a right-of-way for the line from Indianapolis to Richmond. He insisted on the connection to Milton and, as a result, residents could ride the “Dinkey” car to Cambridge City and then take the interurban or train to almost any place in Indiana until about 1941.

Soon Henry Ford’s affordable automobiles were taking people elsewhere for pleasure and shopping, resulting in stores and shops closing one by one. Without income, the business buildings and some homes fell into disrepair and were demolished. However, an important early structure, the Milton-Connersville Pike toll house, is now a charming brick home at the east end of



The Milton-Connersville Pike toll house is now a private residence. Photo by Bob Schmidt

South Street.

Milton’s most important social group is the Masonic Lodge chartered in 1851. In 1870 the lodge purchased a two-story brick building previously owned by the Whitewater Valley Canal Company. Located on West River Street north of Main, it is now covered with stucco.

Organized in 1878, the Milton Cary Club is the oldest Wayne county club in the General Federation of Women’s Clubs and now one of the oldest in the state. It is a literary club for the women of Washington Township and beyond.

Sometime prior to the Civil War a Ku Klux Klan was organized and receives credit for pelting the school house with stones and brick bats in 1842 during a public lecture on the national subject of slavery. However, it is recorded that following a 1922 fire that destroyed the Christian Church, ten klansmen marched into the IOOF lodge where the congregation was meeting and silently presented the pastor with \$100 in cash towards rebuilding the church.

Today Milton has an active volunteer fire department and town board. On Central Avenue (Indiana 1) there is a post office, a mini-mart, and antique shop. The elementary school is closed. The livelihood of many of the 475 (2013) residents depends on employment in other communi-

## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION



### **BENJAMIN CONKLIN**

Find-A-Grave #96313132

**b. May 29, 1811  
d. August 16, 1883**

**By Robert F. Schmidt**

Benjamin Conklin, the youngest son of Joseph and Rebecca (Ross) Conkling, was born on May 29, 1811 in Cincinnati, Ohio. His parents moved to Ohio from Westfield, New Jersey, with 9 children ages 2-19 in April 1806. Their infant daughter and 10<sup>th</sup> child, Mary, had just died in New Jersey in January. Perhaps this move was their way of starting anew.

Benjamin's father was a farmer. He and his family settled on land in Mill Creek township, Hamilton county, Ohio. Three more boys were born in Hamilton county, with Benjamin being the last in 1811. Rebecca, his mother, died in 1813 at

age 43 when Benjamin was just under 2 years of age. His father remarried a woman named Gertrude. Then in 1814, less than a year later, Joseph, age 49, died as well. Gertrude was pregnant at the time Joseph died and she had a baby girl, Elizabeth, born six months later. How she and the Conkling family managed we don't know. Benjamin now had 9 brothers and 3 living sisters. The oldest son, Pierson and oldest daughter, Keziah had married and moved out before the death of their parents.

In September 1822, Rebecca Conkling, who was then 19 years old, married Isaac Conwell age 28. They, along with the three youngest Conkling boys, Aaron, Felix and Benjamin, moved to Liberty in Union county near Richmond, Indiana. In 1823 the Conwell's had a daughter of their own.

Isaac Conwell had moved from Delaware with his three brothers: James, who founded Laurel Indiana; William who settled in Vandalia, Indiana; and Abraham, who settled in Connersville, Indiana. Isaac initially had lived in Cincinnati where he met Rebecca Conkling. (see *The Hoosier Packet* Feb. 2011)

Benjamin Conkling, at age 15, wanted to set out on his own so he went to Vandalia, Wayne county, Indiana around 1826 to work in William Conwell's store. He clerked in the store for the next 10 years.

The National Road reached just south of Vandalia in 1827. It brought more and more trade to the store. Somewhere along the way both Benjamin and brother Felix dropped the "g" in their surname to just Conklin.

Benjamin's future wife, Alice Elizabeth Harris, was born April 14, 1815 to George and Elizabeth Harris of Dayton, Ohio. The circumstances of their meeting are unknown but apparently she was

## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

then living in Fayette county, Indiana. Benjamin and Alice were married by James Conwell of Laurel in Fayette county on Benjamin's birthday May 29, 1833. She was 18 and he was 22. They had one son James Harris Conklin born April 21, 1836, who lived to adulthood. Unfortunately Alice died a few days after his birth on May 9, 1836, probably as a result of labor complications. She was buried at Riverside Cemetery in Cambridge City. Again we don't know who helped Benjamin take care of young James, but somehow he managed to do that and also take over ownership of Conwell's general store about the same time.

In the early 1830s traffic really began picking up along the National Road. Indiana's Mammoth Improvement Bill was passed in 1836. That year the town of Cambridge City was platted where the National Road and the Whitewater Canal would meet.

1838 was an important year for Benjamin Conklin since he decided to move his store from Vandalia to a location just  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile south of the quickly developing town of Cambridge City. Vandalia soon disappeared as a town being absorbed by Cambridge City.

Not uncommon in those days a man would marry a woman in the same family when his first wife died. The Harris family was from Dayton and it appears that Alice's parents had also died. She had a younger sister named Harriet, who was born September 25, 1825 and was only 11 years old when Alice died. Harriet had a guardian, a Mr. Bruien. How Benjamin and Harriet became a couple or how the marriage was arranged we don't know, but on May 15, 1839, they were married in Dayton. Consent was given for Harriet by her guardian. The bride was almost 14 and the groom 28. This might raise some eyebrows today, but it turned out to be a happy marriage. They had 5 children, the first was Henry Franklin born in 1845 when Harriet was 20.



Conklin-Montgomery House in Cambridge City, Indiana  
Home on east side.  
Business Entrance on west side near river.

