



Edward M. Wilson and Caroline's new commemorative tombstone.

not far from this rest area. Among the many items auctioned that long ago autumn were numerous books, a sign of literacy as well as prosperity on the Illinois frontier. The auction records, and numerous court papers associated with the Wilson estate, Kingsbury guardianship, and subsequent lawsuits, provide a valuable insight into the legal, social, and cultural life on the Illinois frontier.

There is a wealth of history associated with Edward M. Wilson, the Irish immigrant who came to America as a teenager in 1802, fought for his adopted country in the Battle of North Point, and migrated to the west in 1832. He exemplifies the hardy pioneers who came to the infant state of Illinois and began the process of making the wild prairie bloom with cultivated crops. His life of accomplishment, and dedication to country, should serve

as an inspiration to all who come to visit his final resting place.

Information for this article was contributed by the Archives Department of the Danville Public Library, the Illiana Genealogical and Historical Society, and the National Archives.



To learn more about Vermilion County's history, visit the Vermilion County Museum
116 N. Gilbert Street, Danville, IL.
www.vermilioncountymuseum.org

To learn more about Abraham Lincoln and the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area visit:
www.lookingforlincoln.com

Pioneer Cemetery Salt Kettle Rest Area I-74 Oakwood, Illinois

Maintained by the
Vermilion County Museum Society
under the auspices of the
Illinois Department of Transportation
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

Pioneer Cemetery

This pristine family burial plot is representative of numerous tiny cemeteries that were created as the nation's frontier expanded west. The cemetery was renovated and a woodland trail established to it by the Vermilion County Museum Society under the auspices of the Illinois Department of Transportation, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

The Pioneer Cemetery was established on land owned by Edward M. Wilson, and he was interred there on September 4, 1840. The cemetery is also known as Searl Cemetery, named for a subsequent land owner. On Wilson's grave stone it was recorded he came to America from Ireland in 1802, fought in the Battle of North Point in the War of 1812, and came west in 1832. The Battle of North Point was part of the greater Battle of Baltimore where Francis Scott Key wrote the words to what became the national anthem. It was the information on Wilson's deteriorated stone that sparked the restoration of the cemetery, and research of his life.

When Wilson came to Vermilion County he began purchasing land from the federal government. In the 1830s, he and his three young sons, James, Joseph, and John William, built a homestead on land not a great distance from where he was laid to rest. Wilson eventually accumulated more than a thousand acres of land, including the area where the Salt Kettle Rest Area is located. He paid \$1.25 an acre for the government land.

In the saline river valley, not far from Wilson's homestead and the Pioneer Cemetery, salt was being rendered from brine provided by deep wells. One of the

original kettles used in the process is on exhibit at this rest area.

In 1834, Wilson made out a will, showing great compassion for his son, William, who was "partially deaf" and his niece, Sarah, who had assisted him when he lost his "beloved wife." He named his friends Doctor William H. Fithian and Samuel McRoberts as executors. Fithian would become a political associate, friend, and client of Abraham Lincoln. McRoberts would be the first native born Illinoisan to serve in the United States Senate.

In 1835, Wilson married Caroline Searl; he was fifty years old and she was twenty-four. Prior to their marriage, he and Searl signed a prenuptial agreement. One of the witnesses to the agreement was Isaac P. Walker, a Danville attorney, who became one of the first United States senators elected from the state of Wisconsin. Wilson was a wealthy individual when this marriage took place and, though he did not leave Caroline a full share of his estate, he did provide for her in the agreement. Two children were born to this union.

When Wilson died in 1840, he left a sizeable estate. Enoch Kingsbury, a pioneer Presbyterian minister from Danville, was appointed guardian of his five minor children. Wilson's son John was deceased, and his namesake son Edward, born to him and Caroline, would die before the estate was closed. Edward's grave marker is one of the stones still visible in the Pioneer Cemetery. James, Joseph, William, and Caroline, named for her mother, shared the inheritance. Reverend Kingsbury kept excellent records of his expenditures and receipts while guardian.

In May 1851, Abraham Lincoln and John H. Murphy, representing the Wilson heirs, brought suit against Kingsbury and others who had signed his guardianship bond. It



Edward M. Wilson's original stone.

was argued he had mishandled assets of the estate. The heirs were attempting to gain the \$12,000 bond Kingsbury and others had guaranteed. Lincoln and Murphy lost the case.

In October 1851, Lincoln and Murphy filed a second lawsuit against Kingsbury on behalf of James Wilson, Joseph Wilson, and James Parmer, conservator of William Wilson, disputing Kingsbury's handling of the guardianship. This lawsuit was not settled until May of 1854, when the court ordered Kingsbury to pay Lincoln's clients Joseph Wilson and William Wilson the amount of \$116.82. James Wilson's claim was dismissed and he was ordered to pay half of the costs of the lengthy court battle. Reverend Kingsbury was to pay the other half.

The estate sale of Edward M. Wilson's personal property took place on three days in October, one hundred seventy years ago,