Canalling in the Whitewater Valley

Paul Fatout*

Among internal improvements enthusiasts of Indiana’s young statehood, none were more ardent and persistent than canal advocates of the southeast. Here the East and West forks of the Whitewater River, after flowing through the counties of Randolph, Wayne, Fayette, Union, and Franklin, came together at Brookville, Indiana, and then traversed the lower half of Franklin County, the northeast corner of Dearborn, a few miles of the state of Ohio, and the southeast section of Dearborn before reaching the Ohio River at Lawrenceburg, Indiana. Having attracted settlers since the turn of the century, the long valley was a rich farming region that was a liberal producer by 1816. By 1825, the population of these six Whitewater counties was about one fourth of the total for all of Indiana.¹ Eyeing the local scene and the state generally, the Brookville Enquirer and Indiana Telegraph began its career on February 5, 1819, with a glowing “Prospectus”:

Gifted by the munificence of Heaven with a delightful climate, and a soil rivaling in fertility the loam of the Nile, and encompassing within her bosom an industrious and enterprising population, ambitious of every laudable pursuit, and emulous of every virtuous and patriotic achievement; she bids fair, under the auspices of a well conducted Press, and a wise administration of her government, to vie ere long, in strength, intelligence and resources, with the first Agricultural States in our Union.

A premature overstatement, that rhapsody was yet symptomatic of youthful Hoosier hope, vigor, and promise.

The chief drawback in the southeast was poor transportation. Cincinnati was the principal market, but Whitewater farmers could send their products to town only by laborious haulage over miserable roads. En route to the Ohio city from Richmond, about sixty-five miles, or from Brookville, forty-three miles, a four-horse wagon bumped and lurched for

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¹ Paul Fatout is professor of English at Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana.
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several days, and freightage was $10 a ton or more. Food-
stuff and other necessities came into the valley by the same
hard method. Cattle and hogs, herded by drovers, plodded
on foot, lost weight and value on the way, mired down,
died. Sorely needed was a better highway to tap the agricul-
tural wealth of this Whitewater country.2

One of the earliest improvement proposals, if not the
first, came from James Brown Ray, Brookville lawyer and
member of the Indiana Senate, in 1822. He suggested that a
canal be cut along the Whitewater River from Brookville to
the Ohio at or near Lawrenceburg. A correspondent who
signed himself “A Citizen” heartily endorsed the idea in two
long letters to the Brookville Enquirer. “I have for twelve
months past,” said he,

had my eye on the White Water . . . I have passed up and down on its
margin, the major part of twenty times, and as far as I have been
able to judge by ocular survey . . . the extent of it which is even now
navigable at its lowest stage, and the eligibility of its marginal grounds
for canalling . . . I am more and more convinced . . . that one hundred
thousand dollars, if economically applied, would accomplish the work.*

He recommended that the legislature appropriate $50,000 from
the 3 per cent fund and raise the remainder by a state lottery.

The 3 per cent fund was a dubious quantity; a lottery
was unreliable, as a previous trial of the device had shown
in the unsuccessful attempt to build an Ohio Falls canal in
1819.4 Furthermore, the estimate of $100,000 for a canal
from Brookville to Lawrenceburg was far too low. Like many
another canal man, “Citizen” was deluded by wishful thinking;
the ultimate cost was more than six times that figure. His
easy confidence did not go unchallenged. In the Indianapolis
Gazette a letter-writer named “Franklin” analyzed the canal
proposal in a manner both serious and ironical:

A spirit of enterprise doubtless is stamped on the infant institutions of
this young state. But the two questions that meet us . . . is first, is it
practicable? And secondly, is this the proper period to accomplish so
great an object? Is there no want of water in that small stream . . . or
are there no want of funds that would stop the prosecution of the
project . . .

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2 On early transportation, see Luther M. Feeger, “Our History
Scrapbook,” Richmond Palladium-Item and Sun-Telegram, April 22,
1963.

3 Brookville Enquirer, November 22, 1822.

4 On the 3 per cent fund and the state lottery, see Paul Fatout,
“Canal Agitation at Ohio Falls,” Indiana Magazine of History, LVII
(December, 1961), 296, 303, 304.
And what if the White water canal company would withhold their navigation bill a session or two, to see if the rich state of Indiana would not join with the representatives from the Ohio state, and cut the proposed canal through the straits of Darien, connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific Ocean?

Are all the beautiful [sic] rivers that meander through this state, to lie neglected, and White Water creek be made navigable, by employing the three per cent stock—or is the little sum of fifty thousand dollars to be squandered in that project?6

This sarcasm emphasized not only the sectional rivalry that attended all internal improving in Indiana but also the need of money. As the abortive efforts at Ohio Falls had demonstrated, canal construction called for five- and six-figure sums of ready cash that were difficult to collect from farmers and merchants, however eager they were. Money was scarce in the early 1820's, when the whole country wallowed in the slough of a serious depression. Governor William Hendricks, reminding the legislature in 1822 that nation-wide hard times had "put the balance of trade largely against the western country, and produced general and individual distress," cautioned against appropriating borrowed money for improvements: "to these objects, great as they are, the fostering hand of government cannot be extended, while its finances are embarrassed by a state debt."6

For the time being, then, the Whitewater Canal remained merely a hope. According to local historians, in 1822 or 1823 delegates from six southeastern counties met at Harrison, on the state line above Lawrenceburg, to discuss the feasibility of a canal; furthermore that the line was surveyed in 1824.7 No convincing evidence indicates that either meeting or survey occurred at any of those times. Nevertheless, events in the making gave the cause impetus. When a business revival in 1823 started the upswing that ended in the next depression fourteen years later, times were more favorable to expensive projects. From the outset, Whitewater improvements advocates were preponderantly in favor of a canal rather than any other form of highway, but that bias is not surprising. They were only reflecting a view that was about to become overwhelmingly persuasive in the Middle West.

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6 Indianapolis Gazette, November 9, 1822.
6 Indiana, House Journal (1822-1823), 37, 38.
American canal fervor rested on a long series of examples reaching back into history as far as the canals of ancient China and Egypt. Cognizant also of the famous seventeenth-century French channel of Languedoc, our waterways men were likewise influenced by the canals of Holland and particularly by those of England. The network of Britain, constructed during a surge of canal mania in the late eighteenth century, was compact and serviceable, a seductive model for the United States. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, stock of successful British canals sold for thousands of pounds and paid large dividends, the while a number of others, conveniently ignored by propagandists, were unproductive failures that lost money for stockholders. Citizens of New York, memorializing their legislature on behalf of a canal across the state, cited the Languedoc, Dutch canals and British as strong arguments. The eventual result was Governor De Witt Clinton's "Grand Canal," better known as the Erie, of 363 miles between Albany and Buffalo: a work exerting such potent influence on internal improvements in the United States that canal sentiment predominated for decades. Begun in 1817, Clinton's project was making headway, fifteen miles between Rome and Utica having been opened with appropriate ceremonies in 1819; in 1823 another section, from Utica to Rochester, was finished and the first canal boat entered the Hudson River. Indiana papers kept readers informed of progress on the Erie. Items like that of the Indianapolis Gazette, noting "the great trade which is prosecuted upon the canals of New York" and stating that in less than a month tolls at Albany "amounted to $17,787.71," impressed Hoosier minds.

The allure of waterways was so strong that it obscured a newfangled device, the railroad, lurking in the background as the future nemesis of canalling. In the 1820's this unfamiliar contraption seemed too experimental to be taken seriously. Yet the first American treatise on the subject, John Stevens' Documents Tending to Prove the Superior Advantages of Rail-Ways and Steam-Carriages over Canal...
Navigation, had been published in New York in 1812. Arguing that a railroad cost much less than a canal to build and maintain and that it was free from the interruptions of locks, Stevens advocated a rail line from Lake Erie to Albany. Trying to convert the New York canal party, he wrote a remarkably prophetic letter to Governor Clinton in 1812: "The more I reflect on the plan I have proposed, the more thorough is my conviction, not merely of its practicability, but that it must eventually supersede every other mode of conveyance, where the nature of the country will admit of its introduction."\textsuperscript{10}

The governor, likewise Robert Livingston and Gouverneur Morris, all with their hearts set on a canal, listened only perfunctorily. Indeed, when Stevens predicted rail speeds of a hundred miles an hour, they probably shrugged him off as an unbalanced visionary. Had they been attentive enough to build Clinton's railroad rather than to dig Clinton's ditch, the example might have been more beneficial to the economic health of Indiana and other states.

In England, Thomas Gray's *Observations on a General Iron Rail-Way*, first published in 1821 in London, went through five editions in five years. George Stephenson had built his first locomotive in 1814, established a locomotive factory ten years later, and was at the throttle when the first train rattled over the Stockton and Darlington line in 1825. The British canal system was already doomed, although it was to enjoy about another ten years of grace before railroads began to take over. Thereafter, to stave off collapse, canal men fought a long rearguard action, a procedure that would be repeated by their American imitators.\textsuperscript{11} The irony was

\textsuperscript{10} John Stevens to De Witt Clinton, February 24, 1812, John Stevens, *Documents Tending To Prove the Superior Advantages of Rail-Ways and Steam-Carriages over Canal Navigation*, reprint from the 1812 edition (Boston, 1936), 15.

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that in the Midwest of the United States canal enthusiasm reached its peak only when canals were on the verge of becoming obsolescent both abroad and at home.

