



The AKEY BRAKEY News

a bi-annual newsletter from the Richland County Historical Society

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LIGHTS ON! FRED G. SCHUERMAN AND WISCONSIN’S FIRST RURAL ELECTRIC LINE

By Jerry L. Bower

In January 1912, Fred Schuerman added a “power house” onto his mill on Willow Creek and installed a 150 HP generator. The wire that he immediately began to string was the first rural electric line in Wisconsin. What follows is the story of Fred Schuerman and his Sextonville/Twin Bluffs electric plant.

Fred G. Schuerman was born 20 October 1864, to William and Carolina, who had emigrated, in 1863, to the Sextonville area, from Germany. As a lad Fred attended school in Sextonville and helped with chores on the family farm. Fred graduated from Sextonville High School in 1880, at age sixteen. Already, Fred was deeply involved in the operation of the Schuerman Mill, located about one mile west of Sextonville, on Willow Creek.

The mill was originally built by E. M. Sexton, the founder of Sextonville, in 1851, alongside a brush and dirt dam. This first mill was a sawmill that processed the fine pine logs into usable lumber. Two years later, Sexton, who had several other businesses in the village, sold the sawmill to Jacob Krouskop. Krouskop soon added a three story grist mill to the operation. In 1858, George Krouskop purchased the mills from his father. Then, in 1863, George sold the mills to Fred’s father, William. The Krouskop brothers, George and A. H., moved to Richland Center and both soon established themselves as enterprising businessmen. From 1863 on, these mills were known as the Schuerman Mills.

On 25 October 1888, Fred Schuerman wed Effie Frankenhoff of Fennimore. The couple had five children—four sons, Harold, Rollin, Millard, and Irving, who died in an accident at age one, and one daughter, Josephine. From an early age, the sons worked on the family farm and helped their father operate the mills.

In 1890, when he was 26, Fred bought the mills from his father. His brother, Henry, helped operate the mills until Fred’s sons were old enough to help. The very next year Fred built an annex to the sawmill in which to manufacture excelsior. Excelsior was long, fine wood shavings used for packing or for stuffing furniture cushions. This addition allowed Fred to use even more of the byproducts from the sawmill.

In June 1897, a fierce thunderstorm turned Richland County streams into raging torrents. All of the dams on Willow Creek, from Loyd to Sextonville, were washed out. The furious current washed out about twenty feet of Schuerman’s dam. Two employees, who went on the mill pond in a rowboat to try to raise the dam gates, were almost drowned when their craft was swept over the dam. Luckily they were able to grab a piling on a downstream bridge and hang on until they were pulled to safety.

In August 1903, disaster again struck the Schuerman Mills. A spark from one of the excelsior mill’s knives set the highly flammable material ablaze. In a short time the entire complex was destroyed. Fires such as this were a very common occurrence in an era when sawmills were powered by steam engines, although this fire was not started by a spark from the smokestack. Undaunted, Fred had his mills rebuilt within six months. However, he did not include an excelsior mill in the reconstruction.

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The electricity generating business of the Schuerman Mill began in early 1912 when Fred and his son, Harold, installed a 150 HP generator. His generator could be operated by either the waterpower from the mill pond or by the steam engine. Schuerman began immediately to erect poles and string wire to both nearby villages; Sextonville and Twin Bluffs. When the generator powered up the lines in February 1913, it was the first rural electric line to operate in Wisconsin! The power was delivered from sundown to midnight.

Among the first customers were residents of Sextonville and Twin Bluffs: Walter Pronold, who owned and operated the Twin Bluffs' general store, Charles Parduhn, John Schauf, and brothers, D.C. and J.L.W. McCollum. And farmers along the line eagerly signed up for the new convenience.

Soon after starting his generator, Schuerman began negotiating with the County to supply electricity to the County Farm and Asylum, located on County Highway O. Within a few months the terms had been worked out and the line was extended from Twin Bluffs to the County institutions.

In 1915, a break-down left Schuerman's customers without power for about ten days. The *Republican Observer* commented on the situation, "There was a great demand for oil lamps when it became known that, owing to a break in the machinery, the electric power was off in the Twin Bluffs area. The inconvenience caused by the accident made people realize the great value of electric lights."

