

Francis Arenz



1800-1856

*Remembering our founder
as a part of*

*the 175th Celebration
of the Village of Arenzville*

September 5th & 6th, 2014

The image on the cover comes from the following publication:
The Black Hawk War, by Frank E. Stevens, published in Chicago, 1903,
which can be accessed online at:

<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/file.php?file=stevens.html>

The reproduction of the image is identified in the book as “Mr. Francis
Arenz, from an oil painting owned by his son, Albert W. Arenz, of
Jacksonville, Ill.”

Booklet compiled by Molly Clark Daniel, 2014

At the height of his career and only a few years after having served in the 14th General Assembly of the State of Illinois (House of Representatives from 1844-1846), Francis Arenz asked a couple of his lawyer friends in Springfield to write a letter for him.

*Springfield, Illinois
March 11, 1851*

*To Millard Fillmore
His Excellency
The President of the U.S.*

Sir:

We have a highly valued friend here, Francis Arenz, who is a native of ---.¹ He is an educated gentleman, of unquestioned integrity, and excellent business capacities and habits. He has resided in this country, and within what is now our sole whig District in Illinois, nearly a quarter of a century, during most of which time we have known him personally and intimately. In our political contests he has ever been our firm and efficient friend; and, disabusing the minds of his own countrymen among us, of those prejudices they generally entertain against us as a party, he has done as much as---perhaps more than,---any other one man, in preserving the integrity of our District. Through this long period he has acted a most disinterested part, never claiming any thing for himself. He now wishes to visit his native country; and we would be much gratified if the government would find him some honorable

¹ The blank was left unfilled in the letter.

employment which would enable him to do so without pecuniary loss. We know not enough of the employments abroad, to enable us to designate; yet we make this appeal, not formally, but in all sincerity and earnestness. Your Obt. Servts.

JOHN T. STUART
A. LINCOLN

Based on this recommendation, Francis Arenz was appointed as bearer of dispatches to Prussia and Austria in 1852, a mere 25 years after arriving in America. His accomplishments in that brief time are impressive. A forward-thinking man, Francis Arenz was a tireless advocate for progress and growth of his new country. While the residents of the tiny village of Arenzville remember him for establishing this place and giving it his family name, the biography written by his brother, Judge John A. Arenz², reveals a man of many talents:

Francis Arenz was born in Blankenberg, Province of the Rhein, Prussia, October 31, 1800. While yet very young he engaged in mercantile business, and in 1827 emigrated to the United States, making his home for two years in the State of Kentucky, following the business of



² Judge J. A. Arenz, Chapter XIV, *History of Cass County, Illinois*, edited by William Henry Perrin, Chicago, O.L. Baskin & Co. Historical Publishers, 1882.

merchandising. In the year 1829, he went to Galena, Illinois, and was for a short time engaged in the lead trade, and then came to Beardstown, where he again followed the business of merchandising and dealing in real estate. He very soon foresaw that Beardstown, on account of its favorable situation and surroundings, was destined to have a prosperous future, and used every means in his power to draw attention to this place and invite emigration. He expected the best mode to accomplish this purpose to be the establishment of a newspaper, and he accordingly, 1834, commenced the publication of *The Beardstown Chronicle and Illinois Bounty Land Advertiser*, of which he became the editor and proprietor, with John B. Fulks, as publisher. This paper was then the only newspaper west of Jacksonville and Springfield. It could not be expected that at this early day such an undertaking would prove profitable, and having been published for nearly two years at considerable loss, its publication was abandoned, after having accomplished, however, its object. Beardstown, a very good landing point on the Illinois River, had become the port of entry for all the goods designed for Springfield, Petersburg, Rushville, McComb, and other places, and from here were also shipped the produce and pork of the surrounding towns and country. Heavy loaded teams with merchandise and produce, could daily be seen on the roads leading to and from Beardstown, and there was no point in the West where more hogs were slaughtered than here.

During the Black Hawk war, Beardstown was the general rendezvous for the State troops, and Mr. Arenz furnished supplies for the army at the request of Gov. Reynolds, and also

a portion of the arms, which had been purchased by Arenz, and originally destined for the South America service.

New roads were surveyed and opened, and the plan was conceived by Mr. Arenz, that the construction of a canal from Beardstown to the Sangamon River, to a place called Miller's Ferry, and then by slackwater navigation to continue to the neighborhood of Springfield, whereby also the bottom lands of the Sangamon valley would become drained and useful for agricultural purposes, would be of great benefit to Beardstown.

