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What's in a name?

by Dave Oberg

This year, Geneva residents will be celebrating the community's demisemiseptcentennial. For the uninitiated, this rather lengthy term simply signifies a 175th anniversary. Literally, it translates to $1/2 \times 1/2 \times 7 \times 100$, which equals 175! While the term demisemiseptcentennial may seem intimidating, it is certainly no excuse to miss celebrating a community milestone.

Our charming city on the Fox River traces its origins to 1835, when James and Charity Herrington arrived with their sizable family. Technically, there were settlers here prior to the Herringtons' arrival, but the Herringtons put down permanent stakes and helped to transform the handful of loosely affiliated claims into a thriving community. The Herringtons built a double log cabin and general store on their property, which served as an important hub for early gatherings.

James Herrington's store acted as the community's first post office and was the site of the first county elections. Naturally, Herrington's careful work with Colonel Richard Jones Hamilton in establishing Kane County ensured that the tiny river



Artist's rendering of the wild prairie that greeted the area's first settlers. Illustration from *Past and Present of Kane County*, published in 1878.

town took the plumb role of county seat. There was, however, the matter of naming the settlement.

Initially, early residents in this area referred to their community as Big Spring. As the Herringtons improved their claim, others began referring to the settlement as "Herrington's Ford." The name "Campbell Ford" in honor of early commissioners James Campbell and Thomas Ford was rather immodestly proposed as well. Herrington himself worked to establish an official post office designation for the area, and referred to it as "La Fox." Federal recognition of La Fox, P.O. would come in March of 1836, two months before residents formally adopted the name of Geneva.

Dr. Charles Volney Dyer, a noted Chicago Abolitionist, is credited

with suggesting the name Geneva. Many of Kane County's cities and villages bear names from upstate New York, such as Aurora, Oswego, and Batavia, and Geneva fit in nicely. However, it should be noted that the La Fox P.O. designation lingered as late as 1850. So, when you celebrate Geneva's demisemiseptcentennial with us on August 14, give a cheer for Big Spring, Herrington's Ford, Campbell Ford and La Fox P.O., too.

Mark Your Calendars: The Geneva History Center is planning a 175th birthday party for the City of Geneva on Saturday, August 14 from 4–8 pm. Residents are invited to bring their picnic baskets and blankets and join us for an old-fashioned community party on the Court House lawn at Third and Campbell Streets.

Dave Oberg is the Executive Director of the Geneva History Center

GENEVA
175 YEARS



Geneva's Demisemiseptcentennial logo, created by artist Sally Ruark