

# **THE EDGAR FAMILY**

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**By THOMAS DELBERT EDGAR**  
**Wilkinsburg, Pittsburgh, Pa.**

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**August 1931**

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It is a matter of regret that I cannot be present at the family reunion to be held at the Union School, Perry County, Illinois, on August 29, 1931. My family, including my mother, now past ninety-four years of age, shares in the regret.

However, we are with you in thought, and as evidence of it, I am sending a communication which may be of interest, either in whole or in part, to some of you. What is said will probably not be new to the older generation, but will be new to the younger people.

My source material is of a three-fold nature. Some of it is from traditions handed down from generation to generation; some from a History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America, by Dr. W. M. Glasgow; and some from the memory of Mrs. Mary Jane Armour (nee Edgar), late of Sparta, Illinois, whom I interviewed some ten years ago, and recorded what she gave; also from recollection given by my mother, who came into the Edgar family by marriage some sixty-six years ago.

From what I can gather, our early forbears obeyed literally the Scriptural injunction to "increase and multiply and replenish the earth." They would have been a source of satisfaction to Theodore Roosevelt, had they lived in his day; for large families seemed to be the rule, rather than the exception. Any brief history of the Edgars would read like

an extract from some of the genealogical tables of the Old Testament. It would be a series of "begats", as for example, in my own case, Adam begat William, and William begat Alexander John, and Alexander John begat Robert Sinclair, and Robert Sinclair begat Thomas Delbert, and Thomas Delbert begat Thomas Delbert, Jr. And there it must rest, for the present, at least, as I am not yet in the grandfather class.

### TRADITION

Let me recall a bit of tradition as it has come to me from sources above noted. Traditions, not being matters of record, are likely to be varied. So, if your traditions do not correspond with mine, I shall not be greatly surprised. And it is quite likely that yours is as authentic as mine.

This in substance, has been handed down to me:

About the middle of the Eighteenth Century—probably between 1745 and 1755—Adam Edgar was born in Pennsylvania. It is not known whether his ancestors came directly from Scotland, or whether they came by way of the North of Ireland. The place of Adam's birth is not known. It was thought that there were other children in the family, but my informant had no trace of them.

Adam Edgar's father died while Adam was yet a boy, and his mother later married a man by the name of Simpson, of whom nothing is known except that after the second marriage of his mother, home was not pleasant for young Adam. Following a custom which was quite common in those early days, his mother bound him out to another man, which action he bitterly resented, and it is supposed that he sought larger liberty by running away.

The next that is known of him is that he was an honored and respected citizen of Chester District (now called County) in South Carolina. When or where he had married is not known. Neither do we know the maiden name of our maternal forbear.

And here comes in another tradition which may or may not have a foundation in fact. I have no way of determining, and shall not try to settle the matter. But if it is a fact, it is nothing of which any of us need be ashamed. Indeed, it might be an occasion for us to point with pride, as an indication that we belong to the first American families. When recalling that one who was the first lady of the land some ten years ago traces her origin back through the First Families of Virginia and to Pocahontas; and that the one who is now the Vice President of the United States has in his veins the blood of the people who occupied this country before Columbus discovered it, it may serve to fortify us against any inferiority complex, if it should be true that there is a wee bit of Indian blood in our veins.

At all events, there is a tradition that the wife of Adam Edgar, who was a good and honorable woman in every respect, was remotely descended from the Cherokee Indians.

Let me say that Mrs. Mary Edgar Burns, who lived in Sparta a good part of her life, told me that it was her father's understanding that the tradition was true. When I relayed that impression to my aunt, Mrs. Mary Jane Armour, also of Sparta, she replied with considerable heat: "I do not believe a word of it." Who am I, that I be the umpire?

## RECORDED HISTORY

Leaving the traditions, which each one will evaluate for himself, we fortunately have some recorded history, which can be gathered piece-meal, from printed records. Of course, the Edgar name appears only incidentally, for the records are not primarily a history of the Edgar family, but a history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (Covenanter) in South Carolina, Tennessee and Illinois.

