



10.1966.1 Grave of Jonathan Jennings (1784-1834) (Two Blocks East)
Clark County
Marker Text Review Report
8/11/2014

Marker Text

Indiana Territorial Delegate to Congress, 1809-1816. President of Indiana Constitution, June 1816. First Governor of Indiana, 1816-1822. Member of Congress, 1822-1830.

Report

Current IHB guidelines require primary source documentation to support all information on a marker. This marker was placed under review because IHB had no sources on file. This report links primary sources to the marker text wherever possible and offers researchers additional resources to learn more about Indiana's first governor. The text of the marker is accurate, but the marker lacks context, which this report and the suggested readings provide.

Jennings was not born in Indiana. Several secondary sources suggest that he was born in New Jersey or Virginia.¹ [Jennings' letters](#) to Dr. David Mitchell in 1807 show that he arrived in Indiana in the fall of 1806.² According to historian Dorothy Riker, [court records](#) confirm Jennings was admitted to the practice of law in Vincennes, Knox County, Indiana, in April, 1807.³

Also in 1807, the [Laws of Indiana Territory 1801-1809](#) show that Jennings served as Assistant Clerk to the House of Representatives.⁴ He also served as clerk to the Vincennes University Board of Trustees at that time.⁵ By November 1808, Jennings had moved to Jeffersonville in Clark County, Indiana.⁶

As is common for state historical markers from this decade, the marker text does not expound on Jennings' political or personal perspective. Markedly absent is the issue of slavery. In 1809, Jennings was elected as territorial delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives.⁷ He was elected Governor in 1816, the first governor for the newly-formed state.⁸ Many secondary sources from the 19th and 20th century label Jennings as "antislavery" and assert that it was a significant part of the "platform" upon which he gained prominent political positions.⁹ Territorial Governor William Henry Harrison and his supporters favored [amending the Northwest Ordinance](#) to allow legal slavery in Indiana Territory. Open letters published in the *Western Sun* from 1808-1809 by both the pro- and anti-Harrison factions suggest that Jennings sided with those citizens who were in favor of continuing to outlaw slavery within the territory. They wished also to prevent slaveholders from retaining people as property when they moved to the emerging state. Jennings' opponent, Thomas Randolph, ascribed to Harrison's view that property rights of slaveholders should be protected.¹⁰

"A Citizen of Vincennes" wrote of Jennings that he "has been taken up as a candidate, by the republicans and the opposers of slavery, in Clark and Harrison counties [. . .]"¹¹ It is important to acknowledge that at the turn of the 19th century, the "antislavery" sentiment in Indiana manifested in ways that modern Americans might not associate with the movement, and should not be conflated or confused with the [abolitionism or antislavery of the antebellum era](#). For example, in his first address as Governor, November 1816, Jennings implored citizens of Indiana to provide "by law to prevent more effectually any unlawful attempts to seize and carry into bondage persons of colour, legally entitled to



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their freedom, and at the same time as far as practicable to prevent those who rightfully owe service to the citizens of any other state or territory, from seeking within the limits of this state a refuge from the possession of their lawful owners.”¹²

According to the [Journal of the Constitutional Convention 1816](#), Jennings was elected president of the Constitutional Convention held in [Corydon, Indiana](#).¹³ In that same year, Jennings was elected the [first governor](#) of Indiana.¹⁴ [Congressional proceedings](#) and debates also demonstrate that Jennings served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1822 to 1830.¹⁵

The marker text also does not mention Jennings’ [role as U.S. commissioner](#), a position that involved negotiating treaties with American Indians in 1818 and again in 1832.¹⁶ Though outside the scope of this accuracy review, Jennings’ influence on American Indian policies bears further analysis by researchers.

Jennings died on his farm in Charlestown, Indiana on July 26, 1834 and is buried in the Charlestown Cemetery.¹⁷ His grave remained unmarked until 1893, when the state of Indiana appropriated \$500 for a memorial.¹⁸

Learn More

To learn more about Jonathan Jennings, see [Jonathan Jennings’ entry](#) in the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress* or the [Unedited Letters of Jonathan Jennings](#), compiled by Dorothy Riker. The [Indiana Magazine of History](#) is also a great source for articles about Jonathan Jennings.

For more contextual information, John D. Barnhart and Dorothy L. Riker’s [Indiana to 1816, The Colonial Period](#) is an excellent secondary source for Indiana history during this period. John Craig Hammond’s [Slavery, Freedom, and Expansion in the Early American West](#) offers a clear overview of pro- and anti-slavery opinions and politics in Indiana Territory (see chapter 6).

See Jennings in Indiana’s [Governors’ Portrait Collection](#).

Note on sources: Most secondary sources referenced in the notes below were accessed in their physical form from IHB’s agency library, but many are now available to the public as digitized records. Where possible, links to free, online versions of the documents have been embedded below. All newspaper articles from the Vincennes *Western Sun* were accessed on microfilm at the Indiana State Library. The library has a searchable database of these early issues. Unless otherwise noted, other newspapers were accessed via NewspaperArchive.

