

SHERMAN VILLAGE HISTORY

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Legend has it there was a small village in the middle of Illinois, named Grasshopper. This isn't a proven fact. Pioneers told of early to mid-1850 sightings of large numbers of grasshoppers living in this area. Some people tried to settle their families in this location, with some folks deciding to move further out West, away from these grasshoppers. Naturally, this no name village might pick up the name of Grasshopper with so many of these varmints trying to share this space with the newly arriving settlers. Could it possibly be in the early 1800s to 1850s that there were more grasshoppers living in this place than pioneer families?

In the early 1820s immigrants began arriving to settle this territory, living along side of the numerous grasshoppers inhabiting the place. This was a wild area, very rough, undeveloped wilderness during these early years. Early settlers found tracks of wild beasts roaming in this vicinity. History tells us that there were wild howling wolves, bobcats, rattlers, panthers and other dangerous animals in this untamed region. As pioneers began arriving to establish settlements in what was to become Fancy Creek Township in Sangamon County, settlers had to deal with extremely harsh conditions and very few inhabitants. Families had to fend for themselves with the occasional new immigrant family moving in, looking to establish themselves in a new environment.

These pioneer families lived around camp fires, where they did their cooking. Many times, they would build small three sided wooden shelters, cooking at their campfire near the opening on the fourth side. These hardy folks had to tend to their families, oxen, cows, horses, cooking, planting gardens, planting seeds to grow corn and various other crops. These immigrants arrived here from Virginia, the Carolinas, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Tennessee and other parts of the country. They came looking to establish a new way of life for their families. At one time these new settlers were growing fine crops of cotton in the vicinity of this newly established village of Grasshopper. The women would weave the cotton into cloth for making their families clothes. After the famous "Deep Snow" of 1830-1831, days began to shorten, causing frostbite to their cotton crops. The climate here did not cooperate and cotton was not widely grown after the early 1800s. This huge, terrible snow is still talked about in 2012 by old timers that heard these stories told by their ancestors. The snow was said to have left horses and their riders dead in their tracks, frozen until the thaw came. The folks trying to settle in what is now the community of Sherman had to deal with severe problems, especially those families living outside in these harsh conditions. It was difficult to build log cabins to withstand the severe weather. Only a few log cabins were built in this local area by 1820. Try to imagine how you would feel without your house, electricity and our spoiled living conditions of 2012 compared to what these very brave settlers had to endure trying to survive the elements in the early 1800s. Most of the settlers hunted, fished and trapped for the meat that they ate. They had simple handmade furniture like cradles and beds, which were usually featherbeds. Pioneer families washed their clothes in streams, creeks or rivers. These industrious women usually made their own soap, made candles, milked cows and did other chores. Parents, especially the mothers were most often the people that taught their children to read and write, but only if they could do those things themselves. Many folks back then were not able to attend a school nor have the

opportunity to learn how to read and write. These families lived an adventure, but not necessarily a fun adventure since it was mainly hard work.

The Pottawatomie, Kickapoo's, Tamaroa and Delaware were some of the Indian tribes residing in the surrounding areas of Sangamon County during the early 1800s. The Indians along with the new pioneers would hunt and trap wild turkey, quail, coons and other animals. They traveled down the Sangamon River by canoe where we now cross this same river almost daily by automobile driving into what is now Springfield. Early settlers of this Grasshopper/Sherman location mainly were carpenters, farmers, operated mercantile businesses, operated sawmills, cotton gins, grew cotton, blacksmiths, ministers, teachers with many raising stock. Coal mining didn't begin in earnest in the Sangamon County area until after the Civil War, getting into full swing around 1870 and later.

On November 26, 1829 James and Nancy Sayles bought 80 acres of land and then sold it to William Carpenter on December 31, 1831. James Sayles came to the Grasshopper location in the year of 1819, settling on his homestead and remaining there until his death. On January 13, 1850, William Carpenter sold the 80 acres to Margaret Wigginton. She then sold 2 1/5 acres to the Gulf, Mobile & Ohio Railroad around 1856. When she died the rest of the land was divided between 10 heirs and was sold to settle her estate. This is the land that was eventually to become the village of Sherman.

About 1820 the nearest post office to Grasshopper was located in Edwardsville, Illinois taking two weeks to go and come with the mail. What a long way to go to collect a person's mail. One of the first settled areas of Grasshopper was where Carpenter's Park is now located. This park is named for one of Sherman's oldest families; the Carpenter's who helped settled this untamed village.

