

## **Edwin Bakewell (1812-1901)**

Edwin Wells Bakewell was born on July 20, 1812, in Wellsburg, Virginia (now in West Virginia). He was one of six children of Samuel and Ann Maria (Bean) Bakewell. On March 17, 1836, he married Julia Ann Parshall in Royal Oak, Michigan. Julia was born on October 25, 1814, in Palmyra, New York, and was one of thirteen children.

In 1845, Edwin and his family moved to the town of Normal (then called North Bloomington) in Illinois, where Edwin bought 360 acres of land. They had six children: three boys and three girls.

Edwin is best known for his role in helping to create Illinois State Normal University (ISNU) in 1857. This was not an easy task, as other towns were also trying to get the school. Supporters of Normal raised money, with many people donating between \$25 and \$200. Edwin donated 40 acres of land for the school, which was worth about \$8,000. He hoped that the land would be used for the agricultural department, though this later caused a big dispute. Edwin also believed that he could make money by selling some of his remaining land for houses near the school.

For years, the land was used as a nursery for fruit trees. But in 1873, an economic panic hit the country, leading to many businesses and railroads going bankrupt. By 1875, Edwin wanted the 40 acres of land back. He argued that he had donated it for agricultural research and that any money from it should go toward funding an agriculture chair at the university. He had signed a donation agreement, but the deed did not include this condition.

Edwin's legal battle to get the land back lasted for 25 years. In 1885, a law was passed that would have returned the land to him, but the state board of education refused. The case went to court and became a major legal fight, with many well-known lawyers involved. At times, ISNU worried it might lose state funding, and school officials fought to keep the land.

By the end of his life, Edwin was obsessed with this battle. It became his main focus, and he talked and thought about it constantly. However, he died on July 18, 1901, without regaining the land. His wife Julia passed away on January 2, 1908. Both are buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, Illinois.

Today, the land Edwin donated is used for University High School, sports fields, a water tower, and other buildings. Many people pass through this area daily without knowing about the long legal battle over the land's ownership.