



William Gooding, Chief Engineer, I. and M. Canal

John M. Lamb

Preface

This is the fifth annual pamphlet produced for and by the Illinois Canal Society. The previous pamphlets have been *Illinois and Michigan Canal Annual Commissioner's Reports*; *The City of Pekin Story*; and *Locks on the I. and M. Canal*. I want to thank the members of the Illinois Canal Society whose support has made these publications possible. In the coming years the society will continue to explore the history of the inland waterways through pamphlets, research, field trips and exhibitions.

John Lamb, Illinois Canal Society

Like most canal engineers of the 19th century, William Gooding was trained on the job. The canal era from about 1800 to 1860 produced a body of engineers who knew one another and learned from each other but had no formal engineering education. They designed and built a series of canals that connected the Hudson River to the Great Lakes and the Ohio River to the east coast and the Great Lakes. Gooding designed the waterway that connected the Great Lakes to the Mississippi via the Illinois River. This canal was called the Illinois and Michigan Canal because it connected the Illinois River to Lake Michigan.

William Gooding was born on April 1, 1803, at Bristol in Ontario County, New York.¹ His father, James Gooding (called Deacon Gooding), was born in 1767 in Massachusetts and migrated to western New York, and then preceded his son, William, in emigrating to Illinois in 1832. James Gooding died at age 82 in 1849.²

William Gooding was educated in common schools and by private tutors, and taught school and worked on his father's farm before he left for Canada at the age of 23. In 1826 he began his engineering apprenticeship under Chief Engineer Alfred Barrett in construction of the Welland Canal. This was the first Welland Canal, and its structures were made of wood. He worked on that canal until 1829 when he returned to New York to run a store in Lockport.³ In 1831 he was back at his preferred occupation – canal engineer. He was hired as a Junior Assistant Engineer on the Ohio canal system on the Wabash and Erie Canal.⁴ In 1832 he married.

In the same year (autumn 1832) his father and brothers moved to Illinois, settling in Yankee Settlement, Homer township near Lockport in what became known as Gooding's Grove. William decided to follow, but was held up by the outbreak of the Black Hawk War in 1832. He came in May 1833. He, his wife Ann, and infant son were the first passengers to come around the head of Lake Michigan with the United States mail headed for Chicago.⁵ He squatted on land near his father and brothers, a cabin already having been built. Although he didn't tarry there long, he was interested in farming, particularly the cultivation of fruit trees. He is credited with introducing fruit growing in Will County.⁶ He wrote an article in the 1830s for The Prairie Farmer on fencing by using dirt mounds and ditches. At that time, before the invention of barbed wire, the problem of fencing was acute as there were few trees on the prairie suitable for split rail fencing.

In June 1834 Gooding was hired by the Indiana Canal Commissioners to head a corps of engineers to survey a route for the proposed Whitewater Canal from Wayne County near the border of Ohio to the Ohio River.

He was assigned by the Chief Engineer of the Wabash and Erie Canal, Jesse Williams.⁷ He also seems to have worked on a survey to extend the Wabash and Erie Canal from "the old treaty ground" on Wabash to Lafayette.⁸

Because of this wide experience, in 1836 he was hired by the Illinois and Michigan Canal Commissioners of the state of Illinois as Chief Engineer. He used to tell the story of the visit by the Canal Commissioner to his humble cabin in “Yankee Settlement,” as the area was called around Lockport. George Woodruff, Will County’s first historian, tells the story. The cabin was built on contract for \$25. Gooding furnished the timber and a team of oxen.

“This was covered with ‘shakes’ - a kind of roof which would shed the rain and snow, if the wind did not blow, and had its chimney outside, according to the style of the times, because if placed inside there would have been no room for anything else. This chimney was built with sticks plastered with clay. The furniture was mostly the handiwork of Mr. Gooding, including the bedstead made of poles.”⁹

One winter morning in 1836 there came to this prairie homestead William B. Archer, Canal Commissioner, who on July 4th of that year would turn the first spadeful of earth on the Illinois and Michigan Canal. With Colonel Archer were Chief Justice Wilson of the Illinois Supreme Court and Robert Dale Owen, the son of the Utopian Socialist Robert Owen. They came before breakfast after staying all night at one of those frontier stage stop hotels that promised little in the way of breakfast besides whiskey and dirt.

