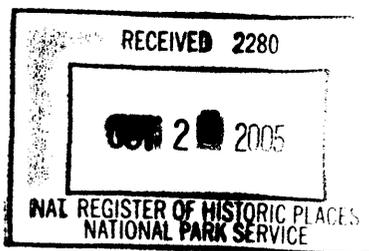


**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form**



1305

OCT 2 2005

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Vermilyea Inn Historic District

other names/site number Jesse Vermilyea House

003-021-70038

**2. Location**

street & number 13501 Redding Dr N/A  not for publication

city or town Fort Wayne N/A  vicinity

state Indiana code IN county Allen code 003 zip code 46814

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title  
[Signature]  
**Indiana Department of Natural Resources**

Date

10.20.05

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

[Signature]  
**Edson H. Beall**

12.6.05

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box)

- building
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
	0	sites
3	3	structures
0	0	objects
4	3	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling  
 DOMESTIC: Hotel  
 TRANSPORTATION: Water-Related

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

EARLY REPUBLIC: Federal

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: Limestone  
 walls BRICK  
 WOOD: Weatherboard  
 roof WOOD: Shake  
 other EARTH  
 WOOD

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1832-1876

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Vermilyea, Jesse

McMachen, Joseph

Cook, James

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

ARCH, Inc.; Allen Co.-Fort Wayne Historical Society

Vermilyea Inn Historic District  
Name of Property

Allen IN  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 20 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	16	641000	4541440	3	16	641560	4541120
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	16	641580	4541320	4	16	641000	4541240

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Angela M. Quinn, Executive Director  
organization ARCH, Inc. date 05-03-2005  
street & number 437 E. Berry St., Suite 204 telephone 219/ 426-5117  
city or town Fort Wayne state IN zip code 46802

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

### Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

## Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Todd and Cathy Freeland  
street & number 13501 Redding Drive telephone 260/ 673-0212  
city or town Fort Wayne state IN zip code 46814

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Section 7 Page 1 *Vermilyea Inn Historic District, Allen County, Indiana*

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**Narrative Description**

The Vermilyea Inn Historic District consists of the Vermilyea Inn, the visible earthworks of the Wabash and Erie Canal, and the timber platform of the Wabash and Erie Canal aqueduct over the Aboite River. The district also includes several non-contributing resources. In all, there are three contributing structures (canal and basin remnants, canal abutments in Aboite Creek bed area, timber platform of the canal aqueduct) and one contributing building (the inn). There are three non-contributing resources in the boundary (Old Lower Huntington Road Bridge abutments, interurban bridge abutments, and a recent gas pipeline). All resources are located in sections 31 and 32, Aboite Township, Allen County, Indiana. Each is described separately.

The Vermilyea Inn is a 2 story, Federal style three-bay brick house with a scant 2 story, four-bay gabled wing, built in 1839. To the original home was added on the west wall a 1 ½ story wood and brick garage addition c.1945. On the east side of the original home a c. 1945 shed addition which housed a bathroom has been removed, and a 1-½-story brick addition was added c.2000, at an angle to the original house. This addition holds a new kitchen and attached garage. The owner intended for the project to comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

The original front entrance—facing south to Redding Drive-- is on the east side of the south wall of the primary 2 story façade, and has a classical door surround with sidelights and entablature. Two windows are located to the right of the door. The windows—many have been recently rebuilt—are wood with 6/6 glazing, and there are three windows located on the second floor. Many of the original windows were replaced with vinyl windows during the 1970's. The owner has recently removed these vinyl windows and installed new wood windows that match remaining original wood windows, and some damaged remnants of the originals found in the barn. All windows have solid wood paneled shutters with working hardware. Lintels and sills are stone. A narrow frieze board is found near the roofline. The roof is wood shingles. The foundation is of fieldstone. (photos 1 & 2)

To the east of the primary façade is a scant 2 story wing, also built 1839. Four wood-frame windows are found on both first and second floor, spaced evenly across the façade. All windows have stone lintels and sills. Second story windows are original, 3/3 windows. First floor windows had been removed by a previous owner during the 1970s, and replaced with vinyl. The current owner recently removed the vinyl windows, and installed custom wood-frame windows, built according to remaining original 6/6 wood frame windows. All windows have solid paneled

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shutters with working hardware. A narrow friezeboard is found near the roofline. The roof is wood shake.

To the west of the original entrance on the south side is located the west addition, c. 1945. First floor walls are common bond brick, and match the original brick in size and color. The second floor walls are vertical wood siding. Four windows are located on the second floor, with 3/3 glazing. On the first floor, two garage door openings remain, and the middle door has been in-filled with brick. The north side of this addition has wood vertical siding on the second floor with four 3/3 windows, and brick walls on the first with three garage door openings with wood garage doors. ( photo 4)

The north façade of the home underwent a substantial alteration during the c. 1940-1950 period. When US 24 was rerouted to the north side of the property the owners created a new main entrance on the north façade of the original full 2 story section of the home. A full 2-story portico was added, with pediment and entablature, supported by 4 square wood columns. The 3-bay façade openings have been maintained, with three 6/6 windows on the second floor, and two 6/6 windows and door on the first floor. The door is located on the east side of the façade. This once-simple rear door was enhanced during the 1940-1950 period with the addition of a pediment. Under the cover of the portico on the floor is located a trap-door-style entrance to the cellar. (photos 5 & 6).

On the north façade, in the c. 1839 scant 2 story wing to the west of the portico is located a shed roof over a small porch area and the original north doorway. Four original 3/3 woodframe windows are located on the second floor, evenly spaced across the façade. On the first floor are found three windows and a door. Windows are new custom-built wood frame windows that match original windows remaining on the house. The original windows had been removed during the 1970s by the previous owner, and replaced by vinyl. All lintels and sills are stone. The 2 panel (vertical panels) door is located in the second opening from the west. (photo 5)

To the west of this is located the new addition, constructed at an angle to the original body of the home, to identify it as new construction. Common bond brick, 6/6 wood windows and other features match the original home in size and color. ( photo 3) The addition holds a kitchen, mud - room, and garage. A large patio/deck is located on the south side of the new addition.

