

W. O. Willard, Early Settler, Passes Away

Civil War Veteran Answers Last Call After Long and Useful Life

Since 1868 W. O. Willard has been a resident of Grinnell Township and Grinnell City, a period of nearly fifty nine years. He was born at Wethersfield, Illinois, November 2, 1840, and was 85 years old at his last birthday. He attended the schools of Wethersfield, Illinois, as well as the High School in that place. His father was a pioneer settler in that part of the state, moving there from Wethersfield, Conn., and helped to lay out the town. He located his farm on an elegant piece of land just east of the town limits. In the early days of that community he was associated with Hon. Henry G. Little, later of Grinnell, as one of the active builders of Wethersfield.

W. O. Willard was brought up in the nursery business and removed to Grinnell in 1868 as a good location to start the raising of fruit trees for sale.

January 1, 1867, he was united in marriage with Emma E. Shaw of Madrid, N. Y., at the home of her parents in St. Lawrence County. His bride to be was a school teacher and had come west and had become a teacher in the public schools of Wethersfield. It was here she first met her husband. They moved to Grinnell in 1868. To them six children were born, Frank E. now assistant superintendent of the public schools of Seattle, Wash.; Raymond, who died in early boyhood, and is buried in Hazelwood; W. A., who is now Professor in the Department of Biology of the State University of Nebraska, located at Omaha; Dr. H. G., who served in the medical corps during the World War in France and is now in charge of his own private hospital and is a practicing physician at Tacoma; Mrs. W. B. Kyle of Los Angeles and Miss Faith Willard who has been her father's help and comfort during the last few years of his life.

Mr. Willard enlisted in 1862 with the 124 Regiment, Illinois Volunteers, and served until after the close of the war, being mustered out in September 1865 at Springfield, Illinois. Mr. Willard was in some of the most severe battles of the war one of them being Champion Hill. He was in the battle at Vicksburg May 19 when an attempt was made to charge the Bluffs under the Confederate fortifications. He was with Logan's Division and at the time of the explosion at the Shirley House when Union troops had dug a tunnel under the Confederate fort, he was thrown into the tunnel with his regiment to hold it against the attack of the Confederate forces who massed at this point to drive back the Union troops. The 124th, known among the Illinois troops as the "Hundred and two dozen" was the second regiment to enter Vicksburg after the surrender and set up the Union flag within the limits of the city. At the Shirley house he was so situated that on the afternoon of July 3rd when General Pemberton and General Grant met under the fa-

mous oak to arrange terms of surrender they were in full view of Mr. Willard and his company.

The writer came to Grinnell with his sister in 1875 and for several years the Willard home was the only home they knew. It was a home of culture, of good reading and of good company. Mr. and Mrs. Willard loved education for its own sake and their children attended and graduated from college and grew up to occupy positions of which their parents were justly proud.

During Mr. Willard's recent illness as he gradually grew weaker, he knew well the love of his children for the old home and when they came to cheer his last hours they were hours of pleasure to him. In the early '90s the Willards moved to town into the home now occupied by John Evans on Park Street. They afterwards built their own home on High St., now owned by Mrs. Paul Peck. This home was a center of college people, all of whom testify to the high intellectual inspiration of the home and the estimable Christian character of Mr. and Mrs. Willard.

Mrs. Willard died suddenly as the result of a stroke of paralysis while visiting her son Dr. Willard in Deer Lodge, Mont., Aug. 19, 1914.

The keeping of the home has developed from then chiefly upon his daughter, Faith, who was an inspiring help to her father and in return was inspired and helped by him.

Mr. Willard was a man of great fortitude. He was a man of strict integrity of character and everyone with whom he had business dealings can testify to his absolute honesty. The failure of the Merchants National Bank, of which he was a stock holder to a considerable extent and in which he had a fair sized deposit for a man of his means, was a great blow to him and also a severe strain upon his financial resources but he paid his assessment without a murmur, because he knew it was a duty which devolved upon him to restore to the depositors in the bank his share of the loss which they had sustained.

Mr. Willard's death occurred Thursday, March 4 at about 1:30 o'clock in the afternoon. For several weeks he had been gradually growing weaker and while it was thought he might last a short time longer, the thread of life was snapped and he passed away without a struggle, conscious almost to the last. With him at the time were his son, F. E., and his daughters Ruth and Faith.

The funeral will be held tomorrow at 2:30 o'clock at the home of W. G. Ray, 821 High Street.

GRAND ARMY AND W. R. C.
Members of Gordon Granger Post and of the W. R. C. will meet at the hall to go in a body to the home of W. G. Ray to attend the funeral of Comrade W. O. Willard. Be at hall not later than two o'clock. The funeral is at 2:30.

Another Reminiscence

The death of Daniel Hays set some of us who are coming to be regarded as early timers of Grinnell to thinking of the days not so very long ago when this country was new. About 1867 W. O. Willard whose father was a nursery-man at Wethersfield, Ill., left his home in that place to find a location for another nursery. He wished to establish it either in Iowa or Missouri. He and a brother-in-law by the name of Chapin started out to find a new location, where the country was comparatively new and where there would be a demand for fruit trees and ornamental shrubbery.

Mr. Chapin settled at Nevada, Missouri, while W. O. Willard found a location which seemed promising at Grinnell. He bought 115 acres, an original eighty where W. M. Rarr now lives and a thirty-five acre piece next to it a half mile from north to south bordering on what was then the Rock Creek road and on this tract of 135 acres he planted the first nursery in this section.

However A. G. Williams had a nursery in Chester township about nine miles from the Willard nursery but whether it was started before the Willard nursery or not the writer does not know.

On this 135 acres he started a nursery of considerable proportions and for many years it was well known in this section of the state.

Mr. Willard himself was a man of honor and those who bought trees, vines, shrubbery and bushes of Mr. Willard were sure to get just exactly what they ordered or not get anything, because it was a matter of honor with him to label truthfully what he sold.

Soon after that time perhaps in the early seventies, he decided to grow osage hedge plants. This hedge was used as a fence and a wind break and was becoming quite popular in Illinois and he devoted a large part of his land to the propagation of it. He built a large covered cellar in which he planned to winter his first growth of year old hedge plants. The plants were carefully taken up in the fall and laid away as carefully in this big cellar which was covered with straw and boards and on top of that was overed again with a thick coating of dirt and here the plants were kept for the winter.

They were in prime condition and traveling men were out in this section of the state selling them. The crop was enormous and there was every reason to believe that the sale would be large. It was large but when the time for delivery came it was found that in the heart of the osage was a black spot or growth which very seriously affected delivery. Many farmers believing this to be a rotten heart refused to accept the hedge. Many of them, however, did accept these plants and set them out along the road and these hedge plants grew and were the foundation of the numerous fences which were to be found in this section of the state forty years ago.

Apparently the black core had not hurt the plants at all but it had prevented delivery and the loss of these plants was very great, so heavy in fact that it was years before he recovered from the thousands of dollars loss which he suffered at that time.

There may be yet some osage hedge fences living, but it is a good chance if there are that they were planted about '73, '74, or '75 from plants raised at the Willard nursery in the early seventies.