

THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 1984



William Parish, Sr., one of the earliest settlers of Mommence, and whose recollections of the early days give us a valuable insight into pioneer life.

Sesquicentennial News . . .

By KAY HESS

With this issue of the paper we shall begin the publishing of some reminiscences of William W. Parish Senior, one of our very earliest settlers. The recollections of Mr. Parish were written in 1912 by his grandson-in-law, Clay Buntain, a prominent lawyer of the county, for the County Historical Society, just two years before Mr. Parish's death. He died at the old Central House at the age of 92. The memories of the early days which Mr. Buntain wrote down for succeeding generations give a vivid picture of life on the Illinois frontier.

William Wallace Parish was born in Naples, New York, in 1821. His parents were Jeremiah and Clarissa Clark Parish of Massachusetts, and they were members of families which dated to the earliest colonial times.

In 1789 a colony of sixty people emigrated with their ox teams from Massachusetts to Ontario County, New York, in the dead of winter. They sometimes literally had to cut their way through dense timber on the journey of one-hundred and twenty miles. Upon their arrival in New York State they purchased an entire township for 12½ cents an acre and divided the land equally among themselves for their homes. Mr. Parish's great-grandfather, grandfather, and a great-uncle were among the first to locate in the township. They settled in the midst of the Indians and life was full of privations and danger.

The great-grandfather was a farmer and had served in the Revolutionary War. The grandfather was also a farmer. Mr. Parish's father, Jeremiah, was a soldier in the War of

1812, and was leading lawyer of Naples and served as a Judge of the Circuit Court. Jeremiah's brother Orson was a prominent lawyer of Ohio and often pleaded at the bar in Washington, D. C. He was noted for always dressing in Continental style in clothing of rich fabrics. On one occasion Jeremiah went to Washington with Orson—Jeremiah with bare feet, and Orson beautifully clad with silk stockings.

There were seven children in the Jeremiah Parish family—Mary, Bishop (who preceded William Parish in coming to Illinois to live), Emily (who later accompanied William to Illinois), Edwin, Corydon, William and Caroline.

When William was nineteen he left his home in Naples, drove 18 miles over-land to Canandaigua, the county seat, and took what was called the "Stage Railroad" to Rochester

“Strap Railroad” to Rochester, then a canal boat on the Erie Canal to Buffalo, and boarded the lake steamer for Chicago.

And now his reminiscences begin:

“This boat had no regular schedule. At Chicago or Milwaukee there was no harbor. We were landed by lighter. A small boat would come out to the steamer and receive the passengers and cargo. Chicago at his time was a small country village. I went overland from Chicago to Momence; stopped at a place on the Sac trail called a hotel, about three miles south of Crete but which was nothing more than one of the old-fashioned Pennsylvan-

ia wagon boxes. This “hotel” was kept by Mr. Brown. Later a substantial log house was substituted for the wagon box hotel, and still later a frame house took its place. It will be remembered that the Sac trail was an old Indian trail running from Detroit to St. Louis.

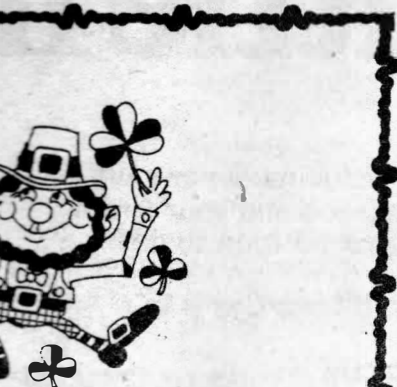
“When I reached Momence, after a continuous trip of 18 days, I found but one log house situated on the west side of what is now known as Range Street. (note: this was in 1840). It was near the site of Burdick’s and Joubert’s Drug Store. (where the Wagner Drug Store is now.) I hired out to A. S. Vail and Orson Beebe at 50 cents a day. As there were no stores in the village, our trading point for groceries, in fact for everything, was Chicago.

