COLONEL JOHN VAWTER DAY FESTIVAL

The question is often asked—just who is Colonel John Vawter and why does Morgantown honor him? The Morgantown history book "One Hundred and Seventy-Five Years on Main Street in Morgantown, Indiana" says this about Colonel John Vawter.

"Colonel Vawter was born in Virginia on January 8, 1782. He was married four times. Licensed in Kentucky as a Baptist minister in 1804, he moved to Madison, Indiana, in 1807. He was the first magistrate of Madison and soon after was elected Sheriff of Jefferson and Clark Counties. In 1810, he was appointed US Marshall for the Indiana Territory. He served as a Frontier Ranger during the Indiana Campaign of 1811-1813, and was elected Colonel of the Militia in Jennings County in 1817.

He founded Vernon, Indiana, in 1815, serving the pastorate of the Baptist Church there between 1821 and 1848. He was a member of the Indiana legislature in 1831-1835, and a year later, became a member of the Indiana Senate.

In 1835, he sent $3000 in merchandise to Morgantown to start a general store. While he did not reside in Morgantown until 1848, he was instrumental in re-platting the town with Isabelle Teeters in 1836. He was not a founder of the town nor the first merchant as some have suggested. In 1850, he donated land and nearly all of the $2000 expense for the Morgantown Baptist Church. This first Baptist Church was located on lots 46 and 47. Later, the Baptist congregation built a new church on lot 48 where Triggers Restaurant now stands (2006). In the early 1990's the congregation procured the land and buildings of the former Morgantown School on Elm Street where they now worship (2006).

Colonel Vawter is buried in the Baptist Cemetery on north Church Street. He died August 17, 1862. On his tombstone is a long epitaph that he wrote himself. The stone is still standing but weathered and hard to read. Several descendants still live in this area."

Colonel Vawter was also instrumental in many churches in Southern Indiana after moving there from Kentucky. While in Kentucky, in 1805, he was with the Long Lick church in Elkhorn. He accepted a call as Pastor on the first Saturday, August 1826 at the Butlerville Baptist Church. He was an Elder during the formation of the The Freedom Baptist Church in July 1827. By profession he was a civil engineer and employed by the government to survey large portions of the State. He surveyed in the counties of Jennings, Brown, Bartholomew, Johnson, Marion, Shelby and Decatur—and preached in them during his surveying tours.

That answers the question—who is Colonel John Vawter…..and possibly some clues as to why we honor him.   The history book also states: "In 1988, the Chamber of Commerce wanted to have a festival unique to the town's history. On October 15, 1988, the first Colonel John Vawter Day was held…..Colonel Vawter Days have been held each year since 1988, and are now planned by the Merchant's Association."

This will be the 30thrd Colonel John Vawter day. Here is a newspaper account for the 4th annual Festival:

The headline reads "Col. Vawter Day Festival to honor early town leader". And the article states: "Morgantown is gearing up for its fourth annual Col. Vawter Day Festival on Saturday. Activities will be held around town on Washington, Cross and Elm Streets from 9am to 5pm. Several booths will be set up offering arts and crafts items, flea market items and baked goods.

Activities will be offered throughout the day, including bingo, hayrides and pony rides. You can test your throwing arm at the dunking booth or try your luck in the hog calling, watermelon seed spitting, nail driving, pie eating, three legged race or Frisbee contests.

An Apple Bake-Off is being sponsored by Wray Produce. Entries in the contest will be on display and the winners will be announced on festival day. Entertainment will start at 11am and will continue through most of the afternoon, featuring clogging demonstrations, the Bundy Dancers, the Hoosierland Band, square dancing and a sing along. Most activities and entertainment will take place on Elm Street, though some entertainment will take place at the fire station on Washington Street.

The Morgantown Fire Department will be serving fish sandwiches, salads and homemade pie and the FFA will have soft ice cream for sale. The Senior Citizens will have their center open with various items for sale, and they invite you to come in, rest and have a soft drink or glass of ice water. There will be an Art Show in front of the old Morgantown School Building with paintings by local artists on display for viewing or purchase. The festival committee welcomes everyone to come and have a nice day."

The same can be said today…...the festival committee welcomes everyone to come and have a nice day."