As Clinton's big ditch inched along, other states, apprehensive that New York was about to monopolize trade, rumbled with disquieting tremors and bestirred themselves. In 1824 Pennsylvania appointed a Board of Commissioners to Promote Internal Improvements. The following year this body issued a rousing manifesto:

Internal improvements . . . have the testimony of the civilized world in their favour—and their effects upon the prosperity and happiness of the people of every nation in which they exist, are in full proof. We can appeal to the experience of Great Britain, of Holland, of France, and of China, on the subject of canals generally, and to that of New York, in her two great canals—cases which are irresistibly convincing on this subject.12

So convincing were these examples that, recklessly disregarding the colossal labor and expense of cutting channels through mountains, Pennsylvania in 1826 authorized a vast program of canalling. This complicated system, involving many locks, stage coaches, inclined planes, and sectional canal boats transported on flat cars, was so costly that it bankrupted the state within the next fifteen years and left it out of pocket many millions of dollars.13

In Ohio, James Geddes, an engineer borrowed from New York, reported in 1823 on his survey of a canal route between Lake Erie and the Ohio River. In 1825 the Ohio legislature passed a comprehensive act for the improvement of the state by means of navigable canals.14 This system, almost as disastrous as Pennsylvania's, saddled Ohio with a heavy debt that would not be thrown off until 1903. At the time, however, the supposedly progressive actions of other states made Hoosiers restless. To the great distress of forward-looking citizens Indiana had no legislative improve-

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12 Commission for Promotion of Internal Improvements in Pennsylvania (n.p., 1825), 1.
14 See Public Documents Concerning the Ohio Canals Which Are To Connect Lake Erie with the Ohio River . . ., comp. John Kilbourn (Columbus, Ohio, 1832). Most of this collection was originally compiled and published by Kilbourn in 1828 in a weekly newspaper, Civil Engineer and Herald of Internal Improvement, printed at Columbus, Ohio.
ments acts, no plans, no reports on surveys, and not one official canal commissioner she could call her own. "While we see," said the Lawrenceburg Indiana Register,

in every part of this vast republic, the men of talents and influence exerting themselves in improving their states, why should the people of this growing state look silently on, while her sister states are increasing in wealth and population? ... Our legislatures meet, and instead of acting on more important subjects, the members content themselves by passing laws to curtail constables' fees, or altering old and laying off new state roads.15

Even those new roads, the Register might have added, were largely paper projects, most of which had not been built. The Indianapolis Gazette, publicizing the large appropriations for internal improvements in New York, observed:

By the above it appears clearly to us that Indiana, although an infant state, ought not to be left to pursue her former schemes of individual and local interest, but that she is called on with the voice of the trumpet to awaken from her lathergic [sic] slumbers and prove to the nation that her sons have not lost the spirit of enterprize.16

As those remarks suggest, Indiana sentiment was veering toward the concept of a co-ordinated system of internal improvements, in which canals would play a prominent part. Yet Whitewater advocates were ready to approve of a state system only if assured that their ditch would be a major part of the plan. Southeastern hopes rose when, on July 4, 1825, ceremonies at Licking Summit, Ohio, inaugurated the cutting of the Ohio and Erie Canal from Cincinnati to Maumee Bay. Governor Clinton attended in person. In a ritual, accompanied by speeches, two shovels passed through several hands and reached Governor Jeremiah Morrow of Ohio and Governor Clinton who dug together. Then cheers arose from ten thousand people while everybody who could lay hands on a shovel furiously attacked the earth. The Chillicothe Blues and the Cincinnati Hussars and Guards paraded, artillery boomed, and one thousand diners banqueted in a grove. The thirteen formal toasts—a standard number symbolizing the thirteen original states—pledged among others: George Washington; the President of the United States; Governor Clinton; Henry Clay; New York State; Simon Bolivar; and

15 Charlestown Indiana Intelligencer and Farmer's Friend, January 8, 1826, reprint of an article from the Lawrenceburg Indiana Register.
16 Indianapolis Gazette, May 17, 1826.
"The fair sex of our country—in prosperity the partners of our joys, and in adversity our greatest solace." As usual, volunteer toasts followed, eleven of them, pledging Bolivar again, New York State again, the blessings of republican government, and so forth.\textsuperscript{17} Canal celebrations being decidedly moist, repetition was a boon to the exuberant banqueter. In retrospect (when one considers later frustration and defeat), the enthusiasm of these ceremonial affairs, their high hopes, and overflowing spirits, often apparent on similar occasions in Indiana, are tinged with pathos.

Among interested spectators who managed to shake hands with the famous New York visitor at Licking Summit was an eighteen-year-old rodman in the engineering corps named Jesse L. Williams. A little over ten years later he became the chief engineer of Indiana's improvements system. At Middletown, Ohio, on July 19, similar ceremonies began the Dayton and Cincinnati Canal (known as the Miami), a new note being struck by the circumstance that the "earth was removed in wheelbarrows constructed for the occasion."\textsuperscript{18} Between the two celebrations Clinton and Morrow visited Louisville; on their return up the Ohio they paused briefly at Lawrenceburg, Indiana. Townsmen turned out to cluster around the steamboat landing, where A. Lane Espy delivered an address of welcome; then followed a parade, artillery salutes, and a dinner for the celebrated guest and his party. The eighth toast pledged "attachment to that system of Internal Improvement, projected and patronized by our distinguished guest, Gov. Clinton."\textsuperscript{19}

Attachment to a state system was problematical in that part of Indiana, but the mere presence of so stalwart a canal advocate as the New York governor stimulated a flurry among Whitewater men. The Lawrenceburg Palladium remarked that a canal in southeastern Indiana should be viewed as

\begin{quote}
the first step towards the connection of the upper part of the Wabash river and the Lake, through the Maumee with the Ohio river. Those who have traversed the country from this to Fort Wayne, represent
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17} "Commencement of the Ohio Canal at the Licking Summit," reprinted from an 1825 pamphlet, \textit{Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications}, XXXIV (January, 1925), 92-94.

\textsuperscript{18} Cincinnati \textit{Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette}, July 26, 1825.

\textsuperscript{19} Lawrenceburg \textit{Palladium}, July 22, 1825.
it as highly favorable for canalling—and a work so important will surely not remain long neglected. Let us then have the credit of making the first effort, in so noble and laudable an undertaking.20

As if inspired by the visit of Clinton, canal delegates from Fayette, Union, Franklin, and Dearborn counties met at Harrison, Ohio, on August 13. They resolved: that a canal from the Ohio River at or near Lawrenceburg be constructed up the Whitewater Valley; that eight commissioners be appointed to solicit funds for surveying, locating, and estimating cost and also to employ an engineer to survey a route to the junction of the St. Mary’s and St. Joseph’s rivers near Fort Wayne; and that these commissioners should consider the probable method of completing the canal and whether the necessary money could be obtained. Financial uncertainty was evidently of minor concern, for the delegates concluded: “there scarcely exists a doubt of the Practicability of making a canal from Fort Wayne to the Ohio, and that a very fair prospect exists of obtaining the means of performing the work from eastern capitalists.”21 They met again at Brookville on August 29, discussed the difficulty of finding a competent engineer, and resolved to petition the legislature for a canal company charter.

By the time the tenth session of the Indiana General Assembly convened in December, 1825, work on Ohio canals was moving ahead, and the full line of the Erie had been opened with a tremendous two months’ fanfare at all ports from Buffalo to New York City: field pieces banging at mile intervals, triumphal arches, huzzahs, lush oratory, steamers towing canal boats down the Hudson, odes, songs, toasts innumerable, a delirium the like of which had never been seen before and would not be again. In his message to Hoosier legislators Governor James Brown Ray, although at heart a more devoted railroad man than canaller, cited “the great artificial channel in New York, which the thunder of a thousand pieces of artillery has just announced finished,” mentioned the Ohio canals under construction, and remarked upon

a warm solicitude . . . manifested by the citizens of the eastern part of the state, for the construction of a canal from Lawrenceburgh . . . to

20 Ibid., July 29, 1825.
21 Ibid., August 19, 1825. This article was reprinted in the Brookville Enquirer, August 30, 1825, and in the Cincinnati National Republican and Ohio Political Register, August 26, 1825.
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Fort Wayne. They have already taken steps to procure a survey of the route, and it is understood have received assurances . . . that the funds necessary to complete the work, can be procured from some of the eastern cities, so soon as a charter of incorporation sufficiently liberal in its provisions can be procured from the Legislature. . . . As it is understood that this project has no design upon the public purse, and as the completion of the work will be of great and unquestionable utility, it is believed that no objection will be urged against granting a charter, as liberal in its principles as may be consistent with the policy, constitution and laws of the state. Our state pride should incline us to give an impulse to designs of this character, so eminently calculated to give us that standing in the Union to which we aspire.22

Lawmakers were agreeable. Apparently they seldom objected to granting a charter to any organization that professed to be a company. On January 21, 1826, the legislature legalized the Whitewater Canal Company; the charter provided for a capital stock of forty thousand shares at $25 each, authorized a board of seven directors (to be elected annually by stockholders) to transact all business of the company, and permitted the company to receive land or money from the United States government or from any other state. It was stipulated, on penalty of nullification of the act, that the company either commence the canal within two years after incorporation or “give to the legislature satisfactory evidence of their intention to prosecute and complete the said canal. . . .” The state reserved the right to purchase one fourth of the stock and to buy the canal in 1860.23

Supplementing the promise implied by canal company incorporation and raising southeastern hopes, a United States Senate resolution of January 10, 1826, ordered surveys of a number of Indiana canal routes.24 According to the chief of the United States Engineers, the purpose of one of the surveys was to “ascertain the practicability of uniting, by canals, the waters of the rivers St. Mary’s, St. Joseph’s and the Wabash, with the Ohio river through the valley of White Water.”25 This encouragement was enough to set off celebrations in Brookville and Connersville. At the latter place a toast to Governor Ray as a man “with a mind bold,
energetic, enterprising and decisive,"\textsuperscript{26} was received in dead silence, perhaps because many people believed the governor to be eccentric if not unhinged. When he harped upon Indianapolis as a great future railroad center, listeners wrote off such views as the dithering of a visionary; yet, considering that Indianapolis became a great railroad center, Ray was less unbalanced than his critics. To the unimaginative the farsighted seem mad.