“When we secured a mill on the Kankakee River then we had our rough lumber, but still had to haul all our finished lumber from Chicago. I have seen as many as 200 wagons at one time camped on the river banks at Momence en route for Chicago. Cattle and hogs were driven to Chicago from

as far south as Vermilion County. I distinctly remember of seeing a drove of 500 turkeys being driven to Chicago. They encamped on the island in Momence over-night.”

(Mr. Parish married Sallie Woodward, daughter of Benjamin and Sylvia Vail Woodward of Kankakee. She died about a year after their marriage and left a little daughter, Angela, who later became the wife of Charles Bellinger and the mother of Alice—later the wife of Clay Buntain— both of whom we have already written about in these columns.)

“My wife and I began housekeeping with the sum of \$60, my ox team and this money constituting all of our property. We drove this team to Chicago for our household furniture. There were no houses between Momence and Goodenow. Returning with the furniture our wagon became mired in the mud and sloughs near what is now Harvey. I carried my wife out of the wagon, and then the groceries and furniture, and with the aid of a log chain the oxen succeeded in drawing the wag-



on out of the almost impassable road. It took us one week to make the trip.

"Settled in our log house near Momence, in the new country, I began the only occupation at that time apparently open to man—farming. Our tools were all hand-made, and we made them. They consisted of a wooden plow, a wooden drag, and a hand sickle. Later a cradle took its place. Our threshing floor was on a prairie. Oxen stamped the grain out, and the wind separated the chaff from the wheat. Nature's threshing machine later gave way to what was known as the "Hedge Hog Machine".

"During this period from 1840 to 1850 we had our choice of farm lands for \$1.25 per acre. Wheat delivered in Chicago was worth 35 cents a bushel; dressed pork, \$1.50 a hundred-weight; corn and oats at 10 cents a bushel. I distinctly remember of giving 700 bushels of corn and oats mixed in the purchase of an old horse, the first that I ever owned."

(Note: The log house, the Parishes' first home, was built on the first land Mr. Parish bought here—that tract was 20 acres just west of the Ponderosa, where the kennels now are.)

"The first wheat I ever saw was in 1841. It was growing on a tract of land just east of the Chicago and Vincennes Road on the William (Squire) Nichols farm, east of the brick house and east of the milestone marked 179 miles to Vincennes. I helped to cut all this wheat with a hand sickle at 50 cents a day. The wheat yielded 40 bushels to the acre and the market price was 35 cents a bushel. These prices remained until 1850.

"As soon as the Illinois Central Railroad was built through this county, the price of land advanced to about \$7 an acre, according to the distance from the railroad. Land values from this time gradually increased and during the Civil War, I owned 80 acres of what is now occupied by the dwelling houses on the south

side of the river at Momence and west of the present Chicago & Eastern Illinois Railroad. This tract was worth then about \$40 to \$50 an acre. I sold wheat from this land that yielded 35 bushels an acre, for which I received \$2.20 at the Momence mill. The land adjoining this tract, now owned by my son, is worth, according to present prices, \$200 per acre. (1912) Eighty acres of land in the 7-mile grove near Momence where the Nichols cemetery is now located, was traded to Squire Nichols for a span of mules.

"Prior to the grist mill in Momence we drove to Attica, Indiana, a distance of 75 miles, to have our wheat ground. This lasted but one year. Then we drove to Wilmington, a distance of 30 miles, for our flour. This continued for a number of years.

"The first corn I ever saw planted was by the father of Andrew Dayton, east of Momence. His wife dropped the corn and he covered the dirt over it with his foot. The first corn planter was a hand jabber, planting two rows at a time. John Wickes of Momence sold them.

"We drove 25 miles south of Momence to get our mail and received it once a week. There were no envelopes—the manuscript was folded and fastened by a wafer (sealing wax). It took two months for a letter mailed in Naples, New York, to reach Momence. The postage was 25 cents, paid by the receiver. Loraine Beebe and her husband David Lynds were the first post office people at Momence.

"The Kankakee River was the dividing line between Will and Iroquois Counties; south of the river being Iroquois, and Will county on the north. The county seat of Iroquois was Middleport, one mile west of what is now Watseka, on the Iroquois River.

