

State of Illinois  
Lake County

I, Philemon Cadwell, do solemnly swear that I will support the Constitution of the United States and of the State of Illinois, and that I will, according to the best of my judgment, skill and ability, diligently, faithfully and impartially perform all the duties enjoined on me as Overseer of the Poor for the Town of Deerfield in the County of Lake and State of Illinois.

I do solemnly swear that I have not fought a duel, nor sent or accepted a challenge to fight a duel, the probable issue of which might have been the death of either party, nor been a second to either to party, nor in any manner aided or assisted in such duel, nor been knowingly the bearer of such challenge or acceptance since the adoption of the Constitution, and that I will not be so engaged or concerned directly or indirectly in or about any such duel during my continuance in office so help me, God.

Philemon Cadwell

Taken and subscribed  
Before me this 8<sup>th</sup> day  
Of April A.D. 1861

Sidney Hall J.P. (Justice of the Peace)

## **West Deerfield Township Document – Oath of Office (April 8, 1861)**

### **Background**

#### **Local History --**

Oaths of office are a common way for public officials to begin their term of office. An oath is a pledge that an official will carry out the responsibilities of office. For example, in Article II, Section 7 of the U.S. Constitution, the President promises to “preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.” Oaths were considered so important, that they often included the words, “so help me, God.”

This document describes the oath of office taken by a man named Philemon Cadwell, who was about to become Overseer of the Poor. The “town of Deerfield” really means township. Deerfield became a township in 1850. After another vote in 1889, the township split in two; West Deerfield Township was created at this time. The Village of Deerfield was not created until 1903.

Philemon Cadwell came from an important family. His parents and their children were the first family to settle in what later became the Village of Deerfield (1835). In fact, this area was first known as Cadwell Corners. His family built the first area school, Cadwell School, which opened in 1848 with his sister Rosella as the first teacher. His brother Caleb was the first Township Supervisor and Post Master, in 1850. That same year Philemon, who was a judge, was chosen as the Township’s first Overseer of the Poor.

The name “Philemon” comes from the New Testament, which mentions a man named Philemon as a good friend of St. Paul.

#### **Overseer of the Poor --**

A township Overseer of the Poor would be in charge of making sure that poor people were provided for. Although there is no specific information regarding how the poor were treated in Deerfield Township, states like Illinois authorized counties to create a “poor house” or “poor farm” where people with no money would be sent to work. These might include orphans and the mentally ill. Sometimes a poor person would be indentured to someone who would care for the person in exchange for his/her work. All this was done publicly. Sometimes poor people were mistreated and ridiculed.

Today the Township, through its Supervisor, still provides “General Assistance” – helping the poor with heat in the winter, food, and educational opportunities. A food pantry is run from the township office. The identity of anyone who receives this kind of help remains private. National and state governments also provide welfare assistance for those in need.

#### **Dueling --**

An important section of Philemon Cadwell’s oath was that he had not participated, or would participate, in a duel. The American Heritage Dictionary defines “duel” as follows – “A prearranged combat between two persons, fought especially to settle a point of honor.” There were specific rules created for duels; the first were written in 1410 during the Renaissance in Italy. Initially, duels were fought with swords, but by

the eighteenth century, pistols were used. Dueling pistols, usually smoothbore flintlock, were not very accurate and frequently misfired.

Still, there was always a chance of killing one's opponent or being killed. In 1777, one year after he signed the Declaration of Independence, Button Gwinnett died of wounds sustained in a duel. In 1804, Vice President Aaron Burr killed Alexander Hamilton, our country's first Secretary of the Treasury. In 1806, future President Andrew Jackson was seriously wounded while killing his opponent, Charles Dickinson.

If insulted, defending one's honor by fighting a duel was considered necessary by many officers and gentlemen in both the East and on the frontier. In fact, in his book, *A Rage for Glory*, James DeKay states that "...between 1798 and the Civil War, two-thirds as many American naval officers were to die in duels as in all of the country's sea fights." The most famous of these officers to die in a duel was Stephen Decatur, even though he wrote to his opponent, a few weeks before their fight, "I do not think that fighting duels, under any circumstances, can raise the reputation of any man, and have long since discovered, that it is not even an unerring criterion of personal courage."

Many famous Americans, like Benjamin Franklin and George Washington, condemned dueling. Many duels were seen, not as defending one's honor, but as an excuse for murder. By the Civil War, dueling was dying out in the United States. Therefore, it is not surprising that many state and local officials like Philemon Cadwell, the Overseer of the Poor for Deerfield, had to swear not to have participated in, and not to participate in, any such activity.

## **West Deerfield Township Document – Oath of Office (April 8, 1861)**

### **Note to Teacher –**

West Deerfield Township is working both to preserve its historic documents and to make them available to the public. One project is to use some of these documents to create lesson plans for junior high and high school U.S. history classes. The objectives of these lessons are as follows:

1. To give students a better understanding of local history, placing it in the context of our national history.
2. To familiarize students with primary sources.
3. To encourage higher level thinking skills, such as interpretation, analysis, and evaluation.

These lessons include the following:

1. A copy of the original document.
2. A typed copy of the document.
3. A reading containing information pertinent to the document.
4. A study guide.
5. “Note to Teacher.”

Of course, the teacher knows best how to incorporate these documents into her/his units of study. Future township document lesson plans will relate to property assessment, the Civil War, death and burial certificates, and relief activities during the Great Depression. West Deerfield Township appreciates any feedback, including suggestions for improvement.

### **Answers to worksheet –**

1. Overseer of the Poor.  
Answers will vary, but should include feeding, clothing, housing and medical care for the poor.
2. a. Constitution of the United States.  
b. Constitution of Illinois.  
c. Overseer of the Poor.  
d. dueling.
3. Answers will vary.
4. Answers will vary.
5. Confederate firing on Fort Sumter, South Carolina, beginning the Civil War.

## Questions for “Oath of Office – April 8, 1861”

1. Philemon Cadwell’s office was \_\_\_\_\_.

What do you think were some responsibilities of his office?

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2. What were the four promises that Philemon Caldwell made?

a. To support the Constitution of \_\_\_\_\_

b. To support the Constitution of \_\_\_\_\_

c. To perform the duties of \_\_\_\_\_

d. Not to have been involved in, or become involved in \_\_\_\_\_

3. In our nation’s early history, some people thought that dueling was a civilized way for gentlemen to settle an argument. Others thought that it was uncivilized – foolish and a waste of life. What’s your opinion? –

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4. Do poor people have a right to welfare from the government, or should any such help be based on charity (whatever individuals choose to give to help the poor)?

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5. Philemon Cadwell took his oath of office on April 8, 1861. What famous event occurred in the United States just four days later? \_\_\_\_\_