



The AKEY BrAKEY News

now a tri - annual newsletter from the Richland County Historical Society

January, 2022 Volume #14 – Issue # 1 – promoting and supporting the History of Richland County and Southwestern Wisconsin

THE BURNHAM DRUG STORES

By Emeritus Professor Jerry Bower

March 2009

This sketch focuses primarily on the following Burnhams:

- Horace Leigh Burnham (1828-1892)
- John William Burnham (1857-1919)
- Robert Craig Burnham (1885-1946)
- Robert Grant Burnham (1911-1966)

The patriarch of the “drug store Burnhams” was Horace Leigh Burnham, who was born 12 July 1828 in Addison County, Vermont. Horace gained an education in the Vermont district schools. He also studied one term each at the Bakersfield (Vermont) Academy and in Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. After he completed his education, Horace engaged in farming and taught school in the winters, when the farm chores were less demanding. In 1850 Horace married Susan C. Lowell (1830-1903), who was a native of Orange County, VT.

In 1856 Horace came alone to Richland County, Wisconsin, and purchased 160 acres. Eighty acres were located in Ithaca Township and the adjoining eighty lay in Sauk County. Horace built a log cabin, with a sod roof, and then he returned, in spring 1857, to Vermont to bring his family to their new home.

As soon as he could afford the expense, Horace built a “neat cottage house” to replace the log cabin and a frame barn to shelter the animals. In addition to farming, Horace was active in Ithaca Township government. He was elected to the town board, served as the superintendent of the township schools, and filled the office of township treasurer for ten years. The latter office evidently convinced the county voters to elect Horace county treasurer, an office he held for four years. When elected to this post, Horace retired from farming and he and Susan moved to Richland Center. The couple lived the remainder of their days in the city.

John William Burnham, one of Horace and Susan’s three sons (they also had a daughter), was born in Bear Valley in the farm house, 7 November 1857. According to the 1884 *History of Crawford and Richland Counties, Wisconsin*, John farmed with his parents until “he attained his majority,” at which time he moved to Richland Center to clerk in the Burnham Brothers drug and general store. (1204)

Dates are often difficult to pin down when one is researching the Nineteenth Century. If the age of majority was eighteen, it would have been 1875 when John moved to Richland Center. However, in this instance, there is evidence that the year was 1876. The Burnham Brothers drug and general store was opened in 1876 by Oliver J. and William Burnham. These Burnhams were not directly related to John W. Burnham, according to the Burnham family genealogy in the Richland County History Room.

John remained with the Burnham Brothers for three years. Then he clerked for Bowen and Allen until March 1883, when he became a partner, with Oliver J., in the Burnham and Burnham Drug Store. In 1883, also, having established himself in the Richland Center business community, John married Florence G. “Bessie” Shue (1856-1911) of Beloit. Oliver’s brother, William, had moved to Dakota and this created the opportunity for John to invest in the business. After six years, in 1889, Oliver J. decided to go into the produce business and the partnership was dissolved.

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Subsequently, John set up his own drug store on Court Street, next to the Bailey Opera House. An article in the *Richland Democrat*, 26 September 1894 provides information about the Burnham Drug Store. John has become a registered pharmacist, who can fill any prescription written by a doctor. The *Democrat* listed the various departments in the store as “drugs, patent medicines, school books and school supplies, blank and miscellaneous books, stationery, wall paper, toilet articles, toys, fine confections, tobacco and cigars, and groceries.” The article finished with a flourish, “If you can’t find what you want at Burnham’s drug store, you need look no farther, for you won’t find it in Richland Center.”

About 1900 John’s health began to deteriorate and in 1904 he brought his son, Robert Craig, into the business. Now the sign read, “Burnham and Son.” John and Florence’s other son, Horace, was otherwise occupied.

Robert Craig Burnham (1885-1946) grew up and was educated in Richland Center. Following high school graduation, Robert C. attended the pharmacy school of Marquette University in Milwaukee. He graduated as a registered pharmacist in 1904 and immediately joined his father in the family business.

