

**SAMUEL OTT AMONG THE FIRST SETTLERS HERE
CAME TO AMERICA IN 1836**

Reminiscences of pioneer Life in Deerfield as recounted by Samuel Ott

While not set down in chronological order, the reminiscences of a benign patriarch of 86 years of age may interest the reader of pioneer life in Deerfield, as seen and remembered by a man who spent his boyhood with his relatives who are also now octogenarians in Deerfield, Mrs. Henry Wessling and George Rockenbach.

The spot where the Ott family located was considered a Garden of Eden. Speculators had bought the first, remained but a short time, and then sold to the German farmers. They settled in the timber, and fruit of all kinds was plentiful. More than ten different kinds of plums, crabapples, hickory nuts of all sizes, berries, blackberries, raspberries, gooseberries, cherries, garden cherries, walnuts, bitternuts, butternuts, (like hickory) for the settlers, and acorns to fatten the hogs, abounded in profusion. In 1836 and 1837 ten log houses stood in a row on the edge of the natural timber on a road two miles west of Deerfield corners. This road was then named as Saunders road, for a man in Cook county. In a group of houses were the homes of the families of the Duffy, Dose, Stewart, Martin Luther, Lorenz Ott, John Jacob Ott, and Casper Ott, and that of a bachelor named Jennings. Jennings' land was later sold to Schwingil, Schley and then Kellogg.

The Ott families came from Baldenheim Alsace in 1832 and settled in Warren Penn. Their sailing vessel took 40 days in crossing, and their hay wagon and rack, which was ballast on the boat, was used as a moving wagon when they moved to the bank of the Allegheny river. After four years residence in Warren, Jacob Ott, the oldest son, came west with the Luther family and married Magdalene Luther and settled on Saunders road.

In the following year the entire Ott family came to Deerfield, where they found a strong family clan of loyal, dependable Illinois citizens. Lorenz Ott had the first store, first kerosene oil lamp, and first crude washing machine, (made in Libertyville) in the colony. Previous to stoves cooking was done in the fire place. A big iron kettle about six inches deep and eight inches across was placed on coals made of hickorywood, and bread was baked in the kettle, or a black iron "spider" was placed in an iron sawbuck in the fireplace and cornbread, and meat, were also cooked in that manner.

One Deerfield woman who settled on the east bank of the east slough about 1840, would carry 20 dozen eggs on her head to Wheeling, where she exchanged them for groceries. A log was laid across the slough, and the little old woman balanced her basket as she made her way across the dangerous crossing over the Cadwell land.

A narrow road ran from the east slough through the Cadwell land south of the present Deerfield road, and logs were laid across each slough. This road ran through the present Plagge farm and made a shorter cut to Wheeling where trading was done before a store was started in Deerfield. There is still a small wooden bridge across the slough over which the Supple family came to Deerfield.

The Gerwell land bordered the Wilmot land at the west slough. Samuel Ott has followed and observed carefully many times, the divide over which the Indian path and trail followed. This divide is across the Vernon Ridge Country club, through the Kennicott grove on the west side

of the Northfield cemetery, to where the Waukegan road strikes Milwaukee avenue, through Niles (which is "Dutchman's Point") and west of Chicago about ten miles, the Indians for thousands of years walked through the thick timber, and wore a deep track in the ground. Without crossing a deep river, the Indians could make a trip from the Atlantic to the Pacific, by following the water shed. The Pioneers followed the Indian trail from Niagara Falls to Buffalo, Cleveland, and around the lake into Wisconsin, up between the Red River and Mississippi river, in their travels over the United States. Mr. Ott learned his geography well, both by study of his book as a child, and by observation in mature life, and he can recite it as well.

In one place in the Ott yard was a creek, and in the spring, by piling up a few shovels full of dirt, Samuel could change the course of the little stream so that it ran toward Deerfield on its way to Niagara Falls, or towards the Des Plaines river which followed the Mississippi water shed. As a lad Samuel Ott observed that no stream in this vicinity runs east and west.

Not one house in twenty had enough chairs in which the entire family could sit at one time. The children stood beside the table to eat. Family visits were frequent on winter evenings. A neighbor would fill his sleigh full of straw, pack in his family and go miles to visit another settler.

