

# THIS IS ITASCA

1890

1965

75TH ANNIVERSARY  
COMMEMORATION  
ITASCA, ILLINOIS

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**1890-1965**

**75TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION**

# THIS IS ITASCA

by

Joyce M. Usher

Forward by Margaret A. Dunton, President of DuPage County Historical Society

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Interviews with Ernst Kraegel (now deceased), Mrs. Linda Liepitz, Mrs. William Droegemueller, Idaclare Lawrence and Elmer Franzen.

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## REFERENCE MATERIAL.

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## FORWARD

No doubt, in the town of Itasca, Illinois, as in all of our towns, there have been dozens of people who have said "I must write a history of this place."

They meant it earnestly, but time slips by. We have descendants — unto the sixth generation removed from those pioneers who first settled our county — living among us now.

The facts, the dates, the stories of our founding fathers and mothers, grow dimmer with each generation and could be lost forever.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to the Wesley Ushers as the instigators and all those who worked with them for an untold number of hours to preserve the great heritage of Itasca in this book.

Margaret A. Dunton

*President, DuPage County Historical Society*

## AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

To undertake a complete history of Itasca would take years instead of the allotted time of a few months. This, then, is a historical sketch combining the information that was generously supplied in the form of interviews and material by long-time Itasca residents with other published reference material and the author's records.

To understand the present, to have some insight into the future, requires a knowledge of the past. This task was undertaken to help preserve for Itasca's youngsters the heritage that is theirs in our beautiful little village.

The true accounts of the hardships the early settlers endured on their search for what became our community should instill pride in every village resident. Families walked through the wilderness losing their health and sometimes their lives. The hardy, farsighted, industrious ones who survived have given us a population of which to be exceedingly proud.

This is Itasca!

Joyce M. Usher

## THIS IS ITASCA

When white men first heard of what is now Illinois, tribes of Algonkian\* Indians farmed, hunted and fished its wilderness expanse. The Algonkians, made up of the Sauk and Fox, Illinois, Kickapoos and Pottawatomies, had been pushed westward into this area by the more forceful Chippewa woodland tribes. They had been driven into some of the finest farming land in North America.

Tecumseh and Black Hawk roamed the land from Illinois to the Creek Territory in the south to the Chippewa regions of the north. An 1818 policy of pre-emption gave preference of land claim to settlers working the land. Illinois became a state the same year with government lands available within its boundaries for \$1.25 an acre. The Indian claim to the land was ignored and Black Hawk gathered his warriors to fight an attempt to remove the redmen from the state. The Indians lost their battle in northern Illinois and Wisconsin, and by 1835 all Indians had been removed from the state to the bleak lands of Oklahoma reservations.

Across the ocean Prince Albert married Queen Victoria. Great Britain was at war with China. In 1840 Louis Napoleon was sentenced to life detention and Frederick William IV of Prussia was ruler of Germany.

On this side of the Atlantic the year 1841 found William Henry Harrison the ninth president of the United States. In the city of Boston a frail doctor prepared for a trip that would affect the lives of thousands of people.

## THE WESTWARD TRIP

Elijah J. Smith was born in Morristown, New Jersey on May 8, 1815. His heritage in this country dated to the nation's beginning. Elijah's grandfather, also named Elijah, had been born on Long Island, N. Y. He served in the Revolutionary War and was stationed with General Washington in Morristown. The doctor's father, Abner, was born in Morristown in 1789.

Young Elijah started at the age of 19 to study medicine with his brother, Dr. John Sutton Smith of New Providence, N. J. He attended lectures at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City and received a diploma from that school on June 25, 1838.

In February, 1841, the young doctor married Jane C. Smith of New York. He had started a medical practice in Boston three years before his marriage. His health was not good, and friends in his profession advised him to move "West" to a more agreeable climate. In May, 1841, Smith gave up his Boston practice and headed west to find a suitable site for doctoring, and an agreeable climate for him and his wife.

Elijah took a train to Detroit. The "City of the Straits" was little better than the East coast with its average 71% humidity and so he bought boat passage to the new city of Chicago.

Chicago had become a city in 1837. By 1841 the federal government

\*Also spelled Algonquins

had begun improvement of the harbor. The state of Illinois had started the Illinois and Michigan canal. The future of Chicago was assured, and the scene that greeted Smith was not a pleasant one. The city was filled with land speculators and promoters with little thought for the more esthetic features of urban life. The dampness and the mud convinced Elijah his dream lay somewhere in the rolling high prairie land he had been told lay to the north and west of the city.

The doctor bought a horse, saddle and saddlebags. He filled his saddlebags with medicines and medical books and started out to find a suitable place to settle. Elijah's destination was DuPage County which had only been established four years earlier. The county was settled by men like Captain Naper, founder of Naperville; Bailey Hobson, pioneer of Lisle; and Pierce Downer, for whom Downer's Grove was later named.

Elijah had more in mind than just starting a medical practice. He had a desire to farm. When he reached the high rolling prairie with a creek running through, he decided his search had ended. The unclaimed land, excellent for farming, with some settlers nearby that would need a doctor's services, was an answer to all his needs.

Smith returned East to settle his affairs and to bring his wife to their new homesite. He again came to Illinois and made application for the purchase of 80 acres of government land on the site he had found. A parchment title dated March 10, 1843, was signed by John Tyler, president of the United States. This document granted Smith ownership of the land that is now bounded by the railroad tracks on the south, Maple street on the west, Cherry street on the east, and Division street on the north.

### **NORTHEAST DUPAGE COUNTY IN THE 1840's**

Many settlers had pioneered the northeast part of DuPage County before Dr. Smith arrived on the scene. The village of Addison, when Smith arrived in Itasca's later site, was already a thriving little crossroads with six businesses. The Salt Creek House was a hotel, and in addition there was a steam grist mill, a general store, a blacksmith shop, a cobbler's shop and a physician. The concentration of businesses was to make Addison the center of the township organization that was established in 1849.

Hezekiah Dunklee and Mason Smith had journeyed into the area in 1833 and settled on the north side of a grove later known as Dunklee's Grove. This was later named Bensonville, and changed again to Bensenville.

Traffic out of Chicago in the 1830's and 1840's heading through this region was bound for Galena with its thriving lead mines. Two miles east of Salt Creek was the path of the Chicago and Galena stage road. Taverns sprung up along the stage route and communities developed from the clustering of businesses around the stage stops. Oxen teams hauled merchandise and farm products as well as the lead from the Galena mines.