An act of the Legislature was obtained in 1836, for the incorporation of Beardstown and Sangamon Canal Company, of which company Mr. Arenz was elected President, and Mr. O. M. Long, Secretary and Treasurer; William Pollock, as Engineer, and John A. Arenz, as Assistant Engineer, commenced the survey on September 1, 1836, and in December following a very favorable report was made; but for want of sufficient means and on account of the hard times soon following, this project failed.

Morgan had at that time six and Sangamon nine members in the Legislature, and the two counties combined, could carry most any measure, and Jacksonville and not Beardstown, would be the recipient of its benefits, for all the members from Morgan were either citizens of Jacksonville or vicinity. For these and other reasons, a division of the county was agitated, and continued until 1837, when the county of Cass was formed. In all these matters Mr. Arenz was the leader and

main worker. In the year 1835, he gave up his mercantile business in Beardstown, and took up his residence on his farm, about six miles southeast of Beardstown, which he named "Recluze." Here he had a house built, which had a good sized room in the center, surrounded by shed rooms and a porch. It



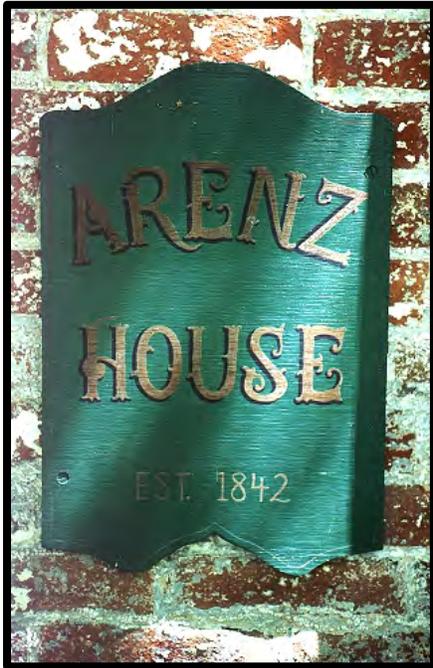
Arenz house in Arenzville

was covered by shingle roof, weather-boarded and painted, and was built on the brow of a high hill, near the edge of the timber, commanding a very fine view. It was certainly the hottest place in the summer and the coldest in winter, and the house appeared from a distance very much like a good sized tent. Here he resided until 1839, when he made his permanent home at Arenzville.

In 1833 he purchased of a Mr. Smart, who had a little mill on Indian Creek, that mill and a large tract of land in Section 31, Township 17, North of Range 11 West, where now Arenzville is situated.

Indian Creek forms here a considerable bend, and to increase the volume of water, a large ditch was cut between said bend, and at the upper end a dam was constructed. A new saw mill was built on said ditch, Mr. John Savage, afterward Sheriff of Cass County, being the builder. It was a difficult matter to keep up the dam, which was constructed of timber and earth, not stone being at hand. The soil being rich and alluvial, the minks, musk-rats and crawfish in some way undermine or

work around the edges of the dam, so that at times of high water it would be damaged or carried away entirely, which required the time of low water for making repairs.



When the timber yielding saw-logs had been consumed, the saw-mill was turned into a flouring mill and rebuilt; but the dam still proved a failure, until finally steam power was applied. These drawbacks would have discouraged most men, but not him, although he had several times either sold or leased the property, but it always came back to his hands, like counterfeit money.

Mr. Arenz was pretty successful in his many enterprises, but in the milling business he proved to be a complete failure, and by it sunk a great deal of money.

In 1838 he engaged also in the mercantile business, and took in partnership his brother, J. A. Arenz, and the name of the firm was F. Arenz & Co. This partnership continued for about six years, when his brother withdrew from the firm. Finally in 1853 he sold the mill and store with a tract of land, to Herman Engelbach and Peter Arenz, in whose hands the concern proved very profitable.

It seemed to be a great relief to Mr. Arenz, when he got rid of his business and obtained more leisure time for other matters. He was very often absent from home, attending meetings of all

sorts, having an object for the improvement of the country. He was very fond of politics and a member of the Whig party. He liked company, was of a very generous and social disposition, and his house was scarcely ever without visitors. There was no session of the legislature, when he failed to go to the capital of the State, to be on hand whenever anything could be accomplished for the benefit of Cass County. He was acquainted with the leading men of the State, and many of them were his warm friends.

In 1852, he was the bearer of dispatches from the Secretary of the United States, to the ambassadors at Berlin and Vienna. He was one of the organizers of the State Agricultural



Arial view of Arenzville

Society at Springfield, on January 5, 1853, and was elected one of its vice-presidents, which position he continued to hold to time of his death.