Jesse Vermilyea opened his home as a tavern and inn, and he also served as the first postmaster for Aboite. The interior of the home retains several features that convey its use as an early site of commerce related to the Wabash and Erie Canal. On the northwest wall of the central hallway is

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Section 7 Page 3 *Vermilyea Inn Historic District, Allen County, Indiana*

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located an early door which originally lead to the tavern area. This 2 panel walnut door has a large bullet embedded in it, from the era of its use as a tavern door. The tavern era is also evident in the deeply scratched and pitted window sills in the dining room, believed to have been the result of being used by guests while eating and drinking. (photos 7, 10, and 11)

Double parlors are located to the west of the hallway. Each is trimmed in walnut. Large 2 panel doors are located between the two parlors. Windows and doors are trimmed with shouldered or "eared" architraves. Baseboards have cyma molding on the upper edge and ¼ round moldings at the base. Fireplaces are centered on the west wall of each parlor. The mantel in each parlor has wide squared pilasters and wide entablature, topped with a shallow pediment-shaped molding. The north parlor features walnut cupboards to either side of the fireplace. The south parlor features a cupboard to the north of the fireplace. To the south is located a built-in desk and cabinet of walnut, with multiple cubbies, used by Vermilyea in his capacity as postmaster. The north parlor includes an original oil painting of one of the Vermilyea's daughters. Both parlors also include oil paintings of Jesse and Maria Vermilyea; reproductions of the original Horace Rockwell paintings housed at the Allen County Public Library. (photos 8 & 9)

To the east of the central hallway is located the Dining Room, originally used as a tavern for canal-travelers. Woodwork in this room is original to the date of construction. Openings are framed in architrave surrounds that lack more formal shouldered treatment of other rooms. Wide wood windowsills still retain scratches, dents, and knife carvings from the canal period, when the sills were most likely used by customers to hold their mugs. A fireplace has been restored on the west wall of this room. (photos 10 & 11)

To the east of the dining room in the lower part of the 1830s wing, is located the early kitchen. The kitchen had been modernized during the 1940-1950 renovations and again in the 1970s, leaving little original trim or details. A massive fireplace with a large opening is original, and is located on the east wall of this room. An iron stove was installed very early into this space, with a date of 1832 visible on the door. The fireplace was faced with "colonial" bricks at some point during the 1960's, and plans to remove them are underway. The north wall has the original north exterior door, and a window. Baseboards, and window and door trim have been recently added, as have applied shoulder-corner wall panels, and a ceiling cornice. To the east of this early kitchen is located the c. 2000 addition, and a doorway from this room opens to the modern kitchen. A small half-bath has also been added, with a doorway next to the massive fireplace. (photos 12 & 13)

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Traveling up the stairs from the central hallway, one finds a small door that leads to a finished third story attic space, remodeled in the 1960s. Its use during the period of significance is unknown. At the top of the stairs are found two bedrooms on the west, a modern bathroom on the south, and a large bedroom on the east. (photo 14)

The west bedrooms are similar in size to the double parlors located below, and double walnut doors are located on the connecting wall between the two. Both rooms have fireplaces centered on the west wall, with cupboards on either side. The mantels have shouldered or "eared" architraves. The north cupboard in the north bedroom has been converted into a doorway to access the west addition. This north bedroom is trimmed in walnut. The south bedroom is completely trimmed in butternut, the only place in the house where this wood is found. Door and window trim in both rooms have shouldered architraves. (photos 15 & 16)

An additional bedroom is found to the east of the hallway. The room extends through the entire upper space of the scant 2 story wing to hold a master bedroom suite. The ceiling of the wing was raised 3 inches to allow the bedroom ceiling to expand across the entire space at the same height. At the east wall of this large bedroom is found a doorway to the modern addition, with a master suite bathroom. (photos 17, 18, 19)

The boundary cuts around two buildings on the Vermilyea property: a bank barn and small outbuilding. Both buildings do not contribute to the time frame or areas of significance of the property.

To the east of the most recent house addition is found a large non-contributing bank barn c. 1900. This wood-frame, side entry barn has a gable roof. The ground floor houses horses and chickens, and the main floor is primarily used for storage. A small entry window is located on the south façade near the gable peak. Additional small windows are found on the ground level. (Photos 20 and 21)

To the south of the bank barn is found a noncontributing small outbuilding, c. 1900. This building is one story, side-gabled structure has board and batten siding and several three-over-three windows. Its original use is unknown. The building sits between the barn and Redding Drive located to its south. (Photos 22 and 23)

The earthworks of the Wabash and Erie Canal are located to the south of the Vermilyea Inn and the small outbuilding, across Redding Drive, and can be seen from the south parlor windows. (Photo 24). The canal bed has been obliterated to the west of Aboite Road, and is currently used

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Section 7 & 8 Page 5 *Vermilyea Inn Historic District, Allen County, Indiana*

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as a cornfield. The location of canal towpath and subsequent interurban track are marked with modern utility lines. A large canal basin also existed at this site, and there has been speculation that a lock was located at this point as well (although most canal historians agree that no lock existed.) Remnant portions of the basin can be found in the low area to the north and east of the towpath/interurban track/utility poles and Redding Drive, just west of the large man-made hill that extends from the Vermilyea Inn to Redding Drive. From the visible canal earthworks, one can look west, following the utility lines that were erected on the canal towpath, towards the Aqueduct. The utility lines cross the Aboite River at the site of aqueduct. (Photos 25 and 26) The boundary includes as little area as possible to connect basin and aqueduct.

A portion of the Wabash and Erie Canal aqueduct is found in the Aboite River. The structure is a large platform of huge timbers, some of them 18 inches square, which lie in the riverbed. It was originally built as a timber foundation platform to extend beneath the entire aqueduct, to create a stable foundation for the stonework. This timber foundation was built below water level to prevent decay of the wood.<sup>1</sup> Along with the aqueduct platform, several other structures exist at the site, including abutments for the interurban bridge, canal abutments, and abutments for the old Lower Huntington Road Bridge. All lie within the canal bed/towpath area and are included in the boundary. Modern utility lines are strung overhead, and a gas-line is suspended across the river as well. (Photos 27-30).