It is said a teamster named John Reid hauled lead from the mines to Chicago, and took supplies needed by the miners on his return trip. The story related tells that on one of Reid's return trips to Galena he was

hauling salt. It was spring and the creek had overflowed its banks. By the time he could get his oxen team and his heavily loaded wagon across the stream, the salt had all melted. The stream was thereafter called Salt Creek.

The Germans in the area later to be Addison township came mostly from Hanover and Prussia. Agrarian reforms intended to aid the plight of the serfs in Prussia had in fact made their lot more difficult. The serfs, though working without pay, had small plots of land for their use. In return for giving up their holdings to the landlords they were given their freedom. The result of this "reform" was exodus of people from all over Prussia to the new country of America. Having been only skilled in agriculture, these immigrants sought the rich farm lands of the "West."

Those settlers who came from the province of Hanover were Lutherans, and those who emigrated from East and West Prussia were of the Reformed faith. The German United Reformed Lutheran Congregation of Dunklee's Grove, a combination of both, was organized in 1837 and services were held in a log cabin.

The story of the Lawrence, Chessman, Franzen and Wischstadt families describe the hardiness and resourcefulness of the settlers that first formed this section of northeast DuPage County.

## ITASCA'S EARLIEST RESIDENTS

### FRANZEN FAMILY

In the farming community that surrounded what later was plotted by Smith as the village of Itasca, many farming families had situated.

The family of Herman Bernhardt Franzen\* left the province of Westphalia, Prussia, in April, 1834, to journey to America. Five children accompanied the parents on the trip to Bremen where they intended to find sailboat passage to America. When the transportation for seven people proved more expensive than the family had expected, they found themselves five dollars short of passage money. An acquaintance from Westphalia refused to loan the necessary funds, but another emigrant was more generous. A promise was made by Herman, and later fulfilled, that the first five dollars earned in the new country would be sent to repay the loan.

A seven week sea voyage found the Franzens finally docking in Baltimore on June 27, 1834. One son found work as a farmer's hand, while Herman and two other sons started to work on the railroad, the first railroad in America.

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad first started construction in 1828 from Baltimore to Ellicott City, a total of 12 miles. This first phase of the construction took two years. When the Franzen men began working for the B & O, the line had reached beyond Ellicott's City and was nearing Harper's Ferry, West Virginia.

This pioneering family decided to head west again. They walked from their Baltimore shelter over 130 miles to Cumberland where they rented an empty mill for a home. The men found employment breaking rocks that were used for road beds. Even Mrs. Franzen worked breaking rocks for three tiring months. The money earned by the joint efforts of the whole hard-working family made it possible for them to continue on their journey. The furniture and beds they had accumulated were sent on to Wheeling, W. Va. on a wagon while the family trudged the same route wearily on foot. They traveled by boat from Wheeling to Cincinnati, Ohio.

The family experienced both joy and sorrow in this Ohio city. The menfolk found work. The oldest daughter, Anna, was married there. Here, also, the mother of the family died after a brief two day illness. Herman and his children were to travel on again.

The family received a letter that told of good farm land that was for sale at an inexpensive price in an area west of Chicago. The news gave the Franzens renewed strength to travel again in search of the dream Herman and his wife had for a farm and a home of their own.

Chicago, when our pioneering family reached it in the fall of 1835, had only been incorporated as a town for two years. Less than 500 people lived in what was then a frontier community. The town was beginning to grow that year, and streets were already beginning to appear as a few far-sighted citizens envisioned the beginnings of a port. The

\*Also spelled Frantzen in early records.

family remained in Chicago two years while the men worked for street builders to save money for the purchase of land.

In 1837 Herman, his three sons, John Henry, Gerhard, and Bernhard, and one daughter, traveled the last 18 miles to Addison where they built a block house and established a home.

John Henry started a brick factory in Addison, and later built one of the first flax-seed oil mills in the state of Illinois. People came from all over the country to bring linsseed to the mill to obtain the linseed oil for painting their houses and barns. This resourceful young man later opened a retail lumber business in Dunklee's Grove in partnership with his son, C. A. Franzen. His other sons, William and Herman, started the private banking firm of Franzen Brothers. This was the beginning of the Franzen banking chain so much a part of Itasca and the surrounding communities.

### THE CHESSMAN FAMILY

William Willis Chessman was born near Germantown, Pa., on January 29, 1800. His parents died when he was seven years old. William and his two sisters were placed in different homes. He stayed on the farm he was placed until he was 12 years of age and then ran away and went to sea. At the harbor of New York he got work on a sailing vessel that plied between that port and Havana, Cuba. This youth followed a sailor's life until a longing to see his sisters made him decide at age 18 to visit them in Salem, N. J. Delarah and Rebecca were each married with homes of their own. They persuaded their brother to learn a trade and quit the sea.

William located in Salem and apprenticed to a shoemaker. When he learned the trade he went into business for himself at Roadstown, N. J. There he married and there his first two children were born. In 1832 the Chessmans bought a farm about eight miles from Roadstown, and here five more children were born.

In 1849 William began to dream of a large farm where his four sons would have a future. He took the train west in search of the Illinois farming country that promised so much to the man with enough vision and ambition. The railroad ended at Fort Wayne, Indiana, but Chessman walked to southern Illinois and then to Springfield. There was fever and ague\* among the settlers in that city, so this pioneer was determined to settle still further north. He headed back East to get his sons, and started for Illinois again in the fall of 1851. His oldest son, Ellis, was a carpenter, and when they reached Chicago William worked as a shoemaker and his 21 year old son worked for a builder. In 1852 the men selected a 57 acre plot on Salt Creek. Mrs. Chessman and her five other children took a train from Salem to New York, a boat from New York to Detroit, and a train to Chicago to join the menfolk. Twelve years later, one son, Abel Griffith Chessman, was to remain on the farm after the rest of the family moved to Lemont.

In 1867, he was appointed postmaster of Sagone by Andrew Johnson.

\*A fever similar to malarial fever.

The post office was in his home that was located on the farm at a site now bounded on the north by Thorndale Rd., on the east by Salt Creek, and on the west by Prospect Rd. The farms surrounding the Chessman property were also considered to be in Sagone.

