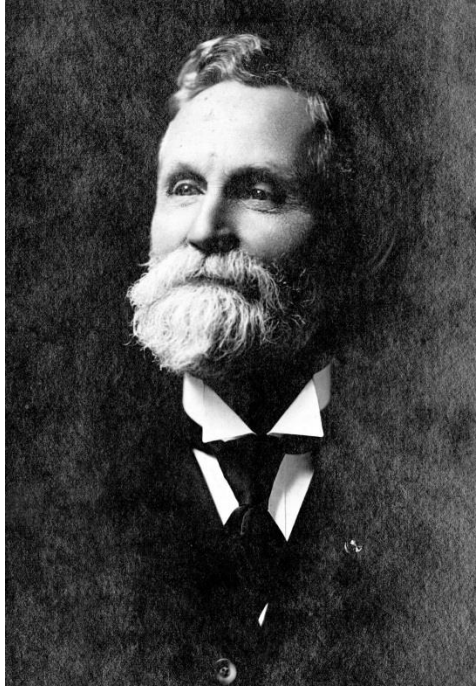


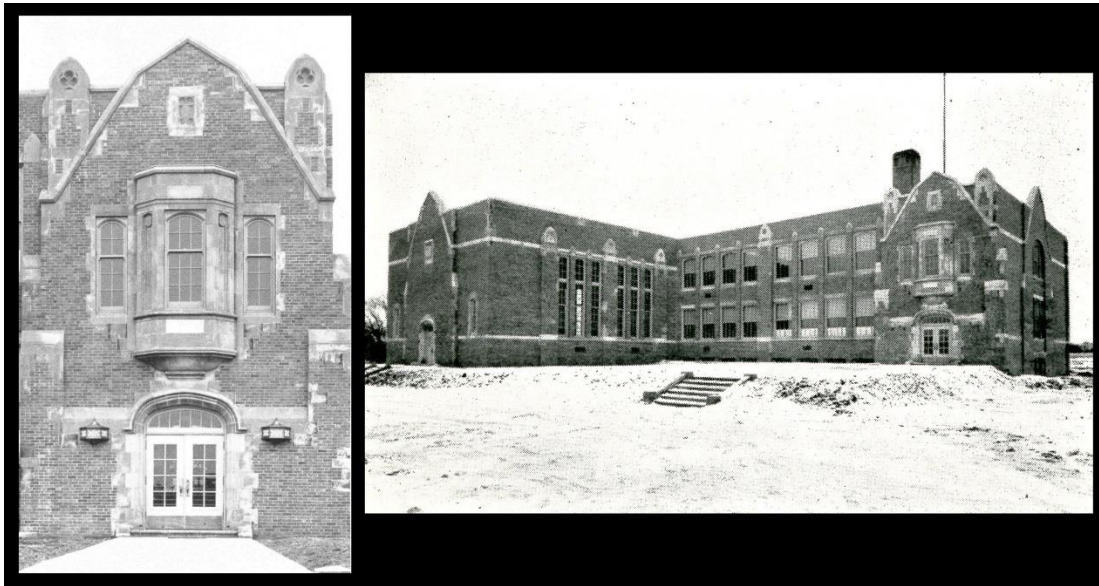
# West Aurora Schools

**Joseph H. Freeman**

(Superintendent 1879-1886)



**Professor J. H. Freeman**




**J.H. Freeman Elementary School  
153 South Randall Road, Aurora  
Constructed 1928**



**Freeman (seated at right) speaks at 1898 event honoring men who fought in Spanish-American War.**

GRACE FREEMAN.  
Graduate East Aurora High School.  
Student Wellesley College.  
University of Chicago, A. B.  
Graduate Student University of Chicago.  
Graduate Student Columbia University.  
Graduate Student University of Wisconsin.  
Instructor in History, Decatur (Illinois) High School  
Instructor in History, Springfield (Illinois) High School.  
Instructor in History, West Aurora High School.  
"She opened her mouth with wisdom."