On 14 June 1906 Robert C. married Lida Marie Postel (1887-1959) of Muscoda in a quiet ceremony in Milwaukee. The couple had met while attending classes at Marquette. Robert’s parents held a reception for the newlyweds at their home shortly after the couple returned to Richland Center. The event was described in the local press as a “gala event.”

In 1913 Robert C. and Lida built an impressive Prairie School style house on Center Street. Today Center Street is Central Avenue. The Prairie School of architecture was inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright, who was a native son of Richland Center. The house was designed by Percy Bentley, a La Crosse architect. Bentley did not study with Wright but he admitted that he was greatly influenced by Wright’s work. The 1987 *Richland Center, Wisconsin, Architectural and Historical Survey Report* states, “Featuring a ‘pebble dash stucco’ exterior, with wooden strips accentuating the short upper story, this Prairie School house displays a two-story center block with one-story porch wings and the main entrance in the center of the southern elevation. Paired windows in a horizontal band on the upper story and the low-pitched roof with overhanging eaves serve to accentuate the horizontal appearance of the house.” (241 & 243)

As John’s health continued to deteriorate, Robert C. assumed more and more of the management responsibilities for the drug store. In 1914, Robert C. and his brother, Horace Lowell (1892-1988), purchased the stock of their uncle, H. B. Allen, whose store building, that was on the northeast corner of Court and Center Streets, had been purchased by the First National Bank. The directors of the bank eventually had the Allen building razed and built, in 1920, an impressive Neo-Classic style bank on the corner. Today, this building houses the M & I Bank.

At the same time, Robert C. and Horace purchased the Bowen Store building, located cater-corner from the Allen Store, on the southwest corner of Court and Center Streets. After remodeling and modernizing, the Burnham brothers moved their uncle’s stock into the building and operated it as the Empire Drug Store. Now the Burnhams had two drug stores—Burnham and Son at 182 East Court Street and the Empire Drug Store at 101 West Court Street. Three years later, in 1917, Horace enlisted in World War I, shortly after the United States had joined the Allies in the conflict. Horace’s enlistment left Robert C. in charge of both businesses. When John died in 1919, Robert C. inherited both drug stores.

After he returned from the service, Horace returned to work in the Empire Drug Store. He also invested in Richland Center’s economic development. He created the Burnham Lumber Company and the Southwestern Box Factory. In 1930, however, Horace sold his businesses and moved to Platteville, where he was equally successful. In Platteville, Horace and his wife, Hilda Kaisermann, started a very successful drug store. The profits from it allowed the couple to acquire three farms on the edge of the city. Both Horace and Hilda were active in civic affairs in Platteville.

Robert C. also was active in civic affairs. He was a director and president of the Richland Center Chamber of Commerce. In 1925 he was elected an initial director of the Richland Center Country Club. Twelve years later, in 1937, he was elected to the first of several terms on the school board. Indeed, he was its president when he died in 1946.

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Upon Robert C.'s death, his sons, Robert Grant and Richard Horace, inherited both drug stores. Robert G. had begun working in the stores in 1934, while Richard had worked for several years as a buyer for Marshall Fields in Chicago. Because of his long experience in the stores, Robert G. became the senior manager of the enterprises.

Almost immediately, the Burnham brothers began a series of moves that changed the businesses on Court Street. In 1946 Richard bought the stock of the Toms Jewelry Store from the estate of Henry Payne Toms. Subsequently, in September 1948, Robert G. and Richard purchased the King Brothers building on Court Street, next door to the Empire Drug Store. They remodeled and modernized the structure and then moved the gift and jewelry departments from both drug stores into it. Thus, Burnham's Jewelry Store joined the establishments on Court Street.

But Richard was restless. In 1949 he decided to cash-in his Richland Center investments and move to Green Bay, where he became an investment counselor. Richard's decision triggered a series of transactions.

First, Robert G. bought Burnham's Jewelry from his brother. Then, to reduce his responsibilities, Robert G. sold the Empire Drug Store to Kenneth Carney of Reedsburg. Burnham's Jewelry Store was described, in the *Richland Observer*, as ". . . one of Richland Center's high class business places, with a clientele beyond the county lines."

