

WILLIAM ORLANDO PRATT

by his daughter, Mrs. J. J. (Clara) Dunton.

(A paper read at the annual meeting of the
Wayne Center Cemetery Association June 17, 1933.)

When Daniel Pratt and his wife, Lucretia Cook Pratt, left their old home in cattaragus County, New York, to make a new home in what was then considered a western state, Illinois, they were no longer young and were the parents of eleven childre, ten then living. Two of these children, Polly and Ann, were already married and preceded their parents to DuPage County.

The ten children all grew to manhood and womanhood, all except Ozro married and they and their families were widely scattered, though mostly westward, Frank alone going east to Pennsylvania. The others settled and reared their families, two in Illinois, two in Iowa, one in Nebraska, one in Dakota and two in California. Ozro was a soldier in the Union Army, was killed in the battle of Atlanta and lies beneath the southern skies.

Daniel Pratt, upon coming to DuPage County in 1844, preempted eighty acres and bought eighty more in Wayne Township. It was located on the extreme western side of the township, on what was known as the County line Road. To this home, two years later, came a little stranger seven years younger than the next youngest child and they named him William Orlando. He was never a very robust person, but these parents who knew nothing of modern rules for rearing children, managed to raise eleven of their twelve children, most of whom lived to quite unusual old age.

A few years later, Mr. Pratt sold his western Wayne Township farm and bought the two hundred acres of which the Wayne Center Cemetery is a part. Here, near the tiny embryo town that never developed, Wayne center, William Pratt grew to manhood and conducted his business of farming. He went to school at the little country school on the corner and later to a "select school" conducted by the wife of the pastor of the little white church in her own home.

This church, of the Congregationalist denomination, stood between the school house and general store which was on the northwest corner of the road running north. This store was also the Post Office and here the farmer boys and men gathered of an evening to discuss and settle the affairs of the universe, as people still continue to do. Across the road south from the store was the blacksmith shop where the farmers took their horses to be shod and farm tools to be mended. So here on the hill, the little town of Wayne Center had all the essential of an early western civilization - the church for religious instruction, the school for secular education, the post office for connection with the outside world, the store where the needs for the physical being could be bought, and the blacksmith shop where horses and tools were cared for, and young William was intimately connected with all of them.

When the Civil war broke out, Ozro and William were the only ones at home. Ozro went to the front and the fifteen year old lad, William, took over most of the management and much of the work of the farm, for by that time the father was getting old and was unable to work a great deal. The mother had died when William was eight years old and later his father married Bathia Minkler who lived to a ripe old age.

During the war, as, always in such times, help was hard to get and William over-taxed his none too robust constitution and was never very strong during the rest of his life, but being quick in his movements accomplished as much as many others.

Fond of fun and a good time with the young people of the neighborhood, yet ambitious and energetic, William was fond of the farm and farm animals, especially the horses. His father seems to have cared a great deal for his youngest child and al ways saw to it that he had a good team to drive and boy saw to it that now many were able to pass him on the road.

So, amid the simple surroundings of the early days, with an occasional trip by team and wagon to the growing metropolis, Chicago, for the marketing of grain or stock, William grew to manhood and at the age of twenty-three married Lorena Elizabeth, the younger daughter of Oliver and Caroline VanCott White. The Whites lived a mile west of the Pratts across from the cheese factory where the farmers took their milk. It was a happy union and then was born one child, Clara Lucretia. The young mother was not to stay with her loved ones long and in 1872 went to her Heavenly home.

William had built a home for his first wife only a few rods from his father's home and to this brought his second wife, Elizabeth Wood, a native of Prince Edward Island, in 1873. When his father passed away in 1874, half of the farm was left to William on condition that he look after his stepmother during her life. The other half he purchased from his brothers and sisters.

About 1880, not being in good health, they rented the farm for a year and made a visit to Prince Edward Island, where Mr. Pratt greatly enjoyed the time spent by the Ocean and fishing and oystering. The next year they resumed the management of the farm, but health not being restored the farm was again rented and in 1882 the Pratts moved to Wheaton where the rest of their lives were spent.

Though in the town and of the town, Mr. Pratt never lost his love for the farm and made frequent trips to it with the team of horses and buggy which he always kept until, when nearly seventy years old, he purchased and drove an automobile.

Some years before they left the farm the Wayne Center Church had been moved to Bartlett and after that the Pratts attended services which the Free Methodists held in what was known as the Red School House and was located a short distance north of the four corners west of the cemetery. The visiting laymen and preachers who worked in this branch church were frequently entertained at the Pratt home.

Upon moving to Wheaton, Mr. Pratt became a member of the Baptist Church in that place and was a very devoted and active member. Never a pretentious man, he yet did a great number of kindly deeds for fellow church members and others who needed him. His horse and buggy or car were always freely used to lend aid or comfort to others. For years, every young woman among his friends expected Deacon Pratt to take her about and secure for her the first country school when she was prepared to teach. He was a Deacon of the Baptist Church for over forty years and was vitally interested in the Old People's home and Children's Home both in Maywood.

Mr. Pratt was not a politician but was greatly interested in civic affairs. In the country, he was on the school board and in Wheaton was a member of the village council for a time. While born and bred a Republican and leaning to that party, he was for some years a member of the Prohibition party and his later years voted for more men in that party.

He was always interested in this cemetery where his parents and his wife were put to rest. In fact no place was ever quite so dear to him as it and the old farm. In his last years whenever he was taken for a ride he always wanted to come out past them. As he grew older, feeling that younger people should be interested in the Cemetery, he helped organize the Wayne Center Cemetery Association and to that Organization he deeded the Cemetery. It is not known just when the Cemetery was started but evidently before it came into possession of the Pratt family.

Mrs. Pratt died in 1932 but he never gave up his home and there, after a particularly pleasant day with neighbors and friends, he went to sleep on the evening of July 30, 1929 and when he awakened, he was with his Lord.

As the world counts greatness he was not a great man. He was not a handsome man, had only a common school education, had not great wealth and never aspired to high places, but he did stand for the old-fashioned virtues, for honesty, sobriety and Godliness, and no one who knew him, had any doubt as to where he stood on any moral issue. He was one of God's noblemen.

Note: At the close of the reading of this paper, Mr. W. I. Phillips, a boyhood friend of Mr. Pratt related the following incident; Being reminded of Mr. Pratt's habit of driving a fast team, he recalled that in 1856 during the Fremont and Dayton Free Soil Campaign a barbecue was to be held by the Free Soilers at Jewell's Grove near Wheaton. His father, Wm. Nelson Phillips, was Marshall of the parade to the grounds from Wayne, and Pratt with his fast team was in line immediately behind. When nearing the grounds a similar parade from West Chicago (Turner Junction) was seen and the heads of the two processions raced the the road intersection. Pratt reached the corner first and blocked the road for the West Chicago contingent so that the Wayne Center crowd had the right of way and got to the grounds first.