

INDIANA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY

VOLUME XXX

DECEMBER, 1934

NUMBER 4

The Wabash and Erie Canal at Lafayette*

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A canal is an artificial watercourse used as a transportation route. By locks it can be made, if desired or necessary, to step up or step down so as to cross ridges or water-sheds and other barriers between the sources of streams. Thus the Wabash and Erie Canal was planned as a highway of commerce to traverse the valleys of the Maumee and the Wabash and to cross the portage separating their drainage areas.

It was promulgated and constructed under the provisions of an act passed by Congress on May 27, 1827. By this act Indiana was given every alternate section of land, with a few exceptions, five miles back on each side of the proposed line of the canal—practically 3200 acres for every mile of the route. The canal was planned at that time to extend from opposite the mouth of the Tippecanoe River to the falls of the Maumee River. To obtain this grant work had to commence by March 2, 1832. Accordingly, on February 22, anniversary of the birth of Washington who had many years previously suggested such a waterway, the ground was broken with appropriate ceremonies.

When first proposed it was thought the entire line would lie within the boundaries of Indiana, but as the surveyors began laying out the route they ascertained that the Maumee River was not navigable, nor was it practicable to make it so. Therefore, the line of construction was planned so as to connect with Maumee Bay, an arm of Lake Erie. Then Congress authorized the state of Indiana to convey that part of the donated lands lying beyond her territorial limits to the state of Ohio. This was done on February 1, 1834, by a joint resolution of the branches of the Indiana Legislature.

* This paper was read at a meeting of the General de Lafayette Chapter, D. A. R., at Lafayette, Indiana, on October 3, 1933.

On July 4, 1835, the first section, extending from Ft. Wayne to Huntington, being from the St. Joseph River to the forks of the Wabash River, was opened. In 1835 a bill passed the Indiana Legislature to extend the canal from the mouth of Tippecanoe River to Lafayette, an estimated distance of fourteen miles and twenty-nine chains, and appropriated for that purpose \$227,000.

In 1836 the canal was built through Wabash County but no water was turned in until ten months later when the feeder at Lagro was tapped. During this long period of waiting the broad, level bottom of the canal was occasionally used as a driving course. According to the program for the opening of this section the freight boat *Indiana* was to make the initial trip to Wabash on July 4, 1837. Upon its arrival the large crowd that had assembled formed a parade and marched to Treaty Grounds where a feast was partaken of and speeches made. The day's celebration was closed by a dance up town in the evening.

In the latter part of the year 1837, the section between Wabash and Peru was opened. The digging of the channel was completed to Logansport in the fall of 1838, too late to undertake a regular opening. The January freshet that followed created a wide breach at Bull Creek, the repair of which was not completed until about the beginning of April. Navigation was formally opened to Logansport on April 20, 1839.¹

In November, 1839, it was estimated that the eastern end of the canal would be completed to the state line by the first of June, and the western section to Lafayette by the first of October (1840).² This turned out to be correct, for in the fall of 1840 the channel was completed to Lafayette and several trips were made by boats between Lafayette and the State line.³

Before the next season opened, freshets had created a heavy break at Birmingham Bluff and another at Wabash Town. These were repaired in the spring and by May, 1841,

¹ *Documentary Journal* (Indiana), 1839, Report by Samuel Lewis, 63.

² *Ibid.*, 87.

³ *Ibid.*, 1840, Report by Board of Canal Trustees to the Legislature, No. 27, 21.

boats were making regular trips between Lafayette and a point in Ohio six miles beyond the State line.⁴

During the season the bank at Birmingham Bluff for a distance of more than a mile, was protected by a layer of stone, taking the place of a brush rip-rap which had not held. The stone was brought down the canal from Georgetown.⁵

