

George Martin

Naperville Heritage Society History Stories

The story of Naper Settlement and the Naperville Heritage Society might have been told differently had it not been for the influence and generosity of the George Martin family. The very ground upon which Naper Settlement operates was once part a large, 260-acre farm that was bordered on the north by the DuPage River, on the east by Webster Street, on the south by the present-day Edward Hospital, and on the west by a strip of land west of West Street.



The original pre-emption, or land grant, was awarded to George Martin I, a Scottish immigrant from the Edinburgh region of Scotland. Although he “staked his claim” in 1833, his pre-emption was not recorded until January 1843. Records found in the Archives at Naper Settlement indicate that George I hauled timber (oak, walnut and possibly locust wood) to Joseph Naper’s sawmill to be made into lumber for the construction of a home, outbuildings and fences. The receipt also indicated that he bought grain, potatoes and other supplies from Naper’s trading post. The home he built was later called “Century House” and was considered the first frame house built in Naperville until it burned to the ground in 1958.

The Martin family members were grain merchants in Scotland and were no doubt enticed to come to America on the advice of relatives and glowing newspaper accounts of opportunities in Illinois. When George I passed away in 1841, his young, 15-year-old son, George II, was left to manage the 30-acre farm. Within a few short years, George II was able to purchase additional land, which he discovered was useful for not only agricultural production, but also contained rich deposits of limestone and clay. In 1849, a quarry for building stone was opened along the DuPage River and by 1853, George II started a brickworks business. The tragedy of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 was an unexpected windfall for George II and his business partners in the limestone, brick and tile business, who began shipping supplies to contractors rebuilding the City of Chicago.

In 1854, George II married Sibelia Riddler, an orphaned daughter of a Scottish minister and his wife, who lived in Peoria at the time of their untimely deaths. Sibelia was sent to boarding schools and later to live with her Uncle John Riddler, who resided in Naperville. To this union four children were born, Elizabeth “Lizzie” (1855-1920), Catherine “Kitty” (1858-1908), George

History Stories are developed by the Naperville Heritage Society Research Library and Archives staff at Naper Settlement. As a bountiful resource for learning about a variety of topics related to Naperville, they provide unique insights into the past. For more information, please call the Curatorial Department at 630.305.3535.

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III (1862-1925), and Caroline “Carrie” (1864-1936). As the estate flourished, George II’s reputation and business activities in the community also grew. He was a member of the Naperville Masonic lodge, Euclid Lodge No. 65, a partner in Producer’s Bank, and co-owner in various partnerships of brick and tile works and stone quarries. He was also one of the village’s first trustees in 1857.

In 1883, George II built a substantial home on the south side of the river, across the road to Aurora (then known as High Street). On an 1869 bird’s-eye map of Naperville, this location was labeled, “Locust Hill,” but the Martins choose to call their new home “Pine Craig.” Pine refers to the number of evergreens planted by the family and the Scottish word for a cliff or steep hill is “craig.” This home was built with limestone from Martin’s quarries and brick from his brick and tile works. The entire home was later parged, or given a thin coating of colored cement inscribed to mimic the look of brick. Of the four parged homes in Naperville, only the Martin home had black beading – the rest have white. His home was plumbed for running water and a central heating system when it was built. When telephone lines were brought to Naperville in 1885, Pine Craig was one of the first to receive a telephone, in part, to assist the operations of the brick and tile and quarry businesses, which were managed from an office located on the first floor of the house.

Tragically, George II died in 1889 leaving his widow and daughters to manage the estate and the brick and tile works, which they did successfully. Of the four children, Caroline was the only child to marry. She most likely met her future husband, Edward Grant Mitchell (1866-1929) from Hinsdale, Ill., while attending Scottish picnics/gatherings sometimes called the “Caledonia” or “Highland” games. They married in 1895 after eloping to Milwaukee, Wis., but in 1896, held a small ceremony in Caroline’s home. Caroline and Edward did not have children.

In 1933, Caroline opened Pine Craig to the public to honor the 100th anniversary of her grandparents’ arrival in Naperville. She displayed many of her family’s heirlooms in the front rooms of her home, similar to the Broeker’s Store window displays she created for the Naperville Centennial Celebration in 1931. Through the efforts of Judge Win Knoch, a Naperville native and friend of Caroline, she crafted a will that would leave the entire estate to the City of Naperville for the perpetual benefit of the City. After this generous bequest in 1936, Pine Craig became the City of Naperville’s first museum and the grounds surrounding the home later were the site of Naper Settlement, Rotary Hill (the location of the Martins’ Century House), Naperville Central High School and the adjacent athletic fields, the Community Gardens, the Sportsman’s Club and a portion of the Scout Camp.

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When the Martin-Mitchell Museum opened to the public in 1939, the bulk of the collection consisted of Martin family items and items transferred from the “History Room” created by librarian Matie Egermann at the Nichols Library in 1905. The creation of Naper Settlement in 1969 was the direct result of a grassroots effort to save St. John’s Episcopal Church, which was built in 1864. When threatened with demolition, a group of citizens rallied to save the building by having it removed to the grounds of the Martin-Mitchell Park, near the museum. Over time, more than 20 structures were added to help tell the story of Naperville from its founding in 1831 to the turn of the 20th century.

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