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Henry Allen Smith

A brief sketch of his life by his daughter, Beulah B. Smith,
June, 1954.

Henry Allen Smith was born November 1, 1843 on the old Smith Homestead, which his father purchased, from the U.S. Government almost one hundred years ago, and which is still owned by his wife and daughter. It is located on the old Army Trail Road one half mile west of the intersection of State Highway #59 and just east of the Smith crossing of the Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Electric Railway, between the Wayne Center cemetery and the town of Wayne. He was the third child of Elizabeth and John Smith, pioneer settlers from Vermont, and the first one born in the new home which had replaced the log cabin located in the grove south. He was one of eight children, four of whom, Sarah, George, Albert and Lucinda (Mrs. J. W. Gorham) have been laid with their parents in the Wayne Center cemetery. Florence (Mrs. J. B. Colvin of Wheaton) lies in the Wheaton Cemetery. Newton and Ellen (Mrs. Wm. Lewis) survive.

Mr. Smith's boyhood was a normal one for the times, spent chiefly in work, but one sorrow overtook him close to his thirteenth birthday. Upon his return one afternoon from the Red School House at the four corners east of his home, he was told that his five year old sister, Sarah, was dead. She had been crushed by one of the timbers piled in the yard for the construction of the new barn.

When he grew to young manhood, two other deep sorrows came into his life. The Civil War called his beloved and honored older brother, George, a young law student at Oberlin, who contracted an army disease and died three days after his successful effort to reach home. Following his, a younger brother, Albert, went to the war and came home to die.

A few years ago his sister, Mrs. Gorham was asked if Henry never wanted to enlist. She said that one night she heard him talking about it with his father and mother who were imploring him not to leave them. He was not then twenty one years of age. They talked far into the night and he shed tears. The subject was never discussed again, she said. His deed was greater than if he had fought for his country, for he did his duty. His father was not well at the time and sorely needed the help of his only grown son. This is just one instance in a life spent in doing his duty, even when it meant sacrificing his own ambitions for those whom he loved, and doing it happily.

He was his father's right hand man until the day of that father's death in 1886, for he remained at home even after his marriage, faithfully doing the work of the farm. He could not be spared to attend Wheaton College as two of his brothers did, but was sent to a "Select School" at Wayne Center, conducted by Mrs. Sylvanus Kellogg, wife of the Congregational Minister there. He served his family, his church, his community, and his country by doing what needed to be done. He was the member of the school board who was sent to ask Miss Jennie Manville, residing west of what is now West Chicago, to teach in the Red School House. She accepted, and lived in the John Smith home during her stay. She did not renew her contract however, because the young director who had invited her to be their teacher, objected to her return as such. He preferred to have her teach a school of one, and as before, she accepted. They were married October 30, 1871 and lived in the east wing of the old home until the death of the parents, when they occupied the whole house.

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In the fall of 1890 Mr. Smith moved his family, consisting of his wife, a son and a daughter, to Wheaton, so that their children might have better school advantages, living first in the old Professor Junry house north east of the College. Two years later he built the home on North Washington St., in the then fringe of town, and in which he lived until his sudden death on Aug. 8, 1908., when he was laid in the Wheaton Cemetery where he had purchased a family lot soon after his removal to Wheaton.

In June 1894 he was one of a group of nine men, all old settlers in the Wayne Center district, but who were then living either in Wayne Township or in Wheaton, who organized the Wayne Center Cemetery Association. He was interested in that association as long as he lived, and no doubt would have chosen that cemetery for his last resting place, if he could have foreseen its present beauty and the care which it is assured of receiving permanently, through the untiring efforts of his old friend and schoolmate, Mr. W. I. Phillips.

During all of his life, Mr. Smith had never suffered a day's illness, except at one time in boyhood, and he went out of this life as he would have chosen to do, without suffering and without feeling that he was a burden to others. It would have been hard for him who had spent his life in serving others, to have caused them to serve him. While living in Wayne Township, he was a member first of the Wayne Center Cong'l. Church and after its removal to the town of Bartlett, he retained his membership there. When he moved to Wheaton, he took his letter, with those of other members of his family, to the Wheaton College Church of Christ. Since his death his son, Leverett, has followed him into the better land, but he is still survived by his wife and daughter. He was a successful farmer, adding many acres to those bestowed upon him by his father, but in the words of his son when writing his father's obituary,

"His memory to the writer holds no dearer thought than that of a tender seeking for the good of those dear to him and not for himself, and yet not having the feeling of sadness, and dissatisfaction with the life that is here, but a hearty optimistic participation in it as well worth while."