

Remembering Hawpatch Veterans: The McConnells

General Douglas MacArthur in his Farewell Address to a joint session of Congress in April of 1951 said, "Old soldiers never die; they just fade away." Thanks to the efforts of Jean Fremion-McKibben and the Veterans Headstone Project (VHP), the memory of several noteworthy Hawpatch soldiers is not fading away. The broken headstones which once stood upright for William McConnell and his grandson William A. McConnell were recently replaced in the Gerber Cemetery west of Topeka. The new McConnell headstones were completed in collaboration with the Topeka Area Historical Society who are preserving the original stones.

William McConnell

William McConnell was born July 30, 1780, in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, to James (a captain in the Revolutionary War) and Rebecca McConnell. In 1806, William married Agnes in Muskingum County, Ohio. The McConnells would welcome the birth of James, Mary Ann, Thomas C., Alexander, William T, and Rebecca A. into their family. In 1810, William built the first sawmill in Muskingum County powered by oxen.

He served as a captain under Joseph Vance (13th Governor of Ohio) commanding riflemen in the event of Indian attacks. When the War of 1812 broke out, Vance's Ohio Militia was incorporated into the Ohio Militia.

In the fall of 1832, William and Agnes purchased the northeast quarter of Section 35 of Eden Township in LaGrange County, Indiana, where they built a log home. William played a prominent role in the development and growth of Hawpatch (Topeka). According to R.H. Rerick's "1882 History of LaGrange County, Indiana" (F.A. Battey & Co.)

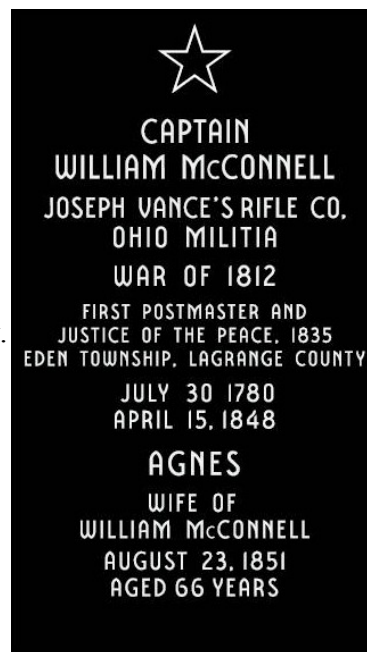
"The McConnells had a remarkable leaning for public affairs, and since then there have been few matters of public interest in and about the Haw Patch in which they did not have a prominent part."

McConnell is said to have been the community's first Justice of the Peace. He performed the first recorded marriage in Topeka on February 8, 1835, when Minerva Gaines married Norman Sessions. Their son (Norman Jr.) would later be mustered into the Indiana 44th Regiment as a musician on November 22, 1861. A photo of the 44th Indiana shows Sessions standing in front of a drum. On November 17, 1832, Mary Ann McConnell was married to Isaac Spencer presumably by her father.

On May 27th, 1837, William was appointed postmaster and mail service began in the community. Known as the Haw Patch

Post Office, the "1882 History of LaGrange County, Indiana" (Ibid.) notes that McConnell operated out of a store where he *"kept a small stock of goods."*

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The Hawpatch Presbyterian Church was organized and met in the McConnell home. Dr. John and Mary Denny along with the Isaac Cavin and Seymour Moses were also members. Cavin laid out, plotted and named the town of Ligonier in 1835, and Moses was a school teacher in Perry Township in Noble County. Another member was Dr. John Brown, the first doctor in Hawpatch, who was in fact a Congregationalist. It is said that the Congregational and the Presbyterian denominations had an agreement not to start a church if the other group already had one in the village. Brown, first cousin to the John Brown who raided Harpers Ferry, joined the church in 1837, and was ordained a ruling elder in 1840.

No doubt William McConnell has some very interesting conversations with Denny's father, Walter, who as a decorated hero in both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. One can only image the war stories. The elder Denny died on March 31, 1842, at the age of 91.

A natural rivalry developed between McConnell and Robert Latta the other prominent figure in the settling of Eden Township. When it came to politics Latta was a Whig and McConnell Democrat. In matters of faith McConnell was a Presbyterian and Latta a Methodist. Rerick says that, "the contest early showed itself in the purchase of land, and the result was that each was the owner of about eighteen eighty-acres tracts, which was considerably more forest land than was profitable in those days." (Ibid. page 186)

The McConnells created a family cemetery in 1836, when their son Thomas died at the age of twenty-six. William McConnell died at his home south of Eden Chapel on April 13, 1848, at the age of 67 and was buried in the family cemetery. Prior to his death the farm had been sold to his son William T. McConnell. Agnes died in 1851, at the age of sixty-six. On April 17, 1852, William T., who married Rhoda Moses in December of 1846, deeded the cemetery to LaGrange County.

Today known as the Gerber Cemetery, it is located across the road from the Eden Cemetery west of Topeka.. When or why the cemetery came to be known as Gerber is still a matter to be discovered.

William A. McConnell

William A. McConnell, grandson of the above mentioned William McConnell, was born in 1839 to James and Elizabeth McConnell in Perry Township (Noble Co.).



Before and After

James and Elizabeth (Shoup) were married in February of 1837.

William A. was a Civil War veteran serving in Company U of the 30th Indiana Infantry, mustering in on January 25, 1862. If or where he saw action is a matter yet to be researched.

It should be noted that the records in the Allen County Public Library's Genealogy Center differ. They show William A. being born in 1843, and dying in 1862. They also list him as having served in Company E. However, the U.S. Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865, confirm he joined Company U on 25 January 1862 and according to his death records, he died in 1870 in Eden Township.

