

THE INGERSOLL FAMILY SAGA

This past summer brought a number of our out-of-town members to our area for research and visiting. One of those members is Frances Eddy of Salem, Oregon, who kindly left our library a copy of "A Genealogy of the Ingersoll Family in America 1629-1925." Mrs. Eddy's husband James Albert Eddy is a direct descendant of Chester Ingersoll and Phoebe Weaver. Chester Ingersoll is one of the earliest pioneers of Will County and left a considerable legacy to our area. The following excerpts are from the above-cited genealogy, which was compiled by Lillian Drake Avery, published by the Grafton Press in 1926.

"Chester Ingersoll...born 1789, probably at Hardwick, Mass., died Sept. 2, 1849, at Maryville, Calif.; m. Mary Burdick, born 1794, daughter of Lorin Burdick; m. 2d, 1832, Phoebe Weaver, daughter of Benj. Weaver. He was a millwright.

"Will County sent a delegation to California previous to the discovery of gold. This was in 1847 and the leading figure was one of the earliest settlers of Plainfield. All who have interested themselves in the early history of our county will remember the name of Chester Ingersoll. He is said to have come to this state as early as 1828 from the state of Vermont...We find he was at Walker's Grove as early as 1830. He was one of the heroes who so bravely defended the old Fort Beggs in 1832, and he held the rank of Sergeant in Capt. Walker's historic company...The very first year of Uncle Ben Weaver's arrival in Yankee Settlement (1832) [Ingersoll was] paying court to his charming daughter Phoebe, and they were married this same year and took up their abode in the frontier hamlet of Chicago, where they kept hotel in all the magnificence of hotel keeping in that day. After two years they returned to what is now Will County and resided in Plainfield, Lockport, and Wheatland, Ill., until 1847.

In 1834 Mr. Ingersoll laid out the first village plat in Plainfield on the N.E. quarter of Section 16, and he gave it its present name. He with three others organized the first Masonic Lodge in the State of Illinois. His name is of frequent occurrence on the early records of Will County. He kept the stage house in Plainfield three or four years. While living in Lockport he held the office of Justice of the Peace.

In 1847 Mr. Ingersoll...determined to emigrate to California. The start was made from Plainfield April 5, 1847. Beside his wife, his family consisted of four sons and a widowed daughter (by his previous marriage), whose name was Alford and who had two children. [The Ingersoll party consisted of about 25 people, with eight teams, per the account of this trip in George Woodruff's "Will County on The Pacific Slopes."]

Letters from Chester Ingersoll document the progress of the trek to California. On June 6th they had arrived at the Platte River. On June 26th they were at Fort Laramie. On July 15th they passed the summit of the Rocky Mountains and were 1500 miles from Joliet.

They reached Sacramento City October 15, 1847. Mr. Ingersoll bought a farm and went to farming until the finding of gold, when they went to the mines and kept a sutler's store.

Mr. Ingersoll was taken with a sickness which lasted two years and the doctor advised him to return to the states. They were all packed up and ready to go back east, living in a tent and waiting for a boat when Mr. Ingersoll died and was buried at San Francisco in the sand. The population of this town then was about 200 and there were only a few adobe houses and forts there at that time.

Children of Chester Ingersoll:

Flavilla, b. Dec. 18, 1826, Plattsburg, N.Y. (child of the first marriage to Mary Burdick)
Chester, b. Dec. 1834, Plainfield, Ill.; d. 1889, Kansas.
Benjamin, b. Joliet, Ill.; d. Joliet, Ill.
Josiah, b. Plainfield, Ill.
A. A., b. Nov. 20, 1839, Plainfield, Ill.
James Knox Polk, b. Dec. 4, 1844, Plainfield, Ill.; d. May 22, 1902, Joliet, Ill.
Dallas, b. Plainfield; d. 1848, California.
Phebe, b. California, d. Wheatland.

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To follow the saga of the Ingersoll family after the tragic death of their husband and father, the following information came from Woodruff's "Will County on The Pacific Slopes."

Mrs. Ingersoll was assisted in settling her husband's affairs by A. B. Brooks of Homer Township, Will County, and did not leave California until February of 1850. On the ship on the way home she met Benjamin F. Russell, a native of New Hampshire. Their friendship developed and on July 25th, 1850, they were married in Joliet. Mr. Russell farmed in Homer Township until 1860, when he was elected Circuit Clerk and Recorder of Will County and later was appointed United States Assessor. He died September 12, 1874.