"I frequently served as juror in the circuit court here. Court would not last over a week or two. I heard Abraham Lincoln try a law suit there (Middleport) in 1840 or 1841. He came on horseback from



Mrs. Charles Bellinger—Angela, daughter of William Parish, Sr., and mother of Allie Buntain.



Carrie Parish, daughter of William Parish, Sr. Carrie died at the age of 23 from typhoid.

Sesquicentinal . . .

away they were all taken away



Danville. We used to get around him to hear him tell his stories. I might say in passing, that the next time I saw him was in his own house at Springfield, where I shook hands with him, the year he was nominated for the presidency.

"I was in Springfield two days. He had a pile of rails in his yard and before I came away they were all taken away by the relic hunters.

"John Chamberlain, John Wertz, and myself were elected three "Side Judges" of Iroquois County. Our duties were similar to those of the supervisors now. The county was badly in debt. Its debts were paid by county orders and men bought these at 50 cents on the dollar and paid their taxes with them. We three decided to stop this and by our efforts made them par. We then got some money, and the first thing we did was put a roof on the court house.

"My colleagues were opposed to the carving out of Kankakee County from Iroquois and Will, and worked to retain the old boundaries as I did for the new. The people by their votes settled the matter in a way satisfactory to me.

"It was a day's journey to the Middleport County seat. Lawyers from Joliet rode horseback to Middleport to try their cases, and lawyers from Iroquois County would ride to Joliet to try theirs."

(Mr. Parish's story will continue in next week's issue of the paper.)

— CALENDAR —

15—County meeting of Senior Citizens, 1 p.m., at Methodist Memorial Building.

21—Senior Citizens potluck luncheon, 11:30 a.m., at Methodist Memorial Building.

Sesquientinal . . .

The members of the Fourth of July committee and the people who are working with Pauline Peterson on the block parties will meet with the main committee on the evening of March 20 at the City Hall at 7:30. Any other Sesqui workers who have questions or need help are also invited to come to this meeting.

We still need furnishings for the log cabin. Please let one of the committee know if you have suitable items for inside the cabin.

The Little Red School House committee regrets that the name of John Wilson was omitted in the listing of contributors to the schoolhouse fund. Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Wilson and John Wilson had sent a very generous check toward the schoolhouse fund, and we are grateful to them.

The Sesqui towels have arrived and go on sale this week at The Hoosgow. They are not on display—ask Sue Butterfield to show them to you in the card shop and she will be glad to sell you one of these beautiful keepsakes.

We are very pleased with the towels. They are silk screened on natural linen in shades of brown, and are beautifully done by an artist from old Momence photographs which we sent to the company. There are town street scenes of old Momence (complete with wagons and horses), a view of the old Union



High School shortly after it was built, a fine drawing of the old Nichols home on the Vincennes Trail (our oldest house), and a fine river scene. A sketch of Chief Momenza completes the lay-out, along with our Sesqui logo.

These souvenirs are the sort of thing that will be beautifully framed and would look fine in any room of the home, or it could be used for a wall hanging.

The supply of the towels is limited.

With this issue of the paper we are printing a "comprehensive" sort of coupon, both for your convenience and ours, by which out-of-town people may order any of the souvenir items which we have.

The price of the towels is \$6.00 each when bought locally and \$7.00 by mail. Like all the other items we have had made up for sale, the proceeds will go toward defraying the expenses of the summer's fun.

Sesquicentennial News . . .

By KAY HESS

The reminiscences of William Parish conclude in this column, along with his recollections of "The Old Log House", which became the scene of the election to choose a County Seat for the new Kankakee County. Readers of the Bert Burroughs books will recall the skull-duggery which went on at that election!

And the story of the Parish family continues, for the roots laid down by that first Parish settler in 1844 took hold, and the family played a leading part through the years in the development of the town.