A gentleman named William Carpenter was born July 3, 1787 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In the early 1800s, William and his brother Samuel moved to Licking County, Ohio which was then considered to be the "far West." Margaret Pence and William Carpenter were married in 1819 in Ohio. In 1820 this family headed to the Springfield, Illinois vicinity. They continued through the Springfield areas and built a cabin about six miles north of it near the Sangamon River. Mr. Carpenter eventually became the owner of the lands on both sides of the river and also the ferry which he conducted until a bridge was built in 1844. In 1830 when stagecoach service began, William Carpenter erected a two story log house which was at the time called the "six mile house," a point for the stage line on the state road leading from Springfield to Peoria. In 1843 William Carpenter Jr. and his brother-in-law Adolphus Wood erected a flouring and sawmill on the Sangamon River at Carpenters Bridge which was also known as the Rock-dam Mills from the material used in construction. Carpenter's Mill and Carpenters Park has been a landmark for Sherman since 1844 even though the Mill is gone. William Carpenter died August 30, 1859 about a year after the village of Sherman was named. He and his large family are buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery at Springfield.

Stories were often told by early residents of Sherman that the village was named for a Civil War General, William T. Sherman. That story which was widely circulated was false. You might wonder how Sherman went from the unusual name of Grasshopper to Sherman. Years ago a

lifelong Sherman resident, Susan Flagg Parks shared the true story of the mystery of changing from Grasshopper to Sherman. Susan's ancestor grandfather, Cornelius Flagg was one of the key players in this exciting event.

According to Susan Flagg Parks, four men bought this same 80 acres of land from the Wigginton estate. They surveyed the land and platted it. Around this same time the post office system was coming to the various locations of Sangamon County. Of course, Grasshopper wasn't a good name for a real town.

Many small towns were having similar problems of selecting names for their villages. The village of Williamsville was then named Benton, Illinois. Abraham Flagg, the father of Cornelius Flagg owned a good portion of this Benton. He bought the land, platted it and sold lots for homes. Another son of Abraham Flagg was Jacob Flagg, who built the first frame home in Benton/Williamsville. At this time there were two Benton, Illinois. In 1853 this local Benton had been named for the Hon. Thomas H. Benton of Missouri. Now Abraham Flagg had to find a new name for his village of Benton. For the new post office in 1861, Abraham Flagg then named his village for his friend Colonel John Williams, a noted pioneer and businessman from Springfield. So now this local Benton became the village of Williamsville, Illinois.

Did you know that Andrew, Illinois was first named "Shepherdsville" with that name being changed to "Cory" and then Andrew, Illinois? The Cora Coal Mine located in Andrew was established in 1905. The name "Cory" was probably used because of the mine.

What about Grasshopper? How did the village of Grasshopper get a new name for their post office? Easy---Four businessmen formed a group, becoming business partners while ending up playing a tremendous part in the development of the Chicago & Alton Railroad. This train track ran from Alton to Springfield and then on to Chicago, Illinois. During this time they needed a proper name for their village.....What to do????

It was decide that these four businessmen would put their names in a hat and the winner of the drawing would be the name of the town. So Cornelius Flagg, Virgil Hickox, Joseph Ledlie and David Sherman dropped their names into a hat. The winning name in the "Luck of the Draw" was DAVID S. SHERMAN, Esquire. The village of Sherman, Illinois was recorded at the Sangamon County court house on November 8, 1858. The true founder of Sherman became DAVID S. SHERMAN, Esq.; hence the village was officially named SHERMAN, ILLINOIS.

DAVID S. SHERMAN, Esq. was a true businessman. He was born in Andover, Massachusetts around the year 1812. Sherman came to the State of Illinois in 1839 working as the superintendent of the New England Hemp Factories. After changing his affiliation with this establishment, he began working with the Illinois Central Railroad and worked in the Peru, Illinois territory. David Sherman came to the Springfield location in the 1840s. When moving to this section of Illinois he began a business with Hickox, Flagg and Ledlie. David Sherman was married to Elizabeth Bickford Sherman from back East. They had two children, Caroline Sherman and William H. Sherman. Caroline Sherman was married to Jacob R. Bacon and they had a daughter, Mae R. Bacon.

Before his death, David S. Sherman and his son-in-law, Jacob Bacon owned a book store on the downtown square in Springfield, Illinois. This establishment was called, "Sherman & Bacon." David and Elizabeth Sherman's only son, William H. died as a young teenager in 1853. Their son-in-law died in 1868. David S. Sherman died at 59 years of age on December 14, 1871. A few years after the death of her husband, his widow, Elizabeth moved to San Diego, California with her daughter now Mrs. J.S. "Caroline" Sherman Bacon Richardson and her family. Granddaughter, Mae R. Bacon died in San Diego, California at the age of 21 with her remains being brought back to Springfield, Illinois for burial. Elizabeth Bickford Sherman died in San Diego, California on August 13, 1896 of old age. Elizabeth's remains were moved by train to Springfield to be buried next to her husband David Sherman and their family at Oak Ridge Cemetery. The Sherman's were highly thought of in the communities of Sherman and Springfield.

