

Memoir by Carrie Stolp, wife of Wilmette's first doctor, in 1916

"The good old time: All times are good when old."

Once upon a time there was a little hamlet situated deep in the heart of the wildwood, beside an inland sea. The aborigines, known as the tribe of Ouilmette, had vanished and pale-faced inhabitants occupied their reservation. The wigwams of the Indians were replaced by two story wooden structures, while here and there through the forest, blue wreaths of smoke issued from chimneys of more pretentious habitations of brick and stone.

Well laid out streets replaced the trail of the redskins, while wide plank sidewalks were seen beside those thoroughfares, and even by the side of embryo streets where native grass, undisturbed by traffic, grew in its original luxuriance. A few pioneers who had established homes here soon after the exodus of the aborigines, and had a personal knowledge of the tribe, related wierd legends of Indian lore, as well as tales of the early days of Wilmette, to the young adventurer who with the courage of untried youth came with their wives and babies, goods and chattels, to make a name and home in this little hamlet beside the blue waters of Lake Michigan.

They told of ancient days when the primeval forest which grew on the western shore of Lake Michigan, immediately north of Chicago, was known as the Ouilmette reservation; how it took its name from the original owner, Archange Ouilmette, described in the original treaty as a Pottawatamie woman. This treaty of Prairie du Chien with the Chippewwa, Ottawa and Pottawatamie Indians was concluded July 29, 1829, by which the reservation was ceded to Ouilmette's wife. Although she was called a squaw of the Pottawatamie tribe, her mother being an Indian woman, her father was white, a Frenchman named Francois Chevallier. Archange was born in 1764 at Sugar Creek, Michigan, and was married to Antoine Ouilmette either in 1796 or 1797 in Gross Point, or what is now Evanston and Wilmette, where this roving band was located at the time. This is the first North Shore wedding of which there is any history. Antoine, the husband, was born in 1760 near Montreal, Canada, and died in 1841. Antoine Ouilmette was a Frenchman, who, like many of his countrymen, came to the west in early days, and married an Indian wife. He was one of the first white residents of Chicago, arriving thre in 1790. One historian says he was the second white settler, Marquette being the first. Their eight children, named Joseph, Louis, Francis, Mitchel, Elizabeth, Archange, Josette and Sophia.

Mr. Alex [Alexander] McDaniel, who was personally acquainted with these children, said there were nearly white, very cleanly, well dressed and intelligent. Josette had acquired quite a reputation as a beauty. Consequently she and her sisters were in great demand at the dances attended by a few blooming white girls of that vicinity and those of duskie hue. Charles Beaubien, cousin of the historic Mark Beaubien, lived on Section 17, the present site of Henry H. Gage's brick house. He was a great fiddler and furnished the music for these occasions. The name given our village originates from Antoine himself, from the phonetic spelling of the French name Ouilmette, and was suggested as the name for the village by Judge Henry Blodgett, late of Waukegan, one of the men who, in connection with Messrs. Alexander McDaniels [sic], S. M. Dingee, John G. Westerfield and Simon V. Kline, planned the original



site of the village in 1869.

Several houses and a depot were built at the time. The dwelling houses of Absolam and Matthew Gedney, the latter the father of Mrs. Edward Mendsen, were built in 1886. The village was formerly called Gross Point, as was the whole voting precinct north of Chicago and east of the Chicago river. The postoffice dates from June 25, 1870. Alexander McDaniel [sic] was the first postmaster, and held the office for many years, although Henry Kinney, his assistant, was in the office for a number of years.

The village of Wilmette was incorporated in October 1872, and the following officers were elected: Board of trustees: Alexander McDaniel, president; C. T. Boggs, A. T. Sherman, B. M. Munn, Amos Shantz and John G. Westerfield. Charles Vail, Clerk.

Alexander McDaniel, a resident of Chicago in 1836, first came to Ouilmette to live in 1853, and resided for a time in an ancient house, known as Stebbins' tavern. Afterward he lived in Evanston and Wilmette. In 1869 he built the house lately owned by Dr. Childs and recently removed to the west side. Mr. Charles McDaniel, a well-known resident of Wilmette, is his eldest son.

Mr. John Westerfield, one of the first trustees, used to relate incidents of the early days which sounded like fairy tales, but were nevertheless true. In 1857 he acquired that part of the reservation where the original cabin of Antoine Ouilmette stood and was occupied by the family from 1828 to 1844. It was a large hewn-log blockhouse, considered a fine structure in those days, situated on the high bluffs on the lake shore immediately east of the present Ouilmette clubhouse. It was occupied after Ouilmette's time by Joel Stebbins as a tavern. A little grove, which stood east of the tavern in 1857 was subsequently washed away by the waters of the lake.

In 1865 Mr. Westerfield tore down the old house, using some of the timbers for a shed to shelter his cows. A portion of these timbers were kept as relics for many years. Mr. Westerfield was an optimist of the most pronounced type. He had great faith in the future of Wilmette and prophesied he should live to see Wilmette with a population numbering 400 or 500. His eldest son, Charles, a resident of Waukegan and a veteran of the Civil War, visited Wilmette quite recently. He narrated several interesting incidents of early days in Wilmette. Among others he told the writer of having seen deer running down the street at present called Lake avenue.

