



Marker Text

In fall 1846, residents of Covington and Attica skirmished at Lock 35 over lack of water to Covington. Heavy rains eventually resolved the problem. Competition among canal towns over water control was often intense. First boat reached Attica 1846 via Wabash and Erie Canal (connected Lake Erie with Ohio River in 1853).

Report

This marker certainly meets the current guidelines for state and national significance due to the economic impact upon the state. As a result of the Wabash and Erie Canal, thousands of jobs were provided, hundreds of businesses were created, and Hoosier products were sent beyond the borders of the state. The *Fort Wayne Times and People's Press* reprinted an article [*Buff. Com. Adv.*] in their September 12, 1846 issue, "The Wabash and Erie Canal with proper care will become one of the most important channels of inland commerce in the county, and it is very desirable, not only for the convenience of commerce, but the interests of the States directly concerned, that the Canal be placed and kept in such a condition as to invite to the trade of one of the greatest and most fertile valleys of the west." This particular incident proves the economic impact of the canal on a community.

The text is correct. This event did take place in 1846.¹ By 1846, towns below Lafayette were eager to get their piece of the canal pie.² By September, after a hot dry summer,³ the canal had been completed to Covington but lack of water kept the canal bed dry.⁴ About fourteen miles north, the town of Attica struggled to keep enough water in their section due to a serious construction error which allowed water to leak slowly from the canal.⁵ At the end of September, the first canal boat, *Daniel Webster* arrived at Attica, after teams of horses and oxen literally dragged it into port.⁶

On September 26, 1846,⁷ a very impatient group of men from Covington⁸ decided it was time for Attica to share the wealth, so to speak, and release the much anticipated water from Lock 35.⁹ This Covington envoy included U. S. Senator Edward A. Hannegan.¹⁰ No one knows what was said at the meeting, but apparently, the Covington folks were not satisfied. Two days later 300 angry and armed men marched on Attica, with Senator Hannegan in the lead.¹¹ Outnumbered, the citizens of Attica were powerless to stop the lock from being opened and the canal drained leaving several packet boats stranded in the mud.¹² The canal superintendent immediately ordered Lock 35 to be closed.¹³ No one was killed but several people were hurt.¹⁴ Ironically, because there was so little water at Attica, it was absorbed into the parched ground and never reached Covington.¹⁵ On November 30, the first canal boat finally reached Covington.¹⁶



23.1997.1 Attica and Covington Canal Skirmish
Fountain County
Marker Text Review Report
January 8, 2013

Additional Sources

Wabash and Erie Canal Company Records, 1833-1837 (Bulk 1833-1862), Manuscripts and Archives Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Paul Fatout, *Indiana Canals* (West Lafayette, Purdue University Press, 1985) Digitized, June 2, 2010.

Links

Canal Society of Indiana, accessed <http://www.indcanal.org/>

The Wabash and Erie Canal: Fort Wayne on the Old Canal, accessed <http://archive.org/details/wabasheriecanalf00publ>

The Wabash and Erie Canal through Huntington, Indiana, accessed <http://www.terrypepper.com/w&e/boats.htm>

Welcome to the Wabash and Erie Canal, [Delphi] accessed <http://www.wabashanderiecanal.org/>

Welcome to Princeton, accessed http://princeton-indiana.com/pages/history/history-pages/wabash_and_erie_canal.htm

Wabash and Erie Canal Trails, Evansville, accessed <http://southernindianatrails.freehostia.com/eriecanal.htm>

Canal Mania in Indiana, accessed <http://www.in.gov/history/2409.htm#transportation>

Canal Construction in Indiana, accessed <http://www.in.gov/history/2409.htm#transportation>

¹ There are two newspaper reports closest to this event. "The Canal Wars," *Delphi Carroll Express*, October 3, 1846, p.2, c. 1, and a reprint of an *Attica Journal* article in "Disgraceful Mob Headed by U. S. Senator," *Logansport Telegraph*, October 17, 1846, p. 1., c. 2; The Indiana State Library does not have copies of the *Attica Journal*. Several newspaper reports of the event appeared over the next several weeks but with no real detail. An article from the *New Albany Bulletin* (n. d.), entitled "Disgraceful Affair," appeared in the *Crawfordsville Press* (n.d.) and then reprinted in the *Fort Wayne Times and People's Choice*, October 24, 1846, p. 1, c. 5. The Indiana State Library does not have copies of the *New Albany Bulletin*. The Indiana State Library does have the *Crawfordsville Press*, but not that particular date; "Mob," *Brookville American*, October 23, 1846. The article wrongly assumes, "We can presume we can now announce the navigation as open to Covington."