“To be so suddenly called upon to entertain these notables was somewhat embarrassing to the young wife of Gooding, Woodruff observes. The country did not afford very much variety wherewith to improvise a breakfast. To add to the difficulty the guests, except Colonel Archer, were strangers and as the one room was kitchen, bedroom, dining room and parlor, and it was too cold to adjourn to the only other place – outdoors – the breakfast must be prepared in their presence. In one all-important respect, however, the hostess was happy. Some little time before, Colonel Archer, whose tastes were somewhat of the Hoosier order, had seen a piece of calico in Chicago which he greatly admired. Wishing to make Mrs. Gooding some expression of his regard, he had bought five yards of the goods, which struck his fancy, which he had given to her with the remark that as she was small it would be ample, and she had the dress on this memorable occasion.”¹⁰

Having been hired as Chief Engineer of this promising transportation and commercial venture, the greatest such embarked upon by the young state of Illinois, Gooding turned his attention to projects that would aid the economic development of this northern part of the state. He helped to build one of the first mills on the lower Des Plaines in West Lockport in 1836 to 1837. He also laid out West Lockport. As

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paid state official. On November 29, 1941, when construction had stopped completely because of lack of funds, Gooding wrote to Colonel Archer:

“I trust that I need not assure you that I am highly gratified that you are in the legislature this winter, but I am

Oakley could get nowhere with Leavitt because the general opinion amongst those with a stake in the canal's construction was that Gooding was the best man for the job. They were also aware of the interest on the part of certain politicians to gain control of the hiring and firing on the canal.

Governor Davis certainly supported Gooding, and he recorded the following in his diary written in 1844 when he was in Lockport investigating the canal.

“It is proper also to remark, that we have had many and free conversations with the Chief Engineer, who appears a frank, sincere, intelligent and skillful man. We have also conversed freely with many contractors, and find, that the canal is not at all unprofitable.”

distribute the offices and make splendid fortunes at the expense of the State and her creditors.”²³

Irish

By the summer of 1847 Gooding’s troubles had increased. Oakley stirred up the Irish laborers on the Summit Division to strike for \$1.25 a day and an eleven-hour day. The strike or “turnout” as it was called, didn’t spread down the line, and the Irish laborers returned after a couple of weeks at their old wages of a dollar a day and twelve hours of work a day. In June 1847 Gooding offered to resign, but neither Swift or Leavitt accepted it. As the summer of 1847 ended, the Canal was near completion, and Oakley grew more bitter in his attacks upon Gooding. At one point in the fall he told Leavitt:

“...He has engaged an Engineer to go to Illinois, and if William Gooding is not discharged he will take the work into his own hands, and that we shall have an insurrection. That he will no longer submit to insults from his inferiors.”²⁴

He had already told all .7200 Tw ET 200 0.00D nD (y. T)Tj 18.2400 0.00dryTD (sch)Tj 14.4000

stomach or the back. Since the want of judgement charges were so fallacious, Gooding replied as best he could.

“For more than twenty years I have been engaged in my profession. I have served in Canada, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. I have been associated with, and been, fortunate enough to

The Governor then goes on in good political style about the people of Illinois and their wishes of which he was the present embodiment, and yet these trustees beyond his ken did this to him. Oakley took it far more seriously; he up and died in January 1849.

But the Governor didn't forget it rankled, providing a perpetual itch to his thin political skin. His ego was burdened beyond endurance, for still in April 1849 he wrote:

“...I really think it a subject much to be regretted that there should be no one but Mr. Gooding capable of performing these duties. A man known to be personally hostile to me, removed for good cause from his office, and with whom it could not have escaped the trustees, it would be unpleasant to me to do business or carry on communications. I am bound to suppose that Capt. Swift did not intend to annoy me personally by this appointment, for he so states, but if he could for one moment overlook the inference [*sic*] which everybody would draw, and in fact

“On entering the church, I have observed that the ladies take a good look at the gentlemen standing in the vestibule – such a look as American ladies would consider altogether improper; but it is not so regarded here, for it is the universal custom of the Country.”