By the first of July, James Shriver, heading a corps of United States Engineers, had arrived in the Whitewater Valley and had conferred with canal company officials. A week later the survey began, but it was only partially completed. On record is a letter from Governor Ray to Shriver suggesting that the engineer begin his surveys in the northern part of the state. At the same time that Whitewater men agitated for a canal, strong voices in the north urged a channel to unite the Maumee and Wabash rivers, a project that evolved into the long Wabash and Erie Canal between Toledo and Evansville. The Maumee-Wabash ditch had powerful supporters, one of the most formidable being John Tipton, of Fort Wayne, a tough Indian fighter, shrewd politician, shrewd entrepreneur, and dogged opponent. Perhaps Governor Ray was yielding to political pressure when he said to Shriver:

\textit{As for my own part I have no special predilections in favour of either of the contemplated canals... But whilst I express this opinion as to the general utility of both projects, I cannot with candour withhold from you my belief that the Wabash canal is more completely within the present means and resources of the State than the Whitewater canal...}

\textit{As there is a company incorporated to devise ways & means for the Whitewater canal, I would respectfully submit to your consideration the propriety of progressing in that work as you have commenced, until you ascertain the practicality or impracticability of the project, and when that is done, leave it for the present season, and repair to the Wabash country to commence operations there.\textsuperscript{27}}

Evidently Shriver did not need much time to estimate practicability, for within a few weeks he was in Fort Wayne,

\textsuperscript{26} Connersville \textit{Watchman}, January 23, 1826.

where he died on August 8. Whatever his conclusions, however, he apparently made no formal report. Governor Ray's message to the eleventh session of the Indiana legislature mentioned only vaguely "a corps of Engineers," who "entered the state during the last spring, with the view of operating here, with the worthy, but now deceased Mr. Shriver at their head. . . . to enquire into the practicability of the Whitewater canal" but said nothing about the results of that inquiry. Shriver's successor, Major Asa Moore, also died shortly thereafter, and for the time being the unfinished Whitewater survey remained that way.

Furthermore, though incorporation of the Whitewater Canal Company seemed a herald of immediate action, the usual difficulty of amassing sufficient capital by stock subscriptions upset the scheme. In January, 1827, the legislature amended the charter, the chief change being an extension of the time limit for starting construction to three years from the first Monday in February. This gesture was generous but useless. Those eastern capitalists supposed to have been eager to buy stock either had been mythical or had become coy for no money to speak of came the company's way and no shovel dug. Time ran out as southeastern canal affairs floundered and stalled.

Meanwhile, Indiana sentiment in favor of a co-ordinated system of internal improvements, state-wide and state-owned, grew steadily stronger as for several years a noisy babble of opinion argued for one kind and another of public highway. "Every citizen of New York and Ohio engaged on their canals," said a memorial of Cass County citizens, "have created for themselves a name for industry and enterprize, that we think laudable for us to imitate. God and nature have been bountiful to Indiana; will her sons stand by idle without filling out the measure of her wealth, prosperity, and happiness?" The Indianapolis Journal, taking a different tack, spoke up for turnpikes:

In a local point of view, unless under rare and peculiar circumstances, the construction of good and permanent roads will be found to be an object of the first importance. Canals, far more expensive, can-

28 Indiana, House Journal (1826-1827), 47.
29 Indiana, Laws (1826-1827), 28-29.
30 Terre Haute Western Register, August 20, 1829.
not be safely attempted until a country has become densely populated and assumed a capacity capable of being rendered commercial to a suitable extent.\textsuperscript{81}

In his message to the twelfth session of the Indiana legislature in December, 1827, Governor Ray touched upon his favorite theme. "Railways," he said, "are rapidly bearing away the palm of usefulness, from actual experiment, from all other commercial facilities. . . . Their cost for the same distances, and constructed on the same natural surface, would be . . . about half that of a canal."\textsuperscript{82}

Legislators unfortunately ignored the governor's hint that, if heeded, might have kept the state out of a financial morass similar to that of Pennsylvania and Ohio. A senate committee brushed aside the governor's tentative suggestion with the brusque assurance that "every consideration of usefulness, practicability, durability, and economy, point to canals, and render it obviously inexpedient to waste time upon the subject of railways."\textsuperscript{83} Canal men were in the majority; they had the power and, as they thought, the evidence. The already famous Erie exerted an irresistible magic. In its first full year of operation, Clinton's waterway earned \$687,976.68 in tolls, and in the following years the annual income climbed steadily.\textsuperscript{84} These figures were too dazzling to resist, and they caused mischief in the Middle West. Optimists, seduced by the false analogy between New York and Indiana, failed to see that the Erie Canal was unique because it funneled into the port of New York City the traffic of a larger and busier region than any other in the nation. The conspicuous fact of the Erie's sensational income obscured other considerations, particularly the important corollary that only the Erie could earn it.

Congress gave Hoosier canalling a great boost when, on March 2, 1827, it granted to the state alternate areas of public land along the line of the proposed Wabash-Maumee

\textsuperscript{81} Indianapolis Journal, September 17, 1827.
\textsuperscript{82} Indiana, House Journal (1827-1828), 20.
\textsuperscript{83} Indiana, Senate Journal (1827-1828), 77.
\textsuperscript{84} Noble E. Whitford, History of the Canal System of the State of New York . . . (2 vols., Albany, N.Y., 1906), II, 1064-66. This work was published as the Supplement to the Annual Report of the State Engineer and Surveyor of the State of New York for the Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 1906.
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Canal. No action occurred in that locality for over five years, but the land grant committed Indiana to a Wabash canal and also made that project of major importance, to the discomfiture of Whitewater men who believed they had been first in the field. Their cause received another blow when, after a reconnaissance completed in early 1829, Colonel Howard Stansbury, of the United States Engineers, reported to the legislature that the southeastern channel was impracticable.

But hope persisted, even though for several years a Whitewater Canal was no nearer reality than it had ever been. Its adherents considered appealing for aid from the federal government. David Guard, state representative from Dearborn County, wrote to John Tipton, who by this time had become a United States senator:

N. B. we are about to call on congress to aid us in surveying a route for a canal or Rail way down white water—which you will please lend us your aid in the Senate and also some publick lands to aid us to carry the same into effect—if Congress will not give us any thing—they surely will not charge us for asking—in as much that all States are in the habit of begging.

The attitude was engagingly frank; yet apparently there was no begging from Congress perhaps because action in Indianapolis made the appeal unnecessary. In 1834 the legislature, ordering surveys of a number of lines, authorized commissioners to employ a competent engineer or engineers to survey and locate a route for a canal from or near the mouth of Nettle creek in Wayne county, thence down the valley of White Water, leaving the same at the most convenient point, so as to terminate at Lawrenceburgh in Dearborn county, on the Ohio river.

In early June a corps of engineers headed by William Gooding and including Jesse L. Williams, risen to the rank of assistant, began work in Wayne County, then moved steadily down the valley. The Connersville Watchman hopefully reported: "When compared with most other Canals, the excavation will

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85 United States Statutes at Large, IV, 236.
86 Indiana, House Journal (1829-1830), appendix, 8.
37 David Guard to John Tipton, January 13, 1834, Glen A. Blackburn (comp.), Nellie Armstrong Robertson and Dorothy Riker (eds.), The John Tipton Papers (3 vols., Indiana Historical Collections, Vol. XXIV-XXVI; Indianapolis, 1942), III, 12.
88 Indiana, Laws (1833-1834), 52.
be very light. . . . If the locks be made of timber . . . the whole expense of the Canal, it is thought, will not exceed between six and seven thousand Dollars, per mile."

That was the sort of talk people wanted to hear. James Conwell of Brookville demonstrated conclusively, on paper, that the Whitewater Canal was certain to be a highly profitable work. He supposed that ten counties would do business on the canal and supposed that there were 1,600 farms in each or 16,000 farms in all. These farms, he figured, would transport enough flour, salt, pork, oats, and other products to pay in tolls annually an average of $19 each or a grand total of $304,000. Subtracting $76,000 for carriage, $50,666 for collection and repairs, and $60,000 for interest at 5 per cent on a loan of $1,200,000 left a net yearly income of $117,334.* This neat calculation was one of many produced by superlative Indiana supposers at the height of Hoosier canal mania. They had a genius for estimating grandiose profits before ever a shovel had bitten into the sod.

C. W. Hutchen, another Brookville man, took issue vigorously. "This," said he, "is only the commencement of a career of Improvements that will ultimately overwhelm the state with debt." Pointing out that the Whitewater Canal would benefit only eight counties, he said that the other sixty-one would all clamor for money, the result being a state debt of eighteen millions requiring yearly interest of $900,000, "a pretty considerable sum for a young state to pay annually for Nothing!" He maintained that the canal would be hard to keep in repair and that it would not enhance property values as much as people thought. Farmers, he believed, would do better to haul produce by wagon over good roads. Hutchen insisted that

to go on in a blind career of Improvements without regard to our available resources, and step by step descend the depths of debt, it will require all the advance on the labor of the country to pay the INTEREST on the principal borrowed and expended on objects of no intrinsic value.\(^{41}\)

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\(^{39}\) Connersville Watchman, June 6, 1834.