He also organized, on January 5, 1855, the Cass County Agricultural Society, and was elected president thereof.

Men of the stamp and character of Francis Arenz, gifted with power to look ahead, and shaping matters for paving the way to accomplish praiseworthy results, have to encounter and overcome a great many obstacles; such men necessarily have

and gain many friends, but they will also have envious, bitter enemies. This was also the case with him.

Mr. Arenz died April 2, 1856.

The executive committee of the State Agricultural Society, then in session in Springfield, adopted April 3, 1856, the following resolutions:

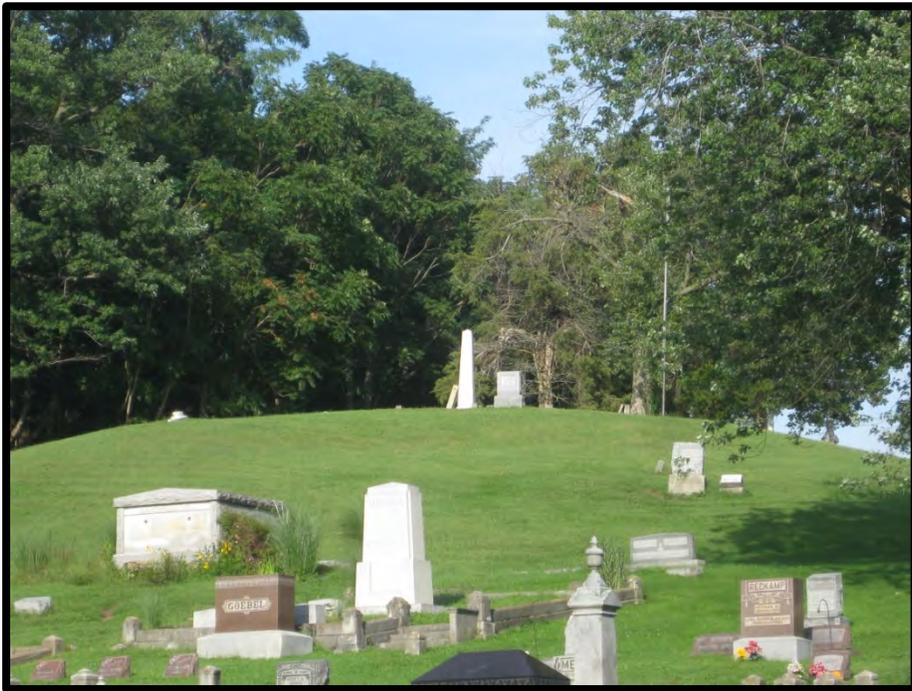


Resolved, That in the death of Francis Arenz, late member of this board, it lost a co-worker, kind, courteous and able, and always in his place; the society, one of its most talented, energetic and ardent friends; the State and community at large, one of its most honorable, respected, and revered citizens; and that while we bow in humble humility and awe before Almighty god, we tender our most sincere and heartfelt sympathies to the family and friends of the deceased, hoping that their loss and our loss is his gain.

Resolved, That a copy of these proceedings be sent to the family and friends of the deceased, to the Prairie Farmer, and to the papers in Beardstown, Jacksonville and Springfield, with the request that the same be inserted in the papers indicated.



Francis Arenz and many of his descendants were laid to rest in the Arenzville East Cemetery, on the hillside overlooking our little town. As we celebrate 175 years of the town's establishment, the residents of our community take a few minutes to remember our founder and reflect on his life. We are grateful for his leadership and initiative. A floral wreath will be placed at the gravesite of Francis Arenz to honor his memory at the conclusion of our weekend celebration.



No. 153.

MY COUNTRY! 'TIS OF THEE.

S. F. SMITH.

Tune, America. 6, 4.

HENRY CAREY.

1. My coun - try! 'tis of thee, Sweet land of lib - er - ty,
 2. My na - tive coun - try, thee, Land of the no - ble, free,
 3. Let mu - sic swell the breeze, And ring from all the trees
 4. Our fa - thers' God! to thee, Au - thor of lib - er - ty,

Of thee I sing; Land where my fa - thers died! Land of the
 Thy name I love; I love thy rocks and rills, Thy woods and
 Sweet freedom's song: Let mor - tal tongues a - wake; Let all that
 To thee we sing: Long may our land be bright With freedom's

cres.
 pil - grims' pride! From ev - 'ry moun - tain side Let free - dom ring!
 tem - pled hills; My heart with rap - ture thrills Like that a - bove.
 breathe par - take; Let rocks their si - lence break, The sound pro - long.
 ho - ly light; Pro - tect us by thy might, Great God, our King!