

Claridge Stone House

by Karen Ruhland Beth

William Claridge was born in Leicestershire, England, April 14, 1816. Elizabeth Felstend was born April 10, 1810. William and Elizabeth were married on April 19, 1841. William and Elizabeth departed for America on May 9, 1847 on the ship called the Washington at Liverpool, England. The ship manifest lists both William's and Elizabeth's occupation as a shoemaker. Their two children, George and Ann, came with them. Landing at New Orleans on July 20, 1847 the family came north up the Mississippi River partly on a steamboat and settled on a farm near Sun Prairie in Dane County, Wisconsin, where Alice was born. July 1850 they relocated to land in the southern part of Franklin Township, Sauk County, Wisconsin. After arriving the William Claridge family stored their china and clothes in a small dry cave across the road and proceeded to build a log house and to clear the land for farming. William, Jr., was born two years later. On this fertile farm the Claridges prospered.

The William Claridge family quarried beautiful stone from their Franklin farm which they used to build a large eight-room, three-story house, with four-rooms on each of the two stories above the basement. The walls are made of limestone and the basement of sandstone. The inside of the basement walls show the remnants of white paint with a black or dark blue-stenciled border. The original woodwork is still intact and the window wells are 15-inches deep throughout the house. All the rooms except the kitchen are painted two different colors, with the ceiling color coming 1-foot down on the walls. Was this a common style of painting? Was it leftover from the Claridges or from the Hetzels? The year 1856 carved into a limestone in the wall of the house can be seen inside the enclosed porch. The enclosed porch was likely added after the Claridges sold the farm. The precision cutting and laying of every cornerstone in all the walls can be appreciated when looking at this fine old home.



This beautiful stone house is still standing where it was built 151 years ago, on Weidner Road just beyond the Paulus Road intersection. This same farm in later years was owned and operated by Mike Hetzel, then by his son Frank Hetzel, and presently by Wayne and Geraldine Bindl.

Imagine the excitement in the local settlements when the Claridges were building their wonderful limestone house. Were their neighbors helping them? Were meals shared

when help was given in raising the stones to build the walls? There are many unanswered questions.

Is this the oldest house still standing in Franklin Township? OFTHS would like your help in determining:

- What is the oldest house still standing in Franklin Township?
- What is the oldest house still standing in the Village of Plain?

If you have any suggestions or information to help us answer these questions, please contact one of the officers listed on the back page of this newsletter.

The Claridge families are a good example of chain migration. One can guess that William wrote to his relatives in England, sharing the news of their good times in Franklin Township. William's nephew Thomas W. Claridge, age 19, and his wife, Hannah Pollitt, age 18, were married in August 1856 and immediately sailed for America. They settled in the White Mound area in the northern part of Franklin Township. His father was also named Thomas. Thomas, Sr. was William's brother. In 1858 Thomas's parents also came to the White Mound area. They settled on Thomas's land and he bought more next to them.

William's wife Elizabeth died February 13, 1881 and was buried in the Pleasant Hill Cemetery on Highway B west of Plain. William married Abigail Bear (widow of John Bear) in the Dakota Territory on October 11, 1881. They then moved to Spring Green, WI, where they lived the rest of their days. William died April 23, 1898 and Abigail died July 25, 1915. Both were buried in the Spring Green Cemetery.

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