

The History of Shenandoah, Iowa

Elaine E. Danforth

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THE HISTORY OF SHENANDOAH, IOWA

by Mrs. Elaine E. Danforth
Shenandoah, Iowa

Mrs. Danforth has been a resident of Shenandoah, Iowa for the past twenty-five years. She is the mother of three children and wrote this article for the ANNALS in conjunction with Shenandoah's Centennial Celebration, which will take place during the week of June 19, 1971.

It is said that many years ago, while southwestern Iowa was still an unbroken prairie and deer grazed and gambled unmolested over its hills and vales, Bayard Taylor, the noted traveler, visited this region. Standing upon the brow of a hill, four miles southwest of the site of the present city of Shenandoah and overlooking the valley of the Nishnabotna river, he exclaimed that the scene was the most beautiful he had beheld in all his travels. We, who have chosen our homes in this favored region, can only imagine how the beautiful valley then appeared. The future site of Shenandoah extended before his gaze thirty miles to the northeast and southwest. The area was two to four miles wide and was carpeted with the most luxuriant of nature's grasses. The land gently sloped to the edge of the winding stream from which the valley took its name. It was beautiful then, but should the great traveler visit the site today, he would find the scene even more beautiful than before.

Today there is the same winding stream, the same valley extending to the northeast and southwest, as far as the eye can see, but instead of the unbroken expanse of waving grass, the scene that now appears is one of diversified colors and objects. Today, thousands of acres are covered with many different crops; thousands of fat, sleek cattle graze in the pastures or lie in the shade of a tree or hedge which were planted only a few years ago by the farmers of this area. On the sides and at the top of the hills can be seen hundreds of comfortable farm houses surrounded by barns, sheds, and groves, and still within the gaze of the traveler are several prosperous towns and the beautiful, growing city of Shenandoah.

Shenandoah was originally called Fair Oaks and for what reason, no one can determine for no oak trees or any other type similar to them were found on the site of the town. This name did not cling long, however; the town was christened SHENANDOAH on August 6, 1870, upon the completion of the first house, which belonged to I. N. Holcomb. This name was given to it because of the striking resemblance of the Nishna valley to the famous Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, then fresh in the memories of the soldiers who fought with Sheridan in that historic locality. The name means "The Daughters of the Stars". No sooner was the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad completed in the summer of 1870 than citizens of Manti began to move here and establish a town. The ties and rails were laid from both ends of the road and met near Jeff Williams' place, just south of the city. The first train passed over the road August 1, 1870. Dan O'Day had put up a shanty near the site of Burkhard's ice house and boarded the railroad hands for weeks before any other structure was erected. Mrs. O'Day may therefore be regarded as the oldest continuous resident of the town proper.

The land, sloping gently westward toward the high point of the town, offered a far view of the Nishnabotna Valley, where the railroad followed the winding tree fringed river. Tarkio and Walnut Creeks flowed through the same district. When the soil proved to be unusually fertile it soon attracted not only farmers, but also nurserymen who set out thousands of acres of trees and shrubs. One of these was David S. Lake of New Hampshire. He came from Illinois and established Shenandoah's most distinctive branch of agriculture—the nursery business. He reached Shenandoah in 1870, before the sale of town lots was held, leased a few acres of ground and set out a bundle of young fruit trees he had brought with him from an Illinois nursery. It was a sound stroke of business and became one of the town's most important enterprises. As soon as a settler obtained land and built a cabin, he would want to set out a small orchard, usually apple trees. David Lake supplied many of the necessary graftings needed for the orchard business and was often

called the leading producer of apples in the Middle West at that time. Another item much in demand in those early days was the Osage orange, a handsome spreading tree which the settlers planted in rows as a substitute for fences to enclose their land and crops. To supply the demand, Lake would produce two or three hundred thousand Osage orange trees annually. After laying out their homesteads most farmers and householders thought only of growing fruit and timber for home needs, but as their properties matured, they began to be interested in making their grounds more attractive. They would plant the shade trees, perennials, evergreens and ornamental shrubs and vines that the Shenandoah Nursery could provide. Lake's establishment grew steadily through the years and on January 23, 1872, he married a Shenandoah girl, Hannah O'Day. Their sons, A.F. and R.S. Lake, and daughter, Clara B., carried on the business after Lake's death in February, 1922.

