

Ogle County Historical Society

Foundation and History of the Ogle County Historical Society

By Beth Simeone

2019 marks over half a century since many dedicated people throughout Ogle County began working to preserve the history of this Northern Illinois County. For some, their interest and passion was fueled by firsthand knowledge as they were the children or grandchildren of earliest settlers who migrated to Ogle County. The following is adapted from early Ogle County Historical Society records, the 1976 Bicentennial History of Ogle County, written and oral records by many members.



Judson M Bemis, born Nashua Township, founded Bemis Bag, Inc, 1858. Pioneered printing, machine sewing cotton bags for farm produce. Complete history/Bemis genealogy at OCHS. Below a pair of hand-carved, wooden shoes worn by East Friesens who migrated to Ogle County early 19th Century.

Creation of OCHS has been credited to Mrs. H.B. (Margaret) Walker, of Byron, Illinois. She proposed this project to the Ogle County Federation of Women's Clubs in March, 1953 and members accepted the challenge to form a committee and move forward. Much talent and professional expertise were donated over the years including Gerald K. Gerard for non-profit incorporation, George Noone, and for many recent years, David Smith.

The original persons dedicating themselves to incorporation were Miss Ella Chaney, Chana; Miss Ruby Nash,

Oregon; Mrs. Ivan (Dorothy) Kuntzelman, Oregon; Mrs. Yale (Julia) Bates, Rochelle; Mrs. Harold (Margaret) Walker, Byron; and Mrs. Arthur (Carolyn) Beebe, Stillman Valley. Mr. Merle Haselton of Rochelle was the first charter life member.

On May 31, 1955, the OCHS Constitution was completed and adopted by the growing membership. Persons who accepted positions on the first board of directors were: Victor Conkey, Frank Coffman, Willard Jones, Mrs. Isaac (Maude) Canfield, Miss Lillian Storz, Russell Poole, Everett Webster, C.C. Parks, George Etnyre, Kenneth Cleaver, Mrs. C.M. (Grace) Tilton and Mrs. Edith Carmichael.

Meetings were held in many towns and locations for the first decade until the passing of Ruby Nash. It then was learned that she had willed her 1878 home site at 111 N. 6th Street in Oregon to the Ogle County Historical Society and to the Oregon Library, 1/2 interest each. The result was purchase by the OCHS of the 1/2 Oregon Library interest. And thus a historical museum space became reality. Prior to this, an unknown **number of members stored their ancestor's belongings in barns, attics, trunks and other buildings** waiting for a final designation. These historical items consisted of household utensils, crockery, homespun woolens, handmade clothing and lace, quilts, farming implements, tools, blacksmith creations, precious books and Bibles. Many were carried in the long migration to Ogle County Illinois.

Little known is that Emily Cartwright, Oregon Public Librarian for fifty years, sister of Illinois Supreme Court



Former "Welcome" building from Courthouse lawn, now at Nash Home. In front, a rescued portion of Ogle County Home/Farm entrance gate located south of Oregon. Only remaining landmark is small cemetery in the cornfield near Highway Department.

Chief Justice James H. Cartwright, had been an unofficial historian. Emily came from the family of Barton H. Cartwright, Methodist circuit riding minister. Her mother Chloe Jane Benedict came with first pioneers to Washington Grove and Lafayette Township. She is noted as the first teacher there in 1836.

Emily had preserved a large collection of pioneer artifacts, perhaps in the library and stored elsewhere. It is not known how long she had kept a repository of early memorabilia or where she stored them. Often early libraries had many collections of ephemera including insects, botanical plants and arrowheads.

Emily and Ruby Nash were both intellectual colleagues and personal friends. When Ruby retired after fifty years of teaching, she proceeded to collect and write the history of Oregon and its surrounding area as she had lived it. Her father Chester Nash was an inventor with several U.S. Government patents. Moving to Oregon in 1882, he began producing the Nash cultivator for agriculture. He also tinkered around with other interests inventing a mechanical pencil sharpener and creating a violin.

Curiously in 1963, the largest single collection came to the newly established Ogle County Historical Museum from the Oregon library and many items had their provenance of the families or where they came from. Today the Nash Home and 2004 Annex are informally referred to as the Ruby Nash Museum, but officially it also remains home to the Ogle County Historical Society. Found elsewhere in this 2019 Gazette are some of the Museum projects that can be visited today.