The canal coursed along the west side of the Wabash River until Carrollton was reached where it crossed to the east side. The towing horses were transported across the river on a ferry boat at first, but later on a towpath bridge, the construction of which was completed October 1, 1844.⁶ By means of a lock here the boats were lowered to the surface level of the river or lifted to the canal's elevation—according to the direction going. The crossing was possible because the stream was placid here, due to the backwater from the Delphi or Pittsburgh dam located four and one-half miles further down stream.⁷ This raised the water eight feet in the pool of the river at the point of crossing, and to all appearances, during normal stages, there was no current. In crossing the river the boats were floated upon the quiet waters of the stream itself for a short distance and then entered the canal's channel, which, for two and one-half miles, was invisible—only the towpath showing. The channel, the west bank and the ground between it and the river proper were submerged by the backwater from the dam, making a single wide stream or body of water.⁸ About one and one-half miles above the dam there was a guard lock where the canal left the river and the low ground that paralleled it on the west, and proceeded on southward between its two banks, both now visible.

⁴ An advertisement of the season of 1841 reads: "The Wabash and Erie Transportation Company. The subscribers will commence running at the opening of navigation on the Wabash and Erie Canal, a Daily Line of boats for passengers and freight from Lafayette, Indiana, to a point in Ohio six miles beyond the Indiana State line, making 146 miles. . . ." Signed by Samuel L. Mahan, L. G. Thompson, and F. Comperel. This statement is important as it seems to settle the date when the Canal was opened to Lafayette. For this advertisement, see issues of the *Tippecanoe Journal and Lafayette Free Press* during summer of 1841.

⁵ *Documentary Journal*, 1841, Report by Supt. J. L. Williams, Nov. 27, 1841. Georgetown, a village on the Wabash about nine miles below Logansport.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1844-1852, Report by E. F. Lucas, 116.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1836, 3; 1838, Report by Engineer, 112. The Pittsburgh dam was part of the canal system, built by the state for a triple purpose:

a. Stilling the current in the river so boats could be towed across it.
b. Feeding water to the canal.
c. Furnishing power for manufactories.

During construction of the dam, a channel for the canal was dug on the east side of the river and a towpath 10 feet high was made from the earth that was excavated. When the dam was completed and functioning, the backwater completely submerged this channel and its west bank, but the towpath, being above the crest of the water, afforded a footing for the towing horses to draw the boats which followed the unseen channel. The dam was blown out with dynamite in 1882.

⁸ *Documentary Journal*, 1838.

The towpath was on the east bank of the canal from Carrollton to Delphi, just below which, at Deer Creek, it crossed to the west bank.⁹ On reaching Wild Cat Creek near Lafayette it changed back to the east bank along which it proceeded until Ninth Street, Lafayette, was reached. Here it changed again to the west bank, the draft animals crossing over the canal on what was known as the "exchange bridge."

A well constructed dam, originally thirteen feet high and one hundred seventy feet long, was built across Wild Cat Creek to form a pool for crossing this stream and to divert the water into the canal channel.¹⁰ Thus the Wild Cat was one of the feeders of the canal—in fact, it was the largest feeder within a distance of one hundred miles. Its gauged capacity during the driest season was 4,500 cubic feet per minute.¹¹ The towing animals crossed the stream here on a temporary bridge until 1848 when a permanent wagon bridge with a passage way on the north side for the towing animals was built.¹²

A short distance above the "exchange bridge" in Lafayette, the canal occupied a natural depression, or basin, which, when filled, acted as a reservoir and was known as "Wide Water." Along the border of this, especially on the south side, were erected buildings for the storage of ice that was harvested on this lake-like pool.

In filling the canal channel from Wild Cat Creek to Lafayette, much difficulty was experienced because of the filtration of the water into the gravelly soil that formed the canal's bed. Large bunches of brush or small tree tops, drawn by oxen, were dragged up and down the muddy channel to cause the earth to "puddle," as it is called. When this coating dried and hardened it was almost impervious to water and then the channel was allowed to fill.¹³

Even though the line was now opened to Lafayette, there was but little traffic because the connection with Lake Erie had not yet been made. Late in 1842, however, Ohio completed

⁹ Carrollton was a little trading point on the Wabash about four miles above Delphi.

¹⁰ *Documentary Journal*, 1836, *Report by Engineer*, 3.

