

# The Story of Twin Oaks— in the words of Martha Durham-Perry (1825-87): Part 2

by Dr. James Paul

I was 28 years old and married with a 3-year-old son when my father, Tommy Durham, died on March 14, 1854 at Twin Oaks. His five daughters (Barbara, Artemisia, Arabella, Margaret and myself—Martha) each received \$5 from his estate. Our mother, Margaret/Peggy (1796-1882), was the beneficiary of the rest of Twin Oaks. Our four brothers (Harris, Stephen, Gurdon and Daniel) inherited four equal parts of the farmstead at Twin Oaks, which had grown to 408 acres. Not only was my father's death a traumatic event in 1854, but also in the year before, a major occurrence changed our community.

On July 4, 1853, the Illinois Central Railroad's first train steamed up the ridge of what would soon be the center of a new town: Kankakee. This shifted the local economic community center from agricultural-based Bourbonnais Grove to a newly born commercial center around the Kankakee railroad depot which was built in 1855. Also, the county of Kankakee was established in 1853. The days of the pioneer covered wagon "trains" were drawing to a close.

I was a middle-child, born into the Durham family in Vermillion Grove (south of Danville) on Aug. 25, 1825. When I was 9 years old in 1835, my family moved north to Bourbonnais Grove and settled on my father's newly purchased land at Twin Oaks. We first lived in a log cabin, but by 1840 we had moved into the two story I-shaped frame farm house located west of the Bourbonnais Trace (later Kennedy Dr.) and southwest of where the Chicago-to-Danville Road intersected with the trace (later the intersection of Kennedy Dr. and North St.).

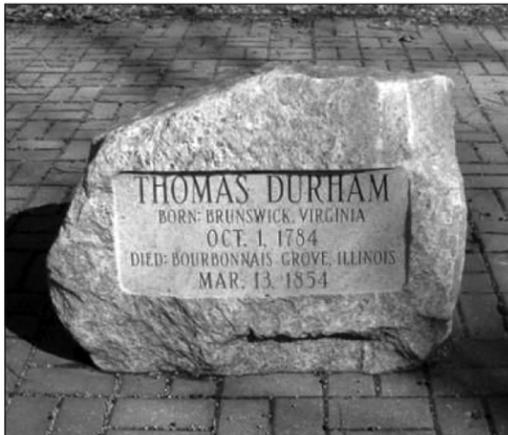
I helped my mother with the women's chores on the farmstead: sewing, quilting, cleaning, washing clothes, gardening, collecting eggs, feeding animals, making butter, preparing food for meals, canning and cooking. Life on the farmstead was hard, but exhilarating. We watched the covered wagon trains pass by our farm house, sometimes 10 to 12 times per day, on their way between the Wabash Valley and Chicago. From a distance, the white canvas-covered wagons, pulled by oxen or horses, looked like a fleet of schooners under sail; therefore we often referred to them as the "prairie schooners". The traffic included stage coaches carrying passengers and mail, herds of cattle, droves of pigs numbering in the 100s and canvas-covered wagons carrying flour, bacon, fruit, sugar and timber.

After 1853, this prairie freight would be mostly carried by train. I was barely 16 years old when I first met David Perry (1807-87) in 1841. It was in that year that David, along with his brother James and friend Thomas Vanmeter, had moved to Bourbonnais Grove to build a saw mill on the Kankakee River, just south of Bourbonnais Creek.

Residents of Bourbonnais Grove could then purchase lumber locally instead of from Chicago. The mill was later converted to a grist mill. In 1859, the mill and dam became part of a flour mill when it was moved upstream two miles to the Kankakee area of S. West Ave.

David had been born in Vermont. His father, Lieutenant Nathaniel Green Perry, had participated in the War of 1812 and his grandfather, Captain David Perry, had served in the American Revolution. As a young carpenter in 1834, David moved to the northeastern Illinois pioneer settlement known as Lower Crossing or Westport on the Kankakee River's north bank along the Hubbard Trail. David and Phillip Worchester built the first frame house there; and in 1838, David and Asher Sargent built the first mill on the river at Westport. In 1845, this settlement was incorporated as the town of Momence.

After three years of acquaintance, and then courtship, David and I were married on January 1, 1845, a major holiday in French-Canadian Bourbonnais Grove. We lived in a house on a one-acre farm just south of the junction of the Danville-to-Chicago Road and Bourbonnais Trace (later the Centru Bank location on S. Main St., Bourbonnais)—across the road from the Twin Oaks' Durham family farm house. David and I



Thomas Durham's grave is in the Millennium Garden at the Durham-Perry Farmstead.

had five children, but we grieved the deaths of two daughters, Rowena and Carrie, and one son, David, in infancy; and daughter Mary at age 12.

Our sole surviving son, Alvah (1850-99), was our first-born on June 25, 1850. Before my father, Thomas, died in 1854, he loved holding and playing with his young grandson. In the years 1853-59, my husband served as Kankakee County treasurer.

During the international financial panic of 1866, my brothers' business ventures in Kankakee were in serious difficulty. They were going to sell their shares of Twin Oaks to make ends meet. When they met in the Twin Oaks' Durham family farm house to discuss selling the farmstead in order to pay off their debts, my husband threw his money belt on the table and said "I can lend a hand!" We paid cash for the farm which was valued at \$25,000 in the 1870 Agriculture Census.