From these I glean the fact that in the summer of 1789, the Rev. James Reid came on a missionary tour to America, and visited different societies in South Carolina, setting in order the affairs of the Church and dispensing the sacraments. At that time he organized the group that lived in the neighborhood of Rocky Creek, Chester County, South Carolina, into a congregation. Five elders were elected at that time, one of whom was Adam Edgar. He bore an honorable name, was an ardent Covenanter, and doubtless continued in the eldership until his death, which occurred probably some ten years later. I draw this conclusion from the fact that record is again made of the Rocky Creek meeting house, which was then known locally as "Widow Edgar's meeting house", the date being January 28, 1801. Her husband must have been dead at least a few years for the church to have become known by the name of the widow.

Among other things which happened at that time was the ordination and installation of Thomas Donnelly as pastor of that and other churches in that general region, and also the election to the eldership of quite a number, among whom was William Edgar, the eldest son of Adam Edgar, and the progenitor of the line from which we spring.

In this connection it may be said that the convictions of Adam Edgar and his wife have been so stamped upon their posterity that in each succeeding generation they have not lacked one or more descendants who have been elders in the Covenanter Church. It is true that many of us have sought and found fellowship elsewhere, with many communions now represented among the descendants; but that that Godly couple who established their home in the south-land more than a century and a half ago, so impressed their religious convictions upon their children, is evidence that they had strength of character for which all of the generations following may be grateful.

It seems that after the death of the parents, and partly because of slavery conditions, the children, with their families, migrated to Tennessee, which, while a slave State, was not so dominantly so as was South Carolina. This was probably in the year 1808 or 1809.

Some of them settled in Lincoln County, not far from Fayetteville. And some of them, either then, or later, settled in Hickman County at Duck River, a little southwest of Nashville.

William Edgar was probably of this group. For, in 1812, a commission was appointed to organize a congregation in Lincoln County. And on that commission was Elder William Edgar, of Duck River. At the time of the organization of the congregation one of the elders elected was Samuel Little, who had married Margaret, a daughter of Adam Edgar. This family of Littles later came to Southern Illinois.

Some years later--1819, several of the families of both

Tennessee communities migrated to Randolph County, Illinois, and were among the pioneers of that section of the country. Among them were the families of William Edgar and Samuel Little. From Glasgow's History I quote concerning the formation of a congregation at Eden, by the Rev. Samuel Wylie:

"The first Covenanter congregation organized was in June, 1821, with thirty-five members, and the promise of a salary of about two hundred dollars per year. The Elders were Samuel Little and William Edgar, who had the year previously emigrated from Tennessee."

Thus endeth the lesson, so far as printed records are concerned.

What has happened to the family in the last 110 years is a part of the history of Southern Illinois, and is probably as well known to the older ones as to me.

Some five or six generations of Edgars have been identified with this part of the country. Some have made it their point of departure, and have gone to the four points of the compass. A goodly number have gone to Kansas, and quite a sizable group may be found at Olathe and Sterling, and some at Topeka. Some of us—at least three families—find ourselves in Pennsylvania, which State Father Adam Edgar left somewhat unceremoniously a good many years ago.

Representatives of the family are to be found in almost all of the processions and lines of business, and have doubtless achieved the average measure of success. However, I have not known of one of the name's becoming a multi-millionaire. That, though, is not the climax of distinction.

## THE FAMILY TREE

I shall now present what I have in the way of a family tree, though not carrying it to its outermost branches. I do not go far beyond my own generation. I have been gone from the old Illinois home for a generation, and have little knowledge of the younger groups. Each of you can locate yourself in the family tree. Briefly, the genealogy is this:

To Adam Edgar were born William, John, James, Margaret, Abigail, and possibly other daughters.

John had two sons, Samuel and William, the first remaining in Tennessee, and the latter migrating to Missouri.

James was the father of eight sons and one daughter. One son was named Henry, and another William. This family, in whole or in part, moved to the vicinity of Houston, Texas, many years ago.

Margaret married Samuel Little, came to Southern Illinois, and still has many descendants in Randolph County and adjoining counties. There are the Littles, near Tilden; the Elders and Beavers, of Coulterville; and the Coulters and Pipers, of Oakdale, and others.

Abigail married a Mr. Walker, and is thought to have remained in Hickman County, Tennessee.

This brings us to the eldest—the one from whom the most of us descended.

