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The W. H. Emery Story

W. H. Emery was born at Fairfield Center, Maine, and spent his early years there. He was one of several children brought up in a two-room Cape Cod cottage, which still stands. Between the two rooms a brick partition extended across the house, replete with fireplaces in both rooms, as well as ovens. Fires were kept going in both of these fireplaces all winter and the bricks would become warm and serve as a furnace. The children slept in the loft at the top of a ladder. Behind the house was a large barn, for Mr. Emery's father was a sheep raiser.

Later his father moved to Waterville, Maine, where on Haden Brook back of his house, he set up a sheepskin tanning and dying shop. As his large family grew, the business would not support all the children, so W.H. Emery began to look for other fields to get his start in life. He married Mary Adelia Tobey, then sixteen. We see their pictures taken at the time of their wedding. He came to Chicago and set up business as a hide broker. Later he was followed by his brother, James, long to be a resident of Elmhurst, and often a partner in some of W. H. Emery's business ventures. Later, he was followed by his brother, Alben, also a hide broker, and the grandfather of Alben F. Bates.

Always an adventurous man, Mr. Emery became interested in the Indian trade and eventually maintained trading posts with the Sioux in Montana. In this adventure his brother James was both employee and sometimes partner. The map in the case will show the route Mr. Emery used to take to the trading posts in the spring when the Missouri was high, so that steam boats could go up the river as far as possible. From that point he would go by horse and buggy to the posts. The 44 cal. Winchester Mod. 73 shown in the case was the one that he carried in the buggy on these trips. He did not stay at the trading posts much, and his brother James acted as Indian agent and trader at the posts. These were wild days and there are many stories of dangers and humor. The humor was shown by the Indian name for Mr. James Emery, a very portly man. His Indian name was Chief Two Belly.

Mr. Emery did not believe in using alcohol in his trading with the Indians. He found another method which seemed to please them. The tribes, when they came in to trade, would be seated on the ground in a large circle. After speeches and before the trading would start, a whole barrel of brown sugar would be rolled into the center of the circle and one by one, the Indians would come to the barrel and their bandana handkerchiefs would be filled with sugar and each one would go back to his place in the circle and eat his sugar then and there.

Mr. James Emery's wife, Myra, had many vivid recollections of these days. A very delicate, highly educated woman from a fine New England family, she shared Mr. Emery's travels and life at the posts. For the long, cold drives over the plains, Mr. Emery had a complete suit of clothes made for her, consisting of pants and coat made of buffalo skins with the hair inside. Her face, for women did not believe in getting a tan in those days, would be covered with chamois mask. Her hands were covered by horsehide gauntlets that came to the elbow. She used to tell of having to sleep on the dirt floors of the way-houses, sometimes beside a murderer, who would be chained to a U. S. marshall.

Mr. W. H. Emery was also one of the men who had the corner on the buffalo hides, when the buffalo were killed off and their hides were dried and piled along the railroad sidings in enormous amounts. In later years he founded the Chicago Rawhide Manufacturing Co. It passed through many ups and downs. Today it is a large and thriving company employing thousands and with branches in Canada, Mexico, Japan and England.

As was common with the "Squire Class" who came to Elmhurst before the turn of the century, Mr. Emery built a large home, which is shown in the case at the time of purchase, and 2 farms, one with headquarters at the house at Kenilworth and Adelia, and the other on the north side, which was later to become Emery Manor. Mr. Emery took part actively in the development of the city of Elmhurst. Also, in the development of a large family, a picture of which is shown below in the case.