¹¹ *Report by Wabash and Erie Canal Commissioners*, Dec. 17, 1835, 20.

¹² *Documentary Journal*, 1848-1849, *Report by Chief Engineer*, 133.

¹³ This information, the author gathered from an eye-witness of the building of the Canal.

her part of the work and, in the following May, through traffic was established with the Lake.¹⁴

In commemoration of the line being opened to the Lake a monster celebration was held at Ft. Wayne on July 4, 1843, with General Lewis Cass as the principal speaker and Hugh Hanna marshal of the day.

The boat *Albert S. White* was the first to make a through trip from Toledo to Lafayette.¹⁵ A local editor wrote of the new canal boat:

THE ALBERT S. WHITE, of Lafayette is a new and superb Canal Packet built at this place for the Wabash and Erie Canal Transportation Company. She was to leave port yesterday for Fort Wayne, there to receive her furniture, etc., and we venture the opinion, that when fitted out she will 'take the shine off' of any thing in her line to be met with 'in these diggins.' She is commodious, and her apartments so arranged as that there can be no danger of indiscriminate mingling up of male and female passengers and crew, as is sometimes necessarily the case in boats of bad construction.¹⁶

Meanwhile the extension down the valley as provided by the Act of January, 1836, had been started. The first section had been advertised in 1842, and in October, 1845, water was gradually let in at Lafayette, being supplied by the Wild Cat feeder, supplemented further down by a small feeder (1,800 cubic feet per minute) from Wea Creek. This last was nothing more, at that time, than the tailrace from the Foresman Mill. The gravelly bottom here gave trouble also, and the channel filled slowly. But before the season closed there was enough water to float a boat used to carry stone to line the weak places in the banks as far as Wea Creek. Breaks occurred during the winter which delayed the opening of traffic during the next summer, but in the latter part of September the first boat reached Attica.¹⁷

Construction continuing on southward the Canal reached the terminus at Evansville in 1853. On September 22, 1853, the first boat, the *Pennsylvania*, Captain Sharra command-

¹⁴ *Documentary Journal*, 1843, Report by Canal Commissioners, Dec. 12, 1843; *Tippecanoe Journal and Lafayette Free Press*, May 11, 1843. The editor wrote: "The navigation of the Wabash and Erie Canal from this place to the Lake has fully commenced. A number of boats from the lakes have arrived during the week."

¹⁵ The *Albert S. White*, which was named after the Whig leader of that name, who was first a national Representative and later a Senator from Indiana, was built in Lafayette and furnished in Fort Wayne. *Tippecanoe Journal and Lafayette Free Press*, Sept. 15, 1841.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Documentary Journal*, 1846, Report by the General Supt., S. Fisher, Dec. 10, 1846, 148.

ing, completed its through trip from Lake Erie to the Ohio River.¹⁸ This southern extension—Lafayette to Evansville, especially from Terre Haute down by way of the "Cross Cut" to the "Central Canal" at Bloomfield—was never as much as a partial success.

The canal's entire length in Indiana was 375 miles, and in Ohio 84 miles, making a total of 459 miles, or, to be exact, 459 $\frac{3}{8}$ miles, the longest canal in the world excepting the Grand Canal in China which was about 800 miles in length.

The boating season opened about March 1, and closed about November 1, annually. The speed of the boats was from three to six miles per hour, some of the packets making even as much as eight miles. The freight boats never did better than three miles. The boats were drawn by from two to six horses or mules, hitched tandem. In 1862 a steam canal boat, built in Lafayette, made a trip to Toledo. It ran on a much faster schedule, but the waves formed by its swifter passage so damaged the banks that it was never permitted to make another trip.

