

OLDEST PIONEER DEAD

December 6, 1907, page 1 *Homer Enterprise*

IN THE DEATH OF DR. W. A. CONKEY THE LONG AND USEFUL CAREER OF A GOOD MAN IS ENDED

One more of Homer's pioneers has passed away. Dr. William Alexander Conkey died at his home in Homer, Monday, Dec. 2, 1907. He was born Dec. 6, 1820, in the Berkshire hills of north-western Massachusetts, at Charlemont, Franklin county. Had he lived until Friday, just four days more, he would have been 87 years old.

Dr. Conkey was first married in 1843 to Miss Elizabeth Wilson. Their two children died in infancy and the mother soon followed them into the other life.

On May 31, 1849, Dr. Conkey married Miss Sarah V. Saddler, a young lady who with her parents, had come from Virginia and settled in Vermilion county, Ill. Dr. and Mrs. Conkey made their home in Homer township, where they continued a long and happy life together until the death of the wife, Mar. 4, 1905.

To this union were born ten children, seven of whom are still living, recorded as follows: Aubert J., Byron M., who died when four years old, Francis and a babe both died in infancy, Lucy, Bruce T., Carl A., Emma S., Frank M. and Fred B. All reside at Homer with the exception of Emma, the wife of E. P. Babb, whose home is in Champaign. There are living twelve grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

Dr. Conkey not only lived to an unusual age, far beyond the allotted "tree score years and ten," but the history of his life is full of interest. Born in the Berkshire Hills he seemed to have inherited something of their rugged strength.

Wm. Conkey was a boy of ten years, when in 1830 his parents, Alexander and Lucy (McCulloch) Conkey, left the hills of Massachusetts for the more fertile regions and larger opportunities of the new west. The history of this journey as related by Dr. Conkey in a paper read before the Champaign Historical Society is full of interest. There being no railroads and the wagon roads in many places being little more than Indian trails, the journey was one of hardship and privation and attended with many dangers. They traveled in various ways, with horses and wagons, by canal boat across New York State, by ship across lake Erie, by flat boat up the Maumee river, by canoe down the Wabash river and from there ending the long journey with an ox team.

Dr. Conkey was not only an early, an honored pioneer of Champaign county, but also of the State of Illinois. His first home in this state was a log cabin; his early schooling was acquired in a log cabin. Later, in 1838, he began the study of medicine at the medical college in Louisville, Ky. He became a skilled physician, and for about ten years he continued the active practice of medicine, when he turned his attention to farming and stock raising.

He early began life for himself. It was in 1843, at the age of 23 years, that he came from Edgar county, Ill., to Homer township, and with \$2.50 bought a lot in the village that was once known

as Old Homer over on the creek. In 1856 he took a prominent part in the removal of Old Homer to its present site, and in this vicinity he spent over sixty years of his active life.

Dr. Conkey always took an active interest in public affairs and was a man whose wisdom and judgment was sought and respected by the community. He had been prominent in the affairs of his township, representing it on the board of supervisors for ten successive years, serving as justice-of-the-peace, commissioner of highways and president of the village council, besides being called upon to assist to many important measures for the general public good.

Socially he was a member in high standing of the Masonic fraternity. He was the last charter member of the Homer lodge, having been a member of the order for 55 years. He was master of the home lodge for about 12 years and was its first secretary. The lodge presented him a gold-headed cane at the celebration of its fiftieth anniversary last year.

In the death of Dr. Conkey Homer loses a time-honored citizen and one of her oldest pioneers.

One by one he had watched his companions of earlier years pass away until he was left like an ancient oak in the midst of a young forest. The memory of his long and active life will continue through the years to come in the hearts of his many friends.

Short funeral services were held at the late home of the deceased yesterday afternoon, conducted by Rev. A. E. Barrows, and were attended by a large concourse of friends. Services at the grave in G. A. R. cemetery were according to the impressive rites of the Masonic order under the direction of District Deputy H. W. Berks of Champaign. Homer lodge and many visiting brethren attended in a body.

