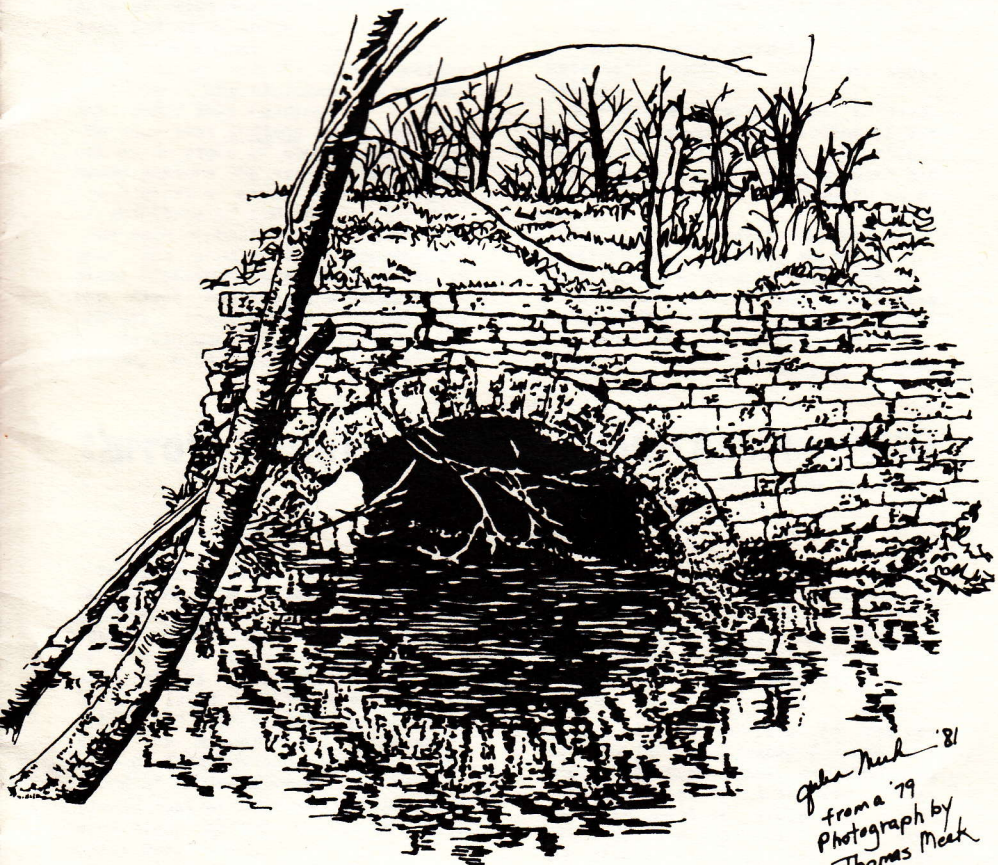


INDIANA WATERWAYS

VOLUME I, Issue 1, October, 1981



*John Trub '81
from a '79
Photograph by
Thomas Meek*

Wabash & Erie Canal Culvert No. 73, over Prairie Creek,
a few miles West of Peru, Indiana. This is one of only
three W.&E. stone arch culverts known to remain standing.

Dear Reader:

Over the past several years, while attempting to complete a survey of the present-day ruins of the Wabash and Erie Canal, we have met, both in our travels over the state and through correspondence, many persons who shared our interest in the canals.

Some of these people are quite knowledgeable on the subject, and many are enthusiastic in their interest. These persons, however, are scattered over the state, and we can only think that there must be many more whom we have not had the good fortune to meet. What seems to be needed is some form of organization which can put these people in touch with each other, and to act as a sort of clearing-house of information and ideas about the canals.

With this object in mind, plans for the formation of the Canal Society of Indiana are discussed in an article under that heading.

We hope that Indiana Waterways will act as an organ of communication between persons who are interested in the history of water transportation in the State of Indiana.

Our main emphasis shall probably be upon the canals built during the great "Internal Improvements" era of the first half of the nineteenth century, their history, impact on the development of the state and the traces, both cultural and physical,

which remain. We also hope to present information concerning other forms of water transportation as material becomes available.

Indiana Waterways is not likely to be considered a scholarly journal, but we do hope to be taken seriously. Thus, we shall attempt to adhere to principles of responsible journalism. However, we have found that even responsible history can be a lot of fun, and through this little newsletter, we hope that we all might share in it.