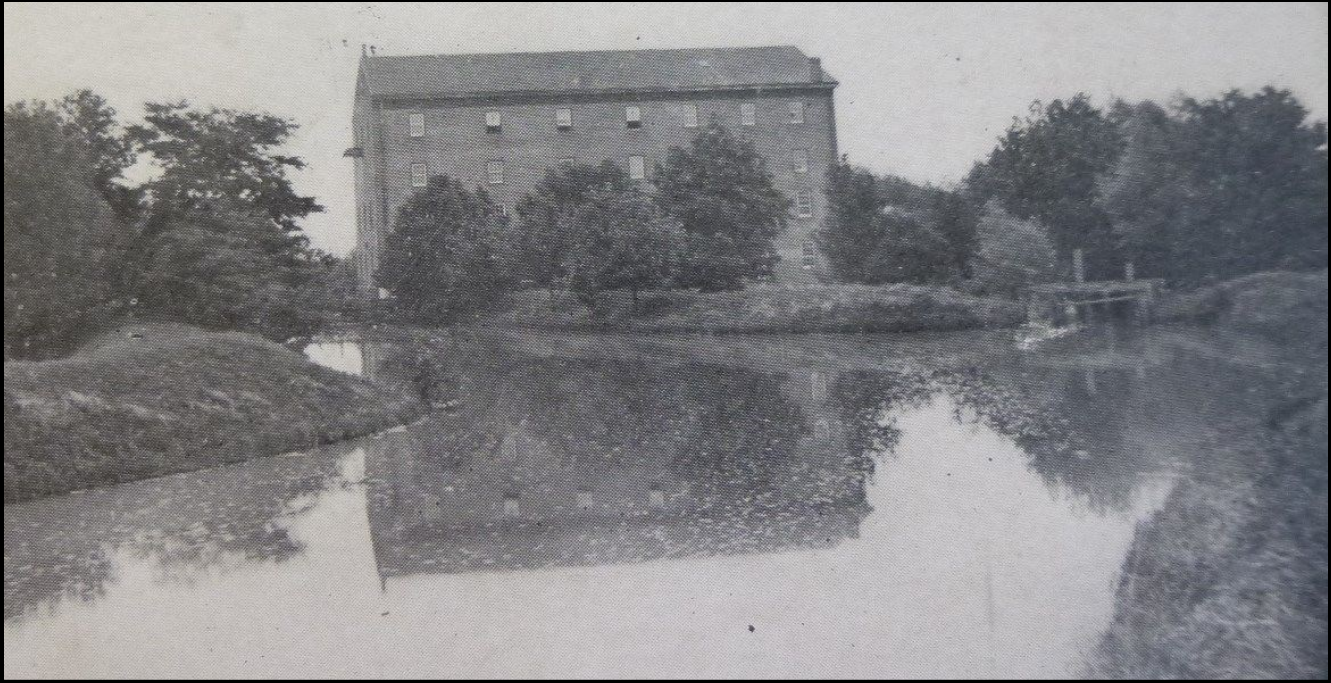
For his new bride and his business, Benjamin built a Greek Revival two story combination home and business on the East bank of the Whitewater River in Cambridge City. Why did he choose this location? Perhaps it was based on the fact that travelers heading west would come to his store in East Cambridge before reaching the main part of the town. He operated his mercantile business on the first floor next to the river and the family lived on the east side. Later on his single adult children continued to live in the home until 1936.

In the fall of 1839 some bad news was received that impacted the economy of Cambridge City and the whole Whitewater Valley. The canal that had promised such opportunity was halted in November as the State ran out of funds to continue the project. The situation looked pretty dire for the next few years, but in 1842 a new corporation was created to complete the works. William Conwell and Benjamin Conklin both became members of the Board of Directors of the White Water Valley Canal Company. James Conwell of Laurel became its president and Abraham Conwell of Connersville was also on the board.

It was decided to have the great groundbreaking at Cambridge City on July 28, 1842 for



## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION



This mill built for Conklin was known by different names at different times: Conklin's Mill, Eagle Mill and Imperial Mills. It was later sold to W. A. Creitz in 1889 and became known as Creitz Mill. The Cambridge City, *Indiana Traveler* of August 3, 1945:

“An Early Landmark Now Gone! Originally Conklin Mill Later Imperial Mills”

“The canal was responsible for the erection of Cambridge City's historic Flour Mill. Built by Jacob Waltz for Benjamin Conklin in 1846, it was considered a colossal structure in its day. The stone used was quarried on the Henby farm southwest of town. Its big beams and joists could not be duplicated today. The walls of brick tapered from the foundation at the rate of 4 inches for each story until they reached the roof. Large quantities of wheat had been floured here, at one time 90,000 bushels of wheat being stored within its walls for milling. Modern machinery had replaced the old water wheels and burrs. W. A. Creitz, who bought in the mill in 1889, continued its operation for almost 40 years when he retired from active business and sold to Mr. Clark, and the mill burned to the ground a year ago. (1944)”

This picture was taken in 1908.

restarting work on the canal. A barbeque was held just east of town on Capitol Hill for an estimated 10,000 people. There were 3 brass bands playing and many speeches made by the local politicians. Finally ground was broken and dirt moved in a wheelbarrow provided for the occasion. The only thing that went wrong that day was a great storm developed that forced the crowd to disperse.

During 1845 as the Whitewater Canal was nearing completion from the south at Connersville to Cambridge City, the Hagerstown merchants were considering their own canal to join the Whitewater Canal at Cambridge City. Benjamin now saw a great business opportunity. He specu-

lated in land north of town where he knew that the Hagerstown merchants were planning to build their canal. He planned on building a large grist mill in the center of town where the canal could provide the water power needed for operating his mill. It would be located on the North side of the National Road near where the canals would meet. He may have even purchased stock in this private canal company.

On October 8, 1845, the “Belle of Indiana” pulled by its mules came into Cambridge City from Cincinnati, Ohio. The privately funded Cincinnati & Whitewater Canal had just been opened from Cincinnati to Harrison, Ohio and joined the



## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

By June 1846 digging on the Hagerstown Canal was underway. At that time Conklin had nearly completed his work on his new mill, but he needed the waterpower of the canal. When the Hagerstown Canal Company ran into a financial problem in late 1846 he had little choice but to agree to complete the last two locks and several miles of prism to attain rights to use canal water to power his mill.

Conklin, having invested heavily in Cambridge City, was eager to enhance the value of his property so he advertised for workers on June 12, 1847 in the *Cambridge City Reveille*. By year end 1847 the canal work had been accomplished. Due to the fine engineering by John Minesinger, this canal was less flood prone and provided Conklin with reliable power while other mills down the Whitewater Canal were often waiting for repairs to dams and the canal due to flooding.