In planning the construction of this canal the high water marks of the freshet of January 8, 1828, to that time the greatest flood in the known history of this part of the state, were used as guides in obviating, as well as could be done, the damages of anticipated floods.¹⁹ But in June, 1858, all the streams in this region, especially in Tippecanoe County, attained a flood stage that far surpassed that of 1828, the Wabash exceeding the former or earlier flood by two feet. Wild Cat Creek formed a new channel around the east end of the dam, destroyed the east abutment, and swept away the bridge. Only the west abutment was left. The aqueduct over Wea Creek, "consisting of three spans, supported by two abutments and two piers, in all 140 feet long," was completely destroyed, leaving only the seriously damaged east abutment. The feeder dam up the Wea was carried away and many breaks made in the banks along the channel. There were created, also, many extensive gaps in the banks of the canal both above and below Lafayette. Through navigation was interrupted from June 10 to August 26, 1858.²⁰

¹⁸ Report by J. L. Williams, Chief Engineer, "Wabash and Erie Canal, 1858-1874," 842.

¹⁹ *Documentary Journal*, 1861, Report by Chief Engineer, 297.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1859, Report by Canal Trustees, 279, 298.

This destruction of property and, necessarily, the loss in service while making repairs, was a severe blow to the canal interests, especially since the railroads, at this time, were threatening its very existence.

This flood, in its destructive action, was most severe in the section between Delphi and Attica, and injured the best paying part of the canal, because Lafayette, previous to the completion of the Wabash Valley Railroad, was the "largest exporting office on the canal."²¹

The Wabash and Erie Canal was more than a transportation line—it furnished power for factories along its course. From the very first Lafayette had her share of these. According to the official report of December 15, 1845, the following leases for industries at Lafayette were made in 1840:

To Hull and Spencer, for 30 years, 3 run of stone for a flouring mill, "with the right to use the water on the second fall . . . without increase of price, @ \$150 per annum for each run."

To Messrs. Clark and Bartholomew for water to run a sawmill, for 30 years @ \$250 per annum.

To Daniel Yandes for

- a. One sawmill for 30 years @ \$250 per annum.
- b. One paper mill for 30 years, three powers @ \$162 per annum each.
- c. One flouring mill, 30 yrs., three run of stone @ \$162 per annum each.²²

For all these industrial plants the fall of water was fifteen and one-half feet. The wheels were of the overshot type fourteen feet in diameter. The engineer states that "for this fall, and diameter of wheel (overshot), I have determined . . . that . . . two hundred and sixty-seven and eight tenths cubic feet of water per minute, is the quantity for *each* 'Mill Stone Power'."²³

Hull and Spencer Flouring Mill: This mill in 1871 had two overshot wheels on the upper fall and one on the lower. It was entitled to three "powers" on the upper fall

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1861, *Report* by Canal Trustees, 276.

²² *Ibid.*, 1846, *Report* of Supervising Engineer, J. L. Williams, 125. After listing the above industries, the Engineer added: "James S. Hoagland (Hogeland) is using 58/100 of a power for a woolen mill such as carding, spinning and fulling. . . . He has made use of the water from the canal for the last four years, and refuses to pay rent for the same. He never had the water leased to him, but commenced operations on the word of one Silas S. White, of whom he claims to have purchased the privilege."

²³ *Ibid.*, 1871, *Report* by Wm. J. Ball on "Water Leases," 17.

and the privilege to use the other without charge.²⁴ The plant stood on the west bank of the canal opposite the terminus of Union Street, and west of the old Thieme and Wagner Brewery. It was reached by crossing the canal on a bridge at Salem Street and going south on the towpath. When Hull left the partnership, which was shortly after its inception, Dr. David Jennings took his place. In 1858 the mill was sold to Robert Breckenridge and Barnett ("Barney") Jenkins. It secured power from the waters of the canal during the whole period of its existence, which terminated in 1887. All of the above mentioned owners took a prominent part in the early development of Lafayette—a development that was phenomenal and which the canal stimulated.

Israel Spencer came to Lafayette in 1829 and purchased, for \$160, the ground on north Sixth Street now occupied by the building of the Lafayette *Journal-Courier* and that of the Painters and Decorators Union. With his own hands he erected thereon a small frame house in which he lived for some time. He was the first mayor of "the Town of Lafayette," under the statute of 1837-38. He was also a director of the Lafayette Branch of the State Bank of Indiana; one of the projectors of the Lafayette Savings Bank, being its President at the time of his death; and a member of the Board of Trustees of the Second Presbyterian Church from the time of its organization.