For persons wishing to learn more about Indiana's canals and their interesting and varied history, a short bibliography is printed elsewhere in this issue.

We extend our special thanks to the authors of this issue, as they have worked extremely hard to get their material together in a very short time.

Our special thanks, also, to David Crosson, Executive Director of the Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society, without whose support and encouragement this would still be a dream.

Your comments, questions, and suggestions are welcomed. Your contributions are earnestly solicited.

We hope that you like this little newsletter, but if you don't, we hope that you will tell us why.

Editorial Staff

Carroll County Has a Canal Association

by: Dennis McCouch

The Carroll County Wabash and Erie Canal, Inc. is alive, well, and growing. A non-profit corporation established in 1974 with the purpose of working toward restoration of part of the old Wabash and Erie Canal, lying within the city of Delphi and part of Deer Creek Township, the association has embarked upon a fund-raising program with hopes of having success in their ultimate goal of a large recreational area along nearly a mile of the old canal bed.

In 1971 the Carroll County Historical Society called a meeting of interested people at the home of Tom and Roseland McCain. There seemed to be sufficient interest to warrant continuing searching for ways to achieve restoration of a part of the canal which still holds water. A steering committee was set up with Roseland McCain as chairperson, then

president. Some funding resulted from donations of local inhabitants; this allowed the financing of a brochure, a code of by-laws, and the printing of a facsimile of an old canal stock (for sale as a fund-raising gimmick).

The code of by-laws for the new corporation was adopted 6 March 1974, and Dean Overholser, an attorney, was elected to its presidency. Easements of involved properties were prepared and approval sought from the diverse owners. Not all owners co-operated, and the project languished for awhile. Without funds and easements sufficient to plan action, it seemed to be an insurmountable undertaking. Many of the early supporters lost interest, but a core of people dedicated to the project's conclusion kept faith.

Occasionally school groups would

spend a day cutting weeds and brush. An arrangement with SPEDY got some more clearing done. Some easements were attained.

Then Peters-Revington Corporation, a member of the Mohasco Group, through its president, Thomas Peters, a Delphi native, decided to donate the easement land as a gift, and Mr. Peters handed the deed to President Overholser, a move which gave renewed faith in the project.

With a long frontage on the canal, the two-acre plot was planned as a small park. Control of brush and weeds from renewed attempts began to bespeak of an ultimate goal. But townspeople still complained about "the green slime," or the "green moss" on the surface of the water during the summers. This "moss" is

duckwort, a plant which feeds fish, frogs and turtles, ducks, and other aquatic beings. Beneath the green cover the water was crystal clear and fish lived in the deeper parts. Turtles sat upon logs and other debris in the canal channel.

Membership on the executive board changed from time to time. The board has twelve members, ranks of four elected for three years, with the officers of the board elected yearly. Roseland McCain again served as president. Then three years ago Dennis McCouch was named to the position after having served as V-P. He was president of the Carroll County Historical Society in 1971 and served as secretary for the first meeting.

With a membership on the board interested in developing ways of funding the project, a fund-raising effort was commenced. In 1978 at the annual "Old Settlers' Days" for Carroll County which is held at Delphi, the association sponsored a hotdog stand and a drawing. Both activities were successful. Later that year a program was sponsored on board the "Madam Carroll," a pleasure boat which cruises scenic Lake Freeman, south of Monticello, Indiana. The make-believe trip aboard a canalboat in the 1860's was a hit, and another trip, this time billed as "Canal Boat Ride II", was taken the following year. It, too, was a successful operation.

The canal association now owns a stand which is yearly put up on the square at the carnival of Old Settlers' Days. It has made a nice profit each year. The drawing also has been successful. With funds to in-

vest, the association has sponsored the sale of copies of the Carroll County Interim Report, the inventory of historic sites and structures of the county. Copies are available from the organization.

Interest in using the canal park for a BMX bicycle moto-cross track aroused further co-operation. Addition to the present park area is pending. This will allow creation of a fine facility for youth and adults of the community.

With funds now available for matching grants, or expenses relating to restoration, the board designated funds for the removal of the "green moss" from the canal. Strangely, complaints were plentiful about the green, but little has been said about the absence of it!

Officers of the executive board were re-elected in July. Serving with McCouch are C. Jerry Boone, V-P David Hanna, Sec.; and Joseph Peterson, Treas. The association's mailing address is:

P.O.Box 255,
Delphi, IN
46923.