The fertile soil and southern Iowa climate proved especially suitable for the nursery industry. Noting Lake's success, several other firms started growing trees and plants at Shenandoah for the surrounding trade territory. One of these was the Mount Arbor Nurseries which T.E.A. Mason founded in 1875; this nursery had gardens and offices on a steep hill four miles southeast of Shenandoah. The combination of hill and an arbor vitae windbreak provided the name of the firm. In 1885 the property was acquired by Tom Howard and L. B. Latimer. Six years later E. I. Martin and Edward S. Welch bought the Mount Arbor Nurseries. Welch, like Lake, had come to Iowa from Illinois.

While the Lake and Mount Arbor Nurseries were supplying customers by local mail order service, Henry Field, a small boy in the neighborhood, was growing up with the determination to be a seedsman. Nearly a year before David S. Lake rode into Shenandoah with his bundle of graftings, Solomon E. Field of Conway, Massachusetts, had migrated to Iowa. On his way to Iowa, Field taught school in Illinois for several years after which he came to Iowa, stopping on his way to view a county fair at Toulon, Illinois. While attending the fair he ate at a dining tent managed by some

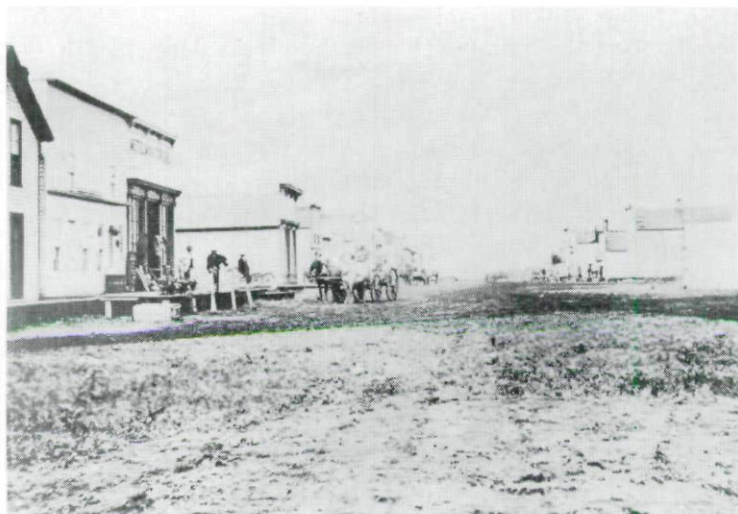
church women. One of them was very young and attractive and her name was Lettie (Celestia) Eastman; before Field continued on to Iowa the two were engaged and in 1870 he returned to Illinois and married her.

When Field first arrived in Shenandoah late in September of 1869, he bought eighty acres of the southeastern part of town for \$7.50 an acre. He divided this land with J. W. Alden. The newly married Mr. and Mrs. Field taught school their first winter in Shenandoah. Mrs. Field taught school at Shenandoah and Mr. Field taught at the Union Grove school in Washington Township. Their son, Henry, was born at Sunnyside Farm near Shenandoah on December 6, 1872. When the boy was able to walk he toddled about among the livestock on the farm, but the growing vegetables and flowers interested him more than the animals did. At the age of five, he discovered a seed catalogue and decided at once to go into the nursery business. It was three years before he had what he considered the necessary amount of money—\$4.65. This invested in pansy seed proved to be a total loss. At the age of 21, Henry Field married Edna Thompson. He bought a small truck farm and raised fruit, vegetables and seeds for Market. He put up a small building in 1902 and five years later built a larger office and warehouse. It was the Henry Field Company that introduced radio broadcasting to Shenandoah on February 20, 1924. As a result, station KFNF was started at Shenandoah on a 266 meter wave length.