**Statement of Significance**

The Vermilyea Inn Historic District is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under criterion A. "Sites that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history," for its association with canal **transportation**, and its role as a center of **commerce**. The Vermilyea Inn Historic District is located within the "Portage" area between the Wabash and Maumee River systems, which was the original focus of canal plans for northeastern Indiana. The Vermilyea Inn Historic District includes three sites historically related to the Wabash and Erie Canal that are extant. The Jesse Vermilyea Inn site provides an exceptional example of a canal-era home built for commerce using the canal. The Vermilyea Inn is located to the north of remnant earthworks of the Wabash and Erie Canal and to the east of the remaining portions of the Aboite River Aqueduct by which the Wabash and Erie Canal crossed this small stream. These three provide a rare collection of Wabash and Erie Canal-related resources that retain sufficient integrity to represent the canal era in Allen County, Indiana. It is

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<sup>1</sup> In Castaldi, *Wabash and Erie Canal Notebook*, pg. 30.

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rare to find the extant residence of a canal contractor in direct association with a visible portion of canal that he helped to construct. Further, these canal sections were among the first awarded statewide by the Indiana Canal Commissioners, and were constructed in the important location of the portage that connected the Wabash and Maumee water systems. As such, the proposed Vermilyea Inn Historic District is significant in the history of the State of Indiana.

Allen County is situated in northeastern Indiana. The center and eastern portions of the county are drained by tributaries of the Maumee River, which rise in the center of downtown Fort Wayne at the confluence of the St. Joseph and St. Mary's Rivers. Streams associated with the Eel and Aboite Rivers, both of which are tributaries of the Wabash River, drain the western portions of the county. Historically, an area of approximately 10 miles separated navigable portions of both river systems. This portage area consisted of an extensive wetland area in western Wayne and much of Aboite Townships.

The Vermilyea Inn Historic District is located approximately twelve miles west of Fort Wayne, not far from the western end of the portage area. It is in the far western part of Allen County, within a mile of both Huntington and Whitley Counties. It is located adjoining both the older Upper Huntington Road and the modern 4-lane US 24 that replaced it in the 1940s.

**The Portage and Transportation**

At the dawning of the American Republic there was recognition that the newly won Northwest Territory included transportation barriers that threatened to stop westward expansion. The only possible transportation routes were those by water, and American settlement grew along these waterways. The "Wabash Trade Route," traversing the Maumee River from Lake Erie, to the Wabash-Ohio-Mississippi River system, was already the most prominent transportation route for Native Americans and early European traders. Miami War Chief Meshikinnoquah (The Little Turtle) described the portage point between the two as: "That glorious gate...through which all the words of our chiefs had to pass from north to south and from east to west."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In *On the Heritage Trail*. Fort Wayne: ARCH, Inc. 1994.

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Section 8 Page 7 *Vermilyea Inn Historic District, Allen County, Indiana*

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Native Americans had used the portage area since prehistoric times, with the earliest record of human activity in the area dated to about 11,000 years ago.<sup>3</sup> The Miami permanently took control of the portage during the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The National Register nomination for the Canal House/John Brown Stone Warehouse Fort Wayne, Allen County, Indiana describes the importance of this waterway:

Fort Wayne has an important place in the history of transportation in the Great Lakes and Midwest regions. Its location at the confluence of three rivers, the St. Joseph, St. Mary's, and Maumee, made it a central point for travel on the rivers by both Native Americans and European traders and settlers. The site was a gathering place for Native American tribes for centuries, and was a traditional trade center for the Miami, Pottawatomie, Wea, and other tribes which inhabited the Great Lakes region. The three rivers provided access to the Great Lakes and much of Ohio, as well as northern and central Indiana. In addition, a short, swampy 7-8 mile portage over a continental divide, between the St. Mary's River and the Little Wabash River to the west, gave access to the Illinois lands and to southern Indiana, as well as to the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. This portage was the only place where travelers by boat had to go overland when making their way from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. The extensive natural transportation network gave the site of Fort Wayne distinct advantages for commerce and settlement. The Miami village of Kekionga flourished at the site, as the French moved into the area from Canada in the early eighteenth century. French traders inhabited the area, and the French established a succession of frontier outposts.

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<sup>3</sup> Personal communication from Andrew A. White, IPFW Archaeological Survey, April 29, 2005. "People may have first moved into the Great Lakes area, including northeastern Indiana may have occurred slightly after people moved into the Ohio Valley. The presence in local collections of a few potentially very early Paleo-Indian artifacts made from southern chert sources is consistent with a small trickle of Clovis period peoples into the area, as is the absence of a large number of "classic" Clovis points. The much stronger representation of slightly later Paleo-Indian points in the area. Thus "settlement" of the Great Lakes may have begun around 11,000 years ago. The raw materials of Early Paleo-Indian points from the region suggest a high degree of mobility. Tools made from distant sources in northeastern Ohio and southern Indiana are present, suggesting these earliest peoples traveled long distances during as a regular part of their lives. The Early Paleo-Indian groups that utilized northeastern Indiana were the same groups that utilized northern Ohio, southern Michigan, and central Indiana."

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Section 8 Page 8 *Vermilyea Inn Historic District, Allen County, Indiana*

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The American fort from which the community derived its name was built in 1794.<sup>4</sup>

In 1790, newly elected as president, George Washington was convinced that control of the Wabash-Maumee Portage was paramount in settling the new territory. He ordered General Josiah Harmar to the portage site, to take the Miami primary village of Kekionga. Harmar, with US regular troops and Kentucky Infantry, lost in two decisive battles against the Miami October 19-22, 1790. Frustrated by the defeat of the United States military in the first campaign of the infant nation, President Washington sent General Arthur St. Clair in 1791 to accomplish what Harmar could not. St. Clair never made it into what is now Indiana, as his army was attacked near Fort Recovery, Ohio, at dawn On November 3, 1791. This would be the worst defeat ever experienced by American forces against Native Americans (more fatalities than even "Custer's Last Stand" at Little Big Horn).

Determined to control the Maumee-Wabash Portage, and consequently, the primary transportation route through the entire Northwest Territory, President Washington called upon General Anthony Wayne to organize a new campaign against the Miami Confederation. Wayne trained his troops for two years, and during the summer of 1794 won a series of battles, as they traveled north from Cincinnati, building fortifications for troops and supplies. The campaign culminated in the decisive Battle of Fallen Timbers, near Toledo, winning the Maumee-Wabash Route—the "Glorious Gate" for the Americans.

