

E. Robert (b. 1817) and Elsie (Lewis) Edgecomb

It is difficult to know the details of the early life of Robert and Elsie (Lewis) Edgecomb because there are no written accounts of their early life. However, some things can be inferred from land records and the places they lived. Robert bought 40 acres in section 10 of Bath Twp., Allen Co., OH next to his father Uriah on 23 Apr 1835 at age of 18. So he was probably living near or with his father at the time that he married "Elsey" Lewis on 16 Jan 1838. Elsie, born in 1818 in Solon, NY was a daughter of Jonathan and Nelly Lewis, who lived a little over a mile from the Edgecombs in section 14. Jonathan was probably a brother of the Elsie Lewis who married Samuel Bassitt, thus Robert's wife Elsie was named after her aunt who lived about a mile further down the road from Jonathan.

Robert and Elsie had the following children:

- EA. **Elizabeth "Betsey" (Miller)**^{1,2} b. 1839, m. 19 Mar. 1862 to Samuel D. Miller
- EB. **William E.**^{3,3} 5 Apr 1840 - 1 May 1934, m. (1) 7 Feb? 1865 to Anna Miller⁴ m. (2) Anna Wyne⁵
- EC. **Sarah Ann (Overley)**,³ 11 Apr 1843 - 14 Feb 1931, m. 18 Dec 1864 to John Overley.³
- ED. **Robert Wilson**^{5,6,1,3} 14 May 1845 - 16 Jan 1923, m. 10 Oct 1867 to Mary Jane Ulrey^{6,1}
- EE. **Uriah**^{7,8,3} 1847 - 1897, m. 30 Dec 1871 to Hannah Fouts³
- EF. **Samuel**³ 18 Aug 1849 - 10 Jan 1872 m. 10 Jan 1872 to Maria Huff.
- EG. **Cloyle Eleanor "Ellen" (Tridle)**³ 10 Oct 1851 - 16 Jan 1933 m. 22 Jun 1873 to Aaron Y. Tridle.
- EH. **Harriett "Hattie" (Huff)**³ 8 Aug 1854 - 13 Mar 1914 m. 7 Apr 1870 to George Washington Huff
- EI. **John**^{3,9}
- EJ. **Mary** b. 1859¹⁰ - 1909 m. 22 Apr 1877 to Samuel H. Ulrey.

After their marriage, Robert and Elsie apparently moved several miles to the north in Monroe Twp. where Robert's brother Lansil owned land and where several other Lewis' lived. We know this because when Robert bought land in section 35 (near the Disciples meetinghouse) on 23 Sep 1843, he was described as "of Putnam County"¹¹. Before the reorganization of Allen County in 1848, Monroe Township was a part of Putnam County. On 15 May of 1846, Robert and Elsa of Putnam County sold this property.¹² This is apparently when they moved back to Bath Township. In the previous year, Robert's father Uriah had sold out and moved to section 11 and by 1850 several of Robert's brothers and sister were living near each other there. Although the 1850 census does not give an "address" for the persons recorded, the households are reported in approximately the order in which they were encountered by the census taker. The census reports Robert and "Elsy" three households after Elias Everet, who was known to have lived on the corner of Bluelick Rd. and the Dixie Hwy, and immediately after "Pegley" and Elisabeth Lewis.¹³ Thus it is likely that they lived on Bluelick Road between the Dixie Hwy. and Thayer Rd. They may have been living on part of the farm that Jonathan and Nelly Lewis bought in section 14 in 1836; "Pegley" was Elsie's brother, Peleg.

Sometime after Robert and Elsa moved back from Monroe Township, they became associated with the Sugar Creek German Baptist, or Dunkard church (now called the Church of the Brethren). The Sugar Creek church was started by Elder Abraham Miller who moved to the Sugar Creek settlement in the northwest corner of the township in 1833¹⁴ making it one of the oldest congregations in Bath Township. At that time the church met in members' homes and did not have paid ministers. Elder Miller preached in German, so it seems as though his ministry must have been primarily to the families of other Brethren immigrants given that most Bath Township residents spoke English. The church had eleven members in 1840 and thirty in 1845. In 1846, the family of David and Elizabeth (Miller) Weaver moved from Virginia to section 9 of Bath Township. On 15 November 1846, he wrote to his family in Virginia to report on how they were doing.

"... I would have wrote to you long ago if I could write myself and now I have got some person to write to you and I will first let you know that I had a spell of the intermitting fever and I took it about the 20 of Sept. and I wasn't able to work anything until about 10 days ago but now I am tolerable stout again and little Betsy and Davy had the chills and fever but they are well again and there has been very sickly here this fall but few deaths.