Robert G., in the tradition of the family, was active in a variety of civic organizations. He had memberships in both the Chamber of Commerce and the Country Club. He was an active member of the Richland Masonic Lodge and also participated in the Madison Scottish Rite bodies.

In 1963, with his health failing, Robert G. sold the stock of the Burnham Drug Store to John Gatz, then the owner of the Empire Drug Store. When this transaction was completed, there was no longer a Burnham Drug Store in Richland Center. Three Burnham generations had been in the drug business for eighty years, 1883 to 1963. Robert Grant Burnham died three years later, from a long-term heart ailment. He was just 55 years old.

SOURCES:

History of Crawford and Richland Counties, Wisconsin, 1884, pp. 1101, 1204.

History of Richland County Wisconsin, 1986, family history #466.

Richland Center, Wisconsin, Architectural and Historic Intensive Survey Report, 1988, pp. 193, 241, 243.

Richland County History Room. MSS 848-Burnham Family, G74-Burnham Genealogy, and MSS 2104-Business Directories, 1873-1927.

Richland Democrat, 3 December 1913.

Scott, Margaret. *Richland Center, Wisconsin, A History*. 1972. Pp. 70, 98, 116, 191, 210.



<https://content.mpl.org/digital/collection/rchr/id/3012/>



<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Property/HI97909>

A Warm WELCOME to those with NEW Memberships to the RICHLAND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY for 2022. * a Lifetime membership # additional donation

- * Karl Gutknecht
- * Jim & Sue Patch
- # Leif & Marcia Carlson
- # Jamie & Angela Larse
- * Carl & Joan Bethke
- # Carolyn Frye
- # Alice Meyer
- * Michael & Robin Cosgrove

Also a sincere THANK YOU to all those that continue to RE - new their memberships as well as those with their LIFETIME memberships.

If I Could Hit Rewind in Life...:

A Series of Short Stories Written by Cathy Johnson
ISBN 978-1-7367726-0-7518

The book is a conglomeration of short stories about life experiences on a Wisconsin dairy farm and raising a family with 5 children in the 1980's.

IF I COULD HIT "REWIND" IN LIFE...

WRITTEN BY: CATHY JOHNSON



The author was a featured writer for Hoard's Dairyman, a national Dairy Farm Magazine.

Cathy began writing for the Muscoda Progressive August of 1979 with a column "Country Chatter by Katy". The column also

appeared in the Richland Observer. A year later Hoard's Dairyman Magazine asked her to be a feature writer for them using her own name, writing about farm life. She has done numerous speaking engagements throughout Wisconsin and the midwest telling humorous down-to-earth stories.

To contact Cathy Johnson about her book → 608-604-2711 or countrychatter@hotmail.com

PRESIDENT'S CORNER by Ken Thiede

Welcome 2022 and so many things to look forward to with the Richland County Historical Society. Certainly we optimistically await the summer for the museum to be open. We are making plans for an agricultural exhibit on the SE triangle of the property.

A Special THANK YOU to WRCO Radio for having the weekly 'History Moments' as our mission is to "Promote Richland County History". You can hear those excerpts being aired during the 'News at Noon' on Thursdays and Sundays.



According to → the romance of Wisconsin place names a book by Robert Gard

Originally it was Richland City because of the confusion with Richland Center it was changed; although the influence of a Mr. H. M. Bock had it changed back from Gotham to Richland City three times.

W. A. McNurlin, a store owner, is credited with suggesting the name after his friend, Captain M. W. Gotham who was postmaster when the post office was moved from the riverfront nearer to the railroad.

Captain M. W. Gotham became a Great Lakes sailor at the age of eighteen and commanded steamers for more than thirty years. When he married Clara Campbell, a Richland County girl, he decided to live in Richland City because it reminded him of his former home on the St. Lawrence River. In the winter months he enjoyed matching tall tales with the river men who worked the steamers and the lumber rafts on the Wisconsin River. He was sixty one when he and two of his sons perished with the Macy on Lake Erie.