Much help has been available to the organization from the Soil and Water Conservation Service. Diagrams of the canal area have been prepared and running of property lines was supervised by Larry Welborn, head of the SCS office at Delphi, who has been quite supportive of the project.

The logo of the organization shows a canalboat in an oblong center with the name surrounding it. A belt buckle with the logo is being fashioned and will soon be available. In 1981 permission was granted to New Haven Canal Days festival for use of the logo in a similar use with substitution of the town's name.

With a positive attitude expecting continued progress toward the ultimate goal of a grand Wabash & Erie Canal Park at Delphi, the Carroll County Wabash and Erie Association sends greetings to all kindred minds.

Dennis McCouch, President
Carroll County
Wabash & Erie Canal, Inc.

Mrs. Spoonaule Tells of Her Harrowing Journey

by Roseland McCain

(Note: This sketch is about an imaginary character, Mrs. Sarah Spoonaule, of New York City, who journeyed to Delphi, Indiana, via the Hudson River, the Erie Canal, Lake Erie, the Miami-Erie Canal, and the Wabash and Erie Canal. The details were gleaned from canal histories, letters from early travelers, and old newspapers. The time is set in 1852, for that year marked about the height of activity on the Wabash and Erie Canal.)

Mrs. Tom (Roseland) McCain of Delphi has, on numerous occasions, given the sketch before groups of school children, clubs, and to the passengers of "Canal Boat Ride No. II" (see story of the W. & E. Canal association). Mrs. McCain is on the board of the Delphi canal group, and served as its president for several years.)

* * *
Copyright 1981-Mrs. Roseland McCain

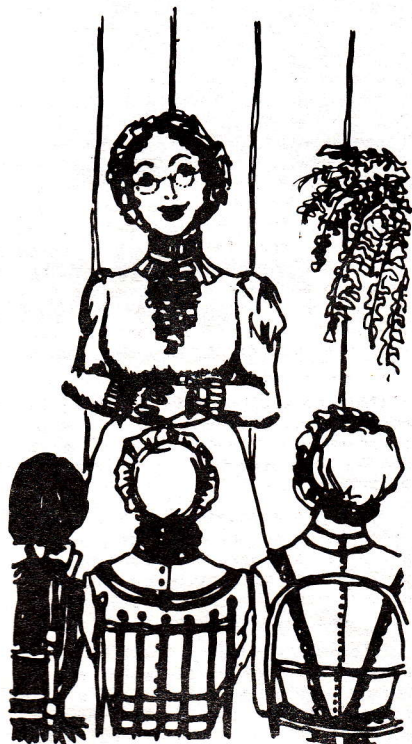
"Good afternoon, ladies of the sewing circle.

"My sister, with whom I am staying during my visit to Delphi, has asked me to tell you about my journey here from New York City—what it is like for a woman my age to travel alone.

"After my husband died, I was taken with a desire to see my only sister, and to view some of the new parts of our great Republic. Of course, I was reluctant to go alone, as I had heard tales of the rough life along the canals and the roads of the back country. However, I was assured by my pastor, who had been on the Erie Canal, that travel was perfectly safe, though tiring, for a respectable lady. She might wish to close her ears against the uncouth language of the 'canawlers', but she

"Well, with fear and trepidation, I set out on a Hudson River steamer to get to Albany where the Erie Canal begins. The steamer was crowded and dirty, but much to my relief, it did not blow up. I was very tired from sitting up all night, as the berths were all taken.

"At Albany, we were out on a fine canal packet, the 'Lady Lightfoot', which was painted green and white, with red curtains at the little windows. It was about seventy-five foot long and ten foot wide. It had room



"The steamer was crowded and dirty, but much to my relief, it did not blow up!"

for the crew of five, the cook's galley, a long main salon, and a retiring room for the ladies, which was partitioned off with red velvet curtains. One woman referred to it as a 'hen coop'. The name was appropriate, crowded as the space was! With children squalling, and much fluttering about by the ladies trying to take care of their belongings, with no place to put anything. I did not undress, but merely loosened my corset and took off my hat and shoes.

"The beds on a canalboat, as you may have heard, are simply narrow frames covered with canvas which are let down from the walls at night. One might call them book shelves. When a packet is crowded, some of

the men sleep on the long dining tables in the main salon. Clothes are draped over ropes strung across the room. The air is stifling and the mosquitoes plentiful—and horrible! Between the snoring of the travelers and the bumping of the boat when it came to a lock, it was hard to get to sleep.

