

Goodman Ferre (1806-1897)

Goodman Ferre (pronounced Ferry) was born on January 27, 1806 and died on September 24, 1897. When he arrived in Bloomington in the 1840s the population was about 1,000 people. What is now the town of Normal was farmland or open prairie and neither town had a university. In the fifty years Ferre lived here he saw Bloomington's population increase to almost twenty times the size it was when he arrived. He witnessed the early growth of the town of Normal and saw McLean County grow from 7 or 8 thousand inhabitants to a population of over 65,000.

Like many early settlers of this area Ferre was born on the east coast and headed west to make his fortune. He was born in Springfield, Massachusetts to Saloman and Margaret Ferre. His father was a shoemaker of considerable success and was considered a fairly wealthy man. Goodman and his brother Lyman left home as young men and moved to western New York where they both learned the trade of wagon-making. The two brothers spent their youth together, learned and worked at the same trade, devoted much of their lives to their memberships in the Masonic Lodge, and spent their last several decades in Bloomington. Goodman died at Lyman's home.

Ferre was married in Connecticut in about 1829 to Miss Julia Ann Cooley. They were the parents of two children, a boy and a girl. The children both lived to be about 20 years old and died within about one year of each other.

The Ferre brothers made their way to Bloomington and decided that it looked like a promising place to set up business. Their first wagon making business was right in the heart of downtown on the west side of Main Street between Washington and Front Streets. Later they moved to Front and Center Streets where they went into business with John Wolcott. In addition to making carriages, they were also involved with the undertaking business started by Wolcott.

Throughout most of his adult life people in Bloomington referred to Ferre as "The Squire" or "Squire Ferre." This title came from the period where he was a justice of the peace, or police magistrate. He was known as a benevolent judge who did not believe in handing down harsh fines.

Ferre was one of the most well known members of the local Masonic Lodge. He was also a charter member of the Order of the Eastern Star, a fraternal organization similar to the Masonic Order but one that women could also belong to. These are fraternal organizations whose members are involved in charitable, educational, and scientific activities. Ferre was a member of the Masonic Order from 1847 until his death in 1897. During most of that time he acted as treasurer of the organization and resigned due to his failing health only months before his death. He was also a long time member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, an organization founded in the United States in 1819.

On the occasion of his 90th birthday, the Eastern Star threw a surprise birthday party for Ferre and presented him with a gift of a beautiful reclining chair. The description of the party tells of him sinking into the chair and, for the rest of the evening, receiving the good wishes and admiration of all those attending.

Death came to Goodman Ferre at 8 o'clock on a Sunday morning after four days in a coma. The obituary stated that his death was brought on due to his being "seized with congestion of the stomach" and the "debility incident to old age." At the time of the death his brother Lyman was in Attica, Indiana for ten days for some kind of treatment.