

THE WHITEWATER CANAL.

BY JAMES M. MILLER.

[For an article on the Richmond and Brookville canal by James M. Miller, together with a brief sketch of the writer, see this magazine, Vol. I, p. 189.]

The rapidly increasing settlement of the Whitewater valley and the remarkable fertility of the soil caused an increasing demand for a market for the products of the farms, and as early as 1822 or 1823 a convention of delegates from Randolph, Wayne, Union, Fayette, Franklin and Dearborn counties, Indiana, assembled at Harrison, O., to consider the practicability of constructing a canal down the valley. The prime mover was Augustus Jocelyn, a minister of the gospel who edited and published the *Western Agriculturist* at Brookville, and through his paper worked up quite an interest in behalf of the improvement of the valley. Shortly after the convention was held Colonel Shriver, of the United States army, began a survey for a canal and got as far down the valley as Garrison's creek, where the survey was brought to a sudden close by the death of the colonel. The suspension was of short duration, for Colonel Stansbury, United States civil engineer, soon completed it. Nothing seems to have been done until February of 1834, when the Legislature directed the canal commissioners to employ competent engineers, and "early the ensuing summer survey to locate a canal from a point at or near the mouth of Nettle creek, in Wayne county, to Lawrenceburg, Ind." Accordingly, William Goodin was employed as engineer-in-chief and Jesse L. Williams assistant engineer. During its construction and existence there were employed as assistant engineers Simpson Talbot, Elisha Long, John H. Farquhar, Martin Crowell, Henry C. Moore, Stephen D. Wright, — Dewey and John Shank. The canal was first located on the west side of the river as far as Laurel, where it crossed to the east and continued down to the gravel bank just above Brookville, where it recrossed to the west bank and proceeded on to Lawrenceburg, but was afterward located on the east bank from Laurel to its terminus.

Strange as it may seem, this great and badly needed improvement was bitterly opposed by some and every obstruction thrown in the way of the enterprise that could be, the opposition being led by Charles Hutchens, a Kentuckian, who resided for many years in Brookville, and during his residence edited several papers.

A meeting was called to assemble at the court-house in Brookville at 2 o'clock p. m., December 25, 1834, to consider the propriety of constructing a canal from the forks of Blue creek to its mouth. It was proposed to connect with the Whitewater canal near the mouth of the creek, and it was thought that Congress would donate the contiguous land. The call closes with the following postscript: "While we are borrowing money to build the Whitewater canal, let's borrow a little more to build the Blue Creek." This was done by the opponents of the Whitewater, as the proposed canal would only have been four miles in length. January 5, 1835, the engineer reported the survey completed. The length of the canal was seventy-six miles, with a fall of 491 feet from its head at Nettle creek to its terminus at Lawrenceburg, requiring fifty-five locks and seven dams, the latter varying in height from two to eight feet. The estimated cost per mile was \$14,908, or \$1,142,126 for the entire canal. In June of that year General Amaziah Morgan, of Rush county, was appointed a commissioner to receive stone, timber, or the conveyance of land to the canal to aid in constructing it. Owing to the hills in southern Indiana, it was deemed best to cross the line at Harrison creek and locate about eight miles of the canal in Hamilton county, Ohio, recrossing into Indiana and continuing to Lawrenceburg. As it was necessary to have the consent of Ohio to construct the portion running through her territory, the Legislature of Indiana authorized the Governor to obtain Ohio's permission, and Governor Noble appointed O. H. Smith a commissioner, who proceeded to Columbus, O., and January 30, 1835, presented Indiana's request. This was bitterly opposed, and the petition refused on the grounds that it was against Ohio's interest to grant it, as the Whitewater canal would run parallel to the Miami at a distance of from twenty to fifty miles from it, and that the products of Wayne, Union and part of Fayette and Franklin counties, Indiana, were taken to