"My first tax receipt was a receipt for 15 cents, being the taxes on my sole piece of property, a yoke of oxen. At this time the sheriff collected taxes. They were paid to him on the old Lowe farm near the present East Court Street bridge over the Kankakee River. (Note: this would now be called the Avon bridge.) An overland trip to Joliet was a day's journey; the first stage being as far as Coon Grove (near Goodenow), the second stage the 12-mile grove,

(12 miles from Joliet), and the third stage the 5-mile grove. This was the route in dry roads and weather. In wet times, we traveled by way of Bourbonnais; the first stage being the tavern of Tommy Durham at Bourbonnais, and next at Wilmington. During the 60's we were greatly bothered by horse thieves. We organized an Anti-Horse Thief Association. We found that within a short time 15 horses were stolen in our immediate neighborhood. A nice span of greys were stolen one night from the barn of Zene Brayton. I was delegated to hunt down the thief. Enlisting Hannibal Worcester, we drove to Crown Point and traced the thief to Chicago, and found the thief and horses west of Chicago. I knew the team as soon as I saw them; arrested the thief, sold my horse, hitched one of the greys to my buggy and led the other. The friends at Momence knew we were coming, and 100 of them met us at Tower Creek. (two miles west of Momence on the Kankakee River.). They wanted to hang

the thief.

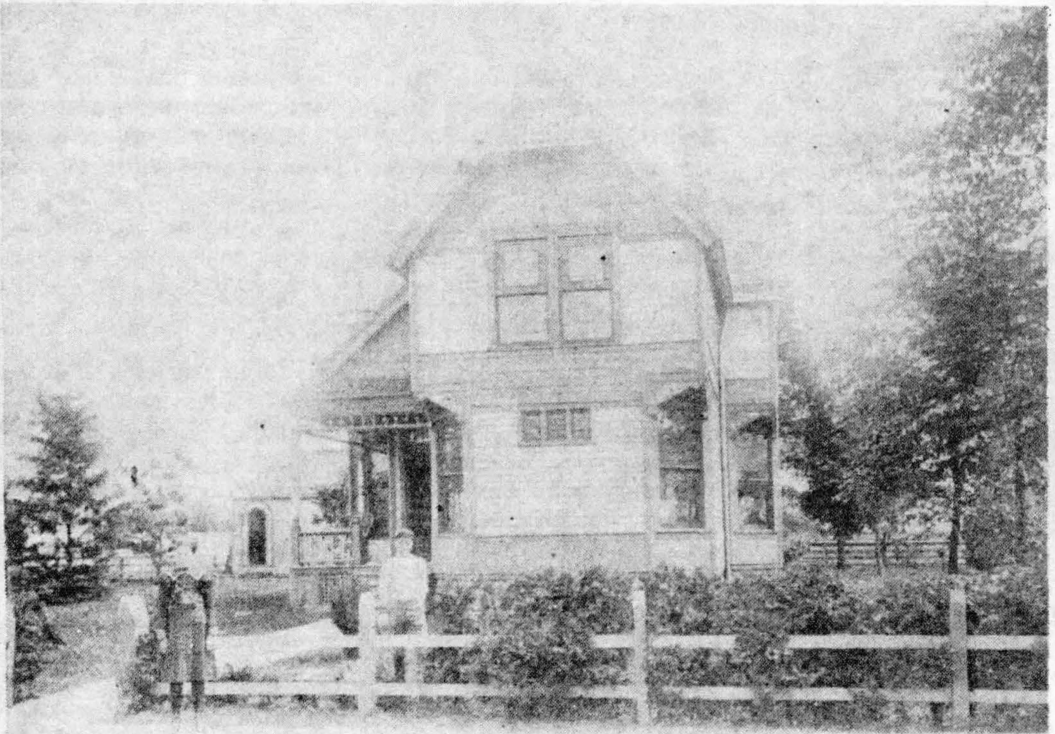
"We were bringing him to Momence for trial before a justice of the peace. Russell Saeger prevailed on the crowd not to hang him and they desisted. We brought him to Momence where the sheriff took him to Kankakee, where he was indicted and escaped from jail.

"We also received from this thief 5 horses and colts belonging to Dick Griswold, and a saddle horse belonging to John Wickes. Our trip covered a period of four days.