In the eighteen fifties he erected a four-room, three-story business block on the east side of the public square, on the third floor of which was a public hall known as *Spencer Hall*. For many years this was the only place in the city for holding concerts, theatrical shows, and other like entertainments. The only original rooms of this block now standing are the two north ones, occupied by the King Clothing Company and the successor of the Ankeny Jewelry Company. The two south rooms have been rebuilt and are now occupied by the B & W Shoe Company and the Tippecanoe Loan and Trust Company.

After many changes of residence Israel Spencer finally resided again on the lot where he had first settled, but this time in a double brick house erected by himself. This stood

²⁴ *Ibid.*

next to the alley, just north of the Family Theatre of today. Here he died on December 7, 1879, after having been active in the upbuilding of Lafayette for over fifty years.²⁵

Nathaniel Hull, the other original owner of the Hull and Spencer or Lafayette Mill, was identified with the flouring industry of Tippecanoe County for many years. Besides being one of the early partners of this mill, he, later, had a connection with the mill at Dayton, and later still, with the Foresman Mill on Big Wea Creek.

Dr. David Jennings, who succeeded Hull as a partner in the Lafayette Mill, came to Lafayette in 1831. He built the Lafayette Hotel, later called the Jones Hotel, situated diagonally across the street from where the Bramble House was later erected, that is on the northwest corner of Third and South streets, where the store of the Sears-Roebuck Company is now located. This was the most pretentious hostelry in Lafayette before the erection of the Bramble House.

Dr. Jennings assisted in organizing a Masonic Chapter in Lafayette on May 7, 1846, and was one of its first officers. An old portrait of him, painted from life by that noted Lafayette artist, George Winter, hangs today in the local Masonic Temple.²⁶

The last owners of the Lafayette Mill, Jenkins and Breckenridge, were both born in Scotland. Barnett Jenkins came to Tippecanoe County in 1845, taking employment in the flouring mill at Wyandotte. In 1858, as stated above, he assumed part ownership in the Lafayette Mill. He was the father of Mrs. Vinnedge, wife of Dr. W. W. Vinnedge, and lived at the time of his death in the house which she now occupies, and which he built. Robert Breckenridge came to Lafayette in 1836 and, with his cousin John McMillan, started a bake-shop on the east side of the public square. This bakery was sold when he purchased an interest in the Lafayette Mill. At that time McMillan went west. The Kleinhans Store is the present-day successor of this old bake-shop, coming down through the owners, B. Bayles and Joseph Ewery to Charles Kleinhans. Breckenridge died on February 21, 1894, in his home at the southwest corner of Ninth and South streets.

²⁵ *Lafayette Sunday Leader*, Sept. 21, Dec. 7, 1879.

²⁶ Information received by the author from the daughter of Dr. Jennings, Mrs. E. Gertrude (Jennings) Orth.

Clark and Bartholomew Sawmill: The water right for this sawmill was leased by S. M. Clark and A. Bartholomew on the fifth of August 1841, and was to run for 30 years from the first of January 1842. "It granted water sufficient, when applied on a Parker or flutter wheel, to propel one saw," which would amount to "1554 cubic feet per minute." The mill was sixteen feet below the surface of the water in the canal, and was to use water only on the second fall. However, the mills that were to use water on the first fall were never built, or, at least, not up to 1846.²⁷ This mill had ceased to operate before 1871 when Wm. J. Ball made his report on water leases. This sawmill stood west of the canal and just north of Salem Street, about one square distant from the flour mill known as the Lafayette Mill. It was approached by crossing the canal on the Salem Street bridge and then going north. In the early days of the canal's existence the above mentioned industries were all that were upon it in the northern part of Lafayette.