Benjamin Conklin continued to be identified with many of the early improvements of Cambridge City, having built several residences, business houses, and manufacturing establishments. His Conklin Mill was at times called Eagle Mill or Imperial Mill.

Benjamin was strictly a businessman and never really got into the political arena. One obituary of this enterprising citizen stated:

“BENJAMIN CONKLIN, one of the early pioneers of our town, died on Thursday, August 16th, 1883, at 12 o'clock noon. He had been confined to his home for several months past, and was failing from the beginning of his illness. He was 72 years old.”

The *Cambridge City Tribune* of August 23, 1883 said:

“Mr. Conklin was born in Butler county, Ohio, May 29th, 1811, and was therefore 72 years, 2 months and 18 days old at the time of his death. He was the first merchant in the village of Vandalia, having located there in 1826 - ten years be-

fore Cambridge City was laid out. He was identified with many of the early improvements of this place, having built several residences, business houses, and manufacturing establishments that are still in existence prominent among which is the Eagle Mill, built in 1847-8. When engaged in active life he conducted a large business, and was an enterprising citizen, but during his later years he became embarrassed, and his financial troubles had much to do with his late illness and death. He was a kind and indulgent husband and father, and sadly missed by his sorrowing family and friends.

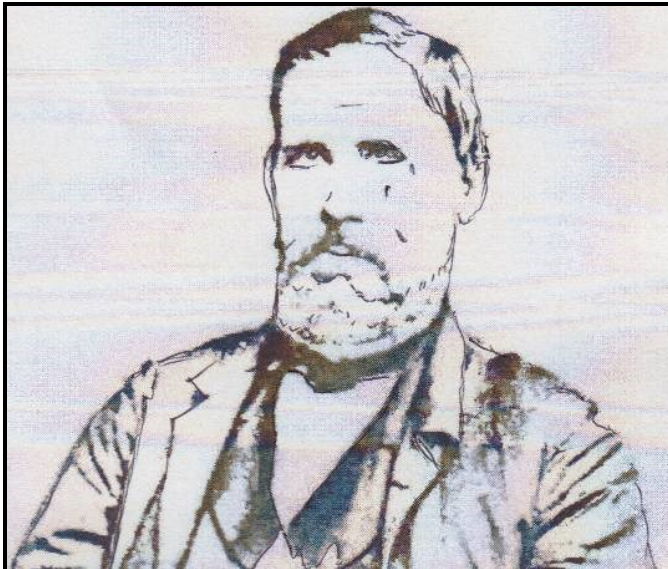
“The funeral services were held at the family residence on Saturday afternoon, and were conducted by Rev. J. W. Bailey in that gentleman’s usual impressive manner. His remains were interred in Riverside Cemetery.”

Benjamin’s second wife, Harriet Harris Conklin, died 16 years later on December 5, 1899 at age 74. Both she, Benjamin, and her sister, Benjamin’s first wife Alice, are buried at Riverside Cemetery in Cambridge City.

The Conklin family lived in their home on the corner of E. Main Street and Lincoln Drive in Cambridge City for almost 100 years. The Conklin door knocker still remained on the door of the home in the mid-1990s. The family members lived there until 1936 when Harriet and Elizabeth “Lillie” died. The home was later purchased by two school teachers and local historians, Robert and Pauline Montgomery. Pauline was instrumental in having the structure placed on the National Register of Historic Places.



## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION



### JOHN MINESINGER

Find-A-Grave #37038230

**b. March 17, 1803**  
**d. September 1, 1870**

When the businessmen of Hagerstown decided to build a canal to connect with the White-water Canal at Cambridge City, they quickly concluded that they would need an engineer to head up the project; a person who had previous canal experience. John Minesinger of Beaver county, Pennsylvania was chosen to layout the 8-mile-long waterway from Hagerstown to Cambridge City. What was his background and experience to lead this task?

John's father, Joseph Minesinger, was born in Wittemberg, Germany circa 1765 to Jacob & Catherine Minesinger, who originally emigrated from Italy. Joseph learned the stone-mason trade in his native Germany, and in late 1790s came to the United States. He bought 400 acres of

timber land in Greene Township, Beaver County, Pennsylvania and circa 1791 married a woman named Christina. During the next decade 4 sons were born to them: David, Jacob, **John** and Godfrey. As the boys grew up they were able to help him clear the land and build a large stone house on his property. The Minesingers had 3 more children, two daughters, Catherine born in 1810 and Elsie born in 1814. Finally in 1817 another son, James, was born.

Joseph continued his stone masonry work and farming. In those days sons often followed the occupation of their father. His son Godfrey also took up stone masonry and built one of the stone abutments for the railroad bridge at Wheeling, West Virginia. Godfrey purchased a farm near the Ohio River at Smith's Ferry. At his death in 1868 this farm was divided between his two sons John & Thomas.

Joseph's fourth oldest son **John Minesinger**, our subject, at 21 in 1824 married to a local Pennsylvania girl, Mary Swearingen, who went by the name of "Polly." She was 16.



**Mary Swearingen Minesinger**

We don't know how John Minesinger gained his canal engineering knowledge, but it was probably on the job like many men did who worked on canals. It appears likely that he became involved with the Beaver Division of the Erie Extension Canal in Pennsylvania.

The Erie Extension Canal was to extend 136 miles northward from the confluence of the

## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

Ohio and Beaver Rivers up the western edge of Pennsylvania to Lake Erie. When completed in October 1844 by a private company, it consisted of 137 locks to overcome a total rise and fall of 977 feet and included 32 miles of slackwater. The first phase of the project began in July 1831 along the Beaver River to Harbor Bridge, a distance of 31 miles—25 miles of slackwater and 6 miles of constructed canal banks. This phase was completed in May of 1834. This Beaver Division is the same area where the David Sanger family built lock #8 and dam #3. (See *The Hoosier Packet* December 2010)

John Minesinger probably gained some work on the Beaver canal project and somehow then learned about a planned survey in Indiana on the Whitewater River. In the summer of 1834 William Gooding and Jesse L. Williams were employed to conduct a survey of the Whitewater valley from the mouth of Nettle Creek (Hagerstown) to Lawrenceburg, Indiana. One of their assistants was **John Minesinger**. They determined that a canal was feasible along this route and subsequently the Whitewater Canal was included in the Mammoth Internal Improvement Bill of 1836. Ground-breaking for the canal was held in Brookville on September 13, 1836. The first portion was completed from Lawrenceburg to Brookville in 1839. By this time the state of Indiana had gotten into financial difficulty and all work stopped in November 1839. In 1842 the Whitewater Canal was sold to Henry S. Vallette of Cincinnati and subsequently became the White Water Canal Company.

