A BIOGRAPHY OF JENOS GEORGE BLANK
by his son Warren Beckett Blank
of Mitchell, Michigan.

(A paper read at the annual meeting
of the Wayne Center Cemetery Associa-
tion on June seventeenth, 1936)

Jenos George Blank was born in Niagara County, "York State" (as he called it) in 1838. He was one of a family of ten—five girls and five boys. In those days to have less than six or eight children constituted a sort of cloud on one's title to good citizenship. The great open spaces were yet unpeopled.

The Blank family was of Pennsylvania-Dutch extraction. Jenos and Selena Blank, J. E.'s parents, had emigrated from Pennsylvania to New York a few years before the birth of the subject of this sketch. By hand labor they had cleared a forty acre farm in the woods near Lockport on the Erie Canal. The Canal had been opened only a few years previously and attracted settlers all along its route.

Jenos was lured by the west, made a trip to Illinois, saw the prairies and York State didn't look good any more. He sold out, loaded his little family, with a few goods and chattels, onto a canal boat bound for Buffalo, where transfer was made to a sailing vessel bound round-the-lakes to Chicago. Some trip! Worse than a round-the-world journey would be now. Little Jenos was nine years old, and his recollections of that memorable voyage were very vague. The last leg of the journey was made with horses and a democrat wagon out to Wayne Township, DuPage County; the railroad was still in the future. This was in 1844 when John Tyler was President of the United States.

When Jenos senior first came to Illinois, he bought 240 acres for fifteen hundred dollars, and afterwards, when his family was too large to take care of the farm, he took enough land from the government to make a section. The deeds to the full section which were signed by James K. Polk, who was president in 1846 when the deeds were issued, are still in the possession of the family.

The older Jenos built a house on his section where Ed Kempsey now lives, MEXIKA. The old homestead stood there until a few years ago. This same Jenos was an enterprising man. No sooner was he established in his new home then he built a saw mill on the West Branch of the DuPage River on the present Schultz farm. You may see the remains of the old mill dam there to this day. Then, contracting pneumonia from working in the water and on account of typhoid fever (from which two of his sons suffered also) he died and was laid away with Jack, his oldest son, also a victim of typhoid, leaving Selena with her three hundred and twenty acres, her unfinished saw mill, and her children to carry on with her pioneer life as best she could mult.

Young Jenos at eleven years was sheep herder for Luther Bertieit, with a pane and shepherd dog he cared for some nine hundred head of sheep.
on the unfenced prairies of the town of Wayne. As a young man he was fond of hunting and a roving life. He made a trip to Kansas at the time of the "border ruffian war" and stayed with the Indians in the wigwams. This roving tendency did not carry over into his later years, as he lived his whole life on one spot -- his sixty-three acre farm in Wayne Township, where he settled down after his marriage to Mary L. Hoffaft in 1869. Mary's parents, Dolly Ann and Warren Hoffaft did everything in their power to thwart the marriage, because of Jones' propensity for roving, by sending Mary to New York to school, hoping that she would forget her roving lover. But it was all in vain, because she married him soon after she got back. However, after the deed was done, and their new son-in-law had settled down, Mr. and Mrs. Hoffaft became very fond of him, and they trusted and depended upon him as long as they lived.

To this marriage were born four daughters: Nena, Ema, Bertha, and Anna; and two sons, Thomas and Warren. Anna died at sixteen and thus as in early childhood. Nena Black Carr, wife of George S. Carr of Aurora, Illinois, passed away in 1933. Bertha Black lives in San Diego, California, Anna Schults on the old homestead, and Warren at Mitchell, Michigan.

James Black, who was universally known as "Jone", or "Jonest" to his friends and neighbors during his years on the farm, was identified with nearly all movements looking toward community uplift. He belonged to the Congregational Church at Wayne Center, assisted in moving the Church building to Burtlett, and was a Deacon and member of the church until his death. He was one of the organizers of the Hanover and Wayne Mutual Insurance Company, and acted as agent for many years. He usually held some township or school office, being Assessor, Collector, etc., at various times. A life-long Republican, during his later years he turned to the prohibition party and worked with almost religious zeal in the cause of national prohibition. He died without seeing it accomplished. One can but wonder what he would think about the darned thing now.

