

Goodman Ferre (1806-1897)

Goodman Ferre (pronounced Ferry) was born on January 27, 1806, and died on September 24, 1897. When he moved to Bloomington in the 1840s, the town had only about 1,000 people. The area that is now the town of Normal was mostly farmland or open prairie, and neither town had a university. Over the next 50 years, Ferre watched Bloomington's population grow nearly twenty times, and he saw the town of Normal grow as well. He also saw McLean County's population increase from around 7,000 or 8,000 to more than 65,000.

Like many other early settlers, Ferre was born on the East Coast and moved west to find success. He was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, to Saloman and Margaret Ferre. His father was a successful shoemaker and considered to be a wealthy man. Goodman and his brother Lyman left home as young men and moved to western New York, where they learned how to make wagons. The two brothers worked together and were also very involved in their Masonic Lodge. They spent most of their lives in Bloomington, where Goodman passed away at Lyman's house.

Goodman married Julia Ann Cooley in Connecticut around 1829. They had two children, a boy and a girl, who both lived to be about 20 years old before dying within a year of each other.

The Ferre brothers moved to Bloomington and decided it was a good place to start a business. Their first wagon-making shop was in downtown Bloomington, on the west side of Main Street between Washington and Front Streets. Later, they moved to Front and Center Streets and went into business with John Wolcott, making carriages and even starting a funeral business with him.

For most of his life, people in Bloomington called Goodman "The Squire" or "Squire Ferre." This title came from his job as a justice of the peace, or police magistrate. He was known for being a kind judge who didn't believe in giving out harsh fines.

Goodman was a well-known member of the local Masonic Lodge and also a founding member of the Order of the Eastern Star, a group similar to the Masons but one that allowed women to join. Both organizations were involved in charitable, educational, and scientific activities. Goodman was a member of the Masons from 1847 until his death in 1897, serving as treasurer for most of that time. He resigned just months before he died because of his poor health. Goodman was also a longtime member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, an organization started in the United States in 1819.

For his 90th birthday, the Eastern Star threw a surprise party for Goodman and gave him a gift of a comfortable reclining chair. The story of the party says he sat in the chair the whole evening, enjoying the good wishes and admiration of the people there.

Goodman passed away at 8 a.m. on a Sunday morning after being in a coma for four days. He was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery. The obituary said that his death was caused by "congestion of the stomach" and "weakness from old age." At the time, his brother Lyman was in Attica, Indiana, receiving treatment.