\(^{40}\) Brookville Indiana American, July 25, 1834. Conwell does not identify the ten counties he supposed would do business on the canal. Presumably, they would be the five through which the canal ran—Randolph, Wayne, Franklin, Fayette, and Dearborn—and the adjacent counties of Henry, Union, Rush, Decatur, and Ripley.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., September 19, 1834.
These were cogent arguments, correct in every particular except that he slightly overestimated the state debt. But it was still large enough to confirm his gloomy prediction.

He returned to the controversy when, posing as the homely rustic, he said that, while toting hoop-poles across a "holler," he had got to "thinkin'" about the canal question:

If I had plenty of money you would not catch me hoop-poling, neither cutting nor carrying. But . . . as the matter stands, I had better perform all my own labor than to hire any part of it, until, at least, I can do so without borrowing the money to pay my hands. The reader may apply the foregoing to the canal question just as he pleases, and he will not displease me.42

Hutchen's reasoning got nowhere. Indicative of prevailing opinion, when he and Conwell ran for a seat in the state legislature from Franklin County, Conwell was one of two representatives elected and Hutchen received relatively few votes.43

In the light of strong canal sentiment in the southeast and elsewhere, it is worth noting that on the Fourth of July, 1834, Indiana citizens had their first ride on a railroad. The legislature having chartered eight railroad companies in 1832, the Lawrenceburg and Indianapolis company built a mile-and-a-quarter line near Shelbyville. It was a makeshift affair—crossties laid on logs, the cars pulled by horses—but it was a railroad and a portent. By the summer of 1834 at least thirteen Indiana rail lines had been incorporated and the following year the general assembly chartered four more.44

When the engineers in the Whitewater Valley completed their survey in December, 1834, they recommended construction of the canal. The 76-mile line was difficult, a fall of 491 feet necessitating 56 locks, 7 dams, and 12 aqueducts over 10 creeks and twice across the West Fork of the Whitewater River. At several points hills forced the line into the river, which would have to be enlarged on the opposite side. The

42 Ibid., October 10, 1834.
engineering problems were considerable and the hazards great. By comparison, on the famous Erie Canal a drop of 500 feet in its more than 300 miles between Lake Erie and Troy made so slight a current that Nathaniel Hawthorne called the waterway "an interminable mud puddle." In the White-water Valley, however, practically the same fall in 76 miles meant strong currents that in high water boded ill for the banks and locks of a canal. The estimated cost was $1,142,126.15 or $14,908 per mile.

Because the Whitewater River between Harrison and Lawrenceburg flowed through Ohio and because canals generally followed the courses of rivers, a section of the cut would go through that state. This circumstance would undoubtedly require negotiation with the Ohio legislature; in a joint resolution the Indiana legislature promptly requested permission of the Ohio General Assembly to encroach on some eight miles of Buckeye territory and appointed Oliver H. Smith as emissary to the governor of Ohio. For a while he had no success, Ohio legislators being suspicious of excessive tolls and discriminatory practices likely to be imposed by Indiana. After about a year of demurring and balking, Ohio solons, having been assured of fair treatment and having been urged to approve by enthusiastic citizens of Cincinnati, finally granted permission.

In Indiana, state-wide discussion of improvements having become insistent, the twentieth session of the legislature, on January 16, 1836, passed a comprehensive improvements act for a co-ordinated system of canals, turnpikes, and railroads. The years of political maneuvering that had preceded this measure, the backstairs vote-trading and compromise, the influence of sectional and party interests, the tremendous outpouring of opinion by vox populi, the visionary estimates of prosperity soon to arrive, the laying out of towns supposed to become flourishing cities overnight: all of that makes a fascinating story. The mammoth bill listed eight projects to be built for a total appropriation of $10,000,000, which

45 Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Sketches from Memory," Mosses from an Old Manse (Boston, 1882), 488.
46 Indiana, Senate Journal (1834-1835), 240-51.
47 Indiana, Local Laws (1834-1835), 272-73.
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Fund commissioners were authorized to borrow on twenty-five-year loans at 6 per cent. First on the agenda was the Whitewater Canal, as already located, and to be continued above the National Road as far as may be practicable; also a connexion [sic] between the said White Water Canal and the Central Canal, by a canal, if practicable, if not by a Rail Road, to commence at some point near the National Road, thence to be continued to some suitable point on said Central Canal in Madison or Delaware counties. . . .

For this work the appropriation was $1,400,000.

The improvements act exhilarated Hoosiers. All over the state, from Fort Wayne to Evansville and Lawrenceburg, they celebrated: banquets, parades, orations, toasts drunk by the gallon. At Connersville, the old town cannon became so heated that in the course of a nineteen-gun salute to those state senators who had voted for the bill a premature explosion killed one man and mangled three. Widespread high spirits inspired the Indianapolis Indiana Democrat to a dithyrambic eulogy of “Our State”:

There is something in the Western country which infuses a new energy in every one. No one here can be idle. No one can dissipate their time and talents in worthless pursuits and trivial amusements. All are busy—all are active—all are industrious. Torpid indeed must be that man’s feelings, slow must be the current of his thoughts and insensible must he be, to every thing that is noble and praiseworthy, if he is not urged on, by the exciting spirit which has seized every one.

Surely Hoosiers were not quite so grim, so averse to worthless pursuits and trivial amusements as all that; yet at the moment the spirit of enterprise was indeed exciting and urgent.

A vast bustle ensued. Descending from the clouds of glory trailing the celebrations, politicians set in motion the ponderous machinery designed by the mammoth improvements bill. Governor Noah Noble appointed a six-man Board of Internal Improvements that, at its first meeting in March, assigned a project to each member and selected General Elisha Long of Brookville to oversee construction of the Whitewater Canal. Later the board appointed Jesse L. Williams principal engineer on canals and, in a lunatic spree of spending money it did not have, hired a corps of other assistants. That circumstance was one of many symptomatic of the reckless hysteria

49 Indiana, General Laws (1835-1836), 7.
50 Indianapolis Indiana Democrat, June 1, 1836.
now gripping Indiana as it had disturbed other states. The board, playing the familiar numbers game of paper profits, also figured that by 1848 the estimated income of $457,762 from all state works added to anticipated receipts from the proposed distribution of surplus federal revenue should leave only a negligible difference between resources and interest payments—a deficit that an increase of taxable property should handily overcome.61

For about eight months, those all-important state loans not having been negotiated, nothing of moment happened in the southeast. Finally, in September, 1836, thirty miles of Whitewater Canal contracts were let at Brookville, and the town staged a ground-breaking ceremony: a marshal and assistant marshal on horseback headed a procession of brass band, military companies, distinguished visitors, canal commissioners and engineers, and citizens generally. Governor Noble delivered an oration, and the Hon. Henry Wallace, former Governor James B. Ray, and the eminent Dr. Daniel Drake of Cincinnati also spoke. At the traditional banquet the final toast was a poem composed by John Finley, entitled “The Meeting of the Waters”:

There is not in this 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 or West Fork shall relinquish the job.52

The reference to the East Fork recognized efforts of canal men in Wayne County, chiefly of Richmond, to promote a ditch of 33 1/4 miles down the East Fork to intersect the West Fork canal at Brookville. Advocates of the Brookville and Richmond Canal had met several times from 1834 to 1836, but so far they had not reached the stage of making surveys and raising money.

“Indiana,” exclaimed the Brookville Indiana American, “has taken a bold stand . . . her name is hailed in every city in the Union as the proud star that will lead on to prosperity, and to glory. . . . Proud Indiana! who can foretell thy

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It was as well that the editor put that optimism on record before anything happened to dim the brightness of the proud star. Yet, considering that within two or three months of letting contracts some contractors actually began digging between Brookville and Lawrenceburg, the rosy view may be forgiven. In his message to the twenty-first session of the legislature, Governor Noble, remarking upon the channel "through the fertile valley of White Water," serenely predicted: "From the large amount of surplus produce exported from that densely populated district, the investment there will yield something for the Treasury so soon as the navigation is open."

Within another year, however, the elaborate apparatus of the mammoth improvements system developed alarming creaks and groans and even showed signs of breaking down. By the end of 1838 the state debt was over $5,000,000; Jesse Williams figured that within another year the total would be $7,000,000 and ultimately $23,000,000. The famous system act of 1836 having failed to provide means for paying interest, it had to be paid out of the loans themselves, a crippling procedure. Fund commissioners, requesting legislative enactment on this point, observed:

The payment of the interest on the money borrowed, in addition to the disadvantages that must result from it on the score of economy, and its rapid increase of the public debt, will be calculated seriously to affect the credit of the state, and must greatly increase the difficulties in making advantageous loans.

The legislature making no move to modify this situation, affairs for the time being went blithely on about as usual, fund commissioners negotiating large loans, some of them unwise, board members letting contracts and overseeing a frenzied scratching-up of the earth at a dozen scattered points over the state—and discovering that paper estimates were subject to revision upward by the vagaries of nature, not to speak of the manipulations of thievish contractors. On the Whitewater Canal work moved fast enough to stimulate a hope that the Brookville-Lawrenceburg section might be

63 Brookville Indiana American, September 30, 1836.
64 Indiana, Senate Journal (1836-1837), 11-12.
65 Indiana, Documentary Journal (1838-1839), 310.
66 Ibid., 93.
finished in another year; people talked of extending the ditch to Hagerstown, above the National Road.

Meanwhile the instigators of the East Fork canal vigorously promoted. Having failed to add their project to the state improvements system, they incorporated the Brookville and Richmond Canal Company in February, 1838: the capital stock was $500,000 and shares were $50 each. When the company opened its books for subscriptions, investors hesitated because the Whitewater Canal down the West Fork only ten to twenty miles away looked like too strong a competitor. Nevertheless, Wayne, Union, and Franklin counties subscribed, or at least promised, $215,000, fifty thousand of that coming from Richmond, where zeal, if ardent, was still not compulsive enough to induce subscribers ever fully to pay up.

