



The AKEY BrAKEY

News

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

April, 2020 Volume #12 – Issue # 2 – promoting and supporting the History of Richland County and Southwestern Wisconsin

NOTE that this is a series of articles which began in April 2019 and will be continued in future issues as well.

THE CHARLES R. THOMSON HOUSE

By Jerry Bower

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE: An article in the *Richland Democrat*, 15 March 1911, reported that brothers C. R. and A. A. Thomson had purchased a block of land, bounded by Pearl and Second Streets, that ran as far up the bluff as it was practical to build. Both brothers, it was anticipated, would build a house on the parcel in the coming summer.

The house that Charles R. and Clara Susan (Vogel) Thomson built in 1911 is described in its Intensive Survey form as a good example of the American Foursquare style of architecture. The *Richland Center, Wisconsin, Architectural and Historical Survey Report* states that, “The American Foursquare appeared during the first decade of the twentieth century and its popularity with the middle class and local builder-contractors lasted well into the 1920s. Described as simple box-like, hip roofed structures with broad overhangs, dormers and full length front porch, the Foursquare’s simple surfaces were the result of the public’s reaction against excessive ornamentation [e.g. Queen Anne style] and their revived interest in the simple lines of the classical style.” (194)

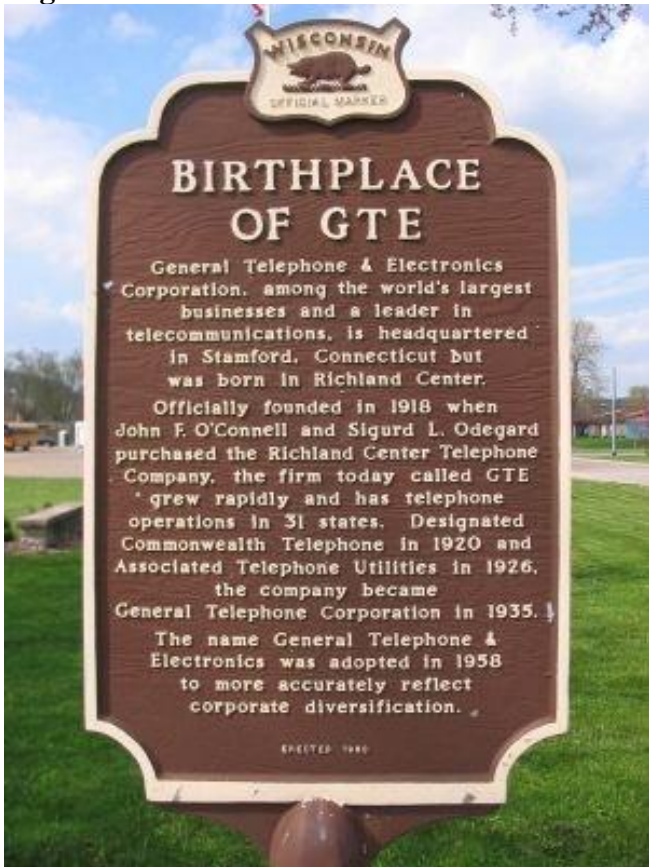
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Charles R. Thomson was an important figure in the development of banking in Richland Center during the first three decades of the Twentieth Century. Mrs. C. R. Thomson also was a significant contributor to the development of public institutions in the city through her work in the Federation of Women’s Clubs.

Charles R. Thomson was born on a farm near Sparta, Wisconsin, 8 April 1872. He attended a rural Monroe County Schools for eight grades and then attended Sparta High School, from which he graduated in 1890. Charles then enrolled in the University of Wisconsin. He was within one term of graduation from the Law School when financial reverses compelled him to drop out. He never completed the work to become an attorney.

The events that brought C. R. from Sparta to Richland Center began in 1901 when Richland County successfully applied to the state for permission to establish a County Normal School for the training of teachers. Richland County was among the first half dozen counties to found a Normal School; eventually all seventy-two Wisconsin counties would do so. Thomson, who had been teaching in Sparta, was hired as the Normal’s first principal. The Richland County Normal School opened in September 1902 with 37 students. Thomson, whose efforts to get the school off to a good start were praised, held this post for three years, overseeing its move from cramped rented quarters into the spacious second floor of the West Side School. Thomson resigned in mid 1905, after the completion of the 1904-05 school year.

C. R. had begun to study banking, in the evenings, soon after he arrived in Richland Center. His effort now paid off, when he joined the staff and officers of the newly chartered First National Bank. The First National was founded on a reorganization of the local State Bank which, in turn, had been based on the Pease Brothers banking operation. Thomson began as the cashier of the new bank. Subsequently, he was elected its president by the board of directors in 1911. He held this position until the First National floundered in late November 1928.