A note on sources: Many of the sources cited for this review were accessed in physical form using IHB’s agency library, but are currently available in digital form. Where possible, links to free, electronic copies of resources have been embedded within the citations for your convenience. Unless otherwise noted, [Indiana State Library](#) microfilm was used for issues of the Vincennes *Western Sun* and all other newspaper records were accessed via NewspaperARCHIVE.com

¹ Logan Esarey, [Messages and Papers of Jonathan Jennings, Ratliff Boon, William Hendricks, 1816-1825, Governors Messages and Letters](#) 3 (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Commission, 1924), 27; Dorothy Riker, “Jonathan Jennings,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, 28:3 (September 1932): 223, accessed <http://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/imh/article/view/6665>.

² Jonathan Jennings to David G. Mitchell (Steubenville, OH), August 18, 1806, [Unedited Letters of Jonathan Jennings](#), *Indiana Historical Society Publications*, 10: 4, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1932) 160-61; Francis S. Philbrick, [Laws of Indiana Territory 1801-1809](#) (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1931), cxii.



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"Nine copyists (including Jonathan Jennings) were paid \$2.50 per diem," to copy the revised code of the Indiana Territory taken from the statutes of the Northwest Territory. See also page 208 of *Unedited Letters*.

³ Dorothy Riker, "Jonathan Jennings," 225. Note: Riker's work is generally considered to be a reliable secondary source by IHB, as this author offers primary sources to back up her claims. Her analyses and extensive footnotes provide further information.

Riker states, "Jennings was admitted to the practice of law in Vincennes at the April term of court, 1807." Territory Court Records for April, 1807 and beyond are accessible at [The Indiana State Archives](#). Case files are catalogued in a thorough and searchable finding aid, which may aid researchers in locating additional details regarding Jennings' legal practice. The finding aid is also searchable by the names of the parties to the case and by the type of case, so family history researchers and researchers of unique subjects including slave replevin (i.e., the capture and return of escaped slaves via their legal definition as property) may find this resource more widely useful.

⁴ Philbrick, 607.

Appropriations for 1807 included: "To Jonathan Jennings, as an assistant to the clerk of the house of representatives [sic] at this session for copying several parts of the revised code as amended, six days, fifteen dollars;" For 1808: "Be it further enacted, That Jonathan Jennings, the assistant Clerk to the two houses at the present session, shall in like manner, receive the sum of two dollars and fifty cents per day, for his services during the present session."

⁵ Dorothy Riker, "Jonathan Jennings," 226. Riker cites a copy of the Minutes of Vincennes University sent to her by Howard R. Burnett; see also Howard R. Burnett's *A History of Vincennes University*, Masters Thesis, Indiana University, 1936, available on microfilm at Indiana State Library; Matthew E. Welsh, "An Old Wound Finally Healed: Vincennes University's Struggle for Survival," *Indiana Magazine of History* 84:3 (September, 1988): 217-236, accessed <http://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/imh/article/view/10887>.

⁶ Jonathan Jennings to David G. Mitchell, December 1, 1808, in Riker, *Unedited Letters*, 165-67.

Jennings wrote that he had been resident in Clark County only one month.

⁷ [Vincennes] *Western Sun*, May 7, 1809, 3; "Proceedings and Debates of the House of Representatives of the United States," *Annals of Congress*, 11th Congress, 2nd Session, November 27, 1809 to January 23, 1810, January 23, 1810 to May 1, 1810, 683-84, 843-48, 1171-74, 1199-1200 accessed [A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation](#); Rump Session, October 16-21, 1809 in Gayle Thornbrough, Dorothy Riker, Eds., *Journals of the General Assembly of Indiana Territory, 1805-1815*, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1950) 315, fn 2, 316; Clarence Edwin Carter, Comp. and Ed., *The Territory of Indiana 1800-1810*, [The Territorial Papers of the United States](#) 7, (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1939), 651-703; Riker, *Unedited Letters*, 172-75.

The *Territorial Papers* elaborates (662) that the "apparently extensive" debate in the house regarding Randolph's request to unseat Jennings were not reported fully. What was recorded suggests that Randolph's complaint centered on errors with polling and the election of delegates. He argued that a mistake prevented some votes from being certified that were included in the majority that resulted in Jennings' election. A further question involved the authority of the Governor of the Indiana Territory to act independent of the U.S. Congress and prevent the election of delegates by executive order, which Randolph asserted nullified Jennings election regardless of any polling irregularities.

Documents in the *Territorial Papers* relative to the election include, "Poll Book of an Election in Dearborn County," May 22, 1809, 651; "Candidate for Congress, 652; "Candidates for the House of Assembly," May 22, 1809, 654-55; "Credentials of Jonathan Jennings as Delegate," July 1, 1809, 660; Thomas Randolph to Jonathan Jennings, July 25, 1809, 661-62; Jonathan Jennings to William Findley, December, 1809, 696; Jonathan Jennings to William Findley, December 22, 1809, 697-703.