Wayne's victorious Legion advanced to the site of Kekionga, where they built their most extensive fortification. On Oct. 22, 1794, the fort was dedicated Fort Wayne, and occupied by the military. Soon an Indian Agent was appointed to the site, and it became a center for trade between the United States and the Miami and other nations.

The site continued to be the primary spot for transportation. A Miami woman named Tacumwah controlled the portage point, and her son Jean Baptiste de Richardville joined her. At his death in 1841, Richardville was Indiana's wealthiest man. Control for Fort Wayne continued to be put to question as well. During the War of 1812 the fort was under siege for several months by Tecumseh's troops and British, finally broken by the approach of William Henry Harrison's forces. The fall of the British and Tecumseh at Detroit brought the war in the Northwest to a close, and the Wabash-Maumee Portage permanently came under control of the United States.

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<sup>4</sup> John Brown Stone Warehouse, Allen County, IN, Section 8, Page 9, Statement of Significance.

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Section 8 Page 9 *Vermilyea Inn Historic District, Allen County, Indiana*

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The United States would continue to have a military presence at the site until 1817, when the fort was vacated.

**The Need for a Canal at the Portage**

Although many noted the potential for a Wabash-Maumee canal route early, the Indiana Territorial government was slow to join the national movement for canal transportation. Following a disastrous first attempt near the Falls of the Ohio in 1805, legislators avoided canal projects until 1817 when a second canal company was authorized to commence construction at the Falls. After considerable expenses, this effort, too, failed, when it was determined that a canal on the Kentucky bank would be more effective and less expensive.<sup>5</sup>

Canal Historian Ronald Shaw describes the location of the state's third effort.

The historic Wabash trade route, which ran southwest from the Maumee River in Ohio, provided the natural path for the longest single canal in the Canal Era, the 468-mile-long Wabash and Erie Canal. The ease of connecting the Maumee and the Little Wabash rivers over the seven-or-eight-mile portage near Fort Wayne made such a canal almost foreordained. Learning of the plan, (New York Governor) De Witt Clinton wrote to Benjamin Stickney in Indiana, 'I have found the way to get into Lake Erie and you have shown me how to get out of it... You have extended my project six hundred miles.'<sup>6</sup>

In 1819 frontier government surveyor James Riley, on his own, arrived at the site of Fort Wayne, and surveyed the area, and suggested a possible route for a canal crossing the Maumee-Wabash portage. Then in 1827 a Congressional Land Grant was awarded Indiana, with sales to fund the completion of a canal to connect the Ohio River with Toledo, using the Maumee-Wabash Portage.

In 1828 the Indiana Legislature elected David Burr of Washington County, Samuel Hanna of Allen County and Robert John of Franklin County, as Canal Commissioners, and assigned them the task of planning a canal to connect the Maumee River to the Wabash River. Samuel Hanna

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<sup>5</sup> Fatout, Paul. *Indiana Canals*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1972. pp. 6-21.

<sup>6</sup> Shaw, Ronald E. *Canals for a Nation: The Canal Era in the United States 1790-1860*. Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1990. Pg. 135. Benjamin Stickney was the Indian Agent at Fort Wayne.

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and David Burr accomplished the survey of a feeder line from the St. Joseph River, north of Fort Wayne, to the proposed canal route at the portage on the west side of Fort Wayne. After proving the possibility of the proposed canal, Hanna and Burr then urged its construction.<sup>7</sup> They submitted a bid of \$235,864.59 to complete the canal from the Maumee River at Fort Wayne, to the mouth of the Little River to the legislature during its 1829 session, but no action was taken.<sup>8</sup>

In 1830 the Indiana legislature approved the sale of public lands to fund the canal, and on February 22, 1832, groundbreaking took place at Fort Wayne, for the first section of the Wabash and Erie Canal—located along the portage, between the Maumee and Little Wabash Rivers.

Canal Commissioner David Burr, born 1796 in Fairfield Connecticut, arrived in Indiana sometime prior to 1818, and settled at Salem, Washington County. In 1818 he married Phoebe Vermilyea at Salem, Washington County. In 1818 both of Phoebe Vermilyea Burr's parents died, and the young couple undoubtedly took her nine younger siblings under wing, including nine-year-old Jesse Vermilyea.<sup>9</sup> David Burr's involvement in the lives of his Vermilyea in-laws can be seen in the number of nieces and nephews named in his honor by the Vermilyea children. Jesse and Maria Vermilyea named their first child "David Burr" Vermilyea, and Jesse's siblings contributed another four with "David Burr" or "Burr" in the name.<sup>10</sup>

According to a 1914 Wabash County history, Burr was a native of Connecticut, was postmaster at Salem, Indiana, 1817-21 then moved to Brownstown (Jackson County.) In 1826, he began trading with the Miami in the headquarters buildings erected at Paradise Springs (in Wabash) for the treaty negotiations. He opened an inn, which was well known in northern Indiana. With Hugh Hanna he laid out the town of Wabash in 1834, and was the first postmaster. Burr was one of the

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<sup>7</sup> Fatout, pp. 41-42.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>9</sup> By 1820 the young couple had moved to Brownstown, Jackson Co., and the census suggests that Phoebe's three sisters lived in their household. See 1820 US Census, Population Schedule, Jackson, County, Indiana, page 263. National Archives Micropublication M33, Roll 13.

<sup>10</sup> Jesse Vermilyea Ancestry File, found online at [www.Familysearch.org](http://www.Familysearch.org). This is the official site of the Genealogy collection of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

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most vocal supporters of the Wabash and Erie Canal. He is the one who prepared the official report of the canal "Irish War" to the legislature in 1835-36.<sup>11</sup>

Jesse Vermilyea was born in Dutchess County New York in 1809, and raised in Salem, Washington County, Indiana. His parents died in 1818, when Jesse was nine years old. His oldest sister, Phoebe, married David Burr, in 1818. It is very likely that Phoebe and David Burr helped to raise and care for her younger siblings, and census records suggest that several of the siblings were in their household in 1820. In 1831, at age 21, Jesse moved to Grant County, where he served as Clerk of the Circuit Court. On July 4, 1832 at the age of 23 he married Maria McTaggart at Brownstown, Jackson County, and the family moved to Allen County. Vermilyea purchased land from Raccoon, a Miami civil chief, which included the area being proposed for the Wabash and Erie Canal by his brother-in-law David Burr. It is likely that Burr assisted Vermilyea with this purchase, financially or strategically. Vermilyea is reported to have lived in the Treaty house of Raccoon from 1832-1839 while constructing the brick home.