Yandes Mills: In the southern part of town, situated near to and operated by the waters of the canal, were the Yandes saw, paper, and flour mills. These were on the west side of the canal, about the distance of a square south of the line of Alabama Street, if extended to the river. The water for all these was taken from the canal at one service opening. Within a short distance the race divided, the western branch supplying the paper mill (Lafayette Paper Mill) which stood near the river bank; and the other, or southwest fork, approached the flour mill near the rear where the generating machinery was located. The used water continued on southwest, was joined by that of the paper mill and flowed into a basin from which, by a second fall, it operated a saw-mill situated at the edge of Sample Run. The saw-mill was later abandoned and a second paper mill took its place, and later still, the power generated here was used in the flour mill.²⁸

The supervising engineer, J. L. Williams, in his *Report* of 1846 referring to this mill (Star City, or Lower Mill) states: "Daniel Yandes lessee, T. Wood and Co. present occupants. . . . Three run of stone operating, each run doing 23 barrels a day."²⁹ T. (Thomas) Wood was

²⁷ *Documentary Journal*, 1846, *Report* by the Engineer, Francis Cleveland, 227.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1871, *Report* by Wm. J. Ball on "Water Leases," 17.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1846, 221-222.

later one of the owners of the Hawkins Mill on Big Wea Creek. In fact, he, or his company, rebuilt that mill in the late eighteen forties—the same building which, as a dilapidated structure stands there today and is known as the Bayles Mill. This old Mill is the only one standing today in Tippecanoe County that was once run by water power.

In 1852 the Star City Mill was purchased by Frederick Geiger who operated it for thirty-two years, or until 1884. Part of the time he had a partner associated with him in the business but from 1871 on, he was the sole owner. Mr. Geiger was born in Germany and as a mere child was brought by his parents to America. He came to Tippecanoe County in 1849. His last residence was at the southwest corner of Seventh and Columbia streets. The house, remodeled and enlarged, is now the Christian Science Church building. His daughter Elizabeth was the wife of the late Hon. Will R. Wood.

Hoagland Woolen Mill: The Hoagland Woolen Mill which Superintendent Williams mentioned in 1846 as operating without a permit but which had “commenced operations on the word of one Silas S. White, of whom he claims to have purchased the privilege,” was reported by Wm. J. Ball in 1871 as having a lease granting it the privilege of using one power, or 267.8 cubic feet of water per minute.⁸⁰

The following advertisement appeared in a Lafayette paper in 1841:

New Establishment—Fulling and Carding.

The subscriber wishes to inform the public that he has purchased of Silas S. White the Carding and Fulling establishment on the Canal, in the south part of the town of Lafayette, where he may be found after the present time ready to execute all work in his line of business. Fulling will commence about the 10th of the present month. Cloth is now coming in briskly and we hope People will get their Cloth generally to the mill early in the season, as the season is more suitable for despatching this kind of work than cold weather.

The subscriber would say to the public that he has with considerable expense prepared himself with machinery and experienced workmen, for dressing country Cloth, and that he will spare no pains to give complete satisfaction in all cases to persons who may favor him with their custom. He therefore throws himself upon the liberality of the public. The custom of the country will regulate our prices.

N. B. Carding will continue to be done as usual, at the shortest notice.⁸¹

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1871, 17.

⁸¹ *Tippecanoe Journal and Lafayette Free Press*, Aug. 11, 1841.

The Hoagland Mill stood on the west bank of the canal, like the other industries, but farther down, at the foot of Green Street. Its power was generated by a sixteen-foot wheel. In 1865 it was purchased by John Ewry. Within a short time Edward Robeson, whose father operated a woolen mill near Monitor, became a partner. At this time (1867) the firm consisted of John Ewry, Edward Robeson and Jacob Ewry. By 1871 the firm was known as J. Ewry and Co., Robeson having withdrawn. It was operated by the Ewrys until about 1875 or 1876 when it was destroyed by fire during the burning of the Eagle Distillery which stood less than two blocks south-east of it.

