



J. B. Spencer House circa 1880

The Spencer Cousins' Brick Houses

By Bryan Thompson

In 1832 three brothers and one sister of the Spencer family settled in the town of De Kalb. As was common in that era close family members and neighbors moved together to new settlements so as to provide a ready work circle necessary for building shelter and clearing and tilling the soil in the era of hand labor. The family group moved to De Kalb from Manheim, Herkimer County New York.

The four were the children of Nathaniel Spencer and Sybil Axtell Spencer. The children and their spouses were: Dwight Spencer and Eliza Wood Spencer, Orin Spencer and Patience Wood Spencer, William C. Spencer and Maria Kingsley Spencer, Polly Spencer Rundell and Obadiah K. Rundell.

The four siblings with their families all settled around East De Kalb; Dwight near Redrock, Orin on the East De Kalb Rd, William C. at the intersection of what is today Brice Rd and County Route 17, and Obadiah and Polly Rundell on the Jeffers Rd.

Each of the siblings raised large families and were quite successful. Dwight Spencer was central in organizing the East De Kalb Methodist church and served as town supervisor. In 1849 he sold his De Kalb farm and moved to a farm on the St Lawrence River in Lisbon. He is buried in East De Kalb. All the other siblings remained in the town of De Kalb.

The brick houses the Spencer's built were built by the second generation as they became more established on prosperous developed farms. John B. Spencer was one of the oldest children of Orin Spencer. He and his wife Delilah purchased a farm from his father and Uncle William Spencer in 1854. The farm was situated near the intersection of Ideauma Rd and County Rt. 17.

At the time the main road through the area was the Gravel Rd (abandoned) and Ideauma Rd. leading directly from East De Kalb to the Canton Old De Kalb Rd. In 1865 they built the first Spencer Brick house on this property.

Meanwhile, up the Ideauma Rd., John Hemenway and his wife Clarissa Spaulding Hemenway (a cousin of John B. Spencer through the Rundells) purchased wild land in 1855. By 1867 the Hemenways were ready to build a permanent house. The second Spencer brick house was built at this time.

John Hemenway was a very successful business man. By 1875 he had purchased and paid for a second farm in Russell as well as his home in De Kalb. That year he rented out the De Kalb farm to his daughter Watie Hemenway Carney and her husband Stephen Carney. He rented the Russell farm to another daughter Lillian Hemenway Farmer and her husband George H. Farmer. John and Clarissa Hemenway moved to Canton and lived off the rental incomes for the rest of their lives.

The Carney's lived in the brick house for 30 years but never owned it while they lived in it. Watie would inherit it after her mother's death in 1899. Their daughter, Grace Carney Fairbanks and her husband Perley Fairbanks took over the lease in 1892 when Stephen Carney died. Grace eventually inherited the property in 1928 after the death of her mother Watie Carney.

Christopher C. Spencer was the youngest son of Orin and Patience Woods Spencer. When he came of age, he took over his father's farm on the East De Kalb Rd. In 1884, following the family tradition, Christopher and his wife Florence Putman Spencer had the third Spencer brick home built.

Two of the three Spencer brick houses have stood the test of time and still stand today. A testament to one pioneer family's determination to tame the wilderness and create a comfortable life here.



Christopher C Spencer House circa 1884.



Circa 1884 The Spencer family enjoy their new parlor in their brick home.
Left to right: Orin C. Spencer, Patience Spencer, unknown, Florence Spencer, and Christopher C Spencer.



Two views of the Hemenway, Carney, Fairbanks House Ideauma Rd.