

1977 Letter from Robert Grant
to
Jean Miller Brown

THE SUGAR GROVE CEMETERY

This cemetery, about one-fourth mile south of Sweetwater, IL., is in deplorable condition and unaccessable to any highway. Many of the stones are down and the weeds and grass have taken over. What a shame; according to the History of Sangamon and Menard Counties, here lies the remains of some very distinguished pioneers that played a prominent role in the early development of Mernard County, IL.

One of the occupants, William Engle, as a young bachelor, came from the Madison County area in Ohio to the Sugar Grove area in 1823. He harvested a crop and returned to Ohio and aided the Leonard Alkire family in coming to the same area. Soon thereafter in the last part of 1823 he married Elizabeth Alkire a daughter of Leonard Alkire and Catherine Davis Alkire. This was the first marriage of pioneers in Menard Co.

William Engle took an active part in the organization of the county of Menard; was one of the first County Commissioners; represented the County in the Legislature, and was the first merchant in the territory now embraced in Sugar Grove, Greenview, and Indian Creek. He was liberal in his views; an ardent supporter of Christianity and a zealous advocate of education. On October 2, 1857 he laid-out the village of Greenview. Also, he and Leonard Alkire laid-out Sweetwater about the year 1853.

Mr. Engle corresponded with Congressman P. M. Harris about establishing a Post Office in Sugar Grove. Mr. Harris advised William that a village elsewhere in Illinois had the same name and had a post office. So, because of several soft maple groves in the area providing sap for sugar, the name Sweetwater was selected for the name of the village. William Engle was the first postmaster. Soon thereafter he moved his store from the farm to the building including the post office. Mail came from Petersburg by horseback and on to Elkhart.

As a young boy, William came with his parents from Virginia to Knox County, Kentucky. Later the family moved to the Madison County area in Ohio.

Leonard Alkire, my great, great, great grandfather, was born December 26, 1786. He was the son of John Alkire. The John Alkire family, when Leonard was a boy, moved from Virginia to Kentucky. Leonard married Catherine Davis while living in Kentucky. Both Alkire families and a son-in-law to John, John J. Smith, moved to the Madison County, Ohio area. About 1805 or 1806. About 1810 or 1812 John Alkire built the first grist mill in the area on the East bank of the Deer Creek River in Pleasant township.

I have in my library a book, "LINCOLN AS A LAWYER", written by John P. Frank and published by the University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Illinois in 1961. I quote from page 23 " **THERE MIGHT BE A STORY TELLING COMPETITION, THE THREE**

CHAMPIONS BEING LINCOLN, UNCLE BILL ENGLE FROM MENARD COUNTY, AND JAMES MURRAY OF LOGAN COUNTY”.

My great-grandmother, Sarah Sikes Engle, occasionally kept me during the evening church services. My reason for writing this is to relate two incidents that she told me about. Incidents her mother and grandmother had with the early Indians.

1. Her grandmother migrated from the East to the West [Ohio or Kentucky] in a large caravan of covered wagons. A young man in the caravan rode ahead by horseback to plot the easiest route to travel. One evening when the caravan was set in a large circle preparing for the evening rest, this young man shot a gun in the air. In a few minutes a large number of male Indians descended by horseback on this small group of travelers. The Indians said that whoever fired the shot hit a female Indian. By threatening the life of all of them they were forced to tell who fired the shot. All of the travelers were forced to watch the scalping of the young man and then witness him being burned at the stake.
2. Her mother was aiding her mother with the duties in the kitchen. Sarah's grandmother was in the process of boiling maple tree sap making it into brown sugar. As I recall two or three large pans of brown sugar had already been prepared and placed on a table in the kitchen. Two or three Indian Chiefs came to the cabin and insisted on entering the cabin. Seeing the brown sugar the chiefs insisted on having one half of the contents of one of the pans. Sarah's grandmother told them that she did not have a tool to split one of the cakes of sugar. One of the Chiefs gave her his hunting knife to cut through one of the cakes. In doing so she broke the blade of the knife. Horrified, she gave the whole pan of sugar to them. The Chiefs left without harming either of them.

I recall that Sarah kept an ivory handled revolver on a shelf in the front room. It was always loaded and I was told to never touch it. I recall that she said she once shot an Eagle which was perched on the chimney of the house.

Sarah was a stern woman , a real sturdy pioneer.

Leonard Alkire, while living in Ohio, bought cattle and drove them to the Eastern markets. These were quite hazardous trips. On one of his trips home, after having disposed of his drove, he traveled on horseback at the rate of 8 miles a day; carrying the cash, mostly in silver, received for his cattle, in his saddle bags. In swimming the Ohio River, perched upon his hands and feet on the top of his saddle, his sturdy and fleet roadster steaming the rapids current with great power and speed, when nearing the opposite shore suddenly went down; but with a terrible struggle for life finally succeeded in landing his precious freight on the opposite bank. Mr. Alkire discovered that his saddle bag filled with silver had drifted back by force of the current, remained suspended by the stirrups, the whole weight resting on the hocks of the horse and cramping his movements.

Leonard Alkire and his father were very successful in their respective pursuits. As stated earlier, William Engle aided the move of Leonard Alkire and his family to the Sugar Grove area. Leonard, having been a successful business man in Ohio, was able

to purchase several claims within the first few years after he came to the Sugar Grove area. He purchased other tracts of land including the purchase of land in Mason County in August 1829. About 1828-30, Leonard was appointed Road Supervisor of his district by the Sangamon Co., Commissioners, which was then larger than Menard Co. He was ordered to open a public road from near the mouth of Salt Creek on to Havana in Mason Co. A serious difficulty to travel at that time was the -----Creek Swamp, with tremendous difficulty he engineered the building of the road which lasted without repair for many years. The technique used is recorded in the History of Menard and Mason Cos.

Leonard Alkire was a strong advocate for education and was a Christian Man. Just a few years after Leonard came to the Sugar Grove area, his father, John Alkire, came to the same area. He was buried in the Blane Cemetery.

John Engle, my great, great grandfather, the first child of William & Catherine Engle, was born Feb 19, 1826. Went to Calif. When a young man and upon his return married Sarah A. Sikes on June 21, 1855. She was born in Ohio Aug 7, 1834. John was a farmer and raised live stock on his 400 acre farm.

Signed:
Robert C. Grant
June 27, 1977