Lucas Nebeker, "The Attica War," *Indiana Magazine of History* (Bloomington, Indiana University, 1913) 9:20-23. [Of the following article the author says: "I wrote it when I was a boy, more than fifty years ago, and I interviewed quite a number of men who knew all about it. All of these are dead now except Mr. H. [Hezekiah] A. Martin, who is now ninety-four years old." Mr. Nebeker adds that his original article, which was never printed, was lost forty years ago. He rewrote it, at the request of Professor J. A. Woodburn, after refreshing his memory by an interview with Mr. Martin.]; United States Federal Census, 1850, Covington, Fountain, Indiana; Roll: M432_145; Page: 65A; Image



495; Ancestrylibrary.com. The 1850 U. S. Census shows a five year old Lucas Bebecker living in Troy Township, Fountain County. Fifty years from the 1913 *Magazine of History* is 1863, which would make Nebeker eighteen when he wrote the article. The same census shows a Heesekiah A Martin living in Covington and being born about 1819, making Martin age ninety-four at the time of the 1913 article.

“Stories of Early Days,” Attica Daily, March 18, 1902, p. 1. This article is referred to and quoted in many secondary sources. It provides information on the immediate aftermath of the event, describing what happened to Attica resident, Ezekiel McDonald, who was injured during the ensuing fight and claimed Senator Hannegan was responsible. It is unclear when, but according to the article, McDonald apparently rode to Covington, found Hannegan and assaulted him. No legal action for either man’s assault resulted. Much more research is needed to confirm the information given.

In all primary and secondary sources, the event’s who, what, why, and where agree. Census records and county histories confirm many of the individuals. Later secondary sources provide a more detailed account of the event and its aftermath. Unfortunately, these sources do not provide citations or give specific dates. An example of such a source, Carolyn Schmidt, “Covington Mob Storms Attica Lock,” *Wabash and Erie Canal Attica/Covington Fall Tour Book* (Fort Wayne, Canal Society of Indiana, 1995) pp. 19-20, 23. In her article, Schmidt, co-founder of the Canal Society of Indiana, provides great detail on the immediate and long-term aftermath, but provides no citations. More research would be needed to confirm her statements.

Other secondary sources: Paul Fatout, *Indiana Canals* (West Lafayette, Purdue University, 1972) pp. 122-23. Footnoted. Fatout summarized the event without citing sources but does state the mob was led by U. S. Senator, Edward A. Hannegan; William Wesley Wollen, *Biographical and Historical Sketches of Early Indiana* (Indianapolis, Hammond & Co., 1883) pp. 217-18.; J. Wesley Whicker, *Historical Sketches of the Wabash Valley* (Attica, author, 1916) p. 73; Doris Holtman Cottingham, ed., *Pearls Along the Wabash: Reminiscences of Newlin Hoover Yount* (Williamsport, Warren County Historical Society, 1991) pp. 47-49.

² Fisher, “Report of the Superintendent of the Wabash and Erie Canal to the General Assembly, December 8, 1846,” Doc. No. 8, Part 1, *Documents of the General Assembly of Indiana at the Thirtieth Session Commencing December 7, 1846*, Part First (Indianapolis, J. P. Chapman, State Printer, 1847) pp. 149. Report states, “The completion of the canal to Covington, will undoubtedly, materially increase the revenues to be derived from that source, and afford a northern outlet to one of the most fertile regions in Indiana. It has long been expected, and the most excessive anxiety has been felt for the accomplishment of the object. The people have voluntarily borne a heavy tax of furnishing to contractors supplies at their cash value, and receiving in payment canal script at its face, and when worth less than fifty cents on the dollar. They have looked upon the completion of this work as an epoch in the history of that country, and it is not the least surprising, that they should feel, and manifest too, much anxiety on the subject”

³ “Markets,” *Delphi Carroll Express*, August 22, 1846, p. 3, c. 1. Article states, “The late rains have had a reviving influence upon vegetation, and beneficial effect upon the health. Business on the canal is rather limited. . . .”; “Wabash and Erie Canal,” *Fort Wayne Times and People’s Press*, September 9, 1846, p.2. c. 1. Article states, “The *Toledo Blade* says the business of this noble channel is augmenting so fast that fears are entertained of a deficiency of water on the Fort Wayne level. Some inconvenience has already been felt from this course-not enough to obstruct navigation, but the level has not been kept quite up to the mark do as to render the navigation as easy as desirable. The *Blade* does well in urging upon the authorities of Ohio and Indiana prompt attention to this matter. . . .”



⁴ Fisher, "Report of the Superintendent of the Wabash and Erie Canal to the General Assembly, December 8, 1846," p. 147, 149. Report states, "The portion of the canal, as far down the river as Covington, was so far completed this year." p. 147; Report states, ". . . The water was then forced into the canal, as fast as was considered safe, and the boats were able to reach Attica the latter part of September, and navigation has continued to that point since. But, it was found impracticable to make the canal navigate to Covington, so as to be any advantage, the present season." p. 148; Report states, "They have looked upon the completion of this work as an epoch in the history of that country, and it is not the least surprising, that they should feel, and manifest too, much anxiety on the subject ; and, it is gratifying to think their wished will be realized next spring, and much regretted that it could not be accomplished earlier." p. 149.