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<https://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=18777>

There is a **NEW DISCOVER WISCONSIN** segment about **RICHLAND COUNTY** -- google it on Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOnYDcOIBQU>

There was a viewing in Richland Center on Thurs. Jan. 30th and aired on television Sat. Feb. 1st, 2020.

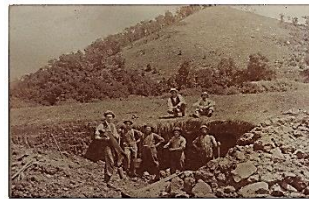
Inscription.

General Telephone & Electronics Corporation, among the world's largest businesses and a leader in telecommunications, is headquartered in Stamford, Connecticut but was born in Richland Center.

Officially founded in 1918 when John F. O'Connell and Sigurd L. Odegard purchased the Richland Center Telephone Company, the firm today called GTE grew rapidly and has telephone operations in 31 states. Designated Commonwealth Telephone in 1920 and Associated Telephone Utilities in 1926, the company became General Telephone Corporation in 1935.

The name General Telephone & Electronics was adopted in 1958 to more accurately reflect corporate diversification.

Erected 1980 by the Wisconsin Historical Society. (Marker Number 261)



A picture of digging for the Boaz Mastodon which was the lead article in our 1st January issue. More to come in the October issue

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT ... How many state highways are there in Richland County?

See the bottom of Page 5 for the answer ... DID YOU KNOW that commonly there are four types of highways; county, state, united states and interstate. County highways are lettered. *'Major Interstate routes are designated by one- or two-digit numbers. Routes with odd numbers run north and south, while even numbered run east and west. For north-south routes, the lowest numbers begin in the west, while the lowest numbered east-west routes are in the south.'* www.fhwa.dot.gov

What then is said to be the shortest state highway in Wisconsin you ask ?? again See Page 5

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by Nick Studnicka

We are starting to look for volunteers to help keep the museum open each Sunday during the 2020 season. Please contact me at studnic@hotmail.com if interested.

Upcoming Projects: We are looking at some major maintenance project that will have to be done in the near future. We are looking for someone to paint the exterior of Akey School, if anyone knows a good painter that is reasonable or would be willing to donate part of their labor to help us repaint the exterior let me know.

PLEASE -- Come and Visit the Akey School this SUMMER

The Akey School Museum is open Sundays June thru September from 1 to 4 pm.



Directions to the AKEY SCHOOL MUSEUM -- it is located east from Richland Center off Hwy 14 about 4 miles south on County TB or from Gotham on Hwy 60 west 1 mile & north on County TB 4 miles.

Check out our website for the past issues of the AKEY BraKEY News

→ www.richlandcountyhistoricalsociety.weebly.com



http://landscapemosaics.com/enviro_advoc/big/bigmap.jpg

“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.

Chapter 2 - Mound Builders and Indian Occupancy

The historian, looking back away down the dim corridor of time, perceives faintly in the mythical light of that far off, pre-historic period, before the red man's foot had desecrated its soil, the traces of a race who evidently peopled these hills and valleys of Richland county; a race who lived in semi-barbaric civilization, akin to that of the Aztec that Cortez found on the plains of Mexico; a race who lived and died and left no trace of their existence except the mysterious mounds and ridges that they have built or that mark the site of their ruined buildings; a race of whom no tradition even exists from which their history can be written; a people of mystery, and probably ever to remain so - the Toltecs or Mound-builders.

The high bluffs and the broad, level bottom lands along the Wisconsin River are in many places thickly dotted over with these reminiscences of a vanished race. In many localities these relics have attracted much antiquarian attention, and many theories have been advanced, plausible enough, but apparently only based upon vague speculation, accounting for their origin and purpose. The few slight traces of bones and implements, with, in some instances, pottery, are all that are left to tell us of a race that has been extinct for centuries.

Continued Page 4

In the neighborhood of Excelsior, Port Andrew, Richland City, and all along the Wisconsin River, these mounds are quite numerous, and are of various shapes and sizes; but we have failed to find that any attempt has been made to elucidate their mystery by a careful research.

