

Historic Preservation Commission

2013 Winter Property of the Season

Oswego Grain Elevator, Adams Street

Oswego Historic Preservation Commission is proud to name the William Cliggitt Grain Elevator as the Winter 2013 Property of the Season. The well-known elevator on Adams Street sits on lots 1, 4, 5, and 8 in Block 13 of the original Village of Oswego which was platted May 5, 1842.

William Cliggitt was the youngest of eight children born to Morris and Julia Russell Cliggitt. Both Morris and Julia had emigrated from Ireland many years before. William's eldest siblings were born in New York and Vermont before the family settled on a farm in Bristol Township around 1850. Later, the family moved to a farm in Oswego Township where William and his siblings attended Oswego schools. William worked on his father's farm throughout his childhood into his 30s, until, at age 35, he rented his first farm in the winter of 1892, which was owned by Cristian Herren. Two months later, in March 1892 William married his sweetheart, Alice Jane Rees. Alice was born in Wales and immigrated to America in 1871.

A disastrous fire broke out on Tuesday afternoon July 16, 1895, destroying the previous elevator built by Thomas Wayne in 1876. The fire was eventually extinguished with the help of a hose from the CB&Q railroad. One young lady displayed quick thinking and bravery, and the Record reported: *"Ollie Edwards was one among a number that distinguished themselves in fighting fire at the burning of the elevator. She climbed upon the roof of a nearby house and with a garden hose played upon it to keep it wet. And Ollie yet wears short dresses."* William was working the Herren farm when word started to spread around town that Mr. Wayne was not interested in rebuilding the grain elevator. On September 11, 1895, the Kendall County Record reported, *"Will Cliggitt is negotiating for the elevator property with the intention of rebuilding, an object very much desired by the people of this vicinity."* The elderly Mr. Wayne sold the business to Mr. Cliggitt and retired to the family farm where he died, just a few years later, in 1901.

Mr. Cliggitt rebuilt the elevator in record time using local builders and masons and was open for business in January 1896. He built coal sheds that summer of 1896, but apparently Mr. Cliggitt's renovations

weren't quite complete. Mother Nature had her own remodeling plans when, in 1897, the roof of his grain elevator office was blown off in a storm. Due to the age of the office structure, it was torn down and replaced with a new building built by George Schamp.

For several years he ran a successful grain and coal business while commuting into town from the farm every day. In 1901, a daughter, Fern, blessed the Cliggitt house, and William and Alice decided to move into town. The family took up residence in the old Judson homestead on Main Street and completely renovated the home. The Record reported, *"The old Judson house has been remodeled into an elegant residence by Will Cliggitt, having now the appearance of an entire new structure of the modern style. It is painted in a darkish red color with cream trimmings."* The Cliggitt's lived on Main Street until 1915.

The Cliggitt's continued to run the grain elevator until William's failing health forced Alice to sell the company to the Farmer's Elevator Company in September of 1915. William Cliggitt died October 15, 1924. Alice and daughter Fern moved to Aurora where in 1929, mother and daughter were both married a month apart. Fern married widower Lester J. Galvin June 19, and Alice married Hiram Hallett July 17. Hiram died in 1938, and Alice passed away on January 18, 1953. She was buried next to her first husband, William, in Oswego Township Cemetery.

Tragedy struck the grain company in 1918. Roy Burrell was working in the elevator when he was accidentally trapped by a collapsed ceiling and was suffocated to death by falling wheat. Burrell, who had just returned from serving in World War I, left behind a widow and baby daughter. The elevator was operated by the Oswego Farmer's Grain Co. under the management of George Etzel for several years until John Herren bought the company and neighboring Northern Illinois Lumber Co. in 1931. Mr. Herren, a well-known and respected businessman, continued to operate the elevator until selling out to Morris Grain Co. in July, 1946. The company continued as usual for several more years before shutting its elevator doors for good. The property has since been owned by L.J. Dodd Construction and current owner, Bradford Smith.

Correction: The Fall 2013 Property of the season, the relocated Barker home, was incorrectly described as 55 Van Buren Street in the Village's fall newsletter. The correct address is 44 Monroe Street.