Will It Rain?

Yes it's rained and rained again in Ogle County this spring of 2019. Just ask anyone but most of all everyone in agriculture.

An old letter written by Nicholas Sauer reminisced clearly of his mother's farm in Section 16, Oregon Township that was two miles south of Oregon. Included was Nick's stunning and credible description of rain commencing on June 29, 1882.

This led us to check the daily diaries of T.J. Fearer, Section 1 on Ridge Road, Pine Creek Township. He too, wrote of this alarming event by Mother Nature that poured out of the sky that night.

Their descriptions pointed to the local Republican Reporter and the always detailed writing of editor T.O. (Timoleon Oscar) Johnston. Thanks to his decades of reporting, we have a wealth of long forgotten Oregon and Ogle County History. T.O.'s mother was Sarah Phelps, daughter of Oregon founder John "Jack" Phelps.

Not to be disappointed, there was a mammoth front page article by Editor Johnston that is filled with details of the damages and curious experiences had by the citizens who fled the fast moving water and extreme light-

ening.

So with that we are including in this Gazette, a special reprint and newly developed map that is based on the 1882 storm editorial by T.O. Johnston.

Nicholas Sauer

1858-1947

"1882 - Being 24 years old this spring and my Brother being old enough and able to take care of our own farm, I hired to Mrs A M Bacon to manage and farm the big Bacon farm west of town. Mrs Bacon was a widow and the Mother of Frank Bacon her only Son who a great many will yet remember as a prominent Lawyer here.

Well we had about 70 head of cattle that we kept in a pasture located in the NE corner of the farm and another pasture South of the farm, to get into this you had to cross the railroad tracks and a bridge over the creek.

Well the night between June 30th and July 1 we had the hardest rain that I can remember in my 85 years. It just poured all night and the next morning all 70 head of cattle were gathered in the little yard around the barn and the fence around both pastures gone. The fence around the NE pasture was all in a heap, posts and all in the big pond on

the Commercial Farm west of the City and the Bridge over the creek was gone too!

Well anyone that has ever lived on a farm can imagine what we had to do the next day and weeks thereafter. And this water from there flowed through the City along the low ground below the School House and emptied into Rock River about where the Etnyre Works are now. And the few houses along its course had water on the first floor.

While it hardly seems possible to me, yet this happened 61 years ago next July."

Nicholas Sauer (written about 1943) (Ed note: Nicholas Sauer was a self-taught, ambitious and thrifty early businessman in Oregon, Not content to work the land, he began to learn the hardware business with Col B.F. Sheets. Then he opened his own store with Nathan Andrew. After retiring from Sauer and Andrew Hardware Store, Nicholas continued his skills in tin and sheet metal from his home shop on S 7th Street. All the while he served in public offices including City Clerk. Over the years he often offered written opinions and early historical memories in letters to the editor.



TIN SMITH

You miserable clipper of tin!
 You boozy old swiller of gin!
 There's naught in the way of a sin
 That you're not a graduate in.
 But some-day the Devil will pin
 You, and, tucking you under his fin,
 In spite of your howls and your din,
 Down to Sheol with you he will spin.

Thomas J Fearer

1823-1910

"Saturday, June 24, 1882

Clear and very warm I went to Oregon to attend the Convention to Elect Deligates to attend the State convention at Springfield and Congressional Convention at Freeport I sold 53 bushell Oats at 48 cents per bushel. Wife went to Oregon with me. Rained today very hard"

"Sunday, June 25, 1882

Clear very warm Blanche Jennie Willie Wife and I went to Sabbath

School after we came home Wife and I went to John M Miller's rained while we was at Millers"

"Tuesday, June 27, 1882

Cloudy this morning I started for Springfield Ills to attend the State Convention I got to Dixon before ten o'clock arrived in Springfield at six o'clock in the evening

I stopt at a private house pd \$1.00 per day Mr Beach the keeper"

"Thursday, June 29, 1882

Cloudy this morning I left Springfield at 6 o'clock got to Polo at 2 O'clock rained some I got home this evening we had the greatest rain tonight that ever was known in this section all the bridges on Pine Creek except one is swept away"

"Friday, June 30, 1882

Clear very warm John Fearer, Ed Will and I went to the bridge at Malone place we fixed a foard and looked for the bridge all the bridges on Pine Creek are gone the railroad track is washed off the bed in a great many places"