During 1917, Fred Schuerman built a line from his mill to Gotham. Again, both farmers along the line and village residents eagerly signed on for the service. Interestingly, many of the farmers had power wired into their barns but not into their homes. When this venture proved profitable, in succeeding years the Schuerman lines were extended to Loyd and Aubrey.

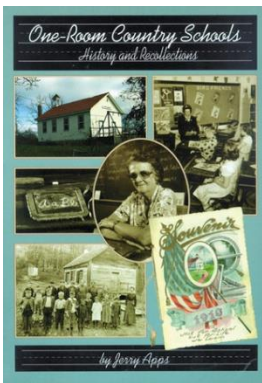
In 1921, Fred and his wife moved to Richland Center, leaving their son, Harold, in charge of the mills. In Richland Center, Fred founded the Home Appliance Company and also, with his sons, Roland and Millard, engaged in the fuel, coal and oil business. Then, in November 1925, the Twin Bluffs Electric Company, now a Wisconsin Corporation, was sold to the Wisconsin Power and Light Company. At the same time, WP & L bought out several other small generating plants in the southeastern Richland County. WP & L soon razed these plants, including Schuerman's, salvaging whatever was useful. WP & L extended its lines right to the outskirts of Richland Center, but did not enter the city because it was served by its municipal power plant. In March 1928, another flood on Willow Creek washed out the Schuerman Dam, removing all evidence of the first rural electric generating plant in Wisconsin.

[END]

In Memoriam -- Carletta Heide, a long time Richland County Historical Society board member serving as Secretary and a true Historian, passed away on May 2, 2016. The following was excerpted from her obituary listed with the Pratt Funeral Service:
Carletta Ann Moerer Heide

She was born on June 6, 1949, in Richland Center, daughter of Erwin and Marianna (Pauls) Moerer. She farmed for many years in Richland County and worked at the Richland Center High School as a special education teacher. She was involved with numerous local organizations and events, including the Richland Center School District Foundation, Richland County Fair, June Dairy Days, High School Rodeo, and Ocooch Mountain Humane Society, among others. She was actively involved with 4-H as a club and project leader for many years and loved working with the 4-H members. She received numerous awards for her dedication and service to the community. She loved her cats Luna and Sunny Sunshine who were her constant companions.





One-Room Country Schools: History and Recollections

From 1791, when the first school was established in what is now Wisconsin, to the 1960s, when consolidation was finally complete, the one-room school's history has been one of growth and change. In *One-Room Country Schools*, this history along with unique memories and shared recollections from the people who learned and taught in the one-room schools of Wisconsin tell the story of these institutions of learning.

Consider this book by popular author Jerry Apps.

The Akey School is one of the many covered in this book. It can be found on Amazon.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by **Jerry Bower**

As I am writing my final President's Corner, I am realizing how much the Richland County Historical Society has changed over thirty-seven years.

When I began as president, in January 1979, the Society regularly hosted public programs at Richland Hills. These programs presented a slice of local history. Two of our regular presenters were Margaret Scott and Halsey Rinehart. We also acquired speakers through a Wisconsin Humanities Council grant, which brought experts on various topics of state history to Richland Center. Now, our regular speakers have passed away and the WHC grants no longer exist.

I also noted a change, over the years, in our potential audience and the Sunday afternoon environment, when our programs were offered. In scheduling programs, I learned to check the Packers' schedule first! Also, more and more events began to be scheduled on Sunday afternoons, providing competition for attendees. Consequently, the Society has not hosted a public program for several years.

Changes have also taken place at the Akey School Museum. I recall, as I began my tenure, that the Society operated on a shoe-string budget. I remember annual bake sales, held at what was then Brown's Smart Fashions, which we considered a success if we raised one hundred dollars. Fortunately, a few years ago, a substantial bequest from the estate of Thelma Cooper eased our budget concerns and enabled us to address long postponed maintenance issues. I have described the improvement projects in previous newsletters, so I won't list them here. If you have not recently visited the Akey School, you should plan to do so next summer. You will be amazed at the improvements that have been made.

Several years ago, the directors decided that the Museum should be open more Sunday afternoons and for an hour longer. Today the Museum is open Sunday afternoons, June through September, from 1:00 to 4:00.