During the summer of 1881, a party from Mineral Point made some research, near Lone Rock, in this county, under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution, and in the interest of anthropology, of which the following account is given:

"The mounds opened were in the meadow of Mr. Loomis, two miles north of Lone Rock, where was found a group of about twenty mounds - all round, except one, which was oblong, and about 200 feet long. The land and mounds had been cultivated, but are now in grass, and no doubt, by these means, the mounds have been greatly denuded; they were in diameter the same as those above mentioned, but lower; no regular design in their position was observed, except in those farthest east, where were seven round mounds in a north and south line, with a mound to the east and west of the second mound, from the south end of the line, each mound about thirty feet in diameter, and distant sixty-six feet from center to center, thus forming a cross. The second mound from the south end or center of the cross was opened, but at the depth of four feet, they were satisfied from the appearance of the earth, that it had been opened before, and the excavation refilled, as it showed no outward signs of having been interfered with.

"Another mound to the west was then opened, and at the depth of three feet the bones of three persons were found; they were so decomposed, fragile, and near to dust that it was only with great care, that parts of them could be preserved; these bodies had been laid upon the surface of the ground, and the mound erected over them; they were doubled up at the knees and hips and laid east and west, with the head alternately each way; one of them is thought to have been a man six feet three inches, and the others of ordinary stature. Strong evidence that part of the remains had been burned, were obtained here, as also the greater part of the genuine skull of a mound builder; many bones and fragments, some charred to coal were taken from here, as also many of the teeth, which were best preserved of all.

"Another mound about 100 feet southeast of the last one mentioned, was then opened, and at the depth of two and one-half feet were found the bones of two ordinary stature, in the same condition, and buried in the same manner, as those last described."

Some idea of the antiquity of these mounds, so called, may be gathered from the fact, that some of them in various portions of the State, represent the form of a mastodon, which leads to the inevitable conclusion, that those ancient builders were contemporary with that long extinct animal. This theory has been strengthened by the presence of mastodon bones found in the mounds. And the conclusion is reached that, either these Toltecs were of earlier date than has been generally supposed, or that the mastodon or mammoth is of later.

Many other monuments of this long banished race are to be found throughout the county, but it would seem that no further effort has been made toward investigating them. Whether they were a race with all the refinements and civilization of the Egyptian or Babylonian, as has been claimed for them, or whether they had but the ruder culture of the more primitive races, remains as ever an unwritten mystery; their history has perished in the lapse of ages, and been buried under the dust of centuries.

Of their successors, the red Indian, the Scythian American, but little has been preserved. Their traditions, like the traditions of all barbarous races, border so much upon the marvelous; are so inter-warped with the myths and creations of the imagination, that what is fact and what is fable it were difficult to determine. The early French explorers in their wanderings to and fro, throughout what is now the broad domain of the State of Wisconsin, record about all that is positively known of the whereabouts of the various tribes that then had a habitation or that hunted and fished within the limits of the State.

<http://www.usgenweb.info/wirichland/books/chap2.htm>

Here's a 'TID-BIT' of Local History → the Eagle - Orion School {both are civil towns in Richland County}

Taken from the January 9th 2020 Muscoda Progressive

Sixty years ago Eagle - Orion School opened. The building cost about \$50,000 to build serving the Joint School Districts of former one room schools including: Pleasant Hill, Indian Creek, Balmoral, Eagle

Corners and the Kite districts. The new school had four rooms; one of which served as a lunchroom and phy ed area in times of bad weather. Eagle - Orion would become one of the elementary schools for then Muscoda and soon to become the Riverdale District.

<https://www.revolvy.com/page/Wisconsin-Highway-193>

State Trunk Highway 193 (often called **Highway 193**, **STH-193** or **WIS 193**) is a **state highway** in the U.S. state of **Wisconsin**. It runs north–south in southwest Wisconsin from near **Port Andrew** to near **Muscoda** in the southwestern part of the state.

Route description WIS 193 starts at an intersection with **WIS 60** near Port Andrew in **Richland County**. The highway runs northward from this intersection through some farm fields. Near the Mill Creek crossing, the roadway passes through some woods before it turns easterly through more fields. South of the Dawson Cemetery, WIS 193 terminates at its intersection with **WIS 80** north of Muscoda.

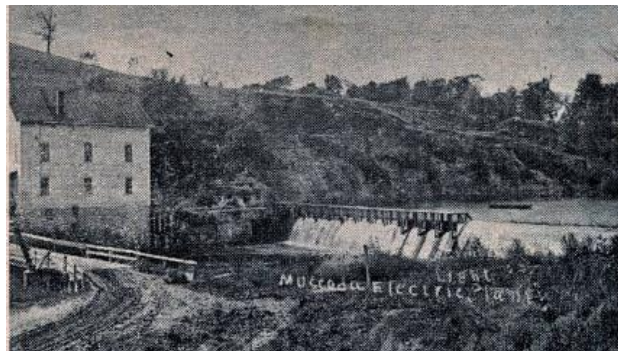
History The first highway to carry the WIS 193 designation was given the moniker in 1947 when 20 miles (32 km) of roads in **Florence County** in the northern part of the state.

