

## **Alexander Sinclair and Jane Eliza Leslie Sinclair of "Hawthorn House", Moore Township**

-- by Mary Dietz

Alexander Sinclair and his wife Jane Eliza Leslie built "Hawthorn House" on Lot 49 and 50 of the Front Concession of Moore Township in the late 1830s. The home and property remained in the Sinclair family for the next one hundred years.

Alexander Sinclair was born in Edinburgh, Scotland on April 25, 1795. He joined the British army's 71<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Foot infantry in 1809 at the age of fifteen. He listed his trade at that time as being a printer and stated that he was an orphan. He may have, indeed, been an orphan or had, perhaps, run off from an apprenticeship to a printer to join the army. He served in Spain in 1814 as a corporal and, then, was promoted to sergeant. He fought in the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. After that, he was stationed in Ireland where he became a Master Mason in 1816. He returned to England in 1818 and arrived in North America in 1824 as a Colour Sergeant with his regiment. Alexander Sinclair was stationed in Bermuda in 1831. He was commended by his captain as being a "sober, zealous, faithful and trustworthy man ... one of the best men in the service", He was discharged in 1833 after twenty-three years of service. By 1836, he was living in the city of Toronto in the county of York.

On September 6, 1836, Alexander Sinclair was granted 228 acres of land in Moore Township: 100 acres comprising lot number 49 in the Front Concession, 100 acres comprising the west half of lot number 25 in the Eighth Concession and 28 acres of "clergy reserve" comprising lot number 27 in the Sixth Concession. The grant was given for long service in His Majesty's army by Sir Francis Bondhead, Governor of Upper Canada, representing the Crown, William IV. On July 23, 1836, Alexander Sinclair had purchased the 100 acre lot number 50 in the Front Concession. He sold the north 50 acres of this lot to Thomas Fisher on October 16, 1848. The Eighth Concession property was sold to Charles Reilly. This left Alexander Sinclair with 150 acres of land on the St. Clair River, the land to which he would bring a wife and on which he would build a substantial home, raise eight children and continue his life of service as clerk of the township, officer in the militia and pioneer farmer.

Alexander Sinclair married Jane Eliza Leslie on November 2, 1837. The couple crossed the St. Clair River to be married in Michigan. Jane was the daughter of William and Elinor Leslie. She had been born in Armagh, Ireland on October 18, 1816. William Leslie had served as a gunsmith and officer in the 71<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Foot alongside Alexander Sinclair. Some of the ten Leslie children were born in Ireland and some at Quebec, Kingston and York where William had been stationed. The Leslie family had decided to settle on the St. Clair River, arriving on the 100 acre lot number six of the Front Concession in 1835 and acquiring title on May 18, 1853. Jane was the only one of the Leslie children to marry. She and her husband Alexander remained close to her Leslie siblings.

Alexander Sinclair built his large Georgian style home, which later came to be known as "Hawthorn House", with bricks made of distinctive rose-coloured clay found on his property. All eight of the Sinclair children were born in the home. The children were: Ellen Sinclair \* (1839-1912); Lucy Jane Sinclair (1842-1932); Alexander Sinclair, Jr. (1844-1923); Fanny Maria Sinclair Seager (1846-1928); Emma Margaret Sinclair (1851-1929); Harriet Ann Sinclair Manuel (1852-1928); William Richard Sinclair (1856-1917); and Flora Blanche Sinclair (1857-1864).

Alexander Sinclair was active in the local militia. From December 25, 1837 until January 6, 1838, he was a Lieutenant in command of the Second Company of Moore Volunteers. From June 23, 1838 until July 6, 1838, he was a Captain and Acting Paymaster for the Officers' Pay List and the Third Company of the Moore Militia. On November 3, 1838, he was appointed Captain of the Third Regiment of the Kent Militia. By March 3D, 1839, he was the Captain and Acting Paymaster for the First Company of Moore Volunteers and the Second Company of Moore Volunteers. On May 25, 1853, he became Lieutenant-Colonel of the Second Battalion of the Lambton Militia.

Alexander Sinclair was also a respected holder of several local government positions. He served for a number of years in the 1860s and 1870s as the municipal treasurer and clerk for Moore Township. Earlier, he had been a school commissioner for Moore and Enniskillen Townships in 1842 and a pathmaster for the same jurisdiction in 1846.

Census records for Moore Township show Alexander Sinclair's evidence of land ownership. His name was on the 1840 Assessor's List as owner of lot number 49 in the Front Concession. By 1861, Alexander, age 64, was also the town clerk. He lived on lot 49 in a three-storey brick house with his wife Jane, age 43, eight children and his sister-in-law Ellen Leslie, age 31. He was a member of the Church of Scotland. By 1871, Alexander was listed on the property as the municipal treasurer. He was 75 years old and was a member of the Church of England, as were his wife Jane, age 54, and his six children. On his 150 riverfront acres were a house and a barn. He had two carriages or sleighs. Twelve acres of the property had been "improved" along with twelve acres having been turned into pasture and two acres into gardens and orchard. His crops in 1871 included one bushel of beans, one acre of potatoes, ten acres producing eight tons of hay and fifty bushels of apples. He had two milk cows, one horned beast, thirty sheep and two swine. His farm had also produced fifty pounds of butter, one hundred pounds of wool and twenty cords of wood. The 1881 census shows Alexander, age 86, to be a farmer. He was a member of the Presbyterian Church. His wife Jane was age 65 and five children remained at home (Ellen, Lucy, Emma, Harriet and William).

