

For Village
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HISTORY OF SOUTH CHICAGO HEIGHTS

by Louise Michalek

Although South Chicago Heights was not incorporated as a village until 1907, in its corporate limits is the site of the home of the first permanent pioneer settler in the south suburban area, as well as the intersection of two of the oldest and most historic roads in this part of Illinois and also the site of the log house in which the First Presbyterian Church of Chicago Heights had its beginnings.

The first two entrymen to make affidavits for their pre-emption claims to land under the Pre-Emption Act of 1838 were men who settled in what is now South Chicago Heights.

The first country inn in the area was located in what is now South Chicago Heights, and it was in continuous operation for over 100 years, longer than any later inn or hotel in suburbia.

The history of the south suburban area began in what is now South Chicago Heights at Brown's Corners, the intersection of two of the most famous trails in northern Illinois - the old Sauk Trail and the Gurdon S. Hubbard Trail.

The Sauk Trail between an important Indian burying ground near Detroit, Michigan, and the Indian villages at Rock Island, Illinois, served long as the main East-West thoroughfare over which traveled traders, trappers, hunters, adventurers, soldiers and pioneers as well as the Indians and before them the buffalo.

Hubbard's Trail served Gurdon S. Hubbard on his treks between his trading post at Bunkum (present day Iroquois, Illinois) and Chicago, where he delivered furs collected from the Indians. It was also known by other names. When a road was surveyed for military purposes between Fort Dearborn in Chicago and the fort at Vincennes, Indiana, much of it made use of Hubbard's Trail. It was known as the Military Road as well as the Chicago and Vincennes Road, later shortened to Chicago Road.

In the early days of the automobile, it was known as the Dixie Highway - connecting Chicago with the South - one of the first mapped automobile highways for motorists. Then when the highway department of Illinois began its systematic numbering of highways, it became Illinois Route 1.

When the first pioneer settlers arrived in northern Illinois following the settlement of the Blackhawk War in 1832, they found a lush country teeming with game; gently rolling prairies; great forests; and streams with water clear as crystal.

The area now composing South Chicago Heights was no exception. Stands of virgin timber; streams full of fish; prairie land covered with tall prairie grass often growing to six feet in height so that a man on horseback could ride into the grass and soon disappear from sight, as well as abundant game - all these awaited Adam Brown and his family from Ohio in 1833; Timothy Smith and family from Long Island, New York, in 1835; and Addy Vannest and family from Ohio about the same time.

These men each established their farms within the present boundaries of South Chicago Heights. Another early settler was John McCoy, whose land was just to the west; he came from Vermont in 1834 and was a much respected citizen.

The first permanent white settler in the south suburban area was Adam Brown. He came in 1833 with his wife and small son and chose the corner of Sauk Trail and Hubbard Trail for his home. Here he erected a log cabin and later a frame building which served as an inn for weary travelers on both trails. This crossroads became known as Brown's Corners and to this day is still known by that name. Brown's Corners is marked by a bronze plaque on the Sinclair Service Station put up on the site of Adam Brown's inn by the Sinclair Company during the Illinois Sesquicentennial celebration in 1968.

Adam Brown was the first to settle in what is now the village of South Chicago Heights. He was born in Guilford County, North Carolina, while his wife, Phoebe Myers, was born in Tennessee. Both had grown up in Preble County, Ohio, where they were married in 1830. They first settled in Elkhart, Indiana, where their first child was born. Eight other children were born to them at their home at the intersection of Sauk and Hubbard Trails. Their second child was the first white child born in the area.

On November 29, 1838, when the land was opened for purchase, Timothy Smith purchased three parcels of land (at the price of \$1.25 per acre) - 80 acres in Section 33, 160 acres in Section 33, 160 acres in Section 28. This purchase made him the largest landholder in what is now the village limits.

Another early settler in this part of Bloom township was Addy Vannest, who came with his family from Ohio and chose land to the north of Adam Brown on Hubbard Trail. It is interesting to note that when in 1838 the land was opened for pre-emption acquisition by the pioneers before it was opened for public sale the first entryman on the record book was Adam Brown (September 8, 1838, 160 acres, northeast quarter of Section 32) and the second entryman to make pre-emption

affidavits in the records of the general land office was Addy Vannest (September 25, 1838, 160 acres in the southeast quarter of Section 29).