Abel became Itasca's first postmaster, and later its first village president. He served as village president from the 1890 incorporation until 1902. In addition to these positions he operated a mill and a box factory. His son, William, was Itasca's first village clerk.

### LAWRENCE FAMILY

Charles Lawrence and his family left England in 1844 on a sailing vessel to come to the shores of America. His family consisted of his wife and three children. They had all their worldly possessions in one small trunk. In addition to the trunk Lawrence was one of the fortunate few immigrants who had a sum of money left after paying boat passage across the Atlantic. Their future lay in the \$400 Charles possessed to start their life anew in this young country.

Lawrence, son of John and Mary Lawrence, was born in Cornwall, England, in 1804. He married Grace Finnemore and together they envisioned a life more plentiful than that of the majority of English living in the 1840s.

The early days of Queen Victoria's rule were times of unrest with the country on the verge of class war and revolution. The emigration of the Lawrence family, and thousands of others, was the result of the unstable condition of the country.

The family, after their arrival in America, came to settle on a farm in Schaumburg before moving on to DuPage County. When they moved into this area the family had been enlarged to seven by the birth of two more children. Their farm was located on property east of what later became Itasca.

Grace died in 1868. Her son, Henry F., attended Wheaton college for two years. In 1873, Dr. Smith, knowing H. F. disliked farming, asked him to operate a general store. Smith built the building on the corner of what is now Walnut Street and Orchard Street, and H. F. rented the structure and opened a store. The sign in front said "Cheap Cash Store." The new storekeeper had merchandise for sale on the first floor and lived upstairs.

H. F., now an important businessman in the community, was in charge of procuring teachers for the one room school. He felt the school was in need of greater discipline, and so he wrote to Carrie Eddy asking that she return from New York state and become Itasca's school teacher. Carrie, a former Itasca resident and a teacher in Roselle, Meacham (Medinah) and Bloomingdale, accepted the position. In 1878 she and Henry were married.

The couple lived above the general store until during the 1880's when H. F. had a home built between the Smith house and the store building. That home is now to the west of the library building.

The building of the house was carefully supervised by Lawrence. The type and quality of each item of construction was specified by the

homeowner. When completed, the couple and their three children moved into a home that rivalled any in the area.

The Lawrence children, all girls, were Jennette Smith, named after the doctor's wife; Idaclare and Duddie G. Jennette, later the wife of Rev. E. P. Leick, is now deceased.

H. F. conducted a general store until his election as county clerk of DuPage County in 1896. The biography of the 1913 DuPage County History said of him, "His capacity for hard work is almost unlimited, and DuPage County has no official who stands higher in general esteem that does he."

Lawrence was also a member of the first village board of Itasca and served until his election as county clerk.

### THE WISCHSTADT FAMILY

William Wischstadt came to America from Germany in 1847. He and his family first settled on 110 acres of land in the northwestern part of Addison township. In 1862 William bought 220 acres in Itasca. His property was situated south of the railroad tracks to Bloomingdale Rd., from Walnut street on the east almost to highway 53 on the west.

Wischstadt married twice, had six children with his first wife and five children with his second wife. His son, William H., was a successful farmer who also was responsible for much of Itasca's growth. He subdivided and sold lots in the area from Line street to Bloomingdale Rd., he served as village trustee of Itasca for 30 years, road commissioner for 3 years, and director of the school board for nine years.

William H. married Louise Peiper in 1881, and they had six children.

In 1920 Wischstadt was presented with a gold watch in recognition of his faithful service to the village. He was a member of the first fire department. He told, in an early newspaper article, about the problems of the hand pumper. At the Huffman mill fire the well from which they were getting water ran dry. The department did not have enough hose to reach the creek, so someone rode a horse to Bensenville to borrow their hose.

During the great Chicago fire of 1871 he reminisced that illumination was so great the family was able to read the newspaper in the evening in their Itasca home.

Herman Wischstadt, a son of William H., farmed 134 acres and raised dairy cattle. He was elected treasurer of Itasca in 1907. He married Lillie Goeddeke and they had three children.

## SMITH SETTLES AND ESTABLISHES THE VILLAGE

Smith settled on his 80 acres in 1843. He built a small house that stood opposite the spot now occupied by the Geil's Funeral Home building. The house faced south. This, the first home in Itasca, was torn down and replaced later before Smith married for the second time.

In 1845 Elijah bought his second parcel of 80 acres that increased his holdings to a quarter section of land. The government minimum price for this land was \$1.25 an acre by government sale. Apparently another purchaser was interested in bidding on this property, for legal records show that Elijah paid \$5.00 an acre, or a total of \$400.00 for this second piece of land. His deed was dated October 9, 1845.

The post office that first served the area and the official map name that designated the cluster of farms surrounding the postal area was called Bremen. The Bremen post office was first established in 1846 with Augustus Eddy\* as the first postmaster. Bremen was, no doubt, named after the port of exit in Europe that was the new immigrants' last sight of their homeland.

In May of 1850 the name was changed to Pierce in honor of the Smith D. Pierce that was postmaster from 1848 to 1864. Again the name of our area was changed, this time to Sagone. In 1873, according to the records of the National Archives, the post office name was recorded in Washington, D. C. as Ithica. Handwritten reports had probably caused the misspelling, because one month later, October 21, 1873, the post office and the community was recorded as Itasca. Abel Chessman was postmaster.

Residents who knew the Smiths substantiate the story that the family visited Lake Itasca in Minnesota. They so enjoyed the area and the name that they selected Itasca for the Smith settlement. Encyclopedias credit the meaning of Itasca to be a combination of Latin meaning true head. Lake Itasca is usually credited as being the beginning of the Mississippi River. This, too, is sometimes disputed.

To the north of what is now the northwest corner of N. Maple and W. Orchard streets the doctor built the farmhouse that was often incorrectly credited as the first home in Itasca. It was an outstanding house of its day with ten rooms and two separate attics. The upstairs rooms were small by today's standards. There were 43 doors in the house and 39 twelve-pane windows. Two staircases each had 13 stairs. One had a black walnut bannister. Wide panel flooring, four panel doors and china door knobs added to the beauty of the home's interior. Smith was not a pretentious man, and the furniture reflected his relatively simple manner of living. The furnishings were considered adequate, but not exceptional, in their day.

