



# The Flag on the Hilltop (Shawnee Classics)

*Mary Tracy Earle*

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Early in the Civil War, two young brothers boldly flew the Union flag from a tree atop a hill between Makanda and Cobden. This was a towering act of courage in an area teeming with Copperheads.

Theodore and Al Thompson, 18 and 20 years old at the time, raised the flag in defiance of the Knights of the Golden Circle, a secessionist group that operated throughout the Midwest. Controlling its membership through terror, this secret society condemned betrayers to death by torture. The Knights, whose goals included capturing a Union prison and liberating the rebels, triggered the Civil War riot in Charleston, instigated anti-draft movements, and aided Northern deserters.

Theodore Thompson, who later owned much of Makanda, Giant City, and the land that became Southern Illinois University describes the tree as a "tall tulip poplar between 3 and 4 feet in diameter at the trunk and some 60 feet to the first limbs. This noted tree could be seen in some directions 15 or 20 miles away."

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