Addy Vannest had built a dwelling house sometime previous to February 22, 1838, and stated he lived in it at the time of making his claim although his farm was sold the same day he purchased it from the government.

The purchaser of Addy Vannest's property was Joseph Caldwell, whose family was closely connected by marriage with the Wallace, McEldowney, and Hood families. All had come from County Tyrone in Northern Ireland to Canada - the Caldwells in 1826, the Wallaces and McEldowneys in 1832, and the Hoods in 1837. These four families dominated the settlement called Thorn Grove, which was to become the village of Bloom and later Chicago Heights.

Joseph Caldwell was 53 and his wife 51 when they came to Illinois in 1838. Their family consisted of three sons - James (23), Archibald (18), Thomas (14) - and a daughter, Elizabeth (12).

It was in the log cabin home of Joseph Caldwell on Hubbard Trail in 1843 that the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Thorn Grove was organized. The log house was demolished in 1885, and the frame house built in front of it sometime before the death of Joseph Caldwell in 1860 was moved a few rods to the north, remodeled and used as a barn.

Archibald Caldwell built a new house on the old site and lived there until his death in 1891. His widow, Mrs. Annie Millar Caldwell, occupied it until her death in 1900. This house is known as 2833 Chicago Road, South Chicago Heights, and is still standing on the site of the original log house.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Thorn Grove became the First Presbyterian Church of Chicago Heights.

A plat map of 1861 shows the following persons as owners of the land within the present boundaries of South Chicago Heights: James Caldwell, Archibald Caldwell, M. Wallace, T. McEldowney, Adam Brown, John Weishaar, G. C. Smith (a son of Timothy Smith), and A. Hewes.

A school-house is also indicated as being located on the west side of Chicago Road (southeast quarter of Section 29) about at the southwest corner of Chicago Road and 30th Street.

H. C. Peck, J. B. Wilson, and J. C. Smith owned property directly south of South Chicago Heights. John McCoy's estate (he died in 1854) was to the west.

The Chicago and Danville Railroad was put through in 1869 and roughly paralleled the route of the Military Road. Later this became the Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad with a station in South Chicago Heights.

In 1903 the Chicago and Southern Interurban Lines laid tracks through South Chicago Heights. This line operated interurban cars for about 20 years between Chicago and Kankakee.

In 1892 when the Steger Piano Company began its factory in Columbia Heights (later Steger), land promoters envisioned rapid development of the area and bought up much of the land now occupied by South Chicago Heights. Keeney was a well-known name on many deeds for Keeney opened several subdivisions and additions to subdivisions.

In 1907 South Chicago Heights was incorporated as a village with John F. Hansen as first president of the village board and William Terre as its first clerk.

In 1910 a four-room schoolhouse was erected on 26th Street and named the Grant School. Later it was to be enlarged to twice the size. It has since been replaced by a new and much larger complex at Miller Avenue and 27th Street. The site of the first Grant School is occupied by Suburban Convalescent Center.

Also in 1910 the volunteer fire department was organized to serve the village needs and became one of the village's most important organizations. According to an old newspaper account, water for South Chicago Heights was supplied from an artesian well with a depth of 2500 feet. The well was sunk by a land-owner attempting to find oil. Since he was unsuccessful, the well was later purchased by the village.

As with Chicago Heights, the village has always had a population of many nationalities, including Scandinavian, Italian, Irish, Polish, and German.

Two of the earliest service stations were located on Chicago Road in South Chicago Heights. Brown's Corners now has four service stations to serve the traveling public, which still uses in ever-increasing numbers the two roads which have such a continuous record of service - Sauk Trail and Chicago Road.

Primarily a residential village of small homes, South Chicago Heights until recently had little commercial business and few factories. However, Chicago Road has gradually developed into a busy business district and factories are beginning to recognize the potential the village has to offer.

History of South Chicago Heights

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A school house is also indicated on the ~~west~~ side of Chicago road at the southeast ~~corner~~ of Section 29. (southwest corner of Chgo rd and 30th st.) quarter

H.C. Peck, JB Wilson and J.C. Smith owned the property directly south of South Chicago Heights (borders (present)

In 1869 the Chicago and Danville railroad which paralleled Chicago road (Military road) was put through. This later became the Chicago and Eastern Illinois railroad which at one time had a station in South Chicago Heights.