Our family moved from across the road into the Twin Oaks farm house, began remodeling of the house and lived there with my mother the rest of our lives.

David, Alvy, Mary, servant Rhoda Hawkins and I cared for my mother Peggy until her death on March 2, 1882. By 1877, Alvy was working with George H. Andrews in a cattle broker partnership at the Chicago Stock Exchange. George and Sarah Andrews were Kankakee River Valley pioneers who moved to Chicago in 1874. Alvy married their 18-year-old daughter, Ida, on May 9, 1877 in Chicago.

David and I loved being with our granddaughters Bertha, born on May 29, 1878 and Sarah, born Nov. 18, 1883. David died on May 19, 1887 before our third granddaughter, Lomira, was born on June 11, 1887. I was able to cradle her in my arms before I died on Nov. 14, 1887.

For the full story of Twin Oaks (Perry Farm Park and Durham-Perry Farmstead), visit [http://www.btpd.org/park\\_history\\_4\\_2934382977.pdf](http://www.btpd.org/park_history_4_2934382977.pdf).

Dr. Paul is a member of the Perry Farm Living History Advisory committee whose purpose is to teach the community about the history of the Durham-Perry Farmstead. Dr. Paul is also president of the Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society.

*The Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting local history.*

*Monthly meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month March to December.*

*Museum hours are 1 to 4 p.m. first and third Sundays of each month, March to December or by appointment.*

*Visit [bourbonnaishistory.org](http://bourbonnaishistory.org), on Facebook at [facebook.com/bourbonnaishistory.org](https://www.facebook.com/bourbonnaishistory.org) or call 1-815-933-6452.*

# Kankakee County positioned in top 10 nationally for millennial growth

A report issued by leading location advisory, economic incentive and corporate real estate services firm Site Selection Group places the Kankakee Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which shares boundaries with Kankakee County, among the nation's top 10 metros positioned for growth of the millennial demographic. Using data provided by Claritas, Dallas-based SSG's "The Best Metro Areas for a Talent Pipeline" forecasts that the Kankakee MSA will experience 6.1 percent growth of the millennial population, classified by the firm as the post-college population under 35, from 2016 to 2021.

The Kankakee MSA is one of only two Midwest metros with populations greater than 100,000 analyzed by SSG to rank in the nation's top 10 in propensity for millennial growth.

From the SSG report:

"When making site selection decisions, companies are faced with selecting locations that possess the skill sets needed to satisfy their immediate hiring needs. They also must look for communities that have the workforce development infrastructure and broad demographic profiles needed to develop talent over an extended period of time.

"Given the drop in unemployment and the increased competition for workers, both objectives have proven to be difficult propositions for companies in the U.S. Across industries, whether to access new and in-demand skill sets or to backfill the large number of baby boomers entering retirement, new and expanding companies place a premium on hiring and retaining the millennial workforce."

"This analysis is welcome news to our office and community," said Economic Alliance of Kankakee County president/CEO Tim Nugent. "Through

our many conversations with our existing primary employers as well as industrial prospects, we are acutely aware of the urgency to develop a strong talent pipeline.

"Our highest priority is working actively with our local, regional and national partners," Nugent continued, "to position our community for sustainable growth by preparing our residents for the dynamic employment opportunities of today and tomorrow."

The Kankakee MSA, having experienced 15 percent gross domestic product growth over the last five years and more than \$1.2 billion in major capital investment over the last three years, has been ranked Illinois' number one small metro for job, wage and salary and technology growth three of the last four years in the Milken Institute's Best-Performing Cities Index. The Kankakee MSA is also currently ranked in the nation's top 10 percent for talent attraction and development, according to Economic Modeling Specialists International (EMSI)'s 2016 Talent Attraction Scorecard. EMSI's scorecard is based on an index that equally weights 2013-14 net migration, 2011-15 skilled job growth and three other data points, overall job growth, regional competitiveness for skilled jobs and annual job openings per capita.

The Economic Alliance of Kankakee County is a public-private partnership that works to create jobs and expand the economic base by improving the local business climate. Working under Kankakee County's 2014-19 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), the Alliance is challenged to help spur \$500 million in new business investment and 500 new jobs, along with assisting 150 prospective new businesses. For more information, visit [kankakeecountyed.org](http://kankakeecountyed.org) or call 1-815-935-1177.

## Create with Music

Merchant Street Art Gallery of Artists with Autism, 356 E. Merchant St., Kankakee, will present Create with Music on Monday, Feb. 6, 2017 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

The event will be an open studio and participants can work while listening to live piano music by Patrick Noland. All artists are invited to create anything they desire with their own supplies. Admission cost is a suggested donation and free for anyone having a person with autism in their family.

For more information, contact Janice by email at [info@merchantstreetartgallery.org](mailto:info@merchantstreetartgallery.org) or call 1-815-685-9057 to reserve a space. Like them on Facebook/ArtistswithAutism15 or visit [www.merchantstreetartgallery.org](http://www.merchantstreetartgallery.org).

The Herald - - - - -

**COPY DEADLINE**

- - - - - Monday, 9:00 a.m.