In 1874, Alexander Sinclair returned to England and was admitted on August 4 to Her Majesty's Royal Hospital at Chelsea in London. His illness is unknown. The records state that he was Colour Sergeant Alexander Sinclair, late of the 71<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Foot and that he was an out pensioner. He was described as being five foot seven inches in height with gray hair and hazel eyes. He was 79 years old and had had 23.3 years of service in the military. Alexander subsequently returned to Canada.

On a deed dated November 14, 1877 and registered on April 27, 1887, Alexander Sinclair granted all 150 acres of his St. Clair River property to his wife Jane Eliza Sinclair and her heirs for the sum of \$8,000. The witnesses to the transaction were Alexander and Jane's son W. R. Sinclair of Moore Township, a yeoman, and their daughter Ellen Sinclair. The money was duly paid on December 4, 1877. The Sinclair children (Ellen, Lucy Jane, Emma, Harriet, Fanny, and William) and son-in-law Dr. Francis Seager each received one dollar from Jane to assure a quit claim on the property.

Alexander Sinclair died of congestion of the lungs at his home on March 10, 1887. He was 92 years old and had been a member of the Church of England. The death certificate noted that he had been a soldier in his youth but had lived on a farm for the last fifty years. He was buried in Sutherland Cemetery (Section Two West, Plot Thirteen) north of Courtright. Church records for Trinity Anglican

Church, Mooretown record his burial in the parish register as being for Alex Sinclair, aged 92 of Moore but no date of death or burial is included in the church records. A subsequent notation to the records states that this omission is "curious given the prominence of this pioneer of Moore", A large monument and several footstones for members of the Sinclair family were provided through the will of Lucy Jane Sinclair which was probated on June 14, 1933. At one time a gravestone at the site referred to Alexander Sinclair with the epitaph "Of such brave and adventurous men Canada is made". This gravestone has disappeared or been worn away and has been replaced by a footstone which reads "Alex. Sinclair 1794-1887 Native of Edinborough [sic], Scotland".

Jane Sinclair and some of her children continued to own the house and property until the mid-1930s. In 1891, Jane, who was by then 74 years old, lived there with her four unmarried daughters: Ellen; Lucy; Emma; and Hattie. The census records describe the house as being built of brick and containing fifteen rooms.

Jane E. Sinclair died at her home on lot number 49 of the Front Concession of sudden pulmonary apoplexy on October 24, 1900. Death records state that she had been a farmer and a member of the Episcopal Church. Her attending doctor was her daughter Fanny's husband, Dr. Francis Seager.

By 1901, three unmarried Sinclair daughters farmed on the lot. They were: "Hellen", aged 63; Lucy J., aged 60; and Emma, aged 50. The three sisters still lived there in 1911, along with their mother's 84-year old sister Ellen Leslie. They lived on "income" and were members of the Anglican Church. By 1921, only Lucy and Emma were still alive, making their home in the brick fifteen-room house. Lucy was 78 and Emma was 68. They lived on "income", employed four people and continued to be members of the Church of England. It is not known what the state of the land was by this time but it is probable that the two sisters were struggling with the work of the upkeep.

The agreement to sell their land for \$50,000 proposed to Lucy Jane and Emma Sinclair by C. B. Talbot and William J. Morriss of Detroit on September 2, 1925 would have paved the way for pleasant declining years and money to pass along to their remaining siblings, nieces and nephews. However, somehow this arrangement collapsed and it was left to Fanny Sinclair Seager's son, Percy Seager, to pursue legal channels to regain ownership of the land for the Sinclair family. By then, both Emma and Lucy Jane had passed away and Percy Seager disposed of the land, as directed by his aunts' wills. The 150 acres was sold in sections to Dr. Reginald and Phyllis Stratford (who purchased the house, as well, and named it "Hawthorn House"), David and Sarah Stratford, Herbert and Margaret Moor and Floyd and Judith Lantz, all of Sarnia. By May, 1937 and after one hundred years, "the old Sinclair place" had new owners.

Alexander Sinclair, his wife Jane and children Emma, Alexander Jr., Flora, Lucy Jane and Eleanor \* are all buried at Sutherland Cemetery. Fanny Sinclair Seager is buried in the Seager family plot at Bear Creek Cemetery at the corner of Moore Line and Telfer Road near Brigden. William Sinclair and Harriet Sinclair Manuel are buried at Grand Lawn Cemetery in Detroit.

### **About the researcher and author ---**

Mary Dietz is a retired elementary school teacher with a degree in journalism from the University of Western Ontario. She has an interest in genealogy and local history.

### **Notes:**

\* Ellen Sinclair (1839-1912) was also known as Eleanor and, in one document, her given name was Helen.

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