

## Old Rural Mail Carrier

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To see Rochester grow from a group of five log cabins to a busy metropolis, to see quarter sections of farmland which were preempted for two hundred dollars sell for fifty thousand dollars, to see the Indian, the big game and the forests swiftly disappear to be replaced by the white man with his well cultivated and well stocked farms, his bustling cities and beautiful parks has been the experience of Talisen Williams, Rochester's oldest citizen in point of years of residence, and one of the oldest mail carriers in the employ of the local post office.

Tal Williams as he is known to scores of friends throughout the county, saw Rochester the first time in January, 1856 when he was a boy eleven years of age. Five log cabins, three on the west side of the river and two on the east bank, were the only indication that the party had that the city had been reached when after a long, cold journey the Williams family completed their drive from Iowa. Today Mr. Williams chuckles over the memory of that first glimpse of the city as he thought of his mother, Hanna Williams, who wanted to know how much farther it was to Rochester as they passed along what is now Broadway.

Mr. Williams preempted a quarter section southwest of the city, the same which is now the approximate center of Dr. Charles Mayo's beautiful country estate. "We could have had a quarter of a section of land that is now within the city limits," said Mr. Williams, "but my mother wanted some with a good bit of timber on it." Deer and black bear were plentiful in those early days. "I shot at lots of them," said Mr. Williams in response to the reporter's question, "but I was only a little fellow then and didn't get much."

Indians were plentiful the first few years that the Williams family spent in Rochester. There were three camps in the spring of 1856, one north of the quarter preempted by Fred Proddger, now North Rochester, another smaller camp northwest of the city, and another just south of College Hill. There were between three and four hundred Indians in the vicinity, according to Mr. Williams. All were harmless and on good terms with the whites.

Potatoes and buckwheat were the only crops raised the first year. "We heard that there was a mill at Preston," Mr. Williams explained, "and we drove there only to find that the mill was not ready for business. Then we drove to Decorah, Iowa where we get the crop ground. The trip took us three weeks."

Even the climate has changed since "Tal" spent his first winter here. "We used to have some real winters," said Mr. Williams reminiscently. "Snow three feet deep wasn't at all uncommon." The rivers were bigger too, due to the absence of cultivated land, he said. The dams which are as permanent as the hills in the eyes of the younger generation, were yet unbuilt in the spring of 1856 although the Old Stone mill was started in that year.

As for electric lights, railroads, and telephones, they came when Mr. Williams was already one of Rochester's old residents.

Although now seventy six years of age, Mr. Williams enjoys excellent health and could easily be taken for one twenty years younger than he is.

He drives over rural route No. 2 daily regardless of weather, and has done so for the past thirteen years.