Vermilyea's purchase included the area of the Vermilyea Inn Historic District and areas to its west. Raccoon's treaty house has been described in various historical accounts as located directly on the county line between Whitley and Allen Counties, approximately 1 mile west of the brick Vermilyea house. Vermilyea continued to rent out the treaty house to travelers after moving into the new home in 1839. No remnants of the Raccoon treaty house have been identified.

Jesse Vermilyea was awarded the contract to construct portions of the Wabash and Erie Canal adjacent to his land holding in July 1832. The contract was approved by Vermilyea's brother-in-law, Indiana Canal Commissioner David Burr. The sections of canal from Fort Wayne west to the Vermilyea property and further west to Huntington were completed in 1834. Aside from his work as a canal contractor, Vermilyea opened Raccoon's home for use as an inn for canal travelers, and he was appointed postmaster for Aboite Township.

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<sup>11</sup> *History of Jackson County, Indiana. Brent and Fuller, 1886.* Page 501. "As to who was the first to sell goods or engage in any kind of trade, we are, after numerous, inquiries, still in doubt. Some say it was William Burr, who sold goods for a man by the name of Olarke, in a log building that stood on the west side of the public square, not far from where the large brick store-house' of Wright Vermilya now stands; others claim that a man by the name of McTaggart, who was afterward sheriff of the county, was the first to embark in the mercantile business. His store-house was a small frame building that stood near the present site of David Lubker's hardware store."

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Groundbreaking for the Wabash and Erie Canal took place at Fort Wayne on February 22, 1832, when construction began on the section from Fort Wayne west to Huntington, Indiana.<sup>12</sup> Poinsette writes: "With the Arrival of (Jesse) Williams in June, 1832, a contract was made by the commissioners for the construction of fifteen miles of canal...in January, 1833, the commissioners were directed to let the balance of the section from the Aboite River to Huntington."<sup>13</sup> Thus, the first section, of what would be the nation's largest canal was under construction from Fort Wayne to the Aboite River, by the end of 1832. On July 4, 1835 this first completed section was celebrated, and the canal opened for business.

At the west end of this first completed section of canal was the land of Jesse Vermilyea. According to historian Tom Castaldi, Jesse Vermilyea and a man named Murray were awarded the contracts for the span of canal running from approximately Amber Road to the area of the Aboite River.<sup>14</sup> Amber Road is located about ½ mile from the eastern border of the Vermilyea Inn Historic District.

### **The Canal and Commerce**

The Vermilyeas became identified with this section of the Wabash and Erie Canal early. Traveler William Holgate recorded this description of the canal:

"Monday 15 June 1835 - Left Fort Wayne pretty early this morning drove through to Huntington twenty five miles distant at about 1/2 past 2 p.m. Having the canal toe path to ride on: the canal being completed here through. We first stopped at 'Vennilliers' 11 miles from Fort Wayne a very neat log establishment for an inn; being composed of about six or seven different buildings. We here fed our horses and took some bread and milk. A merchant bound for Lafayette where he resides here fell into our company.

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<sup>12</sup> Poinsette, Charles R. *Fort Wayne During the Canal Era, 1828-1855: A Study of a Western Community in the Middle Period of American History*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau. Pg. 36.

<sup>13</sup> Poinsette, pp. 40-41.

<sup>14</sup> Castaldi, Thomas C. *Vermilyea House: A Return to Splendor*. Fort Wayne: Parrot Press, 2004. Page. 13. Also, personal communication from Castaldi, March 16, 2005, with information about the length of each "section" awarded in the contracts. Castaldi cites

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"...Ere arriving at Huntington an other traveller fell in with us. We arrived at Huntington at 2 P.M. Fed our horses and got our supper and dinner about 3 P.M. A merchant from Lagro took dinner with us. He was after his goods which he said at 'Vennilliers'.

The next day, June 16th, Holgate returned to Fort Wayne.

"At Fort Wayne. Rose early and started on the Lagro man accompanying as far as Vermillies The country between Fort Wayne and Vermillies is most miserable. Flat wet marshy prairies extend in all directions from the toe path of the canal on which we rode. About 9 A.M. arrived at Vermilliers where we fed our horses, rested ourselves. Arrived at Fort Wayne between twelve and 1 P.M."<sup>15</sup>

In 1836 traveler Elijah Hackleman wrote:

Monday, May 16, 1836, We soon began inquiring of the French and Indians Whom we met, Where We could be accommodated through the night and were informed that We would have to make Vermiliars (sic) Tavern, where we arrived soon after dark. We found Mr. Vermiliars Double loghouse to be pretty well filled by travelers before our arrival. But we were 'cold and hungry and he took us in.' We found him to be a very clever Gentlemanly hoste (sic.)<sup>16</sup>

By 1839 the Vermilyeas had constructed the much larger brick house that still stands. The double log cabin and other outbuildings at the Raccoon site (approximately 1 mile west) were used by a number of inn guests, tenant farmers, and for warehousing grain for canal transport for many years.

There are few other Wabash and Erie Canal related houses or buildings remaining in Allen County. The most prominent is the John Brown Stone Warehouse, in Fort Wayne, listed on the

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<sup>15</sup> "William C. Holgate Journal May 16-June 24, 1835 from Utica, New York to Huntington, Indiana" found in Simonis, Louis A. *Maumee River 1835*. Defiance, Ohio: published Defiance County Historical Society, 1979.

<sup>16</sup> Found in Castaldi, Thomas E., *Vermilyea House: A Return to Splendor*. Fort Wayne: Parrot Press, 2004. pg. 7. Castaldi gives this reference: Woodward, Ronald, *A Trip to the Upper Wabash from the Journals of Elijah Hackleman*, 1976.

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National Register of Historic Places. The McKay Farmhouse—located on the Feeder Canal—was built oriented toward the feeder, which provided transportation for both people and farm produce to and from Fort Wayne. The home was demolished in 2002. A large number of homes throughout the county date to the Canal era (1832-1874) but only those mentioned can be directly related to the canal itself.