"Saturday, July 1, 1882

Clear and warm and sultry I went to Pine Creek with John Fearer and engaged help to put bridge acrost near John Coffman in the afternoon Will and I went to salt our cattle in the timber pasture the bottom is swept clear of fences"

"Monday, July 3, 1882

Cloudy today Ed and Willie Plowed corn

I hoed sweet potatoes John Nye & Wife & son came to bring Sally and Susan

Sally Baker and Susan staid overnite rained this afternoon"

"Friday, July 7, 1882

Rained this morning the carpenters went home this morning rained all the forenoon in the afternoon Ed Willie and I helpt Henry Mumma fix his pump I went to Fridleys"

"Saturday, July 8, 1882

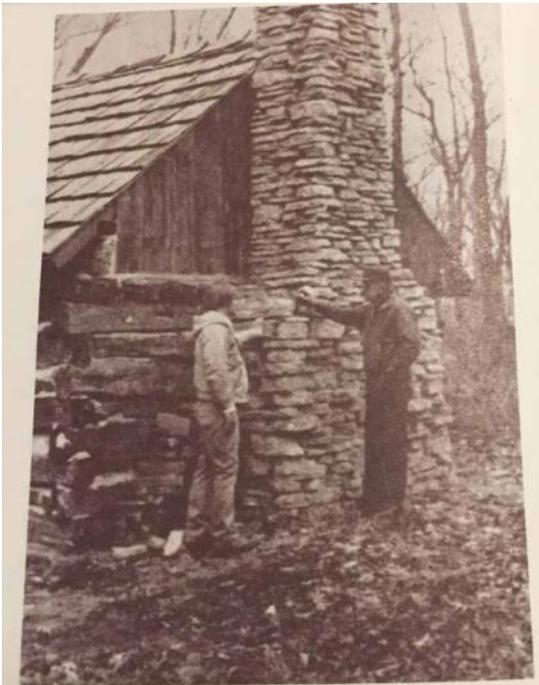
Willie and I went for lumber the carpenters did not work today in the afternoon I went to Oregon Ed went with me Tom Goings pd me \$155.00 for Jack

(Ed note: T.J. Fearer was a self-educated man who took over the family homestead at age 20 when his father died in 1843. His daily entries chronicle 24 of almost 60 years he grew the farm to over 240 acres, invested in Oregon real estate and retired there in 1902. He read widely, always keeping up on current events, went by horse to serve on jury duty and track local politics. Once, he rode horseback alone to hear the abolitionist Frederick Douglas who spoke in Dixon. Very progressive, he sent his daughter Jennie to college in 1882 and son Willie (Wm P Fearer I) to law school.

Presidents Who Have Served 1955-2019

Mrs. H A (Carolyn) Beebe – Stillman Valley
Everett Webster – Polo
Russell Poole – Polo
W F Light - Leaf River
Hamilton Cross – Oregon
Milford Rothermal – Monroe Center
Don Horn – Davis Junction
Margaret Knight - Lindenwood
Don Asp – Mt Morris
Midge Herman - Mt Morris
Doris Vogel. Holcomb
Barbara Barnes – Oregon
Beth Simeone – Oregon
Dottie Bowers – Byron
Kris Gilbert – Oregon

Mrs. H P (Margaret) Walker – Byron
C Merle Hazelton – Rochelle
Ellery Robbins, Stillman Valley
G C Terry - Polo
Paul Hardesty – Oregon
Donald Black – Oregon
Carol Moore – Oregon
Vada Wood- Oregon
Stan James – Mt Morris
James Barnes – Oregon
Ron Bry – Oregon
Paul Behan – Oregon
Otto Dick - Oregon
Bill Bailey – Oregon



The Bornemann log cabin restored at Taft Campus of Northern Illinois University, north of Oregon. Gene Moritz, supervisor of building and grounds, and Hamilton Cross, Ogle County Historical Society member, inspect the fire place.



Left, original Bornemann Cabin moved, reassembled on Taft Campus by OCHS members in 1960's. Above, see today well maintained, moss covered roof, wooden rain barrel, gutters and old grind stone.

The Ogle County Historical Society
PO Box 183
Oregon, Il. 61061

Would you like to become a member to help us preserve Ogle County history?

_____ \$35 per household per year

___ \$5 per year for hard copy of Gazette

Renewals due in November for following year

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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