The surprised housewife always managed to prepare refreshments of some kind from the storeroom. Spiritualists were consulted by some of the settlers to learn where their calves had strayed.

Samuel Ott attended the Wilmot school the first day that it was opened in the summer of 1847. The ringing of the school bell frightened the cattle that ran wild over the prairies, and when they rushed toward the school, the children were alarmed. Rosilla Cadwell was the first teacher, and the only book that was used was her testament. School was opened with prayer, and the twenty-five pupils of all ages learned the alphabet, and to read from the testament. The teacher for the winter term was a Mr. Chapman, from Michigan, and he had men pupils older than he.

Spellers were the first books bought and the first geography used gave the population as 5,000. (In Chicago.)

All the reading was done from the testament, until and Elementary reader was introduced, then Saunders readers.

Lydia Gutzler became the best speller in the Wilmot school, in Samuel Ott's time, and he remembers no other school in Deerfield except the one that stood on the Deerfield corners and faced south, called the Cadwell school. When the third Wilmot school burned about 1857, the pupils attended the Cadwell school. Students in the Wilmot school went to the Edwards school in Northfield for "spell downs."

Samuel Ott went to Naperville college in 1861. His father was one of the first organizers of this Evangelical Association church school. Samuel possesses a perpetual scholarship to the college, and can name any young person he wishes to attend it. In the Wilmot school, at twenty one years of age, Samuel Ott cast his first vote and his father vouched for his age. At twenty-one he was made a director of the Wilmot school and was secretary for two years. Years after his daughter Alice, taught in this school. At the second election of Mr. Lincoln, Mr. Ott voted for him in the Yore school. He also saw Lincoln lying in state in Chicago. The whole Deerfield community grieved for the death of their beloved Emancipator President.

Samuel Ott was pallbearer for the first person who was buried in the Northfield cemetery, Jacob Frey a sixteen year old lad who died of typhoid fever, in 1860.

Early marriages were common in this vicinity. Often the girls were wives at sixteen, and the majority of them old women at forty, If a man with \$50.00 came from a different locality, at least a dozen girls were ready to marry him. "Many men married without a cent and did well."

The women knitted day and night to provide stockings and mittens for their families. They could talk and knit at the same time. The wool came from the sheep raised on the farms. The wool was taken to Elgin to a carding machine, and after being carded was spun by the women in their homes. Extra wool was traded for a sheep grap cloth, from which garments were made, Sarah Ott could spin a pound of wool in a day. She was an expert spinner. She would spin and walk and sing.

Elgin was the grinding place for Illinois. Farmers from this vicinity also went to Naperville to have their grain ground. The Cadwells had a corn cracking machine where they ground their own and their neighbors cornmeal. "Nigger heads" (flat round stones) were also used to grind the corn. It was jammed fine and sifted. When about twelve years of age, by ox team, Samuel Ott took potatoes to Chicago to sell and bought a calf that later developed "black leg", which many young cattle contracted in the spring; he also invented the nut shelling machine from the gear of an old fanning mill, to simplify the work of obtaining the winter supply of nut meats. . Through the west slough he drove his ox team when the family attended church services in the Muhlke's home, where Lorenz Ott was the class leader.

Mr. Ott remembers the log house of his father and of his grandfather, as a two room structure, the upper room a sleeping room for the older boys. In one corner of the downstairs room a portion was boarded off in which the spare bed was made. A one-legged bed with the two walls supporting the sides. This was for the visiting minister, or the school teacher. In another corner the bed for the parents was curtained off in a section reserved for sleeping purposes, and under that bed were shoved the trundle beds of the children in the day time. Ropes were used instead of springs. When he was three years of age his father bought a wild broncho pony from Indian Clark for which he paid \$22.00. The horse lived to be 22 years old. They also traded their yoke of oxen for another horse, and had a team, the first horses in the neighborhood. By close economy and hard labor the Germans became prosperous, more so than their American neighbors.

The deer came in herds of about twenty in the winter and ate hay and straw through the fence in the cowyard while the cattle ate inside. Once when husking the deer came within ten feet, and again in the spring, when plowing, the deer came very close and the dog followed them into the woods, and came back so tramped by the deer that he lay around sick for a couple of days.

