

# Minerva Pierce and the UPDATED story of attempted murder in Menard!

This court document clearly indicates a relationship between Minerva Pierce, and Hollom and Philander Pierce, both sons of Eliphalet Pierce of Menard Co. Therefore I believe she is a sister of these two brothers, and a daughter of Eliphalet Pierce & Annis McMichel. There is also more information that corroborates this. Note: in the November term 1845, this case against Minerva was dropped.

Circuit Court General Docket: 1839-1845 – November term 1845: "The People vs. Minerva Morris" Indictment for assault with intent to murder - Copy of indictment and list of jurors furnished Plea not guilty - Venue changed to Logan County – deft. with Philemon Morris, Hollom Pierce, and Philander Pierce as sureties recognized in the sum of \$310 to appear at said court on first day." [See more on this story below]

Minerva named one Daughter Annis, and another one Cordelia - both were sisters of Hollom and Philander, whose mother was also named Annis.

Philemon Morris was a resident of New Salem, Illinois which was a very early village located on a bend of the Sangamon River. Abraham Lincoln lived at New Salem as a young man. The village was restored in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps, including many of the original log structures.

[http://www.petersburgil.com/new\\_salem/village/themap.htm](http://www.petersburgil.com/new_salem/village/themap.htm).

More details on the court case:

"Philemon Morris vs. Minerva Morris", 1845, Chancery Court, Menard Co., Illinois-a bill to Philemon for court costs -a subpoena for the Menard Co. sheriff to serve to Minerva -Philemon's

affidavit: a statement dated April 19, 1845 and written by his lawyer Thomas L. Harris. Philemon stated that he married Minerva Purse in Menard Co. on April 16, 1845. "But on the same day of his marriage and indeed only a few hours thereafter, his hopes in this respect were cut off, his prospects blasted, and he found to his deep sorrow, only deception, treachery and crime, where he had so confidently believed nothing but trust, virtue, and innocence existed". He goes on to say that on or about the 3rd of February 1845, he first saw Minerva and then several more times in the next 2 weeks at a "protracted religious meeting". Philemon was a widower "with a helpless family of small children" and they all needed a mother. He was anxious to marry whenever he found someone with the qualities he was looking for. Minerva appeared to possess what a companion should and then she became a member of his church. At the time she was living with Mr. and Mrs. A. A. Rankin and they were also members of the same church. They told him they believed she would be a suitable wife and that she was an industrious and excellent housekeeper. [Ambery A. Rankin and family are living next door to Hollom Pierce in Menard County in 1850 census].

A marriage date was set for the evening of April 17. On the 13th it was changed to the morning of the 16th in order to get the minister they wanted for the ceremony. At 7 o'clock AM on April 16th, they were married at the Rankin home. He stayed there until 10 or 11 when he made arrangements to move Minerva to his own home. Mrs. Rankin said Minerva wasn't feeling well from her "monthly sickness" but she should be well enough after dinner to leave. Philemon went home and came back about 2 hours later. Philemon, Minerva, and Mrs. Rankin walked to Philemon's home about a half mile away. Mrs. Rankin's son called her home saying there was an infant found in the hay loft of the barn. He'd found the girl at about 1 o'clock. She was naked and laying in a hole that had been made in hay and then covered with hay. A string was tied tightly around her neck so as to nearly deprive her of life - her neck being greatly swelled and black in the face.

Minerva denied knowing anything about this at first but when she could no longer deny it she admitted giving birth to the baby in the barn on the day of their marriage. She said the girl was a bastard. The affidavit did not name the father. [However another suit filed is The People of Ill., vs. Harrison Rankin and Minerva Morris accusing them of 'adultery and fornication'. See separate story for this case, which was also dropped by the court in Nov. 1845. Harrison Rankin was the brother of Sheriff Amberry A. Rankin.]

Philemon said he had never been suspicious of unchastity and no one in town had any idea she was pregnant. She was walking the streets of Petersburg two days before the birth and no one had any idea. He wanted a divorce because to stay with Minerva "would be revolting to his feelings, disgraceful to his character, and would fix a lasting stigma on his children which they would be compelled to hear through life". Philemon also stated that the girls' name is Alice and he asked that she not become chargeable to him. But what happened to Alice? I have found no record of a girl born on this date with any connection to Pierces or Rankins. One assumes the child did not live.----- Thank you to Matthew Ferricks for locating the above information. ----- Note: that Philemon Morriss did not conclude the divorce, they not only stayed married, but moved to Iowa and then to Oregon in 1851 and had 9 children. One of her daughters with Philemon was named Annis (for her mother and her sister) and Cordelia, for her sister.

## **Minerva Pierce Court Documents - UPDATES**

- • Recently found Nov 2011 - Menard County Court documents that show that All charges against Minerva (Pierce) Morriss were dropped in Nov 1845, in both this case below, as well as the case against her for alledgedly attempted murder on her new-born child. It would appear that this was all about an illegitimate child, and a declaration about who the father was.

Indictment:

Of the June Term of the Menard Circuit Court in the year of our Lord 1845, State of Illinois, Menard County}}

The Grand Jurors chosen selected and sworn in and for the county of Menard in the same and by the authority of the People of the Sate of Illinois upon their oaths present that on the first day of July in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and forty four at the county and State aforesaid; Harrison Rankin being then and there a married man and one Minerva Morris then and there being an unmarried woman by the name of Minerva Pierce unlawfully lived together in an open state of fornication and adultery contrary to the form of the statute in such case made and provided and against the peace and dignity of the laws (of the) people of the state of Illinois. And this Grand Jury aforesaid in the name and by the authority aforesaid upon their oaths aforesaid do further present that at the County aforesaid the day and year last aforesaid and from that time until the making of this formal indictment Harrison Rankin then and there him a married man and Minerva Morris then and there being an unmarried woman did live together in an open state of Adultery and fornication contrary to the form of the statute in such case made and provided and against the peace and dignity of the same people of the state of Illinois.

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Subpoena:

The People vs. Harrison Rankin and Minerva Morris

Minerva Morris & E. Pierce [Eliphalet Pierce, Minerva's father]

Filed Nov 1st 1845

Nathan Duper, Clk, by C. B. Waldon Dep Ck.

Served by [??ary] on the within named Minerva Moris, E Pierc who is dead Bet Nov 1st 1845

Service 25 Travel 6-1/4 Return 12-1/2 = 45-3/4 – A. A. Rankin Sheriff, by Edmund Greer Dept.