**Daughter Grace Freeman - West High School Teacher**



**Spring Lake Cemetery in Aurora**

# **Profile of Joseph H. Freeman**

## **Personal Life**

**Joseph H. Freeman (1841-1931) was born in Poland, Maine on May 13, 1841. In 1860, he entered Maine State Seminary (later known as Bates College). In 1862, he left school to enlist in the twenty-third Maine volunteer infantry and was appointed lieutenant. His regiment was assigned to picket duty and engaged in the defense of Washington.**

**When his enlistment term expired, he reentered the seminary. In the winter of 1864-65, he reenlisted and was appointed captain of Company H, 14th Maine volunteer infantry, which he commanded until the close of the war. In 1866, he returned to college and received a master's degree.**

**As a Civil War veteran, Freeman was often referred to as Captain Freeman. He was a member of the Aurora G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic) Post No. 20 in Aurora for more than fifty years. He served as commander of the post thirteen times. In his later years, he was called upon to speak at numerous patriotic celebrations as he was considered a splendid orator.**

**In a June 10, 1885 article in the Aurora Beacon-News, it was reported that Freeman delivered the oration at Shabbona on Decoration Day. "Professor Freeman had a pointed, logical discourse, which was well written and delivered in a splendid manner. Everyone spoke with praise of his oration and he can rest assured that his part of the program was received with perfect satisfaction."**

**Freeman and his wife Mary Aletta Freeman had one daughter, Grace Freeman, who taught for more than twenty years at West Aurora High School in the early 1900s. They also had three sons, Harry, Perley and J.E. "Ned" Freeman. J.E. Freeman preceded his father in death.**

**Mary Freeman was from Unity, Maine. She taught in Bangor, Maine at the time of her marriage. When her husband left Brady School to assume the position of superintendent for the Polo Schools, Mrs. Freeman became interim principal of Brady until a replacement could be found. She also was a matron at the State School for the Blind in Jacksonville when Mr. Freeman was superintendent at the school.**

**Professor Freeman retired in 1907 after a long and illustrious career as a teacher and administrator. He and his wife returned to Aurora where they resided at 509 Fox Street.**

**In January 1929, Freeman was present at the dedication of the J.H. Freeman Elementary School, where he gave a brief talk. The newspaper**

reported that more than three hundred people attended the event despite the fact that the temperature “hovered around zero.”

Freeman died in 1931 at his home. He was ninety years old. His wife had died prior to his passing.

The Reverend I.S. Yeaworth, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, officiated at Professor Freeman’s funeral service, which was held at the Healy Chapel in Aurora. Reverend Yeaworth prefaced his eulogy with these words. “I shall be totally unable to say anything that will in any way enhance this life which has been lived so nobly in our midst.”

Members of the G.A.R. also participated in the service “in a deeply impressive way.” At the close, members placed on the casket a spray of fern (tribute of love), a rose (symbol of purity, devotion and sincerity) and a wreath of laurel (the award of the victor). “Taps were sounded from far away.” Burial was in Spring Lake Cemetery.

## **Professional Life**

Freeman’s professional life begins after he received his master’s degree in 1866. That year, he came to Illinois and accepted a position as principal of schools at Leland. Three years later, he was appointed the first principal of the new Brady School on Aurora’s east side.

In 1870, he left Aurora to become superintendent of the Polo schools. He remained at Polo for four years.

He then went to Denver to become the first principal of the Denver High School. However, serious health issues forced him to return to Maine where he taught at a private school in Unity. After his health improved, he returned to Illinois and taught in Streator during the last months of 1875. He then returned to Polo where he taught until 1879.

That year, he served as president of the Illinois School Principal’s Association and was called to Aurora to serve as superintendent of the West Side Schools.