In 1903 the Chicago and Southern Interurban laid tracks through South Chicago Heights connecting Kankakee and Chicago. By 1923 the interurban lines were forced out of business by the development of bus lines.

In 1892 as ~~sk~~ the Steger Piano Company began its factory in Columbia Heights - later Steger - land promoters envisioning rapid development of the area bought up most of the land now occupied by South Chicago Heights. Keeney was a well known name on many a deed. Keeney's addition to Keeney's subdivision etc.

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In 1910 a four room school house was erected on 26th street and named the Grant school. Later it was enlarged to twice the size. It has since been replaced by a new complex several blocks away and the site of the first school is now occupied by the South Suburban Nursing home.

Also in 1910 the volunteer fire department was organized to serve the village until a regular force could be financed. Modern equipment of the latest approved style has always been maintained.

According to an old newspaper account water for South Chicago Heights is supplied ~~by~~ from an artesian well with a depth of 2,500 feet. The well was sunk by a land owner attempting to find oil and was later purchased by the village.

The village has always had a population of mixed nationalities including Scandanavian, Italian, Irish, German and Polish.

Early Pioneers in South Chicago Heights Area

Adam Brown, the first permanent pioneer settler in southern Cook county, arrived with his wife and one child in the spring of 1833 choosing the corner of Sauk trail and the Chicago-Vincennes road (Hubbard's trail) for his home. Here he erected his log cabin and later a fram house which served as an inn for weary travelers on both trails. This crossroads became known as Brown's Corners and to this day still is known by that name.

The next year Adam Brown acquired neighbors when John McCoy and his wife, Sabra Clark McCoy, and their large family from Rutland, Vt., decided to make their home on the banks of Thorn creek about a mile west of Brown's. This is now forest preserve property. Part of the McCoy land served as an Indian camping ground before and after the Blackhawk war. John's eldest son, Lorenzo McCoy, with his family also settled along the trail near the old Indian camping ground.

In 1835 Timothy Smith coming from Long Island, N.Y. found land to his liking just east of Brown's. Then in 1837 came John Wilson to settle just south of Sauk trail. His farm lands extended into the present village of Steger and when the Steger Piano company built its factory in 1892, it built on John Wilson's land.

John McCoy has descendants living in the south suburban area but the other families have none left here.

ADAM BROWN

Born March 18, 1805 in Guilford County, North Carolina
Died March 8, 1895 in home at Brown's Corners, Bloom Twp, Ill.

Removed from North Carolina with his parents to Preble, Co. OHIO
when a small child.

Married March 12, 1830, Preble County, Ohio, to Miss Phoebe
Myers (Born in Tennessee, March 23, 1809; moved to Preble
County, Ohio, 1811; died Brown's Corners, Bloom Twp., Ill.
February 27, 1892.) Moved to Elkhart, Ind., 1830, to Bloom, 1833.

They had 9 children:

- (1) Christopher, born Elkhart - 1830(1 or 2)
- (2) Lovina, born Brown's Corners, Ill., 1833
- (3) Elizabeth born Brown's Corners
- (4) George ^{A.} born Brown's Corners m. Martha J. McWhorten
who d. July 14, 1884 age 41
in Kansas
- (5) William B. Brown's Corners
d March 9, 1884
George and William served in Civil War
- (6) Sarah Augusta b. Brown's Corners Dec. 26, 1844
d. Crete July 27, 1920
m. George Henry Wilder(b. 6-1-1842 d. 11-6-1928
veteran of Civil War - Oct. 28, 1868
- (7) Mary b. Brown's Corners d. 1906
- (8) Phebe b. Brown's Corners -
m. Fremont Holbrook -
- (9) Adam, Jr., b. Brown's Corners
d. Chicago after 1933

When Adam Brown died in 1895 his survivors were 8 children, 17
grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren

When Phoebe Myers Brown died in 1892 there had been surviving
8 children, 18 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren

It was the ~~S~~pring of the year and the lumbering covered wagon creaked to a stop at the crossroads of the old Indian trail and the Military road. This seemed a good place to stop so in a grove of trees on the northwest corner of the crossroads, Adam Brown ended his westward journey.