A portion of the downstairs was used for the doctor's office and reception room.

This home was built about 1850. His first wife, Jane, had died on May 31, 1846. They had no children. In 1850 he married Mary Allen,

\*Augustus Eddy is not known to be related to the Eddy family that moved to the area in 1869.

a girl whose family had originally come from Vermont. The Allen residence was located on Arlington Heights Rd. and was considered the showplace of the area.

Mary and Elijah had two sons and adopted one daughter. Allen, born in 1852, died in 1863. The second son, Frank, was born in 1860. The adopted daughter, Carrie C., was born in 1861.

In addition to his practice, Smith started a dairy business and farmed. He had a large barn built from huge timbers cut and hauled from Elk Grove. They were hand hewn and fastened together with wooden pegs.

In the 1860's the first school was built. It was a small wooden structure with one room. The building was located on a site near the present First Presbyterian Church. The building faced the south, overlooking the hill and the creek. The main road from the center of the village continued north on what is now Walnut street for one block. It then turned east on what is now Center street and continued past the schoolhouse. During recess and after school in the winter months the students would sled down the hill and onto the frozen creek. Dr. Smith gave the land for the school building and assisted in financing the construction.

In 1869 the Eddy family came from Limestone, N.Y. They settled on the farm that is now owned by the Mahler family on West Irving Park Rd. Miss Carrie Eddy, in 1874, became a teacher and for one or two years taught in Roselle, Meacham (now Medinah), and Bloomingdale. The Eddy family moved back to New York state.

H. F. Lawrence was in charge of securing a teacher for the Itasca school. Discipline was lacking, and Lawrence wanted to hire a teacher he felt capable of restoring order. He wrote to Carrie Eddy in 1876 and persuaded her to return to the village and teacher. Three years later Carrie became Mrs. H. F. Lawrence.

The post office was at that time still located in the A. G. Chessman home in Sagone. The mail was brought from Cottage Hill (now Elmhurst) twice a week on horseback. The rider's route took him through Sagone enroute to Arlington Heights.

Chessman moved into Itasca in 1873 and built the large two-story home on the southeast corner of Linden and Division streets. The post office was located, for a short time, in one crowded corner of his cheese box factory.

In 1873 Smith plotted 80 acres of his land into lots. The Chicago and Pacific railroad was completed from Chicago to Elgin with three stations at Bensenville, Wooddale (called Lester) and Itasca. Elijah gave the railroad the right-of-way to encourage their locating the tracks through the settlement. He also donated \$400.00 to help build the railroad station. A. G. Chessman constructed the station.

Chessman ran a mill and a cooper shop that made butter tubs and cheese boxes. He also had a glue factory in one portion of his cooperage. In 1872 Ernst Schroeder had moved to Itasca. The following year he set up a blacksmith shop. He invented the Schroeder plow, a potato planter and a bobsled coupler. The Schroeder shop was located



on what is now a triangle of land bordered by E. Irving Park Rd. and S. Walnut street.

Schroeder's ideas were excellent and his patent was sought by such farm manufacturers as the John Deere Company. The blacksmith preferred to make his equipment by hand, refused to consider dealing with the "giants" of the farm equipment industry, and thus his inventions went relatively unnoticed.

Another blacksmith, Henry Droegemueller, located across from Schroeder on the east side of Elgin Road. Old timers tell that the clanging of anvils could be heard for miles around in clear weather. Droegemueller also built wagons and carriages.

Mary Allen Smith died in 1874. Some years previous to her death her sister, living in Texas, had become a widow. The sister came and lived at the Smith house. After Mary died, Elijah married her sister, Jennette. They had no children.

Smith erected a building at the corner of Orchard and Walnut street in 1874. H. F. Lawrence rented the two story structure and started a general store. The post office was moved from the box factory into one corner of the store. A G. Chessman was still postmaster, and H. F. Lawrence was deputy postmaster. The railroad had been completed to Elgin, and now mail was coming in by train daily.

The Chicago and Pacific Railroad became "insolvent" as they termed bankruptcy in those days. In 1879 the road went into the hands of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad, a newly formed corporation combining several roads.

A steam engine with one railroad coach left Itasca at 6:30 A.M. each morning and returned at 7:15 each night. The run was called the Itasca Accommodation train. A turntable was located on the present site of the country club. Each night the train and its crew would "lay over" until the return trip. The Eggleston family located in the village and erected a hotel called the Itasca House. This building is now a drug store and paint store. The railroad crew boarded in the Itasca House. A. G. Chessman had started a feed and lumber business north of the railroad track, and his employees also lived at the Eggleston's hotel.

Edwin Nichols, the conductor of the Itasca Accommodation train was a religious man who wanted to give Itascans some form of a religious service. He held Sunday School classes in the railway coach as it stood on the siding on Sunday. On July 23, 1885, Nichols and 26 other residents submitted a petition to the presbytery of Chicago requesting permission to organize the First Presbyterian Church of "Itaska." On land donated by Jennette A. Smith the first church in Itasca was built.

The Lawrence general store was rented to a Mr. Hendricks. The Hendricks lived upstairs above the store. Louise Buchholtz,\* a young girl whose grandparents owned a large farm where Brookwood Country Club now stands, worked for the Hendricks family. She relates that her

\*Louise Buchholtz later became Mrs. Wm. Droegemueller, mother of Eibert, Dr. Edmund, and Mrs. George Plass.

earnings were \$2.50 a week and her board for caring for the often ill Mrs. Hendricks.

Hendricks and his wife took a trip to Germany to visit relatives. While they were gone a customer came to the store to buy kerosene. While the clerk was busy the careless buyer lit his pipe and threw the still lighted match to the floor. The kerosene fumes ignited starting a fire that burned the building to the ground. Miraculously no one was injured in the blaze. The bucket brigade of local citizens could not put out the fire.

In 1884 William Baruth came to Itasca and started a general store. He carried dry goods, boots and shoes, crockery, wines, liquors and patent medicines. William had served his country in the Civil War as a member of the 113th Illinois Infantry. He was wounded in the battle of Guntown and again at Arkansas Post near Vicksburg. After three years of service during the War Between the States he was honorably discharged. He started a general store in Chicago, but his building was destroyed during the Chicago fire of 1871.

The Lutheran School was erected on Elgin Rd. (E. Irving Park Rd.) in 1885. The Lutherans from Itasca and this area attended Zion Lutheran Church in Bensenville.

