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## The Ellwood Family of Sycamore & DeKalb, Illinois

(Taken from the research notes of Phyllis Kelley of the Joiner History Room who spoke to the Sycamore Historical Society on "The Ellwood Connection: Sycamore and DeKalb.")

### Arrival in Sycamore, 1856

**Abraham (Abram) Ellwood** came to Sycamore in 1856. He was born in Montgomery County, NY, Nov. 1792, right after the American Revolution; and **Sarah (DeLong)**, his wife, was born in the same county, February 23, 1795. Thus, they were both post-war babies.

When they arrived in Sycamore, he was 64 and she was 61. He had been in the **War of 1812** at the age of 20 or more. They were married in 1812 and their first child, Nancy, was born in 1813, and she became one of eleven children.

By the time they came to Sycamore, Nancy was deceased. But two of their other daughters and six of their sons were already in Sycamore. One son remained in NY.

Abram as a young man had learned the "cooper" trade. It was said his barrels were always water proof and his staves stayed put. He had been a contractor on the NY railroads and canals and had built a section of the Utica and Syracuse, now the **NY Central Railroad**.

Not ready to retire, he built a house on the corner of Elm and Somonauk Streets, and down the yard from the house he built a cooper shop where he made butter tubs and hoghead barrels.

He lived in Sycamore 16 years, passing August 24, 1872, in his 80th year. His son, **Dr. Livingston Ellwood**, one of the leading physicians of Schenectady, NY, came and was in attendance for five weeks before his father's death.

Abram left a wife and ten children, nine of which were at his deathbed. One, **Mrs. Livingston Walrod**, is buried in Sycamore. He died of old age and prostatic disease. He was buried with Mason's honors and nearly a thousand persons attended the funeral and his remains to the grave. He is buried in Elmwood Cemetery.

[Many of the Ellwoods are buried in Elmwood but all of their children are listed there whether buried there or not.]

### Sarah Passes Seven Years Later

Other than she bore eleven children, not much is known of Sarah. Except that in 1878, a year before her death, her name is listed in the Sycamore True Republican with 50 women who signed a petition to protest paying taxes when they did not have the right to vote. The women were either widows or single women who owned property. In 1871 **Susan B. Anthony** had been in Sycamore and gave a rousing speech for women's rights.

She was a member of the **Sycamore Universalist Church**. Before her death she chose the scripture that was to be used at her funeral and told **Rev. Dr. Sage** what hymns were to be sung and what he was to say. She also

chose to have her sons as pall bearers. A long and flowery obituary appeared in the Jan. 22, 1879. Sycamore True Republican.

[Note: Their home is not to be confused with the Abram Ellwood House at 421 Somonauk St. This was a grandson and son of Reuben Ellwood and who served as Sycamore's tenth mayor.]

### The Ellwood Daughters

The daughters, **Nancy and Malinda**, were the first of the family to come to Sycamore. Nancy came with her pioneer settler husband in 1836. At that time DeKalb County was still part of Kane County. Nancy had married **Livingston Walrod** and they had two sons. They moved to Sycamore after the birth of their first child. However, Nancy died in 1842 at the age of 29.

**Malinda** was born March 2, 1815, in New York and had married **Joseph Sixbury**. They came with Reuben in a covered wagon and arrived in 1837, the year DeKalb County was officially formed. Both daughters appear in the 1840 census. Malinda was widowed in 1879. After his death, she resided with her brother Chauncey. She died in Florida in 1888 while visiting her brother **Isaac**, who was vacationing in the south. Her body was returned to Sycamore where she is in Elmwood beside her husband who had served in the Civil War.

Both husbands were early land speculators and much is written in the DeKalb County histories about them. Their names appear on many deeds, county records and land abstracts. Both women must have had a lot of courage to come to Sycamore and settle when this was bare prairie, wild animals, and no neighbors except a few stray **Pottowattamie Indians**. [When they first came to Sycamore, there was not more than six trees when the first nine city blocks were plotted and no squirrels. Later they bought five squirrels and turned them loose on the courthouse lawn.]

### Eliza, the Third Daughter

**Eliza**, also the fourth child, was born in NY in 1819. She was married twice: first to **Aaron Barringer** and next to **M.O. Bowman**. She had remained in NY and had four daughters and two sons. Little more information is known other than a brief obituary in the Sycamore newspaper, March 7, 1894. She is buried at Cherry Valley, NY.

