

## The Reed Romance Started Before the Civil War, Married in 1908

When I read the heading “Romance begun before war is culminated at Albany” in the November 12, 1908 Monroe Evening Times, it definitely caught my attention. The subheading stated, “E. R. Reed, of Madison, and Mrs. Sofia Comfort, of Albany, whose early marriage was foiled by rebellion, wedded at advanced ages.” As I researched for more information to share about their lives, I found that not everything in this article was accurate. I’ll first share the article in its entirety and then share with you what I found.

“A courtship had its beginning before the Civil War was culminated at Albany yesterday afternoon when E. R. Reed, of Madison, and Mrs. Sophia Comfort, of Albany, were married at the bride’s house.

“The couple were sweethearts years ago when both lived in Ohio. When the call to arms was sounded throughout the nation in 1861 Mr. Reed enlisted and went to the front with an Ohio regiment. Not long after his departure from home, news was received from the front that Mr. Reed had been killed in battle. The grieved sweetheart at home mourned his loss but no further word was received about her ‘boy in blue.’ The weeks and months passed on and she accepted the proposal of another admirer whom she wedded.

“A year or so later, the man who had been reported killed returned home to convalesce after a long illness. But it was too late, his sweetheart of palmier days had married another, thinking he was dead. The mistake had been made through the report that he had been slain in battle while it was E. H. Reed who had met a soldier’s death.

“He went his way and his former sweetheart went hers. He learned to love another and married. The old sweetheart’s husband died and she married again. For years this couple lived apart without knowledge of one another’s whereabouts until one day the widow received a visit from her former lover, whose wife had died, and arrangements were made for their marriage which culminated the romance that started in Ohio when the nation was threatened with division.

“He came to Monroe from Madison last Tuesday morning and secured a marriage license and special permit which allowed them to be wedded yesterday.

“They will live in Albany.”

Sophia’s obituary said that she was born on October 10, 1845 in Dayton, Ohio and moved to Dane County in early childhood. The 1860 census shows that she was 17 and living with her parents and six younger siblings where her father, Joel, was a farmer in Brooklyn township with an Attica post office. At the same time, her future husband, Reuben Kelley, 28, was living with his widowed father, Benjamin, and 3 sisters, also near Attica in Brooklyn township.

According to her obituary, Sophia was married to Reuben Kelley on September 1, 1860. The 1870 census showed the couple living in Brooklyn township, on the farm where he had been living much of his life. Their real estate holdings were worth \$4,000 and personal property was worth \$1,000. At this time they had three children, Harriet E., 7, William L., 5, and Julia E., 2. His 75-year-old father, Benjamin, was also living with them.

The 1873 Atlas of Green County shows that they owned an 80-acre farm in the southwest corner of Section 28. Reuben leased land for a school to be built on January 24, 1856 for an annual amount of \$1.00 (if called for). Each family in the district contributed three logs for the school building. It was located at W1504 County C and was known as the Kelly School. Another child, Bert, was born in 1869 and all would have attended school here for a few years.

Reuben passed away April 19, 1884 at the age of 55. He is buried at the Hillcrest Cemetery just south of Albany. Their tombstone shows that he was actually more than 16 years older than she was. Their older son, Willie, passed away on February 4, 1890 of pneumonia, but was buried at Jug Prairie Cemetery.

Sophia then married Lewis Comstock, an Albany farmer who had been widowed the year before, on July 26, 1893 in Albany Township. He had one son. According to her obituary, they moved to Albany



This is a photo of Elisha Reed, whose romance with Sophia Smith, started when they were young, but had a few twists before they married more than 40 years later.

in 1895. This marriage lasted only seven years before he died on October 23, 1900. The 1902 plat book showed that the Reuben Kelley estate still owned 100 acres in Brooklyn township.

Sophia, 65, was finally married to Elisha Reed, 73, on November 11, 1908 at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Myrta Kelley, by Rev. Richard Progilly. According to the Albany Vindicator, "the house was profusely decorated in the national colors," very appropriate because of the groom's service. According to the Portage Daily Register, "Neither knew of the other's existence until last week." The couple then lived in Albany until she passed away on April 2, 1913, less than five years after their marriage.

Mr. Reed had moved to Rock County sometime before the Civil War broke out; at that time he went to Madison to enlist on April 24, 1861. This contradicts the original article, which said that he enlisted while in Ohio. Both of them were in Wisconsin before the start of the War. He served with the "Iron Brigade." He was wounded and taken prisoner in a southern camp for a long time. He was eventually exchanged and fought in the battle of Gettysburg where he was seriously wounded. He was declared to be disabled after his release from the hospital. He eventually married and had two children. His wife passed away in December 1905 in Madison, where they had made their home since 1870.

Mr. Reed moved back to Madison after Sophia's death and passed away on February 26, 1923 at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Fred Conlee, with whom he had made his home for several years.