The company needed those thousands and about twice as much for a very expensive job. In the 33 1/4 miles of line a fall of 273 feet called for 2 guard locks, 31 lift locks, 5 dams, 2 aqueducts, and a number of bridges, culverts, and water weirs; the estimated cost was over $15,000 per mile. But expense rarely calmed canal mania, which prospered on faith and a firm devotion to installment buying: i.e., with a dribble of cash in hand—say $25,000, which is about what the Richmond-Brookville people had—the proper tactic was to begin a half-million-dollar job in the hope that the remainder would miraculously appear from somewhere in time to meet subsequent payments. That procedure was routine among canallers in Indiana. This time the company relied on the opinion of Colonel Simpson Torbet, resident engineer, who had predicted that the canal was certain to earn $33,250 a year. Richmond, he said, "situated at the head of navigation, with its vast water power, extensive capital, and enterprising inhabitants, might become the Pittsburgh of Indiana. . . ." With characteristic abandon, the company asked for bids on practically the whole line at five different places. Eventually it contracted for four sections and spent some $8,000 for excavating about a mile-and-a-half channel near Fairfield and

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58 Indiana, Documentary Journal (1840-1841), 364.
another mile-and-a-half one near Richmond, which had to postpone its expectation of becoming a second Pittsburgh. In late 1839 the project collapsed, along with Indiana's improvements system, and was never revived.99

Work on the Whitewater Canal moved along. W. S. Webb, an engineer with headquarters at Brookville, jotted down notes indicating the high quality of construction. About cut stone locks he wrote: “face to be neatly dressed with brush hammer. Headers 6' long for thicker courses, 5' long for thinner, 2' wide . . . 8' apart in the clear on every course.”90

Not all Indiana canals had the benefit of stone, which was the canalier's preferred material. It was more costly than wood but more permanent and less expensive to maintain; wooden locks that rotted, sagged, and leaked required continual repair.

On June 8, 1839, the Ben Franklin, first canal boat to make the trip from Lawrenceburg, arrived in Brookville. Joyful citizens went out to meet her, unhitched the mules, and towed her in by hand to the accompaniment of lusty cheers and thunderous cannonading. She would have got there several weeks sooner except for a mishap below: when frost went out of a clay hillside near Jamison Creek, several hundred feet of earth, dropping into the channel, had to be scooped out. That occurrence was one of those unforeseen contretemps that constantly plagued canalling and generally made the final cost higher than estimators had figured.

On June 9 the Niagara and Little Western arrived, and traffic in freight and passengers got under way at once. S. Coffin advertised “the New and Superior Canal Boat,” Native, scheduled to leave Brookville “every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 6½ o'clock A.M., and arrived at Lawrenceburg the same day.” Arrangements “to meet the line of Hacks” from Harrison to Cincinnati allowed commuters all the time they needed for business or shopping in the city. Then they could catch the Native on one of her Tuesday, Thursday, or Saturday return trips.91

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90 Diary and notebook (November 5, 1838—January 30, 1840) of W. S. Webb, an engineer on the Whitewater Canal (Archives Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis).
91 Brookville Indiana American, August 9, 1839.
year the port of Lawrenceburg had collected $606.39 in tolls. The monthly summary, from July to November, 1839, appears to be the first extant record of receipts from any public work in Indiana.\textsuperscript{62}

The Whitewater cut moved on above Brookville toward Laurel, engineers doing a good job, especially on hammered stone locks, much praised for their fine workmanship. “But we can see no means at present,” said the Brookville \textit{Indiana American} in midsummer of 1839,

to prevent the entire work on the Canal from being stopped in about 5 or 6 weeks. It will be recollected that under the regulations of the modification law of last winter, there could be only $270,000 expended on the White-Water Canal the present season. Of this amount we understand that about $160,000 have already been paid out. . . . We are informed that the next estimate . . . in August, will require about $90,000, leaving then a balance of $20,000, and the fiscal year is not half gone. We presume the Acting Commissioner will retain sufficient . . . to continue the operations on the bridges between this place and Lawrenceburgh, and if there be not some regulations of which we are not advised, the operations above this place will have to cease; or the contractors prosecute the work, and wait for their pay until after the action of another Legislature. This, many of them are not able to do.\textsuperscript{63}

That was a canny forecast. Indiana had bogged down in a debt of over $10,000,000: loans had been negotiated with unsound banks and fly-by-night firms that collapsed, with absconders, and with creditors who had bought state bonds but failed to pay for them. How to meet interest payments mounting toward the half-million mark was about to become an insoluble problem for the Hoosier government; in the state treasury at the moment there was only $28,702.\textsuperscript{64} On August 16, 1839, the Board of Internal Improvements ordered, “That, with the exception of the Wabash Canal from Lafayette to the state line, and the dams on other works yet to be preserved; the work at Lawrenceburgh and the bridge at Harrison; the Public Works be immediately suspended. . . .”\textsuperscript{65} The effect was like that of the five o'clock whistle: the shovel

\textsuperscript{62} Whitewater Canal Correspondence (Indiana State Library, Indianapolis).

\textsuperscript{63} Brookville \textit{Indiana American}, July 19, 1839.

\textsuperscript{64} Indiana, \textit{Documentary Journal} (1839-1840), 99; Lafayette \textit{Free Press}, December 16, 1840.

\textsuperscript{65} Indiana, \textit{Documentary Journal} (1839-1840), 20.
left sticking in the bank of an unfinished ditch, the wheelbarrow nearby, half-hewn timber lying helter-skelter, rock and earth piled in fields, fences torn down, and the terrain cluttered by all the raw desolation of construction jobs. Of approximately 1,300 miles of improvements authorized by the mammoth system bill, the state, at a cost around $8,000,000, had completed about 190-200 miles; otherwise some 290 miles or so of partly graded, partly dug canals, turnpikes, and railroads soon became a dreary spectacle of torn earth overgrown by weeds and eroded by rain. So meager a showing was sad recompense for the high hopes that had launched the great system.

The board's suspension order meant the end of state construction on the Whitewater Canal to the disgruntlement of citizens above Brookville, who added their voices to the howls of protest and recrimination that arose all over the state. The thirty miles completed from Lawrenceburg had been built at a cost of $664,665; additional work contracted for between Brookville and Laurel raised the total state outlay to $1,099,867.32. For the next several years the finished section did a steady though not a booming business. Fragmentary records show that for ten months of 1840, tolls at Brookville were $604.26; for ten months of 1841, $1,027.44; for eight months of 1842, $828.45. Total collections at all ports from July 1, 1839, to July 1, 1841, were $2,820.70. These receipts were far below the calculations of James Conwell, the optimistic forecaster who had "proved" that the canal when finished should earn a net yearly income of $117,000.

Nevertheless, southeasterners still wanted their ditch. The legislature of 1840-1841 having invited private companies to complete unfinished state works except for a few of the first class like the Wabash and Erie Canal, thirty-one men from Franklin, Fayette, and Wayne counties petitioned for a charter. On January 20, 1842, the session incorporated the White Water Valley Canal Company: capital stock of $500,000, the company obligated to complete the canal to Cambridge City within five years from March 1, the state transferring its right to the line from the Ohio River to the

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67 Whitewater Canal Correspondence.
National Road yet reserving the privilege of buying the waterway at any time after fifteen years from completion.\footnote{Indiana, \textit{Local Laws} (1841-1842), 37-45.}

Their hopes undamaged by about twenty years of frustration, some fifteen hundred valley farmers, mechanics, and businessmen dug down in their pockets to subscribe. “I have paid out for 10 thousand of the stock,” said one, “& I think it is the best stock in the world & I am not much in favor of stocks.”\footnote{James Rariden to Allen Hamilton, March 8, 1844, Allen Hamilton Collection (Indiana State Library, Indianapolis).} By May the Richmond \textit{Palladium} reported that at a meeting in Connersville “it was ascertained that $300,000 had already been subscribed, and the belief confidently expressed that the remaining $100,000 would speedily be taken.”\footnote{Richmond \textit{Palladium}, May 14, 1842. The “remaining $100,000” implies a belief that capitalization was $400,000, a figure that appeared in news stories. The act of incorporation, however, specifies a capital stock of $500,000.} Thus hope flamed anew, as it always did when subscribers stepped forward briskly, even though a good many contributed no hard cash but only promises to pay.

On July 28, 1842, festive ceremonies at Cambridge City inaugurated resumption of work. Nobody having had occasion to celebrate for several years, the countryside responded with great good will. Ten thousand people were reported to have swarmed into the little town; bands came from Connersville and from Paris, Ohio; and the Washington Grays, “a young but well disciplined and good looking military company,” arrived from Richmond. Following the customary parade, Samuel W. Parker, orator of the day, and J. T. Elliott dug the first earth, each liberally interpreting his assignment by filling a wheelbarrow and rolling it away. Then a procession marched to a grove for “a bounteous and substantial repast,” after which the orator was just getting a good start when a downpour quenched proceedings and, worse luck, prevented the drinking of toasts composed by a select committee.\footnote{Indianapolis \textit{Journal}, August 2, 1842. See also Richmond \textit{Palladium}, July 16, 1842.}

Within the next three months the company spent on construction $16,476, more than half that amount being paid to contractors in the form of stock and transferable certi-
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These expedients kept the work going; by 1843 boats were running to Laurel, about fifteen miles above Brookville.