The year was 1833 and Adam Brown had started out several weeks before with his wife and their only child, Christopher, from Elkhart, Ind., where ~~they~~ ^{Adam} had taken his bride three years before. Both had been brought up in Preble county, Ohio, on the western boundary of the state. He had been born in 1805 ^{North Carolina in} in Guilford county, ~~while~~ ^{it was in} ~~the~~ Tennessee ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ that Phoebe Myers was born in 1809.

"Western fever" was a common and popular ailment that hit both young and old and Adam fell victim to it as had his father before him. In 1833 the northern Illinois counties beckoned the ~~the~~ settlers for the threat of Indian attack in this section of the state disappeared when the Indians were removed to west of the Mississippi as part of the settlement of the Blackhawk war the year before. This opened the virtually uninhabited northern part of Illinois for pioneers to locate farms and communities.

This crossroads six miles west of the Indiana border held so much attraction for Adam Brown that he stayed here the rest of his life. Here he farmed and ran a country inn until he died on March 8, 1895, just ten days before his 90th birthday,

There were no settlements between his farm and Momence for several years and only scattered farms between his farm and Joliet for many years to come. He did have neighbors to the north along the Military road which also had served Gardon S. Hubbard as a trail between his fur trading post in Bunkum and the shipping point in Chicago for more than a decade before. Absolom Wells and his family arrived at the banks of Thorn Creek and the Military road only a few weeks before Adam. Then in 1835 several inter-related Scotch-Irish families arrived to claim farm lands between the Brown and Wells farms.

To the east on the old Indian trail, lands were taken up by other families - some from Ohio and others from farther east - beginning in 1835. The previous year the Browns had welcomed neighbors who settled about a mile to the west. Then in 1837 the first German families found farm lands to their liking several miles east of the crossroads which by now were being called Brown's Corners - a name which continues to identify this important spot.

In 1838, Adam Brown was the first purchaser of land in the south suburban area then known as Thornton precinct under the pre-emption act of that year. On September 8, 1838, he filed his claim for 160 acres in Section 32 buying it for \$1.25 an acre from the government. On November 29 of the same year he purchased 160 acres in Section 31 and 80 acres in Section 29 while on the following day he purchased 80 acres in Section 33. The price was still \$1.25 an acre and he now owned 480 acres of land in what is now Bloom township at the cost of \$600.

He planted the first orchard in the precinct in 1840 but his hotel or inn at that time according to a pioneer who stopped there on his way from Chicago to Momence was nothing more than an old Pennsylvania wagon box. However the chronicler of that account did say that a log cabin soon ~~was~~ replaced the wagon box and later a substantial frame building was erected. The first frame barn in the area was one built by Adam Brown.

Pioneers en route west were allowed to stop and camp in Adam Brown's woods or in the old Indian camping ground of Neighbor John McCoy a mile to the west. First the pioneers were bound for other sections of northern Illinois, then Iowa - pronounced with the accent on the "o" - and then to the gold fields of California. Neighbor McCoy said goodbye to one of his sons who joined the gold rush.

A cholera epidemic which raged through the west bound travelers camped at Neighbor McCoy's left its toll as Neighbor McCoy caught the disease and died of it in 1854.

The traffic eastward during this decade before the Civil War was apt to be at night. Many a night Adam Brown heard the McCoy farm wagon as it creaked along the trail eastward to Indiana. Adam knew that in the back of the wagon covered with hay would be hidden one or more runaway slaves from Missouri being passed from the McCoy farm to the next station on the Underground Railroad across the border in Indiana with the hope of reaching Canada and freedom safely.

There had been so many Germans move into the area that the little village of Thorn Grove to the north had changed its name to ~~Ridgeway~~ Bloom, an anglicized version of Bluhm,

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an Austrian martyr highly thought of by the new settlers.

Jim Henry McEldowney made regular trips past Brown's driving ^{Between} the mail coach ~~to~~ Danville and Chicago. There were two stores in Bloom on the Military road which was now called Chicago road.

