

Linus Graves (1815 – 1897)

Linus Graves was born in Williamstown, Vermont on April 2, 1815 one of eleven children born to Calvin and Fannie (Robinson) Graves. The Graves family was one of the oldest in the United States. Linus's ancestors first went to England from France in the year 1060 and then his ancestors immigrated to the United States in 1640 settling first in Connecticut and then in Massachusetts in 1660.

In 1836 Linus moved to Springfield, Illinois where he began teaching school and studying law. It was while living in Springfield that he became good friends with Abraham Lincoln. Linus then moved to Waynesville, DeWitt County, IL and started his first mercantile business with Dr. Rogers and John Maris of Washington, IL. It was here that he met and married his first wife, Eveline Sampson. She, along with their two children, died in 1843.

On August 16, 1847 Linus married his second wife, Virginia Frances Haden, in Bloomington where they moved in 1849. Virginia was born in Kentucky on July 19, 1829 the only child of pioneer parents James Crenshaw Hayden and Rebecca (Sweet) Hatfield. Virginia was a teacher and taught at the first Bloomington private school in 1845. She always studied current events and was considered the best informed person in the city relative to Bloomington's growth and expansion. Virginia was very active in church work and was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

Linus and Virginia settled in their first house on the northeast corner of Center and Jefferson streets until it was sold to give place to a brick business block. They had moved just across the street but in 1854 were once again forced to move in order to give place to a hotel structure which was first named "The Ashley," then "The Windsor," and finally, "The Illinois." Linus was allowed to move the house from that property one mile east of the center of town to 1109 E. Grove Street in 1857. The Graves had six children: Fannie, wife of Joseph C. Means; Walter, a student of John Wesley Powell; Linus R.; Arthur, an Illinois Wesleyan University alumnus and prominent figure in civic affairs and lodge work; and two other daughters who died in infancy.

After Linus and his family moved to Bloomington he opened a mercantile business with his brother Oliver. This business was located on Washington Street and was a grocery, dry goods, and millinery store. The *Bloomington Intelligencer* reported that the Graves' store had everything from "delicacies of the table to every kind of agricultural implement."¹ He then headed the businesses Graves, Story & Co. and Graves, McClun & Co. Linus also began working in real estate making connections with Judge David Davis in real estate transactions. Linus was well-known as a pioneer businessman who always searched for new ways to progress further than other merchants to the extent that customers came from twenty to thirty miles away to deal with him.

In 1859 Linus and 15 other prominent Bloomington men went to Pike's Peak, Colorado during the gold rush. He acquired possession of a mining claim which later became possessed by a claim "jumper." He returned to Bloomington in 1860 after this unprofitable venture and turned his attention back to his real estate dealings where he had always been successful.

¹ Linus Graves file in the McLean County Museum of History Archives

On February 16, 1857 the Bloomington Cemetery Association was founded by Linus Graves, James Robinson, David Brier, William Allin, and William Graves, and was created to be a profit-making venture. *The Weekly Pantagraph* published the charter of the Association which stated that the “object of said Association shall be exclusively and solely to lay out and enclose and ornament a plat or piece of ground...to be used as a burial place.”² Linus acted as secretary, superintendent, and treasurer for the Association throughout the rest of his life. His land was the foundation of the new cemetery named Evergreen Cemetery. He gave \$9,000 worth of land which would equal about \$220,576.60 in 2008. After his retirement, he devoted a great deal of his time for the next 30 years to the beautification and improvement of his cemetery.

In addition to his many businesses, Linus was an active Methodist and was one of the first trustees and founders of Illinois Wesleyan University in 1850, along with several other well-known Bloomington residents such as John McClun, Samuel Gallager, and James Robinson. He also helped establish the first public library in Bloomington which was later named Withers Library. He was an Odd Fellow and a member of the Remembrance Lodge.

Linus was very active in local politics. He was originally a member of the Whig Party until that party dissolved. He then became a member of the newly formed Republican Party which held many of the same ideologies and principles as the former Whig Party. As a firm Republican and one of its organizers, he supported abolitionist Owen Lovejoy in his bid for Congress and was part of the Republican Convention Central Committee in 1856. Linus was also nominated to the McLean County Republican Convention in Bloomington to receive the nomination for office of Illinois State Representative in the next Legislature.

Linus also had an interest in the new and rapidly expanding railroad industry. In 1852 he and several other prominent Bloomington businessmen donated land for a railroad depot on the newly chartered Illinois Central Railroad which would run north to south from Galena to Cairo, Illinois.³ Then in 1853 he was appointed one of 25 delegates by the Peoria, Bloomington, and Lafayette Railroad Company to visit Peoria to solicit their cooperation in building a railroad from the Illinois state line in the direction of Lafayette, IN to the foot of the Grand Rapids on the Mississippi River.⁴ However this railroad was not built until the 1870s.

Later in his life it appeared that Linus and his wife Virginia did not have a very happy marriage. In October of 1885 Virginia filed a bill in the Circuit court for separate maintenance and relief from Linus. She claimed that in 1871 he abandoned her, leaving their home on East Grove Street and taking board and lodging near the cemetery. He continued to pay her necessary bills and provide for her until spring of 1885 when he ordered merchants to no longer give her food or raiment on his account. She also claimed that he threatened to rent out her home if she left for any long period of time. She also stated that it was because of his addiction to the use of liquor that made him do terrible things and that he was abusive and offensive when he was under its influence.⁵

² “The Bloomington Cemetery- Graves Addition,” *The Weekly Pantagraph*, July 1 1857

³ “The Bloomington Depot,” *The Pantagraph*, February 11, 1852

⁴ “Railroad Meeting,” *The Pantagraph*, March 30, 1853

⁵ “Graveyard Graves,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, October 24, 1885

Linus Graves died on January 18, 1897, at Deaconess Hospital after an illness of six months. Although he had been in excellent health, he suffered a sudden stroke of paralysis in July 1896 after working in Evergreen Cemetery earlier that day. He was admitted to the hospital and remained in good spirits throughout even though one side of his body was paralyzed. He even had someone take him out to the polls so he could vote the Republican ticket.⁶

Linus' funeral was held at his daughter Fannie's home with music furnished by a choir from Deaconess Hospital. The internment took place in his own cemetery. After his death his son Arthur J. Graves took over as secretary of the Bloomington Cemetery Association as well as the manager of the cemetery and the adjoining Maplewood Greenhouse until his death in 1938.

In the 1960s the care fund of the Cemetery was transferred from the Bloomington Cemetery Association to the Peoples Bank and then finally to the City of Bloomington Township. The Township immediately began cleaning up the cemetery which dramatically improved under its new control. Not long after this the Township merged Evergreen Cemetery with the City Cemetery which was adjacent to the Evergreen Cemetery), to create Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

By: Sarah Yoo, 2008

⁶ "Death of Linus Graves," *The Daily Pantagraph*, January 19, 1897