Mr. B. H. Munn, father of Mrs. Henry Moore, one of the original board of trustees, came to Wilmette in May 1872, and practiced law in Chicago. S. M. Dingee, also a trustee on the first village board, moved to Wilmette in August 1870. He was ever a staunch friend of all newcomers, and enthusiastic local politician. Mrs. Mary Walters, a sister of Mr. S. M. Dingee, and her young son, Alfred, became residents in 1870. Mr. B. F. Hill, an early settler, was born on a farm at Gross Point, sa he used to say, "in the early '30s". He possessed a valuable fund of authentic information, was a man of force and integrity, always interested in historic subjects. He contributed much valuable information to the Evanston Historical Society.

Mr. J. P. Doig and family came to the village in July 1871. Mr. M. C. [Milton Cushing] Springer arrived in 1873 and held many positions of trust in the village. He was also



prominent in educational and church interests. Mr. Edward Mendsen became a resident of the village in 1872. Mr. and Mrs. William Panushka came to Wilmette in 1873. Mr. Brooks and family, consisting of his wife, a son, Mr. Thomas M. Brooks and daughter, Miss Hattie Brooks, came to Wilmette in September 1873. Mr. John Brown became a resident of Wilmette in 1868. He erected many of the first residences on Lake avenue. He lost his sight by an accident in 1874. His later years were spent with his son, J. Melville Brown, to whom this organization is indebted for many and continuous favors.

Mr. John Gage, of Vineland, although never a resident of Wilmette, was a large landowner here and a pioneer of Lake County. He came to Chicago from Litchfield in 1838 and built the first flouring mill in that city in 1826. He purchased the land known as Gage's addition to Wilmette in 1857. The residence of his son, Asahel W. Gage, was erected in 1873. Those of Henry and Neander were erected in 1874. These gentlemen, with their families and their descendents, resided here for many years and entertained largely into the history of Wilmette.

A number of families arrived in Wilmette during the year 1874. Among them were the families of Edwin and Horace Drury, who came in the spring, although Mr. Horace had preceded them in 1873. Dr. Stolp and wife came in June; J. D. Anderdonk and family in July; Mr. Hubbard Latham and family in August of the same year. The majority of these pioneers and many others, residents of more recent date, loved and honored members of this organization, among them Mr. Edwin Drury, historian of this society for many years, have listened to the voice of the Great Spirit and been gathered unto their Father. But they are not forgotten and we recall their cheery reminiscences with interest and enjoyment. It has been impossible to ascertain dates and facts regarding several early residents of Wilmette, but the writer is indebted to families and descendents of many, who have kindly given desired information. Thanks is also due to Frank R. Grover, of Evanston, for knowledge of historical events.

Away back in the '70s the residents of this little village at peace with the Great Spirit and their neighbors and were wont to often meet together in friendly intercourse. Clubs were unknown in those days. When the evening shadows lengthened and the plaintive notes of the whipporwill were heard in the branches of the forest trees, the "gude mon" and his wife, taking their trusty lantern, sallied forth over the newly made streets, taking short cuts through vacant lots, avoiding bushes covered with briars and deep ditches, which had been excavated to carry off surplus water from our lots and streets to the lake. They proceeded to the house of some neighbor, where a phantom party was to be held. The late arrival could predict about how many couples had preceded them by the number of lanterns ranged along the outer wall of the front porch. The guests were met at the front door by "mine host," the only person unmasked, to whom cards were presented. He escorted them in, announcing them by their nom de feathers. At these parties all guests arrayed in ghostly attire made of sheets and pillow cases. Bridal finery was composed of lace curtains. The identity of the ladies was often revealed by the decorations known to be used by certain persons. If the party finery was adorned by Tatting, the individual wearing it was recognized as Mrs. Joy. And as Mrs. Horace Drury was an expert in crocheting, the costume bearing that decoration revealed her identity even without a glimpse of the high-top boots with which her better half had presented her after a strenuous ordeal of carrying her on his back over flooded streets when returning home from choir practice. There was vigorous shaking of hands accompanied by many gestures, but



conversation was carried on in muffled tones until the hour for unmasking arrived. Then pandemonium reigned. Later the ladies unpacked the well-filled baskets containing silver dishes and many toothsome viands for which the women of the locality were then as now justly famed.

There was always a plentiful supply of jellies, preserves and marmalades made of the wild crabapple, which grew in the woods in great abundance, and red and black raspberries, which could be had for the picking. The two churches held sociables at frequent intervals and the entire population attended [damaged] partiality, the gatherings [damaged] held on different days to avoid collisions. A literary society, called the *Athenaeum*, was well patronized. The rival newspapers, the *Pump* and the *Lantern*, furnished much amusement, Mr. J. C. Griffiths and Mr. C. R. Stauffer being the editors. The men of the village took great pride in their lawns and gardens. Upturned stumps were considered very ornamental in the yard when the jagged roots were filled with earth and planted with beautiful maiden hair ferns, wild violets, blue, yellow and white, and jacks-in-the-pulpit and wild vines found in the woods. But semi-occasionally the householders were awakened early in the morning by the tinkle of cow bells and the soft thud of hoofs of Gross Point cows who were turned loose in Wilmette in time to see the sunrise and who took their morning constitutional meandering over the newly-made lawns, chewing the cud of contentment or the best damask tablecloth left out to bleach by the mater familias.