William, who was the eldest son, married Mary Morrison, and they moved to Randolph County, Illinois, in the year 1819. To this union were born four sons and one daughter, their



names being Adam, Robert S., Alexander John, William, and Janet.

Adam married Margaret Sinclair, and lived in Perry County, Illinois. Their children were: William, Robert, Margaret, Mary A., Eliza J., and Nancy. Nancy died unmarried. William married Sarah McWhinney; Margaret married a Mr. Carswell; Mary A. married a Mr. Brown and later, a Mr. Mearns; Eliza J. married a Mr. Bridgewater.

Robert S. married Jane McMillan, of near Sparta. Their children were: William, Matthew, John, James, Robert (died in infancy), Calvin Wallace, Adam Renwick, Mary, Anna, and Margaret.

William was the father of James (Cutler, Illinois), and Elizabeth, now Mrs. Morton.

Matthew was the father of Robert, John, Gill, and several daughters.

John first married a Miss Campbell. Their children were James and Robert. He later married Agnes Cathcart. Their children were: Nancy (Mrs. James Hood), Elizabeth (died in girlhood), Ida (Mrs. James Gallagher), and Margaret (Mrs. David Stewart).

James married Jane Hare. Their children are Robert Renwick—married Anna Torrens, and their children are Paul, Ruth and Charlotte; Mary, married David Smith, and they have three children; Effie, married to John Donnelly, has two or three children.

Calvin Wallace married Serena McClinton. They had two daughters—Elfie, now Mrs. Reid; and Josie, now Mrs. Foster.

**Mary** married Wilson Rodgers. They had several children.

**Anna** married James Leander Dickie. Their children were Robert, Sidney, Edward, and three daughters.

**Margaret Jane** married Thomas Gordon.

**Adam Renwick** married Nancy Beal. Lillian and other children were theirs.

**Alexander John** was married twice. First to Janet Campbell, and their children were William Morrison, Mary Jane, and Agnes Melissa. Later he married Jane Sinclair (sister to Adam Edgar's wife, Margaret Sinclair). Their children were Robert Sinclair, Margaret Boyd, Janet Campbell, Eliza Ann, Adam Alexander, and James Wallace. The family home was a little northwest of Sparta, Illinois.

**William Morrison** married Margaret Lackey, and their children were William Alexander, James Renwick, John Henry, Jane, and Margaret.

**Mary Jane** married James Armour. They had no children.

**Agnes Melissa** married Alexander B. Kane. Their children were John (died in infancy), William A., Martha, Mary, Margaret, Isabelle, Elizabeth and Nancy (twins), and Janet Melissa.

**Robert Sinclair** married Sarah Jane Alexander. To them were born seven sons: Alexander John, Thomas Delbert, Donald Cargil, Robert Metheny, William Melville (died at 13 years), James Arthur Greer, and Joseph Calvin.

**Margaret** married Alexander Moore. They had three sons and three daughters: Alexander John, William Sloane, Alexander, Jane, Anna, and Mary.

**Janet Campbell** died of typhoid fever in young womanhood.

**Eliza Ann** married Matthew Hemphill. Their children were John, Robert, Mary, Samuel, Elmer, and William.

**Adam Alexander** married Hester Findley, and died in a few months.

**James Wallace** married Sarah Hare. Their children were John Newton, Alfred Cyrus, Wallace Everett, Margaret, and Nellie. His second wife was Flora McKnight.

**William** married Mary Morrison. They had one daughter, Mary, who married James Burns.

**Janet** married John Alexander. Their children were William Riley, Mary, and Rachel. William Riley spent his life largely in Colorado. Mary married Samuel McMillan. Their children were James, Thomas, and Martha (Benjamin).

I shall not attempt to designate further branches of the Edgar family. I know there are many more; and I trust that someone will carry the matter farther than I have done. Two, and in some cases probably three, generations should be added. Perhaps no one can do this perfectly. It could not be done in a limited time, and it would involve quite a little correspondence.

None of the foregoing is verbally inspired, and there are no doubt many errors, as memories are often at fault. Yet, in the main, I believe it to be a fairly correct account.

With best wishes to all of you, and hoping that it may be my privilege to be present at some future reunion, I am glad to be one of you.

Sincerely yours,

**THOMAS D. EDGAR.**