"I was snatched out of slumber by a shriek and a great uproar in the main salon. It seems that a gentleman who was sleeping in a bottom bed was awakened by a terrible heaviness on his chest. He felt as if he were dying. Just above him was a fat man whose weight had caused the canvas to split. The gentleman below tried to rouse the fat man, but to no avail. At last he found his cravat stickpin and gave the fat man a tremendous jab, which caused him to bellow and leap off the bed. There was much excitement, and then laughter.

"Before we could get to sleep again, a cabin boy came through the main salon calling, 'All arise! We must put up the beds and make ready for breakfast.'

"In the dim morning light we women tried to dress the children, comb our hair, and make ourselves presentable before we went up on the roof of the packet to sit or walk about while awaiting breakfast.

"The men completed their toilette with a basin of canal water and a common comb on a string. Some of the young dandies jumped onto the towpath and walked or ran alongside for exercise.

"Breakfast was ample, but poorly served. It consisted, if I can remember, of fried ham, liver, beets, pickles, pudding, dark bread with fresh butter, and maple sugar for our tea. There was a young man present who had hopped onto the boat, paid his four and a half cents a mile, ate breakfast, and then got off. 'One way to get a meal', he said.

"We spent a pleasant morning sitting on top of the packet, with interruptions whenever we came to a low bridge and everyone had to duck or go below. We glided quietly along at about four miles an hour, I was told. The scenery was interesting, but not as lovely as the settled farmland in lower New York State. Here, much of it is still raw and wild. The little towns along the canal look new and bare. It seems that the first thing people do when they build a village is to cut down all the trees.

"Many people came to gawk at the travelers when we stopped at a lock, or took on more passengers. In the evening young folks walk along the towpath for entertainment. Sometimes we would see an impromptu wrestling match, a medicine show, or a preacher exhorting a crowd.

"A group of rather seedy actors got on at Syracuse. They had been there a week giving melodramas. Now they were heading west to entertain in small towns along the canal. One of the ladies had a pleasing voice and she sang for us after supper.

"We passed lineboats filled with people immigrating westward with all their goods and livestock. Barges were loaded with stone, wood, wheat, corn, cured meat, tallow, beeswax, feathers, and even ashes for making lye. 'Clinton's Ditch' is a wonderful success—busy, and prosperous.

I was told that over four thousand boats ply the waters in the season that it is not frozen over.

"One thing that worried me was the plight of the hoggees; they're the boys who drive the horses or mules along the towpath. They often are homeless orphans. A lot of them are sons of the Irish bogtrotters who dug the canal—they got that name for they waded waist-deep mud in the swamps. Well, these hoggees used to be bound boys, but I think that practice has been stopped. They work two six-hour shifts a day, trudging through mud and dust in all kinds of weather, with little or no protection from the curses and beatings or their captains who wreak their wrath on them, or from drunken canawlers. Perhaps the horses and mules receive better care, for they are changed every twenty miles and are well fed. They say some of the hoggees are as tough as any man, and can stand at the bar in a groggery and down their whiskey as quick as the men. And, oh, can some of them curse! Why, their profanity is shocking! Just think, they're just young boys!

"Well, at last, after five days on the Erie, we arrived at Buffalo and went through the amazing locks at Lockport—they're double five-tier locks which lift the boats up to the height of Lake Erie on one side while the other side lowers boats coming off the lake. It's a marvel how they got it done. A fellow passenger related how, when the Erie Canal was begun, a young engineer was sent to Europe to study canal construction over there. By the time he returned, our Yankee ingenuity had solved all the problems and his advice wasn't needed.

"We were transferred to a lake steamer which carried us across Lake Erie. The water was rough and most of the passengers were seasick. Again, I was thankful that the steamship did not blow up. I had heard of such disasters.

"When we came to Toledo, I rested one night in a well-appointed tavern. There were two double beds in the room, and the other woman in my bed was quite clean and respectable."