**Alida**, the youngest daughter and child was born Jan. 31, 1838, in Frankfort, NY. She was 18 when her parents came to Sycamore and may have come at that time. She married **Elzey Young**, another well known DeKalb county pioneer. She was his second wife. He was a Sycamore merchant and a partner of the Waterman brothers.

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Alida Young's name was well known in Sycamore for a very large building was named for her. Called the **Alida Young Temple**, the Masons and Odd Fellows Lodge stood on State Street across from the courthouse. It burned awhile ago and there is a parking lot there today but the cornerstones are still there with the emblems for the Masons and Odd Fellows carved on them.

### **The Last and Eldest Son to Come**

Chauncey Ellwood was born Dec. 24, 1816, in NY. The first boy and third child, he came to Sycamore in 1858, two years after his folks, at the age of 42. As the older brother, he perhaps was most welcomed by Malinda who had been in Sycamore 21 years and had been without her sister Nancy for 16 years. But by now all of the family who would plan to move west, had arrived. Of course, Reuben had returned the year before and the folks were still here. Hiram and James came in 1855 and Alida came with the folks in 1856. Isaac also came 1855 and was in DeKalb. Eliza and Livingston stayed behind in New York.

Chauncey, after **Abraham Lincoln** was elected, in April 1861 was appointed Postmaster of Sycamore by the president. In 1867 with his brother Alonzo and local physician Dr. O.M. Bryan, he began a flax mill in Sycamore. In 1874 he was in the Shoe and Boot business and was also on the board of directors of the **Reuben Mfg. Company**.

He was president of the **Elmwood Cemetery Assoc.** when it was organized in 1868. He also served as Vice President and General Manager of the **Sycamore to Cortland Railroad**. He built the brick depot still standing at Elm and Sacramento Streets. Children loved him; in one instance, for putting a chalk mark on the back of young boy's coats enabling them to ride free to Cortland and back.

A strong Republican, he held many political offices. In 1878 the City of Sycamore honored him with a gala affair and speeches about his contributions by the City fathers. He was presented with \$100 and a gold-headed cane.

He married Jane E. Budlay and had one child; later Helen Dexter and had three children. The Chauncey Ellwood House is at 827 Somonauk St. and had a duck pond in their yard. They were long remembered by family members for their annual New Year's Day dinner parties.

### **Reuben Becomes First Mayor**

**Reuben Ellwood**, the second son and fifth child, had first come to Sycamore in 1837 at the age of 16 to join his sister **Malinda Sixbury**. He, too, was born in Montgomery County, NY, 1821, and was the first of the sons to witness Sycamore. A year later at age 17 he staked a claim for 160 acres near the little village where a half dozen log cabins stood on the prairie.

However, four years later at 21 (1842) he suffered some health problems and returned to NY where after a few months he entered the **Cherry Valley Academy**. After graduation (1846-48?) he moved to Schenectady and went into the broom corn business. In 1850 it is recorded he made the first horse drawn cultivator and the first hay rake in the country.

Politics became his main interest and held several offices in NY with the **Whig Party**. In 1857 he returned to Sycamore when in the following year he became the village's first mayor. When the **Republican Party** was formed in Sycamore, Reuben joined and was a strong supporter of **Abraham Lincoln** in 1860.

As a young man, when he first came to Sycamore, he helped build the dam on the Fox River at Geneva; did manual labor in a Rockford brickyard. He raised broom corn for making brooms and later joined his brother, Alonzo, in operating a Sycamore hardware store where he sold farm machinery. In 1870 he began manufacturing agricultural implements in a Sycamore factory. He was a leading factor in establishing the Sycamore preserve works.

He married Eleanor Vedder and they had six children. They lived at the corner of State and California Streets which became the Fargo Hotel and still incorporates some of the original rooms.

He was a member of the 5th District of IL and was sent to the Legislature in 1868. He served as a Republican in the 42nd Congress (1873) in the House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. Believed to be the only one from Sycamore to ever serve in that capacity. [The Joiner Room has a copy of "Memorial Book Addresses of the Life and Character of Reuben Ellwood, Jan. 28, 1886."]

When he died, July 1, 1885, his funeral was said to be the largest ever held at Elmwood Cemetery. Special trains came <sup>from</sup> for fourteen outlying towns to bring mourners.

