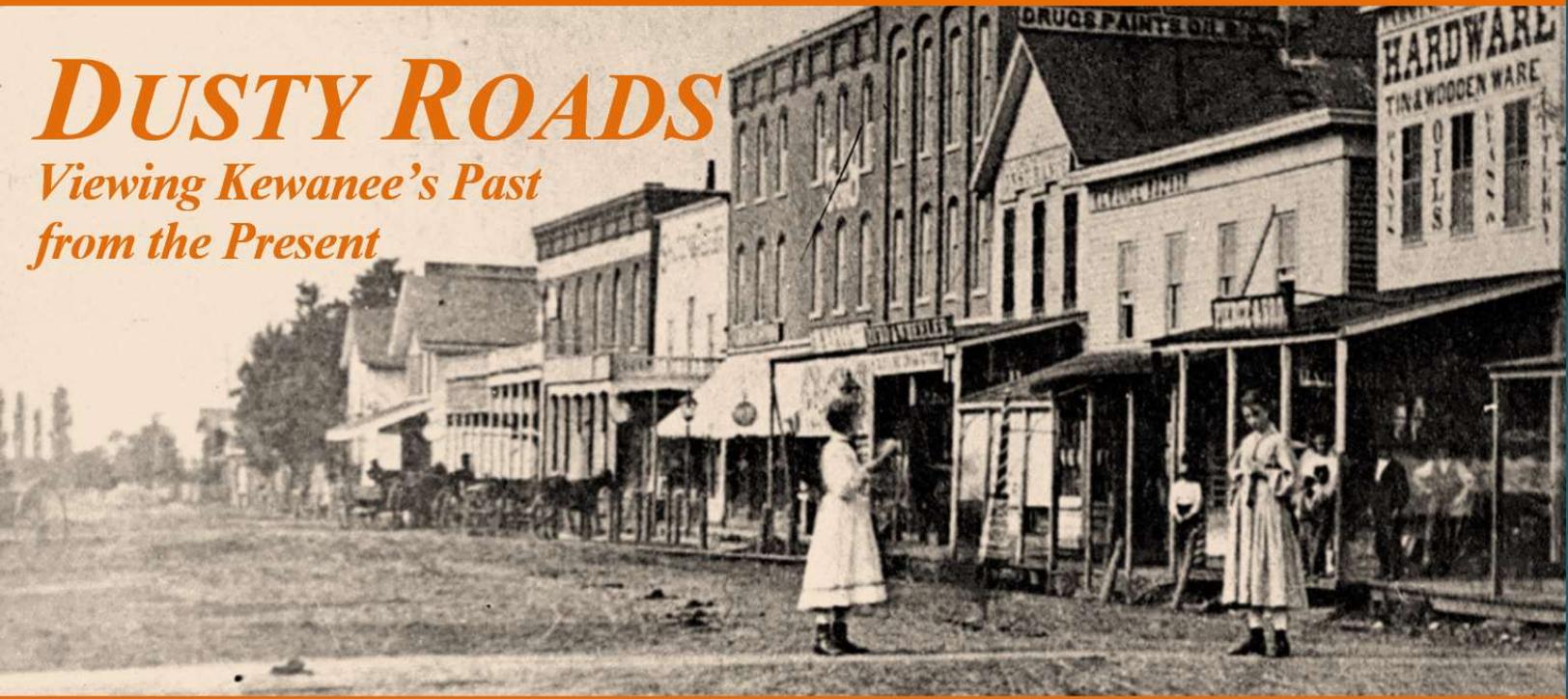


DUSTY ROADS

*Viewing Kewanee's Past
from the Present*



by Dean Karau

September 2019

Get Me to the Church on Time

But There Were No Churches in Wethersfield in 1837 for the First Marriage in the New Colony

On Tuesday, August 22, 1837, 26-year-old Dr. Lewis Hurd married 16-year-old Caroline Wealthy Little in the first wedding ceremony held in the Wethersfield Colony.

Only sixteen months earlier, Reverend Ithamar Pillsbury, businessman Sylvester Blish, and a surveyor had arrived at the site of what would become Wethersfield, Illinois. They had been tasked by the Connecticut Association of Wethersfield, Connecticut, to find and buy land for a new colony. In early May, 1836, they purchased 99 quarter-sections of land, about evenly split between what would become southern Kewanee and northern Wethersfield Townships.

Later that year, Association members Deacon John F. Willard, Reverend Joseph Goodrich, and Henry G. Little traveled back to colony to begin laying out tracts of land for sale, but only Willard stayed initially. The others opted to winter in French Grove, between Peoria and the colony, where Connecticut families were staying after arriving in Illinois.

But then other settlers started arriving in the colony, among them Norman Butler; Captain

Sullivan Howard and his wife Elizabeth Bailey, née Little; Henry G. Little and family; William T. Little and family; Reverend Caleb Jewett Tenney Little and his wife; Hazelton Page; Elisha Wolcott; Evan Wheaton; C. B. Miner; Selden Miner; Sylvester Blish, his brother, and their families; and, of course, Abner Bailey Little, his wife, Nancy Tenney, sister of Caleb Jewett Tenney, and children, including Caroline Wealthy Little.