The 29th Annual Vawter Day in 2016 featured: 5K Vawter Day Dash, Senior Citizens Breakfast, Car Show, Judged Art Show, Quilt show, Talent Contest, Singing on the Main Stage, Baking Contest, Karaoke, Historic wagon tours, Arts and Crafts Vendors, Historic Scavenger Hunt, BBQ Pork Chops, BBQ Chicken, Fire Department Fish Fry, Pet Contest, Kidz Zone, and a Sawdust Scramble.

So, the question becomes, if Colonel Vawter wasn't the founder of Morgantown, then who was? And the answer is in the wonderful book, "One Hundred and Seventy-Five Years on Main Street in Morgantown, Indiana". It says. "Samuel Teeters and his wife Isabella Adams Teeters came to Morgan County from Henry County, Kentucky with Isabella carrying their infant daughter, Elizabeth, on horseback. Elizabeth was born in Henry County, Kentucky on November 26, 1826. She was the first baby to live where Morgantown is now located. The Teeters entered land north of Robert Boles on September 12, 1827 and built the first log cabin here. Coming from Kentucky with Samuel's family were Jonathan Teeters and Henry Jacobs Adams and their families, all being relatives. On April 12, 1830, Samuel bought more land to the south of Robert Boles from Elijah Moskal. At this time, Samuel and Robert Boles conceived the idea of a town and founded Morgantown. Samuel died September 20, 1830, before the town was platted. His widow, Isabelle, continued the work with Mr. Boles.

The Morgantown "Our Proud Heritage" Bicentennial Festival was the forerunner of Colonel Vawter Day. The first one was held in May 1981. The Program for May 1982 shows so many activities. That year the President was Mrs. Jonny Clay, Vice President—Mrs. Melva Crain, the Secretary—Mrs. Nancy Zink and the Treasurer—Mr. Ezra Satter. The festival ran from Sunday,

May 16 to Sunday the 23rd. Kicking off on Sunday, May 16—"Decorating of the Revolutionary Soldier's Grave—and at 7:30pm a Community Sing at the Morgantown Elementary School. On Monday, May 17th—there was a Host and Hostess Contest and a Variety Show. Tuesday, May 18th—an Art Show and Spring Sing. Wednesday, May 19th at Gospel Sing featuring 4 Gospel Groups. Thursday, May 20th an Old Fashioned Box Supper. Saturday, May 22nd was Festival Day and there were activities for everyone from 9am to 9pm. Horseshoe pitching tournament, checker tournament, push mobile race, pet parade, sawdust scramble, style show, Civil Defense rescue demonstration, Elementary School music program, tricycle "500", hoop rolling contest, sack race, beard growing contest, and street square dance. Special entertainment was on the grandstand throughout the day. The Morgantown High School Alumni Banquet was at 7pm on Saturday followed by a fireworks display. Sunday, May 23rd was the Annual Memorial Day Parade followed by the Memorial Service at East Hill Cemetery. In addition to all these activities there were special events on display: Art display, Old Morgantown pictures, quilting and candlemaking demonstration, Women's Missionary Council group singing, a couple of skits ("A portrait of the American Women" and "Circuit Rider", puppet shows, count the jelly bean contest, baby animal zoo, Southern Bells served free cookies and lemonade, musket and tomahawk throwing demonstration, telephone display, steam engine on display, the Morgan County Bicentennial Time Capsule, and cartoons and little rascal movies were shown at the Christian Church. Local business sponsors were: Myers Clark Funeral Home, Akleg Floor Covering, Henderson Nursing Home, Clock Gallery, Casa Del Beauty Shop, Job Anderson, Morgantown Shell, Silver Stallion Restaurant, Morgantown First Bank, Hickman Brothers, Armstrong Drug Store, Mitchell Hardware, Morgantown to Indianapolis Freight Line, Zimmerman Mobile Oil, Whitaker Chevrolet, R&G Variety Store, Kathy's Café, Deano's Barber Shop, Hurdle Insurance & Real Estate, Stockton Co., Mel's Press, Gailes Gas & Electric, Friendly Tavern, Owen's Laundry, Critser's Flower Shop and Downey's Corner. *So much has changed in 30 years!! Morgantown has a rich history of wonderful caring people who worked to make this community a better place to live. A community spirit and community pride was core to how we lived. That same community spirit and community pride is still with us today. Come support Colonel Vawter Day!!*

Joe Reed dressed up as Colonel Vawter for the First Colonel Vawter Day.