The pigeons came in droves of thousands; so many that they darkened the sun, as they flew south in the fall. In foggy weather they sat on dry limbs of the oak trees and made a moaning sound, terrible to hear. When they roosted in the green trees the acorns could be heard falling, as they ate. The sound of the flying of the birds in flocks was as the roaring

of an airplane., as the pigeons rushed to another spot. George Karch remembers these pigeon migrations, and also of killing hundreds.

When about ten years of age Samuel Ott wished to have a new slate pencil, so he walked several miles through the snow in the woods near his fathers house, until he caught a rabbit with a forked stick. The rabbit hid in a hollow tree and the stick was run around in the tree until it became twisted in the fur of the animal when it could be brought out. Samuel then walked two miles from his home to the Deerfield corners with the live rabbit.

A Mr. Cole kept a general store on the southeast corner where the gasoline filling station is now located and faced west in 1850. This store was sold to Seth Hoyt and moved to the Carlos Hoyt lot, next to the Presbyterian church.

When the wife of the storekeeper made the trade for the rabbit she said that rabbits were plentiful, and the price had gone down, so she could give the boy but one pencil. This was his first experience in trading.

On his way to the dedication of the Calvinistic or Reformed Lutheran church on Dundee road about 1848, he went through the Frey farm, and remembers a little snow bird's nest full of eggs in the snow. The congregation and visitors at the dedication ceremony were "packed in like herrings".

Samuel Ott was the first Sunday school teacher in the Wilmot school assisting Lyman Wilmot who was superintendent. Until the last few years, he has been superintendent and teacher in Sunday school ever since.

During the Civil War some men hid in the slough to escape service. When the Deerfield quota, in the last draft, was short four men, because of the absence of men who should have served, meetings were held in the Deerfield school. Finally \$16.00 apiece was raised to buy the services of four young men, and one of the four young men, was the Holcomb boy. The lads went to Springfield, the war ended. They never saw service and were considerably richer than when they left Deerfield six weeks before. Samuel Ott's enlistment was discouraged by the recruiting officer because of the few men left on the farms. He was drafted three times, but his number was never drawn.

Johann Jacob Ott, ancestor of half a thousand descendants in a century, was born November 6, 1782 in Baldenheim, Elsass and died December 8, 1867 in Deerfield. They had two daughters and five sons, Magdalena, Salome, Lorenz, Jacob, Casper, Christian and Philip. Magdalena married George Escher. Salome married Philip Brand and had eight children.

Jacob Ott married Magdalena Luther and had twelve children. This Jacob was the pioneer who led his parents and relatives to Deerfield. Casper Ott married Catherine Trier and had seven children. Christian Ott married Christina Miller and had five children, Christian died of small pox in the Civil War. Philip Ott married Elizabeth Saliday in Pennsylvania and had twelve children. His youngest son, Benjamin, lives in Wilmette.

Born in Baldenheim, Alsace in October 24, 1808, Lorenz Ott married Maria Ursula Rieg, born May 18, 1811, whose mother's maiden name was Peters. Lorenz Ott died February 8, 1863, and his wife died Sept. 18, 1887. The Lorenz Otts had seven children, Jacob, Mary, Magdalena, Sarah,

Clara, Samuel and Eli. Clara died at thirteen. Jacob was born in Baldenheim in 1831. The others were all born in the United States.

In 1849 Jacob Ott with his uncles, Philip and Jacob, went to California in the gold rush. On the trip by water, Jacob the son of Lorenz, contracted Panama, or yellow fever, and was buried at sea.

Mary Ott married Lawrence Offerle in Warren, Pa. When they moved to Illinois, they had a store near the Northfield church, then moved to Geneseo, Illinois, and then finally to Kansas, where the town of Offerle was named for them. The Offerle's had six children, Abner, Minerva, Oscar, Edwin, Russell, and Amanda, who are scattered over the Pacific slope.

Eli Ott went to Ashland Wis., after marrying Cararie of Chicago and have one daughter who married John Beck. Eli Ott died two years ago in May, 1925.

