

Francis Asbury Clay

Francis Asbury Clay was born at Augusta, Maine in 1829. His father Jonothan was born in Maine and was of English descent. His mother's name was Drucilla the little is known about her. In 1851 Jonothan, then a widower, came to Minnesota Territory with his son Francis, his daughter in law and a small grandson, Edwin. They traveled from Maine to St. Louis, thence up the Mississippi to either St. Paul or St. Anthony. Whether they came directly to Plymouth Township or not cannot be definitely stated, but at any rate Jonothan, on Sept. 1, 1854, went to Forest City where all others of Plymouth registered and purchased their land, and purchased the E 1/2 of S E 1/4 and Lot 8 of Section 32, consisting of 111.17 acres. This land was registered for his son Francis, though the registration was in the name of Jonothan. Later, on Sept. 1, 1857 he again traveled to Forest City and registered and purchased for his daughter Rachel Reynolds, the S W 1/4 of S W 1/4 of Sec. 33, 40 acres. This was also transacted in his own name. His daughter and husband arrived later than her father and brother and no reference was ever made of her living on this land. It is known that later, she and her husband went to live in the vicinity of Albert Lea, where later her father joined her and died.

In all events, Francis Clay and his father were one of the very first settlers in the township and built a log home amid beautiful maple trees not far from Gleason Lake. They sent for Phoebe Greer, Matilda Greer Clay's mother. Phoebe was the wife of James Greer who born at Perth, Scotland on March ,4, 1801, migrated to Maine, meeting Phoebe who was born at Wayne, Maine, marrying her and in his work at sea met his death. Phoebe was born Oct. 12, 1792. A friend of Francis Clay, Daniel Thompson, was paid Phoebe's transportation and went to Maine from Minnesota, to bring her back with him and of course to transact personal business.

Mr. Thompson was long in returning but arrived in time with Mrs. Greer to allow Mrs. Greer the honor of officiating at the birth of twin sons to Francis Clay and wife Matilda on Dec. 25, 1855. It must have been a very happy household. Phoebe evidently was a very independent soul as she lived alone in a log cabin in the back of the one occupied by Francis Clay's family. She had a nice stove, a spinning wheel and other necessary furniture. She took her meals with the Clay family and spent her time in her own house where she carded wool, spun and knit. She could knit and read at the same time according to the comments of Laura Howe Carpenter, daughter of Jonas Howe. She would visit them at intervals to help them with their spinning and weaving. They lent her books and Phoebe would tell them tall stories of her early childhood which the Howe children loved. Phoebe was worshipped by her grandson Charles, Blanche Rosing's father. One can picture Phoebe in front of her little stove with the door of the stove open to throw more light upon her knitting and tell her grandchildren stories, for that is what she actually did. Her Bible evidently brought her much comfort as she was profoundly interested in reading it.

Mrs. Greer's daughter Matilda Clay was well educated as evidenced by her being a teacher in School number 48. It is said that she rowed her three small sons over Parker's Lake and in all possibility it might have been Gleason Lake as the later was nearer the school and to her home. The school according to 92 year old Wm Varner (1953) of Golden Valley and a life long friend of Charles Clay, was on the present 6th Ave. North right west of the land on which the Minneapolis Work House Superintendent's home is located. Mr. Varner said there was a store there owned and operated by Mr. Logan and the school was a short distance west of that on a little knoll. Regardless, Mrs. Clay could have rowed, as the lake must have been open, as school for small children was almost always in the spring.

Francis Clay was well educated as well and was a member of the

a good Methodist. He was Justice of Peace, elected at the meeting of the first official town meeting in 1858. He was Road Overseerer in Dist. 8 and 9 different years. Not only was he of firm political and religious beliefs, he was a patriot. At the first call for enlistments for the Civil War in 1863, he volunteered for service immediately as did seven others of the township. The records of the Plymouth Township Minutes of their meetings show that in 1863 he and the other men were paid the magnificent sum of twenty five dollars as a bounty for enlisting. He was discharged from the army August 19, 1865, broken in health due to malaria and asthma contracted in service.

