

WILLIAM H. REEMER

By Linda Murr

My great-great grandfather, William H. Reemer, the son of John and Hannah Siple Reemer, was born in Fairfield County, Ohio on October 2, 1849. A native New Yorker, John Reemer was a farmer and died in 1850.

Hannah and William emigrated to Allen County, Indiana from Fairfield County, Ohio with the Ben Ruffner family in 1852, along with John Claggett, who later married Hannah in 1853. At that time, Ben Ruffner lived at the Vermilyea Farm. (The Vermilyea farm was owned by Jesse Vermilyea, a contractor on the Wabash & Erie Canal.) Hannah, her new husband, and William moved into a cabin that stood across the canal from Vermilyea. Hannah lived and worked at the farm for 19 years. (Note: I have been unable to locate her burial location.)

Educated in the area schoolhouse, William reminisced to F. S. Bash of the Huntington Herald, March 27, 1926, about chasing wolves away from the cabin and watching the last bands of Indians traveling to and from Fort Wayne to receive government allowances. Although he later became a farmer, stock-raiser, and owned a butcher shop in Andrews, Indiana, William recalled his days as a youth working on Vermilyea and becoming a mule driver. From that newspaper article, I will quote his words about his canal experience.

When I had become a chunk of a boy my stepfather returned from Roanoke (IN) one day and remarked that Capt. Sile Welch was looking for a mule driver on the tow-path and was offering twenty dollars a month. I decided to land that job if I could see Sile in time. I made the riffle all right and soon acquired experience that was self-satisfying. Ed Salts was steersmen and Abe Shoup, bowman, or second captain, who had to tend locks and look after the decks. My first trip to Toledo (OH) was with a cargo of ship-knees which were furnished by the Blees who were extensive land owners near the Aboite river. At Toledo we tied up at the old packet dock for the night. Waves kept our boat rocking so it made me too seasick to sleep. I took a blanket and tried to sleep out on the dock but a policeman rolled me around and made me crawl back into the boat.

Our next trip was with a load of walnut timber which we put on at Lagro (IN). Coming Back from Toledo we were ordered to lock over into the Maumee river at Defiance to pick up something for shipment, and we ran on a snag that rammed a hole in our bow. The water poured in until the leak was repaired, then we locked back and struck out for Fort Wayne's dry dock, but our crew had to pump water all the way. We next took cargoes of spokes east and I soon discovered that the life of a boat

driver was not all sunshine. One day at Raccoon Village (Native American Village of Chief White Raccoon) the load was finished out with spokes and the crew was about ready to pull out for Toledo. Rain was pouring down. For some time it had been raining incessantly. Exposure to the bad weather had made me heart-sick. Raccoon Village was near the home of my mother. I balked, couldn't bear it any longer. The thunder was deafening, the lightning blinding, and I told the captain I was done. I was soon at home. Oh, but my mother was glad to see me.

William later recalled the numerous parties and gatherings that were held in the Ruffner neighborhood where he was the caller for square dances. "No rowdyism or immoral behavior of any kind was tolerated by the older heads in the community," William assured Mr. Bash. It was at one of these dances that he met my great-great-grandmother, Emma (Emily) Wells, daughter of George and Susan Wells, formerly of Fairfield County, Ohio. After emigrating to Indiana in a covered wagon, the Wells Family first settled near Liberty Mills and then moved into the Aboite area.

William and Emma were married on March 25, 1874 in Fort Wayne. He died on May 5, 1927 and Emma died on Dec. 4, 1936. Their children were Addie Reemer Crosser Turner (my great-grandmother), Maggie Thompson, Ethel Thompson, William, Hazel Howell, Edward and Glen.



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THE WILLIAM H. REEMER FAMILY

William H. Reemer Emma Wells Reemer Maggie Reemer (daughter) Rachael Wells (aunt) Addie Reemer (daughter)
Edward Reemer (son) Hazel Reemer (daughter)