After the summer of 1834, Minesinger apparently returned to Pennsylvania to the Erie Extension Canal for on July 13, 1837 he is specifically mentioned and linked as an assistant to the Principal Engineer Dr. Charles Tillotson Whippo. Whippo was now responsible for the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase the Shenango Division that was begun in 1837-38. How long John Minesinger was with this work is unknown. He perhaps spent time farming as well.

Somehow John was contacted by Hagerstown businessmen to become the Engineer for the Hagerstown Canal, the portion of the Whitewater Canal that was never completed. Why was he hired? We can only guess. Other engineers were likely working on larger canal or railroad projects. Perhaps he had a friend or business contact. Maybe he was recommended to them by Jesse Williams or another engineer.

John's canal engineering work at Hagerstown was well planned and designed. Here he elevated the canal so it was not subject to the flooding that plagued the lower Whitewater Canal. Around the time he accepted the Hagerstown position, he moved his remaining family to the New Castle area where he purchased a farm. In the 1850 census his family was located in Prairie township, Henry county, Indiana. Martha his youngest daughter was born September 19, 1845 in Indiana so he may have moved to Indiana before he was hired as the engineer on the Hagerstown canal. Other records say the family arrived in 1847.

In the following years John was involved with other engineering projects. The Panhandle railroad, the first railroad in Henry county, was one such project. He was also involved in platting the town of Millville in January 1854 that lies on that railroad and, at that time, was Deputy County Surveyor. Later he served in the mid 1860s as one of the county commissioners when the current Henry court house was being built from 1865-69.

By the early 1870s John began his most ambitious engineering feat, that of building a railroad trestle across the Mississippi River at St Louis, Missouri. Another Hoosier self-taught engineer from Lawrenceburg, Indiana, James B Eads, was also working at the same time on another bridge across the river at St Louis. They probably knew each other. The famous Eads' bridge was completed in 1874. Unfortunately John Minesinger

## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

was fatally injured by a fall off his bridge trestle and died on September 1, 1870. The *St Louis Democrat* reported:

"Late Saturday evening, Mr. John Minesinger, civil engineer, in charge of the construction of the trestle work between the island and main shore for the Belleville and Southern Illinois, in walking over the work, stepped on the end of a loose plank; the plank tipped up and he fell a distance of twenty-seven feet. The unfortunate man was picked up by other employees of the road and carried to his boarding house. The best medical aid possible to obtain here as well as over the river, was called in and every effort was made by Mr. Broughton, Superintendent of the road, to relieve the sufferer, but to no purpose. He lingered till Sunday, when he expired. The deceased leaves a widow and family, all the children grown up, residing near New Castle, Indiana, as well as a host of friends to mourn over his sudden death. The deceased was a member of the Masonic fraternity, and the body will be escorted to the cars today by a delegation of that order to send it home for burial."

His body was returned to New Castle, Indiana and was buried in South Mound Cemetery in the city. His wife Mary died six years later on June 27, 1876 and was also buried there.



**JOHN  
MINESINGER  
DIED  
SEPT 1, 1870  
AGED  
67Y 5M 15D**

B. March 17, 1803  
Hanover Twp.  
Beaver Co., Pennsylvania

D. September 1, 1870  
New Castle  
Henry Co., Indiana  
South Mound  
Cemetery  
Sec. 2 #132

John had played a key role in developing canals and railroads in the Midwest. His children also had interesting careers that bear short reviews here.

### Minesinger Family Members

John's oldest son, James Madison Minesinger, was born in 1826, left Indiana about 1856 and went West to make his fortune. In the fall of 1856 he became a cattle drover in Beaver county, Montana. Other times he did odd jobs like hauling timber. He also was a trader with the Indians. As a trader he met his wife. In 1857 he married Nellie Monteray, whose mother was a mix of Shoshoni (Snake) & Flathead (Salish) Indians. Her father was of Spanish origin. James, taking Nellie and his family with him, tried gold mining for a while. Eventually he settled in Hell Gate, Montana near Missoula. He participated in local civic affairs and help organize the first county government there. He did survey work like his father. He laid out the town of Missoula and did survey work for the Northern Pacific Railroad.

James' daughter Mary, wed Joseph Miles. He and his son-in-law purchased a cattle ranch in High River, Alberta, Canada. It was there that James and Joseph Miles made a trip in May 1894. James contracted pneumonia, died and was buried in the local Catholic cemetery. An interesting fact is that James never returned to Indiana to visit his family members after leaving in 1856.

Nellie remarried in 1897 but her husband, Nazaire Finley, died in 1911. She went on to live until 1932, dying at age 105. She was buried at Pleasant View Cemetery in St. Ignatius, Montana.

The second son of John & Mary Swearingen Minesinger was Joseph R., born in 1828, who was named for his grandfather. Unfortunately this boy died suddenly at age 12 in 1841 either of an accident or disease. He was buried



## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

back in Georgetown Cemetery in Beaver, Pennsylvania.

Their next son, Henry M. Minesinger, was born in 1832. He attended college in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania and went on to medical school at Rush Medical School in Chicago, Illinois. He also was a musician. On April 21, 1861 he enlisted for a 90 day enlistment as a musician in Company B, 8<sup>th</sup> Indiana Infantry.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Indiana Volunteer Infantry was organized at Indianapolis, Indiana on April 21, 1861, for a three-month enlistment. On June 19, 1861, the regiment was moved to Clarksburg, West Virginia, and attached to William Rosecrans' Brigade, in George B. McClellan's Provisional Army of West Virginia. On June 29, it was marched to Buckhannon, West Virginia and occupied Buckhannon on June 30. The regiment engaged in the West Virginia Campaign, July 6-17, fighting in the Battle of Rich Mountain on July 11. The regiment was mustered out of service on August 6, 1861.

