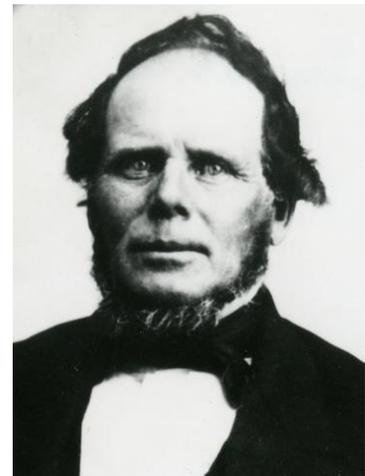


ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: Hill Cottage Tavern and Clover Lawn

It is possible to trace [the roots of Elmhurst](#) as we know it to a single building that still stands today as a private residence at 413 S. York Street. Though no longer sitting in its original location at the northeast corner of Cottage Hill and St. Charles Road, the story of Hill Cottage house spans the entirety of Elmhurst's history, including the original founding of our community.

In 1842, a settler by the name of Gerry Bates arrived in the Elmhurst area from his home near Painesville, Ohio. After purchasing a large tract of land on the north side of St. Charles Road, which was a primary stagecoach route westward from Chicago to the Fox River Valley, he returned to Ohio to settle his affairs. In the spring of 1843, Bates dispatched his brother-in-law, John L. Hovey, to build a home on the property. Bates and his family finally arrived at the newly constructed home in 1845. At this point Hovey, had been managing the house as a stagecoach stop and tavern, which was known by locals as Hill Cottage.



Gerry Bates (1800-1878), M2014.1.267

There are two stories as to how the name Hill Cottage came to exist. Gerry's son, Frederick, recalled years later that his father hailed from a community in Ohio called Hill House, and that origin had informed the name of the cottage in Illinois. Another account credits the name with the fact that the house had been built on the highest elevation for nearly two miles in every direction, which led to travelers referring to the home as the "Cottage on the Hill." Either way, John L. Hovey petitioned for a [post office location](#) at his tavern in under the name Cottage Hill, which was granted by the U.S. Postal Service on December 9, 1845. The roadside tavern was the heart of the fledgling settlement that bore its name.

However, the arrival of the Galena & Chicago Union railway in Cottage Hill in 1849 brought an end to Hill Cottage's place in the center of the community. Gerry Bates built a new home on Prospect Street (present day W. Park Avenue) after providing the right-of-way to the railroad company on the north side of his property in exchange for an allowance to build a general store next to the new train depot. A new post office building was also built next to his home, moving the center of Cottage Hill northwards from the St. Charles Road-York Street intersection to the new York Street railroad crossing. The Bates family sold the Hill Cottage property in 1851, and platted the Town of Cottage Hill around the new train depot in 1853.

Although no longer serving as a tavern or post office, Hill Cottage had an illustrious second act in the latter part of the nineteenth century, serving as the home of several notable figures in Chicago's high

society. The property was acquired by Chicago businessman [Thomas Barbour Bryan](#) in 1856 to serve as a temporary home while he awaited the completion of his Bird's Nest estate house on the southwest corner of York and St. Charles. In 1857, Bryan sold Hill Cottage to his friend and renowned portrait artist [G.P.A. Healy](#). Inspired by the lawn of pink clover in front the house, Healy began referring to the home as Clover Lawn. Healy and his family spent the Civil War years at the old tavern before selling the property in 1864 to move to Chicago, where he owned a painting studio.



*Clover Lawn, formerly Hill Cottage, in the 1880s,
M2013.1.107*

In 1867, Clover Lawn was acquired by Chicago clothing merchant Henry W. King, who intended to use it as a summer cottage. The home became a refuge for friends and family of the Kings after the [Great Chicago Fire](#) in October 1871. The Kings sold Clover Lawn in 1872 and eventually acquired the White Birch estate, which we know today as the Wilder Mansion. In 1873, Clover Lawn was acquired by the millionaire lawyer Mahlon Ogden, brother to the first mayor of Chicago. The Ogden family summered in Elmhurst for a decade before renting the cottage to bookselling magnate A.C. McClurg in 1882. In 1888, Clover Lawn was purchased by prominent Chicago lawyer Owen F. Aldis, who resided in the home until 1891.

At that time, Chicago businessman Frank Sturges was constructing a gigantic granite home just to the east of Clover Lawn, where Sturges Parkway is located today. Wanting to clear the block of neighbors, Sturges bought the old cottage and sold it to [John R. Case](#), who had promised to relocate the home. Case owned a cherry orchard at the southeast corner of York Street and St. Charles Road, and he moved the home to his property and renamed it "Orchard House." It remains at that site to present day.

In 1936, the local Daughters of the American Revolution chapter placed a historical marker at the original location of Hill Cottage in observance of Elmhurst's [Centennial Celebration](#). This plaque can still be seen on the east side of Cottage Hill Avenue, just to the north of St. Charles Road. At that time, early Elmhurst historian Laura Kendall Thomas wrote a few words about the present owners of the home that still ring true today:

"Because of their affectionate regard for its long history, interested visitors in Elmhurst may now see the original inn with its colonial front door and picture for themselves Hill Cottage as it once stood on the highest point of prairie land and imagine how welcome was the light shining through its tiny window panes to the traveler on the lonely St. Charles Road of the early 1840s."

By Daniel Lund, Elmhurst History Museum Staff, October 2021