The main approach to all these industries on the canal in the southern part of the city was by crossing the canal on a bridge at South Street and proceeding south on the towpath. There was another bridge at Green Street, opposite the Hoagland Mill, but it was a crude affair compared to the well built, firm structures at South, Main and Salem streets.

About 1875, when the canal ceased to be operated as a transportation unit, the power consumers of each section had to maintain the upkeep of that portion which supplied them. Thus the patrons in Lafayette, besides paying the nominal fee for water used, had, also, to take care of the feeder dam on Wild Cat Creek and the channel from thence into and through the city. This was so expensive that by 1888 every industry supplied by the canal had ceased operations. Just previous to the flood of 1875, the total paid per annum for hydraulic purposes by the patrons of Lafayette amounted to \$1300.³²

It was in 1852 that the Wabash and Erie Canal reached the peak as to its income. From that time on there was a progressive decline in revenue which decline was augmented in 1856 by the completion of the Wabash Railroad. After six years of railroad competition canal transportation was practically ended. By early 1870, the end of its existence as a highway of commerce was rapidly approaching. The boat *Rocky Mountain*, which cleared October 26, 1872, was the last that went through from Lodi to Toledo.³³

During the first three days of August, 1875, a flood which had been threatening the Wabash Valley at Lafayette for sev-

³² Lafayette Daily Journal, Aug. 11, 1875.

³³ Alvin Fay Harlow, *Old Towpaths* (N. Y., 1926).

eral days reached its crest. After a five-inch rainfall in thirty hours, terminating at noon of August 1, the river, at 11 A.M., August 3, reached its highest stage, which was fifteen inches above that of 1858.³⁴ The damage inflicted by this unprecedented high water so crippled the canal that navigation was never resumed. For many years following this flood, there could be seen here and there along the course of the canal, stranded boats rotting in the mud where the receding waters had deposited them, like unto the animal carcasses which strewn the routes across the great arid plains of the far West in an earlier day. By court order, the canal line was sold on February 12, 1876. The section in Wabash County brought \$505, and other sections proportionate amounts.

The Wabash and Erie Canal hastened the development of the whole Wabash Valley. Along its course there sprang up as if by magic, trading and industrial centers which were supported by the oncoming hordes of colonists that kept penetrating deeper and deeper into the wilderness country that stretched away to the east and to the west of its line of passage. But even in its most prosperous times the great venture was not a financial success, the upkeep being a tremendous drain. The average yearly cost for repairs was \$262 per mile, or a total yearly cost of about \$120,000.³⁵ Covering the whole period of its operation, from the time of its beginning to the time of its abandonment, the tolls did not equal the cost of repairs. Of the lands donated by the government, more than 2,000,000 acres, sufficient were sold to realize \$1,500,000, providing a fairly steady income for several years. When the sales slackened the financial condition became acute.³⁶ All this government land was practically squandered on a failing enterprise. The bondholders lost half of their investment of over \$815,000, and received but little interest. But the Canal's failure as a money making venture in its own right, does not detract from its beneficial influence in the development of the Wabash Valley.

The route across the Wabash-Maumee divide first existed as a buffalo trace, selected by the natural instinct of that roving forager. Later, it became an Indian portage. When the French explorers and traders came they followed the same

³⁴ *Lafayette Daily Journal*, Aug. 3-4, 1875.

³⁵ *Documentary Journal, Report* by J. L. Williams, 1853-1874, 842.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1874-1875, *Report* by Auditor of State, 43.

course, making it perhaps, the portage of greatest historical importance in all America. The Canal in time followed this carrying path across the divide, and displaced the light-canoe traffic of the Maumee-Wabash route. Then came the railroad which eliminated the canal. Later the traction line paralleled the railroad and, for a span of years, was a prominent commercial carrier. Today, all these modes of travel and transportation, except the railroad, have passed out of existence and the hard-surfaced automobile road, the modern "Appian Way," with its graceful curves and undulating gradients carries a great part of the travel and commerce that passes up and down these valleys and over the divide between them. What a contrast between this region today and the Wabash-Valley wilderness that the canal with its slow-moving boats opened to development less than a century ago!