

The AKEY BrAKEY News

a bi-annual newsletter from the Richland County Historical Society

April, 2010 Volume #2 - Issue # 1 - promoting and supporting the History of Richland County and Southwestern Wisconsin

IRA S. HASELTINE: FOUNDER AND PROMOTER OF RICHLAND CENTER

By Jerry Bower

This is Part One of a two-part story about the founder of Richland Center, Ira Sherwin Haseltine. Part One will bring the Haseltine family from Vermont to Waukesha County, Wisconsin Territory. Then, it will trace the Haseltines' move westward to Richland County. Part Two, to be published in the Fall Newsletter, will relate how the crafty Haseltine won the county seat for his city.

PART ONE

Ira Sherwin Haseltine was born 13 July 1821 to Orrin, Sr. and Rachel in Andover, Vermont. The Haseltines eventually had thirteen children, seven girls and six boys. The father was a cloth dresser by trade but, in the mid 1820s, he turned to farming to support his family. Ira and his siblings received an education in the Andover Common School.

The Haseltines' move to the Wisconsin Territory began in September 1836, when Orien, the eldest son, and a younger brother, Curtis, claimed government land at Big Bend, Vernon Township, in Waukesha County. Soon, the brothers had erected a 15' X 16' cabin on their claim.

The rest of the Haseltines came to the Wisconsin Territory the following year. They also settled on government land in Vernon Township. Ira was then sixteen, a young adult ready to strike out on his own.

For the next dozen years Ira worked at a variety of jobs, obviously seeking some permanent occupation. He worked on his father's farm and taught school in Vernon Township in 1839. During the following decade, Ira taught school three terms in Natchez, Mississippi, studied law in Milwaukee (but never became a lawyer), and toured the South and West lecturing on education reform and mesmerism (a form of hypnotism practiced by German physician F. A. Mesmer).

No doubt, the most important event of these years was Ira's marriage to Augusta Thomas on New Year's Day 1846. The wedding took place in Vernon Township, where both families of the couple lived. Augusta was also a native of Vermont, but we do not have information about when her family moved to Wisconsin or whether she and Ira had known one another in Andover. The couple eventually had nine children, three daughters and six sons, born between 1849 and 1870.

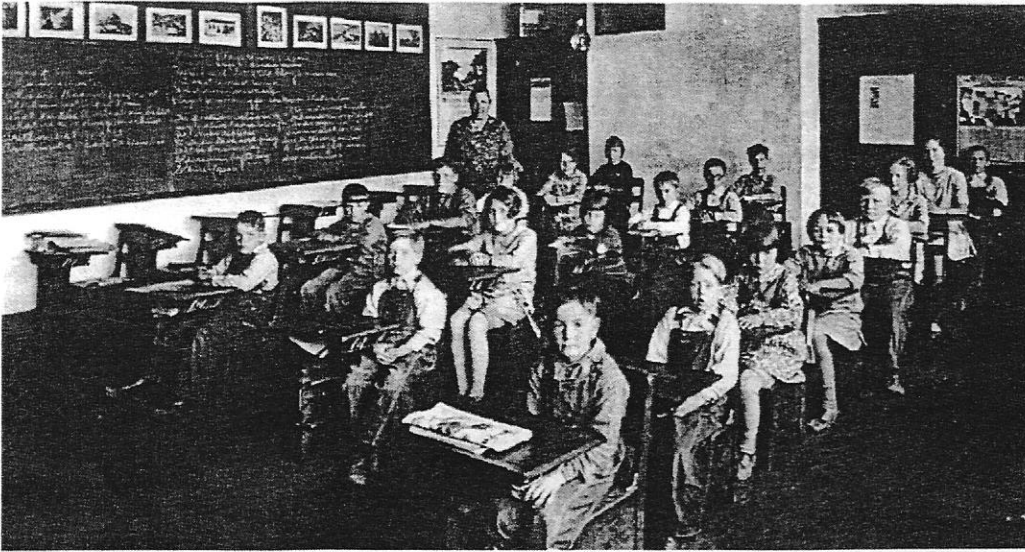
In 1848, the year that Wisconsin became a state, Orien, the eldest son, moved west to government land west of Madison, on the Black Earth River. Two years later, Orien and James Peck platted the village of Black Earth. Orien gradually acquired a farm of 500 acres and became, allegedly, one of the wealthiest men in the area.