"I attended the convention in Chicago that nominated Abraham Lincoln for the Presidency; was too poor to travel to hear the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Heard Stephen A Douglas speak at the Court House in Kankakee during the Presidential Campaign. Knew him well.

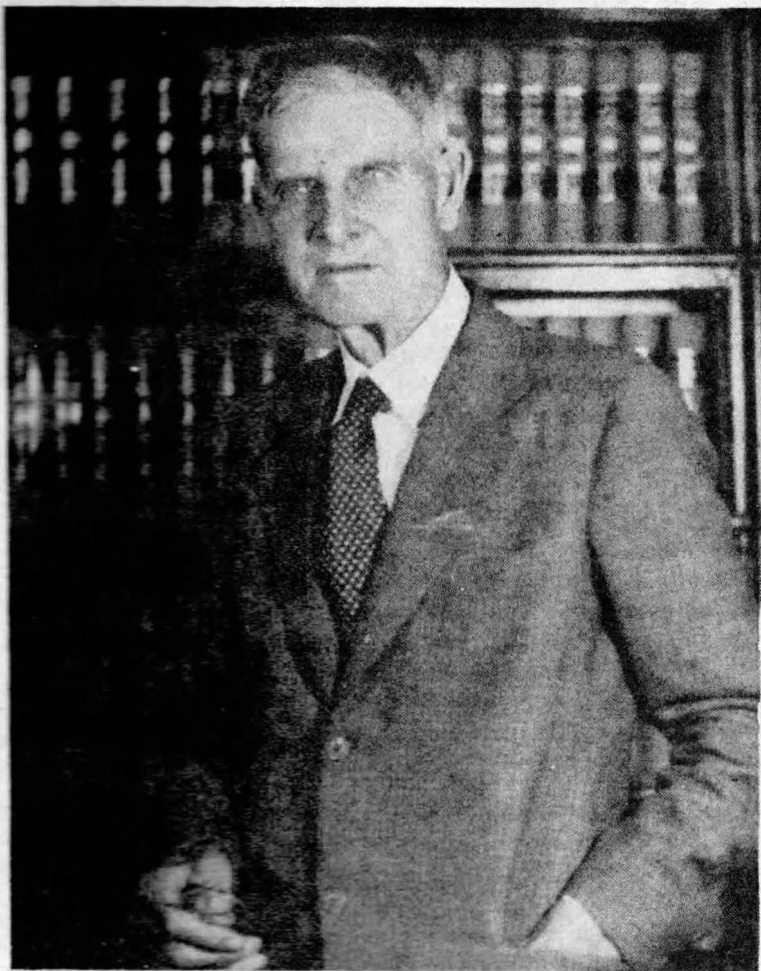
"I was born and brought up a Democrat, voted the Republican ticket beginning with President Polk, up to the present time.

"I was 91 years old on June 14, 1912."



Photograph's loaned by Mrs. Will Parish.

The Parish home as it looked before remodeling. The house was located where the Parish Drive-In Bank now is located.



WILLIAM PARISH, JR.

Father of Varnum, Carrie, Will and Anthony

In 1852 Mr. Parish married for the second time. His bride was Catherine Parkhurst. There were four children born, Varnum, William, Carrie, and a baby who died in infancy. Tragely struck the family when Varnum, who was 28 years old died of that scourge of pioneer times, typhoid fever. His sister Carrie, who was 23 died of the typhoid only hours after brother. It is this Carrie Parish whose picture accompanied the first settlement of the Parish story.

William Parish Junior became the father, grandfather, and great grandfather of the members of the Parish family who live here now.

William Parish Senior died in 1914 at the age of 93. He had, of course, been retired for many years and had turned over the management of his farm land and other businesses to his son. His later years were spent at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Bellinger, at the home in the country north of town (now the Ponderosa) and in living at the

old Central House Hotel.

His life had spanned almost a century, and he had lived to see the wilderness change into a settled and prosperous community.