Two of his quotations: "*He does best for himself who does best for his fellow citizens.*" and "*It is better to give to some who don't deserve it, than to neglect the poor.*"

### **Alonzo Ellwood**

The sixth child and third son, he was born also in NY, 1823. At age 15 he began work as a carriage maker. During the **Mexican War** (1846-7) he was made a captain of the **New York Light Guard** but the war ended before he saw action. In 1849 he joined the trek west in search of gold. For five years he was involved in placer mining on the middle fork of the American River until 1854.

In 1855 he came to Sycamore where he went into the hardware business. In 1874 a big fire in Sycamore destroyed several stores, among them Alonzo's hardware. He and his brother Chauncey rebuilt and Alonzo opened a drug-grocery store the following year.

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He owned stock and was a director of the Sycamore Cortland RR. He was also a stockholder in brother Reuben's manufacturing and in March Harvester Co. He was president of the Wisconsin San Juan Mining Co. in Colorado and vice pres. of an insurance company, the Covenant Mutual Benefit Assoc. of Illinois (1885). He also owned large holdings of Iowa farmland.

He served on the Sycamore village board of trustees, was an alderman, and was on the DeKalb County board of supervisors.

He died in 1899. He was married four times; the father of five children, only one of whom survived to adulthood.

### **Dr. Livingston Ellwood**

He was born Aug. 20, 1825, in NY and remained in Schenectady except for the visit he made to Sycamore when his father was dying. He was the seventh child and fourth son. In 1844 he entered Buffalo University Medical Dept. and graduated four years later with a degree in medicine and a degree in surgery. In 1849 at the age of 24 he opened an office in Schenectady where he established himself as one of the leading physicians of that city.

He was twice married and had one son, Charles. In January 1881, Reuben and his family were called east by the serious illness of his brother. He had gone insane because of a tumor on the brain. The doctor had a large property for which a conservator had to be appointed. He died in July 1890 at the age of 65. A Sycamore obituary Aug. 2, 1890 said he died of a stroke. The brothers James, Hiram and Isaac attended the funeral.

[The NIU Regional History Center has a couple of handwritten sheets about him in their Ellwood papers.]

### **Hiram Ellwood**

The eighth child and fifth son, he was born Sept. 19, 1828, in Montgomery County, NY. At age 15 he became a salesman for a local merchant. At 17 he got a job as a clerk in a dry-goods, grocery store. At 20 he bought a half-interest in a canal boat. A year later he went into the broom corn and broom manufacturing business. He married Sarah Dygert March 25, 1850 at F. Plains, NY, and they had one child.

In 1852 he and his wife moved in with Chauncey and Hiram joined his older brother in a provision store business on the Erie Canal. When Chauncey was later appointed superintendent of the canal traffic, the store passed into the hands of Hiram and the younger brother, James. In the spring of 1856 (1855?) Hiram sold out and headed for DeKalb County. On Aug. 9, 1856, he opened a mercantile firm in the then small village of DeKalb. He continued in the drug and grocery business until 1877.

He then joined his brother Isaac and became the western shipping agent for shipping barbed wire west and

south from Kansas City, KS, where he lived for three years. In 1881 he became a charter member of the Superior Barbed-Wire Company of DeKalb and was elected treasurer, secretary and general manager of the company.

Hiram served as township supervisor, school director, deputy postmaster and treasurer of the county. He had charge of the soldier's claims following the Civil War.

Hiram and Sarah had a beautiful home on north Third Street in DeKalb. They are buried in Fairview Cemetery with modest tombstones near the Isaac Ellwood mausoleum.

### **James Edmund Ellwood**

Apparently the ninth child and sixth son was the first to deserve a middle name. He was born April 26, 1831, in NY. His first business venture was raising 100 acres of broom corn in the Mohawk Valley when he was 20 years old. In 1852 he joined his brother Hiram in the sale of groceries and provisions in Frankfort, NY.

He came to Sycamore in 1855 and joined brother Reuben in the broom corn business. At one time they had over a thousand acres of broom corn planted. After three years of that enterprise, he joined brother Chauncey in the drug and grocery store. After a year of that partnership, he bought out Chauncey and continued to run the business himself for 13 years.