Shenandoah's second radio station, KMA, owned and operated by the Earl May Seed and Nursery Company, first went on the air in August 1925. May, a Nebraska man, had worked his way through college selling garden seeds in the Midwest and South. He had come to Shenandoah in 1915 to work in the Mount Arbor Nurseries. In 1916 he married Gertrude Welch, daughter of E. S. Welch, the president of the Mount Arbor company. Three years later he organized his own seed, nursery and landscaping business.

Thus, with its notable heritage and widespread success in the nursery business, it is no wonder that Shenandoah, with over 5,000 acres of growing fields, is known as the *SEED AND NURSERY CENTER OF THE WORLD*.

The recorded plat of the town of Shenandoah dated from September 15, 1870; it was platted by J. N. Denison on section 19, township 69, range 39. The petition to incorporate the town of Shenandoah was completed June 20, 1871. The first lots were sold during August of 1870. The town company that owned the land through the trustee offered the lots for sale at fifty dollars each for every alternate lot, reserving the intervening lots at one hundred dollars each. It was really intended to make Thomas Avenue, the street south of Sheridan Avenue, the principal business street. Thomas Avenue was laid out one hundred feet wide, while Sheridan Avenue is only eighty feet wide, but the first buyers seemed to prefer the north street.



by K. J. Gee

Shenandoah, Iowa: Main Street, Looking West, 1873.

The Bryson Brothers opened a lumberyard on the site now occupied by the United Building Center, and almost immediately after the trains came through, J. J. Kaster & Company erected another lumberyard. S. P. Carpenter moved a little building over from Manti and used it as a boarding house on the site of the old Delmonico Hotel, now

J. C. Penney's, O. S. Rider & Company had the framework of another building moved from Manti and it was set up at the corner of Sheridan Avenue and Maple Street, which today is Dr. E. J. Gottsch's office. This was a general stock of merchandise. The Riders also moved another building over from Manti and connected the two buildings by a shed, running an implement store in the connection. W. E. Webster & Company built a drug store opposite Rider's; Webster became president of a bank here. John McComb moved over from Manti and built a little harness shop. The old building was moved to East Sheridan Avenue in 1891 and was enlarged and improved.

Some of the early businesses in Shenandoah were the following: J. H. Shugart and Company opened a hardware establishment, J. D. Sprigg was selling shoes, Monzing and Gillespie operated a blacksmith, Collins & Son operated a wagon shop, J. J. Castor & Company were providing lumber.

The post office was granted the same year Shenandoah was incorporated; Stephen Spurlock was the Postmaster.

Sixty-one votes were cast at the first election held in Shenandoah on August 22, 1871, and the following officials were elected: Mayor—J. H. Shugart, Recorder—W. E. Webster, Treasurer—B. M. Webster, Marshal—T. J. Warner, Councilmen—Benjamin Lake, A. J. West, R. B. Crose, J. S. Johnson, and S. P. Carpenter.

James McCabe was a preacher, a teacher and he also practiced law and edited the *Reporter* in 1873. The *Reporter* was the first paper started in the small village of Shenandoah in 1871. Its proprietors were M. Nicholson and D. R. Gaff. The *Shenandoah Republican* was established in September, 1877, by W. H. Capron and D. R. Gaff. The *Post* was in operation in 1882; when Charles Marvin purchased the *Post* from Rev. C. S. Hanley in 1887, the name was changed to the *Sentinel-Post* and at the present time it is called the *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel*.

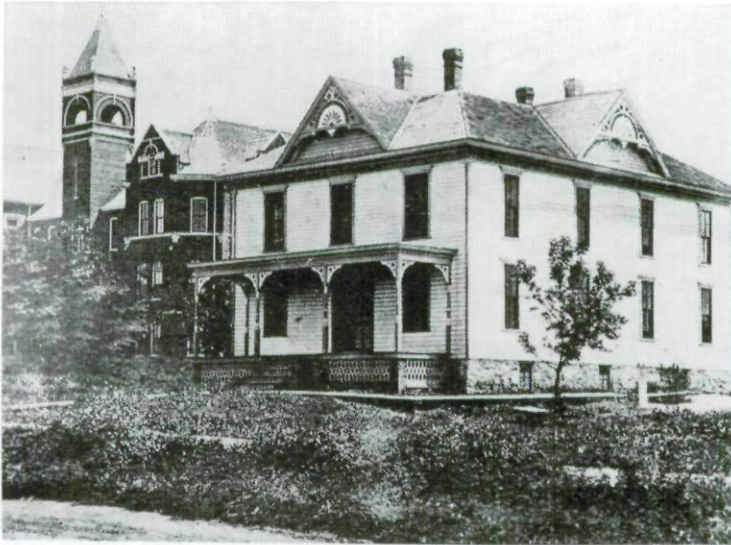
George Shenandoah Shugart, who was born March 27, 1871, was the first child born in the town of Shenandoah. Some other firsts were: W. E. Webster established the first drug store; Dr. B. M. Webster was the first physician; and

