


**WOOD DALE:
THEN AND NOW**

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Wood Dale, a small suburb unknown to most people but to those who live there, is a prospering city trying to reach recognition.

Wood Dale's history started way back in 1833 during the ending of the Blackhawk War. Ebenezer Duncklee, on his journey to settle in the West from Vermont, took the trail now known as Army Trail Road to a path along Salt Creek. He met General C. Scott who was returning to Chicago with Blackhawk to negotiate a treaty for the territory. He continued on his journey along a path known as Plank Trail until he reached the Meacham Brothers trading camp. They advised him to return to the "natural stance of trees" located south of Irving Park Road and east of Wood Dale Road. He took their advice and soon settled in what was to be the first cabin in Wood Dale.

In the spring of 1834, Ebenezer's brother Hezekiah brought his and Ebenezer's family to the territory. In the winter of 1834 three important things occurred. First, a daughter Julia was born to Hezekiah, recording the first birth of a white child in Addison Township. Second, Mason Smith died, recording the first death. Finally, one of their main food supplies, which was apples, had become rotten. After throwing them out the back door, the seeds germinated and the first apple orchards grew prosperously. 

In 1836 several families came into the area from the East. Among them were the Lesters, including six sons and a daughter. Two of the sons became important to the progress of the region. Marshall Lester married the cousin (Leventia) of P. T. Barnum of Barnum and Bailey Circus, which brought circus people to the area. In 1873 Frederick Lester brought the Chicago Milwaukee Railroad and the first depot on the corner of Grove and Commercial, through the help of his syndicate friends. The cheese factory, also started by Frederick Lester, was important because it was the first business of Dunklee's Grove and tempted other industries to move into the area. Later in 1890 the depot was moved to the northeast corner of Wood Dale and Irving, making it more suitable to the people.

The Duncklees and Lesters became related through the marriage of Frederick Lester and Julia Duncklee in 1859. Their home was situated on the corner of Grove and Irving. It is now known as Plenty Work Farm and is now the oldest house in Wood Dale.

In the 1850's a large German immigration invaded the area. They took over old farms that had failed many times and brought the people doctors, schools, churches, and Elmhurst College.

Also during 1859 Addison Township was incorporated. Duncklee's Grove, which was the area's name then, consisted on 100- to 200-acre farms. The main town at this time was Sagone (pronounced Sa-go-na), situated at the corner of Wood Dale Road and Thorndale.

The area of Wood Dale changed its name four times. The first, Duncklee's Grove, was named after Ebenezer Duncklee. The second, Lester's Station, was named after Frederick Lester, in 1899. Then in the 1900's the region was renamed to Wooddale by an unknown developer. Finally, in the 1940's, Matt Bauman, the town mayor, sought a postal franchise for Wooddale, but was turned down because three other towns had the same name. So he divided the name into two words, Wood Dale, and gained his postal franchise.

The 1920's were financially booming years, with Wood Dale being no exception. The farms along the railroad tracks were advertised as being suitable for chicken farming and soon the area was dotted with small white-framed houses. Wood Dale Road was connected to Lake Street in 1920 making easier access to Addison. The one-roomed Puttin Hill School, built in 1855, was moved and a year later Highland Elementary School was situated in its place. Because of the lack of children in the school system, Highland became a recreational center through the help of the Wood Dale Park District. In 1922 Sagone was abandoned, bringing the people from that region closer to the railroad tracks. Electricity and telephone lines were first introduced in 1923, beginning in the center of town. In 1928, Wood Dale was incorporated as a village. This was a direct result of a desire by the village of Itasca to build a sewer plant on the west bank of Salt Creek in anticipation of a large real estate development. Wood Dale did not want them on their territory.

In 1936, Wood Dale formed a volunteer fire department stating in a charter that our fire department allows us to fight fires wherever needed. This was brought on when Georgetown, north of Irving and west of York, was burned down because the Bensenville Fire Department could not cross over the south side of Irving. The people of Wood Dale were afraid that they did not have any fire protection. Wood Dale's first station, situated near the corner of Irving and Wood Dale, is now the Wood Dale Post Office. Wood Dale now has two stations situated where they would have easy access to the surrounding homes. In 1936 the farmers of Wood Dale appealed to the state legislature to let them withdraw from Wood Dale in order to ease their tax burden. Request was granted and Wood Dale returned to its city-like surroundings: a train station, general store, and an inn, incorporated within residential one-acre plots.

During the years of World War II the area stayed much the same. Prosperity increased from availability of war jobs and the population reached 738 despite the Depression. The 1950's proved to be another decade of booming years for Wood Dale. The returning servicemen and their families moved into the area, constituting individual homes and multiple family dwellings. The increase of children in the school system necessitated the building of more schools and churches. Included were Oakbrook and Highland Elementary Schools, Lutheran and Baptist churches, and Holy Ghost Catholic Church and school. Wood Dale Park District was formed, as well as a small library system in 1960. The increase of population to 1,848 created health problems, real and potential. A central water system for bad wells and a sewage treatment plant were to replace inadequate septic fields.

*Westview.
Highland built in 1921*

The early 1960's brought Royal Oaks subdivision, which now includes condominiums and many single family dwellings. Westview School was built to ease the enrollment of the other schools and in later years was added on to.

The late 1960's brought our first high rise to the area and a few years later Brookwood Towers was formed. To prevent flooding, storm sewers were added. The 1960's also saw the development of Klefsted Industrial Park and Georgetown, a commercial shopping center surrounded by townhouses and apartments. The Wood Dale cabin, organized in 1967, included an office for the park district. The Wood Dale Junior High School was ready for use in 1968. Population at this time reached 3,000.

The end of the 1960's and the beginning of the 1970's brought many changes. Of most importance was Wood Dale's annexation as a city in 1971. Other changes included real estate agencies moving into the area to push suburban development and new establishments known as gas stations.

The municipal building was built, housing many offices and the Wood Dale Police Department. It also changed our form of government from village to city. Elizabeth Drive, finished in October 1971, was built to alleviate the traffic problem on Irving Park Road. The Wood Dale Historical Society, started by Mrs. Mary Lou Mittel, preserved Wood Dale's history, from 1833 to present 1980, for all future families to enjoy. Located on Wood Dale Road, the Historical Society began as Mrs. Esther Rosenwinkel's home. But in December of 1973, Mrs. Rosenwinkel donated her house to the Society for use as a museum. As fellow Wood Dale residents donated their antique belongings to the museum, the Historical Society began to grow, and in 1978 celebrated Wood Dale's 50th year anniversary.

The 1970's saw two new subdivisions built, The Woods and Woodview. Holy Ghost Church was demolished in the beginning of 1980 and was replaced by a larger church and addition to the school to accommodate the growing community. The Georgetown Shopping Center found a need to double its size in order to keep up with the neighboring shopping centers and the great increase in population.

In 1833 Chicago was considered the West. People, through the confusion of the big cities, wanted freedom from the other states to expand the United States. Wood Dale also started this way. Ebenezer Duncklee, coming from Vermont with his family, was the first person to start this desire for freedom. Wood Dale still has its share of problems such as farming, transportation, housing, schooling, and even industry just as Chicago had, but to a much smaller degree. People also moved to Chicago from the South to escape the racial problem of slavery. In turn, people moved out of Chicago into suburbs just like Wood Dale to escape the same racial problems. Though Wood Dale prospered from a know-nothing region to a growing community, it still has not reached the high recognition Chicago has, but will definitely try in the years to come.