

Transcript of the Benjamin F. Harris Obituary
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DIED FULL OF YEARS

Benjamin F. Harris Expires at
The Age of Nearly 94.

On Sunday Morning, May 7

After Illness of Scarcely More Than a Week.

DEMISE OF A PROMINENT MAN

Who Was an Active Influence in This
Community for Upwards of
Seventy Years.

Died at his home on the 500 block, West Church Street, Champaign, on Sunday, May 7, 1905 at 5:20 a.m., Benjamin Franklin Harris, in the 94th year of his age.

Mr. Harris had been but a short time sick. Throughout the past winter he had been in his usual health. In the latter days of April, he took to a cold which seemed to affect his lungs, and on Sunday, April 30, he took to his bed. Pneumonic symptoms began to develop, and by the middle of the week his condition was found to be alarming. The seriousness of his case increased, until both sides of the lungs became involved, and he passed away peacefully at the hour already stated.

Mr. Harris was born near Winchester, VA., Dec. 15, 1811. His father was William Hickman Harris, whose father Benjamin Harris and two brothers came to America about 1726 and settled on the east coast of Maryland. His mother was Elizabeth Payne, a cousin of Dolly Payne, who became Dolly Madison, wife of James Madison, fourth President of the United States.

Mr. Harris grew to manhood in Virginia, and his family removed to Clark County, Ohio, in 1833. There he engaged with one James Foley, to assist in driving cattle from Ohio to Lancaster, Pa. This experience led him to come to the prairies of Illinois, where he bought cattle to be driven east. In this occupation he got acquainted with Illinois lands, and made his first purchase, an 80 acre tract, about a mile east of the present city of Springfield. Later he sold that and in 1835 bought 160 acres now lying in the west edge of Champaign county. This was the beginning of his land buying. He continued in the cattle business, buying, grazing, and driving them eastward to market, till in 1841, he had accumulated considerable means and had become the owner of 500 acres of land in the western part of this country. On June 22, of that year, in the log house which still stands on the Harris farm, near the Sangamon river, he was married to Elizabeth Sage of Circleville, O.

From that time onward, he devoted himself to farming and live stock, and to the last day of his life, there was not a year in which he was not in the cattle market, a seller and a buyer. For more than 72 years he was engaged in this line of trade and no man in the business, east or west, was more widely known. He was a buyer and feeder here before there was any such thing as a Chicago cattle market. Chicago in fact had less than (illegible) inhabitants when he began operations in live stock on these wild

prairies. In later years he fed and marketed in Chicago the heaviest 100 head of cattle ever marketed in the country by any one feeder, and, so far as records show, in the world. Of this achievement he was always especially proud, and cattlemen everywhere to this day refer to it as an astonishing thing.

In his early life on these prairies social and religious privileges were very few. The first religious service ever held in the west part of this county was held in his log house on the Sangamon, the distinguished Peter Cartwright being the preacher. Later he built a church on his own lands, and his house was for many years the home and shelter of all the itinerant preachers coming through this section. He was a Methodist from his early manhood days, and always a reliable and liberal contributor to the support of the church.

In politics he was originally a Whig and later and till his death, a Republican. He was never a politician, but he was a radical supporter of the doctrines of his party, and personally knew nearly all the early Republican workers in the state. He was a personal friend of Abraham Lincoln whom he frequently entertained at his home. At the polls in this city in 1904 just after he cast his ballot for Theodore Roosevelt, he stated to the gentlemen around the polling place that he had just then cast his nineteenth vote for a President of the United States. His first was cast for Henry Clay in 1832.

It is worth noting that he brought the first sawmill into the county, the first mowing machine, the first double-seated carriage and the first reed organ or melodeon. The old house on the Harris farm is finished in Walnut sawed out of his sawmill. The story of his early hardships and triumphs would fill columns. He frequently marketed wheat from his Champaign county farm in St. Louis and Chicago, with ox teams, the round trip requiring about twenty days, and the price being realized being about 30c a bushel.

In 1863 he removed to Champaign and occupied the house in which he spent the rest of his days.

In 1865 he organized the First National Bank of Champaign, and served continuously as its president till his death. His farming and live stock operations he conducted from his home in the city. Success marked all his enterprises from his youth up. While for the last 30 or 35 years of his life he found himself under little necessity to devote himself rigidly to business, he never abandoned interest therein, and his judgment and decision in business affairs were as unerring and almost as prompt as they ever had been.

Surviving him are his wife and two of the nine children who were born to him, Mr. H.H. Harris and Mrs. Rachel Phillippe. He had nine brothers and sisters and of these, but one, Mrs. Jane Smith of Florence, Col., is living. She is about 80 years old. It is notable that, of his family, representatives of five generations have lived in this city.

The funeral services occurred at the Harris home, Tuesday at 2 p.m. conducted by Dr. H.H. Oneal, former pastor of the local First Methodist church, assisted by Rev. Chris Galeener, pastor of the church. Interment was in the family lot in Mt. Hope cemetery.

Note: The final two paragraphs of this obituary list the honorary and active pallbearers.