By that time, Ohio having completed a twenty-five-mile channel between Harrison and Cincinnati, a canal all the way to the Queen City made business improve. In a semi-annual report on January 1, 1845, the company reported $261,075.78 in stock subscriptions actually paid, of which sum $250,256.77 had been expended on construction; tolls and water rents at Brookville, Harrison, and Lawrenceburg were $5,862.50. That figure looked encouraging, but the company discovered that the constant need of repairs all along the line took $4,773.51 for only temporary patchwork that would stand up, it was hoped, until more funds were available.\textsuperscript{13} The financial ice seemed thin, but S. W. Parker confidently reported to the president and directors that “the enterprise presents to its early and abiding friends good cause for gratification—and the most flattering prospects to the holders of its stock.”\textsuperscript{74} The flattering prospects looked less good when a subsequent company report in August showed that expenditures had exceeded income by about $11,000.\textsuperscript{75} Hovering in the background was the perennial specter of the empty purse.

Still, sanguine hopes appeared justified when the popular \textit{Native} was the first boat to reach Connersville in June, 1845, construction having been carried on by the same familiar device of paying laborers in company stock and company notes, the latter depreciating so fast that some workmen refused them. Yet the ditch went on. In October of the same year the \textit{Belle of Indiana} was the first boat to Cambridge City, the eleven miles between that place and Connersville having been built by Henry Valette, of Cincinnati, for $115,000 payable after ten years in company 7 per cent bonds. There was an air of irregularity about this agreement because the interest rate was not legal in Indiana. Whereupon Hoosier legislators agreeably regularized the transaction by enacting

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Daily Cincinnati Gazette}, November 10, 1842, reprint of an article from the Connersville \textit{Journal}.

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Connersville Indiana Telegraph}, January 1, 1845.

\textsuperscript{74} Report to president and directors of the Whitewater Canal Company, July 9, 1845, James Herron Papers (Indiana Historical Society Library, Indianapolis).

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Brookville Indiana American}, August 1, 1845.
a law in January, 1845: “That all such bonds issued or to be issued in accordance with the contract existing between said company, and said Valette, be and they are hereby legalized.” Nonetheless, this contract was to cause trouble later.

Completion of the line from Cambridge City to Lawrenceburg and to Cincinnati twenty-five miles farther, produced a stimulating bustle—though not as much action as potential business required. According to the Brookville Indiana American:

there is not more than half as many boats on the line as is necessary to carry off the produce. The warehouses all along the line are full, and freights are high. The . . . freight on wheat from Cambridge City to Cincinnati is 10c per bushel, and boats are clearing from $100 to $140 per trip . . . The number of Canal Boats on the White Water Canal is only about 20 or 23. We have heard of two new ones . . . the “Milton Torch Light,” and the “Rochester Gas Light”. . . . All the boats on the line now pass down heavily loaded.17

Probably the number of boats was not far from adequate. Unlike the Erie Canal, the Whitewater was never jammed with traffic—a half dozen arrivals per day being about the maximum for any port. Yet business seemed fairly brisk, to judge from daily reports in Cincinnati papers on commerce via the Whitewater Canal. One day’s record, showing quantity and variety of commodities, listed receipts of


Such shipments were respectable but not large for a rich valley. They might have been greater had not a good many farmers continued to haul produce over those rough wagon roads probably in stubborn protest against canal tolls considered too high. An indignant correspondent of the Lawrenceburg Political Beacon highlighted this point:

We learn from the canal collector at this place, that the toll on a load of corn from New Trenton in an open boat, was upwards of fourteen dollars—distance about twenty-two miles. At that rate on

16 Indiana, Local Laws (1844-1845), 208.
17 Brookville Indiana American, November 7, 1845.
18 Cincinnati Daily Atlas, March 30, 1846.
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the Erie canal, the boat and load would not more than pay the toll. This is one of the beauties of the Whitewater Valley Canal Company.79

As a result of this partial boycott and a fluctuating traffic—on some days receipts were scanty in Cincinnati—canal business was not spectacularly profitable for the company. In a general report published in July, 1846, the directors stated that tolls and water rents for the first three years of company management amounted to $52,503.57, a modest return on a large investment. And in August a freshet struck just when the canal, having been drained for over a month in midsummer to make much needed repairs on the lower line, was getting into working order again. A sudden rise in Duck Creek swept away the wooden aqueduct there and caused other damage to the extent of some $8,000 or more.80

Passenger travel was a variable experience, agreeable to the carefree, painful to the prim, boring to the impatient. The Rev. Benjamin Franklin, a Campbellite preacher, had a most distressing twenty-hour voyage from Milton, Indiana, to Cincinnati aboard the Express Mail in late 1846. "Some twenty of us," he wrote bitterly,

are crowded into the small cabin of a canal boat, and of all the miserable stenches from chewing, snuffing, smoking and spitting tobacco, we were ever compelled to witness, this is the nearest beyond the possibility of exaggeration. But what is worse, if possible, the company is almost entirely made up of Deists, whose mouths scarcely ever open without pouring out the most shocking oaths we ever heard. And to augment the agony, we have on board one of the most foolish old drunken wretches we ever saw. This old creature and an honest-hearted, civil back-woods youth, are the subjects of all the jests and pranks of the skeptics on board. All manner of foolery that can be invented is continually going on. A good portion of the time, some one is sawing on an old fiddle, while others are whacking down their cards, amid the most horrible profanity imaginable.81

The evangelical voyager had a bad time. His temper did not improve when, having finished his labors in Cincinnati, he was marooned there because the canal had been abruptly

81 Quoted in Joseph Franklin and J. A. Headington, The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin (St. Louis, 1879), 172.
put out of action by the worst flood within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of the Whitewater region.

This flood rampaged down the valley on New Year's Day, 1847. It ravaged the canal by tearing out aqueducts at Laurel, Williams Creek, and Symons Creek, breaching banks in many places all the way to Lawrenceburg, gutting deep channels around half a dozen feeder dams, and destroying abutments. "This great work of the White Water Valley," lamented the Cambridge City Reveille, "is in a state of ruin!"82 The canal very nearly was in that dismal state, being out of commission for six months and calling for at least $70,000 to restore navigation.

To get repair funds, the hard-pressed company appealed to the state for a loan of taxes paid in Wayne, Henry, Rush, Fayette, and Franklin counties for five years, the company agreeing to cede the canal to the state if interest and principal were not paid. The legislature passed an act to that effect, but Governor James Whitcomb refused to sign it.83 His action was understandable in view of the recent passage of the Butler Bill—after Charles F. Butler, emissary of the holders of Indiana bonds—that provided for a settlement of the state debt. The total debt, augmented by unpaid interest for five years, amounted to about $17,000,000. Since 1842 Indiana, as a defaulter, had been called hard names on both sides of the Atlantic: knave, thief, repudiator, dead-beat, and swindler. Indiana bonds were about thirty cents on the dollar. By the compromise Butler Bill, the state agreed to pay half the debt, the other half to be paid out of receipts from the Wabash and Erie Canal, which became the property of the bondholders. Hence, in rejecting the Whitewater appeal, the governor was no doubt showing a natural unwillingness to take on anything that might become another embarrassing liability.

In desperation, company directors then asked for loans from stockholders and well-wishers and offered in return notes in denominations of $5 and $50 earning 6 per cent;

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82 Cambridge City Reveille, January 20, 1847. About the damage done by the flood, see also Brookville Indiana American, January 8, 1847; Richmond Palladium, January 6, 1847.
83 Indiana, Senate Journal (1846-1847), 548; Richmond Palladium, February 2, 1847.
lessees of water power agreed to advance three years' rent. By these means enough money and promises came in to permit letting contracts for extensive rebuilding. The response testified to the firm faith of canal supporters; even public-spirited citizens of Cincinnati were reported to have pledged $20,000. 

"The people of south-eastern Indiana," said the Daily Cincinnati Gazette, are now beginning to understand that canals are of some use beyond that of merely carrying articles of production and consumption to and from market. The public sentiment is now setting strongly in favor of railways; and it is correct, so far as long reaches, and old-settled portions of the country, are concerned; but for the day in which it was dug, and the region through which it was carried, the Whitewater Valley Canal was the very thing needed. And our Indiana friends will do well to keep it in good order.

By July, the canal was again in operation above Harrison; the stretch between that place and Lawrenceburg was in order by the middle of September. There was even a channel to Hagerstown, eight miles above Cambridge City that had been built by the Hagerstown Canal Company, organized in 1846. This part appears to have been a negligible addition, often out of order, its maintenance hampered by lack of funds. No record has been found of the volume of business on that section.

When the whole line was ready to go once more, Henry Valette, claiming that the company owed him $5,750 in interest and applying for an injunction to restrain company officers from acts prejudicial to his lien, filed in Cincinnati a suit to enforce a lien upon the White Water Valley Canal Company. When Judge McLean, in chambers, granted the injunction on September 25, it prohibited the company from redeeming those five- and fifty-dollar bonds by which it had collected repair funds after the flood. "The citizens all along the line," said the Brookville Indiana American,

have promised to pay certain sums on the 1st of January, for which they have given their notes in denominations of five dollars, for which they are to receive canal bonds, receivable for tolls and water rents. But this decision prevents the company from receiving them. The

Cambridge City Reveille, April 7, 1847.

Daily Cincinnati Gazette, June 17, 1847.
consequence is, many of the citizens will refuse to pay their bonds, as
the company cannot comply with her part of the contract, thus creating
endless trouble and litigation, and great loss to the poor laborer, in
whose hands many of these individual notes now are, having received
them in payment for labor.86

The judge, sensibly observing that if the company were not
permitted to operate nobody would get anything, recommended
that a portion of receipts be reserved to satisfy Valette, but
whether the plaintiff accepted that compromise is not clear.87
Perhaps he pondered it to some purpose, however, for the
injunction seems not to have been strictly enforced.