Of the Ingersoll children who returned with their mother to Will County, Woodruff records these: "Chester, now deceased; Benjamin F., who served in the late war in Co. I, 55th Infantry and afterward resided in Homer, now dead; Josiah, who served in Co. F, 20th Regt. and was discharged as a Sergeant, and who since died of disabilities; and James K., now a resident of Joliet, the only survivor of the four." [This account was published in 1885.] Woodruff does not mention the youngest child Phebe, who is listed in the genealogy as having died in Wheatland.

The Ingersoll genealogy contains in the next generation some very interesting details of the life of Chester Ingersoll's oldest child Flavilla:

Flavilla Ingersoll - born Dec. 18, 1826, at Plattsburg, N.Y.; m. Dec. 16, 1841 at Plainfield, Ill. Sterling Alford, who died June 23, 1846 of smallpox in Plainfield, Ill.; m. 2d May 27, 1848 in California William Eddy; m. 3rd Feb. 22, 1854 Winright Willis, born 1834; died May 7, 1896.

From a Plainfield newspaper, no date given: "Mrs. Flavilla Willis celebrated her 82nd birthday Friday at her home on Eastern Avenue in Plainfield, Ill., and was the recipient of many tokens of remembrance. As usual she gave a dinner which was prepared by her own hands and served with the same delicacy.

"When she was three years old she crossed Lake Champlain on the ice when going from New York to Vermont where her father went to work as a millwright. Here they lived until 1832, when they bought the whole township of Plainfield for \$1.25 an acre. Her father laid out the town and gave it its present name, afterwards giving the land for the building of the Methodist and the Baptist churches.

"On the long journey with her father to California, the women made their own butter, baked salt-rising bread, picked berries which resembled the black currant. They found plenty of game, such as buffalo, deer, antelope and elk; also fish. They would skin a buffalo or deer and get the tenderloin and cook it and leave the rest behind.

"In California they learned from the Spaniards to use a flat board in the water and a root called amolia which acts like soap to do their washing. In May 1849 gold was discovered and they gathered lots of the gold dust and kept it in a sack.

"Mrs. Willis is a member of the Eastern Star, a member of the Royal Neighbors, also a member of the Rebekahs. She is an honorary member of the Pioneers of California and an honorary member of the Old Settlers' Union."

The genealogy lists the children of Flavilla's three marriages as follows:

- Walter, Abner, and Harvey Alford, all born in Wheatland, Ill. and Phebe Alford, born in Plainfield, Ill.
- Nellie, James and Alonzo Eddy, all born in California.
- Alpha, Walter and Florence Willis, born in Wheatland, Plainfield and Lockport, Ill. respectively.

The Quarterly sincerely thanks Frances Eddy for sharing these fascinating tales with our readers.

Collateral Obituaries - It's always a good idea to check obituaries of collateral relatives. Even though your direct ancestor's obituary does not contain much information, it is possible that relatives' obits do have data that could prove invaluable. If you know the date of death of an aunt or cousin, for example, you can request microfilm copies of local newspapers through interlibrary loan. Scan the entire paper because articles may appear in any local section. The old papers usually are only four or six pages long and are always interesting.

From the Jersey County (IL) Genealogical Society publication, Nov/Dec 1996.

Indentured Servants - Indentured servants, noted in early records, are frequently assumed to be uneducated or of servile origin, in permanent service to a master. An indenture is simply a contract. So-called "indentured servants" were not akin to slaves, nor were they necessarily cooks, lackeys or housemaids any more than our civil servants of today. Certain people in England and elsewhere in Europe wished to emigrate but lacked money to pay the fare. Often they agreed with a relative or friend to accompany the family, to work for them for a specified time and signed a contract, usually for from five to seven years. [These emigrants] came from any vocation or rank, but lacking cash, they worked their way. As a matter of record, many teachers were indentured and came as family tutors.

From the Zion, IL Gen. Society's Illuminator, August, 1999, via the Lake County, IL Gen. Society Quarterly, Winter 1999-2000.

Helpful Hint - The adhesive on "Post-em Notes" may remove anything printed that you may stick them on! Most libraries ask that you do not use them on their books-- and please be warned, they may obliterate some of your own records.

From Ventura County (CA) Gen. Society Quarterly, Vol. 21, No. 2.

The difference between a geologist and a genealogist is that one digs in the dirt and sometimes finds artifacts-- and the other digs in facts and sometimes finds dirt.

From The Family Tree, June-July 2000.

Research Tip - Before you plunge in to a genealogy or reference book or index, ALWAYS READ any introduction, preface, or appendices, etc. Otherwise you may miss important instructions or guidelines regarding the use of the material.

Source not noted. For shame!

By Scottish law a married woman retains her maiden name. If her death is registered in Scotland it will be indexed under both names. If married several times, if known by the informant, the death will be indexed under several names.

Col. Cliff H. MacLean Hansen, in The Family Tree.