"Now I will let you know something about ower country and so we had a very dry season here this summer but with all we raised a tolerable good crop of corn which we planted the 27th of May so that we have a plenty to do us and I suppose we raised about 30 loads of pumpkin and I let you know that we live in a plentiful country and we like this country well and let you know that we had grate crop of wheet here this harvest that I can say that I never saw such wheet in Virginia and with all the drowth we had grate crops of hay and I let you know that we think we have made a grate exchange by comeing to this country and I believe that I have very good land so that I wouldhn't give my plase for any plase that I have had yet ... P.S. Dear friends I have another attact of the ague sence this was wrote and had it opened to inform you of it. Betsy is very much discouraged with the ague that I have tho she has had her health sence we came to this state, D.W."¹⁵

On 24 Jan 1847 he wrote to his parents in Virginia. "I embrace this opportunity to write a few lines to you having written to you in a former letter about our being unwell as our country around us has been brushed smartly with sickness such as fever and ague. We also had to suffer somewhat along with the rest of the neighbors. ... I will now write a few lines to Elizabeth's mother. If she has any notion of coming out here ther is a good little house now for sale here about sixteen acres of land well improved. It is all cleared but I have a plenty of timber so there will be no difficulty in getting wood ... The land lies in a good Germin settlement ..." ¹⁶

Several interesting things can be inferred from these passages. Although David Weaver identifies with the "good Germin settlement", he writes in English. So despite their distinctive religious customs, he and other Brethren immigrants to Bath Township were able to integrate well with the non-Brethren members of the community. (In contrast, the Swiss Mennonite immigrants to Bluffton in Allen County continued to speak their dialect of German into the 20th century.) Reports of good land and crops influenced many other friends and relatives to move from Virginia to Allen County over subsequent decades until a significant fraction of the residents of northern Bath Township and eastern German Township (now American Township) were members of the Brethren community. Finally, it is clear that malaria (known at that time as "the ague") had

become a significant health problem in the Sugar Creek settlement. At that time, the cause of the ague was not known, although it was associated with the "bad air" of swamps and wetlands. When the Sugar Creek settlement was started, its proximity to a good source of water was probably a major factor in the choice of site, but with its close proximity to the clouds of mosquitos of Great Black Swamp (which carried the malarial parasite) and the increasing pool of white settlers to harbor the malarial disease, living near the creek may have become a net negative factor.

How was a "Connecticut Yankee" such as Robert Edgecomb drawn to an essentially "ethnic" group like the Brethren, given that nearly all church members were from intermarried German families from Virginia? Preaching at the Sugar Creek church was done exclusively in German until about 1840 and after that "sermons were preached in the English language occasionally"¹⁷. A possible explanation is the proximity of Robert and Elsie's farm to Brethren families. The 1850 census shows him living near the family of Lewis and Catharine Miller from Virginia. Although the background of this family is not known, they are likely to be related to the many Brethren Millers who lived in Bath Township. So Robert and Elsie may have been drawn to the German Baptist church through interactions with their neighbors. Robert's conversion must have been a profound one because by the late 1850's, Robert was called to the ministry. He preached (presumably in English!) in the new meeting house that had been constructed in 1853 on Bluelick Rd. in section 7, about four miles from where Robert lived¹⁸.

In 1856, Robert's sister Clarinda Snyder and her husband Peter sold their land¹⁹ near Robert and moved to Shawnee Township. Robert's father Uriah and brother Marquis sold their land²⁰ near Robert and moved to Beaverdam in Richland Township. Both of these pieces of land were sold to David Weaver (who was serving as a minister²¹), making David and Elizabeth neighbors to Robert and Elsie in 1860²².

Robert and Elsa sold land in section 12 of Bath Township in 1859²³ and 1862²⁴ and this may have been associated with plans to move since many members of the Brethren church began moving west after 1860. In 1863, Robert Edgecomb and his family moved to Piatt County, Illinois,²⁵ where many descendants of Robert's son Uriah live today. On 5 Feb 1865, Wilson enlisted in Company I of the 150th Illinois to fight in the Civil War. It is not known how this decision was received by the church, since the Brethren church was a "peace church" that did not believe in participation in war. On 7 Feb 1865, Robert's son William married Anna Miller, daughter of Jacob B. and Salome (Wine) Miller. Jacob Miller was a brother to Elizabeth Weaver (their neighbor) and a minister of the Brethren Church who moved to Piatt Co., IL in 1870.²⁶