Magdalena married Rev. Christian Ott and had six children, two of whom are now living, Elma and Hedwig. Rev. Ott was a missionary to Germany and Switzerland, and Elma was born in Germany and Hedwig in Switzerland. Elma married George Heth and has two children, Beulah and Donald, who live in Chicago. Hedwig married Mr. Whitoft and lives in Long Beach, Calif. Hedwig was a teacher in the Chicago schools, and on two different occasions was voted the most popular teacher, and was given trips to Germany and Jerusalem. She is now retired on pension.

Sarah Ott married George Rockenbach and had eight children, Ella, Adelaide, Ormon, Almon, Samuel, Viola, Preston and Irene. Ella married William F. Plagge. Adelaide died in 1895. Orman married Mary Whitney. Almon married Elizabeth Catlow. Preston married Lida Landau. Viola and Irene are unmarried. The Rockenbach family has been written in another article.

Samuel Ott, the fifth child of Lorenz and Ursula Rieg Ott was born May 19, 1842 in the Ott farm that was later sold to George Rockenbach who married Sarah Ott, after Samuel had lived there for twenty-five years. In 1865 Samuel moved to Geneseo, Ill. and a year later he built and furnished a home and married Mary Kiest of Northfield (whose brothers John and Charles Kiest were ministers.) The Henry Kiests came from northern Germany. Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Ott had five children Alice, Flora, Olive, Arthur and Elmer. Alice married George Ennanta. Flora died at thirteen years of age. Olive married Dr. Henry Kline. Arthur died at three years of age. Elmer married Doris Endaman, and has two daughters, Doris and Alice.

In her youth Mary Kiest Ott worked for two years for D. L. Moody, the Evangelist, and taught in the Moody Church.

Rev. Hoeffle, who spent many a day in the Samuel Ott home, pronounced it an ideal home.

Samuel Ott, in Geneseo, became a merchant, in partnership with his sister's husband, L. ---- selling goods and groceries. The shoes he bought from John A. Reichelt, who traveled in that territory. Samuel Ott's wife died in 1907, and he went to Freeport to live with his daughter, Alice, Mrs. George Ennanta, whose husband was a clothing merchant in Freeport, until Mrs. Ennanta's death seven years later, when Mr. Ott moved to Chicago. He now makes his home with his daughter and with his son. Mr. Ott owns the apartment building in which his son resides.

The beautiful serenity of old age, from a life of right living is seen in the face of Samuel Ott. His grandfather, Jacob Ott, has 500 descendants and Samuel Ott is the oldest of those living, 250 are dead and as many are living and scattered over the United States. The fifth generation, Mr. Ott has seen a kindly Christian man, at peace with all mankind, one who has never had trouble with any neighbor, never learned to swear, nor to use tobacco, wine nor beer, and never used an exclamation worse than "confound it".

The first real information of Andrew Jackson, the runaway slave, Samuel Ott imparts to this generation. In the winter of 1858 a Mulatto, about 28 years of age, came to the home of Lyman Wilmot, the Abolitionist, at night via the "Underground railroad", from Mississippi. The lake was frozen, so the blackman could not be sent across to Canada, therefore he had been taken to Deerfield. Mr. Wilmot brought the slave to the Lorenz Ott home to do the chores, so that the children could go to school.

Keeping a runaway slave was against the law, but the Abolitionist felt that they were in the right disobeying an unjust law. Andrew Jackson's father was a white man and he worked in his father's plantation where he saw his white sisters. The plantation owner was more lenient to his son than to his other slaves, and Andrew learned more than his companions, therefore the desire to be free so overcame the lad that it led him to attempt to escape but bloodhounds tracked him, and he was brought back. In his second attempt at freedom he was successful, and he crossed the Ohio river, where he was sent on his journey north.

The man was a good worker, kept the horses clean (he had been a yard man on the plantation) and "made a nice gate of stout wood", which he said would last till the slaves were freed. When that occurred he requested Mr. Ott to destroy the gate which sentimental request was heeded by the thrifty farmer.

When spring came, and the roads were ready, Andrew Jackson prepared to leave. Lorenz Ott made him a suit, and gave him money for boat fare, and Lyman Wilmot took him to Chicago, where he escaped to Canada. After reaching the slaves haven Andrew wrote to his benefactors, who had taught him to read and write, of his safe arrival, and that was the last they ever heard of him. Samuel Ott was fourteen years of age at the time, and he recalls much that the negro did while he was here.