

The Nelson Manbeck House

Naperville Heritage Society History Stories

The house at 307 E. North Ave., known as the Nelson A. Thomas/Levi Manbeck House, built in 1844, is older than the subdivision surrounding it. The Manbeck Subdivision of the City of Naperville was mapped and recorded in 1907. The house, though covered in board and batten siding and stripped of its classical features, is much older. How would an old house end up in a 1907 subdivision?



The wide, open Illinois prairie attracted many East Coast natives who felt landlocked and crowded. Levi Manbeck, a native Pennsylvanian, came to Naperville in 1847 to farm and to raise a family. Within a few short years, he made the acquaintance of Nelson A. Thomas, his next door neighbor and a fellow farmer; if we can believe the 1850 Federal Census. In 1850, Levi and his new bride were just 28 and most likely were living with or on the same property as the 45-year-old Nelson Thomas and his family. Nelson Thomas must have been an early settler to Naperville. He is listed as a member of the Big Woods Protection Society (1836), DuPage County Treasurer in 1847, and in 1853, a proprietor of the Pre- Emption House. It should be noted that General E.B. Bill, also a manager of the Pre-Emption House and Amander P. Thomas were members of the Naperville Lyceum. The Lyceum was a debating society where men met to discuss topics of interest for the benefit of the community. The connection between Amander and Nelson Thomas has not been ascertained, but it would appear that they are related.

Levi Manbeck's brother, Henry, came to Naperville in 1853 and purchased a farm a few miles east of town. Levi farmed the land with Henry for nearly 30 years before he semi-retired as a gardener. Levi must have saved his money as he proceeded to buy the seven lots surrounding the Thomas house lot. When he died in 1902, his family was left with a large parcel of land about the size of two city blocks. This parcel was bounded on the north by the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad, on the east by Loomis, on the south by North, and on the west by Ellsworth. By 1907, the heirs agreed to annex the property to the official plat of Naperville and called it the "Manbeck Subdivision" in honor of Levi Manbeck.

Over the years, the home was used to house North Central College students, as a boarding house and as rental property.

History Stories are developed by the Naperville Heritage Society Research Library and Archives staff at Naper Settlement. As a bountiful resource for learning about a variety of topics related to Naperville, they provide unique insights into the past. For more information, please call the Curatorial Department at 630.305.3535.

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