

LEVI LEONARD, an early settler

In 1895, Evansville's newspaper, *The badger*, printed a number of interviews with "Old Settlers." The following is an excerpt from the article entitled "Reminiscences, Gleaned From Conversations With Old Settlers....," printed in the 16 Feb 1895 publication of *The badger*, Evansville, Wisconsin.

"Mr. Levi Leonard, to whom the writer is indebted for most of the data of this article, was born in Broome County, New York in 1815. By a varied journey by rail, canal, private conveyance, and on foot, he reached Janesville in 1840. From '40 to '43 he was a farmer and schoolmaster as the season determined. In '43, in company with Ensign Pooler, he opened up a grain farm on the land lying north of the Boyce farm in Brooklyn. In the same year, owing to a stubborn attack of chills and fever, he sold out his farming interests and returned to New York. Two years, however, found him restored to health and back in Wisconsin. In '45 he planted part of the town site of Evansville with nursery trees, and in the same year he and his cousin Harry Bevier bought of John T. Baker his farm lying east of town, now known as the Henry Campbell farm, paying at the rate of \$3.12 an acre. Mr. Leonard was married in 1852 to Miss Charlotte Taggart. Mrs. Leonard died in about two years leaving an infant son who did not survive long. In 1858 Mr. Leonard was again married to Mrs. Sarah M. Jones. In 1865 he sold his farm to Mr. Henry Campbell receiving \$45 an acre for the land he had given \$3.12 for twenty years previous. In moving to Evansville he purchased the Kilgore property, to which the house now occupied by Ed. Smith belonged. These quarters proved too small for a man accustomed to broad acres and in '65 he negotiated an exchange with Mr. Simmons for his property at the head of Main Street. This piece of land included twenty-five acres, extending from George Taggart's property on West Main street to the Pettigrew land on the south. In the autumn of '67 he sold this to his brother-in-law, the late Harry Prentice. In 1868 he erected the residence where he now lives, having purchased about seven acres from Henry Spencer. The city has since bought a greater part of this land for a public park and pleasure ground."

The following is a more detailed report on Levi Leonard, whose original land in Evansville became the foundation for the Evansville Park.

Researched by Jennifer Eager Ehle

ANCESTORS: His paternal grandfather, Captain Joseph or G.F. Leonard, participated in the Indian war at the time of the Wyoming Massacre. About that time, with two canoes lashed together, he took his family up the Susquehanna River. Captain Joseph Leonard has been identified as one of the early settlers of Binghamton, Broome county, New York. Joseph's son Amasa, who would become Levi's father, had the distinction of being the first white child born in Binghamton on 23 Sept. 1788.]

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD: Levi was born 30 December 1815 near Binghamton, Broome County, New York. He was the second born of four children to Amasa Leonard [1788-1867] and Laurana (Bennett) Howard [1792-1823]. His father remarried again after the death of Laurana, but her name is not known by this compiler. Levi referred to her as "Mother" in his diary. She died in Binghamton on 20 June 1858.

Levi's three siblings were named in their father's will: brothers E. C. and Carcinary and sister Juliette [25 March 1819 - 6 January 1868]. One of the brothers was called "Crocker," life years 31 July 1813 - 24 April 1905. Juliette may have accompanied Levi to Wisconsin as the enumerator for 1850 U.S. Federal Census for the town of Union identified Levi and a 31 year-old, New York born female named "Judith" as residing in one household with no other inhabitants. Their relationship was not explained.