In the winter of 1902 the steamer the Sylvanus J. Macy commanded by Captain M. W. Gotham was towing the schooner Mabel Wilson commanded by his brother Captain J. E. Gotham. They were on Lake Erie bound for Kenosha with cargos of hard coal the last trip of the year. When a heavy storm struck, heroically the men on Macy cut loose the towline before their own ship went down. The Wilson reached Detroit and told of seeing the lights on the drifting Macy disappear suddenly about three o'clock in the morning.

https://books.google.com/books?id=J8auCgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=qbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

“RE-SEARCHING” THE EARLY HISTORY OF RICHLAND COUNTY”

This article concept was introduced in earlier editions to provide for ongoing information highlighting various topics of local interest.

<http://www.usgenweb.info/wirichland/books/1906-6.htm>

... as is a phrase from the past - 'No Telephone, No Telegraph ...' When did Richland Center develop these 'modern day' wonders ?

In 1874, Charles W. Towsley, a telegraph operator at Lone Rock, conceived the idea of constructing a telegraph line from that place to Richland Center. He accordingly made a proposition to the people of the latter place, that if they would patronize him and pay for a certain amount of telegraphing in advance, he would construct and manage the operation of the line. Tickets, which were called "franks," were issued, and were handled the same as stock of a joint stock company, only differing in this, "that the holder of a frank was entitled to telegraph out the amount shown on the face of a frank, and was not entitled to dividends." The people of Richland Center took hold of the matter with a vim, and many of the enterprising citizens took \$5, \$10, and some as high as \$150 worth of the franks. At least \$700 was raised in this way at Richland Center. The line was ready for operation in September, 1874, and Mr. Towsley placed operators at Richland Center and Sextonville. The enterprise met with marked success and gave the best of satisfaction to its patrons. When the narrow gauge railroad was built, a few years later, this line of telegraph was used for railroad business, notwithstanding the fact that the wires followed the wagon track and shot across fields and creeks, the nearest way possible to Lone Rock, regardless of the course taken by the railroad. When the narrow gauge railroad was sold to the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul company, in 1880, it ended the existence of the "Pony Telegraph" as a Richland county enterprise.

.....

The telephone made its appearance in Richland County at about this time (June 30, 1905). It was looked upon with the same curiosity which is meeting the introduction of electric railways, in more recent years. A telephone exchange was soon established at Richland Center, by which time the new invention had been greatly improved and popularized.

I didn't know that ... In a previous edition of the AKEY BrAKEY News the landmark signage for GTE with origins in 1918 in Richland Center for what would become Verizon was a featured excerpt

* * * * *

DID YOU KNOW?

• Boaz native Richard Brewer deputized his friend, William Bonney, who became better known as "Billy the Kid".

Brewer lost his life in a shoot-out on April 4th and he became a legend – 1878

DID YOU also KNOW?

• Liberace played a concert in the early 1930s in Richland Center.

A request was made for a mixed play list and not "all long haired music."

<https://local.townsquarepublications.com/wisconsin/richland/01/topic.html>

Richland County Historical Sites -- in the City of Richland Center on Orange St



Ocooch Living History Center

The Ocooch Living History Center is a monument to the Native American people. Complete with colorful flowers and waterfalls, the Ocooch Living History Center recognizes Indian societies as complex and diverse products of history. The center covers a large history of Native Americans in Wisconsin starting with coming to the Americas and the rise of Indian civilizations. It goes further in depth by showing how Wisconsin Indians lost their homelands and finishes with foundations for the future.