Very Ill at Homer
Mr. Conkay, Aged Mason, at Point of Death
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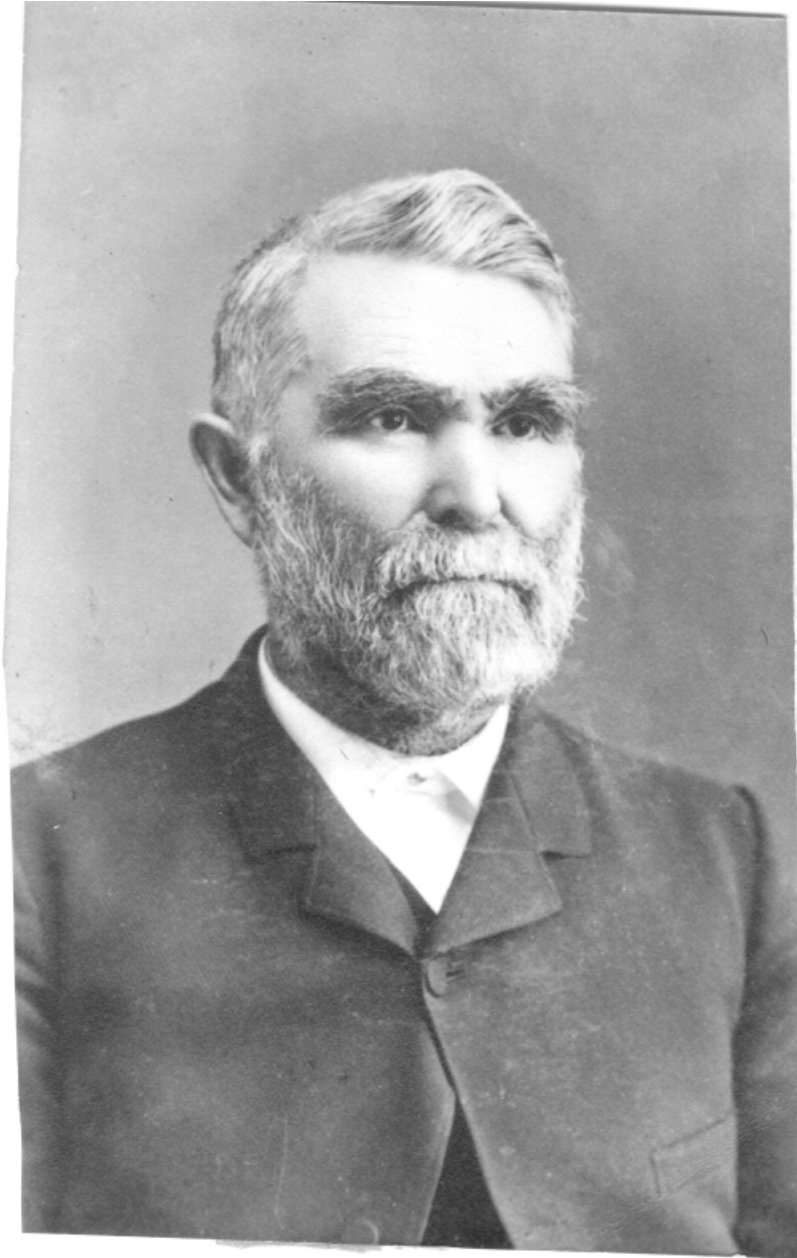
Homer, Ill., Nov. 29. — (Special to the Courier-Herald) — Dr. William A. Conkay, one of Homer's oldest citizens and one of the few survivors of Homer on the Creek, is in a dangerous condition at his home here, and his death is expected at any time. He is suffering with typhoid pneumonia.

Dr. Conkay came to Illinois with his parents in 1830 from Massachusetts and settled with them at Paris, Ill., where he remained ten years. In 1840 he moved to Homer, which was then located on Salt Fork, and opened a general store. Later he studied medicine and has been practicing ever since.

When the Wabash railroad was built and Homer was moved to its present site, Dr. Conkay moved with the town. In later years he invested in farming lands and now owns a magnificent country estate west of Homer. He was one of the organizers of the Liberty school district, in

which Governor J. Frank Hanly of Indiana received his first schooling. He has been quite prominent in politics and has held several political offices.

Dr. Conkay is an enthusiastic Mason and is the only surviving charter member of the Homer lodge. He is also a prominent member of the Presbyterian church.



al had broken into the Shadde residence at Rantoul.

Dr. Conkey of Homer, An Aged Mason, Dead After 86 Years of Life

Homer lost another of her old residents and Champaign county gave up one of her most useful and prominent citizens when Dr. W. A. Conkey died at 11:45 o'clock this morning at his home in Homer, aged 86 years, 11 months and 26 days. His demise was due to his advanced years and the complications arising from senility.



DR. W. A. CONKEY.
From Photograph Taken in 1890.

est member of the Masonic lodge in that village.

Dr. Conkey was born in Charlemont, Franklin county, Mass., Dec. 6, 1820, and moved to Edgar county, Ill., in 1830, coming to this county in 1843. He clerked in a store from 1832 to 1839, but in 1838 he commenced the study of medicine and in 1941 graduated at the medical college in Louisville. He became known as a skilled physician in old Homer, but in 1850 retired on account of the heavy work and bought a farm near Homer. In 1856 he took a prominent part in the removal of Homer to its present site, which was accomplished in a heavy snow, the houses being moved on sleds. In May, 1849, he married Miss Sarah V. Saddler, and to them were born the following children: Aubert, Lucy, Bruce, Frank, Emma and Fred.

In politics Dr. Conkey was a whig in the olden days, but later a staunch republican. He represented Homer township on the board of supervisors for several terms. Dr. Conkey loved to talk about the olden days in Homer. He could remember when there were only ten families in Homer and twenty-six families in the entire township. He was highly respected and greatly admired by the people of that vicinity, and his death has caused general regret.

The Busey Fifteen club will meet

DR. W. A. CONKEY DEAD

Aged Homer Resident Taken to His Reward.

Homer, Ill., Dec. 3.—Dr. W. A. Conkey died Monday from the ailments of old age.

He was born in Franklin county, Mass., on December 6, 1820, and came to this state at the age of ten years. On the 19th day of November, 1843, he married Miss Elizabeth Wilson. Two children were born, but both died in infancy. Mrs. Conkey died in 1847. The decedent in 1849 married Miss Sarah V. Saddler.

Dr. Conkey came to Homer township in 1843, previous to this time having lived in Edgar county. To the second union were born nine children, and the following seven are living, Albert J., Lucy, Preece T., Carl, Mrs. Emma Babb, Frank M. and Fred B.

The decedent was an extensive farmer and stock grower, and was one of the honored pioneers of the state. He was a member of the Masonic lodge, which will have charge of the funeral services to be held at 2 o'clock Wednesday afternoon at the residence. Interment will be made at G. A. R. cemetery.