This highway was supplanted by an extension of **WIS 70** in 1949. Shortly afterwards, the current highway was designated; the routing has not substantially changed since.

And from another source ... <http://www.wisconsinhighways.org/listings/WiscHwys190-199.html>

The present iteration of STH 193 debuted along its present route soon after the first one was decommissioned in 1949. The only change of the route in this highway over the decades has been a slight relocation of the Mill Creek Bridge just north of STH 60.

St Hwy 193 was notable for having the Balmoral Dam [now dismantled] as it provided energy in the mid 1900's for the Muscoda area and St Hwy 193 has been more recently known for the Frank's Hill - Shadewald Mounds
** Both locations were articles previously appearing in the AKEY BraKEY News* refer to a chronicled list of newsletters that appear on our Home Web Page -- www.richlandcountyhistoricalsociety.weebly.com*



St Hwy 193 connects 60 to 80

Map below is scanned from Hidden Valleys Magazine

US Highway 14 not included ... There are **NINE** total State Highways in, through or out of Richland County:
In ADDITION TO St Hwy 193

The eight others include...

- St Hwy 60 along the southern border parallel to the Wisc. River
- St Hwy 80 from Muscoda South to Hillsboro North
- St Hwy 56 from 80 North of Richland Center to Viola
- St Hwy 131 from 56 in Viola North to LaFarge
- St Hwy 58 from US Hwy 14 east thru Ithaca to Cazenovia
- St Hwy 154 from 58 East to Loganville
- St Hwy 171 from Boaz West to Gays Mills
- St Hwy 130 from Lone Rock North to Bear Valley



As a leading man in the business community, C. R. was in demand to join and lead community projects. For example, in 1914 some men of the Commercial Club formed an association to lobby for better roads, because the automobile was becoming more popular. Thomson was chosen president of the group. In the same year, he was among the men appointed by Mayor Pearl Lincoln to operate the brand new City Auditorium. During World War I C. R. was one of the County's "four minute speakers," who traveled and spoke to encourage the purchase of war bonds. He also played an instrumental role in helping to get the Richland Hospital built in the early 1920s. And, of course, he was in the vanguard in supporting the expansion and improvement of Richland Center's schools.

On 27 December 1899 C. R. Thomson had married Clara Susan Vogel. The couple had two daughters, Carol and Helen. Shortly after their arrival in Richland Center, Mrs. Thomson became deeply involved in the activities of the Richland Center Federation of Women's Clubs. During the first three decades of the Twentieth Century, the Federation was instrumental in providing the community with three important institutions—the Carnegie Library (1905), the City Auditorium (1913), and the Richland Hospital (1924). Mrs. Thomson chaired the Federation's Finance Committee for the hospital project. She had earlier served terms as an officer of the Federation, including the presidency.

In the spring of 1920 the First National Bank entered into a contract with A. Moorman & Company, of St. Paul, Minnesota, to build a new bank on the northeast corner of Central Avenue and Court Street. To make room for the structure, the former H. B. Allen drug store would be demolished. The new building would be exceedingly handsome—the front would be dominated by six Ionic columns that stretched from the sidewalk to the top of the building. Entry would be through a massive bronze door. The exterior would be constructed with white Bedford (Indiana) limestone, while the huge, 18' X 41', lobby would feature a floor of Tennessee marble. The front of the teller stations would be faced with dark Italian marble. Moorman's on-site supervisor predicted that the new bank would be ready for occupancy in the late fall. (Today, 2009, the M&I Bank occupies this structure.)

The so-called "Frantic Twenties" were very difficult for farmers. After a half-dozen profitable years during World War I, the farm economy collapsed when the federal government abruptly cancelled all food and equipment contracts shortly after the armistice was signed. This unwise (as it turned out) decision caused produce prices to fall precipitously and instant unemployment in the cities. Because many farmers had expanded production by borrowing money to purchase additional acres and/or new equipment during the years of excellent prices, they now were unable to maintain their debt payments.

As a result of the adverse circumstances among farmers, which only intensified as the decade passed, the First National Bank found that many of its loans to farmers were uncollectible. The 29 November 1928 *Republican Observer* carried these startling headlines: "**First National Bank Closes**" and "**Frozen Assets Given As Cause of the Closing.**" The bank had actually closed the previous Monday (26 November) after a frantic weekend of calculating assets and liabilities. A federal bank examiner had assumed control Monday afternoon. Of course, the problem was the current low value of real estate loans made during World War I.