W. P. Ferguson was the first attorney. The first meeting of the "city fathers" was held in the office of J. H. Shugart, September 15, 1871. The Fire Department was organized in 1876; they purchased a fire bell weighing one thousand pounds on January 3, 1888.

On July 7, 1891, the city council voted to light the town streets with the purchase of twenty-seven street lights and on October 3 of the same year they purchased three more lights.

The school of Shenandoah belonged to the common-school system of Grant Township until 1872 when the independent district of the city was organized. The first regular directors of this district were elected in March 1873 and were as follows: R. B. Crose, J. Swain, A. J. Welty, J. Stokes, and A. B. West. In the summer of 1871, the Mentzer Brothers erected their store building, finishing the upper story for a public hall where all public meetings, church services and school were held for more than two years. Teachers for the school were: Mrs. Bascom, J. R. Badham, Miss Julia Burnet, and S. E. Field. The school moved to a barn later where Mrs. S. E. Field taught forty pupils ranging from kindergarten to high school in age, and rode two miles by pony every morning to teach her pupils. Each child was requested to bring his own chair from home. Later, Miss Eunice Baker was the teacher. In the summer of 1873, the first brick school building was erected in Shenandoah at the cost of \$3,040. It was a two story, two room building with halls and cloak rooms. It soon became necessary to enlarge the building which was done by placing two wings to the former building; this was done at the cost of \$7,000. The first principal was W. P. Jeffrey and the first primary teacher was Miss Gray of Sidney. Other teachers in the lower department were Misses Stella Reed and Mary Lacy. The date of June 21, 1878, was the first Commencement Day in the history of the city of Shenandoah High School. The class numbered two: Katie Carey and Mary Welty. In the year 1880, the school was divided into six departments and superintended by C. H. Guernsey. At that date there was a daily attendance of 200.

Shenandoah was at one time the site of Western Normal College. On November 14, 1882, the building was so far completed as to enable the school to open with forty-seven students; I. E. Wilson was the principal. The Western Normal College building and almost all of its contents were destroyed by fire the night of December 2, 1891 but it was rebuilt in 1893 and back in operation again by September. But in 1917 another fire closed it again.



by K. J. Gee

Western Normal College, Shenandoah, Iowa: Looking West, 1897.

The history of the churches established in Shenandoah are as follows: The first religious services held in Shenandoah were in the fall of 1870 when the Rev. Samuel Farlow spoke to a few who had assembled in a box car before the station house was finished.

The First Presbyterian Church, the pioneer society of Shenandoah, was organized June 4, 1871, by ten members; the Rev. George R. Carroll officiated. The first church, erected in the summer of 1877, stood on Thomas Avenue.

The First Methodist Church was organized December 25, 1870. In 1873 a frame church was erected at a cost of

\$2,500. In 1888 a new building was completed on Thomas Avenue; the Rev. Samuel Farlow was the first pastor.

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints was organized in 1875. The Presiding elder was S. S. Wilcox. On August 22, 1875 the services were held in private homes until 1880 when a church was erected at the cost of \$1,300.

The Congregational Church was formed April 8, 1877. The sermon on that occasion was preached by Prof. J. E. Todd, of Tabor, Iowa. During the summer of 1877, the church erected a frame building with complete cost of \$3,400. The first pastor was the Rev. William Plested of New York City.