7. Fatout, Paul, Indiana Canals, Purdue University Studies, West Lafayette, Ind., 1972, p. 62.
8. Op. cit., Biographical Encyclopedia of Illinois, p. 86.
9. Op. cit., Woodruff, et al., History of Will County, p. 303.
10. Ibid., p. 303.
11. Report of the Canal Commissioners to Governor John Tanner, Dec. 1, 1900, Springfield, 1901, p. 139.
12. Ibid., p. 154.
13. Lamb, John, Locks on the Illinois and Michigan Canal, Illinois Canal Society, Lockport, 1981.
14. Op. Cit., Report of the Canal Commissioner 1900, p. 154.
15. William Gooding to Colonel Archer, Nov. 29, 1941: Swift Papers, Chicago Historical Society.
16. Capt. William Swift, 1800-1879, was a graduate of West Point, worked as an engineer on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canals, did a map of post routes, built the first skeleton iron tower, was president of several railroads, as well as the Illinois and Michigan Canal trustees from 1844-1871. He supported his nephew, James McNeil Whistler.
17. Colonel William Oakley (1792-1849) born in New York and came to Illinois in 1834. He was appointed State Fund Commissioner in 1839 and went to Europe to renegotiate the Internal Improvement loan. In 1843, 1844 and 1845, he made trips to Europe to try and obtain loans for the Illinois and Michigan Canal. In 1847 he was appointed Canal Trustee for the State.
18. Governor Davis (1787-1854). A lawyer and Governor of Massachusetts. Also, a Congressman and Senator from that state. In 1943 he was appointed by a group of Eastern bankers to go to Lockport and investigate the canal to see if it was worth investing in. He agreed it was, and hence the canal got the funds to finish.
19. Charles Oakley to David Leavitt, April 24, 1845, Illinois State Historical Society MSS Collection SC 743 Folder 2, Springfield, IL.
20. Lee, Grey Ed: "Diary of the Illinois-Michigan Canal Investigation 1843-1844," Papers in Illinois History and Transactions for the year 1941, Illinois State Historical Society, Springfield, 1943, pp. 50-68.
21. Gov. Ford to Capt. Swift, July 10, 1845, Swift Papers, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago.
22. Op. cit., "Benjamin Wright to the Board of the Commissioners of the Illinois and Michigan Canal, Oct. 25, 1837," Report of the Canal Commissioners 1900, p. 182.
23. Gooding to Capt. Swift, Jan. 27, 1847, Swift Papers, Chicago Historical Society.
24. Leavitt to Capt. Swift, Oct. 13, 1847, Swift Papers, Chicago Historical Society.

25. Report of the Majority of the Board of Trustees of the Illinois and Michigan Canal of a Meeting of the Subscribers Held in New York, Oct. 18, 1847, Washington, 1847.
26. Ibid., Appendix L.
27. Wm. Gooding to Capt. Swift, Dec. 11, 1847, Swift Papers, Chicago Historical Society.
28. Robert Stuart to Capt. Swift, March 14, 1848, Swift Papers, Chicago Historical Society. Stuart had worked for Astor and the American Fur Co. He became Secretary to the Canal Trustees in 1845 and held that post until he died in October 1848.
29. Oakley to Swift, June 3, 1848, Stuart Papers, Chicago Historical Society.
30. Op. cit., Greene & Thompson, Governor's Letter Book, p. 149.
31. Ibid., Greene & Thompson, pp. 194-198.
32. Culmann, C. W., Culmann's Notes on his Journey to U.S.A. in 1850, from a MSS in ETH-Library, Zurich, Switzerland.
33. p. 369 Andreas, A.T. History of Cook County Illinois Chicago, 1884.
34. p. 305, Woodruff, Geo. et al. History of Will County op. cit.
35. William Gooding to Capt. Swift, June 11, 1860 Swift Papers Chicago Historical Society.
36. p. 305 George Woodruff et al. History of Will County op. cit.
37. Will County Courier, May 27, 1874.
38. p. 301, Geo. Woodruff et al. History of Will County op. cit.
39. p. 302, Woodruff, Ibid