(to be continued)



Proceedings of the Mobocracy on the Wabash Canal

A short time since we published the fact that a large body of ruffians of Clay and Vigo Counties had cut away the bank of the Birch-creek reservoir, and that they threatened dire vengeance on those who should attempt to repair the breach. The Governor issued a proclamation, which we published, offering rewards for the perpetrators of the outrage. The scoundrels (sic) sent a formal notice to the resident Trustee at Terre Haute that, if an attempt was made to repair the canal, it would be at the risk of the lives of the men sent, and that the canal would be cut away for a long distance in the neighborhood of the reservoir. Notwithstanding these threats, a State boat was sent to the reservoir last Tuesday, with twenty armed laborers, under charge of Mr. Higgins. They worked all Tuesday without interruption.

Wednesday night the canal bank was cut away on Summit Level, eighteen miles below Terre Haute, and boats on the level coming down at once made their way back to Terre Haute with much difficulty. The aqueducts over Birch Creek, near the reservoir as was that part of the canal cut away, was burned down the same night, a guard of the poor deluded scoundrels standing by to prevent interruption during the fire. It was also understood they intended to cut away the old reservoir, on the opposite side of the canal to the other, and to perform other acts of villainy. As an exhibition of their contempt for the Governor and his proclamation, they stuck up a notice offering a high reward for the Governor's head.

On Tuesday night the boat was surrounded by men with blackened faces,

who during the night, kept up a continual firing of guns about the boat. These ruffians held a meeting about a mile from the boat during Tuesday night, and drew up a statement of their complaints, and resolutions of a threatening nature. In the morning a copy of these was found stuck up on the boat, with a warning that the laborers would be allowed seven hours to take away the earth they had replaced in the reservoir bank, and one hour after that to leave, and the Birchcreek Aqueduct burnt the following night. The laborers, who had been during the whole night expecting an attack, took the seven hours for at once making tracks from the neighborhood, instead of undoing their work of the day previous.

It was reported at Terre Haute, Friday morning that the mob had destroyed the two locks at the junction. They left written notices at the doors of persons in their neighborhood, who regarded their acts with disapproval, that if they gave any information as to the perpetrators of these cowardly acts, or had any thing to say on the subject, they would be at once taken and lynched. It was reported at Terre Haute that the owner of a mill in this neighborhood had, for some of his language of disapproval, been severely lynched by scourging, and

was told that if he interfered any further his mill would be burnt to the ground. A number of coal-boats were left high and dry.

NEW YORK DAILY TRIBUNE
Monday, June 11, 1885

A Bibliography

(We have not tried to list all sources of information--only the ones of most general interest and availability)

Alvin F. Harlow--OLD TOWPATHS New York, 1926

--After 55 years, this remains as probably the best general work on U.S. Canals.

Paul Fatout--INDIANA CANALS West Lafayette, Ind. 1972

--Very readable and informative, this book contains an extensive bibliography of published and unpublished materials relating to its subject.

Charles R. Poinsett--FORT WAYNE DURING THE CANAL ERA 1828-1855 Indianapolis, 1965

--Fort Wayne was probably the community most affected by the building and operation of the Wabash and Erie Canal. Poinsett has examined the subject in detail, and has produced

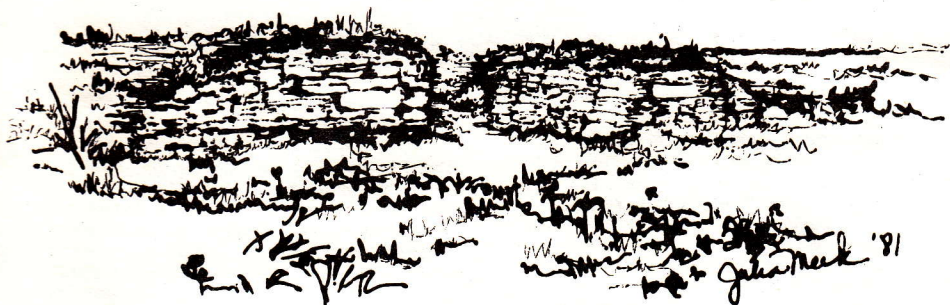
an excellent book.

Indiana Magazine of History has published numerous articles relating to the canals over the years. These are generally interesting, and of excellent quality.

For information of a more detailed and local nature, County histories are often good sources. Old county and city maps prior to the 1800's usually show the routes of the canals

although the locations of locks and other features are usually not shown.

Probably the best primary sources of information concerning Indiana's canals are the Documentaty Journals of the State of Indiana. These contain, along with other canal-related items, the Reports of the Canal Commissioners and Engineers Reports which are detailed and informative. The years from 1835-1880 are the most rewarding.



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