After being mustered out with his regiment in August 1861, at age 30, Henry returned to Henry County and practiced medicine at Sulphur Springs. On December 10, 1861 he was married to Mary H. Engle. They had two daughters and one boy. Henry died at age 47 and his wife, Mary, lived until 1920. They both are buried in South Mound Cemetery at New Castle.

John and Mary's fourth son was John Quincy Minesinger. He was born in 1838 in Beaver County, Pennsylvania, moved to Indiana in 1847 with the family, and became a farmer. He married Mary Jane Ridgeway in April 1858. He remained in Indiana his entire life. They had one child, Omar Eugene Minesinger, born in November 1859. Omar remained single until age 55 and then married a Kate Pence. They had no children.

Charles W. T. Minesinger, was the fifth and youngest son of John and Mary. He was born in Pennsylvania in 1841. In April 1861 the Civil War began with the firing on Fort Sumter. Charles enlisted on October 20, 1861, at age 20. At Middletown, Indiana he joined Captain Bradford's Company F of the 57<sup>th</sup> Regiment Indiana Infantry for the remaining period of the war. The unit was first sent to Indianapolis in December 1861 where he received the rank of corporal. On May 17, 1862, following the battle of Shiloh and during the siege of Corinth, he was promoted to Sergeant. Then in December 1862 he was elevated to First Sergeant. On April 12, 1863 he was discharged and then assumed the rank of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the same Regiment and company.

In pursuit of Hood's Confederate forces south of Atlanta, and during the battle of Jonesboro, Georgia on August 31, 1864, Charles was shot in the abdomen. He was taken to the Military Hospital at Chattanooga, Tennessee, where he died from his wounds on September 14, 1864. His remains were returned to New Castle and was buried in the South Mound Cemetery with other family members.

John and Mary's sixth child was Martha, who was born in Beaver County, Pennsylvania on September 19, 1845. She married Benjamin Franklin Needham in New Castle in February 1867. Her husband was a farmer and member of an early Henry county family. Benjamin followed the painter's trade which he learned from a young age. They had four children. Unfortunately Benjamin died at the young age of 47. Both Benjamin and Martha are buried in South Mound Cemetery. After Benjamin's death in 1884, Martha married Harrison Showalter in August 1886. They had one child, Harry Showalter, born in January 1889. Martha and Harrison were later divorced. Their son Harry is buried in Mt. Summit Cemetery in New Castle.

## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

### CANAWLERS AT REST

## ELBRIDGE GERRY VINTON

**b. July 11, 1824**

**d. Dec. 16, 1913**

## VALENTINE

## SELL

**b. Jan. 1819**

**d. Mar. 26, 1902**

## SARAH

## SELL

**b. July 18, 1827**

**d. Mar. 1918**

**By Phyllis Mattheis**

Have you ever walked into an old building and said, "If these walls could only talk"? Let's consider the Vinton House Hotel in downtown Cambridge City:

"If these walls could talk,  
What stories they could tell  
About an innkeeper named Vinton  
And a canal boat captain named Sell."

This story is about two men and their wives who were history makers in east central Indiana.

Let's start with Elbridge Gerry Vinton, who was born at Boston, Mass. on 11 July 1824. When he was a teenager, his parents, Joseph and Sukey Vinton, joined a group of 41 Yankees heading for Iowa. When the colony reached western Wayne County, Indiana, in 1844, it stopped for a few days. The Vintons decided to

settle on a small farm in the East Germantown area and Elbridge went to work for Solomon Meredith (later to become a Civil War General), who was running the Blue Hall Hotel, located at the southwest corner of Main and Jones Streets in Cambridge City.

These were exciting times in Cambridge City! The first federal road, called the Cumberland or National Road (now U.S. 40), had been surveyed through the area about 1827 and construction was completed across Indiana by about 1834. The National Road connected Indiana to the east across Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Maryland, and brought stagecoaches, Connestoga wagons and gold seekers.

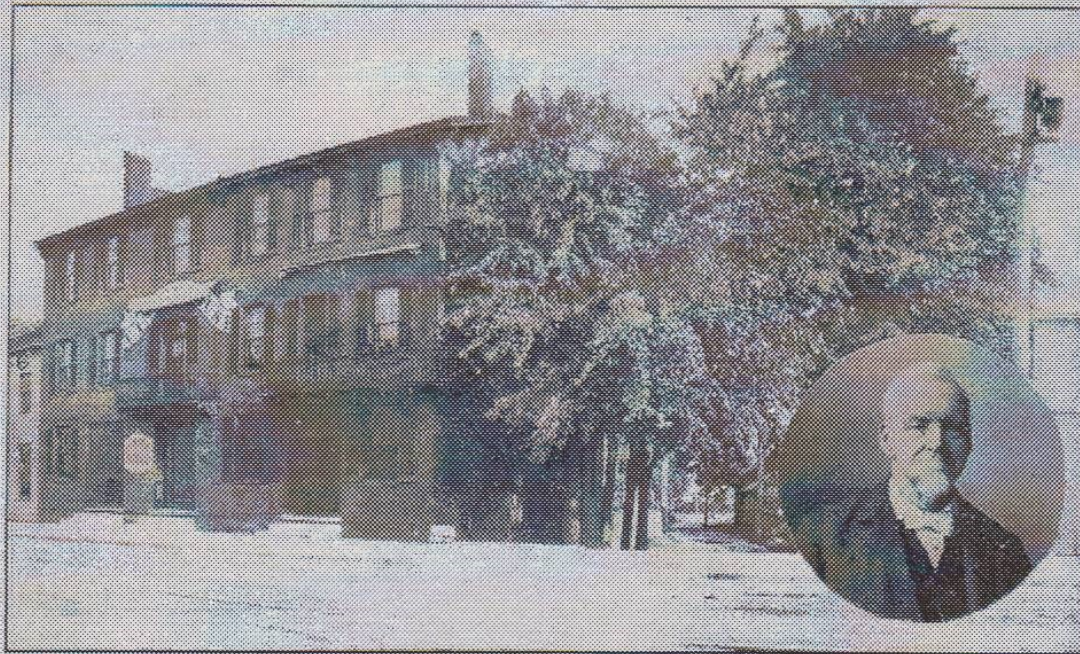
In 1836 the Indiana legislature passed the Mammoth Internal Improvements Act which funded the survey for the White Water Canal to extend about 70 miles north from Lawrenceburg on the Ohio River to the National Road in east central Indiana. Expecting progress and prosperity, businesses began locating at the junction of the two methods of transportation, resulting in the platting in October of 1836 of greater Cambridge City, which included the first 1824 settlement of Vandalia-- just a quarter of a mile north on the east side of the West Fork of the White Water River-- and also the earlier East Cambridge, which had developed about 1830 along the National Road on the east side of the double-laned covered wooden bridge.

