

Adam Guthrie (1825-1904)

Adam Guthrie was born on March 10th, 1825 in Circleville, Parkaway Co., Ohio. He was one of twelve children born to Robert and Catherine Spawr Guthrie. His father was of Scotch-Irish decent and his mother was of German decent.

The Robert Guthrie family, including Adam, first moved to Illinois in September 1826 and settled in Funk's Grove where he took claim of 160 acres and built a log cabin. About three years later, the family moved to Money Creek which was nine miles northeast of the current city of Bloomington. These early years in McLean County were very hard for settlers. During the winter of 1830-31 Guthrie's family endured and survived the "winter of the deep snow." His father Robert was away on business in St. Louis to purchase merchandise with a neighbor. Because of the great snow storm, the roads were impassible from the snow drifts and he was delayed several weeks before returning home. While the family awaited his return, they survived by eating mainly boiled corn. In 1831 the Guthrie family moved to Major's Grove located around the 300 block of West Seminary Street in Bloomington. The land belonged to James Allin, another early pioneer. After living there two years, they moved within the city limits of Bloomington and built a house on the corner of Lee and Front Streets.

While growing up, Adam had a good education. He attended a subscription school which is an early form of elementary school taught by a single teacher during the winter months. Subscription schools were funded by a monthly tuition fee paid by the parents to the teachers. In turn, the teachers were responsible for securing a place of study and for paying the rent from their earnings. Adam attended school during the winters and worked with his father in plastering and carpentry during the summers. He did this with his father until his father's death in 1846. After his father's death, Adam continued to learn the trade of plastering from Squire Lawrence. During his time in this profession Adam helped plaster the walls and ceilings of nearly 200 homes.¹ Adam recalled later in his life that, "more money could be made in the early times, because the price of labor and material was so much less." He stated that the best workmen only made \$1.00 to \$1.50 per day. He was considered the "No. 1 workman" and in *The Daily Pantagraph* it stated that, "it is not at all surprising that he has as much business on hand as he can attend to."²

On December 6th, 1849 Adam married Miss Lucinda L. Butler of New York. They had three children: Eva, Permena A. and Oscar F. Together they resided at their home located at 802 North Center Street. They also attended the Methodist Episcopal Church. Lucinda preceded Adam in death on June 13, 1889 at their home on Center Street.

On August 8th, 1862 Adam enlisted in the Union Army. He became a Corporal in Company A of the 94th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment.³ He served for eight months and was discharged on April 3rd, 1863 due to ill-health caused by fatigue and exposure. During his time in the Army he participated in a march to Prairie Grove, Arkansas. Here, the men engaged in battle were "scattered in a long, irregular line, lying flat on their faces, taking advantage of every stump, fence and irregularity of ground. The Regiment maintained so destructive a fire that no troops could be brought against them without being cut to pieces, while our men of the 94th were comparatively unharmed."⁴ All together, the 94th Infantry "took part in nine battles, sieges and skirmishes, and not one retreat."⁵

¹ Dr. E. Duis. "The Good Old Times in McLean County, Illinois." 197.

² *The Pantagraph*, September 5, 1857.

³ Known as the McLean County Regiment because it was entirely made up of men from McLean County, Illinois.

⁴ Adjutant General of Illinois. "Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois," 407.

⁵ Adjutant General of Illinois, 407.

After being discharged from the Army he was given a job on the police force for the city of Bloomington. Beginning in 1863 he worked on the police force for two years until 1865 after which he resumed his occupation in plastering until 1866. That year he was elected Township Assessor and held this position until 1881.⁶ From 1869 to 1870 he also worked as deputy recorder for his brother, Rev. Robert Elton Guthrie, who was clerk of the Eighth Judicial Circuit Court in McLean County. In 1870 Adam was a census taker in district number seven in Illinois for the U.S. Census.

After his time as Township Assessor, Adam began a career as a Tobacconist. He operated a cigar store started by his brother Noah known as “Noah’s Ark,” later called “Adam’s Ark” and then just “The Ark.”⁷ The business was located at 101 West Jefferson across the street from the old McLean County Courthouse. Here, the older gentlemen of Bloomington sat around talking politics and telling stories. As his grandson, Rev. Sidney A. Guthrie recalled, “They talked quietly and smoked cigars by the box. Most of them had long, white beards and wore frock coats. They talked about the Deep Snow of 1831 and it got deeper every year.”⁸ His grandson remembered well known customers of the shop including Benjamin Funk, former Mayor of Bloomington, Governor Joseph Fifer of Illinois, and Sidney Smith, the cartoonist. “The Ark” remained in this location until it burned down during the Great Fire of 1900. After the Fire, he re-opened his store in the newly built Evans building on Jefferson Street (next door to the previous location of “The Ark”) where Adam ran the store until his death a few years later.⁹

Adam Guthrie was considered one of the oldest residents of Bloomington since he and his family were early settlers of McLean County.¹⁰ They were also long time subscribers of *The Pantagraph*, even when it was first called the *Bloomington Observer and the McLean County Advocate*.¹¹

In an 1899 interview with Mme. Annette from *The Daily Bulletin* Adam discussed the early days of Bloomington and how it grew from “a hundred inhabitants to the present population of 25,000.” He described the Winter of 1836 when there was a drastic change in the weather. After two to eight inches of snow, it began to drizzle. The temperature then suddenly dropped, freezing all the rain and snow. Anything, including the chickens that were outside during this time, froze to the ground. Adam also recalled when prominent lawyers used to hold court at the old Courthouse. Abraham Lincoln was his favorite lawyer because of the many stories Lincoln would tell in court and around town.¹²

On September 15th, 1904, Guthrie passed away, after he was struck by a sudden illness. His grandson recalled that his grandfather was “rather quiet but very friendly. He was gracious and pleasant. Everybody knew him.”¹³ He was one of the most popular men in the city. “His death was a surprise and a shock to the community despite his advanced years.”¹⁴ Adam Guthrie now rests in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, Illinois.

By: Lisa Dretske, 2009

⁶ Duis, 197

⁷ “When Adam Succeeded Noah”, *The Pantagraph*, February 28, 1932.

⁸ Wilma Tolley. “History Made in Guthrie’s Cigar Store”, *The Pantagraph*, February 5, 1950.

⁹ *The Pantagraph*, March 14, 1904 .

¹⁰ *The Pantagraph*, September 16, 1904.

¹¹ “Oldest Subscriber,” *The Pantagraph*, March 31, 1896 .

¹² “Tales from the Ark,” *The Daily Bulletin*, January 15, 1899.

¹³ Tolley, “History Made in Guthrie’s Cigar Store”.

¹⁴ *The Pantagraph*, September 16, 1904.