Jesse Vermilyea opened his new home as a tavern and inn, and continued to serve as the first postmaster for Aboite. In doing so he created the first center for commerce in Aboite Township. He also kept a small store of merchandise to be sold and traded—the only “store” in Aboite Township until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> The interior of the home retains several features that convey its use as an early site of commerce related to the Wabash and Erie Canal. On the northwest wall of the hallway is located an early door which originally lead to the tavern area. This walnut door has a large bullet embedded in it, from the era of its use as a tavern door, and the former tavern area has pitted and stained window sills, once used to hold the food and beverages of customers.

Jesse and Maria Vermilyea were actively involved in the growth of canal era Allen County. Jesse was one of the original directors of the Fort Wayne branch of the state bank. He also served as a contractor for portions of the canal construction, and worked with Samuel Hanna to construct the Lima Plank Road, after Hanna encouraged him to travel to Canada to inspect similar roads being installed there.

The Vermilyeas were also popular hosts for travelers on the canal and several lodgers recorded their stays. John Dawson wrote: “The ‘bill of fare’ was always equal to the occasion, and prepared in the very best style. This lady and gentleman were equally matched.”

Many wrote of their stay at the Vermilyea House:

“I remember we stopped at the Vermilyea hotel for dinner. They changed horses there.”  
*Huntington Herald, Jan. 3, 1896 "Grandmother Hawley rode in it 60 years ago."*

Jesse Vermilyea contracted cholera and died in August 1846, and Maria died in 1848. Family members in Fort Wayne and in Grant County raised their minor children. The Vermilyea House

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<sup>17</sup> Taylor, Mrs. Samuel R. “The Story of the Townships of Allen County Indiana,” in Griswold, Bert J. *The Pictorial History of Fort Wayne, Indiana*. Chicago: Robert O. Law Company, 1917. Pg. 688.

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was rented from the Vermilyea Estate for a number of years by Philo Rumsey, a restaurateur and innkeeper, who maintained the public use of the home as “The Vermilyea House” through the years before the Civil War.<sup>18</sup>

Philo Rumsey was the son-in-law of William Rockhill, Congressman from northern Indiana. Rumsey was born in Rutland County, Vermont and arrived in Fort Wayne in 1832. He married Rebecca Rockhill in 1838. Rumsey was a restaurateur who built a long and successful career running hotels and inns in Fort Wayne, Toledo, and Omaha, Nebraska. He managed the Vermilyea House from about 1849 to 1854.

Even after the construction of the Wabash Railroad line to the south of the Vermilyea Inn, farmers continued to utilize the Vermilyea site. When Benjamin Ruffner purchased the property in 1853 he continued to maintain the site as a center for commerce along the canal. The wide canal basin became known as “Ruffner’s Basin, while the Inn continued to be known as “Vermilyea.”

**The Aboite River Aqueduct—Aqueduct No. 2**

To take the canal over streams that lie along its path, the engineers constructed aqueducts in several places. In total, there were 18 constructed along the entirety of Wabash and Erie Canal in Indiana, and two others constructed along feeder lines at Fort Wayne and in Clay County. Of these twenty, only minimal evidence can be found at a few of the sites. The Aboite River Aqueduct is significant in that both east and west abutments can be found near water’s edge partially hidden by vegetation, alongside a very large section of the wooden foundation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Griswold, pg. 406.

<sup>19</sup> Castaldi, personal communication, April 12, 2005: “Angie: There were 18 aqueducts on the main line and two on the feeders ie...the main feeder in Allen County and the Clay County Eel River (south) feeder. There were two types: open trunk and a covered roofed / boarded aqueduct. Aboite Creek aqueduct was the ninth longest of the main line group. It was an open trunk, but only five were covered.

It is difficult to say what remains of each of these off the top of my head, however, we do know that there is no evidence of Spy Run Aqueduct.

As for the Main Line Aqueducts, here's what I recall:

1. St. Mary's - the west abutment is visible and during low water we have seen the mid stream pier.

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Castaldi notes: "It would be safe to say that as each year passes the Aboite aqueduct becomes more and more rare. Each of the aqueducts listed that have one or two abutments may or may not have a pier foundation left in the stream it crossed. The Aboite seems to be unique because it had no mid stream pier and its foundation timbers are surviving."<sup>20</sup>

The Aboite River Aqueduct was described by Chief Canal Engineer Jesse Williams in his 1833 report:

The aqueduct trunks are all formed of timber. The abutments for the Bull Creek and Flint Creek aqueducts are of hammer dressed masonry. Those at Aboite, Spy

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2. Aboite River - both abutments and foundation timbers survive.
3. Bull Creek in Huntington Co. no evidence remains.
4. Flint Creek Huntington Co. little or no evidence remains.
5. Eel River Logansport - south abutment and several piers in the river are visible. Portions of the north abutment may be in place, however, built over by a car garage.
6. Crook Creek in Cass Co, no evidence remains.
7. Wea Creek in Tippecanoe has a west abutment and a pier in mid stream.
8. *Flint Creek (south) near Attica, Ind.*
9. *Shawnee Creek near Fountain, Ind.*
10. *Mill Creek near Howard, Ind.*
11. *Sugar Creek south of Howard, Ind.*
12. Raccoon Creek some of the abutment on the east side is evident
13. Otter Creek near Terre Haute - no evidence I can recall.
14. *Honey Creek on the Cross Cut near Terre Haute.*
15. *Prairie Creek near Glezen, Ind.*
16. *White River near Petersburg, Ind.*
17. Patoka River supposedly some timbers on one bank being investigated
18. *Big Creek between Francisco and Millersburg, Ind.*

Note: the eight or so aqueducts that I have no memory of having seen - which does not mean there is something at one or more of them - I have put in Italics. I can research them, but it will take some digging and phone calling.

As for Birch Creek feeder aqueduct, I do not recall seeing remnants."

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

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Run and Becket's Run, are built of timber. Flint Creek aqueduct rests on a solid rock bottom. All the other aqueducts are built on sand or gravel bottom, but are made secure by a platform of hewn timber extending over the whole space between the abutments as well as under them."<sup>21</sup>

In 1844, the Report of the General Superintendent of the Wabash and Erie Canal noted "the building of the stonework for a new aqueduct across the river Aboite (sic), ten miles west of Fort Wayne.