By 1839 the canal was completed between Lawrenceburg and Brookville, but construction was halted when the state's funds were depleted. The state was forced to sell the uncompleted canal. In 1842 a private White Water Valley Canal Company headquartered in Connersville was chartered, which resumed work on the canal, much to the joy of Cambridge City merchants. Finally, the canal opened to Cambridge in the fall of 1845, the packet boats bringing settlers and travelers from the Ohio River, and freight boats bringing goods from the east and returning to Lawrenceburg and Cincinnati with products from the fertile farms of the area.

And now Elbridge Vinton enters the scene. On 9 May 1846 twenty-two year old Elbridge married seventeen year old Catharine Johnsonbough, the daughter of Frederick and Elizabeth, who had a dry goods store, plus "fish and groceries, hardware, queensware and the finest liquors." Catharine had been born on 9 April 1830 in Centre County, PA. That same year her parents came west and settled on a farm just south of nearby East Germantown, so they were already here when the Vinton family arrived and decided to become neighbors. At the time of their marriage Vinton was renting Meredith's hotel and took his young wife there to live. Their only son was born on 15 September



## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION



D. 38

VINTON HOUSE.

ELBRIDGE VINTON.

This postcard of the Vinton House and Elbridge Vinton is courtesy the Cambridge City Library.

1847 but died at the tender age of two years. Then three daughters blessed the marriage.

Seeing opportunity for profit to be made in providing lodging for the waves of people passing through this crossroad, in 1847-48 Aaron Reisor and his father-in-law (or step-father) John Sowers built a grand three story brick United States Hotel on the east bank of the canal on the south side of Main Street, in the middle of the block between Center and Foote Streets on lot 7. This Federal style structure has a trapezoid shape plan with an ell to the rear (south). The unique footprint of the building directly relates to its building site at the intersection of the east-west National Road and the north-south White Water Canal. The front (north) elevation aligns with the National Road and the street grid of the town. The west elevation aligns with the turning basin once immediately adjacent to the building. A later two-story wood frame addition and exterior stair fit between the main building and the ell. The hotel's location made it the center for much activity as settlers moved into Indiana or on west; thus it played a substantial part in America's early transportation history.

Flooding plagued the White Water canal nearly

from the beginning, yet the Hagerstown Canal Company completed the northernmost eight miles of the canal between the two towns in 1847. The 491 foot drop in the White Water Valley between Cambridge City and Lawrenceburg caused any slight increase in the flow of the river or its tributaries to rush recklessly down the canal, destroying banks and structures. There were four devastating floods in a six year period, and the last boat reached Hagerstown in 1861. The water of the canal continued to serve a number of mills, and the water of the section between Milton and Connersville was used for hydro-electric power for almost a century.

Perhaps the flooding contributed to Aaron Reisor's decision to join the gold seekers in California. On July 4, 1849, he rented his new 36 room hotel to the enterprising young Elbridge Gerry Vinton.

Two daughters were born to the Vintons in 1850 and 1852. Lillie Ore and Florine told of sitting on the hotel's back steps as little girls, watching for the arrival of the canal boat Aetna, operated by Captain Valentine Sell. His wife and boat cook, Sarah, treated the girls to her fresh baked bread with butter and jelly. The canal boats turned around in the basin at the back door of the



## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

Vinton House for the return trip to Cincinnati, or the passengers and boat-men could enter the hotel for a meal or a drink through doors on the west elevation that were at canal level, below street level. The hotel contained an elegant dining room and bar, serving superb food and wines, and a ballroom for the social scene. The boat bell used to call the hotel guests for meals can be seen today in the History Room of the library, just across the street from the Vinton House.



This bell was used at the inn in early days.

The Vinton family was close-knit, warm and affectionate. Catharine was known far and wide as a true friend. People went to her for advice or just to talk.

In 1867 she served on a committee of lady citizens that began the drive for a better cemetery to replace the old Capitol Hill Cemetery, poorly located south of the railroad. Located about a half mile north of the National Road, Riverside Cemetery opened in the fall of 1868, the same year that Elbridge became the owner of the hotel and changed the name to the Vinton House. County records show that title was transferred from William and George Sowers to Vinton for lots 7 and 12 in Block 3.

Married for 41 years, Catharine died on 1 June 1888 at the relatively young age of 58 after a brain tumor operation in December, which for a time appeared to be successful. Catharine had been in ill health for a couple of years, but her death was a severe blow to the Vintons. Lillie and Flo, who were bright and delightful belles, put away some of their finery and cared for their grieving father. It's written that the two girls' names appeared in the social columns of the papers for years and that they often set forth in their carriage with ruffled, flowered and beribboned dresses for a ride about town, with a Negro coachman standing behind and another driving. These two daughters never married but helped their father in the hotel business and carried it on from the time he "suffered paralysis" in 1902 and after he died more than ten years later. Wisely, Elbridge transferred ownership of the property to his two daughters in December of 1907.

Their older sister, Ida, was married to George Stoddard and lived in Ohio, but the five year old son of

this couple, Thomas Vinton Stoddard, died on 11 January 1875, and is buried in the family plot at Riverside in Cambridge City. Ida and George must be buried in another location.