Matilda Clay, during the war period, assumed the position as post mistress at the South Plymouth Post Office which was at her home. This was established in 1862 and discontinued in 1864 when the post office was reestablished at Wayzata. It must have been a pleasant occupation for her, as people had to collect their mail and their coming and going must have broken the monotony while her husband was at war.

Good times were in evidence also, as references were made in newspaper clippings of celebrations on the 4th of July. In " Old Fence Rail Corners " and in the Howe Memoirs references were made of events such as picnics, barn dances, visits and other good times. Clay's name was mentioned quite a few times. Matilda often told her children of her writing back home to relatives or friends of having gone to a ball in a coach and four. What she did not tell them was that the coach was a bob sled and the team of four, her husband and three other young men who pulled it with her on. An item in the book " Old Fence Rail Corners " mentions a Mrs. French and neighbor from Long Lake. They were traveling to Minneapolis by oxen with Mr. French and stopping at Clays overnight and continuing on to Minneapolis, the next day, returning and spending another night at the Clays. There must have been many travelers doing likewise as they were in a direct line of travel and were extremely hospitable.

In 1875 the Clay farm was purchased by Mr. Ottoway who had been Superintendent of the King Farm at Minneapolis. Mr. Clay, broken in health, moved to Minneapolis with his family and lived between 2nd and 3rd. Ave. So. on Washington. There Mrs. Clay took in boarders and Francis worked at Dean's Sawmill which was located where Basset's Creek empties into the Mississippi. From this residence, they moved to 3rd. St. between 2nd and 3rd. Ave. So. While there Mrs. Clay started an Employment Office on 4th St. where the Globe Building now stands, between Hennepin and Nicollet. The site of the office was owned by Wm. Varner, father of the Wm. Varner now living in Golden Valley (1953) . From there Mrs. Clay had her business on 3rd. Ave. So. between 3rd. and 4th St. While there the Clays built a home on Emerson Ave. north between 8th and 11th Ave..

Francis Clay died in Minneapolis in 1913 and his wife Matilda at Winona in 1916. Phoebe Greer, Matilda's mother died at Minneapolis in 1885 at the age of 93. The children of Francis and Matilda were Edwin, born in Maine in 1849, married to Nellie Brown and lived in Minneapolis where he died. Henry and Homer, twins, born Dec. 25, 1855, at Plymouth Township, Henry dying in 1871 at his home and Homer, marrying Rebecca Ray and dying Apr. 6, 1927. Mary was born in Plymouth in 1858 and died there in 1873. Chas. Asbury Clay, father of Louella and Blanche Rosing, was born at Plymouth Sept. 10, 1861, married Anna Williams of Minneapolis on Nov. 20, 1883 and passed away Nov. 18, 1934. Bertie was born at Plymouth in 1867 and died in Minneapolis in 1879. Abbey Louella was born at Plymouth March 29, 1873, married Dr. Edwin Muir in 1893 and passed away Jan. 20, 1935. Francis Clay and wife Matilda and children Henry, Mary, Bertie, Charles and his wife ~~Matilda~~ and Phoebe Greer are all buried at Parker's Lake Cemetery, Plymouth Township.

Upon making a map of Minnetonka Township in 1954, I came upon some information about Francis Clay which was unknown until then. This map is of the first abstract of lands such as made of Plymouth Township. Francis Clay, purchased by cash the following; Oct. 10, 1855, Entry # 592, NE 1/4 of NE 1/4, Lot # 5, SE 1/4 of NE 1/4 and Lot # 4 consisting of 146.93 acres. This land joined the Jonathan Clay farm on the south. The NE 40 of Francis Clay's land lay directly south of and joined the SW 40 of Jonathan Clay's land. From Wm Varner's description of the location of the Francis Clay home, just on the bank of the small lake in Minnetonka Township and on the north, the road which lead to St. Anthony, lay the Francis Clay home. The home the Ottoway's purchased on the Jonathan Clay's original land was not the Clay home because it was built after the Clays moved to Minneapolis. Francis Clay evidently had his home in Minnetonka Township and farmed the Jonathan Clay land in Plymouth. The Francis Clay land as of today has never been farming land to any extent and in all probability the Jonathan Clay land became Francis's after Jonathan's death or maybe before.