William Parish Junior was educated in the Momence schools, and like so many other young people of the day, he attended Grand Prairie Seminary in Onarga. That institution was an important factor in the education of so many students who came to Onarga from all over the Middle West to study, for there were very few high schools, and the Seminary filled that gap after grade school.

After his brother Varnum had died, William took over with the farming. His father had subdivided the land on the south side of the river, the Southeast Addition, and soon Mr. Parish began a construction business. In one year alone he built some 18 houses in that addition.

He married Katie Canavan, a daughter of one of the Canavan

families who had emigrated here from County Mayo in Ireland. (The Canavans are listed in the old 1850 census of Will County-only the census taker could not decide quite how to spell the name, and it is listed as "Canoveran"). There were four children born: Varnum, Carrie, William (note the similarity of these names to those of the children of William Senior), and Anthony, the youngest.

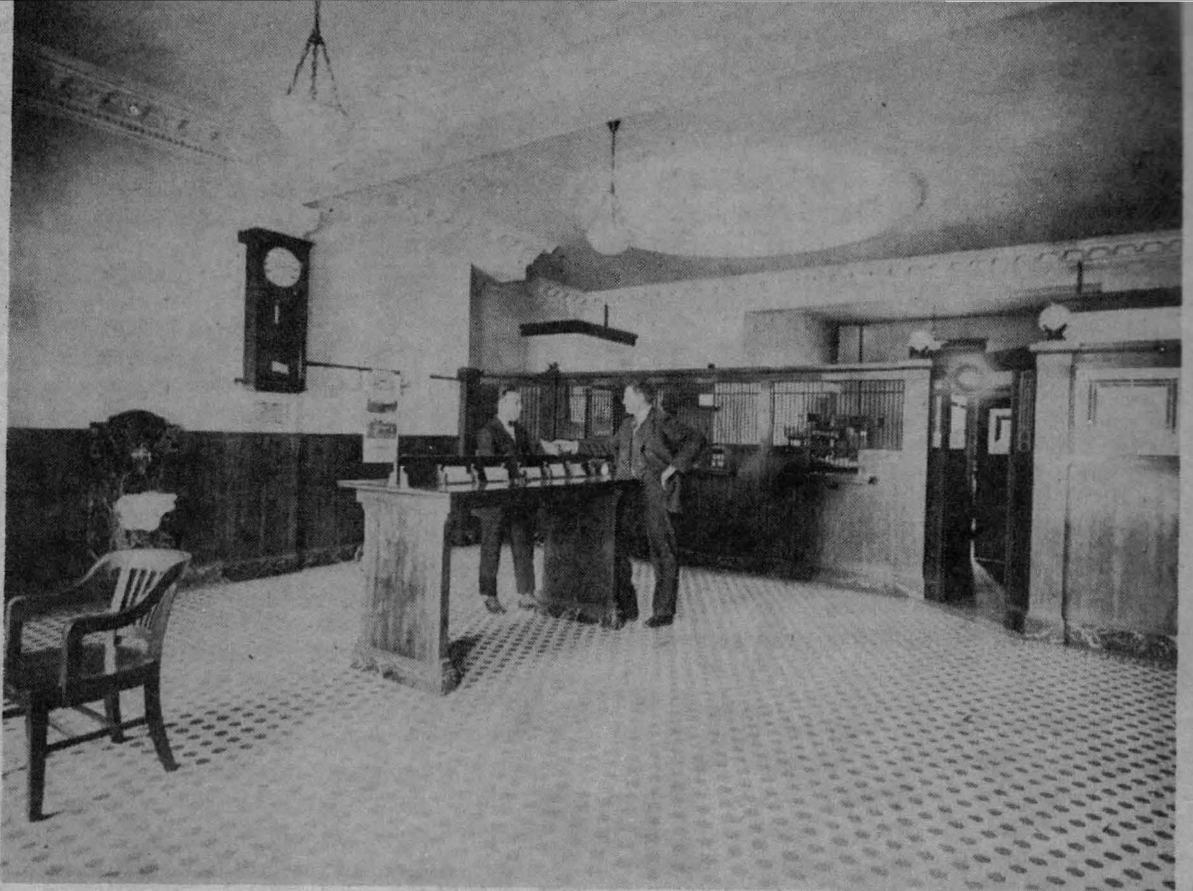
Mr. Parish built the home on the south side which is pictured with this story. The house was torn down when the Parish Drive-in Bank was built. The picture shows the house before it was remodelled, for later there was a large addition to the east side of the house, and a porch encircled the north and west sides of the house. In later years this was the home of Miss Carrie Marie Parish, and she lived here until her death.