Located next to Our House Senior Living, Ocooch Living History Center aims to give everyone a broader understanding and appreciation of Native Americans in Wisconsin.

www.richlandcentertourism.com/about-us

According to →the Amistad Research Center

Margaret Helen Scott was born in Richland Center, Wisconsin on December 26, 1898. After her father died in 1918, she attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in history. She taught in Ladysmith, Wisconsin for two years and then returned to Richland Center to teach English at the high school. In 1930 she moved to California and did two years of post-graduate work at the University of California-Berkeley. She earned a Master's degree in Library Science in 1943 at the University of Chicago. In addition, she worked briefly in Kentucky and in Michigan for a short time. She then returned to the south to Talladega College to serve as head librarian for 25 years until her retirement in 1964. After her retirement, Ms. Scott went back to her hometown of Richland Center and worked for ten years as a volunteer at the Brewer Library where she organized the Richland County History Room. She wrote several books documenting the history of the town including most notably her first work *Richland Center, a History* in 1972 and also her final book *Frank Lloyd Wright's Warehouse in Richland Center, Wisconsin* in 1984. During her retirement, Ms. Scott was honored with numerous awards by her hometown of Richland Center for her work in documenting the town's history. She died March 29, 1994 at the age of 95. Margaret Helen Scott was a historian, a teacher, a librarian, an author, and a humanitarian.



<https://content.mpl.org/digital/collection/rchr/id/2756/>

Margaret Helen Scott, age 4

WHERE in Richland County is **BASSWOOD** located?

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From the popular "Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?" there are locations in Richland County that many are not aware of and only some have heard of. This ongoing series will highlight some spots of interest while covering the History of Richland County.

http://genealogytrails.com/wis/richland/history_towns.htm

Basswood

Source: *History of Crawford and Richland Counties, Wisconsin Illustrated (1881) Transcribed by: Richard Ramos*

Robert W. Peters was the first to engage in mercantile trade at Basswood. In 1869 he put a stock of goods in the one room of his dwelling, opening a country general merchandise store. A few years later he put up a building 18x26 feet in size, and took in John Blickenstaff as a partner. Six months later he sold out to his partner, and a few weeks afterward bought the establishment again. He continued the business until 1873, when he closed out his stock.

The next to engage in business here were McIntire & Eleston. Mr. McIntire soon bought his partner's interest. In 1883 Joseph S. Peters purchased an interest, and now runs the store, Mr. McIntire is in trade in Muscoda.

Norman W. Bennett established a blacksmith shop here in 1879, erecting a two story building. He has since done a flourishing business.

In 1884 R. C. Brown and C. F. Wallace put in operation a steam saw-mill, which is still running.

The United Brethren Church was organized at the Basswood school house in December, 1865, by Rev. George Kite. The following were among the members: James Willey and wife, Charles Johnson and wife, William Warren and wife, Mrs. Thomas Goff and Mrs. William Briggs. Charles Johnson was the first class leader. Among the preachers who have held services here are the following: Revs. Young, Potts, Day, Taylor, Bovee, Whitney and Hood. At present no regular services are held.

The Basswood cemetery was laid out in 1861, on section 16. The land was donated by Thomas Hardy and Mrs. Francis Keplogle, each giving half an acre. The first burial was of the remains of a child of Thomas Hardy. The ground has never been surveyed, and the cemetery is free to all citizens of the town. At a meeting held for the purpose, James Lucas, Charles Johnson and Thomas Rummery were elected trustees. Subscriptions were solicited and money raised to fence the grounds.

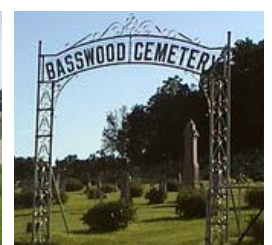
Basswood post office was established in 1869. Jacob Bear was appointed first postmaster, but before he got his commission he sold his farm and moved away. James Lucas was therefore appointed in his stead. Robert Peters was the next postmaster, keeping the office at his store. The next was Joseph Stanley, who kept the office at his house on section 9. Robert Peters succeeded Mr. Stanley. He has deputized his son Joseph, and the office is kept at his store.

<https://content.mpl.org/digital/collection/rchr/id/13045>

[Richland County History Room](#)

[Brewer Public Library](#)

Basswood Church and Cemetery, County Highway E, Eagle Township, Richland County, Wisconsin, ca. 1963.





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HISTORY**



www.richlandcountyhistoricalsociety.weebly.com

... Would you → → pass this newsletter on to a FRIEND?

