

Old Settlers Talk About Early Chicago

(Photo on Picture Page)

Chicago's Old Settlers Social club, composed of men and women who have lived here for 30 years or more, including a few who have been here long before then, held a celebration at the Elam club, home for girls, 4726 South parkway, last Wednesday night. It was some party, but was no place for the 1929 flapper.

There are three classes of members. Mrs. Valetta Drisden, secretary of the club, said: "The pioneers are those who have been here 50 years or more; honored pioneers are those of 60 years or more, and the regular members of 35 years or more residence in the Windy City. Of the pioneers it was said there are more than one hundred."

The members and their friends, especially the women, apparently forgot themselves and talked very freely about early Chicago, the first and second fire, President Lincoln's funeral train, and other contemporary events. It is a question as to whether they realized that they were telling their ages. However, they didn't seem to worry about that, as everybody appeared to be having a marvelous time. Let us hope that none will become offended when she sees what was said in print.

Tells About Fire

Mrs. Joanna G. Snowden, president of the old settlers, gave what has been substantiated as the authentic story of the Oct. 9, 1871, fire. Mrs. Snowden was born here at 239 Third Ave. (Plymouth Ct.). Her father was Joseph Hudlin, for 39 years chief janitor at the Chicago Board of Trade. According to Mrs. Snowden's recollection, the fire actually started in Mrs. O'Leary's barn on Saturday. The firemen, she said, were called and the fire extinguished—they thought.

Continuing her story, Mrs. Snowden said that her father took a visiting friend of his for a ride through the city the next day (Sunday) and when they passed Mrs. O'Leary's barn observed that embers were still on the premises. Later in the afternoon, while their mother was attending Quinn chapel at the southwest corner of Fourth Ave. (Custom House Pl.) and Jackson Blvd., the present site of the Union League club, and their father was asleep, Mrs. Snowden declares that she and her little brothers and sister noticed the elements were quite red. They called their father and assured him that it was "Judgment day."

Mr. Hudlin, the old settler points out, seeing that there was a fire, left the house as soon as his wife came home and went to the Board of Trade building. He is said to have opened the vault and took therefrom all the valuable papers. Everything else was destroyed by the fire.

Mother Called "Fire Angel"

The fire swept north and south. It crossed the river on the north at State St. and came as far south as Taylor, devastating as it traveled. Their five-room cottage, which her father built in 1856, Mrs. Snowden said, was not in the fire area. The waterworks were destroyed, which necessitated the use of water direct from the lake for all purposes. There was very little food and hardtack was

supplied by relief agencies. At one time five families were housed in their little cottage, Mrs. Snowden stated, and so impressive was the work done by her mother during the distressing times that the Chicago Tribune referred to her as one of the "Fire Angels" of the 1871 fire.

Mrs. Amelia B. Wilson, 4026 State St., daughter of Henry ("Hank") and Eva Smith, was born at 311 Clark St. She wore an outfit which was more than one hundred years old. Her mother was born directly opposite the Methodist church at Clark and Washington Sts. Her father was the first member of the Race to own a saloon in Chicago.

Mrs. Mary Atkinson, 3334 Vernon Ave., was one of a family of eight to be succored by the Hudlins during the fire. She lived on Quincy St., near Fourth Ave. (Custom House Pl.). Their house was destroyed.

Mrs. Emma Hayes, 3761 Vernon Ave., was dressed in an outfit which was worn by her mother more than fifty years ago.

Frames Civil Rights Bill

More interesting information was given by Gen. B. G. Johnson, 6316 Champlain Ave. Gen. Johnson is division commander of the military order of guards. He came to Chicago from Boston, Mass., in 1880 and entered the government service as messenger to Collector Spaulding of the custom house. In 1883 he became an inspector, the position he now holds. Mr. Johnson claims authorship of the Illinois civil rights bill. According to him, Attorney John G. Jones had a case in Rood House, Ill., and left here the evening before the case was to be called, arriving in the town before midnight. No hotel would accommodate him, but through the kindness of the janitor of the station, Jones was permitted to sleep there.

When he returned to Chicago, Gen. Johnson asserts that Jones came directly to him and revealed his experience, and added that he had searched the statutes and found no method of redress. It was suggested that a committee be called to draw up a bill. This was in 1887 as well as he could remember.

The committee was called, Attorney Jones was made chairman and Johnson was made secretary. A subcommittee was named and the two mentioned above were placed in the same positions they held in the committee proper. The subcommittee was composed of nine. Mr. Johnson declares that he drafted the bill, which was approved by both committees, then sent it to J. W. E. Thomas, the first member of our Race to sit in the house of representatives, who introduced it and secured its passage.

Two weeks after the bill was passed, a gigantic mass meeting was held at Olivet Baptist church, 11th St. between State and Wabash, when expression of gratitude and thanks were made. It was also stated that a resolution was drafted and adopted that day and forwarded to the family of Gen. U. S. Grant, who was seriously ill. Gen. Fred Grant and Mrs. U. S. Grant replied.



WHAT WAS LEFT of the Chicago business district after great fire of 1871. The Old Settlers club gathered on the anniversary of the fire and went over the exciting scenes of those trying days once more. P. & A. PHOTO

OLD SETTLERS' CLUB—Of Chicago met Oct. 9 and went over the scenes of the Chicago fire of Oct. 9, 1871. The women wore costumes of days gone by.

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