On December 7, 1888 Elijah Smith died. He was buried in Bloomington. His will gave Janette (as Elijah spelled Jennette) his "house, furniture, farm, stock, implements, 1/3 of all personal property, and all buildings except the cottage and the harness shop." At one time his properties included 440 acres of land, but he had disposed of all but 140 acres of that. The farm, he stipulated, was to go to his son, Frank, after Jennette's death. Also in his will "There is a schedule in my safe listing what I bequeath to Mrs. Cone, my adopted daughter, Carrie or her children, my nieces and nephews." Legal papers note the schedule was never found in the safe. Research for this history could find no further mention of Mrs. (Carrie) Cone. The Carrie mentioned in the will was Frank Smith's first wife.\*

The settlers in Itasca decided in 1890 to incorporate into a village. At a meeting at Chessman's Mill, the first election for a village board was held. Thirty eight ballots were cast. A. G. Chessman was elected as the first mayor. His son, William Chessman, was elected as clerk. The trustees elected were William Baruth, William Pieper, John H. Senne, William Schuette, H. F. Lawrence, J. H. Carr, William Wischstadt, and Dr. A. R. Solenberger. The treasurer was F. H. Hattendorf. The first village marshall was August Bucholtz.

One of the first ordinance amendments recorded reads "The committee on street crossings recommended that Ordinance No. 2, Section 3, be amended to read Five (5) planks wide instead of four (4) planks wide—" The amendment was approved, and a little more progress was made in this new village.

The business and professions of the 1890's included Dr. Solenberger; A. G. Chessman, steam power for grain elevator, a cheese box and tub

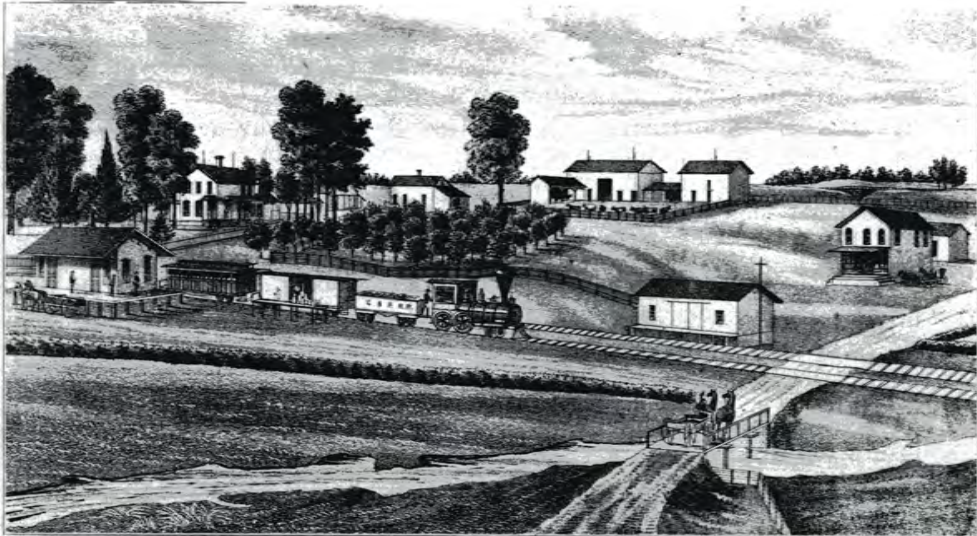
\*After Carrie Perrin Smith's death Frank married A. Emma Smith. They had no children.



