



Pioneer
Heritage
Society

NEWSLETTER

www.pioneerheritage.org

Friday, May 20th at 7:00 p.m. Vaughn Johnson will present "Joseph Wellington Coolidge - Joseph Smith's Executor in Nauvoo - Settler and Resident of Coonsville/Glenwood, Iowa" and Historian Gail Holmes will speak on "Fort Croghan, Council Point, and the Middle Mormon Ferry."

Mormon Trail Center - Lower Level

HISTORY OF BETHLEHEM, COONSVILLE, AND OF LEBBEUS THADDEUS COONS

Highlights from the presentation by Historian Gail Holmes

Dr. Lebbeus Thaddeus Coons (1811-1872) left a rich heritage in Mills County, southwestern Iowa, despite his short stay. He established the little town of Bethlehem in 1846, east across the Missouri River from what today is Plattsmouth, Nebraska. Bethlehem, renamed successively Sharpsburg, Junction City, and East Plattsmouth was the site of a Missouri River Ferry which ran almost continuously from 1850 until 1930. His little daughter, Patience, reportedly was the first child born in Iowa's Bethlehem, in 1846.

L.T., as he was called by his great grandson, Daniel D. Coons from whom we get most of our information about the pioneer doctor, devoted his life to serving others. L.T. was born May 13, 1811 in Plymouth, New York and married Mary Ann Williamson in Spafford, New York in 1832. November 10 of that year L.T. and Mary Ann were baptized into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS).

Moving to Church headquarters in Kirtland, Ohio in 1833, L.T. was blessed "...to nurse and heal the sick." According to the practice of the early 1800s, L.T. studied medicine under the direction of a doctor until ready to serve as a physician. One of his famous patients was Brigham Young. He continued to serve as a doctor and as a surgeon almost 40 years before his death in Richfield, Utah at the age of 61.

L.T. traveled far and wide by carriage tending to the sick in Mills County while it was yet a part of Pottawattamie County, and later when he helped organize Mills County. He was called in January 1848 to serve as Bishop of the Church at Bethlehem and "...the lower area."

The so-called lower area stretched south from Bethlehem 20 miles to include Plum Hollow, or today's Thurman, and other branches of the Church. Included in his church duties, before organization of the county, were those of a church court judge in which he was asked to hear "...all civil cases, cases of difference, debts, immoral conduct, etc."

Six months later, L.T. moved seven miles east of Bethlehem to establish a new town called Coonsville. Like Bethlehem, Coonsville was carefully surveyed with streets running north and south, east and west. Main Street and Broadway, crossing each other in the center of town, were 80 feet wide. All other streets were 60 feet wide. Each block was 336 feet square and divided into only four lots. That was back in the days when gardening was for the dinner table.

As his new town was being built, Bishop Coons was called to go on mission in the eastern States "...to raise means by donations and public contributions for the purpose of establishing schools in this frontier territory..." L.T. responded, taking his counselor, David Gamet, with him. They visited, among other places, Chicago, Illinois, Detroit, Michigan, and Syracuse, New York. Biographer Daniel D. Coons was unable to find a report on the amount of money, books, or other supplies raised by Coons and Gamet. But the 1850 Census of Pottawattamie County found many LDS schools in operation, with a healthy registration of students.

A May 1849 letter, found in the Union Branch (Coonsville) records by researcher Daniel Coons, assigned Bishop Coons to visit, counsel, and preach to his

CALENDAR *of Events*

Saturday, June 25

1:30 p.m.

Jarene Fluckiger will give a presentation on "Amy Sumner Porter: A Winter Quarters Pioneer Who is Buried at Winter Quarters with her Twin Boys".

Friday, July 15

7:30 p.m.

Saturday, July 16

7:30 p.m.

"Preparing the Way: A Visit with Pioneer Anna Clark Hale." A one woman play in one act by Carole Waterman.

Saturday, August 27

1:30 p.m.

"Mormon Pioneer Days of Crescent, Iowa" **Auto tour** to historic sites in Crescent, Iowa.

Friday, September 23

6:30 p.m.

Annual Meeting and Election of Officers, Dutch Oven Pioneer Dinner and Special Presentation.

Friday, October 7

7:30 p.m.

Saturday, October 8

7:30 p.m.

"Voices of Winter Quarters" A play written and directed by Carole Waterman, performed at the Kanesville Tabernacle.

No Meetings Scheduled for November and December.

All meetings are held at the Mormon Trail Center unless otherwise noted.

*3215 State Street
Omaha, NE 68112*

Schedule subject to change.



Florence celebrates its heritage with a parade and other activities the third weekend of May 2005. Organized by the Florence Historical Foundation, the parade continues a tradition that started with a horse club parade in 1962.

This year's parade will commence at 1:00p.m. on Saturday, May 21 on 30th Street from Miller Park to McKinley Street. During the celebration, a children's carnival and music will be at Mormon Park, from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

The Mormon Trail Center and the Pioneer Heritage Society will have a booth set up at Mormon Park.

In next month's newsletter, look for an interview with Carole Waterman.

Carole talks about her one woman play in one act, "Preparing the Way: A Visit With Pioneer Anna Clark Hale."

HISTORY OF BETHLEHEM, COONSVILLE, AND OF LEBBEUS THADDEUS COONS *continued*

branch in Coonsville, Martindale's Branch in Bethlehem, Gardiner's Branch in Plum Hollow (now Thurman), and other branches in Dutch Hollow, Green Hollow, Dawsonburg, and Big Grove (now Oakland, Iowa).

We wonder how this busy doctor found the time to volunteer help for others. Before Mills County was carved out of Pottawattamie County in 1851 and legally established, Church leaders (probably Orson Hyde and counselors in Kanesville/Council Bluffs) called for volunteers to build houses for the poor. L.T. pledged and donated 10 days of labor on those houses.

L.T. was elected August 18, 1851 in Mills County's first election to serve as county prosecuting attorney. If he wasn't busy before, a gang of 30 or 40 men on horseback with guns rode into the new county, probably from near the Missouri state line, and kept him busy. They stopped land and property sales, forced courts to close, and jostled and threatened church members on the street.

Most good members of the Church simply moved out, since they planned to move on to Utah soon. L.T. sent his family on to Utah. He stayed in Coonsville until late 1853 or early 1854. Then he moved 55 miles north to Galland's Grove to be near two of his married children. L.T. also moved to Galland's Grove to be near Chany Williamson, brother of L.T.'s wife, Mary Ann. Finally he moved to the mouth of Soldier River on the Missouri. There he farmed and advertised in the *Magnolia Republican*:

DR. L.T. COONS, Physician and Surgeon may be found at his home near the Mouth of the Soldier, when not away on county calls.

When members of his extended family moved to Utah in 1864, L.T. ended his long stay in Iowa and moved to Utah in 1865.

For the entire presentation by Historian Gail Holmes, please visit our website at www.pioneerheritage.org.

A Quilt Show "Cherished Treasures"

at the Mormon Trail Center - 3215 State Street

Open Daily 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. from May 2 to May 21

No Admission Charge

*For more information, please call
(402) 453-9372*