EARLY ADULTHOOD AND LIFE IN EVANSVILLE, 1840-1845: *Rock County History* provided the following summary: "At the age of twenty-four he left the old home and engaged in rafting on the Chemung and Susquehanna rivers. While thus employed, with a companion named William Brown, he resolved to go West. Starting from Port Deposit, PA., and traveling a round-about way by canal boat, railway, and stagecoach, they finally reached Cleveland, Ohio, where they embarked on the steamer "Illinois" and made the trip around the lakes. High winds prevented their landing at Milwaukee, as was their purpose, and they went on to Chicago, where they hired a man with a four-horse team to take them to Rockford. Thence, they walked to Pope's ferry, four miles above Janesville. This was in April 1840. After a few days, Leonard made a reconnoitering trip to the site of the present town of Evansville and hired out by the month to Hiram Griffith, a hardy pioneer, for whom he worked another three years, teaching in the winter of 1840 in Green County. At the time of arrival here with \$50.00, which he had, he took up forty acres of land and did some work on this while employed by Mr. Griffith. There was then in the neighborhood Hiram, John and John A. Griffith, Stephen and Ira Jones, and Erastus Quivey. After leaving the employ of Mr. Griffith he farmed on his own account, and a little later squatted on 400 acres of land near the present site of Brooklyn [with Ensign Pooler, north of the Boyce farm], where during the next year and half he kept bachelor's hall, hunted, and worked his land, breaking 100 acres. Suffering from chills and fever, Mr. Leonard sold his interest for \$300, receiving in payment \$140 in cash, a note for \$40 and a buggy for the balance, and going to Janesville, traded the buggy for three town lots on the west side of the river. In 1844 he visited his home in the East and spent the winter there, and on his return in the spring of 1845 in partnership with a cousin [Harry Bevier] bought eighty acres just east of the present site of Evansville and planted a nursery. He soon traded his town lots for his cousin's half interest and carried on his own account, teaching during the winter. The small house, which he built at this time still stands on the Henry Campbell farm and one and a half east of Evansville. Mr. Leonard lived on his farm."

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FIRST WIFE: Charlotte Taggart was born near Portage, New York. She was left an orphan in childhood by the death of her parents, so came to Wisconsin with her uncle Levi Taggart. She was a teacher. The couple married on 14 November 1852 in Union Township, Rock County. She died shortly after their marriage on 31 May 1856 at the age of twenty-four, leaving a young son, Fred, who died in infancy. Levi's first entry in his diary for 1856 was the description of his wife's burial marker.

SECOND WIFE, 1858-1867: Levi married the widow Sarah Jones in 1858. She was the youngest of thirteen children born to Elisha Prentice [ca 1773-1861] and Sarah Howard

[1778-1859]. Her birth name was Sarah Marion Prentice; she was born in Genesee County, New York (near South Bryon) on 30 September 1824. Her siblings were: Daniel (married Martha Clapp); Cyrus [- 9 May 1892]; Harvey [- 20 Aug 1890]; , wife Dorinda [- 19 Feb 1880]; John (married Sarah Randall); Leonard [ca 1800-1828]; George W. [1810-1831]; Diana [- 22 May 1886], never married; Charles (1804-1836) who married Nancy Gilbertson in 1827; Susan, who married a Newton, died early, and left a large brood of children; one of whom was Billy Newton, who grew up with Burr Jones; and Jane (married and resided in the state of Michigan). Sally's father Elisha is buried at Tyler Cemetery, in Stafford, Genesee County, New York. A tombstone has not been located for his wife.

Sarah's "old friends" called her "Sally." She married William Jones in 1845 and was the mother of two children: Burr born 9 March 1846 and Marion C. "Minnie" [1849-1879]. Sarah, her husband and extended family were residents of the town of Union on June 1, 1846. Jones, a wheat farmer, died 15 February 1855 at the age of 35 of unknown causes. There is no probated will or death certificate for him. The following year, 1856, his wife was identified as one of the owners of the largest farms in Union Township: 80 acres of wheat under cultivation, 500 bushels of wheat under cultivation, 700 bushels of corn, 300 bushels of oats, 12 bushels of potatoes, 4 horses, 9 cattle, and 3 swine.

Levi married Sarah Jones in Evansville on 6 October 1858 at the home of Lewis Spencer, the former brother-in-law of Sarah. Spencer's wife, Eva Jones Spencer [1835-1903], was the sister of Sarah's first husband, William Jones. After the wedding ceremony, Sarah and Levi started for Whitewater to visit Sarah's older brother, Harvey Prentice, and his wife Dorinda [- 19 Feb 1880]. Eventually, Harvey and his family would settle in Evansville in 1895.

Levi became a father figure to Sarah's children. Burr Jones referred to him as "Father Leonard," and described him as being:

"resolute, fearless, industrious, and physically the strongest man I ever knew; ...was an omnivorous reader. Mentally, he was essentially a nonconformist. In politics, he was one of two Democrats in a neighborhood of Republicans."

Below are some excerpts from other entries in Levi's diaries:

"April 26, 1861 ... a lot of the boys started for the seat of war ..."

April 29, 1861 ... Burr set the woods a fire quite a time ..."

March 6, 1864 ... Afternoon Mrs. Boyce [and daughters] Oliva and Etta here on a visit." [In the near future, Oliva would marry Almeron Eager. Their daughter Gertrude would marry Sarah Leonard's grandson, Lyle Sidney Humphrey].