I will close with thanks to lots of members (and non-members) who have helped me and the Society through the years. I am going to thank groups, rather than individuals, to try to avoid leaving someone out. Three groups of volunteers have been especially helpful. First, the Board of Directors have thoughtfully led the Society and managed the Akey School Museum. Second, thanks to the many volunteers who have hosted at the Museum. Third, thanks to the volunteers who have helped at our periodic "grand openings" of the Akey School Museum. These thanks include the many former one-room school teachers who related their adventures during a grand opening celebration.

So, good-bye as your President. But, rest assured that I will continue as a director and continue to promote our local history!



Richland County Historical Society Board Members

Jerry Bower – President

**Ken Thiede – Vice-president
– Secretary**

Nick Studnicka – Treasurer

Directors – Rob Bender

**Jay Buchanan
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**Barb Cody as
Webmaster**

Known as the Frank Lloyd Wright Trail -- Assembly Bill # 512 signed into law this past spring

The trail runs from Richland Center to Spring Green; then to two locations in Madison and extending on to Racine. The state Department of Transportation will use \$50,000 from the Department of Tourism to build signs along the trail directing travelers to specific Wright attractions.

Wright was born in 1867 in Richland Center, Wisconsin. He was considered one of the most influential architects of the first half of the 20th century.

Assembly Bill 512 – as amended, designates and marks a highway route through Kenosha, Racine, Milwaukee, Waukesha, Jefferson, Dane, Iowa, Sauk, and Richland counties as the Frank Lloyd Wright Trail.

The bill requires signage to be placed at certain points along the trail to direct travelers to specific Frank Lloyd Wright attractions, and allows for additional signage to be placed directing travelers to other Frank Lloyd Wright locations if they are within 15 miles of the specified trail and open to the public. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) must erect and maintain signs only after receiving sufficient contributions from interested parties. WisDOT must estimate the costs necessary to fabricate and erect the required signs and forward that information to the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism will then transfer the amount identified by WisDOT to pay for the required signs, up to a maximum of \$50,000.

Authored by Representative Todd Novak (R – Dodgeville) and Senator Howard Maklein (R – Spring Green), the bill passed the Assembly with a vote of 96-2 and was concurred by the Senate on a voice vote. It is Act 270.

Excerpted -- <http://fox6now.com/2016/03/21/governor-scott-walker-signs-bill-establishing-frank-lloyd-wright-trail/>

Six locations are featured along the trail:

1 SC Johnson Administration Building and Research Tower

Far outside the corridors of high-tech industry and startup spaces, the SC Johnson company headquarters in Racine, Wisconsin, still provides a dashing vision of the modern American workplace, despite having recently celebrated its 75th anniversary. The SC Johnson Administration Building, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1936, eschews business clichés: workers are greeted by a streamlined, muscular exterior made from ribbons of glass and brick, more campus than corporate, before entering a light-filled interior, with rows of organic, curved columns creating an abstract forest surrounding the secretary pool. The 15-story Research Tower, completed in 1950, was built on a "taproot" system. The effect is of a tree enclosed in glass.



A private residence Wright designed for SC Johnson owner Herbert Fisk Johnson, Jr. in 1936, Wingspread lives up to its names, a low-slung streamlined brick home with four wings spreading across the property. The central living room, a dome-shaped room, features a 30-foot-tall vertical fireplace and original furniture designed by Wright. Considered the last of the Prairie Houses, it's filled with unique touches, including a dramatic "Romeo and Juliet" balcony that cantilevers over the landscape and a crow's nest lookout built above the home, a favorite play place for the Johnson children.



3 Monona Terrace

A sprawling, curved convention center on the shores of Lake Monona in Madison, this building was a posthumous addition to the Wright canon, rejected by officials during the architect's lifetime, but finally approved via a referendum put local voters in the early '90s. The curvilinear "dream civic center," which recalls the shape of the Guggenheim, was first proposed by Wright in 1938, and was a project he constantly altered and updated throughout his life. His former apprentice Anthony Puttnam would finish the designs for the interior before it was finally completed in 1997.