Adam Brown's family was growing up. He and Phoebe had nine children. Christopher, Lovina - the first white child born in the area arrived soon after the Brown's settled here - Elizabeth, George, William, Sarah Augusta, Mary, Phebe, and Adam, Jr.

When Lincoln called for volunteers during the Civil War, George and William Brown along with George and Milton McCoy and ~~the~~ other young men from the area were among the first to answer the call.

~~xxxxxx~~ One day in April in 1866, an impressive caravan of wagons and cattle came down Chicago road and turned west at Brown's Corners on Sauk trail headed for Oregon territory. This caravan belonged to the Stewart Eakin family who planned to seek fortune in the ~~the~~ far west where Stewart Eakin had an uncle. The Eakin store on Chicago road had been sold to one of the newly arrived Germans. Since the Eakins were related by marriage to several of the Scotch-Irish families of the area this departure was of considerable interest. It would take them over four months to get to their destination.

Railroads made their appearance in 1852 when the Illinois Central opened its line. Then in the following year the Joliet and Indiana line, later ^{known as} the Michigan Central, began operating trains through the town of Bloom but in 1869 Adam Brown sold some of his land to the Chicago and Danville road which almost paralleled Chicago

road for many miles. It wasn't long before he could see the woods burning ~~steam locomotives~~ engines chugging along just east of his inn.

There were more roads in Bloom but those traveled most were still the Indian trail and ~~the~~ Chicago road. Farmers bringing their produce to market or going to pick up their mail at the post office and pick up the latest news found these roads better than nothing. Church goers, too, drove east on Sauk trail to the church at Strasburg if they were Catholic, south to Crete to the Congregational or Methodist churches ~~there~~ if of ~~that~~ those denominations and north to the ~~Presbyterian~~ little white church in Bloom if they were Presbyterians.

Adam Brown could watch ^{them} all for sooner or later they would pass his corners. His family was growing up and some of them were married. ~~Finally~~ The first break in the family came with the death of William in 1884. Sarah Augusta had married Civil War veteran George Henry Wilder of Crete township in 1869 and lived not too far away on the Wilder farm on east Richton road. Phebe married Fremont Holbrook son of one of Bloom's pioneer settlers.

Mrs. Brown died in 1892 at the age of 82. She had shared with her husband for 59 years the trials and hardships of pioneer life as well as the joys and comparative ease of an advanced civilization, her obituary said. Three years later lacking butten days of his 90th birthday, Adam Brown died at his home having lived there 62 years. The services were conducted by the minister of the Crete Methodist church and burial was in the Crete cemetery.

Surviving were eight of their nine children, 17 grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren. A sturdy pioneer, read his obituary, he labored hard to subdue the raw prairie and was one ~~to~~ of many

to cause the wilderness to blossom as the ~~rose~~ rose and endured all ~~these~~ trials and vicissitudes of settling a new country. A true patriot, it went on, he always stood for liberty, right and justice for all; and our free institutions and the best interests of the nation were by him held dear and sacred.

Adam's death caused a change in the wedding plans of ~~his~~ his granddaughter, Esther Brown. Because of it her wedding to William Rosenerantz took place in the presence of near relatives of the couple ~~with~~ ^{in the home of} her aunt, Miss Elizabeth Brown, ~~with~~ ~~her~~ ~~mother~~ ~~and~~ ~~her~~ ~~mother~~ ~~and~~ ~~her~~ ~~mother~~ who lived in the family home on Chicago road and Sauk trail. The affair was quiet and unostentatious but at the station awaiting the train to take them to South Bend, Ind. where the bridegroom was stationed as a civil engineer for a railroad company, friends assembled and greeted them with showers of rice and scattered little emblems of good luck freely over their costumes that their future ~~life~~ path through life might be ~~freely~~ freely scattered with the pearls of good fortune, so read the newspaper account. It went on to say that as the train pulled out several old shoes emblematic of good luck were thrown after them and if good wishes count then the future life of this happy couple will be a little paradise.

In 1906 the Brown's Corners hotel was bought by the Burgels and they continued to operate it. Recently the ~~last~~ building and corner were sold and the old inn and its more recent addition will be torn down to make way for the fourth filling station on Brown's Corners. Thus the Corners still cater to the traveling public but in the most modern way.