

## **James Allin (1788-1869)**

James Allin was born on January 13, 1788, in North Carolina, the son of Isaac and Sarah (Frances) Allin. When he was 10 years old, his family moved to Boone County, Kentucky. After living there for a year, they moved across the Ohio River to Dearborn County, Indiana, and then to Rising Sun, Indiana, where Allin went to school.

At 21, Allin worked on a flatboat that carried goods down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans. In 1817, he married Catherine Livingston, and they had five children: William, James Jr., John, Lee, and Catharine. In the early years of their marriage, they moved to Edwardsville, Illinois, and then to Vandalia, the capital of Illinois at the time. There, Allin worked as a county commissioner, helping with local government duties.

In 1822, settlers began arriving in Keg Grove, Illinois, about 100 miles north of Vandalia. They were mostly hunters and lived in log cabins far from other people. The local Indigenous population, the Kickapoo, lived in the area but left when the government ordered them to move in 1823. As more families moved in, the area became known as Blooming Grove.

In 1827, Tazewell County was created from part of Fayette County. A new county seat was built in Mackinawtown, but it was far from Blooming Grove, making it difficult for the people there to participate in local politics. Around 1828, people in Blooming Grove began asking for their own county, and Allin supported the idea when he moved to the area in 1829. He helped gather signatures and persuaded state lawmakers to create a new county, which was named McLean County after U.S. Senator John McLean.

In 1830, the new McLean County was formed, and Blooming Grove was chosen as its county seat. Allin donated land for the county seat, which was named Bloomington. He helped lay out the town, chose the location for the town square, and worked on building homes. The first courthouse was built in 1832.

As Bloomington grew, Allin helped the town by selling land to newcomers, often for low prices or even for free if they promised to improve the land. He was also involved in the building of Illinois Wesleyan University, which opened in 1850, and a public library, though the library was forced to close within a few years and Bloomington was left without a public library until 1857.

Allin was also elected to the Illinois State Senate in 1836, where he served for two terms. He was highly respected in the community, and in 1854, Bloomington residents celebrated him at a ceremony for the opening of a new hotel, the Pike House. Allin lived to see Bloomington become a thriving city. He passed away on May 5, 1869, at the age of 81. Allin is buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, Illinois.