4 First Unitarian Society Meeting House

A landmark in church architecture from 1951, Wright's ship-like design for the First Unitarian Society, with a sharp prow jutting out from the earth towards the sky, offers a sense of transcendence, one he would often enjoy as a member of the congregation. His extensive use of copper and glass throughout the building provide a timeless feel to the unorthodox house of worship.



5 Taliesin and Frank Lloyd Wright Visitor Center

Wright's longtime home and studio, named after a Welsh term that means "Shining Brow," is an icon of Prairie School design that saw numerous tragedies and rebirths over the decades as the architect continually renovated, rebuilt and expanded. Set on a 700-acre estate in the rolling hills of Spring Green where he grew up, it was the site where he created and designed many of his masterpieces beginning in 1911 and contains a collection of Wright-designed structures.



6 A.D. German Warehouse

A small brick structure used by a local commodity wholesaler, Albert Dell German, this warehouse, finished in 1921, features an elaborate Mayan Revival exterior. Built in the town of Richland Center, where Wright was born, this offers a rare example of a project the architect designed in the late 1910's that's still standing.

Excerpted -- <http://www.curbed.com/maps/frank-lloyd-wright-trail-taliesin>



The following article was excerpted from Chapter 16 - Railway and Telegraph Lines. It is a detailed continuation from the April AKEY BrAKEY.

The Pine River and Stevens Point Railroad. This road owes its inception and completion to the public-spiritedness and business tact of the residents of the county seat of the county, and has been the means of a large increase in the value of real estate and business facilities of the entire county.

As early as April 28, 1857, there was a movement made looking to the bringing of a railroad from Lone Rock to Richland Center, but the plan seems to have been abandoned on account of the then financial embarrassments of the whole country, during the panic of that year. The whole scheme was held in abeyance until in the fall of that year when it was again agitated but nothing was done in a practical way toward the matter, and like the former project it too was allowed to drop. At various times afterwards some talk was made but nothing more was done in the premises until in 1870, when a charter was granted by the legislature to incorporate a company for the building of a railroad --- narrow gauge, wooden or iron rails --- with the above name. In pursuance with this charter, which bears date of Aug. 5, 1872, the first meeting was held August 20th, of that year, and the following directors were elected: George Krouskop, Joseph L De Hart, John Walworth, Norman L James, D E Pease, D L Downs, D O Chandler, A C Eastland, J M Adams, Charles G Thomas and David Hardenburg. The officers elected were: George Krouskop, president; D L Downs, treasurer, and A C Eastland, secretary.

At the time of the organization of the company it was not contemplated to build the road by their own unaided efforts, but simply to make such surveys as were necessary to ascertain the feasibility of the route and demonstrate to some other railroad company this fact, as an inducement that that company would build the road for them. But during the summer 1875, the plan had so far undergone alteration as to develop into an arrangement to build a narrow gauge railroad by individual subscription, and to be supplemented by the subscriptions of the towns traversed by the line of the road and which would be most benefited thereby.

Stock subscription books were accordingly opened and stock subscribed by most of the residents of the village of Richland Center and town of Richland. The town, by vote, took stock to the amount of \$19,000; and about \$5000 in stock was subscribed by parties outside of the town. The contract for grading the roadbed and surfacing the same, and laying maple rails, was let at some \$400 per mile, the work to be finished and the road to be in running order by June 25, 1876. The road was to be narrow gauge, thirty-six inches between the track, laid with maple rails, 3 1/2 X 5 inches in diameter. All of the road was laid with maple rails except three miles of switches and side tracks which were laid with iron rails.

In December, 1875, the engine was purchased, and also some flat cars for construction purposes. The locomotive was bought of Porter, Bell & Co., Pittsburg, Penn., at a cost of \$5000. It weighed ten tons, and was a perfect model for one of the class to which it belonged. It was hauled across the country from Lone Rock to Richland Center upon logging trucks, and was used for construction purposes from Richland Center south.