While at West Aurora, Freeman brought dynamic leadership to the district. He believed a teacher’s role was to create a desire for learning and to strengthen the judgment of children. During his tenure, the Old Stone School was destroyed by fire in June 1884. By January 1885, a new two-story brick building was completed on the site. It was named Oak Street School (later renamed for Mary A. Todd).

**In 1886, Freeman was offered the position of deputy superintendent of schools for the State of Illinois. The West Aurora Board of Education was reluctant to release him from his contract due to his outstanding administration of the district. But, they eventually relented when local citizens sided with their superintendent.**

**In October 1887, the Aurora Beacon-News reported that “Freeman has disposed of his handsome residence at the corner of Galena and View Streets for \$4,500.” He moved his family to Springfield in September 1887 where he was then working.**

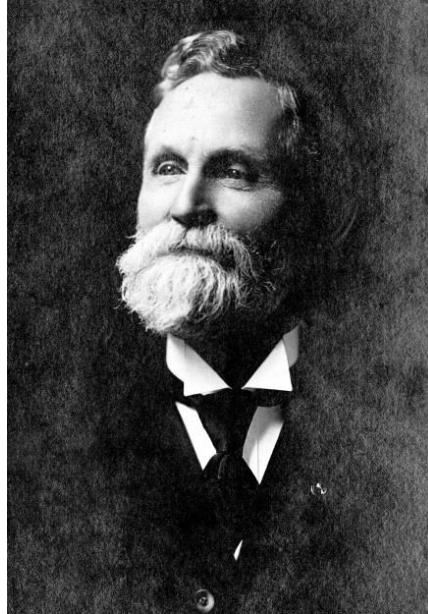
**In 1889, he returned to Aurora to lead the East Aurora Schools as superintendent. He had the distinction of serving as superintendent of both the East and West Aurora Schools.**

**He then was called by the state superintendent of schools (Superintendent Inglis) to be his assistant. Upon the death of Mr. Inglis, Freeman assumed the office of superintendent.**

**In 1902, he resigned to succeed Frank H. Hall as the superintendent of the State School for the Blind in Jacksonville where he remained until 1907 when he retired and returned to Aurora.**

**Later that year, Mayor Finch appointed Freeman to serve on the board of directors of the Aurora Library. The Aurora Beacon-News commented as follows. “Mr. Freeman has returned to Aurora to spend the evening of life amid the scenes of his early labors, and all the people will rejoice to see him again in a position of usefulness and honor. Mayor Finch has done well and is entitled to high credit for a most worthy appointment.”**

**Sources for this profile: West Aurora Schools, Aurora Beacon-News and Frances Jean O'Brien's “A Study of Aurora Schools (1835-1935).” The 1898 photo of the patriotic event is courtesy of the Aurora Historical Society. Photos of the gravestones are courtesy of the Community Foundation. The West Aurora Buildings and Grounds Facilities Inventory Report recorded the date for the construction of the school as 1928. A January 10, 1927 article in the Aurora Beacon-News reported that the West Aurora School Board voted in January 1927 to name the school in honor of J.H. Freeman. A January 26, 1929 article in the Aurora Beacon-News reported that the J.H. Freeman School was dedicated on January 25, 1929. This profile, completed in 2016, is courtesy of the A+ Foundation for West Aurora Schools and the Community Foundation of the Fox River Valley.**



**J.H. Freeman**

In 2016, the A+ Foundation for West Aurora Schools and the Community Foundation of the Fox River Valley collaborated in the development of biographical profiles of those for whom District 129 schools are named. Financial support for the project was provided by the following Special Friends of West Aurora School District 129: Sherry Eagle, Gary and Mary Jewel, Neal and Mary Clark Ormond, Char and Frank Voris, and Brent and Jean Wadsworth. The research, writing and editing of these profiles were courtesy of the Community Foundation and its President Emeritus Sharon Stredde, Research Associate Judith Iverson and Past Chairman of the Board Neal Ormond III.