Please renew your membership annually by July 1st—consider the following options:

- _____ \$10 for individual / family membership
- _____ \$20 for a business to support the historical society
- _____ additional DONATION to support the historical society
- _____ \$100 for a LIFETIME individual / family membership



Donations are always WELCOME

Member Name(s) _____

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Phone # _____

Email _____

Mail registration to:

C/o Richland County Historical Society
213 S Central AVE Apt.#1
Richland Center WI 53581

This is the fifth installment of an insert page for the AKEY BrAKEY newsletter with a Special Thanks for this January issue to Jean Birkett who has provided the material about the Coppertop and Campus/Community Theater as well as previously to Craig & Cindy Chicker. Terry & Kate Moen, Ed Lee and Rob Bender & Tammy Cannoy-Bender who provided materials for our past insert pages.

We are seeking more materials for future inserts. If You have pictures and/or stories that You'd be willing to share Please do get in touch with RCHS President Ken Thiede or mail contact information to:

213 S. Central AVE Apt.#1

Richland Center, WI 53581

% Richland County Historical Society

We would welcome pictures and stories which would be great; even better letters or memorabilia that provide a historical look into our past.

* * * * *

UW - Richland has a gem with the Coppertop Theater and now for over fifty years the theater continues as You can follow on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/UWRichlandTheatre>

UW-Platteville Richland Theatre

Coppertop - Wallace Student Center – 1200 Hwy 14 West, Richland Center



Richland County Historical Society member Jean Birkett, also Professor Emeritus from the UW-Richland, taught English at the Richland Campus first on a part time basis in the early 1970's when she had the opportunity to do plays when asked by then Dean Papke. In her own words "Ultimately, the English and Communication Arts departments of the then Center System saved me and said I should be given 3 credits of teaching for each semester so I taught three courses and did the plays".

She did so with a stipulation only if she could have community members be in plays along with her students. Jean acknowledges Paul Fowell and Paul Murphey as members from the community who played an early role. "It worked well as our students learned from our community actors (and vice versa) and the community hams were delighted to be on stage, it was a good mix"



John Poole with Jean Birkett in early years

Jean received a plaque "**In Appreciation and Recognition of Outstanding Dedication and Service**" for her two decades as Drama Director of plays spanning from

1973 to 1989 as listed below.

1973 <i>Pride & Prejudice</i>	1979 <i>A Christmas Carol</i>	1985 <i>Scapino</i>
1974 <i>Three Scenes from Shakespeare</i>	<i>Fiddler on the Roof</i>	<i>Our Town</i>
1975 <i>Mousetrap</i>	1980 <i>A Man for All Seasons</i>	<i>Hello Dolly</i>
<i>Matchmaker</i>	1981 <i>Pirates of Penzance</i>	1986 <i>All My Sons</i>
1976 <i>The Inspector General</i>	1982 <i>My Three Angels</i>	(producer)
<i>Benet Bicentennial</i>	1983 <i>You Can't Take It With You</i>	<i>Babes In Arms</i>
1977 <i>J.B</i>	<i>South Pacific</i>	1987 <i>Curtain Call</i>
<i>Once Upon a Matress</i>	1984 <i>House of The Seven Gables</i>	1987 <i>The Foreigner</i>
1978 <i>Where's Charley</i>	<i>Little Me</i>	1988 <i>Murder in the Cathedral</i>
<i>The Admirable Crichton</i>		<i>Romanoff & Juliet</i>
		1989 <i>Nicholas Nickleby</i>

Photos that were selected by Jean Birkett of several from the community/campus students that she has worked with over the years.



Paul & Louise Murphey



Louise Murphey Jean Halverson & Norlene Emerson



Rob Gander



← Phil Nee & Cindy Rasmussen



Marilyn Loft-Houck and Kent Houck →



Jim Aagard with Jean Birkett and Marilyn Loft-Houck on set design

“ We did some really good shows, pleased our audiences, and made money, which wasn’t the main goal. ... I loved my work and have made marvelous friends with many who trod the Coppertop stage. Life has been good. “ *Jean Birkett*

Jean Birkett ready for the Shakespeare Birthday Celebration



← Paul Murphey

Chris Simonson →