The road soon was carried to completion and was ready for business on the 1st of July, 1876, when the first passenger train ran through from Richland Center to Lone Rock. It had then cost about \$66,508.10. In the summer of 1875, the second set of directors and officers were chosen. The directors were: George Krouskop, A H Krouskop, D O Chandler, D E Pease, J M Adams, N L James, J L DeHart, W J Bowen and A C Parfley. The officers elected were: George Krouskop, president; A H Krouskop vice-president; N L James, general manager; D O Chandler, treasurer; and A C Eastland, secretary. On the 27th of August, 1878, a meeting of the stockholders was held, and the following were elected directors to succeed those above mentioned: J W Lybrand, John Walworth, J L McKee, F P Bowen, J L DeHart, James H Miner, Jacob Brimer, A C Parfrey and A W Bickford. At the election of officers of the company, the following were chosen: Jacob W Lybrand, president and general manager; A W Bickford, vice-president; J L McKee, treasurer, and W H Pier, secretary. This was the last set of officers and directors that were elected.

The road continued in operation under the home company increasing its business, and finally arriving at what might be called a paying basis until May 26, 1880, when it was sold to the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul RR Company. The directors obtained some \$56,000 as the price, which paid the indebtedness of the company and paid fifty cents on the dollar, on all original stock, except the \$19,000 stock subscribed by the town of Richland, which had been sold at a nominal price and canceled. At the time of the sale the narrow gauge road was in excellent working condition. The entire length of the road had been laid with iron track; except about three of the miles. The Milwaukee Company at once proceeded to make the road entirely iron rail, and the following year altered the track to the standard width of all their roads, and it is now a fully recognized branch of that monster corporation.

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Contact: Kelly Rundle 309-797-0544



“The Barn Raisers” Film was Showcased October 15 at the Richland County Performing Arts Center as a Free Wisconsin Humanities Council Event

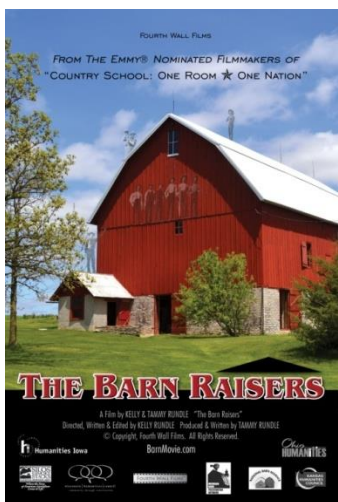
Film Features Wisconsin Barns and their Stories

RICHLAND CENTER--The new documentary *The Barn Raisers* by Emmy® nominated filmmakers Kelly and Tammy Rundle of Fourth Wall Films was showcased at a Wisconsin Humanities Council preview event on Saturday, October 15th at the Richland County Performing Arts Center, 182 N Central Ave. Richland Center, WI. This special program was sponsored by the Wisconsin Humanities Council and the Richland County Historical Society. The one-hour film was followed by Q&A with the filmmakers and barn architectural historian James Draeger and Dr. William Tishler, Professor Emeritus of Landscape Architecture at UW-Madison.

The Barn Raisers tells the story of barns in the Upper Midwest by examining them through the lens of architecture. The film explores what barn styles, building methods and materials tell us about the people who built them, the life they lived and the role these “country cathedrals” played in the settling and building of the Nation.

Barns were constructed by farmer-craftsmen, professional builders who traveled from job to job and even architects like Frank Lloyd Wright. *The Barn Raisers* will paint a cinematic portrait of barns and builders, an important way of life that has been largely forgotten, and the film will remind us that these remnants from America’s rural past are still here to be interpreted and experienced.

A number of Wisconsin barns appear in the film. Also featured are Frank Lloyd Wright’s Midway Barn at Taliesin in Spring Green, the 1897 Dairy Barn at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the story of notable African American barn builder Alga Shivers who designed and constructed many of Vernon County’s round barns in the early 20th century. In addition to Wisconsin, the film was shot in Iowa, Kansas, Ohio and Michigan.



This film and program were funded in part by the Wisconsin Humanities Council (WHC) and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The WHC supports and creates programs that use history, culture, and discussion to strengthen community life for everyone in Wisconsin. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this documentary film and program do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities or WHC. The Richland County Historical Society is the fiscal sponsor for the documentary film project.

The Rundles are the producers of the regional Emmy® nominated historical documentaries *Country School: One Room – One Nation*, *River to River: Iowa’s Forgotten Highway 6* and *Letters Home to Hero Street* (co-produced with WQPT-PBS).

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

→ www.richlandcountyhistoricalsociety.weebly.com