LOG CABIN, 1855 sketch by Junius R. Sloan (whose parents lived in Kewanee, as did Sloan for a time)

And then Dr. Lewis Hurd arrived in Wethersfield by himself on June 3, 1837. Caroline soon found him to be “a fine looking young man of pre-possessing appearance.”

Hurd was born in Hamilton, New York in 1811. He moved to Lafayette in Stark County in 1836 to begin his practice, boarding briefly with the family of a married daughter of Abner Little.

After Hurd moved to Wethersfield, he stayed in one of the Littles’ cabins housing Abner and his family, one of a number of hastily constructed small structures intended only as temporary residences until the village was surveyed and more permanent dwellings could be erected.

The cabin consisted of one room divided by curtains, with a loft overhead. Like all of the cabins, it had “puncheon” floors, rough and uneven wood boards, with cracks between them (which could double as a spittoon for men). Only three-legged stools could rest evenly on them.

With many family members living in the small cabin, there was precious little privacy. But Caroline knew “[b]efore long, knowing ones began to suspect the presence of cupid in our mist using with unerring skill his little bow and arrow.”

Hurd’s and Caroline’s courtship began, but it was difficult in the tight living quarters. But Caroline knew that “where there is a will, there’s a way. The sly glance, the mauling [sic] blush, the constant interest and approval manifested toward each other, needed not the eloquence of words to explain.” In the late hours when it was too cold to sit on the porch, Henry G. Little remembered that “the room was divided by a chalk mark, and neither [Lewis nor Caroline] was allowed to look over the line till 10 o’clock.” Then, sitting on two chairs in a corner of the room behind a curtain, they could whisper their words of love. Henry also observed the couple managing some “moonlight walks and probably some stargazing.” Caroline found that, “[f]or some reason the sky was never so brilliant before or the earth clothed in such beauty.”

After consent was sought and given, the marriage banns publicly read, and preparations turned to readiness, the day of the wedding arrived.

Nearly all of the settlers were invited to the wedding. Because Captain Howard’s home was the nicest of the dwellings in the colony, the wedding was held there. He had hauled in hewed posts and

rafters from a sawmill on the Spoon River seventy miles away in order to build the first framed house in the colony, 14 ft. by 14 ft., one and a half stories, sided with shaved clapboard.

It was a typically hot but bright and beautiful August day. Sunlight flooded the landscape. To the north and west stood the majestic walnut, cherry, and other hardwood trees of Big Barren Grove. For miles to the south and east, the Illinois prairie spread across the horizon, “as fair a land as the eye of man ever rested upon,” interrupted only by the half dozen or so hastily-built cabins. Flowers of many colors blanketed the prairies, “a bright carpet of unsurpassed loveliness.”

The members of the small community gathered at the Howard home. Reverend Pillsbury had walked over 20 miles from his home in the Andover Colony for the ceremony. At eleven in the morning, he began: “If anyone knows any reason why this couple should not be joined in matrimony, let them now make it known, or else ever after hold their peace.” No one spoke up. The reverend solemnized the marriage and filled out the marriage certificate for later recordation.

This certifies that Mr. Lewis Hurd and Miss Caroline W. Little, both of Wethersfield, Henry county, Illinois, after legal publication were united in the marriage relation on the 22d of August, 1837, agreeably to the laws of this State.

*Ithamar Pillsbury,
Officiating Clergyman*

Then the celebration commenced.

The community joined in singing the marriage hymn, “since Jesus freely did appear, to grace a marriage feast,” and they sang other evangelical hymns as well – for, as Caroline knew, “there were good singers among us.”

They walked over to the Little cabin for the wedding feast – a roast pig with a mayapple in its mouth, side dishes, and the last of the wine, followed by a cake. It was a joyous day in the new colony, a long way from their previous home, but among family and friends.

The marriage license for the first wedding to take place in what later became Henry County was issued from Knox County on February 7, 1836, to James P. Dodge and Samantha Colbert. But the August 22, 1837,

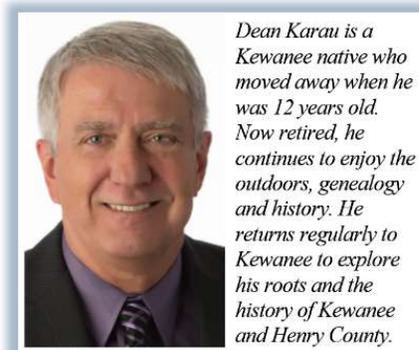
Hurd – Little wedding, in addition to being the first in Wethersfield, was the first recorded marriage in newly-organized Henry County.

In 1887, the Hurds celebrated their fiftieth wedding

anniversary, within a year of the fiftieth wedding anniversaries of four other Wethersfield colonist couples. 1836 and 1837 had been good years and a good beginning for Wethersfield.



Lewis Hurd & Caroline Wealthy Little in their later years



Dean Karau is a Kewanee native who moved away when he was 12 years old. Now retired, he continues to enjoy the outdoors, genealogy and history. He returns regularly to Kewanee to explore his roots and the history of Kewanee and Henry County.