Hamilton and shipped to Cincinnati on the Miami canal, and if Ohio granted the request, she would lose that tonnage. The refusal only served to put Indiana on her mettle, and the Buckeyes soon learned that when "the Hoosiers will they will, and that's the end on't," for the Legislature immediately instructed the Board of Internal Improvements, should Ohio persist in her refusal, to construct a railroad on the Indiana side of the State line from Harrison to Lawrenceburg. This, with the influence of Cincinnati, whose people quickly realized what the result would be to them if the commerce of the valley went to Lawrenceburg, hastily changed the mind of Ohio's Legislature, and the petition was granted. One enthusiastic advocate of the Whitewater canal, in the *Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette* of September 8, 1836, earnestly and persistently urged Cincinnati to borrow half a million dollars to aid in constructing the canal and Miami railroad. Early in January of 1836 the champions of the Whitewater canal in the Indiana Legislature, Enoch McCarty in the Senate and Caleb Smith and Mark Crum in the House, had the pleasing satisfaction of seeing their labors crowned with success by the passing of the internal improvement bill.

Tuesday January 9, 1836, was a gala day in Brookville, for on that day the news that the internal improvement bill had passed both houses of the Legislature was received, and in the evening the event was celebrated with speaking by prominent men, all buildings, public and private, being illuminated, and long rows of lights placed on the fences along Meirs street. A long procession was formed under command of Colonel B. S. Noble and Captain Dodd, and, amid the ringing of bells, beating of drums and roaring of cannon, marched through the streets to the inspiring strains of a band of music. The demonstrations continued until after midnight, when the citizens retired to their homes, but the cannon boomed till daylight. Of all who took part in the demonstration there are, perhaps, living only Rev. T. A. Goodwin,* Thomas Pursel, Jackson Lynn and W. W. Butler*, of Indianapolis; Dr. Cornelius Cain, of Clarksburg, Ind.; Jonathan Cain, of Connersville, and Eli Cain and Dr. Thomas Colescott, of Brookville, who participated in the demonstration.

*Since deceased, as are, doubtless, some of the others. This article was written in 1899.

September 13, 1836, the ceremony of "breaking ground" and letting of the contracts for the construction of the canal from Brookville to Lawrenceburg was celebrated at Brookville by a grand barbecue and every expression of rejoicing possible. The orator of the day was Governor Noah Noble. The other speakers were ex-Governors James B. Ray and David Wallace; Hon. George H. Dunn, of Lawrenceburg, and Dr. Daniel Drake, of Cincinnati. Quite a number of speeches were made and toasts offered, the following being offered by John Finley, editor of the *Richmond Palladium*:

"There is not in the wide world a valley so sweet
As that vale where the branches of Whitewater meet;
Oh! The last picayune shall depart from my fob,
Ere the east and the west forks relinquish the job."

A pick, shovel and wheelbarrow had been provided for the occasion, and at the close of the speaking and reading of the toasts one of the speakers seized the pick and loosened the ground for a few feet, another trundled the wheelbarrow to the loosened earth, another took the shovel and filled the wheelbarrow and ex-Governor Wallace trundled it a short distance and dumped it, and "ground was broken" for the Whitewater canal. On this day, September 13, 1836, contracts were let for the construction of the canal to the following parties: William Carr, Joel Wilcox, Zephaniah Reed, William Rhubottom, Joel Palmer, R. & T. Freeman, — Westerfield, Benjamin M. Remy, George Heimer, Moses Kelley, William Marshall, N. Hammond, William M. McCarty, Isaac Van Horn, H. Simonton, William Garrison, Paren & Kyle, Carmichael & Barwick, Gibbons & Williams, Halstead & Parker, Naylor, Troxall & Co., D. Barnham & Co., Scott & Butt, H. Lasure & Co., Vance, Caldwell & Co., Tyner, Whipple & Co. and C. J. Meeks.

The State pushed the work, and in November of 1837 Joel Wilcox, the contractor for building the bridge and dam across the east fork of the Whitewater below Brookville, completed the latter and water was let in the first mile of the canal. According to the report of the Board of Internal Improvements for that year, there had been employed between Lawrenceburg and Brookville nine of that board, one engineer-in-chief, one secre-

tary, twelve resident engineers, seven senior and eleven junior assistant engineers and twenty-four rodmen. One of the rodmen was the venerable George W. Julian, now a resident of Irvington, and who a few years later took such an active part in national affairs. Also twenty axmen and 975 laborers, the latter receiving \$18 per month.