The following year, in July, Ira and his father came west from Black Earth to Sextonville, where they spent the night. The next day, the two rode their horses north, along the Pine River, to Rockbridge. Here, Orien claimed government land and bought a sawmill from Henry Cole.

Soon, other family members followed and the Haseltines were prominent in the establishment of both the village of Rockbridge and Rockbridge Township. The following year Orien ordered three wagon loads of supplies for his farm and sawmill.

In October 1850, Alden, another son, and three men drove three yokes of oxen from Black Earth to Sextonville. From there they slowly carved out a crude trail along the Pine River to Rockbridge. During 1851 Orien built the first house in Rockbridge, using lumber from his sawmill. He used slab wood, smooth side in, to form the walls. That same summer Ira used his surveying skills to lay out the village of Rockbridge.

Continued on Page 3



School Days – School Days – Those Good Old Golden Rule Days

This article has been printed with the permission of the Muscoda Progressive as it originally appeared in the September 24th, 2009 edition

Here's a quick flashback to school days of many years ago. It was a time before anyone had thought about computers, smart boards, cell phones, and many other things.

It was a time for simple things, like chalk boards, Big Chief tablets, and one teacher instructing eight grades in a one-room school with outhouses out back.

This is a picture from the Indian Creek school, taken in the early 1930's and brought to us by one of the students, Mary [Peska] Imhoff.

Mary, and fellow schoolmate Kenneth Thiede, combined memories to identify students. The teacher in the background is Gertie Bremmer, who taught in the school for many years.

MEMORIES OF ATTENDING A ONE-ROOM SCHOOL

By Kenneth Thiede SR.

I remember attending the one room school at Indian Creek for eight years. In the picture I was in first grade along with five other people in my grade. What I remember most was the duties that we had to do to help keep the school going on a daily basis. The teacher would have a weekly list of chores. We took turns with such things as putting up the flag and taking it down. There was cleaning the blackboards, carrying in water from the outside well which we pumped by hand, cleaning the toilets, dusting the seats and window sills and throwing fire wood for the furnace that was racked up outside. In the winter, the older kids also had to shovel snow making pathways to the well, to the flagpole and to the outdoor toilets.

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Warning! This is a commercial! Our Society memberships expire July 1st. Please take time to renew your membership, and to consider a donation to help defray the cost of insurance on the Akey School and the cost of ongoing maintenance. Last summer we had the exterior painted, at a cost of three thousand dollars. The directors currently are deliberating whether we need to have the interior painted, which has not been done since the Museum opened in 1976. Thank you for your past (and future) support of this important piece of Richland County history.

Jerry Bower

A DAY TRIP

One of the periodic features of *The AKEY BRAKEY News* is to promote locations in and around Richland County to go see as well as enjoy → Why not consider...

a Walking Tour of Richland Center

Available at The Depot in downtown Richland Center, among the many handouts, is one that is titled "Historical and Architectural Heritage Tour of Richland Center Wisconsin".

As it is advertised, this brochure is intended to serve as a general guide to the historic resources of Richland Center. It includes a map showing the location of selected properties that were determined to be significant as a result of the intensive architectural and historical survey undertaken in 1987 and selected sites which form part of the Court Street Commercial, the Krouskop Lumberyard, and the Richland Center Historic Districts that were identified in the survey. Also, the brochure provides brief notes on each of the sites.

Directions to ...

The Akey School Museum is located off Hwy 14 about four miles south of Twin Bluffs on Cty TB between Richland Center & Gotham or four miles north on Cty TB of Hwy 60, one mile west of Gotham.

It is open during the summer months from June through September on Sundays from 1 p.m. until 4 p.m.

Continued from Page 1

Ira S. Haseltine: Founder and Promoter of Richland Center

In 1854 Alden built a grist mill, which was powered by a ten foot head of water trapped behind a dam at the outlet of the tunnel the Pine had carved through the limestone bluff. This mill did a rousing business milling the wheat of area farmers.