Every weekday morning the male constituency of the village were seen hurrying through the woods towards the station, anxious to catch one of the three morning trains cityward. But if they failed they could always arrive at their desired destination sooner or later by sprinting to Evanston and taking a train from there. In the happy springtime, after the snow had melted, the householder looked out of the kitchen window upon a waste of waters formerly designated as the garden. The cellars were miniature mill ponds. The thoughtful housewife kept her gondola and oars, which masqueraded ordinarily under the names of wash tub and broom, safely anchored at the foot of the cellar stairs, where at high tide she could reach the coaling station, which sat up on its dignity on wooden stilts out of reach of the swelling flood.

The sidewalks of the season often exhibited maritime aspirations and the village fathers prevented their sailing away to join the Chicago river by the use of moral suasion and strong stakes driven on either side of the refractory walks. Many old residents will recall this period, when they jumped from one section to another of floating walk to reach the depot, which was surrounded by water.

A large real estate sign, on the station grounds, also entirely surrounded by water, advertised the beauty of Wilmette property and the desirability of acquiring same. One of the commuters boarding the train, his feet encased in soaking shoe leather, suggested to his fellow sufferers that it would be wise to annex and addendum to this sign, stating "the price of real estate by the gallon."

During the winter months the young people of Wilmette held high carnival skating from one end of town to the other, the block of land directly in front of Dr. Stolp's residence, which he used for many years as a pasture for his horses and cows, became a veritable skating rink in winter and nightly the air resounded with merry voices of skaters congregated for the



enjoyment of this winter sport. In March, 1892, invitations were issued by Mr. and Mrs. Hubbard B. Harris and sent to eighty of their friends in Wilmette, sixty of whom responded, inviting them to meet at their residence as old town folks to celebrate the birthday of Mrs. Harris.

The evening having been spent enjoyably and the meeting of old friends recalling so many memories, it was moved by Mr. B. M. Munn to organize a society to be known as Old Town Folks of Wilmette. Mrs. Harris was chosen president; B. M. Munn, vice president; Thomas M. Brooks, secretary, and Dr. B. C. Stolp, treasurer. Executive committee, Mrs. Edwin Drury, chairman; Mrs. Dr. Stolp, Mrs. H. E. Moore, Mr. F. L. Joy, Mr. Munn, Mr. H. Kinney, and Mr. C. Carhart. Wishing Mr. and Mrs. Harris many happy returns of the day the company departed just before Sunday, in fact, some trespassed a few moments on that day.

With Thomas M. Brooks secretary, November 28, 1892, the executive committee met at the residence of Mr. F. L. Joy and proceeded to draw up a constitution and by-laws. Motion was made and carried that this committee recommended all adult citizens thereof prior to January, 1884, "shall be eligible to membership of the society and may become members upon the recommendation of the executive committee and a majority vote of the membership, with the annual fee of 25 cents, and that the husband or wife of a member whose residence has been for a short period in Wilmette shall also be eligible to membership."

Motion was made and carried that the regular offices of this society consist of a president, vice president, secretary and treasurer, who shall be elected annually on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in January of each year; who shall hold their respective offices until their successors are appointed and qualified, and shall constitute an executive committee to transact such business as the society will designate.

Motion made and carried that Mrs. Drury, Mrs. Stolp, Mrs. Bunker and Mrs. Moore shall constitute a sub-committee to appoint a date for a regular meeting in January and provide a place for same. Adjourned. Charles Carhart, Secretary, Pro tem.

An extract of a letter written to John Gage February 27, 1906, when Mr. Gage was president of Old Town Folks, follows:

"The original purpose and object of this organization should be born in mind and adhered to, namely, the association of those who had to do with and are most interested in, either personally or through their parents, the early history of our community, peculiar to that period.

(Signed) T. M. Brooks, Secretary"

Since that time there have been several amendments to the constitution and by-laws, and twice the date of residence has been extended to allow later arrivals in Wilmette to become eligible to membership.

The first annual meeting was held in 1893 at the residence of Mr. Joy. Mr. B. M. Munn, vice president, in the chair. The women of the executive committee and assistants arrived early in

the morning wearing aprons of ample proportions, bringing baskets of food, silver, dishes and table linen.

[From *Lake Shore News*, 21 Apr 1916, pages 5-6, which prefaced it with these remarks: At the meeting of the Old Town Folks of Ouilmette in Brown's Hall, Friday evening, April 7, Mrs. Byron C. Stolp, one of the oldest residents of this village, and who is now historian to the society, read a paper which is considered the most complete record ever compiled of the doings of the pioneer residents of this vicinity. Mrs. Stolp's essay, which for lack of space we were unable to print last week, follows almost in full: Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen:]