The White bridge, as it is called, was finished by the contractor in September of 1838, the west side of it being used for a towpath. It is 392 feet long and cost \$14,000. The locks were either named for some prominent person engaged in constructing the canal or for the town where they were located. They were Marshall's, Fox's, Trenton, Berwise's, Rhubottom's, Cedar Grove, guard lock at Case's, Wiley's (two), Tyner's, guard lock below Brookville, Brookville at the basin, Reed's, just above the depot, Boundary Hill, Yellow Bank, Twin locks, Gordon's, Metamora, Murray's, Ferris's, Jenks's, Laurel, Hetrick's, Garrison's creek, Conwell's, Limpus's, Berlin, Nulltown, Updegraff's, Herron's, Conwell's, Mill lock, Triple locks, Claypool's, Carmen's, Fourmile, Swamp Level, Milton and Lockport (two).

The first boat to reach Brookville from Lawrenceburg was the Ben Franklin, owned by Long & Westerfield and commanded by General Elisha Long. It arrived June 8, 1839, and was drawn by hand from below town up to its landing. The estimated cost of the canal from Hagerstown to Lawrenceburg was \$1,567,470, and to construct it to Brookville had cost \$664,665. The State debt had become so large she could not pay the interest, and the canal was sold in 1842 to Henry S. Vallette, a wealthy Cincinnati, who proceeded to complete it. In November of 1843 the first boat, the Native, in charge of Captain Crary, reached Laurel at dark with a grand excursion from Brookville. During the night the bank burst and left the excursionists eight miles above Brookville to walk home. In June of 1845 the canal reached Connersville. The first boat to arrive at Herron's lock was the Banner. The following October the canal reached Cambridge City and had cost the company \$473,000. In 1846 it was completed to Hagerstown, and according to the report of the Auditor of the State for 1848, had cost the State \$1,092,175.13. In January of 1847 a flood destroyed the

aqueducts at Laurel and this side of Cambridge City and cut channels around the feeder dams at Cass's (now Cooley's Station), Brookville, Laurel, Connersville and Cambridge City. The damage was estimated to be \$90,000, and \$70,000, was expended during the summer in repairs. The following November there was another flood that destroyed all that had been done and \$80,000 more was expended, leaving \$30,000 of repairs undone, and the canal was not ready for use until September of 1848. Disaster followed disaster, the cost of maintaining it exceeding the revenue until the summer of 1862, when it was sold at the court-house door in Brookville by the United States marshal to H. C. Lord, president of the I. & C. Railroad, for \$63,000, that being the amount of the judgment. The railroad had long desired to secure the canal from Harrison to Cincinnati, so it could lay its track through the tunnel and thus gain an entrance to the city and the use of the Whitewater basin for a depot. This sale, for some reason, was set aside, although the railroad held that portion of the canal and used it as I have stated, but on December 5, 1865, C. C. Binckley (now Judge Binckley, of Richmond, and State senator from Wayne county), president of the Whitewater Valley Canal Company, sold it to H. C. Lord, president of the Whitewater Valley Railroad Company, for \$137,348.12.

The last boat that ran from Cincinnati to Brookville was the Favorite, owned and run by Captain Aaron C. Miller, at present a resident of Brookville. I have obtained the names of the following persons who are still residents of the county who helped build the canal: James Derbyshire, Jonathan Banes, William Carr, Peter D. Pelsor, Isaac K. Lee, John McKeown, Josiah McCafferty and Jacob Harvey.