June 26, 1864 ... went up to C. Blackman's to get a gun to kill a wolf."

June 16, 1866 ... 7 Niggers got small pox in Town."

Levi sold his farm in 1865 to Mr. Henry Campbell, receiving \$45.00/acre for the land he had paid \$3.12/acre twenty years earlier. In moving to Evansville, Levi purchased the Kilgore property, then occupied by Ed. Smith.

In August 1866, eight years of their marriage, Sarah and Levi Leonard, with children Burr and Marian Jones, left the farm and moved to nearby Evansville. Burr and Marion both attended the Evansville Seminary in 1864, which may have influenced the family's decision to move to Evansville.

The *Badger* newspaper reported: "These quarters proved too small for a man accustomed to broad acres and in '65 he negotiated an exchange with Mr. Simmons for his property at the head of Main street. This piece of land included twenty-five acres, extending from George Taggart's property on West Main Street to the Pettigrew land on the south. In the autumn of '67 he sold this to his brother-in-law, the late Harry Prentice."

The *Chicago Republican*, in an article dated 27 June 1867 and entitled "Evansville in 1867," wrote: "There are a number of very tasty, fine residences here, with ornamental and beautiful surroundings. Among the best of these are those of ... Levi Leonard."

FINAL RESIDENCE 1868-1908: Levi and Sarah resided at 138 West Main Street for forty years, 1868-1909. The home was a gathering place for Sarah's children and grandchildren. Two of her descendants were born in this house: grandson, Lyle S. Humphrey on 23 December 1872, and great-grandson, Leonard Prentice Humphrey, later known as Leonard Prentice Eager [1895-1991].

Sarah's son, Burr Jones, married Olive Hoyt on 4 December 1873. Marion "Minnie" married first in Evansville Algernon Sidney Humphrey on 27 December 1871 and after his death she married Justin A. Pettigrew on 1 August 1876.

By 1900, Levi would be one of the wealthiest men in Evansville. When asked for his occupation in 1900 by the U.S. census enumerator, Levi responded: "capitalist."

DEATH 1908-1909: Levi passed away quietly in his sleep at his home on 31 December 1908 at the age of ninety-two. Sarah died five months later, 23 May 1909, at the age of eighty-five. She had been preceded in death by many members of her family: two husbands, William Jones and Levi Leonard; her son-in-law Sidney Humphrey, Minnie's husband, in 1874 of tuberculosis; her daughter Minnie at the age of 30 on 25 April 1879 from spinal meningitis; her daughter-in-law Olive (Hoyt) Jones on 19 April 1906, and grandson Lyle Sidney Humphrey on 19 August 1902 from typhoid fever. Her heirs were limited to a small group of people: son Burr Jones; granddaughter Marion Burr (Jones) Smith, and seventeen year old great-grandson Leonard Eager formerly known as Leonard Prentice Humphrey.

LEONARD PARK: In 1883, the Village Board purchased 3 ½ acres of land from Levi Leonard for a street and a public park, named Leonard Park. In 1910, Burr Jones gave to the City of Evansville ten acres of land to be developed into a park and recreation center used for park purposes as a memorial to his mother and her second husband, the late Mr. and Mrs. Levi Leonard.

STEP-SON BURR JONES: Sarah's son Burr Jones was born on the outskirts of Evansville, attended the Evansville Seminary, and resided in Madison, Wisconsin during his adult life except for a two-year hiatus when he represented Wisconsin as a congressman and the family resided in Washington, D.C. Burr served as Dane County district attorney and was a law professor for thirty years at his alma mater, the University of Wisconsin. Burr finished his legal career as a Wisconsin State Supreme Court Justice. He authored at least two books: *Rules of Evidence* and *Reminiscences of Nine Decades*. The latter is informative, providing family history information about the Prentice, Jones and Humphrey families.

Burr played a prominent role in the lives of his sister Minnie and her only child, Lyle Humphrey. He provided emotional support to the family during crisis's, legal expertise for probate and guardianship paperwork, lodging during Lyle's academic studies in Madison, employment for Lyle and his wife during their first year of marriage, and final caretaker for Lyle after his death when burial arrangements needed to be made.

In 1935, Burr bequeathed to the city of Evansville a sum of \$500.00 to be used in the purchase of playground equipment for the park. The council named the recreation area, which included the kittenball diamond and two tennis courts, "The Burr W. Jones Athletic Area."