

THE HISTORY OF WINFIELD, ILLINOIS

While along an early stagecoach line and the first railroad out of Chicago, Winfield remained in the shadow of its neighboring towns, West Chicago, Wheaton, and Naperville. Until the 1920s, Winfield primarily was a center for German-speaking farmers. Suburban growth came with the toll roads after 1960.

Before the village of Winfield was officially established, the area was associated with Gary's Mill, a lumbering settlement established in the 1830s by Erastus, Jude, and Charles Gary, two miles northeast of Warren's Station. Although a James P. Doe of New Hampshire received a land grant in the area in 1845, he did not have it platted as the Town of Fredericksburg until 1853. The following year, however, it appeared on railroad maps as Winfield.

The namesake for Winfield is General Winfield Scott, who was also honored by Winfield Township, which in part incorporates the Village.



Winfield Scott (June 13, 1786 – May 29, 1866) was a United States Army general and unsuccessful presidential candidate of the Whig party in 1852. Known as "Old Fuss and Feathers" and the "Grand Old Man of the Army", he served on active duty as a general longer than any other man in American history and many historians rate him the ablest American commander of his time. Over the course of his fifty-year career, he commanded forces in the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, the Black Hawk War, the Second Seminole War, and, briefly, the American Civil War, conceiving the Union strategy known as the Anaconda Plan that would be used to defeat the Confederacy.

A national hero after the Mexican-American War, he served as military governor of Mexico City. Such was his stature that, in 1852, the United States Whig Party passed over its own incumbent President of the United States, Millard Fillmore, to nominate Scott in the United States presidential election. Scott lost to Democrat Franklin Pierce in the general election, but remained a popular national figure, receiving a brevet promotion in 1856 to the rank of lieutenant general, becoming the first American since George Washington to hold that rank.

Winfield Scott was born on his family's plantation "Laurel Branch" in Dinwiddie County, near Petersburg, Virginia.^[1] He was educated at the College of William & Mary and was a lawyer and a Virginia militia cavalry corporal before being directly commissioned as captain in the artillery in 1808. Scott's early years in the United States Army were tumultuous. His commission was suspended for one year following a court-martial for insubordination in criticizing his commanding General, the pusillanimous and corrupt James Wilkinson.

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During the War of 1812 Scott was captured during the Battle of Queenston Heights in 1812, but was released in a prisoner exchange. Upon release, he returned to Washington to pressure the Senate to take punitive action against British prisoners of war in retaliation for the British executing thirteen American POWs of Irish extraction captured at Queenston Heights (the British considered them British subjects and traitors). The Senate wrote the bill after Scott's urging but President James Madison refused to enforce it, believing that the summary execution of prisoners of war to be unworthy of civilized nations. In March 1814, Scott was brevetted brigadier general. In July 1814, Scott commanded the First Brigade of the American army in the Niagara campaign, winning the battle of Chippewa decisively. He was wounded during the bloody Battle of Lundy's Lane, along with the American commander, Major General Jacob Brown, and the British/Canadian commander, Lieutenant General Gordon Drummond. Scott's wounds from Lundy's Lane were so severe that he did not serve on active duty for the remainder of the war.



A younger Winfield Scott

Scott earned the nickname of "Old Fuss and Feathers" for his insistence of military appearance and discipline in the United States Army, which consisted mostly of volunteers. In his own campaigns, General Scott preferred to use a core of U.S. Army regulars whenever possible. Scott perennially concerned himself with the welfare of his men, prompting an early quarrel with General Wilkinson over an unhealthy bivouac, which turned out to be on land Wilkinson owned. During an early outbreak of cholera at a post under his command, Scott himself was the only officer who stayed to nurse the stricken enlisted men.

In the administration of President Andrew Jackson, Scott marshaled United States forces for use against the state of South Carolina in the Nullification Crisis. His tactful diplomacy and the use of his garrison in suppressing a major fire in Charleston did much to defuse the crisis.