In 1836 Ohio began to consider the propriety of constructing a branch from Harrison to Cincinnati, and in February of 1837 decided to build it, the estimated cost being between \$300,000 and \$400,000. In May following the books were opened at the office of the Ohio Insurance Company, in Cincinnati, for the sale of stock in the Whitewater canal. Ohio took \$150,000 and Cincinnati \$200,000, leaving \$100,000 unsold. In February of 1838 M. T. Williams advertised in the *Cincinnati Gazette* for proposals for constructing culverts over Mill creek, Bold Face, Rapid

run and Muddy creek, also for an aqueduct at Dry Forks and a lift and guard lock at the State line and a tunnel through the ridge that separates the great Miami and Ohio rivers at North Bend. In April of 1838 an excursion left Cincinnati on the steamboat Mosselle for General Harrison's farm at North Bend, to witness the ceremony of "breaking ground" for the Cincinnati branch. In 1838 it was proposed to unite the Central canal with the Whitewater and three routes were surveyed. Starting at or near Muncietown the first intersected the Whitewater at Milton and was thirty-three miles in length. The second, a short distance this side of that place, was thirty-seven miles long. The third, three and a half miles below Milton, was fifty-two miles long. After a thorough examination of the country and ascertaining the amount of water that could be depended on, it was deemed impracticable and the project abandoned. In January of 1839 contracts for constructing forty sections of the canal, averaging one half-mile each, between Harrison and Cincinnati, were let. The locks on this portion were Miami or Cleves, Dry Fork, Green's, Godley's and Cooper's. Thus the work progressed slowly, but perhaps as rapidly as could be expected, and in 1845 the branch was completed and direct communication by the Whitewater canal between Brookville and Cincinnati was established.

The first warehouse erected on the Whitewater canal basin in Cincinnati was built by Stephen D. Coffin and Hadley D. Johnson, of this place, and the first boatload of flour shipped down the canal to Cincinnati was consigned to Mr. Johnson and he sold it in that city. The first boat completed at the Rochester (now Cedar Grove) boat-yard of Messrs. T. Moore, U. Kendall, G. B. Child and S. D. Coffin was a packet called the Native, and with Stephen D. Coffin as master arrived in Brookville July 3, 1839, and the next day took a merry party of excursionists to Cass's dam, three and a half miles below town, one of the excursionists being a "truant schoolboy" who in after years filled a very important place in State and national affairs, made General Grant an excellent postmaster-general and is at present filling an important position in Washington City. The Native made regular trips between Brookville and Lawrenceburg, leaving the former at 6:30 a. m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, ar-

riving at the latter place the same evening, and on the return leaving Lawrenceburg at 6:30 a. m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, arriving at Brookville the same day. The fare was \$1.25 and \$1.50, the State receiving 37½ cents out of each fare.

With all its defects, the canal greatly aided in developing and making the Whitewater valley what it is to-day, one of the prettiest and most desirable places on earth for a home.

JAMES M. MILLER.

Brookville, Ind.

THE CENTRAL CANAL.

[From an interview with Gen. T. A. Morris, engineer, in 1898.]

THE Central canal, of which the piece from Indianapolis to Broad Ripple was the only completed portion, was a part of the system adopted by the Indiana Board of Internal Improvements in 1836. The Central canal was to run from Wabash, by way of Anderson and Indianapolis, to Evansville. Work on the canal was begun in 1837 and prosecuted up to 1838.

"During that time the part between Broad Ripple and Indianapolis was completed. A good deal of heavy work was also done on the canal between Indianapolis and Wabashtown, much of it about Anderson. The canal was almost completed from Indianapolis to the bluffs of White river, and a small amount of work was done between the bluffs and Evansville, when the Board of Internal Improvements failed, overwhelmed with debt. The board required the unfinished work to be measured, and the contractors were allowed what was due them for the work already done. As there was no money to make such payment, the Legislature had authorized the issue of scrip, and this was paid to the contractors.

"Some time after that the Legislature authorized the sale of the Central canal to outside parties. Alexander Morrison and myself were appointed commissioners to value the property, which was to be sold at our valuation. It was sold to parties in New York. Those persons disposed of it to a company formed here. The present Indianapolis Water Company is a successor of that company, and now owns the canal, having bought it more than twenty years ago.