Allen County Historian Thomas C. Castaldi notes:

"I believe that I have discovered in my files a photocopy of a hand written contract issued by David Burr and Samuel Lewis, "Commissioners of the W & E Canal." It is to Joseph A. McMachen and James Cook, to erect and build in a good substantial and workman like manner all & any aqueduct or aqueducts, culvert or culverts, in such place or places on said Sections 24 & 25..." If Principal Engineer J.L. Williams' first 25 sections extended from the feeder to the Aboite River, then this contract would include the aqueduct over the Aboite - a distance of "Thirteen miles of the Canal line on the middle division."<sup>22</sup>

Castaldi described the remnants of this aqueduct in 1995:

In this extreme southwestern part of Aboite Township on U.S. 24, turn south on Redding Road at the Aboite River Highway Bridge and here are the abutments of Aqueduct No. 2. Also at that location are the cement remnants of an old interurban trolley bridge, stones left over from the old Huntington State Road, a trace of the old Highway 24 bridge, and of course, the two U.S. 24 highway bridges in use today. All of this construction is crowded into a very narrow stretch along the stream. Several courses of limestone blocks stand on either side of the riverbank and in the bed of the stream very large timbers are visible at low water.

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<sup>21</sup> Jesse L. Williams, *Principal Engineer, Report to the Canal Commissioners 1833.*

<sup>22</sup> Personal communication, March 21, 2005.

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At least twenty-five long wooden structural members survive despite all the other building activity which took place here over the years.<sup>23</sup>

Canal enthusiasts Thomas Meek and Clarence Hudson researched the site in 1985, and described it as well:

The most prominent feature of the ruins, and the one that first catches the eye, is the large platform of huge timbers, some of them 18 inches square, which lie in the creek bed. This is what remains of the timber foundation platform that once extended beneath the entire structure, providing a stable foundation for the stonework. This timber foundation was built below water level to prevent decay of the wood. Where thus protected, the wood is just as sound today as when it was laid down 150 years ago.<sup>24</sup>

**The Canal Earthworks:**

The construction of the early sections of the Wabash and Erie Canal utilized the same plan as earlier public canals in Ohio and the east. The canal was to be 40 feet wide and four feet deep. Remnants of this earthwork—often called “the canal prism” can be found at scattered sites throughout the state. In Allen County, there are only a handful of locations where the canal prism has been preserved; perhaps totaling ½ mile, of the 80 miles that were constructed (main line and feeder line.) Most of the visible locations are located east of Fort Wayne. West of the city, the canal prism can be seen in one small section that has been converted into a pond near Engle Road in Allen County, and in the location of Redding Drive between Amber Road and US 24.

Historian Tom Castaldi describes the extant portions of the canal earthworks visible from the Vermilyea property:

“...along the south side of Redding Road, the old channel is visible past houses that are being erected. Unfortunately in places, the channel has been filled in and lost.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Castaldi, Tom. *Wabash and Erie Canal Notebook: Allen and Huntington Counties*. Self-published, printed by Graphic Mechanix, Fort Wayne, 1995. Pg 30.

<sup>24</sup> In Castaldi, *ibid*, pg. 30.

<sup>25</sup> Castaldi, Tom. *Wabash and Erie Canal Notebook*: pp. 28-29.

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He also includes an interview completed in 1930 with D.W. Simmers, who lived in Aboite Township from before 1888, purchased portions of the Vermilyea property sometime after his return to Indiana following the Civil War, and the remaining 200 acres in 1900. Simmers sold the property in 1944 to Earl and Olive Darling. According to the interview with Simmers, conducted by Frank Bash: "In the canal just below the house the channel was widened out into a spacious basin in which the boats could be turned or docked for loading and unloading. Vermilyea built a warehouse there for the benefit of the entire neighborhood. Sometimes it was known as "Ruffner's Basin" for after the days of Vermilyea the Ruffners occupied the place [for] some years. The basin was clearly outlined until the traction line was built, at which time it was filled."<sup>26</sup>

**The Canal as Conduit for Culture, Ideas, and Transformation:**

In his study of the canal-building era of the United States Glenn Shaw describes the integral part that canals played in the development of the communication and transportation lines throughout the country:

The regional canals developed into an integrated, interconnected network, the full dimensions of which can be best grasped if seen as a whole. Though the completed canal system was an achievement of American modernization, the character of this network and the decisions to inaugurate or extend it rested on a traditional water-connected society. Settlements had long been made initially at the mouths of rivers, at the fall line or at carrying places. The river [and subsequently, the canals, AQ] was the route to the interior in the face of unbroken forest, inadequate roads, and difficult terrain.<sup>27</sup>

For residents of pioneer Aboite Township, the Vermilyea Inn, the basin, and the post-office became the locus for social and economic exchanges. Early twentieth-century historian Mrs. Samuel L. Taylor described the Vermilyea Inn:

The soil of Aboite afforded a substratum of clay under its rich black loam, which was very good for brickmaking, and upon his own farm Mr. Vermilyea, in 1839,

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<sup>26</sup> Found in Castaldi, *Wabash and Erie Canal Notebook: Allen and Wabash Counties*.p. 29.

<sup>27</sup> Shaw, pg. 160.

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made bricks and built with them a new home, the first brick house in the settlement... The Vermilyea home was by far the most luxurious in the township—a comparative mansion—and the hospitality of its inmates was far-famed. Many a merry party from Fort Wayne enjoyed gala days there, and it was the center of social life in the settlement, which drew many congenial spirits thither.<sup>28</sup>

The canal oftentimes became the preferred transportation for short trips within the Allen County, or to places nearby. Fort Wayne attorney Lindley Ninde used the canal as transportation between his home and business in Fort Wayne, and his brother and sister's farms in Aboite Township, and in Jefferson Township, Whitley County.