⁵ Fisher, "Report of the Superintendent of the Wabash and Erie Canal to the General Assembly, December 8, 1846. Report states, "An attempt to introduce water into that part of it between Shawnee creek and Attica, from Shawnee creek feeder, caused a considerable breach in the towing path bank, and gave conclusive evidence, that the material of which the bank was composed, would not withstand the pressure of water necessary to give navigation, without lining the bank and bottom of the canal for nearly two miles with clay and loam, and would prevent the water from reaching the loose clean gravel of which the bank was formed. . . ." The report continues, "Immediately below the town of Attica, is a large basin . . ." and that its banks were made of ". . . exceedingly coarse clear gravel, through which the water escapes as fast as it can be thrown into the canal, and thus far baffled all attempts to put it in navigable order. . . ." p. 148.

⁶ Schmidt, p. 19; The *Attica Journal* apparently covered the arrival of the boat. I do not have the date but it must have been sometime in September. The publisher has been quoted in many secondary sources. With tongue-in-cheek he states, "Boats beginning to arrive here and the Daniel Webster majestically sailed into port on Thursday." In her article, Schmidt clarifies, ". . . On the day water was finally let into the canal from the Wabash River at Wea Creek below Lafayette, it was found there was barely enough water to flood the canal as far as Attica and certainly none for the portion into Covington. As soon as the boats could wiggle toward Attica they would leave Lafayette, proceed a few miles and get stuck in the mud because there was not enough water. One boat, the Daniel Webster finally was the first to arrive in Attica after being dragged by twelve horses from Maysville, a mile north of Attica where she was stuck. Several additional yoke of oxen were added to the six teams of horses to pull her into port." The Indiana State Library does not have the *Attica Journal*. There are also no newspapers from Lafayette at that time in the Library.

⁷ "The Canal Wars," *Delphi Carroll Express*, October 3, 1846. October 3rd was a Saturday. The article states, "They called to arms, and some three hundred citizens, on Saturday last [September 26] took up the line of march for Attica." See also Footnote 4.

⁸ "The Canal Wars," *Delphi Carroll Express*, October 3, 1846. Article states, "It appears the patience and forbearance of the citizens of Covington have been completely exhausted; and they have resolved to redress their grievances in their own way." See also Footnotes 2 and 4.

⁹ There is no primary source found as of yet that officially refers to the Attica lock at number 35. No doubt, carefully looking through the engineers' and superintendents' reports the statement could be confirmed. Secondary sources refer to the canal lock at Attica, as Lock 35, or the "Battleground Lock." Schmidt, p. 19.

¹⁰ "Biographical Directory of the United States Congress," *American National Biography; Dictionary of American Biography* Accessed at <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=H000167>; Hannegan, Edward Allen, Senate Years of Service: 1843-1849, Party: Democrat, a Representative and a Senator from Indiana; born in



Hamilton County, Ohio, June 25, 1807; moved with his parents to Bourbon County, Ky., the same year; attended the public schools; studied law, taught school and worked as a farm hand; admitted to the bar in 1827; moved to Indiana and settled in Covington, where he commenced the practice of law; member, State house of representatives 1832-1833, 1841-1842; elected as a Democrat to the Twenty-third and Twenty-fourth Congresses (March 4, 1833-March 3, 1837); was not a candidate for renomination in 1836; resumed the practice of law; elected as a Democrat to the United States Senate in 1842 and served from March 4, 1843, to March 3, 1849; unsuccessful candidate for renomination in 1848; chairman, Committee on Private Land Claims (Twenty-ninth Congress), Committee on Roads and Canals (Twenty-ninth and Thirtieth Congresses), Committee on Foreign Relations (Thirtieth Congress); United States Minister to Prussia 1849-1850; resumed the practice of law in Covington; moved to St. Louis, Mo., in 1857, where he continued to practice law until his death by overdose of morphine on February 25, 1859; interment in Woodlawn Cemetery, Terre Haute, Ind.”; “Indiana U. S. Senator,” *Centerville Wayne County Register*, February 1, 1843. Hannegan elected at U. S. Senate; “Senatorial Election,” *Centerville Wayne County Register*, February 8, 1843. Hannegan is elected U. S. Senate for nine years.