The original headstone had become badly worn and was not legible. According to Fremion-McKibben, the stone was actually in the wrong place, being located in front of another family member's headstone. Uncertain of where the stone was originally, the new marker is located close to his grandparents, William and Agnes.

To date, VHP has completed 31 headstone projects

since it began in August of 2011. Next year 28 projects across the county are scheduled for completion as funds are available. At least one of these projects will be in the Eden Cemetery. Tax deductible donations can be made to the Veterans Headstone Project through the LaGrange County Community Foundation, 109 E. Central Ave., Ste. 3, LaGrange, IN 46761.

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|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Answers: | 1) Chambersburg, PA |
| 2) James | |
| 3) Thomas McConnell; 1836 | |
| 4) Leon Emmert & Donnie Fought | |
| 5) Wilson | |

“Track Talk”



It's Membership Time.....!

It's time to renew your Topeka Area Historical Society 2014 membership. Your \$10.00 membership helps us do so much. As a member of the Topeka Area Historical Society:

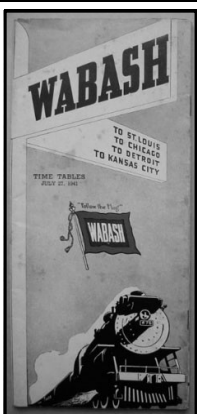
- You will receive the quarterly “Mile 146” newsletter.
- You help us provide copies of the “Mile 146” newsletter to each 3rd Grader at the Topeka Elementary School.
- You help us maintain the Depot Museum and preserve Topeka's rich heritage.

2014 Officers Elected

At the Annual Dinner Meeting of the Topeka Area Historical Society on November 19th, members chose the Officers and Board of Directors for the coming year.

President: Harold Gingerich
 Vice President: Doris Haggard
 Secretary: Cathy Strawser
 Treasurer: Janice Gingerich
 Board Member: Keith Bobeck (3 years)

The remaining Board Members are Michael Zehr with 1 year remaining on his term and Ezra Miller with 2 years.



The Mile 146 Quiz:

1. Where was William McConnell born?
2. What was William & Rebecca McConnell's oldest son's name?
3. Who was the first person buried in the Gerber Cemetery and in what year?
4. Who graduated from THS with Willie McConnell?
5. What was Cecil McConnell's middle name?



Schedule of Events:

January 21, 2014 ***Railroading on the Wabash
Fourth District - Victor Baird***
 Topeka Branch Library

March 18, 2014 TBA
 Topeka Branch Library

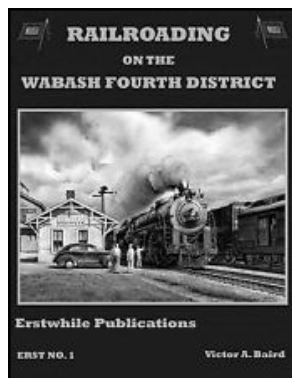
The Depot Museum is closed for the winter. Visit us online at: www.topekahistoricalsociety.com



Soon to be released:

“Railroading on the Wabash Fourth District”

Victor Baird has just completed an exciting new book on the Wabash Railroad that is filled with photos



and references to Topeka, sure to be a classic. Copies of Victor's book will be available at our January 21st Topeka Area Historical Society meeting for \$39.95.

Topeka Area Historical Society
 P.O. Box 33
 Topeka, Indiana 46571

www.topekahistoricalsociety.com

2013 Board of Directors

Harold D. Gingerich, President
 Doris Haggard, Vice President
 Cathy Strawser, Secretary
 Janice Gingerich, Treasurer
 Keith Bobeck, Director
 Ezra Miller, Director
 Michael Zehr, Director

Museum Curator

Susie Parker

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Hawpatch History Detectives Investigative Report

Who are These McConnell

Who are these people in the photograph and when was it taken? What is their story? Where might this house have stood? Inquiring minds want to know!



All we know is what is written on the back of the picture. The baby is *Nancy Lou West*. The man standing to the right is "*Cecil*". The older couple is listed as "*Grandpa & Grandma McConnell*".

Thanks to some excellent research by Sharon Turner (THS Class of 1960) we have some answers. According to 1900 Census records for Clearspring Township, Cecil McConnell was 12 years old at that time. His parents were

listed as Charles (47 yrs) and Elizabeth (36 yrs) McConnell. Their other children were: Clarence age 7, and Lena who was one. So, the *Grandpa & Grandma* in the photo might be Charles and Elizabeth.

Turner found something interesting in the 1910 Census. Cecil and Clarence are both listed, but Lena is now called Ethel (age 11), and Herman (age 9), and Charles Jr. (age 5) have been added to the family.

According to Topeka High School Alumni records, Ethel McConnell graduated in the Class of 1918. She married a man by the name of Clark. Herman J. McConnell graduated in 1919. In 1941 Helen McConnell Brown (perhaps Cecil's daughter?) also graduated.

Cecil's oldest son Willis, known to his friends as Willie, graduated from Topeka with the Class of 1942. Two other notable members of that class were, now retired missionary Leon Emmert and the late Donnie Fought.

Dorothy Fought, Donnie's wife, remembers that Willie McConnell's family lived on the first farm just south of Emma on the east side of the road. Unlike Donnie and his two brothers, when World War II came along, Willie did not join the war effort because he had to stay home and take care of the family farm. Dorothy said Willie had two daughters; Patty was living in Goshen and Sharon lived in Union, Michigan.

Dorothy also remembers that Cecil had a son John who died shortly after coming home from the service, following a surgery.

Cecil Wilson McConnell was born on February 29, 1888, and died in November of 1969 at the age of 81. He is buried in the Oakridge Cemetery in Goshen along with his wife Nettie (1896-1986).

HC

Ada Yoder: "Oh just a minute, let me look across the street and see if he is at the coffee shop."



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