His wife wrote:

“July 9 (1851)... Dear Lindley started to Noble County this morning on business... I hoped he would have a pleasant journey; but soon after he had it chanced up and commenced raining so hard I hardly know how he could get across from the canal to Henry's which is near five miles and the roads very bad he intended walking”

This dependency upon the canal sometimes led to unexpected delays when sections broke down, or were unusable. Lindley Ninde's trip ended up taking four days, and he did not return until the following Sunday. Beulah noted that “He had a tedious, toilsome journey, and was glad to get home where he could rest. He had to walk all the way from Sister Rhoda's which is 12 or 13 miles, for the canal is broken and the hot sun shone on him pretty near all the way.”<sup>29</sup>

Mr. Ninde was employed as a clerk of the circuit court. Ninde and his siblings Rhoda and Henry are also well documented for their involvement in abolition and Underground Railroad activities, and most likely used the canal at least in part to complete their activities.<sup>30</sup> Many researchers have identified the Wabash and Erie Canal as a likely landmark followed by freedom

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<sup>28</sup> Taylor, Mrs. Samuel R. “The Story of the Townships of Allen County Indiana,” in Griswold, Bert J. *The Pictorial History of Fort Wayne, Indiana*. Chicago: Robert O. Law Company, 1917. p. 691.

<sup>29</sup> Quinn, Angela M. *The Underground Railroad and Antislavery Movement in Allen County*. Fort Wayne: ARCH, Inc. 2001. Pg. 107.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

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seekers.<sup>31</sup> There is also strong oral tradition of use of the house as a stop on the Underground Railroad, the stories being traced to at least 1900, and its location is consistent with such use.

**The Railroad and the beginning of the end**

The Wabash Railroad was begun in Ohio in 1854, and was completed to Lafayette, IN by 1856. By 1857 it extended to the Illinois Line, and ultimately it was completed to St. Louis.<sup>32</sup> The railroad line traveled parallel with the Wabash and Erie Canal through Aboite Township, approximately one mile south of the canal. The village of Aboite was formed directly south of the Vermilyea Inn in association with a train stop located there prior to 1876 (when it appears on Indiana Atlas map of Allen County).

As the railroad lines were completed, the canal became less busy, and less maintained and Aboite Township's center of commerce moved south from the Vermilyea Inn to the railroad line at Aboite Station. Canal traffic from Huntington to Fort Wayne finally ended about 1876, and the Vermilyea House lost its role as a center of commerce. The section of the Wabash and Erie Canal that is included in this nomination was finally sold in 1900:

“November 12, 1900. A warranty deed was filed in the recorder's office transferring all canal lands yet unsold in Huntington County. The deed conveys to Mr. Aaron W. Dukes the canal in three counties Allen, Wabash, and Huntington for \$15,000.00. It is proposed by “The Oil Belt Traction Co.” to build a line from Huntington to Fort Wayne following the canal towpath.”

The “Oil Belt Traction Co.” sold its interests (as would happen frequently during the next few years) and the line was completed. On December 12, 1901 the first Interurban Railroad traveled past the Vermilyea Inn. This line would be called the Fort Wayne and Wabash Valley Traction Company.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hedrick, Charles Embury, PhD. *Social and Economic Aspects of Slavery in the Transmontane (W.Va., Ky, & Tenn.) Prior to 1850*. Nashville: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1927. pg. 102. See also Quinn, pp. 96-108.

<sup>32</sup> Griswold, pg. 433.

<sup>33</sup> Bates, Roy M. *Interurban Railways of Allen County*. Fort Wayne: Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society, 1958. Pg. 17.

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**Conclusion**

Ralph Gray summarized the long term affect of Indiana's canal era: "...The Whitewater and the Wabash and Erie canals had a positive impact upon their regions, served to stimulate agricultural and urban growth, and helped develop the towns, the mill sites, the population, and the trade which the railroads of a later time dominated so completely."<sup>34</sup>

The historic resources of the Vermilyea Inn Historic District continued to stimulate the local economy throughout the life of the canal. With the advent of the railroad, the center of commerce in Aboite Township and adjacent portions of Whitley County began to move south towards the new Wabash line. An electric interurban line was eventually built along the towpath, but without a passenger or freight stop in the township, the small rural community grew only slowly if at all.

In 1907, the authors for a Whitley County, Indiana, history described the march of progress at this site along the county line:

"But a few rods away from the scene of the occurrence here related is the battle ground, on the banks of the Aboite River, where years before, a band of Indians completely exterminated an armed force of whites. Less than a mile from this place of carnage, just north of the traction line, stands the old brick mansion of Ben Ruffner, who was a king among his fellows half a century ago, and whose home was the wonder of the hardy backwoodsmen of that day. The artificial waterway which permitted well laden boats to sweep past his door-yard from spring until fall, has long since fallen into disuse and in its place the traction car flies at rapid speed, propelled by a power then unknown."<sup>35</sup>

The Ruffners later sold the Vermilyea home and farm to the Simmers family, who maintained it through the advent of the automobile age, when the old Upper Huntington Road was numbered as US Highway 24. The home was vacant and began to deteriorate during the 1930s. In 1944 it was purchased by Earl Darling and family, who began extensive restoration using the best practices of the day. They reoriented the home's main entrance to the north, to face the re-routed US 24, and embellished it with colonial features popular at the time. They also modernized the home, and added a garage addition to the west side of the home.

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<sup>34</sup> Gray, Ralph. *Indiana History: A Book of Readings*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994. Pp. 124-126.

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The Jesse Vermilyea Homestead site is a well documented example of a home built and used for canal generated commerce. The Vermilyea home, the remnant earthworks of the Wabash and Erie Canal and the remaining portions of the Aboite River Aqueduct provide a rare collection of Wabash and Erie Canal-related resources that retain sufficient integrity to represent the canal era in Allen County, Indiana.

It is rare to find the extant residence of a canal contractor in direct association with a visible portion of canal that he or she constructed. Further, these canal sections were among the first awarded statewide by the Indiana Canal Commissioners, and were constructed in the important location of the portage that connected the Wabash and Maumee water systems. Finally, the connection of Canal Commissioner David Burr to the site as mentor and brother-in-law of Jesse Vermilyea is also significant as a reflection of the state of Indiana's organized efforts to create the Wabash and Erie Canal. As such, the proposed Vermilyea Inn Historic District is also significant in the history of the State of Indiana.

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

See enclosed map.

**Boundary Justification**

The parcel of land described is historically associated with the Wabash and Erie Canal and the Vermilyea Inn. The boundary excludes several buildings that post-date any significant canal association, and includes earthworks, and enough land to physically connect the sites and buildings to one another.