With Mr. Kirby, Edward Chipman, and Charles Watson, Mr. Parish was one of the founders of the First National Bank and was a director of that bank until he sold his share to Vic Brassard. Then Mr. Parish started his own bank, a private bank which in 1921 became the Parish State Bank, and in 1931 became the Parish Bank and Trust. Mr. Parish served as the bank's president until 1940, at which time his son Anthony became president. The bank through the years has been a mainstay of Momence business and a solid financial institution.

It had the distinction of never having to close during the Depression, when so many financial institutions were forced to close their doors. When the First National Bank failed during those hard times, the Parish Bank closed only very briefly as a "sympathy gesture", but reopened immediately. The Bank continues to be a family-managed business, with Varnum Parish's son John and John's son, Michael carrying on the family tradition.

Varnum and Will Parish became lawyers; Varnum served Kankakee County as District Attorney for a number of years. Carrie never married. She was trained in music, and devoted much of her time to "causes". She was a great worker for the Women's Christian Temperance Union and she traveled a great deal.

Varnum married Frances Coontz and built the home west of town on the Island, a local landmark. Will married Ova Frantz, and Anthony married Ruth Sharkey. The children and grandchildren of these marriages are our "Parish residents" today. And it is Anthony, the last of the sons of William Parish Junior, who is such a great help to us in the writing of these stories of the old days. For he remembers so many tales of those folks who used to live and work here, and he can remember so well that a visit with him is a great joy. We are grateful



The Parish Bank in its early days. Note that the beautiful dome and the marble drinking fountain are still fixtures of the bank as it is now.

that we have him as a wonderful link with the past.

Added Note: It will be remembered that the original William Parish's brother Bishop had preceded him in making the move to Illinois. The Bishop Parish farm was that southwest of town, diagonally across from Mt. Ayr Cemetery. Bishop Parish was born in 1814 in New York, and he was married to Marcia, who also was born in 1814, and who died in 1852. Bishop died in 1857 at the age of 43. All of their children—all girls, died at an early age. The family, unfortunately, completely died out. One looks at the graves of some of these pioneer families, and it is more usual than not to see the little headstones of children. Epidemics of typhoid, "summer complaint", diphtheria, and smallpox took their toll. And when one considers the hardships and privations that these early families underwent in establishing homes and farms, it is no wonder that adults and children alike succumbed at a tragically youthful age.

This log house was built by Cornelius Cane for a residence



Carrie Marie Parish and her brother Anthony. Carrie was 11 years old and Anthony, 7, at the time picture was made.

corn dodgers six days each week and biscuits and "chicken fixins" on Sunday. Mr. Cane always asked the same blessing, which was as follows: "O, Lord we praise thee for the present refreshments; pardon our sins, give us grace and wisdom, that we may have the profits we gain thereby for Jesus' sake. John, pass the corn dodgers."

The Sesqui committee extends its thanks to Florence Hayes of Elgin, Illinois, for her most generous gift to be used in some of the completion of the cabin and Conrad Park. Florence Hayes years ago made her home with Henry and Hazel Conrad, and so the name and

location of the new park has great meaning for her. We are happy about that.

One of the best things that has come out of all this planning and doing to get ready for this special summer has been the kindness and caring shown by so many people. In the midst of all the hard work (and worry) have come so many letters and phone calls expressing friendship and a desire to share. Every day we realize more and more just how great Momence people are and always have been. And that is an unlooked-for blessing that the Sesqui has brought! Perhaps this anniversary is bringing us all more than just having fun this summer.

PATRICIA L. ENGELS

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