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1850, Ira and Augusta, and their one-year old son, had rafted down the Pine to go to Black Earth to visit relatives. During the trip, Ira had been attracted to a prairie between the bluffs, where he thought the Pine could supply power for mills. Ira also thought the site could develop into a trading center, since it was near the center of the newly organized Richland County.

After they returned to Rockbridge, Ira purchased 160 acres at the site from John Dillman, a veteran of the Mexican War. Ira invited his brother, Alden to join him in the venture. But Alden turned him down cold, saying, "Ira, you are fanatical, this country is so rough, it cannot be settled and there can be no town at this point." Undaunted, Ira replied, "If you are afraid, I will take it up and play it alone." And that's exactly what he did. The following year, 1851, Ira hired Robert Field to survey his land and to plat a village. Then Ira began to sell lots in his "Richland Center" and embarked on a campaign to make his village the county seat.

That story will be told in the next issue of *The AKEY BraKEY NEWS*.

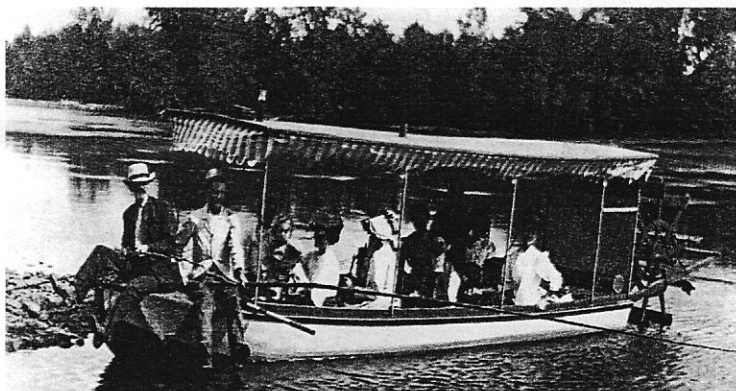
IN MEMORIAM -- HELEN TOMS (1912-2009) By Jerry Bower

In Fall 2009 I received a call from the lawyer who was handling Helen Toms' estate. She informed me that Helen, who had been a member of the Society's Board of Directors for many years, had bequeathed \$10,000 to the Society.

Helen Toms was a very quiet person and I did not know many personal details until I read her obituary and, later, an article about her and her bequests in the *Richland Observer*. Helen earned both a B.S. and M.S. Degree from the UW-Madison. Following graduation, she worked as a physical therapist at the Milwaukee School for Children handicapped by polio. Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Helen enlisted in the army. She was sent to England, where she worked as a physical therapist in the 114th Hospital Unit. Helen earned the rank of major during her service. After the war ended, Helen returned to Milwaukee and worked until her retirement.

Helen was a member of the Board of Directors when I was elected president in January 1979. She had a wry sense of humor and often helped resolve an issue with an incisive question or pointed comment. Helen continued to serve until the mid 1990s.

The current Society Directors voted to contribute half of Helen's bequest to the Richland Area Arts Council, to be applied to the restoration of the historic City Auditorium. The directors subsequently exercised naming rights to name two Auditorium dressing rooms in honor of Helen Toms and Harold Pauls. (Harold also was a long-time director and his family donated the Akey School to be made into a museum.)



Toms Family photos – Mirah [Hart] Toms is holding Ada Toms & H.P. Toms is in the back row holding his knee



The Toms home was located at the corner across from the Alcam Creamery where the Lunenschloss Hanson building is now located
Photos provided by Lon Arbegust

OUR FILM PROJECT -- Last summer Fourth Wall Films contacted Jerry to see whether we would be interested in serving as the fiscal agent for a grant from the Wisconsin Humanities Council. We, of course, said, "yes." The grant is for a documentary film, *Country School: One Room—One Nation*. Filming in Iowa has already been completed, while filming in Wisconsin will occur during this May. It is possible that the Akey School will be one of the schools featured in the documentary. For certain, one of the premiers of the film will occur in Richland Center at a time and place to be determined. **Stay tuned!!**