Such is the simple story of the life which exhibited itself. Surely if we were to stop with this narrative of the mere outward facts, we should have wasted our time. Let us try to get a little closer view of his personality and character. Says Walt Whitman:

"For I see the secret of the making of the best persons. It is to grow in the open air, and to eat and sleep with the earth."

James Black was an open air man. One couldn't imagine him in a city background. He just couldn't fit in there. He loved animals -- especially sheep. To see him with his flock was suggestive of that incomparable parable of the "Good Shepherd." "The sheep knew his voice." He made no pretensions to scholarship, and had but little schooling. His spelling was highly original, yet he was an interesting talker and writer of engaging letters. He invented the fact that he had never amounted to anything, but had been merely a jack of all trades, as he said. And indeed he was. He could turn his hand to almost any of the common trades, was a good carpenter and a fair blacksmith. He could fix your watch or build a wagon.

He never studied law but was so well versed in legal matters that he was frequently called in the settling differences between neighbors and prevented not a few law suits in that way.
He had faults too. One was a quick and explosive temper which would occasionally flare up in a way which moved the early inhabitants to flee to the mountains. But his failings were such as mostly "learned to virtue's side. He was no money maker (if this be a fault) and such money as came his way, he had mostly given away at the time of his death in 1907 at the age of 73.

The founding of the Wayne Center Cemetery Association was largely his idea, and he and his faithful wife rest there side by side.
A TRIBUTE TO JONAS GEORGE BLANK

By Rev. J. C. Van Ness of

Miami, Florida.

(Read at the annual meeting of

the Wayne Center Cemetery Asso-

ciation, of June seventeen 1903)

I am asked to pay a simple tribute to Mr. Jonas G. Blank as friends gather about his end and other graves and say their kindly, generous things. I find it a bit difficult to do this and do it adequately. I am handicapped by limited ability and limited close acquaintanceship. Mr. Blank and I had an acquaintance of many years but we did not often meet and yet, as we passed on his life, so transparent his soul, one with limited scarredship could see his nobility. By general picture of him is greatly cherished. His friends who had the privilege of daily fellow-

ship can tell the same virtues he possessed.

I am reminded of that popular couplet,

"Poems are made by folks like me,

But only God can make a tree."

Permit me to paraphrase this a bit and apply it to our good friend.

"Poems are made by folks like me,

Only God could make a man like thee."

It seems to me that Mr. Blank's life was beautiful in its entirety, not greatly great in any one thing but beautiful in many:

Honest—but never from policy, honest because honesty is satisf-

ying and right.

Clean—but not to simply save a reputation, but because of

the right of it and the joy of it.

Humble—in his ambitions for money, not because he could not

make it, but because its possession could mean less man-

hood, less happiness.

Generous—not because visible need was irksome, but because sym-

pathy bubbled from his heart and enriched his life.

Faithful to his home—not because it was a duty but because his

home and dear ones were his earthly heaven.

Stalwart in his Christian faith—for this he deserves little

praise, for his soul-life turned as naturally toward God as

flowers toward the sun.

Shall I tell you what trait of character impressed me most in Mr.

Blank? Well, it was,

His brotherliness—See one says, "A friend is he who comes in

when all others have gone out." Then all others had gone out, it was then that Jonas Blank with his gentle

charity, and kindly judgment came in. His smile had in

it a glint of heavenly sunshine and his speech, courage,

his half suppressed chuckle was good medicine from a sore

heart. In an everyday, neighborly way he gave"beauty

for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment

of praise for heaviness." Generously tolerant he was

anytime and anywhere somebody's brother. I do not know

much about heaven, but it would not be unlike Mr. Blank

to be off in some corner trying to make some heavenly

stranger feel at home. Such was and is your friend and