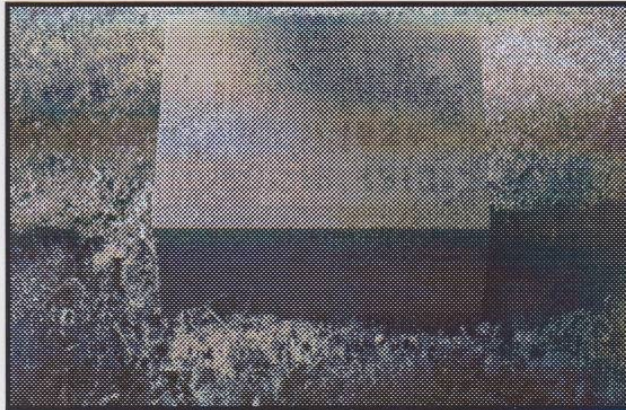
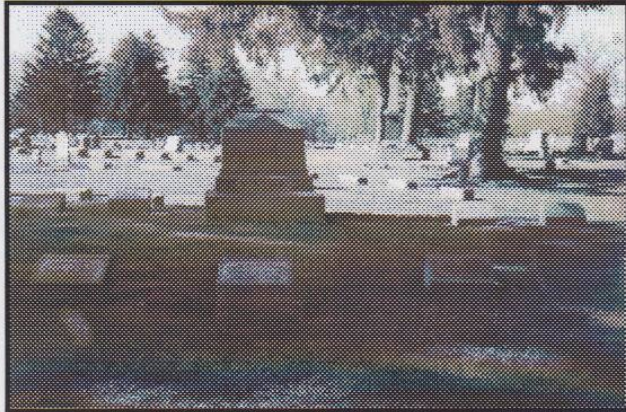
Obituaries of the time are long and flowing. Catherine's tell us that she was "a woman whose aims were always high and whose services great in helping those who needed her assistance and wise counsel. As a wife she was loving, faithful, true and helpful. As a mother she was an ideal and to her children has imparted her native grace of mind, her inherent culture, her scrupulous neatness and her unexampled thrift and industry. As a friend she knew fully what friendship meant and displayed in her character the conviction of her conception. She was always willing to inconvenience herself for the advantage of others who were finding life a hard battle. Always considerate, always kind, always tender with no word of reproach or accrimonious criticism against one who had fallen by the wayside. Her conception of life was to be happy herself and to make others happy, and that her life was a success is evidenced by the hundreds of friends who feel aggrieved as though her death were a personal loss. It is the death of such a person that creates new ties between earth and heaven and brings them nearer together. Whatever is excellent is enduring and though her heart will become dust, yet the kindly influence it shed in life will endure as long as grateful memories."

Vinton operated the Vinton House hotel for more than 64 years and "gave the Vinton House a name as widespread as the United States." No doubt Vinton was the best known hotel keeper in Indiana, since his house was the rendezvous for all the traveling salesmen. Many of the construction contractors for the Pennsylvania railroad boarded there when the railroad was built to Indianapolis. The newspaper reported when redecorating took place and when new furniture was purchased to "maintain the spirit of elegance". The enterprising hotel man also was the agent for the stage-coach, telegraph company and U.S. Mail. Over the years he catered to travelers on every method of transportation: road, canal, railroad, bicycle, auto, bus, train, plane. The local newspaper carried reports on Vinton's health over the years. "He never held or sought political office and was not active in church or lodge life, but spent his time and efforts at keeping a creditable hotel". Vinton died 16 December 1913 at the grand old age of 89, after living 69 years in western Wayne County, Indiana. "His cheery smile, his general intelligence, his good citizenship, his companionship at home and abroad, his wide acquaintance, his courtesy and gentlemanly bearing, all had a part in our town life."





## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION



Elbridge Gerry Vinton's grave in section 6 of Riverside Cemetery has a small footstone with a larger monument to the Vinton family in the center of the plot. Photos by Bob Schmidt

And now let's meet our boat captain, Valentine Sell, born in Pottsville, PA in January of 1819, with his boyhood days spent on a farm. First he worked on a Pennsylvania canal between Altoona and Holidaysburg, then came to the Miami Canal of Ohio between Dayton and Cincinnati, where he worked on a boat owned by the Dittenhaver family. He fell in love with a young woman cook on the canal but hadn't the means to marry. So he came to the White Water Canal late in the 40's to work. In a few years he became master of the Aetna and sent for Sarah. They married in 1861 (the year the Civil War began) when Val was 42 and Sarah 34.

The Aetna ran between Cambridge City and Cincinnati in two-week round trips. Almost 20,000 barrels of flour and over a million pounds of pork were shipped from Cambridge City to Cincinnati up to the 1860s.

Sarah had been born on 18 July 1827 in Newark, New Jersey to Mr. and Mrs. John Vroom, natives of Holland. When she was five years old, they came west and settled at a little village just north of Cincinnati. Here

she married John Gonzales and had one son, Enoch Gonzales. After her husband's death, Sarah began working on a packet boat on the Miami Canal, meeting her second love, Valentine. After their marriage, Sarah became the stewardess and worked for five years, cooking for the crew and also standing her trick at the tiller. It's written that there was no better steers(wo)man on the canal! She said in a newspaper interview that she was on the last boat that ran on the canal, operated by her husband.. She also declared that the canal here was not kept up and there were many breaks in the bank.

In 1865 the Civil War ended and the White Water Canal property was sold to the railroad for nearly \$150,000. Valentine continued to run his boat only to Connersville, but finally sold it and quit the business to become a dealer of horses.

Railroads brought about the decline of both the canal and the National Road. Rails were laid on the old north-south tow path and others paralleled the east-west National Road, soon criss-crossing the state and the country, carrying travelers and freight at far greater speeds year-round. However, today visitors can have a taste of canal life by touring the village of Metamora and taking a boat ride on part of the 15 miles of waterway that have been preserved at this state memorial. The restored wooden aqueduct over Duck Creek is the only one in the nation.

Val's boat was caught in the basin here by the Indiana Central railroad bridge and shut off from going south. For this reason his boat was purchased by the railroad company. He then purchased the Grey Eagle livery stable, in the rear of a furniture store. Later Val purchased a barn and occupied it as a livery or training barn. For more than twenty years he was engaged in the retail liquor business and at the same time he was an extensive dealer in high class light harness horses, developing some fast race horses, which gave him a national reputation. "He was a good husband and an honorable citizen, dealing fair at all times in his business methods and commanding the respect of all who had dealings with him. His religion was morality, honesty, fair dealing, always speaking in the best terms of those he knew, paying strict attention to his own business and respecting the opinion of his neighbors." Val died unexpectedly on 26 March 1902 at the age of 83. He'd been feeling fine and had worked about his house, then went to his training stable. His death was sudden and happened while seated at his training barn chatting with friends, according to his obituary.

