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2010

Bates, Gerry

Gerry Bates, who is generally regarded as the founder of Elmhurst, was born in the year 1800, and after leaving the home of several generations in Massachusetts and pioneering in Ohio, again became a pioneer in 1842 when he came to what is now Elmhurst and purchased land from the government, which now includes most of the central part of Elmhurst.

After purchasing the land, he returned to Ohio to settle up his affairs, planning to return as soon as possible and make what is now Elmhurst his permanent home. At this time there were a few settlers in the southern part of York Township, the Fish, Torode, Talmadge, Atwater, Eldredge, Cobb, Peck, Churchill, Glos and Bohlander families, and the Graue family to the north.

The land where Elmhurst stands today was still owned by the government and was not considered quite as desirable as land in the southern part of the township because it did not have wood and water.

After settling up his business affairs in Ohio, Mr. Bates came to take up the land he purchased in Elmhurst. This was in 1845. He took up residence in a home which had been built for him by his brother-in-law, J. L. Hovey. This house was built on the south side of St. Charles Rd. at about the spot where it is now intersected by Cottage Hill Avenue. At this point was the highest spot of land for several miles, so he called the place Hill Cottage. It not only served as a residence for his family but also as an Inn, being on the main road to Fox River points and approximately the half-way point for the station coaches.

He continued to reside here until the railroad came through in 1851, at which time he built a new home opposite the proposed railroad station and on what is now known as West Park Avenue, between York St. and Cottage Hill Ave. The railroad company in seeking a name for the new station took the name Hill Cottage and transposed it, naming the station Cottage Hill, which became the name of the town.

With the coming of the railroad, homes began to center around the railroad station. A post office was established and Gerry Bates became the first postmaster. He was postmaster of either Cottage Hill or Elmhurst from 1851 until 1878 with the exception of one four year term. He was also supervisor of York Township and justice of the peace. The first school district in York Township was organized in his home.

In 1856 he married Georgia Smith, who was the first school teacher in Elmhurst - his first wife having died several years previous. Of this latter marriage three children were born: Dr. Frederick H. Bates, Mrs. Adeline B. Kidder, and Charles W. Bates, all of whom resided in Elmhurst their entire lives, and Charles W. Bates being the only one surviving.

From the above it will be observed that Gerry Bates took a most active interest in all civic matters during a long span of years and occupied much the same position in the development of the community during the third quarter of the century that Henry L. Glos did in the last quarter of the century and while others preceded him in taking up land in the neighborhood of Elmhurst, it can be truly said of him that he was the one who, by donating land to the railroad, securing the location of the station, becoming the first postmaster, justice of the peace, and supervisor, really started the town on its course of development.