⁸ [Vincennes] *Western Sun*, September 7, 1816, 3.

⁹ Riker, "Jonathan Jennings," 239.

In her article on Jennings, Dorothy Riker asserts that Jennings' leadership did leave a mark on the state, but also suggests that his influence was limited: "Jennings was no doubt sincere in his desire to make Indiana a free state, but the antislavery forces were already in the ascendancy by the time he was in a position to exert much influence."

See also Indiana State Library's clippings file for Jonathan Jennings to explore the topic of Jennings in popular memory. twentieth century biographies of Jennings were frequently published in local newspapers. One representative 1924 *Indianapolis Star* article by Governor Samuel Ralston boasts the headline "Jonathan Jennings, Indiana's First Governor, One of the Bitterest Opponents of Slavery."

¹⁰ "To the Citizens of Indiana," [Vincennes] *Western Sun*, April 29, 1809, 2; "Citizens of Indiana," [Vincennes] *Western Sun*, May 6, 1809, 2; Riker, "Jonathan Jennings," 229; Welsh, 222; See also John D. Barnhart, Dorothy Riker, *Indiana to 1816: The Colonial Period* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau and Indiana Historical Society, 1971), 441.



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Riker states, "In the territorial election of April 3, 1809, Jennings offered himself as the candidate of the antislavery faction for the position of territorial delegate to the United States Congress." See footnote 11.

¹¹ "To the Citizens of Indiana;" "Citizens of Indiana."

An extensive search of the *Western Sun* revealed few outright mentions of a pro-slavery/anti-slavery relating to either congressional candidate, but this open letter offers a clear statement of the position Jennings' supporters believed he espoused.

¹² "Message of his excellency the Governor," [Vincennes] *Western Sun*, December 13, 1817, 1-2; Esarey, 32, 35.

¹³ Donald F. Carmony, Introduction, "Journal of the Convention of the Indiana Territory," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 61: 2, (June 1965): 77, 89-90. See also [Journal of the Constitutional Convention 1816](#) and "[1816 Convention Journal-June 10-June 14, 1816](#)," digital resources from Indiana Historical Bureau.

¹⁴ Dorothy Riker, Ed., [Executive Proceedings of the State of Indiana, 1816-1836](#) (Indianapolis, Indiana Historical Bureau, 1947) pp. 21, 235, accessed via IUPUI Digital Collections.

¹⁵ Riker, *Executive Proceedings*, 235; "Proceedings and Debates of the House of Representatives of the United States," 17th Congress, First Session, December 2, 1822, *Annals of Congress, Debates and Proceedings, 1789-1824*, accessed via [American Memory](#); See also [Proceedings](#) for 1825, 1827, 1829.

Jennings was elected representative to Congress, resigning the office of governor at the end of his term (December 1822).

¹⁶ Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Laws and Treaties 2*, (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1903), accessed via Oklahoma State's [digital collection](#).

See especially "[Treaty with the Weas, 1818](#)," October 2, 1818, 169-170; "[Treaty with the Delawares, 1818](#)," October 3, 1818, 170-171; "[Treaty with the Miamis, 1818](#)," October 6, 1818, 117-121; "Treaty with the Potawatomi, 1832," October 20, 1832, 256-258.

¹⁷ "Deaths" *Washington [D.C.] Daily National Intelligencer*, August 15, 1834, 3; "Grave of Gov. Jennings," *Indianapolis News*, October 3, 1901, 2.

The *Indianapolis News* interview with Charlestown resident James K. Sharp confirms the date of death, though Sharp was a child when he witnessed the burial of Jennings. Generally, IHB looks for corroborating evidence when using recollections. The *National Intelligencer* article gives the date of death July 26, 1834.

¹⁸ Albert Gall, Treasurer, "Annual Report of the Treasurer of State of the State of Indiana for the Year Ending October 31, 1894," Statement No. 4, Miscellaneous, (Indianapolis, Wm. B. Burford, Contractor for State Printing and Binding, 1894), accessed via [Internet Archive](#); photograph, "Jonathan Jennings, (1784-1834)," Find-a-Grave Memorial, Accessed via [Find-a-Grave](#).

A photograph of monument reads: "In the memory of Jonathan Jennings, first governor of the state of Indiana, born 1784-died 1834, erected under an act of the General Assembly, 1893." Additional accounts of the Jennings' memorial project abound. See *Jeffersonville Daily Evening News*, January 10, 1889; *Logansport Journal*, March 15, 1893; *Elkhart Weekly Truth*, June 1, 1893; *Logansport Journal*, June 6, 1893; *Brownstown Banner*, June 22, 1893; *Jeffersonville News*, December 7, 1893; *Jeffersonville National Democrat*, December 8, 1893.