The First Baptist Church was formed June 18, 1871 and the first pastor was Rev. J. W. Roe. In 1880 a frame building was erected on Thomas Avenue costing \$3,500.

The Swedish Mission was organized November 17, 1885, Presiding over the services was G. P. Peters of Red Oak, Iowa. The Swedish Mission was later changed to Mission Covenant with Rev. John Quist presiding.

The Free Methodist Church was formed April 10, 1887; the first pastor was J. M. Reilly.

St. Mary's Catholic Church had their first services in the fall of 1870 with Father B. P. McMenemy of Council Bluffs, Iowa, in charge. Because there was no church building here, he said mass in private homes for about three years. The organization of the body was consummated in the spring of 1894. The Rev. F. W. Pape was assigned to the mission.

The First Christian Church was formed January 7, 1874 with services held at Mentzer's and William's hall.

St. John's Episcopal Church services were first held on July 5, 1896 by the Rev. L. R. J. Hoyt in the Congregational Church, which was cordially offered for the services.

Southern Baptist Chapel was organized August 7, 1862 by the Rev. H. E. Warren of Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Full Gospel Tabernacle was organized September 1930 with Rev. Nellie Cox as the first pastor.

Trinity Lutheran Church was organized in 1928 with the Rev. Otto Bahr in charge.

Church of the Nazarene was organized June 17, 1945 by Rev. Remiss Rehfeldt.

Christian Science Society was organized June 7, 1874 by J. R. Gaff.

Emmanuel Lutheran Church joined Missouri Synod August 1896 and in 1908 Pastor Landgraff became in charge.

Jehovah's Witnesses was organized in 1958 by Mr. and Mrs. Marion Van Ballem.

Shenandoah has several service and fraternal clubs also. Masonic Lodge-Tricentum #300 began June 7, 1871 and met in Jones' Block; then in 1880 they moved to finely furnished rooms in Crose Block, and finally, in December 1900, they moved into their present building.

The Eastern Star #81 received their charter September 11, 1890.

Odd Fellows #261 worked under a charter beginning October 25, 1873. They first met at Jones' Hall then moved to M. C. Johnson's block and then back to Jones' Brothers building.

Rebecca's #166 received their charter October 7, 1892.

Shenandoah Encampment (IOOF) #79 received its charter September 1, 1875.

Knights of Pythias, Juniata Lodge #195 was instituted April 5, 1888. At first this lodge met at the Odd Fellows Hall but later moved to the Hedges' Block.

Kiwanis was organized in 1912.

Lions was organized in February 16, 1956.

Rotary was organized May 14, 1931.

Elks was organized June 12, 1908 with J. A. Masters as the first Exalted Ruler.

Jaycees was organized February 24, 1940.

Chamber of Commerce was organized December 14, 1927.

G.A.R. organized September 1881.

American War Mothers organized August 22, 1934.

D.A.R. organized March 1922.

Burnside Womans Relief Corps #250 organized March 18, 1892.

AMVETS organized October 31, 1945.

VFW organized May 10, 1946.

American Legion #88 organized July 3, 1919.

American Legion Auxiliary organized August 28, 1922.

Shenandoah Barracks #1699 Vets of World War I organized September 11, 1958.

Ladies Auxiliary of Vets of World War I #1699 organized April 27, 1960.

Daughter of Union Veterans of Civil War was organized February 25, 1929.

Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign War #7224 organized March 29, 1948.

Color Guard of the American Legion Post #88 organized in 1934.

Last Man's Club of Company E was organized in 1936.

