

July 4, 1859

Boating Disaster on Clear Lake, Steuben County, Indiana

Submitted by: Gene C. Lewis

What are the details of this accident?

From a 1967 article in THE ANGOLA REPORTER, in a column entitled "Forty-four Years Ago"---"Sixty-four years ago next Wednesday, July 4, 1859, was a memorable day at Clear Lake in this county from the fact that on that day 11 people drowned by the capsizing of a boat. The boat was a scow decked over and had a wooden awning with seats along the sides of the awning posts and propelled by a wheel at the stern which was turned by cranks by two men. A man by the name of Sines owned and had charge of the boat. There were twenty-one people on board and as they were returning from the south side of the lake, a breeze sprang up and the waves washed over the deck which greatly frightened the occupants. Several people being over anxious to get out, crowded to the front of the boat and when crossing the outlet where the water was about twenty feet deep, the boat capsized."

From Dawson's Fort Wayne Daily Times in 1859---SAD CASUALTY AT CLEAR LAKE, IND, ON THE 4TH--11 LIVES LOST Friday, July 8, 1859---"There was a rumor last evening of the sinking of a sailboat on Clear Lake yesterday afternoon between 3 and 4 o'clock, and the lost of 11 lives." "After the ordinary exercises of the operation (July 4 Program) had passed off to the satisfaction of all present, a number of persons prepared to the Lake for an excursion ride on a small sailboat. The boat was capable of holding some 18 or 20 persons but unfortunately when she left the shore she had some 20 or 27 on board. She sailed around the lake and on returning to the shore when in about 25 feet of water partially capsized and sank to the bottom causing the death of 11, some 7 or 8 of whom were citizens of Reading. The following are the names of those drowned from Reading: Mrs William Turner and adopted daughter about 5 years old, and Miss Louise Turner--aged 20, daughter of Nelson Turner--who was formerly a student of Hillsdale College. The following are from a different part of this county (Hillsdale) and also Indiana: Mrs. Lyman Steel and sister-in-law, Miss Lamson of Woodbridge. Mr Sign (or Sines) the owner, was also".

In an article written by Lee S. Duguid, Lee summarizes four articles. In a couple, "considerable blame is placed on Capt. Sines--he had been drinking excessively." Another article gave as a reason "was that a sudden strong wind arose and caused waves to wash across the deck and that when this happened, the passengers rushed to one side of the boat causing it to capsize."

A couple of discrepancies appear in the several articles:

Some say the accident occurred 7/4/1858 and others say it occurred 7/4/1859? What was the correct date? I located the graves of some of those who drowned. Maple Cemetery in Reading, Lot #74 contains the Turners. Reading Methodist Cemetery contains in Row #9 (from the south) the Berry's. The tombstones show the dates of death to be 7/4/1859.

Who was the captain who drowned? STEUBEN COUNTY HISTORY, page 601, in the biography of Leo Jacob Sines, reads "Solomon Sines, brother of Simon, settled at Clear Lake, Indiana, and lost his life there in a tragedy on July 4, 1858." The father of Leo Jacob Sines was Henry Sines, born 11/11/1781 in VA and died 5/16/1861 in Williams County, Ohio. Research finds Henry Sines had 8 known children, none of whom was named Solomon. One of Henry's sons was David Sines, born 1811 in Virginia, who we believe, for the following reasons, to have been the boat captain who drowned on 7/4/1859---(i) David lived and worked in the Clear Lake area. Page 37 from STEUBEN COUNTY OLD SETTLERS BOOK reads "The last sawmill run by water power was built in the fifties by David Sines on the state line about three-fourths of a mile below the outlet of Long Lake." (Census forms showed David's occupation to be "carpenter"); (ii) David was married to Mary Ann Craft. David is not to be found on the 1860 census, but Mary Ann appears on the 1860 census of Scott Twp, Steuben County, Indiana, (only a year after the boating accident) living with Peter Kluck--included were Charles Sines, 15, and Henry Ridgeway Sines, 18--so this is the Mary that had been married to David Sines. I also should mention that Henry Sines, the son, was listed in a couple of the articles as the person on the boat assisting Captain Sines.

More about David Sines---

David Sines and Mary Ann Craft were married in 1837 and was the first recorded marriage in Kinderhook Township, Branch County, Michigan. All 3 of their sons served in the Civil War, and 2 of these sons died in Nashville, Tennessee--Henry in 1863 and Charles in 1864. Only one son, Simon, survived the Civil War. Simon served from 1861 to 1865. Simon was my great-grandfather, so if he had not survived that war I wouldn't be here to relate this story. All three of these sons' names are inscribed on the Civil War monument in the traffic circle in Angola.

Where is David Sines buried?

I have searched cemetery information in Branch County, Hillsdale County, Steuben County, and Northwest County. I've walked dozens and dozens of cemeteries and have never been able to find his grave. Of course, he may not have had a tombstone, or his tombstone may be one of those many which are now unreadable. Recently I learned that there once was a cemetery near Lake Anne (which is close to that mill build by David Sines), originally called Burying Ground Cemetery, which cemetery was plowed over in the 1940's. This may well have been where David Sines was buried. I have not been able so far to find any record of those that had been buried in that cemetery.

What were the sources for this material?

I have spent considerable time researching in libraries in Reading, Coldwater, and Hillsdale, Michigan; Bryan, Ohio; Angola, Indiana. In the Bryan Library I found an excellent article written by Lee Duguid that summarizes much of the information found in various newspapers. A copy of most of my source material has been placed in a manila file entitled "Clear Lake Accident" in the Angola Library. Those interested in more material may want to look at this file, or I'd be glad to furnish copies of my material.

WANTED---

I'm anxious to hear from anyone who may have information to either David Sines or this 7/4/1859 boating accident. Contact me at GCL7029@aol.com

If any further information is wanted, please call or write. My phone number is 269-963-4431 and email is GCL7029@aol.com.

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