In August of the year of Val's death, the **Indianapolis News** interviewed Sarah when she was 75 years old. In telling of her early life she said that she had followed her twin sister, Mrs. Henry Dittenhaver, to the



## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION

Miami Canal to become a cook. She said the boats would race occasionally but there was no fighting on the White Water, like on other canals.

After the canal ceased to be used, boats were stripped of their useable timbers. Sarah said that the skeleton of the Aetna sat between the river and the canal for several years. Town records show that boat skeletons were buried in the basin, which was filled in to make the wide east-west Church Street one block south of the National Road. In 1956 when sewer work was under way, a four foot solid oak section of a boat keel was dug up at the intersection of Church and Center Streets. This heavy remnant of canal days is in the Wayne County Historical Museum in Richmond.

Sarah was known as Aunt Sally and lived in town for many years. She was seen walking to the Vinton House almost every day to reminisce with the Vinton sisters. She passed away at the age of 91 in March of 1918. Her obituary tells us that "Mr. Sell left her a competence to guard against the evil days that too often come in the sunset of life. She lived alone a long while, although she was urged to make her home with her son at Hamilton, Ohio. But she liked Cambridge City, and its people and its churches...she lived here so long that she became a part of the town's history, since it covered almost 60 years."

Sarah was survived by her son, two grandsons and one great granddaughter. She and Valentine are buried in the same section at Riverside as the Vintons. Their gray obelisk stone with a ball on the top of the pyramid has only their names and birth and death years, but footstones tell us that Valentine was known as Volly. And behind them is buried Sarah's twin sister, Margaret Dittenhaver, who died the year after Val, in 1903.

And so our two "history making" couples with White Water Canal connections died in Cambridge City during the thirty years between 1888-1918 after the canal had closed to traffic. First, Catherine Vinton in 1888, then Valentine Sell in 1902, followed by Elbridge Vinton in 1913, and lastly Sarah Sell in 1918. They are all buried at Riverside Cemetery in round Section 6, where the vault building is located.

But what became of Lillie Ore and Florine? Lillie's obituary says that in the fall of 1920 they went to the Home Lawn sanitarium at Martinsville to recuperate their health. "The Misses Vinton assisted in an amateur entertainment at the home less than a week before Lillie's death and were apparently in improved health. Miss Lillie, however, who had practically been a shut-in for several years past from a broken limb, was frail from her long sickness, and when her heart failed she was unable to build her strength and quietly passed away."

Lillie was 70 years of age.

Can we assume that the sisters had continued operating the hotel until they went to Martinsville? They were 63 and 61 when their father died. Florine was 68 when her dear older sister passed away on 14 November 1920.... could she have handled the guests and also taken care of her sister up until that time? Lillie's obituary tells us that their brother in law, George Stoddard, came from St. Louis for her funeral, which was held in the Vinton House with many friends in attendance.

In 1926 the National Road became U.S. 40 with two paved lanes, and the increasing popularity of the automobile brought travelers to the front door of the Vinton House again, especially folks driving to the Indianapolis 500 Race. The grand old hotel was sold in 1929 to Ernest McGraw. Florine died on 18 February 1936 at age 83. No obituary was found in the local paper. The city has a record that her ashes were interred in the family plot at Riverside...the end of the colorful story of two pioneer families in the life of our town.

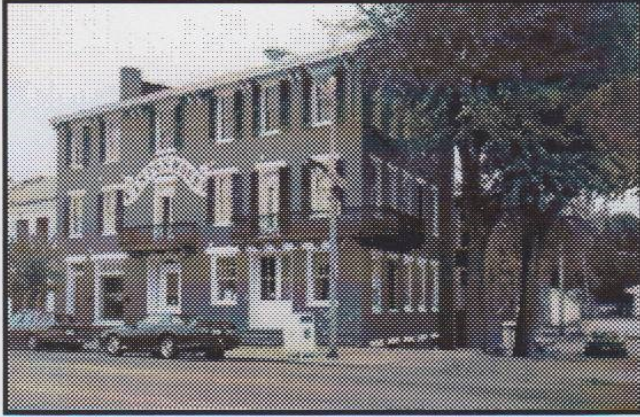
The Vinton family plot is marked with a large red granite marker, and nine smaller red granite individual markers, the earliest being little son Charlie in 1849, who likely was originally buried in the old Capitol Hill cemetery. Many of those burials were moved to Riverside by 1908. Vinton's young grandson Thomas and father Joseph both died in January of 1875. Catharine is next in 1888, her mother-in-law Sukey in 1889, then our innkeeper in 1913 and his two daughters Lillie Ore in 1920 and Florine in 1936. Catharine's parents, the Johnsonboughs, her brother John and sister Elizabeth are on the adjoining lot. Interestingly, Frederick Johnsonbaugh is recorded in 1848 as an owner with John P. Sowers of Lot 12, Block 3, on the east side of the same block as the Vinton House..

But wait...here is a puzzle! In the Vinton plot is a ninth red stone with the name Elbridge Vinton House, born 29 August 1878, died 21 January 1879. Who is this infant named after our innkeeper, with the last name of House??

The Vinton House Hotel was owned by Elmer and Esther Schwegman from November to December 1889, only the second owners after the Vintons. They raised their family of five children on the second floor while renting out rooms on the third floor. A grocery store, telegraph office, tax service and bus stop were on the first floor. Then the building at 22 West Main Street had a checkered history but was rescued by Western Wayne Heritage, Inc. when the non-profit preservation group purchased it in December 1998 with the plan to stabilize it enough for an investor. This brick building is



## HAGERSTOWN EXTENSION



Above: The Vinton House today is being restored by Western Wayne Heritage  
Photo by Bob Schmidt

one of the few still standing that provided food and lodging to those using or working on the canals, the National Road, and the railroads. The local owners have great pride in what they've accomplished and would reluctantly relinquish it to only a person of great vision toward the future of Cambridge City and the National Road.

Sources: Cambridge City Public Library, History Room and microfilm, City Building, Riverside Cemetery, Wayne County Health Office and Courthouse, Morrison-Reeves Library in Richmond.

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