

African-American vote cast, 1870

The first black voter cast a ballot in the spring 1870 election for Oswego Township Supervisor John W. Chapman. The name of the voter, however, was not recorded.

Street lights, 1882

The first street lights in Oswego were put up in January 1882. The Kendall County Record reported that "They are lamps burning naphtha and were put up for trial." Permanent electric street lights, one at each intersection in the downtown area, were not instilled until the 1920s.

High school graduating class, 1887

The first class, five students strong, graduated from Oswego High School in the spring of 1887.

Woman voter, 1892

Mary Frances (Porter) Hunt, wife of Oswego business owner J.B. Hunt, became the first female to cast a ballot in Oswego during the spring 1892 school board election.

Woman elected to public office, 1892

Mrs. Florence K. Read became Oswego's first female public official when she was elected to the Oswego School Board in the spring of 1892.

Telephone, 1893

The first telephone in the village was installed by Levi Hall, connecting his home on South Main Street, with his drug store at 64 Main Street, in August 1881. Commercial telephone lines reached the village in December 1893. "The hello racket on the telephone was ushered in last Saturday. The poles have been set all around town," the Kendall County Record reported on Dec. 15, 1893. The first telephone switchboard office was located in the space above Hall's Drug Store, 64 Main Street.

Mass transit, 1900

The first interurban trolley line was built through Oswego in June, 1900.

First African-American high school graduate, 1903

On July 1, 1903, Ferdinand Smith became the first black person ever to graduate from high school in Kendall County during commencement exercises at Oswego High School. His sister, Frances Smith, became the first black female OHS graduate in 1907.

Automobile, 1903

The first auto in Oswego was built from parts by A.P Werve and took to village streets in October 1903.

Electricity, 1900-1913

Electric power arrived in Oswego with the interurban line in June 1900. The entire town was not wired for electrical power until 1913, however.

Good Starts: A List of Oswego Firsts



The Old Stone School: First Oswego building constructed as a school, 1852

By Roger Matile

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Little White School Museum

2011

Oswego's first...

River crossing, ??

One reason Oswego was settled was due to the smooth limestone ford across the Fox River at the village site. The ford, first used by the area's first Native American residents and later for many years by wagons and stagecoaches, was located north of the mouth of Waubonsie Creek. The first bridge was not built until the 1840s (see below).

Inhabitants, 9000 to 7000 B.C.

Oswego's first inhabitants were most likely members of a hunter-gatherer group of Native Americans who stopped to fish, hunt, and gather wild foods including nuts from the numerous oak and hickory trees and hazel bushes that grew along the banks of the Fox River and Waubonsie Creek.

Settlement, ca. 1500

The first known settlement, located along Waubonsie Creek just east of Illinois Route 25 in

what is now known as Stone Gate Estates Subdivision, dates to about the year 1500. Materials recovered by archaeologists at the village site, including a large piece of the leg bone of an American bison, were carbon dated at Kansas State University.

Mine/quarry, ca. 1500

Native Americans operated the first “mine” in Oswego where they quarried high-quality chert (similar to flint) to make stone weapons and tools. The mine was located in the bluff behind the Oswego Public Library where chert nodules can be found between layers of limestone. Many projectile points and other tools and weapons have been found in the Oswego area made out of Waubonsie chert.

American settler, 1832-1833

In 1832, William Smith Wilson and his brothers-in-law, Daniel, John and Walter Pearce (Wilson was married to the Pearces’ sister, Rebecca) arrived on a prospecting trip from the Mad River area of Ohio. Wilson chose land at what is now the busy intersection of U.S. Route 34 and Ill. Route 25 in Oswego. His claim included virtually all of what would one day be the village of Oswego. In 1833, the Pearces and Wilson returned with their families and built homes and farm buildings on their new land.

House, 1833

William Wilson and his wife Rebecca built the first house in Oswego, a log cabin they sited near the intersection of U.S. Route 34 and Ill. Route 25 in 1833. The Wilsons sold their claim to Samuel Hopkins in 1836. Hopkins, in turn, sold it to Walter Loucks.

Church, 1833

The first church built in Oswego was the Oswego Congregational Church. The first congregation established was the Oswego Methodist-Episcopal Church, started in Daniel Pearce’s home in 1833.

Road, ca. 1833

The first official road through town was the combined west branch of the Chicago to Ottawa Trail or the Joliet to Dixon Road (also called the Galena Road). Both followed modern U.S. Route 34 from Naperville to Oswego. The road to Dixon and Galena crossed the Fox River on the ford just above Waubonsie Creek’s mouth; the Ottawa road headed south on Main Street and Ill. Route 71.

Store, 1835

Levi Arnold built Oswego’s first store in 1836, the same year he and Lewis Judson laid out the village. According to early histories, Arnold’s store was located at 62 Main Street.

Plat, 1835

Levi F. Arnold, a businessman, and Lewis B. Judson platted Oswego in 1835. The original village consisted of a square grid of nine blocks aligned with the south bank of the Fox River.

Name, 1835

Judson and Arnold dubbed their new town Hudson, after the river in New York. But when the U.S. Postal Service established a post office in the new town, it was called the Lodi Post Office. The name of both the post office and the village were changed to Oswego in 1837. Oswego is a Mohawk Indian word meaning “mouth of the stream.”

Post office, 1837

The Oswego Post Office was established in January 1837 as the Lodi Post Office, The name was changed on July 31, 1838 after voters chose Oswego as the official name for their community in the autumn of 1837. The first post office was located in Levi Arnold’s store and Arnold was the first Oswego Postmaster.

School, 1837

Oswego’s first school was established in a small log building on the west side of Ill. Route 25 just north of North Street in 1837. Later, another small wooden building on South Madison Street near Van Buren Street was used as the village school building. However, the first building actually constructed as a school, the Old Stone School, was built in 1852.

Teacher, 1837

The first school teacher in Oswego was George Washington Kellogg, one of the area’s earliest settlers. He taught the first term in the old log school in 1837.

Map, 1842

James Reed, a deputy of Assistant U.S. Surveyor Eli Prescott, surveyed Oswego Township, including the site of Oswego, in the summer of 1838. In 1842, the map resulting from Reed’s surveyor’s notes, including a small depiction of the village of Oswego, was published. In his survey notes, Reed reported that Oswego contained “20 or 30 wood buildings” in 1838.

Fox River Bridge, 1848

The first bridge, built of timber, was constructed across the Fox River in 1848. It was washed away in the great flood of Feb. 6, 1857 and rebuilt on the same site. Due to deterioration, it was replaced in 1867 with the first iron arch bridge across the river. That bridge, too, was damaged by a flood in 1868, but was repaired and used until it was replaced by an iron box truss bridge in 1900 capable of carrying the interurban trolley over the river.

Railroad, 1853

The first railroad through Oswego Township—the Chicago Burlington & Quincy—passed about a mile and a half west of Oswego in 1853. In 1870, the Fox River Rail Road was built along the Fox River from Aurora to Streator passing thorough the village.

Factory, 1854

Adam Armstrong established the first factory, which manufactured brooms, in Oswego in 1854. It was located on South Adams Street.

Incorporation, 1855

The village of Oswego was officially incorporated as a municipality following a vote of village residents on March 23, 1855. The vote in favor was 55-17.

Village board, 1855

The first village board members elected after Oswego was incorporated reportedly included John W. Chapman, Lewis B. Judson, John M. Crothers, Frederick Coffin and Walter Loucks, all local businessmen and landowners.