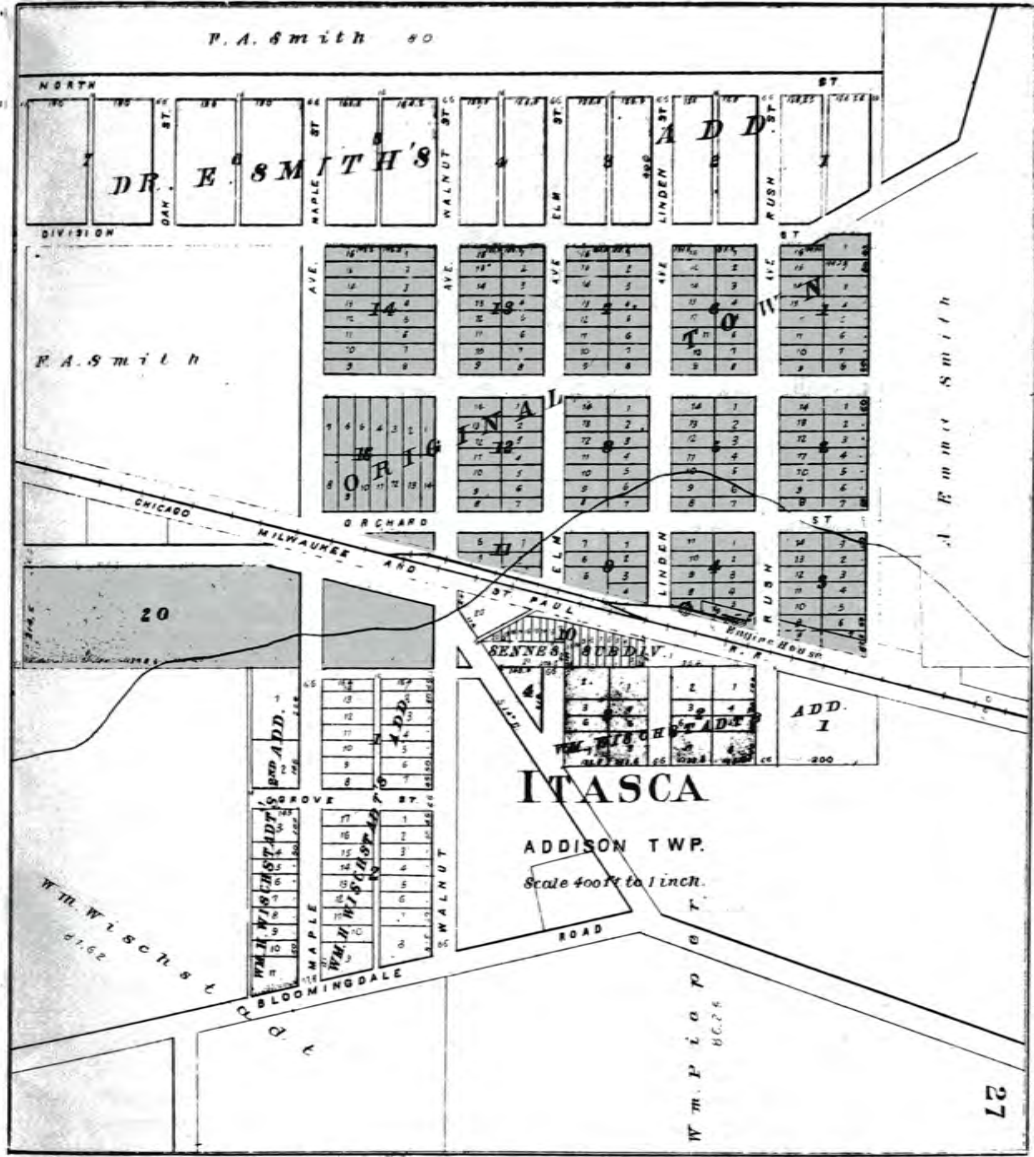
DR. ELIJAH SMITH  
1815-1888



THE ORIGINAL  
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.  
MANSE, TO RIGHT, WAS  
BUILT IN 1927.



ITASCA IN LATE 1870's



ITASCA, WHEN FIRST PLOTTED BY DR. ELIJAH SMITH

factory; H. F. Lawrence, general store; post office; Chessman and Cramer, carpenters and builders; Henry Ahlenstorf, boots and shoes; Ernst Schroeder, blacksmith, wagonmaker, and cheese factory; Lewis Magers, grain elevator; coal and lumber; William Baruth, general store; August Hartman, meat market; Henry Droegemueller, blacksmith and wagonmaker.

Irving Park Blvd. was first called the Chicago and Elgin Road. At an 1891 village board meeting the name was changed to Elgin Avenue. A second village board election was held on April of 1891, and this time 49 votes were cast. The original board was reelected. A motion was passed stating that the village president, the trustees, the treasurer and the village marshal would receive \$1.50 a year for their services.

Many unemployed began to follow the railroad tracks in the 1890's. They were termed tramps then, and the problem caused the village board to decide to build a calaboose. Part of the calaboose was rented out as a barber shop which netted the village a small income and made the new community a landlord. The barber furnished the coal for his shop and the jail. When warm weather arrived he asked the board to purchase awnings to keep the sun out of both the barber shop and the jail.

Marshall Bucholtz was placed in charge of the calaboose and was paid 15¢ to feed each inmate. In one winter 55 such tramps "stayed overnight" in the calaboose.

A larger schoolhouse was built in 1895 on property adjacent to the first school. This was a two-story brick building with a separate boiler to increase the safety of the students. The idea was later copied in the Chicago school construction.

The new school building had two large rooms, one on each floor. Pupils from Roselle and Meacham (Medinah) attended, as well as Itasca children and farm children. Two teachers comprised the staff. As many as 80 children attended at one time. The curriculum covered the equivalent of all eight years of primary work and the first year of high school work.

Youngsters who wished to continue their schooling attended private schools in Chicago.

Telephone service came to Itasca in 1899 and distance, consequently, became smaller for villagers.

Dr. Smith had started the community, Dr. Solenberger served on the first village board, and another doctor moved into Itasca in 1906 that would contribute much to the village. Dr. G. F. Schroeder, besides ministering to the physical needs of the community, served eight years as village trustee and 12 years as village president. He also found time to be president of the Lions Club.

Otto A. Franzen became a dealer in lumber, coal, brewer's grain, flour and feeds. Ed Jacobus was a livestock dealer in the early 1900's. Other prominent men of the era were William Schaper, August Goeddeke, Fred Peiper, George Speckman and John Broker. William Bunge started a hardware business in 1908. His store became so well-known it was once duplicated in a skit on TV by Wayne King. Mr. King loved to "browse" thru Bunge's Hdwre.

The beautiful spire that is Itasca's most familiar landmark graces

the top of what was formerly the Lutheran Church of St. Luke. This edifice was built in 1907 by builder Fred Westendorf. Frederick Zersen, the minister, served the congregation of St. Luke's for 38 years.\* Church services were all in German. It was not until 1926 that English services were held twice a month. German was also taught in the church school.

Fires that occurred in this new bustling little community were usually impossible to extinguish. The citizen's bucket brigades were not adequate for the village of several hundred people. In 1909 a group of civic minded men organized the first fire department. H. H. Geils was elected as the department's first chief.\*\*

A Howe hand pumper bought in 1911 was their first piece of equipment. It was nearly 20 years old, but proved a good investment after serving the village for another 21 years.

The operation of this hand pumper required 16 men, eight on each side working the bars up and down to force the water through the hose. The pressure, it was said, was enough to "knock a man down."

The department owned no horses. To move the pumper to a fire the men 'requisitioned' the team that was closest to the pumper. There was, luckily, always at least one team hitched somewhere in the village. It became a source of pride for a team's owner to have his horses draw the pumper to the scene of the fire.

The firemen had to rely on rain-filled cisterns and the creek for water to fight the blazes. A shortage of water and a shortage of hose often handicapped these civic minded volunteers. Firemen recalled among the famous fires that were battled with the hand-pumper the old mill fire at Roselle in 1916, the Itasca creamery blaze a few years later, and the burning of the Kastning barn, north of Itasca.

By 1905 the dairy industry was flourishing in the county. Two milk shipments went by train to Chicago each day. H. H. Geils bought a cheese and butter factory from Herman Wilk. The factory could process 2000 pounds of milk daily. Geils also organized a corporation called "The Homer Squab Farm Co." raising some 1300 squabs for the Chicago markets.

Five years later he built a large greenhouse behind the family home. His spare time was devoted to serving the village as trustee and later as constable.

The booming little community of Itasca had 333 people in the census of 1910. Oil lanterns lit the "downtown" area streets. The roads were dirt, and residents swallowed dust all day. As more people moved to Itasca with more teams of horses and carriages, the situation got worse. Ernst Kraegel had moved into the village in the early 1900's. He had bought the lumber yard in partnership with the Franzen brothers. He bought out his partners in a few years time. The road that went from his lumber yard to his house proved just as dusty as the rest of town, so

\*Edward Fiene, Edward Schaper and William Rosenwinkel were the first trustees of the Lutheran Church of St. Luke.

