

Samuel Lockhart Hawks (1832 – 1905)

Samuel Lockhart Hawks, also known as “Louis” Hawks, was born in Scotland on March 7, 1832, to Robert and Margaret (Lockhart) Hawks. He married Emeline Preston on September 9, 1872, and they had a son named Joseph Knowlton Preston Hawks. They lived at 821 W. Washington Street in Bloomington, Illinois, after moving from 1005 W. Front Street.

It is not known exactly when Louis came to Bloomington, but in the fall of 1854 he was working for the Chicago & Alton Railroad. Before that, he worked as a machinist apprentice in Pennsylvania, earning fifty cents a day. He eventually became a fireman, engineer, and conductor on several railroads, including the Akron & Hudson Railway and the Pennsylvania Railroad, before moving to Chicago.

Louis was well known for his work with Illinois railroads. He worked at the Chicago & Alton Railroad for 50 years, spending 30 years as the superintendent of air brakes. He was so skilled that he was chosen to break in new engines for the railroad. During a huge snowstorm in 1854, when the railroad was stuck for three weeks, Louis was one of five engineers tasked with breaking through the snow from Chicago to Bloomington. They made it as far as Towanda, IL, which was 10 miles north of Bloomington. Samuel and the rest of the crew were forced to walk the rest of the way to Bloomington for help.

Louis's most famous achievement came during the Great Chicago Fire on October 8, 1871. The Bloomington Fire Department sent their steam fire engine to help, and Louis, driving Engine No. 97, made a fast trip to Chicago. The railroad was specially cleared of other trains, allowing Samuel's train to travel at high speeds. It took just two and a half hours to travel the 126 miles to Chicago, a record at the time. Once in Chicago, Louis and the Bloomington firemen helped fight the fire, which was completely put out by October 10.

After the trip, Engine No. 97 became famous, and people came to see it. Conductor E.J. Smith of the Chicago & Alton Railroad described how Louis stayed focused and calm, making the incredible journey. Engine No. 97 was later used for special runs, including carrying the railroad's pay-car.

In addition to sending the fire engine to Chicago, the people of Bloomington raised over \$14,000 to help fire victims. The town's citizens worked together to collect food, money, and supplies for the survivors. Louis and the firemen were honored for their bravery when they returned home. Mayor Benjamin Funk presented Louis with a gold Maltese cross as a token of appreciation. The local newspaper praised Louis for his calm and steady leadership during the emergency.

Louis worked in a dangerous job, and over the years, he suffered several injuries. One time, he fell between the engine and the tender when the train car separated unexpectedly. He was injured again in a train wreck in 1879. Because of his years of experience, he was later in charge of improving safety features on trains.

Louis was also an elder at the First Presbyterian Church and was known for his long gray beard. He retired from the railroad due to illness and passed away in Bloomington on January 2, 1905, after being sick for several months. He was buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery on January 4, 1905. He is remembered as one of the few people who worked in railroads for over 50 years.