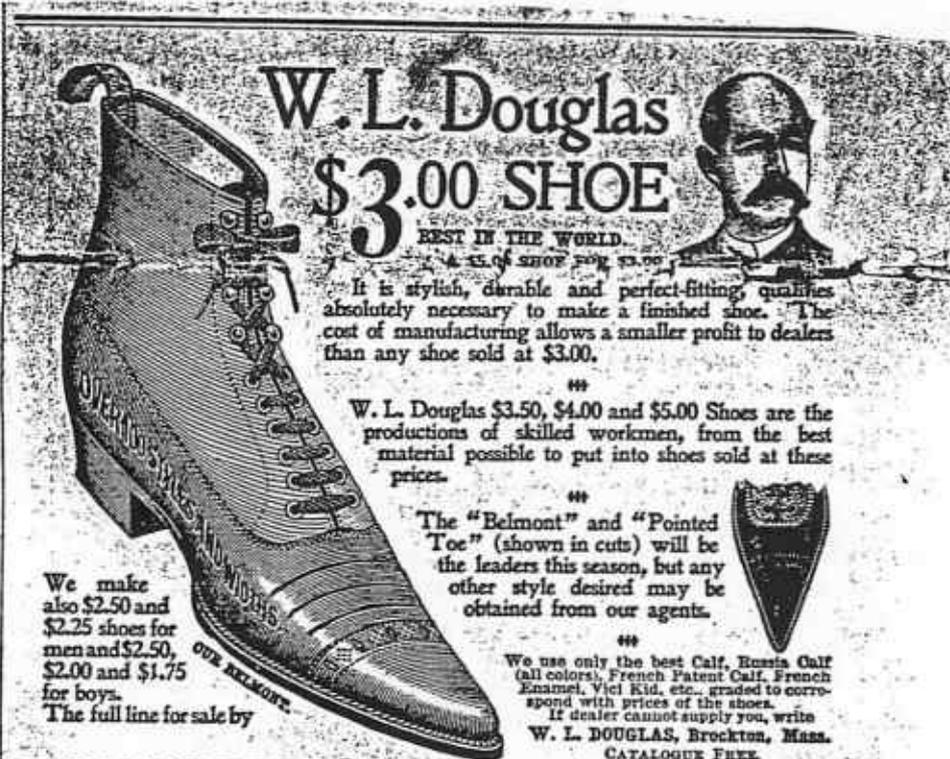
In 1874 he and brother Alonzo built the magnificent Central Block building, at the head of Somonauk and State Streets, which still stands in Sycamore. James moved his business to the new building where he continued his drug and grocery business for 23 years. In 1881 he became a stockholder in the Reuben Ellwood Manufacturing Co. where he officiated as treasurer of the corporation for 17 years. From 1898-1907 he was the Postmaster of Sycamore.

He married Sodeska H. Fellows in Herkimer, NY. They had six children born but four died in infancy. Their home was located at 601 Somonauk St. which later became the administrative office of the Sycamore Municipal Hospital and now is located across the street. [A daughter lived in Peoria, IL, and son James B. was with Diamond Match Co. in Chicago when his father died.]

Oddly, this sixth son died in 1907 which left the seventh son Isaac as the only survivor of the family.

### **Isaac L. Ellwood**

Isaac was the tenth child and seventh son, born Aug. 3, 1833. Because of his fame as one of the three promoters of barbed wire, he is better identified with the City of DeKalb. The Ellwood Mansion and Museum has his complete history. He was known both as "Ike" and as "Colonel." He was married to Harriet Miller and they were a very prominent family. He died Sept. 11, 1910.



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**GOOD ADVICE**

A citizen of Sycamore recently gave his son, who had just got his first situation, some good advice. He said: "For years I have been buying the clothing for you, your brothers and myself from C. H. Stuart. On every suit I saved a dollar. Now you should

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**LOCAL AND VICINITY NEWS.**

1267 voters registered in Sycamore.

At Hinckley hard coal sells at \$6.75 a ton.

Elmer Boynton will build an office and reception room in connection with his greenhouses.

A reception to the new pastor, Rev. N. O. Freeman, and family, was given by the society at the M. E. parsonage Thursday night.

There will be a sociable at the town hall in Mayfield, Thursday evening, November 12th. The proceeds are for the benefit of the M. E. church.

Mr. L. P. Harvey, of Clare, who has a wide reputation for making good butter has gained that reputation by merit alone as the WEEKLY family can testify. A generous supply came to us last week from his creamery.

The Sycamore High school boys will be way out of line if they fail to organize a foot ball team. It's all the go in neighboring towns. Malta has one that wants to play anything in the county.

Special services at the Congregational church tonight and tomorrow night and beginning next Monday night all the week. The services will be conducted by the pastor, Rev. G. W. Rexford.

Harvey Waterbury an assistant in the Treasury department at Washington arrived at his old home in Cert.