“The Canal Wars,” *Delphi Carroll Express*, October 3, 1846; This article does not name Hannegan. “Disgraceful Mob Headed by U. S. Senator,” *Logansport Telegraph*, October 17, 1846; Hannegan is publically named for his involvement and from then on he is in every account of the event; “Disgraceful Affair,” *Fort Wayne Times and People’s Press*; October 24, 1846,

¹¹ “Disgraceful Mob Headed by U. S. Senator,” *Logansport Telegraph*, October 17, 1846. Article states, “The band of ruffians was headed by E. A. Hannegan, U. S. Senator from Indiana, who gave orders with all the pomp of a Bonaparte. His actions throughout are condemned by everyone in the region.”; “Disgraceful Affair,” *Fort Wayne Times and People’s Press*; October 24, 1846. Article states, “. . . [the perceived] Cutting off the supply of water displeased the Covington folks, where upon a meeting was held and two or three hundred persons formed into band, who, armed with pistols, knives and clubs, and headed by E. A. Hannegan, U. S. Senator, preceded to Attica. . . The whole affair, as described by the Press, was a very disgraceful one, and one in which an honorable Senator ought not to have been found.”; “Senator Hannegan,” *Centerville Wayne County Record*,” p. 2, c.1. -----

¹² Schmidt, p. 19. Article states, “Ironically, neither side one the battle. The water that was let into the Covington portion of the canal was absorbed so fast by the dry canal bed that there was not enough water to float a raft. Attica’s portion was also dry. They both lost the ability to reach eastern markets.”

¹³ Fisher, “Report of the Superintendent of the Wabash and Erie Canal to the General Assembly, December 8, 1846; History of Wabash County, Indiana, 1884. (Paw Paw Township by Professor E. Tucker, pages 248 & 249). Chicago, Illinois. USA: John Morris, 1884. Extracted, reformatted and submitted by: David R. Guinnup, (03/12/2009). At U. S. Gen Web Project accessed 1/15 at http://www.ingenweb.org/inwabash/bio/bio_e-f.html; Stearn Fisher was the Superintendent at the time of the event. The following is from a secondary source, the History of Wabash County, “. . . His occupation as a teacher was only a means to an end. He desired to become a scholarly, business man, to aid himself in the accomplishment of which he appropriated a portion of his time to teaching, and from the proceeds prepared the way for a life of usefulness and distinction by close application to those departments of study which he conceived to be best calculated to lead him directly life toward the hoped-for position in life. Laboring during the day to secure the means of subsistence, he studied at night after night, sometimes until the small hours of morning, to make more rapid advancement in his predatory course. Afterwards, he engaged as a common laborer on the Wabash & Erie Canal, during the early stages of its construction, devoting his nights, as before, to preparation for the practical duties of a civil engineer on that most important thoroughfare. Perseveringly he labored on, and erelong the ideal of his life was attained, and he was elevated to the position of assistant civil engineer and subsequently employed as such, holding the place until the completion of the canal. As an engineer in laying out and directing the construction of public works in detail, he had few equals and no superiors. With the excellent record he had made



for himself in view, he was afterward made superintendent, and held that position until the canal passed into the hands of the bondholders in 1847. Again, in 1852-54, when the projection of the Lake Erie, Wabash & St. Louis Railroad through this county had been determined upon, he superintended the survey and location of its line, with the fidelity characteristic of his life and experience. . . Mr. Fisher died at his home in the city on the 26th of July, 1877, in the seventy-third year of his age.”

¹⁴ “Disgraceful Mob Headed by U. S. Senator,” *Logansport Telegraph*, October 17, 1846, p. 1, c. 2. Article states, “When the mob first made its appearance there were but a few citizens about the canal. The mob, after having succeeded in opening the gates, was not satisfied and they knocked down two of our unolending [?] citizens, whom we thought at the time were as dead as ever a beef was knocked; these two Mr. S. Herr and Mr. E. McDonald both fell into the canal, and as they fell the mob cried “kill him, “drown him,” which they came very near doing. Three or four others were struck but not as much injured.”; “Mob,” *Brookville American*, October 23, 1846, p. 1. Article states, “The mob opened them [flood gates] without much resistance-they only having to use *knock down* arguments in a few cases.”; “Disgraceful Affair,” Fort Wayne Times and People’s press, “ October 24, 1846, p. 1, c. 5. Article states, “. . . During the affair, a young man named McDonald crossed the canal to where the Covington band were stationed, when he was instantly struck a blow, an informant says by Hannegan) which quickly being followed by a blow from a club knocked him over the bank into the canal. One of McDonald’s friends in attempting to rescue him, was knocked down, stabbed, and otherwise injured. At length McDonald was dragged from the canal. He revived, but is suffering severely from his wounds.”

¹⁵ See Footnote 12.

¹⁶ *Delphi Carroll Express*, December 5, [Saturday] 1846, p. 2, c. 2. “Article states, “The first Canal Boat arrived at Covington Monday [November 30] of last week-Great demonstrations of public joy were had on that occasion. It will form a new era in their commercial history of which they may well be proud.”