\*\*Some of the fire department charter members include William Mess, Frank Franzen, Elmer Geils, Ed Ackmann, Herman Wischstadt, and Frank Kirchof.

Ernst decided to remedy the situation. In 1916 he bought 250 gallons of waste oil and oiled the road. It proved so successful and inexpensive a solution to the dust problem that the village the following year bought a tank car of oil and spread it over all the village streets. These streets, it must be remembered, only extended from Bloomingdale Rd. on the south to Elm Street on the north.

Frank Smith, Elijah's son died in 1913. His wife kept the family home until 1923 when she sold it to Mr. and Mrs. L. A. McKenzie.

Fred Westendorf and Ernst Kraegel built a building on the corner of south Maple and East Irving Park Rd. It was rented first to William Baruth and Paul Degenkolb who operated an ice cream parlor in the building. The men worked elsewhere during the day and only opened the store at 7 P.M. There was no electricity in the village so the store lamp was filled with kerosene. When one lampful of fuel burned out it was time to close.

Lumber dealer Kraegel told that when the building was being built that workmen had to clear away bushels of Indian arrowheads. This would lead one to believe the site had once been an Indian camping ground. The situation of this spot next to the creek adds credence to this possibility.

Until 1916 there was no bank in Itasca. Herman H. Franzen would take deposits for village residents to the Roselle Bank each morning, making the trip regularly on the 9 A.M. train. In 1916 two banks opened within weeks of each other. One bank has as its president H. F. Lawrence. The cashier was Elmer H. Franzen. The Lawrence bank was located in the drug store building. The second bank was called the Dairyman's Bank of Northern Illinois and was opened by F. N. Peck. This bank opened in the building previously occupied by the Degenkolb-Baruth ice cream store.

Peck opened a total of four banks, but depression forced him to close them all. The Franzen banks in Itasca, Roselle and Fox Lake were sound throughout the hard times of the twenties and emerged successfully from the depression.

The 1920's found the country singing songs like "My Little Bimbo," and "You Know You Belong to Somebody Else." The village had increased to over 500 people. Living was a little easier for the women of the village and they found themselves with leisure time. More leisure gave them an opportunity to take an interest in something besides their home and their church. The first such outside interest came in November of 1923 when 16 mothers met to form a PTA.\* By 1925 the membership had increased to 44.

#### FIRST P.T.A.

Sixteen mothers who "believed that the welfare of their children would be greatly helped by a closer contact between parents and teachers," organized the first PTA on Wednesday, Nov. 14, 1923. The officers serving that first year were: Mrs. Theodore Pierce, president; Mrs. Luehring, Mrs. Chessman, and Mrs. Lake, vice-presidents; Mrs. Kroeger, secretary; and Mrs. Woodworth, treasurer.

\*See insert page for more information of this organization.

#### ITASCA WOMAN'S CLUB

Mrs. L. A. McKenzie was president of the Woman's Club its first year of existence. Organized on April 1, 1924, the club's other officers were: Mrs. von Gunten, vice-president; Mrs. Brockmeier, secretary, and Mrs. Schroeder, treasurer.

The program schedule of the 1925-26 year was as follows:

October — Art program at the home of Mrs. G. S. Schroeder.  
November — Address by Miss Iva Brown of the American Red Cross, held at the Village Hall.

December — Christmas program at the home of Idaclare Lawrence.

January — Food values and their application to every day life, at the home of Mrs. von Gunten.

February — Men of History, at the home of Mrs. McKenzie.

March — Speaker Miss Belle MacFarlane of the U. of C. Settlement, at the home of Mrs. von Gunten.

April — Interior Decorating, at the home of Mrs. McKenzie.

May — The art and theory of story telling by Miss Frances Wetmore of Chicago, held at the Village Hall.

#### INTER-NOS CLUB, 1909-1923

This organization began in 1909. Charter members were Otto Pieper, E. Ahlensdorf, Thomas Van Gelder, H. B. Chessman, W. Weber, Charles Hanck and Frank Schneider.

The club first met in the Itasca Bank building, and then in the Mensching building.

#### YU KNO CLUB

This woman's organization was organized in 1909. With a membership limited to 12, it existed as a purely social club. The membership claimed, it was written in one article, "Itasca's choicest womanhood." Records cannot be found listing all the first officers, but Mrs. Paul Degenkolb, then Erma Schneider, was secretary and treasurer of the select 12. The charter members were Clara Goeddeke, Frances and Florence Slanker, Celia Schroeder, Lydia Weber, Edna Schuette, Linda Wischstadt, Jennette, Idaclare and Grace Lawrence.

#### VILLAGE PRESIDENTS

A. G. CHESSMAN .....	1890-1902
E. D. JACOBUS .....	1902-1905
H. H. FRANZEN .....	1905-1917
AUG. FREDRICK .....	1917-1921
G. F. SCHROEDER .....	1921-1933
HENRY LUEHRING .....	1933-1941
JESSIE F. BEAVER .....	1941-1949
RUSSELL E. PAULSON .....	1949-1957
JAMES E. CLAYSON .....	1957-1961
PAUL F. BOEHNE .....	1961-1963
WILBERT H. NOTTKE .....	1963-

On April 1, 1924, 20 women met at the home of Mrs. L. McKenzie (the Smith house) to form the Itasca Woman's Club.\*

The H.T.M. club also organized in 1924. None except its members, all young married women, knew the meaning of its initialed name. The

men, during the early 1900's had the Inter-Nos Club.\*\* Derived from the French words "entre nous" meaning among ourselves, the club counted as its members most of the successful businessmen of the village.

Electricity was first installed in some of the homes in 1923 and the bustling community boasted about its many facilities. One news clipping of that year stated "We have three churches, three ladies' aid societies, Woman's Club, PTA, Camp Fire Girls, three private clubs, improvement association, golf clubs, real estate business, two lumber yards, one hardware store, two groceries, one meat market, two banks, one music shop, one barber shop, one repair shop, one ice cream parlor, one home made candy business, one garage, one fur company, interior decorator, two building contractors, one mason contractor, one doctor, one tailor, one electric shop, one dray business, two dairies, one athletic club, one taxi service, one pickle factory and one florist." It was a most impressive list, and some of the service shops could be used in our village in this year of 1965.