The burial place of our loved ones is located in the northeastern edge of our town, and is named "Rose Hill Cemetery". It was Miss Anna Johnson, who latter became Mrs. Jack Crose, who gave it the name of "Rose Hill". The cemetery is laid out in a circle, like a wagon wheel, and in the center, where the spokes converge in the hub of a wheel, stands the massive granite monument erected by the Relief Corps of this city in honor of the Unknown Dead Soldiers of the Republic. This shape is very unique for there are no other cemeteries like it. The original owners of cemetery were Ransom A. Crippen and wife, Ruth D. Crippen, of Corning, and J. N. Denison, trustee, of Boston, Massachusetts. Mr. and Mrs. Crippen certified to ownership before Lew E. Darrow, on May 29, 1872, certified, and before Mr. Denison certified in Boston on October 16, 1872. At first the bluff and land were laid out. Next, the north was included, making the circle complete; but when recorded August 4, 1875, the bluff part was left off, leaving the circle with a clipped off north side, like a partial eclipse of the moon. All the lots are twenty-four feet long but vary in width; the full diameter of the first cemetery was 950 feet. The ground on which the cemetery was located originally belonged to Ed Whiting. A. S. Lake had charge of the cemetery either as agent or owner for forty years. He terraced the lots many years ago and sowed them all in blue grass. A major proportion of this work was undertaken while Sam Smith was sexton; he was succeeded by George W. Baldwin.

The first person buried in the new cemetery was a child; he was the son of Dr. W. B. Webster and died May 21, 1871. His grave is located a short distance southwest from the

center of the circle, near the large monument of J. S. Johnson. Not far to the right are the graves of the Holcomb children, Theodore and Alice, bearing the death dated of 1873 and 1875.

The first to purchase grave lots were: R. B. Crose, Julius Swain, I.N. Holcomb, William Ellis, Dr. Webster, Col. W.F. Baker and G. W. Winchester. This does not imply that they were the first to be buried there.

On February 2, 1892, R. W. Morse and others presented the city with a deed to three-eighths of an acre of ground at the entrance to the cemetery.

W. J. Spooner, who was in the marble business here for thirty years, placed most of his early fine granites and humbler stones in the cemetery. The city obtained Rose Hill Cemetery, which now covers thirty-two acres of ground, on September 27, 1916 with ordinance #333.

Today our educational system is a source of pride to Shenandoah. There are four elementary schools, one junior high school and the \$1,100,000 senior high school which opened September, 1968.

There are seventeen churches which serve our city and provide excellent religious training along with recreational programs.

Shenandoah has sixty acres of parks and playgrounds with complete facilities for picnics and camping. Most popular of all is Shenandoah's own Municipal Athletic Park where Iowa's second largest swimming pool is located. Also in this park is a playground, baseball field, rodeo and horse show arena, Rose Garden Community house and Park Playhouse.

Under City Services our gas and electricity is supplied by the Iowa Power and Light Co. and our seventeen well water system provides the city with an abundance of water. A modern sanitation system eliminates all sewage problems. We also operate an excellent airport with an all weather, lighted, 3,000 foot hard-surface runway, a charter service, an air taxi mail service and air freight service.

The government of Shenandoah combines the mayor-council and city manager systems. Officials to fill these positions, with the exception of the city manager, are elected

every two years whereas the city manager is appointed by the council. Shenandoah has a full-time police force and a fully equipped volunteer fire department also. Because of our extensive mailing business, postal receipts at the Shenandoah post office are in excess of \$1,000,000; a sum that is equal to the postal receipts in towns eight times our size.

Shenandoah, Iowa is a town of nearly 7,000 people located in the excellent farming country of south-west Iowa. We think our city is an attractive and interesting place to live and visit.

Looking towards the future, we see the realization of yesterday's dreams. Every achievement begins with the efforts of people like our neighbors who contribute their time, talents and energies toward making our town of Shenandoah grow and thrive. These energetic, spirited Americans make our town great and, ultimately, our nation. For every community like ours, the future is filled with rich promises.

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REMINISCENCES OF A PIONEER BOY

by Ellison Orr

Edited with an introduction by Marshall McKusick

FOREWORD: THE MAN BEHIND THE REMINISCENCES

by Marshall McKusick

State Archaeologist
 Iowa City, Iowa

*The following material represents the first four chapters of Ellison Orr's **Reminiscences**. The remaining chapters of this autobiography will appear in the next issue of the ANNALS.*

A number of years ago I first read this unpublished and almost unknown autobiography by Ellison Orr. I was fascinated with his account of growing up in the middle years of the nineteenth century; he was a rare man with many talents. His life spanned almost a century from 1857 to 1951.

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