In 1866, the church territory was divided and the part south of a road running east and west three miles south of Cerro Gordo was named the Okaw church after a nearby stream. For ten years, this church was without a meeting place and members met in schools, churches, and barns.²⁷ On 10 Oct 1867, Wilson was married to Mary Jane Ulrey by Elder John Metzger, who presided over the Okaw church. In 1869, Robert and John Arnold drove 18 miles through zero degree weather to hold a meeting near Bethany in Moultrie County. On a Sunday, they cut through eight inches of ice to hold a baptism in a nearby river.²⁸ In 1870, Robert and Elsa were living in Cerro Gordo Township of Piatt Co., IL.²⁹ Their neighbors were Charles and Martha Huff and several children of these families married. Harriett "Hattie" married George Washington Huff on 7 Apr 1870 and Samuel married Maria Miranda "Mira" Huff on 17 Jan 1872.³⁰

In 1873, Samuel and Robert Wilson (two sons of Robert), John and Sarah Ann Overley (daughter of Robert), and George and Harriett Huff (another daughter of Robert) moved to the southwest corner of Crawford Co., KS.³¹ The following year, Robert and Elsie settled nearby along with their daughter Mary. It is said that Robert Edgecomb offered \$1000 to each of his children who agreed to move to Kansas.³² In 1875, his daughter Ellen Tridle moved to Kansas with her husband.³³ In the spring of 1878³⁴, J.B. Wolfe, D.D. Shively, J.C. Neher, John Ulery, and Samuel Ulery, who married Mary Edgecomb, moved from Piatt Co., IL to Osage³⁵ and settled on land bought from the railroad.

In June of 1878, the Osage Church of the Brethren congregation was founded by Robert Edgecomb. On August 15, Samuel Edgecomb was selected to minister to the congregation.³⁶ "The congregation first met in the Osage Schoolhouse. Sometimes services were also held in a straw barn on Lightning Creek and in the Christian Church. A charter was obtained in 1881, and the first church building was erected in 1885."³⁷ The distinctive practices of the Brethren evoked the curiosity of their non-Brethren neighbors. The local paper reported that " 'the Dunkards part their hair in the middle and kiss each other like women when they meet.' The Brethren custom of foot-washing also drew attention from neighbors of other denominations. 'People would come from miles around to see the foot washing ... Sometimes so many onlookers came that worship was impossible.' Two of the most obnoxious onlookers were arrested, put on trial in Girard and sentenced to jail time. 'It's interesting that some of those obnoxious onlookers were later converted' ... To block the view of the curious, the lower windows of the church were painted white ..." ³⁸

In the 1880s, the Brethren Church was rocked by schisms between conservative members who felt that the church had strayed too far from their roots of plain dress, simple lifestyle, and church discipline and progressives who felt that the church had not gone far enough in promoting higher education, salaried ministers, and Sunday Schools³⁹. In 1881, this conflict came to a head and the conservatives split to form the Old German Baptist Brethren. In 1883, the progressives formed the Brethren Church. The majority of the Brethren remained in the moderate group which continued to use the name "German Baptist Brethren" until 1908. The church conflicts affected the Edgecombs, with Robert and his son William, going with the Old Order⁴⁰ and the rest of the family remaining in the main body of the church. The result was that in 1881 "Robert Edgecomb lost his eldership"⁴¹ at the Osage Church. Eventually Robert returned to the main body and was reinstated to the ministry. However, the family was effectively split with William and the rest of the family effectively shunning each other to the extent that until recently family contact was lost. Descendants of William presently live in the Garnett, Kansas area and attend the Cedar Creek Old German Baptist Brethren church.⁴²

Elsie died in 1891 and Robert died on 4 Sep 1898 in Crawford Co., KS. Robert and Elsie Edgecomb are buried in the cemetery of the Osage church. Descendants of Samuel and Wilson still live in Kansas today. In later years, other Robert Edgecomb descendants went further west - to Oklahoma, California, Idaho, and Washington.

¹ Bessie Burkett Dyke, *BES family update 37* (1977), 1037.

² Marguerite Edgecombe Gentili, *Letter from Marguerite Gentili to Steve Bassett* (30 Sep 1978).