The Itasca Country Club was opened in the spring of 1925 with a nine hole golf course ready for use. The membership was limited to 150 families. The first 50 members paid \$150.00 membership fee, the second 50 paid \$200.00 and the last 50 members paid \$250.00 There was, no doubt, a scramble to be listed among the first 50. Dues, after membership, were \$60.00 a year. B. B. Clover organized the club and was its first president.

The Bethany congregation that had its beginning in 1858 was, by 1924, composed of mostly Itascans. The congregation's old white church that stood at Nerge road and Rt. 53 in Schaumburg township was moved to the northwest corner of Walnut and Division streets during that year. It was called the First Evangelical Church of Itasca. Today it is the Bethany Evangelical United Brethren Church.

The increase of population in the village lessened the predominantly German influence. The Lutheran Church of St. Luke in 1926 began to have English services twice a month.

A jovial, well-liked postmaster named George Pfaff gave a lot of pleasure to the youngsters when he dreamed up the idea of bicycle races. There was one difference between these races and conventional ones: in his races the youngsters rode as slow as they could without losing their balance. It was recorded that Roger Chessman won the event two years. Pfaff watched and supervised the bike races and sack races "virtually exploding with enthusiasm."

The clubhouse of the country club, built in 1925, was almost completely destroyed by fire ten years later. It was rebuilt on the same site.

The North school was built and ready for occupancy the fall of 1940. There were only four rooms in the original structure. The downstairs had two classrooms; the second floor had a class room with a small stage and kitchen at the back. Morton Webster was principal of the 95 student body.

People began slowly to move out from the city to this village of homes. The population sign recorded 779. The boom was yet to come.

The wartime housing shortage so critical in Chicago caused many

\* \*\*See insert page for more information on these organizations.

city dwellers to eye the suburbs wishfully. Golfers thought of the pleasure of living close to their place of sport. As World War II drew to a close the 779 Itascans became an estimated 1,000 and the village was recorded as containing 3,840 acres or six square miles. It was a lot of growth since that spring of 1841.

## THE PERIOD AFTER WORLD WAR II

The first Itasca State Bank, organized in 1916 by H. F. Lawrence and Elmer H. Franzen, by the mid-1940's had Bensenville depositors in great number. It was decided to move the bank to Bensenville. In 1948 H. H. Franzen and Ray Franzen moved the Itasca State Bank and renamed it the Bensenville State Bank.

Elmer H. Franzen, convinced that Itasca needed its own bank, organized The Itasca State Bank.

The rural village of the 1800's and early 1900's retained its atmosphere until the 1940's. A new word then began to enter the American vocabulary. The village became a suburb. The influence of the city increased as population increased.

Commuting daily to the Loop became the routine for many of the village wage earners. The transferring from city to city common to the life of the young executive on the way up in business caused a more mobile population.

The increase in the number of residents in the community brought a greater need for churches. New religions came into the area, and present churches expanded.

The First Presbyterian Church began construction of a Sunday School annex in 1949. The original church, later torn down to make room for the new sanctuary, held its last service in September of 1950. The new sanctuary was completed in 1952.

Construction on a new Evangelical United Brethren Church was also completed in two parts. The first half of the new structure was dedicated in December of 1951. After this portion was completed the old church of 1875 was demolished. The front half of the new edifice was finished with first services in the entire structure presented in February, 1956.

A new church denomination was introduced to the community when the Itasca Free Church congregation was organized. Services were first held in the North School gym in 1955. Land was purchased on George Street and a building was constructed. The services in the new house of worship were first held in 1957.

St. Peter's parish was founded in June, 1956. Church services began in the gym of the North School. With bread baskets for collection plates and an organ transported each Sunday morning from a parishioner's home, the church began to function.

A church building was constructed on North Rush Street and the first mass was said on July 19, 1959. During 1962 the school and convent were built. School began in September of 1963 with a student body of about 200.

Religious services of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church were held in the Washington School from 1958 until the church was built. The church building on North Catalpa Street was dedicated at its first service in

December of 1962.

A site south of Washington Street was to become the new Church and School of St. Luke. Classes were moved out of the old school and into the new building in 1961. The new church was completed in 1962.

The white spired landmark that had for so long been the church of St. Luke's congregation was sold. A new religious group, the Pilgrim Congregational Church, began services in the structure.

During the 40's all the village services were performed by a small handful of people. Frank Franzen was police chief. Carl A. Hanck was village clerk and policeman from 1945 to 1961. These men policed the village, read water meters, served as building inspectors, supervised the water system and pumping station, kept village records, maintained the sewage disposal plant and repaired the village streets.

The North School, by 1947, had 138 students. A classroom addition supplemented the original four room building and was ready for use in 1949. By 1950 the gym was completed. A second addition to the school building was in use by January of 1955.

Washington School began classes in September of 1957. The increase in village population made an addition necessary to that school in just three years.

By 1963 School District 10 included North School, Washington School and the newly completed Elmer H. Franzen School.

High school students from Itasca were sent to Bensenville's Fenton High School and to the combined Glen Ellyn-Lombard school, Glenbard High School. A high school district, district 108, was organized in September, 1953. Lake Park High School, with students from Itasca, Roselle, Medinah, Keeneyville and Bloomingdale, began classes in September, 1956.

Shopping centers, commonplace on the West coast, were first introduced to this area when Bensenville's Green Meadow Shopping Center opened for business. Village residents with shopping needs that could not be answered in Itasca or at Green Meadows went to the Loop, Elmhurst or Elgin.

Shopping centers moved closer to our village in all directions during the 1950's and 1960's. One was recently incorporated into Itasca. Apartments were constructed and an industrial area was planned for the Route 53 - Irving Park Rd. area. The changing face of the community was not without protest. Loud disagreement from many residents followed the announcement of the plan to initiate each change. Apartments and industry were the most opposed features of change.

In this year of 1965 the suburban village of Itasca still struggles to maintain its individuality in the urban spread that has swallowed area after area. The Village of Iris, its population and area of constructed homes increased nearly 20 fold since the incorporation of 1890, continues its growth. With the adoption of a village plan, the community has stopped long enough to appraise itself and determine its future. Only a history, written in another 75 years, will be able to judge the results.

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*In the hurry to complete this work it is inevitable that some important old-time residents, events of interest and important facts were overlooked. Any such oversight was completely unintentional.*