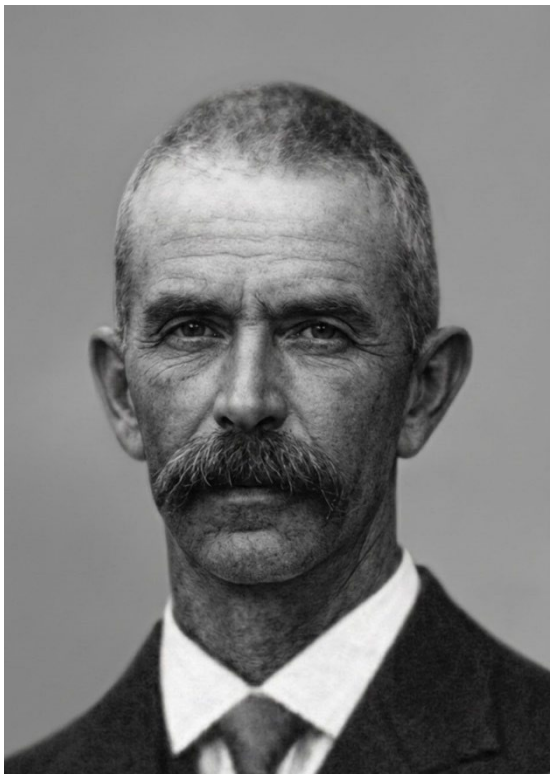
Hampton Historical Society

Hampton, Illinois



Joel Martin Benson
December 13, 1864 – February 25, 1945
President: 1907-1909

Overview

Joel Martin Benson built a long, steady life rooted in work, family, and the small Illinois communities he called home. Born in Albany, he spent his career as a carpenter, a trade he followed until retiring only five years before his death. He married Nettie L. Smith in 1892, and together they raised a large family. His extended family circle also included a surviving sister, seven grandchildren, and a great-grandchild, reflecting a life that grew outward through several generations

Family and Career

Joel Martin Benson was a carpenter by trade. He contracted throughout the area, building and renovating homes, building additions on churches, and even contracted to build the M.E. Church in Watertown and the village hall and jail in Watertown in 1910.

He was born December 13, 1864 in Albany, Illinois and married Nettie L. Smith (daughter of Maniel Smith) on December 28, 1892. They would raise 3 girls and 3 boys. He was a Texas property owner. He moved to Princeton, Iowa, before June 1912. He would visit his friends, Mr. and Mrs. Dan Fullmer, several times before deciding to move to Princeton. The couple would move to LeClair around 1916 to live and finally to Port Byron.

Political Contributions

Joel Martin Benson was Village President from April 1907 through April 1909. Under the Citizens' Party, he defeated August W. Wilkins (People's Party). He attempted to be elected as a Trustee in 1909 but was not successful. He was nominated under the Citizens' party.

J.M. Benson's tenure as Village President in 1908 was marked by active leadership in infrastructure development and municipal governance. Under his direction, the Village Board approved significant investments in public works, including the construction of the Thompson bridge, installation of cement sidewalks on key streets, and improvements to roads and drainage systems. Benson played a decisive role in these projects, sometimes casting the deciding vote on contentious issues such as sidewalk placement. He also oversaw the levying of special taxes and authorized borrowing funds to ensure these improvements could be completed, demonstrating a commitment to advancing the village's infrastructure despite limited resources.

Benson's administration faced notable challenges, particularly in managing board dynamics and community regulations. His appointments to key positions, such as Village Marshal, Street Commissioner, and Board of Health, were sometimes met with resistance and required multiple votes or individual confirmations. The Board's debates over ordinances, such as those regulating fireworks and licensing public exhibitions, reflected ongoing efforts to balance public safety, moral standards, and community interests. Benson also had to address practical concerns such as tramps, weeds, and alley access, which required both administrative action and negotiation with trustees and residents.

Despite these challenges, Benson maintained a focus on transparent financial oversight and community engagement. Regular meetings included detailed reviews of the treasurer's and commissioner's reports, approval of bills, and canvassing of election results. He supported community events, such as granting the Ladies Aid Society permission to hold a sociable and responded to residents' requests for public improvements. Benson's presidency was characterized by a hands-on approach to governance, navigating both the accomplishments and obstacles inherent in leading a small but active village.

Military Record

Joel M. Benson's lack of a military career likely stems from timing. He would have been an adult military age mail around 1884, thus limiting the government's call to service.

Joel died from a stroke on Sunday February 25, 1945. Funeral services were held at 1:30 p. m. Wednesday in the Esterdahl chapel. Burial was at Hampton cemetery.