The following Sunday, 2 December, First National President C. R. Thomson described the condition of the bank to a meeting of concerned citizens in the City Auditorium. Thomson, on behalf of the officers and directors, suggested a plan to have depositors agree to retain a percent of their money in the bank, so it could eventually reopen. However, the federal receiver appointed to supervise the liquidation of the bank's assets refused to allow even an attempt at such a plan. The bank stayed closed.

About a year and a half later, in June 1930, C. R. Thomson was arrested on a federal warrant alleging that the bank had been involved in fraudulent loans. The arrest warrant charged that Thomson had been involved in ". . . misapplication [of funds] and false entries in the accounts of the bank." State authorities also arrested and charged him with ". . . obtaining money under false pretenses." Margaret Scott, in her *Richland Center, Wisconsin, A History*, said that the federal warrant included twenty counts of embezzlement, totaling \$54,545.00. (215) Thomson was immediately released on \$2,500.00 bond.

The charges stemmed from alleged illegal transfers of money from the First National Bank to clients of the First National Realty Company. Depositions had been taken in the County Courthouse in December 1929 from the officers of the First National Realty Company: C. R. Thomson, E. R. Pease, A. D. German, and W. A. Gillingham.

The state’s case against Thomson rather quickly came to trial. Circuit Court Judge Sherman Smalley heard the case in late June 1930 in Prairie du Chien. Thomson waived his right to a jury trial and allowed Judge Smalley to decide the result. The two-day trial pivoted around the allegation that Thomson had sold a mortgage, value of \$2,500.00, to George Drake for property owned by John Hild. The state alleged that Hild did not own the property cited in the mortgage and that, therefore, Thomson had committed fraud. Thomson’s attorney, from Madison, presented several persons who testified that they had witnessed the signing of the documents by which Hild claimed ownership of the property. Unfortunately, those papers had been lost. Testimony was also elicited that Thomson/First National Realty had restored to Drake his \$2,500.00 before the trial began. In the end, Judge Smalley acquitted Thomson of all charges.

By sharp contrast, the federal case against Thomson was not tried for almost five years. The trial was finally held, in January 1936, in the federal courthouse in Madison. In this instance, Thomson exercised his right to have a jury decide the outcome. The key allegations among the twenty charges were that Thomson had committed accounting irregularities, had made excessive loans to individuals, and had made false and misleading entries in First National’s books. Several witnesses from Richland Center testified during the proceedings, but as the *Richland Democrat* (22 January 1936) observed, there wasn’t much local interest because the charges were so old and nearly forgotten in the midst of the Depression. After a ten-day trial the jury acquitted Thomson of all charges.

Charles R. Thomson died, 16 January 1938, after surgery, in a Rochester, Minnesota, hospital. His obituary noted that he had worked up to his hospitalization, but he had been in failing health. He was sixty-five years of age at the time of his death. One has to wonder if the stress of fighting the fraud charges had hastened his passing.

SOURCES: *Richland Center, Wisconsin, Architectural and Historical Intensive Survey*. 1987. P. 194.
Richland County History Room. MSS 63—the Thomson Family, C. R. Thomson folder,
 And MSS 360—First National Bank.
 Scott, Margaret Helen. *Richland Center, Wisconsin, A History*. 1972. Pp. 96, 125, 135,
 155, 179, 189, 197, 215, 290.
The Richland Democrat. 25 June 1930 and 22 January 1936.
The Republican Observer. 29 November 1928, 6 December 1928, 3 January 1929, & 12 June 1930.

<https://ci.richland-center.wi.us/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/C.R.-Thomson-House.pdf>



C.R. Thomson House, 499 East Second St. – 1911.



First National Bank, 108 East Court Street - 1920. Richland County History Room Photo.

In Memoriam ... Lon Arbegust passed away on January 25, 2020. Lon was a contributor of pictures and stories for the AKEY BrAKEY News. His wife Bonnie served on the Richland County Historical Society Board of Directors. Lon will be remembered as a local historian with his passion for architecture in Richland Center and research of the surrounding area along with notable photos.



In Memoriam ... Allan Schaefer passed away on January 26, 2020. Allan’s career included teaching Social Studies at Richland Center High School in the 1970’s. During his time here he played a key role in the Richland County Historical Society serving on the Board of Directors and with the development of the Akey School Museum as a Bi-Centennial project for Richland County.

