

## A Brief History of the First Presbyterian Church of DuPage

(Excerpts regarding the earliest settlements in the area)

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**T**HERE can be no real understanding of pioneer American history without some knowledge of its European background. Neither can there be a true comprehension of DuPage Church history without some knowledge of its New England background. Causes and effects are so closely united that a knowledge of the one leads to a better understanding of the other. Likewise a knowledge of DuPage Church antecedents will lead to a better understanding and a larger appreciation of its history.

A panoramic view of the DuPage Church background discloses, among other things, the Erie Canal, located in the Hudson-Mohawk gap of the Appalachian mountain system; it discloses the timberlands and sterile soil of New England; it discloses the Plan of Union between the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists; and it discloses both the Puritan and Roger Williams, the 'one seeking to establish a state where he should have freedom for his own religion and the other who believed that every man should settle all religious matters with his conscience and God. All of these will be considered in their proper connection.

Even before the Revolution many settlers along the Atlantic coast turned longing eyes westward, but the Appalachian Mountains lay as a mighty barrier between them and their desire. True, there were a number of gateways or gaps that led through these mountains, but only the Hudson-Mohawk is of any importance in connection with a DuPage Church history as all others led away from northern Illinois.

It may seem a far cry from the Erie Canal to the organization of DuPage Church, yet the opening of that canal in 1825, more than any one other event, influenced the date of settlement and the character of settlers in northeastern Illinois and what now constitutes the DuPage parish. Travel on the canal passenger-boats, that made regular trips between Albany and Buffalo, was safe and sure and, most important of all, it was rapid when compared with wagon journeys over poor roads. Forthwith the New Englanders began to swarm to the middle west via the canal and the Great Lakes. Others like the Boughtons traveled in Conestoga wagons from Buffalo to Lake Michigan and points beyond. Evidently many of these New Englanders settled hereabouts, for, as one reads DuPage parish records, one finds such names as "Yankee Settlement" and "Vermont Settlement".

The traits of these settlers find their roots in such ancestors as Governor Winthrop, Elder Brewster, John Alden, and even in Cotton Mather of witchcraft fame. These men came to the new world to establish homes where they not only could better their religious conditions, which, was the primary motive, but also to improve themselves economically. Governor Winthrop listed this as one of his reasons for coming to the new world. The primary motive was easily accomplished, even though a Roger Williams and the like for a time proved to be somewhat of a thorn in the flesh; but not so the secondary motive which involved the subduing of a wilderness.

1833

## ONE HUNDRED YEARS

1933

Pastorius in writing of certain settlers said that all "have to fall to work and swing the axe most vigorously, wherever you turn the cry is, *Itur in Antiquam sylvam*, nothing but endless forests." The men of New England soon discovered that farming was unprofitable and migrating advisable, in part because of forests but mainly because of stony, sterile soil and a harsh climate. One historian facetiously remarks that the New Englander's preoccupation with hell fire may be accounted for by the severity of his winters and the depth of his snowdrifts.

Like their New England ancestors few, if any, of the DuPage settlers were mere adventurers or restless, discontented ne'er-do-wells. With scarcely an exception they were industrious home seekers who "located" their lands, built their cabins, organized their government, erected their schools and churches, and settled down to the long, hard task of creating a civilization in the wilderness. Yet life in that wilderness was preferable to that in New England. In the forest-covered regions there, from forty to fifty days were required to clear an acre of land for tillage, while only three or four days were required in prairie regions. Moreover, the soil was rich and fertile and needed little cultivation.

### FIRST SETTLEMENTS IN THE PARISH

The first white men to blaze a trail through the northeastern part of Illinois were Louis Joliet, a fur trader, and Father Marquette, a Jesuit missionary, who, on their return northward in 1673, after an exploration of the Mississippi valley, passed within a few miles of what now is the DuPage parish. Then came the Jesuit Fathers in the 18th century on their missionary journey from Montreal and Quebec.

No other white men appeared until the beginning of the 19th century when a French hunter and trapper named DuPhaze (now DuPage) settled at the junction of the east and west branches of the river that now bears his name. Here he built a trading post consisting of log huts enclosed in a stockade. This was the first settlement of any importance in this locality. It is a fitting tribute to the memory of trader DuPhaze that today there are a DuPage Church, a DuPage River, a DuPage Township, and a DuPage County in the region where he built this trading post.

The next white men to appear were Stephen Scott and son Williard, Ralph Stowell, and Pierce Hawley. These men came from the new settlement at Grosse Point (now Evanston), Illinois in 1830, and settled as DuPhaze had done before them at the junction of the east and, west branches. This junction has been variously referred to as The Forks, Scott's Settlement, and Fountaindale

Up to this time no church organization had been effected hereabouts, or for that matter, in any part of northeastern Illinois; but credit for the first religious services in this vicinity belongs to the Methodists, for it was in the home of the above named Pierce Hawley, a Methodist, that such services were first conducted.

The vanguard of DuPage Church organizers began to arrive in 1831. That year introduces such names as Israel P. Blodgett, Robert Strong, Henry Boardman, Seth Wescott, Lester Peet, Samuel Goodrich, and John Dudley.

Mr. Blodgett came from Massachusetts. His son later became a judge in Chicago. Mr. Boardman came from Vermont. He was one of the more aggressive men of the community who favored every improvement made in his township. He purchased and operated the first reaper in the township. Robert Strong, a Vermonter, first went to Walker's Grove (now Plainfield) where he found a settlement of twelve families. Mr. Strong wished to buy land there but was told that none was for sale and that further immigrants were not wanted there. He went to the DuPage district and bought a claim from Selvey and Walker, taking possession at once. He lived there until his death in 1885.

Rev. Issac Scarrett, Captain John Barber, Isaac Clark, and Simon Ferrill arrived early in 1832, before the outbreak of Blackhawk War. The Rev. Mr. Scarrett, a Methodist minister, came from New England and settled on the next farm east of the Strong homestead. According to one historian Rev. Scarrett was the first clergyman to preach in the DuPage district. Jonathan Royce, who arrived from Vermont in 1834, bought a farm which had been "located" by Israel Blodgett in 1831. Mr. Royce at one time owned three thousand acres of land hereabouts. His wife was the daughter of a Revolutionary War soldier.