As if law trouble were not enough, about mid-November,
1847, those rollicking rivers overflowed for the second time
in one year and with careless malice wrecked installations
new and old between Cambridge City and Lawrenceburg.
Recently re-established traffic ceased for ten months more
while company directors labored to collect from unhappy
stockholders another damage fund, variously estimated at
$20,000 to $80,000.88 The legislature, in January, 1848, passed
an act amending the company charter: permitting directors
to issue bonds of $20 upwards, earning 10 per cent a year;
levying a 10 per cent assessment on stockholders; allowing
the company to transfer ownership of the line below Harrison
to the city of Lawrenceburg on condition that the city repair
that section. Governor Whitcomb vetoed this bill.89

Nevertheless hope, if by this time not precisely un-
daunted, persisted, but it rose slowly like a fighter a little
groggy after his second knockdown. For three months after
the November flood no action occurred. The delay caused
apprehension that the Cambridge City Reveille cheerily at-
tempted to dissipate: "The fears entertained by some, that
the Whitewater canal would not be resuscitated again are
groundless. Our canal will be permanently repaired within

86 Cincinnati Weekly Argus, October 25, 1847, reprint of an article
from the Brookville Indiana American.
87 For a detailed story of this case, see Daily Cincinnati Gazette,
October 12, 1847.
88 Cambridge City Reveille, November 17, 1847; Fort Wayne Times
and People's Press, February 3, 1848; Cincinnati Weekly Atlas, Novem-
ber 22, 1847; Daily Cincinnati Gazette, December 1, 1847; Cincinnati
Daily Enquirer, November 19, December 2, 1847.
89 Indiana, Senate Journal (1847-1848), 271-75.
ninety days, perhaps." The "perhaps" was well taken, for the ninety days became more than twice that number. The Connersville Indiana Telegraph summarized local attitudes, accurately, if wryly:

The people of the White Water valley have experimentally tested the great truth, that deferred hope will make the heart sick—and in this case, we may add, the pocket also! It is now about twelve years since they commenced digging for their Canal—and it can hardly be said they have reached the hidden treasure yet.91

With extraordinary faith, however, stockholders ruefully dug down for enough money to let repair contracts by March, 1848. In September of that year traffic resumed on fifty-five miles between Cambridge City and Harrison.92 Below that point the canal was still out of action, funds having been exhausted. Two disastrous floods plunged the company deeply into debt, on which moderate returns from intermittent business made only a negligible impression. The enterprise could be firmly re-established, said the Connersville Indiana Telegraph, by "wise and rigid financiering—active and persevering industry, and sleepless vigilance on the part of its officers and agents. . . ."93 This was sensible advice. Unfortunately nature had no respect for any kind of financiering; she flouted the most persevering industry, eluded vigilance, and made a mockery of repairs naively called "permanent."

Citizens of Lawrenceburg, concerned over inaction at that end of the canal, proposed in a town meeting that municipal authorities issue bonds for $15,000 to repair the canal south of Harrison since the company had agreed to cede tolls to Lawrenceburg on that part and to yield title to the section of the canal within the town. Exhorting town fathers to act favorably on this proposal, the Indiana Register said: "If we do not wish to see these streets become verdant with dog-fennel, better close with the offers of mercy."94 There was some disposition at the southern terminus to believe that

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90 Cambridge City Reveille, February 23, 1848.
91 Connersville Indiana Telegraph, March 16, 1848.
92 Ibid., March 30, 1848; Cambridge City Reveille, July 29, 1848.
93 Connersville Indiana Telegraph, March 16, 1848.
94 Lawrenceburg Indiana Register, April 22, 1848.
the canal below Harrison had always been treated like an unwanted stepchild and that business had been deliberately diverted to Cincinnati. Yet sporadic reports of canal business show that collections at Lawrenceburg were as high as those at any other port, sometimes higher. Town fathers did not adopt the town meeting proposal, but apparently Lawrenceburg did not fulfill the gloomy grass-in-the-streets prediction. At any rate, the place continued to exist even though canalling was defunct at that end.

Elsewhere it was not much better. To get some of their own back, company directors charged high tolls that made farmers shun the canal, made boat owners and merchants lose money, and provoked loud howls of indignation. The Cambridge City Reveille calculated that on a hypothetical load of 1,200 bushels of flaxseed worth $15 a bushel a boatman, after paying toll of $9.50 a bushel on cargo, toll of $3 a mile on boat, cost of reshipping at Laurel, and the expense of hands and horses, might earn a net profit of $8.66, which also had to pay for overhead like horseshoeing and wear and tear on the boat. The company ignoring protests, the Brookville Indiana American, over a year later, fired a volley at

the unwise, ruinous and narrow-minded policy that the mousing muskrats are pursuing, who control and direct our canal. It is true, from their sad reverses, they have some claim on the public sympathy and the public purse. But this is no reason that they should kill at once the golden egged goose—drive all business from the canal, and the towns along the dirty ditch, and beggar its merchants. This they are most effectually doing at present. The tolls are now so high, that two thirds of the business of our valley is done in wagons. The boatmen, who begin to look lean and lank, are becoming ravenous, and it is becoming impossible for any one to keep up a boat, unless they pay their hands in grog, filched from the whiskey freight; and steal chickens and turkeys [sic] along the line, to board their hands, and corn from the fields for their horses.

Stock company directors, said the same editorial, "are so sordid, selfish and grasping, that they seldom see or comprehend that which will lead to their own good." Hence,

95 See Lawrenceburg Political Beacon, February 29, 1844.
96 Cambridge City Reveille, September 23, 1848.
“SHAVERS control our banks, MUSKRATS our Canals, and SNAKE-HEADS our Railroads.”

Some three years later the company reduced tolls, but whether that gesture increased receipts is difficult to say. Precisely how much traffic the canal carried and what its earnings were are impossible to determine from fragmentary records. Let it be recalled again that in 1834 James Conwell had calculated an annual net canal profit of $117,000. Intermittent reports, however, indicate that gross receipts never came close to that figure and that returns were far from commensurate with the agricultural wealth of a valley productive enough to have yielded those thousands, if not more. Had the canal operated without interruption, and had it enjoyed more confidence among producers, it might well have lived up to Conwell’s expectations. In reality, it was a loser for investors although, like all other canals, of considerable benefit to shippers. For March, 1849, the company secretary announced income from tolls and water rents of $7,200. Apparently he considered that sum a fairly good one, but, even if receipts continued at that rate for a year, the total would have been scarcely enough to pay debts and to cope with the devastation likely at any time to ride the crests of those destroying rivers. Since the canal rarely enjoyed a full year of uninterrupted navigation, annual gross revenue was probably not ever more than $40,000, a generous guess. Although the rivers were reasonably quiescent during 1849, a cholera epidemic tied up boats and minor freshets caused havoc sufficient to keep parts of the canal out of action a large part of the season and, of course, to dissipate receipts as fast as they came in.

Having nearly reached rock bottom, the company in that year appealed to the legislature for relief. “But your memorialists,” they said, are gratified to say that the work is completed, and must be of incalculable public utility, though they despair of its ever being profitable to the stockholders; the debts owing by the company, including the

97 Brookville Indiana American, November 30, 1849.
98 Cambridge City Reveille, April 14, 1849.
99 Ibid.; Lafayette Wabash Atlas, April 24, 1850.
assessment raised from the stockholders . . . [are] $320,000, a part of the latest repairs not being yet estimated, and the stock in the hands of stockholders, $375,000, making the entire cost of the work now . . . $693,000.100

After that frank but less than optimistic and accurate preamble—the utility so far having been calculable in small figures—they prayed that the state resume ownership of the Whitewater Canal and assume company debts. The effrontery, if not the sense, of that appeal merits admiration. It was no doubt a gesture of desperation; yet directors were surely not so ingenuous as to believe that the legislature could be cajoled into repossessing an expensive liability and creating more than a half million of new debt at the very moment when the state, carrying out the Butler compromise of 1847, was only beginning to crawl painfully out from under an old one. As might have been expected, the solons of the State House turned upon this memorial a cold shoulder and deaf ear.

Whereupon the company, hat in hand, again went up and down the line begging for funds. Before collecting could get well under way, a flood swept the valley in March, 1850, washing out a canal bank at Connersville, smashing a dam at Brookville, and otherwise causing enough disturbance to stop navigation for several months. This disaster, deepening public disillusion, made the omens unpropitious for collecting donations. The Brookville Indiana American scoffed: "The agent of the White Water Canal Company is loose among the people of this region, trying to get subscriptions to repair the Canal. Better go to those who were not broken up by paying high tolls."101 Yet hardy believers, undismayed by one setback after another, contributed enough money to start repairs, and by late May there was hope that the canal might soon be restored.

Repairing was so regular a procedure that a common newspaper line was: "The canal will again be navigable in a few days." That announcement became true only if the editor kept on using it while days stretched into weary weeks. Being out of commission about as many months in the year as it was in working order, sometimes more, the Whitewater

100 Indiana, Senate Journal (1849-1850), 155.
101 Brookville Indiana American, March 22, 1850.
had little chance to acquire robust canal character or to win widespread affection. Valley residents were so busy fuming over breakdowns and raging at the company that they had no inclination to praise or to romanticize. The Whitewater had few boats, no memorable skippers or other characters noted for respectability or raffishness, and no hometown poets, songmakers, or celebrated travelers. Boat building flourished at Cedar Grove and elsewhere in Franklin County, and some craft won a place in local regard: *Native, Banner, Belle of Indiana, Favorite*. Boats raced and crews fought, and very likely the crewmen swore as heartily and got just as drunk as their wicked brethren on the Wabash and Erie, which developed an enviable reputation for devil-may-care. The Whitewater, when it was navigable, must have stirred with lively action, but it did not produce any considerable body of anecdote or reminiscence.