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- ³ Hulvey, Vera June Good, *The William Good Family - Tracing this Good Family from Hasli Valley, Switzerland to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia* (Commercial Press, Inc., Stephens City, VA, 1996), William Good Family, 115-118. Sarah Ann was erroneously called Sally Ann.
- ⁴ Hulvey, Vera June Good, *The William Good Family - Tracing this Good Family from Hasli Valley, Switzerland to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia* (Commercial Press, Inc., Stephens City, VA, 1996), William Good Family.
- ⁵ Marjie Ruth Fouts Paul, *BES family update 67* (1977).
- ⁶ Preston R. and Ruth Fouts Paul, *BES family update 103* (1978).
- ⁷ Steven J. Bassett (Baskauf), *Notes on descendants of Uriah and Hannah (Fouts) Edgecombe*, Notes written on a tablecloth, taken at the Edgecombe reunion in Illinois in about 1978.
- ⁸ Ryan Jay Edgecombe, *Email from Ryan Edgecombe to Steve Baskauf* (2007).
- ⁹ Maurice Click, *Family group sheets* (c. 1978).
- ¹⁰ United States Census, 1870, Cerro Gordo Twp., Piatt Co., IL, p. 12
- ¹¹ Deed: Nathan Huey to Robert Edgecomb, NW quarter of SW quarter of section 35, Monroe Twp., 23 Sep 1843, Allen Co., OH Recorder's Office, Book I, p. 554.
- ¹² Deed: Robert and Elsa Edgecomb to Samuel Barber, NW quarter of SW quarter of section 35, Monroe Twp., 15 May 1846, Allen Co., OH Recorder's Office, Vol. 190, p. 343.
- ¹³ United States Census, 1850, Bath Twp., Allen Co., OH, p.494 (household 212).
- ¹⁴ R.H. Harrison, *Atlas of Allen County, Ohio*. Philadelphia: R.H. Harrison, 1880, p. 27
- ¹⁵ Letter from David Weaver to John Weaver, 15 Nov 1846, published in Mary Mae Cupp Campbell, *A Sense of Place Volume III, Virginia to Ohio and States West Descendants of Peter Weaver and J. Jacob Kopp and Related Families 1787-1986*, 1986, p. 48.
- ¹⁶ Letter from David Weaver to Peter and Elizabeth (Whitmer) Weaver, 24 Jan 1847 in Campbell, p. 51.
- ¹⁷ Harrison, p. 27.
- ¹⁸ Harrison, p. 27.
- ¹⁹ Deed: Peter and Clarinda Snyder to David Weaver, 5 Sep 1856, Allen Co., OH Recorder's Office, Book W, p. 228.
- ²⁰ Deed: Uriah Edgecomb to David Weaver, 1856, Allen Co., OH Recorder's Office, Book W, p. 224.
- ²¹ Hulvey, Vera June Good, *The William Good Family - Tracing this Good Family from Hasli Valley, Switzerland to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia* (Commercial Press, Inc., Stephens City, VA, 1996), William Good Family, p. 44.
- ²² United States Census, 1860, Bath Twp., Allen Co., OH, p. 410.
- ²³ Deed: Robert and Elsa Edgecomb to Nancy Olmstead, 16 Nov 1859, Allen Co., OH Recorder's Office, Vol. 5, p. 186.
- ²⁴ Deed: Robert and Elsa Edgecomb to Samuel Basset and Lewis Basset, 23 Jan 1862, Allen Co., OH Recorder's Office, Vol. 7, p. 316.
- ²⁵ L. Dean Rennie, Sharon Huff Leonard, and William A. Burris, *The Family of Robert Edgecombe father of Harriet Edgecombe Huff*, unpublished manuscript, April 1996.
- ²⁶ Hulvey, p. 111.
- ²⁷ *Church of the Brethren in Southern Illinois*, 1950 quoted in Rennie et al. 1996.
- ²⁸ *Church*, 1950.
- ²⁹ United States Census, 1870, Cerro Gordo Twp., Piatt Co., IL, p. 12
- ³⁰ Information from Ken Kinman, 24 Jun 2007.
- ³¹ Rennie et al. 1996. Another source gives the date of October 1875 as the date when Samuel and Wilson moved to McCune, KS.
- ³² Paul Huff, quoted in Rennie et al. 1996.
- ³³ Obituary of Mrs. Cloyle Eleanor (Ellen) Tridle, *Girard Press*, 19 Jan 1933.
- ³⁴ This date is inconsistent with the marriage date of Mary Edgecomb to Samuel Ulery. Rennie et al. says that they were married in Kansas by her father in 22 Apr 1877.
- ³⁵ Craik, *History of the Church of the Brethren in Kansas* quoted in Rennie et al. 1996.
- ³⁶ Rennie et al. 1996.
- ³⁷ Nikke Patrick, "Revamped Church Dedicated", *Crawford Kansas Morning Sun*, 17 Nov 2003.
- ³⁸ Patrick.
- ³⁹ Wikipedia, *Church of the Brethren*, 2007.
- ⁴⁰ Rennie et al. 1996.

⁴¹ RootsWeb Brethren-l Archives, 8 May 1998.

⁴² Rennie et al. 1996.