In 1832 Scott replaced John Wool as commander of Federal troops in the Cherokee Nation. Andrew Jackson disagreed with the United States Supreme Court views on the Cherokee right to self-rule. In 1835 Jackson convinced a minority group of Cherokee to sign the Treaty of New Echota. In 1838, following the orders of Jackson, Scott assumed command of the "Army of the Cherokee Nation", headquartered at Fort Cass and Fort Butler. President Martin Van Buren, who had been Jackson's Secretary of State, and then Vice President, thereafter directed Scott to forcibly move all those Cherokee who had not yet moved west in compliance with the treaty. This was done even though the treaty actually allowed those who wished to remain in the east to do so.^[2]

Scott arrived at New Echota, Cherokee Nation on April 6, 1838, and immediately divided the Nation into three military districts. Within two weeks he had every Cherokee in North Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama who could not escape to be captured or killed. The Cherokee were rounded up and held in rat-infested stockades with little food. Private John G. Burnett later wrote, "Future generations will read and condemn the act and I do hope posterity will remember that

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private soldiers like myself, and like the four Cherokees who were forced by General Scott to shoot an Indian Chief and his children, had to execute the orders of our superiors. We had no choice in the matter."

Over 4,000 Cherokee men, women, and children died in this confinement before ever beginning the trip west. As the first groups that were herded west huge numbers died in the heat, the Cherokees pleaded with Scott to postpone the removal until after summer, which he did. Scott left Athens, Georgia, on October 1, 1838, and traveled with the removed peoples as far as Nashville, where he was ordered to return to Washington. The Cherokee removal later became known as the Trail of Tears.^[5]

He also helped defuse tensions between officials of the state of Maine and the British Canada province of New Brunswick in the undeclared and bloodless Aroostook War in March 1839.

As a result of his success, Scott was appointed major general (then the highest rank in the United States Army) and general-in-chief in 1841, serving until 1861.

During his time in the military, Scott also fought in the Black Hawk War, the Second Seminole War, and, briefly, the American Civil War.

After the War of 1812, Scott translated several Napoleonic manuals into English. Upon direction of the War Department, Scott published *Abstract of Infantry Tactics, Including Exercises and Manueuvres of Light-Infantry and Riflemen, for the Use of the Militia of the United States* in 1830, for the use of the American militia.

In 1840, Scott wrote *Infantry Tactics, Or, Rules for the Exercise and Manoeuvre of the United States Infantry*. This three-volume work was the standard drill manual for the U.S. Army until William J. Hardee's *Tactics* were published in 1855.

General Scott was very interested in the professional development of the cadets of the U.S. Military Academy.^[6]

During the Mexican-American War, Scott commanded the southern of the two United States armies (Zachary Taylor commanded the northern army). Landing at Veracruz, Scott, assisted by one of his staff officers, Captain Robert E. Lee, and perhaps inspired by William H. Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, followed the approximate route taken by Hernán Cortés in 1519 and assaulted Mexico City. Scott's opponent in this campaign was Mexican president and general Antonio López de Santa Anna. Despite high heat, rains, and difficult terrain, Scott won the battles of Cerro Gordo, Contreras/Padierna, Churubusco, and Molino del Rey, then assaulted the fort of Chapultepec on September 13, 1847, after which the city surrendered. When a large number of men from the Mexican Saint Patrick's Battalion were captured during Churubusco, Scott gave orders for some of them to be hanged *en masse* during the battle of Chapultepec, specifying that the moment of execution should occur just after the U.S. flag was raised atop the Mexican citadel. This was another smudge on Scott's record, as the incident broke numerous Articles of War.

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During political intrigues later in his life Scott openly ignored the fact that this notable incident ever occurred, declaring "not one [Irishman] ... was ever known to turn his back upon the enemy or friend."