VIRGIL HICKOX was a businessman, helping in the construction of the Chicago & Alton Railroad. He was known as the Director of the Alton and Sangamon portion of the railroad. In 1853 Virgil Hickox worked along with John D. Gillett of Elkhart and Col. Robert B. Latham, the sheriff of Logan County, helping to form a city on the railroad line in Logan County. Hickox hired his Springfield neighbor Attorney Abraham Lincoln to help them with their paperwork. On August 27, 1853, Abraham Lincoln cut open a watermelon with his knife, squeezed the juice of the melon into his tin cup and helped to christen Lincoln, Illinois in his honor. Thus, Lincoln, Illinois became a major city in Illinois named for Abraham Lincoln, the future 16th President of the United States. Mr. Hickox married Catherine Cabanis in October 1839 in Springfield, Illinois.

CORNELIUS FLAGG worked with Hickox, Ledlie and Sherman to help build the railroad. The wooden ties used to build the railroad were mainly the responsibility of Flagg. He supplied the Chicago & Alton Railroad with ties, timber and wood between Alton and Pontiac, Illinois from various sawmills. Cornelius Flagg was a farmer and a railroad contractor in Fancy Creek Township. He was born in Oxford, Ohio on May 17, 1831, the son of Abraham and Sarah Hoffman Flagg. Cornelius Flagg married Miss Sarah E.W. Kerns on October 8, 1860. She was the daughter of Abner and Sarah A. Kerns. Cornelius and Sarah Kerns Flagg began their family with Sarah dying on March 14, 1874. Cornelius then married her sister, Jane Kerns. Cornelius and Sarah Flagg's children were Kerns Abraham (K.A.), Albert "Alley", Frank and Sarah Jane Flagg Cline.

JOSEPH LEDLIE was a surveyor for Sangamon County. He did the surveying for the Chicago & Alton Railroad. Ledlie was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on January 18, 1812. His parents were Arthur and Catharine Ledlie who immigrated to this country from Ireland in 1801. Joseph moved to Springfield around 1846. He married Miss Emma Snell in 1881. Emma was born in Massachusetts on July 4, 1818 arriving in Illinois in 1865. Joseph Ledlie died on May 4, 1893 with Emma passing in March 1903.

In life these four men helped to create Sherman, Illinois having exciting adventures along the way while maybe even visiting and sharing business ideas with Abraham Lincoln. Just imagine as you walk through our local Carpenters Park in 2012 how these men may have ridden in

canoes, on horseback, crossing the river with mules, ox-carts, wagons and various other types of transportation.

While living these four men worked together to build railroads and enjoyed other joint ventures. In death they are all buried not far from each other in Oak Ridge Cemetery, Springfield, Illinois. Little did these men know in the 1800s that Oak Ridge Cemetery would become the second most visited cemetery in the United States following Arlington located in Washington, D.C. Taking the time for a walk through history on a visit to the older area in the back of Oak Ridge Cemetery, you might recognize other old-time Sherman families in the same vicinity. Right down the road from the Sherman/Bacon family tombstone on the right, you will find the large McRoberts family buried there. John and Sarah Gibson McRoberts came from Ireland to Sangamon County about 1850. They operated a mercantile business in 1869 in Sherman. In the 1960s their descendants still owned land near the Sherman AC Club. If you search in other parts of Oak Ridge Cemetery, you will find local old time Sherman families like the Carpenters, Petefishs, Sudduths, Coopers, Flaggs, Sweets, Staileys, Neils, Boners, Smiths, Cox, Vignalis, Woodards, Haywards, Hills, Princes, Lowrys, Martinies, Peruginos, Respets, Strodes, Wenneborgs, Farrands, Bacons, Wiggintons, Brittins, Popes, Mitts, Sebrings, Gortz's, Arnolds, Woods, Brauns along with many others.

On November 8, 1858, David Sherman, Esq., Cornelius Flagg, Virgil Hickox and Joseph Ledlie being true pioneers, definitely created a village to withstand time. Sherman turned 150 years old on November 8, 2008. It has been a fine, good, outstanding community making all residents proud to be a part of this way of life. This village has always been and remains safe and a wonderful place to live as folks continue creating generations of close families who want to be a part of this grand community.

In 1858, David S. Sherman, Esq. didn't have a thought that his name would remain such an important part of one village for 150 years or longer. Back then, how could he possibly realize the impact that he would have on so many people over their lifetimes? Being from Sherman, sharing old time stories, adventures and your life with so many good folks is a blessing! What more could a person want from life? Some residents have never left Sherman for even a short out of town trip, while others have traveled the world over, always returning at some point in time to this small piece of Heaven on Earth, called Sherman.....A place where it is peaceful and you can hear the birds sing!