

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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HON. J.D. BILLINGS 1822-1904

The family name of Billings is one which has resounded in Orleans County for almost one hundred eighty years or since early settlement times. Lyndon Billings from Kendall, currently serving in the Orleans County Legislature, although not a direct line descendant of our subject is however, of this same family ancestry. It is interesting that through the generations, several Billings men have taken an active part in local politics.

The father of J.D. Billings was Joseph Billings, Jr. who first settled in the Town of Gaines in 1817 and served as supervisor from 1837 to 1841. He was married to Charlotte Drake and their children were: J. Drake, Myron, Phebe, Clinton, Harlow, William, Clarissa and Helen. Joseph Billings, Jr. was also one of the leading founders of the First Universalist Society in Gaines, now the historic Cobblestone Church and the oldest of twenty-six cobblestone churches in North America.

J. Drake Billings was born in the Town of Gaines Feb. 20, 1822 and received his education in the common schools and the old Gaines Academy. In 1845 he married Melinda Shaw, by whom there were three children including: one son, George N. Billings who moved to Kansas and two daughters who were Dr. Cora Lattin and Lottie Stilson. It is interesting to note that George N. Billings married Grace Bedell of Albion, the little girl who in 1860 wrote the famous letter to Lincoln suggesting that he would look better if he were to grow a beard.

Landmarks of Orleans County published in 1894 states that Hon. J. Drake Billings "...is a well read man, and owns a valuable library. He has a farm of 155 acres, and has taken a prominent part in local affairs..." His farm was located in the Town of Carlton at the north east corner of the Baker Road and the East Kent Road. He served four terms as Supervisor of the Town of Carlton which were 1857, 1858, 1859 and 1862. He also served as Orleans County Assemblyman in the State Legislature for 1875 and 1876.

Like his father before him, J. Drake Billings also became a church founder serving on the first Board of Trustees of the Pullman Memorial Universalist Church when it was incorporated in 1891. Throughout the greater part of his life he was a Republican although he supported Horace Greeley rather than U. S. Grant for President in 1872. We can assume therefore, that J.D. Billings was an abolitionist, a supporter of the temperance movement and a sympathizer of women's suffrage, certainly nothing to be ashamed of. We know from sketchy accounts that he was highly revered and seen as one of Orleans



County's prominent people when he died in 1904.

Coming Up

The Orleans County Department of History is pleased to announce several up-coming events. So mark your calendars now in advance.

1. Sat., June 1 from 2-4 there will be a guided tour of Mt. Albion Cemetery.

2. Also June 1 at 7:30 pm there will be an organ concert in the Cobblestone Church performed by Wade Gidley.

3. On Sunday, June 2 at 2:30 pm John Spare will impersonate Pres. Grover Cleveland at St. Mary's Parish Hall, 215 Eagle Street in Medina followed by the dedication of a historic marker where Mrs. Cleveland lived just a block away.

4. Sunday evening, June 2 at 7:30 pm a premier slide presentation of One Man's Work 1925-1940 Part I will be given at the Pullman Church in Albion. These photos taken by the late Fred Holt, include scenes around Albion, events, organizations, candid shots, people, etc.

5. Friday evening, June 7 at 7:30 pm One Man's Work Part II of the slide show will also be given at the Pullman Church during the Albion Strawberry Festival. These photos by Fred Holt will include artistic shots, portraits of local people and generally beautiful pictures of timeless quality.