In the 1852 presidential election, the Whig Party declined to nominate its incumbent president, Millard Fillmore, who had succeeded to the presidency on the death of Mexican-American War hero General Zachary Taylor. Seeking to repeat their electoral success, the Whigs pushed Fillmore aside and nominated Scott, who faced Democrat Franklin Pierce. Scott's anti-slavery reputation undermined his support in the South, while the Party's pro-slavery platform depressed turnout in the North, and Scott's opponent was a Mexican-American War veteran as well. Pierce was elected in an overwhelming win, leaving Scott with the electoral votes of only four states.

Despite his faltering in the election, Scott was still a wildly popular national hero. In 1855, by a special act of Congress, Scott was given a brevet promotion to the rank of lieutenant general, making him only the second person in U.S. military history, after George Washington, ever to hold that rank.

In 1859, Scott traveled to the Pacific Northwest to settle a dispute with the British over San Juan Island, which had escalated to the so-called Pig War. The old general established a good rapport with the British, and was able to bring about a peaceful resolution.

As Union general-in-chief at the beginning of the American Civil War, the elderly Scott knew he was unable to go into battle himself. He was too large to mount or ride his horse. He offered the command of the Federal army to Colonel Robert E. Lee. However, when Virginia left the Union in April 1861, Lee resigned and the command of the Federal field forces defending Washington, D.C. passed to Brigadier General Irvin McDowell. Although he was born and raised in Virginia, Scott remained loyal to the nation that he had served for most of his life and refused to resign his commission upon his home state's secession.

Scott did not believe that a quick victory was possible for Federal forces. He devised a long-term plan to defeat the Confederacy by occupying key terrain, such as the Mississippi River and key ports on the Atlantic Coast and the Gulf of Mexico, and then moving on Atlanta. This Anaconda Plan was derided in the press; however, in its broad outlines, it was the strategy the Union actually used, particularly in the Western Theater and in the successful naval blockade of Confederate ports. In 1864, it was continued by General Ulysses S. Grant and executed by General William Tecumseh Sherman in his Atlanta Campaign and March to the Sea.



Engraving of Winfield Scott.

Scott's physical infirmities cast doubt on his stamina; he suffered from gout and rheumatism and his weight had ballooned to over 300 lbs., prompting some to use a play on his nickname of "Old Fuss and Feathers," instead calling him "Old Fat and Feeble." Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, the field commander, was

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insubordinate and ambitious; political pressure from McClellan's supporters in Congress led to Scott's resignation on November 1, 1861. McClellan then succeeded him as general-in-chief.^[10]

General Scott lived to see the Union victory in the Civil War. He died at West Point, New York, and is buried in West Point Cemetery.

Stagecoach-related business and significant freight shipping for the region were largely responsible for Winfield's early growth. When a railroad was established in Naperville in 1864, the bulk of the freight business at Winfield was lost.

New Englanders predominated in Winfield's 1850 census. By 1860, half the residents were German, with some Dutch and some French from the Alsace-Lorraine region. The Winfield Creamery was one of the largest businesses at this time. The first public school opened in 1856, but St. John's parochial school was preferred when it opened in 1882, and the public school remained a one-teacher school until 1939. Enrollment in the public school climbed after World War II.

An acre of land donated by Julius Warren in 1867 became the site for St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church, school, and rectory. The church remained German-speaking until World War I and has continued to serve the community in an expanded facility. In 1925, the Winfield Community Church became the town's first Protestant congregation.

In 1897 Jessie P. Forsythe's rest home was established. In 1909 it became the Chicago-Winfield Tuberculosis Sanatorium, and since 1964 it has been the site of Central DuPage Hospital, a nonprofit, acute care facility.

Cantigny Museum and Gardens is located in nearby unincorporated DuPage on the estate of Robert McCormick. The Kline Creek Farm, an 1890s farmstead living-history museum on 200 acres of forest preserve, is adjacent to the village's first golf course community. Barely maintaining its rural flavor amid encroaching suburban sprawl, the village installed its first traffic light in 1990. In 2000 there were 8,178 residents.