One voyager named Henry Shombre did jot down in his diary brief notes of a four-day voyage to Cincinnati en route to California gold fields. He was an easygoing young man who enjoyed canalling in a carefree way that no doubt distressed fastidious passengers. Starting from Hagerstown at nine o'clock on a Sunday morning, he wrote:

big crowd, boys tite. Connersville, crowd. Salute fired, gun in cabin shot through door. Some feel very bad—gals. one fell over & hurt his shin. music dans; coffee week.

Monday. . . . Woke in Laurel, fine morning. crowd come to see us. boys in fine spirits, lame man better. Shooting after breakfast. . . . Boat reshiping . . . our boys little tite. feel better. help reship. took all day. Start at Sundown, run aground 2ce. Pilot got mad, swore, ript tore, snorted, about to leave, concluded to stay. all glad of it. banjo playing dancing, all fired a salute. some playing cards, some tite and full of fun.

Tuesday. . . . Boat made poor progress. last night run aground 7 times. reached Brookville at 6 A.M. lay by 2 hours . . . one of the boys shot a goose. some of them tite. music & dancing . . . arrived at Harrison. the boys all armed on deck fired salute. the whole town came down to see us. lay there one hour. at night great trouble about beds, stowed on deck. Stealing blankets. lots of fun. get to sleep at 12 O'clock.102

Those informative notes illuminate packet behavior and the vagaries of canalling. The crowds in various ports show that boat arrivals were as momentous to canal towns as the Mississippi steamboat was to Mark Twain's village of Hannibal. The frequent grounding implies that the Whitewater, when not overrun by too much water, suffered from not enough. Of the two evils, boatmen evidently preferred to scrape through by the aid of brawn and curses rather than to be kept off by floods. No structure of earth or timber was a sure bulwark against high water that, rushing down the 491-foot drop between Cambridge City and Lawrenceburg, savagely assaulted everything in its path. There was something vindictive about those valley streams. However firmly beams were spiked and bolted, trussed and reinforced, a freshet tossed aside man's handiwork as contemptuously as if it were a vagrant leaf.

In September, 1852, a culvert collapsed at Ross' Mills, and five thousand yards of earth dropped out of the bank. In December, down came another turbulent rise that dismantled bridges, tore up dams, and, as the Laurel News put it, "suspended navigation till nobody knows when," the high water being "but little lower than the great freshet of 1847." That flood was one too many for the dejected company and for stockholders; dazed directors could not decide whether to attempt repairs once more or to give up the whole business as a bad job. Although they managed, by sleight of hand, to let a few repair contracts and although water again reached Laurel six months later, friends of the canal had little fight left and no money. The company, as if shocked into a coma by the unequal struggle, became moribund.

But the ditch remained, or what was left of it, posing the question of what to do about it. A meeting at Brookville in January, 1853, discussed the feasibility of building a railroad on the towpath. The Franklin Democrat objected:

Some of our citizens look upon a rail road as a drain upon the local interests of the Valley. . . . So long as the Canal was in operation our market approximated that of Cincinnati. The Canal must be repaired, or our farmers must be set back to such modes of transporting their

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103 Laurel News, December 31, 1852.
Canalling in the Whitewater Valley

products to market as will virtually place them at least a quarter of a century back from the position they so recently occupied.¹⁰⁴

That argument was curious yet typical of strong canal sentiment, than which nothing was more rigidly resistant to change. Why a railroad should not have aided, rather than damaged, valley interests is not clear nor why farmers might not use it to become more modern than they had ever been. A railroad would not affect the status of all those farmers who had kept on transporting by wagon instead of by canal, which they could not depend on anyhow because it was often out of order. At least four serious floods in six years were not sound arguments for spending more money on repairs. The views of the Democrat demonstrated the inviolability of a fixed idea. Not flood, wreckage, ruinous repair bills, undependability, or railroad shook the unbelievable faith of stubborn canal adherents.

They prevailed for a time in the Whitewater Valley by some means or other amassing funds to keep navigation going, irregularly, on miscellaneous pieces of the canal. High water on the East Fork in the spring of 1853 almost wrecked it again. In 1855 another version of the case of Valette v. Whitewater Valley Canal Company came to trial in a United States Circuit Court in Indianapolis. Complainant filed suit this time to enforce payment of 112 bonds of $1,000 each issued to him by the company in 1845; he again moved for an injunction, also for the appointment of a receiver to take possession of all canal property for the benefit of the plaintiff. Judge McLean, possibly the same man as the arbiter in the previous hearing, appointed a receiver but concerning payment of those bonds ruled that equity was with the defendant, who alleged that “Valette had . . . advanced to them . . . $56,000 in work on the unfinished portion of the canal, and that the $112,000 issued to him was illegal and usurious [sic] and that the work, or contract for work, was a mere pretext . . . to cover up the usury of the loan.”¹⁰⁶

If the decision prevented Valette from taking over, it was still no help to the bankrupt company. When a receiver

¹⁰⁴ Brookville Franklin Democrat, January 21, 1863.
¹⁰⁶ Brookville Indiana American, June 15, 1866, reprint of an article from the Daily Cincinnati Gazette.
took charge later in the year, valley editors immediately began to grumble that he did nothing for the benefit of the canal, but he could hardly be blamed for inaction. He had not a spare dollar he could use to do anything about anything. Nevertheless, three years later the old familiar notice was still current: “The Canal will be again navigable in a few days, as we learn from the superintendent.” Yet if faith were boundless, it was not unanimous. A dwindling number of diehard canallers made resources more uncertain than ever and made the end inevitable.

In 1862 the Indianapolis and Cincinnati Railroad Company bought the Cincinnati branch of the canal, on which the company proposed to build a railroad. “Should this be done,” one Brookville citizen protested to Governor Morton, “it will almost ruin the greater part of the Whitewater valley, for it is the only outlet we have for our produce. . . . I doubt very much whether the R. R. Co. have the right to divert the Canal to other purposes or to destroy it to the great injury of this section.” Not even Oliver P. Morton was powerful enough to control events in Ohio. The railroad company extended its reach. In 1863, at a public auction in Brookville, a United States marshal sold the Indiana part of the Whitewater Canal to Henry C. Lord, president of the Indianapolis and Cincinnati road, for $65,000. Lord proposed to build a railroad to Brookville for $51,000, payable in five equal annual installments bearing 6 per cent interest. But this sale was set aside on the grounds of lack of authority and no railroad appeared.

Canallers would not give up. In the spring of 1865 mill owners and others proposed, at their own expense, to preserve water power and to restore navigation between Brookville and Connersville. “Subscription papers are now in circulation,” the Brookville Indiana American excitedly reported, and it is hoped our farmers and business men generally will donate liberally, as it is of the utmost importance that our mills be again put in operation, and transportation of some kind afforded us. It is useless to await the action of the Canal Company, as the Receiver has declined to render any assistance whatever.

108 Brookville Franklin Weekly Democrat, July 30, 1868.
107 Rufus Haymond to Oliver P. Morton, December 29, 1862, Whitewater Canal Correspondence.
108 Lawrenceburg Democratic Register, July 31, 1863.
109 Brookville Indiana American, April 24, 1866.
Implicit in this flurry was the astounding resilience of canal men, perennially hopeful despite realities hard enough to obliterate hope, never more exhilarated than when collecting donations for a ditch that was beyond salvage.

The effort was abortive. About the same time as the proposal for canal restoration originated, a thousand or more valley residents petitioned the legislature to enact a law permitting a railroad to be built on the line of the Whitewater Canal. The assembly complied. At a called session in November, 1865, it passed an "Act to authorize Railroad Companies to occupy and use for railroad purposes the property of Canal Companies, with their consent," the measure guaranteeing the protection of water power for the benefit of lessees.\textsuperscript{110}

About three weeks later C. C. Binkley, president of the White Water Valley Canal Company, sold the line once more to Lord, this time for $137,348.12. That was the end of the canal as a means of transportation. Two years later the towpath became the roadbed of a rail line between Cincinnati and Cambridge City. Thus the Whitewater Canal ceased to be a highway of commerce, although it continued to serve a number of mills and to develop hydroelectric power for almost a century thereafter. As recently as 1953 the Indiana Flood Control and Water Resources Commission recommended that the canal in Connersville be converted into an enclosed conduit to serve manufacturing plants there.\textsuperscript{111} As a profit-making work, the ditch thus fulfilled its destiny, although in a manner very different from that envisaged by its early supporters.

At many points along the line the Whitewater is still a recognizable channel. Of the high straight stretch north of Connersville, one observer remarked not many years since:

In late June this spot is one of the most beautiful and satisfying imaginable. The banks of the canal, running straight as a die and covered with wild roses, tiger lilies, and elderberry blossoms, are pungent with the tangy scent of pennyroyal. To the west rise partly wooded hills, richly pastured and dotted with grazing cattle and sheep; to the east unfold mile upon mile of rolling farmlands, burgeoning with varicolored fields of ripening wheat, and oats, young corn, and garden plants.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{110} Indiana, \textit{Laws} (1865), 116-17.
\textsuperscript{111} Indianapolis \textit{Star}, May 23, 1953.
\textsuperscript{112} Knollenberg, \textit{Pioneer Sketches of Upper Whitewater Valley}, 114.
The restored aqueduct across Duck Creek at Metamora and the restored stone locks three miles east of there recreate for the contemporary visitor a fragment of the canal as it once was. Like a venerable patriarch exempt from labor, portions of the Whitewater placidly live on.

Despite its checkered career and its many losing battles with the two obstreperous forks of the Whitewater River, the canal had a long history and a long term of usefulness. Both may have been some compensation for the hopes of such strong canal champions as those of the valley. Among the earliest in Indiana, they were also foremost in determination, in persistence, and in courage that, if blind, was doggedly tenacious.